

THE SHADE EFFECT: HOW COLOURISM AND SKIN TONE SHAPE SOUTH
ASIAN CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION IN ADVERTISING

by

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ABSTRACT

Colourism, the preference for lighter skin tones over darker ones within and between racial and ethnic groups, remains a persistent issue across many cultures, particularly among South Asians, as well as in media and advertising. Yet very little marketing research has examined how skin-tone representation in advertising shapes South Asian consumers' perceptions when viewing another South Asian individual with a lighter or darker skin tone. This research investigates whether South Asian consumers respond differently to advertisements featuring lighter-skinned versus darker-skinned South Asian models. Using an experimental design, participants were randomly assigned to view either a lighter- or darker-skinned South Asian model and then evaluated the model and the advertisement. They also completed measures of ideal self/model congruence, Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Contrary to expectations, there were no significant differences in consumer responses across the two skin-tone conditions. Ideal self/model congruence did not mediate the relationship between skin tone and attitude toward the model and ad. Likewise, neither SDO nor RWA moderated the association between skin tone representation and ideal self/model congruence. These findings suggest that consumers responded similarly to both lighter- and darker-skinned models, highlighting the need for future research to examine whether colourism-based perceptions continue to shape South Asian consumers' perceptions, how these attitudes may be changing, and what factors might contribute to such shifts in a multicultural context.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Unsuccessful in marriage, career, and want confidence, beauty and success? – Fairness cream and becoming three to four shades lighter will fix that for sure!

This might sound very exaggerated and humorous, but it reflects the messaging in beauty product advertisements in South Asia. One of the most famous cases related to this issue was the Fair & Lovely case, a brand by Unilever that faced backlash for promoting skin whitening cream (Jones, 2020). Notably, the Fair & Lovely brand was renamed in 2020, following the backlash against its long-standing promotion of lighter skin as a sign of success by the Black Lives Matter movement (Hari, 2021; Yasir & Gettleman, 2020). A similar cream called “Fair and Handsome” in India, targeting male consumers, portrays the notion that to improve one's appearance, one must be lighter-skinned (Davis, 2018). Dark-skinned individuals in South Asian advertisements are often absent in ads or shown in lower-class roles (Varman et al., 2024).

Among South Asians, lighter skin is often associated with beauty, prospects, progress, and freedom, leading to those with fairer skin receiving an unfair share of advantages, such as better job opportunities, marriage prospects, and societal benefits (Mady et al., 2023; Mobius & Rosenblatt, 2006). Companies operating in South Asia are aware of this notion, which is one of the reasons why they have a strong history of selling “whiteness” in the form of bleaching cream (Abdi et al., 2021; Mady et al., 2023; Varman et al., 2024; Glenn, 2008; Davis, 2018).

Colourism, the strong preference for lighter skin over darker skin, among South Asians, stems from centuries of social hierarchy and colonial influence (Dixon & Telles,

2017; Glenn, 2008; Mady et al., 2023; Varman et al., 2024). Importantly, after migration, South Asians in Western countries continue to uphold cultural norms and preferences, as evident in popular media, such as the U.S.-based Netflix production *Indian Matchmaking*, where lighter skin is still portrayed as desirable (Pathak, 2020). This makes it essential to study South Asian consumers in Canada, the USA, and the UK. Furthermore, South Asian consumers in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom form one of the largest ethnic groups in these countries. As of 2021, 7.1% of Canada's population is South Asian (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2024). In the USA, the community has grown to 5.1 million, becoming the second-largest immigrant group (Northwestern University, 2024). Retailers in the USA and Canada are switching to personalized marketing to better connect with the younger South Asian consumers who value branding and representation (Northwestern University, 2024). In the UK, South Asians represent the largest ethnic minority population (Population of England and Wales, 2022), accounting for up to 8% of the advertising industry (Siddiqui, 2023).

This raises an important question: when South Asians see other South Asians in advertisements, do they still prefer lighter-skinned individuals over darker-skinned ones? Furthermore, what factors might influence or alter these intra-group biases? This study will explore the perspectives of South Asians in Canada, the USA, and the UK regarding advertisements featuring South Asian models, focusing on how variations in skin colour representation affect consumer perceptions.

Very few studies have examined South Asians and their reasons behind colourism, with most adopting qualitative research methods (Varman et al., 2024; Mady et al., 2023). Previous studies on skin colour bias or colourism have typically relied on content or qualitative analyses, revealing a preference for lighter skin tones and their overrepresentation in media across different ethnic groups (Krishen et al., 2014; Meyers, 2011; Mitchell, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022; Davis, 2018; Yan & Bissell, 2014). Yet, few have discussed the underlying psychological and cultural mechanisms driving the relationship between colourism and consumer preferences, with most focusing on Black or white consumers and models (Zdravkovic et al., 2014; Sengupta, 2000; Cowart & Lehnert, 2018; Watson et al., 2010).

A recent study by Craddock et al. (2025) found that South Asian women in the UK responded differently to skin tone in advertising: White models reduced skin-shade satisfaction, and darker-skinned South Asian models increased inspiration. Watson et al. (2010) found that African American men preferred lighter-skinned female models, whereas African American women preferred darker-skinned ones. Krishen et al. (2014) reported similar patterns among Asian and White consumers, while Meyers (2011) showed that Black consumers with stronger ethnic identity favoured darker-skinned models. In contrast, Sengupta (2022) found no significant effects of model race or product type.

The underlying mechanisms linking colourism and consumer attitudes remain underexplored, despite previous studies reporting inconsistent findings on the relationship between skin colour variations and consumer responses. One potential mechanism

underlying these attitudes involves the alignment of self-concept. According to Choi and Rifon (2012), when a celebrity endorser's image aligns with a consumer's ideal self, it can strengthen positive evaluations. In the context of colourism, the extent to which a model's skin tone matches a consumer's ideal self-image may mediate the relationship between individual orientations and consumer perceptions.

These inconsistencies may also reflect individual differences in social or ideological orientations, such as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which refers to the belief in and preference for group-based hierarchies (Pratto et al., 1994), and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), which reflects a tendency to organize social views around in-groups and out-groups, emphasizing authority and conformity (Whitley, 1999). Whether individuals high versus low in SDO or RWA perceive skin tone differently remains unclear. To my knowledge, neither of these orientations has been examined in the context of colourism. This study, therefore, examines whether SDO and RWA shape the relationship between the model's skin tone and consumers' perceived ideal self/model congruence, and in turn, how this congruence influences the attitudes of South Asian consumers.

This study examines the perspectives of South Asian ethnic minorities in Canada, the USA, and the UK on the representation of other South Asians in advertisements. To explore this, I conducted an experiment where I manipulated a South Asian model's skin tone and then measured consumer preferences (attitudes towards the model and the ad), ideal self-congruence, and SDO and RWA.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Racial and ethnic cues influence how consumers evaluate and interpret advertisements. Consumers tend to respond more positively to ads that feature models who resemble them, as shared racial or ethnic identity increases feelings of relevance and identification (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Appiah, 2001). Research also indicates that people automatically draw on racial cues, often relying on familiar stereotypes or social hierarchies when evaluating models and brands (Aaker et al., 2000; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001). For minority consumers, who are often underrepresented in media, the race of the model can influence perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and overall ad effectiveness (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). Furthermore, studies have also found that ethnic minority consumers perceive advertisements as more trustworthy when the model is from their own group rather than the majority group (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994; Forehand et al., 2002; Grier & Deshpande, 2001; Hazzouri et al., 2017). Together, these findings suggest that racialized visual cues matter in advertising, and they provide a useful foundation for understanding how more subtle within-group cues, such as lighter versus darker skin tone among South Asians, might also shape consumer perceptions.

