

**BEAUTY REPRESENTATION IN WARDAH CRYSTAL SECRET DAY CREAM
ADVERTISEMENT : A STUDY OF THE CONNOTATIVE AND DENOTATIVE**

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Abstract

This study discusses the representation of beauty in the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement by analyzing the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in its visual and textual elements. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the research applies a qualitative descriptive method to reveal how signs such as the model's image, color usage, visual symbols, and word choices construct both literal and deeper cultural meanings. The data were obtained from the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement on YouTube, selected for its high engagement and rich symbolic elements. On the denotative level, the advertisement presents images of bright, clean, and healthy-looking skin as the result of using the product. On the connotative level, however, it builds associations with ideals such as perfection, self-confidence, purity, and modern beauty standards. These meanings reflect values commonly found in popular culture and the global beauty industry. The findings show that the advertisement's visual and verbal communication strategies not only promote the product but also shape social perceptions of beauty. Therefore, understanding both denotative and connotative dimensions is essential for examining how advertisements influence public views on self-image and aesthetics.

Keywords: Beauty representation, Wardah advertisement, denotative meaning, connotative meaning.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, media and advertising have become powerful tools that influence how beauty is perceived and constructed in society. Advertisements no longer serve merely to inform consumers about products; they function as ideological texts that shape cultural norms, aspirations, and self-identities. One of the most pervasive influences of advertising is the promotion of beauty standards standards that often reflect idealized notions such as flawless skin, fair complexion, youthful appearance, and slim body figures. These representations contribute to the creation of an ideal beauty image that is widely circulated and consumed by the public.

Cosmetic advertisements, in particular, play a significant role in reinforcing these ideals. Through carefully crafted visual and textual messages, they suggest that beauty is not only desirable but also achievable through the purchase and use of specific products. This implicit message influences consumer behavior and individual self-perception, often linking personal worth and confidence to outward appearance. As a result, beauty becomes commodified sold as a product, ideal, and identity.

In Indonesia, the presence of local beauty brands such as Wardah adds a unique dynamic to the discourse of beauty representation. Wardah is known for its image as a halal, natural, and modest cosmetic brand, appealing to both religious and cultural values. However, despite promoting modesty and natural beauty, Wardah's advertisements also adopt visual strategies aligned with global beauty standards, such as highlighting radiant, fair skin, and using models with flawless appearances. This creates a hybrid beauty representation—one that merges local cultural ideals with global aspirations.

The Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement is one such example. It showcases a female model with smooth, glowing skin, bright lighting, pastel colors, and persuasive phrases such as “brightening” and “crystal secret.” These choices are not arbitrary; they are semiotic signs that carry both denotative meanings (literal: clean, healthy skin) and connotative meanings (symbolic: purity, perfection, confidence, and social success). Understanding these layers of meaning requires a semiotic approach that explores how signs work to communicate ideology.

By using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, this study seeks to deconstruct the signs found in the advertisement and reveal how they shape perceptions of beauty. This analysis is important not only to understand the persuasive strategies used in advertising but also to critically reflect on how media reinforces or challenges societal beauty standards. In particular, it highlights how local brands like Wardah participate in the global discourse of ideal beauty, while also navigating cultural and religious values.

Beauty advertisements often embed layers of meaning that go beyond the literal message of promoting a cosmetic product. These meanings are conveyed through a combination of visual and verbal signs, which may carry both denotative (literal) and connotative (symbolic) meanings. In the case of Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream, the advertisement presents an idealized image of beauty that reflects broader cultural and societal expectations. This symbolic construction of

beauty may influence how viewers perceive self-image, confidence, and femininity. How do the visual and verbal signs in the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement contribute to the construction of beauty through denotative and connotative meanings? **Objective**

- To analyze the visual and textual signs in the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.
- To identify the denotative meanings conveyed in the advertisement.
- To interpret the connotative meanings and how they reflect or shape societal ideals of beauty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Beauty Representation in Cosmetic Advertisements

Beauty advertisements have long been powerful tools in shaping public perceptions of ideal appearance. According to Williamson (1978), advertisements convey both explicit (denotative) and implicit (connotative) meanings, often rooted in cultural and ideological values. They do not merely show a product but represent a way of life or a social ideal. Leiss et al. (2005) assert that cosmetic advertisements frequently portray physical beauty in association with values such as confidence, social success, and perfection. This is reinforced through visual tropes such as fair skin, smooth texture, and youthful appearance. Liu and Choi (2010) similarly argue that advertisements create a belief that beauty is attainable through consumption, particularly when visual cues consistently depict "ideal" transformations.

