
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beauty Standard Discourse on Skin Game Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to analyze the discourse of Skin Game advertisements. The approach used was a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were documentation, identification, and note techniques. The data analysis method used was the perspective of critical discourse analysis from Ruth Wodak, known as the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). The data source was the Skin Game advertisement which consists of four videos. The results of the study present that Skin Game advertisements have the courage to take a different stream from the common skincare advertising habit, which always displays talents according to the construction of beauty standards in society. The discourse of the Skin Game advertisement is interpreted as a discourse that desires to change the construction of ideal beauty standards into a more colorful meaning of beauty.

KEYWORDS

Critical discourse analysis, advertisements, beauty standards, Ruth Wodak

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1. Introduction

Women are always strongly related to beauty standards. Benchmarks or standards of beauty have existed since a long time ago until today. The whole physical appearance must fulfill various special criteria in order to be called beautiful according to the standards. Pitts-Taylor (2008) stated that beauty standards were not neutral. It was created by the community and lived as a myth believed by them. Therefore, the standard of beauty is a construction built by society. It is not simply invented but produced. Thus, if a woman's body is also a social creation, it is determined, influenced, shaped, and produced by various social forces.

In the current era of globalization, the media has become a social power. Advertising is one part of the media that has a social force to influence. Advertisements play an important role in maximizing the branding of a product. Audio-visual advertisements certainly optimize the use of pithy and persuasive language as well as the appearance of attractive talent. The advertisement of beauty products is one of the most interesting types of audio-visual advertisement. Siregar (2006:65) revealed that in accordance with its clear purpose, an advertisement offers an "ideal" image of beauty in order to persuade audiences to consume or use the product. The most powerful persuasion comes from the power of facts. It indicates that good advertising must be based on strength, facts, and product quality. Thus, the focus of an advertisement is the superiority of the product based on its ingredients or benefits for the consumers.

Morrison (2010:18) explained that advertising is an important promotional instrument, especially for companies that produce goods or services for wider communities. Moreover, because of its wider reach to society, many people mainly discuss advertisements. Through this magnitude of impact, advertising has an extraordinary ability to influence market segmentation.

In 2020, the ZAP Beauty Index conducted a survey that concluded that 73.1% of 17,889 Indonesian female respondents considered that beautiful means having white and glowing skin. The survey results revealed that many women still believe in the stigma of

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being beautiful as having white skin. Kasiyan (2008:281) also confirmed that women are beautiful not only of their faces but also of their white and flawless skin. Yet, it makes women do everything possible to be considered beautiful by their environment.

Women generally feel insecure about their dark skin and decide to do treatments. It is common that almost every advertisement for beauty products always presents the talent visualized as an "ideal" figure. It is illustrated through a slim and tall body, seductive curves, pure white skin color, and precise as well as perfect facial construction. Therefore, a view that constructs beauty standards is largely formed. The slim body and beautiful curves, the pure white skin color, the sharp nose, the slanted eyes, the voluminous lips, and other standards seem to be made according to people's interests. As a result, a benchmark was created to make women considered beautiful.

Advertisements become references to societies' lifestyles and appearances. In fact, many advertisements for beauty products always feature female talents based on beauty standards. When female talents are less beautiful, they are compared to other talents who meet beauty standards. For example, an advertisement shows a woman who does not meet beauty standards to act as feeling down, sad, broken up, or having low self-esteem. After using certain products, the physical appearance becomes whiter and fresher. Finally, she received her confidence back because of her physical appearance changes. She is illustrated as a woman who has an easier partner, gets a job faster, and has more access to other things.

This arbitrary concept of beauty standardization potentially has a negative impact on women. It is indicated by the advertisements for beauty products that always appear every day internalized within women. Some women who feel that they do not require beauty standards feel inferior or ambitious to change their visual appearance to match the beauty standards.

