



**The social construction of beauty in the digital era: Gen z's  
interpretation of beauty standards in Jakarta**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to understand how Generation Z in Jakarta perceives beauty as constructed by social media, with a focus on beauty standards often shaped by homogeneous representations. These standards influence individuals' perceptions of beauty, which in turn shape their identity and self-image. This research employs Berger's social construction theory to analyse how social media functions as a primary agent in shaping perceptions of beauty. A qualitative-descriptive approach is employed to explore the experiences and perceptions of Generation Z regarding these beauty standards. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and content analysis of social media. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with a total of six people chosen as informants and actively consuming beauty content on social media. They come from diverse backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive perspective. The findings indicate that social media, particularly Instagram, plays a significant role in internalizing homogeneous beauty standards, such as fair skin and slim bodies. However, a growing resistance movement among Generation Z advocates for diversity and inclusivity in defining beauty. This study highlights the importance of critical education regarding the impact of social media on beauty perceptions and the need to introduce more diverse and unrestricted representations of beauty.*

**Keywords:** Social Construction; Beauty; Generation Z; Social Media.

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Received: January 22, 2025; Accepted: March 18, 2025; Published: March 31, 2025

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/equality.v11i1.28836>

## ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana Generasi Z di Jakarta memaknai kecantikan yang dikonstruksi oleh media sosial, dengan fokus pada standar kecantikan yang sering kali dibentuk oleh representasi homogen. Standar kecantikan ini memengaruhi cara pandang individu terhadap apa yang dianggap indah, yang pada akhirnya turut membentuk identitas dan citra diri. Penelitian ini menggunakan perspektif teori konstruksi sosial dari Berger untuk menganalisis bagaimana media sosial berfungsi sebagai agen utama dalam membentuk persepsi tentang kecantikan. Pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif diterapkan untuk menggali pengalaman dan persepsi Generasi Z terkait dengan standar kecantikan tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis konten media sosial. Informan dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling, dengan jumlah enam orang yang dijadikan informan dan aktif mengonsumsi konten kecantikan di media sosial. Mereka berasal dari latar belakang yang beragam untuk memberikan perspektif yang lebih komprehensif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial, terutama Instagram, memainkan peran penting dalam menginternalisasi standar kecantikan homogen, seperti kulit putih dan tubuh ramping. Meskipun demikian, terdapat gerakan resistensi yang berkembang di kalangan Generasi Z, yang mendorong keberagaman dan inklusivitas dalam definisi kecantikan. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya pendidikan kritis mengenai dampak media sosial terhadap persepsi kecantikan serta kebutuhan untuk memperkenalkan representasi kecantikan yang lebih beragam dan tidak terbatas.*

**Kata Kunci:** Konstruksi Sosial; Kecantikan; Generasi Z; Media Sosial.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Awareness of the importance of beauty emerged when we observed our friends comparing their skin tones and body shapes to the standards portrayed on social media. This experience marked the beginning of our realization of how social constructions of beauty influence women's self-perception. Statements like “You are beautiful if you have fair skin” or “You are beautiful if your nose is pointed” are commonly heard in daily conversations at home, school, or on social media. These statements reflect beauty standards that have been deeply ingrained in societal culture. Over time, many women begin to feel insecure because they believe they do not meet these prevailing standards. This social pressure is further reinforced by various beauty advertisements that promote an idealized image of women. Such narrow beauty standards shape the perception that beauty must follow a predetermined pattern. As a result, many women feel compelled to alter their appearance to align with societal expectations. This phenomenon demonstrates that beauty is not merely a physical trait but also a socially constructed concept that continues to evolve. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that beauty holds a broader meaning beyond mere physical appearance.

Growing up in the digital era, particularly in Jakarta, we witnessed how platforms like Instagram significantly shape the definition of beauty. Through influencer posts and beauty advertisements, the concept of beauty has become increasingly narrow and exclusive. The ideal image often emphasizes fair skin, a slim figure, and symmetrical facial features as

primary indicators of beauty. This uniform representation causes many women to feel pressured to conform to the beauty standards set by the media. As a result, whitening products, skincare treatments, and cosmetic procedures have gained popularity to help individuals meet these expectations. Many women feel that beauty is the key to gaining recognition and social acceptance. Social media has become the main tool in spreading and reinforcing these rigid beauty ideals. This imbalance has led to beauty standards becoming more homogeneous and unattainable for many people. Additionally, social media algorithms that prioritize certain beauty-related content further reinforce these norms. Thus, the influence of social media in shaping modern beauty standards cannot be overlooked.

