AN INDONESIAN BEAUTY STORY: HOW COLLEGE WOMEN IN INDONESIA REPRESENT BEAUTY, BODY IMAGE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstrak

Meningkatnya penggunaan media sosial saat ini dapat mempengaruhi bagaimana masyarakat modern mendefinisikan citra tubuh dan standar kecantikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana perempuan Indonesia memandang kecantikan dan citra tubuh melalui Instagram dan untuk mendefinisikan makna kecantikan dari sudut pandang mahasiswi Indonesia di era media baru. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif berdasarkan wawancara mendalam. Pesertanya adalah tiga mahasiswi dari berbagai perguruan tinggi di Indonesia, dengan suku yang berbeda dan tumbuh di kota yang berbeda. Mereka tertarik dengan industri kecantikan dan mengikuti beberapa beauty influencer. Hasil yang diperoleh menunjukkan bahwa telah terjadi pergeseran nilai dan budaya terhadap standar kecantikan mahasiswi Indonesia akibat penggunaan Instagram. Para peserta percaya bahwa warna kulit tidak selalu harus memiliki corak yang cerah seperti kebanyakan orang Korea Selatan dan Jepang, namun kulit mulus, bersih dan cerah adalah standar kecantikan bagi mereka. Kecantikan ideal masa kini dipengaruhi oleh kehadiran beauty influencer di Instagram. Para peserta sepakat bahwa sebagian besar kecantikan ideal Indonesia mirip dengan seorang beauty influencer yang wajahnya merupakan campuran dari karakteristik fisik Indonesia dan Barat. Wanita perguruan tinggi yang sedang mempertimbangkan operasi kosmetik tidak lagi dianggap tabu. Mengikuti beauty influencer tanpa mempertimbangkan unsur agama dan budaya yang melarang operasi kosmetik untuk mempercantik penampilan kini menjadi hal yang lumrah bagi sebagian wanita di Indonesia. Kesimpulan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial Instagram memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap representasi standar kecantikan ideal dan citra tubuh perempuan yang diimpikan oleh perempuan peserta penelitian ini.

Kata Kunci: kecantikan, citra tubuh, Budaya, wanita Indonesia, Instagram

Abstract

The increasing use of social media today can influence how modern society defines body image and beauty standards. The research aims to describe how Indonesian women view beauty and body image through Instagram and to define the meaning of beauty from the perspective of Indonesian female students in the new media era. The method used is a qualitative method based on in-depth interviews. The participant were three female students from various universities in Indonesia, with different ethnicities and grew up in different cities. They are interested in the beauty industry and follow several beauty influencers. The results obtained shows that there has been a shift in

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values and culture towards the beauty standards of Indonesian women students due to the use of Instagram. The participants believe that skin color does not always need to have a fair complexion such as that of many South Koreans and Japanese, but smooth, clean and bright skin became the standard of beauty for them. Today's beauty ideals are influenced by the presence of beauty influencers on Instagram. Participants agreed that much of the Indonesia's ideal beauty resembles a beauty influencer whose face is a mixture of Indonesian and Western physical characteristics. College women who are currently considering cosmetic surgery are no longer viewed as taboo. Following beauty influencers without considering religious and cultural elements that prohibit cosmetic surgery to beautify their appearance is now commonplace for some women in Indonesia. The conclusion of the study shows that the social media Instagram has a significant influence on the representation of ideal beauty standards and women's body image that is dreamed of by women participating in this study.

Keywords: beauty, body image, Culture, Indonesian women, Instagram

PENDAHULUAN

subjective The idea of beauty is as it is based on different cultural, ethnic, geographical, and personal preferences. Meanwhile, women in the Dayak culture see beauty in women who extend their ears (Sari, 2017). Based on the study discussed by Saraswati in the book Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race in Transnational Indonesia from the late 9th century to the early 10th century, the adaptation of ancient Javanese culture from India regarding the aspiration of beauty centered on light skin color became the dominant beauty norm in European Pre-Colonial Java. The influence of Indian beauty on the Indonesian Archipelago before the arrival of European colonialism was very strong and played an important role.

