THE MYTH OF BEAUTY: THE EFFORTS OF THE "UNEJ CANTIK" COMMUNITY TO ACHIEVE IDEAL BEAUTY

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Abstract

This article analyzes the myth of beauty within the "UNEJ Cantik" community, focusing on its members' efforts to achieve the ideal concept of beauty. The research highlights the collective and horizontal interactions among community members in shaping beauty standards, a perspective that is less commonly discussed compared to studies emphasizing the role of individuals or influencers in establishing beauty norms. Using the netnography method, data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews with community members, comprising 10 core informants, 5 additional informants, and 2 account administrators. The findings reveal that the community's ideal beauty standards include glowing skin, a slim body, straight hair, and natural makeup. These standards are influenced by three main contexts: mass media (including social media), Dutch colonial heritage, and the local Pandhalungan culture. To achieve these standards, community members engage in various practices such as using skincare products, undergoing whitening injections, getting hair treatments, and getting eyelash extensions. This phenomenon reflects the tension between students' rational aspirations and the exploitation by the beauty market, as well as the clash between local values and global aesthetics. Thus, this study aims to foster critical awareness of the social pressures arising from the homogenization of modern beauty standards.

Keywords: Online community, beauty myth, beauty standards, netnography, "UNEJ Cantik".

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis mitos kecantikan dalam komunitas "UNEJ Cantik" dengan fokus pada upaya anggotanya dalam mewujudkan kecantikan ideal. Penelitian ini menyoroti aspek kolektivitas dan interaksi horizontal antaranggota komunitas yang membentuk standar kecantikan, sebuah perspektif yang belum banyak dibahas dibandingkan dengan studi yang menitikberatkan pada peran individu atau influencer dalam membangun standar kecantikan. Dengan menggunakan metode netnografi, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara mendalam dengan anggota komunitas, yang terdiri dari 10 informan inti, 5 informan tambahan, dan 2 pengelola akun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecantikan ideal menurut komunitas ini meliputi wajah glowing, tubuh langsing, rambut lurus, dan riasan natural, yang dipengaruhi oleh tiga konteks utama: media massa (social), warisan kolonial Belanda, dan budaya lokal Pandhalungan. Untuk mencapainya, anggota komunitas melakukan berbagai praktik, seperti penggunaan skincare, suntik pemutih, perawatan rambut, dan tanam bulu mata. Fenomena ini mencerminkan ketegangan antara aspirasi rasional mahasiswa dan eksploitasi pasar kecantikan, serta ketegangan antara nilai lokal dan estetika global. Karena itu, melalui temuan ini diharapkan adanya kesadaran kritis terhadap tekanan sosial yang dihadirkan oleh standar kecantikan modern yang homogen.

Kata Kunci: *Komunitas daring, mitos kecantikan, standar kecantikan, netnografi, "UNEJ Cantik".*

Introduction

Ideal beauty has become an integral part of social constructs in global societies. Across various parts of the world, beauty standards are often influenced by popular culture, mass media, and the beauty industry[1]. Referring to Naomi Wolf's insights in The Beauty Myth, beauty standards are neither natural nor objective but are social constructs created to maintain control over women. Wolf asserts that beauty standards are used as a patriarchal tool to restrict and control women through social, cultural, and economic pressures, making them more susceptible to exploitation and distracted from more significant issues such as gender equality and empowerment[2].

In Indonesian society, the concept of beauty is frequently associated with specific physical attributes, such as fair and bright skin, a slim body, long and smooth hair, and a neat, fashionable appearance[3]. This phenomenon is further reinforced by the emergence of new social media platforms, which serve as the primary spaces for sharing and evaluating physical appearances, leading to more homogeneous and standardized beauty ideals[4]. For instance, in the "Unej Cantik" virtual community, interactions among its members reflect how beauty standards are reproduced through activities such as sharing photos, discussions, and comments. This dynamic illustrates how social media not only acts as a space for expression but also as an arena where social pressures regarding beauty standards become increasingly entrenched.

Beauty in a social context does not merely refer to physical aspects; it also symbolizes social status, identity, and power. Women deemed beautiful often receive greater attention in social and professional settings. In this context, beauty can function as a form of power[5] and even an economic opportunity. For instance, in the workplace, women with attractive appearances are often perceived as more competent and are more likely to secure jobs or receive promotions (commonly referred to as "beauty privilege")[6]. This illustrates how beauty becomes a highly valued and scrutinized norm in society.

However, behind the beauty standards set by the media and the beauty industry, beauty remains a subjective and diverse construct[7]. Nevertheless, the myth of beauty, which associates attractiveness with specific physical traits, continues to dominate and shape the perceptions of many[8]. This myth has permeated various layers of society, including younger generations, particularly women[9]. Consequently, dissatisfaction with bodies that do not conform to prevailing beauty standards often leads women to

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[1] Geoffrey Jones, "Globalization and Beauty: A Historical and Firm Perspective," *Entrepreneurship and Multinationals* 41, no. 4 (2013): 885, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782548188.00009.

[2] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*, *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 29 (Harper Perennial, 1992), 7, https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.29-3031.

[3] Giorgiana Garcia and Septia Winduwati, "Representasi Standar Kecantikan Wanita Di Media Sosial Instagram @springsummerstyle," *Koneksi* 7, no. 1 (2023): 251, https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v7i1.21313.

