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## Visual communication on social media advertisement that influence consumer buying behavior on skin-whitening product

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### Abstract

Social media and beauty brands are a match made in heaven. Consumers are exposed to thousands social media ads specifically beauty brands match which are match made in heaven. Small to big brand are now realizing the importance of social media as requirement in creating consumer attention as part of their marketing strategy that engender a positive effect on the attitude and sales intention towards the brand. Social media such as Instagram and Facebook ads are cost-effective, faster and better engagement in build brand awareness. Many believes social media ads generated immense exposure and engagement with online potential buyers as repertoire to be connected as a part of their integrated marketing communications strategy. Advertisers utilized the usage of social media with highly-crafted campaigns by telling a story such as reviewing the testimonial about the effectiveness of their product by enhancing the comments and feedback of the customers to reach marketing goals. However, not all the advertised product that purport to lighten the skin are legal because they are also many unregistered brand that contain chemicals banned with the authority under safety regulations. This could not only cause with the misleading information but the users will easily trapped by the copy or/and visuals image featured in the ads. Desire for white skin that ingrained into the cultural aspects of beauty ideals made most of the consumers or potential buyers just rely solely on the information which is fed by the advertisers. The objective of this research is to discover consumers' opinion towards persuasiveness and believability in social media advertisement. This research is developed by using mixed method in enhancing survey and content analysis. The important of the research is to look at the key factor implied by the marketers in their content ideas of visual communication in attracting the audience and how they motivate the potential buyers in their online purchasing process.

**Keywords:** Visual Communication, Consumer Behavior, Online Advertising, Purchasing Decision, Social Media

### INTRODUCTION

The landscape of advertising is shifting more resources away from traditional advertising in recent years worldwide in favor of new media. The advertising industries always attempt to follow where consumers go especially with the existence of social media whereby is the amount of creative freedom is limitless (Dan Zarrella, 2010) especially when it comes to photos, posts, tutorials, Instastories and everything related to social media. Advertising is applied with the aim of influencing people to think or to act in a particular way or providing information (Jen Green, 2012). No doubt, social media is the best opportunity available for a brand to connect with prospective consumers with low cost as mention by Sisira Neti (2011) but yet they add value to the lives of their potential customer (Meert, 2018). However, these ads mainly offer promises with dubious information that always lookout for opportunities to squeeze cash from vulnerable consumers. The ability of the public to access the



Internet such as social media in a variety of mediums encourage certain groups to take the opportunity to influence the public in making choices related to health products such as skin-whitening product according to Pharmaceutical Department of Health Ministry (2015). Many are unaware that these product advertisements are lack of approval by the Medicine Advertising Board under the Health Ministry. Yet, with all the false advertising and product scandals that have rocked few brands doesn't erodes the public's trust in those false advertising product. The prospered of social media as today's main communication method (Abdallah Al Tawara & Ergun Gide (2017).) also made most of the consumer relies on the information presented in Facebook or even Instagram including the ads displayed. Consumers are now purchasing more thing online and made it even easier for consumers to obtain their intended products. 'Guaranteed results', 'even fairer', 'whiter in three days' and '*cerah sempurna*' are among common headlines used to get user attention or to entrap users. This is what advertising does, it presents typical dreams of human life, promising that a particular product will elevate or empower one to become or to remain what one ought to be (Lars Reuter, 2003). Mass media also have revealed a lot of incidents that befall over the use of forbidden substances and unregistered products which are sold online such as the potential and proven health risks associated with the practice. Advertisements can change consumers' perceptions by visualizing the importance of an attribute or even solving their problems as marketing stimuli (Kruti Shah & Alan D'Souza, 2009). The introduction of video content in Facebook and Instagram also gives the opportunity to advertiser promoting their product by tutorials, sharing video including official television commercial in smaller format and live streaming. Hence, it is important to study their marketing and communication strategies through their advertisement content on buyer's behavior.

