

# A Case Study of Animated Book Covers for Promoting Publishers in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

*The evolution of new technology is changing the consumer perspective of Malaysia's audience, including the book industry. More digital bookstores are popping up, while physical stores are declining as preferences change along with the evolution of technology. This study examines the components used in designing animated book covers, using a content analysis of ten (10) samples of digitally illustrated book covers from several publications. The aim is to understand the components of book cover design and how motion was implemented in the animated book cover. The findings showed that the most common element of book covers to be animated is cover art illustration. Results revealed the pattern of visual components animated in book cover design and suggested guidelines to aid publishers in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** *Animated Book Covers, Digital Devices, Illustrated Book Cover, Motion Graphic, Publisher*



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of book covers spans centuries, starting from hand-engraved or embossed bindings and including materials such as precious stones, ivory, silk, clasps, embroidery, leather, gold, and silver threads to protect the content of sacred texts (Guillermo, 2017). Fast forward to the 1820s, with the introduction of steam-powered presses, books became more affordable, producing low-cost covers using mechanical binding. The ability to print allowed for multicoloured lithography, and halftone illustration techniques influenced by art nouveau were utilised in creating book covers.

By the 1920s, it became more or less standardised to have elaborate book covers as fundamental to selling the book (Alan Powers, 2001). In Powers' writing, he explained that serious artist willing to turn their attention to books when there was a concept of so-called commercial art in art college. This is the beginning of possibilities for publishers to create a brand image. The artists' designs could also provide the identity of the book series.

In the book publishing industry, judging a book by its cover is acceptable and often the first step towards a life-changing literary experience (Taylor, 2024). The best book covers are designed to

capture readers' interest, establish an emotional connection with them, and even contribute to the book's sale. Publishers must ensure that the cover design captures potential readers' attention in fleeting moments on a bookshelf while staying within the genre norm (Taylor, 2024). The design of book covers has always been important, but its significance has been elevated with new technologies and changing customer preferences. A book cover is more than just an accessory; it is a dynamic force that influences decisions and changes people's perspectives. In the digital age, there are only a few seconds to grab a buyer's attention, making the thumbnail image even more crucial to stand out from the infinite virtual bookcases. This makes it the most significant form of the cover.

In recent years, the Malaysian book industry has evolved in response to technological advancements that have changed consumer perspectives. For instance, the rise of online bookselling has made it easier for consumers to purchase books with just a click on their digital devices (Nuradzimmah Daim & Dhesagaan Bala Krishnan, 2022). This growth is particularly evident in the increased use of e-commerce platforms and social media for selling books (Abdullah & Ishak, 2016). Additionally, there is a notable coexistence of print and e-books, along with a rise in small independent publishers. This phenomenon can largely be attributed to the emergence and widespread use of the Internet and social media (Abdullah & Ishak, 2016).

However, to compete with other sources of information and entertainment, there is a need to enhance the digital and overall digital representation of books (Salu, 2019). Animated graphics or motion graphics design has been widely used to promote products and services in the market with its appealing visuals, fulfilling the purpose of attracting the attention of potential buyers. An animated book cover is an excellent approach to enhancing the visibility of promoting a book on social media platforms and digital devices, reaching a larger audience. Hence, this study seeks to identify visual components visualized in the animated book cover design and propose a guideline for producing animated book covers for publishers in Malaysia.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

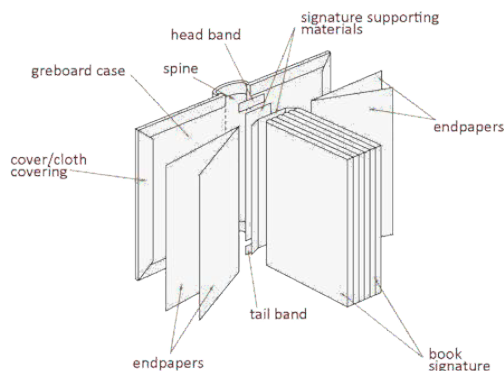
### **2.1 Motion in Animated Illustration**

The term “motion graphics” was first coined by John Withney, a well-known animator, in 1960 (Fathi et al., 2014). It can be said that motion graphics are under the umbrella of animation, which can be understood as moving images. Motion graphics offer distinct themes and genres that use creativity, imagination, and graphic effects as a means of expression and audience contact (Fathi et al., 2014). Motion graphics can range from simple short gifs to long videos like explainers or promotional videos. In the case of animated book covers, motion graphics are used for promotion on social media or for display on websites.

