Media's Strategic Use of Appeals and Cultural Values in Influencing Consumer Behavior

and Purchase Intentions: An Examination of the Skin Whitening Phenomenon Among

Highly-educated Young Chinese Adults

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Abstract

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Media's Strategic Use of Appeals and Cultural Values in Influencing Consumer Behavior and Purchase Intentions: An Examination of the Skin Whitening Phenomenon Among Highly-educated Young Chinese Adults

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In contrast to Western beauty ideals that highly praise tanned skin, Chinese are obsessed with a fair complexion. The fascination with fair skin is deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, resulting in a long-lasting effect on generations of Chinese and an internalization of the white aesthetic ideal. The overall aim of this study is to investigate how media strategically employs advertising appeals and cultural values to influence consumers' purchase intentions and skin whitening behavior. Both quantitative content analysis and qualitative online video/audio interviews were employed. Content analysis of 58 skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese brands was employed to examine the types of cultural values and advertising appeals used in these commercials. These aspects were analyzed because advertisers' preference for a specific persuasive strategy serves as a driving force to impact consumers' attitudes toward skin color and purchase intentions. The major findings are listed as follows: (1) there were more Chinese cultural elements such as Chinese language, technologies, and philosophy incorporated in these commercials; (2) compared to other appeals such as emotional appeals and fear appeals, rational appeals were adopted more often; and (3) celebrity spokespersons played a significant role in constructing media messages. Interviews were also conducted to gain

deep insights into informants' experience with skin whitening and the media's influence on their purchase intentions and skin whitening behaviors. Even though some informants pointed out that tanned skin has become more and more popular among some celebrities, light skin was still the mainstream preference because of the influence of culture and media. Informants also revealed that light-skinned people enjoy clear benefits in areas such as the marriage market and the labor market. Skin color also has a marked impact on people's self-confidence, sense of beauty, and sociability. As consumers nowadays are exposed to various sources of information, findings revealed that recommendations from friends, peers, and family remain the most credible form of advertising. People rely on different sources for information verification. Even though informants' purchase intentions were affected by traditional and social media, they were skeptical about the claims in the commercials, celebrity endorsement, and social media advertising.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With a great interest in culture and feminine beauty, the overarching purpose of the present work was to explore how media strategically employs advertising appeals and cultural values to influence consumers' purchase intentions and skin whitening behavior. Content analysis of skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese brands was performed. Interviews were also conducted to gain insights into informants' attitudes and lived experiences of skin whitening. I begin this chapter with an overview of the literature regarding feminine beauty, skin color, and skin whitening as a way to establish a background for this study. As people's preference for a light complexion does not occur in a vacuum, it is often shaped by social and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the cultural factors that have influenced and shaped people's views on beauty. In addition to cultural influences on the ideal of attractiveness, people deliberately seek a lighter skin tone because of symbolic values, associated connotations, and perceived benefits and advantages of being fair. Lastly, this chapter presents readers with the research questions that guided the overall research process and provided a structure for the dissertation.

Beauty and Skin Whitening

The word beauty is an extensive and complicated term. The definition of beauty differs from culture to culture and varies from time to time. What is viewed as beautiful in one culture at a specific time may not be viewed the same way in another culture. Feminine beauty has been closely examined with age, health, physical attractiveness, culture, and media (Wang, 2014; Voegeli et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2019). Wang (2014) defined female beauty as a combination of all the qualities, especially focusing on

physical attractiveness (p. 364). The skin plays a vital role in assessing a person's beauty

not only because it is one of the most easily observed parts of the human body but also

allows people to extract information and insights about individuals. Skin color is one of

the skin traits that has great significance in aesthetics, especially for women. Researchers

have claimed that skin tone serves as an indicator of beauty and is an essential

characteristic in defining female beauty (Hunter, 2007; Jones, 2013). In China, people

have a fascination with light skin tone. Many scholars have conducted research on skin

color in Asia (Wu et al., 2019; Dixon & Telles, 2017; Tan & Stephen, 2019; Adbi et al.,

2021). For instance, Wu et al. (2019) discovered that the primary skin color for Chinese

females fell into the categories of light, intermediate, and tan; dark skin tone was

unobserved. In another recent study, Han et al. (2018) revealed that in contrast to

Caucasian and African people, Mainland Chinese had a stronger preference for skin

lightness. Thus, these studies further demonstrated that Chinese are eager for a light

complexion.

As a Chinese woman born and raised in China and lived in China for more than

20 years, I have been affected by the deeply rooted cultural norm relating light skin with

beauty. I have witnessed people in the streets of China who strived to avoid the sun by

shading their faces and body parts with UV-blocking umbrellas and adopting clothing

apparatuses such as wearing long sleeves and pants even on the hottest summer day.

People's preference for a light complexion can also be manifested through their daily

makeup when they liberally apply makeup to simulate light skin. Under the influence of

the lighter-skinned beauty standard, I am also a practitioner who has partaken in sun-

protection practices and applied different skin whitening products to conform to social conventions. With high exposure to Western culture during my eight years living in the U.S., I experienced the American beauty standard that emphasizes bronzed and sun-kissed skin. In contrast to Chinese active avoidance of the sun's tanning rays, Americans hungrily absorb the sunshine by engaging in various activities such as suntanning and sunbathing at the beach. In America, coppery/tanned skin is associated with beauty, leisure, class, status, health, and youth (Xie & Zhang, 2013; Jablonski, 2012; Martin et al., 2009). The differences between Chinese beauty standards and American beauty standards prompted me to dig into the phenomenon of skin whitening in China.

Apart from my experience of different beauty ideals in both countries, what motivated me to conduct this research was one incident that happened to me. After being immersed in American culture for many years, I showed a preference for natural beauty. As a result, I no longer used a UV-blocking umbrella in the hot summer or applied skin whitening products. I also stopped editing my photos on my phone or applying any filters that make my skin lighter and free of freckles. Consequently, my photos posted on social media platforms stay untouched, original, and un-airbrushed. One of my Chinese college friends who currently lives in Beijing, China, saw my unfiltered photos, messaged me one day, and questioned why I did not put on any makeup and posted raw photos. She even offered me some advice, stating that I needed to apply makeup daily to have an exquisite lifestyle and edit posted photos by adjusting my skin color. Her comments and suggestions shocked me because she made me realize that Chinese in Mainland China

were still greatly affected by traditional beauty norms. Reasons such as this inspired me to investigate the phenomenon of skin whitening in China.

The practice of using chemical agents or substances to lighten the complexion of the skin is often known as skin whitening. Other terms also include skin lightening, skin brightening, skin bleaching, and skin depigmenting (Blay, 2011). There is a prevalence of skin whitening practices in the world, especially in East Asia like China. According to Wu et al. (2019), "skin whitening and antiaging are the top issues for East Asians and related cosmetic products are best sellers in this region" (p. 585). With the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, China's cosmetics market is growing strongly. According to HKTDC Hong Kong Means Business (2019), the skincare product market is the fastest-growing section of the cosmetic market. In addition, statistics have shown that Asia-Pacific regions such as China, India, and Japan have an increased demand for skin lightening products and held a significant market share with regard to volume in 2017 (Zion Market Research, 2019).

The most popular and widely accepted Chinese idiom for skin beauty is *Yi bai zhe san chou* (one white covers three uglies/一白遮三丑). In some parts of northern China, a similar idiom is stated as *Yi bai zhe bai chou* (one white covers a hundred uglies/一白遮百丑). One of the translations of this old saying is that "A white complexion is powerful enough to conceal thousands of faults" (Li, 2013). Regardless of the translation of the idiom, the underlying philosophy holds true for all of them that addresses the powerfulness and importance of possessing fair skin in China. In China, fair skin is

considered a symbol of feminine beauty and physical attractiveness (Frisby, 2006; Peltzer et al., 2016). Other attached meanings also include refinement and aristocracy (Johansson, 1988), opportunities and socioeconomic class (Hunter, 2007; Dlova et al., 2014), and national or ancestral origin (Jones, 2019).

Cultural Influence on Chinese White Beauty

With the increased attention to skin whitening, a large body of literature has studied this phenomenon through the lens of colonialism. The practice of skin whitening in African countries is influenced by European colonialism and slavery in the 19th century (Lindsey, 2011). The white supremacy ideology brought by the European colonists addresses white people's superior and dominant position over other races, especially the black race. Even though the social phenomenon of skin whitening in China is less likely to do with colonialism because China has not been colonized, the Chinese perception of beauty can be influenced by Western values and ideologies. Some scholars argue that Chinese society has experienced a dramatic change and transformation in a variety of areas because of economic reform and Chinese engagement in globalization (Xie & Zhang, 2013; Jung, 2018). Li et al. (2008) stated that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, China had witnessed Western notions of beauty and fashion (p. 445). Other literature indicates that Chinese beauty ideals are more culturally rooted because the obsession with white beauty has long been practiced throughout Chinese history. For instance, traditional Confucian philosophy has an emphasis on white beauty and women's roles and privileges (Li et al., 2008; Jung, 2018). Ancient sculptures and other cultural artifacts such as books, paintings, tales, poems, and literature all recorded the preference

and appreciation for white beauty (Prasso, 2005; Zhang, 2012; Li, 2013; Yu et al., 2017; Xie & Zhang, 2013). In addition to these two positions, a few scholars have argued that the Chinese perception of white beauty is not solely rooted in either Western ideologies or Chinese cultural values, but is a combination of both (Li et al., 2008; Jones, 2019; Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017).

Motivations for Skin Whitening

The motivating factors for adopting skin whitening products are varied. Several researchers have examined the myriad reasons for this practice. First, the social and economic advantages of fair skin motivate people to pursue fairer skin. Lindsey (2011) pointed out that the endorsement of skin whitening products serves as a vehicle for social and economic mobility. The acquisition of lighter skin helps individuals gain higher social status and privileges. Hunter (2011) argued that skin tone is a form of capital for women. By acquiring light skin, women can gain social capital that can be further transformed into other forms of capital such as economic capital and symbolic capital. These capitals are essential because they lead to advances in many areas. Other factors also drive people's engagement in skin lightening, such as the association of light skin with physical/sexual attractiveness and beauty (Jones, 2013). Not only because light-skinned individuals are viewed as more beautiful and attractive than darker-skinned counterparts, but also because physical attractiveness can produce advantages in various areas such as the dating and marriage markets and the labor market. Chinese culture typically values fair skin: the whiter the female is, the prettier she is, and the more desirable she is. Peltzer et al. (2016) argued that females are more likely to engage in skin

whitening because it provides a way for females to become more beautiful and attractive to men. Thus, the sex appeal and the male gaze motivate women to gain a lighter complexion. Hunter (2007) noted that light-skinned women enjoy advantages in areas such as income, jobs, education, housing, spousal status, and marriage. Beauty is important for women on a job and sometimes it has become an unspoken job requirement. Similarly, Dlova et al. (2014) pointed out that "a lighter skin tone could increase self-esteem, implied that a woman belongs to a higher socio-economic class, helped women get better job opportunities . . . " (p. 239). Lighter skin color provides women with more opportunities to enter the job market and gain a better job. Other factors also include self-confidence building, increased self-esteem, self-pleasure, self-beauty gains, self-actualization, and the like (Lewis et al., 2011; Dlova et al., 2014; Hunter, 2005). All of these motivations contribute to females' obsession with fair skin.

Rationale of Study

A great deal of academic research has been conducted on cultural values in advertising by using content analysis (Pollay, 1983; Chan & Cheng, 2002; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Cheng & Patwardhan, 2010). Their findings indicated that both traditional and modern values are reflected in Chinese advertising, but traditional Chinese values are more prominent and stable. Pollay's coding scheme was often adopted and modified by later research, but it is lengthy and therefore not suitable for the current research that centers on skin whitening commercials for indigenous Chinese brands. Moreover, content analysis cannot explain the extent to which traditional values affect audiences, how media influence people's purchase decisions on skin whitening products,

and people's motivations toward skin whitening. Thus, this study employed mixed methods to gain a deeper and broader understanding of this phenomenon.

Commercials are chosen as the unit of analysis because media messages reflect current cultural and social values and mirror current social trends (Eagle et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2015; Xie & Zhang, 2013). As suggested by Li et al. (2008), "advertising is one of the important archival records for storing cultural images and texts" (p. 446). Commercials are also constructed in a way to satisfy customers' desires and needs; they adhere to the dominant culture and reflect consumer values (Xie & Zhang, 2013). Therefore, media messages provide researchers with an effective way to identify the values held by consumers and modern society.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that by exploring the cultural values and advertising appeals in skin whitening commercials and Chinese motivations for skin whitening, researchers can gain insights into this cultural phenomenon. Advertisers and the cosmetic industries can also benefit from this study, as customer's perceptions of physical attractiveness and media's effect on their purchase intention can be uncovered. It also assists marketers in making better and more informed business decisions on how to reach their customers effectively. This study will also help skin whitening practitioners become more aware of the media's effect on their pursuit of white beauty. By raising their awareness of this subject matter, they will become more critical and powerful and less vulnerable to media exposure. Most importantly, they can redefine beauty and embrace their natural beauty.

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Research Aims and Research Questions

This study developed a coding scheme that is applicable to analyzing skin whitening commercials for domestic brands. It also expanded that analysis by incorporating interviews. This study aimed to discover the cultural values and the use of advertising appeals in skin whitening commercials. Furthermore, it helps to understand the influence of media on audiences' white beauty ideology and purchase intentions.

Thus, the following research questions are therefore posed:

RQ1: Are skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese brands more inclined to appeal to Western cultural values or Chinese traditional values?

RQ2: How do media content such as skin whitening advertising exercise an impact on audiences' skin whitening behavior and purchase intentions?

RQ3: What is the Chinese attitude toward physical attractiveness?

RQ4: What are the motives and influencing factors of skin whitening among Chinese?

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The following chapters are structured as follows: after the introduction of the study, the second chapter presents a detailed literature review on topics related to Chinese cultural values on beauty, advertising appeals, and cultural values manifested in advertising. The synthetic review of current literature not only provides an overview of the key findings on the topic, but also helps the researcher identify gaps in knowledge. The research hypotheses were also identified in this chapter. The third chapter presents the methodological aspect of this study. A

content analysis was conducted by analyzing 58 skin whitening commercials for nine

domestic Chinese brands. Online interviews of 15 informants were later conducted. The

interactions with informants helped the researcher gain a richer and fuller understanding

of skin whitening behavior. Chapter 4 reveals the findings on content analysis and

interviews, accompanied by examples from commercials and direct quotes from

interviews. Finally, the last chapter offers a general discussion of the results associated

with the research questions. And in addition, limitations and suggestions for future

research are presented, followed by contributions and conclusions of the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has established a foundation for the current research. The author

became interested in examining the phenomenon of skin whitening in China due to her

multi-cultural exposure and life experience. Literature has indicated that skin tone serves

as a marker of feminine beauty and physical attractiveness, and that lighter skin tone is

preferred in Chinese culture. Being fair is not only a social convention, but a cultural

practice that has long predominated throughout Chinese history; this notion was also

influenced by Western cultures, which led to the examination of cultural values

embedded in current skin whitening commercials. As people in our contemporary world

are bombarded with information from a variety of media sources, media's influence on

people's idea of physical beauty should be explored. This led to the second research

question that focuses on the media's impact. Literature also suggested that people

committed to skin lightening as a way to gain gratifications such as self-pleasure and

privileges. Thus, the interviews presented in this dissertation's chapters dive into people's

motivations for and experience of skin whitening. The research questions developed in

this chapter not only make clear the focus and purposes of the study, but also help guide

the following chapters in making decisions about methodologies and research designs,

which organically influence the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of current research on skin whitening. It primarily explores Chinese cultural beauty standards through the lenses of cultural artifacts and proverbs, situating this research within its cultural context and helping readers hone their understanding of culture and beauty. The subsequent section examines different advertising strategies and how they influence consumers' purchase intentions and choices. The discussion of these appeals lays a foundation for the content analysis in this study, which also helps in developing research hypotheses. Lastly, this chapter reviews literature related to cultural values in advertising and identifies gaps in the existing literature.

Chinese Cultural Values on Beauty

All beauty ideals are culturally constructed. Thus, they vary from culture to culture or even differ within cultures over time as a product of ever-changing culture. Caffrey (2018) defined the culture of beauty as "the prevalent standard of physical attractiveness as dictated by popular opinion" (p. 1). In current China, with more and more Chinese pursuing the fair skin tone, it has become a widely shared standard of physical attractiveness. In fact, ancient Chinese culture also placed a great value on light skin, which can be demonstrated by the fact that light skin has been the dominant aesthetic that is deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. As a result, both ancient and contemporary Chinese cultures emphasize the light skin tone.

The connotation of light complexion prompts many people to engage in skin whitening. Far more than physical, fair skin has symbolic values. According to Johansson (1988), light skin was a mark of refinement and aristocracy in ancient China, which was used to distinguish the rich from the poor, landlords from the peasants, and the higher class from the lower class. Light skin tone implicates class and social status, suggesting that people like landlords and aristocrats neither need to work under the sun nor participate in physical labor. Jones in 2019 explored the significant meaning of skin color in Asia. He took Vietnamese women as an example to demonstrate how skin color functions as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Additionally, skin color is not only linked to class, but also associated with female beauty and gender. It is a marker of femininity and attractiveness (Jones, 2019; Hunter, 2007; Frisby, 2006). Hunter (2007) stated that "light skin color, as an indicator of beauty, can operate as a form of social capital for women" (p. 247). Jones (2019) evaluated skin color from a related perspective, arguing that skin color serves as an indicator of national or ancestral origin, which is used to differentiate themselves from other national backgrounds. Also, he stressed the idea that skin whitening among Asian countries is not a practice of assimilating Americans or becoming White, but is a practice of becoming more like Asians. The following sections examine Chinese beauty ideals in relation to cultural artifacts and idiom/proverbs.

Cultural Artifacts

Cultural artifacts such as classic poems, books, literature, tales, and paintings all carry cultural weight. They convey specific cultural values that have an influence on human interaction and behavior. Therefore, these forms of cultural products can be

utilized to examine the beauty ideals of that time. Many classic Chinese poems equate white skin with beauty. For instance, poems from the Tang dynasty (618-907) often depict women's beautiful skin as "snow white" or "jade white;" moreover, paintings from the Tang dynasty have already shown the practice of applying makeup and cosmetics (Prasso, 2005; Zhang, 2012). In the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), the evidence showed that there was a sexual preference of women who have a lighter skin tone (Xie & Zhang, 2013). The literature in Tang dynasty mentioned the beauty effect of pearl powder, which is historically used as a way to lighten skin color (Yu et al., 2017). In China's ancient tales, some female characters apply white skin powder or other products to make the face white. Ancient Chinese books also recorded a formula as a prescription to lighten skin color (Li, 2013). Li (2013) stated, "more than 25% of the prescriptions recorded in Chinese historic medical references are for skin whitening" (p. 104). A large amount of skin whitening treatment recorded in ancient medical books shows that China has a long history of skin whitening and Chinese place great focus on whitening their skin tone. Yu et al. (2017) developed a scientific report on the first evidence of using freshwater peals as women's makeup in ancient China-northern Song dynasty (960-1127). This white makeup powder that was made from freshwater pearls was discovered from the Northern Song dynasty Lv tomb in Shaanxi province. For the first time, this report provided evidence for freshwater peals that were used as women's makeup to lighten skin tone in ancient China. The report also recorded other discoveries of makeup unearthed in ancient tombs, such as white cosmetic powder unearthed in Han tomb (206 BC-220 AD) and Yuan tomb (1279-1368), as well as makeup powder uncovered in a

Southern Song tomb (960-1279). The authors suggested two types of white face makeup material: one is lead-based white compounds and the other is natural minerals-based.

Using natural ingredients to achieve light skin is a time-honored tradition is Chinese culture and well-documented throughout Chinese history. Natural ingredients such as food, herbs, spices, and fruits are common modalities for skin whitening. In addition, there are lots of old wives' tales recipes for skin whitening. For instance, mixing pearl powder with milk or water in a particular ratio and applying it as a facial mask continuously for a period of time can result in a fairer skin tone. Other common practices include drinking lemon juice with honey at nighttime, eating white-colored fruits and food, and avoiding black-colored food such as soy source and black sesame seeds. Elghblawi (2016) documented how people in Libya use lemon, saffron, and turmeric to obtain a lighter skin tone. Similarly, Wagatsuma (2019) discussed the application of grains such as beans and grass to achieve a bleaching effect on the skin in Japan. Hunter (2007) mentioned several recipes for skin whitening recorded in folk tales, such as toothpaste and baking soda. Li (2013) highlighted the historical use of traditional Chinese medicine in skin whitening. A large number of prescriptions for whitening skin tone can be found in Chinese medical books. Oftentimes, traditional Chinese medicine is a combination of herbs. Therefore, the underlying ideologies of these practices are the same.

