

#makansiangdubes: Gaining Foreign's Affections through Localized Contents

Pemerolehan Afeksi dari Publik Asing Melalui #makansiangdubes

Agnes Siwi Purwaning Tyas¹, Georgius Benardi Darumukti²

Vocational College Universitas Gadjah Mada¹

agneswiwi@ugm.ac.id¹

Sanata Dharma University²

benardigeorgius@gmail.com²

ABSTRACT

The effect of Japan nation branding in Indonesia is strong. Indonesian youths and teenagers are attracted to *tokusatsu*, *manga*, *anime*, figures, brands, and *J-Pop* which make them easily accept and are familiar with pop-culture and *kawaii* culture from Japan. The development of Japanese creative industries and internet media also reinforce Japanese cultural impacts in Indonesia, especially because Indonesian youths love to spend their pastime accessing social media. Taking this as a good opportunity, Masafumi Ishii, the Japanese Ambassador for Indonesia tries to present the images of Japanese to be closer and accepted by Indonesian youths through #makansiangdubes. Utilizing *Instagram* @jpnamsindonesia as the platform, Ishii frequently posts his pictures enjoying Indonesian dishes he is eating while making *kawaii* or cute poses for his followers, holding Japanese and Indonesian cultural arts and brands, and doing his official activities as ambassador. This attracts his followers whose majority are teenagers and youngsters to give likes and leave positive comments to express how they adore his *kawaii* traits. The methodology adopted signification concepts and semiotics analysis on contents. The analysis on comments explains how the images affect the audience's affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses. Among all comments, affections comprise the majority.

Keywords: *affections, branding, image, media*

INTISARI

Sebagai efek *branding* negara Jepang di Indonesia sangat kuat, kaum muda dan remaja Indonesia tertarik pada *tokusatsu*, *manga*, *anime*, dan *J-Pop*, sehingga mereka mudah menerima dan familiar dengan budaya populer dan budaya *kawaii* dari Jepang. Perkembangan industri kreatif Jepang dan media turut memperkuat dampak budaya populer Jepang di Indonesia. Hal ini ditunjang pula dengan kebiasaan kaum muda Indonesia yang sering menghabiskan waktu luang mereka dengan mengakses media sosial. Masafumi Ishii, Duta Besar Jepang untuk Indonesia, melihat hal tersebut sebagai salah satu kesempatan untuk membentuk citra Jepang yang lebih dekat dan mudah diterima oleh kaum muda Indonesia melalui konten #makansiangdubes. Memanfaatkan *Instagram* @jpnamsindonesia sebagai platformnya, Ishii kerap memposting foto-fotonya ketika menikmati hidangan Indonesia sambil menampilkan pose *kawaii* atau imut untuk *followers*-nya, ketika memegang produk budaya Jepang dan Indonesia, dan ketika melaksanakan kegiatan resminya sebagai duta besar. Konten tersebut menarik perhatian pengikut *Instagram*-nya yang mayoritas adalah remaja dan kaum muda untuk memberikan *like* dan meninggalkan komentar positif sebagai wujud afeksi mereka terhadap sifat *kawaii*-nya. Metodologi penelitian ini mengadopsi konsep signifikasi dan analisis semiotika pada konten. Analisis komentar menjelaskan bagaimana citra mempengaruhi respons afektif, kognitif, dan perilaku audiens. Hasil analisis menemukan bahwa respon afeksi yang paling mendominasi komentar-komentar tersebut.

Kata Kunci: *afeksi, branding, citra, media*

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INTRODUCTION

The delivery of Japanese popular culture brings great impacts and gives large contributions in promoting their images to foreign public. Stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the country has implemented some strategies to create their positive images by introducing a wide range of Japanese cultures from traditional to contemporary, animation, manga, fashion, architecture, and design to promote Japan's various charms for foreign residents (2017). For Indonesian teenagers and youths, Japanese popular culture has strong exposures in their lives. Starting from the 1990s popular cultures like *manga*, *anime* and their related merchandise, and music have remarkably penetrated the young audience's lives with their entertaining features. Related study also indicates that there are many Indonesian teenagers and youths attracted to Japanese animation films, Japanese pop music, brands like food, and Japanese comic books (Surajaya, 2010). This is how Indonesian youths first accepted Japan and their popular cultures.

