

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Beauty and women have always been inextricably linked. Mass media, such as magazines, printed or electronic ads, etc., tried to create the concept of beauty standards. It gained women's understanding of what it means to be beautiful in particular ways. Women expect the mass media to set standards for what constitutes attractiveness. Women and mass media intensely relate to the meaning of femininity and beauty (Hidayanti 2018, 2). The link between women and the media also brings attention to the use of female attractiveness images as a political weapon against women's advancement. This term became a myth known as the beauty myth. According to Wolf (2002, 18), the greater their social influence in society, the stricter the ideal image of beauty that women had to obey. The media's definition of beauty is frequently limited to physical attractiveness, as the beauty myth guides the beauty industry and the media in defining what is considered beautiful (Agatha 2021, 2).

Mass media, such as commercials, are an extremely effective medium for promoting any product, service, or brand. Hidayanti (2018, 1) states that "advertising" refers to communicating with others through language or words to promote a product or service. Commercial can also take the form of a visual image, motion picture, color, and sound that are gathered and used to attract customers. Commercials are also striving to uncover the most effective methods of attracting

buyers to increase the likelihood of the public purchasing their items. According to Tampubolon (2021, 2), a good commercial can raise awareness of the product among the target markets and urge people to buy it. As a result, it positively influences increasing product sales. A commercial video is the most common type of advertisement. A commercial video is an audiovisual intended to advertise items and serves as an example of visual culture (Tampubolon 2021, 2). Novitri (2014, 16) asserts that apart from marketing goods, commercials convey certain beliefs. For instance, in the beauty products area, most commercials portray stereotypical beauty or the image of ideal beautiful women. Women have long struggled to satisfy their ideal demands because of the images and sentiments displayed in advertisements. Women with a tall, thin body, white skin, and blond, an asymmetrical face without pores or flaws is someone wholly “perfect” is all that society expected women to be (Wolf 2002, 1). In America, cosmetic firms frequently recruit a model or talent with a white complexion, a perfect facial ratio, a slim body, tall, and long straight hair. The models must be attractive to attract buyers. Commercials can also be utilized as parts of a beauty reference. Buyers, particularly women, always expect to appear as stunning as the female figures or models in such commercials. If society continues to observe beauty commercials, there is a possibility that customers, particularly women, will feel compelled to adhere to the entrenched standard of beauty. Fathoni and Fadillah (2021, 80) argued that beauty product commercials would continue to try new concepts or even old ones that have been updated to reflect current society and women’s views on typical

beauty. As a result, beauty product commercials attempt to create the ideal beauty through their products.

Additionally, commercials are where the presence of beauty is highlighted. The representation perspective is a recurring subject in all beauty product advertising, and black women are not the typical advertising models for beauty products. The representation of black and white women is a recurring theme in the chosen commercials (Abdi 2019, 3). Even though black women are now considered more empowered, there is still a distinction between white and black women. Commercials depicting white and black women continue to be diametrically opposite.

Numerous cosmetic companies value hiring a model or talent with a white complexion, a perfect proportional face, a slim body, tall, and long straight hair. Abdi (2019, 4) argues that black women struggle to fit into the paradigm of ideal beauty standards. Their dark skin is frequently portrayed in stereotypical ways, and it still emerges now and makes the depiction of black women who are often disadvantaged. Further, in beauty products commercials, black women are often whitewashed or varied face features (Abdi 2019, 2). However, today's black women aim to reach the pinnacle of every industry element, including commercial, entertainment, and even the fashion industry. This raising is progressing slowly but steadily.

Blatantly, the portrayal of the beauty of black women was portrayed in one of the famous Japanese luxury beauty brands, SK-II, through their commercial video. The commercial video entitled SK-II STUDIO: 'VS Trolls' featuring Simone Biles

is an animated commercial video about an African American woman gymnast (Simone Biles) who has journeyed through a world beset by haters and bullies. She was bullied by ‘trolls’ or online media users because of her appearance, which she has big muscular arms and darker skin. A troll, in terms of online users, is a person who intentionally leaves offensive comments to get attention or cause problems (Dictionary.org 2022). Troll intent to criticize or torment public statements, online postings, or actions that are insulting or mocking provocatively (Merriam-Webster 2022). She fights to defeat those who troll her, and in doing so, she goes from victim to victor. This commercial video features gymnast Simone Biles has 5:06 running times, and has been viewed by 2.7 Million people. SK-II studio’s official YouTube account uploaded it on May 1, 2021.

The commercial video of SK-II featuring Simone Biles was chosen as the object of this study due to the representation of an African American woman athlete as the primary model. Since the media began broadcasting sporting competitions and events on television, attractiveness and beauty have become increasingly important (Clijsen, O.Barel and Clarys 2014, 515). The athletes compete in front of millions of people, and then during the award ceremonies, they gain the public’s attention. Thus, the media frequently focuses on depicting the athlete in person, especially women athletes. Furthermore, in the context of athletic competition, “beauty” can be conceptualized as an ideal physical attribute (Clijsen, O.Barel and Clarys 2014, 519). For example, a beautiful female athlete possesses specific physical characteristics that are anticipated to serve them well when competing. This individual is more likely to be selected or prepared to compete (Altman, Torgler

and Whyte 2021, 3). It means that the media only focuses on the athlete that is considered attractive; in contrast, the athlete who does not appear stunning is more likely to be neglected.

