

## The Beauty Ads Impact Towards Women: A Case Study in Penang

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**Abstract:** The power of advertisements in media towards public is clearly visible when the trend that is conveyed in ads that appear in media are welcomed by the public. Advertisement that shown constantly in the media have the power to persuade the viewers (persuasive power), which able to influence the individual and societal preferences. In adjacent to that, a research was conducted in the city of Penang to study the influence of beauty ads towards the career-oriented woman. In the study, three hundred and eighty four (384) respondents were selected using convenient sampling and purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using the IBM Statistic Package of Social Science and content analysis. This study found that social media is the most influential advertising medium on these women, and they declared that they are vastly influenced or affected by cosmetics and skincare ads featured in the media. The beauty ideas featured in beauty ads define women's aspirations of the standard of beauty that they should have. There are many ads shown that men are attracted to more beautiful women, and women who were influenced by the ads are under pressure to seek the ideal of beauty. This study contributes to the theme of humanity in the field of geography.

**Key words:** beauty ads, influence, women, media, Penang, Malaysia

**JEL codes:** M

### 1. Introduction

Advertisements that have been repeatedly shown in the media has a persuasive power in influencing the tastes of individuals and society. According to Greenwald (1968), when a person receives an item or information that attempts to convey a message about something, that information is associated with existing knowledge, making his mind react actively to the information it receives. This model of Cognitive Response pioneered by Greenwald explains that ads that have a specific message to convey to the viewer can persuade the viewer to agree with the message being delivered when the viewer's own mind agrees with the situation the viewer is experiencing. Singh and Sonnenberg (2012) state that advertisements convey an ideology to the audience to feel empathy for the product and service and thus lead the audience to use the advertised product and service. But the success of the audience on the products and services being advertised can have a negative impact on the well-being of the psychological well-being. Women are portrayed as those who love beauty and are more likely to be influenced by advertisements of beauty products in the media that affect their psychological well-being.

The beauty ideas featured in cosmetics advertisement aspire women about the standard of beauty that a woman should have. The ideal of beauty is the trend of Western beauty that has followed the world since the

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Renaissance (Stolnitz, 1961). However, this is an unhealthy trend as not all women have similarities with Western women in terms of body shape, skin tone, lip shape, and so on. Bryant (2013) states that when it comes to Western beauty trends, dark-skinned women around the world are at a very low level (considered as not pretty). The West emphasizes that the idea of beauty is possessing features such as having fair complexion, delicate and slender physical appearance. In contradictory this standard may not fit all, whereas women from all parts of the world have different physical characteristics, skin complexion, tone, and texture. In China, Chiang and Yu (2012) state that since the 20th century the movement of women's rights has influenced the conception of women's social status where the practice of menstruation has become a necessity for showing social manners of interpersonal activities. It was concluded that women who wore cosmetics were women who had social etiquette more generally than women who did not. This raises the problem of double standard or favoritism for women who are not using cosmetics or women who cannot afford to. This shows the importance of using cosmetics for women, and then cosmetics ads distributed using a continuous advertising medium to convey ideas and spread awareness about products that are thought to help women to achieve good look as good as the ones advertised.

In Malaysia, beauty products advertisement is usually in forms of printed and electronic media. The widespread exposure of beauty products in the media has the power to influence vulnerable and overly obsessed women. Deep interest in beauty products makes women spend a lot of money, time and energy to the extent of jeopardizing their psychological health. Mazur (1986) states that men are attracted to more beautiful women and that women are under pressure to seek the ideal of beauty. In order to achieve this ideal beauty standard, women tend to experience low (minor) and high (major) psychological effects. The low-level mental health issues that women face are stress, phobia, panic attacks, depression, dizziness, fear and headache due to financial problems and therefore these women are forced to accept their existing condition (Walters & Charles, 1997). These psychological effects have the tendency to deteriorate individuals' daily productivity and social relationships. This shows that advertising of beauty products in the media can have a psychological effect on women. This is worrying as it can cause a disruption to one's daily activities and productivity and may even affect social inscriptions. In urban areas of Malaysia including in Penang, the presence of beauty centers, beauty clinics, beauty spas, beauty boutiques in shopping malls and the convenience of buying beauty products online delivered to the front door is common among the women community residing in city areas. Jamaludin and Ramli (2012) describe the victims of this phenomenon mostly involving women rather than men. This is because of the accessibility to technology and the influence of advertising in the media that shaped this group's aspiration to embrace the idea of global beauty. Women are synonymous with beauty and they tend to embrace the beauty trends conveyed by the media as part of their lives, such as the use of cosmetics products advertised by product manufacturers. The use of social media by women and girls is increasing due to the attractiveness of cosmetics advertising provided by the media.

