

Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation identifies segments in the potential market for breast enlargement in Bangkok, Thailand using psychological characteristics related to self-concept. Self-concept is conceptualized as a hypothetical construct consisting of three dimensions: values, personality traits, and motives, with each dimension related conceptually to the pursuit of physical attractiveness. Self-concept has been studied largely in terms of its evaluative aspect of the self. By adding an action-influencing aspect as in the present study, self-concept can be employed to explain motivational drive that individuals have toward the pursuit of physical attractiveness.

Motivational drive to pursue physical attractiveness varies considerably across individuals. Variability can be attributed to discrepancies between individuals' desired end states and actual end states on the one hand, and the extent to which individuals consider the pursuit of physical attractiveness to be important, on the other. For example, if a woman identifies a discrepancy between an ideal breast size and her actual small breast size and views having larger breasts as important to herself, she will be more likely to embark on enlargement activities than will others who possess lesser degrees of these two characteristics. Indeed, this dissertation will show that these two characteristics in combination can be used as bases for grouping individuals into meaningful market segments.

In brief, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand motives to pursue physical attractiveness in the potential market for breast enlargement among young female university students in Bangkok in terms of a self-concept framework and a segmented market approach.

Chapter 1 overviews this dissertation and contains six sections. The first section discusses origins of the dissertation. The second describes study context. The third states three research questions. The fourth briefly discusses and justifies theoretical bases within which the research questions are investigated. The fifth elaborates expected areas of contributions and the sixth presents dissertation structure.

1.1 Origins of the Dissertation

Consumption patterns of young women in urban cities in Thailand have changed markedly over the past decade. Causes of these changes include technological advancements in telecommunications, proliferation of mass media, and social dynamics such as an increased participation of educated women into the workplace. For many similar urban cities in the world, these influential factors on consumption are increasingly universal. For example, it is easy to find young career women living in comfortable apartments, carrying Louis Vuitton bags, eating in McDonald's, reading "Cosmopolitan", and commuting to work by subway in Bangkok, Tokyo, New York, London, and Hong Kong. Some cultural differences may be involved: for example, women in patriarchal Japan might not be as well accepted in the workplace as those in the more egalitarian offices of New York. But, on the whole, consumption patterns of young women in these cities continue to converge (Zhihua 1994).

Changes in consumption patterns of young urban women and the assimilation of these women into a global consumption culture have been accelerated by several factors: a burgeoning middle class, with changing values and latent consumer demand; changing women's roles, including labor participation, financial independence, and the structure of the family (Klausner 2000); rising consumer aspirations and expectations; increased consumer

spending on luxury items, aided by past savings and the introduction of a modern credit system; new types of shopping environments and outlets; satellite and cable TV media proliferation and the thriving film industry (Venkatesh 1994); exposure to worldwide consumer products; the existence of hedonic cultural consumption; and the entry of multinational corporations into Thailand. These factors are particularly prominent in Bangkok.

Frequent associations among people living in large cities where people know little about immediate others creates demand for consumers to communicate goodwill of themselves through positive physical appearances. Physical appearance is of particular concern to urban consumers, particularly young women. A few underlying factors that raise physical appearance consciousness among urban young women are noteworthy: exposure to idealized images of slim, attractive, and good-looking models appearing on TV ads, magazines, and other print media targeted at women, and the desire to conform to these beauty standards; the nature of urban lifestyles that increase chances of face-to-face association (Zukin 1998); and predispositions among urban males seeking romantic relationships based on perceptions of prospects' physical attractiveness.

The widespread concern for physical appearance is explicitly reflected in the rapid growth of beauty related industries (currently one of the fastest growing industries in Thailand) and other body improvement products and services. Recent years have seen a surge in Bangkok in the number of beauty salons, spas, and beauty consulting clinics performing reconstructive and elective work, including eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, liposuction, and breast enlargement. As many Thai women have relatively small breast sizes compared to Western standards or as measured relative to their overall physical shape, breast size is an area of major concern.

1.2 Study Context

This study was conducted as part of a larger research project sponsored by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) concerning consumer choice behavior related to breast enlargement. The study selected urban young female university students in Bangkok, Thailand as its population of interest.

