



► BRANDING WITH GRAFFITI

Pushing Branding to a Fresher, More Authentic Level

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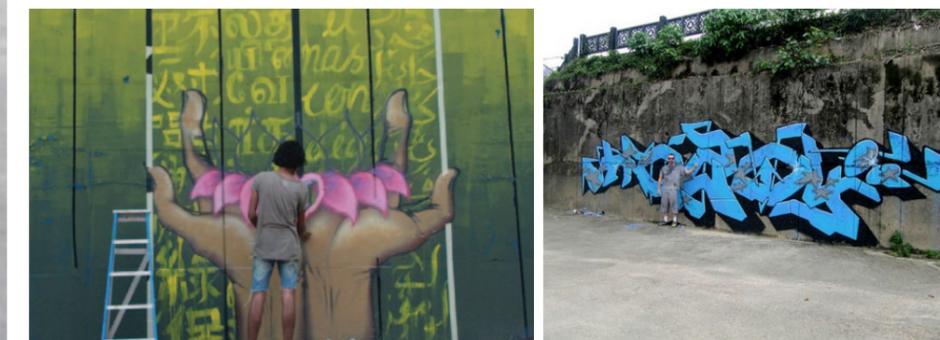
In today's fast moving and competitive times, as traditional forms of communication like television, radio and billboards are losing out to the wonders of marketing in the digital era, there is one ol' skool medium that has the potential of gaining attention - Graffiti art.

Many questions arise when it comes to using this artistic method as a tool for branding. Is this a feasible idea? Can this rebellious art form raise the professional persona of a brand? Will it work in a country like Malaysia?

While one of the earliest forms of Graffiti were drawings on caves walls, modern Graffiti started off as tagging or writing names on street signs and buildings. As one of the four elements of hip-hop, along with Emcee-ing, DJ-ing and B-Boy-ing, Graffiti was closely associated with gangs marking their territories. Also known as street art, it has always had the ability raise eyebrows within certain sections of society.

Is Graffiti vandalism? Or simply a means of expression? Graffiti is illegal almost everywhere around the world but there are a few exceptions. In the US, Graffiti is an illegal act but there are still limited 'legal walls' - places where artists can create murals without having the fear of being arrested. Australians use Graffiti as a sport, with competitions sponsored by famous companies.

Whether provocative, political or just for fun, Graffiti art is an urban art form that has gone from walls of shady neighbourhoods to being a platform for branding productions, albeit skewed towards the younger generation. A reflection of the artist, his community and the state of the world, street art is a colourful medium and thus a great platform for branding productions. As telecommunications giant DiGi have shown in their recent work, Graffiti can provide the means to connect with consumers at a new, more vibrant and down to earth way, if businesses are ready to embrace it.



01-02 Graffiti drawn by students as part of the Gempaknya My School campaign, in a competition created by DiGi.
03 Famous Graffiti artist Super Sunday, who has done campaigns for many prominent Malaysian brands.

Opposite The glory of the Berlin Wall is testament to the emotional power of Graffiti.

image :



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"We see Graffiti as an artistic expression that's gaining popularity amongst the youth. Since DiGi has a close brand affinity with youths, we decided to leverage on this growing form of expression to further engage with our customers," said Chan May Ling, Head of Marketing Services, DiGi Telecommunications.

Chan believes authorities are now more cognisant of this positive and healthy form of modern art and supportive of the movement as it gives them some control over the location and message being conveyed through graffiti art. For DiGi, it is a big blank canvas that offers a creative platform to showcase messages in an innovative and flexible form.

In more 'Graffiti-friendly' countries, brands have already embraced the imaginative spirit of Graffiti art. Brands such as Puma, McDonalds and Toyota have engaged their audiences with a journey of subtle marketing through Graffiti art. Some cities like Buenos Aires have urban festivals sponsored by brands to provide an avenue for international street art artists to share their perspectives, upcoming bands to play their music and a chance for people to appreciate all things artsy.

GRAFFITI IN MALAYSIA

Though still often equated to vandalism, genuine and meaningful Graffiti art has developed through the years to become a legal and legitimate avenue of self-expression, when used on the right mediums and for the right reasons. While Graffiti art still sparks debate among citizens, there are signs that Malaysians are embracing the art form, slowly but surely.

The evidence of this slow embrace is the Kul Sign Graffiti Festival which made its debut in December 2010 involving Graffiti and mural artists from home and around the world. An artistic initiative by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) with collaboration from the Bumblebee Consultancy, the programme saw the revitalisation of the concrete wall banks of the Klang River while giving Graffiti artists a chance to express their talent and creativity.

As the main sponsor of last year's event, Dulux used the two day festival to launch their Start Fresh Kuala Lumpur initiative, in line with the company's revamped global brand identity. The platform gave recognition to Graffiti artists while celebrating urban culture like street art, mural painting, street photography, B-boying and extreme sports.

Other than these festivals, brands like Sony Malaysia, Julie's Biscuits and DiGi have jumped on the creative bandwagon, joining forces with Bumblebee

Consultancy and several schools in Malaysia to inspire students to pursue their passions through the 'Gempaknya My School' initiative.

After introducing the new proposition of DiGi Easy Prepaid's 24 hours Free Calls, SMS, Facebook and Twitter, DiGi decided to do something different and chose Graffiti as a new platform to make real connections with Youth and express their brand proposition of friends never being apart.

