

## **Mirror of beauty: Cultural values reflected in online skincare advertising in the Philippines and Taiwan**

### **美麗魔鏡：菲律賓與台灣保養品網路廣告投射之文化價值**

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**Abstract:** As mirrors of culture, advertisements are believed to reflect values relevant to consumers. This research aims to examine whether the cultural values are reflected in online skincare advertisements between countries with different cultural influences and then further investigate what values consumers maintain and shift. Content analyses of online skincare advertisements and in-depth interviews with consumers in the Philippines and Taiwan were conducted in this study. The research focused in particular on how slogan values, brand prominence, and product prominence and context of online skincare advertisements can be manipulated in a strategic way to pass on implicit messages to the receiver. The results highlight that the notion of beauty in online skincare advertisements and the minds of consumers is socially and culturally constructed and its meanings are maintained and changed by social forces and globalized communication of advertising media.

**Keywords:** Cross-culture, cultural values, online skincare advertising, globalization, beauty.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the market research from Lucintel (Yeonmans, 2012), rising consumer incomes and changing lifestyles are driving the global beauty care products industry, which is forecasted to reach around \$265 billion by 2017. The report also highlighted an increasing demand in Europe and the Asia Pacific region, with the latter contributing the biggest revenue (\$129 billion) to the global beauty care product industry in 2013. This statistic is in the line with Walker's reports in both Global Market Report 2013 and Euromonitor 2014 that six countries of the top ten growth markets for beauty care products are members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Lopaciuk and Loboda, 2014; Walker, 2013). Emerging countries (e.g., Taiwan, the Philippines) represent a huge potential for global companies to expand their business market throughout the world. This phenomenon suggests the beauty industry will be one of the most promising and profitable business in the Asia-Pacific market in the future (Sena, 2014; Yeh, 2015). More importantly, the beauty industry sells brands/products that define which cultural value is considered attractive and presented in advertising (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010). Basically, advertisers often emphasize the functional qualities of a brand/product, but they also simultaneously convey "hidden" messages, by which they diffuse cultural values such as the importance of beauty, youth, femininity, or pleasure. "The repetition of advertising messages creates and reinforces cultural beliefs and values" (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004, p. 410). However, Jones (2011) argues that, as Western beauty standards have been globalized, non-Western countries and local ideals and practices have retreated at different rates and to different extents. Examining advertisements from different countries can help determine whether the traditional cultural values are reflected in them or whether Western entrepreneurs globalized them.

The Philippines and Taiwan have different cultural influences, which affect their cultural totality (Chen, 2016; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). From the perspective of popular and cosmetic advertisements, the Philippines' culture is greatly influenced by the West (Nadal, 2009) whereas Taiwan is greatly influenced by Japanese culture and Confucian ideals (Moskowitz, 2011). The skincare markets in the Philippines and Taiwan have started joining the beauty

trends and show promising development (Cerrer, 2010). According to Euromonitor, retail value sales for cosmetics in the Philippines in 2015 grew by 4.2% year-on-year to \$3.5 billion (Cosmetics Business, 2016). With the Philippines having a large young population—61.5% of the country's 98.3 million people were under 30 years old in 2015—social media and e-commerce have played weighty roles in the cosmetics and skincare products business (Cosmetics Business, 2016). Meanwhile, the cosmetic products market in Taiwan is dominated by skincare products, color cosmetics, anti-aging, moisturizing, oil control, sunscreen, and especially whitening. It is estimated that its cosmetics market will reach \$19 billion by 2018 (Israel Export Institute, 2015). Since the cosmetics business, especially whitening products, is a fast-growing industry worldwide, it is a significant focus of research.

As cultural values are the core of (online) advertising messages, it is appropriate to analyze advertisements through a cultural frame (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Srivastava, 2010). Hofstede (1984), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) further suggested that many cultural shifts occur in response to changes in external factors, such as globalization and the resulting change in economics and social lives. Women in Taiwan and the Philippines, who became the main players in the new world system of globalization, experienced economic conditions that necessitated a reconsideration of their consumption behavior, as countries tried to use all resources available to compete in the globalized market. Marketing theory holds that (online) ads would need to reflect the social norms and cultural values of a given society (Frith and Sengupta, 1991). Globalization alters this process. Standardized campaigns can be created in the head offices of advertising agencies in the U.S. and Europe and run in foreign countries with only simple modifications, such as translated headlines. Foreign branch offices of big multinational agencies often follow Western styles when creating campaigns.

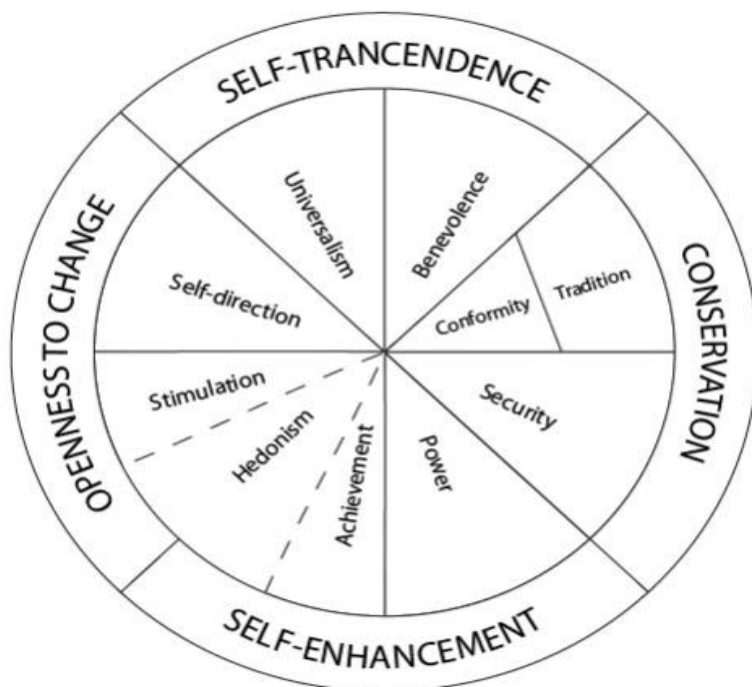
In terms of living standards and levels of development, the societies in the Philippines and Taiwan are comparable and therefore interesting to compare and contrast. Both are located in and typical representatives of the Asia-Pacific region. The Philippines has been influenced by the Western culture, whereas Taiwan is traditionally under the influence of Confucianism. In this study, we see online advertising as a mirror of cultural values and concept of beauty between

the two countries. We further focus on online advertising as an instrument of cultural meaning from the world to consumer goods and as a value indicator. Therefore, this research aims to examine whether the cultural values are reflected in online skincare advertisements between countries with different cultural influences and then further investigate what values consumers maintain and shift.

