

## Female Representation in Online Advertisements: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Beauty Products Advertised on Instagram

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### ABSTRACT

An advertisement is a promotional strategy to introduce a product, brand, or service to a targeted viewership; with the intent to pique their attention, encourage interaction, and ultimately, attract sales. Containing pictures, words and graphics that are familiar and present in the targeted group's realities, advertisements, in addition to financial gains, it also greatly reflects and influences the socio-cultural construct and worldview of a community. In advertising operations carried out particularly via social media platforms, the use of language to manipulate gender depiction as an advertising strategy is recurrently observed. On this premise, this qualitative study looked into the language used in Malay advertisements for beauty products available on Instagram, a social media application. The feminist stylistic framework (Mill, 1998) served as the foundation for the textual analysis approach used to examine 150 Instagram adverts for Malay beauty goods. The stylistic features in particular were evaluated based on Verdonk (2002)'s framework, with a focus on the use of language in depicting women and the role of the language in shaping the depiction. The results demonstrated that the stylistic features utilised in Malay beauty products advertisements contained characteristics that are stereotypically assigned to women. The extensive effect of patriarchy, stereotypes, and woman sexualisation as a marketing tactic is also evident in the seller's language use. This study aims to offer evidence-based justifications for changes to be made to the existing social media advertising practice, especially in terms of language appropriateness and ethics.

**Keywords:** *Feminist stylistics, Malay beauty products, advertising language, female representation, social media advertisement.*

### INTRODUCTION

An advertisement is a marketing strategy used to introduce a product, brand, or service to a specific group of people. Containing images, words and/or graphics, advertisements deliver persuasive messages to the targeted markets with the intent of capturing their interest, eliciting interaction, and ultimately generating sales (Popova, 2018; Pounders, 2018; Michaelidou et al., 2022). When communicated, advertisements not only provide information, but also stimulate the target group's imagination (Popova, 2018). To amplify the appeal of an advertisement, advertisers frequently include the linguistic and cultural norms of a target population as part of the persuasive discourse (Newaz, 2017; Kenechukwu et al., 2013). The content is typically contextualised to the socio-cultural reality of the target consumers as to create familiarity and facilitate connotative understanding. Textual delivery is particularly laconic, clear and accurate, as well as attention grabbing (Popova, 2018). A common practice of the advertisers is to capitalise on the use of audience-specific persuasive language such as booster, engagement marker, and self-mention (Gustafsson, 2018). Evidently, the components of an advertisement are socially-constructed; therefore advertisements are capable to be both a reflection of, and to influence the socio-cultural construct and weltanschauung of a certain community. The ideological underpinnings of

advertising have attracted significantly large number of topical research on advertising discourse (Popova, 2018).

### *Women in Advertisements*

One topic that has drawn a consistent interest among researchers is women's portrayal in advertisements (Pan, 2021) and the manipulation of language to express sexist views (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008; Mohd Radzi & Musa, 2017). Irrespective of target audience and advertisement form, be it written or visual, women are often included as part of the promotional campaign of a product or service (Shah & Saher, 2019). Visually, women and parts of their body would be "displayed" in a derogatory, often decorative manner like commodities (Stanković et al., 2018; Bayazit, 2020). Linguistically, word choice and word play would insinuate, emphasise, or/and describe society's perception of women as the passive, submissive, and undignified gender (Bayazit, 2020; Shahwar, 2013). Sex appeal would also commonly be included in the advertisement's narrative; as some advertisers believe in the highly sellable value of combining women and the notion of sex (Gill, 2011; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008; Perez, 2013; Pounders, 2018; Stanković et al., 2018, Mamudu, 2020; Atkinson et al., 2022).

Extant research trend on women vis-à-vis advertisement points towards gender portrayals in advertisements (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008; Jansson & Sahlin, 2016; Stanković et al., 2018; Bayazit, 2020). Bayazit (2020) critically deconstructed the images of women in five conveniently-selected advertisements. The qualitative research found that while the role of women in the society has evolved, the progression is not reflected in the advertisements. For instance, a side profile of a naked woman is presented next to the word "curve" to emphasise on the curvy aspect of a newly-released mobile telephone. In a jeans advertisement, women are portrayed as the weaker and more dependent gender when two masculine-dressed men are shown to be in the process of lowering a woman into a metal barrel. Plakoyiannaki et al. (2008) analysed 600 high-traffic web pages to determine the portrayal of women in online advertisements between February to May 2006. Limiting their search to global brands marketed primarily in English, the results concurred with those of traditional media advertisements; 303 advertisements or 50.5% portrayed women in decorative roles namely being concerned with physical outlook, and as sex objects. The second highest role is the traditional role with 32.17% or 108 advertisements. Specifically, 91 advertisements depicted women as a housewife, while 17 emphasised women's tendency to get dependent (on men).

Jansson and Sahlin (2015) examined 82 full-page advertisements extracted from seven Mexican fashion magazines. A qualitative and quantitative thematic textual analysis of the data revealed six stereotypes of women portrayal in the magazines, namely the 1) Hot lesbian/the Midriff, 2) Miss fairytale, 3) Femme fatale, 4) Bad girl, 5) Victoria's Secret angel and 6) Happy housewife. Out of the six stereotypes, the first five include sexualisation of women, while the last one reemphasised the nurturing ideals that have been traditionally prescribed to women. Jansson and Sahlin's (2015) research also revealed the influence of Western beauty standard in the Mexican fashion magazine advertising practice in the sense that 70% of the models engaged possess Caucasian features and fair skin, while Mexican women typically have deep, warm skin tone. Furthermore, the findings in this research accentuate the misrepresentation of Mexican women and normalise the underlying societal ideals prescribed to women and their roles. Essentially, this research is concurrent with the

fact that Mexican society is grounded on masculinity, and as reflected in the Gender Gap Index (The World Economic Forum, 2014), achieving gender equality is still a challenge in Mexico.

