

Exploring Character Design Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Identity and Tourism Appeal in Pattaya City

Siriyamon Chaikhwo¹, Panuwad Kalip²

^{1,2}Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand
E-Mail: ¹s64126606072@ssru.ac.th, ²panuwad.ka@ssru.ac.th

Abstract

The "Pattaya Waves" character design serves as a crucial tool for enhancing Pattaya's economic growth by strengthening its brand identity and appeal in the global tourism market. By embodying the city's unique heritage and vibrant atmosphere, the characters "Rompad" (Lom Pat) and "Roma" (Uncle Dolphin) offer a fresh representation that resonates across generations. This character-driven approach positions Pattaya as a distinctive destination, encouraging tourists to engage with the city on a more personal level.

Research involving 100 participants—experts, students, designers, and tourists—demonstrates high satisfaction with the design's effectiveness in communicating Pattaya's image. By attracting increased interest, this initiative has the potential to drive higher tourism rates, thereby generating significant revenue for local businesses and services. The character design not only enriches Pattaya's cultural narrative but also strategically impacts its financial landscape, underscoring the importance of innovative visual branding in fostering long-term economic benefits for the city.

Keyword: Pattaya, City Identity, Economic Impact, Cultural Branding, Character Design

Background and Significance

Soft power, as defined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., is the ability to influence others through attraction rather than force, utilizing culture, media, tourism, and policies to project a nation's desired image. Thailand emphasizes soft power through creativity and technology, aiming to boost the economy by turning cultural assets into business models with global appeal, enhancing citizens' income and quality of life (Creative Economy Agency, 2018).

Mascots serve as memorable brand images, acting as public focal points with friendly, lively appearances in forms like animals or robots. Increasingly vital for business branding, mascots appeal to all ages due to their timeless and risk-free nature, providing a non-competitive and approachable brand presence (Waraporn Mani, 2022).

Pattaya City, known for its vibrant tourism, rapidly transformed from a fishing village to a tourist hub over 40 years, establishing a special local administration in 1976 to manage its growth (Jutamas Kantaphonthitima, 2017). Given Pattaya's international reputation and economic impact, creating a character to embody its identity is crucial for enhancing media engagement and boosting tourism value, supporting the city's future growth.

1. Introduction

Currently, Pattaya is a world-renowned tourist destination, generating revenue from both Thai and international tourists. However, it lacks a character design that represents the identity and image of the city. This research aims to address the issue of designing a character

that represents Pattaya's identity by incorporating the city's unique traits into a character form. This character will be used as a foundation for further media design development and to increase the value of Pattaya's tourism, leading to future growth. The objectives, research methods, development, and design processes are outlined in the following sections.

Research Objective

1. To design a character that represents the unique identity of Pattaya, making it memorable.
2. To communicate the identity and image of Pattaya to the target audience.
3. To promote the use of the character in developing and producing other media to enhance the tourism value of Pattaya.

Scope of the Research

1. Geographic scope: Pattaya City area.
2. Content scope: Study, survey, and analyze visual communication, design theories, and principles.
3. Population and sample scope: Design experts, tourists visiting Pattaya, and residents who have lived in Pattaya for at least 20 years.

Theory and Hypothesis of the Research Project

Designing a character for Pattaya City helps convey the unique identity and image of Pattaya. This character can be further developed in other media to enhance Pattaya's tourism value, contributing to clearer and more substantial growth in the future.

2. Methodology

1. Research Pattaya City's identity, mascot origins, and set project objectives.
2. Develop tools for data collection and gather field data.
3. Analyze data to establish design concepts and project scope.
4. Execute the project plan and ensure quality.
5. Summarize and report research findings.

Benefits of Character Marketing

1. Brand Recall: Characters help consumers instantly recognize the brand.
2. Ease of Communication: Cartoon-like characters make brands feel friendly and relatable.
3. Revenue Opportunities: Characters can expand into merchandise, stickers, or collectibles, adding income streams.
4. Mascots, often seen in events and product launches, are symbolic figures that enhance brand appeal and memorability. They convey the brand's vision and create a warm, approachable image without the need for frequent updates, allowing for lasting consumer recall. Organizations benefit by creating unique mascots to represent their identity effectively.

