

Cultural Identity Through the Background Design of Three Animated Advertisements: The Perceptions of Z Generation

Arum Wulandari^{1)*}, Riksa Belasunda²⁾, Syarip Hidayat³⁾

^{1,2,3)} Master of Design, Faculty of Creative Industries, Telkom University, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email : arumwulandariaw@student.telkomuniversity.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Background design in animated advertising is often treated as a secondary visual element, while most studies focus on character design and narrative. This study examines how background design in three Indonesian animated advertisements Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat functions as a representation of culture and how Generation Z audiences interpret the cultural meanings embedded within those backgrounds. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research applies Kurtz's (2020) background art framework, including form, color, perspective, shadow and light, texture, art style, image placement, and narrative function. Cultural representation is analyzed through Koentjaraningrat's concepts of ideas, activities, and artifacts, while audience reception is examined using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory through semi-structured interviews with 28 Generation Z informants aged 18-27. The findings show that each advertisement uses distinct visual strategies to construct representations of Indonesian cultural identity. Warm and cool color palettes function as cultural signifiers, perspective shapes the perception of space, and anime-inspired visual styles make local cultural content more globally accessible and commercially appealing. Among the 28 informants, 22 occupied the Dominant position, recognizing the cultural environments as familiar and emotionally resonant. Four informants occupied the Negotiated position, acknowledging tensions between anime aesthetics and Indonesian visual specificity, while two occupied the Oppositional position, criticizing the simplification and homogenization of regional cultural representation. This study demonstrates that animated advertisement backgrounds function not merely as decorative settings, but as culturally meaningful visual spaces that influence audience perception and cultural recognition among Generation Z.

KEYWORDS

Indonesian Animation
Background Design
Cultural Representation
Gen Z Perception
Visual Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Visual media, particularly backgrounds in animation industry, often undergo a paradigm shift, with many viewing backgrounds merely as supporting elements. Backgrounds in animation can provide a depiction or reflect both local and modern cultural identities in Indonesia. This phenomenon is not limited to countries that produce animation but has also extended to Indonesia, which continues to develop in the field of animation. There has been an increase in animated advertising in Indonesia from 2019 to 2025, based on data from the 2020 Ainaki report, which indicates that the animation industry in Indonesia grew by 153%, with an average annual increase of 26%. Animation serves as a story and an experience that showcases imagination, which collectively evolves by imparting symbolic meaning and giving form to things that are merely imagined or remembered by people (Man, 2024).

Advances in media communication, including animation production, enable Background Artists to depict both local and modern Indonesian culture through unique, high-quality media. Animated advertisements capitalizing on this opportunity include those by Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat, which adopt the stylistic elements of Japanese animation in their ads while blending them with distinctive local Indonesian culture. These advertisements are intended to fulfill marketing functions that go beyond serving merely as informational media; they aim to influence emotions, serve as a source of knowledge, convey the meaning of messages, and build trust with the audience (Fawzi et al., 2022). Challenges arise, such as how to preserve the distinctive cultural identity of Indonesia within the global media landscape. The presence of these three animated advertisements addresses this challenge by blending the collaboration between background designs that incorporate culture with animated media. Based on existing Japanese animation, such as anime, which reflects Japanese lifestyle and culture. This has permeated various social groups adhering to diverse cultural norms and values, becoming part of Japanese popular culture (Yusof et al., 2023). This is similar to the three advertisements that combine these elements to showcase Indonesia's everyday local culture through animation.

The evolution of animation in Asia is no longer dominated solely by commercialism; rather, it has shifted into a strategic medium for representing national cultural identity (Teru, 2010). In Indonesia, this phenomenon is clearly visible in animated advertisements such as Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat, which adopt anime visual aesthetics to wrap local narratives. However, in visual design studies, researchers' attention is often focused solely on character design or narrative storytelling, while background elements are frequently reduced to mere decorative supporting elements. In fact, the background plays a crucial role as environmental storytelling, constructing the spatial context, time, and cultural identity of the place where the characters live. Animated ads currently airing on digital media not only highlight characters and stories but also rely on the background as a visual element to set the mood. The background serves as a setting that supports the story, reinforces cultural characteristics, and influences the audience's viewing experience. Wikayanto et al. (2023) explain that the setting or background plays a significant role in storytelling and impacts the attitudes or actions of characters as narrative elements; by designing an effective environment, one can attract viewers and leave a lasting impression on the scenes presented. Wang & Sharudin (2025) discuss how backgrounds in animation influence viewers and enhance engagement by blending emotions within them; backgrounds do not appear arbitrarily without emotional resonance, and vice versa. Backgrounds in animation that depict local cultural representations aim to introduce and preserve iconic locations for the community. In line with this, Wells & Moore (2016) offer the perspective that backgrounds create a solid environmental atmosphere and give characters a strong sense of presence within that environment or setting. The layers within the background bridge scenes related to the characters; thus, without a background, these elements feel empty and fail to convey the intended connection. Good background design can draw viewers in and immerse them in scene being presented. Background details create an impression on viewers, and creators play a role in researching specific locations related to the animated story to present the right visual background and create an immersive atmosphere.

The use of animation in advertising must be able to create a unique impression and capture the attention of the youth market. More than just a marketing strategy, the incorporation of local elements into animation is, in essence, a form of learning rooted in local wisdom (Atmojo et al., 2022). This concept aligns with the view that local wisdom is a nation's identity, absorbing and adapting external cultures, such as anime's visual style,

into its own distinct character. In line with this, the high number of comments on the three animated ads serves as an indicator for selecting the subjects of this study. The number of viewer comments on YouTube reached the thousands compared to other animated ads released from 2019 to 2025, demonstrating a significant surge in views. The Pocari ad was viewed 15,801,955 times, the Sasa animated ad 8,300,525 times, and the Khong Guan ad 1,291,683 times. The comments and view counts indicate viewer engagement. This study aims to analyze the background designs in these three ads and examine the cultural factors influencing Generation Z's perceptions. This is based on Generation Z's interests, as reinforced by data from the IDN Research Institute in collaboration with Advisia from May 29 to July 9, 2023, which found that 62% of Gen Z in Indonesia are significantly influenced by ads on social media and YouTube (Muhammad, 2024).

