



IMPACT OF COLOURISM IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS ON
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDE AND PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

TOH YAN TONG


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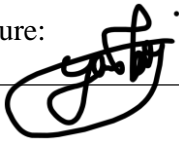
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ABSTRACT

With the rapid rise of social media, social media advertising has become a crucial role in the online marketing environment, especially among university students, with the help of Internet connection, they prefer to buy products in online stores rather than traditional stores. However, social media advertising tends to convey the message that fair skin is the ideal standard for beauty. The dark skin is portrayed in a negative light, ugly and considered unattractive in appearance. It has opened the eyes of many people, especially university students see the issue such as colourism. This study focuses on the impact of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude and purchasing behaviour. This study used online survey questionnaire method to gather information through Google Forms.

Keywords: advertising, colourism, university students' attitude, university students' purchasing behaviour, social media advertising

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background on the subject of study

“Beauty comes from within” has been controversial for decades. There are a deep-rooted traditional belief that fair-skinned people have more privileges, higher social status, and wealth than those with darker skin. People prefer fair-skinned people regardless of gender. Also, in most cases, people with darker skin are discriminated and considered to be physically unattractive (Hunter, 2007; Picton, 2013). Not only that, but Asian community also believes that it is normal for fair-skinned people to be respected and attractive (Rusmadi et al., 2015).

Suresh (2021) stated that from a historical and traditional point of view, fairer skin has always been favoured in Malaysia and is seen as the ideal beauty. According to the Thomas (2020), these behaviours are influenced by racialized aesthetic stereotypes ingrained in the past of colonialism. Based on Al-Adaleih (2012), black and white also have symbolic meanings and associations. Black can signify death, evil, and a person full of hate is described as a person with a black heart. In contrast, white is associated with innocence, purity and caring.

“Light skin, you are beautiful; dark skin, you are ugly” is often used as a metaphor in social media advertisements. The message is that people need cosmetics to cover dark spots, boost confidence, and enhance physical attractiveness. This is because dark skin can make us look imperfect, we need foundation to improve facial defects and ultimately improve our physical attractiveness. People with darker skin tones are often more susceptible to or pressured by new standards of beauty that are equated to the right skin tone (Nittle, 2018).

The irony is that fair-skinned people will constantly make themselves whiter, while dark-skinned people will force themselves to be whiter. Besides, fair-skinned models are often seen as attractive and persuasive when advertised in social media advertisements. In contrast, dark-skinned models often appear in less attractive in social media advertisements, and they often face skepticism. This is because there is a stereotype that dark-skinned people are perceived as materially deficient and their living conditions backward, leading to the erroneous belief that the quality of the products endorsed by dark-skinned models is poor.

The bias against fair skin leads people to prefer skin bleaching or whitening products. The sales of skin whitening products in Malaysia have increased by almost 100% in the past five years (Shome, 2015). This proves that people crave to have fairer skin and are more likely to be attracted to fair-skinned spokespersons or whitening products. Moreover, there are obvious signs of colourism not only in cosmetics advertisements, but also appeared in model advertisements, magazines, and television commercials (Lee, 2016). In key industries such as healthcare, finance and the military, there has been a tendency to prevent the use of dark-skinned models over fair-skinned models.

In Malaysia, colourism often appears in social media advertisements across multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram which may influence university students' attitude and purchasing behaviour (Tan, 2021). As we have seen, most social media advertisements primarily use models with fairer skin, but these advertisements also show visuals of brown or black faces and modify the

model's skin to look whiter. This is to emphasize that fair skin is what the public needs to follow and love. Based on Mitchell (2020), there is a need to transform the social media advertising communication industry by exploring the psychological impacts of whitewashing on the self-image, self-worth, and self-esteem of dark-skinned people. Nelson (2016) also stated that whitewashing has affected dark-skinned children. It is difficult for them to value their self-image because they do not see a good image of themselves in the social media advertisements daily.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

In the process of completing this research, there are two objectives to be achieved which are:

- 1) To understand the influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content.
- 2) To study the impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised.

Within the completion of this research, there are two research questions that were asked and needed to be answered which are:

- 1) What is the influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content?
- 2) What is the impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised?

Scope of study

The scope of research will be focused on analysing the impact of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude and purchasing behaviour. This is to understand whether the colourism in social media advertisements affect university students' attitude positively or negatively towards advertising content. In addition, this study also aims to explore the impact of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised. Apart from that, this study only focuses on university students who have previously seen colourism in social media advertisements. This study recruited participants between the ages of 18 to 29.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory

Critical Race Theory explains how white supremacy used to oppress people with darker skin but is still preserved as a legal institution in the America (De La Garza & Ono, 2016). Critical Race Theory has been used in this study to understand how colourism in social media advertisements and its impact on the attitude and purchasing behaviour. Critical Race Theory develop a high level of sensitivity means that when people recognize colourism in social media advertisements, their attitude to brands are likely to be influenced by their understanding of the discriminatory practices.

There are four themes related to colourism by using Critical Race Theory (Mitchell, 2020). According to Littlejohn and Foss (2011), interest convergence is the first theme refers to the situation where dominant ethnic groups helping each other, but this support is behind their own self-interest. The second theme is social construction means that race is a social construct that is entirely dependent on physical characteristics. The third theme is racialization where white people stereotype minorities for their own benefit. The fourth theme is intersectionality of identities emerging in Malaysian advertising practices. These four themes affect consumers' attitude which are cognitive and affective and lead to consumer behaviour.

Colourism in social media advertisements influence two types of attitudes which are cognitive and affective. The cognitive attitude refers to the beliefs, thoughts, and attributes that we associated with a specific object (McLeod, 2023). The people with personal beliefs, own thoughts and self attributes are more sensitive to recognize and

analyze colourism in social media advertisements. Therefore, the consumers' reaction and impression towards the colourism in social media advertisements will influence their attitude positively or negatively.

The affective component of an attitude refers to a person's emotional response or feelings toward an object, person, problem, or situation (McLeod, 2023). People who have a strong emotional to colourism in social media advertisements may develop positive or negative attitude. For example, people who are uncomfortable or unhappy with colourism in social media advertisements are more likely to develop negative attitude. This is because they are offended and despised, leading to a critical and negative attitude towards it. In contrast, people who believe that colourism is a normal issue and do not feel hurt or angry will have a positive attitude toward colourism in social media advertisements.

Cognitive factor and affective factor work together in the consumer decision-making process. It means that people's attitude towards colourism in social media advertisements is positive, they will buy the products or brands. In contrast, people's attitude towards colourism in social media advertisements is negative, they will avoid and not buy the products or brands.

Colourism

The concept of colourism was first introduced by Alice Walker in 1982, refers to the discrimination or prejudice against to a member of a particular group who has darker skin than other members of the same group (Hunter, 2007). In other words,

colourism is also thought to associate fair skin with positive and dark skin with negativity. Murdock (2019) believed that the root of colourism had started since American colonies practiced slavery during the 17th and 18th century. Slavery had made the idea of white skin is superiority. Centuries after slavery ended, Li et al. (2008) pointed out that “whiteness” is an important part of female beauty standards in Asian countries including Malaysia. Until now, fair skin is still desirable and has influenced the perceptions of Asians (Huey & Kaur, 2019).