[4] Marika Tiggemann and Mia Zaccardo, "Exercise to Be Fit, Not Skinny": The Effect of Fitspiration Imagery on Women's Body Image," *Body Image,* Volume 15 (2015): Pages 61-67, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1740144515000893.

[5] Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisme Dan Culture Studies: Sebuah Pengantar Paling Komprehensih* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2011), 288.

[6] Madeline J. Chance, "Pretty Privilege at Work: The Influence of Physical Attractiveness on Hiring Decisions, Mediated by Perceived Efficacy" (Middle Tennessee State University, 2023), iv, https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/751a6831-8575-4348-8a06-cc7307a55eb9/content.

[7] Muhamad Rizki Nugraha Darma Nagara and Lestari Nurhajati, "The Construction and Adoption of Beauty Standard by Youth Female as the Consumer of K-Beauty Products in Indonesia," *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi* 5, no. 2 (2022): 258, https://doi.org/10.38194/jurkom.v5i2.543.

[8] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*.

[9] Yelly Elanda, "Representasi Mitos Kecantikan Dalam Kolom Female," *Journal of Urban Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2019): 46, https://doi.org/10.30742/jus.v1i1.563.

feel pressured and lack self-confidence10. Many go to great lengths to achieve the ideal beauty, including the use of cosmetic products, body treatments, and even medical procedures11.

In this context, online communities such as "Unej Cantik" on Instagram play a significant role in reinforcing perceptions of ideal beauty. This community, consisting of female students from the University of Jember (UNEJ), serves as a space for its members to share experiences and even aspirations to achieve ideal beauty. The "Unej Cantik" Instagram account exemplifies how beauty is understood and practiced among young women. With over 29,000 followers, this account showcases the physical traits considered ideal by its members, such as fair, bright skin, a slim body, long, smooth hair, and fashionable appearances.

This Instagram account is not merely a platform for sharing photos but also functions as a tool to reinforce prevailing beauty standards among female university students. Through the photos uploaded, members present themselves in appearances tailored to the idealized notions of beauty, thereby creating new beauty myths within the community. Compliments and comments from followers, both male and female, further reinforce the image of beauty evolving within this group12. However, this phenomenon also raises questions about how these constructed beauty ideals influence the self-perception and social identity of the students involved, as well as the impact on their efforts to achieve ideal beauty.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the ideal beauty standards according to the "Unej Cantik" community and the efforts made by its members to achieve those ideals. The findings from this research are expected to provide insights into the influence of social media in shaping beauty standards among young women, particularly female university students.

Methods

This study employs the netnographic method with in-depth interviews, a qualitative research approach based on digital platforms13 designed to understand behaviors and social interactions in virtual spaces. This method is particularly relevant as the research subject is a virtual community on Instagram, namely the "Unej Cantik" community. As of November 2024, this community had over 29.4 thousand followers and 709 posts. The account serves as a social interaction space where members not only share photos but also reinforce the social construction of ideal beauty standards.

In this research, analysis was conducted on the content uploaded by the "Unej Cantik" community, including photos, descriptions, and followers' comments over six months (June to December 2023). Posts within this community were analyzed to identify specific patterns, such as themes of idealized beauty, how the community represents itself, and how they respond to followers' comments. The analysis process began with selecting posts with high interaction levels, such as likes, comments, and reposts, to ensure the data collected was relevant and representative. Comments were chosen based on their content, reflecting reactions, appreciation, or criticism of the displayed beauty standards.

To strengthen the study, in-depth interviews were also conducted with 10 core informants, 5 additional informants, and 2 account managers. These 17 informants were selected based on their level of engagement within the community, allowing for a deeper exploration of their views on beauty and their experiences as part of the

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[10] Asieh Yousefnejad Shomali, "Book Review: Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women, and Children, 3rd Edition by Sarah Grogan," *Feminism & Psychology* 31(4) (2021): 605–8, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/09593535219994 96.

[11] Badero, Aderike, and Oluyemisi, "Effects of Media on Body Image . This Is an Original Work . All References and Assistance Have Been," *Effects of Media on Body Image .*

This Is an Original Work . All References and Assistance Have Been, no. April (2011): 1–41.

[12] Marika Tiggemann and Mia Zaccardo, "Exercise to Be Fit, Not Skinny": The Effect of Fitspiration Imagery on Women's Body Image," 62.

[13] Mahjouba Kaoukaou, "Netnography: Towards a New Sociological Approach of Qualitative Research in the Digital Age," *SHS Web of Conferences* 119 (2021): 4, https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202111901006.

community. Specifically, the selection criteria were as follows: Core informants included users who frequently shared photos, actively participated in discussions, or received high levels of interaction, such as comments or likes, on the community account. Additional informants were followers chosen to represent less active users but who had unique perspectives on beauty standards. Meanwhile, account managers were the operators of "Unej Cantik," offering a structural perspective on managing beauty narratives. They provided insights into content strategies, community goals, and social dynamics that regular followers might not possess.

Through a combination of digital content analysis and in-depth interviews with the informants, this netnographic method enables the researcher to explore various aspects of social interactions within the virtual "Unej Cantik" community.

