

Language and Colorism: Beauty Ideologies in Glutathione Capsule Advertisements on TikTok

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Abstract— TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules significantly influence societal beauty standards, particularly those tied to colorism and the privileging of lighter skin. This study examined how language and visual texts in TikTok advertisements perpetuate beauty ideologies that align lighter skin with attractiveness, social status, and personal success. A qualitative design was employed, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary framework. Five TikTok advertisements were analyzed for recurring linguistic and visual strategies, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants aged 18 to 30 who had been exposed to these ads. The study yielded six themes: linguistic framing of beauty ideologies in TikTok advertisements, discursive practices in marketing and advertising, visual representation of fair skin ideals, psychological and behavioral impacts of beauty narratives, TikTok as a medium for amplifying beauty ideologies, and systemic colorism and socio-cultural implications. These findings revealed that the advertisements subtly reinforced colorist narratives through strategic messaging, framing lighter skin as superior while promoting products as essential solutions. The results underline the role of media in embedding exclusionary beauty ideals into consumer perceptions. The study recommends the adoption of inclusive advertising practices, enhanced media literacy education, and policy interventions to mitigate the harmful effects of colorist advertising.

Keywords— Beauty Ideologies, Colorism, Consumer Behavior, Glutathione, Inclusive Advertising, Language and Media.

I. INTRODUCTION

In many societies, particularly in the Philippines, people equated lighter skin tones with beauty, status, and desirability (Zapata, 2021). Social and cultural norms deeply rooted this preference for a "total white" or light complexion, and media channels, including social media platforms like TikTok, continuously reinforced it. TikTok, as an emerging platform, served as a significant avenue for promoting skin-whitening products. Influencers played pivotal roles in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors regarding beauty standards, leveraging the platform's wide reach and engagement (Castillo, 2021). Media representations, particularly in TikTok glutathione capsule advertisements, perpetuated the preference for lighter skin, a norm shaped by historical legacies of colonization that equated lighter skin with privilege and superiority (Regencia et al., 2023).

Language significantly influenced perceptions, particularly regarding beauty ideals and consumer behavior (Baker & Kim, 2019). Advertisers selected language to communicate product information and shape how consumers viewed themselves and others (Rivas, 2019). The promotion of products like glutathione capsules showcased the multifaceted impact of language on consumer perceptions (Casal, 2023). According to Liyanage (2020), advertisers used

language to construct and reinforce societal norms and ideals of beauty. For instance, they often associated lighter skin tones with qualities such as success, attractiveness, and social acceptance, implying that achieving these qualities depended on using advertised products like glutathione capsules (Sitohang & Ninditya, 2020).

Despite inconclusive evidence regarding their efficacy, marketers extensively promoted skin-lightening products, mainly composed of cysteine, glycine, and glutamic acid, for their purported properties (Sitohang & Ninditya, 2020). Such marketing sustained societal ideals of beauty, furthering colorism—discrimination based on skin color. Although studies indicated the safety and temporary effectiveness of oral and topical glutathione supplements for skin lightening, overall evidence of their efficacy remained uncertain (Dilokthornsakul et al., 2019). This uncertainty raised ethical concerns about their promotion in the beauty industry and their portrayal in advertisements (Sonthalia et al., 2019). Even though regulatory bodies like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Philippines approved oral glutathione supplements, their safety for skin lightening remained ambiguous (FDA, 2023). This ambiguity highlighted the need for ethical and transparent advertising practices.

Studies highlighted the significant impact of historical and cultural factors in defining contemporary beauty ideals. The Philippines' colonial history, which linked fair skin with social status and privilege, continued to inform beauty standards (Singson, 2023). Digital platforms like TikTok amplified these ideologies, with advertisers strategically using language and imagery to create positive associations with fairness and desirability (Pratiwy & Wulan, 2023). Many prior studies, such as those by Liyanage (2020), Zapata (2021), and Pratiwy and Wulan (2019), focused on the theoretical aspects of sociolinguistics and cultural studies. These studies examined how colonial legacies, social hierarchies, and cultural narratives informed beauty standards but did not delve into specific, actionable linguistic strategies in modern advertisements. However, there were very few practical studies or action research that examined the intersection of advertising language and colorism.

