

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Beauty myth is a common concept of beauty that surrounds women based on certain perspectives built through common ideas in society. Beauty that could be variedly defined depending on people's perspectives is seen as a fluid concept which is vulnerable to changes over time. The diversity in cultures and races also plays a big part in the diverse concept of beauty. Though the concept of beauty is not limited to external appearance, the external appearance in western cultures is considered an important factor (Bartky, 2003). Beauty ideals represent the idea of prescribed looks that includes the human's face and body, which define the standards of attractiveness in terms of physical appearance. In the '90s, the use of models with spotless skin, long hairless legs, and slender bodies was widely adored. Women with a similar body type that fulfils the ideals of beauty are regarded as an important factor in advertisements. Due to that, the unbalanced favorability among women increased.

Nevertheless, the concept of beauty which strongly depends on people's perspectives is proven to be an ever-changing concept that keeps shifting over time. This shows how the beauty concept could also be considered an unpredictable matter. In the 2010s, the diversity of body silhouettes is more favorable to be found in the lingerie industry. The exclusive body silhouette which is regarded as something too good to be true does not gain more popularity, instead, diversity and

body positivity movements dominate the trend of beauty in the 2010s. Okwodu in Vogue (2019), argue that the 2010s was a turning point for fashion. There were many breakthroughs that act as a challenge toward the fashion industry which emphasis of diversity. According to Leumatrix (2021), a brand performance cloud, Inclusivity and diversity are regarded as something more important to be achieved in the concept of beauty. The change in beauty concept is also reflected through lingerie advertisements that acted as a prominent mediator in introducing the concept of beauty. The use of diverse models is often found in recent campaigns of brands of lingerie. One of the leading brands of lingerie is Savage X Fenty which used the concept of inclusivity and diversity in its branding. The use of diverse models in terms of body types that do not hide their scars or stretch marks is more appreciated by society. Thus, the evolution among advertisements that rely on the concept of beauty must undergo a shifting of concepts to fit the current beauty ideals. It is important to keep developing new campaigns to follow the trend of current beauty ideals to be able to market their goods well.

Lingerie is a part of women's clothing that is seen as a basic need in life and women have taken them for granted since it was first founded in the Middle Ages. According to the Oxford Dictionary, lingerie is women's underwear or nightclothes, especially the lacy ones or the ones designed to be seductive. The history of lingerie is well written in some books and official websites of lingerie retailers. One of the prominent books which discussed the history of lingerie is a book entitled *The Story of Lingerie* by Muriel Barbier and Shazia Boucher which was published in 2004. Lingerie retailers' websites such as the brand Wacoal and

Little Women also put information about the history of lingerie on their official websites. The history of lingerie started way back in the Middle Ages (500 – 1500 CE), the development of chemises and dresses is depicted through paintings that showed wealthy women wearing woolen hosiery beneath their garters. Later on, in the year of the renaissance (1300 - 1700 CE), the use of ruffle skirts which are used to obtain a push-up bust as well as wide hips are favored. Resulting in the use of laced corselets and stiffened bodices that have the function to maintain the favored silhouette of women.

Moving on to the 1900s, the oppressed feeling suffered by women resulted in the function of lingerie shifting into instruments to represent the feeling of freedom. According to a well-known vintage fashion blog the Glamourdaze, in the year of 1920s, flattened busts without the accentuation of a thin waist is popular as the depiction of the androgynous or boyish silhouette. In contrast, the curvy women figure was a hit back in the 1950s and an overt acceptance toward women in lingerie is widespread following the trend of the “Pin-up Girl”.

Following the popularity of women pictured in lingerie, Victoria’s Secret, a retailer focusing on the production of lingerie introduced products of premium lingerie for women. Victoria’s Secret was the turning point of lingerie from a private to a public domain (Lamare, 2020). According to a book titled Exposed: A History of Lingerie by Colleen Hill which was published in 2014, styles of the 1900s era that depict a highly feminine portrayal of lingerie set a new precedent in the importance of lingerie in women’s private lives. In the 1980s, the use of lingerie which used to be worn beneath the clothing shifted into a fashion statement by

wearing it outside clothing. In the current times, the importance of women's body diversity in advertisements is widely discussed. According to Concept Paris (2020), a design & consultancy group focusing on lingerie, the diversity of body silhouettes is more favorable to be found in the lingerie industry of the 2010s. Slender women are no more, while diversity and body positivity movements dominate the trend.

