



Flipping the script: Code-switching as a digital advertising tool in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the communicative functions of code-switching in Malaysian digital advertisements. Ten narrative-type code-switched commercials were selected based on: i) Malaysian product or service, ii) accessible on YouTube platform, and iii) 3-minute duration. Using Malik's (1994) Ten Communicative Functions of Code-Switching as the framework, textual and discourse analysis were conducted to identify how code-switching fulfils persuasive and communicative purposes in digital marketing. The findings reveal that the most frequent function was to amplify and emphasise a point, followed by lack of facility, habitual expression, lack of registrational competence, mood of speaker, to attract attention, pragmatic reasons, and to conform to group identity. Code-switching was strategically used to enhance clarity, prevent misunderstanding, and create emphasis, particularly when Malay equivalents were unavailable, overly formal, or less effective in conveying meaning. Common English expressions were preferred for their brevity and conversational ease. Beyond linguistic necessity, code-switching reflected emotional states, captured audience attention, adapted to varying contexts, and signalled group identity. Interestingly, older speakers were observed adopting youth slang, gaming jargon, and social media terms to bridge generational gaps and foster camaraderie. The study concludes that code-switching in Malaysian digital advertising is a versatile tool serving linguistic, social, and persuasive functions.

Keywords: **Code-switching, digital marketing, digital advertisements**

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multicultural country consisting of a mix of ethnicities, that is, Malay, Chinese, Indian and others. Each ethnic group has its own language, culture and practices that differentiate it from other ethnic communities. In addition, apart from the different ethnic languages, each state also has its own dialect which distinguishes people from each state. However, regardless of their differences in languages or dialects, Malaysians still have one common entity that binds them together, which is the national language. The Malay language is the national language of the country as prescribed by the Malaysian constitution. Hence, it has become the main medium of communication which is widely spoken and used by the majority of Malaysians.

Other than the Malay language, another language that is equally well-utilised by Malaysians is the English language, which is formally regarded as a second language in Malaysia. It has also become a compulsory subject in the education curriculum or syllabus along with the Malay language, and is primarily used in most economic sectors in the country. Malaysians are required to learn both languages since young. According to the national language policy, it is mandatory for all students to learn Malay and English from the primary level (Muthusamy, 2010). Hence, it is common knowledge that the majority of Malaysians are bilinguals whereby they are accustomed to and fluent in both languages.

Code-switching is frequently used in bilingual communities including Malaysians. It is a natural phenomenon of communication among Malaysians to switch from Malay to English and vice versa. Bishop (2007) pointed out that in multicultural countries, conversing via two or more languages alternately in a sentence is considered accurate communication. Such communication in this type of society is common because most of them are bilinguals. Code-switching happens extensively among the speakers, either consciously or unconsciously during formal or informal settings. In short, code-switching occurs in accordance to the context or situations in which both languages are utilised for specific communicative purposes (Saputra, 2018).

The use of code-switching has transcended beyond personal and social spheres to include the business sector. Currently, it has become an important marketing approach adopted by Malaysian brands in advertising their products digitally. On this note, Sulaiman et al. (2013) highlighted that code-switching or using more than one language alternately in advertisements can attract prospective customers effectively compared to the use of a single language because it effectively delivers messages to bilingual communities. Moreover, Astani et al. (2020) highlighted that code-switching can take place both in direct and indirect communication, which is crucial in the marketing of products or services.

The emergence of the internet has changed the commercial landscape all over the world. Businesses are moving away from traditional platforms such as television, radio and newspapers to advertise and market their products. In turn, the majority of them are spending millions yearly to utilise new digital media platforms for a wider reach of audiences and prospective buyers (Agil et al., 2022).

Besides that, changes in the social paradigm, particularly in relation to media usage among Malaysian consumers, is another catalyst which motivates Malaysian businesses to

adapt their marketing strategy to keep up with this trend. In this digital era, both the new and older generations are spending more time on social media. According to Wan Mohd Ghazali et al. (2024), advancements in technology have shifted TV viewing habits, with audiences increasingly moving away from free-to-air (FTA) channels. As a result, most businesses have migrated to digital media as a means to publicise and create awareness of their brands (Rowley, 2001). Undoubtedly, the transition from traditional media to digital media allows businesses to reach audiences at a larger scale and faster rate.

Research objectives

Due to the development and changes in marketing strategies, the present study intends to investigate the functions of code-switching in the digital advertisements of Malaysian products. It aims to enrich the existing literature on digital marketing, particularly advertisements in social media such as YouTube. This is most apposite since social media has become a must-have platform for most businesses wherein most of them have their own social media account (Ohajionu & Mathews, 2015). Specifically, the main purpose of the present study is to:

- i. Identify and analyse the functions of code-switching in the digital advertisements of Malaysian products, and
- ii. Unearth how code-switching fulfills the communicative purposes of digital advertisements.

