

MARKETING

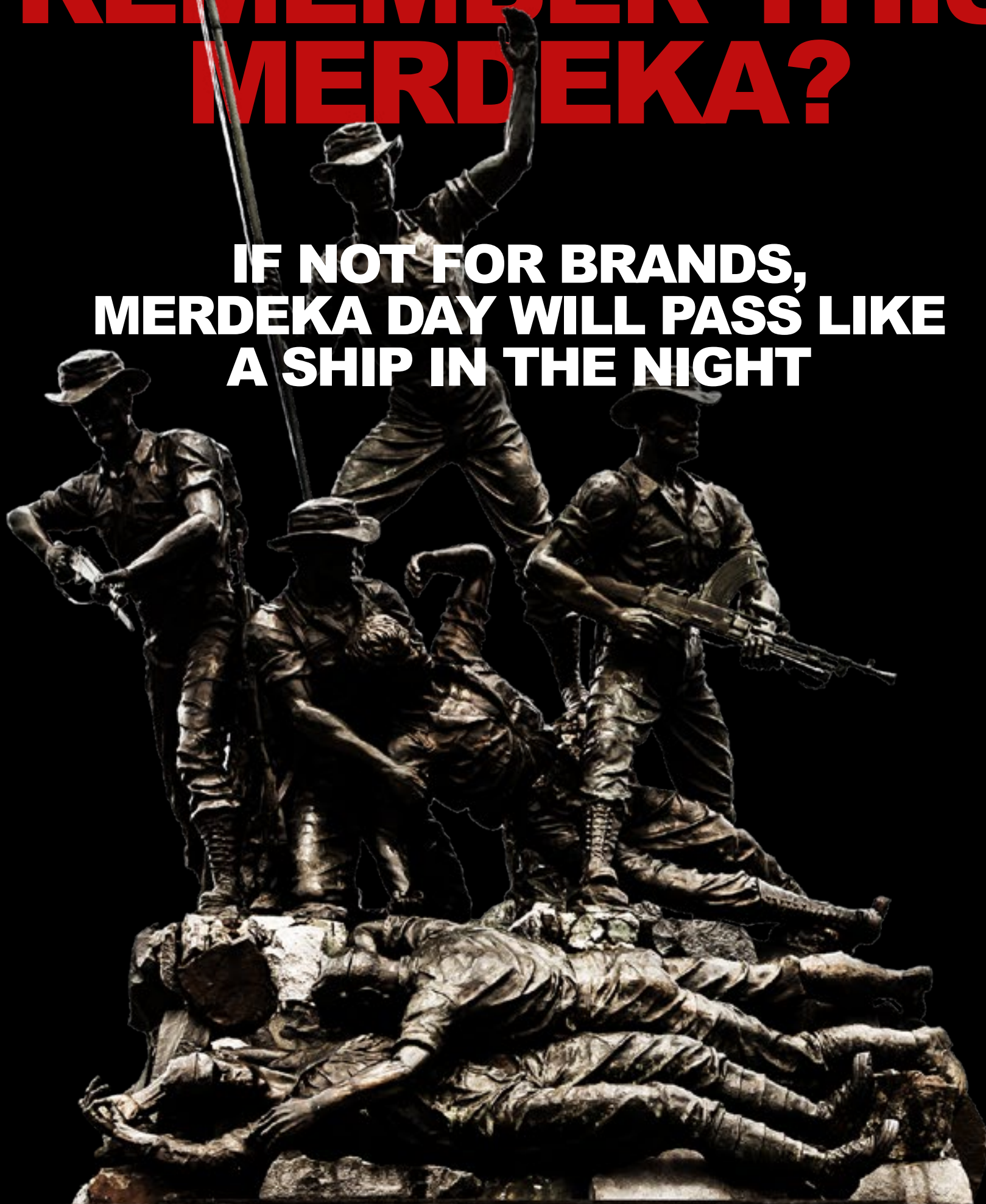
ISSUE #444 A 5

WEEKENDER™



WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER THIS MERDEKA?

**IF NOT FOR BRANDS,
MERDEKA DAY WILL PASS LIKE
A SHIP IN THE NIGHT**



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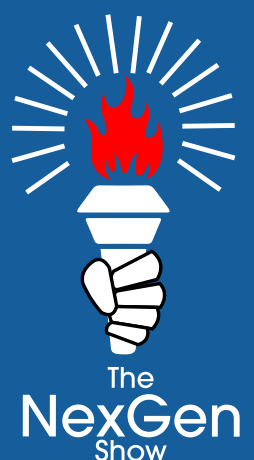
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What If Brands Went Silent This Merdeka?

