

# ADVERTISING, GLOBALISATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: A CONTENT STUDY OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN MALAYSIA

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## **Abstract**

Globalisation is largely attributed to the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which is now making it possible for information to be transmitted and shared across global geographical boundaries. In the context of advertising, globalization is believed to have a significant impact in influencing the shaping of the national identity of a country, especially through the images and messages portrayed by western advertising transmitting through ICT and other forms of print and electronic media. To address this issue, 200 television commercials are content analyzed in an attempt to examine how commercials in Malaysia tackled the issue, especially in balancing western images and influences against the portraying of local identity. The findings indicate that Malaysian television commercials have adopted mostly the local and global (universal) cultural identities in their advertising creative executions. These findings conclude that globalization has an impact on advertising and national identity in Malaysia, but rather to the positive implication as in the Malaysian perspective of enhancing globalization without neglecting the national identity.

## **Abstrak**

Globalisasi kerap disandarkan kepada perkembangan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi (ICT) yang mana telah menjadikan kebolehan informasi itu disampaikan dan dikongsi merentasi sempadan geografikal global. Dalam konteks pengiklanan, globalisasi dipercayai mempunyai dampak yang signifikan dalam mempengaruhi dan membentuk identiti nasional sesebuah negara, terutama melalui imej dan mesej yang ditonjolkan oleh pengiklanan Barat yang disampaikan melalui ICT, dan pelbagai bentuk media elektronik dan cetak. Dalam meneliti isu ini, 200 iklan televisyen telah dianalisis isi kandungannya dalam usaha mengkaji bagaimana pengiklanan di Malaysia menangani isu tersebut, terutama dalam mengimbangi imej Barat dan pengaruhnya berbanding dengan menengahkan identiti tempatan. Hasil penemuan telah menunjukkan bahawa iklan-iklan televisyen di Malaysia telah menggunakan kebanyakannya identiti tempatan dan global (sejagat) di dalam pelaksanaan kreatif pengiklanan mereka. Penemuan ini merumuskan bahawa globalisasi mempunyai dampak terhadap pengiklanan dan identiti nasional di Malaysia, namun lebih membawa atau menampilkan

implikasi yang positif berasaskan perspektif Malaysia, iaitu memperkukuhkan globalisasi tanpa mengabaikan identiti nasional.

Keywords: Advertising, national identity, culture, globalisation, product

### **Introduction**

About 38 years ago, media guru Marshall McLuhan predicted that mass communication would turn the world into a global village. Today, the study of international mass media systems focuses on those media that cross national boundaries. A new term emerged – globalization. Globalization largely refers to the economic, political and social integration and interdependence of cultures and countries from around the world. Where mass media is concerned, it is largely attributed to the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which is now making it possible for information to be transmitted and shared across global geographical boundaries.

About 150 countries engage in some form of international broadcasting. Many of these services are government-run or at least government-supervised (Dominick 2002). Others, like TV3 and NTV7 in Malaysia, are private operations supported by the sale of commercial time. The biggest change in international broadcasting in recent years has been the proliferation of global news, sports and music channels. The pioneer in this area is CNN, reaching more than 150 million homes in about 200 countries. MTV is available on every continent, reaching more than 200 million homes, and has versions in Japanese, Russian, Mandarin, Spanish and several other languages. The ESPN is seen in more than 140 countries and territories and reaches about 80 million households (Dominick 2002).

The Internet has come the closest to fulfilling McLuhan's global village concept. The World Wide Web provides access to worldwide media on a scale never before possible. Radio stations in other countries, for example, are available on the net. Live TV programs from other countries have yet to become common on the web, but the major international and domestic TV systems in many countries have websites that contain general information and programming highlights as well as live video.

Advertising plays a key role in media support. The past two decades have seen the start of new channels for advertising, including cable TV and the Internet. Online advertising has grown in the past few years. The three main components of the advertising industry are the advertisers, advertising agencies, and the media. Advertising agencies put together large-scale campaigns for clients, consisting of a market strategy, theme, the advertisements themselves, media time and space, and evaluation.



### The advertising industry

The Malaysian advertising industry is rapidly growing and with it all, a rapidly evolving consumer market is emerging. Over the past five decades, Malaysia has experienced tremendous economic growth. The gradual buildup of domestic and multinational business activities and as a result, transformation of consumer behavior in Malaysia has made it one of the important centers for international marketing and advertising (Frith 1996). This has been enhanced by the growth of globalization efforts by multinational businesses that see opportunities for advertisers to lift worldwide ventures. When marketers venture, the advertising industry follow, and the media grow.

