

Influence of Cultural Perception on Body Image in Consumer Marketing

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Introduction

Body image, that is, a person's perception of his or her physical appearance, is on the one hand subject to our human desires, and on the other hand is limited by the perceived, as well as actual, capabilities of our body. Among the limiting factors are the genetic, cultural, social or psychological predispositions of an individual, which often result in dissatisfaction with the body, not just in women, but recently increasingly also in men. Furthermore, images of our own bodies are influenced by the human desire to look better, which is amplified by constant consumer exposure to idealized media female and male body images. The aim of this research is to identify differences in body image portrayal in Chinese and American mutations of the *Harper's BAZAAR* magazine, the worldwide print media, and based on the findings to identify culturally conditioned elements of ideal body image perception and its influence on consumer behavior. The research is carried out as part of the grant project "Marketing Significance of Body Image" (GACR 402/09/0311).

General Characteristics of Advertisements - Research results

Content analysis was performed on the selected print media - *Harper's Bazaar* - its American and Chinese versions. Six issues of the year 2009 were selected for the content analysis of American mutation, which contained a total of 272 advertisements (counts for individual issues are listed in Table 1). Of that total, 190 advertisements contained persons (body image), with a total of 281 analyzed persons (Table 2). The remaining 82 ads did not contain persons. When comparing the number of ads containing persons and the numbers of ads without persons, it is obvious that ads with persons occurred about 1.5 times more often than ads without persons.

Representative sample of the Chinese version was a set of issues of the year 2009. Since the Chinese mutation of *Harper's Bazaar* celebrated anniversary of the magazine being published in China, a special October issue was published. Chinese issues contained 487

advertisements, of which 363 ads contained persons and 124 ads were without persons (Table 1). In addition, Table 3 shows to the total number of ads with persons in the Chinese mutation and the total number of persons analyzed (528). If we compare the number of Chinese ads with persons and without persons, we get a ratio of 3:1.

Table 1: Total number of advertisements with Body Image and without Body Image

State	Issue, Year	Number of Ads with Persons	Number of Ads without Persons	Total Number of Ads
USA	January 2009	15	8	23
	February 2009	42	8	50
	May 2009	32	27	59
	July 2009	15	6	21
	August 2009	34	8	42
	November 2009	52	25	76
Total USA		190	82	272
China	July 2009	37	10	47
	August 2009	37	15	52
	September 2009	64	23	87
	October 2009 issue 1	40	19	59
	October 2009 issue 2	59	15	72
	November 2009	58	15	73
	December 2009	68	27	95
Total China		363	124	487
Summary		553	206	759

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Table 2: Total number of advertisements with Body Image in the USA

Number of Ads with Persons		
Issue, Year	Number of Ads	Number of Persons
January 2009	15	24
February 2009	42	66
May 2009	32	36
July 2009	15	25
August 2009	34	49
November 2009	52	81
Summary	190	281

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Table 3: Total number of advertisements with Body Image in China

Number of Ads with Persons

Issue, Year	Number of Ads	Number of Persons
July 2009	37	53
August 2009	37	45
September 2009	64	111
October 2009 issue 1	40	65
October 2009 issue 2	59	90
November 2009	58	74
December 2009	68	90
Summary	363	528

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

It is interesting to point out that the Chinese issues of the *Harper's Bazaar* magazine are approximately 3 to 3.5 times thicker than the American issues. This corresponds to a higher number of advertisements in the Chinese mutation. By the content analysis it was uncovered that both mutations are dominant in portraying women to men in advertisements. In both mutations, men are portrayed only about 10% of the total number of advertisements (see Table 4). However, the ratio is not that surprising, if we realize that the target group of the magazine is primarily female population.

Table 4: Comparison of the total number of persons in relation to gender

Number of Persons State	Gender		Summary
	Woman	Man	
USA	251	30	281
China	473	52	525
Summary	724	82	806

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

If we look at the age of portrayed people in the selected print media, Table 5 shows that the category of seniors is almost absent in advertisements. The Chinese issues did not show any children in advertising, similarly, the number of children in the American issues is low. However, the number of juniors in the American issues is quite high, considering that there are no juniors portrayed in the Chinese mutation. Seniors were portrayed in advertisements only in activities associated with charity or health. As previously stated, these results correspond with the target group of the magazine.

Table 5: Comparison of the total number of persons in relation to age

Number of Persons State	Age				Summary
	Children	Junior	Middle	Senior	
USA	8		267	6	281
China		74	448	3	525
Summary	8	74	715	9	806

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

The following table (Table 6) shows the ethnic distribution of the analyzed persons in advertising. Content analysis shows that while the American mutation is almost absent of Asian models (in the table marked Mongoloid), the Chinese mutation contains almost thirty percent of Asian models. On the contrary, the Chinese mutation has a much lower representation of Nordic types (very light skin and blond hair). The results indicate that the marketers differentiate the ethnical background of portrayed models in the Chinese and American mutations according to the different target group in each country. However, based on the research results, we can conclude that due to the relatively low representation of Asian models in the Chinese version, there is the evidence of Western influence on Chinese consumer and his perception of ideal beauty.

