

Social Representation of Women in Signs, Images and Codes

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Humans certainly have a desire to fulfill their needs to survive, be it clothing, food, or shelter. Along with the development of civilization, especially in modern human civilization, this consumption is always closely related to signs, images and codes where consumption that was previously carried out to fulfill primary needs, now becomes an action carried out because of the influence of other actors through the subconscious so that hyperconsumption can occur. The study examines the images, signs and codes that exist on women's bodies and the form of representation formed from their interactions on social media and the real world. The involvement of women in this discussion, because women are often seen as targets of advertising that are deeply involved in the arena of capitalism and media eroticism. The method used in this study is a qualitative method, this method was chosen because it is considered able to explore meaning in detail. The theory used is the theory of hyperreality put forward by Baudrillard and the theory of social representation put forward by Serge Moscovici. Both theories were chosen because they were considered relevant to studying phenomena related to this problem, namely regarding the social representation of women in the form of images, signs and codes. The results of this study are as follows: (1) social media plays a role in forming social representations of women, (2) The objects used by women are signs of the meaning or image they wish to convey.

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Introduction

How luxurious are the things we own and wear today? Is it all enough to symbolize our existence in society? This is the condition we face now as individuals living in the influence of the market and environmental ecosystem. Our existence depends on what we wear, how luxurious the item we wear is and how much it is loved by many people who follow "fashion". Perhaps when we understand this condition, we also indirectly realize that this condition is like semiotics, where there are "signs" that are closely related to meaning and society, or if in the realm of sociology we will realize about a concept called symbolic interactionism.

In semiotics, what is called a sign can be something concrete or even abstract. A sign can also be called a "thing" or in more philosophical language, a sign is usually called a "*thought*" because it involves the nature of entities and meaning in it. Every day, signs speak to us, whether through symbols, items or even gestures that we can see and feel. From here too, women are made actors to become subjects and at the same time objects in every formation of these signs, whether in terms of clothing, actions, speech and the items they carry where most of them are the result of the production and reproduction of signs in society (Piliang, 2004).

As we are aware, the internet, mass media and social media have always been part of our lives. Like a necessity in life, it seems as if lately we have made these things a necessity that must be fulfilled every day for consumption. It is undeniable that this habitualization arises because of the many advances in the field of information technology and affects the signs that are present in life through the human subconscious. The culture of following "trends" is a sign that people are eager to look modern and not outdated. This trend-following culture is a fertile body, especially among young people who actively consume social media content as the main course in their needs every time.

Through media broadcasts, especially social media, we can find a lot of advertisements promoting all kinds of products and the most prominent are products that are closely related to the culture of makeup, ranging from clothing, body care devices and makeup products such as *make-up*. Often these advertisements are promoted by an actor called a *beauty influencer*. Through *beauty influencers*, capitalism takes control of women's bodies and presents a new culture by creating new signs, such as how women can be said to be beautiful and have an ideal body in this era of modernity. The influence of influencers is increasingly felt, and their promotion has penetrated many domains. Not only do they post about their daily lives, they also strategically target segmented audiences. Influencers also blur the line between opinion and expertise. They are also spreading knowledge and profit-oriented business models (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2025). Influencers build an attractive and branded self-image on Instagram. They use Instagram's technological features to attract followers and increase popularity. They display things that become trending, so to speak, helping the preferences of the audience. The content created attempts to show how interconnected and how far they follow fashion trends. They show that a luxurious lifestyle is one that they want to present (Liu & Suh, 2017). Reality or we call it a fact, is hidden by pseudo reality (Hidayat, 2017). The pseudo reality is even more believable than the original reality. This is where capitalism makes women's consciousness drift in confusion and cannot distinguish between the two realities. Women are required to

become creatures of consumption, where in many economic actions, it will no longer be based on use value and turn into sign value.

In today's reality, consumption can no longer be interpreted as an act based on a use value, but more than that. The lifestyle of most women and the construction of how women can be seen as beautiful and ideal, which requires them to buy various products that are in trend, shows that their consumption is based on "sign value" and "symbol value". Sign value in this case is indicated by women's actions to pursue positive views from society, one of which is to be considered beautiful by other individuals and groups. Meanwhile, the symbol value will refer to the existence of women in the social environment.

