



REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SHAMPOO ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi perempuan dalam iklan sampo melalui analisis semiotika terhadap tiga merek populer: Sunsilk, Clear, dan Pantene. Dengan menggunakan kerangka Roland Barthes, penelitian ini menganalisis makna denotatif, konotatif, dan ideologis yang terkandung dalam elemen visual dan verbal iklan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga merek tersebut secara konsisten menampilkan perempuan dengan rambut yang diidealkan, yaitu sehat, berkilau, kuat, dan bebas masalah, serta memposisikan rambut sebagai penanda utama feminitas, kepercayaan diri, dan nilai sosial. Meskipun Sunsilk menekankan gaya hidup dan ekspresi diri, Clear menonjolkan kekuatan dan ketahanan, serta Pantene mempromosikan efisiensi melalui solusi *all-in-one*, perbedaan tersebut tetap beroperasi dalam kerangka ideologis yang sama. Iklan-iklan tersebut mereproduksi mitos kecantikan dominan yang mengaitkan harga diri perempuan dengan penampilan fisik dan pengelolaan tubuh secara terus-menerus. Meskipun beberapa narasi mengadopsi bahasa pemberdayaan atau kepraktisan, strategi tersebut tetap tertanam dalam logika komersial dan konsumerisme. Penelitian ini berpendapat bahwa iklan sampo tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media promosi, tetapi juga sebagai teks ideologis yang menormalisasi standar kecantikan yang sempit dan menghadirkan konsumsi produk sebagai jalan utama menuju kepercayaan diri, pemberdayaan, dan penerimaan sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Representasi Perempuan, Iklan Sampo, Representasi Gender.*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of women in shampoo advertisements through a semiotic analysis of three popular brands: Sunsilk, Clear, and Pantene. Drawing on Roland Barthes' framework, the research analyzes denotative, connotative, and ideological meanings embedded in the visual and verbal elements of the advertisements. The findings show that all three brands consistently portray women with idealized hair, which is healthy, shiny, strong, and problem-free, positioning hair as a key marker of femininity, confidence, and social value. While Sunsilk emphasizes lifestyle and self-expression, Clear highlights strength and resilience, and Pantene promotes efficiency through an all-in-one solution, these differences operate within the same ideological framework. The advertisements reproduce dominant beauty myths that associate women's self-worth with physical appearance and continuous body management. Although some narratives adopt the language of empowerment or practicality, such strategies remain embedded within commercial and consumerist logics. This study argues that shampoo advertisements function not only as promotional media but also as ideological texts that normalize narrow beauty standards and present product consumption as the primary pathway to confidence, empowerment, and social acceptance.

Keywords: *Representation of Women, Shampoo Advertisement, Gender Representation.*





INTRODUCTION

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping social perceptions and cultural values through the visual and verbal messages it conveys. As one of the most pervasive forms of media communication, advertising does not merely promote products but also constructs meanings related to identity, lifestyle, and social norms. Shampoo advertisements, in particular, frequently position women as central figures, making them a relevant site for examining how femininity and beauty are represented in contemporary media. Through repeated visual patterns and persuasive narratives, these advertisements contribute to the normalization of particular standards of attractiveness and gender expectations within society.

In many shampoo advertisements, women are commonly portrayed with specific physical characteristics, such as long, smooth, and shiny hair, fair skin, and a youthful appearance. These recurring images contribute to the construction of narrow and idealized beauty standards in which women's value is closely associated with physical appearance. Exposure to such idealised models in advertising has been shown to influence women's body image and self-perception, often reinforcing unrealistic beauty norms (Wallhead & Furnham, 2025). Previous studies indicate that beauty and personal care advertisements often reinforce stereotypical representations of women by emphasizing attractiveness, softness, and bodily perfection (Teng et al., 2021; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2022). A meta-analysis by Eisend (2019) further confirms that gender role portrayals in advertising remain largely traditional and appearance-focused, which may marginalize women who do not conform to dominant beauty ideals.

