

## BEAUTY IS NOT ABOUT BEING WHITE (A Semiotics Analysis of Clean & Clear Advertisement)

<sup>1</sup>Aniek Dwi Lestari

<sup>2</sup>Afdal Makkuraga Putra

[dwilestari.anik@gmail.com](mailto:dwilestari.anik@gmail.com),

[afdal.makkuraga@mercubuana.ac.id](mailto:afdal.makkuraga@mercubuana.ac.id)

Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Mercu Buana

### ABSTRACT

*Advertisement as a mass media product does not merely offer a product but also contains moral and socio-cultural values that are intended to be communicated to the public through the concepts that are represented. Therefore, this research aimed to figure out and reveal the meaning behind a media text production and how the media texts are represented through a sign system, especially in the "Clean & Clear advertisement version of "1000 Indonesian Tribes, Different Skin Colors". The researcher observed a shift in the representation of beauty. Beauty in this advertisement is not shown in portraits of white skin color, slim, and long hair. It represented in various types of skin color and diverse physical forms of various tribes in Indonesia which represent Indonesia's diversity. Stuart Hall (Hall, 1997) explains that representation is the practices of social life that produce culture and events called circuit of culture. The circuit of culture describes the relationships or connections between the representations with identity, regulation, consumption, and production. The representation system consists of important components, namely concepts in mind and language. The paradigm in this research is the semiotics analysis using the Roland Barthes model. Barthes concept focuses on two levels, namely the denotative and connotative meaning in order to reveal the myth. The research results showed that Clean & Clear advertisement break the beauty myth that holds that beauty is about being white. It also showed the awareness of plurality by giving an opportunity for dark-skinned and brown-skinned women become the model in advertisements.*

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Clean & Clear Advertisement, Beauty Is Not about Being White

### INTRODUCTION

This research discusses the meaning of 'beauty is not about being white' in Clean & Clear advertisement. The message of this advertisement is different from many other women beauty advertisements that discuss skin whitening products. The beauty advertisements and skin whitening are modern cultural products offered to the women consumers through the mass media. The advertisement message represents the meaning to be communicated to the public. In advertising communication, advertisement does not only use language as a tool but also other communication tools such as images with motion picture, colors, and sounds where the whole combination will produce effective advertising communication (Mulyana, et al, 2017: 68).

Women in advertisement are always interesting to talk about, let alone related to the mass media which can be enjoyed almost everyday by the media consumers or public. In advertisement, women and all their appeal are assets for the media industry to attract the consumers. They are seen from the ability to display their bodies, not their performance, intelligence, and innovation.

The representation of women in advertisement is always synonymous with beauty, sexiness, and other femininity symbols. The advertisement sees that beauty is a top priority for women. Then, many advertisements use beautiful women as objects. In many advertisement products the beauty is always depicted in the form of white skin which is thought to be able to attract people's attention. The advertisements visualize the main character who is not confident with her black or dull skin and is afraid to be exposed to the sun. She becomes confident after using the beauty advertising products because the skin become whiter and cleaner.

Through the advertisement in the mass media, then it forms the mindset of public who assume that beauty is about being white, clean, tall, slim, have long hair, and so on. It makes the reality in a society that dark-skinned people need to be "enlightened" since they are considered dirty, seedy, and shabby. Moreover, some people think that dark-skinned people are considered wild. So the dark-skinned people feel insecure about their surroundings. They are difficult to socialize and to make a relation in society.

The formulation of the problem is what and how is the construction of the meaning of beauty discussed in the Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes? What kind of plurality awareness does the advertisement build? This research aimed to reveal the meaning of beauty that offers by Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes. The urgency of this research to be the antithesis of 'beauty is about being white' discussion which has become the dominant discourse in women's beauty advertisements.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The researches about beauty which say that 'beauty is about being white' have been carried out by several researchers including Juliana Luna Freire (2016), Crolyn Michelle (2011), Radhika Parameawaran and Kavitha Cardoz (2009), Imani M and Tafari-Ama (2016), Ava Purkiss (2016), Levashni Naidoo, Nokubonga Khoza and Ncoza C. Dlova (2016), Roro Retno Wulan (2017), and Kasiyan (2012).