## **2. Cultural values and advertising**

Theoretically, cultures of different contexts will reflect different values in their online advertisements (Alozie, 2011). It has been argued that if we are to understand and compare these across cultures, we need a conceptual framework for mapping them. One approach is to focus on the underlying values associated with these set of rules. For this purpose, Schwartz's (1994) theory of basic human values can be most useful. Schwartz's circular model of cultural values has been validated with more than 70 societies (Schwartz, 1994, 1997, 2006). Schwartz's model identified ten motivationally distinct values, which can be located along two orthogonal bipolar dimensions resulting in four higher-order values (Schwartz, 1994). One value's dimension consists of openness to change (*self-direction* and *stimulation*) on one end and conservation (*conformity*, *tradition*, and *security*) on the other end of a continuum. The other value's dimension consists of self-transcendence (*universalism* and *benevolence*) on one end and self-enhancement (*achievement*, *hedonism*, and *power*) on the other end of continuum (see Figure 1).

In respect to the openness to change/conservation values dimension, openness to change includes self-direction and stimulation values. Self-direction is related to autonomy and independent thought and action, as well as beliefs in creativity, freedom, curiosity, and choosing and pursuing one's goals. Stimulation relates to the pursuit of excitement, novelty, variety, and challenge in life as well as the desirability of being daring. On the other end of this values dimension, conservation includes conformity, tradition, and security values. Conformity relates to restrained actions, inclinations, and impulses that are likely to upset others as well as the avoidance of upsetting social norms and expectations. Behaviors associated with conformity are self-discipline, politeness,



**Figure 1**  
Schwartz's circular model of cultural values (1994)

obedience, honoring elders, and control of emotions. Tradition relates to respect and acceptance of and commitment to ideas and customs that are transmitted through culture and religion. Behaviors associated with the tradition value include respecting traditional practices and being moderate when assimilating new cultural ideas. Security relates to safety, harmony, and stability of society, relationships, and the self. There are two subtypes of security values; some serve primarily individual interests whereas others serve wider group interests. Behaviors associated with the security value include clean, national security, social order, family security, reciprocation of favors, healthy, and sense of belonging.

With respect to the self-transcendence/self-enhancement values dimension, self-transcendence values relate to benevolence and universalism. Benevolence is the preservation and enhancement of the interest and well-being of those with whom people have close contact. Beliefs in honesty, forgiveness, helpfulness,

loyalty, and responsibility to those with whom people are in contact relate to this value. Universalism relates to the understanding, tolerance, appreciation, and enhancement of the state of well-being for all people and for nature. This value encompasses the beliefs in broadmindedness, wisdom, equality, social justice, peace, unity with nature, and environmental protection. On the other end of this values dimension is self-enhancement, which includes power, achievement, and hedonism. Power relates to the desire for social status and prestige as well as the control and dominance of people and resources. Achievement refers to the desire for personal success through the demonstration of personal competence. Related to these two values are the beliefs in the desirability of being ambitious, influential, and successful and the pursuit of social power, authority, and wealth. Hedonism relates to the beliefs in attaining pleasure and sensual gratification for oneself and that one should seek to enjoy one's life to the fullest.

We use Schwartz's circular model of cultural values to organize the two countries' values. In reviewing the cultural influences of the countries, the Philippines' values (strongly influenced by the West) fall on openness to change and self-enhancement values, while Taiwan's values (greatly influenced by Confucian and Japanese cultures) lead to self-transcendence and conservation values (Tsai and Ho, 2013). Consequently, those values raise some issues in terms of the differences in beauty concepts and communication contexts used on online advertising from two cultural backgrounds. The following sections discuss factors such as slogan values, brand prominence, and product prominence and context.

## **2.1 Slogans of beauty cultural values between the Philippines and Taiwan**

According to a 2014 study by the global marketing research company Gyan Research and Analytics, nearly 50% of women in Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines used skin whitening and lightening products. Not only is whitened skin seen as a form of symbolic capital, but it has also been implicated as a sign of attractiveness and desirability, particularly among Asian females (Peltzer, Pengpid, and James, 2016).

As Western beauty standards have become globalized, "white skin" has emerged as a central theme of consumer culture in affluent Asian countries like Taiwan and the Philippines (Craven and Goon, 2003; Li *et al.*, 2008; Peltzer *et*

al., 2016). In reviewing the Philippines' major values in Schwartz's model, self-enhancement and openness to change values are reflected in beauty ideals. The Philippines was a Spanish colony for more than three centuries and an American territory for almost half a century. Consequently, the Western colonization has certainly left its mark on the Philippines' ideals of beauty. Because of the Philippines' hierarchical values, the higher members of the hierarchy (colonizers) were considered to be models of beauty. The Filipinos associate beauty with the Western colonizers' features because it suggests power and high standing in the society. This is why the Filipinos prefer light skin, a physical feature that can be associated with the West. Not only history, but also the media is responsible for giving the idea that power and beauty come with white skin (Craven and Goon, 2003). For instance, Pond's Philippines released a television advertisement featuring a local actress who claimed to have succeeded in the show business industry because she had fair skin. She mentioned in the advertisement that, when she had darker skin, people told her she would not be popular. This presents the idea that being beautiful and having light skin are essential to being successful and influential in society -- a clear representation of the achievement (*successful, ambitious, influential*) value type. In 2010, Olay Philippines launched its "I Defy" campaign, which obliges women to defy society and give in to their desires by, for example, staying up late at night and resting the entire next day or skipping their diet and eating ice cream; such values reflect the hedonism (*pleasure, enjoying life, self-indulgence*) value type. Such hedonistic values are attributed to the Philippines' Western influences.

