

# Beauty Standard Construction

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## **Beauty Standard Construction and its Influence on Consumerism in Indonesia's Next Top Model**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Indonesia's Next Top Model* (INTM) is a television program that airs under a license from *America's Next Top Model*. Through this event, the participants are challenged to show their abilities and talents to become the best model. This event is also part of the symbolic recognition of who is the best and prettiest model. When the contestants' abilities are recognized, they will receive the title of *Indonesia's Next Top Model*. This thesis aims to analyze the beauty standards determined by the judges in the talent show, *Indonesia's Next Top Model*, as well as their influence on consumerism.

**Keywords:** beauty standards; women; consumerism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Most women desire beauty. Many women try to always look beautiful in every situation. This makes them strive to achieve the ideal of beauty for themselves. The ideal standard of beauty is different because it is subjective. Furthermore, this is also a place where women compete in society. Many women then try to be considered beautiful to achieve the satisfaction they expect. Their desire to be seen as beautiful women is well captured by the media. This is shown by the emergence of beauty contests broadcast on television. One of them is *Indonesia's Next Top Model* (INTM), which is broadcast by NET TV every Friday at 21.30 WIB. The show featuring the beauty contest can be watched again through *Indonesia's Next Top Models* YouTube account, where the account currently has 785 thousand subscribers. The five INTM judges are Luna Maya, Deddy Corbuzier, Patricia Gouw, Panca Makmun, and Ivan Gunawan.

Reporting from the YouTube channel *Indonesia's Next Top Models*, INTM is a television program that airs under a license from *America's Next Top Model*. Through this event, the participants are challenged to show their abilities and talents to become the best model. This event is also part of the symbolic recognition of who is the best and prettiest model. When the contestants' abilities are recognized, they will receive the title of *Indonesia's Next Top Model*. This recognition is also the beginning of a good career for them as they enter the world of modeling professionally.

TV shows such as *Indonesia's Next Top Model* (INTM) lead the public's opinion toward the Eurocentric beauty standards. Rituals such as selecting an outfit, altering an outfit, arranging hair styles, acting as an artistic director, applying makeup, photographing models, and presenting them in a more appealing manner indirectly influence public opinion toward the standards of beauty (Musin, 2013). As a lifestyle and beauty propaganda event, this one also deals with commercial matters that promote consumerism.

The beauty capitalization of these models can occur because beauty can be commodified according to market demand. In this case, commodification is seen as an attempt to convert non-commodity products into commodities (Idrus, Salman, & Agustang, 2020). This commodification can also be seen as someone's attempt to add value to a commodity so that its value becomes more valuable. In this case, beauty was initially thought to be a woman's value when she had her own charm in someone's eyes. However, this is turned into a commodity by the media industry, so it has a selling point to make a profit for them.

This commodification can happen because the perception of beauty that is broadcast through the media has become entertainment for the public and promoted consumption. This phenomenon occurs because today's society has entered the culture of consumerism. Consumerism itself has become a lifestyle for many people (Kuhumba, 2018). Consumerism here does not just stop at the issue of someone buying a product for the needs of their lifestyle and appearance alone. It does, however, include a person's habit and needs in consuming impressions, which can affect one's perception. In this case, the perception that can be influenced by INTM shows is related to a person's standard of beauty. People who participate in the INTM program are bound to develop new values that differ from the beauty standards they previously understood.

Of course, when beauty can become a commodity that is consumed by many people, this is a big advantage for the media industry. This is inseparable from the condition where the object of beauty becomes the main role for women who are used in advertising production (Middleton, Turnbull, & de Oliveira, 2020). One of the important factors in selecting actresses or models for advertising production, especially body care product advertisements, is the beauty value of the actors themselves. This is important because in this advertising practice the important commodity sold by the industry is not the product that is shown. However, it is more about the text or a beautiful identity that is implanted in the community, thus making a product more in demand in the market. Thus, in this thesis, we are interested in analyzing the perception of beauty and its relation to consumerism.

People's tendency to shop at malls, hypermarkets, and supermarkets often exceeds their needs or the needs that they should have. Baudrillard states that what is consumed by the consumer society is not the use of a product, but the image of the message conveyed by a product. For example, if a consumer buys a BMW car, he buys the product not only because of its usefulness, namely a car as a means of transportation, but also because a BMW car offers a certain image to consumers, namely luxury and high social status.