Motion graphics depict space and time to create the illusion of movement or changing visual factors usually displayed in electronic media technology (Bui Minh Nhat, 2020; Fathi et al., 2014). In his writing, Nhat explained how motion graphics emerged in design when it used to be a crucial cinematic aspect in creating movies and series. When Millennials and Gen Z, the groups that dominate the portion of video consumption, gain purchasing power, they are more likely to search for short content to match their entertainment desires.

The most used media are shifting from desktops and laptops to smartphones, and brands are adopting the changes. Since the advances of technology, Motion Graphics have become more accessible and integrated with almost every business-made video. The increasing volume of video content and screens visible today has accelerated the expansion of motion graphics in areas such as the Internet, television, and mobile applications. He also lists the benefits of motion graphics: consistent brand identity, increased brand memory, emotional appeal, simplified content, improved engagement rates, and compatibility with all devices.

## 2.2 Book Cover



**Figure 1 Book Anatomy (Pulsio, 2023)**

As presented in Figure 1, a book usually consists of a text block, covers, endpapers, a spine, and a raised band. Some parts may be absent depending on the type of book. The text block is the leading book body, which contains sheets or book signatures that can be bound. Endpapers are blank pages on the front and back of the book to bind the book's body and make the cover more potent. The spine is the edge of the book where the pages or book signatures are bound together. It is the exposed area when the book is placed on the shelf. Typically, the title of the work, the author's name, and the number of books in the series are included. A raised band is a set of small canvases to protect the paper at both ends of the spine.

The cover is the outer part surrounding the text block to protect it during use and storage. There are two common types of covers: softcover (paperback) and hardcover. The paperback is flexible and thick paper glued to fasten the paper body. The paperback cover can also be styled as flaps; a continuation of the cover folded inside the book. While providing more space, it can be used as a divider. The hardcover is highly stylized by adding covering/cloth, which can add texture to the book's cover (Paul, 2017).

## 2.3 Book Cover Design

A book covers are the outer layer of the book that protects the text block during use and storage which is later also used to sell the book as they also offer a glimpse of what readers can expect to find inside (Darling, 2019; Vanderschantz, 2013). From the publisher's standpoint, the book cover should have details such as the title, the author's name, the publisher logo, a blurb, the ISBN, and a bar code for ordering (Darling, 2019).

Historically, the practice of placing typography and artwork on the outside of a book dates to 1820 with book jackets, and it has grown in popularity throughout the years. The jacket was originally designed to serve as a protective wrap for the book until the customer carried it home (Powers, 2001). Early outer book decoration consisted of either blocking directly into the binding material or paper sheets attached to the front and back (Powers, 2001). With the evolution of the paperback, jacket designs were moved to the book's cover and were no longer discarded once the reader arrived home.

The universal shift to digitalization sparked a significant transformation in the publishing sector, and consumers' enhanced access to information resulted in a new type of marketing: social media. In addition, the design of books had to take into account a whole new digital perspective. One example is how the digital cover is limited to the front cover, separating the blurb from the book. According to Darling (2019), a digital cover serves as a visual gateway to web page data, which includes publication date, reader reviews, rating systems, price, and notably, the blurb. In this sense, a digital cover's function is purely aesthetic and informational.

In digital bookstores, the front cover is displayed in a thumbnail size to simulate the ideal position of a front-facing book in a physical store (Darling, 2019). This emphasizes the importance of front cover design, providing a brief overview of the book's story or theme before readers delve into the blurb. The cover can convey the genre, emotion, message, plot, period, or target audience (Darling, 2019). A potential reader might overlook a book display without anything intriguing catching their eye. Book covers should be visually striking, captivating, or unique. They should connect the image and the book's content to visually stand out and attract readers. The book cover aims to attract and give a first impression to the reader (Darling, 2019). Books in the same market segment often have similar design features based on their content, genre, and target audiences. Using artwork related to the book's contents, book covers create a strong first impression and pique the reader's interest, encouraging them to learn more. Marketing departments for publishing companies and self-publishing authors often rely on book cover designs to attract readers more than any other approach (Nulik, 2022). Occasionally, book covers may need to be updated, refreshed, or revitalized, especially when targeting audiences from social media (Darling, 2019). This is particularly important when transitioning books to digital bookstores, where the cover is reduced to a thumbnail-size image. As a result, book cover design has undergone significant changes from the early invention until now.

