

Window To Germany – Detecting Cultural Values In German Television Commercials By German Language Students In Malaysia

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Abstract

According to Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall (1990, xiv) “Communication experts estimate that 90 percent or more of all communication is conveyed by means other than language, in a culture’s nonverbal messages. These messages are taken for granted and transmitted more or less unconsciously”. Min Zhou (2008, 103) supported this statement: “language proficiency alone does little to facilitate effective communication if one is unaware of the nonverbal and ‘situation-specific’ codes of another culture”. Thus, authentic teaching material such as TV commercials, which can blend language and culture, could assist learners of a foreign language to grasp the meanings of visuals and the implied as well as the literal meanings of a text.

This research examines the question ‘How do learners of a foreign language (German) in Malaysia interpret the cultural information in television commercials of that target language country?’. Do they recognize the hidden cultural values besides the visual information? And is their interpretation of the hidden information similar to that of the native speakers of the target language? Based on the author’s earlier research, this paper focuses more on the connotative level than on the denotative level of interpreting advertisements of the culture of the target language. Results of the analysis and experiences using randomly selected advertisements in the foreign language classroom will be discussed.

Key Words: Hidden messages in television commercials; Semiotics; Teaching language and culture

1.0 Introduction

Cultural awareness and culturally based social differences has created a complex topic since people start communicating with each other. To understand another culture better, advertisements could be the medium used to find out more about aspects of human life such as behavior, appearances, and cultural values, because advertisements are carriers of cultural messages. This is due to their setting in their specific environment and the presence of fashion as well as other trends that were reinforced by the advertisement or alienated for their own purpose. Advertisements always required a concrete setting in which they can develop their full meanings and convey them to the consumer. “They sell to us which of these are “normal”, “vital” or “reasonably expected”.” (Retrieved on 28.4.2013 from <http://qvaken.wordpress.com/2012/01/28/advertising-part-1-overview-of-cultural-messages/>)

The decoding of those cultural messages in the advertisement could probably open a “window” to the foreign culture. Hence, the aim is to find a procedure that allows detecting cultural aspects in the communication process of advertisements. The employment of a semiotic analysis enables members of another culture to examine the communication process as well as cultural aspects of the advertisements.

Therefore, various German advertisements are analyzed by Malaysian learners of German-as-a-Foreign-Language to find out whether the signs in the advertisements can be decoded with respect to the German culture.

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. The effect of television as advertising medium on the viewer

According to Jamhoury and Winiarz (2009), despite the increase of digital media, television remained a powerful advertising medium with a high influence on people. This influence occurred subconsciously, whereby the emotional stimuli of the advertisement were more effective because the viewer did not notice them (Heath, 2009). Treutler, T.a.G., T. (2010) cited The Television Bureau of Canada which confirmed that television was the “most effective medium for delivering high emotional engagement, cognitive recall”. Heath (2009) defined the ‘subconscious influence’ as engagement in terms of attention or emotional response. Damasio argued that “emotions precede conscious thought and can gatekeep, or lead directly to, decisions” (as cited in Heath 2009). According to a study of Innerscope Research, television advertisements delivered three times higher emotional engagement and three times higher aided next-day recall than radio advertisements. On-air commercials also got less than half the attention of print advertising. These confirmed television advertising as a high engagement and low attention medium.

Rubinson, J. (2009) argued that television was not only increasing in effectiveness but also leading in building awareness. This increased effectiveness was due to the marketers’ improved skills in deciding when to use television compared to other media options.

In addition, Sharp, Beal and Collins (2009) found that the television viewing behavior remained the same over the past forty years. They argued that television “will remain the preeminent fast and vast advertising medium” in the future. A study on consumers’ response to an advertisement shown on interactive television and non-interactive television showed that interactivity evoked greater enjoyment and higher levels of comprehension. Edwards, Brown and Hess (2009) concluded that the Internet might be better for rational appeals whereas television was more effective for emotional communication.

2.2. Factors influencing comprehension

Comprehension of advertisements is a complex process. “Advertising text is not “stable” and open to one and only one interpretation” (Cook 1992; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Myers 1994; Scott 1990; Stern 1990; as cited in Brown, Stevens and Maclaran 1999, p.11). “Instead, it is argued that text is unstable and readings of text are multiple, depending on the interpreters of that text.” The interpreters’ gender, their personal and cultural background served as the basis on which they generate meaning when analyzing the same textual impulse. In addition, comprehension depended on the interpreters’ general knowledge, personal experience, interests, personality, and language proficiency, as Lian and Tonawanik (2011, p.227) found in an experiment with respondents of the same ethnic, cultural, and gender background.

Furthermore, Lundmark (2005) brought to light visual and linguistical clues which could help grasp the intended meanings.

2.3. Cultural aspects in advertisements

“Multiculture is the wave of the future” (Palacios 2011).

Müller (1998) stated that standardized advertisements mostly failed in international advertising because the cultural determinants remained overlooked.

International advertising is a complex phenomenon. It is an interwoven mechanism between the sales message, the consumer and the product. Müller (1998) elaborated this in the so called “culture-free” products, as what computers, music instruments and consumer electronics have been regarded for a long time. Looking at the diffusion rates of the computer in the USA, France and Germany, a totally different distribution pattern and usage made obvious cultural aspects to consider.