This 'Buddyz Never Apart' proposition focused on the strong bonds Youth build and develop over time with their close friends or 'Buddyz', with staying connected an integral part of that dynamic.

Using a Twitter hashtag, a medium familiar to the youth, DiGi crated a platform for its target market to express, interact and create their own little manifestos of what friendship and camaraderie meant to them. A mock Graffiti wall, amongst other Youth passion points, was used in their communication channels (print, social media, website, POSM) to promote the campaign.

"As a brand we believe there are various arts interest groups in Malaysia that exist as fragmented sub-cultures. DiGi's intent was to galvanise these artists under one 'branded' platform, immerse in the culture and drive relevance with the youth," said Chan.

The brand continued to collaborate with Graffiti artists in the next phase, coming up with co-created merchandise expressed by spoken word artist Jamal Raslan. They also collaborated on a meet-the-characters session for "Gempaknya My School".

The campaign also empowered Youth to express their friendship through blogging, learning the special Buddyz handshake and also through Graffiti competitions.



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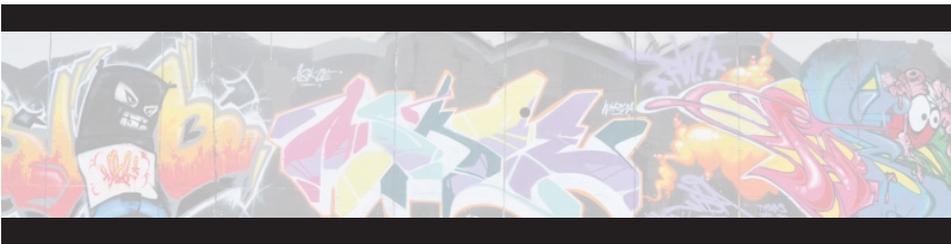
Artistic competitions such as these not only bring out the competitive spirit amongst the students, they also offer avenues for friendship and camaraderie through the common bond of Graffiti painting and exploration. Kids also got the chance to work with experienced Graffiti artists on the ground. This effort reached out to more than 15,000 youth on ground and more than 27,000 youth via Facebook in 10 schools over three regions.

"Based on the many positive responses received for our DiGi Easy Prepaid Buddyz Never Apart campaign, I would say that using Graffiti is an effective way to engage with the youth. The intention needs to be a genuine effort in making their voices heard and providing due recognition for their creative efforts. On ground, it sparked fantastic attention and interest amongst the students. As a direct consequence to our campaign, the students who joined our program with in SMK (P) Taman Petaling were even commissioned by the school to paint another wall with Graffiti," added Chan.

Known as the quintessential challenger brand, DiGi always aims to be different and the first into new and exciting activities, and Graffiti is no different. Though their efforts are highly praised, we are yet to truly know whether Graffiti is a viable means of branding and engagement in the long term.

One issue is the perception of Graffiti as vandalism. Hopefully this can be worked around in a sensible manner with a focus on quality Graffiti, and brands like DiGi are certainly playing their part in this change. Whether or not brands can profit long term from Graffiti depends on them coming up with novel ways of using the medium and leading the charge in innovation, not merely following the trend. If they can harness this creativity, there is great potential.





Shuhaida Saharani, 33, Shah Alam

"Graffiti is an art form only when it is done tastefully, not too complex, with meaningful messages or humour and of course, lovely colours. It's a street art that many would understand its purpose and meaning always directed locally, to a specific group of people and particularly the young," said Shuhaida.

Shuhaida believes it the local Graffiti art scene is blossoming in a positive way. Before, these painting were done anonymously but these days artists claim their art, show their signatures and even make a business of out. While some learning and business centres decorate their walls with graffiti art, few are brave to do so.

Although open to brands marketing their ideas through Graffiti art, Shuhaida also believes Malaysians are not ready for this as a whole as graffiti art is still seen as vandalism and has a negative connotation.

"Maybe if there's a media hype to inform the public that the marketing initiatives are sanctioned by the government (like a 'Halal' stamp) and that it is not against the law to 'like' it, then maybe, Graffiti art marketing is acceptable," she added.

Kanendra Naidu, 28, Kuala Lumpur

A big fan of Graffiti art, Kanendra believes the current graffiti scene in Malaysia is slow-moving due to the fact that many view graffiti as an act of vandalism. The artist often uses his creativity and emotions to express himself in either an abstract or descriptive form.

"Using Graffiti art as a means of advertising and branding is a good idea. Conventional marketing methods are losing its appeal and integrated advertising on social media is a nuisance. Graffiti art as a source of promotion is intriguing and will certainly get the attention of customers," he said.

Moving forward, Kanendra feels a proper regulatory body should be formed to educate the Graffiti artists on the do's and don't's on Graffiti. Proper education of this art form will create a more receptive audience and could be a catalyst for a blossoming graffiti art scene in Malaysia. In the future, they will "Graffiti" with a sense of responsibility.

However, he feels the landscape in Malaysia provides good avenues for Graffiti art as a marketing tool, on concrete structures, pillars and establishments. Graffiti art as a marketing medium is becoming more acceptable globally. With the aid of smartphones which is owned by almost everyone in urban areas, the static Graffiti art form enable customers to find out more by engaging the art form with applications in their electronic devices. TBL