

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated how Thai and American families are represented in fast-food television advertisements and uses Hofstede's individualism-collectivism as the theoretical framework. The findings show that both Thai and American advertisers portray modern Thai and American families as representations of Thai and American families, respectively, and reflect the changes in family structures in the respective societies. Accordingly, the cultural values of Thai and American societies play an important role in shaping the representations of Thai and American families in advertisements.

Thai families are shown as nuclear families, including parents and children. The number and sex of the children vary. Other family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews join them mainly for parties and special occasions. Husbands and wives share housework tasks. However, cooking is still depicted as the wives' task. The roles and responsibilities of children are not presented explicitly.

The prevalent cultural values reflected in Thai fast-food advertisements are a "We" identity, high-context communication, and support and protection of family members in exchange for loyalty. A "We" identity is found in three of the Thai KFC ads and three of the Thai Pizza Hut ads. High-context communication is found in one KFC ad and two Pizza Hut ads. In addition, there are two KFC ads reflecting protection of

family members. The term “We” means that family members think of themselves in terms of “We,” and this suggests a feeling of in-group solidarity. To be a family means that family members spend time together, think of each other, and share resources. Thai families prefer high-context communication. Family members are happy when they are together even when there is little or no conversation. In this case, actions are considered to speak louder than words. To sum up, the overall values depicted in the Thai advertisements are associated with collectivism.

For the American families depicted in the advertisements, the family patterns vary. A family can be a typical nuclear family, a single parent family, or a couple without children. Other family members are not mentioned at all. Husbands and wives share the housework. Cooking can be a task of either the husband or the wife. However, it is still suggested that husbands are not typically good cooks. Furthermore, children are shown participating in the housework.

The most commonly found cultural values in the American fast-food advertisements are an “I” identity and concern with each person individually and their immediate families. There are four American KFC ads and two American Pizza Hut ads which refer to an “I” identity. In addition, there is one KFC ad and three Pizza Hut ads reflecting Americans’ primary concern with themselves and their immediate families. The term “I” means that family members think of themselves primarily in terms of “I” and associate this with privacy, freedom, individual rights, and responsibilities. The adults generally eat separately. There appears to be no great need to spend time together all the time. In conclusion, the American values depicted in the advertisements reflect a concern with individualism.

To compare, Thai and American families appear mainly different in terms of patterns and cultural values. Nevertheless, there are some similarities, including the sharing of housework and the importance of dinner.

As mentioned above, husbands and wives help each other to do housework. House work does not appear to be exclusively a female task as in the past. Additionally, the findings show that both Thais and Americans are concerned with the importance of dinner. Although American adults may eat alone, American families with children under eighteen typically eat dinner together. Dinner is a precious time to gather, talk, and transfer the cultural values of their societies.

The depictions of happy Thai families in the advertisements show families in which family members spend time together, do activities together, think of each other, and pay respect to older relatives. Happy American families are depicted as families in which family members express their feelings and opinions and in which the individual family members can and typically do stand on their own two feet. A happy family in both the Thai and American fast-food depictions is a family that follows the cultural values and norms of their respective societies.

The differences in cultural values are the first thing advertisers need to study and focus on since inappropriate depictions this may lead to misunderstanding. For example, while the Thai Pizza Hut ad for “Num Hit Jad Yai” and the Thai KFC ad for “Suk Jai Set” are focused on a “We” identity, the American ads, KFC “Bite”, KFC “Dad ate the bones,” and KFC “Chicken corsage” clearly represent American cultural values that differ from Thai cultural values. In their own culture, Thais may interpret the behavior of some of the characters in these American ads as being inappropriate. It is hoped that

this study may help to create better understanding and explain the gap between the two cultures.

Of course, advertisements shown in America would probably not be successful in Thailand, and vice-versa. Good advertisements need to follow the cultural values and norms of the country they will be used in. Moreover, the products, and advertisements, need to be adapted to fit the new target customers. For example, Thai KFC and Thai Pizza Hut employ ลาบไก่ [larbkai] (minced chicken with spices), a traditional Thai dish, to attract Thai customers.

This study compares the representations of Thai and American families in advertisements for only two brands, KFC and Pizza Hut. Further studies could be conducted of other fast-food brands to determine if the findings are similar or not. Moreover, it would be useful to study the representations of families in advertisements for other cross-cultural products such as soft drinks and life insurance.

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