

Conference Paper

The Dilemma of Beauty in the Social Media Era

Djilzaran Nurul Suhada*, Argyo Demartoto, Yuyun Sunesti

Faculty of Social and Political Science, Sebelas Maret University, 57126, Indonesia

ORCID IDDjilzaran Nurul Suhada: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4049-6210>**Abstract.**

This study aims to analyze the dilemmas of Indonesian society, especially women, in understanding beauty, amidst the constructions of what is deemed beautiful by Instagram. This study included 10 female informants aged 23 to 26 years, with different ethnic backgrounds, including ethnic Melayu, Batak, Minang, Banten, Betawi, Sundanese, Javanese, Papuan, Arabic and Chinese. All these ethnic groups are present and exist in the midst of Indonesian society, actively using Instagram and following Instagram influencers. This study uses the hyperreality theory of Jean-Paul Baudrillard, which includes simulacra, consumption and simulation. The results of this study show that Instagram creates a construction of which physical characteristics are beautiful through content uploaded by influencers. Secondly, the impact of this construction is such that followers of these influencers believe that their physical characteristics are not attractive and ultimately want to be like the influencers they see and follow on Instagram. Lastly, Instagram is a performative media such that the physical characteristics that are shown on the platform have often gone through alterations involving make-up, filters, and editing processes. Indonesian society, as a multicultural society, is faced with a dilemma when it comes to upholding values of beauty when the media highlights 'beautiful' physical characteristics that do not represent any ethnicity in Indonesia.

Keywords: Equality, Beauty, Social Media, Instagram

1. Introduction

Durkheim argued that humans as individual beings have absolutely no autonomy over themselves to act. Since being born into the world, humans have been introduced to the existing order and according to the standards created by the community in their environment (1). Gradually, these standards can be utilized and penetrated by capitalism which indirectly hegemonizes people around the world. The standards depicted by capitalism refer to life and perfect physical form that they displayed through television channels and social media which tend to be easy to consume and access by people from all over the world. Whether we realize it or not, these standards make it easier for modern humans to feel insecure or trapped in high insecurity. Humans must realize that

Corresponding Author: Djilzaran Nurul Suhada; email: djilzarannurul98@student.uns.ac.id

Published 21 December 2022

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

© Djilzaran Nurul Suhada et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICESRE Conference Committee.



the perfect life offered by television and mass media is not always factual and can harm viewers if there is any doubt about its veracity.

Social media is a mass media that can spread the desired discourse easily into the human subconscious so that it can influence the behaviour of its users (2). People are offered freedom of expression in social media and it is inversely proportional to the real life they live. This is what escapes society into the world of hyperreality, namely human unconsciousness to distinguish what is real and what is just a fantasy so that truth and lies will be very difficult to distinguish (3).

Previously, television was the mainstay of the community in following the development of information, both nationally and internationally. However, the function of television competes with the presence of social media is also taken into account recently. People can access unlimited information just by holding their smartphone. Katadata in 2021 revealed the fact that in Indonesia there were 94% of internet users aged 16-64 years accessing YouTube in February 2021. In addition, Indonesian people also use several other social media such as Whatsapp (87.7%), Instagram (86.6%), facebook (85.5%), Twitter (63.6%) and LINE as much as 52.4% (4). The data also shows that there are situations that are difficult to predict, such as the presence of many new professions in society. Lately, many people like to appear and show their opinions on social media accounts these people use social media as a space to share personal experiences to show off their ideal body shape. From that activity, they also earn income and at the same time seek the attention of other users.

The use of self-oriented social media can at least increase appearance self-esteem for two reasons, the first is that online self-presentation is often the best version of a person's self, so that when presenting their ideal version of themselves, they can integrate themselves optimally. Second, when individuals post their content, they will get feedback that has the potential to increase their self-esteem (5). However, this has a side, where they also often evaluate their ideal self from others. This will involve them directly in social comparisons that have a negative impact on their self-esteem.

Every time on Instagram, millions of content are uploaded that have the potential to transmit physical inequality (6). That's where racism begins to creep in without anyone even realizing it. racism between blacks and whites will always exist forever, but now racism is forming a new face and tends to be well received (7).

Instagram as a social media not only provides images uploaded by its users but can also provide thousands of important information. Launched and created in 2010, Instagram is a short photo and video sharing network service. Instagram users can access the service through an application or web that is equipped with several mainstay features in it, such as the availability of various filters to beautify the uploaded image

and can also include a description of up to 2200 characters in the uploaded photo or video. Like social media in general, Instagram also provides a feature to send messages between users, the option to mark content with hashtags to make it easy to find, the ability to include many pictures and videos in one post and the Instagram story feature that allows users to post stories via a timeline that can be accessed by other users for 24 hours (8). Messages, posts, and stories allow each Instagram user to communicate with other users in ways that are more varied in privacy and formality.