Research questions

In fulfilling the purpose of the study, the research was guided by the following questions:

- i. What are the functions of code-switching in digital advertisements of Malaysian products?
- ii. How does code-switching fulfill the communicative purposes of digital advertisements for each function?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital media

The internet has brought about tremendous changes to various aspects of our lives including new practices in consumerism and marketing strategies. With the rise of digital media usage amongst consumers, many companies have shifted their marketing approaches to include digital marketing to reach their targeted markets. In the new digital era, most people choose to go online instead of traditional media because it is easier and faster to access information (Odun & Utulu, 2016). In the past, advertisers used traditional media such as printed media, billboards, television, radio, etc. as platforms for advertisements (Odun & Utulu, 2016). However, following current development, many now choose to go online for socialising, branding and marketing purposes because online platforms provide more effective means of communication and social evolution.

Online advertising has become increasingly prevalent due to the wide range of digital platforms available for companies to promote and market their brands. In their

study, Durmaz and Efendioglu (2016) highlighted the transition of traditional marketing to digital marketing and how companies took measures and initiatives to embrace the changes. They also contended that online platforms allow companies to communicate with consumers regarding their products and services. The advantages of digital media were also highlighted, including enabling businesses to reach target consumers more effectively. As the means of communication evolved, the field of marketing also changed, whereby businesses communicate with consumers through the use of digital media. The study also emphasised that traditional media remains a means of changing the perception of consumers towards products while digital media is a platform to speed up the purchasing process. The paper also listed out the applications of digital media including social media, search engines and viral marketing.

The utilization of social media is intended to increase the exposure of brands. This study is consistent with a later study conducted by Lakshmanan and Basariya (2017) where they mentioned that the digital platform is an ideal avenue for consumers to recognize and engage with brands more effectively compared to the usual banners and pop-up advertisements. It is worth noting that Malaysian brands too have been utilizing these platforms to maximize their efforts to reach out to consumers.

One of the most used platforms for marketing is YouTube. Some brands spend part of their revenue on online advertising such as paid advertisements on digital platforms like YouTube. Dehghani et al. (2016), in their study, found that YouTube advertising did affect recognition towards brands and customers' purchase intention. However, the right content and message is vital for digital advertising to be a success. The rates of advertisement on YouTube differ in accordance with the types of advertisements such as in-stream video advertising and in-video advertising. YouTube advertising is paid advertisement; therefore, companies need to allocate a specific portion of their budget for such purposes. Further, higher rates are applied depending on the demand for the product or service being advertised.

However, there are also advertisements which are created and uploaded on YouTube for free by various companies. Within the Malaysian context, these advertisements are normally produced in conjunction with certain celebrations or campaigns. For example, some of the most famous advertisements have been done by Petronas, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), and Telekom Malaysia (TM) for the major celebrations of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. It is also noted that the type of genre for most of these advertisements is unique, in that they are produced in a narrative or story-like manner embedded with strong social or moral messages. Moreover, most often these advertisements contain appealing and meaningful storylines that leave such a deep impression on Malaysians regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Due to this unique characteristic, these narrative-type YouTube advertisements were chosen as the focus of the present study.

In addition to focusing on free-narrative YouTube advertisements, this study distinguishes itself from previous research by adopting a different analytical lens. While past studies have primarily emphasized the types and effectiveness of digital marketing strategies (Barari et.al, 2026; Dolbec & Smith, 2025; Yeo et al., 2025; Zamri et al.,

2024), the current study highlights the emotional appeal embedded in storytelling-based advertisements, emphasizing the narrative-driven approach used to engage audiences. Furthermore, in Malaysia, most of the established brands or companies tend to use emotions and storytelling in advertisements to give value instead of the hard-selling type of advertisements that emphasize on brand awareness and how the brands are closely related to consumers.

Code-switching in advertisements

Advertising is a means to inform, expose and attract audiences and potential buyers. Advertisers may use different tools and techniques to make the advertisements a success. Some may use one language, while others may utilize code-switching in their advertisements depending on their focus and context. Code-switching is used in many advertisements, especially in a multicultural society where the community speaks more than one language. Cowley (2016) mentioned that in the past, code-switching was considered a language flaw and speakers who incorporated words from another language in their communication were perceived as incompetent. However, the views on code-switching slowly changed when many researchers started to delve deeper into its intricacies in terms of its features and consequences.

Several studies have been conducted focusing on code-switching in advertisements. Among the earliest studies were by Luna and Peracchio (2005a), who investigated the persuasiveness of code-switched advertisement, aiming to identify how code-switched advertisements affect the perception of code-switching among bilingual speakers. The framework used to assist their study was the Markedness Model by Myers-Scotton (1993). Two studies were discussed comprehensively in their article. In the first study, the participants involved were 105 fluent Spanish-English bilinguals whereby they were given eight slogans that consisted of a code-switched word. Two languages became the focus, English as the majority language and Spanish as the minority language.

