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The perception and influence of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class

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The Perception and Influence of Global Brands on the Cultural Values of Malaysia's Middle Class

By

Mohd. Adnan Hashim

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

March 2008

Supervisor: Professor Peter Golding
Department of Social Sciences

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Department of Social Sciences

Advertising
Cultural meaning transfer
Globalisation
Global brands
Malay culture
Malay-Islam
Malaysia
Malaysia's middle class
Malaysian culture
Western lifestyle

This thesis is specially dedicated to my wife and children for their
overwhelming sacrifice and patience.

Acknowledgements

From the moment in time when I officially started as a doctoral student at the Social Sciences Department of Loughborough University on October 3, 2002 until the end of this thesis in late 2007, I have been indebted to many people for their support and cooperation. Then again, it would not be possible for me to recollect everyone's name. Therefore, the following names are those that have never escaped from my memory.

First and foremost, a loving thanks to my dear wife Hayati and our children Hilal, Arisha and Haikal for their undivided sacrifice and constant encouragement to guarantee this successful journey of achieving a doctoral degree.

A special thanks is fitting to my respected thesis supervisor, Professor Peter Golding for providing me with valuable supervision and advice. He has certainly done a great job of rigorously scrutinising my texts and returning me pages of corrections and suggestions which have resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of this thesis.

Many thanks to Ms Ann Tanner, the Head of Department's Secretary for never failing to ascertain that I get to see and meet up with Professor Golding whenever I needed to. Not to forget, my thanks also go to Ms Deirdre Lombard, the Clerical Officer for Postgraduate and Research who would continually prompt me on the administrative requirements of the department throughout my days as a research student at the University.

Several people had played crucial roles in the collection of data which was conducted in Malaysia. I am especially thankful to my friends Rajib Ghani and Azami who were the key research intermediaries for this study. They helped me search, select and recruit participants for the eleven focus group discussions. I am also appreciative for their assistance in choosing and confirming the participation of respondents for the q-sort technique. My thanks also go to my ex-students Zalia and Leen for sparing their time to lend a hand to recruit some of the participants and to provide me with the latest statistical

data on Malaysia's middle class consumers, respectively. Additionally, I value greatly the support provided by Raymee, Yasir and Ikhwan who acted as my assistants during the eleven focus group discussions. They facilitated arrangements for the execution of all of the focus group sessions; tape recorded every session and acted as note takers to back up the audiotape recordings. Many thanks to Shafinas for videotaping three of the sessions and to Amy for assisting me to transcribe a number of the sessions. I am also grateful to Azman Zainal and Dr. Azizul Halim Yahya for lending me their cars to necessitate travel convenience, ensuring the smooth execution of my research work.

After completion of data collection and data transcription which took almost one year, I was back in Loughborough to analyse the data and continue the write-up. During the final 12 months of my stay in Loughborough without my family, I am touched by the kindness offered by fellow Malaysian friends, Rahmat Ghazali and his family in Leicester and Zulkipli Abu Bakar and his family in Loughborough. I am deeply indebted to them for keeping me company whenever I feel lonely and for inviting me to savour delicious meals at their homes. I would also like to thank my other Malaysian friends in Loughborough University for their companionship, in particular Nasarudin for sharing a lot of valuable information with me with regards to my thesis topic.

I cannot leave Loughborough without mentioning and thanking some of the other people I have met who made my stay memorable. They are: Ian Taylor, my roommate at the University; Im Joon, another fellow PhD student; Moses, John and Alison, the three nice people I got acquainted with; Sue and her husband Adrian who were friendly caretakers of the studio flat that I lived in while my family was away; and lastly to my resident neighbour, Ozhan.

Thesis Abstract

As a developing nation that embraces the global economic policy, the succession of cultural transformation of the Malaysian society has been quite evident. Additionally, the nation's consistent economic growth and stable political situation which encouraged the massive inflow of goods from the West and the establishment of multinational corporations have been instrumental in the creation of a consumerist society amongst the population. This situation becomes more explicit with the rise in the number of Malaysia's middle class community who are vigorously occupied with contemporary economic activities in industry and services. Alongside their relative affluence in lifestyle and consumption patterns is the progression of the media's role as major instruments for advertisements and the display of consumer goods. While this thesis accepts the significant role of advertisements as an important facilitator of Western cultural lifestyles, it is focussed on unearthing the sensitivity and magnitude of influence of Western global brands on the cultural values of the various sub-segments of Malaysia's middle class population.

To establish the scale of impact of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's diverse middle class community, the focus group discussions was employed as a major research technique whilst the q-sort technique was engaged as a complementary research approach. The focus group method comprised nine purpose-constructed and two special-interest groups. Participants were separated according to economic levels, locality and age groups. While each of the nine groups consists a mixture of the three major ethnic groups of Malay, Chinese and Indian male and female who were either single or married, the two other groups were exclusively *folk urbanites* and females respectively. In every focus group discussion, the participants were examined on three major components: firstly, their perception on global brands in relation to advertisement impact, brand attitude and buying behaviour; secondly, their attitudes towards Malaysian cultural values and Western lifestyles and, thirdly analysis is of the extent of influence of the global brands on their daily lives. As for the q-sort technique, it is conducted specifically to identify the thinking patterns of Malaysia's middle class segment according to similarity of attitudes, opinions and viewpoints in relation to their perception of global brands.

The results from this thesis explain that Western global brands are given very high regard by the multiethnic middle class community in Malaysia. Also, although total Westernization does not occur, Malaysia's middle class citizens are generally won over by the depiction of Western lifestyles and the "universal" cultural elements in the advertisements. Then again, the effect on Western cultural values as represented in the global advertisements can be divided into two broad categories, specifically Malay and non-Malay factor and urban Malay and provincial Malay concern. The non-Malays being non-Muslims were more open in accepting Western values than the Malays whilst the urban Malays were more prepared to accept Western cultural elements that they deem suitable compared to their provincial counterparts. In all, it is safe to infer that the "universal" Western influence of technology, education and media exposure blended with the Malaysian values of politeness, cooperation and friendship, spiced up with the Malay-Islam version of respect for differing worldviews are Malaysia's cultural challenge in getting the best mix of local uniqueness and global uniformity.

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AFTA: ASEAN Free Trade Area	31
ASN: Amanah Saham Nasional	97
ASB: Amanah Saham Bumiputra	97
APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation	31
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nation	31, 73
FCCP: Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning	3, 44, 104, 105
FDI: Foreign Direct Investment	1, 56, 66, 67, 68, 71, 72, 107
FIC: Foreign Investment Committee	73
GCI: Global Competitive Index	71
GDP: Gross Domestic Product	56, 71, 99
GSP: Generalized System of Preferences	71
IMF: International Monetary Fund	70
LCCP: Local Consumer Culture Positioning	3, 44, 104, 105
LSEs: Large Scale Corporations	71, 72
MCA: Malayan Chinese Association	58
MIC: Malayan Indian Congress	58
NDP: National Development Policy	59, 60, 67, 93
NEP: New Economic Policy	56, 58, 59, 60, 66, 67, 87, 93, 95, 96, 131
NGO: Non Governmental Organization	88
NVP: National Vision Policy	67
PAS: Malaysian Islamic Party	63, 64, 97
SMEs: Small Medium Sized Enterprises	72, 402
TNCs: Transnational Corporations	31, 32, 71
UMNO: United Malays National Organisation	58, 64, 84, 89, 97
VCRs: Video Cassette Recorders	72
WTO: World Trade Organisation	31
Y2K: Year 2000	70

Chapter One

Introduction

As one of Asia's most stable developing nations, Malaysia's growing economy is very much dependent on global trade and investments. Between the late 1980s and late 1990s, with the continuous establishment of multinational corporations in the country, Malaysia became one of Asia's top beneficiaries of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) (Economic Report, 2005). Complementing the growth of multinational corporations, the nation's globally-influenced economy has also resulted in the setting up of Western based financial institutions and new communications technology which arguably have brought about economic advantages to the nation. Alongside these rapid global economic advancements, Malaysia has indeed been increasingly integrated economically and socially into the wider world by way of activities and interconnections of all kinds that transcend national boundaries. These developments have gradually transformed the social and cultural life of Malaysians in general.

In recent years, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the benefits and disadvantages of globalisation to developing societies. While an eminent scholar in globalism, Anthony Giddens (1990) refers to globalisation as an extension of modernity for the developing countries, Tomlinson (1999) argues that it is a new phase of imperialism. On the other hand, DeSoya and O'neal (1999) contend that in the long-run, a developing country which embraces the economic system of global trade and investment would be able to progress expeditiously and ensure the well-being of its population for the simple reason that the global economy encourages business activities and transactions amongst many countries. This is aligned with Sklair's (2001) contention that the globalising developed countries extend their accomplishments by sharing their business strategies with the developing countries.

On the contrary, Hirst and Thompson (1996:170) were critical of globalisation for demeaning the importance and competence of the developing nation-states to manage their own economy and state authority. More importantly, another scholar Manuel Castells (1999) contends that although globalisation allows a developing country like

Malaysia to progress economically because its production systems would be modernized and as a result become more competitive, he warns that it is also capable of suppressing the nation's cultural values. He adds that the cultural life of the nation-state is interpreted as of little or no value to the developed Western nation. According to him multinational corporations, global financial markets and the latest technological inventions of the West are crucial tools to link each and every dominant value and belief systems to the member nation.

Hence, economic globalisation would automatically result in cultural globalisation, and this continuous process, as indicated above, has a strong tendency to provide for the prevalence of the dominant culture, which in this case is Western culture. On this issue, Chan and Ma (2002) indicate that because cultures would eventually link up as their progress integrates globally and as cultural exchanges broaden over time, a hybridised and globalised culture would ultimately emerge. The question is, if cultural practices of the local population will reduce in importance, could not a new hybridized global culture work together to benefit the local population?

At this juncture, it is pertinent to mention Robertson's (1995) claim that conceptually, global and local work hand in hand. This is because if local is not incorporated into global, there is a glaring tendency that it would pose a strong resistance to the forces of globalisation. This situation explains the idea of localisation of global production, marketing, distribution and consumption of global goods. As the global and local provides for one another, the restrictions between them become vague and the notion of a "genuine" local culture is continually being redefined. According to Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000), the interconnections and recontextualisation of the cultures within Western cultures would lead to creolized local products such as those found in food, music or clothes.

One of the ways in which a universal culture that combines global and local elements are developed is by way of global media advertisements, in particular television commercials which have the power of sight, sound and motion. Because global advertisements are among a small variety of communication that are universally shared, television commercials become essential tools that are seen as capable of

moving freely across national boundaries to market global brands which in the process are promoting a global culture.

It must be emphasised that the global culture that has crept into the lives of the developing societies today is predominantly one rooted in Anglo-American values which have established themselves into the global world markets by means of media promotion of consumer goods (Tomlinson, 1999) since the last century.

In relation to this aspect, Foxall, Goldsmith and Brown (1994) indicate that the consumption of goods is derived from the acquisition of social and psychological values transmitted in the media advertisements. As an example, when the media promote a certain brand of car, the consumers purchase them not simply because they make efficient transportation possible but for the social status and prestige they confer on their owners. Similarly, when making a purchase decision for clothes, one does not buy simply for body warmth or protection but also for the more possible reasons such as the clothes' style, colour and quality which connote or indicate the wearer's status, group affiliations, self-image and attitude. And these lifestyle factors provide the reputation for the product which global marketers have cleverly linked with the product's brand name, making it an important reason for consumers' buying decision. Branded goods, in other words, have symbolic value as well as use value.

Aligned with the rapid pace of globalisation, global advertisers have today developed a well-thought idea of transmitting cultural meanings using global advertisements by using two main approaches, which Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) categorised as Local Consumer Culture Positioning (LCCP) and Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP). While the LCCP associates the Western global brand with local cultural meanings that mirror the local traditions of the consumers, the FCCP transfers the cultural meanings in the global advertisement outright in its original Western form to consumers outside the Western world. And by and large, consumers of global brands comprise mainly the middle class population, normally defined as the educated and informed professionals and those holding white collar jobs. More importantly, they are regarded as the "new rich" (Robison and Goodman, 1996) who have the market capacity to buy popular brand name products to keep up with the latest trend.

In fact, based on Howes's study (1996) the local populace prefer imported products and are receptive with the cultural life that come with them.

At the present moment, the continuous economic growth in Malaysia coupled with strong demand for the consumption of global brands has made its multi-ethnic middle class population who have the monetary means to consume, a more sophisticated consumer public than before. The constant influx of high quality global products and wide-ranging choice of goods such as brand name clothes, cosmetics, new cars and a host of other brand names into the Malaysian market is a major factor for the increase in consumption of the middle class consumers. With the steady promotion of global brand names in Malaysia's satellite television, its five terrestrial television networks, close to 100 dailies and weeklies and other traditional and newly introduced media, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the cultural impact of Western globalisation on the minds of its middle class group. It is therefore not surprising that the issue of global advertisements and culture has received considerable critical attention amongst social science scholars (see Holden, 2001; Marieke de Mooij, 1998).

As a research student with a background in communication and advertising, I find it challenging to explore the impact of global advertising of Western brand names in relation to two key components, namely cultural values and the varied middle class community, which are important determinants in the formation of the cultural identity of a developing country like Malaysia.

Taking into account the constant bombardment of promotion for global brands in the Malaysian media, particularly the television networks, this study will explore if there is a strong correlation between global brands and the changing cultural lifestyles of Malaysia's multi-ethnic and varied middle class community. In other words, it would attempt to address the issue of whether the minds of the various sub-segments of Malaysia's middle class community are slowly being transformed with Western sets of thinking based on what they see and hear from the global brands advertised in the media, television in particular. For instance, have their eating habits and their social behaviours changed? And if there are changes, do the influences in Western values lead to the neglect or decay of Malaysian traditional values? Additionally, this study

would also explore other factors including their consumption habits. For instance, I would like to find out the underlying reason for the middle class person to buy a certain product of their choice. Are Malaysia's middle class consumers similar to those described by Solomon in his book entitled *Consumer Behaviour: Buying Having and Being* (1996), which theorizes that in general, consumers buy products not for their functional purpose alone but also to impress others and raise the buyer's social status? In this study, the focus is on two major dimensions: firstly, how global brands are perceived among the various middle class sub-groups in Malaysia and secondly, the extent of influence of global brands on the cultural values among Malaysia's middle class sub-groups with emphasis on their lifestyles and consumption patterns.

This thesis will trace the exposure of Malaysia's middle class segment to advertisements found in the Malaysian media with a special focus on television commercials. In short, while the study will probe the perceptions and influence of Malaysia's middle class community based on their exposure to the various media, television commercials on global brands will be exposed to them during the study so that they will be instantly reminded of what they have been exposed to. The underlying reason for using television commercials as a major instrument is due to their unique advantage of having a combination of sight, sound and motion, making television advertising the most influential and pervasive medium that no other advertising media could match.

However, it must be mentioned that this study will not examine meanings underlying the contents of Western advertisements and how they shape the life of Malaysia's middle class community as there had been studies done earlier that had supported the thesis that advertisements significantly contribute to shaping social life and culture of its audience (see Azizul, 1999).

The data for this dissertation will be obtained using a combination of two major research approaches, namely focus group discussions and q-sorting technique to best answer the research questions and fulfil the research objectives. While the focus group discussions will be the main research technique for this study, the q-sorting

technique is a complementary approach to further support the data and is primarily used to examine the thinking patterns of the research audiences.

1.1 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to understand the cultural lifestyles of Malaysia's middle class population and its various sub-segments in relation to their consumption of global brands. Using this purpose as a basis the following objectives were formulated:

- a. To study the scope of cultural transformation of the lifestyles of Malaysia's middle community with reference to their consumption patterns of global brands.
- b. To investigate, compare and contrast the perceptions of the various middle class sub-segments in Malaysia in relation to the cultural content in global brands as advertised in Malaysian television.
- c. To examine the magnitude of Western cultural influence among the various middle class sub-segments in Malaysia, as depicted in their daily lifestyles in respect of their exposure of global advertisements in Malaysian television.

1.2 Specific Research Questions

Parallel to the research topic and research objectives, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- a. As an important facilitator of Western cultural lifestyles, are advertisements on global brands well-received by Malaysia's middle class segment? Which of the sub-segments are most influenced to purchase the global brands?
- b. As a dominant sub-segment within Malaysia's middle class population who are generally practicing Muslims, are there differences in thinking between its Malay-Muslim members, such as the urban and provincial Malays, with regards to the Western lifestyle as depicted in global advertisements?
- c. With the influx of Western global brands in the Malaysian media, are the greater part of the multiracial middle class population concerned about the

- decline in Malaysian values?
- d. Does portrayal of an evident Western lifestyle in global advertisements has an influential appeal for the young members of the middle class segment?
 - e. Are members of the lower middle class sub-group influenced by the lifestyle and consumption patterns of the middle level and upper middle class sub-groups?

1.3 Organisation of the Study

The overall structure of the thesis is organized such that it is easy for the reader to follow the sequential course of discussion. It is divided into eight chapters, including this introductory chapter. As Chapter One, it presents the background to the study, its objectives and research questions. Chapter Two which lays out the theoretical dimensions of the research presents a review of pertinent literature on key issues of this study, namely cultural change in societies, global branding, the middle class community and also the correlates associated with the subject matter.

The third chapter serves to provide a contextual background of Malaysia and is also an extension of the theoretical framework established in Chapter Two. It discusses the complexities of Malaysian politics, the globally influenced economic policies of Malaysia, its unique multi-ethnic society and also the development of its advertising industry. The fourth chapter presents a comprehensive research design and methods of the study. Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven are confined to the results of empirical findings and analyses of the study. Each of these chapters focuses on a key theme that have been identified as follows: Chapter Five details the findings and analysis based on focus group discussions relating to advertisement impact, brand attitude and buying behaviour of participants when making purchase decisions of global brands. Chapter Six deals with the focus group findings and analysis relating to the participants' attitudes towards Malaysian cultural values and Western lifestyles. In Chapter Seven, the findings and analysis presented are based on the evaluation of selected advertisement commercials of global brands by research audiences from two research approaches, namely focus group discussions and q-sorting technique. The purpose is to determine the extent of influence of the global brands on the cultural

values of Malaysia's middle class segment. The concluding chapter, Chapter Eight draws upon the entire thesis summarising the various theoretical and empirical strands in order to assess the findings critically. It also touches on the research limitations and implications of the findings for future research.

Chapter Two

Cultural Changes, the Middle Class and Global Branding

2.1 Introduction

Discussions on a society's cultural changes would not be complete without taking into account its class composition. Both concepts are intimately linked to the society's behaviours in relation to its consumption of goods and services (see Robison and Goodman, 1996). This situation is especially observable for a rapidly industrialising and multicultural nation like Malaysia. Along with the nation's changing consumption patterns and external cultural influences, there seem to be an apparent link to its rapidly shifting class structure. At it stands, Malaysia's middle class segment is undergoing a swift growth in population.

This chapter presents the main theoretical framework for this study which examines the perception and influence of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class segment. It is structured such that it will form the basis for an understanding of the sensitivity and impact of the global brands on the cultural values of the middle class community in Malaysia. It is thus focused on the three key areas concerning this study. They are: cultural values, the middle class and global brands.

The goal is to correlate these subjects together and discuss related issues in detail before proceeding to the subsequent chapters which will zoom in to the Malaysian situation. In Chapter Three, Malaysia's political, economic and socio-cultural domain which incorporates a discussion on its middle class and its advertising practices will be presented.

To reduce the intricacy of comprehending the subject matter in this chapter, I have sub-divided each of the three main sections. The first section which investigates the process of cultural change in societies, starts with an understanding of the progression of cultural transformation that occurred since the pre-industrial age. It is then followed with a description of debates about the present socio-economic and political

scenario in post-industrial societies, after which a sub-section is devoted to end this section with a scrutiny of the religious significance in societies today. The second section which centres on the middle class is divided into two sub-sections, first the concept and classification of the middle class and second their characteristics and lifestyle patterns. I will present the arguments provided by scholars on the definitions of the middle class followed by a discussion relating to their lifestyle and cultural habits. The third and final section which confines itself to globalisation and global branding is divided into four. The scope and theories of globalisation present the viewpoints and arguments by various scholars relating to the dimensions and concepts of globalisation. Following this is the second sub-section which focuses on economic and cultural impact of globalisation on the developing societies particularly amongst the Southeast Asian nations. Among others, it traces the beginnings of globalisation and assesses the benefits and disadvantages of globalisation for the economic and cultural structures of the developing countries. This is then followed with another important sub-section that discusses on cultural hybridization and creolisation in cross-cultural consumption. It probes on the validity of Western cultural imperialism against the concept of universalised global cultures.

This section ends with a detailed look at the relationship between global branding and global consumer culture. On this subject, the role of the media as a main vehicle of advertisements is emphasized. In addition to this, since advertising as a process has been equated with a product brand's success, I discuss the concept of branding in association with global brands as seen by scholars in the field. Last and more importantly, I have laid out the global positioning strategy employed by global advertisers in the promotion of their product brands. This positioning strategy which is conceptualized by theorists and which involves cultural meaning transfer in global advertisements is closely tied in with the global consumer culture.

2.2 Cultural Values and the Structural Changes in Society

In this turbulent period of rapid change where we face new challenges in the 21st century, the far-reaching changes in communications and financial systems and the

rise of the transnational corporations in developing countries have resulted in the cultural transformation of societies, particularly in the developing world.

In fact, the word “culture” too has been misunderstood by many. Being a term that is commonly referred to as a whole way of life or ideas of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” behaviours, values, beliefs and rituals, the original meaning of “culture” was linked to the tending of crops and animals – as in agriculture (Williams, 1983). However, as societies evolve due to various influences, cultural values and norms progress accordingly and persist at shaping a society’s socio-economic and political functions. Of the diverse effects on cultural change, economic development in the societies which is externally influenced plays a significant role. Hence, individuals in post-industrial societies are by and large engrossed as consumers of material goods while other aspects of their social life follow from this primary role.

2.2.1 An Overview of Cultural Changes

Social studies on the various aspects of cultural norms and values maintain that human beings in general, regardless of their backgrounds, are passionate about their cultural life probably due to habitual patterns inherited from their forebears. For instance, the customary daily practices of some societies such as the idealisation of large families, are like a religion or doctrine embedded in the domestic and working lives of the society. Cultural aspects of life are thus deeply embedded in the material life and experiences of human beings.

With regards to the cultural changes within a society, Bell (1996) provides three distinct stages in the society’s economic evolution. They are the agrarian society, the industrial society, and the post-industrial society. He concurs with scholars in the field (Harvey, 1989; Katz, 2000) that societies with high percentages working in the agrarian sector tend to hold to traditional practices and customs which are passed down to the generations that follow.

As the passing down of the traditions and customs continue from one generation to another and as the traditional societies come in contact with each other, they take along with them various competing external influences resulting in different groups of

people or generations understanding the practices and values differently. Although the reception and communication of these traditions are not the same, each of these self-sufficient agrarian societies communicate and exchange knowledge with one another. As they evolve, they learn to adapt to and eventually adopt a new culture. As such, specific areas of social life like religion and economic production which they gain knowledge of are treated with high respect and duty (Bilton et. al, 1996). It must be noted that being a traditional agrarian community, they are divorced from man-made technology but instead are close to the natural environment. Through his direct contact with nature, the farmer develops the “positive spiritual virtues” of self-sufficiency, courage and moral integrity which are associated with Godly characteristics. As such, the concepts of God and religion are important in the daily life of the agrarian community.

However, as these traditional societies advance, in due course they are transformed into a “modern” cultural community which places less emphasis on God and religion. Despite the fact that there are arguments stating that there are “modern and advanced” nations such as the United States of America in which religious beliefs and influence remain strong (Inglehart, 1997), by and large most scholars (see Spier, 1996; Inglehart and Baker, 2003) tend to accept the popular notion in the modernization theory which espouses that the process of economic development and the rise of the industrial sector are conducive to a secular-rational worldview. While these modern societies develop, traditional cultural values and norms including some of the societies’ age old practices, social positions, religion, marriage and other cultural norms are weakened and are steadily reduced in significance. As time passes, this situation would lead to their eventual demise in the social life of individuals. Furthermore, Berman (1983) argues that modernity signifies the destruction of past forms of life, values and identities, combined with the production of ever more new ones.

On another note, it must be mentioned that as societies evolve from traditional to modern practices, it is only natural for conflicting ideas to emerge resulting in the protection of traditional practices on one side and the welcoming of the forces of modernity on the other (Luke, 1998). This idea is similar to Daniel Bell’s prior prediction (Bell, 1976) that the contemporary community would not put the earlier society out of place but rather reposition it within the acceptable limits of the previous

practices, just like industrialisation continues to stay alive along with the agrarian community. Whilst preservation of traditional practices is often associated with the non-Western communities, modernization is generally equated with the more “technologically advanced” Western societies (Inglehart and Baker, 2003) .

In Marx’s famous theory of capitalism, modernity is referred to as “the cultural processes of collectivisation and privatisation” (Katz, 2000: 120). By collectivisation, Marx means the grouping of labours pulled into the social production system, and by privatisation, he means the system is under the authority of private owners. The general cultural forms of modernity such as the materialistic wants and needs for objects or products are actually the end-results of a contradiction between the concepts of collectivisation and privatisation. Marx goes further to explain that the final form of modernity is “corporate liberalism”, which is based upon the reorganisation of the global liberal order through the control of multinational corporations, paving the way for the consumer-producer networks which started after the second world war in the middle of the 20th century. A detailed argument on multinational corporations and globalisation is presented in the pages that follow.

The process of cultural shifts in societies being incessant, the modernised societies that have embraced the global concept of commercialised laissez-faire economy have today moved into an era of knowledge economy which Kumar (1995), among many others, refers to as the post-industrial society. This community which belongs to the era of the services industry is synonymous with the rapid and continuous progress in information and communication systems. Because the post-industrial society is associated with globalisation and knowledge, the bewildering excess of information and image, the buying and selling of material goods as cultural symbols to serve the ultimate human purpose or goal are of central importance (Strinati, 2000).

There is no doubt that by and large societies of the past and present have experienced major shifts in values. The industrial period encourages the move from traditional to secular-rational values while the ascent of the post-industrial societies brings a change towards more globally individualized communities who are dependent on the latest communication media for the well-being of their cultural life. The question that arises is, does modernity relate to Western society or is the concept of modernity

dependent on the society that embraces it?

2.2.2 Contemporary Socio-economic and Political Landscapes

The contrasting paths that different types of societies around the world have adopted in the earlier years signify that the society's socio-economic environment is a crucial factor for its shift in cultural norms and values. The changes that occur from generation to generation is primarily centred on influences outside the society's cultural sphere.

The externally-influenced cultural changes draw in new meanings and values, new practices and new relationships created by the society itself. Among others, these aspects are tightly correlated with its economic development, change in its political system and intergenerational shift of values between the young and the old. Nonetheless, it must be noted that cultural heritage within the society is also an important factor that determines how societies deal with the socio-economic and political situations that exist.

A major finding from the World Values Surveys, the largest ever study on attitudes, beliefs and values of 65 countries involving more than 75 percent of the world's population (Inglehart and Baker, 2003) suggests that there is a coherent linkage between economic development and systematic changes in a society's basic values. In essence it brings to light that whenever there is economic development, which is externally influenced, there is a strong trend for one generation of the society to move away from norms and values normally practiced by the earlier generation. These new values would be interpreted by individual members of the society as being "rational, tolerant, trusting and participatory". However, its cultural heritage is an important determinant for the direction in which the society would take. For instance, Inglehart and Baker (ibid) discover that there is no cultural convergence between the world views of rich societies and those of poor societies.

Going back to the thesis that the stability in a society's socio-economic environment is very much dependent on its external influence which would lead to cultural changes, Inglehart and Norris (2000) contend that when there is economic

development, secularist ideals and self-expression values will flourish within the society. For instance, over the years one can observe the progression in cultural changes within the Malaysian society with regards to its influence of the Western concept of democracy. This subject is discussed in Chapter Three.

In essence, the Western based democratic model has an overwhelming support from societies throughout the world partly because it encourages intrinsic human values such as freedom and self-expression. Recent events, including the 2002 biggest demonstrations in Britain against the Iraq war and the 2006 worldwide Muslim protests against the depiction of Prophet Mohamad as caricatures in the Danish newspapers are classic examples of freedom of expression as adopted by Western democracy. These events and many others are proof of the extent to which a society has an underlying culture of civilian protest and the extent to which its people give high priority to subjective well-being, freedom of speech and self-expression as very powerful indicators of effective democracy. As indicated earlier, the Southeast Asian nations are presently experiencing a resurgence in the political culture of democratisation and freedom of speech amongst its middle class population (Johan and Loh, 2004). In fact, there are indications showing that Malaysia and many of Asia's developing nations are following the footsteps of developed countries like Britain in empowering its women and members of the minority communities to speak up and be heard (see Deane, 2005). This phenomenon suggests the extent of external influence that has seeped into the developing Asian societies.

Another major socio-cultural phenomenon that continues to be a subject of study among social science scholars is the intergenerational shift between the young and the old (Inglehart, 1997). The rapid changes and developments in technology and media have brought in external pressures to the society resulting in the cultural gap between the young and the old becoming more acute than before. Be it the Western society or Asian society, depending on its cultural circumstances, intergenerational shifts which involve the conflicts of values between the young and old is a common phenomenon today.

In the comparatively more politically and economically stable West, the issue of youth authority is probably more widespread than that of the developing Asian

societies. In Britain, for instance, the young generation is further separated from the rest of the society because British parents have become more irresponsible than they were in the past (Deane, 2005). Deane (ibid: 55) reveals that 68 percent of British youths say that they are not forbidden to watch any programme on television. Also, programmes with graphic violence and sexual content are not only watched but are often preferred by them.

In contrast, in Hong Kong and Singapore, as a consequence to the shift in values from the earlier generation, the issue centres around the wide income disparity between the young and the old. According to Chui (2001), the elderly in Hong Kong are comparatively poorer in physical, financial and social aspects, compared to the younger generation. As the policy of the Hong Kong government is to give heavy focus on urban renewal, only the young benefit, resulting in a weakening of Chinese traditional values of respecting the elderly and their heritage of community care. In addition, the concept of a nuclear family whereby three generations live under one roof, which has been a pride of the Chinese culture for generations, is slowly but surely fading. This situation is also true for Singapore which gives too much emphasis on economic growth at the expense of the erosion of its traditional values, making its Confucianism heritage a thing of the past (Martin and Sengupta, 1998).

Despite the conflict between the old and young, it must be mentioned that not every traditional value is rejected by the young. As noted earlier, values considered as “positive for the future” are accepted and practiced in everyday life, as is the case with many young couples in Holland. Findings in a panel study (Jansen and Kalmijn, 2001) that measured value orientations amongst young Dutch couples between 1991 and 1995 of which behavioural outcomes were measured in 1999, show that couples that practice traditional values invest more in family lives than those who adopt modern values. The former were more participative in joint consumption activities and division of household tasks and have children sooner after marriage.

Overall, as laid out above, if a nation progresses economically, it is inevitable that its socio-economic and political structure are bound to change akin to the characteristics of the prevailing post-industrial societies of the world today. This would mean the slow fading out of the societies’ traditional beliefs and customs and

the embrace of new externally-influenced values and lifestyle that form the culture of the young generation today.

2.2.3 Religious Traditions

As mentioned earlier, when a society develops and adopts new cultural values that evolve, much of its old practices and customs would disappear gradually. However, although the significance of religious beliefs may be reduced, its influence within the traditional system is unlikely to fade. This is because the belief systems in a society exhibit remarkable durability and resilience (Inglehart, 1997). Findings from the World Values Survey disclose that despite cultural changes and modernization, most societies of the world still uphold their long held beliefs and philosophies (Inglehart and Baker, 2003). In fact, evidence from the study supports the view that religious traditions in some societies have had an enduring impact on the present value systems of the societies (ibid).

Being a distinct cultural heritage in a society, religious and philosophical beliefs such as Protestant, Roman Catholic, Islam, Confucianism or Communism endures up to this day. This is in line with Huntington's thesis which argues that although history, language and culture are important elements in shaping the world's cultural zones or civilizations, religious traditions are most important (Huntington, 1996).

Since religious traditions have historically shaped a society's culture, they therefore spread effortlessly within the population via the mass media and other public and private institutions. As such, despite social and cultural changes due to globalisation, religious traditions being a nation's long-held heritage remain distinct to a remarkable degree. Findings from a study among students from the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) ascertain that the society's religious values topped all other values such as cognitive, political, aesthetic, social and economic. The results from this study imply that Islam is still the main source of judgement among the UAEU student community (Fayez A.Simadi and Mohammad A. Kamali, 2004). In addition, this finding is also consistent with the philosophy of the UAEU government which emphasizes Islamic tradition in modern life. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, I discuss the strong traditional bond between Islam and the Malay society in relation to

the socio-cultural life of the Malays.

In fact, the link between a society's religious tradition and its economic development is inevitable. Retrospectively, Weber (see Giddens, 1994) in his explanation of the relationship between capitalism and religion emphasises that Christianity, specifically Protestantism plays an intrinsic role in shaping the attitudes involved in the spirit of capitalism, a set of beliefs and values practiced by early capitalist merchants and industrialists in the 17th century. This was the period of the great religious upheaval where wealth for the greatness and glory of God was perceived as positive, as Weber (in Kendall and Wickham, 2001: 140) elaborates:

First, it was acceptable to 'have the best of both worlds', that is to acquire wealth in this world with the certainty of gaining a place in the next, and second it was acceptable to pursue a middle class existence provided one did so honestly and with a good conscience. In other words, religion slowly lost its importance as part of the ethics of capitalism. The bourgeois businessman was thus able to go about his wealth creation comfortable in the knowledge that he was fulfilling a duty in so doing. He was even able to justify inequalities of wealth on the grounds that these inequalities were ordained by God, that the God-ordained poverty which goes with them was crucial to discipline the workers.

Weber's thesis is supported by Inglehart (1997) who affirms that although religion may not play a crucial role in economic development today, the early phase of industrialisation was focused on the Protestant population of mixed societies. In consideration to the validity of this argument, Giddens (1994: 729) deduces that the present-day economic and social developments cannot deny the influence of religious ideals although this notion may initially be thought of as unlikely since religion seems quite separated from it.

In the preceding pages, it was mentioned that the shift from agrarian to urban industrial society that was completed sometime ago in most advanced societies had reduced the role of religious thinking and encouraged the growth of secular-rational thinking. Nevertheless, despite the continuous decline of allegiance to the established religious institutions, it must not be forgotten that in today's society there is an increasing quest for individual need for security and for the meaning and purpose of life. As a final point, although economic development is indisputably a major factor in bringing about persistent cultural shifts to a society, one cannot deny that societies of the world are shaped by religious beliefs and values. Being the society's cultural

heritage, religious values and norms contribute a substantial proportion to the society's cultural development.

2.3 The Middle Class and their Cultural Orientations

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1989) defines “class” as a social group whose members have the same social, political and economic position and rank. It is a system of dividing society into groups with different social and political positions. In accordance, Giddens (1980) divides class into three categories based on “market capacity”. They are:

- a. the upper class who owns property as their means of production;
- b. middle class who possess educational and/or technical qualifications; and
- c. the working class who occupy the power of manual labour.

As a dominant group in today's society that Deane (2005) refers as the arbitrator of societal ethics whom the upper class and the working class once rely on, studies on the role of the “new” middle class conducted post 1990s are many and most of the areas of study differ with one another. However, Eijck and Mommaas (2004) observe that many of the analysis on the middle class community are centred on three major areas, namely on the aspects of their leisure activities, changes in their socio-economic status and lastly on their lifestyle orientations. These varied studies manifest the adjustments and advancements of the middle class in keeping up with the transformation of societal values as the communities evolve to keep up with the changes in the environment. Accordingly, McDowell et.al (1989) state that the growing middle class communities which have become central within the society may seek to enforce their meanings and images onto those diverse cultural interpretations of economic and social change. It is therefore quite predictable that the middle class group has been a persistent focus of debate in cultural studies. In Chapter Three, a specific section is reserved for a discussion on the cultural orientations and consumption habits of Malaysia's middle class population.

2.3.1 The Concept and Classification of Middle Class

What actually constitutes a “middle class group” is quite a complex debate as social science scholars accede that the concept is difficult to define. Liberal pluralists regard them as “a cultural entity defined by values of individualism and rationality, as well as status, occupation and income” (Robison and Goodman, 1996). The middle class group are seen as the “new rich” with ownership of property, market capacity and possession of qualifications. To the ordinary man on the street, they are bearers of modernity and rational culture (ibid). On the other hand, Deane (2005) argues that the middle class is not a class defined by its members’ economic role, but a collectivity of individuals whose membership of the middle class is the result of their individual attributes and moral qualities.

Acknowledging that there is no singular way to describe the middle class, Jomo (1999) provides the following approaches to add to the understanding of the concept of this important community in the society:

- a. intermediate class, which is placed between capital or top management and labour, for instance the self-employed individual;
- b. intermediate residual category, the class left after other classes particularly the capital and labour classes are defined, comparable to the definition of the “informal sector” which is also usually defined residually;
- c. historically in terms of class location, like eighteenth century European bourgeoisie was the middle class between the aristocracy (ruling or upper class, or elite then) and the masses (serfs, proletariat, et al.); and
- d. middle class as defined in occupational terms, for instance the educated and knowledgeable professionals or white collar occupational categories.

Jomo (ibid) adds that, most studies relating to middle class use the fourth approach as it provides convenience for the researcher. This means social science researchers operationalise the middle class by their occupation, as it has been proven to be more binding and coherent (ibid). Abdul Rahman (2002) who did a study on the new middle class in Malaysia uses occupation as a major indicator to determine Malaysia’s middle class group. To Abdul Rahman (1996), besides possessing educational qualification, the middle class contains people who manifest or aspire to a certain

lifestyle. This concept is closely suited to Malaysia's middle class as it differentiates it from the other classes.

Unlike the middle class of the late twentieth century (Westergaad, 1995), today's middle class are actively involved with "modern" economic activities in industry and services. They are the white-collar "salaried" that is the professional, managerial and administrative employees who share a distinct employment status and whose principal feature is the 'trust' and some autonomy that employers place in them (Abdul Rahman, 2002: 83).

Because they are relatively privileged in employment and income terms, often due to their educational attainment, the middle class group can be categorized as people with good purchasing power. If they are employed, they hold good positions in their workplace drawing a good monthly salary package than the average citizen. If they are not an employee, they are either an independent professional who offers their services to businesses or, are owner-operator of their business set-ups who also pay salaries to their workers. Bourdieu (1984: 354) describes the new middle class today as the "new petite bourgeoisie" involved in many private sector jobs such as occupations in marketing and the fashion industry, in medical and social assistance or in cultural production and organisation. In other words, being a heterogeneous group, the middle class person may work as a doctor, marriage counsellor, television producer, advertising professional or a teacher.

On the social aspect, unlike the old middle class society who are considered as a pillar of stability and strength especially in upholding societal values, the middle class today, Deane (2005) argues, are no longer the arbiters of morality they once were as they have "abdicated their responsibilities". They tend to be reluctant to put their time and effort on community work. In fact, the old culture of the wife expressing the husband's role by having morning coffee with the community (Westergaad, 1995) and the middle class taking leadership role in the school's parent teacher's association is slowly waning (Abdul Rahman, 2001). Instead, it is quite common among them to utilize their leisure time as a way of escapism from a busy working life by going on vacations or sight-seeing with the family.

Perhaps, the British middle class's indulgence in an "extended childhood" (Deane, 2005) could also be applied to the new middle class in the developed and developing societies today. This is because it is now common for the new middle class today to marry late, sometimes in their late thirties. Besides this, they start investing in properties later in life and they treat as customary to provide whatever their children ask for: "Adidas" trainers, the latest "Nokia" mobile telephone, "Levi's" jeans or other designer clothes. Similar to the West, children in a developing country like Malaysia too have become materialistic beings. As Phua and Soo (2004: 95) note, the growing affluence of the middle class in Malaysia has created an increase in demand for products related to children and teenagers like educational and entertainment products and clothes wear. Furthermore, while satisfying the needs and wants of their children, the middle class parents sacrifice their own pleasure and financial security which is unheard of during the times of their predecessors.

In sum, the new middle class as a significant group in today's era are growing in tandem with the economic development of the societies. They are a heterogeneous grouping that can best be categorized by their occupation, regardless of whether they are an employee or an employer of an organisation. Certainly, knowing the occupation of a middle class individual and his materialistic trait will lead to further understanding of the middle class group particularly on their class or status within the community.

2.3.2 Characteristics and Lifestyle Patterns of the Middle Class

By and large, as indicated earlier, the cultural life of the middle class today is segmented according to their occupational positions and the organisational sector they work in. Their occupation which establishes their class level and their workplace would determine their characteristics and lifestyle patterns, of which their consumption habits and leisure activities are most dominant.

It is observed that in most working sectors nowadays, the occupational success of the middle class employee in newly emerged jobs is very much dependent on his or her personal qualities. As a matter of fact, the personality of the middle class employee being closely linked with his or her expertise or "socially useful knowledge" (Martin,

1998: 666) is more important than educational attainment. This means that apart from formal education and training, experiences, interests and contacts which shape the character of the employee are very essential to develop the unique service expected of him or her. As such, although they are no longer bounded by the cultures and traditions of their forebears (Giddens, 1991: 76), the new middle class preserve certain traits that differentiate them from the working class.

Because of their stable economic position, members of the new middle class who have established themselves in the workplace tend to orientate themselves to certain leisure activities that would fulfil their materialistic needs. If a British middle class person sees a holiday country home as symbolic of the world he lives in (McDowell et. al, 1989: 252), a first generation middle class person from an Asian country would distinguish himself with condominium living or ownership of luxury cars (Pinches, 1999).

However, the results of a survey conducted by Warren and Tyagi (2003) involving 2000 American middle-class families found that because of their obsession to keep up with a certain lifestyle that they are identified with, many of them depend on loans and credit cards. This trend is very much similar to the British middle class today as described by Deane (2005). In fact, it has spread to the developing countries in Asia (Vervoon, 1998).

As major consumers of goods and services, Bourdieu (1984) concludes that members of the upper middle class have established a cultural authority the lower middle class and the working class crave for. In essence, they crown a cultural hierarchy and are establishing it for people at the lower end to emulate. In Bourdieu's (ibid: 370) words, they are:

inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratification and prestige of the intellectual at the least costs; they adopt the most external and most easily borrowed aspects of the intellectual lifestyle.

This phenomenon is especially true in the Asian countries. Because of the new developmental modernization that swept the region in the past three decades, its middle class community is increasingly preoccupied with their lifestyle and consumption which have spread across all segments of the population. As such, even

the working class factory workers participate to some extent in urban consumer lifestyles. This explains why some scholars would like to define Asia's middle class in terms of lifestyle rather than income (Pinches, 1999).

Exposure of the middle class population to the media has turned them into good modern consumers that buy products made to identify them with varying classes and social status (Phua and Soo, 2004). Taking the case of Malaysia as an example, the upper middle class will, for instance buy Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo, while those from the lower class will buy the imitations of these products. A detailed discussion on this subject is in Chapter Three.

With regards to leisure activities of the middle class which as pointed out earlier is another important factor that establishes their more inclusive lifestyle orientation, these behaviours are aimed at substituting, "relaxation for tension, pleasure for effort, 'creativity' and 'freedom' for discipline, communication for solitude" (Bourdieu, 1984: 368).

The middle-class lifestyles can be categorised into three, namely ascetic, post-modern and indistinctive (Eijck and Mommaas, 2004). The ascetic lifestyle, being a frugal way of life is popular among professionals in the public sector whose monthly fixed earnings are much lesser than their counterparts in the private sector. On the other hand, the post-modern lifestyle, a distinctively individualised way of life that is divorced from the mainstream lifestyle, is dominant among private sector professionals and specialists. Lastly, the indistinctive lifestyle, as the name suggests, is an ordinary working life that is most prevalent among managers and government bureaucrats. It is quite fascinating that while those who adopt the ascetic lifestyle are still deliberately cultivating a cultural image long associated to the middle class, the post-modern and indistinctive lifestyles are a diversion from this lifestyle patterns. For instance, while the former places importance on high-class leisure activities like listening to opera or classical music, the post-modern and indistinctive are content with exotic and skiing holidays (ibid). This development supports the view that most new middle class individuals in developed countries today are no longer guided by forms of status competition and cultural emulation (Wynne and O'Connor, 1995).

Results from the study by Eijck and Mommaas (2004) reaffirm the universal understanding that those with higher income and who are more educated would pamper themselves in more refined and prestigious forms of leisure participation than the ones with lower income and education. Among the Dutch upper middle class, significant differences in the leisure and cultural activities were noted in relation to the three segments mentioned earlier. Interestingly, although economic and occupational status were identified as reasons for the disparity in leisure activities, keeping to their traditions was the primary motive.

Members of the public sector middle class whom Bourdieu refers to as the “petite bourgeoisie” were found to be more rooted with “authentic”(read: intellectually challenging) traditional culture of reading books or visiting museums. They spend less time attending bars or dance halls. Also they would involve themselves more in traditional high brow activities and less in social or popular-cultural activities than their private sector and self-employed counterparts. Being teachers or government officials with a modest income, their consumption pattern is likely to comprise activities that require much time but little money. Bourdieu (1984: 350) affirms:

the members of the petite bourgeoisie are convinced “that they owe their position to a ‘simple,’ ‘serious,’ ‘honest’ life and therefore express in all areas the most austere and traditional values.

Besides being prudent in matters relating to expenditure, keeping to traditions such as showing gratitude to their parents for the sacrifices made for them is an important aspect of their life. As for members of the private sector middle class, Eijck and Mommaas (2004), found that although they are not bounded by cultural standards like their public sector counterparts, their free time is confined to household jobs and childcare. The leisure activities they participate in are dependent on the type of organisation they are employed in. Nevertheless, their orientation is towards commercial forms of entertainment or a mixed kind of traditional and popular cultural activities like visiting receptions and having outdoor dinners. Savage et al. (1992) interpret this post-modern lifestyle as legitimizing their new occupational status and positions as professionals in their field. This argument is parallel to Bourdieu’s (1984) description of the “new petite bourgeoisie”.

The self-employed middle class are the most versatile of the three segments. They

participate in a mixed repertoire of leisure activities which include both highbrow culture and lowbrow culture. In other words, they allocate time to visit museums or attend theatres while at the same time involving themselves in sporting activities and social networking. Because they identify themselves strongly with their work (Martin, 1998), they spend a lot of time incorporating receptions, having dinners, or going out in general to convince their clients that they are offering socially useful knowledge. This cultural participation is akin to acquiring cultural resources that will benefit their work (ibid). To many scholars of the social sciences, the socially active and varied lifestyle of the self-employed is a typical example of the post-modern lifestyle.

In the main, the middle class community in today's societies who are commonly identified by their occupational status, distinguish themselves from the population by their consumption patterns and their lifestyle orientations. Besides this, the leisure activities that they are involved in, influenced by the nature of their occupation, are important indicators of their lifestyle orientations. These factors are instrumental in creating an image for them which most among the lower middle class and the working class yearn to reach.

2.4 Globalisation and Global Branding

The term globalisation conjures varied meanings. Being an intricate phenomenon it refers to diverse aspects involving history, large scale world system and ideology. Nonetheless, it is most commonly understood as the cross-national flow of goods, investment, services, technology and production between nations.

Because it involves the breaking down of barriers across national borders, the impact and consequences of globalisation for developing countries are many. Other than the rise of multinational corporations, the convergence of cultures and the creation of new cultures, the results and consequences of globalisation have also impacted on the global branding of products and services that are marketed and advertised.

2.4.1 The Scope and Theories of Globalisation

Ever since the past decade or so when globalisation started becoming a popular topic of discussion, there has been various arguments and debates particularly on aspects relating to its concept, its basis and significance to societies and nations. A distinguished sociologist, Roland Robertson proclaims that the novelty and significance of the globalisation process is the consciousness of the new globality (Robertson, 1992). By this, he means that there is a realization that the economy of a country relies heavily on the global market as a guiding force to run the country's financial system. The effect of this situation is that the government plays a secondary role because globalisation results in the increase in privatization and deregulation. However, another eminent social scientist, Leslie Sklair (2001) believes that the term globalisation must be conceptualised beyond the nation-states since it not only involves the nation's economy but also its socio-cultural and political aspects which differ from one nation to another.

Then again, Anthony Giddens who has contributed massive writings and literature on this subject has famously described globalisation as entailing an intense "time and space distancing" in social life (Giddens, 1990: 14). By this phrase, he is denoting that the world we live in is one place because we can actually interact and communicate as if we are in the same locality although we may be thousands of miles apart. Because it has an impact on most people's everyday life, Giddens deems globalisation as one of the most observable consequences of modernity. Specifically, he is referring to the efficient global network of media technology that transmits new messages and images that have taken grips on people's life. In the globalisation process, local practices and cultures are linked globally. Giddens view is similar to Sklair's (2001) who espouses the idea that modern media technology plays a dominant role in globalisation processes.

On this subject, Harvey (1989) tries to elaborate by amplifying that in this era of fast-paced technology, one need not be in the same location to communicate face-to-face (ibid: 18). He affirms that with the speedy pace of globalisation today, it is normal for changes in social life to occur very quickly such that important happenings in history become obsolete and forgotten after a short while of commemoration. In

fact, Harvey's elucidation becomes convincing when he relates to the launch of new products or fashion designs in the market which keep changing within a short time span. While their approach on the globalisation issue may vary slightly, they share similar viewpoints on the foundation that the globalisation process involves the free flow of goods and capital between nations by way of transnational practices (see Sklair, 2001). However, despite the opening up of boundaries, globalisation and liberalisation do not remove the nation state, instead it essentially redefines its role and its function (Castells, 1999).

In addition to the debate on the globalisation model, scholars also have divergent views when deliberating on the source or foundation of globalisation. Rosenau's (1990) argument centres on technology as a major cause of globalisation. According to him, the capabilities and potential of technology have made it possible for nation states to be interdependent with one another. Although he does describe today's epoch as the age of "post-international politics" where international organisations, transnational corporations and movements have turned into a conglomerate of nations, Rosenau's explanation stops short of delving into the world political systems at work. In contrast, another scholar Wallerstein (1974) who expounds that the Western economic capitalist system is the primary source of globalisation, convincingly elaborates that this new economic system has transformed the world into one huge economic space. In effect, Wallerstein's long established work is about the growth of globalisation as a world system since the dawn of capitalism. His thesis delves on the inequalities in power and wealth among the nation-states which are forced to embrace the capitalist system to survive economically although he believes that the developing societies and nations are actually at the losing end. Wallerstein argues that since the capitalist system is always rife with crises, it is always at risk with global economic restructuring which would normally benefit only the developed countries. On the contrary, Sklair (2001) refutes this argument by claiming that multinational and transnational corporations (TNCs) from either America, Europe or even Japan see themselves as extending strategies for the local businesses to globalise and their interests are conceptualised based on markets, which may or may not suit a nation-state. He rejects the notion that these TNCs are in one way or another interested in dominating the nation's economy.

Additionally, Gilpin's (1987) argument on the primary source of globalisation relies on the fact that globalisation is a product of international politics that allow linkages between nation-states. He opines that the globalisation process is actually a conditional course of action in that the developed and powerful nations are taking leadership roles to the developing and less powerful states in areas like communications, ingenuity, collaborations and interdependence.

Thus far, we have seen that although Rosenau, Wallerstein and Gilpin have differing opinions on the major cause of globalisation, they seem to agree on the perspective relating to the capitalist system. However, looking at the varied and wide ranging scale of globality, Giddens' (1990) multi-causal logic of globalisation seems quite concrete and credible. In his study of the dimensions of globalisation, Giddens notes four essential elements. Besides capitalism, the other three factors are inter-state system, militarism and industrialism (ibid: 70). Taking a close scrutiny of his thesis, Giddens actually ties together arguments from the other theorists. He reaffirms that the capitalist world economy is impacting economic globalisation. As for the inter-state system as another basis for globalisation, he reiterates the universality of the nation-states which leads to the formation of a single global world (Giddens, 1987: 283). The same can be said for his argument on the globalisation of military power (Giddens, 1990: 75) wherein the nation-states join hands as one force to fight a common enemy. With regards to industrialism as another important factor responsible for globalisation, Giddens points to the shift in global division of labour as its consequence.

In his later work, Giddens (1996) conceptualises the globalisation process beyond the idea of large-scale world systems but draws attention to the idea of globality as the removal of the boundary between the "out there" and the "in-here". For him, today's globalisation has an intense cultural dimension wherein people around the world are interconnected in their daily life because of the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe.

In his discussion of the global movement of culture, Appadurai identifies five aspects of global cultural flow: ethnoscaping, mediascaping, technoscaping, finanscaping, and ideoscapes (1996: 33-6). Ethnoscaping involves the movement of people from one

locality to another. The second aspect, Technoscapes mean the high-speed movement of technology across boundaries. The third aspect, Financescapes portray the character of global financing such as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations which keep shifting from one “financial hub” to another. The fourth aspect, Mediascapes are both the sharing of electronic capacities to construct and disseminate information, and the delivery of the world’s images “created” by the media. The final aspect, Ideoscapes are political thoughts of the countries and the counter-ideologies of movements, which challenge countries themselves. Aligned with Appadurai’s thesis on global cultural flow, Lash and Urry (1994) deduce that due to globalisation, people realize that it is possible for them to create imagined worlds where culture and meaning are based on global communication. Sklair’s (2000) opinion on the continuous flow of homogenised local cultures via global mass media channels, further supports this argument.

Cultural globalisation assumes special significance because it is concerned with symbolic construction, articulation and dissemination of meaning. According to Robertson (1992: 27), these cultural elements, primarily the symbolic expressions of language, music and images which stretch across boundaries intensely affect every aspect of the nation’s social life including its civilization, societies, regions and individuals. Robertson theorises that the global cultural flows often reinvigorate local cultural niches. He argues that cultural globalisation always takes place in local contexts and he rejects the concept of cultural homogenisation. Instead, he speaks of “glocalisation” – a complex interaction of the global and local characterised by cultural borrowing (ibid). To him, the resulting expressions of cultural “hybridity” cannot be reduced to clear-cut manifestations of “sameness” or “difference” (ibid).

In all, globalisation is a complex process constituting the consciousness of the world as a single space. Although there may be some divergent viewpoints, the current conjectures and models recognize that globality is unavoidable as nation-states have to co-exist within the new global order to survive economically, if not culturally.

2.4.2 Implications of Globalisation on Developing Societies

A significant mass of literature on the impact of globalisation towards the economy

and culture of developing nation-states has created endless debates and opinions that both support and oppose globalisation (Castells, 2004; Martin, 2001; Mahathir, 2002). Among them, a narrative by DeSoya and O'neal (1999) assert that the high level of trade and investments from developed capitalist countries could stimulate economic growth of developed and developing countries and in turn improve the countries' welfare and benefit its masses. This argument supports the notion that globalisation offers long-term benefits to the population. On the contrary, Hirst and Thompson (1996:170) note that the present system of economic globalisation has reduced the significance and capacities of the developing nation-states for national governance and economic management.

In consideration of today's context of globalisation, Jomo (2004:37-51) maintains that the era of globalisation in Asia, in particular the developing Southeast Asian region, began in the late nineteenth century. This was the period most popularly referred to as Western imperialism where Western Europeans were actively establishing their political and economic interests in the developing nations of Africa and Asia. It must be mentioned that besides being a major period in the globalisation process, the nineteenth century was also associated with technological developments which continue until the twentieth century where economic liberalisation became the catch phrase. This section looks at an overall picture of the implications of globalisation on the developing societies in Southeast Asia with a particular focus on Malaysia.

a. Economic consequences

It is generally accepted by many scholars on globalisation that the global integration of goods and capital markets has by and large benefited the economy of the developing countries of the world. In the case of Southeast Asia, because of its pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial pasts, globalisation has become part of the region's inheritance. In fact, Abdul Rahman (2004) affirms that the idea of modernity in Southeast Asia is very much due to the rather unrestrictive flows of capital and labour into the region. It therefore explains the milieu of the culturally and socially pluralized societies of Southeast Asia.

On the same note, the spread of neo-liberal globalisation in the Asian nations in the late twentieth century has provided these countries with little or no alternative except to embrace the American capitalist system of free market. This complex interplay of the global economy has produced a wide income disparity among the upper and lower levels of society. Castells (2004) indicates that, just like in the advanced capitalist societies of the United States and Western Europe, this situation is unavoidable mainly because of the shift in occupational structure of the labour force either through market sectors or occupational composition.

These inequalities have been more evident amongst the developing Asian countries particularly after the 1997 Southeast Asian financial crisis. The 1997 global impact of the destabilising effects of free capital and currency movements had caused the suddenness of the economic crash suffered by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand (Rajah Rasiah, 2004). A likely reason for the economic instability is the liberalisation of economic institutions across the world and the global political framework which are dominated by powerful interests in capital and currency markets. As revealed by McGrew (1992), the compelling dynamism of globalisation brings along with it the gradual change in executive power to international institutions such as the non-governmental World Trade Organisation (WTO) which is responsible for enforcing rules and regulations resulting in the continuous reduction of power among the nation-states. It is an economic fact that the deregulation pressures faced by Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in the 1990s was for the most part due to the financial liberalisation processes of WTO and other non-governmental agencies such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and lately, the Association of Southeast Asian Nation or ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). Taking the formation of AFTA as an example, although it was created to provide access to the ASEAN countries to venture into bigger markets, it has been argued that it would only benefit the established entrepreneurs with large enterprises. This is because only these companies are prepared to face competition from other producers whilst the small and medium producers which form the bulk of business establishments in these countries are not able to compete with the bigger establishments.

Discussing the Malaysian situation, Rajah Rasiah (2004) in her analysis of the country's income distribution and inequality points out that globalisation could stifle

the Malaysian government's effort at eradicating poverty and narrowing income inequality among the population. This is because with globalisation, the government's role in economic development is reduced while the private sector's role is increased. As such, costs of the basic welfare and labour rights of the population had to be scaled down at the expense of attracting foreign direct investments which is meant to improve competitiveness. At the same time, the government is also pressured to reduce the progressive and corporate tax rates which provide various incentives to the foreign companies. This means that there is less resource to be spent on national redistribution, that is, on social expenditure including education, health and housing.

While the arguments thus far seem inclined to support the view that globalisation is a Western imperialist plot to exploit the less-developed nation-states, Sklair (2001) offers a different perspective. Although he accepts that Western countries still dominate the global economy, he stresses that the move today has shifted towards forging a globalizing alliance capitalism such that new technologies of production, financing and marketing can be transferred to the nation-states. While it cannot be refuted that the intensification of TNCs is instrumental in the creation of a globalised capitalist economy resulting in a new division of labour (Ohmae, 1999), Sklair (2001) notes that the global system theory is not just confined to the TNCs alone but also involves the transnational capitalist class and the culture-ideology of consumerism which is very much creased with capitalist globalization.

Nevertheless, by and large the TNCs which are headquartered mostly in America or Europe are recognized as major change agents for the developing country. Furthermore, the exceptional advance in communication technologies today acts as an important catalyst for these corporations to relocate or setup their base in the rapidly changing markets of the developing countries where the labour costs are comparatively cheaper, and consequently making the production revenues bigger. In her celebrated book, "No Logo", Naomi Klein (2002) offers an account of labour exploitation of American companies in the developing nations. For instance, her mention of the indiscriminate abuse of cheap child labour in Indonesia to manufacture Nike, a sport shoe product from an American company is proof of the

impact of the American capitalist system. According to her, the workers were paid a pittance compared to the profits reaped from the sale of every pair of Nike sneakers.

It seems obvious that once the TNCs have established their foothold in the developing nations, what follows will be the globalisation of the socio-economic and political state of affairs of the nation. In recent years, the TNCs have become huge companies and many of them are based in the United States of America (Giddens, 1994). For instance, the last two decades saw the establishments of very large TNCs like AT & T, Sony, Universal and Disney that dominate the global market for entertainment, news, television and film (Steger, 2003). Some others have grown to become conglomerates. One of them is the American based cigarette company RJ Reynolds which expanded its business to include non-tobacco business interests including Del Monte (fruit), Heublein (alcohol), Sealand Services (shipping), Kentucky Fried Chicken (food retailing) and Aminoil (oil and petroleum) (see Giddens, 1994). Interestingly, the more globalised their activities the more the TNCs become less associated with any country. In fact the governments of the United States, Europe and Japan where the TNCs have their headquarters find it more difficult to rely on TNCs to act in their national interest (ibid). As the owners and controllers within the TNCs manage the transnational economic practices, the globalizing politicians, bureaucrats, merchants and media professionals will line themselves for the transnational practices of politics, culture and ideology (see Sklair, 2000).

Taking into consideration the impact of economic globalisation on the local economy of developing Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia, there have been ripples of doubt and question with regards to the feasibility and sustainability of neo-liberal globalisation. Mittleman (2000) suggests that resistance from developing nations affected by neo-liberal globalisation is not only a natural reaction but also a central component in the whole process. To *Mahathir* Mohamed, former Prime Minister of Malaysia and a foremost articulator of the Asian approach in the discourse on globalisation, the big powers of America and Europe interpret globalisation as their right of capital to enter the borders of nation-states at their own will. Hence, he characterises globalisation as a Western project in the service of a new empire (Mahathir, 2003). Nevertheless, despite his opposition towards neo-liberal

globalisation, Mahathir concurs with the viewpoints of most scholars who see the advantages brought about by globalisation towards the economy of developing countries. As such, he demands that globalisation be redefined from the perspective of the small nations for these nations to benefit in terms of technology, know-how, foreign direct investment and other related matters (ibid). In short, the Malaysian leader is actually in favour of the universal values of globalisation for as long as the Western nations do not meddle in the Malaysia's politics which is generally perceived by the West as "autocratic".

b. Cultural Impact

As discussed in the earlier section, although there are many critics of economic globalisation, most governments support the global flow of goods and capital markets because by and large they see the economic benefits for the country. In spite of this, one cannot doubt that economic globalisation would also eventually affect every other aspect of the social life of the citizens. Among the most controversial in the non-economic area of globalisation is the homogenisation of cultures which most governments oppose.

Tracing the history and development of the colonised nation-states, one is reminded of the work of a pre-eminent scholar in post-colonial studies, Edward Said who in 1978 released a controversial book, *Orientalism*. Said focuses his interest on the relationship between the "occident", the Western nations of England, France and the United States of America and the "orient", the naïve and often misinterpreted middle east and the far east. To Said (1979), the West has created a demarcation between the actual history and culture of the East and the romantic perception of the "orient". He claims that since the West has a prejudiced opinion of the East as being backward and ignorant of their own history and culture, they take it upon themselves to create a new civilization, the past and future for these nations. In effect, this is seen as a clear form of cultural imperialism of which the West has treated the people in its colonised empires as soulless objects that can be manipulated. On the other hand, in consideration of the fact that there is no longer direct interference of the West on the politics, culture and economy of developing nations today, we may want to question on the relevance of Western cultural imperialism.

While we may see Said's description of imperialism as slightly far-fetched, there is no denying that the existing cultures of the developing nation-states of Southeast Asia are going through the process of transformation into a global culture. Abdul Rahman (2004) notes that although the national cultures may still be practiced, there are clear signs showing that globalisation is threatening the national identities of these countries. This situation, Abdul Rahman (*ibid*) elaborates, would eventually lead to marginalisation and commodification resulting in the creation of an identity crisis. But then again, we may want to ask, will not the energetic mix of the Eastern and Western cultures rationally lead to the widespread feeling that Asians are embracing a new middle class lifestyle of a universal global consumer culture?

At this juncture, we are reminded of Giddens' (1996) claim that the nature of globalisation today involves a serious cultural dimension wherein one cannot avoid the inter-connectivity on the day-to-day activities and events that occur around the globe. Based on this contention, it is not surprising that the most revolutionary progress in the century has been the arrival of the internet technology. As an important and popular medium in the 21st century for the spread of information and cultural services throughout the world, the internet technology has proven itself to be a pervasive facilitator of globalisation. As Abdul Rahman (2004) notes, the internet was a major alternative medium in the late 1990s particularly among the young middle class group in the Southeast Asian cities of Bangkok, Manila, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur who rose against their respective regimes demanding for justice. In fact, internet usage in these Asian countries has been experiencing a phenomenal rise since the past decade. To quote an example, the number of internet users in Malaysia increased by almost 90 percent within a span of just seven years. In 2004, there were 10,040,000 internet users (Internet World Statistics, 2005) compared to only 1,374,000 in 1997 (Matrade, 2004).

As such, one cannot discount the fact that as images and ideas can be more easily and rapidly transmitted from one place to another with the internet technology, it profoundly impacts the way people experience their everyday lives (Steger, 2003: 70). For instance, the dominant symbolic systems of meanings in this age – such as individualism, consumerism and various religious discourses that may originate from

one corner of the Western world are already circulating freely and widely among the developing Southeast Asian populace.

Another issue at hand in relation to internet technology is its apparent exploitation by the profit-motivated commercial corporations which are keen to utilise the internet space as an important source of reaping profits via the marketization of products and services to the global market. In effect Murdock and Golding (2001) are of the view that the confrontation between the motives of the commercial corporations and the culture of open access and public participation as espoused by many net enthusiasts will seriously affect the structure of modern-day universal culture. Although this phenomenon could cause confusion among the net users, the budding Southeast Asian users in particular, and could lead to an eventual weakening of their cultural coherence, it could also make them knowledgeable cosmopolitan citizens of the world.

A discussion of the cultural impact of globalisation will not be complete without referring to the widespread use of the English language among the Asian societies today. Indeed, as a very noticeable feature of cultural globalisation English is a popular language now. In his evaluation of the cultural changes brought about by globalisation in Southeast Asia, Yoshihara Kunio (2004) notes that English has widely been acknowledged as the most important language for knowledge acquisition and development.

Because of its wide acceptance as a primary global language particularly for global business expansion, Abdul Rahman (2004) reasons that English impacted into almost every Asian society including those considered to be highly nationalistic societies like Japan, China and South Korea. These societies, according to him (ibid) had to succumb to studying English to avoid being left behind in the global race. For the same reason, the use of English in vernacular schools in Malaysia has been reemphasised since the past few years. A more complete picture of this situation is presented in Chapter Three.

As it is, language and culture are two elements that are deep-rooted among the people and are hard to change. It is universally accepted that the Western culture of English

and American have extended far and wide due to the liberalisation of the free market economy and this has resulted in its strong influence among the people of the world. Abdul Rahman (ibid: 337-351) theorises that during the colonial years in Southeast Asia, the use of English was promoted and encouraged among the colonised societies to get them to accept and be identified with their “new masters”. All at once, it is also equated with advancement, modernity and cosmopolitanism whilst the national languages were regarded as parochial or insular.

Although the influence of English as a global language may be seen as harmless by some, the fact remains that its spread has promoted an English-speaking mass media that are dominated by American companies and that transmit American culture. Kunio (2004: 83-120) warns that because the American mass media are frequently more appealing than the national language mass media, readers are susceptible to believe that these media benefit them. On a more serious note, Kunio (ibid) adds that the depiction of cultural messages in the American mass media conflict with the norms and values of the developing Asian countries like Malaysia. When this kind of exposures continue unabated, the national cultures will eventually reduce in significance. To proponents of world cultural diversity, depending on their sentiments, this situation can either be damaging or harmless. It may be damaging because it could create divisions within the national culture. At the same time, it could be remarkable as there will be interconnections of varied cultures that will lead to a hybridized global culture.

Taken as a whole, the globalisation process which includes the spread of values, beliefs, lifestyles and popular culture from one country to another would consequently result in the extension of the cultural habits of the local population beyond their local customs and beliefs. On the other hand, in the economic arena, there are bound to be significant creation of economic opportunities for the citizens of the nation-state.

2.4.3 Global Consumption and Hybridization of Culture

One needs no reminder that culture provides the source for people’s sense of character and belongingness in a community. Additionally, people of differing cultural groups can be drawn to one another when they adopt similar beliefs and values. On the same

note, although there may be differences in lifestyles that exist in every society, the ubiquitous nature of culture compels it to take on a universal role.

The global system has generated new universal phenomena in the form of specific, localized products such as food, music or clothes (Franklin, Lury and Stacey, 2000: 2). Also, the traditional cultural life of a society can no longer be confined or duplicated in a globalised world because its traditions and its detraditionalized versions are dependent on material and symbolic goods to effect a universal structural and technical transformation (see Moeran, 2001). In essence, the commercialization of cultures and traditions of the world societies has turned out to be crucial for the very survival of a society's cultural life. This section attempts to discuss the global trend of universalism and hybrid culture amongst the world population.

a. Globalization and universalism

It has been established earlier that the rich cultural diversity amongst the various ethnics around the world, whether they are culturally similar or different, leaves everyone with little choice but to be tolerant of one another's cultural life. Even though there are cultural clashes happening around us, like the incidences in northern Ireland and Iraq, these differences generally occur due to the narrow-mindedness of a minority group within the cultural community. Also, what is observed by someone at the physical level does not necessarily represent the real person being observed. Miller (2001) believes that a person's significant ideals, practices and behaviors in his or her own home is a good hint of the society's cultural life. It follows that although Western consumer goods are being marketed and consumed almost everywhere in the world, people's reactions to these goods are generally varied.

Despite this, today's global citizens who are transforming themselves as consumers of new tastes, be it of food or ideology, are global universalists who represent consumers of new global markets, brands and identities. America's KFC for instance, is an example of a positive reaction which exploits an underlying globally universal desire for a quick lunch with the family on a busy day. As mentioned and indicated in earlier pages, although there are cultural diversities, the immense influence of Western goods, whether symbolic, technological or aesthetic can easily erase any local differences. Howes (1996: 183) even asserts that the local population

in most nations glorify imported products so much that they acknowledge and absorb the foreign lifestyle that comes with the product. He supports his contention by claiming that in Japan, Western products enjoy better sales when Western models are portrayed in Western settings in the product's advertisements. This situation suggests that Western marketers can assume that the Western lifestyle has been accepted as a universal cultural life amongst the major markets of the world.

A study conducted by Miller (2008) amongst 30 international households living on a street in South London shows that in a culturally mixed contemporary urban society the aesthetic sense of balance inculcate a variety of relationships within the society. Miller refers to each urban household as a "tribe" which utilizes material things or objects, such as their car, furniture, clothes or other goods, to serve as a vehicle for various kinds of social communication. In other words, urban consumers are not exactly unbridled individualists but are rather "part of tribes".

In their everyday consumer life, the modern and urban "cultural tribes" are nevertheless quite fluid and unstable because they are constantly in search of an identity. As a result of this situation, neo-tribes develop. Lury (1996) informs us that these ephemeral tribal groupings are loosely organized to come together on the basis of their own minor values, including fluctuating similarities such as affinity, interest or being in the same neighbourhood. As such, the traditional sociological groupings of class, gender, race and age are not sufficient to describe these universally global cluster of consumers. Characteristic of the contemporary society, these modern and urban citizens of the world are representatives of the global lifestyles.

Results from an ethnographic study on the usage of the internet amongst Trinidadians by Miller and Slater (2000) demonstrate that when Trinidadian youths communicate online, they prefer to be perceived as global citizens rather than as Trinidadians. Nevertheless, while they take pleasure in watching television programmes from the West and other foreign countries, they are also proud to be Trinidadians. In fact, most of them believe that they would be able to better appreciate their own civilization by travelling and learning from outside their own country (ibid: 12). It can therefore be inferred that in today's postmodern society where global cultural barriers are almost invisible, there is a strong willingness among people to accept one

another as one and the same, or at least to adhere to associations which are cross-national or international, and based on a perception of globally shared cultural values or lifestyle aspirations. In this connection, Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000: 115) remind us that “the discovery of traditional Western cultures, reunites us with all living beings in a universal pan humanity of global proportions”. Further to this, Howes (1996) adds that in addition to being marketed globally, the West is also constantly being reinvented for local consumption. Taking this factor into consideration, is the concept of Western cultural imperialism still valid? Or are the Asian nations actually colonizing themselves instead?

b. Creolization in cross-cultural consumption

Global products and brands from America and the European countries that are widely marketed and consumed by the world population particularly in the Asian countries, have to go through hybridization, the process of which foreign goods are designated with cultural meanings and uses to fulfill local needs. Unlike “coca-colonization” which signifies the flood of Western values and brands and the acknowledged intent of the Western producer, hybridization is closely associated to the “creolization” model which focuses on the reaction of the local consumers’ towards the foreign brands. It takes into account the background of the foreign goods and brands (ibid). Therefore, all foreign goods would have to go through creolization before a universal consumer lifestyle takes effect. To cope with the challenges of global marketing, a common solution employed by marketers of consumer brands is to integrate foreign goods with the local lifestyles such that cultural diversity is sustained. Additionally, since creolization is an essential component of cross-cultural consumption, one of the most powerful brand strategies developed by a group of three American scholars namely Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) that global advertisers employ to entice global consumers is the Local Consumer Culture Positioning (LCCP) and Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP). A detailed explanation of these strategies is provided on page 52 of this thesis.

Creolization takes effect when the local consumers colonize the brands first instead of the other way round. Hence, their local values, beliefs and practices are enforced and consequently their cultural integrity remains intact. In fact, Tomlinson (1991:173) proposes that the term “cultural imperialism” should be replaced with “spread of

modernity” since goods and brands from the West are actually preferred by the non-Western consumers, instead of being forced upon them. Nevertheless, when discussing this issue one cannot disregard the possibility of Western interests towards the economy and ideologies of the nation-states while promoting modernity by way of Western brands and cultural life.

On the same note, despite concern about the proliferation of Western brands and the restrictions imposed by most governments to counter the possible demise of traditional local values due to the influence of Western lifestyles, this has not deterred the local population from consuming Western goods and emulating Western cultures. Howes (1996: 180) gave two classic examples regarding this issue, namely the banning of satellite dishes in Iran and India’s disapproval of the Western culture of kissing in public. He notes that while Indians continue getting pleasure watching passionate scenes from Western movies via satellite, underground video establishments keep mushrooming in Iran. These two examples clearly demonstrate the strong attachment to Western consumer goods and Western lifestyles of people in the East. This West and East bond is particularly true for countries like India and Malaysia which were once under the rule of Western powers for more than 100 years.

In consequence, portrayal of the West in the process of hybridization or creolization is no doubt a dominating feature all across the world. Since “Westernness” is for many a very significant promotional strategy, Western images are being exploited not only by the Western producers but also by their non-Western counterparts. It is therefore not surprising that fake Western products manufactured outside the West do meticulously duplicate the genuine Western brands. In Malaysia, it is very easy to find fake Levi’s jeans, Rolex watches or Clark shoes.

At the same time, this trend towards embracing the global culture amongst the non-Western countries has also caught up with the Western countries. The Western society works to accomplish this by reframing some of the non-Western practices, beliefs and possessions to fulfill their needs. Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000) mention the dependence of the West on the spiritual strength of the East which the West lacks, a component of globalization that is rarely discussed. They explain that the West recontextualises and regularly hybridizes Eastern traditions within their own practices,

which they emphasize as a far-reaching adjustment of Western beliefs about the meaning of life, death and God (ibid: 121).

Discussion of creolization and cultural hybridization of the East and West in the context of a universally global phenomenon will not be complete without addressing food cultures as a homogenized identity of the global population, particularly with the clear presence of the Western food outlets like KFC, Big Mac and McDonalds throughout the globe. Nevertheless, although these outlets have been successfully localized, the proliferation of creolization of Eastern food traditions into the Western world has also been continuous, although seldom discussed. As a typical example, Howes (1996:1) claims that Indian food businesses in Britain outnumber the everyday Western stores selling ordinary takeaways such as fish and chips. This indicates that the cultural blending of tastes and cuisines in creolized food, whether from West to East or the opposite is a universal response that gives the consumer a global experience of cross-cultural consumption. Given its transnational character, the appearances of hybrid dishes in many parts of the world and its increasingly homogenous character, one can presume that internationalized food (see Hannerz, 1990) is a good indicator towards an apparent global sense of identity. Other than food, the increasing importance and success of “world music” today that cuts across cultural barriers is another similar phenomenon. In fact, since “the age of rock and roll” in the 1960s when the Beatles and Elvis Presley were household names, many local artistes have adapted the music forms of these music idols and those of other global artistes to create hybrid sounds which blend Western popular music with local traditional music.

In essence, the shift from Western culture to a universal consumer culture may not necessarily be Western globalization since foreign goods may not be able to supersede local receptivity. As global producers cannot simply ignore local uniqueness and traditions, global cross-cultural consumption is admittedly very closely associated with a modernized hybrid culture.

2.4.4 Global Branding and Global Consumer Culture

In today's post-industrial global era, there are segments in the societies who are economically affluent. The increases in their income levels are the primary factors that transform their behaviours and thinking patterns. As mentioned in the section earlier, the middle class community, due to their relative affluence and concern for status is characterised in accordance to their lifestyle and consumption patterns. Along with the rise in the middle class group is the advancement in the role of the media as vehicles for the advertising and the display of consumer goods.

As a matter of fact, since the 1980s when globalisation started becoming the buzzword, the average growth in advertising expenditure throughout the nations of the world has been stable at about five percent every year, a figure that exceeds the average growth in world economy (Zenith Optimedia, 2006). In 2005, the Asia Pacific advertising expenditure in the major media of regional newspapers, magazines, television, radio, cinema, outdoor and internet amounts to a total of 403.7 billion US dollar. Of these, about 87.7 billion US dollars were spent in the Asia Pacific region which ranked third after North America and Europe.

a. Global Consumer Culture and the Role of Media

Aligned with the study by Giddens and Robertson, Hannerz (1990: 237) suggests that the "world culture" is expanding because of the "increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory". Indicating the massive diffusion of the Anglo-American values and consumer goods into the global world markets, Tomlinson (1999) argues that other cultures of the world are vulnerable to be influenced by Western norms and lifestyles.

In Barber's (1996) concept of "McWorld" which he refers to as a form of soulless consumer capitalism, he cautions against global cultural imperialism. More importantly, he contends that "McWorld" is fast changing the world's diverse populations into a weak homogenous market (ibid). He further elaborates that "McWorld" is a product of a superficial American popular culture which was

accumulated since the 1950s with a motive for expansionist commercial interests. These American image exports including music, video, theatre and books are constructed to create a uniform flavour around the same logo, advertising slogans, stars, songs, brand names, jingles and trademarks (ibid). Then again, with the emergence of an active media force in Asia to create and maintain the “Asian” culture by way of its media contents (see Moeran, 2001), we may be seeing a shrinkage of the “American influence”.

