

ABSTRACT

WHAT IS THE FACE OF ADVERTISING IN CHINA?

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The advertising scene in China has experienced a revolution of its own over the last ten years. There has been a proliferation of outdoor signs, print ads and even television commercials in the People's Republic of China (Holton, 1985; Stevenson, 1985; Bonner, 1986; and Seligman, 1986). However, very little research has been conducted on the nature of Chinese advertising.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

This exploratory study analyzes a sample of Chinese advertising to confirm whether the following truths which have developed about Chinese advertising are valid:

1. Chinese advertising both domestically and internationally is uncreative and amateurish (Reaves, 1985, p. 76). Most ads consist of poorly painted pictures of heavy machinery. Most lack pictures of people.
2. Advertising should emphasize product specifications and performance, not subjective factors. References to sex and humor should be avoided (Seligman, 1986; Reaves, 1985, p. 74).
3. Advertising should use graphs and drawings which show the product off to its best advantage (Seligman, 1986).
4. Emphasis in the advertising should be placed on the benefits the product will confer on the consumer (Seligman, 1986).

METHODOLOGY

A sample of 921 ads were examined from the Chinese editions of the PEOPLE'S DAILY from 1980, the first year ads started to appear, to 1986. Of the 921 ads, 60.2 percent were classified as announcements and did not undergo any further analysis. The PEOPLE'S DAILY, with a circulation of five million and an estimated readership of 50 million is China's largest circulation daily newspaper.

For the years, 1980, 1981, 1983, and 1985, all the ads which appeared during the first week of January, April, July and September were analyzed. 1980 was substituted for 1979 since 1980 was the first year a significant number of ads appeared in the newspaper. September was substituted for October to determine the impact of a holiday season on advertising. Examination of ads found no significant difference in the number of ads in September versus the other months. For the remaining years, ads appearing in the first week of September, 1982; January, 1984; and April, 1986 were examined.

The ads were content analyzed by a three member

panel of Chinese speaking members, two of whom were native speakers.

FINDINGS

The ads were evenly distributed among the four months included in the sample and among the seven days of the week.

The majority (83.4%) of ads were placed by Chinese producers. Among domestic producers, those located in Beijing dominated with 16.6% of the total ads, followed by concerns in Jiangsu (9.5%) and Zhejiang (6.8%). Among foreign advertisers, Japan dominated with 7.0% of the ads, followed by Italy (2.7%) and the United States (2.1%).

The ads were relegated to the last two pages or pages seven and eight of every issue and started from the bottom of the page up. The larger, product oriented ads were generally found on page eight. The announcements were concentrated on page seven.

As commonly believed most of the ads were indeed quite basic with respect to copy and layout and focused on heavy machinery. Of the 367 non-announcement type ads, 71.6% advertised industrial type products. Another 24.5% were for products like light trucks that had both consumer and industrial applications. Only 3.9% of ads were for products that could be classified as strictly consumer goods. The most heavily advertised categories were: special industrial machinery, 19; non-electrical machines, 19; motors and generators, 15; and office machines, 12.

Most of the ads were small and crowded, supporting the commonly accepted notions that ads (1) are not very creative and (2) should emphasize product specifications.

Fifty-five percent of the ads analyzed contained a line drawing of the product; 18.8% a photograph; 1.0% both a drawing and a photograph; and 24.4% neither a photograph nor a drawing. Most of the ads (65.1%) simply showed the product alone.

Despite their small size, many (75.0%) of the ads contained more than one photo or line drawing. This contributed further to the clutter within the ads.

Only 6.8% of the ads showed the product in use. An even smaller proportion (3.2%) showed people.

In sum, the advertising in Chinese newspapers adheres to a very rigid, basic style.