The market for breast enlargement in Bangkok is driven by four factors. First, it is driven by influences of large-breasted idealized Western images that pervade the city through an abundance of popular press, televised broadcasting, movies, and other media. The influx of idealized images is facilitated by the nature of Bangkok as a large metropolitan area with an outward-looking character and a city open and tolerant to foreign cultures. Bangkok is well integrated into the global economy and is developing an increasingly cosmopolitan character. Such an environment naturally engages young women in a social comparison based on an innate drive to evaluate themselves against comparison targets. When evaluating themselves in a social environment where idealized images in mass media abound, women are tempted to compare themselves to ideal others present in the mass media and in advertisements rather than with their peers (e.g., Richins 1991). Such comparisons often produce a discrepancy between a person's ideal and actual selves, creating unstable or uncomfortable states of mind that can stimulate perceived needs for breast enlargement.

Second, the market for breast enlargement in Bangkok is driven by a changing notion of beauty among the public in general and women in particular. Beautiful Western images replace traditional Thai inner aesthetic values such as good social manners and etiquette and Western images are becoming a standard of beauty for many Thai women. The more pervasive exposure is to idealized images of Western models in mass media, the more likely

it is that Thai women will show dissatisfaction toward their physical appearances and that all Thai people will consider these images as a norm. The changing notion of beauty from inner aesthetics to outer physical appearances reflects the fact that Thai women sense more of themselves in their bodies as they interact with others and that they are aware of and experience their own corporality. To experience corporality is to be aware of and understand the salience of one's body in one's sense of self. The pursuit of breast enlargement perhaps lies in the notion that women increasingly include the body as an important component of self.

Third, the market for breast enlargement in Bangkok is stimulated by changes in social roles among Thai women. As Thai society is becoming increasingly commercialized and modernized, the roles for Thai women as set in traditional practice are becoming marginalized, changing from the predominantly domestic roles to income producing roles. Thus, chances of physical association with publics beyond the household readily exist for many Thai women. Parallel with their increasingly social roles, urban Thai women have become more conscious of their physical appearances. Rising consciousness of physical appearances as a result of changes in women's roles is understandable. Frequent face-to-face interactions make it necessary to communicate a favorable physical impression in the eyes of others. Doing so increases the individual's "physical capital" and helps the individual to accumulate other resources such as recognition, approval, money, group influence, all of which are symbolic of success as a career woman.

Fourth, the market for breast enlargement in Bangkok is driven by active participation of medical professionals, manufacturers, and retailers to meet a large and varied demand in the market. A wide variety of enlargement alternatives currently compete in the breast enlargement market in Bangkok. Examples include special bras, silicone pads, contraceptive

pills, herbal pills, herbal creams, surgery, and exercise. These alternatives vary from necessary lead times, price ranges, efficacies (claimed and actual), and side effects, to certified approval from the Thai Food and Drug Administration. Thus, the market consists of a large number of product choices that satisfy a variety of needs and levels of affordability. Despite its being relatively costly, breast implant surgery is widely accepted as the only permanent way to enlarge breasts. Compared to implant surgery, herbal creams and herbal pills are much more affordable. Despite their temporary effect, special bras and silicone pads are alternatives for women expecting immediate efficacy at low cost. Health conscious women who want a sustainable effect might try exercising programs such as the “bosom firming dance” sponsored by the Ministry of Public Health (*Bangkok Post* 2003), without resorting to surgery or risky alternatives such as direct injections of silicone into their breasts.

Competition in the market for breast enlargement is intense. For example, at the present moment, retailers of herbal creams and herbal pills are expanding their distribution channels aggressively and these products are easily accessible over the counter or from unsolicited e-mails. Through these easily accessible channels, retailers of herbal creams and herbal pills target price conscious, less wealthy women. However, the efficacy of herbal creams and herbal pills is questionable. As soon as one stops using herbal creams or herbal pills, the effects shrink rapidly and dramatically; many of the creams and pills show no effect for at least a month and some take three to six months. In addition, herbal creams and herbal pills produce enhancements of about half a cup size while most women want to gain from one to two cup sizes.

Filling this gap are other seemingly established options, most notably implant surgery. Many doctors have turned into beauty consultants despite the fact that the role can conflict with

doctors' traditional responsibility to promote good health. Instead of just advising patients to get a mammogram, some doctors now also suggest having a breast reshaped or enlarged (Palmer 2004). Intense competition here is accelerated by a legal loophole because the plastic surgery industry is largely unregulated in Thailand. In 1999, while there were only 172 Medical-Council-certified plastic surgeons in Thailand, any of the Kingdom's more than 20,000 medical doctors is allowed by law to perform these operations (Hail 2000). The situation is worsened by participation of unlawful clinics that offer clandestine breast surgery.

In sum, competition within and across product categories is intense, with a variety of products competing to cater to untapped markets and to satisfy varied demands. Supply, both lawful and unlawful, emerges to meet these demands.

