

Nostalgic Advertisements in Multicultural Malaysia: A Multimodal Analysis

Iklan Nostalgia dalam Pelbagai Budaya Malaysia: Satu Analisis Multimodal

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ABSTRACT

Advertisements that feature nostalgia as a theme have been highly successful in their ability to evoke an emotional reaction in consumers thus connecting them to the brand and product being advertised. Nostalgic advertisements are memorable as they prompt consumers to draw from their own past experiences in a positive manner therefore creating a “feel good” factor in consumers. Nostalgia has been a popular theme in many Malaysian television commercials (TVCs) in the past decade. This study examines a Malaysian national day TVC using a thematic multimodal approach to analyse how nostalgia is reinforced through the multimodal elements in the TVC. The analysis includes a discussion of the types of nostalgia elicited by the multimodal elements in the TVC in reference to the socio-cultural context of multicultural Malaysia. The findings reveal how specific multimodal elements in the TVC are used to evoke a sense of collective nostalgia among Malaysians of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. This study shows that personal, collective, historical or national nostalgia is reinforced in a Malaysian national day TVC by making references to dates, events, images, relationships and values that are significant and meaningful to all Malaysians regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief. Such advertisements serve to transcend ethnic and religious boundaries to create a national mindset that the whole nation can connect with instead of communal or ethnic based ones.

Keywords: Nostalgia; television commercial; multimodal; Malaysia; multicultural.

ABSTRAK

Iklan-iklan bertema nostalgia didapati sangat efektif di kalangan penonton kerana dapat membangkitkan rasa emosi penonton yang kemudiannya dikaitkan dengan produk yang diiklankan. Iklan yang membangkitkan nostalgia sukar dilupakan oleh penonton kerana ia menyebabkan penonton mengimbas kembali pengalaman manis zaman lepas mereka dan seterusnya mewujudkan perasaan yang positif dihati penonton. Nostalgia merupakan tema yang semakin popular dalam iklan-iklan televisyen di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis multimodal bertema untuk mengkaji cara-cara nostalgia diperkukuh melalui elemen multimodal dalam satu iklan televisyen (TV) Hari Kebangsaan di Malaysia. Analisis ini merangkumi perbincangan tema nostalgia dengan merujuk kepada jenis nostalgia yang dicungkil oleh element multimodal dalam konteks sosio-budaya pelbagai budaya Malaysia. Kajian ini mendedahkan elemen-elemen multimodal dalam iklan TV yang memainkan peranan dalam membangkitkan rasa nostalgia kolektif di kalangan rakyat Malaysia dari pelbagai latar belakang sosio-budaya. Kajian ini turut menunjukkan bahawa nostalgia peribadi, kolektif, sejarah/nasional diperkukuh dalam iklan TV Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia dengan membuat rujukan kepada tarikh, peristiwa, gambar, hubungan insan dan nilai-nilai yang penting dan bermakna kepada semua rakyat Malaysia tanpa mengambil kira faktor etnik, agama atau kepercayaan. Didapati bahawa iklan TV bertema nostalgia yang dikaji berusaha merentasi sempadan etnik dan agama untuk mewujudkan pemikiran kolektif dan semangat kenegaraan di kalangan rakyat Malaysia yang berbilang kaum.

Kata kunci: Nostalgia; iklan televisyen; multimodal; Malaysia; pelbagai budaya

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine through the lens of multimodal analysis the use of multimodal elements in constructing a nostalgic television commercial (TVC) in Malaysia. The analysis will shed light on the significance of the multimodal elements in a Petronas National Day TVC in evoking a sense of personal, collective, historical and national nostalgia for Malaysians. Through the analysis, we discuss the significance of the nostalgic theme in the TVC in reference to the socio-cultural context of multicultural Malaysia.

Nostalgia can be understood as a mood or feeling evoked by the recollection or memory of something in the past or far away which is not attainable at the present time or space. Bambauer-Sachse and Gierl (2009) describe nostalgia as a longing for the past while Bohn (2007:143) defines nostalgia as the “longing for something far away, not necessarily in space, but in time”. According to Mohammad Hafeez, Chong and Muhammad Sabbir (2015:13), “the expressions of nostalgia widely describes the psychological personality in humans that appear to have a yearning for the past which helps humans preserve their identities when going through major life transitions and discontinuities”. Routledge (2016:119) notes that in general nostalgic memories tend to feature childhood or adolescent experiences. It is not surprising therefore that advertisements that feature images related to children and memories of childhood, home and adolescence are popular and well liked among people of all ages.

PERSONAL, COLLECTIVE AND NATIONAL NOSTALGIA

There are several types of nostalgia including, personal or private nostalgia, collective nostalgia, historical and national nostalgia. Both personal and collective nostalgia is employed in advertising to create a lasting memory in viewers. Personal or private nostalgia refers to thoughts and memories of symbols and images from a person’s childhood and past that bears significance to the individual such as a childhood home, school or a parents’ scent or voice. According to Merchant, Latour, Ford and Latour (2013:151), personal nostalgia is a multidimensional experience and is defined as “a reflection on the past, comprising a mix of memories and multiple emotions”. While personal nostalgia involves memories that have been directly

experienced by a person in their past, historical nostalgia is “generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born (“the way it was”)” (Marchiegnani & Phau 2015:138).