Their consumption will depend on the spectacles they see and enjoy on social media, including advertisements for products with actors they like so that they will routinely consume for the value of signs hegemonized by capitalism about how a woman's physique should be. Everything will be determined in a relationship of signs, images and codes. As mentioned, signs are anything that has meaning in them, while images are things that appear real and can be felt by the senses but actually have no substantial existence, and codes are a combination of social signs to convey a message to others (Damayanti & Hidayat, 2019). Therefore, this article will try to examine the existence and representation of women in the realm of signs, images and codes in the midst of an increasingly modern life.

Literature Review

Serge Moscovici's Social Representation

Social representation is described as the result of collective elaboration among people about an object where the goal is to communicate and even to act. Moscovici put forward social representation in the study of social psychology through his study of *appearance* and *diffusion* in the realm of psychoanalysis in 1950. As a concept of psychoanalytic theory, social representation is closely related to context, meaning and language. Social representation reproduces its object by transforming it without neglecting psychological matters, which means that everything related to cognitive or psychological functions as well as all social factors are very important in this concept (Jodelet, 2006). In this perspective, affective and emotional elements can articulate the content of ideas that are all taken into account, by re-situating representations in psychic processes and intersubjectivity. The goal is to transform *unfamiliar* information into *familiar* information through a process called *anchoring* and *objectification* (Ratri, 2011).

In social representation, *anchoring* is a process of changing objects in social contexts, events, as well as actions that were initially less recognizable into a form that is very recognizable by the community. Signs, experiences, relations and practices are transformed to fit a common *worldview* and existing categories can erase many things that were previously unfamiliar and frightening (Smith J A et al., 2015). In other terms, this process can also be referred to as *generalizing* and *particularizing*. In the same situation, when there is a process of conventionalization of experience or the formation of knowledge through *social sharing*, the *anchoring* process can be unique because it succeeds in transcending existing conceptions of classification and typification, especially in cognitive matters (Ratri, 2011). In social representation there is almost no perception of the results of thinking without the existence of *anchoring*. Its purpose

is to facilitate interpretation of characteristics and understanding of the intentions behind individual and societal behavior.

After *anchoring*, in this social representation we will encounter *objectivication*. *Objectivication* is a more active process if we compare it with *anchoring* which has been briefly and clearly reviewed above. *Objectivication* is the process of transferring scientific theory into the discourse of people's daily communication activities, where there are main components, namely the selection process and the process of decontextualizing elements of a theory that are mostly complicated to understand for some people to be easy to understand and use. In more scientific words, this process performs the formation of a *figurative nucleus* and naturalization of elements (Smith J A et al., 2015). There are also two implications in *objectification*, the first is that things that were previously abstract in scientific theories become concrete and detailed concepts, or things that are mentally conceptualized in such a way turn into something repressed. The second is when this mental conception has entered the arena of everyday knowledge, then various examples and applications of this mental conception will be easily found by the public (Smith J A et al., 2015) describes the process of social representation of scientific knowledge or *reified universe* can be accepted by ordinary people and then can become *common* knowledge or *common sense* (Suhada, 2023).

Jean Paul Baudrillard's Hyperreality

Baudrillard describes hyperreality as a desert, a mirage can be seen from a distance in the desert, but when approached it disappears. It is the same when someone watches something on television, the internet or other social media. Someone on social media will portray something according to what they want ranging from sadness or happiness. But when we get closer, we will realize that what we are watching is a fiction, a fantasy or an invention. The world of reality is very difficult to distinguish from the world of hyperreality. At this stage, social media has developed into a second reality. Social media becomes a picture of the development of lifestyle (Asharudin, 2023).

In hyperreality, Baudrillard explains that reality is divided into four stages, which include (1) the *image* is a reflection of the basic reality, (2) the *image* will create and distort the basic reality, (3) the state of the *image* will erase the basic reality, and (4) this state will relate to any reality, anywhere and this is what is called the real *simulacrum* (Asharudin, 2023). Of the four stages, the fourth stage is the most prominent and determines hyperreality. The *image* can make our view blurry so that we cannot realize the absence of the *image*. In simple terms, this image or *image*, is more trusted than the real situation.

