

Beauty Construction of Camera 360 apps in Indonesia

Luri Renaningtyas

Petra Christian University, Surabaya

cocolatos@petra.ac.id

Aniendya Christianna

Petra Christian University, Surabaya

aniendya@petra.ac.id

Abstract — A smartphone beautification app has been released for quite some time, it is called Camera360, an application that enhance the facial feature and skin of one's self photograph. Users can apply some effect to their liking, such as changing the facial skin to become whiter and smoother, or changing the shape of the face to look thinner or enlarge their eyes. This shows that the media can act as an extension for perpetuating an ideology, in this case a construction of beauty. Interviews and experiments were conducted to 10 women from Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya, they take their daily self pictures and enhance it using Camera360. The images will be analyzed based on theories that related to gender studies and techno-cultures. This study aims to enrich the discourse on Indonesian beauty myth within the spectrum of techno-cultures.

Keywords – Gender, Beauty, Technology, Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of women's ideal body and beauty has long been subjected to various transformations. This transformation is relatable with the effort of reconstruction and exploration. The myth of beauty has become a very significant part of women's representation over time. Beauty and femininity formed and perpetuated through various occurrences. In short, the myth of beauty is one of the community's efforts to promote how 'to be an ideal woman'. The ideal of beauty is often growth with the support of certain groups of the dominant society (which is patriarchy). It could open the possibility of idealization and legitimation to the myth of female's beauty.

The development of information and communication technologies encourages a lot of changes. One of which is the change in postmodern public's understanding of text/media, which is dominated by the concept of figural signification. This concept states that image/visualization is dominating the public's perception of media content. Its trait is the emphasis on consumption and production of visual forms.

In relation with this construction of beauty, a smartphone beautification app has been released for quite some time. It is Camera360, an application that enhance the facial features and skin of one's photograph, in order to look smoother, whiter, or thinner by scaling down the chin or even dilating the eyes. This shows that beauty can be constructed by media that act as an extension for perpetuating an ideology.

This gender discourse techno-cultures based context, raises a question what kind of beauty Camera360 is constructing? Furthermore, is this application suggest women to be objectified and oppressed under the influence of ideological powers or is it suggesting the opposite way? Interviews and experiments were conducted to 10 women from Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya; they take their daily self pictures and enhance it using Camera360. After that, we analyze the role of Camera360 for women in patriarchal society using theories that related to gender studies and techno-cultures. This study aims to enrich the discourse on Indonesia's beauty myth in techno-cultures.

2. LITERATUR AND THEORY

The cultural approach with the theory of gender is applied in this study, exposing women as objects and men as subjects. **Women are judged by their appearance as described by Yasraf Amir Piliang (citation).** He associates women, capitalism, culture, technology and media. His thinking may be the main basis in explaining the role of technology in shaping the commodification of women, as well as showing the relationship between technology, media, culture and gender. However Yasraf inclined to the western's economy and capitalism, whereas this study focusing on the cultural practice in Indonesia, therefore it needs to be sorted and adjusted into the cultural discourse in Indonesia, from the colonialism era until the era of visual culture when the new media emerges as outlined by Widjajanti Mulyono Santoso and Agus Sachari.

As a supplement, literature about visual culture of Indonesia by Agus Sachari also used to describe the condition of culture in Indonesia (Sachari, 2007, p.2-16). Theories and literatures mentioned above were used as a foundation to describe the role of technology and media in constructing the beauty myth among Indonesian's women.

3. DATA AND METHODS

The method in this research is quantitative and qualitative. Data gathered in the form of self photograph by setting up an experiment (quantitative) to 30 women, each of 10 people representing Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya, aged 19-24 years old. Volunteers were asked to take pictures using camera's Selfie mode and to edit the photographs by applying any effects. After that, the same respondent was interviewed (qualitative).

Interview results strengthen the findings of visual tendencies that arise when analyzing the visual aspect from the experiment. Results of content analysis were used as a reference to formulate the concept of "beauty".