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JADE LIM
THINKS
DESIGNERS
SHOULD
DO MORE
WRITING



What Say

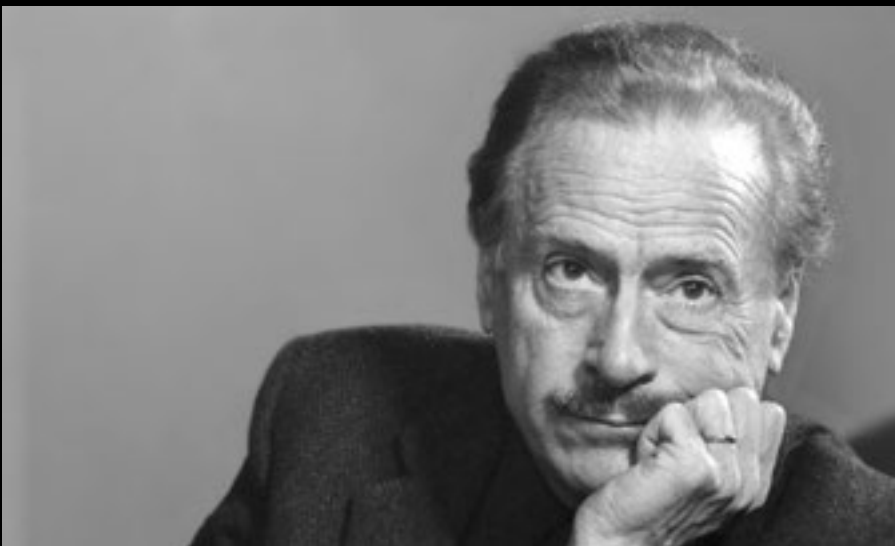


“In a world where creativity is the lifeblood of communication, the advertising industry stands out for its uncanny ability to blend art, commerce, innovation, culture and persuasion.”

Dr. Izabela Derda in a recent book ‘Advertising as a Creative Industry: Regime of Paradoxes’.

“In Malaysia, advertising isn’t just business - it is culture powering the creative economy.”

HAMANOID



“Advertising is not just persuasion; it is the nervous system of the creative economy, translating culture into commerce and commerce back into culture.”

From the amazing mind of media theorist Marshall McLuhan.



“Good advertising is more than selling; it is the engine that lets the creative economy turn imagination into industry.”

What advertising legend Bill Bernbach would have said if ‘creative economy’ was a term during his time.



Who Owns the Advertisement?

The agency created it.

The client paid for it.

The consumer shares it.

The culture absorbs it.

So who really owns the ad?

Intellectual Property law says the rights usually belong to the party that commissions and pays for the work - the client.

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Contracts are drafted to make this explicit: once the invoice is paid, the brand owns the idea, the script, the jingle, the artwork...

But ownership is far messier. Agencies argue that their creative DNA runs through every line and every frame and should years of craft be signed away with a single cheque?

Some global agencies negotiate carve-outs to showcase campaigns in awards, reels, and teaching, because even when the law says they don't own the ad, they still live off the credit.

Take our Petronas' festive ads. Legally, Petronas owns every frame. But ask Malaysians who those ads belong to, and most will tell you they belong to the rakyat - they are part of our cultural fabric.

People don't recall the contracts. They recall the tears, the humour, the humanity. In the end, Petronas owned the rights, the creators owned the soul, and Malaysians owned the memory.

JOSHUA PALMER IS CREATING BRAND GUIDELINES FROM SCRATCH





What If Brands Went Silent This Merdeka?

Advertising in Malaysia doesn't flow evenly across the year. It beats in rhythm with the nation's cultural heartbeat. Hari Raya. Chinese New Year. Deepavali. Christmas. And, of course, Merdeka.

These are the moments when adex explodes. Agencies sweat, media owners cash in, and brands deliver their most memorable work. Tens of millions are invested in a matter of weeks to remind us of who we are and what we stand for.

But what if the cycle broke? Imagine Merdeka stripped bare of brand storytelling.

No Petronas short films tugging at our hearts.

No TNB commercials making us laugh in unison.

Just flags. And a parade.

Would the Merdeka spirit survive—or would it shrink into sterile ceremony?

Are brands the custodians of patriotism?

Here's the uncomfortable truth: advertisers have done more to keep the Merdeka spirit alive than government institutions.

When Yasmin Ahmad's Tan

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Hong Ming in Love aired in 2007 for Petronas, it wasn't just an ad—it was a national memory. Digi's anthem campaigns reframed connectivity as togetherness. TNB turned festive ads into WhatsApp-forwarded family traditions.

Ask Malaysians what they recall most vividly about past Merdeka celebrations. Chances are, it wasn't a minister's speech. It was a commercial.

In effect, advertising has become the *Ministry of National Sentiment*.

Hard Numbers Behind the Sentiment

- In 2023, Malaysian adex reached RM 8.3 billion, with festive and national milestone periods disproportionately high.
- Festive advertising alone accounted for about RM 250 million annually - Merdeka consistently a major spike.
- Projections for 2025 diverge - some analysts remain optimistic about a rebound (+5%), while others foresee continued softness (-2.8%). The truth likely lies between.

And yet, even in downturns,

festive budgets remain sticky. Why?

Because brands know something policymakers often forget; in hard times, advertising isn't just commerce -it's community therapy.

