

40.1 Local Traditions and Global Inspiration: Design Students in Singapore and Norway

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Abstract

Today's graphic design students embody inspiration from sources associated with globalisation, not least online, as well as local impulses from everyday life. In this article, we draw upon the work of two student groups – one in Norway, one in Singapore – to investigate the relationship between input and how they are used to design the packaging of food products. Two classes got similar design briefs and worked simultaneously in two countries, communicating through a common Facebook group. By the end of the project, each class discussed and analysed their sources of inspiration. The design solutions were dissected in separate design elements to look for national characteristics, despite similar international digital inspiration. By investigating cultural differences and similarities in designing based on the hypothesis that design students in Singapore and Norway have the same online design inspiration, this article demonstrates how international sources of inspiration affect the local visual traditions of designers. However, the prioritisation of design elements reveals that despite living in a global network society, designers still adhere to national design traditions.

Keywords

Design inspiration, globalisation, graphic design, local design, Norway, Singapore

Introduction

This article explores the global and local influence design students seek in their design process. By examining student projects of two graphic design classes conducted in Singapore and Norway, this article investigates how local design culture may be part of a global influence and inspiration. The rationale for this approach is that when starting sketching for a new design project, students do research and

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often gain insight into other designers' work for inspiration and learning. The two classes worked on briefs within the packaging design of local products. The students had a common Facebook group for the project and used it for exchanging ideas and commenting on each other's designs.

Through class discussions about the students' designs and their inspirational sources, we examine to what degree the design inspiration is found through local culture or international sources.

By tapping into theories of globalisation and local cultural particularities, the article examines differences of designing in the two student groups. Based on the student design projects, issues of national and international influences are discussed. The article explores differences in ways of designing and prioritising sources of inspiration. We are asking, to what extent are Norwegian and Singaporean students inspired by their local culture relative to global inspiration?

The article proceeds as follows. The next section unpacks our main analytical concepts. Subsequently, a case description details the steps undertaken to collect data based on student designs and student analyses in the two countries. The data is examined and discussed comparing the students' designs and their potential global and local sources. We conclude by discussing the possible inspirational sources of the two student groups and the way they influence the designs.

Globalisation and national identity

How can we understand the balance between the global and the local influence design students are exposed to? To grasp this relationship a contextualisation is needed. Ritzer (2011, 118) defines globalisation as 'a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places, and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows'.

Globalisation is changing due to the increase in digital activity worldwide. It is being redefined by 'flow of data that embody ideas, information and innovation' (Manyaka et al. 2016, 23). Singapore tops the list of being the most digitally connected nation, while Norway is ranked 36 out of 118 (Manyaka et al. 2016). The connectedness gives easy access to the sharing of information and inspiration. Global connectedness may not mean the end of crafting and national identity. Gimeno-Martinez (2016) discusses the understanding of national symbols and the need for decoding them to recognise social messages. He approaches the importance of everyday objects as carriers and signifiers of national culture. Artefacts and everyday objects, such as packaging design, Gimeno-Martinez describes as design from below in opposition to high-end governmentally initiated design such as flags, money, passports, and national and regional logos. The vernacular elements of everyday objects such as packaging design may adopt elements from high-end culture for example by using a flag on the packaging. Flags being used in advertising creates a connection where users are connected to a larger community, reminded of its existence and their affiliation in the nation (Gimeno-Martínez 2016, 170). The using of national flags in commodity products varies within nations. The British and Danish flags are used extensively on commodity products whereas other nations may consider the use of flags this way a disgrace (Eriksen & Jenkins 2007, 9). Another important national symbol described by Gimeno-Martínez is the

national landscape. He calls it the expansion of national symbolism and refers to Edensor when describing how national landscapes are ‘the most natural expression of symbolic values and national virtues ... emblem of cultural genuineness and continuity, places where people can return to their roots’ (Gimeno-Martínez 2016, 152).