“For an effective marketing of a product, it is crucial to find a consumer experience that sets the product apart from the concurrence, is unique and calls out to the customer to buy it. This objective can only be achieved if the emotional rules which are valid for the particular culture only, are referred to” (Müller 1998). Also erotic and tempting contents, which were considered popular consumer experiences in many countries, were not ‘universal appeals’ and subject to cultural restrictions in other countries. These cultural differences must be reflected in advertising because an advertisement can only be most effective on the consumer buying behavior when it connected best with the consumers’ expectations and desires. The use of cultural schemes for advertising made it easier for the consumer to decode the message and to relate faster to the product. In this context, pictures have an important role. As Prof. Kroeber-Riel (cited in Müller 1998, p.5) stated, pictures “are quick shots into the brain”. At the same time they bore a variety of possible interpretations. These aspects made it difficult to create standardized advertisements in the market. They also showed that advertisements were carriers of cultural information specific for the country/culture targeted at. Marques (2009) proved in a comparison of various Volkswagen print advertisements from different regions of the world where the sale of a special product depended on its image which was quite stable to communicate across the range of cultures of the numerous countries.

Summarizing the above,

- Television advertising is a high engagement and low attention medium.
- Television is the most effective medium for delivering high emotional and cognitive responses in advertising.
- Engagement is defined as "the amount of subconscious 'feeling' going on when an advertisement is being processed".
- Television “will remain the preeminent fast and vast advertising medium” in the future.
- Comprehension depends on the interpreters’ gender, general knowledge, personal experience, interests, personality, language proficiency, cultural background, visual and linguistical clues.
- Cultural differences must be reflected in advertising because an advertisement can only be most effective on the consumer buying behavior when it connects best with the consumers’ expectations and desires.

These elements justify the use of television advertisements as a tool to explore the culture of the target language. The author seeks to answer the following questions in the study:

1. Do students of the German language detect cultural content in German television commercials?
2. If students of the German language detect cultural content in German television commercials, which cultural values have they discovered?
3. What are the similarities or differences in the cultural values detected in German television commercials by students of the German language and by native German speakers?

3.0. Past studies on cultural values

Sillars (1991) stated that “arguments in advertising will be proven effective when they clearly express or indicate values that are important to the viewers. Hence, advertisers have to focus on the consumers’ interests, desires and aims which reflect their cultural values” (Mueller 1987; Pollay & Gallagher 1990).

Already in 1943, Maslov had stated in his 'Theory of Human Motivation' a hierarchy of needs that reflected a country's level of development. The products that serve one's personal and social needs are considered higher in the hierarchy compared to the products that serve physiological needs. In the search for a classification of cultural values numerous research projects were carried out.

In 1962, Singh and Huang reported that American advertisements did not work in India due to them not grasping the Indian cultural values.

In the 1970's, Rokeach (1973) recognized eighteen essential values that were important for the desired 'end states of existence', whereas another eighteen instrumental values focused on the ways of execution and beliefs that were reflected in the ways of conduct.

In the 1980's, the research focused on the comparison of Western and Eastern commercials in order to compare the two main cultures (Belk et al. 1985; Belk & Pollay 1985; Belk & Bryce 1986). However, the revolutionary coding framework of Pollay (1983) changed the research landscape. He identified 42 cultural values that were prevalent in advertisements and allowed researchers to measure cultural values systematically. Because of the division into 42 values, its application became a bit muddled. Thus, researchers were looking for other ways of classifying cultural values. There were several different approaches over time. They are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Different approaches to cultural content of advertisements

Author	Cultural factor	Elaboration
Hall (1959)	1) <u>Context</u>	
	High Context	Many contextual elements helped people to understand the rules. Consequently, people took too much for granted.
	Low Context	Very little was taken for granted; this required many explanations.
	2) <u>Time</u>	Doing one thing at a time
	Monochronic Time	Doing many things at once
	Polychronic Time	
	3) <u>Space</u>	
	(The need for personal space)	
	High Territoriality	People marked out their territories and disliked it when the boundaries were disturbed.
	Low Territoriality	People shared their territories and ownerships.
Hofstede (1982)	Model of four dimensions of culture:	
	1) Individualism	An individual and his/her rights was more important than groups that they might belong to. This was the extent to which less

	2) Power Distance	powerful people expected and accepted unequal power distribution (Top-down control). This is was the extent to which a culture values valued predictability.
	3) Uncertainty Avoidance	It focuses focused on the degree to which 'traditional' gender roles were assigned in a culture.
	4) Masculinity	
Trompenaar & Hampdon-Turner	1) Universalism vs. Particularism	Universalism: finding general rules Particularism: finding exceptions Analyzing decomposed to find the details.
	2) Analyzing vs. Integrating	Integrating brought things together to build the big picture. Individualism was about the rights of the individual.
	3) Individualism vs. Communitarianism	Communitarianism was about the rights of the group or society. Inner-directed was about thinking and personal judgement.
	4) Inner-directed vs. Outer-directed	Outer-directed was seeking data in the 'real world' (outer world). Time as sequence: events were seen as separate items in time (a serried array of action). Time as synchronization: events were seen in parallel, as synchronised together.
	5) Time as Sequence vs. Time as Synchronization	Achieved Status: gaining status through performance Ascribed Status: gaining status through other means, such as seniority Equality: all people have equal status, equal rights, irrespective of birth or other gifts.
	6) Achieved Status vs. Ascribed Status	Hierarchy: about people being superior to others.
Mueller 1987	7) Equality vs. Hierarchy Modern vs. Traditional	Modern values: individualism, youth, modernity Traditional values: collectivism, respect for elders, tradition
Cheng & Schweitzer (1996)	Utilitarian vs. Symbolic	Utilitarian values: convenience, economy, quality & effectiveness.

