

THE EFFECTS OF PLAYING WITH WHITE DOLLS IN ADVERTISEMENTS: A CASE STUDY OF YOUNG GIRLS' EXPOSURE TOWARDS 'MEDIATED BEAUTY' IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study is an effort to explore the effects of mediated white beauty through advertisements of fairness products in young girls of Pakistan. For this purpose, the researchers used survey method with structured questionnaire consisting of closed and open ended questions. A sample of 100 young girls of the age 13- 21, completed criteria of advertisements' exposure and comparisons was analyzed under the light of 'social comparison theory' and 'source credibility and source attractiveness model'. This study concluded that due to these advertisements, the Pakistani culture has been facing 'snow white syndrome' for the last one decade. Ads of fairness products inject this idea in the minds of girls that they are not socially acceptable if they have darker skin complexion. In addition to this, these advertisements also make young girls think that if they want to enhance their social acceptability, attractiveness, and sexual desirability in their personal relationships, it is necessary to achieve the extra white color as the 'white dolls' presented in the advertisement as brand

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ambassador. This study also concluded that extra white color is not only important in their personal relationships especially for marriages but also at professional level because they believe that they will get noticed and hired for good jobs with better incentives if they have fair complexion and white smooth skin.

Keywords: Women Studies, Advertisements, Snow White Syndrome, Fairness Beauty Products.

INTRODUCTION

For the last couple of decades, feminists' critics have been arguing on the hegemony of the stereotypical thinking about the fair complexion and thin body images among young girls. There is no doubt about the power of media in setting stereotypes of beauty, changing mindsets of public and creating new values in society. If one turns on the television or glances at a magazine, the definition of mediated beauty for women looks like: she must be tall, she has long, thick and flowing hair, she has extremely white complexion and she must be extremely thin.

The 'perfect' beauty images represented in advertisements, television, and music usually depict the "ideal woman" as extremely white, extremely thin, with a "tubular" body, and blonde or thick black flowing hair (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Lin & Kulik, 2002; Polivy & Herman, 2004; Sands & Wardle, 2003; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003). Feminists' critics are evident that only a very small percentage of women belongs to any age group to meet the false standards of mediated beauty (Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Thompson & Stice, 2001) but due to their exposure to these mediated beauty standards of 'ultra thin' and 'extra white' make them realize that they are not attractive and acceptable in their society if they do not match the criteria (Dittmar & Howard, 2004).

Many media scholars have argued that one sees in television these days models are thinner and whiter than ever, much thinner and whiter than the real world, and very often thin and white enough to

be considered unrealistic by world health standards. If there is a constant exposure towards thin and white models, it enhances body image concerns and psychological inferiority complexes among young girls because all the media especially television and movies contain unrealistic and impracticable images which have negative effects on their perceptions of low self image (Serda, 2006).

This present study experimentally tested the effects of ‘white dolls’ mediated beauty portrayed by television channels in a sample of young Pakistani girls. Mediated beauty of thin and white celebrities creates the desire among young girls of becoming ‘white and thin dolls’ like them. This desire creates not only psychological disorders, mental and body dissatisfaction, inferiority complexes, eating disorders but also give a chance to advertisers to make them emotional fool too. As a renowned psychiatrist, Dr Faisal Mamsa, added on the dilemma of complexion obsession faced by many girls in Pakistan that:

The problem is no matter how educated we all are, we generally prefer to marry off our daughters and sisters before they turn 25 and once a girl turns 30 we demarcate her as a ‘lost cause’. I personally counsel brilliant girls who are not happy with the color of their skin or eyes just because they were rejected by uneducated people who believe in apparent beauty. The reassurance to girls that they are not a burden on their families regardless of how they look or how old they get is very important. The media plays a crucial role in further sidelining these girls. A fair complexion is how we epitomize beauty. We need to address the issues that are very much psychological.

This is the responsibility of our social media to launch campaigns to create awareness about how we cannot change the way we look and should rather be contented with what God has bestowed upon us” (Mirza, 2012).

The advertisers are using this predicament as the main theme of beauty products’ advertisements. The general trend in

advertisements for skin care products and beauty creams is to create a fear of sun, dry air, cold, wind that cause oily skin, black heads, dark skin, moisture, wrinkles, aging, rough skin and physical decay. The hegemony of advertised products and cosmetics plus the white doll like models create a sense of protection by using these products. A series of ads in Pakistan like 'fair & lovely', 'fairness snow cream', 'Ponds fairness cream', 'ubtan cream', 'care honey lotion' etc, which are playing with the emotions and stories of the girls who want to be attractive and after using those products, they become 'white and attractive dolls' who can achieve whatever they want.

