

WHITE BEAUTY: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS ON SKIN-WHITENING
ADVERTISEMENTS IN MALAYSIAN FEMALE MAGAZINES

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ABSTRACT

In this era of globalisation, the practice of skin-whitening has become a global trend with frequent appearances in print advertisements in beauty and fashion magazines. This beauty trend has also made its way into Malaysia making skin-whitening a standard beauty regime among Malaysian women. However, the need for skin-whitening could be seen as discriminatory since it discourages appreciation of diverse beauty among women of colour for a more uniform white skin. This paper explores the skin-whitening phenomenon in Malaysia through print advertisements distributed as media texts in global brands of female magazines to gather the social messages imbued in them. This qualitative research employs a multimodal analysis to analyse the linguistic features of the skin-whitening advertisements and uses the social semiotic approach in analysing the colour, composition, and images of the print advertisements. The integration of semiotic resources (linguistic and non-linguistic features) on a higher scalar level of analysis show several key social messages. Skin whitening texts inform the consumers that whitening is a natural procedure to battle against darkness. The semiotic resources function to communicate the idea that the practice is pragmatic and logical in order to achieve the divine white beauty. Malaysia's skin-whitening media texts reinforce the value of the ideal white by creating a social hierarchy placing women who are dark in the bottom of the strata while projecting a dependency to achieve white beauty as the unblemished, pure and divine beauty. The skin-whitening discourse in Malaysia ultimately exhibits a linear and hierarchical communicative pattern with the ideal white beauty ideology influencing the widespread cultural practice of skin-whitening.