

## Cultural Identity of Lat's Cartoons in the Context of 'Malaysia Madani'

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysians' varied perceptions of cartoons, often undervalued as mere entertainment despite their deep cultural and societal resonance. Hence, it prompted the researchers to explore the denotation and connotation of cultural significance in Malaysian cartoons, particularly in the works of Lat. The cartoons were selected for this study because of their ability to capture the essence of Malaysian society, culture, and identity through humor and social commentary. The objectives of this study are to quantify the portrayal of the colour, meaning and relationship between these elements in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity in the context of 'Malaysia Madani'. Through the quantitative content analysis method with 248 visuals from Lat's cartoons by exploring the Madani concept through themes of these cartoons, the study unleashes a diverse range of societal issues and viewpoints; the prominence of the themes indicates areas of significance, relevance, and engagement. The findings demonstrate that Lat's cartoons effectively communicate the benefits of the Madani concept, encouraging Malaysians to be sustainability-oriented and compassionate for others, regardless of race or religion, thereby fostering harmony and unity. For further suggestions, the government and education sectors should use cartoons to promote knowledge transfer and community engagement.

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### KEYWORDS:

Cultural Identity  
Lat's Cartoons  
Malaysia Madani

### CITATION:

Subramaniam, M., Muthusamy, C., Kamarul, S. B., Tan, Y. S., & Ambikapathy, M. (2025). Cultural Identity of Lat's Cartoons in the Context of 'Malaysia Madani'. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 10(1), e003141. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i1.3141>

**Contribution/Originality:** This study documents Lat's cartoons which reflect the Malaysia Madani concept through the themes presented in the cartoons, uncovering a wide array of societal issues and perspectives. Madani's core values and policies through Lat's cartoon highlighted their significance and the level of engagement to be fostered by the community for a better lifestyle.

## 1. Introduction

In Malaysia, cartoons followed the development of technology by appearing sequentially in newspapers, magazines, blogs, television, and movies. [Faryna Mohd Khalis et al. \(2020\)](#) believes that rather than focusing on cartoons from other countries, Malaysians ought to take pride in their own, whether they are digitally animated for the movie "Upin dan Ipin" or hand-drawn for "Usop Sontorian". According to [Lee et al. \(2017\)](#), Malaysians have different perceptions and understanding towards a deep-rooted affinity for cartoons, particularly those that capture the essence of society and culture. Cartoon sections, both in print and digital media, serve as a means of engaging Malaysians in critical discussions about societal issues, thereby Lat's cartoons are highly regarded for its ability to reflect these aspects. It may be complex because Malaysian audiences may perceive it in various ways based on one's experiences and cultural background. This is so because many people are unaware of the true meaning, communication purpose and function of cartoons. However, what makes Lat's work of significance is that his comics provide an interesting window unto itself as a site of sociocultural contestations in many pluralistic societies. This is also to reflect the recent policy from the government to build MADANI nation. The Malaysian Prime Minister led administration developed the policy framework and official slogan known as "Malaysia MADANI" in January ([Anwar Ibrahim, 2022](#)). With an emphasis on racial harmony, environmental development, and good governance, it seeks to make Malaysia a more developed and prosperous nation. MADANI is an acronym that represents the following concepts namely (i) sustainability (*kemampanan*) (ii) compassion (*kesejahteraan*), (iii) respect (*hormat*), (iv) innovation (*daya cipta*), (v) trust (*keyakinan*) and (vi) prosperity (*ihsan*). [BERNAMA \(2023\)](#) stated that the six domains of MADANI are the focus of the concept namely foreign policy, governance, social security, environment, education, health, and the economy. In addition to promoting inclusive, democratic administration and a humane economy, it places a strong emphasis on democracy, freedom, justice, and the security of all races.

In Malaysian society, cartoons are often viewed as entertainment for children, which seems unproductive and are largely being ignored. The perception of cartoons published in editorial sections, educational inserts or sports sections in newspapers and magazines seems trivial and offer little value. Generally, the public tends to view cartoons for the purpose of humour or jokes found in local newspapers, magazines, comics, or television, rather than considering deeper meaning and communication within the cartoon. Thus, to strengthen the gap, based on the preliminary study by the researcher with respondents from 25-60 years old, the researchers concluded there is a problem on the acceptance of recent local cartoons on delivering messages or information.