Collective nostalgia on the other hand, is brought upon by symbolic objects that are of a highly public, widely shared and familiar character, i.e. resources from the past which can trigger off wave of nostalgic feeling in millions of persons at the same time such as the national flag or anthem (Davis 1979). National nostalgia is a form of collective nostalgia where members of a country share nostalgic emotions on remembering events or seeing objects that is significant to the nation and its people. Collective nostalgia when used effectively in advertising or governance, can serve the purpose of forging a national identity, expressing patriotism (Davis 1979). Routledge (2016:123) notes that “when people reflect nostalgically on an experience shared with a group, they are more inclined to support that group and more interested in engaging that group”.

Both personal and collective nostalgia usually evokes pleasant and positive feelings and emotions although it can also bring about sadness and unpleasant memories. While memories of a past when reminisced can bring about happy and pleasant feelings, the impossibility of reliving those past memories can bring about sadness and melancholy. However, in general nostalgia is associated with good and positive emotions which make it a popular theme in not only popular culture but also media and marketing texts such as advertisements.

The use of nostalgia in advertising has been a global trend since the 1980s (Chan 2015). Nostalgic advertisements are popular as they help nurture brand-consumer relationships. A study by Bambauer-Sachse and Gierl (2009:391) revealed that nostalgic advertisements “evoked more positive emotions and more intensive mental images than non-nostalgic advertisements which in turn affected consumers’ attitudes toward the ad and toward the product and their purchase intentions. Thus, nostalgia has been recognised as a very highly effective and persuasive tool in advertising for its ability to elicit a positive emotional response from consumers and therefore enable consumers to establish an emotional connection with the brand or advertising company (Muehling & Sprott 2004; Muehling & Pascal 2011).

NOSTALGIC ADVERTISEMENTS IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, the emergence of nostalgic TVCs is fairly recent. Nostalgic advertisements began to gain popularity in Malaysia in the mid-1990s and were most prominent in TVCs aired in commemoration of the different festive periods in Malaysia. The first of such TVCs were specifically made for oil and gas government linked organisation Petronas in commemoration of Malaysia's independence (Merdeka) day celebrations by notable advertisement and film maker, the late Yasmin Ahmad. These TVCs have garnered a following on the Internet through websites such as YouTube where they generate a lot of interest and discussions.

According to Kugan (2014) the Merdeka commercials produced over the years have become a veritable tradition and "they help us reflect on how far we've come as Malaysians and what makes this country what it is". A key factor that is responsible for the success and popularity of such TVCs among Malaysian viewers is the use of nostalgia to elicit emotional responses that resonate with many Malaysians of all generations, background and ethnicity. The popularity of the TVCs has also boosted the image of Petronas as Malaysian TV viewers eagerly await the festive TVCs by Petronas for the nostalgic feel good factor they evoke.

The first nostalgia inducing Merdeka day TVC by Petronas directed by Yasmin Ahmad TVC aired in 1996 and was titled *One Little Indian Boy*. Kugan (2014) considers this first Merdeka as among the best of the Merdeka TVC that have been produced over the years for its portrayal of Malaysia's "historic moment from a personal perspective, humanising what most Malaysians simply dismiss as a public holiday". Through the use of black and white footage and flashbacks, this first Petronas commercial set precedence to other nostalgic Merdeka and festive TVCs that followed over the years.

According to Rozita (2011), festive TVCs in Malaysia evoke nostalgia through the use of family values and emotional appeal. Petronas festive TVCs in particular, tend to feature childhood periods and close family relationships which elicit a strong sense of personal nostalgia as the festive seasons generally do for many people, bring about recollections of memories of one's childhood and family (Rozita 2011). *One Little Boy* for example,

centres on a man's memories of celebrating Malaysia's independence with his father and emphasized on the memories and relationship that the man shared with his father. Other Merdeka TVCs by Petronas such as *Tan Hong Ming* and *Two Friends* focus on inter-ethnic childhood friendships. In addition to prompting recollections and nostalgia towards one's childhood and family, these TVCs also highlight elements of national unity, integration and good neighbourliness that exists among the different cultural and ethnic communities in Malaysia that also aims to create a sense of national nostalgia that can be shared by all the different communities in Malaysia in an effort to foster nation building.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA AND ADVERTISING IN NATION BUILDING

The media has always been an important medium in propagating multiculturalism and national unity in Malaysia. The ability of advertisements in particular, as a useful and effective tool for such a purpose has not gone unnoticed by the Malaysian government and its affiliated agencies (Zuraidi Ishak & Mohamad Md Yusoff 1991; Holden 2001 and Holden & Azrina 2002). According to Holden (2001:275), advertising in Malaysia has been used as a "social reproductive tool to install a common roof over the separate rooms in which these groups (ethnic groups) reside". Zuraidi Ishak and Mohamad Md Yusoff (1991:15) called for advertisements to be used to promote national unity and multiculturalism by suggesting "advertising in Malaysia should begin to play a vital part in promulgating harmonious interracial relationships" and "should provide the multiracial Malaysian society with a clear vision of the future with regard to how they could live together without racial prejudices". Dass (2009) applauds organisations that use advertisements for inculcating the concept of 1Malaysia in the hearts of the nation and believes this concept should be integrated in more events, promotions and advertisements. Like Ishak and Md Yusoff (1991) and Dass (2009), many Malaysians are aware of, expect and even appreciate the use of advertisements as a tool for social engineering. Waller and Fam (2000:10) claim that "Malaysians have realised advertising can be a powerful force in shaping national values". Consequently, many advertisements with nation building themes and national nostalgia are popular among the

multicultural Malaysian audience. According to Chan (2015:170), “for places struggling to cope with an absence of national identity or a recognised motherland, reflective nostalgia may help”. In Malaysia, 59 years after independence, ethnocentricism remains an issue in the public, political and communal spheres. Malaysians still struggle with a national identity as so much of their identity is linked to ethnicity and religion. Nostalgia, therefore, is a “rather constructive approach that requires recasting of history in the process of reconstructing an identity” (Chan 2015:170).

