

The Role of Cultural Elements on Advertisement Reception: Case Study of Malaysians

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Abstract— Communication is a transactional means of sending and receiving meaning with the use of language which can be inform of words, signs, sounds and so on. Advertisement shares all these features thus, a form of communication. For communication to be effective there must be some sense of shared values between the message provider and the receiver among which are language, religion, and norms. This study examines the relationship between of cultural effects (language, religion, and norms) and Malaysians' reception of advertisement. Using a sample 150 Malaysian (50 Malay, 50 Chinese, and 50 Indians) from a university town in Northern Malaysia, the study revealed a significant correlation between the cultural elements and advertisement reception; $(r(148) = 324, p < 0.1)$, $(r(148) = 371, p < 0.1)$ $(r(148) = 703, p < 0.1)$ for language, religion and cultural norms respectively. The findings of this study draws the attention of advertisement agencies towards a constructive consideration of the cultural elements of their target audience. This ensures easy attainment of desired advertisement goals.

Keywords—Advertisement Reception; Cultural Elements.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sociologists claim that culture is locally unique, but universally different. Precisely the elements of culture distinguish culture universally. Cultural elements contribute to the segmentation of people [1]. These include language, norms, beliefs (Religion), values, social collectiveness, status and cultural integration [2]. Excluding the physical characteristics (such as; color and body structure), the main features that distinguish the three main ethnic of Malaysian population are; language, religion, and cultural norm. Interestingly, these are the perceived adoptable cultural elements in Malaysia media [3][4]. Presented language as the most important cultural elements that is used to transfer meaning for the purpose of communication. Language itself could be seen as a symbol of culture and the differences in languages indicate cultural diversity. In this study, language is a cultural element that relate to words in advertisement as well as determining media selection based on the existing Malaysian diverse languages (Malay, Tamil and Mandarin).

Theorists describe cultural norm as the inseparable part of culture that includes folkways, taboos, mores, laws. Norms are usually created nationally and habitually accepted as a general ideology and philosophy of a particular cultural

boundary [5]. Cultural norms directly affect peoples' way of living, communication and interactions [2]. By inference, this study assumes that the differences in Malaysians' cultural norms influence differences in reception of advertisement themes, pictorial interpretations, media selection, and words [6] holds that religion can be socially defined as human ways of living that affects their behaviors and ideologies. Religion differences affect receptions of pictorial interpretations, symbols, words and media selections. Religion here, refers to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.

Malaysia is a unique country with complex cultural identities from different ethnic groups. The country is populated by 65% Malay, 25% Chinese, 10% Indian, and 10 % others [7]. This reflects the existence of diversity in ethnicity, religion, and cultural norm. Hence, this study intends to examine the relationship between cultural effects (language, religion, and norms) and Malaysians' advertisement reception. To achieve this objective, the following questions are advanced:

- What is the relationship between language and advertisement reception?
- What is the relationship between cultural norms and advertisement reception?

- What is relationship between religion and advertisement reception?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Advertisements Reception

Studied the cultural reflection and the preferred appeals in mobile advertisement in Vietnam and concluded that, cultural differences play a vivid role in determining audience advertisement preferences [8]. The study suggested that global advertisers must be able to decide on the level of globalization and localization of advertisement messages, as cultural adaptation or advertising standardization are the main mediators of global advertising. Though the study aims at examining the cultural reflection on mobile advertisement in the context of global advertisements, it is reasonable to examine the relationship between cultural differences and advertisement reception at a local level.

Revealed in their study on the reactions to different types of ads in Belgium and Poland that commercial ads are reflective of cultural elements, and should not be undermined in any marketing and advertising research [9]. The source claim that audience and customer cultural differences are directly pertinent to the effective communication of any commercial ads, thus cultural differences indicate distinct interpretation of advertisements. [10] Added that the inevitable differences in audience culture normalize the reflection of domestic strategies and approaches of communication in both cross-national and national ads.

B. Effect of Language on Advertisement Reception

Generally communication is defined as the transactional means of sending and receiving meaning with the use of language which can be in forms of words, sign, sound and so on [11]. No doubt communication has been the engine of human endeavor especially marketing, while advertising has been its elevator. [12] Observed that, advertisement is the marketing tool that inundates marketers with options of communicating, persuading, and informing consumers of emerging trends or impacting reaction. [13] In their research on the relevance of neo-linguistic programming to effective marketing communication observed that consumers deserve to be communicated in their desired manner and language. Arguably this desired manner is understood to be their language.

