

Sociocultural Attitudes toward Appearance and Cosmetic Consumption: The Comparison between Chinese and Thai Males

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of major variables and their relationship with the males' appearance consciousness that affect the men's cosmetic consumption. Also, the study also intended to verify the differences of men's cosmetic consumption between Chinese and Thai males. The samples consisted of 200 males who ranged in age from 18 to 35 years (M=24.64). One hundred participants were Thai and one hundred were Chinese. Based on literature review, six research questions were proposed. For data analysis, descriptive statistics, factor analysis, t-test, and multiple regression were used for this study. As the results, the sociocultural attitudes of consumers towards their appearance are positively relevant to the self-esteem and public self consciousness. Also, appearance consciousness such as appearance evaluation and appearance orientation led more cosmetic consumption. Chinese males revealed higher scores on public self-consciousness, appearance orientation, and sociocultural attitudes toward appearance than Thai males. Based on these results, some implications for global cosmetic markets would be suggested.

Key Words : sociocultural attitude, appearance, cosmetic consumption, cultural comparison study

I. Introduction

Today appearance management has played important role and expanded the markets to make variety of choices for the consumers. The

cosmetic market segment is also spilt up into mass market products and selected products. Initially the market of cosmetic was attributed for women only, men personal care products were not conscious much among manufacturers, brands,

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markets and consumers. However, with the phenomenon of metrosexual, the men's cosmetic usage has spread into wide population of men¹⁾. The cosmetic industry produced various personal care and grooming

products in the new line to meet the demands of the male consumers, and put more concern on this Niche market. The traditional concept of ideal male is as a strong, tough, aggressive, and muscular man who enjoys manly sports. However, males' lifestyles nowadays have been changed, allowing men to have greater freedom of expression in clothing choice, or hobbies. Men are not only becoming more aware of wearing on their bodies, but they are also willing to pay for grooming products in order to enhance their appearances³⁾. This change in male grooming is becoming a great diversity laid on the new trend of man consumption behavior⁴⁾. The man's grooming markets are currently going very fast and have greater influence on male consumers than before. Especially, the men's cosmetic market is one of the most dynamic market in the grooming industries⁵⁾.

In the past years, male cosmetics on the Chinese domestic were inconspicuous by the Chinese male consumers. According to the marketing research⁶⁾, in 2005 male cosmetics in China only accounted for 8% of the total cosmetic markets in China, but in recent years there was a surprised phenomenon of male cosmetic consumption in China. Male cosmetic counters at the supermarket have increased rapidly; the cosmetics industry for male consumers has a great development both in specific types and brand diversity. Not only in China, but also in Thailand are there a number of male consumers concerned about their grooming. From the report of Kasikorn research⁷⁾, men's cosmetic market in Thailand greatly accounted for 5.1% and has

been increasing continuously year by year. As Thai lifestyle keeps changing to be more and more toward modern style due to the development of the country and economic, Thai males have also become more concern on their appearances. Especially, men working in the business field have more opportunities to meet clients, thus good appearance can give them the advantage in the term of trustworthiness and first impression.

Although men have become more visible consumers in cosmetic markets, there are a few studies exploring this phenomenon in the literature. Furthermore, little attention has been paid on the studies of sociocultural factors influencing on the men's cosmetic consumption. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of major variables and their relationship with the males' appearance consciousness that affect the men's cosmetic consumption. Also this study intends to verify the differences of men's cosmetic consumption between Chinese and Thai males.

II. Literature Review

1. Social Comparison Theory

Festinger⁸⁾ explained social comparison theory that an individual has an instinct to evaluate one's opinions, beliefs or ability, compared with others. Based on this theory, individual use the social comparison as the motive to force their behaviors. Moreover, the social comparison emphasizes those individuals who frequently compare their appearance to other persons'. Especially if one compares oneself with targets who are more attractive, he or she can be at a greater risk of body dissatisfaction⁹⁾. People tend to compare themselves with others or ideal im-

age such as models on the advertisement and change or adapt the way to express their appearance as those. Lennon et al.¹⁰⁾ mentioned that people tend to engage in automatic social comparison through comparison with idealized media images.

The social comparison theory has been applied to many researches, especially related to self-esteem, body image and body dissatisfaction¹¹⁾. For example, Richins¹²⁾ suggested that women tend to compare themselves with the idealized advertising images which causes the dissatisfaction with the self. Bessenoff¹³⁾ also researched on the effect of social comparison that consumers compare themselves with thin idealized model on the media, and this impact of the comparison can lead to the self-direct negative consequence.

