

Animating Heritage: The Sidek Family in Roles in Cultural Branding and Retail Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The Sidek family legacy in Malaysian badminton has transcended sports, evolving into a powerful cultural brand through its animated series, *Anak-anak Sidek*. This study explores how the visual narrative of the Sidek brothers, rooted in perseverance, discipline, and national pride has been leveraged to shape cultural branding and consumer experiences across retail contexts, both online and offline. The biographical comic and the animation series of *Anak-anak Sidek* has immortalized the family's journey and is also seen as a strategic tool for identity formation, a symbol of national pride and fostering emotional connections with audiences. Drawing parallels to global franchises like *Upin & Ipin* and *Boboiboy*, the Sidek animation exemplifies how local art can drive commercial success, from merchandise and memorabilia to digital platforms. The popularity of the animation has spurred demand for Sidek-branded products, such as comics, apparel, and badminton equipment, sold in physical stores.

The recent retrospective experiential marketing like exhibition at the Sultan Alam Shah Museum transformed the story into an immersive retail experience where visitors engaged with trophies, stamps and interactive displays which could enhance emotional connection to the brand. This study highlights the Sidek Family's role in redefining national identity through visual arts and branding.

Keywords: *Anak-anak Sidek, Cultural branding, Consumer engagement, Retail contexts, Visual identity*

INTRODUCTION

In the Malaysia history of Badminton sport, Sidek family has been renowned in a significant history in professional badminton. The story started when Sidek Abdullah, who was a badminton player, trained all his sons in badminton since they were young. Sidek asserts a strict training method emphasizing on endurance and discipline and at the same time introduces a unique playing technique that focuses on strategy, agility and power. The training methods were strict, emphasizing discipline, footwork and endurance.

Sidek and his sons' life story was published in a biographical comic book, entitled *Anak-Anak Sidek (The Sidek Brothers)*, which was published by Penedaran JAS Sdn Bhd, a company owned by Jalani's former spouse, Raja Azmi. The comic was later adapted into an animated series of the same title which aired on Malaysia Televisyen for three seasons. The Sidek brothers, except Razif, became the board of directors and executive producers for both comic and the animated series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Identity of Anak-Anak Sidek

The first autobiography of *Anak-anak Sidek* was in a biographical comic. The content of the biographical comic refers to several adaptations of the story about the Sidek family, who is also a famous family of badminton players from Malaysia. The comic contains the real-life journey of the Sidek brothers—Misbun, Razif, Jailani, Rahman, and Rashid—who became legends in Malaysian badminton history. The comic is significant because it highlights the hard work, determination and perseverance of the Sidek brothers in searching for international fame in the sport of badminton.

The biographical comic of the Sidek brothers reflects a lifestyle through a set of signs and symbols in the badminton sports industry which serve as a platform to recognize national identity (Shamsudin 2001). National identity is usually presented in languages, history, literature, music and many other cultural traditions that build a national narrative (Alcoff & Mendieta 2003). The *Anak-anak Sidek* biographical comic book is also seen as the national identity as it is the first biographical comic produced in Malaysia and presenting the Malaysia badminton legacy in the 1990s. Through the comic series, the identity of Sidek brothers are recognized and differentiated from other badminton players. Table 1 below shows the profile of *Anak-Anak Sidek* Characters.

Table 1: The Profile of *Anak-anak Sidek* Characters.

No	Character's Name	Description
1	Mohammad Radzif Sidek	Complaints to father, exceptional badminton skills
2	Mohd Jalani Sidek	Patient and like to give advice
3	Mohamed Misbun Sidek	Mischievous, stubborn, loves teasing other siblings.
4	Abdul Rashid Sidek	Quiet and Observant
5	Abdul Rahman Sidek	Mischievousness

In early 2000s, the biographical comic of Sidek brothers turned into a television animation series. It is seen that animation characters could bring the sense of strength, weakness, kindness, mischievousness of the character. The animation further enhanced the personality and attitude of the character to be easily remembered (Kerlow, 2009). The Sidek animation series reminisces the story of Sidek brothers during a childhood stage to the year where they become renowned to the Malaysia sport badminton industry. The animation portrayed Kanchong *Darat, Banting, Selangor* – the original place where the Sidek brothers started the training. The series highlights the struggles, family life, and eventual success in badminton sports. The animation has been popular in Malaysia and received many recognitions due to its oneness in presenting the cultural touchstone of Malaysia sports history. The production of Sidek animation shows a realistic character of Sidek brothers where the character is similar to the real-life character with a high quality of strokes and colors.