The sharing of design projects digitally may provide a more homogenised style of design globally. Razzaghi & Ramirez (2005) suggest this phenomenon makes everything more alike and converges the design industry into one single taste of design on behalf of human need for diversity. Ambrose & Harris (2011, 197) state: ‘we are witnessing major cultural shifts as a consequence of the relentless process of globalization – a smaller world, where we are more familiar with certain products and brands. We are experiencing homogenization – where design styles are ironed out into a global language with less national variation.’

They claim that designers are influenced by each other on a global basis, which creates diminishing visual diversity. Gimeno-Martínez (2016) discusses how nations are adopting new cultures and implementing the new into the current culture, which leads to new ways of recognising the national culture. Hybrid designs are a result of multiculturalism and globalisation. He gives the example of a ‘chork’, which is a mixture of chopsticks and a fork. The global processes may diminish a sense of national identity or reinforce it (Gimeno-Martínez 2016, 156). The ideas of multiculturalism are supported by Ritzer (2011), who argues through the cultural convergence theory that dominant societies in the world affect local cultures. Still, the local cultures do not disappear, they adjust and converge the globalised culture into the local. Globalisation processes impact the view on ‘the national’ in terms of design.

Norwegian visual culture

Scandinavian and Norwegian design claim to possess elements of democracy, functionality, simplicity, purity and light. These values are simplifications of common perceptions often describing Scandinavian design (Bergflødt et al. 2012; Fallan 2012; Gimeno-Martínez 2016; Skou & Munch 2016). Values, in this instance, are defined as characteristics important to a group that is recognised beyond the borders of the society within a limited timeframe (Jimenez 2009). Sundqvist (2002) describes the traditions of Scandinavian design as being modest, clean and functional, where ‘form follows function’. He refers this simplicity to the Protestant tradition in the north of Europe in opposition to the more decorative style of the Catholic tradition. He also refers the tradition of modest design to the ‘Janteloven’, the law of Jante, ‘whereby citizens are reminded that they are no different or more important than the rest of the population, irrespective of social position, wealth or success’. The cold climate of Scandinavia and the dark winters may have inspired the ‘blond’ colour palette much used in the Scandinavian countries, where the light colours brighten up the darkness of the winter (Sundqvist 2002). Sundqvist claims that Norwegian graphic design has less of the cleanliness and simplicity typical for Scandinavia and suggests this is due to the deeply rooted folk traditions in Norway. Norwegian folk art has a rich tradition of crafting and decorative elements. Norwegian rose painting is a traditional way of painting wooden artefacts in a swirly style of acanthus with stroke endings of droplets based on the European rococo style of the eighteenth century (Aarseth & Edwards 2001). The Norwegian nature of mountains and fjords is much used as a motif in Norwegian art. Norwegians are traditionally vastly connected to nature and use it for leisure activities

and inspiration (Eriksen 1996). Skou & Munch (2016) describe images of nature as a crucial part of the brand 'New Nordic' which is labelling Nordic style as something fresh based on minimalism and honesty.

Singaporean visual culture

Singapore is a young nation consisting mainly of four ethnic communities – Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian – all communities with centuries-old visual culture. The influence of Western visual culture is increasingly present in today's Singaporean graphic design. The Design Singapore Council (n.d.) (Designsingapore.org) explains today's Singaporean design as:

in the hive of activity, there is a movement of looking back. This is set against global trends such as the return of craft; and in a more local context, a return to roots. The trend is not just about nostalgia, but an active reinvention with an interest to preserve and conserve what has been done in the past. The Singapore design scene has taken on a spirit, a character, and energy as it looks towards the future.

Both the past and the present are important as inspiration for today's Singaporean designers (Designsingapore.org). Chan (2003) explains the Chinese visual influence of Singaporean design as important and highlights the significance of Chinese schoolbooks with graphic references to the winter flowering plum blossom in Beijing. He also emphasises the vernacular Malay culture and 'pictorial forms from the natural environment' such as village images. The Peranakan culture is a blend of Malay and Chinese culture in Singapore. Visual elements of the Peranakan culture on vernacular artefacts such as traditional costumes and interiors show patterns of flowers and birds in bright colours and pale colours in combination (Knapp 2012). Food culture in Singapore is divided into the four ethnic groups of Singapore – Chinese, Malay, Indian and Western – all with distinct, but different traditions both in food, spices and eating habits. The octagon shape is recognised in artefacts in homes in Singapore and also in the \$1 coin. The baqua octagon is considered a lucky symbol in the Chinese theory of Feng shui, a Chinese system of geomancy believed to use the laws of Heaven and Earth to improve one's life (Jones 2002).