2.1 Colourism and Marketing

Colourism, also known as skin colour bias, refers to the preferential or discriminatory treatment of individuals based on their skin colour, often favouring lighter skin over darker skin (Mitchell, 2020; Watson et al., 2010). This bias affects opportunities in various areas, including income, education, housing, and even social relationships, thereby reinforcing systemic inequalities (Mady et al., 2022; Hunter, 2007). Although

often linked with racism, which refers to discrimination between racial groups based on perceived differences in ethnicity or group membership (Henry & Sears, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 1997), Colourism instead privileges lighter skin tone within or between racial and ethnic groups (Bajwa et al., 2023).

Research from social psychology has shown that darker-skinned individuals face more discrimination compared to lighter-skinned individuals, with the societal pressure being heavier on women than men (Watson et al., 2010; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Adbi et al., 2021). Women are pressured more to meet the societal standard of having lighter skin due to a higher level of judgment on female external beauty compared to men, as men are primarily judged on wealth and education (Glenn, 2008). This widespread preference for lighter skin has helped reinforce global beauty ideals that favour whiteness, allowing corporations worldwide to profit by promoting it (Davis et al., 2018; Glenn, 2008). As a result, the use of skin-lightening products has become common across many countries.

The roots of intra-group colourism among South Asians lie in the region's post-colonial history, where colonial powers portrayed South Asian culture as inferior, outdated, and chaotic, while positioning Western culture as modern and superior (Panikkar, 2007; Varman et al., 2024). They tried to erase India's rich history, calling it irrelevant, and made people believe that real progress could only come from the West (Panikkar, 2007; Varman et al., 2023). Furthermore, the authenticity of the South Asian lifestyle was questioned, which led to anxiety and humiliation (Joshi, 2016; Varman et al., 2024). This had a significant impact, especially on the Indian middle class, who

began to view Western lifestyles as more authentic than their own (Joshi, 2016; Varman et al., 2024). Many scholars argue that not only colonialism but casteism or classism plays a major role behind colourism in India, where upper-class individuals used to stay indoors and lower-class individuals used to work outside in the sun (Dixon & Telles, 2017). A study by Mady et al. (2023) on women from Ghana, India, and Egypt found that the patriarchal nature of these nations, casteism in India, and the pressure to meet beauty standards contribute to the desire for lighter skin. Multinational corporations are aware of this notion, which leads them to promote more skin-lightening products, portraying in advertisements that usage of such products and being lighter-skinned will enhance one's social standing, implying that their current social standing is low or negative (Mady et al., 2023).

According to Glenn (2008), from beauty pageants to the portrayal of actresses in Bollywood, the women on the screen tend to be lighter than average Indians, which is one of the biggest reasons behind wanting to be lighter-skinned, as portraying lighter-skinned models or actresses in media as more successful and prosperous in India. Furthermore, the paper notes that many Indian companies, both in India and those targeting Indian communities abroad, label their products as fairness or whitening items to attract consumers. A study by Adbi et al. (2021) on Indian men and women showed that manipulating psychological disempowerment by asking them to recall an incident where they had no power (disempowerment) or had power (empowerment) led Indian women to be more substantially interested in selecting hazardous skin-lightening products despite their awareness of the risk, while Indian men's interest remains unchanged. However, contrary to the usual pattern of colourism among South Asians, a

recent experimental study with South Asian women in the UK found that participants viewed advertisements featuring darker-skinned South Asian models, lighter-skinned South Asian models, White models, or product-only images (Craddock et al., 2025). Viewing White models reduced skin-shade satisfaction and confidence, while darker-skinned South Asian models increased inspiration. Lighter-skinned South Asian models increased appearance satisfaction, and both conditions of South Asian models reduced anxiety (Craddock et al., 2025).

Despite this emerging counterevidence, dominant marketing practices in South Asia continue to draw on Eurocentric representations of modernity, where fair-skinned models are positioned as markers of prosperity and achievement (Mady et al., 2023; Varman et al., 2024). Recent research on post-colonial India by Varman et al. (2024) found that Indian advertisements often employ Westernized imagery to appear modern, rather than showcasing their own culture. Fair-skinned models are used to represent freedom, progress and modernity, creating a social hierarchy and dark-skinned individuals are marginalized by putting them in either a minor role, where they are considered lower-class, or they will not be present in the advertisement at all (Varman et al., 2024).

Among South Asians, lighter skin tone is more desirable and socially advantageous compared to darker skin, where South Asians consistently link fairness with beauty, higher status, success and better marriage and career prospects, while dark skinned individuals are discriminated against (Glenn, 2008; Hunter, 2007). This pattern is deeply rooted in South Asia's colonial past and its enduring social hierarchies, which

have shaped perceptions of beauty and status. Even today, these ideas continue to influence how South Asians view themselves and others. Based on this background, I hypothesize that:

H1: South Asian consumers in Canada, the USA and the UK show more positive consumer responses (attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the model) toward lighter-skinned South Asian models in advertisements compared to darker-skinned South Asian models.

2.2 Mediating Effect of Ideal Self/Model Congruence

The effectiveness of an advertisement often depends on how well the ad, its model, or its content relates to the viewer's self-concept (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Sirgy, 1982). Self-concept can be defined as the overall perceptions and feelings one has about oneself in relation to others (Xu & Pratt, 2018; Zhu et al., 2019). This concept can be divided into multiple categories, including the actual self, ideal self, social self, and ideal social self-image (Sirgy, 1985). Actual self-image refers to the concept of how a person or individual sees themselves, and ideal self-image refers to the concept of how a person or individual wants to ideally be (X. Zhu et al, 2019). Furthermore, a match between a person's actual self-image and a product/brand image is referred to as self-congruity, while a match between an ideal self and a product/brand image is called ideal congruity (Sirgy, 1985).

According to Choi & Rifon (2012), consumers who want to meet their ideal self have inspirational figures whose attitudes or behaviours they follow, which leads to positive responses towards advertisements, brands, and products related to the

inspirational figure. Furthermore, consumers tend to create a positive association between themselves and influencers they follow on social media who represent their aspirational selves, and when those influencers promote brands or products, it creates a link between the consumer and the product as well (D. Belanche et al., 2019). An endorser or inspirational figure can assist the consumer to enhance their ideal self-congruency due to the shared cultural values, images and symbols leading to effective endorsement (X. Zhu, et al., 2019).

Based on literature on self-concept, both actual and ideal self-congruence are predictors of brand attachment and purchasing decisions, but motivation varies (Ekinici & Riley, 2003). According to Ekinici & Riley (2003), if an individual's self-concept is considered undesirable, consumers try to conform to their ideal congruence rather than self-congruence. Additionally, when consumers perceive a gap between their actual and ideal selves, they are motivated to reduce it, often engaging in compensatory or impulsive buying to feel closer to the version of themselves they aspire to be (Japutra et al., 2018). Studies have shown that ideal-self congruence is more effective when it comes to predicting consumers' attachment towards brands and impulsive buying (D. Belanche et al., 2019; Japutra et al., 2018, 2019). This is due to brands assisting the consumers to achieve what they aspire to be, and when the brands effectively assist the consumers to achieve their ideal self, the brand is perceived to be ideal self-congruent with the consumer (Japutra et al., 2018).

As established in prior literature, it is reasonable to assume that lighter skin is idealized in South Asia. In this study, I assume that a South Asian consumer's ideal self is

more closely aligned with a lighter skin tone than a darker one. Consequently, exposure to a lighter-skinned model is expected to produce greater ideal-self congruence, which in turn is expected to influence attitudes toward both the model and the advertisement. In this context, when a participant's ideal self aligns with the model's skin tone, I refer to this alignment as ideal self/model congruence.

H2: Ideal Self/Model Congruence will mediate the effect of model skin tone on consumer responses (attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the model) with lighter-skinned models eliciting stronger congruence and more positive responses.

