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## HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE MODELS IN ADVERTISING: WHAT CAUSES NEGATIVE AFFECT?

### ABSTRACT

Highly attractive models (HAMs) have been popularly used in advertising to impact psychologically on the message receiver in the hopes of increasing the advertisement's effectiveness. The marketing literature is replete with evidence of the positive effects of using HAMs. However, support for their effectiveness is somewhat conflicted. The research attempts to add to the body of knowledge, specifically through exploring individual difference variables (model characteristics, product types, comparison motives, and culture) impact on negative affect. This study also investigates whether advertising skepticism determined by culture has an impact on negative affect as a result of a HAM comparison. The methodology uses a 3 (beauty types) x 2 (product types) x 2 (comparison motives) between-subjects experimental design. Respondents for the main study are female students across cultures from international programs and universities in Vietnam. The results supported all hypotheses; except product types shown having no impact on negative affect. The research also confirmed there are interrelationships between culture and skepticism. These findings have implications regarding the potentially negative influence of advertising including HAMs for practitioners, academics and public policy makers.

*Key Words: negative affect, beauty type, product type, comparison motive, across-culture, advertising skepticism*

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## INTRODUCTION

Highly attractive models (HAMs) are deemed to be “haunting images of perfection” (Richins, 1991: 17), and have been popularly used in advertising with intention to impact psychologically on the message receiver in the hopes of increasing the ad’s effectiveness (Bower, 2001). While marketing literature is replete with evidence of the positive effects of using HAMs in advertising on both ad and product evaluations (Belch, Belch, and Villareal, 1987; Stephens, Hill, and Hanson, 1994; Perlini, Bertolissi, and Lind, 1999), support for their effectiveness is somewhat conflicted (Caballero, Lumpkin, and Madden, 1989; Bower and Landreth, 2001; Bower, 2001). For instance, Bower (2001) found that HAMs included in advertising could destroy advertising effectiveness because of the deflated self-image in contrast to the beautiful ad models. The power of HAMs in creating negative affect is therefore still of interest (Martin and Gentry, 1997; Bower and Landreth, 2001; Bower, 2001; Richins, 1991; Martin and Kennedy, 1993).

The effects of physical personal dissatisfaction from exposure and comparison to HAMs are widespread and severe. Experimental studies reported that females compared themselves frequently with models in clothing, personal care, and cosmetics ads, and these ads made them feel dissatisfied with their appearance (Richins, 1991). In addition, exposure to highly attractive images could have a negative effect on perceptions of attractiveness of self and others as well as satisfaction with the attractiveness levels of self and others. Continual exposure to highly attractive images could lead to a negative body image, which in turn could lead to eating disorders and mood disorders (Wolf, 1992; Groesz, Levine, and Murnen, 2002).

The inconsistent support for the use of HAMs in advertising has led researchers to explore the importance of a convergence between the product and the message communicated by a model’s image, that is, a model-product type match-up (Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Kahle and Homer, 1985). Although a number of empirical investigations examined the match-up hypothesis suggesting a match between beauty-type and brand image (Solomon, Ashmore, and Longo, 1992), researches did not look at negative effect of HAMs.

Empirical evidence to date has established that the use of HAMs can stimulate comparison behaviors that trigger negative feelings so that negative affect is experienced (Richins, 1991; Martin and Kennedy, 1993; Martin and Gentry, 1997). Consequences of such negative affect are confirmed by Bower (2001) in the context of comparison with HAMs resulting reduced advertising effectiveness due to reduced product and model

evaluations that in turn caused reduced intention to purchase. However, in Bower's (2001) research there is a variation in results it may be due to other unmeasured differences.