To connect with a wider audience, especially foreign publics, Japanese government maintains their proactive communication by providing information through domestic media (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). The communication strategies involve a three-pillar approach that includes (1) conveying Japan's views, policies, and initiatives, (2) sharing Japan's rich and varied attractiveness, (3) cultivating understanding and support for Japan (Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, 2019). One example of these strategies is the effort of Japanese Ambassador for Indonesia, Masafumi Ishii, to connect and interact with Indonesian youths by utilizing a social media platform that is going to be discussed in this study. Masafumi Ishii has held his position since April 2017. For many Indonesian youths as well as his *Instagram* followers, Ishii has his own distinctive image that differs him from the other ambassadors for Indonesia. Having known to enjoy special culinary from Indonesia, he frequently posts his pictures with the dishes he is eating while making *kawaii* or cute poses for his followers. "He is *kawaii* and he loves to eat Indonesian foods" is the image he is famous of in the eye of teenagers and young people in Indonesia that can be seen from the comments he received in his *Instagram* posts.

Ishii first opened his *Instagram* account *@jpnambcindonesia* in 2018 and posted his first picture in May 2018 showing him at Business and Technology Symposium event with Mr. Yoshino, President Director and CEO of K Co., Ltd, a cocoa processing company that uses 100% cocoa from Sulawesi, Indonesia. Speaking in some interviews with local or international media, he decided to open an *Instagram* account to connect with Indonesian young generation who will continue this bilateral relation in the future and through his *Instagram* posts, Ishii wants to present and bring Japan closer to Indonesia. Until March 21st, 2020 he has made 448 posts and the contents that he posted are various, from Indo-

nesian food, cultures, to his activities doing his official duty as an ambassador. However, among those, posts showing himself having Indonesian foods for lunch which come with hashtag #makansiangdubes receive the most likes and comments. Taking advantage of this high interactivity in social media, Ishii is trying to represent the image of Japanese to Indonesia. What is interesting is that instead of presenting Japanese-related cultures, Ishii uses localized contents in his posts. This study will further describe the images that are trying to be presented in the posts and the responses of Indonesian youths toward the images.

Representing Images through Social Media

There has been a remarkable growth in the number of social media users in Indonesia since the growth of the smartphone market in 2016. Based on a statistical report, there are 150 million active internet users in Indonesia who spend 8 hours 36 minutes every day online (Wong, 2019). That is equal to 56% of populations and among these people, millennial ages are the majority. The total time spent on the internet recorded at 6 hours 42 minutes is higher compared to the global average, which then brings Indonesians to number 5 most digitally active internet users. Another report also illustrates that 95% of internet users in Indonesia access social media (*Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia*, 2019). With at least 3 hours and 26 minutes spent on social media, Indonesia's

internet users become the 4th highest global social platforms browsers.

The functions of social media can be divided into three: communication, information, and entertainment. Indonesians embrace online communication as a form of social interaction (Ananda & Lamberti, 2019). The way people communicate in Indonesia can be mediated by social media. Users can build community and easily maintain interaction with people in social media. This also marks the transfer of communication patterns from conventional media to digital media (Lestari, Suryana, Mulyana, & Hidayat, 2019). It helps to serve its function as an information sharing platform. Content in social media has become a vital source of information about an object (can be an individual, a product, or a place). People even find news faster in social media. Based on a survey, almost all teenagers and youngsters in Indonesia access social media for pastime activity (Luthfia, 2019) that fulfills the function of social media for entertainment. According to a study, young people in Indonesia respond to posts that bring feelings of pleasure and arousal (Kusumasondjaja & Tjiptono, 2019). They tend to favor posts that suit their interests and make them happy and excited to try something.

The 'usefulness' and 'playfulness' features of social media like *Instagram* affect their intention to use it (Kusyanti et al., 2018). Not only to communicate, people now also use social media platforms like *Instagram* to establish their image (Liu & Suh, 2018). People easily perceive images from

what they usually see or experience, so intense exposures to certain objects in social media is vital in shaping ones' perceptions about the objects. There are two important definitions of images that are trying to be discussed in this study. The first is image as identity which refers to distinctive characteristics and outward expression of a brand (Malmelin & Moisander, 2014). This defines image as identity that is portrayed and produced to the public. The second definition is related to receptive feature of image. According to Grunig (2009), image is perception, impression, reputation, and attitude. Image can be manifested in the minds of the audience as something that they perceive or value about an object. In other words, it can result in different impacts and create different perceptions on individuals depending on their background knowledge and experiences about the object in social media.

