VISUAL PLAGIARISM IN GRAPHIC DESIGN PROGRAM

Mohd Amin Mohd Noh [1]

International Islamic University College Selangor

[1] mamn@kuis.edu.my

Anith Liyana Amin Nudin[2]

Universiti Teknologi MARA

[2] anithliyana@melaka.uitm.edu.my

Nik Narimah Nik Abdullah[3]

[3] Universiti Teknologi MARA

niknarimah@melaka.uitm.edu.my

Wan Nur Khalisah Shamsudin[4]

Universiti Teknologi MARA

[4] wnkhalisah@melaka.uitm.edu.my

Hoo Fang Jing[5]

Universiti Teknologi MARA

[5] hoofangjing614@melaka.uitm.edu.my)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to identify students' and academicians' understanding and the contributing factors in visual plagiarism in order to provide appropriate solutions to be applied in the art and design program thus to improve the academic integrity among the university community. This research employed a qualitative research with purpose to investigate the different opinions and the contributed factors related to visual plagiarism in the design assessment among students and academicians. The sample of this research consists of eight students and two academicians from graphic design program in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka campus. The credibility and confirmability of qualitative validity has been made to approve the legitimacy of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study had discovered that students have different understanding regarding visual plagiarism. The confusion has led to the misuse of visual references from other resources and some of them are not aware that plagiarism is considered as an offence in the academic setting. The contribution factors of wrong decision-making in selection topic, time mismanagement in design progress, and disregard consultation session with academician cause students to commit visual plagiarism. Academician's unwillingness to convey information to students about visual plagiarism in details for every course in graphic design program contributes to the miscommunication among students in designing artworks. Nevertheless, every academician agreed that visual plagiarism should be taken seriously to curb the situation from deteriorating. The trend of visual plagiarism in design assessment for art and design program is alarming. Academic community should consider any measures to address the issue not only in terms of restrictions and punishments but most importantly to educate students to value people's ideas and works and to improve academic integrity.

Key Words

Plagiarism, visual plagiarism, design assessment, academic integrity

INTRODUCTION

Plagiarism is considered a serious offence to students in the completion of assignments, writing reports or thesis in academic setting. Usually, there are established and documented policies or academic rules regarding plagiarism in text-based assignments or projects in every academic institution. There are also several universities that had standard procedures for text-based assignments to be verified and checked using software for text-based plagiarism.

Plagiarism in the general context can be defined as the practice of taking someone else's work and self-proclaimed the work as its own; or the use of other people's works or ideas without giving proper credit (Oxford Dictionaries; Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Plagiarism in the academic institution does not only happen in text-based assignment but somehow it has become more critical for non-text based media especially in visuals. Visual plagiarism cases had increased seriously among students in the graphic design program and without stern actions the problem could be further damaging. Most of the creative fields in universities especially the art and design program dominantly requires students to produce non-text based assignments including coding, audio, video, sculptures, 3D models, photography and visual designs. In graphic design program, students are required to produce new visual design to provide solution to visual communication problems. Rising issues of plagiarism in visual design had increased drastically and had been discussed especially in the social media. Malaysia has gained striking attention due to the disqualification of two winners during the recent Kancil awards as plagiarism was detected in the artwork. Figure 1 and 2 below has shown similarities in 'Professional Man' and 'Cross River Gorilla' both by Dentsu Utama an advertising agency which has been accused of plagiarising a Swedish artist and Tom Anders Watkins, British design student's artwork. Prior to that, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic committee members were faced allegations of plagiarism when the portrayed logo had showed major similarities to the Theatre De Liege logo. It is believed that more cases on visual plagiarism will be discovered with the advancement of technology and applications.
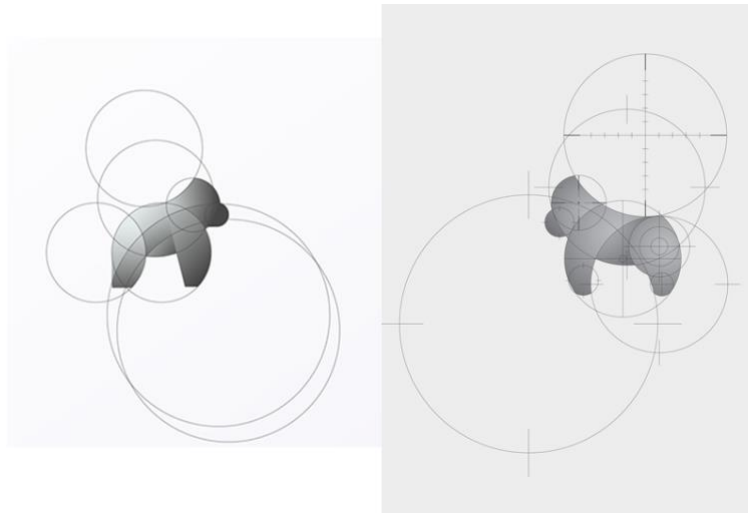