It is clearly seen that most of the research has focused on the outcomes of negative affect rather than the possible antecedents of negative affect. Research has indicated that the negative affective responses to HAMs may be widespread; there is little information about how types of social comparison motives impact on negative affect as a result of exposure to advertising stimuli. And while exposure to advertising has been linked to advertising skepticism in past research (Oishi, Diener, Scollon, and Biswas-Diener, 2004), little has been done to compare such attitudes cross-culturally to advertising skepticism as a result of the socialisation process, as well as the impact of advertising skepticism on negative affect. By controlling for them, it is better able to understand when and why negative affect occurs.

It should, therefore, be concerned with the impact of model type, product type, comparison motive, culture and skepticism on negative affect as an outcome of exposure to advertising including HAMs. The study, in fact, follows recommendations for further research in the area by Bower (2001). The results of this research will help advertisers to have more control regarding selection of HAMs to ensure their beauty type and product type used in advertising contexts will provide positive effect and minimise risk of negative affect. It also allows practitioners to understand cultural impacts and skepticism levels for advertising of HAMs to have a greater impact.

In order to address these issues, the study will begin by summarizing the factors felt to impact an individual's negative affect after exposure to a HAM message source as supported by the literature.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES**

### **Negative affect**

Negative affect is defined, in this study, as the unpleasant feelings and emotions generated by exposures to HAMs such as negative emotions, moods, feelings and drives and it may include distress, fear anger, disgust, fear and shame (Batra and Ray, 1986). Negative affect occurs here when a HAM has the opposite effect on the audience than was intended. Negative affect has potentially important implications for advertising effectiveness since message recipients would engage in derogation of the HAM featured in the ad causing

related advertising messages to lose effectiveness (Bower, 2001). Global affect and discrete affect are two competing perspectives of negative affect. Global negative affect is negative feelings co-occur simultaneously (Edell and Burke, 1987), while discrete one is investigated separately types of negative affect (Batra and Ray, 1986). In this study, global negative affect is considered as an overall measure to investigate types of social comparison motives impact on negative affect as a result of exposure to advertising.

### **Highly attractive model**

Physical beauty has long been celebrated and appreciated by society (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972). It is useful to note that most of the research on physical attractiveness has been concentrated on facial attractiveness.

The term “HAMs” is used to refer to those who have a beautiful facial appearance (Richins, 1991) and thinness (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, and Rodin, 1986). The appearances of HAMs are both idealized and unrealistic (Bower and Landreth, 2001) and HAMs tend to be associated with the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype. In that stereotype beautiful people are believed to have more positive life outcomes (i.e., more successful careers, better marriages) and are evaluated more positively by others than those who are unattractive (Dion et al., 1972). Conversely, normally attractive models are defined as a more average or moderate weight, height, and facial beauty considered attractive but not beautiful in the idealized manner of HAMs (Bower and Landreth, 2001).

Some studies have examined the role of different ideals or types of beauty in influencing consumers’ responses to models in ads (Solomon et al., 1992; Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore, 1994). Solomon et al. (1992: 23) noted that “perceivers distinguish multiple types of good looks, and that in advertising, certain beauty ideals are more appropriately paired with specific products than with others”. Correspondingly, Martin and Peters (2005) found that the different types of beauty influence consumers’ responses to models in advertising.

For this research, the beauty categories are adopted from Frith, Cheng, and Shaw (2004) that are defined extracted from Solomon et al.’s (1992) and Englis et al.’s (1994) categories and adapted to Asian context by testing the reliability of the content. Three beauty types include: (1) Classic: slightly older than average, elegant, feminine to look at, fair skin and glamorous, usually wears soft, feminine but not heavily accessorized apparel; (2) Sensual/Sexy: posed in a sexual way, usually wears sexy attire or tight fitting, revealing

clothes; and (3) Cute/Girl-Next-Door: with casual attire, a cute and youthful appearance, outdoorsy, in a casual active manner.