At that time, race was seen as an indicator of identity and played a significant role in all aspects, including beauty. In the early 20th century, when Dutch colonialism fully arrived in Indonesia, the image of Caucasian white beauty was used to illustrate the symbol of beauty in advertisements published in women's magazines (Saraswati, 2013). The role model of beauty also changed, replacing the white beauty ideal of Caucasian women. Global habits that developed in various historical periods, including technology, were greeted with the sharp role of the mass media in constructing the beauty of Indonesian women (Elsera et al.,2022). Not only were Europeans and Japanese are followed as ideals of beauty, but then a new mode role emerged that had to be taken into account because it succeeded in influencing the monopoly of beauty interpretations during the colonial period and had affected not only the public's understanding concept of beauty but also race, gender and skin color in Indonesia. China, India, Thailand, and Korea are cited as the most influential countries in providing beauty contemporary interpretations in Asia (Henley & Porath, 2021)

The dissimilarity meanings of 'Ideal beauty' and the 'beauty standard' have led to media and cultural studies in the academic realm. The media has become one that describes the standard of beauty in a provocative way that constantly describes the concept of ideal beauty (Irza, Taufiq, & Hermanto, 2022). The impact is significant on the culture of modern society, which has begun to rely more on digital media than

traditional media. Research on the Hootsuite Social Media Management Platform and a Social Marketing Agency found that about 64% of the Indonesian population is connected to the internet (Hanika, Putri, & Witjaksono, 2020).

One of the digital media that is often used currently is social media. The increasing use of social media can affect how modern society defines body image and beauty standards. First, social media allows users to post pictures of themselves rather than just pictures of models and celebrities (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Second, people often post ideal images of themselves on social media, which can be improved by editing or filtering, and deleting the images they consider less attractive (Sukamto, Hamidah, & Fajrianthi, 2019).

Third, social media are used to interact with friends and others in one's social circle (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). People can see other people's posts and comments on social media, which can affect how they feel about their appearance. Social media images significantly determine how people view their bodies, especially in the modern world, and shape our beauty standards. The topic is interesting to research because beauty trends constantly change yearly, especially with the growth of media.

Limitation of the research is to explore how Indonesian college women currently define beauty and body image in the realm of Instagram social media, given the sociocultural developments of modern society (Garbett et al., 2023). Recently, social media has significantly impacted how people around the world look, with the homogeneity of visual media being an exciting issue (Ando et al., 2021). The study aims to describe how Indonesian women view beauty and body image through social media and to define the meaning of beauty from the perspective of Indonesian college women in the new media era. As an agent of information for the public, the media also contains news about women in addition to general news.

The depiction relates to women's body shape and beauty standards conveyed through social media. As Tuchman puts it, "To expect the media to accurately represent women is an oversimplification of the complex relationship between women and the media and the symbolic processes involved in representation" (Marlianti & Suryani, 2012). Therefore, the study was made to describe how body shape and beauty standards are represented in social media on Instagram, which has implications for the perception of beauty standards that are formed for college women in Indonesia.

METODE PENELITIAN

The objective of the study is to describe how Indonesian college women represent beauty and body image in the realm of social media on Instagram. The study explores how socio-cultural changes in contemporary Indonesian society have an impact on female college students' attitudes and behavior towards beauty. **The theoretical framework** of research analysis reviews existing literature on the experience of

women's body image in Indonesia. Exploratory investigations and qualitative methods with in-depth interview techniques were adopted to answer the research question.

Three college women from three different universities in Indonesia were interviewed. Three of them come from different ethnic groups and grew up in different cities. Their age ranges from 19-22 years old. They are women who have an interest in the beauty industry, are active on social media, and follow several beauty influencers.

The interview was held online and recorded by online video application. Each participant was interviewed individually according to their time preferences from 45-60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was used in the interviews. They were mostly questioned about "What is their opinion about beauty image?", "What's the meaning of beauty?", "Who are the beauty influencers that they follow on Instagram?", "What's the beauty or cosmetic brand that they follow, and how do they see the campaign of the brand through their brand ambassador or influencers". Each participant was guided to share their thoughts based on their personal experiences so that they could describe them specifically. The interview will be transcribed into Bahasa Indonesia and translated to English and will be analyzed.

