

# Cosmetic Advertisements: A Study on Self-Esteem and Buying Behaviour of Young Women in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** *The current trend among young women in this millennium era desire to have their looks as per their idols portrayed in the cosmetic advertisements. Young women play an important role in the market as they exert enormous influence over the spending power across a growing number of product categories including cosmetics. According to Scott (2007), beauty industry tends to reveal unrealistic beauty standards in cosmetic advertisements which some may lead to negative effects on young women such as feeling inadequate of self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. As a result of this negative effect of personal beauty evaluation, this study is conducted to investigate the impact of cosmetic advertisements on self-esteem and buying behaviour among young women in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A primary research has been conducted via online data collection towards 216 young women in Kuala Lumpur. The findings indicated that there is a significance correlation between cosmetic advertisements, self-esteem, and buying behavior. Finally, this research is expected to benefit the young women to be cautious in believing the advertisements provided by cosmetic producers' in lieu with their intention to be beautiful as portrayed by the advertisers.*

**Keywords:** *cosmetic advertisement, self-esteem, buying behaviour, young women.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Advertisements today seem to be one of the main influencer of marketers to reach their target markets. Advertisements also create an entire worldview persuading women to emulate the images they see all around them. Advertising is a form of business communication used to encourage, persuade, or manipulate an audience to take some action to buy the desired product in the market (Krithika, 2015). Advertising is a business activity that employs creative techniques to design persuasive communication in mass media that promote ideas, goods, and services in a manner consistent with the achievement of the advertiser's objective, the delivery of consumer satisfaction and the development of social and economic welfare (Cohen, 1988 cited in Ampofo, 2014). Whilst Manickam and Ceasar (2016) indicated that advertising can change emotions of people and influence on the daily lives of people that develop self-concepts in order to induce purchase intentions. According to Trampe (2011), advertisers targeted on women into buying beauty products by making them seem like "problem-solving" products.

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Advertisers make it appear these products will fix the flaws of a person's appearance, and that by using beauty products, the consumer will be as attractive as the person featured in the advertisement. Further, when beauty advertisers create an ad, they suggest an ideal view of beauty and create a standard of beauty. Cosmetic companies constantly prey upon women's self-esteem, to feel like they aren't good enough in order to create a market for their products. The message in the advertisement is created strongly to attract the consumers and the target audience. The most vulnerable group who are more attracted to the message is young women. These young women tend to get carried away of the idea in becoming beautiful with good body image and health conscious.

The cosmetic industry has been expanding and growing around the world in both developed and developing countries (Hassali et al, 2015). The cosmetics market in Asia seems to be one of the fastest growing markets. Currently, the attitudes towards using cosmetics are changing among the population. Women show a great importance on personal grooming as well as working women and those with higher incomes are often interested to buy premium personal care products. There is a growing market for skin care and cosmetic products as consumers become more affluent. Hassali et al (2015) emphasised that the consumers' interest was influenced by heavy advertising, marketing and growing prosperity that increased their interest in premium brands. Women including the young ones are constantly bombarded with images of what the society deems as beautiful and this effects self-esteem. Majority of cosmetic advertisements today share a common view that portrayed an "idealized" view of beauty that has been forced on audiences so much that majority women aspire to this look. A study in *Journal of Consumer Research* found that ads featuring beauty products actually has affected female consumers' self-esteem (Trampe, Stapel and Siero, 2010).

Individuals who have low self-esteem are more likely to feel sad, lonely, and dejected. According to Orth and Robins (2013), self-esteem and depression are empirically related. People with low self-esteem are more prone to depression, both clinical levels and milder forms of depressed affect, and depressed people are more likely to feel worthless, incompetent, and inadequate. Low self-esteem is considered as a risk factor for depression as well. It predicts poorer mental health outcomes which may lead to future suicide attempts. It is estimated that about 150 million people worldwide are affected with depression at any moment in time, and one in every five women and one in every eight men experience an episode of major depression over the course of their life (Ali, Suhail and Ali, 2016).