Thus far, studies on nostalgic advertisements in Malaysia have been limited. A study by Mohammad Hafeez, Chong and Muhammad Sabbir (2015) that aimed to understand the factors that influence the nostalgia sensitivity of consumers in Malaysia revealed that advertisements that contained a nostalgic theme, especially ones that depicted past and childhood memories were very popular and were received positively in Malaysia. This study revealed that “there is a positive and significant relationship between past childhood experience and the sensitivity towards nostalgia sentiment among consumers when exposed to nostalgic driven advertisement” Mohammad Hafeez, Chong and Muhammad Sabbir (2015:22).

In the next section, we present the analytical approach and method used in the analysis of the nostalgia themed TVC conducted in this study.

METHODOLOGY

A multimodal approach to text analysis takes into account the multiple modes of meaning including visual, linguistic, audio, gestural and technical modes that are employed for meaning construction (Periasamy, Gruba & Subramaniam 2015). As noted in Chan (2015), nostalgia and the experiences and feelings it invokes are usually triggered by a multisensorial experience. Images, words, sounds, smells and touch can all trigger the memory and longings for ones’ childhood or past. The Petronas TVC *Two Friends* was selected for its depiction of childhood and life milestones and the unmistakable manifestation of spatial and temporal nostalgia throughout the entire TVC (Petronas *Two Friends* TVC can be accessed via YouTube through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8m4Axnm4nM>).

It is suitable therefore to employ multimodal analysis to examine how nostalgia is constructed through the different modes of meanings that are present in the *Two Friends* TVC. The detailed and rigorousness of multimodal analysis limits this study to one TVC as more than one will be beyond the scope of the study. As a result, this study does not aim to be a representative analysis of all nostalgic advertisements in Malaysia.

The Petronas TVC, *Two Friends* which is used in this TVC is 90 seconds long and consists of 8 scenes. In total, there are 55 shots that make up the 8 scenes in the TVC. In this study, we conduct a thematic multimodal analysis of the TVC by analysing the multimodal elements in specific shots selected across the eight scenes from the TVC that we have sequentially clustered together based on the theme of nostalgia. The thematic sequential clustering of the TVC shots from the TVC is adopted from the syntagmatic analysis approach in semiotics.

In line with the multimodal method of videotext analysis which involves repeated viewing of data similar to that used in Periasamy, Gruba and Subramaniam (2015), the TVC was viewed several times in its entirety and segmented into scenes and shots. A total of 8 scenes were identified. Each scene was further segmented into shots and a total of 55 shots were identified in the whole TVC and numbered accordingly.

The screen shot for each shot was captured, saved and analysed according to the two nostalgia subthemes, Reflections of the Past and Transience of Life. For each subtheme, we selected 6 shots from the TVC which we considered best reflected the subthemes and clustered the shots together sequentially in a syntagm table based on the syntagmatic analysis approach in semiotics as previously stated. The selected shots for each subtheme were then further analysed and prominent multimodal elements in all the shots that reinforce the subthemes are identified, analysed and discussed. In selecting the multimodal elements in the cluster of shots for each subtheme, we used The Inventory of the Multimodal Elements for the Transcription and Analysis of a TVC outlined in Periasamy (2014) as a guide.

Using multimodal analysis as an analytical tool, we analyse how nostalgia is constructed in this TVC and discuss the significance of

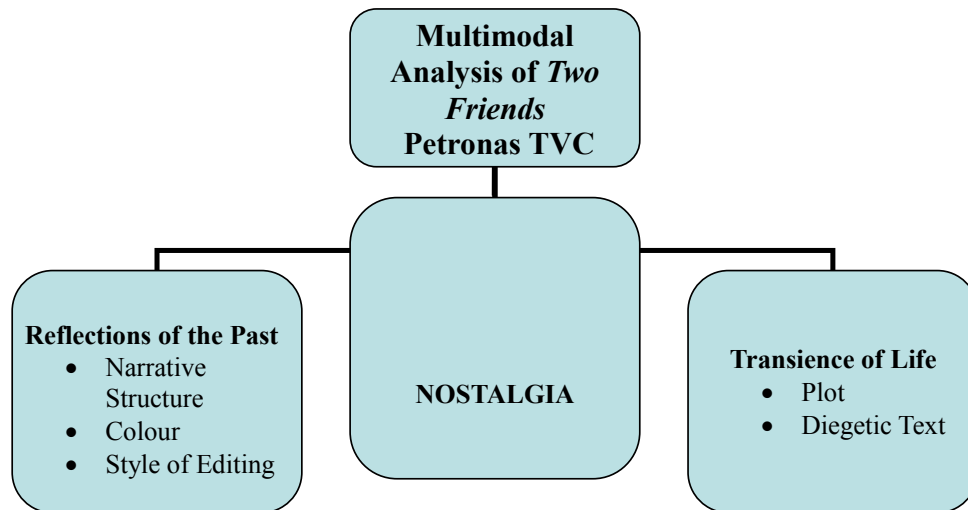


FIGURE 1. Thematic Analytical Structure

the multimodal elements in eliciting personal, historical and collective nostalgia within the socio-cultural context of Malaysia. The discussions will be further substantiated with comments extracted from interviews with Malaysians who had viewed the Petronas *Two Friends* TVC.

