MALAYSIAN CHINESE REACTION TOWARDS NUDITY IN ADVERTISING

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MALAYSIAN CHINESE REACTION
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By

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APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it confirms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a research paper for the degree of Corporate Master in Business Administration.

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Supervisor

This research paper was submitted to the Faculty of Economic and Business, UNIMAS and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Corporate Master in Business Administration.

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DECLARATION AND COPYRIGHT

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I hereby declare that this research is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving references and a bibliography is appended.

Signature : 
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ABSTRACT

Although, nudity has become very common used in advertising, limited research investigating the effect of using nudity in advertising in Malaysia. This research contributes to find out the Malaysian Chinese community’s reactions towards the used of nudity in advertisements. Besides, this research was designed on order to explore gender differences in Chinese community’s reactions towards male nudity and female nudity in advertising. This research adopts Hierarchy of Effect Model as the underpinnings for this research to measure and explain the effects of nudity in advertising to Malaysian Chinese using 9 variables; attitude towards company, attitude towards advertisement, likeability, attitude towards the brand, corporate credibility, corporate image, purchase intention, advertiser’s sensitivity and word of mouth. Research was conducted in Malaysia with a total of 875 Chinese Respondents. Three types of questionnaires have been used in this research to represent female nudity, male nudity and non sexual item as a controller. The findings show that Chinese reactions are significant differed toward different type of advertisement and they are more favorable when viewing advertisement with female nudity and advertisement without nudity than advertisement with male nudity. Besides, significant gender differences are found in all variables and the respondents reacted more favorably to nudity of opposite gender in advertisements. The theoretical implications of this research included: (1) there are likely to be positive reaction toward nudity in advertising for Chinese in Malaysia and Chinese in China. (2) Both male and female Chinese also react more favourably to nudity of opposite gender in advertisements compare to other ethnic groups in previous researches. (3) There is less evidence show the cross-cultural difference of nudity in advertising in this research.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The use of nudity of both female and male models in consumer-oriented print advertising has become very common over the past two decades (LaTour et al., 1990; Lin, 1998). Sexually oriented appeals usually operationalized as levels of nudity in advertisements. Nudity is typically referred to as the amount and style of clothing worn by models in advertisements and the nudity is operationalized as models in progressive stages of undress (Nelson & Paek, 2005; Reichert, 2003a). This includes suggestive, partially-revealing or nude (Reichert & Ramirez, 2000). For example, advertisement for Playtex featuring live models in bras and some staid companies are using bare skin to sell their products (Anonymous, 1987, 1995). The issues of sexuality or sex appeal in advertising have occurred when the advertisement using semi nude or nude model became the norm for advertising.

Sex appeal advertising is defined as the use of sexual information in mediated promotional messages and sexual attraction as a tool of persuasion to draw the interest of consumers to a particular product for purpose of sale (Reichert, 2002). Attractive models are generally used in a sex appeal advertisement. The images of pretty and sexy women often appear in advertisements without connection to the product being sold. Sex appeals in advertising do also include eye-catching male models (Kuriansky, 1995; Miller, 1993).

Though there are extensive literatures on the evaluation of sex appeal advertising in the United States, not many researches have been conducted on sex appeal advertising especially the used of nudity in advertising in Malaysia (Liu et al., 2006). There is a research show that the European advertising historically features more nudity than U.S advertising (Reid et al., 1984). Besides, the use of nudity in advertising has generated controversy of negative reactions to consumers (Anonymous, 1991). Therefore advertising images, particularly nudity, indecent language, and sexist images, were perceived as major reasons for advertising restrictions in various countries due to media restrictions and cultural and legal factors (Waller & Fam, 2000).
Malaysia is a multicultural country with three main ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) and numerous indigenous people living side by side (De Run & Fah, 2006). Thus the cultural and religion has play an important role in Malaysian advertising. Nudity in advertising is prohibited due to the religion factor in Malay community which is largest ethnic in Malaysia. Hence, the second largest ethnic (Chinese) play important roles in the research of nudity advertising. Although there is a research in China shows the modern Chinese can accept mild nudity in advertising (Dunne, 1999) but the acceptance of nudity in advertisements by Malaysian Chinese might be different with Chinese in China.

