

# The Impact of Idealized Imagery of Models/Celebrities in Malaysian Television and Online Commercial Towards Youth Behaviour

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**Abstract:** *Advertising plays an important role to educate, promote and create awareness for a company's product and services through traditional media such as television, radio, newspaper, billboard, and magazine or via the Internet. It is not easy to persuade potential and target market to buy the product. Therefore, advertisers decided to use any methods to attract the customer's attention. One of the ways includes using beautiful and well-figured models in their advertisements. However, some of the ads do not look relevant to the product. The advertisers' objective is to develop the ads that can grab attention, create interest and desire to purchase. The study's major purpose is to look into the effects of the media on body image and self-esteem in males and females aged 19 to 24. The media is the most influential contributor of social acceptance norms surrounding physical expectations, ideal height and weight, which have been the main factors contributing to one dissatisfaction of his or her own physical appearances and in turn, attributed to mental health issues such as depressive disorder, inferiority complex and disturbed eating habits. A quantitative non-experimental correlational method was used, and a total of 354 participants involved in this study which consists of 225 females and 129 males. Participants completed survey questionnaires containing three sections, which included media exposure, body image, and self-esteem. Data from these survey questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results derived from the study shows that females tend to have lower body image than males, but there is no significant linkage between a person's body image and self-esteem. The result also shows that there is a negative correlation between media exposure and self-esteem for both males and females.*

**Keywords:** Idealized imagery, Media, Television, Online Commercial

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## 1. Introduction

Advertising and commercial are the most well-known and vital aspect of the marketing landscape for every company wherever we live. Millions of dollars will be invested and earned by advertising agencies around the world through the development of innovative concepts and methods for selling campaigns. Most of the time, highly glamorous women will be used as their spokesperson to ensure that they succeed in attracting as many viewers as they can. The physical impression of women's bodies has been used for marketing of almost all consumer goods such as from food to floors, from cream to vehicles, perfume to popcorn (Sarkar, J., 2014). A lot of viewers indicate the likelihood

of increasing the revenue of the product is higher. This representation of the media is known to be so popular as the task of the commercial itself is to persuade consumers to buy the goods they are trying to sell. Besides, advertisement helps build top-of-the-line brand recognition and seeks to promote the recall of products (Ingavale, 2013). Surprisingly, this works better when people's appearance in their ads is presented as ideal as they can to influence consumers and also explains why advertisements are now reinforcing depictions of women far removed from reality. Women and beauty are the two aspects that cannot be separated from each other. Yet beauty has often been depicted by mainstream media as having a perfect body composition. The most harmful part of our commercials today is its portrayal of beauty - someone who is flawless, slim and has a fair complexion. Sociocultural ideals of feminine attractiveness are portrayed in almost all types of mass media, highlighting photographs of women representing what is perceived to be the 'ideal body' (Sarkar, 2014). Unfortunately, this kind of idealised image depicted in the media implicitly influences young girls to alter their bodies and lacks the fact that beauty is subjective. Many teens feel like they are obese and overweight when they equate themselves to photos of very slim people in the media, even though their weight is average enough. It would be fair, then to continually stream a typical "ideal body image" served by the media, including television and the Internet, to deliver negative views within adolescents that they can equate to their own. The body image does not necessarily apply to how a person thinks, feels, and perceives their body and physical appearance. Instead of a conceptual representation that people have developed to direct their thinking about how they look that may not or might not be connected to how others view them.