Media representations play a crucial role in shaping how women perceive themselves and how they are perceived by society. Hall (1997) argues that representation is not a passive reflection of reality but an active process through which meaning is produced and circulated. This perspective is supported by more recent research suggesting that advertising continues to shape gender identities and beauty norms within contemporary media environments (Lazar, 2017). This process is also connected to post-feminist and neoliberal media discourses, in which women are encouraged to perceive self-management and bodily discipline as forms of empowerment (Martínez-Jiménez, 2023). In the context of beauty advertising, repeated exposure to idealized female images has been shown to influence women's identity construction and self-perception (Dai et al., 2024), potentially normalizing a singular image of femininity while limiting representational diversity. Media representations not only shape beauty ideals but also influence how gender identities are negotiated and performed in everyday life (Lestari & Elfattah, 2025).

Furthermore, advertising frequently reproduces gender stereotypes through visual conventions and symbolic portrayals. Goffman (1979) notes that women in advertisements are often depicted as emotionally expressive, passive, and primarily concerned with their appearance. Recent research confirms that such gendered portrayals persist in current advertising practices, including beauty and hair care advertisements, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations (Khalil, 2024). The promotion of ideal beauty standards in advertising can also be understood as part of a broader media ideology. Wolf's (1991) concept of the beauty myth suggests that dominant beauty ideals function as a form of social control over women, encouraging them to continuously manage and discipline their appearance in accordance with prevailing cultural norms. Contemporary studies further demonstrate that media representations continue to reproduce restrictive beauty standards that shape women's self-perception and social expectations (Konwar & Saikia, 2024).



Although previous studies have widely examined gender stereotypes and beauty standards in advertising, most focus on general beauty or personal care media rather than specifically on shampoo advertisements as a distinct category. In addition, limited research applies an in-depth semiotic approach to explore how denotative, connotative, and ideological meanings operate simultaneously within specific brand narratives. Few comparative studies investigate how different shampoo brands may project themes such as empowerment, strength, or practicality while still reinforcing similar underlying beauty ideologies. By employing Barthes' semiotic framework in a comparative analysis of three popular shampoo advertisements, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary shampoo advertising constructs femininity and negotiates beauty, empowerment, and consumerism.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine how women are represented in shampoo advertisements. Specifically, this research analyzes the representation of women in three popular shampoo advertisements, namely Sunsilk, Clear, and Pantene, by examining the visual and verbal elements that construct denotative, connotative, and mythological or ideological gender meanings, as well as their implications for contemporary understandings of femininity and beauty. By focusing on these widely circulated brands, the study seeks to identify both similarities and differences in the ways femininity is constructed and communicated. The findings are expected to contribute to broader discussions on gender representation and beauty ideology in contemporary advertising.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using semiotic analysis to examine the representation of women in shampoo advertisements. The analysis focused on three television and digital advertisements from Sunsilk, Clear, and Pantene released between 2024 and 2025, selected purposively based on brand popularity, advertising visibility, and the explicit portrayal of female models. The selection enabled a comparative examination within the same product category. The data consisted of visual and verbal elements in the advertisements, including images, slogans, narration, gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation by repeatedly viewing each advertisement and systematically identifying significant signs relevant to the research focus. Data analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework by identifying denotative and connotative meanings and subsequently interpreting the ideological meanings constructed in each advertisement. The analysis involved categorizing visual and verbal signs, interpreting their literal and symbolic meanings, and comparing patterns across the three advertisements. To enhance credibility, theoretical triangulation was applied by relating the findings to relevant perspectives in representation, gender, and media studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Analysis of Sunsilk Power Shot Creambath Advertisement

1. Denotative Meaning

At the denotative level, the Sunsilk Power Shot Creambath advertisement features a young woman with a modern lifestyle who frequently styles her hair. Her hair is initially portrayed as being affected by repeated styling activities, such as appearing dry or less manageable. After using Sunsilk Power Shot Creambath, her hair is shown to become healthier, softer, and easier to manage. Visually, the advertisement emphasizes smooth hair

texture, light hair movement, and confident facial expressions. Verbally, the message highlights the product's ability to nourish and protect hair despite frequent styling, reinforced by the slogan "stay slay."