The findings of this research can serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders in advertising, marketing, media studies, and public health. Advertising professionals may apply the insights to develop more ethical and inclusive strategies, fostering campaigns that challenge harmful beauty standards and prioritize diversity. Policymakers may utilize the findings to design and implement regulations that curb discriminatory advertising practices, ensuring that promotional content aligns with equitable societal values. Advocacy groups and organizations championing body positivity and the fight against colorism can leverage the results to inform their outreach efforts, design impactful awareness campaigns, and advocate for systemic changes in the beauty industry. Additionally, educators and scholars in media and sociolinguistics can use the study's outcomes as a foundation for further research, contributing to a broader understanding of the intersection between language, advertising, and societal norms.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded in Norman Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which views discourse as both shaped by and shaping social, political, and cultural contexts. Fairclough emphasizes that analyzing discourse involves more than examining language itself; it requires understanding the broader structures and ideologies that influence communication.

Fairclough's CDA includes three interrelated levels of analysis: Description (textual features such as

vocabulary and grammar), Interpretation (how texts are produced and understood in interaction), and Explanation (the influence of wider social structures and ideologies). This multi-level approach enables the analysis of both linguistic and visual texts, acknowledging the growing influence of imagery in shaping public perception.

Central to Fairclough's theory is the concept of Members' Resources (MR), which refers to individuals' socially shaped knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies that are used to interpret discourse. These resources are influenced by education, media, and cultural norms, and are crucial to understanding how discourse is received and internalized. This framework is particularly relevant to the study, which analyzes TikTok advertisements for Glutathione capsules in the Philippines. Through Fairclough's lens, the study examined how linguistic and visual elements reinforce colorism and promote narrow beauty standards.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study examined how language and colorism in TikTok advertisements reinforce beauty ideals. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What recurring verbal texts are employed in TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules that seemingly support ideologies of beauty and skin color?
2. What recurring visual texts are employed in TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules that seemingly support ideologies of beauty and skin color?
3. What are the participants' perceptions of glutathione capsules?
4. How does the language of glutathione TikTok advertisements influence the participants' perception of using the product?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Design

This study utilized a critical discourse analysis design. The design examined how language functioned in social contexts to create meaning (Fairclough, 2023). It systematically and objectively identifies specific characteristics of messages, allowing researchers to infer their effects and meanings (Krippendorff, 2019).

B. Setting

This research was conducted in Ozamiz City, located in the province of Misamis Occidental, Philippines. It

provided an ideal setting to explore the intersection of language and colorism in the portrayal of beauty ideals in Glutathione capsule advertisements on TikTok. The city's increasing number of establishments, stores, and mall stalls offering beauty products like glutathione capsules and skincare items further enhanced its suitability for this study.

C. Participants

This study included three participants from Ozamiz City. They had been exposed to TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules. The participants were identified through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Inclusion criteria for the participants included the following: 1) aged 18 to 30 years old; 2) users of glutathione capsules for at least three months; 3) viewed TikTok advertisements related to glutathione, and 4) gave consent to participate in the study.

D. Instruments

Five TikTok advertisements promoting Glutathione capsules (2018 to 2024) were selected based on their focus on skin whitening, high engagement (likes, views, shares), and use of language and visuals that highlighted lighter skin as a beauty ideal. These were analyzed using Cook's (2001) deconstruction model by dividing them into scenes and frames. Both video and written formats were reviewed to examine the connection between verbal and visual texts, alongside cultural and social context. An Interview Guide was used, and pilot interviews were conducted with three glutathione users not included as actual participants of the study.

E. Data-Gathering Procedure

The participants of the study were identified as users of glutathione capsules who had encountered TikTok advertisements. Informed consent was obtained through signed forms outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Glutathione users who had viewed relevant TikTok advertisements, and were conducted via Zoom, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, and scheduled according to participant availability. With prior consent, interviews were audio-recorded, and the researcher ensured a neutral and respectful approach throughout.