Comparisons and designers inspiration

Several comparisons of design have been done before. Razzaghi & Ramirez (2005) and Razzaghi et al. (2009) did studies comparing the ethnic influence of design students in Iran and Australia, revealing significant contrasts in ways of designing in the two cultures. Aaker et al. (2001) did a study using packaging design consumption symbols to compare Japanese and Spanish cultural values to American values and beliefs. However, so far, we have not found any studies comparing the influence of globally available inspiration and how it affects students designing packaging. There are a handful of studies about the designers' inspirational processes and retrieval of inspiration sources in general (Mougenot et al. 2008; Bouchard et al. 2008; Herring et al. 2009; Laing & Masoodian 2015, 2016). Within packaging design, the focus of cultural comparison has mainly been related to how packaging and brands are perceived in the commercial markets of different cultures. Studies in this area are often based on marketing theory: for example, Vyas (2015) split the packaging of fashion branding into its separate design elements of name,

colour, images, typography, size and so on. and analysed the importance of each element concerning the consumers' interests. Our study, however, split packaging design into separate design elements to understand the designers' influence and inspiration in two parts of the world, aiming to find differences in ways of designing and prioritising design elements.

Mougenot et al. (2008) suggest that young designers need more inspiration and do more research than an older designer who rather finds solutions in their experience. This means that students and young designers may need inspiration due to a lack of experience. A study by Herring et al. (2009) explored how designers need different types of inspiration comparing the inspiration of industrial designers, web designers, graphic designers and packaging designers. They found that graphic designers doing visual identities for companies used words extensively in their search for inspiration and did not just use visual research. Packaging designers find inspiration in the physical examples of packaging in addition to pictorial sources (Herring et al. 2009). Both studies of Mougenot *et al.* and Herring *et al.* found that designers mostly need pictorial sources, but they also use words when doing their searches. Finding the *right* words are important in this process. Laing & Masoodian's (2016, 206) study concludes that images may influence designers process, but not the creativity of the design output. Our study scrutinises the tension between globally available digital inspiration and locally found sources, and highlights how it influences graphic designers' sense of national traditions.

The next section deals with our students' projects and examines how they do research and which design elements help to provide an experience of national belonging.

Case description: a common packaging design project

A packaging design project was run simultaneously within the bachelor's degree courses at Nanyang Technological University, School of Art, Design and Media in Singapore and Kristiania University College, Westerdals Department of Communication and Design in Norway. Nanci Takeyama tutored the Singaporean students and Margaret Rynning the Norwegian students. The duration of the project was four weeks. There were 28 Norwegian students working either independently or in groups and 11 Singaporean students working individually, involved in the project.

The two classes were given briefs of which an important part was to include a sense of national values in their designs. The Norwegian brief asked the students to create a series of packaging designs for fish. The Singaporean brief requested the students to create a series of gift souvenirs to introduce the multi-layered facets of Singaporean culture. The design students were encouraged to tap into their own heritage to find narratives communicated through the creation of visuals, materials and packaging structures. The products are slightly different, but the design *process* is still comparable. The students had a common Facebook group for the project and used it for exchanging ideas and commenting on each other's designs. This was an interesting cultural exchange during the project and allowed the students to influence each other (see Figure 1).