The same principles of book cover design apply when designing an animated book cover. Typography, colour psychology, imagery, layout, and composition should be harmoniously blended to create an appealing visual representation of the book's contents (Lombardi, 2024). However, with animated book covers, designers have an additional element to consider motion. The animation should be subtle enough not to distract from the book's content but engaging enough to catch the reader's attention. They can make the book stand out from the competition and increase its visual appeal. The thoughtful arrangement works as a visual communicator as the brain responds to colour, form, depth, and movement. They can also provide an interactive and immersive experience for the reader, making the book more memorable. Additionally, animated book covers can be used to promote the book on various digital platforms, such as social media and websites.

## 2.4 Visual Communication

Visual communication involves conveying ideas and information using images, symbols, colours, and typography (Izzatun, 2023). According to Ezell (2023), visual communication can deliver a message, spark change, or evoke an emotion. Marilyn and Sitinjak (2022), define visual communication as expressing ideas through visual media and emphasising its significance across fields like education, marketing, politics, and sustainability. Studies highlight the role of visuals in delivering messages, influencing behaviour, and enhancing understanding. Visual communication has gained importance in social interactions and message transmission due to technological advancements that have made visual media more accessible and affordable since the 20<sup>th</sup>. century. In marketing, the reliance on graphics, images, and signs to inform consumers has grown, demonstrating the more significant impact of visual communication in conveying information. Book cover design also relies on visual elements to attract and educate readers about the book's content. Through visual communication, text and images can influence what people see and think. Good book covers can convey information about a story's ideas, characters, themes, and concepts. Research indicates that images are more memorable than text in communication and can make a message more memorable.

## 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design and used content analysis to analyse the animated book covers. The study examined ten (10) samples of digitally illustrated covers from online platforms, including but not limited to online bookstores, digital articles, and content hosted on YouTube, as listed in Table 1. By setting these boundaries, the study aims to offer a detailed analysis that significantly contributes to understanding the role and impact of digital illustration in today's visual culture.

As presented in Table 1, the researcher listed the sample specifications as title, genre, platform, file, and duration. Each sample was then analysed using the elements of book cover design according to Lombardi (2024), which include typography, colour, imagery or illustration. An in-depth analysis was carried out to better understand the appeal of the cover design suitable for the book content, as presented in Table 2. Moreover, the researcher has added another element to consider with animated book covers: motion graphics. Motion graphics sometimes include audio and sound (Mohsen, 2014). To analyse the data, the researcher described the motion sequence from the sample and analysed the animated component. The researcher proposed combining the book cover design elements (Lombardi, 2024). In the cover art, the researcher referred to object types of illustration (Shi et al. 2021): character, environment, embellishments, and special effects. The researcher also includes audio presence, as referred to (Mohsen, 2014). At the end of this study, the researcher would propose a set of guidelines for developing animated book covers.

**Table 1** Animated Component to be analysed in animated book cover sample


Animated component of Book Cover	
Elements of book cover design – Lombardi (2024)	Audio (Mohsen,2014)
Typography	- Title
	- Author's Name
	- tagline
Illustration (Shi, et al. 2021)	- Character
	- Environment
	- Embellishment
	- Special Effects
Colour	

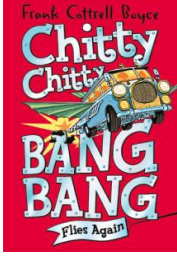

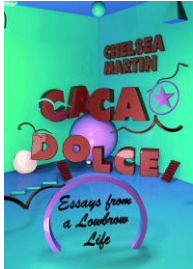
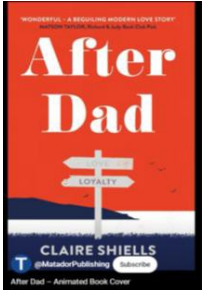
### 3.1 Sample

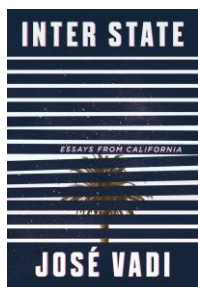
The researcher established three criteria for selecting samples for this study:

- 1 The book must be available on an online digital platform without requiring any third-party applications.
- 2 The cover should include more than three design elements.
- 3 The animation of the book cover should last longer than three seconds.