The discussion of the nostalgia in the TVC is categorised thematically based on two selected subthemes: Reflections of the Past and Transience of Life. These subthemes are further elaborated prior to analysis in the next section.

ANALYSIS

NOSTALGIA: REFLECTIONS OF THE PAST AND TRANSIENCE OF LIFE

In our analyses of the nostalgia theme, we divide our analysis according to two subthemes:

1. Reflections of the past
2. Transience of life







In analysing reflections of the past, we will focus on three dominant multimodal elements that we found to most prominently reinforce the nostalgic theme. These multimodal elements are:

narrative structure (literary mode of meaning), colour (visual mode of meaning) and style of editing (technical mode of meaning). For transience of life, we focus on two multimodal elements of plot (literary mode) and diegetic text (linguistic mode) which we found to reinforce this subtheme. The analytical structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

NOSTALGIA: REFLECTIONS OF THE PAST

Through detailed content analysis, we found that the Reflections of the Past subtheme is most prominently reflected through six shots from the TVC shots 3, 6, 10, 21, 46 and 54 in the TVC. These shots make up a syntagmatic unit that reflect the movements in time in the TVC organised from past to present and back to the past. The shots selected depict life experiences and past events starting from the stage of early childhood to maturity.

We analysed the six shots and identified three multimodal elements that construct nostalgia; narrative structure, colour and editing style. In this section we discuss how the three multimodal elements in syntagmatic combination of shots 3, 6, 10, 21, 46 and 54 in Syntagm Table 1 construct meaning associated with the reflections of the past and reinforce the nostalgic theme of the TVC.

Scene 1 Shot 3	Scene 2 Shot 10	Scene 3 Shot 21
		
Scene 6 Shot 21	Scene 7 Shot 46	Scene 8 Shot 54
		

Syntagm Table 1. Nostalgia: Reflections of the Past

Narrative Structure The narrative structure (order of events and scenes) in this TVC plays an important role in reinforcing the nostalgic theme. In line with Burton (2005), this TVC employs a circular narrative which consists of extended flashbacks and “disquisition on beliefs that our past affects our future” (Burton 2005:56). The circular structure is evident in the last scene (see shot 54). Shot 54 is a flashback shot (from scene 1) where the chronology in the plot breaks away from the present and takes the viewer back to 1957. Shot 54 is used to trigger a reflection of the past and positive memories associated with it. The circular structure of the narrative is evident as the last shot is an image from the first scene which depicts the childhood period of the lead characters who are now middle aged. In being consistent with the circular pattern, the pattern in Syntagm Table 1 consolidates the reflections of the past and nostalgia theme.

The narrative structure reinforces the theme that the past is something worth remembering and cherishing because one can learn from it and consequently enjoy a better future. When the lead character is overcome with grief when

she learns of the death of her dear friend in the second last scene (shot 46), her thoughts drift to the past (shot 54) as a way to cope with her present complications. It is evident in Syntagm Table 1 that the producers have formally structured this TVC to suggest that the solutions for issues that arise in the present can be gleaned from knowledge of past experiences. By structuring a narrative that forces a reflection of the past (emphasized through visual recreation of childhood, adolescent and past images), producers of this TVC attempt to capture the notion of nostalgic reflections and its capacity to promote a better understanding of present issues and complications. The contextual significance emerging from the use of the circular narrative structure in this TVC in relation to multicultural Malaysia is discussed next.

The circular narrative is important in prompting historical, collective or national nostalgia because it is a TVC commemorating the birth of a nation and the coming together of people of different races at the point of obtaining independence. In order for Malaysians to collectively appreciate and celebrate this independence, they will have to go back to the origins of the nation and think about

the past struggles to forge the spirit of nationhood. Thus a circular narrative encourages the collective reflection of the past which is a necessity in wholly embracing the commitments and relationships that were made to bring the people together as one nation. The celebration of nationhood is essentially a celebration of an achievement of the people's ability to unite and live together in harmony. Without and understanding and appreciation of the past, the present is meaningless.

Thus, a reflection on the past mindsets is useful in rekindling the collective common notions of nationhood and kinship shared by every Malaysian regardless of race or religion. The use of a circular narrative structure evokes collective nostalgia by triggering flashbacks to the good old days and works well to remind Malaysians to always cherish what they have worked hard for to attain and maintain.

Colour Colour is an important element in multimodal texts such as advertisements and TVCs. According to Holden (1997:129), in advertisements, colour, like images, words and sounds is employed intentionally as "a tool to assist the viewer in constructing mental associations" and this could be of a specific emotion or time period.