Social media have provided opportunity for organizations to depict themselves and display characteristics they deem important for the audience through visual nature (Ferguson & Greer, 2016). Image can easily be delivered to and perceived by social media users because of its visual or appearance. To strengthen the impacts of social media branding, one should emphasize design features, informative contents, and entertainment properties (Gao & Feng, 2016). It is considered necessary to put pictures that arise interest and verbal description that can easily be understood by the audience and *Instagram* is largely used for

branding activity since it offers those complete features in one platform. This explains why *Instagram* as the 4th leading social network serves optimal functions for branding. Branding in this context refers to the efforts of individuals developing a distinctive public image for commercial gain or cultural capital (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). In this study, instead of financial benefit, Ishii establishes his image to be accepted by Indonesian youths as foreign audience and to maintain interaction with them. His strategy is posting pictures of Indonesian foods for his daily lunch in his *Instagram* account. Brands can use local strategies and tactics (a local consumer positioning), which manifests in the use of specific cultural elements (Ahn et al., 2020). Therefore, Ishii understands that to connect with local youths, he needs to represent localized contents close to their cultures as his targeted audience.

Successful image representation can be explained if the purpose is more than partially delivered and captured by its targeted audience as well as bring favorable results for the individuals or companies. Image representation undergoes a process involving Stimuli-Organism-Response (Kim & Johnson, 2016). Contents act as stimuli that trigger the audience as organisms to make responses. In social media, people prefer stimuli they are often exposed to and prefer those fostering positive affection that leads to favorable attitudes toward the stimulus (Becknell, Wilson, & Baird, 1963; Ruggieri & Boca, 2013; Harrison, 1977). In order to see this relation, one should see the engage

ment of the audience with the audience that will impact their affective, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes if the image is successfully communicated (Yan, 2011). The audience will show positive emotional feedback (feelings), recall what they know about the brand, perceive the value of the brand, and feel triggered to do some actions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The first step conducted was selecting 10 most-liked posts under hashtag #makansiangdubes in *Instagram*. The posts including the visual contents and captions in Ishii's *Instagram* will be analyzed to see how Japanese are represented in the contents. To analyze the use of visual contents for image branding, the researcher will adopt signification concepts and semiotics analysis on contents. The researcher breaks down the posts into categories, then identifies the elements and qualities as signifiers that define the signified images. The analysis is aimed to identify the images that are trying to be portrayed and produced in the posts.

The responses from his followers (like and comment) will also be observed to find out how Indonesian teenagers and young people perceive and react to these images. Content analysis of the comments given to the top 10 most liked contents in *Instagram* is aimed to identify from the comments the perspectives of younger audience after seeing them. The written contents were examined and classified based on the types of responses. The study employs a coding frame on categories of responses

about the contents that involve affective, cognitive, and behavioural attitudes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to see the impacts of image branding, first we need to understand the images portrayed and produced in the posts. As for its nature, the posts of #makansiangdubes use the nature of *Instagram* as its media. *Instagram*, as a social media, uses photos or pictures, or sometimes videos, to inform something to our social circle. This remarks the points of analysis start from its nature as a press photograph: a photograph posted in public media to inform something. We can say that its purpose is not just a virtual blog of his lunch, made to satisfy his own historical accord, but to inform something to a certain society.

a. Creating Images in Social Media

As a press photograph, this posts are formed by (1) a source of emission, which is the ambassador, the embassy's staff, and its ideology; (2) a channel of transmission, which is the *Instagram*, and (3) a point of reception, which is of course the youths as the post's segment. Only by grasping the segmented receptor of these photographs, the photograph and the text following it can be discussed. Barthes (1977: 17) said that all these 'imitative' arts comprises two messages: a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it. When the photographs appear to the youth as the segmented receptor, the youth

bring the certain ‘culture’ to evaluate the photographs—in a different way than the evaluation of other photographs of an old-man eating a lunch. This certain ‘culture’ can be found when we look at 10 of his most-liked posts (above 17,000 likes). First, we need to take a look on the structures and features of the posts.