Advertising as Therapy in Hard Times

Think back to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, or the Covid-19 lockdowns. In both cases, Malaysians clung to ads that reminded them of unity.

TNB's funny festive spots softened economic anxiety. Petronas ads during lockdown reassured families that love survived distance.

Advertising became therapy. It stocked hope when shelves were bare of optimism.

The feel-good impact of national sentiment matters more in difficult times. When wallets tighten, advertising fills the emotional deficit.

Will the Merdeka Spirit Die If Brands Go Silent?

That's the uncomfortable question.

Without ads, Merdeka risks becoming a hollow holiday. A half-day parade, some flag

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waving, a moment of patriotism, then back to life as usual.

But with ads, Merdeka becomes alive. It's not just a holiday—it's a shared conversation across households, offices, and mamaks.

If brands go silent, the stitching may unravel.

Iconic Merdeka Ads That Shaped Identity

Some of the most enduring Merdeka memories weren't parades—they were campaigns:

- 2007 – Petronas: Tan Hong Ming in Love
Yasmin Ahmad's masterpiece captured innocent interracial love, teaching Malaysians that unity is natural, not political.
- 2013 – Digi: Negaraku
A remix of the anthem across languages and rhythms, making patriotism inclusive.
- 2015 – TNB: Together We Celebrate
Proof that Merdeka advertising could be cheeky and joyful without losing meaning.
- 2018 – Malaysia Airlines: Journeys
Nostalgic reminders of



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“home” for Malaysians abroad.

- 2020 – TNB: #KamiJagaKita
A pandemic-era Merdeka ad showing independence as mutual care.
- 2023 – Maybank: Kita Sama, Kita Merdeka
Hawkers, nurses, riders—the real face of independence.

These weren't commercials. They were chapters of Malaysia's living history.

Advertising as the Creative Economy's Powerhouse

Globally, governments are scrambling to nurture the creator

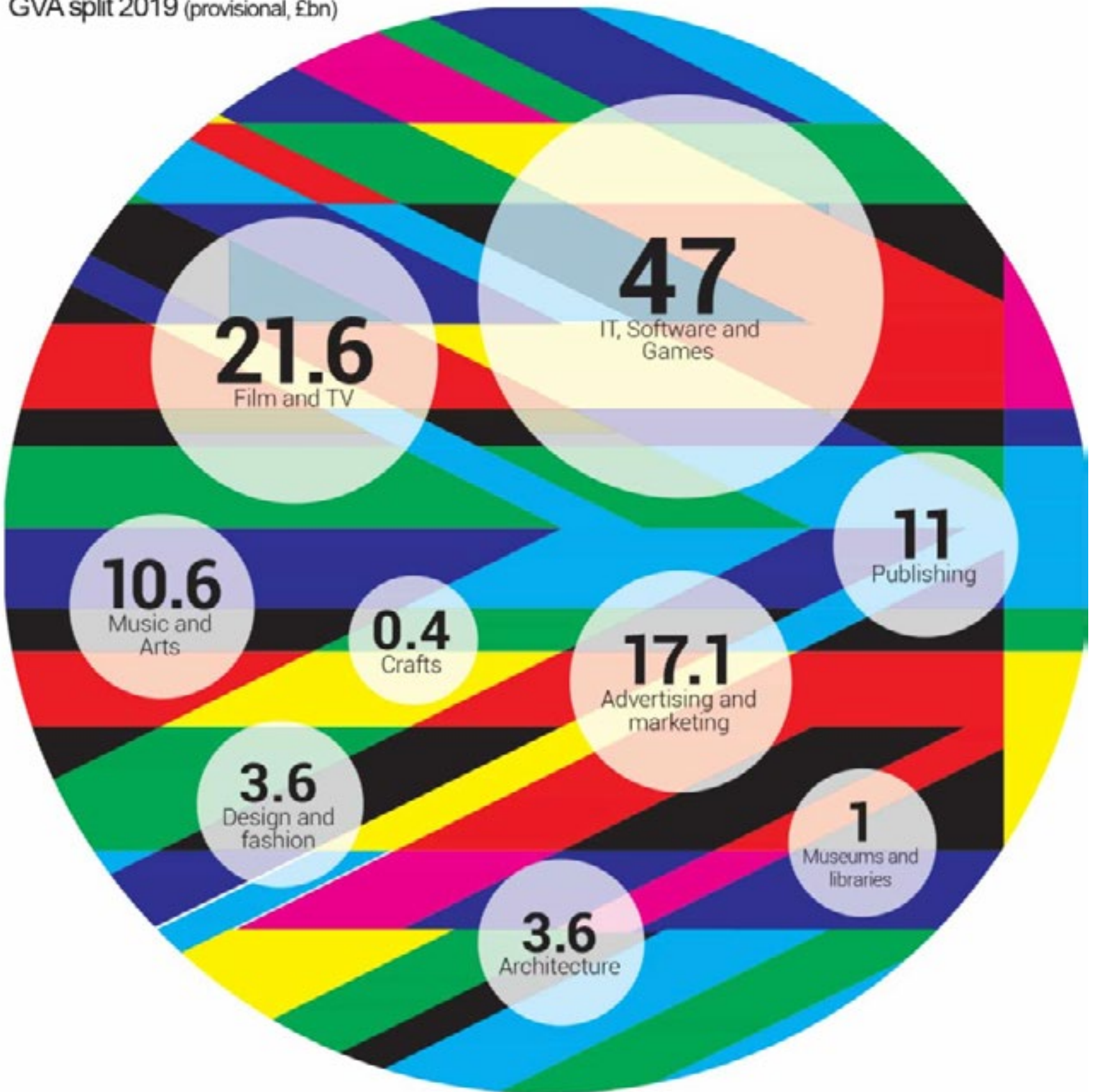
economy—influencers, digital creators, freelancers. Malaysia too has launched roadmaps, grants, and policies around TikTokers, YouTubers, and streamers.

