

## CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINE ADVERTISING IN THAILAND: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL BRANDING

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*Given the surge of multinational companies marketing their products and services globally, the purpose of this study was to assess print advertising in women's Thai magazines regarding information content, globalization vs. localization of advertising and female role portrayals. A content analysis among female directed magazines showed that most ads were localized to some degree. Further, information content among all advertisements was high emphasizing product/service performance and packaging. Finally, females were portrayed primarily as sex objects rather than in roles of career-oriented, housewife, or dependent. Implications for advertising practitioners are presented.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Advertising in Thailand for the first half of the nineties was growing at an annual rate of 30 percent with primary expenditures directed toward television advertising. However, during the Asian economic crises of 1997, advertising expenditures dropped by one third and nearly 40 percent of the advertising industry workforce was lost through layoffs and an exodus of talent to the freelance market.(Kanwerayotin 2001). The Advertising Association of Thailand estimates that about 20 percent of Thailand's 250 advertising agencies folded in 1998 (Kilburn 1999). As the crises continued, many advertisers shifted advertising expenditures from television to print media such as magazines and newspapers.

Although the Asian economy is improving, many countries, including Thailand, have a long way to go. However, even with such constraints, opportunities exist for marketers of products and services in the Thai market. According to Asian Market Intelligence

(AMI)("Tough Times . . ." 1998) consumers in Thailand are shifting from purchasing expensive brands to cheaper ones, e.g., premium spirits. This provides marketers an opportunity to develop loyalty among Thai's for lesser-known brands. The economic gloom of the late nineties has actually resulted in a fierce courtship of the consumer. It now appears that the lure of consumerism is making a renewed pitch in Thailand with some \$573.8 million in ad spending during the first half of 2001 (Vittachi 2001).

Hence, given the above, the purpose of the study was to determine the extent and type of information content, globalization vs. localization of advertising, and female roles portrayed in Thai women's magazines. Since most magazines published in Thailand are directed toward women consumers, such types of magazines were chosen for this investigation. Further, women's magazines were chosen because of the wider variety of products advertised. Findings from the study will enhance marketers' ability to target female consumers in Thailand and formulate messages that appeal to them and drive sales. Moreover, global marketers will be able to communicate a consistent brand image while adapting the message to appeal to Thai women.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE

### Globalization vs. Localization

International advertisers are faced with the decision as to whether to globalize or localize their advertising messages for target audiences in countries around the world. The question is, in fact, one of degree, with globalization and localization at opposite ends of the continuum. The advertiser must choose, depending on a variety of circumstances, the extent to which to globalize or localize their message.

Globalized advertising theory is based on the assumption that "people all over the world have the same tastes and desires, and they are remarkably alike regarding, for example, love, beauty, fear, etc." (Lynch 1984). Advertising theorists supporting the localization of messages suggest that advertising is one of the most difficult marketing elements to globalize especially as culture is considered as all-pervasive (Mueller 1987). Many researchers agree that the impact of culture is greatest in communication strategies. Douglas and Dubois (1977) maintain that cultural factors affect advertising in four ways:

1. The choice of advertising theme,
2. The connotation of words and symbols,
3. The way pictorial conventions are interpreted, and
4. Media selection.

The opinion in favor of localized advertising is based on the position that different customs, attitudes and need render many of a firm's normal procedures inapplicable or nontransferable. There is the argument that, despite similarities and the exportation of culture to other countries, i.e., the American culture, that cultural differences are still basic enough to warrant recognition and consideration in advertising. Lifestyles and consumption patterns differ greatly across the world and even within the Pacific Rim. For example, in Thailand the primary religion is Buddhism while Islam is dominant in Indonesia. Thailand was principally settled by Indians while Mongolians, from southern China,

settled in Korea, affecting all aspects of their culture as we know it today.