To discuss a complex message infused in those posts, it is insufficient to conclude it only with the discussion of the intrinsic aspect of the photograph. We have to look at these posts as a whole process of intentional signification, through the nature of the channel of transmission itself: *Instagram*. There exists not only a photograph, not only the symbolic message, but it is always accompanied with texts. There are two types of text existing side by side with the photographs. The first one is the texts offered by the *Instagram* algorithm—when we follow some hashtags and we will be offered other related posts attached with certain hashtags, or when we follow some accounts and we will be offered to follow similar accounts. The position of these texts is always above the photographs, similar to the newspaper’s headline or just the newspaper’s company name. The second texts are the texts offered by the account or creator itself. These texts appear below the photographs, and sometimes tend to give the photograph an additional meaning. Barthes (1977: 36) called it the literal message, as opposed to the previous symbolic message—the image itself. The symbolic message, then, can be divided into two-folds, like discussed

above, the *denoted* message and the *connoted* message. The viewer of the image receives *at one and the same time* the perceptual message and the cultural message. The task now is thus to reconsider each type of message to understand the overall structure of the image. It is important to explore the final inter-relationship of those three messages: the linguistic message, the denoted image, and the connoted image.

The first message is the linguistic message. In regard to the two-folds of image, there are two functions of the text: *anchorage* and *relay*. These two functions of linguistic message can co-exist, but the dominance depends on the work. The first function, the *anchorage* function of the texts works as a denominative, to recourse the meaning of the object (the image) to its nomenclature. *Anchorage* is a control, bearing a responsibility for the use of the message. It helps the receptor to choose the correct level of perception, causing him to avoid some interpretation and receive others (Barthes, 1977: 39-41). This function can be found on the first kind of texts, located above the photographs, acting like a headline in the newspaper. In these *Instagram* posts, the text above the photographs is always its account name, *@jpnamb синдонезия*. In some other case, when some people try to search for similar posts and look for the exact same hashtag, then the headline of the exact same posts changes into *#makansiangdubes*.

For the account name, the text focuses on the ‘institution’ or the social status

of the account, which is the ambassador of Japan for Indonesia, started by the word ‘*jpn*’ to focus the attention on none other than Japan. The following ‘*ambs*’ word then shows the reason why the ambassador and his activities are always present in each post—gives this account a different purpose than the *Facebook* account which focuses on the embassy. For the hashtag, the text focuses on the lunch (‘*makansiang*’). It is not just an ordinary lunch, but it is lunch of the ambassador itself, proved by the word ‘*dubes*’ (trans: ambassador) that focused on the appearance of the ambassador in each photograph. However, even there are no specific words on that hashtag’s text that refers to the certain ambassador, from 100+ posts using this #*makansiangdubes*, there are only two posts unrelated to the ambassador of Japan.

It is clear then that these two head texts brought similar text inside it, which is the ‘ambassador’. To be precise through the account name, it is the Japanese ambassador itself. The receptor’s interpretation then controlled by its function serves as the *anchorage*. When people find from another media the photograph of this old-man wearing batik and eating his lunch, they cannot easily relate it to the Japanese ambassador. When they look at it on *Instagram*, those head texts always follow the photograph. *Instagram* gives the repressive value to the photographs. The *anchorage* function of these texts then can be interpreted as the controller of the receptor’s interpretation. This repressive function is the most frequent function of the linguistic message.

Even these posts are recognized as food posts, the food took only 1/3 part of these photos, while the ambassador’s image takes most part in each photograph. From 10 of most-liked posts, there exists only one photo that focuses on the food—the ‘*telur dadar*’ post, which he took the photograph himself. This photo shows the food first, and clearly places the ambassador behind it. Other than that, in most of his posts—taken by his staff—the camera shot from slightly above, then showing the ambassador and his act first and the food below. The purpose of these acts depends on the second function of the linguist message: *relay*.