Colour is a key element in establishing the time period and conveying the time motif of passage of time particularly in emphasizing the distinction between past and the present. The black and white colour scheme in shots 1-4 and 52-54 functions as a period indicator of the times and lends authenticity to the temporal periods in the earlier scenes in this TVC, transporting viewers back at least 5 decades to a time before colour photos or colour television existed. The use of black and white in shots 1-4 provide a sharp contrast to following shots which are depicted in colour. From shots 5 onwards colour is continually employed to mark the changes in time periods between scenes. From black and white to colour and then the gradual increase in the degree of colour saturation and clarity in each progressing scene; colour is used to mark the changes in time period. In shot 46 which portrays the year 2002, the colour images differ sharply in terms of quality, saturation and tone compared to shots 6 (1960s), 10 (1970s) or 21 (1980s).

The visual changes evident through the use of colour and saturation work well to represent the movement in time, indirectly prompting viewers to

reflect on the changes and developments that have come about over the years. Colour is used as a visual metaphor to mark the changes brought upon with each passing year or decade. The changes in the visual appearance (in terms of colour and degree of saturation) of progressive shots representing different decades also correspond with changes in the physical appearance of the represented characters, landscape and environment in the TVC. The element of colour therefore plays an important role in lending authenticity to the text and its portrayal of the different time periods and the developments that take place in the passage of time, prompting a reflection on the past.

The black and white images play a very central role in eliciting feelings of historical nostalgia in many younger Malaysian viewers who were not around during the independence period. For many young Malaysian viewers who grew up with colour television and photography, black and white images on television tend to be an unfamiliar and dispreferred visual experience. This is because "a world composed entirely of black against white will leave viewers with essential gaps in understanding and leaves viewer unable to perceive what is patently clear in colour" (Holden 1997:126). However, the use of black and white images in the era of colour images provides an entry way into the past and works to transport the viewer to a specific time zone in the past.

Young Malaysian viewers of this TVC attribute the black and white colour of the scenes as helping them identify the time period in the first scenes and bring upon a nostalgic reaction to the TVC. The comments pertaining to colour by the viewers are as follows.

Geraldine, 30, says, "black and white colour shows that this is history (the past)".

Ng, 28 says, "attempts to invoke feelings of nostalgia through use of black and white and school setting".

Fazilah, 24 also attributes the sepia colour palette used in the TVC to lending a nostalgic feeling to the TVC.

Wai, 29, the black and white shots at the start helped set the mood".

Rani 23, comments how the colour prompts nostalgia in her, "The dull tone/ colour in making the audience feel touched, thoughtful, makes one think deeply about their own lives".

In addition to establishing the time period,

colour in this TVC also functions as a metaphor to represent the nature of the times. For many Malaysians, the period of 1957 represented in black and white reflected simpler times. The past is often nostalgically talked about in Malaysia as a simpler time. For Malaysians who were around in 1957 the black and white images may potentially bring about a sense of personal and collective nostalgia related to the simplicity and innocence of their childhood years and the sense of national pride evident in all ethnic group as the nation obtained independence.

Having had first-hand experience of the many changes that have occurred in the country, older Malaysians will be able to reflect on the past and make a genuine comparison of the differences between now and then. This is evident from the comments of an older viewer, Aziz, 50, "The ad really brings me back to my childhood and schooldays. Remind me of my parents and friends that I have been living with in those days. It is very unfortunate that these days I don't see any more close bond of multiracial friends sitting and doing things together with no other feelings than being friends. The ad is very touching indeed." Aziz's comments which include concrete examples from his own past show how the TVC is able to elicit a feeling of personal and collective nostalgia involving not just his family and friends but the society around him in general.

For younger Malaysians, unlike Aziz, who do not have first-hand experience or knowledge of what life and the nation was like in the 1950s the TVC will aim to evoke a sense of historical or national nostalgia based on their knowledge of the country's history and their knowledge of the nation instead of on personal experiences. As commented by Rajah, 23, "The uniqueness of the country, no matter who you are, what background you are from, still a Malaysian. How important the old days are". Unlike, Aziz, Rajah's comments are more general. Rajah comments on the significance of the past and reacts with a positive nostalgia to the past based on his knowledge rather than experience of history even though he was too young to have experienced it first-hand. Nevertheless, the TVC is still able to evoke some sense of nostalgia in Rajah. Although there are no personal nostalgic recollections for the 1950s for 23 year old Rajah, there is historical nostalgia based on his understanding of the context and the period. The TVC therefore has the ability to prompt different types of nostalgia based on the age and the experience of the viewers in this

context.

Editing

The notion of time is characterized by cycles of milestone events and experiences, and is expressed in a linear progressive development from innocence to maturity, from childhood to childbearing. This progressive development of time is visualized and compressed in this text through the means of a montage editing technique. In montage - style editing, "footage is cut together using short shots or sequences to represent action, ideas or to condense a series of events" (Kellison 2006:154). Montage style editing is usually done based on a central theme designed to communicate feelings, ideas or experiences.

In the Petronas TVC, the passage of time is represented through a montage of special events in the protagonists' journey featuring milestones and memories from childhood to adulthood. According to Routledge (2016:119), nostalgic memories tend to feature childhood and adolescent experiences which involve "revisiting the events and feelings of one's youth". Between shots 1 to 50 in the TVC, a period of about 5 decades is condensed into a screen time of 90 seconds.