Typical examples of student work from both nations are described. The packaging designs are split into their separate design-elements of logo, colour,

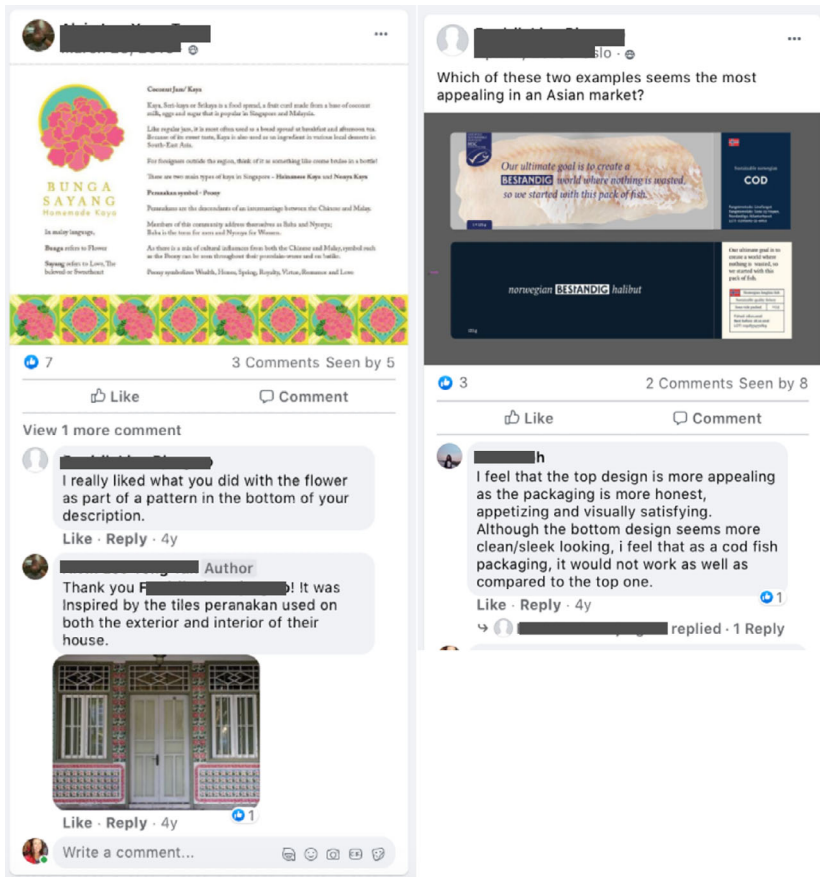


Figure 1
Students' Facebook communication

typography, patterns, photo, illustrations, symbols, shapes and the overall look and feel, searching for cultural differences in the choice of elements. The frequencies of certain design elements are counted to find possible national or global tendencies. We also examine students' designs relative to some of their own mentioned digital sources – Behance.net, Pinterest.com, Thedeline.net and Trendlist.org – using the sources as measurements of trends.

We now turn to an overview of the students' designs in both countries followed by a discussion about their inspirational sources.

Singaporean students' designs

The Singaporean students designed a souvenir gift serving as a cultural ambassador. Five of the Singaporean students' designs are described. These examples represent the diversity of the designs created in this project (see Figure 2).

Design S1 examines cultural patterns and colours that represent each of the four main cultures of Singapore (Chinese, Malay, Indian and European). Each culture uses different eating utensils. The student created a kit introducing each culture and their eating habits. The outside of the packages features culturally associated patterns. The colours of each package are light pastels, giving a



Figure 2

From top left: design S1a and S1b, middle row: design S2 and S3. Bottom row: design S4 and S5

contemporary look. The hexagonal shapes aggregate all individual packages, representing each ethnic group, into a honeycomb. The package shape is a metaphor of Singapore, a place where different ethnicities can co-exist harmoniously. The honeycomb also served as the overall logo for this project.

Design S2, named Red Dot Remedies (playing on Singapore's nickname, 'little red dot'), is an introductory kit to traditional herbal medications of the four different ethnic groups of Singapore. Although this project features traditional medicines, it chooses minimalistic, modern contemporary visuals. Singapore's national colour red is used as the main colour together with natural paper colour. This process of re-packaging tradition in a new modern format is how this student interprets Singapore's current identity, a place able to bridge old and new through business.