2.3 Moderating Effect of Social Dominance Orientation

How individuals respond to others and different representations in advertising can be influenced by their beliefs about social hierarchies (Hazzouri et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994). Since colourism reflects social hierarchies based on skin tone, where some groups are viewed as having higher status than others, I will be measuring whether being high or low on Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) leads to differences in perceiving skin colour. SDO is the belief in group-based hierarchies, with individuals high in SDO supporting inequality and power structures that maintain group disparities and believing that their group is superior to other groups in society (Ho et al., 2015; Sidanius et al., 2016; Uduehi & Barnes, 2024; Pratto et al., 1994).

People with high Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) tend to favour social hierarchies where they inherently believe and promote inequality among the groups in society (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Ho et al., 2015). These individuals often support policies that maintain existing power

structures, the status quo, and the dominance of their in-group members (Hazzouri et al., 2019). Furthermore, people with high SDO are more likely to endorse discriminatory ideologies to justify social inequality and hierarchies (Pratto et al., 1998; Pratto et al., 2000). Research has further shown that high SDO is associated with low tolerance, concern and compassion for out-group members (Pratto et al., 1994). A study by Hazzouri et al. (2017) showed that minority group members with High SDO prefer seeing an in-group member in the advertisement rather than a minority out-group member compared to an advertisement representing a majority group member.

On the other hand, people with low Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) tend to promote equality in society and resist hierarchical dominance among groups (Pratto et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2015). Instead, these individuals support policies that promote equal opportunities in society for all groups by trying to reduce discrimination and aiming for a more egalitarian society (Pratto et al., 2000; Jost & Burgess, 2000). Individuals with low SDO scores are less likely to endorse ideologies that legitimize group inequality and are more supportive of marginalized groups in society (Sidanius et al., 1994). They tend to exhibit higher tolerance, concern and compassion for all other groups (Pratto et al., 1994). In the realm of advertising and research, ethnic minorities with low SDO generally do not show a preference for advertisements featuring either majority or minority groups, as their focus is on equality in society rather than maintaining the status quo (Hazzouri et al., 2017).

As discussed earlier, lighter skin is often perceived as a sign of higher status and wealth due to deep-rooted cultural and historical beliefs among South Asians (Mady et

al., 2022; Patel, 2014; Varman et al., 2024). In India, the concept of fairness is closely tied to the caste system, where lighter skin is often associated with power and success (Mishra, 2015). The concept of colourism and the caste system, which is a form of social hierarchy, is still a subject of scholarly debate, where some scholars argue that skin colour plays a significant role in ancient Hindu deities and texts that established caste hierarchies and Brahmin dominance (Dixon & Telles, 2017; Ayyar & Khandare, 2013). Over time, colourism and the caste-system became interconnected, where people started associating the higher class with lighter skin and the lower class with darker skin and later, the introduction of colonialism by the European traders and British rule in South Asia reinforced this association more (Dixon & Telles, 2017; Jablonski, 2012; Vaid, 2009).

Since among South Asians, whiteness is perceived as higher in social hierarchy and equates with power and prosperity (Mady et al., 2022; Patel, 2014; Varman et al., 2024; Dixon & Telles, 2017; Glenn, 2008), I predict the preference for lighter skin will be more pronounced among individuals with High Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) compared to low SDO individuals who supports equality in society and opposes discrimination in the society. As a result, I expect that consumers with high SDO will have greater congruence with a lighter-skinned model of their ideal self compared to consumers with low SDO. Hence, I hypothesize that:

H3: Consumers with high Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) will show greater ideal self/model congruence toward lighter-skinned models compared to darker-skinned models. This leads to more positive consumer responses (attitudes towards the ad and the

model) towards lighter-skinned models compared to darker-skinned models, and this effect is mitigated for consumers with low SDO.

2.4 Moderating Effect of Right-Wing Authoritarian

Consumers' social and political beliefs can shape how they perceive and respond to social representations, including those in advertising (Jost et al., 2009; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017). Political ideology influences attitudes toward hierarchy, conformity, and diversity (Jost et al., 2003; Feldman, 2003), which may also affect how individuals perceive skin colour and attractiveness. Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) is examined as a form of political ideology to understand its moderating effect on preferences for lighter versus darker skin tones and whether it influences consumer behavioural intentions.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) is a psychological concept that describes a set of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of individuals which can be characterized by three main components: "authoritarian submission," which analyze means submitting to oneself without any critical evaluation; "authoritarian aggression," which means reacting aggressively to rule-breakers, and "conventionalism" which means strictly abiding by the social conventions (Rattazzi et al., 2007; Altemeyer, 1998). The idea of authoritarianism was first introduced to the rise of fascism around the 1930s by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950). However, over time, the definition and measurement of authoritarian personality have changed and evolved, and the construct in the current literature is called "Right Wing Authoritarianism or RWA" (Altemeyer, 1998).

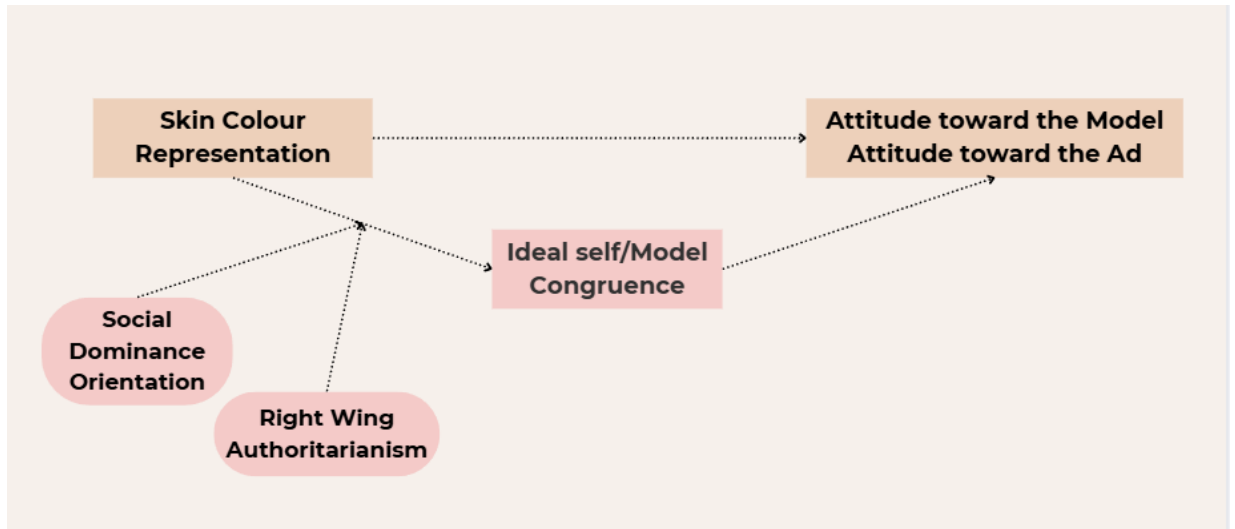
Individuals with high RWA organize their views on the world and societal issues in terms of in-groups and out-groups, where they perceive the out-group members as a threat to their traditional norms and values, which leads to prejudice, social discrimination and hostility towards the out-group members (Whitley, 1999). Much research has shown that people with high RWA have strong biases or intolerance towards African Americans, women, lesbians and gays, disabled people and AIDS patients (Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland & Adelson, 1996; Whitley, 1998; Duncan et al., 1997; Noonan et al., 1970; Cunningham et al., 1991; Peterson et al., 1993). Furthermore, these individuals perceive themselves as morally more correct than others and usually justify prejudice against those perceived as immoral by authority figures (Whitley, 1999). This sense of superiority allows them to look down on the out-group members by considering them insignificant and harmless to their values and norms (Whitley, 1999).

On the other hand, individuals with low RWA tend to be more tolerant, open-minded, support egalitarian values and favour individual liberties, freedom and self-expression and democratic principles (Altemeyer, 1996; Whitley, 1999). Studies have shown that individuals with low RWA are generally less biased, less ethnocentric, more supportive of social changes, and more advocates for progressive policies (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018). This means that they might be less likely to exhibit aggression towards the out-group members and more likely to promote diversity and inclusive values as opposed to high RWA individuals. Thus, tolerance, openness to change, and support towards progressivism might make low RWA individuals advocate for social equality and justice and challenge traditional social norms and views.

