

## Harley Davidson Malaysia in a Communication Perspective

Mohd Haizra Hashim<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Mu'ati @ Zamri Ahmad<sup>1</sup>, Mohd. Nizam Osman<sup>1</sup>,  
Mohd Yazid Mohd Yunos<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, University Putra Malaysia,

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Design and Architecture, University Putra Malaysia

**ABSTRACT:** Harley Davidson's is one of the biggest motorcycle names that is very popular in Malaysia and worldwide. The name has its own appeal among its fans. A Harley Davidson community mostly consists of successful professional groups and entrepreneurs. This biking community is active and it regularly holds meetings as social activities. Some of the members are also distributors of Harley Davidson's motorcycle parts, sold at reasonable prices due to loyalty and deep enthusiasm in the brand. This study focuses on organisational and visual communication in a Harley Davidson community in Malaysia.

**KEYWORDS:** *Harley Davidson, organisation, culture, identity*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Most of affairs in a society realise the importance of community. Various programmes are conducted to improve the relationship between members and organisations. The most fundamental thing that strengthens an organisation is loyalty. In a biking scene, members succeed in forming a strong community as a result of the strength of the product used. This community is not just about building relationship and loyal consumer base but can also develop consumer advocators. This community will maintain the good name of Harley Davidson's products and defend them from any harming elements. The second strength lies in the ease of attracting new users (consumer acquisition) from fanatic members' proposals. New users who join this community will be excited and usually provide good feedback about Harley Davidson's products. The fourth strength is the presence of peer-to-peer consumerism, a service among members that caters questions related to Harley Davidson products.

When we speak of Harley Davidson, it is arguable that the entire world is well aware of this American brand. Harley Davidson is a large American *big bike* product that has aesthetic values and its own fans. Owning a Harley Davidson motorcycle is a pride. Its riders will feel stout, macho, luxurious and proud. The quality, character and value of the ride carries a real satisfaction. Overall, solid design combinations, the performance of the twin V engine and the aesthetic value of the brand are able to put its community in a different class.

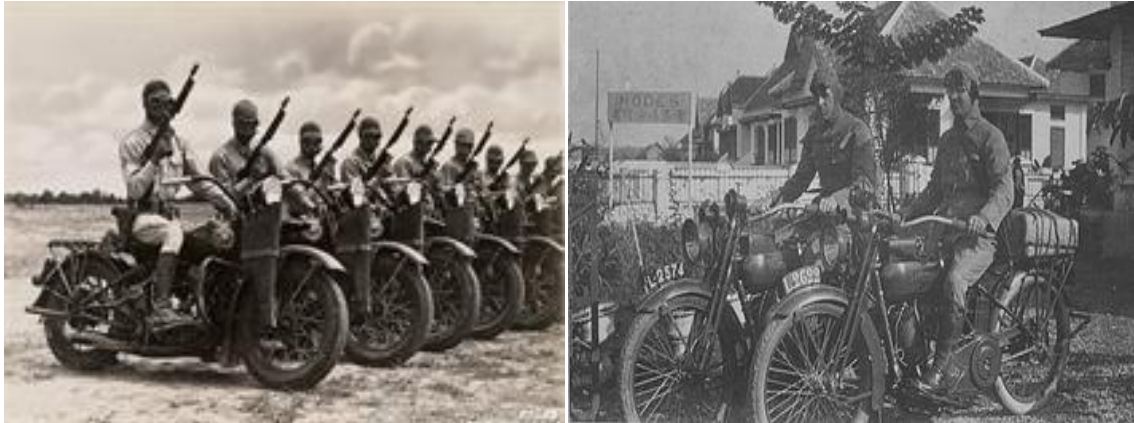
### II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to look from the point of communication in a Harley Davidson community in Malaysia.

