

# EVALUATION ON THE MASCOT-DESIGNED OF TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE BY USING SAUSSURE SEMIOTICS

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## INTRODUCTION

Street advertisements often feature symbol characters that capture our attention and resonate with us. Companies commonly use brand identities, known as mascots, to strengthen their reputation and attract customers. Mascots offer various business opportunities, including promoting client interest and enhancing brand recognition (Smith, 2021). For example, Kumamon, a bear mascot, was introduced in 2010 to help boost the economy of Kumamoto County in Japan after the Kyushu Shinkansen began service. Kumamon quickly became a well-known intellectual property (IP) figure, elevating Kumamoto County's fame and reputation across Japan (Shimizu, 2015; Ichikawa, 2018). To achieve success in tourism promotion, a mascot's design aesthetic and marketing plan are two essential components that must fit customers' views and preferences (Smith, 2017).

In a previous study, the author's team created three types of dolls based on Saussure's semiotic theory and the idea of bionics, which were highly regarded by tourists (Yao, Wu, & Wang, 2021). In this study, the Tiantoushui community, which includes the Tianzhong, Shetou, and Ershui townships in Changhua County, central Taiwan, serves as the subject of travel destination image (TDI). The researchers use semiotic principles to decode the image codes of popular tourist destinations and transform them into TDI mascots to promote nearby sightseeing activities. By providing the extracted steps from the design-symbol phase as a guide, inexperienced designers can efficiently create their mascots.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Tourist Destination Image*

The term "travel destination image (TDI)" refers to the visual portrayal of a specific destination, which is frequently used to encourage travel or market a destination to potential tourists (Balakrishnan & Jayaraman, 2017). It may consist of images, films, drawings, and other visual materials that perfectly express a place. For potential passengers, it is meant to arouse excitement and anticipation. Most people concur that Hunt (1971) was the first to give a definition of a TDI. He believed that TDI refers to A collection of impressions of a place where an individual or a group of people have never lived. Besides, a study by Pike (2002) also revealed that tourists' personal views, opinions, and perceptions about a potential location make up the TDI, which has a big impact on how they make their travel decisions. Some specialists now contend that cognitive imagery (CI) and affective imagery (AI) are included in the connotation of TDI (Cai & Lehto, 2016). In a nutshell, CI refers to local knowledge and perceptions, while AI is concerned with the appreciation of tourist attractions (Wang & Hsu, 2017).

### *Saussure Semiotics Concepts*

Saussure's theories on signs propose that a sign is an object with meaning, and that it is composed of a signifier and a signified (Chandler, 2017; Silverman, 1983). The signifier is the physical expression of the sign, such as an audible or visual cue, while the signified refers to the meaning that the sign conveys (Chandler, 2017; Silverman, 1983). Saussure's ideas also support the principles of

arbitrariness and difference, which are fundamental components of structuralism (Chandler, 2017). According to the principle of arbitrariness, the selection of signifier and signified is arbitrary and depends on cultural conventions (Saussure, 2011). On the other hand, the principle of difference suggests that the meanings and values of symbols are created from the internal oppositions between various components of a symbol system (Chandler,

2017). The use of these principles in design can help capture the symbol and connotation of a product image (Wu, 2021), and Saussure's notation concept has been increasingly used in design fields, particularly for character design in intellectual property (IP) (Lai & Fan, 2019). For example, the Taipei city bear mascot is distinguished from other bear mascots through the white V-stripe on its breast and the word T (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2022; Yen, 2017) (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. The pattern of oh bear, retrieved**

from <https://www.taiwan.net.tw/m1.aspx?sno=0040078>

### ***Anthropomorphic Concepts***

Anthropomorphic concepts refer to the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, which can be seen in literature, art, and religion, where animals, plants, and even inanimate objects are given human characteristics (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). In other words, anthropomorphism is the process of adding characteristics of a human look to objects or occurrences, whether they are real or imagined, and is often used to make the non-human more relatable and easier to understand.

Especially, there are many various ways to personify items in brand marketing, including interacting with customers directly on social media, using advertising pictures to metaphorically represent objects engaging in human behaviors, and personifying mascots (Mick & Fournier, 1998; Thomson, MacInnis, & Whan Park, 2005). Recent studies have

also discovered that anthropomorphizing service robots and assessing how well they are perceived in terms of their capacity to provide service and likability have a favorable effect on consumer value perceptions (Nass, Moon, & Green, 2011).

