

Consumers' attitudes toward advertising by traditional Chinese medicine practitioners

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Even though traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has long been practiced in Hong Kong, it has only been officially professionalized with given legitimacy within the last twenty years. Before Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, medical education in this former British Colony was dominated exclusively by western medicine. TCM was not a formal part of the healthcare system, and there were no regulations governing the registration and quality of TCM practitioners. After the handover in 1997, the formalization of TCM in Hong Kong started to accelerate. With the introduction of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance in 1999, TCM became officially professionalized at the policy level in Hong Kong. Various universities in Hong Kong began to provide formal TCM education. The first one was the School of Chinese Medicine at Hong Kong Baptist University established in 1998. As of 2013, there are over 9,000 TCM practitioners in Hong Kong, and over 70% of these are registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners. The number of registered TCM practitioners is about half the number of registered western medical practitioners.

A survey found that a majority of respondents expressed that advertising by professional practitioners in the accounting, legal, and medical professions would not lower their prestigious images, although most respondents worried that the cost of professional service would increase as a result of advertising. Another more recent survey found that public attitudes toward advertising of western medical professionals, such as doctors and dentists, were favorable in Hong Kong. As a further study on Hong Kong consumers' attitude towards advertising by professionals, this study investigated consumers' attitudes toward advertising by TCM practitioners, and how attitudes varied among different demographic groups and user experiences in TCM. A survey using quota sampling was conducted. Altogether 1,039 adults aged 20 or above in Hong Kong filled in an online questionnaire in March 2014. Respondents of the survey appreciated information value of TCM advertising, but held some skepticism and worries about it. Respondents perceived strongly that advertising by medical professionals would lead to increase in the cost of services. Respondents with TCM consultation experience demonstrated a more positive attitude toward TCM advertising than respondents without TCM experience. The marketing implication of this study is that advertisers should emphasize TCM practitioners' services, expertise, and qualifications in order to assist consumers in making informed decisions. Price appeal should not be used since consumers generally believe that service quality is far more important than price.