The gap in current research within this area which has not been adequately explored in previous studies and demands for further investigation. Whereby the gap in documentation regarding Lat's cartoons in Malaysia is a matter that requires greater attention. Local cartoons can serve as valuable cultural documentation, helping future generations recognise the importance of local cartoons which offering historical insight,

cross-cultural understanding, inspiration of creativity and artistic heritage preservation of Lat's cartoons addressing the domains of MADANI, introduced by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim promoting sustainability, compassion, respect, innovation, trust and prosperity through the denotation and connotation meanings portrayed through cartoons.

### **1.1. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research study serve as a fundamental guide, direction and focus, providing a clear framework for the research aims and achievements, ensuring that the investigation remains systematic and purposeful. The following are the main objectives of this study:

- i. To quantify the portrayal of the colour discovered in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity in the context of 'Malaysia Madani'.
- ii. To quantify the portrayal of the meaning discovered in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity in the context of 'Malaysia Madani'.
- iii. To measure the relationship between the elements in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity in the context of 'Malaysia Madani'.

The objectives mentioned above have been established to guide the research process and ensure achievement of intended outcomes.

### **1.2. Hypothesis**

H<sub>1</sub> Lat's cartoon elements have a significant relationship with local cultural identity within the context of 'Malaysia Madani'.

## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review examines key works and theories to contextualise current research, highlighting trends, gaps, and significant contributions in the area of study. In this section, the researchers discussed the role of cartoons towards society, the forms in cartoons, and semiology theory.

### **2.1. The Role of Cartoons Towards Society**

Cartoons are essential for spreading news and communication. Political media structure delivers a humorous scenario in creating political discourse by presenting a colourful and comprehensive analysis of current events due to the capability of the cartoon to provide an immediate impact on readers' or viewers' minds ([Husain et al., 2022](#)). [Rubhani et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that the newspaper's cartoonists employed a variety of linguistic techniques to create social parody through symbols, labels, captions, irony, comparison visuals, and so on. Furthermore, the researchers added that cartoons can assist in attracting people's attention to understand societal issues affecting them or their country, proving that pictures through cartoons can impact the education sector as well. According to [Egounleti et al. \(2018\)](#), cartoons through visuals improve teaching and learning in the classroom environment. A study by [Nkiru and Chinwe \(2015\)](#) found that cartoons are an effective resource for reducing anxiety which motivates students in English Oral classes to develop speaking competencies and communication skills. Through a focus group discussion with selected teenagers, the impact of learning through cartoons were examined, and the results showed that using cartoons in teaching improves students' storytelling abilities and the use of language effectively. On another interesting note,

cartoon portrayal in the news helps in creating and forming a public agenda. The role of the media in agenda setting works well with the assistance of cartoons in portraying and framing the importance of news on current national issues set by policymakers in promoting policy agenda for gaining attention and response from the public that cannot easily be explained in textual format ([Hassan Abbas et al., 2021](#)). Such roles of cartoons in media influences the society by shaping perceptions of messages or information conveyed visually which eventually affect one's final thoughts or opinions.

## 2.2. The Forms in Cartoons

A study by [Syaza Marina Ramli and Mokhtar Muhammad \(2019\)](#) found that the underlying semiotic meanings of pictures created by Zunar, a Malaysian cartoonist who employed the most significant political cartoon features in his illustration, effectively depict the contentious political subject of 1MDB. The analysis of the semiotic meanings in Zunar's drawings on the 1MDB issue revealed that he portrayed real-life events and satirized the political figures involved, drawing on facts and news published shortly before his cartoons appeared. Most of Zunar's works featured elements of political satire while avoiding the excessive boundaries that some other political cartoonists occasionally cross. In another research on signs and symbols, signs used in political cartoons create powerful meaning to convey an aspiration of Indonesians towards Anies' government. Also, the cartoons in the forms of visual (symbols) and verbal (words) were able to ease the readers' understanding of the meanings behind, showing relationships between visual and verbal signs ([Nindya Hasanah & Didin Nuruddin Hidayat, 2020](#)). Just as the example of positivity and negativity of verbal and visual-verbal signs and deciphering the non-verbal signs shown in two episodes of "Tom and Jerry" study, researchers classified the signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. They used the universal Six Pillars of Character Counts as the criteria for evaluating positivity and negativity. The findings revealed that negativity was the dominant aspect in both episodes ([Dweich et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, shape, colour and value, lighting, scale, repetition, rhythm, tangents, balance, and contrast were found to be significant in creating illustrations related to cartoons, comics, and animations ([3Dtotal Publishing, 2020](#)). A study by [Zhao \(2020\)](#) suggested that visual language such as colour, shape, space is needed to transform communication in a specific context of cartoons, comics, and animations. Local cartoons have various styles, themes and humour which consist of forms such as line, shape and colour with purpose. Ultimately, cartoonists communicate concepts, emotions, and messages to the audience using symbols that are generated with colours and shapes. The deliberate use of shapes and colours enhances storytelling and helps to create memorable and visually appealing cartoons with a strong message to the society ([Mohamad Abdul Aziz et al., 2022](#)). Cartoonists rely on the essentials of creating forms to convey visual meaning and communication that engages with the audience effectively. Therefore, forms in cartoons are powerful tools for cartoonists to express ideas, evoke emotions, and connect with the audiences on a deeper level, therefore by mastering the art of manipulating forms, cartoonists can create meaningful and impactful cartoons that resonate with audiences.