In view of the above, an argument has been made by Wolfe (1991) that in many cases it may be most cost effective to use separate advertising, using what the Ogilvy Group calls the "10 percent rule". Where production costs on average run at about 10 percent of media costs, if the Korean advertisement for a brand is only 10 percent less effective in producing sales in Thailand than it is in Korea, it will still be worth while creating a separate campaign for Thailand.

Worldwide brand globalization appears most feasible when products approach either end of the high-tech, high-touch spectrum. The hypothesized success of global marketing of high-touch products may be explained by the fact that products such as fragrances, fashion, jewelry, etc. simply touch on universal emotional themes or needs (Domzal and Unger 1987). Sommers and Kernan (1967) recognized that globalization of advertising was possible when the product served the same needs across cultures such as beauty, love and fear.

Seitz and Johar (1993) found that some types of products lend themselves to globalized campaigns while others profit from more localized approaches. In their study they found that clothing products benefitted from a localized approach while perfumes profited from a globalized approach. Clothing is seen as a personal reflection of oneself and of one's culture, which can vary widely even within the US; perfumes, on the other hand, require little copy to sell the product and are primarily image driven for all women, suggesting that a globalized approach may enhance purchases. In addition, brands such as Levi and Coca-Cola, well known throughout the world, could incorporate more globalized campaigns to different countries with much success. Other product categories such as cosmetics, although well known throughout the world, may require copy changes to explain features and benefits. With these types of products the copy can be rewritten to give different emphasis to information of importance to targeted markets in selected countries. In another study Seitz

and Johar (1994) found that in analyzing advertisements from different European countries some degree of globalization existed among them and suggested that marketers employ a "globalized approach where the home office develops the theme, positioning, target market and localize media mix, scheduling and the creative strategy."

**Information Content Needs of Consumers:**

According to Zandpour et al. (1994) the presence of an American based advertising agency influences the information content of advertisements in globalized campaigns. Most individualistic oriented nations such as the U.S. and Germany prefer newsworthy information with plain facts yet providing no specific conclusion. The researchers noted that U.S. based agencies transfer their individualistic outlook to those cultures that tend to project a holistic orientation as in the case of most Asian nations. Although many U.S. agencies, such as J. Walter Thompson, Leo Burnett, Ogilvy and Mather have agencies in Thailand, they are often operated by Thais as opposed to Americans. According to O'Leary (1994) J. Walter Thompson, one of the top agencies in Asia divides a market into four levels: 1) affluent markets, 2) growth markets, 3) emerging markets, and 4) untapped markets. O'Leary (1994) noted that the more mature and affluent the economies, the more likely consumer markets would be similar to those in the US with a taste for western goods, western style appeals and information content in advertising.

However, according to Wang, et al. (1997) "even though people from different markets might share the same needs and wants, these needs and wants have to be addressed according to different communication patterns . . ." These different patterns are reflected in different advertising appeals and information content used in selected markets. Wang, et al. (1997) found that Eastern appeals "included group consensus appeals, soft-sell appeals, veneration of elderly and traditional appeals, and oneness with nature appeals that were prevalent in Taiwanese advertisements."

Further regarding information content, Resnik and Stern (1977) found that US television commercials

contained more information cues than Japan, China, and South Korea in 30-second advertisements. However, in 15-second segments Japanese commercials were more informative than U.S. ones. Zandpour et al. (1994) found that the differences in information content are a function of culture and advertising environment.

**Stereotyping in Advertising:**

Often the question has been asked, which came first the chicken or the egg? In advertising, do advertisements mirror society, enhancing stereotypes or does advertising initiate new behaviors and attitudes?

In reality, over two-thirds of Thai women work outside the home in all facets of business from advertising executives and business owners to managers and laborers. This is the highest ratio in the Asian-Pacific region, making up 47 percent of the national workforce. Women are particularly concentrated in industries such as clothing and preserved foods that have been the driving forces behind the national development.