### *Language Use in Advertising*

Research involving language manipulation as an advertising practice are skewed towards uncovering the use of language in invoking inadequacy and amplify insecurity among women. Kuldip et al. (2013) critically analysed the advertisements from two Malaysian magazines using Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. The research found that by using words such as “wrinkles”, “puffiness” and “dark circles”, advertisers have identified and validated the flaws of the target market. Buying the promoted products would “amend” the flaws, and substantiate their fear with the hope of achieving the ideal look. Similarly, Tehseem and Kalsoom (2015) proved that advertisers use vocabulary such as “deep-set wrinkles”, “phenomenon of aging” and “smudge messy” to broker the notion of beauty from their point of view. In this research, ten cosmetic advertisements in a fashion magazine were analysed by using Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotic Theory to understand the process and impacts of ideologising a standardised set of beauty ideals by means of words. On this premise, this study confirms that women generally perceive cosmetic and beauty products as an instrument to meet their expectations of beauty, and their expectation is funded on the brokered ideals by the advertisers.

Asmat and Madiha (2018) investigated the utilisation of language and visuals in beauty product commercials, as well as the techniques employed by publicists to control and affect their potential buyers. Using Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model (1995), Asmat and Madiha (2018) ascertained that advertisers would use negative descriptive words to evoke the feeling of inadequacies. For example, to communicate the need to “lift” something that is “sagging” using an anti-ageing cream, words such as “Revitalift’s Formula” and “Elastic-flex” are used. This will affect women and incite the anxiety of “looking old”, hence psychologically manipulating them into buying the products to stop the ageing process. Mihayo (2018) did a content analysis on the use of language online telecommunication advertisements in Tanzania. Investigating the influence of language in communicating cultural ideologies related to women’s status and symbol in Tanzania, the findings showed that just like in Mexico (Jansson & Sahlin, 2015), the online telco advertisements restate women to an inferior position in comparison to men. As a strategy, it is believed to increase the purchase appeal targeted towards male consumers (Mihayo, 2018).

Notably, the discussions on women in advertisement are mainly framed by Critical discourse analysis, where language used is examined in relation to the context of usage (Kuldip et al., 2013; Asmat & Madiha, 2018; Rahbari et al., 2019; Kenalemang, 2021), Mohd Radzi & Musa (2017) shifted the focus from context to language as the primary carrier of ideology (Mamudu, 2020) by looking into the sexist underpinnings of female representation in cosmetic brand names. Using Mills’ (1998) Feminist Stylistics model, Mohd Radzi & Musa (2017) analysed beauty products’ name at word and clausal level, as well as stylistic features and rhetorical devices. The evidences found that cosmetic names indicate unequal gender differences and endorsement of the patriarchal concept of male domination. Aside from several isolated studies such as Mohd Radzi & Musa (2017), Mill’s feminist stylistics framework is typically used in analysis of women discourse in books (Qayyum et al., 2019; Abd El Azim, 2020; Siregar et al., 2020).

### *Social Media as an Advertising Platform*

An integral component of the advertising mechanism is the advertising medium or avenue (Popova, 2018; Voorveld et al., 2018). Presently, social media applications such as Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram are the fastest-growing advertising platforms (Knoll, 2016; Voorveld et al., 2018); consequently, marginalising the conventional outlets such as television and newspapers (Michaelidou et al., 2022). The impetuses of this development are grounded on social media's ability to provide widespread outreach, instant accessibility, and high interactivity – with the collective outcome of increasing profitability (Voorveld et al., 2018; Vithayatil et al., 2020; Michaleidou et al., 2022). Vithayatil et al. (2020) highlighted that as advertising avenues, social media is superior than their traditional counterparts predominantly in the aspects of interactivity, consumer feedbacks and creativity. Firstly, social media fosters the establishment of consumer communities where exchanges of opinions on a promoted brand could occur. In addition, it also allows businesses to explore and develop effective consumer-supplier communication strategies on the basis of the feedbacks received from the online communities. On similar premise, social media developers have modified and extended their range of functions to support online shopping, or also known as “social commerce” (Vithayathil et al., 2020; Hyun et al., 2022). In-app shoppable features have been invented to create, ease and enrich the selling-and-buying process, as well as the overall shopping experience. These features include product tags, virtual marketplace and shop, click-on-link and shopping cart or list (Sumrak, 2021). Given the influential pull of social media (Hyun et al., 2022) and the growth of social commerce (Pounders, 2018), the area of online social advertising discourse has gained more attention in recent years (Popova, 2018).

### *Social Media Advertisements*

According to Ziyadin et al. (2019, p.4), “...advertising in social media gives a lot of control over the target audience”, henceforth pointing to the greater extent of social media advertising's ideological impacts on the socio-cultural constructs of the world (Alalwan, 2018; Davis, 2018; Mihayo, 2018; Pounders, 2018; Atiyeh, Chahine, & Abou Ghanem, 2021) as compared to any other advertising avenues. Current research suggests emergent evidences of effectiveness in promoting harmful, dangerous or/and unlicensed products and services online such as tobacco, alcohol (Dunlop, Freeman, & Jones, 2016; Atkinson et al., 2022) skincare, slimming product and makeup (Pounders, 2018; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008; Mahsan et al., 2020) fast food and drinks (Coates et al., 2019), plastic surgery (Paul, 2017; Atiyeh et al., 2021) and gambling (Gainsbury et al., 2015). Social media advertising also potentially dissipates the notion of ethics in advertising; observable in the trending practice of hiring an individual who is influential, popular or powerful to be part of a marketing campaign without considering the quality, safety, legality and social consequence of a product or service. For instance, companies promoting gambling as a social activity (Gainsbury et al., 2015) and doctors promoting plastic surgery for beauty enhancement (Paul, 2017).