Beauty is often perceived as a trait inherently associated with women. In the modern era, many women strive to appear beautiful to gain recognition based on their physical appearance. Beyond natural tendencies, considerable pressure also comes from social, educational, and professional environments. In public education, especially in academic and workplace settings, physical appearance frequently becomes a key factor in evaluating individuals. A woman's value is often elevated if she meets prevailing beauty standards (Wolf's, 2002). As a result, many women feel pressured to conform to these expectations to be accepted or considered worthy in their surroundings. This pressure influences their choices in fashion, skincare, and even cosmetic procedures. Social media further amplifies these beauty ideals, making it harder for women to escape unrealistic expectations. Many women feel compelled to invest time and money to maintain a certain look. Over time, this constant demand for perfection can impact self-esteem and overall well-being.

Wolf (2002) argues that a woman's value is tied to her appearance according to beauty standards, and the "beauty myth" serves as a social construct to control and limit women's development. As women gain more freedom and power, the pressure to meet unrealistic beauty standards intensifies, leading many to conform for acceptance. Over time, beauty's meaning has evolved with technological advancements and digital media (Pratiwi, 2018). Beauty standards, once diverse, have become more generalized due to technological progress and social media influence (Farleni & Widayatmoko, 2016). Platforms like Instagram have shaped users' perceptions of beauty and self-image (Pratiwi et al., 2022), pushing women to meet the beauty standards created by social media (Sihombing, 2024). The widespread use of beauty filters and photo-editing tools further reinforces unrealistic ideals. Women often feel pressured to enhance their appearance digitally before sharing images online. This normalization of altered beauty creates a gap between reality and online portrayals. As a result, many women struggle with self-esteem issues when they fail to match these idealized images. Encouraging media literacy and diverse representations of beauty is crucial to reducing the negative impact of these standards.

In today's digital era, women are easily bombarded with beauty advertisements portraying the ideal woman as tall and slender, with a well-proportioned figure, fair skin, a sharp nose, defined cheekbones, rosy lips, shiny black hair, and other specific features (Sandhy, 2016). This ideal image is not only propagated through advertisements but also increasingly disseminated via new media, such as women's forums. One example is the Indonesian blog *femaledaily.com* (Sandhy, 2016). Social media platforms further amplify these beauty standards through influencer endorsements and viral beauty trends. Many women feel pressured to conform to these ideals to gain social acceptance. The popularity of

beauty tutorials and product reviews reinforces the desire to achieve a flawless appearance. Digital filters and photo-editing apps contribute to unrealistic expectations by modifying facial features. As a result, women may develop insecurities about their natural looks. The constant exposure to idealized beauty can lead to self-comparison and dissatisfaction. Raising awareness about diverse beauty standards is crucial in promoting self-acceptance and confidence.

The social construction of beauty has evolved alongside rapid changes in society, particularly in the digital era where Generation Z plays a key role. A survey by Rachmayani (2023) found that 96% of Indonesian women consider beauty essential to womanhood, a view heavily shaped by social media. These platforms have become spaces for promoting and reinforcing beauty standards through algorithms, influencer posts, advertisements, and filters, leading to more homogenized and often unrealistic beauty ideals. This pressures women to conform, impacting their mental well-being and driving the beauty industry's growth (Rachmayani, 2023). Many feel the need to invest in skincare, makeup, and cosmetic procedures to meet these expectations. Social media also fosters a culture of comparison, where women measure their appearance against idealized images. The rise of beauty challenges and viral trends further reinforces unattainable beauty norms. Women who do not fit these standards may experience lower self-esteem and social exclusion. The pursuit of perfection can lead to financial strain as individuals spend significant amounts on beauty products. Encouraging diverse representations of beauty is essential to promoting a healthier and more inclusive perception of self-worth.

The widespread impact of homogenized beauty standards is particularly concerning for younger generations. Elias and Gill (2017) discuss the concept of the “selfie gaze,” where individuals engage in self-surveillance to ensure their appearance aligns with online standards. This can lead to appearance anxiety, where women feel distressed if they don't meet the visual expectations set by digital media (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Social media platforms constantly expose users to curated and filtered images, reinforcing unrealistic beauty ideals. Many young women feel pressured to edit their photos before posting them online. This digital perfectionism often creates a gap between online portrayals and real-life appearances. Over time, repeated exposure to idealized beauty can lower self-confidence and increase dissatisfaction with one's natural look. The rise of cosmetic procedures and beauty apps reflects the growing desire to conform to these unattainable standards. Psychological effects, such as body dysmorphia and low self-esteem, have become more prevalent among social media users. Encouraging media literacy and promoting diverse beauty representations are essential to counteracting these negative impacts.

