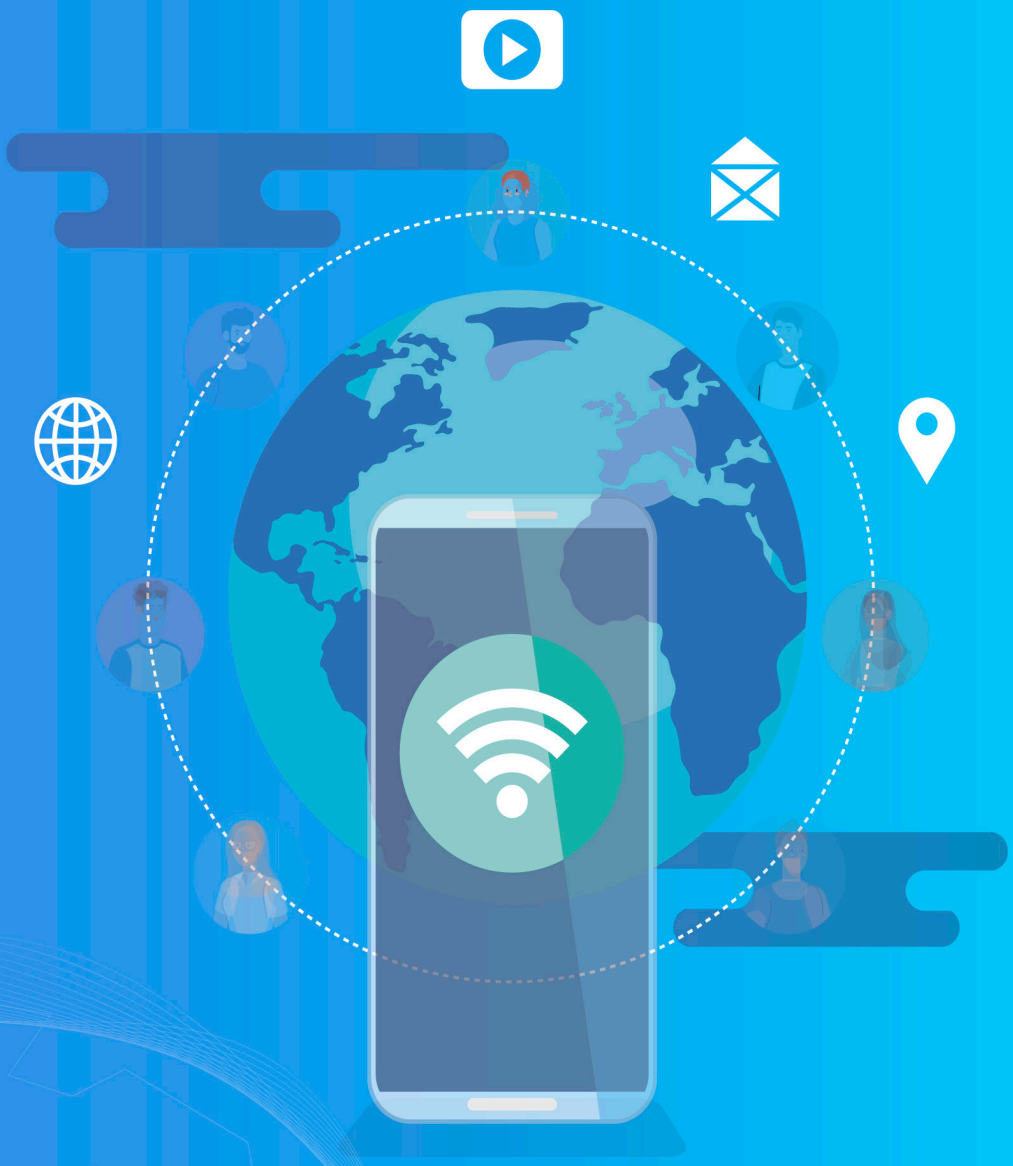
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Whitening Ideals in TikTok Platforms: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Soap Product Descriptions in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to critically analyze the discourse in TikTok product descriptions of whitening soaps in the Philippines, focusing on textual, discursive, and social practices. Guided by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, the study sought to explore how verbal and visual features, production and circulation strategies, and broader social ideologies construct and normalize skin-whitening discourse. A qualitative research design was employed. Fifteen TikTok advertisements of popular whitening soap brands were purposively sampled. Data collection involved transcribing verbal content, screenshotting visual elements, and coding features based on linguistic categories and visual features. Data analysis followed Fairclough's CDA framework, examining the construction of textual meaning, discursive practices, and social ideologies. Findings revealed that advertisements consistently employ hyperbolic claims ("10x whitening," "extreme brightening"), scientific terminology, and K-beauty aesthetics to construct whitening as desirable, attainable, and modern. Visual strategies, including pastel and white color schemes, glowing filters, and before-and-after imagery, reinforce this discourse. Discursive practices highlight influencer-mediated promotion, rapid circulation, and algorithmic amplification on TikTok. Socially, the product descriptions reproduce colorist ideologies, associate light skin with femininity, youthfulness, and social mobility, and normalize globalized beauty standards in the Philippine context. In conclusion, TikTok whitening soap advertisements operate as multimodal texts that shape consumer perceptions through verbal, visual, and social strategies. Recommendations include promoting ethical advertising practices, raising consumer awareness of colorism, and encouraging further research into the psychological and sociocultural impacts of beauty marketing on social media.

INTRODUCTION

The global beauty industry has positioned skin-whitening products as one of the most profitable sectors of the cosmetics market, particularly across Asia, where lighter skin has long been associated with attractiveness, youthfulness, social status, and economic opportunity (Glenn, 2008). While skin whitening is often marketed as a cosmetic practice that enhances appearance and confidence, scholars argue that it is deeply embedded in historical, cultural, and socioeconomic structures that privilege fair skin over darker complexions (Hunter, 2011). Consequently, beauty advertisements do more than promote skincare products; they function as cultural texts that construct and reinforce ideals of beauty, femininity, and social identity.

In the Philippines, skin-whitening products remain among the most popular personal care commodities, with whitening soaps being particularly affordable and widely accessible across different socioeconomic groups. According to a 2023 Nielsen consumer report, more than 60% of Filipino consumers purchased whitening products within a year, reflecting the continued demand for skin-lightening cosmetics. This popularity is closely linked to long-standing colorist beliefs rooted in the country's colonial past, where Spanish and American rule associated lighter skin with privilege, education, modernity, and higher social status. Although contemporary advertising rarely promotes whitening through overt racial narratives, fair skin continues to be represented as a desirable attribute associated with confidence, cleanliness, professionalism, and success. Such representations demonstrate how historical color hierarchies remain embedded in contemporary beauty discourse.