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Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness (Branden, 1969 cited in Gorman, 2015). It is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. (DeBord, 1997 cited in Davis, 2013) also identified that self-esteem refers to how positively or negatively individuals feel about the subjective image of themselves that they have constructed. If one does not take a positive attitude towards their physical appearance or body, it can lead to feelings of worthlessness and confidence levels can be lowered. In today's society, images of unattainable body ideals fill magazines, TV advertisements, movies and social media sites, and these images generally reflect those of the thin idealized women (Cory and Burns, 2007 cited in Gorman, 2015). Advertising and media as a whole clearly portray a certain type of image known as "thin ideal" that contributes to women's low self-esteem and skewed perception of the ideal image to which they should compare themselves (Sheehan, 2013). On the hand, consumer buying behavior refers to the selection, purchase and consumption of goods and services for the satisfaction of their wants (Ramya and Ali, 2016). Anandarajan and Sivagami (2016) proposed that consumer buying behavior is the entirety of a consumer's attitudes, preferences, intentions, and decisions pertaining to the consumer's behavior in the marketplace when purchasing a product or service. Many factors, characteristics, and specificities are combined to build up the behavior of any individual. The perception of the quality, awareness of the product and consumer opinion influence the consumer buying decision. As such, this study critically evaluates the role of advertisements and factors that shape consumers' buying behavior. The purpose of this study is to uncover the effects of cosmetic advertisements on young women's self-esteem and their buying behaviour. In order to determine the more prominent reasoning amongst a sample size, the following objectives are being observed:

1. To determine how young women are portrayed in cosmetic advertisements.
2. To examine the impacts of cosmetic advertisements on young women and the way they feel about their own appearance.
3. To investigate how the buying behavior of young women today have been affected by cosmetic advertisements.

With this information, one can draw conclusions as to what influences these consumer's behaviour. Furthermore one

can see how much advertising influences these decision and if there needs to be changed in the advertising or cosmetics industry.

## II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

Primarily, the sample in this study are young women who live in Kuala Lumpur with an age range between 18 to 24 yearsold. The location chosen was due to the socio-economic conditions present in the area that is relevant to the study and also as it fits the time frame and resources. Data collection of self-administered questionnaire was employed. A convenience sampling methodology has been selected as it is one of the best ways in getting information effectively and efficiently. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016). Nevertheless, the respondents must fulfill the requirement as being young women between 18 to 24 years old in Kuala Lumpur.

Young women as identified by Yazici (2016) are any individual that born between the year of 1980 and 2000 also referred to as "Generation Y" (Gen Y). Total female population in Kuala Lumpur for the year 2017 is around 0.87 million, an estimated population according to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2017). Based on this 384 sets of questionnaires (minimum sample size) suggested by Raosoft Sample Size Calculator were distributed online via social networking sites and email. However, there were only 216 valid questionnaires were obtained.

A survey type of questionnaire was developed by using five-point Likert scale. By following the Likert scale technique for scale construction, the scale moving from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Coding is assigned to the scale as: 5 is strongly agree, 4 is agree, 3 is neutral, 2 is disagree and 1 is strongly disagree.

A research framework is built to investigate the correlation between the variables such as cosmetic advertisements, self-esteem, and consumer buying behavior. Upon collecting the data, a Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software is used for data analysis. Lastly, the ethical considerations will be highlighted in this section.

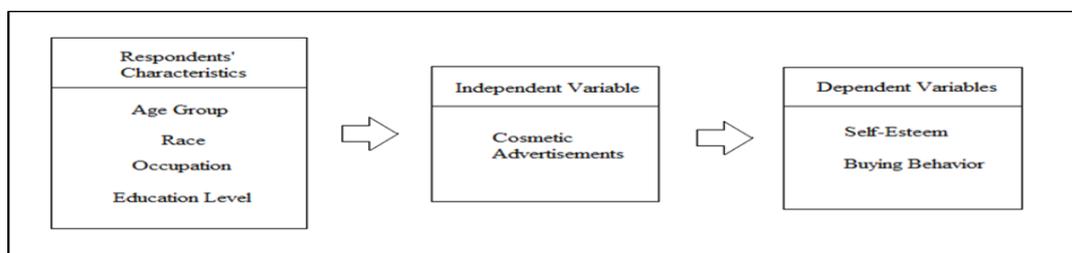


Figure 1: Research Framework

Figure 1 shows the research framework in this study. The potential variables include cosmetic advertisements, self-esteem, and consumer buying behavior. Young women have the internal tendency to compare themselves with others such as model and this will have effects on self-esteem. As (Richins, 1991 cited in Zotou and Palla, 2012) highlighted that women after viewing ads

containing thin and appealing models tend to be less satisfied with their appearance.