Beyond the phenomenon of Western cultural imperialism is the viewpoint of post modern theorists that the consumer culture has engendered individualized consumers who are generally not tied to any form of adapting to a “mainstream lifestyle”. As Giddens (1993) indicates, this new generation of consumers are self-conscious, individualists and expressive. They display their own individuality and sense of style in their choice of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and outlook. The consumer is “made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home furnishings, decorations, car and other activities” (Featherstone, 1991: 86). This notion of creative participation in a particular type of consumption is the expression of taste and image offered in lifestyle advertising. The consumer’s preoccupation with customizing to a lifestyle he wants has become one of the ways in which he becomes imaginative with his daily life. Although this image of non-conformity to which the consumer must conform to belong is successfully sold to the young, the consumer characteristics of self-expression and self-improvement have caught up with all age groups and class origins (ibid). This fact certainly demonstrates that the open and persuasive culture of consumption has been able to change attitudes and promote acceptance amongst the larger population within the societies.

When associating a brand with the global consumer culture, one must accept that brands with a global image possess powerful means to increase sales (Buzzell, 1968). This is because these brands derive their additional power and value by encouraging consumer acknowledgement of enhanced self-worth and status through purchase of the brand (Friedman, 1990). Therefore, consumers may purchase certain global brands for the sake of reinforcing their membership in a specific global segment, like the teenager, government or upper middle class market (Hannerz, 1990). On the other

hand, they may do so to strengthen their self-image such as being referred to as sophisticated, intelligent or modern (Friedman, 1990). In addition, globally positioned brands are likely to have special credibility and authority (Kapferer, 1992) amongst the consumers.

Parallel to the massive flood of global brands in the market, it is observed that over the past twenty years or so, shopping for consumer goods has turned into a trendy lifestyle. Further, in tandem with this development is the flourishing of big shopping malls in major towns and cities all over the world. Indeed, according to Bryson (1994), mall shopping is now America's biggest leisure activity. He claims that since the last decade, Americans spend an average of twelve hours a month in shopping malls (ibid: 217). Hence, the economic development in many countries of the world today which is inherently linked with the consumer culture of the population is further fastened with the growth of the "mall life" in countries like Britain, Australasia, Canada and much of Europe and Asia (Kendall and Wickham, 2001).

The emergence of global consumer cultures and shared sets of consumption-related symbols, in particular the brand names of products, has created a big impact in the minds of the segment members (Terpstra and Kenneth, 1991). These mostly urban popular cultures are specifically packaged, structured and marketed by media organisations even before they become consumer items in the marketplace (Ferguson and Golding, 1997). As affirmed by Appadurai (1990), the mass media have played a major role in the creation, learning and sharing of such consumption symbols. The central role of the mass media, television in particular also caught the attention of Habermas (2005) who bemoans that the new consumer culture in this century has slowly displaced the once thriving and highly respected literary culture which was the pride of 18th century Britain. He details that even intellectual discussions have been turned into cultural goods by the media vehicles in the likes of television programmes, magazine supplements or internet websites and as a result knowledge and education do not appear genuine anymore. The media have transformed panel discussions and other educationally skewed issues into consumer item programmes that would be financed by advertisers. In this way, these programme types become "cultural goods" for the media to make money rather than to educate the audience on the importance of knowledge. He (ibid: 164) asserts:

Professional dialogues, panel discussions and round table shows become the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a saleable package ready for box office, it becomes a commodity to be sold to the public.

The use of various persuasive advertisement approaches employed in the media to create pleasurable sensations has no doubt been successful in encouraging a culture of consumption among its audiences. Also, advertisers are fully aware that for a global brand to be embedded into the consumers' mind, heavy media advertising is crucial. It is therefore not surprising that in the year 2000, the amount of advertisement commercials aired in between television programmes on American television reached a record high, peaking at over 15 minutes of commercials per prime time television hour and television advertisement volume in the United States increased by almost 15 billion US dollar within a span of 30 years with \$36 billion in 1970 and \$50.44 billion in 1999 (Television Bureau of Advertising, 2005).

Based on the figures above, it is quite obvious that of the many media that lend themselves as advertising vehicles for consumer marketing and product promotion, television has been the most influential medium to sell goods and services to the consumers at large. As it is, the daily average viewing time for an American home has leapt from five hours and 56 minutes in 1970 to seven hours and 26 minutes in 1999 (ibid). The fact that television watching was voted as one of the four biggest pastimes among Americans (Kendall and Wickham, 2001: 127) further support this point. The strong influence of television is certainly phenomenal because of its worldwide access in generating a global culture of consumption. Walker (1996) notes that in 1996, one of satellite television's most popular channels, MTV boasted a viewership of 238 million spanning 68 countries. He adds that the direct influence of channels like MTV would lead to a strong tendency for the formation of global culture of the teens, like jeans, running shoes, and denim jackets (ibid). Indeed, it is now common among marketers of good and services to incorporate advertising as part of their television programming strategies. Anderson (1995: 9) remarks:

Just as products are embedded within entertainment, entertainment is incorporated into commercial messages. These 'creative' practices have forged yet another set of unities between advertising and media content.

In discussing the issue of media and its relationship with advertising, in particular in the promotion of consumer culture, one cannot dismiss the economic aspect as an

area of discussion. Boyd-Barret (1992) reminds us that economists today view the media's role beyond changing attitudes but as a means to promote economic growth. Here advertisement messages in the media vehicles are perceived as important since they help encourage the consumption of consumer goods which in turn would elevate industrialization, higher income and yet further consumption.

However, critics of cultural imperialism dismiss this standpoint on the basis that it does not consider the extent to which the consumer goods are manufactured and controlled by major Western-based corporations. The critics also blame the advertising industry for creating "commodity fetishism" (Anderson, 1995: 102), a term from classic Marxism which refers to the capitalization of goods for short term profits at the expense of their social responsibilities and other considerations. However it is unfair to blame the creators of advertisements alone. Although it cannot be denied that they do contribute to the culture of purchasing goods that may not be necessary, there are other economic-related industries and institutions such as the government and private businesses that are equally responsible for indirectly encouraging the growth of today's trend of consumer culture.

b. Global Brands and the Concept of Branding

In today's globalised business environment, customers are exposed to a variety of product brands that flood the marketplace. With the lifespan of product life cycles shortened, waves of new brands are introduced into the marketplace at a frenetic pace. Therefore, brands have to be managed well so that its image is consistently distinguished and the consumer's receptivity is unquestionable (see Arvidsson, 2006).

Unlike advertising, branding is more immersive and instant because it involves every element of the product design, a "total communication package" which goes beyond the production and placement of advertisement in the media vehicles. Other than design knowledge and marketing consultancies, branding management also includes business strategy plans (Moor, 2007; Arvidsson, 2006). In their efforts to persuade customers and citizens, keepers of brands who range from product manufacturers to government organizations and political parties consistently promote and passionately protect their brands that have become part of the society's cultural life (Moor, 2007).

Because advertising is an inseparable part of brand building, it is designed consciously or unconsciously, to create and strengthen consumer impressions of the brand advertised, so that they will be more likely to buy it, or to buy it more often. The youth segment for instance, as Roderick (2000: 286) reveals in his study would more likely be interested to buy brands for products like savvy, slick hand phones, latest engineered pair of jeans, sunglasses, prepaid telecommunications services, cigarettes or a disc man.

The ultimate goal in branding a product is to produce a unique and attractive offering that satisfies both the rational and emotional needs of customers in a better way than the competition. The consistent use of brand name, symbol or logo makes the brand instantly recognisable to consumers and can bring to mind the 'personality' of the brand and its associations (Turbin, 2000).

As brands promote a psychological need that is often at the heart of a purchase decision, they act as important means through which Asian consumers in particular can express their personality, aspirations and achievements (Temporal, 1999). In Malaysia for instance, it is quite common to find successful people expressing their wealth or success through their Mercedes-Benz car or Rolex watch. An advertisement in a Singapore newspaper by a Mercedes-Benz distributor features a picture of an E-class model with the tagline "Make a statement, without saying a word". Consumers buy expensive and prestigious brands of goods because possession of these outward expressions of success differentiates them from other people, giving them the opportunity to stand out from the crowd.

Temporal (ibid) elaborates that although names, symbols, designs or their combinations are often associated with brands, the most important ingredient in a brand is as specified earlier, its "personality". Like an individual, the brand has a personality too. Major brands that people talk about today such as BMW or Gucci are personalities in their own right and are well known in all societies and cultures as either heroes, cartoon characters, sports stars or great leaders. In Asia, names like Coca Cola, Brad Pitt, Nestle, Sony, Batman, Mercedes and Michael Jackson are on many people's lips and are equally well known. Thousands of people relate to brand personalities in the same way as they do to human personalities (ibid).

The Marlboro man from the “Marlboro High Country” advertisement showing the image of a rugged cowboy roughing himself up alone in a place away from modernity, is a classic example of what a brand personality is all about. It uses a combination of physical and emotional elements to appeal to certain customers who live or would love to live a certain lifestyle. Here, the consumer who is attracted to the advertisement would have a perceived value that he fits in with the brand because his personality, lifestyle, habits and related aspects exemplify the brand.

Also, the use of brand personality for a product equates the consumers with self-confidence, dominance, sociability or aggressiveness. These characteristics are examples of behavioural expressions of the consumers’ personality traits. In fact, results from studies on lifestyles maintain that the activity, interest and opinion measures are reflections of internal psychological states that structure a person’s behaviour when making a decision to purchase a product’s brand name (Corrigan, 1997).

As such, a popular brand is preferred primarily because of its perceived symbolic value, not its price or other product attributes. For instance, Coke is purchased not because of its taste or its bubbles but because of its perceived symbolic value as a fun drink for youths. In fact, consumers who are comfortable with Coke are less concerned about how Coke tastes because to them, the brand has met their emotional expectations which will remain with them in the long run.

Global brands like Coke, McDonalds, Mercedes Benz and many others such as those mentioned above that make their presence in most markets of the world share one common characteristic, that is they stick to the same basic brand personality, values and positioning across the world. However, while the concept and the brand’s personality is maintained throughout the world markets, the advertisement would adapt to the culture and customs of the prospects in the country that the product is marketed in. For instance, the logo, packaging and colour of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) are maintained throughout the world but the taste of the American KFC is slightly different from that of the Malaysian KFC to suit Malaysian taste buds (Adnan, 1994).

Another example of a universal global concept that was used successfully in Malaysia was the Coke “chup” advertisement campaign which appeared on Malaysian television in 2000. This commercial showed a group of Malaysian youths having fun on a street and they became highly spirited when one of the youths in the group stopped playing, took a can of Coke and howled “chup” (Malaysian’s slang word for “take a break”), he then started drinking the Coke. Obviously, “chup” was used because it is a local slang word; it is typical among youths all over the world to communicate among themselves using slang words since it denotes a spirit of camaraderie among them.

The two examples above show that the approach used in marketing global brands by portraying a universal lifestyle and maintaining the brand’s personality have been successful. Furthermore, it is quite logical since the principle used is that although people throughout the world may be culturally different, they still share key emotions like joy and sadness which have been identified as universal emotions. A more detailed discussion on global branding strategies is presented in the sub-section that follows.

c. Global Brand Positioning

Global marketers of brand name products enjoy the advantage of economies of scale when they indulge in a global marketing and communications campaign to promote their global brands. For instance, a global brand like Coca-cola that is standardised throughout the world and employs a mix of marketing and communication activities including advertising and promotion, public relations, media overlap, packaging and others would reduce a lot of costs on its production, research and development. Nevertheless, the complicating task for the global advertiser is to derive a uniform concept and appeal for it to be accepted by its audience throughout the world. To achieve this, a hybrid blend of differing cultural practices may need to be recontextualised as global within Western cultures (Franklin, Lury and Stacey, 2000).

At this point, it is important to highlight a well-developed concept of cultural meaning transfer in global brand strategies by Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999). According to them, there are two main strategies: Local Consumer Culture Positioning (LCCP)

and Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP) . The LCCP is a strategy that links the global brand with local cultural meanings reflecting the local cultural values of the consumers. The product is portrayed as being produced for the local people. Examples of LCCP are many as it is the most popular approach used. The Coca-cola, Levi Strauss and McDonalds advertisements as will be described in the following paragraphs are some of them. On the other hand, the FCCP is an approach that positions the global brand as representing an explicit foreign consumer culture. In other words, the personality, application and target users of the brand that employs FCCP are linked with a foreign culture. An example of this type of global advertisement is the 2002 Pepsi advertisement which appeared on Malaysian television. This advertisement reflects Western culture. It uses the setting of a stadium akin to the Roman empire, involving the character Julius Caesar and lady gladiators played by singers Britney Spears and Beyonce. From the use of the American stars in Roman costumes that reveal their cleavages to the depiction of the way Pepsi is gulped by the character Julius Caesar, the advertisement is very much American in character.

Because the LCCP is more widely used than the FCCP, this section will focus on the former. The extensive use of this specific strategy amongst global advertisers is understandable because the behaviours, norms and values of people are generally different from one nation to another mainly because they are stubbornly connected to their native cultures. Although the world may be in the process of homogenising, thus far national and sub-regional cultures still continue to thrive.

On a related subject of upholding to the native culture, it is worth mentioning a classic research work by Katz and Liebes (1990) who studied cultural differences in the interpretation of the famous American television drama “Dallas”. Among others, his respondents included American, Russian, Palestinian and Arab viewers. The study concludes and reaffirms the fact that the same cultural good is interpreted differently in different cultures. For instance, one of the findings reveals that the Russians were ahead of the rest in labelling the programme as an American conspiracy. In other words, they were certain that the programme’s message which depicts rich people as unhappy was a typical American agenda to corrupt the public’s mind.

As such, it would not be surprising if, for instance, a Thai audience responds differently to the same global advertisement message received by a German audience. This situation is certainly a big challenge for global advertisers in their effort to market their brands throughout the world. Due to this, some of them use the approach of spotting uniform cultural elements among countries, whilst the rest utilise the alternative way of adapting and adjusting according to identifiable circumstances in a variety of markets. Consequently, the global advertiser's choice to regulate the advertisements is aimed at modifying the cultural elements in their advertising to suit to local conditions. This is done such that the effectiveness of the advertising appeals are assured. As Marieke de Mooij (1998) puts it succinctly, "local markets are people; global markets are products".

Scholars generally agree that there are three major sets of cultural symbols in global advertisements. They are the language used, the aesthetical aspects and the theme or subject matter of the advertisement. The use of English in global advertisements is widespread because it signifies modernism and globalism (Abdul Rahman, 2004; Kunio, 2004). Thus, because consumers of global brands are often communicated in both written and oral English, they tend to view themselves as modern and global (Ray, Ryder and Scott, 1994: 251).

In the same way as the English language, specific aesthetic techniques in global advertisements have shown strong signs of becoming a part of the global consumer culture. Because aesthetics is equated with an image or representation, the use of a world famous personality to endorse a brand is one example of an aesthetic cultural symbol. For instance, to give Visa credit card a global image, Pierce Brosnan (as a James Bond character) is used as an endorser in the Visa card advertisement. The same technique is used for Michael Jordan in a Nike advertisement.

Another occurrence of global approach in aesthetic construction is the design and presentation of the brand logos in the advertisement. Whether the logo is designed such that it is linked to a certain culture or not, consumers would take into consideration all elements in the logo before they connect it a certain culture (Grunert, 1996). As it is, logos which are designed specifically such that the shape, colour, texture and the overall look do not touch on the cultural sensitivities of the particular

market segment, are universally accepted as suitable for all cultures. Examples of these are the star-shaped logo of the Mercedes Benz and the “M” alphabet of McDonalds.

Lastly, specific themes used in an advertisement can be acknowledged as representing a specific consumer culture. For example, a Nokia advertisement in Malaysia portrays the story theme of a young professional executive receiving a call from his Nokia hand phone while on his way out from his posh office premises. He then gets into his Mercedes Benz car and drives to attend a wedding reception at a five star hotel. This advertisement signifies that owners of the Nokia brand belong to the upper middle class segment who follows a global culture which Hannerz (1990) describes as “transnational commerce culture”.

On the other hand, a local Malaysian theme for a Malaysian-made car, *Kancil* shows the scene of a Malaysian man driving his *Kancil* car on a narrow road to his village to celebrate the *Hari Raya* festival. He stops halfway to give way to another car whose driver was initially impatient to get in the way. Hence, the *Kancil* brand in this advertisement is more likely to be associated with a specific Malaysian culture of tolerance and compromise based on the storyline theme of the advertisement.

It must be noted that although there are many global brands that use one version of the same advertisement throughout the world, more often the three elements of language, aesthetics and theme in the advertisements that are applied globally are adapted to the values and customs of the local culture (Poortinga and Malpass, 1986). The brand is packaged such that the theme remains the same worldwide but the positioning may be communicated differently to suit the specific market.

Levi Strauss jeans is an example of a global brand with a worldwide uniform theme and universal message but which allows some degree of modifications to suit local conditions wherein specific cultural differences are accommodated. While the Levi's quality and its American roots are intact, its presentation is patterned to be aligned with the local setting. In its 1990s button fly blue jeans campaign, Levi Strauss's global theme was the youthful carefree image. Its standard setting was a blue background accompanied with a blues music and song showing images of youths

loosening up in their button fly blue jeans. For its Malaysian version, a Malaysian adaptation of the setting and situation is maintained with Malaysian actors in the advertisement. Also, for the vernacular Malay version of the advertisement, a Malay blues song was rendered although the music and melody remain in their original form (see Adnan, 1994).

The McDonalds “I’m Lovin’ It” global campaign is another case of a global brand with a unifying theme that transcends nationalities and borders. Launched for the Asian market in early 2005, the McDonald’s prosperity burger campaign not only produces the same promotional spicy burger but also the same television advertisements for its more than 2,000 restaurants in Asia, not including Japan (Fowler, 2005). Despite the blend of cultures and tastes in Asia, the Asian spirit of collectivism is the unifying force that the advertiser identified to portray a uniform Asian culture in the advertisement. If Malaysians show their unity amongst the ethnic groups by celebrating the differing festivals of *Hari Raya*, *Chinese New Year*, *Thaipusam* and *Christmas* together, Asians could also come together via a common festival. So the advertiser decided to focus on a unifying theme that was developed to link Asians of all nationalities and borders with the celebration of the Lunar New Year. As it is, most Asian cultures which comprise a big population of Chinese ethnics are known to commemorate the Lunar New Year with a certain occasion that signifies the prospect of good luck for the future. Based on this premise, the campaign features a boy who wishes to have a better luck on his fishing trip. He then receives a beef Prosperity Burger from his brother. This special burger is very similar to the McRib sandwich in McDonald’s restaurant. His dream finally comes true as his luck changes with the appearance of a computer-generated whale (ibid).

Because people are by and large strongly attached to their cultural norms and practices, global advertisers have indisputably used the most effective strategy in drawing the attention of the consumers. After all, consumers are invariably the final decision makers when making a brand purchase.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has given an account of the process of cultural transformation in

societies, leading to the creation of the middle class community. It then relates this development to the concept of globalisation which necessitates nation-states to open their borders for the free flow of goods, services and ideas. It ends with an explanation on the rise of the consumer culture which prompts marketers and advertisers of global brands to conceive a winning positioning strategy to win the hearts of the global consumers.

The unmistakable societal changes today have resulted in the old traditional practices fading out in place of modern and for the most part Western based changes. Also, the strong need for financial stability and material wants have to a certain extent reduced the importance of religion although religious traditions are still being practiced in many societies. In addition, the widening of the generation gap and the clash of values between the young and their more matured parents are principally due to the new modern values that the young inherit either from their exposure to the global media or via other non-media channels of communication.

With regards to the middle class group, ranked between the upper and lower groups, they are a dynamic and ambitious component of the society whose consumption patterns and lifestyle orientations distinguish them from the population. The new middle class segment nowadays tend to be commercialised in thinking. Because of their penchant for material wealth and status, they become great consumers of well-established brands which are often equated with image and standing in society. Despite being educated, the middle class group is segmented based on their occupational position and income level. Besides the white collar positions in their occupation, their leisure activities such as holidaying, dining or art appreciation are another important measurement of their status in society. The middle class society in the West, being more established can be differentiated from their Asian counterparts because the former does not compete for higher status and cultural emulation between them whilst the Asian middle class group, being generally first generation middle class has a tendency to outdo one another for the sake of their image in society.

On the subject of globalisation and global branding, this chapter explores the meanings, scope and impact of globalisation on the developing countries. It also examines the concept of hybridization and creolization within the context of a cultural

blend of global cultures. With regard to global branding, it delves into the positioning strategies employed by global advertisers to influence the brand consumption of the goods advertised. It needs to be noted that although globalisation is popularly argued as depriving the developing nation-states of economic and cultural gains, this is not necessarily so. Although it is an accepted fact that the more economically and politically powerful developed countries of the West control the global market, many of the developing countries are also reaping economic benefits from this American capitalist economic system. Despite the popular view that it is difficult for the national corporations in the nation-states to implement their own national development programmes due to the control wielded by foreign-based multinational corporations, it can still be argued that these national corporations could still gain by way of transfer of new technologies from the more developed countries.

Beyond the economic consequences, globalisation has also led to cultural homogenisation. As it is, the opening of borders among nations coupled with the latest technology that have speeded up information and message have provided people with no alternative but to be exposed to new cultures which seem to be a major concern of the affected developing countries. Literature relating to the internet as a persistent channel of global communication that spreads free images and ideas of all kinds around the world support the notion that the global culture of consumerism, individualism and other post-modernist ideals are fast occupying the minds of youths.

This phenomenon is of significance to some social scholars who view it as the spread of neo-liberal globalisation although there are those who see it as an opportunity to become global citizens who can share and if necessary adopt new “positive” values that can benefit them as cultural beings. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that cultural imperialism began very much earlier in the British colonies of African and Asian countries. In the case of Malaysia, like many other developing countries, the spread and promotion of the English language since the past two centuries as a language of modernity has indeed been instrumental in the expansion of cultural globalisation. At this point, one needs to ask whether modernity is synonymous with the Western society or is it dependent on the society that embraces it?

Notwithstanding this, we can agree that the traditional English mass media of

television, newspapers, magazines and many more play a major role in the advancement of Western culture. This state of affairs, where Western culture dominates the global culture, serves as a base for the conflict in norms and values of the local population. In sum, among the many factors that point towards economic and cultural globalisation are the long history of colonisation, the need of the developing countries for economic development and the spread of English language as an international language. These factors and many more, including the widespread use of the internet, have left countries like Malaysia with little choice but to adapt to the globalisation process. The challenge is for the citizens to decide whether to embrace a totally foreign culture at the expense of a possible loss in their identity or to adopt a hybrid culture that combines the “positive” elements that can transform them to be better citizens of their own country and the world at large.

Studies relating to global culture undertaken by eminent scholars such as Giddens (1993) and Featherstone (1991) reaffirm the notion that the post-modern consumers of products and services today are individualised consumers. For instance, they have their individualised taste in their choice of clothes, interior house designs or even their own brand of soft drink. Aligned with the idea of the importance of individual self-image, manufacturers of global products have positioned their brands such that consumers who choose certain specific brands would be perceived as having a certain image or credibility.

Taken together, while a brand facilitates self-expression for the consumer and differentiates him from others, its primary goal is to satisfy his or her individual needs. This special characteristic of the global brand has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the primary importance of brand personality. As Temporal (1999) has reiterated, it is the brand personality that is the key element in making a global brand very successful and long lasting. Consumers who find the brand appealing are tied to the brand psychologically and emotionally because they relate their character, attributes and overall lifestyle with the personality of the brand. Coca Cola for instance is equated with a carefree personality and appeals to the urban young global segment while Marlboro is associated with a rugged and macho image and is meant for those in the mid 20s onwards who love adventure. Therefore, it is the perceived symbolic value of the popular global brand that appeals to the

consumer, rather than its price or any other characteristics of the brand.

Literature associated with the marketing of the global brands suggest that global advertisements are without doubt effective tools for the traditional and contemporary mass media to market the brands. As it is, while global advertisements in the print, broadcast and other media are used to the fullest, various other promotional efforts are also utilised by the media to reinforce the global brand impression that the advertisements have established. To advertisers and the general audiences, television which has the unique advantage of audio, visual and motion is the most pervasive and popular media. Because of this situation, a lot of television programmes are packaged to tie in with the requirements of sponsors who are marketing the brands, making the television and other media a conduit for selling cultural goods. In relation to this subject, it must again be noted that the internet is fast catching up as a carrier of global culture especially amongst the young. Thus, the media play a crucial role in extending today's era of material wants and needs wherein global brands are marketed to increase sales while creating a perceived status and self-worth for the consumers who treat shopping for consumer items as a trendy lifestyle.

Aligned with the concept of cultural hybridization and creolization in cross-cultural consumption (see Howes, 1996; Franklin, Lury and Stacey, 2000), local consumer culture positioning strategy (Alden, Steenkamp and Batra, 1999) has proven to be very effective in the marketing of global brands throughout the world. This advertisement strategy, which works on the basis that despite the dissimilarities in behaviours, norms and values of cultures throughout the world, there is a uniform cultural element that can be utilised to adapt and adjust according to identifiable local circumstances. This strategy which also incorporates the global cultural symbols of the English language, aesthetic techniques and a global story theme has proven to be very effective with almost every major global brand including McDonald's, Coca Cola or Levi Strauss.

Returning to the goal of this chapter, its aim is to present the theoretical framework for this study on the perception and influence of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class community. In it, I have laid out the inevitable changes in cultural values of the societies due to a variety of factors. They include the changing

socio-economic and political structure of societies with economic development as a major catalyst. An evident observable fact of the societal change is the rise of the educated middle class group. Being in the class level that is a transition between the working and upper classes, members of the middle class are an ambitious group whose goal is always to better themselves in their quest for a comfortable cultural life. As such, status and self-image are important components in their life. With the dynamic and fast paced changes occurring around the world where national borders are opened and the latest technology becomes the catchword, more and more cultural goods are marketed using various media strategies. Global advertisements aimed at selling global brands throughout the world use the most effective positioning strategy by adapting the global culture with elements of the local culture. This strategy has in fact won the hearts and minds of consumers, who are mostly from the middle class. And this situation has resulted in various global brands becoming items for consumption of the global audience. Thus, the global brands become forerunners of the now famous term, global consumer culture. The next chapter is focussed on the Malaysian scene in relation to its political, economic and socio-cultural domain including issues related to the Malaysian middle class segment and its advertising industry.

Chapter Three

Malaysia's Political, Economic and Socio-cultural Realm

3.1 Introduction

Malaysia is a former colony of the West which became an independent entity about 50 years ago. Its vibrant political, economic and socio-cultural climate has been and is currently going through a process of transformation. In its quest to be a developed country by the year 2020, Malaysia's globally influenced economic policy is a central issue and a subject of discourse amongst social science scholars and economists. Like most developing countries in Asia, its political, economic and cultural spheres of life are intertwined with the consumption of its middle class population and the proportionate growth of its advertising industry. With the Malaysian middle class population comprising various ethnic groups and socio-economic levels, are they all the same in their thinking patterns especially in the aspect of consuming products and brands? Or is their ethnic background a significant factor in determining their decisions to consume certain products and brands? This chapter attempts to unravel the intricacies of Malaysian politics, the direction of Malaysia's economic policies and the remarkable and distinctive culture of Malaysians and its middle class segments. Not to forget, it also explores Malaysian advertising practices which interrelate very closely with the politics, economy and culture of the middle class group.

It is imperative to note that this chapter functions both to provide a contextual background of Malaysia and also as a continuation of the theoretical framework which was established in Chapter Two. Beginning with an overview of the country, the next part scrutinises the history and present developments of Malaysian politics which influence advertising practice in the country. Following this is an examination of Malaysia's economic setting, its expansion and buoyancy relative to the consumption patterns of its middle class population. Finally, this chapter ends with a section on the cultural facets of Malaysia involving the practices and customs of

Malaysians in general, the uniqueness of the Malay culture and its close relationship with Islam. Its purpose is to establish the differences and similarities of the Malay culture and Malaysian culture (which includes Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnics as one cultural group) with the Western culture. Also included within the section on “Socio-cultural Milieu” is a discussion on Malaysia’s middle class community focusing on their cultural traits and consumption habits. This section then closes with an analysis of Malaysia’s advertising industry which spotlights on the intense penetration of Western cultural values in advertisement messages in Malaysia alongside advertisements portraying Malaysian traditional culture.

3.2 A Background Portrait of Malaysia

Malaya, subsequently Malaysia, has experienced a tumultuous history. Its political, economic and cultural structure today could be traced from its fascinating beginnings in the 15th century during the supremacy of the empire of Malacca. All through this time, the port of Malacca, due to its strategic location in the Malay Peninsula, was a major centre of international trade between the East and West. Undoubtedly, besides attracting Indians, Chinese and Arab traders, it has also drawn the attention of the Europeans who had already colonised India and some African states. Subsequently, as documented in the annals of Malaysian history, the Malay peninsula became the colony of three European powers, namely the Portuguese who captured Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch who took over in 1641 and finally the British who first annexed the northern Malayan island of Penang in 1786. Except for the second world war years of 1942 until 1945 during which time the Japanese controlled Malaya, the Malay states of Malaya were a British colony until the independence of Malaya in 1957 (Gullick, 1981).

After its independence, Malaya progressed as a democratic nation with a political and economic system which it inherits from the British. In 1963, Singapore (which later separated in 1965), and the British Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form what is now known as Malaysia (Phua and Soo, 2004). As a developing country strategically situated in the centre of the Southeast Asian region, Malaysia has, throughout its history been a politically and economically stable country. As

implied earlier, the country comprises two geographic regions separated by the South China Sea. Peninsular Malaysia or sometimes called West Malaysia is on the Malay Peninsula which is south of the Thailand border. At its southern tip, it is linked with the republic island of Singapore by the Johor-Singapore Causeway. East Malaysia which consists of the states of Sabah and Sarawak is located on the island of Borneo which shares a land border with Kalimantan, an Indonesian territory.

Compared with other plural societies, Malaysia has an almost balanced ethnic structure made up of two dominant groups, namely the indigenous groups or *Bumiputras* and the immigrant groups. The former are the Malays and natives in Sabah and Sarawak who together comprise about 63 percent of the population, whilst the latter are the Chinese with about 26 percent, the Indians about 9 percent and other races make up the rest of the population. Given its multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature, cultural pluralism is inevitable in the Malaysian society (Salleh, 1994: 58). While Islam is the country's official religion, Malaysians also practice Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other faiths. Besides the diversified cultural backgrounds of Malaysians, the existence of foreign workers and students in the country has also contributed to the spread of cultural exchange. Presently, the number of foreign workers from Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar and other countries in Malaysia is nearing two million (see Kunio, 2004: 93).

As Malaysia's political, legal, economic and education systems show strong British influence, the citizens tend to be quite susceptible to Western thoughts. Furthermore, ideas continue to flow into Malaysia from Britain and other English speaking Western nations such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand because many Malaysians today are students of higher learning in these countries. Thus, reading material, music and television programmes from the West in particular, Britain and America are favourites among most of these young Malaysians. With English acknowledged as a primary global language, many of these young Western-oriented urban Malaysians have adopted it as their primary language. They speak English at home and to each other, and often watch American movies on Astro, the Malaysian satellite television station and feel comfortable mingling with foreigners, especially Westerners. But despite this, the majority of Malaysians probably do not want to give up their culture nor adopt English as their mother tongue. These are Malaysians who

are mostly forty years old and above and who are still closely associated with their traditions and who want to preserve their vernaculars. On this subject, it must be noted that while Malay cultural values are very much alive partly because of its intimate link with Islam, the well-established Malay medium education assures the preservation of the Malay language and culture. Also, the uninterrupted existence of the Chinese and *Tamil* schools signifies that the Chinese and Indian cultures continue to flourish (see Bernama, 2005).

On the economic front, despite the two major difficulties faced, one in 1985 and 1986 as a consequence to the Persian Gulf War and another, in 1997 and 1998 due to the East Asian financial crisis, Malaysia's economy can be considered as generally stable. This is attributed to its active participation in the export manufacturing activities and its own rural development policies which led to the creation of new jobs in order to eradicate poverty and restructure the society. In fact, it practices one of the most liberal economic policies in East Asia and encourages massive FDI inflows into the country especially between the 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, along with the remarkable advancements that have been accomplished in uplifting the citizens' quality of life, there were a number of troubling events that occurred in the 1990s. Although income inequality improved during the NEP years of 1976 and 1990, it started worsening again in the early 1990s until 1998 (Rajah Rasiah, 2004: 162). The government policies of economic liberalisation and privatization of public companies, which will be discussed in the following pages, have forced a wider gap in income disparity between the "new rich" and the "new poor". In addition, the impact of the financial crisis has also deteriorated the income inequality of the population.

Nevertheless, while the issue of inequality of income is still being addressed, from 2002 until the present time, the government has been able to sustain the economic growth to a comfortable level. After an impressive 7.1 percent growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2004, its economy moderated at about 5.3 percent in 2005 (Bank Negara, 2006) whilst for 2006 the GDP made a steady increase of 5.9 percent (RTM, 2007). Its latest figure on unemployment is still below five percent whilst its comparatively high disposable incomes and stable labour conditions have kept private consumption above the five percent mark (MIER, 2006). As such, Malaysia's consumer economy has over the years been generally steady with its

overall population, particularly its middle class community, maintaining a decent standard of living and good purchasing power.

Because of the reliably stable economic growth, more and more rural people are moving into towns and cities resulting in growth of new urban centres. At the same time, market centres like *Klang Valley*, Johore Bahru and Penang island are experiencing a rapid increase in population making the Malaysian society today a predominantly urban and modern society. Abdul Rahman (2001: 84) states that Malaysia's urban population in 1998 comprised 60 percent. Today, it would have increased to about 65 percent (Phua and Soo, 2004). This figure is certainly remarkably high compared to the projected 50 percent of the urban world population by the year 2007 (see United Nations Information Service, 2007) .

Hence, as a country that has gone through an era of colonialism that comes with various intricacies, Malaysia has proven itself to be a thriving sovereign country. Its unique multi-cultural and multi-religious set up, its strategic location on the world map coupled with its stable political system and constant economic strength are Malaysia's accomplishments as one of Asia's most successful countries.

3.3 The Political Terrain

The political topography of Malaysia is uniquely intertwined with an intriguing blend of divisions and compromises, and of restrictions and freedom. Nevertheless, despite its experience of the 1969 racial riots, Malaysia is presently a relatively stable nation. In fact, its political system has interlaced well into the social life of its masses as it has been successful in maintaining unity amongst its multi-ethnic and multi-religious people from varying classes and regions for over 35 years. Generally, its politics revolves around the cooperation amongst the ruling political parties in the government, its practice of democracy as defined by the government and the population's acknowledgement, not to forget its reverence that Islam is the official religion of the country.

Following Malaya's independence in 1957, the three ethnic political parties namely United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which represents the Malays, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) which acts for the Chinese, and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) which embodies the ethnic Indians joined hands to govern Malaya as *Parti Perikatan* (Alliance Party). Ever since the first election in 1955, the Alliance Party continues to enjoy success. In 1974, other smaller parties came under its umbrella to form a bigger coalition called *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) which has been ruling the country ever since. It must be noted that before gaining independence, the three major ethnic groups agreed on a compromise that the Malays would hold on to their position as political custodians whilst the Chinese and Indian citizens would be free to practice their cultural traditions.

Unfortunately, this agreement did not work out smoothly. Although the political agenda of the Malays was a success, its economic agenda was not. The younger generation of Malays were not happy with the economy of the country being in the hands of the Chinese while the young Chinese were also not satisfied that the Malays were dominating the country's political system. It is therefore not surprising that right through the 1960s, social unease among the ethnic groups intensified, leading to riots which broke out three times, one in 1964, another in 1967 and the worst in 1969, which resulted in 196 deaths (Holden, 2001) and threatened to split the nation. .

While order was eventually restored, this bloody incident changed the course of Malaysian political history. In the interest of national unity, the ruling Alliance government decided to put together and implement a remedial action plan in the form of a "social contract" based on the pre-independence bargain among the ethnic groups. This 20 year action plan which started in 1970 is famously known as the New Economic Policy (NEP) and its primary objective is to create a more balanced economic growth and wealth redistribution between the Malays and the non-Malays aimed at removing ethnic-based domination of specific economic activities and eradicating poverty regardless of racial backgrounds (Rokiah, 2000).

3.3.1 The Government Policies

Towards the end of its 20 year implementation, the NEP has to a certain extent been successful in creating a community of *Bumiputra* entrepreneurs through direct government intervention and economic support. In addition, potential *Bumiputra* Malays were also financially sponsored with training and education to fill in its quota of professionally trained manpower to contribute in diverse spheres of development (Shamsul A.B., 1999). By the end of 1990, although the NEP did not actually achieve its 30 percent target of *Bumiputra* participation in the economic development of the country, it increased the number of Malay professionals including accountants, engineers, company executives, academicians and many others (ibid). This means the NEP had been successful in generating and increasing the Malay middle class which is crucial to Malaysia's political stability and national harmony.

When the NEP expired at the end of 1990, the 10 year National Development Policy (NDP) was launched in 1991 to replace it. Under this policy, the private sector played a pivotal role in moving the country towards industrialization, paving the way for a substantial increase in employment throughout the 1990s. With the impressive growth in economy, the Malaysian population developed a perception that the Malaysian government is caring towards them (Gomez and Jomo, 1998).

In continuance of the NDP, the Vision 2020 was instituted in 2000 aimed at a full economic, political, social and spiritual development of Malaysia by the year 2020. It is pertinent to note that this vision is also determined at guiding Malaysians towards national unity where Malaysians would no longer be identified by their ethnic groups but their nationality. Although it uses a modernist Western approach, Vision 2020 endeavours to distinguish Malaysian values from those of the West (Mahathir, 2002).

3.3.2 The Present Political Scene

Since implementation of the NEP, followed by the NDP and Vision 2020, Malaysian politics has overtly been constructed around the redistribution of economic resources amongst the three ethnic groups. Phua and Soo (2004) maintain that sustained economic growth is essential in Malaysian politics because the ethnic compromise is

very much dependent on improvement of living standards among Malaysians in general. In essence, the three development policies of NEP, NDP and Vision 2020 are all institutionalized within the “Malaysia Plan” which runs consecutively every five years.

Although the Malaysian government has thus far been successful in keeping racial tensions at bay after the 1969 race riots, its management of race relations continues to be a major challenge. Various approaches have been used at unifying the ethnic groups. Sometime in the 1990s, the former premier *Dr. Mahathir* Mohamed started a campaign known as *Malaysia Boleh* which became widespread in the country. Literally translated as “Malaysia Can”, it is aimed at instilling patriotism by telling Malaysians of all ethnic groups that they are capable to achieve what they want. It encourages them to attempt feats that could reach world standards.

As politics has been entwined well into the Malaysian life, this *Malaysia Boleh* campaign became an important platform to inculcate the pride of national identity and messages of ethnic unity and religious harmony to the public. The mainstream traditional newspapers and the television channels being important tools for social development and under the control of the political parties within the National Front coalition (Phua and Soo, 2004: 75) are consistently utilised for this purpose. Aligned with this, the government encourages the notion that some Asian values like selflessness and collectivism are more favoured than Western values such as personal satisfaction and egoism (Holden, 2001).

Interestingly, an advertisement commercial for Nutrimalt mineral drink has cleverly merged its sales message with the ideological message of *Malaysia Boleh* (ibid). This commercial shows a group of young friends who represent Malaysia’s ethnic groups climbing a mountain, first by cycling uphill, then using their bare hands. Accompanying this scene is the narrator’s voice: “chasing your full development, scaling the peak of success, is very hard . . . it takes all your energy”. The commercial ends with the boys conquering the mountain, the snow-capped peak of Mount Everest is superimposed along with the Malaysian flag. It reminds the audience of the 1997 successful attempt by young Malaysians of all ethnic groups to scale Mount Everest.

As race relations is an important determinant for political and economic stability, the government has been accommodative to the demands of the Chinese and Indian communities in retaining their constitutional rights including preserving and developing their own vernacular schools. This denotes that although Malay is the national and official language, the Chinese dialects of *Cantonese* and Hokkien, and the *Tamil* language of the south Indians are widely spoken. Also, not to forget the English language is very much at home in Malaysia and remains the dominant language in the private commercial and industrial sector. Thus, Malay being the medium of instruction in public schools and universities has not secured itself as a language for all Malaysians (Abdul Rahman, 2004). This situation becomes more perplexing as the government, for the past five years, has started reintroducing English for science and mathematics in the educational system in order to prepare young Malaysians for a global future. This puzzling state of affairs indicates the government's predicament. While gearing its efforts at ensuring constant stability of the country and appeasing the non-Malay community, it has to embrace globalisation to ensure economic progress continues undisturbed. Therefore, although globalisation is often discussed as a threat to national sovereignty, the government also recognizes that Malaysia must be portrayed as an attractive environment for foreign investors.

In commenting on the issue of global influence, Johan and Francis (2004: 352-375), when exploring the subject of global political culture and democratisation in Malaysia, argue that like the other Southeast Asian countries, there has been a resurgence of Western-influenced democratic politics in Malaysia. Nevertheless, preceding as well as after the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, democratic practices had to some extent been diverted by the preoccupation to restore the economic stability of the country (ibid). Despite this situation, it must be noted that the urban middle class sub-group had been successful in putting pressure on the government for electoral or procedural democracy, and consequentially political and economic reforms. In response to this demand, in October 2003 the government under the leadership of the comparatively moderate *Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi* who took over from the more uncompromising Mahathir's 22 year rule, made promises for democratic and economic reforms which resulted in the ruling National Front coalition gaining a landslide victory in the 2004 Malaysian general elections. This major win, which

yielded 92 percent government control in parliament, is a far cry from the slim margin it gained in the 1999 elections (Liew, 2006).

At this juncture, it must be noted that the principles of Western democracy as practiced by the current Malaysian regime endeavours to encourage multiculturalism amongst the ethnic groups which in itself is a distinct aspect in the Malaysian context (Kahn, 1992). This uniqueness of the Malaysian democracy where local rules are applied is centrally well-defined in its religious practices which is reflected in the legal system. The Malays who are constitutionally defined as Muslims and who comprise more than half of the population, under Federal Law come under the *syariah* court which follows the Islamic law on matters such as family, marriages or divorces. On the other hand, the mainly non-Muslim Chinese and Indians fall under the jurisdiction of the civil court which is more globally reflected. As indicated in the beginning of this section, since the 1969 racial riots, this unique understanding between the Muslims and non-Muslims had been acknowledged and respected in multi-racial and multi-religious Malaysia which prides itself on tolerance and understanding among the races. Nonetheless, although the public media of television and newspaper tolerate occasional “interference” from the government with regards to controlling discussions considered as “sensitive” for inter-ethnic relations, this is not the case with the online media.

The influence of Western democracy and globalisation together with the government’s liberalisation policy on online media has naturally offered more democratic space for Malaysians to air their views and grievances. As a consequence, these new media such as the online newspaper “Malaysiakini” and a popular news portal like “Malaysia-Today” are now enjoying a steady growth in penetration amongst the urban middle class. In fact, there is a growing number of mainly young Western-educated urban Malaysians who are using the internet media as discussion platforms to express their long-suppressed frustrations on various issues and making calls for fairness and justice (Baradan, 2006). For instance, contentious issues in inter-ethnic relations such as those that touch on the affirmative action policy which gives special rights and privileges to the *Bumiputras* are now openly discussed in these internet media.

Another intense and contentious topic of discussion on the internet which occurred in early 2006 was an issue involving the burial of a supposedly Hindu soldier in a Muslim cemetery. Islamic authorities claimed that the soldier had converted to Islam while his widow believed he was still a Hindu and therefore must be buried according to Hindu rites (ibid). It is pertinent to record that this incident became the deciding factor that led the non-Muslim population, political parties representing the non-Muslims, non-governmental organisations and the more “moderate” Muslims to insist that the government alter the structure of the civil law to make it absolute over *syariah* law particularly on matters involving the non-Muslims. On the other hand, the general Muslim population and an opposition political party, Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) contend that since the Federal Constitution forbids the civil courts from intervening in *syariah* matters, civil courts cannot infringe the rights of the Muslims to be under the purview of *syariah* courts.

Although these developments have become litigious with both the Muslims and non-Muslims calling for constitutional changes to protect their respective religious rights, is it the religion per se that has created the discomfort over what Islam is all about or is it more of cultural indoctrination than anything else? Whatever the answer is, at the time of this writing the government is still looking for the best possible manner to tackle and resolve this issue such that the long-standing ethnic relations will continue to thrive. As in the past, it has to find the right balance between fulfilling the wishes of the largely Malay Muslims and pacifying the desires of the non-Muslims.

Hence, the Malay-Muslim dominated Malaysian government restrains differences between the groups by making a compromise within a public space to accommodate the dominant culture, which in this case is Islamic in leanings. This notion is parallel to Kahn’s (1992) argument who goes further to explain that this policy actually limits total freedom of cultural practices because they are only applied within the private realm of the cultural community. He criticises this arrangement as an example of Western deception by illustrating that in Western liberalism, cultural hegemony remains private but Western culture is allowed to be practiced in public (ibid).

At this point it must be stated that due to the impact of the global perspective on Islam, particularly after September 11, 2001 in which America’s World Trade Centre

in New York was bombed, the political environment in Malaysia went through some distinctive adjustments. For instance, PAS which was defeated badly in the 2003 general elections has positioned itself as being more moderate by opening its doors to non-Malay Muslims. Another significant consequence was the 2005 announcement by UMNO of a novel approach in Islam which is called *Islam Hadhari*. It is a form of Islam which emphasises the importance of progress in the economic, social and political fields. At the same time, it is focused on developing a thinking society comprising Muslims and non-Muslims that encourages social harmony and economic progress consistent with the tenets of Islam. Not to forget, it is also aimed at appeasing and guaranteeing the non-Malay Muslims of their equal rights as Malaysian citizens (Mohamed, 2006). Its philosophy centres on a fair and responsible government that ensures its citizens are free from apprehensions from any group. Aligned with this new approach in Islam, Malaysia is being promoted to the West as a modern multi-racial Muslim country. It is not only tolerant towards other religious beliefs, but also a place for carnivals and festivals whereby the holiday of every major religion is celebrated (Taiyab, 2005).

To recapitulate, the political setting in Malaysia is a unique mixture of Western and Asian elements with a tinge of Islamic basics. While it cannot be denied that the Malaysian political system has adopted some remnants of the British liberal principles and democratic freedom, it is also filled with the Asian culture of concessions and cooperation. At the same time, its administration's receptiveness towards aspects of the Islamic principles that are universally accepted is generally well-received by the non-Muslim population. Therefore, due to its various shades and vagueness, it is quite challenging to classify Malaysia's political system accurately. Perhaps O'Donnell's and Schmitter's (1986) description of Malaysia's political system as "not quite 'liberalised authoritarian', but not exactly 'limited democratic' either" is most appropriate. Nonetheless, it must be reiterated that despite the ambiguity, Malaysian politics has always been considerably stable since its independence from British rule.

3.4 The Economic Landscape

Since discussion on the Malaysian economy would not be complete without touching on Malaysia's history, its politics and social life, this section is sub-divided into two, namely "Malaysia's Economic Background" and "Capital Flows, Inequality and Malaysia's Economic Resilience". While the first sub-section gives an overview of the Malaysian economy, the second one focuses on the nation's heavy dependence on foreign investments in which it is faced with addressing the problem of a wide disparity in income among the population while maintaining consistent economic progress and hardiness.

3.4.1 Malaysia's Economic Background

As a considerably youthful economy which is closely tangled with its politics and culture, the Malaysian economy is best explained as a combination of stratification of policies and plans. Throughout the implementation of these economic programmes, despite the glitches it went through due to its global policy of liberalisation, Malaysia's economic setting has by and large been consistently stable since its independence in 1957. Thus, herein lies its distinctiveness compared to many other world economies which suffer major setbacks during recessionary periods.

Since the past 50 years of its independence, Malaysia underwent at least three phases of economic changes in policies. The first phase is referred to as the Laissez-Faire policy, the second phase is commonly identified as the period of growing state intervention and lastly, the third phase is the era of economic liberalisation and deregulation. The Laissez-Faire policy depended on the exports of its primary commodities of rubber and tin and was aimed at advancing industrial growth through import substitution. The bulk of expenditure during this period, which lasted from 1957 to 1969, was focused on public infrastructure (Gomez and Jomo, 1998). However, due to high unemployment rates, there was mounting inter-ethnic and even intra-ethnic income gaps especially among the Malays and this situation had also led to an urban-rural economic disparity (ibid). It must be mentioned that the inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic and urban-rural economic imbalances were also the consequence of the

earlier economic and social policies implemented by the British colonialists who kept the Malays, Chinese and Indians geographically and economically apart. The large economic discrepancy among the ethnic groups, as mentioned in the section on “Political Terrain”, had led to the 1969 racial riots.

Due to these factors, the government had stepped up its efforts to bring about national unity, social restructuring and economic stability among the major ethnic groups by implementing the NEP. After 1969, the public sector was expanded and export orientated industrialization including Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) was heavily promoted to spur the advancement of employment opportunities. A major event which marked this era was the setting up of the 1971 Free Trade Zones Act to promote investment and export movements amongst the manufacturing organisations based in the newly set up industrial estates within the country which are often referred to as free-trade zones.

The period between 1970 and 1986 was the second economic phase. This interval of growing state intervention became significant when, in 1983 the government proclaimed its privatisation policy (Abdul Rahman, 2004). With this policy in place, it managed to sustain public spending and at the same time appease mounting pressures from multinational and international corporations to promote what they regarded as economic improvements in the country.

The beginning of the third and last economic phase which was in 1987 was marked by a sizeable reduction in government intervention in the country’s economic activities. This period of economic liberalisation and deregulation is best remembered with the government’s privatisation programme which offers economic encouragement and incentives for private corporations. The 1991 Privatisation Master Plan was among others, aimed at perking up efficiency in economic development and pushing more investments into the country (Malaysia, 1991).

In fact, during the late 1980s and early 1990s many government owned companies including public utility corporations such as Syarikat *Telekom* Malaysia Berhad (STMB), National Electricity Board or *Tenaga Nasional* Berhad (TNB) were corporatised. This was followed by the licensing of a private television station, NTV 7

and satellite television network, Astro. Today, most government departments have been corporatised. The government's economic liberalisation policy to accentuate growth, modernisation and industrialisation is aligned with the implementation of the NDP in 1991 which as mentioned earlier replaced the 20 year long NEP. The NDP which lasted until 2000 was further replaced with a ten year National Vision Policy (NVP). These policies complement the Vision 2020 which is aimed at turning Malaysia into a developed country by the year 2020.

It must be noted that during implementation of the policies mentioned above, Malaysia achieved a very rapid economic growth and managed to reduce inter-ethnic income gap which brought the Malays who were left behind economically into mainstream economic activities (Roslan A.H., 2003). Also, since the 1980s when it started focusing on manufacturing, Malaysia has built a prosperous export-oriented economy and consequently, in 2003 it became the seventeenth largest trading nation in the world (Abdul Rahman, 2004).

The Ninth Malaysia Plan, the latest of the nation's five-year development plans was announced in March 2006 and is designed to make it the world's first developed Muslim nation targeting an annual average economic growth of 6.0 percent until 2010 (The Star, 2006a). Similar to the earlier eight development plans, its major objective is to narrow the income gap between the urban and rural, and within the different ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians.

Because of the challenges of global competition particularly with the rise of China and India in addition to the releasing of free trade agreements, the objectives of the development plan address the issue of forging competitiveness in the main economic segments of manufacturing, agriculture, information and communication technologies, biotechnologies, science and innovation, financial services and tourism (ibid).

3.4.2 Capital Flows, Inequality and Malaysia's Economic Resilience

Over the last 30 years or so, as a consequence to its high dependence on the economic policy of liberalisation, pro-FDI and privatisation, Malaysia's growth has consistently

been resilient. For instance, unlike many countries of the world which were severely affected by the recessionary periods of the mid-1980s, Malaysia came out of the downturn very strongly. This elasticity was also exhibited after the 1997-1998 East Asian financial crisis. In fact, its economic progress has generally been more robust than many Western economies. On an opposite note, with Malaysia's globally influenced economic policy, the problem of income inequality between the rich and poor comes into view. Although the widening of income difference may be marginal, due partly to the government's arguably prudent economic management of creating employment within the manufacturing industries, and alleviating poverty through infrastructure developments in the rural areas, the disparity is still a cause for concern.

Going back to Malaysia's thriving economy, it must be reiterated that its programme of encouraging FDI into the country is a major factor for the relatively consistent growth. Countries like America, Britain, Denmark and Japan which contribute to the bulk of its FDI helped maintain international confidence and sustain equity investments into Malaysia. Japan in particular turned out to be an active investor particularly in the second half of the 1980s and also in the early 1990s. This is not only due to the rapid and steep appreciation of the yen exchange rate against the major international currencies of which Malaysia offers a competitive rate, but also because of the latter's attractive liberal economic policy (see Thomsen, 1999). Indeed, Japan's resolve to invest heavily in Malaysia has created a strong impact for the inflow of FDI into the country.

At the same time, the significant inflow of funds from America and the European countries into the Malaysian stock market during the high economic growth of the early 1990s had attracted members of the middle class community to participate in the stock market dealings. Those with secured income earnings were confident of the buoyant economy and were influenced by the low interest rates offered by the banks to buy shares from multinational and public-listed companies. However, to Jomo (2004: 43), this development cannot be considered as real economic growth because the apparent high growth in the prices of shares and stocks and associated "wealth effects" were due to the sharp fall of the Malaysian currency. In turn, this situation gave a lot of opportunity for foreign firms to enter into the local market by acquiring

Malaysian companies at grossly depreciated prices due to the need by local shareholders to raise cash urgently (see Thomsen, 1999). Expectedly, this state of affairs led to a sharper increase in income gap between those who have the purchasing power and those who do not.

In addition, although Malaysia has been quite successful in addressing the problem of ethnic income gap particularly between the *Bumiputras* and Malaysian Chinese, it has not achieved much in terms of individual income disparity (see G. Lim, 2005). Despite the fact that Malaysia was ranked as Asia's fourth most developed country by the 2004 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development report (see UNDP Report, 2004), in terms of individual inequality which was measured by the common Gini coefficient, it was in the second lowest position among all Asian countries. The report elaborates that the richest 10 percent in Malaysia controls 38.4 percent of the economic income as compared to the poorest 10 percent who controls only 1.7 percent (ibid). This situation indicates that private consumption of goods and services is confined to the upper strata of the society and the middle class community and not widely spread to the rest of the population of which about 50 percent are the working class work force (Yearbook of Statistics, 2004).

Further to this, to understand the income gap between the rural and urban citizens, Evers (2004) points out that one needs to look at the digital divide that exists. Despite the economic upswing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the infrastructure of the government's ambitious multimedia super corridor, a knowledge-based economic project has been centred in and around Kuala Lumpur and the central region leaving other parts of the country behind (ibid: 313). This situation has left an obvious fissure within the knowledge-based industry where the urban work force tends to be more adept with computer technology than their rural counterparts, thus creating a discrepancy between urban and rural Malaysians. This state of affairs is akin to Golding's (1990: 98-100) discussion on the correlation between socio-economic obstacles and the information gap in advanced capitalist societies. Although Malaysia is not a highly developed country, its wide urban-rural digital gap is showing signs of producing an "information poverty" amongst the nation's rural citizens, similar to that of the United States of America (see Golding, 1990). Taking into consideration the

factors relating to inequality amongst Malaysia's globally influenced consumerist society, the nation's rapid economic growth is undeniably a major factor for the considerable structural transformation which comprise the "new rich" consumers with a comfortable lifestyle and the "new poor" who has to toil hard in life to fulfil their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. In fact, the government's policy of privatisation of public companies during the 1990s has led to an increase in unemployment wherein the labour force that are deemed as a liability to these companies were retrenched from their jobs (see Johan and Loh, 2004).

On the other hand, the fact that Malaysia came out of the 1997-1998 East Asian financial crisis within a short time span compared to that of Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines shows that its economic management is comparatively better than its Southeast Asian counterparts. Although Malaysia's economy was as severely affected as the other East Asian countries, it was the only country which refused to abide by the reform package proposed by the American-based International Monetary Fund (IMF). To the West, Malaysia's refusal was due to the "recalcitrant" attitude of the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, *Mahathir* Mohamed who was more interested in concealing the Malaysian government's mismanagement of fund from public knowledge. This situation became worse when *Mahathir* used his own formula for revitalising the economy by devaluing the Malaysian Ringgit and announcing a fixed rate of MYR 3.80 to one US Dollar. This act was indeed a bold step and in total defiance of the approach set by IMF which deemed that the Asian currencies must be floated in the open market in order to overcome the crisis. Another measure taken by the government, although similar to IMF's proposal, was by getting Malaysia's Central Bank (Bank Negara Malaysia) to increase the loan interest rates from 8.7 per cent at the end of 1997 to 11.0 percent in early February 1998 (Jomo, 2003: 185-188). As it turned out, *Mahathir*'s formula of capital controls was indisputably a successful approach and illustrates that there are alternatives to capital account liberalisation other than following the prevailing market attitude and IMF neo-liberalism. In addition to this, another equally important factor for the fast economic recovery after the 1997-1998 financial crisis was the increase in demand for electronic components from the United States caused by the fear of the effects of the arrival of the year 2000 (Y2K) upon older computers and other digital devices (Jomo K.S., 2005).

Table 1 demonstrates that Malaysia's GDP was an impressive 8.3 percent in 2000 although it capped its lowest growth in history in 2001. However, it was able to make a considerable increase of 4.2 percent in 2002 and continues moving up progressively in 2003 and 2004 as a consequence to the increase in FDI. However, the economy grew modestly at 5.3 percent in 2005 making the average economic growth between 2001 and 2005 a decent 5.1 percent. In 2006, it moved up to 5.9 percent. Also, based on the most recent 2006 Global Competitive Index (GCI) Report covering 125 countries, Malaysia is placed on an impressive position. It is ranked sixth most competitive economy in Asia and is at 26th worldwide (ibid).

Table 1: GDP Growth

Year	Growth Rate
2000	8.3 %
2001	0.4 %
2002	4.2 %
2003	5.2 %
2004	7.1 %
2005	5.3 %
2006	5.9 %*

Source: Bank Negara Malaysia, 2006

**(2006 figure is extracted from RTM, 2007)*

This is not surprising because the intense establishments of TNCs between 1989 and 1998 have placed Malaysia as one of Asia's top five recipients of FDI (Economic Report, 2005). With these Large Scale Enterprises (LSEs) from numerous developed economies of Europe, America and Japan investing in thousands of varying projects in Malaysia's manufacturing sector, the remarkable performance is to be expected. Malaysia's access to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) privileges which offer tariff exemptions to the industrialised investor countries is a major reason which made it an attractive location for these foreign-based corporations to set up their base.

As illustrated in Table 2, the manufacturing and services sectors as the major engine of growth which account for about 85 per cent of total GDP have been experiencing a

progressive increase. At the same time, there is a regressive movement for sectors associated with agriculture and forestry, mining and construction.

**Table 2: Gross Domestic Product by Industry
1995-2005**

SECTOR	1995 (%)	2000 (%)	2005 (%)
Agriculture and Forestry	10.3	8.7	7
Mining	8.2	6.6	5.5
Manufacturing	27.1	33.4	35.8
Construction	4.4	3.3	3.2
Services	51.3	52.6	55.1

Note: Services sector comprise electricity, gas and water; wholesale and retail trade; hotels and restaurants; transport, storage and communication; finance, insurance, real estate and business services; government services and other services.

Source: Malaysia 2006.

Nevertheless, the consistent inflow of FDI along with the proportionate increase in domestic investment from the manufacturing activities has created economic difficulties since the intensification of FDI was not sufficient to disperse the industries (Asan Ali, 2004: 180) resulting in a wide gap in income share between foreign manufacturing firms and locally established firms. As it stands, there has been a continuous imbalance in investments between the foreign based LSEs and the more locally based Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs). Based on the 1996 figures, even though SMEs accounted for almost 94 percent of the companies, they total up only 27 percent of manufacturing output, 26 percent of value added and 39 percent of the employment in the manufacturing sector. In contrast, LSEs which make up only 6 percent of all businesses put in 73 percent of the output, 74 percent of the value added and 61 percent of the total employment. In terms of fixed assets, SMEs held a share of only 24 percent, in contrast to the 72 percent share of the LSEs. (Suresh, 2004: 229).

While the Japanese LSEs manufacture electronic products such as Video Cassette Recorders (VCRs) and computer display monitors or generic electronic goods such as magnetic heads, the Western corporations focus their attention on the production and

assembly of semiconductors and engineering works (Economic Report, 2005). For a developing country which gained independence only five decades ago, one cannot dispute that its achievement of an average annual growth of 6.7 percent over the last 30 years is considered quite impressive. This accomplishment is in actual fact the consequence of the economic transformation mentioned earlier.

As it is, beginning in 2000 until today, the world economic situation has been quite uncertain. This is due to the uncontrollable global market forces such as the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York and the unending wars in Afghanistan and Iraq which have undoubtedly affected investor sentiments. Despite this situation, as illustrated in Table 1, Malaysia's economic growth has been continuous. One of the most important strategies employed by the government to sustain progress of the economy was to review the Foreign Investment Committee (FIC) Guidelines in order to make it attractive for foreign investors (MIDA Website, 2007).

It is therefore logical that Malaysia continues to be among the preferred investment destinations in the ASEAN countries. This is reflected in its cash balance of payments, which registered a net inflow of RM3.4 billion during the first five months of 2006 although this figure is lower than the January till May 2005 figure of RM5.5 billion (The Star, 2006a). With the good returns from the crude oil prices which spill out to other related products that it produces such as palm oil and rubber coupled with its strong consumption spending, the private sector continues to become an important growth engine for domestic economic activity (ibid). In fact, after it started embarking on a manufacturing economy since the 1980s, Malaysia kept maintaining high growth rates and rapid industrialisation, following the tracks of the "Asian Tigers" like Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea.

In respect of the encouraging commodity prices, generally steady employment market and the low interest rate atmosphere which have resulted in rising household disposable income, private consumption maintains a high growth of 7.1 percent (ibid). The fact that about 37 percent of the population has a monthly household income of RM2001 and above (AGB NMR Media Index, 2006) demonstrates that there is a growing middle class population who are primary consumers of a wide range of

services. It is places like the shopping centres, restaurants, new housing estates, domestic tourism destinations or theme parks that become their meeting places. In essence, it is the consumption requirements of this middle class population that more than anything else shape the new urban landscapes of Kuala Lumpur, Johore Bahru and Penang (Phua and Soo, 2004) which are full of shopping malls.

As it is, because the consumption patterns in the country are very much driven by the middle class segment, transaction activities that occur mainly take place among this group of the population. For instance, the sale of a property by a middle class consumer would simultaneously attract the entry into property ownership for those within the segment who intend to buy their first property or provide opportunities for others who, with secure and continuing employment would want to upgrade their accommodations. It is also interesting to note that, even during an economic slowdown, the symbolic value of consumption remains a powerful force in Malaysia. The need to maintain a lifestyle is all the more necessary because the person has to give the impression that he is economically sound as this would retain the confidence of his colleagues, friends or business associates (Chua, 2000).

In all, it is acknowledged that Malaysia's industrial development policy that has been adopted and implemented since the past two decades has proven to be successful in ensuring the nation's progress. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that while it has a well-developed manufacturing and export-driven economy, it remains a significantly inequitable society which has created a wide gap between the "new rich" and the "new poor". This phenomenon certainly poses a clear demarcation in lifestyles and consumption habits in which only the rich could afford to buy goods that provides them with satisfaction. On the same note, as a consequence to the globally influenced economic policy and individual inequality, the Malaysian government continues to address the issue of the changing occupational structure of its labour force.

3.5 The Socio-cultural Milieu

As a plural society that boasts of a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious people that is well-exposed to the Eastern and Western cultures, the general Malaysian society is a mixture of traditionalists and modernists. However, as indicated earlier, the British rule which encouraged mass immigration of Indian and Chinese to obtain labour power for agricultural plantations, extraction of mineral resources and building of railroads had left independent Malaysia with a big burden to manage. The government was faced with the difficult task of uniting and creating a common identity among the ethnic groups who have their own distinct languages, religions, customs and traditions.

Despite this, as Sardar (2000: 120) claims, the multicultural society in Malaysia has outgrown its infancy and is the only one in the world that works successfully. The Malays which comprise more than half of the country's population are invariably the source of the dominant culture so much so that Holden (2001) has repeatedly asserted that Malaysia's national culture is often identified with Malay beliefs and practices. However, although the Malay Muslim community dominates the language and cultural traditions, there is guaranteed continuity of the Chinese and Indian language and culture.

The yearly festivals of *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, *Chinese New Year*, *Deepavali* and Christmas are celebrated together by all the races. They do not just prepare for or observe these festivals but each of the community practices the open house, inviting neighbours and friends to share the feasts in conjunction with the particular festival. This is just one of the many distinctive facets of Malaysian culture.

As this study's focus is on the culture of Malaysia's middle class population in relation to their experience with global brands, this section will not only deliberate on the general Malaysian cultural lifestyle and the ethnic Malay-Islam practices but will also assess the cultural orientations of its middle class segment. It will end with a discussion on Malaysian advertising and its correlation with Western culture.

3.5.1 The Common Cultural Norms of Malaysians

The glaring influence from the Indian and Chinese cultures amongst the local Malay population is a noteworthy basis to deduce that many common cultural norms are shared among Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds. Because of the intimate bond between India and Indianised states of Southeast Asia in the early centuries, the Indian influence is quite pervasive leading to the distinctive variation on common cultural threads of language, texts and practices (Coedes, 1966). For instance, the popular Malay traditional performance of *wayang kulit* originates from the Hindu text of Ramayana from India. As for the Chinese influence, its expansionist policy has encouraged many Chinese from southern China to move into countries down south including the Malay Peninsula and bringing with them their values and customs (ibid).

Besides the dominant ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians, the existence of the other ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Eurasians and Arabs has also created an ethnic diversity that makes Malaysia's socio-cultural landscape more varied. Nevertheless, the cultures of the main ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians are more dominant than the rest because the other ethnic groups comprise only about two percent of the population. However, since essentials of these cultural mix are evolving and are continually seeping into almost every facet of the Malaysian society, to most of the older generation particularly the more provincial-based, social and cultural traditions have become a part of their daily lives. To them, it is the respect for one another's traditional values that creates a harmonic social relationship between the Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia (Evers, 1980). As such, many young Malaysians have begun to accept intermarriages among the differing cultures although this is not traditionally encouraged. This development is in accord with one of the nine challenges of Malaysia's Vision 2020 which is to create a united Malaysian nation that is ethnically integrated and harmonious by the second decade of the 21st century (Mahathir, 1997).

As one would expect, because Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds have lived and interacted with one another for more than a century, they tend to follow and practice the same cultural norms for certain customs, practices and behaviours. An observable

Malaysian cultural tradition is the framework of expectations for appropriate gender conduct. For instance, the general Malaysian society would frown on women who smoke and would not approve of men who put on ear rings or wear lipstick. Another familiar social attitude is that a woman should marry a man who is better educated than her and this is one major reason why there are more and more highly educated Malaysian women who are single (Phua and Soo, 2004: 8).

One more quite noticeable feature of Malaysians is the aspect of individual identity. Like most middle class societies in the Asian countries (see Vervoon, 1998), Malaysia's middle class and upper class groups build their individual identities in accordance to their social class. Regardless of their ethnic groups, they live alongside one another in residential areas, are members of the same hotels, clubs and resorts. As indicated by Shamsul A.B.(1999) their lifestyles demonstrate a preference for class over ethnic values. In contrast to the lifestyle of the middle class group, Phua and Soo (1994:112) observe that Malaysia's working class call attention to their ethnic identity over class commonality as they can benefit more as individuals in initiating the association of patronage on the basis of vertical connection between members of the same ethnic group. In support of this contention, as working class Malaysians comprise a significant number of the population, Crouch's (1996) argument that Malaysian unification of its ethnic groups would take a long time for it to come to fruition is quite logical. Perhaps this situation explains why certain values and habits particularly the ones with religious undertones are still ethnically skewed, to be precise not "Malaysian" in character.

Going back to the sharing of customs and practices, the Malaysian cuisine for instance is a mixture of borrowings from the varied cultures making it more diverse and enriching (Phua and Soo, 2004:67). The Malay and Indian cuisines display the influence of Chinese cuisine. The same is true with Chinese cooking which to an extent is inspired by Malay and Indian foods. As an example, the *Hainanese chicken rice* that comes with delicious sauce, pounded chillies and garlic are taken from the Malay dishes and can only be found in Malaysia and Singapore but not on China's Hainan island. Similarly, Malay cuisine that has been enhanced by the cuisine of the Indian sub-continent is *nasi lemak* and *satay* (ibid: 92).

Additionally, the mode of costumes worn by Malaysians is another consequence of the cultural exchange among the races. As it is, the Chinese and Indians have for the most part embraced the “Western dress” as their daily wear. As a result, the Chinese *samfoo* and the Indian *saree* are less popular among the females. The same can be said of the Malays who by and large emulate the Western style of dress, except for special occasions such as funerals or Friday prayers at the mosque, where the males would normally put on their traditional *baju melayu* and the females their *baju kurung*. At this juncture, it is important to be reminded that nowadays a majority of the Malay females are dressed in “Islamic-Malay style” where, although their attire may comprise the pants and long-sleeved blouse, their heads are covered in public. This is in consequence of the global Islamic resurgence which saw its beginnings in the country since the past thirty years.

Other than food and costumes, another dominant cultural element that had to live through cultural exchanges is the major Malaysian vernacular languages. For instance, the Chinese dialect of *Cantonese* has integrated Malay words like *pasar* and *longkang* into its language. Similarly, some Indian words such as *tali* and *roti* and the Portuguese words *sepatu* and *almari* are used in the Malay language. In relation to this, the English language in Malaysia has also been modified into certain variations which would appear peculiar to the British and American. Commonly referred to as Malaysian English or “Manglish”, among the most common add-ons to it is the Malay word “lah” which is a multifunctional word popularly used for emphasis such as “cannot lah” to respond to the graveness of a request for something or “gone lah” to explain the consequences of getting involved in something negative. Another interesting aspect in Manglish is the weird application of the word “one” as in “my one” instead of “mine” or “your one” in place of “yours” (Phua and Soo, 2004: 89).

Conversely, although one cannot deny that the enriching aspects of food, language and dress have to a great extent blurred the cultural boundaries between the Malaysia’s major ethnic groups, a common culture did not emerge because religious faith becomes the defining element of each group’s ethnicity. Young, Bussink and Hassan (1980) note that despite a long history of interactions among the major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians, each group more or less maintained its distinct ethnic and cultural identity. For instance, the Malays, being practicing

Muslims, do not eat at Chinese stalls which serve pork because it is forbidden in Islam. On the other hand, there are *halal* versions of Chinese and Indian cuisines available to Muslims in Malaysia.

In deliberating on the subject of language usage among Malaysians, it is worth reiterating that although *Bahasa Melayu* is the official language of the country and is secured as the first language, English is still the dominant language in the urban areas. Because urban Malaysians in their late thirties onwards are mostly English-educated, English has in fact turned into an important medium of integration within Malaysia's urban multi-ethnic middle class group (Salleh, 1994). As a matter of fact, like all former British colonies, Malaysia which practices the free market economy was very much affected by the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s and the ascendance of the neo-liberal globalisation which ensure the unchallenged position of the English language (Abdul Rahman, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that while *Bahasa Melayu* is used in official communications, in practice English is given the pride of place in daily communication and interaction, including sometimes in official, and more so in semi-official or closed door settings. With usage of the English language being established since the British occupation and being presently quite widespread in the country, this situation clearly demonstrates that the impact of globalisation in Malaysia has been quite significant.

In furtherance to the issue of globalisation and the free flow of goods and information into the country in the 21st century, like many other developing countries there has been a marked impact on the cultural norms of the society, in particular the young. In addition to the fact that much of the cultural contents on Malaysian television are American or European, the massive technological advances of the past 20 years or so have made it hard for the authorities to censor sex and violence in the mass media. More so, the explosive growth of the internet in recent years has rendered it almost impossible to control sexually explicit material to be exposed amongst the young. In essence, as posited by Phua and Soo (2004: 75), this situation reflects "a clear case of technological advances outpacing the adaptive ability of social and cultural institutions."

Besides this, the exposure of the young and their participation in globalised consumerism had in the eyes of the elders, particular among those in the provincial

areas, transformed them into lifestyle consumers who ape the West and disregard their own culture. For instance, there are now many Malaysian teenagers who dye their hair yellow. Also, despite the disapproval from their elders, many Chinese teenagers today are dressed in black. To the elder Chinese, black is an unlucky colour which is only worn during sad occasions such as at funerals (ibid). In addition, it is quite common now to read in the mass media about the abuse of illegal drugs amongst Malaysian teenagers. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that at this moment, there is a sizeable Malaysian community dedicated to combating the growing “social ills” among young Malaysians. For many among them, Asian values and civilization do represent the only hopeful alternative to the path to modernity taken by the West (Sen and Stivens, 1998).

Thus, it is obvious that Asian cultural influences in particular from India and China are the major factors for the creation of cultural exchanges amongst the Malaysian ethnic groups. This phenomenon explains the enriching impact of Malaysian lifestyle with regard to their food, attire and language. Nonetheless, of late, as a consequence to globalisation a more distinct influence of Western lifestyle has penetrated into the Malaysian culture, especially among the youths. The question that begs an answer is this: how much has the West influenced the behaviours, attitudes and thinking of Malaysians, particularly the young?

3.5.2 The Malay Customs and Islam

Despite being a heterogeneous group with ancestors varying from cultural groups in the neighbouring Indonesian islands or sometimes up to India, China, Middle East or even Europe, one can still discern a common Malay ethnic identity. Two unique characteristics that identify the Malays are their strong attachment to *adat Melayu* or Malay customary practices and their adherence to Islam as a religion. Thus, this subsection is broken down into two: “Malay Customary Practices” which focuses on the Malay personality in relation to the close ties with their customs and “Malay-Islam Fusion” which discusses the distinctive synthesis between the Malay culture and Islamic practices.

a. Malay Customary Practices

According to Wilder (1982), the *adat Melayu* which characterises the Malay community, is comprehensive and it includes many obscure beliefs and ideas. For instance, despite the technological advancement and exposure to the globalised world, the customary practice of traditional healing that normally involve the chanting of magical spells is still embedded in the Malay psyche. Despite the fact that this tradition is no longer influential in this modern age, it is still being practiced amongst some Malays whose links with their villages are still strong. It is an important Malay legacy because like many other beliefs and customs, it is sourced from a depository of understanding and passed down from generation to generation (Endicott, 1972).

Nevertheless, side by side with these sometimes incomprehensible Malay values, there are many features of customary practices that are obvious and they include costume, marriage ceremonies and manners. In describing Malay etiquette and mannerisms, Sardar's (2000: 136) eloquent account explains it all:

The gentle and eclectic mingles seamlessly with formal punctilious orthodoxy and precise organisation; appearing to be correct, observing the rules, is a major concern for Malays, a shared cultural predisposition and preoccupation. Religious education for young Malays is highly organized, a visible presence.

To put it simply, a stereotypical Malay is, among other characteristics, modest, unassuming and cultivated. More importantly, he or she takes pride and has a deep knowledge of his or her own unique cultural heritage. As a close-knit community, the Malays maintain a close link with their extended families as it is in their culture to look after their elderly parents. The bond between grown-up working children and their parents is normally preserved by providing regular financial support and making regular visits (Rokiah, 2000). In relation to this, because of their strong spirit of camaraderie (Wilder, 1982), by and large the Malays attempt to set up *kampung*-like communities wherever they go. In his thesis on Malaysia's new middle class, Abdul Rahman (2002) claims that the presence of Malays in an area can be traced by the existence of *surau*-based activities or *gotong royong* for a special occasion such as preparation of children's wedding feast or religious thanksgiving rituals.

Being courteous individuals, they are also generally reserved and normally keep their thoughts to themselves unless they find it truly necessary to speak. On this issue, Salleh (1994) reiterates Swettenham's (1887) claim that it is within the Malay character to keep their feelings suppressed. In describing the Malays as essentially hedonistic, Salleh (1994) goes further to explain that this feeling of self-gratification broods within the Malay psyche, concealed by a larger force or imagined authority (ibid:155). Nevertheless this restrained characteristic does not mean they are poor communicators. Wilder (1982: 111) affirms that it is part of the Malay custom to enquire about certain things constantly because they are active communicators. Culturally and socially, they can blend well with the local Chinese and Indian ethnic groups and they enjoy watching Chinese kung fu films, Hindi or *Tamil* movies (Heide, 2002).

They are also quite obliging with foreigners who visit or settle down in the country (Wilder, 1982). Nevertheless, because it is considered local dignity to speak with the same accent, anyone from the community who has been away for sometime and comes back with a "foreign accent" is often criticised or teased (ibid : 34, 113). The question that begs an answer is, with more young Malays now globally exposed to the media and becoming occasional travelers overseas, is this phenomenon still relevant? Perhaps the gentle and polite nature of the Malays is one logical reason for their heavy emphasis on hierarchy and social status within the society, although these aspects may at most times and situations, be implicit. On this subject, Sardar (2000: 141) notes that to the Malay, it is significant that an individual's superiority or inferiority is accorded. Referred in the Malay language as *pangkat*, a person's status is so pertinent that any adult, male or female over the age of about 40 years old has a status based on relative age, generation or birth-order (Wilder, 1982: 80). In fact, it is considered ill-mannered for a Malay individual to address someone older than himself or herself by his or her name (ibid: 79). Sardar (2000) reasons that as the Hindu influence was very dominant among the Malays before the spread of Islam in the 14th century, the obsession with social status and hierarchy is very much similar to the Hindu practice of the caste system.

To further underline the impact of social status within the mindset of the Malays, the following are some examples of the stereotype terms used as a show of respect for individuals within various strata of the Malay society:

- i. among family members, uncles start with the term *Pak*, the English version of “dad” and aunties start with *Mak* which is “mum”; therefore *Pak Long* is the eldest uncle in the family because *Long* is short for *Sulong* or eldest and *Mak Su* is the youngest auntie because *Su* is short for *Bongsu* which is youngest;
- ii. between the royalty, the group that is highly respected, *Tengku* refers to prince;
- iii. as a token of respect for Malays and non-Malays who have been accorded a medal or decoration by the king, the *Datuk* is equivalent to the English “Sir” whilst a *Tan Sri* and *Tun* is a level and two levels higher, respectively;
- iv. as a firm mark of esteem, school teachers are classed as *Cikgu* wherein *cik* is short for *Encik* which means mister and *gu* is short for *guru*, a Malay word for teacher (ibid) and;
- v. the regard given to persons of high rank particularly for Europeans who were serving Malaya during the colonial rule is expressed with the word *Tuan*, which means “Sir”(ibid).