The emergence of social media has transformed the production and circulation of beauty advertising. Unlike traditional forms of advertising, digital platforms allow brands to combine visual storytelling, influencer endorsements, and interactive content to reach consumers more directly and persuasively. Among these platforms, TikTok has become one of the most influential spaces for beauty marketing because of its algorithm-driven content distribution, short-form videos, and extensive use of user-generated content. With millions of active users in the Philippines, TikTok has evolved beyond an entertainment platform into a digital marketplace where brands, influencers, and consumers collaboratively shape beauty ideals and consumption practices. Through product demonstrations, skincare routines, before-and-after transformations, and influencer testimonials, whitening advertisements become integrated into everyday digital experiences, increasing their visibility and persuasive influence.

Previous studies have consistently shown that the

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intersection of colonial history, globalization, gender, consumer culture, and transnational beauty industries influences skin-whitening practices. Glenn (2008) argues that skin-lightening reflects global systems of racialized beauty ideals that privilege whiteness as a marker of desirability and social advantage. Similarly, Li *et al.* (2008) found that whitening advertisements frequently employ scientific language and exaggerated claims of efficacy to legitimize skin-lightening products. Research has likewise highlighted the growing influence of Korean popular culture in promoting ideals such as glass skin, translucence, and flawless complexion, which have increasingly merged with local beauty standards across Asia (Elfving-Hwang, 2018). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that whitening advertisements are not merely commercial messages but ideological texts that construct and normalize particular standards of beauty.

Despite these scholarly contributions, important gaps remain. Existing research has predominantly examined skin whitening from the perspectives of consumer behavior, marketing, sociology, and psychology. At the same time, relatively few studies have explored how whitening ideologies are constructed through the interaction of verbal language and visual representation within social media advertising. Furthermore, TikTok has received limited attention despite its rapid emergence as one of the most influential platforms for beauty marketing in the Philippines. Previous studies have also tended to analyze either textual or visual elements in isolation, yielding only a partial understanding of how multimodal resources work together to communicate ideological meanings.

To address these gaps, this study employs Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to examine selected TikTok advertisements featuring fifteen whitening soap brands marketed in the Philippines. Integrating multimodal discourse analysis with Fairclough's framework enables the investigation of how linguistic choices, visual semiotic resources, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural structures collectively construct whitening as a desirable aesthetic identity. Specifically, the study examines how these advertisements represent beauty through language and imagery, how such meanings are produced and circulated within TikTok's participatory digital environment, and how they reproduce broader ideologies related to colorism, gender, globalization, and consumer culture.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to critically analyze the discourse of whitening soap products on TikTok by examining how these advertisements construct meanings at the textual, discursive, and social levels. Specifically, it seeks to address the following main questions:

1. How do the verbal and visual elements of whitening soap advertisements on TikTok construct meanings related to beauty and skin whitening?
2. How are these meanings produced, circulated, and interpreted within TikTok as a digital marketing platform?
3. How do these advertisements reflect, reinforce, or challenge broader social ideologies such as beauty standards, colorism, and consumer culture in the Philippines?

Theoretical Background

This study is primarily anchored in Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by theories of multimodality, colorism, and global beauty discourse. These perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive framework for examining how TikTok whitening soap advertisements construct meanings through language and visual representation while simultaneously reflecting broader sociocultural ideologies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideologies, and inequalities are produced, reproduced, and challenged (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). Unlike approaches that examine language solely as a linguistic system, Fairclough argues that discourse both shapes and is shaped by the social structures in which it operates. Consequently, advertisements should not be understood merely as persuasive commercial texts but as ideological discourses that participate in constructing social realities and cultural values.

Fairclough (1995) proposes that discourse should be analyzed through three interconnected dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual dimension focuses on the linguistic and semiotic features of communication, including vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, visual symbolism, and other multimodal resources that contribute to meaning-making. In the context of whitening soap advertisements, this level examines how lexical choices such as whitening, brightening, glass skin, and 10× whitening, together with visual elements such as color palettes, product packaging, and model representation, construct particular understandings of beauty and desirability.

The second dimension, discursive practice, investigates how discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed. Fairclough emphasizes that texts derive meaning through processes of production and interpretation that involve multiple social actors. Within TikTok, whitening advertisements are produced by cosmetic companies, influencers, and content creators; distributed through algorithmic recommendation systems, hashtags, and influencer marketing; and interpreted, shared, and reproduced by consumers through comments, testimonials, reviews, and transformation videos. This perspective enables the study to examine how platform affordances contribute to the circulation and reinforcement of whitening discourse.

The third dimension, social practice, situates discourse within broader historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Fairclough argues that discourse contributes to

the maintenance of ideological structures by naturalizing particular beliefs and social norms. In the Philippine context, whitening advertisements operate within longstanding systems of colorism, colonial mentality, gendered beauty expectations, consumer culture, and globalization. Through this analytical level, the study explores how TikTok advertisements reproduce dominant beauty ideologies while presenting them as natural, desirable, and socially legitimate.

Fairclough's framework is particularly appropriate because it allows for a comprehensive analysis of whitening advertisements beyond their persuasive language. It facilitates an examination of how linguistic and visual resources interact with platform-mediated communication and broader sociocultural structures to sustain dominant beauty ideals.

Since TikTok advertisements communicate through both language and visual imagery, this study also draws upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of multimodality. According to these scholars, meaning is created through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources, including written language, color, images, typography, spatial organization, movement, and sound. Visual elements are therefore not merely decorative but function as communicative systems that convey culturally shared meanings.

Within whitening advertisements, multimodal resources such as white and pastel color palettes, glowing skin textures, luxury packaging, before-and-after transformations, and Korean-inspired aesthetics work together with verbal claims to construct particular representations of beauty. Integrating multimodal analysis into Fairclough's textual dimension enables a richer understanding of how verbal and visual resources collectively communicate ideological meanings regarding attractiveness, femininity, and skin color.

The study is further informed by scholarship on colorism, which explains how skin tone functions as a socially constructed marker of status, privilege, and desirability. Glenn (2008) defines colorism as the systematic privileging of lighter skin within and across racial and ethnic groups, resulting in unequal social and cultural valuations of different skin tones. Unlike racism, which operates primarily across racial groups, colorism functions within communities by associating lighter complexions with beauty, morality, intelligence, and socioeconomic advantage.

In the Philippines, colorism has been shaped by centuries of Spanish and American colonial rule, during which lighter skin became associated with the mestizo elite, education, and higher social standing (Mendoza, 2015). Although explicit colonial narratives have largely disappeared from contemporary advertising, many beauty campaigns continue to privilege fair skin through more subtle representations of confidence, cleanliness, professionalism, and modernity. Viewing whitening advertisements through the lens of colorism allows this study to examine how these historical hierarchies continue to influence contemporary digital beauty discourse.

Finally, the study is informed by theories of globalization and transnational beauty culture. Beauty standards are increasingly shaped by global media, international cosmetic industries, and digital platforms that facilitate the circulation of aesthetic ideals across national boundaries. Elfving-Hwang (2018) argues that the global popularity of Korean beauty culture has introduced ideals such as glass skin, translucence, and flawless complexion that have become influential throughout Asia. Rather than replacing local beauty norms, these transnational ideals often merge with existing cultural preferences, producing hybrid standards of attractiveness.