Relay works not only as elucidation but to advance the message. Here, text and image stand in a complementary relationship, in so meanings not to be found in the image itself (Barthes, 1977: 41). Thus, this function can be found in the second type of text in *Instagram*, below the photographs, called caption. In every foods’ post there, captions are always divided into two sections, the Indonesian section and the Japanese section. The Indonesian section is filled with the food names, ingredients, and the reason why the ambassador ate it or why those foods are delicious or famous. Not more than 30% of this section, in which the ambassador gives some joke, some explanations or advertisements of products—mostly Japanese products—or just explanations on interesting Japanese words. Like in the post of food from Manado named ‘*ikan cakalang*’, he used the post to explain ‘*fufu*’ the translation of ‘*ikan cakalang*’ but also the

onomatopoeia of Japanese laughter. Because the explanation of this word took up most of the Indonesian section, he did not explain the food clearly. On the other side of this post's caption, the Japanese section is filled with the explanation of Indonesian menu, not the onomatopoeia. In the post of '*Nasi Campur Bebek goreng dari Bali*', similar case could be found where the Japanese section is filled with the explanation of the menu—eliminating the spicy aspect of the food—and added it with how he felt about his shirt that made him feel the vibe of Bali. This similarity is applied in some posts, and it shows that the Japanese section focuses on the menu. Those explanations clearly show the intent of these posts to the Japanese, which is the intention of the ambassador to attract Japanese by the explanations.

That is not the case for the Indonesian section. The Indonesian section which consists of only one sentence or more, is not only filled with the explanation of menus, but also expression or explanation of another thing. Quite a good explanation of the menu—on such food posts—can only be found in the Japanese section. Most of his followers are Indonesian, and most of his Indonesian followers maybe do not have capabilities to understand the Japanese section though. It can be proven on most of the comments, most Indonesian youths give affection not onto the food posts, but on the expressions he puts in the Indonesian section. Even some people who commented on these posts showed an impression on Japanese knowledge and their desire to go to Japan which are not really related to his posts.

There are some rare cases when the public give exact comments on food posts. It mostly happened when the ambassador asks something to the public—like in the *Indomie*'s post. Public then could give suggestions on the food and what he should do with the food.

There are some problems happening around the politeness principles of the sentences between the Indonesian section and Japanese section too. The sentences in the Japanese section use formal-polite form on most of their sentences, but the Indonesian sentences mostly use casual grammar—even though the post uses '*Saya*'. Those sentences gave a different impression to the public. The casual Indonesian sentences attract youth because those are the sentences that are mostly used by the youths on their own posts. That is the reason why youths can relate more to the Indonesian section than to the Japanese section.

Given those reasons, it can be concluded that the *relay* function of the second type of text depends on the Indonesian section. The fact that most of Indonesian followers gave affection not into the food but the ambassador's expressions showed that the *relay* function focused on the expressions. Even though the posts were mentioned *#makansiandubes* as its main core, it was not the food that gave impression to the public. The casual—funny expression of the ambassador became the main attraction of the posts. This conclusion supported by his post in June 2019 that showed his gratitude by getting 40.000 followers on *Instagram*.

In that post, he is holding four *uchiwa* (Japanese handheld fan) which contain 4 kind of expression mostly said by his followers; *kawaii*, *lucu*, *gemeeees*, and *uwu* which all of them mean cute in quite similar manner.

This analysis on linguistic message showed two kinds of purpose that benefit with the *anchorage* and *relay*. The analysis on the first function, *anchorage*, shows that these posts are trying to control the public interpretation by focusing on the word ambassador. This function gives a certain social status to these posts. On the other hand, the analysis on the second function, *relay*, shows that these posts benefit more from the expression of the ambassador itself than the foods. This function distorts the denoted purpose of the image—the food itself—and brings the audiences to come up with the word *cute*. By the linguistic message alone, it shows that these posts are no longer the food posts. It has already become posts of the *cute ambassador*. Foods on these posts became additional attractions.

The second and third messages that have to be analysed after the linguist message are the denoted image and the connoted image from the photograph. Barthes (1977: 42-45) said that we never encounter a literal (denoted) image in pure state. It is about the relationship between nature and a culture, between the denoted image and the connoted image, between the literal message and coded message. To analyse the denoted-literal message, the coded messages in the photographs have to be eliminated first. The absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic ‘naturalness’: the

scene *is there*, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical here is a guarantee of objectivity. Man’s intervention in the photograph (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) all effectively belongs to the plane of connoted-coded message. There remains in the photograph a kind of natural *being-there* of objects: nature spontaneously to produce the scene represented without any ‘symbols’.