In reviewing Taiwan's major values in Schwartz's model, self-transcendence and conservation values are reflected in beauty ideals. Taiwanese women have adapted the fascination with white skin. A beauty study by Frith and colleagues (2005) conducted with a cross-cultural analysis of women's magazine advertising showed that the conservative Confucian cultural values (e.g., *conformity, tradition, and security*) held in Singapore and Taiwan (Chen, 2016). Furthermore, Li and colleagues (2008) found that many slogans for beauty skin products emphasized whitening (or lightening) combined with other socio-cultural symbols in Asian cultures (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan). In other words, white skin is perceived as a sign of upper class, luxury, and prestige (Rhada, 2007). Previous research has also indicated that Asian celebrities link

their success with whiteness. Altering skin color implies success in controlling the body, thereby achieving an ideal body image (Miller, 2003). The Taiwanese media feature numerous celebrities with white skin who are considered to be beautiful and desirable. Meanwhile, Nydia Lin, a senior executive in Taiwan for the Japanese brand Shiseido, emphasized, “We promote the idea of whitening. Especially in Taiwan we see many beautiful idols on TV, and they are all focused on their whitened skin.” Culturally imbedded skin whitening advertisements in Asia show that the female representations are clearly constructed for the male gaze. This concept is integrated into the Chinese proverb “one white covers up three uglinesses,” which has been passed down through the generations. The statement clearly reflects the conservation values (*conformity, tradition, and security*) dimension of Schwartz’s models in Taiwan’s beauty ideals (Frith *et al.*, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, this idea of beauty as essential for the social order in society is a clear representation of the security (*reciprocation of favors, sense of belonging*) value type. This obsession with whiteness has not faded over time.

The interpretations of culturally imbedded skin whitening advertisements produced online between the Philippines and Taiwan are clearly constructed. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

**H1:** Online skincare advertisement slogans in the Philippines and Taiwan reflect significantly different cultural values. In particular, slogans in a society with stronger Western cultural influences (e.g., the Philippines) reflect power, achievement, and hedonism values whereas slogans in a society with weaker Western cultural influences (e.g., Taiwan) reflect conformity, tradition, and security values.

## **2.2 Brand prominence, product prominence, and context**

Most advertisements contain images, brand identifiers, and text elements. The logo is the brand element that is responsible for the advertisement’s identity. For this research, the brand refers to the company logo. This study observes the prominence of the brand and product image within online skincare products’ advertisements. Basically, this study uses Gupta and Lord’s (1998) definition of prominence: “Prominent placements are those in which the brand/product (e.g., logo or product itself) is made highly visible by virtue of size or position...



Subtle placements are those in which the brand/product is not shown prominently (e.g., small in size).”

Product/brand placement and its effects on consumers have attracted substantial research attention in the past two decades (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Ptwardhan, 2006; Brennan, Dubas, and Bain, 1999; Bressoud, Lehu, and Russell, 2010; Grigorovici and Constantin, 2004; Matthes and Naderer, 2016; Olsen and Lanseng, 2012; Sabour *et al.*, 2016; van Reijmersdal, 2011; van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit, 2009; Wilson and Till, 2011). Although the literature has explored consumers’ attitudes toward product/brand placement as a practice, many studies have addressed the cognitive and persuasive effects of placements in terms of memory and brand attitude (Bressoud *et al.*, 2010). Nelson (2002) specified that this memory effect is superior for local, new, atypical, consumer-relevant, and prominently placed brands/products, suggesting that stimuli (e.g., brand/product prominence), individual factors (e.g., brand familiarity), and their interplay all affect product/brand placement effectiveness in terms of memory (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2006). Early studies in product/brand placement were mostly of U.S. origin, and little attention has been paid to the global nature of placements (Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Krauter, 2000). Nowadays, the number of international contributions has grown in the product/brand prominence placement literature (Hang and Auty, 2011; Kamleitner and Jyote, 2013; Lee, Sung, and de Gregorio, 2011; Olsen and Lanseng, 2012; van Reijmersdal, 2011). In other words, understanding how consumers from other national and cultural backgrounds view product/brand prominence placements has become increasingly important as diverse products (e.g., beauty, movies, television shows) (Gould *et al.*, 2000).

According to traditional brand placement research, when some conceptual link exists between the brand and the story characters, editorial context (e.g., high or low), and size, vehicle, or medium, it leads to more positive attitudes (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2006). Attitudes toward a particular context element may then produce similar attitudes to the brand because of their perceived connection (Murry, Lastovicka, and Singh, 1992). Previous studies have found that attitudes tend to be swayed by the different meanings (sometimes implicit or sometimes explicit meanings based on difference cultural backgrounds) a viewer assigns to a placement (Russell, 2002). As a result, attitudinally effective

placement must be associated with the respective emotional or behavioral cues and cultural backgrounds (Percy, 2006).

Applying the foregoing concepts to the current study, this means that high enjoyment gained through online skincare ads could translate into a greater liking of brand within online environments (Wise *et al.*, 2008). The connection between the brand (prominence or subtlety) and online context element (high or low) affects transfer (Wise *et al.*, 2008). As research based on Hofstede's (1984, 2005) cultural dimensions support the relevance of advertising messages and formats to be adapted to the dominant cultural values of a particular country, it is important to investigate how advertisers in different cultures apply brand/product placement in online advertisements (Chou and Chen, 2016; Lou *et al.*, 2014). Theoretically, people from low-context cultures believe that a high degree of specificity or direct communication is most effective. On the other hand, people from high-context cultures view group agreement as more important than personal feelings, which means that direct communication is not being used very much as it can upset the group's harmonious relationship. Therefore, people from high-context cultures integrate information with a low degree of specificity, subtle context, and nonverbal cues (Gudykunst, 2003).

