

## Counter-Hegemony of Masculinity and Male Beauty Standard: Semiotic Analysis of Pantene Shampoo Advertisement Represented by Keanu

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**Abstract:** *Technological advancements and digital media have transformed advertising, allowing for precise targeting and personal engagement, thus influencing consumer decisions and economic activity. Advertising serves as both product promotion and societal messaging, impacting cultural values and social norms, including gender perceptions. This study aims to explore the semiotic representation of masculinity in Pantene shampoo advertisements featuring Keanu, a male figure with traits traditionally deemed feminine. By depicting Keanu with long hair and emotional expression, the advertisement challenges conventional masculinity and beauty standards, promoting a more inclusive definition of male identity. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The data used consists of visual data from YouTube videos. The writers uses the theory from Barthes (1972) on semiotic analysis was employed to uncover the ideological and mythic layers in the ad. The concept of thi theory provides depth of meaning through denotation, connotation and myth, highlighting a shift in advertising media towards more diverse and realistic representations of masculinity. This study shows that Keanu's depiction signifies significant changes in portraying masculinity and beauty standards in advertising media. This counter-hegemonic portrayal encourages acceptance of varied male identities, breaking away from rigid gender stereotypes.*

**Keyword:** Advertising, Masculinity, Beauty Standard, Counter hegemonic, Semiotic

**Abstrak:** Kemajuan teknologi dan media digital telah mengubah dunia periklanan, memungkinkan penargetan yang tepat dan keterlibatan pribadi, sehingga memengaruhi keputusan konsumen dan aktivitas ekonomi. Periklanan berfungsi baik sebagai promosi produk maupun pesan kemasyarakatan, yang berdampak pada nilai-nilai budaya dan norma-norma sosial, termasuk persepsi gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi representasi semiotik maskulinitas dalam iklan sampo Pantene yang diperankan oleh Keanu, sosok laki-laki dengan ciri-ciri yang secara tradisional dianggap feminin. Dengan menggambarkan Keanu dengan rambut panjang dan ekspresi emosional, iklan tersebut menantang standar maskulinitas dan kecantikan konvensional, serta mempromosikan definisi identitas laki-laki yang lebih inklusif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data yang digunakan terdiri dari data visual dari video YouTube. Penulis menggunakan teori Barthes (1972) tentang analisis semiotika yang digunakan untuk mengungkap lapisan ideologi dan mitos dalam iklan. Konsep teori ini memberikan kedalaman makna melalui denotasi, konotasi dan mitos, menyoroti pergeseran media periklanan ke arah representasi maskulinitas yang lebih beragam dan realistis. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penggambaran Keanu menandakan perubahan signifikan dalam penggambaran standar

maskulinitas dan kecantikan dalam media periklanan. Penggambaran kontra-hegemoni ini mendorong penerimaan terhadap beragam identitas laki-laki, melepaskan diri dari stereotip gender yang kaku.

**Kata Kunci:** Iklan, Maskulinitas, Standar Kecantikan, Konter Hegemoni, Semiotik

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Technology and digital media development have enabled more complex and interactive advertising, allowing companies to target audiences more precisely and with a personal touch. Creative and persuasive advertising can increase brand visibility, influencing consumer purchasing decisions (and thereby driving economic activity). According to Tjiptono in Minati (2017), advertising is a form of indirect communication based on information about the advantages and benefits of a product. It is designed to create a pleasant sensation that changes a person's willingness to buy. Advertising is a form of communication, or, according to Bittner (1980), it is called mass communication.

Advertising has the dual purpose of promoting products and spreading messages. It significantly impacts society by creating false narratives and myths that shape consumer behavior. This incentivizes manufacturers to adjust their marketing communications tactics to better reach and influence their target audience. Cultural values, gender identities, and social norms are disseminated and reinforced through the symbols and expressions presented in advertising, making advertising an important element in forming and maintaining social perceptions.

The impact of advertising on gender is very large because advertising has a direct and real influence in shaping and strengthening people's perceptions regarding gender roles. Using gender representation in advertising reflects contemporary cultural standards and can change people's perceptions of their gender roles and identities in everyday life. The concept of gender in cosmetic advertisements is still primarily associated with women. However, the concept of gender, especially masculinity, is now also found in cosmetic advertisements featuring men. The depiction of the ideal male figure is beginning to focus on beauty. The lifestyle of self-care and appearance, traditionally associated with women, is now being adopted by many men (Apsari, 2010).

At this time, advertising is not only used to promote something. Advertisements are informative and benefit from offering ideology and lifestyle (Kurnia, 2004). Advertisements can become a discourse in society because advertising includes language-related things. Masculinity is formed through hegemonic masculinity, which was first used by Cornell in 1987 by gender sociologists. Humans or people included in the hegemony category also influence life at a higher level in social conditions. Men or people not included in certain hegemonic situations will tend to enter a lower status than people who fall into certain stereotypical circumstances.