The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English when necessary. Transcripts were examined thematically and cross-referenced with the content analysis of TikTok advertisements. The final

transcripts and analysis were presented back to the participants for validation.

E. Data Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis: TikTok advertisements were first transcribed to document both verbal (spoken text, music lyrics) and visual (gestures, expressions, colors, imagery) elements. Using Cook's (2001) model, the ads were broken down into scenes and frames for detailed examination. Fairclough's three-level CDA framework guided the deeper analysis. At the description level, linguistic and visual strategies promoting skin-whitening were identified. The interpretation level explored the hidden messages and ideologies in the ads. Finally, the explanation level placed the ads within broader social and cultural contexts, revealing how beauty ideals and colorism were reinforced through media discourse.

Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts were reviewed to identify key insights and recurring ideas. The authors selected vivid quotations and identified keywords related to beauty standards and skin color. These were coded into meaningful categories, which were then grouped into themes. Through interpretation, these themes were refined into concepts that aligned with the study's goals. A conceptual model was developed to represent how language in Glutathione TikTok ads influences perceptions of beauty and perpetuates colorism.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were organized into six major themes based on the participants' responses and aligned with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework.

These themes reflected the lived experiences and perceptions of three Glutathione capsule users, aged 18 to 25 years old, who have been active TikTok users and consumers of skin-whitening products. Their insights offered a deeper understanding of how TikTok advertisements shape and reinforce beauty standards favoring lighter skin.

The themes included: (1) linguistic framing of beauty ideologies, (2) visual representation of fair skin ideals, (3) discursive practices in marketing, (4) psychological and behavioral impacts of beauty narratives, (5) TikTok as a medium for amplifying beauty norms, and (6) systemic colorism and its socio-cultural implications.

Theme 1: Linguistic Framing of Beauty Ideologies in TikTok Advertisements

TikTok advertisements for skin-whitening products, particularly glutathione capsules, employ carefully framed language to associate lighter skin with positive qualities and life improvements. These ads use persuasive statements and aspirational tones that shape consumer perceptions of beauty. The following sample statements, lifted directly from TikTok ads, illustrate how this persuasive framing operates:

“So, to ensure my skin is always bright and healthy, I’ll show you a product I take that helps me glow from within.” (T2)

“What if I tell you that there’s a glutathione with an incredibly fast whitening effect on the body... Other than this being the most affordable S-Acetyl Glutathione in the market, it also contains Vitamin C, Zinc, Vitamin E, Vitamin D3, Oral Sunblock, Collagen, and Rosehip.” (T4)

These statements highlight how advertising appeals to aspirations by promising inner glow, transformation, and affordability. Persuasive phrases such as “glow from within” and “incredibly fast whitening effect” create an emotional connection that frames lighter skin as a symbol of confidence, beauty, and social acceptance. Insights from participants further revealed how this language could be interpreted.

“You often hear phrases like ‘Feel confident in your skin’ or ‘Achieve glowing, radiant beauty.’ On the surface, it sounds inspirational, but... they frame your current state as ‘not enough,’ with the solution being the product they’re promoting.” (P1)

“What attracts me the most is how they use phrases like ‘quick results’ and ‘achieve glowing skin in just weeks.’ These phrases give you a sense of urgency...” (P2)

“Words like ‘flawless,’ ‘radiant,’ and ‘glowing skin’ seem to suggest that this is the ideal look—not just fair skin but healthy and perfect-looking skin.” (P3)

The persuasive language not only described a product but also created a psychological urgency in the participants. It positioned beauty as both a goal and a standard, reinforcing social norms that equated lighter, radiant skin with higher value.

Another sample excerpts from TikTok ads:

“I’ve been taking this for a few months now, and... you’ve noticed that I really have become whiter... Someone said that my skin has lightened.” (T1)

“So, what are you waiting for, VVs? Add to cart now so we can all be whiter!” (T5)

These subtle messages do not openly disparage darker skin but imply that one’s natural tone can be insufficient. By presenting whitening as a form of self-improvement, the ads normalize lighter skin as the beauty ideal without explicitly stating it.

