

**COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF FAIR SKIN ADVERTISEMENT  
ON THAI YOUTH**

BY

EKARAT ANUSATISIRIPORN

5706640603

FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS

MAJOR IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED TO AJ.SIMON STEWART

Cognitive effects of fair skin advertisement on Thai youth

**Abstract**

The problem of whiteness obsession in Thailand is receiving inconsiderable attention from people all around the country. With the new era of consumerism as a social and economic order and ideology encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts (dictionary.com), the development of television advertisement has been increasingly accelerated without considering its consequence on people subconscious. While it is known that advertisement effectively plays role on people mind and behaviour on the surface level as its contribute to people's perception, its consequences on the cognitive level is still highly questioned in Thai society as fair skin advertisement was believed by many Thai to create unrealistic, unhealthy, impractical and idealistic for Thai youth on the cognitive level. This research will further investigate the issue that was build on the problem by surveying how many Thai youth have been affected by whitening advertisement. As a result, the anticipate extent number of stricken Thai youth will be shown as a result of this research to explore and extend the problem that will help contribute to the solution of the problem in the future. However this is just an simple research that mainly to prove the point of the hypothesis, as it collecting only small amount of example due to the limited amount of time and resources.

## Introduction

“An advertising agency is 85 percent confusion and 15 percent commission.” (Fred Allen, 1943). This quotation has been repeatedly cited in various advertising books and articles. It is a principle for advertising people to keep 15 percent of commission for themselves and the rest is for the making processes. However, by practising the word ‘confusion’, it indicates the lack of understanding and uncertainty in what are they doing. By definition, confusion means the state of being bewildered or unclear in one's mind about something’(Cambridge dictionary). This can be linked to the disorientation in the consequence of the effect on the advertisement on people’s mind itself.

In the past decades, people have witnessed the development of communication technologies that facilitated customer and advertiser to easily interact and correspond. Television is the most potential to generate effect on people psychology especially on the youth. Youth is treated as the special audience due to the powerful impact as the advertisements nowadays mostly employed celebrities. This is the main reason why youth are easily targeted. The effect of advertising on youth can be seen through many ways including the changes in their consumption habit, taste, life style and attitude. In 21st century the youth is getting much more conscious on their looks, skin colour, body, wearing and brand. Some of them are good but mostly are not. It created unhealthy, impractical, unrealistic and idealistic attitude against themselves.

One of the most concern issue on the effect of the advertisement is on the skin colour. Throughout history, it can be seen that the media has used stereotypes to convey a false perception of a certain group to society, regarding races or social classes. By displaying such negative and confining images in advertisements of darker skinned people as a lower class and lighter skinned people as a higher class or rich people. This images are limiting the self-concept of the young. By growing up around such images of whiter skinned people as a better person, youth are taught that such an ideas are the “fixed” way of life, and are force to believe these false perceptions of reality because in fact, whiter skinned people doesn’t have to be better, more attractive or richer. It’s the variety of genetic trait which was given to them for a reason. By detaining the image of beauty and successful women in a white skinned colour, teens are given impractical, unattainable goal to look up to which is unhealthy to them. (Asha Bromfield, 2012) For example, there is Thai cosmetics company that issued the video advertisement for the product called “Snowz”. The advertisement featuring skinned racism in which furore over racism and stereotyping. “Just being white, you will win,” Cris Horwang declared, the white porcelain-skinned star, adding that without the product, “the whiteness I have invested in will just vanish”. Horwang also assured the viewers that Snowz “will help you not to return to being dark” and make the message even clearer, “Eternally white, I am confident”, she added ( CNN, 2015).

Therefore, it is unarguable that these whitening advertisements contributed to people’s perception, attention and memory one way or another. This sparked a fierce debate about racism and beauty stereotypes in the South East Asian country that it is racist and creating bad stereotype on Thailand where there is a stereotype from all over television and any media that women with "fair complexion" are in high demand. In recent years, there are

numerous new creams that have been introduced to lighten skin colour including armpit hair and even female genitals. Many manufacturers advertised their wares by preying on basic human insecurities consumers are encouraged to believe that lightening their skin tone a shade or two will enable them to win 'better' jobs and spouses and generally improve the quality of their lives (Geeta Pandey, 2016)

For this reasons, it can be concluded that whitening advertisement created bad effects upon Thai youth attitude and perception on the cognitive level toward the idea of skin colour which are impractical and unhealthy for society and their mind.