## LITERITURE REVIEW

Having fair skin is considered an important element in assembling beauty especially women in Asian cultures. Around the globe including Malaysia, many products which are experimental, unregulated and extremely dangerous but becoming popular among women hoping to be more attractive with lighter complexion. Skin-whitening or skin- lightening products that occurred in the markets is rapidly growing industry by continue makes profits off women's insecurities in a global market. Thanks to social media, advertising world has transformed and is regarded as the most effective in terms of cost other than useful method to obtain necessary information on consumer-to-consumer connection (Jalal Hanaysha, 2016). The emergence of social media has changed the presented knowledge, needs and expectations of consumers in terms of information search, information sharing and decision making (Furguson, 2008). A properly designed online advertisement campaign not only can hit the door of targeted demographic but faster within a second with so many options available. It is widely used for any business of all sizes to use it as their marketing strategies to expand their reach other than traditional media. Online advertising is a two-sided market (Rochet and Tirole, 2003; Anderson and Gabszewicz, 2005), where it operates as a platform that facilitate the relationship between consumers and advertisers. According David S. Evans (2009), internet advertising is efficient toward consumers and advertisers. Internet advertising is more economical to reduce resources in creating content toward consumers and potential buyers instead of traditional media such as magazine and newspaper ads. Internet advertising is now slowly become a consideration and becoming the primary method of attracting attention for a brand to get noticed. Internet advertising isn't just about sales but it is more about brand awareness which allows for specific target prospects that would be attracted to what is being offered. Advertisers are more likely to have greater ability to target their right consumer and directly injecting the message to the right consumer. This practice is called behavioral targeting even though in some extend, internet advertising is becoming oversaturation where people tend to skip over advertising messages. There are three types of internet advertising which are widely used in promoting products such as display advertising – web banner/ banner ads, social networking advertising – Intagram, Facebook and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (Chowdhury, T., & Debi, H. R., 2013). This type of media also comes in different appearances such as still or animated images and interactive media including audio and video. Previously web banner, blog, websites and e-mail were examples of option in digital advertising. As time flew, social media

such as Facebook and Instagram are currently the most effective and efficient platforms not just to follow trends but also a place where there are many users (Walter & Gioglio, 2014). Both are popular with millennials and each type of ads for either the main Instagram feed, or for Instagram Stories can be share automatically at both platforms at a time. Social media is an opportunity for a business to expand into higher rankings in achieve campaign objectives.

Buying decision is influenced by many factors such as the consumer's societal role, cultural environment and desires (Gagandeep Nagra & R Gopal, 2013). According to Liao & Hsiou (2014), consumer behavior can be categorized into two categories which are internal and external factors. Internal factor can be describe as personal factors such as motivation, emotion and perception to represent the consumer's ability to benefit directly from the product. Where else external factors such as social norms, family roles, cultural values and marketing activities that can be influenced by trends or even the environment. So it is not surprising that today we can see almost every business will benefit from the use social media as an opportunity of marketing activities for their products and services offered in larger markets. According to Sajjad Husain, Ali Ghufuran & D.S. Chaubey (2016) social media marketing, or SMM, is a form of internet marketing that implements various social media networks to achieve marketing communication and branding goals. According to Dan Zarrella (2010), social media is such a great equalizer for businesses whereby big brands can be outsmarted without making huge investments and small brands can make big names for themselves. Instagram is now owns by Facebook. Thus, it's not surprising that Instagram ads are mirror of four of the Facebook ads types which are photo, video, carousel and collection (Meert, 2018). Photo and video posting can be set automatically to be align and maintain the ads consistency together with significant hashtag and caption or even call to action. Video ads options work well in conjunction of TV commercial (TVC) which was a great way to draw people in. Instagram Stories and Facebook Stories also a beneficial ads for a short video post and can be add on with interactive elements like stickers and polls. Both photo and video is the best way in using compelling visuals that highlight the best parts of any products. In carousel and collection ads, it allows the viewer's to swipe through different images and usually tied together by a common theme (Meert, 2018; Dan Zarrella, 2010). In Malaysia alone, the number of active Internet users in 2015 exceeds 20.1 million with 16.8 million of them are active in social media based on data issued by Ministry of Communication & Multimedia. Data by OpenMindsResources.com showed that 65 percent of Internet users now prefer to buy goods online than face to face (Star, 2016). This is because social media is used by all levels of society. Social media is not just a platform of publicizing but it also facilitates the interaction and communication between a brand and its customers (Jalal Hanaysha, 2016). With more targeted audiences, the advertisement may affect more potential buyers. However, not all advertisement guarantees the quality or even the authenticity of the product. Advertisement can be so manipulative, the best advertisement was the one based on people's desire without making a real effort (Kruti Shah & Alan D'Souza, 2009). Indeed, consumers can be easily drifted by what is displayed on the ad even though it is unproven in terms of medical science. Hence, the consumers deceived by the claims and promises of maximum results although many cases of fraud and suspicious product in the market especially those which were marketed through social media.