## 2. Literature Review

### Media and Idealised representation

Women have often been used in today's media as a commodity that can help market a product where women and sex also make a perfect combination to boost audience excitement. Although media entertainment is most frequently the subject of sex concern, it is important to note that the advertising industry also relies heavily on sexualized media content to sell goods (Valkenburg and Piotrowski, 2017). Kumar, S. (2017) also found that using women's sexual appeals attracts customers. The media has been continuously portraying the ideal image for men that are wide and muscular, and thin and slim for women. The media has set a certain standard for a certain body appearance for men and women, and these standards were being heavily portrayed in commercial ads, television, and magazines. Previously, the ideal female body was wider, complete body size, however, presently, cultural standards emphasise on a slimmer body shape, therefore, advertisement models have become increasingly thinner. Mills, J.S, et al. (2017) noted that the thin ideal, which promotes the perception that 'thin is good,' is one way the media influences beauty standards by utilising exceedingly slim and beautiful models. The representation of women as decorative objects is frequently portrayed in advertising, television shows, magazine articles and social media content. Popular media content not only draws other (male) media characters to look at the woman's body, but also encourages media users to do the same (Vandenbosch and Oosten, 2017). Barbara and McQuarries (2011) described idealised images as those that feature models or settings that consumers would expect. Haboush et al. (2012) described Western culture's ideal of beauty in a more specific way, stating that models must have a very slim body with long legs, light eyes, smooth skin, and wrinkles free.

According to Birla, N. (2018), the commercially depicted female characters are primarily influenced by the appearance stereotype where most models have perfect skin, slender figure and symbolise all components of beauty viewed in society. When television screens or commercials display only small, long legs, prominent breasts or thighs, there is no doubt that this kind of myth leads to an increased generalisation across cultures and societies. Mills, J.S, et al. (2017) said that media influence their viewers by manipulating perceived norms of beauty, skewing views of reality that are not just imagination or inspiration.

Most of the time, it is difficult to reach the ideals of beauty as presented in advertising, as the models have certainly been turned into perfection by a variety of technological means beforehand (Widdows, 2018). Past research shows that using women's idealised and pornographic images in ads is nothing new. Even in the initial stage of its existence, women's representations were adapted to the man's taste. Furthermore, these initiatives have been concocted widely on which results in the bombardment of idealised view of male and female body image that were slim ideal for women and muscular ideal for men on every platform of media advertisements (Vandenbosch, 2017). Quite often it is impractical and unattainable. Survey shows that over 60% of women died to achieve a flawless body image (Mc Cabe et al., 2003).

Moran (2011) tried to examine whether or not TV's representation of female body image promotes eating disorders in young women and noticed that most of the advertisements highlighted slim and flawless female actresses receiving praise from attractive males, either in the form of appreciation or gift. Not just this idealised portrayal of women attracting male attention, but also several instances of only thin actresses feeling social security and acceptance. DSW Shoe Warehouse is one of the ads depicting a subtle women's beauty message. It highlighted a tall, skinny, and beautifully dressed woman, carrying evening drinks outside a pool and walking confidently as men turn their heads and stare. Such ads indicate that slim females were the recipients of male affection and admiration. Rosninawati Hussin et al. (2015) found that in marketing their products, TV advertisements often show attractive Western-style women. In Malaysia, this presence has begun to change to modest women in Islamic dressing with headscarves for some items, where Malays are the target audience but ironically included only thin women.

### **The Effect of Idealized Images Against Youth**

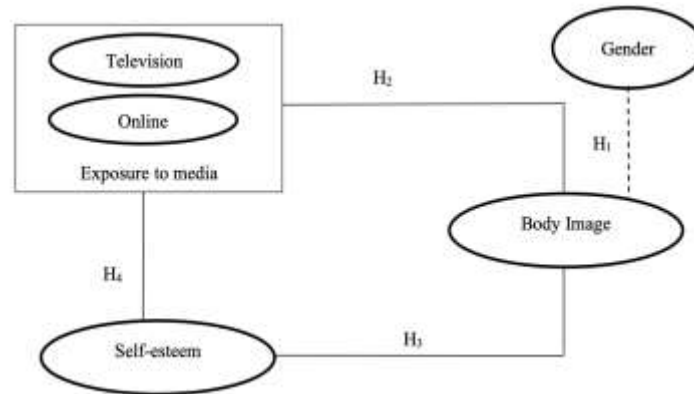
Majority of the people have been continuously living with the inferior feeling of how they physically look which led to a low self-esteem attitude. In a study conducted by Cho and Lee (2013), women experienced high body dissatisfaction by spending a lot of time looking at thin women's images. This means that the creation of body image problems can be attributed to constant media attention, along with the slim ideal reflect beauty standards. These can include body dissatisfaction or weight-related thoughts, particularly among adolescent females. The study found that women's worries regarding their bodies can be related to repeated exposure to media representations portraying the body and attractiveness of the slim female models. The findings also revealed that women found the thin ideal images are more desirable than the actual average images. A similar study by Mills, Shannon, and Hogue (2017) found that women who were prepared to feel insecure about their bodies were actually more likely to want to expose themselves to mediums with slim, desirable models. This series of experimental experiments often illustrates the ambiguity of people's beauty standards relationships.

