

## MALAYSIANS PERCEPTION ON CODE-SWITCHED ADVERTISEMENT

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### Abstract

*Despite the various researches conducted on the impact of code switching in the marketing field, little is known about the impact of code switching between Bahasa Malaysia and English in advertisements. Therefore this study intended to investigate the impact of usage of code switching between these two languages in advertisements. Local students studying in local universities were used as the target group (N=30). The aims of this study were to investigate the attitude towards such advertisements, the reasons behind the perceptions and the impact of such advertisement on its persuasion level. It was found that the respondents have positive perceptions towards code-switched advertisements. Hence, the findings suggest that code switching is a good marketing skill as it is perceived as effective, influential and creative.*

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Code-switched advertisement.

### 1. Introduction

Code-switched advertisement can be described as an advertisement in which the message is not presented in its entirety in target languages (Bishop, 2007). Instead, two or more languages may be alternated within an advertisement. It differs from the traditional advertisement in which only one dominant language is used.

Most of the time, this kind of advertisement can be found in a community with bilingual speakers. Mixing language is a common practice of bilingual speakers. This phenomenon is also known as code-switching. One reason bilinguals prefer code-switch is due to lack of language proficiency (Heredia & Altarriba, 2001). In the article, they argued that bilinguals prefer to mix languages because they do not know either language completely. So it can be understood that by code-switching, bilingual speakers can enhance the level of understanding while communicating. In relation to advertisement, by implementing code-switching, advertisers can really attract buyers to engage with the advertised products since the intended message of the advertisement can be delivered effectively.

This view is shared by Luna and Perrachio (2005) when they stated that code-switch is a good way to advertise to bilingual speakers. By inserting a foreign or second language in a part of advertisement, for example in the slogan, it can yield mixed language message to bilingual speakers.

Many researches have been conducted regarding code switch and its effect on advertisement but the results are inconclusive in which mixed languages can have both positive and negative effect if used in advertisements. One example was a study by Koslow *et al* (1994) which yielded a result that showed for instance, bilingual advertising is effective in increasing advertiser cultural sensitivity and affect for the advertisement. Another study by Luna and Perrachio (2005) showed that switching from Spanish to English in a slogan for advertisement yielded a positive

result rather than switching from English to Spanish. Therefore it can be said that the effect of code-switch in advertisement can be either negative or positive.

This paper explores the attitude and perception towards code-switched advertisement among Malaysian consumers by utilizing The Markedness model by Myers-Scotton, (1998). This study aimed to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the perception of Malaysian consumers towards code-switched advertisements?
2. What are the reasons for their perception towards code-switched advertisements?
3. Does the perception on code-switched advertisements have any impact on level of persuasion?

## 1.1 Literature review

The Markedness Model was proposed by Carol Myers-Scotton in which the model is usually associated with motivation for code switching between participants in interactions. This model embarks on the claim that individuals (speakers or writers) tend to exploit the relationships that become established in a community between a linguistic variety and who uses the variety and where and how it is used (Myers-Scotton, 1998). In other words the individuals take advantage of the associations that their addressees or readers make between a variety and its typical users or uses. This claim is further highlighted by Bell (1984) in saying that individual speakers or writers design their conversational contribution with their audience in which that particular design itself is chosen based on the speech associated with a particular social group (Myers-Scotton, 1998). Based on the Markedness Model, language users are aware that the chosen variety that they employ would have a certain amount of effects in achieving certain social ends. They choose a particular variety with the expectation that the addressees or readers would recognize it as carrying a particular intention. Addressees or readers tend to identify with the language that they are familiar or most comfortable with and this notion makes it more relevant to be used among bilinguals.

The rapid increment of population around the world has seen code switch emerges as one of the important research areas. This is due to the growth of many bilingual communities around the globe. Code-switch can be define as moving from one code to another for reasons such as showing solidarity, to reduce social distance or to convey specific messages. (Holmes, 2008). From a peripheral linguistics branch in 1950's, code-switch has gained much attention from researcher around the world (Auer, 2002).