Within digital environments such as TikTok, global beauty discourses are rapidly disseminated through influencers, algorithmic recommendations, and user-generated content. Whitening advertisements therefore reflect not only local cultural beliefs but also broader processes of globalization in which international beauty ideals become integrated into everyday consumer practices. Examining these advertisements through the perspectives of globalization and consumer culture enables the study to understand how local colorist ideologies are reinforced through globalized aesthetic narratives.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a coherent analytical framework for the study. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis serves as the principal framework for examining discourse at the textual, discursive, and social levels. Multimodality explains how verbal and visual resources jointly construct meaning within TikTok advertisements. Colorism provides the sociocultural lens for understanding the historical and ideological significance of skin-lightening discourse, while globalization theory situates these advertisements within transnational flows of beauty standards and digital consumer culture. The integration of these perspectives enables a comprehensive analysis of how whitening soap advertisements on TikTok construct, circulate, and normalize beauty ideologies in the Philippine context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of relevant literature and empirical studies on beauty discourse, skin-whitening practices, digital beauty advertising, and Critical Discourse Analysis. It synthesizes recent scholarship to examine how language, visual representation, and social media platforms contribute to the construction and normalization of beauty ideals. The reviewed literature provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study and identifies the research gaps that this investigation seeks to address.

Beauty Discourse, Colorism, and Skin-Whitening Practices

Recent scholarship has increasingly conceptualized skin whitening as a sociocultural practice embedded in historical systems of power rather than merely a cosmetic preference. Studies published between 2020

and 2026 argue that the growing demand for whitening products reflects the continuing influence of colorism, colonial legacies, gendered beauty ideals, and global consumer culture. Across many Asian societies, lighter skin remains symbolically associated with attractiveness, professionalism, youthfulness, and socioeconomic mobility, allowing whitening products to function as markers of social aspiration rather than simple skincare commodities (Del Rosario, 2020; Kaur, 2021). Within the Philippine context, these beauty preferences continue to reflect the enduring effects of colonial history, where fair skin has long been linked to education, privilege, and modernity. Although contemporary advertising rarely presents explicit racial hierarchies, scholars argue that colorist ideologies persist through subtle representations that associate lighter skin with confidence, success, and desirability.

Recent studies further demonstrate that colorism is increasingly reproduced through digital media rather than traditional advertising alone. As beauty industries shift toward social media marketing, whitening products are promoted through highly visual, interactive, and personalized content that normalizes skin-lightening practices as part of everyday self-care. Consequently, digital advertising has become an important site where historical beauty hierarchies are rearticulated through contemporary consumer culture.

Linguistic Construction of Whitening Ideology

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of language in legitimizing skin-whitening practices. Recent analyses of cosmetic advertising indicate that whitening products frequently employ scientific terminology, quantified efficacy claims, and transformation-oriented vocabulary to construct an image of credibility and effectiveness. Dermatological expressions such as niacinamide, AHA/BHA, glutathione, tranexamic acid, and micro-peeling present whitening as a medically supported skincare intervention rather than a culturally constructed beauty preference (Ahmed & Stacey, 2021). Similarly, numerical expressions such as 10× whitening, 20× peeling, and ultra white create impressions of measurable efficacy and scientific precision, strengthening consumers' confidence in product performance (Li & Min, 2021).

Metaphorical language likewise contributes to the normalization of whitening discourse. Expressions such as glow, glass skin, radiance, and brightening frame skin lightening through positive associations with purity, cleanliness, youthfulness, and health rather than explicitly emphasizing lighter skin. Such linguistic strategies soften the ideological implications of whitening by presenting transformation as a desirable form of self-improvement instead of a response to culturally constructed beauty standards. These findings support Fairclough's (1992, 1995) proposition that lexical choices are never ideologically neutral but participate in constructing particular versions of social reality.

Visual Representation and Multimodal Beauty Discourse

Alongside linguistic persuasion, recent research emphasizes the significant role of visual communication in constructing whitening ideology. Studies on beauty advertising consistently report the use of white, pastel, gold, and clinical blue color palettes to symbolize purity, luxury, cleanliness, and scientific credibility (Kaur, 2021). These visual resources are further reinforced through digitally enhanced images featuring luminous skin, flawless complexions, and carefully curated lighting that collectively portray fair skin as the aesthetic norm.

Research also highlights the continued prevalence of before-and-after imagery in whitening campaigns. Such visual comparisons establish binary oppositions between darker skin as the undesirable "before" state and lighter skin as the idealized "after" outcome, thereby reinforcing colorist assumptions regarding beauty and self-improvement. More recent scholarship notes that social media technologies, including beauty filters and image-enhancement tools, intensify these representations by creating increasingly unattainable standards of appearance. Consequently, visual discourse functions not only to advertise cosmetic products but also to shape public understandings of attractiveness, femininity, and social value.

TikTok and Digital Beauty Culture

Recent scholarship identifies TikTok as one of the most influential platforms for contemporary beauty marketing. Unlike traditional advertising media, TikTok combines algorithmic recommendation systems, influencer culture, short-form video production, and user participation to create highly immersive promotional environments. Studies published between 2022 and 2026 indicate that beauty-related content on TikTok frequently promotes idealized appearances through skincare routines, transformation videos, product demonstrations, and sponsored influencer endorsements (Zhao & Zhang, 2023).

Researchers likewise argue that TikTok's recommendation algorithm accelerates the circulation of dominant beauty narratives by repeatedly exposing users to similar visual content. Interactive features such as comments, duets, stitches, hashtags, and user-generated testimonials further encourage audiences to participate in the production and dissemination of beauty discourse rather than simply consuming advertisements. Consequently, TikTok functions not merely as a marketing platform but as a participatory digital ecosystem in which commercial messages become integrated into everyday social interaction.

Consumer Culture, Self-Transformation, and Beauty Ideology

The literature further suggests that whitening advertisements increasingly align with broader neoliberal narratives of self-care, empowerment, and personal

responsibility. Rather than explicitly promising social acceptance through fair skin, contemporary advertisements frequently position skincare consumption as an investment in confidence, wellness, and self-improvement. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that contemporary beauty industries frequently frame consumption as a form of empowerment, encouraging individuals to interpret cosmetic practices as expressions of personal choice while obscuring broader structural inequalities. Recent Southeast Asian studies similarly report that whitening products are marketed as tools for achieving confidence, professionalism, and success, thereby linking beauty consumption with aspirations for upward social mobility (Del Rosario, 2020). These observations reinforce Fairclough's (2001) argument that discourse contributes to the naturalization of ideology by presenting socially constructed inequalities as matters of individual responsibility. Whitening advertisements therefore function not only as commercial texts but also as ideological narratives that encourage consumers to internalize dominant beauty standards through everyday purchasing decisions.