In the Indonesian context, beauty advertisements reflect local values. Fathmawati (2017) notes that many Indonesian beauty brands—like Wardah—present beauty through a lens of modesty, natural elegance, and religious adherence. This aligns with the cultural preference for "clean" and "soft" appearances while also being influenced by global beauty standards. Indonesian advertisements often present a hybrid representation of beauty, combining local cultural values with global ideals.

B. Semiotic Theory in Advertisement Analysis

Semiotics, particularly Roland Barthes' framework, provides an effective tool for analyzing how advertisements construct layered meanings. Barthes (1972) divides meaning into two levels: denotation (literal) and connotation (cultural or ideological interpretation). These

levels are crucial in decoding the ways images, colors, gestures, and words function as signs in media texts. In the context of cosmetic advertisements, signs are deliberately selected to promote symbolic messages. The model's glowing skin, choice of words like "bright" or "pure," and color palettes such as white and pastel are not neutral; they function as signs pointing to deeper meanings like purity, modernity, success, and desirability. Rose (2001) emphasizes that semiotic analysis allows researchers to understand how visual codes operate in the construction of cultural meaning. Applying this to the Wardah Crystal Secret advertisement, one can interpret how visual softness, facial expressions, and symbolic word choices are tied to ideas of ideal womanhood in a specific cultural context.

C. Beauty as a Social and Cultural Construct

Beauty is not merely a biological or aesthetic category; it is socially constructed and context-dependent. Gill (2007) notes that beauty ideals in media often create unrealistic expectations that can lead to dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, particularly among women. These ideals tend to exclude diversity, prioritizing one version of beauty over others.

In the Indonesian context, beauty ideals are shaped not only by global influences but also by religious, ethnic, and traditional values. Aisyah (2019) found that Muslim women's cosmetic choices are heavily influenced by the concept of modesty (*kesopanan*), where beauty must be balanced with ethical and religious considerations. As a halal cosmetic brand, Wardah responds to this demand by aligning its brand image with Islamic values while still embracing global beauty cues like fairness and perfection.

This duality shows that advertisements like Wardah's negotiate between global trends and local expectations. As a result, these advertisements present a complex, layered representation of beauty that deserves deeper semiotic analysis.

D. Denotative and Connotative Meanings in Advertisements

Understanding the distinction between denotative and connotative meaning is essential in advertising analysis. According to Barthes (1972), the denotative level conveys the literal image or message, while the connotative level carries emotional, cultural, and ideological associations. Leech and Short (2007) suggest that advertisements often use figurative language, repetition, and symbolic visuals to evoke feelings and project ideals.

For example, in Wardah's advertisement, words like "bright," "radiant," or "crystal" may literally refer to skin brightness but connotatively relate to purity, transformation, and ideal beauty. The denotative meaning may be that the product improves skin clarity. However, the connotative meaning suggests that such skin represents success, elegance, or even moral purity—especially when linked to Islamic values and social status. These layers of meaning reveal how advertisements work not only as commercial tools but also as cultural texts that shape identity and desire.

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring the connotative and denotative meanings within the beauty representation in the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement. The design focuses on examining how the visual and verbal elements of the advertisement convey both explicit and implicit messages to the audience, particularly in relation to ideals of beauty, purity, and femininity. The qualitative approach is chosen to provide a detailed interpretation of how these elements interact and the ways in which they reflect and shape cultural norms, values, and consumer behavior. By analyzing these advertisements, the study seeks to uncover the layered meanings in cosmetic ads and understand how these meanings influence perceptions of beauty in a specific cultural and social context.