The passage of time is recreated in this text through the editing style which uses montage style sequencing of shots taken from various special events in the life of the protagonists. The montage-like style of the TVC, which uses shots of photography sessions and important milestones, works in providing 'a walk down memory lane' feel for the viewers. The fictional montage on the life journey from childhood to adulthood of two "everyday" Malaysians works perfectly for this TVC which wants its viewers to look back into their own past and life journey as well as that of the nation. The montage which depicts the past and life events of another person works to trigger the memories of the viewer. The reflection on past memories is one of the only ways for one to access the past.

TVC producers understand this and use montage-styles in TVC as a means to recreate the past and trigger personal nostalgia for the viewer. This is because "memory and anticipation become our only access to time outside our own, and they are emptied of any real content and completely absorbed by the constitution of the subject: the past and future are deliberately represented as vaguely as possible so that we may insert ourselves there"

(Williamson 2002:155). The montage style as an editing and presentation technique that has been used in the text evokes similar mental montages of the viewers' own milestones and special occasions. A montage style video clip or slide show is usually used in many special events as a way of "walking down memory lane" and serves well to reinforce the passage in time syntagm.

In order to follow through with the sub-theme of nostalgia for an idealised past, the TVC contained very few elements that would portray material hardship or difficulty of any kind. Showing any form of poverty, hardship or difficulty would have not served the positive nostalgic sub-theme of this particular TVC. In order to make sure the past was remembered fondly, minus the setbacks, elements that would evoke negative flashbacks of the past had to be minimized. This could be seen in the choice of the scenes and events shown. All events shown, school years (shots 1-6), wedding (shot 10-19), pregnancy (shots 20-17), birthday (shots 31, 34 and 37), graduation (shots 41-46) are happy events that most people would reflect on with fondness, therefore creating a sense of collective nostalgia.

The nostalgic feeling the montage style creates is evident from the viewers' comments as follows:

"It gave me this overwhelming feeling (showing that I should appreciate things)...by showing an event, which takes place in everyone's life at some point or another" (Rani, 23).

"Reflecting on the memories of the past during the childhood days with the best friend on meaningful the schooling days which can never be forgotten" (Roslan, 37).

"It brings back my memories to the same year. My friends of multiracial and language..I have been through that years to see and feel what was pictured on the ads..." (Aziz, 50).

"It reminds me of my school days, my wedding and family" (Hassan, 36).

In many viewers, as seen above, the montage editing style brings about a sense of personal nostalgia, prompting reflections of the significant milestones in their own lives.

Although the time periods may not be the same periods in which the viewers grew up in, viewers are able to connect with the events depicted. These are events that everyone goes through in life and therefore allows viewers to share a common sense of nostalgia. According to Chan (2015), by not limiting the TV commercial to one specific time period, the production serves as a form of both

historical and personal nostalgia. As seen in Rani's comments, for younger viewers, the portrayal of different milestones in life depicted a time in the past before they were born (historical nostalgia) and for older viewers, like Aziz and Hassan, personal memories were revived in response to the images presented in the TVC (Chan 2015).

The Petronas TVC successfully constructs through the use of montage style editing, a personal, historical and collective recollection of a past that all viewers, which in turn provides a sense of collectivism born from a common past filled with similar events and imagery that most viewers would be able to relate to.







NOSTALGIA: TRANSCIENCE OF LIFE

In discussing the sub-theme of the transience of life as part of the theme of nostalgia, we analyse the element of plot and diegetic text as illustrated in shots 4, 48, 50, 51, 52 and 55 in Sytagm Table 2.

Plot The analysis in this section focuses on the literary element of plot and its significance to the issue of transience of life and the overall theme of nostalgia. In this section we discuss how death in the plot functions in prompting nostalgia by creating awareness on the transience of life.

A death in the plot of the TVC plays a big part in triggering reflections on the transient nature of life. Death is dealt in a very subtle manner in the TVC. There is no visual depiction of the death occurring, or of the dead person or of a funeral or cemetery or of any final rites or rituals associated with death. The producers of the TVC rely quite heavily on the deduction skills of the viewers as a means of dealing with the subject of death as part of the plot. The knowledge that a death has occurred is only available to the viewer through the facial expressions and body language of Rokiah and Letchumy's husband seen in shots 48, 50 and 51. Viewers learn about Letchumy's death at the same time as Rokiah but in a less direct way.

In Scene 7, when two men, Letchumy's husband and son come to visit, Rokiah asks them, "Where is Letchumy"? This question, although verbalised, is not audible to the viewers. Only the movements of her lips which are visible to the viewers allow them to lip read and make assumptions that she is enquiring after her friend. At this point, the facial expression of Letchumy's husband (shot 48) turns grim and sorrowful and he replies to Rokiah's

Scene 1 Shot 4	Scene 7 Shot 48	Scene 7 Shot 50
		
Scene 7 Shot 51	Scene 8 Shot 52	Scene 8 Shot 55
		

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Syntagm Table 2. Nostalgia: Transience of Life

question. Rokiah is seen to be completely shocked by this news and breaks down in tears. Her shoulders sag and she stoops to the point of falling (seen in shots 50 and 51) and is supported by her son, indicating her extreme grief. These physical manifestations of grief and sorrow by the characters seem to allude the viewers that Letchumy had died.