Frith (1998)	Cultural or ideological meaning of the advertisement	Symbolic values: enjoyment, social status. “... depends on the cultural knowledge and background of the reader. We all ‘make sense’ of ads by relating them to our culture and to the shared belief systems held in common by most people” (Firth 1998).
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(Retrieved on 12 June 2012 from http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall_culture.htm;
http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hofstede_culture.htm;
http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/trompenaars_culture.htm;
www.ltconline.net/lukas/gender/background/howto.htm)

In the 1990’s, the focus of research was on the cultural values that were found in one specific product category or in one particular cultural value in advertisements from different countries. According to a study by Tansy et al. (1990) on cultural values in car advertisements in Brazil and the USA, there was strong evidence of different values regarding work, leisure and urban life in both countries. Another study, examining cultural values in advertising, was conducted by Frith and Sengupta (1991). They reported major differences in the use of the value ‘individualism’ in Indian, American and British magazine advertisements.

Another aspect was included in the discussion of cultural content in advertisements by Katz and Lee (1992). They found that in UK and American television commercials, irrespective of how important cultural differences were, the product categories were significant factors for the choice of the advertising format. Zhang and Gelb (1996) reported that the ‘product use’ (product use in public or private) might also be a factor that should be considered. Firth (1998) added into the debate that the whole advertising message was important. Hence, she suggested completing three stages of exploiting advertisements: 1) the Surface Reading, 2) the Advertiser’s Intended Meaning, and 3) the Cultural or Ideological Meaning. The Cultural or Ideological Meaning “...depends on the cultural knowledge and background of the reader. We all ‘make sense’ of ads by relating them to our culture and to the shared belief systems held in common by most people” (Firth 1998: 1).

More recent studies especially on Chinese advertisements revealed that China portrayed a ‘melting pot’ of Eastern and Western cultural values in the course of her ‘Four Modernizations’ program (Chan & Cheng 2002). The research—showed the following five cultural values dominant in Chinese television commercials: modernity, family, tradition, technology and collectivism. The results also indicated the cultural values were highly influenced by the product categories. For example, the service and automobile advertisements correlated often with the ‘modernity’ value. Two years later, Zhang and Harwood (2004) found quality/effectiveness, family, modernity, beauty/youth, and pleasure as the five dominant values. Studies by Zhang, Song and Jensen Carver (2008) on advertisements for older adults produced the following six dominant values: health/life, product effectiveness, family, tradition, education, and pleasure. The researchers also confirmed a relation between cultural values and product categories.

Based on this wide input on how television commercials and the cultural values encoded can be analyzed, the current study addresses whether Malaysian learners of the German language will detect the same cultural information in German television commercials as a native speaker of the German language

would, or whether they will identify different values. Do they decode the signs in a different way compared to a native speaker?

4.0. Methodology

“The vast majority of the existing instruments operationalize culture through values and the data are collected via self-report questionnaires.” (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002, p.369). The researchers reviewed the existing measures of culture and found that they were “fairly consistent in terms of their approach.” According to the reviewers, a self-report survey (SRS) is the most suitable method to obtain data of the construct ‘culture’ and/or ‘cultural values’. The advantage of this method is that the person’s own perspective is displayed. Furthermore, it reflects the person’s own experience.

Thus, this research employed a qualitative research utilizing self-reports. Five students (1 male and 4 females) of the German language proficiency course LAG 300 at the University Sains Malaysia in the first semester of the academic session 2012-2013 were given German television commercials for an analysis on cultural values of the target language culture. Their level of proficiency was equivalent to the first part of level A2 referring to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*.

After a short introduction to the project on German television commercials, a pre-project survey soliciting the respondents’ background information was carried out.

A DVD with 72 German television commercials that were recorded from the German main TV channels (ARD and ZDF) in February 2012 during prime time 8.00 - 10.00 pm. were shown to the respondents. After watching all the advertisements, each student chose one of the advertisements based on the question “In your opinion, which of the German television commercials include cultural messages that could be clearly identified?” The five most frequently mentioned commercials were selected and distributed to the respondents according to their choice.

A sample television commercial (Paulaner Weißbier) was screened and a semiotic analysis was carried out in plenum. Based on this sample, the students developed an observation roster to be used as a guideline for their individual analysis of their selected advertisements.

They compiled their own perspectives towards these advertisements in a self-report identifying and writing about cultural values spotted in the commercial. The respondents also summarized their findings in the form of Power Point presentations. Immediate follow-up questions by the rest of the participants as well as by the researcher enriched their findings with further insights on their perceptions and thoughts of this particular advertisement. The researcher then analyzed the reports according to the detected signs and connotations of the respective respondents. The results were compared with the researcher’s own pre-administered analyses of the five television commercials which set the standard.

4.1. The samples of television commercials

The five TV commercials used in the research are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Samples of Television Commercials (in alphabetical order)

No.	Brand (Type of Product)	Conveyed Message	Cultural Value	German TV Channel	Date of Recording
1.	Adelholzener Mineralwasser (Mineral water) 	Stay young and healthy	Eat healthy food Healthy active lifestyle	ARD	February 2012
2.	Möbelix (Furniture) 	Value for money Buy local products	Effectiveness	ZDF	February 2012
3.	Radeberger Pilsener (Beer) 	Look out for quality and style	Elegance Quality Style	ZDF	February 2012
4.	REWE (Supermarket and the company's own products) 	Enjoy life together with others	Enjoyment Fun Gender Equality	ARD	February 2012
5.	Schärdinger Käse (Cheese) 	Eat healthy food	Healthy lifestyle Gender equality	ARD	February 2012

All logos retrieved on 24 June 2013 from <http://www.google.com>

4.2. The observation roster

The respondents developed the following observation roster as a guideline for the analysis of the television commercials (Table 3). It also assisted the researcher in facilitating the comparison of the report analyses.