### III. HARLEY DAVIDSON'S HISTORY

Harley-Davidson is the iconic American motorcycle manufacturer. Founded out of a small shed in 1903 by William S. Harley and brothers Arthur and Walter Davidson in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Motor Company produces traditional cruiser motorcycles utilizing air-cooled V-Twin engines. When Harley and Davidson produced and sold their first motorcycle in 1903, they were one of many small motorcycle marques springing up across the country. Flash forward more than a century and the Harley-Davidson brand is so rooted in American culture that the history of the company intertwines with the history of America itself. Harley-Davidson incorporated in 1907, with William Davidson officially joining forces with his two brothers and Harley. Setting down roots in Milwaukee, Harley Davidson began hiring employees and by the end of the decade were producing bikes using its signature 45-degree air-cooled V-Twin. During the next decade H-D continued to expand. Many sales were generated by Uncle Sam, with the American military sourcing Harley motorcycles during the First World War. The Bar and Shield continued to grow and by the early '30s, its only surviving domestic rival was Indian. Again H-D expanded in peacetime and found itself producing high quantities of bikes

for the American military during World War II. Harley Davidson press material cites its wartime motorcycle production at 90,000 units. Post-war Harley Davidson developments include the introduction of the Sportster in 1957, the oldest production model in the current H-D lineup, as well as other signature H-D models. Harley experienced changes in ownership in the '60s, going public in 1965 and eventually merging with American Machine and Foundry (AMF) in 1969. A decline in fortunes saw AMF sell its stake back to current ownership, which included members of the founding families, in the early '80s. The Davidson family's involvement in the day-to-day running of H-D continues, with direct descendent Willie G. Davidson serving as President of Styling. (Motorcycle USA Staff, 2008)



*Harley Davidson produced many motorcycles for U.S. military during world wars.*

Harley Davidson has been an important icon in the classic motorcycle history. The motorcycle technology then developed into Japan until the generation of the Yamaha, Honda, Kawasaki and Suzuki brands. The Japanese motorcycles are more functional, whereas Harley Davidson has more emotional touch and self-identity appeal to its riders although the motorcycle has existed since 1930s.

#### IV. SCOPE OF STUDY

In this study, the researcher uses the texts of the previous studies as well as the data obtained in the field of study as texts. This data will be examined to identify the meaning of understanding communication based on the mindset of Malaysian society. The researcher uses discipline from the point of communication of organisation and visual communication.

#### V. CASE STUDY

This study is a case study using a qualitative approach. The researcher uses the qualitative approach in this study to explore Harley Davidson community members based on several reasons.

1. Suitability to explore the underresearched area and ability to provide a detailed understanding of the phenomenon studied (Creswell J., 2002).
2. Quantitative studies have limitations, ie, can not provide a large and detailed perspective.
3. Qualitative studies help the researcher understand more about the Harley Davidson community. This is in line with Denzin's view, N & Lincoln, Y (1998) stating that other methods are less successful in elaborating complicated and complex problems.

As a result, this method gives the researcher an opportunity to explore this study. This study is not intended to predict or generalise, but to seek understanding of the Harley Davidson community from the point of communication. This is to answer arising questions of the problem and how it is carried out. Selection of participants is in line with the intention of obtaining as much data as possible or relevant information. This study takes an inductive approach, which is to guide the concept and category development of the phenomenon studied through the data collected.

The understanding of the phenomenon studied is derived from the interpretation of the researcher based on experience and perception. The findings are narrative and descriptive that are supported by participants' words. In summary, these features aim to provide an understanding of the Harley Davidson community practices at the actual locations. Qualitative case study methods also enable the researcher to study, observe and examine what is happening in the real environment.

## VI. HARLEY DAVIDSON COMMUNICATION

Communication is a process of conveying a person's thoughts or feelings to others by using meaningful symbols for both parties. In certain situations, communication uses certain media to alter the attitudes or behaviors of a person or a number of people until there is a certain impression expected. (Effendy, Onong Uchjana, 2003). Communication is a process of transfer of understanding in the form of ideas, information from one person to another (Handoko, 2002: 30).

According to Burgoon (1978), communication is a dynamic process involving creation of shared meanings, and the meaning is created from the process of communicating and receiving messages through the shared and understood codes.

The success of communication within the Harley Davidson community depends on the accuracy and precise assessment of a Harley Davidson owner. This verbal or non verbal message is actually deciding what is known and how the motorcycle user is using it. Effective communication includes the delivery of content and the way it is conveyed. The receiver will understand the content as wished by the sender. The primary basis for this communication is the community members have the common interest to own and use the motorcycles.

