

OBJECTIFICATION AND COMMODITY FEMINISM IN PANTENE INDONESIA ADVERTISEMENTS: A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of gender and beauty, often reinforcing dominant social ideologies through verbal and visual representations. This study investigates how women are objectified in Indonesian hair-care advertising by analyzing two Pantene commercials, *The Raline Look Super Straight Hair!* (2015) and *For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!* (2022). The study aims to examine the discursive strategies through which these advertisements construct female identity and reproduce gendered power relations within neoliberal consumer culture. This research employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, van Leeuwen's theory of visual representation, and Nussbaum's theory of objectification. The analysis focuses on spoken utterances, on-screen text, visual representations, and character interactions to explore the relationship between textual features, discursive practices, and broader social structures. The findings reveal that both advertisements construct women as deficient subjects whose social value depends on achieving an idealized hairstyle through product consumption. The 2015 commercial associates flawless hair with personal identity, attractiveness, and self-worth, thereby positioning women as objects of visual evaluation. Meanwhile, the 2022 commercial employs performative shaming, in which a male character attributes a woman's romantic failure to inadequate hair care, reinforcing male authority in defining female value. Across both advertisements, objectification is normalized through narratives framed as humorous, aspirational, and empowering, obscuring the patriarchal assumptions embedded within the promotional discourse. The study concludes that Pantene's advertising discourse reproduces and adapts patriarchal ideologies by linking female worth to physical appearance and consumer practices.

Keywords: *advertising; consumer culture; critical discourse analysis; gender; Indonesia; multimodality; objectification; visual semiotics.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global advertising industry has undergone a significant shift in its portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics. Historically, advertising relied heavily on sexist tropes and imagery, particularly in the 20th-century consumerist context. However, there has been a notable transition towards narratives that prioritize women's empowerment, inclusivity, and autonomy. This shift is characterized by a move away from the traditional, stereotypical portrayals of women as objects of desire or submissive figures, towards more authentic and empowering depictions that reflect contemporary societal values and aspirations. This novel industry phenomenon has been designated "femvertising" (Priyadharshini, 2025). From the perspective of critical media studies, this ostensibly progressive shift is more a stylistic adjustment than an ideological renewal. The "commodified feminism" proposed by Goldman et al. (1991). This phenomenon provides a precise illustration of its fundamental nature. In the neoliberal capitalist context, it has been observed that brands have engaged in the appropriation of feminist language for commercial purposes, effectively distorting and depoliticizing the original essence of feminist principles. Furthermore, an analysis of these brands reveals a strategic reframing of women's empowerment as an aestheticized, individual achievement that can be attained through the act of consumption.

The tension between progressives in messaging but regressive at the level of underlying ideologies is especially evident in the Global South. The rapid digitization of the media landscape in Indonesia meets deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and cultures of religious modesty (Labiste & Sykes, 2025). Indonesian advertising increasingly employs diverse casting, humor, cosmopolitan aesthetics, and appeals to modern consumer and appeals to the more cultured modern consumer but with a baseline imperative of female social value anchored squarely in bodily perfection or male gaze. Modern Indonesian women are paradoxically positioned as active subjects pursuing self-actualization, yet simultaneously subjected to strict surveillance of their femininity (Beta & Rakhmani, 2026).

The personal care and beauty field is a major site for the negotiation of these gendered discourses. In particular, hair care advertising often employs the female body as a blank canvas onto which ideals of femininity, health and social achievement are inscribed. This study explores the diachronic development of these forms of discursive strategies through a close textual analysis of two flagship television commercials (TVCs) for Pantene Indonesia, although released seven years apart; the aspirational 'The Raline Look: Super Straight Hair!' (2015) and the funny 'For Hair, No More Half-Hearted' (2022). These two campaigns signal a clear pivot in tone of marketing. This 2015 advertisement features the serious, perfectionist voice of a female brand ambassador (Raline Shah) while the 2022 campaign employs comedic realism and performative humiliation, led by male influencer Keanu Agl. Even though there is such apparent diversity in tone, genre, and spokesperson gender, this paper asks whether the ideological treatment of women has actually changed. Textual analysis alone is insufficient to capture the ideological dimensions of advertising.

Ads convince because of not only what they say but how the subjects are arranged visually and spatially. Based on this, an approach of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is adopted in the current study to account for both linguistic and non-linguistic CDA drawing from Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse (2013), and van Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). In addition, Nussbaum's philosophical theory (1995) of objectification – the characteristic of instrumentality and the

denial of subjectivity — is engaged to address ways in which women are visually fragmented and evaluated.