As mentioned earlier, lighter skin colour is strongly associated with traditional values and a positive trait to portray modernity, progress and freedom in South Asian advertisements; individuals high in Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), who tend to favour established norms and hierarchical social structures, are likely to perceive lighter-skinned models as strongly aligned with their ideal self. In contrast, they may view darker-skinned models as misaligned, which can result in lower ideal self/model congruence. For individuals low in RWA, however, the difference in congruence between lighter- and darker-skinned models is expected to be less pronounced, as their ideal-self perceptions are less tightly tied to these traditional hierarchies and norms. Hence, I hypothesize that:

H4: Consumers with high Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) will show greater ideal self/model congruence toward lighter-skinned models compared to darker-skinned models. This leads to more positive consumer responses (attitude toward the ad and the model) towards lighter-skinned models compared to darker-skinned models, and this effect is mitigated for consumers with low SDO.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Model*



CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Study

An experiment was conducted to examine how different skin tone representations of South Asian models in advertisements influence South Asian consumers' perception of the ideal self and how this perception, being congruent with the model in the advertisement, affects their attitudes toward the model and the advertisement. In addition, I investigated whether having low or high levels of Social Dominance Orientation or Right-Wing Authoritarianism impacts the extent to which consumers perceive their ideal self as aligned with the model.

3.2 Participants and Design

Number of participants. Four hundred eleven South Asians residing in Canada, the US and the UK voluntarily participated in the experiment on the online panel Prolific for nominal monetary compensation. A total of 5 participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not complete the survey. Furthermore, a total of 42 participants were screened out of the analysis as they did not fall under the South Asian ethnicity category. Thus, the final sample included data from 364 participants. The average age of the participants was 33.16 years, and 50.8% identified as female, 48.6% as male, and 0.5% as other. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions (Skin colour representation; lighter-skinned South Asian model vs darker-skinned South Asian model) in a between-subjects design.

3.3 Procedure

Participants either viewed an advertisement with a lighter-skinned South Asian model or a darker-skinned South Asian model. The same model and advertisement were used for both conditions, except their skin colour was edited to be lighter or darker (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to view the advertisement for at least 10 seconds, complete a manipulation check, and then answer questions measuring their attitude towards the ad and ideal self/model congruence. The attitude towards the model was asked later so that the questions wouldn't lead participants to understand that I was assessing their perception based on the model. Participants were then asked to answer questions regarding their demographics, which included questions related to their age, gender and self measured skin tone. Participants also assessed their own skin tone by selecting the option that most closely matched their complexion. After that, participants answered questions related to their Social Dominance Orientation and Right-Wing Authoritarianism. I kept that for the end so that measuring them earlier does not impact the measures. Finally, participants answered screening questions about their ethnicity and place of birth.

3.4 Measures

Attitude toward the model. Participants evaluated their attitude toward the model using a 7-point semantic differential scale. They were asked to indicate their impressions by selecting a point on each of the following bipolar items: “Unappealing–Appealing,” “Unattractive–Attractive,” “Unpleasant–Pleasant,” “Unfavourable–Favourable,” and “Unlikable–Likable”. These items were adapted from the validated scale developed by

Spears and Singh (2004). The five-item Attitude Toward the Model scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .958$). Please Appendix B for the details of all the measures.

Attitude toward the Advertisement. Participants evaluated their attitude toward the advertisement using the same 7-point semantic differential scale and items that had previously been used to assess their attitude toward the model. These items were also adapted from Spears and Singh (2004). The five-item Attitude Toward the Advertisement scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .96$).

Ideal Self/Model Congruence. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items included: “The model in the advertisement represents the kind of image I admire”; “The model’s appearance in the ad reflects qualities I aspire to”; “I identify with people who have an image like the model in the ad”; and “People like the model in the ad are similar to the person I want to be associated with”. These items were adapted from the validated scale developed by Sirgy et al. (1997). The four-item ideal self/model congruence was averaged to create a composite measure as it demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

Social Dominance Orientation. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items included: “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups”; “It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom”; “Inferior groups should stay in their place”; “We should

do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups (reverse-coded)”; “Increased social equality (reverse-coded)”. These items were adapted from the validated Social Dominance Orientation scale developed by Pratto et al. (1994). I averaged the five SDO items to form a composite score, as the scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$).

Right Wing Authoritarianism. Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items included: “It’s great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority” (reverse-coded), “What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity,” “God’s laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late,” “There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse” (reverse-coded), “Our society does not need tougher governments and stricter laws” (reverse-coded), and “The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers if we are going to preserve law and order”. These items were adapted from the validated Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale developed by Bizumic and Duckitt (2018). The six-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .77$).

3.5 Results

3.5.1 Screening Question

A total of 406 individuals completed the survey. A screening question asked participants to identify their ethnic background, and only those who self-identified as South

Asian were eligible to continue. Based on this criterion, 42 respondents were screened out, leaving a final sample of 364 South Asian participants.

3.5.2 Manipulation Check Results

A manipulation check was conducted to assess whether participants perceived the model in the advertisements as intended to be South Asian, as indicated by the manipulation of the skin tone in the advertisements. Participants answered the question “Do you think the model in the advertisement you viewed is South Asian?” with “Yes”, “No” or “Not sure”.

A chi-square test of independence revealed a significant association between skin-tone condition and recognition of the model's ethnicity, $\chi^2 (1, N = 364) = 25.29, p < .001$. Recognition rates were high overall; however, participants in the dark-skin condition were more likely to identify the model as South Asian (98.4%) compared to those in the light-skin condition (83.2%). After applying the manipulation-check exclusion criteria, 331 participants were included in the analysis. Of these, 182 were assigned to the dark-skin model condition, and 149 were assigned to the light-skin model condition.

In conclusion, despite the differences, most participants across both conditions correctly identified the model as South Asian. However, since participants in the dark-skin condition were more likely to identify the model as South Asian than those in the light-skin condition, this may indicate that the lighter skin tone introduced some ambiguity for a few participants, suggesting that the manipulation was not perfectly effective.

3.5.3 Direct effect of Skin Tone manipulation on Consumer Responses – Test of H1

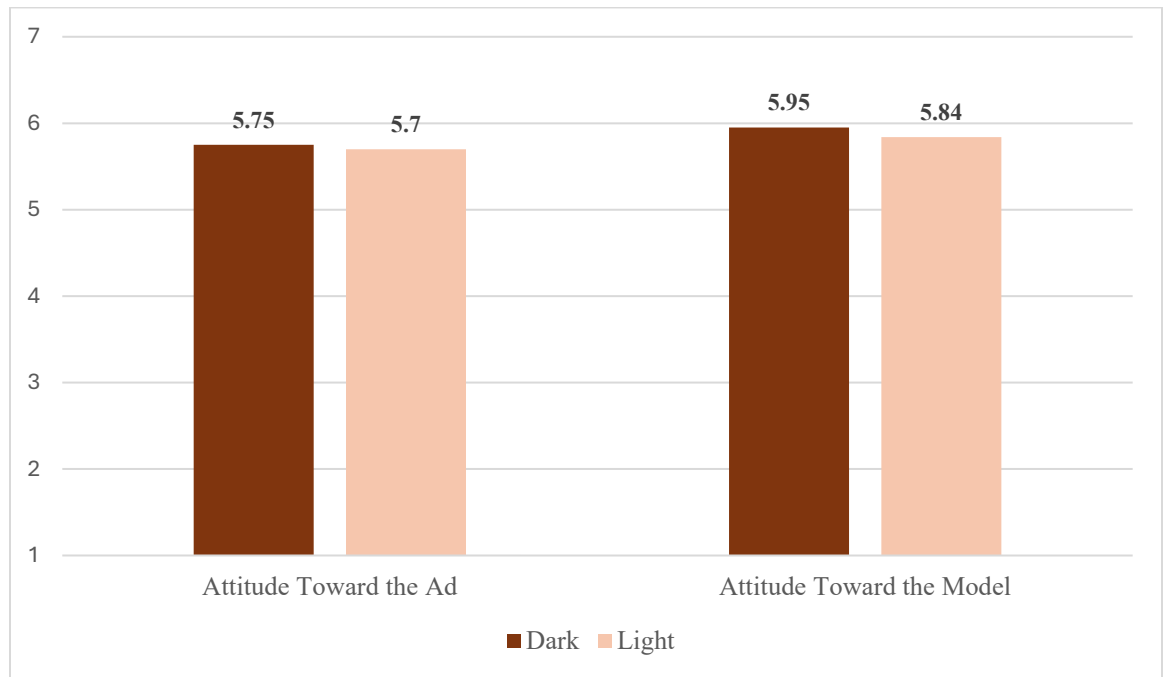
A one-way ANOVA was conducted with skin tone (dark vs. light) as the independent variable and attitudes toward the ad and model as dependent variables. Only