The semiotic analysis method will be employed to analyze the denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural or ideological) meanings conveyed by the advertisement. The visual and textual elements in the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement are examined through this lens to understand how they communicate messages about beauty, health, and identity.

B. Research Subject

The subjects of this study are the viewers of the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement, with a specific focus on Indonesian women aged 18 to 45. This age group is selected as it represents the target audience for beauty advertisements, particularly those in the cosmetics industry, who are often seeking beauty products that promise improved skin appearance, radiance, and youthfulness. These subjects are likely to have encountered the advertisement either through television, social media platforms, or other digital channels.

The selection of this particular group is intended to capture a broad spectrum of interpretations and understandings of beauty messages, from young adults to middle-aged women, allowing for a varied perspective on how beauty is perceived and consumed. Additionally, the group includes individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, ensuring that a range of perspectives on beauty ideals and cosmetic consumption is included in the study.

C. Research Object

The primary object of this research is the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement, specifically focusing on how the advertisement uses semiotic signs—both visual and textual—to represent beauty. The advertisement features a combination of images, words, and symbolic elements that suggest both denotative and connotative meanings related to skin care and beauty ideals.

The research will closely examine the following aspects:

- **Visual Elements:** The model's appearance, the color scheme (including the use of white, pastel, and soft tones), lighting, and the portrayal of skin texture. These elements will be analyzed to understand how they relate to beauty ideals such as purity, softness, youthfulness, and perfection.
- **Textual Elements:** The choice of words in the advertisement (e.g., "bright," "radiant," "pure," "flawless") will be analyzed for both their denotative and connotative meanings, with a particular focus on how they contribute to the creation of a specific beauty ideal.
- **Cultural Symbols:** How Islamic values, modesty, and traditional beauty standards are embedded in the advertisement. As Wardah is a halal-certified cosmetic brand, the study will explore how the advertisement balances global beauty ideals with local cultural and religious values, especially concerning modesty (*kesopanan*) and natural beauty.

The object of the study is further explored through examples of ambiguous lexical items and their interpretation in context. For example:

- “Radiant”: Denotatively referring to bright or glowing skin, but connotatively suggesting purity, beauty, and perfection.
- “Flawless”: Denotatively meaning skin without imperfections, but connotatively evoking an ideal of femininity and success.

By analyzing how these words and images interact, the study aims to uncover how advertisements like the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream communicate deeper cultural meanings and contribute to shaping societal beauty standards.

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, DISCUSSION

A. Data Analysis

This part offers a semiotic analysis of the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream commercial by applying Roland Barthes' theory, which separates meaning into two levels: denotation (the direct, literal meaning) and connotation (the cultural or ideological significance) (Barthes, 1972). The 15-second advertisement on YouTube is analyzed through ten main visual and textual components that collectively build the brand's story about beauty.

No.	Advertisement Element	Connotative Meaning/ Cultural Myth	Denotative Meaning
1.	Woman in White Outfit and Grey Hijab	Symbolizes a modest, graceful, and religious Muslim woman. This represents the ideal image of a pious yet beautiful woman.	A female model is shown wearing a white outfit and a grey hijab.
2.	Dull skin and Hyperpigmentation	Highlights common skincare issues and reinforces the cultural standard that fair, even-toned skin is desirable.	The model's skin appears dull and uneven due to sun exposure.
3.	5 Dimensions Technology	Adds scientific credibility, implying the product is innovative and trustworthy. Science is used as a symbol of effectiveness	The ad mentions "5 dimensions technology."
4.	Phrase "Rejuvenate & Repair"	Reinforces the association of beauty with youthfulness and healthy skin, suggesting long-	Indicates that the product helps rejuvenate and repair skin.