Table 3: Observation roster

No.	Item for Observation	Description	Interpretation
1.	Name of product		
2.	Product category		
3.	Product use condition (visible / private setting)		

4. Environment (Setting of the scene)
5. Situation
6. Age
7. Fashion
8. Non-verbal language:
Behavior/ Reaction of people / Body language
9. Verbal language: Language (formal / informal / choice of words)
10. Dominant messages of the commercial
11. Dominant values in the commercial

This observation index included criteria of Nagwa El Gazzar's concept (2004) for analyzing advertisements. El Gazzar combined two frameworks: Leiss, Kline and Jhally's (1990) person-product relationship and Frith's (1998) three stages of reading advertisements. The person-product relationship provided an insight into the connection between the semiological codes, the textual and the visual modes of representation.

4.3. The respondents

The participants [1 male (respondent A) and 4 females (respondents B, C, D and E)] in this project were between 20 and 29 years old. They were all Malaysian citizens but of different ethnicities; Two Malays, two Chinese and one Indian-Chinese. Thus, they came from different cultural backgrounds and lived in a society of different ethnic groups. Malaysia's population consists of three main ethnic groups; the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. So, the respondents were exposed to different languages and culture.

Table 4: Respondents' Characteristics

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E
Sex	male	female	female	female	female
Age	21	20	22	22	29
Descent	Malay	Malay	Chinese	Chinese	Indian-Chinese
First Language	Malay	Malay	Mandarin	English	Cantonese
Duration of Learning German Proficiency	2 years	1.5 years	1.5 years	1.5 years	1 year
Level of German (CEFR)*	A2	A2/1	A2/1	A2/1	A2/B1

Course enrolled USM*	at	Social Science	Translation	Biology	Biology	-
Experiences with the German culture outside the classroom		1 Exchange semester in Nürnberg/Germany	-	German boyfriend	-	Living half of the year in Switzerland and the other half in Malaysia

*) CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

***) USM: Universiti Sains Malaysia

Respondents A and B declared Malay as their first language, whereas respondent C reported Mandarin as her mother tongue. Respondent D denoted English and respondent E Cantonese as their first language.

The duration of German language learning of all respondents was between 1 and 2 years. The proficiency in the German language of the respondents B, C and D was equivalent to the first half of the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Participant A's command of German was higher (A2) because he had learned the language when he spent one semester of the students' exchange program in Germany. Respondent E was a housewife who lived with her Malaysian family in Switzerland during the summer months. In winter she usually returned to Malaysia. Her German language skills were better (A2/B1) compared to the rest of the respondents due to the extensive exposure to the German language, despite a short duration of one year studying in a classroom environment. Similar to respondents A and E, respondent C had an additional exposure to Germany and the German language. She had a German boyfriend and her aim was to go for further studies in Germany in 2013. Respondents B and D did not have personal knowledge of Germany. The course subject of participant B (translation) might have increased her sensitivity towards cultural content in texts as she studied translating cultural aspects in foreign languages. In the pre-project survey she stated that the link between the target language and the culture of the target language country was very important, "because in language, there are cultural-specific concepts that are not translatable to other languages." All respondents regarded *culture* as a *very important* attribute to language learning.

4.4. The German language lecturer

Using the researcher's interpretation of the television commercials as an evaluation benchmark, the researcher's background also had to be scrutinized.

The researcher is a native speaker of German and a lecturer of German-as-a-Foreign language at the Universiti Sains Malaysia. Malaysia has a multicultural society (Malay, Chinese, Indian and other minorities). Thus, the students' population in the German language classroom is multicultural as well. With 14 years teaching experience in Germany and 19 years of teaching practice in Malaysia, the researcher has a rich cultural experience. The personal background of the researcher also supports this impression as she is married to a Malaysian.

5.0. Data Analysis & Findings

5.1. Radeberger Pilsener commercial

Respondent A analyzed the *Radeberger Pilsener* commercial. It involved beer, a product under the category Food & Drink. Table 5 shows the findings of respondent A in his own words as stated in his report.

Table 5: Analysis of the *Radeberger Pilsener* commercial by respondent A

No.	Signifier	Signified	Cultural value depicted in the commercial
<i>Scene 1</i>			
1.	The Dresden Elbe Valley, former World Heritage Site in Dresden, Germany	Excellent quality of water Radeberger Pilsener guaranteed the finest.	Clean Healthy
2.	Background music is representing Radeberg's song	The city is made up the Pilsener beer.	-
<i>Pure Gold</i>			
3.	View towards <i>Hofkirche</i> and <i>Semperoper</i>	Tradition and pomp and circumstance when they (people of Dresden) having a party or celebration It is classical and tradition place where people gathering and enjoy	Keeping up custom and tradition
4.	<i>Brühlscher Garten</i> at the end of <i>Brühl's Terrace</i>	Art – craft – special values of gold – good health People who favour the colour gold are optimistic. Gold is the colour of success, achievement and triumph Symbol of wealth, increased personal power relaxation and enjoyment of life	Classic Protected Proud
5.	Spoken text: <i>Meisterhaft, unnachahmlich, einzigartig und von einer Eleganz, die man jeden Tag neu genießen kann. Radeberger Pilsener: schon immer besonders</i> (Masterly, inimitable, unique and full of elegance which you can enjoy every day anew. Radeberger Pilsener: always been special.)	-	-
<i>Scene 2:</i>			

6.	A man holding (a bottle of) the Radeberger Pilsener He is smiling. He wears a white shirt and black trouser.	The moment we get to experience the quality of this beer Instantly feeling refreshed Feel like appreciate the product, satisfy, proud and luxurious	Clean Healthy
7.	The logo Radeberger sign and signature place	(It) illustrates the organisation's intended branding message in a way that words alone could not convey.	-
8.	The man presenting the beer	That is the way how do people appreciate the beer.	-
9.	The meeting Joyful, cheerful moment while gathering with friends	Pilsner connecting people	Excitement Enjoyment
10.	Tagline: <i>SCHON</i> <i>IMMER</i> <i>BESONDERS</i> (Radeberger Pilsener always special)	-	-

Respondent A concluded with the following statement:

Themes	Cultural Values
Gathering with friends	Keeping up custom and tradition
Fresh	Clean, healthy
Nice view of Dresden	Classic, protected, proud
Fun	Excitement and enjoyment

The respondent's focus was on the cultural values *tradition* and *enjoyment*. At the beginning of his analysis he pointed correctly on Dresden's fantastic art treasures and characterized the scenic view of the historic buildings at the Elbe River as the "Balcony of Europe".

