Indonesian female beauty concept: Does it take into account the traditional values?

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Abstract

This article will discuss the way Indonesian commercial of female beauty products portray Indonesian female beauty concept. Generally speaking, for most women, beauty becomes a significant indicator for them in identifying their self-esteem and self-confidence. It influences how they value themselves as a person. Over the age, beauty is a significant asset for a woman to be success in her life. Therefore, how beauty is conceptualized give significant influence on both how woman treated their self and how other treated them as an individual in society. The concept of beauty itself relies on how culture defines a woman. However it change overtime along with the modernization wave. Advertising as one of media message, not only promote products and services but in the same time it also promotes particular worldviews and ideologies that define the parameters of how one might look at things and how they give meaning to it. Furthermore, using deconstruction techniques this article will discuss the way beauty was represented in female beauty products' commercial. This research argues that female beauty' commercial tends to identify that the beauty of a woman relies only on her physical beauty. With this kind of beauty, a woman will be able to accomplish her purpose in life such as love and career. This research also found that the current concept of beauty, unfortunately do not necessarily suitable with traditional moral and ethics.

Introduction

Each culture has their own way to define about what is the right thing to do and what is not. Norms and values are different between cultures. How individual values their self is based on what culture they are believed. Culture is significantly influences by both history and demography. For that reason, every culture is possible to have different definition of women beauty.

However, in nowadays reality most culture have the same standard on women beauty. No one reject the idea that sexy body is a criterion for beauty in women. No one also deny the notion of white skin color in women beauty. In the other hand, everyone would definitely have a doubt whether using veil is a standard for women beauty. Everyone would not agree if being pregnant makes women beautiful. Everyone would also not believe if big body is an add value on women beauty.

Until today, media is still believed to bring impact on how people see the world. Using media, individual have the ability to witness any 'important' events on the world. It is described using McLuhan famous idiom "the extension of man". This media power raise the problem about media ability in deciding which one is important and which one is not. This kind of practice inevitably will influence which fact that media choose to deliver to their audience.

Hence, how media choose to portray women beauty, somehow have an impact on the way women view themselves. Women beauty is presented in all forms of mainstream media, bombarding women with standards that define what is considered to be the "beautiful women". Such standards of beauty are impossible to achieve by every woman; a majority models displayed on popular media have the same standards of beauty such as the same body image and the same physical appearance. Mass media's use of such same standards sends hidden message, that in order for women to be consider beautiful, she must look like what media portray of women, regardless their culture origin.

As a big country, Indonesia consist of many tribes that posses different physical appearances. Though, Indonesia is Asian country, Indonesian women do not necessarily have the same skin color with most Asian country such as Japan, China, Korea, etc. This also applied to other physical characteristic such as hair color, hair texture, body image, etc. However, popular media such as magazine and television use such the same model to portray woman beauty.

Media effect on the perception about beauty

Research has repeatedly indicated that women are negatively affected by the constant exposure of beauty standard on media. Dove global study on 2005 (2006) discovered that many women fell themselves under pressure because they don't meet the criteria of ideal women as featured in mass media. Ramirez's (2007) research on the effect of media portrayal of woman attractiveness uncovered that the influence of the media, namely TV, movies, and magazines, on women's perceptions about what it means to be attractive cannot be ignored. Results indicated that overall women are generally influenced by the media in their perception about what it means to be beautiful. Tiggemann's (2003) study about female media consumption found that frequent

magazine reading was consistently correlated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating for women. This is disturbing because most individual consume mainstream media to get well inform, including about woman world. However the so called 'information' about woman world from media most of the time are used by women to evaluate their sense of self and appearances. In short, media works as social comparison for women. Research also found that women who report frequently comparing themselves to other women, especially women in the media, are more likely to show signs of negative mood and body image disturbance (Schooler et al., 2004).

Social comparison theory by Festinger (1954) described that there is a drive within individuals to evaluate themselves by constantly making comparison with others. From this process, individuals learn how to define themselves. This principal also works on how women define themselves. There are two ways people compare their self with others (Corcoran, Crusius, Mussweiler, 2011:121): 1) Downward-comparison is when people compare themselves with others they outperforms in order to maintain positive self-image, to feel good about ourselves. 2) Upward-comparison is when people compare themself with others who are better than them in order to fulfill the need of self-improve. In this sense, media works as upward-comparison. Media feed woman with the beauty standards. What it got to do to be beautiful? What it has to take to be attractive? By consuming media, women think they will get the answer for those questions. Another study, Bessenoff's (2006) study, also found that exposure to thin-ideal advertisements increased body dissatisfaction, negative mood, and levels of depression and lowered self-esteem on women.