This paper examines the discourse of women as static and oppressive, through the analysis of vocal scripts, on-screen text, camera techniques (close-ups), body positions and character interaction across both campaigns (O'Halloran, 2008). The results show how through their advertisements, both campaigns portray women as socially inadequate, whose worth depends on achieving idealized bodily perfection through brand consumption. This study contributes to critical scholarship on the discursive persistence of objectifying ideologies in the face of modernizing techniques for deploying Euro-centric advertising practices throughout the Global South.

This study investigates the following research questions: 1. How do Pantene Indonesia advertisements construct female identity through verbal and visual discourse? 2. How are objectification strategies represented across the 2015 and 2022 campaigns? And, 3. How do these advertisements reproduce neoliberal and patriarchal gender ideologies? Although previous studies have examined femvertising and gender representation in Indonesian media, limited research has comparatively analyzed how multimodal advertising strategies reproduce objectification across different advertising eras within Indonesian beauty campaigns.

2. Literature Review

Over the last decade, global advertising appears to have shifted from overt sexism toward narratives of female empowerment, often termed 'femvertising'—a portmanteau of "feminism" and "advertising"—refers to marketing campaigns that employ pro-female messages, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote women's empowerment (Gill, 2016; Sheehan & O'Donnell, 2023). Emerging prominently in the 2010s, femvertising represents a strategic shift by brands to align with contemporary social movements such as #MeToo and UN Women's HeForShe campaign, responding to growing consumer demand for authenticity and social responsibility (Kahlenberg & Rojas, 2021).

Scholars note that while femvertising can foster positive brand perceptions and strengthen emotional connections with female consumers (Jhally, 2020), it also risks accusations of "fem-washing"—the superficial co-optation of feminist rhetoric for profit without substantive commitment to gender equity (Banet-Weiser, 2018). For instance, campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" or Pantene's "Strong Is Beautiful" have been praised for challenging narrow beauty standards but critiqued for simultaneously selling products premised on physical appearance (Gill, 2020).

The intersection of femvertising and commodity feminism captures one of the most consequential cultural shifts of the 21st century: the marketplace's absorption of feminist rhetoric. Femvertising refers to marketing campaigns that explicitly champion female empowerment, gender equality, or body positivity, often leveraging feminist language to target socially conscious consumers (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007). Commodity feminism, a concept rooted in cultural and feminist theory, describes the process by which those same ideals are stripped of their political and structural critiques, repackaged as consumer goods, and sold back to the public (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Together, they illustrate how capitalism adapts to social movements, transforming collective liberation into individualized lifestyle branding (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

However, as critical scholarship argues, such changes frequently indicate a stylistic shift more than they do an ideological one; especially in the context of the Global South's

neoliberal consumer culture (Davis et al., 2025). This third space is awkwardly reconciling a new image of women with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. In Indonesia, for example, we see brands channelling themes such as agency, humour and diverse beauty to appeal to the millennial consumer, whilst at the same time are still using discursive practices that link female value tightly to aesthetic perfection and male validation (Gomez-Borquez et al., 2024).

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) has emerged as a vital methodological framework for examining how power, ideology, and social identities are constructed and contested not only through language but also through the integration of multiple semiotic modes—such as image, colour, layout, gesture, sound, and typography—in communicative texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Building on the foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which traditionally focused on linguistic structures as sites of ideological reproduction (Fairclough, 1989), MCDA expands this scope to account for the increasingly visual and multimodal nature of contemporary media, advertising, digital platforms, and public discourse.

Central to MCDA is the recognition that meaning is inherently multimodal; no mode operates in isolation. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) *Visual Grammar* provides a foundational toolkit for analysing how visual elements function grammatically—through representational, interactive, and compositional meanings—to position viewers ideologically. For instance, camera angles, gaze direction, and framing can construct relations of power or solidarity between depicted subjects and audiences (van Leeuwen, 2008).

The concept of objectification is rooted in Kant's (1784/1963) moral philosophy, which posits that treating individuals merely as means to an end—rather than as ends in themselves—constitutes a fundamental violation of human dignity (Langton, 2009; Morris & Goldenberg, 2015; Pasha, 2022). Building upon this framework, Nussbaum (1995) advanced a feminist conceptualization of objectification, delineating seven distinct forms wherein human beings are reduced to mere entities devoid of intrinsic dignity or subjectivity (Kaur, 2019). Women are disproportionately subjected to this phenomenon; they are frequently evaluated solely by their physical attributes, relational status, or traditional social roles, effectively stripping them of their agency and autonomy (Szymanski et al., 2010; Wardani & Suherman, 2023). Consequently, the female body is heavily commodified as an object of desire, precipitating systemic objectification across contemporary media contexts.

