การสังเกตและตีความวัฒนธรรมในสื่อโฆษณาภาษาอังกฤษ [1]

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บทคัดย่อ

สื่อระหว่างประเทศโดยเฉพาะการโฆษณาทางทีวีและอินเตอร์เน็ต มีบทบาทสำคัญในการเปลี่ยนแปลงการใช้ภาษา และรูปแบบของภาษาอังกฤษทั่วโลก นับเป็นความท้าทายสำหรับครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษที่จะปรับตัวให้ทันต่อความเปลี่ยน แปลงของภาษาที่มีผลไปทั่วโลก และค้นหาประโยชน์จากปรากฏการณ์นี้เพื่อเป็นทางเลือกสำหรับผู้เรียน นอกจากข้อมูล ทางการค้าแล้ว บางครั้งสื่อโฆษณายังส่งสารเกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรม ปรัชญา และค่านิยมจากสังคมหนึ่งไปสู่สังคมหนึ่ง โฆษณา บางชิ้นที่มีลักษณะเช่นนี้สามารถนำมาปรับเป็นสื่อเสริมการสอนการพูดและการเขียนแบบพรรณนาได้

บทความนี้รายงานถึงวิธีการพัฒนาทักษะในการพรรณนาเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ   พร้อมกับส่งเสริมให้นักศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรีที่ศึกษาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษมีความตระหนักในวัฒนธรรมต่างประเทศ โดยการ สังเกตและตีความสารจากสื่อโฆษณา ผลพลอยได้จากกิจกรรมนี้คือ เมื่อนักศึกษาสังเกตเทคนิคการโฆษณาก็จะเข้าใจ เป้าประสงค์ทางการค้า และสามารถพัฒนาตนเองให้เป็นผู้บริโภคที่ฉลาดและรอบคอบมากขึ้น

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Observation and Interpretation of Culture in English Advertising [1]

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Abstract

International mass media, particularly the advertising on TV and Internet plays an important role in the changing of the usage and forms of global English. It is a challenging task for English teachers to cope with this influential, global language changes and look for alternative advantages for their students. Apart from commercial information, advertising sometimes conveys cultures, philosophy and concepts of values from one society to others. Some advertisements with these characteristics are adaptable for supplementary teaching materials for descriptive speaking and writing.

This article reports how to develop KMUTT students' descriptive skills at the same time as to encourage their foreign cultural awareness by observing and interpreting the message from the advertisements. The by-product of this activity was that when the students observed the advertising techniques, they understood more about commercial propose and develop themselves to be wiser and more careful consumers.

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1. Introduction

All languages constantly change and grow alongside the evolution of technology, way of life and activities of the speakers. English, which is used globally, has inevitably been influenced by the changing world. International mass media, particularly the advertising on TV and the Internet play an important role in the changing of the usage and forms of global English.

Contrary to traditional style of prose, advertising usually uses short and simple sentences, attractive vocabulary with imaginative content but usually unconventional structures that may not be grammatically accurate. However, English teachers may find some alternative advantages for their students because apart from commercial information, advertising sometimes conveys cultures, philosophy and concepts of values from one society to others. Some advertisements with these characteristics are adaptable for supplementary teaching materials for descriptive speaking and writing.

2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to analyze the designs of several international advertisements in English which were uploaded on the Internet for customers in several countries. The explicit message about language, products and target customers is investigated as well as the implicit message about culture, philosophy and concepts of values.

The result of this analysis can be helpful to English teachers who may adapt some appropriate international advertisements for authentic supplementary teaching materials their students to practice descriptive speaking and writing. Moreover, this authentic practice will sharpen the students' observation in techniques of advertising so they will be more careful and wiser consumers.

3. Literature review

3.1 The influence of advertising

Advertising shows great influence upon consumers. An analysis by Okigbo, Martin, and Amienyi [1] upon 2158 full-page advertisements from eight general circulation magazines in the U.S.A. shows that American cultural values are embedded in popular magazine advertisements or ads. In particular, individualism, low context communication patterns and action/achievement values are most common. Kilbourne [2] describes how this kind of advertising affects young people, especially girls, by offering false promises of rebellion, connection, and control. She also analyzes the way advertising creates and then feeds an addictive mentality that often continues throughout adulthood.

