ADAPTING DOMESTIC PRODUCT WITHIN CULTURAL MIGRATION IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Planning one new product for the cultural migrating community, users determined needs may be particularly unpredictable in a changing society. The growth of products from abroad might overlook the diversity of users’ culture. This shift is a challenge product planner and political experts. This paper illustrates how social researcher engaged in understanding about cultural migration and domestic product trend in Malaysia, where individuals, who find themselves in new environments, use and adapt household products to support both traditional and developing expectations. Findings from this work are beneficial to propose some principles of product migration in practice, and techniques for product planner and social scientist to developed a future product for a specific user to respond to these situations.

Keywords: Culture; Product; Migration; Traditional; Household.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to the author experience being a user, also as a social researcher and product planner, he noticed frequently that cultural factors consistently affected by product use and functions. This insight has led to his interest in culturally localized products. This work considered the possibility that, as an alternative to developing completely new products, traditional artifacts might be improved and made relevant to today's lifestyle, which can be done through a good product planning and social study practice.

Many discovered that a variety of complex factors including economics and demographics have led to big changes in lifestyle in the 20th century. Rapid economic growth especially in Asia, over the past few years, has led to significant changes in values and social structures. Apart from market data, demographic patterns data could be used by manufacturers to distinguish the changes that are difficult to address such as the needs of the users. In addition to these demographic changes, the local government's socio-economic planning has also contributed to influence current products and services. Previous studies have revealed that in many Asian developing countries, there has been a remarkable change in products and services influenced by social development factors such as economic growth and changes in government policies.

This economic shift has generated the movement of population from traditional rural to urban industrial areas as reported in Malaysia Internal Migration statistic from Department of Statistic Malaysia in 2006. The growth in economic and social development in Malaysia for more than two decades has also led to a transformation in the social class structure (Hassan R., 2004). Furthermore, a new social class group of users has emerged, which is more focused on settling in the urban area which is then known as "the new middle class" (Talib 2000). In relation, in their work revealed that the household structure has also changed simultaneously within these social class groups due to the increment in their level of development and economic prosperity (Radam et al. 2006).

CULTURAL MIGRATION

In general, "Migration" has been defined as the movement of humans from one district to another, sometimes over long distances or in large groups. However, in any current definition of the migrant, an account of the complex array including sexual, political, economic and cultural form must also be considered (Papastergiadis 2000). In similar, research also revealed that in the process of migration, one would experience different stages in the assimilation process which involved cultural, structural, marital, identification and attitudinal acceptance. (Bloch A. 2002)

Migrating from traditional rural to advanced industrial urban, users will be exposed to the interplay of conflicts between cultural values and the processes of adaptation (Hofstede 1994). In this situation, we might not know the appropriate products which occupy the migration space (Figure 01), but there are opportunities gap research and clear space and experiments design work to provoke insights and develop more questions. In this case, migration of cultural practices can also lead to a migration of product.

As socio economic progress and demographic patterns change, culturally localized products should also be improved to be more coherent with users' current practices, social status, and new life settings.

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METHODOLOGY

This work has conducted 30 interviews with the potential user experiencing cultural migration within Klang Valley in Kuala Lumpur. The participants have been identified through several agencies of hiring people from rural areas to work in the industry within urban areas. Their participation is highly appreciated as they determined to share their adaptation on the product used to comply with their constant cultural values.

MAIN FINDINGS

Many culturally localized products have been transformed into a different practical form in response to the social and environmental changes in user's lives. In Malaysia, culturally localized products are still in great demand, and some can still be found in a stable condition as users still have a strong attachment to them, although they are experiencing a different lifestyle through human migration. Illustrations below show images that indicate those ideas of constant values when a product takes on a new practical form responding to human and geographical migration.

This work recognized that products could transform and migrate into a different practical form in response to the social changes and environment of the users through numerous, confusing and unpredictable routes. These can be observed in individual cases but are difficult to measure as a "snapshot" across communities where individuals are found at all stages of this migration.

In most cases observed, the author found that users are still experiencing social and cultural changes in adopting a modern urban lifestyle, while at the same time, still trying to adapt elements of traditional products and practices were appropriate to their new urban settings. Through initial background research with geographical migrants, the author began to recognize that more than just cultural elements influenced product interaction with users. In the hybrid lifestyles of migrants (people moving from rural area into urban areas), there are also other aspects and possibilities of interaction in terms of ergonomics, usability, safety, hygiene, and practicality, which can be potential areas for designers to engage with as can be seen below is a good example of the needs of having traditional tools to assist cultural practices in current situation.

Figure 1 - Schematic model of “Migration” (in this work context)

Figure 2 - Images of Traditional Practices and Unchanged Values (Malaysia Context: moving from traditional rural to urban industrial areas) Left - Satirical illustrations (Lat 1993), Right photograph from an anonymous source.
Figure 3 - The use of modern equipment does not necessarily lead to speed up the process in traditional food preparation. In this case, the oven needs to be modified to have a top and bottom flames for appropriate baking activity for the production of these specific traditional cookies.

From data collection activities, this work encountered users who retained a strong traditional cultural connection with the tools or products they employed. They have long experiences of living and learning with such products: most of these urban dwellers have grown up in villages before establishing a life for themselves in the city. However, the new environment engenders adaptation of these traditional products and services. In relation to that, 'values' are basic assumptions which have been developed over a long period and are very slow to change (Fernandes 1995).

Although some of these products might be transformed into new practical forms to deal with new environments or the availability of new materials, the application of these products remains broadly the same. About this, this work early observations indicated that product use, choices, adaptations and users’ cultural mentalities arise from their cultural experience which predisposes them to particular practices regardless of the external environment, even if that requires adaptation of new materials and products as indicated in Fig 2 and Fig 3 above.

IMPLICATIONS

This work recommends that such work into product migration about social change could assist designers to understand how to respond to fluid cultural circumstances. Designers should engage with the real social situation and should be more sensitive to the changes or improvements needed to bring them in line with users' current practices in their new environment; they should not just simply offer users a simple continuity of similar traditional forms of design which might not be relevant to their culturally-changed circumstances. Designers can no longer take shelter from theiractions and continually reproduced the type of consumer goods when research into user needs is becoming increasingly dominant in the design research arena including when observing constant values and potential transform products design.

REFERENCES