Juliana Luna Freire writes the article entitled "Whitening, Mixing, Darkening, and Developing: Everything but Indigenous" (2016) at Framingham State University. In that journal, Freire discusses the image of Brazilian indigenous minority groups as figures in media discourse. The analysis highlights the need to rethink about ethnic identity and minority cultures so they can get equal opportunities in political and cultural movements in Brazil.

Crolyn Michelle writes the article entitled "Co-constructions of Gender and Ethnicity in New Zealand Television Advertising" (2011) at The University of Waikato. Michelle discusses gender analysis and ethnic representation in advertising products on New Zealand television. In that research, it is found that there is a predominance of white-skinned people over dark-skinned people. In advertisement, white-skinned people are superior compared to dark-skinned people for food advertisement, telecommunications, and financial or company or legal services advertisements which are more represented as white-collar worker or professional workers. For household products, personal products, and medical products displayed by housewives. Whereas the dark-skinned people are represented as athletes, service workers, and sales workers. Dark-skinned women are prominently displayed in multi-ethnic groups in advertisements for personal care products and are most often shown as glamor models.

Radhika Parameawaran and Kavitha Cardoza write the article entitled "Melanin on the Margins: Advertising and the Cultural Politics of Fair or Light or White Beauty in India" (2009). In that journal, they analyze the cultural politics of gender, nation, beauty, and skin color in persuasive narratives in Indian magazine advertisements and television for beauty cosmetics and personal care products. The analysis examines the rhetorical themes of body

and personal transformation, modern and traditional science, and a heterosexual romance that operates together to enhance the currency of light-skinned beauty.

Imani M. and Tafari-Ama write an article entitled "Historical Sociology of Beauty Practices: Internalized Racism, Skin Bleaching, and Hair Straightening", (2016). This article discusses the practices of skin whitening and hair straightening to explore the extent to which Africans (among other postcolonial) have internalized the dominant racist discourse that informs popular notions of beauty and sexual desire.

Ava Purkiss writes an article entitled "Beauty Secrets: Fight Fat": Black Women's Aesthetics, Exercise, and Fat Stigma, 1900-1930s, (2016). She discusses the rival hegemonies over the dominance of white-skinned people who were the leaders in the fitness campaign from 1900 to the 1930s and considered black-skinned people to be identical with fat bodies who were not concerned with physical fitness. However, in the reality, they were not entirely as thought by others. They began to encourage women to be slim and beautiful as well as improve their body fitness through sports in the 20th century. In the end, black-skinned women made visions of black-skinned women's bodies that were counterintuitive. They were fit, slim, and beautiful in a very real and imaginary way. The aesthetics of black-skinned women's bodies added nuance to the historiographical record of what Africans-America considered beautiful and desirable.

Levashni Naidoo, Nokubonga Khoza, and Ncoza C. Dlova write an article entitled "Review A Fairer Face, a Fairer Tomorrow? A Review of Skin Lighteners" (2016). This journal discusses the exploration of the initial symbiotic relationship of skin colour through the religion, the ideals of cross-cultural and time complexion, the motivation behind the use of skin enlightenment practices, and the use of color in the political and economic agenda.

Roro Retno Wulan write an article entitled "The Myth of White Skin: A Postcolonial Review of Cosmetics Ads in Indonesia" (2017). This study analyzes the beauty myths in Indonesian advertisements using a postcolonial perspective. The result shows that beauty myths since the Dutch colonial era have never changed. The main concept is always in the idea of colonialism: "white is better" and "local is bad". West is better than the East.

Kasiyan discusses "Hegemony in Postcolonial Aesthetics in the Representation of Advertising in Contemporary Indonesian Print Mass Media", (2012). This article examines the postcolonial hegemony in advertisement ethics in contemporary Indonesian print mass media. Through the semiotic analysis shows the results that postcolonial aesthetic representation tends to be dominant by prioritizing: to the West and or Indo, white skin, and the use of English. So it is necessary to have a counter-hegemony by raising awareness of local culture as a national identity.