Using traditional Chinese medicine or natural ingredients to achieve lighter skin remains popular in modern China. For instance, traditional Chinese medicine has been incorporated into modern skin whitening products. Natural ingredients, often advertised

as safer and more natural, have been used as a selling point in advertisements to attract customers. In addition to applying skin whiteners to gain a lighter skin tone, many people also embrace protective means. For instance, using a UV-blocking umbrella in the summer to avoid sun radiations and wearing long sleeves, sunglasses, sunscreen, and hats to protect body parts from directly exposure to the sun.

Idioms/Proverbs

Apart from cultural artifacts mentioned above, many idioms and proverbs also entails cultural meanings and values. The idiom depicts people's preference for whiteness mirroring the beauty standard held by the current society. Mak (2007) pointed out the importance of studying the proverb, "an idiom or proverb captures what a group of people deem as important. Because an idiom carries cultural weight, it may impact on learned human behavior" (p. 145). Thus, the following paragraphs discuss some idioms regarding skin color preference in China.

One of the most popular idioms, 'one white covers three uglies,' indicates that white skin tone takes precedence over darker ones. Thus, being fair is perceived as beautiful; by contrast, dark skin tone connotes ugliness. In a similar vein, another prominent beauty ideal depicts the standard of beauty for women as "white, wealthy, and beautiful," complementing to the beauty ideals for men—"tall, rich, and handsome." These six words summarize the key attributes of the beauty ideals for women and men concisely and vividly. Interestingly, in the study of social perception of skin color in Japan, Wagatsuma (2019) pointed out one Japanese idiom that reflects the strong

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preference of fair skin tone in Japan—"white skin makes up for seven defects" (p. 407), which is nearly identical to the Chinese idiom.

Zhang (2012) explored how college women in China negotiate beauty and body image as portrayed in mass media. As suggested in the findings, all the interviewees mentioned one particular idiom—"one white covers three uglies." The ubiquity of this idiom suggests the wide adaptation and the internalization of the white beauty standard. Zhang (2012) discussed three implications of this idiom. First, light skin is a symbol of beauty and has been widely accepted as a universal beauty standard. Second, light skin is a mark of high socioeconomic status. As the author suggested, "skin tone is often used as a cue to identify a person's family origin and social class' (p. 445). Lastly, fair skin provides people with a way to cover other beauty flaws, which works like a mask that is used to hide and conceal. As the idiom implies, one white skin can cover three, a hundred, or even a thousand ugly qualities or flaws. For instance, Chinese culture highlights slim and tall body types in addition to light skin tone. Even though some Chinese may be short and chubby, fair skin tone compensates for other beauty flaws.

Another critical study has been done in the field of skin color is by Jung in 2018. The author explored young women's perception of female beauty ideals in China by comparing and contrasting traditional female beauty ideals with contemporary ones. One key difference discovered was the physical characteristic of women's faces and bodies. For instance, traditional female beauty ideal sometimes emphasizes round faces and plump bodies, while modern beauty standard prefers small and v-shaped faces and slim and curvy figures. As indicated in the study, among all the differences and similarities

between traditional and contemporary beauty ideals, one area that remains unchanged was the fair skin tone. As a result, the white beauty standard has been sustained for thousands of years in China. Both traditional and contemporary views on beauty endorse the attractiveness of fair skin. As shown above, this fair skin preference is not a novelty, but historically and deeply ingrained in Chinese culture.

Advertising Appeals and Their Impact on Purchase Intentions

After providing the general cultural background of skin whitening, this section considers different advertising appeals. Advertising appeals are persuasive communication strategies used to gain people's attention and motivate them to purchase a particular product or service. Jovanović et al. (2016) stated that advertising appeals are the fundamental element in advertising and are adopted by advertisers to influence consumers' beliefs, awareness, and attitudes towards the products. Their findings suggested that different advertising appeals might affect people's purchase intentions differently. Aristotle pioneered three rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos, which are three modes of persuasion used to convince audiences. Ethos appeals to ethics, which is related to the endorser's authority, credibility, and trustworthiness. Pathos appeals to emotions and feelings (Gagich & Zickel, n.d.). Both positive and negative emotions can stir the audience's emotions as long as the correct number of stimuli is used. Positive emotions include happiness, joy, love, excitement, and the like, while negative emotions contain fear, irritation, anger, sadness, etc. Finally, logos appeals to logic and reasoning, which is based on logical arguments and information (Gagich & Zickel, n.d.).

Rational Appeals

Derived from Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals, advertising appeals traditionally are divided into two categories: rational appeals and emotional appeals (Jovanović et al., 2016; Lee & O'Connor, 2003; Chan, 1997; Kim & Cho, 2012; Keshari & Jain, 2014). This classification is dependent upon how consumers respond to commercials. Hornik et al. (2017) added a third category to persuasive appeals—metaphor that can be either rational appeal or emotional appeal. Kim and Cho (2012) stated that the third category could be a combination of rational and emotional appeals.

Rational appeals, also known as informative, informational, or logical appeals, aim to appeal to logic, reason, and evidence. These appeals build upon the assumption that consumers make logical and rational decisions during their decision-making process. Rational appeals tend to address the benefits and advantages of using the product, as well as facts, quality, features, function, price, material, packaging, purchasing time and place, characteristics, and performance of the product (Jovanović et al., 2016; Kim & Cho, 2012; Keshari & Jain, 2014). The advantages of rational appeals lie in the fact that, first, they are based on objective evidence, facts, or logical arguments; people with a strong cognitive capacity may be more inclined to be persuaded by such appeals. Also, the effectiveness and sustainability of such appeals may last longer than emotional appeals, which is supported by Bergin's (2015) proposal that "arguments lacking logos often fail to persuade over the long term" (p. 1). Second, applying numbers, graphics, arguments, and information to the message may yield a stronger, more straightforward, and more powerful persuasion. Third, some products are more suitable for using rational appeals

than emotional appeals in persuading audiences. Newbold (2017) suggested, "the rational appeal is especially effective when the product, service, or idea contains many features that will appeal to someone's sense of reason" (p. 1). Consequently, rational appeals are more effective in advertising certain products or services.

Rational appeals also have limitations. First, rational appeals can be tedious and less entertaining than emotional appeals that employ humor and sex (Chan, 1997). If the messages are less amusing, it is more difficult to attract audiences, resulting in less compelling messages. Second, appealing to logic requires viewers' cognitive power and mental capability to process the information, which may prolong the decision-making process (Tellis, 2004). As suggested by Tellis (2004), such ability requires "adequate language skills, proper training in logical thinking, adequate knowledge about the issues, and time and quiet to carefully think through the issues" (p. 114). Thus, viewers who lack the previously mentioned abilities may not be eligible for processing messages containing strong arguments. Another major problem associated with using logic is the possibility of raising counterarguments (Tellis, 2004). When the message conveyed in the commercial contradicts the audience's ideology or opinion, audiences may be more motivated to scrutinize the proposition.

Endorsement Appeal. Endorsement appeal is another commonly used marketing practice for enterprises. Endorsement appeal, such as celebrity endorsement, is one category of rational appeals (Ka, 2014). According to Tellis (2004), endorsers can be grouped into three groups: experts, celebrates, and lay endorsers. Tellis (2004) defined experts as "individuals or organizations that the target population perceives as having

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specialized knowledge in a particular area" (p. 180). Their skills, expertise, and knowledge in a specific area function as the main appeal to audiences. A celebrity endorser, as defined by Majeed et al. (2017), is a person "who has a public identity and uses his/her recognition to promote a consumer good by drawing consumers' attention in an advertisement" (p. 6). They can emerge from a variety of areas such as sports, music, movies, and TV shows. They can be famous for their look and appearance, particular talents or abilities, knowledge, or even voice. Celebrities are widely used in commercials because of their ability to raise awareness, establish brand equity, and increase consumers' purchase intentions (Liu et al., 2007). At the same time, audiences may have an increased remembrance and recall of the product because of the celebrity's appearance. Misra and Beatty (1990) noted that when the celebrity's image is congruent with the product image, the recall of brand information is higher and a more favorable brand affect is also produced. This fit between the celebrity and the product is known as the 'match-up hypothesis,' which refers to "the harmony of the match connecting the product being endorsed and the personality of the endorser" ("ukessays.com"). In a test of culturally incongruent advertising images in China, Zhou et al. (2015) stated that the match-up effect suggests a match between the celebrity and the product characteristics. They claimed that when there is a match between the advertising appeals and consumer's schemas, consumers apply less persuasion knowledge to analyze and evaluate the persuasion attempts, resulting in a more favorable response to the commercial. The third class of endorsers is lay endorsers. These endorsers are not well known by the general public. They are "fictitious or unknown individuals or characters used as spokesperson in

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an ad" (Tellis, 2004, p. 180). Even though lay endorsers are unknown and unpopular by the public in the first place, the continuous use may increase their fame and reputation gradually and make them become celebrities one day. Therefore, these three types of endorsers are not mutually exclusive. There are some overlaps between different endorsers. The same endorser can take different roles, such as being a celebrity and an expert simultaneously.

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumers' purchase intentions, generally indicating a positive influence of such testimonials in advertising (Wang et al., 2012). Purchase intention is the probability a person assigns to purchase a specific product (Tanjung & Hudrasyah, 2016; Lin, 2011). Jovanović et al. (2016) outlined the way in which advertising affects consumers' purchase intentions. Advertising first impacts consumers' beliefs. Because beliefs determine people's attitudes toward an object/a product, advertising can influence their attitudes. Attitudes can further lead to particular purchase intentions of the object, which are directly related to consumers' purchase decision. Attributes of celebrity play an important role in consumers' intent to purchase. Osei-Frimpong et al. (2019) revealed that celebrity endorsers' positive attributes, such as attractiveness and trustworthiness, positively affect consumers' purchase intentions. Attractiveness refers to one's physical attributes, such as facial features (Anwar & Jalees, 2017). Trustworthiness is a summary of values such as integrity and honesty that help increase purchase intentions (Ha & Lam, 2017). In addition to the previously mentioned attributes, other dimensions of celebrity's attributes were also well examined by researchers, including credibility and expertise.

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Mikuláš and Světlík (2016) noted that expertise and trust are the two components of credibility. Several studies have validated the cognitive and positive effect of source credibility on people's intention to purchase (Tanjung & Hudrasyah, 2016; Anwar & Jalees, 2017). In sum, celebrity endorsement plays a significant role in affecting customer behavior and product purchase intent.

Several studies have examined the link between celebrities and beauty product commercials. In exploring the unfair promotion of whitening creams in India, the authors, Chauhan and Tiwari (2019) discussed the connection between stardom and fairness. They suggested that celebrities serve as brand ambassadors of skin-whitening products and they have the ability to build brand awareness, credibility, and trust. They are also effective in creating media hype and attract consumers' attention. Cochrane and Quester (2005) suggested that for low involvement products such as skincare products, "celebrity endorsers and source attractiveness were more persuasive than high quality arguments" (p. 9). It has been widely documented in the existing literature that Chinese are inclined to trust celebrities and authorizes. "Celebrity-chasing" is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary China, which may increase people's favor of celebrity endorsement. Many studies have demonstrated that celebrity endorsement has a more substantial impact on women. For instance, Klaus and Bailey (2000) discovered that compared to men, women are more favorable to celebrity-endorsed products. Likewise, in exploring international cosmetics advertising from Chinese female consumers' viewpoints, Barnes et al. (2004) discovered that Chinese females have a preference for expert opinions, friends, and opinion leaders regarding products that address human wellbeing and beauty. In addition

to people's trust in celebrities, Chinese also place a strong emphasis on deferring to authorities (Barnes et al., 2004), which is a result of the vertical collectivist society that emphasizes hierarchy (Shavitt et al., 2011). Consequently, as a culture that focuses on complying with authorities and trusting in celebrities, it is possible to assume that skin whitening commercials for domestic brands tend to adopt more celebrities.

As such, the first hypothesis states:

H1: Endorsement appeals are used more frequently than non-endorsement appeals in skin whitening commercials for indigenous Chinese brands.

Emotional Appeals

Emotional appeals tend to target consumer's psychological or social needs (Jovanović et al., 2016). Because the foundation for emotional appeals is appealing to feelings, Jovanović, et al. (2016) went further to classify customer feelings into two categories: personal feelings and social-based feelings. Feelings such as humor, fear, love, pleasure, and happiness fall into the category of personal feelings, while status, shame, recognition, respect, rejection, and the like are related to social-based feelings. In fact, emotions can be either positive or negative. Positive emotional appeals include emotions like love and humor; in contrast, negative emotional appeals arouse fear, scare, and guilt.

There are several advantages of emotional appeals over rational appeals. First, instead of appealing to logic and reason and relying on argument and evidence, emotional appeals focus on arousing certain types of emotions. Emotions, compared to reasoning, require less cognitive effort. And less cognitive effort that is required for processing the

information may accelerate the decision-making process (Tellis, 2004). As Tellis (2004) stated, "the emotion also lowers their defenses against the message" (p. 148). Because of this, consumers are more likely to make impulsive decisions on purchasing a product. By bypassing the logic, audiences are more likely to identify themselves with the message on a personal level, making the communication more effective and pervasive (Tellis, 2004). As suggested by Keshari and Jain (2014), this form of appeal is easier to remember and recall than factual evidence because it engages audiences on a more personal and individual level. Second, in discussing different modes of emotion persuasion, Tellis (2004) addressed the concept of emotion-arousing stimuli. These stimuli are used to stimulate emotions to fulfill the persuasion purpose. He suggested, "emotion-arousing stimuli draw the viewers into the action and distract them from the advertiser's intention to persuade" (p. 150). Therefore, persuasion happens more subtly and unconsciously and it is less likely to evoke counterarguments. Third, emotional appeals try to engage more senses rather than only providing pure evidence and facts. For instance, emotional appeals that incorporate drama, story, humor, and music can better engage customers' senses, making the appeals more engaging and exciting and the commercials more effective and attractive.

Emotional appeals also suffer from several disadvantages. First, in contrast to using the argument to appeal to audiences' logic in a straightforward manner, emotional appeals that use drama, story, and demonstration require more time and effort to arouse audiences' emotions (Tellis, 2004). For example, stories are commonly used in emotional appeals. In order to tell a complete story, more advertising space and time are required.

Audiences also need to watch the whole story to comprehend the message. Second, as suggested by Tellis (2004), "viewers could get so involved in the emotions that they may miss the central message" (p. 151). Similarly, Chan (1997) stated that sometimes commercials could be too emotional, leading to insufficient product information (p. 55). Therefore, an audience that gets too involved in the commercial may ignore or get lost in the main message that the commercial tries to deliver. Third, the strength of emotional stimulus in a commercial can influence audiences positively or negatively. Tellis (2004) examined the relationships between the strength of emotional stimulus and persuasion and attention. He suggested that with an increase in strength of emotional stimulus, typically, there is a steady increase in attention to the commercial, but persuasion does not have a linear relationship with the strength of emotional stimulus. When the strength of emotional stimulus increases, persuasion to the commercial first increases and then decreases when it reaches the highest point; therefore, it does not mean that the stronger the emotional appeal is, the more effective the persuasion is. For instance, if a commercial stimulates extreme unhappiness, anger, fear, or other types of unpleasant feelings, audiences may shun away from the message and reject it completely. In this case, if used inappropriately, emotional appeals may cause detrimental effects on the audience's acceptance of the message. Finally, Tellis (2004) pointed out that the audience may have a feeling of exploitation of their emotion if there is an absence of a link between the emotional stimulus and the media message (p. 152). His model of the implicit mode of persuasion by emotion suggests that advertisers implicitly embed media messages to arouse audiences' emotions with stimuli. Therefore, when the connection

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between the stimuli and message is lacking, unclear, or weak, the persuasion tends to be less effective. At the same time, audiences may feel emotionally exploited because they cannot see a link between the message and the stimuli.

The use of emotional appeals is quite common in some types of products, including beauty and skincare. Many studies have shown that emotional appeals are more suitable for low-involvement products or personal products. In general, there are two product categories: low-involvement products and high-involvement products, which depend on "the level of involvement that consumers have with a certain product or service" ("How to use," n.d.). Typically, low-involvement products are low in price and risks, while high-involvement products have higher prices and perceived risks that require more engaged consumers in the buying process ("How to use," n.d.). As suggested by Majeed et al. in 2017, "skin care advertisements have been found to be effective in manipulating women's emotions and skin care product consumption pattern" (p. 5). Shen (2013) discovered that compared to service commercials, goods commercials tend to adopt more rational appeals; in contrast, personal products such as skincare, cosmetics, and fashion apparel are more likely to employ more emotional appeals. By the same token, Chan (1997) mentioned that appealing to affections is more important in low involvement products such as skincare, soap, shampoo, and food. This was also supported by Cochrane and Quester's (2005) findings that strong and logical arguments are more effective for high involvement products. Advertising appeals not only vary based on the product, but also vary depending on the target groups. Previous studies have discussed the emotional nature of females and the impact of emotion on consumption

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behaviors, suggesting that because of the difference in reaction between males and females to emotional stimuli in commercials, emotional appeals have a stronger impact on women while rational appeals have a stronger influence on men (Coley & Burgess, 2003; Jovanović et al., 2016). Taken together, these results suggest:

H2: Emotional appeals are used more frequently than rational appeals in skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese brands.

Fear Appeals. Fear appeal is also one subcategory of emotional appeals, and it belongs to negative emotional appeals. The concept of fear and fear appeals are extensively discussed by different scholars. For instance, LaTour and Zahra (1988) defined fear as "a primitive instinct that can occasionally guide and activate human behavior. It creates anxiety and tension, causing people to seek ways to reduce these feelings." Gupta et al. (2017) conducted a content analysis of 100 YouTube beauty advertisements; they defined fear appeals as "attracting the attention by showing the threatening effects of wrinkles, dandruff, pimples, rough skin, etc." (p. 18563). Different from this context-specific definition of fear appeals, Bartikowski et al. (2019) defined fear appeals in a more general way: "fear appeals activate a person's sense of risk and vulnerability" (p. 2). Jovanovic et al. (2016) related fear appeal to danger because it "draws attention of consumers on the possible danger they are exposed to and to give a recommendation on how to avoid this danger, and to motivate consumers to release themselves of the fear by using the advertised product" (p. 38). Similarly, Tellis (2004) highlighted that fear appeals work by addressing the dangers of non-compliance and/or the advantage of compliance. Even though there is no unified definition of fear, there are

some shared common characteristics: fear is an arousal of emotion commonly associated with danger, risk, crisis, vulnerability, pain, anxiety, threat, and other negative and unpleasant feelings. In this study, fear appeal is defined as an advertising strategy used to evoke negative emotions such as danger, anxiety, and pain in an attempt to attract audiences' attention, increase persuasion, and finally affect their beliefs, attitudes, and purchase behavior.

Fear appeals can be classified into different categories. For example, Jovanović et al. (2016) categorized fear appeals into two forms, including social disapproval/discomfort related to social fear appeals and physical danger related to physical fear appeals. Cochrane and Quester (2005) pointed out that social, physical, and self-esteem fears are the most common types of fear appeals used in advertising. Self-esteem fear appeals stimulate fear with the damage of the social self. Bartikowski et al. (2019) extended this standard categorization of fear appeals by identifying one more fear appeal: economic fear appeals, which relate fear with financial risks and economic loss. Many scholars have explored the relationship between fear appeal intensity and persuasion, but the results have been inconsistent. The discrepancies may lie in the difference in examined products and audiences. Some studies have shown that the relationship between persuasion and fear follows an inverted-U-shape, which is known as the Parallel Response Model (Cochrane & Quester, 2005). This model suggested that the influence of fear is only effective up to a certain point. Therefore, too little fear evoked by advertisements may be ineffective because it fails to "prompt sufficient elaboration of the harmful consequences of the undesirable behavior" (Cotte & Ritchie, 2005, p. 25),

while too much fear may evoke an uncomfortable state and provoke audience's protective or defensive reactions (Tellis, 2004; Janis, 1967). Thus, a moderate level of fear is appropriate to invoke by the commercial. On the other hand, some studies have discovered that stronger fear appeals are more effective than weak fear appeals, especially in areas related to human wellbeing and security (LaTour et al., 1996). For instance, LaTour et al. (1996) demonstrated that even though stronger fear appeals generated more tension than weak fear appeals, they also significantly influenced consumer's attitude toward the commercial and purchase intentions. In fact, inconsistent with the inverted-U-shape model, some studies have shown a positive and linear relationship between threat and persuasion (Dillard & Li, 2020).

Bartikowski et al. (2019) discovered that fear appeals are used most frequently in product categories such a beauty and personal care products as well as drugs and medical products. In the Chinese cultural context, fear appeals are the most frequently used appeals in commercials for drugs and medical products and are the second most frequent appeals in commercials for beauty and personal care products. Chinese advertisers are also prone to employ self-esteem fear appeals and social fear appeals. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that there are more fear appeals employed in skin whitening commercials for Chinese brands.