The news of the death is shocking to Rokiah as it closes any opportunities for a possible reconciliation between her and Letchumy. The death reminds her of the transient nature of life and the fragility of relationships with loved ones. Consequently, it triggers nostalgia in Rokiah who begins to reflect on the past experiences with Letchumy as evident in the flashback scene, Scene 8. The nostalgia feelings evident in Rokiah also work to trigger nostalgia in the viewers as well. "It reminds us to appreciate friendship especially with our best friend and appreciate it before lose them forever...we will regret it when we have lost a friend in comparison to the small fight because that isn't a big problem but the loss of a friend who grew up with you is a problem and there will

surely be regret if we don't rectify the situation and wait till the other friend dies" (Roslan, 37), "Never break a friendship as one day we will regret the most in our life" (Aziz, 50).

In the context of Malaysia the use of death in this TVC can be interpreted as signifying finality, loss and regret in relation to the relationships that Malaysians of different races have with each other. Death is used as a foreshadowing element of what may happen to the nation if race relations are not taken seriously. The death of the character in the TVC and the regrets felt as a result can be interpreted at the contextual level to represent the decline in healthy relationships among Malaysians of different racial backgrounds which forms the backbone of Malaysia.

The TVC uses here a personal narrative to present a national narrative. Viewers too, recognize that as seen in this comment by Dalia, 41, "Even though there was a disagreement, the ties of friendship are still strong in the heart...Even though they are of different culture, Malaysians are still one at heart". In many ways, the TVC works

to elicit a national nostalgia through personal nostalgia as observed by viewers Clara, 22, “I believe who people made this ad were trying to link memories from photographs to remember National Day and the feelings and emotions that occurred”, Rajah 23, “It achieved the aim by narrowing down to life of 2 M’sian individual and the reflection of the country’s values”. Another viewer, Tulsi, 23 had this to say, “It shows that every relationship has its ups & downs. Symbolic to our country after gaining independence. Shows that we should not take anything for granted and that we should appreciate what we have because we don’t know when we are going to lose it. Symbolic of our country’s independence as we have been leading a good life for more that 50 years now and that we should never take this for granted and always remember to go through in order for us to be living like this today”.

In using something as personal as death, which symbolises loss and finality and by highlighting the consequences that follow the permanent loss of something which is precious, the producers of this TVC can be seen as reminding Malaysians to cherish the peace and harmonious conditions of the country to avoid bearing the negative consequences if the peace is lost. Death is one of the most powerful triggers for nostalgia and is employed quite effectively in this TVC.

Diegetic Text The diegetic text plays an important role in establishing the message and theme of the TVC and ensures that viewers leave with the intended impression of TVC. The use of linguistic modes in this TVC is limited. Images are preferred over language as the rhetorical device for this TVC. The TVC is devoid of any audible verbalised linguistic mode. With the exception of two diegetic texts that appear at the beginning and the end of the TVC, the TVC is devoid of any other audible or visible linguistic elements, either written or spoken.

In this section, I analyse and discuss the diegetic texts present within the TVC for their role in communicating the transience of life in relation to the nostalgia theme. The two diegetic texts that appear in the text are diegetic text 1, *31st August 1957* which appears in scene 1 (Shots 2, 3 & 4) and diegetic text 2, *When you remember the day, don’t forget the feeling*, which only appears at the end in the final scene (shot 55).

Diegetic text 1 (*31st August 1957*), seen in

shot 4, establishes the context of the TVC world by locating it within a specific time frame. It offers information on the scene, locating it within a specific decade and point in time allowing the viewers to gauge the following decades depicted in the TVC. Locating the scene within an actual date in time also increases the reality factor of the text making it seem less like a TVC and more like a documentary or home video and consequently more appealing. Providing a realistic impression of the text world is important for the text to achieve its goal of eliciting viewers’ nostalgic reflections of their own past. Diegetic text 1 therefore performs the very important function of pointing to the specific time in the past i.e. “The Day” that the producers want the people to remember and reflect on. This is the memory diegetic text 1 prompted in viewer Ho, 55, “During the day of Independence 1957. All races can be best friends, even marry. They are happy for each other”. Ho’s comments show that the text evokes a sense of national and collective nostalgia.

The TVC’s emphasis on the importance of reflecting on the past and its virtues is further reinforced by diegetic text 2 that appears in shot 55 which tells the viewer, “When You Remember the Day, don’t forget the feeling”. While diegetic text 1 served more like a factual statement which offered information for viewers to absorb and make note of, diegetic text 2 is more interactive and makes direct a demand to the viewers.

Diegetic text 2 (*When you remember the day, don’t forget the feeling*) allows for the TVC to interact directly and make a demand to the viewer. The demand made of the viewer is through the use of direct address evident in the use of second person pronoun “you” and the directive speech act “remember the day” and “remember the feeling”. This demand is also specific in that it urges the viewer to dwell on the positive feelings associated with the past and that specific date in the past (referred anaphorically to diegetic text 1). The article “the” is used to refer to “day” and “feeling” indicating that a specific day and feeling is preferred. The use of imperative verb “don’t”, a contraction of “do not” also reinforces the imperative mood of the speech act.