At this point, it is important to note that, it is in the Malay-Muslim mind to confer high reverence for people they consider as knowledgeable in Islam, academic or non-academic. Although many Western-influenced Malays have begun questioning the overzealous admiration of some Muslim Malays towards the *ulamas*, the latter is still highly respected in the Malay Muslim society (Farish, 2000). Even a person who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca to fulfill his fifth obligation as a practicing Muslim is given the title *Haji* and addressed as such before his name. Many of the *Hajis* particularly from the provincial areas wear the white scull cap as a status symbol to identify themselves as successful pilgrims. A more detailed deliberation on the issue of Malays and Islam is reserved in the consequent sub-section.

Having established the obsessive nature of the Malays towards the significance of status in society, one needs to look at feudal patronage of the Malays as another related trait. Sardar (2000: 140) traces this practice to the times before the colonialists established themselves in Malaya in the 16th century. As it is, feudal patronage which correlates with the undivided loyalty of the Malay citizens towards their kings has

long been a part of the Malay culture. Sardar (ibid) indicates that, the colonialists in wanting to rule Malaya embarked on a strategy to reduce the sovereignty of the rulers by subtly putting them under their tutelage. They allowed the dependence of the patron-client system of relations between the ruler and the Malays to flourish and made it appear that the power and influence of patronage was still in the hands of the ruler although in actual fact, they (the colonialists) were in control. Today, although the ruling elites are no longer the royalties, the vestiges of Malay feudalism are still stuck within the ruling Malay political system (see The Star, 2006b). It is vital to point out that the patrons in this inherited system of feudal patronage are not only the Malay leaders in UMNO but also the Malay business elites. As such, most ordinary Malays, consciously or subconsciously, keep to the idea that their careers and prosperity are shaped and moulded by these privileged and influential group of Malays. Sardar (2000: 140) claims,

where patronage is concerned, individuals matter, rather than laying down rules and regulations that somehow never have the flexibility to cope with special cases, when everyone is a special case.

Thus, other than having total admiration for power, the Malays are by and large extremely loyal to their leaders although they are aware that as humans, the leaders are fallible and may sometimes lack self-control. Sardar (ibid: 141) adds, “The hallmark of Malay character- traditional, modern, postmodern-is loyalty to the system and those who maintain and manage it.”

b. The Malay-Islam Fusion

As Muslims for more than 600 years (see Abdul Rahman, 1996), the life of the Malay society is very much influenced by their understanding of Islam. Indeed, according to the Malaysian constitution, a “Malay” is not only a person who habitually speaks Malay and follows Malay customs and traditions but he must also be a Muslim in his religious belief (Korff, 2001). Being known as a modest, respectful and eclectic ethnic group, the Islamic faith as practiced by the Malays is also a reflection of these characteristics.

Because they have absorbed and adopted an assortment of history and traditions from India, China and the Indonesian islands in addition to living in a multicultural

environment and exposed to the Western colonial culture, they can be categorized as pragmatic in their daily observances as Muslims. Thus, their characters are different from the other Muslim societies such as those from the Middle East or South Asia.

In their quest to be better Muslims, they continue to seek the validation, explanation, interpretation and resolution on various issues and subjects within the framework of Islamic ideas (Wilder, 1982). As an example, Malaysia's Islam acknowledges women's rights as individuals. Like their men folk, the Malay-Muslim women work as factory workers, teachers, lawyers, doctors and many other professions. Besides this, it is a familiar sight to see them mix freely with men in public places. In fact, at the present moment the public and private colleges and universities around the country are dominated by more than 60 percent female students (Anuar, 2006).

Another notable feature among the Malay Muslim women is that many are now wearing the *tudung* as a symbol of their identity especially with the present heightening of self-consciousness about being a Muslim, since Islam dominates public discourse. Nonetheless, they do so with elegance and vitality, in various colours and designs to match their attire. Additionally, for the more daring younger ones who are attracted to the tight-fitting Western attire, they would combine a fashionable *tudung* to cover their heads with the latest Western dress. While they try hard to acknowledge the Islamic tradition, they are also inclined to keep up with the times.

The manifestation of the contradiction of modernity and tradition among the Malay Islam society is, as indicated in the earlier sub-section, similar to the inconsistencies of the feudalistic system that flow profoundly in the Malay society against their exemplary moderate and pleasant demeanor as a Muslim. The same is true when one relates to the obsession of some rural Malays with their long-held *adat Melayu*, parts of which comprise very old traditional customs (Wilder, 1982) involving incantations that are clearly opposed to Islamic practice. Sardar (2000: 136) notes,

Malay certainty about identity, rooted, as it is in Islam, includes, involves and lives with all the contradictions, paradoxes and earnest debate that form the contemporary state of Muslims everywhere; all attempts at questions and answers are evident and available.

With these conflicting arguments surrounding the Malays, the more hesitant ones would keep this suppressed feeling within their mindset and in the long run would make them less self-assured about themselves. On the contrary, one can also argue that this conflict between customary practices and religious faith also demonstrates that the Malays will give their utmost to Islam but will not compromise to situations that would weaken their Malay character. However, one question is still left unanswered. Would constant exposure to advertisements depicting the Western culture change their Malay Islam persona?

To recap, this sub-section on “The Malay Customs and Islam” attempts to provide an account of the Malay as a pragmatic person who is passionate with his traditional customary belief and his Islamic faith. However, the typical Malays are generally unaware that some of the practices contradict one another. While they are well-mannered as encouraged in Islam, they tend to be submissive to authority and power, which could be interpreted as going against the Islamic faith. Thus, the Malay personality is an assorted blend of strict adherence to customs, religion and practicality. As a consequence, added to the fact that the concept of domination is embedded in his psyche, he could at times be locked with feelings of insecurity.

3.5.3 Malaysia’s Middle Class Society

The rapid growth and expansion of Malaysia’s multi-ethnic middle class segment began in the beginning of the 1970s although the middle class community was already in existence since the period of British colonialism. Their expansion is in consequence to the rapid and extensive economic and social changes that have transformed Malaysia from an agriculturally based nation into a newly industrialized nation. This development led to the changes in occupational patterns of the population.

During British rule in the early 20th century, the small middle class population, which comprised mainly entrepreneurs and an insignificant number of government administrators, was not racially balanced, and this trend continued even after Malaya’s independence in 1957. According to Jomo (1986: 300), from the total of about 25,000 administrative and managerial jobs in 1957, 62.4 percent were

dominated by Chinese compared to only about 17.6 percent Malays and 20 percent Indians and other races. Thirteen years later, in 1970 there was only a rise of up to 24.1 percent Malays in the administrative and managerial category (ibid). And it must be noted that during these years, the administrative group were considered the most important component of all the middle class groups as they had immense power and prestige *vis a vis* the rest of the population.

As discussed in the earlier sections, the early 1970s was the actual beginning of the government's seriousness in fulfilling the economic agenda of the country with the implementation of the NEP. To ensure the Malays get a greater share of the country's economic wealth and eventually create a community of Malay entrepreneurs, between 1971 until 1990, the government provided aggressive training and education that would create the much needed professionally trained manpower to participate in various fields. Using this social engineering strategy favouring *Bumiputras*, the NEP has successfully fostered the creation of a large new middle class and waged working class (ibid). It is also noteworthy that despite being Malay-biased, the NEP period also conferred benefits to Chinese as well, as their economic share increased from 22 percent in 1970 to 45.5 percent in 1990 (Abdul Rahman, 2002:57).

Among this multi-racial new middle class group which made up almost fifty percent of the working population in 2000 (ibid), the most important groups are the professional, technical, administrative and managerial categories as they have been growing very rapidly over the last three decades. In 1970, they constitute 5.9 percent of the total population employed, twenty years later, in 1990, this figure grew to 11.2 percent and at latest count, in 2000, the total number employed in these categories increased to 15.2 percent from the 1.35 million of the total employed (Malaysia, 2001). Since the middle class members in the public sector are by and large administrators that include administrative officers and clerks, whilst the professionals, technical experts and managers are either self-employed or work in the private sector, it can be deduced that a big majority of Malaysia's new middle class are in the private sector. Further to this, although the Malay middle class is growing in number, they are mainly middle range government servants and still form the minority of professionals and business people while the Chinese and the Indians predominate in business and the professions (Rokiah, 2000). In other words, the marginal middle

class are dominated by Malays in the public sector whilst the more affluent new middle class, although multi-racial in nature are more slanted towards the Chinese and Indians in the private sector.

They work in the comfort of air-conditioned offices and more often than not in very large organisations; they drive daily to work in comfortable cars. Most of them reside in sub-urban housing estates (Hsiao, 1999). This new group of Malaysian middle class are also highly educated with more than 70 percent having a minimum college education (Abdul Rahman, 2002) and therefore play important roles in Malaysia's development and modernization. As they enjoy good monthly incomes, they have better purchasing power than the rest of the population. According to Abdul Rahman (2001) a majority of the new middle class community residing in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur and the metropolitan market centre of *Klang Valley* earn a high monthly income ranging from RM4000 to over RM10,000 with 43 per cent earning very high incomes of RM6000 to over RM10,000 per month. It is therefore not surprising that they become an ideal market for various types of consumer products. More so, they are also trendsetters for Malaysia's changing lifestyles.

Similar to the East Asian middle class study by Hsiao (1999), their economic basis rests mainly on their salaries. Apparently, because of their obsession with an affluent lifestyle, many are highly dependent on the financial system for credit and loans mainly for house purchases and also for the purchase of motor vehicles (Abdul Rahman, 2002). Nevertheless, despite their progressive increase in number, the proportion of the middle class group in Malaysia is still considered relatively small when one compares their number with the more developed Asian neighbours, namely Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore which experienced a much earlier phase of rapid industrialization (Rodan et.al, 1997).

In his study, Abdul Rahman (1996) reveals that Malaysia's middle class are "first generation new middle class" with only 17.6 percent of them being children of the new middle class. This shows that a majority Malaysia's present middle class group are from humble backgrounds with very weak economic base. Despite being a new generation of Malaysian citizens, many among them are leaders and members of political and Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) groupings.

Their emergence also brought about different norms, values, civilized attitudes and political cultures to the country. To quote an instance, abuse of power and the rise of authoritarian rule concern them seriously. Fresh in the minds of this important group of citizens who are shaping the political contours of Malaysia is the controversial issue of “executive interference of the judiciary” as seen in the 1988 sacking of the independent-minded Lord President, Tun Salleh Abbas and the 1998 sacking of Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim for charges of corruption and sodomy. Nonetheless, despite the “disillusionment” towards the government, in Abdul Rahman’s (2000: 163) research findings, the results revealed that by and large, Malaysia’s middle class segment support the incumbent democratic government for the sake of social order and economic stability. In other words, most of them wanted the UMNO-led National Front government which has been ruling the country since 1955 to continue maintaining developments among its multi-ethnic population.

Hence, it can be deduced that the Malaysian society of the future will be shaped or influenced more strongly by the expanding multi-ethnic new middle class community.

a. Lifestyles and Cultural Orientations

Despite being a heterogeneous community, Malaysia’s middle class segment can best be described as outwardly Western but fundamentally Asian. Although they are dressed in Western outfits, are comfortable with the English language, even study and do business abroad, most follow a lifestyle that stays oriental. More than their Western counterparts, they are generally family-oriented, although the husband and wife of a Malaysian middle class family act as true partners particularly when making decisions on buying expensive items like a house or a car (Abdul Rahman, 2002). In essence, they are quite similar to most of Asia’s middle class segment (Vervoon, 1998).

In their pastimes, the middle class family likes to eat out and travel within and outside the country. As an educated group who keeps up with the times, they also watch news on television and read the daily newspapers regularly (Abdul Rahman, 2002). For the smaller proportion who are more affluent, they take up golfing and socialise at coffee houses and karaoke bars (ibid). More importantly, being Asian in

personality, the lifestyle of Malaysia's emerging middle class is very tightly-linked to three major areas of consumption namely housing, cars and children's education (Pinches, 1999). The emphasis on these three items, although seen both as a symbol of prosperity and as functional items, show their attempt at improving their status and well-being.

In Malaysia, ownership of a house is always perceived as functional and is seen as the best and most obvious way to display the owner's wealth. Most of the urban middle class live in comfortable two-storey houses with a minimum of two bathrooms and three bedrooms and one utility room. Every five years or so, these houses would normally be upgraded either with a fresh coat of paint, a new front gate or a change of new furniture.

In describing the house and its interior as an indicator of the middle class status, Rokiah (2000: 37) states:

inside these houses are adorned with furniture from Italy, Chinese Rosewood, Persian carpets, antiques and such expensive artifacts as paintings, vases taken as signs of 'culture' or 'being cultured'.

For the younger set of middle class who are in the upper income brackets, living in expensive fully equipped apartments and condominiums in upmarket urban locations such as the hills of *Bangsar* is another characteristic lifestyle (Sardar, 2000: 100). Costing anywhere between RM300,000 and RM 1 million, these urban dwellings of the rich come with recreational facilities like swimming pools, squash, tennis, badminton courts and club facilities. The popularity of these apartments and condominiums, many of which are copied from Western designs reflects a change in family size and composition among the new urban middle class group (Phua and Soo, 2004: 82).

With regards to car ownership, as another important symbol of social status and identity, the type and make of a car determines the owner's level in Malaysian society. For instance, the more affluent middle class drive European made cars such Mercedes Benz, BMW and Volvo or high-end Japanese brands. Rokiah (2000) further stratifies the different brands among this highly affluent segment of the middle class. While the highest segment owns cars costing a minimum of RM200,000, the middle ranking

civil servants normally drive cars which cost between RM100,000 and RM150,000 (ibid: 42). As she (ibid: 21) puts it succinctly,

anyone who calls the latest model Mercedes, purchased at inflated prices and maintained at high cost, merely a 'car' clearly misses the symbolic point of such a possession.

Thus, Mercedes cars are the choice of businessmen while the higher-educated and younger professionals prefer the BMW, and the civil servants normally drive the Volvo partly because the car comes together with the post they hold at the state government offices. It must also be noted that car ownership is an important indicator of the rapid expansion of the middle class. To illustrate this, amongst urban Malaysian households, car ownership increased by 13 percent over an 11 year period, from 33 percent in 1980 to 46 percent in 1991 (Abdul Rahman, 2002: 44).

In respect of education as another important lifestyle component, Malaysia's middle class community sees it as a very important social value. Most middle class parents would place strong emphasis on a minimum university education for their children. It is perceived as an investment for a better future. Thus, it is common for the parents to put aside between RM150 and RM250 per month per child for pre-school education. When these children reach year five, most will be sent to tuition classes to prepare for the year six examinations. As such, a lot of money on education from pre-school to university is spent by middle class parents.

The government's special emphasis on education is no doubt an added factor that makes educational attainment an important indicator of a person's status as a middle class Malaysian. Thus, with a big number of public and private universities, coupled with various private colleges sprawled throughout the country, children's education has always been both an investment in their future and a symbolic display of the parents' ability to pay. Certainly, education taken together with the other two important indicators of house and car ownerships does indicate the growth of Malaysia's new middle class.

Besides their obsession with the three major items above, most of them also own household entertainment gadgets like television, video units and hi-fi sets, personal computers, mobile phones and financial assets such as share and insurance which

reflect their modern lifestyles (Abdul Rahman, 2002). However, despite their high consumption habits, with the exception of the more affluent few, most are cautious about price labels, preferring to look for reasonably prized quality goods like shoes, clothes, toiletries in supermarkets and shopping complexes that offer “cheap sales” (ibid). Nevertheless, it must be noted that among most of the Malays and Indians, these possessions are acquired through hire-purchase schemes, but the same is not true for a majority of the Chinese middle-class groups as these possessions are likely to be acquired through wealth inheritance. Thus, it is not surprising to discover that many of the Malay middle-class group are exposed to huge debts in comparison to their incomes (ibid). It can therefore be concluded that, a majority of members among the Malay middle class group are not really financially secure and are easily vulnerable to crisis situations.

Another lifestyle element of this dominant segment of the population is the common practice of commercializing marriage ceremonies by holding receptions in a hotel. As observed by Rokiah (2000), at these receptions some relatives would feel odd being served instead of them playing hosts by serving the guests which tends to show that the cultural changes occurring among this “new rich” group is a recent phenomenon. For those who cannot afford the hotel, community halls within the township would be rented for this purpose. Rokiah (ibid) adds that the Chinese middle class would normally cater for 200 to 300 guests while the Malays would commonly have up to 1000 guests in attendance. Symbolically, the bigger the crowd the higher is the status and respect one gets from the community.

Going back on their exterior Western outlook, a prevalent influence of the West among the urban middle class community is the habit of hanging around in international fashion centres and shop in exclusive shopping malls (Pinches, 1999). Due to the growing affluence of the middle class parent, they get turned on by materialism and are easily taken in by the demands of their children so that they can continue with the latest trends and be part of the “in crowd” (Phua and Soo, 2004: 95).

Apart from this, another obvious global phenomenon that has crept into Malaysia’s middle class society is the excesses of the “yuppie lifestyles” among mostly single urban youths. Unburdened by familial concerns, these young, single and Western

educated wealthy youths adorn themselves with designer branded clothes and accessories; spend their time and money in discos and expensive foreign restaurants (Chua, 2000). The consumption items of these middle class youths are clear reflections of their lifestyle.

Thus, there is no doubt that, the items of consumption mentioned above are seen as important in giving a certain image to their owners. It must be further emphasized that despite their high costs, middle class professionals spend a large proportion of their incomes on these items; although this would at times mean that they have to limit their expenditure on other more important and useful consumption items.

b. Characteristics of the new Malay middle class

Though the new middle class segment in Malaysia comprises a varied mix of Chinese, Malays and Indians, this sub-section is confined specifically to the new Malay middle class group because Malays represent a majority of Malaysia's population which is more than half of the total population of 26 million. More importantly, since a majority among the new middle class community are first generation middle class Malays whose parents were mainly rural peasants; this fresh group of Malaysians have acquired certain characteristics that are exclusively associated with the new Malay middle class.

As described under "Political Terrain", the present community of new Malay middle class is actually shaped under the 20 year NEP programme which ended in 1990 after which the NDP and Vision 2020 were then introduced as new development strategies for the country. Since a major challenge of these policies is to make Malaysia a fully developed country comprising a large base of well-mixed middle class population, the government continued giving special privileges to the Malay population who, for a long time have been associated with backwardness and incompetence due to hereditary and environmental factors (Mahathir, 1970). Thus, the term *Melayu Baru* or "New Malays" became a popular buzzword in the early 1990s. Mahathir (1991: 70) defines *Melayu Baru* as:

Malays who possess a culture that is in keeping with the times, who are capable of meeting all challenges, able to compete without assistance, learned and knowledgeable, sophisticated, honest, disciplined, trustworthy and competent.

This means this group of new Malay middle class are expected to be modern, progressive, independent Malays who are competitive, yet retain their own identity as Malaysian Muslims who are spiritually strong. However, although the government's economic policies have successfully produced a considerable number of new Malay middle class of professionals, technocrats, managers and entrepreneurs who are competent and industrious and have earned the trust and confidence of others in their ability, a lot of them have become greedy and have forgotten their roots (Rokiah, 2000). In other words, many have yet to fulfill the criteria of a real *Melayu Baru* as defined by Mahathir.

In part, this factor could be due to their early exposure at boarding schools and separation from their parents in their early teens. Since they are deprived of parental upbringing, their values are visibly different than their parents and grandparents. For example, they do not practice the traditional Malay social beliefs of giving or offering assistance to one's own member of the community which, to the elderly Malays is a matter of honour (Shamsul A.B., 1999). As such, they do not have a strong bond with the village folks who may have been the children of their parents' friends. The lack of this essential Malay value amongst the young Malay middle class has in a way created a social divide between them and the older generation.

To the older Malays, regardless of their status, when one has reached a certain level in the Malay society, it is obligatory to offer monetary assistance to the less fortunate, for instance their own relatives, also to the Malays in general, particularly to those that are within the same community. Furthermore, this is in line with the teachings of Islam which encourages distribution of wealth from the rich to the poor (Schmidt et. al, 1998).

Like most young Malaysians, these "new rich" Malays desire a comfortable high status and middle class lifestyle. In addition, the pressure of city living has made them more individualist in their status orientations, caring only for their own family members with the exclusion of other members of the society except in the form of

formal donations for charity. Their extra cash is required to maintain their middle class lifestyle (Shamsul A.B., 1999).

Although the older generation from the Malay middle class share some similarities with most of the post-NEP new Malay middle class particularly when demonstrating their middle class identity, like driving big European cars, unlike the latter, they place less emphasis on ethnic identity, live in mixed ethnic middle class housing estates and join prestigious golf clubs with mixed ethnicity. One major reason for this differing pattern of lifestyle is the stark difference in their family backgrounds. While parents of the post-NEP new Malay middle class are generally from poor rural background with little formal education, the parents of their older counterparts are not only English educated, more importantly, they have the means to educate their children at tertiary level while still strong on old Malay traditions.

While there are several among the young who still maintain the old traditions of the Malays, most do not have a sustained interest in the more “intellectual” aspects of life, like strong reading habits and appreciation for culture. Despite being highly educated and proficient in English, in a sense they are not yet cosmopolitan in outlook. Many are more concerned with material pursuits and acquiring status by way of consuming goods that they feel would reflect their social positions. They represent a broad section of the new middle class Malays who originates from the villages whom Abdul Rahman (2002: 129) refers to as *folk urbanites*, relatively modest urban dwellers with strong family and community orientation. When connecting this piece of information with making buying decisions for items of consumption, are the new Malay middle class concerned about the brand name of the product?

However, it has to be noted that there is a small fraction of the new Malay middle class community who are cosmopolitan in values and lifestyles. They are mainly Western educated and are widely traveled (Phua and Soo, 2004). These firmly urban-based affluent Malays feel secure and confident in the city and mix well with the other ethnic groups. However, they are more individualistic than the *folk urbanites* who, as mentioned above, are more community based and family oriented.

Nevertheless, regardless of their personal background, the most glaring aspect shared among many of the new Malay middle class is their Muslim identity, normally expressed through overt symbols of piety in speech, dress and ritual prayer. However, in their enthusiasm to portray themselves as moderate practicing Muslims, criticisms towards some of their practices are many. Rokiah (2000) noted that it was ironic to see some of these new middle class Malays spending lavishly on regular receptions and gatherings in hotels, whether big or small, as Islam does not condone extravagance. She supported her contention about the contradicting Islamic practice by quoting an example of how a lot of money is wasted on *berbuka puasa* (the breaking of fast) functions during the holy Islamic calendar month of *Ramadan* in five star hotels. This kind of function has been an on-going affair every year, and has been absorbed into the culture of the new rich Malays. As such, considering their contradictory position of having an innate desire for status in society, one can deduce that the Malay middle class culture in the post NEP era is often a mixture of what would seem to be the elements of fundamentalist piety and extreme materialism, the need to demonstrate status with expensive consumer items (Shamsul A.B., 1999).

The Muslim identity portrayed by the new Malay middle class is the result of global Islamic resurgence started between the late 1960s and early 1970s and became strong in the 1980s (Chandra, 1988; Zainah, 1987). Beginning with these years, the old Western ways of drinking alcohol and offering alcohol to guests at official and unofficial functions attended by Malays no longer became a practice. By 1990s, even names of most Malay children were selected after having consulted the respective meanings in Arabic and, receptions and parties were often accompanied by a Koran recital or other blessings (Rokiah, 2000). It is in fact an important moral and religious obligation for Malay parents to ensure that their children are taught the basic tenets of Islam so that they become practicing Muslims when they grow up.

Regardless of whether they are moderate, radical and ordinary Muslims, the new Malay Muslim middle class are definitely the primary consumers of a wide range of services: shopping centres, restaurants, theme parks, new housing estates, domestic tourism destinations, the arts and the like. Shamsul A.B. (1999) adds that because they were deprived from material comfort in their younger days, it is not surprising that their status in the community is demonstrated by the possession of material

things, like brand new continental cars or a newly renovated house as important symbols of their prosperity. For instance, the more affluent few rides on “American” Harley-Davidson motorbikes because it fits in well with their psyche (Rokiah, 2000).

This conspicuous group also owns

luxurious bungalows fitted with alarm systems and electronically controlled gates, imported often chauffeur-driven luxury cars, gold credit cards, mobile phones, travel to Europe and America for holidays (ibid: 51).

On the matter of utilizing credit facilities, as mentioned in the earlier pages, it has become part of the Malay culture to buy most goods on credit. Although many among the middle class Malays have some form of personal savings like investments in the government-sponsored unit trusts of *Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN)* or *Amanah Saham Bumiputra (ASB)*, it is typical of them to buy affordable goods like housing appliances or television sets costing anywhere between RM400 to RM5000 in cash. In fact, buying on credit is an instrument of conspicuous consumption among them. Also the use of credit cards has become a minor symbol of status and prestige (Abdul Rahman, 2002). Furthermore, this factor becomes more pronounced since as *Bumiputras*, they have greater access to various forms of credits and other financial help from various government and banking institutions.

Obviously, there are internal contradictions within the new middle class Malays. As Shamsul A.B. (1999: 103) puts it eloquently :

On one hand, it is in favour of market expansion and promotion of aggressive individualism making it hostile to tradition, on the other, its political survival depends upon the manipulation and persistence of tradition for its legitimacy, hence its attachment to conservatism, notably in areas concerning the nation, religion, gender and family. Having no proper theoretical rationale, its defence of tradition in these areas normally take the form of fundamentalism of sorts. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why many observers quickly label the *Melayu Baru*, who belongs to the middle class, a confused and schizophrenic lot.

In addition to this, regardless of whether they are the more affluent or the ordinary *folk urbanite* middle class Malays, many among them are politically conscious and participate in movements championing democracy, and had emerged as a force to be reckoned with in national politics. About 44 percent (Abdul Rahman, 2002: 153) are members of the Malay Muslim dominated political parties, either UMNO which is the backbone of the National Front government or PAS, an influential opposition Islamic party. Judging from these observations, in tandem with rapid industrialization and

modernization, political parties and religious movements attract a high number of the new middle class Malay community as their members.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that the new Malay middle class, being a "first generation" middle class group in a rapidly industrialising society is a reflection of the extent to which the Malaysian society has undergone modernization and social transformation. They may be educated, ambitious, religiously inclined but by and large, they do not have a clear sense of direction.

3.5.4 Cultural Depiction and the Malaysian Advertising Industry

Although advertising activity in the country began as early as 1805 when the first known advertisement appeared in the "Prince of Wales Island's Gazette" newspaper on the island of Penang, real progress of the advertising industry began very much later. After the setting up of the Association of Accredited Advertising Agents (4As) in 1948 in Singapore (Anderson, 1984), then an island state of Malaya, various advertising activities and practices followed. The establishment of the Malayan Advertiser Association (MAA) in 1952 comprising among others, pioneer multinational marketing firms like the British Lever Brothers, the Swiss Nestle and the American Shell was an example of such accomplishments. This was then followed with the setting up of a number of multinational advertising agencies to fulfil the advertising requirements of the multinational firms. Starting in the mid-1970s until today of which the government's economic policy is leaned towards a liberalised global economy which has resulted in the swift rise of foreign investments, the advertising industry in Malaysia had been experiencing rapid changes and progress, in tandem with the nation's economic and technological developments.

Although the current trend in Malaysia's advertising industry seems to show that many of the advertisements in the media are getting more Western-oriented than before, the industry is best articulated as a blend of Western and local components with a touch of religious concern. In a study involving 234 Malaysian television commercials in TV1, TV2 and TV3, Holden (2001) deduces that the advertisement contents in Malaysia generally display two opposing societal structures, that is "modern" and "autocratic". It is modern because there is portrayal of Western

elements such as individual freedom, market solutions and a reception of global infiltration whilst it is considered autocratic because there are messages relating to law and order which justify local government control, monitored guidelines for execution of advertisements and the necessity for social supervision and guidance. With regards to the latter, an example of advertising restrictions in the Malaysian media is the prohibition of certain images that are considered as offensive to the religion and society such as nudity or kissing scenes (ACTR , 1990).

Concurrent with the country's economic development, Malaysia's media advertising expenditure (ADEX) has been on the rise. Table 3 illustrates that between 1999 and 2005, the general growth in media advertising expenditure was highest in the year 2000, the same year Malaysia's GDP growth went up to 8.3 percent (see Table 2) which expectedly is the highest rate recorded thus far after the 1997 and 1998 Asia's financial crisis. For the year 2005, advertisers in Malaysia used RM4.56 billion to buy media space and airtime which is a nominal rise of three percent from 2004. This figure matches the marginal economic growth rate of 5.3 percent in the same year.

Table 3: Monitored Advertising Expenditure 1999-2005

YEAR	ADEX	Increase over previous year
1999	RM2,474,043	15 %
2000	RM3,078,270	24 %
2001	RM3,157,050	3 %
2002	RM3,450,453	9 %
2003	RM3,717,281	8 %
2004	RM4,423,066	17 %
2005	RM4,555,500	3 %

Source: Nielsen Media Research Adex

*Astro ADEX not included

Like in most parts of the developing countries, advertisement contents in the Malaysian media comprise the universally acknowledged four stages of advertisement strategy namely product information, product symbol, personalization, lifestyle (Leiss

et al., 1990). However, the findings from Holden's study (2001) reveal that advertisements using the product symbols and product information formats are most frequent.

Based on the figures shown in Table 4, the major advertisers in Malaysia now can be categorised into three, namely the Malaysian telecommunications providers (Maxis, Digi and Celcom), global fast moving consumer goods (Proctor and Gamble, Nestle and Unilever) and also Malaysian government-linked companies (*Telekom* Malaysia and *Petronas*).

Table 4: Top Advertisers in Malaysia

Advertiser	2002 RM Million	2003 RM Million	2004 RM Million	2005 RM Million
Maxis	73	80	144	98
Proctor and Gamble	38	57	103	129
Celcom	32	62	90	123
Digi	36	45	80	81
Nestle	44	45	61	66
Unilever	50	55	60	81
KFC Holdings	27	38	41	45
<i>Petronas</i>	42	45	35	37
<i>Telekom</i> Malaysia	67	54	35	48

Source: Nielsen Media Research

* The figures above include expenditure in non-media advertising and promotion activities

a. Advertisement Restrictions

The advertising practices in Malaysia are constantly being monitored by the government to not only protect the consumer but also the industry from bad cultural values that may possibly be shown or seen in the media. Nevertheless, ever since the implementation of the 1998 Communications and Multimedia Act, government

policies in relation to advertising practices particularly in broadcast advertisements in Malaysia can be considered to be generally quite liberal. This 1998 Act which comes under the Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications replaces the Information Act, Telecommunications Act and ICT Act is promulgated to encourage industry self-regulation to address the rapid changes in the technological development of the multimedia and broadcasting industry (Tariq, 2005).

It must be reiterated that the introduction of the government's open sky policy after which the internet media was launched in the early 1990s has resulted in more and more Malaysians exposing themselves to a lot of foreign contents. Following this, when the Malaysian satellite pay television, Astro was launched in 1999, it gave further access to Malaysian viewers to expose themselves to foreign material. As it is, the latest figures show that internet penetration and Astro viewership recorded a very high increase amongst Malaysians compared to free-to-air television. In 2005, there was a 14 percent reach in the internet media and 25 percent reach for Astro compared to only five percent and four percent respectively in 1999 (AGB NMR Media Index, 2006). Due to the steady penetration of these new Malaysian media, the reach of free-to-air television which was almost 90 percent in 1999 went down to 70 percent in 2005 (ibid). It is important to note that the marked reduction in penetration of free-to-air television which now comprises six channels and which together carry more than 50 percent foreign programmes, was never experienced before. This situation clearly demonstrates that globalisation of the media has left the government with very little choice except to relax the advertising regulations imposed on global advertisements. Herein lies the government's predicament. While there is unease on the impact of "foreign" Western values, the implementation of the 1998 advertising regulations is also prompted by concerns about reconciling the need for advertising to boost consumption and the economy.

With this 1998 Act in place, the role of the Ministry of Information which since 1971 was the main regulator of Malaysian advertisements broadcast over radio and television has been limited to the government channels of TV1 and TV2 and its 32 radio stations (<http://www.rtm.net.my/radio>). As such, the privatized television stations that include TV3, NTV 7, Channel 8, Channel 9 and Astro satellite pay television which has more than 15 channels and the other privatized radio stations are

no longer bound by the Ministry of Information's 1990 Advertising Code for Radio and Television. This explains why there are now many foreign produced advertisements being screened in the private television stations.

Notwithstanding the more tolerant approach used, the 1998 Act also takes into account that not all Malaysian citizens are prepared to fully accept all aspects of Western culture. As such, using the 1990 Advertising Code as a basis, aspects of the Western way of life that are considered a social taboo and an infringement of a citizen's religious faith remain prohibited. Besides nude images which most Malaysians would refer to as an epitome of Western moral degradation, other examples of images that continue to be banned on the television screen include scenes of an amorous, intimate or suggestive nature. In addition, the use of indecent language is also not allowed (ACTR, 1990). This situation illustrates that as an Asian country, Malaysia is distinguished from the international and Western markets by its cultural environment.

b. Cultural Infiltration in Malaysian Advertising

The growth of the global economy has, as explained earlier, inevitably led to the intensification of the multinational advertising agencies in Malaysia. The obvious foreign elements in advertisements seen in the Malaysian media nowadays can be traced to the early seventies when these agencies started gaining grounds due to the flourishing economy which encouraged the setting up of more multinational and local firms. It cannot be denied that these agencies, due to their proven track record and experience in managing big multinational advertising accounts are understandably more professional and efficient in their management of the accounts than the local ones. This is because the established local agencies although headed by Malaysians who have had a few years experience working with the multinational agencies, do not have the financial strength compared to their multinational counterparts (Mussadikh, 2005).

It is therefore quite predictable that advertising agencies that operate in Malaysia have always been dominated by Western firms. Names of American based agencies that have been synonymous with the Malaysian advertising industry include Bates, Ogilvy

and Mather, McCann- Erickson , Leo Burnett, Saatchi and Saatchi, Grey and JWT. Most of these agencies which were set up with local partners to fulfil the requirements by the Malaysian government, have established their footholds in this country more than 40 years ago (see Adnan, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that these Western firms along with one or two Asian based agencies such as Dentsu, Young and Rubicam, and Hakuhodo, have always been in Malaysia's list of top ten advertising agencies (Mussadikh, 2005). The multimillion global accounts that these multinationals manage, which normally encompass more than 70 percent of the advertising expenditure annually (Tariq, 2005; Khairuddin, 2005), are primarily the result of the policy of international alignment wherein global advertisers use the services of the same multinational agencies throughout the world. For instance, if Levi Strauss New York uses the services of McKann Erickson, then McKann Erickson Malaysia automatically acquires the Levis Strauss Malaysia advertising account. Because the product is a global brand, the concept of the advertisement would understandably be global in nature. More importantly, the presence of foreign elements in these advertisements would be hard to evade because the key personnel in the multinational agencies particularly the creative people who create and adapt the advertisements are by and large foreigners who do not practice local tradition, values and culture (Mohamad, 1993: 56). In consequence, the meanings and interpretation communicated by the advertisements to the local audiences mirror a culture which is normally not local in character.

Evidently, the flow of foreign actors, popular culture, icons or locales in global advertisements in the Malaysian media is becoming more common now. The continuous influx of Western brands and the continued dominance of Western advertising agencies have undoubtedly moulded and shaped the direction of the advertising industry in Malaysia. In fact, the seepage of the America and European influence in advertisements can be described as heading towards pervasiveness. For example, besides the normal global influence of Malaysian youths patronising American fast foods like the KFC to have their regular meals, it is also becoming more common nowadays for them to adopt an identical Western behaviour in the way they socialise such as greeting one another with "hey dude, what's happening!" as portrayed in a Pepsi commercial in Malaysia a few years back.

Holden and Azrina (1998) in detecting the dominance of Western content in the advertisements confirm that “the look, feel and sound of Malaysian advertisements are very much influenced by those found in the North American media”. Holden (2001) further elaborates that aspects on the intense sensitivity, the music selection and coloration of the advertisements and the lack of “semiotic literacy” in them have made these Malaysian advertisements similar to the American advertisements. To him (ibid), like the ones in America, foreign products in Malaysian advertisements use the utilitarian approach which is simply put, a rational and straightforward technique wherein a wide number of local situations and uses are adapted. In other words, akin to Barber’s (1996) concept of “McWorld” as mentioned in Chapter Two, the seepage of Western influence in Malaysian advertisements mostly come in the form of the local consumer culture positioning, referred earlier as LCCP . This leads me to the following question: Can values and lifestyles identified as the Malaysian culture oppose this influence?

Additionally, subsequent to the implementation of the 1998 Communications and Multimedia Act and the relaxation of government restrictions on foreign advertisements, global brands portraying overt culture of the West have started appearing in the non-government stations. These types of advertisements, referred to and elaborated in Chapter Two as Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP) started appearing in the private television stations and Astro satellite pay channel since the past four years. They include the Visa Card advertisement which features Pierce Brosnan in his usual James Bond role, the Toyota Corolla advertisement which features Brad Pitt as the main character and also the Pepsi advertisement which portrays Britney Spears and Beyonce Knowles as female gladiators in “revealing” two piece outfits. In consequence, these advertisements were allowed because they were within the guidelines of the 1998 Act which was in compliance with the government’s open sky policy on foreign culture. Unlike the earlier 1990 Advertising Code, the 1998 Act is not only more flexible with the costumes of the actors but is also silent on the earlier imposition of the “Made in Malaysia” requirement which allowed only a maximum of 20 percent of the foreign contents to be on air. In fact, the government’s TV 1 and TV 2 permitted the airing of a 100 percent UK made product, McVite (Adilah, 2005).

On the same note, it must be pointed out that the consistent barrage of global advertisements which align themselves with the multinational advertising agencies have spurred a buoyant local economy which encourages more local brands into the market. For instance, over the past five years Malaysia's telecommunications providers and government linked companies have been investing vast amounts of their expenditure on advertising and promoting their products and images. In fact, as Table 4 illustrates, their advertising expenditure is on a par with or sometimes higher than their counterparts from among the major global advertisers.

In line with this trend, while the global messages of consumption which use the LCCP and FCCP still dominate the industry, there has been a marked increase in local advertisements that truly depict the Malaysian culture. Advertisement contents for the *Petronas* corporate advertisement or the *Telekom* corporate advertisement are two examples that show the plural nature of tolerant Malaysians living life within the confines of national boundaries. These advertisements and a few others promote the notion of a united Malaysian nation in spite of the onslaught of Western brands and ideas. This situation proves that there are a substantial number of Malaysian commercials which carry a social agenda in disseminating its advertisement message.

A common approach used in these advertisements is to feature the main actors as identifiable with all the major ethnic groups, that is they cannot be easily tagged as Indian, Chinese or Malay. This technique of selecting actors with the "*Pan-Asian* look" is meant to remind the audience that they are a Malaysian first and an Indian, Malay or Chinese second. At this juncture, it is pertinent to illustrate an example of a global advertisement which, although employing a slightly different approach than the local advertisements in selecting its actors yet gives the same attention at communicating similarity, that is telling the audience that the product is suitable for everyone. It is a 2003 McDonald's "Prosperity Burger" advertisement which was exclusively created for the Asian market and produced in Malaysia (Fowler, 2005). Launched to coincide with the *Chinese New Year*, this advertisement integrates Chinese music, Malay narration and shots of the product. The final scene depicts a Malay man enjoying the meal, accompanied by an elder Chinese man and a younger Indian woman (ibid). Clearly, this advertisement tries to portray the three ethnic

groups as one equally urban, middle class, prosperous and happy consumption community.

Other than communicating ethnic harmony in the advertisement scenes and imposing the use of Malay language taglines in local advertisements that use English, *Cantonese* or *Tamil*, Holden (2001) in his study observes that there are also elements of Malay traditional values in the form of costumes, depiction of rural life and occasional references to Islam.

Conversely, although these type of advertisements are quite visible in the Malaysian television, it would still be quite impossible to compete and counter the flow of Western cultural elements that are now continuously penetrating the Malaysian media. It is anticipated that in the next few years, more Western advertisements carrying totally Western consumer culture will keep flowing into the Malaysian media. As indicated in the earlier pages, the impact of globalisation, new technology and open sky policy is too tough for the government to effectively curb “negative” Western influence from penetrating the minds of Malaysians.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the politics, economy and socio-cultural domain of Malaysia and their relationship to its middle class and the advertising scene. The most obvious piece of evidence to emerge from this chapter is that Malaysia is a nation with an intriguing mix of divergent political, economic, social and cultural forces. Its political system is a puzzling blend of Western democracy and “guided Malaysian style democracy” which is jumbled with elements of authoritarianism. Also, its economic policies and programmes are mergers of various periods while socio-culturally, it is a picture of ethnic divisions with varied tongues, creeds, colours, customs and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, despite these complications and the problem of socio-economic barriers within the population, Malaysia is a stable, restrained and expedient nation. Compared to its Asian counterparts, its political system is fairly secured, its economic development is quite

consistent and its multi-cultural society is generally peaceful. In fact, Malaysia can be considered a model for a “successful” Asian nation.

Its middle class community which is growing and comprises almost half of the total working population, forms the backbone of the country as they are not only politically-conscious but are also culturally resilient. More importantly, as they are well-exposed to the Western media and are comparatively secured in financial standing, the middle class group in Malaysia is unsurprisingly an important target market for a wide variety of consumer products and brands from the multinational companies, mainly from America and Europe. In fact they are ingenuously coaxed by various media tools into becoming first-rate contemporary consumers that buy Western products and brands meant to identify them with varying classes and social status.

This chapter has also given an account of the effortless penetration of Western culture into Malaysian advertising to convince the middle class population via the implicit and explicit messages in the advertisements. Taken together, Malaysia’s political, economic and cultural representations of East and West, traditional and modern which has been comprehensively elaborated in the chapter is clearly reflected in the way of life of its population, in particular its middle class public.

The literary evidences laid out in the chapter suggest that the cultural norms relating to the use of English language, Western-influenced costume and mainly Asian-influenced food are fundamental aspects of Malaysian culture that are uniformly practiced and common within Malaysia’s middle class culture. In fact, these enriching customs, regardless of their Western or non-Western origin are regarded as a universal way of life for Malaysia’s middle class community. However, although they are fascinated with the Western concept of retaining a social status in society as depicted in the house they live in or the type of car they drive, the Malaysian middle class consumers are by and large still inherently Asian. They are not only family oriented but are proud of their cultural heritage, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.

These contradictory forces of Western influenced lifestyle and Malaysian cultural values is certainly a consequence to the government’s economic policy of pro-FDI to

encourage growth while at the same time advocating the concept of taking pride in being Malaysians and practicing Eastern values. Sequentially, exposure to global advertisements with Western elements becomes the norm and consumption of Western imported products turn out to be a normal experience. While advertisements in the Malaysian media are negotiating the contradictory drives of Western and Eastern images, many within the population are concerned about what is regarded as “Westernisation”, a set of values which threatens their cultural sovereignty and much of their religiously rooted values and ways of life regarded as distinctively Malaysian although Malaysian culture is itself the result of a blend of various cultural influences.

Additionally, although there are behavioral similarities among the Chinese, Indian and Malay middle class, an obvious implication from a number of social science studies point to the fact that the Malay group demonstrates a number of significant attitudinal differences. Their strong attachment to the traditional customs which could be traced to Hindu beliefs and their faith in Islam as a religion strongly implies the predicaments in their minds. This lack in the sense of direction explains why they are more vulnerable to promises of power and status than their Chinese and Indian counterparts. Yet, the pertinent question that needs asking is, what about the perception of the Malay middle class towards global brands that portray messages of power and status?

Lastly, another significant conclusion from this chapter is that like the Malaysian government itself, advertising content has been dominantly replete with global elements ever since the 1970s. Despite the substantial number of advertisements in the Malaysian media that represent Malaysian values and universal ideals, of late the infiltration of Western elements in global advertisements has been quite colossal. At the same time, the portrayal of general correspondence between government goals and Western contents are also present in many of the advertisements. This inconsistent situation in the Malaysian advertising industry which is representative of the Malaysian state of affairs, like the government itself is expected to prolong indefinitely given that the economy of the country is unwavering as it has always been since its independence in 1957.

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes a detailed outline and description of the research methods employed for this study. The contents include procedures involved in undertaking the research. Two research approaches were employed to acquire primary data for this study.

The primary research method used was eleven focus group discussions and this technique contributed about 90 percent of the data to resolve the research questions. To complement the focus group discussions and to further support the data obtained, a q-study was used as a secondary method.

Additionally, for background information, informal personal interviews with decision-makers from the Malaysian advertising industry representing advertising agencies, major advertisers, media organisations, media specialists and the government were also conducted. The reason was to get the industry's perspectives on policies and latest trends in the advertising and communication industry in relation to global brands and the changing cultural values of Malaysia's middle class segment.

Because this research is about global brands and their impact on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class segment, this chapter opens with a setting of the research which clarifies definitions of the key terminologies, that is, global brands, cultural values and the middle class. In addition, it also describes the study population. The chapter then shifts to a description of the research methods and a detailed discussion on the process of conducting the research.

4.2 Research Setting

Given that the main issue of this study concerns the impact of Western cultural values via global branding, this dissertation traces the exposure of Malaysia's middle class to advertisements found in the Malaysian media with a special focus on television commercials. In short, while the study probes the perceptions of and influence on Malaysia's middle class based on their exposure to the various media, they will be exposed to television commercials on global brands during the study so that they will be instantly reminded of what they have seen and heard. The underlying reason for using television commercials as a major instrument is not only due to their unique advantage of having a combination of sight, sound and motion, but also because they have proven to be a very forceful influence in shaping the culture of a society (Moon and Chan, 2005). This makes television a pervasive medium that no other media can match.

At this point, it is important to provide the research definitions of the two key terminologies for this study, namely global brands and cultural values. Specifically for this research, global brands are defined as products which originate from Europe or America and which are advertised in various Malaysian media. In other words, brand names from Japan or any other country outside Europe or America are not the subjects of this study. Cultural values are defined as elements relating to the way of life, lifestyle, beliefs or customs of the audience.

As a starting point for the empirical work of the research, the study population needs to be identified. The population for this study is Malaysia's middle class population living in Peninsular Malaysia. Abdul Rahman (2002: 81) has sub-categorized the middle class into the new middle class comprising professionals and managers, and marginal middle class comprising lower white collar workers. For this study, the middle class is defined as white collar workers of various levels, ranging from employers who run their own business to low white collar employees such as clerks. To identify them, it is pertinent to take an overview of the latest Malaysian population figures.

According to the mid-year population estimates for 2004 (Yearbook of Statistics, Malaysia 2004), as of 30th June 2004, the total population of Malaysia (Peninsular and East Malaysia) was 25.6 million with about 51 percent males and 49 percent females. The ethnic composition in Peninsular Malaysia is about 60 percent Malays, 30 percent Chinese and 10 percent Indians and other races. Furthermore, about 67 percent of the adult population in Peninsular Malaysia is urban-based and about one-third live in the market centres of Kuala Lumpur/Petaling Jaya, Johor Bahru, Penang/Province Wellesley and Ipoh (AC Nielsen Media Index, 2005).

Presently, the average monthly household income of a Malaysian is RM3,011 with 49 percent of the population earning above RM1500 monthly (ibid). A detailed breakdown is as follows:

RM4001 and above:	11.7 percent
RM3001-RM4000:	7.6 percent
RM2001-RM3000:	17.4 percent
RM1500-RM2000:	12.3 percent

With regards to the percentage of the middle class population in Malaysia, Abdul Rahman (2002:57) claims that in 2000 they comprise about 50 percent of the total population. The 2003 official government statistics which did not include the sales personnel, self-employed individuals and owners of small businesses, provides the following breakdown of percentage distribution of white collar employees (Yearbook of Statistics, 2004):

Legislators, Senior officials and Managers:	8 percent
Professionals:	5.4 percent
Technicians and Associate professionals:	12.4 percent
Clerical workers:	9.5 percent

4.3 Research Methodology

Taking into consideration the study purpose and the research questions, focus group discussions and q-sorting technique were employed for this study because of their unique advantages. While the focus group discussions provide an environment for

participants to express their opinions and comments freely allowing for honest and frank responses, the q-study's major advantage is that it identifies clear and coherent thought patterns of the respondents.

As for the informal personal interviews conducted among Malaysian advertising industry practitioners, although the data gathered from this approach were not meant for the study's final analysis, the input provided by the respondents were useful as background information.

4.3.1 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions have become a popular qualitative research method among researchers both in the professional and academic fields. In fact many studies in the field of Social Sciences have relied on group discussions of various kinds to generate their data. Before the focus group method became popular within the academic community, it was a very successful method among research professionals in the marketing industry.

Krueger and Casey (2000) illustrate the potential of the focus group as a research method when they assembled the skills of 21 researchers who had conducted the focus group technique to research a variety of issues with an array of populations in an assortment of settings. According to them (ibid: 160-162), the academics showed a keen interest in the potential of focus group research in the 1980s as most of them wanted to find out if focus groups could provide a different kind of information than individual interviews or surveys. Soon, as this method became prevalent among academics, several strategies were introduced to make it systematic and verifiable. For instance, data from the focus group discussions were captured using field notes and audio tapes and transcripts were used in the analysis.

As it turns out, today's studies on various issues including marketing, public health, education, youth, the environment and the like have used the focus group method with the purpose of getting an insight into how people feel or think about an issue, product, service or idea. Besides being extensively used as a primary research method, the focus group has also been used in pilot work for many different type of studies such

as the surveys and in-depth interview studies as a way of furthering the interpretation of research findings. Their primary strength is in revealing what aspects of a topic are salient to a given population, and in exploring the range and elements of a subject area that concern a target group (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999: 188). Because of the varied topics that this method explores, focus group participants comprise many different types of people. It is also sometimes claimed that since they generate statements and views in the course of social interaction and dialogue, focus groups are more valid as indicators of public views than the data obtained from the more artificial circumstances of an isolated interview. Indeed, although focus groups are sometimes used on their own, many researchers have combined this method with other research methods including surveys, observations or single interviews. In fact, as Flick (2002 : 127) contends, it could replace single interviews because of its advantage of the group dynamics.

Normally applied to extract opinions and study attitudes of audiences, the focus group study, as defined by Krueger and Casey (2000:5),

is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non threatening environment. Each group is conducted with six to eight people by a skilled interviewer. The discussions are relaxed and often participants enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others.

Because it is ideal for exploring opinions, comments, experiences or concerns, it is capable of bringing forth the inner feelings and responses from the participants. This advantage is not inherent in quantitative surveys. A survey for instance may be able to get rankings from its respondents on the seriousness of crime among youths today, while a focus group discussion among a small group of participants would be able to relate crime rate to parental upbringing, peer pressure and much more. In other words, the discussions in a focus group could extract information beyond just attitudes of the audience. They also may generate ideas and values not imported by the researcher, whereas a survey questionnaire can only elicit responses to those items selected as important by the survey designer, and constructed by the researcher's vocabulary and formulation.

As the name implies, a set of focused issues are discussed in a focus group because it involves a collective activity such as viewing a number of television commercials or

simply giving opinions and comments on the lifestyle of a middle class segment. It is different from the broader category of group interviews because there is interaction among the participants to generate data. As each member of the focus group is considered a member of a social group, they are encouraged to express their viewpoints, exchange experiences and opinions (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999: 4). In essence, it is a practical way of eliciting opinions and comments on a complicated topic and analyzing it. The informal nature of the focus group makes it lively and unpredictable, and participants can make sudden connections. Nevertheless, it cannot be equated with a casual conversation between friends since a moderator is present to elicit responses and control turn-taking among participants. When the moderator intervenes in a discussion, he or she follows not only the discussion guide but being someone who has expertise in the topic, the moderator uses his or her own judgments about how conversation usually works (ibid: 175).

Taking into consideration the explanation above, the major strengths of focus group interviews and discussions over other methods are, firstly they generate discussions which automatically reveal meanings in relation to the subject matter discussed and secondly, the focus groups produce diversity and differences in viewpoints and opinions either within or between groups. Due to these interactive aspects of the focus groups, this method is capable of gathering data and insights that many other methods cannot offer.

Unlike individual interviews where the interaction is between the interviewer and a single interviewee, in focus groups, “a multitude of interpersonal dynamics occur”, people change their views through interactions, and the “unit of analysis becomes the group” (Crabtree et al., 1993: 144). Beyond gaining interactive data, the focus groups also offer the opportunity to observe the non-verbal and verbal aspects of the group process.

With regard to the sample size, Krueger and Casey (2000: 205-206) remind us that the focus group interview or discussion is a qualitative study and therefore sample size is not an indicator of quality as in quantitative research. As such, statistical representativeness is not necessary. Rather it is “qualitative sampling” where it is

diversity of participants in the focus group that is essential. This strength is admittedly also a potential weakness as will be mentioned later.

The most important aspect is the pattern of interview results and the goal of the focus group which is to determine the variability of a concept or idea. In other words, the purpose of the study and the nature of what is to be discovered determine the sample type and size. This also means that the number of groups in a focus group study could be resolved by referring to the research questions and the different population sub-groups required (Flick, 2002:120). In making preparation for the various groups, Krueger and Casey (2000: 27) caution that the researcher would have to mix people with similar expertise and power related to the issue in the study. This is done to create a conducive environment where participants feel comfortable to express themselves freely.

Analyzing the results from the focus groups follows accepted systematic steps wherein key points are identified and the results compared with other groups so that certain patterns can be distinguished. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), in categorizing the thought patterns of the participants the purpose of the study is of key importance.

Nevertheless, despite the many advantages of the focus group as a qualitative research method, it also has its limitations. Firstly, although the focus groups is not about consensus building but to obtain a range of opinions from a representative set of identified audiences in relation to a subject of study, its central problem is still “representativeness” of the sample. In other words, regardless of the number of groups selected to discuss on an issue, being a qualitative method, it can never have a representative sample as a structured quantitative survey can.

In addition, since the nature of a focus group discussion is such that a small group of six to ten people is gathered to discuss an issue, there could be a possibility that some of the participants may be silent or less talkative. Here, the role of the focus group moderator and the method of recording data are crucial considerations. Therefore, it is essential for the moderator to be skilful in order to get reserved participants to open

up. This is important because it will determine the nature and quality of the data gathered.

In relation to this, special care is needed when analysing the data because it could be erroneous to get a consensus of attitudes from focus group data as similarity of views do not necessarily reflect an individual participant's opinions. Also, when comparing data from different focus groups, there is a possibility of incorrect inferences drawn because certain groups may not offer the views discussed in certain other groups (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

Another major drawback of the focus group method is the heavy organisational effort required which translates to high costs in undertaking the tasks of participant selection, recruitment, arrangement of venue and preparation of incentives to participants and research assistants. As such, this reason alone could discourage a researcher from using this technique since the cost of organizing is not a meagre amount.

However, notwithstanding all the difficulties, if systematically planned and executed, the focus group technique could be a very rewarding experience. From the researcher's own experience of undertaking this large scale study which comprised eleven focus groups comprising Malaysia's divergent middle class population at six different locations, much of the limitations of the study were overcome successfully.

From the very beginning of the research plan up to the end of the focus group execution of this study, every consideration was made to ensure that the study's goal was accomplished. This effort was central to the researcher because this method of data collection is the backbone of this study. For instance, the researcher was equipped with contingency plans to overcome the problem of participants who could not turn up on the appointed date of the focus group discussions. Also, research intermediaries were utilised to assist the researcher in the selection, recruitment and transporting participants from their homes to the discussion venue. To fill in the possible gaps in data analysis, the q-sorting technique was employed as a secondary research method. Details on the research procedures of focus group discussions and q-sorting technique are on pages 128 to 132.

4.3.2 The Q-sorting Technique

Ever since it was first developed as a behavioral research technique in the early 1930s by William Stephenson (1953), the q-sort approach has been used quite extensively particularly in the fields of psychology, sociology and marketing (Thomas and Watson, 2002). This research approach has been widely acclaimed by its proponents as a powerful, theoretically grounded and effective quantitative tool for studies that seek to examine perceptions, attitudes and other qualitative aspects of the respondents (Brown, 1980).

As an overview, the q-sorting technique begins with a q-sample which is drawn from observations of what people say or think about an issue that is about to be examined. As such, it could comprise either selected statements, drawings, illustrations, smell or even advertisement commercials that represent thoughts or viewpoints of the subjects or respondents. The researcher then makes a general analysis of the q-sample and separates the units of analysis into categories based on the researcher's own subjective judgement (Stephenson, 1953).

The data for q-factor analysis is derived from a succession of "q-sorts" executed by the respondents. A q-sort is a ranking of the variables, which are normally presented on small cards referred to as the q-cards. Using statements as an example of the q-sample, the respondent is required to rank each one of the series of statements presented to them on the q-cards. Ranking is employed in this research approach because it denotes that people think about ideas in relation to other ideas, rather than in isolation (ibid).

Since this research approach uses q-factor analysis to analyse its data, it is different from many conventional research approaches which normally involve analysis of variables. The q-methodology looks for correlations between respondents across a sample of variables. This means it is concerned with categories of respondents according to their personality, attitudes, beliefs or thinking patterns in relation to an issue or issues. As such, its factor analysis works to reduce many individual viewpoints into a small number of categories, usually three or four; and each factor represents a type of individual. In short, the q-study not only measures an

individual's self-concept (see Thomas and Watson, 2002) but is also intended to get a patterning of specific behaviours on certain issues amongst individuals (Stephenson, 1953).

One dominant difference between q-methodology and other social science research methodologies is that it usually uses very few subjects. As its findings are not meant to be representative of the total population, it is concerned with a detailed analysis of the subjectivity of an individual, as pointed out earlier. Because the respondent in this research method represents a proportion of the population, it cannot be compared with many other quantitative methods which normally try to represent the total population using the random sampling method. To Brown (1980), the sample that supposedly represents the study population in a conventional quantitative study is always suspicious because of the large number involved. According to him (ibid: 112), the q-study: "focuses on each respondent's subjective opinions as intensely as possible, rather than say 10 persons but less intense on each person."

Another interesting aspect is that once the process of sorting the q-sample is completed, follow-up interviews with the respondents can be conducted to capture their reasoning for ranking the various q-samples in their own unique way. Again, this provides opportunity for more data analysis. Additionally, another advantage of the q-sorting technique is that it is not complicated to execute as it involves only three steps, namely designing a q-study, administering the q-sort and finally data analysis. When designing the q-study, a topic and a q-sample which may comprise statements, smell, drawings, advertisement commercials or any other relevant elements would have to be decided. Next, when administering it, the respondent must be given independence to assure self-reference when rank ordering the q-sample using the likert scale, and lastly factor analysis would be executed to produce groupings whereby the factors created are interpreted in detail.

Looking at the advantages offered by the q-study and the major goal of this dissertation, it cannot be denied that this research approach can add value to the findings from the primary method of focus group discussions in that it is capable of making subjective psychological comparisons within groups, specifically identifying the thinking patterns of Malaysia's middle class types. From the differing thought

patterns derived from the factor analysis of the q-sorts, clear comparisons of attitudes and perceptions among the middle class sub-segments can be discerned. In addition, as indicated above, being a study in human subjectivity, q-methodology is useful because its nature is such that the observed patterns of behavior among the respondents are not imposed since they are given choices when doing the q-sorting, devoid of researcher influence. Furthermore, considering the fact that the q-study is capable of measuring subjectivity and identifying similarities in thought patterns (Brown, 1996), it would for instance be useful for this study to unravel the degree of certain inherent values of the Western lifestyle to which the young urban affluent middle class share with their older urban affluent counterparts. Undeniably, adding the q-sort technique to complement the focus group discussions would result in a more robust data for this dissertation.

4.3.3 Informal Personal Interviews

In general, social science researchers concur that the face-to-face personal interview is one of the most popular forms of interviewing techniques (see Hakim, 1987) to obtain facts and information from the respondents. There is no doubt that this technique offers a great opportunity for the interviewer as the researcher to study non-verbal reactions of the interviewee which, depending on the purpose of the study can be very useful because facial reactions denote meanings beyond the spoken word. This also means that the face to face-to-face interview is more advantageous than the telephone interview which does not offer as much interpersonal contact between the interviewer and the interviewee.

What is fascinating about the informal personal interview technique is that it is flexible because the interviewer can probe certain issues based on the answers given by the interviewee. Additional questions could also be posed once rapport has been developed during the course of the interview session particularly when the questions prepared are either unstructured or semi-structured. It is important to note that since this technique involves only the interviewer and the interviewee and could take a longer time than expected, the conversations are normally tape recorded (Oppenheim, 1992) to avoid missing out essential information.

Despite its advantages, a common problem faced in the personal interview approach is that interviews involving top management personnel of organisations could at times affect the timeline of the research schedule. This is because the interviewer may face difficulty setting the interview time and day because the interviewee would more often than not be busy. For this study, as mentioned earlier, the data obtained from the informal personal interviews are not meant for final analysis of the study findings but will be used as background information. The respondents' comments and opinions on the latest advertisement policies and trends, their sensitivities and insights on local and Western culture will be used to either support or dispute the information from the secondary data for this study. Besides this, their viewpoints and updates on the latest happenings in the industry will be useful to buttress findings for this dissertation. Taking the above aspects into consideration, only decision makers representing the major organisations within the Malaysian advertising industry were interviewed and they comprise four male interviewees and one female interviewee.

4.4 Research Outline and Data Collection

As pointed out earlier, the primary data for this dissertation on “The Perception and Influence of Global Brands on the Cultural Values of Malaysia’s Middle Class” were obtained using two major research processes. They were: focus group discussions and q-sorting technique. The focus group discussions as the main research technique contributed about 90 percent of the primary data while the q-sort technique provided the remaining data. Before conducting the fieldwork, a number of research instruments were prepared for both the research approaches, and the informal personal interviews (see appendices) as additional data for the study’s background information. They were:

- (1) A discussion guide for the focus group discussions
- (2) Videos containing 23 selected commercials on global brands which were screened on Malaysian television between 2002 and 2004.
- (3) A q-sort instruction guide for the q-sorting technique
- (4) Q-cards for the q-sorting technique
- (5) A score sheet for the q-sorting technique
- (6) Semi-structured questions for informal personal interviews

As the discussion guide is a major research instrument for this study, it was carefully formulated with the study objectives and the research questions in mind (see Chapter One). Taking into account that the study's major aim is to examine the perception and influence of the global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class, it was formatted such that it would follow a smooth transition between issues while answering the research questions in the study.

Therefore, it was divided into two major parts, namely: the round table discussion and analysis of television advertisements. The round table discussion was further broken down into three sub-sections; general, brand attitude/behaviour and perception of cultural values. This first part begins with general but relevant questions on language proficiency, brand understanding, culture and lifestyle in order to get the participants to break the ice and get the feel of the goal of the discussion. It then focuses on specific questions relating to brand attitudes and behaviours, followed by how the participants perceive traditional and Western cultural values. In the second part, the participants were asked to evaluate two of the 23 selected advertisement commercials on global brands. The 23 selected commercials of global brand names served two functions: as a research instrument for the focus group discussions and a q-sample for the q-sorting technique. For the focus group discussions, as indicated above, the commercials were screened in the second part of the discussions for the participants to select two commercials to evaluate. The reason for this is to keep to the maximum time limit expected in a focus group as a focus group discussion should not take longer than two hours (see Bloor et. al, 2001) to prevent participants from losing their concentration on the issues discussed.

In respect of the q-sample for the q-sorting technique which is the same 23 commercials, they were specifically selected based on a number of criteria. Firstly, they comprise a variety of product categories, including food products, skincare, holiday package and banks which cater for varied sub-segments of the middle class audiences. Secondly, these commercials were also frequently displayed on the existing television channels in Malaysia between 2002 and 2004. These channels are TV 1, TV 2, TV 3, NTV 7, Channel 8 and Malaysia's only satellite channel during that time, Astro. Due to these factors, these commercials are assumed to be familiar to the participants and respondents.

And lastly, taking into consideration that in a q-study the researcher would have to categorize the q-sample using the researcher's own logic (see McKeown and Thomas, 1988; Stephenson, 1953), it was not complicated to separate the 23 commercial according to the content of cultural images because these commercials were wide ranging in terms of their Western cultural content.

The major cultural images and elements identified in the 23 commercials include the attire of the characters, their interactions and behaviour, the food and drink in the commercial and the way the food and drinks were taken, the indoor décor, the outdoor setting, the music and other related cultural elements. For instance, a commercial which is categorised as "least Westernised" portrays more Malaysian cultural images than Western cultural images. These are elements such as family togetherness, music background with traditional sounds and Western originated images that have been generally accepted as Malaysian such as Western food that is flavoured with traditional herbs and Western attire that do not expose too much of the body. In contrast, a "highly Westernised" commercial is categorised as a commercial comprising elements and images that is in opposition to the "least Westernised" commercial. Details of the categorization can be examined in Appendix B(i) and Appendix B(ii) . Of the 23 commercials, the categories were as follows:

- (a) Eight commercials with very low Western cultural elements (Nestle Drumstick, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Danone Chipsmore, Danone Jacobs, Koko Krunch, Standard Chartered, Pantene, Pampers);
- (b) Six commercials with a balanced mixture of Western and Malaysian cultural elements (L'Oreal, Pizza Hut, Wall's Cornetto, Cadbury, Clairol, HSBC); and
- (c) Nine commercials with very high Western cultural elements (Coca cola, Olay, Marlboro, Salem, Nokia, McDonald's, Visa, Clorets, Benson and Hedges).

Another research instrument, the q-sort instruction guide was prepared in order to guide the researcher to conduct the q-sort in a systematic way such that the sorts done by each respondent are valid and reliable without any researcher influence. The q-cards along with the score sheet which has a seven-point likert rating scale were prepared such that they appear significantly professional in outlook. The q-cards in particular were printed with the exact colour and logo of the brand names to ensure

that the respondents were clearly reminded of the advertisements that they had seen when sorting the commercials into categories.

With regard to the semi-structured questions for the informal interviews, although the interviews were only used as background information for the study and were not meant to be used as primary data, the questions prepared differed for every one of the five interviewees as each of them represented different types of organisations within the advertising industry, namely advertisers, advertising agencies, media organisations, media specialists and the government.

4.4.1 The Pilot Study

Prior to conducting the actual fieldwork, pilot interviews were held between the first and second weeks of December 2002 among ten Malaysian students of varied backgrounds studying in Loughborough University. The purpose was to assess the soundness and consistency of the questions in Part One of the discussion guide which was initially prepared in late November 2002. Being a Malaysian who share similar cultural practices with them, I had no difficulty at all in getting their inputs. Among the amendmends made were the deletion of phrases or words considered redundant or ambiguous. Some relevant questions and issues were added while there was also a question considered irrelevant that was deleted. Besides this, changes were also made to some words and phrases to make them more coherent and comprehensible. This is in line with Krueger's and Casey's (2000) reminder that the goal of the pilot study is to learn how a target audience sees, understands and values a particular topic and to learn the language used and to talk about the topic. Taking into account the comments made and the duration of time spent on each participant, a new discussion guide was then finalised and prepared (see Appendix A).

However, because the primary research method of focus group discussions would involve participants who represent a number of sub-segments of Malaysia's new middle class, one or more of the questions prepared in Part Two of the discussion guide (see Appendix A) which required the screening and evaluation of commercials may not be suited or may need changes to suit to the needs of the sub-segment or sub-segments concerned. To ensure this issue is addressed and since the research

instruments for the q-sort technique had already been prepared, a simple sorting procedure was held in *Shah Alam*, Malaysia in the third week of March, 2004. The pilot comprised 14 respondents who represented various sub-segments of Malaysia's new middle class. Respondents were asked to watch the 23 commercials which were copied onto a compact disc and used on a laptop computer connected to a big screen. Using the 23 q-cards (see Appendix D) that were provided, they were asked to sort the commercials into three different categories: commercials they liked best, commercials they did not like and commercials they were not sure of. Each of them was then asked to pick two commercials; one they like most and another that they dislike most. Probing questions were asked based on these choices and minor changes were made to some of the questions in the second part of the discussion guide. Since the purpose of the sorting was only meant to verify the relevance of the questions on the commercials chosen and to tie the loose ends in the questions, no analysis was run on the sorts made.

4.4.2 The Focus Group Discussions

This section explains in detail the initial preparation and planning, the execution process of the focus group discussions up to final analysis of the data gathered. This empirical work took about nine months, between March 2004 and December 2004. Because the focus group discussions involved eleven separate sessions in two quite distant localities, a considerable amount of time was spent in gathering an adequate amount of data to address the research questions for this study.

In all, a total number of 81 participants comprising the upper, middle level and lower middle class, of mixed racial composition, gender, age and localities were involved in the focus group discussions. To further simplify the explanation of the research process, this sub-section is divided into two: preparation and planning and, data gathering and analysis.

a. Preparation and Planning

The preparation and planning stage for the fieldwork of the focus group discussions started in early March 2004 at the same time the changes and minor amendments were

made on the discussion guide. Having ensured that the research instruments for the focus group discussions were ready, the researcher charted a comprehensive and systematic plan of action. The main goal was to ascertain a smooth and efficient execution of the focus group discussions such that the reliability and validity of the data gathered would not be compromised. This study attempts to not only make comparisons between class levels and ethnic groups but also across the urban-rural divide.

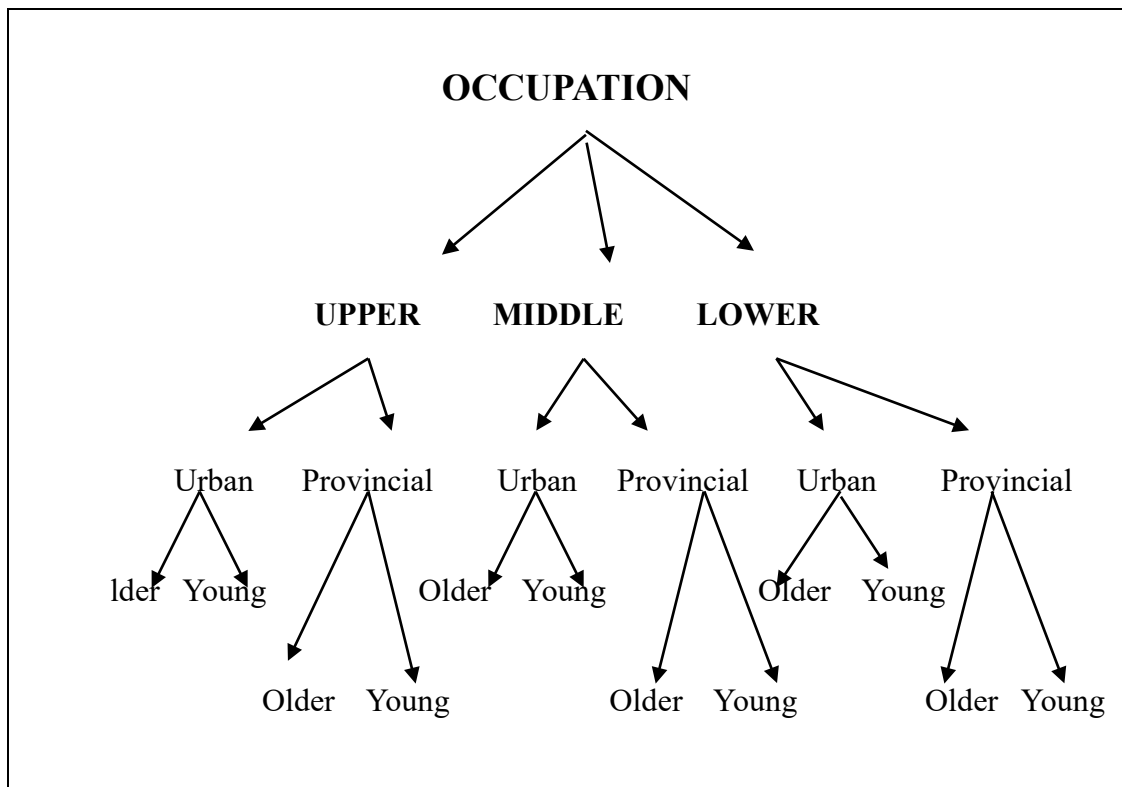
Factors that were considered critical during the preparation and planning stage involved decisions on the group size and the sample selection of participants for the focus groups. And aligned with this process were aspects of logistics including making and confirming appointments with potential participants, suitable incentives to attract participants to be in the sample, monetary and time considerations and not to forget, choosing suitable and conducive discussion locations that were not only neutral but also familiar to the participants. Because the population of this study is Malaysia's middle class living in Peninsular Malaysia, each single middle class Malaysian residing in Peninsular Malaysia, as defined by the researcher (see Chapter Three) was eligible as a participant for the group selection in the study.

When planning the group selection, the researcher used the theoretical sampling model as suggested by Kitzinger (1995). Bearing in mind the distinct hierarchies of class among Malaysia's multiracial urban middle class, class level was considered a major issue for this study. Therefore, it was crucial to ensure homogeneity and as such the selection of participants within each group was based on the participants' occupation as a key variable since class level is very closely associated with occupation. In short, participants for the focus groups would come from varied professions within the public and private sectors, self-employed individuals and business people.

Based on literature on Malaysia's middle class and the latest figures on its population structure, the execution of the focus group discussions necessitates that the sample be selected using a combination of purposive and quota sampling to encompass the range and diversity present within the Malaysian middle class community. Using occupation as a key variable a chart was created in Diagram 1.

The structure in Diagram 1 represents the total universe of middle class Malaysians using occupation as the most important variable as this factor determines the three classes of the middle class community: upper, middle and lower middle class participants. Each class was then divided into two: urban and provincial middle class. This is because locality of the middle class is also a significant variable since it could determine the difference in lifestyles, perceptions, belief system and consumption patterns amongst the sub-groups within the middle class. At this juncture, it is important to note although ethnic composition is also a key variable, it is not included in the chart because this variable will be incorporated within the focus groups created. This is because, Malaysia's middle class do not normally identify themselves in terms of their ethnic background. Similar to ethnic group as a variable, the participant's gender would be incorporated within each of the interview groups that that will be formed. The sample was further dichotomised into older and young middle class as shown in the chart as this is another key variable that could address some of the research questions.

Diagram 1: Guideline Structure for Focus Group Discussions



It must be highlighted that the chart in Diagram 1 serves only as a guideline for the research plan in relation to the number of groups to be selected. Therefore, when resolving on the number of focus groups, the researcher took into consideration factors such as the ratio of urban and provincial middle class in Malaysia, homogeneity and diversity of participants (L.K. Hock, 2002), and also the importance of special interest or purpose-constructed groups. Also, the fact that about two-thirds of Malaysia's population is urban and that more than 65 percent of Malaysia's purchasing power is focused in the market centres (A.C Nielsen, 2005) were also important issues to consider. As such, although the quota chart in Diagram 1 shows 12 focus groups, the actual number of focus groups that the researcher had decided to create was eleven. They comprise nine typical groups and two urban-based special interest groups. The nine typical groups are broken down into six urban-based multiracial homogenous groups and three provincial-based groups. While urban participants who are not categorised as members of the special-interest groups would be separated according to their middle class levels and further broken down according to their age groups, provincial participants would only be divided according to their middle class levels without further breaking down into age groups. As for the special interest groups, they would comprise an all-female urban group of all middle class levels and an all Malay *folk urbanite* group of all levels. Details on each group will be explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

It must also be emphasized that in coming to a decision on the eleven focus groups, the additional factors taken into consideration were, the research questions, group views that the researcher would be making comparisons of, and the variability of responses that could be culled from the various discussions. Notwithstanding these factors, it was also essential to segment the groups as such since this study involves varied middle class participants from the Malaysian population.

Once the various focus groups were identified, the next step was for the researcher to scrutinise the occupations of the middle class population within each group. A complete list of professions linked together with average monthly salaries of potential participants for each group was then made accordingly. The latest statistics on Malaysia's labour force was used as a guide for maximal variation in the sampling frame.

Subsequent to the listing down and categorization of occupations for the formation of focus groups, each category of occupations was then reviewed so that the participants to be selected in each group would likely share common traits. In “Focus Groups in Social Research”, Bloor, Franklin et.al (2001: 19) remind focus group researchers to give attention to participant characteristics in relation to the topic being discussed.

Taking this reminder seriously, the researcher placed careful consideration on group composition in order to provide sufficient diversity for effective discussions. Relative to this and for the purpose of convenience, particularly when selecting participants for each group, the eleven groups were named and characterized for guidance as follows:

a. Group 1 (*Older Urban Affluent*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, mixed gender

Class :Upper middle class (senior public sector personnel, senior managers in private and public sectors, senior academicians, business people, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM6,000 and above.

Age: 35 – 54

b. Group 2 (*Young Urban Affluent*)

Multi-racial, urban -based, mixed gender

Class : Upper middle class (public sector personnel, private sector managers, self-employed individuals and business people, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM5,000 and above.

Age: 25 – 34

c. Group 3 (*Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, mixed gender

Class: Middle level middle class (senior public sector personnel, senior nurses, senior teachers, private sector managers, professionals, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM4,000 to RM5,999

Age: 35 - 54

d. Group 4 (*Young Urban Middle Level Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, mixed gender

Class: Middle level middle class (senior public sector personnel, senior private sector executives, young professionals, self-employed individuals, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM3,500 to RM4,999

Age: 25 - 34

e. Group 5 (*Older Urban Lower Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, mixed gender

Class: Lower middle class (senior clerks, nurses, teachers, junior administrators, private sector executives, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM2,000 to RM3,999

Age: 35 - 54

f. Group 6 (*Young Urban Lower Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, mixed gender

Class : Lower middle class (senior clerks, nurses, teachers, private sector executives, sales executives and other white collar workers)

Monthly household income: RM2,000 to RM3,499

Age: 25 – 34

g. Group 7 (*Upper Provincial Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, provincial-based, mixed gender

Class : Upper middle class (senior public sector personnel, senior private sector managers, senior academicians, self-employed individuals, business people, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM5,000 and above.

Age: 25 – 54

h. Group 8 (*Middle Provincial Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, provincial-based, mixed gender

Class: Middle middle class (public sector personnel, senior nurses, senior teachers, private sector managers, professionals, etc.)

Monthly household income: RM3,500 to RM4,999

Age: 25 - 54

i. Group 9 (*Lower Provincial Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, provincial-based, mixed gender

Class: Lower middle class (senior clerks, nurses, teachers, private sector executives, sales personnel, junior administrators, sales executives and other white collar workers)

Monthly household income: RM2,000 to RM3,499

Age: 25 - 54

Special interest Groups:

j. Group 10 (*All-women Middle Class*)

Multi-racial, urban-based, all females

Class: A mixture of upper, middle and lower middle class

Monthly household income: RM2,000 and above

Age: 25 - 54

k. Group 11 (*Folk Urbanites*)

All Malays, urban-based, mixed gender

Class: Mainly middle middle class

Monthly household income: RM3,500 and above

Age: 25 – 54

As illustrated above, the three groups of provincial middle class (groups 7, 8 and 9) were planned to be separated only by class because, as mentioned earlier, most of Malaysia's middle class are urban-based (AC Nielsen, 2005) and many among the young and educated in the smaller provincial towns have moved to bigger towns and cities for better job opportunities. Therefore, based on this logic, the number of provincial-based focus groups had to be smaller so that the urban-rural divide among Malaysia's middle class population would be reflected proportionately.