H3: Fear appeals appear more frequently than non-fear appeals in skin whitening commercials for indigenous Chinese brands.

Cultural Values and Advertising

This study rests on a theoretical foundation informed by the role of culture in the construction of and consequent responses to advertising messages. There has been ongoing scholarly interest in exploring cultural values reflected in advertising content and the tool most often adopted in research has been content analysis. Central to the study of this topic is Pollay's (1983) seminal coding framework. He identified 42 common cultural appeals predominant in commercials. This framework has been widely adopted by later research. For instance, many studies have compared the cultural values manifest in Chinese advertising to advertising in other countries/regions, such as India, the U.S., and Hong Kong (Chan & Cheng, 2002; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Cheng & Patwardhan, 2010). It is common to see research comparing the U.S. and China, in that the U.S. is the world's leading capitalist country and it typically represents a Western culture (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). In the exploration of cultural values in Chinese and U.S. television commercials, Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) identified three dominant values reflected in Chinese commercials, including "family," "technology," and "tradition." These were different from the dominant values manifest in the U.S. commercials: "enjoyment," "individualism," and "economy." Their findings suggested that Chinese commercials tended to adopt more Eastern cultural values than U.S. commercials. And Chinese commercials centered more on symbolic values, while U.S. commercials tended to adopt symbolic and utilitarian values. Their findings also indicated that Chinese advertising incorporated both Eastern and Western cultural values. According to Chan and Cheng (2002), in advertising, utilitarian values emphasize

product features and qualities while symbolic values often highlight human feelings and emotions. Similarly, Lin (2001) conducted a study to examine cultural values reflected in Chinese and American advertising appeals. The findings revealed several cultural values employed more often in Chinese commercials, such as the soft-sell appeal and the tradition appeal, which was in opposition to cultural values reflected in American commercials: the hard-sell appeal and individual/independence appeals. In a later study of cultural values in Chinese and Hong Kong Television commercials, Chan and Cheng (2002) came up with similar results with regard to cultural values reflected in Chinese commercials. Their findings revealed that Chinese commercials tended to use more Eastern values and symbolic values while Hong Kong commercials employed more Western values and utilitarian values. In another cross-cultural advertising study of cultural values in Chinese and Indian TV commercials, Cheng and Patwardhan (2010) discovered that Chinese commercials included more traditional/Eastern values and Indian commercials have a greater reflection on Western cultural values. Additionally, the dominant value in both countries was *modernity* rather than *tradition*. The top two most frequently advertised product categories were the same in both countries: beauty/personal care and food/soft drink. Similarly, Zhang and Shavitt (2003) examined the cultural values in advertisements intended for the Chinese X-generation. Their results indicated that modernity and individualism values were the dominant values in Chinese commercials. In comparison to magazine advertisements that advocated modernity and individualism, television commercials centered more on collectivism and traditional values. In a study analyzing commercials shown on three Chinese TV stations, Zhang and

Harwood (2004) generated 13 values discovered in the commercials, indicating that the most frequently used value was modern value, followed by traditional values and utility values. Their results also indicated the coexistence of both traditional values and modern values in Chinese advertising.

In summary, these studies have made a substantial contribution to the understanding of cultural values in advertising. Several themes can be drawn from the above literature cited. First, there was a co-occurrence of Eastern/tradition and Western/modernity values in Chinese advertisements. Second, although Chinese advertising was a "melting pot" of both tradition and modernity values (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996), Eastern/traditional values were more pervasive in Chinese commercials, which may have resulted from the influence of Confucian doctrine in Chinese culture (Lin, 2009). Third, even though traditional values predominated in Chinese commercials, Western values such as modernity and individualism were on the rise, especially from the 1990s to the 2000s (Lin, 2009).

It is important to note that current literature on cultural values in commercials suffers from limitations. First, even though previous studies had developed exhaustive cultural values manifest in commercials especially Pollay's 42 common cultural appeals, they were too many to be applied to the current study. As suggested by Zhang and Harwood (2004), an excessive number of value items "lead to analytical problems and results in a number of categories that are very infrequent in the Chinese context" (p. 159). Thus, this study used the previous coding schemes as a reference to generate a new and more applicable coding instrument. It not only adopted cultural values identified in

previous studies such as technological (resulting from science, research, etc.), status

(prestige, power, dominance, etc.), and natural (organic, nutritious, vegetables, etc.)

(Pollay, 1983), but expanded the scheme by identifying specific values that are unique

and central to Chinese cultures such as traditional Chinese philosophy and medicine,

ancient poetry, and idiom/proverb. In addition, because the current study deals with the

content of skin whitening commercials, some relevant and valuable appeals and values

were also included, such as fear appeals, socialization, and promotion. Second, existing

research had investigated cultural values and advertising primarily through content

analysis; little research employed interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how

media messages affect consumers and the degree to which traditional cultural values

affect Chinese views on skin color.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed literature review on the main areas of interest in

this study. It first examined the cultural preference of skin color by looking into Chinese

cultural artifacts and proverbs, which serves to introduce the study and provide a

foundation for this research. As this research focused on media's influence on audiences'

intent to purchase and skin whitening behavior, the following section addressed different

advertising appeals and their impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Celebrity

endorsement, such as endorser's attractiveness and credibility, can positively affect

consumer behavior. Emotional appeals have shown to be more effective in low

involvement products and advertising to women. As one subgroup of emotional appeals,

fear appeals are more frequently adopted in commercials for beauty and personal care

products in China. The examination of literature regarding advertising appeals helped generate the hypotheses for this study. Finally, the theoretical proposition concerning cultural values in advertising was highlighted, which provides guidance to and forms the basis for the current study. In addition, it assists the researcher in developing the key variables for the content analysis. The gaps in existing research were also identified, which further help highlight the importance and contribution of the current study.

Chapter 3: Methodologies

Introduction

  This chapter aims to explain the research methodologies employed in this study. A mixed-method approach was applied, including both content analysis and online interviews. This method was selected because of the researcher's recognition of the limitations of employing a single research method. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the use of multiple methods allows biases inherent in one method to be neutralized or canceled by the biases of other methods (p. 14); therefore, a mixed-method approach takes advantage of both methods and helps strengthen each other by limiting the biases that lie in a single method. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data results in a deeper and better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which cannot be achieved by a single research method. In this study, content analysis was first performed to identify cultural values and advertising appeals, followed by in-depth interviews to capture informants' lived experience of skin whitening and media's effect on their purchase intentions and skin whitening behaviors. The findings of interviews added value to the research by assisting in the interpretation of the content analysis. It is noteworthy to mention that this study took an idiographic approach, aiming to emphasize the unique skin whitening experience of participants and discover commonalities among them. This qualitative approach was not intended as a survey, and thus the results generated from the interviews are not intended to generalize to the entire Chinese population.

The first portion of this chapter provides an overview of the content analysis, which helps to promote an in-depth understanding of this research method. The following section delves into a more detailed discussion on the samples of the study, the measures, and the coding of variables. The coding procedures were clarified with detailed explanations of coder training and pretest. The second portion discusses different forms of interviews and the rationales for choosing online video/audio interviews to gather data. Sample interview questions will also be presented, followed by the recruitment procedures and the sampling techniques. The process of conducting a pilot interview was offered and different steps of undertaking a successful thematic analysis are shown as well. Finally, this section ends with a summary to provide readers with a condensed and synthetic view of the previous content.

Content Analysis

Earl Babbie (2013) stated that content analysis is a study of human communication that has been recorded in a variety of forms such as images, media, sounds, text, etc. As defined by Krippendorf (2004), content analysis is a "systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective" (p. 3). Content analysis focuses on content, including manifest content and latent content (Sumser, 2000; Babbie, 2013). According to Sumser (2000), manifest content can be examined by analyzing the surface and visible meaning of the message, while latent content centers on the underlying and hidden meaning of communications or implications of the message. Researchers can count the number of times a particular word/phrase appears or observe the frequency of a certain concept or

other manifest content, which is known as conceptual analysis; by contrast, researchers need to view and assess the message holistically in order to reveal latent content (Sumser, 2000). Compared to manifest content analysis, latent content analysis is more subjective. Sumser (2000) also noted that researchers could compare and contrast the latent meanings with the manifest meanings, which allows researchers to bring new life to mundane things and to view commonplace things from a different perspective.

Babbie (2013) discussed a variety of strengths and weaknesses of content analysis. There are many advantages to adopting content analysis. For instance, content analysis is a very economical research method because it does not require a large crew of researchers or expensive tools. It analyzes data at minimum cost, but at maximum convenience, since researchers are free from geographic restrictions in terms of gathering and analyzing data. It also allows for both qualitative and quantitative assessment of the material; thus, it can be a qualitative research method or a quantitative research method, allowing generations of both qualitative and quantitative data. The nature of content analysis permits researchers to study the content occurring over a course of time. Researchers can retrieve recorded data in a variety of ways such as online search engines or library archives. More importantly, it is an unobtrusive research method compared to others like overt participant observation because it deals with content/text directly, diminishing human interactions. Lastly, as suggested by Babbie (2013), content analysis has strong reliability for the reason that researchers can always return to the recorded communication to code and recode the text as many times as they want.

Content analysis suffers from several weaknesses, too. For instance, some researchers tend to oversimplify the process by only counting the frequency of certain words or phrases, which lead to simplified and incomplete findings. Because it deals with text, it runs the risk of disregarding the context in which the text is produced. Babbie (2013) indicated that there is a limitation in scope in content analysis because it only permits analysis of recorded communications. Furthermore, it cannot explain the causes and consequences of the content because it only discusses content. For instance, it cannot answer the questions of why the media produce what they produce and what influence the media has on the audience (Sumser, 2000).

Sampling

Commercials for domestic skincare brands were selected for content analysis because they serve as a carrier of culture. As suggested by many researchers, commercials are cultural artifacts created by advertisers that serve as mirrors of the ideology held by contemporaneous society (Eagle et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2015). Thus, examining television commercials aligns with the goal of this study that is to analyze and understand deep-rooted cultural values reflected in media. In this study, the domestic brand was defined as a brand originating from China and maintaining its headquarter in China (Xie & Zhang, 2013). Based on reports and recommendations from several Chinese fashion and beauty websites, primarily from PClady/太平洋时尚女性网 and Chinapp/品牌网, the most popular nine domestic skincare product brands were identified, including MEIFUBAO/美肤宝, TJOY/丁家宜, Herborist/佰草集, OSM/欧诗

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漫, PROYA/珀莱雅, hanhoo/韩后, CHANDO/自然堂, INOHERB/相宜本草, and COGI/高姿. PClady is a website aiming to provide females with the most up-to-date information regarding fashion, skincare, beauty, hairstyle, etc., and Chinapp is a big data service portal for brands, which provides users with a platform to search for brands. These two websites were identified by searching the term 'Top 10 Skincare Brands in China' on American search engines-Bing and Google and Chinese search engine-Baidu. They were among the top 10 search results in response to the query in search engines. The commercials were selected only if they had a focus on skin whitening and they were narrowed down by filtering out any commercials older than 2009. Based on the criterion for selection, some brands - even though they were among the top ten domestic skincare brands recommended by the websites - were not selected because they emphasized more on moisturizing, antiaging, or tightening instead of whitening. Some other brands were selected even though they were not suggested by the websites because they specialized in skin whitening and they were well known among Chinese customers.

After the identification of the most popular domestic skincare brands in China, the skin whitening commercials were collected online primarily in three ways; the first one was from the brands' official websites; then, from the largest search engines such as Google in the U.S. and Baidu in China; and finally, from popular video-sharing websites such as YouTube in the U.S. and Youku/优酷, iQiyi/爱奇艺, and Bilibili/哔哩哔哩 in China. Youku is identical to YouTube; iQiyi is a popular online video platform that is founded by Baidu, and Bilibili is a video sharing website based in Shanghai that was

established in 2009. All the commercials were either downloaded from the website if it was allowed or screen recorded by using QuickTime Player on a MacBook Pro. Then, they were all stored in an external hard drive. They were re-named with the following format: Brand name-Year of broadcast-Commercial's name-Celebrity's name (if there was a celebrity endorsement). This systemic way of labeling ensured the researcher could retrieve the data in an easy, clear, and quick manner.

The skin whitening commercials that were published or broadcast on TV in the last 11 years were collected. The year 2009 was chosen because, as suggested by Yu et al. (2015), China has become more open and globalized after the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, which helps identify the Western and Eastern values embedded in the media messages. Some video publishers indicated the broadcast date of the commercials. For instance, some commercials' production/broadcast date was displayed at the beginning of the commercials. For those without date indications, the broadcast date can be speculated by the time period of the celebrity endorsement of the brand because the commercials are normally shot and broadcast during the time when the celebrity endorses the brand. The celebrity endorsement time of the brand can be easily found online. Collecting TV commercials through the internet is appropriate for this study because of accessibility; it provides an easy way to retrieve and gather data from the past. By searching keywords such as "skin whitening commercials," "PROYA skin whitening commercials," "skin whitening TV commercials," "whitening and moisturizing commercials," and "whitening and sun protection commercials," a total of 58 skin-whitening related commercials were collected for this study, comprising eight MEIFUBAO/美肤宝, eight TJOY/丁家宜, six

Herborist/佰草集, nine OSM/欧诗漫, five PROYA/珀莱雅, two hanhoo/韩后, eight

CHANDO/自然堂, four INOHERB/相宜本草, and eight COGI/高姿 commercials.

Measures

Four coding categories were developed to assess the commercials: (1) Celebrity

Endorsement, (2) Advertising Appeals, (3) Western Cultural Infusion, and (4) Eastern

Cultural Infusion. *Celebrity* is defined as someone who is famous and has received much

fame and attention; as such they can be recognized easily by the general public. For

celebrity endorsement, coders focused their attention on four aspects: first, if there was

any celebrity endorsement in the commercial. If there was no celebrity in the

commercials, the non-celebrity spokesperson was coded. They can be easily

distinguished from the extras. If there was more than one celebrity, they were all coded in

the sequence of their appearance in the commercial. If one actor/actress was paired off

with the celebrity to create a holistic narrative, the celebrity was coded first and then the

actor/actress was coded. Second, the gender of the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson

was coded; third, the ethnicity of the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson; and finally,

the skin color rating of the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson. As adopted from the

study of Yu et al. (2015), the ethnic origin of the endorser was scaled as "0" (product

only), "1" (Chinese), "2" (Korean), "3" (White), "4" (mixed), and "5" (others). The skin

tone was rated on a scale of 1 to 6 (1=very dark, 6=very fair/white). The higher the

number is, the whiter the skin tone is. The skin tone scale was adopted from Xie and

Zhang's cross-cultural skin beauty study in 2013.

In the analysis of advertising appeals, appeals were coded into "0" (no; there is no such appeal), "1" (yes; there is such appeal), and "2" (can not identify). These appeals include rational appeal, emotional appeal, fear appeal, status appeal, appeal to economic capital, and appeal to social capital. Rational appeal appeals to logic and it centers on the product's features and performance. For instance, if the commercial had a focus on the product's ingredients or cutting-edge technology, it adopted rational appeals. Emotional appeal tries to stimulate people's emotions and feelings. As fear is a negative feeling that can be evoked by media messages, it belongs to emotional appeals. Bartikowski et al. (2019) noted that fear appeal could be defined as an advertising strategy used to evoke the feeling of fear in an attempt to attract audiences' attention, increase persuasion, and affect their beliefs, attitudes, purchasing intentions, and purchasing behaviors. Such feelings can serve as a motivation for customers to purchase the product because the advertised product can be offered as a solution for reducing anxiety and worry. For example, if the commercial suggested that a series of skin issues such as wrinkles, freckles, and dark skin tones would occur if the customer did not adopt the product, it employed fear appeal as a persuasive strategy. Status appeal is also a subcategory of emotional appeal and it is trying to appeal to people's social status and prestige (Ka, 2014). Social status is a symbolic capital that people can gain from adopting a certain product. A luxury skincare brand can be associated with high social status. Consumers who purchased the product endorsed by high-status persons can gain a high social status by identifying themselves with that person. Economic capital includes cash or any assets that can be directly converted to money. A high-paying job or a promotion can be

considered economic capital because they lead to a salary raise or more income (Hunter, 2011). It is possible that the consumer becomes prettier and more attractive after adopting the product, which provides them with more opportunities to gain a higher-paid occupation or a promotion. Lastly, social capital, according to Bourdieu (1994), is "the sum of active or potential resources that are connected through the possession of a network of permanent relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition, which are more or less institutionalized, or, in other words, with the inclusion into a group" (p. 90). Simply put, social capital is related to social networks, connections, relationships, family, and friends. Marital prospects can be seen as a form of social capital because, as discussed by Alejandro Portes (1998), social capital is the ability to secure benefits through "participation in networks and other social structures" (p. 6). For instance, the self-confidence and beauty gained by using the product may give the person an edge on securing a partner.

In the measure of Western cultural infusion, three main items were coded: language, technical superiority, and experts/specialists. A modified language index was developed based on Xie and Zhang (2013)'s research. Language of product name and brand name were coded into "0" (Chinese only), "1" (English only), "2" (Chinese and English), "3" (Others), "4" (Pinyin), and "5" (Chinese and Pinyin), respectively. Pinyin, as the Chinese pronunciation system, was included because some Chinese domestic brands employ pinyin as their brand name instead of English letters. The language spoken by the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson and the language of dubbing were coded as "0" (Chinese only), "1" (English only), "2" (Chinese and English), and "3" (Others).

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Technology and expertise were also coded as "0" (no), "1" (yes, Eastern), "2" (yes, Western), "3" (yes, a combination of both), and "4" (yes, can not identify). The goal was to examine if there was an emphasis on or adoption of Eastern or Western technology/expertise. Sometimes, the origin of the technology is unclear; thus, the choice of "can not identify" was provided. The author also asked coders to identify any Western-related elements in the commercials such as Western architectures, cities, restaurants, people, food, etc.

Lastly, in the exploration of Eastern cultural infusion, especially with a focus on Chinese/local appeals, coders were required to code 17 elements and each of them was coded as "0" (none), "1" (yes), and "2" (can not identify). These 17 items were associated with traditional Chinese culture and values. Some of them were exclusively related to Chinese culture, while others were associated with a particular culture of origin based on people's stereotypical beliefs. For example, as suggested by Zhou et al. (2015), things like silk and tea are typical products that are related to Chinese culture and tradition (p. 562). Chan and Cheng (2002) also pointed out that "some cultural values are more typical of eastern cultures whereas other cultural values are more representative of western cultures" (p. 388). From this perspective, the researcher of this study developed 17 items that are typically or exclusively linked to Chinese tradition, which were adapted from Chinese Traditional Culture suggested by baike.baidu.com ("中华传统文化," n.d.). These include drinks (tea, alcohol, etc.), animals including their related products (panda, silkworm, silk, etc.), gemstones and jade (pearl, crystal, etc.), Chinese historical figures (Yang Guifei/杨贵妃, Wu Zetian/武则天, etc.), Chinese traditional festivals (the Chinese

Spring Festival/春节, etc.), martial arts (Tai Chi/太极, Kung Fu/功夫, chess/象棋, etc.),

paintings & calligraphies (Chinese painting/国画, calligraphy/书法), opera & folk art

(Beijing Opera/京剧, etc.), music & dance (Chinese folk music/中国民族音乐, ancient

dance/民族舞, etc.), ancient poetry (the Four Books and the Five Classics/四书五经,

etc.), idiom/proverb (one white covers three uglies/一白遮三丑, etc.), typical Chinese

vocabularies (dynasty/朝代, palace/宫廷, etc.), traditional Chinese medicine/herbs and

related ideology (Ginseng/人参, ginger/姜, goji berry/枸杞, Ancient Chinese herbalist,

naturalist, pharmacologist, and physician (Li Shizhen/李时珍, Chinese Medical

University/中国医科大学, etc.), traditional Chinese philosophy (Taiji/太极, yin & yang/

阴阳, the five elements/五行, the Eight Trigrams/八卦, Qi/气, Dao/道, etc.), plants and

flowers (peach blossoms/桃花, lotus flowers/莲花), traditional Chinese vessels

(porcelain/瓷器, etc.), and Chinese traditional dress, clothing, or ornaments (Han

clothing/汉服, Qipao/旗袍, hairpin/簪子, etc.).

Coding Procedures

Coder Training and Pretest

Based on previous literature (Nelson & Paek, 2007; Xie & Zhang, 2013; Mbure &

Aubrey, 2017; Yu et al., 2015; Cheng, 1994; Hong et al., 1987), a six-page codebook

with detailed descriptions and examples were developed. Two bilingual coders, one male

and one female, were selected to code the commercials independently. Both of them were

proficient in both Chinese and English. They both gained a Ph.D. degree in the field of

communication and had lived in both China and the U.S. for more than four years. The

initial training was held online and the researcher first briefed the purpose of the study.