## 2.3. Semiology Theory

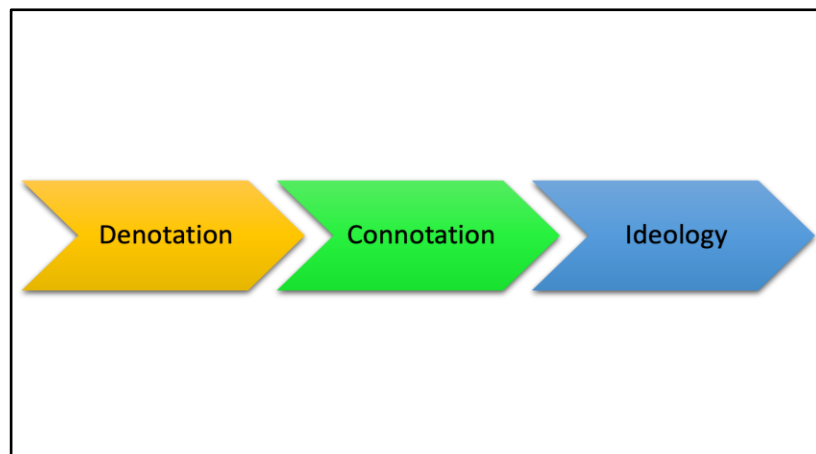
The investigation of semiotics, with particular attention to semiotic theory developed by [Barthes \(2012\)](#) for sign interpretation, has led the researchers to review well-known works including "Mythologies", "Elements of Semiology", "The Five Codes", "The Rhetoric of the Image", "The Death of the Author" and "From Work to Text". The conclusion made clear that the three layers of signs from semiology theory, focuses on denotative (literal

meaning), connotative (mental notions), and mythic (connected to viewers' history and culture) (Hatam et al., 2021). In another study by Nauli and Halomoan (2021), the researchers discuss denotative and connotative meanings of several signs in the movie "Forget Me Not" by applying this theory to the analysis. This qualitative research study investigates the Ideology (meanings) of signs in the movie. For example, a necklace can be interpreted as jewellery with a pendant or as a symbol of fortifying bonds. Comparably, a film depicting live beings has the denotative meaning of preserving priceless memories and the connotative connotation of recording a tale. Based on the semiotic theory, the study offers a thorough analysis of different signals in the movie, highlighting denotative and connotative levels of ideology connected to the signs.

Barthes (2012) semiological method focuses on comprehending the fundamental meaning structures by examining how signs and symbols operate in many cultural situations. In semiology theory, denotation, connotation, and ideology are included when analysing signs and symbols.