## VII. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The researcher finds some communication elements within the Harley Davidson community:

### 7.1) Media Communication

The presence of social media has led to changes in community participation through online. The community participation does not only occur in the real world but also in cyberspace (Ali & Samsudin 2012). In fact, social media has had an impact on the community's involvement in current issues. These engagements include actively following current issues through blogs, forming online groups to convey aspirations, blogging on current issues, commenting on online news, articles / blogs, participating in online discussions, downloading or spreading news related to current issues (PewInternet, 2009)

Mass communication involves the use of print or electronic media, such as newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, or television, to communicate to large numbers of people who are located in various places - often scattered all over the country or world. The people reached may be in groups of varying sizes or may be lone individuals. A number of different elements make up mass communication media; images, spoken language, printed language, sound effect, music, color, lighting and a variety of other techniques are used to communicate messages and obtain particular effects. (Berger, 1995: 12)

The role and the future of the media is a simple interaction between the Harley Davidson community members as well as outsiders. These relationships can be maintained and connected with each other regardless of time and place. Hence, the use of social media includes the delivery of the latest news on Harley Davidson through a variety of methods according to the current trend. The influx of social media such as Facebook and Twitter is seen as an opportunity to spread messages about activities due to its fast and global nature. This is evident when there are celebrities who use social media as a main tool to disseminate their biking activities.



### 7.2) Cultural Communication

Tubbs, Stewart L. and Sylvia Moss (2012) state that a person's culture will determine how we communicate, meaning a person's way of communicating with others of the same or different culture. Cultural characters that have been developed from childhood are very difficult to get rid of. This is because culture is a way of life that is developed and shared by in a community and inherited from generation to generation.

Culture and communication have been defined and re-defined repeatedly, as they are concepts that are intimately linked with what is intrinsically human. Indeed, from an anthropological point of view, culture became consolidated with all of its variables when man first appeared and established interpersonal relationships

with the different individuals forming separate communities, thus allowing for intercultural communication. (García-Carbonell, A. & Rising, 2006)

Intercultural communication means that individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other. Culture affects values, beliefs, worldviews, non-verbal behaviors, languages and how to relate to others (Liamputtong, 2010). In other words or more precisely, intercultural communication involves interaction between people who have cultural perceptions and different symbol systems to change communication events. Differences in language, food, attitudes, work habits, social behaviors, and so on can cause many intercultural ineffective interactions (Samovar & Potter, 2004). The intercultural communication competence is an individual's ability to manage multiple forms of challenges from various cultures. However, intercultural competencies are not only defined as multicultural knowledge, but also as awareness of cultural differences, beliefs, tolerances, and interpersonal skills in order to avoid misunderstandings. (Zimmermann, 2010)

According to Rohana Yusof (2010: 76-85), culture is a way of life based on material and non-material. Material culture is a knowledge of production, handling and use of goods associated with moral values based on religion, rules and ethics. This material culture contains human-made objects, whereas non-material culture involves abstract forms of human creation such as customs, taboo, beliefs and so forth. She concluded that, although cultures differ from within one community to another, they have the following features:

a. Change

A process where aspects of the American culture on the Harley Davidson motorcycles undergo transitions from time to time according to circumstances.

b. Learned

All forms of American behaviors and cultures that are followed by the individuals in the community are not based on instincts, but each is learned through a learning curve. This has become a trend among the Harley Davidson communities in Malaysia.

c. Shared

Each culture is shared by a group of people. For example, Harley Davidson motorcycle is a symbol shared by the American community for the purpose of socialising among them. This is also shared within the biking communities in Malaysia.

d. Integrative Value

A society is integrated by a cultural character that has integrity value. For example, the love for a classic Harley Davidson motorcycle is measured as a characteristic of the culture which carries members together.

American cultural communication on Harley Davidson is constantly changing as humans always tend to learn something new which is happening in this country as well. Cultural change involves all people in the world. The clash of the world's cultural communication along with the emerging of technology brings people closer to accelerating the process of change.

### 7.3) Visual Communication

Visual communication is available everywhere today, starting from internet usage and television screens to street signboards and retail outlets. According to the National Education Association of USA, "Western Civilisation is more dependent on visual culture, visual artifacts and visual communication as a way of discourse and how to build a social and cultural identity." (NEA, 2001)

This shows that humans communicate better, visually. Visual communication makes things interesting and effective indirectly. Humans will remember and quickly learn from images rather than texts. However, text-based communication helps humans explore and understand these symbols deeply.