But here's the irony: advertising has been the original creator economy all along. So, it's time for advertising to claim its place, not just as a business sector, but as critical cultural infrastructure.

- Advertising employs tens of thousands: copywriters, designers, animators, filmmakers, strategists, data scientists.
- Advertising funds the very media ecosystem creators rely on.

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GVA split 2019 (provisional, £bn)



www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk

• Advertising produces cultural products (films, slogans, installations) that live in the public imagination. If policymakers are serious about the creative economy, they must ask: why is advertising, the biggest and most established

player, missing from the national conversation?

- Malaysia (via MDEC, CENDANA, and government policy) defines the creative economy mainly through its Digital Creative Industry (animation, gaming,



... Other nations put advertising at the centre of creative strategy. Malaysia doesn't...

multimedia, digital content) and cultural arts sector.

- Policymakers often highlight creators, influencers, and digital platforms when discussing the “creator economy,” but this tends to understate the bigger role of advertising and media, which actually fund and employ much of the ecosystem.

Global Mirror: How Advertising Powers Creative Economies

Other nations put advertising at the centre of creative strategy. Malaysia doesn't.

United Kingdom – Advertising as GDP Engine

- Contributes £29 billion annually.
- Employs 300,000+ people.
- Backed by a Creative Industries Council where advertising leaders shape policy.

London is one of the world's most respected advertising hubs.

United States – Advertising Funds Culture

- Supports 7 million jobs and nearly US\$1 trillion in GDP.
- The Super Bowl ad economy alone is worth US\$7 billion annually.

Ads here are not just commercials—they're cultural events.

South Korea – Advertising Amplified Hallyu

K-pop's global rise was fuelled by advertisers—Samsung, Hyundai, Coca-Cola.

- Government (KOCCA) worked hand-in-hand with brands.
- By 2021, cultural exports reached US\$12.4 billion.

Advertising became a force multiplier for soft power.

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... Malaysia needs a National Merdeka Creative Awards, co-hosted by government and industry, where campaigns that elevate patriotism...

Brazil – Creativity as Soft Power

- São Paulo agencies dominate Cannes Lions.
- Advertising recognised as a national cultural export.

Singapore – Advertising as Strategy

- Included in Design 2025 Masterplan.
- Supported by EDB and DesignSingapore Council.
- Framed as a strategic export industry.

In the UK, advertising is GDP infrastructure.

In the US, it funds culture.

In Korea, it exports identity.

In Brazil, it projects soft power.

In Singapore, it's national strategy.

In Malaysia? Advertising is still dismissed as “marketing spend.”

Should the Government Reward Storytellers?

If brands are carrying the nation's emotional weight, shouldn't government incentivise them?

Corporate tax rebates already exist for CSR. Why not extend this to “nation-building advertising”?

Imagine:

- Tax deductions for campaigns that promote unity.
- A matching fund for patriotic or cultural campaigns.
- Instead of punishing brands for flag mistakes, celebrating their best ideas.

This isn't subsidy, it's recognition.

From Policing Symbols to Celebrating Ideas

Too often, Merdeka ad debates spiral into outrage; upside-down flags, misplaced lyrics, tone-deaf imagery.

Respect matters. But nitpicking symbols misses the forest for the trees. The true value lies in ideas that uplift.

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... Merdeka without ads would be like a city without streetlights. The structure may exist, but the glow is gone...

Malaysia needs a National Merdeka Creative Awards, co-hosted by government and industry, where campaigns that elevate patriotism are celebrated—and rewarded.

Nation-Building: Brands vs Government

Government campaigns are stiff, formal, forgettable.

Meanwhile, brands spend hundreds of millions crafting emotional, shareable narratives. They compete not just to sell, but to outdo each other in patriotism. So who really fuels Merdeka? The Ministry of Communications, or agencies and brands? If the answer is brands, why are they left out of creative economy policymaking?

Advertising as Emotional Infrastructure

Infrastructure is usually measured in roads, rails, bridges. But in today's fractured world, emotional infrastructure matters just as much.