The prominence or subtlety of the brand/product placement examined in this study has been examined in previous literature (Hang and Auty, 2011; Kamleitner and Jyote, 2013; Lee, Sung, and de Gregorio, 2011; Olsen and Lanseng, 2012; van Reijmersdal, 2011). Consequently, a prominent brand/product placement is viewed as one that is more in the forefront with a highly visible and big image. A subtle brand/product placement is regarded as one that is not in the forefront and has a small image or is not highly visible. Presumably, high-context cultures (e.g., Taiwan) are intuitive and contemplative, tending to use the indirect messages and low degree of specificity as a brand/product image. It may show a small size or an ambiguous image of brand/product in online skincare ads, and its online ads may occupy more spaces in discussing the product usage information and benefits. Low-context cultures (e.g., the Philippines), on the other hand, are analytical and action-oriented, tending to use clearly spoken messages and a high degree of specificity as a brand/product image in online skincare ads. It may include no detailed explanations about the brand/product usage when providing only a big size or a

clear image of the brand/product as a demo. As a result, the following hypotheses are presented:

**H2:** Online skincare advertisements in both countries present significantly different brand prominences.

**H3:** Online skincare advertisements in both countries present significantly different product prominences and communication contexts.

### 3. Methods

In order to investigate the mirror of beauty across cultures, content analyses and in-depth interviews were used in this study. The main reason this study applied a hybrid research methodology (e.g., mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches) was to achieve “triangulation” by using multiple methods (Chang, 2017). Prioritizing triangulation when investigating online advertising is appropriate because “different research techniques producing consistent results provide a more effective base for describing, explaining, understanding, interpreting, predicting, controlling, and critiquing a communication process or event than a single research technique producing a single result” (Frey *et al.*, 1991, p. 14). Multiple methods can better depict the communication process, from the information production stage to its effects on consumers. Furthermore, in (online) advertising research, it is important to detail how the actual content appears in the media (e.g., websites), and then explore its possible effects on consumers (Boyle and Schmierbach, 2015). In total, a quantitative method (e.g., content analysis) provides a general understanding of the effect whereas a qualitative method (e.g., in-depth interview) allows a closer look at the effects dynamics (Creswell, 2007).

#### 3.1 Content analysis and sample selection

Content analysis has long been the method of a typical choice for analysis communication, particularly for studies of advertising (Beane, 2013; Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2015; Maslow, 2015). In advertising research, content analysis often provides quantitative summaries of different messages, including verbal and visual elements of advertising, messages, and product placement in different media contexts, such as televised programs, print media, or online websites

(Chang, 2017). According to Wimmer and Dominick (2013), content analysis can aid in comparing media content to the real world. Because content analysis enables “interpretations about the content that imply something about the nature of the communicators or effects on communicators” (Keyton, 2006, p. 233), when conducted appropriately, such analyses enable researchers to make inferences about communication messages or the behaviors, attitudes, and values of the people who create the content (Keyton, 2006).

Furthermore, a content analysis can be descriptive, detailing the characteristics of communication messages or interactions between messages and contexts or they can be explanatory and seek to explicate why messages are constructed in the ways they are in different cultures (Merrigan and Huston, 2004). In this regard, the method of content analysis offers an opportunity to compare media content to different cultures or countries (Morris and Nichols, 2013). In fact, content analysis has long been associated with investigating cultural issues represented in mass media. Such human interactions and cultural issues are observed by making realizations about the relative frequencies of visual representations of particular classes of people, actions, roles, situations, or events. It is context sensitive and, therefore, allows researcher(s) to process data such as texts that are significant, meaningful, informative, and even representational to others. In this study, the content analysis of online skincare advertisements is mainly performed to dig out culturally relevant values from two different cultures.

To develop a code sheet for the online skincare advertisements in this study, code-sheet development procedures from previous studies of online advertisements were followed (Robinson, 2008) and used as references. The codes sheet was developed from the gathered literature review, especially Schwartz’s Circular Model of Values. The code sheet included the identification of the leading brands in each country, type of skincare products, value reflection of slogans, brand prominence, and product image prominence. The samples of this content analysis were skincare advertisements appearing on major websites in both countries from September 2011 to August 2012. The online ads were collected from high-traffic websites with a high Alexa ranking. For the Philippines, Facebook, Yahoo! Philippines, and YouTube ranks first, second, and fifth, respectively. Meanwhile in Taiwan, Yahoo! Taiwan, Facebook, and

YouTube rank first, second, and fifth, respectively. The third and fourth rankings in Alexa for both countries were search engine websites and were disregarded for the data collection. A total of 373 online skincare advertisements were collected and analyzed: 223 from Taiwan and 150 from the Philippines. Only skincare products for the face were considered for data collection, thereby excluding online ads for other product categories, including color cosmetics or makeup.

After developing the code sheet for the content of the online skincare advertisements, two research assistants were responsible for coding each feature online ad. They were trained over three afternoons, and both had previously worked on other content analyses. The two coders resolved any disagreements in the online ads through discussions with each other. Inter-coder reliability was then measured using Cronbach's alpha. The coding categories were conceptually defined as follows: slogan values, brand prominence, and product image prominence and context. Brand prominence and product image prominence were measured using a six-point scale from no brand/product (0) to very subtle (1), somewhat subtle (2), neutral (3), somewhat prominent (4), and very prominent (5). Two research assistants identified each of online skincare ads to assign points. These categories were analyzed using chi square or *t*-test statistics to determine significant cross-cultural differences.