However, in America, where the percentage of women in the workforce has grown consistently for over 20 years, advertisements still stereotype them in nurturing roles as mothers and homemakers, as well as sex objects, in selling most products whether directed to women or men. Yet the integration of a professional life as a wage earner is slowly infiltrating US advertising even though women have been an essential part of the work force since World War II. During the 80s over 50 percent of women worked outside the home and advertisements portrayed women as "having it all" or as "superwomen" with successful careers, family life and enduring loving relationships with their husbands. However, as reality set in, women learned that they couldn't do it all and although the number earning a substantial income continues to grow, many have businesses that operate successfully out of their homes. Others have broken the "glass ceiling" such as the CEOs of Avon, Hewlett Packard, and Leo Burnett Advertising Agency. Given that US agencies are "still behind the

times" regarding mirroring women's multifaceted roles in American society, they are further ahead of other countries around the world in portraying women in society. Hence, Thai magazine advertising would likely stereotype women in more traditional roles such as mothers and sex objects rather than in roles that reflect reality.

### METHODOLOGY

Magazines chosen for content analysis of advertising included *Dichan*, *Poo Yin*, *Ploy Gam Petch*, and *Image*. These were chosen because they are four of the top selling women's publications in Thailand. Twelve other women's publications were also chosen for a total of 16. One hundred magazine advertisements were randomly selected from these magazines published in Thailand from 1997 through 1998. Print advertisements were content analyzed for information content, globalization vs. localization and female roles portrayed in the advertisements. As a research tool, content analysis provides the opportunity to examine the feelings, beliefs and attitudes of a culture in their environment (Rice and Lu 1988).

Razzouk and Al-Khatib (1993) developed the instrument used for the study. Originally developed for television commercials, the instrument was modified for content analysis of print advertising. The instrument included gender portrayals, product category, level of globalization vs. localization of the advertisement and information content. Gender portrayals included mother, sex object, and career oriented. Information content cues included performance, safety, taste, price, quality, contents and availability.

### RESULTS

As mentioned above, 100 print advertisements were randomly selected from 16 women's magazines and analyzed. The majority of ads (33%) advertised personal care products followed by food and beverage (16%) and clothing (12%) (Table 1). Regarding globalization vs. localization, most advertisements were globalized with localization of the copy. This

practice was most prevalent in personal care, food and beverage product advertising in which the copy was modified and written in the country's own language, while the illustration and model were the same as in the to western publications. Clothing ads were totally globalized compared to western ads where the model, layout and copy were the same and written in English. Only approximately twenty-three percent of the advertisements analyzed were totally localized (Table 2).

**Table 1**  
**Product Categories**

| Type of Product    | Percentage   |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Food and Beverage  | 16.0         |
| Personal Care      | 33.0         |
| Household Products | 9.0          |
| Medicine           | 9.0          |
| Home Appliances    | 10.0         |
| Clothing           | 12.0         |
| Durable Products   | 11.0         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>100.0</b> |

**Table 2**  
**Globalization vs. Localization of Advertisements**

| Category                          | Percentage   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Totally Globalized Advertisements | 19.0         |
| Globalized with Localized Copy    | 57.0         |
| Totally Localized Advertisements  | 23.0         |
| Combination of the above          | 1.0          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>100.0</b> |

As to the extent and content of information in the print advertising, most product advertisements were quite informative averaging six information cues per ad. Pharmaceutical advertising provided the most information cues as compared to other categories investigated with a mean of  $X = 10.33$  (Table 3). Further, advertisements emphasized product performance, packaging and shape, new ideas and quality respectively. Food and beverage advertising acknowledge the taste and nutrition of the their products as well as other cues, while personal care product ads included results from independent



research, introduced new ideas and gave price information (Table 4).

**Table 3**  
**Information Cues by Product Category**

| Type of Product    | Percentage of Information Cues | Mean |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|------|
| Food and Beverage  | 14.99                          | 4.38 |
| Personal Care      | 28.91                          | 4.09 |
| Household Products | 10.06                          | 5.22 |
| Medicine           | 13.28                          | 6.20 |
| Clothing           | 7.49                           | 3.18 |
| Durable Products   | 11.99                          | 5.09 |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>100.0</b>                   |      |

With respect to the female roles, most advertisements portrayed women as sex objects more than any other role. This role type was most prevalent in food and beverage, personal care, household, clothing and durable product advertisements (Table 5). The ads portrayed women as sexy related to these products providing sexual overtones and promoting this stereotype of women. Thai women, whether in business or otherwise are generally portrayed as soft-spoken and gentle mannered which is the antithesis of western career women but more reflective of eastern cultures.