2. Connotative Meaning

At the connotative level, the advertisement associates hair care with confidence, self-expression, and modern femininity. Well-maintained hair is constructed as a symbol of an active and expressive woman who can freely experiment with her appearance without compromising hair health. The phrase "stay slay" connotes empowerment and self-assurance, suggesting that women can remain confident and stylish as long as they use appropriate hair care products. Implicitly, the advertisement links women's confidence and personal identity to their ability to maintain ideal hair conditions.

3. Myth and Ideology

At the level of myth and ideology, the Sunsilk Power Shot Creambath advertisement reinforces dominant beauty ideologies that position hair as a central marker of female identity. The myth constructed suggests that the ideal modern woman is one who can balance an active, expressive lifestyle with flawless hair appearance through proper product consumption. This ideological message reflects the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991), in which beauty standards function as a form of social regulation that encourages women to continuously manage and discipline their bodies in accordance with prevailing cultural norms.

Analysis of CLEAR Anti-Dandruff & Anti-Hair Fall Advertisement

1. Denotative Meaning

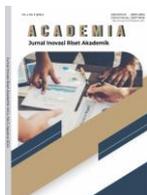
At the denotative level, the CLEAR advertisement emphasizes a new formula that claims to address both dandruff (wet and dry) and hair fall simultaneously. Visually, the ad highlights the CLEAR shampoo product with text and graphics emphasizing "10x super vitamins and ginseng" as key ingredients. The scenes depict hair appearing strong, healthy, and well-styled after product use. The verbal message communicates the primary benefit of strengthening hair up to "10 times more resilient against hair fall."

2. Connotative Meaning

At the connotative level, the advertisement associates product use with strong, dandruff-free hair that resists damage. The emphasis on "10x super vitamins and ginseng" symbolically suggests resilience and robustness in hair care. Strong hair becomes a metaphor for self-confidence, control, and personal strength. The ad also conveys convenience, implying that women no longer need separate products for dandruff and hair fall, thus associating CLEAR with practicality and comprehensive hair care solutions in modern lifestyles.

3. Myth and Ideology

At the level of myth and ideology, the CLEAR advertisement reinforces the narrative that strong, problem-free hair is a defining characteristic of the ideal modern woman who manages both her appearance and lifestyle effectively. The product is positioned as a single solution that normalizes the idea that women must maintain perfect hair to be socially and personally confident. This ideological representation aligns with normative beauty standards that tie women's value to their physical appearance, especially hair condition. Furthermore, it reflects consumptive ideology by implying that the optimal solution lies in selecting a specific product that offers multiple benefits in one. This aligns



with the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991), where beauty standards emphasize the management and control of the body through beauty product consumption.

Analysis of Pantene Anti-Dandruff Shampoo Advertisement

1. Denotative Meaning

At the denotative level, the Pantene advertisement emphasizes the “double solution” benefit, which claims to fight dandruff while reducing hair fall. Visually, the ad highlights the Pantene shampoo product with text and graphics emphasizing its active formula that keeps the scalp clean and hair strong. Scenes depict hair appearing healthy, shiny, and well-styled after product use. Verbal messages stress the convenience of an all-in-one solution for common hair problems.

2. Connotative Meaning

At the connotative level, the advertisement associates Pantene use with healthy, dandruff-free, and strong hair, symbolizing an active and confident woman. Emphasis on the “double solution” formula suggests that well-maintained hair represents resilience, control, and self-confidence. Another connotative meaning is convenience and efficiency: women no longer need multiple products, but can rely on a single solution for ideal hair.

3. Myth and Ideology

At the myth and ideology level, the Pantene advertisement reinforces the idea that healthy, strong, and problem-free hair is a hallmark of the ideal modern woman who manages her appearance and daily life effectively. The product is positioned as a single solution, normalizing normative beauty standards where women’s social value is tied to their hair condition. This ideological representation also reflects consumerist ideology, implying that purchasing and using a specific product is the path to achieving perfect hair. This aligns with the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991), which emphasizes the management and control of the body through beauty product consumption.