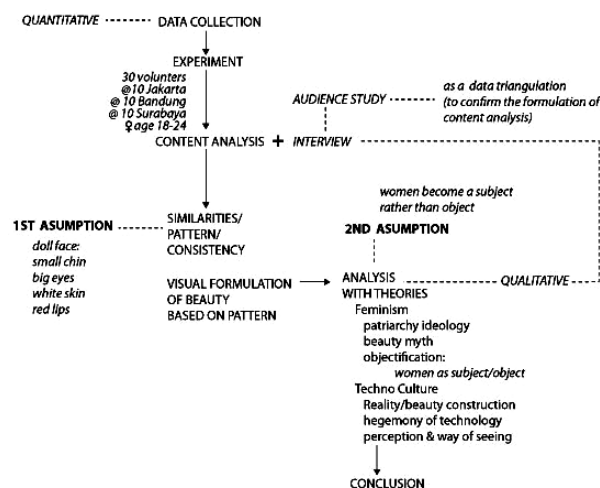


Figure 1. Research method schema

These formulations used as a basis to interpret the concept of female beauty in Indonesia, which is constructed through Camera360 application. The authors assumed that the images of doll face: thin jaw, big and round eyes, white skin and red lips will dominate the produced photos from Camera360 application.

After that, we examined further theories related to gender discourse in techno-culture based on context, cultural studies, and visual discourse in Indonesia to find the basic reason behind the emergence of Camera360 phenomenon. In addition, the analysis can also represent whether the application could possibly make women become objectified or just the opposite. It is assumed that women are no longer a passive object in the eyes of men, but with Camera360 the women are able to role as a subject who define and create the spectacle.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on 54 effects that has been applied to over 300 Camera360-edited photos, the content analysis shows that Skin Smooth has been used 185 times, Skin Tone for a lighter color skin for 96 times and Whiten for 75 times. The average number of Skin Smooth applied by 22 volunteers is 8.4 times. 7.4 times the average of Skin Tone used by 13 volunteers, and 5 times the average of Whiten to be used by 15 volunteers. These numbers proof that there is a high preference in those

three effects, therefore the concept of beauty in the mind of most volunteers are smooth, white or lighter skin.

Data from interviews also reflect what respondents thought about the standard of beautiful woman, which is white and smooth skin. Basically they prefer natural-looking results, focuses on skin color, they are rarely used effects that can change the shape of their face, the opposite as proposed in the first assumption about the tendency of enlarging the eyes or make their face look thinner.

Therefore based on the analysis above, the Camera360 constructed beauty in Indonesia is smooth, glowing white skin with no dark spots or and acnes. They can be obtained by applying Skin Smooth, Skin Tone and Whiten effect.

These results indicate the issue of women and beauty in gender discourse and techno-culture. Image of beauty with smooth glowing white skin is believed to be the ideal beauty for women in Indonesia. It is a long form ideology that woman should feel obligated to make them always look beautiful. And it still perpetuated through media exposure until now.



Figure 2. Photo Visualization of beauty constructed by camera360. Original (left) photo edited by applying Skin Tone, Skin Smooth and Whiten (right). Photo courtesy of Rere Samantha.

Based on Sachari’s overview about the mindset of Indonesian society, since the days of colonialism the Caucasian European figures become ideal references for Indonesian people.

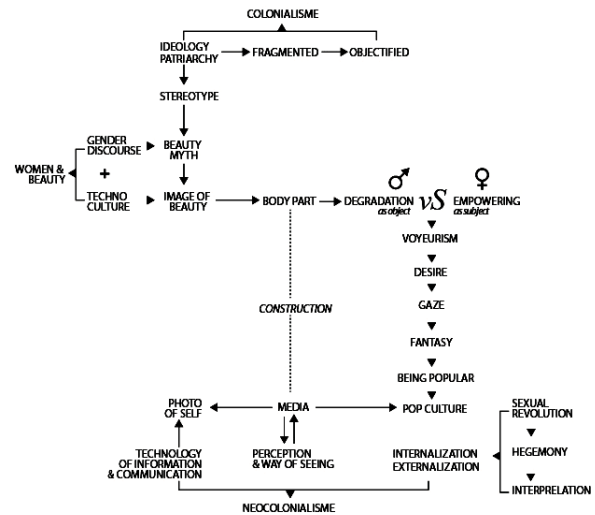


Figure 3. Framework of thinking

Unfortunately this fantasy about modernity and progress often achieved by Indonesian instantly without thinking about the future impact (Sachari, 2007:2-16). This includes the skin color that white is identified with progress and higher culture. This in the long run could affect the mindset and perspective of women in Indonesia, thus in the end they can feel as Thwaites, Davis & Mules said as interpellation (Thwaites,et.al, 2011, p.241), they take for granted these ideologies, so that the original characteristics of Indonesian tan-skinned women is fading away by the time being.