### **3.2 In-depth interviews**

Belk (2017) suggested that in-depth interviews are the other main technique of (online) advertising research. Rather than just recall and recognize measures of advertising effectiveness, in-depth interviews probe more deeply into how consumers perceive an advertisement and what meanings they take away from it. Creswell (2007) explained that it is important to selectively choose individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being investigated so that researcher(s) can effectively derive a common understanding. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted in the second stage of this study in order to capture consumers' unique experiences with online skincare ads (Baba, 2014; Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013).

Theoretically, in-depth interviews are useful when detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors are desired and to explore new issues more deeply (Belk, 2017). Interviews are often used to provide context to other

data, offering a more complete depiction of what happened and why. In this study, in-depth interviews were used as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to investigate their perceptions of particular ideas, such as the beliefs of beauty, brand prominence, and product prominence and context. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), interviewers must use effective interview techniques, such as avoiding yes/no and leading questions and keeping their personal opinions in check. Therefore, the interviews utilized unaided and aided online advertisements. Unaided online advertisement interview questions relied on the interviewee's personal recollection and encounter with a certain skincare advertisement. Utilizing unaided interview questions in the beginning of the interview ensured that the interviewee was not led on or affected by the interviewer(s). On the other hand, aided online advertisement interview questions were asked by presenting chosen ad samples to the interviewees. Advertising samples introduced to the interviewees during the aided interview were drawn from three different ad pools, each containing different categories (see Table 1). Interviews were estimated to last 30 to 45 minutes, but were extended in cases when the interviewee was willing to share and expound on answers in greater depth.

A purposive sample, where individuals were selected based on how much relevant information they could provide to this study, was used (Patton, 1990). This sampling method was appropriate because the study's intention was to understand how a specific group of individuals (e.g., females who have regular experiences accessing online skincare ads in Taiwan and the Philippines) perceive the media (e.g., online advertisements). Although this method did not provide generalizable results to a broader sample in the tradition of quantitative research, it did provide valuable insights into perceptions and behaviors of beauty (Peltzer *et al.*, 2016).

The researchers adopted a strategy of recruiting volunteer consumers who had engaged in online cosmetics communities and had bought skincare products online within the preceding six months. Sampling in qualitative research is flexible and often continues until new themes emerge from the data. Ultimately, 30 respondents were recruited: 15 Taiwanese women and 15 Filipino women who were 20 to 30 years old, had logged on to the identified websites, and had

**Table 1**  
**Advertisement pool content**

Advertisement Pool	Category	Category Items
Ad Pool A	Slogan Values	<i>Self-direction</i> <i>Stimulation</i> <i>Hedonism</i> <i>Achievement</i> <i>Power</i> <i>Security</i> <i>Conformity</i> <i>Tradition</i> <i>Benevolence</i> <i>Universalism</i>
Ad Pool B	Brand prominence	<i>Very prominent</i> <i>Somewhat prominent</i> <i>Neutral</i> <i>Somewhat subtle</i> <i>Very subtle</i> <i>No brand</i>
Ad Pool C	Product Image Prominence	<i>Very prominent</i> <i>Somewhat prominent</i> <i>Neutral</i> <i>Somewhat subtle</i> <i>Very subtle</i> <i>No product image</i>

bought skincare products online. A profile of the respondents is summarized and presented in Table 2. The level of education between participants from the two countries was mostly university or college; occupations included university/college students and working women.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of the study participant profile**

Variables	Description
Buying behaviors	Have bought online skincare products within recent months in the Philippines and/or Taiwan
Demographic	Females; 20 to 30 years old; Taiwanese and Filipinas
Education level	Both countries are the same as some participants are university students and others have completed their university degrees
Occupation	Some university students and other working women in both countries

Developing an interview protocol is an important part of performing in-depth interviews. To ensure consistency between interviews, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings (Boyce and Neale, 2006), the same instructions were followed for each interview. All questions were organized and asked in a similar manner with all respondents. In order to preserve the respondents' responses and not lose important details, the interviewer took notes and audio-recorded the interviews. The transcribed interviews were analyzed by the first author using line-by-line analysis to develop provisional explanatory themes. The analysis of in-depth interviews focused on uncovering similarities and differences in the results of this content analysis, including the interpretation of beauty slogan values, brand prominence, and product prominence and context on skincare advertisements. The constant comparison method was used as each interview was compared those before it to ensure consistency of provisional themes. The research team made these comparisons as a group following individual analyses of in-depth interviews from each country.

## **4. Results and discussions**

To ensure inter-coder reliability, two scorers separately coded the entire data set. The inter-coder reliabilities of the variables are as follows: slogan values (.923 $\alpha$ ), brand prominence (.872 $\alpha$ ), and product prominence and context (.884 $\alpha$ ). All of the variables show acceptable reliabilities.

### **4.1 Slogan values**

It was assumed that the online skincare advertisement slogans reflect values based on Schwartz's model of values (1994, 2006). The Philippines' values with stronger Western cultural influences in particular fell on the self-enhancement values dimension, such as power, achievement, and hedonism. Contrarily, Taiwanese values with weaker Western cultural influences highly led to the conservation values dimension, such as conformity, tradition, and security. Expectedly, slogans of online skincare ads from the two countries did show significant differences (see Table 2:  $\chi^2 = 22.924$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). Therefore, H1 is supported. Table 3 further shows that achievement (20.0%), stimulation (18.7%), security (16.7%), and no slogan (15.3%) dominated the slogan values in the



**Table 3**  
**Comparative data of online skincare advertisements**  
**in the Philippines and Taiwan**

Variables		Philippines	Taiwan
<i>Slogans</i>	Self-direction	6.0%	6.7%
	Stimulation	18.7%	7.2%
	Hedonism	4.7%	2.2%
	Achievement	20.0%	21.1%
	Power	10.7%	13.5%
	Security	16.7%	25.1%
	Conformity	0.7%	0.0%
	Tradition	4.7%	2.7%
	Benevolence	2.7%	1.3%
	Universalism	0.0%	2.7%
	No slogan	15.3%	17.5%
H1 $\chi^2 = 22.924$	<i>d.f.</i> =6	<i>p</i> < .0005	

Philippines whereas Taiwan's slogan values were dominated by security (25.1%), achievement (21.1%), no slogan (17.5%), and power (13.5%). The Philippines' online skincare ad values fell on the self-enhancement values dimension, such as achievement; the openness to change dimension, such as stimulation; and the conservation dimension, such as security. In contrast, Taiwan led to the conservation dimension, such as security, and the self-enhancement values dimension, such as achievement and power. It is worth noting that, although slogans of online skincare ads from the two countries did have a significant difference, carefully investigating the content frequency of online skincare ads in both countries showed a manipulation by globalized ad strategies rather than cultural philosophy and values.