Research Tools

For the research project "Character Design for Pattaya City," the following tools were selected to gather data:

Questionnaire

A satisfaction questionnaire was used to assess the satisfaction with the character design as a representative for the Faculty of Fine Arts. The questionnaire is divided into two sections:

- Section 1: General information about the respondent
- Section 2: Evaluation of the character design, covering the following aspects:
 1. Image of Pattaya City
 2. Character design
 3. Utility and usability
 4. Potential for further development

The research evaluation utilized descriptive statistics, including percentage, mean, and standard deviation based on 5-likert scaling questionnaire (Boonchom Srisawat, 2000).

3. Result

Table 1: Results of Scores, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Level of Satisfaction from the Design Evaluation.

Assessment Topics	Mean	S.D.	Satisfaction
1. The character design is cute and attention-grabbing.	4.84	0.44	Very satisfied
2. The character design is creative and innovative.	4.62	0.84	Very satisfied
3. The character design is distinctive, with unique traits that make it memorable.	4.44	0.56	Very satisfied
4. The character design is suited to the contemporary era.	4.9	0.39	Very satisfied
5. The character clearly communicates the identity of Pattaya.	4.82	0.59	Very satisfied
6. The character can create an image or a memorable identity for the city of Pattaya.	4.87	0.51	Very satisfied
7. The character can represent the population of Pattaya.	4.52	0.96	Very satisfied
8. The character can be used across various types of media.	4.75	0.54	Very satisfied
9. The character can be developed into products and souvenirs.	4.81	0.46	Very satisfied
10. The character is suitable to be used as a representative of Pattaya's identity.	4.74	0.58	Very satisfied
total	4.77	0.59	Very satisfied

Design Executions

The concept for a character representing Pattaya City emerged from data collected through documents, field research, and surveys. The design theme, centered on “Pat” (wind), waves, and the sea, symbolizes life’s continuous growth, change, and return—like waves that go out and return with new insights. This reflects Pattaya’s evolution from a fishing hub to a city of social and economic growth, all tied to the sea. Inspired by the Dolphin Roundabout, a key landmark originally created to manage traffic, the character also embodies Pattaya’s adaptability and charm.

The proposed character, ROMPAD (Lom Pat), is based on the Dolphin Roundabout and aims to boost Pattaya’s image as a dynamic, welcoming city. Styled as a chubby child with bright pink hair and side ponytails, ROMPAD represents the sea’s richness and Pattaya’s vibrant cabaret culture. With a hoodie and swim ring costume, ROMPAD blends fun, tradition, and modern appeal, making it approachable and distinctive for various media uses.

Character Design for Pattaya City



Figure 1: Character Design for Pattaya City

The character Uncle Roma (ROMA) is designed in cool tones to convey a sense of age, with a friendly appearance that is neither intimidating nor overly authoritative. These colors make Uncle Roma (ROMA) appear as a kind-hearted advisor, complementing rather than overshadowing ROMPAD and enhancing the balance in the relationship between the two characters. Uncle Roma represents knowledge and experience, supporting ROMPAD in their journey of growth and adventure.



Figure 2: Character Design for Pattaya City

Evaluation

To evaluate the character design for communicating Pattaya City's identity, the researcher gathered feedback from 100 participants, including Fine Arts students from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, tourists, and Pattaya residents. The character was assessed across ten criteria, receiving high scores for cuteness (4.84), creativity (4.62), memorability (4.79), relevance (4.9), and effectiveness in communicating Pattaya's identity (4.82). The character also rated well for creating a lasting image of Pattaya (4.87), representing local people (4.52), suitability across media (4.75), potential for merchandise (4.81), and overall appropriateness as a city symbol (4.74). With an overall average score of 4.77 and a standard deviation of 0.59, the design achieved a very high level of satisfaction.

Summary

The "Character Design for Pattaya City" project centers on creating a character that embodies Pattaya's unique identity, aiming to enhance public relations, tourism, and education through various media. The research gathered insights into Pattaya's image and involved a satisfaction survey with 100 participants, including students, tourists, and residents, who evaluated the character's creativity, modernity, and symbolic value.

Inspired by the Dolphin Roundabout, the project introduced two character designs reflecting Pattaya's balance of tradition and innovation. The main character, ROMPAD, a cheerful, pink-haired child with a swim ring-like hoodie, symbolizes abundance and curiosity. Results showed high satisfaction across all criteria, with an average score of 4.77.

Recommendations include adjusting colors for print consistency, using the character in event-based promotions, and adding costume variations for broader appeal.

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