

# Analysis of Contradictory Messages in Advertisements (Semiotic Analysis of Citra Advertisement Version “Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia”)

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## ABSTRACT

*In the advertising industry, the media plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of beauty standards, including in Indonesia. Representations of women in advertisements are often depicted with ideal images centered on fair skin. Although advertisements now often feature representations of diversity, these standards are still made subtly in the media. This study discusses the contradictory messages contained in the Citra advertisement version “Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia” using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method. This research is a qualitative study using a constructivism paradigm approach with text analysis. The purpose of this study is to uncover the hidden meanings in advertisements using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method with Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. The results of the study show contradictory messages in the representation of diversity raised in this advertisement. Although Citra highlights the diversity of Indonesian skin color beauty, the presence of visuals such as placing light-skinned women as the main focus, the use of skin lightening ingredients such as bengkuang and niacinamide in Citra products as the main selling point, animations of skin color changes towards lighter, the appearance of characters who have dark skin characters with the label “Glowing Skin” still refers to the standard of beauty of light skin. This advertisement has not completely deconstructed the standard of beauty, but rather reproduces it in a new and more subtle form in selling its products.*

**Keyword:** Deconstruction, Beauty Advertising, Contradictory Messages, Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics, Beauty Standards

## INTRODUCTION

In the world of the advertising industry, the media has an important role in shaping consumer perceptions of products made by companies, especially in the field of beauty and body care. Advertising is not only a promotional medium, but also an indicator in shaping an understanding of the public around the concept of beauty. Advertising itself is a media tool used as a promotional tool in order to influence the perception and behavior of the audience towards the products it sells (Sebayang, 2017). According to Chinta et al., (2023) Representations of women featured in advertisements often depict beauty standards such as fair skin, slender bodies, and straight hair as a benchmark that often occurs in Indonesian society. These

standards occur due to a long historical process, and are also influenced by cultural elements that have long been in Indonesia. According to Fitrasari et al., (2024) From the precolonial era, the concept of beauty was a construction of literary culture such as in the Ramayana Epic where beautiful women were depicted with white skin color, while antagonistic characters were often depicted with dark skin color. In this case, the media also plays a role in maintaining the social construction of beauty standards. According to Auli & Jamiah (2017) Her research shows that women are often used as the main object in advertisements because they are considered to have higher visual appeal than men with a percentage of 17% while women are 33%. While research from Mulyana in Santoso (2022), approximately 90% of women are usually used as models in the world of the advertising industry for reasons of beauty and beauty that can increase the attractiveness of advertisements in selling their products.

In the general definition according to Risma Dara & Maria Herawati (2022) beautiful means something that is both fascinating and attractive. However, the meaning of beauty itself in each region and country has a different meaning of beauty. In Indonesia, there is a standard stereotype of beauty where beautiful women are women who have white skin, tall bodies, straight hair, and ideal bodies are the characteristics of perfect women. However, in reality, not all women have all the criteria above, which in turn forces them to change their physique in order to meet the beauty standards in their environment. Because in Indonesia itself, the standard of beauty has been placed where the standard of women must appear perfect, such as white skin which is a benchmark of ideal beauty. However, in recent years, the advertising industry in Indonesia has changed by carrying advertisements that contain messages of diversity, one of which is the advertisement of Citra beauty products. Citra brand itself is a beauty product produced by PT Unilever Indonesia since 1984. In marketing Citra products, advertising has an effort to create a tagline that can stick to people's minds when they see the product, but in the Citra advertisement version "Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia" there are several parts that have contradictory messages in it that still need to be analyzed more deeply because this advertisement was made as a form of resistance to beauty standards in Indonesia. According to Nurdin (2014:45) contradictory messages are verbal messages and also non-verbal messages that do not become a complete unit, causing message ambiguity. This ad needs to be analyzed in depth in order to find out whether this Citra ad deconstructs the beauty standards that occur in society or only reproduces the existing beauty standards but in another form.