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings suggest that the influence of westernization is prevalent in Thai magazine advertising. Regarding, information content, most advertisements had a high number of information cues which is most common in individualistic oriented countries such as the U.S. This suggests that perhaps the influence of countries outside of the Pacific Rim, such as the United States, that promote individualistic concerns, are affecting the nature of Thai advertising. However, as noted previously, many of the advertisements studied were globalized which may also explain the high number of information cues.

This study supports earlier research indicating that advertising in high-context cultures normally is more informative (contains more information cues per ad)

than advertising in low-context cultures. The 4.80 average number of cues per ad reported in this study is significantly higher than what has been reported for similar advertising directed toward American women or even Hispanic women in the U.S. The nature of information cited in the ads appears similar to that which has been reported for Hispanic women magazines. Information on product performance, content or packaging is common for products advertised to women in the U.S. as well. What was different in this case is the relatively high incidence of "New Ideas" cues that were reported in this study. This could be explained by the growing trend of more Thai women who go for higher education and the use of print media as a source of new ideas for women.

In addition, most ads were globalized with localized copy. Only a small percentage of advertisements reviewed were 100 percent localized to the Thai culture. Clothing ads, however, were globalized with a Caucasian model, same layout and copy in English. These findings are inconsistent with those of Seitz and Johar (1993) who found that clothing ads among European editions of *Vogue* were primarily localized. However, Wang et al. (1997) found that the use of Western models and language were prevalent in Taiwanese advertising that emphasized western, individualistic appeals. Further, according to Wang et al. (1977), the use of this strategy presented the impression of prestige for the brand and product origin and could have been the reasoning behind the westernization of the clothing advertisements in Thai magazines. For multinational designers such as Calvin Klein, the globalization of advertisements can maintain a prestigious, consistent, brand image when being introduced into Thailand. For lesser-known brands from outside Thailand, using this strategy can perhaps break through the clutter of competitive clothing advertising when introducing the brand to the Thai market.

As mentioned previously, approximately 63 percent of Thai women work outside the home; however, advertisements in Thai women's publications still stereotyped them primarily as sex objects. Some of the roles portrayed included housewives and dependents which, as predicted, were considered

**Table 4**  
**Evaluation Criteria Presented in**  
**Advertisements by Product Category**

| Product Category   | Price          | Quality | Performance          | Contents  | Availability |
|--------------------|----------------|---------|----------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Food and Beverage  | 22.2           | 13.2    | 14.8                 | 23.8      | 5.4          |
| Personal Care      | 38.9           | 26.4    | 33.3                 | 40.5      | 21.4         |
| Household Products | 11.1           | 13.2    | 11.1                 | 4.8       | 7.1          |
| Medicine           | 16.7           | 15.1    | 11.1                 | 16.7      | 12.5         |
| Home Appliances    | 11.1           | 13.2    | 12.4                 | 2.4       | 17.9         |
| Clothing           | 0.0            | 7.6     | 6.2                  | 4.8       | 17.9         |
| Durable Products   | 0.0            | 11.3    | 11.1                 | 7.1       | 17.9         |
| Product Category   | Special Offers | Taste   | Nutrition            | Packaging | Guarantees   |
| Food and Beverage  | 10.0           | 88.9    | 66.7                 | 16.4      | 0.0          |
| Personal Care      | 10.0           | 11.1    | 16.7                 | 35.6      | 0.0          |
| Household Products | 20.0           | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 9.59      | 6.7          |
| Medicine           | 40.0           | 0.0     | 16.7                 | 11.0      | 6.7          |
| Home Appliances    | 10.0           | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 13.7      | 46.7         |
| Clothing           | 0.0            | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 5.5       | 6.7          |
| Durable Products   | 10.0           | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 8.2       | 33.3         |
| Product Category   | Safety         | Energy  | Independent Research | New Ideas |              |
| Food and Beverage  | 5.3            | 16.7    | 0.0                  | 10.8      |              |
| Personal Care      | 5.3            | 16.7    | 57.1                 | 29.2      |              |
| Household Products | 5.3            | 16.7    | 35.7                 | 9.2       |              |
| Medicine           | 10.5           | 50.0    | 0.0                  | 13.9      |              |
| Home Appliances    | 31.6           | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 12.3      |              |
| Clothing           | 5.3            | 0.0     | 7.1                  | 10.8      |              |
| Durable Products   | 36.8           | 0.0     | 0.0                  | 13.9      |              |

