

# PRELIMINARY REPORT ON DOODLING'S CULTURAL ROLE AS INTENTIONAL ART: A STUDY OF YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF AESTHETIC SELF-EXPRESSION AND IDEA HELPER IN BRANDING

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**Abstract:** *The concept of doodles as a self-expression art-form is discussed through a quantitative study on the perceptions of youths towards doodling activity to produce ideas, to develop self-confidence, and in decision making for brands. The intentionality and purposes for doodling have been much critiqued by contemporary visual researchers. This paper considers the function of doodles in visual communication, and how contextual utilisation of doodles as a communication medium impacts individualistic expression as well as influencing consumer decision-making in brand preferences. Research also highlights doodling's capacity as visual representation of complex information. Primary research in the form of a survey and quantitative analysis of young adults' perceptions about doodling is analysed. Overall, the survey acknowledges doodle as creative self-expression. The use of visualisation in branding was found to be correlated, however, views about doodle as intentional art were not conclusively proven. Youths perceive doodle's role symbolically, chiefly in creating self-identity and projecting individualism. Doodling is a highly personal style to communicate or reflect on personal experiences, but the self-confidence to explore doodling in developing ideas is not a habitual practice that is encouraged among youths. Based on the survey, the effectiveness of doodles in branding or marketing practice is questioned as responses were mixed on the application of casual art styles for creative marketing approaches. Findings suggest further observation would enable consumer researchers to better understand doodling's effectiveness to shape cultural information based on self-expression, and to explore its influence on brand decision making. To conclude, creative industry, design educators, brand owners and industry stakeholders could collaborate to optimise creative solutions to improve perceptions towards doodles and doodling as a visual thinking, information processing and decision-making tool.*

**Key words:** branding, doodling, idea generator, intentional art, self-expression, visual thinking

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The intentionality and purposes for doodling have been much critiqued by contemporary visual researchers. The attributes, characteristics, functions, and symbolisms inherent in doodling will be critically examined in this paper. Through a scholarly review on related aspects including cognitive and visual thinking processes, the motivations, and perceptions towards doodling among various segments in society are considered, focusing on the impact of doodling on audiences, students, and consumers in activities such as learning, problem solving, memory, self-expression, and creativity (Andrade, 2009; Coward, 2022; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

As doodling gains increasing interest among academics of many disciplines, the main research objective is to reflect on the significance and provide key arguments to value the role of doodling activities to several key branches of knowledge, including visual communication, psychology, literacy, and marketing science (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Lurie & Mason, 2007).

For this paper, a wealth of literature on doodling was sought, under disciplines of studies ranging from visual thinking, neurology, psychology, and sociocultural (Chamberlain, 2013; Chan, 2012). The breadth of studies found has contributed to some degree in understanding aspects of doodling as a communication and artistic tool. This enables multidisciplinary researchers to view doodles as a human activity serving multiple contextual roles when practiced.

As an academic undertaking, doodling finds a natural place as a tool for study under the research field of visual thinking (VTS Journal, 2022). The strategies and applications of visual thinking can be seen in contemporary practices, but in essence, it is a form of literacy that involves a set of skills to find meaning in imagery. The learning theories and frameworks behind visual thinking practices are grounded in the highly influential studies of cognitive development pioneers such as Rudolf Arnheim, Abigail Housen and Jean Piaget.

Intentional doodling as visual elements are commonly used to reflect brands' corporate personality, a love for innovation, or simply as a unique presence in oversaturated consumer markets such as *Food and Beverage* (F&B), fashion, retail, and other lifestyle sectors. A case study of Google Doodle is presented in the paper.

Two broad hypotheses of research guided this study: First: The significant ways doodles contribute to the study of visual thinking and second: How to encourage greater exploration of doodles in developing youth self-confidence, in idea generation, memory retention, information recall, and for branding.

## 2. METHODS

The concept of doodling as self-expression and as idea generator through visual thinking and information processing was examined through a quantitative study on the perceptions of youths towards doodling activity. Questions were designed in an online survey conducted to understand the attitudes towards doodles as an intentional visual tool used in developing self-confidence and its role in decision making and developing preference for consumer brands.

A summary demographic showed the majority of 270 young adults sampled comprised 18-20 years old, undergraduates studying architecture and design at Malaysian universities.

Research aimed to understand doodling's capacity as visual representation of complex information among youths who may be under-exposed to creative communication approaches. Research also considers the function of doodles in visual communication, and how contextual utilisation of doodles as a communication medium impacts individualistic expression as well as influencing consumer behaviour such as decision-making, brand engagement and preferences.

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Primary data from a quantitative survey of 270 young adults' perceptions about doodling was analysed. Overall, the survey acknowledges doodle predominantly as a form of creative self-expression. The use of visualisation was found to be correlated with visual thinking theories, with an association clearly established between visual thinking and self-expression. Youths perceive doodle's role symbolically, chiefly in creating self-identity and projecting individualism. Doodling is perceived as a highly personal style to communicate or reflect on personal experiences.

However, having the innate self-confidence to explore doodling to generate ideas is not a habitual practice that is encouraged as cultural practice among youths. Based on the survey, the effectiveness of doodles in branding practice is questioned as the application of casual art may not be appropriate as creative branding for certain sectors such as healthcare. Hence, views about doodle as intentional art in branding and design communication were not conclusively proven from the survey.

Overall, the survey acknowledges doodle as a signifier of identity and a mode of self-expression. The use of visual representation in branding of lifestyle sectors was found to be positively correlated.

However, the mentality about doodle as intentional artwork or style is not conclusively proven. These findings suggest further observation would be helpful to enable researchers from multiple disciplines from educators, marketers, and psychologists to better understand doodling's effectiveness in shaping cultural information based on self-expression, and to explore its influence on brand decision making.

In the final argument, results show that doodles have a significant role to help shape youth mindsets while having appreciable characteristics among both creative and non-creative communities. Branding is a viable, exciting platform to inspire youths to embrace doodling, while encouraging the idea of self-expression to improve confidence and creativity, besides providing an engagement touchpoint for the brand community. Many other methods are at the disposal of inspired creative communities, and commercial marketers and designers could tap these specific sociocultural contexts relevant for consumers in Malaysia.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this research addressed a key aspect of doodling as intentional art as a mode for self-expression, to improve visual recall and memory, and as visual representation in branding. With huge potential to boost personal creativity and to provide iconic touchpoints to commercial marketers and

brand owners, creative doodle designing should form an essential module among creative educators and creative industry stakeholders such as advertising agencies and commercial or content producers. More resources and effort could be allocated to foster fruitful collaborations between specialist doodle artists and institutions such as schools and universities to encourage doodling. With its immediacy and value as an information process medium, doodling can be an engaging solution to improve brand perceptions, for tapping youth potential for self-expression, developing confidence, and in consumer decision-making.

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