'Snow White Syndrome & Advertisements of fairness beauty products

During the early 20th century, white complexion of skin became a cosmetic staple within some communities of color in the whole world including Asia and Africa and diasporas of America and Europe too. According to Velmurugiah(2012), the complexes of dark skin tone have been prevailing in African American beauty industry from the early 20th century. White complexions have not only become a symbol of achieving appreciation and admire at personal level but also at professional level too. Velmurugiah added that the white manufacturers dominated the industry in African American communities in the United States that as a result projected chauvinistic white cultural ideals into portrayals of African American beauty. In addition to this, she added that media openly portrayed dark-skinned black women as unattractive, sexless, aggressive and unfeminine. This depiction is used by media advertisers in order to project the beauty industry and its skin lightening products that are propagated in a way that these products can make the African American women attractive, beautiful, sex and feminine.

Similarly, Magsi (2011) argued that:

Asian girls with darker pigmentation suffer hissing, scorn and laughter at the hands of their peers. Evidence shows that in South Asian societies, darker girls face

challenges when finding employment, getting married, and earning equal respect and recognition as their fairer counterparts even today. Mothers look for *gori biwis* (fair wives) for their sons, discarding even the prospect of a *kaali* (dark) daughter-in-law. Girls are seldom allowed to play out in the sun for too long because of the fear of developing a tan”.

Moreover, Shantanu (2010) argued that India has been facing ‘snow white syndrome’ since couple of decades. Television industry and advertisement’s business are fueling the demand of fair complexioned white brides and grooms in India and as a result, the Indian market of whitening creams is expanding day and night and this rate is getting higher nearly 18% every year. But on the other hand, at consumption level, when these products do not get faster results of giving whitening color to the girls as they want, they go in to the depression but the advertisements address the audience that we are giving the fastest results of fair complexion. We are not selling steroids. Our products are lab-tested. But it is a stunt in order to increase the demand in the market. Advertisements related to skin bleaching products give a sketch of a dark skinned woman who is not successful in her personal or professional life but after using these products she became white and her new white complexion make her successful in her personal and professional relationship.

Consequences of being ‘Fair’

There was a report published by Bahawalpur Health Department of Pakistan in 2010 regarding the negative consequences of fairness products including skin cancer among young girls. The Health Department of Pakistan claimed that young girls having ‘snow white syndrome’ do not take care of the standards of fairness products. They just focus on their goal to achieve white skin. It was revealed that some local creams contain extensive amounts of ‘dexamethasone’ a component that can cause skin cancer. The report added that the fairness creams which are used very frequently by a large number of women have severe side-effects. It

was further reported that all the fairness creams that contain whitening agents, to some degree have damaging effects for skin. All fairness creams are damaging the skin. Several laboratory experiments have proved many times that the creams' ingredients including whitening agents are long-term contributors in exacerbating skin conditions and often causing skin cancers. An estimated 40 per cent of users of fairness creams suffer from various skin abnormalities including hair growth on face, skin acne, thinning, aging and tanning the skin, pigmentation and allergic rashes and eczema (Amir, 2010).

Underpinning of 'Social Comparison Theory' and 'Mediated-beauty of White Dolls'

Social comparison theory suggests that people are in constant evaluation process. They evaluate and compare themselves with others constantly (Festinger, 1954). People compare themselves at two levels i.e. downward and upward. In 'downward comparison', people compare themselves with others and set a criteria of those characteristics in which they find others to be lacking. Whereas 'upward comparison' occurs when people compare themselves with others on the basis of those characteristics in which they find themselves to be lacking (Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012). So, when women compare themselves on the bases of mediated beauty characteristics of white and fair skin and thin like 'Barbie' girls, they either go in depression or become obsessed to build these characteristics in themselves too. Tiggemann and Slater (2003) added that "the process of social comparison may provide the mechanism by which exposure to media images induces negative effects" (p. 50). Similarly, Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2002) found that when women evaluate their attractiveness and beauty by comparing themselves with media figures, they realize that they cannot match what is physically mediated. In result, body dissatisfaction usually occurs.

In the case of achieving beauty, fairness and thin body figure like the girls portrayed in advertisements, girls are usually found involved in upward comparison and according to Bailey and Ricciardelli(2010), 'upward comparison' is one of the strongest reasons behind obsession and body dissatisfaction among women belong to any age group. In addition to this, women who are heavy viewers of television and exposed heavily to those advertisements that promotes 'thin-white dolls' as the perfect beauty package, are more easily caught themselves in 'upward comparison that enhance obsession, depression and body dissatisfaction among them (Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012).

