

TAXI DESIGN REVIEW: MALAYSIA CONTEXT

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Abstract: The taxi plays a critical part as a transportation alternative in not just Malaysia, but numerous other global urban cities. In most countries, including Malaysia, taxis have a tendency to be utilised as a substitute for private vehicles by travellers who use the service for convenience reasons or because they do not own a personal vehicle⁹, also, taxis are frequently used to supplement insufficient public transport systems based on train or busses.

Taxi has turned into the preferable public transportation in Malaysia. Nonetheless, the fulfilment towards the user satisfaction, as well as the feedbacks from them was not exactly match the genuine circumstance. Referring to several ministers, the authorities and Malaysian Prime Minister, we need our taxi design and image here in Malaysia¹³, the same thing that had been done by a few nations in bringing their particular image embedded into their taxis. Together with that, while building the Malaysian taxi identity, the other thing is to investigate a few improvements towards enhancing the user experience. As been expressed by the Malaysian previous Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, the configuration taxi ought to investigate the comfort or ergonomics of users, the safety issues, some technology apparatuses and availability issue for the disable individual¹³. Not long after that, the minister of entrepreneurship during that time, Tan Sri Noh Omar had commented by supporting the statement made by our prime minister saying that, if we have our own image of taxis, we will be proud of and say, "well, that's Malaysian taxis".

Keywords: Taxi, Public Transportation, Taxi Image, Taxi Design, User Experience.

INTRODUCTION

Taxis commonly described as a service but it also can be a product and for that, they are difficult to determine which market segment they occupy. Typically, which are the dominant form that serves the user will classify it because many theorists see theirs is a continuum between these two extremes, with pure services on one end and pure commodity goods on the other²⁰. Well, taxi is a tangible service²². The taxi drivers provide the means of travel by using a car, and together with the act of driving to a place, which is measurable, and a

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service, primarily. Therefore, taxis provide both goods and services, and it is a product that is tangible³.

By referring to a statement made by John Koldowski says that the first contact between the tourist and locals is frequent between airport to hotels and it makes an extremely solid initial reaction either it is good or bad¹. And then we look at the current taxi design and services in Malaysia; does it represent Malaysia with a good resemblance of Malaysian culture and identities towards the design together with the welcoming services?

2.1 The importance of Malaysian Image, Identity and Culture towards taxi design

As a multi-race country, until now it is difficult to choose what are the perfect things to represent Malaysia. As a designer, inspiration, or a subject matter is one of the important things to be considered when designing a product. It happened to be a dilemma for most Malaysian designer when it comes to design a Malaysian product²¹, and as a result, Malaysian products, without a distinct identity, were hard to differentiate between the products from the neighbouring countries. There are studies made entitled "*How do consumers express their identity through the choice of products that they buy?*" explaining the importance of character towards a product. Illustration made in the research saying that there is a link between identity and products through a description which called 'product identities'⁵. In addition to that, the research is considering the product's identity construction at early stages and the reflection of the outcome towards the end.

2.2 Malaysia as a Tourism Attraction

Malaysia, the home to the tallest twin towers in the world, KLCC, welcomes 11.13 million visitors in 2015⁴. Kuala Lumpur ranked 8th on the ten most popular cities for travellers in 2015 reported by CNN. Not just that, Malaysia also ranked top 10 by projected visitor arrivals in the coming years, and top 10 cities for international overnight spend in 2015. There are numerous reasons to the success of Malaysia for being rank as top 10 most visited by destinations around the globe. Among the components are structures, assets, procedure, strategy and administration¹⁰.

As a consequence of the escalated endeavours made in changing the structures of Malaysian tourism authorities and agencies in advancing visitor destination, Malaysia has been positioned as main ten most visited destinations between the years 2009 until 2012. Malaysia was positioned as 9th (2009-2011) and 10th (2012) based on the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), indicator. In 2012, Tourism Malaysia reported a sum of 25

million visitors, an expansion of 1.3% contrasted with 24.7 million in 2011. This acquired vacationer receipts of RM60.6 billion, an expansion of 3.8 % from RM58.3 billion in 2011.

2.3 Tourism and Taxis in Malaysia



Figure 1: Showing that there are visitors or tourists around the globe who visits Malaysia based on the airport travel route. Source: <http://www.malaysiaairports.com.my/>

In conjunction with the increasing number of visitors visiting Malaysia, and a massive income generated from that, what does the taxi service had something special to offer? Based on figure 1, there are lots of taxi journey that will need to be provided to the tourist visiting Malaysia. It is important to have a special image, or specific branding strategies for Malaysian taxis, to clear up their bad reputation based on their services¹. Brands will create an extraordinary and emotional bond between the preferred travellers and the destinations¹⁵. Ironically, brand also promises a travel experience that will drive to the elements of the destinations excitements⁷.