The condition develops into very dangerous for children and young women who have received advertisements regarding these arbitrary beauty standards from an early age. Advertisements influence can distort girls' perceptions of their own image. Children and young women with damaged self-image potentially experience a crisis of self-confidence and other psychological disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (eating disorders). The insecure children who are not satisfied with their standard of beauty eventually get depressed.

Gradually, the concept of "beauty is pain" emerged as a phrase that most women adhere to. In order to achieve beauty, they struggle with an abundance of hard work. Physical appearance seems to be the main requirement to be beautiful (Worotitjan, 2014). It is not surprising that many skincare and body care products promise to guarantee whiter skin or an "ideal" body according to the talents displayed in advertisements. Finally, there are many dangerous skincare and body care products that fulfill their promise to change their customers' skin and body in a short time. However, in fact, these products contain harmful chemicals. Other facts also prove that many women with more finances choose plastic surgery to beautify their faces and body shapes. Thus, the beauty standard that continues to be echoed through advertising massively contributes to creating a complex impact.

In Indonesia, the beauty standard is firmly held by society. They assume that pure white skin supported by a slim body is the main requirement for women to look "beautiful". A dark-skin woman is badly judged, and the fat woman is speculated to have no attention from others. The categorization and sentiment have been deeply and strongly rooted until today (Saraswati, 2013).

The trend of beauty discourse happens not only in Indonesia but also in other countries. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, racial stigma is utilized by many beauty companies to produce and sell products to generate white skin and slim bodies as well as assist women in achieving the standard of "beauty". It clearly implies the power of relations portrays a role in exploiting the opportunity. Pratiwi and Luthfianisa (2020) asserted that the representation of white-skin women deliberately created by the media is very powerful. Numerous skincare and body care products highlight their whitening and brightening functions. Additionally, beauty companies also recruit talents who have pure white faces with proportional bodies to be their commercial actors. Those advertisements that always appear in the media are inevitably remembered and internalized in societies. The situation automatically perpetuates beauty standards and is absolutely beneficial for beauty companies. Yan Yan (2014) stated that the phenomena in the mass media industry that spotlight certain physical characteristics and cause the construction of beauty standards are very common, especially in western countries. It also happened moderately and globally.

At the beginning of 2022, a local skincare company named Skin Game courageously released an interesting advertisement attracting people's attention because of its different concept from other brands. Through the appearance of three women as talents, this advertisement seems to demolish the beauty standards entrenched in our societies. The advertisement presents Emily, a woman who has albino skin; Nisya, a woman who has quite thick hair; and Nana, a woman who has many birthmarks on her face. Instead of campaigning for ridiculous beauty standards, Skin Game's advertisement contains the discourse that every woman was born with her own characteristics. The presented talents have varied uniqueness that is able to represent the naturally different human form and appearance.

The study related to myths and standards of beauty was researched by Intan and Vanitha (2021) entitled 'Beauty Myths and Consumer Culture in Indonesian Chick-lit Novel'. The study concluded that myths of beauty are generated by the construction of patriarchal culture. As a result, women compete with other women to attract men's attention. One of the novels studied by Intan and Vanitha revealed that the main character of the story became consumptive as a result of trusting the existing beauty myths.

Another research conducted by Hariyanti et al. (2015) also focuses on beauty standards entitled *Construction of Women's Ideal Beauty through Beauty Product Advertisement on Television*. The results of their study summarized that three beauty products (Pond's, Biore, and Dove) have their own characteristics. However, the whole three products contain similarities in depicting women's ideal beauty. The depictions are slim, white, active, and modern, as well as having mixed-race Asian-European faces. Based on their study, television advertising accommodates this idealism as a product marketing strategy even though it is not suitable for the real physical characteristics of most Indonesian women.

According to the complexity of beauty standards issues that are strongly entrenched in society, the current study will explore the discourse on the advertisement of skincare products that conceptually break beauty standards. This study will examine the advertisement discourse from the perspective of Ruth Wodak's critical discourse analysis.

