

the right pitch

Defining brand Malaysia

COUNTRIES are brands in their own right. While they might position themselves differently for tourism or business or world politics – the fundamental soul or DNA of a country is inextricably linked to its reason for existence.

The United States modelled itself in contrast to Europe and became known as the land of opportunity which



The Sun - 29/8/2007

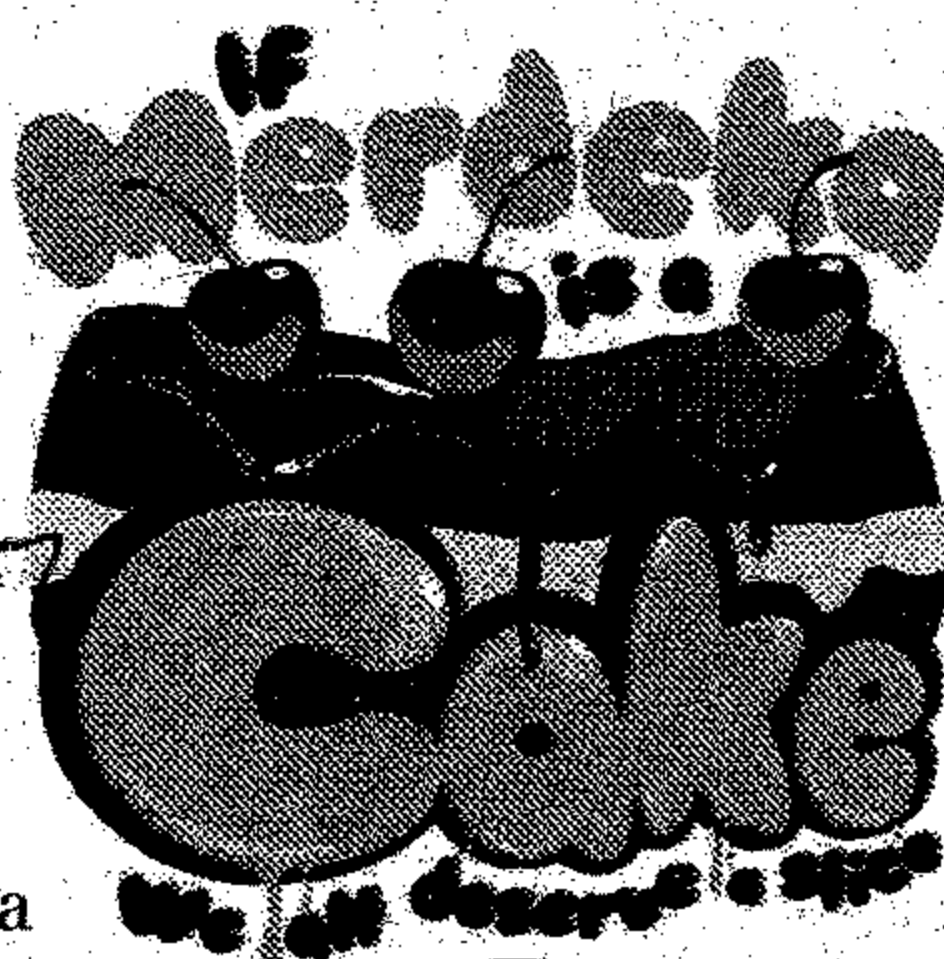
offered the "American dream" to immigrants seeking a better life. While there is general cynicism in terms of a the current worldview of America – many are still drawn to emigrate there based on the ideals of freedom and opportunity. Similarly, many are drawn to emigrate to Singapore because of its reputation for efficiency in all aspects of public life underscored by a corruption free system of administration and government.

To what extent are citizens loyal to their countries? And how is this form of loyalty similar to loyalty to commercial brands? Are the fundamentals of brand loyalty similar in both instances?

Over the past month we have been reintroduced to some of the brand promises from the Merdeka era in the run-up to the country's half-centennial.

It would be interesting to compare these images prevalent currently in the media and discover what one-word aptly describes Malaysia :