The present study selected young female university students as its studied subjects. The population of interest is defined as unmarried undergraduate and graduate university students living in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Members of this consumer segment are accumulating their purchasing power based on achieving financial independence once they embark on their career paths. Although they may not be the richest group, they are increasingly regarded by retailers and economists as the potential saviors of Thailand's economic growth (Holland 2000). While there are no data available in Thailand, statistics in the U.S. show that 40 percent of cosmetic surgery is performed on patients between 19-34 years old (*American Society of Plastic Surgeons* 2005). The perceptions of this consumer segment have tremendous impact on the revenues and profits of the cosmetics-related industry. Members of this consumer segment also represent a great potential business target for cosmetics-related industry in the coming years. Further, trends in consumption often are initiated by opinion-leading groups who adopt new consumption behaviors, which are in turn

adopted by the mass market; the urban youth segment of the market is one of the strongest set of opinion leaders in Thailand.

1.3 Research Questions

As summary of the earlier discussion, changing social environments, public perceptions, women's perceptions toward physical appearances, along with product choices and offerings available in the market interact to influence urban young university students' perceptions and demand toward breast enlargement. Two issues are of interest to both academic research as well as to managerial practices. The first issue concerns identification of segments of these young female students on the basis of their motivations to pursue physical attractiveness. Different levels of motivations of these students lead to different levels of propensities to consume and should serve as a basis to identify meaningful market segments. These motivations to consume always are context dependent. That is, motivations used to segment markets must be relevant to particular phenomena under investigation. The second issue concerns psychological characteristics of young women most likely to be involved in breast enlargement activities. For example, an understanding of differences in a self-concept variable that characterizes concerns over physical appearance (physical vanity) between the segment most likely to pursue breast enlargement and the least likely segment would be of benefit to both academic research and to managerial practice.

Practically, it may be difficult to identify members of this narrowly defined group because: they may be small in number; they may hold distinct psychological characteristics or motivational drives that are extreme relative to other peer segments; they may be difficult to isolate using traditional frameworks. Using female university students as the studied sample, the study raises three research questions, answers to which could lead to a better

understanding of segment composition in general and of the most likely and least likely groups to pursue breast enlargement activities in particular.

Overall research questions can be stated as follows.

Q1: Can valid segments of female university students be formed on the basis of context dependent motivational variables directly related to self-concept?

Q2: Given the existence of meaningful segments of female university students in the market for breast enlargement, can segments be differentiated in terms of the proposed set of self-concept variables?

Q3: Given the existence of meaningful segments of female university students in the market for breast enlargement, what characteristics describe the segment most likely to pursue breast enlargement? Least likely?

Based on these research questions, a conceptual framework of the self-concept is developed and appropriate self-concept characteristics are selected based on literature reviews on self-concept and its associated dimensions. Cluster analysis is performed to identify segments with differing degrees of likelihood to pursue breast enlargement. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is performed to test whether the self-concept characteristics as a set differ across the identified segments. Multiple discriminant analysis (MDA) is used to identify combinations of self-concept characteristics that have substantive discriminating power in differentiating between the identified segments.

1.4 Theoretical Justification of the Research

Literature in two broad theoretical topic areas is particularly relevant to the three research questions: physical attractiveness and self-concept. Research on physical attractiveness typically centers around the “what-is-beautiful-is-good” mentality where physical

attractiveness is found to be associated with psychological well-being. Although relatively smaller in number, research on motivation behind the pursuit of physical attractiveness also contributes to the field. Research on this topic area investigates motivational drives behind people's involvement in plastic surgery or in diet control. Although findings of these investigations can be identified, they never lead to identification of characteristics of people pursuing physical attractiveness.

Research on self-concept varies but lacks conclusiveness because, historically, self-concept has been applied in a variety of contexts. Although researchers agree that self-concept has both an accusative, self-as-object ("me") and a nominative, self-as-subject ("I"), studies overwhelmingly have chosen the self-as-object perspective (e.g., Harter 1996; James 1890; Markus 1977; Rosenberg 1979).

The linkage between the physical attractiveness and self-concept streams of literature lies in the consideration of self-concept within the context of physical attractiveness. For example, traditionally, studies of physical attractiveness assume that one's psychological being is a function of one's physical appearance (e.g., I am happy because I am attractive). All such studies adopt a self-as-object approach, treating the individual as an object whose beauty, traits, cognitions, motivations, and behaviors, must be assessed (e.g., Furnham, Dias, and McClelland 1998). Research on physical attractiveness rarely considers individuals as sentient subjects (self-as-subject), capable of manipulating their endowed attractiveness or lack thereof.