Various studies have been done on the impact of the use of code-switch in various fields. Ignacio Redondo-Bellón, (1999) studied the effect of bilingualism on the consumer among communities across Spain. In the study, the researcher studied the effect of switching from Spanish regional dialect such as Catalonia and Galicia in the field of consumerism. It was found that mixing both Spanish and regional dialects helps consumer to understand more about certain products or services. Hence, he suggested that mixing language is an effective way in order to reach each linguistic group more efficiently.

Likewise, Schau, Dellande, and Gilly (2007) conducted a research on the impact of mixing languages on service counters. According to them, it enhances employees and customers in service operations to run smoothly. They say mixing languages can bring positive outcome to organizational efficiency, while dialect and brand mixed languages bring about negative consequences. Their study was aimed to investigate whether any code-switch occurs in scripted service counters and whether it results with subversion with its attendant negative outcome or maybe better outcomes as the script is customized for the consumer. Methodologies that included interviews, observation and

also analysis of obtained videotapes of drive-thru service counters show that most mixed languages in the service counters was initiated first by the customers and it was found that customers that used different codes such as different languages or different brand or product names will result with the attendants switching their current codes (Schau et. al, 2007). For example, a customer using the brand term 'Big Mac' in a Burger King Fast Food Restaurant compelled the attendant to switch to 'Big Whopper' to check whether it was what the customer meant. This was done to accommodate to customers' needs and as a result better service was provided as the goal of the encounter was achieved.

Previously, code-switch has always been associated and much researched in relation to oral conversations only but at present attention has also moved to focus on the role of it in written communication. Montes-Alcala (2005) studied code-switch in personal letters among bilinguals of English and Spanish. In his study, it was found that mixed languages occur in various situations such as quotations, emphasis, clarification and elaboration, parenthetical comments, lexical need switches, idiomatic expressions as well as free switching. He added that participants mixed languages due to reasons such as expressions or words were more accurate when used in original forms or momentary gap in the lexicon of the individual. In addition to that, Zentella was quoted in saying that "code mixing for bilinguals is a way of saying that they belonged to both worlds, and should not be forced to give up one for the other" (Montes-Alcala, 2005). This explains that using code-switch is also related to cultural elements.

Luna and Peracchio (2005) found that processing a message in a first versus a second language can have an impact on bilingual memory as there is some persuasion process for bilinguals. Their research was aimed to investigate advertisements employing code – switch or mixed languages. Advertisers put in a lot of effort to target and persuade bilinguals in an intense and creative manner in marketing their products and services. Manipulations of the language in which the advertisement is written are an important part of the advertisers' efforts to appeal to bilinguals. Thus, according to this journal, advertisements should have two versions – one in the majority language and another mixing the majority and the minority languages. One good example was highlighted in this journal where English Language advertisements targeting bilingual United States Latinos which reads "Looking great doesn't have to cost a fortuna". In this advertisement, the advertiser appears to believe that the word 'fortuna' will be more compelling than the word 'fortune' among Latino customers.

A joint research between Luna and Peracchio (2005) studied the impact of code-switch on persuasion of advertisement to bilingual consumers using the Markedness Model as the theoretical basis. This model suggests that individuals will switch languages or insert other-language elements into their speech when they want to communicate certain meanings or group memberships. Where bilingual advertising is concerned, this model states that a code switched word becomes "marked" in that this is a conscious choice to signify an individual's social or ethnic identity and the meaning behind this identity. The code switched element sparks a contrast within the language and attracts the readers' attention to it. Luna and Peracchio (2005) also offered cognitive explanation in their application of this mode. i.e. the code switched language term inserted in a message/advertisement provides perceptual salience or markedness, motivating bilinguals to direct attention to the switched expression. Their study provides consumer researchers with an awareness of the communicative role of language choice, the notion of language schemas and phenomenon of mixed languages and the social constraints on its use.

Bishop (2007) also carried out a study on the role of code-switch in increasing advertising effectiveness among Mexican – American youth. The researcher investigated how the use of mixed languages interacts with the context language of the medium to influence certain outcomes related to advertising effectiveness. She investigated the Spanish–English code switch that occurs among bilingual Hispanics living in the United States. According to her this population is receiving increasing attention by marketers as Hispanic in general compose the largest U.S. minority group with explosive projected growth rates and spending powers. In her research, she discovered that advertisements aiming at the Spanish society were better recalled by the participants when the advertisements used more words in Spanish with some elements of English rather than the other way around.