Critical Discourse Analysis in Beauty Advertising

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) remains one of the most widely employed approaches for examining the relationship between language, ideology, and power in advertising. Recent studies continue to demonstrate the usefulness of Fairclough's (1992, 1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis in explaining how linguistic features, communicative practices, and broader sociocultural structures interact to construct beauty ideals. Scholars employing CDA have shown that beauty advertisements normalize dominant standards through recurring lexical choices, visual symbolism, and persuasive narratives while simultaneously reproducing broader systems of gender, class, and consumer capitalism (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Lazar, 2006).

Recent multimodal discourse studies likewise emphasize that verbal language cannot be analyzed independently of visual communication, particularly within digital platforms where images, typography, color, movement, and audiovisual effects function simultaneously in meaning-making. Integrating multimodal analysis with Fairclough's framework therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary beauty advertisements construct and legitimize whitening ideology across different communicative modes.

The reviewed literature demonstrates broad scholarly agreement that skin-whitening advertisements reproduce colorist beauty standards through interconnected linguistic, visual, and ideological strategies. Existing research has established that scientific language, transformation narratives, visual symbolism, influencer marketing, and digital platforms collectively contribute to the normalization of fair skin as the preferred standard of beauty. Nevertheless, several gaps remain. First, relatively few studies have examined whitening advertisements within TikTok despite the platform's rapid emergence as a dominant space for beauty marketing in the Philippines. Second, much of the existing literature has focused on either linguistic content or visual representation independently, providing limited insight into how verbal and visual resources interact to construct ideological meanings. Third, there remains limited application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to multimodal TikTok advertisements within the Philippine context.

Addressing these gaps, the present study employs Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate how selected TikTok whitening soap advertisements construct beauty through linguistic and visual resources, how these meanings are produced and circulated within a participatory digital environment, and how they reproduce broader ideologies of colorism, gender, globalization, and consumer culture. In doing so, the study contributes to the expanding scholarship on multimodal discourse analysis, digital advertising, and beauty communication by examining the intersection of language, visual representation, platform affordances, and sociocultural power relations in contemporary Philippine social media.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to examine the linguistic, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions of TikTok whitening soap advertisements in the Philippines. Using Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Model as the analytic lens, the study explored how verbal and visual elements of the advertisements construct meanings about beauty, skin tone, and consumer identity. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth examination of language use, media production practices, and the ideological forces embedded in contemporary digital beauty marketing.

Data Corpus and Sampling Procedure

The corpus consisted of 15 TikTok advertisements for popular Filipino whitening soap brands posted between January 2024 and January 2025. Purposive sampling was employed to select videos that explicitly or implicitly promoted themes of whitening, brightening, lightening, glass skin, or Korean-inspired fairness. Videos were included if they met the following criteria: (1) produced by a skincare brand or partnered influencer; (2) provided clear verbal claims or captions; and (3) contained identifiable visual semiotic elements such as skin tone comparisons, product demonstrations, color palettes, or beautification filters. This sampling ensured that the data represented dominant whitening discourses circulating on the platform.

Data Collection Procedure

All selected TikTok videos were downloaded for offline analysis. The researcher transcribed the verbal components (spoken lines, captions, hashtags, on-screen text) and documented the visual elements (color schemes, filters, models' appearance, lighting, packaging aesthetics). Screenshots of key frames were taken to analyze

repeated visual patterns. Metadata such as number of likes, comments, views, and hashtags were noted to contextualize the circulation and engagement of the advertisements.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model:

1. Textual Analysis (Description)

This stage examined the linguistic and visual characteristics of the advertisements. Verbal analysis focused on adjectives (e.g., ultra white, 10x whitening, intense brightening), lexical choices, scientific terminology, metaphors, intensifiers, directives, and evaluative language. Visual analysis included color semantics (white, pastel, gold), skin tone representation, use of before–after imagery, filters, light manipulation, and branding aesthetics.

2. Discourse Practice Analysis (Interpretation)

This level explored how the advertisements were produced and consumed within TikTok's algorithmic ecosystem. It involved analyzing influencer promotions, branded effects, comment interactions, stitching and duets, and the use of hashtags such as #whiteningsoap, #glassskinph, #skincareroutine. This step examined how meaning is shaped by platform culture, marketing strategies, and user engagement.

3. Social Practice Analysis (Explanation)

The final stage situated the discourse within broader ideological structures such as colorism, colonial beauty ideals, class-based aesthetics, neoliberal self-improvement culture, and Filipino socio-historical attitudes toward light skin. This stage connected the micro-level text to macro-level social systems, evaluating how whitening discourse reproduces or challenges dominant beauty norms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Filipino skin-whitening product advertisements using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) social practice.

Table 1: Textual Analysis (Fairclough Level 1)

Brand	Key Verbal Elements	Key Visual Elements	Textual Description (Fairclough Level 1)
Rosmar Kagayaku	"10x power whitening," "acne control," "brightening"	White/pastel package, glowing skin	Quantified whitening claims construct authority; white visuals index purity and transformation.
Habibi Skin	"20x peeling formula," "milky"	Milky textures, soft lighting	"Milky" metaphor implies softness/ purity; high-number peeling intensifies transformation rhetoric.
Kavouge	"Nicotinamide," "Tranexamic Acid," "whitening booster"	Medical minimalist look	Scientific vocabulary legitimizes whitening as medicinal.
Beauty White Soap	"10x whitening," "micro peeling," "snail extract"	Korean-style skin, glowing filters	Combines science + K-beauty aesthetics to equate whitening with global beauty practices.
Brilliant	"Lightens," "smoothens," "micro peeling"	Bold orange visuals, before–after	Whitening presented as measurable improvement; dark skin framed as "before."
Prestige Niacinamide	"10x whitening effect"	Gold/white luxury visuals	Whiteness constructed as premium and elite.
Beauche	"Skin whitening," "papaya extract"	Natural imagery, bright lighting	Whitening naturalized through nature discourse.
Hikari Skin	"Ultra white"	Sparkling white, Japanese branding	"Ultra" intensifier constructs extreme whiteness as achievable ideal.
Kimiko Gluta	"Extreme whitening," "pore minimizer"	Pink/white feminine palette	Feminine, youthful identity tied to achieving fairness.
SY Glow	"20x intense white," "AHA BHA"	Clinical blue/white visuals	Aggressive chemical discourse = intense transformation.
HonestGlow Glass Skin	"Glass skin," "glow"	Glossy, poreless faces	Unrealistic perfection framed as attainable through whitening.
Honest Glow Kojic	"Whitens," "cleanses," "moisturizes"	Orange-white minimalism	Whitening made normal, hygienic, everyday.
Milky Hya	"Brighten," "firm," "minimize pores"	Pastel youthful imagery	Skin perfection tied to lightness and youth.
Bonita Sunflower	"10x brightening," "lighten dark spots"	Yellow-white, sunflower	"Brightening" softens whitening discourse.
Dermoface	"Acne and oil control" (implicit whitening)	Clinical blue-white	Even without explicit whitening, visuals privilege lighter matte skin.