In addition, Baudrillard also states that every individual in a consumptive society has a desire to make a distinction between herself and others. Individuals will continue to consume products that are considered to provide for or improve their social status, regardless of whether the product is needed or not. People learn a lot from advertisements about how to dress, how to talk, what styles are currently trending, what lifestyles are now popular, and what brands of clothes or shoes are considered *bona fide* and can give them prestigious status. This objectification will be internalized by women and then bring up psychological desires according to the message in the advertisement. Paradoxically, the contestants in *Indonesia's Next Top Model* fix their "unique" model identity by copying a supermodel's look. The "before" and "after" images situate the contestants as both the subject and the object of transformation. This visually expresses how consumerism is both a facilitator of a change for *Indonesia's Next Top Model* and a means of constructing an identity as a commodity (Musin, 2013). The ideology of consumerism clearly states that continuous consumption is beneficial, particularly for women in terms of self-improvement. The culture of consumerism from the perspective of beauty myths can influence the determination of beauty standards.

## ANALYSIS

We plan to analyze the beauty constructs built through the INTM beauty contest. This beauty pageant is constructed in two ways. The first is through the assessment submitted by the judges to the contest participants. The second is through the visual images that are displayed in every scene in the contest. These two things cannot be separated and are interrelated. Both female and male judges base their judgments on the visuals displayed by the contestants. From the appearance the contestants showed, the judges were able to provide a perspective regarding the beautiful constructions that they should display. In this case, there are differences of opinion that are influenced by the cultures and backgrounds of the judges.

Both the judge's assessment and media construction, as well as media interests, all have an important meaning in shaping the perception of beautiful women. These three things are pursued by media content producers so that the public also has a perspective on what kind of beauty is built by the media. For the media, this can certainly provide benefits because through this effort, the media can get advertising cooperation related to beauty products that they want to promote through shows or media that have a lot of ratings or viewers.

The beauty assessment that is pinned on women often comes from other people who see the female subjects. However, if we look closely, this assessment is very subjective. This subjective assessment can bring up beauty standards that must be owned by women so that they can be considered beautiful. This then raises the desire for women to get this recognition. They then made various efforts to achieve recognition from others, ranging from using beauty products to participating in beauty contests. On average, the judges looked at the standard of beauty based on several criteria, which were skin color, hair, organs, and inner beauty. Like in Panca Makmun's perspective, who looked at the character of skin color, Ivan Gunawan saw the side of skin color as masculinity, and Patricia Gouw saw the standards of beauty through hair and inner beauty; while another judge, Luna Maya, also supported Patricia Gouw's perspective, which based the standard of beauty on inner beauty.

In television shows, especially when seeing advertisements displayed, the depiction of women who have an ideal beauty has been standardized. An advertisement or show that constructs a beautiful woman is judged based on her slim body, long hair, and smooth white skin (Worotitjan, 2014). This also applies to shows in which the theme of the competition is raised. The INTM beauty pageant also directly demonstrates this standardization. Thus, the beauty assessment shown by the media regarding the standardization of this beauty becomes even stronger.

Beauty standards based on appearance or the visuals that we see are more strongly demonstrated by male judges. One of the judges in this INTM is Ivan Gunawan. In this contest, Ivan Gunawan is positioned as a guest judge, so he has a different position from Patricia Gouw, who is

also a judge. From Ivan Gunawan's view, beauty is also seen based on skin color. It is not just limited to hair. Even the color of the skin can attract the attention of more people.

Figure 1. Grace, INTM Contestant

*"Kalau aku sih suka banget sama warna kulit kamu ya. Karena dibandingin yang*



*lain tu kamu paling stand out rasanya, karena warna kulit kamu tu, eee mencuri perhatian. Kalau sekedar cantik tu menurut aku nggak cukup. Apalagi fashion models gitu ya. Yang mana punya kulit, kalau oriental harus oriental banget. Dapetin orientalnya. Kalau kamu punya dark skin kayak gini, kamu harus dapetin lagi." ["I really like the color of your skin. Because compared to the others, you stand out the most because of your skin color, which steals the attention. If you're just beautiful, I don't think it's enough. A fashion model especially. For example, for skin, if it is Oriental, it must be really Oriental. Get the Oriental. If you have dark skin like this, you must get it more"] (Ivan Gunawan, a guest judge).*

The words "dark skin" appeared in Ivan Gunawan's message as well. The utterance takes on a strong meaning by reproducing the meaning related to beautiful women. Beautiful women can be pinned for women who have dark skin. This raises the perspective that the skin of Indonesians, which basically tends to be tan, brown, or slightly yellow, can also be considered a beautiful woman's skin color. Thus, little by little, a shift in skin color appears to build the meaning of a beautiful woman.