Previous studies on Indonesian animated advertisements have made valuable contributions, yet several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Hatta and Jupriani (2025) examined the Pocari Sweat advertisement primarily through a general visual style review, offering descriptive observations without situating background elements within a cultural representation framework. Similarly, Alfath et al. (2025) applied a semiotic approach to the same advertisement, identifying surface-level cultural signs but stopping short of analysing how those signs function as part of a layered background design system or how they are received by audiences.

Beyond these two studies, the broader body of literature on Indonesian animation and advertising shares three methodological and analytical weaknesses. First, most studies adopt a single-case design, analysing one advertisement in isolation, which limits the ability to identify comparative visual and cultural patterns across different brands and narrative contexts. Second, the dominant use of general semiotics tends to focus on what cultural signs are present rather than how those signs are structurally organized through background design as an environmental storytelling system. Third, and most critically, prior research has not empirically examined audience reception of culturally hybrid animations. That is, works in which local Indonesian content is rendered through foreign aesthetic conventions such as Japanese anime. As a result, the interpretive gap between the advertiser's encoding of cultural identity and the audience's actual decoding of that identity remains underexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of three Indonesian animated advertisements such as Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat, using Koentjaraningrat's Three Forms of Culture as a framework for analysing background design as a cultural artifact, and Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory to empirically map how Generation Z audiences interpret the cultural representations embedded within those backgrounds. Previous studies discussing Indonesian animated advertisements generally focus on semiotic interpretation, character representation, or general visual styles without specifically examining how background design operates as a cultural representation system. Most studies also analyze animation as singular visual objects without comparing multiple advertisements or exploring how audiences interpret the represented cultural spaces. Consequently, the role of background design in constructing collective memory, spatial identity, and everyday cultural experience remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by comparatively analyzing three Indonesian animated advertisements and examining Generation Z audience reception toward the cultural representations embedded within the backgrounds. Assessing the effectiveness of advertisements is crucial for investigating how animated ads influence viewers' attention and memory, so that the results of this research can inform the content produced in the future (Kuisma dkk., 2010).

Although these studies have made significant contributions, there remains a significant research gap. The majority of previous studies have focused on a single case study without any comparison and have employed the commonly used approach of general semiotics without deeply analyzing background elements as cultural artifacts. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by offering a novel comparative analysis of three animated advertisements: Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat. Specifically, this study examines the background design structure using Koentjaraningrat's Three Forms of Culture framework and empirically measures how Generation Z perceives these representations using Stuart Hall's theory.

The research questions are: how are background aspects and cultural elements presented in these three animated advertisements, and how does Generation Z perceive these cultural and visual representations? The objective of this study is to understand the visual forms and cultural meanings in advertisements and how both influence the perceptions of Generation Z viewers. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to animators and background artists as a foundation or guideline for background design.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine background design in Indonesian animated advertisements and Generation Z's cultural reception of those designs. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aim, to interpret visual cultural meaning and understand subjective audience perception, requires interpretive depth rather than statistical generalization (Sugiyono, 2013).

The research objects were the animated advertisements of Sasa (Sasa Hadirkan Rasa), Khong Guan (Khong Guan Lebaran), and Pocari Sweat (Jadilah Bintang SMA), selected based on their high viewer engagement on YouTube, with view counts of 15,801,955, 8,300,525, and 1,291,683 respectively, significantly exceeding other Indonesian animated advertisements released between 2019 and 2025. Visual data were collected through systematic frame-by-frame observation of each advertisement, focusing on background scenes featuring identifiable cultural elements. Key scenes were selected based on two criteria: (1) backgrounds featuring iconic Indonesian landmarks, and (2) backgrounds depicting recognizable everyday cultural activities.

Participant recruitment followed purposive sampling. Informants were required to meet three criteria: (1) belonging to Generation Z, defined as individuals aged 18–27 years; (2) actively using digital media platforms, specifically YouTube and Instagram, on a daily basis; and (3) having previously watched at least one of the three analyzed advertisements prior to the interview. A total of 28 informants were recruited. This sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new themes or response patterns emerged from the interviews (Sugiyono, 2013).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each informant. Each interview session lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted online via video call. The interview protocol consisted of three thematic sections: (1) recognition whether informants could identify specific cultural elements in the advertisement backgrounds; (2) relevance and familiarity, whether the depicted environments corresponded to informants' personal cultural experiences; and (3) visual interpretation, how informants made sense of the relationship between the animated settings and Indonesian daily life. The interview process focused on how informants recognized

visual cultural elements, emotionally responded to the environments presented, and interpreted the relationship between the animated settings and Indonesian daily life.

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, visual analysis, backgrounds from all three advertisements were systematically examined using Kurtz's (2020) framework of background art elements including form, color, perspective, shadow and light, texture, art style, image placement (foreground, middle ground, background), and narrative function, alongside Koentjaraningrat's three forms of culture (ideas, activities, and artifacts) to identify cultural representations embedded within the visual design.

