

The Social Construction of the Meaning of Beauty in Dove and Wardah Advertisements on YouTube

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how Dove and Wardah's digital campaigns on YouTube shape and deconstruct conventional beauty narratives through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social construction theory. A qualitative approach combining critical discourse analysis and in-depth interviews was applied to explore audience interpretations of both campaigns. The findings reveal that Wardah successfully contextualizes beauty messages within religious and cultural frameworks by emphasizing values such as modesty, spirituality, and inner beauty, which strongly resonate with Indonesian Muslim women. In contrast, Dove focuses on global inclusivity through narratives of body and age diversity, but its secular orientation often limits cultural relevance in the Indonesian context.

The study also identifies a gap between the inclusivity messages promoted by the brands and the audience's interpretations. Some audiences accept the messages, while others resist or modify them according to their social and cultural values. Analysis of YouTube interactions—comments, likes, and shares demonstrates that audiences act as active meaning-makers rather than passive consumers. Through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, a new social reality of beauty emerges, redefining beauty as a synthesis of spirituality, diversity, and authenticity beyond mere physical appearance.

Keywords: Dove Real Beauty Sketches, Wardah Feel the Beauty, Social Construction Theory, YouTube Content

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Konstruksi Sosial Makna Kecantikan dalam Iklan Dove dan Wardah Di Youtube

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kampanye digital Dove dan Wardah di YouTube membentuk serta mendekonstruksi ulang narasi kecantikan konvensional melalui teori konstruksi sosial Peter L. Berger dan Thomas Luckmann. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis wacana kritis dan wawancara mendalam terhadap audien yang aktif merespons kedua kampanye tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Wardah lebih berhasil mengadaptasi pesan kecantikan yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai religius seperti kesopanan (*modesty*), spiritualitas, dan *inner beauty*, yang beresonansi kuat dengan budaya dan identitas Muslimah Indonesia. Sebaliknya, Dove berfokus pada inklusivitas global melalui narasi keberagaman tubuh (*body positivity*) dan usia, namun tetap membawa kerangka sekuler yang seringkali kurang relevan secara kultural di Indonesia.

Penelitian juga menemukan adanya kesenjangan (gap) antara pesan inklusivitas yang dikonstruksi oleh merek dan persepsi publik yang menerima, menolak, atau memodifikasi makna tersebut sesuai nilai sosial masing-masing. Analisis interaksi di YouTube, terutama pada komentar, *likes*, dan *shares*, menunjukkan bahwa audien tidak hanya menjadi konsumen pasif, tetapi juga aktor aktif yang merekonstruksi realitas sosial kecantikan. Melalui proses eksternalisasi, objektivasi, dan internalisasi, terbentuklah realitas sosial baru yang menegaskan pergeseran makna kecantikan dari sekadar estetika fisik menuju spiritualitas, keberagaman, dan otentisitas diri.

Kata kunci: konstruksi sosial, kecantikan, YouTube, Wardah, Dove

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of beauty representation in today's digital media has undergone a significant transformation. In the era of new media, platforms such as YouTube have become primary spaces for global and local cosmetic brands to express their values, identities, and ideologies through visual narratives. The shift from conventional to digital media has not only changed the way marketing communication operates but has also reshaped the social meaning of beauty itself. Advertising is no longer merely a commercial tool; it has become a discursive arena where ideas about the body, morality, and identity are negotiated.

Within this context, two major brands, Dove and Wardah, serve as compelling examples of how the beauty industry constructs the meaning of beauty through different cultural approaches. Dove, as a global brand, promotes the idea of *real beauty* by emphasizing diversity in body shapes, skin tones, and ages. Campaigns such as *Real Beauty Sketches* and the *Self-Esteem Project* are designed to challenge the hegemony of conventional beauty standards dominated by images of fair-skinned, slim, and symmetrical-faced women. On the other hand, Wardah, as an Indonesian local brand, constructs beauty through an integration of Islamic spiritual values,

emphasizing modesty, piety, and *inner beauty*.