According to Ashikari (2005), fair skin is the notion of Japanese and as a part of traditional beauty. In India, people with fair-skinned are given more preferences and are more likely to be hired than those with darker skin tones (Mishra, 2015). In another Asian county, namely China, there is an idiom that says, “one white cover up three ugliness”, which meaning that white skin can cover up other physical blemishes. Similarly, in Thailand, fair skin is an integral part of beauty. Velayutham (2009) stated that colourism has occurred in Singapore as well, where dark-skinned people are mocked and insulted by negative words such as “orang minyak”.

Based on Nakamura (2012), before the colonialisation, the preferred fair skin in Malaysian society is not defined as beauty in pre-colonial time. This is supported by Subish and Shankar (2016), who claimed that Malaysia had been ruled by the British, those people with white skin, which may lead Malaysians to believe that fair skin is beautiful. As a result, Malaysians desire to have fair skin for themselves, and at the same time, they also believe that other people should have fair skin. Otherwise, people with fair skin discriminate against and dislike people with dark skin, which is

why colourism happens and has traditionally been linked to beauty standards in the Asian cultures.

Social media advertising

Social media advertising is a form of digital marketing where you can promote your brand on social media platforms. For example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on (Ohajionu & Mathews, 2015). Social media advertising can be divided into organic social media advertising and paid advertising. Organic social media advertising is more about posting content on a brand's page and then waiting for consumers to visit and engage with their content. In contrast, paid social media advertising is that you pay a fee to the social media platform that sponsored posts can target at specific audience (Macready, 2024).

Ashley and Tuten (2015) claimed that the message content and source effect are considered to be one of the key factors in social media advertising. The message content includes visualisation and text that an advertiser or brand communicates with their target customers through an advertising campaign to persuade them to take the desired action. A visual is a video or photo of an advertisement. In contrast, text content refers to the copy, title, and slogan in an advertisement. According to Egbeh et al. (2020), this aspect refers to the content that advertisers say to make an impression and attract consumers. Even in text form, the tagline or slogan of an advertisement may indicate colourism. For instance, a Thailand skincare company named Seoul Secret had to repeal an advertisement that shows two women, one with fair skin and

the other with dark skin, using a controversial slogan, “white makes you win,” which lead to the colourism (Lim et al., 2019). Social media advertising that always show fair skin is the standard of beauty. Therefore, our brain tells us about that models with lighter skin tone are beautiful, and if we buy the products they represent, our skin tones will become whiter and more beautiful like them instead of buying products endorsed by darker skin tone models.

According to Steyn et al. (2011), the source effect refers to the effectiveness of an advertisement is influenced by consumer’s impression of the advertising source. There are some sources effect factors such as media source effects, different spokesperson effects, race, celebrity fame and so on.

According to Rauf and Ullah (2019), social media advertising plays a crucial role in shaping consumers’ beliefs and values, influencing their buying process. In addition, social media advertising being a crucial platform for the creation and spread of various stereotypes such as colourism and discrimination (Iturriaga, 2016). Based on Gerdeman (2017), colourism in advertising is its effect on an individual's perception of beauty, where lighter skin tones are often preferred, causing darker-skinned people to feel insecure. The global prevalence of colourism extends to prejudice, favouring lighter skin tones over darker ones (Hamilton & Slutskiy, 2017). Even among ethnic and racial groups, a preference for fair skin has led to widespread use of whitening products among African, Asian, and Latino women (Arzi et al., 2021). In short, social media advertising has played an important role in shaping fair skin as a beauty ideal and encouraging people to buy more whitening products.

Consumers' attitude and colourism in social media advertising

Attitude is an individual's settled way of thinking or feeling towards some ideas or objects (Kotler, 2000). Attitude is composed of cognitive, affective, and behaviour. Based on Kumar and Raju (2013), exposure to advertisements will lead to cognition. For example, remember on advertisements, which leads to attitudes like product preferences and buying attitudes eventually leads to habits, such as buying advertised products. In other words, consumers develop a positive attitude towards the advertised products are more likely to buy. In contrast, consumers who have a negative attitude towards the advertised products will have no intention of buying it.

According to White and Harkins (1994), advertising research has shown that the ethnicity of models appearing in advertisements often affect viewers' attitude toward those messages. Caucasian is considered to be the noblest race, putting all the "ugly races" under the beautiful white people (Hussein, 2010). The advertising researchers recognize that people's racial attitudes can have a greater effect on their attitude toward advertisements.

According to Qualls and Moore (2006), colourism in social media advertisements can be shown by the lack of dark-skinned people in social media advertisements. A fashion designer Sarah Ryan Hill posted a video on her TikTok to question why to use of white models to promote local brands To Malaysians. She pointed out she had not seen the local models while only see Caucasian on advertisements promoting cosmetics or fashion. She wondered Malaysians will resonate with white models who were seen everywhere in advertisements, implying that even local brands in Malaysia

consider lighter-skinned models to be the ideal beauty (Amin, 2023).

According to Mitchell (2020), cosmetic colorblindness is a type of colourism used in marketing communication to describe the use of black actors in advertising. The study depicted black actors in advertisement and found that people viewed black actors were added because meeting quotas, not because of racial integration. It clearly showed that when advertisement with black actors, consumers will tend to have lower and negative attitude toward the advertisement.

The study of Whittler and Dimeo (1991) showed white people's comments on non-white model advertising regardless of feelings of colourism. The result suggested that white viewers developed more positive attitude towards white models advertising than non-white models advertising. One of the significant was when the actor or model comes from an internal group rather than an external group stimulated favorable attitudes.

The findings of Torres and Briggs (2007) focused on the effect of Hispanic viewers' racial attitude on their evaluation towards advertising featuring white models and advertising featuring Hispanic models. The result of this study was that both high and low racial identifiers showed more positive attitude of white models advertising.

The research of Whittler (1989) examined the impact of racial attitude on evaluating advertising is racial prejudice. The study focused on white viewers' evaluation of advertising with black models increased, because advertisers worry about negative attitude toward such advertising. The researchers used racial prejudice to evaluate how the racial attitude of white viewers will impact the processing of

advertising message. The result showed that highly prejudiced people had more negative attitude towards advertisements by non-white models than less prejudiced people.

One of the studies by Greenwald & Krieger (2006) evaluated racial implicit biases through using white and black faces can lead to positive and negative words. The implicit association test (IAT) was widely used in this study to measure implicit attitudes by using word, phrases and concepts. The implicit attitudes mean that inaccurately identified or introspectively unidentified based on experience that led to like or dislike feeling, or action toward social objects. In contrast, the condition of the implicit association test (IAT) was that people respond time to concepts that were highly related will be faster than concepts that were not highly related. The result showed that white Americans in the USA respond more quickly to white with positive relations compared to black with positive relations, implicating good and preferences attitudes to white people than black people.

Consumers' purchasing behaviour and colourism in social media advertising

According to Maio and Haddock (2008), behaviour refers to the past behaviour related to the object of the attitude. Consumer behaviour in Malaysia includes psychological, sociological, anthropological, and economic factors (Muniady et al., 2014). Smith et al. (2008) believed that purchasing behaviour can help to create and strengthen a sense of identity and communication of social differences. Besides, the more the brand image aligns with the consumer's self-image, the easier it will be for

the consumer to buy that brand to fulfill their desires (Muniady et al., 2014).

According to Statista (2023), 33% of respondents said they frequently buy products based on social media advertising. In addition, 14% of respondents said they often purchase an item after seeing advertisements on social media platforms.