According to the social comparison theory, males may perceive the appearance image and grooming image of friends, colleague, reference group or male models in the media, from comparing themselves with those images. This comparison may form and change their grooming consumption behavior which can also impact on the cosmetic consumption.

2. Self-Esteem and Public Self-Consciousness

Self-esteem is an attitude and positive or negative feeling towards one's own self as the self-conscious emotion¹⁴⁾. Individuals are more likely to enhance the attention or recognition from others. They tend to attempt to enhance their self-esteem by using products to communicate with others. Self-esteem is the essential motive for appearance management as consumers to attempt to reduce the gap between actual self and ideal self by choosing and consuming a product with a similar image to their ideal

selves.

Public self-consciousness is called the self awareness as a social and public object¹⁵⁾. Based on literatures, individuals having high in public self-consciousness are more likely to perceive the relationship between themselves and other people. Moreover, the individuals who have public self-consciousness is more likely to be a social consumer and tend to choose the products to create favorable impression to others. The individual who has public self-consciousness expects to be observed by others though their behavior or appearance. Apparently, individuals who are high in public self-consciousness are aware that people around them form impressions of based on their product choice and usage behavior. Thus, men who are in interested in their appearance may use the cosmetic products and try to have impressive out looking while being with other people

3. Sociocultural Attitudes towards Appearance & Appearance Attractiveness

Sociocultural attitude toward appearance can be a pervasive force in shaping physical appearance ideals¹⁶⁾. It can help to explain how social's attitudes about beauty or socio-cultural operate and motivate consumers' decision-making for men cosmetics. A person's physical appearance is a large part of his or her self-concept and could be a consumer's subjective evaluation about his/her physical self¹⁷⁾. The person satisfies with the good physical image, which he/she presents to others. Appearance attractiveness by itself influences success, power, happiness, and satisfaction in life¹⁸⁾. According to Ricciardelli and Clow¹⁹⁾, perception of the body is important to men's sense of confidence and that men see the body as a tool for personal improvement. Consequently, males

trend to emphasize the appearance and body image by consuming the beauty product and services, as today males who have the clean and polished looks are more widely accepted and even more admired among males and females.

4. Consumption & Cosmetic Management in China and Thailand

Male cosmetic market in Thailand has been growing since recent years, and has been expected to continue a trend of increased consumption in the future. According to the research of trend spotting project of Leo Bernard Company, nowadays Thai men have more positive attitude towards the cosmetic and grooming consumption, and they have been more interested in their grooming and taken care on their appearance²⁰⁾. Moreover, the number of non-married Thai men has been increasing years by years. These people turned to be an important target of grooming market since they have enough sufficient funds to enhance their grooming by purchasing and consuming the grooming products such as clothing and cosmetics. Consequently, many cosmetic brands have also repositioned the brand and have launched the men's beauty products under the concept "for men" such as Biotherm Homme, ClarinsMen, Shiseido Men, Lancome Homme or Zirh. The customized cosmetic products consequently open up new group of potential customers in the grooming market. Furthermore, the cosmetic brands spend on the advertising by using the popular stars to raise the consumers' confidence and the spending of male cosmetic products. The Kasikorn Research Center²¹⁾ announced that the overall growth potential for the male cosmetic products during 2009 was optimistically at 1,560 million Bath, and expanded

approximately to 3.5%. Moreover, Byerdorf Thailand, one of the cosmetic companies in Thailand, said that in 2010 the men's cosmetic market in Thailand has growth from last year 56%; cleansing product 64% and facial care 36%. The inclusion of a whitening agent and reducing wrinkles in facial and body care products is widely accepted by Thai male consumers²²⁾.

This situation also exists in the Chinese market. Male cosmetics in 2005 only accounted for 8% of the Chinese cosmetics market, but in recent years this situation has changed. Since cosmetics counters at the supermarket has increased rapidly, cosmetics industry for men has a great development both in specific types and brands diversity²³⁾. In 2011, Chinese cosmetic market will reach total sales of 100 billion dollars, while the share of male supplies at least 1 billion. In the next 5 years, China's market demand for men's cosmetics will be an annual increase rate of 96 %²⁴⁾. Men's skin care products gain bigger market share and increasing sales. In economically developed cities, there are large numbers of male white-collar workers and golden-collar workers. Their awareness toward grooming gradually has formed a sense of male beauty atmosphere. Men's cosmetics market will be the scale, more than 35% of men spending every month on cosmetics²⁵⁾. The average spent per person per month was ¥80.4 (\$13.5), while more than 34% families purchasing with men beauty skin care products²⁶⁾. This means that Chinese men are concerned about their appearance using make-up.

5. Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and the review of literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Sociocultural attitude towards appearance

is negatively related to self-esteem.

H2: Sociocultural attitude towards appearance is positively related to public self-consciousness.

H3: Self-esteem and public self-consciousness are positively related to appearance evaluation.

H4: Self-esteem and public self-consciousness are positively related to appearance orientation.

H5: Appearance evaluation and appearance orientation are positively related to cosmetic consumption.

H6: There will be different between Chinese and Thai males in (a) sociocultural attitude towards appearance: (b) self-esteem: (c) public self-consciousness: (d) appearance orientation: (e) appearance evaluation: and (f) cosmetic consumption.

III. Method

1. Participants and Procedure

The samples consisted of 200 males who ranged in age from 18 to 35 years ($M=24.64$). One hundred participants were Thai and one hundred were Chinese. A questionnaire included demographic information plus the following measures: Self-esteem, Public self-consciousness, Sociocultural Attitudes towards Appearance, and Appearance evaluation and Appearance orientation scales.

2. Measures

The self-esteem measure used in this study consists 10 items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale²⁷. This 5-item index scale serves as a measure of global self-esteem, reflected in this measure imply feelings of self-acceptance, self-respect, and generally positive self-evaluation.

The public self-consciousness is part of the

23-item self-consciousness scale²⁸, which measures individual differences in public self-consciousness.

For measuring sociocultural attitude toward appearance, SATAQ-3²⁹ was used to measure levels of internalization of culturally ideal body types presented in the media and levels of impacted to individuals by social standards of appearance. This scale is consist of 30 items.

For appearance attractiveness, the study measured body image with the appearance evaluation subscale from the Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire³⁰. The AO (Appearance orientation) and AE (Appearance attractiveness) were generally used to measure feelings to body or appearance. High scorers feel positive feeling with their appearance and low scorers are unhappy with their physical appearance. Subjects are asked to circle the most appropriate number on the scale (1-5) for each question (1=Definitely Disagree, 5=Definitely Agree).

IV. Results

1. Demographic variables

Participants were 200 males with a mean age of 24.64 (range=18-35). There were 3 different education levels represented with 8% under bachelor degree, 57% bachelor degree (Chinese including "Junior college") and 35% master degree. Occupation break down was as follows: 80 students (40%), 42 bureaucracy (21%), 54 employee in private company (27%), 14 own business (7%) and 10 classified as others (5%). And 88% of participants are single (176) with 9.5% are married and 2.5% divorced.

2. Data analysis

For data analyses, descriptive statistics, reliability, t-test, and multiple-regression were conducted. Factor analysis was conformed for SATAQ scales. As the result, three factors were extracted: Information, Pressures, and Internalization. Cronbach's alphas on these subscales were high: Information (.83), Pressures (.80), Internalization-Athlete (.79). Also, Cronbach's alphas for other scales ranged from .79 to .90. This suggests that the instrument for the scales were internally consistent.

1) H1: Sociocultural Attitude towards Appearance and Self-esteem

Multiple regression was conducted with 3 sociocultural attitudes towards appearance subscales (Information, Pressures, International) as the independent variables, while the self-esteem and public self-consciousness were used as dependent variables. As showed in table 1, Internalization ($\beta = -.49, p < 0.000$) and Pressures ($\beta = -.42, p < 0.000$), two SATAQ subscales, were positively related to self-esteem. The Internalization showed more significant impact to self-esteem than Pressures.

2) H2: Socio-cultural Attitude towards Appearance and Public self-consciousness.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using SATAQ as the independent variables and public self-consciousness as the dependent variable. As can see in Table 2, results revealed that there was a positive relationship between public self-consciousness and Information, one of 3 subscales of SATAQ ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.000$) only.

3) H3: Self-esteem, Public self-consciousness, and Appearance evaluation.

Multiple regression was conducted with self-esteem and public self-consciousness as the independent variables and appearance evaluation as the dependent variables. Regression analysis showed that there were the positive relationships between public self-consciousness ($\beta = .51, p < .05$) and appearance evaluation. Also the relationship between self-esteem ($\beta = .39, p < .05$) and appearance evaluation was positive.

