

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

The fierce globalisation of world trade has led economic rising to converging needs and tastes of market, pushing the creativity and originality of marketing and advertising idea beyond the usual. Intense competition spurs advertiser to envisage, develop and adopt alternative approach of advertising. This general overall approach that advertisement adopts is also known as message strategy or appeal.

Appeal or also known as approach is one of the advertiser's most important creative strategy decisions. Advertisements are designed to appeal audience in a rationale and logical aspect of the consumer's decision making process or some are constructed to appeal the consumer's feeling in an attempt to evoke some emotional reaction.

The sexuality has been heavily exploited in advertising, entertainment and art for a long time and it seems today that fear has the same power of attraction. Fear and sex are among the most powerful tool of persuasion and commonly used in emotional appeal advertisement. Usage of fear or sexual message strategy in advertising is rhetoric and stylist method, which creates certain types of reactions. Fear and sexual elements implanted in provocative or shock advertising often disquieting messages are purposefully invoked to challenge social mores (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1996; Ve'zina and Paul, 1997 and Andersson et al., 2004). And as David Bailey and Stuart Hall have formulated it, shocking pictures i.e. featuring fear and sex

have become “the most effective way of selling commodities today” (Giroux, 1994, p.4).

Fear is an emotional response to a threat that expresses, or at least implies, some sort of danger (Belch et al., 2009, p.197). Belch further elaborates that advertising uses fear appeals to evoke these emotional responses and arouse individuals to take steps to remove the threat. For example, the anti-drugs advertisements used by the Partnership for a Drug-free America, stress physical danger that can occur if behaviours are not altered.

On the other hand, sex appeal can be defined as message, whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in marketing contexts, which are associated with sexual information (Reichert et al., 2001). More specifically, sex appeal can be defined as the degree of nudity or sexual explicitness (ibid). As an example, take Calvin Klien’s infamous campaign that featured seemingly underage youths in provocative positions. The suggestion of pederasty sparked enough controversy to force Calvin Klien to pull the advertisement.

There is an agreement that the type of appeal either fear or sexual needs to match the product type for maximum effectiveness (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). On contrary, Laskey et al.(1995) tested the effectiveness of appeals in over 1,100 advertisements across a range of products and they found no evidence to support the work of Johar and Sirgy (1991). Many of the comparisons they tested identified no significant difference in effectiveness.

This study explores and examines the attitude and perception of Malaysian consumers towards advertising appeals focusing fear versus sex appeal. An understanding of consumers' responses to these two appeals will assist advertisers to better position themselves in designing creative advertisement using fear and sex elements, as to capture the attention of the target market sufficient enough, to stimulate the purchase intention.

## **1.1 Research Background**

### **1.1.1 Standardisation or Adaptation**

Academics and international marketing managers alike have struggled with the issue of the standardisation of advertising programme (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1999). Proponents of standardisation argue that in a world of increasingly homogenised markets and consumers, it is possible for a firm to standardised advertising programmes and messages across countries (Levitt, 1983; Ohmae, 1989). In contrast, critics of standardisation have consistently argued a case for their adaptation, citing cultural, economic and political barriers that provide the mandate to adapt of advertising programmes for products marketed globally (Sorenson and Weichmann, 1975; Quelch and Hoff, 1986; Wind, 1986).

According to Tai (1997), despite the rising living standards and growing similarity of consumer tastes in Asia, international advertising strategies are only partially standardised in positioning and main theme, and not in execution style and media buying. Where else, Laskey et al. (1994), found that execution style does impact on the commercial effectiveness, but effective style tend to differ by product category. This is supported by Belch et al. (2009). They claim that the way marketing

communications are presented is very essential in determining its effectiveness (Belch et al., 2009, p.192). Belch further explains that advertisers must consider not only the content of their persuasive message but also how this information will be structured for presentation and what type of message appealed will be used.

### **1.1.2. Types of Message Strategy**

According to Kathleen Mortimer (2005) there are two types of message strategy; which are the rationale nature and emotional appeal. Rational nature has been defined by Stafford and Day (1995) as a presentation of factual information in a straightforward way, characterised by objectivity. In earlier research, Puto and Wells (1984) refer to this rational approach as informational advertising. Meanwhile, Johar and Sirgy (1991) categorise it as the functional congruity route, which they define as the match between the beliefs of the product utilitarian attributes and the consumer's ideal attributes. Johan and Sirgy suggest that the functional congruity route is similar to the central processing route in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). Such an offering is generally consumed inconspicuously and therefore self-image is not important (Johar and Sirgy, 1991).