As for Groups 10 and 11, they were categorized as special-interest or purpose – constructed groups which were exclusively different from the other nine groups. The all-women group was specially created because the gender issue is an important and challenging issue in Malaysia. It is expected that within the next five years, the

growth rate of women entering Malaysia's labour force will be about five (5) percent compared to men with only 0.8 percent (Mohd. Nasir, 2002). As such, opinions from the female gender are deemed specially important for this dissertation. In relation to this situation, since this study is interested to know about perception and influence of global brands, it would be essential to probe the feelings of the women who have generally been accepted as important decision-makers for the households when making purchases of goods.

As for the *folk urbanites*, Abdul Rahman (2002:ixx) defines them as follows:

modern urban dwellers whose lifestyles are relatively modest, with a strong family and community orientation, rather than being cosmopolitan, individualistic and isolated from kin and community. Culturally, "folk urbanites"- though living in modern urban settings tend to operate within the domain of their cultural values and religious practices.

They were particularly chosen as they represent the new Malay middle class that started emerging in the mid-1970s as a consequence to the introduction of the government's NEP. As elaborated in Chapter Three, the NEP is aimed at restructuring the economic makeup of Malaysian society in order to ensure equal distribution of wealth amongst the major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians. The *folk urbanites* are exposed to Western education, have stable jobs with good disposable incomes, are nationalistic, politically conscious and religiously inclined. Unlike the older urban affluent and the young urban affluent Malays, they seldom mix with ethnic Chinese and Indians. Due to these characteristics, their attitudes and buying behaviours may be uniquely different from the rest of the middle class community.

In addition, it must be reiterated that only participants of similar characteristics would be placed in any one group. This arrangement would avoid conflicts and refusals by some participants that could be interpreted as gender or ethnic bias. As indicated earlier, group homogeneity was emphasized because it would encourage inter-person "comfortableness" so that participants would feel at ease to give their opinions freely. As Jourard (1964:15) noted in his study on self-disclosure, "subjects tended to disclose more about themselves to people who resembled them in various ways than to people who differ from them."

To ensure a smooth flow of conversation among members of each group, the total number of participants to be recruited for each group, as mentioned earlier would be restricted to between seven (7) and ten (10) individuals. This group size, when relating to the dissertation topic, is considered ideal because it would reflect the characteristics of the participants as well as the topic being discussed. As it is, the topic to be discussed was not so complex as to necessitate a smaller group which could potentially result in limited discussions.

On the contrary, if each group is larger than 10 participants, it could become difficult to moderate and might be frustrating to participants who would like adequate time to express their views and opinions (ibid). Nevertheless, to ensure a good turnout, each group would be “over recruited” to overcome the problem of absenteeism among some of the participants.

As this study’s sample is focused on the Malaysian middle class in relation to their cultural values and their exposure to global brands, the area in the market centre of *Klang Valley* (Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya and its vicinity) was chosen as the discussion venue for all eight (8) of the urban-based groups. The reason for this choice is that, the various middle class community in Malaysia are concentrated in the urban areas in particular the market centres. Besides providing convenience and the economics of time for the conduct of this study, the multi-ethnic, technologically advanced and cosmopolitan *Klang Valley* and in particular, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia’s capital city, is inhabited by Malaysians originating from various parts of the country. As such, it is a representative place for a variety of urban middle class Malaysians.

Participants for the other three provincial-based groups were selected from *Kuala Selangor*, a provincial town in the state of *Selangor* in Peninsular Malaysia which is about 60 kilometres (or 40 miles) from Kuala Lumpur. *Kuala Selangor* boasts a mixed ethnic population with varied backgrounds. Besides its commercial centres and local tourist spots, this thriving town also comprises government administrative offices. In addition to these suitability factors, this medium sized town is also a popular residential area for the middle class population that works in the bigger towns of *Shah Alam* or *Klang* which are about 40 minutes drive away. Because of these factors, the middle class community living in *Kuala Selangor* includes public

servants, self-employed individuals, private sector personnel, teachers, nurses and business people. As such, it represents an ideal and varied provincial middle class population.

To ensure a smooth and effective execution of the focus group discussions, the researcher devised a work schedule as his guide (see Appendix G).

b. Data Gathering and Analysis

Having laid out the preparation and planning activities of the research process, the second stage was to implement the guidelines conceptualised such that a smooth collection of data, free of unnecessary complications would take place.

At this stage, detailed descriptions of the potential participants for each of the eleven focus group were by now complete. To start the data gathering process, the researcher used the work schedule prepared earlier (see Appendix G) as his guide. As the initial task was to identify and recruit participants for each group, I decided to appoint research intermediaries as recruitment assistants. Aware of the fact that lecturers of higher institutions in Malaysia are highly revered by the diverse Malaysian community, I decided to use my position as a lecturer to look for research intermediaries. My strategy worked very well because I was able to appoint four research intermediaries within one week of making the search. The use of these intermediaries was advantageous in that it saved a lot of my time. As their main responsibility was to approach and select potential participants, the intermediaries appointed were considered quite experienced and skilful in that they had valuable contacts and were trusted within their social, geographic and professional communities. Because of these qualities, and the fact that Malaysians work harder when there is financial rewards, they were paid accordingly as incentives for their services.

Step One: Recruitment of Participants

At the end of the second week of March 2004, a meeting was held with the four intermediaries to brief them on the detailed eligibility characteristics of the

participants for each group. Based on the detailed descriptions of the participants for each of the eleven groups (see pages 145, 146 and 147), the intermediaries provided a list of names and contact numbers of potential participants that met the qualifications set by the researcher. To minimise bias, I ensured that the nomination of names as potential participants came from everyone of the intermediaries, including the researcher himself (Krueger and King, 1998: 55).

A process of screening was then undertaken to ensure the participants' eligibility. Only individuals who met the researcher's criteria were short-listed. As mentioned before, besides the participants' occupation, other essential characteristics that were to be adhered to included, the participants' age group, gender, ethnic group, marital status and geographic locality.

The meeting with the intermediaries also discussed ways to overcome the distance participants had to travel to the discussion venue and the concern that some participants of the same group might live far apart from one another. Furthermore, as Kuala Lumpur and its neighbouring areas are most of the time congested, it would be a daunting task to search and recruit potential participants and convince them to meet at a specific place at a specified time to spend two hours from their busy schedule. Having considered this difficulty, the meeting agreed to assign every intermediary specific sampling sites for each one of them to approach individuals.

The intermediaries were also given clear guidelines on their roles, including making calls to eligible participants, confirming their attendance, arrangement of discussion venue and ferrying participants requiring transportation to the discussion venue and back. Once names of the potential participants were finalised, the intermediaries were then given guidelines on the process of recruitment. To recruit, intermediaries were to make the first one-on-one contact with the participants using telephone communication, convincing participants of the importance of the study to their interests and concerns (Krueger and King, 1998:56). As soon as they agreed, the intermediary then provided them with the my contact hand phone number so that they could be linked to me directly for any queries on the study or to notify me of any change of plans. The intermediary would also provide me with the participant's name, mailing address, contact numbers and other necessary details deemed necessary. To

ensure maximum participation and in anticipation for individuals who refused or could not turn up on the day of the focus group discussion, the intermediaries were instructed to be ready with a second list of potential participants. However, they were also cautioned not to recruit individuals known to one another so that the discussion would be free from inhibitions and cliquing. Throughout the recruitment period, I worked with the intermediaries very closely and always monitored the progress made by them on a regular basis to avoid any bias or control on their part. As cautioned by Bloor (2001:32) , if left unchecked, the intermediaries could for instance act as an unwanted “screening device” selecting only participants they are in favour of.

Once contact with a participant was established, a personalised but formal invitation letter from me was then sent detailing the objectives, date and venue of the focus group discussions. Following this, the intermediaries made follow-up calls to remind the participants of the discussion date. As encouragement to the participants, incentives like “out-of-pocket” expenses for travelling to the discussion location were also offered by the intermediaries. Besides this, participants were also persuaded with a promise that the discussion to be held would be in a pleasing and permissive environment with light snacks and drinks and an opportunity to interact and touch base with like-minded individuals (Morgan, 1995). It must be mentioned that, this persuasion technique worked quite well presumably because it is quite typical of the Malaysian middle class to network with one another for business opportunities and other interests.

To further ensure a good turn-out, reminder and confirmation calls were made to the participants about two or three working days before the date of the discussion. Also, whenever time permitted, I met with potential participants to get the participants to feel at ease and to give them the opportunity to ask any question they might have. More importantly, this personal approach was aimed at increasing the chance of making the invitation successful. It has to be reiterated that in employing the theoretical quota sampling to select and recruit participants, I was always guided by the research questions and the participants’ key characteristics, particularly in relation to their occupation (Bloor, 2001: 30).

While the selection and recruitment of participants were taking place, I was also making other preparations for the focus group sessions. Among other things, a Malay translation of the discussion guide was drafted as preparation for participants who prefer to speak in the Malay language. Besides the discussion guide, the 23 taped global commercials as another research instrument and essential equipment for the focus group sessions together with a video recorder, a tape recorder, a laptop computer, video tapes and audio tapes were also made available. Gifts in the form of a letter opener (see Appendix H) with a thank you message from the researcher inscribed on it were also prepared. These gifts would be given to each of the participants as a token of appreciation for their participation in the discussion.

Step Two: The Focus Group Sessions

In the first week of April 2004 when almost every one of the participants for the first focus group session, the urban young middle level middle class had confirmed participation, I made the necessary arrangements for the reservation of the discussion venue. At about the same time, two research assistants were appointed to assist me during the discussion session. Besides assisting me to set up the equipment for the focus group sessions and changing the audiotape in the middle of the session, the major role of the research assistants was to jot down the responses from participants in the focus group. Each of these paid assistants were assigned to take note of the responses of three to five participants in each session, depending on the number of participants who turned up. The written notes were used as back-ups to the audiotapes in anticipation of possible technical problems with the tape recorders while the discussions were in session.

Nevertheless, despite the plan for the first focus group discussion to be held in the second week of April 2004, it had to be postponed to 6 May 2004 due to last minute changes in dates made by the participants. This focus group discussion was held at Metro Inn, a two star hotel in *Kajang*, about 32 kilometres or 20 miles south of the Kuala Lumpur city centre. The session which was facilitated by me was held in the afternoon and lasted slightly more than two hours with a 15 minute break for snacks and drinks after the first hour. It comprised eight participants.

As a moderator for the session, I started by introducing myself and explaining to the participants the aim of the focus group discussion. After that, the participants were asked to introduce themselves. The discussion guide was then used as a leading tool throughout the session. Participants were encouraged to debate and discuss the issues raised. Inconsistencies and disagreements between the participants were focused upon to elucidate opinions, comments and viewpoints from all of the participants. At the end of the session, participants were presented with a gift from me as the researcher. This same routine was applied to the subsequent ten focus group discussion sessions.

The information below details the eleven focus group discussions that were eventually held at five locations, comprising 81 participants with the following breakdown: 51 Malays, 18 Chinese and 12 Indians. In terms of gender, there were 50 male and 31 female participants.

Group 1:

Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class held at Metro Inn, *Kajang* (a two-star hotel in a busy town, about 32 kilometres (or 20 miles) from the city centre of Kuala Lumpur) on Sunday, 16 May 2004 (2.30PM-4.45PM): Nine participants (six Malays, two Chinese and one Indian) with three females and six males.

Group 2:

Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class held at Metro Inn, *Kajang* on Sunday, 16 May 2004 (8.30 PM - 10.45 PM): Eight participants (six Malays, one Chinese and one Indian) with three females and five males.

Group 3:

Urban Young Lower Middle Class held at Metro Inn, *Kajang* on Sunday, 30 May, 2004 (2.15 PM - 4.30 PM): Nine participants (five Malays and four Chinese) with five females and four males.

Group 4:

Urban Older Lower Middle Class held at Metro Inn, *Kajang* on Sunday, 30 May, 2004 (8.30 - 11.00 PM): Eight participants (five Malays, one Chinese and two Indians) with

one female and seven males.

Group 5:

Provincial Malay Middle Class (mixed: upper, middle and lower) held at De Palma Inn, *Kuala Selangor* (a two-star hotel in a provincial town about 60 kilometres or 40 miles West of Kuala Lumpur) on Wednesday, 30 June 2004 (10.00AM - 12.00 PM): Seven all Malay participants with two females and five males.

Group 6:

Provincial Malay Middle Class (mixed: upper and lower) held at De Palma Inn, *Kuala Selangor* on Wednesday, 30 June 2004 (2.30pm - 4.45 PM): Eight all male Malay participants.

Group 7:

Young Urban Affluent held at Holiday Villa, Subang Jaya (a five star hotel in a cosmopolitan township 16 kilometres or 10 miles from Kuala Lumpur city centre), Saturday, 24 July 2004 (11.00AM-1.00PM): Seven participants (four Malays, two Chinese and one Indian) with three females and four males.

Group 8:

Older Urban Affluent held at Intekma Resort and Convention Centre, *Shah Alam* (a two star hotel in the capital city of *Selangor* state, 40 kilometres or 25 miles from Kuala Lumpur), Saturday 31 July, 2004 (11.00AM-1.00PM): Eight participants (four Malays, three Chinese and one Indian) with three females and five males.

Group 9:

Provincial Indian and Chinese Middle Class (mixed: upper, middle and lower) held at De Palma Inn, *Kuala Selangor* on Wednesday, 22 September 2004: Six participants (three Chinese and three Indians) with three females and three males.

Group 10:

Women Middle Class (mixed: middle and lower) held at two separate locations: Metro Inn *Kajang* on Sunday, 12 September 2004 (10.00 - 11.45 AM) (two middle level middle class Chinese) and Intelek Office, SS19 in *Shah Alam* on Thursday, 23

September 2004 (9.30 - 11.15AM) (one middle level middle class Malay, one middle level middle class Indian and two lower middle class Indian): Six all female participants (one Malay, two Chinese and three Indians)

Group 11:

Folk Urbanites (mixed:upper, middle) held at two separate locations: Intekma Resort and Convention Centre, *Shah Alam* on Friday, 17 December 2004 (9.00 - 10.30 PM); (two middle level middle class Malays and two upper urban affluent Malays) and at Universiti Teknologi MARA, *Shah Alam* on 24 December, 2004 (3.30 - 4.45 PM) (one middle level middle class Malay): Five all Malay participants with two females and three males.

While every effort was taken to ensure that for every group, all the participants would fit in with the profile required, there were cases wherein modifications had to be made. This was due to some difficulties faced when gathering the participants together. However, it is important to note that these modifications did not affect the reliability and validity of the study. The following were the minor changes made to some of the focus groups:

- a. For Group 2, an older Chinese participant had to be placed in another group (Group 3) because he was not available on the date set for Group 2.
- b. For Group 3, an Indian female participant could not attend on the day that was set, she was then included as a participant for the women middle class (Group 10).
- c. The three provincial middle class groups which were planned to be divided into upper, middle and lower middle class were instead broken down into the following:
 - i. One group comprising an all Malay middle class of all levels (Group 5)
 - ii. One group comprising an all Malay upper and lower middle class (Group 6)
 - iii. One group comprising a mixture of Chinese and Indian middle class of all levels (Group 9)

The reason for the changes made to the three provincial focus groups (Groups 5, 6 and 9) was that in the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor* where the interviews took place, I had some difficulty getting the involvement of the Chinese and Indian participants. To overcome this, I had to use a more formal approach of sending official letters to

head teachers in schools in the area requesting them to allow their non-Malay staff to be participants. The request was finally approved after about eight weeks of delay.

Other minor modifications were also made for Groups 10 and 11. For Group 10, although it took three weeks to get the participants' confirmation, for some unexplained reasons, only two participants turned up at the hotel where I planned the interviews. The problem was surmounted by having separate discussions with the participants, two at Metro Inn *Kajang* and the other four at the Intelek Office in *Shah Alam*. For Group 11, the *folk urbanites*, the middle class Malays living in cities but traditional in outlook and thinking, was a difficult group to identify and gather. As such, when four of them agreed to be participants, I had to agree with their time and decided to interview another participant separately.

For all of the above eleven sessions, the researcher was the moderator of the discussions. The shortest time taken for a session was two hours and five minutes whilst the longest session took about two hours and thirty minutes. Every session was interspersed with a tea break in the middle to get the participants to refresh themselves. All of the discussions were conducted smoothly and systematically in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. Audiotapes were used to record the discussions throughout all the sessions. Additionally, for three of the sessions in the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor*, namely for groups 5, 6 and 9, videotapes were also used.

As mentioned earlier, two research assistants assisted me in every session. Their tasks of transcribing the responses from participants proved very useful as the recorded conversations from the tapes used for one of the sessions were very faint and difficult to decipher. After every session, each participant was given a "letter opener" inscribed with the researcher's note of thanks as a token of appreciation from the researcher (Appendix H).

After each focus group session was completed, it became my task to arrange for the next focus group session. Concurrently, the data gathered from the focus groups that were conducted earlier were transcribed based on recordings from the audiotapes, videotapes and the jottings from the research assistants. By mid-February 2005, all the eleven focus group discussions were fully transcribed.

Step Three: Data Analysis

The data collected from the focus group discussions were analysed manually from the middle of February until the middle of May in 2005. Like most other qualitative data, I pulled together and compared discussions from every group in accordance with their similarity of themes and examined how the responses relate to the variables within the sample population. The data were categorised into various parts according to type of responses, such as “personal opinions”, “uncertain”, “Western inclination” or “patriotic”.

Besides this, individual opinions, interactions and comments expressed within the group that did not conform to the actual group consensus and considered as minority opinions were also noted. In the process of analysing the data, where necessary I made a special effort to emphasise the influence of group dynamics on certain issues that were discussed.

4.4.3 Q-sorting Technique

As a secondary research method, the q-sorting technique was conducted to compliment findings from the focus group discussions. As mentioned on page 129, the q-sample for this research approach is the 23 commercials shown earlier to participants of the focus group discussions who were required to pick two commercials of their choice and evaluate them based on the cultural contents in the chosen advertisements. It must be reiterated that the same commercials were deliberately used so that the additional data contributed from the q-study would provide a continuous link to the data from the focus group interviews. In turn, this integration would assure that the validity of the results is intact.

The q-sorting technique was used because it was not practical to spend additional time in each focus group to evaluate all the 23 commercials. Additionally, this research approach is capable of producing groupings of Malaysia’s middle class segment according to similarity of attitudes, opinions and viewpoints in relation to their perception of global brands. Theoretically, the factors produced as a consequence to the q-sorts of the commercials would add value to the findings from the focus groups

since they represent the underlying significant drives of the respondents' behaviours. Here, respondents for the q-study would comprise individuals that represent a cross-section of the various segments of the middle class identified earlier for the focus group discussions.

Step One: Quota Sampling

The experience I had in conducting a mock q-sort procedure for the pilot study in the third week of March 2004 was very useful when the q-sorting technique was executed between December 20, 2004 and January 12, 2005. The plan to have q-sorts completed within three weeks went on smoothly without any hitches whatsoever.

On the first week of December 2004, I charted a sampling strategy for the q-study. First, my acquaintances were identified according to the variables required in the study, that is, the middle class social level, locality, age group, gender and ethnicity and their phone numbers listed. Subsequently, a short list of the names and phone numbers was made in accordance with the needs of the study. Although only nine of the 20 contacts agreed to be respondents, a number of them agreed to assist me by providing telephone numbers of their own network of friends. By the end of the second week of December 2004, I had achieved 22 respondents for the q-study which is sufficient as they represent a cross-section of Malaysia's middle class group of all social levels, ethnic groups, locality, gender and age levels.

Of the 22 respondents, five were from the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor* while the remaining 17 respondents who represent the urban middle class sub-group live in the vicinity of *Shah Alam*, the capital city of the state of *Selangor* which is about 40 kilometres or 25 miles from Kuala Lumpur. Altogether, the respondents comprised five upper urban affluent, ten middle level middle class and seven lower middle class with 13 males and nine females of which there were 12 Malays (two of whom were categorized as *folk urbanites*), five Chinese and five Indians. In terms of age group, there were seven young middle class aged between 25 and 34 while the remaining 15 were older middle class aged 35 and above.

Step Two: The Q-sort Procedure

On 20th and 21st December, 2004, I supervised the q-sorting technique among the five provincial respondents in an office in *Kuala Selangor* which was owned by one of the respondents. Between 26th December 2004 and 12th January 2005, the 17 q-sorts in *Shah Alam* were conducted in six residences of the respondents who agreed to allow me to use their homes as venue for the q-sort procedure. On average, each one of the six homes became the venue for three respondents to execute their q-sorts.

The q-sorting technique was carried out successfully on an individual basis among the respondents. Every respondent took an average of 40 minutes to complete the q-sort. Using the q-sort instruction guide (see Appendix C) as an instrument, the procedure employed was as follows:

- a. Each respondent was briefed on the purpose of the q-sort, that is to choose the commercials that appealed to him/her most and those that he/she disliked most. More importantly, he/she was instructed to focus on the cultural elements in the commercial when making his/her decision. These are aspects like the food or drink taken by the characters in the commercial and the way they are taken, the clothes worn and language used by the actors, the socializing aspects, home furnishings in the commercial, and the setting of the commercial. A score sheet (see Appendix E) was then given and the respondent was asked to fill in his/her name on it.
- b. He/she was then given a stack of 23 numbered q-cards (see Appendix D); each card had the brand name of a global product and a statement: "This commercial appeals to me" at the bottom. The number on each card, from 1 to 23, represented the sequence of global commercial that would appear on the screen later.
- c. He/She was then shown the 23 global commercials from a compact disc screened on a laptop computer.
- d. Next the commercials were screened again and he/she was asked to view each

one of the commercials closely and to place the cards representing the commercials he/she “liked most” on the left, the cards representing the commercials he/she “disliked most” on the right and the cards representing the commercials he/she considered "confusing", "ambiguous" or he/she was “not sure” of in the middle.

e. He/She was then asked to review his/her decision and ensure that there were nine (9) cards on the left, nine (9) cards on the right and five (5) cards in the middle stack.

f. The respondent was further asked to sort the nine (9) cards on the left into three (3) piles representing “strongly agree”, “agree” and “slightly agree”. The same process was to be repeated for the nine (9) cards on the right.

g. The respondent was consequently asked to record his/her decision by filling in the number printed on each q-card, on the score sheet given to him/her earlier with his/her name on.

h. Finally, the respondent was interviewed using four (4) open-ended questions which included the reasons for choosing the commercial he/she liked most and the one he/she disliked most.

The four follow-up questions were:

- (a) Choose a commercial which you ranked as +3 and tell me what influenced you to do so?
- (b) Choose a commercial which you ranked as -3 and tell me what influenced you to do so?
- (c) Discuss your feelings about the commercials (refer to (a) and (b)).
- (d) Should any of the commercials that do not appeal to you stop you from buying the product? Why?

Responses for the above questions were tape recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Step Three: Q-analysis

As indicated earlier, analysis of the data for this research approach is based on the 22 q-sorts represented by 22 score sheets filled up by each one of the respondents. The q-sample comprises 23 commercials on global brands. It must be reiterated that each of the advertisement commercial which represents various cultural opinions of the respondents was ranked by each one of the respondent comparative to the other commercials in the sample.

The analysis entails correlations amongst respondents with regards to their choice of groups of advertisement commercials that appeal to them and those that do not appeal to them. Data from the 22 q-sorts were analyzed using the SPSS package wherein factor analysis was employed in order to create categories of respondents based on their attitudes and thinking towards the commercials. The factor analysis works to identify similarities of opinions amongst the respondents in relation to the commercials they have rank-ordered.

Using the principle component analysis, followed with the rotated component matrix, the computer package reduced data complexity by lessening the number of variables being studied. As detailed in Chapter Seven, the computer output created eight factors comprising a total of 18 commercials. This means that the initial result of the factor analysis found that five commercials were insignificant as they did not reach the positive loadings of a minimum of 0.50 for any of the components.

Out of the eight factors, I used only three factors for data interpretation. One of the primary reasons for this decision is that, unlike the three factors selected, the other five factors only had one commercial in each factor. Based on the total number of commercials in the three factors selected for interpretation, the final result of the factor analysis involved the understanding of only 12 out of the 23 commercials. For instance, interpretation for Factor 1 was confined to the five commercials factored as one group since these commercials share a significant pattern of cultural relationship in respect of the opinions of a group of respondents. In short, each of the three factors symbolises a middle class category. A comprehensive analysis of the results are laid out in Chapter Seven.

4. 4. 4 Informal Personal Interviews

The informal personal interviews, which engaged five decision-makers in the advertising industry, were conducted individually between 7th March 2005 and 21st March 2005. These individuals who represent the various organisations involved in the Malaysian advertising industry were the Managing Director of a local advertising agency, DNA Comm Sdn Bhd; the Managing Director of an internationally affiliated media specialist firm, Pakar Media; the Deputy Director General of *Tourism Malaysia*, the biggest local advertiser that advertise globally; the Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Information, the Ministry that was formerly responsible for advertisement control and lastly, the former Marketing Manager of TV3, the premier television station with majority control of Malaysia's television advertisement revenue. As the description implies, the interviews were conducted face to face in an informal manner. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 80 minutes.

While the questions formulated for each of the interviewees were semi-structured in nature, the content of the interviews differ as every one of the interviewees represented differing organisations (see Appendix F). Because of the informality of the interviews and the semi-structured nature of the questions, there was no specific order in the questions asked. This situation was advantageous to me as it allowed me the freedom to establish new questions and skip some of the questions prepared earlier that were considered irrelevant.

In general, the interviews revolved around the interviewee's responsibilities, his or her organisation's structure and roles and the organisation's sensitivities to the local culture and the latest update on the Malaysian advertising scene.

The data gathered from these interviews were transcribed one week after the last interview. The relevant information gathered from these interviews were used as supporting arguments for this dissertation, particularly for Chapter Three which covers the contextual background and theoretical framework of this dissertation.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

This research employs two techniques to gather primary data to accomplish its objectives. They are the focus group discussions which is the primary research method and the q-sorting technique which was used as a secondary research approach.

Besides the collection of primary data, I made the effort to add background information or secondary data for this dissertation. To accomplish this, informal personal interviews were conducted among five key personnel who represent the vital organisations within the Malaysian advertising industry.

The goal of the eleven focus group discussions that comprised nine sub-segments of the middle class participants and two special-interest groups was to elicit viewpoints, opinions and comments relating to their perception and the extent of influence of the global advertisements on their cultural values. Throughout the process of the focus group discussions, systematic procedures in data collection, data handling and data analysis were ascertained. The discussion guide and a number of advertisement commercials portraying global brands were the research instruments used in the study. In general, the various activities involved the research procedure for the focus group discussions including recruitment of participants, arrangement of discussion venue, audio and video recordings, transcriptions of data and final data analysis went on smoothly and according to schedule.

The q-sorting technique which was conducted concurrent with the focus group discussions was aimed at complementing the results from focus group discussions. This technique which is capable of intensively probing self-reference perspectives, exclusively emphasises on the thinking patterns of the Malaysian middle class in respect of the cultural values depicted in the global brands. The q-sorts were carried out without any hitches.

As for the informal personal interviews, although they were not used as a method to collect primary data, the information and updates on the latest happenings in the

industry gathered from the five interviews were utilized as important support for the facts provided in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

To conclude, the research techniques used in this study were proven to be the most suitable approaches as they have accomplished the goal of measuring the impact of the global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class population.

Chapter Five

Consuming Global Brands: Analysis of Focus Groups on Advertisement Impact, Brand Attitude and Buying Behaviour

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first in a series of three chapters that present my empirical findings. In this chapter, I present findings on the perception of Malaysia's middle class of global brands, followed by their attitudes towards Malaysian cultural values and Western lifestyles in Chapter Six. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, analysis is of the extent of influence of the global brands on their daily lives.

As in many parts of the world today, the competitive marketing and business environment in Malaysia has made the practice of advertising and the promotion of brand names critical in the marketplace. This research is presented in three major sub-sections, namely prelude, advertisement impact, and brand attitude and buying behaviour. Each of the divisions are further sub-divided. As a preamble to the discussion, the sub-head "prelude" is broken into language proficiency and favourite television programmes. Although these subjects were meant as an icebreaker for the discussion, they are nevertheless important because they present facts on the cultural background of the participants. The subject of language competence is considered relevant because it could act as an indicator of the participants' world view and level of exposure. As a global language of business and industry, understanding the English language, for instance, would give a hint of the participant's initial stance towards the West. On the same note, a participant's favourite television programme would be able to suggest his or her inclination towards a certain lifestyle.

The second part, advertisement impact, probes the participants' recall of advertisements and explores their attitudes towards the impact of advertisements on society. The advertisement recall could disclose the types of advertisements that may have an impact on them, while their viewpoints on advertisements would give a

broader idea of their thinking and analytical understanding of the topic. These facts are certainly essential as supporting information in addressing the study objectives.

The last part, which is on brand attitude and buying behaviour, is focussed on a key area in this study, that is the global brands. The discussions, which revolve around their opinions and viewpoints on the significance of the brand names, key element in purchase decisions, experiences with brand names and their attitudes towards brand switching, would at the very least be able to establish whether brand names are perceived as important in purchase decisions of products. Subsequently the deliberations will follow on the participants' perception of Western brands and their opinions of Japanese brands. Answers to questions relating on whether global branding is a dominant factor in shaping the cultural lifestyles of Malaysia's urban middle class and on whether the provincial middle class is truly influenced to buy global brands would be able to address this issue.

5.2 Prelude

The focus group discussion started off by asking participants about their language proficiency. Language, as most scholars agree, is not only a mirror of reality but also shapes consciousness and installs ideologies.

The discussion then continued with the participants' favourite television programmes which was aimed at getting into their thought patterns on the lifestyle that they would be comfortable with.

5.2.1 Language Proficiency

All of the 81 participants from the eleven focus groups could understand *Bahasa Melayu* or the Malay language and a majority had little problem understanding English. Among the 51 Malay participants, only 26 participants were bilingual in both English and Malay while the rest, in particular the provincial Malay middle class group from *Kuala Selangor*, were only proficient in Malay. Nevertheless, they had some understanding of the English language. Those among the Malay middle class

sub-segment who were proficient in both English and Malay were mainly young and older urban Malay members of the upper and middle level middle class groups.

As for the 18 Chinese middle class participants, all were fluent in the *Cantonese* dialect which is their mother tongue. A few of them could speak and write in *Mandarin* too. All of them could understand the Malay language. In fact, there were two young urban lower middle class Chinese women and an older provincial middle class man who said that they speak the Malay language like their own mother tongue. In the case of the Chinese middle class cluster, although not all could speak English well, 15 of them, all of whom were from the urban areas are proficient in the English language. In fact, nine could speak English as often as they speak *Cantonese*. With regard to the Indian middle class sub-segment, all 12 of them speak *Tamil* as their main language and all were very fluent in both Malay and English.

5.2.2 Favourite Television Programmes

Interestingly, the findings show that participants from all of the sub-segments of Malaysia's middle class community generally watched similar programmes although there were slight variations among some of them. Programmes in vernacular languages were favourites among the specific ethnic groups who could understand the language. In other words, the Indian participants watched *Tamil* drama serials and news in *Tamil* quite frequently. The same was true of the Chinese participants who chose Chinese News and Chinese serials whilst Malays liked to watch Malay movies and dramas, and local entertainment shows in their own language.

As expected, the young set of Malaysia's middle class group were quite inclined towards sports programmes. Besides this, news was also listed as among the most watched programmes among the urban affluent and the middle level middle class clusters. The rest of the programmes listed by Malaysia's middle class of all levels included English movies, English sitcoms, talk shows, science fiction, comedies and musical entertainment programmes. Also, there were a few among the Malays in the provincial areas and among the *folk urbanites* who mentioned that they liked to watch "Misteri Nusantara" (literally translated: Mysteries of the Region), a local mystical

programme on the “world of the unseen” within Malaysia and the neighbouring countries.

5.3 Advertisement Impact

The subsequent discussions attempt to explore the participants’ views of advertising, both in terms of its perceived impact on consumer behaviours and their attitudes to the values and lifestyles displayed and endorsed by the advertising.

5.3.1 Advertisement Recall

The purpose of getting participants to remember an advertisement that came to their mind was to inspect their degree of awareness towards advertisements they have frequently been exposed to. The brand names mentioned would indicate the leaning they have towards either global or local brands.

In general, the urban middle class sub-segment seemed to be more evoked by commercials than their provincial counterparts. Although the discrepancy was not big, more global brands were mentioned than local brands. In all, there were 16 global brand names compared to 11 local ones cited. Among the global brands, only two brand names were cited by more than one participant. They were Sunsilk shampoo which was mentioned by four participants and Marlboro cigarettes which was quoted by two participants. The rest of the global brands that were quoted were: Pantene, Rejoice, New and Trendy, Citibank Plus, Levi’s, McDonalds, Nokia, Twisties, Vanilla Coke, Visa, HSBC, Dunhill, KFC, and Fresh and White. With regard to the local brands that were recalled, interestingly, a majority of the 11 advertisements were corporate rather than product advertisements. The *Petronas* corporate advertisement was mentioned by three participants and the *Telekom* corporate advertisement was remembered by two participants. The rest of the corporate advertisements were *Merdeka Day* Celebration, TV 3, *Akademi Fantasia*, *Cuti-Cuti Malaysia* and *Bumiputra Commerce Bank*. There were only four local consumer product brand names that came to the minds of the participants and these were Maxis, MAA Insurance, Baba’s and Kao Attack.

Additionally, most participants showed that they were not only aware of the brand names they were exposed to but were also familiar with the more specific aspects of the commercials such as the advertisement categories, appeals and message. Also, in most cases there seemed to be a correlation among the provincial middle class and the *folk urbanites* in that both middle class types preferred local corporate advertisements which depicted local culture. This situation indicates an inclination or concern towards the Malaysian lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement commercials.

Unlike the urban middle class set, there were very few among the provincial middle class participants who could recall any advertisement. The reason for this lack of recollection could possibly be due to the heavy advertising emphasis in the market centres. In short, the provincial middle class lacked the advertising exposure compared to their urban counterparts who were not only exposed to the same advertisements in television but also on outdoor boards and in shopping complexes around the city.

Among the participants, most of the older urban affluent members could not only recollect the brand names and the advertisement scenes, they could also remember the message in the advertisement commercials.

The ad for “Broadband” internet showing a funny guy performing and singing. I find it very interesting for both the Chinese and Malay versions. I believe I can remember the commercial because of its humorous element. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

As a person who has migraine, I cannot stand cigarette smoking. I find the ad against cigarette smoking, the *Tak Nak* ad campaign as relevant to me. Also there are three or four more ads showing smokes in the lungs that strike me. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor {1})

There are two types of ad I can recall, one is because of the humour and another is because the educational aspect. The humorous one is the “Visa” credit card ad, not so much on the product but because I like to remember the funny stunt of the main talent Pierce Brosnan as James Bond. The other ad is a “Pantene” shampoo ad which claims it can prevent hair loss and to me this is revolutionary. But when I went to the shop to check out, the product package stated “hair loss due to breakage”. This means the commercial was not really telling the truth but my point here is, it provokes me to go and check on the product. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

It’s an ad for HSBC that I like. It is humorous but has a strong message. It tells about cultural diversity, the importance of understanding people’s culture to win their

hearts. From the business point of view, this is important particularly for HSBC whose tagline is “the world’s local bank”. Being local, you have to understand the local culture. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

The few provincial middle class members who could retain information on the advertisement could relate scenes in the commercials they had seen very well. The following narrative from a government clerk illustrates a possible influence among some Malaysians on a local public service commercial which depicts Malaysian unity as its theme.

I saw an advertisement for *Merdeka Day*. It shows three young friends, Chinese, Indian and Malay. They were playing together happily under a tree but soon after, a group of hornets came buzzing towards them. They ran as fast as they could and jumped into an old mining pool. The hornets then turned and attacked a group of people accompanying a bride and bridegroom in a marriage ceremony. Everyone then jumped into the mining pool. In the next scene, the Malay friend had a circumcision and the Chinese and Indian friend made a visit to their Malay friend’s house. In the following scene, they became grown ups, if I’m not mistaken, it was at a hospital, the Malay asked the Indian what happened to their Chinese friend, and the Indian answered that he had passed away. In this ad, it is trying to show the importance of the spirit of unity among the races to achieve independence. This means, there will not be war if this kind of spirit prevails. I am attracted because the message is about living together peacefully. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

Although she could remember only some parts of the commercial, the following participant, a provincial Chinese middle class woman was also positive about the same local corporate advertisement as mentioned by the participant above.

The *Petronas* ad showing a group of boys running from the hornets, they jumped into the river, applied medication on their face because of the sting from the hornets. This ad looks quite interesting to me. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

As mentioned earlier, the *folk urbanites* seemed to share the same liking with their provincial counterparts with regards to local corporate commercials which portray a Malaysian cultural lifestyle. Among them, public service and corporate commercials aired during the festive seasons of *Hari Raya*, *Chinese New Year*, Christmas or *Deepavali* were the ones most remembered.

I like the corporate ads like the ones for *Petronas* and *Telekom* shown during the festive seasons. I can still remember one such ad shown in conjunction with *Deepavali* about three years ago. They did it so well, it had an impact on me till now. The message was about harmony among races in Malaysia. The ads for consumer

products that I see have no impact on me at all and I cannot recall any of them. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

I always ignore the ads on TV and I change channel when I see an ad. I am a bit conservative as I choose things based on what I need rather than what people tell me. Because I know that an ad break on TV will take about two minutes, so for two minutes I switch channel to watch something else. The only ad that catches my eyes is the series of festive ads sponsored by *Petronas*. These are classic ads that are done very well and are very impactful because the message is very strong. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

I can only recall the festive ads. For the other consumer product ads, I don't really pay attention to because I don't find them interesting. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Self-employed {6})

A corporate ad for TV3 appeals to me. I like the character of the small boy who hurts his forefinger because it got hooked to his fishing rod. I find it creative. And the most interesting part is when the Indian neighbour accidentally sprayed water on the face of his Malay lady neighbour. It is humorous when you see the lady gets angry. Also, the Malay folk song "ikan di laut asam di darat" in the commercial is quite nice to hear, it reminds me of my younger days. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

5.3.2 Attitudes about Advertisement Effects

When the question of the advertisements' effects on the society was raised, the focus of most of the debates and arguments by the participants was more confined to the harmful effects of advertisements. Nevertheless, there were a sizeable number of them who thought that there were as many advertisements which instill good values as there were those which inculcate bad ones. While comments by the Malay and Indian participants tend to centre on the religiously and culturally inclined local issues such as the inappropriateness of certain behaviours portrayed, opinions from the Chinese members were more confined towards humanistic and universal aspects such as racism and health-related issues.

Among the older urban middle class participants in the middle and lower level, their main criticism was that the advertisements promote a culture not suitable for the young.

I am a fun guy you know, but it does not look nice to see young girls and boys in some ads acting quite wild. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

It depends on how you look at it. As some people used to say, you cannot throw stones in glass houses. In my case, as a parent for this generation of youths, a lot of what we see in the ads are not suitable for our culture. May be I am saying this because I am getting older, if I were younger I may not mind it. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

The chemical content in snack products is high but ads for these products force parents to buy because their small children would insist on them. I notice every time my child sees a new snack ad, he would persuade me to buy, he is actually interested in the toy that always come with the snack, not the snack itself. To me this type of ad does not sell any product but is aimed solely at taking money from consumers, it's a lose-win situation, I lose they win. I buy the product, my son takes it, he opens the package and throws the snack away but he keeps the toy that comes with it. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

While admitting the importance of advertising, an older research assistant also from the urban lower middle class group touched on two things that he regarded as negative in some advertisements. One was on claims in some medicine advertisements and another on “racist” statements in a certain facial product advertisement.

Advertising is a fact of life, you cannot escape from it. Without advertising, it is difficult for anyone to buy anything. But what is not good about some ads, especially those that relate to medicine from herbal extracts is that they claim to heal almost every ailment, from diabetes to high blood pressure. Another example of bad advertisement is those that promote racism, like some facial products that claim it can whiten the skin. As an Indian, I am offended with this type of ad. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

On the topic of racial prejudice, two urban Chinese, also from the lower middle class sub-segment were critical of advertisements that are not sensitive to the Chinese culture. An older college tutor quoted an advertisement which, according to him, could be misinterpreted as being racist while a project executive mentioned a local product advertisement for the Malaysian car which to him showed scenes that were insensitive to the feelings of the Chinese.

Although I am not influenced by what I see in the ads I am concerned with some of them as there are other people who may be influenced. For example, there was one ad shown in conjunction with the *Chinese New Year*. The colour black instead of the usual red became dominant in the ad, this ad brings negative impact in terms of inter-racial relationship because it could be misinterpreted as Chinese being anti-African or something related to it. This kind of input is not good for the Malaysian society. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

Advertising in Malaysia is not matured. For example, the *Perodua* ad shown two years in a row is insensitive to racial harmony. It shows a Chinese driver being

impatient with the tortoise that crossed the road. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

Besides the totally critical comments and opinions, there were also a considerable number of viewpoints that looked at both the good and bad side of advertising effects to society. These arguments which centred on moral issues came mostly from the provincial areas. A young computer programmer who belonged to the provincial upper middle class group noted that while she sees the need for products to be advertised, she also indicated that there are advertisements that should be banned from the airwaves. To her, an advertisement for the Pepsi soft drink which featured female celebrities including Britney Spears and Beyonce Knowles, who were presented as female gladiators in a stadium, was a bad influence for the young, because of the exhibitionist dress of the female starlets.

To me there must a reason for the existence of ads. It is to promote products. From the company's perspective, there are good and bad to it, for instance the approach used for the Pepsi ad is not suitable because the talents are scantily dressed. This is not good for kids. My nephew gets excited when he sees the ad. Although that is how the company promotes the product but it is not good. However, I do not deny the importance of advertising. (Provincial Young Upper Middle Class – Single Female Malay Computer Programmer)

The following comment from a provincial middle class man which also relates to body exposure in advertisements supports the argument above.

There are positive and negative aspects in ads. There is an ad for "Smart Shop" showing talents exposing parts of their body, this is not good. Just like some programmes that are rated for those above 18 only, but there is still no control, children below 18 still watch these programmes. Except for a few ads like those ads for *Tenaga Nasional* showing fireflies in a village atmosphere which are suitable, many other ads we see today are not suitable because the talents' attire are not suitable, parts of the body are unnecessarily exposed. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

In addition to this, another provincial woman teacher believed that advertisements which promote education must be applauded while those that can cause embarrassment need scrutiny.

Some ad messages are good, they advertise programmes like private colleges for students to further their study. The ad messages that are not good are those that touch on some sensitive and private things on women like menstrual cycles. These ads can be quite embarrassing when you watch them with children. (Provincial Older Middle

The following provincial middle class male from the upper level group demonstrated his understanding of the role of advertising and admitted that advertising has a strong impact on society. He believed that besides selling the product, advertisers should have a sense of social responsibility by being sensitive to the local culture of the population.

As we know, ads are marketing tools by a company to promote products manufactured by the company. In terms of its influence, ads have positive and negative influences. On its positive influence, ads can promote Malaysian culture. In fact, while selling the product ads can instil characteristics of the Malaysian culture from beginning till end of the commercial. This means, all foreign elements in the ad can be avoided. On the negative side, there are ads that do not depict Malaysian culture at all and many of the ads we see today fall in this category. Therefore, ads play an important role to the consumers. Because of the strong influence of ads on the consumers, we have to be concerned on the right type of foreign ads that are brought into our country. For instance, it is football fever now, so people drink a lot of Pepsi because they want to feel the fever. Some even think *Kopi O* is not suitable, Pepsi is the only drink when watching a football match. Here, we can see how strong the influence is with the consumers. If the influence is not strong enough, I feel the product will fail in the market and the company manufacturing it will not prosper. Foreign advertisers use all kinds of approaches to influence consumers in a short time span but in Malaysia, we have a culture of *sopan dan tertib*. We have got to look at the suitability of the ads to the audience before we air them in the electronic media. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

A young *folk urbanite* cited two local advertisements. One was a corporate advertisement for *Tourism Malaysia* which he believed was good because it promoted local culture while another was for a local bank, *Bumiputra Commerce Berhad (BCB)* which he said could be misconstrued as encouraging youths to be rude and disrespectful to the elderly.

It depends on the ad. There are also good ads that are good for the society. For instance, there's a corporate ad about this Malaysian lady from *Negri Sembilan* in a taxi who just got back from London and speaks with a British accent but along the way she slipped into her own *Negri Sembilan* accent. The indirect message is that , wherever we go, our culture will still be intact. These kind of corporate ads are good because they instill beneficial messages.

But there are also messages in ads that may be misinterpreted like the BCB ad showing an old Chinese lady asking for directions to the closest BCB branch from a group of youths. The youths then started giving various directions. It is actually meant to say that there are a lot of BCB branches but can be misinterpreted as showing disrespect for the elderly.(Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

The issues raised by the following single urban Chinese ladies from the lower middle class group were slightly more diverse although they offered differing viewpoints from each other. While accepting that most advertisements are tolerable, the former was against what she denoted as “sexual exploitation of female talents” and the advertisements promoting the sale of liquor and cigarette products. On the other hand, the latter felt that the message in advertisements are sometimes misinterpreted by the audiences. To her, some people may see the positive side of an advertisement message while some others will notice the negative message in the advertisement.

There are good and bad ads on TV but generally most ads can be accepted. However, I don't quite like ads in the cinema because the liquor and cigarette ads shown are quite distasteful. For instance, these ads portray sexy women which I find difficult to accept. About cigarette ads, before it was totally banned it uses the name like Marlboro and do not show the cigarette but the young kids know it is selling cigarettes. This is not good. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

I think this depends on how the person understands the commercial. I was watching an ad with my nephew at home. This ad is a public service ad during a festive season telling the public to be patient on the road. It shows two cars on different sides of a narrow road passing one another. Both drivers do not want to give way. I agree with the message because it tells us to be patient and to tolerate one another but my nephew understands differently and does not approve of it. So it depends on how different people interpret the ad. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

5.4 Brand Attitude and Buying Behaviour

This section aims to investigate the extent of impact on the participants in relation to global brand names originating from the Western countries of America and Europe. Understanding the attitudes of the middle class segment towards brands while at the same time having some knowledge of their consumption habits would, the researcher believes give a strong signal of the degree of influence the global brands have among the participants.

As elaborated in Chapter Two, global brands tend to be popular amongst consumers because their frequent advertisement messages tend to be very convincing to the audiences. As such, these brand names more often than not, create brand awareness and a favourable image to the consumers. When a consumer is frequently exposed to the brand name which has already overwhelmed him, then he or she will associate

himself or herself with the qualities of the brand (Turbin, 2000).

At this point, it must be clarified that when a consumer associates a brand name with its product qualities, it means he or she is referring to the product's tangible or intangible benefit points. The tangible qualities include the product's effectiveness, efficiency, reliability, durability or any other actual advantages of the product. On the other hand, the intangible qualities are lifestyle factors such as aspects relating to the consumer's sophistication, cosmopolitanism, success or status as a result of using the product. The tangible and intangible qualities represent the product's superior perceived value which will ultimately lead to a psychological need for the brand (Temporal, 2000) compared to a lesser known brand name. Additionally, since brand names offer choices and judgements to the consumers, besides the standard of product quality, other elements such as price can also become interlocked with the brand names.

5.4.1 The Most Important Factor in Purchase Decision

Since members of Malaysia's middle class segment make up about half of the total working population of Malaysia (Abdul Rahman, 2001) and they have the purchasing power, they are logically speaking, the major consumers of goods in the market.

Participants were asked to recall a product they have bought lately and to discuss the most important factor in the product that influenced them to make the buying decision. By and large, the responses amongst a cross-section of the participants revolved around product quality, price, brand names and product functions. In other words, most of them did not talk about just one factor when elaborating on the subject of the most important element in their buying decision. The most popular reactions were statements that aligned product quality with brand name which in this case are brand name of products from either America, Europe or Japan which have been controlling the Malaysian market ever since.

Where most of them were concerned, the term "brand name" was a generic term for Western or Japanese brands. In many instances, participants would refer to these brand names as "established" or "strong brands". Among the middle class groups, it

is noticed that the upper level among them were more clear-headed about the importance of brand consideration whilst the lower level had to take into account the price factor before making their purchase decision. This is expected as the former has better purchasing power than the latter. However, the results also show that participants from the provincial areas from all economic levels were quite outright about the importance of brand consideration when making their purchase decision. The reason for this could possibly be due to the fact that being provincial based, they enjoy lower cost of living than their urban counterparts and can therefore afford to buy goods perceived as of better value.

Comments from the following upper level *folk urbanites* quite clearly illustrate that for certain items, they trusted only certain specific brands.

I'll choose the brand I'm used to. I have a certain brand I go for. For instance, for bathing soap, I'll choose "Darlie", for detergent I prefer "Dynamo". (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Self-employed {6})

For shirts and trousers, I will choose the brand I'm comfortable with like "Snail". (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

According to the upper and middle level middle class participants quoted below, an associate professor and a quantity surveyor respectively, the decision on the most important element when making a product purchase was dependent on the type of product they were buying. However, the factors considered were either price or brand name.

For some products I look at the price, for some other products I look at the brand. For example, if I buy clothes for my kids, I would look for those with established brands because they have been proven to last longer. This is also the same with toys, I buy the branded ones in "Toys-R-Us" because they are safe. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

It is according to the price I can afford. For some products, I may look at the brand first. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

Although the following urban young affluent participant would more often consider price as the most important factor, she admitted that for products she uses everyday, the brand name is a consideration.

I go for price first but I know a lot of Malaysians go for brands, this is alright because they want to look for brands that are of quality to them. I only choose brands for basic products, like “Colgate”. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Chinese Video Editor)

As mentioned earlier, despite living away from the market centres, many among the provincial middle class categorised brand name as an important factor as they deemed products with an established brand name to be assured of good quality. Even the lower middle class among them who have a comparatively low purchasing power would somehow try to buy products with a known brand name whenever they have the opportunity. As stated by the provincial clerk below, although the price of a pair of Levi’s jeans was beyond his means, he persisted in buying it because he believed in the brand name and the quality.

I bought a pair of “Levi’s” jeans recently because of its new design and style. I am interested with the brand name, its stitching and its colour. The price is quite expensive, it is RM200. But I still buy because the jeans really appeal to me and its quality suits the brand name. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

An ardent badminton player of the provincial middle level middle class sub-segment admitted that he is brand loyal to “Yonex” badminton rackets.

I like to play badminton. Of all the badminton racquet brands, I choose “Yonex” because it suits me well. It gives me satisfaction. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

The provincial lower middle class male quoted below, made a confession that he buys imitation goods with established brand names. Indirectly, this indicates the strong influence of brand names as a “status symbol” among the lower middle class population.

I go for the price. I bought a football jersey. It is an imitation “Nike” jersey that is made in Thailand, costs me only RM30 but it looks original. I don’t think anybody can notice that it is faked. I cannot afford to buy the original “Nike” because it may cost me up to RM400. To me the brand name is important too. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

The following statement from another lower middle class participant in the provincial locality is another classic example of the strong influence of and belief in the quality of an established brand name.

Considering my meagre salary and affordability, my expenses are more focused on my two year old son. So my major expenses on him will be his “Pampers” diapers and “Nespray” powdered milk. Other than expenses for daily food and petrol for the car, these two items are my priority every month. I will not buy other unnecessary goods because if I do, I may run out of money before the end of the month. Quality milk is important for the child to grow and develop his brain. Who knows my little boy may end up as a lecturer, if God wills it. I will train him the best I can. As for the “Pampers”, I buy this brand because it is proven to absorb urine better than the rest, so that the baby can sleep well. It is slightly expensive but is of high quality. I don’t want my boy to wake up crying in the middle of the night and break my wife’s sleep because I sympathise with her. She has been with him the whole day every day and I know it is very tiring. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

The considerations given by the provincial upper middle class male quoted below further support the statements made by the other provincial middle class participants on the importance of the brand name when making their buying decision. To him, one must accept the fact that a well established brand name, coupled with an excellent design and high quality of the product comes together with an expensively priced product .

I consider three factors when buying daily goods. First, I look at the brand, second the design and lastly the quality. To me all these factors are linked to the price factor. What is important for us to understand is that if the price is high, the quality is good. For instance, a pair of shoes costing RM300 or RM400 would be of a higher quality than another pair which costs RM100. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

The participant quoted below, a reporter working in a local newspaper makes her purchase decision based on brand name only for certain items. This represents the thinking of many among the lower and middle level middle class.

It depends on the product, for some products I look at the brand first. For products like jeans, I’ll have one expensive and branded pair and for shoes I’ll keep two pairs that are branded. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

Although the following urban lower middle class female cited below mentioned product function as the most important factor in her buying decision, the underlying meaning in her statement could be interpreted differently. Her use of the phrase “nice to have a branded pair of shoes that is expensive....” could be her expressing her frustration that she could not afford a good quality item with an established brand name. Like many among the lower middle class members who do not have a strong

purchasing power, she believed that a well known brand name would assure her of product quality.

It's the functional aspect of the product. For a pair of shoes, for instance it may cost only RM10 but if it is comfortable, then I'll buy. But it is nice to have a branded pair of shoes that is expensive. You will feel good wearing it. However, because of the price, I'll only buy one pair and use it to death.

If you have a lot of money, you can get financial freedom which gives you access to everything you want, without having to consider the price. Sometimes most of the things you like and want to buy are expensive. You cannot help it and it's unfortunate that these products are of good established brands. But this is not intended to show off unnecessarily. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

The following statement from a lower middle class participant echoes the comment above. Although the price would most likely be beyond her means, she put a high value on an established Western brand. This is because she believed that it would assure her of product quality.

To me, I don't really bother about brands because most branded products from the West are expensive and I cannot afford it. That is why, if I get one imported branded product, I'll really take good care of it because I pay highly for it and I believe it can be used for a long time. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

As indicated earlier, quite a number of participants from the lower middle class sub-segment equated product quality with a good brand name. The following comment by an urban lower middle class participant supports this statement.

Quality of the product and this comes together with brand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

The argument below, also from an urban lower middle class participant, although to a certain extent similar is at the same time in opposition to the comment above. She explained that there are some daily household products without well-known brand names that are also of high quality.

Quality of the product, and at most times, although not necessarily so are equated with established brand names. For instance, everyday products like toothpaste and soap which do not carry established brand names are also of good quality. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

However, to the following administrative assistant, after product quality, he would take into consideration the product functions.

It's the product quality first. The next element is the product functions. For instance, I'd buy food products if I am convinced it would give me good health. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

Unlike the participants above, a young urban teacher from the lower middle class group, felt that one had to spend within one's means. As such, she believed that for products used daily, price is the most important factor.

Sometimes it's not practical to buy expensive things with good brands when you don't use it often because you spend so much on it, you value it so much. For products you use everyday, it's more practical to buy cheaper products with unknown brands because if it gets worn out, you don't lose so much money. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

5.4.2 Significance of Brand Names

As Malaysia embraces the global economy which encourages the free flow of foreign goods, the choices offered to the middle class consumers in the highly competitive marketplace are almost limitless. As such, since these variety of goods are presented and packaged to the consumers together with their individual brand names, it is quite reasonable to believe that there are members within the middle class community who would be very attentive to the brand names of products that they buy.

This fact has been supported from the research responses given in relation to the issue on the most important factor in purchase decision as stated in 5.4.1 above. As Temporal (2000) claims, a brand name is important since it reflects the personality of the product and the person using it. Based on the responses given in relation to the significance of brand names, Malaysia's middle class consumers of various social level, ethnic group, age, gender and locality were generally of the opinion that the product's brand name is an important consideration when making their buying decision. In addition, many of them reiterated their earlier response that an established brand name is linked with a product of good quality and are therefore capable of creating strong awareness about the product. However, there were also minority comments that were against the idea that a good brand could be equated with good

product quality although they did not deny the powerful influence of brand names on consumers. These comments came mainly from older urban members of the lower middle class group.

Malaysia's middle class community in general were quite faithful to certain brands for a number of product types. This is because they were satisfied with the quality of a specific brand they have used before. The following older participant from the urban upper middle class sub-segment is a testimony to this.

When I try a brand and find that it has the quality I want, I would go back and buy the same old brand even though there may be other competing brands. But to me brands are important for products like dress because it can give me a classy look and is long lasting. For an everyday product like soap, the brand do not matter to me. So it depends on the category of products that I buy. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor {1})

Another urban older affluent lady was a firm believer that a well established brand is synonymous with good quality.

An established brand reflects quality of the product. An expensive branded product we buy will definitely be attractive and lasts long. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

A young lower middle class participant confirmed further that as a brand loyalist, she gets only genuine brands because of the quality that comes with it.

In my opinion, established brands are assured of their product quality. For example, I believe in "Bonia" brand. Although there may be imitations of the "Bonia" brand that are made in Thailand, I will not buy but I'll keep enough money to buy the original brand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

To the following young *folk urbanite*, it is not uncommon to be mindful of brand names because a brand name not only assures good quality but in the long run, it is also economical.

It's a trend now because nowadays anyone who buys a product will choose the brand he wants. The only difference is whether the brand is genuine or an imitation one. For the young, if they buy jeans, it is either "Levi's" or any other established brands. Brand is an important factor that influence people to buy. This applies to me too. Even my mother told me, it is okay to buy an expensive item because it can last very

long and in the long run it is cost-effective. Also the quality of a product goes with an established brand name. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

On this issue, an administrative assistant living in the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor* had a similar opinion.

In my opinion, many among us go for brand names because an established brand normally gives quality product. Sometimes products without brands are of poor quality. For example, if we buy a less known brand of product in *Macro*, we'll find that it cannot last even a month. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

Another participant, a provincial upper middle class male observed that associating with brand names has become a culture in the Malaysian consumer market and advertisements play an important role to promote this culture. Also, unlike the comment above, he opined that brand culture is linked closely with a person's status in society.

Sometimes brands can influence the life of an individual. Let us say we buy a packet of *kacang putih* and a packet of "Twisties" at a nearby shop for our children and allow them to make a choice. I can bet they'll go for "Twisties" because of the strong influence of advertisements. Besides this, its attractive package is an added value compared to the *kacang putih* which does not have a proper package. Brands can determine a person's status. As we were discussing a while ago, a Mercedes Benz, not a *Proton* is suitable for a wealthy person. A person's status is aligned with the quality of products he chooses to use. If he is in the high status category, indirectly the product he uses is also within the same category. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

The following comments that focus on status and brand name, and which came from a provincial lower middle class Malay male and an urban upper middle class Indian male respectively further explain the opinion given by the provincial participant above.

To me, it shows the person has purchasing power. Owning branded products is a reflection that the person has money. It also shows the value of the person. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {1})

It's more of the status quo. When you wear an expensive branded shirt, you feel confident because you know it is of high quality, lasts long and you feel good. An established brand equates itself with a quality product. I am concerned about brands for certain products I consume. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

According to a self-employed Indian participant, products with established brand names are reliable because they are long-lasting.

Brands that are popular have been in the market for a long time so they can be trusted.
(Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian- Self-employed)

The urban young affluent participant quoted below would go for practicality. Although she gives priority to brands when buying certain products, the brand she buys must be within her means.

I am particular about brands for certain items only, like for detergents I choose “Dynamo”. But most of the time, affordability is an important factor to me. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

In slight contrast, for the following urban older affluent male cited below, a brand name is especially important when the product is an expensive item.

I think it depends on the product itself. Sometimes when I buy affordable consumer products, I’ll be happy if I can get a good brand. Take soap for instance, how effective can it be regardless of its brand? But for electronic products which is more expensive I’ll certainly choose the brand that I want. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

A provincial participant had similar views.

I agree that a branded product is a quality product. When I buy electrical goods, I place importance on the brand. For products like shirts, I am not so particular about the brand. As long as it is comfortable on my body, it is good enough. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

Despite the widely held belief among the middle class participants that the brand name is of importance when making an assessment for the purchase of a product, as noted earlier, there were a number among them who did not concur. A social worker indicated that some brands are over-glorified and therefore cannot be relied on.

Branded goods do not necessarily equate with good quality. There are products which may cost less but lasts longer. Take cars, to me Honda or Camry is more reliable and durable than a BMW which gives a lot of problems and in the long run, takes a lot of your money. BMW is more for status than anything else. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Social Worker)

To further prove his point, he narrated his own unpleasant experience on an established global brand.

Sometime ago, my wife went on a holiday in Italy and she bought me a pair of branded shoes made in Italy. I told her there are shoes of better quality in Malaysia. True enough, on the first day when I first wore the branded Italian made shoes, I slipped and had to repair the sole. That was one lesson learnt, imported branded goods are not necessarily better than local ones. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Social Worker)

The participant quoted below felt that a product's brand name was not as important as the product benefits. To him, the main goal of advertisements should be to inform consumers about the benefits of the product, so that customers could make the right buying decision.

To me advertisements must educate me. Brands are not as important as the satisfaction we get when we use the product we purchase. For cars, if it is an expensive one, we should find out what it can offer us and whether the price of the car commensurate with the quality. Ads give us the opportunity to evaluate, like in the case of Chandra, to him Honda is better than BMW in a lot of ways although he agrees that BMW is a more prestigious car. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Student Counsellor)

Another older member of the lower middle class sub-segment emphasized that the logical thing to do when buying a product is to look for the product functions first, not the brand. To him, people who are brand conscious are not being rational.

I think it is a stupid thing to do. We buy goods not because of the brands, brands do not equate with quality. If I find a product is suitable for me, I'll buy it regardless of its brand. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

In the provincial locality, a middle level middle class male participant believed that most products with established brand names are quite pricey but there are products with little known brand name or no brand name that are of good quality.

Branded products are expensive. But there are non-branded products that are also good but is cheaper. I am not into brands. I go for cheap but quality products. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

5.4.3 Experiences With Brand Names

Although results of this study has established that the brand name element is an important consideration to middle class consumers in Malaysia, it is imperative to find out their preferred brand names for the products that they purchase. As such, they were asked on their positive and negative experiences with local, Western or Japanese brands.

Although there were some negative experiences that were recorded, in the main, Malaysia's middle class community had pleasing experiences with brand names they purchased and these are generally Western brand names. Between the participants, the upper level middle class from all ethnic groups, specifically the young urban affluent and their elderly counterparts whose purchasing power are comparatively strong tended to be quite faithful with the Western brand names that they were familiar with. In other words, they have candidly associated specific brand names with the highest quality for specific product types.

Also, it is interesting to note that the women among the middle class were quite loyal to the brands they used and equally fascinating is that the product type most popularly mentioned was detergent. The reason for this could be because working women in Malaysia like to spend their time at home during weekends to machine wash their clothes.

The participant below related her experience with "Attack" detergent.

I use "Attack" detergent when washing my clothes because it has proven itself to be effective.(Urban Older Middle Level middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

The same can be said of the lady school counsellor quoted below.

For washing machine I'll use "Dynamo" liquid detergent and it has proven to be the best. But if I wash manually, I'll stick with "Fab", not any other brand. I'm happy with the cleanliness and the fragrance. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

The following statement from a lady lecturer supports the conclusion that besides being brand loyal, middle class ladies could also recall brand names easily.

I use “Soflan” detergent for silk material because it keeps the material soft with a good smell. “Soflan” keeps to its promise. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

An urban young affluent lady was more objective in her response in that she touched on both her negative and positive experiences with brand names. And being honest, she admitted to being loyal to “Dynamo” detergent.

I had blisters because of a pair of an expensive branded shoes I bought. But my other experience which is positive is with “Dynamo” detergent which, because of its effectiveness has made me a loyal user of the brand. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

Besides the participant quoted above, most other members of the urban young affluent group revealed that once they were comfortable with a brand name the first time, they will keep to the same brand name the rest of the time.

I am brand loyal to “PUMA” shoes because it suits me very well. I will not change to another brand because my experiences with “PUMA” had been satisfactory. I will stick to this brand because it is the one I like best. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

I learn from experience. If I try a brand once and I find that it delivers what is promised to me in the ad and I feel good about it, I’ll stick to the brand. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

I’m very particular with the product I buy. Once I was looking for a certain blouse. It took one whole day to look for the brand I wanted and I don’t complain about it at all. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

When I like a product with an established brand, I’ll put effort to get it. I’ve done this many times because I am not the type who goes for an alternative brand name or worse, a brand name of an imitation product. I think those who go for imitation brand names are pathetic people. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

The experiences of the subsequent urban older affluent participants quoted below have turned them into brand name enthusiasts. In fact, they reiterated their contention earlier that established brand names are synonymous with high quality products.

For me, good established brands will equate with good quality. If for instance I buy an expensive branded pair of shoes, I am happy with it because it is comfortable and when people complement me, I feel nice because it boosts my confidence level. In my lifetime, I have experienced buying non-branded ones but it gets torn easily and does not last long. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

Before this, I don't really care about brands but now that I have some money I change to better and more expensive brands because established brand names assure me of high quality items. I feel better, more comfortable and confident. I know the difference. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

An upper middle class man from the provincial area was so impressed with a brand name that he still keeps the “Kiko” shirt he bought for his son 15 years ago. It is therefore of no surprise that he was convinced established brand names have a long lifespan.

I like to see the positive side of things. Today, we have to accept that brands have strong influence on us. I bought a “Kiko” branded shirt for my son who was then about four years old. Believe it or not, it's been 15 years and I still keep the shirt while my son is already 19 years old. The colour of the shirt never fade. If we buy a cheap shirt, it's not that it is not good but after a while the colour will fade, the stitching will wear out and you can tear the shirt easily. One thing about going for established brands, you must know when to buy them. The best time is during a sales carnival or mega sale at *Jaya Jusco*. In my case, I like “Pierre Cardin” shirt and I buy them when there is 50 percent to 70 percent discount. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

Reading the statements from the upper middle class members above, one would understand why the older lower middle class man cited below would not trade the brand name he is so used to for another alternative brand name.

My experience is with a peanut butter product. I have been buying the “Planter's” brand for the past 20 years, one day I had to go for another brand because “Planter's” brand was out of stock but I found this other brand not as good and tasty. So the next month I went back to “Planter's” brand although it is a more expensive brand. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

The following *folk urbanite* made up her mind on a brand name after going through a series of trial and errors with other brands.

I used to buy “Darlie” toothpaste, then switched to “Sparkle” and “Colgate” but found that the brands do not suit me, so I went back to “Darlie”. Although it is a cheaper brand, I am satisfied with the quality. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

There were also a few middle class members who had unpleasant experiences with the brand names they buy. For instance, the negative experiences of a *folk urbanite* with regard to a branded shirt and a pair of sneakers with a well known brand name were important lessons he learnt.

This happened to me some time ago. I bought a shirt I liked. The brand was “John Master”. After using it for a while, it tore off and from then on, I don’t use the brand anymore. For shirts, the brand I use now is “Snail” because I feel comfortable in it. Another experience I had is with “Adidas” watch which I bought with a one year warranty. I don’t use it anymore because it is not waterproof although it claims otherwise. (Urban Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Interestingly, a renowned brand name was the subject of negative experiences for two middle class participants, an older middle level middle class man and a young lower middle class lady respectively.

Recently, I bought a “Canon” printer, I am not so happy with it because it takes up a lot of ink. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Self-employed {4})

My experience is with a “Canon” printer which I used only a few times but had to send for repair. But I’m still using it because I have no choice. “Canon” controls the printer market. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {7})

Although renowned Western brand names are popular among many of Malaysia’s middle class members, the urban young lower middle class participants quoted below were not concerned about popular brand names as they were comfortable and satisfied with the less known or unknown brands.

I don’t place importance on brands. I am wearing jeans now but I don’t know what brand of jeans. I find it okay and I have no complaints. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

I don’t know what brand of jeans I’m wearing and I have no complaints. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

Their statements are supported by a young lady, also from the urban lower middle class sub-segment.

There are products without a brand that are cheap and last long. The blouse I'm wearing is one such product and I have been using it for six years. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

Lastly, the following female teacher revealed that there was no difference in results between a cheaper washing soap that does not have a brand name and another washing soap with a well-known brand name.

A bar of washing soap with no brand name that I use that I buy only for RM 1 could last me one month compared to established brands like “Breeze” or “Fab”. The effect is good and my clothes are clean. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

5.4.4 Brand Switching

The goal of this section is to further explore the participants' attitudes towards brand names and the extent of influence these brand names have on them. Participants were asked to imagine a hypothetical situation wherein a certain brand name they are familiar with is out of stock and they are in need of it. Some participants were also probed about their opinion of people who like to switch brands. Various responses were solicited with regard to their reaction towards this situation.

The findings revealed that participants from the upper and middle sub-segments seemed more hesitant to switch brands. This result corresponds with the earlier conclusions which confirmed that the upper and middle level middle class members placed importance on brand in their purchase decision and that established Western brand names were equated with high quality products. On the contrary, most of the lower middle class members, in particular the Chinese participants were ready to switch to an alternative brand on condition that the brand name they were accustomed to was not available when they needed it. To them, it was acceptable and normal to switch brands because it is the choice for the consumer to choose better quality, more available, or more affordably priced products.

The following statements by urban young affluent participants who had indicated earlier that once they were comfortable with a brand name they would stick to it, support the notion that they were mindful of brand names they were used to.

For certain brands like “Dynamo” detergent, I’ll wait for a while. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

I’m willing to wait. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

I will give sometime before switching to another brand. To me it is okay for other people to switch brands because they will be able to make judgement on another brand.. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

The following statements by three middle class members, an urban young affluent male, an urban older affluent female and an older provincial middle level middle class male respectively prove that they had been consistent in their attitude towards brand names. They were strong believers in established brand names.

I’m willing to wait till the brand is available.(Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

I’ll wait for the same brand. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

I’ll do all I can to get the brand I want.(Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Three participants quoted below, all of the provincial middle class sub-segment had been consistent about their commitment to brand names and were willing to be patient and wait for their favourite brand name.

I like “Pierre Cardin” shirt because of its big collar, easy for me to put my necktie on. Unlike shirts from other brands. For “Pierre Cardin”, it looks immaculate with the neck tie on. If the brand I’m looking for is out of stock at the place where I use to go, like *One Utama*, I am willing to look it up at other shopping complexes. I am also willing to wait for a sale at *Parkson*, for instance. To me that is how I practice purchasing, I call it wise spending. I get the brand I want but at a reduced cost. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

I agree that most people are comfortable with specific brands. In my case, I am comfortable with “Guy Laroche”. Whenever and wherever I go shopping, I’ll look for the brand first. When it is not available in the place where I use to shop, I’ll be patient and try looking for it at another shopping centre. From experience I know of the brand’s quality and also it is affordable. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

For certain products, I’ll wait for the stock to be available. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

On a slightly different note, a provincial middle level middle class lady and an urban older affluent man were only willing to switch to another brand name only temporarily.

I will change to an alternative brand temporarily until the regular brand I buy is back in the store. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

If you talk about cigarettes as a product, I smoke “Dunhill”. If I need to smoke and I cannot find “Dunhill”, I don’t mind an alternative brand as I know I can get my favourite brand later. The same goes for any other product. I’m not so rigid. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

On the other hand, among those who seemed less concerned on brand names, two urban young Chinese males and a young Malay female in the lower middle class sub-segment quoted below were quick to react in favour of changing to another brand name.

I’ll look for an alternative brand. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

I’ll buy another brand. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

I would not go overboard and wait for the brand, I would go for another brand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

While the comments above are quite generic, a comment by the participant quoted below went further, saying that he had no trust in local brands.

I have no confidence in local products, so if the Western brand is of good quality, then it’s alright. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

Also, there were provincial Indians and Chinese who would not think twice about switching brand names.

I am not brand loyal to any product. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

I have no problem with changing brands. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

I will change to another brand. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {7})

5.4.5 Perceptions of Western Brands

By and large, the results illustrate that Malaysia's middle class segment of various socio-economic level, race, locality, gender and age group are generally receptive towards Western brand names as they believe them to be of higher quality than local brands and for most product types, Asian brands. It must also be noted that at certain times, because of the lack of local or Asian brands, they have no other alternatives but to opt for Western brand names.

The upper level middle class participants were very consistent and unconditional in expressing their admiration of Western brand names whilst the middle level middle class members, although were not as outright as their upper level counterparts were also of the opinion that Western brand names are of superior quality.

However, although most of the other participants did not deny the superiority of Western brand names, a number of the older middle class members demonstrated their love for the country by stating that they would first give preference to local brands before opting for the Western brands.

As mentioned earlier and illustrated in the statements below, the urban young affluent participants showed that they had little doubts about the advantage of using Western brands.

Western brands generally offer good quality. They become expensive because of the tax, that's all. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

Perceived as of high quality especially those manufactured in America or Europe. The Western brands that are manufactured in Asian countries are perceived to be of lesser grades. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

Sometimes there is nothing much to choose from local brands. There's nothing wrong with choosing Western brands, especially when the quality is good. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

Most members of the urban older affluent were also of the opinion that products bearing Western brand names are of good quality, as testified by the following

businesswoman.

It's okay. Western brands are normally better, especially their fashion wear, computers and many other brands. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

Another urban older affluent participant who was proud to be a brand name advocate held that there was no denying that certain product types were accepted across the world as synonymous with certain established brand names from outside Malaysia.

I believe when a brand or product is good, it is universally agreed because they are quality products. Good cameras are from Japanese brands and good cars come from Germany. I am normally brand loyal but it is the external force like the ads and promotions that make people switch to another brand. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

The marketing manager quoted below, also of the urban older affluent group was outright in his belief that products with established foreign brand names, be it from Europe or Japan are of superior quality.

I am loyal to certain foreign brands because of the quality and I choose the particular brand according to the product category. For electronic products, I go for Sony which is Japanese. For shoes, I go for a Western brand, from Italy. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

Although most of the urban young middle level middle class participants were not as direct in their responses, they were unanimous that Western brands were of better quality than local ones which, by coincidence were also limited in choice and quantity. Due to this factor, although they were aware of the influence of Western brands on them, they did not see it as a dilemma or a predicament.

To me, it's freedom of choice. If an imported jeans from America or Europe is proven to be better than the local ones, I would go for the imported jeans. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Malay Male Lecturer {1})

I think this has to do with our mentality. Some people are very concerned with brands. For instance if they use an American brand, they feel comfortable. Some products are difficult to get locally, for instance, good quality jeans. Sorry to say, locally branded jeans are not as durable as those imported ones. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Professional Footballer)

Western goods are better than Malaysian goods. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Chinese Female Sales Executive)

Western products are generally good. But local products have potential to improve too except they need more time to improve on quality and design. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class - Married Indian Male self-employed {3})

Despite being strongly linked to the provincial and non-urban areas, the *folk urbanites* who were of the successful urban middle class community shared positive opinions on Western brand names.

I don't deny that Western products are nice and attractive although most of the time they are quite expensive to buy. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

Certain types of clothing from the West come with quality. One must buy because they need the brand but if they buy just because it is Western, I think it is not right. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Like most other middle class sub-segments, the provincial middle class men quoted below perceived Western brands positively. However, their opinions were varied. For instance, the following provincial businessman did not approve of brand names for Western fashion wear because to him, it was not suitable for Malaysian culture. Nevertheless, he was receptive to most other Western brand names.

I am okay with Western brands but not Western fashion. What I mean is, brands for certain products, especially technology related ones are good to follow but brands for fashion wear which is closely related to culture, we have to be cautious. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {1})

Another provincial middle class male had only praise for Western brand names.

Brands from the West like Mercedes Benz or BMW are highly regarded. To most people these brands are a class above the rest. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

Then again, the next participant, a provincial male from the lower middle class sub-segment used Western brand names because of the perceived higher status these brands offered him.

I think this has to do with influence. People who use Western brands like shirts for instance, feel more confident wearing German made or Italian made shirts than Malaysian brands. People's attitudes change, they become more egoistic with Western brands. I still use Malaysian made goods but mainly for household products. For products like shirts or shoes, I use Western brands. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

On the contrary, unlike any other participant, the participant quoted below decided to reject the superiority of American brands absolutely because of its support for Israel. Obviously, she was more concerned with the political impact of consuming the product rather than its socio-cultural need.

At the moment, I don't want to support American products because America supports Israel. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {2})

On a slightly diverse view, it was quite fascinating to discover that many of the older urban members of the middle level middle class group were quite patriotic and would like to support local products although they did not deny the superiority of Western brand names.

I would prefer Malaysian made goods because we need to support our local industry. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

I still prefer Malaysian made products. A lot of things now are Malaysian made, for example "Nike" shoes or "Levi's" jeans. Although these products are from America but I still consider them Malaysian products because they are made in Malaysia. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

The subsequent participants from the same sub-segment, although still defensive of local goods were quite objective in that they admitted that Western products and brand names were superior to local or Asian products.

We only feel that the product is American but they are made in Malaysia, Thailand or Vietnam. To me it's just a feeling but there are products like cosmetics manufactured in America which are of high quality. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {3})

Possibly these people want to show off or it is just that they like to use quality products. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

Many of the products with established brand names are of good quality and good after sales service. For my laptop, I use Compaq and I find it good. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

Like most of the urban older members of the middle level middle class group, a provincial participant quoted below was nationalistic and patriotic about using local

goods although she was aware that it would take a long time for local brand names to be on par with Western brands.

If we like their technology, it's natural that we buy their goods. But what will happen to our own local Malaysian goods? Who is going to buy Malaysian cars then? By right, we should try our own product first before we even begin to say that Western brands are better. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

The following comment from an urban young lower middle class male illustrates the dearth of local products and brand names compared to the abundance of Western brand names which also come with variety and quality.

For a healthy culture to flourish, local manufacturers must learn from the foreign industries, for instance, furniture from Europe, especially from Italy has been proven to be much better than the local ones. There are so many of them now and they come with so many designs. Even other products from Europe are so much better than the local ones. This should be a challenge to our local manufacturers. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class Married Male Malay Self-employed {2})

Another urban lower middle class participant would support a local brand first even though it is of lower quality and only if it fails to satisfy her, she would turn towards the Western brand names.

I feel this is our attitude for not supporting local products although we are always reminded to buy local goods. However, we cannot deny that most of the local products are low in quality compared to Western products. On my part, I'll try my best to support local products but if after a try I find the product not suitable for me, I'll switch to Western brands. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

A remark from the participant below, an older lower middle class male from the urban area further confirms the statement above.