Then, the researcher provided the coders with the codebook and went over all the coding

categories, definitions, examples, and variables. During about 70 minutes of training, all

the raised questions were discussed and answered. As a practice, the coders were asked to

code a few samples independently. In order to achieve maximum reliability between

coders, after pilot coding, a second online meeting was held to discuss any problems they

encountered during the coding process. For any disagreements over coding, the

researcher and the coders discussed them and reached a consensus at the end. Then, each

coder coded the same ten commercials individually.

Intercoder Reliability Analysis

To test intercoder reliability, coders were offered a subset of commercials. The sub-

sample of 10 commercials was selected randomly from the whole sample pool. Ten out

of 58 commercials for checking intercoder reliability is sufficient, because according to

Mouter and Noordegraaf (2012), about 10% of the whole body of content should be

adequate. Also, it is unrealistic to test all samples and after a certain point, it will not add

much more information to the data (p. 2). There were nine brands involved and the

researcher ensured that there was at least one commercial chosen from each brand.

Intercoder reliability was determined by Cohen's kappa. McHugh (2012) suggested that

kappa values between .60 and .79 represent a moderate agreement between coders; values

between .80 and .90 indicate strong agreement beyond chance, and values above .90

represent an almost perfect agreement. In a similar vein, Zegers et al. (2010) suggested

that a k-value between .41 and .60 is classified as 'moderate' and between .61 and .80 is considered 'substantial'. For each variable, Cohen's kappa was calculated twice; one was between the researcher and coder number one (male coder) and the other was between the researcher and coder number two (female coder). The results showed that at least one of the kappa values for the same variable was above the moderate level of agreement, which is .60 (McHugh, 2012).

The first coding category required coders to code the sex, ethnicity, and endorsement of celebrity in the commercials. There was 100% agreement on these variables between the researcher and two coders. Table 1 provides information about the k-value between the researcher and coder 1 as well as the researcher and coder 2 regarding advertising appeals. All the p-values were less than 0.05. Even though for some variables such as 'Happy' (k=.35) and 'Socialization' (k=.21), the k-value between the researcher and coder 1 was lower than .06, the k-value between the researcher and coder 2 was above the moderate level of agreement (>.60). Table 2 offers k-value for variables related to Western cultural infusion (p<.05). Two variables in this category were eliminated; one was 'confidence,' and the other was 'attractiveness.' The first attempted to evaluate if there was an increased level of confidence after the adoption of the skin-whitening product and the second sought to assess if the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson became more attractive after the use of the product. Both concepts were found to be too abstract and difficult to be operationalized. The researcher and the coders failed to reach an agreement on operationalizing and coding these two variables even after the

discussion. Considering the inability of coming to a consensus about these two variables, they were ultimately deleted from the codebook.

Both Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that there was a higher consensus rate between the researcher and coder two, which may be a result of a similarity in gender. It is possible that as both Chinese females, they tend to share similar ideologies toward skin beauty, resulting in a similar coding of the commercials. Table 3 shows k-value for variables associated with Eastern cultural infusion and only the ones that are in disagreement were reported. The rest were all in perfect agreement. All results were statistically significant at a level of .05.

Table 1

Kappa Value for Variables Related to Advertisement Appeals

Variables	Coders	
	Researcher-Coder1	Researcher-Coder2
Rational Appeal	1	-
Fear Appeal	0.62	1
Emotional Appeal	1	0.80
White Beauty	0.62	-
Charm	1	1
Happy	0.35	0.74
Social Status	1	1
Promotion	1	1
Socialization	0.21	0.62
Natural Ingredients	1	-

Note. '_' means at least one of the coder's coding is a constant; thus, there is no k-value

Table 2

Kappa Value for Variables Related to Western Cultural Infusion

Coders	Dubs	Product Language	Product Name	Brand Name	Technology	Expert
Researcher-Coder1	1	0.41	1	1	0.57	1
Reseracher-Coder2	1	0.74	1	0.74	0.69	0.61

Table 3

Kappa Value for Variables Related to Eastern Cultural Infusion

Coders	Painting	Music	Chinese Medicine	Flowers & Plants
Researcher-Coder1	0.62	1	1	0.79
Reseracher-Coder2	_	0.62	0.78	0.58

Note. '_' means at least one of the coder's coding is a constant; thus, there is no k-value

Interviews

Interviews, one of the most widely used qualitative research methods, have been adopted by researchers to obtain information, especially to seek and understand informants' feelings and experiences (Berger, 2016, p. 191). Ellis (2016) defined an interview as a data collection method that is used to "discover the understanding, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of the interviewee regarding the issue under research" (p. 84). Thus, in this study, the interaction with informants helped capture the interviewees' complex lived experiences, and feelings and perceptions toward skin color. Different from survey results that have good generalizability, interview findings are not intended to generalize to an entire population. Rather, interviews aim to gain a deeper understanding of participants' unique experiences and opinions.

Types of Interviews

There are different types of interviews such as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and online interviews. Young et al. (2017) classified interviews into three categories: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview. In addition to these three forms, Berger (2016) added another form of interview: informal interview. This study employed online semi-structured video/audio interviews to explore participants' experiences of and attitude toward skin whitening.

A structured interview, also known as a patterned or standardized interview, is based on a set of fixed, organized, standardized, and pre-determined questions. The specific set of instructions provides guidance for interviewers during the interview process (Berger, 2016). In each separate interview, a uniform interview script is applied

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and the same questions are asked in the same order. The structured interview allows for comparison between different subgroups (Young et al., 2017). Because of its pre-set agenda, it allows for a great amount of consistency and efficiency; however, the structured interview suffers from several disadvantages. For instance, because of its structured nature, it lacks flexibility. Interviewees are less likely to shape the conversation, resulting in a less intriguing and revealing discussion. Furthermore, if the questions are not carefully phrased, it runs a higher risk of leading the interviewee in a particular direction, which may affect the responses.

An unstructured interview does not rely on a pre-determined interview guide or prearranged interview questions, but the interviewer is clear about the research goal that can guide the overall interview (Ritchie et al., 2014). Compared to the structured interview, the unstructured interview is more informal, flexible, and free-flowing. The conversation is guided by the responses from the interviewees, leading to a more everyday conversation-like communication. By probing or asking more open-ended questions, interviewers are able to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under study. Because interviewers have little control over the interviewee's responses, the flow of conversation is more fluid and free. As suggested by Ritchie et al. (2014), the topic is covered in a sequence "most suited to the interviewee" (p. 141), providing the interviewees with the freedom to express their opinions fully. Thus, the attention of the conversation is focused more toward the interviewee, contributing to a more empowered interview subject (Young et al., 2017). The unstructured interview has its drawbacks, too. First, because of the flexibility and fluidity of the conversation, it is difficult for the

interviewers to control the direction of the conversation, making it hard to cover all the topics and issues in a limited period of time. It is also easy to get diverted from the focus of the study and turn attention to irrelevant and unimportant topics. As stated by Berger (2016), researchers in unstructured interviews "exercise relatively little control over the responses of the informants" (p. 193). Lastly, the unstructured interview is more time-consuming in comparison to the structured interview.

There are advantages and disadvantages of both structured and unstructured interviews; semi-structured interviews provide a middle ground. It is a combination of both interview types. A semi-structured interview does rely on a pre-determined interview guide and premeditated interview questions, allowing interviewers to ask standardized questions to assure the reliability of the data. However the interviewer tries to "maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews" (Berger, 2016, p. 193). In addition, the semi-structured interview allows interviewers to have more room to expand on the topic and ask questions in more depth. Such flexibility enables researchers to explore more complex and sensitive issues (Young et al., 2017). Therefore, this study adopted the semi-structured approach to take advantage of both structured and unstructured interviews.

Online video/audio interviews were chosen over other forms of interviews for the reason that, first, online interviews tend to reach a wider population. There is no restriction on geography as long as interviewees have access to the Internet. Second, it is more cost-effective, efficient, and productive because there is no need to travel a long distance and the interview can be scheduled at any time at the interviewee's convenience.

Interviewees also can participate in the interview at any location where they feel most comfortable, such as their own home, office, etc. Third, online video interviews offer just as many positive affordances as face-to-face interviews. Interviewers are able to capture interviewees' physical cues of body language or facial expression. Similar to face-to-face interviews, online video interviews also require interviewers to build a good rapport with the interviewees to ensure the openness and transparency of the conversation. Finally, online video interviews are the most suitable method for conducting interviews during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic while this study was undertaken. Because of this infectious disease, people were experiencing wide-scale lockdowns such as social distancing, bans on large gatherings, business closures, and stay-at-home orders. Since close-up person-to-person interactions were prohibited, online interviews were one of the best ways to conduct research.

Even though an online video interview has several advantages, it is undeniable that it has some disadvantages. First, it requires certain technologies and configurations to ensure the success of the communication online. Some participants may not have a high-speed or stable internet connection to ensure a smooth agile online conversation. Therefore, online audio interviews were adopted as an alternative. The time lag is another common issue, which results in a delay in receiving or providing a response. Second, the online interview may not show as many physical cues as face-to-face interviews because only the part that is shown in the camera is visible to the interviewer. Finally, there is a 12-hour/13-hour time difference between China and the U.S., which means that online interviews only can occur either in the morning or at night when both the researcher and

the participants are awake. It is impossible to conduct the interviews during the day, which may have an effect on the results.

Interview Questions

Interview questions can be open-ended or closed-ended. Open-ended questions focus on the "what, why, and how of the experiences people have had, as well as on their understandings, perceptions, feelings, beliefs, and points of view" (Ellis, 2016, p. 84). Because they do not suggest any answers, interviewees are at ease and have more space to explore the question and express their viewpoints. As discussed by Ellis (2016), this way of questioning is helpful in examining issues that are under little study and is great for discovering new meanings and understandings (p. 84). It may also generate unanticipated findings. Because of the open nature of open-ended questions, richer and more detailed data can be generated (Allen, 2017). There are also several disadvantages of open-ended questions. For instance, it is more time-consuming and interviewers may lose control over the conversation. It is also possible to produce more irrelevant and useless information, making it harder to analyze, classify, and compare the data.

The alternative to open-ended questions is close-ended questions. Compared to open-ended questions, close-ended questions make it easier for interviewers to gather relevant data. Closed questions have a narrower focus that permits people to answer the question with a single word such as 'yes' or 'no', or allow them to pick an answer from limited multiple-choice options (Farrell, 2016). Because interviewers have more control of the flow of the conversation, topics and issues can be covered fully and quickly. It is a more efficient method than open-ended questioning. There are also drawbacks to using

closed questions. First, this format does not allow interviewees to freely express their

opinions because it limits the response and the choices available to the interviewee. Thus,

the interviewer's tight control over the conversation leaves less room for interviewees to

expand, explore, and reflect. Interviewees have less opportunity to ask questions and

clarify responses; as a result, misunderstanding and misinterpretation may occur.

Furthermore, close-ended questions can be leading or suggestive, resulting in more bias.

If the responses or discussion opportunities offered within the format of a closed question

are not comprehensive or mutually exclusive, it fails to represent the interviewee's full

point of view. Such constraints may not lead to accurate data (Rehman, 2015).

The interview questions in this study were a combination of both open-ended and

closed questions because different types of questions yield different answers. Also, based

on the goals of the study, some questions are best asked in an open format while others

are best asked in a closed format. Open-ended questions are great for gaining

participant's views on their perceptions of skin whitening commercials and experiences

with using fairness products. Adopted from the six stages of conducting an interview

suggested by Ritchie et al. (2014), interviews can be roughly divided into three parts:

beginning the interview, during the interview, and ending the interview. In each stage,

different and relevant questions were asked. In this study, the interview started with

greetings, small talk, and the introduction of the researcher. The goal was to establish a

positive and friendly tone, build an initial and good rapport, and create a trust relationship

between the researcher and the interviewees. Then, the researcher introduced the research

by talking about the aims and objectives of the study, the duration, and the main coverage

of the interview. All informants were consented prior to the interviews using the standard Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedure. The researcher also gained permission to audio/video-record the interviews. Before moving into key questions, interviewees were first asked about their demographic background information such as their names, occupation, age, nationality, education level, and the like.

In the second stage, questions with more breadth and depth were introduced into the conversation, which was broken down into four topical areas: 'personal experiences', 'motivations', 'media effects', and 'beauty standard'. The first one focused on the interviewees' individual experiences of using skin whitening products. Questions like 'Have you used skin whitening products in your lifetime?' and "How long have you used them?" were asked. The second one aimed to make sense of their motivations. The following questions were presented: "What are the main reasons for using them?" and "Who or what prompted you to start using these products, such as media/TV/commercials/culture/celebrities/family/friends/peers/others/self?" The third topical area examined the effect of media on people's adoption of skin whitening products. Questions such as "Are you aware of skin whitening products commercials?" and "What effects do these commercials have on your own practice of skin whitening?" were posed. Finally, informants' beauty standard was discovered by asking questions like "What do you think is the beauty standard in current society?" All the questions were posed in Mandarin Chinese because both interviewees and the researcher are native Chinese speakers. Speaking in the mother tongue ensures natural and free-flowing communication.

The interviews were ended by asking informants to express their final thoughts or comments. The researcher thanked them for their participation by addressing the value of their contribution to the study. The researcher also provided them with contact information, allowing them to contact the researcher for any questions related to the interviews.

Data Gathering

Sampling and Participants

For this portion of the study, snowball sampling was employed as a technique to recruit interviewees. This sampling method permits researchers to recruit additional participants by asking current participants to pass along the name and contact information of their friends, family members, co-workers, or any other acquaintances who may be interested in participating in the study (Babbie, 2013). As a non-probability sampling method, it offers several advantages. This sampling method is great to use when informants are difficult to locate or they are rare, unknown, or hidden, which makes it possible to reach vulnerable and disempowered groups (Babbie, 2013, p. 191). Second, it is easier and more efficient to recruit additional informants by asking current participants for nomination. It also suffers from many disadvantages. For instance, the sample is convenient/not randomly selected, which may result a homogeneous sample (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Furthermore, the chain referral process can be problematic because the current participants may be hesitant to make a reference, or the people who get referred are not willing to participate but feel pressured to do so. However, this sampling method is suitable for this study because it allows the researcher to reach the desired population

in a simple, fast, and economical way. Also, it helps the researcher to reach a wide range

of potential participants without traveling abroad. In specific circumstances like the

COVID-19 pandemic, this technique is practical and proper.

Participants were selected only if they were skin whitening product users or they

were knowledgeable about the subject under study. They must show an interest in the

study and voluntarily participate in the interview. Interviewees were all Chinese and a

majority of them were currently living in Mainland China. The initial informants were

selected through personal contacts; then, they were encouraged to give one or more

referrals to help identify future informants.

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview can be tested on a subset of samples or colleagues. As suggested

by Young et al. (2017), the pilot interview is essential for checking the "length, language

suitability and potential sources of bias like leading questions" after generating an initial

set of interview questions (p. 13). Other goals of a pilot interview are to see if there are

enough relevant data being generated in order to answer research questions and the

research investigates what it is intended to. In other words, it has the ability to check the

validity of the research. Furthermore, as pointed out by Majid et al. (2017), pilot

interviews allow researchers to gain experience, hone their interview skills, and build

early rapport with interviewees before embarking on the full-scale interview.

In this study, pilot interviews were carried out in a subgroup of sampled

participants. Two informants took part in the pilot interview. The goal was to test the

interview techniques, wording, and appropriateness of the questions. This provided the

researcher with early suggestions on revising interview questions and refining strategies. The interview guide was refined and improved after the pilot interviews. Some questions were arranged in a different order and others were rephrased or clarified. For instance, the notion of skin whitening products was elaborated in more detail because some interviewees posed a question about if sunscreen can be considered a skin whitening product because one of the main goals for Chinese to use sunscreen is to avoid skin darkening. Thus, skin whitening products in this study would be defined more broadly, to not only include skin whitening creams or serum, but also include products that have whitening effects or are commonly used by users for a lightening purpose. Some probing questions that resulted from the pilot interviews were also added to the interview questions to deepen the conversation with the informants.

Full-scale Interview

Full-scale interviews were conducted after the pilot interviews. The initial participants were reached via WeChat/微信- a mobile phone based social media networking and messaging application in China. It was first introduced to Chinese users in 2011 by the Chinese social media company Tencent/腾讯. It is one of the most popular mobile chat applications in China. WeChat has the affordances to build communities, send text messages, share posts, etc. Users also can make video or voice calls. This application was chosen because it is user-friendly and prevalent among Chinese citizens.

Fifteen individuals, including one male and fourteen females, with a mean age of 29 years, participated in the online video/audio interview. The majority of the participants were between 20 to 39 years old. Only one was 19 years old and another was 48 years

old. Table 4 shows the demographic information of the study participants. All participants were Chinese citizens with three of them currently living in foreign countries and the rest in Mainland China. One was in the process of pursuing a Bachelor's degree and the rest all graduated from college. Almost half of the participants had gained a Master's degree or higher. Two-thirds of the participants had a foreign educational background. For instance, one of them had studied in France for one year, and another studied both in the U.S. and Australia. One-third of the participants only attended schools in China and never studied abroad. This sample is suitable for this study because it represented a group of thoughtful and articulate people who could express themselves clearly and thoroughly. They were also well-educated and well-informed about the topic under study. The majority of participants were either millennials or Generation Z. These groups of people are digital natives who have been raised in the digital age. They tend to be more knowledgeable about digital technology and social media. Thus, they could provide insights into the influence of media on their perception of beauty. As both media users and cosmetic product consumers, they made up a valuable sample for this study. Although participants' identifiable information was collected during interviews, participants were identified by numbers rather than actual names as a way to protect the confidentiality of their information.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant#	Age	Gender (F/M)	Highest Degree	Profession	Hometown (Province)	Foreign Educational Background (Y/N)
1	30	F	Master's	Related to Finance	Shanxi	Y
2	29	F	Master's	Software Engineer	Jiangsu	Y
3	34	F	Postdoc	Postdoc	Shandong	Y
4	22	F	Bachelor's	Student	Jilin	Y
5	31	F	Bachelor's	College Worker	Shandong	N
6	21	F	Bachelor's	Student	Jilin	Y
7	27	F	Bachelor's	Student	Shanxi	N
8	29	F	Bachelor's	Data Operations Manager	Shanxi	N
9	25	F	Bachelor's	Civil Servant	Hunan	Y
10	27	F	Bachelor's	Related to Internet Education	Anhui	Y
11	24	F	Master's	Student	Xi'an	Y
12	19	M	Sophomore	Student	Sichuan	N
13	48	F	Master's	Professor	Hunan	Y
14	39	F	Master's	Professor	Shanxi	N
15	28	F	Master's	English Teacher	Sichuan	Y

Data Analysis

All the interviews were video/audio recorded with the interviewee's permission, resulting in approximately eight hours of recordings. During the interview, the interviewer also took handwritten notes. The interviews stopped when data saturation was reached. The interviews ranged in duration from 21:37 minutes to 45:11 minutes and the average interview time was 32:33 minutes. After the interviews, interviews were transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible and all the transcriptions were

completed on August 13, 2020. Because the transcription is an iterative process, the researcher listened to the same recording many times to ensure every single word was transcribed, including words like "uhs" to fully reflect the recording verbatim. Nonverbal communication was identified when interviewees sign or laugh during the conversation. If a word was inaudible, symbols like "x" were used and if there was a pause, ellipses-" . . . " were adopted. The transcribed interviews were typed with double space in Chinese and saved to a Word document on a Mac computer. A total of 50 pages of transcription were generated. Because this dissertation was written in English, the interview quotes and paraphrased statements presented in the subsequent chapters were the author's own translations. The author attempted to be as literal as possible during the translation process in order to retain the original meanings of the discourse.

Thematic Analysis

After the transcription of all interviews, a thematic analysis was performed to identify underlying themes, ideas, and patterns (Berger, 2016). The researcher chose to manually code the data due to the familiarity of the overall analytical process. The analysis was performed step-by-step in line with the principles suggested by Braun and Clarke in 2006. The steps allow researchers to turn unstructured data into structured data to uncover richer insights.

The first stage requires researchers to familiarize themselves with the dataset. In order to gain an overview of the data coverage, the researcher in this study revisited the notes taken during the interview, listened to the audio recordings repeatedly, and transcribed the interviews. Listening to the audio recordings many times not only ensures

the accuracy of the transcription, but also helps the researcher to become familiar with the data. In the second stage, the generation of initial codes enables researchers to organize the data in a meaningful manner. According to Mortensen (2020), a code is "a brief description of what is being said in the interview," and it is "a description, not an interpretation." The researcher printed out all the transcripts and used highlighters to color-code the text while taking notes. The corresponding initial codes - a description of the text - were generated and written down on the same page. The third phase is searching for potential and interesting themes. Mortensen (2020) noted that themes are different from codes in a way that they are "broader and involve active interpretation of the codes and the data." Normally, initial codes can be collated and combined into broader themes by constantly moving codes back and forward to form different themes and subthemes. After the identification of initial themes and subthemes, it is important to revisit and refine them. Contradictions and overlaps between themes should be avoided to ensure final themes that are clear, coherent, and distinctive. Mortensen (2020) suggested that researchers could stop this process when there was no further new and significant information adding to the analysis. Finally, each theme identified in the previous phase was defined and named. Rauf et al. (2019) recommended that themes should also be named in the manner in which they are relevant to the research questions (p. 554) and while describing the theme, researchers should "identify which story the theme tells and how this story relates to other themes as well as to overall research question" (Mortensen, 2020). Consequently, merging themes along with sub-themes resulting from the coding was created in a way to connect the research questions and interpret the results.