Participants echoed these perceptions:

“The language subtly implies that your natural skin isn’t enough, encouraging you to feel that you need to lighten your skin to be beautiful.” (P1)

“They don’t directly say that darker skin is undesirable, but the presentation implies that being lighter is better.” (P2)

“Their language is subtle but clearly shows that if you’re not flawless or fair-skinned, something is missing.” (P3)

Through subconscious persuasion, audiences absorb these ideas while engaging with entertaining TikTok content. This quiet reinforcement of colorist ideals perpetuates whiteness as the unspoken norm, as conveyed by the following statements from TikTok ads:

“But here it is, guys! Hold on tight! We’ve been working on this for a year now... Make sure to be on time and see you on June 6th at exactly 7:30 PM. Bye!” (T4)

“You should definitely give it a try! Stop talking so much!” (T3)

These ads heighten urgency and aspiration by combining exclusivity with direct commands. By announcing product launches at specific times or urging immediate purchase, they pressure consumers to act quickly. The participants noted the impact of such urgency:

“Phrases like ‘quick results,’ ‘limited time only,’ and ‘in just weeks’ create a sense of urgency...” (P2)

“Words like ‘achieve whiter skin in just weeks’ and ‘quick and visible results’ give the idea that you can achieve this easily...” (P3)

“The ads often say things like ‘Limited time only!’ or ‘Get yours now with free shipping!’” (P1)

TikTok ads simplify decision-making by emphasizing speed and transformation. They foster a sense of missing out if consumers do not act, reinforcing the aspirational nature of beauty products on TikTok.

Theme 2: Visual Representation of Fair Skin Ideals

In addition to persuasive language, TikTok glutathione advertisements rely heavily on visual strategies to communicate and reinforce beauty standards. These representations frame lighter skin as aspirational and desirable, often using techniques such as before-and-after imagery and influencer endorsements. The following examples, lifted from TikTok ads, demonstrate how visuals function as rhetorical tools that normalize fair skin ideals and sustain colorist ideologies:

“I’ve been taking this for a few months now, and... you’ve noticed that I really have become whiter... Someone said that my skin has lightened.” (T1)

This statement highlights the persuasive nature of transformation narratives in advertising. By showing or describing visible changes, these ads appeal directly to consumers’ insecurities and desires for social validation. The “before-and-after” structure is not merely aesthetic but functions as proof of product efficacy, reinforcing the message that darker skin is a problem that requires a solution.

The participants also observed the strong impact of these visual contrasts:

“Sometimes, they even show ‘before and after’ photos or videos. In the ‘before,’ their skin looks tan, and in the ‘after,’ it appears to glow and look lighter, with glossy visuals like those from an expensive photoshoot.” (P1)

“The ‘before and after’ videos are what impacted me the most. In the ‘before,’ their skin looks darker, and in the ‘after,’ it looks glossy and much lighter.” (P2)

“You see the before-and-after photos, and the models look flawless and very fair. It makes me think, ‘Wow, that’s the kind of skin I want!’” (P3)

The participants’ observations demonstrate how visual contrasts amplify the aspirational framing of fair skin. These comments reveal that the ads are not neutral representations but rather carefully constructed portrayals that exaggerate the value of lighter skin. By consistently presenting fairer skin as flawless, glowing,

and socially desirable, the advertisements shape consumer perceptions and fuel aspirational desires. This process not only reinforces colorist beauty hierarchies but also risks internalizing feelings of inadequacy among viewers with naturally darker complexions.

Sample statements from TikTok ads:

“But anyway, what Ate said is true... She highly recommends it. So, we’re both VVs who took Lumi because I’m getting married, too.” (T5)

“Thank you again to those who commented, thank you! I hope you find happiness in what I’m saying. I love you all!” (T1)

These excerpts reflect how endorsements are embedded within casual, conversational exchanges, which increase their persuasive power. The tone resembles friendly advice rather than commercial promotion, making the message appear authentic and trustworthy. This blurring of boundaries between personal storytelling and advertising is central to influencer-driven marketing.