This study argues for the inclusion of action-influencing aspect (self-as-subject) into the self-concept model. By adding the action-influencing aspect of the self-concept, it is expected

that motivational drives behind the pursuit of breast enlargement of each segment can be explained by a more general framework of self-concept. The study's broad research questions can be explained by a self-concept that translates motivational drives in the context of breast enlargement into more general psychological predispositions.

In summary, identification of psychological characteristics of women seeking breast enlargement by conceiving of self-concept as consisting of both evaluative and action-influencing aspects will add to knowledge in the field of physical attractiveness, extend previous research in self-concept, and answer research questions posed by this study.

1.5 Expected Areas of Contributions

This section describes expected theoretical and managerial contributions in the areas of physical attractiveness and self-concept.

1.5.1 Academic Contributions

The present study is expected to provide academic contributions in two areas. First, findings from Chapter 5 are expected to provide a better understanding of segment structure and psychological characteristics related to self-concept of the most likely and the least likely segments to pursue breast enlargement among urban young female university students in Bangkok.

Second, the self-concept conceptualized in this study is expected to help to explain motivational-based segments of a demographically homogenous population. Following this, the self-concept itself also can be used as a segmentation basis that classifies urban female university students based on different levels of values, personality traits, and motives.

1.5.2 Managerial Contributions

The present study is expected to provide managerial contributions in two areas. First, segment structure obtained from the results is expected to provide a good general understanding of the composition of segments in the target population of young urban female students for market stakeholders, including firms, medical professionals, marketing professionals, and even young women themselves.

Second, combined with other segment information such as demographic profile, it is expected that marketing managers can design marketing or advertising programs based on self-concept information to satisfy each segment. Segmentation on the basis of self-concept can be used as an extension to the traditional value segmentation.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is designed and implemented with the objective of answering the three research questions stated in Section 1.3. To achieve this objective, this dissertation is organized in six chapters.

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the self and self-concept—cores of this investigation—in general and in the social psychology discipline in particular. Following the review is a discussion of the multidimensional nature of self-concept, as preview for the theoretical position taken in Chapter 3. Dimensions of self-concept to be adopted in this study—values, personality traits, and motives—are discussed with regard to their conceptual connections to self-concept and their action-stimulating quality. Nine constructs—four belonging to values, two to personality traits, and three to motives—also are discussed. Discussion in Chapter 2

continues with a focus on relationships between self-concept and its motivations as related to physical attractiveness and a review of the literature on social comparison theory, self-discrepancy theory, corporal theory of the body, and resource advantage theory. Chapter 2 ends with a summary of what is considered a gap in the literature and with conceptual observations that are discussed, expanded, and operationalized in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 describes research questions, construct conceptualizations, propositions, and hypotheses relevant to this study. It begins with statements and discussions of the three research questions of interest based on a conceptual framework related to self-concept. Chapter 3 continues with conceptual definitions of constructs identified in the framework. It ends with statements of general propositions relevant to the study and specific statements of research hypotheses to be tested in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 summarizes research methodology used to answer the research questions and to investigate hypotheses discussed in Chapter 3. Specifically, Chapter 4 describes: study design and research subjects; sampling plan (population of interest; sampling frame, sample size and method); survey questionnaire (origins, development, translation, pretest); data collection; and, data analysis approaches.

Chapter 5 describes procedures and results of data analysis. It begins with a discussion on data preparation that includes missing data, outliers, assessment of construct reliability and validity, and multicollinearity. Following a brief description of respondents' profile, Chapter 5 continues with results of analyses performed in accordance with a three-step clustering approach suggested by Singh (1990). Clustering results are validated and interpreted, with

particular emphases on two cases of two-group comparisons. Chapter 5 ends with a summary of hypotheses testing results.

Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation by discussing analysis results, limitations on research design, academic and managerial implications, and the directions that these implications suggest for future research. Discussions focus on the psychological characteristics of the extreme market segment of interest in comparison to other market segments. Chapter 6 ends with conclusions of this dissertation.

1.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduces general discussions that lead to the origination of this dissertation. It identifies four driving factors behind the breast enlargement market, the context of this study: influences of large-breasted Western idealized images; a changing notion of beauty among the Thai public in general and Thai women in particular; changes in social roles among Thai women; and intense competition within and across product categories. Three research questions are proposed that will lead to identification of segments of the population of interest and to identification of self-concept variables that differentiate among these segments. These three research questions are the major focus for this dissertation. This dissertation is expected to bridge the gap in knowledge in the area of self-concept as well as in physical attractiveness. The chapter ends by describing the organization of this dissertation in chapter order.