There are diverse studies and evidences suggested the negative impact of advertisement on human psychology. To begin with, we have to investigate the multitude aspects of human perception and how we process it through advertisement as V. Iljin (2000) and D. Jokubauskas (2003) state, it is proven by the research of psychologists that "the perception of advertising information is determined by a multitude of aspects. However, the psychological ones including cognitive, emotional and behavioural play the most important role. Most amount of information is perceived by seeing as visual presentation of advertising is the simplest way of pertaining information because perceive visual information the human uses least energy. As a result ad can affect the customer subconsciously. This could be colour, an unusual shape of size of the first character, a large, attractive and full-colour photo or text design. Empty spaces, abstract images and drawings do not suit the ad. It is noticed that the more realistic illustration, the more efficient is the ad, as it is the thing directly affecting the customer." The main goal of advertising is to evoke the feeling, in other words, it demonstrates how the customer is going to feel after acquiring one or another product.

There are research that concern on the false perception of the advertisement as human has subconscious aspect of psychology. According to D. Jokubauskas (2007), if the ad evokes the feelings that is not directly related to it, but also indirectly ones (both positive and negative). Another important cognitive aspect is perception. The feelings are usually evoked subconsciously, while cognition is a conscious process.

According to Sandra Jakštienė, Dalia Susnienė and Valdas Narbutas (2008) on their research on The Psychological Impact of Advertising on the Customer Behavior. They concluded that "Having generalised the results of the theoretical surveys by Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2005; Mažeikaitė, 2001; Čereška, 2004; Kotler et al 2003; Lamb, Hair, McDaniel 1992; Dolak, 2007; Jokubauskas, 2007, Iljin, 2000 it can be concluded that advertising influences the customer through the cognitive aspects. Cognition is related to the fact that an individual perceives the information advertised through senses, perception, attention, memory, reasoning, language, etc. It is possible to state that one of the most important tasks advertising performs is to distinguish the item or service advertised, attract the customer's attention and sustain his/her attention. On the basis of theoretical analysis three aspects - cognitive, emotional and behavioural - were identified and evaluated during the survey. The survey results revealed that the customer's attention, as one of the psychological cognitive aspects under research, was influent mostly by ads in press and brochures. The research data showed that the second psychological aspect (emotional)

influences the respondents mostly because it caused positive feelings for the biggest part of respondents (79 %). It can be concluded that the final aim of advertising (behavioural aspect) was achieved – adverts make a psychological impact on the customer.”

They also convey that positive feeling ads can create obsessive feeling, as they stated that “Companies ads evoke positive feelings. Alongside with these feelings they name easily memorised and obsessive information, the background is not too bright, the product is introduced in a detailed way, and contains a funny photograph, and therefore the ad is not tedious”

Olson and Mitchell (1975) also suggested that an attitudinal and information that focuses on the intervening cognitive factor can cause the changes in attitude and behaviour intentionally. This approach has its theoretical roots in learning theory and concentrates on information in the form of beliefs as the causal basis for attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and possibly choice behaviour. From this conceptual perspective, the focal point of communication research becomes the information contained in an advertisement and its resulting effects on beliefs and other elements of the cognitive structures of audience members.

Furthermore, according to D. Jokubauskas (2007), it can be said that viewing is the most influential in the process of advertising information perception and evaluation. Therefore, advertising has to correspond the principle of consistence, all of its aspects including title, text, illustration and logos are closely related and determine the general impact of the ad. If the aspects and information are insufficient to formulate the main idea, ambiguities can occur.

In addition, this research will focus on the youth as advertisements can be aimed directly at children. Given the significance of imaginative play in early childhood, there has been a great deal of concern about how television affects imagination in young viewers. Because television provides audiovisual images, one can hypothesise that television, rather than the child, will create the mental images that are the essence of imaginative play, thus supplanting the imaginal processes of the child. A number of studies have found television to have a negative effect on the imagination of children and adolescents (Greenfield & Beagles-Roos, 1988; Greenfield et al., 1986; Meline, 1976; Meringoff, Vibbert, Char, Fernie, Banker, & Gardner, 1982; Peterson, Peterson, & Carroll, 1986; Singer & Singer, 1981, 1986; Harrison & Williams, 1986). As a result, the majority of the research on television and imagination indicates a detrimental effect of the medium.

Moreover, Youth do not realise that a message can portray only positive information while withholding negative information, in order to manipulate people's mental state (Aloise- Young, 1993; Bennett & Yeeles, 1990).

According to Greenberg, Fazal & Wober, A lack of awareness in younger children, resulting in higher trust in the advertiser, renders them more vulnerable to selling messages. Allied to this is the authoritative status of television messages for young children, who believe that adults do not lie and the younger the child is, the more likely they are to believe that advertisements always tell the truth (1986).