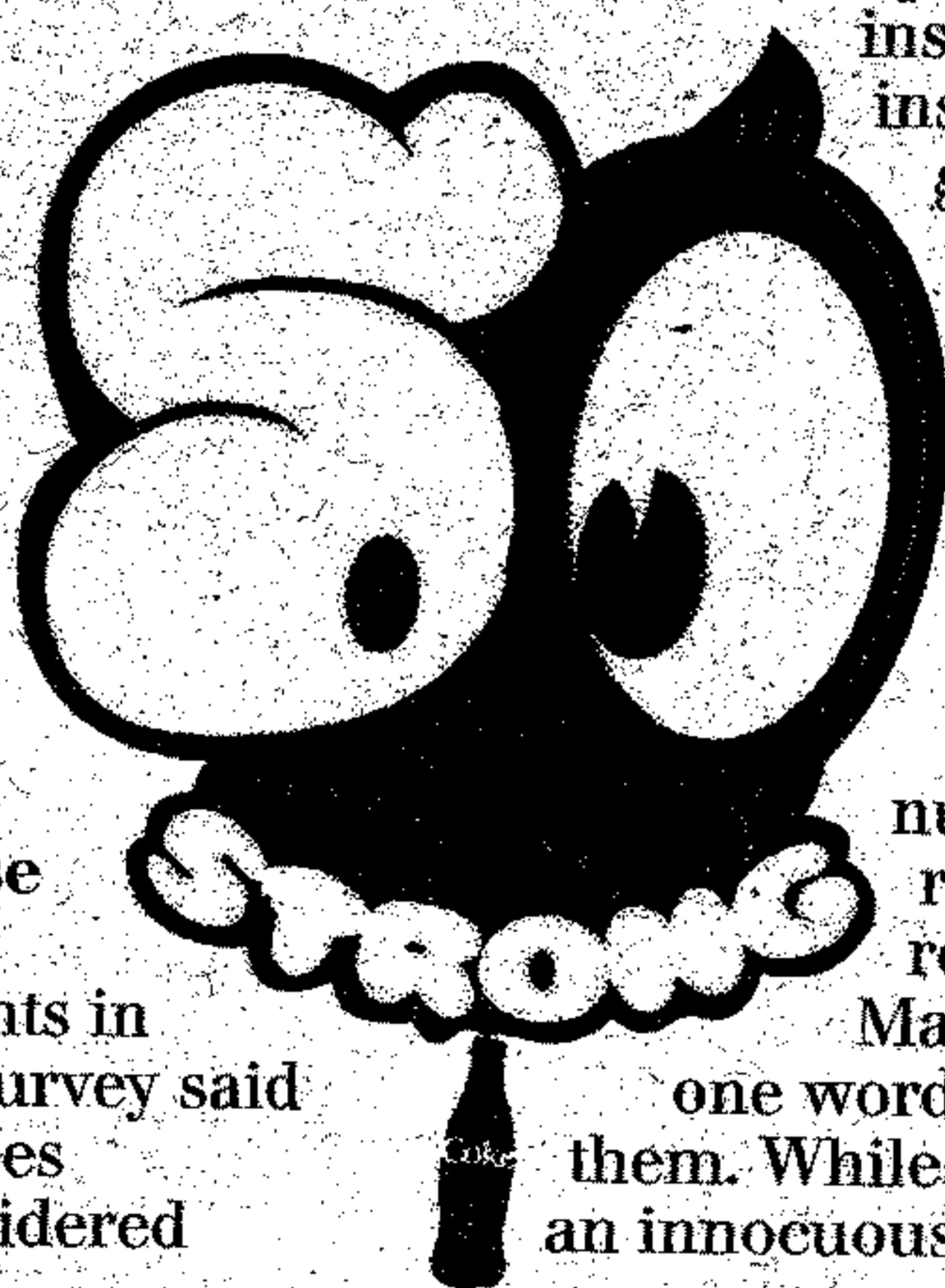
1. Malaysia is diverse
An overwhelming number of respondents in an online and SMS survey said diversity best describes Malaysia. Many considered



diversity something to be cherished due to the sheer multitude of opportunities it delivers for the observance and enjoyment of cultural richness. Interestingly, many also observed that any threat to the fundamental element of the country's DNA in the sectarian or partisan interest would erode belief in brand Malaysia.

2. Malaysia is harmonious
Peace, harmony and mutual respect are all considered fundamental to Malaysia's DNA. Since the launch of brand Malaysia, many compromises have been favoured over confrontation in order to secure the "peace" currently enjoyed.

It comes as no surprise that Malaysians have come to expect a certain equilibrium and good sense to prevail in the instruments and institutions of government including the legislature, executive and judiciary.



3. Malaysia is home
A large number of respondents replied that Malaysia was in one word – home – to them. While this might seem an innocuous answer for a



Giant screen ...

Adding colour to the Kuala Lumpur night skyline, the Menara Maybank building in Kuala Lumpur has become a giant screen which will display projected images in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Merdeka from 8pm to midnight until Sept 10. The images projected on two facades of the building are visible 5km away.

one-word brand equity – I noted the intensity of some of the responses. The image of the home is an important one because home is where we can all be ourselves and are accepted for all that we are.

What distinguishes a home from a house? In a home, people compromise and sacrifice for the greater good of all its members.

And the qualities for creating a home are also highly prized – warmth, friendliness and love. Once again any erosion in the values of a true home would diminish the strength of the relationship and the ties one has with one's own home.

4. Malaysia is optimistic
Summed up in the words "Malaysia Boleh", which at one end of the spectrum mean a can-do attitude expressed through a dire need to be noticed through a number of activities e.g. going to space, building the world's tallest buildings, the best airport or erecting the world's tallest flagpole!, everything and anything is possible.

While there may be rational reasoning for some of these activities – it's an idiosyncrasy that is both loveable and laughable, a sort of child-like optimism which hardened cynics may laugh at (and they do!) but an essential quality which can be tapped again and again to recreate and reinvent ourselves as a nation.

5. Does brand Malaysia deliver on its promise?
To a large extent brand

Malaysia has delivered on its promises.

However, disillusionment with the brand has inevitably crept in with the pace of globalisation, resulting in a maturing nation whose citizens seek reward based on their talent and ability.

Although positive discrimination has both its critics and supporters, many respondents expect that 50

years of nationhood is an appropriate time to revisit the benefits of a much debated nation-building policy.

"A home or a family which has only one or more favourites often sidelines other siblings," said one respondent.

The greater concern however is with corruption and how we can take giant steps towards its complete removal in public life. Brand Malaysia needs to re-examine its Brand Charter in this respect to ensure that its DNA is intact or risk losing its brand soul.

Tony Savarimuthu is CEO of McCann Worldgroup. The illustrations accompanying this article appear courtesy of The Coca-Cola Company Far East Ltd and McCann Erickson.