In the second stage, perception analysis, interview transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring response patterns. Responses were then categorized using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework. The categorization criteria were operationalized as follows: a response was coded as Dominant when the informant fully accepted the cultural representation as an authentic and positive depiction of Indonesian identity, with no critical qualification; Negotiated when the informant accepted the representation in general but expressed partial criticism regarding visual authenticity, stylization, or the choice of cultural elements; and Oppositional when the informant rejected the representation, arguing that the background failed to adequately or authentically convey Indonesian cultural identity. Each interview response was coded independently, then cross-checked against the full transcript to ensure consistency. Where a single informant's responses spanned multiple categories across the three advertisements, the predominant pattern was used for overall categorization.

Of the 28 informants, 22 were categorized in the Dominant position, 4 in the Negotiated position, and 2 in the Oppositional position. These figures are presented as descriptive counts to characterize the overall distribution of audience reception within this qualitative study, not as statistical proportions generalizable to a broader population.

To ensure data credibility, this study applied source triangulation by systematically comparing findings from the visual analysis with the interview responses. Specifically, cultural elements identified through visual analysis were cross-referenced with informants' recognition and interpretation of those same elements, allowing for verification of whether the encoded cultural meanings were received as intended.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Visual Analysis

Kurtz (2020) explains that the background in a good animation incorporates elements such as Form, Color, Perspective, Shadows and Light, Texture, Stylization, Image Placement or Layering (Background, Middle Ground, and Foreground), and Narrative or Storytelling function to construct spatial environments that carry meaning beyond mere decoration. The following analysis examines how these elements operate in the three advertisements not only as aesthetic choices but as culturally encoded visual strategies. In the three animated advertisements including Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat ads, the use of these visual aspects was observed as follows.

Form Elements

The form elements across all three advertisements reflect a deliberate blending of geometric and organic shapes that serve distinct cultural signalling functions. In the Sasa advertisement, organic forms. The curved silhouette of a street vendor's cart, the distinctive profile of the Jam Gadang clock tower, the handwritten aesthetic of a pecel lele banner, function as cultural anchors that ground the narrative in recognizable everyday Indonesian spaces. In the Khong Guan advertisement, form is concentrated in domestic interior objects:

dining tables, serving trays, and biscuit tins. These are not neutral furnishings; they operate as culturally coded objects whose specific shapes carry associative meaning tied to Indonesian family gatherings and Eid al-Fitr celebrations. In the Pocari Sweat advertisement, rigid geometric forms such as bus stops, pedestrian bridges, school building facades, establish an urban visual register that signifies modernity, mobility, and structured youth activity. These visual elements present diverse visuals in the animation to depict the diversity found in the real world (Arbi et al., 2024).

Critically, the selection of forms in all three advertisements reflects a process of cultural editing: certain objects are foregrounded while others are omitted. The Sasa advertisement, for instance, depicts a curated diversity of Indonesian regions, from West Sumatra to Papua, yet the representation is necessarily selective. What appears as "diversity" is in fact a condensed, visually manageable version of Indonesia's far more complex cultural landscape, shaped by the practical constraints of a short advertisement format. This tension between representational richness and inevitable simplification is a structural feature of advertising as a medium, and it warrants acknowledgment rather than uncritical celebration (Atmojodik, 2022).

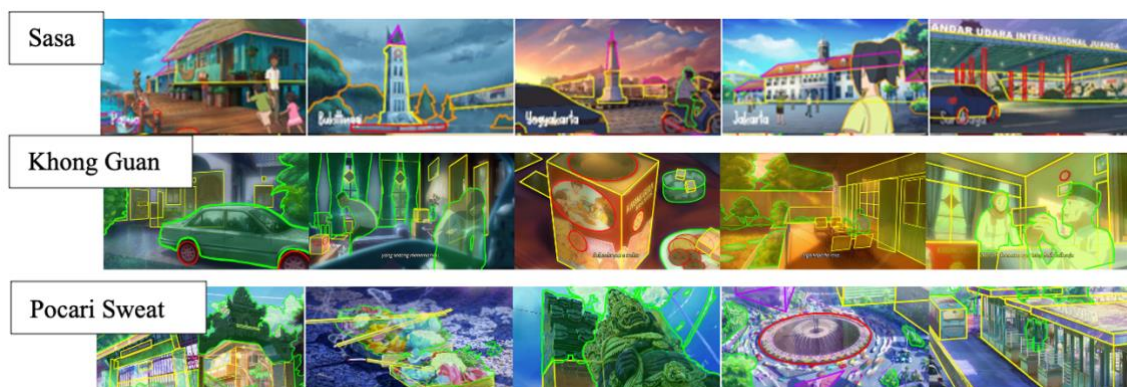


Figure 1. Analysis of Visual Elements in Three Animated Advertisement
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Color Elements

Color palettes across the three advertisements function simultaneously as aesthetic choices and cultural signifiers, operating at both the product-identity level and the cultural-memory level. There are contrasting color palettes corresponding to the narratives presented by the brands. The Pocari Sweat advertisement is dominated by cool tones, specifically blue. These colors reflect the product's identity, which psychologically represents the freshness and youthful spirit of the younger generation. Conversely, Sasa and Khong Guan use warm tones with orange-brown hues to evoke social warmth and nostalgia for the past. This aligns with (Feng, 2016) assertion that color is a crucial element in visual art; the background of an animation plays a vital role in capturing the audience's attention. Color, of course, cannot stand alone but is inseparable from other visual elements such as form, space, texture, and so on. Some of the colors presented are adapted from the originals and incorporate varying mood colors depending on a nation's cultural region and customs, and these colors will be intertwined and influence one another. The contrasting color palettes in the advertisements function not only as aesthetic choices but also as cultural signifiers. The warm orange-brown tones in the Sasa and Khong Guan advertisements construct emotional intimacy associated with Indonesian domestic life, family gatherings, and nostalgia. In contrast, the dominant

blue palette in the Pocari Sweat advertisement symbolizes urban modernity, youth productivity, and the energetic lifestyle commonly associated with contemporary Indonesian teenagers.