It's not the question of whether it is a Western or non-Western brand, when I decide to buy a product, I look for quality and design and generally I find the Western brands are of good quality. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

The subsequent comments are inclined towards a more mixed approach in that the participants believed that there are first-rate local products which ought to be supported although they are not as wide-ranging as the Western brand names. For the

following participant, in terms food products, Malaysian brand names are better but in terms of technology related products, the West is more superior.

It depends on the product, for instance for food products, Malaysian brands are good, but for products with the latest technology like computers or digital camera, Western brands are better because the technology is more advanced. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Human Resource Executive)

Although the statement by a participant below is quite general but it confirms the remark above.

To me, if you can afford it and you find it suitable for you, it is alright to choose Western brands. The same applies for those who prefer local brands. In my opinion, most Western brands are more expensive, many are good in quality but there are some which is of poor quality and there are local products which are better and cheaper. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Conversely, an urban older lower middle class man offered a widely divergent viewpoint. He observed that some Malaysians who are too obsessed with Western brand names do not act rationally. Engrossed with their obsession, he also noted that they could not even differentiate between an American brand name and a European brand name.

It is a status symbol. Some people worship Western products without consideration for any other factors. Also, it's not fair to put American and Western brands in one basket because American values and European values may be different. When you talk of "Levi's Strauss", it's actually German not American and I don't deny that it is of good quality. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

5.4.6 Opinions of Japanese Brands

In general, Malaysia's middle class community of varying sub-segments acknowledges the superiority of Japanese brands in specific areas such as electronic goods and automobiles. While they perceived Japanese brands as way ahead of any Malaysian made product or brand, they were also convinced that in terms of quality, Japanese brands are much better than Western brands for electrical goods. For passenger cars, Japanese brand names are preferred to Western ones due to a number of factors including affordability, economy and technology, although they are not

thought to be necessarily better in overall quality. It must also be noted that to members of the lower middle class sub-segment, just like their responses for other issues in relation to brand consumption, the affordability factor of the Japanese brands is most vital.

To an urban young lecturer from the middle level middle class sub-segment, the many brand names in the market provide opportunities for consumers to make a choice. Because he felt the quality of Japanese brands is on par with Western brands, he welcomed them. This statement indirectly positions the local products in the lower grade compared to either Western or Japanese brand names.

Buying Japanese is still considered important. Brand is considered a mediator of technology and progress. We always make comparisons between Japanese and Western products because we are always caught in the middle. We become confused when we have to make a choice. That's the situation in the consumer market now. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Lecturer {1})

Further, the urban older lower middle class male quoted below was very confident of the quality of Japanese brands.

A lot of goods in the market are Japanese, from slippers to electrical goods. All are of good quality. From my experience, the car's rubber bush that is made in Japan is more long-lasting than the Malaysian made one although Malaysia is the world's number one producer of rubber. To me, the Japanese brand offers good quality control. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

The participant cited below who had experienced working with a Japanese firm was convinced of the formidable Japanese technology in producing high quality products at an affordable price. Despite this, she admitted that she still felt Western brands are by and large better than the Japanese brands.

I've worked in a Japanese company before, I believe in the quality of Japanese goods. However, since the cost to produce goods in Japan is very high, many Japanese goods are manufactured in countries where labour cost is lower, for instance China or Indonesia. This is why I believe the quality of Sony branded products have dropped slightly because the country that manufactures the product does not have the same systematic quality control as Japan. But in general, I still prefer Japanese goods because the quality is generally good, the price is affordable and the product is technologically driven. When comparing a Japanese brand and a Western brand, I would compare the price before making my decision to purchase. Although I know that a Japanese product is good, but in my perception, a Western product is better. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Sales Executive)

However, the participant quoted below had a strong inclination towards Japanese brand names which he thought were at times ahead of the Western brands.

Sometimes Japanese brands are better than Western brands. They are innovative and are constantly making improvements on existing brands. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

On the other hand, the participant referred to below found that both the Japanese and Western brands were of equal quality.

To me both Japanese and Western brands are generally good.(Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Administrative Executive)

Based on the statements from the mainly lower middle class participants below, there is no doubt that one of the major reasons for the popularity of some Japanese brands when compared to the Western brand names is that they were much more affordable to most of Malaysia's middle class consumers.

If the price is okay, I'll go for a Japanese brand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

Price is important. It doesn't matter if it is Western, Japanese or local brand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

Japanese brands are cheaper to buy than Western brands. It caters for the people. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

Japanese brands are good because they are priced within the affordability of the consumer. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

Japanese technology is good and affordable compared to Western brands. In terms of affordability, Japanese brands are better but in terms of quality, it depends on the product. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

For the urban older affluent lady mentioned below, she would not mind where the brand name originated from for as long as it gave her the satisfaction she wanted. In other words, being a believer in established brands she would choose a Japanese brand name if it is proven to meet the standards she expects.

I am not so concerned about the price. If the brand is good, I'll grab it. Take for instance a Japanese made TV, if I find the visual is very clear, then I'll go for it. And normally good products are expensive and they are from established brands. If I do

not have the means to buy it yet, I'll wait for a good opportunity like during grand sales and such. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

The participants quoted below, both from the provincial middle class sub-segment recognized the prowess of Japanese technology.

Japanese technology is acknowledged by many as of high quality. We can trust their technology. Whether Japanese technology is better than Western technology, it depends on the product manufactured. (Provincial Upper Middle Class – Young Single Female Malay Computer Programmer)

In terms of technology and design like what we see in cars and electronic goods, the Japanese are better than the West. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

From the various positive remarks, comments and opinions on Japanese products and brand names, it is clearly evident that Malaysia's middle class consumers regard Japanese made electronic products and cars very highly. The subsequent statements and comments are illustrative.

The negative experience of the following participant with a Korean television brand has further strengthened her confidence in Japanese electrical brands.

I am not brand-conscious by nature but recently, I bought a new TV set manufactured in Korea which I have forgotten the brand name but after one month I had to send for repair. I was naturally quite disappointed especially when I compare the brand with my 10 year old Japanese brand TV set. So for electrical products, I prefer Japanese brands. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

Japan's "Sony", "Toshiba" and "JVC" have become important brand names for the participants cited below when referring to electrical products.

For electronics, Japanese brands are the best, for instance Sony is a good brand and lasts long. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Site Supervisor)

Japanese brands like Sony or JVC are best for IT and electronic products. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

For electrical products, Japanese brands are more long lasting, For instance, I use Toshiba TV only because I believe it is better than any other brands. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {2})

To the participants mentioned below, although some Japanese made brand names are assembled in Malaysia, their trust towards the quality of Japanese made electronic products was unwavering.

I truly believe electrical brands from Japan are good. All the electrical products like television, fridge or washing machine that I buy will either be National, Sanyo or Sony because I believe in these brands. Although the products for “National” are manufactured in Malaysia, Japanese quality control is ensured. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

For most of the electrical appliances, I’ll choose Japanese brands instead of Western brands even though these products may be locally assembled. (Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Lecturer {2})

The participant quoted below further confirmed the popularity of Japanese branded electrical products among the middle class consumers.

Most Japanese brands, especially for electronic products, are of better quality and pricing than Western brands. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Lawyer)

Besides electrical goods and brand names, Japanese made cars are equally popular among Malaysia’s middle class segment.

Today, if we talk of Japanese products, most Malaysians prefer the electronic products, like camera and similar stuff. Most Malaysians cannot afford a “Mercedes Benz”. If we have the money now, we’ll go for Japanese made cars that are of the same standard with the “Mercedes Benz” because it is cheaper and the spare parts are also much cheaper. Go to any workshop now. You’ll find that Japanese car parts are easily available but for car parts of American or European brands, you’ll normally have to wait one or two months. However, for goods like garments and clothing, Japanese made brands are less popular. The design and size do not fit well. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

A young urban middle level middle class male who was also a professional footballer claimed that Japanese made car spare parts are superior to locally made ones. According to him, in terms of car design Japan is still ahead of the West.

There are a lot of Honda and *Proton* parts in the market. Although Honda’s absorbers are quite expensive, they are of better quality than absorbers for Malaysian cars. I believe people have accepted that Japanese car parts are good, and designs of continental cars are not as up-to-date as Japanese cars which are also more affordable. Between the two, I’ll choose Japanese cars. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Professional Footballer)

Comments from the participant cited below, a provincial young lower middle class male was similar to the remarks above.

Japanese made cars are efficient. Its parts are more reliable and advanced than Malaysian made parts. Most Malaysians depend on car parts from Japan. Our country is not ready to compete with Japan. As such, we use their technology. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician 2)

Another comment, also from a provincial middle class male further authenticate the positive feelings of Malaysia's middle class towards Japanese made cars. In terms of technology, Western made cars were still behind and Malaysian made cars were considered below par.

In terms of technology, and accessories, Japanese cars are much ahead of Malaysian cars. Also, they are more durable. Even after 10 years on the road, Japanese cars can still be used. In terms of technology, Japanese brands are far ahead, the West cannot beat them. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

On comparing Malaysian made cars with Japanese made cars, a comment from an urban young affluent male referred to below shows that Malaysian made cars are still very far behind.

I have little faith with Malaysian brands. It's the sentiment I have after the bad experience with the Malaysian-made car I am driving, the *Proton Waja*. There don't seem to be much quality control despite the campaign to encourage consumers to buy Malaysian made goods. I think it has something to do with the culture and the product. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

Another remark below, from an urban young affluent female who was in the motor industry lends credibility to the statement above.

I totally agree with anyone who prefers Japanese cars than our local cars. I work in the local motor industry that assembles car parts, I know how bad the quality control of Malaysian made cars are. Parts for the local market are sub-standard whilst the parts meant for the import market would have to follow strict quality control. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

The following urban older middle level middle class male believed in being realistic when making a purchase decision. And because a new Japanese car was superior in quality and was also economical, he would prefer a Japanese car to a continental car.

Personally, I will not buy an expensive brand for products that will not last long. For example, a “Nikon” camera can last for three years but if you drop it, it’s gone. But this is not the case with a good new car, it can last you years. So if I buy a car, I would go for a brand new Japanese car because it has the quality and its maintenance is more affordable than a Western brand. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

The comment above parallels the opinions of the *folk urbanites* below.

I always have a Honda car because I believe it is a good car. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Their cars like Honda and Toyota have been accepted by the Malay society as good cars. This is also true of their electronic goods. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

To the participant below, although Japanese brands were behind Western ones in terms of lifespan, in terms of technology and affordability Japanese brands are very much ahead of those from the West.

In terms of durability, Japanese goods are inferior to the Western goods. The lifespan of Japanese brands are shorter than the Western brands. But the Japanese are clever, they manufacture affordable goods. The Malaysian working class can afford to buy Japanese cars compared to those from the West because the price is very much cheaper. And because of this, the parts for Japanese cars need to be changed more often. Economically, this is good for Japan. In fact, the West is following Japan now. Japan learns new technology from the West, upgrade it and make it more advanced. Even those from the lower income group can use Japanese made products. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

The comment from the participant quoted below confirms that continental cars like “Mercedes” were tougher and more long-lasting than Japanese cars. However for electrical products, Japan was considered unbeatable.

There are certain Western products with established brands like “Mercedes Benz” which are better than Japanese products. But for electronic goods, like “Mitsubishi” television, Japan has always been ahead of the West. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {1})

Although more than 90 percent of the participants gave positive comments on electrical products and cars with Japanese brand names, the participant cited below was of the opinion that in terms of car design, Japan was losing to Europe.

Car designers have now shifted to Italian and other European designs instead of

Japanese design because its design has become quite out-dated. It's an open market.
(Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Self-employed 2)

5.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter focuses on the participants' attitudes in relation to their daily exposure to advertisements, the purchase decisions they make on the products they consume regularly and their thoughts about brand names. Its purpose is to scrutinise the scope of influence of Western brands on these middle class participants.

On the whole, advertisements in general do have an effect on the buying decisions of the participants and products with Western brands were highly regarded because of their perceived superior quality. This thinking is backed by their past experiences with the brands they use.

The results also revealed that English, being a primary global language is spoken more often among the upper and middle level middle class sub-segments in the urban areas than the rest of the participants. Although a substantial number of the provincial Malay participants rarely speak the language, they could comprehend the English language advertisements and television programmes.

With regards to their favourite television programmes, the majority of them in spite of their differences in social levels, ethnic groups, age, gender and localities watched similar programmes which include news, sports and entertainment. However, it needs to be mentioned that each of the major ethnic groups listed their own ethnic programmes as their favourites. This observable fact is an indication that the Malays, Chinese and Indians take pride in their specific cultural heritage, and ethnic identity is still a powerful force among Malaysia's major ethnic groups.

On the subject of advertisement recall, this study confirms the impact of some advertisements on the participants as many of them could remember the advertisements they mentioned vividly. Besides this they could also describe and interpret the message in the advertisements confidently. The fact that most of them mentioned global brand names indicates the high degree of advertisement exposure to

global brands rather than local ones. Moreover, there were comparatively lesser local advertisements appearing in the Malaysian media. Nevertheless, among the local advertisements, corporate public service advertisements with themes that instill patriotism to the country were the ones most appealing to a cross-section of the audiences. This goes to show that aspects relating to cultural identity was very dear to most participants of all ethnic groups.

Additionally, the participants gave well-considered reasons in relation to advertisements they felt were no of benefit to the society. For instance, advertisements for junk foods were condemned and some advertisements which made wrongful claims were considered insulting to their intelligence. Besides this, cigarette and liquor advertisements were also criticised.

In the main, product quality, brand name and price are important factors in purchase decisions. To the participants, the brand name and the product quality were synonymous with one another. For the upper and middle level middle class sub-segments, these two factors were of equal importance when they made purchase decisions on products they interpreted as affordable such as detergents, clothing, electrical goods or shoes. However, for the more expensive items like cars, many among them would place price as another equally important element in their purchase decision.

On the other hand, to most of the lower middle class members, although they agreed that the product's brand determines its quality, price is the major determining factor in their purchase decisions. This situation arise because of their comparatively poor purchasing power. In fact, a number of them would opt for imitations of established brand names. This fact shows that underlying the inner feelings of most of the lower middle class members was a longing to be recognized as part of the "privileged" group who had attained a certain status in society.

The constant purchase of a brand name over time has developed as brand loyalty among some participants. As the results illustrate, for items and products that were comparatively affordable, such as household products, many women participants normally bought the same brand names. Also, they would be willing to wait a while if

these products were out of stock, rather than switch to another brand. According to Kirmani and Zeithaml (1993), this repeat purchase of the same brand name is referred to as a high-involvement purchase either due to the brand attributes or emotional attachment to the brand. Interestingly, the findings also showed that the *folk urbanites*, despite being comparatively more provincial in outlook were also brand loyalists.

With regard to popularity of the Japanese products, except for the Japanese brand names for electronic products and car models, Western brands were the preferred brand names for the participants. Although some among the middle class participants, particularly the provincial Malays, were patriotic and wished to support local brands and products, they were aware that the local brands were inferior and unable to provide the same quality and variety as any of the Western or Japanese brand names. In fact, a few urban young affluent participants who had bad experiences with some local brands even lost their confidence in locally made products.

Taking into account all factors, there is no doubt that Western brands were perceived as strong high quality products that enjoyed vivid and rich imagery among the participants. Besides this, they had a comparatively long history which made them withstand the test of time. The classic cases in point are Coke, KFC, Marlboro and Levi's. The same is true for Japanese brands of electrical goods which are perceived as better than the Western brands. Most Japanese cars are the preferred choice because of their perceived quality, fuel economy and affordability.

In sum, one can presume that Malaysian middle class consumers are characteristically rational brand users who are receptive to brand name products that they perceive would bring benefit to them. Western brands were generally the choice brand names because they come with guaranteed quality.

Chapter Six

Perceived Cultural Values: Analysis of Focus Groups on Malaysian and Western Values

6.1 Introduction

Modernisation theory has it that as a country experiences changes in its economic development, and as its middle class population increases, there is a strong leaning towards the slow but sure adoption of a new culture. This phenomenon is not new and there are many studies that demonstrate such changes amongst countries in the developing world. In his discussion on Western colonialism, Sardar (1998) posits that the Western powers generate a culture of contentment among the local populace in order to infuse their imperialist values. This strategy assures the latter that their existing privileges and advantages are not endangered. With the passing of times, the original cultural behaviours become fragile and the natives start to conform and become accustomed to the informational flow of another way of life (Bikhchandani et. al, 1992).

As a consequence to the new global economy beginning from the mid-1980s, Malaysia which was for more than 400 years under Western rule, did not escape the cultural and social pluralisation of its society. Having experienced massive economic growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coupled with the onslaught of new technology, media boom and information overload, understandably Malaysia's middle class community has displayed a marked change in its consumption patterns. Further to this, their attitudes and opinions towards local politics were also significantly different from before as evidenced by the reduced support towards the ruling *Barisan Nasional* and the increase in votes for the opposition parties in the November 1999 general election. Nonetheless, while they were keen to change the government, they were at the same time cautious that the outcome of their political attitudes could deprive them of the economic security they have been enjoying. To Abdul Rahman (2001), this attitude is more pronounced amongst the Malay middle

class than the other ethnic groups as they are grateful to the government for assisting them to achieve the status they benefit from.

Taking the above into consideration, the question that arises is, can this dualistic thinking of the middle class be applied in their attitudes towards cultural values of the West? As such, this chapter aims to investigate the inner feelings of the participants with regard to the Malaysian cultural values that have been part of their heritage, and at the same time explore their attitudes towards a Western lifestyle which they have been constantly exposed to.

This chapter is divided into two sections: perception towards Malaysian cultural values and perception towards Western cultural values. The former focuses on aspects relating to Malaysian customs and practices, participants' attitudes towards local ethnic culture and their views on the changes in lifestyle among Malaysians. On the other hand, the latter zooms in to the participants' viewpoints on the Western lifestyle that is already a phenomenon in Malaysia.

6.2 Perceptions of Malaysian Values

The discussion in this part involves the perspectives and opinions of the participants on varied aspects of Malaysian traditions, culture and lifestyle. Their thinking on the traditional culture and Malaysian values in general would give an understanding of their position on cultural identity. At the same time, their attitude on the inherent changes in Malaysian lifestyle would indicate the extent of their inclination to accept or reject the new cultural values.

6.2.1 General Observations on the Current Traditional Practices

As an opening to the discussion on Malaysia's traditional practices, it is imperative to have a general picture of the participants' outlook on what they believe is happening with Malaysia's traditional customs and practices. This is because responses on this issue would lead to further elaboration of the participants' attitudes on what they consider as good cultural traditions or otherwise.

The perspectives and viewpoints with regards to the participants' general observations of the traditional customs and practices were generally centred on the waning of early cultural values such as religious rituals and practices and the reverence to the older generation. They observed that these old values are slowly but surely being replaced by new modern values taken from other parts of the world, particularly the Western world. By and large, they believed that the strong impact of globalisation is a major factor for this change in values. However, their comments and viewpoints on this issue seemed to some extent quite peripheral as they were indicative of a community who were disturbed with the seepage of the new culture but were too ineffective to prevent the slow disappearance of their own traditions and practices.

A number of members from the urban young middle class sub-group commented that the old traditions still being practiced in Malaysia have been simplified to suit the changing times. The comments below were from three young participants, a Chinese lady, a Chinese man and a Malay man.

Some traditional values that are practiced have been modified to make it simpler. For example, the Chinese community used to pray twice a month and every prayer takes about two hours, now it has been shortened to save time but it is still being practiced. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Chinese Female Sales Executive)

For the Chinese, only the major practices are being maintained. And the practice of these old customs can only be seen during the *Chinese New Year* celebrations, temple visits and some other more formal occasions. Even then, I am not sure whether the younger generation are doing it just to please the older generation, or as an annual habit. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Human Resource Executive)

The basic values are still being practiced but suited to the needs of the time, for example the circumcision ceremony in the villages among Malays which I saw on TV recently have been modified. Normally, once the circumcision is executed, a proper ceremonial shower will normally take place but what I saw on TV was different. The kids were showered using the fire brigade's hose. The symbolism is maintained but the practise is modified. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Malay Male Customer Service Officer) .

A young Malay lecturer observed that some basic values on greetings were still intact although in practices such as pre-marriage rituals, the old customs were no longer followed.

Some values like being polite and respecting the elders are still being practiced. On other aspects like marriage ceremonies, a lot have been simplified, for example some marriages today do not go through the process of engagements. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

Comments and opinions from the provincial middle class sub-segment on the issue of whether the old traditions were still being practiced, were not much different from their urban counterparts. A Malay participant in the province who defined traditional values as “being polite and putting on a decent attire without exposing the body like the Westerners normally do” indicated that some practices in traditional marriage ceremonies were obvious examples of how the traditions were being modified.

In some places, we still preserve some elements of traditions in marriage ceremonies. Although these traditional elements are small, in the villages we still continue with the traditions of *kenduri* and *berinai* although these practices may have been modified. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

Another Malay participant who supported the opinion above added that even in provincial towns, marriage ceremonies are seldom held at the house as it is no longer practical to do so because the host would not be able to get young volunteers to help out as they used to a few years back. However, he accepted this change since it is a natural process of modernisation.

There have been a lot of changes during wedding ceremonies. For instance, we now have the self-service concept and the ceremonies are now held at public halls. The traditional practice of *gotong-royong* or *rewang* is losing popularity. Nobody is to be blamed for this because this is part of the process of changing times. In the earlier days we work in the same area but now a lot of folks here work outside the vicinity. As such, we have to understand the situational change in practice. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {1})

Yet some members among the urban middle level middle class sub-group tended to be quite sentimental about the traditional values passed down to them from the earlier generation. They mentioned about the slow demise of the old practices while Western elements are seeping into part of the traditional customs.

Some values like marriage ceremonies are still being practiced although many ceremonies have become Westernized. (Urban Older Middle Level middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

In terms of costumes and daily way of life, I think there are not many traditional values being practiced now. In the practice of dancing, not many are doing traditional dances. Most youths now prefer disco dancing at the discothèques. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Lecturer {2})

A Chinese senior teacher noticed that some Chinese families had already discarded their old customs totally and are following the Western lifestyle.

I follow what my parents pass down to me but if I compare my family with another Chinese family, there are a lot of differences. In general, they do not adhere to the traditional values passed down to them like what my family does. They are more Westernised. I agree that our good values are slowly fading away but to say it is totally gone, I do not think so because my neighbours and I still communicate well, we still help one another. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

Another Chinese participant observed that some Chinese families have also abandoned their traditional eating style of using chopsticks.

Even the food we have now are influenced by the Americans, like McDonalds and KFC. And very few Chinese use chopsticks now, they prefer forks and spoons. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

Yet, one more young Chinese participant who worked as a reporter with a local daily lamented on the fact that some new generation Chinese have grown up with a new language which is different from their parents' original dialect.

I notice now the younger Chinese can no longer speak their own dialect, they can only speak *Mandarin*. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Chinese Female Reporter)

A Malay lecturer quoted below gave an academic argument to the issue of traditional values. He indicated that changes in traditional values are inevitable due to the impact of globalisation where everyone is exposed to influences from outside the country.

Because traditional values is a construct, changes cannot be avoided, so much so you are free to practice what you want. Whether you are going against the religious practice or not, this is more personal in nature. It is the changing construct of culture. The dominant culture is practiced because of an established social construct but the changes that occur are more individual in nature due to the influences of consumerism, globalisation and the like. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Malay Male Lecturer {1})

Another Malay participant, a marketing manager of a local bank blamed some television programmes which are influencing children to follow some foreign cultures and in the process demarcate them from the local culture.

To a certain extent, it is a culture moulded by TV programmes. My three year old son calls a dog a “stupid dog” because he learnt this from the movie “Toy Story”. He also questions me when I asked him to address my friend as “uncle” because the person is not related to him. He does not understand that it is the Malaysian culture of showing respect to the elderly.

The same participant commented that the dynamic change in society has led to individuals following the trend of the day so that they can fit in.

I think the society is evolving. Due to exposures, most people like to emulate somebody they think is better than them. Instead of having *teh tarik* at an ordinary restaurant which is not only more tasty and much more affordable, they want to try it at “Coffee Bean” because it is more “classy”. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

Another participant’s opinion further confirms the comments above. He held that Western globalisation and the new media have been the major causes for the decline in the practice of traditional values among Malaysians.

In my opinion, our traditional values are fading away due to globalisation although some people may say that if we keep to our old traditions we will not move forward. People with this opinion are those who are overly exposed to the internet media. They are influenced by the idea of a universal culture which is encouraged through globalisation. If we go back to history, the Japanese kept to their own values but the country could still be strong economically. But with Western influences like rap music now coming into Japan, the traditional Japanese culture is already affected. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

In a similar observation, a Chinese project executive cited below mentioned modernisation as one major reason for the slow demise of traditional values.

Traditional practices are only preserved for traditional functions, we are already influenced by modernisation. At present, I notice that there are a lot of traditional elements that have been modernised and this makes it difficult to differentiate between traditional elements and modern elements. To suit with the times, there is modern packaging to traditional values, like what we see in *nasi lemak* and *satay*. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

The opinion of another Chinese participant quoted below while concurring with earlier comments from the other participants, verifies that the Chinese too are losing their old traditions.

It's hard to define but traditional values are a heritage, the passing down of practices from earlier generations. These values are not really practiced now except during certain festivals or occasions. A lot of our values now are influenced by the West, even the way we dress does not represent our traditional values.(Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

A veteran journalist below, an older middle level middle class participant explained that even if the customs are practiced, especially in the cities, it is not done for the love of the culture but because of other reasons particularly material benefits. Like most Malay participants, he believed that the Malay culture is closely related to Islamic religious beliefs and practices.

We are given the impression that what matters to youths now is that traditions are meant for occasions only. If an occasion requires them to get a *kompang* group, they get a *kompang* group. But if it is a football game, the *kompang* is not necessary, so they don't use *kompang*. The practice of the community is that do what you're told to do but there's no realization like for instance, "I am a Malay, I must preserve my Malay traditions". Let's take my grandfather, he started a *pondok* school, then my father became an *imam*, but when I grow up and left my village to further my study, I do not become an *imam* anymore, so the tradition dies.

For a simple *tahlil*, only the older folks are involved, when it comes to *berzanji*, you can see in occasions where the younger generation will prompt the older folks to start because they know they are not capable of doing it. Take *Kajang* town for instance, if we get a *berzanji* group to perform, we have to pay them because they do it for money, not for the love of the tradition. Give another 20 years, we are going to see a totally new culture. So it is a dead end. In my case, my eldest child is a daughter and my eldest son who is 17 stays in a boarding school, we only meet every three or four months, how can I pass the tradition to them? The situation does not allow you to. My grandfather and my father have passed away a long time ago and I am a very busy person.

In my analysis, only ordinary people who have the time to spare to put in effort, and those working with the Ministry of Culture whose job responsibility is to preserve traditional practices are really the only ones serious about preserving the old traditions. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

An affluent upper middle class man, an older *folk urbanite* well exposed to Western values but strong in religious belief further emphasised that the present situation is a global phenomenon that cannot be avoided. The world has become small as

civilisations of the East and West clash with one another and there is very little for anyone to be able to do anything. He believed that anyone in their right minds, be it a Westerner or a Malaysian would not condone “immoral” lifestyle of many of the young today.

The Malay society used to live within a certain parameter. Each person knows what is acceptable and what is not. Nowadays that parameter has been broken off, there is a divergence. Some will choose the extreme of one part, while some will go on the other extreme. What was unacceptable before becomes acceptable now, these days it is not difficult to see the belly buttons of young Malay ladies. At the very same time , there is also an increase in the awareness of religion and those who follow the traditional Malay values. These people will ensure that their children go by that track. This is the current scenario and I think this divergence, the clash of civilisation will continue because there are conflicting ideas of what Western values are. The government interpretation of Western values may be different from what its citizens understand.

In Western societies now, their realization of the importance of religion is growing. In fact, the British in the countryside adopt communal values that are similar to our *kampungs* here. I am sure they too are not happy with the moral degradation among their youths. On the other side, the number of orthodox Muslims are also growing. So this has become a global phenomena, I foresee no stop between the clash of “evil and good”. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

6.2.2 Insights on Traditional Practices

Viewpoints and attitudes of participants on certain aspects of the traditions and customs considered as beneficial or otherwise are important as the specific cultural beliefs and values suggest their approval or disapproval of certain practices and lifestyles. On the whole, Malaysia’s Malay middle class sub-group were distinguished as the most ardent advocate of their own ethnic culture of what they understood as adhering to Islamic practices, revering the elderly among them and upholding to the community spirit. This situation denotes that the Malays were supportive of cultural changes that do not violate their understanding of Islamic practices. This finding supports the works of scholars on Malay culture (see Wilder, 1982; Sardar, 2000) which spell out the intricate relationship of the Malays with Islam and their fervour with *Adat Melayu*. Similarly, the Indians were also appreciative of the practices of their forefathers such as the religious rituals of marriage and praying. However, there were not many among the Chinese participants who were supportive

of the past traditions which most of them thought were not suited to the needs of the modern times.

Going back to the position taken by the Malay Muslim participants, most of them rejected traditional practices that originated from sources other than Islam. The reason given was that the said practices were against Islam and must therefore be kept away. Since Malay traditions are closely linked with Islam, and Malays being inquisitive and pragmatic Muslims (Wilder, 1982), cultural change in the vein of what they understand as “true Islamic teachings” are welcomed.

A young Malay technician touched on the age old practices of the *jampi serapah* and *bersanding* in a marriage ceremony which were slowly being discarded because these practices were now considered to be contrary to Islamic teachings.

We Malays, are very close to the religious aspects. We have actually learnt a lot. We use to practice *jampi serapah* but nowadays a lot of these practices are no longer popular. Another example is the practice of *bersanding* which is slowly fading out. These are some of the practices considered to be contrary to Islamic teachings which are slowly fading away because a lot of Muslims are beginning to see that they are not actually Islamic in spirit. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Young Single Male Technician {2})

Another participant, an urban Malay was unconditional in his belief that only traditional values that do not contradict the Muslim religion should be kept.

For Malays, traditional values are important. Take a marriage ceremony, what's most important is the *akad nikah*, and in Islam, there is no mention that we have to have a *bersanding* ceremony because it is a practice inherited before the coming of Islam. I feel it is important for us to understand our history, where we come from. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Professional Footballer)

As for the provincial Malay participant quoted below, besides feeling frustrated that today's youths no longer took heed of their parents' instructions, he felt distressed that the traditional practice of praying at regular times are taken lightly. And to add more insult to injury, he seemed helpless about this situation.

In my father's time, when we play football, everyone will stop playing once it gets dark. We dare not stay on the field because our parents will go after us. Today is different, youths now are not scared of their parents. They don't even respect the

azan, they keep playing on the field. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

In respect of the tradition of regular prayer rituals, an Indian research assistant quoted below noted that a key element that identified his origin as an Indian was the customary practice of praying and he felt sorry that it is slowly diminishing.

For an Indian like me, traditional values mean praying, going to the temple and practicing the other religious rituals that define yourself and your race. I think these values are fading away as generations continue. For instance, I don't follow everything that my parents practice and my children do not follow everything that I practice. I think we cannot avoid this, it is sad but it is part of the social process. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

Another participant who was a provincial Indian teacher explained that many of the intricate religiously inclined marriage practices which she cherishes, had already been simplified.

Where the Hindu customs are concerned, marriage customs in those days were more elaborate because people were more particular but today they are quite open and flexible, they are willing to let go. For example, those days the bridegroom is supposed to get the bridal *sari* for the bride so the bride is not supposed to see the *sari* until the wedding day but today the bride chooses the *sari* herself. It is being modified. I think some traditions are just ignored and I think this is not so good. I still belong to the old group who disagree with the practices of some young people who goes to the extreme of staying together. This kind of practice goes against religious rights. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

Although the Chinese wedding culture may be less slanted to religious influence compared to the Malay and Indian cultures, an urban Chinese lower middle class lady who was originally from a small provincial town believed that it should be maintained for the sake of her ethnic identity.

In the place where I am, in Sarikei, Sarawak, these values that have been passed down by earlier generations are still being practiced. For example during the *Chinese New Year*, the lion dance is still being performed. Wedding ceremonies still follow the tradition and I feel this is good because it reminds us of our origins. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Being long time residents of small towns and villages, middle class participants in the provincial areas experienced a slower infiltration of the “new culture” compared to their urban counterparts. As such, most were very sentimental with their cultural

heritage which some among them are still practicing. The following young technician supported the preservation of well-mannered values close to the Malays such as being courteous which have been accepted as universally good values.

Although I do not know much about this cultural thing, there's nothing wrong in preserving values like, being polite, respectful to the elderly and other good values.

However, like most Malay participants, he rejected some traditions that were passed down by the earlier generations that were considered outdated and against the Islamic beliefs.

Some are not good, for example for pregnant women, the practice of *lenggang perut* is an old tradition that is not in line with Islamic beliefs and those who practice could end up becoming apostates. Another controversial practice is the *kuda kepang* dance which involves the use of *mantera* by soothsayers. This practice is considered against the Muslim religion and is *syirik* because of the use of *mantera* to get help from the genies. What is good about this dance is its artistic aspects and this should be preserved but what should not be practiced is the *mantera*. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

On the attitudes and behaviours of today's youths who were less respectful of their elderly, a young provincial lower middle class Malay man felt that youths today lack the will to adapt to situations. However, he did not offer solutions. Instead, he lamented on this problem.

I think we are losing the impact of traditions, the culture of respect that has been with us. The youngsters today are too rebellious, they don't seem to adapt well to situations.

In my case, I'll always show respect for people older than me but at the same time, I can also joke around with them. What is important is that the young now should be more well-behaved. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

To an urban Malay managing director of a construction firm, the Malay identity of showing respect to parents and the elderly is a necessity.

I am of the opinion that traditional values, like respecting elders should be preserved. I like it when my son kisses my cheek whenever he wants to leave the house. To me, this show of respect is very important.

In relating his experiences, he confessed that the way he behaved with his parents and the elderly was so much more polite, filial and well-mannered than how his own children would treat him and the elderly. He blamed the latest technology and the new media for this deterioration in cultural values.

The values my parents passed on to me are still with me. For example, when we want to eat dinner at home, we must first make sure everyone in the family sits together. As a parent, I try to instill the old values to my children. When my friends come to the house I'd try to get my children to shake hands with them.

I would say the traditional values are deteriorating. Youths now are so preoccupied with internet and hand phones. The traditional values we have are all good values but are not practiced now. When we go to a restaurant, we hardly find anyone offering a chair to an elderly person or a pregnant woman for instance.

In those days, before we leave the house to go somewhere, we tell our parents where we are going. But this is not happening with my children. I am not worried about why they don't tell me, I'm more worried about their safety. It makes a lot of difference if I know where they go to. Those days are very different from now. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

The participant cited below was apologetic because although some old values like giving respect to the elderly are still being practiced in the villages and small towns, the same is not quite true in the urban areas. To him, because of the Western influence, there may be nothing left for Malaysians to be proud of.

There are some differences between the rural and urban population. In urban areas, traditional values are fading away but in rural areas, we can still find some of these values being practiced. Youths in town don't respect elders anymore partly because there's no community spirit in towns where for instance the older folks could invite youths to the *surau*.

Another factor could be due to the influence of the "yellow culture" from the West. To me, this is sad because the society will eventually lose because some of the old values are positive values that could help the society to be better. If we lose these values, we will lose our own image and identity. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

A Chinese associate professor believed that although one may not agree with his or her parents, the act of respect for the elderly is a very important practice and this she said, is not adhered to by the younger generation today.

In my time, if my mother refuses to give me what I want, I will not argue and just accept her decision. The new generation is different. If I tell my adopted son he

cannot have what he wants, he'll argue and tell me he wants it because all of his friends have it. I can still remember when I was young I was not allowed to wear a black dress and I still follow this rule until now because my mother is still around. I am doing this out of respect for her, not so much because I believe black brings bad luck. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor {1})

Another lifestyle ingredient considered as an essential culture that would bring benefit to the community is the Malay concept of community work. A technical assistant in the provincial town expressed regret that the concept of *rewang* which has been synonymous with the Malay tradition no longer holds true in some places because of the negative attitudes of the youths towards this tradition.

The practice of *rewang* for marriage ceremonies is slowly fading away because the youths are not interested to come together as they are more interested in enjoying themselves somewhere else. It's difficult to get them back, what is left are only the elderly neighbours. If we don't find ways to get back the youths, we may not be able to get them again. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

As for a provincial Indian cited below, he seemed more inclined towards some old Indian traditions of chasing ghosts. .

In those days, Indians use a mixture of herbs and certain plants as part of a ritual to chase ghosts but these days they are not really serious about it. I feel it is good to preserve the old values. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

In all, the general consensus among the Malay and Indian middle class participants is that it is important to preserve the traditional practices because it is assumed that what had been passed down were mostly good values.

We must maintain our old traditional values because it comes from our fore fathers. They are good values for our own understanding. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

We must continue the tradition our forefathers have created for the generations after them and these are generally good values. What is good, most likely is due to their own experiences like, when the Malays shake hands, they put the other hand on the head as a symbol of respect but the Westerners do not do this because they do not see the need for it. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Malay Male Customer Service Officer)

6.2.3 Impact of the Changing Lifestyle of Malaysians

Like the earlier issues covered on Malaysian traditional practices, the subject of lifestyle changes which is a current phenomenon among Malaysia's middle class community sparked a lot of interest. There were varied responses from participants representing all the sub-segments of the middle class population.

On the whole, participants of all social levels and locality were unanimous that changes in lifestyle were inevitable and many indicated that a cultural mix of the "positive" Western and Eastern values that would be of benefit to the local population is a possible solution. In this regard, most of the older cluster of the middle class participants were apprehensive with the infiltration of "negative" Western values into the culture of the local population. Among the implications of this lifestyle change that were noted by them include strains and break up in family relationships. Also, among Malays in particular, Western culture was blamed for the "decline" in religious (read: Islamic) values and practices among the youths.

Nevertheless, there were quite a number among the younger set of the Chinese middle class sub-group who believed that some traditional values that would not bring any benefit to the next generation should be discarded. They indicated that the old practices were conservative, stifling, overly religious and wasteful and would therefore not go well with today's "progressive" lifestyle. One possible reason for this trend could be due to the fact that besides being a very irreligious group (DeBernardi, 2004), the Chinese ethnic group were also known to traditionally dominate the Malaysian economy (ibid) compared to their Malay and Indian counterparts. As such, any customs or practices that would not bring monetary gains were considered economically wasteful. Since the young Chinese middle class sub-group seemed quite vocal and expressive on the issue of lifestyle change, this phenomenon could be interpreted as a possible manifestation of a generational divide among the older and young Chinese middle class clusters.

According to the Malay participant cited below, with the continuous change in lifestyle nowadays, it was very challenging for parents to discipline their children. He

believed parents should pick the best values from the West and merge with the good aspects of Malaysian values so that they get the best of both worlds.

I think it is quite confusing. In the past, we were raised with the old values which can be good and what the parent says is final. But there are also some old values that do not make sense. We were raised with fears and a lot of taboos that restrict our creativity and these should be removed. There is also another paradox that kids today are brighter and more exposed and open but with this are other negative Western influences like moral decadence and such things and this is also a problem. I think we should discipline our kids in a manner that is acceptable to our culture. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

Another middle class parent, an Indian senior social welfare officer was convinced that in terms of the pace of change in lifestyle, the big cities were very much ahead of the smaller towns. In the cities, the changes were more dominant as people were less community-oriented as in the smaller towns.

I think it depends on where you come from. For instance *Kajang* is a safer place than *Bangsar* which is like a totally new world to me. Last Saturday, I went to *Bangsar* and I was wondering whether I am in Malaysia or somewhere else because the lifestyle portrayed by the youths, the way they dress and behave are not like Malaysians. In *Kajang*, this kind of influence is not seen yet.

If it is a small town, people know who the parents of the kid is. If the youngster does something not right, the neighbour will inform the parent because people know one another. In *KL* and bigger towns, this is not practiced anymore, we become individualistic, we do not know each other. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

The remarks from the following student counsellors, a Malay university lecturer and a Chinese school teacher show that parents today spend less time with their children. In their experiences when counselling delinquent students, they inferred that parents of these students seldom meet and communicate with their children.

Part of my job is to supervise university students conducting practical research on delinquent students in schools. We discovered that what is happening in Malaysia now is quite alarming. These problem students are not happy with their parents. I think they have valid reasons because parents spend a lot of time outside the house. They are too busy with work and they take some time on the road to reach home because of the traffic jams. Most parents are not fit to be parents because they are not disciplined. Due to stress and pressure, they become very harsh with the children. There have been cases of children attempting suicide, taking ecstasy pills or something of that sort. This phenomenon is on the rise among Indians. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {3})

As a school counsellor, I have been involved in many cases like this. The children express their dissatisfactions towards their families. Actually they need a lot of counselling. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

To the businesswoman quoted below, the neglect of the family spirit among the younger generation was due to the fault of parents who did not monitor their children well.

The old values of family togetherness are disappearing and parents should be blamed for this because they are not persistent in keeping to these values. In the earlier days, it is easier to follow because there is less exposure to foreign elements. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

Besides the challenge of parenting as an after effect of change in lifestyle among Malaysians, religious and moral aspects were other issues close to the heart of the middle class participants, particularly among the Malays. The influence of Western films and Western attire were the two factors mentioned by the *folk urbanite* quoted below.

The change in culture happens because there are people who bring these values here and these influences are not religious in nature. They come from foreign films and the dressing attire brought back by Malaysian students studying in Western countries. Furthermore, most Malaysians like to follow others without thinking. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

Comments on the changing Malaysian lifestyles from the provincial Malay middle class sub-group were mainly confined to social and moral aspects including their interpretation of “indecent attire” and “free intermingling” of the differing genders and cases of illicit sex which were generally blamed on the negative influence of the West.

I believe what we are talking about relates to something that is endangering Malaysian citizens. On the social front, there has been a sharp increase in rape cases, drug abuse and other social ills. The statistics on these cases show that Malaysia is moving towards a lifestyle that is alien to the eastern culture. This situation is a weakness of the easterners too. If we go back to the 70s, we had the hippy lifestyle from England, in the 80s we were exposed to the rock culture from America and now we have hip hop. These influences show the weaknesses of the Malays who allow themselves to be influenced to a culture easily, without any restrictions or without making comparisons on what aspects can be absorbed and what aspects should be discarded. (Provincial Upper Middle Class - Young Single Female Malay Computer Programmer)

In the context of living in Malaysia, be it in the villages or in towns we are now seeing a lifestyle that is so alien. In the aspect of socialising, we are seeing a new culture emerging even in the remote areas. Indirectly, this new lifestyle is creeping alongside the concept of the borderless world brought in by the Western world. Undoubtedly, this is an agenda of the West to destroy the identity of the Malays because to them this is the only way to colonise the minds of the locals. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

I share the same opinion. We will notice that there have been a lot of changes among Malaysians now, they are very exposed. They travel outside the country for vacations because they have more spending power today. Because the government wants Malaysians to spend inside the country, the *Cuti-Cuti Malaysia* campaign was launched. The sad thing today is that we have embraced a new culture, we hear cases of wife swapping, the sad case about *Norita* who had multiple sexual intercourse with a number of men and was later brutally murdered. We have such things as living together before getting married. Those having families seldom eat at home with the family anymore because of the busy lifestyle. This is the new Malay culture that is very worrying. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

To an upper level provincial Malay man cited below, what has been happening among the urban Malay society today was very upsetting as their precious cultural values are diminishing. According to him, they have disregarded their own language and have lost their polite and soft spoken character. He added that the daring act of young urban Malays today hugging someone from the opposite sex in public was never heard of before. Besides this, the spirit of neighbourliness which had been the pride of the Malays is also no longer the norm in the urban areas.

The Malays are no longer polite as before. Just look at the television ad on “Kopi Cap Kapal Api”. It does not make sense at all for the wife to spill coffee on the husband’s face and the husband falls on the floor because of that. I feel the ad should be banned from the airwaves. If we watch the entertainment reality programme, *Akademi Fantasia*, when one of the participants is taken off because he or she does not qualify, then he or she will be hugging the rest of the participants, is this Malay culture? This kind of act has gone beyond limits.

And in the villages today, we are fortunate to still know who our neighbours are but this is not so in towns and cities. Sometimes they only bump into one another at shopping complexes and realize later that they are next door neighbours. In terms of communication, Malays refuse to speak the Malay language. Even if Malay is spoken, it will be interspersed with English words. Even when singing, the diction is wrong, they use a mixture of English and Malay. In terms of religious practice, what the Malays inherit now are practices that are passed down. They take Islam lightly, they celebrate *Hari Raya* without fasting during *Ramadan*. Actually, what is depicted in the TV programme “Misteri Nusantara” signifies the Malays. The Malays are actually lagging behind in many areas.

The pride of the Malays is the *gotong royong*, a spirit of cooperation, but this practice can only be found in villages during ceremonies and feasts wherein one week before the event, everyone is given a responsibility to handle. However, in towns and cities this does not happen since catering service is the choice. This practice will eventually lead to the cultural death of the Malays. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

In contrast to the thoughts of the older participants, in particular the Malays, most young Chinese participants, urban and provincial, seemed more inclined to discard some old values that they believed were no longer suited to modern times. The following urban young Chinese school counsellor who emphasised on the importance of technology showed very little sentiments towards the old traditions.

I believe some traditional values are outdated and has to be changed to suit the needs of the changing times. If we want to wash clothes, we cannot be using our hands anymore because we can use the technology of the washing machine. Also, we now have electric stoves and we do not need the firewood anymore as we are living in the 21st century. In my family, as we become more educated, we are slowly doing away with the traditional values, we have adopted modern values.

Furthermore, her support for Western style wedding reiterated her belief.

Among some urban people, the practice of having weddings in hotels using Western costumes is done to save time and follow with the times. Being urbanites, they are too busy to delve into the do's and don'ts in traditional culture. Their main concern is for the bride and bridegroom to be happy. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

To the following young urban affluent Chinese man, although some of the old values may still be relevant today and have been modified accordingly, one cannot be too sentimental because changes are inevitable.

Certain values are being modified. For instance, although we still greet one another but we do it differently now. To me, this is alright as we must move on. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

A young Malay participant echoed his sentiments.

It depends on the specific values. The good moral values should be preserved but if these values are ignored, we cannot be sad and do nothing. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

But a subsequent member of the urban young affluent offered a stronger viewpoint. She felt that some of the past cultures practiced in the earlier generations were not making the new generation to be better people. Therefore, it is a relief that these practices, such as those that discriminate against women are slowly disappearing.

There are a lot of customs like the elaborate rituals in marriage ceremonies which are pointless. Also, there were a lot of restrictions against what a female could do. There need to be some liberalisation on how we should be brought up. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Chinese Video Editor)

Another Chinese participant cited below preferred to be practical and economical. She indicated that sometimes one need to be realistic in this modern times by not following some of the old practices which tend to be financially wasteful.

Sometimes it is not good to be conservative. In a Chinese wedding, if we adhere to traditions we have to spend a lot of money and time but if we follow the modern way, minus all the old rituals, we can save a lot of money and time. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Teacher {7})

To an older Chinese businessman, some values that help foster relationships among Malaysians are worth keeping but some superstitious ones are better off abolished.

Some values are good but some are bad. The good ones like presenting oranges to guests during the New Year should be maintained but the negative ones like offering gifts to the gods for good luck and wealth does not make sense anymore. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Chinese Businessman {6})

An Indian associate professor summed up the thinking of the older middle class community in the urban areas.

We should adapt to changing situations but there should be control. Some old values should be modified to suit the needs of the times. We need to adopt changes that can benefit us but those that could destroy us, we should be weary of them. For instance, I keep to my practice of visiting my parents at least once a fortnight but I have also long abandoned the old practices of keeping small figurines in the house to ward off evil spirits. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

In relation to the remarks above, an urban older lower middle class Chinese tutor, is of the opinion that it is important for Malaysians to be rational when making a choice on values relating to their social life because he contended that not everything local is good and not everything Western is bad.

I personally believe that we should not equate traditional values with good values. If we believe it is good, we keep it, if it is not good, do away with it. At the same time we should not worship modern values as well but we should be able to analyse and use our rational mind to choose what is good for us. Just because the West is more advanced does not mean that we should look up on them in every way.

At the same time, the changing lifestyle from traditional to modern is a social construct, so sometimes it is not fair to blame people from becoming individualistic. Also, it is just a perception that being traditional in outlook is being conservative or negative, something that can suppress a person from being what he wants to be. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

6.2.4 Cultural Similarities Among Malays, Chinese and Indians

In the main, most of Malaysia's middle class community, young and older, urban and provincial, cutting across gender, marital status and social levels were of the opinion that noble Malaysian values are customs and practices that could lead to better understanding and interactions amongst the three major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians. Regardless of the fact that this notion of a harmonious multi-ethnic community may be an exaggerated expression, participants seemed to show determination to uphold the values of mutual respect, tolerance and compromise.

The following remarks from three participants representing each ethnic group of the young middle level middle class sub-group show that they were united in their thoughts. From the statements below, it is clear that a compromised cultural value that is acceptable by all the races is what they considered as good Malaysian values.

We realize that Malaysia is multi-ethnic, so to develop a race that will be an important base for our society, it is not wrong to take the good values inherent in each ethnic group to nurture a Malaysian society. We must take values that are considered good and suitable for all ethnic groups in Malaysia, we cannot take values that are only good for one ethnic group only. For instance, a certain value may be good for the Malays but considered unsuitable for the Chinese. Practices that may lead to unnecessary controversy cannot be used to promote Malaysian values. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Malay Male Customer Service Officer)

To me, the best value acceptable to all ethnic groups is the value which Malaysians can compromise with one another in all aspects including economic and political aspects. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Chinese Female Sales Executive).

All aspects of the culture among all ethnic groups that are considered good and suitable to each and every ethnic group should be incorporated into one to make a

Malaysian culture.(Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class - Married Indian Male Self-employed)

As a matter of fact, all the major ethnic groups were in unison in their viewpoints regarding their similarities particularly in the aspect of cultural values. In other words, the middle class community in Malaysia of all ethnic groups took pride in sharing a lot of similarities with regard to their social life and the spirit of harmony among themselves.

It is quite fascinating that most of the young middle class sub-group in the urban and provincial areas from all the three social levels namely lower, middle and upper middle class gave very similar views. They referred the characteristics of Malaysians of all races as hospitable, respectful, compromising, peace loving and tolerant citizens. In my opinion, such responses illustrate that despite having different cultural and religious backgrounds, Malaysian youths recognised the importance of separating personal beliefs and values with the practical aspect of living together with people who do not share the same principles and philosophy. This is not quite the case with some other culturally diverse countries such as Australia where ethnic diversity is occasionally observed as a hazard to national integration (Jones, 1997).

The following are comments from the multi-ethnic urban young lower middle class sub-group which reflected the perception of the three different ethnic groups.

One obvious characteristic is tolerance. They are willing to compromise with one another. In my case, during *Ramadan* I don't drink or eat in front of my Muslim friends. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Human Resource Executive)

As a multiracial nation, we respect each other. We are also hospitable people. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

Every race is unique and practice their own culture. We can tolerate one another. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Indian Recruitment Officer {2})

The following Chinese participants touched on the common use of *Bahasa Melayu* as a language of unity for Malaysians of all races.

Everyone can speak Malay and this is a good tool that can assimilate the races together, regardless of backgrounds. Because *Bahasa Melayu* is an easy language to learn I believe language can break all barriers and can be used as a language to unite the races together. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor).

The three major races can mix well and speak the same language. They understand one another although they have different cultural backgrounds. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Likewise, most members of the urban young middle level middle class sub-group spoke on the similarities of having a common goal of living together in peace where every ethnic group could tolerate and respect one another's culture.

We can still live together, we understand one another's beliefs and learn to compromise and if there are differences, we can overcome these differences ourselves. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Malay Male Customer Service Officer)

We can still live peacefully in a plural society with various cultures. This shows that understanding one another's culture is important to everyone. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Professional Footballer)

The following young urban affluent and subsequent provincial middle class participants echoed similar opinions.

All of them want to be good citizens. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

It's the spirit of cooperation. Like in hospitals, we have all races. Regardless of races, it is important for us to help one another. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

When there is festive celebrations like *Hari Raya*, we can see harmony among the races. (Provincial Upper Middle Class – Young Single Female Malay Computer Programmer)

The opinions and comments of the younger set of Malaysia's middle class community were also shared by some of their older counterparts. As can be seen, the following viewpoints relating to the experiences of the urban older lower middle class participants revolved around the aspects of respect, tolerance and hospitality as essentially shared cultural values of the major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians.

In the housing area where I am staying, I am happy to note that the practice of tolerance and respect among the different races is an everyday thing. We greet one another when we meet. I believe education is a major factor that binds the various races. What I mean is, when one is educated he tends to be more understanding and tolerant. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

Respect for one another has been Malaysia's trademark for a long time. What I am happy about now is that, in the place where I am staying, neighbours of different races and religions can mix very well, and the younger generation show respect for the elderly. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {2})

Malaysia is a unique country, it's a paradise compared to many other countries. I've worked in Saudi Arabia before, over there during *Ramadan*, when you are in public places you have to fast even though you are not a Muslim. If you want to eat or drink, you'll have to hide in your house because if you are caught, you'll be in trouble, you may be caned. Also during prayer times, you'll have to follow the Muslims and pray. If you are found not practicing it, you will be taken for questioning by the police force. This situation does not happen in Malaysia and we should keep it this way. And one trademark of Malaysians that I notice is that they are hospitable and have respect for each other, regardless of their racial backgrounds. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Social Worker)

To the following *folk urbanite* man, the respect shown amongst Malaysians of all races is the key that bridges them, leading them to have high tolerance among one another.

Compared to a lot of other societies, the degree of tolerance in our society is much higher. We are willing to give and take. It begins with the core value, that is respect for one another. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Members of the urban older affluent sub-group observed similarities among the ethnic groups on the physical aspects. They reasoned that the three major races of Malays, Chinese and Indians were actually practicing the values of tolerance and respect by intermingling with one another as part of being Malaysians.

Integration of the three races is on the positive side. It is a common practice among the three races is to drink *teh tarik*, eat *nasi kandar* and drive the National car *Proton*. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

It is common to see the young urban Malaysians, the Chinese, Malays and Indians at shopping complexes drinking coffee at "Coffee Bean" outlets. They are sharing the same happening and are progressing at the same level. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

In terms of values, they are the same as they can adapt well with one another. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

Comments from older members representing the three major races of the provincial middle class cluster were also concurrent with the above.

Although our society comprises Indians, Malays and Chinese, we refer to them as Malaysians to portray unity and harmony, in line with the spirit of *Malaysia Boleh*. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

Unity among the various races, living in peace and can work together, tolerant of one another. Every ethnic group respects one another's culture. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Each ethnic group can tolerate each other. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

Additionally, an older Indian provincial middle class man observed that the Indians and Malays share many common cultural heritage.

There are a lot of similarities among Indians and Malays in terms of their cultural life. For instance, you can trace this in the practice of *berinai* and *bersanding* in weddings. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

The subsequent provincial middle class Indian and Chinese participants respectively, noticed the similarities of the Malaysian ethnics in terms of the food they consume.

They eat the same food. You can see Chinese and Indians in Malay restaurants and vice versa. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

They eat the same food except that Malays only eat *halal* food at Chinese or Indian restaurants. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Beyond food, an urban middle level middle class man claimed that language, costume and the same television programmes watched are the other factors that depict the similarities in the way of life of Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The similarities are in terms of food, costume, and the same TV programmes they watch. Nowadays, even Malays watch Chinese serials on TV. These factors show that Malaysians have learnt to compromise and tolerate one another because they believe that this is the best way to live in peace. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {3})

Among the young, two Chinese female participants from the lower middle class subgroup, like their Malay and Indian counterparts treasure harmony and the Eastern culture. To them these aspects were good Malaysian values.

There is racial harmony wherein the three major ethnic groups can live together peacefully which other countries do not enjoy. Malaysians are respectful people and still retain the old Eastern values. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

We mix well socially. But there is a slight difference between urban and rural areas. We are much friendlier with one another in the rural areas and it is safer to live in the rural areas. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

A substantial number of the middle class participants from all social levels and ethnic groups liken Malaysian culture with the unique Malaysian way of celebrating the various religious festivals whereby all the major races are together when celebrating the *Hari Raya* (Eid) festival, Christmas celebration, the *Deepavali* (Diwali) and the *Chinese New Year* festivities. Besides this, the various races were also comfortable in each other's ethnic costumes.

We all celebrate the religious festivals like *Hari Raya*, *Deepavali*, *Chinese New Year* and Christmas together, regardless of whether we are Malays, Indians or Chinese. This is Malaysian culture. In terms of dressing, you can now see Malay women wearing the Indian *sari*, Chinese wearing *baju kurung* and so on. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

During *Hari Raya*, we assimilate the Chinese culture of giving *ang pow* and burning *firecrackers* into the Malay culture. The Malaysian spirit is important, if there's a badminton match between Malaysia and China, I support Malaysia because I'm a Malaysian although I am Chinese in race. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

Kongsi Raya, *Deeparaya* and Christmas celebrations that the government organise annually is a form of Malaysian culture. Besides this, there are open houses where every ethnic group celebrates. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

As evident from the comments above, because of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Malaysian population, although religious and cultural festivals are celebrated together, each major ethnic group of Malays, Chinese and Indians is starkly distinguishable in terms of their cultural practices.

As one of its many efforts to encourage integration among the major ethnic groups, the Malaysian government has embarked on the concept of combining the national schools with vernacular schools (Indian and Chinese language schools) into one integrated school system comprising Malay pupils from the Malay dominated national schools with Chinese and Indian pupils from their own vernacular schools. This concept has obviously received the support of a provincial upper middle class Malay businessman who reckoned that it was a good way to inculcate Malaysian culture among the ethnic groups.

The Malaysian culture is a combination of the cultures of the three major ethnic groups we have. In implementing the Malaysian culture, there are still a lot of gaps that need to be filled up, for instance we need to integrate the vernacular schools into one. This is what our leaders are working on so that a Malaysian culture can be conceived. By integrating the three vernacular schools together but at the same time preserve the cultural identity of each ethnic group, every ethnic group in the country can eventually refer to themselves as Malaysians. I believe this can happen because every ethnic group is inclined towards peace and harmony. Lately, we notice that a lot of foreign tourists like to visit Malaysia because of its uniqueness in that these tourists can treat Malaysia as their own country. Compared to their own countries, Malaysia is harmonious. This is our strength and for this reason, we are a role model to other countries. (Older Provincial Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

As the Malaysian culture evolves, intermingling of the major ethnic groups become more pronounced especially among the young as they become more tolerant with each other. A comment by a veteran journalist below shows that the developments towards this phenomenon is occurring in the urban centres.

I believe in ten years we'll be looking at the Malaysian race, the trend among young urban Malaysians now is intermarriage, we can all mix very well. Talking about religious festivals, I can actually go to my Chinese friend's house and take the food prepared without any worries because I am assured they are *halal*, meaning we have learnt about each other's religion very well. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

6.2.5 Affluent Lifestyle: Ownership of Luxury Cars

Comments and viewpoints were solicited from the participants on the issue of ownership of luxury cars. The objective was to probe the extent of their perception of an affluent lifestyle which equates with the importance of status in social life. As noted by Pinches (1999), to most of Asia's middle class community, a car is an

important indicator of a person's affluence. Relating specifically to Malaysia's middle class group, Rokiah (2000: 21) emphasises that driving and owning a Mercedes Benz or any other luxury car with the subtle aim of portraying one's status is a common trait of the middle class individual in Malaysia. Participants were asked on their opinion of people who drive BMW, Mercedes Benz and other luxury cars. A question was then posed whether they were interested to own one of the cars.

On the whole, the findings from this study show that the participants perceived owners of luxury cars as having a high status in society. To most of them, having high status in society is tantamount to having money and being successful in life. Although some of the older participants did not see the need to own a Mercedes Benz or a BMW, most of the young middle class cluster, particularly the Malays expressed their desire to acquire one of the cars if they had the financial resources.

A self-employed Indian middle class man was of the opinion that owning a luxury car was important because it would provide an opportunity for the person to move further in life.

It is an advertisement for the personal development of the owner. It's the truth. Everyone wants to upgrade themselves. Normally people in politics and businessmen drive luxury cars. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Self-employed {3})

The following participants, an older Malay and a young Chinese both from the lower middle class sub-group felt inspired to be successful when referring to owners of luxury cars.

The owners of these cars are high-achievers and this gives me more motivation to achieve. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

I am impressed with them and they motivate me to own the same type of car. The car represents the status of the person. Since I want to be in business, the perception of status is important to be successful. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Among the Malay middle class participants in the provincial areas, luxury car owners were associated with wealth and high status. Although they were aware that these cars

were beyond their means, most of them showed interest to own either a Mercedes Benz or a BMW.

To a provincial technician below, only people with a certain lifestyle and a certain amount of money could afford these cars.

People who drive these cars have a high standard of living. In fact, these luxury cars are meant for them. They may be businessmen and people with high income. If ever a person with a lower income drives one of these cars, he must have additional incomes from other sources. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

Another provincial middle class man emphasised that Malays ought to feel dignified to see other Malays driving luxury cars because it only shows that they too could be as successful as the Chinese and Indians.

To me, Malays who drive luxury cars are considered successful. The luxury cars driven symbolise affluence. I am proud of these Malays because most of these cars are driven by non-Malays. I believe in the maxim, “Majulah Bangsa Majulah Negara” (literally: *A race develops together with the nation*) (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

The participant below, also a provincial middle class Malay man remarked that owners of these cars use them because of the status that come with the brand name.

This is about status. Sometimes these cars do not belong to the rich alone. Some people buy these expensive imported cars for the sake of style. They may be running just a small business but just because status is so important to them, they are willing to borrow beyond their means. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {1})

A young provincial participant concurred with him and he too admitted that for the sake of status, he would like to own a luxury car.

It has to do with the personality of the individual. If he drives a BMW, he is educated, holding a high position in the corporate sector. If I have the money, I’d definitely own one. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

Among the urban segment, a young upper middle class lady who worked at a local car manufacturing plant associated car ownership with a person’s standard of living. To her, owners of certain luxury cars are high achievers.

We're talking on lifestyle here. BMW is associated with success, a form of symbolism although definitely some people may think that other cars, like Alfa Romeo also symbolises success. I think cars in general is about symbolism. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Malay Female Business Development Executive)

The following members of the urban older affluent sub-group indicated that owners of these cars belong to a certain class in society.

Because these are not Malaysian cars but are expensive imported cars, the owners must be at the higher end of society. These cars are prestigious, the owners exude confidence, they have good taste. I'd like to own the car one day. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

I think they have taste, it speaks for their income status. They may not have a lot of money but they have taste. It also tells me that to own the car, you are in a certain bracket of the society. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

On the contrary, complementary opinions on this subject from two older *folk urbanites* were quite poles apart from the opinions above. This difference in their opinion could be because they have already achieved their dream of owning the luxury cars.

Actually the BMW that I am driving is not the one I actually dream of. To tell you the truth, I bought it by default. I was looking for a good car, suddenly there's a good opportunity to buy it because of an offer that I cannot resist. So I bought it and am very happy with it. I don't deny that BMW is a good comfortable car. So, if anyone has the means they can choose whatever car they like. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

Basically, I have overcome the phase of bothering what car a person drives. I have passed that certain stage in life. When I was studying I told myself by the time I am 30, I want to own a BMW. I have achieved that dream. I had a BMW, a Range Rover and a Mercedes Benz. I have now reached 40 years old and I am not bothered about cars anymore. So long as I can get from point A to point B comfortably, safely and reliably, I am happy. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

However, a comment from another *folk urbanite*, a young lecturer, was typical of many young middle class individual who dream of becoming the proud owner of one of the luxury cars.

To me if we work hard and can afford it, there's no problem because this is the result of hard work. Sometimes when you are in a big company, you have to take care of

your status and image. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Opinions and comments from the rest of the participants were slightly different. For instance, although many among the older members of the urban middle level middle class sub-segment showed interest in the luxury cars, they were not keen to own them. Instead they preferred to use their extra money for other investments.

No there's no need for me to show my status, I'll use the money for something better. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

It shows they are successful, it is a means of enhancing their image. Whether the money they get to buy the car is legal or not is another issue. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

For the provincial Chinese and Indian middle class participants below, their opinions were contradictory compared to their Malay counterparts in the same provincial areas. While believing that ownership of a luxury car was not a big issue for as long as the person could afford it, they did not see a need to own the car and portray their status.

Not necessarily only rich people can afford them, even our school teachers can drive these luxury cars but it is not necessary for me to join them. May be they buy these cars because they want to show off. Second hand cars are much more cheaper. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

It is not a necessity, it is better to buy a local car which is much cheaper. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

Their opinions were in line with the following urban Chinese participants from the lower and upper levels respectively.

I will not go for these cars even if I am in business because I think it is a waste of money. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

It's not extraordinary. I know of a lot of people who can afford a BMW but it's a choice they have to make, whether they want to live on credit for 10 years or not. At the same time, there are also those who can afford it but prefer to drive the *Proton* and have more liquidity in the bank. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor {1})

6.3 Perceptions Towards Western Cultural Values

The opinions and viewpoints in this part are confined to aspects of the Western lifestyle that the participants were familiar with as these elements have been adopted by most of Malaysia's middle class community. Eating in fast food outlets for instance had been a common practice ever since the past decade. The participants' reactions towards a Malaysian who had studied in the West and as a result, adopts an American or British speaking accent is also a popular topic of discussion. In addition, the more general subjects on lifestyle adjustment and Western way of life are issues that seldom escape the media spotlights in Malaysia.

6.3.1 Malaysian Eating Habits: Eating Out at American Fast Food Outlets

On the subject of eating out at American quick service restaurants or fast food outlets like Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds or Pizza Hut, in the main Malaysia's middle class segment, regardless of their social status, age, ethnic group or geographic location, have indirectly absorbed this new way of life. Various justifications were put across for this change in lifestyle. Among them was constant pressure from their children who were normally influenced by frequent advertisements on the product. Hectic urban living was also a popular reason given. And interestingly, many had also accepted that this activity of eating out at the outlets together with the family has become part of the Malaysian culture.

Since going to American fast food outlets saves time and have been accepted as a way of life for the middle class person, it is automatically thought as suitable for the busy urban middle class group.

It's the busy urban life that makes people eat out. In my case, when I come back home I am too tired to cook, so on the way back I'll stop by at one of the fast food restaurants to take away snacks or something like that. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

People now are busy with work, so eating at fast food outlets is the best solution. Also, they are influenced by fast food ads on television. (Young Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Although these fast food outlets did not exist in the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor*, two of its middle class residents believed that the KFC, Pizza Hut and McDonalds outlets attract a lot of Malaysians because of the convenience and delectable meals that were offered.

It is fast food, so when you don't have time, you go for fast food. In places like *Kuala Selangor* you don't have KFC or Pizza Hut. So I think it depends on the community where you live. If you are the kind of people who is living a hectic life, fast food is necessary but people here go there only once in a while. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

People like to eat there because these places provide light food, no rice and other heavy stuff. The food stalls on the roadside do not provide quality food. Compared to the burger at these food stalls which offer only nine herbs, KFC burger has 30 herbs. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Single Malay Male Health Assistant).

It must be noted that from the various responses given, the mention of children as a push factor for frequenting the fast food outlets dominated many of the discussions among married participants with children. The comments below that relate to children as one of the factors are indicative of the impact of children's influence on parents to make family consumption decisions. Interestingly, these comments support the findings of a doctoral dissertation by Bao (2001). The study also concluded that the effects of family socialisation and power structure on children's choice of influence strategy and subsequent relative influence vary with product type decisions. In addition, the results of another study by Middleton et al. (1997) also correlates with the viewpoints of the participants on the children's "pester power" towards the consumption decisions of their parents. This study whose respondents were mothers of British children and their children, revealed that a large percentage of mothers frequently or occasionally go without possessions or activities so as to provide things for their children.

The following married participants with children, a lecturer and a businessman respectively, supposed that living in the city was always hectic. As such it was always difficult to plan quality time with the family. Hence, taking their children out to KFC or McDonalds was a good alternative for this purpose.

Parents nowadays have very little time to cook at home, the easiest way is take their kids to these outlets. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Malay Male Lecturer)

My wife works and I am always busy. When we are back home from work, we get tired and when our children pester us to go to KFC we just follow their wish. In school, they are influenced by their friends to eat at KFC or McDonalds. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

The subsequent comments from three parents and a bachelor participant further confirm the strong influence children have in getting their parents to take them to the American fast food outlets.

I think it's the children that are more influenced to fast food than the adults. It has become a trend now. And most parents who go to fast food outlets do so because they want to please their children. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Social Worker)

Parents who follow their children's wish are influenced by the advertisements on fast foods. They wouldn't mind taking their children there for as long as they do not have to do that too often. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {2})

To go once in a while with the kids is alright but not too often because the food is quite expensive. (Older Provincial Lower Middle Class – Married Malay Male Junior Officer)

KFC and McDonalds attract children because there are toys children can get from the promotions activities these outlets often have. Besides this, there are also play areas for kids that parents find useful to keep the children occupied while enjoying their meals. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Chinese Female Reporter)

On the issue of advertising influence, a number of the Malay middle class participants admitted the strong impact of frequent advertisements on the fast food brands had been successful in persuading them to make the buying decision.

It has become a way of life among urban people. This is due to the influence of advertising which is very strong. The message is very catchy, for instance the Italian pizza has been localised to include *satay* with it. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay/Self-employed)

Although we can choose the local outlets but there are not many compared to KFC and McDonalds. Also I think the American food outlets are more popular because we are reminded of them in the advertisements almost everyday. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

I think fast food ads are a clear cut and classic case where the ads have managed to influence the children. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

The following *folk urbanites* were supportive of the opinions above and were also impressed with the Western indoor concept of clean environment.

Once in a while when I'm too tired to cook, I'll bring my children to McDonalds. The burgers are nothing special except that it is more expensive than the ones we buy outside. I think it is the ambience that attract the kids. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

Youths like to go there because the place is comfortable. Also, it is a culture for some people to visit these places because the KFC chicken and McDonalds burger are better than those outside because they are cooked based on certain quality control. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Based on the responses given above, it is quite obvious that many among the middle class segment from all ethnic groups have assimilated themselves to a new culture of eating out at American fast food outlets and fascinatingly they were comfortable with the adoption of this new culture.

I think eating out whether at American fast food outlets or any local outlets has become a Malaysian culture. The good part is we have the opportunity to interact and exchange information but still it depends on how one sees it. (Older Urban Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Student Counsellor)

There is nothing wrong, it has become part of our culture, a Malaysian thing. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

It is a culture among the urban people. Although the food is not healthy, they do not seem to care. I think this is part of being Malaysian. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

Interestingly, the following comment from an urban young middle class lady shows that despite being aware of the poor nutritional value of the meals offered and other disadvantages that came with it, the young allowed themselves to be influenced by this new trend.

When I was younger, I seldom eat out because my family cannot afford it. But now, since I am working and have some money, I tend to follow the crowd. Sometimes I go out and eat at fast food outlets although I know the food has very little nutritional value and is high in cholesterol level. I feel the young generation now grow fat

because of too much fast food. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class - Single Female Chinese Administrative Executive)

Another participant, an older Malay middle class lady observed that the Malays are slowly getting comfortable with the new lifestyle of eating out which has been a popular culture among the Chinese.

I believe that Malays who frequent these fast food outlets are actually starting a new culture. This is because eating out with the family is not a Malay culture but a Chinese culture. Culturally, Malays like to eat and cook at home, sit down for a private dinner and spend time with the family after a hard day's work. The fast food outlets cannot actually offer this atmosphere. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {2}).

As for the minority among the participants who disapproved the habit of Malaysians having their meals at American fast food outlets, one of the reasons given was that the meals comprised unhealthy food.

The food is not healthy and can make you lazy. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class - Single Male Chinese Site Supervisor)

In my case, I only go to these outlets once in a while because they are junk foods and therefore are not healthy for my children. (Urban Older middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {3})

The following remarks from two provincial Malay middle class participants pointed towards the fact that affordability of the meals at the outlets was a major consideration among some provincial middle class individuals.

I don't quite encourage eating at fast food outlets because these are unhealthy foods. Secondly, the food is also quite expensive, between RM9 and RM11. But if we have to eat there, once a while is okay. To me if we keep going to these places, it could lead to the break up of the family institution. These places may be suitable for people who are in business, who do not want to spend too much time eating. The danger of eating too often at fast food outlets is that we may lose the Malaysian culture. (Older Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant)

I have only one child and I like to cook at home. Whenever I am free I'll help my wife to cook. Besides getting quality food, I can also save some money because it is quite expensive to eat out. I eat out only when I want a change of taste and this is very rarely done. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

6.3.2 Sensitivity Towards English Language with Western Accent

Just like the local vernaculars of *Cantonese*, *Hokkien* or *Tamil*, the English language which is widely spoken in Malaysia has been modified into the local variations of “Manglish” or Malaysian English (see Chapter Three). As such, the local spoken English has its own unique Malaysian accent. Therefore, it would be considered odd for a Malaysian to speak English with an accent that is thought to be British or American English. To Wilder (1982: 34), the act of speaking with a non-native accent is akin to going against local decorum.

To investigate the degree of tolerance towards the Western culture, the researcher explored a hypothetical situation by asking the participants’ on their reaction when a close friend who has been away in United States for about two years and comes back speaking with an American accent. There were varied and mixed reactions from the participants with some of them accepting the change as normal, while a section were willing to empathise with the friend. Yet, there were still a few among the middle class participants who expressed their disgust towards the adoption of a new sub-culture by their friend.

Nevertheless, based on the overall reactions, it can be said that unlike most of the Malay participants, the young Chinese and Indian middle class sub-groups were generally broad-minded on this aspect. They could accept a person who has been away from the country for some time to adopt some cultural features of the foreign country they have lived in. For instance, the following school teacher was quite tolerant about the issue and was willing to accept the switch in language accent as a normal occurrence.

Normally, an accent comes naturally, so it’s okay if it is genuine. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

The subsequent comments from two young Chinese and two young Indian middle class participants were indicative of their liberal minds towards the matter.

I can accept because he is already influenced by the Western culture, it takes time to adapt. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Sales Executive)

I can accept his change in accent because he was away for quite awhile.(Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

I can understand the person's situation. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Indian Recruitment Officer {1})

I am okay with it. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Indian Recruitment Officer {2})

A young Chinese project executive remarked that one needs to be adaptable to the change.

It's just a mode of communication but one should use his rational mind and be sensitive to the person he communicates with. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

On another note, an urban young Malay middle class lady expressed a feeling of inferiority because she perceived that a person who speaks English with an American accent is more superior.

I would feel like the person is much better. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

However, a young Chinese reporter, while accepting it as her friend's choice to speak with an American accent, did not feel herself lesser than the friend.

It's okay, I don't feel inferior because I take the person as equal to me. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

The following statement by an older urban affluent participant of Chinese origin which was supportive of the statement above tend to infer that the Chinese middle class sub-group were most receptive to this aspect of cultural change, followed by the Indians and lastly the Malay middle class sub-group.

I'll accept and understand. It's normal. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

Additionally, candid remarks from the following Chinese and Indian provincial middle class individuals further confirm the fact that the non-Malay participants treated a change in accent as a minor aspect in cultural change that should not be taken too seriously.

He has been there two years, he changes according to the situation. This is okay to me. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

I can accept it because language is easy to get influenced. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

Unlike the two straightforward comments from the Chinese and Indian participants above, although he acknowledged the change in accent from his friend, the Malay participant below was hopeful that the person would return to his own accent after a while.

It's normal, he may not have spoken Malay for two years. He would change automatically after two or three months. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {1})

Similarly, the Malay participant below could put up with the cultural change but admitted that she would initially be surprised with the change.

I would be shocked as I don't expect him to change drastically but after a while I'm willing to understand him. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

The same is true of another Malay participant below, an urban older affluent. Typical of a person who keeps to the Malay culture, he felt the Malaysian friend speaking English with an American accent should be sensitive of the feelings of his fellow Malaysians.

I'll feel uncomfortable because as a Malaysian, he has forgotten his own language. I think he has to readapt. He must be sensitive enough that he may offend the friend he is speaking to. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

However, the following young professional footballer who represented the urban young middle level middle class cluster was more open about it and believed that it is the individual's freedom to speak in an accent of his choice.

It is for him as an individual to choose the accent he is comfortable with. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Professional Footballer)

While there were many of the participants who took a tolerant approach towards the issue, quite a few of them were less charitable in their opinions. A young female Malay tutor maintained that she would not give face to a hypocritical person.

Most of my friends studied in UK or other parts of the Western countries. If they try to put up and act, I'll ignore them but if it's natural, why not? (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

Similarly, the following *folk urbanite* could only tolerate the change if the person had stayed in America much longer than two years.

If it is just one or two years I think it's rather hypocritical. I can understand if he had stayed there for 10 or 20 years. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Next, a Chinese participant could only tolerate the person if he could comprehend the accent used.

If I understand what she says, it is okay but if I don't understand I'll be upset. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

Consequently, comments and viewpoints from the following participants were much less generous. In fact, they considered it gross of the person because they would not believe that the change was genuine.

This is a culture shock, I'll be surprised and angry he has changed so fast. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

I'll be angry too. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

I think it is too much. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

He must have been carried away with the American surroundings and forgotten his Malaysian roots. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

I'll show my disgust to him if he is being overly expressive. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

I'll tell him to go back and fly kites. Something is wrong with him, I'll understand if he has stayed there for more than 20 years. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

6.3.3 Aspirations Towards Lifestyle Adjustments

The impact of media and various forms of globalisation in Malaysia have led to diverse economic, political, cultural and social changes. With the on-going change and progress, continuous adjustments in daily living and thinking patterns among Malaysia's middle class segment are inevitable. To address this issue, the eleven groups of participants were asked to discuss their dreams for the future. Being members of the middle class group, they are wedged in the middle of the social strata. Unlike the working class whose priority was to ensure their basic needs were attended to while they hope to better themselves, and the upper class who have accomplished their material wants, the middle class group although generally financially more stable than the working class, were continually working on new opportunities to keep moving up the social strata of the society.

Taking a situation in which they have the financial resources, a majority of Malaysia's middle class segment were prepared to make changes in their social life. However, there were a few, particularly from among the older set who responded that they were satisfied with their present situation and did not find it necessary to make adjustments to their lifestyle.

Among those who were in favour of making adjustments, there were varied responses. Some of the reactions included long term investments, investment in better health, helping people in need, investment in children's future and in education. There were also those who wanted to clear all their loans. The young middle class sub-group were generally more interested in material needs like a house, a nice car and also vacationing.