Later on, a man in the commercial wore a black suit and a white shirt. His elegant attire matched the elegance of Dresden's art monuments which he presented proudly. Although the respondent described the situation using the words *luxurious*, *proud*, his emphasis was high on *refreshing*, but low on appreciation of the product (*That was the way how people appreciate the beer.*).

The main clue, the winding staircase and the distribution of the beer in the glass in a similar twist was not identified. This was surprising because the man in the advertisement was presenting the staircase as well as the beer in the same body language. In his conclusion, the respondent did not mention *art* any more. Art as an important part in German life was not given significance. The appreciation of art monuments, art exhibitions, concerts, etc. in Germany is very high and the country spends a huge amount of money to preserve heritage buildings. *The Culture of Taste* – as the Radeberger Pilsener producing company Radeberger Exportbierbrauerei claimed for its beer, implying the beer ought to be enjoyed consciously similar to enjoying the arts.

The respondent is a member of the university's Jazz Band and therefore interested in music. He identified the title of the song *Pure Gold* that underlined the images in gold colour and words with expressions in the superlative.

5.2. *Möbelix* commercial

Respondent B reviewed the *Möbelix* commercial. It represented the household product category (other than household appliances), the example being furniture. Table 6 illustrates the findings of respondent B in her own words as stated in her report.

Table 6: Analysis of the *Möbelix* commercial by respondent B

No.	Signifier	Signified	Concluded cultural value depicted in the commercial
<i>Scene 1:</i>			
1.	The dawn sky	The time the hunters usually do their activities The company that takes action first before any other competitor, e.g.: lowering their price first	-
2.	The <i>Möbelix</i> man wears <i>Loden</i> . It is Bavarian and Austrian traditional clothing worn by the hunters to withstand the cold temperature up at the mountain. It is made from sheep's wool and is water-resistant.		-
3.	The pine trees: Pine trees make up most of their park's scenery	Contextually they represent other companies that are competing against <i>Möbelix</i> and the height significantly refers to their products' high price compared to <i>Möbelix</i> 's.	-
4.	The air rifle The oldest known rifle was invented around 1780 by an		-

- Austrian, named Girandoni of Vienna. Contextually, it represents the finest mean of a weapon to ‘slow’ down a prey’s movement (rate).
5. *Der Hochsitz* (The raised hide) -
The hut that is used by the hunters to watch for their preys. It is usually located at a clearing in the forest and built at a high place to make it easy for them to target their prey.
- Scene 2:*
6. Tree stumps - Low price that *Möbelix* offers, it gives no protection against the evil high price and the hunter stops shooting until the evil high price contains only one ‘zero’ (small price) of his body
7. The deer-shaped high price - The prey for the hunter and also the high price of a product
8. The zero shape - The number ‘zero’ in the price, the hunter shoots the body one by one to make it shorter (cheaper)
9. The grassy evil deer-shaped body on the ground - The company’s discount for their products for a long time (since the grass starts to develop on the zero numbers)
- Scene 3:*
10. *Das Halali* (Death halloo): Marking the ritual end of a hunt. In war context, it signifies the fastest way of conveying the message to the other people due to its loudness. - The *Möbelix* man wants to tell everyone that they have the lowest price.
11. The *Möbelix* man wearing the usual superhero costume in red and blue - The *Möbelix* man is strong enough to fight an evil price that’s coming to their way (their product will always be cheaper than other companies).

12. The *Möbelix*'s logo:
The 'Umlaut' at the letter o becomes eyes. They will always do a lookout on the prices of similar products they produce in market to ensure that their price is always lower than others.
- The X that is on the uniform and also at the end of their name can be associated with the cartoon *Asterix* which the suffix *-ix* is derived from the names of real Gaulish chieftains (wants to lead)
13. The displayed text: *KOST FAST NIX!* (COSTS ALMOST NOTHING!) Their motto shows how cheap they sell their products to their customers, even dared to use a motto that brags that much about their products' low price.

The respondent illustrated in her report's signifiers and signified columns those facts that she found in the analyzed commercial. The signified column failed to detect cultural values. The analysis stopped at the identification of the signified.

The similarity to the Asterix cartoon was unveiled but the meaning of *Loden* as the fabric from the alpine area was not discovered. The colour scheme was not elaborated.

5.3. *Adelholzener Mineralwasser* commercial

The *Adelholzener Mineralwasser* commercial was analyzed by respondent C. The advertisement portrayed mineral water, a product under the category Food & Drink. Table 7 shows the findings of respondent C in her own words as stated in her report.