In addition, Leung (2010) did a research on code-switch in print advertisement to see its cultural implications in Hong Kong. Based on his study, code-switch is a common phenomenon in Hong Kong whereby English, Japanese Kanji and vernacular Cantonese are permeated and mixed with Chinese virtually in every section of the economy, a linguistic resource to attract consumers. His study analyzed 125 code-mixed print advertisements produced in Hong Kong between 2008 and 2009. Based on his study it is found that there are different reasons for people to mix English, Japanese Kanji and vernacular Cantonese in print advertisements and this reflects the relative importance of the mixed languages in the Hong Kong society. English was mixed in advertisements as this particular language is always associated with modernity and advancement as well as more attention-catching which serves the purpose of advertising (Leung, 2010).

It can be concluded that the Markedness Model is the most appropriate model to be used as the basis for this study as this study seeks to investigate the perception towards code-switching/ code-mixing in advertisements in Malaysian context.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research design**

This study adopted the survey research design. Survey research design are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to sample or population to describe attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics. Numbered data was collected through questionnaires and statistically analysed to describe trends about responses to questions and later to answer research questions.

### **2.2 Population and sample**

This study employed convenient sampling. It is a random sampling which can minimize the effect of extraneous variables on the outcome of the study. The population of this study were local students from Faculty Modern Languages and Communication of Universiti Putra Malaysia. A total of 30 respondents (N=30) were selected using non-probability convenient sampling as time was the main constraint of this study. As the study sought to investigate the perceptions of Malaysians towards advertisements using both English and Bahasa Malaysia (the national language of Malaysia), the respondents had to be Malaysians who understood Bahasa Malaysia. While Bahasa Malaysia was regarded as the main language, English was treated as the embedded language in this study. Employing convenient sampling for selecting respondents for this particular study can be said as acceptable as the reliability of the results is heightened because the participants were not pre-selected and therefore more authentic answers can be expected. However, at the same time it is not denied that there is a drawback to this type of sampling which in this case is related to the sample. The findings of this study cannot be generalized as the sample cannot be considered to be a representative of a certain

group. As this was only a small scale study, the results too cannot be generalized to a bigger population and this can be perceived as a limitation of this particular study.

### 2.3 Instrument

This study used questionnaires as the main instrument. The questionnaires consist of two sections namely Section A and Section B. The first section, Section A, consists of demographic questions. There are 4 close ended questions for the respondents to answer. The purpose of this section is to get an overview background of the respondents.

Section B consists of two parts. The first part is the advertisement. The advertisement was designed in a mixed language in which Bahasa Malaysia is designated as the majority language and English Language is the minority language. In order to retrieve the data on their perceptions towards code-switched advertisements, this study was based on the Markedness Model proposed by Myer-Scotton (1998).

The second part of Section B consists of 8 statements. The purpose of these statements was to elicit data from the participants to answer the research questions. This part was constructed using Likert Scale in order to gain the data on their perceptions towards code-switched advertisements. The participants were required to rate the statements between the scale of one (1) to five (5), whereby one (1) represented “Strongly Disagree”, and (5) “Strongly Agree”.

### 2.4 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to respondents on a selected date. Researchers were present to give instructions to respondents in order to answer the questions. Researchers also explained the purpose and objective of the study to the respondents. Researches collected the completed questionnaires to analyse the data.

The completed questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistic. Frequency counts were made for every response. The data was then converted into percentage and tabulated in order for it to be analysed and answer the research questions.

## 3. Results and Discussion

This study employed a quantitative approach where questionnaires were used as the instrument. There were 8 likert-scale questions and an open-ended question designed to elicit responses to answer the research questions for this study. The demographic profile and results of the study are shown below:

Table 1. Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-3- years old	22	73.3	73.3	73.3
	30-40 years old	6	20.0	20.0	93.3
	40 and above	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Gender of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Female	20	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Educational Background of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Degree	19	63.3	63.3	63.3
	Master	11	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. First Language of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bahasa Malaysia	19	63.3	63.3	63.3
	English	6	20.0	20.0	83.3
	Mandarin	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
	Tamil	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

There were three questions in the questionnaire posed to elicit responses to answer the first research question. The questions asked were of whether respondents always encounter code-switched advertisements, the level of influence of mixed-languages advertisements compared to monolingual advertisements, positivity in perception as well as preference towards code-switched advertisements.