Members of the urban lower middle class sub-segment, both young and older were divided in their plans. Some were prepared to spend their money on traveling while quite a number would invest in a house and spend on a nice car. Still, four out of ten participants from this sub-segment mentioned attaining better education as the next step for their career advancement, as stated by the following participant.

I'll increase my efficiency rather than luxury, for instance if I am in IT, I'll invest my money to learn more on IT-related aspects. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Tutor {1})

The following older lower middle class man also intended to further his studies but at the same time was concerned about helping the needy.

I'll lead a simple life, pursue my studies and get involved in charity work. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Tutor {3})

Quite the opposite, the participant below would prefer to spend part of the money he garners by rewarding himself with his dream yacht.

I'll buy what I dream to have first, may be a yacht or something like that. For the remaining sum, I'll look for a good investment. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

I'll upgrade my living standards, may be buy a better car, and then a better house. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

In contrast to the urban young lower middle class sub-group, responses from the urban young middle level middle class sub-group were less varied. A lecturer wanted to keep himself healthy all the time while a professional footballer was keen to invest his money in unit trusts. Nonetheless, the following response from a customer service officer was more interesting.

I'll clear all my loans first, after that I'll do what comes to mind that can give me a peace of mind. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Male Malay Customer Service Officer)

On the other hand, the older members of this sub-group were more attracted at investing for their children's future, as explained by the following senior teacher.

I will look forward for a better future for my children. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

For an urban young affluent man quoted below, he would enjoy the fruits of his labour by getting a dream car. In addition he would put aside some investments for his children whilst keeping to a simple lifestyle.

I'll get my dream car and secure my children's future. Live life wisely and maintain a moderate lifestyle. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

The following participant, an urban older affluent man shared a similar plan.

Besides meeting all the basic needs like a nice house and a fancy car, I'll do some charity. I'll do a bit of everything that I feel people with money should do. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

Looking at the responses given, rewarding oneself with a new car and a nice house while giving away some for charity seemed to be a popular response from the participants, particularly among the Malays. The following young *folk urbanite* man would buy a car and be cautious with his expenditure.

If I have the means, I may change my lifestyle accordingly, may be buy a new Honda car. But I will not change drastically, I'll spend according to how much more I have. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Despite the many expected responses, there were a few among the participants whose reactions were poles apart from the rest. For instance, the provincial lower middle class man below would reward himself by buying quality goods from established brand names which he had been deprived off as he could not afford them.

I'll buy quality goods. For shirts of good brand names, the stitching are much better than those unheard of brands. You feel comfortable in them compared to the low quality ones which can sometimes develop itchiness on your body. At the moment, with what I have, I buy "bundle goods". These are cheap second hand original goods that are of high quality. I cannot buy the new quality goods because I cannot afford them, they are too expensive but if I have the money, I'll go for these goods. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

Looking at the assertion below, it was quite surprising to hear a similar statement from a human resource director whose monthly salary might have been ten times more than the clerk who gave the statement above. Nevertheless, this shows the strong influence that brand names have towards some middle class participants. Also, in the case of the participant below, he might be referring to items that were very much more expensive than the brand names he had been using.

I will go for all branded products since I always believe that products with established brands will never disappoint me. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

Like most other business minded Chinese Malaysians, the statement below by a Chinese teacher did not come as a surprise.

I'll get into business because I come from a business family. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

The following participant, true to his uniqueness of being a *folk urbanite* would never forget his roots. Because the village was where he came from, he would spend and invest the money he has in the village.

I lead a simple life. I buy according to my own affordability. When I have some money, I'd like to buy a piece of land in a village where I can live there and rear goats. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

With regards to the few who preferred to maintain their existing lifestyle even if they had the financial means to change, they were generally satisfied with their present way of life. The following participant, a senior social welfare officer gave a frank response.

My lifestyle is so comfortable, I'll not change it. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

For the following participant, a financially successful *folk urbanite* man, he did not see a need for him to change his lifestyle as he had achieved what he wanted in life.

My life has shifted now. I don't live according to what I want anymore. I live according to what I need. I used to be very much brand conscious before. To a certain extent I am still brand conscious now because when I go to for official meetings, I put on suits of an established brand. I don't deny they are of very good quality and I feel very comfortable in them. I do this because first impression counts. To the people I meet up with, the type of clothes I wear gives a certain credibility. I guess this is the Malaysian way. Other than formal functions, I wear what I like. I must say that ads do not influence me, it is other factors. Some brands of men's wear do not suit me at all. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

As for the following associate professor in a local university, with the financial means that she has, she would maintain her present lifestyle, help the needy, travel and invest some for her children's future.

I am a simple person. Even if I have a lot of money, I would not change. I'll get involved in charity. I'll go on an overseas trip. I'll get into health products, keep some money for the children. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor {1})

6.3.4 Perspectives on the Western Way of Life

Opinions and comments relating to the Western way of life from the middle class community are vital because this would give an indication of their leanings towards certain cultural values which would also point towards their attitudes on global brands.

Overall, Malaysia's middle class segment of all social levels and ethnic groups gave consistent and sound standpoints in respect of their perception of the Western culture and lifestyle. Although a substantial number of the participants were critical of the "stereotyped" immoral behaviours of the Westerners, many believed that there were a lot of good Western values that Malaysians could adopt to make them a more cultured society. Discussions that reveal the immoral acts of the West were mostly confined to the stereotyped social aspects of the West which include "indecent exposure", "free sex", non-restrictive mixing of men and women and the like.

On values of the West that were highly regarded by Malaysia's middle class segment, it is interesting to note that a majority of the Malay middle class community provided very positive comments towards the Western way of life. In fact, this is not surprising because the Malays are historically known to be pragmatic Muslims who adapt well to both the traditions and to modernity (see Sardar, 2000; Shamsul A.B., 1999).

Despite this, it was rather unexpected to hear "untraditional" comments from the *folk urbanites* and provincial Malays who have been well known to be quite traditional in outlook. A *folk urbanite*, also a successful businessman provided a detailed

description on this issue. To him, many people had actually misinterpreted and generalised the Western way of life. He argued that a lot of the Western values were universally good values. Although he might have exaggerated or misunderstood the lifestyle of the Westerners in the countryside, he sounded quite logical when he emphasised that it was wrong to stereotype the Western way as a negative influence to the young due to the indecent behaviours of some Malaysian youths. According to him, the blame was not on the Western people but the Western media and their government.

This is where we have to understand that the West does not have a single value system. What is propagated by their governments may be different from what the general population in the specific country thinks. Those who have studied in the West would be able to better understand this. It is actually very difficult to say what a Western value really is. Those in the countryside live a simple communal life like respecting neighbours and believing in the ten commandments which are similar to what we practice here. Of course not many people live in the countryside.

The fault is not only with the Western governments but also with many other governments in the world. Leaders of some countries practice their own ideologies, that is why they are corrupt and they become dictators. Many leaders in the Middle East are not good. For instance, if you have Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan the problem will not be solved, uprisings will continue. Like I said earlier, it has created a difficult situation. In terms of mannerisms, I think people in the West are sometimes better than us. The bad influences that are creating a trend among the youths are the music video clips that promote too much body exposure and sensuous body movements. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman (1))

Another *folk urbanite* businessman supported the above opinion and blamed not only the media and the politicians but also the people in business who, according to him were not socially responsible.

News about the West that we get from the media are those from politicians and businessmen who have vested interests and their own agenda. I think the Western society in general is not that bad. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

The above opinions were also shared by another *folk urbanite*, a young lecturer who related his own experience of living in United Kingdom while studying there. He looked at both the positive and negative aspects of the West. He likened the good practices of the Westerners as parallel to the Islamic values while those practices that were considered universally bad, like getting drunk and destroying properties were

against the Islamic practices. Like the participant above, he criticised the media for influencing the minds of Malaysian youths.

We can see both the good and the bad. The good part is that they value cleanliness. Even though they wear shoes in the house, they always keep it clean. That's why some people say, on certain aspects, what is propagated by Islam is not practiced by Muslims but by non-Muslims. They are also quite friendly. From my experience, while studying in UK, my landlord was very compromising when dealing with my needs.

The negative aspect is that they are too free to do anything. They don't seem to have limitations. Their youths have parties and entertainments everywhere, are rowdy and disrespectful. Once on a weekend at around midnight, the window panes of the house I was staying in UK was smashed, glasses splattered all over the living room. Liquor bottles were all over the place. I am actually quite concerned about young Malay Muslims who frequent discotheques and entertainment centres in *KL*. I notice our youths are influenced by the media portrayal of Western artistes who wear skimpy clothes. So there are good and bad in the Western lifestyle. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

Like the experiences of the participant above, another Malay middle class man, a marketing manager of a bank linked his own experiences with the British culture and expressed his admiration with their social values which he said should be practiced by all practicing Muslims.

Not all about the West is bad. When I was in UK, I find most of their social values very good. As a Muslim, I find the values I am taught are practiced by non-Muslims, for instance they can give way to you when you are on the road and they do other little things to help others. That's why some people say we embrace Islam, the West practice the values. If those good values are practiced well, the children and the family will benefit. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

Further to this, another older Malay middle class participant who was a student in the United States of America for four years was also full of praise with the American values concerning aspects of daily living. Typical of most Malay Muslims who had been exposed outside the country, he equated these universally accepted values with Islamic values.

In terms of values, I find the Westerners are quite Islamic. If they pray and embrace the Islamic faith, they can be model Muslims. They are punctual and are efficient in their work. I wish teachers in Malaysia are like the teachers in America. When I was studying in America, even the head teacher visited my house because he was concerned about my child who complained that she was disturbed by one of her classmates. This shows the head teacher's commitment in carrying out his duty. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Lecturer)

In relation to the experiences observed by the three participants above, a provincial Malay participant cited below spoke of a series of incidences told to him by his brothers who had experienced living in a Western country. He felt Malaysians must take upon themselves to follow. To him, these Western values, if followed would benefit Malaysians.

We need to investigate aspects of the Western lifestyle that are suitable for us to follow. I have brothers who have had experience living in the West who related to me that one good aspect of the West that we in Malaysia is lacking is discipline. According to my brother, when making appointments, Westerners never fail to turn up. If for some reason, they cannot make it, they will send their spouse to represent them. We Malaysians seldom do this. On the road, Western motorists are very patient and disciplined, they wait for pedestrians to cross. If an accident occurs, the motorist involved will be responsible to clean up the mess so that a smooth flow of traffic is ensured. When they eat and drink, they follow specific times. They are not like us who eat as and when we want. In actual fact, there are a lot of practices from the West that are good that we can adopt. I am not saying everything from the West is good. We can pick and choose the practices that are suitable for our culture. To me, an old married couple holding hands is a good example for the younger generation to follow because it shows that love can be everlasting. It should not be seen as a show off. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk)

Similarly, most provincial Malay middle class participants were impressed with many aspects of the Western culture including their work ethics, their eating etiquette, their respect for time and their overall application of skilful knowledge to everyday living. Nevertheless, on the negative aspect, they shared similar opinions with most of the other participants, that is the stereotyped outlook that the West is a socially “immoral” society.

The three provincial Malay participants below were quite aware that compared to Malaysians, the Malays in particular, the Westerners are much better in terms of work ethics and they felt that this aspect of the West should be emulated.

Their work ethics is good. Although they are socially free, we can take what is good. Take the positive aspects in their work culture. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

To me, we must not follow the Western lifestyle but we must adopt their work ethics, their technology and everything else that is good for us. Their social behaviours are against all aspects of our culture, socialisation and religion. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

We Malays have ethics and values as guidelines that limit us from doing certain

things against the religion. People in the West do not have these restrictions and do not know their limits. But since they are more disciplined and committed in what they do, we should follow them. Malaysian technology cannot go far because of the apathetic attitude of the Malays. Malays are not punctual and this aspect jeopardises their quality. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

Another provincial Malay middle class participant, a health assistant noticed that the Western culture of exposing their small children to games that challenge the mind is an activity that Malaysian parents should follow.

I want to compare the West with Malaysia. Western parents encourage their children to play mind games like mastermind and the like because these games can educate their children's mind. Sadly, most Malaysian parents do not practice this with their children. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

Like many of the other provincial Malay middle class participants, the following businessman from the upper level demonstrated his knowledge of the respectable Western culture which he strongly believed were practices that Malaysians ought to imitate.

There are certainly a lot of good we can adopt from the West. Firstly, in the aspect of adapting to situations and occasions. For instance, if a Westerner goes for dinner, the clothes he wears will always be appropriate. For sporting occasions, it is sports attire. Another exemplary culture is that they empower themselves with all kinds of knowledge. They have the interest to look for new knowledge that can benefit them. For example, they are into "do it yourself" skills so that they do not have to depend on plumbers or carpenters. This is one aspect we should follow. And if we visit their houses, we'll find them very neat and the interior is harmoniously decorated.

In fact, although Japan has surpassed them in mobile technology, the Western countries first started it and the products they manufacture are of the highest quality so much so that these products could last more than 20 years.

The Westerners are also known to be open people. They show their love, even at an old age, couples still hold hands. They are also serious in building the minds of their children. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

While the participant above was impressed with the Western traits of adaptability, curiosity and openness, the following participant, also a provincial Malay businessman was full of praise of the highly spirited nature of the Westerners. He was

also amazed at their hygienic habits, effective communication ability and pleasant eating etiquette.

What appeals to me about the Westerners is that they are sporting. For instance, in a football match or a tennis match, men and women will come in full force to enjoy the event. Sometimes we wonder, they seem to love everything but in actual fact they are sporting people, they show unity. They are also active and like to experience getting involved in dangerous sporting activities like mountain climbing and canoeing. Sometimes they come to Malaysia for this kind of adventure.

They are also concerned about cleanliness. By world standards, their toilets are the cleanest. This is the reality we have to accept. In the aspect of communication, I'd like to relate an experience when I was working with a bank. There was a white man who came to the counter to change his currency. He was annoyed and used foul language to the teller who was attending to him because the teller could not really understand what he wanted. However, because the teller finally managed to provide the service he asked for, he appreciated her by saying "thank you for your service". This is the good aspect of Western culture.

On the area of eating etiquette, they are very proper. They don't open their mouths wide like the Malays, they chew their food very slowly. They also dress well, we are sometimes surprised when we see on TV that even cleaners have their overall on. This shows how disciplined they are. We are so different than them. Even I myself wear slippers for this session today. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

Another provincial Malay middle class man, an office assistant applauded the Western way of keeping the family unit close together. However, this opinion contradicted the viewpoints of many other middle class participants who felt otherwise.

They are proper when eating with the family. They go to the beach together in a family. There is closeness among members of the family. The Western dramas on TV seldom show quarrels among family members but this is not so with our local dramas. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

Besides the provincial Malays, a number of other urban Malay participants were also bowled over with some positive characteristics of the Westerners. An urban Malay graphics designer from the lower middle class sub-group was impressed with the Western man's work efficiency and ethics, honesty and frankness which he thought was the reason why they are a progressive society.

I like the Western lifestyle for a number of reasons. First, they are inquisitive in nature, they are research based. They are also efficient in their work, this is why they are progressive. They are also direct and straightforward, if they don't like something

they don't beat around the bush. Unlike us, we tend to do something without first researching thoroughly on the subject matter. This is why the West is ahead of us in technology and education. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

A young urban lower middle class Malay lady who worked as a tutor at a local university laid the blame on the media for the stereotyped portrayal of the West as an immoral society. She admired the Western way of expressing their feelings overtly.

We are influenced by what we see on TV. The programmes give us the impression that the West practice free sex and other practices that are considered not good for the society but actually these activities are also being practiced by some Malaysians. Actually, there are some good Western values. The Americans for instance, are expressive especially in showing their emotions towards children. This is good because love for children should be expressed directly which we do not practice. Another example is that Americans show their appreciation towards performers by a standing ovation and a loud applause. Why can't we Malaysians follow these examples? (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

On the influence of television programmes, a Malay administrative assistant, also a father of two young teenagers, observed that it was impossible to avoid his children from being exposed to negative scenes. He took it upon himself to use the Western approach of discussing the good and bad scenes with his children.

Often when we watch TV together, I tell my children on what is good and what is bad about scenes that they watch. I tell them that as practicing Muslims, we have our own values to follow. This is my way of providing them a guideline. Like the Westerner, I am honest and direct with my children and so far my approach has been quite effective. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {2})

In addition to the comments from the Malay participants, there were also similar opinions from a few Chinese and Indian middle class individuals who were supportive of the Western culture. A Chinese teacher from the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor* admired the Western way of training their young children to be independent.

The West instill freedom to their children from young, their children sleep separately and become more independent when they grow up. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Additionally, an urban Indian research assistant was in awe of the Westerners for their passion in knowledge and also for their culture of giving respect to individual rights and freedom.

What I like about the Western way of life is their mindset. They have a sense of curiosity and seriousness and they believe in freedom of speech and information. Although with freedom of expression, they are exposing their weaknesses but they do not hide these issues. Problems faced by the minority black Americans and problems of drug abuse are discussed openly. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

Another participant, also an urban Indian middle class man highlighted the fact that there were still many among the Western people who valued the old traditional practices.

Although I have not been to a Western country but based on my reading, Westerners are also now coming back to the old values. In UK sometime ago, there was a campaign telling youths that it is okay to be a virgin. Although they are an open society, but there are people who practice the good old values. (Urban Older Affluent– Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

Although there were many participants who were absorbed with encouraging comments on the Western way of life, there were a substantial proportion who appeared more impartial because they looked at both the positive and negative aspects of the West. To most members who made up the urban older middle level middle class sub-segment, one must be wise to only emulate the good aspects of the West and discard the negative aspects. Similarly, a few of the upper and lower middle class participants from the urban areas and a small number from the provincial areas were receptive to positive values brought in by the West but were also consistent on their disapproval of the negative values of the Western way of life which to them, could bring harm to the population.

An ICT supervisor, a Malay middle level middle class man appreciated the behaviour of Western elderly couples who exhibit their love towards each other. According to him, this conduct was not common among Malaysian elderly couples. Conversely like all other middle class participants, he disapproved the “immoral behaviours” of the Western youths.

There are good and bad things that are portrayed on TV. For instance, the Western way of showing love between elderly couples by holding hands is good but is not practised in our culture. However, I agree that in general the immoral youth culture of the West is not good for our culture. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Malay Male ICT Supervisor)

An Indian senior social welfare officer admired the Western concept of punctuality but lamented on their lack of respect for the elderly.

Generally they are good with time but they lack respect for the elders. For instance, I don't smoke in front of my parents but this does not happen in the West. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

On this, a female Chinese senior teacher gave a similar comment but she indicated that the Western lifestyle of being too independent might not be suitable for Malaysians.

The West show respect for time and this is good but the bad part is they are too individualistic. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Chinese Senior Teacher)

Although the Malay executive quoted below felt the same way as the participant above about Western individualism which she hinted would be detrimental to the Malaysian culture, she conveyed her admiration of the Westerners for their habit of taking light meals to keep themselves active.

They don't take rice, they take light food and this makes them lively but the bad part is that they are too independent, they can live together without marriage. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

The following participant, an older Indian operations manager expressed her approval with the Westerner's respect for time but like some other middle class participants, she showed remorse when referring to their "immoral" acts of exposing their flesh.

What is good is their punctuality and professionalism, what is not good is their moral well-being, for example exposing their bodies in public. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

A young female lecturer admitted that from her experience, a Western man is normally a gentleman but on the other hand he could also be ignorant of another person's culture.

What I like about them is that the men are real gentlemen. What I don't like is that they are too open and they find difficulty adapting to our culture. Once I had an American male pen pal who came over to Malaysia, he wanted to stay in my house but I told him it is not possible in our culture because I have two other bachelor

sisters in the house but he found it hard to understand. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer)

In articulating his strong approval towards the Western culture of having a family dinner together, the following Malay Muslim man was willing to adopt this particular practice if it could guarantee him a strong family bond among his family members. However, he was against the Western concept of giving too much freedom to the individual.

I'm very open on the Western culture. If it is beneficial to my culture, I'll accept it. For instance, if getting together with family members during Christmas eve is good, then I don't mind practicing it. Although it may be Western in nature, it upholds togetherness and it is good for my family.

On the bad aspect, as our former PM *Dr. Mahathir* once said in a function, the Western culture allows an individual to do what he wants. He quoted an individual who went to court to fight for his individual right to start a pornographic cinema. So this part about not caring for the feelings of the masses is not good. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

A Chinese associate professor told of her experience while studying in America. She believed that Americans were generally law abiding and the American men were true gentlemen. Nonetheless, like the other participants she did not fancy the overly liberal lifestyle of the West.

We take what is good and leave what is bad. When I was studying in Ohio State, in a small rural town of Athens, whenever there is the sound of siren, all cars on the road will stop because they respect the law. Also it is common to see guys opening doors for ladies. These are some good values that are seldom practiced here. But there are certain things about the West that I do not agree, they are being too liberal and overboard in their thinking. For instance, they can accept marriage of the same kind, between lesbians and homosexuals. Also they go against natural law like human cloning. (Urban Older Affluent – Single Female Chinese Associate Professor)

An assistant head teacher in the provincial town of *Kuala Selangor* was quite magnanimous with his opinion. Basically, he believed there were some good qualities we could adopt but like the participants above, he rejected the Western lifestyle of immoral sexual activities.

The Western way of life is actually good. Their moral values is the only thing that is spoilt by some of them. So we take the good qualities and throw away the bad ones.

Their good qualities are that they dress up to suit an occasion, their education system allows freedom for children to be creative and equip them with strong communication skills. The bad part is the practice of free sex and addressing their parents by name. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

A female Chinese school counsellor hinted that unlike Malaysians, the Westerner is less restrictive in their deeds and behaviours although this characteristic has made them great seekers of knowledge.

The Westerners are too socially open and this can cause a lot of problems here. The good part is that they are interested in new knowledge to better themselves. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Another female Chinese school teacher noticed that the Westerners are ethical people as they always keep to their words although they may be less inclined towards religious values.

They are good in terms of service, if you are not satisfied you can return your goods, they value quality. The bad part is, socially they are too open and they don't follow the religious practices strictly. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher)

Besides the comments and opinions above which are either totally positive or are a mixture of approval and disapproval of the Western culture, there were also a few totally negative viewpoints. A female executive was put off with the Western lifestyle because she reasoned that the Western lifestyle is a life of crime like those shown in the movies.

Western lifestyle as portrayed in the movies on TV focuses on crime. To us Malaysians, that is the way of life of the Westerners and I don't fancy that life. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {2})

Additionally, an urban lower middle class teacher implied that the West is a "sick" society as they tend to act beyond the norms of human nature. As such, she felt some "weird" behaviours of some Westerners are not suitable for Malaysians.

The Westerners tend to be overly adventurous. They like to practice something that is against the mainstream thinking which is not normal. In a magazine that I read recently, there was an article on a European lad who likes to cycle in the nude. Imagine if our children look at the pictures, it won't be good for them. Another

example is about this weird guy who appeared in the programme “Believe It or Not”. He sharpens his tongue to be shaped like the tongue of a monitor lizard. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

Although the following comment from a young Chinese middle class man was more flexible than the comment above, he was also disgusted with some practices of the Western youths.

It is alright for Malaysians to follow Western values if these values do not affect the good Malaysian values. But I find those Western youths who pierce studs on their tongues and belly buttons quite strange because I am sure they had to go through a very painful experience. (Young Urban Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Site Supervisor)

An older provincial English teacher, an Indian lady highlighted on the strong family institution that Malaysians had been comfortable with. She criticised the Western lifestyle for their lack of emphasis on this aspect.

Unlike the Western way of life, our way of life gives emphasis on unity, beginning from the family unit to the society. Our society is such that the focus is more on family interdependence amongst themselves. So the family stays together and works together. The West don't emphasise this aspect. This practice of starting with the family unit first is very important for us because we are living in a multiracial country. So when students nowadays follow the Western way of life, there is less practice of caring for each other leading to the break away from the family unit. Instead they live on their own and they are susceptible to bad influences. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher)

Another older Indian participant who was a manager in an employment agency bemoaned the negative effect of modernisation on the religious practices of Muslims.

I feel sad with the behaviours of youths today. We find Muslim girls in *tudung* today doing things against their religion, like hugging in public. It is not good to be too Westernized. (Older Urban Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

On the other hand, a female *folk urbanite* from the upper middle class sub-group argued that most Malaysian youths were actually confused because they had narrowed down Western culture to merely having fun and mixing freely.

The youths seem proud about going to parties and discotheques which they think is what Western culture is about although this is not necessarily a true reflection of the Western lifestyle. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Self-employed {6})

6.4 Concluding Remarks

The theme of this chapter borders on the thinking and attitudes of the participants who represent Malaysia's middle class segment, in relation to the Malaysian and Western way of lives. In other words, it draws on the understanding of the participants towards what they perceived as the Malaysian lifestyle and the Western way of life.

This study has found that the general Malaysian middle class community are keen on preserving some aspects of their cultural values they look upon as synonymous to being Malaysians. Most members of the multi-ethnic middle class participants, particularly the older set were sentimental of their treasured values of giving deference to the elderly and showing acceptance and respect to another person. While these ideals are universally accepted as significant cultural values, the older participants were quite concerned about the decline of these precious values that represent Malaysia's identity. They were specifically troubled by what they described as negative Western influences that are creeping into the minds of the young whom they observed have shown a less caring attitude towards their parents and those older than them. The Malay participants in particular who took pride of their Islamic beliefs, their strong family bond and their culture of living together as a community, were critical of the "individualistic" Western culture. Besides the Malays, the Indians were also passionate with their religious beliefs although the Chinese illustrated less fervour towards religion.

The evidence from this study suggests that most of Malaysia's middle class community are of the opinion that much of the age-old traditions with elaborate customs and practices normally seen in religious and cultural functions have been modified and shortened to suit the present times. This phenomenon is perceived as a consequence to the rapid changes occurring around the world. It was shown from the findings that global technological developments, modernisation and worldwide media influence were the major factors for this transformation in lifestyle particularly among the youths.

Nevertheless, as a largely knowledgeable group exposed to new information which coincidentally are mostly from the West, a substantial number of the participants appreciated the phasing out of some of the old values deemed of no significance to the society. For instance, the young Chinese participants, as a race that are traditionally less religious than the Malays and Indians rejected the intricate practices and traditional rituals such as in wedding ceremonies because they claimed these practices are a waste of money and time. As for the Malays, urban and provincial, young and older, being fervent followers of the Islamic faith, practices such as the use of incantations to cure sickness were condemned because they believed that these traditions were against their belief system.

Although the general viewpoints on maintaining the old practices from the young Malay and Indian middle class participants were not as discernible as the older set, there was a striking difference of opinions among the young Chinese middle class cluster against the thinking of the older middle class from all ethnic groups. This shows the existence of a clear generational divide between the young Chinese middle cluster and the older Malaysian middle class sub-segment.

On the issue of cultural similarities between the three major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians that make up the Malaysian population, descriptions provided from all ethnic groups were amazingly similar. Words like compromising, tolerance and respect for each other's beliefs and values were applied freely by the participants. These portrayals demonstrate their maturity in accepting one another's cultural values. Clearly, the participants were comfortable with the shared cultural identity of taking similar foods, interchanging of cultural costumes and the shared celebrations of religious festivals like *Kongsi Raya* and *Deeparaya*. Yet, despite proof of a continuous effort by Malaysians of all races at forging a representative Malaysian identity, the true Malaysian race of one culture one race as envisaged in Malaysia's Vision 2020 is still in its formation stage. One reason for this phenomenon could be the comparatively young age of the country which is reason enough for it to be open to Western influence.

Despite the many complexities in the comprehension and attitudes towards Malaysian way of life vis-a vis the Western cultural values, most of the participants were, as

indicated, responsive to the changes in the Malaysian cultural lifestyles. For instance, a *folk urbanite* provided a detailed picture by inferring that the world is experiencing a clash of civilisations between the East and the West (see Huntington, 1993). He contended that certain basic values like good and evil are universal values and as such not everything from the West is bad and similarly not everything from the East is good.

The findings also showed that urban members of middle class community were relatively open on the issue of Western values for as long as the practices do not contradict their religious and cultural beliefs. They were realistic and willing to adopt Western values they believe would benefit them. Besides the elements of modernisation which were associated with progress, there were varied responses on their positive impression of the Western values. These positive thoughts on the Western lifestyle include the Western habits of timeliness, seriousness in seeking new knowledge, being law-abiding, treatment of the opposite gender with respect, eating light, making a habit of having family dinners, good communication skills and adaptability in formal occasions. To add to this list, a few Malay Muslim participants who had lived and studied in either United Kingdom or America noted that most British and American residents are sometimes more “Islamic” in practice than the Malaysian Muslims because the former were generally more civic-minded than the latter.

As for viewpoints on the negative values of the West, most of the participants responded by narrowing down on the aspects of the deterioration of moral values among the youths. The examples given contained a list of things. Besides the popular concern of ignoring the welfare of the elderly, their liberal lifestyles of having pre-marital sex, homosexuality, lesbianism and even human cloning, the Westerners’ lack of inclination towards religious beliefs were also mentioned by many of the Malay and Indian participants.

A number of behaviours considered as weird and disgusting were quoted. One of these was the trend of some Western youths who abuse their human rights by going through painful experiences of piercing studs on their belly buttons and tongues. Another example given was of a European lad who likes to cycle in the nude. In

relation to this, an older urban participant touched on the abuse of the Westerner's own individual rights. A case was cited where an English citizen went to court to fight for his rights to open a pornographic cinema. These examples of social misconduct associated with the Western culture received outright rejection as they were seen as not bringing any good to the Malaysian society. Another major cause for concern was the uncontrolled intermingling of the opposite genders among the young. An Indian participant even related her shock to see a Muslim girl in *tudung* hugging her boyfriend in public. Undoubtedly, such behaviour is an example that some of the Western influences have been stronger than religious awareness.

On the issue of religious awareness, the findings confirm the works of various scholars on Asia that Islam as a religion is very close to the Malays. The criticisms made by many of the provincial Malay middle class participants towards the West centred around the subject of indecent exposures and also the overly free mixing among the opposite genders which were against the Islamic practices. In fact, the more conservative ones regretted the fact that many Malay girls now preferred to wear t-shirts rather than the traditional *baju kurung*.

On the other hand, when probed on the subject of leading an affluent lifestyle, interestingly there were comparatively more proportion of the young Malays than the other races who showed a keen interest to own a Mercedes Benz or any luxury car. As Rokiah (2000) posits, owning a luxury car is perceived as a person's achievement in life as this means that one is in the higher strata of the society. On the issue of the Malay middle class in particular, Shamsul A.B. (1999) provided a more coherent picture than Abdul Rahman's (2001) contention when he conceived that considering the fact that they want to be religious and be seen as religious for their political survival, they are also inclined for material comfort which at times contradicts the image they portray. In short, although they are educated and at times resolute and tend to be religiously inclined, by and large they do not have a clear sense of direction.

Overall, the middle class participants were aware that changes in their lifestyle are inevitable yet they realise that it is beyond their means to stop the flow of Western culture. At the same time, they recognise that technology and modernisation brings

the world closer and as such they cannot avoid Western influences, which have continuously been with them ever since the nation was first colonised by the Portuguese in 1511 (Gullick, 1981). Hence, the onus is on them to choose what is good for their cultural life. As it is, they are constantly verifying elements and images of their traditions and those of the West so that they could adopt aspects of the West that would benefit them and be wary and avoid those influences that could destroy the fabric of their own traditional culture.

Chapter Seven

Measuring the Impact of Global Brands on Cultural Values: Analysis of Focus Group and Q-sort Studies

7.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to investigate the scale of influence of the global brands advertised on Malaysian television on the cultural values of the audiences in this research who represent Malaysia's middle class population. Further to this, this chapter also intends to examine thought patterns of the audience in relation to their association with the global brands. To accomplish this goal, the aspects scrutinized for analysis are the major cultural elements inherent in the television advertisements and the audiences' sensitivity towards them. Therefore, the analysis from this chapter will make reference to the 23 advertisement commercials appended with this thesis in compact disc in Appendix B (i) and a description and general analysis of each of the commercials in Appendix B (ii).

There are two parts in this chapter, namely Sections A and B. Section A which is titled "Focus Group Analysis: Assessment of Television Commercials on Global Brands" delves on the participants' interpretation and evaluation of the cultural representations within the selected television advertisements. Analysis for this part is based on eight commercials selected by the participants in each of the eleven focus groups from the 23 commercials screened to them.

As mentioned on page 132 in Chapter Four, each focus group was required to choose two commercials for evaluation. Subsequent to this, each of the two commercials were shown to them again after which they were probed using the questions in part two of the discussion guide as a lead (see Appendix A). This was done to examine the participants' comprehension of the chosen advertisements. Depending on the commercial, these questions include the role of the actors, the advertisement message, the type of people who would buy the product and the lifestyle portrayed in

the advertisement. Participants were also asked about their feelings towards the product such as, their viewpoints on the overall cultural images and elements in the advertisement including the costume of the main actor, the food eaten and the way it is eaten, interactions among actors, background music and the setting of the commercial.

The second part, Section B entitled “Q-sort Analysis: Appeal of Global Brands” attempts to identify a number of sub-sets within the middle class segment who have similar characteristics, in relation to their association with the global brands. The same 23 commercials on global brands used in the focus group discussions were utilised as the research instrument for the q-sort study. Responses were factor-analysed based on the specific commercials the respondents sorted and chose. In addition, follow-up questions relating to their choice of commercials were also posed. Groups with similar thinking patterns were then identified and further analysed.

7.2 Focus Group Analysis: Assessment of Television Advertisements on Global Brands

Since participants in each of the eleven focus groups were required to choose only two commercials of their choice for examination, many of the commercials chosen by each group overlap with one another either due to its overall appeal or alternatively, respondents’ abhorrence of the particular commercial. It must also be noted that there were exceptional cases where participants from the same group evaluated differing commercials. This was due to the modifications made for some focus group compositions during the construction of the focus group as was detailed on page 139 in Chapter Four. Another reason was that the “all women focus group” which comprised a mixture of middle level and lower middle class sub-segments have been grouped in various different groupings according to the commercials they chose to evaluate. Nevertheless, this situation does not in any way affect the validity of the study.

At this point, it must be noted again that because this section confines itself to the analysis of eight of the 23 commercials, reference has to be made to Appendix B (i) so that the commercials could be viewed, and Appendix B (ii) which provides the

description and general analysis of the commercials. As such, for ease of comprehension and convenience, this section is formatted so that the commercials analysed are arranged according to the sequence used in Appendix B (i) and in Appendix B (ii).

It must be reiterated that in getting the participants to respond objectively, as a moderator I kept in mind that the purpose of getting the respondents to assess the advertisements was to extract their personal opinions and study their attitudes towards the advertisements selected for evaluation by them. As such, I made certain that the questions asked were those that start with phrases like “What is your opinion....” or “Please comment on....” so that the responses given would not in anyway be influenced by my own personal opinions. Also, realizing that this factor is especially important for questions relating to the dimensions of Western or Malaysian lifestyle in the advertisements, I took special care to encourage spontaneous follow-up responses from the respondents. Additionally, for every advertisement that was evaluated, the concluding question compelled the respondents to give an overall rating of the advertisement. This final task is required so that, in my analysis, I would be able to gauge whether the overall rating given to an advertisement corresponds with the earlier responses. Lastly, it is important to note that when asked to rate the advertisements, respondents were told to take into account all factors relating to the advertisement, including its general impact, overall quality, cultural affinity, production characteristics and other related aspects.

7.2.1 Kentucky Fried Chicken (fast food)

Overall, there was very strong approval for the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) advertisement commercial. Almost every one of the participants who responded understood the message well. In general, their remarks on the advertisement message revolves around the KFC chicken as delicious and meant for the whole family to enjoy together. Specifically, they mentioned about the appealing visual of the chicken pieces and the scene portraying a strong family bond among the actors. The participants which comprised members from the urban young middle level middle class, urban older middle level middle class, urban older lower middle class and the

Chinese and Indian members of the provincial middle class sub-groups were also comfortable with the cultural aspects in the advertisement. Most of them were overcome with a desire to visit KFC when visuals showing close shots of the ready to eat smouldering chicken drumstick were on the screen.

The following participants who gave immediate reactions to the commercial implied that it has been successful in convincing them of the “finger-licking good” chicken as claimed in its tagline.

Looks very tempting, if I am hungry and if KFC is close by I may just go there and eat. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Indian Recruitment Officer {1})

The chicken looks delicious. They are showing the real thing, the way the chicken is cooked and the cleanliness that comes with it. You feel satisfied by looking at the ad and you are influenced to try the chicken. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

Looks delicious, nice shots. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Tutor {1})

It looks very delicious, I want to try it. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {7})

The chicken looks so good, succulent. Someone told me it's world class. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

For the Malay participant quoted below, the advertisement has been very effective in getting into the minds of the children such that they would cajole their parents to go to the nearest KFC outlet.

Overall, as an adult audience, the ad cannot pull me to go to KFC although I must admit that the chicken looks delicious. However, KFC has achieved its goal of influencing the children to persuade their parents to go and eat the chicken together. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

As for the following urban young Chinese participant, while not denying that the advertisement had a positive impact on him, he was also concerned on the low nutrition value of the chicken.

The visual is really attractive, makes you want to go to KFC and have a good meal. But according to a food decorator that I know, the chicken used is not real chicken

but contains a lot of chemicals and is not very healthy. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class - Single Male Chinese Group Human Resource Executive)

Subsequently, remarks from the participant below, an Indian middle level middle class lady supported the opinion above.

I think the chicken shown is not the same type you get when you go to KFC. On TV it looks so juicy and big but when you go there, you'll find that they use the same cooking oil over and over again and the chicken is small. And actually, it is not healthy food. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

To further find out the extent of their comprehension of the KFC commercial, participants were asked about the target group of the commercial. A number of the participants mentioned that the advertisement was meant to attract all categories of working Malaysians, young and old.

The ad is done in a good way so that they can attract all categories of people. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

It attracts all range of Malaysians regardless of age or racial origins. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Indian Recruitment Officer {2})

What they are trying to highlight is that KFC is a one stop centre for the whole family. I think that is the concept, it is meant for all age groups. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

However, some of the participants felt that the advertisement was focusing on the young Malaysians, particularly the school going children.

The pulling power is mainly for the younger generation. Adults only take it once a while. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Social Worker)

Young kids will love it especially when they see the chicken dropping on the plate. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Indian Recruitment Officer {2})

The ad tries to tackle the younger generation, particularly children so that they can influence their parents to go to KFC. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {1})

In addition, while a provincial participant below said that KFC was more suitable for the urban Malaysians, the subsequent urban middle class lady observed that since the

actors in the advertisement looked sophisticated, the advertisement was trying to reach the affluent Malaysians.

It's for those living in the cities and big towns, they have little time to cook. We are content with home-cooked food. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant {4})

The KFC consumers must be those in the modern society. The actors seem to be from the elite class. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

With regard to the aspect on lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement, most participants interpreted the advertisement as promoting family togetherness, a value of significance to Malaysians.

I think it is promoting togetherness with the family. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

The ad promotes a spirit of togetherness, like eating together while enjoying the food. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

It is about family togetherness. Sometimes we realize we don't even look at each other, we don't come home to have dinner. As an alternative, if we go to KFC once a while, it can create togetherness. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Food for mum and dad and the family, domesticated happy hours for the family. (Urban Young Middle Rung Middle Class – Married Male Malay Lecturer {1})

Tries to show fun with the family and a happy lifestyle. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

However, the following participant who represents a minority opinion on this issue, believed that the advertisement was actually meant for those who wanted to associate with high class living as the prices of the meals are generally high for an average middle class family.

This is more of a high class lifestyle because a set of menu is about RM7 and if a middle class or working class family has four children, it's going to cost them RM28 plus service tax from the government, add another RM15 or so. Also I think it is not so healthy but it is okay to experience the meals once a while. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

Overall, the participants acknowledged that KFC is an American brand name and

most of them seemed receptive to the deeds and actions of the characters portrayed in the advertisement.

Although it is a Western product, it is acceptable. The actors are quite well-mannered in their interactions. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Self-employed {2})

The provincial middle class man below reasoned that the name may be American but the product is still Malaysian.

Although it is American, the chicken is Malaysian, so it is alright. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

Similarly, an urban participant had the same viewpoint with the participant above.

The flavour has been Malaysianised, for example the *tom yam chicken*. So it has become Malaysian food. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Nevertheless, despite showing optimism for the advertisement, respondents were generally not ready to make it their daily diet. In fact, according to some provincial participants, they would only eat at KFC once in a while, for instance on average once every month. Remarks on the said issue from the following provincial participant is representative of the thinking from the middle class sub-segment he belonged to.

The KFC chicken meal is more suitable for people in the cities and big towns who are always busy with so many things. We visit KFC only about once a month, the rest of the time we are content with home-cooked food. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

Similarly, the urban participants were generally unprepared for KFC chicken meals as their daily meal. Many found it less filling than the local meals while some said that it is not a healthy food. The following perspective relating to contentment of Malaysians with their own delicacies, sums up the thoughts of the urban participants on this issue.

I find the ad for KFC quite appealing and the chicken appetizing. I believe many aspects in the ad including the way the chicken is eaten is okay but I don't think it can be a daily meal for Malaysians. We are used to taking rice, curry, *sambal tumis* and all, we cannot change our diet overnight. To me, it's okay to eat the KFC chicken

once a while. Also, there are a lot of side effects in KFC chicken as it is a 45 day farm chicken. They grow from chemical injection, they have little nutritional value. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

Added to this, a small number of the participants including an older participant cited below criticised the advertisement for using actors that did not behave like typical Malaysians.

The actors are Western in lifestyle, they seem too gluttonous when eating the chicken. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Because of this, the following participant felt that the KFC advertisement did not reflect Malaysian culture.

What I don't like about the ad is the use *Pan-Asian* actors who don't look Malaysian. So it makes the ad less Malaysian. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

Conversely, although the issue of lifestyle may not be the most important or urgent issue to the participants, there were more spur-of-the-moment remarks which supported the KFC advertisement as reflecting Malaysian culture. An urban middle level middle class participant reasoned that because KFC use Malaysian spices, it can be considered Malaysian food.

When the chicken is shown, we tend to think that KFC is a Western product but when the herbs are shown, it relates to Malaysian dishes. We feel it is part of Malaysian food. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {3})

Her opinion is supported by another urban counterpart from the lower middle class sub-group.

The ad shows that KFC is equivalent to most Malaysian traditional food, that's why the spices are highlighted. If it's in Japan, they'll show Japanese taste. The ad reflects Malaysian culture because the consumers are Malaysians. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

Subsequently, the following provincial participant touched on the family values portrayed in the advertisement as being Malaysian.

They are showing all the good things, a happy family enjoying good food, it is showing our culture. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

For another provincial participant, although the culture is American, it is well-adapted to suit the Malaysian lifestyle.

It is localised American culture but it is alright. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

Judging from the many positive comments towards the KFC advertisement, it is not surprising that participants who gave their viewpoints rated it quite highly with an overall average rating of 7 out of a possible total of 10.

7.2.2 Koko Krunch (breakfast cereal)

By and large participants realized that this advertisement is very appealing and effective. Nevertheless, although the urban participants found that the advertisement has been successful in instilling superior cultural ideals that fit in well with the Malaysian way of life, the provincial Malay participants emphasised that the values portrayed were universal values, not uniquely Malaysian in character.

Their responses towards this advertisement can generally be divided into three different groupings. They are, comments relating to the appropriateness of the commercial message to the Malay culture, those that focus on the health aspects and lastly those responses which touched on the brand's intention to attract only a certain segment of the population. The separate threads in opinion show that the middle class segment comprises Malaysians with diverse viewpoints and attitudes. Despite the fact that there were only two Chinese and one Indian urban participants compared to the 15 provincial Malays who chose to assess this commercial, one can still discern the ethnic difference in thinking. The urban Chinese and Indian participants were more inclined towards the health benefits of the product whilst the provincial Malays, true to their natural characteristics of being a culture bound society showed more concern towards issues on Malay culture and family relationship.

When prompted to give an overall comment, a young urban Chinese participant from the middle level middle class sub-segment understood the message in the advertisement as Koko Krunch's healthy breakfast can make a child mentally strong.

The ad gives the message that kids who take Koko Krunch are smart kids because it is not only delicious but also highly nutritious. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Similarly, in the case of another Chinese participant quoted below, she felt very strongly about the high nutritional value of Koko Krunch. In fact, she would like to follow the lifestyle in the advertisement which she felt could replace the local breakfast of *nasi lemak* which has been proven to be high in cholesterol content.

The ad portrays a lifestyle that I would like to have. The cereals can replace a daily diet like the *nasi lemak* which has a lot of fat and can weaken the brain especially when eaten in the morning. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

A Malay participant from the provincial middle class sub-group gave the following comment.

The ad is good and I am attracted to it. The message reaches me. It is telling us that Koko Krunch is food for brain development. (Provincial Young Upper Middle Class - Married Female Malay Computer Programmer)

Besides this, they were also convinced that the Koko Krunch advertisement is targeted to working parents who are looking for a practical, fast and easy meal. Furthermore, Koko Krunch as a Western brand name was not an obstacle for the participants to accept it as a healthy food. In fact, they had a strong faith in the brand name.

I can accept as long as it is nutritious and delicious. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

It is for a healthy body, I don't mind it at all. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

To me, the product is good because the food advertised is nutritious food and contains vitamins. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

To the following urban Indian recruitment officer from the lower middle class sub-segment, she would not mind good healthy food as long as the price is affordable to

her.

It is a Western food which offers a healthy lifestyle. It is worth trying because I believe it is not expensive. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Indian Recruitment Officer {1})

Pertaining to the lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement, participants interpreted it as promoting a healthy way of life while at the same time keeping up to a harmonious family relationship.

Breakfast is important and taking care of children's well-being is a responsibility. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Parents must be aware that good food for the children is important for them to grow well. (Urban Young middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

The following provincial Malay participant noticed that the advertisement is also focussed on promoting togetherness among family members.

The message is on good family relationship. The product is also quite dominantly shown. (Provincial Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Technical Assistant)

Likewise, the following urban Chinese participant was impressed with the advertisement because of its portrayal of the parents who exemplify model parents.

It is a good way to communicate with children. The parents begin the day by training the son with new knowledge and testing his IQ. Also they show care for one another. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Viewpoints from the other Malay provincial participants further support the notion that Malays are very family-oriented.

The lifestyle portrayed is on family relationship and the love of mother for children. This means it is about relationship and love. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

There is relationship in the lifestyle portrayed. He wakes up in the morning, he says he has a test and then he eats Koko Krunch which is full of nutrition to increase his brain power. His family members join him too. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

Although the following disapproving comments represent a minority view, they are worth noting because these remarks reinforce the view that the family unit is important to the Malays.

There is one thing in the ad I don't like, that is, the father does not sit together with the children. He sits by himself reading the newspaper. This means there is no family harmony. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

It would be better if the boy greets his mother with a *salam* before he leaves. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

When asked to comment on aspects in the advertisement that they did not approve of, a majority of the participants could not detect any fault in the advertisement. The following are some of the remarks made in respect of this subject.

I cannot see anything bad in the ad. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Everything in the ad seems okay. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

Advertisers in Malaysia should use the Koko Krunch advertisement as an example of a good Malaysian advertisement. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Despite the positive remarks on various aspects of the advertisements, as mentioned earlier participants differed in opinion regarding the portrayal of Malaysian culture in the advertisement. While the urban participants were of the opinion that the Koko Krunch advertisement commercial depicted Malaysian culture, remarks from the provincial participants were quite different.

The comments below show that the urban middle class sub-segment can easily relate themselves to the scenes illustrated in the advertisement.

The Malaysian culture depicted is suitable for suburban and provincial Malaysians. I feel the standard of living of the family is not too high, most average Malaysians can reach this standard of living. The music is suitable. The ad has been successful in instilling a certain culture to Malaysians. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

A good family, regardless of race. It is suitable for Malaysian culture. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

The advertisement promotes strong family values among Malaysians. It is suitable for all working Malaysians. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Indian Recruitment Officer {1})

However, with the popularity of cereals like Koko Krunch, the following provincial participant expressed his concern on the effects of Western culture.

Even in the area of food, we are already influenced by the West and this affects our culture. We'll slowly forget our own local food like *cekodok*, *nasi lemak* and the other local foods. The influence of advertising is very strong, our local food producers should also advertise. (Provincial Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant).

Although the provincial participants concurred with the viewpoint that the Koko Krunch advertisement left a strong impact, they felt the advertisement cannot be categorised as promoting true Malaysian culture. The following participant felt that the advertisement depicted a universal culture, not just Malaysian culture.

There's no specific Malaysian culture at all. The concept of love and relationship in the commercial is universal, not just Malaysian. And we cannot say that it is a Malaysian advertisement but an international advertisement. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

To the following female participant, because the product advertised is not meant for all Malaysians, it is therefore not portraying Malaysian culture.

If it is Malaysian culture, then it should be common for Malaysians to take cereals as their breakfast. So to say that it is Malaysian culture is not quite true but I don't deny the message in the ad has impact. (Provincial Young Upper Middle Class - Married Female Malay Computer Programmer)

The subsequent comment below supports the remarks above.

The ad does not represent Malaysian culture because it shows a middle class family. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

Taken as a whole, due to the strong impact and powerful appeal, participants who responded to this advertisement gave it a very high overall average score of 9 out of 10.

7.2.3 L'Oreal (beauty and skincare product)

In terms of respondents' attitudes to its content, the L'Oreal commercial can be categorised as very unfortunate. It must be noted that every time this advertisement commercial was shown, members of all eleven focus groups members deemed it as among the worst of the 23 selected advertisement commercials for assessment. Hence, only members of the urban young affluent decided to analyse it. In general, they not only considered it as uninspiring, but also noticed that there was nothing positive to identify in the commercial.

The first reaction from the participants was to the message intended for the audience which espoused that one has to be white to be beautiful. Every one of the six participants found the message biased and unethical. The following participant questioned the lack of sensitivity of the advertisement message towards the various ethnic communities in Malaysia.

Why does the ad has to relate beauty with white skin? It is tantamount to racism.
(Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

Subsequently, another Chinese participant below indicated that the idea of being white is superior has been ingrained in the minds of most Malaysians.

Chinese always like to relate themselves with fairer skin and the Malays too like to paint their skin white. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Chinese Video Editor)

The statement above is aligned with the remarks made by the following Indian participant.

The ad is made because men want fairer women. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

A business development executive quoted below noticed that unlike the other commercials for global brands, foreign elements in the L'Oreal commercial were too

obvious. The most dominant of these elements was the actor's features which did not look Malaysian at all. As such, she did not find the commercial appealing.

The first thing I notice about the ad is that the lip sync is not right. This means the ad is localised. It originates from Japan because the actor looks Japanese. It puts me off. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

On the subject of the advertisement's target group, participants had no doubt that it was for ladies who had the notion that to be fair is to be beautiful. As quoted by the following public relations consultant, the trend of being fair has a strong following among the Malaysian ladies.

This product is for those who want to be fairer and also for those whose boyfriend wants them to buy. It's the lifestyle now, people think they should have fair skin to be beautiful. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

The remark by a female participant below further confirms the statement above.

I know of people who think they are not very beautiful and want to solve the problem by having a fair skin. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Chinese Video Editor)

The following perspective by an academic department head which hypothesised that there has been a Western agenda to make darker people feel inferior provides more insight on the possible reason for the craze among Malaysian ladies to "feel white" with L'Oreal.

A classic example of how the Western influence operates in our society, they set the ideals. The West makes people who are dark-skinned inferior. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

In support of the opinion above, it is worth noting the experience of the participant below who believed the strong influence an advertisement could have on people.

Talking about the impact of advertising, a slimming advertisement sometime ago portrayed fat people as lazy and ugly. It made me feel depressed. I used to feel inferior because of my fat body. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

To further strengthen the belief among Malaysian women of the benefits of having white skin, the following participant revealed that besides L'Oreal, there are also

other cosmetics brand names which positioned itself as the brand that can whiten one's skin.

The L'Oreal ad and many other ads on cosmetics focuses on fairness of skin and female Malaysians of all races are influenced by these ads. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

To sum up, although every member of the urban young affluent was certain that L'Oreal had managed to convince Malaysian women, the overall average rating for this advertisement was a mere score of 3 out of a total 10.

7.2.4 Salem (cigarette-related product)

In general, like the earlier advertisements, participants who responded to it could understand the advertisement well. Being a popular choice among participants, this advertisement commercial was evaluated by members of the *folk urbanite*, urban older affluent, urban older lower middle class, urban young lower middle class, urban older middle level middle class and urban young middle level middle class sub-segments. To a majority of them, the advertisement is quite straightforward and easy to comprehend.

From the comments and opinions gathered, almost everyone among the participants was very impressed with the beautiful shots of the greenery and the rolling hills which dominate the commercial. The following are some of spontaneous comments that came from the participants after watching the commercial.

The beautiful green and refreshing environment on a hill is attractive. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

It's portraying the youth culture, freshness, happiness and energy. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Human Resource Director)

It is cooling and refreshing. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Chinese Businessman {6})

The beautiful scenery and the people enjoying themselves make it relaxing and refreshing. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

Relaxing, soothing. I feel like taking my family for a holiday. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Self-employed {4})

I'd love to visit the place. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

Would love to visit the place. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Besides the impressive scenery, the music that accompanies the scene was also referred to as suitable and appealing.

I like the music, it creates the right mood and the scenes that come with it match the music. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Self-employed {5})

Very nice background music to support the advertisement. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

The actors' attire as another cultural element in the advertisement was considered appropriate and decent by the participants. As the following participant commented, although the attire is Western in nature and the interactions between the actors are also Western in outlook, these aspects were acceptable to her.

Western clothing, aspects of interaction like man and woman in an isolated place is not Malaysian. The clothes are Western but decent, so it is acceptable although there is no Malaysian identity. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

When asked to comment on the kind of lifestyle portrayed in the Salem commercial, although they did not deny that the lifestyle depicted was reassuringly comfortable, most participants were not inclined to be part of the lifestyle because of the association it has with cigarettes.

It is no doubt comfortable and makes you feel good but I don't want that lifestyle. The actors seem to be doing nothing else but enjoying themselves. I know that Salem is a cigarette, that is what I don't like. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

It is a high class lifestyle. The scenery is beautiful, the way it is done is very professional. They are cheating consumers by hiding behind selling a holiday package when in actual fact they are selling cigarettes. I don't want that lifestyle because I am not into smoking. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Comfort and freedom, but definitely everyone knows the main product is cigarette, and this is misleading. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Group Human Resource Executive)

Further to this, a majority of the participants were aware that the subtle objective of the advertisement was to sell cigarettes to existing and potential smokers. Although no cigarettes were shown in the advertisement, and the advertisement hid behind the cloak of selling a holiday package, many of the participants realized that the advertisement was actually reinforcing the “Salem” brand name which is synonymous with menthol cigarettes.

I prefer the nice scenery. It feels fresh and comfortable. You are free from problems. The ad is selling Salem cigarettes in a subtle way. The large word on the screen is to remind people of the Salem cigarette. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

There’s double meaning in the message, the ad is selling both cigarette and vacation but the main goal is to sell cigarettes. It is trying to show that Salem is involved in various businesses. The scene in the commercial shows nature and greenery, there’s clean air, free of pollution and no motorised vehicle is used. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Graphic Designer)

I know it is a cigarette ad but the objective of the advertiser is achieved because they show a young wrinkle free couple with fantastic music in the background. This is a good way of marketing. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Research Assistant)

The ad is selling cigarettes. May be it is a different way of portraying the brand. Their marketing strategy is to use female actors. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class - Married Male Indian Senior Social Welfare Officer)

Although the scenery is beautiful and all, but in the end we know they are selling cigarettes, this is where I don’t agree. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

I don’t think it is relevant to tie up Salem and menthol to get the “cool” idea. I won’t go out to buy Salem because of the ad, it gives no impact to me. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

If people do not know Salem, they won’t understand the message in the ad because there’s no one smoking, the commercial only shows people relaxing. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Malay Businesswoman {1})

On the other hand, an urban young lower middle class lady was attracted to the peace and tranquility shown in the commercial and admitted that she liked the lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement.

They are enjoying the peaceful situation where there is no disturbance. I prefer that lifestyle. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

The following urban older affluent man was also attracted with the depiction of the carefree lifestyle.

If I have the resources, I'll follow the lifestyle. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Director of Human Resource)

Referring to the main characters in the commercial, a young man cycling on a hill with an attractive lady sitting on the carrier behind him, candid comments from a number of the participants were evidently quite receptive. They described it as a normal relationship between a couple and there was nothing unusual about it.

The action signifies a good relationship that every couple dreams of. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese School Counsellor)

It is a nice, good relationship between two people enjoying the peace and freedom. It does not cross my mind about the couple being married or not. More importantly the freshness of the place attracts me. I can feel it myself. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay ICT Supervisor)

The couple on a bicycle together is OK as they are well-dressed and proper in their interactions (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Executive {1})

Although they look quite pretentious, I have no problem with it. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Sales Executive)

It's just normal interaction between a man and a lady, it is suitable in the context of the advertisement. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Self-employed {2})

A couple having a good honeymoon. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Indian Social Worker)

However, there were a number of the older Malay participants who were quite critical of the scene which to them is not suitable for Malaysian culture as it did not indicate that the couple is married.

I don't like the bicycling scene where the couple is together. They don't look like husband and wife. They want to be happy and enjoy a world of love and freedom in the hills. The message is indirect but effective. The ad should show kids too. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {4})

The bicycling scene is ridiculous. Although the attire of the couple is decent, their social interaction is suspicious. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Not suitable for our culture. I don't quite approve. Although the target is youngsters, they should not display couples alone up in the mountains. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

Refreshingly cool young couple. The question is, are they married or not? (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

When participants were posed with the issue of elements of Malaysian culture in the Salem advertisement, almost everyone were certain that there was no trace of Malaysian culture in the advertisement. The following participant implied that there could have been Malaysian values in the advertisement if a family is portrayed instead of showing the youngsters having fun with one another.

Nothing I can think of that relates to the Malaysian cultural aspect. In a nice place like that, showing a family atmosphere is better. A holiday with the family is very suitable rather than going to have fun with friends. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

The subsequent comments are testimonies with regard to the cultural aspects which indicate that the Salem advertisement was not positively considered by most married Malay participants.

It does not really reflect the Malay culture because Malays normally prefer to go vacationing by visiting relatives. (Urban Older Lower Middle Class - Married Female Malay Executive {2})

Not suitable showing an unmarried couple on a holiday together, it is not good for the Malaysian culture. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

As for the following Malay Journalist, the advertisement was actually glorifying the Western culture of mixing freely among males and females.

It is a subtle way of promoting a Western lifestyle. I don't like the idea of a couple alone up on the mountain together. We don't know whether they are married or not, it's like telling our kids, this is what you can do. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Journalist)

In fact, the Chinese participant quoted below observed that the scene showing the couple together was insensitive to Malaysian culture, particularly the Malay culture.

Some parts of the commercial, like the body language between the couple may not be suitable to the Malay culture. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

To another Chinese participant, the only noticeable Malaysian value in the advertisement is the spirit of being together.

The little aspect on Malaysian culture is the harmony created in the friendship. (Urban Young middle Level Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {8})

Taking an academic stand, the following associate professor implied that because the main objective of the advertisement is to sell the cigarettes, aspects relating to culture were not important considerations of the advertiser.

No, it does not reflect Malaysian culture. The whole thing is a strategy used to attract youngsters to look at the ad and eventually enjoy that sort of lifestyle and become a smoker and smoking is depicted as having a status quo. I think they are successful in their advertising. (Urban Older Affluent - Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

By and large, except for the older members of the *folk urbanite* and a few members of the urban older middle level middle class sub-groups, participants who responded to the Salem advertisement rated it very highly with generous ratings of 8 and 9 out of a full 10 score. These ratings signify that the commercial was considered to have a strong impact. This means despite their strong disapproval of the lack of Malaysian cultural values and of the fact that the advertisement was selling cigarettes, they were impressed with the other elements in the commercials particularly the beautiful soothing scenery and the music that accompanied the commercial.

7.2.5 Nokia (handphone)

In the main, this advertisement had a strong positive appeal among the participants who evaluated it. The participants involved were members of the *folk urbanite* and urban older affluent sub-segments. In addition, two other female participants namely an urban young middle level middle class lecturer and an urban older middle level middle class operations manager also chose to evaluate this commercial.

Most were impressed with the overall message and production of the commercial. The shots, scenes, music and other elements left a very strong impact among most of the participants. They also showed they had a good understanding of the message portrayed in the visuals, sound and motion. Their descriptions of the commercial were quite varied. The following viewpoints are three differing descriptions of the advertisement from among multi-ethnic members of the urban older affluent. However, every one of them was certain that the main advertisement message was clearly about effective communication with Nokia hand phone.

It depicts a situation where people get caught in the traffic jam, rushing for a wedding. It shows what a hand phone can do and that communication is very important. There is no negative aspects in the ad. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Female Chinese Businesswoman {2})

It illustrates the importance of family togetherness in a wedding, the grandparents are there. It shows an urban lifestyle where communication is crucial. It is important to communicate in this modern times. It does not reflect the general Malaysian culture. It is meant only for the minority Malaysians. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Marketing Manager)

Very good ad, there is human factor, it is about relationship between people and technology, that is the hand phone. In terms of branding on human technology, “Nokia” is very popular. It reaches all levels of consumers. It is very successful. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

To internalise the thoughts of the participants on their comprehension of the Nokia advertisement, they were enticed to give comments and opinions on the positive and negative aspects in the advertisement. The responses given were astonishing. Among the dominant remarks was the following from an upper level *folk urbanite* man.

This is an effective ad. It relates technology with human. Although the wedding is among the upper class, but when you look at the price, “Nokia” is affordable to almost everyone and it is a leader in the hand phone market. In terms of ad impact, I would rate it highly because it shows that “Nokia” can solve communication problems. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Similarly, an urban young lower middle class lady was also amazed with the state-of-art technology offered by Nokia hand phone.

For me, I like the technology where the grandparents could enjoy the wedding by just watching the video from another location. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Indian Recruitment Officer {2})

Another constructive remark about the Nokia advertisement included the creative tagline which encourages people to keep in touch.

The tagline “Connecting People” is creative. It is very interesting and has a strong impact. The ad projects the importance of connectivity, a successful lifestyle. There are so many things we can relate to. The number one thing is that “Nokia” wants people to communicate with one another. It answers towards projecting the “Nokia” brand as they want to. This is why I am very loyal to Nokia hand phones. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Managing Director)

As indicated earlier, although most of the participants who responded to the Nokia advertisement did not deny the superiority of the Nokia brand name, there were also a few comments which disapproved the depiction of some scenes in the commercial. The following remark from an operations manager concerned the link between consumers of Nokia with an affluent lifestyle. To her, it is not appropriate to associate Nokia only with the rich.

I agree that Nokia is a good hand phone but I don’t agree with the association that Nokia users drive Mercedes Benz. It gives bad influence to the youths. It promotes high and expensive quality of life. It is saying, to be successful you need “Nokia” hand phone. In a way, even people who can’t afford will be buying. You can see, even factory operators are using Nokia phone now. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

Being very receptive towards the brand name, participants from the non-Christian faith were quite tolerant about the Western attire and the Christian style wedding seen in the advertisement.

They put on Western clothing because it is a Christian kind of marriage and the characters are Chinese, this is acceptable. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

The message is on the importance of communication. This is why I am using the hand phone, it suits my lifestyle. However on other aspects in the ad, it does not relate to my lifestyle but I can tolerate it. Although I am a Muslim, I find it okay to show a Chinese Christian wedding. (Urban Young Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Lecturer {4})

From the various shots and scenes, some participants found it obvious that the Nokia advertisement represented an alluring and modern lifestyle meant for the upper middle class and above. The comment from the participant quoted below is an example.

A glamorous, high society with an affluent and prestigious lifestyle. The scenes depict an up market situation like luxury cars, swimming pool and a grand wedding in a hotel. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Director of Human Resource)

Although expressed slightly differently, participants were quite parallel in their perception of the cluster of Malaysians that comprise the target audience of the Nokia advertisement.

The product is meant for upper class Malaysians. (Older Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Malay Quantity Surveyor)

Teenagers and older Malaysians. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Self-employed {6})

They cover the young as well as the elderly and therefore this is a good ad. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

On whether the lifestyle depicted in the advertisement is suitable for them, although a number of them showed a desire for it, they acknowledged that they could not keep up to it.

It is too sophisticated for me. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

Interestingly, the following participant was forthright when he mentioned that the lifestyle portrayed was ideal for him.

It suits me very well. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Malay Director of Human Resource)

Pertaining to the reflection of Malaysian culture in the advertisement, there were mixed reactions. Those who responded positively can be considered to be more broadminded, including a lecturer as quoted below.

The costume and the luxury cars are OK, they are meant for the upper class Malaysians. The Chinese wedding by the poolside shows that the ad is targeted to the upper class Chinese Malaysians. (Young Middle Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Lecturer {5})

For those who thought the commercial lacked Malaysian culture, they seemed less tolerant to the urban culture of the rich.

It does not show an ordinary Malaysian culture, it is an elite culture because everything in the ad relates to prestigious brands, luxurious and high class living. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Female Self-employed {6})

They portray a lot of rich personalities with Western features wearing Western costume. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

The subsequent participant gave a more balanced opinion on this issue. To him, the actors represented urban Malaysians but he argued that the use of luxury cars did not truly represent Malaysian life.

The people involved are Malaysians and in term of the actors in the ad, it depicts Malaysian culture. But the expensive cars shown depicting a cosy kind of life that does not really reflect our culture. This is not relevant. I perceive the luxury cars only as tools and nothing more. (Urban Older Affluent – Married Male Indian Associate Professor {2})

Concerning the other cultural elements, many were quite impressed with the music that accompanied the commercial.

The music is good. (Older Upper Level *Folk Urbanite* – Married Male Malay Businessman {5})

Quite appealing music. (Urban Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Operations Manager)

Overall, this advertisement was favoured by all of the participants. It received a very high rating among all of the participants with an overall score of 7.5 out of a total score of 10.

7.2.6 McDonald's (fast food)

The McDonalds advertisement commercial was analysed by participants comprising members of the urban young affluent and those from the provincial middle class sub-segments. In the main, except for the music accompanying the shots and scenes, the commercial was overwhelmingly disapproved in every cultural aspect.

Participants were convinced that the commercial did not depict Malaysian culture at all. One of the more common comments raised was on the lack of eating etiquette which was considered “not Malaysian” because the nuggets were taken while getting

involved in other activities. The provincial participants were very quick to comment on this aspect.

Maybe the message behind the ad is about flexibility of the nuggets, one can eat them anywhere. But the culture portrayed is not suitable for us because the kids in the ad seem to be doing other things while eating. Eating etiquette is an important culture. There are no Malaysian elements at all in the ad because the actors are doing all kinds of stunts while eating, even in the water. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

Right from the beginning scenes in the ad, we know it is instilling foreign culture. We can see from the way they eat and behave themselves. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

For Malays it is not proper to drink or eat while doing something. It's not being Malay, in fact not Malaysian. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Male Malay Broadcast Producer)

Another provincial participant criticised the advertisement for its over exposure of the intermingling of the teenagers of differing genders.

There is no problem if the ad's goal is just to sell the nuggets. The only regret is about the overly free mixing of genders. There's one part in the ad where a boy comes out of the water to try to kiss a girl but he is pushed with her finger. Those who are not married yet may like to see this kind of scene. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

However, initial remarks on this subject from the following urban young affluent participants were more general in nature as they described the scenes in the commercial as trying to attract the youth market.

It's about teenagers with hip hop music and skateboarding. An ad for the younger generation. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

The ad associates the product with youth culture. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

While the following comment from a provincial participant is aligned with the opinions above, he went further by adding that the youth culture depicted was not appropriate to the Malaysian culture.

The scenes in the ad, like the extreme games, the street dancing will attract the young because this is what they like to do but these shots may not be suitable to our culture. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

An older provincial participant offered a more academic perspective. He believed that the scenes in the advertisement were created merely to promote the McDonalds brand name. Nonetheless, he rationalized that the visuals portrayed were not sensitive to the feelings of the viewers and as such the advertisement lacked social responsibility.

What is important in the McDonalds ad is actually only the brand name “McDonalds” which markets nuggets and burgers. Unfortunately, throughout the presentation of its message to influence consumers, it is full of negative elements. Except for the fact that McDonalds nuggets can be taken anywhere, I am of the opinion that what is depicted in the ad, whether in the aspect of culture, socialising or the message itself, has no connection with McDonalds. In terms of attractiveness or cultural appeal, I believe there is nothing we can accept because the elements portrayed are not in us. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

The following provincial participant, an English language teacher was concerned about the use of American lingo in the advertisement. To her, it is not the right kind of English and was bad influence for the Malaysian students because they could get bent on using this kind of English in their written school assignments.

The ad is focusing only on the younger generation. If you go to Western countries, fast food is for everyone. Secondly, the slogan “I’m loving it” is very American. I feel it is in a way influencing the younger generation to go for that kind of language. As an English teacher, I am not happy with this sort of influence on the students’ writing skills. Nowadays, there are many students who cannot write one sentence with the right structure because of the influence of the media. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

In spite of the fun activities in the commercial, almost everyone of the participants were aware that the advertisement was selling its McDonalds nuggets. To the following urban middle class participants, there was nothing truly special about the advertisement except that they are trying to persuade the audience to take the nuggets.

McDonalds is just selling one item that is the nuggets, there’s nothing else in the message of the ad. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

It is a fun ad trying to sell nuggets. (Urban Young Affluent – Married Female Indian Public Relations Consultant)

A normal ad, nothing catchy for me to remember. It’s just that it’s trying to sell the latest product, its nuggets. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

On the other hand, the following provincial middle class participants could not decipher why the advertisement had to show bad eating behaviours and other insensitive shots just to sell the nuggets. To them, the message could still be reached without having to embarrass the audience.

The message in the ad is the nugget. The bad eating etiquette and distasteful clothing are not necessary. There are too much action scenes in the ad although what they are trying to sell is just the nuggets. What is wrong with being direct by just informing on the goodness of the product and showing how to eat the right way? Is it necessary to show distasteful eating etiquette? (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

I want to comment on the aspect of marketing strategy. If we look closely, the ad is trying to market its new product. Before this, McDonalds does not produce nugget. When the nugget is introduced, it is trying to inform us how simple the food is. One can eat while dancing, in the water or while jumping around. But there is no eating manners at all because the right way to eat and drink is while sitting down. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

In one aspect, the way the ad is approached may be attractive. But the message is simple, to sell the nugget, it is not necessary to show style. The ad is more suitable as a vacation ad because it shows a beach activity. It is more meaningful to show how the nugget is made rather than showing youngsters enjoying themselves in a resort. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

The following statement from a provincial Chinese participant shows that although he was not the conservative type, he still disapproved the shot showing a group of teenagers happily street dancing.

I understand it is a fun ad, the skateboarding part is okay but the dancing part is not good. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Judging from the many negative comments about the advertisement, it is no surprise that a number of the participants expressed total dislike towards the advertisement.

They are selling a new product but I find the ad confusing, it muddles my mind. I don't like it at all. (Provincial Young Upper Middle Class - Married Female Malay Computer Programmer)

I don't fancy it at all because there is nothing in the ad that I like. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

It doesn't appeal to me at all. Not my kind of food. In fact, we hardly see the product in the ad, it's just the fun activities. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Chinese Video Editor)

There is nothing I like in the ad. The product is not highlighted but the people are given importance. It is very confusing. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Malay Administrative Assistant {3})

Because the advertisement commercial highlighted youngsters involved in fun activities, participants were confident that McDonalds was targeting its product to the teenagers. A provincial participant quoted below observed that teenagers are also less concerned about the health content of the nuggets.

From the advertisement, you can be sure that the people buying the nuggets are youngsters because it is simple food that suits them. If they have time they will eat, otherwise they won't eat. To the older group, this type of food may not attract them because of its cholesterol content. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

An urban young affluent man quoted below believed that McDonalds has changed its marketing strategy by focusing on the youth market instead of making it a brand name for the family.

They are trying to change from a family restaurant to a teenage restaurant. It used to be a family thing which suits everyone. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

In terms of affordability, the subsequent participant understood that McDonalds was meant for the middle class segment and above as they have more purchasing power than the working class population.

Those with a comfortable income, not for the working class and rural people. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Malay Administrative Assistant {4})

Consequently, participants were convinced that it was impossible for the nuggets to be a daily diet for Malaysians.

It is just a snack, not a daily diet. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

Not suitable as a daily diet. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

On the subject of the McDonalds nugget as a meal, the following provincial participant cautioned that it lacked nutritional value and would not be healthy for the body.

I am not very familiar with Western foods. All I know is that the nuggets are food that can be taken anywhere and I have tried food in McDonalds and KFC. I could feel that there are side effects to this food when I ate them. I know the nuggets, burgers and all have a lot of preservatives. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

The statement above is aligned with the following remark by an urban young affluent man.

Fast food can lead to a super size and cause a lot of diseases. It's not good for the body. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

For the participant quoted below, as a Muslim he raised his doubt in the way the McDonalds chicken was slaughtered. Like all other Malaysian Muslims he believed that a permitted animal must be slaughtered the Muslim way.

We are not sure how the chicken is slaughtered, whether it is in accordance with the Islamic way. It is true, they use the *halal* logo and I have eaten at McDonalds but I am still not sure. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

The perspective offered by a provincial upper middle class participant quoted below indicates a possible reason for the popularity of American fast food. According to him, the consistency in the quality and taste of the food are among the reasons for its success. This is especially true when compared with the consistency in taste of the local dishes which is nowhere near that of McDonalds or any other American fast food.

My question is, why are we so attracted to American products like McDonalds, KFC and the like? The answer is in the quality control of the food. The food provided in McDonalds *Klang* for instance, is of the same taste and quality with the one in *Seremban*. Unlike our own food, the *sambal tumis* in *Kuala Selangor* is not of the same taste with the one in *Klang* although it is made by the same person. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

On whether the nuggets were thought to be appetizing, participants were requested to give a rating with a maximum point of 10 as most appetizing. Interestingly, members of the urban young affluent sub-group rated the nuggets as less appetizing with an average rating of 4. In contrast the provincial participants thought otherwise. The overall average score from them was an impressive rating of 7. With reference to the depiction of lifestyle in the advertisement, without imposing their values, the following young urban affluent participants described it as a popular culture among the youths now.

Hip hop culture is the contemporary culture now. The hip hop teenagers are excited to jump on the bandwagon, to skateboard and all. It's cool. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Academic Department Head)

The portrayal of heterosexual relationship, popular and hedonistic culture is what the youths are about. The advertisement is an aspiration of the youth. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Chinese Project Manager)

However, another young urban affluent participant, described the lifestyle of the youth portrayed in the advertisement as excessive and not constructive.

An overexposed hip-hop lifestyle, it's unhealthy for the young generation. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Male Malay Lawyer)

Among members of the provincial middle class sub-group, everyone who responded on this issue considered it as a totally Western lifestyle that is not fitting with the Malaysian culture at all.

To me, it is not suitable. The whole ad carries too much foreign elements. I am worried if my kid will one day follow what they see in the ad. Another thing, the slogan "I'm loving it" is also not suitable to the Malaysian culture because the audience could overreact and misinterpret the real meaning. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

The ad portrays a free lifestyle that has no boundaries. If we still want to eat the nuggets, let it be suitable to our culture. What is wrong with showing the Malay way of eating with the family? (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

The social behaviours of the actors have gone beyond limits. One scene almost shows a couple kissing one another lip to lip. Although the ad message may have reached the audience, most of the scenes are not suitable to the Malaysian culture. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

Despite the many disapproving comments and viewpoints on the McDonalds advertisement, a few positive remarks were noted. Based on the responses, the most dominant positive element in the advertisement was the music that accompanied the commercial. In general, participants found it suitable for the teenagers.

It is trying to attract the audience to try the nuggets, the music is also appealing. It's not dull. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {2})

The music suits young people. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Indian Female Indian Teacher {3})

The music blends well with the fun situation. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

As a young man with a young heart, I find the music suitable. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

On this subject, the following urban young affluent lady manifested her more liberal thoughts.

Western music is something that has become Malaysian. Going by the beat of the music, it is quite a normal thing among youths to dance on the street. (Urban Young Affluent – Single Female Malay Business Development Executive)

Her comment above is not a surprise. Compared to the other members of the urban young affluent who gave an average rating of 5.5 on the aspect of the intermingling of the teenagers in the advertisement, she gave a considerably high score of 7. As for the score from members of the provincial middle class sub-group, the single young members also gave an average rating of 7 while the overall average rating from the older members who disapproved the socializing activities was a middle 5.

Other than music that was positively commented, the following provincial participant noticed that there was a shot showing the close relationship between a parent and his child.

The restaurant scene shows the closeness between a parent and his child. I think that is the good part, the rest are not very good. But to the youths, the kind of lifestyle portrayed may be suitable for them. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Technician {1})

7.2.7 Visa (credit card)

The advertisement for Visa was evaluated by the Chinese and Indian members from the provincial middle class and the urban young lower middle class sub-groups. The initial reactions towards this advertisement centred on the advertisement message.

Referring to another Visa commercial which features Pierce Brosnan as James Bond, the participant below interpreted the advertisement as conveying the message that Visa card offers convenience in that it is an alternative to cash and can be accepted everywhere.

Visa is easy to use wherever you may be. Even “James Bond” makes good use of it during an emergency. At times it’s useful because you don’t have to carry cash, especially when there are a lot snatch theft cases now. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Site Supervisor)

A provincial teacher participant noted that the advertisement is telling viewers that the Visa card can solve problems of every nature.

The message is that Visa card can solve all our problems. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

An urban young reporter quoted below reacted similarly but added that she did not believe Visa card could resolve all problems. To her, the product could in fact intensify more financial problems.

Interesting ad, it says if you have any problem at all, Visa card will solve it for you. Actually, I don’t think credit cards can overcome all problems because the more you use, the more credit you have to pay. This means you are using the money you need for future use. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

In contrast , the following provincial participants stated that they could not make out the message in the advertisement.

I am very blur with the message, not clear at all. Also, I just cannot understand why animation effect was used in the ad. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Female Indian Teacher {3})

I am not clear on what is the exact message in the ad. Possibly, it is saying Visa can solve all problems but for those who do not know what is Visa they will not

understand. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Noticeably, there were more criticisms than accolades towards this advertisement. While the participant below, an assistant head teacher thought the shots on aspects of technology in the advertisement was the only impressive element, the rest of the participants who commented had very little praise for it.

The technology shown is good otherwise there is nothing special about the ad. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

I think the ad has no value at all. It's fictional, showing a monster and all. The actor has no Asian look. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

I agree with the opinion that credit cards actually add more problems. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

To most of the lower middle class participants, urban and provincial, the Visa card advertisement is targeted towards the middle level and upper income sub-groups in Malaysia.