Hyperreality is the manifestation and necessity of simulacra, visual and attractive in social media. With the prefix of the word "hyper" we must have grasped that there is a combination of reality and image, a mixing of signs of reality, so the sign is only a representation of the reality. In hyperreality, we will not find a clear indication of the extent of the meaning or meaning of this reality, how this reality runs or even no specific characteristics of how the signs that characterize reality begin (Asharudin, 2023). As we understand the word "hyper" which means excessive, this is indicated to things or actions that are disproportionate, it could be an excessive reality, a world that goes beyond what makes sense.

Real or reality means the presence of common sense, qualities or conditions that are really "real", signs whose existence is objective not just an idea, not just imaginary or fictitious. Hyperreality really creates conditions that are clearly full of falsehoods that are blended with real or "real" things, so the categories of truth, falsehood, original, will not apply in this world of hyperreality (Minan, 2017). Contextually, this theory can be used to see and understand how women struggle with social media virtually, how they consume for the fulfillment of fashion in an era that is always shrouded in the word "trend" and what is viral.

Hyperreality was created by Baudrillard to accompany the advancement of technology and its transformation of society in detail. Like the new era of social relations in social media, hyperreality is used to describe this condition. The world becomes *hyperreal*, filled with *simulacra* in which *images* are shifted by the production of class conflict as a core component of contemporary society (Asharudin, 2023). The existence of individuals who act as actors and are dubbed *beauty influencers* on social media, is one example of hyperreality conditions, when many women are influenced by the seduction of these advertisements and influence all their actions in the real world, such as consuming make-up products, fashionable clothes and other accessories that are in trend.

All women's actions in this condition may now have no real reproductive value, but they are always based on simulation. The *hyperreal* replaces the *real* or transcendent, displacing the immanent and contingent. Everything done by women on social media only comes from and is based on immanence (Barroso, 2022). In a world full of uncertainty, it is always possible if the image is wrapped in high resolution from the start of the image editing feature, image filters and supported by the presence of *beauty influencers* with all the lure of ideal beauty according to community standards. Now everything can be achieved easily, capitalism makes it all for the sake of the goods it produces to be marketed freely and get profit from these activities. Through smart phones connected to social media, women no longer need to watch television to see advertisements for beauty products or go to beauty clinics to achieve beauty. Simply by opening a *digital marketplace* that has now been converted into an application, women can with one touch to own and use the items they buy there.

Research Methods

This article uses qualitative methods in describing the situation as realistically as possible in understanding each meaning studied (Putri et al., 2023). This research method can be used to explore meaning and is used to examine natural objects without any researcher manipulation (Magister et al., n.d.). The focus of the research as well as the subject leads to the lives of women who consume social media and how they present themselves in society with signs, images and codes. The data in this study were obtained directly and face-to-face through interviews, observation and documentation with women social media users and connoisseurs of beauty devices in Banten, whether it is clothing, treatments to facial makeup campaigned by social media through actors called *Beauty Influencers*. The *culaitiaf* method can help the author to be able to get in-depth information about the meaning, action patterns and values given by the subjects related to the theme of discussion in this article.

Results and Discussion

Let us start with a discussion of action. As we understand, action always involves an impulse from the heart that consequently stimulates one's senses. This stimulation will later make a person do something according to what he thinks and is considered to be his need. This condition is referred to as *impulse* in Mead's concept which is also quite focused on discussing action. Almost the same with the definition of action put forward by Weber, where action is behavior in which there is involvement of the thought process, there are also motives, intentions and meanings indicated in it. Action occurs when someone does it with subjective meaning. This also underlies the definition of social action, which is where the action is wrapped in this subjective meaning, involving someone else to create a concept of instrumental rational action, value rational action, affective and traditional (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019).

From the concept of action, we will understand the motives of women in carrying out actions oriented towards beauty values that are constructed by society through advertisements for beauty products on the social media they use. The pervasiveness of the hegemony of how women's bodies should appear in society makes women think that all products that can make them beautiful must be bought and used as soon as possible. They seem to be aroused and consider all these products as primary needs in addition to clothing, food and shelter in the real definition. It is very apparent that women react automatically to stimulus which is also related to impulse so that they will feel satisfied when the products they have reached and used.