Consumers communicate both through visual communication and language. Color gives powerful impact because it can influence our buying mood and affects the decision-making processes. Selecting the right color requires a psychological understanding of how each shade and hue affects visual design. However, there is no ideal or universally accepted color scheme for a general audience or even a specific socio-cultural group. In terms of images, the used of nonverbal signals and cues used in advertising. Both advertisers and marketers use this technique in every aspect of product and brand promotion. The harmonious and skillful use of gestures, stances, facial expressions and movements leads viewers to buy product and promote the brand. The role of images in advertising is to create positive experiences and feelings associated with the advertised to engage receiver's response (Negm & Tantawi, 2015). The element of typography has its own impact. It is crucial for the marketer to incorporate readability and legibility in typeface design. It serves the purpose of catching the viewers' attention; short phrases and slogan; and the name of the company and/or the name of the product or service. (Negm & Tantawi, 2015) for both images and videos advertising. Symbol

characteristics of advertisement design include understanding, pertinence, innovation, culture and communication (Yuan, 2014). The selection of symbols required higher understanding on the brand image, quality and brand positioning. The designer's initiative to apply semiology will increase consumers' buying desire, thus behavior can be well motivated. Advertising layout refers to the arrangement of images and text in a format. Layout may give an effect on consumers' attention, recall and recognition, attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand, and purchase intentions (Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė, 2016). The lowest advertising layout complexity level requires shorter processing time, because of the smaller number of items that must be scanned in short term memory. The brand presented in the lowest complexity level advertisement is recalled better and provide positive attitudes that affects higher purchase intention (Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

The study is focusing on Facebook and Instagram ads as the main medium not just because both are most popular mobile platforms but it allows advertiser to scale up their campaigns quickly by reaching more of their targeted audience across both platforms in a single click. The study also look out closely on external factor that influence consumer decision making that involve in their marketing activities. The usage of visual communication design such text, image and color used in photos as display ads and video in both platforms become the main attention of the study. The research methodology used for this study was content analysis and quantitative method using questionnaire. Non-probability quota sampling was used with the size of 120 respondents with the age of 18-40 years old to find out the consumers' opinion towards persuasiveness and believability in social media advertisement. The questionnaire was divided into 3 different sections which are the background of the respondent, consumer sentiment towards online shopping and the content as well the elements of the advertisement. Nominal and Likert-Scale was used as survey question in most of the questions in section two and three. In addition, in order to increase the study's credibility in term of content and structural effectiveness of the contents, the study also went through revisions during the pretest and pilot study (confirm that content validity and construct validity) before it conducted a large-scale survey.

**Figure 1:** List of skin whitening brands as case study



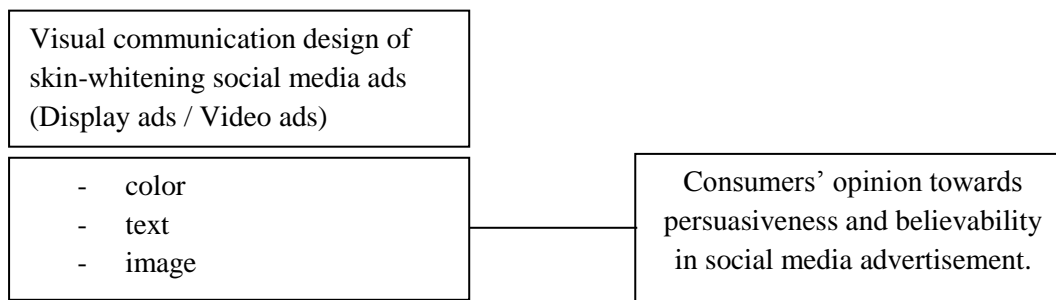
A total of four brands were surveyed and inspected in this study selected based on a selected period (advertisement were seen between January to April on Facebook and Instagram) and these products were merely depending on online advertisements as their marketing strategy. These products were shown in Figure1.0 above. The advertisement later was screen-captured/saved to compare their context in term of content, visual and their approach (message strategy). This study is using both manifest and latent content analysis to create inferences objectively on the characteristics of the advertising. Conceptual framework of the questionnaire is explained as below;





## Independence Variables

## Dependence variable



As the research framework indicates, independent variables that used in the study were chosen based on the basic principles of design (Samara, 2007). These elements of design are cognitively influence the consumer believability and act as ‘middle man’ in persuade the audience. The copy includes hashtag word used in Instagram or even copywriting used as ads caption other than the advertisement headline, bodycopy and slogan/tagline of the product. In image, the study will focus on packaging, props/elements used, logo and talent(s) appeared in the ads (if any) in both display and video ads. Color attraction in creating attention of the viewer also part of the study as to look out the color combination as to complete the whole package of advertising look.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The key to a successful advertising or even marketing campaign lies in consumer buying behavior. Generally, an online advertising that does not carter specific audiences will drown together with its message. Hence the only way to reach the potential consumer and to influence their purchasing decision is to understand their buying behavior. Other than that, advertiser can create custom audience different customer segments based on their interest, activity, search and much more. Majority of respondent have the experience in purchasing skincare products through online medium from head to toe including skin-whitening products. Majority of the respondents purchasing it online due to external factors especially when there is promotion about the product as part of their marketing activities.