This influence is not by accident. A successful ad is a work of art which is carefully designed scientifically in order to attract attention, to communicate clearly, and ideally, to be memorable for optimum impact. Many researchers study the techniques to fulfill these requirements such as Kaufman-Scarborough [3] for detecting information-processing problems and analyzing the responses of color-deficient consumers.

Martin, Bhimy, and Agee [4] explore the influence of ad design elements and consumer characteristics upon perceptions of advertising effectiveness. From 878 respondents, they find that advertising is more effective when employing expert comments, testimonials, product demonstrations, and the use of target market models, celebrity endorsers, product comparisons, and bonus offers.

Branthwaite [5] investigates visual imagery in ads and finds that it has potentially powerful

effects on human psychology and physiology, affecting ideas, perceptions, beliefs, feelings, behavior and health. It plays a central role in most advertising, especially posters, print and TV, and also radio through the ability of language and description to conjure up images internally.

3.2 Culture and English as an International Language

As a teacher of English, one complex problem is to decide whether it is profitable to teach English or Western culture together with the language so the learners may use the language correctly and appropriately according to native speaker norms or focus on the language as a means of communication without links to any particular culture but international or global purposes.

From McKay's study [6], the teaching of English in many countries goes along with the host culture by presenting native characters in local environment and content. However, in more subtle ways, the language is linked to the culture of western English-speaking countries. It can be seen in the content where there are some native English-speakers instead of second language users of English such as people from Asia or Africa. Because of this, learners lack the models that they, too, can communicate effectively in English with other non-native people. The most important remark is that the learners have to accept, maybe unconsciously, western concepts of values.

There are examples of studies that support the inclusion of western cultural components in the teaching of English such as the research conducted by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi [7]. This inclusion can promote international understanding, deepen an understanding of one's own culture, facilitate learners' visits to foreign countries, and

motivate learners to be confident in communicating in English.

A different opinion about this is from educators such as Smith [8], who insists that English as an international language does not belong just to its native speakers but it belongs to the world and every nation using it with different tone, color, and quality. The purpose of an international language is to facilitate the communication of international speakers' ideas and culture so non-native speakers do not need to internalize cultural norms of English native speakers.

When teaching English to my students, I find that they encounter international users of English who are not only native speakers. Therefore, the more they are exposed to international concepts and cultures, the more they can cope with English for global communication.

3.3 Language and paralanguage in advertising

Cook [9] says that current ads reflect radical changes in technologies and media, social and economic relations, and a sense of personal and group identity. He has found that his students remember the words and details of ads more readily than those of novels and poems and plays, and that they often recall them with more laughter and enthusiasm. Certainly, this same reaction is so frequently found in my Thai students that it inspires the idea of using ads as an authentic supplementary teaching materials in my classes.

Cook describes that there are two elements in an ad: the language that gives the message explicitly and the paralanguage that conveys implicit meaning. Paralanguage is meaningful behavior accompanying language, such as voice quality,

gestures, facial expressions and touch (in speech), and choice of typeface and letter sizes (in writing). In face-to-face communication, a speaker may convey important meanings by eye contact, gesture, body movement, clothing, touch, body position, physical proximity, voice quality, volume, pitch range and facial expression such as smile or laughter. In writing, the writer may convey his inner thoughts through the page lay-out and letter sizes, typefaces and handwriting styles. These and many other factors also carry meanings which may reinforce or contradict the linguistic meaning of the signs which they accompany. They are examples of paralanguage.

Cook confirms that "Language never occurs without paralanguage" [Ibid: 68]. I fully agree with him since the message in an ad will be incomplete without both elements. In my opinion, the practice in interpretation of paralanguage is as useful to my students as the practice in language for preparing them to communicate with English speaking people, native or non-native alike.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants of the study

Two hundred students who were studying English as a foreign language (EFL) with me at KMUTT participated in this study. They were in oral communication and in context-based classes from 2004-2006. I assigned volunteer students to choose one ad that they liked best and presented it to the class.

4.2 Presentation of ads

Having been instructed in how to observe the explicit and implicit message in the ads, each student described for five minutes the ad that he or she had chosen. Firstly, they observed the information, models, products, background, fonts, and colors and reported these features to the class. In this activity, the presenters could develop their observation skills as well as their stock of vocabulary in order to present their ads. While the presenters practiced speaking and presentation skills, the audience practiced listening skills.