The emergence of new professions through social media is not a phenomenon that can be avoided. These new professions are including celebrity and beauty influencer. It can be said that these two professions have a considerable impact on Instagram social media users, especially women. Celebrities and beauty influencers often praise or campaign for their physical characteristics and ideal body shape in their every upload on social media. This also indirectly penetrates the subconscious of their followers and creates new standards of beauty in society. By reaching all circles widely, Instagram is often used by beauty product manufacturers to market their products. The role of stakeholders such as beauty influencers has an important role in marketing and recommending these products to their followers who come from various circles. We can see that the patron-client relationship between beauty product manufacturers and beauty influencers can influence the standards and values that exist in society, including beauty standards.

Instagram users basically see influencers as attractive and authentic. The views or words of an influencer can be a very effective message for their followers on social media and can also create a brand impact (9). In the process of promoting a product, an influencer can easily lead the trust and connection that has been built between himself and his followers to expand reach and impact on social media, especially Instagram (10). It can be interpreted that the role of influencers is very important for their followers in cyberspace, especially for women who use Instagram. Influencers can also be a representative of someone who brings influence to his followers whether it's a situation that has been built and creates mutual trust, especially for the impact of the spread of advertising and consumptive habits (11).

The physical characteristics of most Indonesian women are tan and brown skin colors (12). In terms of facial structure, Indonesian women are blessed with faint facial bones and a nose that is not too sharp or *bangir*, while the eyes tend to be large and round with eyelid creases that make the face look more defined. For the hair, Indonesian women are identical with black hair. The combination of tan skin with black hairdo makes the appearance of Indonesian women look so exotic. In addition, the posture of Indonesian women generally ranges from 160 cm. However, the beauty standards that the media

touted turned out to be inversely proportional to the reality of Indonesian society. The beauty standards of the Indonesian people also refer to the beauty represented by beauty influencers and girl group members from South Korea with the characteristic of glowing white skin (13). This standard is promoted by the beauty industry through mass media advertisements day by day. The representation of beauty in the media is mostly dominated by white women and thin bodies, thus making people feel insecure about their skin color.

2. Method

This study uses descriptive qualitative research method. This method was chosen because the object of research includes social media activities of Instagram users which will be more effective if presented in a narrative presentation. The data collection technique used in this study consisted of observation activities, by observing the social media activities of the Informantts on the Instagram platform. As well as interviews with Informantts with predetermined criteria as follows:

1. Female aged 23 – 26 years.
2. Using social media Instagram for the last 3 years.
3. Have an interest in beauty content.
4. Follow beauty influencers

This study was analyzed using Jean paul Baudrillard's hyperreality theory, in which there are the concepts of Simulacra and Simulation. The Simulakra concept is used to describe an ideal life in the form of construction of perfect physical characteristics through content uploaded by influencers on Instagram social media. In addition, the Simulation concept is used to describe the life lived by followers with all their efforts in order to look equal to the influencers.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Informant Profile

The data shown in Table 1 is a profile of the informants involved in this study. Informants come from various ethnic backgrounds, as a racial representation of several major ethnic groups in Indonesia.

TABLE 1: Informant Profile.

No.	Initials	Age	Ethnic	Period of using Instagram
1.	Informant A	24 years old	Malay	10 years
2.	Informant B	23 years old	Batak	8 years
3.	Informant C	23 years old	Minang	7 years
4.	Informant D	23 years old	Banten	7 years
5.	Informant E	26 years old	Betawi	9 years
6.	Informant F	25 years old	Sunda	7 years
7.	Informant G	26 years old	Java	11 years
8.	Informant H	25 years old	Papua	6 years
9.	Informant I	23 years old	Arabic	7 years
10.	Informant J	24 years old	Tionghoa	8 years

3.2. Influencer Construction of Instagram's Physical Characteristic Values through Influencers

Generally, Instagram social media displays a perfect but similar face and body as a reference for its viewers. Similarly, the physical characteristics constructed by Instagram through Influencers tend to refer to one physical trait that is considered superior. Physical characteristics that have a beautiful value that people agree on today are oriented to the skin color and body shape of South Korean women, namely a glowing white skin color and without blemishes, the media often refers to it as 'glowing'. In addition to skin color, Instagram also constructs how a person's body posture can be said to be perfect, namely when they manage to get a slim body shape and even tend to be skinny. After skin color and body shape, there are also elements on the face that are constructed as physical characteristics that are of beautiful value by Instagram influencers. In contrast to the skin color and body shape that is oriented to the beauty of Korean women, the facial details coveted by the followers of beauty influencers refer to the beauty of middle eastern women who have several elements that must at least be present in the composition of a beautiful face, namely having an oval or often called thin, clearly visible facial lines, sharp nose, thick eyebrows and eyelashes, and naturally pink lips.