Thus, young women who have low-self-esteem tend to enhance their physical appearance by using cosmetic products. The promises of “beauty” being achievable influence and persuade consumers to make certain purchasing decisions that benefit the cosmetic companies (Davies, 2016). Young women who tend to conform to the “ideal beauty” will be convinced by cosmetic advertisements to purchase a particular cosmetic product.

Based on the research framework, specific hypotheses have been derived. The hypotheses derived from the research framework are as below:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between cosmetic advertisements and self-esteem.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant correlation between cosmetic advertisements and consumer buying behavior.

**Table 1: Instrumentation of the Study**

Variables	Items	Sources
Cosmetic Advertisements	A1. Females are accurately portrayed in cosmetic advertising today.	Britton (2012); Davies (2016); Merritt (2012)
	A2. Females are being affected by cosmetic advertisements.	
	A3. I compare myself to models in cosmetic advertisements.	
	A4. I desire to look like the models in cosmetic advertisements.	
	A5. Makeup is important to my appearance.	
	A6. Makeup is important to my self-confidence.	
	A7. Makeup is important to my comfort in social situation.	
	A8. Makeup is important in professional situations. (e.g., work, job interviews)	
Self-Esteem	B1. I am confident about my physical appearance.	Merritt (2012); Gorman (2015)
	B2. I am confident about my body image.	
	B3. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	
	B4. At times, I think I am no good at all.	
	B5. I perceive the models in cosmetic advertisements to be beautiful.	
	B6. If I were to look like the models it makes me feel more beautiful.	
	B7. If I were to look like the models I would perform better in society.	
	B8. If I were to look like the models I would have more friends.	
Buying Behavior	C1. Print advertisements create awareness of a new cosmetic product.	Ampofo (2014); Gupta and Jain (2017)
	C2. Print advertisements inform me the features and benefits of a new cosmetic product.	
	C3. Print advertisements create a preference for a new cosmetic product.	
	C4. Print advertisements influence my purchase of the cosmetic products.	
	C5. I recommend a cosmetic brand after watching its print advertisement.	
	C6. I purchase cosmetic products in order to look beautiful.	
	C7. I purchase cosmetic products in order to be attracted to the opposite sex.	
	C8. I purchase cosmetic products in order to be socially acceptable.	

Table 1 above, illustrates the instrumentation of the study. There are four items from Britton (2012); three items from Davies (2016); and one item from Merritt (2012) to look at the cosmetic advertisements variable. In addition, there are six items from Merritt (2012) and two items from Gorman (2015) to explore the self-esteem attitude of young women. Finally, there are three items from Ampofo (2014) and five items from Gupta and Jain (2017) to investigate the buying behavior of cosmetic products among young women.

The data collected is analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Analyzing frequencies of these variables help to better construe the relevancy and validity of the sample group within this research. The statistic will include both of the descriptive and inferential statistics. This helps to explore and investigate

the effects of demographic factors on self-esteem and buying behavior. The inferential statistic makes inferences and predictions about young women based on a sample of data taken from the population in question. The measures of skewedness and kurtosis as well as reliability analysis will be included in this study. Finally the study employed Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation Test and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to examine the correlation of cosmetic advertisements towards self-esteem and buying behavior of young women.

**III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To examine the process of how young women view themselves and how their self-esteem is related to personal comparisons to other women the researchers apply social comparison theory in this study. Developed by social psychologist, Leon Festinger in 1954 and it is the most commonly used comparison theory. Festinger (1954) described that people typically evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others who are somewhat more attractive or to others who are less attractive than oneself. Social comparison can take place among people who are not involved in a certain group together or have no interaction with one another; for example, individuals may compare themselves to a valued celebrity or fashion models (Davis, 2013). Social comparison theory is focused on two main types; downward social comparison and upward social comparison. In downward social comparison, people view others as less attractive or worse off than themselves in order to feel better about their appearance or ability. Whilst in upward social comparison, people compare themselves with others that they perceived superior or better than themselves in order to improve the self's view. Often, self-improvement motives lead to upward social comparison. In this case more common however is that many women have great dissatisfaction with their own personal appearance after upward comparison, which can lead to feeling inferior