The intersection of these two approaches highlights the dialectic between global secular and local spiritual values within the same digital space. Dove represents a universal and secular form of inclusivity, whereas Wardah formulates inclusivity based on religiosity and culture. This is where the theory of social construction developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) becomes highly relevant. They propose that social reality is built through three interrelated processes: *externalization*, *objectivation*, and *internalization*. In this research context, advertisements function as forms of externalization of beauty values; social media platforms like YouTube act as spaces of objectivation where such narratives become public discourse; and audiences engage in internalization, the process of absorbing, rejecting, or modifying the meanings conveyed.

As a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia presents a social context distinct from the global market. Religious, cultural, and moral values remain essential in shaping women's identities. In this setting, marketing messages containing spiritual values tend to be more readily accepted because they align with the prevailing *frame of meaning* within society. However, the integration of religion into commercial contexts raises an ethical dilemma: to what extent can religion be represented without diminishing its

sacredness? Wardah exemplifies a brand that has successfully navigated this tension through its narrative of "*beauty in modesty*", aligning beauty with piety, though not without criticism of the commodification of religious values.

Conversely, Dove faces different challenges. While its campaigns have been widely praised for promoting *body positivity* and *self-acceptance*, some audiences argue that its notion of inclusivity remains rooted in Western aesthetics and fails to fully represent non-Western diversity, including Asian and Muslim perspectives. Thus, there exists a *cultural gap* between the globally expressed values and the lived social realities of local audiences.

Based on this background, this study focuses on how the meaning of beauty is socially constructed in Dove and Wardah's digital campaigns on YouTube, and how audiences interpret, modify, or reject these messages according to their own social and cultural values. This research aims to answer three main questions:

1. How do Wardah and Dove's communication strategies externalize beauty values in the digital context?
2. How does the process of objectivation occur through interactions on YouTube?
3. How do audiences internalize and reconstruct the meanings of beauty offered by the two brands?

Through critical discourse analysis and in-depth interviews with active YouTube audiences, this study seeks to demonstrate that beauty

realities in the digital era are neither singular nor universal. Rather, they are shaped through negotiation among religious, cultural, and commercial values that are interwoven. Dove and Wardah represent two poles of contemporary beauty discourse, one affirming the pluralism of the body, and the other affirming the spirituality of the self. These narratives converge in the digital sphere as a form of new social dialectic that constructs modern beauty within Indonesia's cultural framework.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in the theory of the social construction of reality developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. This theory asserts that social reality is not objective or fixed but is produced through repeated and meaningful human interactions. The process involves three main stages: *externalization*, *objectivation*, and *internalization*. In the externalization phase, individuals or institutions express values and meanings into the social world through actions, symbols, and cultural products. In this study, brands such as Wardah and Dove externalize their beauty values through advertisements and digital campaigns. Objectivation occurs when these expressions are accepted, circulated, and regarded as social reality, facilitated by digital media like YouTube. Internalization, in turn, is the process by

which individuals or audiences absorb, interpret, and integrate these meanings into their consciousness.

Berger and Luckmann emphasize that the process of social construction is dialectical: humans create the social world, the social world becomes objective, and ultimately it shapes the humans who created it. Therefore, in the context of beauty advertising, audiences do not merely receive messages from brands—they negotiate, modify, or even reject meanings that conflict with their own values or beliefs. This theory is particularly relevant for analyzing interactions in digital spaces, where social media enables externalization and internalization to occur simultaneously and publicly. Through comment sections, likes/dislikes, and sharing practices, audiences participate actively in producing new realities of beauty. Thus, Berger and Luckmann's framework provides a robust lens for understanding how beauty realities are socially constructed in the dynamic digital context.

The representation of beauty in media has long been a focus of critical studies due to its deep connections with issues of gender, power, and ideology. Stuart Hall (1997) in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* argues that representation does not merely depict reality but constructs it through systems of meaning and signs. Cosmetic advertisements are a form of representation that produce and distribute meanings about the "ideal

woman” according to dominant societal values.

Globally, studies on Dove’s campaigns have shown how the brand seeks to deconstruct traditional beauty standards through the concept of *real beauty*. Campaigns such as *Dove Real Beauty Sketches* encourage women to accept themselves as they are and to reject social pressures toward idealized body shapes. A study by Hutt (2024) in the *Tulane Journal of Cultural Studies* reveals that although Dove’s campaigns carry empathetic and progressive messages, they still operate within a commercial framework that leverages empathy to reinforce brand image. This critique is known as *commodified feminism*, where feminist values are utilized as marketing tools.