Results and Discussion
Profile of the "Unej Cantik" Instagram Account

"Unej Cantik" is a popular Instagram account showcasing photos of female students from various faculties at the University of Jember. The account is characterized by a profile icon featuring white flowers and an image of a woman wearing a hat, representing femininity and aesthetics. Since its inception in 2015, the account has remained active and is currently managed in rotation by students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Jember.

To date, Unej Cantik has uploaded approximately 709 photos and has garnered over 29.4 thousand followers. Its follower base consists of University of Jember students and the general public, both women and men. The account's popularity stems not only from social interactions but also from the image it has cultivated as a representation of the beautiful female students on campus.

Figure 1. "Unej Cantik" Instagram Account Profile
Source: Instagram "Unej Cantik"

The photos uploaded on this account feature female students with various styles and appearances. Some posts include full-body portraits, half-body shots, or selfies. A variety of appearances is also evident, with some students wearing hijabs and others not. However, the majority of the posts consist of selfies and half-body portraits that emphasize individual faces and expressions. The photos uploaded on this account are carefully curated; any student who wishes to have their photo featured on Unej Cantik must meet specific criteria set by the administrators. These criteria generally align with widely accepted beauty standards, such as having an attractive face, fair skin, and a neat or aesthetic appearance[14]. As a result, most of the students featured in the posts share common characteristics that conform to these standards.

This has made "Unej Cantik" a symbol of prestige among female students. Many students feel proud if their photo is posted on the account, as it provides social validation, popularity, and recognition as a "beautiful student" known across campus. Some students even expressed that being featured on this account made them feel more appreciated, recognized, and "trendy" within the campus community [15]. Additionally, numerous comments containing compliments like

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[14] Interview with the account manager, July 25 (2023).

[15] Interview with Annisa, July 23 (2023).

"incredibly beautiful," admiration such as "the celebrity of Unej," or "finally, you're part of Unej Cantik," as well as playful remarks from male followers like "promise you won't ignore me, sis," "my dream girl," and "Anya Geraldine's Jember version," reflect the enthusiasm, recognition, and humor of the followers. These comments further reinforce the symbolic status of beauty within this community.
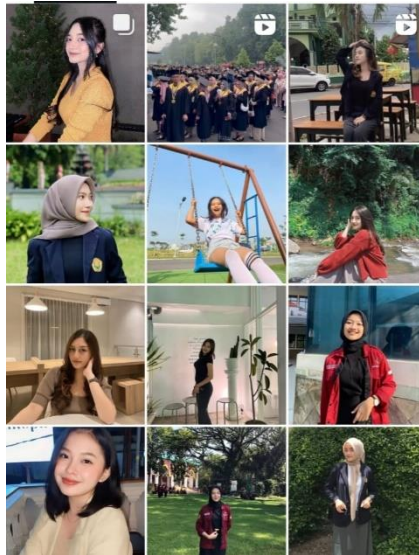

Figure 2. "Unej Cantik" Photos
Source: Instagram "Unej Cantik"

However, the existence of this account also brings about certain social implications that warrant attention. On the one hand, the account can serve as a platform to strengthen social connections among students while showcasing the positive image of female students at the University of Jember. On the other hand, the beauty standards set by the account tend to be exclusive, potentially creating social pressure for students who do not meet these criteria. Students who do not align with the perceived ideal beauty standards may feel marginalized or less confident [16] , especially if attention is predominantly focused on those who fit specific stereotypes.

In the context of this study, "Unej Cantik" serves as a digital representation reflecting the social construction of beauty among students at the University of Jember. The popularity of this account demonstrates how social media becomes a powerful tool in shaping perceptions and self-images. However, this phenomenon also highlights the importance of inclusivity and diversity in celebrating beauty, ensuring that every individual feels valued regardless of differences in appearance.

Beauty in the Perspective of "Unej Cantik"

The beauty myth is the perception that women's beauty is associated with specific characteristics, such as an alluring body, tall stature, a sexy figure, straight hair, and glowing white skin, often complemented by the use of makeup. This myth reflects social constructs that vary across cultures [17] . In the context of this research, for example, fair skin is considered a symbol of beauty, unlike Western societies, such as the United States and Europe, where tanned or darker skin is more appreciated. These beauty constructs are influenced by societal knowledge, mass media, and socially accepted norms[18].

According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), the word "cantik" (beautiful) is defined as a woman's face that is charming in form and feature[19]. However, there is no universal or definitive definition of beauty. Beauty is a relative and subjective concept, allowing individuals or communities to have their own interpretations

This study finds that beauty is often associated with a glowing complexion, a slim body, straight hair, and natural makeup. These perceptions are influenced by three main contexts: (1) mass media, including social media, which accelerates the dissemination of homogeneous beauty standards; (2) Dutch colonial heritage, which introduced value hierarchies based on skin tone and "civilized" aesthetics; and (3) local Pandhalungan culture, which incorporates traditional values like modesty

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[16] Interview with Indah, Mayang dan Sari, Dec 10 (2023).

[17] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*.

[18] Garcia and Winduwati, "Representasi Standar Kecantikan Wanita Di Media Sosial Instagram @springsummerstyle," 252.

[19] Setiawan E, "Arti Kata Cantik - Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Online.," 2024.

but adapts to modernity. These three contexts synergistically shape prevailing beauty standards, creating norms that are continuously reproduced within society.