Table 7: Analysis of the *Adelholzener Mineralwasser* commercial by respondent C

No.	Signifier	Signified	Cultural value depicted in the commercial
<i>Scene 1:</i>			
1.	Snow covered Bavarian Alps	Source of the Adelholzener mineral water	-
2.	A man performing ski and free falling off the cliff in a wing suit.	Free, active and lively attitude towards life. The chosen sport skiing correlates back to the original source of the water, which is	Extreme sport (exciting and dangerous sports) Carefree, actively engaging with nature, lively and active

- from the Bavarian Alps. lifestyle
- Scene 2:*
3. The ski man knocks into the Adelholzener mineral water bottle. The moment you get to experience the taste of this water, you are instantly feeling refreshed. You feel like entering the pure and untouched mountains of the Bavarian Alps once you tasted the water.
 4. The ski man is getting out of the Adelholzner mineral water bottle. Trying to imply the refreshing feeling you get after drinking the water Refreshment of the body after performing an extreme sport Health consciousness
 5. Introducing another series of the company's products, which is called Active O₂ Refreshment for active living Active lifestyle
 6. Backdrop and action chosen Emphasis on the original source of the water as well as it is an ideal companion for sports
 7. Bubbles in the water There are 10 x more oxygen in Active O₂ than in ordinary mineral water
 8. *Spoken text:*
Respondent's Transcript:
 Active O₂ - die Natürlich Adelholzener Mineral Wasser aus den bei Hochsten Alpen
Correct version:
Active O₂ – das natürliche Adelholzener Mineralwasser aus den Bayerischen Alpen
 (Active O₂ – the natural Adelholzener mineral water from the Bavarian Alps)
 Active O₂
 Refreshment for active living
 Enriched with an extra of calcium, magnesium or vitamin B12 to strengthen bones, muscles and your immune system
 The natural Adelholzener Promoting the product

mineral water

From the Bavarian Alps

Marking the product as a German product

9. *The Logo:*

Snow covered Bavarian Alps

Product brand *Adelholzener Alpenquellen*

Origin of the water source -
Adelholzern is the name of a -
 therapeutic bath that dates
 back to the old Bavarian time.
 The name was adopted with
 the meaning of healing water.
Alpen means The Alps, while
quellen means the source of
 water. Thus *Alpenquellen*
 means the source of water is
 from the Alps.

Colours of small flag:
 red and white

Same colour as the usual -
 German pharmacy symbol.
 The water has the same
 healing power as to the
 normal understanding of the
 healing power that one can
 get from the pharmacy.

Three white stripes in the flag

Flow of water which
 correlates back to the original
 source of the water that flow -
 from the Bavarian Alps.

Respondent C concluded with the following statement:

Themes	Cultural Values
Performing sports in the Bavarian Alps	Engage with nature
Skiing and free falling with winged suit from high point	Try out new and exciting things
Refreshing	Looking for a healthy lifestyle
The whole advertisement itself	Excitement and enjoyment

In her analysis the respondent focused on the main elements *excitement* and *enjoyment*. The factors *engagement with nature* and *healthy lifestyle* were identified. Regarding the backdrop and the logo, the respondent could not link them to cultural values.

The connotation of the colours white, blue and red was not seen clearly by the respondent. White and red were connected with the German  pharmacy sign, a permitted conclusion as the water was well known for its healing effect. Furthermore, the sign for *Apotheke* (German word for Pharmacy/ pharmaceutical shop) was introduced to the respondents in the previous semester in the course of the topic *In town*.

In the Adelholzener mineral water commercial the three colours appeared in the logo (red/white), in the background (white/blue) and in the skiing man's winged dress (red/blue). The colours red and blue reminded of the Superman suit which was one of the intended connotations. The mineral water gave the consumer *The Pure Power of the Alps* (Tagline on the Adelholzener Alpenquellen homepage <http://www.adelholzener.de/en/>) needed to gain not merely more energy for sports, but also for taking action to go after one's dreams with confidence and to protect from fears and anxieties all indicated by the colour red. (Retrieved on 24 June 2013 from <http://crystal-cure.com/red.html>). The respondent connected Superman mainly with *excitement/extreme sports* and *enjoyment*.

A second meaning, that of religious belief, was connected to the background of the company. Bavaria is a German state that built on strong spirituality of the catholic belief. The company Adelholzener Alpenquellen is owned by the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. The logo illustrated celestial bodies, mountains and the shape of a half circle above them, surrounded by a white glowing frame and the sun depicted in the form of a bright white star. These signs stood for the glory of God and His creation to the Catholics. That was also the reason why the colour white – instead of the usual blue – was chosen for the water symbol in the heraldic sign of the logo. The red ground was derived from the cardinal red, the color worn by a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church (Retrieved on 14 June 2013 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red>). Red also stood for life, vitality and enthusiasm, but it also could mean danger. These meanings were well in the context. The heraldic sign functioned as a shield in front of the mountains and the pure white snow to protect the source of the pure and healing water from disturbances, e.g. pollution. In this spiritual context, it connoted that the future of the nature reserve, in which the company operated its wells, was in God's will.

White and blue are the colours of the Bavarian state. Its anthem goes - *Gott mit dir, du Land der Bayern...Und erhalte dir die Farben seines Himmels, weiß und blau!... und den alten Ruhm bewähre unser Banner, weiß und blau!...* (God be with you, land of the Bavarians...And preserve for you the colours of His sky, white and blue!... And the old splendour stands the test with our Banner, white and blue!...) (Retrieved on 24 June 2013 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayernhymne>). The white-blue sky above Bavaria is reflected in the Bavarian flag and cannot be replaced with a blue-white sky. This placed another emphasis on the statement *The Pure Power of the Alps*. As Adelholzen is located in Bavaria, it was clearly understood that the Bavarian Alps were the mountains meant in this tagline. Hence, the slogan *Enjoy a true piece of Bavaria* (Retrieved on 24 June 2013 from <http://www.adelholzener.de/en/>) meant to say that consumers “are instantly entering the pure and untouched mountains of the Bavarian Alps whenever they drink this water”, as the respondent aptly concluded in her report.

The aspect of *engaging with nature* was only concerned sports but not with environmental consciousness which was very close to religious elements and business aspects. It implied that

environmental protection was crucial because “*Nature provides us with the precious basic ingredient for all our products – Adelholzener mineral water. Our actions are therefore driven by social responsibility, sustainability and environmental awareness*” (Retrieved on 24 June 2013 from <http://www.adelholzener.de/en/the-company/>).