Meanwhile, research on Wardah within the Indonesian context highlights how the brand constructs *Islamic femininity* that blends religiosity and modernity. Wardah presents the image of a Muslim woman who is active, professional, yet modest and spiritually grounded. A semiotic analysis by Rahmawati (2022) in *Jurnal Komunikasi Widyakartika* indicates that Wardah’s advertisements convey messages rooted in Qur’anic values, such as *Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)*, which emphasizes equality and moral virtue rather than physical appearance. Thus, Wardah shifts the paradigm of beauty from the physical to the spiritual, positioning religiosity as a moral authority in the cosmetic industry.

The issue of inclusivity in the beauty industry has become a rapidly evolving global discourse since the early 2010s. A study by Campbell et al. (2023) in the *SpringerLink Journal of Advertising Review* concludes that diversity representation in advertising is most effective when brands portray variations in body types, ages, and ethnicities authentically rather than symbolically (*tokenism*). Authentic representation fosters empathy and broadens the interpretation of beauty into a more humanistic concept. However, some scholars note a paradox: campaigns that highlight diversity often continue to reproduce dominant aesthetic structures, such as featuring conventionally attractive faces within supposedly inclusive frames (Gill, 2016). This phenomenon, known as the *postfeminist masquerade*, shows how equality discourses are used to enhance market appeal without genuinely challenging the underlying gendered capitalism.

In Indonesia, Wardah’s concept of inclusivity takes on a different character from Dove’s. While Dove emphasizes *bodily pluralism*, Wardah emphasizes *moral and spiritual pluralism*. Dove encourages women to love their bodies without shame; Wardah invites women to love themselves as part of their devotion to God. Both narratives challenge hegemonic beauty, yet they operate within distinct value systems—secular versus religious, global versus local.

Digital media, particularly YouTube, has become a new arena for the formation of social constructions and public discourse. According to Jenkins (2018) and his concept of *participatory culture*, social media audiences are no longer passive viewers but active participants who co-create meanings through commenting, sharing, and remixing. In this study, YouTube comment sections serve as spaces where audiences negotiate the beauty messages presented by Dove and Wardah.

Through these digital practices, the processes of *externalization–objectivation–internalization* occur simultaneously. Brands upload campaigns (externalization), YouTube archives them in a public sphere (objectivation), and audiences interpret and reproduce meanings (internalization). Thus, YouTube is not merely a medium of distribution but also a discursive arena where beauty meanings are negotiated between institutions and the public.

This research offers several forms of novelty: conceptual, contextual, and methodological. Conceptually, it integrates Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social construction with digital beauty representation analysis, which has often been examined primarily through feminist or media theories. This integration allows for tracing the dialectical process between advertising messages (externalization), digital media as distribution spaces (objectivation), and audience

interpretation (internalization). Thus, the study expands the application of social construction theory into the realm of digital marketing communication and contemporary visual culture.

Contextually, it positions Wardah and Dove as two symbolic entities representing global and local systems of beauty values. Wardah constructs *religious femininity* grounded in Qur'anic principles, while Dove constructs *secular inclusivity* rooted in bodily pluralism. The study demonstrates that the meaning of beauty in Indonesia is shaped not only by media globalization but also by the negotiation between religiosity and digital capitalism. It also reveals that the integration of spiritual values in marketing communication functions not merely as a commercial strategy but as a means of forming a new collective identity for Indonesian Muslim women. Meanwhile, the analysis of Dove highlights how global values of *self-acceptance* require cultural adaptation to remain locally relevant. Therefore, this study contributes not only to communication theory development but also to cross-cultural communication strategies and ethically value-based marketing practices.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach within the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of ongoing interactions and negotiated meanings among individuals and social groups. The constructivist paradigm assumes that meaning is not

inherently fixed within an object or phenomenon but is continuously shaped through communication and repeated interpretation. In the context of this research, beauty is not regarded as an objective or universal truth but as a social construction that is constantly formed and re-formed by brands, media, and audiences within digital spaces.

The main theoretical framework used is the social construction of reality theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966). This theory posits that the social world is built through three primary processes: *externalization*, *objectivation*, and *internalization*.