Successful components in attracting tourist-visiting Malaysia were the branding of destination, the image of the destination, and brand communication with the publics together with destination awareness. Despite all successful branding work undertaken by Malaysia, aggressive and unprofessional drivers are tarnishing the nation's image as a squeaky clean and hospitable destination, the taxi fleet branded as 'the worst in the world' can come as a bit of a shock after all¹. Pertinent to the issue, during the PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) biannual meeting in September 2008, a delegate commented that the Malaysian taxi drivers managed to damage all the money dumped to promote Malaysia¹⁷. Grumblings

about taxis are regular in numerous countries, however, in Malaysia we can find it everyday, on online journal locales and in letters to daily papers. Parallel to that, we can see that today, some small and up-scale operators had taken an advantage in entering the taxi service market here such as Uber, to provide a more expensive yet quality services for the frustrated locals and tourist¹.

3.0 Taxis in Malaysia

Today, most taxicabs found in Malaysia are from the national "local" car manufacturers e.g. Proton Saga BLM, Iswara, Wira, Waja, Naza Citra and from foreign car manufacturers e.g. Japan and Germany. The taxis are operating for various types of services in various locations all over Malaysia. The major consideration is why Malaysian authorities, in this case is the Public Land Transport Commission (SPAD) for granting these types of cars for taxi use, is to give the best user experience especially in comfortability and worthiness. Before the start of local car production in 1983-1986, the Mercedes-Benz 200, Mazda 323 of Ford Laser, Toyota Mark II X80 series and Opel Kadett were used. In 1989, most of the taxis were discontinued and Malaysian Taxi services start to use the national cars as their main taxis operating in the cities.



Figure 2: Type of taxi used in Malaysia since its operational time started in 1966¹¹

One of the main issues raised was that there was lack of engagement by the Proton, which is the base vehicle makers, with their potential clients¹⁸. And in this case were the taxis here in Malaysia are using the Proton cars. In 25th June 2008, during the Perhimpunan Agung Umno, the cabinet had encouraged the national car manufacturer; Proton to turn out with another model of car, which will be used just for taxis here in Malaysia¹³. Be that as it may, what we

can see here until 2013, despite the fact that they recognize that their vehicles are being used as taxis after a conversion had been made; there was small understanding of what they should do to ensure that they make it easy for the conversion authorities.

The conversion process of taxis does not take much as it does not differ enough from the existing Proton car that is on the street, except for the paint and some detailing from the outside. Also, the criteria of taxis as the public transport should well consider the diversity of user, including the disable people. In a case study written by Anne Frye stated that, taxis are generally based on mass-market vehicles, produced by multinational companies, and the proportion of these vehicles utilized as taxis is little⁶. Frye continued by saying that few countries have a convention of reason-constructed vehicles that give access to wheelchair users, or have made provision for special transport services for disable people, however these are the minority. Furthermore, there is constrained proof of major manufacturers perceiving the necessities of disable people and reacting to these with enhanced vehicle design. The results of a review of countries participated in the last report of Task Force which was distributed in March 2007 demonstrated that the predominant vehicle used as a taxi is the saloon car¹⁹, except the UK and the Netherlands. Now and again the quantity of taxis (vehicles which can be hailed in the city or from a taxi rank) had lessened, yet this was balanced by an expansion in quantities of private hire (vehicles which should be pre-booked, more often than not by phone).

4.0 Proton Cars and Taxi Design

The success of overcoming adversity of Malaysia in automotive industries ought to be the pride of Malaysian until today. Since the first national car that is Proton Saga manufactured in 1985, Malaysia has acquired much acknowledgement locally and internationally for its extraordinary achievements in the automotive industries. Until today, Malaysia has long been involved in the development and advancement of the automotive industries with an alternate accentuation over time¹². During the main period of industrialization drive (the Import Industrialization Strategy) in the 1950s and 1960s, the accentuation was on the assembling activities of both user and commercial vehicles to provide employment and reducing the import bills at the same time¹².