Research on the representation of women in advertising has been widely discussed by previous researchers. For example (Risma Dara & Maria Herawati, 2022) which examines the representation of beauty standards in advertising, and several studies that focus on the cultural constructions that underlie the concept of beauty in the advertising industry. (Rachmayanti, et al, 2024) Based on the research findings, women are often portrayed in advertisements due to their physical attractiveness, which aligns with advertising industry standards. However, none of these studies have addressed the contradictory messages conveyed by advertisers. While imagery in advertisements appears to promote diversity, it actually upholds outdated beauty practices.

The researcher used Jaques Derrida's deconstruction theory approach as well as Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method. The use of deconstruction theory itself has the aim of revealing injustice, or discrepancies that cannot be accepted by society. According to Constantin et al., (2023), deconstruction has the aim of looking at the ideology that has been embedded in language that can influence the thinking of society and individuals. The purpose of deconstruction theory is to examine the text that builds a certain meaning and see the contradictory hidden meaning of the text (Tiara et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the Charles Sanders Peirce semiotic method is used by researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of the signs and meanings contained in the advertisement. According to Saleha & Yuwita (2023) Peirce divides signs in 3 forms, namely icons, indexes, and symbols which have a role to identify messages that are already perceived and constructed by society. The use of semiotic methods in this research will be used to examine the signs hidden in advertisement (Eksanti et al., 2022). In the discovery of similar research, researchers have not found anything specific that discusses contradictory messages in beauty product advertisements, especially in the Citra advertisement version of

"Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia." Therefore, researchers see the novelty of this research, especially the use of deconstruction theory used to uncover the meaning and also the hidden contradictions of Citra advertisements. This research aims to complement the shortcomings in previous studies by adding a critical thinking of ambiguous message delivery in beauty advertisements.

## RESEARCH METHODS

According to Tabrani (2023) The research approach is the whole of the research carried out starting from the formulation of the problem to the conclusion. The qualitative research approach in this study is used to explain and provide an overview of the nature, realities and harmony of the phenomena to be studied. Qualitative research has the aim of being able to understand the phenomena that exist around and see in terms of behavior, motivation, perception, which will later be put together and explained descriptively in the form of language, and words in a natural research context using various scientific methods (Moleong in primadi, 2019). In this study, researchers also used a qualitative analysis approach by adopting the constructivism paradigm used to understand the concept of beauty that has been formed, and understood by society from the media.

According to Karamoy et al., (2022) The purpose of using the constructivism paradigm is to be able to understand and reconstruct from existing understandings, including from the researcher's own understanding. While in the type of research, researchers use text analysis using the Charles Sanders Peirce semiotic model which is used as an analysis of the signs in the advertisement using the basis of three main elements known as the triangle theory of meaning consisting of Sign, Object, and Interpretant. According to Peirce, everything is a sign, and the sign has a hidden meaning behind it. (Fatimah, 2020). Then it is divided again based on the object into three categories, namely Icon, is a sign that represents the object, then index is a sign that has a relationship with the object, and the last is a symbol is a sign that has a relationship between the signifier and the sign. For the type of data in this study consists of two data, namely primary and secondary data.

Data in research is divided into two types, namely primary data and secondary data (Solli Nafsika & Huda, 2021). Primary data is obtained from the scenes in the Citra advertisement version of "Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia" which displays the representation of beauty standards in advertisements seen from visual elements, narratives, and also the symbols used. According to Nurhikmah (2019) Primary data is used as the main focus of the foundation in carrying out an analysis process of the research object. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from outside documentation sources such as scientific journals, books, theses, or articles that are relevant to the researcher's research topic. According to Rachmani (2015), secondary data is obtained from sources obtained indirectly, for example in the form of archives, documentation data, and also scientific books.