Figure 1: Left: Work by Tom Anders Watkins; Right: Dentsu Utama's 'Cross River Gorilla' (Source from: http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/)

Figure 2: Left: Work by Erik Johansson 'The Architect' (Reprinted with permission); Right: Work by Dentsu Utama's 'Professional Man' (Source from: http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/)

In regard to this situation, it is important to address visual plagiarism from the beginning among students as young designers need to have clear understanding about visual plagiarism. This is to instil design ethics in their prior involvement in the creative industry.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Notably, visual plagiarism is identified in the design assessment when academician assess and value every visuals designed by students. Documentation of overall idea developments will prove further whether students can demonstrated the body of work is authentic or dubious. However, there are limited resources of literature when it comes to non-text based assignment especially concerning visual-related. Most of the time, students excuses of plagiarism is failed to understand the concept of visual plagiarism and academic integrity as escapism (Garrett & Robinson, 2012; Cook, Minichiello & Lawrence, 2014). In addition with the technology advancement and the internet accessibility, the opportunity of plagiarism happens in design assessment are almost visible (Economou, 2011; Grozea & Popescu, 2010; Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). Furthermore, academician who does not have a proper guidelines or clear definition of plagiarism and did not state a clear project brief of assignment related to academic integrity inadvertently let it happens (Foltýnek, Rybička & Demoliou, 2013). One of the factors that contribute towards visual plagiarism is lack of awareness in drawing the border between being inspired and copying when students need to refer to one's artwork or design (Bradley, 2013). According to Ferguson (2011) no one starts out with original ideas and suggested that creative persons or students build their understanding through copying thus building their design knowledge. Therefore, they need to refer to established artworks or design in developing their understanding and creative judgement. However, there are big possibilities that this genuine admiration of styles or execution turned to copying especially when finding ways out from creative block as shortcut to the design process. Internet as an open source has also played its role in both ways; to encourage students and designers to utilize resources or to act negatively towards the reference (Howard & Davies, 2009; Davies & Howard, 2016). Deviant Art, Behance, Pinterest and other design blogs have been providing good platforms of creative references whereby saved images are easily placed in design software to be edited. Crowdsourcing design is also another risky platform thriving in the internet era to collect people's ideas without emphasising the origin of the ideas and the designers (Airey, 2012). Some businesses and competitions dominantly using crowd source to offer and to collect as much designs as they can get with minimum cost or rewards. Therefore, it can be an opportunity to exploit the design ideas and irresponsibly using it as their own. In university, the academic community is struggling to overcome the problems within visual plagiarism context whereby the availability of internet allows students to access information and visual without limits. Hence, it is important to cultivate academic integrity and understanding of visual plagiarism to hinder students from performing plagiarism in the academic setting.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

There is a blurred-line in definition of visual plagiarism due to act of copy and paste, borrowing images or manipulation; students' poor understanding or misunderstanding of the meaning and never aware of the act of resubmission of previous submitted works can be consider as plagiarism. (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010; Gynnild & Gotschalk, 2008; Curtis & Popal, 2011). Furthermore, the deficiency of the definitions could be heading people in different interpretations and aggravate the situation among design students. It is has worsen when academicians doesn't explain the academic integrity during academic session which might contribute to low awareness among students. Therefore, this paper to investigate a correlation between the acts of plagiarism among academic community with the lack of understanding about plagiarism and perhaps there is others possibilities which contributed to such act. This paper aims to answer the following research questions:
- What does visual plagiarism means to students and academicians?
- How visual plagiarism happens in design assessment?

- What actions can be taken by academicians to ensure students are well aware about visual plagiarism?