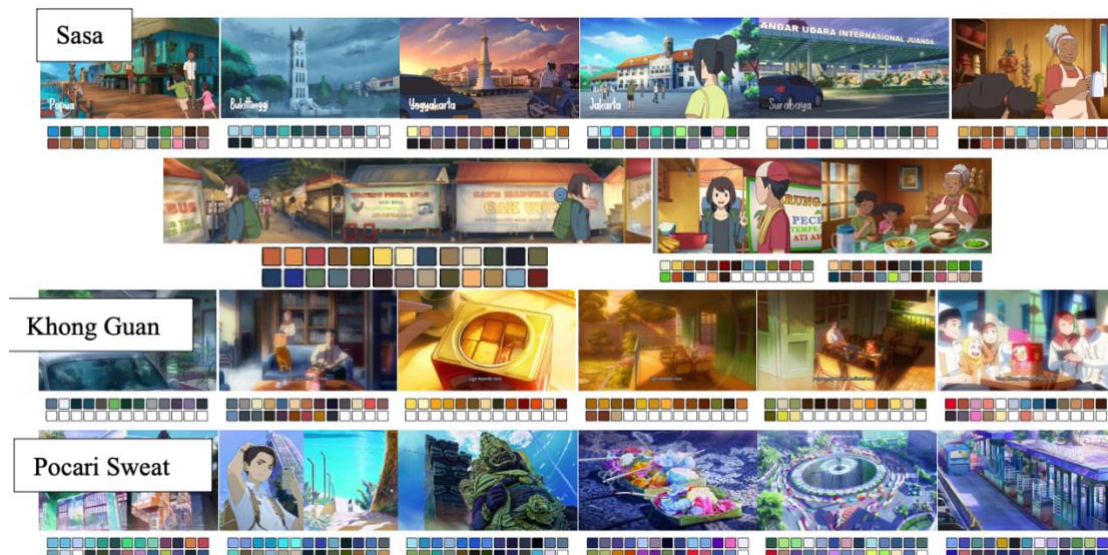


Figure 2. Analysis of Color Elements in the Three Animated Ads
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Perspective

Perspective choices in three advertisements operate not only as compositional techniques but as ideological framings of space and identity. The use of perspective in the advertisements also operates symbolically. Sasa and Khong Guan ads consistently and extensively use one-point and two-point vanishing point perspectives. This choice visually locks the viewer's focus on areas indicating closer interaction, such as the middle ground and creating spatial environments that feel enclosed, familiar, and intimate. This perspectives in Sasa and Khong Guan advertisements create a familiar and intimate spatial atmosphere that reflects communal social interaction. In contrast, Pocari Sweat advertisement takes a bolder approach by showcasing extreme areas through a three-point perspective on tall buildings in Jakarta, enhancing a sense of grandeur and scale. Extreme three-point perspective in Pocari Sweat advertisement visually emphasizes urban scale and aspiration, positioning Jakarta as a representation of mobility, ambition, and contemporary youth identity. In this case, the extreme vertical perspective positions Jakarta as a site of aspiration, ambition, and upward mobility. A spatial metaphor for the youth identity the advertisement seeks to construct. This perspective strategy, however, also carries ideological implications. By rendering Jakarta through a dramatic, almost sublime visual framing, the advertisement implicitly centers the metropolitan experience as normative horizon of Indonesian youth identity. Spaces outside Jakarta the kampung, provincial town, rural landscape are absent from the Pocari Sweat visual world. Perspective choice thus participates in a broader representational politics in which urban modernity is equated with youth aspiration, while other forms of Indonesian youthful experience remain visually unmarked. In animation, the background must rely on perspective to represent three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional plane, transforming a flat surface into a broader viewpoint (Feng, 2016).



Figure 3. Analysis of Perspective Elements in the Three Animated Ads
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Shadows and Lights

Lighting and shadows play a role in dramatizing the background in animation. All three advertisements deploy multiple lighting strategies, top lighting from natural sunlight, artificial lighting from interior lamps, backlighting in evening scenes (particularly in Sasa and Khong Guan), and mixed lighting combining natural and artificial sources. As Feng (2016) emphasizes, lighting and shadow are essential storytelling tools that shape the emotional register of animated environments.

All three advertisements utilize Top Lighting from a sunlight source and Artificial Lighting from room lights or other lamps. Additionally, there is Backlighting in the evening scenes of the Sasa and Khong Guan advertisements. There is also Mixed Lighting, which combines various light sources from both artificial and natural light. In essence, shadows and light are integral to animation production and serve as essential tools for storytelling to achieve better visual effects; therefore, attention must be paid to lighting and shadow design in accordance with real-world conditions (Feng, 2016). Lighting and shadow compositions support the emotional atmosphere of the represented environments. The warm lighting in the Sasa and Khong Guan advertisements reinforces scenes related to family interaction and communal activities. The warm, diffused interior lighting of the Khong Guan advertisement creates a visual atmosphere of intimacy and safety associated with Indonesian domestic life. The backlighting used in evening scenes of Sasa produces a nostalgic, golden-hour aesthetic that aestheticizes everyday urban spaces, street vendors, city landmarks as sites of warmth and communal memory. The brighter, higher-contrast lighting of the Pocari Sweat advertisement, by contrast, emphasizes clarity, energy, and the visible dynamism of outdoor public spaces. Brighter lighting compositions in the Pocari Sweat advertisement emphasize active outdoor environments associated with youth mobility and school activities.