The first stage, externalization, refers to the process through which individuals express ideas, values, and experiences into the social world. In this study, externalization is manifested through the communication strategies employed by the two cosmetic brands, Wardah and Dove, in presenting beauty values through their digital campaigns on YouTube. Wardah externalizes values of religiosity, spirituality, and modesty, while Dove externalizes secular values such as self-acceptance and body diversity.

The second stage, objectivation, occurs when the results of externalization become visible, shareable social realities. In this study, objectivation takes place through the YouTube platform, which functions as a digital public sphere where beauty messages from these brands become

open discourses that can be observed, commented on, and circulated by the public. Digital media plays a crucial role in objectivation, as it transforms symbolic or ideological values into tangible and interactive forms. Metrics such as view counts, user comments, likes, shares, and dislikes serve as indicators of the objectification of beauty meanings in a broader social context.

The third stage, internalization, refers to the process by which individuals or groups absorb, interpret, and integrate social meanings into their consciousness. In this study, YouTube audiences act as active subjects who interpret the campaign messages of Wardah and Dove in accordance with their personal values, experiences, and beliefs. Audiences do not merely receive the messages passively but negotiate and reinterpret them. Some internalize Wardah's spiritual message as an affirmation of religious identity, while others appreciate Dove's inclusive narrative as a liberation from restrictive beauty standards. However, certain audiences also display critical attitudes toward the commercialization of religious values or the instrumentalization of diversity for branding purposes, leading to a process of selective internalization.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, aiming to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the process through which beauty meanings are socially constructed among brands, media, and audiences. The data consist of primary and secondary sources.

- Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight informants, aged 20–35, who are active YouTube users and have watched either Dove or Wardah campaigns. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they had prior engagement (e.g., commenting, liking, or sharing) with the campaign videos. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and WhatsApp Call, using open-ended questions about their perceptions of beauty, religiosity, and the social relevance of the campaigns they watched.
- Secondary data were obtained from content analysis of official campaign videos on Dove's and Wardah's YouTube channels, including user comments, as well as relevant academic literature related to social construction theory and digital beauty representation.

The data collection process followed three main stages:

1. Digital observation (netnography) of the YouTube campaigns to understand message contexts, presentation styles, and audience interactions.
2. In-depth interviews with selected audiences to uncover personal and social meanings generated from their engagement with the campaigns.

3. Documentary analysis of academic literature to reinforce the study's conceptual and theoretical interpretation.

The data analysis employed Berger and Luckmann's social construction model, integrated with phenomenological interpretation. The analytical process included data reduction, thematic categorization, meaning interpretation, and triangulation.

- In the data reduction stage, the researcher filtered information relevant to core themes such as *spiritual beauty*, *body positivity*, *commercialization of religious values*, and *selective internalization*.
- During categorization, data were organized according to the three stages of social construction: externalization (brand strategies), objectivation (media representation on YouTube), and internalization (audience responses and meanings).
- In the interpretation stage, the researcher examined the dialectical relationships between these stages to understand how digital beauty realities are constructed and negotiated.

To ensure data validity and reliability, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

- Credibility was achieved through triangulation of interviews, digital observation, and document analysis.

- Transferability was ensured by providing rich contextual descriptions that allow findings to be applied to similar contexts.
- Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the entire research process.
- Confirmability was safeguarded by maintaining transparency between the researcher's interpretation and the empirical data, minimizing bias.

In conclusion, this methodological framework seeks to trace how the meaning of beauty as a social reality is constructed through the interaction between brands, digital media, and audiences. Using Berger and Luckmann's theoretical lens, the study views Dove's and Wardah's YouTube campaigns not merely as visual representations of cosmetic products but as social processes that generate new realities of beauty in the digital era.

This constructed reality is dialectical, created by institutions through symbolic messages (externalization), manifested by media as public discourse (objectivation), and reinterpreted or negotiated by audiences according to their cultural, spiritual, and social values (internalization). Through this triadic process, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how global and local narratives of beauty intersect and evolve within Indonesia's digital communication landscape, reflecting a continuous dialogue between modern

consumer culture and moral-spiritual identity.

Results and Discussion

The Construction of "Religiosity" in Wardah and "Secularism" in Dove

The success of Wardah's communication strategy lies in its emphasis on the concept of *spiritual beauty*, which aligns with Islamic values and encompasses aspects of inner beauty and modesty while portraying Muslim women as empowered subjects. This approach does not merely position women as objects of beauty but as agents who radiate values of faith and virtuous character.