Only those earning more than RM2,000. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

Meant for the upper income groups. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Teacher {1})

The short narration below from an urban young lower middle class participant is an indirect admission that she became a credit card user because she had the opportunity to do so, and not because she felt the need for it.

I am not very sure whether Visa card users are average income earners like me or those earning more than RM2000 monthly. I have never had the intention of using credit card but I am now using one because I was taken up by the persuasive skill of a credit card salesman who convinced me. I signed up as a member because I was told I do not have to pay annual charges and so on. It's actually easy to use and can be approved there and then. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

Taking the above situation as a case, there is reason to believe that there are a portion of Malaysia's lower middle class members who spend on goods or brands that they do

not really require. With regards to the brand name Visa which denotes that it is a Western brand, participants were generally of the opinion that this issue was of no significance.

It is alright even though it is a Western product. If they can afford it, they are free to use it. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

If I have the money , I'll use the card, Western or not Western is not an issue. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {7})

It doesn't make a difference whether the card is Western or local. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

However, there was one comment below which criticised the advertisement for its portrayal of an exaggerated lifestyle which was associated with a Western outlook.

Everything is Western from the product up to the portrayal in the ad, this is an outward lifestyle, pretentious. It's like you can get away with everything. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Project Executive)

Bearing in mind that participants who evaluated the Visa card advertisement were members of the urban young lower middle class sub-group and that a majority of the provincial participants who responded to this advertisement were also from the same sub-group, it figures that most of them associated the images depicted with the lifestyle of the rich. As such, it did not suit their lifestyle.

It is the lifestyle of the rich which does not suit to my way of life at all. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Teacher {5})

Additionally, they did not notice any element of Malaysian culture in the advertisement.

I don't see any trace of Malaysian culture in the visuals, from the costume up to the monster and the setting of the place. May be it's too advanced for Malaysians to follow. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Teacher {6})

The fictional female protagonist, Lara Croft in the commercial was positively reflected as a role model by the urban female participants.

Sexy and heroic. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Chinese Reporter)

Successful, she helps people in need. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

Although participants thought the costume worn by the heroic Lara Croft was a little revealing, they were tolerant about it as it was seen as appropriate for the occasion.

Sexy costume because it is fitting, does not suit the culture of the people in the rural areas. However, the storyline fits in with the costume she wears. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

Sexy but it is okay with me. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Quality Controller)

With regard to the setting of the scenes in the advertisement, although the participants had reservations on other related aspects, they found it remarkable.

The place looks interesting but not realistic. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Married Female Malay Secretary)

Impressive setting but because of the dark colours, it is quite depressing (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Female Malay Tutor {2})

People will find it interesting, but the message will be difficult for the audience to understand. (Urban Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Chinese Site Supervisor)

The music accompanying the scenes was also thought to be amazing and appropriate.

The music suits the action. (Provincial Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Indian Assistant Head Teacher)

The music creates suspense. (Provincial Older Middle Level Middle Class – Married Male Chinese Teacher {4})

Both the urban and provincial participants gave an overall average rating of 5 for every aspect of this commercial.

7.2.8 Benson and Hedges (cigarette-related product)

The Benson and Hedges cigarette advertisement was assessed by Malay members of the provincial middle class sub-group. By and large, similar to the Salem

advertisement, participants were well aware that the advertisement was actually selling cigarettes instead of the sporting activities as shown throughout the commercial. Nonetheless, they had interestingly differing interpretations and explanations of the scenes and shots in the advertisement.

The following businessman participant from the upper middle class sub-group elaborated that the advertisement engaged in high risk sporting activities as an alternative approach to attract the young to the Benson and Hedges cigarettes. According to him, it is a way to associate Benson and Hedges cigarettes with rough and rugged activities.

The ad uses outdoor activities as a concept to sell Benson and Hedges cigarettes. This ad is an alternative ad to sell Benson and Hedges cigarettes indirectly because direct cigarette ads are banned by the government. We are aware that Benson and Hedges is synonymous with cigarettes from the day we were introduced to cigarettes. What is portrayed in the ad is a new approach to shift the thinking of the public from cigarette per se to an outdoor event concept depicting dare devil activities. This is a psychological approach to promote cigarettes to the youths. This means when they smoke Benson and Hedges, they feel they are the tough outdoor guys. This is a psychological war meant for the young. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {3})

To another of his counterpart, also a businessman, the message in the advertisement is that one will not be endangered of health risk with Benson and Hedges cigarettes for as long as one is involved in the sporting activities shown in the commercial.

I understand the message in the ad. as, it does not mean if we smoke today, we'll die early. The ad tells us that, if you practice healthy living like involving yourselves in adventure activities, it is alright to smoke. And the Golden Dream message is meant for the viewer to dream of gold and this is synonymous with Benson and Hedges. The ad shows swimming and other outdoor activities to encourage people to get involved while at the same time telling them to smoke and doing these will keep one healthy. This is how I understand the ad. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

With regard to the subject of associating Benson and Hedges cigarettes with sporting activities, the participant cited below indicated that the advertisement was insulting the intelligence of the viewers as it is not logical to be a smoker as well as an active sportsman.

To me what is portrayed in the ad does not make sense. Although I don't smoke I know that when smoking, one has to inhale, not mountain climbing or kayaking. I think because they cannot advertise cigarette, they confuse us. They are giving us entertainment. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

In direct contrast to the opinions above, the subsequent participant admitted that while he was impressed with all the shots of the sporting activities, he was also disappointed that the act of smoking was not shown.

I like all the adventure activities shown. There are no complaints except for one, that is they don't show anyone smoking. As a smoker, I like to see another smoker. It is good to see a smoker doing mountain climbing. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {3})

Another response which is poles apart from the rest of the comments and viewpoints on the advertisement was the one below which defended the fact that the Benson and Hedges advertisement was not selling cigarettes but was sponsoring a high risk sports event. To defend his stance, he made a comparison of the advertisement with the Marlboro advertisement. To him the Marlboro advertisement was selling cigarettes because its scenes are confined to the cowboy in Marlboro country and unlike the Benson and Hedges advertisement, there was no particular event that was promoted.

I like everything about the ad. The extreme sports activities in the ad are just events sponsored by Benson and Hedges. It is not a cigarette ad. A real cigarette ad is the Marlboro ad which shows the cowboy. The ad we just viewed is just a sponsored ad. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

In terms of the lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement, the participant below interpreted it as healthy living for active Malaysians.

It is a healthy lifestyle that encourage youths to be involved, just like the *UiTM* student who conquered Mt. Everest recently. Outdoor sports activities like what is shown can convince youths to participate and provide them a chance to have their names in the Malaysian Guinness Book of Records. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

On whether the scenes depicted in the commercial suited his lifestyle, he was quick to give a positive response.

Yes, it suits my lifestyle. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Health Assistant)

In general, participants were quite confident that the advertisement was targeting its message to Malaysian youths.

Suitable for people below 20 years old. It is not suitable for people above this age. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

I agree that the target audience for this ad are the youths. This is the reason why the commercial is presented as such. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

On the other cultural aspects in the advertisement, comments were made on the sporting attire of the actors. The statements by two of the participants below show that they were quite tolerant and accommodative on this issue although the underlying message indicated that their minds were still restricted to societal norms.

The commercial blends well but the costume worn may not be suitable. The man and lady doing mountain climbing wear similar costumes. It may be alright for the man to wear shorts but it may not be suitable in our society for the lady to put on shorts. But I understand that the ad is meant to influence both men and women and shorts is the most suitable attire for such activity. (Provincial Young Lower Middle Class – Single Male Malay Clerk {1})

We cannot deny they wear shorts but why show the actors with their legs open? Why not use better and decent shots that would still show them climbing? Viewers may have negative perceptions. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

The following remarks which responded to the question above further substantiate the assumption that on issues interpreted as “moral values”, participants were careful in making their stand because of its sensitivity towards the society at large.

May be the shots are meant to show real stunts to attract attention. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Clerk {2})

It is interesting to note that of the eight provincial participants who responded to the Benson and Hedges advertisement, only two gave a rating of 5 while the average rating from the other six participants was an impressive 9. It is quite obvious that the high score of 9 was given on the aspects of production of the commercial which they found appealing.

One of the two participants who rated 5 reasoned that his score was such because he did not see the link between cigarettes and sports.

I give a 5 because the outdoor activities and the cigarette do not fit in. (Provincial Older Lower Middle Class – Married Male Malay Office Assistant)

On the other hand, the other participant found the advertisement perplexing due to the many quick shots of so many sporting activities.

I give a 5 because I don't quite enjoy the ad. It is quite confusing and I don't feel satisfied with the ad. By right, it should only focus on two or three activities, like mountain climbing, snorkelling or jogging. There is too much to see in a very short presentation. (Provincial Older Upper Middle Class – Married Male Malay Businessman {2})

7.3 Q-sort Analysis: Appeal of Global Brands

As mentioned on page 149 in Chapter Four, the q-sorting technique was conducted among 22 respondents representative of a cross-section of Malaysia's middle class population. Seeing that this technique is capable of suggesting similar thought patterns among certain sub-sets of the middle class respondents who share mutual values in their reactions to a variety of advertisements, therefore this research approach can ascertain the significant array of appeals evoked in responding to advertisements as a whole.

Given that the results from the q-sorting technique are aimed at complementing findings on the evaluation of advertisement commercials from the focus group discussions, the researcher recognizes the importance of maximizing the value of the data extracted for analysis of the q-study. At this juncture, it must be restated that the commercials sorted by the respondents were the same ones shown to the participants of the focus group discussions.

To summarise the q-sort procedure as detailed from page 149 until page 153 in Chapter Four, each respondent was first asked to watch the 23 commercials twice to understand the cultural images inherent in each one of the commercials. They were then asked to sort the commercials using the q-cards given to them and stack them into three piles: nine commercials considered as "most appealing", nine as "least appealing" and five kept in the category of "not sure". Except for the "not sure" pile, the two other piles were further sorted wherein each respondent was required to

create three new piles for each. For the “most appealing” pile, respondents were asked to choose three q-cards each grouped as “strongly agree”, “agree” and “slightly agree” with the statement stated in each of the q-cards that “This commercial appeals to me”. The same procedure was replicated for the “least appealing” pile which was classed as “strongly disagree”, “disagree” and “slightly disagree”. Once this procedure was completed, the respondent was then asked to fill in the boxes in the score sheet (see Appendix E) given to them earlier, based on the rank order given to each q-card, each of which was numbered from 1 to 23 according to the number of commercials that was q-sorted. For instance, if KFC commercial stands for card number 1 and this commercial is considered “most appealing”, it is ranked as “strongly agree” and therefore number 1 is written inside the box representing “strongly agree”. Once all the score sheets were completed, a factor analysis from the q-sorting technique was conducted.

7.3.1 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis from the 22 q-sorts were tabulated using the SPSS package. The computer output was obtained by retrieving data using the principle component analysis, and subsequently a rotated component matrix. The data extraction which were based on the respondents’ subjective viewpoints revealed “eigenvalue significance” (see Gorsuch, 1983) for further interpretation. By itself, although the factor analysis would not be able to scrutinise all of human personality, it could describe the nature of responses among Malaysia’s middle class segment in relation to their perception of and influence by global brands. The resulting factors that emerged for interpretation from the q-study are therefore indicative of the division of cultural subjectivity that exists among the respondents who sorted the 23 commercials on global brands. In other words, analysis of the q-study would reveal the differences in cultural outlook among certain sub-sets within the middle class segment in Malaysia with regards to their use and consumption of global brands. As such, the respondents’ similarities in their thought patterns are the focal point of the q-study, not the 23 global advertisements that were individually ranked by the respondents as variables in the q-sample.

Looking at Table 5, from a total of 23 variables that were q-sorted by 22 respondents, there were eight factors extracted and these account for a cumulative 81 percent of the initial eigenvalues of the total variance. A detailed interpretation of the eight extracted components is revealed in Table 6. Variables with positive loadings above the value of 0.50 are considered significant and are interpreted as component factors. Noticeably, as illustrated in Table 6, loadings of the significant factors are below 1.00. This situation come about because of the small number of respondents against the number of variables for this study and according to Gorsuch (1983: 562-563), this issue is quite common in marketing studies. As such, he cautions researchers faced with this situation to conduct the data interpretation with special care. Furthermore, he proposes the principle of using a ratio scale of four observations to one variable although he admits that this is not a hard and fast rule.

Nevertheless, because the ratio of observations against the variables for this study is 1:1 and aligned with Gorsuch's suggestion, the results were interpreted cautiously. Undoubtedly, the figures in both Table 5 and Table 6 indicate that an association certainly exists between global brands and the respondent's exposure towards these advertisements. As Table 6 reveals, representation of each of the eight factors based on loadings above the positive value of 0.5 are:

Component 1 comprises Nestle Drumstick, Danone Chipsmore, Wall's Cornetto,
Cadbury and Clairol;

Component 2 comprises L'Oreal, Salem, Visa and HSBC;

Component 3 comprises KFC, Coca-cola and Marlboro;

Component 4 comprises McDonalds and Standard Chartered;

Component 5 comprises Danone Jacobs;

Component 6 comprises Nokia;

Component 7 comprises Pampers and

Component 8 comprises Nestle Koko Krunch

TABLE 5: TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of	Cumulative	Total	% of	Cumulative	Total	% of	Cumulative
		Variance	%		Variance	%		Variance	%
1.00	4.27	18.57	18.57	4.27	18.57	18.57	3.15	13.70	13.70
2.00	3.66	15.91	34.48	3.66	15.91	34.48	2.90	12.60	26.30
3.00	2.50	10.85	45.33	2.50	10.85	45.33	2.61	11.35	37.64
4.00	2.18	9.46	54.79	2.18	9.46	54.79	2.16	9.39	47.03
5.00	1.87	8.13	62.92	1.87	8.13	62.92	2.13	9.24	56.28
6.00	1.66	7.22	70.14	1.66	7.22	70.14	2.04	8.85	65.13
7.00	1.37	5.97	76.11	1.37	5.97	76.11	1.92	8.36	73.49
8.00	1.12	4.88	81.00	1.12	4.88	81.00	1.73	7.51	81.00
9.00	0.91	3.96	84.96						
10.00	0.84	3.65	88.60						
11.00	0.59	2.58	91.19						
12.00	0.52	2.28	93.47						
13.00	0.48	2.09	95.55						
14.00	0.36	1.56	97.12						
15.00	0.29	1.28	98.40						
16.00	0.16	0.71	99.10						
17.00	0.12	0.51	99.61						
18.00	0.05	0.21	99.82						
19.00	0.02	0.10	99.93						
20.00	0.02	0.07	100.00						
21.00	0.00	0.00	100.00						
22.00	0.00	0.00	100.00						
23.00	0.00	0.00	100.00						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

To determine the number of factors for interpretation from the q-sorts, the approach of *a priori* determination (ibid: 566) was employed. The reason for taking this course of action is to align with the findings from the focus group discussions which the researcher has prior knowledge of. As such, although eight components were extracted, only the first three factors are selected as they are considered sufficient for interpretation to achieve the study's goal of looking at the patterns of relationship among the selected variables.

Furthermore, as illustrated in Table 6, compared to the other components, there is a minimum of three commercials for interpretation in each of Components 1, 2 and 3. In other words, each of the first three components offer sufficient information

significant enough for data interpretation. All three factor solutions combined comprise a total of 12 out of the original 23 commercials on global brands.

The figures in Table 6 also demonstrate that there are five variables, namely Olay, Pizza Hut, Clorets, Benson and Hedges, and Pantene which do not attain the minimum positive loadings of 0.50 for any of the components.

TABLE 6: ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

Variable	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Nestle Drumstick	0.88	0.10	0.03	-0.03	-0.11	0.00	0.03	0.03
KFC	0.02	-0.02	0.87	-0.12	0.03	-0.07	-0.18	-0.16
Coca-Cola	-0.34	-0.27	0.62	0.15	-0.51	-0.20	-0.02	0.10
L'Oreal	0.22	0.56	-0.24	0.43	0.00	-0.24	0.11	-0.06
Danone Chipsmore	0.52	0.34	0.21	0.09	-0.43	-0.51	-0.06	0.02
Olay	0.00	0.31	-0.18	0.48	0.02	-0.32	0.12	-0.08
Marlboro	-0.21	-0.47	0.51	-0.16	-0.06	-0.28	-0.11	-0.41
Salem	-0.05	0.56	-0.20	0.21	-0.04	0.11	-0.05	0.16
Nokia	-0.26	-0.12	-0.07	-0.03	0.03	0.85	-0.08	-0.23
Danone Jacobs	-0.27	0.09	0.40	-0.07	0.58	-0.02	0.32	0.15
Pizza Hut	-0.67	-0.04	0.00	-0.48	0.05	0.27	-0.18	0.17
McDonald's	-0.36	-0.39	0.06	0.54	-0.16	-0.20	0.14	-0.09
Wall's Cornetto	0.79	-0.17	-0.10	-0.06	0.06	-0.14	-0.05	0.16
Visa Card	0.19	0.82	-0.04	-0.28	-0.08	0.03	-0.18	0.09
Cadbury	0.62	0.12	0.12	0.00	0.29	0.25	0.02	-0.40
Clairol	0.87	-0.16	-0.07	-0.11	0.24	0.13	0.03	0.03
Nestle Koko Krunch	0.04	0.35	-0.28	0.32	0.12	-0.42	0.09	0.64
HSBC	-0.26	0.74	-0.26	0.06	0.12	-0.05	-0.26	0.26
Clorets	-0.47	-0.60	-0.02	-0.26	-0.03	0.42	0.31	-0.10
Standard Chartered	0.43	0.05	0.15	0.51	-0.17	0.19	0.08	0.15
Benson & Hedges	-0.84	-0.25	-0.04	0.28	0.40	-0.00	-0.08	-0.20
Pantene	0.13	-0.42	-0.25	0.39	0.10	0.42	0.07	0.20
Pampers	-0.10	-0.12	0.04	-0.11	0.20	0.02	0.83	0.03
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.								
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.								
a. Rotation converged in 17 iterations.								

Using the content of the commercials within each component as a basis, the three factor types that were examined are labelled as “New Traditionalists” (Factor 1), “Modernists” (Factor 2) and “Brand Advocates” (Factor 3).

The “New Traditionalists” comprised an all Malay middle class cluster of six members comprising three provincial and three urban respondents. There were three females and three males in this group. Table 7 details the commercials and their loadings within this factor. They are: Nestle Drumstick, Danone Chipsmore, Wall's Cornetto, Cadbury and Clairol. Of the five commercials in this group, three of them,

namely Wall's Cornetto, Danone Chipsmore and Cadbury, share a similar theme that focuses on family togetherness. As for the other two commercials, the concepts are quite familiar. Nestle Drumstick suggests that the ice cream is temptingly delicious whilst Clairol shampoo, like most shampoo commercials, places emphasis on beautiful and shiny hair. It must be mentioned that according to the researcher's own subjective evaluation, the cultural content of Nestle Drumstick and Danone Chipsmore commercials is categorised as "least Westernized" while the Wall's Cornetto, Cadbury and Clairol commercials are categorised as "moderately Westernized".

TABLE 7: FACTOR 1- THE NEW TRADITIONALISTS

No.	Commercial and its concept	Loadings
1.	Nestle Drumstick (ice cream) : Irresistably delicious	0.88
2.	Danone Chipsmore (biscuits) : Enjoy it with the family	0.52
3.	Wall's Cornetto (ice cream): Share it with the family	0.79
4.	Cadbury (chocolate): Happiness and joy with the family	0.62
5.	Clairol (shampoo): Keeps hair fresh and beautiful	0.87

All the three family related commercials were rated positively by members of this group. As described in Appendix B (ii), Wall's Cornetto ice cream commercial, which confines itself to a modern interior setting of a house, shows the mother as the main character giving a surprise to her husband and children by serving them with Wall's ice cream. It concludes with everyone sitting together at the dinner table enjoying Wall's. The Cadbury chocolate commercial also depicts a modern indoor setting. Added to this is a birthday celebration showing a loving family atmosphere. As for Danone Chipsmore biscuits, this commercial shows a loving family having fun, playing hide and seek with one another. An interesting comment on one of the three commercials came from an older provincial upper middle class male: "This commercial shows an exemplary Malaysian family. It is very harmonious when you

see a father and son baking Cadbury cake together and making the mother happy. It focuses on positive family values that should be followed by everyone.”

Another commercial rated positive by members of this group is the Nestle Drumstick ice cream. This commercial which has a humorous tone shows two yuppies who cannot contain their excitement when they are absorbed in innovative technology. The delicious “xchoc” drumstick ice cream was the ultimate excitement they received. The actors in this commercial, the music, the technology, attire and actions of the main character are Western in nature but have generally been accepted as urban Malaysian culture.

Concerning the Clairol shampoo commercial, the “New Traditionalists” were divided in their opinions with three out of the six respondents giving a positive response to this commercial. A positive response came from a provincial older lower middle class male who observed: “The message is easy to understand, very direct and straightforward”.

As typical Malays who are culturally strong on tradition, members of this group would most likely be nationalistic and patriotic. Like the respondents under this group, most of the “New Traditionalists” would also likely be public sector executives. Being responsible citizens and consumers, whenever possible they would make an effort to support local products for as long as the product is within the expected quality they are looking for. Hence, local brands such as the Malaysian made cars, *Proton* and *Perodua* are the pride of this group.

As the results show, they were house proud and believed in maintaining strong family values with the mother as the central figure when it comes to household chores. As such, global brands with Malay cultural proximity would fit in well with the personality of the “New Traditionalists”. At the same time, since they are a tolerant and educated middle class cluster, they were willing to accept universally accepted values considered as within the traditional boundary that they can compromise on. In other words, although they are quite compromising on Western values such as celebrating birthday parties and using English as a spoken language, they would not

tolerate an “overly Western” lifestyle. Some of these examples are excessive exposure of the female flesh or unmarried couples living together in the same house which are indeed against their cultural values and principles.

The second group, the “Modernists” comprised eight urban middle class members from all levels of social status, with mixed age groups and mixed ethnic groups. Of these, three were female respondents. The four commercials in this group are L’Oreal, Salem, Visa and HSBC (see Table 8).

TABLE 8: FACTOR 2 – THE MODERNISTS

	Commercial and its concept	Loadings
1.	Olay (beauty and skincare) : Fairer skin creates confidence	0.56
2.	Salem (cigarettes) : Refreshing in taste	0.56
3.	Visa (credit card): Visa protects you in any situation	0.82
4.	HSBC (bank): An international bank sensitive to local needs.	0.74

Among the eight participants in this group, there were five members who ranked positive for Olay which promotes the idea that a lady with a fair skin is more acknowledged than a darker skin lady. This response alone indicates that this group is the opposite of the “New Traditionalists”. The other three commercials, namely Salem, Visa and HSBC were generally accepted as appealing by this group. Except for the HSBC commercial which the researcher categorised as moderately Westernized in respect of its cultural content, the other commercials within this factor were categorised as highly Westernized (see Appendix B [ii]).

The Salem commercial, which the respondents were aware is selling cigarettes, was rated very positively. It uses the concept of coolness and freshness and portrays a Western lifestyle showing scenes of a couple on a bicycle enjoying themselves on a

refreshingly soothing and green highland. The scenes are accompanied by a slow paced music which suits the mood of the visuals. Therefore, it came as no surprise when the following comment was given by one of the respondents: “The commercial shows a clean environment with a nice and cooling scenery. The actors are well attired and easy going. It fits in with my kind of lifestyle”.

The Visa credit card commercial portrays the character Lara Croft in tight-fitting leather attire as the protagonist who is in grave danger of being attacked by a monster but is saved by Visa credit card. This commercial uses animation technology and suspense music to add impact. It elicited the following response from an older urban middle level middle class member who was a Chinese male: “The high tech graphics looks amazing, the music is appealing and Visa is a useful product. Almost everyone uses a credit card nowadays”.

The message conveyed by the HSBC commercial is that although the bank is international, it is very sensitive to local needs. There are Western cultural elements in the scenes including the beach dancing and the interior décor, but these scenes are cleverly interspersed with regional music that has been absorbed into the Malaysian culture. One of the responses noted was from a young urban lower middle class Chinese female: “It is a good idea indulging ad. The brand has a creative tagline (Your local bank) and appeals to everybody”.

In general, the commercials chosen by the “Modernists” are those that are modern in setting and quite liberal in approach. Being urban multi-ethnic Malaysians who have adopted some aspects of the Western values, the “Modernists” can be categorised as a broad-minded sub-segment of Malaysia’s middle class community with “progressive mindsets”. This group’s pattern of thoughts is that one cannot be sentimental with some age-old traditions and practices if one wants to move forward in life. As such, like themselves who are career-minded and ambitious, most of their spouses work as executives in the private sector while their children are taken care by maids. As education is an important investment for them, their children normally attend tuition classes after school. Since they are not constrained by traditional values, they are

therefore enthusiastic consumers of most global brands which they believe are always of higher quality than local brands.

Factor 3 which is labelled “Brand Advocates” consisted of four urban, multi-racial middle class members in the upper and middle level brackets. Specifically, they comprised one older Indian upper middle class male, one young Chinese upper middle class male, one young Chinese middle-rung middle class female and one young Malay middle-level middle class female respondents. All of the three commercials, namely Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Marlboro and Coca-cola were rated positively by this group (see Table 9).

Undoubtedly, the brands of their choice are the most established brands among all of the variables. Being in the market for more than 30 years, these brands are also among the most frequently seen and heard in the media. It is therefore quite understandable that the KFC commercial was overwhelmingly rated positive by a majority of the 22 respondents. As for the Marlboro and Coca-cola advertisements, although there were some negative comments from members of the middle class segment outside this group, the “Brand Advocates” gave positive ratings to these commercials.

There is no doubt that the “Brand Advocates” believed that a well-established brand is synonymous with good quality regardless of whether these brands portray Malaysian values or otherwise. Marlboro which can be considered as 100 percent Western influenced because of the actor’s cowboy outfit, the wild West setting and the American country influenced music, was seen by this group as a well executed commercial that looks real. An older upper middle class Indian male noted: “It is a very good commercial, everything in the commercial looks genuine. No wonder it is a very famous brand name”.

Similarly, the Western influence in the Coca cola commercial is also quite dominant. All the actors in the commercial are Westerners, the spokesperson wears Western suits and the way the drink is gulped is also Western in nature. According to a young Malay middle rung middle class female: “I like to drink Coke and I like the commercial. It is simple and easy to understand”.

The “Brand Advocates” are a group of strong-minded middle class members who are not easily swayed to change their minds not only when making buying decisions but also in their thought patterns towards socio-cultural or political aspects. Most members of this group are quite likely former “Modernists” who have achieved most of what they want in their career. They revere and emulate the Western habits of timeliness, freedom of thoughts and an individualistic mind. Also, being “less Malaysian” in attitude, it is quite probable that they spend their annual vacation outside the country, play golf and dine in expensive restaurants. As such, their exposure to Western lifestyle is more pronounced than the other groups. Most of them are active private sector executives holding senior positions in multinational companies.

As consumers, this group is not influenced by the crowd. If a product is from an established brand name, is perceived to be of good quality and can fulfil their needs, they will buy even if it means going against the thinking of the majority. In fact, because of their high purchasing power, they can be categorised as trendsetters.

TABLE 9: FACTOR 3 – BRAND ADVOCATES

No.	Commercial and its concept	Loading
1.	Coca cola (soft drink): Tastes good	0.62
2.	Marlboro (cigarette): Rugged and tough	0.51
3.	Kentucky Fried Chicken (fast food): Family togetherness	0.87

Using the three factors that emerged from this q-methodology as a basis, the researcher can deduce that Malaysia’s middle class population are generally receptive to global brands. Advertisements that contain considerably strong Western images are at most times tolerated by most of them. Western values that are interspersed with typical Asian values of close family ties are welcomed by them. For as long as these global advertisements do not cross the limits of accepted norms and well rooted cultural values of Malaysians, the Malay culture in particular, global advertisements are well-received by Malaysia’s middle class community.

Taken as a whole, the q-sort technique has considerably been successful in adding useful data to achieve the purpose of this study that relates to the impact of global brands on the lifestyles of Malaysia's middle class population. Certainly, it has achieved its purpose of complementing and reinforcing the findings from the focus group discussions which is a major research technique for this thesis. Despite the small sample of 22 respondents, the q-sort technique has been able to chart a definite category of thinking patterns of Malaysia's heterogeneous middle class population, adding more credibility to the overall results. Undeniably, this research procedure has contributed significantly to this study.

7.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter focuses on the analysis of television advertisements on global brands that were assessed by participants of the focus group discussions and sorted by respondents of the q-methodology. Whilst there were 23 global brand name commercials categorised as highly Westernized, moderately Westernized and least Westernized as explained in Appendix B (ii) that were screened, a total of eight were picked up for evaluation by the focus group participants. On the other hand, for the q-sorting technique, 12 of the same 23 advertisements were considered significant for factor analysis.

In general, although results from both approaches show the presence of Western influence on the cultural life of Malaysia's middle class segment, these influences are deemed "within accepted norms of Malaysian culture and values". A major reason for this situation is that the Malaysian middle class group are by and large still passionate with much of their traditional values and lifestyles such as the practice of religious and cultural rituals and maintaining close family ties. However, although they take pride in upholding some Malaysian values, they are quite receptive to "progressive" elements of Western modernisation that have been making inroads into the Malaysian society via technology and the globalisation of media since the beginning of the global era in the early 1970s. This explains the easy acceptance of global advertisements that portray universal elements of what they regard as "Western values" such as Western female dress that do not reveal too much of the body shape

and flesh, social interactions that involve minimal touching between the different sexes or Western indoor setting with blinds, soft colours as backdrops and Western furniture. In a nutshell, aspects relating to a broad spectrum of modernisation in the advertisements appeal to a cross-section of Malaysia's middle class segment who were generally able to comprehend the message in the advertisements quite well. The findings also substantiate that advertisements with themes close to Malaysian values of close family bonds fascinate the audience.

It is therefore not surprising that KFC is a favourite advertisement among audiences of both research approaches. As it is, this advertisement depicts a close-knit modern family willing to adapt to a Western lifestyle that is blended well with local tradition which, in this case is the Western fried chicken flavoured with local taste. At this point, it must also be noted that as the focus group findings disclosed, although the participants liked the KFC chicken they were not ready to accept it as a daily diet.

The favourable comments by focus group participants on Nestle's Koko Krunch advertisement and q-study respondents towards Wall's Cornetto, Danone Chipsmore and Nestle's Cadbury advertisements are also not surprising as these advertisements carry a family-related theme. These advertisements which appeal mostly to the Malay audiences are considered typically "Malaysian in character" not only because of the focus on the close family relationship but also the portrayal of the traditional gender role of the mother taking responsibility of serving meals for the family.

The Nokia brand name is another advertisement that was well-received. Throughout the advertisement, the focus is on decently dressed Malaysians in Western costume in a modern and affluent setting. Undoubtedly, the latest technology and the material comfort in the advertisement appeal to the upper and middle level urban Malaysian middle class members who are willing to adopt Western culture provided it does not go against the traditional norms.

Interestingly, Western cultural elements in the Salem advertisement fascinated many of the audiences. Although they were critical of its subtle message of selling cigarettes, the middle class audiences who evaluated this advertisement in both the research approaches were amazed with the beautiful highland setting with snow

covered mountain. Psychologically, this means they were attracted to experience a Western setting. Besides this, the Western attire of a long skirt and loose blouse worn by the female actors were also regarded as decent. Except for a number of older participants and the *folk urbanites*, audiences in general were also tolerant towards the subtle interactions between the opposite sex in this advertisement. It must also be noted that some of the young urban middle class members were also compromising with the blatantly Westernized street dancing scenes in the McDonalds commercial and the skin tight attire of the character Lara Croft in the Visa commercial.

Based on the cultural elements portrayed in Salem and Nokia advertisements, it can be deduced that the Western images of affluence, technological aspects and friendship with the opposite sex are pleasing to most of the urban audiences. This is particularly true among the upper and middle level middle class members who enjoy a better standard of living than their lower middle class counterparts. In fact, some members of the lower middle class sub-group indicated that although they aspire to own products with global brand names such as Nokia and Visa, affordability is a stumbling block. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon is typical of most of Asia's marginal middle class cluster who are anxious with a new lifestyle and consumption habits (see Pinches, 1999).

However, there were advertisements such as L'Oreal which were rejected because it was interpreted as being racist for promoting the idea of "being white is beautiful". More significantly, this advertisement was evaluated exclusively by urban young affluent participants of the focus group discussion who were comparatively more open and liberal in their comments of the "strong Western influence" in the McDonalds advertisement. It can therefore be inferred that Western images that "insults the intelligence" of Malaysia's middle class group will be considered as redundant by them.

Unlike their urban counterparts who were largely a compromising and tolerant lot, the provincial middle class members were more concerned and rigid in their attitudes towards advertisements that they considered have trespassed the Malaysian values which are still dear to them. In fact, many among the Malay provincial middle class sub-group manifested their religious inclination. This can be discerned from their

observations of some of the advertisement scenes including the way the nuggets were eaten in the McDonalds advertisement and the “immoral” behaviour of a male character in the advertisement who tries to kiss a female actor. Other comments include the “unsuitable” attire of the female actor in the Benson and Hedges advertisement. Besides this, they were also more careful in their viewpoints on aspects relating to Malaysian culture. A case in point is the Koko Krunch advertisement which was generally well-received by them. A comment from one of them was that the advertisement is actually promoting universal culture, while another said that the cereals is not Malaysian food and another provincial participant suggested that the advertisement would have been more effective for the family if the father joins in to eat the breakfast together.

The results above extracted from the focus group discussions and the q-sort technique which reaffirm each other have undoubtedly given a clear picture on the extent of influence of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia’s middle class segment. Further to this, besides establishing the results of the focus group discussions, factor analysis from the findings of the q-sort technique had also added new information to this study. In relation to the impact of Western cultural values in global advertisements, the thinking patterns of Malaysia’s middle class could be categorized into the “new traditionalists”, “modernists” and “brand advocates”. While the “new traditionalists” embrace strong Malaysian values but are willing to accept new values that do not cross the traditional limits, the “modernists” are more liberal and open-minded and therefore more flexible than the former. Lastly, although they are a minority, the “brand advocates” who believe that Western brands are generally superior are the champions of individual choice and freedom and are not bounded by traditions. They are a strong-minded middle class cluster.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to determine the perception and influence of Western cultural values featured in global brands of products advertised in the Malaysian media.

Specifically, this study has three major aims: First, to scrutinize the extent of cultural change in the way of life of Malaysia's middle class population in association with their consumption patterns of global brands. Second, to explore and make comparisons within the sub-segments of Malaysia's middle class population on their perceptions of the Western cultural values in global brands as advertised in Malaysian television. And thirdly, to examine the extent of Western cultural influence depicted in the advertisements on global brands in Malaysian television on the lifestyle of Malaysia's middle class community.

In this investigation, the research audiences which represent a cross-section of Malaysia's middle class community were probed and their responses analysed based on three areas of discussion that concern their perception and influence of Western global brands. They are: the consumption of global brands which is connected with advertisement impact, brand attitude and buying behaviour, perception of Malaysian and Western cultural values and the impact of global brands on their cultural values. While the term global brands refers to all American and European brand name products advertised in the Malaysian media, "cultural values" denote the ideas of lifestyle or way of life. Cultural values are measured in this study using responses relating to contents in the media advertisements, especially television advertisement commercials that contain cultural images and representations such as the actors' attire, their verbal and non-verbal communication, food and drink used, interior design of location and outdoor setting, music and other related cultural components. This study employs two research approaches, namely the focus group discussions as the main method and the q-sorting technique as a complementary method.

In consideration of the research objectives, research questions and the diversity of the middle class population, the focus groups were formed using the participants' occupation as a major variable, followed by other variables such as ethnic group, locality, gender, age group and marital status. They comprised eleven groups with nine typical groups and two special-interest groups. The nine typical groups comprised six multiracial urban-based groups and three multiracial provincial-based groups whilst the special interest groups were a multiracial urban-based all women group and an all Malay *folk urbanite* group. As a major research approach for this study, the participants for the focus group discussions which contributed about 90 percent of the research data comprised 81 participants with a breakdown of 51 Malays, 18 Chinese and 12 Indians representing the upper, middle level and lower middle class from urban and provincial localities, of mixed ages, gender and marital status. Each of the eleven focus group discussions was executed using a well-prepared discussion guide which deals with consumption patterns of global brands, viewpoints relating to Western and Malaysian cultural values and the participants' assessment of television advertisement commercials on global brands for the Malaysian market which were screened for them.

As for the q-sorting technique, 22 respondents representing a cross section of Malaysia's middle class population were asked to sort the same advertisement commercials shown for assessment to the focus group participants. This is done to ensure that the link to the data gathered from the focus group discussions is maintained and validity of the research is assured. This research approach was aimed at identifying and constructing categories within Malaysia's middle class group who share similar thought patterns in respect of their perceptions and influence of global brands. The findings from both research approaches are summarised in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

8.2 Appraisal of General Perspectives

As established in the literature presented in this study (see Berman, 1983; Bell, 1976; Kumar, 1995), the cultural changes occurring in a society's cultural life are due to the infiltration of new elements into the society's social, political and economic structure.

Over time, as the essentials of the new culture are adapted and adopted by the local populace, a hybrid culture would emerge (Steger, 2003; Howes, 1996; Franklin, et. al, 2000). Many scholars seem to be in agreement that economic progress of the society is an important yardstick that provides a major boost in the cultural transformation of a society (see Inglehart and Baker, 2003). Ostensibly, the speed of change in the cultural process would very much depend on the intensity of cultural beliefs and values upheld by the local population. In other words, if the local belief and value systems are ingrained, the transformation will take a longer time to occur. However, it must also be noted that although the secular-rational worldview dominates the newly adopted cultural value, the religious traditions and beliefs maintained by some societies are identified as a primary obstacle for the slowing down of the cultural change.

Today, the most important process that fosters cultural change in developing societies is the globalisation process. The interference of the developed Western countries in the politics and economy of the developing nation-states started with the introduction and international spread of the capitalist economy. Since the nature of Western capitalism is such that it is persistent, dynamic and ubiquitous, developing nation-states are compelled to consent to the unrestricted entry of the goods, services and ideas from the developed Western nations. Subsequently, this process continues with the cultural conversion or cultural globalisation of the developing nation-states.

As it is, the influx of Western consumer products into the nation-state has generated a culture of consumerism particularly amongst members of the middle class segment who possess the monetary means to buy Western goods. With many developing nations today adopting global economic policies, the inevitable adoption of new Western values amongst its populace, has consequently affected the practice of local traditions and long-held customs. The widespread exposure to global media and its technology has undoubtedly paved the way for the easy access of Western concepts of modernisation, leading to the eventual fruition of a cultural blend that combines the Western lifestyle and belief systems with local customs and practices of the developing nation-states (see Miller and Slater, 2000).

By and large, the youth population in these nations would normally be the first group

to adopt the new cultural life as they are relatively more vulnerable than the rest. This is because they usually experience the adolescent discrepancy of “identity crisis” (Erikson, 1968). With the seepage of this new lifestyle, materialistic desires develop and start flourishing to become the norm as the consumerist culture has gradually crept into the local traditions. As indicated earlier, along with this new form of lifestyle, although the significance of religious practices and traditions in some societies may decrease, being a well-defined cultural heritage (Inglehart, 1997), fundamental aspects in the religious beliefs such as those inherent in Islam, Roman Catholicism or Hinduism will continue to be practiced, regardless of transformation of culture or modernisation.

Notwithstanding this, the spread of consumerist and individualistic ideas via the establishment of Western-based multinational corporations serves as an important base for the mushrooming of the Western way of life. Along with this, the free flow of information and entertainment from the West by way of various global media including the internet would eventually interconnect and influence the local cultural practices of the developing nations. To many social science scholars, this phenomenon is a new form of globalisation commonly referred as cultural imperialism (see Golding and Harris, 1997; Barber, 1996; Kahn, 1995; Giddens, 1993). In effect, a discussion on this subject cannot detach itself with debates relating to the changing culture of a developing society that is facing a globally influenced consumerist culture.

However, despite the popular argument that cultural imperialism has been successful in capturing the minds of citizens in the developing nations to consume goods for their self-image, pride and status, recent debates on universalised cultures has been quite convincing. The consistent recurrence of a hybridized culture particularly in the consumption of food, music or clothes (Franklin, Lury and Stacey, 2000) is testament to the fact that a society’s local cultural life that is dependent on material goods has to go through a universal structural and technical transformation (Moeran, 2001). In fact, there have been instances where developing societies today are voluntarily receptive to the globalised Western lifestyle (see Howes, 1996).

Going back to the middle class segment who are the major consumers of Western

global brands, being an ambitious group of the population who hold respectable white-collar positions in their jobs, their growing affluence has made them synonymous with a certain standing in the society they live in. The promotion of Western products that use the mass media as major carriers seem to benefit the middle class consumers very well because they portray a certain image or status. As such, when consuming goods like cars, perfumes, clothes or other similar products, the middle class individual would most likely choose well-known and established Western brand names which are associated with, or which he or she wishes to associate with their identity. Apparently, the brand name turns out to be a primary appeal of the product whilst other elements like its quality, price or its function are secondary considerations.

Although an assortment of mass media are employed to market the brands using various strategies, television is acknowledged as the most pervasive tool to promote these “cultural goods” (see Habermas, 2005) which depict various images of lifestyle traits such as self-confidence and other attributes. Being the world’s most popular mass medium which offers the uniqueness of sight, sound and motion, it is also a natural companion to the viewer who can immerse himself for hours fixed to his favourite programme. It is in between these popular and highly rated programmes that advertisements of Western global brands are aired using a well-thought out and sure fire approach to get the attention of consumers, such as adapting the Western concept of lifestyle to local customs and traditions.

In Chapter Three, my focus of assessment was on the Malaysian experience in relation to global influence of the cultural life of its population, with emphasis on its middle class segment. Despite the fact that it is confronted with economic and cultural globalisation like other developing nations, its unique and intricate blend of conflicting forces of politics, economy and culture makes Malaysia different from the rest. It is a mix of Western influenced thoughts and Malaysia’s own style of compromise and tolerance amongst the multi-ethnic population. Yet, as a young nation that became independent only 50 years ago, by and large, analysts acknowledge Malaysia as a developing nation that is economically resilient, politically stable and culturally peaceful (Chua, 2000; Phua and Soo, 2004). Its more than 450 year long history of Western colonisation has no doubt been influential in

shaping its politics, economy and culture (Gullick, 1981). Although the Portuguese and then the Dutch ruled Malaya for some time, the British who eventually controlled the whole of the Malay peninsula left the most indelible mark on Malaysian life.

Since its independence, the government has thus far been successful in managing the fundamental political, economic and cultural needs of its multi-racial and multi-religious population which now comprises approximately 60 percent Malays, 30 percent Chinese and 10 percent Indians and other races. Considering its unique racial diversity and cultural pluralism with varying traditions and customs, together with its long-held Western influences, Malaysia is actually a complex hybrid of both Western and Malaysian outcome.

Today, Malaysia's biggest test is to forge a homogenous nation, a united *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian Nation) envisaged in Malaysia's Vision 2020 as one of its major challenges (see Mahathir, 1991). Albeit a sovereign nation, Malaysia's national language, *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) has yet to establish itself as a principle identity marker. On the same note, English which was advanced as a forward-looking language for the local population since the British rule turns out to be the main language amongst the urban Malay, Chinese and Indian middle class segment. In addition, although the three major ethnic groups socialise well with one another, they preserve their own individual way of life and are separated by their religious faiths. While Malays are mostly practicing Muslims, the Chinese are mainly Buddhists and a majority of Indians are Hindus, while Christianity is practiced by some Chinese and Indians. Because the Malays are a majority race and Islam is their religion, the form of modernity in Malaysia shows clear inclinations towards Islam. A classic example of this influence is the government's campaign for Malaysians to practice the concept of *Islam Hadhari* or Civilisational Islam which encourages its Muslim citizens to welcome modernisation while not abandoning the universal Islamic rituals and practices that identify them as practicing Muslims.

The complexity of this socio-cultural policy in the local setting is further aggravated by the continuous in-flow of global cultural messages from the media and its latest technology. Consequently, the cultural lives of Malaysians are deluged with unending media information, particularly television programmes and global

advertisements from the West. Malaysia's educated middle class group are compulsive audiences of the Western media as they are always in search of new information and knowledge to further improve their standard of living. Furthermore, a majority of them are from the first generation since their parents are mainly rural working class farmers who are least educated. Being financially sound, coupled with their psychological need for recognition as progressive trendsetters, the middle class consumers are the most likely target audiences of Western brand name advertisements that appear continuously in the various media channels. In other words, the news content in the media and the advertisements that carry the product's or brand's message are apparently important instruments that facilitate the identity makeover of Malaysia's middle class consumers.

However, akin to Malaysia's political, economic and cultural composition, which, as noted earlier, is an intricate mixture of both Malaysian and the West, the general cultural lifestyle of its middle class community is apparently a blend of both traditional and modern. While they are comfortable with the English language and Western style clothing which have become universal, they generally prefer Malaysian dishes although they can adapt to the Western food. Besides this, although they are compellingly mindful of the type of car or the house they live in, they are also proud of their close family relationship. At this point, it must be noted that among them, the Malay middle class members can be distinguished in terms of their outlook and mannerisms. Unlike their Chinese and Indian counterparts, being practicing Muslims, at times they tend to be perplexed between their materialistic desires and their religious journey. In short, the Chinese and Indian members of the Malaysian middle class community tend to have a clearer worldview of their needs and wants than the Malay members. In consequence, the Malays are apparently more susceptible to messages in the media which assure them of attaining power and status. Additionally, the Malaysian advertising industry which is responsible for the marketing and promotion of brand names from the West and within the country is also a reflection of the Malaysian scenario. As it stands, although the Malaysian media is presently promoting a great deal of global brands which depict Western elements, there are also a considerable amount of advertisements which portray the Malaysian culture.

Taking into consideration the various factors and issues mentioned in this section, the principle question that arises is, what is the perception and extent of influence of global brands on the cultural values of Malaysia's middle class population? The next section of this conclusion will address this issue.

8.3 Findings

As elaborated in the preceding section, advertisements on global brands in Malaysia, like in most developing countries, are acknowledged as playing a significant role towards the transformation of cultural values of its middle class segment.

By and large, it can be deduced that Malaysian middle class consumers have adopted the consumerist culture as a result of their continuous exposure towards Western global brands by way of the global advertisement message. To address the issue of perception and influence of global brands on the cultural values of the middle class segment in Malaysia, this section is presented in accordance with the research questions posed in Chapter One.

(1) As an important facilitator of Western cultural lifestyles, are advertisements for global brands well-received by Malaysia's middle class segment? Which of the sub-segments are most influenced to purchase the global brands?

Based on the findings from this study, it is evident that advertisements on global brands that appear in the Malaysian media, particularly television, present a strong cultural impact which is reflected in a mixed reaction from a cross-section of the middle class participants. Nevertheless, there were more positive feedbacks compared to the negative ones. Of the varied middle class participants in the research sample, the results seem to show that the upper and middle-level middle class sub-groups from all ethnic groups and from both urban and provincial areas were most influenced to consume the global brands. This is particularly true for women.

The evidence from this study illustrates that, as an important catalyst for the spread of Western cultural values into the Malaysian society, advertisement messages of the global brands could easily be recalled, described and critically commented upon by

the participants. Also, while the results demonstrate that the research audiences recognized the cultural effect of global advertisements, Western global brands were also perceived as products that are assured of very high quality.

By and large, the upper and middle level middle class members see a global brand name and its product quality as one and the same entity. This is especially so for low-risk products such as toothbrush, detergents, clothing or electrical equipment. In fact, as shown from their responses, many women members of the upper and middle level middle class were loyal to the same brand name for most of the low-risk products they buy. This is because they were not only convinced of the quality offered but more importantly were emotionally attached to the products (see Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993). According to Classen, et. al (1994), products such as detergents are added with fragrances to transmit meanings of status and freshness.

This situation is further supported with the findings in this study which confirm that the Malaysian culture being a generally compromising and tolerant culture, is relatively accommodative to other cultural influences. Consequently, it becomes virtually effortless for Western cultural products to be consumed as they have been converted into the “lowest common denominator” in a unique multiracial society which maintains its own ethnic culture (Chin, 1998). Furthermore, since modernization in Malaysia is linked to the West (Alatas, 1972), the Western lifestyle becomes dominant and as such it turns out to be unproblematic for Malaysia’s middle class community to identify with advertisements of global brands that have been adapted to the local situation (see Alden, Steenkamp and Batra, 1999). As an example, it is no longer a surprise to see Malaysian youths skate boarding or using roller blades by the roadsides as depicted in some global advertisements. It must also be noted that almost everyone of the audiences who responded on the issue of “good Western values” accepted the fact that there are exemplary Western values portrayed in the media that Malaysians could benefit from. Some of the examples given were, good eating etiquette, respect for time or punctuality, being well-attired for specific occasions, and having good ethics in driving on public roads.

Additionally, findings from the study suggest that Nokia, a popular brand name for cellular phones, received very positive response from among the upper and middle

level middle class participants. This advertisement depicts successful executives in immaculate Western suits using the latest technology in communication as an important part of their cultural life. The posh hotel setting is another reflection of an affluent environment. The upbeat feedback from this advertisement supports the notion that Western global advertisements portraying material comfort and the latest technology are highly appealing to these middle class sub-segments.

With regards to Salem as a global brand name, although the participants were aware that it is a cigarette advertisement, most found the beautiful scenery and the snow-covered mountains appealing. Also, the comments and opinions made about this advertisement reveal that the thoughts of the upper and middle level middle class participants were generally swayed towards the Western way of thinking. For instance, most of them did not object and were generally quite broad-minded about the young “unmarried” couple in the advertisement having a private outing on the hills.

Nonetheless, the findings seem to suggest that the participants, being rational and knowledgeable, would reject advertisements that they consider as going beyond the limits of their cultural boundaries or those that they interpret as insulting to their intelligence. An example of this is the McDonalds advertisement which portrays what was perceived as a distinctively Western culture of free intermingling among the opposite genders. There were also other advertisements such as Olay and L’Oreal, both beauty products for women, that received outright rejection because they sell the “discriminatory” concept of white is beautiful.

Taken together, while the general middle class community in Malaysia acknowledge the technical or practical superiority of global brands compared to the local brands, they are also cautious of the cultural aspects portrayed in the global brands. Depending on the cultural content and images, they would generally give a positive response to global brands they consider as within their accepted cultural norms. While they are quite open minded on Western lifestyles portrayed in the advertisements, they are also concerned about cultural aspects that they interpret as “too Westernised”. In addition to this, the results of this investigation also show that the upper and middle level middle class sub-groups, from both urban and provincial

areas, regardless of their age groups, ethnic backgrounds or marital status are the major consumers of global brands. Also, the women members within these sub-groups are most influenced to purchase the Western global brands.

(2) As a dominant sub-segment within Malaysia's middle class population who are generally practicing Muslims, are there differences in thinking between its Malay-Muslim members, such as the urban and provincial Malays, with regards to the Western lifestyle as depicted in global advertisements?

In general, results of this study support the idea that the thinking patterns of the Malay-Muslim middle class community in Malaysia can be distinguished based on their geographic location. Based on their responses in relation to the issue of consuming global brands and their assessment of some global brands that they were familiar with, the urban Malay-Muslims were considered as more compromising and broad-minded than their provincial counterparts with regards to the representation of images related to Western lifestyles in advertisements of global brands. Additionally, it is important to note that although the results show that both the urban and provincial middle class Malays share some similarities in their thoughts on certain universal aspects of the Western culture deemed as "acceptable" or "not acceptable" in Islamic practices, they differ in interpretations on the finer aspects of their cultural life. For instance, although they believe strongly in the basic principles of performing the daily ritualistic prayers but as an eclectic community (see Sardar, 2000), they may be at variance with their understanding on issues and practices relating to the "worldly" part of their lives.

The results seem to suggest that there is an inclination for urban Malays to link their religious faith with reason, progress or the celebration of diversity when commenting on the cultural aspects in global advertisements. This is not quite true with most provincial Malays who tend to be "emotional" when expressing their opinions on certain scenes in the global advertisements. While the urban Malays seemed more tolerant and compromising towards the behaviours and clothing of actors in a commercial, the provincial Malays were more rigid in their thoughts.

For instance, when giving their opinions on a scene in the Salem commercial which depicts a young couple on a bicycle alone in the hills, the urban Malay participants

implied that they were quite open-minded. Their comments were apparently quite “liberal” for practicing Muslims because they did not mind whether the couple was married or otherwise. To them, it was a normal relationship between a man and a woman. Also, the fact that the couple was regarded as decently dressed was an added reason why they approved the scene.

In contrast, the provincial Malays were more conservative in outlook and inclined towards following Islamic guidelines as they understood them. This is noted from the comments made on the scenes in the McDonalds advertisement. When referring to the social behaviour of a male teenager trying to kiss a female actor on a boat, a number of the provincial members expressed their disgust as this type of social behaviour of the actors was considered to have gone beyond the limits of their traditional culture. Another response on this commercial which points towards religious inclination of the provincial Malays was the uncertainty raised by a participant with regards to the McDonalds chicken, whether or not it was slaughtered the Islamic way. In addition, the “unsuitable” attire of the female actor in the Benson and Hedges advertisement commercial was also an issue by the provincial participants. The urban Malay participants would have endured the image of the female actor in the commercial in shorts as she is engaged in a mountain climbing activity. This is because they would consider it as appropriate for the occasion.

The differences between the thought patterns of the urban and provincial members of the Malay middle class sub-groups are also evident from the results of the q-sorting technique. From the three factors extracted, members of the “New Traditionalists” who coincidentally comprise only Malay participants from urban and provincial areas, were the most traditionally skewed. On the other hand, the Malay members of the other two groups, labeled “Modernists” and “Brand Advocates” were exclusively urban in locality.

Based on their choice of commercials such as Wall’s Cornetto, Danone Chipsmore and Cadbury, the “New Traditionalists” as indicated earlier, are still steeped in long-held traditions, reflected in the character of the mother figure as the head of the house. Although they can adapt to new changes, the changes that are introduced must be within the confines of their accepted norms. For instance, the substitution of cereals

as a breakfast meal instead of the traditional *kuih* or *nasi lemak* is considered tolerable by this group.

It is clear that commercials that appeal to most of the provincial Malays are those that revolve around the family environment and those that contain moderate or least Westernized cultural elements. This means the attire of the actors in the commercials, the food, the interior décor of the setting, the music and other related elements in the commercials of their choice have popularly been accepted as “Malaysian”.

This situation is not quite the case with the exclusively urban “Modernists” and the “Brand Advocates” who seemed to approve the more controversial aspects of Western elements such as individualism and liberalism. For instance, the skin tight attire worn by the character “Lara Croft” in the Visa advertisement and the totally Western setting and wild West costume worn by the cowboy figure in the Marlboro advertisement were accepted by them.

Lastly, it is quite obvious that although both the urban and provincial middle class Malays are closely associated with Islam, they can be distinguished in their perceptions towards Western cultural lifestyles in global advertisements. While the urbanites who seemed to have replaced some of the old ideas and thinking with new Western inclined values, their provincial counterparts, although not too traditional, are more disturbed and uneasy with global advertisements they considered as “too Westernised”.

(3) With the influx of Western global brands in the Malaysian media, is the greater part of the multiracial middle class population concerned about the decline in Malaysian values?

Although the findings imply that a majority of the middle class participants were positively responsive to the inflow of global brands into the Malaysian market due to the superior quality that the brands offer, the participants were at the same time uneasy with the weakening of some of the long-standing customs and practices that they were proud of.

The current findings have added substantially to our understanding of the strong link between an existing cultural life of a society and the society's characteristics. This study has certainly supported the notion that the Malaysian middle class population which comprise a multi-ethnic group of Malays, Chinese and Indians are quite sentimental and proud of practices such as respecting the elderly and being considerate of other people's customs and practices, which they deem as uniquely Malaysian. This feeling is especially dominant among the older middle class sub-group who were not happy with the change in behaviours of the youths that have apparently disregarded these long held customs. Most of them complained about a Western lifestyle of individualism which they indicated has influenced the thinking of the youths. To them, this attitude is against the very grain of Malaysian culture, in particular the Malay culture which takes pride in the spirit of *gotong royong*.

Additionally, another inference that can be drawn from this study is that modernization and technological developments brought about by the global media have affected the practices of local traditions. As the finding shows, some of the participants could not avoid expressing their abhorrence of the stereotypical Western lifestyle of pre-marital sex, over exposure of the flesh, homosexuality or lesbianism. Also, the older set of the middle class community indicated their regret that traditional cultural and religious values such as marriage ceremonies today have been simplified and modified to fit in with today's needs.

As such, it is not surprising to discover from the findings that of the local advertisements that most of the multiracial participants could recall and describe, the most popular were corporate image advertisements such as those of *Petronas* and *Telekom*. These advertisements focused on themes close to Malaysian values like patriotism for the country, cultural tolerance among the different races or those with pro-social values that revolve around the family, education and moral conservatism.

At this point, it must be mentioned that of the selected global advertisements that were assessed by the focus group participants, the KFC commercial fascinated the participants most because of its theme of family togetherness. The main scene in the commercial was the close-knit family of grandfather, mother, father and children enjoying the Western fried KFC chicken that was flavoured with local taste.

It must be added that the findings also confirm the unity of the differing ethnic groups towards maintaining their cultural identity. Based on their responses on the subject of cultural similarities, the participants from the three major ethnic groups seemed convinced that there is mutual respect for each other's cultural life. The terms that were repeatedly applied to describe this situation include "compromise", "tolerance" and "harmony". In line with this unique Malaysian concept of acceptance for one another's cultural values, each of the major races is also passionate about their own ethnic cultural life. Instances of responses on this issue include a Chinese participant expressing her disgust when relating a *Perodua* television commercial showing a Chinese driver not giving way to another vehicle and an Indian participant feeling insulted by the Olay commercial which promotes whiteness of skin colour. Another example is of the provincial Malay participants who were not happy with the Westernised behaviours of youths depicted in the McDonalds commercial and the attire of the female actor in the Benson and Hedges commercial.

Thus, it can be deduced that although Western global brands are the most preferred brands compared to local brand names, a majority of the middle class population in Malaysia, especially its older set, are troubled by the slow demise of their treasured traditional values.

(4) Does portrayal of an evident Western lifestyle in global advertisements has an influential appeal for the young members of the middle class segment?

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the younger set of the middle class participants were drawn to the Western images such as affluence, Western setting, and fun and enjoyment among youths as depicted in some global advertisements.

In fact, a commercial like Salem which has very little connection with Malaysian culture has apparently generated a significant interest among the young participants. Other than the scenes portraying an affluent cultural life and the Western music, the technique of fast change of visuals made the commercials attractive to the young audiences. More importantly, the young audiences were also fascinated with the Western setting of snow-covered mountain and rolling hills which they perceived as suggesting a feeling of peace and tranquility.

Another example to support the notion that an affluent Western lifestyle attracts the young audiences can be explained from the highly positive feedback given to the Nokia advertisement as explained in the response for research question (1) earlier. The reason for the high rating given to this commercial is the fact that the portrayal of affluence is universal in approach, that is, it is not exclusively Western as in the Salem commercial. Among the young audiences, the urban set tend to be take the middle ground on scenes that are considered “overly Westernised” such as those portrayed in the McDonalds advertisement. The controversial scenes in the commercial were the street dancing and a male teenager popping out of the water with an attempt to kiss his girlfriend. Another example of tolerance is the acceptance of the skin tight attire of the character Lara Croft in the Visa commercial.

The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is that it is a spillover effect gained by the participants from the latest media channels that were continuously accessible to them. More so, the new media such as the internet or cellular phone have apparently resulted in the slow demise and divorce of some essential cultural elements of the Malaysian community. In his comment on this issue, Sardar (2000) claims that because of the constant mediated exposure to Western lifestyles, Malaysian youths, especially Malay youths, are experiencing cultural asymmetry where there is no connection between what they believe and what they practice. This situation would, according to Sardar (ibid) eventually lead to highly perturbed minds wherein instead of being ordinary consumers, their minds are actually being consumed. This opinion implies that, whether with clear intent or otherwise, the West has to an extent influenced the behaviours, attitudes and thinking of young Malaysians.

The findings from this study have also enhanced our understanding of the strong fixation of status amongst Malays and reaffirm the claims made by scholars of the Malay character of placing importance on power and status (see Wilder, 1982). When the participants were prodded to response on ownership of luxury cars such as the Mercedes Benz, the young Malays were most eager to own one as this is equated with an affluent lifestyle, a concept that is often represented in global advertisements. Additionally, the findings also show that among the young middle class sub-segment, the Chinese participants tend to be more liberal-minded than the Malays and Indians and as such were more at ease with scenes of blatant Western cultural lifestyles than

the latter. This is because they are least bounded by religious traditions and practices compared to the latter (see DeBernardi, 2004).

In all, it is quite apparent that Malaysia's young middle class cluster tend to be effortlessly influenced to Western cultural lifestyles as depicted in the advertisements of global brands they are exposed to. The rationale for this impact is also quite clear because global advertisements only serve as an important reinforcement for the exposure to the Western cultural life that they are continuously experiencing in using the latest media such as the internet or satellite television.

(5) Are members of the lower middle class sub-group influenced by the lifestyle and consumption patterns of the middle level and upper middle class sub-groups?

This study's findings has restated the notion that Malaysia's middle class community, like its counterparts in other parts of Asia is preoccupied with lifestyle and consumption. The evidence from this study has shown that members of the lower middle class sub-group, despite their lower purchasing power were keen to follow the urban consumer lifestyles of the middle-level and the upper middle class sub-groups. They showed willingness to buy products of established Western brand names whenever they have the means to do so.

The results of this investigation show that although they concurred with the opinions of the upper and middle-level middle class sub-groups that Western global brands are synonymous with high quality products, affordability was a setback for most of them to purchase the product. It is therefore not surprising that price of the brand was mentioned as another important factor that determines their purchase decision. In fact, a lower middle class participant confessed that it was normal for him to buy imitation products of established Western brand names such as "Nike" because the price was at least five times lower. This acknowledgment is in accordance with Sardar's (2000:84) description of Malaysia's lower middle class public whom he claims occupy their pastime of "social presentation and fashion permutations" by adorning themselves with imitation designer watches while hanging on to false designer bags and duplicate cellular phones. To borrow his words, "they are *in*-cluded fashion and fancy, and not *ex*-cluded, marginalized onlookers".

To another lower middle class participant, when asked how he would adjust his lifestyle if he had the means, his spontaneous response was to buy goods from established brand names which he had always dreamt of. Yet another participant from the same socio-economic level admitted that although he knew that a pair of Levi's jeans could cost more than he could afford, he was willing to go to great length to buy it. According to him, besides the up-to-date design, the quality offered by Levi's jeans made him confident that the product was worthwhile buying as it could last long. He was particularly satisfied with the stitching of the jeans which made it a durable brand name. Other than these examples, many members of this sub-group also expressed their desire to own a luxury car such as the Mercedes Benz or BMW. This shows that underlying the inner feelings of most members of the lower middle class sub-group was a yearning to be acknowledged as a member of the "privileged" group who can impress others and raise their social status. This phenomenon also explains why some scholars would like to define Asia's middle class community in terms of their lifestyle rather than their income (Pinches, 1999).

8.4 Research Constraints and Propositions for Additional Research

This study is distinctive because it presents a contemporary inquiry on three key measurements that interrelate with one another. They are: cultural values, global brands and the middle class. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings obtained from this study seem to suggest that Western ideas of individualism and liberalism are generally expressed by a greater part of the middle class segment in Malaysia. Nevertheless, aspects which have little resonance with Islam, Hinduism or the Asian culture, such as indecent exposure of the flesh or free intermingling of the genders are still frowned upon.

Despite this, like any other research undertaking, there are limitations and inadequacies which are bound to happen. Appended below are among the major research constraints I faced when conducting this study. Together with these limitations, I have also included my suggestions for related research in the future:

(1) As elaborated in Chapter Four, it took me about nine months to plan, prepare and complete the collection of data for the eleven focus group discussions for this study. Although the preparation started in March 2004, the 11th focus group discussion was held in mid-December 2004. Despite the fact that I have taken into consideration almost every aspect of the human and social factors to ascertain the smooth execution of the focus group discussions such that I would be able to complete the transcription of data from all the eleven focus groups by end of October 2004, I was still delayed by about four months.

The major reason for this holdup was due to human factors which involved last minute confirmation and absence of participants which affected the dates set earlier for the focus group discussions. Hence, it is very important for researchers who wish to embark on focus group discussions as a research approach to not only make early plans and preparations with regards to the research logistics and other related matters but to also set aside between four and six months for concerns that are beyond their control. In this way, the researcher would be able to avoid unnecessary wastage of time as he would be mentally prepared for alternative plans, such as taking on other research tasks while not neglecting the main objective of completing the data collection.

(2) Using the focus group discussions as a primary research approach, the scope of this study has been confined to the *Klang Valley* to represent the urban middle class population and *Kuala Selangor* to embody the provincial middle class community. Complementing this method is the q-sorting technique which involves only 22 respondents that represent the varied middle class population in Malaysia. Although the q-sorting technique has proven itself to be a useful approach that complements the results from the eleven focus group discussions for this study, future research should incorporate the former within the latter. This means, by using the same participants in each focus group discussion, a q-sorting technique can be integrated as part of the focus group discussion. This approach would most certainly make the research process more meaningful as it not only involves a bigger number of audiences but also makes final analysis of the study efficient since two research methods are used using the same audiences. At the same time, a similar study using this research

method could be extended and replicated to other marketing centres such as Johore Bahru and Penang and provincial areas within the nation.

(3) Among the most stimulating discoveries from the literature relating to this study is the Malay-Islam persona of the Malay ethnic group who form a majority of the total population in Malaysia. Although the sample in this study encompasses all major ethnic groups in Malaysia, its findings have somewhat managed to reaffirm much of the literature on the Malay middle class members as a relatively disoriented group due mainly to the internal conflict within them. On one hand, they are attracted to the Western influenced material wants and needs which assure them of a comfortable middle class lifestyle. On the other hand, they are concerned about becoming devout Muslims who would not want to part with their traditional customs and religious practices which at times may contradict with their Western influenced lifestyle. The minds of members of the Malay-Islam middle class sub-group continue to be more perplexed today due to the overwhelming usage and exposure of the latest media technology such as the internet and cellular phones. As such, it is recommended that further research be undertaken on issues relating to the cultural disorder of the Malay-Islam middle class segment and their preoccupation with new Western media as lifestyle instruments.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

This study, which interlinks the concepts of cultural values, global brands and the middle class in Malaysia demands a wide-ranging knowledge of the notion of culture and globalisation while all at once a clear understanding of Malaysia's politics, socio-economic and cultural aspects is also essential. As such this research was undertaken after taking into consideration the factors mentioned. In consequence, the results from this study have brought to light the attitudes of the middle class community in Malaysia towards global brands and its impact of their cultural lifestyles. It is very clear that the middle class segment of the Malaysian population are modern global consumers who adopt the global branding culture on the basis of their own unique local traditions including their religious practices, their urbanised character and their idea of gender roles in society.

This thesis has ascertained that Western global brands are highly distinguished as superior brands by the multiethnic middle class community in Malaysia. Furthermore, they are also swayed to the portrayal of Western lifestyles and cultural elements in the advertisements on global brands, particular those that are universally accepted. However, the influence on Western cultural values as depicted in the global advertisements can be separated into two broad categories, namely Malay and non-Malay factor and urban Malay and provincial Malay concern.

Giddens's (1990) argument that globalization is a significant outcome of modernization and new media technology, is in harmony with this study's findings. More importantly, Robertson's (1992) "glocalisation" theory, Howes's (1996) hybridization concept and Sardar's (1998) justification of Western imperialism are clear-cut interpretations of this research findings on the cultural changes occurring amongst the middle class population in Malaysia. As the first two scholars espouse an intricate interface between global and local cultures which eventually results in a hybrid culture, the latter details the skilful strategy of the West in gaining confidence from the local populace by not disturbing their traditions and religious values while their colonial ideals are instilled. The long history of British influence in Malaysia as narrated by Gullick, (1981) can be taken as an important foundation which encourages Western influence to continue the transfer of its cultural meanings (see Alden, Steenkamp and Batra, 1999) in the Malaysian media, using advertisements as one of its primary facilitators. The continuous exposure towards global brands in television advertisements as a sum total of all the other parts have culturally effected the establishment of what is today Malaysia's brand of modernity that at best can be described as a case of local pragmatism and hybridity at work, with mixed results. As the results of this study show, the young energetic mix of Malay, Chinese and Indian middle class Malaysians take great pride to associate themselves with the unique Malaysian culture of tolerance and compromise for one another's cultural practices. Not only that, their cultural habits have extended to include the adoption of Western lifestyle that they deem acceptable within their own individual local customs and practices.

However, as the findings show, although the infiltration of Western cultural lifestyles in Malaysia by way of the global brands has to a certain extent reduced the

importance of local traditions and customs, some of these age-old values are still intact and revered by many of the older middle class members. This implication is in line with Pinches' (1991) assertion that there is a desire among the local Asian populace to preserve their traditional entities. Moeran (2001) who supports this view, believes that a synthesised Asian culture is taking shape among the young urban middle class group.

Hence, as a Malaysian reality, total Westernisation is still a disputable issue at this point in time. To further emphasize this point, related to what has been mentioned earlier, the unique multi-racial Malaysian culture of compromise and tolerance provides space for individual ethnic culture to flourish (see Kahn, 1992). In addition, the distinctive dedication of the Malays towards Islam as elaborated by Abdul Rahman (1996) and Korff (2001) which assures them that their traditional Islamic practices persist yet material development is not denied is another reason to believe that a Western-Malaysian cultural mix has taken shape and continues to evolve.

Consequently, going back to assess the scope of cultural influence of Western lifestyles in global advertisements, Malaysia's complex mathematics of ethnicity and religious beliefs are essential markers for cultural interpretation. In fact, the overall findings from this study revolves around the association of global advertisements and a convergence between three key cultural components, namely Western, Malaysian and Malay-Islam. The Western influence of technology, education and media exposure blended with the Malaysian values of politeness, cooperation and friendship added with the Malay-Islam version of respect for differing worldviews are Malaysia's cultural challenge in getting the best mix of local uniqueness and global uniformity.

As shown in the study's findings, the Malay participants, being Malaysian natives who practice Islam were generally more inclined towards global advertisements that portray images which are closer to the Asian way of life such as those that depict strong family relationships, showing respect for the elderly and tolerance for people with differing cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the Indian and Chinese participants, in particular the young Chinese cluster were relatively more predisposed to advertisements that are closer to the Western way of life which portray images of

independence and modernity. Additionally, there is also a marked difference in cultural reception between the urban Malays and their provincial counterparts. While the former is more tolerant on evident Western culture in the global advertisements, such as the cowboy character in the Marlboro advertisement or the free intermingling of the genders in the McDonalds advertisement, the latter is more unyielding.

With Malaysian culture constantly shifting, adjusting and tagging on to a vigorous environment, advertisements on global brands retain as a catalyst for the continued structuring of the cultural lifestyle of Malaysia's middle class community. It is therefore quite certain that extensive cultural change will continue to stretch into the Malaysian society to create a new cultural meaning to its middle class population. Indeed, there will be more questions that will arise that would demand further research into the area.

Appendices

- A. Discussion Guide for Focus Group Discussions**
(also included: form for participant's particulars)
- B. (i) 23 Selected Commercials in Compact Disc**
(ii) Description and General Analysis of 23
Selected Commercials on Global Brands
(Q-Sample for Q-Sorting Technique)
- C. Q-Sort Instruction Guide for Q-Sorting Technique**
- D. Sample of Q-cards for Q-Sorting Technique**
- E. Sample of Score Sheet for Q-Sorting Technique**
- F. Semi-structured Questions for Informal Personal Interviews**
- G. Work Schedule for Focus Group Discussions**
- H. Sample of Gift for Focus Group Participants**

Appendix A: Discussion Guide for Focus Group Discussion

Introductory remarks

Good evening, welcome and thank you for sparing your valuable time with us today. I am Adnan Hashim, a PhD student from Loughborough University in England. This study is conducted as a requirement for my PhD programme. Assisting me are (name of assistants).....

The purpose of this interview is to determine the impact of global advertising amongst the middle class segment of the Malaysian public. We want to know what your opinions are on the global products you buy or are exposed to in the media. Specifically, we want to find out your perceptions on the products, whether you are influenced by them. We are having discussions like this with several groups in the *Klang Valley* and a number of groups outside the *Klang Valley*. You were selected as participants because your profile fits in with the requirements of this study.

Please note that this discussion is informal, everyone is expected to participate and there are no wrong answers but only differing viewpoints. In other words, you do not have to agree with what everyone or anyone in the group says. So feel free to share your points of view as we are interested in both the negative and positive comments.

For your information, this session will last between one and a half to two hours, with a short refreshment break. We are tape recording the session as we do not want to miss any of your comments.

The name cards placed in front of you are meant to help us remember each other's name. However you will be assured of complete confidentiality as no names will be used in the final report. Let's begin by getting you to fill up your particulars in the form placed in front of you.....Let's now introduce yourselves, tell us where you are from and what your profession is.....

Part One: Round Table Discussion

a. General

1. I am sure most of you here are conversant in both Malay and English.....
How often do you speak English at home? In office?
2. What is/are your favourite TV programme/s? Why is that so?
3. Try recalling an advertisement from the TV or newspaper that you've seen recently, and share your opinion on it with us.
4. Some people say many advertisement messages are not good for our society. What is your comment?
5. Moving on to something else.....What do you think of people who drive BMW, Mercedes or any other luxury cars? If you have the money, would you like to drive these cars?
6. What do you think of people who are concerned about brand names when they buy certain products?
7. Assuming you have the means to change your lifestyle now, how would you do it?

b. Brand Attitude/Buying Behaviour

The following questions are on the products/brands you buy:

1. Think back on a product you bought recently, if you have to pick one factor in the product that is most important to you, what would it be? *wait for answer, if there's no reply, prompt: is it product quality, price, brand name, product functions or something else?*

2. Tell us your positive or negative experiences with the brand?
3. If a certain brand you use regularly is out of stock when you most need it, what would you do?
4. It is quite common for Malaysians to switch brands. What is your opinion on this?
5. What is your opinion of Malaysians who like to use western brands?
6. What about those who prefer Japanese brands?

c. Perception on Cultural Values

The next part of the questions is on culture or way of life:

1. Many of you may be familiar with the term “traditional values”. In your own words, how would you describe traditional values.....*allow several participants to respond, then use their responses to connect*
For the purpose of this interview, traditional values refer to...”principal or basic beliefs, customs and practices, for instance in marriage ceremonies or religious rituals, that are passed down by earlier generations to the generations below them”. Do you think the basic traditional values are still widely practiced in Malaysia or are they slowly fading?
2. What do you think of Malaysians who preserve their traditional values?
3. What is your opinion of people who seldom follow their traditional values?
4. How would you describe good Malaysian values?
5. What are the similarities in the way of life of the Malays, Chinese and Indians?
6. In your opinion, is there such a thing as the Malaysian culture? *Probe...*

7. How do you feel about the changing lifestyle among Malaysians?
8. What is your opinion of Malaysians who like to eat at fast food outlets like McDonalds, KFC or Pizza Hut?
9. How would you react if your closest friend who spent two years in America comes back speaking with an American accent?
10. What is your opinion of the western way of life? What is good about it and what is bad about it?

Part Two: Analysis of Television Commercials

For this session, participants are required to view 23 television advertisement commercials on global brand names aired on Malaysian television networks. The screening of these commercials will take between 12 and 15 minutes. The discussion for this session will begin immediately after the commercials are shown.

To begin this second part of the interview in two minutes, you are going to watch 23 television commercials of global brand names that have been screened or are still being screened on Malaysian television channels. Please focus and try to understand what you see and listen. Our discussion afterwards will be based on these television commercials. *(screening of television commercials)*

a. Understanding the advertisements

1. Can we all decide which two commercials we want to evaluate?
2. Can you give a general comment on it? What is it trying to sell? *(in reference to a specific advertisement mentioned)*
3. What do you like best about the advertisement and what don't you like about it?

4. What kind of people would buy the product?
5. Considering that it is a western product, how do you feel about it?
6. What kind of lifestyle is the advertisement trying to show?

b. Perception and Influence

(questions would depend on the advertisement chosen)

1. *Main Character:*

What is your overall opinion of him/her?

What is your comment on the costume he/she wears?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 as “very favourable”, how would you rate him/her?

2. *Food/Drink:*

Would you accept the food/drink as your daily diet? Why?

What is your comment on the way he/she eats/drinks?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 as “very appetizing”, how would you rate the food/drink?

3. *Socializing:*

What is your opinion of the way the characters communicate with one another?

What is your general opinion of their overall behaviors?

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 as “very favourable”, how would you rate their behaviors?

4. *Scene/setting (in reference to a western setting, eg snow covered mountains in Salem Holidays” or America’s Grand Kenyon in “Marlboro High Country”):*

If you have the means, would you like to visit the place? Why?

What is your overall rating of the place?

5. Please comment on the other cultural aspects in the advertisement.

Prompt: What is your opinion of the indoor/home furnishings? The outdoor activities? The music in the background?

6. In general, do you think the commercial reflects Malaysian culture? Why?
7. Do you think what is depicted in the commercial suits your lifestyle?

c. Concluding Question

1. As we come to a close, let us reflect on the entire discussion.... of all the things we have discussed, what in your personal opinion is the most important issue? Thank you for your contribution to this study. This was certainly a very stimulating interview and your varied responses will be an important asset to my work. As your addresses and contact numbers are with me, I am making a promise to you that I'll be sending you key results of this study once it is all complete, hopefully one year from now. We appreciate your involvement very much.

Participant's Particulars

(Filled in by participants)

Instruction: Please fill in (1), (2) and (8) and underline or circle a suitable response for the other numbers with a pen.

(1) Name:

(2) Mailing address/ telephone number (optional) :

(3) Age: 25-34/35-54

(4) Gender: Male/Female

(5) Ethnic Group: Malay/Chinese/Indian/Other

(6) Religion (optional): Islam/Christian/Buddhist/Hindu/Other

(7) Monthly Personal Income (Gross) :

i. RM2,000-RM3,000

ii. RM3,001-RM4,000

iii. RM4,001-RM5,000

iv. RM5,001 and above

(8) Occupation: _____

Appendix B (i):
23 Selected Commercials in Compact Disc

Appendix B (ii): Description and General Analysis of 23 Selected Commercials on Global Brands

(Q-Sample for Q-Sorting Technique)

Note:

It is imperative to point out that Malaysian television stations broadcast its programmes and advertisement commercials in the official language of Malay, English or any of the other vernacular languages of *Mandarin* or *Tamil*. Of the 23 selected commercials below, 16 are in English, five are in Malay and the other two, namely Marlboro and Cadbury commercials are neither because they do not use voice overs or jingles. The researcher decided on this combination because this study is English-based and Malay is Malaysia's official language and understood by everyone. Besides this, it is also meant to keep the participants and respondents reminded that although the brand names are not Malaysian, they are watching Malaysian made advertisements.