According to Khalis et. al (2016) the animation of *Anak-Anak Sidek* has a great influence on Japanese animation culture rather than Western animation culture. Japanese animation through anime and manga, creates simple characters and stylish characters which can be easily imitated and admired by the followers (Hafiz & Zpalanzi 2009). The animation of *Anak-Anak Sidek* is slightly influenced by anime and manga styles, especially the eyes, nose, body and the haircut. Interestingly, the animation market in Malaysia gained popularity in the 2000s where animation Upin-Ipin has become popular in Asian countries and it has brought positive impacts to the local industries. The Upin and Ipin set a remarkable success and standards of the animation industries in Malaysia. Later, more and more animation series are produced in the Malaysia market like Ejen Ali, Boboiboy and many more.

Cultural Branding

Branding has left a remarkable impact on consumer behaviour studies but now, the term has circularized into many other fields including societies, humanities and sociology studies. (Suarez and Belk, 2017). A precise definition of branding by Anholt (2005) defines branding as all the elements which allow a product, company or service to have an identity and be recognised. Some previous researchers (Schroeder, 2009; Cayla and Arnould, 2008; Askegaard, 2006) affirm that brands are cultural forms and are an important part of the community, and assert that brands are assets for the societies or community.

The *Anak-Anak Sidek* animation serves as a powerful tool for cultural branding by embedding Malaysia's national identity into its narrative and visual language. The series celebrates the Sidek family badminton legacy, transforming their real-life perseverance and discipline into a branded symbol of Malaysian pride and resilience. Through its storytelling, the animation reinforces values like hard work and family unity, aligning them with broader cultural ideals that resonate with local audiences. This intentional narrative framing elevates the Sidek brothers from sports icons to cultural ambassadors, strengthening their brand as a representation of national achievement.

The visual identity of *Anak-anak Sidek* further enhances its cultural branding by blending Japanese anime influences with distinct Malaysian aesthetics. Character designs, settings like *Kampung Darat*, and the use of local dialects create an authentic yet stylized portrayal of Malaysian life, making the animation relatable and marketable. These visual cues differentiate the Sidek brand in a competitive media landscape, allowing it to stand out in merchandise, promotions, and collaborations. By merging global animation trends with local cultural elements, the series crafts a unique brand identity that appeals to both domestic and international viewers.

Cultural branding reshapes offline retail environments by embedding products and spaces with deeper meaning, turning transactions into culturally resonant experiences. The *Anak-Anak Sidek* animation exemplifies this by transforming the Sidek family sports legacy into a retail-friendly brand tied to Malaysian identity. This manifests in themed merchandise like badminton gear, comics, and apparel sold in stores that evoke nostalgia and national pride. Retailers leverage the brand's cultural identity to create immersive displays like pop-up stores replicating the training grounds and this would drive foot traffic.

Through the online platform, cultural branding amplifies retail impact through e-commerce platforms and social media engagement. The *Anak-Anak Sidek* brand thrives on digital marketplaces like Shopee, where fans purchase DVDs, posters, and reissued comics, often bundled with exclusive digital content (e.g., behind-the-scenes footage). Social media campaigns—featuring fan art, hashtag challenges, or live Q&As with the animators—sustain interest and direct traffic to retail sites. By anchoring retail in cultural narratives, the Sidek brand ensures long-term relevance, turning casual buyers into devoted advocates who perpetuate its legacy.

Consumer Engagement

Cultural branding deepens consumer engagement by transforming passive buyers into active buyers in a shared cultural narrative. The *Anak-anak Sidek* animation achieves this by tying its brand to Malaysian national identity. Simultaneously, buyers also connect with symbols of perseverance, family values, and sporting excellence. This emotional resonance compels fans to seek out and purchase Sidek-themed merchandise, attend exhibitions, support the events and share experiences online and offline which helps to create organic brand advocacy. By aligning the brand with cultural pride, it fosters a sense of belonging that transcends transactional relationships.

Digital platforms further extend engagement by enabling real-time interaction and community building. Social media campaigns featuring fan contests, behind-the-scenes content, or user-generated art keep the *Anak-anak Sidek* brand relevant between major releases. E-commerce integrations, like augmented reality (AR) filters that let users "play badminton" with animated Sidek characters, bridge offline nostalgia with online innovation. This omnichannel approach ensures consumers remain engaged at every touchpoint, reinforcing the brand's cultural significance while adapting to modern retail trends. Ultimately, cultural branding is able to be turned into storytellers who carry the brand forward.

CONCLUSION

The animation series usually delivers a good and positive message to the audience. Similarly, *Anak-Anak Sidek* conveys a message of family, perseverance and national pride. The Sidek brothers are seen as a team of heroes that have inspired the future generations of Malaysia, especially those in the sports field. The journey to fame started from a humble beginning to become an internationally renowned badminton player. The brothers are the source of Malaysia pride in the 1990s. The adaptations in comics and TV have helped keep the Sidek legacy alive for future generations. Recently, a retrospective exhibition called “*Pameran Anak-Anak Sidek*” was held at the Sultan Alam Shah Museum in Shah Alam, Selangor. In the museum, the brothers’ memorabilia, customized stamps, medals, trophies and many more are displayed to the public for the first time.

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