The first study aimed to see the effects of code-switched components in terms of perception and attitude towards code-switched advertisements. The results of this study showed that code-switched slogans from minority to the majority language were more persuasive compared to slogans from the majority to the minority language. The second study involved 56 fluent Spanish-English bilinguals and the focused text was the cover of a magazine consisting of code-switched excerpts of these two languages, either English to Spanish or vice versa. Similar to the first study, the findings from the second study also indicate that the shift from the minority to majority language was much more favourable as compared to advertisements which code-switched from the majority to the minority language.

Building on the work of Luna and Peracchio (2005b) which examined code-switched advertisements in isolation, Bishop and Peterson (2010) explored how the surrounding medium influences bilingual consumers' responses to Spanish-English code-switching. Drawing on neuroscience and sociolinguistic theories, the study developed a model tested on 122 bilingual Mexican Americans. Results showed that when the primary language of a code-switched advertisements matched the language of the medium

(for example, Spanish advertisements in a Spanish medium), it led to a better recall of the advertisements and heightened perceptions of the advertiser's cultural sensitivity. This, in turn, enhanced cognitive engagement and persuasion. Thus, the findings suggest that aligning the advertisement's language with the medium can improve advertising effectiveness.

Since then, research on code-switching and advertisements has continued to gain momentum with different scholars contributing to the existing literature with a new scope of interest and different community background. For instance, Ahn et al. (2016) investigated code-switching and its influence on advertising attitude and product evaluations through the lens of the Markedness Model within the context of the Korean society. Their study involved 130 Korean tertiary education students, fluent in Korean and English, examining printed advertisements as a stimulus and answering related questions. Findings from this study showed that both Korean–English and transliterated Korean–English code-switching led to a more positive attitude towards the slogan and better product evaluations compared to English–Korean switching.

Investigations on code-switching and advertisements have gained similar appeal and interest among Malaysian researchers. Moreover, code-switched advertisements are a common feature in the multiracial commercial landscape of the country. A study by Sulaiman et al. (2013) investigated the attitude, reasons of perception and impact of code-switched advertisements on the persuasion level of consumers. Their study focused on Malay-English code-switching in advertisements, addressing a gap in research on audience attitudes and perceptions within the Malaysian marketing context. Using a survey of 30 respondents, data were collected through a Likert-scale and open-ended questionnaires. The findings revealed generally positive perceptions of code-switched advertisements. However, some respondents expressed concerns, suggesting that such advertisements might lack professionalism and could be ineffective in persuasion. Despite these mixed views, the study concluded that code-switching holds potential as a persuasive marketing strategy for advertisers in Malaysia.

Besides that, Hadei et al. (2016) conducted a study which utilised data from YouTube. This study focused on identifying the social factors that motivate code-switching in Malay-English bilingual speech. Data were collected by transcribing short video clips of bilingual conversations and then analysed using Malik's (1994) framework to explore the social functions and dimensions of the language switches. The analysis revealed that the most common motivation for code-switching was to express one's sense of identity with a particular group. These findings offer valuable insights into the reasons Malaysian bilinguals switch languages in everyday communication.

A recent study by Ramba and Abu Bakar (2024) examined code-switching among Malaysian bilingual radio announcers on radio stations, Hitz FM and Mix FM. Using Poplack's (1980) typology and Gumperz's (1977) functions, findings revealed tag switching as the most common, mainly for interjections, qualification, reiteration, and quotation, underscoring its role as a key strategy for engaging diverse audiences. An equally recent study that focused on social media was conducted by Adnan and Nik Mat (2024) who examined code-mixing by Malaysian Instagram influencers in product endorsements,

focusing on types and motivations. Using a qualitative design, data collected from five influencers across niches were analysed. Guided by Muysken's (2000) framework, insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation emerged as key categories. Their findings showed that influencers strategically employ code-mixing to engage with multicultural audiences, build personal connections, and boost endorsement impact, underscoring its effectiveness as a linguistic strategy in social media marketing.

From the literature above, it is noted that despite the fact that code-switching has become a common feature in the Malaysian digital advertising industry, very few studies have been conducted to investigate the different functions of this feature, especially in digital marketing. The current study aims to add to the intellectual discussion on this aspect.

METHODOLOGY

In achieving the purposes of the study, identifying suitable narrative-type digital advertisements on the YouTube channel became the first main task. The sampling of videos was done based on the criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for selection of video advertisements

Criteria	
1	Malaysian product/service advertisements
2	Published and accessible on YouTube
3	The minimum duration of the advertisement videos is 3 minutes
4	Contains code-switch elements of Malay and English

Eventually, a total of 10 video advertisements were identified and were immediately coded. Contextual information of these advertisements and their codes are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Contextual information and coding system of selected video advertisements

Code	Title and Contextual Information
A01	TM's 2018 Raya ad — #MakLongBawang This Raya ad tells the story of Mak Long, a nosy aunt who asks uncomfortable personal questions during Raya and upsets Kamal and Maryam, her younger relatives. Initially, they are annoyed with Mak Long but over time, they realise that she doesn't mean harm, although her comments seem intrusive, her intention comes from honest care. The storyline emphasizes empathy in maintaining family harmony during the festive season.
A02	Watsons' Raya ad — #MisiIkhlasAidilfitri This advertisement tells the story of a well-known TV host known as Munira who appears glamorous and confident but in reality, self-absorbed and dismissive. Everything changes, when she sees herself through "truth glasses" which reveal how others truly see her. Being confronted with her own unkind behaviour, leads to a transformation where she starts reflecting and finds the true meaning of Aidilfitri, that celebrates other aspects such as sincerity and meaningful relationships.