However, the numbers of advertisements with different levels of nudity is apparently growing in Malaysia especially among Chinese community. Chinese consumers are considered more open-minded towards the nudity in advertisements because that kind of advertisements can be easily found in Chinese Magazine such as New Tide, Feminine, New Life Post, New Icon for Him and My Wedding. Therefore, this research seeks to find out the Malaysian Chinese community’s reactions towards the used of nudity in advertisement.

1.2 Sex liberation in today’s Malaysia

Since Malaysia became independent, its economic record has been one of Asia's best (Anonymous, 2007a). Malaysia is rated as an upper middle-class country in 1990s (Johnson, 2007) when the tide of economic globalization is sweeping every corner of the planet. Malaysia was considered as a member of pure Asian culture before globalization (Fang, 2006). People under the traditional Asian heritage are less sexual experienced less liberal attitudes, and lower rates of desire, arousal, and sexual receptivity compare to western culture people (Brotto et al., 2005). There is a great international cultural exchange and causing Westernization as the effect of globalization (Dunning & Hamdani, 1997). Some imported culture may have supplanted the local culture because individual has better access to cultural diversity in globalization, for example through the export of Hollywood and Bollywood movies, women's fashion and beauty magazines and commercial products (Dunning & Hamdani, 1997).
Therefore, sex is no longer a taboo subject in Malaysia. According to the study of the influence of religion on attitudes towards advertising of controversial products, those who are low intensity of belief, even Muslim did not think that sex related products are offensive (Fam et al., 2004). Discussion of sexuality can be found in most women's fashion and beauty magazines which are youth's favorite magazines such as Cleo, Cosmopolitan, Female and Girlfriends (Braun, 2005; Pugsley, 2007; Rosenthal & Smith, 2004). As a result, many people especially the youth are quite liberal about sex. With the extensive exposure to various sex-related messages, many people, especially the youth have become more liberal about sex.

Due to the sex liberalism, Malaysians become more open to the sexual revolution, especially the young. According to a sexuality study in year 2006, the mean age of secondary school student in Negeri Sembilan to have sexual intercourse is 15 years old (Lee et al., 2006). The research found that the approximately 5.4% of the respondents have sexual experience. Besides, 1% of the respondents even reported that they had been pregnant or had made someone else pregnant before (Lee et al., 2006). This is corroborated by another sexuality study by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia psychologist Dr Khaidzir Ismail and his team in 2007. 886 out of 887 female students with disciplinary problems in Selangor confessed to having had sex (Kathirasen, 2007). Some people indicated that the absence of proper sex education in schools is one of the reasons of that affair. However, the result might be totally different if the result carried out in 20 years ago before Westernization and cultural diversity happened because culture plays a crucial role in influencing attitudes towards and beliefs about sex (Ahmed & Bhugra, 2007).

1.3 Sex liberation in Chinese community

Westernization has brought impact to most of the South East Asian countries where the people have distinct languages, cultures, norms, regulations and business environment which are very different from the West (Waller & Fam, 2000). Malaysia is one of the South East Asian countries which has approximately 26.9 million people, with three main ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) (Anonymous, 2007a).
The Chinese are the second largest ethnic in Malaysia and they constitute around 24.5% of population Malaysia (Anonymous, 2007a). Malaysian Chinese are from China by origin. They started to move in huge amount, settle and spread in Malaysia after the mid 19th century (Anonymous, 2006). Traditional Chinese are influenced by Confucius and act in accordance with external expectations or social norms, rather than with internal wishes or personal integrity (Tai, 1999). Normally, they have very conservative sexual practices and attitudes (Dunne, 1999).