- Ads remind us of what binds us.
- Ads create collective identity.
- Ads provide joy, humour, and hope in hard times.

Merdeka without ads would be like a city without streetlights. The structure may exist, but the glow is gone.

Final Thoughts: Closing the Blind Spot

Malaysia's creative economy is alive and digital content is booming, local IP is gaining traction, creators are rising. Policymakers have embraced the "creator economy."

But here's the blind spot: advertising.

This is the industry that funds media, employs the largest pool of creative professionals, and produces the narratives that shape national identity, yet it's absent from policy discussions.

Advertising is not just commerce. It is emotional and



cultural infrastructure. It carries the Merdeka spirit, often doing the government's job of nation-building better than official campaigns.

To leave advertising out of creative economy strategies is not oversight. It's a strategic error.

Three Policy Moves That Could Change Everything

- Tax Incentives for Nation-Building Campaigns
- Rebates for brands that promote unity, inclusivity and cultural values.
- A National Creative Advertising Fund
- Government-backed fund that matches ad spend for campaigns with social or

cultural impact.

- Integrate Advertising into DICE
- Malaysia's Digital Creative Ecosystem Roadmap (DICE) focuses on gaming, animation, content creators. Advertising must be explicitly included.

If the government is serious about the creative economy, it must answer one simple question:

Why is the biggest player in the creator economy—the advertising industry—not top of mind in national policy?

Because without advertising, Malaysia doesn't just lose adex.

It loses the very narratives that stitch the nation together.

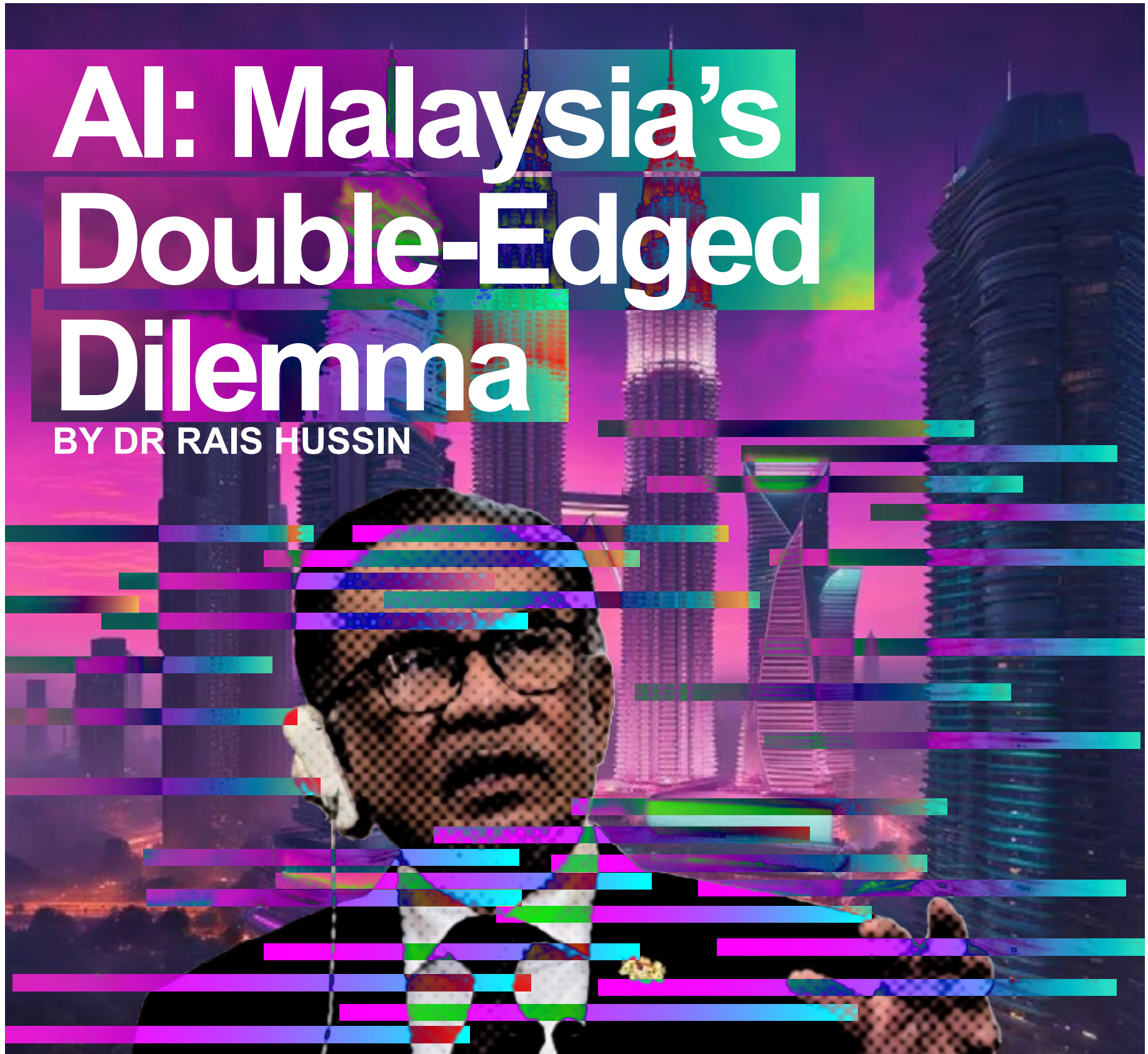
Submission for MARKETING Magazine's Readers Choice Merdeka TVC Awards 2025 is now open. Over the years we have found that our coverage and polling of the Best CNY TVCs, Best Merdeka TVCs and Best Raya TVCs based on our readers choice have had growing success and traction. Our respondents have grown from a few hundred to over a few thousand. Email vishnu@adoimagazine.com for details. Please note National Day ads are accepted in this contest.

