

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

Fast-food is a good example of a cross-cultural product. Fast-food restaurants began in America in 1940 and the number of fast food franchises grew quickly between 1960 and 1970. After that, fast-food became part of American consumption culture. Schlosser points out in his book, *Fast Food Nation*, that fast-food is popular among Americans because of its price, taste and convenience. Fast-food franchises have spread rapidly in many countries around the world. Thailand is one of the countries that have accepted this consumption culture and recently fast-food has become popular among Thais.

Advertising is one of the factors that make products successful. In order to advertise a product, advertisers need to follow the cultural values in that country. Singh and Huang state that American printed advertisements that did not follow Indian cultural values were not successful in India (cited in Lin 84). Nevertheless, Lin claims that there might be universal appeals that every culture shares (84). Cheng and Schweitzer find eight values that American and Chinese television commercials share. These are family, technology, tradition, enjoyment, individualism, economy, modernity, and youth (32). Another factor affecting the portrayal of values in advertisements is the advertiser. Who the advertiser aims at and what appeal the advertiser uses can affect advertisements. Advertisers cannot use the same type of advertisement everywhere.

Therefore, advertisers use the values of particular cultures in their creation of advertisements. Although they may sell the same product in different places, they cannot use the same advertisement. An advertisement that is created for particular cultural values in a particular society must construct a different identity (Lin 83).

In the past, almost every fast-food television advertisement in Thailand presented its products as new and different, and used teenagers as the main presenters. In these cases Thai advertisers used modernity and youth values to target teenagers. Rachanee Yonniyom stated in her research that “80% of fast-food customers were students in secondary, college and university levels and most of them learned about fast-food through television advertisements” (cited in Ubolpoolpol 3). This evidence shows that television advertisements influence viewers. Nowadays, Thai advertisers tend to use family values in fast-food advertisements. If viewers take a look at recent fast-food television advertisements, they will find that images of family members are frequently included.

In Thailand, family is very important because Thai kinship is very strong. Traditional Thai families are extended, with three generations or more living in the same house. They might consist of grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, uncles and aunts (Natsupha and Lertwicha 238). Thai families are concerned about having meals together, especially dinner. Dinner is considered an important meal because it is the time that family members gather and talk with each other after spending the whole day outside of the home. In this way, dinner is an activity that can create closer relationships and happiness in Thai families. The importance of having a meal together is used in many kinds of Thai food advertisements such as *Roy Thai* coconut milk and *Pun Dee* Rice. *Roy Thai* states that “having a meal together creates family happiness.” Moreover,

*Pun Dee* Rice depicts family members at tables full of food but no one eats before the father arrives. Fast-food advertisers also use the importance of meal time and families in their advertisements in order to assimilate fast-food into Thai culture. The images of family members in Thai fast-food advertisements are used to convince the adults that everyone in the family can consume fast-food and that fast-food is a family meal.

Although family values are used to sell the same product, definitions of family and the relationships of family members portrayed in advertisements are certainly different. American and Thai fast-food advertisements both use family. However, where American advertisers, especially *McDonald's*, aim at children, Thai advertisers aim at adults. Accordingly, the portrayals and concepts of family in Thai and American advertisements are different. In *McDonald's* "Happy Meal" advertisements, the family often consists of a mother with children—a boy and a girl. The relationship between the mother and her children is not presented explicitly because these advertisements aim to persuade children to eat and play at *McDonald's* restaurants. Thus, toys, cartoons, and an imaginary world are used in advertisements to attract children (Schlosser 40-42). In contrast, if viewers take a look at *KFC* and *Pizza Hut* advertisements, they will find diverse family pattern. This might be because *KFC* and *Pizza Hut* both target adults. The families in American *KFC* advertisements include an African-American family, a white American nuclear family, a single parent with children and a couple without children. The depictions of families in American *Pizza Hut* advertisements are similar. The restaurant and imaginary world settings in *McDonald's* advertisements change to a home setting in both *KFC* and *Pizza Hut* advertisements. Furthermore, when compared to *McDonald's* advertisements, the family members in the other two brands have more interaction with each other.

In contrast, although traditional Thai families are extended, in Thai fast-food advertisements a family is always shown as two parents with a son and a daughter. Furthermore, their relationship is shown as quite close as they spend time and do activities together. The images of family members, especially those presented in Thai *KFC* and *Pizza Hut* advertisements, often refer to the concept of “happy family.” Some portrayals of “happy family” presented in *KFC* advertisements are parents doing activities with their children during weekends, family members having meals together and children visiting their grandparents during holidays. Kulapa Wajanasara suggests in her research “ภาพและชีวิตครอบครัวในสังคมไทย”(Image and Family Life in Thai Society) that “happy families” are defined by the good relationship among family members including understanding and spending time together (113-17). In these cases, representations of the ideology of “happy family” in *KFC* advertisements reflect some of her definition.

Since the media generally tries to portray reality as they see it, many scholars accept that the media can reflect ideology. Hence, the images that the media chooses as representations also reflect ideology as well. Furthermore, in advertising, advertisers try to select images that audiences want to see. Of course, their representations will reflect ideology since what audiences want to see is generally based on the norms and values in their culture.

The family is an important basic unit of every society and teaches children how to fit well into their culture and be productive citizens. Therefore, families in which there are strong relationships between parents and children are highly desirable. Since advertisements reflect ideology, portrayals of family presented in advertisements reflect

the attitudes and behaviors of people in the society. Therefore, to examine how culture and values affect advertisements, it would be interesting and beneficial to study the concepts of Thai and American families as presented in fast- food television advertisements. Thus, the purpose of this research was to compare the representations of Thai and American families as presented in fast-food television advertisements. The research question and sub-research questions were designed to enable the researcher to achieve the purpose of this research. In order to answer these questions, this research analyzed the content and ideology of selected fast-food advertisements.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

To compare the representations of Thai and American families presented in fast-food television advertisements.

## **1.3 Educational advantages**

1.3.1 To understand how verbal and non-verbal language is used to reflect the representations of Thai and American families in fast-food television advertisements.

1.3.2 To understand how advertisements are shaped by the cultural values of Thai and American societies.