Based on Craddock et al. (2018), colourism can affect youngster at school, university, workplace, and the media they consume. It has been determined from previous studies that colourism in advertising generally applied to women in the beauty and cosmetics industry (Jacobs et al., 2016). Women believed that advertisements for whitening cosmetics force them to believe and buy light-skinned cosmetics because the advertising often allude to black or dark-skinned women are ugly, looked down upon, and have low self-esteem. Since fairness is portrayed as the standard of beauty and competitiveness in the social media advertising, it has a big impact on the purchase and use of whitening products (Jacobs et al., 2016). According to Rusmadi et al. (2015), it showed that 61% of Malaysian women thought they looked younger with fair skin. They willing to buy skin lightening products in large quantities.

According to DeWolf (2020), Darlie was originally launched in Shanghai, represented by a black man wearing a top hat and bow tie, modeled after American bard Al Jolson, who was notorious for his blackface image. The original name called Darkie was a racist epithet for black people in Western countries. Darkie, named "Black People Toothpaste" in China, and "Darkie" in English, appeared in advertisements with blackface images, bringing the issue of colourism. Moreover,

many local advertisements clearly stated that "Black people toothpaste is still black people toothpaste in 1940s, which was an insult because black people have dark skin, and their teeth look white. As a result, black or dark-skinned people resisted the use of black people image and darkie name. They also chose not to buy Darkie to express their dissatisfaction and anger. On the contrary, white people in Western countries and fair-skinned people in Asian countries choose to buy because they want to make their teeth whiter.

Based on Astor (2017), Dove caused controversy with released an advertisement posted on social media platforms showing a dark-skinned woman took off her brown shirt and turned into a white woman with a light skin tone. The idea of this advertisement seems to promote and persuade people to buy the product because fair-skinned was better and more beautiful than dark. Several years ago, Dove made the same mistake which showed three women stand in towels, each is lighter than the next. The "before" word was above the dark-skinned woman and the "after" word was above the white woman, implying that the transition to lighter skin was Dove's commitment to beauty. As a result, black or dark-skinned people were really offended by these advertisements and thought Dove's advertisements should change its core and reflect on beauty. At the same time, they refused to buy Dove. In contrast, fair-skinned people did not influence them to continue or increase their purchase of Dove because they were indoctrinated by Dove advertisements that only fair-skinned people could be considered beautiful.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Quantitative approach

The methodology selected for this research is quantitative research. Based on Bhandari (2020), quantitative research is the process of gathering and interpreting numerical data using mathematical methods or specific statistical. It can be used to identify patterns and averages, make hypotheses, test causality, and generalize results to larger populations. Quantitative research method such as survey has been used in this study to obtain accurate result.

Sampling

Sampling is the process or technique of selecting a specific part of a population. Sampling allows researchers to select a small group of people for observation and determination (Tuovila, 2024). The sample size for this study will be set at 50 participants, aged 18 to 29 years old.

The sampling method adopted in this study is non-probability sampling. The non-probability sampling includes non-random selection, allowing me to easily collect data (McCombes, 2023). The non-probability sampling method uses a technique called voluntary response sampling. This study uses the voluntary response sampling to reach university students who are willing to complete the questionnaire. This allows me to gather accurate information from university students more easily and efficiently.

Research design

Research design refers to the whole plan or strategy for conducting research. It includes outlining the methods and procedures that will be used to collect and analyze

data in order to answer research questions (Hassan, 2024).

This study adopted the questionnaire survey method. The questionnaire survey will be conducted online through Google Forms and distributed to university students to better understand their attitude and behaviour. Also, the estimated time to complete this survey is just around 8 minutes. The questionnaire survey is divided into 3 sections, which are demographic section, the influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content, and the impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised.

Firstly, I will ask respondents to fill out a credential verification question to confirm their acknowledgement of data use if they are going to participate in this survey. In addition, this section also to make sure that only qualified respondents can participate in the study. Next, the demographic section will ask about the background of participants such as their basic personal details. Furthermore, the influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content (RQ1) section will ask about their attitude when seeing colourism in social media advertising. This is to analyse the university students' response based on their past experiences to think and develop positive or negative attitude towards the colourism in social media advertising. The last section is about the impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised (RQ2), where the using light-skinned, medium-skinned, and dark-skinned models will affect their purchasing behaviour.

Procedure

This study will not include any incomplete questionnaires to make sure the reliability of the data. Each information record is verified twice before being analyzed. The responses of people who do not belong to the target group will be removed from the analysis. This study will use Google Forms' cart graph and bar chart. This is because of the user-friendly interface of Google Forms, which displays survey results and is also easier to understand.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study has collected 50 participants that aged between 18 to 29 years old who have seen colourism in social media advertisements before to study the impact of colourism in social media advertisements affect their attitude and purchasing behaviour.

4.0 Demographic Section

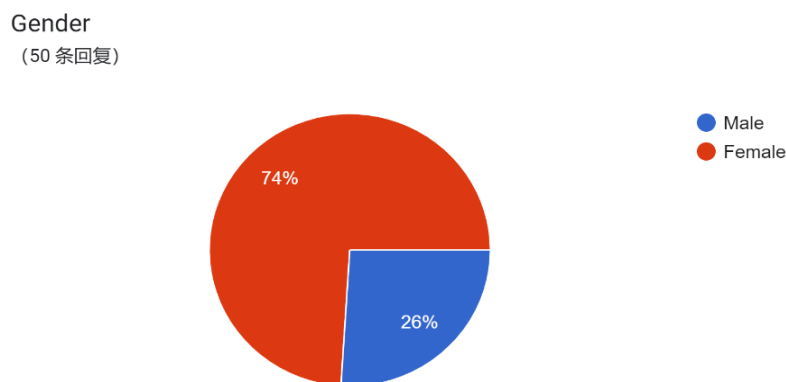


Figure 1: Gender

Based on Figure 1, there are total of 37 (74%) female respondents, and 13 (26%) of male respondents. The number of female respondents is higher than male respondents. This is because female respondents have a stronger interest to issue related colourism and beauty standards, impacting their willingness to take part in this survey.

Age

(50 条回复)

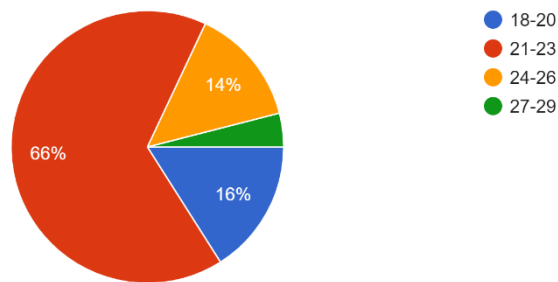


Figure 2: Age

Based on Figure 2, 66% of them are aged between 21 to 23 years old, followed by 16% of 18 to 20 years old. This is because most university students are between 18 to 23 years old. These two age groups are generally more active on social media platforms. They are more likely to see and interact with social media advertisements that contain colourism issue.