5.4. REWE commercial

Respondent D analyzed the *REWE* commercial. It depicted snacks and drinks under the product category of Food & Drink. Table 8 shows the findings of respondent D in her own words as stated in her report.

Table 8: Analysis of the *REWE* commercial by respondent D

No.	Signifier	Signified	Cultural value depicted in the commercial
<i>Scene 1</i>			
1.	The doorbell rings and a man opens the door. He has a disappointed look on his face when a few women walk into the house.	Ordinary home	Women and men equality No signs of gender discrimination
2.	One of the tells him “...sprechen Sie nicht so laut!” (Don’t talk so loudly!) while tapping him on the face.	The woman is asking him to keep his voice low during the women’s gathering.	Women and men equality
3.	The women (a group of 5) settle down in the living room. Women gather and watch football intently while consuming plenty of snacks and drinking champagne.	Quality time to themselves	Independence of women
4.	They cheer loudly when a goal is scored.	Women enjoy football	Patriotism
5.	They are puzzled when they hear louder cheers from outside. They see a big group of males celebrating outside.	Men enjoy football	Men and women, both enjoy football regardless of gender Patriotism

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 6. | The women painted their cheeks in the colours: black, red and yellow.
The men are wearing scarfs in the colours of the German flag. | Colours of the German flag

Patriotism |
| 7. | One of the men is drinking orange juice. | Healthy lifestyle |
-

The respondent identified correctly the cultural values, gender equality and football, integral parts in German life that brought patriotism to the foreground. Some signifiers were not recognized clearly.

The scene took place in an ordinary home stating only that the venue was a normal residence in Germany. It was not indicated that it was an apartment with a balcony. The unit had a corridor-like hallway unlike a common Malaysian apartment where people enter directly into the living room when they open the main door.

The fact that men and women were watching a football match separately was not especially questioned by the respondent. The reason given was that women claimed quality time for themselves as in Malaysia. Furthermore, in Malaysian culture the gender separation is quite normal hence this not being an issue for the respondent to mention.

Although the annual German beer consumption per person is on the decline, drinking alcohol is a common practice in Germany. Despite this, the role of alcohol was not raised. The respondent merely mentioned *The group of five women was seen consuming junk food and champagne while watching the football match and a man was seen holding a glass of orange juice*. The respondent did not identify Thomas Müller, a famous German football player, as the orange juice drinker. Health awareness plays an important role in Germany; especially among sportsmen.

The women drank alcohol as part of the routine when at a gathering. It is a common practice to serve alcohol in appreciation of guests and when gathering with friends. However not all women like to drink the common beer, most prefer wine or champagne. In this commercial, champagne was the choice because the women were celebrating *their* women football team's victory.

The women watched the match separately from the men because the National women football team was playing a masculine sport. This proved that not only men can play rough sports. The group of women gave the female players special support to emphasize on their team spirit and ambition.

The respondent found correctly that football was a unifier in this commercial. Despite this, the respondent did not see the real reason for the separation of men and women in this advertisement. In actual fact, the women thought the men were not interested in women football. This also explained why the women *were puzzled* when they heard the men cheering. The girls did not expect the men to be interested in women football. Thus showing that women were still feeling a bit inferior despite gender equality in Germany. In the end, *football as unifier* worked not only among famous football players (Thomas Müller and Lukas Podolski), but also among men and women, the ordinary people.

In addition, the cultural values implied in the signifier column (football), excitement and enjoyment, were not clearly stated by the respondent.

5.2. *Schärddinger Joghurtkäse* commercial

Respondent E reviewed the *Schärddinger Joghurtkäse* commercial in the product category Food & Drink, the example being food. Table 9 illustrates the findings of respondent E in her own words as stated in her report.

Table 9: Analysis of the *Schärddinger Joghurtkäse* commercial by respondent E

No.	Signifier	Signified	Concluded cultural value depicted in the commercial
<i>Scene 1:</i>			
1.	Charlie Chaplin He is pushing a woman down.	Society of the past Domination of man over woman	Gender domination of man over woman
<i>Scene 2:</i>			
2.	Modern woman eating cheese while watching television Dark background	The lifestyle now of common culture of watching television At night	-
3.	Audio: Woman is giggling	Fun	Humour and enjoyment
4.	Cheese	Tradition of eating cheese in Germany	Tradition
<i>Scene 3:</i>			
5.	Charlie Chaplin was kicked by a man for his action of pushing the woman down.	Domination over woman was not accepted by certain society even in the past.	-
6.	Audio: Surprise music	A change or a surprise	-
<i>Scene 4:</i>			
7.	Woman on a sofa eating and laughing	Comfort and enjoyment	Enjoyment
7.	Furniture: old fashion	Tradition	Tradition
8.	Audio: different music	Disturbance	-
9.	A man's belly moving across the room blocking the television Woman is trying to move to continue watching television.	The man is trying to get the woman attention or trying to disturb. She doesn't want to be disturbed. She prefers to watch television than looking at the man.	- Woman does not allow gender domination
<i>Scene 5:</i>			
10.	Dressing of the man: man only clad in a towel with a knowing smile walking towards a door	He is trying to get the woman's attention and interest.	-
11.	Spoken text: <i>Ich hab' gedacht, am Abend soll man nichts mehr</i>	The man is giving advice to the woman.	Domination over woman Healthy eating

Schweres essen. (I thought that in the evening you shouldn't eat anything heavy.)

Scene 6:

12. Woman's facial expression The woman is annoyed and not happy for him disturbing her comfort and also disagrees with the advice.