According to Granatino R. and L. Haytko (2013), people are aware of the media's depiction of the ideal female as unrealistically thin, but the relationship between young women's body image concerns and media representation varies by race. Therefore, they have conducted a survey among a group of seventh-grade students aged 12 to 15, represented by three major African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic cultures. The findings suggest that Hispanic females displayed the greatest media power in contrasting themselves with television models with comments like "I wish I could look like that." This study concluded that females were much more likely to be affected by media images than males. This is because of the increased use of the White thinness ideal over media like television shows, movies, and even ads. Wynn (2012) has conducted a study to explore the relationship between media effect on women and their body image as teenagers, and their media relationship towards body image. The study also explores whether women are influenced by media images and alter their lifestyles to look like them. Results showed that young people work for good health by eating healthy and exercising. However, most women were not happy with their body images and wanted to be skinnier due to media's definite role in shaping women's body images. Thus, it provides a substantial result that advertising impacted their body image during their teenage years and also when they become.

Vitelli (2013) found that there has been an implicit belief in which an ideal body weight and form can contribute to low self-esteem, biased expectations of how much food they can eat to get the ideal photos, and an inclination towards unhealthy eating habits that can plague health issues. A recent study by two Israeli researchers, published in *Journal of Media Psychology*, explored the impact of media reporting on early adolescent body image. Using social comparison theory, the researchers built a prediction model that demonstrated the link between social comparison and body image. Results suggest that the beauty ideal commonly portrayed on television, advertisements, movies and video games have a major influence on teenagers. This influence strengthens low self-esteem that can lead to unhealthy habits such as excessive diet. The issue is that obsessive promotion of these unsustainable ideals will make young girls more vulnerable to eating disorder, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Spettigue, W., and Henderson, K. A. 2004). Furthermore, famous media personalities seem to have a strong influence in encouraging unhealthy eating patterns which can threaten young people's health (Vitelli, 2013).

Want and Saiphoo (2017) conducted a study to discover adolescents' reactions to women's image in TV ads, to see whether social comparisons against media images cognitively successful or cognitively extreme processes are. The research was performed on a group of 151 female undergraduate students reporting media pressure on their appearance. Two groups showed 12 small, beautiful females model's photos. One group has been asked to memorise a complex 8-digit number during image exposure (cognitive busy condition), conversely, the other memorised a much simpler number (free view condition). The study findings have shown that the state of free view is significantly affected by the effect left by ads and lowered the satisfaction of appearance from before to after exposure. Thus, these findings indicate that social media comparisons are rather cognitively extreme even among women who say they experience media pressure.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework with hypothesis of the study**

The following hypothesis were investigated. A model presenting the hypothesized relationships among the variables is shown in Figure 1.

H0: There is no significant relationship between media exposure and body image

H1: There is a significant difference between gender and body image

H2: There is a significant relationship between media exposure and body image

H3: There is a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem

H4: There is a negative correlation between media exposure and self-esteem

## Results

The purpose of this paper was to use an online poll to determine the effects of media play on college-aged men and women's body image and self-esteem. On-line surveys were randomised and distributed to undergraduate male and female students at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia in November-December 2018.