Media ability to choose which information they deliver to its audiences, messing women mind about beauty standards. Most of the time, these standards are not even close with the reality we found on the social world. On her research, Ramirez (2007) argued that the media is thus highly unrepresentative of the real world. Women on TV and in magazines are depicted much thinner than they are normally, often to the point that the images presented are unhealthy. From the five Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted on this research, which involve 50 students each, both male and female, everyone agrees that they don't really meet someone who looks like someone they saw on the media on the daily basis. Male students agrees that almost every women they meet on their real life do not looks like the one they saw on the media. The same statement also goes with the female students. However, most of them both male and female students were also agreed on the statement that the one they saw on the media such as beauty commercial, fashion magazine, movies and so on is the ideal woman, the beautiful one. This finding shows though the audiences knew that what media portray about women is not something close with the reality they experience in their life, but still they tend to believe that those portrayals are the right one.

Moreover, when the FGD participants were shown the picture taken from the movie "Devil Wears Prada" as follows:

Though both pictures were portray the same person, most participants consider the right picture as the ideal beauty compare to the left one. They consider the right picture as the modern one, sexy, fashionable, and they attached those characteristics to beautiful women. While, for the girl on the left picture, they considered it as old-fashioned, a squirt one, close-minded, and they attached those characteristics to an unattractive woman.

This preliminary research proved the implicit power of media. Media never says explicitly that particular characteristics are necessary for woman to be considered beautiful and other characteristics are not. However, the way media portray it, unconsciously influence the way audiences evaluate themselves and others, which is tend to be unrealistic. This implicit power is more dangerous than the explicit one, since it is dictate how people think and not being aware of it. In her book *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Naomi Wolf condemns the media for the flawless and unrealistic illusions created by makeup artists and photographers, arguing that such unobtainable perfection invites young women to compare their unimproved reality to physical ideals that do not really exist.

The ideal women of beauty product commercials

Most of the time, people have trouble defining about beauty, but they know it when they see it, and people actively looking for it. And this is become the reason of beauty industry exists until nowadays. Every beauty product commercials boost their product advantage in fulfills women need of beauty. Therefore, female beauty products advertisement is another potent source of women beauty standards.

Women's exposure to beauty commercial is thus reinforcing the notion that some particular characteristics are a requirement of beauty. Beauty commercials are important because their influence is so great on women. In order to boost sale and make their product more attractive, manipulation is inevitable. Numerous researcher agree (Ramirez: 2007, Hoffman: 2004, Wolf: 1991, Tiggeman: 2003, Schooler, et.al: 2004) that those beauty image portrayal presented on the media can only be attain through digital alterations. Furthermore, not only are there carefully manipulated the visualization of beauty ideal, but these visualization are also often accompanied with the comparison on before and after using the products. Somehow this kind of comparison alienates particular characteristics and privileges other characteristics.

Dark vs. Light Skin Color

First and foremost characteristic that compares on beauty commercial is dark vs. light skin color. Indonesia is an Asian country which consist of many tribes. Therefore, there are varieties of physical appearances on Indonesian women, especially skin color. Indonesians skin color ranges from yellow to light brown to very dark brown or black skin color. On his book *The Prehistory of Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (2007), Archeologist, Peter Belwood explained that the population in Indonesia is range from mongoloid, melanesian and even negritos. However, research discovered beauty product commercial portray woman with lighter skin color as more beautiful than woman with darker skin color. Dark skin color is identic with dull skin. What make it worse, not only being darker is less attractive but also having other negative characteristics. Having dark skin color makes women not confidence with their appearances, poor social interaction, ashamed of their self for being darker skin compare to their friend. In addition, darker skin color was portrayed as the condition on women low self-esteem. Research also discovered, being dark hinders women to get success on their love life as portrayed from the commercial.

Before	After

VS

Quite the contrary, the beauty commercial depicted being white or having light skin color means carrying advantage of better opportunity in workplace, better chance to get and be love even better marriage life, since your husband will love you more if you have lighter skin color. A great deal numbers of research has proofed the white beauty hegemonic on women (Banks: 2005, Chung: 2012, Dove: 2005, Hoffman: 2004, Li, et.al: 2008). Hence, light skin tone become the desired skin color and was perceived as "sign" of prestige within the Indonesian diversity races.