The steps in data analysis, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) in the book *Social Research Methods* (Bryman & Bell, 2019), emphasize three main aspects: (1) Category (category), which is a unit of information consisting of events, incidents, and examples; (2) Theoretical sampling, is samples selected from the results of interviews with participants to assist researchers in forming an adequate theory; and (3) Constant comparative data analysis (constant comparative) takes information from a data set and compares it with existing theory or concept to emerge categories. Data analysis used three stages of coding including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the data analysis, the participants were given pseudonyms.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Three main themes emerge related to how college women in Indonesia represent issues of body image and beauty in contemporary Indonesian society in the social media era.

The Indonesian Beauty Ideal

The college women in this study were very aware of the impact of social media, especially Instagram, on their representation of beauty and body image. One of them is the phenomenon of Influencers who get many followers by posting pictures that show their glamorous lifestyle, even how they look, which can influence the views and dreams of their followers (Chae, 2018; Marwick, 2015). All participants mentioned "The influence of beauty influencers," which is growing rapidly in the era of the social media Instagram, pays great attention to contemporary beauty standards. In addition,

Instagram can actively highlight a beauty influencer's fame, wealth, and lifestyle, which participants can see at any time. Participants B and C stated that: "The presence of beauty influencers quite influences beauty standards in Indonesia because they are always perceived as beautiful and considered as *body goals*".

Transformation in sociocultural modernity and body modification also occur in Indonesia. Previously, young women in Indonesia were still reluctant to do cosmetic surgery due to religion, culture, and fear of social judgment (Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017). Religion is made as something sacred that makes them take care of themselves physically and remain original and unchanged. Islam is the majority religion embraced by society in Indonesia (Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017). Islamic law states that it is not permissible to do cosmetic surgery to improve appearance for beauty (Aravik, Amri, & Choiriyah, 2018). However, with the development of social media and the existence of beauty influencers, various treatments or extreme injections in the beauty field are no longer taboo for contemporary society in Indonesia.

Participant A said: Influencers really influence beauty standards in Indonesia. Proven by the current plastic surgery or fillers and botox injection which is no longer viewed as a disgrace in our society, but instead, people are proud and vying to change the shape of their faces so that they will resemble the influencers they follow.

Therefore, the existence of beauty influencers on Instagram can be said to greatly influence women's body image and one's perception of ideal beauty as displayed by beauty influencers. This is in accordance with previous research from Bauer (2020) which states that influencers who post pictures of their bodies generally tend to conform to appearance ideals, which could lead to body image dissatisfaction and creating an ideal beauty standard for female followers on Instagram. Participants believe that ideal beauty is represented by beauty influencers that they see every day through Instagram social media. The college women in the study are inspired, to follow this beauty influencer and copy their "looks" to feel attractive themselves. Several Indonesian beauty influencers who were stated to have ideal beauty standards were "Tasya Farasya", "Abel Cantika", "Sara Robert Louis", "Sarah Ayu", and "Nanda Arsyinta". as Participant A stated: @tasyafarasya (Tasya Farasya), @abellyc (Abel Cantika), the reason for following them is because they can keep their skin smooth, have a sharp nose, they are thin, and give a complete review when explaining a product, be it skincare or makeup.

Further, Participant B stated that: @saraahayu (Sarah Ayu) and @saraarobert (Sara Robert) because they are thin, have very clean and glowing skin. They often give health tips on how to take care of their bodies and do make-up tutorials.

The same thing was said by participant C that she followed influencers based on their physical appearance and how these influencers could explain the beauty tips that they had. Participant C stated: @tasyafarasya (Tasya Farasya) and @paola.serena (Paola

Tambunan) because they are beautiful, have bright skin, flawless skin, have a nice body. They also create good makeup tutorial content.

With slight differences, all participants provided some version of the same beauty standard for Indonesian women, which they believe most Indonesians would agree with. As stated by the college women participating in this study, the standardization of Indonesian beauty is determined by the ideal body image possessed by women. As said by participant A: a woman who has a slim body is not too thin and not fat, she has pleasing to the eye, healthy skin, and she is able to do proper make up.