The purpose of this literature review is to bring together existing research on commodity feminism, representation in Indonesian culture, and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to expound a possible theory about this phenomenon. Tracing gendered representation from the aspirational 'Super Raline' campaign to the performative humiliation of the 'Half-Hearted' campaign reveals continuity in objectification strategies. It is evident that, although advertising language has adopted new strategies of objectification, it continues to embed patriarchal surveillance within narratives that are framed as progressive or comedic (Edouihri, 2024).

The findings of gender studies have shown that Indonesia is not spared from these entrenched dominant paradigms of visual culture even amidst accelerated digitization of media in the country (Azizah, 2023). Digital platforms have broken away from the original mature framework of media relations. In theory, the progress narrative could have flourished in this new context. Some scholars have pointed out that male privilege can shift into the new digital context to replicate patriarchy. Against the backdrop of the deeply entrenched state of traditional gender roles, we define the concept of "commodified feminism". This

study introduces this perspective to analyze the Pantene brand case. Since digital platforms lie outside established media relations, progressive narratives theoretically can prosper. However, recent studies demonstrate that masculine prerogative transfers to new contexts capable of re-enacting a patriarchy (Allen, 2025). In this regard, women remain overrepresented in non-public spaces and are often framed as emotional rather than rational consumers. Adiprasetyo (2023) demonstrates this in a sociological study of Indonesian cinema, where women are depicted as passive vessels while men are granted agency. This entrenched cultural context makes Pantene's strategies in the 2022 'Half-Hearted' campaign appears as allegorical comic devices.

While traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, a more recent phenomenon has emerged in the form of "commodity feminism," whereby feminist ideology is appropriated and commodified as a strategy for marketing and product promotion. In the context of the global literature, sensibility market consumption was put in its place. However, more recent work in Indonesia offers up a more complicated picture (Banet-Weiser, 2018). 'Femvertising' in Indonesia typically deploys the language of empowerment and agency. Words have traditionally come to signify freedoms for women (Nahumury, 2025) as though they are stamps of approval for what is ultimately a fashioning of consumerism around beauty. It supports the paradox of "empowerment" that is based on purchasing power. This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for analysing the 2015 Pantene advertisement 'Super Raline'. Although the advertisement appears to emphasise Raline's strength and social status, her identity and success are ultimately tied to the texture and appearance of her hair. Consequently, the advertisement functions not as a liberatory technology, but as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality. It reinforces the notion that women's value is largely determined by their physical appearance.

We needed this epistemological lens for Pantene in part because it demonstrates how objectifying mechanisms continue to operate despite progressive branding strategies. By triangulating Norman Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model with the visual grammar framework developed by and Leeuwen (2010), researchers can demonstrate how specific production choices construct gendered meanings. For instance, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) claims that high-angle shots may symbolically reduce female characters' authority, while the use of a male voice-over, such as Keanu's, positions men as dominant speaking subjects and marginalises women's subjectivity. As argued by Machin (2010), sound, camera angle, and body positioning should not be viewed as merely aesthetic elements, but as communicative resources that reproduce social relations and power structures.

This study integrates three cross-disciplinary perspectives—cultural, theoretical, and methodological—to argue that contemporary Indonesian advertising relies on deceptive adaptive operations. Operating under the guise of ostensible creative innovation, it in fact continues to package and promote deeply rooted social norms including traditional gender roles, patriarchal authority, and collectivist conformity. Digital platforms had already freed themselves from many constraints of traditional legacy media, and should have become fertile ground for the development of progressive narratives. Drawing on Indonesia's deeply rooted traditional gender context, we put forward the concept of "commodity feminism"—a framework where feminism is instrumentalized to market consumer goods. This perspective can unpack the essence of brands like Pantene, which appear progressive on the surface but actually engage in commercial objectification.

3. Research Method

This study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how women's objectification works in Pantene Indonesia advertisements. Fairclough (2013) three-dimensional model and van Leeuwen's (2021) visual grammar were used to analyze the data.

3.1 Data Collection

The data consist of two television commercials released by Pantene Indonesia:

1. The "Raline Look: Super Straight Hair"! (2015): a 30-second spot featuring brand ambassador Raline Shah.
2. 'For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!' (2022): a 60-second spot featuring influencer Keanu Agl. These commercials were purposively selected to illustrate a tonal shift in advertising, from aspirational (2015) to comedic/relatable (2022).

Both videos were accessed on May 24, 2025 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UXZayvz_bs&list=LL&index=61&pp=gAQBiAQB8AUB, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15hwtRrMhfANub05pell6ns-VELg_xhX1?usp=drive_link)

The purposive selection of the two Pantene Indonesia television is grounded in established principles of critical discourse and advertising scholarship, particularly in relation to evolving brand communication strategies in response to sociocultural and media landscape shifts. This selection enables a comparative multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) that captures a documented industry-wide transition from traditional aspirational advertising toward postfeminist, relatable, and comedic messaging.