In their meaning creation and reception study of the Latinos viewers of English television programs resulted that viewers' social construction and negotiation for meaning are always inevitable from their creation and reception of media message [14]. Adding that viewers prioritize cultural characters in television scenes, this is an index that media message creator must be aware of their audience's cultural elements and characters, before communicating an effective and impacting message. Invariably language as an element could play an obstructing or supporting role to the creation of positive meaning to media messages such as advertisement.

C. Effect of Religion on Advertisements Reception

In a recent study, expose that audience of India advertisement offensively or tastefully interpret advertisement in respect to their religious themes and how it is regarded and reputed in advertisement messages [15]. Clear instances are some advertisement campaigns informing audience about safe sex and the use of condom that may be contrary to some audience's religious values and moral teachings. Reasonably there should be a study that enlightens about audience or customer respect and regard to their religious teachings with respect to indications of some attitude and forms of behavior that are offensive to their religion in advertisement messages.

Buttresses that ad messages help in the formation and modification of beliefs [16][17]. It is then justifiable to examine the effect of religion differences on a localized advertisement reception in Malaysia.

Stressing out the congruity of investigating effect of religion on advertisement reception might appear unjustifiable with the contentment of some previous advertisement studies like [18] claiming that most advertisement research are inconsistent in linking religiosity of audience to product category. Only religion categorized product could be used to link audience or consumer religiosity. Contrarily, [19] argued that audience beliefs could determine the acceptance and interpretation of any messages, and recommended future research to consider its examination. Interestingly, religion could be one of the influence, determinant, and causes of consumer behavior and decision making.

Precisely in relation to this study, [20] revealed that advertisement literatures seldom focus on religion due to its complexities and controversies, and affirmed this time as a high time conjoining religion and advertisements for the emerging usage of religion in mass appeals and the consistence social trend of religion. [21] Reported that religion now affects peoples' interpretation of media messages, comprehensively, this notion is similar to the argument of [22] that Malaysian religiously approach things differently.

D. Effect of Cultural Norms on Advertisement Reception

Claimed that advertisements could be acceptable and offensive or disrupting according to the receiving culture, in their study done in a homogeneous cultural atmosphere of India [23]. In the advertisement struggle of achieving a higher scale of audience, advertisers might overuse their artistic and standard persuasive communication convention and lapse into a superficial and immoral conveyance, that maybe disregarding and disrespecting audience cultural value. Obviously, such a trespassing and cultural threatening advertisement would be apparently disregarded by audience. This verdict is in contrary to some part of the study discussion, claiming that the media social communication influences and foreign imperialism could enslave audience and eschew their interest. Nonetheless, acceptably or not, [46] was one of the communication theorists that affirmed that media messages are independently interpretable, thus cultural norms affect advertisement reception, and not vice versa, this study create a possible room to investigate Malaysia scenario of a

different cultural norms with a singular advertisement message.

Acknowledged advertising as a manipulated channel of cultural publication in their comparative study between Malaysia and Singapore [25]; the source contended the fact that advertisement in Malaysia do conjoin the value of sex and work as an index to cultural norms of Malaysians. Picking on this view, it is reasonably ideal to investigate the consent of Malaysians cultural norms towards the published advertisement.

Communication theorist defined advertisement symbols (images, color and so on) as one of the advertisement component that elevated the throb of advertisement messages in audience brain [26]. The study of [27] added to this notion revealing that both non-verbal and the verbal component of advertisements are significantly influential according to their cultural congruity. The source compared two online advertisements of Nokia and Ericsson, benchmarking the conveyance of messages of the advertisement symbols in different cultures. Their study proved that culture determines the creation of meaning to advertisement symbols, and the advertisers should be able to adopt a communication strategy that are culturally, socially, nationally, historically congruent. [28] related their study to this particular one that online advertisement vulnerably challenge cultural norms with its flexibility of communicating across different cultures.

E. Advertisement Reception with Respect to its Content

Corroborating the effect of audiences' cultural element on advertisement reception, apart from the abstracted and the detailed discussion of advertisement reception theory which explicitly revealed that audience creation of advertisement meaning is contextually influenced by audience culture. [29] Lamented that the main source of meaningful and effective advertisement is from the respect given to the audience personality. Doubtlessly human personality or value is built according to its cultural (Religion, Norms, and Language) teachings; indirectly a successful, effective and meaningful advertisement must respect audience culture.