In addition to the physical characteristics mentioned above, it is recognized by followers that it is not a physical characteristic that can be said to be beautiful by the public, both virtual and real. Even though as we know that the physical characteristics of the Indonesian people are so diverse, this certainly makes most people feel they have to eliminate their physical characteristics that are not in accordance with what is displayed by influencers on Instagram social media.

The construction of the value of Instagram’s physical characteristics through Influencers is the embodiment of an ideal life, such as the Simulakra concept proposed by Baudrillard in the Hyperreality theory.

Fractal Codes and Orders

Instagram also broadcasts content that contains certain physical or racial characteristics indirectly, so that it can form a standardization that the physical characteristics that Instagram "requests" are as determined. In hyperreality society, simulacra are formed through fractal codes and arrangements. The code is defined as a means of controlling objects and individuals in the community. In this study, the code refers to the "Kode Cantik" where the code controls objects, namely beauty products, and individuals who follow beauty influencers on Instagram social media, and this is a condition of its existence in the community. With "Kode Cantik" you can encourage followers to follow every beauty influencer’s words in every recommendation, tip, or even just by showing their daily life so that followers have admiration.



Figure 1: Influencer Recommendation Upload .

In beauty influencer content, there are a number of followers who will determine the "beautiful" code to stay alive and eliminate things that are considered negative. These followers are the fractals of the beauty influencer’s content. After watching a beauty influencer’s content, followers will make a decision whether they choose to enjoy the content as an activity to admire, practice, or follow recommendations even

just as entertainment, and then ignoring it can play a role in the sustainability of the code itself. Followers will choose which ones will go viral, and which ones will be removed so that what is considered appropriate for virality is used as a standard to establish uniformity.

The following are the physical characteristics that become the "Cantik" Code on Instagram social media along with their fractal and negativity arrangements.

TABLE 2: Instagram Racial Construction.

"Cantik" Code		Followers Influencers as a Fractal Order	Beauty as a	Negativity	
Part of standard	Physical characteristics	Follow to Follow Recommendations Follow the Tutorial Follow as Entertainment	Admire the	Part of standard	Physical characteristics
Skin tone	White			Skin tone	Dark, Brown, Black
Face	Smooth and clear as crystal, glowing, thick eyebrows, sharp nose, dark eyes, no pores, no black spots, no panda eyes, no acne, firm facial lines, thin.			Face	Textured, rough, bald eyebrows, snub nose, slanted eyes, porous, dark spots, panda eyes, eye bags, acne, lack of firm lines, chubby.
Body shape	Tall and slim			Body shape	Short and fat (stubby)

If the code "Beautiful" above is compared with the biological conditions of the Indonesian people, who come from various ethnicities, including the informants involved in this research. Certainly, there will be a lot of negativity that is removed because there is no complete match between the physical characteristics of the Indonesian people and their physical characteristics. constructed by social media Instagram. That way, the beauty standards found on Instagram social media don't make sense to be accommodated by all ethnicities in Indonesia.

3.3. Impact of Influencer's Physical Characteristic Value Construction on Followers' Self-Evaluation of Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics that have been constructed by Instagram social media through Influencers have an impact on how followers see their own physical characteristics. The perfect content uploaded by influencers brings followers to the reality

that in fact, what they have seen on Instagram social media does not match the life they live. Followers feel inequality based on the physical characteristics they have with those of the influencers they follow. Beauty constructed by influencers does not even represent the people of most ethnic groups in Indonesia. The influencers are no longer able to represent the physical characteristics of people's domination, but they prefer to perpetuate the beauty construction that has existed before, both historically and thanks to changes in the current modernization.

3.4. Instagram as a Performance Media and Representation of Beautiful Physical Characteristics

After Instagram's social media has succeeded in constructing beautiful physical characteristics through influencers, it is undeniable that Instagram is increasingly filled with content with similar content. Society becomes one voice to determine the value of beauty in women. This situation has finally made Instagram a medium of performance and representation of beauty that is endlessly reproduced. Influencer is a very lucrative job and has an impact on many people. Construction is built, coupled with the huge profits they reap. In addition to constructing beauty values, influencers also offer ways, so that followers can become like themselves based on their physical characteristics and appearance. The methods offered include providing recommendations for beauty products to providing tutorials on using them.