White Dolls like Celebrities and their endorsements

There are many brands on the shelves for fake fairness to choose. Some are for lightening, some are for brightening, some can give cleansing and whitening, some are experts in anti-pigmentation, and some can cause freshening, anti-dullness and even illuminating. But in addition to these qualities, the models and celebrities who act in advertisements also endorse girls' belief and selection criteria. When the girls watch Resham (Pakistani actress), Reema (Pakistani actress), Meera (Pakistani actress) etc and other very white and fair models in the ads, they inspire from them and want to be like them that cause not only endorsement of that product but also make them depressed when they cannot be like that. This phenomena is not limited by mere borders rather the girls get fascinated by Indian charismatic actresses with white complexions in the ads like Katrina Kaif (Indian actress) and Aishwariya Rai (Indian actress).

Under pinning of Source credibility and source attractiveness model and Beauty Mediation through 'White dolls'

This model was extracted from the research of Roozen (2008) in which he explained that how the models and celebrities, their attractive personalities, their credibility endorse the consumers' beliefs and perception in print media advertisements.

Attractiveness model suggests the dependence of message efficiency is source's 'familiarity', 'likeability', 'similarity' and 'attractiveness' towards the audience. Pleasant appearance and good looks have become an important element through the growing trend of using celebrities as endorsers for products, services and/or social causes (Patzner, 1983; Ohanian, 1990). He further added that most of the television and print advertisements use physically beautiful, handsome and attractive people with good looks. As Cahiken (1979) also added that it has been observed from eighties that psychically groomed, attractive communicators with fair looks are more successful in changing mindsets of people regarding a product than that of unattractive communicators.

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

To investigate the effects of advertisements regarding fairness beauty products, in Summer of 2013, the researchers conducted a survey of young girls who belong to the city of Lahore in Pakistan. A questionnaire comprising of both open ended and closed ended questions was constructed as a tool of data collection. The researchers selected 100 young girls from the age of 13 to 21 years old on the basis of snow ball sampling technique because the researchers selected those girls who were willing to participate in the research voluntarily.

Fair Complexion.....A way towards 'Girls' Social Acceptability'

It was found that ads of beauty fairness products inject this idea in the minds of girls, that they are not socially acceptable if they have darker skin complexion. 53% young girls of the selected population, most of the times, feel normal to be sad for their looks and dark complexion after watching ads of fairness beauty creams (see table 1). In addition to this, 42% young girls think that most of the times, the advertisements of fairness products create anxiety in young girls for their ordinary looks and complexions (see table 1).

Table 1: Advertisements of fairness beauty products create anxiety.

Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
Young girls feel normal to be sad for their looks after watching ads of fairness beauty creams.	28%	53%	2%	17%
These advertisements are creating anxiety in young girls about having ideal fair complexion	41%	42%	13%	4%

Fair Complexion.....A Way to be a ‘Desirable Bride’

Majed (2013) argued that “the intersection of colorism and sexism create an oppressive beauty ideal of fairness”. Women in Pakistan are mocked for their skin from their birth. “Their entire worth is often put into it, as girls who have darker skin face marriage problems and are ‘unwanted’ or ‘wretched’. Of course, this colorist conundrum is not unique to Pakistan (Majeed, 2013). Many women in post-colonial countries in South Asia are facing the same fate for instance in neighboring country India. So, the advertisers use this weakness and make girl emotional for their marriages. The theme of such advertisements is based upon the complexion in a way that a girl wants to get married but she is in dark complexion that is why she is unable to get a good match. On the other side, boys and their families do not like the girl with tanned and skin tone. On one hand, these ads are creating inferiority complex among young girls as 56% girls believe that the ads are creating inferiority complex among them. But in the next half of the ad, it is presented that if the girl would use this fairness beauty cream, the complexion would be lighter and every one would like her. It exactly happens in the ad of almost 30 seconds. The girl with dark skin uses that product and gets a very beautiful, light, pinkish color of skin that makes her attractive towards boys and their families. After this, they suddenly

get married with their dream boys. So, it is induced that the black women could enhance their social acceptability, popularity and sexual desirability if they would be successful in achieving white skin by using different fairness products like ‘Fair & Lovely cream’, ‘Care Honey lotion’, ‘Fairness snow cream’, ‘Ponds’, ‘Mod Girl Bleach cream’, ‘Jolen Bleach cream’ etc. The ads make the young girls inundated with the fake promises of lighter, clear, brighter, smooth, whiter skin and also indicate that makeup cannot hide their tanned and dark complexion and can never make them whiter. So, it was found that 55% young girls think that the advertisements of beauty products make young girls think that boys can easily get attracted towards a girl having fair complexion as compared to that of the dark skin tone(see table 2). Similarly, 67% young girls of selected population feel that 67% people think that these ads are promoting the concept among young girls that an ideal fair complexion gives more opportunities to get married easily(see table 2).