Design S3 is based on 'Peranakan culture', 'the Straits Chinese' and the 'Babas and Nyonyas', which are the three names to describe the community of mixed blood between the Chinese and Malays. This project creates a gift for a Batik

sarong. The peony flower represents the Peranakan culture. The peony is a symbol for nobility and value, a symbol of spring and a metaphor for female beauty and reproduction. Contrasting the colourful sarong itself, the package is minimalistic with a golden logo featuring the peony.

Design S4 *Bunga kaya* is a gift set of traditional homemade *kaya* (coconut jam). It consists of two different flavours. The logo features a modern octagonal representation of the flower peony, using a thin line stroke to provide a touch of elegance. The octagonal shape conveys luck according to the theory of Feng Shui (Jones 2002). This packaging uses Peranakan traditional colours such as pink, lime green and yellow.

Design S5 is a series of spices emphasising historic Singapore as a spot where trader vessels docked, and pirate ships lurked. The logo uses the symbol of a wheel and an octagon. Old maps have inspired the visuals of the background pattern. The design has greyscale colours in combinations with a complex packing system using strings and rough brown paper inside.

Out of a total of 11 Singaporean projects (see Figure 3), four of the designs use flowers, either as a logo or as patterned illustrations. Repeating patterns are used by four students. Pastel colours and the use of pink are used in four projects, and red and white colours associated with the Singaporean flag are used by two students. Two students have used the shape of an octagon, either in the logo or in the entire shape of the packaging. Four of the Singaporean projects have used complex packaging shapes tied up with strings, and three students have used elements of minimalistic design, with a solid colour background. None of the Singaporean students has used images depicting nature or landscape, nor an appearance of a flag.




					
	Design S1	Design S2	Design S3	Design S4	Design S5
Logo	Makanpura. Honeycomb hexagon	Red Dot Remedies.	Nyonya Singapore. Peony flower	Bunga Kaya. Peony line art style. Based on octagon	Spicory of the southeast. Compass star in one letter based on octagon shape
Colours	Multiple colours	Red and white, Singapore flag colours	Black, gold, purple	Bright pink green yellow	Craft paper colour, black white
Typography	Classical typography	Classical typography	Classical typography	Classical typography	Classical typography
Patterns	4 different patterns	No	No	Flower pattern	No
Illustrations/Photos	Photo inside the pack	No	No	Illustrative pattern	Illustration of maps
Pictorial or verbal symbols	No	No	No	No	Compass star
Packaging shape	4 hexagons	Cubic	Square. Several elements. No window	Square. Octagonal jars. Several elements	Square. Several elements
Overall look and feel	Decorative	Simplistic, functional	Exclusive	Exclusive	Exclusive. Product is seen from the top

Figure 3

The data in this table derive from the students' descriptions of their work

Norwegian students' design

The Norwegian students designed fish packaging that conveyed a sense of Norwegian culture. Five of the students' designs are described below (see Figure 4). These examples represent the diversity of the designs created by the students in this project.

Design N1 has few colours with white background and black type. A small colour-panel backgrounds the logo separating the products from each other. An additional logo stating 'freshly frozen' has a classic, international design-style. The typography is also classical. A pale illustration of spiky mountains in the background creates a link to Norwegian landscapes. The window displaying the content of the packaging has a jagged edge giving an illusion of mountains. The big window, exposing the fish, provides honesty as the consumer can see the product. This packaging may give a sense of simplicity and light, values associated with Scandinavian design (Sundqvist 2002) and Norwegian food (Bergflødt et al. 2012).

Design N2 has black as the background and keeping all the information white. The only colours are a banner of red, white and blue associating the Norwegian flag and a green icon related to sustainability. The typography of the product-name may give links to the traditional Norwegian crafting of rose painting. The most striking elements are the large stars representing snow crystals dissolving into



Figure 4

From top left: design N1 and N2. Middle row: design N3 and N4. Bottom row: design N5

smaller pieces depicting the shells of fish-skin. The snow crystals may convey Norwegian culture, as snow and ice are associated with the cold north.

Design N3 has a photo of Norwegian nature as the most striking visual element. A smaller photo shows a serving suggestion. The main colour is dark blue with white classic typography. An additional symbol, picturing mountains, is created in a style of line art. A Norwegian flag reinforces a sense of being Norwegian. The outer shape of the packaging, being an elongated octagon, creates recognition.