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In the interest of firmly establishing rigorousness and credibility of this study, the researcher has provided in this chapter a detailed description and explanations of the method. As noted by Roberts et al. (2019), the trustworthiness in thematic analysis of qualitative research can be best achieved by "a detailed and reflexive account of procedures and methods" (p. 2). The researcher was also being reflexive upon the research process. Because of the tense international relationship between the U.S. and China during the time when this study was conducted and people's fear of the Chinese government's tight control over conversations on social media, some participants expressed their concerns about participating in interviews and they did not want to cover any sensitive topics. In addition, because the researcher currently lives in the U.S. and conducted research from the U.S., this might not only have frightened some potential participants, but also made current participants feel more constrained to disclose their experience. In order to help ease some of the informants' concerns, the researcher claimed at the beginning of each interview that she would not cover any sensitive topics and that no personally identifiable information will be released in the final report. Finally, to make the results more credible and robust, direct and precise quotes from informants were incorporated in the findings and discussions.

Chapter Summary

By systematically analyzing the skin whitening commercials, especially focusing on cultural values and advertising appeals, the researcher could gain insights into how media exercise power on audiences' preference of skin color and purchasing behaviors. After identifying nine major domestic skincare brands, television commercials for the last

11 years were collected from various online channels, such as YouTube and Baidu. Television commercials were selected instead of social media advertisements because television commercials are easier to retrieve and may not as ephemeral as social media advertisements. After collecting all the television commercials, they were primarily coded into four categories based on the cultural values and advertising appeals. The researcher and two more coders participated in the coding process. To enhance the intercoder reliability, coders were trained and open discussions were held.

Online video/audio interviews conducted in this study yield valuable information in understanding informants' experiences of skin whitening as well as cultural and media's influence on their perception of beauty and purchase intentions. Interview questions incorporated in this study contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions in order to motivate thinking and facilitate conversations. Snowball sampling was adopted to recruit additional participants, resulting in a total of 15 informants. Pilot interviews were conducted before carrying out full-scale interviews to assess and improve the research method. Finally, thematic analysis was used in analyzing the interviews to identify essential themes and patterns.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Both content analysis and interviews were employed to investigate how media affect attitudes toward physical attractiveness, skin whitening behavior, and purchase intentions among Chinese citizens. This chapter first looks into the findings on content analysis. The results shed light on cultural appeals and advertising appeals manifested in examined commercials. Advertisers' preference for a specific persuasive strategy serves as a driving force to impact consumers' attitudes toward skin color and purchase intentions. The major findings are listed as follows: (1) there were more Chinese cultural elements, such as Chinese language, technologies, traditional medicine, and philosophy incorporated in these commercials; (2) compared to appeals such as emotional and fear appeals, rational appeals were adopted more frequently; and (3) celebrity spokespersons played a significant role in constructing media messages.

A total number of 15 informants participated in the online video/audio interviews with the aim to understand their experience and views toward skin whitening and the impact of media on their purchase intentions and skin whitening behavior. After the completion of all interviews, a thematic analysis was performed to identify possible themes and subthemes. The first theme established the background for interviews by uncovering informants' experience in using skin whitening products. The second theme provided a comprehensive understanding of people's perceptions of and attitudes toward skin color. The cultural preference of light skin to dark skin results from multiple factors, such as sociocultural context and the symbolic meanings of fair skin. The last theme

offered beneficial insights into how media, such as social media, exert an influence on informants' skin whitening behavior.

Findings on Content Analysis

Results from content analysis of 58 skin whitening commercials from nine domestic brands explain (a) what kind of cultural appeals were incorporated in the examined commercials, (b) whether there are more Eastern cultural infusion or Western cultural infusion, (c) what are different types of advertising appeals exist in the commercials, and (d) what is the most prominent appeal. The following paragraphs delve into these aspects in more detail.

Chinese Cultures are more Prominent than Western Cultures in Commercials

The findings suggest that skin whitening commercials for domestic brands are prone to use both Western and Chinese/local cultures to engage audiences, but the local ones predominated in analyzed commercials. This finding can be seen through three aspects: language usage, technology and expertise, and cultural infusion.

In terms of language usage, while most product packaging used Chinese, English was shown on all product packaging, and some packages only used English. All commercials' spoken language was in Mandarin Chinese although two had a combination of Chinese and English. Also, the language used in product name and brand name was also examined, suggesting that 94.8% of the product name had a mix of Chinese and English. Only one product name had Chinese only and two with English only. In regards to the language of brand name, almost 95% of the products incorporated either Chinese characters or Pinyin, and around 66% had a mix of English and Chinese language. This

suggests that domestic skincare brands are more inclined to adopt the native language in

their brand names. Not all commercials had an emphasis on advanced technology.

Among 26 commercials that addressed superior technology, 62% mentioned the adoption

of Eastern technology. Eastern experts or specialists were mentioned in five commercials,

compared to two commercials incorporating Western experts. In addition to cultural

elements, such as languages, nine commercials adopted other Western elements such as

Caucasian extras, English store names, Western food and tableware, and English letters

on the endorsers' clothes. The following tables illustrate these results.

Table 5

Number of Product Incorporates a Certain Language in Product Names and Brand Names

	Language				
	Chinese Only	English Only	Chinese & English	Pinyin Only	Chinese & Pinyin
Product Names	1	2	55	0	0
Brand Names	1	3	38	11	5

Table 6

Number of Commercials That Appeals to Advanced Technology or/and Expertise

	Appeals				
	None	Eastern	Western	Eastern & Western	Can Not Identify
Technological Superiority	32	16	1	0	9
Expertise	51	5	2	0	0

Cultural elements, especially Eastern ones, appeared prominently in the commercials. The most frequently adopted elements were traditional Chinese medicine/herbs and related concepts, such as Ginseng and Chinese Medical University and traditional Chinese philosophy, such as yin & yang, Qi, and Dao. Eighteen commercials integrated traditional Chinese Medicine; ten commercials incorporated traditional Chinese philosophy, and six commercials included both. The second most frequently appearing cultural elements were traditional plants and flowers, such as peach blossoms and lotus flowers, followed by ancient Chinese jades and gems, such as pearl, and conventional Chinese dresses or ornaments, such as Qipao and traditional hairpin. The following table demonstrates the number of commercials that incorporate certain Eastern cultural elements.

Table 7

Number of Commercials Appealing to Eastern Culture

Eastern Appeals	If Include (Y/N)	
	Y	N
Drinks	2	56
Animals	1	57
Gemstones	8	50
Historical Figures	0	0
Traditional Festivals	0	0
Martial Arts	3	55
Paintings & Calligraphies	4	54
Opera & Folk Art	4	54
Music & Dance	4	54
Ancient Poetry	0	0
Idiom/Proverb	0	0
Typical Chinese Vocabularies	2	56
Traditional Chinese Medicine	18	40
Traditional Chinese Philosophy	10	48
Plants and Flowers	9	49
Traditional Chinese Vessels	4	54
Traditional Dresses/Clothing/ Ornaments	6	52

Advertising Appeals in Skin Whitening Commercials

Commercials craft their messages strategically to affect customers' attitudes and emotions toward specific products. Research has shown that certain advertising appeals are more effective than others with an influence on product types (Bartikowski et al., 2019). Accordingly, skin whitening commercials may favor one appeal over the other. The content analysis indicated that more than 90% of the commercials employed rational appeal and only 22% employed emotional appeals. Eight commercials adopted both rational and emotional appeals. Hypothesis 2 posits that emotional appeals are used more frequently than rational appeals in skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese

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brands. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test suggested that rational appeals are actually used more widely than emotional appeals in skin whitening commercials examined in this study, $X^2(1, N=66)=24.24$, p<.05. Fear appeals appeared in 11 commercials; interestingly, these commercials also employed rational appeals. Hypothesis 3 suggested that fear appeals appear more frequently than non-fear appeals in skin whitening commercials. The results failed to support the hypothesis, indicating that there are more non-fear appeals than fear appeals in these commercials, $X^2(1, N=58)=22.30$, p<.05. Additionally, these commercials were examined to learn if they appealed to people's social status, economic status, or social capital. None of the commercials appealed to social status or economic status. However, social capital, such as marital prospects and social networks, was discovered in six commercials. As in skin whitening commercials, it is unsurprising that almost 97% of the commercials associated fair skin with beauty, and 76% linked skin color to charisma and physical attractiveness. Table 8 below shows the number of commercials that had incorporated each particular appeal or message.

Table 8

*Number of* Commercials *Employs Appeals and Messages*

Appeals/Messages	If Include (Y/N)	
	Y	N
Rational Appeal	53	5
Fear Appeal	11	47
Emotional Appeal	13	45
White Beauty	56	2
Charm	44	14
Happiness	29	29
Social Status	0	0
Promotion	0	0
Socialization	6	52
Natural Ingredients	6	52

Another important persuasive strategy examined in this study was endorsement appeal. In the realm of celebrity endorsement, several aspects were examined, including the presence of the celebrity, the gender, ethnicity, and skin tone of the endorser/ non-celebrity spokesperson. Based on the results, 55 out of 58 commercials involved celebrity endorsement, and the remainder incorporated a non-celebrity spokesperson. A majority of the commercials only had one celebrity as the endorser, but five had more than one celebrity as the spokesperson. There were more female endorsers and non-celebrity spokespersons (79%) than male ones (60%). This unbalance can be explained by Boyd and Shank's (2004) findings that the gender matching between celebrities and consumers has a significant effect on trustworthiness. As a result, female consumers may favor female endorsers over male endorsers. With regards to ethnicity, all endorsers were Chinese, except for one endorser who was from Korea. Their skin tone was rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being very dark and 6 being very fair. The coding results showed

that almost 80% of the endorsers'/ non-celebrity spokesperson's skin tone were rated as either fair (5) or very fair (6), and the rest were rated as either (3) or (4). None of their skin colors was in the range of dark to very dark (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Number of Models in Relationship to their Skin Tone Ratings
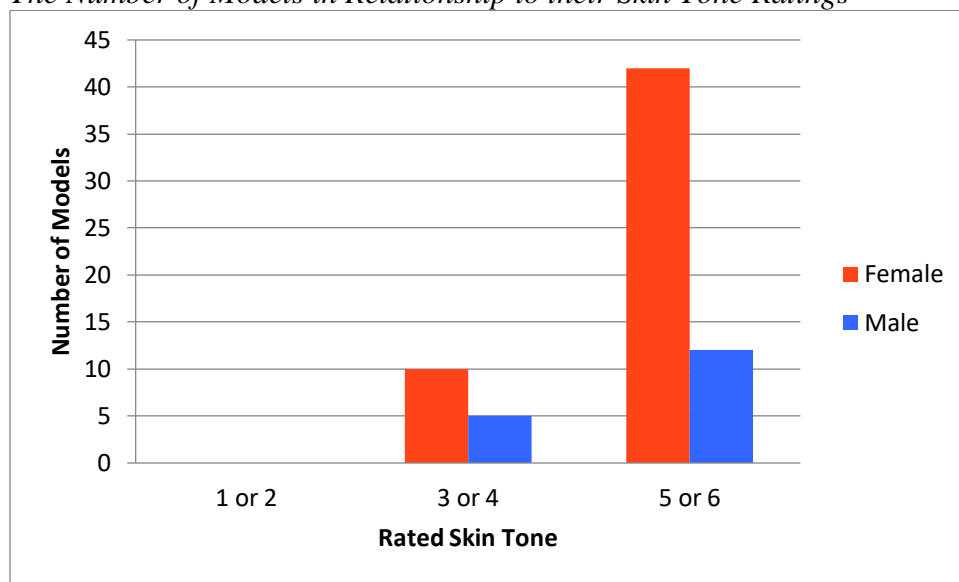
A *chi-square* test of independence was performed to determine whether the models' gender in the commercial was related to a difference in skin tone ratings. Because one cell had an expected frequency of less than five, Fisher's exact test was applied. The results showed no statistically significant relationship between sex and skin tone, $X^2(1, N=69)=.78$, p=.50. Thus, male and female skin tones were not significantly different in the evaluated commercials. The *chi-square* results supported the first hypothesis that endorsement appeals are used more frequently than non-endorsement

appeals in skin whitening commercials for indigenous Chinese brands (alpha=.05, X^2(1, N=58)=44.86, p<.05). Therefore, there were more endorsement appeals in the analyzed commercials.

Findings on Interviews

A thematic analysis of interviews resulted in three main themes with corresponding subthemes, including the status quo of skin whitening, informants' views on skin color, and media's role in influencing people's purchase intentions. The first section regarding the current status of skin whitening provides contextual information for the interviews and helps establish the foundation for future discussion. It mainly provides answers to 'what' and 'when' questions concerning informants' skin whitening experience. These generally addressed the types of skin whitening products they have used and the time they first started to use them. The answers would provide an overall picture of user behaviors related to applying skin whitening products. The second theme unpacks participants' attitudes and views toward skin color. Findings suggested that a light skin tone has remained a constant and unchanging preference among Chinese. Two subthemes were developed, including why dark skin is not desirable and why light skin is more desirable. The long-standing preference for fair skin tone is not only a result of personal taste, but is an influence of Chinese culture associating light skin with beauty and physical attractiveness. Fair skin also provides people with clear and significant advantages, benefits, and privileges in areas such as the labor and marriage markets. The third theme focused on the role media plays in people's purchase intentions. Two subthemes were recognized, including the role of celebrity and the role of social media.

One common theme shared by informants was media skepticism, suggesting that, even though informants were influenced by media messages through celebrity endorsement and advertising, they were skeptical about the trustworthiness of the commercials and the effectiveness of the product.

The Status Quo of Skin Whitening

The researcher first delved into participants' experiences of skin whitening. Even though informants were mostly unique in their product usage, there were some shared commonalities. For instance, we can narrow down the variety of products into two categories: (a) topical whitening products, and (b) oral whitening products. Topical whitening products are those can be applied directly to body surfaces. For skin whitening products that can be applied on face, facial masks were the most popular ones among participants. This was followed by skin whitening creams, lotions, and facial cleansers. Apart from topical whitening products, whitening products taken orally were also mentioned frequently by participants, such as whitening tablets (美白丸), vitamins C, E, and F, and enzymes. In addition, dietary therapy also emerged as a popular method used to achieve a fair skin tone. This therapy is guided by Chinese medicine theory. People try to use different nutrients from food to regulate body functions in order to achieve certain health goals ("食疗美容," n.d.).

In addition to those methods, preventive procedures also serve as an important component of beauty regimens. A majority of the participants pointed out the use of sunscreen because sun exposure is responsible for most skin problems such as aging, wrinkles, fine lines, and dark complexion (Beta, 2018). About half of the informants

reported using UV-blocking umbrellas, sun hats, and sunglasses when outdoors. Other effective ways also include wearing long sleeves and pants, facial masks, and UV-blocking clothing. A few informants recommended that the best way to stay fair is to diminish sun exposure by limiting outdoor activities. For instance, one informant shared that,

> After I grew up, I strongly believed that one white covers hundreds of uglies, so I started to use UV-blocking umbrellas . . . if the sunlight is very bright or if I need to walk outside for an extended period of time, I would use a UV-blocking umbrella. (Informant #15, personal communication, August 9, 2020)

Informants' engagement in skin whitening evolves over time. Two primary timelines were uncovered in this study: one was during the pubescent age around 15-18 years old, and the other was around 24-25 years old. Along with physical growth during the pubescent age, people also begin to experience psychological maturity. At this stage, people may become more socially and visually aware of their appearance and some females may try to see themselves through a male gaze ("青春期的特点," n.d.). Because people at this age start to pay more attention to their appearance, skin whitening products may provide people with a way to achieve the desired skin tone. The following interview quote describes the first time participants realized the desirability of skin whitening:

> When I was in the first or the second year of high school, I paid close attention to my appearance because of the raised levels of self-esteem. Also, because of the military training (军训), I got tanned quickly and became a dark monkey [Chinese expression of describing a dark-skinned person]. After returning home, my mom

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could not recognize me at all, which resulted in my low self-esteem. (Informant #12, Personal communication, July 31, 2020)

As discovered in the interviews, people in their early adulthood also showed more interest in their appearance. At this stage, people may experience transitions from student life to professional life, from single life to married life, and from dependent life to independent life ("Introduction to Early Adulthood," n.d.). It is a common Chinese belief that people should take more care of their skin after 25. With an increase in age, the rate of collagen synthesis slows down, which causes many skin problems such as slack skins, wrinkles, and dark spots (Beta, 2018). According to Ricard-Blum (2011), "Collagens are the most abundant proteins in mammals (~ 30% of total protein mass)," and they account for tight, wrinkleless, and elastic skins (p. 1). Several participants stated that they started to use whitening products around 25 years of age. For example, participant #10 stated that, "I discovered that I have very tanned skin maybe when I was 24-years-old. I felt the need to whiten my skin tone" (Personal communication, July 27, 2020). Informant #8 noted that, "I started to use one skin whitening product about four years ago when I was 25 years old" (Personal communication, July 25, 2020).

Informants' Views on Skin Color

The discussion of informants' views toward skin color revealed that fair skin has continued to be the beauty standard that dominates current aesthetic thinking. For instance, informant #6 said, "Most girls still pursue a pale skin tone. They are reluctant to become tanned even if they equate tanned skin to a healthy lifestyle. They still believe that fair skin is good but not tanned skin" (Personal communication, July 23, 2020). A

few informants mentioned the internet celebrity face (网红脸) to further demonstrate the beauty ideal pursued by contemporary people. As a slang expression, internet celebrity face depicts a certain kind of facial appearance that is common among internet celebrities. Many of these celebrities have a standardized facial appearance because they underwent plastic surgeries to achieve a V-shape face with big eyes, double eyelids, and a high nose.

It must be noted that, even though there is a societal preference that skews toward fair skin, informants believed that tanned skin has become more and more popular among people, especially celebrities, because recent years have witnessed a rise in celebrities with tanned skin. Among the most frequently mentioned celebrities known for their tanned skin are singers and actors/actresses, including Summer (吉克隽逸), Louis Koo (古天乐), and Wangju (王菊). The association of tanned skin with fitness, health, and fashion may serves as a motive for pursuing darker skin. As pointed out by participant #3, "If your skin is too fair, you look unhealthy. Nowadays, fair skin is linked to beauty and dark skin is linked to fitness . . . For those who want to have toned muscles, getting tanned is a better choice" (Personal communication, July 21, 2020).

Why not Engage in Skin Tanning. The first reason why people would not prefer to engage in tanning was the association of dark-colored skin with ugliness. Some informants perceived others with dark skin as aesthetically unappealing, while others considered themselves ugly if they had dark skin. One participant, in particular, expressed her intense dislike for dark skin, "Summer is known for her dark skin, but I do

not think she is pretty because I strongly believe that fair skin is beautiful. I cannot stand

dark skin. I feel like even yellowish skin tone is better than dark skin" (Informant #8,

personal communication, July 25, 2020). Another informant stated,

> After military training in college, I found myself getting too tanned. I was really
>
> ugly. With the emergence of the internet, more and more internet celebrities
>
> started to arise. I noticed that pale skin looks better as you look good in
>
> everything. (Informant #15, personal communication, August 9, 2020)

The second reason referred to the link between dark skin and certain negative

traits of character. For instance, one participant stated that light skin gives an impression

of kindness, thus making people feel more comfortable. More importantly, she believed

that light skin is related to an outgoing personality and being sociable, while a dark skin

tone is linked to a melancholic personality (Participant #7, personal communication, July

24, 2020). In addition to negative characteristics associated with dark skin, it is also

connected to strength and wildness, which is not in conformity to societal beauty

standards in China. One participant suggested that tanning is not in line with Asian

aesthetics because it is related to wildness and power, which is in stark contrast to most

Chinese preferred characteristics (Participant #10, personal communication, July 27,

2020).

Why Engage in Skin Whitening. Participants were asked to choose between

being fair or dark as a way to show their actual preferences for skin color. Interestingly,

more than half of the participants chose fair skin. Multiple reasons could explain this

personal choice, including the advantages of being fair, cultural influences, and symbolic values of fair skin.