4.3 Observation practice

After they finished describing explicit message of the ads, the presenters gave remarks on implicit messages such as the environment, some noticeable cultural aspects, and concepts of values. At this step, the audience could practice speaking skills in discussing about the message. The whole class could also develop observation skills in looking for evidence in the ads to support their comments.

In oral communication class, after the students had described the ads, they discussed about them and gave comments. In the content-based class, they wrote about them in short paragraphs to practice descriptive writing.

4.4 Analysis of the data

After the descriptive practice, the class analyzed all the ads that had been presented in class. They classified the types of ads according to the techniques used in the ads that presented explicit and implicit messages-especially the cultural influence in overall characteristics of the ads.

5. Findings

5.1 Types of ads

The students brought two types of ads: printed ads and the ads on the Internet. The products that were chosen varied as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Statistics of the ads investigated in this study

Types of ads	Products	N	Percentage
Food	fast food such as pizza, pasta, fried chicken, ice-cream, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages such as wine and beer	48	24%
Clothes	men and women's garments, sports shoes	20	10%
Accessories	jewelry, watches, perfumes, cosmetics	28	14%
Vehicles and equipment	trucks, luxury cars, motorcycles, computers, mobile phones, TVs, home theatre sets, cameras	52	26%
Entertaining service	hotels, restaurants, movies, tour agencies, spas	32	16%
Real estate	condominiums, houses, townhouses	20	10%
	Total	200	100%

5.2 Explicit message from the ad

The explicit message that can be seen immediately in an ad is its commercial information. It includes products and descriptions of its quality, producer, price, place to buy or contact and target customers. From the studentsû analysis, explicit messages from the ad could be identified as follows:

5.2.1 The products

The illustration of the product or its logo is the most prominent feature in every ad. It is the centre of interest and sometimes it stands alone in the vast space of monotone background. Many high-end products which rank themselves as qualified, expensive and claimed to be produced with high technology are frequently advertised in this style.

The ads for mass products show different characteristics. They are full of descriptions of the quality, promotion of special low prices and places to buy or contact. Most ads for low-end products which aim for general people regard price as the first attraction of their viewers. It is noticeable that similar products are presented differently if they appear in different web sites. This shows that they are designed to attract different target customers.

Fig. 1 Comparison of the ads in different web sites

a. the general market web site
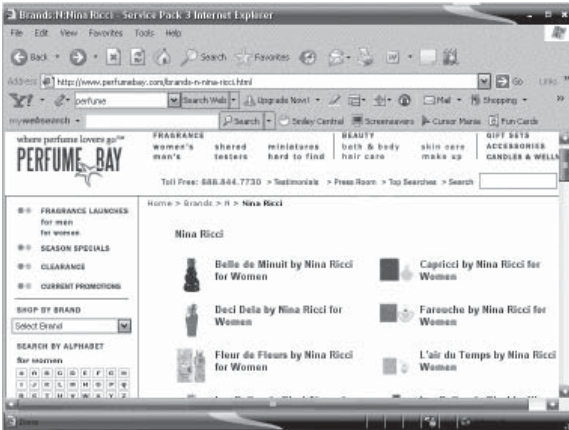
(www.perfumebay.com)

b. the company web site:

(www.ninaricci.com)

The two ads above present similar products, that is, perfumes from a well- known company. The first ad in the general market web site describes the quality and price. The second ad in the company web site is designed differently to attract customers who are not concerned with price but prefer good taste. Therefore, the price is not shown but there is more detail about the perfume such as inspiration of the designer.

5.2.2 The target customers

Target customers can be observed from explicit information in the ad. This is reflected in the techniques of presentation such as the design of illustration, color and fonts as seen in Fig. 2 below.

Fig. 2 Comparison between different target customers

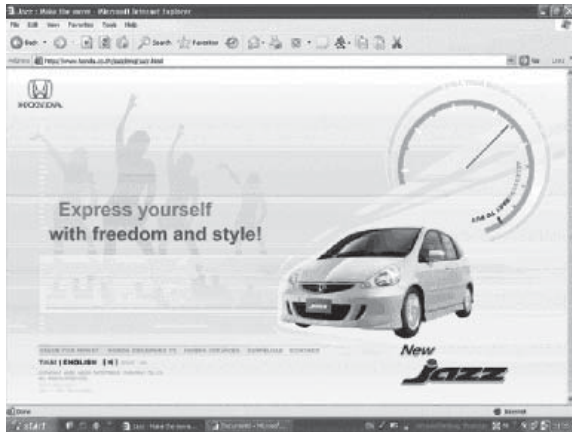a. the target customers are children.