The continuous consumption of beauty-related content reinforces the idea that an individual's worth, especially for women, is largely determined by their appearance in the digital space. Social media has become a visual competition, pressuring women to invest emotionally and financially to meet beauty standards set by algorithms and capitalism. The rise of beauty influencers and celebrities further amplifies these pressures, as their curated appearances set unrealistic expectations. Many women feel obligated to follow beauty trends to maintain relevance in online spaces. Digital filters and editing tools contribute to a culture where natural beauty is often overlooked. The monetization of beauty content also encourages individuals to modify their looks for social and financial gain. As a result, beauty has become

a commodity rather than a personal expression. The increasing demand for skincare and cosmetic products reflects this societal shift. Psychological effects, such as self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction, have become more common among women exposed to these ideals. Promoting self-acceptance and diverse beauty standards is crucial in addressing the negative impacts of digital beauty culture.

According to Novianti and Darmawan (2024), these beauty standards deeply influence all aspects of life in Indonesia, particularly body care practices. The ideal of fairness is often seen as the standard for Indonesian women's physical appearance, leading to indirect discrimination. This issue is compounded for Generation Z, who not only consume but also create digital content, shaping beauty trends. Growing up with social media playing a crucial role in identity and social acceptance, this generation faces pressure from ever-changing, often unrealistic beauty standards (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Many young women invest in skincare and cosmetics to conform to societal expectations. The constant exposure to curated beauty content reinforces narrow definitions of attractiveness. Those who fail to meet these standards may experience social exclusion or reduced self-esteem. Promoting diverse representations of beauty is essential to fostering a healthier self-image.

In the Indonesian context, this study expands upon research by Saraswati (2017) who traced the historical development of skin-whitening practices and the idealization of fair skin in Indonesia, rooted in colonial influences and global beauty marketing. Meanwhile Suci (2018) noted how beauty ideals in Indonesia continue to evolve while maintaining an emphasis on skin tone as an indicator of beauty and social status. The focus on Generation Z as both consumers and creators of beauty content aligns with the work of Cwynar-Horta (2016), who explored how young women navigate between reproducing conventional beauty standards and creating counter-narratives on social media platforms. This study examines the beauty preferences of Generation Z in Jakarta, aiming to understand the diversity of beauty definitions amidst the changing cultural, social, and technological influences. It explores how digital media shapes Gen Z's views on beauty and how they respond to these pressures through reproduction, resistance, or new narratives. This aligns with the findings of Boursier et al. (2020), who highlighted how social media pressures influence self-concept and social anxiety among adolescents. Additionally, Cohen et al. (2021) demonstrated how digital media consumption not only shapes beauty standards but also creates space for resistance against dominant norms through online communities and body positivity movements. The study also supports findings by Matthew (2024) which emphasize the role of influencers in shaping beauty perceptions and how young audiences navigate between beauty aspirations and social realities.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *2.1. The Meaning of "Beauty" and Naomi Wolf's Beauty Myth*

The concept of beauty has evolved significantly throughout history, representing a complex and multifaceted idea studied across various disciplines. Wardani, (2024) research in the sociology of body and beauty highlights that perceptions of beauty vary greatly between cultures and historical periods. Beauty standards extend beyond physical traits, reflecting the social, cultural, and psychological connections within a society. These standards often mirror

the core values and beliefs of a given time, demonstrating how aesthetic preferences adapt to societal changes and evolving values.

Research by Sihombing (2024) shows that the concept of beauty now extends beyond facial appearance to include personality and behavior, becoming a social construct influenced by media and popular culture. Wolf critiques the beauty industry for creating unrealistic standards that serve to control women. She explains that the “beauty myth” is an ideology that makes it difficult for women to achieve an impossible standard of “perfection,” perpetuating gender inequality. This myth pressures women to adhere to strict diets and buy expensive beauty products, often portrayed by social media as a homogenized ideal body, failing to reflect the diversity of women (Wolf, 2002). According to Sihombing, (2024), the beauty myth has shaped perceptions of uniform beauty standards, compelling women to constantly conform to the expectations set by the media and the beauty industry.

Research by Pratiwi et al. (2022) shows that social media platforms like Instagram have shaped teenagers' self-image and beauty standards, aligning with Wolf's critique of how the media perpetuates the beauty myth. Irawati et al (2024) emphasize that in Indonesia, beauty perceptions are influenced by both local cultural values and global standards, with a shift from traditional to modern beauty ideals. Indonesian women also face social pressures to conform to these idealized standards, often driven by capitalist and patriarchal values. Nurdin et al. (2024) reveal how mass media contributes to constructing and reinforcing unrealistic beauty ideals in Indonesian society, particularly through advertisements.

## 2.2. *The Social Construction of Beauty*

The formation of beauty standards in society occurs through a complex and ongoing process of social interaction, in line with the social construction theory Berger & Luckman's (1998). This theory explains that social reality is shaped through three interrelated dialectical processes. The first is externalization, where individuals express themselves in the social world, such as voicing opinions about beauty standards. The second is objectification, where these expressions become accepted as truth by society. The third is internalization, where individuals internalize these societal norms, incorporating them into their personal consciousness, like evaluating themselves according to societal beauty standards.