The participants conveyed the impact of influencers and social proof:

“The influencers appear to be just sharing their personal stories... They would say something like, ‘This was my journey—before, I had no confidence, but because of this, my perspective on myself changed.’” (P1)

“Influencers I follow would also say that the effects are ‘life changing.’ You end up feeling that you need to try it because you might be the only one who hasn’t.” (P3)

The participants’ statements illustrate how influencer endorsements foster both relatability and subtle social pressure. Viewers interpret these endorsements as authentic experiences rather than scripted promotions, which makes them more persuasive than traditional advertising.

This creates a cycle of normalization where lighter skin is not only framed as desirable but also as a collective pursuit endorsed by admired personalities.

At the same time, the absence of clear sponsorship disclosures raises ethical concerns, as consumers may unknowingly equate paid promotions with genuine testimonials. Such practices blur the line between personal advice and commercial influence, reinforcing systemic colorism while undermining informed consumer choice.

Theme 3: Discursive Practices in Marketing and Advertising

Beyond linguistic choices and visual strategies, TikTok glutathione advertisements also rely on discursive practices that reflect and reproduce broader societal ideologies. These discourses draw on historical and cultural associations of lighter skin with privilege, success, and desirability, making fairness appear not only as a personal goal but as a collective norm. The following examples, lifted directly from TikTok ads, illustrate how these marketing practices reinforce exclusionary standards while disguising them as aspirational and attainable.

Direct quotations from TikTok whitening product ads:

"I've been taking this for a few months now, and... you've noticed that I really have become whiter... Someone said that my skin has lightened." (T1)

"So, what are you waiting for, VVs? Add to cart now so we can all be whiter!" (T5)

These excerpts reveal how advertisements use everyday conversational styles to normalize the pursuit of lighter skin. TikTok Video 1 draws attention to external validation, emphasizing the role of others' observations in proving the product's effectiveness. In contrast, TikTok Video 5 emphasizes a collective aspiration, framing fairness as a shared journey where inclusion depends on participation. This discursive framing makes whitening practices appear both natural and socially endorsed, which strengthens the internalization of colorist ideals.

Participants described how these discourses communicate subtle but powerful implications:

"The language subtly implies that your natural skin isn't enough, encouraging you to feel that you need to lighten your skin to be beautiful." (P1)

"They don't directly say that darker skin is undesirable, but the presentation implies that being lighter is better." (P2)

"Their language is subtle but clearly shows that if you're not flawless or fair-skinned, something is missing." (P3)

The participants' reflections highlight how indirect discursive strategies convey exclusionary standards without explicitly demeaning darker skin tones. This subtlety makes the message more insidious, as it avoids overt discrimination while still positioning lighter skin

as the norm. By framing skin whitening as an act of self-improvement or a requirement for completeness, the ads reinforce societal favoritism for fair skin and reproduce long-standing hierarchies rooted in colonial and cultural histories.

Sample statement from TikTok ads:

"So, to ensure my skin is always bright and healthy, I'll show you a product I take that helps me glow from within." (T2)

The excerpt demonstrates how advertisements blur the line between wellness discourse and beauty discourse. By associating fairness with health, vitality, and a radiant glow, the ads frame lighter skin not merely as an aesthetic preference but as an indicator of holistic well-being. Such framing legitimizes skin whitening by linking it to socially valued concepts like health and self-care.

Participants reflected on the recurring implications:

"The language subtly implies that your natural skin isn't enough, encouraging you to feel that you need to lighten your skin to be beautiful." (P1)

"They don't directly say that darker skin is undesirable, but the presentation implies that being lighter is better." (P2)

The participants' insights confirm that these messages create aspirational ideals by subtly equating fairness with confidence, wellness, and social desirability. This discursive pattern reinforces the perception that beauty and self-worth are contingent on attaining lighter skin. On both individual and collective levels, the constant repetition of these messages embeds colorist ideologies into everyday cultural consciousness, encouraging consumers to normalize exclusionary standards while viewing whitening products as pathways to belonging, attractiveness, and upward social mobility.