and needing to repair their imperfections according to Davis (2013). On average, women tend to make upward comparisons, which provide the opportunity for them to become displeased with their body and experience shame, dissatisfaction, weight anxiety, negative moods, and low self-esteem (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004 cited in Davis, 2013). Social comparison theory is a useful framework for studying cosmetic use and provides a framework for understanding varied pathways of psychological functioning (Bunnk and Mussweiler, 2001 cited in Davis, 2013). Davis (2013) proposed that one way to improve after upward comparisons on the part of women who feel unattractive is to buy and apply more cosmetics.

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the demographic information showed that out of 216 respondents, 126 (58.3%) aged between 18 to 21, with Chinese 110 (50.9%) as the highest race responding to the questionnaire distributed. Since most of the questionnaires have been distributed online in universities and colleges in Kuala Lumpur, thus most of the respondents were students 128 (59.3%) earnings through part-time students, mostly undergoing their bachelor's degree. Further findings and analysis are listed in Table 2 below;

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on factors that influence cosmetic advertisement**

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Females are accurately portrayed in cosmetic advertising today.	Agree	128	59.3
Females are being affected by cosmetic advertisements.	Strongly Agree	106	49.1
I compare myself to models in cosmetic advertisements.	Agree	100	46.3
I desire to look like the models in cosmetic advertisements.	Agree	94	43.5
Makeup is important to my appearance.	Strongly Agree	99	45.8
Makeup is important to my self-confidence.	Strongly Agree	106	49.1
Makeup is important to my comfort in social situation.	Strongly Agree	95	44.0
Makeup is important in professional situations. (e.g. work, job interviews)	Strongly Agree	138	63.9
I am confident about my physical appearance.	Disagree	97	44.9
I am confident about my body image.	Disagree	81	37.5
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	Disagree	104	48.1
At times, I think I am no good at all.	Agree	105	48.6
I perceive the models in cosmetic advertisements to be beautiful.	Strongly Agree	94	43.5
If I were to look like the models it makes me feel more beautiful.	Agree	103	47.7
If I were to look like the models I would perform better in society.	Agree	111	51.4
If I were to look like the models I would have more friends.	Agree	95	44
Print advertisements create awareness of a new cosmetic product.	Agree	112	51.9
Print advertisements inform me the features and benefits of a new cosmetic product.	Strongly Agree	90	41.7

Print advertisements create a preference for a new cosmetic product.	Agree	111	51.4
Print advertisements influence my purchase of the cosmetic products.	Agree	105	48.6
I recommend a cosmetic brand after watching its print advertisement.	Agree	87	40.3
I purchase cosmetic products in order to look beautiful.	Agree	94	43.5
I purchase cosmetic products in order to be attracted to the opposite sex.	Agree	85	39.4
I purchase cosmetic products in order to be socially acceptable.	Agree	80	37

Based on Table 2 above, the findings showed that most of the respondents have agreed to the statements being influenced by the advertisements. This is because according to Richins, 1991 cited in Zotou and Palla, 2012, suggested that women after viewing ads containing thin and appealing models tend to be less satisfied with their appearance. Thus, young women who have low-self-esteem tend to enhance

their physical appearance by using cosmetic products. The promises of “beauty” being achievable influence and persuade consumers to make certain purchasing decisions that benefit the cosmetic companies (Davies, 2016). Young women who tend to conform to the “ideal beauty” will be convinced by cosmetic advertisements to purchase a particular cosmetic product.

**Table 3: Reliability Analysis**

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of Items
Cosmetic Advertisements	0.854	8
Self-Esteem	0.809	8
Buying Behavior	0.857	8

As presented in Table 3, the actual value for Cronbach's Alpha is 0.854 (Cosmetic Advertisements); 0.809 (Self-Esteem); and 0.857 (Buying Behavior). Therefore, this indicated that the actual test results of all variables are considered as good results (strong reliability).