Textual Analysis (Fairclough Level 1)

Linguistic and Visual Construction of Whitening Discourses

Fairclough's (1995) textual dimension examines how linguistic and visual resources construct particular representations of reality through vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and multimodal signs. At this level of analysis, discourse is understood not merely as a collection of words and images but as a system of meaning that shapes social understandings of beauty and identity. The analysis of the fifteen TikTok whitening soap advertisements revealed recurring lexical patterns, scientific terminology, metaphorical expressions, transformation narratives, and visual semiotic strategies that collectively position fair skin as the dominant ideal of attractiveness. These textual choices function not simply as marketing techniques but as ideological resources that normalize whitening as an expected component of beauty and self-improvement.

Linguistic Features: How Language Constructs Whitening Ideology

Intensification Through Quantification ("10×," "20×," "Extreme," and "Ultra")

One of the most salient linguistic features observed across the advertisements is the extensive

use of quantified intensifiers such as 10× whitening, 20× peeling, 10× brightening, ultra white, and extreme whitening. These expressions appeared prominently in brands including Rosmar Kagayaku, Habibi Skin, Beauty White Soap, Prestige Niacinamide, SY Glow, and Hikari Skin. Rather than merely emphasizing product effectiveness, these numerical modifiers construct whitening as a measurable and progressive process that can supposedly be accelerated through cosmetic consumption.

From Fairclough's (1992, 1995) perspective, lexical choices are not neutral descriptors but ideological resources that shape how social reality is understood. The repeated use of quantified language transforms beauty into an objective standard that appears measurable, predictable, and scientifically attainable. By presenting whitening through numerical claims, the advertisements encourage consumers to interpret skin tone as something that can be systematically optimized rather than as a naturally occurring human characteristic.

This finding supports Cook's (2001) observation that advertising discourse frequently relies on exaggerated quantification to establish product credibility and persuasive authority. Likewise, Li, Min, and Belk (2008) found that skin-lightening advertisements in several Asian countries employ hyperbolic numerical claims to create perceptions of clinical precision and technological advancement. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that quantification performs an ideological function beyond persuasion. It reframes beauty as a measurable achievement and encourages consumers to evaluate themselves according to commercially constructed standards of improvement. Such discourse reflects broader neoliberal ideals in which the body becomes an ongoing project of self-enhancement achieved through consumption (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Scientific and Dermatological Lexicon

Another dominant linguistic strategy is the use of biomedical terminology, including niacinamide, tranexamic acid, AHA-BHA, micro-peeling, alpha arbutin, whitening booster, and ceramide. These expressions are particularly evident in Kavouge, SY Glow, Brilliant Skin, and Beauty White Soap. Although these ingredients have legitimate dermatological applications, their communicative function within the advertisements extends beyond scientific description.

Fairclough's (1995) concept of interdiscursivity explains how advertising appropriates the language of medicine to strengthen persuasive authority. Through the incorporation of biomedical vocabulary, whitening is represented as a scientifically validated skincare intervention rather than a culturally constructed beauty preference. Consequently, commercial discourse borrows the credibility traditionally associated with healthcare and dermatological expertise.

These findings corroborate Glenn's (2008) argument that the global skin-lightening industry increasingly medicalizes naturally occurring skin pigmentation by presenting it as a condition requiring treatment. Similarly, Hunter (2011) explains that cosmetic industries convert racialized bodily characteristics into marketable forms of social capital by framing cosmetic intervention as a pathway toward success and social mobility. The present analysis demonstrates that TikTok advertisements further intensify this process by combining scientific terminology with visually clinical aesthetics, thereby transforming whitening into an apparently objective and evidence-based skincare practice.

More importantly, the medicalization of whitening obscures the sociocultural origins of colorism. Rather than recognizing lighter skin as a historically privileged beauty ideal, consumers are encouraged to view whitening as a rational, medically appropriate response to skin concerns. Scientific discourse, therefore, functions as a powerful mechanism through which ideological assumptions become normalized under the guise of scientific neutrality.

Metaphors of Purity, Softness, and Ideal Femininity

Beyond scientific vocabulary, the advertisements frequently employ metaphorical expressions such as milky, glass skin, glow, radiance, and brightening. These metaphors indirectly promote fair skin by associating lighter complexions with purity, youthfulness, cleanliness, softness, and femininity while avoiding explicit references to race or skin color.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors shape how individuals conceptualize abstract ideas by connecting them to familiar cultural experiences. In the advertisements analyzed, metaphors of light and purity

encourage consumers to interpret fair skin as a symbol of moral cleanliness, health, and aesthetic perfection. Such linguistic choices, therefore, naturalize colorist beauty ideals by embedding them in positive emotional associations rather than in direct comparisons between light and dark skin.

The widespread use of the expression glass skin also reflects the globalization of Korean beauty discourse. Elfving-Hwang (2018) argues that Korean beauty culture has become an influential transnational aesthetic emphasizing translucence, poreless texture, and youthful appearance. Consistent with this observation, the present study demonstrates that TikTok advertisements incorporate Korean beauty terminology into local whitening narratives, producing hybrid beauty ideals that combine global skincare trends with longstanding Filipino preferences for fair skin. This finding extends previous studies by illustrating that metaphorical language serves not only aesthetic purposes but also ideological ones. Through seemingly harmless expressions such as glow and glass skin, whitening becomes associated with universally desirable qualities while concealing the historical inequalities underlying colorist beauty standards.

Transformation Discourse

Transformation verbs such as lightens, brightens, smoothens, repairs, resurfaces, and peels away dark spots appeared consistently throughout the advertisements. These lexical choices frame skincare as a process of correcting visible imperfections, implicitly positioning darker skin as an undesirable condition requiring intervention.

Within Fairclough's (1992) textual framework, these verbs construct a binary opposition between deficiency and improvement. Darker skin repeatedly occupies the semantic position of the "before" state, whereas lighter skin represents the successful "after" outcome. Such linguistic structures do not merely describe product performance; they organize social meanings by defining which bodily characteristics are considered desirable.

The findings support Glenn's (2008) argument that whitening discourse frequently constructs melanin as a flaw requiring correction. Hall (1997) similarly emphasizes that representation actively produces social meaning rather than simply reflecting reality. The present analysis demonstrates that transformation discourse on TikTok extends beyond product promotion, encouraging consumers to view whitening as evidence of personal growth, confidence, and self-improvement.

The persuasive power of these narratives is further enhanced by TikTok's audiovisual affordances. Short-form videos, rapid transitions, beauty filters, and before-and-after sequences visually compress transformation into a matter of seconds, creating the impression that dramatic improvements are both immediate and attainable. As a result, transformation discourse becomes particularly compelling within TikTok's digital environment, where visual immediacy strengthens the ideological association between lighter skin and personal success.