However modern Chinese now are more open-minded towards sex. There is evidence that shows 0.9% high-school students out of 6000 respondents admitted experiences of sexual intercourse in China in 1990 (Dunne, 1999). Another survey conducted in Malaysia shows that there are approximately 5.3% of Chinese secondary school student in Negeri Sembilan has sexual experience (Lee et al., 2006). Sexuality has become general topic among Chinese community, discussion of sexuality and jokes involved sex even can be found in some Chinese daily newspaper.

Transsexual was one of the hottest sex issues which were discussed in Chinese daily newspaper in 2005. This issue illustrates the reformation of sex in Chinese community. Although the Malaysia government does not recognize transsexuals but they are slowly accepted by the society after the incident of Jessie Chung. Jessie is a Chinese transsexual in year 2002, who married accountant from Perak in the end of 2005. The wedding ceremony was held with the consent and blessing of their parents and their fiends and published in the papers (Anonymous, 2005a).

In short, it is obvious that the modern Chinese have more open-minded sexual practices and attitudes. So, it is significant to study on Chinese community’s reactions towards the nudity in advertisement because the sex liberation is interconnected with the effect of applying nudity in advertising.

1.4 Nudity in Advertising in Malaysia

Advertisers have noticed this acceptance and more open mindedness towards sexuality of Chinese Malaysians that is discussed earlier. There are numerous adverts in Malaysia with various levels of nudity.
The beer posters showing cleavage-baring women in swimwear, or in tight dresses with high slits down the sides could be easily found in Chinese-run coffee-shops in Malaysia (Anonymous, 2005b).

Nevertheless, there are advertising codes that have to be followed and Malaysia is no exception. As an Islamic country, Malaysia’s advertising code was heavily influenced by Islamic values. Therefore, the regulation has been set and specified in Advertising Code for Television and Radio by the Ministry of Information (Anonymous, 1990). For example, female models must to adhere to the advertising code’s decent dress code (Waller & Fam, 2000). The Malay female models must be “covered until the neckline, the length of the skirt worn should be below the knees, the arms may be exposing up to the edge of the shoulder but armpits cannot be exposed” (Waller et al., 2005). Advertising codes control practices that the local industries may not wish to self-regulate themselves including anti-social content like uncompetitive practices, foul language, anti-government or unacceptable images (Anonymous, 2002).

The government has revised the latest strict Malaysian Advertising Code of Ethics for Television and Radio to protect the television industry as well as the government's social policies in 2002 (Sinclair, 2007). The code controls the content of commercials and advertisements by restricting sex to sell products. In addition, scenes involving models undressing are not allowed and woman model must be covered from the neckline to below the knees. Other restrictions include scenes which suggest intimacy, disco scenes, feminine napkins, and kissing between adults (Johnson, 2007).

Despite the advertising code, it is increasing popular for advertisers to use nudity. In television advertisements, semi-nude woman often appear yet tastefully hidden in the advertisements of shampoo. Some advertisements of fashion and beauty products in magazines even showed the nearly nude model wearing sexy underwear such as Cleo, Cosmopolitan, Female and Elle (LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Pugsley, 2007). In conclusion, it is apparent that there is some level of acceptability of nudity in advertising in Malaysia.
1.5 Problem Statement

Consumers have different degrees of reactions and attitudes to nudity in advertising due to cultural factors. Modern Chinese in China are more liberal to sex practices and attitudes; therefore they can accept the use of mild nudity in advertising (Dunne, 1999). However, the acceptance of nudity in advertisements by Malaysian Chinese might be different with Chinese in China and there is a lack of study of such reactions.

The growing number of advertisements with different levels of nudity is apparent in Malaysia. It is obvious that the target market is Chinese, such as for beer with cleavage-baring women in swimwear, or in tight dresses with high slits down the sides (Anonymous, 2005b). Nevertheless, advertisers should be aware that advertisements with nudity may lead to negative effects on their brands (Dunne, 1999). Hence, this research is important in order to find out what the Chinese community's reactions toward different levels of nudity in advertisements in Malaysia.