Education Level

(50 条回复)

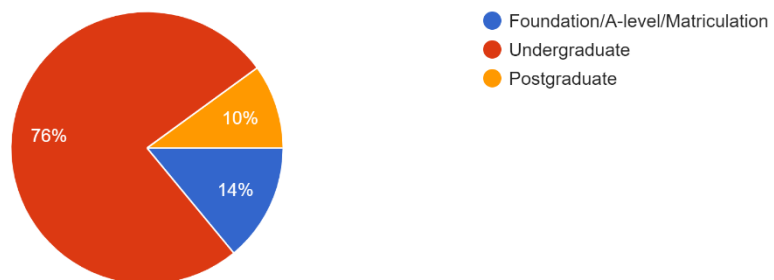


Figure 3: Education Level

According to Figure 3, only 10% are postgraduate students. Postgraduate students are generally a smaller demographic compared to undergraduates.

Ethnicity
(50 条回复)

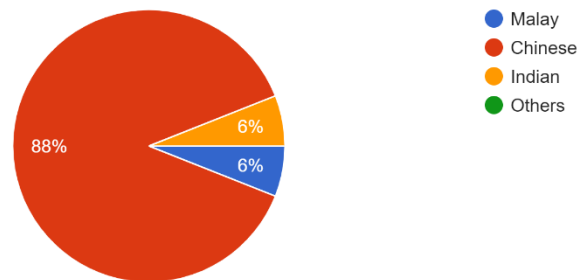


Figure 4: Ethnicity

Based on Figure 4, there are 44 (88%) of Chinese, 3 (6%) of Malay, and 3 (6%) of Indian. This is because demographic composition of the university, which is UTAR has a predominantly Chinese student population, which can make a higher proportion of Chinese respondents.

Religion
(50 条回复)

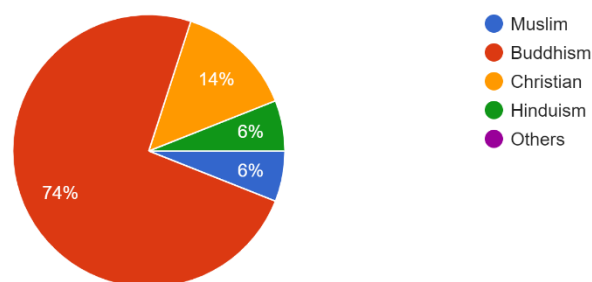


Figure 5: Religion

As shown in Figure 5, most of the respondents are Buddhist. This is because students from UTAR are usually Chinese and have a Buddhist culture.

Objective 1 (The influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content)

Are you familiar with the term "colourism" as it relates to social media advertisements?
(50 条回复)

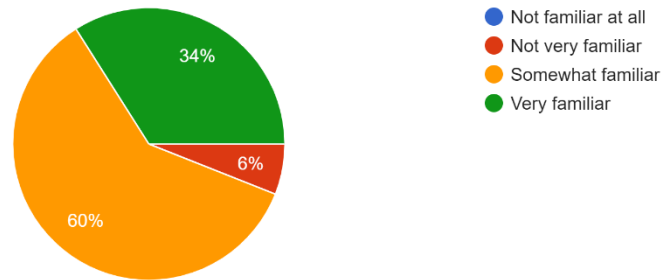


Figure 6: Are you familiar with the term "colourism" as it relates to social media advertisements

According to Figure 6, 60% of respondents somewhat familiar about the colourism as it relates to social media advertisements. 34% of respondents very familiar, while 6% of respondents not very familiar. This is because of the increasing visibility of colourism in social media advertisements, resulting in university students being frequently exposed to and may have a high level of familiarity with colourism in social media advertisements.

How frequently have you seen instances of colourism in social media advertisements?
(50 条回复)

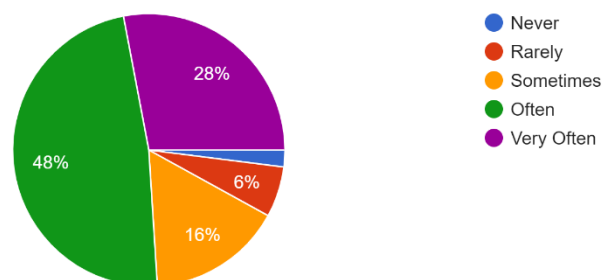


Figure 7: How frequently have you seen instances of colourism in social media

advertisements

As shown in Figure 7, 24 (48%) of respondents among the whole sample size often see colourism in social media advertisements. 14 (28%) of respondents very often see colourism in social media advertisements. This is because colourism increasingly being recognized and discussed in social media advertisements.

The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements affect your attitude or perception of the brand or product being advertised.

(50 条回复)

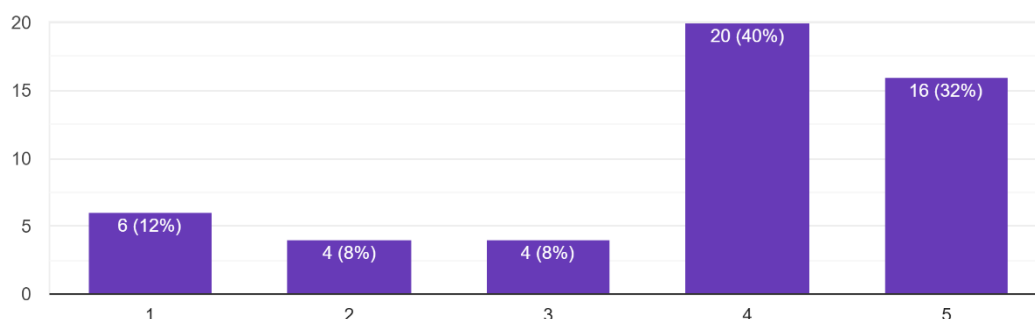


Figure 8: The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements affect your attitude or perception of the brand or product being advertised

According to Figure 8, the significant percentage of respondents (40% agreeing and 32% strongly agreeing) that colourism in social media advertisements affect their attitude or perception of the advertised brand or product. This is because respondents who are familiar with the colourism in social media advertisements can lead them to recognize that colourism has a greater impact on their attitude toward brands and products being advertised.

Based on your own observation, what skin tones are most commonly represented in models in social media advertisements?

(50 条回复)

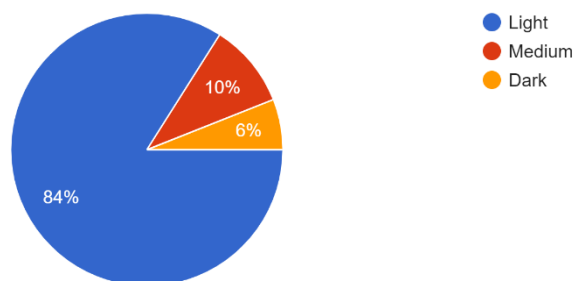


Figure 9: What skin tones are most commonly represented in models in social media advertisements

Based on Figure 9, most of the respondents observed that 84% of social media advertisements featured light-skinned models, 10% medium-skinned models, and 6% dark-skinned models. This is because the advertising industry has always followed and believed in prevailing beauty standards. Therefore, brands always choose light-skinned models in their social media advertisements to attract consumers that are considered to drive consumer preferences.

Which skin colour of models in social media advertisements gives you a positive attitude towards the advertising content?

(50 条回复)

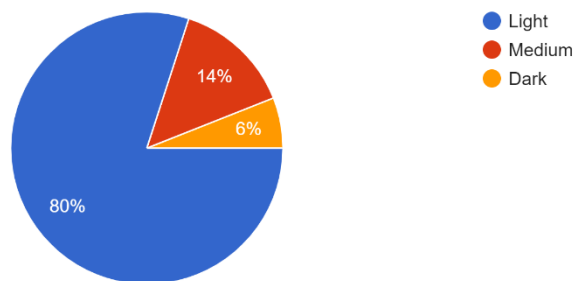


Figure 10: Which skin colour of models in social media advertisements gives you a positive attitude towards the advertising content

According to Figure 10, most of the respondents think that light-skinned models at 80% in social media advertisements give them a positive attitude towards the advertising content. This is because light skin is always associated with beauty in Malaysia, which lead university students to have a positive attitude towards the social media advertisements featuring light-skinned models.

Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more appealing than those featuring darker skin tone models?

(50 条回复)

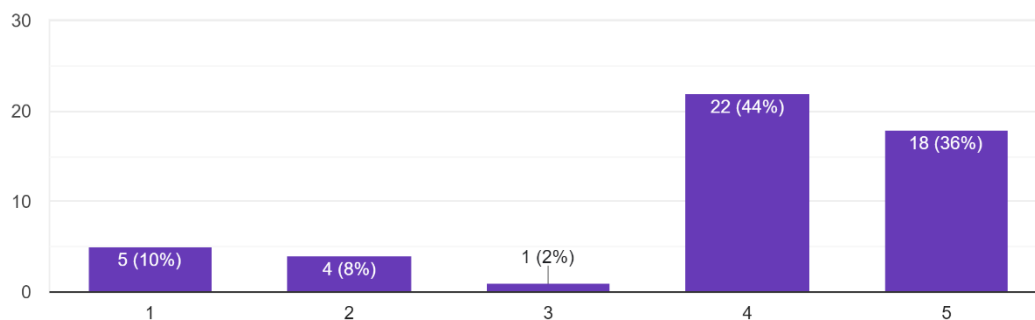


Figure 11: Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more appealing than those featuring darker skin

tone models

As shown in Figure 11, 22 (44%) of respondents agreed and 18 (36%) of respondents strongly agreed that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more appealing than those featuring darker skin tone models. This is because light-skinned models are always used to represent the ideal or desirable, which makes light-skinned models in social media advertisements appear more attractive than dark-skinned models.

Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more prevalent or positively portrayed compared to those featuring darker skin tone models?

(50 条回复)

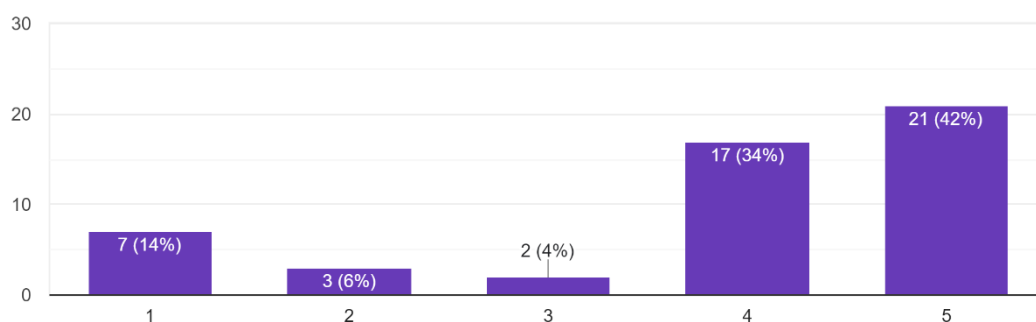


Figure 12: Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more prevalent or positively portrayed compared to those featuring darker skin tone models

According to Figure 12, a substantial percentage of respondents (42%) strongly agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more prevalent or positively portrayed compared to those featuring darker skin tone models. This is because the lighter skin tone models always perceived as the beauty ideal that they believe will resonate most with their audience.

Do you agree that models with darker skin tones in social media advertisements can create negative attitudes and reduce your interest in the products being promoted?

(50 条回复)

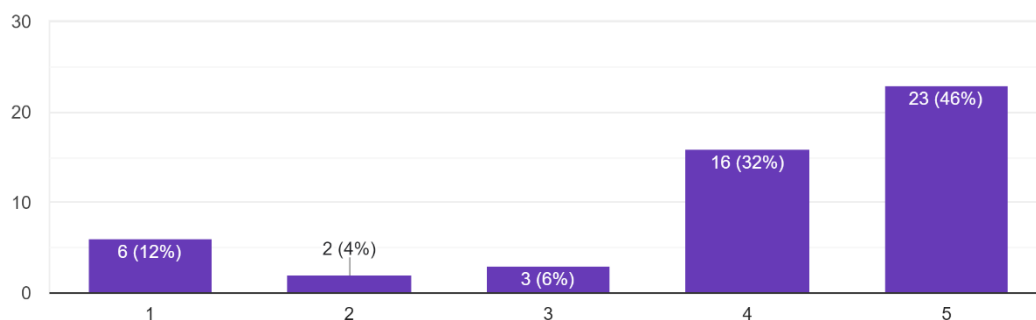


Figure 13: Do you agree that models with darker skin tones in social media advertisements can create negative attitude and reduce your interest in the products being promoted

Based on Figure 13, the high percentage, 46% of respondents strongly agree that models with darker skin tones in social media advertisements can create negative attitude and reduce their interest in the products being promoted. This is because the underrepresentation of darker skin tone models in social media advertisements can lead to a lack of positive attitude and reduce consumers' interest.

Do you think that phrases like "become whiter" or "achieve a lighter skin tone" in social media advertisements make you more likely to have a positive attitude towards the advertising content?
(50 条回复)

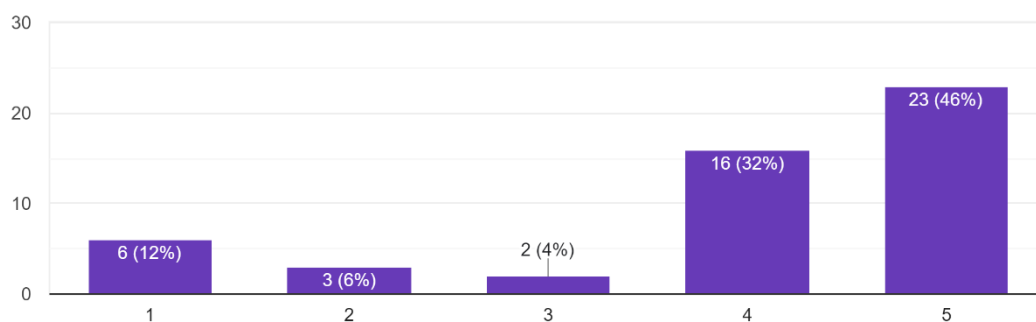


Figure 14: Do you think that phrases like "become whiter" or "achieve a lighter skin tone" in social media advertisements make you more likely to have a positive attitude towards the advertising content

According to Figure 14, it showed smaller percentages of respondents who strongly disagree (12%) and disagree (6%) that phrases like "become whiter" or "achieve a lighter skin tone" in social media advertisements make them more likely to have a positive attitude towards the advertising content. This is because they might see social media advertisements promoting such words may be perceived as misleading or unrealistic, causing them to have a negative attitude towards the advertising content.

Do you agree that university students may try to lighten their skin due to colourism in social media advertisements?