participants who passed the manipulation check were included in the primary analysis ($N = 331$); however, including all participants ($N = 364$) produced the same pattern.

For attitude toward the ad, results showed no significant effect of skin tone, $F(1, 329) = 0.17, p = .682, \eta^2 = .001$. Participants rated the ad similarly in both dark-skinned ($M = 5.75$) and light-skinned conditions ($M = 5.70$). A similar pattern emerged for attitudes toward the model; the results showed no significant effect of skin tone, $F(1, 329) = 0.79, p = .374, \eta^2 = .002$. Participants evaluated the model similarly in the dark-skin ($M = 5.95$) and light-skin ($M = 5.84$) conditions.

A robustness check that included age and gender (dummy-coded) as covariates produced the same pattern of results. Neither covariate was associated with attitude towards the model, and although age was a significant predictor of attitude towards the ad, adding these variables did not change the non-significant effect of skin tone. Overall, the findings consistently show that skin tone did not influence attitudes toward the advertisement or the model; thus, H1 was not supported.

Figure 2: Results of the Effect of Skin Tone on Attitude toward the Ad and Model (H1)



3.5.4 Mediation Analysis – Test of H2

To test H2, Ideal-Self/Model Congruence was examined as a mediator of the effect of skin tone on consumer responses using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022).

Skin tone (dark vs. light) was entered as the predictor, ideal self/model congruence as the mediator, and attitudes toward the advertisement as the outcome variable. Skin tone did not predict the mediator, $b = -.02$, $p = .87$, indicating that lighter- versus darker-skinned models did not differ in the degree of ideal self/model congruence they elicited. Ideal self/model congruence strongly predicted attitude towards the ad, $b = .61$, $p < .001$. However, the indirect effect of skin tone through ideal self/model congruence was nonsignificant (effect = $-.014$, 95% CI $[-.188, .155]$). The direct effect of skin tone on attitude towards the ad was also nonsignificant, $b = -.04$, $p = .68$.

The same PROCESS Model 4 analysis was conducted again, this time using attitude toward the model as the outcome variable. Skin tone did not predict ideal self congruence, $b = -.02, p = .87$. Ideal-self congruence strongly predicted evaluations of the model, $b = .63, p < .001$, but the indirect effect of skin tone through the mediator was not significant (effect = $-.015, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.200, .161]$). The direct effect of skin tone on attitude toward the model was also nonsignificant, $b = -.10, p = .25$.

Including participants who failed the manipulation check produced an identical nonsignificant pattern for both the direct path and the indirect pathway. A robustness test that included age and gender (dummy coded) as covariates did not alter the indirect effect results for either outcome, specifically the attitude toward the model.

Overall, ideal self/ model congruence did not mediate the relationship between skin tone and attitude toward the model, and H2 was not supported.

3.5.5 Moderated Mediation Analysis by SDO – Test of H3

To test H3, whether Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) moderated the effect of skin tone on ideal-self/model congruence, and whether this moderation produced conditional indirect effects on consumer responses, PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2022) was used with skin tone as the predictor, ideal-self/Model congruence as the mediator, SDO as the moderator and attitude toward the model as the outcome. Skin tone did not significantly predict ideal-self congruence ($b = -.11, p = .76$), and the interaction between skin tone and SDO was also nonsignificant ($b = .04, p = .78$). Ideal-self congruence strongly predicted evaluations of the model ($b = .63, p < .001$).

The indirect effects were nonsignificant at low (effect = $-.036$, 95% CI [$-.307$, $.233$]), mean (effect = $-.010$, 95% CI [$-.189$, $.166$]), and high levels of SDO (effect = $.016$, 95% CI [$-.239$, $.284$]). The index of moderated mediation was also nonsignificant (index = 0.027 , 95% CI [-0.176 , 0.234]). Thus, SDO did not moderate the mediated effect of skin tone on Attitude towards the model.

The same moderated-mediation model was run with Attitude towards the Ad as the outcome. As before, skin tone did not predict ideal-self congruence ($b = -.11$, $p = .76$), and the Skin Tone \times SDO interaction remained nonsignificant ($b = .04$, $p = .78$). Ideal-self congruence significantly predicted attitudes toward the ad ($b = .61$, $p < .001$). The indirect effects were again nonsignificant at low SDO (effect = $-.035$, 95% CI [$-.303$, $.230$]), mean SDO (effect = $-.010$, 95% CI [$-.183$, $.164$]), and high SDO (effect = $.016$, 95% CI [$-.239$, $.277$]). The index of moderated mediation did not reach significance (index = $.026$, 95% CI [$-.172$, $.220$]).

Including participants who failed the manipulation check produced the same nonsignificant pattern, with no evidence of moderated mediation for either attitude toward the Ad or attitude toward the model. Adding age and gender (dummy-coded) as covariates also did not alter the results. Neither covariate altered the effect of skin tone, the mediator, or the moderator. Across all specifications, SDO did not moderate the indirect effect of skin tone on consumer responses.

Thus, H3 was not supported, as SDO did not alter the indirect relationship between skin tone and consumer preferences.

3.5.6 Moderated Mediation Analysis by RWA – Test of H4

To test H4, whether Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) moderated the effect of skin tone on ideal self/model congruence, and whether this moderation produced conditional indirect effects on consumer responses, PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2022) was used with skin tone as the predictor, ideal self/model congruence as the mediator, RWA as the moderator and Attitude toward the Model as outcome. Skin tone did not significantly predict ideal-self congruence ($b = -.52, p = .31$), and the Skin Tone \times RWA interaction was nonsignificant ($b = .13, p = .31$). Ideal self/model congruence remained a strong predictor of attitude toward the ad ($b = .61, p < .001$). Indirect effects were nonsignificant at low (effect = $-.104, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.381, .155]$), mean (effect = $-.012, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.188, .158]$), and high RWA (effect = $.079, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.177, .339]$). The index of moderated mediation was also nonsignificant (index = $0.079, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.090, 0.253]$). Thus, RWA did not moderate the indirect effect of skin tone on Attitude towards the Ad.

The same moderated-mediation model was then run using Attitude toward the Model as the outcome variable. Again, skin tone did not predict ideal-self congruence ($b = -.52, p = 0.31$), nor was the interaction with RWA significant ($b = 0.13, p = 0.31$). Ideal self/model congruence strongly predicted attitudes toward the model ($b = 0.63, p < 0.001$). The indirect effects of skin tone through ideal-self congruence were nonsignificant at low RWA (effect = $-.108, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.392, .161]$), mean RWA (effect = $-.013, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.194, .160]$), and high RWA (effect = $.082, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.190, .336]$). The index of moderated mediation was nonsignificant (index = $0.082, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.092, 0.253]$). These results indicate that RWA did not moderate the mediated relationship between skin tone and attitudes toward the model.