BEST MERDEKA TVCS 2025

EXPERT'S CHOICE AWARDS

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AI: Malaysia's Double-Edged Dilemma

BY DR RAIS HUSSIN

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's warning on the perils of artificial intelligence (AI) spending captures Malaysia's dilemma perfectly: spend recklessly and billions will be wasted, hesitate too long and the nation risks being left behind in the race for technological sovereignty.

AI is not a luxury—it is fast becoming the backbone of

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...the “paperless office” promised efficiency in the 1980s but ended up increasing paper use...

economic and security power. But Malaysia must strike a careful balance: rigorous safeguards against waste and corruption, paired with bold investments in quantum-AI convergence, chip design, and sovereign data ecosystems.

The Risks Are Real

Anwar is right that billions could be wasted if AI becomes a fig leaf for inefficiency or, worse, corruption. AI carries a massive hype bubble. Around the world, countries are burning through funds with little to show, launching projects without strategy, oversight, or clear metrics. Malaysia cannot afford to repeat that mistake.

The “AI productivity paradox” the Prime Minister cited is real.

Chatbots and automation save 64–90% of user time, yet only a fraction translates into higher productivity or earnings. The history of technology is littered with such disappointments: the “paperless office” promised efficiency in the 1980s but ended up increasing paper use.

The Four Ss—and the Slack Problem

Yet the paradox is not just about numbers. MIT’s system design framework reminds us that effective organizations thrive on the “four Ss”: simplification, standardization, stabilization and synchronization. AI fits naturally into these functions.

But the framework also highlights a counterintuitive truth: high-performing systems leave slack—unused capacity that allows for creativity and resilience. Slack is like oxygen: it fuels innovation, but it can also leak into waste. AI promises to generate slack by saving time, but unless users have capability, accountability and a culture of experimentation, those gains risk vanishing into idleness.

AI’s potential ultimately depends less on algorithms and more on the intelligence of the

ARTIFICIAL PARADOX**...Malaysia must move beyond warnings to build its own AI governance framework—anchoring transparency, performance measurement, and ethical use...**

people and institutions deploying them.

Malaysia's Three Structural Gaps

Even if governance is tightened, Malaysia cannot capture AI's potential without addressing three deep structural gaps:

- Institutionalize IOOI (Input–Output–Outcome–Impact). Every ringgit must be tracked not just in inputs and outputs, but in real outcomes and impacts. This framework curbs leakages and embeds accountability.
- Fix the brain drain. Our brightest talent leaves not only for higher salaries, but because of weak institutions, poor recognition, and limited

pathways. Without serious reforms, AI investments will continue leaking out through human capital flight.

- Reform education. Schools and universities must produce critical thinkers and innovators rather than paper credentials. Malaysia has lost a decade to declining STEM uptake, under-qualified teachers, and rote learning.

These gaps are interconnected. IOOI restores trust and reduces frustration, which helps retain talent. Retaining talent ensures education investments strengthen Malaysia rather than subsidize foreign economies. And an education system that cultivates innovators strengthens both governance and talent retention.

Together, they create a virtuous cycle: AI becomes a catalyst for transformation, not a costly illusion.

Governance Must Match Innovation

Caution, on its own, is not a policy. Warning against “AI as a cover for inefficiency or corruption” is important, but unless paired with a concrete

ARTIFICIAL PARADOX

governance framework—covering procurement standards, evaluation metrics, and independent oversight—it risks becoming rhetoric.

Countries that succeed with AI—such as Singapore or South Korea—don't just warn against failure. They embed AI adoption in strict governance ecosystems, while also investing in research, talent, and experimentation. Malaysia must do the same. Otherwise, risk-aversion could slow adoption just as global competitors accelerate.

This is not just a regional race. The United States, China, and the European Union are already competing to set standards, infrastructure, and governance models for AI. If Malaysia lags, it risks being locked into dependence on foreign platforms, with little control over its data or sovereignty.

Balancing Brakes and Engines

Malaysia must move beyond warnings to build its own AI governance framework—anchoring transparency, performance measurement, and ethical use. But governance alone is not enough. If governance is the brake, then

innovation is the engine. Both are needed to drive the economy forward.