On the other hand, the second appeal type is of an emotional nature and has been associated with such feelings as adventure, fear, romance and status (Cutler and Javalgi, 1993). Johar and Sirgy (1991) refer to this emotional approach as the self-congruity route which is defined as the matching of the product's value expressive attributes and the consumer's self-concept and likened to peripheral processing in the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). An important feature of many self-congruity products is that they are consumed publicly and therefore the matching of the brand

and consumer image is paramount (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). Emotional appeals attempt to stir up negative i.e. fear, guilt and shame or positive emotion i.e. love, romance, humour, pride and joy influencing affective responses (Batra and Ray, 1986), including attitudes (Edell and Burke, 1987; Holbrook and Batra, 1987). Moreover, this type of appeal has also been defined as transformational where the brand is linked with a positive and enjoyable experience (Puto and Wells, 1984; Rossiter and Percy, 1997).

There is also agreement that the type of appeal needs to match the product type for maximum effectiveness, i.e. that a rational appeal is more effective for a utilitarian product whereas an emotional approach is suitable for value expressive or experiential products (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). This contingency or matching approach is evident in both the FCB grid (Vaughn, 1986) and the Rossiter-Percy Grid (Rossiter et al., 1991). Although this matching theory would seem logical, establishing the effectiveness of these two types of strategies in the general advertising literature has created ambiguous results. Shavitt (1990; 1992) performed a number of advertising experiments that supported the theory. She tested utilitarian and value-expressive advertising appeals on two utilitarian products, i.e. air conditioners and coffee and two value-expressive products, i.e. greeting cards and perfumes. Results indicated that in all cases the appeal that matched the product type was most effective.

Conversely Laskey et al. (1995) tested the effectiveness of these two types of appeals in over 1,100 advertisements across a range of products and they found no evidence to support the work of Johar and Sirgy (1991). Many of the comparisons they tested identified no significant difference in effectiveness. A body of research by Stafford

and colleagues has tested the effectiveness of rational and emotional appeals in terms of attitude to the advertisement, attitude to the service, level of recall and patronage intention. They have found that the rational approach is more effective in all respects for both experiential services and utilitarian services thereby disputing the matching theory (Stafford and Day, 1995; Stafford, 1996; Stafford and Stafford, 2001). However Mattila (1999) challenges this conclusion. She produced evidence to suggest that, when advertising hotels to consumers unfamiliar with this experiential service category, the emotional message strategy was the most successful in terms of liking the advertisement, attitude towards the brand, service expectation and future purchase intentions. The debate continues with the findings of a more recent study by Hill et al. (2004) which suggests that a documentation strategy, which could be classified as a rational approach, is more effective in the advertising of hedonic or experiential than utilitarian, which is a complete reversal of the matching theory.

Three main reasons have been put forward to explain the inconsistent results on the matching theory. First, effectiveness has been measured in a number of different ways i.e. recall, persuasion and key message comprehension (Laskey et al., 1995). Second, rational and emotional appeals are being classified differently. A number of researchers have utilised Pollay's (1983) comprehensive list of 42 rational and emotional appeals (e.g. Albers-Miller and Stafford, 1999). However, there is little similarity between this list and that proposed by Moriarity (1991) which has been adopted in other studies (e.g. Cutler and Javalgi, 1993; Turley and Kelley, 1997). De Pelsmacker and Geuens (1997) acknowledging the lack of a recognised model for emotional advertising content, created another list, which again added new definitions. Third, there may be other product characteristics which have an influence

of the appropriate appeal, e.g. maturity, product homogeneity (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Swaminathan et al., 1996).

### **1.1.3 Sex and Fear Appeal**

“According to Bumler (1999), most advertisers employ sex appeal as the most powerful weapon in their arsenal and as such they use graphic images to get and hold on to audiences’ attention. From a marketing point of view, sexual appeal may be beneficial for the simple reason that they prey on basic biological instincts and thus, a remarkable motivational factor, which is a desirable trait to break through clutter. Advertisements that attract attention have a better chance to affect persuasion, especially in a saturated media environment typified by passive viewing exposure (Reichert, Heckler & Jackson 2001).

Nevertheless, misuse of sex appeal can be costly. Many campaigns deemed offensive have started brand boycotts that affect sales and damage brand reputation. Take Abercrombie & Fitch (“A&F”) for instance, the company has been involved in several scandals, the latest from their most recent catalogue entitled “XXX Wet, Hot Summer Fun”. On April 18, 2002, only a week after the catalogue hit the stores, the Illinois State Senate passed a resolution condemning A&F’s advertising strategies. This resolution, backed by several non-profit organizations, suggests citizens and shareholders boycott A&F’s products and to take a stand against the company’s marketing tactics. Although sexy images in catalogues are not at all uncommon, “XXX Wet, Hot Summer Fun” featured nude boys and girls frolicking in natural settings. Not really proper for an apparel catalogue targeted at youths.