From several research journals above, it is found that there is inequality in social life where there are racial, gender, ethnic, and other inequalities. The journal above also shows the results of an analysis of the existence of a counter-hegemony over the domination of power that occurred. The findings from these journals assist the researcher in revealing the meaning represented in the "Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes, Different Skin Colors". The difference with the previous research is that the researcher try to draw the representation of women in the Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes, "Different Skin Colors" to the critical realm using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis method, then connects them in the form of nation democratization to the public who are more aware of plurality owned by the Indonesian.

The plurality awareness in this research is to build a counter-hegemony discourse on dominant discourse that assume that beauty is about being white. The plurality referred is that the Indonesian tribes are very diverse with a variety of different genealogies. Consequently, it is very difficult to make a single discourse that the beauty of Indonesian women is about being white. Therefore, the difference in skin colors become important discourse.

## METHODOLOGY

The critical paradigm is used in this research which aimed to reveal the false consciousness to show the real structure. The method used by the researcher was semiotics analysis with the Roland Barthes model. Semiotics is the science or method of analysis to study signs. Signs are devices that are used to find a way in this world, among humans and with humans. Semiotics want to learn how *humanity* understands *things* (Granat, 2003: 157). Semiotics according to Roland Barthes is a science or method of analysis to study signs. They are a set that is used to try to reach the road in this world, among humans and with humans. He also detonates two meanings (*signification*) of semiotics, namely denotation and connotation. Denotation is the descriptive and literal level of meaning agreed upon by all members of a culture. At the level of connotation, the meaning is produced by the relationship between the signifier and the broad culture that includes the beliefs, behavior, framework and ideology of a social formation. Semiology in Barthes's term wants to learn how *humanity* uses *things*, interpret *to signify*, in this case it cannot be mixed by communicating (*to communicate*). Interpreting means that objects want to communicate and still constitute a structured system of signs (Irawan, 2019: 682).

The meaning of denotation is the meaning that can be directly seen when we observe a sign. While the meaning of connotation is the implicit meaning obtained from a sign. The connotative meaning is the second level of significance in the Barthes two-stage marking system. Then, at the second stage of significance, the sign works through myth, as a product of social class that already has dominance. With a semiotic approach, Barthes examines the various forms of language used to bring the ideology into society, especially the forms he encountered in media culture. Its presence is not abstract but has become a part of everyday life. The data collection technique is done by the text observation namely Media Text Observation. In this section, the researcher made observations of the text to observe directly. Through this semiotic method, the researcher try to analyze and reveal the construction of beauty meanings that offers by Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes. The urgency of this research to be the antithesis of 'beauty is about being white' discussion which has become the dominant discourse in women's beauty advertisements.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The beauty of Indonesian women is represented variously in the "Clean & Clear advertisement of version 1000 Indonesian Tribes, Different Skin Colors," based on the various tribes owned by the Indonesian. The variety of beauty is displayed in several *scenes* which have a specific meaning or purpose. The skin color in Indonesia varies by ethnicity. Eastern Indonesia such as Ambon, Papua, and Nusa Tenggara tend to have darker skin color (black), while in Java, Sulawesi and Sumatra tend to have brown skin.

Figure 1.

A dark-skinned teenage girl typical of Eastern Indonesia who dares to express herself  
*Scene 1*



The meaning of the denotation from the picture above refers to a dark-skinned teenage girl typical of Eastern Indonesia who dares to express herself. This is shown by the courage of a dark-skinned women who dares to wear slightly open and white clothes. The white color on the shirt shows the meaning of cleanliness, purity, and simplicity, besides white also mean freedom and openness (Jones, 2015 in goodminds.id).