Despite the theoretical belief that the two cultures are vastly different (Schwartz, 1994, 2006), our findings related to the slogan values reflected in the Philippines and Taiwan contributing to the globalization resulting in the appeal of online skincare advertisements showed many similarities. Interview results in both countries showed some different values from consumers' perspectives. The results of the interviews indicated that achievement values in slogans yielded positive responses from interviewees in the Philippines. For example, Joan

(Filipina, 25, trainee) shared how she understood the achievement slogan of an online advertisement. She noted:

*It means that if you have a good skin or if you're taking good care of your skin, it means more confidence. It brings out the confidence in the person. You will not be too ashamed to present yourself to others.*

The interview data also revealed a slight shift in the Philippines. The power value infused with the online ads did not fit with local values, thereby resulting in negative feelings about the online ad and product. More importantly, the power value expressed in the online skincare ads mostly mirrored the social division in society. For instance, the slogan of a whitening product, “*Kutismayaman (Wealthy skin)*,” highlights that white-skinned people look rich whereas tan-skinned people are relatively poorer. This factor created a negative appeal for some females in the Philippines. For instance, Salve (Filipina, 21, law student) explained her negative feeling about the power slogan:

*Our society is conscious when it comes to being a socialite and being rich. So if there are ads like that, I think people will get encouraged. But for me, I am not so encouraged because I am not fond of products like this, saying that if you use this product, it would make you seem like a rich person. For me, my feedback is not positive. It can be discriminatory and, personally, it's not effective for me.*

On the other hand, the Taiwanese interviewees expressed how they can relate to online skincare ads with security values in the slogan. The security value infused with the online ads highly fit with local values, thereby giving them positive feelings about the ad and product. Taiwanese interviewees expressed the importance of beauty as a member of a community; for instance, they care about what the people think of their skin, and they discuss beauty and skincare matters with their family and friends. These are the values that they are able to absorb from the online skincare ads, leading them to agree with the online ad message. Wella (Taiwanese, 21, student) elaborated what a security online ad means to her: “*The ad is saying that the product is very moisturizing, so that the skin does not dry out.*” *Because I care about what other people think about my looks, I want a more hydrated face.* Importantly, most Taiwanese interviewees shared their concept of beauty with their peers and family members. For example, Annie (Taiwanese, 21, student) said: “*The idea of becoming white is something*

*that I share with my family and friends. When I use a product like Nivea, I will become white and everybody will know because I will share the results.*” Such comments greatly reflect the conservation values dimension (in particular, *security*: e.g., family or in-group orientation) of Taiwan (Schwartz, 1994, 2006), where the thoughts and opinions of the community are more important than those of the individual. They care about the sense of belonging. Thus, even with the concept of beauty, the majority of Taiwanese interviewees shared that their family’s and friends’ thoughts are important to them.

Unlike the content analysis results, most Taiwanese interviewees preferred white skin because they keep traditional beauty value in mind to attract the male gaze, which is a clear representation of the conservation (in particular, *tradition*) value type (Schwartz, 2006). Wella (Taiwanese, 22, student) shared:

*I prefer white skin color, because people often say that white can obscure other shortcomings. White has been a certain fundamental element of beautiful criteria in our society. I highly agree that white always attracts the male gaze. It is important for girls.*

Furthermore, some Taiwanese interviewees’ values also reflected conservation values (combining *tradition* with *conformity*) because they are unlikely to upset social norms and expectations (Johansson, 1998). They believe that having white skin attracts males in the society. Yuri (Taiwanese, 21, student) stated:

*White skin is an advantage because everyone will say that white is more beautiful. The first impression that black represents to others is “dirty.” The color is also less attention grabbing. More importantly, most Taiwanese girls understand that having white skin can gain her boyfriend’s face. We want boys to love us, so keeping white skin becomes essential.*

Similarly, Audrey (Taiwanese, 21, student) believed that having white skin makes a good impression in society: *“White skin can cover many faults; white would have clean feelings, be more likable, and make a good impression.”*

Profoundly, young Taiwanese females still keep traditional beauty values in minds, but the high exposure of Western beauty entrepreneurs has made Taiwanese more open to Western ideas. Such influences might have caused a shift in values. This phenomenon shows a big shift in the values of young

Taiwanese women especially. For example, some Taiwanese females like Janet (Taiwanese, 25, clerk) elaborated what the achievement (in particular, *successful*) slogan of an aided advertisement means to them. She stated that, “*When I have a good skin, I feel happy and achieve my self-actualization needs. I think it will make one more successful in making friends.*” Hedy (Taiwanese, 23, saleswoman) further pointed out that, “*Nowadays, most women keep our skin whitened and clean. It is not for others, but for ourselves. It makes us feel good and happy. Not having white skin to attract the male gaze will lose our confidence easily.*”

## 4.2 Brand prominence

Theoretically, advertisements in Taiwan exploited subtle brand placement, whereas advertisements in the Philippines used prominent brand placement (Alozie, 2011). As the results in Table 4 indicate, brand prominence used in the online skincare ads of the two countries differed ( $[M_{Philippines} = 2.2467, SD = 1.79835]$  versus  $[M_{Taiwan} = 1.6816, SD = 1.44944]$ ;  $t = 3.374, p = .000$ ). Taiwan’s online skincare ads utilized subtler brand placement than those in the Philippines. Furthermore, the Philippine data revealed that online skincare ads utilized equal frequencies of subtle (35.19%) and prominent (35.19%), more than neutral (29.63%), brand prominence. In Taiwan, on the other hand, the results showed that online skincare ads utilized subtler brand prominence (62.5%) than prominent (15.27%) and neutral (14.31%) prominence (see Table 5). Thus, these differences support H2.