A Study by CMO by Adobe (2019) found that 61,5% of Americans think diversity in advertising is important. To attract customers, the importance of following the trend of inclusive brand image in campaigns is key. Instead of the depiction of exclusivity which was often shown in the brand campaigns before the 2010s. The phenomenon of the use of models with specific physical traits in the advertisement referred to women that meet the standards of the ideal. This results in the unconscious idea of beauty standards set by advertisements. Advertisements unconsciously serve the purpose of a pioneer for the beauty myth. This existence of beauty myth makes women expected to fulfil the obeyed social standard in purpose to be accepted by the social environment (Wolf, 2002).

The beauty myth generates low self-esteem for women and high profits for industries (Wolf, 2002). Advertisements that utilize the use of symbols, signs, and other modes to convey messages to customers have the main purpose to attract and convince people to be consumers of the promoted products or services. To attract customers, the advertiser must present an eye-catching advertisement that has the goal to convince customers to take a glance at the advertisement and influence them to buy the products. According to Caballero & Pride (1984), utilizing women with attractive physical traits will result in higher purchase rates, compared to other

models with low and medium attractive counterparts. Following the statement, it is to be expected that the use of models will be important for an advertisement. Kanungo & Pang (1973) stated that every model will reach its purpose to attract customers with the regarded products or brands if the use types of models are utilized well. Each brand, with its distinctive brand image and products, will need a suitable model for the products to be effectively marketed.

Female models with attractive physical traits that suit the beauty standard are often hired by brands that regard beauty as one of the traits of their brand image. The model's compatibility with the product or brand will play a significant role in the purchase rates. Advertising has been a strong influence on the production of knowledge, not just in reflecting ideologies, but also in constructing them (Picton, 2013). The existence of women's product advertisements will result in certain beliefs on the concept of beauty that is expected of a particular advertisement. The significance of the sales target is bound to be important for brands of retailers. The socio-economic aspects that tried to be achieved by the brands hold significance which leads to the use of female models that has the ability to achieve the sales target. The prominence of a consumerist ethos, and the emphasis on a rather illusionary sense of female empowerment, choice and individual agency, have emerged as central ideologies in postfeminist and neoliberalist discourse; thus leading to contestations over the seemingly autonomous female subject, which is positioned at the centre of such ideologies (Genz, 2011; Stuart & Danaghue, 2011). Postfeminism in the context of beauty culture regards women's liberation and

empowerment as well as freedom of choice to use beauty as the power to pursue advantages.

One of the most prominent utilization of models in lingerie advertisements is in Victoria's Secret advertisement. Victoria's Secret is a lingerie company founded in 1977 and known as the largest retailer of lingerie in the United States. According to YouGov America, a global public opinion and data company, Victoria's Secret ranked 26th as the most popular clothing & footwear in the third quarter of 2021. Victoria's Secret, as a big brand with a long history, marketed its products through several platforms. The first Victoria's Secret offline store to market its products is located in San Francisco, California, the United States. Other than the offline store, Victoria's Secret also markets its products through its website <https://www.victoriasecret.com/us/> and on social media such as Instagram and Facebook. Being a big company with worldwide known products, Victoria's Secret has a bunch of stores located all over the world. In Indonesia itself, the brand has a total of 16 stores, in addition to its popularity, the official Instagram account of Victoria's Secret Indonesia followers has accumulated to be 60,5K as of the moment. This proves the market interest regarding the brand in Indonesia is high, which resulted in a higher rate of the brand's influence.

Victoria's Secret, one of the biggest lingerie retailers in the United States is known as an adaptation to the Victorian era. According to Slate News (2013), Roy settled on the name Victoria's Secret which underlies the idea of how the respectable women of the Victorian era (1837-1901) had secrets kept underneath them. In the Victorian era, the emergent grandeur of fashion advertisement reflects

the improved technology which elevates consumer interest, especially in fashion. The increasingly glamorous fashion advertisement suggests a heightened consumer interest in the pleasures of personal ornament and the pleasures of the social use of the middle-class figure, especially the female figure, for display and status enhancement (Loeb, 1994). The conspicuous consumption of luxurious and glamorous things by females reflects the family's economic status. Victoria's Secret re-enact the depiction of such luxury and glamour into its brand image. Les Wexner, the one who bought Victoria's Secret from the originator depicts the brand with the use of models who looked like they walked off the pages of Vogue or Glamour magazine. According to Slate News (2013), The first-ever product to grab the world's attention is the Miracle Bra collection, women were buying the products, while men are interested in the catalogue. According to Trading Up, Victoria's Secret had become a \$1.9 billion company by the year 1995.