Social media, and by extension social media advertisements are imperative in reinforcing the culturally defined and idealised imagery of women (Michaelidou et al., 2022). In promoting beauty products online, sellers would tap into existing beauty ideals and then reinforce it (Stanković et al., 2018). This will pressure women into buying the products or engaging in the services that would assist them in achieving the standard of beauty (Pan, 2021). In a study comparing the social media advertising of luxury and non-luxury brands

(Michaelidou et al., 2022), luxury brands are found to be less diverse in their model's physical appearance, and more reliant on female sexualisation, as well as the stereotypical female expressions. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2016), the overall cosmetic procedures have increased by 115% since 2000. One of the primary contributors to this growth is the shift to social media advertising by plastic surgeons and clinics involving beautification, less evasive procedures such as lip filler and Botox injections (Paul, 2017). In time, this strategy could potentially be an etiological impetus for psychological distress and unhealthy habits (Mair, 2019) such as depression and eating disorders.

Marketers, advertisers, or companies who use social media for advertising are aware of its massive potential to influence social beliefs and nurture biased narratives (Pounders, 2018). More than just a feedback, words used on social media represent the consumers' identity, their fundamental ideologies as well as meaning-making practices (Voorveld et al., 2018; Mileva, 2022). This allows businesses to collect user-engagement data, such as consumer preference and purchasing behaviours (Michaelidou et al., 2022) to be curate online marketing strategies that are highly customised to their target market. In addition to economical and ethical purviews, the socio-cultural significance of online advertising has made it rewarding area to be researched on (Popova, 2018). In spite of this, advertising research, particularly on the topic of women, are largely restricted to conventional media (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008) such as magazine and television. Taking into account of the ideological significance of language in the context of women discourse and the paucity in social media advertising research, this study implemented Mill's (1998) feminist stylistic framework to examine Malay beauty product advertisements found on Instagram.

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to look at how women are portrayed in Malay beauty product advertisements on Instagram in relation to the language used by the online vendors or sellers. Focusing on the stylistic elements of the advertisements, Mill's (1998) feminist stylistics approach served as the basis in 1) identifying the stylistic features present in Malay beauty product advertisements on Instagram; and 2) assessing the degree to which these features contribute to the representation of women.

#### METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, text analysis was used to examine the data obtained from Instagram, a social media application. The analysis procedure was anchored on the feminist stylistic analysis approach by Mills (1998). Feminist stylistic analysis is concerned with uncovering the depiction of sexism in a text, and breaking down the way the perspective, agency, metaphor, or transitivity of a text are strongly linked with gender issues. To do so, feminist stylistics proposes a system for the texts to be investigated at three distinct edges, namely word, phrase, and discourse. At the word and phrase level, the analysis was guided by the stylistic qualities outlined by Verdonk (2002), namely compounding, blending, coinage, sexist words, sexual connotations, male connotations and animal connotations.

Table 1: Stylistic features and explanation

No	Stylistic features	Explanation
1.	Compounding	the process of creating a new word by combining two or more words (free morphemes). Example: <b>sugarbomb</b> (sugar + bomb)
2.	Blending	The process of merging the start of one word and the end of another to create a new word with a new meaning. Example: <b>lashgasm</b> mascara (lash + orgasm)
3.	Coinage	The process by which a new word is generated, either intentionally or accidentally, frequently appearing to come from nothing and lacking the usual mechanisms for word development. Example: <b>beautenizer</b> fiberwig
4.	Sexist words	Words of discriminatory nature; used to belittle, degrade, and trivialise women, their activities, actions, and/or any other aspects associated with women. Example: <b>hot</b> mama
5.	Sexual connotations	Subjecting a person to any act of physical intimacy. Example: <b>foreplay, orgasm</b>
6.	Male connotations	A sentiment or notion that, though it need not be a part of the word's definition, is implied by a specific phrase that is associated with men. Example: Anita <b>boytoy</b>
7.	Animal connotations	a sentiment or notion that, though it need not be a part of the word's definition, is implied by a specific phrase that is associated with animals. Example: <b>zebra</b> mascara

At the discourse level, the analytical process was guided by Mills (1998) description and evaluation protocol, as shown in Figure 1.

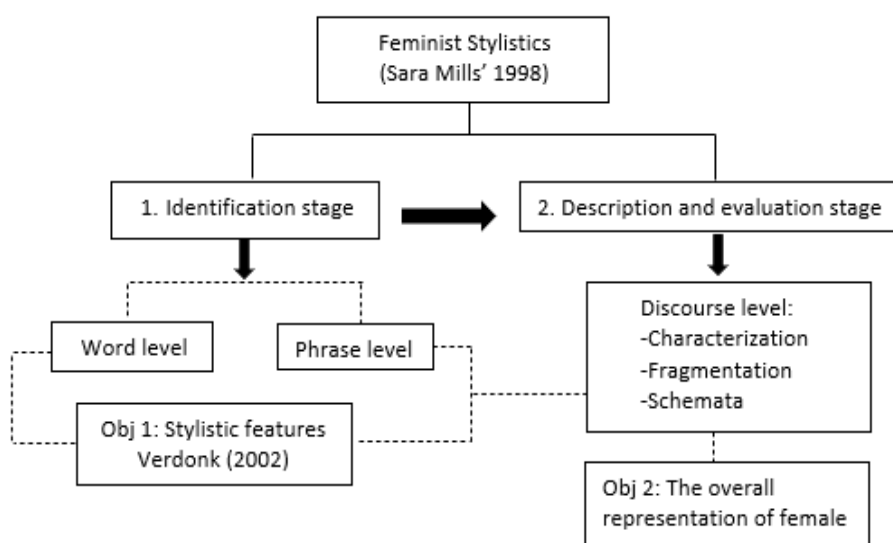


Figure 1: Feminist Stylistics theoretical framework

In this research, compounding, blending, coinage, sexist words, sexual connotations, animal connotations, and masculine connotations were the only stylistic aspects that the researchers specifically examined at the word and phrasal level. At the discourse level, the focus was only on fragmentation and schemata.