Having dark skin color is no longer a reason for Indonesian women to keep to themselves, depressed, and not confident. *Sound bite "Indonesia has more than 1000 tribes, with different skin colors"*, emphasizing the diversity of skin color of Indonesian women based on their ethnicity. So as part of the diversity or pluralism, Indonesian women must be proud. Grin as in the *screenshot scene* above, shaking his head and nodding his head and let her hair down as a form of pride, expansive freedom, and high self-confidence. Finally, the myth that says that dark skin tends to lack confidence can be broken, because whatever the color of their skin they can express as they wish.

Figure 2.  
The expression of how proud a dark-skinned woman is over her  
*Scene 2*



The *screenshot scene* above shows how proud a dark-skinned woman is over her. A denotation mark of a grin, a 'blossoming' curly hair that appreciates what is possessed, a passionate expressive spirit. The skin color doesn't matter, she can wear what other people are wearing as shown in the same clothes as the women in the previous scene. So the myths that view Eastern Indonesia as 'the other' can be broken. They also have the right to express themselves with the uniqueness of their curly hair since the beautiful one doesn't have to have straight hair. Even the curly hair is free to smile freely, nor does it have to be white.

Figure 3.  
A women with slanted eyes typical of Chinese people shows the diversity of ethnic  
groups that are owned by the Indonesian  
*Scene 3*



A women with slanted eyes typical of Chinese people shows the diversity of ethnic groups that are owned by the Indonesian. The woman in the picture can still laugh broadly and wear the same clothes. In the sense that any tribe in Indonesia can still do the same thing

that other people do. Although her skin is already white but she still wears the same shirt (white color). It is a form of diversity which means a unity of Indonesia. The myth that emerges here is that a minority can also express themselves freely as with other teenagers. Whatever their tribes can be equal to others. The expression shown is a form of equality.

Figure 4.  
Women with typical hairstyles

*Scene 4*



The meaning of *hairlight* on women's hair in the *scene* above can show the complexity and the side that someone wants to highlight (Mangapul, 2017). The complexity reflects the Indonesian nation that is full of complex diversity. It means that variety is united in unity. Besides, *hairlight* is a prominent part of someone's hair. Each individual has their inner strengths to be highlighted and expressed because everyone has the right to the opportunity. Likewise, Indonesian women who feel different and not included in the beautiful category do not need to be discourage. Like the *hairlight* on hair that looks prominent though different from the others. One myth about women who feel insecure since they do not meet the standards of beauty can be broken with the courage to show the uniqueness in self.

Figure 5.  
A woman shows the impression of simplicity but still can express herself.  
*Scene 5*



The *screenshot scene* above shows an impression of simplicity, which means that an ordinary woman can still express herself. The most important thing is to maintain and care for what they have because beauty is not about being white and *glowing*. Beauty is clean and well-groomed. Like a white clothes that symbolizes a simplicity. This is supported by *sound bites* "natural bright that nature has given", which means that someone should appreciate everything that exists in the social environment.

The myth says that beautiful women are those who use *makeup*. Then many skincare products are sold with the aim of whitening the skin. However, this myth can be dispelled with the presence of a simple woman who is naturally bright without skin whitening

products. The model above shows the beauty of her face. without using excessive *makeup* because she is already naturally beautiful. The simple women also look beautiful. So they don't need to hesitate to express themselves.

Figure 6.

A woman is accompanied by the text written "ISN'T ABOUT BEING WHITE", with capital letters.

Scene 6



In the *scene* above, the text writes clearly "ISN'T ABOUT BEING WHITE", with the capital letters. It means that she expressly rejecting that the beautiful are those who are white. Dark-skinned women are also beautiful, emphasized by the presence of dark-skinned woman model who laugh cheerfully and *sound bite* "you don't have to be white anyway".

The *sound bite* above seems clear, so the myths which says that white-skinned people get more value can be broken because beautiful "isn't about being white". Dark-skinned models are still able to express themselves with pride, regardless of skin color. Moreover, we can participate in campaigning #ProudOfYourSkinColor in this advertisement that means they can get the same opportunities as other models.

Figure 7.

The Map of Indonesia is pink.