Since there are various studies suggesting that advertisement really has impact on human psychology especially on the youth and television has the most influence on the

subconscious level, it's still debatable that whatever fair skin advertisement really impact on Thai youth attitude toward skin colour and the concept of beauty or not. In short, the hypothesis of this research is that fair skin advertisement really impact a huge number of Thai youth on a cognitive level. Thus, this research will find a percentage of Thai youth who have been influenced by fair skin advertisement in order to explore and extend the problem that will help contribute to the solution of the problem in the future.

### Research methodology

The research approach will be conducted by oral interview people individually by giving psychological questions to random 18 Thai youths in 6 different regional parts of Thailand which are Northern, Southern, Central, Eastern, Northeast and Western. This research will interview 3 person per regional parts of Thailand in order to get as much variety as possible.

Youth in this research will cover people who age around 16-18 as they are main targeted by whitening advertisements. Moreover, people who age around 16-18 are the one who has been effected by false value the most as they are the generation who was born in the period where television advertisements flourished without much regulation.

The interviewing questions will be drafted by Mr.Ekarat Anusatsiriporn, the writer of this paper and Mr.Dharanphob Boonkunswut, forth year psychology student which are the questions below (1).

Number	Question
1	How do you feel when you cross paths with a black skin people and why?
2	Have you seen stereotypes portrayed in the television?
3	Have you ever avoided a certain group of people or type of person because of their skin?
4	Do you think it's necessary to have white skin person to be on television or to be main character?
5	Do you think that white skin is the better one and why?
6	Do you want to have whiter skin and why?
7	Have you ever angry when you are being told that you are black?
8	We show 2 picture which is the white skin man and dark skin man and ask which one is more likely to be doctor?
9	Do you think white skin people are more likely to be successful in some career and why?
10	Do you think that dark skin person is more likely to be poor?

(1)

As a result, the researcher will analyse each person cognitive approach individually. The ways of analysing the effects of fair skin advertisement on Thai youth will be examined through the statement below.

- (1) Not assuming that white people are good person than the darker one.
- (2) Having the ability to acknowledge that colorism in the advertisement exists.
- (3) Be able to be recognise the variety of your racial/ethnic heritage without ridicule.
- (4) Be recognised the symbol of racism on television.
- (5) Standard of beauty is not base on the skin colour because of the advertisement.
- (6) Not have the act of self-hate due to the advertisement.
- (7) Not being angry when you are assumed to be member of darker skin people group.
- (8) Not assuming that white people are more intelligent than the darker one due to the advertisement.
- (9) Not think that white skin people have a better chance of landing a job than a darker person with the same credentials because of the advertisement.
- (10) Not making the assumption that dark skin grew up poorly because of the advertisement.

The methodology of measuring how many percentage of fair skin advertisement influences on Thai youth in the cognitive level will be resulted in percentage(%). This research will draw the percent out of the interviewee by using  $(\text{Number of people} \times 100) \div 18$ . As a result, this result will help researcher conclude the percent of how many percentage Thai youth have been influenced by fair skin advertisement. If the answer of the interviewee is not related to the influences of the advertisement, the answer will immediately became NO as aim of this research mainly focus on the effects of the whitening advertisement.

The reason why this research use this method to determine the result is that it's easy to concluded that how many percentage Thai youth have been influenced by fair skin advertisement. The percent result not reflects the reality but it reflects the result base on this research standard as it's impossible to measure how we thinking and how much are we influenced directly. Thus, the aim is show that fair skin advertisement really has negative influence in the cognitive thinking in Thai youth in much more than we realised to explore the problem that occur

The goal of this research is to clearly defined the problems. In this research, the issue of the cognitive effects of fair skin advertisement on Thai youth will be clarified by the experiment conducted which is to find the number of Thai youth who have been influenced by the fair skin advertisement. This research to explore and extend the problem that will help contribute to the solution of the problem in the future. However this is an simple research as it collect only small amount of example due to the limited amount of time and resources. Likewise, the research will qualify and analysed all of the data individually that was gathered through all of the interviewed person. For this reason, the qualitative

approach will be used. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as multi method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' living.

This research is to study the cognitive effects of fair skin advertisement on Thai youth. In order to achieve accurate results, our group used three variables to determine that Thai youth is really effects by fair skin advertisements. Three variables are composed of an independent variable, a dependent variable and a control variable as following:

### **Independent Variable**

There are many independent variables in this research including the 10 interview questions, the 11 examine statements.

### **Dependent Variable**

There are dependent variable in this research which are the answer of the interviewee which is the result of the research.

