A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL WOMAN'S BODY IMAGE IN PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate i) what are the words used to describe the non-ideal female body and the ideal female body, ii) what are the qualities and values associated with the ideal female body; iii) How does the social practice and discursive practice influence text production and interpretation. The data for this study consists of 132 print advertisements that featured services offered by slimming centres obtained from *The Star* and *The Sun* newspapers.

Fairclough's (1995a) three dimensional framework was adopted to analyze the data for this study because this framework enables the researcher to examine the relationships between three facets of a particular communication event i.e. discourse as texts, discourse as a discursive practice and discourse as a social practice. The analysis concentrates on linguistic features at the level of text. In order to unearth the opaque ideology on female ideal body image in the print media in Malaysia, the researcher examined the various lexicalization strategies employed by the promotional texts.

Findings from the analysis show that promotional texts rely heavily on negative lexicalization, negative labeling, positive lexicalization and positive association to construct the non-ideal and the ideal body image for Malaysian women. Negative lexicalization is more widely employed by the advertisers compared to positive lexicalization. The print advertisements examined promote and endorse the 'slim' body shape as the ideal body image for women. The frequency count shows that the body parts that are given the most attention by the promotional texts are the *thighs*, *waist*, *hips*, *arms* and *tummy*. The promotional texts also use positive association to attach certain qualities and values to the ideal female form. The positive associations found in the promotional texts with regards to the ideal female body are *self-esteem, confidence, beauty, sex appeal; success, achievement; health; happiness; sense of pride; peace of mind* and *object of desire*.

Majority of the studies on media portrayal of the female body image focuses on the visual images that appear in the advertisements without paying adequate attention to the lexical items. This study is significant because it discussed how the social practice (i.e. patriarchal culture) in Malaysia has to a certain extent shaped the beauty ideology and belief system of the Malaysian women. The researcher also discussed how the internalization of the constructed beauty ideal in the culture that celebrates thinness has resulted in the production of promotional texts that advocate the thin ideal. Likewise, readers of the print advertisements are also not able to easily recognize the ideology of the thin ideal in the promotional texts due to the strong influence by the social practice

in this society. The ideal body image for women is therefore a social construction by the authority in power.

It is hoped that this study in a way has achieved its aim to create awareness among Malaysian women to recognize that the media portrayal of the slim ideal is merely a construct. Due to the absence of other triangulation methods such as interview and questionnaire, the data analysis of this research may contain some potential biasness. Another limitation of this study is that it does not analyze audience reception of the print advertisements. Therefore, the researcher is not able to say with certainty that the audience will interpret the promotional texts as stated in the analysis chapter.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji i) apakah perkataaan-perkataan yang digunakan untuk menggambarkan bentuk badan wanita yang tidak unggul dan bentuk badan wanita yang unggul, ii) apakah kualiti-kualiti dan nilai-nilai yang dikaitkan dengan bentuk badan wanita yang unggul; iii) bagaimana amalan sosial dan amalan "discursive" mempengaruhi penghasilan dan intepretasi teks. Data untuk kajian ini terdiri daripada 132 iklan bercetak yang memaparkan perkhidmatan yang ditawarkan oleh pusat pelangsing badan yang diperolehi daripada suratkhabar *The Star* dan *The Sun*.

Kerangka tiga dimensi oleh Fairclough (1995a) telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data kajian ini kerana kerangka ini membolehkan pengkaji mengkaji hubungan antara tiga aspek suatu peristiwa komunikasi iaitu wacana sebagai teks, wacana sebagai suatu amalan "discursive" dan wacana sebagai amalan sosial. Analysis ini memberi tumpuan terhadap ciri-ciri linguistik di peringkat teks. Untuk membongkar ideologi yang samar ke atas imej badan unggul wanita di dalam media bercetak di Malaysia, pengkaji menganalisa berbagai strategi "lexicalization" yang digunakan di dalam teks promosi.

Penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan teks promosi banyak bergantung kepada "lexicalization" negative, label negative, "lexicalization" positif dan hubung-kait positif untuk membina imej badan tidak unggul dan imej badan unggul untuk wanita Malaysia. Berbanding dengan "lexicalization" positif, "lexicalization" negatif telah digunakan dengan lebih berleluasa oleh para pengiklan. Iklan-iklan bercetak yang dikaji mengesyorkan bentuk badan langsing sebagai imej badan unggul untuk wanita. Daripada pengiraan frekuensi, bahagian badan wanita yang paling diberi tumpuan adalah bahagian *paha, pinggang, punggung, lengan* dan *perut*. Tek-teks promosi juga menggunakan hubung-kait positif untuk mengaitkan kualiti-kualiti dan nilai-nilai tertentu dengan bentuk badan wanita yang unggul. Hubung-kait positif yang ditemui di dalam teks-teks promosi berkenaan dengan bentuk badan wanita unggul adalah *keyakinan diri, keyakinan, kecantikan, daya tarikan seks; kejayaan, pencapaian; kesihatan; kegembiraan; perasaan bangga; ketenangan minda* dan *objek idaman.*

Sebahagian besar daripada kajian pemaparan media ke atas imej badan wanita menumpukan kepada imej visual yang terpampang di dalam iklan tanpa memberi perhatian yang mencukupi ke atas item leksikal. Kajian ini signifikan kerana ia membincangkan bagaimana amalan sosial (iaitu budaya "patriarchal") di Malaysia telah membentuk ideologi kecantikan dan sistem kepercayaan wanita Malaysia pada tahap

tertentu. Pengkaji juga membincangkan bagaimana penghayatan kecantikan unggul yang dibentuk oleh budaya yang mengagungkan kelangsingan telah menyebabkan penghasilan teks-teks promosi yang mengesyorkan bentuk badan langsing sebagai bentuk badan unggul untuk wanita. Pembaca iklan bercetak tidak dapat mengenalpasti dengan senang ideologi bentuk badan unggul di dalam teks promosi disebabkan pengaruh kuat amalan sosial masyarakat di sini. Imej badan unggul wanita adalah suatu pembentukan sosial oleh pihak yang memiliki kuasa.

Diharap kajian ini sedikit sebanyak telah mencapai tujuannya untuk memberi kesedaran kepada kaum wanita di Malaysia untuk mengenal pasti bahawa pemaparan media terhadap bentuk badan langsing adalah konstruk semata-mata. Oleh kerana ketiadaan kaedah “triangulation” seperti temu bual dan soal selidik, analisa data kajian ini mungkin mengandungi sedikit potensi untuk menjadi berat sebelah. Satu lagi limitasi kajian ini ialah ia tidak menganalisa penerimaan pembaca ke atas iklan bercetak. Oleh yang demikian, pengkaji tidak dapat menyatakan secara pasti bahawa para pembaca akan menginterpretasikan teks promosi seperti yang dinyatakan di dalam bab analisis.

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