# How Do Design Students Design Visual Identity & Packaging Design For Innovative Food Products? Results From Four Batches of Design Studio Class

**Brian Alvin Hananto**
Visual Communication Design
Universitas Pelita Harapan
Indonesia
brian.hananto@uph.edu

## ABSTRACT

Visual identity and packaging design are essential parts of a product, especially food products. To teach students of the Universitas Pelita Harapan's Visual Communication Design Department about packaging design, the author collaborated with Universitas Pelita Harapan's Food Technology Department to design their innovative food products. After four years of classroom action research, the author attempts to review and evaluate the literature and designs of the 2016-2019 cohort to understand how the students had been designing a visual identity and packaging design. The result of the study is that the students had been drawing inspiration from the product, product's ingredient, product's benefit, taste, and sensation, presented image, and culture. The inspirations are then implemented as graphic elements, illustrations, character designs, and typography. The result of this study is a framework that the author hopes can be implemented in the next class's cohort.

Keywords: Food Product, Visual Identity, Packaging Design, Classroom Action Research

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes a consumer's first experience with a product is a visual experience with its packaging. Consumers see the packaged product in offline retail stores or even online e-commerce. This makes the role of packaging to create a first impression of a product significant. This importance is also true for food products. Studies have shown that the

visual design of packaging may influence consumers' food quality perception and brand preference (Wang, 2013). This may be because packaging design can communicate information and messages, not just protect the product (Mustikawan & Swasty, 2019; Natadjaja, 2011). Packaging has a better reach than advertising (Agariya et al., 2012). These facts make the packaging design a crucial component for new products, such as innovative food products.

At Universitas Pelita Harapan, food innovation has always been part of the focus of the Food Technology Department. The Food Technology Department annually exhibits various food innovations in their Food Explore event. Since 2018, the Food Technology Department has collaborated with the Visual Communication Design department to create identity and packaging design for the products as part of the event. For the Visual Communication Design Department, the collaboration was tasked with the Graphic Design 3 class, where students are assigned different innovative foods that the students need to design. The overall design project was conducted for half of the semester, with the remaining semester later used to revise and finalize the design for the student's portfolio.



**Figure 1. Food Explore Event with Designs from the Graphic Design 3 class**
**(Source: Hananto, 2024)**

The author conducted classroom action research each year to continuously improve the Graphic Design 3 class. Each year the class receives various products that are different in idea. The vast number of food products creates challenges for the students in class. However, as each year goes on, some similarities in approach can be seen and have been successful for the students. After more than four years and 40 or so projects, the author wants to evaluate all the results to understand how the students have been designing the visual identity and packaging design for innovative food products throughout the year. The result of this study is intended to provide a framework that can help future students learn design and real design projects.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Branding creates a specific image in the minds of the audiences (Wheeler, 2009) to enhance the brand (Chiaravalle & Schenck, 2007). Branding can be done by creating a consistent brand identity and touchpoint so that the audience can consistently see and experience the brand (Hananto, 2019a).

When we discuss brand identity, people usually relate that to logo design. However, that is only sometimes the case. A logo is just the tip of the iceberg for a brand identity (Budelmann et al., 2010). A brand identity, or visual identity, is the visual expression of a brand or group (Landa, 2011). This means visual elements that express or communicates a brand or a group may serve as a visual identity for the brand. Some visual identity examples are color, typography, shape and patterns, and character mascots (Budelmann et al., 2010).

A brand touchpoint is an object where audiences may experience or interact with a brand (Wheeler, 2009) to give meaning to a brand (Stoimenova, 2017). Brand touchpoints that are often used for food products are their packaging. Packaging, as a brand touchpoint, may serve as a protective tool for the development and a communicative one (Ambrose & Harris, 2011). Packaging may communicate clear information regarding the product and create impressions and associations between the product and the brand (Hananto et al., 2022).

## METHOD

The article is a compilation of classroom action research that the author has conducted throughout the years. Classroom action research is research conducted to solve practical problems in a classroom setting (Sukardi, 2015). Classroom action research is one way to understand the classroom so that educators can improve student learning (Khasinah, 2013) by creating a more effective learning opportunity (Syah, 2016). The classroom action research has been done since 2018 for the 2016 cohort. Since then, the author has conducted several cycles to monitor further and evaluate the class.