Furthermore, another judge, namely Luna Maya, adds that a beautiful woman should be beautiful inside and out. In her comments, Luna Maya seemed to show that the assessment of beauty cannot only be shown through physical appearance whether it is in terms of sexuality, which is manifested through the style, the skin, or the hair of the contestants. However, there is an inner beauty that can work to a contestant's advantage so that it makes a difference in their appearance. The view of beauty seen through the physical is also further strengthened when, in the assessment of the INTM contest, Panca Makmun (mentor, fashion show producer, and director) comments. In his comments, Panca Makmun even mentioned some of Ilene's body parts, such as the eyes, nose, and mouth, where all the parts are considered talking. What Panca Makmun expressed is a form of connotation as well as semiotics to emphasize Ilene's value of beauty.

Unlike Patricia Gouw when she saw Ilene, Panca's and Patricia's perspectives are very different. Patricia Gouw places more emphasis on Ilene's inner ties. The inner beauty expressed by Patricia is more explicit than when Luna Maya gave an assessment to Gea.

*"Dan dia juga memiliki attitude yang bagus pada saat on set. Dia kasih kita beberapa pose juga. Kibasan rambutnya juga cantik." ["And she also has a great attitude on set. She gave us some poses too. Her hair flick is pretty, too."] (Patricia Gouw, a judge)*

This inner beauty is shown through the attitude that Ilene has when preparing as well as the poses she shows. In this case, there are social and emotional aspects shown by Ilene through Patricia Gouw's assessment. This aspect is a form of beauty assessment in addition to being formed from a physical aspect (Pratiwi, 2018). Showing the attitude of a woman can be one aspect of shaping their beauty. In the end, beauty is no longer found in the context of the body alone but also attitudes that are actualized in social life. In addition, when inner beauty is shown through a show, the pose shown can also strengthen the inner beauty of that person.

The assessment given by the male judges by focusing on physical problems when broadcast on television or YouTube (as a new media channel) indicates an attempt to exploit women in these shows. When talking about exploitation, it is not limited to the issue of women's bodies that are shown in the media. However, other things are also shown to provide entertainment to the media audience. This eventually penetrates various aspects of life, including privacy or what is inside a person (Syafri, 2014).

Beautiful women, when viewed from another perspective apart from their physical appearance, will be represented by the media as gentle, beautiful, and elegant (Widuhung & Sartika, 2022). Tenderness, beauty, and grace are abstract judgments of beauty. Although sometimes the three assessments are also shown in physical form, basically they are abstract values. However, this beauty contest also tries to construct the reality of beautiful women from these abstract things. This is more likely to be demonstrated by female judges when they give their assessments. Although the female judges' evaluation of the contestants was based on their physical appearance, the female judges also judged them based on another aspect of their beauty.

This is evident when Patricia Gouw evaluated one of the participants based on an attitude or when Luna Maya evaluated by mentioning something else. This demonstrates that women's beauty is no longer solely based on a woman's physical characteristics. However, their beauty can also be seen in their behavior. Behavior becomes important when a woman wants to be seen as a beautiful, gentle, or beautiful person. Their behavior can be a supporting character in the judgment given by the judge. This makes their identity as a beautiful woman stronger so that they can have more points compared to other participants. As a result, beauty pageants are no longer viewed solely from a physical standpoint, but other elements need to be considered by participants in the INTM contest.

Furthermore, we will discuss the relationship between the beauty standards that have been set earlier and consumerism. When talking about consumerism in a show related to models or entertainment, two things can be focused on in the analysis. First, it can be seen in terms of the content that is displayed and the values that can be understood and internalized by the public. Related to this, INTM shows provide a standard of beauty by showing a beautiful female model, where the beauty is consumed by the public, not only by men but also by women. From the male side, this consumption is seen in their desire to watch physical beauty. However, from the women's point of view, it can be seen from the women's desire to become individuals that are exposed in the media. This also includes several cases where television advertisements always try to make women interested in the beauty of the model being exposed. Second, the public can buy products that are implicitly or explicitly advertised in the show. Some products are advertised in this INTM model contest, so this show promotes consumerism by capitalizing on women's desire to look beautiful.