What is significant here is not merely that each advertisement uses lighting to match its narrative, but that these lighting conventions draw on a globally circulated visual grammar of emotional association, one derived substantially from Japanese animation aesthetics, particularly the works of Studio Ghibli and CoMix Wave Films. The emotional effectiveness

of these lighting strategies thus depends partly on audiences' prior exposure to anime visual conventions, raising the question of whether the "Indonesian-ness" of these backgrounds is being constructed through indigenous visual languages or through a borrowed aesthetic framework applied to local content.



Figure 4. Analysis of Shadow and Light Elements in the Three Animated Advertisements
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Texture

The three animated advertisements apply textures adapted from their real-world counterparts. All three advertisements use textures that highlight building glass, asphalt, and light reflections displayed within natural settings. The visible background conveys a sense that the depicted objects are the intended ones, as exemplified by one of the three animated advertisements: the Sasa animated advertisement. See Figure 4, which features natural textures with soft textures in the mountain and ocean scenes. Rough textures are present on land, islands, and roads. In other images, the city displays hard and sturdy textures with smooth surfaces on the buildings. The kitchen features detailed textures of cooking utensils both hard and smooth as well as food items with slippery, wet, and rough textures. This application of texture is similarly used in the Khong Guan and Pocari Sweat advertisements. In line with this, (Williams, 2009) explains that texture is a crucial aspect for conveying uniqueness that builds the atmosphere of a setting by creating surface effects consistent with the animation's theme. This semi-realistic texture treatment is crucial for building the atmospheric credibility of animated settings.



Figure 5. Analysis of Texture Elements in the Sasa Animated Advertisement
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Art Style

The visual style of the backgrounds in the three animated commercials draws inspiration from Japanese anime aesthetics, such as the works of Studio CoMix Wave Films and Studio Ghibli. This style is characterized by thin outlines and semi-realistic proportions. The application of this style to locations in Indonesia represents a form of cultural fusion that borrows from global pop culture (Aziz & Ong, 2023). This fusion, however, is not aesthetically neutral. The choice to render Indonesian cultural environments through a Japanese visual framework reflects a global hierarchy of animation aesthetics in which certain styles particularly those associated with high-prestige Japanese studios, carry greater cultural capital and commercial appeal than indigenous Indonesian visual traditions. This does not diminish the effectiveness of the resulting advertisements, but it does invite critical reflection on whose visual language is being used to represent Indonesian identity, and what is gained or lost in that translation. The stylized realism in the three animated advertisement background designs presents a semi-realistic aesthetic, incorporating subtle animation techniques for simplification in certain scenes. (Feng, 2016) explains that the enrichment of realistic backgrounds follows historical reality and the laws of nature in their application and processing, using methods derived from natural forms and materials, incorporating perspective, light, shadow, and colors originating from the actual events. This stylization of realism is not about imitating real life but about extracting meaning, which is then artistically processed into a background to achieve the inherent value and meaning.

Image Placement atau Layering (Background, Middleground, dan Foreground)

All three advertisements employ a distinct separation of layers or depth of field. The layering in the animations creates the impression that the background possesses a sense of depth. Image placement across all three advertisements employs effective three-layer depth composition, foreground framing elements (foliage, power poles, architectural details), middle ground focal elements (carts, dining tables, landmarks), and distant background gradients (sky, mountains, cityscapes). The foreground is typically filled with framing elements such as foliage, power poles, and others that are consistently blurred or softened. The middle ground serves as the focal area where primary cultural elements like tables or

carts are placed. Meanwhile, the farthest background is filled with gradations of sky, mountains, houses, and others. The image placement in all three animated advertisements features effective layering, comprising a foreground, middle ground, and background. (Feng, 2016) notes that the distinct background elements help define boundaries while simultaneously indicating a clear hierarchy among the back, middle, and front sections. This depth is intangible, it cannot be touched or grasped yet the space retains a visual form that is clearly perceptible.

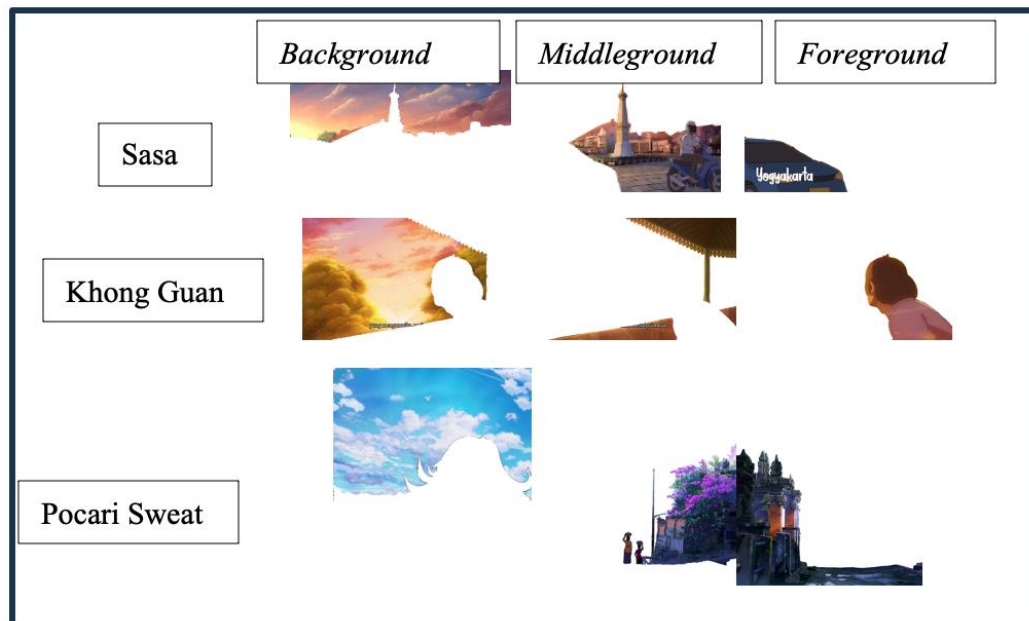


Figure 6. Image Placement Analysis of the Three Animated Advertisements
(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Storytelling