The dataset comprises two interrelated categories of materials: textual (including spoken dialogue, voice-over narration, on-screen captions and taglines) and visual (camera work, character portrayal, colour palette, lighting, framing, gaze, body posture,). To ensure methodological transparency and analytical consistency, we adopted a systematic, iterative coding protocol grounded in the principles of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). This protocol involved multiple rounds of close reading and annotation, during which we extracted recurring semantic patterns (e.g., lexical choices that frame hair as a site of personal failure or triumph), representational strategy patterns (e.g., the use of transformation narratives versus comedic realism to depict hair care), and underlying ideological structures (e.g., neoliberal individualism, feminist empowerment, or traditional beauty norms).

Our approach is explicitly grounded in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which treats discourse as a form of social practice embedded within—and constitutive of—relations of power (Fairclough, 2013). Accordingly, we move dialectically between text (close description of linguistic and visual features), discursive practice (interpretation of production, distribution, and consumption processes), and social practice (analysis of how the text reflects and reproduces broader ideological structures in Indonesian consumer culture).

This framework necessitates reflexivity about our researcher positionality. As critical scholars positioned outside corporate media institutions yet deeply engaged with feminist and postcolonial critiques of beauty norms, we foreground questions of agency, representation, and commodification. Thus, our reading is deliberately ideological—not in

the sense of bias, but in Fairclough's (1989) methodological sense. It seeks to uncover how dominant ideologies are naturalized through semiotic choices, while remaining attentive to potential counter-hegemonic elements. We do not claim objective neutrality; rather, we embrace CDA's emancipatory aim of making power visible in everyday discourse.

3.2 Analytical Framework

Verbal and audio scripts were analyzed using Fairclough's model to uncover power relations embedded in lexical choices and discursive practices. Lexical contrasts such as "Super" versus "Half-hearted" were examined to reveal the ideological construction of female value and to situate the advertisements within broader patriarchal ideologies in the Indonesian sociocultural context. Simultaneously, the visual dimension was deconstructed through Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar framework, focusing on:

1. Representational meaning: identifying active observers versus passive subjects.
2. Interactive meaning: analyzing gaze and camera angles (e.g., high angles signaling vulnerability).
3. Compositional meaning: examining salience, particularly the isolation of body parts (e.g., hair) over personality, reflecting Nussbaum's concept of instrumentality.

To ensure analytical rigor, coding was cross-checked and interpretation triangulated across verbal and visual dimensions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The 2015 'Super Raline': Idealized Objectification

The 2015 advertisement constructs an idealized paradigm of desire situated at the critical intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. Drawing on O'Halloran's (2008) theory that visual structures shape constrained meanings, and Macken-Horarik's (2004) research on compositional frameworks, this study argues that the advertisement constructs a desire paradigm at the intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. The female empowerment symbols in the advertisement's dubbing, such as "Super" and "Excellence", are completely undermined by close-up shots that fragment lead actor Raline Shah's body and reinforce the "Raline Look", ultimately narrowing the lead character to an objectified aesthetic commodity that only serves to embody hair-related aesthetics.

The 2015 Pantene Indonesia advertisement constructs an idealized paradigm of desire that operates precisely at the critical intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. Drawing on O'Halloran's (2008) assertion that visual structures do not merely illustrate meaning but actively constrain and shape ideological interpretation, and Macken-Horarik's (2004) insights into how compositional frameworks guide viewer attention and assign value, this study contends that the ad orchestrates a semiotic regime in which empowerment is superficially invoked yet systematically evacuated of political or agentic substance.

On the surface, the advertisement deploys lexical markers of excellence and superiority—phrases like "Super" and "Excellence" in its voice-over and on-screen text—that echo the rhetoric of female achievement and self-mastery common in early femvertising campaigns. However, these verbal affirmations are starkly contradicted by the visual grammar of the commercial. The camera lingers in extreme close-ups on Raline Shah's hair—smooth, glossy, and perfectly straight—while other parts of her body are cropped or

decontextualized. Her face is often shown in profile or with eyes averted, denying direct eye contact (what Kress & van Leeuwen [2021] term an “offer” rather than a “demand”, thereby positioning her not as an active subject engaging the viewer but as a passive spectacle to be consumed. This fragmentation of the female body aligns with feminist critiques of objectification, wherein women are reduced to a collection of aesthetic parts rather than whole persons with agency (Szymanski et al., 2010).

Crucially, the phrase “Raline Look” functions as a branding mechanism that commodifies not only the hairstyle but also Raline Shah’s identity itself. Her name becomes synonymous with a standardized beauty ideal—one that is unattainable without the product—thereby transforming her from a public figure into a proprietary aesthetic template. This exemplifies what Banet-Weiser (2018) describes as “commodity feminism”: the process by which feminist language (“confidence,” “excellence”) is co-opted to sell products, while the structural conditions that limit women’s autonomy remain unchallenged. The advertisement thus produces a paradoxical subject: she appears empowered through perfection, yet her “power” is entirely contingent on conforming to a narrow, market-driven standard of beauty.