Respecting audience culture might even appear as an easy task, but according to the observational study of [30] investigating the cross cultural and cross national differences in marketing communication contended that advertisers are challenged in communicating people from different cultural background. More so, the differences in culture will necessitate using different kinds of mass media and message content to advertise. The study gathers data from six different television channels of two distinct Canadian regions and conclusively proved their presumption right. This study is interested in a quantitative form of investigating Malaysia advertisement audience from different culture, on their perception of the words, symbols, picture, advertisement themes, and media used in respect to their culture.

F. Theoretical Perspective

This study is strongly related to the literary theory called Reception theory. [31], the theory explains the audience negotiation or opposition to a particular message, by which reader, audience and listener don't passively accept

messages. Audience could create meaning or interpret the message based on their individual cultural background and life experiences [32]. In other words, message doesn't inherit meaning itself, but they could be created and organized by audience. [33] revealed that, same interpretation to a particular message basically occur when group of audiences have a unique cultural background, and same life experience

Additionally, [24] reviewed that reception theory is the total shift of concern from the producer of a message and the meaning of the message to the content of the message and the audience. This exposes how subjective audience is, in any communication. In another word the existence of reception theory was an index of the level of creative process that occurs in the act of interpreting, reading, and receiving any message. Most often, the creativity level of audience or recipient of any artistic work, resultantly influence the two element of every message meaning creation, which is "fact" and "truth" [34].

The power of audience to deduce fact or truth from any message is apparently done through their relationship with the content (words, sign, and structure) of the sent message. Relatively, the main function of the audience-centered theory, known as the reception theory in media message and mass communication is to create or locate meaning for media messages before it is comprehended or effectively absorbed. [35] specifically argued that powerless media messages is truly open and polymeric, thus having series of distinct meaning, and can be interpreted according to the cultural background and context of the receiver. Aptly, audience cultural and social status should be consulted in media messages, more truly audience is the basic instance in the creation and the production of meaning [36]. [37] affirmed that the distinction in peoples' cultural elements was the mean inventor of persuasive communication, which also embodies advertising. Showed another dimension of this study in relation to reception theory [36]. In his rhetorical approach to reception theory revealed that encoder, sender, orator, or and presenter of any mass directed or individual directed message, must take audience, reader, and listener into control or as an equal apt creator of words and meaning respectively. [38], [39], added that if orator or utter of any message, either persuasive or informative message can effectively influence the audience; it is only that the cloud can control the orator.

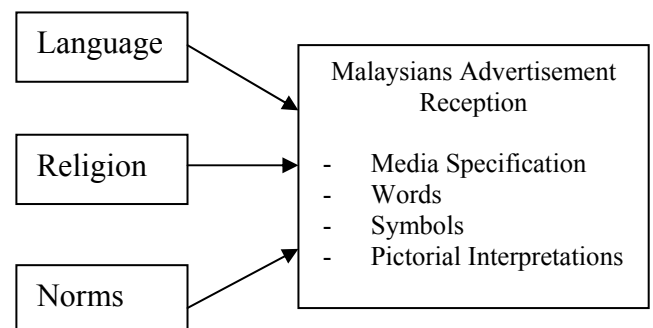


Fig. 1 Study Framework

G. Research Design, Population and Sampling

Added that intercultural studies beneficially adopt quantitative research to indicate an assertive numerical relationship between the subjects of the study [40]. The source broadly added to the benefit of employing quantitative research in a cross-cultural study, that it poses a high rate of reliability to the collected data, with a measurement and statistical power, in other to practicalize theoretical assumptions.

The chosen subject of this research is Universiti Utara Malaysia student both graduate and undergraduate local student who are presently studying in the university from different departments. According to the Registrar's office of UUM in the year 2010, UUM has more than 24,000 local students. However, actual data indicating the distribution of students according to ethnic group; (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) was not released for ethical reasons. Therefore the study draws sample representativeness of 150 respondents that is; 50 Malay students, 50 Chinese students and 50 Indian students.

Revealed that sample representativeness is the most appropriate for cross-cultural studies that aim at investigating opinion and attitude [41]. Otherwise, any drawn sample will just be a representative of all the available cultural subject of the research to study relationship of the variables regardless of the distribution of the variables across all the involved cultures.