This study shows the result of four research cycles, from the 2016 cohort to the 2019 cohort. Overall, the conduct of the class hasn't changed significantly. Changes and improvements are made to the project parameter, creating a framework for students to work with. One distinctive difference between the classes is the conduct of the class. The 2016 and 2017 cohorts were done in an offline traditional classroom format, while the 2018 and 2019 cohorts were done in an online setting class due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The projects shown in this study are projects that had been accepted and published previously. This study accumulates the published projects and then reviews them for this research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the designs made by the Visual Communication Design students in collaboration with the Food Technology Department. The table shows the structure, main idea, main inspiration, and main visual for all the designs shown.

**Table 1 Selected Designs from the 2016-2019 Class.**

| Class/ Cohort | Design Project | Design | Design Idea | Main Inspiration | Main Visual |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2016 | Fibble (Hananto, 2019b) |  | The design idea came from the idea that the product is easy to eat and consumed 'on the go.' The idea is then translated into illustrating a cityscape scenery filled with people walking around and being lively. | Product | Illustration |
| | Ubibu (Hananto, 2020b) |  | The product's main ingredient is Ubi Cilembu, which has a myth behind the ingredient. The myth is then illustrated and becomes the main illustration for the brand. | Product's ingredient | Illustration |
| | Mireokki (Hananto, 2020a) |  | The product is an acculturation of Korean food with local Indonesian ingredients. Korean Hangul is implemented | Product's Ingredient, Culture | Illustration, Typography |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | for the typography, while traditional illustrations of the product's ingredients are illustrated and implemented as a pattern. | | |
| | Kupana (Hananto, 2019c) |  | The product was made with dragon fruit, and ideas of the dragon fruit were translated into a monkey character used as a mascot for the design. | Product's Ingredient | Character Design |
| 2017 | Banazel (Gondo & Hananto, 2020) |  | The product's shape is used as a module, which is later used to design a logo. The product's ingredients are illustrated as shapes used as graphic elements throughout the design. | Product & Product's Ingredient | Typography & Graphic Elements |
| | Jaipong (Kotandi & Hananto, 2020a, 2020b) |  | The brand's name, "Jaipong," is a well-known cultural tradition in West Java. The idea of tradition is implemented in the design idea, where the design represents characters, elements, and attributes derived from West Java tradition. | Culture | Character Design, Graphic Elements |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Tulaboocha (Tiffany & Hananto, 2020a, 2020b) |  | The design shows the origin of SCOBY, the product's main ingredient for the brand's logo. Yoga hand gestures are also part of the graphic system to implicate the health benefits of drinking the product. | Product's Ingredients, Product Benefit | Graphic Elements |
| | Get To Yu (Kelvin & Hananto, 2020) |  | The product's shape is used as the base idea for a character design. The product's shape (square) is also used in various implementations, such as the packaging's square shape, blocky typography, etc. | Product | Character Design |
| 2018 | Bobucha (Claudy et al., 2020) |  | The main idea for the design is to show the freshness of drinking the product, which is showcased by the bubble graphic element. | Product's Taste and Sensation | Graphic Elements |
| | Breotic (Therisnajay a et al., 2021) |  | The idea for the design is to showcase the benefit of consuming the product, in which | Presented Image, Product's Benefit | Illustrations |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | consumers may have a healthy digestive system, hence a healthier lifestyle. | | |
| | Crav'fin (Sujanto et al., 2020) |  | The main idea for the design is to represent the energetic keyword derived from the targetted consumer of the product. The keyword is represented with contrasting and bold colors, with geometrical illustration styles. | Presented Image | Graphic Elements |
| | Jicama (Vannia et al., 2021) |  | The design uses the *lactobacillus* microorganism, which is contained in the product. The shape of the microorganism is used as the logo and a character design. | Product's Benefit | Typography, Character Design |
| | Kefir Pop (Marcella et al., 2020) |  | The main idea of the design is to visualize the product's taste and sensation with colors and elements in the design. | Product's Taste and Sensation | Graphic Elements |