Findings reveal that Wardah goes beyond presenting physical diversity; it integrates beauty messaging with Qur'anic and Hadith-based values. The research documentation shows how Wardah's campaigns link their visual and verbal messages to spiritual values rooted in religious texts, such as references to *Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)* and the *Hadith* of Imam Ahmad. These references emphasize dignity, respect, and the spiritual dimensions of beauty, highlighting sincerity and moral virtue rather than transient physical attributes. Thus, Wardah's narrative represents a paradigm shift from materialistic beauty to moral and spiritual beauty.

Interview data reinforce this interpretation. Informants such as Anisa, Rina, and Nadia noted that Wardah "teaches a form of beauty that

radiates spiritual values” and makes them feel represented as Muslim women when viewing the campaign. They expressed that Wardah’s messages align with their values as Muslim women who wish to appear beautiful without abandoning modesty and faith. This indicates that Wardah’s communication resonates not only at a cognitive level but also at an affective level, touching emotional and identity-based dimensions. Muslim audiences thus internalize the harmony between beauty and religious identity, strengthening their attachment to the brand.

From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann’s social construction theory, this high level of audience acceptance can be explained by the alignment between Wardah’s campaign and Indonesia’s dominant socio-religious framework. Since most of Wardah’s target audience is Muslims seeking representations of beauty consistent with religious and cultural norms, the brand’s emphasis on modesty, inner beauty, and self-respect makes its message easier to internalize. In Berger and Luckmann’s terms, this internalization occurs because the campaign resonates with preexisting social meaning structures embedded within the collective consciousness. As a result, audiences do not merely receive Wardah’s message; they situate it within their lived social reality, legitimizing the narrative of “beauty as an act of faith.”

In contrast, Dove emphasizes *self-acceptance* and *physical diversity*

within a secular and global framework. Its message asserts that true beauty comes from embracing one’s unique body and individuality. However, Dove’s campaign does not engage with religious or spiritual representations, such as hijab, modesty, or moral orientation in beauty. Consequently, while Dove’s campaigns succeed internationally as symbols of women’s empowerment, they lack strong religious resonance in Indonesia’s cultural context.

Wardah, on the other hand, successfully creates a culturally specific and emotionally powerful resonance among Indonesian Muslim women. It presents an identity of beauty that conforms to religious norms while affirming the role of Muslim women as modern individuals grounded in spirituality. This dual affirmation distinguishes Wardah from Dove; it bridges emotional, cultural, and spiritual needs through authentic representation. Thus, Wardah’s success in integrating beauty and religiosity not only strengthens its brand image but also contributes to the social reconstruction of beauty as a spiritual and moral value.

Deconstructing the Meaning of Beauty

Both campaigns successfully deconstruct the notion of an “ideal body shape” and challenge narrow beauty stereotypes. This transformation marks a significant shift from rigid beauty standards toward recognition of

diversity in body forms, age, and expressions of beauty. Dove and Wardah both challenge the long-standing paradigm equating beauty with uniform physical ideals, replacing it with a more inclusive and humanistic narrative.

Informants primarily interpreted Dove's campaign as a challenge to traditional beauty standards and an encouragement of *body diversity* and *self-acceptance*. By showcasing women of varying skin tones, body types, and ages, Dove offers a counter-narrative to Western ideals that glorify youth, thinness, and uniformity. Through this, Dove encourages audiences to adopt broader, more human perspectives on beauty.

Wardah, meanwhile, advances a holistic beauty concept emphasizing the harmony between the physical and the spiritual. Its approach shifts the public focus away from idealized body forms toward *inner beauty* and *spirituality* as true sources of attractiveness. In doing so, Wardah reframes beauty not as a visual attribute but as a reflection of faith and moral integrity. Consequently, Wardah deconstructs narrow beauty norms in a manner that is both contextual and religious.

International literature supports these findings. Studies confirm that Dove's campaigns, such as *Real Beauty Sketches*, were designed to challenge single-body ideals and promote self-acceptance. However, scholars also note contradictions in Dove's strategy, arguing that while it promotes

inclusivity, it remains tied to capitalist marketing frameworks (Hutt, 2024; *Tulane Journal*).