(50 条回复)

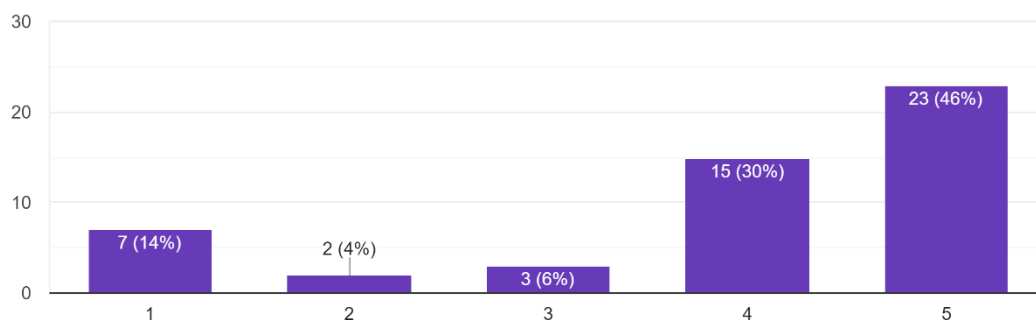


Figure 15: Do you agree that university students may try to lighten their skin due to colourism in social media advertisements

As shown in Figure 15, the high percentage, 46% of respondents strongly agree that university students may try to lighten their skin due to colourism in social media advertisements. This is because social media advertisements emphasize lighter skin tone as a desirable trait, leading university students try to lighten their skin to pursue and perceive beauty.

Objective 2 (The impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised)

The colourism in social media advertisements will affect your purchasing behaviour.
(50 条回复)

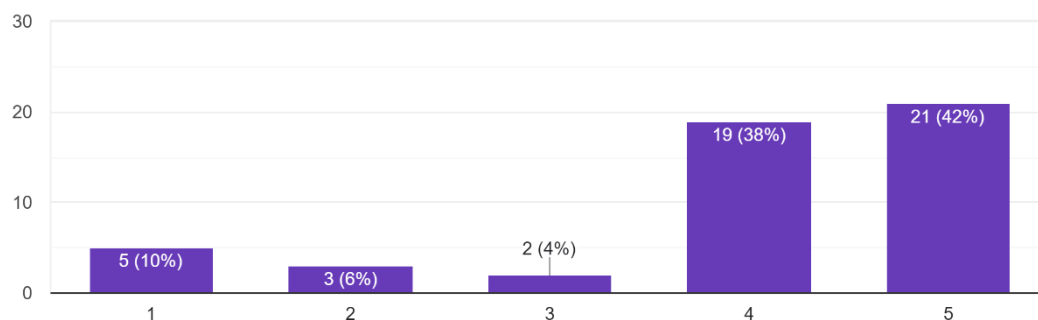


Figure 16: The colourism in social media advertisements will affect your purchasing behaviour

According to Figure 16, a small percentage of respondents, 10%, strongly disagree that colourism in social media advertisements influence their purchasing behaviour. This group might be less sensitive and do not believe that such bias has a material impact on their purchasing choices.

The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements influence your purchasing behavior for the brand or product being promoted.

(50 条回复)

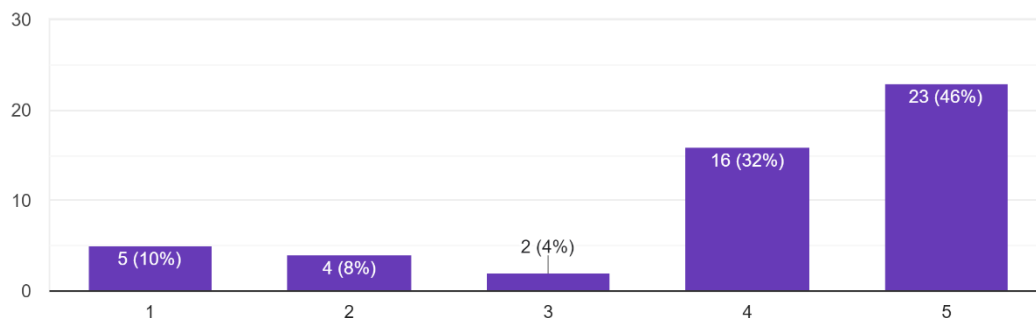


Figure 17: The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements influence your purchasing behavior for the brand or product being promoted

Based on Figure 17, we can see almost half of the respondents strongly agree that the portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements influence their purchasing behavior for the brand or product being promoted. These respondents may be highly aware of how colourism is portrayed in advertising and influenced by it.

You always feel influenced to purchase a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a lighter skin tone.

(50 条回复)

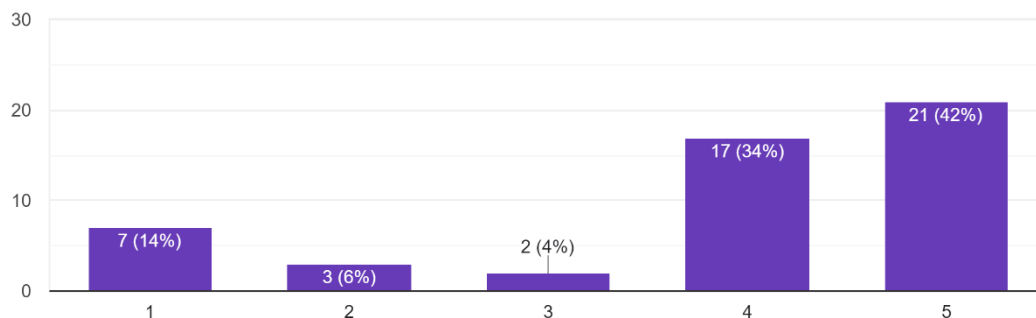


Figure 18: You always feel influenced to purchase a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a lighter skin tone

As shown in Figure 18, a substantial percentage of respondents (42%) strongly agree that they feel influenced to purchase a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a lighter skin tone. This is because they may perceive lighter-skinned spokesperson as having higher status, making them perceive the products promoted by lighter-skinned spokesperson as more attractive.

You always feel deterred from purchasing a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a darker skin tone.

(50 条回复)

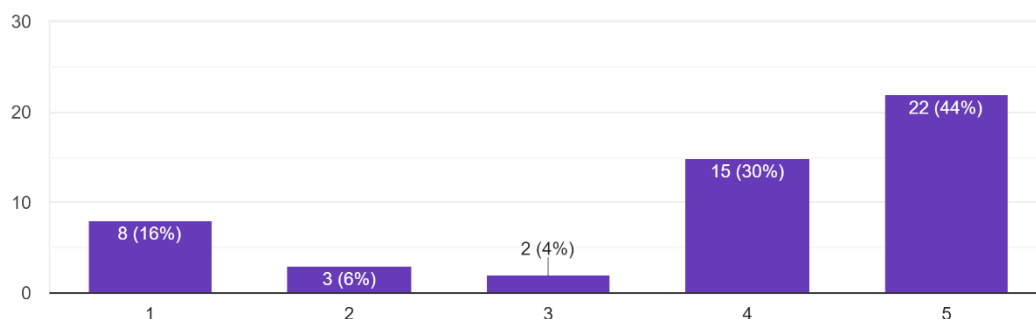


Figure 19: You always feel deterred from purchasing a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a darker skin tone

As shown in Figure 19, most of the respondents which is 44% strongly agree that they always feel deterred from purchasing a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a darker skin tone. These respondents may be influenced by the prevailing trends in social media advertising that lighter skin tones are usually preferred over darker ones.

What skin tone of models promoting products on social media advertisements influence you to buy more?