- i. Denotation: Denotation refers to the literal, primary meaning of a sign. It is the basic, surface-level understanding that is often shared within a particular cultural or linguistic community.
- ii. Connotation: Connotation goes beyond the literal meaning and involves the secondary, cultural, or social meanings associated with a sign. Connotations are shaped by cultural values, historical contexts, and social conventions.
- iii. Ideology: Ideology refers to the underlying system of beliefs, values, and norms that shape the connotations of signs. It represents the cultural or social context that influences the way signs are interpreted. Following is semiology theory shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Semiology Theory



Source: Barthes (2012)

Barthes (2012) often argues on "myth", especially as it relates to ideology. The writer investigates the process of mythologizing commonplace items and behaviour which gives cultural connotations that support prevailing viewpoints. In conclusion, denotation refers to the fundamental, literal meaning of signals in semiology theory, whereas connotation refers to the supplementary, culturally produced meanings. At a deeper level, ideology shapes the cultural and social framework in which signs are perceived, hence changing the meanings. In order to uncover the underlying ideologies and cultural presumptions

present in diverse modes of communication and representation, the approach advocates a critical investigation of signs and symbols.

### **3. Research Methods**

This section presents the description of the research process that was used in undertaking this research. The research methodology according to [Creswell and Creswell \(2022\)](#) and [Kumar \(2019\)](#) is determined by the nature of the research question and subject to be investigated. To achieve the research objectives, this research used quantitative research methods. As for quantitative methodology the researchers employed quantitative visual content analysis ([Rose, 2023](#)) to analyse a compilation of selected visuals. The justification of this method is to determine a concept within some given quantitative data and produce generalizable predictions. The researchers used 248 visuals from Lat's cartoons to analyse the data. The simple random sample for quantitative purposes is used in this study because there is a fair sampling method and at the same time to reduce bias. The researchers developed a coding sheet based on the research questions used in this study. Coding sheets were constructed in accordance with a few selected variables retrieved from relevant journals. The proposed variables are visuals, interpretation consistent with denotation and connotation, themes portrayed and policy portrayed by Lat's cartoon.

The research procedure involved several steps. Initially, the researchers identified and collected the visual content based on the research objectives. In the subsequent step, visuals are selected according to the research questions to determine the source of visual data. Following, the coders created codes and coded the visuals, including the use of colour, and colour meaning for coding. In the fourth step, a pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the coding scheme, and inter-coder reliability was assessed. Two coders were selected and trained accordingly, and both possessed background knowledge in visual and communication. [Krippendorff \(2013\)](#) emphasized the necessity of having at least two independent coders in content analysis to ensure the reliability of a coding scheme. Accordingly, in this study, 10% of the 248 visuals were selected for a reliability test, following the guidelines ([Wimmer & Dominick, 2006](#)). The inter-coder reliability test was conducted using Holsti's formula, with two coders participating. The analysis yielded an inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.88, indicating a high level of agreement between the coders.

The fifth step entailed the collection of data based on predefined criteria and guidelines, with the visual content being coded according to the established scheme. Once the coding was completed, the data was input into statistical software, such as Excel and SPSS, for analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics. Finally, the data was interpreted and reported based on the quantitative analysis. The methods of data analysis used in this study are frequencies and cross tabulation ([Rose, 2023](#)).

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1. What is the portrayal of the colour discovered in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity?**

Cartoons serve as a means of engaging Malaysians in critical discussions about societal issues. Lat's cartoons are highly regarded as one of the dominant cartoons in Malaysia to unite the Malaysian diversified community. Thus, this research aims to explore the

functions of Lat cartoons through colour and meaning in developing an unity among citizens while incorporating the Madani concept.

**Table 1** shows the prevalence of palette in colour, and black and white within Lat's comic based on percentage. It examines the samples through two contrasting palettes components. The data breakdown reveals the proportion of each palette component choices in comic applications from Lat. The highest percentage among is the Black and White palette 78.2%, indicating strong preference, popularity and common availability of this palette type within the sample. While the colour palette on the other hand is 21.8%, indicating that colour may be limited or less available among the samples. Overall, black and white palette clearly dominates the coloured palette in proportional analysis of the samples. Black and white palette usage is popularly seen in Lat's cartoon drawing, depicting a great sense of emphasis on expression that enhances the comic characters' emotions making it more impactful. [Wang \(2021\)](#) observed that cartoons facilitate cross-cultural understanding, employing diverse modalities to convey its intentions and meaning. Thus, serving as a timeless medium, conveying a classic feel that has no boundaries with time, evergreen, which resonates with the readers and adds charm to its visual comic narrative.