Theme 4: Psychological and Behavioral Impacts of Beauty Narratives

TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules not only promote products but also influence how viewers perceive themselves. By exploiting insecurities, constructing ideals, and framing fairness as a social necessity, these ads shape psychological responses and consumer behavior. The following excerpts, drawn from TikTok advertisements, together with participants'

reflections, illustrate how such narratives affect perceptions of self-worth and beauty:

“Are you like me who wants to achieve glass skin, sister? Just look at my skin; it’s so beautiful now. Thanks to these capsules!” (T2)

This example demonstrates how TikTok ads employ a problem-solution framing, where the viewer’s current state is implicitly marked as inadequate and the product is positioned as the remedy. By presenting flawless, radiant skin as both achievable and desirable, the ad draws attention to perceived deficiencies and directs consumers toward whitening products as the solution.

Participants reflected on how such framings impact self-perceptions:

“The words they use are very friendly and positive. You often hear phrases like ‘Feel confident in your skin’ or ‘Achieve glowing, radiant beauty.’ On the surface, it sounds inspirational, but when you think about it, they frame your current state as ‘not enough,’ with the solution being the product they’re promoting.” (P1)

“These ads contain many subtle messages that tap into insecurities. It’s up to you whether or not you let yourself be affected. It’s important to remember that the ‘ideal beauty’ shown on TikTok doesn’t have to be the ideal for you.” (P2)

“Sometimes it feels pressuring because their language is subtle but clearly shows that if you’re not flawless or fair-skinned, something is missing. You can’t help but feel insecure and get convinced to use the product to fit the standard they’re showing.” (P3)

The participants’ insights highlight the psychological weight of these messages. Participant 1 emphasized how “positive” language can disguise implicit judgments. Participant 2 pointed out the difficulty of resisting repeated exposure, while Participant 3 directly described the pressure to conform to fair skin ideals. Collectively, their reflections show how subtle discursive cues reinforce insecurities and normalize the idea that beauty is conditional on skin lightening.

The following excerpt from TikTok advertisements reveals this framing:

“So, what are you waiting for, VVs? Add to cart now so we can all be whiter!” (T5)

This excerpt illustrates how urgency and collective belonging are discursively constructed. The direct call to action (“add to cart now”) combines with inclusive language (“we can all be whiter”) to position whitening as a socially shared pursuit rather than an individual choice.

The participants explained how such messages create necessity:

“When you see testimonials saying, ‘This product changed my life’ or ‘I feel more beautiful now,’ you can’t help but wonder, ‘Maybe I need this to feel the same way.’” (P1)

“It’s like everyone is talking about it, and I don’t want to feel left out.” (P2)

“You end up feeling that you need to try it because you might be the only one who hasn’t.” (P3)

The participants described the powerful social mechanisms behind these strategies. Participant 1 highlighted how endorsements link beauty and happiness to product use. Participant 2 underscored the fear of exclusion, and Participant 3 revealed the pressure to conform when whitening is presented as a widespread norm. Together, these insights show how discourses of urgency and inclusivity generate a perceived need, framing non-participation as a form of social exclusion.

Theme 5: TikTok as a Medium for Amplifying Beauty Ideologies

TikTok functions as a significant medium through which beauty standards are constructed, reinforced, and circulated. The algorithm-driven personalization and participatory culture provide fertile ground for the normalization of societal ideals, particularly those linking fair skin with attractiveness, confidence, and social acceptance. Advertisements for glutathione capsules capitalize on TikTok’s short-form, visually engaging format, enabling messages about beauty and fairness to spread rapidly and repeatedly across diverse audiences. The following excerpt from TikTok advertisements, alongside participant reflections, illustrates how the platform amplifies and sustains these discourses.

“So, to ensure my skin is always bright and healthy, I’ll show you a product I take that helps me glow from within.” (T2)

This excerpt illustrates how whitening products are framed not only as cosmetic enhancements but also as essential for wellness and self-care. By linking fairness to health and vitality, the ad appeals to both aesthetic aspirations and broader lifestyle values, making the message resonate with everyday practices of beauty maintenance.