The social construction of beauty is dynamic and constantly evolving, with beauty standards differing across societies and changing over time. This highlights that beauty is not fixed or universal but is shaped by social consensus, influenced by culture, history, and specific social contexts. Wolf (2002) offers a critical feminist perspective, arguing that beauty standards are part of a larger system of social control. Patriarchal and capitalist systems create and maintain these standards to control women. Wolf explains that the “beauty myth” operates through institutions like the media, the beauty industry, and the workplace, perpetuating unrealistic beauty ideals. This drives demand for beauty products while also imposing psychological and social pressures on women. Failing to meet these standards often leads to issues with self-esteem and social acceptance (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

The social construction of beauty is evident in everyday practices, such as clothing choices, the use of cosmetics, and decisions to undergo beauty procedures. These actions are shaped by collective beliefs about what is considered beautiful. This understanding influences

not only how women perceive and evaluate themselves but also how society values them in different contexts, including education and the workplace.

### 2.3. *Social Media and the Evolution of “Beauty”*

The Society 5.0 era, marked by rapid advancements in digital technology, has brought significant changes to various aspects of social life (Schumi et al., 2024). This technological development is closely linked to the evolution of human culture, which progresses faster as culture advances. While technology provides numerous benefits, such as simplifying daily activities and facilitating global information exchange, the ease of access to digital technology has also influenced the creation of new definitions of beauty, often shaped by influencers promoting beauty products on social media platforms. In the digital era, beauty standards are no longer naturally formed but are constructed and disseminated on a massive scale through digital content (Nyoman et al., 2024).

Social media, particularly Instagram, plays a crucial role in shaping beauty perceptions, especially among younger generations like Gen Z. Accounts like @ugmcantik, for example, construct beauty by featuring college students deemed attractive, reinforcing the ideal beauty myth characterized by fair skin, a slim physique, and modern fashion sense (Maulidya & Milda, 2022). These representations heavily influence other social media users, who may feel compelled to emulate these beauty standards to gain social validation. This phenomenon shows how social media not only presents beauty standards but also communicates “beauty privilege,” granting social advantages to individuals considered attractive. Additionally, some social media accounts commodify appearances by presenting beauty as a consumable product, often to attract sponsorships from beauty companies, which can have psychological impacts on users who feel pressured to conform to these standards (Rinaldi, 2023).

### 2.4. *Generation Z*

As the first generation to grow up in the digital age, Generation Z demonstrates unique attitudes and behaviours in defining the concept of beauty. Monica Anderson et al. (2018) reveal the complexity of how this generation views beauty, reflecting a blend of progressive values and the impact of digitalization. Their research shows that Generation Z takes a more flexible and inclusive approach to defining beauty, yet at the same time, cannot fully escape the pressures of beauty standards disseminated through digital platforms.

Generation Z (born between 1997-2012) exhibits a distinctive mindset and behavior in interpreting the concept of beauty (Kamil & Laksmi, 2023). Turner (2018) explains that Gen Z has characteristics different from previous generations, particularly in terms of digital media consumption and identity formation. His research indicates that 95% of Gen Z use social media platforms as their primary source of information, including in shaping perceptions of beauty.

A study by Fardouly et al. (2021) on beauty perceptions among Gen Z found that this generation has a more complex view of beauty, where they tend to challenge conventional beauty standards and advocate for diversity. The research shows how this generation seeks to create an alternative narrative about beauty that is more inclusive and diverse.

### 3. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach as described by Moleong (2019), which aims to understand phenomena related to the experiences of research subjects holistically. The focus of the research is to explore and understand the social construction and meaning making of Generation Z regarding beauty standards in Jakarta in the digital era. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how Generation Z constructs and interprets beauty within the current cultural and digital context, including how they respond to beauty standards that are constructed through social media.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation over a period of three weeks. Informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: they must be part of Generation Z (born between 1997-2012), reside in Jakarta, and be active users of social media who engage with beauty content. Prior to in-depth interviews, an initial survey was conducted via Google Forms to identify potential informants who met the criteria. A total of six informants were involved, ensuring representation from Central Jakarta, North Jakarta, West Jakarta, and South Jakarta. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the informants, pseudonyms were used for each participant in this study.

Jakarta was chosen as the research location because it is the capital city with the largest population and has broad access to social media and digital technology. The data obtained were analyzed using source, method, and theory triangulation techniques as described by Moleong (2019) to ensure the validity of the research. Theory triangulation was carried out by comparing empirical data using the perspectives of social construction theory and beauty myth theory to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. *Understanding the Meaning of "Beauty"*

This study found that Generation Z in Jakarta has diverse understandings of beauty, largely influenced by exposure to social media. Through in-depth interviews, informants provided perspectives that reflect how beauty standards disseminated through social media have shaped their perceptions of beauty. The findings indicate that the majority of informants associate beauty with homogeneous standards such as fair skin, a slim body, and proportional facial features, which they have internalized from exposure to influencers and social media algorithms. However, there is also a growing resistance narrative among those who embrace diversity in beauty and reject limiting standards.