Keller et al. (1996) found that fear appeals can be effective in changing attitudes and that there is an optimum level of fear arousal. This is akin to Yankelovich's (1991) concepts of working through and resolution, and a measure of audience involvement. At the extremes, fear appeals appear to be ineffective. When a problem is not perceived as serious, it only evokes a low level of fear or none at all. The individual is unlikely to exert much effort elaborating a solution to an unimportant problem and the message is not persuasive. When the level of fear is too high, (for example when the harmful consequences of a proposed action are too horrendous) "one may engage in defensive denial of the message by denying either the existence of a problem or its importance" (Keller et al., 1996, p. 448).

From the previous findings, there are evidences showing that extreme use of both fear and sex elements might lead to negative association to the brand and product. Studies have also found that among others, fear and nudity are the most cited reasons consumers for finding the advertisement offensive (Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Prendergast et al., 2002). Offensive advertisement can be harmful for both the products and also to the brands (Kara Chan et al., 2007) and consumers are likely to boycott a company using offensive advertising (Prendergast, 2002). Nevertheless, it does not stop the increasing usage of fear and sex appeal in advertising in the recent years. International advertisers must be careful when incorporating both elements in a campaign, especially in Asian countries like Malaysia that places great emphasis in morale values and cultural sensitivity. Although Asia is fast becoming strategic area for market expansion for multinational companies, it is also a minefield for advertising. With hundreds of languages, dozens of religious values and customs, it is advisable to understand consumer attitudes towards advertising content in these



markets (Kim and Reinhard, 2007). Great advertisers consider not only the attention-getting power of an advertisement or commercial, but also what kind of emotional response it provokes in customers and the aftermath to purchase intention. To answer these managerial questions, international advertisers need to understand how Malaysian consumers respond to different advertising strategies, including fear and sex appeal tactics.

For that reason, this study attempts to address the above-mentioned gap in international advertising research by examining Malaysian consumer's responses to a print advertisements constituting fear and sex element in it. The central focus of this study is the relationship between perception and attitudes towards fear and sex appeal advertising, adopting the Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein and Ajzen to predict intention to purchase. The study will also look at gender differences in consumer's responses to both kind of appeal advertising and the impact on the purchase intention.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Objectives of the Study**

Principally, research questions that are addressed in this study are:

1. How do consumers respond to fear appeal advertising and its influence to purchase intention?
2. How do consumers respond to sex appeal advertising and its influence to purchase intention?
3. Is there any difference on consumer's attitude towards fear versus sex advertising appeal?
4. Is there any difference between gender and attitude towards fear advertising appeal?

5. Is there any difference between gender and attitude towards sex advertising appeal?

Based on the research questions, the following objectives are constructed:

1. To examine consumer response to fear advertising appeal and its influence on purchase intention
2. To examine consumer response to sex advertising appeal and its influence on purchase intention
3. To compare consumer's attitude towards fear versus sex advertising appeal
4. To compare gender's attitude towards fear advertising appeal
5. To compare gender's attitude towards sex advertising appeal

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

Advertisers' reliance upon the use of sexual imagery and text to attract consumer attention is increasingly common in today's saturated media culture (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994; Reichert, 2007; Reichert and Carpenter, 2004; Severn et al., 1990; Streitmatter, 2004). Research suggests that both the frequency and explicitness of sexual content in advertisements have intensified, with graphic depictions of provocatively dressed models, nudity, and sexual intercourse becoming increasingly common, especially in advertisements targeting young adult audiences (Reichert, 2003; Reichert and Carpenter, 2004; Soley and Kurzbard, 1986).

By targeting consumers basic animalistic behaviour, namely the drive for sexual reproduction, advertisers have found that through a cleverly designed message containing sex appeal, they can attract and hold on to consumers' attention, thus

making it more likely for consumers to choose that particular product over another. On the other hand however, sexual content may not be communicative and might even have a detrimental effect on brand information processing. Reichert et al. (2001) claim that when sexual stimulus is used in advertising, viewers' perceptual and processing resources are directed toward the sexual information in the advertisement rather than toward the brand. Severn et al. (1990) also argue that the use of explicit sexual messages in advertisements may interfere with consumers' processing of message arguments and brand information, which in turn may reduce message comprehension. Furthermore, according to Stewart and Furse (2000), initial devices such as sexual stimuli overwhelm the message, and are negatively correlated to both recall and persuasion. Finally, there has been evidence to suggest that overt sexual appeals may have detrimental effects on attitudes toward the advertisement and brand, and therefore may reduce purchase intention (Grazer & Keesling 1995). These findings led MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski (1991, cited in Hoyer & MacInnis 2001) to advance the proposition that hedonic appeals, such as sexual stimuli, increase motivation to process the ad execution, but largely at the expense of the brand. All of these threaten to act as potential hazards of using sex appeals.