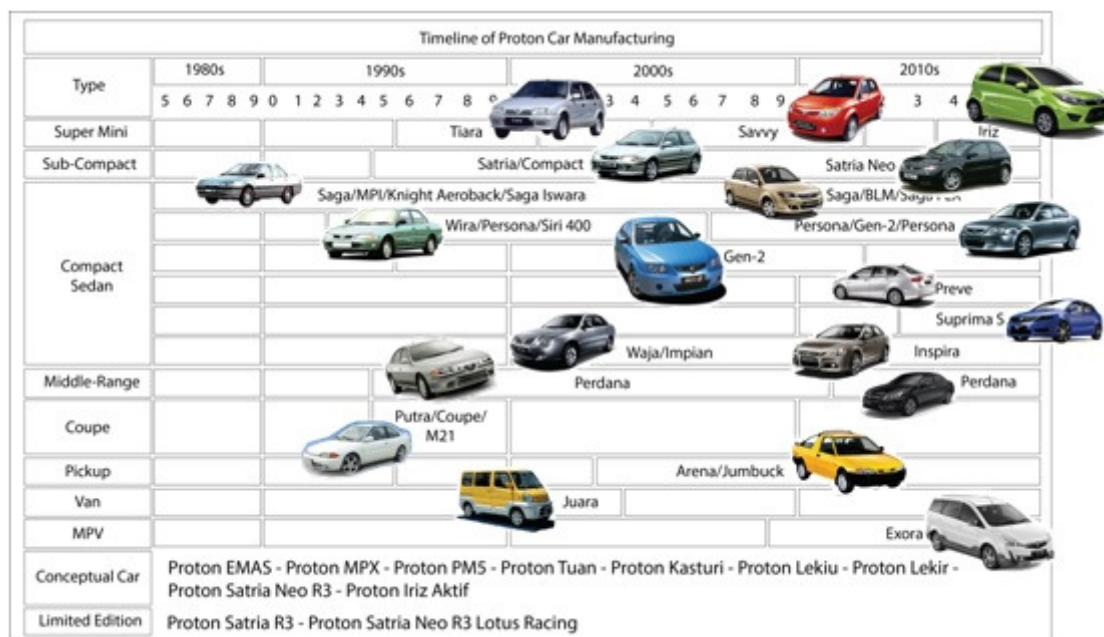


Figure 3: List of Proton cars since 1985 starting with ‘Proton Saga’ that rolled out first of its plant.

The automotive sector of Malaysia is characterised by a locally created manufacturing structure geared towards the production of passenger vehicles⁸. The industry has been highly subsidised and ensured to deliver national champion and automotive components as well as parts suppliers. Before the first Proton car rolled out from its plant in 1985, there are joint ventures established between the Malaysia Industry Cooperation of Malaysia (HICOM), Mitsubishi Motor Corporation (MMC) and Mitsubishi Corporation (MC). MMC and MC were the automotive companies based in Japan, and as we can see from the figure 3, lots of Proton cars influenced by the Japanese designs. One of the Japanese strategies with the joint venture program is to play an unobtrusive but commanding role, attempting to stay as unnoticeable as possible in Malaysia. They offer their technology and expertise at the very first stage and in return, they own nearly a third of the Proton, which is the biggest industrial enterprise in Malaysia¹⁴.

In essence, there is no big surprise on why most of the Proton cars were influenced by the Japanese design, as been discussed in several websites and blogs². As been stated by Malaysian previous prime minister, and current prime minister himself, he urges that Proton to comes out with a new design that will be used as taxi in Malaysia, a taxi with Malaysian image, brand and identity¹³. Speaking about the Malaysian identity, the government of Malaysia facing challenges identifying the suitable identity that can represent Malaysia not just for taxi design in this context, but also other product identity. Looking closer to this

issue, Proton somehow has made a great effort towards Malaysian identity issues, in bringing out Malaysian identity through nature resources by using Malaysian tiger metaphors, and it seems had given a promising attributes to the newest car design, Proton Preve²¹.

In supporting the discovery and brand-building initiatives for the taxis, Malaysian designers should take part in the promotion processes. Research on taxi image and identity, design in connection to DNA of the identity investigation, and user perception of Malaysia's taxi design ought to be undertaken to assure its successfulness, and we will see challenges in the future, whereby the Malaysian taxi model with the identity will be the reliability, verification and validation by all users.

5.0 Conclusions and Future Research

Malaysian taxi and its brand package should be built and actualized with the collaboration and continuous support of other tourism partners as a whole, particularly tourism advertisers, and to be specific travel organizations who are in contact with guests on the front line, and consequently able to make a synergetic impact. This was due to the impact of bad feedback reported almost daily on the news and something needs to be done before this service could not go further. The branding of taxis need to involve a broad range of key stakeholders; it will involve the designer, the commissioners of design, authorities and Proton as well. Since the taxi services and experiences eventually depends on people, those people who will support the new branding of Malaysian taxis need to be trained in terms of improving the services, giving ideas, and a new look for the taxi itself. The branding of taxis is concerned with the promotion of the taxi itself, and it will adds to the change of the general picture and the making of a solid branding of taxis. There's also a significant role need to be played by the tourism authority, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOCAT) together with Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board, to be alert regarding the pattern of travel environment and how satisfied the visitors are. These are required to strengthen all of the Malaysia tourism elements towards their branding and identity including the public transportation system.

Despite the fact that Malaysia is known as a nation rich in historical, cultural and natural resources, further work ought to be made to reinforce its competences. Specifically, Malaysia unique culture ought to be used as a way to increase the future of any of its product brand related to tourism including the taxis. The successful of Malaysia tag line 'Malaysia Truly Asia' has created an identity where people can easily associate and provide the good experiences while in Malaysia. This successful identity is a new way that future researcher can embark towards any related product development activities.

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