Table 2: Advertisements of fairness beauty products are a way to be a desirable bride.

Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
These advertisements are creating inferiority complex among the young girls of Lahore	34%	56%	7%	3%
These advertisements make young girls think that boys can easily get attracted towards a girl having fair complexion as compared to that of dark skin tone?	23%	55%	12%	10%
These ads are promoting the concept among young girls that an ideal fair complexion gives more opportunities to get married easily	17%	67%	14%	2%

Fair Complexion.....A way to 'Unlock Reserve Potential and Awaken her Sleeping Confidence'

In Asian culture, the fair complexion is a part of something that is valued as a 'good', 'superior' and 'better trend'. So in such culture advertisements of fairness cream are inducing that only fair and white skin can make a girl able to get hired, succeeded, appreciated, admired and get noticed. So, fairness commercials usually promote the concept that these advertisements are supposed to create confidence and self-assurance. In the first half of the ads, the advertisers highlight again that no girl can get white color job with dark skin because she would not be confident without pleasant personality. In the next half, by using fairness cream, she starts to smile, she feels confident and happy and she becomes able to unlock her hidden potential. So, according to the advertisements, these are beauty creams who can unlock and reveal the reserve potential of a girl and awaken her sleeping confidence. For instance, in the advertisements of Fair & Lovely cream with the booming sale in Pakistan, the viewers "meet a downtrodden, badly-off, dark-skinned girl with low self-worth. Within a few weeks of becoming whiter, though, her path takes a drastic turn for the better. She starts running into men who want her, and their approval is all that is needed to instantly validate her self-esteem. She gets a good job and is successful professionally. She laughs a lot. Everyone admires her for her skin tone, and she is finally happy" (Majed, 2013).

Likewise, the researchers found that 48% young girls believe that these advertisements make young girls think that they would be strong and confident in their personal and professional lives if they have fair complexion as compared to dark skin tone (see table 3) and almost 51% people think that these ads are promoting the concept that an ideal fair complexion gives more opportunities to make a successful career (see table 3).

Table 3: Advertisements of fairness beauty products are a way to unlock reserve potential.

Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
These advertisements make young girls think that they would be strong and confident in their personal and professional lives if they would have fair complexion as compared to dark skin tone	39%	48%	10%	3%
These ads are promoting the concept that an ideal fair complexion gives more opportunities to make a successful career	23%	51%	17%	9%

Fair Complexion.....A Wish to be like “White doll” in Advertisements

The models and celebrities with extra white complexion, perfect figure, ultra thin, beautiful hair and extra stylish dressed in these advertisements have a strong effect on the thinking patterns of young girls. The researchers found that almost 69% young girls believe that these doll like models affect their mind sets, create a perfect beautiful body image with white complexion and cause body dissatisfaction and anxiety too(see table 4). After it most of the young girls start to use these fairness creams after watching these models having “fair color” shown in these advertisements.

Table 4: Advertisements of fairness beauty products-a wish to be like “white doll” in advertisements

Statements	Some times	Most of the times	All the times	Not at all
The models and celebrities of these advertisements have ideal fair complexion and thin bodies that affect the thinking patterns of young girls.	6%	21%	69%	4%
Young girls start to use these fairness creams after watching these models having “fair color” shown in these advertisements	27%	10%	48%	15%

CONCLUSION

To put it into nutshell, the advertisements of fairness beauty products create inferiority complexes among young girls in Pakistan. These advertisements make them compare themselves with advertised ‘white dolls’. If these advertised ‘white dolls’ are popular celebrities, the effects get double. So, the results endorsed the source credibility and source attractiveness model. It was also concluded that the advertisements of fairness products make young girls realize that they are not socially acceptable because they are not white as the ‘models of the advertisements. It was found that if they want to become ‘desirable brides’, ‘sexually attractive ladies’ and successful professional women, they have to lighten their skin complexion. Only fair complexion can make them beautiful and confident. It was also concluded that the aim of the advertisements of beauty products is to induce the fake belief among girls that fair complexion is only a solution of their problems that can only be achieved by using advertised fairness beauty products.

It is true that advertising is an influential and manipulative means of business and marketing. It is the job of the advertisers to play with emotions of the audience and exaggerate the features of the product for high sale. For the achievement of their goal, the advertisers use 'white dolls' as a source for creating influence on the mindset of the young generation. Sometimes, they use the techniques of photo editing, artificial sparkle, perfect lighting, good cameras and careful choices of the models that have nothing to do with reality. So advertisers should keep the consequences of their advertisements in their minds while manipulating and building the image of any product.

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