Table 2. (con't)

Code	Title and Contextual Information
A03	TM's 2019 Raya ad — Atuk Gamer #LebihUntukMu <i>Atuk Gamer</i> is a heart-warming story of a grandfather who learns gaming to connect with his grandson. His efforts in stepping out of his comfort zone and mastering new tech trends portrays how connectivity can bridge generational gaps. This ad shows how technology can bring different generations closer to each other, especially during festive seasons like Raya.
A04	Masta Chef <i>Masta Chef</i> by Mat Luthfi, in collaboration with DahMakan, uses humour and parody to celebrate the Malaysian food culture. By blending parody and styling it like a competitive cooking show, the ad highlights and promotes local food appreciation.
A05	PETRONAS' 2019 National & Malaysia Day ad — UNI This advertisement reflects Malaysia's multicultural story, following Roger from Sabah and Rizwan from Kedah. Due to cultural differences, they did not get along at first, but when they are forced to work together during their university's semester break, a friendship slowly develops.
A06	PETRONAS' 2017 National & Malaysia Day ad — Piala Taman Thomas The short film shows a group of boys challenging badminton legends Rashid Sidek and Foo Kok Keong for a spot to play on the court. What begins as rivalry becomes a lesson in teamwork and determination. It captures teamwork, unity and friendship in a light-hearted way.
A07	PETRONAS' 2017 Deepavali ad — Arathi's First Love <i>Arathi's First Love</i> is a heartwarming Deepavali story centred around a schoolgirl named Arathi who develops a crush on her new classmate, Ivan. Her friends tease her about it, making her feel embarrassed, which indirectly puts their friendship to the test. The story beautifully captures the spirit of friendship and forgiveness during Deepavali.
A08	TNB's 2019 Raya ad — Konvoi Epik Fantastik <i>Konvoi Epik Fantastik</i> tells the story of a family's chaotic road trip back to their hometown for Hari Raya, where they face hiccups along the way. This ad highlights the importance of togetherness and the true meaning of Raya.
A09	Filem Pendek Hari Raya — Mana Tok Ucu? <i>Mana Tok Ucu?</i> is a Raya short film about a group of grandchildren who try to locate their missing grandmother during the lockdown. The story highlights family bonding as they use video calls and the internet to work together to find Tok Ucu.
A10	#BakalMertuakuGengster This advertisement, in collaboration with Touch 'n Go, tells the story of a man trying to build a good relationship with his father-in-law, who happens to be a gangster. It promotes the use of the Touch 'n Go eWallet in a humorous and entertaining way.

In order to identify the functions of code-switching in Malaysian brands' advertisements, the collected videos were transcribed and analysed qualitatively using Malik's (1994) Ten Communicative Functions of Code-Switching (refer to Table 3). During the analysis, each video transcription was carefully and meticulously perused to match the utterances to the different functions in the framework. Inter-rater reliability was applied at this stage to avoid misclassification of codes and classification for the function of code switching.

Table 3. Malik's (1994) ten communicative functions of code-switching

Social Factors of Code-Switching	Definitions
To identify with a group	Code-switching happens when bilingual speakers want to conform with the identity of a specific group
To address different audiences	Code-switching is used to convey messages to people from different languages.
Lack of facility	Bilingual speakers use code-switching to explain concepts in order to avoid misunderstanding
Pragmatic reasons	Code-switching occurs depending on the context, for example, formality, participants, and location in which a conversation is taking place
Lack of registrational competence	Bilingual speakers code-switch when they have difficulties in expressing a certain word in the targeted language
Semantic significance	Conveys a vital linguistic and social information
To attract attention	Media uses this type of code-switch to grab the attention of the audience by using two or more languages.
Habitual expressions	Code-switching happens in a fixed phrase, for example, greetings, commands, requests, apologies, and discourse markers
To amplify and emphasize a point	Code-switching to highlight a specific argument or point
Mood of speaker	Code-switching happens depending on a certain mood (angry, anxious, or nervous)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The validated number of occurrences of code-switched elements in the 10 videos which complemented Malik's (1994) communicative functions are as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Occurrences of code-switching

Social Factors	Frequency
To amplify and emphasize a point	29
Lack of facility	25
Habitual expression	19
Lack of registrational competence	19
Mood of speaker	17
To attract attention	15
Pragmatic reasons	13
To identify with a group	11
Semantic significance	3
To address different audiences	0
Total	151

A total of 151 occurrences of code-switched words were identified across the 10 advertisements uploaded on YouTube. It was found that the most used function was to amplify and emphasize a point which scored the highest number of occurrences (29) compared to other functions. This is followed by lack of facility (25), habitual expression

(19), lack of registrational competence (19), mood of speaker (17), to attract attention (15), pragmatic reasons (13) and to identify with a group (11). The least used communicative function of code-switching was semantic significance with 3 occurrences. Meanwhile, it was noted that none of the advertisements utilised code-switching to address different audiences. This result contrasts with that of Hadei et al. (2016) whose study revealed that the social function of identifying with a group was the most common motivation for code-switching. Further exploration of each function was carried out via the discourse analysis approach. The results are provided next. All occurrences in the Malay language have been translated.