In this study, researchers used 10 specific articles as references for analysis.

Title	Author	Content
Influencers Navigating Platforms, expertise, branding, and authenticity	(Jerslev & Mortensen, 2025)	The influence of influencers is growing and their promotions have penetrated many domains. Not only do they post about their daily lives, they also strategically target segmented audiences.
Grief Labor on Instagram Resilient Influencers and Platformed Grief	(Harju & Pentikäinen, 2025)	Influencers offer their followers an aestheticized way of dealing with problems. Life events are turned into commercial products that they offer to their followers.
Relevance, Commitment, and Impact Aspirational Formulations of Investing related influencer collaborations in the context of ethical fashion	(Hirsto & Hjerpe, 2025)	There is currently a new phenomenon, where influencers consider their followers as "potential investors" in a business context. Lifestyle and fashion influencers do promotions with fashion companies.
"Meaning" in Social Media	(Lomborg, 2015)	To make sense of social media, we can look at stakeholders' perspectives on their practices, understandings, and preferences regarding social media and social discourse in social media.

Improvised Marketing Interventions in Social Media	(Borah et al., 2020)	The potential of IMI (Improvised Marketing Interventions) in social media and its features when managed by companies proactively, they will get benefits and value.
Social media influencer vs. virtual influencer: The mediating role of source credibility and authenticity in advertising effectiveness whitin AI influencer marketing	(Kim & Wang, 2024)	A person with a large following on social media is called an influencer, they can shape the attitudes of their audience or followers according to their target.
Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style Bloggers on Instagram	(Liu & Suh, 2017)	Influencers build an attractive and branded self-image on Instagram. They use Instagram's technological features to attract followers and increase popularity. They showcase what is trending, which can be said to help the audience's preferences.
Fashion Promoting on Instagram with Eye Tracking: Curvy Girl Influencers Versus Fashion Brands in Spain and Portugal	(Mañas-Viniegra et al., 2019)	Self branding affects identity formation self-esteem, credibility, persuasion, preferences and social comparison
Personal Branding Content Creator on Instagram social media	(Lois & Ayu Candraningrum, n.d.)	A well-formed personal branding can be used by a person to show who he is, what he does and what makes him different from other people.
Personal Branding Influencers on Tik Tok Social Media	(Yumna et al., 2021)	Personal branding is used to instill a positive perception of a person to the public.

Manipulated Bodies

Thoughts are the result of internalization of the social communication process that makes meaning for individuals to exist (Mead, 2018). So it can be mentioned pragmatically that the mind is the process of thinking towards problem solving. Here, the mind is the ability to be able to process the responses indicated by the gestures of others. The mind can also show us the extent to which humans can be aware of the objects around them and the meanings of these objects, who and what role they play (Restu & Agustina, 2017). The mind can manipulate the meaning or even enrich the meaning of the symbols around humans and their minds. The mind, in its concept, has what is called vocal gestures, imitation, as well as symbols whose meanings are very diverse. The term gesture is aimed at the beginning of social actions that stimulate the response of others, while vocal gestures are vocal elements that become a stimulus through a person's communication process, because when the mind works it will still have a social nature that involves other people's assumptions about the actions that will be carried out (Mead, 2018). In this condition, after the vocal gesture penetrates into a

person, that person will imitate the sound he hears and perform actions which tend to imitate the stimulus. If a person is successfully influenced by vocal gestures, then that person will bring out the meaning of the phenomenon that occurs.

Many possibilities show that social media has this vocal gesture, through actors called *beauty influencers* and their activities on social media, women will imitate each other and imitate every symbol attached to the *beauty influencer's* body. Speaking of self-concept, there are factors that influence women's actions to do it all, the first is when individual women can be accepted by others, liked because of their physical condition which is fairly close to the word beautiful. on the other hand, if someone underestimates, blames and rejects a lot, women will tend not to accept their condition. The second is the existence of a referral group, where in social life, at least these women will become members of the existing group. This referral group will direct women to behaviors or meanings that are in accordance with the group's mindset (Masturah, 2017).