Design N4 has illustrations in a style related to rose painting and an icon in red, white and blue, related to the Norwegian flag. We also find international trends mentioned by Trendlist.org such as the wave pattern, the bright blue colour and the title going around the side of the pack. There are few colours in each of these packs, which give a minimalistic sense, and the white background gives a sense of purity.

Design N5 has a different approach being minimalistic, utilising recyclable plastic and showing as much of the product as possible and thereby obtaining the Norwegian values of functionality, simplicity and honesty (Skou & Munch 2016; Bergflødt et al. 2012). A Norwegian flag is added, suggesting the origin of the package.

Out of a total of 14 Norwegian projects (see Figure 5), eight designs have white backgrounds and four have black backgrounds. Six designs have images associated with Norwegian nature. Three designs have incorporated subtle elements associated with rose painting. Two projects use repeating wave-patterns which are logically connected to fish and the sea and also an international trend according to Trendlist.org. Recycling symbols on the front of the packaging are included in six of the Norwegian students' designs. Ten designs either use a window or a photo of the content on the front page of the pack. All of the Norwegian designs have an element associated with the Norwegian flag.

Student inspiration examination

A combination of a survey and discussions with students in the two universities were performed to examine their inspirational sources in general, and sources for these specific packaging projects in particular. The students were also asked to reflect which design elements in their packaging best conveyed the sense of national identity. A total of 19 Norwegian students and six Singaporean students participated in the discussions. These are some of the questions examined by the two student groups regarding inspiration:

1. Do you have any inspirational sources you use regularly?
2. Can you mention any inspirational sources used for this packaging project?
3. Can you mention any inspirational sources used to find the ethnic, Singaporean/Norwegian expression of your packaging design?

Questions about which design elements gave the greatest national feeling were:

1. Which component of your packaging design do you think is the most important element to give the Singaporean/Norwegian impact?
2. Can you give a short description of how the element/elements give the ethnic Singaporean or Norwegian feel?






	 Design N1	 Design N2	 Design N3	 Design N4	 Design N5
Logo First Seafood	First Seafood	First Seafood	First Seafood	First Seafood	Bestandig. A word with several meanings: always, durable, permanent
Colour	White background, black type. Panel of colour as a background of the logo. Pale colour of mountains	Black and white. Red, white and blue. Norwegian flag colours. Green sustainability icon	Dark blue with white typography. Full colour photos	White background. Few colours in each pack, giving a minimalistic sense	Few colours. Blue, Norwegian flag colours. The fish itself provide colour
Typography	Classical typography	The typography of the product-name associates traditional Norwegian crafting of rose-painting	Classical typography	Classical typography	Subtle use of various type to emphasize different information
Patterns	No	No	No	Wave pattern	No
Illustrations/ Photos	A pale illustration of spiky mountains in the background creates a link to Norwegian landscape.	Large stars representing snow crystals dissolving into smaller pieces depicting the shells of fish-skin	Colour photo of Norwegian nature. A smaller photo of a serving suggestion.	Illustrations in a style associated with rose-painting. Symbols on the side of the pack.	Sentences related to durability and climate.
Pictorial or verbal symbols	'Freshly frozen' verbal symbol. Symbols related to the preparing of fish. Certified sustainable seafood symbol, MSC	Banner of Norwegian flag. Symbols related to preparing of fish	Line art symbol of mountains. Norwegian flag	Icon relating to the Norwegian flag	Norwegian flag. Certified sustainable seafood symbol, MSC
Packaging shape	Square. Jagged edge of window gives illusion of mountains	Cubic. Fish is seen from the top	Elongated octagon creates recognition	Square. No window	Simple. Recyclable plastic and showing as much of the product as possible
Overall look and feel	Simplistic, cold	Exclusive	Origin, fresh	Modern. Cannot see the fish (Less honest).	Honest, functional