This white beauty notion was unfair and extremely racist for those Indonesian women who were biologically born with darker skin tone, such as the northern mongoloid race or even the negritos race in Indonesia. The commercial is just like condemn that those women destined to never be consider as beautiful because of their dark skin color. Which in the end, will affect their self-esteem and influence their love life, job prospects, earning potential, social life, and so on.

Thin vs. 'Not-so thin' Body Shape
The most definite characteristic that portrayed on beauty commercial product is women body shape. It is discovered that beauty product commercial always depict women with thin body shape as beautiful women. Most of the time, this standard was found unrealistic and unhealthy. Only women with disorder eating behavior will be able to fulfill this media standard. There has been a plethora of study indicates the negative effect of the use of thin model in beauty products commercial in affecting women's perception on their own physical attractiveness (Serdar:2006, Halliwell, Dittmar and Howe: 2005, Ramirez: 2007, Dittmar and Howard:2004a, Dittmar and Howard: 2004b, Vonderen and Kinnaly:2012)

The word 'not-so thin' was intentionally use to describe, the way beauty product commercial portrayed the ideal body. What make it worse, in making comparison, the commercial compare their 'ideal' body with the other thin body (but considered less thinner than the 'ideal' body). In reality this 'before' body were much thinner than the ordinary women found in the real world. The media is littered with images of women who fulfill these unrealistic standards, making it seem as if it is normal for women to live up to this ideal. By constantly exposing women to such images, it is like demanding something unreasonable to be done by women. Giving the impression that the ideal body can only be attain if women look like models they seen on beauty commercial, which is unrealistic. Serdar (2006) made this statement regarding the unrealistic portrayal of women beauty on the media:

Images of women in the mass media send a powerful message that a female must be tall and ultra-thin to be considered attractive by societal standards. Repetitive exposure to media images has lead many women to believe that they must sacrifice their health to be considered beautiful. Mass media's use of such unrealistic models sends an implicit message that in order for a woman to be considered beautiful, she must be unhealthy.

Before   After

VS.

Moreover, regarding with the effectiveness of using thin model on the beauty products commercial, research done by Halliwell, Dittmar & Howe (2005) proved that not only do women feel bad about themselves but they also are just as likely to buy product if the model is equally attractive but of average size. However, most of beauty product commercials does not necessarily diet products use the thin model without exception. Advertising as one of media message, not only promote products and services but in the same time it also promotes particular worldviews and ideologies that define the parameters of how one might look at things and how they give meaning to it (Prianti, 2011:34-35). If the beauty products commercial put the 'not-so thin' body shape as the undesirable body shape, then what about the normal body that were bigger from it. This thin notion put women under pressure by the media beauty ideals nowadays.

In a few decades ago in Indonesia, there is a belief that many kids will brings many fortunes. Therefore, women with big hips considered as the ideal woman. Since it is a symbol that women will be able to have many children. However, the diversity on Indonesia, makes the writer cannot simply say that this is the general value in Indonesia but the point is with the increasing influence of the media and widespread consumerism, does not matter what your origin is there is only one beauty standard for women; that is thin body.

Old vs. Young

The other obvious characteristic discovered on the research is the age portrayal. Most of beauty product commercials use young age model. With the help of digital alteration, model looks even younger, have smoother skin than she truly is. The advertisement also portrayed young as a desirable age by all women. Looking age will make women to be more attractive, more beautiful therefore she will be love more by her husband, more success in career, more idealized by her daughter.

This young notion alienates women who look old. Being old makes women less attractive; less beautiful. Being old identic with unhappy and gloomy life, whereas being young identic with happy and colorful life. Wrinkles and other aging symptoms are a disgrace that should be covered. The constant exposure of this kind of message influences how women face their age. Issue of age became forbidden issue to discuss in life especially when in the conversation with the opposite sex. Instead of promoting the normal way to get older, since getting old is biologically in nature, the beauty product commercials advocate women to fear this natural event. Growing old is a scourge to be feared. The trend of cosmetic surgery, Botox injection could verify the effect of the young notion on women.