1.6 Brief Literature Review

Almost all the sex-in-advertising scientific effects studies are located in the marketing and advertising. The origin of sex-in-advertising effects research attempted to comprehend and explain the utility of sex and nudity in advertising. Although there are male and couples that have been researched, but female models represent the majority of sex stimuli (Reichert, 2002). Some tests of different level of nudity comparison had been carried out as well. Beside, comparison between advertisements applied with nudity images of a couple model and advertisements applied with nonsexual images of a couple were also studied in those researches (Belch et al., 1981; Judd & Alexander, 1983; Reichert, 2001). The result shows that different kind of respondents favored the advertisements differently. The effects of nudity in advertisements to customers include attention, advertisement or brand-name recall, perception towards advertisement or brand, message involvement, advertisement or message thoughts, cognitions, purchase intention and etc. The researches of the effects of nudity in advertisements to customers could be group into three main categories, which are advertising
processing, emotional response effect and behavior response (Reichert, 2002).

Respondent gender and other demographic variables are very important in discussion of the effects of nudity in advertising toward consumers. The research would not be complete without examining the role of respondents differences (Reichert, 2002). There is an evidence suggested that groups of individuals vary in their reactions to sexual stimuli (Morrison & Sherman, 1972). There are significant of gender difference found in the research. Therefore the demographic variables should be considered when the research is containing sexual information.

Product relevance is explained as the appropriateness of the link between the product category and the use of nudity, and it is an important variable that needs further study (Reichert, 2002). There are some researches indicated that the sexual and nudity content is more prevalent in advertisements for products categories that represent positive purchase motivations such as entertainment, health/hygiene, beauty and fashion (Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Reichert et al., 2000; Simpson et al., 1996). Hence, the product relevance might affect the result of the research that using different product as advertisement stimuli.

Nonetheless, there has been little research into the reactions of Chinese especially Malaysian Chinese towards nudity in advertising. Nudity in advertising would become a potential avenue for Chinese market penetration and growth if Chinese in Malaysia reacted positive toward nudity in advertisement.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Advertising effectiveness are can be evaluated by the combination of communicating effects and sales effects (Kotler & Armstrong, 1991). Advertising effectiveness is explained as measurement of the extent to which a particular advertising campaign achieves communication objectives (Benxiden, 1993). The achievement of sales objective would not be considered in this study because sales were affected by many other factors besides advertising, such as product features, price, and availability (Kotler & Armstrong, 1991).
The following well-known theoretical base serves as the underpinnings for this research: the Hierarchy of Effect Model. According to the Hierarchy of Effect Model, consumer will pass through a series of steps in sequential order from initial awareness of a product or service to actual purchase when advertisement works (Belch & Belch, 1993). The advertising literature in a previous study also supported Hierarchy of Effect Model by revealing that cognition, affect and experience of the consumers are all key intermediate advertising effects (Mortimer, 2002).

The theory postulates that three hierarchies of outcomes of this evaluation are possible: (1) the consumers will first become aware of the brand of the advertisement then they are provided with information about knowledge or features or attribute. But if consumers were unaware of the advertisement then the advertising effect would stop at cognitive stage. (2) The information and knowledge the consumer acquires will lead to liking - positive feeling toward brand then lead to preference later conviction when consumers become convinced they should buy the brand and form purchase intention. But if the information and knowledge bring negative feeling to consumers then the advertising effect would stop at affective stage. (3) The final step that translate those feelings and convictions into behavior is purchase, then the ultimate goal sought by the advertiser (Belch & Belch, 1993). The theory is then summarized into the model of response process as shown in Figure 1.1 (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Under the Hierarchy of Effect Model, most of the consumers who have the opportunity to see and/or hear advertising may reach cognitive stage, fewer will achieve the affective stage and more fewer will reach behavior stage (Benxiden, 1993). Besides, when an advertisement shows in a culturally diverse and sensitive region, it might cause some offence to some members of the public (Waller et al., 2005). Therefore, cultural sensitivities and differences will start to affect the response process of consumers during affective stage towards the use of nudity in advertising. Hence, this research is designed to find the reactions of Chinese consumer toward nudity in advertising from affective stage to behavior stage which including processes of liking, preference, conviction and purchase.
Figure 1.1 The model of response process in terms of the Hierarchy of Effect Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