#### **The Construction of beauty and its influence on the consumerism (direct and indirect)**



| Perspective<br>(Physical<br>Appearance) | Products Promoted                         | Findings   |
|---|---|--|
| Hair                                    | Hair vitamin (Ellips)                     | The promotion for this hair vitamin product in almost all broadcasts was done openly and directly because Ellips is one of the major sponsors of the INTM event. However, from time to time, there are displays that show the promotion in a subtle way, such as during a conversation in the room where one of the participants is using the product. |
| Skin                                    | Fruits and vegetables                     | Even though they do not directly promote a product, there is still an element of consumerism in some shows related to skin health, namely shows where the models eat fruits and vegetables. This certainly makes people who witness it aware of the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables to look beautiful like models.                       |
| Body                                    | Exercises, clothing, and sports equipment | To get the ideal body, the INTM program aired several scenes where the models had to exercise. Of course, this does not only want to show the public how to get an ideal body, but there are several products, such as sportswear or certain sports equipment, that are promoted even though they do not directly mention a brand.                     |

The INTM beauty contest is one of the shows that can meet public consumption related to entertainment content. In this case, we know that INTM takes the value of beauty and commodifies it for public entertainment. In Wolf's view (as cited in Winarni, 2010), beauty "is a stronghold of women's defense, which is currently being attacked by the beauty industry." This happens after women get their rights as citizens who are equal to men. In the entertainment industry, women can be seen as one of the objects of public consumption, whether in soap operas, advertisements, or contests like the INTM show. Their existence as objects that are consumed in the end is considered to bring benefits to the industry. This, in the end, continues to be used by the industry to reap maximum profits.

This culture of consumerism can have an impact on how the public understands beauty standards because it is constructed by the media through the comments of the judges in the INTM contest. The media has the power to shape people's perceptions through the shows that are shown repeatedly. This consumerism is the goal of capitalists' efforts to make big profits. When the culture and thoughts of society are dominantly formed, then the goals of the capitalists can be

considered achieved (Syafri, 2014). When this is achieved, the public will have a need that must be fulfilled so that the capitalists can reap the benefits of this condition.

The consumerism that is encouraged by the judge's perspective on beauty standards can be shown through Ellips' encouragement. One of the products endorsed at this event that promotes consumerism is Ellips. The product is a hair vitamin and softener. Two products are highlighted, namely products that are sprayed on the hair and products in the form of hair oil that are applied. One form of endorsement by Ellips is to include its spray product in the challenge. In this challenge, participants must be a TVC model of Ellips products with a horse. With the inclusion of Ellips products in this challenge, the products are always displayed and attached to the contestants. The show of the Ellips products can be seen on Figure 2. This happens repeatedly in one episode of the show, so there is enough repetition to make viewers always remember the product. Because the image is shown repeatedly through an advertisement or promotion process, the idea of the need for the product is implanted in people's mind, and they will buy them to fulfill their lifestyle.



Figure 2 Ellips product

The existence of these women as models for the Ellips product advertisement helps shape the desire of the community to become beautiful women. This desire allows the women who are viewers of the show to become consumers of Ellips products. This can gradually create a culture of consumerism in the audience, which ultimately forms a perception of how beautiful women should look. By watching the advertisement repeatedly, the audience may internalize the beauty standards set by the judges, promoting the consumption of Ellips products. The audience can be seduced into consuming the products because they have the need to be beautiful women. This need makes them unable to be critical about whether consuming the products can really make them beautiful women.

In this case, women become easy targets for the beauty industry because they have been attached to the culture of consumerism. A woman is often described as more consumptive than a man because her needs are different. For women, appearance is one of the most important things for them to fulfill (Rachel & Rangky, 2020). It has even become a way of life for them. They want to show off this beauty, starting from the fashion she wears to the appearance of her body, such as her hair, nails, eyes, and other body parts. All these things are important for women, and the beauty industry captures them. The way they capture this phenomenon is by providing various body-care services along with supporting products. With women consuming what the media has to offer, they can fulfill their need to become beautiful women.