To synthesize the findings of the semiotic analysis, the results are comparatively presented in Table 1 using Roland Barthes’ three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth/ideology. The table summarizes how each advertisement constructs meaning at the literal level through visual and verbal signs. It also highlights the associative meanings that emerge from these signs at the connotative level. Finally, the comparison reveals broader ideological patterns, particularly in the shared representation of femininity and dominant beauty standards across the three brands.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Semiotic Analysis Results

| Brand | Denotative Level (Signifier & Literal Meaning) | Connotative Level (Associated Meaning) | Myth / Ideology Level |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Sunsilk Power Shot Creambath | A young modern woman frequently styling her hair; hair initially appears dry and less manageable; after using the product, hair becomes soft, smooth, and | Hair is associated with self-expression, confidence, and modern femininity. “Stay slay” connotes empowerment and the ability to remain stylish and confident despite frequent styling. | Constructs the myth that the ideal modern woman can balance an active lifestyle with flawless hair through proper product consumption. Reinforces dominant beauty ideology and |

| Brand | Denotative Level (Signifier & Literal Meaning) | Connotative Level (Associated Meaning) | Myth / Ideology Level |
|--|--|--|---|
| | healthy; slogan “Stay slay.” | | aligns with the beauty myth. |
| CLEAR Anti- Dandruff & Anti-Hair Fall Shampoo | Product visuals emphasizing “10x super vitamins & ginseng”; claims to fight dandruff (wet & dry) and hair fall; hair appears strong and healthy after use. | Strong, dandruff-free hair symbolizes resilience, control, and personal strength. The multifunctional formula connotes practicality and efficiency for modern women. | Promotes the myth that strong, problem-free hair defines the ideal woman. Reflects normative beauty standards and consumerist ideology by positioning the product as the comprehensive solution to hair problems. |
| Pantene Anti- Dandruff Shampoo | Emphasis on “double solution”; visuals of clean scalp and shiny, strong hair; product presented as all-in-one solution for dandruff and hair fall. | Healthy, shiny hair symbolizes confidence, control, and efficiency. The “double solution” suggests convenience and reliability. | Reinforces the ideology that women must maintain perfect hair to achieve social confidence. Reflects consumerism and the beauty myth by framing product consumption as the pathway to ideal femininity. |

As shown in Table 1, all three advertisements construct a similar semiotic pattern. At the denotative level, each ad presents literal visual and verbal signs emphasizing hair transformation, strength, and problem-solving formulas. At the connotative level, healthy hair is consistently associated with confidence, control, resilience, efficiency, and modern femininity. Finally, at the myth and ideology level, the advertisements collectively reinforce dominant beauty norms by naturalizing the idea that ideal womanhood is closely tied to flawless, well-managed hair achieved through product consumption. Thus, despite differences in slogans and functional claims, the three brands reproduce a common ideological framework aligned with the beauty myth, where women’s social value is subtly linked to their ability to maintain ideal physical appearance.

Discussion

All three advertisements depict women as confident, stylish, and expressive individuals, with healthy and beautiful hair positioned as the central focus of representation. In each case, hair is consistently associated with self-confidence and modern female identity, functioning as a symbol of beauty, self-control, and social status. The semiotic strategies used to construct these meanings include visual emphasis on shiny and flowing hair, dynamic hair movement, positive facial expressions, and verbal or textual elements highlighting the benefits and effectiveness of the product. Recent research confirms that stereotyped visual framing in beauty ads influences body image and self-perception, especially through social media exposure (Dai et al., 2024).



The advertisements differ in their product focus and thematic emphasis. Sunsilk highlights the idea of maintaining stylish hair despite frequent styling, using the concept of “stay slay” to foreground lifestyle and self-expression. In contrast, CLEAR emphasizes hair strength and protection against dandruff and hair fall through its “10x super vitamins and ginseng” formula, positioning resilience and durability as key attributes. Meanwhile, Pantene promotes a single solution for dandruff and hair fall with active ingredients, underscoring convenience and efficiency for women who manage multiple responsibilities. In addition, studies show that beauty advertising continues to reinforce conventional feminine roles while also shaping gender identities through repetition (Konwar & Saikia, 2024).