The destination is a relatively full space-time framework that is independent of the world of daily life for each individual and serves as an objective carrier of the presence of the tourism world. Both the intangible symbol system and the system of tangible objective entities are included in the destination. Tangible and objective entity system, including lodging facilities, dining establishments, and other ancillary service facilities. The brand personality of the location may be directly influenced by intangible symbol systems, including cultural ambiance, customs, myths, and historical stories (Kim, Han, & Lee, 2019; Uysal, 1998). This complicates the consumer's perception process. Anthropomorphic

marketing has steadily caught the attention of the public, but with the fiercer rivalry of resource homogenization among tourist locations, it will become a useful method for the destination to establish distinctive beneficial brand positioning (Kim, Han, & Lee, 2019).

## METHOD

### *Extraction of theme symbols of tourist destination image*

The Saussure symbol extraction approach was used to extract the metaphorical code corresponding

to the tourist destination image of the Tiantoushui area. Four design steps were summarized in this work, as shown in Figure 2. The procedures were as follows:

- 1) The tourism destination's visual concept was decided.
- 2) Significant imagery elements were extracted from imagery themes.
- 3) The figurative image elements were transformed into image elements.
- 4) The image narrative elements and image design elements that could be employed in this design in order to write the story were established.

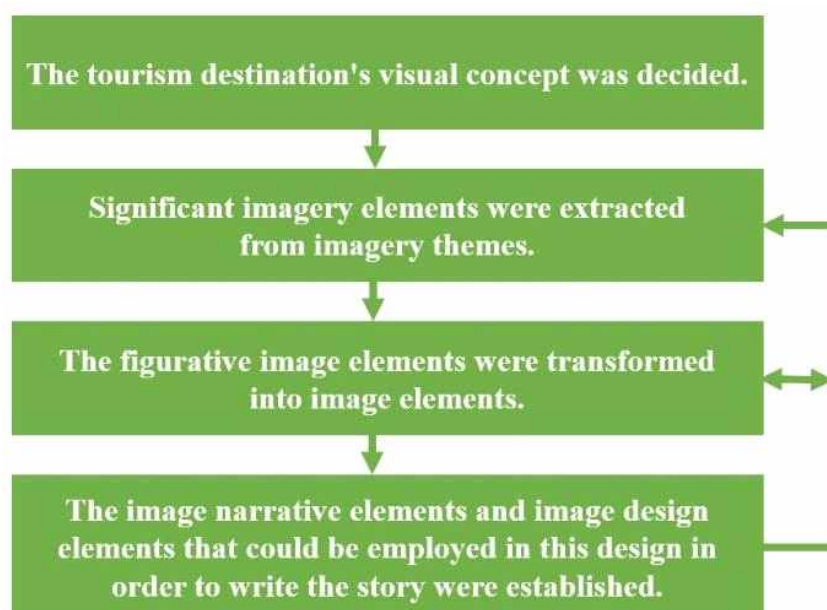


Fig. 2. Extraction steps of theme symbols of tourist destination image

### *The procedures of mascot personification*

Personification can successfully bridge the gap between brands and customers, enabling customers to relate to them and thus improve marketing efforts. Anthropomorphic elements, when used in the mascot's design, can enhance this effect. Using the relevant components produced by the symbol extraction model, this study followed

anthropomorphism procedures, depicted relevant design components as characters, and created the intellectual property (IP) of the character image. To produce a comprehensive IP of the image character, the character story (character setting) was simultaneously developed in accordance with the story elements (see Fig. 3).

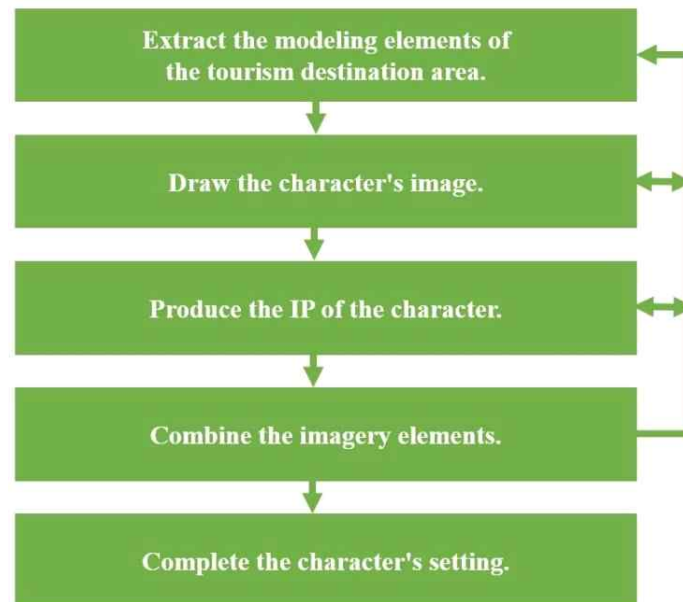


Fig. 3. The flowchart of mascot personification

## FINDINGS

### *Extraction of theme symbols of tourist destinations in Tiantoushui area*

Many distinctive agricultural products are produced in Changhua County in Taiwan. However, based on the Saussure code concept, the extraction of image elements from Tianzhong, Shetou, and Ershui Townships was carried out to further improve and energize the rural economy (Lin, Wu, & Lin, 2015). Honey Twist Rolls, a hand-made agricultural product from Tianzhong Town, has gained