According to Hamid, Ishak, and Yusof (2015) the increasing trend in social media use among at-risk consumers, women and girls, has increased in recent years. This is because these groups are more easily influenced by the media as compared to men. Media is an advertising medium with users playing a key role in implementing global beauty ideas and introducing and promoting cosmetics products to women. In this regard, Singh and Sonnenberg (2012) state that the storyline conveyed by advertising in the media has a sense of empathy for the viewer so that the audience has meaning or memories when watching it when linked to their current knowledge and experience. Thus, viewers perceive what they see in the media as a form of help or solution to the problem that they face, such as the desire to be beautiful, and this can be achieved by buying the advertised

product. Women are major social media users and they are at risk as well because they are easily misled by the news and advertisements (Hamid, Ishak and Yusof 2015). This is supported by Jamaludin and Ramli (2012) state that women are likely to fall prey to this phenomenon, as compared to men. They are easily deceived and influenced to achieve their individual desires and to attain characteristics as conveyed in the beauty ads. Women are portrayed as obsessed with beauty. This is because of the pressure and influence of the people around them and their surroundings that make them agree with the advertised beauty idea. Greenwald (1968) states that advertisements played over and over in the media can give the audience a sense of what they say. This is a media campaign for the community that aims to get the ideas they want to convey. Ahmed and Ashfaq (2013) state that brand image, persuasion, using celebrities as a model is the underlying factor as to why women's desire to become consumers and buy the product has increased. My buying behavior is the result of strong image built by advertisers. Repeated cosmetics product advertisements in the media can influence women to embrace the idea of global beauty buying products that help them achieve their desired beauty.

## **2. Material and Methods**

This study was conducted in urban areas in Penang from the Northeast District of George Town to the District in the New South West as a study area. The area is a metropolitan part of the state, marked by densely populated areas with business, shopping, housing, offices, hotels, resorts, and recreational parks in the area. In this area, strategically located areas are conveniently selected to get female respondents for survey questionnaires at Queensbay Mall, Prangin Mall and several more main attraction places. Places such as shopping centers mentioned earlier, were chosen because this is where women choose to be when they wish to purchase beauty products. Apart from that, it is convenient for women to access all kinds of beauty products that they prefer in these places. Apart from that, abundance of beauty centres in the city areas provide a means of alternative for women to achieve their desired goals. This particular area is a vibrant urban area and a tourist attraction place with easy access to hotels and shopping centres in Penang city. This area is the study area chosen by the researchers because it provides access for urban women to get their cosmetics. A total of 50 female respondents were selected for interview and they are provided with a questionnaire form in order to obtain valuable information for this study. Interviewees were residents of Georgetown and Bandar Baru in Penang. Settlement period is not an affecting factor in choosing the respondents. The selected respondents were confined to women aged from 18 to 60 to obtain credible data on the impact of cosmetic advertising on women's psychological health. Only women between the age of 18 and 60 are selected as respondents in this study, as this age group is expected to make informed choices and decisions for themselves. Researcher purposively choose respondents of Malay women based on two reasons; firstly to make the study more focus oriented, and secondly to make the study more insightful (or deep) when focusing on one group of ethnicity.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This section will discuss the impact of cosmetics advertisement in media on respondents. The purpose is to find out which cosmetic ads are of interest to respondents when buying and using cosmetics, what is the most influential advertising medium, what kind of information that respondents are looking for in a cosmetic advertisement and what information that respondents pay attention to the advertised cosmetics. In addition, the researcher also sought information on the factors used by the respondent, the suitability of the respondent to the

cosmetic product being used, the respondents “experience of seeing the cosmetic product and the respondents” consent to the influence of the cosmetic advertisement.

### **3.1 Advertising Cosmetics Products Attract Respondents**

86 percent (43) out of 50 respondents agreed that cosmetic product ads attract them to buy cosmetic products while the remaining 14 percent (7) disagree that cosmetics product ads can attract them to buy cosmetic products. This is because respondents do not have any skin problems so they need to keep up with the advertised cosmetic product trends. This analysis shows that most respondents were influenced by the advertisement of cosmetic products that were published in the media and were interested in purchasing the cosmetic product. This finding supports Singh and Sonnenberg’s (2012) argument that advertising conveyed in media is very important in promoting the product to the audience as it can make the viewer empathizes with the advertisement and agree with the idea they want to convey.