1.8 Research Question

How are the Malaysian Chinese community's reactions towards different type of nudity in advertisement?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Nudity is normally used in the sex appeals advertisement which is considered as a powerful tool of marketing and particularly advertising. Earlier empirical studies have shown that sex appeal in advertising can be very effective for attracting initial attention (Reid & Soley, 1981), enhancing recall (Steadman, 1969), evoking emotional responses (Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2001), and increasing persuasion (La Tour et al., 1990; Saunders, 1996) as well as buying intention (Grazer & Keesling, 1995). Besides, the benefits of using sex appeal in advertising had been summarized as to grab attention, augment recognition, bolster brand image, increasing receivers’ interest in processing the advertisement, and enhance persuasion (Reichert, 2001). Nevertheless, there are a number of researchers that indicated there are uncertainties associated with using sex appeal and sex appeal is only effective when used appropriately (Judd & Alexander, 1983; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Sciglimpaglia et al., 1979; Weller et al., 1979). The results of their studies indicated that sexual content may be eye-catching and entertaining, but it may not be communicative and might distract the viewer from the main message (Liu et al., 2006).

In most content and effects research in the advertising literature, nudity is defined as a sexual content which more accurately refers to the amount and style of clothing worn by models (Reichert, 2002). Nudity in advertising refers to the advertisements involve revealing displays of the human body (Reichert, 2003b). Revealing clothing includes women in short skirts, innerwear, and low-cut blouses, and men in tight jeans or underwear, or shirtless (Kang, 1997). Besides, images of women’s breasts with nipples covered often occurred in advertisements although genital displays are rare in mainstream consumer advertising. However, nudity in advertising is defined as one of the ways of executing sex appeal in advertising (Biswas et al., 1992). Therefore nudity in advertising is closely interrelated to sex in advertising, so most the researches carry out studies of nudity and sex in advertising at the same time.
The bulk of nudity in advertising researches is using female models as advertisements stimuli to study the effects of the advertising and customer's reactions towards nudity (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Chestnut et al., 1977; Judd & Alexander, 1983; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; LaTour et al., 1990; Patzer, 1979; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Steadman, 1969). Comparison of effects between different level of nude female model and nonsexual scene are emphasized in most of those researches. Most of the results indicated that moderate nudity in advertisements would be preferred by respondents instead of nonsexual scene or fully nude models in advertising. Besides, there are also few researches that try to study the attractiveness of nudity of male models in advertisement (Reidenbach & McCleary, 1983; Simpson et al., 1996). In general, the opposite sex effect was found in those researches where the women responded more favorably than men towards the advertisements.

Researchers then started to enhance their scope of studies by adding in male models and couples as advertisements stimuli. They tried to find out which type of nudity applied in advertisements would be the most effective. But the results shows the different kind of respondents would react diverse towards vary advertisements stimuli (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Belch et al., 1981; Dudley, 1999; Jones et al., 1998; LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; LaTour et al., 1990; Liu et al., 2006; O'connor et al., 1989; Reid & Soley, 1983; Sciglimpaglia et al., 1979). The results also implied that different kind and level of nudity in advertisements may influence the response process to advertisements and affect the effectiveness of advertising such as affective, cognitive and attitudes toward advertisements. Effects of nudity in advertisements had been categorized to Advertising Processing, Emotional Response Effect and Behavior Response Effect in following sections in order to discuss the results of previous researches thoroughly.