This culture of consumerism is also realized because the product is displayed by a model. In this case, the model can be considered a public figure even though he or she is not an artist or someone who has a strong influence (Octaviana, 2020). However, in beauty contests or



advertisements, they have become the center of attention for the impressions presented by the mass media. When they become the center of attention, the impact of their presence in advertising products can successfully shape the audience's consumerism culture. This is what ultimately shapes the lifestyle and identity of women who are considered beautiful. This identity arises because when they use the product, there is a desire to be reflected as a subject that resembles an actor in the advertisements or shows they consume.

Another method used by the media to promote something may be indirect. Apart from having beautiful hair, an ideal body is also definitely the dominant thing in this INTM event. One of the things that the media crew shows is the side scene where they do sports. With this action, the viewers will certainly feel that this is one part of getting a beautiful body. On the other hand, for some consumptive people, they will see another side when they exercise. For example, when models do yoga, viewers can see the yoga mat they are using, and without people realizing it, they often feel that a yoga mat is necessary, even though it may not really suit their lifestyle.

In addition, there is also something that can be seen from the side scene of the model doing sports, namely looking at the sports clothes they wear. Even though it was not mentioned directly in the scene, it is quite clear what brand is being indirectly promoted. Not only is "exercise" used as a benchmark for consumptive society to get the ideal body, but what models wear when exercising can certainly influence people's mindset to buy something to support everything they do.

Regarding skin problems, the INTM models are certainly in the spotlight for the audience as well. As said by one of the guest judges, Ivan Gunawan, each skin color has its own identity and strength. It depends on how the nature of the INTM models represents their respective racial ethnicities. On the other hand, how society views the healthy skin of models is also related to consumerism. Even though it does not directly show a product being able to produce healthy skin, there are several things that models do to get it. This side scene can be viewed in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Fruits and vegetables in the making

The picture above shows a scene where the models eat fruit and vegetables. Even though it does not show a specific brand, the show featuring models eating fruit is obviously beneficial not only to health but also to skin health.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that the perspective of beauty in Indonesia which is shown through the beauty contest at the INTM event is still dominated by patriarchal views. Even though in the assessment process there are women to balance the perspective of men, this patriarchal view is still very strong. This was shown by all the judges who judged the beauty of a woman based on what was

shown from the visible appearance of her body, not from another perspective which is based on the inner beauty.

Most women in this program are shown as individuals who have white and bright skin, slim bodies, and long hair. These criteria are often constructed by the media to build a public view of what a beautiful woman should appear. This view of the standard criteria for a woman's beauty has often been shown on television, both in advertisements, soap operas, and films. This construction was also shown through the INTM event so this event further strengthened the view of beauty standards formed by the capitalist industry. In this case, it is done through the media industry.

Even though the beauty that is constructed in the INTM program is dominated by criteria that are often pointed out by the media, there are several scenes, especially when the judges gave an assessment where the dominant construction tends to highlight physical appearance. One of them is the presence of a participant who has dark skin (oriental skin) which can be seen as the skin of a beautiful woman. This builds a view that beauty nowadays is not only owned by white women. Women who have dark skin can still be beautiful women. However, she must try to accentuate her oriental skin, so that her physical appearance does not seem half-hearted.

In this study, the view of beauty standards in the eyes of male judges is often more inclined to look at the physical. While for the female judges, they do not only look at their physical appearance but also see their inner beauty through the character and attitude of the models. Also, by looking at the existence of a consumerist culture, it can be concluded that the influence of the media on a consumer society certainly has great opportunities. Promotions carried out in this INTM broadcast can be seen directly or indirectly. In terms of hair, an ideal body, and healthy skin, of course there is a product or lifestyle that can certainly influence people's mindsets to have the same to get a look that is considered beautiful in this context. Examples of promotions that are often carried out openly are hair vitamins, namely Ellips. Ellips is one of INTM's major sponsors. Apart from hair, to get the ideal body, the models show a side scene where exercise is one of the most important things, and what they wear will maximize the activities that the models do. Regarding skin color, the judges considered each of them to have a unique character depending on their nature. However, this consumerism clearly demonstrates how to achieve healthy skin, one of which is by eating fruits and vegetables, and from the various things that models do and wear, the audience will witness and remember them, especially if they are shown repeatedly. In this way, it will shape the mindset of a consumptive society to do and wear the same products to become women who are considered beautiful, like the comments made by the judges to the models in INTM shows.

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