### Level of answer

On 16 November 2018, 1,390 surveys were sent electronically to USIM undergraduate students. The instruction to the students were to click on the link to answer the survey and the survey was to remain open until 7 December 2018. A total of 366 completed surveys were returned at a response rate of 24 per cent. Twelve of the returned surveys were not used due to poor results. Thus only 354 surveys have been evaluated.

### Demographic Information

Participants of the survey were: 225 females (63.6%) and 129 males (36.4%)

**Table 1: Demography - Gender**

Gender	Total Respondents	Percent of Total Responses
Male Respondents	129	36.4%
Female Respondents	225	63.6%

The respondents' ages were from eighteen to twenty-three. From the 354 respondents, 127 people or 35.9% were between 19-20 years old, 203 people or 57.3% were between 21-22 years old, and 24 people or 6.8% were between 23-24 years old.

**Table 2: Demography - Age**

Age	Total Respondents	Percent of Total Responses
19-20	127	35.9%
21-22	203	57.3%
23-24	24	6.8%

The students were varied in heights and weights. Two people (.6%) were less than five feet tall which is below 149 cm, 90 people (25.4 %) were between the heights of 150 cm - 156 cm, 140 people (39.5%) were between the heights of 157 cm-162 cm, 112 people (31.6%) were between the heights of 163 cm-168 cm, and ten people (2.8%) were between the heights of 169 cm and above. Of the respondent's weights, one person (.3%) weighed less than 40 kg, 68 people (19.2%) were between the weights of 41 kg-48 kg, 114 people (32.2%) were between the weights of 49 kg-56 kg, 86 people (24.3%) were between the weights of 57 kg-62 kg, 56 people (15.8%) were between the weights of 63 kg-70 kg, 15 people (4.2%) were between the weights of 71 kg-78 kg, and 14 people (4.0%) were 79 kg or higher.

**Table 3: Demography - Height and Weight**

Height	Total Respondents	Percent of Total Responses
under 149 cm	2	.6
150 cm - 156 cm	90	25.4
157 cm - 162 cm	140	39.5
163 cm - 168 cm	112	31.6
169 cm & above	10	2.8

Weight	Total Respondents	Percent of Total Responses
under 40 kg	1	.3
41 kg -48 kg	68	19.2
49 kg - 56 kg	114	32.2
57 kg - 62 kg	86	24.3
63 kg - 70 kg	56	15.8
71 kg - 78 kg	15	4.2
79 kg & above	14	4.0

### Descriptive statistics

This research aimed to investigate whether young people who been exposed to the media using social networks and TV have lower body image and or self-esteem. Data computed with SPSS

version 22, and 354 participants were analysed, which consists of 225 females and 129 males. Participants answered three sections of survey questionnaires: 1) self-esteem, 2) body image, and 3) media use. Table 4 reported the mean, minimum score, maximum score and standard deviation for the criterion variables body image, media usage and the predictor variables, self-esteem, and gender.

**Table 4: Means and Standard deviation between males and females**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
Media	Female	225	9.3733	2.20049	17.00	5.00
	Male	129	10.1705	1.96899	16.00	6.00
Self-esteem	Female	225	39.7067	3.93056	44.00	26.00
	Male	129	40.0698	3.55577	44.00	28.00
Body image	Female	225	13.4844	2.92785	19.00	10.00
	Male	129	17.0155	2.28782	20.00	12.00

In Table 4, the mean score was quite different between genders which for male's body image (mean= 17.02, SD=2.29) was higher than that for females (mean =13.49, SD=2.93). The maximum score for body image was slightly different for males and females (maximum males=20, maximum females=19), and the minimum score for body image between genders (minimum males=12, minimum females=10). The females have lower body image than males. This result was not surprising as past research found that the females are the one who would always experience lower body image. It can also be seen that the mean score for male's self-esteem (40.07) is higher than that for females (39.71).