#### Data Collection Procedure

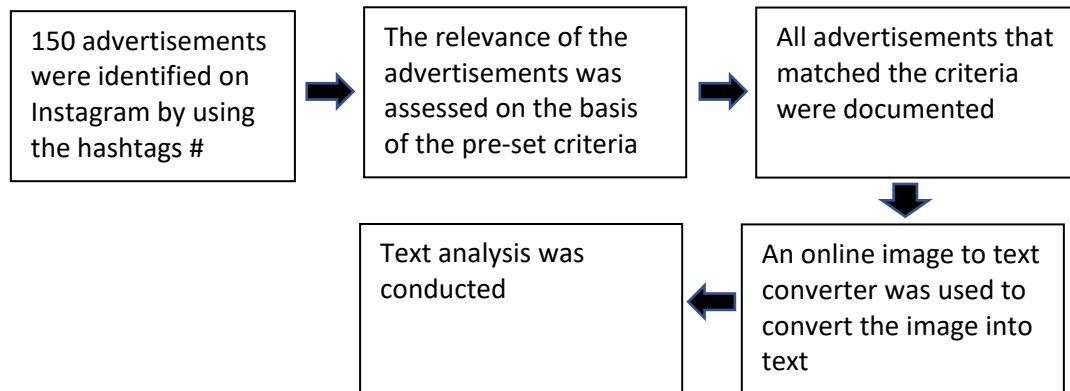


Figure 2: Data collection procedure

Figure 1 depicts the data collection process. The data collection process was conducted between late 2019 and early 2020 on Instagram. Using hashtags (#) such as “*produk kecantikan Malaysia*” (Malaysian beauty products), “*nak cantik*” (I want to be beautiful), and “*suamisayang*” (my lovely husband), the advertisements were then filtered using a pre-established selection criteria. The requirements were: 1) advertisements must be in the Malay language; 2) the word counts for each advertisement must only be between 50 and 200 words; and 3) each vendor account must have at least 1000 followers. After the screening process, 150 Malay advertisements for makeup, skin care, and weight loss were found across several beauty categories. The advertisements that met the selection criteria were screen shot and then uploaded onto an online image to text converter (see Figure 1). The conversion of captured images into text was pivotal to commence the textual analysis process. Figure 3 is a sample of an advertisement accepted for analysis, while Figure 4 is a sample of a rejected advertisement. The number of the followers of the rejected advertisement is shown in Figure 5.

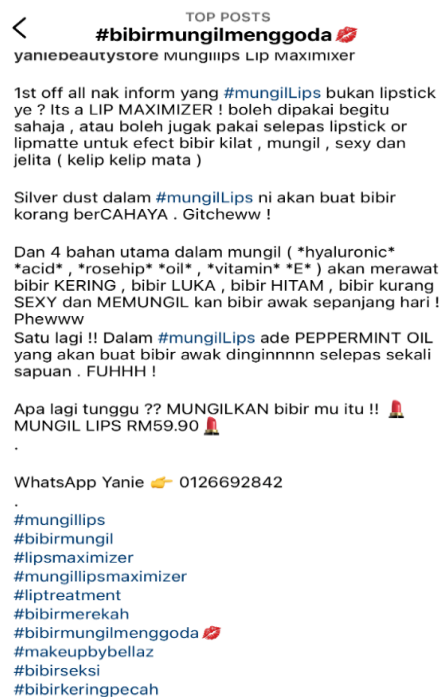


Figure 3: Sample of accepted advertisement

The advertisement in Figure 4 fulfilled the criteria required; the text word count is more than 50 words, ii) the vendor account has 4676 followers and iii) it was published in 2019.



Figure 4: Sample of a rejected advertisement



Figure 5: Sample of a rejected advertisement

The advertisement in Figure 4 was rejected because i) the vendor account has only 505 followers (see Figure 5) and ii) the post was published in 2015. The number of followers is a critical consideration because it is deduced that followers' amount correlates with the scope of outreach. The greater the follower count, the more people are anticipated to have viewed the advertisement.



*Data Analysis Procedure: Word Level*

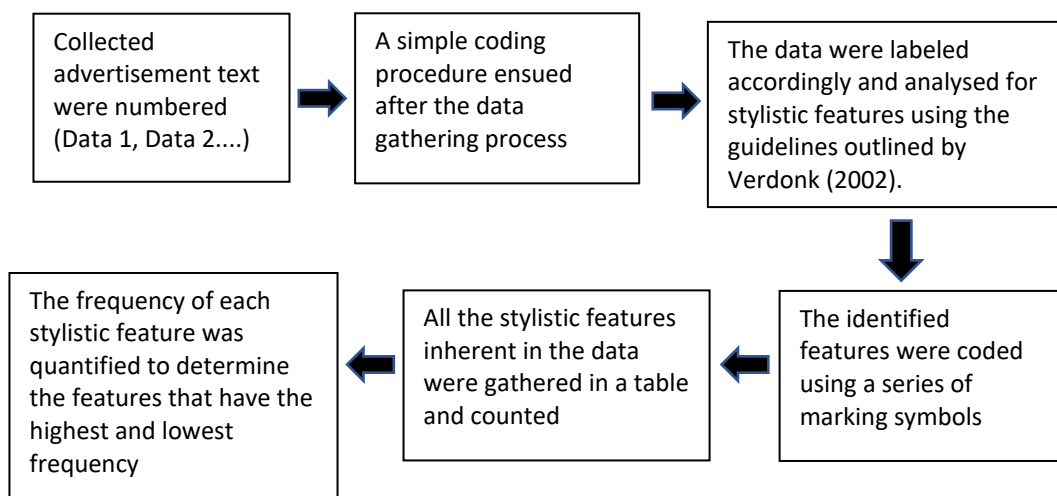


Figure 6: The analysis procedure at the word level

After the data collection procedure, the analysis segued into the stylistic feature identification process; beginning with coding the advertisement texts accordingly using numbers. In total, there were 150 data, labeled as Data 1, Data 2 up till Data 150. Next, another coding procedure ensued. Each extracted data was examined for the Verdonk (2002)-described stylistic characteristics. These seven stylistic features are coinage, sexist terms, sexual implications, compounding, mixing, male connotations, and animal connotations (Verdonk, 2002). Each stylistic feature was labeled using a series of marking symbols as shown in Table 2. The outcome from the stylistic features identification was later on recorded in Table 3. The final process for this stage involved quantifying the stylistic features that are present in each data, before a final count was made to determine the stylistic feature with the highest and lowest frequency.