Advantages of Being Fair. The results suggested that the advantages of being fair are both professional and personal. For example, some participants stated that a person with fair skin might make a good impression on others, and it is also easier for them to stand out from the crowd and to be noticed (Participant #11, personal communication, July 28, 2020). This could provide people with a significant advantage in the labor market. For instance, people with an outstanding appearance can catch the interviewer's attention faster in a job interview. One informant shared her own experience:

> If you are beautiful, you will have an advantage in the workplace. For instance, when you attend a job interview with a group of people, if you are pretty, you will be the most prominent one and catch most of the interviewer's attention . . . I have personally experienced this. My written scores for the civil service exam (公务员考试) were not very high . . . but my interview score was the highest . . . My mentor told me that your score would not be low as long as you walk in the interview room confidently and self-assured. (Participant #9, personal communication, July 26, 2020)

However, the importance of appearance varies in different workplace environments. Some jobs require a good-looking appearance, while others pay less attention to appearance. One informant who was majoring in broadcasting and hosting, stated that if the person's appearance does not conform to the traditional beauty standard,

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it is hard for that person to get a job in the field (Participant #12, personal communication, July 31, 2020).

A fair skin also can benefit people at a personal level. First, fair-skinned people are more attractive and aesthetically appealing, not only to the same sex, but also to the opposite sex. There are a group of men in China called *zhainan* (Geek,宅男) and *diaosi nan* (Loser, 屌丝男) who especially like fair-skinned women. *Zhainan* is typically understood by the general public as a type of man who likes to stay inside, has obsessive interests, and has limited socialization with others ("宅男," n.d.). According to *The Atlantic* (2013), "The term *diaosi* originated as an insult for a poor, unattractive young person who stayed at home all day playing video games, with dim prospects for the future—in other words, a loser…it is slowly transforming into a descriptor of the ordinary Chinese citizen who faces everyday struggles and hardships" (p. 1). The following interview excerpt demonstrates this point. "For girls who want to make friends with the opposite sex, if she has very fair skin, she will be given preferential treatment and enjoy some advantages. After all, there are still some *zhainan* and *diaosi nan* who really like fair-skinned girls" (Participant #15, personal communication, August 9, 2020).

The second advantage can be demonstrated by informants' belief that people are more kind, caring, and accepting toward fair-skinned people. For example, participant #11 discussed how she felt the change in treatment as a result of skin tone:

After I became better looking, I became more confident and felt that society had become more friendly. Everyone who saw me on the street was more polite and

would not treat me indifferently or impolitely. I thought the whole world had become better and I also became more confident. (Participant #11, personal communication, July 28, 2020)

Another informant shared a similar view:

For instance, if you go out to run an errand, people are nicer to you [if you are pretty]. They are more likely to help you if you are fair and clean (白白净净) and gentle and elegant (温文尔雅) . . . Others are very willing to talk to you, offer you help, and answer your questions. Everything seems better. (Participant #13, personal communication, August 2, 2020)

A final advantage reflected in the interviewees' responses was that a fair-skinned person might receive more praise and compliments from others, which helps raise self-confidence. Participant #12 shared his experience, "Your good-looking and tall figure will give you an advantage. Recently, I encountered many girls who have praised me for my fair skin. They even said, "You are even fairer than us [girls]!" They were pretty envious" (Personal communication, July 31, 2020). Participant #5 described how a fair-skinned person always gets compliments from others. "Most girls still seek lighter skin. While they were chatting, they like to compare to each other. For instance, someone would say to another, "How fair are you!" . . . Girls were very pleased to hear other's praise" (Personal communication, July 23, 2020).

Cultural Influences. A majority of informants reported that a light complexion would fit them better because of their race, facial structure, and body type. For example, participant #4 noted that, "I choose fair skin not because tanning is bad, but because

different skin tones fit different body types. I think tanning looks better on those who are skinny, fit, and healthy, while fair skin is more suitable for an Asian who is plumper" (Personal communication, July 22, 2020). Therefore, the notion of suitability may be influenced by the sociocultural context. If cultural values enforce the view that light skin is better and prettier, individuals may naturally develop a preference for fair skin and adopt those cultural norms and expectations.

A fair number of participants overtly claimed that their preference for light skin was dramatically influenced by Chinese culture and traditional modes of thinking as Chinese culture highly praises and values light skin color. One interesting phenomenon revealed in the interviews was that, without prompting informants to use the widely accepted proverb-"one white covers hundreds of uglies", almost all the participants automatically mentioned the phrase or the equivalence. The origin of the proverb is unknown, but it has been frequently cited in classical Chinese poetry and prose. For instance, people have suggested that the earliest documentation that advocates white beauty is the *Classic of Poetry* (Shijing/诗经) (风烛残年 72, 2018). As the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, it has more than 3000 years of history. Hence, thousands of years ago, ancient Chinese had considered fair skin as the standard for beauty. This not only affected ancient people's aesthetic thinking, but also had a long-lasting effect on modern aesthetic thinking. For instance, participant #3 also noted that, "From ancient times to the current age, all Chinese like to be fair. For instance, fair-skinned people have been shown in many wall paintings" (Personal communication, July 21, 2020).

In addition to Chinese cultural influence, other cultures, including European, American, Japanese, and South Korean cultures, also played a vital role in shaping informants' attitudes toward skin color. Numerous participants believed that, with the saturation of foreign culture, Chinese white beauty standard was therefore affected and shaped. For example, participant #8 noted that, "Countries that have a higher international status such as the United States and France . . . could affect our preference for skin color. Now, more and more people in China are pursuing Japanese [beauty standards]" (Personal communication, July 25, 2020). Similarly, participant #12 noted that, "There must be an influence [of Western culture] . . . Many of my friends were jealous about the appearance of Caucasians who have a high nose and three-dimensional facial structures" (Personal communication, July 31, 2020). Thus, both Chinese traditional values and foreign cultures seem to have influenced people's perceptions and attitudes regarding beauty ideals.

Symbolic Values. Interview findings revealed that people eagerly pursue fair skin because of its symbolic meaning, i.e., a representation of higher social class. According to Cole (2019), social class refers to "the socio-cultural aspects of one's life, namely the traits, behaviors, knowledge, and lifestyle that one is socialized into by one's family." (para. 6). Several participants discussed how the practice of mimicking Caucasian skin color symbolizes a higher social class, which also afforded people more social privileges and benefits. Participant #3 shared her views:

> [Chinese] knew that white people were noble while black were enslaved . . . A
> fair-skinned person has more privileges. Skin color could be linked to class

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because there was a difference between people who lived a luxurious life and those who work in the countryside. . . . If you always stayed inside the palace, you definitely have fair skin. (Personal communication, July 21, 2020)

Participant #4 also took the example of Michael Jackson in discussing the relation between skin color and social class:

It reminds me of Michael Jackson who was black initially but turned into white after going through countless skin whitening procedures. Maybe race is a factor that prompts people to pursue a certain skin tone . . . I believed that the trend of whitening began with classifying different skin colors. [People] may also associate white with a higher class. (Personal communication, July 22, 2020)

Second, as suggested by informants, fair skin indicates one's socioeconomic status (SES), which may function as an influencing factor in people's skin whitening practice. The concepts of social class should be distinguished from that of SES because, as suggested by Rubin et al. (2014), the former "refers to one's sociocultural background and is more stable, typically remaining static across generations," and the latter "refers to one's current social and economic situation and, consequently, it is relatively mutable, especially in countries that provide opportunities for economic advancement." (p. 3). The most common elements involved in one's socioeconomic status include one's income, education, occupation, and wealth ("社会经济地位," n.d.). Several participants described how a fair-skinned person was considered to have a luxurious and enjoyable indoor life, which signifies a higher SES. On the contrary, a person who works under the sun or engages in physical labor develops a tanned skin, which indicates a lower SES

(Participant #9, personal communication, July 26, 2020). The following interview excerpt explains this viewpoint:

> First of all, when you see a person who has fair skin, you would not think that she works under the scorching sun. Nevertheless, you would think that she has good working conditions and a higher living standard. How could this person have a good standard of living? It must be a result of higher education, rich family, or higher socioeconomic status. (Participant #14, personal communication, August 3, 2020)

In sum, the implicit connotations and positive cultural meanings associated with fair skin motivate people to acquire lightness. People can gain symbolic capital such as higher social class and economic class by consuming skin whitening products.

Role of Media in Affecting People's Purchase Intentions and Skin Whitening Behavior

Commercials use different advertising strategies to impact viewer's brand preferences and purchasing decisions. Results from interviews revealed the role celebrities played in affecting informants' purchase intentions. Even though social media, especially *Weibo* (微博) and *Xiaohongshu* (RED/Little Red Book, 小红书), played a vital role in providing consumers with helpful information about products, word-of-mouth recommendations from peers and friends were still shown to be the most trustworthy source for acquiring information.

Role of Celebrity. Endorsers' skin tone rated in this study's content analysis showed that most of their skin color was either very fair or fair, while very dark or dark skin tone was nonexistent, which was buttressed by the interview findings that almost all

the interviewees agreed that endorsers' skin tone was very fair as displayed on the screen.

Participant # 8 stated that, "Endorsers' skins are definitely very good and very fair too . . .

Their skins are relatively fair and healthy" (Personal communication, July 25, 2020).

Celebrities function as role models and endorsers in advertising and their physical

attractiveness and appearance can represent a specific type of beauty ideal that often

conforms to societal conventions. Thus, celebrities' snow-white skin depicted in

commercials sets a beauty standard for consumers to follow.

Past research has shown that celebrity endorsements positively and significantly

affect customers' purchase intentions and buying behavior (Wang et al., 2012; Ahmed et

al., 2015). Several participants in this study commented on the degree to which celebrities

affect their purchase decision. Participant #6 claimed, "Endorsers have a strong influence

on me. If I like the endorser, I would also like to purchase the product she/he endorsed"

(Personal communication, July 23, 2020). Likewise, participant #15 shared how celebrity

serves as an influencer for product adoption: "I watched lots of advertisements . . . not

only skin whitening ones, but also others too. If the advertisements really grasped my

attention, especially when there were celebrities who highly recommended the product, [I

mean] celebrity endorsement, I would purchase the product" (Personal communication,

August 9, 2020).

It is undoubtedly true that celebrities play a significant role in influencing some

consumers' purchasing behavior, but not all consumers are affected to the same degree.

Some informants were skeptical about the flawless image constructed in the commercials.

Findings from the interviews uncovered that most participants noticed the highly

idealized models depicted in the commercials. They claimed that it was almost certainly that models' images are modified by modern technologies. Thus, the altered images failed to reflect reality. One informant expressed the distorted reality created by the commercials:

> The advertised outcome is definitely unachievable because of the advertising effect. I tried some of the products and found out that they were ineffective. The skin of the spokesperson is perfect, but they adopted beauty filters. They are not showing the reality. (Participant #13, personal communication, August 2, 2020)

Two major factors contribute to this skepticism. First, participants believed that the goals set by the commercials were unrealistic and unreachable because models might be born with light skin, meaning that their skin tone was embedded in their innate DNA. Consequently, it cannot be changed easily by using the product. Another participant also pointed out the inborn nature of a celebrity's fair skin, "I have imagined that one day my skin would look like the celebrity's, but in fact, the core of a good skin lies in its genes. If you have good genes, coupled with a healthy lifestyle and workout, [a fair skin can be achieved]" (Participant #8, personal communication, July 25, 2020). Second, some participants realized that it was impractical to rely on a single product to achieve celebrity-like skin because it may result from multiple factors. For instance, a celebrity's skin may be reached by applying different products, undergoing plastic surgeries, and engaging in aesthetic medicinal products (医美).

Role of Social Media. According to the interviews, at a micro-level, family, friends, and peers served as primary sources for obtaining product recommendations.

Most informants perceived close friends, peers, families, and co-workers as a more trustworthy source than advertisements. Informants referred to friends for gaining information about product effectiveness. It is more likely for them to adopt the product if a positive outcome has been shown by their friends. A number of informants revealed how they were influenced by their friends and peers. "I'd like to follow my friend's recommendations. If they all recommended one product, I would use it too . . . After taking my friend's advice . . . I would purchase the product" (Participant #7, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

People not only seek friends and families to gain advice but also use social media as a source of acquiring useful information. As discovered in the interviews, social media was the second influential factor in influencing informants' information gaining and product selection. Two dominant social media platforms were identified: *Weibo* and *Xiaohongshu*. Weibo is a Chinese-based microblogging platform that provides a service similar to US-based Twitter. Two key functions provided by Weibo are social interactions and advertising. The platform allows for a variety of social interaction via different social products, such as 'Follow,' 'Comment,' 'Like,' and 'Favorite'. Weibo not only offers an opportunity for user-generated content, social networking, and social interaction, but also provides companies with a platform for advertising and marketing.

The findings suggested that participants were influenced by Weibo mainly through advertisements and beauty bloggers. Most participants claimed that, even though they were well informed by the advertisement, they were concerned about its

trustworthiness. Participant #3 explained why she found advertisements on Weibo untrustworthy:

> Nowadays, the advertisements were pretty sneaky. They did not tell you the ingredients included or the mechanism of whitening; they just claimed that their product has a whitening effect. They incorporated two models or two before and after photos in the advertisement, but who knows if those photos were edited or not. All in all, they were not convincing . . . I did not believe in advertisements . . . Generally, I received most of the advertisements from Weibo because I use it very often. (Personal communication, July 21, 2020)

Beauty bloggers also turned out to be a trusted source for product advice. The underlying reason for trusting beauty bloggers is the similarity shared between the participants and the bloggers. One informant revealed how the resemblance encouraged her to take advice from the blogger. "Usually, I would watch videos that I considered as trustworthy. I followed many beauty and fashion bloggers because their skin type is similar to mine and the products they recommended were very effective" (Participant #11, personal communication, July 28, 2020).

Even though many participants followed beauty bloggers for recommendations, as an analog to advertisements on social media and celebrity endorsement, some participants exercised caution with blogger's suggestions and sought additional sources for product evaluation and information verification. Participant #3 pointed out that recommendations from beauty bloggers might be a result of paid advertisement or company sponsorship; thus, they were not very reliable (Personal communication, July 21, 2020). Another

informant described the steps she followed to purchase a product, which shows how she relied on different sources to gain and verify information:

I did not trust bloggers' recommendations because I think their recommendations were not very accurate. I would like to go to Taobao (淘宝) to read the reviews and I also like to ask my friends who work as purchasing agents (代购) to purchase the product for me. (Participant #7, personal communication, July 24, 2020)

The second most-often-mentioned social media platform was Xiaohongshu. Xiaohongshu is a social networking service and an e-commerce platform, which was founded in 2013 in Shanghai. The original purpose of this platform was for product review and shopping experience sharing. A preponderance of the content is user-generated content, which ranges from fashion, skincare, fitness, to food, and books. As suggested by Sentence (2018, October 23), one of the reasons why Xiaohongshu turned out to be a trustworthy and authentic source of recommendations was that "instead of cheap wholesale goods, Xiaohongshu offers premium quality and exclusivity; it has built a highly-engaged community of savvy users who research and review their products extensively on the app." Thus, Xiaohongshu is conceived as a trusted source of high-quality products and genuine advice. This might be one of the reasons that prompt individuals to seek Xiaohongshu for advice. One participant shared how much she relied on Xiaohongshu for product selection:

Nowadays, I depended upon Xiaohongshu . . . It greatly affected me. For example, if I want to buy a different product like a new lipstick, Xiaohongshu is

my first go-to place. Even if I would consult others, I still go to Xiaohongshu to

see how many people have used the product and the ratings too. I also search for

the price and purchase location. I'd like to search for all kinds of information

there. Anyway, I heavily rely on it. (Participant #15, personal communication,

August 9, 2020)

Chapter Summary

As shown in the content analysis, there were both Western and local cultural

elements integrated into skin whitening commercials. Western appeals were well

employed in areas such as product packaging and product name, but Chinese appeals

were more prominent. Several elements related to Chinese culture were analyzed. Results

showed that traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy were among the most adopted

Chinese cultural elements. In addition to Western and Chinese appeals, advertising

appeals were also explored. Contrary to suggestions of previous literature, this study

revealed a reliance on rational appeals in skin whitening commercials. This study did not

find an emphasis on appeals to social status, economic status, or social capital. To

increase persuasive power, the majority of the commercials employed well-known fair-

skinned celebrities. For skin whitening commercials that mainly target Chinese female

consumers, results showed that there were more female endorsers and local endorsers.

As suggested by the interviews, even though participants had different

experiences in product usage, some similarities were discovered. For instance,

participants cared more about their appearance at certain stages of life, leading to greater

adoption of skin whitening products. Informants mainly avoided skin tanning by wearing

facial masks and sunscreens. Even though more participants reported inadequate efficacy of products, a majority of participants had engaged in some types of whitening practices in the hope of gaining a fair complexion. Participants believed that dark skin had become more and more popular and acceptable, but fair skin was still the mainstream preference. This was further supported by the fact that a majority of the informants favored fair skin over dark skin. Due to the development of the internet and technology, consumers nowadays are exposed to various platforms. Social media has shown to be an influential source in affecting people's purchase intentions and decisions, but informants in this study not only relied on celebrities and bloggers, but also heavily depended on friends and peers because they were deemed more credible and trustworthy.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

        To better understand how media shapes the white beauty standard among Chinese

audiences, this study not only conducted interviews, but also examined the use of cultural

values and advertising appeals in skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese

brands. This chapter has been organized by analyzing in greater detail the results related

to the research questions introduced at the beginning of the study. First, a comprehensive

discussion regarding each research question is offered. Later, it presents readers with

limitations, suggestions for future research, and implications.

Discussions

Research Question 1: Are skin whitening commercials for domestic Chinese brands

more inclined to appeal to Western cultural values or Chinese traditional values?

        Results from the content analysis have shown that there were dynamic

interactions between Western and the local culture, but advertisers were more inclined to

use local appeals. In this study, if there were traditional Chinese cultural values reflected

in commercial messages, this commercial employed local appeals. This finding with

regard to local appeals is consistent with the literature on cultural values and advertising

(Chan & Cheng, 2002; Cheng & Patwardhan, 2010; Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Lin,

2001). Studies have found that when advertising messages are congruent with local

cultural values, the messages tend to be more persuasive (Belk et al., 1985; Tsao, 1994). I

concur with Okazaki et al. (2010) that "brands are complex cultural forms, rooted in

historical, geographical, and social context" (p. 23). In this view, domestic brands

incorporating local cultural values could highlight their cultural identity. For instance, one of the skincare brands analyzed in this study, Inoherb（相宜本草）, is known for its natural and safe ingredients that commonly contain traditional Chinese herbs and fruits. The description in its brand culture and brand concept emphasizes the idea of "Oriental beauty" which all Chinese women should achieve by adopting its product (logoids, n.d.). By emphasizing the Oriental characteristics, it situates its brand within the Chinese cultural context.

Among all the traditional Chinese cultural elements examined in commercials, some appeared to be more prominent than others. The most frequently adopted elements include Chinese language/characters, traditional Chinese medicine/herbs, and traditional Chinese philosophy. This is followed by plants and flowers, gemstones and jade, and traditional Chinese dress, clothing, and ornaments. The leading Western cultural element adopted by these commercials were Western languages, mainly English. English was not only spoken by some endorsers, but also shown in different scenes in the commercials, such as on product packages, people's clothing, and store names. Moreover, a number of commercials incorporated additional Western elements such as Caucasian extras/experts, Western cuisine, and Western sports such as tennis.

Research Question 3: What is the Chinese attitude toward physical attractiveness?

Based on the interviews, most interviewees upheld local beauty ideals of fair skin even though, as they declared, dark skin has become more and more common among public figures in contemporary China. In interview discussions concerning contemporary beauty standards in China, being pale was pointed out by eight out of fifteen participants.

Some other criteria also included a specific type of face, eyes, eyelid, nose, mouth, and body figure. On the other hand, four participants mentioned that the current beauty standard is evolving as more and more people have begun to appreciate diverse skin color. Informants associated a fair complexion with beauty and wealth while they associated a dark complexion with fitness and Western-ness. Most people still favored fair skin, which was evidenced by the fact that more than half of the participants desired to embody a fair skin tone. A few participants mentioned that dark skin is not as pretty as pale skin, but most believed that a fair complexion is more suitable for them owing to the fact that it is in alignment with Oriental facial features and body structures.

Even though a majority of informants were prone to embrace the white beauty standard, they interpreted the notion of beauty in varied ways. Six of them underlined the importance of being healthy, including both physical and psychological health. According to them, being healthy is a prerequisite for being pretty. Some informants mentioned their desire to have a healthy skin condition that is not only limited to skin color, but also to a clear, unblemished, and radiant skin. Five informants pointed out that they were advocates for natural beauty, and they would like to maintain their natural skin tone and current appearance. However, this natural beauty is still built upon societal beauty standards because some informants who made this claim were those who already embodied fair skin. Thus, their goal is not to become fairer, but to maintain their fairness. A few informants noted some other factors people should pay attention to while seeking fair skin, including inner beauty, mental health, knowledge, morality, and the like. Participant #7 discussed the importance of inner beauty over outer beauty. She indicated

that people's physical beauty came from within and is manifested through inner beauty; thus, it is important to first pursue inner beauty (Personal communication, July 24, 2020).