Indeed, this is the case, similar to what Mead said, where the self means an individual through his experience of social processes, such as interactional actions and his ability to think. In the self, individuals can be subjects (*I*), as well as objects (*Me*) (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019). The explanation of this is that women can be "I" when they are in a subject position and become "Me" when they act as an object in front of society. Women will do anything to be accepted and become "Me", considered their existence in any way, one of which is to create their body as attractive as possible, as beautiful as possible and as ideal as possible in front of society.

This situation is exacerbated when capitalism and patriarchy openly compete for power over women's bodies to gain profits for themselves. Capitalism clearly uses women's bodies as a tool to gain a lot of profit from selling women's bodies through mass-produced products and through stereotypes that women should look ideal like the actors they use in every advertisement. Meanwhile, patriarchy expects obedience from the female body, by placing women as objects, either to be exploited by their bodies, and helping capitalism to attach the stigma that women must be beautiful for them so that they can also accept the condition of the woman. From time to time, women are never free from these shackles, continuously, using new styles and methods to be exploited throughout time.

Women are easily manipulated using the image of the ideal body, and the sad thing is that they seem to accept that every inch of their body must be continuously improved, polished with chemicals contained in *make-up*, wrapped in clothes that are in trend and accessories of luxury and gentrification. This manipulation penetrates their subconscious, which in turn leads to endless consumption in order to look beautiful and ideal. This condition succeeds in shaping the sign to be so very important for women, because the existence of women in society must also be accompanied by the presence of signs in the form of *beauty* and ideal body. Women as viewers of *beauty influencer* content, will respond to what they see from social media in real life, before finally being manipulated and doing the actions she does as something she considers rational.

Locus of Female Consumer

In a general definition, *locus* can be defined as the place where an event takes place. Without any argument, that's what *locus* means in micro terms. In a concept explained by Baudrillard, he defines this *locus* as *simulacra* which is a reality space. In *simulacra*, there is a process of reduplication or recycling of many fragments of

different lives, whether in the form of commodity images, facts, signs and codes that pile up on each other and in the same dimension without us knowing the existence of the end side of each fragment. *Counter feit, production and simulation* play women explicitly with their styles of imitating and reduplicating actors in the social media they see (Wandalibrata, 2018).

Here it is quite clear that social media is the *simulacra*. By influencing women's experiences, opinions and self-image, women will mobilize all the persuasive means of the most transparent form, namely representation supported by manipulation and simulation. In this *locus*, women will never again have the proprietorship to be oriented to themselves. She will live in unreality, blurry and difficult to distinguish between real reality and imaginary reality. In this reality, reality itself has turned into hyperreality, as if there is no more reality, because women are confused about what is real and imaginary. The shadows of advertisements and recommendations displayed by *beauty influencers* have successfully trapped women in this context. Many signs are reproduced there, so that everything is crisscrossed in women's lives as individual trend followers who are constantly trying to appear perfect in popular culture. Their consciousness is blurred, so there is little portion for them to control their own body as *I (I)*.

Basically, *images* can trick anyone, so that we, not only women, will be made unaware of what exists and what is not visible to the senses. *Images* in social media become multi-interpreted and make it difficult for us to distinguish between *semiotic signifier* and *signified*, between sign and signifier. The distance between the two is almost lost so that the meaning will depend on the subjective experience of everyone. At this moment, we seem to be faced with a picture of reality itself. This is the condition that according to Baudrillard *immediate, the unsignified* or in shorter terms is called *simulacrum* (Rajagukguk & Sofianto, 2019).

Representation of Women in the Culture of Hyperreality

Luxury goods can be a symbol of self-existence in society. It is not uncommon for someone to become famous or famous on social media to show off their possessions. Signs in the form of objects that are sometimes followed by the wearer's gestures seem to speak to others about the meaning contained. Social media is an effective arena for interaction and symbol exchange, as users are not limited by time and space. A person can frame himself in the minds of others through what he displays or uploads on social media. Most social media users know their fellow users only in cyberspace. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between reality or imaginary. A person assumes what is seen on social media is something that happens, in this situation sometimes checking the truth will be ignored.