Table 2: Marking symbols and explanation

Symbol	Explanation	Highlight Colour
CP	Compounding	CP
B	Blending	B
C	Coinage	C
SW	Sexist Word	SW
SC	Sexual Connotation	SC
MC	Male Connotation	MC
AC	Animal Connotation	AC

Table 3: Table for stylistic features

No of advertisement	CP	B	C	SW	SC	MC	AC
1	1		1	2			
2			1				
3	1						1
4							1
5		2					
6		1				1	
<b>Total</b>	36	19	16	218	53	59	11

### Example of Data Analysis Procedure

#### Data 3

yaniebeautystore Mungilips Lip Maximizer

1st off all nak inform yang #mungilLips bukan lipstick ye ? Its a LIP MAXIMIZER ! boleh dipakai begitu sahaja , atau boleh jugak pakai selepas lipstick or lipmatte untuk effect bibir kilat , mungil , sexy dan jelita ( kelip kelip mata )

Silver dust dalam #mungilLips ni akan buat bibir korang berCAHAYA . Gitcheww !

Dan 4 bahan utama dalam mungil ( \*hyaluronic\* \*acid\* , \*rosehip\* \*oil\* , \*vitamin\* \*E\* ) akan merawat bibir KERING , bibir LUKA , bibir HITAM , bibir kurang SEXY dan MEMUNGIL kan bibir awak sepanjang hari ! Phewww Satu lagi !! Dalam #mungilLips ade PEPPERMINT OIL yang akan buat bibir awak dinginnnnn selepas sekali sapuan . FUHHH !

Apa lagi tunggu ?? MUNGILKAN bibir mu itu!! MUNGIL LIPS RM59.90

Figure 7: Data sample

Figure 7 is an example of an advertisement obtained from doing an Instagram search using the hashtag #bibirmungilmenggoda. It was then numbered as Data X or Y to ease the process of analysis. Next, the researcher ensued a simple coding procedure to the identified stylistic features in the data. As shown in Table 3, there were a total of two stylistic features identified namely compounding, and animal connotation.

#### Data Analysis Procedure: Phrasal and Discourse Level

The second phase of analysis continued with the ii) description and iii) evaluation procedure. The stylistic features present in the advertisements were described by adding the phrases and context in which the features are present in. Finally, in the evaluation stage, the discourse meanings were decoded and clarified. According to Mills (1998), fragmentation, characterisation, and schemata can be used as themes to categorise and assess female representation at the discourse level. When mapped to Verdonk's (2002) stylistic features, "characterisation" refers to the compounding, blending, and coinage stylistic features that express stereotypical accreditation towards females, while "fragmentation" refers to sexist

words. Finally, “schemata” is matched to male connotation, sexual connotation, and animal connotation. In this study, only fragmentation and schemata were analysed. Table 4 and 5 illustrate the execution of the description and evaluation exercise.

Table 4: Example of word-to-discourse level description analysis

Stylistic features	Data No	Advertisement Text (Description -Discourse)	Words that contribute to the representation of female	Phrase breakdown
CP	1	Mungilips Lip Maximizer 1st off all nak inform yang #mungilLips bukan lipstick ye ? Its a LIP MAXIMIZER !...'	mungilips	mungil + lips

Table 5: Example of word to discourse level evaluation analysis

Stylistic feature	Data No	Example	Analysis description (Discourse Evaluation)
CP	1	mungilips      mungil + lips	Women are characterised through use of stylistic feature compounding word “mungil” lips. “Mungil” is the Malay word for plump and pouty, so “mungil” lips refer to plump and pouty lips.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Stylistic Features and Notional Representations of Females in Advertisement*

Table 6 reports the stylistic features identified in the advertisements, and the frequency of occurrence. Table 7 on the other hand provides the contextual evidences of the stylistic features’ occurrence in the texts analysed.

Table 6: Frequency of stylistic features used by sellers on Instagram

Stylistic features	Frequencies	%
Compounding	36	8.74
Blending	19	4.61
Coinage	16	3.88
Sexist words	218	52.92
Sexual connotations	53	12.86
Male connotations	59	14.32
Animal connotations	11	2.67

Table 7: Stylistic features in beauty product advertisements on Instagram

Stylistic features	No of advertisement	Examples in advertisement	Words that contribute to Female representation	Description
CP	1	* MungilLips Lip Maximizer 1st off all nak inform yang #mungilLips bukan lipstick ye ? Its a LIP MAXIMIZER !...'	Mungilips	mungil + lips
B	5	'...Tak mau la risau2 sayang. Trudolly & Vdolly by Fazura dapat bantu setelkan...'	Trudolly Vdolly	true + dolly vagina + dolly
C	1	'Mungilips Lip Maximizer 1st off all nak inform yang #mungilLips bukan lipstick ye ? Its a LIP MAXIMIZER !...'	Maximizer	-
SW	1	'...selepas lipstick or lipmatte untuk efect bibir kilat , mungil , sexy dan jelita..'	mungil , sexy	-
SC	79	'...kurang bernafsu bila bersama suami? Kami ada penyelesaiannya... PUCUK HARUMNITA...'	Bersama	-
MC	37	'..Cik Manja rasa best sangat harini. Sebab apa ?? Sebab dah amalkan rahsia pengikat kasih dengan AbangArjuna..'	abang , arjuna	-
AC	77	'...Trpesona apabila melihat aset mu yg bgtu menggoda. berbody ramping seperti kerengga...'	Kerengga	-

### *Sexist Words and Fragmentation*

Out of the 150 texts analysed, sexist word is the most frequently used stylistic feature (52.92%).