Entering into data collection, researchers used observation and documentation techniques. Then, after data collection was carried out, the researcher analyzed the data with the first process of identifying the signs of the advertisement where the data was collected through visual, verbal, and narrative elements in the Citra advertisement version of "Radiate Beautiful Variety of Indonesian Skin", then analyzing the signs using Peirce's semiotic method by categorizing them into three, namely Sign (Sign), (Object), and also the use of signs (Interpretant), then interpreting and presenting the data arranged in the form of tables and descriptions, and finally drawing conclusions which contain a combination of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method and also the use of Jaques Derrida's deconstruction theory approach. In the validity of the data itself, researchers apply data validity testing techniques starting from the extension of observation, conducting observation diligence by rechecking the data that has been obtained so that its relevance and accuracy can be accounted for, then using reference materials. According to Sa'adah et al., (2022) data validity is an important step so that the results obtained are accurate and in accordance with the existing reality. Through this approach, researchers analyzed beauty messages in image advertisements, focusing on contradictory messages about the narrative of beauty diversity, which is actually a reproduction of old beauty

standards. Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic analysis was used to help researchers analyze the implicit messages in the advertisements.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research discusses and also describes the form of contradictory messages in the Citra advertisement version "Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method and also using Jaques Derrida's deconstruction theory approach, this research examines symbols as well as signs in advertisements, and also how Citra advertisements form a message of beauty diversity delivered to the audience. This ad seems to want to change the concept of beauty that has been attached to society, but still maintains certain elements of beauty standards. Through the use of deconstruction, the meaning of beauty in this advertisement is understood as an unstable meaning, due to the tension between the message to be raised and the visuals displayed.



**Figure 1 : Scene Three Woman Holding Angklung**

Source : [Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWzJLjyfJ7U)

In scene 1, showing three women with different skin color characteristics and holding angklung with an open natural background, followed by the narration "Indonesia is rich in culture and diverse skin.". Through the use of Peirce's semiotic method, this scene contains a sign (Sign) in the form of visuals of women with various skin colors and natural backgrounds as a representation of culture in Indonesia, the Object addressed is the diversity of Indonesian women's skin colors, and the Interpretant is to make an interpretation where bright skin in the middle is still considered to be positioned higher and more ideal than other skin colors.

Although this scene conveys a message of diversity, the visual still shows the dominance of light skin, with the main character Maudy Ayunda placed in the center position. In the context of deconstruction itself, it shows that there is a hidden meaning behind the representation shown, where light skin is used as the center or symbol of ideal beauty, while darker skin is considered only as a companion. In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are shown from the visuals of three women who represent diversity, then indexes are visualized through the placement of light-skinned characters as the center of attention, then symbols are depicted through the narrative "Diverse Skin" which although voicing diversity, it is only a strategy to expand the market. This shows that in Citra advertisements there is still an ideology of capitalism where diversity is used as a marketing tool, but still maintains fair skin as the main attraction of Citra products.



**Figure 2 : Image Product Giving Scene**

Source : [Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWzJLjyfJ7U)

In scene 2, featuring Maudy Ayunda and also Vina Larasari who symbolically handed over citra products in caring for the skin, with the narration that Citra has understood and cared for various types of Indonesian women's skin for 30 years. If analyzed using Peirce's semiotics, the scene of two female characters handing over the product is a sign (Sign), then the object (object) is appreciating all Indonesian women's skin colors depicted with smiling female faces, then the interpretation (Interpretant) is that there is an inconsistency where the third character Shella Cletus who has darker skin characteristics present in the first scene does not appear in this scene, which gives an impression of overlooking dark skin.

In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are visualized through two women who represent diversity but both women have bright skin characters, then indexes are depicted through the handover of products as a form of skin care, and finally symbols are visualized through the narrative "30 Years of Caring for Skin Diversity" which carries a message of diversity. However, in terms of deconstruction itself, there is a contradiction between the narrative of diversity and the visuals that still emphasize fair skin.