| 2019 | Bresco (Kusuma et al., 2021) |  | The design showcases the energetic young consumers of the product. | Presented Image | Illustration |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | Herby (Lienardo et al., 2021) |  | The design shows a minimalistic approach based on the target consumer demographic. | Presented Image | Graphic Elements |
| | Larkies (Lie et al., 2021) |  | Using character design, the design tries to present the product's ingredients in a friendlier approach. | Product's Ingredient | Character Design |
| | Sorgumee (Yosephin et al., 2021) |  | The design uses a housewife as the mascot of the brand. The housewife is chosen to represent the friendly character of the brand, which came from the claim that anyone can consume the product. | Presented Image, Product's Benefit | Character Design |
| | Verenice (Elizabeth et al., 2022) |  | The design illustrates the product's ingredients and uses a more minimalistic approach to showcase and enhance the | Presented Image, Product's Ingredient | Illustration |

| | | | image presented by the design. | | |
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**(Source: Hananto, 2024)**

From Table 1, we can categorize the students' primary inspiration for their design from the product's Ingredient, the product's benefit, taste, sensation, presented image, and culture. Using the product as the main inspiration can come from the shape, color, size, and other things we can instantly recognize. Using the product as the main inspiration can help designers easily represent the product in the design. The product's ingredient is relatable to the product's form and taste but not instantly apparent to the consumers. Students use the product's ingredients as the main inspiration if the product's ingredient is something unique and needs to be highlighted in the design. The product's benefit is even less evident than the product's ingredients. The product's benefit usually comes from the ingredient or how the ingredients are processed. By highlighting the product's benefit, the design may appeal to consumers who are more interested in the benefit of consuming a product. The product's taste and sensation are potential main inspirations and should be used if the product's taste is unique and can be a unique selling point. The presented image is not a product-centered approach, as it focuses on presenting particular image consumers want to have or be when purchasing or consuming the product. The final main inspiration of design can also come from a particular culture implemented in the design. Using a specific culture as an inspiration for the design can make the design feel traditional; however, using a specific culture can also implement certain values from the culture into the design.

The main inspiration that the students used in each cohort have shown a slight but noticeable difference. The 2016 cohort has tried to focus on the product and product ingredients more as the source of inspiration. The 2017 cohort has a similar approach but started to include the product's benefit as the source of inspiration. The 2018 cohort has focused more on the product's benefit, taste, and sensation and presented image as their source of inspiration. The 2018 cohort has shown a significant difference. In contrast, the 2016 and 2017 cohorts focused on the tangible aspects of the product, and 2018 has started to focus more on the product's intangible characteristics and the presented image. The 2019 cohort also followed the trend by having more designs developed based on the presented image while still having the product's ingredient as an inspiration.

Overall, two of the most used source of inspiration are the product's ingredients and the presented image. The product's ingredients are critical components of the innovative product, as students from the Food Technology tried to innovate their products by using different ingredients on their product. The other ingredients are then used to inspire the design because of the potential and necessity to be included. The presented image is also shown to be one of my favorite sources of inspiration. This approach may stem from the fact that when presented with a particular image, consumers are more emotionally interested in purchasing or consuming a product. However, giving a specific image should always be done with caution, as the image

itself has to be adequately defined based on the product. If the image presented does not relate to the product, it may be hard to use as a source of inspiration. Consumers may also find the image unrelatable and does not make sense.

The least used inspiration from the compiled data is the product, the product's taste, and culture. The product may sometimes be a generic source of inspiration compared to the ingredients or benefits. This goes the same as the product's taste and sensation. Similar products sometimes have the same form and taste as others. Similar products sometimes have the same shape and taste, so these two categories may not be unique enough. Another fact is that as the product is still in development, the look and flavor of the product aren't finalized yet. However, if the product had been finalized, using the product's look and taste may be more potent. Culture is also a challenging source of inspiration in these design projects. Unless the Food Technology Department students had certain ideas for their product or brand that are heavily influenced by culture, implementing a certain culture to inspire the design may be challenging.

We can also see from Table 1 that the main inspirations are often used as graphic elements, illustration, character design, and typography. Graphic elements are simple graphical elements that can be used individually or collectively in a compound shape or pattern. Illustrations are drawings that serve as a design element to communicate a specific message. Character designs are distinct character illustrations that help as a mascot for the brand. Typography is letter elements that express a particular message, like a logotype.