2.2 Advertising Effects Research

2.2.1 Advertising Processing

In generally, two related theoretical approaches are used by the researchers to explain sex and nudity in advertising processing effects, which are information-processing and hierarchy of effects models (Reichert, 2002). Both approaches assume that the persuasive
communications progress linearly by recipients though a series of stages before ultimate outcome (Barry, 1987; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; McGuire, 1986). Steps in the process included awareness, attention, knowledge, liking, comprehension, receptivity and persuasion before purchase.

By applying the processing theories, most of the researchers hypothesized that the sexual information like nudity in advertisements is noticed and subsequently remembered by consumers. At the same time, there is a strong evidence shows that sexual information attracts attentions of consumers (Belch et al., 1981; Chestnut et al., 1977; Dudley, 1999; Reichert et al., 2001). Some of the research findings indicated that advertisements with sexual content or nudity are more engaging, involving and interesting than nonsexual advertisements (Bello et al., 1983; Dudley, 1999; Jones et al., 1998; Judd & Alexander, 1983; Reichert & Alvaro, 2001; Reichert et al., 2001). For example, the effect of advertisements with moderate nudity, nonsexual advertisements and landscape as controller had been tested on 300 undergraduate students. The advertisements with moderate nudity were significantly more favorable (in the measurements of attitude toward advertisement, attitude toward brand, recall and recognition of advertisement) than the nonsexual advertisements by the respondents (Jones et al., 1998).

However, the presence of nudity in advertisements was proven that it will affect the processing and encoding of brand information. Some studies using the brand-name recall as indicator had been carried out as the evidences to support the hypothesis (Reichert, 2002). Most of the studies were doing direct compare between advertisements with nudity and nonsexual advertisements where the results of the studies showed the sponsors of advertisements with nudity are less likely to be remember than the sponsors of nonsexual advertisements (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Judd & Alexander, 1983; Reichert & Alvaro, 2001; Weller et al., 1979). Moreover, a study also found that copy recall was significantly higher in nonsexual advertisements compare to advertisements with nudity (Severn et al., 1990). Thus if sex is used gratuitously, the distraction effect likely to be pronounced (Reichert, 2002).

Besides, different levels of nudity in advertisements have been compared to each other as well as to nonsexual advertisements (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Judd &
Alexander, 1983; Weller et al., 1979). Low level of nudity or nonsexual in advertisements resulted in significantly higher brand name recall than moderate and high level of nudity in advertisements. Again, the finding suggest that nudity or sex in advertisements especially moderate and high level of nudity in advertisements can interfere with the processing of brand information.

From the nudity in advertising researches, the conclusion suggest that the nudity content has a relative advantages at attracting attention of consumers to the advertisements; consumers are more likely to remember the image with nudity in advertisement; and encoding of the brand name will be inhibited if the advertisement contain image with nudity.

2.2.2 Emotional Response Effect

In some of the researches which intend to find out the response of the effects of nudity in advertising, researchers also consider emotion such as generalized arousal and affect. They tried to assess opinions and advertisement evaluations of various levels of nudity image to know whether those particular images are appealing, offensive or appropriate (Belch et al., 1981; Sciglimpaglia et al., 1979). Both of the studies found that opposite sex nude was appealing but same sex nude was offensive. A research suggested that attitude toward the advertisement is an effective evaluation of an advertisement that can influence feelings about the brand and purchase intention (Muehling & McCann, 1993). When individuals views advertisement through media, they will form favorable or unfavorable feelings which is known as emotion towards the advertisement that can influence important variable especially attitudes toward the brand and purchase intention (Reichert, 2002).

The important component of emotion towards the advertisements is assumed consist of arousal and affect (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The most significant about the influence of sexual information on persuasion is the arousal and affect with the effects of these responses on information processing (Reichert, 2002). Arousal is defined as “a continuous response ranging from energized, excited, and alert” to “calm, drowsy, or peaceful” (Lang et al., 1995; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In a research of the analysis of gender differences in arousal and advertisement response, arousal is found to be increased in intensity as the level of nudity in advertisements increased (LaTour,