The backgrounds in all three advertisements demonstrate environmental storytelling, the capacity of visual setting to convey narrative meaning without dialogue or text. Without the need for text or dialogue, the Khong Guan advertisement's background conveys family togetherness communicate family togetherness through the arrangement of domestic space: the shared dining table, the warm interior, the gathered family members. The Sasa advertisement's background showcases the diversity of foods and using landmark architecture in Indonesia and street-level detail as narrative waypoints. The Pocari Sweat advertisement construct a narrative of youth aspiration and urban mobility through the scale and energy of Jakarta's and Bali's public spaces. This visual consistency serves as a strong foundation for connecting the narrative to the audience. The narrative elements presented evoke strong emotions and help connect the story to the audience. Hidayat et al. (2025) define narrative function in visual design as the capacity to captivate audiences through images and illustrations used creatively. In these advertisements, the backgrounds achieve narrative function precisely because they mobilize cultural memory, they depict spaces and objects that Indonesian audiences recognize from their own lived experience, and this recognition generates emotional engagement that purely fictional or generic backgrounds could not produce.

Analysis of Cultural Elements: Forms of Culture

In addition to visual elements in the background of the animated advertisements for Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat, there are certainly cultural elements. Referring to Koentjaraningrat's anthropological framework (as cited in (Tjahyadi et al., 2019)), the cultural representations in these three advertisements are constructed through three forms of culture. The cultural elements in the three animated advertisements showcase everyday culture in Indonesia. Scene selection is based on key scenes, specifically backgrounds featuring iconic landmarks of each city and those depicting everyday life. This analysis aims to examine the application of cultural forms and identify the culture evident in the backgrounds of the animated advertisements.

Cultural Forms as Ideas or Concepts (Value Systems)

At the level of ideas, each advertisement encodes a distinct value system through its visual environment. The Khong Guan advertisement's domestic interior visualizes the Indonesian cultural value of *kebersamaan* (togetherness) and the social significance of Eid al-Fitr as a time of family reunion. The Sasa advertisement encodes the value of cultural diversity (*kebhinekaan*) by visually traversing multiple Indonesian regions and their distinctive local architectures and foods. The Pocari Sweat advertisement encodes a conception of youth identity centered on aspiration, productivity, and metropolitan mobility, values closely aligned with contemporary urban Indonesian youth culture.

Critically, however, the "ideas" encoded in these advertisements are not simply reflections of pre-existing Indonesian values; they are also constructions shaped by commercial imperatives. The warmth and togetherness of the Khong Guan advertisement serves the brand's long-standing positioning as a product associated with Indonesian family celebrations. The diversity narrative in Sasa supports the brand's claim to be a seasoning for all Indonesian cuisines. The aspiration narrative in Pocari Sweat reinforces the product's identity as a beverage for active, high-achieving youth. In each case, cultural ideas are mobilized in service of brand identity, a process that Atmojo dkk. (2022) describe as the commercial appropriation of local wisdom. This does not render the cultural representations inauthentic, but it does mean that they are strategically selected and framed rather than straight forwardly representative.

Culture as Activity (Social System)

Activity manifests as patterned human behavior within society. The animation captures these activities through the characters' interactions with their backgrounds. The background of the Sasa advertisement captures the economic and social activities of the community, such as street-side buying and selling, scenes from iconic locations across Indonesia, and kitchen activities. The Khong Guan advertisement represents intimate communal social activities, namely the tradition of gathering and eating together at the dining table. The urban visual environment in the Pocari Sweat advertisement suggests representations commonly associated with youth mobility, school activities, and contemporary metropolitan lifestyles.

What is notable, however, is that the activities depicted are predominantly idealized versions of Indonesian daily life. The street vendors in Sasa are clean and orderly; the family in Khong Guan is harmonious and well-dressed; the youth in Pocari Sweat are healthy and aspirational. The messy, contradictory, and economically stratified dimensions of Indonesian daily life are largely absent. This aesthetic idealization is a common feature of advertising as a genre, but it produces a romanticized image of Indonesian culture that warrants critical acknowledgment alongside its positive reception.

Cultural Manifestations as Artifacts (Material Culture)

At the level of artifacts, the most visually concrete dimension of cultural representation, the three advertisements display a rich inventory of material cultural markers. Artifacts are the most concrete and visually tangible physical results of human activity. These artifacts serve as “identity markers.” Khong Guan artifacts are showcased through depictions of typical Indonesian homes and the warm interiors of family homes, featuring arrangements of plates, serving trays, and the iconic red biscuit tins that symbolize major celebrations in Indonesia. Sasa artifacts are exceptionally rich in local elements, ranging from the architecture of the Jam Gadang, Jogjakarta’s iconic Tugu Pal, traditional Indonesian houses, including those in Papua and others, down to micro-level details such as street vendors’ carts and pecel lele banners. The artifacts in Pocari Sweat showcase modern physical cultural forms, such as the grandeur of school buildings in Jakarta, Jakarta’s skyscrapers, the HI Roundabout (Bundaran HI), distinctive Balinese statues, and other cultural properties like Canang Sari.