Advertising research further emphasizes that representation is only effective when campaigns authentically depict diversity in body, age, and ethnicity. Campbell et al. (2023) in the *Journal of Advertising* assert that genuine and diverse portrayals can reshape beauty norms and reduce psychological pressure among audiences. This principle is reflected in both Dove and Wardah, which strive to depict diversity without sacrificing message authenticity.

Local studies on Wardah (e.g., ojs.widyakartika.ac.id) highlight how the brand constructs the image of a modern Muslim woman harmonizing religiosity and modernity. Wardah is not merely a cosmetic brand but also a social symbol representing confidence and spiritual identity. Semiotic analyses of its advertisements affirm that Wardah conveys the message that beauty belongs to every woman who upholds moral and religious values, not just those who fit narrow physical standards. Conceptually, both campaigns deconstruct the "single ideal body" through complementary approaches. Dove achieves this by promoting self-acceptance and showcasing bodily diversity that rejects hegemonic beauty ideals, while Wardah expands the meaning of beauty by integrating spirituality, shifting the focus from body shape to deeper moral and emotional dimensions. Dove

reshapes perceptions of the body, while Wardah enriches the meaning of beauty itself.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the deconstruction of beauty standards involves not only physical representations but also broader cultural and religious constructions of value. Globally, Dove symbolizes the *body positivity movement*, whereas in Indonesia, Wardah represents the *spiritual beauty movement*. Both contribute to raising awareness that beauty is plural, contextual, and cannot be reduced to a single physical ideal.

The Essential Construction of the Sacred and the Profane

In the context of value-based marketing communication, the findings of this study reveal an intriguing dialectic between the sacred and the profane in audiences' perceptions of Dove and Wardah campaigns. Both campaigns seek to affirm values of humanity, authenticity, and diversity; however, audience reception reveals a more complex layer of meaning. Rather than passively accepting the brand's intended message, audiences engage in interpretive processes that involve spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions.

1. Religious Construction in Commercial Contexts

Some informants, such as Dika and Adi, noted that although Wardah received positive responses, there remains criticism toward how the brand

integrates religious values into its marketing messages. Some audiences perceive religion as being used as a commercial tool, potentially diminishing the sacredness of religious messages. This perception creates ambiguity in public reception: on one hand, audiences embrace Wardah's spiritual message; on the other, they remain cautious of the commercial intent behind the religious narrative. This phenomenon illustrates a clear gap between the brand's goal of inclusivity and how the public interprets it.

From the perspective of Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, this reflects a distinction between the externalization of values by institutions (brands) and the internalization of meaning by society. When religious values are externalized as a marketing strategy, audiences may objectify the message as a profane phenomenon, having moved away from its original sacred context. Consequently, audiences internalize Wardah's messages selectively, accepting the spiritual substance while remaining critical of its economic motives.

2. The Construction of Westernism

In the case of Dove, several informants expressed skepticism about the campaign's relevance in non-Western contexts. While Dove is often praised for challenging conventional beauty standards, criticism arises that its campaigns are still rooted in Western aesthetics, often adopting a

“post-racial” stance or even implying racial and ethnic assimilation. Informants questioned the extent to which Dove’s representations genuinely reflect authentic diversity, especially for Asian or Muslim women whose norms and experiences differ significantly.

This finding aligns with international academic critiques suggesting that campaigns like Dove’s still center the meaning of beauty around Western appearances, despite their seemingly diverse portrayals (Hutt, 2024). Such skepticism indicates that inclusivity imported from global contexts does not always resonate with local values. Public reception of the “real beauty” narrative is thus situational, depending on how sensitively the brand engages with the cultural context of its audience.

3. Interpretive Dialectics of Beauty

This study also highlights the dialectical relationship between campaign intent and local audience interpretation. Both Dove and Wardah externalize inclusive narratives—Dove through messages of body and age diversity, Wardah through spirituality and piety. However, the objectification and internalization processes among audiences are far from uniform. Some internalize the messages wholly, integrating them into their personal identity, while others adopt only parts or reject certain elements altogether.

This gap is reflected in critical YouTube comments questioning the authenticity of both campaigns’

intentions. Dove is often criticized for promoting inclusivity while still operating within a capitalist, profit-oriented framework. Similarly, Wardah’s religious values are appreciated, but audiences caution against reducing spiritual messages to a mere marketing strategy.