		term benefits.	
5.	Pentagonal Graphic	Symbolizes a holistic skincare approach: brightness, smoothness firmness, oil control, and hydration.	A five-pointed graphic displays the five skin benefits.
6.	Phrase “Transform your Skin to Multidimensional Glow Skin”	Suggests a profound transformation not only in appearance but also in self-confidence and self-image.	Promotes transformation to glowing, multidimensional skin
7.	“Wardah Science-Powered Skincare”	Promotes the myth that effective beauty must be backed by science and research	A tagline emphasizing the science behind the product.
8.	Soft Colors and Lighting	Creates a calm, clean and feminine aesthetic aligned with purity softness, and natural beauty.	The advertisement uses pastel tones and bright lighting.
9.	Model’s Facial Expression	Communicates satisfaction and empowerment, implying that using the product will enhance confidence.	The model appears calm and confident.
10	Call to Action	Suggests that beauty transformation (achieved through consumption, reinforcing cons ideals.	Encourages viewers to try the product.

B. Findings

This analysis identifies some of the main themes contained in Wardah's advertisements:

1. Combining Islamic Modesty with Modern Style

This advertisement features women wearing hijab, which symbolizes modesty in religion while following today's beauty trends. This is in accordance with the findings of Fathmawati (2017) which states that halal beauty brands combine religious values with global aesthetic standards.

2. Bright Skin as the Main Beauty Symbol

The emphasis on fair and glowing skin reinforces cultural views that associate fair skin with success and social attractiveness (Hunter, 2007).

3. Scientific Approaches to Increase Consumer Confidence

The use of terms such as "backed by science" and "5-Dimensional Technology" serve to lend a sense of science and credibility to the product, as described by Leech and Short (2007) in relation to scientific rhetoric in advertising.

4. Focus on Rejuvenation and Keeping Skin Cool

Product promises to renew and keep skin youthful reflect the view that maintaining youthfulness is the ideal state (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

5. Visual Representation of Femininity and Cleanliness

The pastel colors and soft lighting in the ad depict femininity, purity, and a calm atmosphere (Rose, 2001).

6. Self-empowerment through product consumption

The models' confident expressions and the call to "Try it now" suggest that product use is associated with emotional empowerment and increased self-confidence (Williamson, 1978).

Discussion

The elements in this advertisement carry deeper cultural and ideological meanings beyond their surface-level appearance. According to Barthes, signs in media often construct myths—social narratives that shape public perception and are taken for granted. In this advertisement, several beauty-related myths are reinforced:

1. Muslim Beauty as the Ideal: The woman's modest attire reflects values of decency and piety, aligning with the brand's identity as a halal cosmetic line. It promotes the idea that religious women can also be stylish and beautiful.

2. Fair Skin as the Standard: The shift from dull to radiant skin portrays light skin as the ultimate beauty goal, reinforcing the societal belief that fair skin equals beauty and health.
3. Science as a Symbol of Trust: Phrases like “science-powered” and “5 dimensions” appeal to rationality, persuading the audience that the product is both modern and effective. Science is portrayed as the key to achieving beauty.
4. Youthfulness Equals Beauty: Terms such as “rejuvenate” and “repair” construct the notion that beauty is tied to youth and that aging skin needs correction or improvement.
5. Total Transformation Through Products: The idea of multidimensional transformation suggests that skincare is not just about looking good, but about completely enhancing one’s identity and confidence.
6. Beauty as a Path to Confidence: The model’s expression represents inner satisfaction, suggesting that physical appearance affects emotional well-being and that the product can empower users.
7. Soft Colors as Symbols of Femininity: The pastel colors and bright lighting create an atmosphere of purity, calmness, and femininity, reinforcing gendered notions of what beauty should look like.

CONCLUSION

Based on the semiotic analysis of the Wardah Crystal Secret Day Cream advertisement, it can be concluded that this advertisement not only acts as a means of promoting beauty products, but also helps shape and spread cultural myths that integrate Islamic modesty values with today's beauty standards. Fair skin is presented as the ultimate symbol of beauty and success, while scientific claims are used to add credence to the product. The ad also reinforces discourses of youthfulness and self-empowerment through consumption, influencing the social perceptions and identities of contemporary Muslim women. Overall, the ad demonstrates that advertising media can be a culture- and ideology-shaping tool that impacts society's norms and views on beauty, gender roles and religious values.

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