Mass media for example plays a significant role in creating beauty standards. Women frequently portrayed in advertisements or television programs are typically depicted with glowing fair skin, long hair, sharp noses, symmetrical faces, tall stature, and what is considered a sexy figure. This portrayal becomes a dominant symbol of beauty in the public's perception, as part of a capitalist culture[20]. Social media further reinforces this myth by showcasing content that highlights the ideal female figure. As a result, the perception of beauty becomes homogenized, creating social pressure for women to mimic or adopt these standards in their daily lives[21].

In the context of colonial heritage, beauty standards also have strong roots in issues of race, gender, economics, and skin color [22] , which historically shaped the image of the ideal woman in society. This view was reinforced by colonial norms that positioned "white skin" as a symbol of superiority, creating a social hierarchy in which Western values were considered superior to Eastern ones. This narrative has been passed down through generations, becoming a perception that is difficult to change [23]. Although it is now more implicit, this idea continues to live on through the preference for fair skin, which is often seen as a symbol of beauty, modernity, and higher social status.

Meanwhile, the socio-cultural context of Pandhalungan, a blend of Javanese and Madurese cultures [24][25] , also exerts a unique influence on beauty standards, though not with the same metaphors found in Madura[26]. This local tradition emphasizes simplicity, modesty, and self-care as aspects of beauty. However, modernity and colonial influence have expanded this view. Today, beauty is more often associated with fair skin and "civilized" features, in line with the flow of cultural globalization.

The combination of these three contexts makes the "Unej Cantik" community a representation of diverse views on beauty. The beauty standards they adhere to are influenced by a social construct interwoven from mass media, colonial heritage, and local Pandhalungan values, creating a definition of beauty that is continually evolving but still carries the elements of homogenization from these three aspects. These beauty standards can be explained as follows:

Having a Glowing Face

Women are often considered beautiful if they have a glowing face. Interestingly, the term glowing in this context does not align with the universal definition referring to naturally healthy and radiant skin. Instead, its meaning shifts to being synonymous with "fairness" as a symbol of ideal beauty. This phenomenon reveals the socio-cultural bias deeply ingrained in certain communities' perceptions of beauty.

This standard reflects a complex social construction rooted not only in aesthetic preferences but also in historical, cultural,

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[20] Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Dunia Yang Dilipat: Tamasya Melampaui Batas-Batas Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2004), 342.

[21] Adinda Windi Triani and Tengsoe Tjahjono, "Mitos Kecantikan Dalam Kumpulan Cerita Kitab Kawin Karya Laksmi Pamuntjak (Kajian Feminisme Liberal Naomi Wolf)," *Jurnal Bapala* 10 (2023): 71.

[22] Ciara Mae Gonzales Tirona Tirona, "The Impact of Colonial Beauty Standards on the Ethnic Identity and Mental Health of Filipina Americans," *The California State University*, no. May (2023): 31, https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/concern/theses/3t945z3 50.

[23] Roro Retno Wulan, "The Myth of White Skin: A Postcolonial Review of Cosmetics Ads in Indonesia," *SHS Web of Conferences* 33 (2017): 00048, https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20173300048.

[24] Ayu Sutarto, "Sekilas Tentang Masyarakat Pandalungan (Overview of the Pandalungan Community)," *Jelajah Budaya 2006*, 2006, 2.

[25] Mochamad Ilham, *Orang Pendalungan* (Jakarta: BRIN, 2024), 1.

[26] Nur Awaliyah Putri, "METAFORA PENGUNGKAP KECANTIKAN DALAM MASYARAKAT MADURA," *Etnolingual Vol 1 No 2* 1, no. 2 (2017): 73–99.

economic, and media influences. The preference for fair skin has deep historical roots, often shaped by colonial history and social stratification. In many cultures, lighter skin has been associated with higher social status, purity, and beauty. This tradition has been perpetuated through cultural practices, mass media, and beauty product advertisements, which frequently highlight fair skin as the ideal standard.

Figure 3. Netizen Comments
Source: Instagram "Unej Cantik"

The comments from this community illustrate how this standard is widely accepted. For example, comments on the image above, such as "White as if without a mirror" or "So bright," indicate that beauty is measured by the level of skin brightness. Furthermore, social media features like filters also reinforce this narrative, with visual effects that enhance the appearance of fair skin.

One member of this community, named Fina, emphasizes her view of beauty with the following statement:

"In my opinion, a beautiful woman definitely has fair and glowing skin. Fair and glowing skin tends to look more attractive compared to dark skin. Even if someone's face is ordinary, if their skin is fair and glowing, it makes their appearance more appealing."[27]

This statement reflects the internalization of beauty myths supported by social constructs and media[28]. Comments that emphasize skin brightness as the main measure of beauty show how this standard is widely accepted in society. Views like Fina's not only reflect personal preferences but also reflect a narrative that has been repeatedly promoted by the media and the beauty industry. Fair and glowing skin is seen as a symbol of cleanliness, success, and attractiveness, even though this standard often overlooks the natural diversity of human skin tones.