Majority of the respondents agreed that they often encountered such advertisement. As can be seen in Table 5, 36.7% of the respondents answered agree with the statement 30.0% average, 23.3% disagree and the remaining 10.0% strongly agree. This yields similar result to that of Leung (2010) where he stated that code-switch advertisement was ubiquitous in a multilingual society.

Table 5. Item 1: "I always come across this type of code-switched advertisement"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	7	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Average	9	30.0	30.0	53.3
	Agree	11	36.7	36.7	90.0
	Strongly agree	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows that majority of the respondents were in the view that code-switched advertisements were more influential compared to advertisements employing one language only. This is indicated by 50.0% of the respondents answered agree, 3.3% strongly agree, 26.7% average, 16.7% disagree, and 3.3% strongly agree.

Table 6. Item 2: "This advertisement is more influential than advertisements that only use one language"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	3.3	3.3	3.3

Disagree	5	16.7	16.7	20.0
Average	8	26.7	26.7	46.7
Agree	15	50.0	50.0	96.7
Strongly agree	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In addition to that, the results in Table 7 indicate quite positive responses toward code-switched advertisements as the responses for this particular question were dominant on the agree (40.0%) and strongly agree (20%). Only 3.3% of the respondents chose disagree while no respondents chose strongly disagree. A fair amount of respondents (36.7%) answered average for the statement. This is in line with the findings by Luna and Peracchio (2005) when they received positive responses on code-switched advertisements. Based on the responses, it can be suggested that code-switched advertisement is perceived as positive and influential by majority of the respondents.

Table 7. Item 3: "I perceive this advertisement positively"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Average	11	36.7	36.7	40.0
	Agree	12	40.0	40.0	80.0
	Strongly agree	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In addition to that, there were four questions asked to obtain responses for answering the second research question which was related to the reasons for their respective perceptions. The reasons suggested include attractiveness of advertisements using code-switch, confusion of messages in the advertisements, ability to understand the advertisements, obliteration of the national language when mixing languages as well as an open-ended question for respondents to give their own reasons for preferring code-switched advertisements or not. The results show little difference in answers for attractiveness of advertisements. As can be seen in Table 8, 26.7% of the respondents disagreed that code-switched advertisements are attractive while 36.7% and 33.3% answered average and agree respectively. The remaining 3.3% strongly agreed with the statement. This shows that the respondents did not really sure about the attractiveness of code-switched advertisements.

Table 8. Item 4: "This advertisement attracts my interest"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Average	11	36.7	36.7	63.3
	Agree	10	33.3	33.3	96.7
	Strongly agree	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The study also analysed whether code-switched advertisements are confusing or not. Table 9 shows that code-switched advertisement did not confuse the respondent. It can be seen when majority of the respondents stated disagree (33.3%) and strongly disagree (6.7%) to the statement.

In contrast only 23.3% of the respondents chose agree while only one respondent (3.3%) responded with strongly agree. The remaining 33.3% chose average as a response towards the statement.

Table 9. Item 5: "This advertisement confuses me"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	10	33.3	33.3	40.0
	Average	10	33.3	33.3	73.3
	Agree	7	23.3	23.3	96.7
	Strongly agree	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.00	100.00	

Table 10 shows 73.3% of the respondents rated agree and 10.0% rated strongly agree for the question of whether they could understand the advertisement without any problems. Only 3.3% of the respondents rated disagree while 13.3% of them rated average. No respondents chose to strongly disagree with the statement. This item is closely related to the previous data (Table 9).

Both of these data show that respondents understood the code-switched advertisement and faced little, if any problems understanding it. This is probably because one of the aims of an advertisement is to ensure that messages are conveyed clearly to eliminate misunderstandings and this is even more important in code-switched advertisements. Therefore, it is very unlikely that code-switched advertisements would use words that could pose problems in understanding the messages but rather they would utilize words that people could understand easily.