To amplify and emphasise a point

Code-switching occurs when a speaker wants to highlight a specific argument or point. A few examples are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. To amplify and emphasise a point

Line	Occurrences	Code
1	Ini Munira, pengacara <i>popular</i> . (This is Munira, the famous host).	A02
2	Aku yang <i>famous</i> , kau yang panas. (I am famous, you are angry).	A02
3	Harini I nak share some <i>wonderful products from Watson</i> . (Today I want to share some wonderful products from Watson).	A02
4	Ha! You. Boleh you ambikkan <i>contact lens solution</i> tu tak? (Ha! You. Can you take that contact lens solution?).	A02

In Line 1: “Ini Munira, pengacara *popular*” and in Line 2: “Aku yang *famous*, kau yang panas”, it could be seen that the speaker used code-switched words such as *popular* and *famous*. Both words have the same meaning, and they were used consecutively. It could be deduced that in this instance, the speaker code-switched from Malay to English because she wanted to highlight that she is a well-known person. In addition, in Line 3, “Har ini I nak *share some wonderful products from Watson*”, the phrase *share some wonderful products from Watson* indicates that she wanted people to concentrate on her message, that is, Watson sells many wonderful products. This is followed by Line 4 where she used the phrase *contact lens solution*, highlighting that this is one of the products that could be found in Watson. Furthermore, the phrase *contact lens solution* is a common term used by Malaysians. These examples from the advertisement clearly indicate that in order for the speakers to emphasise or stress their points effectively, they would code-switch by using lexical items which people are more familiar with.

Lack of facility

Bilingual speakers use code-switching to explain concepts to avoid misunderstanding. More importantly, they switch to English when they are unable to find the equivalent words or phrases in Malay. Lack of facility prompted them to code-switch as the translated version of the words may not carry the intended precise meaning. Hence,

instead of using Malay words throughout their utterances, they would resort to using English words for the messages to be well conveyed. Lack of facility is illustrated in the following examples in Table 6.

Table 6. Lack of facility

Line	Occurrences	Code
5	Kami tengah sibuk duk terawih, baca doa, dia boleh duk <i>selfie</i> ? (<i>We are occupied with 'terawih prayer', making supplications, but he is busy with selfie?</i>).	A10
6	Ini bahagian Mak Cik, Mak Cik punya ada <i>cashback</i> ! (<i>This is your portion, yours has a cashback</i>).	A10
7	Manalah aku tahu, dia pergi Genting Highlands ke, tempat yang <i>chill</i> , sejuk, yang ada <i>roller coaster</i> tu. (<i>He went to Genting Highlands, a cold and chilly place with roller coasters</i>).	A09
8	Bukan rumah Tok Ucu ada <i>CCTV</i> ke? (<i>Doesn't your house have a CCTV, Tok Ucu?</i>)	A09
9	Eh drone delivery? Eh <i>innovative</i> juga. (<i>Eh, delivery via drone? That's innovative</i>).	A09
10	Eh Hakim, kau cuba tengok dua <i>hashtag</i> ni. (<i>Eh Hakim, please take a look at these two hashtags</i>).	A09
11	Okay, kita pergi <i>search</i> dekat area kampung Tok Ucu tu sesiapa yang ada <i>drone</i> . Mesti ada <i>footage</i> . (<i>Ok, let's find someone who has a drone in Tok Ucu's village. Surely there are footages</i>).	A09

From the examples in Table 6, it could be deduced that words such as *selfie*, *cashback*, *CCTV*, *drone delivery*, *hashtag* and *footage* were better conveyed in English to ensure clarity in the meaning of the utterances. In general, Malaysians are more familiar with the English version of these terms due to the frequent exposure they receive from their surroundings. Moreover, replacing the word *selfie* with its Malay equivalent, which is *swafoto*, may not convey the message with the same impact that it should because the term is uncommonly used among Malaysians. This finding reverberates with that of previous studies such as Bishop and Peterson (2010) as well as Ahn et al. (2016) that reflected a positive attitude in the use of code-switched words in English to encourage advertising effectiveness and product evaluation.