Research Question 4: What are the motives and influencing factors of skin whitening among Chinese?

The study results suggest that the fundamental motive for people to practice skin whitening is their desire to become fairer as fair skin is culturally and socially desirable. Based on the interviews, fair skin helps people stand out from the crowd and become more visible, which allows them to gain more attention and social popularity. Apart from this personal pursuit, some other external factors also urge people to engage in skin whitening. One such important factor is the influence of friends, peers, and family members. Friends and peers can provide product information and demonstrate the efficacy of the product. They also serve as a frame of reference to which people often compare. Some participants mentioned that the people around them who had fairer skins prompted them to pursue a pale complexion. Thus, peer influence plays an important role in influencing people's skin whitening behavior. Moreover, evaluations from the opposite sex can affect a female's adoption of skin whitening products dramatically. Some males in China are obsessed with females who have a fair skin tone. Hence, in order to be more physically and sexually attractive and desired by the opposite sex, people eagerly seek a fair complexion. It is undeniable that people face some outside pressure to meet cultural expectations, and that the male gaze also plays a vital role (Luo, 2013).

Both traditional media and social media affect people's views on physical attractiveness. Two-thirds of the participants stated that they had been exposed to skin

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whitening commercials, either on traditional media, including television, or on social media, such as Weibo. Even though most participants claimed that commercials are untrustworthy, a few admitted that they were affected by the commercials in varying degrees. The fair-skinned models depicted in the commercials constructed the beauty norms for audiences to emulate. Although many participants were clear about the exaggerated or even spurious advertising effects, half of them still engaged in wishful thinking about gaining a celebrity-like skin.

In addition to the traditional media, social media has become an integral part of life in the contemporary world. With more and more people turning to new media, it is undeniable that digital media influence users in various ways. Like celebrities and models in commercials, online beauty bloggers and online celebrities also create beauty ideals for viewers to follow. They are highly emulated because they are the beauty icons who lead the trend. The two most popular social media platforms mentioned by participants were Weibo (微博) and Xiaohongshu (小红书), both of which exert an influence on users through blogs, forum posts, commercials, bloggers, videos, etc.

Finally, people's lives are deeply rooted in a particular cultural and social environment. The white beauty standard has predominated throughout Chinese history. Most participants mentioned the old saying that "One white covers three/a hundred uglies," which is an evidence for how widely accepted the white beauty standard is. The finding that people's notion of beauty is strongly affected by cultures corroborated Wang's (2014) findings. In the study of children's perceptions of female beauty as reflected in drawings, Wang discovered that factors, such as historical and local cultural

traditions, education levels, and media, all influence children's drawings of ideal beauty. For instance, Chinese children are affected by traditional presentations of women who often have a pale skin and long, dark hair.

Research Question 2: How do media contents such as skin whitening advertising exercise an impact on audiences' skin whitening behavior and purchase intentions?

The results of the content analysis showed that celebrity endorsement, as a marketing strategy, was widely adopted by skin whitening commercials. The models in the commercials helped construct a beauty ideal that is highly idealized, unrealistic, and unachievable. Even though beauty ideals are fluid and subject to change, the beauty standards set in the commercials are subjected to the traditional Chinese cultural values and prevailing beauty trends. The results also revealed a preference for domestic models over foreign ones perhaps because the ethnic backgrounds of models are assumed to affect the persuasiveness of the message. This will be explained later in this chapter based upon congruence theory. The following paragraphs expand on the these findings by discussing different appeals, including celebrity endorsement, localized appeals, rational appeals, and fear appeals, as well as their effects on audiences.

Celebrity Endorsement. Media employs different techniques and strategies to shape people's attitudes toward skin color. One of the ways media exercise an impact on audiences is through celebrity endorsement. Results from the *chi-square* tests supported the hypothesis that skin whitening commercials tend to employ more well-known celebrities. Even though it is evident that the ideal image created in commercials is a product of modern production technologies, it still imparts the power to create a yearning

for fair skin among audiences. Multiple factors may have contributed to the adoption of celebrities/highly-idealized models in marketing communications. First, celebrities' attractiveness can impact customer behavior and increase the persuasiveness for potential customers. For instance, many studies have documented that the attractiveness of an endorser has a positive association with consumers' purchase intentions (Rafique & Zafar, n.d.; Khan et al., 2019). Physically attractive communicators have the potential to increase advertising effectiveness and help increase sales (Liu et al., 2007; Hunter, 2011; Chauhan & Tiwari, 2019). Second, attractive endorsers/celebrities are preferred by consumers. Previous research has suggested that female consumers have a more positive response to celebrity endorsement than male consumers (Klaus & Bailey, 2000). According to Antioco et al. (2012), "models in advertising represent highly idealized images of physical attractiveness," and they are more favored by consumers (p. 15). Thus, one of the aims in adopting attractive endorsers is to fulfill audiences' needs. Another aspect lies in celebrities' potential to mirror and strengthen cultural values that serve the interest of sellers. Many researchers have claimed that celebrities have the ability to "echo the symbolic meanings and values that are closely tied to the culture" and may also "mirror the fundamental cultural orientations and values of that society" (Kim & Cho, 2012, p. 503). Furthermore, Pollay and Gallagher (1990) argued that advertising "models and reinforces only certain life-styles and philosophies, those that serve seller's interests" (p. 360). As Chinese culture places a great emphasis on fair skin, celebrities who endorse skin whitening products further reinforce this value, suggesting to consumers that fair skin is the norm. Thus, in these ways, celebrities function as an

effective advertising tool to influence consumers' views toward beauty as well as their skin whitening behavior.

Local Appeals. The word "local" here refers to the locus of cultural values, language, the brand names, model/expert nationalities, and technology origin. Modern China is awash in a hybrid mix of both Western and local images and appeals. However, the results of this study indicated that in advertising intended for Chinese consumers, skin whitening commercials for domestic brands favored local appeals. For instance, regarding the dominant spoken language used in the commercials, almost 97% of those commercials were in Mandarin Chinese; and about 95% of the brands incorporated Chinese/Pinyin into their brand names. Additionally, about 62% of the commercials emphasized Eastern technologies, and Eastern experts appeared more often than Western ones in the commercials.

Congruence theory can be employed to make sense of the local preference in skin whitening commercials. Derived from Fritz Heider's (1958) consistency theory, congruence theory postulates that people strive to seek a state of consistency and harmony. Congruence theory also suggests that "people automatically tend to prefer certain elements of the cognitive system to be internally consistent with each other" (Janse, 2020). Lee et al. (2020) defined congruence theory as a way to assess the match between two or more entities. As explained by Lee et al. (2020), when audiences are exposed to an advertising stimulus, they use their schema to test the degree of congruency of the information and assess how the information matches their cognitive structure. In contrast, incongruent information occurs when information, such as

advertising messages, does not fit into an individual's existing schema/cognitive structure, which leads to discomfort and surprise. When individuals encounter incongruent information, they try to process the mismatch by either ignoring or resolving it. The unresolved incongruity may result in a negative evaluation of the information (Lee et al., 2020). The study by Zhou et al. (2015) demonstrated that incongruent cultural images, such as using a Western model to promote a distinctive Eastern culture-related product, might lead to consumers' unfavorable attitudes toward the commercial. In Cui and Yang's (2009) test of congruence theory, they discovered that Chinese consumers had a preference for Chinese models compared to Caucasian ones, resulting in the suggestion that "local companies do not need to associate their products with foreign models or imagery of foreign origin to enhance the image of their products" (p. 243). They recommended that local companies adopt local models because they can be as effective as foreign ones or possibly even more effective.

Based on congruency theory, it is possible that consumers may have been attracted to the models with whom they have more in common in terms of their ethnic backgrounds, skin tone, and cultural backgrounds. Previous studies have demonstrated that, when model ethnicity matches consumers' cultural orientations, consumers tend to find the message more believable. The same ethnicity shared between the consumer and the model may suggest a similarity in skin type or skin tone, which makes the model seem more dependable. This is supported by Antioco et al. (2012), who proposed that "when individuals perceive similarities between themselves and a model in an advertisement, they tend to perceive the model as trustworthy" (p. 18). In addition, when

the consumer and the model share the same cultural backgrounds, it is easier for consumers to better relate with the model. Pan (2013) also suggested that companies adopt local celebrities or models, which would provide a way to better relate to consumers. This connection may result in consumers' favoring a brand (Okoli, 2016).

Lastly, it is noteworthy to mention that advertisers in commercials examined in this study did not solely employ the local approach; instead, there was a combination of foreign and local appeals in some areas, such as product name and product packaging. For example, this study revealed that 95% of the commercials that adopted Chinese in their product names also adopted English. Previous studies have suggested that the reasons Chinese consumers face foreign appeals are the commendatory meanings and positive cultural connotations associated with anything foreign. For instance, Kuppens (2010) suggested that one important reason for employing English in advertising is because "the values or stereotypes associated with it (e.g., Internationalism, modernity, and Britishness) are assumed to reflect positively on the product … " (p. 117). Other general values associated with English also include youth, prestige, progress, cosmopolitanism, premium quality, industrial and technological innovations, reliability, and credibility (Hsu, 2008; Kuppens, 2010).

Rational Appeals. This study has found that rational appeals (appealing to people's logic and reason) are adopted more frequently than emotional appeals, even though emotional appeals are suggested to be more powerful and effective in advertising skincare products (Chan, 1997; Shen, 2013). This discrepancy could be due to a large number of factors. One such important factor may have been related to a change in

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consumer characteristics. Rational appeals may be more effective than emotional appeals in persuading consumers if consumers are of a certain age group, have higher access to information, and have higher levels of education. Most of the participants in this study were between 20 to 39 years old. Based on the 2020 Development of Global and China Beauty Industry Market Overview (费雪祎, 2020, p. 17), people from 19-39 years old were the main contributors to the beauty industry in China. In addition, the internet was used predominantly by this age group too. Thus, the participants in this study were both primary consumers of beauty products and key internet users. With a higher access to information via various online channels, informants could evaluate the products by comparing and contrasting different product information, helping them make more rational purchase decisions. As the interview findings suggest, participants not only invested more time and effort in deliberation, but also engaged in extensive information searches for skincare products during the pre-purchase stage. This is in line with Nicosia's (1966) suggestion that information search is important for minimizing risks and making better and more rational buying decisions (Gu et al., 2012). According to the interviews, the two most popular social media platforms among participants were Weibo and Xiaohongshu. People deliberately follow beauty bloggers on Weibo to gain product recommendations. Similarly, posts, comments, and product reviews on Xiaohongshu also provide users with constructive advice on beauty products. Participant #15 claimed that social media platforms including Xiaohongshu, greatly affected her selection of a new product and she always seeks Xiaohongshu for product recommendations (Personal communication, August 9, 2020). Furthermore, participants' educational backgrounds

may also be an influential factor in affecting people's decision-making. Almost all participants have a Bachelor's degree, or higher, and two-thirds have a foreign educational background. As pointed out by Fan (2017), burgeoning literature has shown that there is a seemingly positive relationship between individual rationality and education level (p. 2). Thus, it is possible to suggest that higher education level helps participants make more rational purchasing decisions.

Informants' acquisition of information is not only limited to online media, but is also from friends and peers who are conceived as more trustworthy and reliable than advertising campaigns. This finding is consistent with the findings from Barnes et al. (2004) that friends, colleagues, and opinion leaders appeared to have a specific strong effect (even relatively stronger than celebrities) on consumers' cosmetics purchase decisions. People's preference for friends and peers may be a result of source familiarity and similarity. People in the peer group commonly share similar traits of character, hobbies and interests or even skin types. These similarities between them could generate feelings of closeness, familiarity, and rapport, which could encourage the individual to seek advice from their peers.

Consumers not only have become rational but also more sophisticated. Cotte and Ritchie (2005) defined sophisticated consumers as those who are "conscious of advertisers' persuasive intentions and skilled at recognizing specific tactics" (p. 24). Consumers may have become more sensitive to marketing strategies due to their increased awareness of the exaggerated claims and unrealistic beauty standards constructed in the commercials. Based on the interviews, even though a majority of the

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participants had watched skin whitening commercials, the effect on their purchase

decisions was not significant because they were less trusting of brands and advertising.

Most participants maintained a negative and skeptical attitude toward skin whitening

commercials. As demonstrated by participant #13, the results projected by the

commercials were unachievable as a result of the advertising effect, and the model's skin

might have been filtered (Personal communication, August 2, 2020). This could show

that they are sophisticated consumers who do not blindly fall into the trap of the

persuasive message and they actively evaluate and engage with the content based on their

personal experience, beliefs, and knowledge.

Fear Appeals. Fear appeals attempt to arouse negative feelings such as fear and

anxiety. Results from the content analysis indicated that 11 out of 58 commercials

employed fear appeals. The *chi-square* test results further showed that fear appeals were

used significantly less frequently than non-fear appeals. Although fear appeals appeared

less frequently, they could be effective in generating interest among audiences and

influencing their purchase behaviors and intentions. Cotte and Ritchie (2005) discussed

three reasons advertisers adopt fear appeals: attention capturing, arousing intended

emotions, and motivation for purchasing. Generally, skin whitening commercials

employed a problem-solution approach by showing audiences the negative consequences

(e.g. potential skin problems) for failing to adopt the product (Cochrane & Quester,

2005). Meanwhile, these commercials offer solutions to reduce the fear because "it

provides consumers with an opportunity to dissipate the negative emotion and turn it into

a positive one" (Cotte & Ritchie, 2005). As an illustration, one of the skin whitening

commercials claimed to solve eight tough skin issues, such as dark spots, wrinkles, and dark/yellowish skin tone. It also promised to transform the skin eight times fairer. Another commercial depicted a fair-skinned male endorser questioning why people got so upset when they expose themselves to the sun for only a few seconds, suggesting that the skin whitening product people use may not be effective. He then claimed that his secret to fair skin is the use of the advertised product.

In sum, media employed a range of persuasive strategies to influence audiences. Generally, the main goal of commercials is to motivate audiences to purchase the product or service. Domestic skin whitening brands tended to employ well-known celebrities who served as brand ambassadors to increase the persuasive power of the message. A positive association of the brand and the image of the celebrity helps increase brand awareness. The models and endorsers depicted in the commercials also play an essential role in shaping and reinforcing the beauty standard. As a result, consumers may normalize and internalize the skincare regimens. Even though celebrity endorsement is effective in persuasion, as consumers have become more experienced and have shown an increasing level of involvement in the product, celebrities' influence on their purchase decision has lessened. Consumers rely on more trusted sources of information such as word-of-mouth recommendations to assist them in decision-making. Moreover, advertisers of indigenous Chinese brands favored local appeals over foreign ones, providing a way to better connect with the consumer. There was also a greater use of rational appeals, which might be a result of the effectiveness of this sort of appeal due to a change in consumer characteristics. Lastly, fear appeals were adopted by some skin whitening commercials. A

combination of a moderate level of fear with recommended solutions might positively influence audiences' attitude and behavior.

Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research, and Implications

First, regarding the method of data collection, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviews were forced to transition to virtual interviews (i.e. audio and/or video chat). However, virtual interviews suffer from some drawbacks. For instance, unclear communication due to unstable internet connection and distracted participants due to the absence of face-to-face conversation. Second, there was a disproportionate number of male (1) versus female (14) participants. Although skin whitening commercials orient themselves primarily to female audiences, with an increasing number of males who also pay attention to their appearance, it is crucial for future studies to incorporate more male participants. Third, this study only took into account television commercials for content analysis. Future research should expand the scope of the analysis by examining commercials created for different channels. As social media has become more and more popular and prevalent among young adults, it is essential to examine the impact of social media advertising on consumer behavior. For instance, some participants claimed that they were rarely exposed to television commercials, but rather were bombarded with social media marketing such as banner advertisements, pop-ups, forum posts, blogger recommendations, and live commerce (直播带货). At last, as opposed to surveys, interviews help researchers better understand informants' experiences, behavior, attitudes, etc. The informants are not intended to be representative of a population. Thus, the findings of the interviews are not generalizable to a broader population or situation.

Future research can incorporate surveys to examine the skin whitening phenomenon on a large scale.

The findings of this study can be of value to researchers and scholars who are interested in media studies. The study contributes to the current understanding of what cultural values and advertising appeals were employed in skin whitening commercials and how they shape the beauty standards in China. In addition, previous research often employed a single research method, while this research contributed by using a mixed method, which helped yield more comprehensive and robust results. Moreover, this study not only confirmed the results of existing studies, but also contradicted some previous findings, providing new insights into the field of study.

This study can also be helpful for practitioners in advertising, especially for domestic skin whitening brands aiming to appeal to local customers. It also helps new companies to craft marketing strategies to enter the Chinese market. Several managerial implications can be drawn from this study. First, even though commercials on television can affect audiences, the effects are modest because customers nowadays are more enlightened, rational, and powerful. As revealed in the interviews, informants trusted friends and peers above all other forms of advertising because people find recommendations from friends, peers, and family members the most credible. This is consistent with the report from Nielsen's *Global Trust in Advertising* issued in 2015 (Nielsen, 2015). Furthermore, the increased ability of consumers to detect the persuasive intentions of advertisers and marketing tactics has made the work of advertising more challenging. Thus, advertisers must be aware of sophisticated consumers to devise a more

compelling advertising message. It is also important for companies to have a presence on a variety of social media platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, WeChat, and TikTok. By taking advantage of these online social media services, companies can target and engage with existing and potential customers on a larger scale and it is cost-efficient and great for brand development. Second, proper advertising strategies should be developed. As revealed in this study, it is helpful to employ celebrities and rational appeals in advertising to Chinese customers. Fear appeals should be adopted with caution because they can be risky (Cotte & Ritchie, 2005). Third, based on the congruence theory, it is recommended that local brands employ local appeals, such as using a local model and incorporating more traditional Chinese values to better appeal to local customers.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

Project Number	20-X-78
Project Status	APPROVED
Committee:	Social/Behavioral IRB
Compliance Contact:	Robin Stack (stack@ohio.edu)
Primary Investigator:	Zeyu Zhang
Project Title:	How white is white? An analysis of skin whitening advertisements and Chinese attitude toward whiteness
Level of Review:	EXPEDITED

The Social/Behavioral IRB reviewed and approved by expedited review the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

IRB Approved:	04/09/2020 08:06:54 AM
Expiration:	04/09/21
Review Category:	7

Waivers: Waiver of signature on consent document for online study.

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations / agreements must be obtained, if needed. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures,

advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Periodic Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of the IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. All records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least three (3) years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under the Ohio University OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00000095. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Compliance staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

The approval will no longer be in effect when the Primary Investigator is no longer under the auspices of Ohio University, e.g., graduation or departure from Ohio University.

Appendix B: Ohio University Online Consent Form

Title of Research: How white is white? An analysis of skin whitening advertisements and Chinese attitude toward whiteness
Researcher: Zeyu Zhang
IRB number: 20-X-78

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to participate in this study. You may print a copy of this document to take with you.

Summary of Study
This study aims to learn about Chinese experience and motivation of using skin whitening products, the attitude of users toward skin whitening advertisements, the skin whitening advertising in the media, and the potential influence of skin whitening advertisements on users' perception of beauty.

Explanation of Study
By participating in the online interview, you will indicate your willingness to be part of the study. You do not need to participate in the study if you are not skin whitening product users or are not knowledgeable about this subject matter.

If you do not wish to discuss any subject that arises, you may decline to respond and may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Your participation in the study will last for approximately 30-60 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts
No risks are anticipated.
You may also feel uncomfortable about talking about personal habits and beliefs regarding skin whitening. If you do not wish to discuss any subject that arises, you may decline to respond and may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Benefits
This study is important to science/society because it adds to the existing knowledge on the subject regarding whiteness in Chinese culture.
You may not benefit, personally by participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Records

Even though the interview will be video and audio recorded, your identifiable information will be kept confidential by securely stored on an external hard drive and personally owned computer that is password protected. Moreover, your information will be destroyed within three years of the initial interview dates. The approximate date of erasure of recordings is May 31, 2023. None of the identifiable information will be released to others or in the final report. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

      * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

      * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Future Use Statement
Identifiers will be removed from data/samples collected, and after such removal, the data/samples may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your legally authorized representative.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator *[Zeyu Zhang, zz004816@ohio.edu, 765-212-6871]* or the advisor *[Drew McDaniel, mcdanied@ohio.edu, 740-593-4855]*.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:
- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Version Date: *04/08/2020*

Appendix C: Recruitment Script for Current Participants

Hello, my name is Zeyu Zhang. I am a Ph.D. Candidate at Ohio University in Scripps College of Communication. I am inviting you to participate in my research about studying Chinese attitude toward skin whitening. This research is being conducted under the auspices of Ohio University and my IRB number is 20-X-78. You're eligible to participate in this study because you are either a skin whitening product user or you are knowledgeable about this subject matter.