Table 1: Palette percentage appeared in Lat's Comic

| Palette         | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|
| Colour          | 21.8       |
| Black and white | 78.2       |
| Total           | 100        |

Moreover, comics being a widely enjoyed entertainment form, attract a broad spectrum of audience demographics and are easily shared on social media for effective mass distribution of information. Without colour, viewers focus more on the storyline of the comic, dialogue, details, clues within the visual, and most of all defining cultural and historical significance in the comic narrative. Hence, deepening the engagement of viewers and Lat's cartoon of Kampung Boy theme. While 21.8% of the samples are in colour palette, this smaller proportion plays a crucial role in establishing not only visual interest, but colour representation, meaning and value in the comic. Depending on the colour usage, it evokes specific visual connotations and denotations that resonate meaningfully with the readers, an essential component of the overall comic medium that is analysed in the next table.

#### **4.2. What is the portrayal of the meaning discovered in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity?**

Meaning conveyed through visuals divided into denotation and connotation. The best visuals should convey the meaning directly without ambiguity, to carry out a clear message and effective understanding, as well as allowing people to react towards the messages portrayed by visuals in cartoons. **Table 2** presented in the above provides a comprehensive overview of frequency distribution of comic interpretations used in Lat's, classified into two distinct categories, denotation and connotation. Denotation means, messages are communicated directly, and the receiver can understand the meaning without putting any extra effort in comprehending the content. However, connotation is

defined as the receiver - should comprehend and interpret the content with additional understanding and interpretation. A substantial 70.2% of the interpretations fall under the denotation category. This suggested that most respondents focus on the explicit meaning of words or phrases rather than implied meanings.

Table: 2: Interpretation percentage within Lat's Comic

| Interpretation | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|
| Denotation     | 70.2       |
| Connotation    | 29.8       |
| Total          | 100        |

Whereas, interpretations categorised as connotation represent a smaller proportion, accounting for only 29.8%. This indicates that the nuanced, emotional, or associative meanings that accompany the language used are less frequently engaged with in this context. The data analysis reveals clearer preference for denotation over connotation among the sampled interpretations. Thereby, reflecting a tendency towards straightforward communication or a focus on literal meanings in this context. This is good and effective in communicating Madani concepts to the entire Malaysian citizens regardless of age, gender and education level. In conclusion, the preference for Denotation shows broader trend in Lat's comic, suggesting that readers in this context prioritise clarity and straightforwardness. It could also indicate a deliberate choice to emphasise literal meanings, possibly to avoid ambiguity. In general, the findings highlighted a significant focus on clear meanings, which influences the way Lat's comic is understood.

#### 4.3. How is the relationship between the elements in Lat's cartoons to represent local cultural identity?

Table 3 presents the outcomes of a series of Chi-Square tests aimed at examining the relationship between two categorical variables – palette and interpretation. The following is a detailed analysis of each component and its result: A chi-square test of independence showed association between pallet and interpretation,  $X^2(1, N = 248) = 5.7, p = .017$ . Thus, p-value shows less than the common alpha level of 0.05, can confidently conclude that there is meaningful relationship between these two variables. The analysis indicates a statistically significant association between the two categorical variables based on multiple tests conducted with Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, and Fisher's Exact Test (Harrison & Pius, 2021). Consistency of the results across these various tests adds value to findings and conclusions, indicating that the observed association is not merely a result of chance or sampling variability.

Overall, the analysis suggests a significant relationship between palette and interpretation, indicating that variations in one variable are likely to influence the other. This finding shows an understanding on how different usage of palettes can affect interpretations in the context studied.

Table 4 provides a detailed overview of the percentage distribution of themes identified in this research. Political cartoons serve as a tool for cartoonists to express viewpoints about issues by using satire and caricature to influence public perception and encourage thoughtful reflection about our society (Nindya Hasanah & Didin Nuruddin Hidayat,

2020). Among the various themes presented in Lat's Cartoon (Sustainability) emerges as the most prevalent, accounting for 26% of the total themes analysed. This is closely followed by (Compassion), which represents 24% of the themes. Additionally, a combination of (Compassion & Prosperity) constitutes 17% of the themes observed. It is noteworthy that themes primarily related to politics under the (Others) category also play a significant role, collectively making up 17% of the distribution. In light of these findings, the researcher has identified politics as an important theme worthy of further exploration.