III. FINDINGS

A. Testing Research Hypotheses

With the use of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient as supported appropriate for explaining relationship between variables [42], [43]. The result of the correlation and each of the study alternative hypotheses are discussed below:

H11: There is a relationship between language and advertisement reception

This study's first hypothesis presumed that there is a relationship between language and advertisement reception. Findings from correlation analysis revealed the score of the relationship between language and advertisement reception as ($r(148) = 324$, $p < 0.1$) which is generally accepted. The result revealed that there is a significant relationship between Malaysian languages on the way they perceive advertisement messages.

H21: There is a relationship between religion and advertisement reception

This study also hypothesized that, religion as one of the element of culture and people's way of living and from what is denoted from the reception theory, initially presumed that Malaysians' religion affect the way they receive advertisement messages. The result of correlation analysis done in this research support the report that religion is correlated with advertisement reception with the score of ($r(148) = 371$, $p < 0.1$). This finding could be interpreted that, the religion is significantly related to the way Malaysians receive and interpret messages from advertisement.

H31: There is a relationship between cultural norms and reception

The third hypothesis of this third stated that cultural norms related to advertisement reception. Cultural Norms has been established and proved as one the cultural element related to the proclamations of the reception theory, this study curiously perform a correlation analysis on the relationship level of the cultural norms and advertisement reception. The correlation analysis revealed that cultural norms is correlated with advertisement reception with score of ($r(148) = 703$, $p < 0.1$), this means cultural norms strongly related to the Malaysian's interpretation and the reception of advertisement.

		Malaysian Advertisement Reception
Language	Pearson Correlation	.324(**)
Religion Mean	Pearson Correlation	.371(**)
Norm	Pearson Correlation	.703(**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

a Listwise N=150

IV. DISCUSSION

A. The Relationship Between Malaysians Language and Advertisement Reception

This study first research question asked; if there is a relationship between the language differences of Malaysians and their advertisement reception. The question is answered with the result of the correlation analysis, which revealed that language is significantly related to the way Malaysians receive and understand advertisement. This result answers the first research question which is the first research objective; "to examine the relationship between language differences and Malaysians advertisement reception".

This research achievement is in relation with the study of [12] and [44] as both sources identified the immense influence language has on persuasive communication and precisely on advertisement. Their research articulated that consumers deserve to be communicated in their own desired language.

B. The Relationship Between Malaysians Cultural Norms and Advertisement Reception

The aim of the second research question is to examine the relationship between Malaysian cultural norms and advertisement reception; this is also answered with the result of the correlation analysis performed that shows that Norms is significantly related to advertisement reception. This can be interpreted that cultural norms affect the way Malaysians understand, interpret and receive advertisements. This result helps in achieving the second research objectives; "to examine the relationship of Cultural norms and Malaysians advertisement reception".

This result is practically related to the studies of [23] which identified that advertisement messages and elements could be offensive or obnoxious to people's cultural norms and personalities; this research precisely answers the argument, from the correlation findings between cultural

norms and advertisement reception. Additionally [45] and [46] claimed that since media messages like advertisement are independently interpretable, thus audience cultural norms is likely to affect and relate to the way they create meaning from advertisements individually.

C. The Relationship Between Malaysians Religion and Advertisement Reception

In the same slang with the other two research questions, the third research question also aimed at enquiring the relationship between religions and Malaysians advertisement reception, the findings from the correlation analysis revealed that religion is significantly correlated with advertisement reception which means religion affects Malaysian advertisement reception. This finding conclusively answers the third research question, and help in achieving the research objective three, "to examine the relationship between differences in religion and Malaysian advertisement reception".

This is directly related to the studies of [23] that explain how religion is related to Indian advertisement reception; the study is directly related to this particular study objective. [47] Also explained audience religion concern on the type of message they receive through media, and how religion affects the way they interpret these messages.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions from reviewed literature, explanations of the advertisement reception theory, and the findings of this research, it is evidenced that Malaysians culturally and individually receive advertisement differently according to their language, cultural norms, and religion. This research serves as a clue to the Malaysian advertisers, advertising agencies, and business retailers that Malaysians as a very unique country with a diverse culture, religion, and cultural norms, receive advertisement as one of the successful mass media messages differently, and their particular beliefs and culture influence their receptions, acceptance and understanding of messages. This study, in a dimension has proven the theoretical claims of reception advertisement theory, that culture and its elements affect how audiences of a particular message create meaning, regardless of how rhetoric, convincing or rather confusing, the words, or signs of the message may be. Impliedly therefore, the findings of this study draws the attention of advertisement agencies towards a constructive consideration of the cultural elements of their target audience. This ensures easy attainment of desired advertisement goals.

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