In those posts, when many ‘symbols’ inside it are eliminated, it remains only the photograph of a food, a working room with the desk and office chair, and an old man, who performs a certain mimic or act. Nothing is really special there, except the mimic or the act. And this is exactly what matters the most for the most of its followers who made it viral. Those matters depend on the nature of *Instagram* itself. *Instagram* brings certain nature to the youth, so they can quickly swap all the photographs shown before them. Youths are not really concerned about the symbols or the connotations in the photographs in *Instagram* because they always do the ‘quick’ reading on posts. They just stop their swapping as long as the photographs can give instantaneous impression just by looking at it for one second—or the accounts matter for the youth. With those posts becoming viral, it can be seen that the certain mimic or expressions made by the old-man successfully makes it viral. It also can be proven from the analysis of the comments above, those expressions are the one that receive the most affection by the followers. Other comments that are not related to the ambassador’s expressions,

must be some comments that come up after a full reading of the image-text. Certain expressions by the ambassador that can catch the impression just on a quick-reading is the only one matter in the first place.

This is quite different from the reading of all the symbols scattered around the photographs. The image, with all the symbols in its connotation, is constituted by an architecture, a system, a rhetoric, which builds the whole meaning. To analyse the third message—the connoted image—all the symbols have to be considered from the point of view of a certain culture. In this analysis, those symbols will be named by the point of view of Indonesian culture. In the posts, symbols usually shown are the *batik*, the luxurious office room, the arrangement of the food, the silver tray and luxurious cutlery, or in some posts also exist branded products. *Batik* is a traditional cloth of Indonesia, and its material and the pattern define the quality. The ambassador wears a luxurious batik and it shows that the wearer is a non-ordinary person. Those kinds of *Batik* are usually worn by the important people or by most people on important occasions. The luxurious office room clearly defines not an ordinary office worker too. The room and its furniture usually are used by the chairpersons of some companies, the officials of some offices, or the authorities. The silver tray and luxurious cutlery also show the status of this man on the photographs. Those instruments are usually used only in important occasions for some authorities or in some ceremonies. These three symbols

already show that this man is not an ordinary person. It also can be seen on the arrangement of the food. Those are not the ways the common Indonesian eat those kinds of food. It can be concluded here that these symbols give a status to the man. The symbols work as a reminder of certain social status for the receptors, so they cannot avoid some interpretations. These symbols work exactly like an *anchorage* in a linguist message.

The relationship between the second message—the denoted image—and the third image—the connoted image is mutual. Barthes (1977: 51) said that connotation is only a system that can only be defined in paradigmatic terms; on the other side, iconic denotation is only syntagm, associating elements without any system. Here, the system works as culture, and the syntagm works as nature. Here the symbol of social status depends on the existence of the nature of the ambassador's expressions. On the other side, the expression of the ambassador receives meaning by the scattered symbols of social status.

It can be concluded here that the relationship of the denoted image and the connoted image works similarly as the relationship between the *relay* and *anchorage* function of the linguist message. The denoted image focuses on the expressions of the ambassador, and the *relay* function of the texts gives expressions that matter most for the followers. The connoted image works as a reminder of social status, and the *anchorage* function of the texts give restriction so the

followers perceive these posts as a Japanese ambassador’s posts.

b. Gaining Affections of Foreign Audiences

Social media has become one of the easiest communication platforms to deliver information to the younger audience and it

also offers abundant opportunities to connect with and gain interests from them. In this study, it can also be viewed as one factor that influences perceptions about an object. The findings can help to explain how social media contents help to disseminate values, trigger acceptance, and generate liking or interest about Japan and Japanese.

Table 1. Audience’s Responses towards the Images

No	Responses	Percentage (%)
1	Affective responses towards the personality	63
2	Affective responses towards the items (Indonesian)	11
3	Affective responses towards the items (Japanese)	4
4	Cognitive responses towards Japan	19
5	Behaviour responses towards Japan	3

(Source: data analysis by author)

The table summarizes the patterns of responses from the followers. The analysis investigates patterns and responses toward the images trying to be represented by Ishii. Being the major findings of the research, 63 percent of the contents were identified as comments that express emotions or feelings towards the personality or characters of Ishii. 11 percent of the comments are connected to the emotional responses about items related to Indonesia, such as the foods, *batik*, and crafts found in the posts. Then 4 percent of the comments fall into the last category of affective responses that are specifically given to Japanese items presented by Ishii, including Japanese products and foods. Cognitive responses towards Japan is marked by 19 percent of the comments. Some audiences signal their familiarity with Japanese products including cultural and creative products and the language. The last

category of responses is behavioural responses towards Japan that scored 3 percent. The comments indicate actions triggered after the images such as buying Japanese products and going to Japan for tourism, study, and employment.