In Fairclough’s (1992) CDA terms, this constitutes a discursive strategy of incorporation, where progressive discourse is absorbed into hegemonic consumer logic. The ad’s textual layer gestures toward female distinction (“Super”), but its discursive practice—evident in the visual framing and editing—reinscribes patriarchal norms of passive femininity. At the level of social practice, it reinforces a neoliberal ideology in which women’s worth is tied to their ability to self-optimize through consumption. Ultimately, the “desire paradigm” constructed is not for liberation or self-determination, but for a flawless, commodified image—an objectified ideal that masquerades as empowerment while serving the primary function of driving product sales.

The ad suggests that Pantene not only repairs hair but also enhances personal identity, epitomized in the figure of ‘Super Raline.’ Her role in this new identity is that of a place to look up how effective Pantene is. However, the reason her standing is high. The third and final tagline, “Strong is beautiful,” grounds the entire narrative in ideology by connecting a particular quality—strong hair—to an unspecified value of femininity. This echoes Nussbaum’s ideas of “reduction to appearance,” which is judging a person mostly by how they look (Nussbaum, 1995). Raline’s value concerns how well she can replicate and maintain the “super straight” / “super soft” hair/shake that shapes Raline out to be. We can only do this with the product. The interplay of the visual semiotics of the advertisement with the spoken narration makes the message that reduces women to their objects more potent. The pictures show swooping black hair, the prime of Raline Shah as those radiant flowing strands. The ad promotes an unattainable ideal of perfection encompassing hair, skin, body type, demeanor, and fashion accessories. The images of her broken locks are showing the issue with dull and fine strands that made a crisis emerging as an organic state.

Photos showing how the conditioner penetrates the hair shaft lend some reality to the promise of deep healing. Now her hair becomes unusually long, straight, glossy and silky. It is a very hopeful portrayal of the archetype of what it means to be a lady in relation to product. The two images extracted from the commercial in which these of Raline Shah appeared on the advertisement in 2015 are important visual data that illustrate how objectification operates inside the pictures. Raline Shah stands and poses in front of camera. She directs her calm, confident smile straight at the camera while running a hand through her hair. This image shows a high-fashion and beauty advertisement pose. There is no

narrative representation of emotion; rather, the image functions solely as a visual display to be observed.

The light is soft, and her skin looks even better, so does her hair. Both are really smooth. There is a blurry, almost empty background behind her making her the centre of focus. This image represents her as an object of contemplation, functioning more as a static tableau than as an individual engaged in action. She goes beyond any beautiful appearance and so gets completely taken over by her attitude as it has gone passive, and also, she cares only for what appears to really be. It does have a counterpart, however, which is the second picture, and this one has life in it. A swath of her hair dominates the screen, suggesting some fracas. It is a very common subject in advertising about hair care that wants to make an advertisement with the fullest, shiniest, bounciest hair.


According to Kress and Leeuwen (2021), the use of a low shot emphasizes facial elements; therefore, the hair becomes the primary focus of the image. The image cuts Raline off from her humanity, focusing solely on her hair. The instrumental function of this graphic style is highly pronounced, as the female figure is positioned as an object through which the effectiveness of the product in producing silky and smooth hair is demonstrated. This paper conducts a semiotic cultural critique of two Pantene advertisements. It first anchors model Raline Shah's hair as the core sign — it serves both as a marker of female identity and a carrier of social value; it then unpacks how the advertisements first frame this sign as a flawless, commodified aesthetic object, naturalize mainstream beauty ideals and tie them to mass consumption, before packaging the lead character's ideal physical traits as a standard that the general public can attain through purchase. Finally, the paper extracts the hidden logic underlying the ads: to uphold ideal femininity, one must consume Pantene, and an individual's acquisition of social capital must be mediated by this commodity.

4.2 The 2022 "Half-Hearted": Performative Humiliation

The 2022 advertisement marks a tonal shift to comedy but retains the core objectifying ideology. The introduction of Keanu, a male figure, transforms the dynamic from self-reflection to external assessment. The narrative employs "performative humiliation," where the female character's romantic failure is explicitly linked to her "half-hearted" hair care. By framing romantic rejection as a consequence of consumer negligence, the ad reinforces neoliberal self-governance (Aspinall, 2013). The use of humour serves to mask the patriarchal nature of the critique. However, the visual positioning of the woman—often shown looking up at the male critic or reacting to his judgment—relegates her to a passive role. The following presents a multimodal analysis grounded in selected shots from the advertisement.