Malaysia's advertising expenditure (adex) on media airtime and space rose by 5.3% in the first half of 2005 to RM2.19 billion, compared with RM2.08 billion in the corresponding period last year. Based on Nielsen Media Research (2005) figures, every medium except outdoor advertising, registered an improvement in adex (see Table 1):

TABLE 1. Jan – June Adex by Media (RM million) – First Half 2005

Medium	H1 2004	H1 2005	% change
Newspapers	1,250.7	1,369.3	6.9
Television	590.3	609.7	3.3
Radio	78.7	83.5	6.1
Magazines	70.4	74.4	5.7
Outdoor	35.1	24.3	- 30.8
POS Ad	16.0	18.0	12.5
Cinema	6.6	8.4	27.0
Total	2,077.7	2,187.5	5.3

Source: Nielsen Media Research 2005

Television showed an increase of 3.3% this year compared to the same period last year. Among the factors that contributed to the growth was due to the entry of two new TV stations and on the overall, was also the rise in the newspaper advertising rates. It is also in tandem with Malaysia's economic growth. For the January-June 2005 period, newspapers maintained their top position with ad revenue of RM1.369 billion with television being second with ad revenue of RM609.7 million.

The top ten advertisers until the first half of 2005 were (see Table 2):

TABLE 2. Top Ten Advertisers (First Half 2005)

Advertiser	Adex (RM million)
1. Celcom	62.3
2. P & G	57.4
3. Maxis	55.8
4. DiGi	43.8
5. Unilever	40.8
6. TM	29.0
7. Nestle	28.6
8. MAS	21.6
9. KFC	20.7
10. Petronas	18.8

Source: Nielsen Media Research 2005

The mobile line companies were in the top five advertisers, being Celcom (RM 62.3 million) at the top, Maxis (RM 55.8 million) at the third and DiGi (RM 43.8 million) at the fourth place. P & G with a total spending of RM57.4 million at second and Unilever (RM 40.8 million) at the fifth place.

The mobile line services and mobile interactive services remained the top two product categories in terms of adex, at RM146.2 million and RM116.5 million, and the rest of the top ten product categories were as follows:

TABLE3. Top Ten Product Categories (First Half 2005)

Product Categories	Adex (RM million)
1. Mobile Line Services	146.2
2. Mobile Interactive Services	116.5
3. Female Facial Care	58.8
4. Hair Shampoo and Conditioner	54.3
5. Real Estate	52.9
6. Local Government Institutions	42.7
7. Airlines	32.5
8. Credit Cards	32.2
9. Fast Food Outlets	30.7
10. Telco Corporate Communication	30.6

Source: Nielsen Media Research 2005

The rapid economic growth has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in advertising. As Malaysian economy shifts to

mass-market, advertising is positioned at the center of this change. One of the most interesting results pertaining to this shift in Malaysia has been the connection between culture and economic growth. This aspect prevails clearly in transnational advertising as it brings along transnational products into the culture. This has been enhanced by globalization (direct products and advertising toward a worldwide market) efforts by multinational businesses that see greater opportunities but seldom neglects the industry interfaces with the local culture (Mohd Helmi, 2002).

### The research

Globalization is somewhat seen as generalization of communications across cultures. But, generally people living in different countries often belong to different cultures, and cultures again may even vary widely within a multi-ethnic country such as Malaysia (Mohd Helmi 2003). Every culture is a complex web of social relations, religious beliefs, languages and consumption attitudes and habits. All of which will obviously impact on how communications (advertising) are delivered and received (Tse, Belk & Zhou 1989).

Nevertheless, most international companies would prefer to use global branding and marketed their product virtually the same way everywhere. A global brand is one that has the same name, design, and creative strategy everywhere in the world and is marketed in most major regional bloc (North America, Latin America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific). The former Soviet Union may coalesce into smaller fifth bloc. The sixth bloc – Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Asia – is so much smaller economically than the others (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty 2003).

The product that is almost always used as an example of a global brand is Coca-Cola. Other global brands are emerging as well: Revlon, IBM, Apple, Marlboro, Xerox, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, McDonald's, Rolex and Henkel all have global brands in their product lines, or their company name is considered a global trademark.