**Table 2** Sample specification

Cover	Title	Genre	Platform	File	Duration (Second)
 <a href="https://youtu.be/MKfM7Tti5vY?si=EhEsr8BgXI8EjDwG">https://youtu.be/MKfM7Tti5vY?si=EhEsr8BgXI8EjDwG</a>	Sky Pirate	Adventure fiction	Social media – YouTube short	Mp4	18

 <p><a href="https://www.adazi.ng.com/animated-moving-book-covers/">https://www.adazi.ng.com/animated-moving-book-covers/</a></p>	Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Flies Again	Fantasy Fiction	Web page	Gif	10
 <p><a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/zu0ldVU-5E?si=qY7mIZs1x_gMab3x">https://youtube.com/shorts/zu0ldVU-5E?si=qY7mIZs1x_gMab3x</a></p>	Blood Rose Rebellion	Adult Fantasy Fiction	Social Media – YouTube short	Mp4	5
 <p><a href="https://lithub.com/the-art-of-the-moving-book-cover/">https://lithub.com/the-art-of-the-moving-book-cover/</a></p>	Caca Dolce	Biography	Web page	Gif	10
 <p><a href="https://youtube.com/shorts/EIGzP-q7Nhq?si=UIRzJqFbr-PKIAww">https://youtube.com/shorts/EIGzP-q7Nhq?si=UIRzJqFbr-PKIAww</a></p>	After Dad	Domestic Fiction	Social media – YouTube short	Mp4	10



<https://softskull.com/books/inter-state/>

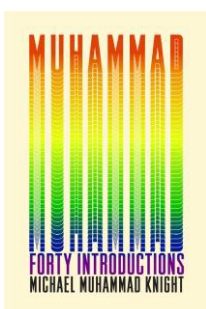
Inter-State

Biography

Web page

Gif

10



<https://softskull.com/books/muhammad-forty-introductions/>

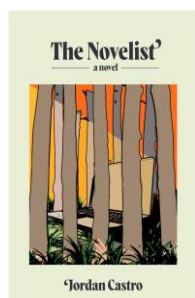
Muhammad  
Forty  
Introduction

Religion

Web page

Gif

15



<https://softskull.com/books/the-novelist/>

The Novelist

Dark Comedy

Web page

Gif

8



<https://plainmagazine.com/spellbinding-animated-vintage-book-covers-henning-lederer/>

Industrial design

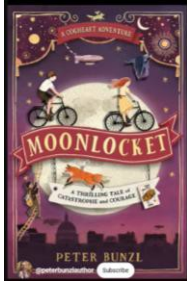
Textbook

Web page

Gif

8





<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ga-tvoYdWyU>


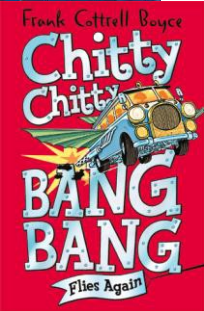
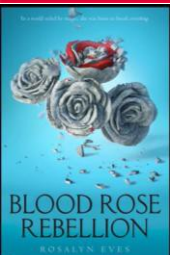
Moonlocket    Adventure fiction    Social media – YouTube Short    Mp4    15

The table above shows that animated book covers last from five (5) to eighteen (18) seconds. The platforms on which they are published are usually social media and online bookstores. The researcher also confirms that animated book covers are not limited to fiction books but can also be implied in non-fiction books. The file formats used for animated book covers are video for social media and GIF images for web pages.