**Figure 3 : Scene Claim 20x Glowing Serum**

Source : [Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLhXzXzXzXz)

In scene 3, it displays a visual of serum droplets with an illustration of bengkuang, and also the words "20x Glowing Serum from Niacinamide" which if analyzed using Peirce's semiotics in the visual above is considered a sign (Sign), then the object (Object) is the word "20x Glowing Serum" which is claimed to brighten and make the skin look glowing, and the Interpretant (Interpretant) is that bright skin is still considered an ideal beauty standard, because the use of bengkuang visuals and also the famous Niacinamide as a skin lightening ingredient is the main selling point in Citra products. The cultural context of beauty standards in Indonesia still upholds that fair skin is a beauty standard that many women desire, because it is considered to have a high social status class and is considered cleaner, while those with dark skin characteristics are considered less attractive.

In terms of deconstruction itself, this advertisement carries the diversity of beauty, but in this scene shows a contradiction, where claims about glowing serum with niacinamide content which is a skin lightener and bengkuang illustrations as a symbol of local ingredients to brighten the skin directly reinforce the old beauty construction, namely bright skin as an ideal standard. In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are visualized through the image of bengkuang which represents natural ingredients, then the index is depicted from the serum droplets that show a skin brightening process, then the symbol is depicted through the text "20 Glowing Serum from Niacinamide" which conveys a message that Citra products have high effectiveness in brightening the skin. According to Parwati (2021) niacinamide is a natural skin lightening ingredient and is often used in cosmetic ingredients. When viewed from the point of view of the ideology of capitalism, Citra does not only sell products, but creates a perception that bright skin is the main goal in care if using its products, by raising the message of diversity, the message conveyed still places bright skin as a desired representation of beauty, in order to reach a wider market and maintain beauty standards that are already inherent in society.



**Firgure 4 : Scene Claims Quickly Permeate**

Source : Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil

In scene 4, if analyzed, the sign (Sign) shows an animation of a droplet of Citra product that is absorbed by the pores of pink skin, and turns brighter when exposed to the product, accompanied by the words "Fast Absorbing". The object is the absorption of Citra's product into the skin making the skin brighter and the Interpretant is to make an interpretation that this change shows the narrative that natural skin (tends to be dark) and is considered not ideal, and becomes perfect after using the product.

In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are shown from animated scenes of skin and serum droplets as a representation of skin care, indexes are shown from visual changes in skin color that are brighter after using the product, and symbols are visualized through the text "Quickly Absorb" which tells the advantages of Citra products to have effectiveness on the skin quickly. In the context of deconstruction itself, this advertisement subtly emphasizes bright skin as a standard of beauty, because the skin before using is considered less than ideal, and the skin after using the product becomes ideal in achieving beauty standards.



**Firgure 5 : Scene Representation of Light Skin**

Source : Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil

In this scene 5, if analyzed, the Sign (Sign) lies when the scene displays two female models, Maudy Ayunda and Vina Larasari with an Indonesian natural background with a smiling expression followed by the words "Bright Skin", the object (Object) lies in the appearance of two bright female skins and also the natural atmosphere of Indonesia. then the interpretation (Interpretant) interprets that even though it displays two different models, both have bright skin characteristics, and remain the center of the meaning of beauty in Citra advertising. In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are depicted through visuals of two women with Indonesian natural backgrounds as a representation of Indonesia's cultural and geographical diversity. The index is seen in the movement of touching the arm with a happy expression because it shows confidence with bright skin, then the symbol is shown in the text "Bright Skin" which emphasizes the beauty message that is still associated with bright skin is the main beauty standard. In a deconstruction point of view, visuals like this still bring up

a contradiction of the diversity message raised, because the claim of beauty diversity is not fully reflected because what is highlighted is still bright skin.



**Figure 6 : Scene Representation of Glowing Skin**

Source : Youtube.com/Pernah Lihat Komersil

In scene 6, if analyzed, the sign displays Sheila Cletus with darker skin characteristics with curly hair set in Indonesian nature and followed by the words "Glowing Skin" which has a natural impression. Then the object (Object) is a representation of the diversity of beauty of Indonesian skin color, with the presence of Sheila who has dark skin color characteristics can still look attractive. The Interpretant is interpreting that Sheila's presence in this advertisement is a step that expands the representation of more diverse beauty but there is a hidden message of how dark skin must meet advertising expectations in order to follow standards that are still limited by the aesthetic values of the advertising industry.