Table 3: Chi-square test

|                                                                                       | Value  | df | Asymptotic<br>Significance (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-<br>sided) | Exact Sig. (1-<br>sided) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square                                                                    | 5.721a | 1  | 0.017                                |                          |                          |
| Continuity<br>Correctionb                                                             | 4.945  | 1  | 0.026                                |                          |                          |
| Likelihood Ratio                                                                      | 6.22   | 1  | 0.013                                |                          |                          |
| Fisher's Exact Test                                                                   |        |    |                                      | 0.018                    | 0.011                    |
| Linear-by-Linear<br>Association                                                       | 5.698  | 1  | 0.017                                |                          |                          |
| N of Valid Cases                                                                      | 248    |    |                                      |                          |                          |
| a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.11. |        |    |                                      |                          |                          |

Table 4: The MADANI Theme discovered in Lat's Comic

| Theme                       | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Sustainability              | 26         |
| Compassion                  | 24         |
| Compassion & Prosperity     | 17         |
| Others                      | 17         |
| Sustainability & Compassion | 16         |
| Total                       | 100        |

Overall, these insights suggest a rich tapestry of themes in Lat Cartoons, reflecting a diverse range of societal issues and viewpoints. The prominence of Sustainability and Compassion themes indicates areas of significant relevance and engagement, while the addition of political themes highlights the importance of understanding the broader

context in which these cartoons operate. This nuanced analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dynamics at play.

Based on [Table 5](#), findings from multiple Chi-Square tests aimed at investigating the relationship between two categorical variables: palette and theme. Among these tests, the Pearson Chi-Square test provides valuable insights into the association between the two variables. The computed value for the Pearson Chi-Square test is 61.065, which is accompanied by 45 degrees of freedom (df). This statistic serves as an important indicator of the strength of the relationship between palette and theme. The corresponding p-value for this test is 0.055, which is only slightly above the commonly accepted threshold for statistical significance, typically set at 0.05.

Table 5: Chi-square test - value

| Value                        |                     | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 61.065 <sup>a</sup> | 45 | .055                              |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 72.494              | 45 | .006                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 4,372               | 1  | .037                              |
| N of Valid Cases             | 248                 |    |                                   |

a. 78 cells (84.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .30

This result suggests that while the association between the two variables is not quite statistically significant according to conventional standards, it is very close to this threshold. Being on the borderline indicates that there may still be a meaningful relationship worth considering, especially in the context of the study. The proximity of the p-value to 0.05 invites further reflection and discussion about the implications of the findings. It may suggest that with a larger sample size or different methodological approaches, the association could potentially reach statistical significance. Overall, these results highlight the need for careful interpretation and could pave the way for further research to explore the relationship between palette and theme more comprehensively.

According to [Table 6](#), the analysis of policy themes reveals key trends, with Local Policy, Economy, and Other as the most prominent categories. Local Policy accounts for 18.5% of the themes, underscoring its significance in regional governance discussions. Economy follows closely at 14.5%, indicating a strong focus on economic issues such as policy and market trends. The "Other" category comprises a substantial 37.1%, highlighting a diverse range of additional themes especially on the political policy that warrant consideration. This distribution of themes provides valuable insights into the areas of greatest concern and interest, guiding future discussions and policy-making efforts. The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the government machinery is responsible for implementing policies, functioning optimally, and addressing governance issues through coordination and alignment, but it must start with top-level management ([BERNAMA, 2023](#)).

Table 6: Policy percentage in the MADANI value

| Policy                           | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Local                            | 18.5       |
| Foreign                          | 1.2        |
| Environment                      | 5.2        |
| Health                           | 4.8        |
| Governance                       | 4.0        |
| Education                        | 4.8        |
| Economy                          | 14.5       |
| Equality (Race,Religion, Belief) | 8.5        |
| All policy involved              | 1.2        |
| Others                           | 37.1       |
| Total                            | 100        |

Through analysis shown in [Table 7](#), it is clear that most interpretations of Lat's comic focuses on denotation rather than connotation. Specifically, 174 visuals were interpreted through denotation, while 74 used connotations. The "Other" category mostly reflected politics content and the government's agenda has the highest number of visuals, with 71 under denotation and 21 under connotation. Following that, Local Policy includes 29 visuals using denotation and 17 using connotation. The Economy is represented in 23 cases for denotation and 13 for connotation, totalling 36 cases. The finding is in line with the announcement announced in *Belanjawan Malaysia Madani* that the government is focusing on ensuring stability and the well being of its citizens by taking steps to boost the economy through job creation and increased productivity while also enhancing security measures, managing finances to maintain economic balance and implement development strategies strategically ([The Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2023](#)).