4) H4: Self-esteem, Public self-consciousness and Appearance orientation

Regression was conducted with self-esteem and public self-consciousness as the independent variables and appearance evaluation as the dependent variable. There were statistically

<Table 1> Regression analysis results for self-esteem

	β	t-value	p	R ²	F
SATAQ Sub3(Internationalization)	-.49	-5.77	.000	.15	18.24***
SATAQ Sub2(Pressures)	-.42	-4.98	.000		

*** $p < .000$

<Table 2> Regression analysis results for public self-consciousness

	β	t-value	p	R ²	F
SATAQ Sub1(Information)	0.28	4.08	.000	.08	16.67***

*** $p < .000$

significantly positive relations between self-esteem ($\beta=.34, p<.01$) and appearance orientation, and between public self-consciousness ($\beta=.55, p<.0001$) and appearance orientation.

5) H5: Appearance evaluation, Appearance orientation and Cosmetic consumption.

Multiple regression was conducted with appearance orientation and appearance evaluation as the independent variables and cosmetic consumption as the dependent variable. As showed in Table 5, the cosmetic consumption was positively correlated with appearance orientation ($\beta=.25, p<.0001$).

6) H6: Comparison of Chinese and Thai males.

To compare between Chinese and Thai males, the data were analyzed using the independent samples t-test. Statistically significant differences were obtained between the two countries. As can see in Table 6, Chinese males

revealed higher scores on public self-consciousness, appearance orientation, and Internalization. On the other hand, Thai males got higher scores on self-esteem, and Information (SATAQ3). However, there was not a significant difference about cosmetic consumption between Thai and Chinese men.

V. Conclusion and Implications

This study provides insights into the significance of factors influencing the Chinese and Thai men to consume the cosmetic products between two countries. As the results, this study revealed that men are more likely to be affected by interpersonal influences which are the first step of grooming enhancement. The positive socio-cultural attitudes of consumers towards their appearance are relevant to the self-esteem and public self-consciousness. Those who have high level of the relevance are more likely to evaluate

<Table 3> Regression analysis result for appearance evaluation

	β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2	<i>F</i>
Self-esteem	0.28	3.67	.047*	.14	12.35*
Public self-consciousness	0.39	4.00	.012*		

* $p<.05$

<Table 4> Regression analysis result for appearance orientation

	β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2	<i>F</i>
Self-esteem	0.34	5.72	.002**	.31	42.13***
Public self-consciousness	0.55	8.11	.000***		

** $p<.01, ***p<.0001$

<Table 5> Regression analysis result for cosmetic consumption

	β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>	R^2	<i>F</i>
Appearance orientation	.25	3.64	.000	.11	15.24***

*** $p<.0001$

<Table 6> Comparison of China and Thai men

Measure	Chinese Participants		Thai Participants		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Self-esteem	2.50	.34	3.13	.35	12.69***
Public self-consciousness	3.62	.75	2.88	.59	-7.76***
Appearance evaluation	3.47	.62	3.52	.53	.51
Appearance orientation	3.53	.63	3.17	.50	-4.42***
SATAQ	2.90	.81	2.90	.79	.00
SATAQ1(Pressure)	2.88	.94	2.71	.86	-1.32
SATAQ2(Information)	2.79	.90	3.23	.91	3.40***
SATAQ3 (Internalization)	2.99	.94	2.73	.75	-2.19*
Cosmetic consumption	3.18	.73	3.29	.61	1.16

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .000$

their appearance and orientate how their appearance should be. From those the usage of consumption can fulfill the needs of consumers who prefer to concentrate on their looking.

The result of the research implies the trend of men consumers towards the personal care and grooming products and attitude which can affects the purchasing behavior. First, based on the findings, the men cosmetic consumption in surveyed countries are seemly in a high level. The emergence of this phenomenon would be the new future of cosmetic industries to produce and developed new products that cater to the consumers' needs. Moreover, it is reasonable to infer that the cosmetic industry in Asia may expand dramatically in the future. Thus, the manufacturers may product cosmetic features and attributes to match with the consumers' desire in those countries. Second, the consumers in both countries are likely to be more conscious on the grooming and the care of appearance. The results of this study can be applied to other grooming product consumption, such as clothes, fashion accessories, and fashion magazines. The research would be essential for the brand marketers

to develop the strategies to construct the Niche markets. For Thai male cosmetic markets, the brand may also expand more product lines for men cosmetic products. For instance, teenagers or males with age 35-50 years old. Third, the consumers can have positive or negative attitude towards the appearance enhancement by perceive various information though the images in advertisements, TV or magazines.

To create the habit of consuming the grooming products the marketing might emphasize more on the advertising strategies, especially Chinese markets. The marketers can use mass media forming the concept of male cosmetic, and a public accepted concept or image of good appearance model can be set as individuals' ideals which impact the consumer behaviors efficiently. Moreover, for Thai market, a communication channel may also be used to target men who have low level of familiarity with the cosmetic and grooming care product.

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