2. Method

The approach used in this study was a qualitative approach. According to Gay et al. (2006:399), qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and comprehensive interpretation of narratives on visual data to gain insight into certain phenomena of interest. The data source in this study was the discourse of the Skin Game advertisement on Instagram @skingameofficial. The advertisement consists of four series of videos that are interesting to dissect using the critical discourse analysis method of Ruth Wodak.

Data collection techniques were documentation, identification, and note techniques (Sudaryanto, 1993). The documentation technique used was downloading four Skin Game advertisement videos on Instagram @skingameofficial and transcribing them. After the documentation technique, the next step was identifying data according to the theory used, namely the perspective of historical discourse analysis known as the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) from Ruth Wodak. Finally, the technique was then used when the data had been identified.

The analytical method used is the perspective of critical discourse analysis from Ruth Wodak or DHA. This discourse analysis is known as historical discourse analysis because its analysis of discourse needs to include the historical context, which results in how a group or community is described in discourse (Fauzan, 2014). In order to identify the power of language in certain discourses, critical discourse analysis is used as an important approach to understanding the reality in social life that influences the ideology of certain audiences (Blommaert, 2005).

The data analysis technique carried out was based on Wodak (2009:96) as follows. *First*, mobilization and consultation of previous theoretical knowledge. *Second*, collecting data and context information systematically. *Third*, selection and preparation of data for specific analysis (selection and streamlining of data according to relevant criteria, transcription of tape recordings, etc.). *Fourth*, specification of research questions and formulation of assumptions (based on literature review and first data search). *Fifth*, qualitative pilot analysis (allows testing of first categories and assumptions and specification of further assumptions). *Sixth*, detailed case studies (from the entire range of data, especially qualitative and partly quantitative). *Seventh*, the formulation of criticism. *Eighth*, the application of detailed analysis results.

3. Results and Discussion

As one of the beauty product brands in Indonesia, Skin game released a skincare advertisement with a unique concept. The advertisement presents Emily, a woman who has albino skin; Nisya, a woman who has quite thick hair; and Nana, a woman who has some birthmarks on her face. The advertisement featuring three inspiring women dared to take a different stream from the habit of common skin care advertisements, which always show talents with white skin and slim bodies, as well as conform to society's beauty standards. This Skin Game advertisement contains four series of videos uploaded on the Instagram account of @skingameofficial.



Figure 1 Advertisement talents of Skin Game Products

The first advertisement is a 32-second video featuring Emily, Nana, and Nisya. They appeared fully confident and took turns voicing their gratitude. The narrative in the first advertisement is as follows.

*I'm Emily, and I have albinism, and I love it
I'm Nana, and I have healthy birthmarks
I'm Nisya, and I have beautiful hair
I am creative; I am limited edition; I am happy
I am born this way!*



Figure 2 Emily in Skin Game Products Advertisement

The second advertisement is a 20-second video. Unlike the previous advertisement, it focuses on Emily, a woman who has albino skin. The narrative of the second advertisement is as follows.

*I'm Emily, I have albinism, and I love it.
Arts and design have always attracted me.
There are lots of love forms in this world. One of them is through self-care.
Taking care of my skin makes me more excited about the day.
I am creative. I am lively. I am Born This Way.*



Figure 3 Nana in Skin Game Products Advertisement

The third advertisement is a 20-second video. This advertisement features Nina, a woman who has some birthmarks on her face. The narrative of the third advertisement is as follows.

*I'm Nina, and I have healthy birthmarks.
A neat look is one form of my self-love.
As a content creator with a skin-care hobby, I think with or without skincare; I'm still comfortable with myself.
I am beautiful. I am limited edition. I am Born This Way.*



Figure 4 Nisya in Skin Game Products Advertisement

The fourth advertisement is a 25-second video. It features Nisya, a woman who has thick hair. The narrative of the fourth advertisement is as follows.