### **3.2 Ad Medium That Affects Respondents**

Social media is the medium of advertising that mostly promotes interest and attracts respondents to buying a beauty product. This is because social media is the most accessible media because the internet technology of mobile phones makes it easier for individuals to load ads that are broadcasted. All the respondents also had mobile phones that could access social media. Online traders use social media as a source of income by uploading product advertising videos and product testimonials that may convince their target customers which are mainly targeting on women. Advertisements on social media are easily accessed via mobile phones and can be repeated several times has drawn respondents with the advertiser and a product to the respondent thus creating confidence in the respondents. This is in line with Greenwald’s (1968) assertion that repeated advertisements are a medium made by the media for the public to be receptive to the ideas they wish to convey.

### **3.3 The Information Respondents Want to See on Cosmetic Advertising Products**

Majority of the respondents, 88 percent (44 people) out of 50 respondents, agreed that they would like to see the benefits of a product when looking at a beauty product ad. Product quality and product functionality are the most important thing for a product to be purchased by consumers. In line with the study by Ampofo (2014), respondents agreed that if the goodness and function of the product did not meet their expectations then their interest in the product would be diminished or became nonexistent. But if the product gives or promises the effect that the respondents want, then the advertisement of the cosmetic product will be diligently viewed to understand and memorize the name of the product with the intention of buying or trying the product later.

### **3.4 Respondents’ Attention to Cosmetic Product Advertising**

It was found that 66 percent (33) out of 50 respondents paid full attention to cosmetic product ads each time they appeared. This is because the advertisement of the cosmetic product that is being displayed is a product ad that is currently in use or will be used. Respondents have a deep interest in trying out the product and want to better understand the style and manner of using it and to benefit the respondents’ satisfaction. Respondents also stated that by looking at the advertisement of the cosmetic product, the respondent could better understand the technique of using the product than just reading in the cosmetic product box. This finding is consistent with Ahmad and Ashfaq (2013) who stated that buying behavior is the result of strong image building by advertisers. Users will be interested in buying products advertised by delivering ads that are empathetic to the user's situation and therefore, users are more interested and have more confidence in trying it.

### 3.5 Influence of Cosmetic Advertising on Respondents

The majority of respondents paid attention to the advertisement of cosmetic products, but stated that they were strongly influenced with the use of the advertised product by only 16 percent (8 people). The rest said it was “influential” (18 percent) and most people were sometimes influential (54 percent). Another 10 percent said they had no effect and very little (2 percent). This indicates that respondents are still cautious in selecting and accepting ideas conveyed by advertising cosmetics products in the media. This finding contrasts with Hamid, Ishak and Yusof (2015) who stated that women are major media users as well as users whom are at risk because they are easily deceived by news and advertisements. It can be said that female consumers are now more aware and cautious in trusting the advertisement of cosmetics products that appear in the media.

### 3.6 Respondent Factors in Using Cosmetic Products

It was found that 58 percent of respondents said that one of the reasons why they use a cosmetics product is to make sure that they have a good appearance in order to become beautiful and attractive. This is the response of the respondents once they have been collected and generalized. In the interview, respondents indeed agreed that the use of cosmetics can increase their confidence to socialize with others. Despite this fact, the respondents also expressed their wish to be accepted by the community as one respondent stated that:

“When it comes to dating people, I have to wear makeup, sometimes close friends even curse us as ugly” (Respondent 1, 30, 2016)

The idea of beauty and cosmetic products is seen to influence the social and psychological well-being of the individual. The feeling of being accepted and just like everyone else is so strong that one can use cosmetics products. It also contributes to the knowledge that cosmetics use factors as an incentive to increase women's confidence in meeting friends and socializing. The use of cosmetics not only promotes beauty, but also enhances self-confidence. This is in line with the recommendations of Jamaludin and Ramli (2012) who state that women are naturally more obsessed with beauty. In addition, the use of cosmetics with the desire to maintain skin health is also one of the factors in the use of cosmetics among women, as explained by one respondent in the interview;

“The older we get, we must be more mature in taking care of our skin care for example Che Ta, the older she gets, the prettier.” (Respondent 10, 39, 2016)

This is consistent with Bower and Landreth (2013) who state that the use of models with high attractiveness can influence consumers. Idols and models of beauty are also a source of inspiration for the respondents to maintain the health and appearance of their skin. The use of cosmetics is one of the ways towards having the desired beauty.