Participation in this research includes attending an online interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes. I would like to record the interview. This interview is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Would you also be willing to pass along the name and contact information of any of your friends/family members/co-workers who may be interested in participating? There is no obligation for you to pass along this information and there will be no penalty if you do not provide this information. I will let the potential participants know that you are the source of the referral. You also can notify the potential participants prior to me contacting them.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at *765-212-6871* or *zz004816@ohio.edu*

Thank you so much!

你好，我叫张泽宇。我是俄亥俄大学斯克里普斯传播学院的博士候选人。我想邀请您参加关于中国人对皮肤美白看法的一项调查研究。这项研究是在俄亥俄大学主持下进行的。此研究的 IRB 审批号是 20-X-78. 您被邀请参加此研究是因为您要么是美白产品的使用者，要么您对美白产品比较了解。

如果您同意参加此研究，您将接受一个为时 30-60 分钟的在线采访。并且采访将被录音。此采访完全是自愿的，您可以以任何理由在任何时间退出此采访。

您是否愿意把有可能对此课题感兴趣的朋友/家庭成员/同事的姓名和联系信息提供给我？这不是强制性的，如果您不愿提供此信息，您也不会受到任何处罚。我会让您推荐的人知道是您推荐了他/他们。在我联系他们之前，您也可以提前通知他们。
如果您有任何疑问，请以以下方式联系我。
电话：*765-212-6871*
邮箱：*zz004816@ohio.edu*
谢谢 ！

Appendix D: Recruitment Script for Potential Participants

Hello, my name is Zeyu Zhang. I am a Ph.D. Candidate at Ohio University in Scripps College of Communication. I am inviting you to participate in my research about studying Chinese attitude toward skin whitening. This research is being conducted under the auspices of Ohio University and my IRB number is 20-X-78. You're eligible to participate in this study because you are either a skin whitening product user or you are knowledgeable about this subject matter.

Your name and contact information have been shared by [participant's name]. It was suggested that you may be interested in participating in my study. Would you like to participate now or to set up a time to discuss this further in the near future?

Would you also be willing to pass along the name and contact information of any of your friends/family members/co-workers who may be interested in participating? There is no obligation for you to pass along this information and there will be no penalty if you do not provide this information. I will let the potential participants know that you are the source of the referral. You also can notify the potential participants prior to me contacting them.

Participation in this research includes attending an online interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes. I would like to record the interview. This interview is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at *765-212-6871* or *zz004816@ohio.edu*

Thank you so much!

你好，我叫张泽宇。我是俄亥俄大学斯克里普斯传播学院的博士候选人。我想邀请您参加关于中国人对皮肤美白看法的一项调查研究。这项研究是在俄亥俄大学主持下进行的。此研究的 IRB 审批号是 20-X-78. 您被邀请参加此研究是因为您要么是美白产品的使用者，要么您对美白产品比较了解。

XX 把您的姓名和联系信息推荐给了我，因为您有可能对我的研究感兴趣。您是否愿意现在参加我的研究还是我们安排一个别的时间？

您是否愿意把有可能对此课题感兴趣的朋友/家庭成员/同事的姓名和联系信息提供给我？这不是强制性的，如果您不愿提供此信息，您也不会受到任何处罚。我会让您推荐的人知道是您推荐了他/他们。在我联系他们之前，您也可以提前通知他们。

如果您同意参加此研究，您将接受一个为时 30-60 分钟的在线采访。并且采访将被录音。此采访完全是自愿的，您可以以任何理由在任何时间退出此采访。如果您有任何疑问，请以下方式联系我：

电话：*765-212-6871*

邮箱：*zz004816@ohio.edu*

谢谢 ！

Appendix E: Interview Guide

你好，我叫张泽宇。我是俄亥俄大学传播学院的在读博士。首先感谢你愿意接受此参访，我研究的课题是关于中国人对皮肤美白的态度和看法，以及美白产品广告对人们使用美白产品的影响。您被邀请参加此研究是因为您要么使用过美白产品，要么您对美白产品比较了解。此采访完全是自愿的，您可以以任何理由在任何时间退出此采访。如果有涉及到任何您不愿意谈及的的领域，你可以不谈。所有收集的数据将被保密并匿名，我不会将你的个人信息透漏给任何人。此外，此采访将会被录音，用于后期的数据分析。

1. **Beginning the interview**
   a. Could you introduce yourself? 首先，你能简单介绍一下你自己吗（姓名，年龄，学历，工作）？
      i. (Name, Nationality, Year of birth/Age, Major/Occupation, Education level (highest)
2. **During the interview**
   a. **Own experiences:**
      i. Have you ever used skin whitening products in your lifetime? 你有没有使用过任何美白产品？（美白面霜、精华、防晒、面膜）
      ii. How long have you been using it?/At what age did you start to use them? 你从什么时候开始使用的？
      iii. How often have you used such products? /the frequency of use in a month? 你多久使用一次？
      iv. Are they effective? 是否有效？
      v. Have you ever encountered any side effect/health issues while using the product? 在使用产品时，你是否遇到过任何副作用？
   b. **Motivations:**
      i. What are the main reasons for using them? 你为什么会想使用美白产品？
      ii. Who or what prompted you to start using these products? (Media/TV/ads/culture/celebrities/family/friends/peers/others/self) 是什么促使/影响你使用的？
   c. **Media effects:**
      i. Are you aware of skin whitening products advertisements? 你有看过美白产品广告吗？一般是在哪儿看到的（电视，社交网站，杂志。。）？
         1. 你觉得这些广告所描绘的美白效果是否是可以达到的？
      ii. What effects do these ads have on your own practice of skin whitening? 你觉得这些广告对你使用美白产品有什么影响？

iii. Would you like to look like the endorsers/models in skin whitening ads? 你有没有会想要像那些产品代言人一样白？
        a. 如果有，你会通过什么方式来达到那种效果？
iv. Have you ever seen any ads that promote dark skin tone? Such as using dark skinned models or promoting 'dark is beautiful'? 你有看过任何美黑产品的广告吗（宣传以黑为美的）？
        1. Do you know any celebrities who are trying to promote dark skin tone? 你知道哪个明星是以黑为美、为黑代言？你怎么看待她、他的这种美？

d. **Beauty standard:**
   i. What do you think is the beauty standard in current society? 你觉得当今社会人们所追求的美是什么样的？
        1. Do you pursue this beauty standard? 你是否追求这种大众美、社会所定义的美？
            a. 如果不，你对美的定义是什么？
        2. Why do you think white skin is the desired skin color in current society? 你觉得为什么当代人追求白色的皮肤/以白为美？
   ii. Where do you think this beauty ideal come from? (Western influence? Chinese culture/deep historical and cultural roots? both?) 你觉得这个以白为美的思想观念是从哪里来的 （西方的影响还是中国文化历史的影响）？

3. **Ending the interview**
   a. Do you have any final thoughts/comments before ending the interview? 最后，你还有没有什么需要补充的？
   b. Thank you for your participation and contribution of the study
   c. The data will be transcribed by me and only used for the purpose of this study. I will not share the data with any others
   d. Here is my contact information, if you have any concerns, feel free to contact me

Appendix F: Codebook for Indigenous Skin Whitening Product Commercials

一. **Endorsement**:
1. If there is a celebrity endorsement?
   Celebrity: refers to someone who is famous and has received lots of fame and attention
   0=Product only
   1=One celebrity
   2=More than one celebrity
   3=Ordinary people
   4=Mixed (Celebrity + Ordinary people)
   5=Others

2. Gender of celebrity/non-celebrity endorser:
   0=Product only
   1=All female
   2=All male
   3=Mixed (when there are more than one endorser and they have the opposite sex)

3. Ethnicity of celebrity/ non-celebrity endorser:
   0=Product only
   1= Chinese
   2=Korean
   3=White
   4=Mixed
   5=Others

4. Rate the skin tone of the first or the only celebrity/non-celebrity endorser from 1-6:
(1=espresso/very dark, 2=bronze, 3=wheat, 4=beige, 5=fair, 6=very fair/very white)
   0=product only
   7=two endorsers (If there are two endorsers, rate the second endorser's skin tone in #4.1)
   8=three endorsers (If there are three endorsers, rate the second one in #4.1 and the third one in #4.2)
   9=four endorsers (If there are four endorsers, rate the second one in #4.1, the third one in #4.2, and the fourth one in #4.3)
   4.1. Rate the second celebrity/endorser's skin tone from 1 to 6: _____
   1=espresso, 2=bronze, 3=wheat, 4=beige, 5=fair, 6=very fair
   4.2. Rate the third celebrity/endorser's skin tone from 1 to 6: _____
   1=espresso, 2=bronze, 3=wheat, 4=beige, 5=fair, 6=very fair
   4.3. Rate the third celebrity/endorser's skin tone from 1 to 6: _____
   1=espresso, 2=bronze, 3=wheat, 4=beige, 5=fair, 6=very fair

二. **Appeals:**

    0=None
    1=Yes
    2=Can not identify

1. If the commercial employs rational appeals?
    a. Rational appeals: appeal to logic, reason, and evidence and address objective evidence, facts, and logic.

2. If the commercial employs fear appeals?
    a. Fear appeals: an advertising strategy used to evoke the feeling of fear that includes danger, anxiety, pain, and the like, in an attempt to attract the audience's attention, increase persuasion, and affect their beliefs, attitudes, purchasing intentions, and purchasing behavior. Instead of stressing the benefits and advantages of using the product, it addresses the danger and negative consequences that can occur if you do not use the product.

3. If the commercial employs emotional appeals?
    a. Emotional appeal: appeal to emotions and feelings, such as love, happiness, etc.

4. If the commercial associates fair skin with physical beauty?

5. If the commercial indicates that people will become more charming after using the product?

6. If the commercial indicates a more confident endorser after using the product?

7. If the commercial shows a happier endorser after using the product?

8. Is there an increase in social status after using the product?
    a. Social status: Related to one's prestige, rank, position, or honor in society.

9. Is there an implication of gaining economic capital by using the product?
    a. Economic capital: Related to high-paying job/promotion/opportunities/money.

10. Is there an implication of gaining social capital by using the product?
    a. Social capital: Social capital, according to Bourdieu, is "the sum of active or potential resources that are connected through the possession

of a network of permanent relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition, which are more or less institutionalized, or, in other words, with the inclusion into a group" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 90). It also includes social networks/connections/relationships/family/friends/ marital prospects.

11. If the commercial indicates that people will become more attractive such as attractive to the opposite sex after using the product?

12. If the commercial emphasizes the safe and natural characteristics of the product?

三. **Western/foreign appeals:**
1. Language spoke by endorsers/the dub:
    0=Chinese only
    1=English only
    2=Chinese and English
    3=Others

2. Language showed on the product packaging:
    0=Chinese only
    1=English only
    2=Chinese and English
    3= Chinese, English, and Pinyin
    4=Pinyin (the Chinese pronunciation system)
    5=Chinese and Pinyin
    5=English and Pinyin

3. Language of the product name showed on the product packaging:
    0=Chinese only
    1=English only
    2=Chinese and English
    3=Others
    4=Pinyin
    5=Chinese and Pinyin

4. Language of the brand name showed on the product packaging:
    0=Chinese only
    1=English only
    2=Chinese and English
    3=Others
    4=Pinyin
    5=Chinese and Pinyin

5. If the commercial has an emphasis on advanced technologies?
    0=No
    1=Yes, it emphasizes Eastern technology
    2= Yes, it emphasizes Western technology
    3= Yes, a combination of both
    4=Can not identify

6. If the commercial has an emphasis on expertise such as experts or specialists?
    0=No
    1=Yes, Eastern expertise
    2=Yes, Western expertise
    3= Yes, a combination of both
    4=Can not identify

7. Are there any presence of other Western-related elements such as architecture, Western cities, people, food, etc.?
    0=No
    1=Yes (If there are any, please write down what they are)
    2=Can not identify

四. Traditional Chinese culture/value/local appeals:
(0=No, 1=Yes, 2=Can not identify)
1. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese drinks, such as tea, alcohol, etc.?
2. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese food, such as edible bird's nest, etc.?
3. Does the commercial include any Chinese animals, such as panda, silkworm, etc.?
4. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese jade, such as pearl, jade, etc.?
5. Does the commercial include any Chinese historical figures, such as Yang Guifei, Wu Zetian, etc.?
6. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese festival, such as Spring Festival, etc.?
7. Does the commercial include any Chinese martial arts such as Tai Chi, Kung Fu, etc.?
8. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese paintings & calligraphies?
9. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese opera & folk art groups?
10. Does the commercial include any Chinese music & dance?
11. Does the commercial include any ancient Chinese poetry?

12. Does the commercial include any Chinese idioms/proverbs, such as '一白遮三丑 one white covers three uglies'?
13. Does the commercial include any other Chinese vocabulary, such as dynasty, palace, etc.?
14. Does the product include any traditional Chinese medicine/herbs, such as Ginseng, ginger, turmeric, etc., or any Ancient Chinese herbalist, naturalist, pharmacologist, or physician such as Li Shizhen (李时珍)?
15. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese philosophy such as Taiji, yin & yang, etc.?
16. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese plants and flowers, such as peach blossoms, lotus flowers, etc.?
17. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese vessels such as porcelain?
18. Does the commercial include any traditional Chinese dress, clothing, or ornaments, such as Han clothing, qipao, and hairpin?

Appendix G: Codebook for Indigenous Skin Whitening Product Commercials (in

Chinese)

本土品牌美白产品广告编码簿

一：明星代言：

1. 是否有明星代言：
   0=无明星代言人
   1=一位明星
   2=多于一位明星
   3=普通人/大众
   4=混合（明星+大众）
   5=其他

2. 代言人性别：
   0=无代言人
   1=女性
   2=男性
   3=有男性有女性（当有一位往上的代言人时）

3. 代言人种族:
   0=无代言人
   1=中国人
   2=韩国人
   3=白人
   4=混合（中国人+韩国人；中国人+白人；韩国人+白人）
   5=其他

4. 唯一/第一位产品代言人肤色：＿＿＿＿＿从 1（非常黑）到 6（非常白），
   数字越大表示皮肤越白。

   0=无代言人
   7=两位代言人（如果有两位代言人，请将第二位代言人的肤色填写到 4.1）
   8=三位代言人（如果有三位代言人，请将第二位代言人的肤色填写到 4.1，
   将第三位代言人的肤色填写到 4.2）
   9=四位代言人（如果有四位代言人，请将第二位代言人的肤色填写到 4.1，
   将第三位代言人的肤色填写到 4.2，将第四位代言人的肤色填写到 4.3）

4.1. 第二位产品代言人肤色：_____从 1（非常黑）到 6（非常白），数字越大表示皮肤越白。

4.2. 第三位产品代言人肤色：_____从 1（非常黑）到 6（非常白），数字越大表示皮肤越白。

4.3. 第四位产品代言人肤色：_____从 1（非常黑）到 6（非常白），数字越大表示皮肤越白。

二：广告策略/诉求

0=无
1=有
2=无法判断

1. 广告中是否采用理性诉求？
理性诉求：旨在诉诸于消费者的理性思维，强调产品的特质、功能，质量，价格，优缺点等产品信息。是基于逻辑，数据，证据，事实，理由的一种广告策略。消费者通过理性思考，分析比较进而做出购买决定。

例如如果广告中提到使用某种先进的技术，可以有效击退黑色素生成，从而使皮肤白皙，就是使用了理性诉求。

2. 广告是否采用恐惧感诉求来激起消费者的恐惧心理，由此来使消费者产生消费冲动？
恐惧感诉求：是感性诉求的一种，它不是强调产品的优点或使用产品的好处，而是强调如果不使用产品可能会带来的不好处，危险等消极后果。从而引起消费者焦虑，痛苦，或不使用此产品所带来的恐惧心理或危机感。

例如，广告中强调一系列不使用美白产品所带来的后果，比如色斑，皮肤衰老，晒斑，皮肤发黄暗沉，不自信等。

3. 广告中是否采用感性诉求？
感性诉求：诉诸于消费者的情感、情绪，如喜悦、恐惧、爱、悲哀等。比如强调某产品是好男人给心爱的人的选择。

4¶ 广告是否将白与美联系起来？

5. 广告是否传达了使用此产品后可以提升个人的魅力/使人更有魅力？

6. 广告是否传达了使用此产品后可以使人变得更有自信？

7. 广告是否传达了使用此产品使人更快乐，更开心？

8. 广告是否传达了使用此产品后可以提升个人的社会地位？

9. 广告是否传达了使用此产品后有助于消费者获得升迁的机会/升职/在职场上更有优势？

10. 广告是否传达了使用此产品使人更愿意社交，扩展关系人脉？

11. 广告是否将白与吸引力联系起来，比如更吸引异性？

12. 广告中是否提到绿色天然，纯植物，无污染，无添加等相关词汇？

三：广告是否融入西方文化和相关因素：
1. 代言人说的语言是/广告配音是：
   0=中文
   1=英文
   2=中英文
   3=其他

2. 产品包装上使用的语言有：
   0=中文
   1=英文
   2=中英文
   3=中文，英文和拼音
   4=拼音
   5=中文和拼音
   6=英文和拼音

3. 产品包装上**产品名**使用的语言是：
   0=中文
   1=英文
   2=中英文
   3=其他
   4=拼音
   5=中文和拼音

4. 产品包装上**品牌名**使用的语言是：
   0=中文
   1=英文
   2=中英文
   3=其他
   4=拼音
   5=中文和拼音

5. 广告是否提到**引用某项科技/技术**？
   0=没有
   1=有，引用东方/中国传统科技
   2=有，引用西方进口/国外科技
   3=既有东方也有西方
   4=有，无法确定东方或西方

6. 广告是否提到**专家或专利**？
   0=没有
   1=有，东方/中国专家/专利
   2=有，西方/国外专家/专利
   3=既有东方也有西方
   4=有，无法确定东方或西方

7. 广告中是否融入其他西方的相关因素，比如某些西方的建筑，人物，城市，英文商店名，西餐，等？
   0=没有
   1=有（如果有，请注明是什么）
   2=无法判断

四：广告是否融入东方、中国传统文化或相关因素：

   0=没有
   1=有
   2=无法判断

1. 广告中是否提到**中国传统饮品**，如茶叶，酒等？

2. 广告中是否提到**中国传统食物**，如燕窝，银耳等？

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3. 广告中是否提到**中国传统的动物及相关产品**，如熊猫，蚕（蚕丝）等？

4. 广告中是否提到**中国古老的玉石、宝石**，如珍珠，玛瑙，玉，水晶，珊瑚等？

5. 广告中是否提到**中国的历史人物**，如杨贵妃，武则天，吕后，四大美女（西施，王昭君，貂蝉，杨玉环）等？

6. 广告中是否提到**中国传统节日**，如春节，七夕，中秋，二十四节气等？

7. 广告中是否提到**中国传统的一些体育运动**，如中国功夫，武术，气功，象棋，围棋等？

8. 广告中是否提到**中国传统的一些绘画书法**，如油画，国画=中国画，书法等？

9. 广告中是否提到**中国传统的一些戏曲曲艺**，如京剧，评剧，粤剧，皮影戏，越剧，相声，双簧等？

10. 广告中是否提到**中国传统的一些音乐舞蹈**，如中国民族音乐，传统民歌，古代舞蹈，民族舞等？

11. 广告中是否提到**古诗词，古书**，如四书五经，诸子百家等？

12. 广告中是否提到中国的一些**民间俗语，谚语或成语**，如一白遮三丑，沉鱼落雁、闭月羞花、倾城倾国、国色天香？

13. 广告中是否提到中国的一些其他**汉语词汇**，如朝代，四大发明，宫廷，匠人，匠心精神，登峰造极等？

14. 广告中是否提到**中医的理念**，
如**汉方；古方**（绛雪方、琼玉方、七白方等）；
本草，花本，中草药（大花红景天，姜，**人参**，灵芝，枸杞，白术、当归，白芍、白蒺藜，金钗石斛，门天冬、鲜生地、 山药，雪莲、黄芪、御苁蓉，麦冬、白芨、白蔹等）；

中国古代中医学经典著作（《千金方》=孙思邈，古代中医学经典著作，《本草纲目》=明代李时珍，本草著作，《饮馔服食笺》=明代养生类中医文献）；
医药学家（孙思邈， 李时珍等）；
中医药大学（上海中医药大学）。

15. 广告中是否提到**中国的古典哲学/中国古代哲学思想**，
    如太极阴阳；五行（金木水火土）；八卦；气；道；养生等？

16. 广告中是否提到**中国传统植物花卉，**如桃花，莲花，水仙等？

17. 广告中是否提到**中国传统器皿，**如瓷器？

18. 广告中是否有**中国特有或传统的服饰装饰，**如汉服，古装，簪子等？

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