This hegemonic masculinity and beauty standard has an impact on social conditions. Men who are not included in the hegemony will be marginalized with characteristics, one of which is homosexuality, men who have lower class jobs, men who have dark skin, and men who have female characteristics within them. This is also what is often depicted to be perpetuated in advertising. Advertisements must contain content to attract people differently.

The Pantene brand is a hair care brand famous in its home country, the United States, and various countries, including Indonesia. In promoting its hair care products, the Pantene brand often uses female figures who have ideal hair following beauty standards in Indonesia, such as long, black, straight, and shiny hair, to promote their products. However, it was

recently discovered that Pantene collaborated with Keanu, a celebrity and public figure quite famous in Indonesia. Keanu is a male figure with a fuller body and hair that tends to be long, black, and straight, resembling a woman's hair. Pantene collaborated with Keanu to become a model for the Pantene Shampoo advertisement entitled *New Miracles Hair Supplement! #Hello Short Hair #ChargedHair*, which was uploaded to Pantene's official YouTube account on January 2, 2022. The 51-second video shows how Keanu shows long black, long, and straight hair as a representation of the results of using Pantene shampoo products.

Challenging male beauty standards in advertising media is becoming increasingly prominent. Traditionally, advertisements often feature handsome men with muscular, masculine bodies. However, a paradigm shift has occurred, and advertisements now feature men with various body types, including fat and curvy.



Fig 1. Shampoo ads roled by Keanu

Figure 1 is an image of one of Pantene's advertisements uploaded to the YouTube platform. This image shows Keanu as an advertising model. The Pantene ad shows Keanu, a man with a large body, brown skin, no masculine appearance, and long, black, and straight hair like a woman's. These different looks represent diversity and inclusivity in the definition of male beauty. This ad also reflects an effort to break stereotypes and provide a more realistic representation to the audience.

With these theories, we try to answer the problem formulation that we build based on the issues mentioned above, namely the Counter Hegemony of Masculinity and Beauty Standards from the perspective of semiotic analysis:

Researchers found several previous studies that were similar to the discussion of this research. Klein (2014) discusses beauty and the body in communication studies by considering beauty standards, norms, and beauty practices that operate in the techniques and tactics of power in various modes of communication (Lustyantie, 2012). In this analysis, several types of communication practices within the context of practices of standardization and normalization of beauty can operate in a counter-hegemonic process. The second previous that found Oktafianto (2021) discusses the depiction of the masculinity value of the 'Extra Joss product and the characteristics of men in the advertisement (Oktafianto, 2021). Widiarto and Riswari (2022) discuss the normalization of the use of facial care products for men, which is a form of advertising challenge to the concept of toxic masculinity of the product 'MS Glow for Men.' Several findings from previous research provide a general overview of this research and have a similar discussion regarding the standards of masculinity and beauty displayed in several products. They were naturalizing the depiction of male characters that should be addressed to society in advertising media (Rani Angga Riswari & Sugeng Widiarto, 2022).

Although previous studies have explored various aspects of beauty standards and masculinity in advertising, there remains a gap in the specific semiotic analysis of how these themes are represented in advertising for traditionally female-oriented products, such as

shampoo. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing Pantene shampoo advertisements featuring Keanu, providing insight into how male beauty and counterhegemonic masculinity are semiotically constructed in this context. Based on the background that has been explained, this research aims to examine how the meaning of male masculinity is constructed in the advertisement "*New Pantene Miracles Hair Supplement Shampoo!*" Apart from that, this research will also discuss myths and ideologies related to the representation of male masculinity in these advertisements. Researchers also wanted to explore how beauty standards are represented in these advertisements.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sigit (1982), advertising is a form of presentation with print, writing, words, pictures, or using people, products, or services carried out by a company to influence and increase sales, increase revenue, increase usage, and obtain votes, support, or opinions. Alexander defines advertising as a form of nonpersonal communication about an organization, product, service, and ideas paid for by a known sponsor (in Morissan, 2010:

17). The opinion, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), says that advertising is any form of nonpersonal presentation and paid promotion. In addition, advertising can also be a communication process, a marketing process, a social and economic process, and a persuasion information process, depending on how we look at it; Bovee conveyed this. Thus, advertising is a promotion and a non-personalized presentation of a particular product supported by the media (Khan et al., 2021).

Advertising aims to influence affection, cognition, consumer evaluation, feelings, knowledge, meaning beliefs, attitudes, and images of products and brands (Peter & Olson in (Wijaya & Diah, 2014: 2). In addition, “Advertising now not only offers a product but also offers a culture and an image. For example, whitening soap and shampoo advertisements will bring an image of a sense of beauty that radiates from white skin or confidence because the hair is straight and shiny. From the representations given previously, identity and imagination about beauty are formed, namely those with white skin and hair” (Aprilia, 2005, p. 49).