**Table 1:** Participant experiences in purchasing skin care product through online

	N		P	Total
Experience buying skin care product through online	Yes	104	87	120
	No	16	13	
Type of skin care product	Cream	35	29.2	120
	Lotion	29	24.2	
	Powder	20	16.7	
	Spray	12	10	
	Others	24	19.9	

According to the survey that has been conducted, the majority of the respondents will purchase skincare product only if the brand has the believability elements. Their believability also much influence by external factor compare to internal factor such as getting information from the other users who are using the same brand at the comment area of the ads. Besides, the majority of the respondents also influenced and persuaded mostly by friends other than family members. Respondents who are mostly higher education students also often gather as much information from any other sources about the particular skincare product advertised online before purchase it. This made them as extensive information search compare being an impulse buyer that almost instantaneously or less time of effort in information search. Since the product are sold online, majority of them also believes that





the persuasiveness of the advertisement must be captured their attention to stop at that specific ads. Most of the respondents agreed to be loyal customers towards their favorite brands of skin care product because it is hard to gain their believability and persuasiveness. They believes that their current skin care product is effective enough to them. Majority of the respondents agreed that they are kind of loyal customer to skincare products that they are used because of the effectiveness and satisfaction. Hence, most of the respondents will not take any chances in buying unfamiliar brands of skincare product but consider a proper testimony to proof about the effectiveness of the products other than few more external factors of promotional marketing activities such as discounts, coupon or even free gift. Factors influence their buying decisions are quality, price, brand, ingredients, promotion, advertisement, and packaging. They will look carefully to find the best value for the money. This is shown by 23% of respondents whereby they have the experiences of buying local skincare product through online even though majority are more believes towards international brands as they are well known and familiar in the market. Most of the approaches used by marketers to influence consumer using online advertisement as mentioned by the participants are includes the elements of image, followed by copy and color. Photo is the most favorable social media ads compare to video ads as it is doesn't take time to watch other than caption that was created for that specific ads or post.

Within the four-month periods in observing advertisement that appear on Facebook and Instagram, there are four brands of skin whitening products that frequently appear in three different accounts of those media socials which are Oceana Orchid, Phyto Astaxanthin plus Abyadh, Austronesia; Austra White Collagen B17 and Shee Candy. These brands are representing advertisement that basically depending on online advertisement to market their products and not well known. Based on the analysis and observation of four brands as stated, marketers are using a different approach of visual communication in term of a subject, color combination, visual arrangement and copywriting. However, only two of the brands comes with video ads which are Phyto Astaxanthin Plus Abyadh and Austra White Collagen B17. Based on content analysis also found that, only these two brands display a good theme of advertising in term of standardization of color, typography and image used. For the meantime, Shee Candy and Oceana Orchid does not have a standard theme for each of their ads which regularly display only the product image and testimonial of user image; which each of these brand advertised as well. Only 36% of the respondents will watch video post on social media that act as an advertisement which mostly shared by others or numbers of comments on that specific video which cover 53%.

**Table 2.0:** Table of social media advertisement elements impact towards audience

	N		P	Total
Type of visual	Image	73	60.8	120
	Type	32	26.6	
	Color	15	12.5	
Type of image	Product	39	32.5	120
	Talent	31	25.8	
	Background image	30	25	
	Before after testimonial	13	10.7	
	Screenshot of feedback	7	6.2	

Based on the survey, the most influential elements that trigger the respondent attention are visual as information which is the product image itself and talent images as the second important visual in retain the audience attention long enough to allow sufficient encoding of information which is good for a the long-term memory. This approach been implemented by all brands involved other than comes with a posting of testimonial picture to create believability towards the audience. These advertisement regularly display before and after or even problem/solution message format even



though not many of them now believe in that so much. Even though the images are self-taken without any proper design and composition especially in Shee Candy and Oceana Orchid brands, it still manage to collect a lot of people toward the promoted product by looking at the comment area. The image of the product also been highlighted in Phyto Astaxanthin Plus Abyadh and Austra White Collagen B17 video post as their ads. The photo caption and hashtag also add more convincing story in attracting potential buyer towards their product. Just like any other product, advertiser try to create better conviction by real experiences of real people and make the audience think about how it will work for them. This kind of photo ads been post many times to their official Facebook page for each brands. From the survey, respondent also highly considered the arrangement of background images that gives the enhancement of product reputation. Plain and too intricate background mostly avoided by majority of the respondent as the product doesn't look outstanding and decreasing their believability. The majority of the advertisement also emphasize of their product appearance which are the packaging look and how the product look like; all product are in tablet. Other than that, most advertisement also featuring a flawless and fair woman as part of their advertisement content which delivering a message of enhancing fair complexion for a stunning look. This is also what have been highlighted in video post as their ads. This kind of approach can increase a credibility strategy to intensify the believability of a message.