In addition, beauty and sport are correlated. The perception of health and beauty and the desire to preserve one's youthful appearance is given significant attention in society today (Clijsen, O.Barel and Clarys 2014, 515). Moreover, products marketed as skincare use the connotations typically associated with the word "sport" to provide a subjective sensation similar to being physically active. An athlete's skin is frequently exposed to harsh conditions. Thus, the beauty product industry has developed specialized preventative and protective skincare products tailored to the individual athlete's need to protect and prevent skin damage (Clijsen, O.Barel and Clarys 2014, 515). It is assumed that beauty products industries use athletes in terms of "sport" as the marketing strategy to promote several products.

In SK-II's commercial video, they hired the famous African American gymnast Simone Biles as the face of their phenomenal products, SK-II Facial Treatment Essence or 'miracle water.' This product is made in Japan with ingredients derived from PITERA. Pitera is a bio-natural ingredient that contains over 50 micronutrients and can help nourish and condition the skin's natural function. This product was discovered by observing a sake brewery and noticing that the hands of the old sake brewers still looked soft and young. Since 1980, this brand has been a Japanese luxury skincare brand. In East Asia, North America, Europe, and Australia, SK-II is marketed as a luxury skincare solution by its parent firm, Procter & Gamble (P&G). SK-II is owned by P&G and distributed by the corporation.

SK-II mainly uses typical Asian (East Asia and South East Asia) lighter-skinned women such as Haruka Ayase (Japanese actress), Sooyoung (Korean singer), Siyoung Lee (Korean actress), and Anggun (Indonesian singer) as their primary models to advertise their products. Besides that, SK-II also hired an American actress, Chloe Grace Moretz as their model. However, this brand mainly uses lighter-skinned Asians (East Asia and South East Asia) as a model to promote their phenomenal product. The commercial video for SK-II STUDIO: 'VS Trolls' featuring Simone Biles is a reverse depiction of the brand's typical advertising. This commercial video version features an African-American woman athlete as a model. This version is a part of the "*VS Series*," featuring six stories from exceptional athletes such as Simone Biles, Mahina Maeda, Kasumi Ishikawa, Hinotori Nippon, Liu Xiang, and badminton duo Ayaka Takashi and Misaki Matsutomo. The version of "VS Trolls" becomes the first SK-II commercial depicting an African American woman athlete (Simone Biles) as the brand model. Although portraying Asian and African-American women in commercials is frequently offensive (Abdi 2019, 28), this brand still portrays Simone Biles as their model, showing that this commercial is unique and challenging the typical beauty commercials.

The commercial serves as the media representation of the product (Saraswati, Prasetyo and Artaria 2017, 396). Representation is presented through signs, words, sounds, expressions, and clothes that become a part of life. Semiotics analysis is one of the approaches that can be an analysis to analyze representation. *SK-II STUDIO: 'VS Trolls' featuring Simone Biles #CHANGESTINY* represents the meaning of beauty for women, especially black women. This commercial attempts

to negotiate standardized beauty by representing an African American woman as the primary model. Black woman in this commercial is also shown as empowered, enabling them to flourish even though she is not the stereotypical ideal beauty.

This representation of black women in the advertisement is not the first. Some previous studies have been conducted regarding the issue of black women's representation. The first study was conducted in 2021 by Elise Heesch, entitled *"Multiculturalism in Advertising: A Look at non-diversification and stereotyping in the advertising industry."* This study tried to analyze multiculturalism in the advertising industry. Several advertisements portray diversity, creating stereotyping advertisements notion. The communities of women, people with disabilities, indigenous people, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos were used to represent the various minority groups in this study. This paper also provided a brief history of advertising as well as progressive approaches and advertising recommendations. Advertising has a significant impact on society's expectations. In commercials and other promotional materials, women are frequently portrayed as thin, white, and otherwise flawless. Ads and social media campaign posts featuring beautiful women are likely to spring to mind as a result of this concept. White men define the ideal woman (Heesch 2022, 15). White women with no issues with skin, weight, etc., are portrayed as "idealized images of perfect beauty." Moreover, the idealized images of beauty elevate various beauty products and services. Within advertisements for beauty products or services, African American models are not adequately represented. The second study is entitled *"Representasi dan Stereotip pada Perempuan Berkulit Gelap dalam Iklan 'Fair and Lovely'"*