## 4 FINDINGS

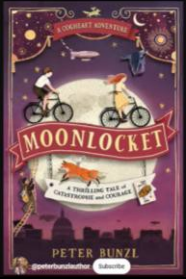
### 4.1 Data Analysis

**Table 3** Design analysis of the sample according to book content

Cover	Book Content	Illustration (Cover art)	Colour	Typography	Layout and Composition
	Sky Pirate: An adventure story for children about exploring the world outside their city wall.	Title, Character, Zeppelin, Tagline, Author's name,	Blue, Purple, Orange - Complementary - Friendly - Imaginative - Mysterious - Wisdom	San Serif	Landscape Centre
	Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Flies Again: A sequel to the children's classic by Ian Fleming featuring a contemporary family and a camper van with a mind of its own.	Title, Rocket Author's name	Red, Silver, Yellow, Black - Contrasts - Excitement of youth - Optimism - Strength - Joy - Adventurous	Serif	Portrait Centre
	Blood Rose Rebellion: In a world where social prestige derives from a trifecta of blood, money, and magic, one girl can break the spell that holds the social order in place.	Roses, Concrete, Title, author's name. Tagline	Blue, Grey, Red, Black - Balance - Strength - Complexity - Sophistication	Serif	Portrait Centre


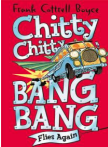


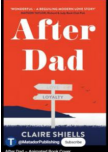
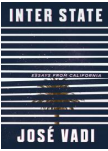


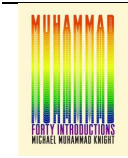



	Caca Dolce: Essay from a Lowborn Life. An autobiography of a young artist facing life tribulations.	Title, Abstract 3D Shape, Subtitle, Author's name	Green, Blue, Red, Purple - Split complementary - Intensity - Creativity - Hope - Growth	San Serif	Portrait Centre
	A bittersweet love story exploring why good people sometimes do bad things	Title, Landscape, Signage, Comment	Orange, White, Navy - Authority - Bravery - Ambition - Peace	Serif	Portrait Centre
	Inter-State: Essay from California. A collection of poetic, linked essays investigating the past and present state of California, its conflicting histories and their impact on a writer's family and life.	Tree, Title, Line, Subtitle	White, Blue - Authority - Indifferent	San Serif	Portrait Centre
	Muhammad: Forty Introductions offers a distinct and nuanced take on the life and teachings of Muhammad, the prophet, using a traditional genre of Islamic literature called the "forty hadiths" collection.	Title, Author's name	Off White, Rainbow, Black - Formality - Noble - Truth - Peace	San serif	Portrait Centre
	The Novelist: A Novel pays tribute to Nicholson Baker's The Mezzanine and Thomas Bernhard's Woodcutters, but in the end is a wholly original novel about language and consciousness, the internet and social media, and addiction and recovery.	Pillar, Title, Laptop, Author's name, Lights	Off White, Chocolate, Black, and Yellow - Optimist - Mysterious - Simple	Serif	Portrait Centre
	A textbook of Industrial Design.	Gear, Title, Series number	White, Blue, Orange - Complimentary - Confidence - Wisdom	Serif	Portrait Right side

	Moonlocket: A steampunk fantasy fiction of children defeating criminal masterminds.	Title, Moon, Character, Cityscape, Symbols, Author's name, Tagline.	Purple, White, Red, Yellow -Harmony -Mysterious -Hope -Truth	Serif	Portrait Centre
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## Data Analysis 2

**Table 4** Analysis of animated components from the chosen sample

Book Cover	Motion description	Animated component							Audio
		Title	Typography Authors Name	Tagline	Character	Environment	Embellishment	Special Effects	
 Sample 1	Zoom out establishing the environment, The Character came down with a zeppelin in the sky, title and tagline came in together with a mechanical dragon.	/		/	/	/			
 Sample 2	The yellow bus came in the cover, stayed for a second and went out from the book cover while the exhaust kept flicking.				/			/	
 Sample 3	The roses appear as if made out of concrete. The concrete shattered revealing the bright red of rose petals.						/	/	/
 Sample 4	Geometry shape and a few alphabets in the title drop and move around as a follow-through.	/					/		
 Sample 5	Birds move around in the background, the signage wiggles up and down, tagline fades in and out.			/		/	/		
 Sample 6	Lines in the cover are depicted as window blinds rotating up and down, peeking at the tree. One of the lines has a tagline that moves together.			/			/		