Table 1.

Stella and Keanu's shot

Frame	Visual Data	Textual Data
1		(S1) Stella: Hey, Keanu, I'm confused about what I did wrong. (S2) Stella: That guy left me on our first date, even though my effort was already at its maximum. (S3) Stella: I have checked his zodiac sign, searched for the best date spot, picked the most 'wow' outfit, ehh, no results.


Frame 1 shows Stella and Keanu seated opposite each other at a cafe table, medium shot with warm lighting, Stella (left) speaking with confused/disappointed expression, Keanu (right) listening attentively, two glasses of orange juice on table. This image functions as a critical narrative foundation for the verbal exchange. The visual composition establishes a seemingly equal interpersonal dynamic that masks underlying power asymmetries. The warm lighting and cafe setting create a sense of everyday authenticity, positioning the interaction as relatable and normal rather than staged or artificial. The two glasses of orange juice serve as visual signifiers of social ritual, yet Stella's glass remains untouched, visually reinforcing her emotional disruption.

The statement (S1) establishes Stella as the subject seeking explanation, positioning her as vulnerable and in need of guidance. The phrase "I'm confused" signals cognitive dissonance between her perceived effort and the negative outcome, setting up the narrative tension. The use of "Hey" creates an informal, conversational tone that aligns with the visual's casual setting. The visual framing of Stella's confused expression directly reinforces the textual claim of confusion. Stella's furrowed brow and slightly parted lips visually manifest the verbal "confused" state, creating a multimodal reinforcement of her emotional vulnerability. This synergy makes the narrative feel experientially real rather than abstractly stated, positioning Stella as a relatable figure experiencing genuine social rejection.

The utterance (S2) employs the language of neoliberal self-governance (Aspinall, 2013), where personal outcomes are framed as direct results of individual effort. The phrase "effort was already at its maximum" presents her as having exhausted all possible actions within the system—implying the system itself (dating) should reward such effort. This visual element establishes what Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) term a "demand" relationship between the characters, positioning Stella as actively engaging with Keanu. However, this visual "demand" is undermined by her emotional vulnerability, suggesting an unequal power dynamic where she seeks validation but receives judgment. Keanu's steady gaze constructs him as the rational authority figure who possesses the solution.

This statement (S3) details Stella's extensive self-monitoring and optimization, reflecting what Gill (2020) identifies as "confidence culture" where women must constantly manage their appearance and behaviour to achieve social success. The list format emphasizes the comprehensiveness of her efforts while the hesitant "ehh" signals her frustration with the lack of results. The visual contrast between Stella's animated gestures and Keanu's composed posture reinforces the gendered dynamic where women are emotional and men are rational. This visual element creates what Fairclough (1992) would call a "discursive practice" where power is exercised through non-verbal cues as much as through speech.

Tabel 2
Keanu's shot

Frame	Visual Data	Textual Data
2		(S4) Keanu: No matter how maximum your effort is, it won't matter if your effort on your hair is only half-hearted.

Frame 2 shows Keanu seated at cafe table, medium close-up, confident expression with slight smile, direct eye contact with camera, holding glass of orange juice, warm lighting, blurred background. This image functions as the ideological climax of the commercial's narrative. The visual composition strategically positions Keanu as the authoritative figure delivering the commercial's core message. The medium close-up creates an intimate social distance that invites viewer engagement with his pronouncement, while his confident expression visually embodies epistemic authority. The warm lighting and café setting maintain the relatable, everyday authenticity established in previous frames, masking the underlying disciplinary nature of his statement. His glass of orange juice—held but not consumed—serves as a visual motif that signifies his role as the detached observer rather than the emotionally invested participant.

The statement (S4) delivers the commercial's ideological punchline with strategic linguistic precision. The phrase "*No matter how*" establishes hair care as the absolute prerequisite for social success, positioning it above all other forms of effort. The binary construction of "*maximum*" versus "*half-hearted*" creates a moral framework where anything less than total commitment to hair care is inherently flawed. Crucially, the term "*half-hearted*" performs a linguistic sleight of hand—it conflates emotional commitment with consumer behaviour, making the product demand feel personally relevant while reinforcing the commercial's product focus.

Keanu's steady gaze and composed demeanour visually manifest the certainty of his pronouncement, creating a multimodal reinforcement that makes the ideological message feel objectively true rather than ideologically constructed. The direct eye contact with the camera positions *him* as the speaker addressing the audience directly, bypassing Stella as an intermediary. This visual strategy transforms Keanu from a conversational participant into the brand's authoritative voice. The strategic repetition positions "*effort*" as the key concept in the narrative, while the binary of "*maximum*" versus "*half-hearted*" constructs a moral imperative where hair care becomes the non-negotiable foundation of social value. This linguistic choice elevates the product from functional item to ethical necessity. By positioning hair care as the absolute determinant of social success, the ad transforms complex interpersonal dynamics into a simple consumer problem. This exemplifies Aspinall's (2013) "*neoliberal self-governance*," where individuals are held solely responsible for social outcomes through consumer choices. Keanu's authoritative delivery masks this as objective truth rather than ideological construction.