Including participants who failed the manipulation check yielded the same pattern of nonsignificant effects for both attitudes toward the ad and the model. Adding age and gender (dummy coded) as covariates also did not alter the results; none of the covariates changed the significance or direction of the effects. Across all analyses, RWA did not moderate the indirect effect of skin tone on consumer responses.

Thus, H4 was not supported, as RWA did not alter the indirect relationship between skin tone and consumer preferences.

3.5.7 Exploratory Analyses- Participants' Gender

A recent previous research showed that South Asian women in the UK, showed higher level of inspiration while viewing a dark-skinned South Asian model compared to a White model and lighter skinned South Asian model (Craddock et al., 2025) which leads me to explore whether the effect of skin tone differed by gender, a 2×2 ANOVA was conducted with skin tone (dark vs. light) and gender (male vs. female) as between-subjects factors. All participants were included in the analysis, regardless of their responses to the manipulation-check item, allowing the results to reflect participants' evaluations of the advertisements as they perceived them.

For attitudes toward the ad, a significant interaction was found between gender and skin tone, $F(1, 358) = 6.11, p = .014, \eta^2 = .025$. As shown in the estimated marginal means, female participants evaluated the advertisement more positively when the model had a dark skin tone ($M = 5.97$) than when the model had a light skin tone ($M = 5.62$), and this difference was statistically significant ($p = .041$, Bonferroni-adjusted). In contrast, male participants showed the opposite pattern, evaluating the light-skinned

model ($M = 5.72$) more favorably than the dark-skinned model ($M = 5.47$); however, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .148$).

For attitudes toward the model, the interaction between gender and skin tone was significant, $F(1, 358) = 4.43, p = .036, \eta^2 = .029$. As shown in the estimated marginal means, female participants evaluated the dark-skinned model more positively ($M = 6.16$) than the light-skinned model ($M = 5.81$), and this difference was statistically significant ($p = .029$, Bonferroni-adjusted). In contrast, male participants showed the opposite pattern, rating the light-skinned model ($M = 5.80$) slightly more favorably than the dark-skinned model ($M = 5.67$); however, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .429$).

CHAPTER 4: GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to shed light on the colourism issue that has been prevailing for decades among South Asian communities, and how South Asian consumers perceive advertisements based on varying skin tone and whether the issue is still prevailing or there has been a shift in consumer preferences or not, as the world keeps progressing. By conducting an experiment on the online PROLIFIC panel, where South Asian participants from the USA, the UK, and Canada were recruited, I first investigated whether participants would prefer a lighter-skinned model over a darker-skinned South Asian model. After analyzing the data, a non-significant effect was found. Furthermore, the study hypothesized that a congruence between the ideal self of the participants and the model would mediate the relationship between skin tone representation of the South Asian model and consumer preferences, which was also found to be insignificant, not supporting H2. This suggests that consumers' ideal self did not differ between models with lighter skin and those with darker skin, resulting in no significant impact on consumer preferences for the advertisement.

This research has also investigated whether Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) or Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) moderates the relationship between skin tone representation and ideal self/model congruence. The moderated mediation analysis did not reveal any significant differences between participants low or high in SDO or RWA. This indicates that these traits did not meaningfully influence preferences for the model's skin tone in the advertisement. In other words, consumers with low or high SDO or RWA did not differ in their responses to lighter versus darker-skinned models.

One possible explanation behind the lack of significant difference between South Asians, evaluating lighter skin versus darker skinned model is that according to most academic research so far, ethnic minority consumers has positive evaluation to see members of their own group compared to seeing members of majority groups (e.g., Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001; Hazzouri et al., 2017). In this study, since the model was South Asian and the participants were also South Asian, participants, regardless of the conditions, may have evaluated both advertisements favourably because the representation itself felt affirming, which might have reduced the likelihood of detecting differences based on skin tone.

Another reasoning behind why the hypothesized effects were not supported relates to the perceived authenticity of skin colour of South Asians. Skin tone can carry competing meanings within ethnicities, where lighter skin is often associated with social advantage and darker skin may function as a cue of ethnic or cultural authenticity (Hunter, 2005; Hunter, 2007). As a result, individuals with darker skin maybe perceived as more representative of the ethnic group compared to lighter-skinned individuals. This might have played a role in my study, where the lighter skinned model may align with dominant beauty standards, the darker skinned model may have elicited perceived authenticity leading 98.4% of the participants in the darker skinned condition saying yes to the model being South Asian and 83.2% of the participants in the lighter skinned condition recognizing the model as South Asian. Furthermore, research suggests that lighter-skinned or racially ambiguous individuals are more likely to feel excluded from co-ethnic groups, while darker-skinned individuals are more readily accepted as legitimate in-group members (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Hunter, 2007). Together,

these opposing forces may have offset one another, weakening the expected effects of skin tone on advertising evaluations.

Overall, the hypotheses were not supported; however, exploratory analysis based on gender revealed that men responded almost identically to both the lighter and darker-skinned versions of the ad and the model, suggesting that skin tone did not significantly impact their evaluations. Women, however, showed more differentiated responses. They tended to prefer the darker-skinned ad over the lighter-skinned version, and they rated the darker-skinned model significantly more favourably than the lighter-skinned model. This finding is consistent with recent experimental research by Craddock et al. (2025), who found that South Asian women felt more inspired and positively engaged when viewing South Asian models with darker skin tones, whereas exposure to lighter-skinned or White models reduced their confidence and satisfaction with their own appearance. Together, this suggests that South Asian women, especially those living in Western contexts, may respond more positively to darker-skinned representation, and the reason might be because it counters long-standing colourist beauty norms, offers a sense of relatability, or provides affirming and empowering cues. Thus, even though the overall effects in the study were nonsignificant, the gender pattern indicates that women may be more sensitive to skin-tone cues in advertising and may interpret darker-skinned models in a more positive and meaningful way.

4.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research contributes to the marketing literature on race, identity, and advertising in several important ways. Firstly, while prior studies examining consumer

responses to racial cues in advertising have focused primarily on African American and White populations (e.g., Zdravkovic et al., 2014; Sengupta, 2000; Cowart & Lehnert, 2018; Adbi et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2010), very little work has examined how South Asian consumers evaluate members of their own racial group in advertising. This gap is notable given that South Asians are one of the fastest-growing ethnic communities in Western countries. The present findings help address this gap by showing that differences in skin tone within the South Asian community do not significantly influence advertising evaluations. This pattern suggests that the broader shared identity of being South Asian may matter more to consumers than within-group differences, such as lighter or darker skin.

Secondly, previous research on colourism in South Asia has largely relied on content analysis, cultural critique and qualitative approaches (e.g., Mitchell, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022; Varman et al., 2024; Mady et al., 2023; Davis, 2018). The studies offer detailed accounts of how colourism operates culturally and socially, but offer limited insight into the psychological processes or causal mechanisms underlying these patterns. Our study extends this work by experimentally examining skin colour in relation to the ideal self-congruence of the model.

Thirdly, this study contributed to understanding how social dominance orientation or right-wing authoritarianism shapes consumer preferences for skin tone. This research helps to connect broader cultural discussions of colourism to the underlying consumer-level processes that might explain when, why, and for whom skin tone matters in advertising. Our study, therefore, represents an initial empirical attempt to consider

whether ideological orientations moderate responses to lighter versus darker-skinned ingroup models. Although the hypothesized effects were not supported, the null findings themselves add theoretical value by suggesting that ideological dispositions may exert a weaker influence when all models belong to the consumer's own ethnic group.

Fourthly, although a recent experimental study by Craddock et al. (2025) examined how exposure to lighter- versus darker-skinned South Asian and White models influences body-image outcomes among South Asian women in the UK, its primary focus was on wellbeing-related constructs such as confidence, inspiration, and skin-shade satisfaction. Advertising effectiveness was assessed using broad evaluative measures, including general attitudes toward the advertisement, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions; however, no significant effects were observed for these advertising outcomes. The present research extends this work into the marketing domain by explicitly examining attitudes toward the advertisement and the model, as well as the role of ideal self-model congruence in shaping these evaluations. In addition, the study investigates whether individual differences in social dominance orientation (SDO) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) moderate these effects, thereby offering a distinct theoretical perspective on how South Asian consumers respond to colourism-related cues in advertising contexts.