Among the many advertisements that are always shown to the public through mass media every day, many advertisements preserve the gender construction of masculinity, one of the gender issues that still occurs and prevails during social life. In this regard, Grau (2016) explains the relationship between advertising, gender, and its influence on society through two theories. The first is the 'mirror' theory, which views advertising as a reflector of existing and prevailing values, even dominantly in society. The portrayal that advertisements represent by female and male actors reflects what is happening in society. The second is the 'print pattern' theory; this view explains that advertisements have shaped people's perceptions, especially about gender.

The meaning of masculinity in society is usually related to physical traits, strength, courage, and boldness. In other words, masculinity is a characteristic associated with maleness. Masculinity is formed through hegemonic masculinity, which was first used by Cornell in 1987 by gender sociologists. Humans or people in the hegemony category also affect higher life in social circumstances (Destita, 2022). A man or person who is not included in a particular hegemonic will tend to enter a lower status than a person who is included in a particular stereotypical situation. Masculinity is a social practice shaped by culture to create male traits. Masculinity and femininity do not emerge from individuals but are cultural representations (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 378). Concepts of masculinity and standards of male beauty are shaped through various popular culture texts such as pop songs,

popular fiction, movies, television, newspapers, and advertisements (Storey, 2018:178). In Indonesia, masculinity standards and male beauty standards are contextualized. Men will be perfect in their masculinity if they fulfill more prerequisites than men in their lives and environment (Kurniawan, 2009).

The concepts of masculinity and femininity have been challenged for decades. Culturally defined in the past as an expression of dominance, independence, selfconfidence, strong determination, and ambition (Kimmel & Tissier-Desbordes, 1999), masculinity has changed considerably. Since the early 1980s, there has been a transition in the way we define masculinity; if in the 1970s the image of the masculine figure was the Marlboro

Man with various muscular, strong, capable of using mechanical equipment, now masculinity more often appears to be called the Business-Man figure, who is smart, shiny and takes care of himself (Brandt, 1995). Harrison's (2008) research clearly shows how mascara advertisements use men as the main actors of their advertisements, as well as Korean Cosmetics Advertisements: Etude and Tonymoly that try to offer a new form of masculinity where men can use cosmetic products and take care of themselves (Fatimah et al., 2017). Men are also expected to do household chores like washing, cooking, and preparing breakfast (Pratiwi & Wiyanti, 2017).

In investigating this issue, the researcher used the theory of semiotic analysis according to Ronald Barthes (1968). According to Barthes, every sign or symbol consists of two main components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical or material form of the sign itself, such as a word, image, or sound. The signifier, on the other hand, is the concept or meaning associated with the signifier. Barthes also introduced the concepts of “denotation” and “connotation.” Denotation refers to a symbol's literal or descriptive meaning, while connotation refers to the more complex meaning associated with certain associations, values, or ideologies. Barthes used semiotic analysis to examine how symbols are used in different cultural contexts to express power, ideology, and the myths they contain.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive methodology. Qualitative research is defined as a method of inquiry that aims to explore and elucidate the meaning of a social phenomenon through the interpretation of the collected data (Cresswell, 2018). The data collection techniques employed in this study include documentation and literature review, as the researchers observed phenomena, took photographs, collected data, and identified data.

In this study, the researcher employed a semiotic approach to the rhetoric of images proposed by Ronald Barthes (2018). This approach was utilized to demonstrate how the terms signifier and signified function within the myth system, where the signifier represents a sign (the result of meaning) within the language system. This theory was employed to investigate the impact of the Pantene shampoo advertisement starring Keanu on masculinity and beauty standards (Stocks, 2016).

The advertising videos in this study were taken from YouTube Pantene shampoo advertisements titled “*Miracles Hair Supplement Baru! #Rambut Cepak Hello #RambutKeCharged*” from the Pantene Indonesia channel, which became the subject of research. The research subject is a man (Keanu) who became a movie star in the advertisement as a sign of counter-hegemony. Two sources are used in this research, namely primary and secondary. Primary sources are sourced from YouTube Pantene


Shampoo Ads, which contain advertisements such as *"Miracles Hair Supplement Baru! #Rambut Cepak Hello #RambutKeCharged,"* and secondary sources are used in literature reviews to support and strengthen the data in the research.