This moment represents the ideological core of the commercial, where visual and textual elements converge to deliver a message that positions consumption as the pathway to social value. Keanu's statement functions as what Fairclough (1992) identifies as a "*discursive practice*" where power is exercised through seemingly neutral language choices. His confident delivery transforms the commercial's product claim into an objective social law: "*No matter how maximum your effort is...*" creates a false binary that positions hair care as the sole determinant of social worth.

Critically, the visual framing of Keanu as the *confident authority* (not Stella as the distressed subject) reveals the commercial's strategic masking mechanism. By positioning the judgment within a relatable, humorous context (Keanu's slight smile, casual setting), the ad avoids direct accusations of sexism while still delivering a message that women's social value depends on appearance. This represents a sophisticated evolution of commodity feminism: the language of individual responsibility ("*maximum effort*") is retained but redirected toward consumer compliance rather than genuine agency (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The multimodal construction—where Keanu's authoritative visual presence reinforces the textual claim—demonstrates how power operates through seemingly neutral choices. His direct gaze and composed demeanour construct him as the rational arbiter of social value, while the warm café setting naturalizes patriarchal judgment as everyday wisdom. This analysis reveals that the commercial does not challenge patriarchal assumptions; it repackages them in the language of self-improvement, making the ideological message feel both modern and empowering while sustaining the system of gendered objectification.

Keanu's hiring as the ambassador for Pantene Indonesia in 2022 signifies a change in strategy for the brand. Keanu's persona, framed as humorous and non-threatening, masks patriarchal critique through comedic realism. He does not look like a traditional male model. Some people think his amusing; non-threatening nature is a sign of variety. From the perspective of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework (2013), however, he is represented as part of the "For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!" campaign.

The commercial for the "campaign" does not seek to dispute the brand's patriarchal messaging; instead, it wants to support and strengthen it. Keanu is the actor in the ad who makes others seem bad. He uses his platform to spread and reinforce the idea that the commercial is trying to sell. His presence enables the corporation to disseminate the ideological message that women's value is primarily determined by their physical appearance, while framing this representation within a contemporary and socially acceptable discourse that simultaneously mitigates potential criticism. The verbal scripts ("Super," "Half-hearted") and visual framing techniques, such as close-ups and gaze, work together to reinforce neoliberal self-governance and patriarchal surveillance.

This study first unpacks the narrative positioning of the character Keanu in this commercial, pointing out that rather than serving as the friendly, helpful male partner common in similar advertisements, Keanu is a special character that fulfils the function of a clown-like critic. His core role is to undermine the female protagonist Stella's self-perception, and forcefully shift her emotional attention to appearance anxiety. From the perspective of behavioural logic, Keanu uses scornful teasing to downplay the social context anxiety that Stella originally experienced, employs language packaged as humour to reinforce male discursive dominance, and blames all conflicts in her complex social circumstances entirely on Stella's hairstyle. While simplifying these conflicts, he firmly holds onto both the interpretive power over the event and control over its associated emotions. To substantiate the instrumentalized nature of this character, this study introduces the theory of instrumentality proposed by Nussbaum (1995), pointing out that Keanu never treats Stella as an independent individual in need of comfort. Instead, he reduces her to a marketing vehicle used to demonstrate that hair care products are essential for social success. This study further argues that the narrative repeatedly reinforces the misleading assumption that the success of a romantic encounter is determined primarily by women's physical appearance, particularly the condition of their hair. Cross-referencing this with Keanu's lines in the advertisement confirms that this is a typical gendered objectifying discourse that singularly ties women's worth to their physical attributes.

Men often impose their own objectifying narratives on women and refuse to engage with women's authentic lived experiences, placing themselves in a privileged position that supersedes women's subjectivity. The core vehicle for this set of power-manipulation tactics is humour: the core of gender discrimination is wrapped in smiles and jokes, turning acts of objectification into content for casual entertainment. The current virally spreading extreme entertainment-driven marketing is concrete evidence of this type of rhetoric. This marketing

blurs the underlying foundation of gender discrimination, further uses the cognitive dissonance triggered by its comedic elements to weaken audiences' critical awareness, and ultimately conceals the harmful effects embedded within the discourse. The two-way dialogue between Keanu and Stella features a clear power hierarchy at the level of reification: Keanu actively initiates quarrels, defines problems, makes decisions, and puts forward solutions, while Stella is unable to refute his arguments or come up with any alternative plans.