Slim Body

Another beauty standard that is often highly regarded is having a slim body. A slim body is considered a symbol of physical attractiveness, health, and even success in some cultures. On social media and other platforms, the image of women with slim bodies is often positioned as ideal, even though the term "slim" itself has different definitions according to individuals. For example, one informant named Dini defines a slim body as one that looks "sexy," with features such as a narrow waist, flat stomach, rounded and prominent hips, and firm breasts[29]. In her view, women who have this body type are considered more attractive, especially in the eyes of men. This phenomenon reflects how beauty standards are not only determined by women but also shaped by men's views, which are often used as a benchmark[30].

However, not all men prioritize physical appearance in their attraction. Some men value a woman's character or personality more than her physical looks.

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[27] Interview with Fina, September 20 (2023).
[28] Marwah Daud Ibrahim, "Citra Perempuan Dalam Media: Seksploitasi Dan Sensari Sadistik," in *Lifestyle Ecstacy: Kebudayaan Pop Dalam Masyarakat Komiditas Indonesia*, ed. Idi Subandy Ibrahim (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 1997).

[29] Interview with Dini, August 20 (2023).
[30] Ibrahim, "Citra Perempuan Dalam Media: Seksploitasi Dan Sensari Sadistik."

A similar opinion was expressed by another informant named Andriana, who defines a slim body as one that is "tight" and proportional[31]. According to her, an ideal body has features like a clearly defined waist, firm hips, and no excess fat. For her, a slim and ideal body is a dream for many women because it is seen as a gift and a symbol of beauty. This trend has become more popular among women, who often feel that having a sexy body will boost their self-confidence and attractiveness.

However, there are other criteria as well, such as having a tall body and being free from a bloated stomach. According to an informant named Anisa, female beauty includes a tall, proportional body, but still free from a bloated stomach. She stated:

> "A beautiful body, in my opinion, is one that is tall and fit, but not with a bloated stomach. For example, like the influencer Rachel Vennya, I think she looks like that."[32]

Anisa emphasized that, in her view, being slim does not just mean being thin, but also having a body posture without a bloated stomach. A bloated stomach is considered a hindrance to appearance, often lowering a woman's self-confidence, especially for those who want to wear certain clothes like *crop tops*.[33] This highlights how important body shape is in today's beauty standards, especially among young people.

Based on the explanation above, having a slim body is a social construct that depicts the ideal female body as one that is proportional, with a narrow waist, flat stomach, and body curves that are visually attractive. This standard is not only based on aesthetics but is also often associated with perceptions of health, self-confidence, and sexual appeal.

Straight Hair

The next beauty standard according to this community is having straight hair. Straight hair is considered neater, easier to manage, and gives an elegant impression. The definition of straight hair as beautiful varies among the informants, ranging from short black hair to long colored hair. Here are some opinions that support this standard:

According to Tera, straight, black, and short hair gives a neat and simple impression. She said:

> "For me, a beautiful woman is not just one with long hair, but I actually think a woman with short straight hair is more beautiful because it looks neat."[34]

Tera emphasized that short straight hair does not require complicated maintenance but still gives a fresh and youthful appearance. Short black hair is also considered more practical and still gives an elegant impression when styled well.

A different opinion was shared by Dini, who defines beautiful straight hair as long and colored. She explained:

> "Beautiful hair is straight and long, so if it's straight, it's easier to style. I happen to like dyeing my hair blonde-brown, so I think it looks more beautiful too."[35]

Dini pointed out that blonde-brown hair suits typical Indonesian skin tones such as medium brown or light brown. The trend of dyeing hair is also seen as a way to boost confidence and follow the latest fashion.

Anisa has the view that beautiful straight hair is long, not split-end, and colored. She said:

> "Yes, definitely straight, long, and not split, that's what I think."[36]

For Anisa, long straight hair shows hair health. Even though she wears a hijab, Anisa still chooses to take care of her hair for personal satisfaction. She also realizes that split ends often occur due to improper care, such as frequent hair dyeing without follow-up treatment.

Fina added another dimension to the standard of beautiful hair. She said:

> "Even though I wear a hijab, I think a beautiful woman is one whose hair is long,

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[31] Interview with Andriana, August 3 (2023).

[32] Interview with Annisa, July 23.

[33] Fitriyani Puspa Samodra, Sejarah Baju Crop Top yang Identik dengan Wanita, Awalnya untuk Pria (2024).

[34] Interview with Tera, August 3 (2023).

[35] Interview with Dini, August 3 (2023).

[36] Interview with Annisa, July 23.

straight, colored, and styled like the curly hair trends women have nowadays."[37]

According to Fina, long straight hair has flexibility in styling, such as with the popular curly hair model. Brown is the primary color choice because it gives a natural impression without being too flashy.

Based on the informants' views above, hair plays an important role in shaping the concept of female beauty. In the end, hair is seen as a crown that is inseparable from a woman's identity and appeal. In this context, straight hair is more often viewed as the beauty standard compared to curly or wavy hair. This is not only based on aesthetic preferences but also on the practicality of maintenance and the styling flexibility that straight hair offers.