The research team collected data by viewing the "Pantene Shampoo" advertising video, which Keanu posted on Pantene's official YouTube account. From the video page, the team conducted repeated observations. Furthermore, the team analyzed how this advertisement counters the myths of masculinity and beauty standards through the role of Keanu, who is not aligned with the hegemony of masculinity and beauty standards that have been widely accepted by society.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research took one of the advertising videos from the Pantene Shampoo brand, which Keanu collaborated with, entitled *"New Miracles Hair Supplement! #Hello Short Hair #ChargedHair,"* with a video duration of 51 seconds. The advertising video has been uploaded on YouTube via the official account Pantene Indonesia. In text analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic method, the meaning of the denotation and connotation of a sign system in the Pantene Shampoo hair care advertisement will be explored. At the second level, signs function as new markers with deeper meaning. This is called connotative relatedness. Connotation is closely related to the operation of ideology. Barthes calls it a myth to display and validate the dominant values that apply in a certain period (Sobur, 2004, p. 71). At this stage, the myths hidden behind the text will be dismantled.

The advertisement shows that a male actor is a model in a shampoo brand advertisement who has long hair like a woman. It is not wrong if the model in the ad is male, but it is not normal when Keanu tosses his hair, gestures his body skillfully like a woman, and confides in women. The movement shown by Keanu in the Pantene shampoo advertisement has a sign that shows Keanu's image. The results of this study indicate that the men featured in the *Pantene Miracles Hair Supplement New! #Hello Short Hair #ChargedHair* describes the Counter Hegemonic masculinity, which will be explained in the table below:

Data Image	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
	Excessive emotional expression	Keanu revealed a tired expression while shaking his hair.	In traditional masculinity, men tend to be less able to express their feelings. In this advertisement, Keanu displays his tiredness in front of the general public, showing his weakness as a man. If he does so, he is equated with women.

	Uncon	Keanu	Keanu displays hairstyles
	venti -al on appe ar ance.	displays a long hairstyle by shaking his hair. A man who likes to care for long hair.	that are different from traditional masculinity, such as long hair or styles usually associated with femininity. This challenges the norms of hegemonic masculinity, which tend to associate short hair with men.
	Reje ct ical physotypes stere	Keanu's appearance in the advertisement shows that his physical form is not strong.	Hegemonic masculinity is often associated with a stocky and muscular body. Showing men with less muscular bodies challenges this stereotype.
	Emotio nal Expres sion  Sensiti vity	and Keanu displays a soft and graceful voice; in these situations, he shows empathy, gentleness, or sensitivity.	Traditional masculinity is often associated with a deep, strong voice. The ad challenges the stereotype that men must have "manly" voices to be considered masculine by featuring men with soft voices.
	Concern appearance	about Keanu feels frustrated with problems that are usually considered women's problems.	Traditionally, hegemonic masculinity may trivialize concern about hair appearance as unmasculine. Angry Keanu shows that men also care about their hair and self care. This challenges the stereotype.

From the five data displayed, the *Pantene Miracles Hair Supplement shampoo* commercial starring Keanu shows several counter-hegemonic masculinity. The counterhegemony of masculinity in Pantene's advertisement starring Keanu is shown through audio and visual aspects. The audio aspect is characterized by Keanu's soft and graceful voice, emphasizing great attention to his appearance, something that is not usually associated with traditional masculinity. Meanwhile, the visual aspect features Keanu's woman-like body movements, chubby appearance, long flowing hair, and exaggerated expressions of emotion. All these elements serve to challenge and deconstruct conventional gender stereotypes, showing that masculinity does not have to be rigid and can be expressed in more inclusive



and realistic forms.

The counter-hegemony of masculinity in the Pantene ad starring Keanu reflects the media's attempt to show the diversity of masculinity and encourage men to be comfortable with conditions that do not meet traditional standards of masculinity and beauty. The ad consciously reduces rigid gender stereotypes by presenting a more inclusive and realistic representation of masculinity and male beauty. In doing so, Pantene challenges dominant norms of masculinity and shows that beauty and masculinity can be interpreted in different ways, giving men the space to express their identity authentically without the pressure to conform to traditional standards.

#### 4.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the Pantene shampoo advertisement featuring Keanu reveals a significant shift in the portrayal of masculinity and beauty standards in advertising media. Traditionally, advertisements have reinforced hegemonic masculinity and rigid beauty ideals, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting the representation of diverse identities. However, the Pantene ad challenges these norms by showcasing Keanu, a male model with unconventional traits such as long hair and emotional expression, counteracting traditional notions of masculinity.

Through semiotic analysis, it becomes evident that the advertisement strategically subverts gender stereotypes by portraying Keanu in ways that defy traditional expectations of male appearance and behavior. His emotional sensitivity, unconventional appearance, and rejection of physical stereotypes challenge the hegemonic masculinity often depicted in advertising media. By doing so, the ad promotes a more inclusive definition of masculinity and encourages viewers to embrace diverse expressions of identity and beauty.

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