(www.disney.go.com)

b. the target customers are men.

(www.toyota.com)

c. the target customers are teenagers

(www.honda.co.th)

From Fig. 2, the font, colors and the illustrations in the first ad are designed to attract children. The color is bright, the layout is clear and the cartoon cars are smiling happily. This simple, clean and joyful style is suitable for children. On the other hand, the car in the second ad shows its capacity and capability on a muddy road in a rocky environment, probably near a mountain. The theme is adventurous and challenging so it is appealing to men. The third ad aims to attract teenagers, so we can observe the motto about freedom which is desirable for all young people. The bright yellow color also creates a joyful and energetic feeling. Moreover, there are shadows of dancing teenagers in the background to emphasize the concept of Jazz, the name of this model. The meter in the background for the viewer to click when choosing topics of description matches the theme of modern cars.

Another artistic technique that can be observed in the ads is the description of the product which not only matches or supports the product itself, but also controls the theme of the ad and the feeling of the viewers. For example, the Honda Jazz motto which says "Express yourself with freedom and style" in Fig. 2c; and Chevrolet's motto "360

Degrees of Safety Starts with Stabilitrack" in Fig. 3a are artfully rhyming with the [s] sounds.

5.3 Implicit message from the ad

With some initiative questions from the teacher, students noticed the implicit message from the ads presented in class. The implicit message that can be observed from the ad concerns its focus, concepts of values of the native people and cultural influence in techniques of presentation. After several discussions, students identified implicit message from the ads as follows:

5.3.1 The motive in the ads

The mass products for all types of people attract the customers by economical motives such as price list, discounts, or promotion. Certain web sites such as in Fig. 1a above, www.parfumebay.com focus on the price list and how to buy the products on-line.

The ads for fast food such as pizza, fried chicken, or ice-cream motivate the viewers by the appearance of the products, mostly over-sized and looking ideally delicious. Sometimes they are presented with the chefs and attached with contact information for delivery.

Soft drink ads attract people's attention by relating to sports and sports stars whereas alcoholic drinks ads present people at a bar or a party. In the ads, these drinks are usually regarded as an irresistible magnet at the party and the ad designers intentionally neglect their unhealthy effect.

The ads for modern technology products such as computers, mobile phones and audio-visual equipment focus on the design and quality of their products. They also assume to represent the buyer's prestigious personality. In addition, mobile phones and network companies are shown as a tool to link

the owner with his long departed family members, friends, lover, and strangers and at the utmost limit, with other creatures such as whales.

The ads for trucks focus on capacity and capability of their engines and new technology. The ads for luxury cars also focus, in addition, on the design and speed. Some virtual ads on the Internet such as those presented by Chevrolet and Toyota serve individual preferences by allowing viewers to choose the colors, additional parts and accessories to design their own car and show the result in one click.
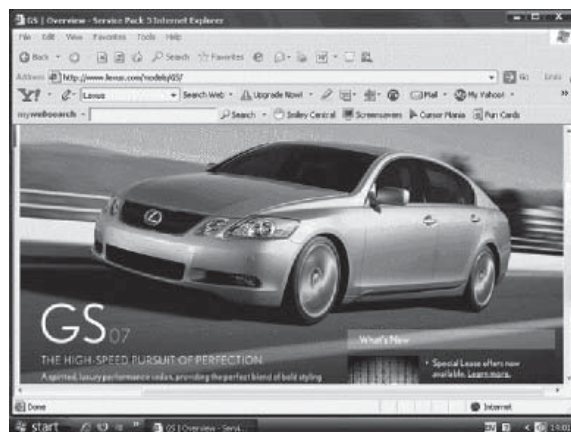
Fig. 3 Comparison between the motives in ads

a. Truck ad focusing on the engines
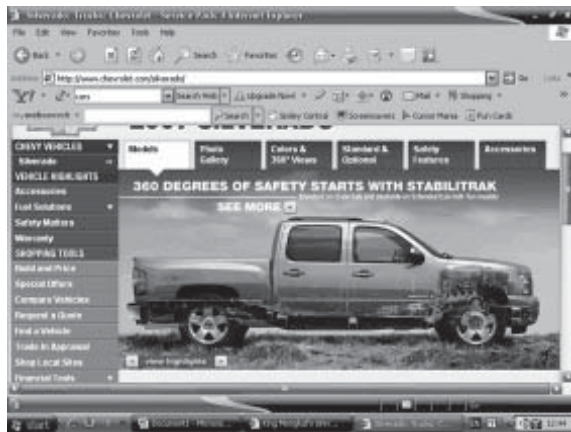
(www.chevrolet.com)

b. Luxury car ad focusing on design and speed

(www.lexus.com)

c. Luxury car ad focusing on modern technology

(http://www.mazda.co.jp)