Based on this measure, beautiful woman is a white-skinned woman and they are required to always look beautiful, it is a myth that internalized within Indonesian women. There are many ways to fulfill this desire of beauty, and by the advent of new media such as interactive applications, these passions not only satisfied, but also multiplied. The convenience to enhance a lot of aspect from the image instantly by Camera360 features, have formed a certain mindset, a new behavior that gradually entrenched as more and more people accustomed by this standard of beauty.

As Daniel Miller exposed about sublimation in Yasraf explanation about internalization and externalization (Piliang, 2010, p.139). It is not necessary to be physically beautiful, virtual affirmations (internalization) from the virtual community are enough for some people.

Recognition that she could look beautiful by externalize herself by applying some effect to their own photo. A self-photograph could be considered as an 'assets' which is used as a virtual profile picture, uploaded to social media to be popular and appreciated by others, even on a certain occasion they got a lot of job offering as a presenter or model based on their uploaded picture in social media. For Baudrillard as exposed in Yasraf (Piliang, 2010, p.297) this is a new form of women empowerment, sort of what Widjajanti described as sexual revolution (Santoso, 2011, p.34). The women become the subject of her own, and the audience of her own.

In previous study on women and the media, many states women as a passive objects that consume textual media, without any tendency whatsoever; just to fill in spare time. However, in these studies, women have shifted into an active subject; consciously participate in the forming of meaning / textual media. Women consciously and voluntarily conduct a 'ritual' of a self photograph, enhance it a little bit with Camera360 before upload it to social media. In the end, the ideology of beauty became controlled by women themselves through the production of textual media. Women no longer referred as a prisoner of the text that appears as an empty and helpless individual. It turns out women are not a powerless mass, but also actively involved in forming the text they consume. Yasraf confirmed that the purpose is no other than to satisfy narcissistic desire in voyeuristic spectacle (Piliang, 2010, p.333).

Women (Camera360 respondents) have become passive objects of the dominant ideology, the myth of beauty that has been constructed over time. However, women at the same time also act as an active subject who negotiates on ideological disagreements that have been implanted through the process of editing her own self photograph with various enhancement effects that has been provided. But in general, all women accept and agree that beautiful skin is white and smooth.

This shows that the activity of women in textual media consumption is a fundamental

aspect of the long struggle to find the true meaning of 'being a women' in the world of patriarchal hegemony, a world that has been largely constructed by the ideology of masculinity. Women are degraded because it is seen merely as objects without the need to find who she really is, her thought and personality. Women represented into a form of beauty that has no reference.

Thus in the advancement of information and communication technology, the existence of women become a paradox. Initial theory argues that women are often regarded as objects that are exploited, turns out by the birth of new media such as Camera360, it is not always the case. On one side, women can be empowered as the subject, but on the other side they as an object of voyeurism. They are demanded to appear attractive with smooth glowing white skin . This demand is either for herself or for others. As a result, women also become the object of technological hegemony, bound to continuously interact with new media such as Camera360. They **experiencing interpellation, the state when a person is surrendered under the influence of media, she feels that the message is specifically addressed to her.**

Within the gender discourse in techno-culture, where the technology subdues the society, it eventually transforms the culture itself. A Pop culture, when everything comes and goes based on what is popular in the society. The Society constructed by media, and media also influenced by the society. They overwhelmed by visual artifacts, that happen really fast, changing simultaneously, fragmented into components of which every part can be manipulated and no essence, thus they are temporary. As temporary as other beauty apps, like BeautyPlus, or Modiface MakeUp, they exaggerating beauty and doubles the spectacle.

In the end, studies like this could put women as the *observer* in aspects of their life. This kind of study is a form of public awareness activities against subversive ideology. Moreover the media nowadays are strongly influenced by capitalism interests which

frequently positioned women as a commodity.

Pendekatan Semiotika. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra.
(Original work published 2002)

In the future, the results of this study need to be compared with the observations of non-experiment photograph due to the results of the experiment that can't be 100% natural, because the respondent was conditioned on certain rules. The pattern that emerges from the results of experiments and natural observations could possibly be different.

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