Theoretically, this suggests that social reality constructed through marketing communication is dialectical and dynamic. Brand externalization does not automatically lead to uniform audience internalization. Between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the commercial, there is an ongoing negotiation of meaning shaped by individual experiences, values, and social consciousness.

4. Resonance with Local Wisdom

Audience rejection is not total but selective and interpretively modified. They embrace elements that resonate with their values, such as spirituality, modesty, and diversity—while rejecting or ignoring aspects perceived as inauthentic or overly profane. Consequently, beauty in digital discourse no longer stands rigidly between sacred and profane poles but occupies a fluid, gray zone where meanings are continuously negotiated.

These findings show that the social construction of beauty presented by Dove and Wardah extends beyond symbolic advertising; it continues in the digital social sphere, where audiences act as co-creators of meaning. The sacredness of religious and moral values

does not disappear but is transformed into part of a commercial discourse renegotiated by the public. Thus, the modern social construction of beauty is inherently fluid, existing between market values and faith-based values, between the need for self-expression and the quest for spiritual meaning.

DISCUSSION

Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann)

1. Externalization

The campaigns (Dove and Wardah videos) are social actions that generate new representations. Dove externalizes the idea of *self-acceptance* and *diversity*, while Wardah externalizes beauty that aligns with *religious values*. This marks the initial stage in the formation of a new social reality.

2. Objectivation

On YouTube, the videos become public objects; comments, likes, and shares function as mechanisms of *objectivation* by providing *social proof* that these narratives exist beyond the individual. The narrative is thus objectified as a shared “way of seeing beauty.”

3. Internalization

Some users wrote that they felt more confident or represented—this indicates *internalization*. At the same time, critical or skeptical comments (regarding the use of religion as a

marketing strategy or the persistence of *white norms* in Dove) reveal *negotiation* or *reinterpretation* processes. Audiences are not passive recipients; rather, they actively *reconstruct* and *adapt* the campaign’s meanings according to their experiences and cultural norms.

Integration of Spirituality as Cultural Differentiation

Wardah represents the most prominent example of successfully integrating religious values into the construction of beauty messages in Indonesia. In campaigns such as “*Beauty Moves You*” and “*Inspiring Muslimah*,” Wardah emphasizes the concept of *inner beauty* derived from Islamic values such as modesty, sincerity, and gratitude. Public reception of Wardah demonstrates the success of a *glocalization* model, adapting global values of *beauty empowerment* through local wisdom and religious sensitivity.

While Dove promotes a universal, religion-neutral message of “*real beauty*,” Wardah fills the spiritual gap within the global beauty discourse. Within Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) theoretical framework, the internalization of religious values through Wardah’s advertising contributes to a new *reality-maintenance* process among Muslim women, where *beauty* is no longer understood solely in physical terms but as an *expression of faith and piety*.

As stated by Hidayati and Lubis (2022), Wardah's representation "shifts the discourse of beauty from a secular domain toward a narrative that affirms the identity of the modern Muslim woman." Thus, religiosity serves a dual function: (1) strengthening brand authenticity, and (2) fostering *symbolic belonging* between consumers and the Islamic values they hold.

Deconstruction as a Symbol of Resistance

Both Dove and Wardah campaigns engage in the *deconstruction* of standardized beauty ideals, particularly regarding body shape and age. In the global campaign "*Real Beauty Sketches*," Dove explicitly challenges the myth of the "ideal body," replacing it with messages of *self-acceptance* (Hutt, 2024). In the Indonesian context, Wardah performs a similar deconstruction but through a *spiritual* lens—beauty is no longer merely physical but reflects harmony between body and soul.

An international study by Campbell et al. (2023) asserts that successful deconstruction of conventional beauty narratives occurs when brands portray diversity in body, age, and ethnicity *authentically* rather than symbolically. YouTube content analyses in *Journal Pia* (2025) highlight how viewers praise Dove for representing middle-aged women and various body types, while Wardah is appreciated for depicting hijabi women from diverse professional backgrounds.

Hence, both brands succeed in reshaping beauty standards: Dove through *bodily and age pluralism*, Wardah through *spirituality and Muslim identity representation*. Yet, their success underscores distinct cultural contexts; Dove's narrative is *liberal-secular*, while Wardah's is *religious-inclusive*, together expanding the mainstream understanding of beauty.