Lastly, this study addresses a key gap in the literature on intra-racial dynamics of colourism in advertising. Much of the existing literature frames consumer responses in terms of minority versus majority audiences (e.g., Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999) or own minority group versus other minority representation (Hazzouri

et al., 2017). Our findings offer a different insight: when South Asian consumers viewed ingroup models, the positive impact of ethnic similarity appears to outweigh subtler distinctions based on skin tone. This suggests that ingroup representation may reduce colourism-related biases in advertising contexts, refining existing theories by highlighting the need to consider identity processes operating within racial and ethnic groups, not only between them.

4.2 Managerial Contribution

Although the hypothesized effects of skin tone were not supported, the findings offer very valuable and important insights for marketers targeting South Asian consumers in the USA, the UK and Canada. Firstly, the non-significant difference between lighter- and darker-skinned models suggests that South Asians in these countries may respond positively to seeing representation of their own group, regardless of skin colour. Brands can utilize diverse South Asian models, including those with both darker and lighter skin tones, without negatively impacting the effectiveness of their advertising.

Secondly, our exploratory analyses revealed that South Asian women may be more responsive to darker-skinned representation compared to lighter-skinned representation, suggesting that darker skin can evoke positive emotions, such as inspiration, among South Asian women (e.g., Craddock et al., 2025). This suggests that campaigns targeting South Asian women could benefit from challenging traditional colourism norms rather than perpetuating them.

Third, the non-significant effects of ideological variables (SDO, RWA) and ideal-self congruence suggest that colourism-related biases may not operate as strongly in

marketing contexts as cultural narratives predict, at least when consumers view members of their own community. For practitioners, this means that authentic representation may matter more than specific skin shades, reducing the risk associated with moving toward more inclusive portrayals.

Finally, it is important to consider these findings in light of South Asia's long history of advertising that promotes lighter skin as the ideal. For decades, South Asian consumers have been exposed to marketing that equates fairness with beauty, success, and social mobility, which has shaped both expectations and purchasing behaviours. The current results suggest that when South Asian consumers in Western contexts see models from their own community, regardless of skin shade, the broader positive effect of ingroup representation may outweigh the colourism-based preferences that traditional advertising has reinforced. This indicates a potential shift: South Asian consumers may no longer respond to lighter skin as the default aspirational image, opening the door for brands to move away from colourism-driven messaging without sacrificing effectiveness.

4.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that offer meaningful opportunities for future research. First, the advertisements featured only a young female South Asian model, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Colourism attitudes may differ when evaluating male models, older models, or models with different facial features, and future studies should explore whether gender or age of the model alters how skin tone is processed in advertising contexts.

Second, the attractiveness of the model may have influenced participants' evaluations. The model used in this study was conventionally attractive, which could have overshadowed the impact of skin tone. Future research could use average-looking models or systematically manipulate attractiveness alongside skin tone to better isolate the effect of colourism in advertising.

Third, the present study included a measure assessing whether participants recognized the model as South Asian prior to completing the key outcome measures, including attitudes toward the advertisement and the model, ideal self-model congruence, and the SDO and RWA scales. Placing this question immediately after the experimental manipulation may have primed participants to attend to ethnic representation rather than to skin tone differences. As a result, skin shade may not have been the most salient cue guiding participants' evaluations, which could help explain why variations in the model's skin tone did not produce significant effects.

Fourth, the study employed only two skin-tone conditions, a lighter tone and a darker tone. South Asian communities encompass a wide range of skin shades, and future work should incorporate a more nuanced skin-tone spectrum to capture how subtle differences may influence perception and preference.

Fifth, the manipulation check was less successful for the lighter-skin condition, with a notable number of participants indicating that the model did not appear South Asian or that they were unsure of its ethnicity. This may point to an underlying authenticity concern, where lighter skin may not be perceived as prototypical of the South Asian ingroup. Future research could build on authenticity literature to examine how ethnic prototypicality shapes model recognition and ad evaluation.

Sixth, given that the hypotheses were not supported, future research should investigate the psychological or social factors that might explain a potential shift in colour-related preferences. Despite the strong historical roots of colourism in South Asian cultures, the current findings suggest that ingroup representation may outweigh skin-tone biases. Further research is needed to understand whether this reflects a generational change, a consequence of migration, or evolving beauty norms influenced by global media.

Additionally, because the participants were South Asians living abroad, it is possible that their migration experiences, cultural exposure, or identity negotiation influenced their responses. Future studies could compare South Asians in Western countries with those living in South Asia to examine whether diaspora contexts change colourism-related attitudes.

Finally, future studies may extend this work by testing different advertising categories, such as skincare or beauty products, where colourism narratives are especially prominent. Comparing effects across ad types may reveal whether colourism operates differently in beauty-focused versus neutral advertising contexts.

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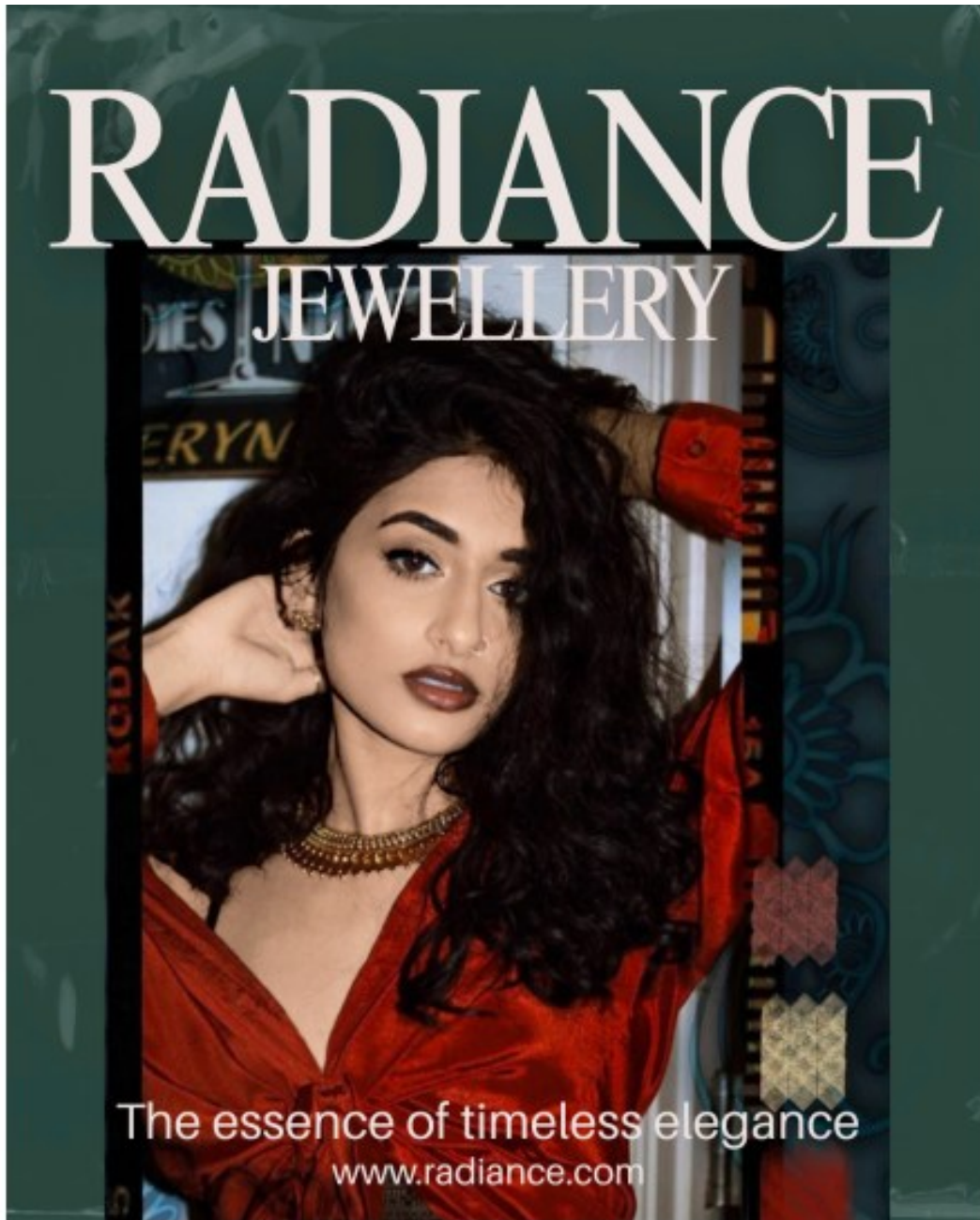
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APPENDIX A: STUDY MATERIALS