That means investing in sovereign data ecosystems, semiconductor design, and preparing for the convergence of AI with quantum technologies. These are no longer futuristic luxuries but critical pillars of sovereignty.

Caution Without Vision is Failure

Invoking the principle of *tabayyun*—verification—Anwar is right that AI is not absolute and must never replace human judgment, especially in sensitive domains. Yet verification must be matched with vision.

Otherwise, Malaysia risks repeating a familiar mistake: not just wasting money on failed systems, but wasting the opportunity to transform the nation's future.

The real danger is not reckless AI spending. The real danger is caution without strategy.

Because when it comes to AI, standing still is not safe—it is falling behind.

Excerpted from the original version of this article which first appeared in The Star.



Media Prima Audio's Studio and Office Transformation Powered by EV Sun's Health-Focused Innovation

Media Prima Audio (MPA), home to Malaysia's No. 1 radio station, is transforming the way it operates, not just through its content, but in the very environment where that content is created. While much has been said about its shift toward digital-first, brand-safe broadcasting, one behind-the-scenes change has been making a tangible impact across both its studios and offices: the introduction of **EV Sun's advanced lighting technology**.

More than just lights, EV Sun's patented LED downlights bring together illumination and sterilization in a single, innovative system. Leveraging non-UV, bacteria-killing LED technology, tested and certified both locally (by SIRIM Malaysia) and internationally (including TÜV certification from Singapore and Europe), the lights have quietly enhanced not just the atmosphere, but also the well-being of MPA's teams.

MEDIA PRIMA AUDIO





“Beyond the aesthetics, we’ve noticed something unexpected since incorporating EV Sun into our studios and office spaces, a drop in medical leave rates,” shared Aaron Pinto, Chief Operating Officer of MPA. “It’s not just about brighter spaces; it’s about cleaner air and surfaces, and healthier people.”

Installed across MPA’s state-of-the-art studios and now extended to office areas, **EV Sun’s lighting actively targets airborne bacteria and fungi**, minimizing odors and contributing to a fresher, safer working environment. This aligns naturally with Media Prima Berhad’s broader ESG goals, as the energy-efficient Japanese-engineered drivers in the downlights further reduce power consumption.

As the demands of digital-first content creation grow, ensuring staff health and operational stability becomes increasingly critical. For MPA, EV Sun has become part of that equation, quietly supporting smoother day-to-day operations, from the studio floors to the meeting rooms.

While MPA’s digital dominance continues to capture headlines, it’s innovations like these, behind the scenes but deeply felt, that reinforce its commitment to not just creating great content, but doing so responsibly, safely, and sustainably.

In the fast-evolving world of content production, sometimes the most effective innovations aren’t just seen or heard, they’re felt. And at MPA, **EV Sun** has been a key part of that quiet evolution.

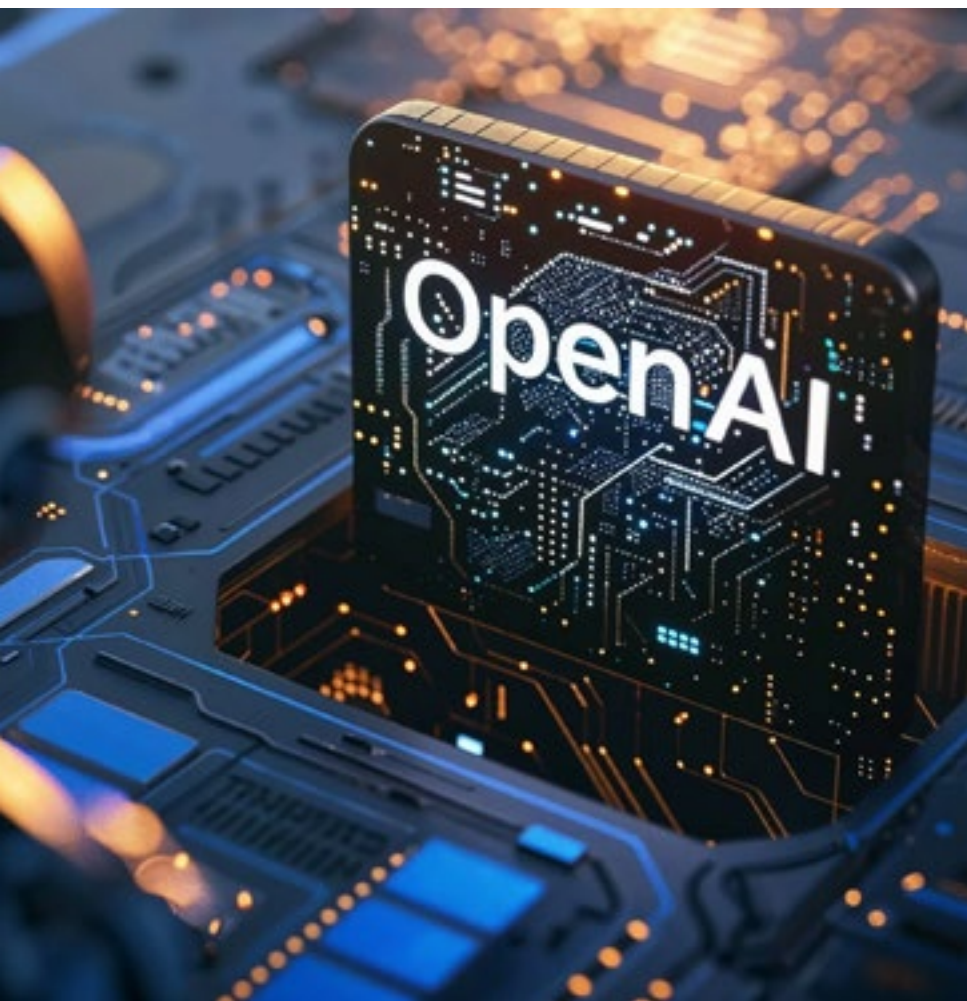
AI Industry nervous about not making real money.