The participants elaborated on how TikTok's algorithmic structure heightens this exposure through the following statements:

"On TikTok, when you view one piece of beauty- or skincare-related content, the algorithm seems to show you more of the same. That's why these glutathione ads appear almost daily." (P1)

"It's really entertaining because there's so much content to see, but sometimes you don't notice that you're watching the same type of videos over and over again." (P2)

"I use TikTok every day... It's really become part of my daily routine, and I feel like I'm missing out if I don't open it, especially since it helps me stay updated on trends and popular topics." (P3)

The participants' reflections highlight how TikTok's algorithm amplifies exposure by creating cycles of repetitive content. Participant 1 emphasized the daily recurrence of glutathione ads, Participant 2 pointed out how repeated exposure can be unnoticed yet constant, and Participant 3 linked TikTok to routine and social belonging. These insights demonstrate how algorithm-driven reinforcement integrates colorist beauty ideals into everyday digital consumption, embedding them as both habitual and socially normative.

A TikTok advertisement stated:

"Glowing! You're so glowing! Admit it, I'm glowing! Don't be shy; I'll tell you why." (T2)

The statement shows how playful and rhythmic language, combined with visuals, creates an immersive, persuasive appeal. By dramatizing the transformation, the ad emphasizes fairness and radiance as attainable outcomes, thereby reinforcing aspirational ideals of beauty.

The participants reflected on how language and visuals interact to persuade viewers:

"The words they use are very friendly and positive... They frame your current state as 'not enough,' with the solution being the product they're promoting." (P1)

"The messaging, like 'Achieve your radiant glow' or 'Lighten your skin naturally,' taps directly into your insecurities." (P2)

"Words like 'quick results' and 'achieve glowing skin in just weeks'... give you a sense of urgency, as if using the product will make changes happen quickly." (P3)

These participants' accounts reveal how advertising strategies exploit both emotion and cognition. Participant 1 emphasized the subtle framing of inadequacy. Participant 2 identified how messaging exploits insecurities, while Participant 3 underscored the urgency built into the language of transformation. Together, their reflections show how aspirational language and visually enhanced content foster desire while normalizing exclusionary standards. By coupling multisensory appeals with algorithmic visibility, TikTok advertising not only sustains consumer demand but also embeds fairness as a collective cultural aspiration.

Theme 6: Systemic Colorism and Socio-Cultural Implications

TikTok glutathione advertisements do not exist in isolation; rather, they reflect and reinforce broader systems of colorism deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and social hierarchies. By presenting lighter skin as the standard of beauty and success, these ads perpetuate long-standing ideals that equate fairness with higher social value. Sample TikTok advertisements stated:

"I've been taking this for a few months now, and in those months, you've noticed that I really have become whiter... Someone said that my skin has lightened." (T1)

"So, what are you waiting for, VVs? Add to cart now so we can all be whiter!" (T5)

These excerpts illustrate how whitening is framed both as an individual accomplishment and a collective pursuit. In TikTok Video 1, fairness is positioned as evidence of personal transformation validated by others, while TikTok Video 5 frames skin lightening as a shared norm, making the pursuit of whiteness appear communal and socially sanctioned.

The participants further noted:

"On social media, I kept seeing that having fair skin makes you more attractive and classier... It's like they

subtly suggest that to achieve that, you need to invest in yourself.” (P1)

“Growing up, I always heard that fair skin is more beautiful and classy. Morena or tan skin is often labeled as ‘less.’ Sometimes, you’re even called ‘negra’ or ‘iti’ (chicken dung).” (P2)

“Many people would say, ‘You’d look better if you were fairer,’ and ads and social media often show that fair skin is the standard of beauty.” (P3)

The participants highlighted that these ideals are not new but rooted in long-standing cultural biases. Participant 1 pointed to framing of fairness as an investment in self-worth. Participant 2 recalled childhood experiences where darker skin was labeled with derogatory terms, while Participant 3 emphasized how these perceptions persist through media reinforcement. Together, these reflections show how TikTok ads exploit cultural legacies of colonial colorism, embedding whiteness as both aspirational and normative. By normalizing fairness as a collective goal, these ads sustain historical hierarchies while disguising them as modern beauty aspirations.

An excerpt from a TikTok advertisement:

“Sister, why are you so white?... I’ve made several videos about it, girl... Hikari is really effective, girl.” (T3)

The excerpt reflects how influencers celebrate fairness as a visible achievement, positioning whiteness as both remarkable and socially praiseworthy. By showcasing repeated transformations, the ads frame fair skin as a desirable outcome that is worth public recognition.