Habitual expression

Next, code-switching is also employed for habitual expressions such as greetings, commands, requests, apologies, and discourse markers. A few examples of this social function are illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Habitual expressions

Line	Occurrences	Code
12	<i>Sorry</i> tak dapat balik raya tahun ni! Selamat Hari Raya! (<i>Sorry, can't go back for Raya this year! Selamat Hari Raya!</i>)	A01
13	<i>Sorry</i> Cik. Siapa cepat, dia dapatlah. (<i>Sorry Miss. First come, first serve</i>).	A02

Table 7. (con't)

Line	Occurrences	Code
14	<i>Excuse me?</i> Eh, kau kenal tak aku ni siapa? Munira. M-U-N-I-R-A. Satu Malaysia kenal aku kut. (<i>Excuse me? Do you know who I am? I am MUNIRA. The whole Malaysia knows me</i>).	A02
15	Haa. ni nak dekat raya, bawak kereta tu baik baik ye. <i>Drive carefully</i> . (<i>Haa....Raya is approaching. Drive carefully</i>).	A01
16	<i>Bye...</i>	A01

In Lines 12, 13 and 14, the phrases *sorry* and *excuse me* are common habitual expressions used by bilingual speakers in Malaysia. Words like *Sorry* and *Excuse me* are translated as *Maaf* (*sorry*) or *Maafkan saya* (*Excuse me*) in the Malay language. It is rare for Malaysians to use Malay words as they might sound too formal to be used in a conversation. Thus, code-switched words have become the habitual expressions used by Malaysians, be it in formal or informal settings. In Line 15, the phrase *drive carefully* was a reminder to drive safely. It is an expression used to remind someone to stay safe while driving. It would undeniably sound “awkward” should the speaker use the Malay language equivalent, which is *Selamat memandu*.

In Line 16, *Bye* is another common word to be used for parting or ending a conversation. Malaysians commonly use *Bye* instead of *Selamat Tinggal* (Malay) because *Bye* is much shorter and easier to utter. Besides, the Malay term *Selamat Tinggal* is normally used in the formal context and in written form, rather than oral.

Lack of registrational competence

Bilingual speakers code-switch when they have difficulties in choosing certain words in the targeted language. In addition, code-switching happens due to certain phrases sounding much better in the second language (L2) than the first language (L1). Table 8 presents some examples of occurrences for this social function.

Table 8. Lack of registrational competence

Line	Occurrences	Code
17	Pak Cik, yang paling penting dalam <i>relationship</i> bukanlah budak kampung dan pernah bertumbuk. (<i>For me (Pak cik), the most important thing in a relationship is that he is not a village kid and has not been involved in violence</i>).	A10
18	Pak Cik, zaman sekarang kita dah ada <i>smartphones</i> . (Pak Cik, we have smartphones now).	A10
19	Dia pergi <i>holiday</i> kut. (<i>Maybe he went for a holiday</i>).	A09
20	Jap aku <i>search</i> . (<i>Wait, let me search</i>).	A09
21	Tok Ucu tu sebenarnya nenek saya, Kitaorang risau pasal dia, <i>call-call</i> tak dapat. (<i>Tok Ucu is my grandmother. We are worried about her, our calls were not answered</i>).	A09
22	Ha, You. Boleh you ambikkan <i>contact lens solution</i> tu tak? (<i>Ha! You. Can you take that contact lens solution?</i>).	A02

The examples in Table 8 show the speakers' preference in using words in L2, although there are equivalent words in L1. For instance, the term *smartphones* in Line 18 has its equivalent in the Malay language, which is *telefon pintar*. However, using *telefon pintar* in the utterance may create an odd feeling of being too formal. Other than that, as seen in Line 22, the phrase *contact lens solution* was used to indicate that among the things sold in Watson are contact lens solutions. In this instance, the use of English was deemed more effective in conveying the message since majority of Malaysians are more familiar with such a phrase than the Malay equivalent, which is *solusi untuk kanta sentuh*.

Mood of speaker

Code-switching also happens depending on the mood of the speaker such as angry, anxious, or nervous. Several scenarios are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Mood of speaker

Line	Occurrences	Code
24	Mimie, <i>not now</i> . Latte I mana? (annoyed) (<i>Mimie not now. Where is my latte?</i>)	A02
25	Cuba jangan <i>spoil</i> kan drama ni. (annoyed) (<i>Please do not spoil this drama</i>).	A02
26	<i>My stomach doesn't deserve this</i> . Hanya layak untuk orang yang takde <i>taste</i> ! (sarcastic). (<i>My stomach doesn't deserve this. This is only for those without taste</i>).	A04

In Line 24, the speaker gives a stern warning that she is in a lousy mood via the phrase *not now* which clearly reflects her state of mind at that time. Meanwhile, Line 25 shows that the speaker resorted to code switch in the middle of the sentence by using the term *spoil* to emphasise her annoyance to the development of the drama that she was watching. Another example is shown in Line 26 whereby the speaker highlighted her annoyance through her sarcastic remark by the code-switched phrase, *My stomach doesn't deserve this*. From these examples, it could be deduced that code-switching is used as a means by speakers to accentuate their mood or state of mind and emotions during a conversation. Using L1 in these instances may fall short of achieving its intended effect.