Some have even pointed out that certain facial features that are considered beautiful or ideal by women in Indonesia are more westernized than the original facial structure of Indonesians. As participant B said: The body is ideal, thin, the face is smooth, she has a tall body, the nose is sharp and thin nose, light eyes, and whose face possesses Indonesians and Western physical attributes, such as beauty influencers Sarah Robert and Sarah Ayu.

Likewise, college student C said that ideal beauty could be described by one of the artists, Pevita Pearce, whose facial features are a mixture of English and Indonesian physical traits.

The ideal body shape for women is described as having a slim, tall body, usually having bright and clean skin, then light brown eye color like the artist Pevita Pearce.

Based on the research findings above, the ideal beauty of Indonesian, according to participants in this study, is represented by highlighting a perfect body image like a slim and tall body. Interestingly, not all participants believe that fair skin color such as the skin of many East Asian citizens (Korea and Japan) is necessary as long as their skin is smooth and healthy. All participants said "Beautiful women do not always have fair skin, and nowadays, many local brands have collaborated with beauty influencers who have olive and brown skin tones but still look beautiful". Therefore, the result of this research contradicts the previous study which suggests that Indonesia's ideals of beauty have shifted in response to the increasing influence of East Asian culture (Puspitasari & Suryadi, 2020), and that Indonesian women now aspire to have white skin like snow rather than tan or brown skin (Nagara & Nurhajati, 2022). However, they instead emphasize the composite facial structure between Indonesian and western facial traits. This fits with a beauty standard study for Brazilian women that saw "Western" beauty preferences which serve as a euphemism for light skin tone and facial features of European origin (Jarrin, 2015).

Beauty and Social Media

All of the college women in this study have social media such as Instagram. In the platform, they can see so many beautiful women that immediately made them compare themselves with the woman on social media.

These college women also compare themselves to the influencers or their relation that they see and also follow on Instagram. As a result of comparing themselves personally, they feel more insecure about themselves. This also happened because these influencers posted all the best possessions that they have, which ultimately made the college women feel they were very lacking and not as good as them. As said by participant A: It is quite influential, especially on social media Instagram, people like to post things for example their facial beauty, their lifestyle, and their skin.

Also stated by the participant B: It is really affecting, especially on Instagram now that people are very active, such as doing workouts.

The results of the study in Surabaya shows the impact of using social media such as Instagram; young women tend to compare themselves more often with a figure (coworker or celebrity) who is more attractive, prettier, slimmer, and taller than them (upward appearance comparisons) (Sukamto et al., 2019). This theory is also supported by participant C: These posts are indirectly influential because they always see the perfect side of other people who post, such as artists, friends, influencers, or celebrities.

Because these college women often compare themselves to various beautiful women on social media which then ends in dissatisfaction with themselves, they finally choose to improve themselves. They do it in various ways. They try to improve their own beauty by doing beauty care. College student A and C said: I have tried to do vitamin C collagen injections because I saw a friend on Instagram took it.

A different example was stated by Participant B, that she wants to do some plastic surgery for herself: If I had money, the first thing I will do is to have Botox Injections and nose filler.

They try to change themselves by being healthier such as doing workouts or joining a gym membership and buying products that their favorite influencers suggested because they believe these suggestions will help them. Participant A said: At that time one of the ways to get the ideal body shape is by joining a gym membership and also buying skincare. I was influenced by Tasya Farasya.

Skincare and makeup that have already been endorsed by influencers make participants believe that the products will be beneficial to use. Thus, they try to purchase these products to meet the standard that the influencers already set. Skincare and makeup are used as a way to enhance their appearance. As participant B said: Using makeup and skincare makes you more beautiful.

Also, participant C said: One way to follow the beauty standards that are trending is by using skincare and makeup to make us more beautiful.

One of the quickest ways to be beautiful on social media is by using filters on Instagram or any other phone app to edit their face. Most filters usually edit people's faces to be prettier by adding instant makeup. Other filters usually try to slim noses, slim chins, and tighten faces upward. Participant B said: The reason for using filters is

because it makes the pictures better, so if we do not use them, it will us feel more insecure.

Participant C also said: Before posting the picture, usually filters are used, and it is mostly makeup filters.