The presence of these locally drawn artifacts rendered in a global visual style underscores the phenomenon of cultural negotiation. Conceptually, the representation of ideas, activities, and artifacts in these advertisements functions as a medium for the transformation of local wisdom, as explained by (Atmojo et al., 2022). This aligns with the findings of (Kholis & Ayob, 2025), who assert that the interplay of diverse cultures in artistic media can generate new aesthetic harmonies that enrich the representation of local identity without erasing its original essence. In general, it can be concluded that the backgrounds in the three animated advertisements effectively showcase cultural elements ranging from modern to traditional cultures. Cultural elements are the result of daily life in modern, traditional, or fantasy contexts, encompassing tangible and intangible signs that reflect Indonesian culture (Wikayanto et al., 2019). Local cultural elements are also evident through visual details, such as city buildings, market stalls, household furnishings, and color patterns characteristic of Indonesian culture. Some intangible cultural elements are aspects that cannot be depicted through background design because they exist solely as visual concepts. In line with the views of (Belasunda et al., 2021), films and animations serve as media aimed at conveying cultural and social phenomena to the public through digital platforms, making them easily accessible.

The cultural representations presented in the three advertisements demonstrate how local Indonesian environments are visually reconstructed through animated media. Cultural forms such as social activities, urban spaces, household interiors, traditional landmarks, and everyday artifacts become recognizable visual elements for audiences because they are closely related to daily cultural experiences.

Generation Z’s Perception of Visuals

Interview results with 28 Generation Z participants placed them in the “Dominant” category, where informants received cultural messages positively in line with the information presented in the three animated advertisements. The majority of Generation Z informants recalled and acknowledged that the local and modern cultures depicted in the three animated advertisements align with their daily lives, which they have personally experienced. These interview findings support the view of (Hernández-Pérez, 2019), who explains that animated media, including background elements, effectively enhance viewers’ perception and memory of animated visuals compared to text-based media.

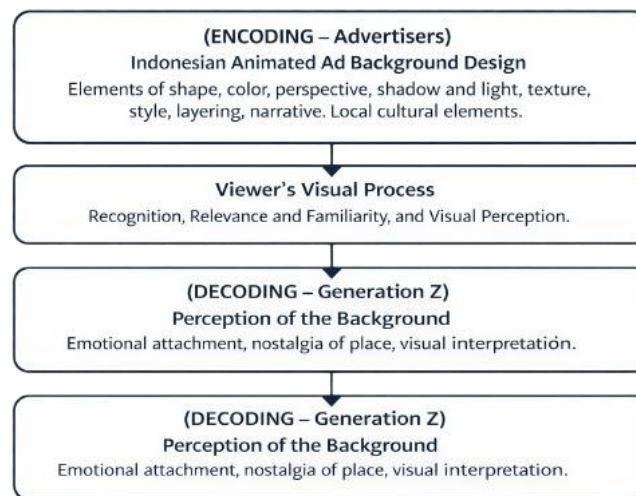


Figure 7. Visual Process Chart (Source: Personal Data, 2025)

More specifically, the Encoding process occurs when the animated advertisement airs on digital media, and at that moment, the audience views it and begins to grasp the story within. Subsequently, the Decoding process takes place, where the audience forms their opinions about the animated advertisement; see Figure 8. The interviews were conducted with 28 Generation Z participants who are frequently exposed to social media and content on digital platforms. Based on the interview results, the majority of Generation Z informants expressed positive perceptions regarding the background design of the “*Sasa Hadirkan Rasa*” animated advertisement. Informants noted that the visual settings or backgrounds in the advertisement showcased local cultural nuances commonly encountered in daily life, making them feel a sense of connection and relevance based on their personal experiences.

As respondent 1 (RYP24) shared their perception: “Visual elements like streets, houses, kitchens, power poles, or other small objects reflect the reality of life in Indonesia, making viewers feel connected and truly immersed in Indonesia.” Another informant, Informant 5 (FYA24) who holds a Dominant stance or agrees with the meaning and message of the animated advertisement, stated, “The Sasa advertisement successfully represents local culture through family warmth, a kitchen atmosphere, and evokes a sense of nostalgia and emotional closeness for me.” These two statements represent the majority of Dominant opinions that agree with the message evident in the background of the Sasa animated ad and provide evidence that background design plays a role in shaping the viewing experience regarding emotional connection and nostalgia for the setting.

Some informants expressed a “Negotiated” perspective because their experiences differed slightly. Informant 3 (LZM23) stated, “The animated ad wasn’t very memorable because I didn’t really recognize it; it used a style that isn’t typically Indonesian, but so far, some of the locations depicted seem to match the real ones”. This response points to a genuine tension in culturally hybrid animation: the adoption of a globally recognizable visual style may enhance production quality and international appeal while simultaneously diluting the specificity of local visual identity. The anime aesthetic renders Indonesian spaces legible to a broad audience but may do so at the cost of the visual distinctiveness that would make those spaces unmistakably Indonesian.

Additionally, a small number of informants rated the ad as “Oppositional,” noting that the background lacks visually striking elements. Informant 12 (NLW25) commented, “The ads fail to highlight regional distinctiveness despite featuring local icons.” This critique identifies a structural limitation of the advertisements' representational approach: the

selection of nationally recognized landmarks (Jam Gadang, Bundaran HI, Balinese statues) produces a version of Indonesian cultural identity that is nationally legible but regionally homogenizing. The rich diversity of Indonesia's 38 provinces is reduced to a curated selection of iconic visual markers that are broadly recognizable but may not resonate with audiences from regions that are not represented.

Based on the interview results, the majority of Generation Z informants found the ads appealing and nostalgic because they incorporated local culture that is closely tied to daily life. This aligns with (Prensky, 2001), who states that Generation Z or Digital Natives live in a fully digital age with a unique way of thinking that bridges the gap between real-life reality and digital media, where reflections of life are used to validate existing experiences. However, a small portion of the respondents felt the visuals were too overwhelming and lacked focus on the culture intended to be highlighted. Based on the research findings using Stuart Hall's theory, the majority of respondents fell into the "Dominant" category, followed by "Negotiated," with only a few in the "Oppositional" category. This indicates that while the advertisements were received positively and aligned with viewing experiences, viewers maintained a critical perspective consistent with their preferences derived from daily life experiences.