All three advertisements reproduce what Wolf (1991) conceptualizes as the beauty myth, in which the ideal woman is measured by the condition of her hair, expected to be perfect, healthy, and attractive. This ideology implies that women must continuously manage and maintain their hair through the use of specific products in order to sustain a positive self-image. Although the advertisements share this underlying framework, they differ in their additional connotative emphases: Sunsilk associates beauty with self-expression and lifestyle, Clear links it to strength and resilience, and Pantene frames it in terms of efficiency and an all-in-one solution. Media scholars also note that symbolic representations in advertising perpetuate norms of beauty that limit women’s roles and reinforce gendered expectations (Rachmayanti et al., 2024). From an industry perspective, such representations persist because conventional gender portrayals are often perceived as commercially effective and culturally familiar to audiences (Das, 2024). Even when brands attempt to frame beauty narratives through empowerment or ethical positioning, these strategies frequently remain embedded within broader commercial logics (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Moreover, consumption-driven media cultures on digital platforms amplify normative standards by prioritizing idealized visuals and engagement metrics (Van Duffelen et al., 2026).

Despite their different product focuses, all three advertisements ultimately convey the same underlying narrative: healthy hair signifies the ideal woman, which in turn represents confidence and social acceptance. In this way, shampoo advertisements function not only as promotional tools but also as media mechanisms that normalize specific standards of feminine beauty while simultaneously positioning consumerism as the primary means to attain those standards. Recent research shows that cosmetic and beauty advertising significantly shapes societal expectations and reinforces overconsumption by linking idealized appearance with personal value and social status (Chan, 2025). Ultimately, this dynamic underscores how advertising contributes to broader cultural norms that prioritize visual beauty and consumption as markers of success.

The findings further suggest that shampoo advertisements play a significant role in reinforcing consumerist culture, where personal confidence and social acceptance are closely linked to product consumption. The repeated association between ideal hair and personal success encourages women to continuously manage and discipline their appearance through the use of beauty products. In digital advertising environments, such representations are intensified by visibility-driven media cultures, where women are encouraged to present an idealized appearance to gain social recognition (Duffy & Hund, 2019). These patterns indicate that shampoo advertising not only reflects existing beauty standards but actively participates in sustaining beauty myths and consumer-driven identities within contemporary media landscapes.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focuses on only three shampoo advertisements—Sunsilk, Clear, and Pantene—therefore the





findings cannot be generalized to all hair care advertisements. Second, the study relies solely on semiotic textual analysis without incorporating audience reception, meaning that interpretations are based entirely on the researcher's analytical perspective. Additionally, this study does not examine advertising production processes, such as marketing strategies or the perspectives of advertisement creators, which may also influence how women are represented. These limitations highlight opportunities for further research using broader data sources and methodological approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the representation of women in shampoo advertisements using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework by analyzing denotative, connotative, and myth/ideological meanings in Sunsilk, Clear, and Pantene advertisements. The findings indicate that all three advertisements consistently position hair as a central marker of women's identity and social value. At the denotative level, women are depicted with healthy, shiny, and well-maintained hair as the result of using specific products. At the connotative and mythological levels, ideal hair symbolizes confidence, control, and modern femininity while reinforcing dominant beauty standards aligned with the beauty myth.

Theoretically, this study confirms the relevance of Barthes' semiotic approach in revealing how advertising constructs and naturalizes gendered beauty ideologies. It demonstrates that shampoo advertisements function not only as commercial media but also as cultural texts that reproduce normative standards of femininity. Practically, the findings encourage audiences to develop critical awareness of ideological messages embedded in beauty advertising and invite practitioners to promote more diverse representations of women. Future research is recommended to broaden the scope of analysis across different beauty product categories and incorporate audience reception or intersectional perspectives for deeper understanding.

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