Figure 5

The data in this table derive from the students' descriptions of their work

Singaporean inspiration

The Singaporean students explain they find inspiration for their packaging projects in stores, in the environment around them and through digital sources. Books and magazines are less important but also used. The digital inspirational sources regularly used are Behance.net, Pinterest.com and Creativebloc.com. Most of the students start their searching process by word search in digital sites. One student starts her searching process by word search in Duckduckgo.com because this search engine does not tailor results, she explains. Half of the students split their inspiration search into hunting for 'the big ideas' or searching for the style of the designs. Stores and physical environments are most popular when searching for ideas, but Behance.net and Pinterest.com are also mentioned. Searching for visual style inspiration, Pinterest.com is the most used source. Other inspirational sources are style lookbook websites within interior design and fashion. For this specific

packaging, the Singaporean students found inspiration from local supermarkets, souvenir stores, airport gift stores and the Design Singapore Council (n.d.). Asking the students which element in their packaging design they consider expressing Singaporean culture the best, the colour combinations are considered most essential, but also illustrations, logos, typography and materials are mentioned as being important. Patterns are stated to play a minor role in the designs achieving the Singaporean impression in this project. Examining elements that give an ethnic Singaporean feel, the students point to the importance of the octagon and the number eight, a common symbol found in Singapore. Red and white symbols associated with the Singaporean flag convey a sense of being Singaporean.

Norwegian inspiration

Most of the Norwegian students start their searching process by word search in Google. They split their search into hunting for 'the big ideas' and searching for the style of the design. When searching for the ideas, most students use Behance.net first, then Pinterest.com, Thedieline.com and their physical environments. Searching for visual style inspiration, Pinterest.com is the most used source with Behance.net as number two. Google images, Thedieline.com, Trendlist.org, Trendspiration.net, Lovelypackage.com and Fontsinuse.com are also mentioned as visual inspirational sources. For this packaging project, the Norwegian students found digital inspiration from Behance.net and Pinterest.com, in packaging books, Norwegian and German supermarkets, Pentawards.org, Google Images and images of Norwegian nature. The inspiration of Norwegian traditions, they found through Pinterest.com, Google images, books from the library, Norwegian supermarkets and Norwegian maritime history and fishing traditions. Asking the students which elements in their own packaging design they consider expressing the Norwegian culture, they all point out the importance of the image, photo or illustration and more than half of them emphasise the colours and also the typography. Additional icons, such as flags, are also important. Patterns, shape and materials of the packaging and the logo are less important for achieving the Norwegian impression in this project, according to the students. The element giving the most ethnic Norwegian experience are the images of Norwegian nature with mountains, fishing communities, snow and ice. The links towards nature give values associated with Norwegian and Scandinavian design such as cold, clear, unvarnished, robust, straightforward, simple and honest. Some also mentioned typography and ornaments being inspired by Norwegian rose-painting and Viking patterns as elements to convey a Norwegian sense.

Discussion

The significance of the separate design elements, such as colours, shapes, patterns, images, logos and symbols in the two student groups' designs is discussed to reveal differences in what contributes to the giving of national understanding in Norwegian and Singaporean students' designs. Subsequently, we discuss to what extent the students may be inspired by their local culture relative to digital-accessible inspiration.

Comparing the designs of the Singaporean and the Norwegian students, the Singaporean students use a different colour palette than the Norwegian students when conveying a national sense. Colours found in the Singaporean designs and

not in the Norwegian designs are variations of pink often in combination with colours such as bright green. Yellow and gold are also more used by Singaporean students. All these colours belong to the traditional Peranakan colour palette (Knapp 2012). Norwegian students are using more primary colours and especially shades of blue, naturally associated with fish in Norway. The Singaporean students use a wider range of packaging shapes, materials and sizes than the Norwegian students. Also, patterns and lush backgrounds are more common among Singaporean students than the Norwegian. Backgrounds of the Norwegian designs are mostly plain white or black, which give a simple and minimalistic feel. This style is often associated with Scandinavian design (Sundqvist 2002). More Singaporean students than Norwegian students have created a logo. Several of the Singaporean students' logos depict a flower, which is an important and recurrent symbol of the Peranakan and the Chinese culture. Images of landscape as photo, drawings or line art are used by the Norwegians students, but not at all by the Singaporean students. Natural materials such as brown cardboard or wood are used in some of the Singaporean designs and convey a sense of sustainability. The Norwegian students have added symbols indicating sustainability. The Norwegian students have chosen a simple packaging shape which may contribute to a more sustainable design solution, as they minimise the amount of packaging material used.