### **Control Variable**

This research is to conduct on the youth who aged around 16-18 so it's the control variable of this research.

## **Results**

The results will be shown in statistics in the table below and analysed each question in term of number. This research will not show the full interview scrip as it's unnecessary to know all of the raw information.

Number	Question
1	How do you feel when you cross paths with a black skin people and why?

Conclusion : 14 people felt normal when they have to cross paths with a black skin people. Only 4 person felt that they are insecure.

Statement analysis : 4 out of 18 people which is 22% of Thai youth assumed that white people are good person than the darker one.



Number	Question
2	Have you seen stereotypes portrayed in the television?

Conclusion : Only 4 person recognised the stereotypes portrayed in the television.

Statement analysis : 14 people which is 77% of Thai youth don't have the ability to acknowledge that colorism in the advertisement exists.

Number	Question
3	Have you ever avoided a certain group of people or type of person because of their skin?

Conclusion : All of the 18 people said that they used to avoided a certain group of people or type of person because of their skin but only 1 person said it's because of the television influence. Other 17 said it's because of other factors such as their looks.

Statement analysis : Only one of them which is 5% of Thai youth is not be able to be recognise the variety of the skin colour heritage without ridicule.

Number	Question
4	Do you think it's necessary to have white skin person to be on television or to be main character?

Conclusion : 8 people think it's unnecessary for white skin person to be on television or to be main character.

Statement analysis : 10 people which is 55% of Thai youth not recognised the symbol of racism on television.

Number	Question
5	Do you think that white skin is the better one and why?

Conclusion : 15 people think that white skin is better than darker skin. All of them state that white skin is more likely to be successful base on the television.

Statement analysis : 15 people which is 83% of Thai youth's standard of beauty is base on the skin colour because of the advertisement.

Number	Question
6	Do you want to have whiter skin and why?

Conclusion : 15 people said they want to have whiter skin mostly because they think that it's more beautiful. As the researcher further investigated, all of 17 people got the idea from advertisement.

Statement analysis : 15 person which is 83% of Thai youth have the act of self-hate due to the advertisement.

Number	Question
7	Have you ever angry when you are being told that you are black?

Conclusion : 17 people are used to be angry when they are being told that you are black but only 2 of them show sign of the influences of the television.

Statement analysis : 2 interviewee which is 11% of Thai youth angry when they are assumed to be member of darker skin people group that show sign of the influences of the television.

Number	Question
8	We show 2 picture which is the white skin man and dark skin man and ask which one is more likely to be doctor?

Conclusion : 17 people prefer white man to be the doctor.

Statement analysis : 17 people which is 94% of Thai youth assume that white skin people are more intelligent than the darker one due to the advertisement.

Number	Question
9	Do you think white skin people are more likely to be successful in some career and why?

Conclusion : However, in this question, 5 person said white skin person is more likely to be successful in some career such as air hostess.

Statement analysis : 5 people which is 28% of Thai youth have a better chance of landing a job than a darker person with the same credentials because of the advertisement.

Number	Question
10	Do you think that dark skin person is more likely to be poor?

Conclusion : 2 of them think that dark skin person is more likely to be poor.

Statement analysis : 2 people which is 11% of Thai youth make the assumption that dark skin grew up poorly.

In conclusion, it can be concluded that fair skin advertisement has negative influences on Thai youth in the cognitive level one way or another. Every interviewee shown signs of negative influences of the whitening advertisement.

### Discussion

The purpose of the research is to explore and clarify the given situations of the effects of whitening advertisement on Thai youth. Its aim is to show the extent data in order to provide significant insight into the problem. However, this research is not useful for decision-making as it provide only small sample of the situation. While it's unarguable that advertisement effects our school of thought one way or another, the negative influences of fair skin advertisement is still debatable that how much it effects Thai society. Thus, as a result, this research conduct a way to measure negative influences of fair skin advertisement on Thai youth who age around 16-18 by interviewing 18 people who come from different parts of Thailand as they are the representative of Thai youth in general. The experiment strongly suggests that Thai youth are influenced by the fair skin advertisement in a huge number. This is because the false propaganda of the advertisement itself that installed bad image and impractical value for Thai youth without responsibility. The result of this research was supported by a large number of studies that concern on the influence of television affects on cognitive thinking. However. there are some limitations in this research is that it's hard to get the answer from the interviewee whatever their value of skin colour came form the whitening advertisement or not. The researchers have to analysed their statement carefully and separately in order to know the answer but it's still not get 100% accurate information. Thus, the results of this research are just an simple example that mainly to prove the point of the hypothesis, as it collecting only small amount of example due to the limited amount of time and resources.