Over the decade, Victoria's Secret utilized a campaign named VS Angels consisting of supermodels, but in the year 2021, it underwent a big turnover by changing its campaign into VS Collective. Supermodels who became the face of the brand over the decade are famous for their long hairless legs, slim and fit bodies, spotless skin and gorgeous faces. They are often set as the standard of beauty by society, especially by the Americans from which this brand came. These models are regarded as suitable for this brand to bring out the brand's image of being luxurious and exclusive. These models are expected to influence the escalation in sales rate which results in bringing more fame and profits to Victoria's Secret. According to The Guardian (2019), Ray Raymond originally made Victoria's

Secret to appeal to men by having a place where men can comfortably buy lingerie for their female partners. After being bought by Les Wexler in 1982, Victoria's Secret shift their motive to a female-focused brand. Through the widely accepted stereotype of beauty, this campaign of VS Angels met its heyday and brought Victoria's Secret as the number one brand in the annual BrandIndex perception study conducted by YouGov for 2012.

By the time the brand gained fame, Victoria's Secret campaign of VS Angels unconsciously serve the purpose of a pioneer for beauty myth. One of the portrayals of this campaign could be found in the Fall 2019 Campaign which carries the theme of Luxe Lingerie. The Fall 2019 Campaign highlights the intimacy and sensuality portrayal through the advertisements posted on Instagram @victoriasecret. This campaign was held for about one month, marked with the first post, dated 10 July 2019 until the last post, dated 18 August 2019. After decades of success, Victoria's Secret was eventually faced with a decline in performance. Victoria's Secret has been under scrutiny for failing in complying with the customers' demand of including the trend of body positivity and diversity (Daley et al., 2017). According to CNN Business (2021), Victoria's Secret's sales have dropped since 2015, which started at \$7.7 billion, but it ends up at \$5.4 billion in 2020. In addition, it is reported that the shares of L Brands Inc., the parent company of Victoria's Secret reach a peak of around \$100 in November 2015, but since then dropped more than 80%. The very famous hit show, Victoria's Secret runways which once marked the successful era of the brand is seen to be positively retrograde since 2018 and eventually canceled in 2019. L Brands Inc. gave a statement of substantially pulling

back the capital investment and closing 53 physical stores of Victoria's Secret due to the decline in performance (Nylon, 2019). Due to competitors such as Aerie, ThirdLove, and Savage X Fenty that comply with consumers' demands of inclusive marketing strategy, it is reported that Victoria's Secret sales continue to deteriorate (Daily Mail, 2020). Women seemed to demand not only a female-focused product but also a female-friendly product. Victoria's Secret influenced women in experiencing lower body satisfaction, more appearance-driven self-esteem, and a greater concern with others' opinions of themselves (Strahan et al., 2008). The depiction of Victoria's Secret as a brand that does not comply with the concept of inclusive marketing strategy, made it seem like the brand is outdated.

The VS Collective which was launched in 2021 marked the turning point of Victoria's Secret rebranding. In contrast with the previous campaign, the VS Collective consists of trailblazing women that represent beauty through their achievements rather than proportions. Supermodels are not the majority of individuals for this campaign, and instead, the majority of this campaign are activists and athletes. Because of the riddance of Angels which has been the face of the brand over the decade, VS Collective is seen as a revolution of Victoria's Secret brand image that aims for diversity in beauty. One of the campaigns released after the rebranding is The Fall 2021 Campaign which carries the main theme of Dream Angels. This campaign was held for about one month dated from the first post on 8 September 2021 until the last post on 16 October 2021. As an annual event that is held every year, this campaign in 2021 gives highlights persuading women to experience being in their best condition and looking good while becoming the life

of the party. The use of models of various types is presented in the Fall 2021 Campaign, along with the new release of the products.