The national flag appears on all the Norwegian students' designs, but not on the Singaporean designs. Eriksen & Jenkins (2007) state that British and Danish flags are used extensively on commodity products. The Norwegian students may be more inspired by Britain and Denmark using flags, as Norway is geographically closer to these countries. Another possible reason for using a flag-inspired symbol may be to reinforce the national feel due to a distrust in their other elements intended to give a Norwegian sense. This may be associated with what Billig (1995) calls banal nationalism suggesting subtle, almost invisible symbols of nationalism that are every day and taken for granted. The signs seem so familiar that they may not be thought of as conveying a national feeling. We propose that some kind of 'visual immunity' to our own national symbols may appear, meaning the signs seem so familiar that they are no longer trusted as conveying a sense of nationalism.

As stated by Mougnot et al. (2008), young, inexperienced designers need inspiration. Through the student surveys in both countries, we find that students are inspired by both visuals and words. When seeking inspiration for a visual identity design project, designers often start by doing word searches (Herring et al. 2009). We found that the students preferred using word-search when starting the packaging projects. Herring et al. (2009) found that when starting a packaging design project, designers often find inspiration in physical examples of packaging design. This kind of inspiration was explored in both the student groups, but to a greater extent among the Singaporean students. When comparing the students' designs in both countries to the global trends found on the websites Behance.net, Pinterest.com, Thedieline.com and Trendlist.org, some trends or influences are recognised in the students' work. The Scandinavian style of minimalism (Sundqvist 2002; Skou & Munch 2016) is recognised as a global trend in the inspirational websites mentioned above. The minimalism comes in several styles, but the most simple designs found in these websites have pure white backgrounds with only black type. Students of both nations are using this style. For instance, the Singaporean design S5 uses the simplicity of whiteness and few colours, but at the same time, it has a non-Scandinavian complexity when it comes to the intricate

combinations of packaging shapes. Most of the Norwegian students use elements of the minimalistic trend. We find modification style of luscious, detailed colourful illustrations, recognised in the Peranakan culture, in the globally available inspirational websites. This global style of detailed and colourful illustrations is more used by the Singaporean students than by the Norwegians. The designsingapore.org website refers to the new nostalgia in Singapore, going back to the roots. Nostalgia has an interesting possibility of using elements of national culture. Incorporating the national, sometimes old-fashioned element into the modern packaging designs could relate to what Gimeno-Martinez (2016) calls multiculturalism that leads to hybrid designs and what Ritzer (2011) calls cultural convergence referring to the local culture being influenced globally. This kind of hybrid designs we recognise in most of the students' work: contemporary looking design with a traditional twist. For instance, The S2 design Little Red Dot combines the whiteness of minimalistic modern design with the packaging of traditional medicine and the N4 design converges the whiteness of minimalism with illustrations inspired by traditional Norwegian rose-painting.

Conclusions

As expected, we found similarities in styles of designs in the two student groups and we recognise international trend elements. However, the way of conveying the national sense was different in the two groups. The Singaporean students used the shape and materials of their packaging designs to a greater extent than the Norwegians. They used a warmer colour palette and more lush and detailed patterns. The Norwegian students made more use of illustrations of landscape and nature. The Norwegian colour palette was simpler and the packaging form more minimalist in terms of recycling. We conclude that graphic design students in both Singapore and Norway, being highly digitally connected, are influenced by globally available digital inspiration. However, they are also aware of their own cultural heritage and mostly manage to balance and combine the two inputs of national elements and global trends. This way, our own design culture is incorporated into the globally available design impact we get digitally. The tie between local or global inspiration and the separated design elements that create the national associations in graphic designs are areas for further investigations and development.

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