Scene 7:

13. Man's expression: He wants her to finish eating and follow him to the other room.
He turns and looks at the woman with a grin. He thought he had her attention. Gender domination

Scene 8:

14. Woman's expression: She disagrees with him and will not follow him. Woman does not allow gender domination
She continues eating. She would not allow domination of man over a woman.
She wants to continue doing what she was doing.
Audio: Change of music Ending or conclusion

15. Spoken text: She knows that (what the man advised her before) but one can still eat but with a healthy choice. Woman does not allow gender domination
Soll man auch nicht. (Still one should not.)

Scene 9:

16. Cheese and grapes Traditional food Tradition
Healthy way of eating

17. Logo on box of cheese: Common image for slimming or weight control products Healthy way of eating
Measuring tape

18. Spoken text: Fresh and healthy Fresh and healthy food
Milch Frisch und fettreduzierten Die Joghurt Käse, die schlanke Linie von Schärddinger.)Fresh milk and fat reduced

Scene 10:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|------------|
| 19. | Textual:
<i>Mit Schärddinger lässt sich's leichter leben.</i> (Living the lighter way with Schärddinger.) | Weight control | - |
| 20. | Logo:
Measuring tape
Company logo
Weight watchers' logo | Promoting weight control

American-based international company that uses a science driven approach to help participants lose weight by forming helpful habits, eating smarter, getting more exercise and providing support. | -

- |

Respondent E concluded with the advertisement's emphasis on "a change in culture" and "keeping a tradition but in a better way". She concluded with two items the term *change in culture*, namely a change in the gender roles and a change in eating habits.

Regarding gender roles, the commercial portrayed an independent, self-conscious young woman. The respondent proved this statement with her description and interpretation. *The woman's facial expression and her action of continuing eating signified that she disagreed with the man and did not follow him. She also wanted to continue what she was doing. This signified that she did not allow domination of a man over a woman.* She also stated *Soll man auch nicht* (Still one should not.) *This showed that she knew about the fact but she was of the opinion that one can still eat with a healthy choice.* The man showed with his body language and facial expression that he was quite sure that *he had her attention. He wanted her to finish eating and follow him to the other room. This signified gender domination.*

With regard to eating habits, the respondent identified the signifiers and signified precisely and concluded that *Healthy lifestyle* was a cultural value (*German culture as fresh and healthy food!*). Hence, the tagline *Mit Schärddinger lässt sich's leichter leben* (Living the lighter life with Schärddinger!) was interpreted correctly: *This placed emphasis on weight control characteristics of the product.*

The respondent did not look at colour schemes in this commercial.

6.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that respondents (A, C and E) who had been to Germany before were better equipped with decoding skills to apply on the signs that were present in the German television commercials compared to respondents (B and D) without personal German experiences. Nevertheless, respondents B and D managed to read the signs correctly. However, although respondent B studied semiotics in her translation course, she could not perform the next step, that was to conclude on cultural values based on her findings. Respondent D, whose only exposure to Germany was the German language course, did not feel comfortable discussing the alcohol issue openly and did not fine-tune her results.

It can be finalized that the respondents in this research were able to detect the main cultural values in the German television commercials, but not all the details. The cultural values discovered were: *Active lifestyle – Enjoyment - Gender equality/Change towards reinforcing gender equality in daily life – Healthy lifestyle – Patriotism – Tradition.*

However, the following items were either overlooked or less intensively discussed by the respondents.

1. The landscape and the environment, the whole setting of the scene was often taken as the necessary venue of the commercial only. The connotation was not provided.
2. Colour schemes were not or only partly discussed. The meaning of white/blue in the Bavarian context was already discussed in the sample commercial *Paulaner Weißbier*, however it was not analyzed in the commercial *Adelholzener Mineralwasser*. Possible reasons might be that the respondents did not find it important to mention cultural values and/or that they were uncertain about the meaning of colours in a culture different from their own.
3. Although research was done by the respondent, the spirituality factor could not be detected in the commercial *Adelholzener Mineralwasser*. Possible reasons could be that Malaysians ~~like~~ prefer action movies and are already accustomed to this way of selective perception and thinking.
4. The company logos were not discussed or not elaborated in detail. This showed the respondents' uncertainty in decoding the signs. Majority of the respondents were not used to the topic of *semiotics*.
5. Spoken and/or written text in two of the five analyses was not commented on, although it was translated into English by the respondent. This implied the respondent understood the words, but apparently could not connect them to the topics *signified* and *cultural values*.
6. Art is not yet much appreciated by some respondents in Malaysia. With the declaration of Georgetown as UNESCO World Heritage Site, the perception towards arts and heritage is now slowly changing and the sense of appreciation is improving.
7. The issue 'alcohol' was treated differently by the respondents. While respondent A (a Muslim) had no problem working on the beer advertisement, respondent D (a Christian) reacted more reluctantly to this topic. This showed that most probably there was an uncertainty in respondent D to voice out her thoughts openly as alcohol is strictly prohibited for Muslims in Malaysia where the official religion is Islam. It was assumed that she did not want to touch this sensitive topic to avoid offending Muslim classmates and the teacher. The frankness of respondent A could be attributed to his one-semester-stay in Germany and to his core subject social science.
8. Respondent A commented on the scene, when a man was presenting the beer, with the statement "*That is the way how do people appreciate the beer*". This phrase automatically triggered the question: was it different from people of other countries/cultures? If the answer is YES, in which way and why? This question leads back to the beginning of this paper and makes clear the main problem of this research: the respondents recognized the key points but did not scrutinize their findings. Is this the general working attitude of the generation Y or is it due to the lack of suitable instruments to measure cultural values? In the researcher's opinion, both aspects are part of a network of different factors. One of them is the degree of cultural awareness that is much associated with the personality of the individual.
9. The question whether the respondents with a multicultural background are in general more sensitive to cultural values of other cultures cannot be answered in this research because of the specific characteristics of the respondents. A future research project with Malaysian students without previous exposure to the German culture could assist to solve this problem.

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