**Table 5: T-test analysis: significant difference between gender and body image**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	t
Body Image	Male	129	17.0155	2.28782	352	11.787
	Female	225	13.4844	2.92785		

Alternative Hypotheses H1, it is predicted that there would be a significant difference in body image for males and females. Thus, based on Table 5, the females showed lower body image than males where Mean = 13.48, SD = 2.93 for females and mean = 17.02, SD = 2.29 for males. An independent samples t-test carried out indicated that there was a significant difference in mean scores of body image for males and females  $t(352) = 11.787, p < .001$ . Therefore, alternative hypotheses H1 is accepted.

**Table 6: Pearson correlation analysis: Relationship between media exposure and body image**

Variable	Media Exposure	
	r	p
Body Image	0.169	0.002

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In the correlations analysis using Pearson's, the significance level used in this study was 0.05. Alternative hypotheses H2 predicted that there is a significant relationship between media exposure and body image. Table 6 indicates that there is a significant relationship between media exposure and body image ( $r = .169$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypotheses is rejected while the alternative hypothesis H2, which says that there is a significant relationship between media exposure and body image is accepted.

**Table 7: Pearson correlation analysis: Relationship between body image and self esteem**

Variable	Body Image	
	r	p
Self esteem	0.013	0.807

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Alternative Hypotheses H3 predicted that there is a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem for both genders. Correlational analyses indicated in Table 7 that there was a non-significant relationship between body image and self-esteem ( $r = .013$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). From these results between body image and self-esteem, alternative hypotheses H3 is rejected.

**Table 8: Pearson correlation analysis: Relationship between media exposure and self esteem**

Variable	Media Exposure	
	r	p
Self esteem	-.091	0.090

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Alternative hypotheses H4 predicted that there would be a negative correlation between media exposure and self-esteem. The results correlated for variables showed in Table 8 that there was a negative correlation between media exposure and self-esteem, but on a non-significant level ( $r = -.091$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). These results suggested that the media does not affect self-esteem. But since Pearson's  $r$  is negative, this result indicates somehow that when the amount of media exposure increases, the level of one's self-esteem decreases. Alternative hypotheses H4 was rejected.

### 3. Discussion

The four hypotheses of the study were:

- 1) There is a significant difference between sex and body image;

- 2) There is a clear association between media representation and body image;
- 3) There is a significant relationship between body image and self-esteem, and
- 4) There is a negative correlation for self-esteem and media use in both males and females, which indicates that the more participants are exposed to the media, the lower their self-esteem.

### **1) There is a disparity between gender and body image**

The first alternative hypotheses H1 revealed that there was a substantial difference in body perception between males and females. The females developed a low body image than males. There was also a significant gap in mean body image scores between males and females. The mean scores were lower for females compared to males. The result indicates that females experience dangerous levels of concern on body image compared to males.

These findings are consistent with previous research results by MacNeill et al. (2017), which explains that women experience higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than their male counterparts. Instead, men, are less influenced by body image issues and physical appearance ideals and prefer to resort to a downward social comparison. In contrast, women have more pessimistic perceptions of obtaining the ideal figure and appearance. This study showed that females are more affected by graphic media representations and thus exhibited a more significant concern for body image than males. However, findings from Neagu (2015) indicate that body image dissatisfaction has increased among men over the last two decades due to idealised muscular representations depicted in the media, suggesting that males may often have a low body image as females. Some of them want to be smaller, while others wish to increased muscle mass, using protein supplements, steroids, and bodybuilding. They explain why, due to a social comparison with idealised media photos, men often appear to feel uncomfortable with their body size and tone and want to become more muscular. Thus, they indulge in unhealthy conduct, such as obsessive exercise.