Table 8: Advertisements containing sexist word stylistic feature

Stylistic features	No of advertisement	Examples in advertisement
SW	2	gebu, ramping
	3	mungil, sexy
	10	Montok
	108	menggelambir, kendur
	78	montok, seksi, kecut , kendur
	93	tegang , lembik

These sexist words were used in relation to institutionalising “desirable” imagery of women; prescribing physical traits that would appear to be sexually attractive to men. Words such as “*menggelambir*” (flabby), “*kendur*” (loose), “*kecut*” (shrunken) and “*lembik*” (weak) were used to imply feelings of inadequacy in the targeted female group. The miracle-working solution being advertised would “fix” the flaw, as evidenced by the findings’ scatological and anatomical references to “*bibir mungil*” or “plump lips”, “*montok*” or “supple (breasts)”, “*body gebu’ ramping*” or “fair and slim”.



Figure 8: Data 3

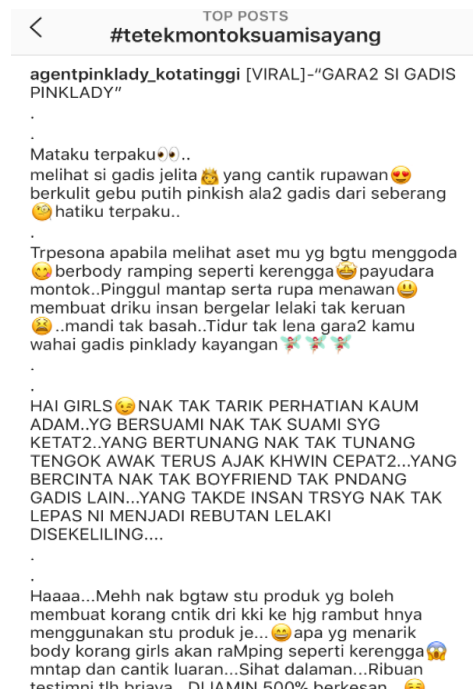


Figure 9: Data 2

Figure 8 demonstrates the advertiser using the term “*sexy*” and “*mungil*” to refer to the female body parts specifically the lips. Lips are typically fragmented when described vis-à-vis a woman’s physical outlook. Conversely for men, they are usually described as a whole. Besides that, in this post, the advertiser invoked the notion of full-lips or plump lips being an

attractive feature. Additionally, plump lips are a symbol of sexual excitement; prompting advertisers to use this socially-constructed perception to entice women into buying a product that would serve a sensuous effect on the lips. In the analysis of Data 2, words like “*gebu*” (curvy) and “*ramping*” (slim) and “*pinggul mantap*” or “beautiful hips” are fragmented to emphasise on the expected physical outlook of a woman’s body. These “thin-ideal” terms are used in relation to a man’s desires for an ideal woman: “*membuat diriku insan bergelar lelaki tak keruan*” or “(your physical beauty) has made me, a mere man, feeling restless (with sexual desires)”.

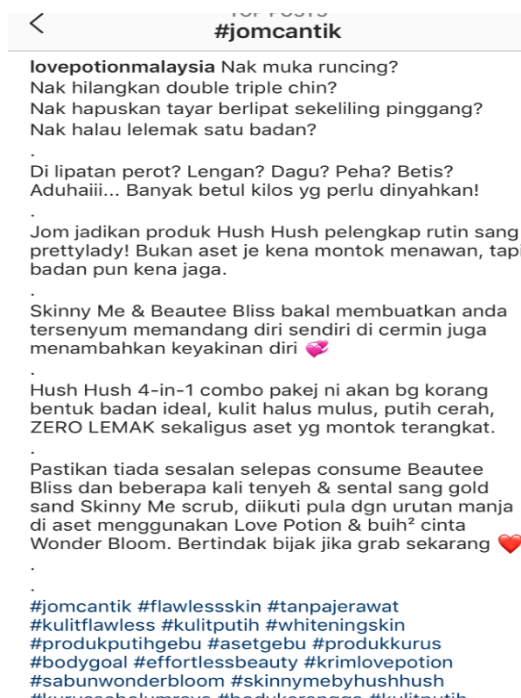


Figure 10: Data 10

The phrase “*montok*” was employed by the advertiser to describe a woman's breast in the study of Data 10. Evidently, as exemplified by this advertisement, women are often fragmented into anatomical elements. “*Montok*” means “supple and plump” while “*montok terangkat*” refers to “enhanced suppleness and extra plump”; henceforth prescribing characteristics of an ideal body type for a woman. In this case, beauty is equated to having plump and supple breasts. Additionally, the advertisement objectified women by alluding to their breasts as an “asset”; a “valuable possession” highly-priced due to its superior sex appeal. Fragmentation of body parts has also pointed out to women (in relation to men), the parts of their body which men would find desirable- in the form, shape and state that they find attractive. The usage of these phrases and its connotation frequently cause women to feel inadequate of their own body; oftentimes when the condition of the isolated body parts such as breasts is not as prescribed. To feel confident of their own body equates to having the “improved” appearance; thus encouraging them to buy the product.

#### Male Connotation, Sexual Connotation and Animal Connotation and Schemata

Male connotation (14.32%) and sexual connotation (12.86%) are the second and third most frequently used stylistic feature.