*I'm Nisya, and I have beautiful hair.
Honestly, I was surprised when getting on Tiktok FYP.
At first, there were many negative comments; apparently, I'm not alone.
I met my support system on social media.
The BTS fandom helps me find confidence through BTS songs.
And, of course, skincare also plays a big role.
I am happy. I am confident. I am Born This Way.*

From the description above, the four discourses of Skin Game advertisements are different from mainstream beauty product advertisements in general. When most beauty companies flock to highlight the benefits of their products for whitening and brightening with beauty standards talents, the advertisement from Skin Game prefers to present three women who represent the diversity of beauty meanings. Carrying the tagline "I am Born This Way", this advertisement campaigns that diversity is a necessity.

Referring to Ruth Wodak's critical discourse analysis, the steps to dissecting the discourse on Skin Game advertisements is answering questions about the meaning of beauty standards according to existing scientific literature and history. The next step is exploring the reasons for the formation of a beauty standard applied in society. To answer it, researchers trace the history of beauty standards which are presented as follows.

3.1 Examining Beauty Standards through the Feminism Movement

Since the 19th century, the movement for women's equality has evolved into a self-conscious movement that is clearly identified. Xue (2015) described the four waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism (1848-1920) was called the suffrage period, with the "right to vote" as a form of participation in democracy. This movement began with *The Seneca Falls Convention* led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848. There were 300 women and men rallying for equality. Forms of "domestic cults" that suppress freedom of expression in front of the public are abolished, and political participation is increased. The "rough" lines in the form of arguments for the "superiority" of women in terms of morality are still existing in this era. Furthermore, the "rough lines" were further refined in subsequent waves of feminism.

Then, the second wave (1960-1988) was an era of struggle for equality of access to penetrate several "territories" that were restricted to women. This era includes the period of struggle to liberate minority women who require special needs and others to have equal positions and opportunities legally.

Furthermore, the third wave (1988-2010) was an era of "rejuvenation" of the concept of feminism itself, in which "feminism" was identified as a spectrum within the post-colonial and post-modernism paradigms. "Hardline" feminism is not the only valid definition.

Finally, the fourth wave or the era we are currently living in. This wave is the development of the third wave, when women and society have access to technology and advances regarding gender. The fourth wave recognizes the variety of rainbow colors of the humanity and womanhood spectrum. "Feminism" in this era includes the quality of someone's spirituality which is reflected in the details of the heart and soul greatness. In other words, the fourth wave is the "era of liberation," in which there is no need to compartmentalize in categorizing. Intergender synergy for the benefit of universal humanity is prioritized.

Developments in each wave evidently bring significant results. However, it does not mean that the whole problem has disappeared. Indeed, women have been actively involved in various activities that were previously considered "taboo" and have clear civil rights, especially in secular countries. Nevertheless, women's life is still distant from freedom due to the fact of "patriarchal shackles". Worotitjan (2014) stated that the formation of beauty standards is certainly an impact of patriarchal culture, which has been passed down from the previous generation to the next generation.

Age, looks, and clothes are still often used as a measurement of "female" physically. In *The Beauty Myth* (Harper Collins), Wolf (2002) wrote that the beauty myth is "the last remaining of the old ideologies" or the last remnant of the old ideology that still has the power to control women.

3.2 Considering Beauty Standards from a Global Perspective

To complete the discussion, considering beauty standards from a global point of view is necessary because of the varied benchmarks regarding the meaning of beauty in several countries. Different countries have various beauty standards. The differentiating factors of beauty standards in many countries are the difference in cultural background, customs, and beliefs. Essentially, beauty is something measured subjectively. Since antiquity, every country has possessed different beauty standards.

In some parts of West Africa, a large body is considered a symbol of beauty. From an early age, girls are sent to special camps, where they are forced to consume 16,000 calories a day to reach a certain weight in order to be able to marry. Meanwhile, in northern Thailand, Kayan women wear brass scrolls to give the appearance of an elongated neck. This look is considered a sign of perfection and beauty. In contrast to Thailand, the forms of status and beauty in the culture of China are proven by shaping girls' feet to be small in size by wearing ceramic shoes. This practice was later banned in 1911 because of its effects in causing women to have difficulty walking normally. Moreover, in the United States and other Western countries, many women are busy with their weight which causes them to starve themselves because of their ambition to be slim (Laham, 2020).