Taiwan’s online skincare ad samples showed subtler brand prominence, which supports Alozie’s (2011) claim that high-context cultures are intuitive and contemplative, tending to use brand logo as a small size or an ambiguous image. However, the Philippines’ online skincare ad samples did not strongly support the initial assumption that a low-context culture country would only provide a big size or a clear image of brand. This suggests that it does not fall in an extreme low-context form of communication in the Philippines’ online skincare ads.

The interview data showed deep differences between the two countries. Interestingly, most of the Filipina interviewees voiced that they do not give importance to the logo. For instance, Wendyl (Filipina, 25, 3D artist) shared: “*I don’t think there’s a big importance in the logo. I think, to me, the logos are not*

**Table 4**  
**T-test results of H2 and H3**

Variables	Country	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	F value	t-value	p-value
H2. Brand Prominence	Philippines	2.2467	1.79835	.14683	17.528	3.347***	.000
	Taiwan	1.6816	1.44944	.09706			
H3. Product Prominence	Philippines	2.08	1.645	.134	8.328	3.034***	.004
	Taiwan	1.63	1.230	.082			

\* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ .

**Table 5**  
**Brand prominence in the Philippines and Taiwan**

Variables		Philippines	Taiwan
Brand Prominence	No Logo	28%	35.4%
	With Logo	72%	64.6%
	Very prominent	10.19%	0.69%
	Somewhat prominent	25%	14.58%
	Neutral	29.63%	22.22%
	Somewhat subtle	23.15%	41.67%
	Very subtle	12.04%	20.83%
Product Image Prominence	No Product Image	16%	4.5%
	With Product Image	84%	95.5%
	Very prominent	23.81%	15.02%
	Somewhat prominent	21.43%	30.52%
	Neutral	35.71%	38.97%
	Somewhat subtle	17.46%	11.74%
	Very subtle	1.59%	3.76%

that important because usually my eyes would land on the endorser and then the product.” In the Philippines, interviewees expressed that their priority was the visuals—that is, the endorser and the product. Therefore, they do not really pay attention to the slogans and texts. Andrea (Filipina, 25, merchandiser) explained:

*To me, the images and graphics attract my attention right away. For me, if I look at the ads, I would look at visuals first, then the tagline. After this I would look from the visuals to the logo and then the copy. For most people who are browsing a magazine and they don't really intend to read slogans and copy texts, the first thing they would really notice are the visuals.*

Upon showing the interviewees the aided skincare advertisements, most of them expressed their attraction to the neutral size of the logo. Abigail (Filipina, 21, student) responded, *“I think I like the Estee Lauder ad (neutral logo). I saw the endorser first, and she has a big photo. I am attracted to this big figure of a woman and not too small.”* Similarly, Andrea (Filipina, 25, merchandiser) described, *“Specifically, I really like Estee Lauder’s ad (neutral logo) because I am particular with visuals. The photo of the endorser attracted me. The others look boring, and I would feel lazy reading all those texts.”* The results suggest that an endorser preference linked with a specific brand image becomes important in online skincare ads. Once an endorser linked with a prominent brand is more deeply processed and leads to increased memory, in some cases, a prominent placement may activate awareness of deliberate brand placement and cognitive defenses against persuasion. Such comments highlight the interviewees’ preference for the perfect balance between visibility and attention-grabbing characteristics.

However, the results from Taiwanese interviewees who preferred prominent logos challenge those of the abundance of subtle brand placement in Taiwanese online skincare ads. A prominent and highly visible logo captures more attention for the brand, which is an important element in communicating with young Taiwanese females. Yuri (Taiwanese, 21, student) explained, *“I like a big and eye-catching logo because it’s catching, clear, simple, and easily recognizable. I like the Lancôme ad (very prominent). It is also simple and clear.”* Similarly, Jenny (Taiwanese, 21, student) shared that the size is what she considers among other things: *“I prefer big and conspicuous logos because the brand is also one of the factors that I consider.”* The Taiwanese interviewees were attracted by the prominent visuals. When exposed to aided advertisements, Yuri (Taiwanese, 21, student) highlighted that, *“I am most attracted by the brand and product functions. I somewhat dislike background images.”*

### **4.3 Product image prominence and context**

The assumption demonstrated that advertisements in the Philippines use prominent product placement and appreciate straightforward and clear messages (Nadal, 2009), whereas advertisements in Taiwan use subtle product placement and prefer the indirect and ambiguous messages (Alozie, 2011). As shown in

Table 3, the Philippines' online skincare ads had more product prominence than those of Taiwanese online skincare ads ( $[M_{\text{Philippines}} = 2.08, SD = 1.645]$  versus  $[M_{\text{Taiwan}} = 1.63, SD = 1.230]$ ;  $t = 3.034, p = .004$ ). Thus, these differences support H3. It is worth examining further that the Philippines' data showed an abundance of prominent (45.2%) product image placement compared to neutral (35.7%) and subtle (19.1%) placement. Surprisingly, Taiwan's data showed an exceedingly abundant prominent (45.5%) product image placement compared to neutral (38.9%) and subtle (15.5%) placement (see Table 5). As expected, product images in the Philippines utilized prominent images and showed few words in product usage messages. However, the high percentage of prominent product images or less space in addressing product usage information in Taiwan's data is astounding. Contrary to the assumption that the Taiwanese ads would yield subtler product images, the prominent online skincare ads in Taiwan showed an even greater number than those from the Philippines' data. The usage of prominent product images could be affected by the huge amount of Western brands present in the data.