Overall the usage of main visuals for the design is relatively equal between graphic elements, illustration, character design, and typography. Drawings, either for graphic elements, illustration, or character design, are very potent as the designers can modify and create a specific image as they want to. Graphic elements are used when the designers need simple elements that can be used flexibly. Illustrations are used to illustrate a particular story or message. While illustrations are less flexible compared to graphic elements, illustrations can communicate a more complex message. Character designs are used when flexibility is needed, but graphical elements aren't enough. Character designs can be seen as the personification of the product or brand, which makes the design more friendly and relatable for consumers. The use of main inspirations for typography is the lowest compared to the other three. However, typography can create uniqueness when properly executed compared to image-based elements.

Understanding the possibilities of main inspirations and creating main visual ideas can help see the possibility of a design approach. Each main inspiration and visual could be explored, and the possibility of mixing the two is possible. The designers should try to break down the product, ingredients, product benefit, taste, sensation, presented image, and culture, as each developed product may have more potential and distinct aspects. The designers could also explore the possibilities of creating graphic elements, illustrations, character designs, and typography from each inspiration.
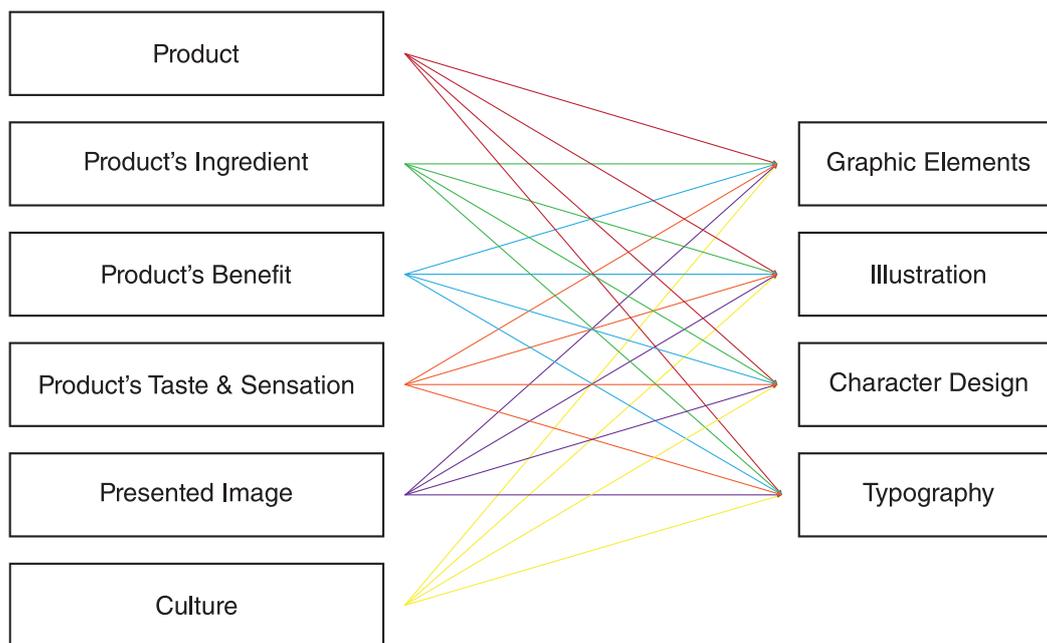
**Figure 2. Main Inspiration & Main Visual for Design (Source: Hananto, 2024)**

It should be noted that the branding strategy towards the targetted audience also plays a vital role in deciding the visual approach. Using character designs may make the overall design look childish, which may work well for younger audiences. Illustrations may seem mature or childish, depending on the illustration style. A simple yet refined typography may seem more mature and premium, which may not be suitable for a product that is intended to be affordable, etc. In the end, the main visuals must be coherent with the overall branding strategy.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research formulates how the students from the Graphic Design 3 class design their projects in designing a visual identity and packaging design for innovative food products. The result shows that students get their inspiration for the design from the product, ingredient, benefit, taste, sensation, presented image, and culture. The main inspirations are then used to develop graphic elements, illustrations, character designs, or typography. The findings from this evaluative research on the classroom action research's four-year cycle can be adapted as a framework for students to work with (Image 2).

The author recognizes that the research could've included more design samples to gather more data. The author hopes that the framework defined in this study can be implemented in the next classroom action research cycle and have the research also include an evaluation of the framework.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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