Natural Makeup

The last beauty standard is natural makeup, which is understood as an effort to highlight natural beauty without relying on heavy layers of makeup products. In interviews with several informants, there were diverse views on the definition of beauty with natural makeup. One informant, Dian, stated that for her, natural makeup is a simple and understated look. Dian explained:

> "For me, natural makeup is more beautiful because it doesn't look too thick or heavy. The natural makeup I mean is like this-just sunscreen and then powder. I don't use makeup products like BB cushions or anything like that. So, my makeup looks very light."[38]

Dian's explanation reflects a growing phenomenon where women feel that beauty that appears light and not excessive is a form of beauty that is more elegant and easier to accept in various contexts. The concept of natural makeup, as understood by Dian, seems to portray a simple appearance, without eye-catching products, and

tends to emphasize a more natural impression. This reflects the desire of many women to look more natural and fresh.

On the other hand, there is a different opinion, as shared by Zindi, one of the informants, who stated that women who wear makeup do look beautiful because makeup serves to cover imperfections on the face, such as acne scars or pockmarks. In Zindi's view, the use of Another beauty standard that is often highly regarded is having a slim body. A slim body is considered a symbol of physical attractiveness, health, and even success in some cultures. On social media and other platforms, the image of women with slim bodies is often positioned as ideal, even though the term "slim" itself has different definitions according to individuals. For example, one informant named Dini defines a slim body as one that looks "sexy," with features such as a narrow waist, flat stomach, rounded and prominent hips, and firm breasts[39]. In her view, women who have this body type are considered more attractive, especially in the eyes of men. This phenomenon reflects how beauty standards are not only determined by women but also shaped by men's views, which are often used as a benchmark[40].

However, not all men prioritize physical appearance in their attraction. Some men value a woman's character or personality more than her physical looks.

A similar opinion was expressed by another informant named Andriana, who defines a slim makeup is an instant solution to enhance appearance and conceal flaws on the face. Zindi explained:

> "Oh, yes, definitely. When women wear makeup, they look beautiful because makeup's purpose is to make you look more beautiful and also cover imperfections like acne scars or pockmarks on the face."[41]

Overall, interviews with the various informants above show that the use of natural

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[37] Interview with Fina, September 20.
[38] Interview with Dian, December 6 (2023).
[39] Interview with Dini, August 20 (2023).

[40] Ibrahim, "Citra Perempuan Dalam Media: Seksploitasi Dan Sensari Sadistik."
[41] Interview with Zindi, December 6 (2023).

makeup is understood as an attempt to cover flaws and enhance appearance, with the hope of achieving a fresher and more natural beauty. However, this so-called natural makeup often falls into the paradigm that women's beauty can only be achieved through the use of cosmetic products, even if in a lighter or minimal form. The definition of beauty that prioritizes natural makeup cannot escape the social and cultural influences that shape how women are expected to appear in the eyes of society. In this case, although natural makeup seems to offer the freedom to look simpler, in reality, it is still bound by existing standards, where women are still expected to achieve beauty through certain efforts and products.

Efforts to Achieve Ideal Beauty

Ideal beauty is a concept that continues to evolve, influenced by various cultural, social, and economic factors. In modern society, beauty is often viewed as something that can be achieved through various efforts, one of which is through the use of cosmetic products and makeup. Many women, particularly university students, strive to meet the beauty standards that align with trends and social expectations. However, behind these efforts, a critical question arises: do these beauty standards truly reflect individual desires, or are they more influenced by norms created by the media and the beauty industry as commodities for profit?.[42] This discussion will explore the efforts to achieve ideal beauty within the "Unej Cantik" community.

Using Skincare Products

Skincare products are an inseparable part of the mass beauty industry, which is deeply influenced by the long-term project of globalization[43]. This industry not only sells products but also the social values attached to the concept of beauty. Global beauty companies have played a major role in redefining beauty standards

through cultural, technological, and marketing influences. Through globalization, skincare products have become not only a solution for skin care but also a symbolic means to achieve the ideal image created by the industry itself. Beauty companies strategically translate social values such as confidence, health, and success into their brands. With global marketing campaigns, these values are adopted by societies across cultures, significantly expanding their markets. For example, advertisements often portray fair skin as a symbol of universal beauty, reinforcing certain standards without considering cultural diversity.

In fact, skincare products have become an inseparable part of daily life, including among university students. In communities like "Unej Cantik," using skincare is no longer just an option but a necessity considered essential to achieving the ideal beauty standard. All the informants interviewed acknowledged the use of skincare products as an important step in their self-care routine. This reflects the view that women must appear beautiful, and that beauty can only be achieved through the use of specific beauty products. However, this view overlooks a fundamental question: what exactly are these beauty products, and who is behind this industry? The global beauty industry has successfully built a narrative linking beauty with confidence, while simultaneously creating beauty standards that are uniform[44] and difficult to achieve. As a result, many consumers, including university students, become trapped in a relationship of subject and object, that is, a consumerist relationship[45] to always appear "ideal."

In this regard, the experience of a university student in the "Unej Cantik" community using skincare products reveals an interesting phenomenon related to their consumption patterns. Most informants acknowledge that they allocate a significant monthly budget, ranging from IDR 350,000 to IDR 700,000, to purchase various

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[42] Ardhie Raditya, *Sosiologi Tubuh: Membentang Teori Di Ranah Aplikasi* (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2014), xxi.

[43] Jones, "Globalization and Beauty: A Historical and Firm Perspective," 885.

[44] Jones, 916.

[45] Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hipersemiotika: Tafsir Culture Studies Atas Matinya Makna* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2003), 147–48.

skincare products in order to achieve the ideal beauty standard. They purchase these products from various sources, including beauty clinics such as Erha, e-commerce platforms like Shopee, and modern beauty stores such as Sociolla.