In terms of equality related to race and religion, there are 18 denotation cases and 3 connotation cases, making a total of 21. The Environment is mentioned in 9 cases under denotation and 4 under connotation, totalling 13 cases. In summary, denotation is more commonly used across most policy areas, especially in Local Policy, Economy, and Other, while connotation is less frequent, appearing more in Foreign Policy and Governance. Malaysia prosperity and resilience, in line with the MADANI concept, is essential to enhance the enforcement of good governance and regulations at all levels. The nation's policies and initiatives for the country's socio-economic progress can prioritise sustainability, well-being, creativity, confidence, respect, and compassion ([The Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2023](#)).

Table 7: INTER\*Policy Crosstabulation

|       |      | Local policy | Foreign Policy | Environment | Health | Governance | Education | Economy | Equality in race/ religion | All Policy involved | Other | Total |
|-------|------|--------------|----------------|-------------|--------|------------|-----------|---------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|
| INTER | DENO | 29           | 1              | 9           | 10     | 4          | 9         | 23      | 18                         | 0                   | 71    | 174   |
|       | CON  | 17           | 2              | 4           | 2      | 6          | 3         | 13      | 3                          | 3                   | 21    | 74    |
| Total |      | 46           | 3              | 13          | 12     | 10         | 12        | 36      | 21                         | 3                   | 92    | 248   |

## 5. Conclusion

Cartoons are potent forms that have the power to unite and engage Malaysians, nevertheless it also wields as an effective visual communication on government agendas. Lat's cartoons are particularly regarded for its ability to instill profound visual messages that resonate with Malaysian society. However, complexity lies in one's diverse interpretation, where some may miss the underlying meaning of the cartoon. Thereby, this paper examines further the denotation and connotation meanings portrayed in Lat's cartoons and how it reflects the Malaysian Madani concept which advocates for sustainability, compassion, respect, innovation, trust, and prosperity by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The researchers use a quantitative visual content analysis approach to examine 284 pieces of Lat's cartoons. Set of coding sheets were developed to focus on elements of colours, visuals, interpretations (denotation and connotation), themes, and policy depictions. After conducting an inter-coder reliability test with a high agreement rate of 0.88, the data was analysed using frequencies and cross-tabulation in SPSS. The findings revealed that Lat's cartoons uses direct visual meanings, with readers preferring denotative interpretation over connotation because the use of black-and-white visuals was a deliberate choice to literal context that prioritise clarity, straightforwardness and timelessness.

The analysis also highlighted that the "other" category of policy, voted most prevalent – especially on the political policy that warrants consideration. Local and economic policies were also featured to serve the social security of Malaysians on financial planning, improve and upgrade various aspects of the community for better and healthier living standards. In line with the Madani's concept, the government is focusing on ensuring stability and well-being of citizens by taking steps to boost the economy through job creation and increased productivity while also enhancing security measures, managing finances to maintain economic balance, and implementing development strategies strategically ([The Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2024](#)). Lat's cartoons are relatable to themes of Sustainability and Compassion, as it encourages Malaysians to become sustainability-focused and being compassionate to others. This distribution of themes provides valuable insights into the areas of greatest concern and interest of Malaysians, guiding future discussions and policy-making to align with initiatives implemented by Malaysia's policymakers and government.

Hence, the Madani concept is clearly conveyed in Lat's cartoons, effectively highlighting the government's intentions. Policies introduced by the Prime Minister were prominently featured and incorporated within themes of Lat's cartoons. A signature style of Lat that serves no boundaries in connecting readers' with its visual charm and comic narrative across generations. Lat's humble yet impactful cartoon approach is an indulgence in conveying the Madani concept in an enduring manner. Ultimately, the researchers recommended that future cartoonists cultivate local identity through relatable cartoons which educate Malaysians on government agendas, fostering unity, harmony and promote greater culture values and virtues for a peaceful and prosperous country.

## **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology.

## **Acknowledgement**

We would like to express our gratitude to Gallery Rumah Lat and Lembaga Muzium Perak for granting us permission to collect data for this study.

## **Funding**

This research received funding from TARUMT internal research grant (UC/I/G2024-00139).

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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