5.3.2 The concepts of values of native viewers

In general, when people view ads, they are convinced to buy the products because of several reasons. The ads show that it is worthwhile if viewers choose their products according to these concepts of values as seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2   The concept of values in the ads investigated in this study

Concept of values	Motivating focus in the ads
Competition	winner in sports, drivers in traffic, workers in daily life
Economy	price, promotion, quality and quantity
Entertainment	Popular or charming person at the party, or meeting
Modern technology	special design, good personality, job promotion
Relationship	love, care, sympathy
Safety	guarantee of support in accident, death or sickness
Sex appeal	power to seduce the other sex
Success	wealth, health, prestige, degree, medal, trophy, etc.

The same products that are launched in international markets may be advertised with different concepts of values in different countries such as ads for Nokia mobile phones as shown in Fig. 4.
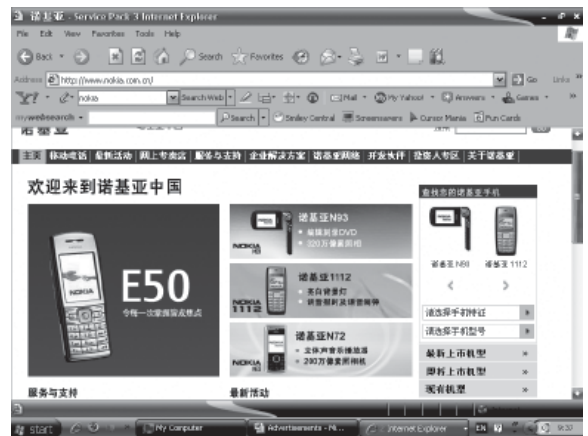
Fig. 4 Different concepts of values in ads of the same product
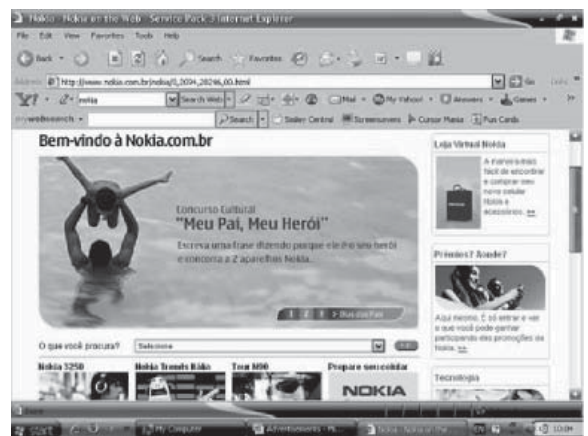
a. Nokia in Thailand
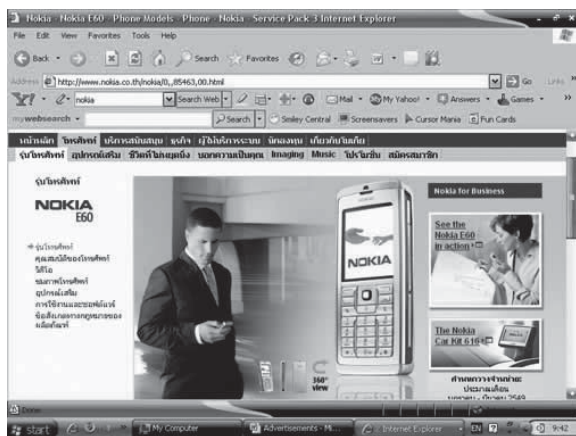
(www.nokia.co.th)

b. Nokia in China

(www.nokia.co.cn)

c. Nokia in Brazil

(www.nokia.co.br)