Participants’ reflections were conveyed in the following statements:

“I was 18 years old then... When I reached that age, I became more conscious of my skin.” (P2)

“Growing up, I always heard that fair skin is more beautiful and classy... I hoped that if my skin were lighter, people would see me more positively.” (P2)

“As I got older, my perspective on myself changed... I started doubting myself and thinking maybe it would be better if I were fairer.” (P3)

“When you’re constantly exposed to this kind of messaging and visuals, you may not notice it right away,

but slowly your perception of yourself begins to shift.” (P1)

Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to the influence of such advertising, given that these stages involve identity formation and heightened sensitivity to social validation. Repeated exposure to messages equating fairness with attractiveness and worth fosters internalized self-doubt and dissatisfaction with natural skin tone. The algorithm-driven and interactive nature of TikTok further amplifies these effects by ensuring constant exposure and encouraging peer comparison. By positioning influencers as relatable peers, the ads increase pressure to conform to narrow beauty standards, normalizing colorism as part of everyday social interaction. These dynamics illustrate how systemic colorism is not only reproduced at the cultural level but also internalized at the psychological level, raising significant concerns about long-term impacts on youth self-esteem and mental health.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The recurring verbal texts in TikTok advertisements for glutathione capsules emphasize aspirational narratives that align lighter skin with beauty, confidence, and elevated social status, subtly framing skin whitening as a means of self-improvement. The visual texts prominently feature before-and-after imagery, influencer testimonials, and visually appealing depictions of lighter skin, reinforcing societal biases that position fair skin as the ideal standard of beauty.

The participants perceived glutathione capsules as transformative products promising quick results. However, their perceptions were shaped by discursive marketing practices that portrayed lighter skin as aspirational and socially advantageous, coupled with the psychological effects of beauty advertisements that encouraged internalization of fair skin ideals. The language and visual strategies employed in TikTok advertisements influenced the participants' perceptions. These strategies fostered feelings of inadequacy, urgency, and self-doubt while normalizing systemic colorism through TikTok’s algorithmic amplification of beauty narratives.

Conclusions

The use of aspirational verbal messaging in TikTok advertisements underscores the societal reliance on

deeply ingrained beauty standards, revealing how marketing strategies exploit cultural ideologies to shape consumer desires. This highlights the need to challenge these norms by promoting alternative narratives that celebrate diverse definitions of beauty. The prominence of visual texts perpetuates the societal preference for lighter skin. These strategies not only reinforce existing biases but also normalize the commodification of fairness, suggesting that beauty is an attainable product rather than a diverse spectrum. This perpetuation calls for greater accountability in media representation.

The dual impact of discursive marketing and psychological messaging on participants' perceptions reveals how advertisements influence not just purchasing decisions but also personal identity and self-worth. This demonstrates the broader societal impact of beauty advertisements, where consumer choices are tied to internalized insecurities and aspirations shaped by cultural hierarchies. TikTok's role in amplifying systemic colorism reflects the platform's influence as a cultural mediator, where algorithmic reinforcement of narrow beauty narratives exacerbates societal inequities. This highlights the urgency of addressing how digital spaces contribute to the entrenchment of discriminatory ideologies, emphasizing the responsibility of platforms in shaping societal norms.

Recommendations

TikTok content creators and advertisers may prioritize ethical practices that promote inclusivity by avoiding language and visuals that reinforce narrow beauty standards or colorist ideologies, instead celebrating all skin tones with empowering messages. Advertisers may diversify visual representations in their campaigns, showcasing individuals with various skin tones to challenge existing colorist ideologies. They may also refrain from using before-and-after visuals that suggest lighter skin is inherently better or more desirable.

Policymakers and content moderation teams of social media platforms may consider implementing stricter guidelines to promote transparency in product claims and to address harmful beauty narratives, including subtle forms of colorism, in advertisements and user-generated content. Future researchers may explore the long-term psychological and societal impact of beauty advertisements on social media, focusing on the role of algorithms, consumer behavior, and cultural beauty norms.

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