by JOE WILKINS



The recent launch of OpenAI's latest model, GPT-5, comes as ChatGPT ascends to the fifth most-visited website in the world, ahead of Wikipedia, Reddit, TikTok and Amazon.

In just three short years, the software has upended education, scrambled the tech labour sector, and ushered in something of a pandemic of chatbot-related mental health problems.



But for all those technocratic bona fides, the software that's said to be kicking off the next industrial revolution has one major hurdle to clear: it has yet to make any real money.

Despite some terrific promises about GPT-5's capabilities — OpenAI CEO Sam Altman went as far as to compare the chatbot update to the Manhattan Project last month — the model's actual improvements are seriously underwhelming, putting a damper on our timeline to reach the AI singularity.

While that doesn't really change much for the average Joe, it does tighten the immense financial pressure facing OpenAI and its peers.

Thanks to the ridiculous cost of running millions of energy-intensive AI queries every day, the company is struggling to make a dent in its expenditures, as the vast majority of users remain content to use its free model.

Out of 700 million weekly users, OpenAI says only 5 million of them actively pay for their services.

Put into monetary terms, in 2024, OpenAI was burning through \$2.50 for every dollar it brought in. Given that most successful startups take anywhere from 3-5 years to turn a profit, that might not necessarily sound like a death knell. After all, they're going to keep growing, right?

However, current analysis suggests that OpenAI — now six years into its growth strategy — won't reach a positive cash flow until 2029 at the earliest, and that's if everything goes according to plan.

That might be well and good in China, where low-cost AI architects like DeepSeek are free to prioritize long-term research and development without pressure from third-party investors.



But in the US, where a few massive tech monopolies rule the roost, time is money — and firms like OpenAI are spending their investors' cash like water going through a data center.

As Reuters pointed out in a recent analysis, Alphabet, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft — the latter of which is backing OpenAI — expect to spend upwards of \$400 billion to keep the AI dream alive in 2025 alone.

The promise of that kind of spending has sent tech shares through the roof, with Microsoft becoming the world's second \$4 trillion company this summer.

Those numbers might sound high now, but what they really signal is investor confidence that companies like OpenAI — currently valued at a hefty \$300 billion — will continue to grow in a way never before seen in history.

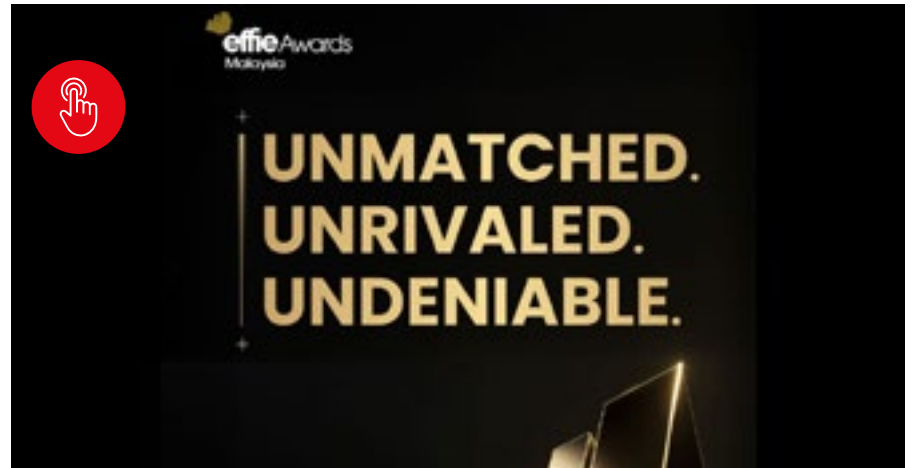
Whether they'll ultimately succeed depends on the tech itself. If the lacklustre release of GPT-5 is any indication, the tech industry has a long climb ahead of it — and it's all loose rock from here.

This article first appeared on <https://futurism.com>

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RISE OF THE TRIBES

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Real brand fandom thrives in cult clusters and culture wins