conducted by Ma'ruf Fathoni and Della Fadillah in 2021. This study analyzed the representation of dark-skinned women in the Fair and Lovely advertisement. Fair and Lovely is one of the well-known Indonesian teenage beauty products. The Fair and Lovely advertisement shapes ideal beauty stereotyping toward women around Indonesia. Fair and Lovely Advertisement represents the woman model with darker skin considered 'ugly,' thus changing the model through glowing white skin to get the typical beauty. The stereotype of perfect beauty that women must have lighter skin is blatantly depicted in Fair and Lovely Advertisement. Physical appearance is deemed attractive if they have a brighter skin tone color (Fathoni and Fadillah 2021, 80). The third study was conducted by Xiaohua Luo, *entitled "Cultural Representation of Female Images in Advertising"* (2022). This study aimed to analyze several issues from a cultural perspective to represent diverse views in advertising. In addition, this study explores how contemporary advertising defines female identity in magazines and how women such as white women and women of color are represented in advertising. Several advertisements depict black women as being culturally racialized. Apparently, with the aid of camera technology that displays racial images, a commercial appeals to racial discrimination. A black woman shall be marginalized by being placed in the background with white women in the center of the frame, even in some images of advertisements with women of various cultural backgrounds, representing the continued dominance of white women in beauty commercials. For instance, in the ad "Holiday Pleasure," The black man and black woman are relegated to the background or placed in the margins, with a white man holding cigarettes in the foreground, which demonstrates

the marginalization of black people. According to Luo (2022, 10), the racialized position can be strengthened by depicting white privilege. Therefore, this research helps strengthen the false depiction of black women in commercials. The last study is conducted by Melissa L. Baird, entitled *“Making Black more beautiful: Black Women and the Cosmetics Industry in the Post-Civil Rights Era.”* This research aimed to investigate how black communities’ perceptions of beauty standards have been altered due to the “Black is Beautiful” movement and how the cosmetics sector intends to capitalize upon those changes through its marketing tactics. In addition, despite the cosmetic industry’s success in removing specific racialized barriers to mainstream American beauty culture, the commodification of the language and imagery of "Black is Beautiful" in beauty commercials frequently amplified gendered expectations and increased tensions in black communities regarding racism and business ownership. Changes in the relationship between black women and the cosmetics industry prepared the path for the celebration of blackness, exemplified by the famous slogan "Black is Beautiful," which demanded that African Americans, especially those with dark skin, be considered beautiful as part of the political agenda against racism. Even though black women were more represented in beauty ideals due to this change, they were not liberated from them. This intricate relationship represented equality, increased representation, manipulation, and exploitation (Baird 2021, 571).

The previous studies helped this study understand the correlation between black women in advertising, beauty standardization, and women’s advertisement roles. Additionally, the beauty myth theory aided this study’s comprehension of women’s

beauty and its relationship to society. This study intended to examine the concept of beauty represented in the *SK-II* commercial video by combining previous studies, beauty myth by Naomi Wolf, and semiotic analysis by Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's semiotic is applied to the analysis of visual, audio, and narrative elements from the *SK-II* commercial to generate the sign (*representament*), object (*referent*), and signified (*interpretant*).

1.2 Statement of problems

According to the background above, the writer intends to study and investigate the depiction of black women in which aspects of Simone Biles as the primary model of SK-II featuring Simone Biles commercial videos are used. As a result, this study was conducted to answer the following question:

1. How is the black woman (Simone Biles) represented in the SK-II STUDIO commercial video: *'VS Trolls' with Simone Biles #CHANGEDESTINY?*

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study aims to answer the statement of the problem mentioned above. This study was conducted to reveal:

1. The way beauty of a black woman (Simone Biles) is represented in the commercial video of *SK-II STUDIO: 'VS Trolls' with Simone Biles #CHANGEDESTINY*.

1.4 Significance of the study

The writer anticipates that this study will provide theoretical and practical knowledge of black women's representation in a commercial. Theoretically, this study hopes to contribute valuable insights toward the study of representation, specifically in black women representation research. The representation of a black woman in the commercial defies the viewer's expectations that the model of beauty products must fulfill specified criteria or adhere to stereotype beauty standards. Hopefully, this study contributes to acknowledging the correct representation of black women in commercials for the proper purposes. Moreover, for those who are unfamiliar with the term "Black women's representation," it is believed to be helpful to recognize this concept as diversity in representation.

Practically, this study hopes to give two benefits, which are, 1) this research as a reference to find out the representation and beauty myth in commercials, and 2) adds the reference towards research about beauty and beauty myth of Black women in the commercial.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study will only concentrate on how black women's representation is performed by the primary model, Simone Biles, in the SK-II #CHANGEDESTINY version to avoid vague research. The scope of this study is from the selected sign of figure and act played by the models in this commercial in several scenes. In addition, the writer will only analyze the detail within the pictures and text that appear in the commercial that is displayed and assumed as the elements related to the representation of black women's beauty aspects.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Based on the title of the research, the definitions of key terms are:

African-American:	African-Americans are an ethnic category of Americans who were born with partial or total African ancestry (Rastogi and Elizabeth M Hoeffel 2011).
Beauty Myth:	The term of political weaponization of the female attractiveness images in which opposition to women's advancement. The beauty myth prevails objectively and universally, leading to the emergence of a quality known as "beauty" (Wolf 2002).
Commercial:	A medium used to market, communicate, and urge people to buy a product or service (Abdi 2019). Commercials have an impact on human behavior and thinking, which can be beneficial or harmful by advising them on products or services.
SK-II:	A Japanese luxury skincare brand launched in the early 1980s and owned by P&G, marketed as luxury skincare products around East Asia, North America, Europe, and Australia.