The construction of beauty in the digital age shows variations, but there is a common thread among the informants. Through in-depth interviews, the informants shared their perspectives on the definition of beauty, which is largely influenced by exposure to social media. This was reflected in the diverse viewpoints expressed by the informants, both female and male, from Generation Z.

Marsha's, a 19-year-old student from South Jakarta, seemed to take a small mirror from her bag before the interview began. She spent a few minutes touching up her makeup, applying powder from the brand 'L'Oreal Paris,' which had been recommended by her favorite beauty vlogger, Tasya Farasya. Marsha also tidied up her eyebrows and applied lipstick from the brand 'Mother of Pearl (MOP),' a beauty product owned by Tasya Farasya.



Afterward, she adjusted her hijab to make it look neater. When asked by the researcher why she did this, Marsha blushed slightly and explained that she did it to appear attractive and feel more confident. When asked about her definition of beauty, Marsha shared her perspective with a hint of enthusiasm.

*“In my opinion, beauty these days already has certain standards. You have to have glowing skin, a slim face, a sharp nose, and a tall, slim body. If you don't meet those criteria, it feels like you're not even considered.”* (Marsha, 2 December 2024).

Marsha's statement aligns with Wolf (2002) assertion that “the beauty myth is a mechanism of social control that makes women conform to standards that are nearly impossible to achieve, in order to serve the interests of the patriarchal social structure”. In the digital era, social media has transformed these standards, creating a beauty hierarchy that strongly influences younger generations. This reflects how beauty standards are objectified through social media's pervasive influence.

In Berger dan Luckmann's (1998) framework of social construction theory, Marsha's perspective demonstrates the process of externalization, where abstract concepts like beauty become rigid and measurable. Her use of the word “benchmark” signifies how beauty standards have undergone objectification, becoming something “given” or naturalized. Specific criteria, such as “glowing skin,” “slim cheeks,” “sharp nose,” and “tall, slim body,” exemplify this transformation into observable traits. Furthermore, Marsha's decision to choose makeup products based on recommendations from beauty vlogger Tasya Farasya highlights social media's role in constructing beauty ideals. Beauty vloggers not only provide practical advice but also shape consumer aspirations, creating accessible yet demanding beauty narratives. This aligns with Utami et al. (2023), who argue that social media significantly narrows the definition of beauty for Indonesian women.

While Marsha emphasizes the importance of adhering to certain beauty standards, another informant, Yellow, offers a different perspective, though still influenced by social media. Yellow, a 20-year-old university student from North Jakarta, has an interesting take on the definition of beauty.

*“For me, beauty is when you can make others believe that you're worth following. It means you have an aesthetic Instagram feed, flawless makeup results, and a trendy style”.* (Yellow, 2 December 2024).

Yellow's admiration for Nanda Arsyinta, a beauty vlogger, reflects how beauty definitions are shaped by social media, particularly Instagram. Yellow sees beauty not only in physical appearance but in the ability to create a compelling digital image through an aesthetic feed, flawless makeup, and trendy outfits. This indicates that, for today's younger generation, beauty is increasingly linked to one's digital presence and personal brand, as exemplified by Yellow's statement, “Beauty is when you can make others believe that you're worth following”.

Berger's social construction theory can be applied to Yellow's view, as her perception of beauty is shaped by the interplay of subjective and objective realities in social interactions.

The creation of a curated Instagram feed represents externalization, where individuals construct social reality through digital interactions. This aligns with Berger's objectification process, where digital beauty standards are perceived as objective truths. Yellow's perspective also echoes Naomi Wolf's critique of the beauty myth, which critiques the shift from intrinsic beauty to a commodified form based on digital representation. Through the internalization process, individuals adopt these digital beauty standards, reinforcing their role in social recognition. Wolf (2002) refers to this as the "commodification of women's bodies," where beauty is a social construct used for status in digital spaces.

A different perspective comes from Alice's, a 22-year-old employee from Central Jakarta, who provides a more critical definition of beauty. When interviewed, Alice had just finished lunch with her colleagues. The lipstick she had applied in the morning had faded, and after lunch, the nude shade had further worn off. However, Alice seemed unbothered by this. Without taking the time to touch up her makeup, Alice's confidently prepared for the interview. This attitude reflects Alice's laid-back personality and provides insight into her unique perspective on beauty.

*"Beauty standards nowadays are like a blueprint that's been copied over and over. Everyone wants big eyes, plump lips, and clear, white skin. But when I was little, the definition of beauty wasn't this narrow".* (Alice, 2 December 2024).