**Table 5**  
**Women Stereotypes by Product Category**

| Female Role                | Food & Beverage | Personal Care | Household Products | Medicine |
|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|----------|
| Dependency                 | 13.0            | 10.3          | 11.1               | 7.1      |
| Housewife                  | 8.7             | 4.4           | 22.2               | 7.1      |
| Physical Attractiveness    | 17.4            | 32.4          | 11.1               | 42.9     |
| Sex Object                 | 34.8            | 33.8          | 33.3               | 28.6     |
| Non-traditional Activities | 4.35            | 4.4           | 0.0                | 11.1     |
| Career Oriented            | 17.4            | 11.8          | 11.1               | 14.3     |
| Neutral                    | 4.4             | 2.9           | 11.1               | 0.0      |

Table 5 (continued)  
Women Stereotypes by Product Category

| Female Role                | Home Appliances | Clothing | Durable Products | Total |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|-------|
| Dependency                 | 11.1            | 10.5     | 5.9              | 8.3   |
| Housewife                  | 33.3            | 5.3      | 17.7             | 9.6   |
| Physical Attractiveness    | 11.1            | 26.3     | 11.8             | 26.3  |
| Sex Object                 | 22.2            | 26.3     | 29.4             | 32.1  |
| Non-traditional Activities | 11.1            | 10.5     | 11.8             | 5.8   |
| Career Oriented            | 11.1            | 5.3      | 11.8             | 12.2  |
| Neutral                    | 0.0             | 15.8     | 11.8             | 5.8   |

traditional for women. Recently Ford et al. (1997) noted a significant structural linkages between criticality of role portrayals of Thai women in advertising and company image as well as between company image and purchase intention. They attribute this phenomenon to a growing "feminist consciousness" in the region.

In employment as with education, it appears that Thai women approach equality with their opposite-gender counterparts. In fact the literacy rate of women is 96 percent of the male rate, up almost 10 percent from 20 years ago. In low secondary education, girls made up 48 percent of the students in 1992, while in 1993 women outnumbered men among university graduates ("The Closing of the Gender Gap. . ." 1997). At the post-graduate degree level, they approach equality in number with men; however, women still need better education so that they may play a greater role in Thailand's political arena ("The Closing of the Gender Gap. . ." 1997). Given women's changing roles in Thailand, marketers should consider reevaluating their advertising strategies directed to them to be more versatile as their roles are.

As the world becomes reachable through the Internet, the exportation of cultures will become more rapid. Asia, which includes Thailand, has lived by a different philosophy that promotes harmony, collectivism and oneness in nature. As time progresses, Asia's culture will be further penetrated by western themes such as individualism that will be manifested in advertising. As the world becomes a smaller place, global advertisers will need to balance

the need for adaptation while communicating a consistent brand image.

Moreover, as Thailand digs out from the rubble of financial misfortunes, it will undoubtedly regain its position as a viable Asian market. The traditional respect given women in Thailand and the acceptance of them in the workplace as equal to men, should convince marketers of Western products and services that this an accepting and efficient market to target.

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