*Model characteristics.* The use of varying beauty types may explain the differences in negative affect as a result of comparison motives that were simulated. Bower (2001) noted that the HAM's pose or clothing or the salience of certain HAM physical characteristics [model characteristics] may influence the extent to which negative affect is experienced as a result of the comparison. Martin and Gentry (1997) also suggested, when self-improvement is the primary motive for comparison, self-perceptions of physical attractiveness may temporarily rise in anticipation of an improvement because the comparisons with advertising models are inspiring rather than threatening. When a girl is inspired to improve her physical attractiveness, feelings of self-esteem are likely to be enhanced as well in anticipation of an improvement. It is reasonable to consider ideal beauty types when assessing the effects of a HAM comparison. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H1: In high involvement situations, model characteristics will impact on negative affect.*

*Product type (malleability).* Product type refers to the extent to which the advertised product improves appearance (Bower, 1997) and malleability (alterability) refers to perceived control over comparison differences (Major, Testa, and Bylsma, 1991). Product type and related body part (malleability) are proposed to influence the level of comparison motives experienced. The nature of the product and related body part is discussed by Bower (2001) and was found by Richins (1991) to impact on negative affect. They argued that when the beauty is achievable the comparer may feel an uplifted (self-improvement motives) and more positive than if the body part is not malleable so that the beauty is desirable but considered unachievable (self-evaluation and self-enhancement motives).

It can be argued that when the body part is malleable or changeable as a result of using the product, then the comparisons may be more optimistic as the body part is alterable so making the level of beauty achievable. A malleable body part is alterable so that reaching a level of beauty is achievable potentially resulting in lower levels of negative affect (Bower, 2001), whereas non-malleable body parts are not easy to alter potentially resulting in frustration and negative affect. Clearly, the influence of the malleability of a feature's attractiveness may lead to differences in negative affect, thus the hypothesis is suggested:

*H2: In high involvement situations, malleability will impact on negative affect.*

*Comparison motives.* Many studies used (Festinger, 1954) social comparison theory to explain how HAMs in advertising may affect female consumers (Martin and Kennedy, 1993; Martin and Gentry, 1997; Richins, 1991). The basic premise of these studies is that consumers compare their physical attractiveness to HAMs and that these comparisons can have a negative affect on self-perceptions and self-esteem. The importance of physical attractiveness prompts many women to compare themselves with the images of physical perfection, thinness, and beauty found in advertising. A result of that comparison may lead to negative feelings such as frustration and anxiety, because according to (Richins, 1991) exposure to idealized advertising images may change consumers' comparison standards for what they desire or lower perceptions of their own performance on relevant dimensions, the result is lowered satisfaction. Hence it can be seen that exposure to HAMs could have a negative effect on perceptions of attractiveness of self and others as well as satisfaction with the attractiveness levels of self and others.

In the context of advertising, given that advertising models represent an ideal (perhaps unrealistic) image of beauty, the type of comparison that generally occurs will be upward (Martin and Kennedy, 1993). It means females will generally consider advertising models to be superior in terms of physical attractiveness. In this case, any one of the three motives can be served through upward comparisons. However, it is likely that upward comparisons to models in ads by females are not self-enhancing, because similarity on surrounding dimensions, such as age or context, are not perceived to exist (Martin and Kennedy, 1993). Thus, when self-enhancement predominates as the motive for comparison, females will most likely avoid upward comparisons to advertising models in an attempt to preserve self-esteem.

Therefore, only self-evaluation and self-improvement comparison motives are investigated in this research as self-enhancement motives are not naturally occurring. The level of comparison with similar or dissimilar others and the underlying comparison motive is important in understanding negative affect. That is, self-evaluation motive is likely to result in negative affect as the HAM is used as a direct comparison and self-improvement is likely to result in lower rates of negative affect as the HAM is inspirational. It is clearly that the types of comparison motives result in variations of negative feelings. This goes to support the notion that certain types of comparison motivations are more likely to cause negative affect. Therefore, the following hypothesis is generated:

*H3: In high involvement situations, comparison motives will have varying impact on negative affect.*

*Cultural variation.* Culture can be a particularly important consideration for understanding social comparison with HAMs due to each culture having a set of general beliefs about what constitutes conformity and beauty in society. The crucial distinction between individualistic and collectivist cultures is that individualist cultures focus on “I-identity” and personal self-esteem enhancement, while collectivist societies attend more closely to “We-identity” and social group-esteem maintenance (Hofstede, 2001). While to be feminine in the U.S. (individualist) is to be attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships (Wood, 1999); femininity in Confucian (collectivist) cultures is associated with virtue and modesty (Hofstede, 2001).