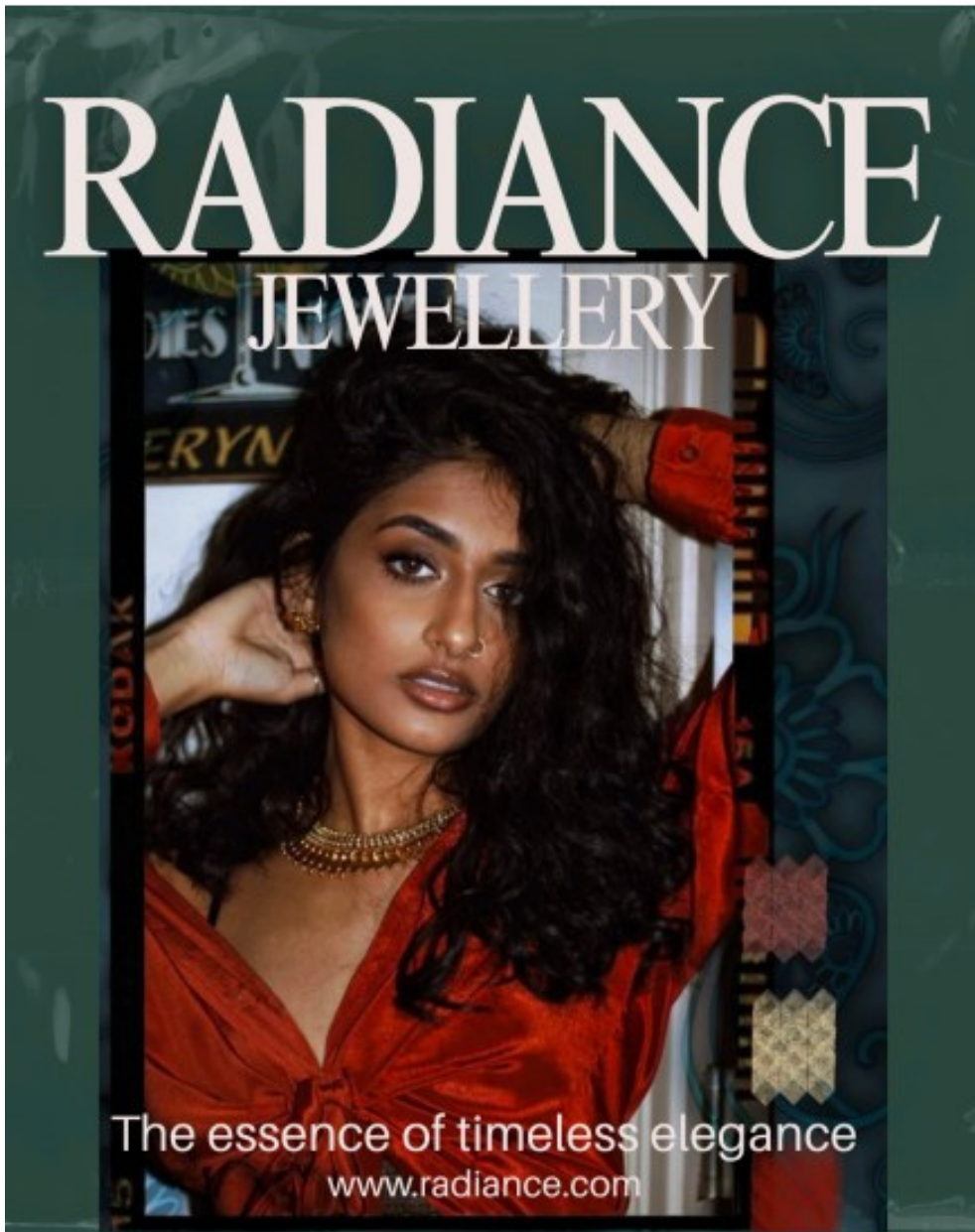
Condition 1: Lighter Skinned Model

Please take a moment to view the advertisement below. After viewing the advertisement, please answer the questions on the next page.



Condition 2: Darker Skinned Model

Please take a moment to view the advertisement below. After viewing the advertisement, please answer the questions on the next page.



APPENDIX B: STUDY MEASURES

Manipulation Check

Do you think the model in the advertisement you viewed is South Asian?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Main Measure

Attitude toward the Ad

Based on the advertisement you just viewed, please indicate your **attitude towards the ad** by selecting the point on each item that best reflects your opinion.

Unappealing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Appealing
Unattractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Attractive
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Unlikable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likable

Attitude toward the Model

Based on the advertisement you just viewed, please indicate your **attitude toward the model** featured in the ad by selecting the point on each scale that best reflects your opinion.

Uappealing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Appealing
Unattractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Attractive
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Unlikable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likable

Ideal Self-Model Congruence

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

The model in the advertisement represents the kind of image I admire.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The model's appearance in the ad reflects qualities I aspire to.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I identify with people who have an image like the model in the ad.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

People like the model in the ad are similar to the person I want to be associated with.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Social Dominance Orientation

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly Agree

It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly Agree

Inferior groups should stay in their place.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly Agree

We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly Agree

We should increase social equality.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly Agree

Right Wing Authoritarianism

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Moral principles about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Our society does NOT need tougher governments and stricter laws.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going to preserve law and order.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Screening Question

What is your ethnicity? (Please select the option that best describes your ethnic background.)

- White
- South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Bhutanese)
- Chinese
- Black
- Filipino
- Arab
- Latin American
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)
- West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan)
- Korean
- Japanese
- Other group (please specify):

Demographics

What is your age? (numbers only)

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other


Please select the skin tone that most closely matches your own from the options below.



Where were you born?

- United States
- Canada
- United Kingdom
- South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives)
- Other (please specify):

APPENDIX C: REB APPROVAL

 Outlook

REB # 2025-7909 Letter of Approval

From do-not-reply-DAL@researchservicesoffice.com <do-not-reply-DAL@researchservicesoffice.com>
Date Fri 7/18/2025 4:20 PM
To Zarin Tassnim <zt665845@dal.ca>
Cc Tom Koo <th808340@dal.ca>; Valerie Trifts <VTRIFTS@DAL.CA>; Research Ethics <ethics@dal.ca>

****To respond to this message, click "Reply All" and adjust recipient list as required. Do NOT click "Reply".****



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

July 18, 2025

Zarin Tassnim
Management\Marketing

Dear Zarin,

REB #: 2025-7909
Project Title: Skin Tone Representation and Colourism in Advertisements
Review Type: Delegated Review
Effective Date: July 18, 2025
Expiry Date: July 18, 2026

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application for research involving humans and found the proposed research to be ethically acceptable in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This approval will be in effect for 12 months as indicated above. This approval is subject to the conditions listed below which constitute your on-going responsibilities with respect to the ethical conduct of this research.

Sincerely,



Dr. John Cameron
Chair, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board
Dalhousie University

ethics@dal.ca