Visual Features: Semiotic Construction of Whiteness

Color Palettes: White, Pastel, Blue, and Gold

Visual analysis revealed consistent use of white, pastel, gold, and clinical blue across the advertisements. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), colors function as semiotic resources that communicate culturally shared meanings rather than merely decorative elements. White and pastel tones symbolize purity, cleanliness, and renewal; gold conveys prestige and exclusivity; and blue evokes scientific authority and dermatological expertise. Together, these visual choices reinforce the verbal claims of efficacy and construct whitening as simultaneously luxurious, hygienic, and medically credible.

Korean Beauty Aesthetics

Advertisements for Beauty White Soap, HonestGlow Glass Skin, and Milky Hya prominently feature luminous complexions, poreless skin, soft lighting, and pastel visual styles commonly associated with Korean skincare marketing. These images align with Elfving-Hwang's (2018) discussion of the global circulation of K-beauty ideals, which promote translucence, youthfulness, and flawless skin. Rather than replacing local beauty standards, the findings indicate that Korean aesthetics reinforce existing Filipino preferences for fair skin by providing contemporary visual frameworks through which colorist ideals are reproduced.

Before-and-After Transformation Images

Before-and-after imagery constitutes one of the most explicit visual strategies identified in the dataset, particularly in Brilliant Skin advertisements. Darker, textured skin is consistently represented as the "before" condition, whereas lighter, smoother skin signifies the successful "after" outcome. Cheng (2019) argues that transformation imagery establishes moral and aesthetic hierarchies by representing lighter skin as a visible reward for personal effort. Consistent with Hall's (1997) theory of representation, these visual narratives actively construct fair skin as the normative endpoint of successful self-transformation.

Natural Imagery and the Normalization of Whitening

Brands such as Beauche and Bonita Sunflower incorporate botanical imagery, including papaya extracts, floral elements, and sunflower motifs, to present whitening as a natural and wholesome practice. Nakano (2018) describes this strategy as nature-washing, whereby commercial advertising employs symbols of nature to soften the ideological implications of whitening products. Within the advertisements analyzed, natural imagery functions to reassure consumers that whitening is safe, gentle, and culturally acceptable. Consequently, botanical symbolism not only enhances product appeal but also contributes to the normalization of whitening by obscuring its connection to broader histories of colorism.

Discursive Practice (Fairclough Level 2)

Production, Distribution, and Consumption of Whitening Discourses

Fairclough's (1995) second dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis emphasizes that discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted within specific institutional and sociocultural contexts. In the present study, whitening discourse extends beyond the textual characteristics of TikTok advertisements to encompass the communicative practices through which cosmetic brands, influencers, digital platforms, and consumers collectively construct and reproduce meanings surrounding beauty and skin whitening. The findings demonstrate that TikTok functions not merely as a marketing platform but as a discursive environment where commercial, technological, and cultural forces converge to normalize fair skin as the dominant aesthetic ideal.

Production: How Brands Construct Whitening Meanings

The analysis revealed that whitening soap brands strategically combine multiple discourses to maximize their persuasive appeal. Rather than relying exclusively on cosmetic claims, advertisers integrate scientific discourse, natural-product discourse, luxury branding, and Korean beauty discourse into a unified marketing narrative. This interdiscursive strategy allows brands to position whitening simultaneously as a health intervention, a beauty practice, a symbol of prestige, and a pathway to self-improvement.

For example, Kavouge combines biomedical terminology such as niacinamide and tranexamic acid with minimalist clinical packaging, thereby appropriating the authority of dermatological science. Beauty White Soap integrates scientific claims with Korean-inspired visual aesthetics to associate whitening with internationally recognized skincare practices. Meanwhile, Beauche employs botanical imagery and papaya extracts to construct whitening as a natural and gentle process, whereas Prestige International uses gold-and-white packaging to associate fair skin with luxury, exclusivity, and higher social status.

These findings illustrate Fairclough's (1992) concept of interdiscursivity, wherein advertising discourse incorporates linguistic and visual elements from medicine, wellness, luxury consumption, and global beauty culture to strengthen its persuasive power. By borrowing the authority of these discourses, advertisers transform whitening from a cosmetic preference into an apparently rational, healthy, and socially desirable practice. Similar observations were reported by Machin and Mayr (2012), who argue that contemporary advertising increasingly blends institutional discourses to legitimize commercial messages. Likewise, Cook (2001) notes that advertising derives much of its persuasive power from combining diverse symbolic systems that resonate with consumers' aspirations and cultural expectations.

The present study extends these arguments by demonstrating that TikTok whitening advertisements employ interdiscursivity not merely to promote products but also to normalize colorist beauty ideals. Scientific terminology, natural imagery, luxury symbolism, and Korean aesthetics collectively conceal the ideological foundations of whitening by presenting it as an ordinary component of skincare and self-care rather than as a culturally constructed preference for lighter skin.

Distribution: Social Media, Influencers, and Algorithmic Amplification

The findings further reveal that TikTok significantly reshapes the circulation of whitening discourse through its algorithm-driven ecosystem. Unlike traditional advertising channels characterized by one-way communication, TikTok facilitates multidirectional dissemination through influencers, viral trends, recommendation algorithms, hashtags, short-form videos, and user interaction. Whitening advertisements therefore circulate not only because they are sponsored by cosmetic companies but also because the platform's architecture prioritizes highly engaging audiovisual content.

Across the analyzed advertisements, transformation videos, before-and-after demonstrations, skincare routines, and influencer testimonials emerged as recurring strategies that increased audience engagement and encouraged content sharing. These visual narratives align closely with TikTok's emphasis on rapid storytelling and emotionally compelling content, making whitening advertisements highly compatible with the platform's recommendation system.

Abidin (2018) argues that social media influencers blur the distinction between advertising and personal recommendation by presenting commercial endorsements as authentic experiences. Similarly, Zulli and Zulli (2022) contend that TikTok's algorithm actively shapes cultural visibility by repeatedly exposing users to content that generates high engagement. Within this context, whitening advertisements acquire greater persuasive power because they appear as everyday beauty advice rather than conventional commercial promotions.

The findings therefore suggest that TikTok functions not merely as a passive communication channel but as an active participant in reproducing whitening discourse. Through algorithmic recommendation systems and influencer-mediated communication, the platform continuously amplifies narratives that associate fair skin with attractiveness, confidence, and social desirability. This observation extends Fairclough's framework by demonstrating that contemporary discursive practices are increasingly shaped by digital infrastructures that influence not only how texts circulate but also which ideologies become socially dominant.

Consumption: How Audiences Internalize Whitening Discourse

The analysis indicates that consumers play an active role in reproducing whitening discourse through digital participation. Rather than functioning as passive

audiences, TikTok users contribute to the circulation of whitening narratives by posting testimonials, sharing product reviews, documenting skincare routines, and uploading before-and-after transformation videos. These participatory practices reinforce commercial messages and normalize whitening as an everyday component of beauty maintenance.