	<p>The first word from the title stretches upward and shows a range of colours from darker blue to bright red.</p>	/	/					
<p>Sample 7</p>	<p>The colour behind the pillar changes from orange to yellow and sometimes torching light shows a laptop behind the shadow.</p>		/	/	/			
	<p>Sample 8</p>							
	<p>Sample 9</p>	<p>Two gears rotate in opposite directions continuously.</p>	/					
	<p>Sample 10</p>	<p>Hanging elements in the illustration swing back and forth slightly, the fox running and the bird flapping, the light changing to a full moon, and tyres spinning along with small stars. And Zeppelin moves across the cover.</p>	/	/	/	/	/	/

4.2 Results and Findings

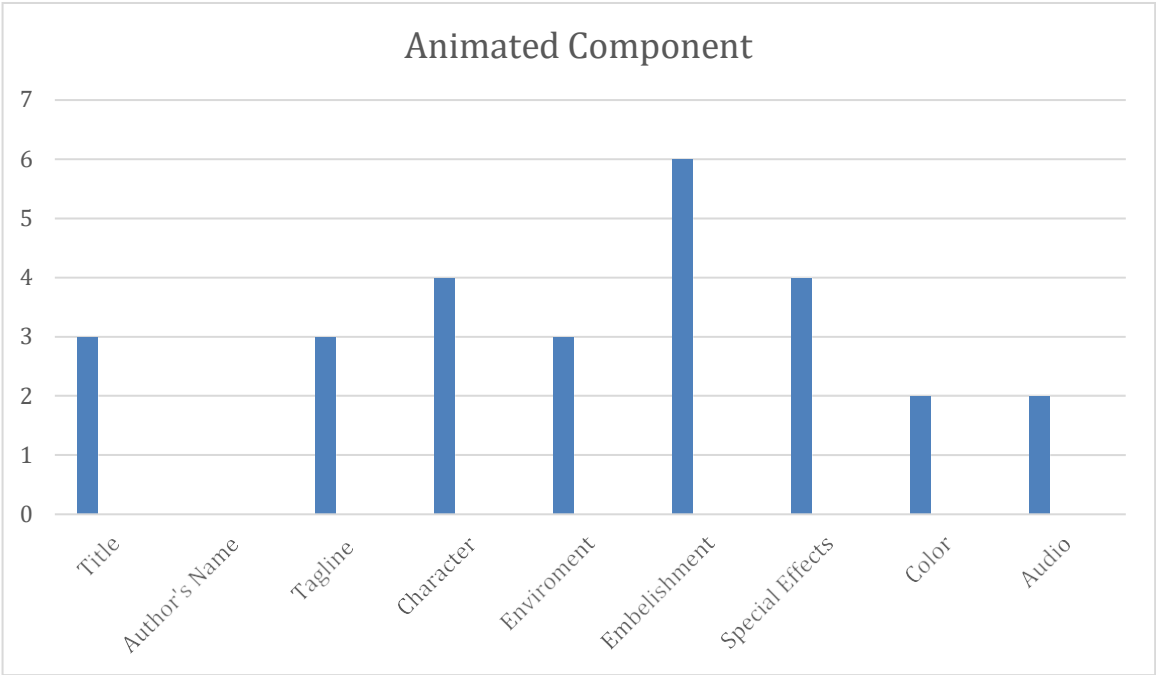


Figure 2: The graph visualised the frequency of animated components presented in the book cover

Several components are important in designing animated book covers. The findings are presented in *Figure 2* which are:

### **4.2.1 Typography**

The researcher conclude typography in book cover design can be presented as title, author's name, and tagline.

#### **4.2.1.1 Title**

The title is the major element in the book cover was only animated in three out of ten (3/10) samples. Those are sample 1, sample 4 and sample 7.

#### **4.2.1.2 Tagline**

For the tagline, only three out of ten (3/10) samples animated the tagline which are sample 1, sample 5 and sample 6.

#### **4.2.1.3 Authors Name**

All authors' names from the sample were kept as it is without any motion.