To attract attention

Code-switching is also used to attract the attention of the listeners or audience. This scenario mostly occurs at the beginning of the sentences or at the start of a conversation. A few examples are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. To attract attention

Line	Occurrences	Code
27	Eh <i>freshie</i> , selamat datang. Siapa nama awak? (<i>Eh freshie, welcome. What is your name?</i>)	A05
28	<i>Roger, make some friends</i> . Okay?	A05
29	Eh <i>Apek</i> . <i>ready or not?</i>	A06

In Line 27, the speaker used the term *freshie* to attract the listeners' attention and to indicate that they are being specifically addressed in the conversation. The speaker then code-switched again to L1 for the remaining of the conversation, once the listeners have started to listen and given their attention to the speaker. Line 28 shows that the speaker used L2 to attract the attention of the listener, *Roger*, and to point out the need for him to make friends. However, Line 29 shows a slightly different pattern in that the code-switch phrase is found at the end of the sentence, yet the purpose remains the same, which is to attract the attention of the listener(s). Here, the listener, *Apek*, was being asked on his state of readiness.

Pragmatic reasons

Code-switching also occurs depending on the context such as the formality of the occasion, participants, and location in which the conversation takes place. The examples are illustrated in Table 11.

Table 11. Pragmatic reasons

Line	Occurrences	Code
30	<i>And cut!</i>	A02
31	Eh <i>freshie</i> , selamat datang. (<i>Eh freshie, welcome</i>).	A05
32	<i>Announcing the arrival of, You must be Mr Roger Buang</i>	A05
33	Belum <i>Chef</i> . (<i>Not yet Chef</i>).	A04
34	<i>Uncle</i> , lama sudah kami tunggu ni. (<i>Uncle, we have been waiting here for so long</i>).	A06

The examples in Table 11 demonstrate that code-switching took place based on the conversational context. For instance, *And cut* (Line 30), *Eh freshie, selamat datang* (Line 31) and *Announcing the arrival of, You must be Mr. Roger Buang* (Line 32) are examples of how code-switched phrases were used in sentences to indicate the location that the conversation took place. In Line 30, it could be deduced that the situation took place in a set and the one who uttered this phrase was the director. In addition, in Line 31, the term *freshie* is the colloquial term for university freshman. Moreover, the following phrase *Selamat datang* or *Welcome* further denotes that the context could refer to the beginning of an academic programme.

As for the formality context, certain forms of honorifics were used including *Chef* and *Uncle*. *Chef* in Line 33 was used in the context of a cooking show. Meanwhile, *Uncle* in Line 34 is a colloquial term of respect used by the young in Malaysia to address older people and it was used by the children in the video advertisement.

To identify with a group

Code-switching happens when bilingual speakers want to conform with the identity of a specific group (Malik, 1994). The sentences in Table 12 are examples of code-switching used by the speakers to identify with a particular group.

Table 12. To identify with a group

Line	Occurrences	Code
35	Apa yang <i>back up</i> nya? (What is the <i>back up</i> ?)	A01
36	Kamu <i>flanning</i> ye, Yam? (Are you <i>planning</i> Yam? (Take your time to conceive))	A01
37	Ate, kome semua kalau udah tengok <i>share</i> ler, <i>like</i> video tu haa (Since you have watched the video, please share...like)	A01

The examples in Table 12 show that oftentimes, the speakers resorted to code-switch during certain parts of the conversation to conjure up the idea that they belong to the same group or to create the effect of camaraderie between both speakers and listeners. It was noted that a few speakers went to the extent of employing code-switching for this social function by uttering incorrect features. For instance, the word *back up* in Line 35 should have been *break up*. Meanwhile, the term *flanning* in Line 36 should have been *planning* since the context of the conversation was about planning which refers to planning for pregnancy or taking time to conceive. The elderly speaker intended to use the word *planning* as it is a common word used by married couples at the early stage of their marriage indicating that they are taking time to conceive or planning for pregnancy. It was noted that elderly people such as the speaker in the video were exposed to the words and used them in the conversation regardless of the mispronunciation of the words. They were not reluctant to use the words in order to conform to the speech repertoire of the younger generation in the conversation.

In Line 37, the speaker used terms commonly utilized by younger generations at the end of the video. For example, “Ate, kome semua kalau udah tengok *share* ler, *like* video tu haa”. The speaker used terms like *share* and *like* to address all types of viewers who may come from different age groups. The speaker code-switched from Malay to English as she wanted to identify with the online users who watch the video. These terms are commonly used by people who are active on social media such as YouTube. YouTubers commonly use these phrases in their videos as they want the viewers to share and like their videos so that they will have a higher engagement. It could also be assumed that the speaker code-switched in order to affirm that she is keeping up with the latest trend. Other than that, she wanted to emphasize that she could fit in with the younger generations. Other examples of code-switching to identify with a group are portrayed in Table 13.