According to viewer Tulsi, 23, “When you remember the day, don’t forget the feeling”. The second appearance of the sentence. Its trying to rekindle our feeling of gaining independence” (sic). As noted by the Tulsi diegetic 2 text urges

viewers to mentally transport themselves back in time and to reflect on the feelings and emotions and experiences that they had in the past. Although Tulsi is too young to have personal memories of 1957, she has a sense of historical and national nostalgia. The diegetic text read in context of the general plot suggests a positive association of the past and implies that the past is something that the viewers will recollect fondly and appreciatively. This assumption is made based on the knowledge about reminiscence, that the “one important characteristic of nostalgia is the filtering of negative information - the past is almost always remembered as better or happier than it probably was (Davis 1979)” (as cited in Havlena & Holak 1991:328). The linguistic modes employed through the use of diegetic texts play an important part in reinforcing the theme of national and historical nostalgia in the TVC.

The use of exact dates however, does have its effects. For Malaysians who were around in 1957, the date elicits personal and national nostalgia as they will be able to remember their own specific experiences of the day. The TVC as it would have reminded them of their own childhood, school days and the friends they had as well as memories of how they commemorated the day Malaysia gained independence. Viewer Aziz’s comments on the diegetic text in Scene 8 was, “When you remember the day, don’t forget the feeling. It brings back my memories to the same year. My friends of multiracial and language” (sic). Aziz here shows the feeling of personal and collective nostalgia.

However, for Malaysians who had not been born at that time, there is only possibility of historical and national nostalgia and not a personal one. Viewer Fazilah, 24, comments that the TVC prompted her to “remember how happy we were during Independence Day and that racial riots were regrettable and not to let it happen”. Although Rani, 23, did not have first-hand experience of the Independence day or racial riot period, her comments shows her experiencing a form of national historical nostalgia based on her nationality as a Malaysian and her knowledge of Malaysian history. However, for another viewer, Aza, 31, the diegetic text did not bring about recollections of any nostalgic feelings or memories, “Flashback at scene 1. I still cannot relate the ad’s message with the rest of the plots, What “feeling”? It left me confused at the end...the day is Independence day...I know its 1957....remember the day...

independence day...remember the feeling...it doesn’t say anything in the ad....I was not there in 1957...I was not born...so obviously I don’t have any feelings towards that day”. While eliciting some form of historical/national nostalgia in some younger viewers, the diegetic text 2 left some viewers feeling confused and alienated. In general however, the TVC was able to elicit some form of nostalgia in all Malaysian viewers across ethnicity and age.

The thematic multimodal analysis of Petronas TVC, *Two Friends* has shown how the nostalgia is constructed through the use of the visual modes of colour, the technical mode of editing, the literary mode of narrative structure and plot and the linguistic mode using diegetic texts. These multimodal elements work to elicit several types of nostalgia in viewers including personal and collective and historical nostalgia. The analysis has revealed that for this TVC, age is a factor in determining the type of nostalgia experienced by viewers of the TVC. Although most viewers across all ages experienced some form of personal nostalgia, younger viewers naturally experienced more historical national nostalgia while older viewers experienced a more personal sense of national nostalgia as a result of being around in the independence era in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have analysed nostalgia in a Malaysian TVC using the multimodal analytical approach. We identified various multimodal elements including colour, narrative structure, style of editing, plot and diegetic text that reinforce the theme of nostalgia in the TVC. Through the analysis we have also discussed the meanings that the different multimodal elements have within the context of the TVC and in reference to the socio-cultural context of multicultural Malaysia. The analysis has revealed how the use of images, memories, experiences and values in the TVC appeal to a personal and/or national consciousness and is able to evoke a sense of collective nostalgia in a group of diverse Malaysian audiences. This includes the use of the nationally significant dates such as 31st August 1957 and personal or universal experiences such as childhood friendships, birthdays, weddings and death to evoke a collective nostalgic experience in viewers

of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The use of happy childhood images like the ones found in the PETRONAS TVC is an extremely effective strategy to evoke positive nostalgic sentiments in viewers as revealed in Mohammad Hafeez, Chong and Muhammad Sabbir (2015).

The nostalgia theme is important in the positioning and understanding of this TVC in the Malaysian context as the TVC is shaped around allusions to transformations in post-independent Malaysian society. As the TVC appears to invite viewers to explore and reflect upon the true meanings of independence and nationhood, it seems to suggest that only through the contemplation of the passage of time can a real understanding of history and the events that shape the growth of a society be arrived at.

This study has revealed how nostalgic advertising in a multicultural context such as Malaysia transcends ethnic and religious backgrounds by evoking a sense of collective and national nostalgia in its viewers through the use of national and universal symbols, values and memories rather than communal ones. This was possible through the construction of a TVC which depicted a plot and narrative that interspersed personal memories with collective aspirations and imaginations (Chan 2105).

This study has also shown the effective use of multimodal elements in a TVC to elicit nostalgia in a multicultural context. The Petronas TVC was to a certain extent, successful in merging personal nostalgia with historical or national nostalgia in an attempt to resonate with Malaysians of different age groups and ethnic backgrounds. As a Malaysian organization, Petronas has been able to successfully use nostalgia in its festive TVCs by idealizing the past as a time of innocence, harmony and peace and indirectly portraying Petronas as an agent that provides that access and link to national unity and harmony that all Malaysians yearn for. This study further substantiates the role of nostalgia and nostalgic TVCs as an effective advertising tool and a significant and valuable agent for inculcating unity and patriotism in Malaysia.

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