Alice's statement highlights how global beauty standards have diminished the diversity of local beauty definitions, as explained by Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory and Wolf's critique of the global beauty myth. The pressure to conform to these standards marginalizes ethnic and cultural uniqueness, making homogenized beauty ideals seem normal and unquestionable. This transformation is driven by social media, the global beauty industry, and pop culture, which promote standardized beauty ideals and reduce the appreciation for diversity in body types and facial features.

Berger and Luckmann's (1998) concept of externalization explains how beauty perceptions have been reshaped to reflect a narrow, globally accepted aesthetic. The objectification process is evident in Alice's criticism, as younger generations become more aware of the standardization of body aesthetics. Features like big eyes, plump lips, and clear skin have become universal templates. Wolf (2002) argues that the beauty industry creates unrealistic standards that become so institutionalized they are seen as objective reality, diminishing body diversity and ethnic uniqueness. The internalization stage of Berger and Luckmann's theory is crucial here, as individuals integrate these beauty standards into their self-identity, reinforcing the global beauty norm described by Wolf as the "beauty myth".

A similar pragmatist perspective is expressed by Robert's, a 22-year-old TikTok employee from East Jakarta. Robert views beauty from a more pragmatic angle.

*"Beauty is an investment. You have to be consistent with skincare, makeup on point, and, most importantly, be able to take good photos for content. Because first impressions are really important in the content world."* (Robert, 3 December 2024).

Robert's definition illustrates how beauty has evolved into an economic asset in the digital age, echoing Wolf (2002) critique that women are pressured to continuously invest in meeting beauty standards for material or professional advancement. Garcia and Winduwati (2023) emphasize that beauty on social media has shifted from personal expression to a tool of production within the attention economy. Through the process of social externalization, beauty transcends its aesthetic roots, becoming a deliberate strategy to build credibility and acceptance in digital spaces.

The objectification of beauty is evident in Robert's framing of it as an "investment," highlighting how the social construction of beauty has become institutionalized, rational, and measurable. Practices like consistent skincare, flawless makeup, and creating engaging visual content have evolved into survival strategies within the digital economy. Wolf (2002) interprets this as an extension of systematic control, compelling women to invest time, energy, and resources into crafting a consumable self-image.

Robert's emphasis on "first impressions" underscores the internalization phase of social construction, where beauty standards shift from personal acceptance to strategic professional tools. Beauty is no longer solely an aesthetic attribute but a critical skill for navigating the content-driven world. This transformation reflects how Wolf's beauty myth has adapted in the digital era moving from oppressive social constructs to complex instruments of empowerment. Individuals, particularly women, are not only subjects of these standards but also active agents renegotiating beauty's role in the contemporary digital economy.

Complementing this perspective, Agung, a 27-year-old private sector employee from North Jakarta, as a male informant from the early Generation Z, offers a more multidimensional definition of beauty. When interviewed, Agung casually mentioned that he often follows beauty vlogger content on social media, including Rachel Vennya. According to him, Rachel is not only physically beautiful but also radiates a strong character, which he believes is a real example of modern beauty.

*"In my observation, beauty is a combination of confidence and maintenance. It's not just about perfect facial features, but more about how someone can maintain their appearance consistently and have a strong character in their personal branding". (Agung, 3 December 2024).*

Agung's view on beauty illustrates the influence of digital media in shaping contemporary beauty standards, where beauty has expanded beyond physical attributes to include performativity and personal branding. This shift aligns with the concept of objectification, where beauty now involves "confidence" and "maintenance," showing how beauty standards have become institutionalized beyond appearance. Wolf (2002) would see this as a discursive mechanism, where beauty is renegotiated through self-representation. Agung's focus on "personal branding" highlights the performative nature of beauty, which requires continuous effort.

The beauty definitions shared by the informants reflect the evolution of the "beauty myth" in the digital age, as social media emphasizes both physical appearance and online self-presentation. This aligns with Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, where digital platforms shape and internalize beauty standards through content and algorithms.

While some informants offer broader definitions, the impact of digital beauty standards remains significant.

#### 4.2. *The Social Construction of Beauty in the Digital Era*

Social media has become a powerful force in shaping beauty standards, especially for Generation Z, who frequently use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Marsha's, a 19-year-old student from South Jakarta, shared how she feels pressured by the beauty ideals she encounters online. As a fan of beauty influencer Tasya Farasya, known for her product Mother of Pearl (MOP), Marsha admires her flawless appearance and ideal body, which she perceives as the standard to achieve.

*“Every time I open Instagram, the posts from the influencers I follow, like Tasya Farasya, all seem to have the same beauty standard: flawless white skin, a slim body, and a face that looks perfect. Because I keep seeing this, I start thinking that only models like this are considered beautiful,”* said Marsha, a 19-year-old student from South Jakarta. (Marsha, 2 December 2024).