In line with the concept of social representation, Moscovici describes the process of social representation from scientific knowledge or *reified universe* can be accepted by ordinary people and then can become *common knowledge* or *common sense* (Suhada, 2023). Social media acts as a disseminator of information, making things that were originally only accessible to certain people accessible to all members of society. Thus, many things that were previously exclusive can become commonplace. This happens in almost every walk of life, and women's lifestyles are no exception. Knowledge about goods, brands, uses, benefits to the composition of an item can be accessed easily today, not only by certain circles, but it also makes education develop unlimited.

In this study, it can be seen clearly that women convey symbols through various media and are certainly influenced by knowledge. Knowledge about certain products also affects how they package these symbols. Nowadays, general knowledge about brands of cosmetics, *skin care*, clothes, bags are easily accessible on the internet and these items can also be purchased on *e-commerce*. With this convenience

Posts on social media are interesting. Many assume that what is uploaded on social media is something that happens. Few care whether the person has a life as shown on social media or not. Because meaning is so important, it makes competing to display interesting things. These things can be called images, images as rich people, images as people who have a high social spirit, images of people who are successful in business, images of people who have a healthy lifestyle, images of people who have knowledge about luxury products and even images of people who have a difficult life and need to be pitied are also on social media. The image is not necessarily in accordance with what happened, but more inclined to what a person wants to be seen or judged by the general public.

Everything will be determined in a relationship of sign, image and code. As mentioned, signs are everything that has meaning in it, while images are things that appear real and can be felt by the senses but have no substantial existence, and codes are a combination of social signs to convey a message to others (Damayanti & Hidayat, 2019). Social relations cannot be separated from symbols that have meaning in them or can be called signs. On women's bodies, signs are spread in various ways ranging from the clothes they wear to even facial makeup. The clothes one wears can be a sign of one's social class. For example, when using *branded* clothing, people who see it can automatically assess the price and interpret that the person using it is from a certain social class because they can afford luxury goods. The sign that is spreads is not just a coincidence, but the user has a certain purpose or a certain meaning that he wants to convey to others. Just like clothes, simple things like cosmetics also have meanings that users want to convey to others, which can be in the form of reputation, social class and so on. Cosmetic products also have a stratum and will automatically affect someone's view of the user.

Hyperreality blurs the line between the real and the imaginary, where simulation is more attractive than reality. *Beauty influencers* are influential in the formation of signs or symbols that exist in women, they form beauty standards and spread them. The signs that have been formed are then consumed by women through the media, both social media and television. The content created tends to standardize that beautiful is white, beautiful is lancing, beautiful is smooth skin. These things are more interesting than reality, women's skin varies sometimes textured, porous and even acne. Women's body shapes also vary. It is not uncommon for products sold in the market to be unsafe and also *overclaim*. False promises cannot be avoided from fake products that have not been tested for safety. However, due to various factors, sometimes women are easily tempted by false promises offered by unscrupulous sellers of dangerous cosmetics. Promises about being white in a few days, low price offers, *claim* that the product is safe. Because of the loss of boundaries between the real and the imaginary, it is difficult for humans to distinguish whether what they meet on social media is reality or just fictitious.

Conclusion

Hyperreality is inseparable from human life today, things that are real and imagined have blurred boundaries. Women's bodies become a medium for the exchange of symbols and meanings. Codes are always closely related to everything about women, whether in the form of speech, actions, or even the way they display clothing and other objects in public. The objects used are silent but speak as if conveying the intentions of the users to the people who see them. In the process of hyperreality, there is a process of social representation of scientific knowledge or *reified universe* that can be accepted by ordinary people and can then become *common* knowledge or *common sense*. Things that were originally exclusive at this time can be accessed by anyone so that the knowledge is spread unlimitedly. The involvement of women in this discussion is because women are often seen as advertising targets who are deeply involved in the arena of capitalism and media eroticism. The lifestyles of most women and the construction of how women can be seen as beautiful and ideal that requires them to buy various products that are in trend, shows that their consumption is based on "sign value" and "symbol value". Their consumption will depend on the spectacles they see and enjoy on social media, including advertisements for products with actors they like, so they will routinely consume for the value of signs hegemonized by capitalism about how a woman's physique should be.

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