Thus, standardization of advertising has become too common to the world market. The premise holds that companies should operate as if there were only one global market. Differences among nations and cultures were not only diminishing but should be ignored altogether because people throughout the world are motivated by the same desires and wants. Furthermore, businesses will be more efficient if they plan for a global market. In other words, see the world market as one.

The controversy begins. Critics began to argue that the standardization of advertising has created problems of invading the culture of others. Global advertising is believed to have a significant impact in influencing the shaping of national identity and culture of



a nation, especially through the images and messages portrayed in western - based advertisements. To a larger extent, this issue has generated a large interdisciplinary debate among scholars, advertisers and practitioners alike. Therefore, standardized advertising approach makes little sense.

Consumers in different countries have different ways of deciding which brands to buy, different level of involvement toward the same product category (Zaichkowsky & Sood 1989), and different attitudes toward advertising (Durvasala et. al. 1993). The standardization of creative strategy in advertising has created bad tasters and threatened the culture. As an example, an advertisement showing a child repeating the father's words is considered rude in the Malaysian culture. Strong culture and devoutly religious Malaysian audience do not accept a wife shouted at her husband in a consumer product category advertisement. Advertising is seen as a medium of change and to change something that society would want to preserve (culture) is not acceptable. To an extreme viewpoint, it is seen as marketing or cultural imperialism. The culture that society would want to preserve has been intruded. Inertia, resistance, rejection and politics are sometimes lumped together as "not invented here" situations. The global perspective of advertising is seen as western imperialism to impair the societal values.

In tackling these issues, some multinational advertising agencies sought out by taking the popular approach of planning global, acting local. In Malaysia, for many instances, creative strategies still hold to the same global idea, but reinvent with local settings, have local talents and speak through the local language. But again, critics said: "We do not support that way of thinking. Why can't it be ours!"

This research was undertaken to find answers to several questions pertaining to these issues in Malaysia:

- a. What is the state of global advertising in Malaysia?
- b. What are the strategies taken by advertising agencies in Malaysia to tackle the issues?
- c. What is said to be local ideas and foreign ideas, and how it is solved in the advertising creative strategies?
- d. How is culture being portrayed in Malaysia advertisements in an attempt to maintain a balance between local and foreign creative ideas?
- e. How to define global advertising as to be acceptable by Malaysian consumers?

### Conceptual design

Many may assume that advertising results in purchases by consumers of products and services they see advertised. Research indicates that this is only partially true (Borchers 2002). Twitchell (1996) argues that advertising today does not have a strong effect on what we buy, but it is effective in creating our culture. The premise of this research is adopting Twitchell's theory of advertising effects.

Advertising's most profound effect on consumers is in creating a culture that values the pursuit of certain lifestyles. Advertising's influence on the choices consumers make, then, is probably strongest on a secondary level. Thus, the real impact of advertising is the value that it gives to our lives. We consume the advertising more than we do the goods and services advertised (Twitchell 1996).

Twitchell (1996) terms this feature of contemporary culture as *Adcult*, which refers to the process by which culture is transmitted through advertising. Twitchell explains: "For what is carried in and with advertising is what we know, what we share, what we believe in. It is who we are. It is us" (p. 4). Advertising gives value to the things of our life. Advertising performs a role that in the past has been filled by religion, education, or art (Twitchell 1996).

David Slayden (1999) offers a complementary view to Twitchell's theory of advertising effects. Advertising has changed from being about the product, to being about the user of the product. How the product works is less important than what the product does symbolically. Advertising identifies the important myths, symbols, and stories of culture and associates them with a product or service. Thus, when we purchase the product or service, we place ourselves within this myth, symbol, or story. The benefit we receive from a product is social identity (Slayden 1999). As to relate with a cross cultural effect of advertising is the national identity of a particular nation.

Culture is the complex of values, ideas, attitudes, and other meaningful symbols that allow humans to communicate, interpret, and evaluate as members of society (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard 1995). When society is in a culture, it creates an identity of the society. Culture and its values are transmitted from one generation to another. The core values of a society define how products are used, with regard to their function, forms and meaning. Culture also provides positive and negative valences for brands and for communications programs and defines the ideology of consumption.

How can it be measured pertaining to the study? Culture also provides people with a sense of identity and an understanding of acceptable behavior within society. Thus, this research has adopted some important attitudes and behaviors influenced by culture in the form of interpretations done in the advertising creatives. The study



adopted the consumer culture constructs developed by Harris and Moran (1987) and later adapted by Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1990). The ten constructs of culture behaviors are: 1) sense of self and space, 2) communication and language, 3) dress and appearance, 4) food and feeding habits, 5) time and time consciousness, 6) relationships, 7) values and norms, 8) beliefs and attitudes, 9) mental processes and learning and 10) work habits and practices.