Scene 7



The meaning of the denotation of the *scene* above shows that although Indonesia consists of many islands, it is still one pink color, which means it is still a unitary state, namely Indonesia. Clearly, the Clean & Clear advertisement invites all Indonesian women to be proud of their skin color, because whatever their skin color they still Indonesian. They have the same opportunity. All Indonesian women must believe that they can (#IAmBright).

*Hashtag* in the text "#IAmBright" is text *marking*. *Hashtag* (#) refers to a sign that serves to invite or grab the public to support the movements or topics that are campaigned in Clean & Clear advertisements, namely "# Proud of Your Skin Color". It has been explained that the hashtag function has associated to Twitter in the code that automatically links to various developing discussions that can be used in several other social media. So the *user or business user* with the target audience can be connected.

Then the sentence 'IamBright' is a *marked* sentence which means 'I'm Shine'. 'I'm Shine' is a positive statement that states women 'Shine' without seeing any deficiencies in them. So, when added with the *hashtag* "#IamBright", it will show a sentence that calls for statements that require support from various parties who are members of the tag. It is a support for the movement of each individual to be more confident (especially women) since they can shine whatever their skin color. The sentence 'Proud of Your Skin Color' appears as a supporting statement that complements the statement "#IamBright" so that all women shine and proud with their skin color.

The hashtag "IamBright" is an invitation to dispel the myths about the assumption which says that those who are white are more potential on various occasions. The more people follow #IamBright, the more supporters who want to break the myth that has been developing for a long time.

Figure 8.

A campaign to convince all Indonesian women to be confident in their skin color.

Scene 8



The meaning of the denotation from the *scene* above is a form of a campaign to convince all Indonesian women to be confident with their skin color. The text "skin color" deliberately *highlighted* blue to ensure that they must believe in what they have since they will be able to be shine during the domination without caring about their skin color. The opportunity is not owned by those who are white but all women have the same opportunity. Then, there is the text "I agree" within the circle that is repressed '*throbbing*'. It means that the beliefs about the statement above must be implanted in a sense or heart, so that the myth of *white is beautiful* can be broken. There is only pride in the skin color of each individual whether they are unity in diversity, Indonesia.

## DISCUSSION

Beauty is identical with a relative beauty, depending on the point of view and the subject who looks at it. Why is that? It is because God created all the things in this world that are different but blessed with the strengths and weaknesses, *anythings isn't perfect*. So that each individual has their uniqueness, both from the physical, emotional, way of thinking, and so on. They have the same opportunity to express it.

The criticism of the dominant beauty standard (*postcolonial*) emerged after Edward W. Said published the Orientalism (1978) about a style of thinking made between the East "as (*the orient*) and almost always" the West "as (*the occident*). At the beginning of modern orientalism, the East was defined in the perspective of colonialism which despised on Eastern people as Easterners were considered irrational, bad moral, childish, and "different". In contrast, Europeans are more rational, virtuous, mature, and "normal". The knowledge of the East in terms of Cromer and Balfour (British colonial scholars) of the East as a nation worth

to be considered, to be reviewed, to be explained, and to be disciplined; something illustrated as in the zoology handbook (Said, 1978: 35-38).

Said illustrates that the European Orientalist's skin color tends to supersede the white skin at every opportunity. There are still many social assumptions or myths say that white-skinned people are better, so the dark-skinned people become insecure and excluded. This is proven by many beauty products that offer skin whitening products which pamper the audiences with Western-style beauty fantasies, glorify *postcolonial* aesthetics.

This social standard develops and indirectly forces a person or community to run or look at things based on these standards. In this case, the researcher take the example of social standards about women's beauty which is a classic problem that is still developing and is rooted in the minds of most people. It is about the beauty which is always synonymous with white skin, slim, tall, and straight hair. This can be seen from many advertisements of beauty products that offer skin whitening products, body slimming, and shampoo advertisements that use models with long-straight hair. Then, it triggers women to meet these beauty standards.