### **4.2.2 Illustration**

The most common element found on book covers is illustration, which can be categorized into various types based on the objects identified by Yang Shi et al. (2021): characters, environments, establishments, and special effects. This classification allows for a wide range of animated assets. Additionally, illustrations comprise most of the visual elements on book covers. A study conducted by Zsofia K. Takacs and Adriana G. Bus in 2016 concludes that motion attracts attention when viewing illustrations, as it enhances understanding compared to a static image.

#### **4.2.2.1 Characters**

Characters can consist of main symbols or items that act, for example, gears, characters, or transportation such as buses or zeppelins. Four out of ten (4/10) book covers animated this element. They are sample 1, sample 2, sample 9 and sample 10.

#### **4.2.2.2 Environment**

While environment are physical location, weather, or social surroundings of a narrative. Three out of ten (3/10) samples animate the environment of the book cover. They are sample 1, sample 5 and sample 10.

#### **4.2.2.3 Embellishment**

The most animated illustration is embellishment, a movement that was implied to show the characteristics of the object. From the data, six out of ten (6/10) samples use this movement in the animated book cover. They are sample 3, sample 4, sample 5, sample 6, sample 8 and sample 10.

#### **4.2.2.4 Special Effects**

The last element in the illustration is special effects, which refer to illusions or visual tricks that simulate the imagined events in a narrative. In the data collected from the sample, four out of ten (4/10) samples used special effects in the animated book cover. They are sample 2, sample 3, sample

8 and sample 10.

#### **4.2.3 Colours**

Colours are one of the important elements of the book cover as the aesthetic element in the book cover. The data shows two out of ten (2/10) samples animate and change colours: sample 7 and sample 8. Sample 7 colour changes indicate the resent of light while sample 8 spreads the RGB colour as the title stretches upward.

#### **4.2.4 Audio**

The last element included in the animated component is audio, aligned with Mohsen, 2014, stating that audio is part of motion. Two out of ten (2/10) samples have the presence of sound in the animated book cover; the samples are sample 3 (Blood Rose Rebellion) and sample 10 (Moonloket). Sample 3 uses sound effects to give more emphasis to the crumbling concrete. Sample 10 uses the ambience of several sounds to make the animated book cover more immersive. The audience can hear the sound of birds chirping, the clock ticking, and the sound of bicycles. All this sound can be synced to the visual of the book cover.

### **4.3 Discussion**

According to this finding, guidelines can be created for animated book covers for publishers in Malaysia. A subtle kinetic element can be implemented in the cover art. This could be as simple as the fade in and out of any element or brief storytelling using symbolism. If the book cover is minimalist and only has the title on the front cover, publishers can use kinetic typography to make it more appealing. A change of colour in the cover can also influence the audience's perception, as colour can convey the emotion the author tries to express in their work. From the samples, there was minimal motion in the composition and layout. This suggests that extensive changes could confuse the audience with the original book. In visual communication, audio might be absent; however, it can be used depending on the platform the animated book cover is presented. It's not crucial if the cover is to be used on a website or a digital bookstore. However, for social media marketing, it's important to use compelling audio to grab the audience's attention in seconds.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of book cover design and its evolution with new technologies. The digital age has emphasised the importance of captivating potential readers' attention within seconds in the digital space, making animated book covers a valuable promotional tool for publishers in Malaysia. While currently there are no specific studies on the animated book cover, there are some studies that can be related to how animated illustrations are more effective in promoting than a static image. It can effectively convey product messages in engaging and memorable ways while simplifying information, creating positive associations with brands, and increasing consumer engagement (Laksita & Prasetya, n.d.).

By identifying the visual components of animated book cover design, this research aims to enhance the visibility of published books on social media platforms and digital devices. Furthermore, it underlines the potential of animated book covers to create a brand image and increase the overall digital representation of book advertisements in Malaysia. As the publishing industry adapts to the digital landscape, incorporating animated book covers can contribute significantly to promoting and marketing books effectively on digital devices. An animated book cover can increase engagement more actively and increase attention spent on the media.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nur Afifah Binti Abdul Rahim developed the study and case study with help from supervisor, Inda Murni binti Hairul Anuar. Then, Sharkawi Che Din and Nur Aniza Binti Mohd Lazim examined the intonation and clarity of the language used in this paper.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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