These behaviors that have been projected in advertisements are paired up with the culture positioning theory proposed by Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999). The theory implies that three brand positioning strategies are normally used in advertising strategies, namely the Local Consumer Culture Positioning (LCCP), Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP) and Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP). Those behaviors are categorized in the form of identification in advertisements to whether they are local, foreign or global in terms of brand positioning.

### **Methodology**

The study employed the content analysis method; both quantitative and qualitative. The unit of analysis was commercials that appeared in Malaysian television; both government - owned and private - owned stations. Commercials selected were based primarily on availability and representativeness. Two hundred television commercials were used as samples recorded between the months of January to March 2005. The commercials were then analyzed by concentrating on the brand positioning – the creative strategy, appeal and story line. The unit of observation, however, was focused on the culture behaviors employed by the commercials involved, emphasis was less given on the product or service advertised. Scores were given based upon the counts of culture behaviors portrayed in the commercials with a collective agreement of not less than seventy five percent as reliability measures. Four judges were used in the decision process.

The process of data collecting was as follows: the judges looked at the commercials and identified the brand positioning and decided on an agreement. They then analyzed the culture behaviors portrayed, gave a score on all variables of culture behaviors that existed and decided on an agreement. The scores or counts were later counted for a decision to be made on the commercials as to decide on the category.

### **Result**

The ten product categories of the 200 television commercials used as the sample for the study were as follows (refer Table 4):



TABLE 4. Ten Product Categories

Product Categories	No. of Products	Percentage (%)
Food, Drink & Beverages	60	30.0
Toiletries & Body Care	51	25.5
Services	19	9.5
Automobiles	18	19.0
Household Products	15	7.5
Health & Special Diets	11	5.5
Telecommunications	9	4.5
Insurance & Banking	4	2.0
Electrical Appliances	1	0.5
Others	12	6.0

The ten product categories represented a wholesome of products and services that have been used by all consumers. All of the products and services rendered in the sampled commercials were global brands as to justify the objective of the study. The commercials were identified through their advertisers or sponsors.

A brand is a name, term, sign, design or a unifying combination of them, intended to identify and distinguish the product or service from competing products or services (Russell & Lane 1996). Brand positioning connotes on how advertisers positioned their brands for the perceptions of the consumers. It is usually done through creative strategies, appeals and story lines of the commercials.

As for brand positioning in determining local, foreign or global strategy being employed in the ten sample product categories, interesting result has emerged (refer to Table 5):

Almost 80.9 percent of the commercials' culture positioning are local, 14.4 percent are global and 7.4 percent are using foreign culture positioning.

The brand positioning strategy of all product categories in the commercials tend to use the local consumer culture positioning (LCCP). Foreign consumer culture positioning (FCCP) seemed to be higher in the health and special diets (36.15 %) and so did the automobiles product category (12.40 %). For the health and special diets product category, a reasonable explanation is that Malaysian consumers are least health conscious as it prevailed in their culture. Thus, brand positioning has to be brought over from the western culture. As for the automobile commercials, perhaps the prevailing technology based of the automobile industry influenced the brand positioning of imported image concept. Therefore, it has to be foreign, sometimes.

Table 5: Product Category and Brand Positioning Strategy

Product Categories	GCCP	%	FCCP	%	LCCP	%	Total
Toiletries & Body Care	278	12.68	135	6.16	1780	81.16	2193
Household Products	66	10.23	29	4.50	550	85.27	645
Automobiles	95	12.27	96	12.40	583	75.23	774
Insurance & Banking	28	16.28	16	9.30	128	74.42	172
Services	84	10.22	59	7.18	679	82.60	822
Electrical Appliances	5	11.63	1	2.32	37	86.05	43
Food, Drink & Beverages	278	11.00	171	6.77	2078	82.23	2527
Health & Special Diets	79	16.70	55	36.15	339	71.67	473
Telecommunications	33	8.53	29	7.49	325	83.98	387
Others	55	10.58	40	7.49	425	81.73	520
<b>Total</b>	<b>1001</b>		<b>631</b>		<b>6924</b>		

Using the global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) are more prevailing compared to foreign consumer culture positioning (FCCP). It can be explained, perhaps due to the universal values of culture that is perceived to be in line with global values. There are tendencies to owing to the above explanation, as it in the insurance and banking (16.28%), and the health and special diets (16.70 %) product categories.