These stories describe the painful steps experienced by many women to meet beauty standards. This socially constructed idea seems to deify the physical as the most important attraction and asset of women.

3.3 The Dynamics of Indonesian Beauty Standards from the Ancient Javanese Era

Through the book *Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race in Transnational Indonesia*, Saraswati (2013:50) revealed that beauty standards had appeared in Indonesia since ancient times. Specifically, in the story of the Ramayana literature, ancient Javanese life is described. At that time, the figure of Rama's wife, Sita, was illustrated as a very beautiful and well-behaved young woman. The light on her face was like the moon. At that period, the moon was described as the radiant beauty of a bright woman's skin.

Entering the colonial era, beauty standards followed the standards of the colonialists. They traded beauty products through advertisements in the media, one of which was an advertisement for Palmolive soap in the magazine *De Huisvrouw in Indie* in 1937. Not only inviting female readers to use this soap, but the advertisement also expressed and sold the idea that white women were the ideal standard of beauty. It indicates that during the Dutch colonial period, there was a shift in the meaning of bright skin to white skin in the discourse of beauty. Their strong position as occupiers made it possible to circulate the idea of Caucasian women as symbols of beauty. After the Dutch colonial period, Indonesia was then colonized by Japan. Although it was relatively shorter than the Netherlands, Japan also tried to configure beauty standards by including white Asian skin as the ideal beauty (Saraswati, 2013:50-53).

3.4 Skin Game Advertisement Breaks Indonesian Beauty Standards

The rapid development of technology and the fast flow of information causes the world to be more widely opened and connected to each other. Unfortunately, the construction of beauty standards made by the media through advertisements in this era is still entrenched.

Wolf (2002), in her book *Beauty Myth*, explained the reason for the social order to present a formulaic image of women's beauty when the image does not correspond to actual facts. The construction of ideal beauty is based on patriarchal ideology, that is, by developing the "anxiety" or a woman's feeling of their body's deficiency. Another important cause is the economic factor related

to the large income derived from beauty products. For the sake of their business, these factors continuously display the construction of an ideal beauty that encourages women to perfect their beauty according to the standard presented. Therefore, the Skin Game advertisement that carries the tagline "I am Born This Way" is like a breath of fresh air to demolish the current beauty standards in Indonesia.

In the narration of the first commercial video, Emily, Nana, and Nisya, who were born with their own uniqueness, still feel confident and grateful for what they have. It can be seen from the expressions "I have albinism, and I love it", "I have healthy birthmarks", and "I have beautiful hairs," which reflect expressions of gratitude for what they have. Moreover, the expressions "I am creative", "I am limited edition", and "I am happy" shows that they do not perceive their differences as obstacles to progress. With expressions of showing big smiles and confidence, they become limited edition figures, stay happy, and focus on their potential.

In the second commercial video narrative, Emily is the main character. Even though owning the albino skin, she enthusiastically presents his positive energy. Her love for art and design keeps her confident to explore her potential. The video also explained that Emily always takes care of herself as a form of self-care. Therefore, she uses skincare to treat her skin in order to be more enthusiastic about carrying out her daily activities. "I am creative; I am lively; I am Born This Way", the last statement uttered by her, becomes a positive affirmation for all women that the shape given to us is the most beautiful gift from God.

Furthermore, in the third commercial video, Nana becomes the main character. She has birthmarks on her face. As a content creator, she always pays attention to her appearance. For her, it becomes a form of self-love. In addition, she also feels comfortable with both applying and not applying skincare. Instead of feeling inferior, she felt that her birthmarks made her a rare figure in this world. Nana also still feels beautiful with whatever is attached to her skin currently.

Finally, in the fourth advertisement video, a woman named Nisya is featured as the main character. Nisya also has a unique feature which is thick hair. She tried uploading videos on TikTok, which became viral. She said that she had received hate speech from netizens. However, behind that, Nisya met a support system on social media. Her love for the BTS boy band made her more confident because she received positive energy from their songs. On the other hand, she also said that she never forgets the role of skin care in making her always confident.