Several previous studies have been conducted regarding the issue of beauty in women's products. One of them was research by Nurus Solikha in 2016 with the title of *The Representation of Beauty Myth of Indonesian Women in Wardah Lightening Beauty Balm Cream Product Television Commercial*. The research by Nurus Solikha which also utilizes the theory of beauty myth and the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes found that the use of distinctive models would result in better penetration in the global market while still maintaining its original brand image. Another research that utilizes the theory of beauty myth was also conducted by Caitlin M. McCleary, entitled *A Not-So-Beautiful Campaign: A Feminist Analysis of The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. Through this research, the contradiction of the Dove Campaign about beauty redefinition with the original act of redefining beauty is found, which raises issues about this campaign.

Moreover, another research was previously conducted by Dwi Retno Linggasari in 2015, entitled *Reading Beauty Construction in Revlon Lipstick Printed Advertisements: A Social semiotic Study* which utilizes Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen Socio-Semiotic theory. This research discovers that the use of sensual and seductive lips in advertisements is significant and is based on the ideal standard of American Beauty. Furthermore, there was research conducted by Maryann McCabe, Timothy de Waal Malefyt, and Antonella Fabri in 2020 entitled *Women, makeup, and authenticity: Negotiating embodiment and discourses of beauty* which relies on ethnographic research. This research found that women as

consumers of makeup will develop an “authentic self” where the self-concept of inner beauty is joined with outer beauty. Lastly, research concerning the field of the law in the modelling industry by Galya Hildesheimer and Hemda Gur-Arie entitled *Just Modeling? The Modeling Industry, Eating Disorders, and the law*. Through this research, it is revealed that commercial advertisements played a big role in developing a sense of toxic beauty standards concerning body types.

The concept of beauty is a well-known discussed topic in research over the years. Yet, the shifting of the beauty trends always makes each research with different times and trends worthwhile. Research shows there are some aspects that influence how beauty and attractiveness are perceived, such as biological, psychological, cultural and social aspects Maymone (2019). The mentioned aspects that have the ability to influence the way beauty is perceived made it important to conduct up-to-date research. The rebranding of Victoria’s Secret which is regarded as a big new step taken by the brand in 2021 is seen to be a worthy research to be conducted. The writer put the main concern of finding the shifting of the concept of beauty presented by the advertisement posted on Instagram in the form of images. Therefore, the writer utilized Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory, accompanied by interpretation through the perspectives of the beauty myth concept by Naomi Wolf while taking post-feminist visualization of women’s bodies by Rosalind Gill.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the writer formulates the statement of the problem of this study as follows:

1. How are women in lingerie represented in the Fall 2019 and 2021 Campaigns?

2. How is the portrayal of beauty shifted from the Fall 2019 Campaign to the 2021 Campaign?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify how women are portrayed in Victoria's Secret advertisements as well as to reveal how the portrayal of beauty is shifted from the Fall 2019 Campaign to the Fall 2021 Campaign.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Following the statement in the purpose of the study, there are several significant premises as to why conducting this research is beneficial. First, the outcome of conducting the result on the researcher is to help in the comprehension of the concept of beauty myth coined by Naomi Wolf. The theory of postfeminist visualization of women's bodies which was applied to the study also contributed to understanding the social context of the advertisement. This study is expected to seek the affirmation of the shifting concept of beauty in Victoria's Secret rebranding which could affect the value of beauty myth by utilizing the theory of semiotics by Roland Barthes. Lastly, the writer hopes this study will be useful in contributing to the next studies that will be conducted in the future. Especially with studies that focus on the portrayal of beauty myth in commercials which utilizes Roland Barthes' semiotic.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1. Advertisement: a form of persuasive communication media designed to generate responses and achieve certain marketing purposes (Gilson & Berkman, 1980).

2. Beauty: the object of a universal interest, where people put interest with the pleasure that beauty provides (Scruton, 2009).
3. Beauty myth: a concept concerning beauty which pressures women to abide by the social beauty standards to be accepted by society (Wolf, 2002).
4. Postfeminism: represents feminism's 'coming of age'; being able to tolerate difference and to reflect upon its location in relation to other intellectual and political movements (Yeatman, 1994).
5. Semiotics: the study of signs that exists in human life, everything that exists in life can be seen as a sign to which we have to give meaning (Hoed, 2008)