Her experience highlights how social media, especially Instagram, shapes narrow beauty standards that emphasize flawless white skin and slim bodies, limiting diversity and creating psychological pressure. This exposure can lead to identity crises and low self-esteem. Such beauty ideals are rooted in historical power relations, colonialism, and Western dominance, with social media and algorithms reinforcing and normalizing these restrictive standards.

According to Wolf (2002) *beauty myth*, the beauty industry and social media perpetuate an artificial and limited definition of beauty, which individuals internalize as normal and obligatory. Constant exposure accelerates this process, making these standards feel natural and unquestionable. However, growing awareness, as seen in Marsha's case, reveals that beauty is a dynamic social construction shaped by culture, history, and power, highlighting potential resistance to the rigid norms promoted by social media.

The pressure to meet these standards comes not only from influencer content but also from the algorithms of the platforms that reinforce the exposure to similar content. Yellow, a 20-year-old student from North Jakarta, is a loyal fan of Nanda Arsyinta, an influencer she admires for her relatable communication style.

*“I really like Nanda, she's amazing in how she communicates. She doesn't come off as perfect like other influencers. She's open about her beauty journey, even sharing her insecurities, so I feel more connected”.* (Yellow, 2 December 2024).

This emotional closeness is what makes Yellow's feel comfortable following the beauty content shared by Nanda. Yellow explained that what attracts her to Nanda Arsyinta is her ability to demystify the beauty industry. This is what makes Yellow's feel that the social media algorithm intensifies the display of similar content.

*“Once I watch beauty content and like the posts, suddenly my Instagram Reels is flooded with similar content. The longer it goes, I start thinking that to look beautiful, I have to use this and that product, hehe. The algorithm seems to know*

*exactly what I like, and then it feeds me videos that make me feel I always have to look perfect*". (Yellow, 2 December 2024).

Her experience highlights how social media algorithms actively shape beauty perceptions. According to Berger and Luckmann's (1998), this process represents internalization, where beauty standards promoted by influencers like Nanda Arsyinta are absorbed into individual consciousness, making them feel like natural needs. The algorithm accelerates objectification by tailoring content, narrowing beauty perceptions, and fostering a homogenized aesthetic. Alice's experience further illustrates how social media algorithms limit individuality, promoting a singular beauty ideal. As platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube boost engagement with these norms, they shape identities and intensify psychological pressure to conform to artificial beauty standards (Wolf, 2002).

*"It feels like there's no room for a different definition of beauty. Everyone is racing to look fair, with a slim body, and follow the latest trends"*. (Alice, 2 December 2024).

Alice's observation shows the internalization process, where global beauty standards have become internalized in individuals' awareness, shifting the diversity of local beauty definitions. This phenomenon strengthens Berger and Luckmann's (1998) theory about how social realities that are constructed eventually come to be accepted as something natural, while, as Wolf (2002) explains, the homogenization of beauty standards is a social construction that serves the interests of the beauty industry and patriarchy, used to control women through aesthetics.

The homogenization of beauty standards through social media has complex and profound impacts on the construction of identity and consumer behaviour. In the case of Robert's, a 22-year-old man from East Jakarta, this phenomenon is clearly visible. Robert admitted to being a huge fan of Tasya Farasya. He faithfully watches every post from the beauty influencer, admiring every detail of her appearance and self-care routines. For him, Tasya is the ideal figure who represents the perfect modern beauty standard—flawless (smooth with no blemishes on her face)—and always looks stunning. Every product recommendation from Tasya feels like an order that must be followed.

*"At first, I just wanted to try out the recommended products. But now, if I don't use skincare, I feel less confident"*. (Robert, 3 December 2024).

Influencers like Tasya Farasya significantly drive beauty product consumption by promoting the idea that beauty can be "bought" and "engineered". Drawing on Wolf (2002) *beauty myth*, this social construction not only shapes self-image but also creates a continuous consumer cycle where skincare becomes a symbol of status and acceptance. For Robert, this narrative shifted him from observer to active consumer, fulfilling a false need created by the beauty industry. He remarked, "Look at Tasya, she always looks flawless. She must have a secret," highlighting how influencers set nearly unattainable beauty standards. This phenomenon reshapes individual perceptions of beauty, self-worth, and consumption behaviour.

Amid the complexities of the social construction of beauty, the perspective of Agung's, a 27-year-old private employee from North Jakarta, provides an interesting reflection on how beauty standards are formed in society.

*"Beauty is actually a social construction that we accept without realizing it. We don't realize that the beauty standards we hold are formed by our environment, media, and social circles. It's not something natural, but the result of a long social process"*. (Agung, 3 December 2024)

In the framework of Berger and Luckmann (1998) social construction theory, Agung's statement illustrates the stages of beauty standards formation. Initially, in the externalization stage, beauty standards emerge through social interactions, such as media representations and personal relationships, forming a collective understanding of beauty. As beauty standards move to the objectification stage, they gain the status of objective reality, appearing natural and unquestioned through media, education, and social influence. Agung's perspective highlights how society unconsciously accepts these standards as truths, even though they are socially constructed.