The three ads above reflect different concepts of values in each country. The concept of success is shown in the Thai web site. The model represents a good-looking, white European businessman who has a magnificent office indicating his high position in the company, his wealth and his success. The Chinese web site focuses on the capacity, function, and price. This design denotes that Chinese people tend to value economic reason when they buy a mobile phone. As for the Brazilian web site, the camera function in a mobile phone is presented, indicating that Brazilians rather value family relationship and they love taking photos to keep records of memorable occasions.
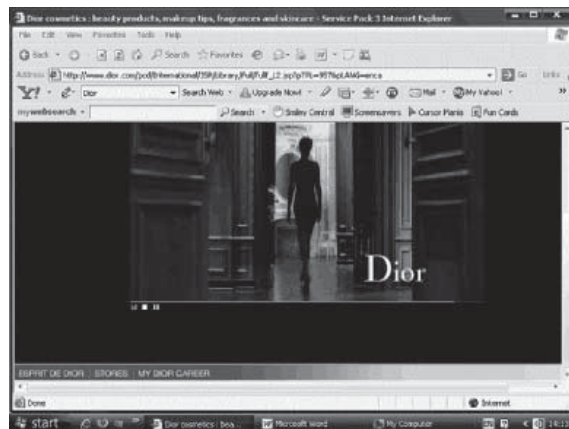
5.3.3 Cultural influence

High-end, luxury products emphasize more western culture, or cultural environment and activity than general market products. As seen in Fig. 1b, the Nina perfume in its company web site is presented as a magic fruit in a western style fairy-tale theme. The background is a winter scene of bare branches covered with snow in a cold country.

When it is analyzed for techniques of presentation, we can see that the product is artfully designed as a magic fruit with lively red color. The technique in choosing color matches the theme and strengthens the prestigious image of the perfume as the elixir of life, youth and charm. It sharply contrasts with the background of white snow and grey branches, denoting death or loneliness in a western concept. The model who dressed in a western style soft pink princess gown represents a young, innocent lady that supports the fairy-tale theme. In the ad, the icons for choosing topics of description are in pale grey which almost dissolve into the white background. When these icons are chosen by clicking, they are highlighted in lively red, the same color as the perfume as if they are given life by the perfume.

Other aspect of western culture is shown in another perfume ad by Dior in Fig. 5. It is presented by a woman in expensive silk evening dress in western style. The video clip shows that while walking through a luxury mansion that looks like a French palace, she deserts her jewelry and dress on the way but keeps on whispering the name of the perfume, denoting that it is the only valuable thing she wants to wear.

Fig. 5 Western Culture influence in the ads

(www.dior.com)

Rolex, a premium watch company, presents its watches with a background of famous buildings in several countries as shown in Fig. 6

Fig. 6 Different cultural influences in ads of the same product

a.   Rolex Thailand

(www.rolex.com/en/)

b. Rolex Hong Kong

(www.rolex.com/en/)

c. Rolex Athens

(www.rolex.com/en/)

The native viewers will know at first glance that the ads refer to their own culture. As a psychological effect, this technique not only creates intimacy with the brand by the viewers but it also indicates that the dealers in each country do not overlook their distinguishing culture and they are ready to serve their customers properly.

Another distinguished concept is 'globalization' or 'international similarity' as found in several ads of modern technology products such as computers or luxury cars. It is noticeable that ads for cars do not show distinction between the web sites from different countries. Actually, they keep the 'international' similarities so the ads in Japan are the same as the ones in Australia or Germany. The only exception is the native languages and sometimes, the fonts of those languages that are different from Romanized alphabets. Moreover, many modern cars are shown as being parked in a vast, deserted land which looks like the scene on another planet. This background creates the suitable atmosphere for the car which is designed like a future vehicle from sci-fi movies as seen in Fig. 3c above.

6. Summary and discussion

From the study, we can see that ads not only present business information, but the techniques of presentation are also carefully and artfully designed to attract the viewers' attention and make them remember the ads for a long time. Therefore, the colors, fonts, lay-out, background, and description are neatly created to match the theme of the products. Actually, the visual imagery in ads serves its creators well since it affects the viewers psychologically and physically as Branthwaite [5] has mentioned. Moreover, these ads also convey the concepts of values and cultural influence of the

creators to their target customers.

For these reasons, the study of international ads is a good practice for students to observe and interpret the explicit and implicit message in English. The observation practice for insight understanding of these authentic messages can be applicable for students' communication with foreigners from different cultures. The by-product from this practice is that students may be aware of the techniques of advertising and become a more careful and wiser consumer.

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