In the context of icons, indexes, and symbols as a classification of signs, icons are shown through Shella's visuals with Indonesian nature as a form of diversity, then indexes are visualized through happy expressions with natural backgrounds signaling harmony, confidence with glowing skin, while symbols appear in the text "Glowing Skin" which still represents ideal beauty standards. However, from a deconstruction point of view, although it seems to voice diversity, the term "Glowing" still carries the old beauty standards. Usually the word "Glowing" is often associated with bright, clean skin, so dark skin called "Glowing" must still meet the ideal criteria of the beauty industry version. Meanwhile, if drawn into the ideology of capitalism, this scene shows that diversity is utilized as a marketing strategy, where dark-skinned characters still have to conform to the industry's ideal beauty standards, while expanding the market reach of their products. Therefore, this scene is actually not completely freeing from the old beauty standards, but filtering diversity by applying long-established commercial values.

## CONCLUSION

This research describes the contradictory messages in Citra's advertisement version "Radiate Beautiful Variety of Indonesian Skin" using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method and Jaques Derrida's deconstruction theory approach. Peirce's semiotic method is used as a decomposition of meaning through three main components or triangle of meaning, namely sign, object, and interpretant. This analysis is carried out by identifying the signs in each scene, then associated with the designated object, and interpreted through the interpretations that arise from the visuals and narratives displayed. The use of deconstruction theory as an approach is used to uncover hidden meanings in the visual and narrative construction of Citra advertisements. The use of this theory is used to uncover the tension of meanings and visuals displayed that contradict the message of diversity raised by the advertisement, namely "Pancarkan Ragam Cantik Kulit Indonesia" where the visual representation and narrative still reinforce the existing beauty standards.

The results show that there is a contradictory message between the narrative of skin color diversity raised, with visuals that still display light skin as the main beauty standard in Citra advertisements, for example the placement of female characters, namely Maudy Ayunda, who has light skin characters in the middle position, the product handover scene where Sheila Cletus, who has dark skin characteristics, does not appear in the scene which reinforces the existing beauty standard.

exclusion which is seen from the placement of light-skinned characters as the main center of the advertisement, the use of skin lightening ingredients such as bengkuang and Niacinamide with claims to have 20x glowing serum as the main selling point, The animation that illustrates the change in skin color towards a lighter one, and also the appearance of a character who has dark skin but the label "Glowing Skin" still refers to the existing beauty standards, where Citra's advertisement is still not completely separated from the existing beauty construction even though it carries the concept of diversity of Indonesian skin color but the diversity is still limited to the beauty values that already exist in the world of the advertising industry but in a more subtle way in selling their products through their advertisements by carrying the diversity of Indonesian skin color.

The results of this study also strengthen the use of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach to unpack the implied meanings of media messages, especially advertisements, while also expanding the application of Derrida's deconstruction theory. This research is important because messages in advertisements have the potential to influence audience perceptions of the construction of beauty in the media. If old standards continue to be reproduced, diversity will become merely a marketing strategy, not a paradigm shift. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of truly inclusive advertising practices to encourage a more equitable transformation of beauty culture.

For theoretical advice, it is hoped that this research can be a reference in the study of Communication Science, especially in semiotic studies and also deconstruction. For future researchers, it is recommended to examine media representation in the context of existing cultures and social issues in order to enrich understanding of the meaning of the media. For practical advice, this research is expected to be a reminder for beauty brands and the advertising industry to not only display a message of diversity, but actually realize it in the form of narratives and visuals displayed, and for the community, it is expected to encourage people to have a critical awareness of the media messages conveyed, especially regarding beauty standards. And also for educational institutions and also the media can make these findings as evaluation material in developing communication campaigns that are more widespread towards the diversity of society.

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