(50 条回复)

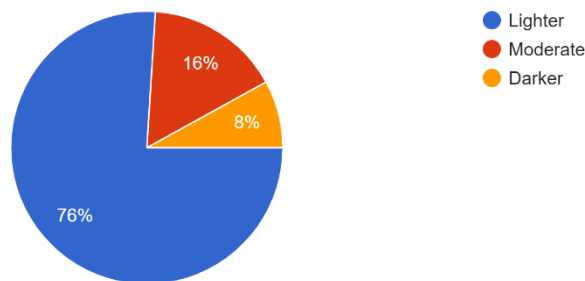


Figure 20: What skin tone of models promoting products on social media advertisements influence you to buy more

According to Figure 20, only 16% of moderate skin tone models promoting products on social media advertisements influence them to buy more. This is because moderate skin tone models are often considered as more common or less special in social media advertisements, leading to less influence to buy.

Social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more persuasive compared to those featuring darker skin tone models.

(50 条回复)

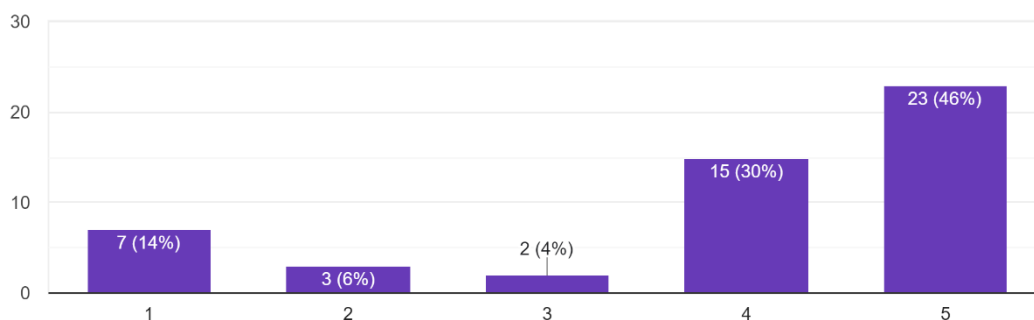


Figure 21: Social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more persuasive compared to those featuring darker skin tone models

Based on Figure 21, almost half of the respondents (46%) strongly agree that social

media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more persuasive compared to those featuring darker skin tone models. This is because lighter skin tone models are often idealized and associated with standards of beauty, which makes lighter-skinned models appear more attractive and makes social media advertisements more convincing.

You always trust a brand more if it predominantly uses lighter skin tone models in its social media advertisements.

(50 条回复)

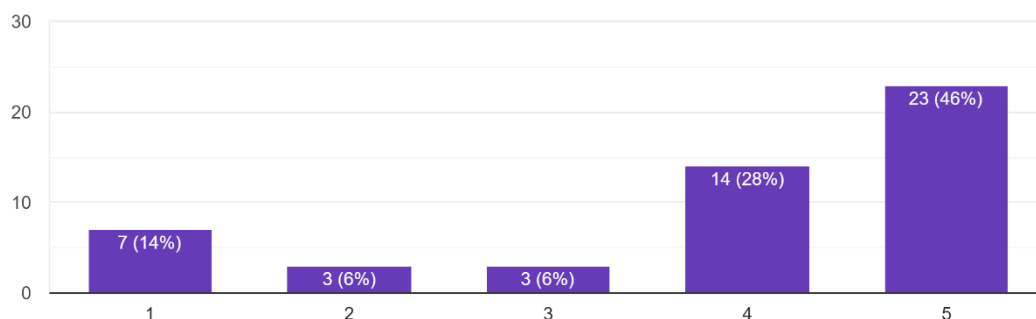


Figure 22: You always trust a brand more if it predominantly uses lighter skin tone models in its social media advertisements

Based on Figure 22, nearly half of the respondents (46%) strongly agree that they always trust a brand more if it predominantly uses lighter skin tone models in its social media advertisements. This is because light-skinned models are always associated with higher standards and desirable qualities, which leads to greater trust in the brands that light-skinned models advertise.

You always feel more influenced to buy products if social media advertisements frequently show lighter skin tone models endorsing whitening products.

(50 条回复)

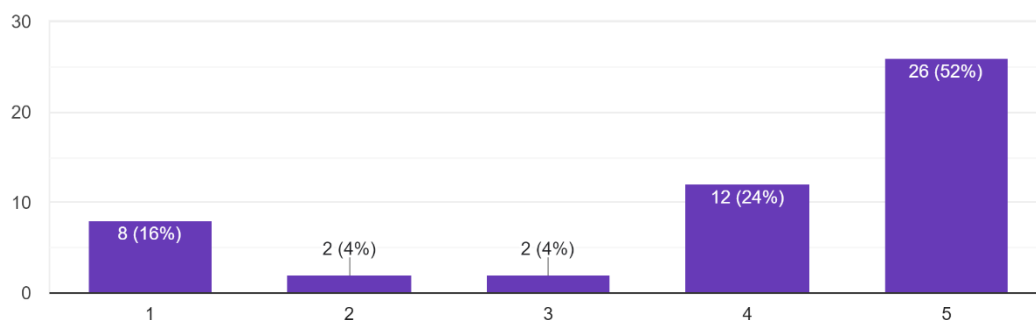


Figure 23: You always feel more influenced to buy products if social media advertisements frequently show lighter skin tone models endorsing whitening products

As shown in Figure 23, most respondents (52%) strongly agree that they always feel more influenced to buy products if social media advertisements frequently show lighter skin tone models endorsing whitening products. This is because they may think that using the same whitening products will help them achieve a similar look to light skin tone models.

Social media advertisements emphasizing the removal of dark spots make you more likely to buy the product.

(50 条回复)

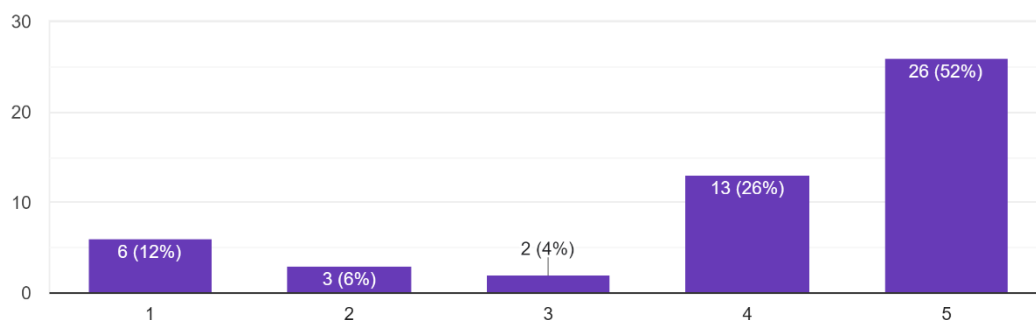


Figure 24: Social media advertisements emphasizing the removal of dark spots make you more likely to buy the product

According to Figure 24, the smaller percentages of respondents who strongly disagree (12%) and disagree (6%) that social media advertisements emphasizing the removal of dark spots make them more likely to buy the product. These groups may think such claims are exaggerated or unachievable, leading to doubts about the effectiveness of the product.

You agree that using darker skin tone models to promote products can make consumers doubt the quality and effectiveness of the product.