Evaluate the commercial standards on the ideal beauty for women, showed physical appearance as the ultimate answer for women to conquer the world (read = gaining success in life). Additionally, research discovered that sexy clothes serve as the

indicator for women to show confidence with their physical appearance. Having lighter skin, thinner body shape and looking younger are assets which unfortunate if it is not put on display. Indeed, this women's sexuality were seen as their power to success in life. Research done by Machin and Thornborrow (2003) on the cosmopolitan magazines also argued that female agency is linked to sexuality and the body. Women's ability to succeed in life was seen from the extent of her physical attractiveness. Referring to the Women's Media Center report on 2012, for the last 3 years female characters in film were more likely than males to wear sexy clothing, more likely to be depicted partially nude, and to be referred to as attractive.

Binary opposition and the hyperreality on the advertisement

The way in which language constructs meaning is the foundation of binary opposition. At first, the concept of binary opposition is based from the linguistic theory of Roman Jakobson, developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. Further Claude Levi's Strauss established the concept of binary opposition in 1960s (Juschka, 2001:26). The concept explains about how people's mind works in categorizing something based on the opposite value e.g black and white, beautiful and ugly, old and young. Rather than contradictory, the relation between each binary code is more complementary relation instead. We will not be able to understand beauty without having understanding on ugly.

Furthermore, in the reality, when we make categorization, our brain goes further than just categorize. At the same time we also make assumption and evaluation that helps to reinforce meaning, which is fully subjective. On this level, each binary code attached with deeper binary opposition. The word black attached with evil, dark, bad and on the opposite the word white attached with pure, good, angel and so on. This secondary binary opposition put one binary code over the other. One is more superior to the other; such as white skin color vs. black skin color, young vs. old, thin vs. fat. The question raise now are, who have the privilege to decide particular characters goes with particular binary code; who have the power to choose that young woman is more attractive than the old one; thin woman is more desirable than fat woman; and dark skin color woman is uglier towards lighter skin color woman.

Plenty study on the media effect that have been discussed previously show the dangerous effect of the media relies not on the explicit message sent by the media but more on the implicit message. This kind of message found on the way media sent their explicit message. The way media portray woman will influence how woman sees herself. A woman must look a certain way and often time women look towards the media to see what they should look like. Beauty products commercial is one source where woman can find the concept of beautiful woman should like. Despite the fact that advertising give misleading impression about how woman should like. John Corner (2004:226) on his article *adworlds* explained about the misleading nature of advertising:

In many commentaries, advertising has, indeed been positioned as the quintessentially 'anti-public' form, a kind of anti-news designed to mislead rather than inform and to promote selfish emotion over civic reason.

This research argues that this mislead information from advertising was goes beyond just a sensationalism. It creates another whole new reality that does not even exist on

the real world. The model use by the beauty product commercial, even celebrities does not even look as good as they look like on the commercial. They do not have the body as thin as they look like on the commercial; their skin do not look as light and smooth as they look like on the commercial; and they definitely do not look young as they look like on the commercial. In the critical media studies, this kind of phenomenon known as the hyperreality. The hyperreality is Baudrillard concept in explaining the power of media in bringing simulation to their audience. It distorts the reality itself since it does not even refer to any existence at all. There is no exact representation on the real world. The nature of the hyperreal world is characterised by "enhancement" of reality. As Derrida argues, it is an "artifactuality" that is produced and made rather than a record. (*Echographies of Television*, 41). Chung (2007) argued the danger of hyperreal relies on the inability to distinguish reality from fantasy, and begins to engage with the latter without understanding what it is doing.

To sum up, the beauty product commercials create their own version of reality, which do not depict any existence on the real world. They send a message to any women in order to be able to reach success in life woman should be beautiful. Beautiful itself define from the physical appearances such as looking young, thin body and have a light skin color. Subsequently, for those who are not possess those particular characteristics your life is a doomed.

Conclusion

Indonesia consists with variety of races that have different physical characteristics. Therefore, the beauty of woman should also be defines in various ways. Nevertheless, with the influence of beauty product commercials there is only one single notion about woman beauty. Ironically, this notion was unrealistic, unhealthy, and even unreal. Putting woman under impractical excessive pressure. Moreover, it alienates and marginalizes women who cannot identify themselves with the beauty standards. Considering the abundant variety of belief in Indonesia, this research does not have the ability to define one single traditional schema about woman beauty. However, this research conclude there should not be only one standard in defining female beauty as the only Indonesian traditional values about Indonesian women is the diversity itself.

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