The final internalization stage occurs when individuals incorporate these beauty standards into their personal identity, influencing their self-perception and behaviour. Agung's statement reveals how media and social interactions shape personal conceptions of beauty, reinforcing a cycle that reproduces these standards.

In the digital era, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become key spaces for shaping beauty definitions. Algorithms on these platforms amplify narrow beauty narratives, turning them into norms that appear natural and objective. Influencers and celebrities actively reinforce these constructions, further solidifying beauty standards with every interaction. Research by Rahmawati (2021) confirms that social media use among Indonesian youth shapes homogeneous beauty perceptions.

The social construction of beauty today is influenced by historical power relations, such as colonialism and Western aesthetic dominance, with social media amplifying these longstanding narratives. Thus, beauty in the digital era is not just a visual phenomenon but a complex social practice that shapes identity, self-perception, and power dynamics in society.

#### *4.3. Era Resistance to Beauty Standards*

The pressure to meet beauty standards is significant, but some individuals are resisting these norms. Wafer, a 22-year-old student from West Jakarta, started supporting the body positivity movement after feeling frustrated with social media expectations. She realized that beauty is subjective and began accepting herself as she is, using filters she had frequently applied. This resistance reflects the process of deconstructing institutionalized beauty norms, as explained in Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory. The body positivity movement and other inclusivity movements provide a space for young women to resist the pressure of homogenizing beauty standards. Generation Z is trying to create a new narrative about beauty, one that is more inclusive and aligned with their social realities. This resistance demonstrates how the process of counter-hegemony works in resisting dominant social constructions. However, resistance is not always easy. In Indonesia, research by Putri and Fitriana (2020) reveal that the use of social media increases the pressure on women to meet

certain beauty standards. The body positivity movement in Indonesia is growing as a response to these pressures, with local influencers playing an important role in constructing a more inclusive beauty narrative.

*“Sometimes I still feel not good enough, especially when I see a friend I follow looking perfect on social media because they are using filters”.* (Wafer, December 2024).

Wafer’s statement illustrates the complexity of the struggle against deeply internalized beauty standards. Although there is awareness and efforts of resistance, the influence of the ingrained social construction still exerts significant pressure.

This statement aligns with trends in the modern era. With technological advancements, there are more filters available for use on social media. A person’s face can look different after using a filter. Celebrities also follow this trend of using filters. They try viral filters on their Instagram and TikTok accounts, one of which is the "versus no filter" filter, which shows someone’s face in two versions: with and without the filter.



**Figure 1.** When Using a Filter and Not Using a Filter. Source: KapanLagi.Com

In the image above, the beautiful actress and model Donita is also seen trying out this filter. The video with the "filter vs no filter" effect changes her skin tone. Interestingly, Donita still radiates her characteristic beauty in both versions, showing that beauty does not always have to be measured by physical perfection. The unique characteristics each individual possesses should be more appreciated as their true allure.

The modern beauty representation shows a duality: on one hand, technology and filters add pressure to meet stringent beauty standards, while on the other, movements like body positivity provide a healthier, more inclusive narrative. Generation Z, represented by Wafer’s and Yellow’s, is reshaping the concept of beauty, aiming to celebrate diversity and individuality. Informants, such as Alice’s, resist the homogenization of beauty, criticizing the global standards imposed by the media and the beauty industry. Agung’s also challenges traditional views, emphasizing self-confidence and personal branding over physical appearance. Some informants reject the exclusivity of beauty, critiquing Wolf’s beauty myth, which enforces unrealistic standards to control women. This resistance is not just rejecting standards but actively constructing a more inclusive and authentic definition of beauty based on personal realities.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study was driven by the research question of how Generation Z in Jakarta perceives beauty standards constructed by social media and how they respond to these pressures. To address this question, a qualitative-descriptive approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and social media content analysis. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on Generation Z individuals actively engaged with beauty-related content on social media. The findings reveal that social media, particularly Instagram, plays a dominant role in shaping homogeneous beauty standards, such as fair skin, a slim body, and symmetrical facial features. These standards are internalized through algorithmic exposure and influence content consumption. However, the study also identifies a growing resistance movement among Generation Z, advocating for a more inclusive and diverse representation of beauty through body positivity initiatives and alternative beauty narratives. Thus, this study asserts that the social construction of beauty in the digital era is not only shaped by social media as a primary agent but also by individuals' active resistance against restrictive beauty standards. It highlights the importance of critical education, the impact of social media on beauty perceptions and the need for broader representation, ensuring that beauty is not confined to rigid norms but embraces inclusivity and diverse social realities.

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