popularity in Taiwan since 1976. To symbolize the harvest and satisfaction, the color element taken from these agricultural products is brown. Shetou's specialty is the textile industry, best represented by socks. The color of the extracted sign stands for warmth and happiness. Additionally, the inkstone made in Luo-Xi, a tributary of the Zhuo-shui River in central Taiwan, is a specialty of Ershui. Because of the hardness and fragility of the Luo-Xi inkstone, ink can be preserved and is less likely to dry out. Thus, the dark gray stands for simplicity and the region's culture (Table 1).

Table 1. List of element codes extracted from Tiantoushui area

Townships	Signifier	Signified
Tianzhong	Honey Twist Roll, Agricultural process products	Brown, Full
Shetou	Sock, Textile industry	Colorful, Warmth and Happiness
Ershui	Inkstone, Stone	Dark Gray, Culture

### *Personification process*

The role setting and personification of the IPs were based on the coding ideas of signifier and signified elements. Tianzhong Town is well-known for its agricultural products and the sweetness of its honey twist buns. The IP character for Tianzhong Honey was created, representing life and vitality with a cute young girl (Fig. 4A).

Shetou Township's textile industry specializes

in socks, and the trademark for the product was named Shetou Socks. The socks were matched with vibrant colors as the primary motif, which stood for vigor, warmth, enjoyment, and liveliness (Fig. 4B).

Ershui Township's high-quality Luoxi stone served as the inspiration for the Ershui Inkstone IP, with a primary color scheme of black and gray representing humanities, temperament, and connotation (Fig. 4C).



Figure 4. The IP color drafts of the Characters, A: Tianzhong Honey (upper), B: Shetou Socks (middle), and C: Ershui Inkstone (lower).

#### *Transitioning from Image to Visualization*

After completing the mascot design, it will be integrated into the actual field application, and the element IP can also be utilized. For example, tourism marketing can produce peripheral products, including masks that are practical during the COVID-19 epidemic (see Figure 5), stamps that tourists can collect to increase their sense of

participation (see Figures 6), and LINE stickers for publicity (see Figure 7). In addition, the development of actual products such as dolls and stamps can be linked to serve as teaching aids for localized tourism education (see Figures 8). Furthermore, the mascot can act as a spokesperson when introducing the Tiantoushui community (see Figures 9).





展開圖

17.5cmX9.5cm



模擬圖

Figure 5. The masks for Tiantoushui community



Figure 6. Tianzhong Honey’s stamp, Shetou Socks’ stamp, and Ershui Inkstone’s stamp.



Figure 7. LINE stickers for publicity



Figure 8. The mascots serve as teaching aids





Figure 9. Introduced the Tiantoushui community in an exhibition

It can be seen from the above that a mascot with local recognition can make tourism marketing activities more diverse, and it is easier to bring the characteristic image of the Tiantoushui community to life, increasing people's memory and interest in the destination's image.

### ***The Impact of Mascot IP on Local Economic Revitalization***

The effectiveness of mascots in marketing has been demonstrated by numerous successful campaigns. By utilizing mascots, businesses can connect with their audience and promote their brand in a fun and engaging way. However, creating a successful mascot requires careful consideration of various factors, including semiotics and anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism is particularly useful in creating an engaging character that resonates with the audience. By adding human-like qualities to a mascot, marketers and designers can create a more relatable and memorable character. Additionally, the use of local image codes and customs can further strengthen the connection between the mascot and the target audience, promoting tourism and having a positive impact on local economic activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the use of mascots in marketing has proven to be a valuable strategy for businesses to

promote their brand and increase their visibility. This study's results demonstrate the effectiveness of utilizing anthropomorphic elements in mascot design, which allows customers to better relate to the brand and its values. By representing pertinent design components as characters, marketers and designers can create IPs that effectively symbolize the culture and characteristics of different regions.

The techniques proposed in this study provide a practical approach for businesses and local governments to enhance their branding efforts, promote their regional specialties, and stimulate economic growth. Additionally, this study's findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the use of semiotics and anthropomorphism in marketing and design.

Overall, businesses should consider the principles of semiotics, anthropomorphism, and local image codes when creating mascots for their marketing campaigns. By doing so, they can create mascots that are effective, memorable, and relatable to their target audience. With the right approach and execution, mascots can serve as powerful tools to help businesses achieve their marketing goals and build a stronger connection with their customers.

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