Table 13. To identify with a group

Line	Occurrences	Code
38	Asyik dengan <i>handphone</i> awak ni lah, tak habis-habis dengan internet tu. <i>So engross with your handphone, you are using the internet non-stop.</i>	A03
39	LOL...? “TOLOL” kot! <i>LOL...? Stupid</i>	A03
40	IMHO... <i>in my honest opinion.</i> Banyak la pulak nak kena ingat ni <i>IMHO..... in my honest opinion. I need to remember so many terms.</i>	A03

Table 13. (con't)

Line	Occurrences	Code
41	Tengah <i>farming</i> ni. <i>I am farming.</i>	A03
42	Pergilah depan, atuk <i>cover</i> . <i>Go to the front, atuk will cover you.</i>	A03

The data revealed that code-switched slang words were used several times in the video advertisements, especially by the older generation to create a sense of connection with the younger generation. This could be seen in Line 39, *LOL*... and Line 40, *IMHO*. In reference to the context of the video, the story highlighted a grandfather who learnt to play mobile games for the sake of his grandson. He learnt all the slang words in order to show that he belongs to the same group as the younger generation. Code-switching has been used alternately, including certain words that might not be used in their normal conversation at their age (older generation) such as *LOL* and *IMHO*. However, due to the age gap, these words have been used to facilitate the conversation between two different generations.

Another example is the use of the word *farming* in Line 41. The literal meaning of *farming* is the diverse processes involved in the agricultural industry. However, in the context of gaming, *farming* relates to a gaming tactic used in virtual games. Hence, in this advertisement, the grandfather deliberately used the word *farming* to indicate a sense of togetherness with the grandchildren and that he was able to relate to them.

These examples clearly accentuate the idea that code-switching occurs when the speakers want to show that they belong to the same identity group. Besides that, the examples also illustrate how the older generation utilize terms like slang words that are uncommon in their generation in an effort to relate to the younger generation. Moreover, their utilization of gaming jargons with their younger audience clearly shows how they attempt to create shared values and experience and ultimately, express unity with different generations.

Semantic significance

Semantic significance is a social function that is used to convey vital linguistic and social information. Examples are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Semantic significance

Line	Occurrences	Code
43	Kejap nak <i>record Chef</i> , kejap nak <i>record</i> peserta. <i>Wait Chef, I need to record, wait I need to record the participants.</i>	A04
44	<i>Soundman</i> pulak <i>sound</i> aku. <i>The soundman reprimanded me.</i>	A10

In Line 34, the word *record* was repeated to highlight the additional work that needed to be done by the videographer. In the first half of the sentence, the videographer was asking the Chef to be patient, while in the second half, he was emphasizing to the

Chef that he needed to record the participants during the show. In Line 44, the repetition of the word *sound* creates a nice rhythm to accentuate the differences in their meanings. The first which is *soundman* refers to a profession while the second, *sound*, refers to a Malaysian slang which denotes reprimand or scolding. These examples clearly illustrate how words are code-switched to enhance the delivery of important linguistic and social information to the listeners or audience.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the functions of code-switching in 10 narrative-type Malaysian digital advertisements on YouTube, applying Malik's (1994) Ten Communicative Functions of Code-Switching as the analytical framework. The analysis revealed that the most frequently used function was to amplify and emphasise a point (29 occurrences), followed by lack of facility (25), habitual expression (19), lack of registrational competence (19), mood of speaker (17), to attract attention (15), pragmatic reasons (13), and to identify with a group (11). The least frequent function was semantic significance (3).

Findings indicate that advertisers strategically employ code-switching to enhance emphasis, ensure clarity, and prevent misunderstanding, particularly when equivalent terms in Malay are either unavailable or fail to convey the intended nuance. Common English expressions such as *sorry*, *excuse me*, *drive carefully*, and *bye* are preferred over Malay equivalents due to their perceived informality, brevity, and conversational ease.

Code-switching was also found to occur when speakers lacked registrational competence, opting for English terms like *smartphones* or *contact lens solution* over more formal-sounding Malay alternatives. Emotional expression was another key trigger, with English phrases used to convey anger, irritation, or sarcasm. Additionally, code-switching was utilized to capture attention, often at the beginning of conversations, and to adapt to the conversational context, including the formality of the setting, the participants, and the location.

The results further revealed code-switching as a means of aligning with a group's identity, with older speakers adopting youth slang, gaming jargon, and social media terms—even with mispronunciations—to connect with younger audiences. Finally, semantic significance emerged as a function for conveying vital linguistic and social information, with repeated or contextually contrasted words enhancing clarity, rhythm, and impact.

Overall, the study shows that code-switching in Malaysian digital advertising is a versatile communicative tool that serves multiple purposes, from enhancing persuasion to fostering social connection across generational and contextual divides.

Future studies could expand the scope by examining code-switching functions across a wider range of digital platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Facebook) to explore whether platform-specific features influence language choice and communicative strategies. Besides that, a comparative cross-cultural analysis could be conducted to investigate whether similar functions and patterns of code-switching occur in digital advertisements

in other multilingual societies, thereby deepening the understanding of its universality or cultural specificity.

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