(50 条回复)

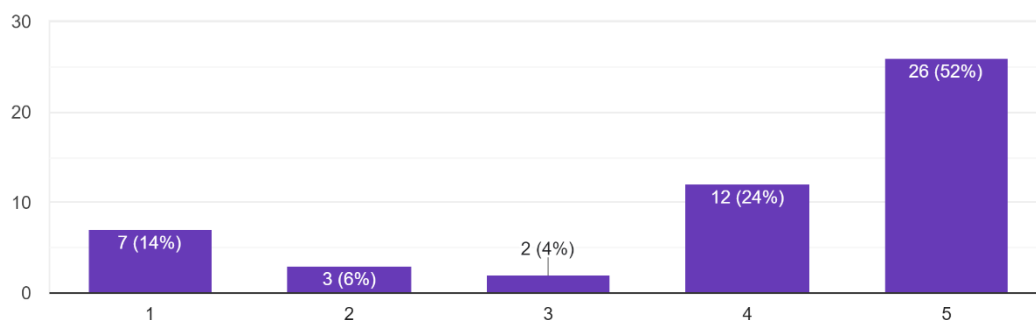


Figure 25: You agree that using darker skin tone models to promote products can make consumers doubt the quality and effectiveness of the product

Based on Figure 25, the high percentage, 52% of respondents strongly agree that using darker skin tone models to promote products can make consumers doubt the quality and effectiveness of the product. This is because darker skin tone models always present a lower status or quality in social media advertisements, which can lead to doubts about the products being promoted by dark-skinned models.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

According to the analysis of the survey, it shows that lighter-skinned models are more often featured and positively portrayed in social media advertisements. This preference arises because lighter-skinned models are considered as a more universal standard of attractiveness. Consequently, brands will perceive that lighter-skinned models are perfect, beautiful, and better able to attract and engage the audience. This creates a feedback loop exists where light-skinned models are seen as more distinctive and attractive, leading consumers to accept and have positive attitude towards social media advertisements featuring light-skinned models.

In addition, the analysis shows that the proportion of dark-skinned models in social media advertisements is only 6%. Many brands intentionally focused on featuring lighter skinned, neutral and not too dark models. A study of 70 beauty brands by Eyecue Insights showed that only 13% of photos showed darker-skinned models before the summer of 2020. In July, the proportion dropped to 20% (Sergan, 2020). The lower visibility and lack of diversity of dark-skinned models in social media advertisements can lead to a lack of familiarity. As a result, the lack of positive depictions of dark-skinned models can lead to have negative attitude or less interest in social media advertisements featuring darker-skinned models.

Besides, the analysis indicates that a significant majority (80%) of respondents either strongly agree or agree that colourism in social media advertisements influence their purchasing behavior. For these respondents, colourism in social media

advertisements is an important factor in their decision-making process. They may strongly recognize the colourist stereotypes in social media advertisements, but they still believe in the brand and are willing to support it. Conversely, a small percentage of respondents either strongly disagree or disagree with the idea that colourism in social media advertisements influence their purchasing behaviour. These groups may not see colourism as an important issue when making purchasing decisions. For them, they may consider other factors, such as product features, personal preferences, over the influence of colourism in social media advertisements.

Also, the data shows that lighter skin tone models have a greater impact on purchasing decisions than medium and darker skin tone models. The high proportion of respondents influenced by light-skinned models suggests that such models are perceived as more desirable, reinforcing their influence on consumer behaviour. In contrast, medium and darker-skinned models have less impact, likely due to lower representation and a general bias in favor of lighter skin. This disparity highlights the ongoing problem of colourism in social media advertisements and its impact on consumer preferences and buying patterns.

Apart from that, most of the respondents which is 44% strongly agree that they always feel deterred from purchasing a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a darker skin tone. Based on Byrne (2016), the depiction of blackface in social media advertisements is also considered as colourism. This is because it reminds consumers of the degradation and ineptitude of black or dark-skinned people and makes them reluctant to trust and buy products endorsed by black

or dark-skinned models.

Research limitations

It is limited in generality because of the small sample size of the survey. The survey only focused on 50 university students, which will limit the possible factors or results. Therefore, the result may not be the most accurate representation of university students in Malaysia. In addition, we found out that university students have positive attitude and high purchasing behaviour when seeing lighter skin tone models on social media advertisements is indeed an issue and make them blindly believe that fair skin is the standard of beauty.

Recommend areas for further research

It is recommended to increase the sample size of the survey. A larger sample size can improve the statistical power of the study and make it easier to apply the results to a larger population. If the study is limited by a small sample size, letting more people involved in the study could help solve this problem. Furthermore, it is suggested to come out with the solutions to control or solve the colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude and purchasing behaviour.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has found that colourism in social media advertisements did impact university students both positively and negatively in terms of attitudes and purchasing behaviour towards advertising content and products advertised. It showed that university students develop positive attitude and high

purchasing behaviour when light-skinned models are featured in the social media advertisements compared to medium and dark-skinned models. The Critical Race Theory has also been applied in this study to identify and recognize how colourism in social media advertisements impact on university students' attitude and purchasing behaviour.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaires

Part 1- Demographic

1. Gender (male & female)
2. Age (age range 18-29)
3. Education level (Foundation/A-level/Matriculation, Undergraduate, Postgraduate)
4. Ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Others)
5. Religion (Muslim, Buddhism, Christian, Hinduism, Others)

Part 2- Objective 1 (The influence of colourism in social media advertisements on university students' attitude towards advertising content)

1. Are you familiar with the term "colourism" as it relates to social media advertisements?
 - Not familiar at all
 - Not very familiar
 - Somewhat familiar
 - Very familiar
2. How frequently have you seen instances of colourism in social media advertisements?
 - Never
 - Rarely
 - Sometimes
 - Often

-Very Often

3. The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements affect your attitude or perception of the brand or product being advertised.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

4. Based on your own observation, what skin tones are most commonly represented in models in social media advertisements?

-Light

-Medium

-Dark

5. Which skin colour of models in social media advertisements gives you a positive attitude towards the advertising content?

-Light

-Medium

-Dark

6. Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more appealing than those featuring darker skin tone models?

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

7. Do you agree that social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more prevalent or positively portrayed compared to those featuring darker skin tone models?

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

8. Do you agree that models with darker skin tones in social media advertisements can create negative attitudes and reduce your interest in the products being promoted?

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

9. Do you think that phrases like "become whiter" or "achieve a lighter skin tone" in social media advertisements make you more likely to have a positive attitude towards the advertising content?

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

10. Do you agree that university students may try to lighten their skin due to colourism in social media advertisements?

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

Objective 2- (The impact of colourism on university students' purchasing behaviour towards products advertised)

1. The colourism in social media advertisements will affect your purchasing behaviour.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

2. The portrayal of colourism in social media advertisements influence your purchasing behavior for the brand or product being promoted.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

3. You always feel influenced to purchase a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a lighter skin tone.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

4. You always feel deterred from purchasing a product if it is advertised with a model or spokesperson who has a darker skin tone.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

5. What skin tone of models promoting products on social media advertisements influence you to buy more?

-Lighter

-Moderate

-Darker

6. Social media advertisements featuring lighter skin tone models are more persuasive compared to those featuring darker skin tone models.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

7. You always trust a brand more if it predominantly uses lighter skin tone models in its social media advertisements.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

8. You always feel more influenced to buy products if social media advertisements frequently show lighter skin tone models endorsing whitening products.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

9. Social media advertisements emphasizing the removal of dark spots make you more likely to buy the product.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree

10. You agree that using darker skin tone models to promote products can make consumers doubt the quality and effectiveness of the product.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly agree