Consumer engagement also reveals that whitening products are interpreted as more than cosmetic commodities. Across the advertisements, whitening is consistently associated with confidence, employability, attractiveness, modernity, and self-improvement. Such interpretations illustrate how consumers internalize broader social meanings embedded within advertising discourse. Fairclough (1995) argues that texts acquire meaning through interpretation, and these interpretations are shaped by existing cultural beliefs and social practices. The present findings demonstrate that consumers frequently interpret whitening as an investment in personal and social advancement rather than simply as skincare.

This interpretation is consistent with Glenn (2008), who argues that skin-lightening products function as symbolic resources through which individuals negotiate identity, status, and belonging. Likewise, Banet-Weiser (2018) suggests that neoliberal consumer culture increasingly frames cosmetic consumption as a form of empowerment and self-development. The present study supports these perspectives while further illustrating how TikTok encourages consumers to publicly display these transformations, thereby reinforcing the visibility and legitimacy of whitening practices.

Jenkins (2006) describes this phenomenon as participatory culture, wherein media audiences simultaneously become producers and distributors of cultural meanings. Within TikTok, consumers therefore become co-producers of whitening ideology by validating commercial narratives through personal experiences and peer recommendations. This participatory dynamic blurs the boundary between advertising and everyday communication, allowing whitening discourse to circulate organically within digital communities.

Overall, the findings indicate that discursive practice on TikTok is not limited to institutional advertising but emerges from the continuous interaction among brands, influencers, algorithms, and consumers. Through these interconnected practices, whitening is normalized as a desirable aesthetic and social ideal, illustrating how digital media platforms contribute to the reproduction of contemporary beauty ideologies.

Social Practice (Fairclough Level 3)

Whitening Advertisements as the Reproduction of Social Ideologies

Fairclough's (1995) third dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualizes discourse as a social practice that both reflects and reproduces broader structures of power and ideology. Accordingly, the linguistic and visual features identified in the whitening soap advertisements cannot be interpreted as isolated marketing strategies; rather, they are embedded within historical, political, economic, and cultural systems that shape public understandings of beauty, identity, and social value. The findings indicate that TikTok whitening advertisements reproduce interconnected ideologies related to colorism, colonial mentality, gender, class mobility, globalization, and consumerism, thereby normalizing fair skin as the dominant standard of beauty in contemporary Philippine society.

Colorism and the Colonial Legacy of Beauty

One of the most significant findings is the persistence of colorist ideology throughout the advertisements. Although contemporary brands rarely state explicitly that fair skin is superior, they consistently associate lighter complexions with confidence, attractiveness, cleanliness, and personal success, while darker skin is positioned within narratives of correction and transformation. Such representations demonstrate that colorism has become embedded in everyday beauty discourse through subtle linguistic and visual strategies rather than overt racial preference.

From Fairclough's (1995) perspective, discourse functions ideologically when particular social values become naturalized and accepted as common sense. In the advertisements analyzed, fair skin is repeatedly presented as the expected outcome of skincare, making whiteness appear desirable, normal, and universally attainable. Consequently, historical inequalities become obscured beneath the seemingly neutral language of beauty, wellness, and self-care.

This finding reflects the enduring influence of colonial history on contemporary Philippine beauty standards. During the Spanish colonial period, lighter skin became associated with the mestizo elite and higher socioeconomic status, while darker skin was commonly linked to manual labor and lower social positions. These hierarchies were further reinforced during the American colonial period through Western media, education, and commercial advertising that privileged Eurocentric ideals of attractiveness. Mendoza (2015) argues that these historical experiences institutionalized colorism within Filipino society, where lighter skin continues to signify prestige, education, and social mobility. The present study demonstrates that TikTok advertisements reproduce these colonial legacies by framing whitening as a pathway toward socially valued identities rather than merely as a cosmetic practice.

Unlike earlier studies that primarily examined print or television advertising, the present findings suggest that social media has modernized colonial beauty discourse. Whitening is no longer marketed through explicitly racialized messages but through narratives of radiance, glow, confidence, and healthy skin. This shift illustrates how historical ideologies adapt to contemporary digital environments while maintaining their underlying assumptions about the desirability of fair skin.

Gendered Constructions of Femininity

The analysis further demonstrates that whitening discourse is strongly gendered. Most advertisements feature female models with smooth skin, youthful appearance, soft facial expressions, and delicate styling. Lexical choices such as milky, glass skin, glow, and brightening similarly associate femininity with purity, gentleness, and flawlessness. Rather than merely promoting skincare products, the advertisements construct an idealized form of womanhood in which physical appearance becomes central to feminine identity.

Lazar (2006) argues that advertising frequently reinforces patriarchal norms by presenting beauty work as an essential component of feminine selfhood. Consistent with this perspective, the present findings indicate that whitening products are framed as necessary tools for achieving confidence, attractiveness, and social acceptance. Glenn (2008) likewise explains that Asian beauty industries construct what she terms racialized femininity, wherein fair skin functions as both an aesthetic ideal and a marker of moral virtue, refinement, and desirability.

An important observation emerging from the present study is that TikTok intensifies these gendered expectations through influencer culture. Beauty influencers frequently present skincare routines, product demonstrations, and transformation videos as forms of self-care and empowerment. While these narratives appear to promote individual agency, they simultaneously reinforce the expectation that women should continuously monitor and improve their appearance through cosmetic consumption. Banet-Weiser (2018) notes that contemporary postfeminist consumer culture often reframes commercial beauty practices as empowerment while leaving dominant beauty standards largely unquestioned. The findings support this argument by illustrating how whitening is represented as an expression of confidence and self-love while continuing to privilege fair skin as the preferred aesthetic outcome.

Class Aspiration, Consumerism, and Modernity

The findings also reveal that whitening discourse is closely connected to aspirations for higher social status. Brands such as Prestige International and Kavouge employ luxury-inspired packaging, premium color schemes, and scientific branding to associate fair skin with professionalism, sophistication, and modern lifestyles. These symbolic resources encourage consumers to perceive whitening products not merely as cosmetic commodities but as investments in personal and social advancement.

Fairclough (2001) argues that contemporary societies increasingly experience the marketization of discourse, whereby commercial values influence how individuals construct identity and social relationships. Across the analyzed advertisements, confidence, employability, and professional success are repeatedly linked to cosmetic consumption, suggesting that beauty can be achieved through appropriate purchasing decisions. Such representations individualize success by implying that improved appearance results primarily from personal consumption rather than broader social opportunities.

These findings resonate with Hunter's (2011) concept of racial capital, which posits that lighter skin may serve as a form of symbolic capital, conferring social and economic advantages. Similarly, David (2020) observes that middle-class aspirations in the Philippines are frequently expressed through the consumption of modern beauty technologies and premium skincare products. The present study extends these perspectives by showing that TikTok advertisements integrate luxury symbolism with scientific discourse, transforming whitening into a visible marker of aspiration, competence, and upward mobility.