Cultural variation may have important implications for social comparison processes (Cynthia, 2004; Donnalyn and Jesica, 2004). These studies found that different cultural background females who were exposed to images of thin models responded differently, for example African American females tend to have a higher level of self-esteem than their Caucasian counterparts. Social comparison theory may suggest that women of various ethnicities respond differently to ideal body images, it can be assumed that negative affect could be varied in different cultures. Thus the following hypothesis is developed:

*H4: In high involvement situations, cultural variation will impact on negative affect.*

*Advertising skepticism.* Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) defined advertising skepticism as the tendency towards disbelief of advertising claims, which is related to the quality of accumulated consumer experiences. In other words, the more consumers experience perceived advertising deception and exaggeration, the more skeptical they will be. Thus the consumers with relatively higher skepticism toward advertising should exhibit less positive responses to ads. As a result, more skeptical consumers like advertising less, rely on it less, attend to it less (Obermiller, Spangenberg, and MacLachlan, 2005).

As advertising skeptics regard advertising as not credible and therefore not worth processing, negative affect of comparison with HAMs in advertising is likely experienced

only when comparers have certain level of belief. Indeed, personal efficacy beliefs do significantly moderate the relationship between personal improvement estimation and the affective consequences of comparison (Bower, 1997). In this study, it is expected that the HAMs comparison occurred is likely to result in negative affect in such cases where the comparers have relatively low skepticism towards advertising of HAMs. In other words, those who have high skepticism level towards advertising including HAMs would be unaffected by comparison to produce negative affect, because they may disbelieve advertising in which unattainable beauty ideals (HAMs) appeared to make claims. It could be that with a certain belief of advertising of HAMs would lead to negative feeling result. Therefore:

*H5: In high involvement situations, advertising skepticism will impact on negative affect.*

Cultural variation may have an impact on skepticism due to conformity and exposure to advertising varying in different culture. It is argued that peer group conformity as discussed is varied significantly cross-culturally was shown to be negatively related to ad skepticism (Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998). For example, Asians are more concerned with peer conformity (being from collectivist societies); one would expect Asians to be relatively less skeptical of advertising (Schaefer, Hermans, and Parker, 2005). In contrast to collectivist societies, studies in individualistic cultures have shown that Americans generally hold negative attitudes towards advertising (Calfee and Ringold, 1994). Besides, many found that ad skepticism to be positively related to marketplace knowledge (Schaefer et al., 2005; Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998). That is, heavy exposure to advertising has fostered familiarity with advertising tactics and opportunities to test ad truthfulness through their personal purchase experiences.

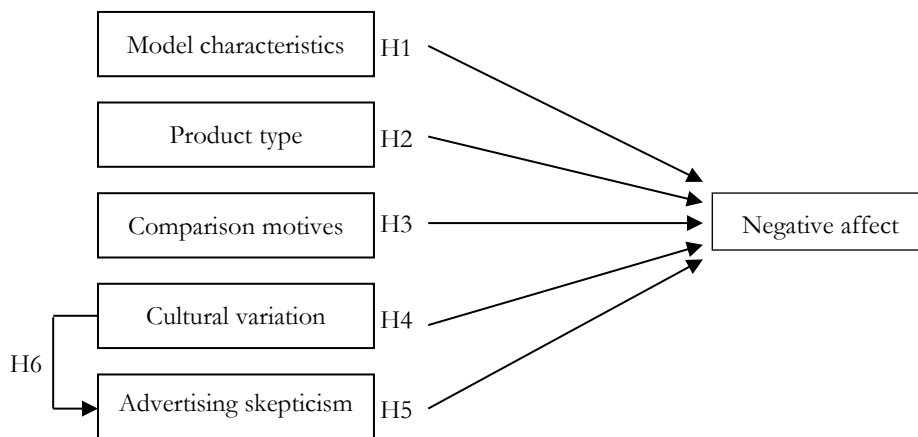
Because of the positive linkage between conformity, advertising exposure and advertising skepticism, it might be expected that groups with less concerned with peer conformity and greater exposure (i.e., American young females) will be more skeptical. It is clear that it could be expected that such attitudes towards advertising differ across culturally. Therefore the hypothesis is:

*H6: In high involvement situations, cultural variation will impact on skepticism towards advertising of HAMs.*



The research model shown in Figure 1 puts forward that negative affect is a result of a HAM comparison based on model characteristics, product type/body part featured as stimulus materials, comparison motives stimulated, cultural variation, and ad skepticism level.

**Figure 1: Research model**



## METHODOLOGY

### Method

The method began with an initial pool of approximately 50 HAMs taken from magazines published in Vietnam such as *Metropolitan*, *Her World*, *The Gioi Thanh Nu*, *The Gioi Phu Nu*, *Thoi Trang Tre*, *Tiep Thi and Gia Dinh*, *Sai Gon Tiep Thi*, etc. The 50 images were then narrowed down to 20 images based on not only level of attractiveness but whether the photograph could be easily manipulated to eradicate the product/brand/copy for each advertisement. Two focus groups comprising of 10 undergraduate females (aged 18-25) in each group were then conducted with the objective being to:

- (1) rate the most attractive models of the 20 images of HAMs and determine with beauty type each model belonged to: Cute, Classic, and Sexy;
- (2) rate the product malleability of list of products, i.e., lip gloss, teeth whitener, hair straightening gel, etc. and determine whether each product could be classified as malleable or non-malleable; and

(3) rate whether they felt inspired or confronted by several different headlines (based on Martin and Gentry (1997), comparison motives were manipulated through headline) and determine with comparison motive each headline belonged to: self-evaluation, self-improvement.

Result of the focus groups determined the three most HAMs that were consistently classified as a single beauty type: Cute, Classic and Sexy. Lip gloss was determined to be a product that respondents deemed to be malleable (92% agreement); skin cleansing bar was deemed to be a non-malleable product (94% agreement). Then the three chosen ads containing the HAMs was removed any product, brand, copy. The ads were manipulated to include a generic lip gloss product for each beauty type, a generic cleansing bar for each beauty type, and assessed comparison motive is stimulated by two types of headlines (self-evaluation: *You. Your Skin/Lips. Think About It. Do You Look This Good?*; self-improvement: *Improve Yourself. You Can Learn To Be Just As Beautiful! Looking Better With Skin Fresh Cleansing Bar/Satin Couolors Lip Gloss.*) for each type.

Twelve manipulations resulted: (1) Cute model, Lip gloss, Self-improvement; (2) Cute model, Lip gloss, Self-evaluation; (3) Cute model, Cleansing bar, Self-improvement; (4) Cute model, Cleansing bar, Self-evaluation; (5) Classic model, Lip gloss, Self-improvement; (6) Classic model, Lip gloss, Self-evaluation; (7) Classic model, Cleansing bar, Self-improvement; (8) Classic model, Cleansing bar, Self-evaluation; (9) Sexy model, Lip gloss, Self-improvement; (10) Sexy model, Lip gloss, Self-evaluation; (11) Sexy model, Cleansing bar, Self-improvement; and (12) Sexy model, Cleansing bar, Self-evaluation.