After discussing the images presented, we will discuss the impacts on the audience. From the analysis of the comments, it can be explained that most of the comments posted in response to the contents show the audience’s affective attitudes or affections towards the personality of Ishii. Majority of the audience express their likes and admirations after receiving and perceiving the objects. Comments like ‘funny’, ‘cute’ or ‘*kawaii*’, and ‘*uwu*’ or other related comments that signal emotions of liking, such as ‘love’, ‘like’, and ‘happy’ even small emoticons of love shapes and smiling faces directed to the posts obviously refer to

their expressions of liking and acceptance that comprise the majority illustrate a successful transfer of attractive image portrayed in the posts to the young audience. There are two types of acceptance and affection found in the comments. The first is acceptance and liking towards Ishii as an individual. Majority of the affection-related comments illustrate that Indonesian youths as the targeted audience capture similar images about Ishii's as 'cute' and 'admirable' which enhances the acceptance and interest from Indonesian youths. They even call Ishii with several local addressing terms like 'Opung', 'Abah', 'Simbah', and 'Engkong' to call the figures of father and grandfather in Indonesia which serves as the sign of acceptance from the audience. In a few comments found, the audience also expressed their appreciation towards Ishii as 'the cutest ambassador'. This signals the second acceptance and affection toward Ishii's creative efforts as Japanese ambassador to maintain good relations with Indonesia. When we compare between those two, the first type dominates the responses, meaning that Indonesian youths accept and give affections towards the Ishii's attractive quality as a 'likeable' individual and might overlook his identity as an ambassador. 'A failure' on capturing his high status in fact has positive effects that bring him much closer to the audience.

The findings demonstrate that out of five main categories, comments showing likes and interests about Ishii's attractive personality outnumber the affective re-

sponses to other visible objects in the posts, indicating that the cute and likeable characters receive the greatest emphasize in the minds of the followers and enable effortless acceptance and generate likes from Indonesian youths. Only 11 percent of the comments are directed to the local Indonesian foods and cultures. This serves a sign that Indonesian youths are more attracted to the personality of Ishii as 'cute' and 'loves Indonesian foods' rather than other identities. Other objects or items are regarded as additional attractions. Younger audiences are more often exposed to contents available online and more likely attracted by unique and interesting contents they are frequently exposed to. Young people are more susceptible to capturing images of cuteness because Japan is famous for their *kawaii* culture and Ishii successfully reproduces this image in his posts. Anime, manga, fashion, and figures have an important role in introducing and promoting *kawaii* images (Lieber-milo & Nittono, 2019; Pellitteri, 2018). The posts have aroused high public interests about the image presented by the Japanese ambassador. Many comments also use expressions like 'hahaha' or 'wkwkwk' and laughing emoticons to show that they find watching the posts as entertaining and enjoyable that thus signal the likeable and entertaining features of the posts. Of the major comments on personality traits, it can be perceived that Ishii is depicted as the only ambassador who can maintain close connection and interaction with Indonesians and to some extent is considered to classify

himself as Indonesian-like because he embraces Indonesian cultures in every occasion by wearing *batik* and eating Indonesian foods.

Additionally, the audience also express their cognitive responses that are characterized by comments indicating knowledge sharing. Despite the low number of cognitive-related comments, the findings highlight that the images presented in contents, for some people help to recall their knowledge about Japan and Japanese while for others add or strengthen the knowledge. Although Ishii only posts contents that generally depict himself enjoying Indonesian foods, some of the audience respond with comments expressing their knowledge related to Japan. They mention the names of products, places, stores, and figures in Japan. Those comments clearly draw attention to some facts that Indonesian youths are familiar with Japanese products and creative industries as a result of massive distribution of Japanese popular cultural and creative contents with the support of global media. Supporting this idea, the development of internet media has developed the branding and circulation of these creative cultures all over the world (Oyama, 2015, 2019) making Japan globally known for its popular and creative cultures. The increasing popularity of creative cultures like *manga*, *anime*, music, and video games among Indonesian youths also affects their acceptance towards Japan. This also characterizes Japan's power to maintain diplomacy with foreign publics through media culture and creative industries (Iwabuchi, 2019; Oyama, 2015).