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the interviews have been conducted by a small number of focus group which involves eight undergraduates in different semester undergoing diploma in graphic design. This random selection of respondents aims to evaluate their clarification of plagiarism and to explain the possibility of visual plagiarism during the design process. The discussion has also about the resources of references, implementation of references in design and the causes of visual plagiarism among design students. The discussion was recorded in order to collect data and written notes have been taken along the session conducted. Furthermore, in-depth interview were carried out to discuss the issues surrounded in visual plagiarism. The interview was conducted through face-to-face interview with the reliable academicians. The experts were acknowledged in graphic design program based on their experience in managing students' design assessments. The topic questions are focused on the roles of visual references in student's design projects, the sources of visual references, the implementation approach of visual references, the factors of visual plagiarism among students, the impact of visual plagiarism in students' design projects and the prevention mechanism of visual plagiarism in art and design program (see Figure 3). This qualitative approach has been judged through criteria proposed by Guba & Lincoln (1985) with credibility criteria; in preference to internal validity and confirmability criteria; in preference of objectivity. Credibility criteria can be argued as one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness and to help honesty in informants while confirmability criteria is triangulation to reduce the effect of investigator bias and admission of researcher's belief and assumptions (Shenton, 2004). These criteria were purposely chosen to ensure the findings are reliable and valid within the natural setting. The limitation of this study is the focus group of students of Diploma in Graphic Design from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka campus. The suggestive evidence does not represent overall students in similar program or related programs under faculty of art and design in different campuses of UiTM. It is difficult to replicate findings using qualitative approaches which take place in natural setting for different environment and different respondents (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The findings also delimit the issue surrounding the argument of plagiarism in ideation or inspiration from other references because it is quite ambiguous to proof visually unless there is a continuous progress from the early development till the final outcome.
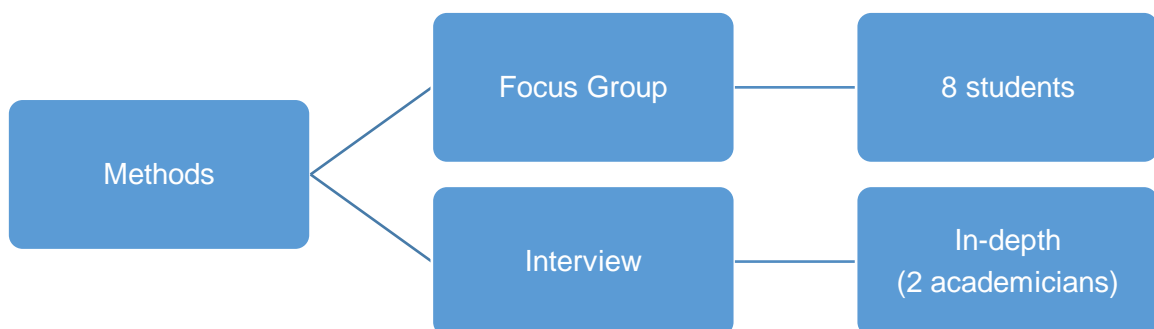

Figure 3: Qualitative methods applied in this study.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Definition of visual plagiarism
Based on the result of the focus group and the in-depth interviews conducted among students and academician, most of them have high awareness toward the definition of visual plagiarism except one respondent which is a first year student. Most of them relate visual plagiarism to copying visual from other sources and reused the previous design artwork from friends or relatives to be applied as their own design artwork. Academicians are fully aware and understood the appropriate use of visual references even though they have further clarification on the terms of application towards visual especially from internet while students have slight misconception to what extent visual references can be used in design artwork. Some of them especially the first year students might use the visual references as part of their design artwork without knowing it is part of plagiarism activity when not acknowledge the original designer. Even though they did realize that copying visual from internet is considered as plagiarism but most of them were unaware that it is an offence in the academic setting. In this situation, academicians were expecting students to be independent aware and that plagiarism is prohibited despite no formal notification from any parties from the academic community. From the staffs and academicians or students' association is responsible to clarify about visual plagiarism. Most of students are not aware of plagiarism in general even though it is stated in the university academic rules and regulations booklet. In related faculty and department, visual plagiarism are happens only among few academicians and the final years students. This is because they are required to produce more detailed research for their preferred topics and the design artworks could determine their final grades. Other academicians assumed that first years students will not perform such act and there is no urgency to obligate all students to adhere to the rules of visual plagiarism. However, with current trends of technology and students' adaptation in design activities in university and surrounding could affect and influence them to perform visual plagiarism.