Conclusions from the questions raised indicate that respondents used cosmetic products for beauty, health and appearance for the purpose of personal and social satisfaction. The use of cosmetics for self is in line with the instincts of women who are obsessed with beauty as according to Jamaludin and Ramli (2012), but if cosmetics are used to please others or accept the environment, it is abnormal. Low self-esteem is one of the symptoms of mental illness.

### 3.7 Respondents' Perceptions of Used Cosmetic Products

78 percent (39 respondents) said they were satisfied with the product they used because it had a positive effect on their use in short term. Respondents also stated that at a cheap and affordable price they were able to

have the best product. Products which shows good and positive results mean that these products are in line with the wishes of the respondent, such as having flawless and delicate skin. Therefore, they are very satisfied with the product used. One respondent also stated that the Bumiputera product, which is Tati Skincare which they use, had satisfactory results. It gives respondents the desired effect on the third day of its use in one case, the product (Pewit Skincare) used in comparison to the international product previously used. Most of the respondents also stated that their loyalty to the products used was that for the first time using the cosmetic product, it was found to be best suited to the respondents. When respondents are very satisfied with the existing product, they are less likely to exchange it with another product. For example, one respondent stated that:

“I’ve been using Safi for years, it’s nothing to worry. I don’t want to change anything else” (Respondent 4, 35, 2016)

However, this study also found respondents’ negative response to the cosmetics products used, as they have a slow and unproven effect. The 26-year-old respondent claimed that she had been deceived numerous times by advertisements and changed cosmetics products quite frequently when she saw convincing new ads, but the results were still disappointing. Also, another factor that makes the respondents dissatisfied with the product used is that not all products are compatible with all skin types. The respondent stated that her skin type was different from that of her friend caused the respondent to feel inferior. An example from her experience states that:

“I had a friend who buy a similar product, but my face wasn’t good. Finding the right product is difficult. Shame when people say the product is good, this is good but when my part is hard to say” (Respondent 2, 26, 2016)

The respondents were disappointed with the product used and admitted that it was difficult to find a product that suited their skin. She also found it difficult to accept the fact that the products that she liked did not match her skin tone. There were respondents who blamed the ads for the problem they were having with the product. Among the factors the lead to the dissatisfaction with the product used is that the advertisement displayed does not have the desired effect of the respondents. One of the respondents was seen as depressed and emotional when expressing her feelings to the researcher. Respondents stated that:

“The ads says that the product is suitable for all skin types but when used, the shop says it does not fit my skin and other products. I was bored, frustrated and didn't know what to say, shy to go out and meet people. If I have money I would have gone to get injections” (Respondent 9, 20, 2016)

This section concludes that most respondents are satisfied with the cosmetics products that they use. Respondents are mostly assisted by the advertisement in selecting the product. All the more reason to be concern with the emotional and psychological well-being of the respondent when she has a problem with the product being used. Feeling wanted to recover from skin break out quickly, to be beautiful quickly, to have healthy and flawless skin like other people so they constantly switching products and feeling want to always be able to spend money to get the right product is one of the unhealthy behaviours. This is because the respondents have high feelings and emotions to feel appreciated, accepted and recognized by others, thus making the respondents’ thoughts and emotions unstable. The high desire to be like those who are seen to be attractive can influence this group of women to act unexpectedly as described by one of the product sellers interviewed by the researcher. A 47-year-old Mrs. X cosmetics product seller told researchers that:

“Products that have mercury are fast and sell well because of the high demand, after all users are not concerned about the effects, some do not know” (Mrs. X, 47, 2016)

Mercury is a substance that can whiten the skin quickly. However, it has a negative effect on the skin's depletion, and long-term effects of skin cancer (Mahe, Ly, Aymard, & Dangou 2003). The statement from the seller of the product is particularly alarming because the risk of using a product containing mercury is dangerous. However, some respondents still use the product as it seems that it has no side effects. Respondents were also unaware that there was mercury in cosmetics products that were openly sold in the market due to their poor health and well-being awareness. According to cosmetics product sellers, although there is some doubt on the product, and it has been reported that there is mercury hazard by the Ministry of Health Malaysia but no seizure or notice was withdrawn from the market. Therefore, consumers can still buy and obtain these cosmetic products publicly at herbal kiosks.

### 3.8 Respondent's Experience Regarding Cosmetic Product Advertising

There are two television commercials in Malaysia that are very intimate to the respondents — the “*Terlajak Laris*” ad by Dato Aliff Syukri, a D’herbs beauty product entrepreneur and the “*Qu Puteh*” beauty product advertisement by Dato Vida.