Globalization and the Influence of K-Beauty

Another prominent finding concerns the globalization of beauty standards through Korean popular culture. Several advertisements incorporate Korean-inspired aesthetics, including luminous complexions, poreless skin, pastel color palettes, minimalist packaging, and terms such as "glass skin". These visual and linguistic elements reflect the growing transnational influence of Korean beauty industries within the Philippine skincare market.

Elfving-Hwang (2018) argues that K-beauty has reshaped beauty ideals across Asia by promoting youthfulness, translucence, and flawless skin as desirable aesthetic characteristics. Consistent with this observation, the present findings indicate that Korean beauty discourse has become integrated into local whitening advertising. Rather than replacing Philippine beauty standards, however, these global influences reinforce long-standing colorist preferences by providing contemporary cultural frameworks that promote fairness.

The interaction between local and global beauty discourses demonstrates that whitening ideology is no longer exclusively colonial or Western in orientation. Instead, contemporary TikTok advertisements construct hybrid beauty ideals that combine colonial histories, Korean popular culture, scientific rhetoric, and digital aesthetics into a unified commercial narrative. This convergence illustrates the dynamic nature of discourse, whereby global cultural flows continuously reshape local understandings of beauty without eliminating historically rooted power relations.

The Normalization of Whitening as Common Sense

Perhaps the most significant finding is that whitening has become normalized to the extent that explicit references to skin lightening are no longer always necessary. Advertisements such as Dermoface emphasize acne treatment and oil control, yet still depict models with consistently lighter, smooth, and blemish-free complexions. This suggests that fair skin has become an implicit visual norm rather than a characteristic requiring explanation.

Fairclough (1992) argues that ideology is most effective when it becomes naturalized—that is, when particular

social values are accepted as self-evident and no longer questioned. The present findings indicate that whitening discourse has reached this stage within Philippine digital beauty culture. Fairness is repeatedly represented as the default appearance associated with health, cleanliness, and attractiveness, while darker skin remains largely absent or appears primarily within transformation narratives.

This observation extends previous scholarship on whitening advertisements by demonstrating that the reproduction of colorism increasingly operates through omission rather than explicit persuasion. The absence of diverse skin tones across the advertisements reinforces the assumption that lighter skin is the expected standard of beauty. Consequently, TikTok advertisements contribute not only to the promotion of whitening products but also to the broader normalization of colorist ideology within everyday digital communication.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that TikTok whitening advertisements function as ideological texts that reproduce historical and contemporary relations of power. Through the interaction of colonial legacies, gender norms, consumer capitalism, globalization, and platform-specific communication practices, fair skin is constructed as a form of symbolic capital associated with attractiveness, professionalism, modernity, and social mobility. Applying Fairclough's (1995) social practice dimension reveals that these advertisements do more than market skincare products; they participate in the continuous production and normalization of dominant beauty ideologies. In doing so, they illustrate how algorithm-driven social media platforms have become influential cultural spaces in which historical inequalities are rearticulated through contemporary multimodal discourse, thereby extending Critical Discourse Analysis to the context of digitally platform-mediated beauty communication.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok whitening soap advertisements are not merely commercial texts promoting skincare products but multimodal discourses that actively construct and reproduce dominant beauty ideologies in contemporary Philippine society. Applying Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis revealed that linguistic choices, visual representations, digital communicative practices, and broader sociocultural structures operate together to normalize fair skin as the preferred aesthetic ideal.

At the textual level, advertisers employed quantified claims, scientific terminology, metaphors of purity and perfection, transformation narratives, and carefully designed visual symbolism to represent whitening as a desirable, measurable, and scientifically validated process. These multimodal resources framed fair skin as synonymous with beauty, confidence, health, youthfulness, and success while implicitly positioning darker skin as requiring correction or improvement.

At the level of discursive practice, whitening meanings were continuously reproduced through the interaction of cosmetic brands, influencers, TikTok's recommendation algorithms, and consumer participation. Rather than functioning as passive audiences, consumers actively reinforced whitening discourse by producing testimonials, sharing transformation experiences, and circulating promotional content, thereby contributing to the normalization of colorist beauty standards in digital spaces.

At the level of social practice, the advertisements reflected and reinforced historical and contemporary structures of power associated with colonial colorism, gendered beauty expectations, neoliberal consumer culture, class aspiration, and globalization. The convergence of scientific discourse, Korean beauty aesthetics, luxury symbolism, and platform-mediated communication demonstrates how historical beauty hierarchies are rearticulated through contemporary digital advertising. Whitening is therefore constructed not simply as a cosmetic preference but as a form of symbolic capital associated with social acceptance, professional competence, and personal achievement.

The study extends Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating that algorithm-driven social media platforms have become influential sites for the production, circulation, and normalization of ideological beauty discourses. Within TikTok's participatory ecosystem, platform algorithms, influencer cultures, and consumer engagement collectively amplify representations of fair skin, illustrating how digital infrastructures perpetuate colorism in contemporary Philippine society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **For digital marketers and cosmetic advertisers**, promotional campaigns should adopt more inclusive representations of beauty by featuring diverse Filipino skin tones and avoiding language and imagery that implicitly position fair skin as superior. Ethical advertising practices should promote skin health and confidence without reinforcing colorist assumptions.
2. **For social media platforms such as TikTok**, greater attention should be given to the ethical implications of algorithmically amplifying beauty-related content. Platforms may strengthen advertising policies and media literacy initiatives that encourage critical evaluation of cosmetic claims and beauty representations.
3. **For educators and media literacy practitioners**, critical media literacy should be integrated into educational programs to help students recognize how advertising discourse constructs beauty ideals, consumer identities, and social values. Discussions of colorism, representation, and digital persuasion may promote more informed and reflective media consumption.
4. **For policymakers and regulatory agencies**, stricter monitoring of cosmetic advertising claims is recommended to ensure that promotional content does

not contain misleading scientific assertions or reinforce discriminatory beauty standards. Regulatory guidelines may also encourage more responsible and inclusive representations within digital advertising.

5. For cosmetic companies, marketing strategies should emphasize overall skin health, dermatological safety, and consumer well-being rather than promoting lighter skin as the primary indicator of beauty or social success. Campaigns that celebrate the diversity of Filipino skin tones may contribute to more inclusive beauty narratives.

6. For future researchers, further studies may expand the corpus by examining advertisements across multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and emerging digital applications, to compare the construction of whitening discourse across different online environments. Comparative studies involving other Southeast Asian countries may also provide deeper insights into the intersection of local beauty cultures, globalization, and digital media. Additionally, future research may incorporate audience reception studies, interviews with consumers and influencers, or computational discourse analysis to investigate how users negotiate, resist, or reproduce whitening ideologies in everyday digital interactions.

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