Table 6: Ethnical background of the portrayed persons

Ethnical background Etnikum	State		
	USA	China	Average
N/A	0,00%	0,57%	0,37%
Europoid	86,43%	68,07%	74,47%
Mongoloid	1,43%	29,83%	19,93%
Afroamerican	3,21%	0,00%	1,12%
Nordic	6,07%	1,34%	2,99%
Mulat	0,36%	0,00%	0,12%
Latino	2,50%	0,19%	1,00%
Součet	100%	100%	100%

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Body Shape and Weight of Persons in Advertisements - Research results

Table 7 shows the results of weight in both Chinese and American mutations. Looking at the weight of men, research shows that only a very small percentage of men weigh less than normal in both mutations. Surprisingly, in the Chinese mutation, about 4 percent of men weigh above normal. The situation is different for women. In the American mutation almost 40% of the models have a lower than normal weight, in China, the share is 20 percent. From the research results it is clear that the cult of thinness and a tendency to unhealthy low weight in the media is still promoted. In addition, in the Chinese mutation the number of very slim women is lower also because there is a higher percentage of Asian models, who are smaller and petite. Therefore, their thinness is given genetically and cannot be regarded as underweight.

Table 7: Comparison of Body Weight in Portrayed Persons in the USA and China

State	Gender	Weight			Summary
		Under	Normal	Above	
USA	Woman	39,84%	59,76%	0,40%	100%
	Man	6,67%	93,33%	0,00%	100%
Total USA		36,30%	63,35%	0,36%	100%
China	Woman	19,61%	79,96%	0,43%	100%
	Man	7,69%	88,46%	3,85%	100%
Total China		18,41%	80,81%	0,78%	100%
Summary		24,72%	74,65%	0,63%	100%

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Given that the comparison is performed on two diametrically different cultures, one of the parameters included in the analysis was the skin tone. Table 8 shows that the analysis confirmed the assumption that the perception of ideal beauty is culturally conditioned. The research findings show that in the Chinese mutation almost 90% of models have pale or normal skin. Furthermore, only 6 percent of models have tanned complexion. On the other hand, the American mutation shows a higher proportion of models with tanned complexion – around twenty per cent. Thirty percent of models with pale complexion are due to the large proportion of models of Nordic ethnicity. Interesting is the situation in men, where the percentage of tanned models is similar in both mutations, for a total of approximately 20%. In the Chinese culture, this finding relates to the continuing influence of globalization, where women look for successful, entrepreneur, Western style men, who have tanned complexion, while they follow the tradition of skin protection, since light skin is a sign of a higher class.

Another interesting phenomenon is the large proportion of men with black skin in the American mutation, while in the Chinese mutation they do not appear at all.

Table 8: Skin Complexion in Portrayed Persons in the US and Chinese Print media

State	Gender	Skin Complexion						Summary
		Pale	Normal	Tanned	Racially tanned	Racially yellow	Racially black	
USA	Woman	29,32%	49,40%	20,08%	0,40%	0,00%	0,80%	100%
	Man	6,67%	50,00%	20,00%	0,00%	0,00%	23,33%	100%
Total USA		26,88%	49,46%	20,07%	0,36%	0,00%	3,23%	100%
China	Woman	50,21%	39,57%	6,38%	0,21%	3,62%	0,00%	100%
	Man	14,29%	65,31%	18,37%	0,00%	2,04%	0,00%	100%
Total China		46,82%	42,00%	7,51%	0,19%	3,47%	0,00%	100%
Summary		39,85%	44,61%	11,90%	0,25%	2,26%	1,13%	100%

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Among the most striking elements of body image are color and type of hair or eye color. Table 9 shows the distribution of eye color in both Chinese and American mutations. Research findings show that blue color of eyes is the most popular in models in both mutations. What is very interesting is the much higher percentage of black eyes in the Chinese mutation in comparison to the brown eyes. It is evident, that the color difference is genetically conditioned.

Table 9: Color of Eyes in Portrayed Persons in the US and Chinese Print media

State	Ethnicity	Color of Eyes					Summary
		Green	Brown	Blue	Black	Gray	
USA	Europoid	9,15%	39,63%	46,34%	1,22%	3,66%	100%
	Mongoloid	33,33%	33,33%	0,00%	33,33%	0,00%	100%
	Afroamerican	0,00%	100,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100%
	Nordic	6,25%	25,00%	68,75%	0,00%	0,00%	100%
	Latino	28,57%	57,14%	0,00%	14,29%	0,00%	100%
Total USA		9,55%	41,71%	43,72%	2,01%	3,02%	100%
China	N/A	0,00%	0,00%	33,33%	66,67%	0,00%	100%
	Europoid	6,52%	25,00%	59,78%	6,88%	1,81%	100%
	Mongoloid	4,29%	50,71%	9,29%	31,43%	4,29%	100%
	Nordic	0,00%	0,00%	100,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100%
	Latino	0,00%	100,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	100%
Total China		5,62%	33,02%	43,56%	15,22%	2,58%	100%
Summary		6,87%	35,78%	43,61%	11,02%	2,72%	100%

Source: own data processing (results of primary research)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of the content analysis show that body appearance and the perception of ideal beauty in both respective countries are culturally conditioned. Such traditional cultural tendencies concerning body image parameters such as weight or the color of eyes are uncovered in the way models are portrayed in advertisements. However, the research results suggest that some culturally conditioned parameters of body image have a tendency to change. For example, there is an apparent tendency of Chinese consumer behavior towards changing particular body parameters due to the presence of Western body image parameters in Asian advertisements. Such results are important for consumer marketing orientation in a variety of product categories.

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