The research methodology was a 3 (beauty types) x 2 (product types) x 2 (comparison motives) between-subjects experimental design. Each respondent, from both domestic and international female undergraduate students studying in international programs and/or universities in Vietnam namely, RMIT University Vietnam, British University Vietnam, The Saigon International University, and University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU-HCM) between October 2011 and March 2012, was randomly chosen given a self-administered questionnaire and a full colour ad of one manipulation only (i.e., one of 12 mentioned above).

## Measures

All measures were assessed through 7-point bipolar semantic differential and/or 7-point Likert-type scales as this is the measure used by most prior studies into social comparison

and the idealized images (Martin and Kennedy, 1993; Bower, 2001; Bower and Landreth, 2001; Richins, 1991; Martin and Gentry, 1997). These scales (see Table 2) were generated on the basis of prior operationalizations. Model attractiveness was measured as much less/much more noticeable, far below/far above average, and 2 Likert-type items (Bower, 2001). Subject comparison with HAM was measured by assessing the degree in which respondents' comparison is through 3 Likert-type items developed and tested by Bower (2001). Product type/malleability was measured by four-item scale (3 Likert-type items and one semantic differential item). Skepticism towards beauty, advertising and disbelief of claims were measured by 14 Likert-type items (Crossley, 2002; Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998; Boush, Friestad, and Rose, 1994). Finally, negative affect was measured using the four-item scale developed by Bower (2001).

## RESULTS

A total of 937 usable questionnaires were obtained. A statistical description of the manipulation and sample is shown in Table 1. Accordingly, each manipulation has equally distributed and respondents are widely diverse by different age groups, ethnic background, and product involvement.

**Table 1: Sample characteristics**

<b>Manipulation</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Beauty Type</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>%</b>
1	8.0	Cute	32.7	17-20	51.1
2	8.8	Classic	34.3	21-24	38.3
3	8.4	Sexy	33.0	25-30	8.4
4	7.9	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>%</b>	31-40	2.2
5	8.0	Self-evaluation	49.0	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>%</b>
6	7.9	Self-improvement	51.0	Caucasian	45.0
7	8.1	<b>Product Type</b>	<b>%</b>	Asian	48.1
8	8.6	Malleable Lips	50.7	Other	6.9
9	8.6	Non Malleable Skin	49.3		
10	8.6	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>Bought a similar product as featured in ad in the past 2 years</i>	
11	8.1	Did buy	60.2		
12	9.0	Did not buy	39.8		

Table 2 shows the results of the Cronbach's alpha reliability measure. No items have been omitted as strong results indicate that there is good internal consistency and all the

scales have a reliability above 0.6. The Cronbach's alpha measures are all very high which is consistent with previous research in this area.

**Table 2: Scale item, reliability test, and overall measures**

Construct	Scale	Sig.	Mean	SD
Model attractiveness	Much less/Much more noticeable; Far below/Far above average; 2 Likert-type items	.838	4.46	1.040
Subject comparison	3 Likert-type items	.765	4.37	1.292
Negative affect	4 Likert-type items	.873	4.17	1.349
Product malleability/ non-malleability	Not at all influential/Very influential; 3 Likert-type items	.866	3.62	1.453
Beauty skepticism	5 Likert-type items	.895	4.50	1.312
Ad skepticism	4 Likert-type items	.913	2.93	1.384
Disbelief of claims	5 Likert-type items	.871	5.07	1.158

A series of tests that involve *Independent Samples T-test*, *One-way ANOVA* and *Correlation* are then conducted to test relationships in the research model.

In order to determine relationship between model characteristics and negative affect, a *One-way ANOVA* is conducted. The differences between model characteristics and negative affect were significant,  $F(2, 929)=25.09, p < .000$ . That is, Cute model type ( $M=4.47, SD=1.307$ ), followed by Sexy model type ( $M=4.29, SD=1.368$ ) were the most effective at producing a more negative affect. Cute and Sexy model types were significantly more likely to create a stronger negative affect than Classic model type ( $M=3.75, SD=1.271$ ). These findings support the expectation that model characteristics impact on negative affect (*H1* is supported). To ascertain which model types are similar and which ones are different from each other with respect to negative affect the *Bonferroni* results are used. There are significant differences between Classic and Sexy ( $p < .000$ ), between Classic and Cute ( $p < .000$ ) with respect to negative affect, while the difference between Sexy and Cute is not significant ( $p > .263$ ) with respect to negative affect.