Visual communication is a discipline to learn communication concepts and creative expressions through various media in delivering messages and ideas visually by organising graphical elements in the form of shapes and drawings, letters, color composition and layout. Thus, visual communication can be accepted by a person or group that is targeted by a recipient. (Kusrianto, 2007).

Visual communication covers all aspects of human life, including social, cultural, political, economic, health, education and so on. This shows that humans can not be separated from it. Visual communication on Harley Davidson covers the bike's classic design associated with its rider's individual identity and also the American people.

Secondary communication (visual) requires the media to document information such as writing on the motorcycle's body and so forth. The information to be conveyed has to undergo a planning process to keep up and compete with the day and age. Information that has been symbolised, will cover the American culture, race and language. Media used in the secondary communication requires a more effective artifact, such as this classic motorcycle. This classic motorcycle displays information. Dissemination of information in secondary communication is done repeatedly as done indirectly in the media.

Visual communication through symbols found on these motorcycles is an overview of the American community in the past. This is the foundation of growth and development of the people's culture. In this regard, the researcher points out that the visual communication on the Harley Davidson motorcycles is a survival legacy in the past that has been preserved to this day.

Visual communication according to Waluyanto (2005) is a communication that uses basic elements of visual language as its main strength in communicating. The basic element of the visual is everything that can be seen and used to convey the meaning, intention, message and media. As one of the visual communication design study areas, it is an integrated applied science that studies the concept of communication and creative expression, techniques and media, in order to deliver messages and ideas visually until they are received or functioned to their purpose.

An architectural design that delivers a different message and gives different definitions to each artwork. An artwork can be defined through four activities below:

- Designers technical skills.
- Designers competence and creativity in manipulating the use of the equipment.
- Creativity in interpretation and presentation of design artworks.
- Possess emotional impact on the surrounding community.

Through the definitions described above, it is argued that the artwork design has a particular purpose it carries and is to be communicated to the public. A motorcycle is built from the expressions of ideas and creativity through skills and exploration of certain media, also hardware applications. People who observe and appreciate the art of motorcycle design will be impressed by their emotions or excitement. (Sidi Gazalba, 1977)

This invention results from the expression or imagination of a designer in visual forms. It is intended to be appreciated and felt by the local community. Every designer has their own reasons and ideas or inspirations. Creative designers will always be able to apply diversity in creating various unique artworks.

Visual is a viewpoint that can be seen through the naked eye. Generally, a motorcycle design is intended to visually communicate with the users. In the book 'Encyclopaedia of Graphic Design and Designer' written by Alan and Isabella, the term graphic design refers to the activities involved in typography ie art involving the selection and arrangement of letters, illustrations as well as images, photography, printing, advertising and information.

American community first crafted motorcycle artwork through expressions associated with beliefs, life surrounding them and was produced in various shapes and forms. Visual communication is one of the languages. The visual communication information design is an expression of creativity, applied to various symbols by processing graphic design elements.

The outcome of the artwork design is an expression of the designers creativity. This classic motorcycle is operating as a visual communication medium in conveying beliefs, confidence, ideas, tastes and feelings. The use of symbols is an instance of how visual communication is found and used to share information in daily life among American people in the past and today.

#### 7.4) Organisational Communication

Organisation is a body of various individuals with diverse advantages that perform different tasks and roles to achieve the same goals (Robbins, 2003). Achievement of organisational goals is dependent on two elements – human and non-human. Human elements consist of accountability and commitment to the organisation, whereas non-human elements involve processes, policies, structures and technologies. These two elements will influence the behavior either of individuals or groups in an organisation. (Abd.Aziz, 2003).

According to Timm and De Tienne (1995), the success of an organisation relies heavily on the communication used or practiced. Communication process is crucial in providing employee satisfaction and improving the

productivity of an organisation to achieve organisational goals and development. The acceptance of accurate information is essential for the purpose of avoiding negative impact that will affect productivity of an organisation. According to George and Jones (2008), communication will be more effective when all members of an organisation share information with each other and can understand the information presented clearly. Clear communication will help employees and organisations improve motivation and work performance as well as reduce a potential of retrenchment in the organisation.