Table 4: Advertisements containing male connotation, sexual connotation and animal stylistic Features

Stylistic features	No of advertisement	Examples in advertisement	Analysis description (Discourse Evaluation)
SC	79	<i>Bersama</i>	In analysing schemata of advertisement text, women are often portrayed as sexual objects that are used to satisfy men. For instance, “ <i>malam pertama</i> ”, “ <i>pengantin baru</i> ” and “ <i>orgasm</i> ” are examples of how women are depicted as sex objects. These explicit terms are also a reflection of the lack of respect shown towards women.
	81	<i>hubungan intim , malam pertama</i>	
	90	<i>klimaks, malam pertama, pengantin baru</i>	
	91	<i>bersama, ereksi</i>	
MC	4	<i>Suami</i>	In analysing advertisement text, advertisers would utilise male connotations such as “ <i>abang</i> ”, “ <i>lelaki</i> ” and “ <i>suami</i> ” to re-emphasise the superior position of men, and the fact that women only exist in the presence of a man. Advertisers would also try to invoke the feeling of inadequacy in women in terms of their attractiveness and ability to satisfy their “ <i>abang</i> ” or “ <i>suami</i> ” in bed. Women are expected to be visually and sexually pleasing for their husband or partner, and this could be achieved by buying the product advertised.
	37	<i>abang, arjuna</i>	
	40	Bro	
AC	77, 78, 80	<i>Kerengga</i>	“ <i>Kerengga</i> ” or red ant connotes the meaning that every woman should have a body like a “ <i>Kerengga</i> ” which is slim and sexy.  Equating a woman to an insect intends to reduce women into a marginalised class, one that is beneath humans.
	14	<i>Ikan masin</i>	“ <i>Ikan masin</i> ” or fermented fish is used by the advertiser to describe the smell of a woman’s genitalia. Women are implored to avoid such situation as it would deter them from pleasing a man sexually. Targeting married women, the advertisers also insinuate the idea of husbands straying away from their wife because they are not happy with the condition of the “organ that serves them pleasure”.

nadiera\_sundara MAKIN CANTIK , MAKIN LENTIKKKK .MAKIN TAKUT LAAS SUAMI YOU ALLS MAKAN LUAR !!!  
 NAK KURUS !! NAK LENTIK !! KEMBALI RAMPING !! DARRA ASMARAS Pasti Bantu Anda 🙏  
 Dapat Body Idaman 🙏🥰🥰 Rugi sangat2 sapa x try.. !!!  
 Nak aset montok tapi pinggang macam kerengga !!  
 Yang nak berat ideal !!  
 Nak berat turun sbelum kawen !!  
 Nak berat turun yg mencanak naik lepas kawen tu !!  
 Dapatkan DARRA ASMARAS sekarang !!  
 Sumpah ampa xkan menyesal 🙏🙏 Ubat wanita seksii Paling Berkesan !!  
 100% bahan Herba !!  
 100% Tiada Dadah !!  
 100% Tiada Bahan Terlarang !!  
 Tiada Kesan Sampingan !!  
 Ampa nak kurus , nak sihat, nak ketad.. Penatkan jadi GEMOK . KURUS LIDI !!

'...En Hubby tegur miss P dah tonggek cantik berisi...' '...Hubungan suami isteri dah macam perantin baru lah sis...'	Mr hubby (my husband) told me that my Miss P (buttocks) are now fuller, and more beautiful. Our relationship has returned to our early days of marriage, we are like newlyweds...
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Figure 11: Data 4

Figure 12: Data Excerpt 1

In Figure 11 and 12, men are frequently referred to as "*abang*" or "brother," "and "*suami*" or "husband," which strengthens the idea that they are "protectors" of women while also demonstrating their dominance over them (see Figure 11). The research demonstrates how women have been socialised to judge their own body image based on the opinions of others. The advertisers also used the term "*Suami*" to instil the feeling of insecurity in women where men, particularly their husband is concerned. The used of the phrase "*suami you alls makan luar*" (to avoid your husband from having an affair) concretises women's fear of losing their husband, a commanding figure in their life. The only way to keep the "protector" interested and satisfied is by maintaining or improving on their body shape and appearance (seen in Figure 15), ultimately achieving the allusion of "perfection". This finding is coherent with the studies conducted by Mihayo (2018), Bayazit (2020) and Jansson and Sahlin (2015), in which it is concluded that in some communities, the position of women would always be below men, hence they are objectified to serve the superior. Drawing from the patriarchally constructed perception that women lack autonomy and are over-reliant on men for economic stability and physical safety, this portrayal reaffirms the perceived fragility of women and their body.



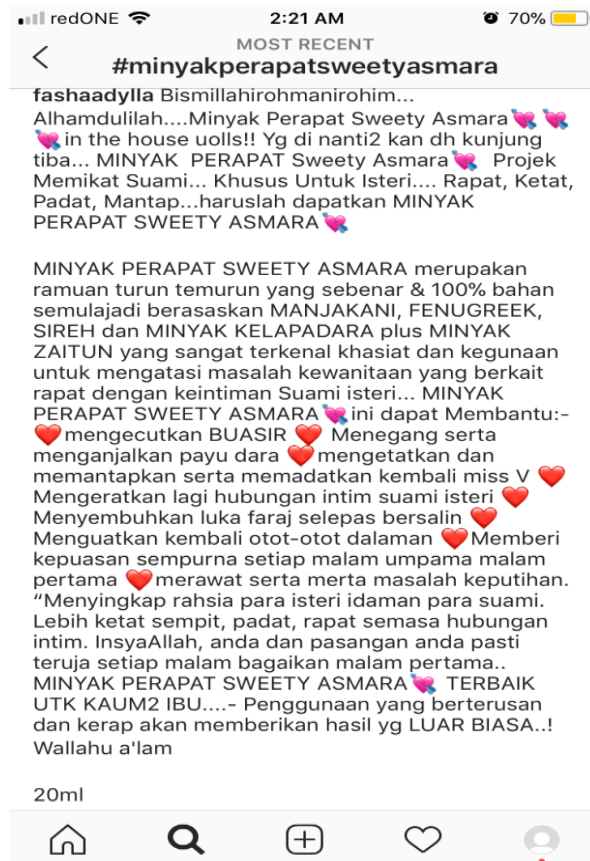


Figure 13: in Data 8

Conversely, colloquial concepts such as “*asset*” referring to a woman’s breast and bottom, “*hubungan intim...seperti malam pertama*” or “*sexual intercourse...just like the first night (consummation of marriage)*”, as well as word choice such as “*sexy*” and “*seductive*” or “*menggoda*” demonstrate the clear sexualisation of women portrayed in Instagram advertising discourse. The presence of these words also depicts women as a sexual object whose primary purpose is to gratify men's appetites. In Figure 13, advertiser used terms “*hubungan intim*” and “*malam pertama*”. This finding was in line with the findings of Habiba (2010), who found that women are frequently portrayed as ready-made sexual objects. Habiba (2010) also highlighted the fact that advertisers tend to use language that portrays women as sexual objects “*ever ready*” to satisfy men’s sexually. This is reflected in her findings, where words like “*play*” and “*naked*” were heavily used in the beauty advertisements found in magazines.