To determine relationships between product types and negative affect, *Independent Samples T-test* is conducted. The statistics show that malleable (Lips) ( $M=4.20, SD=1.320$ ) creates a stronger negative affect than non-malleable (Skin) ( $M=4.13, SD=1.379$ ). However, the differences between product types and negative affect were not significant,  $t(927)=.840, p > .401$ . This indicates that there is no significant difference between the

impact of malleable (Lips) and non-malleable (Skin) on negative affect. The findings do not support the expectation that product type/malleability impact on negative affect, *H2* is thus rejected.

In order to determine whether there are relationships between social comparison motives and negative affect, *Independent Samples T-test* is conducted. The differences between social comparison motives and negative affect were significant,  $t(928)=3.615, p < .000$ . That is, self-evaluation motive has a stronger impact ( $M=4.33, SD=1.325$ ) than self-improvement motive ( $M=4.01, SD=1.355$ ) on negative affect, so *H3* is accepted. To test whether the cultural background has an impact on negative affect, the *One-way ANOVA* is conducted. The differences between cultural backgrounds and negative affect were significant,  $F(2, 917)=17.34, p < .000$ . That is, Caucasians have much stronger negative affect ( $M=4.46, SD=1.356$ ) than Asians ( $M=3.94, SD=1.257$ ) when compare themselves with HAMs in advertising. The findings support the expectation that negative affect would be varied in different cultures, *H4* is therefore supported.

To test the hypotheses associated with the relationship between skepticism and negative affect, *Bivariate Correlations* are conducted for each of skepticism (beauty skepticism, ad skepticism and disbelief of claims). The results indicate that the relationships between beauty skepticism and negative affect ( $r(908)=.065, p < .049$ ), between ad skepticism and negative affect ( $r(910)=.150, p < .000$ ) were significant; however, it is a weak positive relationship. There was no significant difference created by the disbelief of claims on negative affect ( $p > .172$ ). This means that hypothesis *H5* is supported but with limitations.

To test the hypotheses associated with the relationship between cultural backgrounds and skepticism, *One-way ANOVA tests* are conducted for each of skepticism (beauty skepticism, ad skepticism and disbelief of claims). The statistics also indicate that the differences between cultural backgrounds and all type of skepticism were significant, with beauty skepticism,  $F(2, 909)=5.86, p < .003$ ; with ad skepticism  $F(2, 912)=6.66, p < .001$ ; and with the disbelief of claims,  $F(2, 909)=4.601, p < .010$ . Overall, the hypothesis *H6* that attitudes towards advertising differ across cultures is supported. To ascertain which cultural backgrounds are similar and which ones are different from each other with respect to all type of skepticism by looking at the *Bonferroni* tables. There are significant differences between Caucasians and Asians with respect to beauty skepticism ( $p < .006$ ).

That is, Caucasians were more skeptical towards beauty ( $M=4.63, SD=1.346$ ) than Asians ( $M=4.35, SD=1.266$ ). The relationships between Caucasians and Asians with

respect to ad skepticism are significant ( $p < .032$ ), showing Caucasians were much more skeptical ( $M=2.85$ ,  $SD=1.752$ ) than Asians ( $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=1.198$ ). Similarly, the relationships between Caucasians and Asians with respect to disbelief of advertising claims are significant ( $p < .022$ ). It means Caucasians were much disbelieving of advertising claims ( $M=5.18$ ,  $SD=1.199$ ) than Asians ( $M=4.96$ ,  $SD=1.191$ ).