Table 10. Item 6: "I can understand this advertisement without any problems"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Average	4	13.3	13.3	16.7
	Agree	22	73.3	73.3	90.0
	Strongly agree	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

It is highlighted in Table 11 that 30.0% of the respondents disagreed that the code-switched advertisement obliterates the national language while 50.0% answered average on the obliteration of the national language through code-switched advertisements. 13.3% agreed while the remaining 6.7% strongly agreed that the code-switched advertisement obliterates the national language. This shows that the positive or negative views on code-switched advertisements are very much influenced by the role of the national language. Some respondents may have felt that it was not proper to indirectly encourage mix languages as the national language may be threatened.



Table 11. Item 7: "This advertisement obliterates the national language"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Average	15	50.0	50.0	80.0
	Agree	4	13.3	13.3	93.3
	Strongly agree	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In order to answer research question 3, one question was provided to the respondents in the questionnaire asking the level of persuasion of code-switched advertisement. Table 12 shows that an equal of 36.7% of the respondents answered average and agree respectively to the question of whether or not the code-switched advertisement was able to persuade them to buy the product offered. Only five respondents (16.6%) respondents disagreed with the statement while the remaining 10.0% strongly agreed. Therefore it can be said that code-switched advertisement has an adequate level of persuasion to persuade users to buy the advertised product or service.

Table 12. Item 8: "This advertisement manages to persuade me to buy the product offered"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	5	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Average	11	36.7	36.7	53.4
	Agree	11	36.7	36.7	90.0
	Strongly agree	3	10	10	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Lastly, the respondents were required to answer an open ended question. The purpose of this question was to elicit an overall perception towards code-switched advertisement and their reasons from the respondents. The data were analyzed and categorized according to two themes namely, positive and negative perception. Seventeen respondents (56.7%) stated that they perceived the code-switched advertisement positively. Among the reasons provided by the respondents were code-switched advertisements cater to the needs of multilingual persons and they create awareness for people of the importance of knowing more than one languages. In contrast, the other 13 respondents (43.3%) perceived the advertisement negatively. The respondents stated that this kind of advertisement is not proper and creates a bad impression towards the advertiser.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Conclusively, from the study it can be said that code-switched advertisement is mostly perceived as positive by the respondents. Some of the reasons of this perception are this kind of advertisement is influential, easily understood, effective and interesting. In addition to that, there is not much concern of obliteration of the national language in relation to code-switched advertisements. However, there are some negative perceptions towards code-switched advertisement. Few respondents stated that the advertisement is not proper which consequently does not have the credential to persuade consumers.

Besides, code-switched advertisement can be perceived as persuasive as found in the study. Therefore it can be suggested that code-switched advertisement can be perceived as a good marketing tool but the advertiser should be aware of the different needs and perceptions of consumers.

For future research, it is suggested that the research use probability sampling where all of the samples are gathered equally. In this case, respondents could be divided equally based on gender to represent an entire population. Researchers may also look into different perceptions between male and female towards code-switched advertisement. Researchers can also compare between both genders perceptions and see which gender is more acknowledging towards the code-switched advertisement. A bigger sample is encouraged to be used in future research as the results can be generalized to a larger population.

Future research will also have to consider participants' background regarding their age, education, and race. This is because all of the aspects somehow have different consequences towards the findings. For example, younger respondents will consider code-switched advertisement as just a strategy used by the company to attract consumers' attention but for older respondents, they will perceive it as a violation of their mother-tongue language. The same goes with educational background of the respondents and as well as their races. Those who were educated fully in English might find code-switched advertisements unacceptable compared to those who code-switched frequently in a daily basis. All of these aspects will need to be considered if the researcher wants to gain authentic and genuine data in future research.

Another suggestion for future research is that the researcher needs to do more in-depth analysis in terms of exploring reasons for respondents' perceptions. This research managed to get many responses from the respondents in terms of their perceptions towards code-switched advertisements. Each and every reason is valuable in determining the level of persuasion of code-switched advertisement. Therefore, in a larger scale, researchers will manage to get versatile responses from all of the respondents in determining their perceptions towards code-switched advertisements.

Last but not least, researcher will need to consider what type of advertisements should be shown to the target group or participants. For example, a fast food advertisement might be appropriate for all ages while an advertisement on kitchen utensils might not be appealing to teenagers. This is to ensure their interest in comprehending the advertisements in order for them to give their responses. It is also to gain their interest towards the advertisements shown thus will give authentic data needed. The advertisements should be appropriate for all ages, gender, and race.

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