CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0   Introduction

Some general conclusions have been derived through the analysis of the corpus.

They have been discussed under the following sub-headings:

5.1   Summary of research

    5.1.1   Neutral connotative corpus

    5.1.2   Concept of Beauty in Facial Product Advertisements

    5.1.3   Concept of Beauty in Slimming Advertisements.

    5.1.4   Conclusion

5.2   Recommendations

    5.2.1   Comparative study

    5.2.2   Other languages

    5.2.3   Other collocates

    5.2.4   Effects of Exposure

    5.2.5   Conclusion

5.1   Summary of Research

5.1.1   Neutral connotative words

Although neutral connotative words, which bear denotative meanings, were not in focus initially, they have to be taken into account because they are the words that occur most frequently and play a significant role in advertisements. With regard to this, the researcher has reached several conclusions.

Neutral connotative words are also necessary to make advertisements appear positive and unbiased so that the subtle image created is positive and unbiased. This is because motivational research has shown that the rational consumer conforms to the ideals that surround the society in which she lives. Thus, if the image created is prejudiced against any group of people, individuals in the group may be critical of the image created. This is because she lives in a society that frowns on issues that discriminate groups of people. Thus a positive advertisement is best achieved by the greater use of neutral connotative words.

On the other hand, advertisements need to create a negative image in order to stimulate a need among consumers to purchase the product or service. However, this image cannot be blatantly implied. This could be because of two reasons. One reason has been discussed in the paragraph above. The other is the fear of negative response from the affected consumer. As a result of the negative image

created, some groups of people can develop low self-esteem. Thus to avoid such an undesirable consequence, advertisers make use of a larger percentage of neutral connotative words.

Neutral connotative words are used, to camouflage some stereotypes that are reflected in advertisements. As advertisers base their ideas on the stereotypes that govern a society, they use more neutral connotative words to play down the subtle stereotypes that exist in advertisements. This is because if the stereotypes are obvious and are perceived as negative, the society, for which the advertisements are meant, will be exposed to criticism from other groups of people outside the society.

5.1.2   Concept of Beauty in Facial Product Advertisements

Facial product advertisements convey the message that only the person who possesses a young and fair complexion is considered beautiful. On the other hand, it is also conveyed that a complexion that is either dark or shows signs of ageing is undesirable and imperfect.

On the note of youthful beauty, it appears that the advertisements do not accept the concept of ageing with grace. This is because once the signs of ageing sets in, they are conveyed as problems that need to be rectified or removed. If advertisements are written based on the stereotypes that govern society, it reflects

the fact that women in Malaysian society fear ageing. Thus, it may appear that society views signs of ageing as something that needs to be prevented or erased. However if this is not done, then these signs are viewed as unattractive. If such a stereotype continues to be reinforced, it will subtly devalue the contributions of older women to society, giving higher value to younger women. This would then lend support to ISIS' (1999) claim that the Asian media has announcers and newscaster whose "youth and looks were given premium on socially-defined standards" (ISIS, 1999).

The above is quite similar to the trend that is taking place in some modelling agencies in the west, where older models have been dropped because of age. However two of the famous models, Twiggy and Isabella Rosellini, have gone on to launch their own products and advertising strategies that have made popular advertising agencies hire women above 40 to model their products (New Straits Times, Life and Times, 13 September 2001 : 5). This reveals that the western media is slowly accepting the fact that older women can be beautiful in their own way. If our society can accept this, then the stereotype that is being held can be changed.

In a multi-racial country like Malaysia, it is surprising that facial product advertisements promote fair complexion as a desirable one. Although the negative connotations of "dark" constitute an insignificant percentage, its very existence implies that a dark complexion is unappreciated. Furthermore, since

advertisements extol the virtues of having a fair complexion, it strengthens the view that advertisements are biased against dark complexions. Since such connotations do exist in advertisements, it implies that society itself has this stereotypical view. Thus this would prove the letter written by the Australian model to be true. That is, "the "fair and lovely" culture predominates the Malaysian media." This finds support in Joe Hasham's earnest statement 'research has shown that there are lot of women out there who prefer to have fairer skin" (New Straits Times, Life and Times, 27 May 1999 : 1). This would also explain why there is a total absence of dark-complexioned models appearing in our local advertisements, as pointed out by the Australian model in her letter. It could also explain why dark-complexioned models only appear for whitening or skin-lightening products.

Interestingly this concept of beauty being fair is something that exists in the western media. As Kerbes (2000) had pointed out in her essay, Black models who are included in western magazines are light skinned,

One explanation for the similarity in stereotypical beauty would be the effects of transnational advertising, as defined by Kyoung, (1998). That is, besides the Asian countries mentioned by Kyoung (1998), Malaysia too has been influenced by the stereotypical beauty promoted by the western countries.

Thus the researcher agrees with the writer on her views that the Malaysian media should start looking at the stereotypes that they hold and correct them first before criticizing others on theirs.

5.1.3   Concept of beauty in slimming advertisements

Being beautiful, according to these advertisements, means that everyone has to be slim. When one becomes slim, then one is deemed to have gained her confidence.