Visual plagiarism in design assessment
Students acknowledge that plagiarism is the last solutions in design assessment due to running out of ideas in the critical period; having difficulty in finishing-up design artwork and the due date of assessment is around the corner, even though the students realise the action could affect their grade. It is also discovered that some students get too obsessed by the style and creativity of their references and thus increased the tendencies of copying or plagiarising. Other than that, students tend to use visual from other sources because of wrong decision in selecting topic at early stage of design project which might require visuals that is difficult to be produced by them; either using computer software or photography. Most of the time, students are determined to focus on their preferred topic even though they are reminded by academician at the early stage to find different topics for their design artwork; academician had experience enough to oversight that students will unable to produce certain aspect of design production. Next, students are desperate to overcome their difficulty in completion their project by plagiarising. In the design assessment, basically academicians will require students to present their design artwork in a proper manner including documentation of design development and report. During assessment, students need to explain in details each and every process and procedures in producing their design artwork. A lot of plagiarism cases are identified during this particular session when students can hardly to convince the academician that the design artworks are genuinely produced by them. Majority of the students stumble upon not able to provide the documentation process in creating the design artwork or fail miserably to explain the procedure in having the design artwork in discussing. Furthermore, some academicians do have certain tendency or instinct based on their experience while assessing students' design artworks. They could see the originality or imitation of ideas produced by students. Academicians state that the overall abilities and performance among all of their respective students is in their knowledge; based on students availability in consultation session, commitment and contribution of students throughout the on-going design project and prior knowledge of students'

academic and discipline record. With these criteria, some academicians can detect suspicious outcome from students in the design development during the whole design process. Throughout the question and answer session between academicians and students in the design assessment, most of that instinct is reliable. Based on the experience of the academicians, most students copy images from internet sources; whether it is raster-based or vector-based images. Most of the cases, students pretended to be the ownership of the visual and would hardly admit the images are acquired from internet unless they failed to provide enough evidence to support their claims. There are several cases that happened in which students were using their friends' visuals such as vector-based images with minimum changes that is still traceable. Academician also mentioned that there were no cases where students commit visual plagiarism by using friends' or relatives' previous design artwork entirely in the same university or others university which may prove difficult to detect.

The action towards visual plagiarism

Visual plagiarism can be identified when reviewing and investigation found that one of the students has admittedly plagiarised in design assessment. Basically, the academicians will look further in detail on every aspect of the students' design research including documenting the design developments, soft copies of design artworks and its' final outcome in printing format or digital format. Most of academician will not considered any chance for plagiarism offenders if proven guilty. If refers to any academic rules and regulations in universities, the plagiarism as a general is serious offence in the academic setting. Therefore, students will fail in that particular course or program depending on the requirement. Hence, most academicians agrees that visual plagiarism should be treated as similar to text-based plagiarism because student are considered as having the intention to deceive to pass in particular assignment using plagiarised design artwork. Despite that some of academicians will give second chance to the particular student to produce other design artworks in certain period of time if the student is in the final year. Therefore, academicians explain that, the important of consultation session need to be taken seriously among academic community in any design progress to ensure that academician must be aware in every stage of development in students' design process. If consultation session was conducted in a proper manner, there will be less potential of students having visual plagiarism and academician is convince with the students' ability in producing design artwork.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis of this study, some of the students are well aware while others are on the contrary about visual plagiarism especially for the first year students. For students that are not well aware about the issue could contribute to the downturn of their integrity towards the process of designing artwork. The influence of negative attitudes such as wrong decision-making in selected topic, slow design progress, no consultation with academician, weak time management and lacking of design knowledge and skills contribute to the activity of visual plagiarism. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the academic community especially the academicians to emphasize the importance to convey information in the early stages to students about visual plagiarism in the academic setting. The academic community should also take responsibility to express the importance of plagiarism issues in the design context for students' awareness. Furthermore, early preventive actions could hinder the problems in the future and most importantly to foster academic integrity among students and hopefully it could improve the code of practice in designing while in the working industry. To consistently manage students' academic integrity toward visual plagiarism, there should have some proposal of guidelines and procedures for students to abide in developing design artworks. The guidelines must be informed and implemented early especially for the first year students for them to adapt a proper academy process in designing artworks till their final year. It is important to expand the use of visual plagiarism guidelines in every courses in the graphic design program and hopefully it can also bring positive contribution to other programs in the art and design disciplines. Every part of the academic community should encourage students to have advance design knowledge, skills in

computer and manual applications and effective time management to prevent students to be involved in the plagiarism activity. With the current scenario in the design industry that are surrounded by plagiarism issues, it is an important measure to take within the academic setting to ensure design graduates will be more ethical in the working environment in the future. With proper implementation, future designers will become more sensitive in design appreciation, acknowledge others in their design artwork and be more cautious in managing design works.

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