One informant, Tera, for example, revealed that her main goal in using skincare is to maintain beauty, make her skin brighter, and prevent acne. Her skincare routine involves using morning and night creams, with expenses covering both doctor-recommended products and popular local brands. Additionally, purchasing decisions are often influenced by testimonials and reviews seen on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram[46]. Social media plays a crucial role in shaping their preferences, offering information they consider credible through reviews and testimonials from other users.

Undergoing Whitening Injections

Another effort made by members of the "Unej Cantik" community to achieve ideal beauty is through whitening injections. Informants, such as Eka, clearly describe how whitening injections have become one of the relied-upon methods to achieve bright, firm, and even skin in a short amount of time. With costs starting from IDR 400,000, and higher for whitening infusion services[47], this procedure has become part of their routine to support the use of skincare products.

Such practices are not only a form of physical effort but also involve emotional and financial investment. For them, skincare is not just a basic need; it has become a symbol of the effort to appear attractive and enhance self-confidence. Whitening injections, for example, are chosen for their perceived quick and significant results. This treatment accompanies their daily skincare routine, which includes products like morning and night creams, masks, and additional cosmetics.

Through this routine, members of the "Unej Cantik" community create a narrative about how ideal beauty can be achieved through dedication, investment, and the use of modern beauty technology. This reflects a collective aspiration to meet certain beauty standards accepted in society while also showing how global beauty trends have influenced local habits. On one hand, this effort strengthens their position in the pursuit of ideal beauty, but on the other hand, it also creates a need to constantly follow the development of increasingly diverse and complex beauty products and services.

However, there are deeper reasons related to psychological, social, and cultural needs. The use of whitening injections is driven by several main reasons. *First*, regarding self-confidence, many members of this community feel that physical beauty gives them a greater sense of self-confidence. A bright, firm face free of blemishes is often associated with a positive self-image. As Eka explained, whitening injections are chosen because of their quick and significant results in improving skin appearance. This shows that they view beauty as an important asset that can enhance self-acceptance and confidence in social interactions.

Second, regarding social status, for some community members, receiving treatments at beauty clinics also serves as a way to demonstrate social status. The costs, ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions of rupiah each month, reflect their commitment to achieving the ideal beauty that is highly valued in society. The choice of beauty products and services often reflects their ability to keep up with the latest trends.

Through these efforts, the "Unej Cantik" community has gained both direct and indirect benefits. On social media platforms, especially Instagram, their follower count has been increasing significantly. This not only reflects the popularity of the community but also their success in building a positive image in the eyes of the public. Furthermore, their social media popularity has opened up economic opportunities for community members. They have started receiving offers for collaborations in the form of endorsements from various local products, particularly beauty and fashion items. For example, some community

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[46] Interview with Tera, August 3.

[47] Interview with Eka, October 13 (2023).

members promote local skincare, clothing, and accessories, which allows them to earn additional income. This pattern shows how the effort to achieve ideal beauty not only impacts physical appearance but also provides opportunities to grow as micro-influencers with economic impact.

Hair Care

Another effort made by members of the "Unej Cantik" community is hair care. The experiences of community members in their pursuit of ideal beauty reflect how social beauty standards influence their daily practices. For them, beauty is not just a physical attribute but also a tool to build self-confidence and identity. This phenomenon can be seen in interviews with several members, such as Dini, who, despite having naturally straight hair, still feels the need to straighten it to look more neat. Similarly, Andriana regularly undergoes smoothing to straighten her curly hair, and Anisa, although wearing a hijab, feels it is important to take care of her hair to maintain her beauty and not feel "left behind" compared to her friends. These practices illustrate how external demands for appearance influence individual decisions, even in aspects that may not be directly visible to others.

> "Although my hair is naturally straight from birth, I always straighten it every morning or when I go out so it doesn't look puffy or frizzy. So, I go to the salon just to color my hair."[48]

This effort is often influenced by media representations and social pressures that shape their perceptions of what ideal beauty is. Social media, for example, plays a significant role in presenting beauty standards that influence individuals' choices regarding hair care. In an interview, Andriana mentioned that she was inspired by celebrities on social media who displayed straight, beautiful hair as a symbol of beauty. This shows how globally produced standards by the media serve as a reference for individuals to determine their actions. Hair care

treatments such as smoothing, coloring, and using hair care products are not only seen as a necessity but also as symbols to "fit" into these standards. In other words, these beauty practices become a way for individuals to respond to the social expectations they face.

> "I have curly hair, and this makes me feel insecure about it. As an effort to deal with this, I undergo smoothing. I go to the salon to straighten and color my hair. I want my curly hair to be straight and easy to style. Besides, I also buy hair products at the salon. These products include shampoo, conditioner, and hair vitamins. I feel beautiful and confident when my hair looks nice and beautiful. That's why I go to the salon once a month for treatments and to style my hair. I am motivated to style my hair because I often see videos on social media where celebrities have beautiful straight hair. This motivates me to follow their hairstyle."[49]

Additionally, the effort to achieve ideal beauty is closely related to a sense of control over their bodies. From a phenomenological perspective, the body is an important part of one's identity, and through the body, individuals interact with the world. When Andriana and Anisa choose to undergo hair treatments, they are not only changing the visual aspect of their bodies but also reshaping their relationship with their bodies. With neater, straighter, or colored hair, they feel more confident and capable of presenting the best version of themselves. This emphasizes the importance of the connection between the body, identity, and the meaning of beauty in everyday life.