On the contrary if one is fat or overweight, then one is 'unsightly' and hence lacks confidence.   Such messages though subtle, are tactless and biased. Furthermore, the messages appear to make women in our society objects of beauty only.   Their message is that they "expect women to attract men's attention" (ISIS , 1999).   Though women's groups like ISIS are critical about these issues, they do not have a strong voice. One reason given by ISIS is that governments of Asia are rather concerned with racial sensitivity.   The other reason to explain this silence could be that since advertisements are a reflection of the stereotypes that govern our society, women's groups have not been openly critical of such advertisements. In addition, there is a lack of research published in the media concerning this issue.   Furthermore, the researcher feels that such an approach has not come under severe criticism or censorship because the slimming advertisements do not hurt people's sensitivities racially.   Thus, though these

advertisements can have an effect on the self-esteem of groups of people, they are allowed to be published because these advertisements do not touch on racial sensitivities.

That advertisers continue to use such a crude approach in these kinds of advertisements is due to the lack of criticism made on such a approach by either academic researchers or women's groups. In comparison, slimming advertisements meant for the western audience are more sensitive to these issues and hence have associated the problem of being overweight to health. In other words, the problem of being overweight is been seen as a reason that causes health problems. Such an approach is made possible because much research done on the effects of slimming advertisements on the self-esteem of groups of people have been published, which in turn, have made many women's groups to voice their dissatisfaction. As a consequence, western advertisers produce advertisements that avoid hurting anyone's sensitivities. Thus if local advertisers take on the same approach, it would very much be appreciated by many women.

5.1.4 Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that our media is indeed biased in its stereotypical image of an ideal Malaysian beauty. It projects the false image that the ideal Malaysian beauty is only one who is young, fair and slim. The other conclusion that has been reached is that when one has acquired these attributes of beauty, one will be

automatically confident and vibrant. In other words, attributes of young, fair and slim will give one self-confidence.

The continual subtle exposure to such stereotypes may result in those, who fall short of this so-called criteria, to be totally dissatisfied with themselves and have a low self esteem. Affected groups may even resort to extreme dieting or be anorexic. Or for some of them, they may resort to bleaching themselves without realising the consequences.

One other conclusion drawn is that facial product advertisements in Malaysia convey similar message on the ideal beauty as the western media. That is, the ideal beauty is one who is fair in complexion. This is surprising because though the Malaysia Advertising Code of Ethics states that the adaptation of or projection of foreign culture which is not acceptable to a cross-section of the major communities of the Malaysian society is not allowed, our attitudes are still reflective of the western media.

On the whole, it appears that women in our society have a long way to go when it comes to raising their status in our society. Women are linked to confidence and vitality only when they are fair, youthful and slim. Moreover, as there are very little hints of such stereotypes for men, it goes to reflect that the Malaysian society continues to view women as beauty objects. This view has affected some everyday issues like marriage proposals. A check with five matchmaking units

(whose spokesperson do not wish to be identified) have admitted that many men have requested that their future brides be "fair and lovely" and slim too. The men included those from racial groups who are not biologically fair.

Advertisements have a cross-fertilization effect. Although the stereotypes in advertisements have their roots in the stereotypes present in the society, the continual bombardment of these stereotypes from advertisements reinforces those already present in society. Thus, if society is to experience a change in its concept of what constitutes an ideal beauty, future advertisements have to move away from the present stereotypes and be more sensitive. When this happens, society will then start to accept new concepts of beauty or attractiveness. Or, as Chia (2000) has suggested, women in Malaysia should realise the difference in ideal beauty created by advertisements and the actual physical characteristics and stop purchasing the advertised products. In this way, perhaps the concept of what constitutes an ideal beauty may change.

Thus the researcher feels that beauty product advertisers should revamp their approach when promoting their product or service. Continual failure to do so will only result in not only the advertisements but also the society to be exposed to harsh criticisms by others who have gone forward in their concept of an ideal beauty.

5.2   Recommendations

In the course of writing this dissertation, the researcher has found some other scope for research.

5.2.1   Comparative Study

The idea of beauty may not be a reflection of the Malaysian society only. As advertisements are common in every society, more research could be done to see whether the idea of beauty is similar to those present in other Asian countries..

5.2.2   Other Collocates

Beauty need not necessarily mean the face and body. It can also relate to hair. So if a study is done in this area, a complete picture of the ideal Malaysian beauty can be derived. It can also give an idea whether the advertisements are indeed biased against particular groups of people.

5.2.3   Other Languages

As Malaysia is a multilingual society, a study could be done to look at the concept of beauty in all the other languages groups. By doing so, it can be determined

whether this idea of an ideal beauty is a true reflection of social norms as a whole, or is it only associated with those with an English-speaking background.

5.2.4 Effects of the Advertisements

Many studies on the effects of beauty product advertisements on readers have been carried out by foreigners in their own country. However, few have been done here. So a study could be done to find out the reaction of readers to the advertisements and the effects they have on each racial group.

5.2.5 Conclusion

Advertisements are here to stay. So further research into this area will benefit our society because it can help correct misconceptions that may be held by certain groups of people involved in creating advertisements. It would also help all groups to be more aware of the stereotypes that govern it. By becoming more aware, society can take measures to correct those which are undesirable.