The visual environments presented in the advertisements encouraged audiences to recall familiar cultural experiences and everyday social settings. Referring to (Solomon & Russell, 2024) consumer perception theory, this condition can be understood as the exposure stage, where the audience receives visual stimuli through the depiction of space and environment within the advertisements. Furthermore, during the interpretation stage, the audience interprets the background as a representation of everyday culture closely aligned with Generation Z's experiences. This is reflected in comments mentioning home settings, school environments, and daily activities. The response stage is demonstrated through expressions of interest, liking, and positive attitudes toward the advertisements, indicating that the background plays a role in shaping viewers' acceptance of the animated advertisements.

Moreover, a static background is certainly not appealing to viewers, but when presented alongside animated visuals, it can evoke a deeper connection to the background images they have seen before; the combination of animation heightens their curiosity and engagement. In line with Kuisma dkk. (2010) view that engaging elements such as animations that evoke the feel of paintings or persuasive images resonate with the audience. These diverse forms of Indonesian culture do not merely imitate their original forms but adapt them into recognizable variations, creating a sense of novelty and uniqueness that appeals to the audience (Trisna & Rahma, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine how background design in three Indonesian animated advertisements: Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat. Functions as a system of cultural representation, and how Generation Z audiences receive and interpret the cultural meanings embedded within those backgrounds. The findings address both questions with a degree of clarity that has practical and theoretical implications for the fields of animation studies, visual communication design, and cultural representation research.

From a visual design perspective, the analysis demonstrates that background elements, including form, color, perspective, lighting, texture, art style, and layering. Operate not merely as aesthetic support for character and narrative, but as an independent system of cultural encoding. Each visual strategy carries ideological weight: the warm color palettes of Sasa and Khong Guan construct emotional associations with Indonesian domestic life and

family tradition; the extreme three-point perspective of Pocari Sweat frames Jakarta as a space of urban aspiration; and the semi-realistic anime art style positions Indonesian cultural environments within a globally legible visual language that enhances commercial appeal while introducing aesthetic distance from indigenous visual traditions.

From a cultural representation perspective, applying Koentjaraningrat's three forms of culture reveals that the advertisements operate simultaneously at the level of ideas (encoding cultural values such as *kebersamaan*, diversity, and youth aspiration), activities (depicting recognizable social behaviors embedded in their spatial contexts), and artifacts (deploying material cultural markers as identity anchors). Crucially, however, this study finds that cultural representation in these advertisements is not straightforwardly authentic or celebratory. The depicted cultural environments are strategically selected, aesthetically idealized, and commercially framed, processes that inevitably simplify and romanticize Indonesia's far more complex cultural landscape. The *canang sari* appears as a visual detail stripped of its ritual context; regional diversity is reduced to a curated selection of nationally recognizable landmarks; and everyday Indonesian life is rendered in its most harmonious and aspirational form.

From a reception perspective, applying Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework reveals that the majority of Generation Z informants (22 of 28) occupied the Dominant position, accepting the cultural representations as relevant and resonant with their personal experiences. This finding suggests that the visual strategies employed, particularly the deployment of familiar everyday spaces, objects, and activities as cultural anchors are effective in generating audience identification and cultural recognition. However, the Negotiated responses (4 informants) point to a genuine tension between the anime aesthetic style and the specificity of Indonesian visual identity, while the Oppositional responses (2 informants) identify the regional homogenization embedded in the advertisements' representational choices. Taken together, these three categories of reception reveal that the advertisements' cultural effectiveness is real but partial, contingent on audiences' willingness to accept hybridization and simplification as necessary features of the animated advertising format.

The findings indicate that animated advertisement backgrounds can function as visual spaces that reconstruct local cultural identity within contemporary digital media. Nevertheless, the representations presented in the advertisements also show tendencies toward cultural simplification and aesthetic stylization for commercial purposes.

Although the findings are positive, this study has several limitations. First, the research scope is limited to three commercial animated advertisements: Sasa, Khong Guan, and Pocari Sweat animations and thus cannot represent the entire body of animation work in Indonesia in general. Second, the scope of the informants and viewers studied is limited to Generation Z demographics, so the perceptions obtained may not necessarily represent the views of other generational groups with different visual backgrounds and cultural experiences.

This study makes three contributions to the existing literature. First, it establishes background design as an analytically independent dimension of cultural representation in animated advertising, distinct from character design, narrative, and dialogue and demonstrates that it can be systematically analyzed using a combined visual design and cultural anthropology framework. Second, it operationalizes Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory for the specific context of animated visual culture, providing a replicable model for categorizing audience reception based on explicit coding criteria applied to interview transcripts. Third, it demonstrates that the phenomenon of cultural hybridity in

Indonesian animated advertising, the rendering of local content through foreign aesthetic conventions, produces complex representational outcomes that cannot be evaluated through purely affirmative or purely critical lenses; rather, they require simultaneous attention to commercial effectiveness, cultural authenticity, and representational politics.

Recommendations for future research include expanding the study using different methods or examining other aspects of animation such as character audio, music, stylistic elements, and others. Future research is expected to broaden the scope of the study beyond commercial advertisements to include other animated media such as short films, local animated series, or feature films. It should also conduct cross-generational comparisons of perceptions and compare perceptions across different advertising brands. This is to further understand how media context influences cultural perceptions in animated advertisements.

For the animation industry, it is hoped that visual details can be optimized to enhance the connection between the audience and the created work. For background artists, this research is expected to serve as a reference guide for standardizing background design depictions that adhere to visual background principles and incorporate Indonesian cultural themes, thereby enhancing the exploratory capabilities of background artists.

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