4.3 Continuity in Ideology: A Comparative Examination of Verbal and Visual Strategies

While the faces and narrative foundations of 2015's "Super Straight Hair" and 2022's "Half-Hearted" are indeed strikingly more different than they might first seem, a critical discourse analysis indicates that ideological frameworks keeping women objectified have not shifted almost at all. The same message lies at the heart of both ads, though they use different verbiage and images to get there. So, one ad uses aspirational branding, the other confrontational shaming.

The central premise is that a woman's value, especially her prospects in social and romantic spheres, is fundamentally dictated by the quality and presentation of her hair. The brand's essential ideals do not alter when Raline Shah is replaced by Keanu. Instead, the brand's communication style changes, making the continuous issue of objectification seem new and important to today's viewers. The most significant thing that stays the same is how vital hair is. In both ads, hair is more than simply a feature. It is also the key way to tell who you are, how much you are worth, and what your social status is. "The Raline look," which is a key element of her celebrity image, is all about Raline Shah's "straight hair." This style is what makes her a terrific brand ambassador. Stella believes that her frizzy, "tired" hair is the only thing that makes her less desirable to guys.

In these two cases, hair is elevated to the level of a full identity label representative, thus complying with Nussbaum's reduction to appearance. The language in two pieces speaks to that void. Raline's hair is described as "dry," implying that it requires treatment because it lacks something essential. While this framing still positions hair as a problem in need of correction, it appears comparatively neutral. In contrast, Stella's hair is portrayed as "half-hearted" and "tired," descriptions that extend beyond physical appearance and suggest deficiencies in her personality or demeanor. It is used to construct a sense of defect and urgency, as though a catastrophic outcome is imminent unless the Pantene product is used to repair the physical damage in exchange for achieving beauty.

Pantene products are framed as transformative, altering women's appearance and voice to align with idealized femininity. Raline transforms into "Super Raline." It embodies what is portrayed as the ultimate feminine ideal: perfectly straight, glossy hair. She appears confident and self-assured, implying that the product is effective in enabling this transformation. In the current context of commercial media, the ubiquitous before-and-after narrative is commonly used to validate product efficacy. Yet this narrative erodes the structural value of the subject: the changes it portrays stay strictly at the surface level, and it fails entirely to support the subject's internal agency, resilience, and personal growth.

5. Conclusion

This study positions the target commercial advertisement as its central object of critique, revealing how it functions not as a site of empowerment but as a vehicle for the reproduction of patriarchal ideology under the guise of progressive messaging. The

advertisement frames positive male attention as the ultimate validation of women's worth, thereby positioning men as rational arbiters who evaluate women's aesthetic eligibility and romantic desirability. In doing so, it constructs a narrative in which female subjectivity remains incomplete without male approval or the successful completion of a market-mediated transformation. Women are cast as perpetual subjects of scrutiny, their social legitimacy tethered to externally imposed beauty standards that reinforce entrenched gender hierarchies. Consumption is then packaged as the primary—indeed, the only—pathway through which women may attain attractiveness, self-confidence, and social acceptance, effectively commodifying their insecurities. Crucially, the advertisement does not interrogate or disrupt these underlying patriarchal assumptions; rather, it appropriates the language of female empowerment to obscure its disciplinary function. This case exemplifies a broader trend in contemporary advertising: the strategic co-optation of feminist rhetoric to sustain, rather than subvert, the systemic objectification of women. As such, it underscores the urgent need for critical media literacy that can discern between performative inclusivity and genuine structural change.

This research contributes to the growing body of critical scholarship on gender, consumer culture, and media representation in Southeast Asia by offering a fine-grained multimodal analysis of how global beauty brands like Pantene adapt feminist discourse to local advertising contexts. By applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis in conjunction with multimodal frameworks, the study demonstrates that shifts in advertising tone—from aspirational glamour to comedic relatability. The findings have significant implications for media literacy education, feminist activism, and ethical marketing regulation in Indonesia and beyond. They reveal how "empowerment" can be depoliticized and repackaged as individualized consumer choice, thereby neutralizing feminism's transformative potential. Ultimately, this work advances methodological rigor in visual cultural studies and provides a replicable analytical model for interrogating the subtle yet pervasive ways in which commodity feminism operates across diverse media landscapes.

This study has achieved its core research objectives, having clarified the communication logic underlying the excessive objectification of female images on social platforms. It nonetheless has two limitations. Future academic research may supplement cross-regional sample pools and data from lower-tier markets, and conduct analyses of gender narratives in live streaming scenarios. Industry stakeholders must advance rectification efforts from the dimensions of traffic allocation and content moderation.

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