78 percent (29) of respondents thought that the trademark of these ads was becoming a trend or memory for them and their family members, so they knew the type and brand of the product as a result of the advertisement effect it had left behind. Repeated ads multiple times a day can persuade and make the audience feel empathic and close to the ad. They understand and appreciate the message that the ad is trying to convey better. Advertising strategies for the founders of D’herbs and Pamoga Qu Puteh cosmetics products can also leave an impression on respondents’ memories. It turns out that the advertising and trademark styles featured in the ad have a long-term impact on viewers regardless of age. According to respondents, the children also memorized the scripts and plays that were displayed as trademarks in the ad.

The trademark D’herbs ad used by the founder of the company Dato Aliff Syukri is “*Terlajak Laris*”. For the “*Qu Puteh*” ad by Dato Vida, the trademark used is “*Qu Puteh Qu Puteh Barulah Putih*”. In addition, most respondents agree that the ad model makes it easier to forget the ad, and the ad model contributes to the buying factor of their product. This is because respondents are very interested in the ad model or they want to be as beautiful as the model shown in the ad. Beautiful ad models are featured in ads to be an idol to users or viewers. This beautiful ad model acts as a spokesperson between the product and the audience, where the product model or ambassador convinces users to look as good as they do (Bower & Laundreth, 2013).

The advertising style through this model is a message or idea of beauty that the product is trying to convey through the model, so that the audience and consumers can agree on the same idea, then they can use the product because they want to be as beautiful as the model or the product ambassador (Ahmad & Ashfaq, 2013). To further persuade users of product, ambassadors’ meet and greet sessions are often held in Malaysia so that the viewers and fans can see the models that use the product closely, and witness the model more clearly to convince consumers that using the product will be as beautiful as the model used. It is concluded that advertising of cosmetic products greatly affects the psychology of the audience and thus creates a sense of empathy within the users.

Advertising helps viewers to define their own beauty, whereby the audience will reflect on themselves whether they fulfil the idea of beauty as conveyed in the ad (Miller, 2006). When the user does not meet the advertised beauty standards, users will feel pressured and they will be persuaded to try the advertised product (Gelles, 2011). Users consider ads viewed as a form of assistance for them to solve their problem.

### 3.9 Influence of Beauty Advertising on Women

82 percent of respondents agreed that cosmetics product advertising influenced them, where beauty ideas provided by cosmetics product advertisements were published in ads were similar to findings in Gelles (2011) and Bryant (2013) which suggested global standards of beauty. Respondents obtain an idea of the latest beauty trends and cosmetics through advertising on the media. In the era of globalization and technology, it is now easier for respondents to acquire information on the latest cosmetics products and styles of cosmetics from around the world. They can watch the latest cosmetics ads disseminated by the media and by themselves through the media they own. The attractive style of advertising and the ideas applied in the ad were agreed upon by the respondents so that it could influence the respondents' behavior to meet the advertised beauty standards. The persuasive ad style made the respondents agree with the message they were trying to convey which later will influence their decision. 18 percent of respondents said that not all women were influenced by advertising because of the personal experience factors that respondents had. There were respondents who bought cosmetics products as they were influenced by advertising in the media. The respondent stated that she had purchased the product many times when the cosmetics was advertised in the media but the results are not as expected. In addition, respondents disagree that cosmetics advertising can influence their purchase of cosmetic products because they are already satisfied with the products used and they are confident that they will not switch to other products because they fear the new product will cause them skin problems. Respondents also stated that she had no serious skin problems and this explains why they are not affected or influenced by the advertisement. It was concluded that respondents who agreed with the influence of cosmetics product advertising on them were due to the beauty issues that they faced and the desire to be as beautiful as the models in the ads. Respondents have the potential to face psychological instability because they want to keep up with the beauty trends, especially when people around are doing the same thing such as buying cosmetics according to the current trend.

## 4. Conclusion

The media plays an important role in promoting the idea of global beauty in accordance with the developed standards from developed countries. The idea of beauty is being inculcated towards women by the media with the repetition of advertisements that are intended to persuade and make women feel empathic and accept the idea of beauty. This feeling of empathy makes women become more influenced by the message that the media is trying to convey, which is: cosmetics can help to solve their beauty problems and enable them to become beautiful in accordance with global beauty standards of perfect skin, dark eyelashes, slimming eyes, long nose and thin beard. Advertising cosmetics products in the media attract women to buy advertised cosmetics products. Social media is the most influential medium in persuading women to use cosmetics products because of the accessibility of women to cosmetics ads delivered through social apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The beauty of a cosmetic product is the information most women want to see. However, women are still in control of the product because they want to be cautious over review unsatisfactory results.

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