**Table 4: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Test**

		Cosmetic Advertisements	Self_Esteem	Buying_Behavior
Cosmetic_Advertisements	Pearson Correlation	1	.372**	.716**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	216	216	216
Self_Esteem	Pearson Correlation	.372**	1	.370**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	216	216	216
Buying_Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.716**	.370**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	216	216	216

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 above indicated that there is a moderate positive relationship between the cosmetic advertisements and self-esteem since correlation coefficient result showed (r) is 0.372. Whilst on the other hand the finding showed a strong

positive relationship between the cosmetic advertisements and buying behavior with correlation coefficient of (r) = 0.716.

**Table 5: Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)**

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.980	4726.119 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	189.000	.000	.980
	Wilks' Lambda	.020	4726.119 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	189.000	.000	.980
	Hotelling's Trace	50.012	4726.119 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	189.000	.000	.980
	Roy's Largest Root	50.012	4726.119 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	189.000	.000	.980
Cosmetic_Advertisements	Pillai's Trace	.754	4.603	50.000	380.000	.000	.377
	Wilks' Lambda	.336	5.492 <sup>b</sup>	50.000	378.000	.000	.421
	Hotelling's Trace	1.712	6.439	50.000	376.000	.000	.461
	Roy's Largest Root	1.538	11.690 <sup>c</sup>	25.000	190.000	.000	.606

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is an extension of analysis of variance for use when there is more than one dependent variable (Pallant, 2007). Wilks' Lambda statistic is typically the one used in most MANOVA, because it examines whether groups are somehow different without being concerned with whether they differ on at least one linear combination of the dependent variables (Hair et al 1998). Pallant (2007) stated that if the significance level (Sig.) is less than .05, it can be concluded that there is a difference among the groups. Based on Table 5 above, the MANOVA result indicated a Wilks' Lambda value of .336, with a significance value of .000. This is less than .05; hence there is significant difference between cosmetic advertisements, self-esteem and buying behavior.

In summary, the findings can be concluded that that young women' self-esteem and body image will be susceptible to the inherent messages that are spoken through the media. This study found that 67.1% of the respondents compare themselves to the models in cosmetic advertisements and it has resulted in low self-esteem. As noted by Staley and Zhan (2011), numerous studies further showed that advertisements also have effects towards individuals' perceptions on beauty and their levels of body satisfaction. Body dissatisfaction among young women is increasing and is directly related to the development of eating disorders and emotional difficulties, including low self-esteem and depression (Staley and Zhan, 2011). For instance, by using advertisements of an ideal American woman (blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin); young women experienced decreased ratings in self-esteem and increased desires to conform to the Caucasian standard (Staley and Zhan, 2011). The findings also showed that young women wearing make-up express a more positive body and self-image and show more confidence than women not wearing make-up. With the promise that cosmetics present an ideal image, young women believe that cosmetics will transform them and lift their self-confidence to a higher level (Bloch and Richins, 1992 cited in Yin and Pryor, 2012). DeBelen (2016), an advertiser reveals that an advertisement can make a product is a necessity to a consumer and able to change the way the consumer thinks about herself. This is caused by the consumer self-referencing the product to her own daily life. An example includes cosmetic companies usually display a young woman in the advertisements to promote foundation such as concealer to cover fine lines and wrinkles.

## V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the study conclude that most of the respondents agreed that cosmetic advertisements do influence women buying behaviour and self-esteem, thus met the objectives set for the research. Advertisements are considered as a source of building trust and a source of motivation which affect young women to buy cosmetic products. As noted by DeBelen (2016), an advertiser can make it appear that their product is a necessity to a consumer, thus changing the way a consumer thinks about themselves. The cosmetic advertisements create a psychological impact among young women by continuously insisting about their physical appearance and skin tone that attempted them for a social comparison with the models. This study found that by making social comparison with others, it makes young women lose their self-confidence

which resulting in lack of self-esteem with regards to their physical appearance and body image. Hence this is corresponds with the social comparison theory applied in the study. The researchers suggest that companies in the cosmetic industry should avoid the negative effects on young women experience in terms of their physical appearance and body image by refraining from using images of ultra-thin and beautiful models in the cosmetic advertisements. The cosmetic companies can feature models in different body sizes and skin colors in order to represent the diversity of females' age, body size as well as background. This is due to the reason that women should accept themselves the way they are, that they are beautiful and different in their own way. Therefore, it is important for cosmetic companies to consider consumer ethics when developing marketing communication messages. It can bring positive impacts to the young women such as increase their self-esteem as well as promote a healthier and more accepting view.

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