In relation to the culture behavior constructs and consumer culture positioning, the following result is prevailed (refer to Table 6):



TABLE 6. Culture Behavior Constructs and Consumer Culture Positioning

Culture Behavior Constructs	FCCP	GCCP	LCCP
Sense of Self & Habits	198(16.5%)	340(28.3%)	662(55.2%)
Communication & Language	23(3.8%)	296(49.3%)	281(46.8%)
Dress & Appearance	52(4.4%)	267(22.4%)	870(73.2%)
Food & Feeding Habits	38(3.2%)	53(4.4%)	1109(92.4%)
Time & Time Consciousness	66(11.0%)	41(6.8%)	493(82.2%)
Relationships	37(6.2%)	16(2.7%)	547(91.1%)
Values & Norms	34(5.7%)	13(2.2%)	553(92.1%)
Beliefs & Attitudes	2(0.3%)	41(6.8%)	557(92.8%)
Mental Processes & Learning	85(14.2%)	0(0.0%)	515(85.8%)
Work Habits & Practices	21(2.1%)	55(5.5%)	915(92.3%)

Culture behaviors in the sample commercials are prone to be using the local consumer culture positioning to the highest. Except for mental processes and learning behaviors category, the global culture positioning is more prevailing compared to other behavior categories. By and large, the sample commercials used the local consumer culture positioning, the global culture positioning and the foreign culture positioning respectively, pertaining to the culture behaviors constructs. The highest for local consumer culture positioning strategy is the food and feeding habits behaviors. The highest for global consumer culture positioning strategy used is sense of self and habits behaviors. As for foreign consumer culture positioning strategy, the highest positioning strategy used is the sense of self and habits behaviors. The result thus offered an explanation of why there are criticisms toward Malaysian advertising, especially the issues of (western) lifestyle influences on consumers at large. The counts of using FCCP and GCCP were substantially prominent pertaining to sense of self and habits behaviors.

### Conclusion

The findings conclude that Malaysian television commercials have adopted mostly the local cultural identities in their advertising creative executions. There are attempts to use the global (universal) and foreign advertising creative executions, especially advertisers who still maintain the standardization of global brand positioning, but not that substantial to materialize a strong point that Malaysian global advertising threatens the national identity. Thus, it implies that Malaysian commercials is adapting the local consumer culture positioning (LCCP) and the global consumer culture positioning

(GCCP), compared to the foreign consumer culture positioning (FCCP) used, in the advertising strategies. Thus it connotes that conceptually, glocalization is already being used in advertising creative executions in Malaysia, pertaining to culture influences.

Malaysian advertising is forward looking and advance in their conceptualization of advertising and globalization. The advertisers and advertising practitioners in Malaysia have used localization, globalization and glocalization strategies in their global branding and advertising. Although there is standardization strategy used, but some how or rather, they realized that it does not work to the fullest for Malaysian consumers. Thus, the amount of advertising using the FCCP is not substantially used for the Malaysian market.

The direction toward global markets, however, is inescapable. Will true global advertising ever be achieved? Probably not. At least probably not soon. Ideas are global. Management thinking is increasingly global. The challenge in advertising is careful and sophisticated use of variations nationally or regionally under a basic global plan. Up to this point, a wise approach would be "plan global, sell global, be local" rather than "acting local". Western approaches to creativity in advertising does not work when culture is taken into consideration, at least in Malaysia.

It is important that advertising practitioners to be cautious of cultural, social, religious systems and national identity underpinnings, that create impact on advertising. It is important that resistance and rejection by the public should not turn political as what happened in Indonesia in the 1970s. The anti-foreign sentiments were not restricted to the advertising industry, but certainly the industry was a key source of frustration to many Indonesians. Anti-foreign tensions erupted in Jakarta with the "Malari" demonstrations in January of 1974. One of the prime targets of the demonstrations were the 30-foot outdoor advertisements for Toyota products that were displayed atop the tallest building in Jakarta, the Nusantara Building. Advertising was then increasingly seen as part of a larger system. The government banned all television commercials for luxury products. By the 1980's the negative public sentiment toward advertising has grown into a significant public issue. By April that year, all television commercials were banned from the airwaves and it lasted for over a decade. Politics are sentiments and is difficult to solve by logic and rationality. Perhaps, Malaysian should learn from this tragedy.



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