

MASTER'S THESIS

Converging consumer culture: an inter-cultural comparison of sex appeal advertising in Hong Kong, China, the United States and the United Kingdom

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**Converging Consumer Culture:
An Inter-cultural Comparison of Sex Appeal Advertising
in Hong Kong, China, the United States and the United Kingdom**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, which compares advertisements cross-culturally in Hong Kong, China, the United States and the United Kingdom, examines women aged 19 to 38 about their perspectives on sex appeal advertisement in women's magazines. The methods used to explore the texts in the four regions were by textual analysis and semiotic analysis, while the triangulation method used to conduct such an examination was in-depth interviewing. By adopting an interpretivist and symbolic interactionist perspective, the in-depth interview facilitated insightful understanding of the experiences that women have with local advertisement examples selected by the researcher. Past research in this area has not explored the intercultural comparison with such a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods; therefore, this study assists researchers and advertising practitioners in achieving a higher level of understanding than presently exists in the literature. The 40 advertisement samples were coded, and the inter-coder reliabilities ranged from 0.89 to 1.00. Besides textual analyses, qualitative semiotic analysis and in-depth interview were carried out. Three pilot studies were conducted to refine the interview questions and enable the researcher to become familiar with the topic for the in-depth interview. Following the pilot interviews, 83 women heavy-readers, light-readers and non-readers in the four regions were interviewed and used to triangulate the results obtained from the textual and semiotic analyses. Six sex appeal persuasive strategies were extracted after a series of analyses; they are sex appeal: as a metaphor for the product's name, as a metaphor for the product's tangible characteristics, as a metaphor for the product's intangible characteristics, as a strategy to get audience's attention, as a strategy to challenge the existing social norm, and as a strategy to legitimize/reinforce the existing social norm. Most of these strategies are common in the four regions, which imply that the practices in sex appeal advertising and the persuasion to target audiences are similar. The results obtained from the textual and semiotic analyses show that the elements of the sex appeal advertisements are independent of the local culture, and the representation of the models are alike in a certain extent. It might be concluded that advertisers in the four regions are using similar persuasive strategies toward the readers in different culture, and thus, the consumer culture in our world is converging, so as to become assimilated to one another.

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