In the Asian context, empirical studies found that among others, fear and nudity are the most cited reasons for finding the advertisement offensive (Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Prendergast et al., 2002). Offensive advertisement can be harmful for the products and also to the brands (Kara Chan et al., 2007) and consumers are likely to boycott a company using offensive advertising (Prendergast, 2002).

On the other hand, fear appeal is one of the types of high-impact persuasive technique used in advertising other than sex appeal. An effective fear appeal contains a high-threat component and a high-efficacy component (Witte and Allen 2000; Witte 1992, 1998). At the extremes, fear appeals appear to be ineffective. When a problem is not perceived as serious, it only evokes a low level of fear or none at all. The individual is unlikely to exert much effort elaborating a solution to an unimportant problem and the message is not persuasive. When the level of fear is too high, (for example when the harmful consequences of a proposed action are too horrendous) "one may engage in defensive denial of the message by denying either the existence of a problem or its importance" (Keller et al., 1996, p. 448). Sometimes, extreme fear or shock campaigns can therefore have an effect opposite to that intended.

As the previous findings vary on the consumers' responses towards fear and sex appeal advertising, it is interesting to know how Malaysian consumers respond to these two types of advertisements. It is important for the advertisers to find out how do Malaysian consumers respond to fear and sex advertising, and the effect of the advertisements on the consumers purchase intention. The findings could assist marketers and advertisers in choosing, designing and executing the most appealing message strategies to Malaysian market instead of using the standardized advertising strategy. By using the right approach at the right level, it could attract audiences' attention and stimulate brand awareness that lead to purchasing and loyalty without causing community outcry to any insensitive offensive advertisement.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

A total of 162 university students in Klang Valley are recruited to participate in this study using a random sampling method. A student sample is adopted mainly for their accessibility and homogeneity as a group (Calder et al., 1981). To obtain a diverse sample, participants are approached at various sites on a university campus, including the student center, academic buildings, and residence house.

The study was based on a set of printed advertisement featuring fear and sex appeals which had been carefully selected to study the response of Malaysian (See Appendix A).

#### **1.5 Limitations of the Study**

This study has the following limitations:

1. Examining only two advertising appeals which are sex and fear appeal and not any other appeals.
2. Exploring only differences in gender instead of other demographic factors such as level of education, household income and urban versus rural area.
3. Findings derived from student sample live in urban areas with high proficiency in English. This group may limit generalization as it is student sample within the Klang Valley area. Nevertheless, many studies have used student samples and justified their use in similar attitude research by arguing that there is little difference between student attitude towards advertising and beliefs and those of other segments of the population (Andrews, 1989; Pollay and Mittal, 1993; Ramaprasad and Thurwanger, 1998).

## **1.6 Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five main chapters:

### **Chapter One-Introduction**

The first chapter provides the introductory information about the study and consider as overview chapter of the study. This chapter also highlights the purpose and significant of study followed by objective and scope of study and includes limitation and organization of study.

### **Chapter Two- Literature Review**

The second chapter presents the literature review of fear and sex appeal advertising from previous researches and empirical studies. It discusses about response towards fear and sex appeal advertising and its effect on consumers' purchase intention.

### **Chapter Three – Conceptual Model**

Chapter Three covers the model development, study approach on independent variables, dependent variable and the research hypothesis.

### **Chapter Four- Research Methodology**

Chapter Four, explains the research methodologies used in the study and the research hypothesis, sampling design, research instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis techniques used in the study are presented. It includes information on the demographic characteristic and selection criteria of the respondents

## **Chapter Five- Research Results**

The fifth chapter discusses the overall findings of the study. It presents a summary of data collection, profile of the respondents from the results, tests used in the study and its outcome. It also analyses and explains the survey findings and hypotheses testing.

## **Chapter Six- Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter, which is the last chapter of this study, gives an overview of the study and concludes the study by summarizing the findings and implications of the study. It interprets the major findings of the study; discuss the marketing implication and give recommendations for future research.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed about the introduction of the study, which included the research background, purpose of the study, importance of the study, research scope and the thesis organization. Following that, in Chapter 2, the discussion will follow with the literature review of fear appeal advertising, sex appeal advertising, the development of both appeal advertising in Malaysia and the consumers' response towards advertising and its effect on purchase intention.