### **2) Relationship between media exposure and body image**

Based on the results, the Pearson correlation indicates a strong association between media exposure and body image. As expected, this finding shows that media reporting affects body image. Based on various observations, Kinnally (2012) research resulted in an overall media (television) exposure that seemed to have significant associations in body image, even though their effect seemed to be overshadowed by other factors. Although the total media exposure was not related, there was still a strong media correlation. Upward contrast with media data was the primary media influence associated with the internalisation of the slim ideal and body image issues. Stephen and Perera (2014) research has shown that Chinese women prefer lower weight to beauty after being exposed to model images, indicating that short-term exposure to model images can potentially influence a woman's body image.

Also, research by Rodgers, R.F. and Melioli (2016) shows that there is a correlation between spending more time on social media sites or interacting with more appearance-related content among young men and female that contributed to concerns about body image and disordered eating. Viewing these images can increase the dissatisfaction of women's bodies, particularly when women compare their bodies to slim and lean bodies in these images. A significant contribution to building a youth body image is the media which by continuously watching perfect bodies, can feed young people's insecurities about beauty and weight (Pop, 2016).

### **3) Relationship between the image of the body and self-esteem**

The result indicates that there is no strong correlation between body image and self-esteem. The result suggests that the idea of the body has little effect on one's self-esteem. This finding is consistent with a study by Tawatia (2017) in which, as expected, the body's image attitude is not similarly bound to self-esteem for all adolescents. There may be a lot of explanations behind the same. However, in comparison to this finding, there are also many research and hypotheses that support the fact that body image generally goes hand in hand with self-esteem. It has been said that perceptions of body appearance and self-esteem have clear connections where individuals who display higher degrees of body image dissatisfaction and diet have shown lower self-esteem (Tiwari, 2014). Lin also agreed on the fact that body image leads to lower self-esteem. The study found that there are significantly high and supportive relationships among college the students in southern Taiwan connecting perception of body image and self-esteem. It has shown that the more positive the view of the body image, the higher the self-esteem. In a related recent research, Szabo (2015) examined the relationship between body image and self-esteem in a young adult sample. It concluded that significant variations between perceived and ideal body image predict lower self-esteem levels.

### **4) The relationship between exposure to media and self-esteem**

Alternative hypothesis H4 predicted that there would be a negative link between media reporting and self-esteem. Results have shown that there is a non-significant negative association between self-esteem and media use for both. These findings indicate that the media does not influence self-esteem for both males and females. Thus Hypothesis 4 has not been confirmed.

While there is no evidence to propose that media consumption or use can specifically negatively impact self-esteem, there are studies that show that media impacts body image, which then indirectly affects one's self-esteem. Research by Jan et al. (2017) indicates that there is a clear association between media and self-esteem. Increased media consumption leads to the self-esteem of individuals to drop. One hour spent on Facebook daily results in a 5.574 decrease in the individual's self-esteem score. Much study has also been conducted to show that body image is closely related to self-esteem. These two findings contribute to the creation of Hypothesis 4, whether exposure to mass media can affect self-esteem.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study aims to investigate in both men and women the media impact on body image and self-esteem and its effects on young people aged 19-24. It has been understood that the body image one possessed has become a main contributor of one's mental health, self-esteem and well-being. The results show that if you do not take the right attitude towards your body, it can lead to the feeling of worthlessness, and affected the levels of trust one has for other people. We live in an age in which the body has become a natural part of life. Presently, the images of unattainable body standards jammed up the magazines, TV ads, movies and social media platforms. These images usually reflect those of the thinly idealised women and developments in technology. This study addressed media attention and its effect on one's body image and self-esteem. Most research indicates that the media, whether it is model photos or movies and TV, literally has an impact on the body image of young people across the globe and in turns their self-esteem. However, these findings did not endorse media consumption contributing to low self-esteem or harmful habits.

The present study showed that women have lower body image than men, and this is no longer shocking because young women prefer to equate their appearance with others, contributing to negative attitudes towards their own body. Conclusively, this research revealed there exist a correlation between media and body image however it did not correlate with self-esteem.

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