Figure 1. Model of the Dialectics of Digital Beauty Reality Construction
(Source: Researcher's analysis, 2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the flow diagram of the "*Dialectics of Digital Beauty Reality Construction*," which

explains the formation of beauty meanings through the interaction between brand, media, and audience, based on Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory.

The process begins with externalization, where brands like Wardah and Dove express their beauty values—Wardah through religious beauty narratives (*modesty* and *faith*), Dove through inclusive beauty (*diversity* and *body positivity*).

Next is objectivation, where the messages are mediated by YouTube's platform, campaign videos, comments, likes, and content visibility algorithms, transforming beauty discourse into a *publicly accessible social phenomenon*.

Finally, internalization occurs when audiences interpret and negotiate meaning through three patterns:

1. *Acceptance* ("beauty is syar'i"),
2. *Modification* ("beauty but authentic"), and
3. *Rejection* ("religion is not a selling tool").

This process collectively produces a *new social reality of digital beauty*, leading to three major discourses:

1. Spiritual Beauty Discourse (Wardah)
2. Body Positivity Discourse (Dove)
3. Hybrid Interpretation (Audience)

In conclusion, the figure shows that beauty reality in the digital era is not singular but rather the *product of ongoing negotiation* among spiritual, cultural, and commercial values within the social media sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social construction of beauty represented by Dove and Wardah on YouTube embodies two distinct yet interacting cultural paradigms: global secularism and local spirituality. Applying Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality, the study reveals that digital beauty is not a fixed or universal entity, but rather a dialectical process shaped by the interactions among brands, media, and audiences through the stages of externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

In the externalization stage, Wardah expresses beauty through Islamic spiritual values that emphasize *modesty*, *inner beauty*, and morality, whereas Dove externalizes global secular ideals through *body positivity* and *self-acceptance*. Both brands demonstrate how commercial institutions seek social legitimacy by embedding moral or ideological values within their marketing messages.

The objectivation stage occurs when these beauty narratives are disseminated through digital media platforms such as YouTube. The platform functions as a discursive arena where beauty values become commodified and transformed into social realities that are publicly accessible and collectively recognized. Through interactions in the comment sections, as well as through likes and shares, these messages acquire social

meaning but also become open to critique, reinterpretation, and resistance.

In the internalization stage, audiences act as active agents who interpret beauty based on their personal experiences, cultural contexts, and religious beliefs. Findings indicate that Muslim Indonesian audiences generally internalize Wardah's message positively, as it aligns with their social and spiritual value frameworks. However, some participants expressed critical views, perceiving the use of religion in marketing as a form of commercialization that might diminish its sacredness. Meanwhile, responses to Dove's campaigns were characterized by partial acceptance: while audiences appreciated the brand's emphasis on body diversity, they also recognized its continued reliance on Western aesthetics that do not fully represent non-Western experiences.

Therefore, the digital reality of beauty that emerges is neither singular nor homogeneous but rather dialectical and pluralistic. Both Dove and Wardah contribute to the deconstruction of conventional beauty standards, yet they do so through distinct pathways. Dove challenges the myth of the ideal body by highlighting diversity and self-esteem, whereas Wardah expands the meaning of beauty by linking it to spirituality and moral consciousness.

A key finding of this study is that audiences are no longer passive recipients of media messages; they are active co-creators who construct, negotiate, and even reject meanings they

perceive as inauthentic. This process demonstrates the nature of *selective acceptance* and *interpretative modification* that characterizes participatory digital culture.

Theoretically, this research reinforces the applicability of Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction in examining digital communication phenomena, particularly in the context of value- and identity-based marketing. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of cultural and spiritual sensitivity in brand communication strategies within multicultural societies such as Indonesia. Integrating spiritual values can strengthen brand identity and emotional connection with audiences, provided that it is done authentically and not merely as a commercial tactic.

Ultimately, this study reveals that digital beauty in the YouTube era constitutes a fluid social reality, shaped by the dialectics between market values and faith, between commercial desire and spiritual meaning. This evolving reality suggests that the meaning of beauty in Indonesia has shifted—from the physical to the spiritual, from image to identity, and from consumption to social reflection with deeper cultural significance.

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