To counteract the beauty standards that have weakened people's awareness about the values of the nation's plurality, the Clean & Clear as one of the beauty products has dared to campaign for the "**# Proud of Your Skin Color**" movement, with clean and healthy skin, because beauty is not about being white. The Clean & Clear as traditional intellectuals are limited to the environment of the small-town bourgeoisie that have not been expanded and moved by the capitalist system'. The traditional intellectuals always 'position themselves as dominant social groups that are autonomous and independent'. They are people whose position in society has a certain inter-class circle because Clean & Clear seeks to break the social beauty standards (myths) that have dominated by creating the idea of the movement "**# Proud of Your Skin Colors**," in the Clean & Clear advertisement version of '1000 Indonesian Tribes, Different Skin Colors' to uphold respect and tolerance for plurality of Indonesia.

The Clean & Clear advertisement version of 1000 Indonesian Tribes, Different Skin Colors 'should have the potential to join in the arena that is dominant in supporting the social standards of women's beauty myths since in the culture of domination, advertising is part of the political economy, which seeks to meet the market demand which had been previously formed based on social demands. However, Clean & Clear uses the dominant power as the traditional intellect to suppress the existing domination by creating beauty products where the beauty standards are women with a variety of beautiful skin colors that are clean and healthy. Women should be confident and proud of what God has given in themselves. The Clean & Clear realizes that every woman has the same opportunity, regardless of their skin color. With the movement "**# Proud of Your Skin Color**" campaigned through social media. It also made a *Social Experiment* and *Photo Exhibition* video which were all made to support and open the eyes of Indonesian women to be free from existing social myths so they can increase their confidence.

The researcher judge the movement or concept of advertising ideas made by Clean & Clear as a *counter* form to the practices of dominant power to foster a spirit of awareness of pluralism possessed by the Nation. This can be seen in the results of media text research, where Clean & Clear uses women models from different ethnicity with different skin color. They do not all white and do not have straight hair.

Figure 9.  
The Dark-skinned women with non-straight hair

Scene 1 & Scene 2



The concept of advertising made by Clean & Clear is clear evidence as a *counter* to the practices of dominant power to foster a spirit of awareness of pluralism possessed by the Nation. This can be seen in the results of media text research, where Clean & Clear uses women models from different ethnicity with different skin color. They do not all white and do not have straight hair.

Clean & Clear believes that women's beauty is not merely seen from the physical. It can be transmitted through self-confidence, courage, emotional intelligence, and other uniqueness that exists in every woman. So beauty is not about being white, slim, and long hair. It is just a social myth that dominates. The beautiful women are those who can care for the natural beauty that is given by God and proud of what is inside, # **Proud of Your Skin Color**” Clean & Clear Version. That is the meaning reproduced by Clean & Clear to foster public awareness, especially women to be confident and respect all differences, related to national pluralism.

So, in the study of Clear & Clear advertisement, besides fulfilling its entity as an advertising media that functions persuasively in offering products, it also provides knowledge and social propaganda for wisdom in understanding beauty or the *local wisdom of beauty* that move the spirit to break the myth of *white is beauty* especially in Indonesia since the pluralistic nature of Indonesia consists of various tribes with different skin colors. So that beauty is not seen from white skin, but beautiful from healthy physical and psychological, healthy works, and useful for others. So with this understanding of beauty, every woman can regain confidence with the color of their skin and can free to express themselves. Because **all women are beautiful**.

## CONCLUSION

Advertisement is produced as a persuasive communication tool that is not just selling a product or fulfilling its entity as an advertisement, but also fulfilling its social function in driving a change in living standards and inspiring people's views on something. The Clean & Clear advertisement appears as a traditional intellectual tune oriented to the study of Edward Said Orientalism, who has dared to change people's views of the myths of women beauty through the #Proud With Your Skin Color, played by the models from various tribes with different skin colors, because beauty is not about being white "You don't have to be white. " They look natural, smiling proudly with what they have. To break the myth of *white is beauty* requires confidence in what is owned by each individual. So that beauty is not seen from white skin, but beautiful from healthy physical and psychological, healthy works, and useful for others. So with this understanding of beauty, every woman can regain confidence with the

color of their skin and can free to express themselves. And believe that all women are beautiful.

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