#### *Animal Stylistic Feature*

The use of animal metaphors is another strategy that stereotypes, sexualises and accentuates the standard of beauty that has been set for women. This is evident at Figure 14, where the advertisers described an ideal physical silhouette using terms like “*kerengga*” or “*red ants*”.



Figure 14: Analysis of Animal Connotation stylistic feature in Data 14

Equating women to a habit or characteristic of animals generally connotes a negative sentiment. Terms like “*ikan masin*” in reference to a “vagina that smells like fermented fish” suggest that women must maintain their intimate area as to not bring displeasure to their partner or husband. Mohd Radzi and Musa (2017) concluded that the usual practice of utilising animal or animal behaviour to describe women derives from the cultural reality that advertisers are used to. Animal references and the accompanying adjectives used to describe women are indicators of their position in the society; “*kerengga*” or red ant and “*ikan masin*” or “fermented fish” are not allusions of strength or power. As argued by Jansson and Sahlin (2015) and Mihayo (2018), in most parts of the world such as Mexico and Malaysia, research has proven that women are not placed on the same pedestal as men. The animalistic reference and overt sexualisation of women’s body parts and the notion of their femininity reaffirm the towering prominence of masculinity, while at the same time reinforces the decorative role that they society has prescribed to women.

### *The Notion of “Sex Sells”*

From the findings, the element of sex either by means of hypersexualisation or objectification of women is still a consistent feature in advertising discourse, including online. It is essential to note that in this research (see Figure 12, 13 and 14), the notion of sex is intertwined with “pleasing” men, for instance, to look a certain way or take good care of a certain area to ensure the satisfaction of the husband. This also indicates the perceived positioning of women in the Malay society, which is inferior and non-counterparty to men. In the western context, the utilisation of sex is nothing new (see Mohd Radzi & Musa, 2017; Kenalemang, 2021). However, its expression is isolated from men, and remains predominantly within the desire to fulfill and maintain the expected standard of beauty (Pounders, 2018; Kenalemang, 2021). Recent observations of Western advertising have demonstrated a modification in the

narrative; whereby sex is ascribed to women symbolically to indicate their power over men, with the insinuation that women are the powerful gender (Mamudu, 2020). In other advertising campaigns, sex appeal is likened to women empowerment and the freedom of choice (Kenalemang, 2021). Some social media advertisements, such as those by alcohol companies have drastically limited or refrained the usage of sex in selling their products (Atkinson et al., 2022), focusing instead to perpetuate messages of feminism and equality (Atkinson et al., 2022). The change in the discourse is indicative of a positive cultural shift in the social positioning and role of women occurring in the West, which is not observed in the findings of this research.

#### *Social Media as an Advertising Platform and The Propagator of Positive Changes*

The inability of traditional advertising platforms to facilitate two-way communication, interactivity and wider outreach have consequently limited the discourse on women's portrayal in advertisements beyond the academic purview. This is not the case for social media; as a highly inclusive and accessible space, the discussions occurring on social media are more nuanced, current, frequent, and robust. According to Pounders (2018), the call for change in advertising practices vis-à-vis women occurred largely via social media (Pounders, 2018); where advertisers in particular are subjected to public scrutiny and direct feedbacks from consumers. Therefore, Pounders (2018), Atkinson et al. (2022) and Michaelidou et al. (2022) in their investigation have discovered positive portrayals of women on social media in recent times. In this study, similar to traditional media platforms, advertisements on social media seem to reinforce the biased and sexist perception of women to the public. Given the results of current research, this outcome is potentially weighted by the community being examined, and their perceived notion of women.

The impact scale of social media and by extension social media advertising on the society is undoubtedly colossal. However, at present, there is also no institutional or governmental control on social media in relation to advertising activities and practices. Several new policies, practices, and initiative have been established to guide practitioners and protect the physical and mental health of consumers, as well as those in the advertising industry such as models (Pounders, 2018), but they are non-specific to social media advertising. As such, in some communities the consistent invocations of women's inadequacy and pressure to meet the standardised beauty ideals remain rampant in the online sphere, and unmediated by the authorities.

#### CONCLUSION

This study was motivated by the need to determine the stylistic features and the influential extent of the said features on the representation of female in beauty products advertisements. While numerous studies have observed how women are portrayed in advertising, few have concentrated on studying the stylistic features' contributions to the female representation, particularly in the context of the Malay community and social media. In the field of advertising language, this research has narrowed the existing research gap by providing evidence-based grounds for improvements to be made on the current social media advertising practice; particularly in terms of language appropriateness. Socio-culturally, this research has established a typology of women representations, particularly from the Malay community in beauty product advertisements. The findings substantiate the urgency to create awareness on the advertisers' manipulative strategies which are essentially

detrimental toward the establishment of a well-informed, self-assured and confident female community in Malaysia. Ultimately, this study empowers and liberates women from the standards, ideals and expectations that have been prescribed to them since time in memoriam, and reclaim their purchasing rights. As discussed in the earlier literature review section, Malaysia is not the only community in which women are represented negatively and manipulated by certain sections of the society into purchasing products and services so that they could feel accepted, loved and respected (see Bayazit, 2020; Mihayo, 2018; Newaz, 2017; Paul, 2017). Given the magnitude of this research's findings particularly in realigning the construct of women, future research should look into advertisements of other products and services on social media, such as food and beverages, clothes and household goods. Researchers should also conduct research similar to this in the context of other countries, and compare the results so that a comprehensive, bias-free and ethical compendium of online advertising practices could be established and adapted by advertisers.

#### BIODATA

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