## Appendix

There are details that include information that are too detailed for the result that could distract reader from the important information which are the region part where the interviewees come from including;

1. How do you feel when you cross paths with a black skin people and why?
  - 4 out of 18 people assuming that white people are good person than the darker one.
  - 2 of them from Northeast
  - 1 of them from Northern
  - 1 of them from Central

Which is 22% of Thai youth assumed that white people are good person than the darker one.

2. Have you seen stereotypes portrayed in the television?
  - 14 people don't have the ability to acknowledge that colorism in the advertisement exists.
  - 3 of them from Northeast
  - 3 of them from Eastern
  - 3 of them from Western
  - 2 of them from Southern
  - 2 of them from Northern
  - 1 of them from Central

Which is 77% of Thai youth don't have the ability to acknowledge that colorism in the advertisement exists.

3. Have you ever avoided a certain group of people or type of person because of their skin?
  - Only one of them is not be able to be recognise the variety of the skin colour heritage without ridicule.
  - 1 of them from Northeast

Which is 5% of Thai youth is not be able to be recognise the variety of the skin colour heritage without ridicule.

4. Do you think it's necessary to have white skin person to be on television or to be main character?
  - 10 people not recognised the symbol of racism on television.
  - 3 of them from Northeast
  - 2 of them from Southern
  - 2 of them from Eastern
  - 2 of them from Western
  - 1 of them from Northern

Which is 55% of Thai youth not recognised the symbol of racism on television.

5. Do you think that white skin is the better one and why?

- 15 person's standard of beauty is base on the skin colour because of the advertisement.
- 3 of them from Northeast
- 2 of them from Eastern
- 2 of them from Western
- 2 of them from Southern
- 1 of them from Northern

Which is 83% of Thai youth's standard of beauty is base on the skin colour because of the advertisement.

6. Do you want to have whiter skin and why?

- 15 person have the act of self-hate due to the advertisement.
- 3 of them from Northeast
- 3 of them from Southern
- 3 of them from Eastern
- 3 of them from Western
- 2 of them from Northern
- 1 of them from Central

Which is 83% of Thai youth have the act of self-hate due to the advertisement.

7. Have you ever angry when you are being told that you are black?

- 2 interviewee angry when they are assumed to be member of darker skin people group that show sign of the influences of the television.
- 2 of them from Northeast

Which is 11% of Thai youth angry when they are assumed to be member of darker skin people group that show sign of the influences of the television.

8. We show 2 picture which is the white skin man and dark skin man and ask which one is more likely to be doctor?

- 17 people assume that white skin people are more intelligent than the darker one due to the advertisement.
- 3 of them from Northeast
- 2 of them from Southern
- 3 of them from Eastern
- 3 of them from Western
- 3 of them from Northern
- 3 of them from Central

Which is 94% of Thai youth assume that white skin people are more intelligent than the darker one due to the advertisement.

9. Do you think white skin people are more likely to be successful in some career and why?

- 5 think that white skin people have a better chance of landing a job than a darker person with the same credentials because of the advertisement.

- 3 of them from Northeast
- 1 of them from Central
- 1 of them from Northern

Which is 28% of Thai youth have a better chance of landing a job than a darker person with the same credentials because of the advertisement

10. Do you think that dark skin person is more likely to be poor?

- 2 of them make the assumption that dark skin grew up poorly.

- 2 of them from Northeast

Which is 11% of Thai youth make the assumption that dark skin grew up poorly.

## References

Allen, Fred. *"The Government as an Advertising Agency."* *Sci Am Scientific American* 80.10 (1899): 146. Web.

Anonymous. *"Cambridge Essential English Dictionary."*

"Asha Bromfield." IMDb. [IMDb.com](http://IMDb.com).

"Thai Beauty Ad: 'Just Being White, You Will Win'" CNN. Cable News Network.

Pandey, Geeta. *"#unfairandlovely: A New Social Campaign Celebrates Dark Skin - BBC News."* LockerDome.

V. Iljin, and Jokubauskas. *"The Psychological Impact of Advertising on the Customer ..."*

Sandra Jakštienė, Dalia Susnienė, and Valdas Narbutas. *"The Psychological Impact of Advertising on the Customer ..."*

Olson and Mitchell. *"Theories of Behavior Change | The World Bank."*

Jokubauskas. *"The Psychological Impact of Advertising on the Customer ..."*

Greenfield & Beagles-Roos. *"A Study of Television/ on - University of California, Los ..."* Web. 12 May 2016.

Fazal & Wober. *"Dear Santa: The Effects of Television Advertising on Young ..."*