The Filipina interviewees expressed their preference for a neutral to prominent product placement with less text information in online skincare advertisements. Wendyl (Filipina, 25, 3D artist) shared,

*I think I prefer the sizes from neutral to big because I am also particular with the product packaging. I also want to see the product image more clearly. Also the products already have the features printed out on the packaging itself, so I can see what the product is for initially. The features are all in the image already. If the features are written with a great amount of text, I will not notice them. I like the Clean Dew of Tony Moly's (very prominent). This is the first time that I've seen this ad, and it looks interesting. It's the one that I would notice first.*

Some Filipina interviewees highlighted their preference for little to no text. Joan (Filipina, 25, trainee) said, *"I like bigger product shots because I want to know what it is. Is it soap? Is it a lotion? Is it a facial wash? I immediately look for that. Less text is better."* Moreover, Abigail (Filipina, 21, student) added that her only focus was the endorser: *"I like the last one, Celeteque (no logo), because there's no text, and I just see the model."* With regard to text and

information in online skincare ads, the Filipina interviewees were very clear when they pointed out that they prefer lesser text in online advertisements because such ads are straight to the point. Andrea (Filipina, 25, merchandiser) elaborated,

*Less text, but it should include an intriguing kind of information. If they put too much text, there's too much input. You don't need long explanations to be intrigued by a product; a short slogan can intrigue viewers about a product. I think as long as the viewer can relate, it's important. I think too much information will make me not give too much attention to those kinds of online ads.*

Contrarily, all of the Taiwanese interviewees said they preferred prominent product placement. The interviewees expressed their preference for the low-context manner of communication as opposed to the high-context manner of communication where Taiwan belongs. Considering that Taiwanese culture is a high-context culture, it was surprising that most of the interviewees expressed their attraction to less text information in online skincare advertisements. For example, Jenny (Taiwanese, 21, student) stated that too much text information is not her preference: *"I dislike very detailed text and descriptions."* Candice (Taiwanese, 25, teacher) explained further: *"The face of the model and the slogan attracted my attention."* Annie (Taiwanese, 21, student) explained her preferences:

*I prefer a large and eye-catching product image because it is simple and straightforward. For the text, I prefer less product information. I just want to see the explanation of the product's primary effects to gain some knowledge on it.*

Similarly, Audrey (Taiwanese, 21, student) described *"Big and eye-catching. It's easier to remember."* Vivian (Taiwanese, 21, student) further pointed out the importance of less online ad messages: *"Due to too much advertising, the messages in online ads should not be too much."*

The data on content analysis of online skincare ads and in-depth interviews from both countries (particularly Taiwan) highlighted that the trends in online skincare ads and consumer preferences are starting to shift toward low-context communication, requiring bigger photos of the brand/product and less text information.



## **5. Conclusion and future research**

Whitening skincare products advertised online have recorded a dramatic growth in the markets in the Philippines and Taiwan over the past two decades and are best-selling products in the Asian beauty industry. The long history of the desire for white skin has collided with technological developments and marketing forces. In both countries, skin whitening products promise to fulfill the desire for white skin as a route to higher status or to attract the male gaze. Meanwhile, whitening skin is a social norm that “forces” women to follow such trends and marketplace mythologies (Jones, 2011). Failure to follow this norm will result in low self-esteem and social pressure. In the social interaction context, white skin is a social symbol. The findings of this research highlight that the notion of beauty is socially and culturally constructed in online skincare advertisements and its meanings are maintained and slightly changed by the globalized communication of online advertising media.

In the context analysis, significant differences in online skincare advertisements were expected between the Philippines and Taiwan, such as slogan values, brand prominence, and product prominence and context. The results suggest that (online) advertising is viewed as mirrors of society, being influenced and shaped by the culture and society. However, the details of our online data challenge previous studies on cultural values, especially on Taiwanese conservation values. The outcome shows a slight shift from Taiwanese conservation values to self-enhancement and openness to change.

In the in-depth interviews, the Taiwanese females in particular still keep traditional beauty values in mind, but the high exposure to Western beauty entrepreneurs has made Taiwanese more open to Western ideas. Such an influence might have caused the value to shift. Importantly, a surprising finding that emerged from the study is that the females in both countries may have similar preferences toward the brand prominence and product prominence and context of online skincare advertisements. The results do not put the two countries on either side of the low or high context communication as the degree of context communication falls in between the two extremes. Surprisingly, the data from both countries’ interviews demonstrated a high preference for

prominent brand/product placement. As images are supposed to be the main element in capturing consumers' attention, advertisers may have prioritized prominent product/brand images in capturing audience attention (Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty, 2000). When considering the decision to adapt online advertising campaigns to communicate with consumers, this result seems to contribute to the debate of globalization versus the adaptation of local values.

This study offers some academic and managerial implications to the current literature in online skincare markets. First, it is important for marketing scholars to be aware of the extent to which whiteness in the beauty industry is embedded in consumer values research (Frith *et al.*, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2008). Theoretical insights help scholars understand the (new) world of globalization and structure the online skincare markets that we see. Second, this study deals with how some cultural value dimensions in skincare markets affect attitudes toward women's beauty consumptions in online advertisements. The findings of this study assist practitioners by helping them think more broadly about how whiteness and cultural value dimensions in online skincare ads structure their view of consumer behavior and consumer markets in the Asia-Pacific region. Third, this study also investigates how the online ads in skincare markets can affect the effectiveness of using globalization strategies in marketing campaigns. Thus far, few studies have dealt with the interacting effects of cultural value dimensions and online advertisements in the same setting. Our research shows that some relationships exist among these factors and identifies other issues to be investigated in the future. Further research could study whether other factors (e. g., gender [females vs. males], occupation, education) moderate the effect of some cultural value dimensions on attitudes toward beauty care products of online consumptions in emerging markets. The effect of the Web 3.0 (e.g., technology or mobile usage) on attitudes toward beauty consumption may be further studied in other countries than the Philippines and Taiwan.

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