However, these practices also highlight social pressure, which can make individuals feel inadequate if they do not meet these standards. In an interview, Anisa revealed that even though her hair is not visible to others due to wearing a hijab, she still feels it is important to straighten her hair to avoid feeling "insecure." This illustrates how beauty standards are not only external demands but also internal ones that affect how someone views and judges themselves. At this point, beauty

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[48] Interview with Dini, August 3.

[49] Interview with Andriana, August 3.

becomes part of their existential journey, where the effort to achieve ideals is a way to understand and affirm themselves in a social world full of demands.

> "I started wearing a hijab at the beginning of college, but I still like to go to the salon to smooth and color my hair. My hair is a bit curly, and I feel like it's not nice. Even though I wear a hijab and my hair isn't visible to others, I feel confident when my hair looks good. It makes me feel less insecure around my friends who have beautiful hair."[50]

Overall, the efforts of the "Unej Cantik" community to care for their hair through smoothing, coloring, or using certain products reflect how beauty practices are connected to the search for meaning, identity, and social relationships. By understanding their experiences, we can see that beauty is not just about physical appearance but also a dynamic process where individuals try to balance social demands and their own expectations. Through these rituals, they reshape their relationship with their bodies and the world, creating space for themselves to feel valued and accepted.

Eyelash Extension

The final effort is getting *eyelash extensions*, which is practiced by several informants in the "Unej Cantik" community. This is another method for achieving the ideal beauty standard. For them, having long and curly eyelashes not only enhances physical appearance but also boosts self-confidence in the face of social demands for beauty. As Fiky mentioned, she feels that her short eyelashes do not support her appearance, so she regularly gets eyelash extensions at the salon every month. By choosing the "natural premium" type[51], Fiky emphasizes the importance of maintaining a natural look, even with a cosmetic procedure.

A similar experience was shared by Laura, who has made eyelash extensions a part of her routine since she started college. Laura believes that eyelash extensions are not just about fulfilling aesthetic needs, but also a solution for her eyelash loss. She pays special attention to post-extension care, such as avoiding direct contact with water while washing her hair, which reflects her dedication to preserving the results of the cosmetic procedure. Her choice of the "double premium" type also reflects her preference for a thicker and more prominent look[52].

This process is clearly a beauty ritual that involves planning, time investment, and costs. The informants do not only view eyelash extensions as an effort to beautify themselves, but also as a way to conform to the beauty standards in their environment, especially on Instagram. This need is often influenced by high social expectations, which portray curled eyelashes as an important attribute of facial beauty.

Additionally, this phenomenon can be understood as the informants' attempt to build self-confidence based on control over their appearance. The physical change they undergo not only impacts how others see them but also how they view themselves. By undergoing this procedure, they create a new relationship with their bodies that aligns more with the beauty ideals they desire. In the context of the "Unej Cantik" community, eyelash extensions are not just a cosmetic procedure but also a reflection of the ongoing effort to gain recognition, self-confidence, and social connection.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the beauty standards within the "Unej Cantik" community, showing that many individuals, especially among students, strive to meet the ideal beauty standards dominated by images of fair skin, slim bodies, sharp noses, and long, straight black hair. This standard is not only promoted by the beauty industry and social media but also influenced by colonial heritage and the local Pandhalungan culture. These influences shape the widely accepted perception of beauty and encourage

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[50] Interview with Annisa, July 23.
[51] Interview with Fiky, December 13 (2023).

[52] Interview with Laura, December 12 (2023).

various efforts to achieve it. These practices include the use of skincare products, beauty procedures such as whitening injections, hair treatments like smoothing, and modern procedures such as eyelash extensions.

These efforts demonstrate how beauty standards have been internalized and how they influence perceptions of the body as an object to be cared for and modified in order to gain recognition and self-confidence, particularly on Instagram. These practices also reflect the complex relationship between the construction of ideal beauty and personal experience. Individuals are not only influenced by social expectations but also actively shape their identities through control over their physical appearance. This reinforces the idea that beauty is not merely natural but is the result of a complex social, economic, and cultural process.

However, we can say that the phenomenon occurring among students, especially within the "Unej Cantik" community, reflects a tension between the desire to be rational and critical individuals and the reality in which they become objects of exploitation by the beauty market. The younger generation, who should be able to make conscious and independent choices, instead finds itself caught in a shift in social values influenced by beauty standards constructed by the cosmetic industry and social media. Additionally, this phenomenon highlights a significant tension between local and global values, where the traditions and aesthetics of the Pandhalungan community must confront the homogenized beauty standards driven by global culture.

Communities like "Unej Cantik" become arenas for interaction and competition between these values. The global beauty standards, which often dominate, create pressure to conform to standardized images, leading individuals to feel compelled to consume beauty products and services as a means to meet these expectations. The impact is not only psychological but also extends to the broader social and cultural dynamics. Thus, the construction of beauty not only shapes personal identity but also changes the

way young generations view their bodies, identities, and aspirations in the context of modern society.

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