The discourse of the Skin Game advertisement can be interpreted as a discourse that desires to change the construction of ideal beauty standards into a more colorful meaning of beauty. With the power position, Skin Game company does not want the product advertisements to force or intimidate consumers with ridiculous beauty standards. Instead, Skin Game encourages every consumer to be more grateful for their body shape and appearance. By featuring Emily, Nana, and Nisya, who have a variety of body and face shapes, skincare products from Skin Game can be used to support the health of women's skin, not used to change women's bodies for the sake of existing social construction rules.

Obedying a beauty standard is very unlimited. Indonesia consists of tribes that have various physical characteristics (Prianti, 2013). There is an inevitability that every human being is created with various body shapes and appearances. Due to its unique climate and geographical conditions, the majority of Indonesian people have a brown skin color. In Eastern Indonesia, there are also many black people. All societies have unique characteristics of skin color and body shape. Therefore, it would be ridiculous when beauty was only limited by white skin color, slim body shape, and other arbitrary standards.

The evolution and continuity of technological developments cause beauty and aesthetics to be in the flow of transformation. However, every person has the right to define the meaning of beauty because an individual defines it differently. No one has been able to clearly define the standard of beauty. The definition of beautiful depends on various perceptions that are changing with the times. This phenomenon is getting stronger considering that the world has also entered the esteem economy era (Kasali, 2018).

Every woman must understand that beauty has a broad definition. Meanwhile, the standards shown in most beauty product advertising media currently are only a manipulation of beauty standards in the form of marketing strategy. Therefore, the Skin Game advertisement featuring three inspiring women is a fresh movement to destroy the standard of beauty that continues to be inherent in Indonesian society.

5. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, the current research determines that the discourse on Skin Game advertisements uploaded on Instagram *@skingameofficial* contains an attack on beauty standards that exist in Indonesia. It can be noticed from the talent selection in the advertisement featuring Emily, a woman who has albino skin; Nana, a woman who has some birthmarks on her face; and Nisya, a woman who has thick hair on her body. Instead of campaigning for ridiculous beauty standards, the Skin Game

advertisement actually contains a discourse that every woman was born with various characteristics. The presented talents have varied uniqueness that is able to represent the naturally different human form and appearance.

According to literature and history, beauty standards have their own dynamics. Since the 19th century, the movement for women's equality has evolved into a self-conscious movement that is clearly identified. The wave of the feminist movement has been carried out since 1848, which was marked by the holding of The Seneca Falls Convention in the United States as the first women's convention. However, until the fourth wave of feminism (current era), the issue of beauty standards could not be eliminated. It is caused by the influence of patriarchal shackles that are still firmly entrenched. In addition, differences in cultural background, customs, and beliefs also influence it. Moving on from the wave of the feminist movement, beauty standards have long been in force in various countries. For example, West Africa, northern Thailand, China, the United States, and other Western countries. In Indonesia, beauty standards can be traced back to the ancient Javanese era, to Dutch and Japanese colonialism, and to the present day.

With a persuasive goal, an advertisement for a beauty product offers an "ideal" image of beauty to persuade audiences to consume or use the product. Advertisements became a reference in society's lifestyle and appearance. Therefore, recognizing the reality of beauty standards constructed a long time ago, Skin Game advertisements are a discourse worthy of research. Its presence is a breath of fresh air and gives a new color to Indonesian women. The discourse of the Skin Game advertisement can be interpreted as a discourse that desires to change the construction of ideal beauty standards into a more colorful meaning of beauty

The researcher realizes the limitations of this study, such as the object of research which is limited to Skin Game advertisements only. It is hoped that this research can be refined by further researchers. Suggestions for further research are that the research object can be expanded. In addition to studying the beauty standards in skincare advertisements, further research can examine the standards of good looks in men in skincare products and others.

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