In addition to providing reviews and recommendations for beauty products, Influencers also share tips and tricks on how to use the recommended beauty products correctly. The activities of influencers on Instagram social media end up forming a trend, from the style of dress, and make-up, to the use of filter features and photo editing. Trends are produced and live in the insecurities of followers every day. Followers seem to have to keep up with what's trending today, in order to compromise with the inequality they've been feeling. The presence of influencers and the creation of trends encourage followers to take actions that they believe can make them closer and equal to the influencers they follow.

This situation is called Simulation in Hyperreality theory. According to Baudrillard, today's Western culture is a representation of a simulated world, namely a world formed from the relationships of various signs and codes randomly without clear references and relations. This relationship involves real signs (facts) that are created through the production, as well as pseudo signs (images) that are created through the process of reproduction (14). In a simulated culture, the two signs then accumulate and intertwine and form a single entity. It can no longer be recognized which one is real, which one is

real, which one is fake, and which one is fictitious. Everything is part of the reality that is lived in today's society.

4. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Instagram creates a construction of beautiful physical characteristics through content uploaded by influencers. This construction has an impact on an unequal view of followers when they see influencer content, it makes followers have excessive insecurity, and creates feelings of wanting to look like influencers. Instagram has finally become a medium of performance and representation of beautiful physical characteristics with various efforts such as the use of make-up, filters, and editing processes in every upload of its users. Indonesian people experience a dilemma when they have to understand equality in the midst of their nation's diversity, but on the other hand, the media creates a construction of beautiful physical characteristics that does not favor any ethnicity.

Acknowledgements

The source of funding for this research came from the researcher's personal funds. In addition, there are also several parties who helped in the completion of this article. Thank you to the ten informants who have shared their experiences with social media, both through interviews and recorded in observations made by researchers. The researcher also thanks the reviewers and proofreaders who provided the opportunity for this article to be published.

References

- [1] Mustofa. Undisciplined reviewed from the Habitus Pierre Bourdieu Theory. *The Journal of Society and Media* 2019. 2019;3:142–158. Available from: <https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jsm/index>
- [2] Bastick Z. Would you notice if fake news changed your behavior? An experiment on the unconscious effects of disinformation. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2021;116:1–12. Available from: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh>
- [3] Damayanti NL, Hidayat MA. Hiperreality of social media: A phenomenology study of self-confession of housewives of Facebook users. *The Journal of Society and Media*. 2019;3:261–277. Available from: <https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jsm/index>

- [4] Lidwina A. 94% orang Indonesia akses Youtube satu bulan terakhir. 2021. Available from: <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2021/02/17/94-orang-indonesia-akses-youtube-dalam-satu-bulan-terakhir/>
- [5] Steinsbekk S, Wichstrøm L, Stenseng F, Nesi J, Hygen BW, Skalická V. The impact of social media use on appearance self-esteem from childhood to adolescence – A 3-wave community study. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2021;114:1–7. Available from: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh>
- [6] Althoff T, Sosič R, Hicks JL, King AC, Delp SL, Leskovec J. Large-scale physical activity data reveal worldwide activity inequality. *Nature*. 2017;574:7663.
- [7] Carney N. All lives matter, but so does race: Black Lives Matter and the evolving role of social media. *Humanity & Society*. 2016;40.
- [8] Carpenter JP, Morrison SA, Craft M, Lee M. How and why are educators using Instagram? *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 2020;96:1–14. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7380928/>
- [9] Riama CO. Peran influencer dalam proses electronic world of mouth untuk meningkatkan persepsi merek. *Jurnal Manajemen Komunikasi*. 2021;5.
- [10] Leite FP, Baptista P. The effects of social media influencers' self-disclosure on behavioral intention: The role of source credibility, parasocial relationships, and brand trust. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*. 2021;30:295–311.
- [11] Suhada, Nurul D, Demartoto A, Sunesti Y. Women in the shadow of self-racism: A phenomenological study of women using Instagram. *Interdisciplinary Social Studies*. 2022;1.
- [12] Indozone T. Seperti apa ciri khas kecantikan perempuan Indonesia? Indozone [Internet]. 2020 Jul 8. Available from: <https://www.indozone.id/beauty/OysXZQD/seperti-apa-ciri-khas-kecantikan-perempuan-indonesia>
- [13] Jonesy. Pesanku pada adik-adik perempuan tentang standar kecantikan. *Magdalene* [Internet]. 2021 Oct 26. Available from: <https://magdalene.co/story/standar-kecantikan-indonesia>
- [14] Hidayat MA. *Menggugat modernisme: Mengenal Rentang pemikiran postmodernisme Jean Baudrillard*. 1st ed. Pavitrasari SO, editor. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra; 2017.
- [15] Damayanti NL, Hidayat MA. Hiperreality of social media: A phenomenology study of self-confession of housewives of Facebook users. *The Journal of Society and Media* 2019;3.