The subcultural factor such as the belief that fair skin makes you beautiful also affect purchasing behavior. This also been agreed by most audience whereby they can't denied that today's society is obsess in having fairer skin. As a new product in the market, image of the product is important to be highlighted in any post of these four brands to make sure the audience familiar with the product look and may cause the audience to likes, comments, and shares the advertisement. Most of advertisement are applying soft color and this is contradict with the surveys done where the majority believes that more color applied in the ads enable to create attractiveness thus will effectively affect their purchasing decision.. Colors to them not just affect the brand image but stimulate impulsive action regardless of gender, personality, culture and other factors. Even though the visual content is far more influential than textual content in this study, the marketers also emphasize on the copywriting since it is one of the factors of marketing stimuli of the ads other than the information provided in the post that can increase buyer decision process. The marketer tries different catchphrase to grab consumer attention on their products not only in their ads design but as well on their post caption and hashtag. Even though copywriting is the second influence factor, most of the marketers try to focus consumer attention by stating the benefits of their products other than the result. The survey shows that copywriting that considered important to respondents are the product names with 38%. However, consumer are also most likely to consider searching information other details on their Facebook or even Instagram page after they captivated by the ads. This information mostly on the background of the product itself other than comments post by other user on their posts. Company background is the last information that they usually search. This does align with the most of the brand in this study where they do have a series of advertisement for their posting. All these posts are presenting by adding new attributes to the attitude formation process where the strategy was adding or highlight unique feature or benefits other than having a fair skin. The most important part of the ads that they failed to provide is the product advertisement registration number from Malaysian Health Ministry. Based on the content analysis, only two of the brands provide their official website link and telephone numbers. Other than that, based on the surveys, simplify in purchasing procedure and promotion such as free gift, discount, extra pack and other related promotional activities will encourage the consumer to buy. These are some of the advertising content that are also impulse buyer towards the brand. However, within the four months of observation, there is no special promotion conducted by any of the brands. Based on the analysis, price of each product that they promote is not stated, thus, it does not the main attractive or valuable content to be highlighted for all brands. Thus, some advertisement content are also great instrumental and exert an influence on consumer behavior even though it does not affect decision process directly.

## SUMMARY & SUGGESTION

Customer feedback/comments of the product are their first step in searching for evidence and medium to retain current as well as attract new customer. However, solely depend on social media platform in deliver all information is not enough for today's audience as they need additional information sources to increase their believability such as the official web. Even though video is might not suitable in promoting skin-whitening product in Facebook and Instagram, consideration of storyline, length and a twist of entertainment elements are things that can be look to be more engaging as well as capturing attention.. Brand name and the products images are the major visual content that should be highlighted hands in hands as appealing features of social media ads. In addition, the copywriting created for social media posting or even hashtag for Instagram should be determined by the targeted audience social personas that can stand out in the social feed. Its plays an important role in building connections with others. Dependency of photo and collection ads also affects how audience look at the whole campaign and brand. Lack used of other option provided by Facebook and Instagram such as carousel or even video ads to create a narrative or tell stories within the whole campaigns as extrinsic cue signaling of prestige and believability towards their brand; especially to new local brand. Colors also play an important role to persuade consumer purchasing intention, especially in an online platform. Majority believe that interpret a message is easily and faster from an image but good color presentation make it more interesting and gain better attention. Consumers are mostly attracting to the good color combination that represents excitement and warmth. Same goes with high end and classy color appearance advertisement persuade the consumer to click the advertisement and to achieve the outcome that they looking for. Therefore, this finding, in reality, is beneficial not just discover the techniques and tactics used by marketers in utilizing social media advertisement but how they adapt to produce design that meet favorable consumer attitude. Moreover, it explain the social changes especially in consumer behavior towards online marketing especially on social media user by captivating their experiences, attitudes, moods, and behaviors. The influential ideas spread by the media is systematically influence society's perception on definition of social images in beauty and attractiveness. In addition, for future research direction, a comparison studies can be conducted to compare the social media advertisement in a wider platforms other than Instagram and Facebook.

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