Another point to note is that according to the Malaysian government's code of advertising (Ministry of Information, 1994), regardless of the language used in commercials that go on air on Malaysian television, all superimposed words that appear on the screen during a commercial would have to be in Malay. The code also specifies that talents used in the commercials must be Malaysian citizens. Nevertheless, under the 1998 Communication and Multimedia Act, control and development of the multimedia industry no longer comes under the Ministry of Information but under the purview of the newly formed Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications. This means that commercials aired in the private stations of TV3, NTV7, Channel 8, Channel 9 or the satellite station Astro are not subject to the regulations set by the Ministry of Information. This explains why five of the 23 selected commercials below, namely HSBC, Coke, McDonalds, Visa and Clorets used superimposed English taglines on the screen and Visa uses a non-Malaysian as its talent. Furthermore, with the 1998 Communication and Multimedia Act, commercials which are 100 percent foreign made, subject to the self-regulation of the private television station have also been allowed to be on air. A case in point is the

Coke and Visa advertisement commercials below which is totally foreign produced and which uses a non-Malaysian talent.

The following description and general analysis of the commercials are categorized into three, that is least Westernized commercials, moderately Westernized commercials and highly Westernized commercials. As the screening of the commercials are sequenced according to the numbers on the q-cards, besides its brand name, each of the commercial below is also identified with a commercial number.

A. CATEGORY: LEAST WESTERNISED ADVERTISEMENTS

1. Drumstick Xchoc (ice cream) : Commercial 1

This ice cream advertisement is produced by Nestle, a brand name from Switzerland. Using a simple slice of life advertising technique, there are many close-up and medium close-up shots coupled with an ordinary special effects technique to signify that one of the characters in the commercial is imagining an X factor ice cream. Besides music for creating suspense and to add impact, this advertisement also uses dialogue and voice over. Some elements of wit and humour are also used in this commercial.

It starts with two young characters, one is bald-headed and another scruffy haired. They represent youths today who are in search of an identity. The scruffy haired character first introduces the latest hand phone to his bald-headed friend who is impressed by it but indicates that something else is missing, that is the X factor. Wanting to impress further, the scruffy haired young man comes up with a few technologically new products but none of them impress his bald-headed friend until the X Choc Drumstick ice cream is introduced. The bald headed young man now announces the new innovative X factor. Visual of the chocolate coated X factor ice cream then appears on the screen, announced by a male voice over. The next scene shows a couple enjoying the ice cream and ends with the bald-headed man catching the ice cream cone flying in the air with his mouth.

This advertisement introduces a new ice cream and depicts the importance of innovation in order to be ahead of the others. This is seen from the many new introductions by the scruffy haired youth to impress the bald-headed young man.

A number of elements in the commercial including the modern setting, the music used, the technology aspect, the modern costume and the spirit of sharing knowledge among friends and the young couple having ice cream together reflect modernity which is an accepted phenomena among the young urban Malaysians. Many of these elements are no doubt Western elements but they have been universally accepted and have assimilated themselves into the urban Malaysian culture. As such this advertisement can be categorized as least Westernized.

2. Kentucky Fried Chicken (fast food) : Commercial 2

Kentucky Fried Chicken is a fast food advertisement. It is a product from the United States of America. The commercial utilizes a male voice over and background music as its major tools to emphasize on its delicious taste. Most of its shots are close up shots while the advertising technique is the slice of life.

It begins with a panning shot of various herbs used for the fried chicken. In the middle of these herbs is a small drum bottle apparently containing pepper which prominently displays the face of Colonel Saunders, founder of KFC. As the camera continues panning through a pile of cinnamon and garlic, it then dissolves to shots of chicken drumstick, thigh and other chicken pieces falling onto a plate. Then there are close up shots of smoldering chicken flesh torn open with a pair of hands to show its succulence, and a knife is used to cut open the chicken showing its delicious flesh. It then shows a chicken piece being taken from a plate followed by a close up shot of a teenage boy enjoying a piece of drumstick. Camera cuts to a young girl licking her finger denoting she has just finished eating one of the chicken pieces, it then cuts to a father character putting a chicken piece in his mouth, a fast cut close up of mother, another cut to close up of toddler smiling happily. Finally a medium shot shows a grandfather, mother, father and a teenage boy at a table in a KFC restaurant enjoying their chicken together. Camera freezes to this shot and a superimposed tagline

appears on the lower quarter of the television screen . It reads “jaminan berkualiti yang bertaraf dunia”, translated as “total quality assurance of world class standards”

In the beginning of the commercial, while shots of the herbs are screened, the male voice over asks: “Why does KFC have the trust of Malaysians?” As the subsequent shots are shown, he answers: “Because along with the Colonel’s eleven blends of secret herbs and spices, it is cooked to perfection at extremely high temperature to give you fried chicken of world class standards.”

Although it is a Western product, this advertisement has been successful in making it accepted as Malaysian. The portrayal of herbs is synonymous with Malaysian food and the depiction of a family atmosphere that includes the grandfather is truly Malaysian in character. The various close up shots of KFC chicken being enjoyed by the family is a clever strategy to make KFC accepted as part of Malaysian culture.

3. Chipsmore (biscuits) : Commercial 5

This food advertisement sells Chipsmore biscuits, manufactured by Danone from France. It employs a slice of life technique showing a happy family having fun at home while enjoying the Chipsmore biscuits. A male voice over with music of local flavour is used.

The advertisement begins with an establishing shot of the interior of a dining area of an urban dwelling. The mother serves tea with Chipsmore biscuits and calls out everyone to the dining table, “Time for Chipsmore” . The camera then cuts to son enjoying his Chipsmore on a plate, he persuades his parents and little sister, “Let’s play hide and seek”. Father, mother and sister rush to hide. Next, on the screen is Chipsmore logotype and the voice over says, “Enjoy Chipsmore and you will get more chocolate taste”.

Cut to shots of mother hiding behind the fridge, sister covers herself in blanket in a crib and father gripping under a roof within the house but loses his grip and falls. Meanwhile, the son is counting to give time for everyone to hide. He uses the raisins on the Chipsmore biscuits to count. He then starts eating. Suddenly he gets a tap on

the back and turns. He sees his father, mother and sister smiling. The commercial ends with a visual of the Chipsmore biscuit and a superimposed tagline in Malay, translated as “More chips, more smiles” and the male voice over repeats the words.

The theme of the advertisement is obviously fun with the family while enjoying Chipsmore. This advertisement is typically Malaysian in outlook. The house interior may have some Western influence with its light coloured drapes and nicely framed pictures on the wall, but the spirit of togetherness and closeness with family members is the focus of the advertisement and this aspect is very Malaysian. It is least Westernized.

4. Jacob’s Hi-fibre (cream crackers) : Commercial 10

This food advertisement for Jacobs cream crackers is manufactured by Danone from France. It uses a straightforward slice of life technique with no special effects at all. Besides the visual actions with a mixture of shots, a male voice over and music are its tools to deliver its message.

The first scene shows a lady in white blouse and dark long skirt entering her office, smiling. The commercial opens with the accompaniment of music. On entering the office interior, she passes by the office staff, busy at their desks. As she approaches her desk, her expression shows amazement at piles of work she has to finish. She then starts her day at the office. Camera shows her painstakingly photo copying papers as she panics. Camera then cuts to a scene showing her, hastily making coffee in the office kitchenette. Suddenly she spills coffee on the table. In the next scene, as she is sitting on her swivel chair, part of the chair stand connecting to the wheels gives way, she falls. Then, in the next shot she moves her head slowly from below the table, her face shows she is embarrassed. Still in the same position, she then pulls a container of Danone Jacob’s hi-fibre cream crackers, bites a piece of the cream-cracker. She smiles, her facial expression shows relief. The voice over says, “with all the goodness you get in a tasty snack, you can count on Jacob’s hi- fibre to make you feel good”. The last shot is a freeze frame of the product package with the tagline “feel good snacking”. In the background is the lady enjoying the cream crackers.

This advertisement depicts a typical Malaysian scene. The talent portrays a typical urban middle class Malaysian female executive who is very busy. The office setting is common in many urban offices in Malaysia with files all piled up and a little messy. Although the office wear of the talent is Western, this is acceptable because it is decent and she portrays a pleasant urban character. The music tempo that accompanies the commercial originates from the West but has been blended into Malaysian culture and this suits the mood of the storyline. This commercial is considered least Westernized in character.

5. Koko Krunch (breakfast cereal) : Commercial 17

As a breakfast cereal, Koko Krunch comes under food advertisement. As it is owned by Nestle, it is a Swiss brand name. The advertisement employs the slice of life approach to deliver its message. As such, like other commercials, its shots are a mixture of close ups, medium shots and a few long shots with more close up shots being used to show the product, the product package and the expressions of the talents. Besides dialogues among the family, background music and a male voice over are also used in this commercial.

This advertisement begins with an establishing shot of the kitchen. A young boy in school uniform with a school bag in hand, sits down at the kitchen table and tells his mother he is nervous. Camera cuts and pans to a close up shot of a calendar with a date circled with a Malay word “ujian” which means a school examination. The camera then cuts to a Koko Krunch box and mother takes it from the kitchen shelf. Smiling, she starts testing his son with possible questions and son replies confidently. The boy becomes more excited, mother pours Koko Krunch into his bowl. The boy shows his expression of enjoying the Koko Krunch as a male voice over interrupts, “research confirms kids that take breakfast cereals like Nestle Koko Krunch with minerals and vitamins have the energy to do better in school”.

The father then appears in the kitchen reading newspaper in one hand and holding a cup of drink in the other. The son asks his father to give him a tough question to answer. When the father responds with a tough question, the boy could not answer and scratches his head. The younger sister then continues with a tougher question and

the boy becomes more astonished. Camera then focuses to father who laughs lovingly at his son. The product package then appears with a tagline, translated as “A smart start for smart kids” which is mentioned by the male voice over. The final scene shows the mother carrying her daughter in one hand and holds her son with the other one hand, walks away from the camera towards a waiting school bus.

This advertisement, like many that portrays a family atmosphere is generally accepted as culturally Malaysian because of its strong emphasis on family togetherness, concern for son’s future and his education. It depicts a happy urban middle class family that adapts well to Western culture they deem acceptable. These aspects are seen in the interaction they have with their children where the boy expresses himself with his parents. Other Western aspects adapted is the décor in the house including the light coloured interior background and the kitchen cabinet. The music in the background which depicts a cheerful mood is universal in character and is accepted as Malaysian. Because many elements in this advertisement depict Malaysian cultural values, this advertisement is categorised as least Westernised

6. Standard Chartered (bank) : Commercial 20

This advertisement is for a multinational bank based in the United Kingdom. It uses the common approach of slice of life with a mixture of common shots, close ups in particular to show facial expressions and the bank’s logotype and tagline. Besides the visual actions, elements of music, a male announcer’s voice over and the main character’s voice over are used as important tools for effective message delivery.

The whole advertisement centres around a young man assisting customers of Standard Chartered bank to get used to the bank’s latest user-friendly services. It opens with the young man in smart informal jacket taking an escalator within the interior of Standard Chartered bank with customers milling around. At the same time his voice over says, “Standard Chartered let’s you do so much...”, he then asks, “so why am I here?”, then camera cuts to a close up of a pretty teller, then cut to him at the end of a queue jutting his face out to the camera and his voice over answers, “...step one... the pretty teller”.

He then taps his fingers on the shoulder of an Indian customer, asking him, “Depositing boss?” The Indian man nods in agreement and the young man shows him the way and pointing his finger, tells him, “ ...try the deposit machine there.” The next shot is a close up of an elderly Chinese lady. The young man asks her, “Transferring money auntie?” He then shows her the way and says, “ ...you can use the ATM or phone banking, let me show you.. it’s working”. The camera then cuts to a Malay man with a small girl. The young man speaks to him, “Higher education fund I see, that personal financial consultant can help you”. He leads him and looking towards the pretty teller, he sighs, “finally” denoting that he can now flirt with the young girl. The bank logo and telephone number then appears on the screen and a voice over is heard, “At Standard Chartered we make banking easier for you twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. Even without the new facilities, you can count on the friendly face”. The final shot shows the young man talking to the pretty teller.

This is a corporate image advertisement that tries to establish that Standard Chartered is a friendly bank that offers the latest the facilities for its customers. It offers convenience for the customer and would always assist him or her in every way. The young man is a symbol of the bank’s image. His courteous and respectful character towards an old lady and middle aged men are characteristics akin to Malaysians. The customers represent the major ethnic groups in Malaysia. The modern Western interior of the bank and aspects of Western technology are elements Malaysians have assimilated well. In short, because of the strong Malaysian character in the advertisement, it is categorized as least Westernised.

7. Pampers (diapers) : Commercial 23

This advertisement is a baby product commercial which originates from the United States of America. It capitalises on a jingle and the character of a baby and his cuddly toy elephant as the main attraction. A female voice over is also used to add impact to its message. The shots used are a mixture of close ups, medium and long shots. No extraordinary special effects are utilised.

The advertisement has a blue coloured theme wherein the backdrop is light blue and the cuddly teddy bear is also in blue. It revolves around the cuddly toy elephant and

the baby, both in Pampers diaper happily playing with one another and singing.

Translated in English, the lyrics are as follows:

Cuddly toy elephant : Good morning....

Baby: Hello....

Cuddly toy elephant: Where are you going...come here

Baby: Pampers...

Cuddly toy elephant: Wake up joyfully...

Baby: Crooning....

Cuddly toy elephant: Playing together....

Baby: Let's go....

Cuddly toy elephant: You sleep soundly. So joyful when you grow big with Pampers.

While both are singing in voice over, using baby voices, the baby opens the blanket he hides in, smiling. They then continue playing and crawling around before going to bed together, on an all blue bed. Next, the camera zooms in to the Pampers diaper worn on the baby. Then a female voice over is heard. Translated in English, it means, "His deep sleep helps him to grow better. That is why "Pampers comfort" absorbs up to five soakings, making baby's skin dry all night" At the same time, the screen shows an opened pampers and five glasses of liquid being poured on it. A superimposed letter and word, translated as "5 soakings" appears on the screen.

The next shot is a close up of the baby's dry smooth buttocks being lovingly stroked by a lady's hand. The camera then cuts and zooms out to the baby sleeping soundly on bed , then cut to a medium close up of the baby smiling with the cuddly toy elephant in bed beside him. The next shot shows a mother cuddling the baby lovingly, followed by a final shot of the new Pampers package with the cuddly toy elephant beside and a tagline. Translated in English, the tagline is "because a deep sleep is important for better growth". The commercial ends with the female voice over uttering the tagline.

This advertisement is universal in nature because its emphasis is on the effectiveness of the diaper on the baby. As such, elements of strong cultural values in the commercial are not significant. Throughout the commercial, the shots and scenes are dominated by a cute one year old baby and his cuddly toy elephant. The light blue background that becomes the theme of the advertisement symbolizes trust and loyalty

which relates to the love between the baby and his cuddly toy elephant. This aspect on love is strengthened with the ending shot of mother cuddling the baby. Blue is also strongly associated with tranquility and calmness as depicted in the shot of the baby sleeping soundly in his Pampers. More importantly, because the Pampers advertisement is also promoting cleanliness for the baby, blue colour is most suitable.

The jingle accompanying the visuals is instilled with Malaysian flavour especially in its rhythm and tempo. Overall, the advertisement is considered heavy in Malaysian character and is therefore least Westernised.

8. Pantene (shampoo) : Commercial 22

An American brand name owned by the Proctor and Gamble company, Pantene employs the problem-solution technique in advertising. The scenes are filled with a combination of shots and cuts for visual transitions. Besides this, a female voice over and music are utilized to complement the visual actions in the commercial.

It opens with a theme music and a lady walking on a barren land. Only her legs are seen moving away from the screen. The next scene is an establishing shot of her walking, she wears a white loose blouse with light coloured loose pants. Next is a cut to a close up of her sad face, she holds and looks at her strands of hair. Translated in English, her voice over says, “Oh no, more hair are falling”. Then a strain of hair in her hand is blown away and stops at a barren tree branch and hangs there.

In the following scene, she puts on a thin scarf to cover her hair, obviously to avoid her hair from falling off further. What follows is a logotype of Pantene ProV appearing on the screen. This is then followed by a package showing the product and its name, “Pantene baru Hair Fall Control” translated as, New Pantene Hair Fall Control. During this scene, a female voice over announces, “Now there is still hope with New Pantene Hair Fall Control Formula Pro-B.....”

The next shot is a special effects showing triple split screen of three shots of the lady holding her long flowing hair. In the left screen, she looks worried, in the middle screen, she is less worried, the letter and word, “1 bulan” (translated as “one month”),

is at the bottom and in the right screen she smiles, the letter and word “2 bulan” (or “two months”) appear at the bottom of screen. Then a fast cut to another triple split screen of the lady’s palm; in the left screen, there are a number of hair strands, in the middle screen, reduced amount of hair strands with the word and letter “bulan 1” (which means “first month”) and in the right screen, only one strand of hair is on the palm, below the right screen are the word and letter “bulan 2” (translated as “second month”). The female voice over continues, “which treats hair roots and strengthens hair, promising fifty percent less hair fall in two months”.

The subsequent scene is a cut to the lady taking off her scarf and letting it off in the air denoting she does not need it anymore since she has found the solution in Pantene. This is followed by the following superimposed words: “reduces 50 % hair fall within two months”, and on the lower screen: “due to damage compared to shampoo without conditioner” . Her voice over then says, “let it go”. After this is a scene of an all white setting and blue skies apparently denoting a new life for the lady. She walks happily by a swimming pool. Two of her friends, a lady on a white sofa and a man sitting, both by the poolside are laughing away happily.

Next is a close up of the lady swinging her thick and soft long black hair happily. The voice over ends, “hair turns thick again with New Pantene Hair Fall Control”. The final cut is a visual of the product package with its tagline (translated as “New Pantene Hair Fall Control, hair fall due to hair damage”).

This advertisement is quite universal in approach and exhibits very little cultural elements. The music is also universal in that it can be identified as both Western and Malaysian. The main talent is decently attired. The only Western about this advertisement is the shot at the swimming pool but the lady and the man in the scene are also decently attired. This advertisement is therefore least Westernised.

B. CATEGORY : MODERATELY WESTERNISED

9. Pizza Hut (fast food) : Commercial 11

Like KFC and McDonalds, Pizza Hut is a fast food advertisement which originates from the United States of America. This advertisement uses the technique of association in its presentation. Two short vignettes relating to the concept are employed to link with the double ring pizza. Close up shots are used frequently particularly when focusing on the product. Cuts are used as transitions between scenes while a male voice over and music complement the visual actions in the commercial.

The scene starts with an establishing shot of a football match among a group of male youths with voices of crowd cheering in the background. Then cut to a close up shot of the goal keeper getting ready to catch the ball, then another cut to a long shot of ball being kicked by a player and the goal keeper saving it. Following this is another shot of the ball being kicked by another player and this ball goes inside the net. Then a male voice over is heard, "If only there were two footballs..."

Consequently, another cut to a scene of a young man in casual wear on his knees in front of his girlfriend on the pavement of a shop house. Beside them is a parked motorcycle. The young man puts a ring on the girl's finger, the girl smiles and the young man puts on another ring on the same finger of the girl. Then cut to a close up of the girl pleasantly surprised. Following this, the male voice over says, "If only you got two rings instead of one. If only more things in life would double like that new double rings..."

Subsequently, there are fast cuts showing extreme close ups of the various sequential steps of the process of pizza double rings being made, from the pan until it is ready for serving. The male voice over continues, "...it's the only pizza that's made with cheese and sausage rings crust with almost six feet long. Come to Pizza Hut now to double your satisfaction". The last shot shows two young ladies and a young man enjoying pizza slices, followed by a female voice crooning the words, "pizza hut".

Overall, this advertisement has almost an equal amount of Malaysian and Western cultural elements. The game of soccer shown in the advertisement, although British in origin, has been accepted as a popular Malaysian game. The Western element inherent is the scene showing the young man on his knees and then putting the rings into his girlfriend's finger. The rest of the shots showing the pizza being made is considered universal in nature. This advertisement is therefore categorized as moderately Westernized.

10. L'Oreal (beauty and skincare product) : Commercial 4

This advertisement for L'Oreal, a brand name for beauty and skincare from France employs the advertising technique of facts and figures wherein the brand provides factual information to support its claim of superiority. Various shots are used throughout the commercial. As for visual transitions, both cuts and dissolves are utilized. Music and a female voice over are the tools that complement the visual actions in this advertisement.

It revolves around a fair-skinned talent. It starts with her in a casual sleeveless white shirt with white pants in an all white setting. With music as the background, she turns around the camera with a remote control in one hand, she presses a button on it and the word "brightness" appears on the lower left of the screen, she begins talking to the audience:

"What if you can maximize your skin brightness...." It then cuts to the next shot showing the product package followed by a dissolve to superimposed words, "Vitamin C, Manik-manik mikro, Melano-block" (translated as, "Vitamin C, Micro beads, Melano-block"). A female voice over starts, "New L'Oreal white perfect deep whitening of mask ..triple concentration of melano-block, regulates the sourceof skin darkness".

The subsequent shots shows how the brand works, a number of fast cut shots are used: the brand package L'Oreal Paris White Perfect and a superimposed "3 x Melano Block", the lady talent's face with mask on, visual of small bubbles with the word "brightness" on the lower part of screen, the Malay words, "urutan di muka" which

means “facial lines” and “sel mati yang gelap” which means “dark dead cells”. The voice over says, “micro beads seek for layers of darken cells to reveal fairer more translucent skin”

Following these shots is a cut to medium close up of the lady touching her face with both hands, she says “ ..for bright skin like glowing from within”.

After this shot is a series of four shots showing the brand package. A combination of fast dissolves and fast cuts are used. These shots show the variety of packages within the brand. Along with visuals of the package and the brand name, superimposed words, “white perfect deep whitening mask from L’Oreal” also appear on the screen. Besides this, different superimposed words also appear below the visuals. They are: “brightness” , “kecantikan kulit” (translated as “beautiful skin”) and “jimat sehingga RM 20” (translated as “save up to RM20) . Simultaneous with these shots, the male voice over communicates,

“ White perfect deep whitening mask from L’Oreal.....”

“L’Oreal Dermo-Expertise....lets women of every age have beautiful skin”.

“Experience the white perfect range for RM20 or less”

The final shot is a close up of the lady smiling. She says, “because you’re worth it”.

There is no doubt that this advertisement’s message is a Western concept, that is “to be white is beautiful” and therefore more superior. Nevertheless, much of the commercial introduces the brand as an effective brand that could work wonders to the user. There are noticeably very little cultural elements portrayed in the commercial. With respect to the talent, because she is Chinese and not Malay, the costume she wears is considered decent. In short, although the message in the advertisement is Western in outlook, other elements in the advertisement are generally acceptable. As such, it is categorised as moderately Westernised.

11. Wall’s Cornetto (ice cream) : Commercial 13

Wall’s Cornetto is one of the brand names owned by Unilever in United Kingdom. This ice cream advertisement uses a mixture of close up shots, establishing shots and

some medium shots. The advertisement capitalizes on the slice of life approach. Cuts are used as its visual transitions. Sound effects and a female voice over complement the visual actions in the commercial.

It opens with the sound of a ticking clock and an establishing shot of a family of four comprising a father, mother, son and daughter who have just finished their meals at a dinner table. Father, son and daughter then leave hastily with mother alone at the table, frustrated. Then a long shot of the living hall with son playing with a toy helicopter, daughter plays ball and father watching news on TV. Next is a close up shot of mother smiling. At the same time, a female voice over is heard, "Laughter...it's no secret that laughter makes you smile". Next, mother takes Wall's ice-cream out, opens the container cover showing a close up shot of ice cream in the container.

The next scene are fast cut shots of son, daughter and father turning to see their ice-cream and shots of all movements in the hall stop suddenly: freeze frames of the fish swimming in aquarium bowl, toy helicopter in mid-air, ball in mid-air and newscaster on television screen. The next shot shows father, son and daughter rushing for the ice-cream, and start eating together with mother happily. The female voice over says, "Everything stops for the taste of Wall's Creation Two in One..." An extreme close up shot of the ice cream being scrapped is shown and the voice over continues, "...two delicious flavours in one tub".

The final scene is the family finishing their ice-cream and the fish, helicopter and ball starts moving again, the ball falls on to mother's head, bounces on the television remote control onto the television screen showing the newscaster speaking. Everyone laughs. The commercial ends with Wall's logotype on full screen with a tagline: "Wall's Heart of Happiness."

The indoor setting of the house with its high ceiling, Western style sofa, timber like flooring, wall cabinets and soft colours are elements of Western cultural values. Also the informal nature of the family's behaviours can be considered western in influence. Nevertheless, the strong bond between members of the family is a heavy

Malaysian influence. This advertisement is therefore categorized as moderately Westernized.

12. Cadbury (chocolate) : Commercial 15

This advertisement for Cadbury chocolate, a British product employs the slice of life approach with a mixture of shots. For visual transitions, the dissolve is used to signify passage of time. Only background music is used to accompany the visual actions throughout the commercial.

A slow romantic music begins the commercial and accompanies it until the last shot. The first scene shows a young man relaxing on a hammock by the beach, he opens his eyes due to glare from the sunlight. His female partner appears and teases him with a bar of Cadbury chocolate, he moves his hand to grab it but falls from the hammock. The next scene is a dissolve to the interior of a house, a young girl walks slowly to her brother who is enjoying his Cadbury chocolate. She wants to surprise him but the brother knows it and teases him with his Cadbury. Next, dissolve to mother pleasantly surprised to find out father and daughter just finished preparing a Cadbury chocolate birthday cake for her, son serves her. The following scene is another dissolve to a long shot of the young man on the hammock, now sharing Cadbury together with his partner on the hammock. Then, dissolve to the young girl and young boy sharing Cadbury chocolate together and dissolve to father, mother, son and daughter sharing the Cadbury cake. The final shot is two containers of Cadbury milk being poured to form the Cadbury logo. The tagline in Malay appears, “Cadbury: Pilih Kegembiraan” (translated, “Cadbury: Choose Happiness”).

The Cadbury commercial has a good mixture of Western and Malaysian elements. The Western elements identified are the interior of the house with soft coloured drapes, the uninhibited interactions between the young man and his partner and the birthday cake. However, the close relationship among the family members is a very strong Malaysian cultural value. As such, this advertisement is considered moderately Westernized.

13. Clairol Herbal Essence (shampoo) : Commercial 16

This American brand name advertisement, uses the slice of life approach with some information on the brand's content. It uses a combination of shots with cuts used for transition of scenes. The visual actions are complemented with music and voice over to deliver the advertisement message.

The advertisement opens with an establishing panning shot of an all girl classroom comprising differing races of students wearing similar Western uniform, then teacher asks the class, "Who wants to answer this question?" She then notices a girl sitting in the middle of the class, dreaming and letting her mind free.

The following scene is a cut to the girl's imagination of water sprouting from a fire sprinkler attached to the class ceiling. As the water splashes, she dances with the accompaniment of a fast beat music, visibly enjoying herself. A few of her classmates are seen moving out to avoid being soaked. Next, she washes her hair with shampoo. At this moment, a male voice over introduces the brand, "Now introducing Clairol Herbal Essence.....". Next is a fast cut to the smiling young lady smelling the bottle of the brand. The voice over continues, "...it not only smells good but contains new hawafina, from extracts of nutritious protein that brings freshness to your hair and yourself". The following shot shows the lady stroking her soft hair with special effects of leaves and flowers moving about on the screen to show the freshness of hawafina. Then cut to her swinging her hair while dancing, not realizing she is now in front of her teacher. The teacher then exclaims angrily, calling her name, "Ani!" Next is a cut to a close up of her face, eyes shut while still on her chair in the classroom. Then, a medium shot of her teacher standing in front of her, she opens her eyes, surprised. Next, camera shows her fellow classmates are shocked too, she then regains her composure and tells her teacher, "I want to answer first". The final shot is the product package with the tagline: "Clairol Herbal Essence: Experience perfect freshness" and a voice over is heard, translated as: "Clairol Herbal Essence, making it better with Hawafina".

This advertisement has a moderate Western influence. Although the girls are dressed in Western school uniform, they are decent and this uniform is common in urban

private colleges. Except for the obvious scene of the main character dancing in class and the music, other aspects like the anger expression of the teacher and the decently dressed students can be accepted as urban Malaysian cultural values. This advertisement comes under the category of moderately Westernized.

14. HSBC (bank) : Commercial 18

This advertisement is for a bank whose main office is in United Kingdom. Although it uses many establishing shots, close up and medium shots are also utilized. For change of shots and scenes, the cut is used. Additionally, the transfer technique in advertising is employed for this advertisement where the concept portrayed in the advertisement is linked between the bank and the potential customer. A male voice over and contemporary music are the tools utilized to accompany the visual actions in the commercial.

The advertisement opens with a background music and a male voice over, “All over the world people borrow money sometimes for ordinary things....” The visual shows a young man looking at the books on a bookshelf that occupies the walls of a big room. Then the scene changes to various shots of the spacious interior, modern bookshelf, and the well arranged books. The next shot is a special effects shot showing the books on the shelf disappears and replaced with other items.

The following shot is a scene showing the man taking a book out from a stack of books on his table and starts reading up the book. Camera zooms in to the book cover to show the title, “Project Management”. Subsequently, the man starts placing a picture of a scooter beside a number of miniature scooters on the shelf. Then a shot shows him arranging the various miniature scooters on the shelf. Next is a cut to show a collection of his scooters in the room, he sits on one of the scooters with his helmet on and imagines himself riding on it.

The next shots depict holiday scenes: a shot of a couple holidaying on a boat, then fast cuts of the sea, seaside and a hammock in front of a chalet portraying a fun atmosphere.

During these scenes, the male voice over is heard, “Because HSBC serves so many people in so many countries, we undertake financial requests from as simple as travel to as easily as that for so many special occasions.....”.

Subsequently the next scene is a couple dancing on the beach accompanied by musicians around. A small signboard stuck on the beach says, “Ivy and Jones private party”. The voice over continues, “....which is why you’ll find whether your needs are ordinary or extra-ordinary...our personal loans are much more personal”. After that the HSBC logo appears on the screen together with its tagline, “the world’s local bank”. The last shot shows a map of the world full of markings of the HSBC branches.

The advertisement is sending a message that it is the only bank of its kind. Its concept is that it is an international bank that adapts to local needs. As such, it has a mixture of international and local elements. The Western culture like beach dancing and the indoor décor are interspersed with Malaysian cultural elements. This include the traditional setting on the beaches including the pontoon and the small bird cages hanging on poles and also the traditional ethnic music with traditional drums. This advertisement is categorized as moderately Westernized.

C. CATEGORY: HIGHLY WESTERNISED COMMERCIALS

15. Coke (soft drink) : Commercial 3

This American soft drink advertisement uses a mixture of a short drama and the straightforward approach of a spokesperson to deliver its message. The shots used are also simple and straightforward with no extraordinary special effects. Besides the visuals, only the spokesman’s voice is used in this commercial.

The commercial begins with a medium long shot of a Caucasian middle aged man dressed in black suit standing and speaking to the camera. The setting is in a hotel suite. Behind the spokesman is a stout man, seen only as a dark shadow. The spokesman says, , “you... are a curious young man....” The camera then cuts to a close up shot of part of the Coke bottle immersed in a glass of ice cubes with the

logotype “Vanilla Coke” clearly visible. Next, it cuts to a close up of the bottle taken out from the glass of ice cubes. At the same time, the spokesman’s voice over is heard: “....you get rewarded with a nice Vanilla Coke” . The next scene is a medium shot of the spokesman continuing with his message, “.....the smooth flavor of vanilla, so intriguing, the way you like it.” The man behind him, still in dark shadow moves forward to pass something. The camera then cuts to a medium close up shot of a Caucasian young man using straw to seep Coke from the bottle. Following this, a close up shot of the same young man smiling, satisfied with the drink. Subsequently, the scene shows a medium shot of his profile holding the bottle of “Vanilla Coke” and taking it into his mouth to drink. On the left side of the screen, part of “Vanilla Coke” bottle moves up making a split screen of the part of the product package and the young man gulping Coke from the bottle. It ends with a freeze frame of the split screen of this shot with a superimposed tagline, “reward your curiosity” on the lower right hand corner of the screen. The voice over ends with “reward your curiosity” with new Vanilla Coke.

The short drama in the advertisement is of a young man taken hostage in a hotel suite, he gets rewarded with a Vanilla Coke for behaving well, passed to him by a bodyguard of the spokesman. It is heavy with Western cultural values. The Western suits of the spokesman, the Caucasian features of the talents, the hotel interior and the way the drink is taken, using the bottle into the mouth are clear examples of Western elements. As such it is a highly Westernized advertisement.

16. Olay (beauty and skincare product) : Commercial 6

The Olay brand in this advertisement belongs to Proctor and Gamble based in United States of America. It uses the problem-solution and factual claim approach wherein it shows how one can get a whiter skin within five days of product usage. The shots used are common ones used in television commercials and only simple special effects are utilized. Only a female voice over and the visual actions are employed to deliver the advertisement’s message.

The advertisement opens with a lady happily trying out her wedding gown. Her voice over is heard, “I’ll be married in five days”. Next, is a close up shot of her worried

face. Her voice over continues, “I want to look as beautiful as I can”. Following this is a visual of five packets of the product appear on screen with the following superimposed words: “Olay White Radiance mask”. A female voice over is heard, “....Olay white radiance mask introduces a new mask”. Next is a special effects of a mask flying on the lady’s face with superimposed information, translated as: “1 piece= 1 bottle whitening cream”. The voice over continues, “..every piece contains a full bottle of whitening cream” . Following this is a fast dissolve of three visuals of the same lady with a new mask taken off from her face, then cut to her in mask and the mask being taken out. The voice over says, “...one piece everyday for you to look light-skinned in five days”. Then, the camera cuts to her, back in her wedding gown as a bride at a garden wedding. In the background are guests sitting and a tall cake, she throws a bouquet of flowers in the air happily. The commercial ends with the product package, Olay White Radiance, on screen is a superimposed Malay tagline: “Hargailah kulit anda” (translated as “value your skin”).

Throughout the scenes and shots, this advertisement is promoting the idea that one has to be white to be beautiful and it promises whiteness of skin within five days of use. This is a subtle way of instilling the idea that to be white is superior. Other Western elements in the advertisement include the Western style wedding ceremony with wedding gown and the guests in Western suits and dress. This advertisement is categorized as highly Westernized.

17. Marlboro (cigarette-related product) : Commercial 7*

This advertisement is a cigarette-related American product. It uses the slice of life approach, just like a scene in a cowboy movie. Only music and visual actions are used to convey its message.

It opens simultaneously with a wild West music and a cowboy lying down on a wild West setting in the dark. He holds his hat. Camera pans slowly from left to right, from his head downwards showing his cowboy’s costume in the darkly lit setting. He then lights up by scratching a match stick on his wrist. The match light shows his stubbled face, then his watch, the pointers indicate the time as 8.20 PM. Next is a shot of the water tower not far from him. Following this is a dark close up shot of a flask, then a

close up shot of his rugged pants with belt on lying on the ground. Subsequently, a cut to the cowboy now buttoning his white casual shirt, he then ties his scarf on nicely. The next shot is a close up of his boots, followed by another shot of his boots kicking the sand, cut to him walking away towards the water tower, he takes his jacket hung on one of the water tower bars. Consequently, a close up shot of the cowboy looking up. The final shot is a freeze frame of an establishing shot of the water tower with superimposed words in Malay: “Gaya Nyata Lelaki” (translated as “The Real Style of Man”) and on the lower screen are the following printed words: Marlboro Classics, Lot 10 & Sogo, Kuala Lumpur.

Although no cigarette or cigarette pack is shown, the fact that the brand name Marlboro has been well established as a cigarette brand makes this television commercial a cigarette advertisement. This commercial is a classic case where no trace of Malaysian culture could be identified. The product’s name, the talent and his outfit in cowboy costume, the wild West setting and the music are obvious elements of the West. Its message of signifying the macho image of the Marlboro man has successfully been conveyed throughout the commercial. The address shown in the last frame of the commercial are outlets selling Marlboro outfits, to fulfill the government’s requirement and as proof that the Marlboro brand name is also selling non-cigarette products. This advertisement certainly falls in the category of a highly Westernized global advertisement.

18. Salem (cigarette-related product) : Commercial 8*

This cigarette-related American product advertisement uses the vignette approach accompanied by a jingle to convey its message. Besides the usual medium and close up shots, a lot of establishing shots are also used for this commercial. For camera transitions, it uses the dissolve instead of the cut.

The commercial begins simultaneously with a jingle and a long shot of lush beautiful greenery with fern trees similar to some Western countries. The camera then tilts down slightly to show a young couple in their twenties walking together. The man walks with his hands holding and pushing a bicycle. He wears a blue long sleeved shirt and white pants with a white sweater wrapped around his neck while the lady is

in a pink blouse with a loose white skirt. The scene then dissolves to the couple now on the bicycle with the man cycling and the lady sitting on the carrier laughing away, passing through a beautiful backdrop of greenery and snow-covered mountains. Their body language, including their smiles and laughters denote that they are having fun together. A superimposed logotype “Salem Holidays” then moves up to take on the full screen. It then dissolves to a shot of another young couple in similar attire walking through the woods. In the background is the couple on the bicycle. The next scene is a dissolve of the main couple on the ground laughing away and having fun, followed by another dissolve showing the two couples on their feet laughing and joking around. The closing shot is the logotype “Salem Holidays” on the first two thirds of the screen. On the lower part of screen is the tagline in Malay, “suasana yang menyegarkan” (translated as “a world of refreshment”), and underneath is a much smaller print of an address of a travel agent: 2, Jalan Sultan Ismail, 50250 Kuala Lumpur TDC2002.

The lyrics of the jingle accompanying the scenes from beginning until the end of the commercial is as follows:

Male: Above all the rest, we're moving so free and high

Female: Freer than the clouds, we touch the sky

Male and Female: Above it all.

Like the Marlboro and Benson and Hedges advertisements in this category, the Salem brand name is associated with cigarettes. However, just like the two advertisements mentioned, it has to camouflage with another product, in this case a holiday package as proof that it is selling a non-cigarette service because cigarette advertisements are banned in Malaysia. The advertisement portrays happiness, joy and pleasure as its major selling points whilst freshness is the benefit one gets when using the brand name. The many establishing shots used emphasize the beautiful, cooling and refreshing scenery. It is actually promoting the Salem cigarettes in a subtle way using the concept of coolness and freshness. Its portrayal of a couple enjoying themselves on a bicycle in a very refreshingly soothing and isolated surrounding is very unMalaysian. To add to this, the backdrop shows a snow covered mountain which is alien to Malaysians. The music too has a lot of Western influence. In fact, the

advertisement uses the snob appeal, suggesting that the use of the brand name makes the audience part of the “high-class” lifestyle portrayed in the advertisement. As such, there is no doubt that it is highly Westernized.

19. Nokia (handphone) : Commercial 9

The Nokia hand phone which originates from Finland employs the suspense and drama approach in its advertisement commercial. It has a mixture of shots and for transition of scenes, a lot of cuts and some dissolves are used. A jingle accompanies the visual actions throughout the commercial while a female voice over compliments the advertisement towards its end shot.

The first scene in the advertisement opens simultaneously with the jingle. The jingle begins: “I know the pre-paid ...no... I could ask you... why you live your life....” At the same time, the visuals show fast cuts of scenes of a busy city life: cars and people moving, a young man in black suit, newsagent, a close up of hand holding Nokia hand phone and the hand phone screen reads, “news update”, then cut to a close up of a Mercedes Benz moving. Then another cut to two men in black suits in the Mercedes Benz car asking for direction. Next is a cut to young man in black suit pointing them to a direction. The jingle continues: “...just forgot the three ten steps you made....Come alive...come alive.....watch the city go by.”

The next scene shows the Mercedes Benz moving very fast through city skylines, in the car the two men are panicking. Then cut to a hotel swimming pool setting, a medium shot of the bride’s father in black suit with guests milling in the background, looking at his watch, panicking, non-verbally asking her daughter in wedding gown on the delay and cut to her gesturing she has no idea of the delay. The jingle continues, “turn me up, turn me up.... turn me up....”. Subsequently, a cut to the Mercedes Benz stopping in front of hotel lobby, bridegroom and friend get out of the car, rush inside the hotel, running....The jingle continues, “aaaaaahaaa aaaa..... how wonderful you are....”

Then a dissolve to the wedding party, the bride turns and relieved on seeing bridegroom who smiles with his male escort to show joy. The voice over is heard, “

you will see that people want to be closer”. The flowing scene is a cut to the bride’s father beaming, holds bride’s hand towards bridegroom. The voice over continues, “that’s why we constantly pioneers in technology that breaks barriers between people today and the future.

Then a scene of the bridegroom and bride, happily holding hands running from the stairs. And the next short is a special effects showing the same actions of the couple in a hand phone screen, camera zooms out to show grandfather and grandmother in the lounge of their house enjoying watching visuals of bride and bridegroom on their hand phone. The advertisement ends with a tagline on the screen: “Nokia, connecting people”.

It is quite obvious that this advertisement comprises many Western cultural influences. Right from the black suit worn by the talents to the Western style wedding by the poolside of a five star hotel and the use of a luxury car, this advertisement has very little trace of the traditional Malaysian cultural values. This advertisement also has a snob appeal in that it denotes that Nokia is associated with a luxurious and affluent lifestyle. Although, it may be argued that some of cultural elements are universal, many elements including the melody and rhythm of the jingle is Western. It is categorized as highly Westernized.

20. McDonald’s (fast food) : Commercial 12

The American –based McDonald’s is a fast food advertisement. Using a lot of fast cuts to show various scenes in a variety of shots, this commercial employs the wit and humour technique with an upbeat jingle to deliver its message.

It opens with a group of four young girls enjoying themselves on a boat in the sea, having fun eating the nuggets, dipping and sharing the sauce together.

Along with the opening of this scene is a jingle which is sung in a group. It begins with, “parapappappa... I’m lovin’ it, I’m lovin’ it, come on, come on, I’m lovin’ it. Taste the difference, quality fits with what I love....”

The next scene is a shot on a beach showing a Caucasian young man holding both legs of a young girl with her face hanging upside down as she dips nugget into a white sauce placed on a low table on the ground. A close up shot shows a small plastic container of fish McNuggets, the McDonald's product in the commercial. Then, the words "I'm lovin' it" flashes on the screen.

The next shot is a close up of a pair of hands tearing a piece of nugget into two, zooms out to a girl enjoying a nugget alone on a boat, suddenly out from the water a young man pops up beside the boat to grab a piece of the nugget from the young girl's hand with his mouth. He moves up to smooch the girl but is pushed down with her finger. During this time the jingle's lyrics, ".....on the sauce before the dip...." is heard.

Following this is a cut to a group of youths skateboarding and dipping nuggets in sauce while skateboarding, then a skateboarder dips in sauce of fellow skateboarder.

The lyrics in the jingle during this scene is, "...only sixty is the difference all the time...come on... get some of the guys.....just as ...I'm lovin' it" followed by the words "I'm lovin' it" flashing on the screen.

The next scene is a young boy in McDonald's restaurant dipping nugget into sauce and into his mother's sauce. The jingle continues in a lady's voice, ".....my boy's glad...dip in his sauce and my sauce.. and just like his dad".

Following this is an establishing shot of a big group of people, youths and middle aged, male and female merrily dancing on the street and dipping new fish McDippers into the sauce. The jingle continues, "I'm lovin' it...dip...dip...dip...MDonald's parappappa.." The next cut is a logotype of McDonalds on the screen with the tagline: "I'm lovin' it". The last shot is a close up of the boy who was earlier pushed into the water, smiling underwater.

Throughout the commercial, the shots and scenes shown are Western in outlook in almost every aspect. While introducing its latest nugget product, the fish McDippers, the MacDonalds advertisement is portraying a truly Western culture. The social

behaviors of the characters including the way they communicate, the street dancing, the costume worn, the music and the way the food is taken are some examples of strong Western influence. It is therefore beyond any doubt that this commercial is highly Westernized.

21. Visa (credit card) : Commercial 14

This advertisement of Visa credit card, a product of the United States of America uses a mixture of approach to get the audience attention. Besides animation, it also employs suspense music and drama with a tinge of the hidden fear technique in advertising. Not to forget, it also uses the testimonial strategy. Its shots are a mixture of close ups, medium and establishing shots with fast cuts used for the transition of scenes.

The advertisement opens together with its music. The first shot is a close up of a remote control in a pair of hands, then cut to the television screen showing an animated video game on the adventures of the famous heroine Lara Croft. On the television screen, a monster is attacking Lara Croft. She goes through adventures under the sea to protect herself from the monster. Then, cut to a part profile of the “human” Lara Croft concentrating on the movie video game, her hand on the remote control. Next is another cut to the video game of the adventures on the television screen. The camera zooms in to the animated heroine Lara Croft, the monster coming closer to her, but she manages to seek help from the “human” Lara Croft playing the video game by telling her, “I sure need help here”. Then, cut to a close up shot of the “human” Lara Croft who slips out her Visa card and throws it into the television screen. The animated Lara Croft in the television screen grabs the card, swipes it on a swipe machine plucked on a wall as part of the setting in the movie video game, the words “payment accepted” then flashes on the swipe machine and she now fights the monster confidently.

In the next scene, the monster is out of the screen and breaks into the main house door of the “human” Lara Croft, the monster moves in to attack her. While she moves away to avoid the monster, she turns her head towards the television screen and the animated Lara Croft in the television set immediately throws the Visa card towards

her and the commercial ends with a visual of the Visa card and a tagline: “All it takes”.

The commercial suggests that Lara Croft, as the endorser is telling the audience that Visa card can protect a person in danger. This hidden fear technique does not conform with the Malaysian cultural values. Overall, this advertisement is quite heavy with Western influence. The Caucasian talent who plays the Western heroine Lara Croft in tight Western attire, does not have a Malaysian look. The animation technology, the storyline and the music that come with it are entirely Western. It is therefore a highly Westernized advertisement.

22. Clorets (chewing gum) : Commercial 19

A brand name from the United Kingdom, the Clorets commercial uses the approach of a movie scene with a touch of wit and humour. Various shots, cuts and camera angles are used with some special effects and music utilized to create impact to its message.

The first shot is a close up drawing of the main protagonists as if a movie is going to begin. At the same time, a fast paced, upbeat continuous music is heard in the background. The first scene starts with two men in a flashy sports car, both in sunglasses and flashy costume depicting them as “men about town”. While on the road, they are joyful and notice something that interest them. Afterwards, the scene cuts to a close up of a lady’s legs, zooms out to show lady in red mini skirts stooping towards an open bonnet of her car in front of a night spot.

Then, cut to another man who notices the lady. Next, the car screeches to a stop and the two men get out. Soon, the other man pass through them apparently to help but one the men signals him to leave, indicating that they got out first and are helping the “damsel in distress”. Next is a close up of the lady’s captivating buttocks. Then cut to the men getting excited on seeing it but one of them indicates they have to be focused. Both then prepare themselves, adjust their sun glasses and shirt collar to impress the girl, both walk forward, then take their Clorets out, an extreme close up of the lady’s buttocks and double fast cuts of the lady turning her head and smiling towards the men, revealing her “ugly face” with heavy eye shadow, thick lipstick and big set of

teeth. On seeing this, the men are shocked and try to avoid her; they could not contain and start vomiting.

The lady then takes her Clorets out, puts in her mouth, then cut to a visual of Clorets chewing gum package with words “klorofil” (in English, chlorophyll) and “actizol” on the screen, then another cut to the lady chewing, she blows air towards the men, followed by a special effects of “love” symbols flying around the men who become amazed, their facial expressions depict their joy. The lady then turns again and the men get excited, they react by running towards their car as one of them climbs on another’s back indicating excitement. The Clorets product package appears on screen with the words “70 sen” (translated as 70 cents) together with its tagline: “Fresh breath comes first, good looks second. A male voice over says, “get Clorets for the fresh breath everyone loves”.

This advertisement is filled with Western cultural influences. Besides the fast-paced music, the other visible Western elements are the lady’s dress and the men’s costume, the setting outside the night spot and the uninhibited behaviours of the men in trying to woo the lady. As such, this is a highly Westernized advertisement.

23. Benson and Hedges (cigarette-related product) : Commercial 21*

A product of the United Kingdom, this advertisement employs the transfer technique where words and visual actions are used to suggest an association between the brand and the consumer. Because a lot of activity shots and scenes make this commercial, a variety of close-up, medium and establishing shots are used and a lot of fast cuts utilized to denote change in scenes. Music and visual actions are the major tools to convey its message.

The advertisement starts together with an adventure type music which accompanies the scenes throughout until the last second. The logotype appears, Benson from the left, Hedges from the right and the symbol “&” appears in the middle to form “Benson and Hedges” on the screen, then the words ”GOLDEN DREAMS” appear in capital letters under the Benson and Hedges logotype. Next is a cut to a snorkeling activity among youths in clear blue water, then fast cuts to a number of scenes: a

young lady and two young men on a speed boat, youths mountain climbing, a youth riding an elephant in the forest, a youth riding on a two-wheeler on a desert like land mass, then to two young girls doing an acrobatic exercise, back to another fast cut to the youth in the two-wheeler losing his control. Next is another cut to a kayaking activity among some youths and a cut to a mountain climbing activity. The word "kecekalan", a Malay word for steadfastness, appears big on the screen while fast cuts of the sporting activities are still going on, the symbol "&" appears and flashes on the screen a few times. Then a cut to a shot of the skyscrapers, a fast cut to water in the sea and the word "keazaman" which means resolution, flashes on the screen a few times.

Subsequently, the following appears at the bottom of the screen:

"12 Oktober – 30 November, Setiap Isnin 9.30 malam", TV 3. It is translated as:
12 October – 30 November, Every Monday 9.30 PM.

The commercial ends with a repeat of its beginning: the word Benson appears on the left of television screen together with the word Hedges which appears on the right of screen and in the middle of these words is the symbol "&" to form the words Benson & Hedges. Under this logotype are the words GOLDEN DREAMS. At the bottom of the screen are the smaller printed words, Benson and Hedges Bistro, Life Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

Like the other cigarette-related Marlboro and Salem advertisements, this advertisement embrace many Western cultural values. The extreme sports of mountain climbing, snorkeling and canoeing and many more as depicted in the advertisement involving both male and female are from the West. The music is also very Western in taste. Also, the sports attire is also Western in outlook. This advertisement is therefore highly Westernized.

* Note: Although cigarette advertisement commercials were banned since the early 1980s, up to 2003 cigarette companies were allowed to advertise their brand name using non-cigarette products or services, like Salem Holiday packages, Marlboro accessories or Benson and Hedges Adventure sports. Since 2003, brand names associated with cigarettes have been taken off the air.

Appendix C: Q-Sort Instruction Guide for Q-Sorting Technique

Q-sort instructions

(1) Please note that a q-sort will be conducted and the q-sort package comprise:

a. a deck of 23 cards and each card is numbered and represents a commercial of a global brand name accompanied by a q-statement which reads: “This commercial appeals to me”.

b. a score sheet

Q-sorting will begin now with the set of 23 cards in front of you. They have all been arranged in sequence from number one to number 23.

(CD of 23 commercials arranged in sequence according to q-cards, switched on)

(2) Please view the 23 commercials and familiarize yourselves with them. As a guideline, when viewing each commercial, please focus on the culture aspects depicted in the commercial. These are the type of food or drink, the way the food or drink is taken, ways of socializing among the characters, clothes worn by the characters, the language spoken, the home furnishings and settings of the commercial.

(3) Familiarize yourself with the brand name and the statement on each of the 23 cards.

(4) View the commercials again. Start sorting the cards into three (3) piles: a pile on the right for brand names that represent the commercials that *appeal to you*; a pile on the left for brand names that represent the commercials that *do not appeal to you* and a pile in the middle for brand names that are considered *neutral* to you.

(5) Use the score sheet as a model for arranging the cards. Starting with the pile on the right, select three (3) commercials that you “strongly agree” and place them

before you to represent the +3 category on the score sheet. Next, select three (3) commercials for the +2 category that are the next most important. Then select another three (3) commercials for the +2 category, and three (3) more for +1 category.

(6) Next, take the pile on the left, pick three (3) commercials that you “strongly disagree” and place them before you to represent the -3 category of the score sheet. After that pick another three (3) commercials for the -2 category, followed by three (3) commercials for the -1 category.

(7) By now, you have selected nine (9) commercials that *appeal to you* and (nine) 9 that *do not appeal to you*. Finally, place all the remaining five (5) (of the 23) cards in the middle or “neutral” stack, that represent those commercials which you find “confusing” or “meaningless” in the zero (0) category.

(8) After sorting all the 23 commercials into the score sheet categories (-3 to +3), review the sorts to check whether there are any commercial that needs to be re-arranged. Also, please note that you must have the correct number of commercials in each category. Next, fill in the score sheet by writing the number of each commercial in the appropriate block on the score sheet.

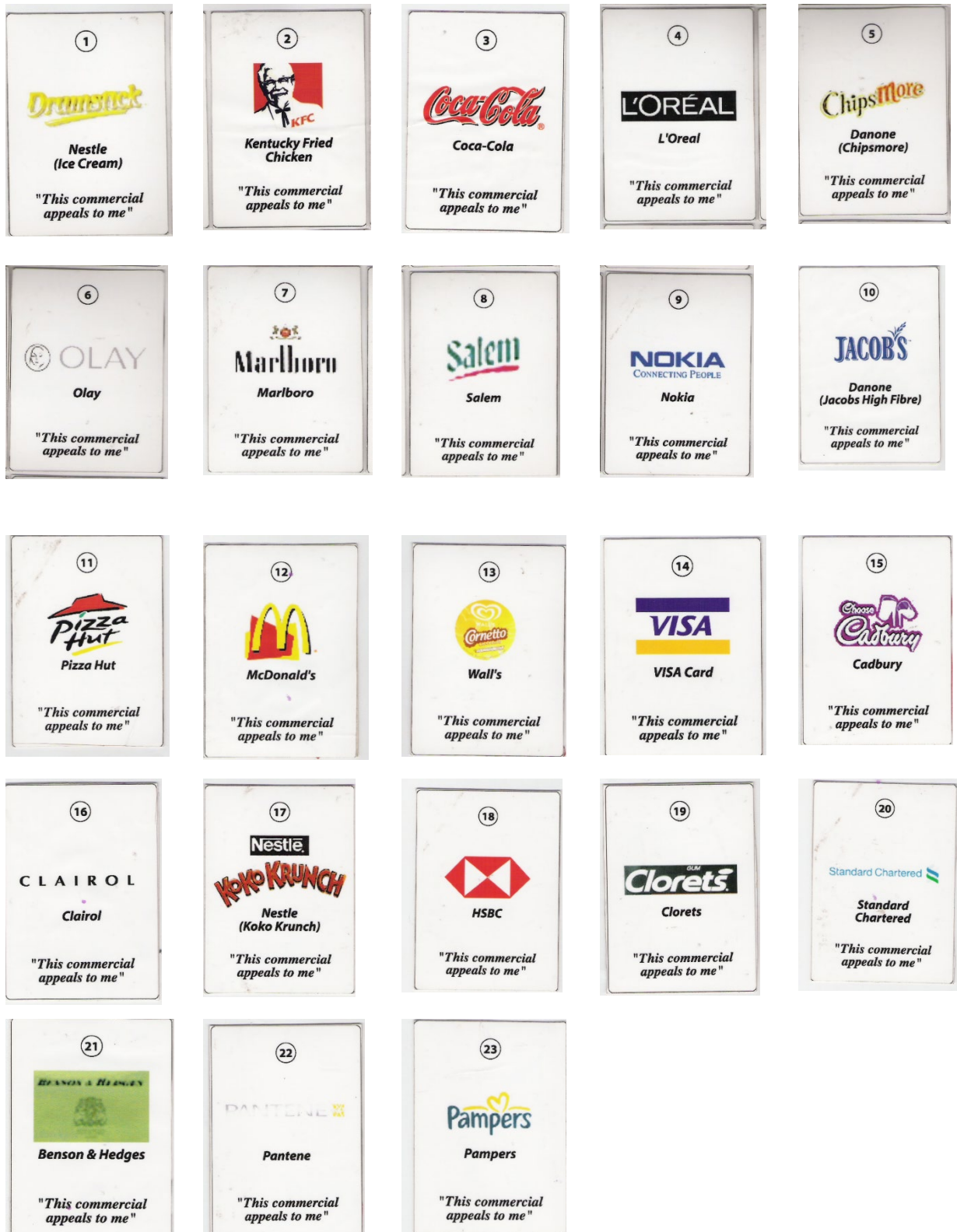
(9) Finally, ensure that you write your name on the score sheet and return the score sheet and cards to me.

Once a respondent has completed the q-sort, he or she will then be asked to answer a number of follow-up questions, as follows:

- i. Pick a commercial which you ranked as +3 and give your reasons?
- ii. Pick a commercial which you ranked as -3 and give your reasons?
- iii. Can you comment on the cultural elements in the commercials you mentioned?
- iv. Would any of the commercials that do not appeal to you stop you from buying the product? Why?

(Responses from the above questions will be tape recorded and transcribed for further analysis)

Appendix D: Sample of Q-cards for Q-Sorting Technique



Appendix F: Semi-structured Questions for Informal Personal Interviews

1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR KHAIRUDDIN OTHMAN

Senior Executive of TV3 (1986-2000)

Interviewed on March 07, 2005

i. Background

a. Please relate on your career with TV. When you first joined, your designations, your last position, your responsibilities and tasks.

ii. TV 3's Advertising Operations

a. Can you explain the roles and responsibilities of TV3's Marketing division? The process of getting a commercial approved up to putting it on air. The process of regulation, self-regulation, censorship, guidelines for ad agencies, etc? Complaints on some ads aired (if any) and action taken?

b. What was TV3's advertising revenue last year? What is its percentage of increase since the past year? Why do you think it is still the premier station for advertisements? How does it compare with the other TV stations? What percentage of the ad segment is allocated in an hour?

c. On the average, what is the ratio of global ads against local ads aired on TV3 in a day?

iii. Global Branding, Cultural Values and the Middle Class

a. How would you describe the terms "globalisation" and "global branding"?

b. Is global branding necessary? Why?

c. Do you think Malaysians should preserve their traditional values? Why?

d. In general, do you think ads of global brands take into consideration the local cultural values of its audiences?

- e. What is your opinion of global ads that utilize Western talents and portray Western lifestyles?
- f. Are Malaysian audiences truly concerned on the impact of some TV commercials on their lifestyle?
- g. Who is Malaysia's middle class? Are they the major consumers of global brands? Why?
- j. Can you describe their lifestyles?

iv. Other comments, opinions and suggestions?

2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MUSSADIKH MEAH

Managing Director, DnaComm Sdn. Bhd.
Interviewed on March 12, 2005

i. Background:

- a. Could you relate your past advertising experiences, when and where you were since you started your career in advertising, your responsibilities and the accounts/clients you were in charge of?
- b. In multinational agencies, how were important decisions made? Creative concept, agency structure, multinational clients, client-agency relationship, etc.
- c. What about the present agency you are in? In terms of operations, clients, etc, how different is it from the international agencies? The problems you face (if any)?
- d. Who is your major client now? Please relate briefly your experiences in dealing with this client.

ii. Global Branding, Cultural Values and the Middle Class

- a. Please relate your experiences on a global brand you've handled before, starting from idea conceptualisation until its execution.
- b. Do you think Malaysians should preserve their traditional values? Why?

- c. In general, do ads of global brands take into consideration the local cultural sensitivities and values of its audiences? If they do, to what extent?
- d. What is your opinion of global ads that utilize Western talents and portray Western lifestyles?
- e. Is there one single most important element that appeals most to Malaysian audiences when they watch a commercial on TV?
- f. Are Malaysian audiences truly concerned on the impact of some TV commercials on their lifestyles? Why?

3. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MIRZA MOHAMED TAIYAB BEG

Deputy Director-General, Tourism Malaysia
Interviewed on March 13, 2005

i. Background

- a. How long have you been with this organisation and what are your experiences when dealing with the advertising and promotion of your services?
- b. What is your major responsibility now?
- c. What about Tourism Malaysia, its history, its services, philosophy, overseas branches, etc?

ii. Advertising and Promotion (Global and Local)

- a. Can you explain briefly on the marketing and promotion aspects of MPTB, its ad and promotion allocation for the international and local markets, how this is derived and on what basis?
- b. How effective has its promotion been? Explain.
- c. Among its local audiences, does Tourism Malaysia consider instilling traditional values in its marketing and promotion strategy? Why?
- d. Among the international audiences, what are the strategies?

e. Does Tourism Malaysia promote local culture among international tourists? If so, can you give examples and to what extent?

f. Do you think it is important to promote our local culture to the foreigners? Why?

g. What is your opinion on the influence of Western lifestyles among Malaysians?

iii. Client-Agency Relationship

a. How do you go about choosing an advertising agency for the promotions of your services? How is the ad message developed?

b. Have you been satisfied with the agencies in relation to the execution of your campaigns? Why?

c. Who are your ad agencies now? On what criteria do you choose your agencies?

d. Has there been any complaint on your ads, local and foreign market? Can you explain?

e. In your experience, has any of the agencies you hired shown concern and sensitivities towards traditional values, local and foreign culture or related aspects in ads they produce for your organisation?

iv. Other comments, opinions and suggestions?

4. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MIRZA MOHAMED TARIQ BEG

Managing Director, Pakar Media Sdn. Bhd.

Interviewed on March 21, 2005

i. Background

a. What is your designation in the company? Your responsibilities and roles?

b. The company's background? When established, its organisational structure, its local and international affiliations, philosophy, etc?

ii.. Company Operations

- a. What are the services your company provide to its clients?
- b. How do you establish long term relationships with the agencies, media organisations and clients? Please relate your experiences.
- c. Specifically, how do you as a media specialist firm earn your income?
- d. What is your company's overall billings?
- e. How does this compare with your competitors?
- f. Can you name some of the other media specialists?
- g. Is the market controlled by multinationals?
- h. Are your accounts only local accounts?
- i. Are you telling me it is difficult to penetrate the multinational accounts?

iii. Global Branding, Cultural Values and the Middle Class

- a. How would you describe the term “globalisation” ?
- b. What is “global branding”?
- c. Is global branding necessary now?
- d. With the impact of globalisation, do you think Malaysians should preserve their traditional values?
- e. What do you think of global brands that portray Western talents and Western lifestyles?

f. Are Malaysian audiences truly concerned on the impact of some TV commercials on their lifestyle?

g. Who are Malaysia's middle class?

h. Are they the major consumers of global brands?

iv. Government restrictions

a. What is your opinion of the role of the Ministry of Information on the regulation of TV ads?

b. Have they been too strict or too relaxed in the implementation of the regulations?

c. Do you think the ministries involved are very concerned about foreign influence in ads aired by the TV stations?

v. Other comments and suggestions

5. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ADILAH SHEK OMAR

Deputy Director-General, Broadcasting Department

Interviewed on 23 March, 2003

i. Background

a. As a Deputy DG of the Broadcasting Department in the Ministry of Information, what are your roles and responsibilities?

ii. Government Policy on TV Commercials

a. When was the advertising code for the Ministry introduced? How effective has it been?

b. Are there specific policies on foreign culture? Please explain.

c. What is your opinion on the existence of Western culture in some of the commercials?

d. In relation to foreign (Western) culture, can you give examples of what is allowed and what is not allowed in the commercials aired on the government channels?

e. In your opinion, what is the role of the ministry responsible for internet media in curbing Western influences in commercials? Have there been overlapping of roles between the two ministries?

f. Why are foreign talents allowed to appear in commercials in the private TV stations?

g. With the advent of internet and other new multimedia sources, do you think the government can control Western influence?

iii. Other opinions, comments and suggestions

Appendix G: Work Schedule for Focus Group Discussions

Activities	Timeline/ Duration
1. a. Appointment of research intermediaries and a meeting with them. b. Selection and recruitment of participants c. Preparations of: - A Malay- translated discussion guide - invitation letters for participants - taped commercials, tv monitor, video recorders, audio recorders and tapes, etc. d. Arrangement and booking of venues	March 2004 (one month)
2. a.. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 1 b. Appointment of research assistants	First week of April 2004 (one week)
3. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 1 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 2 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 1	Second week of April 2004 (one week)
4. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 2 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 3 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 2 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 1	Second week of April 2004 (one week)

5. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 3 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 4 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 3 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 2	Third week of April 2004 (one week)
6.a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 4 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 5 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 4 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 2	Fourth week of April 2004 (one week)
7. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 5 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 6 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 5 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 3	First week of May 2004 (one week)
8. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 6 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 7 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 6 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 3	Second week of May 2004 (one week)
9. a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 7 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 8 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 7 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 4	Third week of May 2004 (one week)

10.a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 8 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 9 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 8 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 4	Fourth week of May 2004 (one week)
11.a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 9 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 10 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 9 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 5	First week of June 2004 (one week)
12.a. Final confirmation for participants of Focus Group 10 b. Invitation letters to participants of Focus Group 11 c. Execution of interviews for Focus Group 10 d. Transcription of responses from Focus Group 5	Second week of June 2004 (one week)
13. Transcription of responses from Focus Groups 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11	Fourth week of June until Fourth week of October 2004 (17 weeks)

Appendix H: Sample of Gift for Focus Group Participants



INDEX AND GLOSSARY

Akademi Fantasia:	A local reality television programme similar to Britain's Fame Academy: 160, 216
Almari:	Cupboard (for clothes) : 86
Ang pow:	A red paper packet that contains currency notes in Malaysian ringgit used as customary gifts for guests during the <i>Chinese New Year</i> : 224
Akad nikah:	A ceremony that announces a Muslim marriage is officially recognized. The marriage is represented by a verbal contract between the bride's father and the groom. An authorized religious official from the state Islamic religious Affairs Department known as <i>kadhi</i> , usually conducts the ceremony : 208
Azan:	A call for prayers from the mosque or <i>surau</i> : 209
Bahasa Melayu:	The Malay language, the Malaysian national language. Hence, the official first language that is widely spoken and understood by all Malaysians : 87, 158, 220, 221, 319
Baju kurung:	A traditional costume most commonly worn by Malay women. A loose tunic over a sarong. This costume cover or retain one's modesty according to Malay customs and Islam: 86, 224, 258
Baju Melayu:	A traditional Malay shirt for males. A complete set would comprise the shirt, the pants and <i>kain sampang</i> , a special <i>sarung</i> tucked outside the pants from the waist to the knee : 86
Bangsar:	A cosmopolitan and thriving sub-urban area within Kuala Lumpur city. It is a fashionable address for the upper middle class community : 98, 214
Barisan Nasional:	The National Coalition, a coalition of 14 political parties which is presently ruling Malaysia : 66, 200
Berinai:	A henna application ceremony before a Malay traditional marriage wherein the bride will have her hands and feet decorated with motifs created with dark brown paste derived from the henna plant: 203, 223
Bersanding:	A ceremony held as part of a wedding reception where the bride and bridegroom sit side by side on a dais, grandly decorated in a regal style. It is normally the highlight for the wedding reception: 208, 223

Berzanji:	The Arab inherited tradition of singing praises on Prophet Muhamad, normally during special occasions like marriage or circumcision ceremonies : 206
Bumiputra/s:	Literally translated as “sons of the soil”, natives or original inhabitants : 63, 67, 70, 77, 95, 105
Bumiputra Commerce Bank :	A local commercial bank : 160, 166
Cantonese:	A Chinese dialect widely spoken amongst Chinese Malaysians residing in the Malaysian capital city of Kuala Lumpur and the state of <i>Selangor</i> : 69, 86, 114, 159, 235
Cekodok:	A Malaysian cake popular among the Malays, normally taken in between meals :272
Chinese New Year:	A customary new year celebration for Malaysian Chinese of all faiths, Buddhism in particular. The date is based on the Chinese calendar year: 55, 83, 113, 162, 164, 202, 209, 224
Cuti-Cuti Malaysia:	Literally translated as Vacation Malaysia, it is an advertising and communication campaign by <i>Tourism Malaysia</i> to encourage Malaysians to spend their vacation by visiting interesting places within the country: 160, 216
Datuk Seri AbdullahAhmad Badawi:	The current Prime Minister of Malaysia. The words <i>Datuk Seri</i> before the name is a title bestowed by the king in conjunction with his birthday. It is a symbol of social status. Other title orders and awards which come in different grades according to hierarchy are Datok, Tan Sri and Tun (see <i>Tun Dr. Mahathir</i>): 69
Deeparaya:	A new term coined by Malaysians to mark a dual celebration of <i>Hari Raya</i> and <i>Deepavali</i> when the dates of both celebrations fall within three or four days of each other: 224, 256
Deepavali:	Known famously as “Festival of Lights”, it is an annual religious celebration among Indian Malaysians who follow the Hindu faith: 83, 162, 224
Dr. Mahathir:	Former Prime Minister of Malaysia who served the country for 22 years, between 1982 and 2004: 68, 252
Firecrackers:	Fireworks crackers that are let off to make continuous cracking noise. This traditional custom is practiced by the Chinese about one week before the Chinese New Year celebration and ends about one week after the celebration: 224

Folk urbanite/s:	A term borrowed from Abdul Rahman (2002), folk urbanites are generally Malays who originate from the villages but have settled in towns and cities but their lifestyles are relatively modest, very family and community oriented. As he (ibid: ix) puts it, the folk urbanites “operate within the domain of their cultural values and religious practices”: 103, 105, 135, 139, 148, 150, 159, 162, 166, 169, 180, 181, 199, 206, 207, 228, 233, 238, 241, 242, 243, 244, 254, 257, 275, 280, 281, 312, 315
Gotong royong:	Sometimes referred to as <i>rewang</i> . The Malay community, being communal in nature has a tradition of potluck and cooperation a few days before a ceremony, like a wedding reception with guests bringing various dishes while helping out the host to prepare for the occasion: 89, 217, 327
Halal:	Permissible in accordance to Islamic law and practices: 87, 223, 225, 289
Hari Raya:	see <i>Hari Raya Aidilfitri</i> .
Hari Raya Aidilfitri:	The festival of the breaking of fast, celebrated by Muslims on first Syawal from the Muslim calendar to mark the end of the fasting month of <i>Ramadan</i> : 83
Hari Raya Puasa:	see <i>Hari Raya Aidilfitri</i> .
Imam:	A prayer leader in a mosque, at most times also a Muslim scholar: 206
Jaya Jusco:	A brand name supermarket found in various shopping complexes in major towns in Malaysia: 180
Jampi serapah:	Medical incantation by a <i>bomoh</i> (traditional healer). Modern Muslims exposed to new knowledge consider this practice as against Islamic beliefs if the incantations incorporate elements of Hindu mythology or any other influences where the <i>bomoh</i> will fall into a state of trance: 208
Kacang putih:	A generic name for nuts, normally peanuts are popular snacks among Malaysians youths taken in between tea time while watching programmes on the television: 175
Kajang:	A busy urban town, located about 20 miles south of Kuala Lumpur city centre: 144, 145, 146, 148, 206, 214
Kampung/s:	A Malay village or Malay villages: 89, 207
Kancil:	Name of a mini car model produced by Malaysia’s second national car company: 54
Kenduri:	A Malay reception held in conjunction with a function, for

	example a wedding ceremony: 203
KL :	Acronym for Kuala Lumpur, capital city of Malaysia: 214, 245
Klang:	A port town about 30 miles or 48 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur: 140, 289
Klang Valley:	An area in Malaysia comprising the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, its suburbs and neighbouring cities in the <i>Selangor</i> state. Based on the 2006 statistics (Wikipedia, 2007), its total population is about 6.5 million: 65, 96, 140, 332, 338
Kompang:	A shallow-framed drum made with goat or cowhide that is firmly nailed to a wooden frame: 206
Kopi O:	Black local coffee: 166
Kongsi Raya:	A newly coined word by the Malaysian media to denote a dual celebration of <i>Chinese New Year</i> and Hari Raya if both dates of the celebrations fall within one week of one another. The term “kongsi” is a Malay word from the Hokkien Chinese dialect “qongsi” which means “to share”: 224, 256
Kuala Selangor:	A provincial town about 40 miles or 64 kilometres West of Kuala Lumpur: 140, 146, 147, 148, 150, 151, 158, 175, 231, 249, 252, 289, 332
Kuda kepang:	A traditional Malay dance involving communication with the spirits. In the middle of the dance routine, the dancers get into a trance and start fighting and dancing like horses: 210
Kuih:	Various types of traditional cakes: 326
Lenggang perut:	Preparation before the birth of a child whereby the pregnant woman’s abdomen is wrapped with a seven foot long fabric. This is a practice passed down when the Malays followed the Hindu faith: 210
Longkang:	Drain (noun) as in “sewer” or “ditch”: 86
Malaysia Boleh:	Literally translated as “Malaysia Can”, a slogan created by the Malaysian government to inspire Malaysians to acquire success for the country in every field including in sports, inventions or business: 68, 223
Mandarin:	An official spoken language amongst Malaysian Chinese: 159, 204, 346
Mantera:	A magical formula that is created by a soothsayer: 210

Merdeka Day:	Malaysia's independence day. Celebrations are held every year on 31 st August to commemorate the date when Malaysia gained independence in 1957: 160, 162
Nasi kandar:	An Indian Muslim delicacy among most Malaysians comprising a portion rice with smaller portions of two to three dishes on the same plate: 222
Nasi lemak:	Boiled rice cooked with coconut milk commonly served during breakfast: 85, 205, 269, 272, 326
Negri Sembilan:	A state in Peninsular Malaysia, located on the West coast: 166
Norita:	A 2004 brutal murder case in Malaysia which became headline news in the local dailies for a few months. It involved a Malay Muslim lady who was reported to have a number of boyfriends and was found dead in her apartment due to sexual suffocation: 216
One Utama:	A popular shopping complex located strategically at the northern edge of Kuala Lumpur city: 183
Pan-Asian:	Actors in advertisement commercials with Caucasian features. These actors are normally used in Malaysian commercials because they do not have the typical Malay, Chinese or Indian ethnic looks and as such could represent any of the races: 113, 267
Pangkat:	Position, rank, status: 90
Parkson:	A popular department store with outlets in major shopping complexes in major towns in Malaysia: 183
Pasar:	Wet market: 86
Perodua:	Malaysia's second national car company formed in the late 1980s to cater for small-sized models with lower horse power than the proton models (see <i>Proton</i>): 164, 183, 305, 328
Petronas:	Malaysia's premier government linked company dealing with oil and gas: 108, 113, 160, 162, 163, 327
Pondok:	Traditional Islamic religious school: 206
Proton:	Malaysia's premier national car company formed in early 1980s. Various models of the Proton car, including Proton Saga, Proton Wira, Proton Waja, Proton Perdana and many more have been produced and sold to a majority of car owners in Malaysia. The word proton is commonly used to refer to one of the proton car models: 175, 194, 222, 229, 305

Proton Waja:	A proton car model (see <i>proton</i>).
Ramadan:	The month of Islamic daytime fasting: 104, 216, 220, 222
Rewang:	see <i>gotong-royong</i> .
Roti:	Bread: 86
Salam:	The Muslim way of greeting another Muslim by uttering “Assalamu’alaikum” which means “peace be upon you”: 271
Sambal tumis:	A hot Malaysian dish and delicacy especially among the Malays. It is made made of a mixture of grounded chillies normally mixed with prawn paste: 266, 289
Samfoo:	A traditional Chinese costume: 86
Saree:	A traditional garment worn by female Indian ethnics consisting of a long rectangular fabric reaching the feet, wrapped and pleated around the waist over an underskirt and draped over the shoulder: 86
Satay:	Pieces of meat skewered with a stick, cooked over a charcoal of fire. It is served with sliced cucumber, peanut gravy and <i>ketupat</i> (rice wrapped in coconut leaves): 85, 205, 232
Selangor:	A state in Peninsular Malaysia, centrally located on the West coast. Due to its strategic location and closeness to the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, it is the most developed and richest state in Malaysia: 140, 146, 150
Sepatu:	Shoes: 86
Seremban:	The capital town of Negri Sembilan, a southern state in Peninsular Malaysia: 289
Shah Alam:	The capital city of Selangor state in Malaysia, about 25 miles (or 40 kilometres) from Malaysia’s capital city of Kuala Lumpur: 132, 140, 146, 147, 148, 150, 151
Surau:	A small prayer house for Muslims to perform communal prayers, normally found in housing estates. In villages and small towns in particular, the surau also serves as a meeting place for making community decisions: 89, 211
Syariah:	A term used by Malaysians to refer to Islamic-based law: 70, 71
Syirik:	Apostacy: 210
Tahlil:	A religious gathering in a house involving neighbours, families and friends where the name of God is chanted and

continually repeated: 206

Tak Nak :	Literally translated as “don’t want”. The “Tak Nak” ad campaign is a government campaign against cigarette smoking launched in 2002. Forming part of the campaign is a public service television commercial which revolves around youths saying “tak nak” (I don’t want) when offered a cigarette: 161
Tali:	Big rope: 86
Tamil:	An official language spoken by Malaysian Indians who originate from South India: 64, 69, 90, 114, 159, 235, 346
Teh tarik:	A specially prepared Malaysian tea where the tea is mixed with sweetened condensed milk by pouring from one mug into another a few times until it produces a foam on the surface, somewhat like cappuccino coffee: 205, 222
Telekom:	Malaysia’s public utility organisation in charge of telecommunications: 74, 108, 113, 160, 162, 327
Tenaga Nasional:	Malaysia’s public utility organisation in charge of electricity: 74, 165
Tom yam chicken:	A hot Malaysian soup with spices and prawns that originates from Thailand: 266
Tourism Malaysia:	A government owned organisation for the promotion of tourism in Malaysia: 154, 166
Tudung:	A scarf that covers the head, ears and bosom worn by many Muslim women today: 93, 254, 258
Tun Dr. Mahathir:	see <i>Dr. Mahathir</i> .
UiTM :	An acronym for Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia’s largest university that caters only to <i>bumiputras</i> (natives or sons of the soil). Based on its student population of more than 100,000 it is also recognized as one of Asia’s largest university: 297
Ulamas:	Islamic religious scholars: 91
Waja:	see <i>Proton</i> .
Wayang kulit:	A traditional shadow play which used to be popular amongst Malays in the North eastern state of Kelantan: 84

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