From the results, it could conclude that five hypotheses are accepted, one rejected ( $H2$ ) with  $H5$  accepted with limitations.

## DISCUSSION

The unintended consequences of advertising using HAMs were enhanced by this study that some women experience negative affect by comparing themselves with these beauty models. But the study looks further at individual difference variables including beauty type, product type, comparison motive, culture, and ad skepticism.

Analysis revealed that beauty type, and comparison motive have impacts on negative affect. These are consistent with prior researches (Martin and Gentry, 1997; Martin and Kennedy, 1993) showing that HAM characteristics may heighten negative affect and explain the differences in negative affect, and motives have been demonstrated to influence these differential affective consequences of HAMs in advertising.

In addition, ethnicity and skepticism variables have been examined in a social comparison theory context by this study. The finding is that both cultural variation and skepticism (and skepticism determined by culture is also confirmed by the interrelationships between them in this study) have influenced negative affect. This is hence the first study to explore cross-cultural affect of mediated beauty image among Caucasian and Asian young females. The findings are consistent with prior cross-cultural perceptions of ideal body image and advertising skepticism indicating that negative affect could be varied in different cultures (Cynthia, 2004; Donnalyn and Jesica, 2004), as well as more skeptical consumers experience negative affect less (Obermiller et al., 2005).

Specifically, Caucasians display a greater negative affect and more skeptical towards advertising than their Asians counterpart. These findings are actually important to issues related to standardization of cross-cultural advertising. That is, consumer perceptions of messages communicated through visual elements of ads can be especially challenging due to the potential to communicate unintended meanings.

Although this study investigated some cultural specifications regarding negative affect, it still does not state about those from Caucasians or Asians who are more motivated by certain comparison motive and who view the self as more malleable and improvable than other. Also the findings demonstrate the need to look beyond measures of advertising knowledge and product type again towards negative affect to study the impact of HAMS in advertising more fully.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research investigating what limiting conditions make comparers turn negative contributes a number of practical implications. Firstly, it identified that model characteristics has an impact on negative affect despite product type does not, suggesting that HAM characteristics is ad stimulus that influences the extent to which negative affect is experienced as a result of the comparison. By understanding this knowledge practitioners can control the ad stimuli to lessen the unintended consequences of HAMS.

Secondly, the role of motives for comparison was found in this study that it is responsible for the variation in negative affect. With self-evaluation motive it has a stronger impact than self-improvement one on negative affect indicating that the extent to which a young female believes that she might be able to improve her appearance may prompt a self-improvement motivation. By manipulating the comparison motive, in certain conditions, a HAM comparison will occur and the affective consequences of those comparisons may be controlled.

In addition, in relation to cultural variation and skepticism, the finding is that they have impacts on negative affect of a HAM comparison. The research also found that there are interrelationships between culture and skepticism can help international marketers to understand whether consumers across various cultural markets identify with specific images in an ad, especially possible cross-cultural differences in consumer attitudes of HAMS stimuli in advertising elements.

Besides, the results of the correlation indicate that skepticism towards beauty and advertising are related to negative affect. This is an important finding to management as it suggests that in the case of advertising seen as skeptical there needs to be controlled for them. In all, the study can help managers to maximise the effect of HAMS in advertising by understanding how type of comparison motives, model characteristics, cultural

variation as well as skepticism impact on negative affect. By isolating them it will inform managers about when and why negative affect arises to have a greater impact.

While this study offers a foundation for further hypothesis testing in the area of cross-cultural skepticism research, data gathering limitation must be considered. That is, because all respondents were university female students, education levels of this sample may be above average. Findings among varied social-economic strata may reveal different results. As per Boush et al. (1994), trust in advertising decreased as one's educational level increased. It would be of interest to look further into negative affect as a result of HAMs comparison held by people of varying ages, for example, to learn how representative samples of young female adults other than university female students would score on negative affect. A longitudinal study would also be beneficial in determining whether negative affect of HAMs comparison actually change over time.

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