It is stated that they are insecure about themselves and that they have to change their own faces before posting on social media, to show the best version of themselves, even though it changes the real them.

Social Pressure to be Beautiful

Women always want to be praised in order to be happy and proud of what they have, both academically and physically. To be beautiful is the desire of all women. But sometimes due to various kinds of beauty standards that have been made in the real world and social media, women get discriminated and ridiculed by the surrounding community. This does not only happen on social media, but also to the closest people we know.

This discrimination sometimes also happens in everyday life, whether it is just sarcasm or ridicule, even with good intentions this also happens. Various existing beauty standards make women feel that they are always wrong with the physical shape they have. Stated by participant A: My close friends say that I am fat and they try to tell me to be skinny.

The opposite happened to participant C. She stated that: Close friends would say that my body is heavy when riding a motorbike.

Not only about the body, but people also discriminate against women for their facial features. As told by participant B: Because my body is not tall and my eyes are always sleepy, people told me that I was short and had sunken eyes.

Because of this discrimination, some of the participants do diets but not in the right way. Some of them chose to do these diets using a very quick way even though it will not always affect their body well, and this leads them to develop an eating disorder. As stated by participant B: I used to go on a diet to the point of developing an eating disorder and until now I like to buy skin care because of the influence of other people

Also stated by participant C: I am currently on a diet, but the diet may be classified as unhealthy because I only eat once a day. This happens because I want something that works fast.

The result of this study concurs with the research from Brady et al (2017) which revealed that exposure to ridicule about a person's body shape could lead to increased body image problems and unhealthy eating attitudes. The Tripartite influence model which shows that body image dissatisfaction is influenced by three main sources namely, parents, peers, and the media (Gendron & Lydecker, 2016) is proven in this

study. Based on their opinion the discrimination comes from peers and they also feel pressure because of the impact of exposure to social media that they see every day.

The interesting point from this study is that there is a shift in values and culture towards beauty standards for Indonesian college women as the impact of using *Instagram*. Participants in this study were able to tolerate skin color, which does not have to be as fair as snow such as the skin of many South Koreans and Japanese. Through Instagram, participants can see more broadly the development of beauty ideals carried out by local skincare brands which use models with olive skin tones. However, smooth, clean, and light skin remains to be the standard of beauty for them.

Today's beauty ideals are also influenced by the existence of beauty influencers on Instagram. All participants agreed that Indonesia's ideal beauty resembles a beauty influencer who has mixed facial features between an Indonesian and a Westerner. The trend of "following" beauty influencers can become a new value and culture for them today. Including cosmetic surgery activities that are no longer considered as a taboo for women who desires to perfect their appearance. Currently, the culture and values that adhered to the ideals of beauty for women are to follow beauty influencers without considering elements of religion and old culture that forbids cosmetic surgery to improve appearance.

SIMPULAN

The study shows that the social media Instagram significantly impacts the representation of ideal beauty standards and women's body image that is desired by the women participating in this study. They have a descriptive image of a contemporary ideal beautiful woman with a slim body, height, smooth and healthy skin, light eyes, and a sharp nose. Celebrities and beauty influencers whose facial features are mixed between Indonesian and western features are considered the ideal beauty for them. The rise of beauty influencers on Instagram has shifted the culture and values of college women in Indonesia, such as cosmetic surgery which is considered a natural action to improve a woman's appearance.

The findings also help to explain the factors that influence the public's ideas about beauty and body image, including the social media role in shaping these beliefs. Instagram is a platform where users discover global beauty standards and trends, as well as consumerism and globalization. It is one of the most significant platforms in this regard. *Instagram* has equipped these women and their peers with daily ideas and ideals of feminine beauty, which leads to body image dissatisfaction. They recognize the dangers of extreme dieting and eating disorders. Still, they also admire people with a strong will to achieve cultural ideals with the tenacity to become the beautiful ideal they see and represent on Instagram. In terms of facial appearance, the college women here try to show their best appearance by using skincare and makeup They also use filters to

support them to be more confident when sharing photos on Instagram. Therefore, beauty ideals on social media are proven to have a high contribution to increasing dissatisfaction with women's body image.

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