Therefore, such comments are possible to occur considering the strong branding effects of Japan in Indonesia. Various studies also identify the effects of *kawaii* pop-culture that generate liking or interest in enhancing the image of the nation (Heng, 2014; Iwabuchi, 2015).

Surprisingly, the posts also trigger thoughts on behaviour. Found among the comments given, some audiences also mention how such images might trigger thoughts about going to Japan or buying products from Japan. Although its appearance only represented 3 percent of the comments, it is interesting to find that the effort of Japanese ambassador in maintaining interaction and communication with the young audience can serve as a persuasive message to interact with Japan. For many people, Japan has become an attractive destination for tourism, education, and employment. Despite its insignificance in the number of comments, this finding still can offer an important baseline to predict the future direction of human mobility between Indonesia and Japan. Therefore, to some people, communication patterns and strategies initiated by Ishii can be considered as nation branding or public diplomacy involving foreign audiences. Such branding effect can be achieved through authority the groups or people are represented by creating impression and trust (Anholt, 2010). After gaining acceptance from the audience, Ishii then can build their interest and trust toward Japan. This view is common if we observe the same pattern used by influencers to affect

the audience's responses or behaviors through stories or experiences they frequently share (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018).

After analysing the images and the responses, the reasons why Ishii's posts became viral, and even people started to say "the cutest ambassador ever", are similar to and can be described by the relationship of the three messages explained above. The existence of the denoted message and the *relay* function of the text became the core of these posts. People love the natural or funny-casual expression of Ishii, and it makes them give affection; an affection that is natural in front of the likeable, well-pleasing, or just like the people say, cute person, regardless his status. It has been proved above in the comment analysis that most people commented on these posts are mostly moved by the affection towards the likeable and interesting personality presented in Ishii's posts. Only a few of the audience commented based on knowledge about or behaviour toward Japan. Those few people were people that read all the connoted messages of the image, and were restricted by the *anchorage* function of the linguist message. Those people were 'repressed' by those messages, and started to relate these posts so much on something that exists outside it, like the presence of Japan and its culture, the diplomatic relation between Japan and Indonesia, or even the intention to go to Japan. In other words, instead of responding because of the likeable personality traits, the awareness of identities beyond the objects generates ac-

ceptance and liking towards the images portrayed and produced. From this analysis, it can be concluded that there exist two manners to react to these kinds of posts: the honest way and the 'repressed' way. However, them both indicate successful image delivery from Ishii to the audience. A brand is considered successful when its core identity is clearly understood and perceived (Latiff & Safiee, 2015). In this study, Ishii presents attractive and likeable images as himself in order to be accepted and liked by Indonesian youths and the responses are gained as expected.

CONCLUSION

The most dominant findings in the study point to the fact that Indonesian youths are very much attracted to the likeable personality traits presented by Ishii who is considered as cute and funny. Other items in the posts serve as additional attractions that generate their interest. This natural and honest response results from their perceptions after observing the expressions used by Ishii in his posts. Only few audiences raise their interest towards the posts out of their awareness about his identity as Japanese ambassador. This explains that Ishii as himself can successfully present his image to be accepted by Indonesian youths by portraying his likeable features and loves toward Indonesian local cultures and cuisines. Other than affections, the images also generate cognitive and behavioural responses. Cognitive responses signal audience's familiarity with Japanese popular

cultures and creative industries indicating Japan's strong branding in Indonesia that to some extent affects their acceptance towards the images. It is interesting to find that the images portrayed can influence the audience's behaviour to visit Japan for tourism and continue their study or seek employment in Japan.

The results of the study demonstrate a link between contents as stimuli and responses. The process of image delivery can be described as successful because the targeted audience can capture and receive the likeable traits portrayed in the images that generate acceptance and interest. We can conclude that the use of creative contents and communication strategies in social media impact the way youths feel and respond to the images. Using Indonesian foods as localized contents for #makansiangdubes in Instagram, Ishii aims to communicate with foreign public. Presenting likeable and attractive images in social media helps increase acceptance and affection towards Ishii as an individual who is considered cute and loves Indonesian foods. From the discussion on the affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses, such image representation can also be viewed as one contributing factor in generating acceptance, likes, interests, and to some extent trust about Japan which will be discussed in the next research.

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