Communication in an organisation is more complex compared to individual communication. This is due to inclusion of many people with a variety of behaviours and it also involves broader and more focused scopes.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Organisational and visual communication on Harley Davidson motorcycles is an important element in reviving the history and civilisation of the U.S. The brand is an important and respected cultural heritage, not because it is one of the earliest motorcycle builders in the country, but due to its aesthetic values. Apart from the work, it also reflects American cultural thinking in the fields of engineering, economics and sociology. Indeed, classic Harley Davidson motorcycles are a symbol of splendor as they are regarded to represent the glorious era of the American automotive engineering back in the day.

Organisation communication within the Harley Davidson community uses strategic information and knowledge and is able to plot the knowledge in achieving organisational objectives. The main strategy towards the formation of this organisation is to catalyze the development of a knowledge-based American economy which is a major source of deciding future progress. The important aspect of this classic motorcycle creation process is the strategic investment in this classic motoring industry and the sharing of knowledge as an added value to the Harley Davidson company.

### Reference

- [1]. Abd.Aziz (2003). *Komunikasi Untuk Pengurus*. Utusan Publication & Distributor Sdn. Bhd. Kuala Lumpur.
- [2]. Ali Salman & Samsudin A. Rahim (2012). *New media and youth participation: towards nation building*. Retrieved from <http://www.ukm.my/> [27 September 2012].
- [3]. Berger (1995: 12). [\*A plan-based approach to strategic communication\*](#).
- [4]. Burgoon Michael & Raffner Michael,(1978). *Human Communication A Revision of Approaching/Communication*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- [5]. Creswell, J. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- [6]. Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y (Eds) (1998) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, Thousand Oaks (Calif), Sage.
- [7]. Effendy, Onong Uchjana. (2003). *Teori dan Filsafat Komunikasi*, Bandung : PT. Citra Aditya Bakti
- [8]. García Carbonell, A. & Rising (2006). *B.Culture and communication*.Georgia: College of Management Georgia Institute of Technology Atlanta, Georgia, USA-
- [9]. ISSN: 13 987 099773617. Páginas: 23-40. Año: <http://www.upv.es/diaal/publicaciones/rising1.pdf>
- [10]. George & Jones (2008) *Understanding and Managing Organizational Behavior*, 5th Edition.
- [11]. Handoko( 2002: 30) *Manajemen Personalia dan Sumberdaya Manusia*, BPFE: Yogyakarta.
- [12]. Kusrianto (2007). *Pengantar Desain Komunikasi Visual*.
- [13]. <https://pdfkingdom.com/pdf/downloads/pengantar-desain-komunikasi-visual-adi-kusrianto.pdf>
- [14]. Liamputtong, P. (2010). *Performing qualitative cross-cultural research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [15]. Motorcycle USA Staff (2008). Harley Davidson Motorcycle History. <http://www.motorcycle-usa.com/2008/02/article/harley-davidson-motorcycle-history/>
- [16]. NEA (2001) <http://www.nea.org/>
- [17]. Rohana Yusof (2004). *Penyelidikan sains sosial* (Edisi Kemas Kini).
- [18]. Pahang: PTS Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd.
- [19]. Robbins (2003). *Organizational Behavior*, 10th ed., Prentice Hall, ISBN 0-13-100069-1, New Jersey
- [20]. Pew Internet (2009). *The demographics of online and offline political participation*.
- [21]. Retrieved from [http://pewInternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement/3--The-Demographics-of-Online-and-Offline-Political-Participation/2-- Online-Politics.aspx](http://pewInternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement/3--The-Demographics-of-Online-and-Offline-Political-Participation/2--Online-Politics.aspx) [27 September 2012].

- [22]. Samovar, L. A. dan Porter, R. E. (2004). *Communication Between Cultures* (5<sup>th</sup>Ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- [23]. Sidi Gazalba (1977). *Pandangan Islam Tentang Kesenian*. Pustaka Antara. Kuala Lumpur
- [24]. Tubbs, Stewart L. dan Sylvia Moss (2012) *Human communication : principles and contexts* McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- [26]. Timm & De Tienne (1995). *Managerial Communication: A Finger on the Pulse*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [27]. Waluyanto (2005). *Komik sebagai Media Komunikasi Visual Pembelajaran*.
- [28]. Nirmana, Volume 7 Nomor 1, Januari 2005 page: 45-55.
- [29]. Zimmermann, K. (2010). *Intercultural Competence As A Success Factor Of Virtual Multicultural Teams – A Case Study on the Team Effectiveness of Global HR Teams Master*. Tesis Master, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.