Redefining Beauty: The Refined Narrative of Plus-Size Women by Adithira Hanim

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Abstract

This study highlights the transformative potential of social-media in democratizing beauty discourses and foresting diverse, empowering portrayals of body image in contemporary digital culture. This study examines the portrayal of body positivity on Instagram through the plus-size influencer Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon), using Roland Barthes' semiotics analysis to explore how visual and textual elements construct alternative beauty narratives. Focusing on five aspects, text captions, embedded messages, settings, objects, and mood, this research reveals how Adithira redefines beauty beyond thinness by negotiating within Instagram's visual culture. At the denotative level, her posts display everyday fashion, fitness routines, and self-expression; at the connotative level, these visuals signify confidence, empowerment, and resistance to body stigma; and at the mythological level, they challenge long-standing beauty ideologies tied to slimness, fairness, and Eurocentric ideals. Her content also disrupts postcolonial beauty myths, particularly the notion of cosmopolitan whiteness, while aligning with postfeminist sensibilities where empowerment and agency are expressed through strategic self-presentation. By curating fashion, showcasing an active lifestyle, and sharing personal stories, Adithira subverts restrictive beauty standards from within culturally accepted frameworks, demonstrating how digital platforms can serve as inclusive spaces for negotiating body representation. This study highlights the transformative potential of social-media in democratizing beauty discourses and foresting diverse, empowering portrayals of body image in contemporary digital culture

Keywords: beauty standards; body positivity; plus-size influencer; postfeminist; media culture

Introduction

Beauty standards in modern society are often shaped by social constructions influenced by mass media. Women who do not conform to these standards, such as plus-size individuals, frequently experience discrimination and negative stigma, both in real life and digital spaces (Sarwer & Polonsky, 2016). Social media, particularly Instagram, has emerged as a significant platform in challenging these rigid standards by offering more inclusive body representations (Cohen et al., 2019). One of the public figures contributing to this movement is Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon), a plus-size model and digital creator based in Indonesia. Through her Instagram account, she frequently collaborates with local fashion and beauty brands to represent plus-size women in mainstream campaigns. Her consistent presence and voice on the platform provide a relatable and empowering representation for Indonesian women with diverse body types.

From a constructivist perspective, social reality is not fixed but is continuously shaped through human and social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 2021). Beauty ideals can be redefined through social media, where individuals and communities create new narratives (Cohen et al., 2019). Saraswati (2013) argues that beauty is not solely based on physical appearance but is also shape by cultural and historical structures. In Indonesia, conventional beauty standards, such as fair skin, a sharp nose, and a slim figure, further limit the representation of women who do not meet these criteria (Prianti, 2013). Building up on this, Priyatna (2023) introduces the concept of "Kebaya Feminism" to describe how Indonesian women engage in cultural negotiations by re-appropriating traditional symbols, like the kebaya, as mediums of subtle resistance against gendered and aesthetic norms. Rather than confronting these ideals head-on, they navigate within existing cultural frameworks, transforming restrictive symbols into tools for self-expression and agency. Similarly, Naomi Wolf (2002) posits that beauty myths are media constructs designed to sustain patriarchal dominance,

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imposing unrealistic standards that pressure women to conform.

Plus-size women often face body shaming and cyberbullying, reinforcing the stigma that associates larger body sizes with unattractiveness and poor health (Sarwer & Polonsky, 2016). Body shaming is a form of bullying that ridicules individuals for not adhering to perceived beauty norms, targeting aspects such as body weight, skin tone, and facial structure (Butar-butar & Isman, 2023). However, social media has also enabled positive movements, such as body positivity, which challenges traditional beauty myths and promotes self-acceptance (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

In addition to body positivity, this research also considers the influence of postfeminist media culture in shaping women's relationship with beauty and self-presentation. Drawing on Rosalind Gill's perspective, post feminism is marked by a paradox in which women are encouraged to embrace empowerment and autonomy, yet within a framework that continues to emphasize individualism, consumerism, and self-surveillance (Gill, 2007). On Instagram, women are simultaneously subjects and objects of the gaze, navigating empowerment through curated images that are still bound to dominant visual aesthetics (Gill, 2017). This mirror Priyatna's (2023) argument in Kebaya Feminism, where women's agency is expressed not by rejecting cultural systems outright, but by tactically negotiating within them, employing aesthetic and cultural codes recognized by society to challenge, subvert, and reframe gendered expectations. This lens is important in understanding how figures like Adithira Hanim negotiate visibility, not entirely outside the system, but from within it, strategically engaging with popular formats to subvert rigid ideals.

This study is situated within the growing body of literature that explores how beauty narratives are being redefined in digital spaces. Prior research has examined how social media provides opportunities for diverse representations (Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Gill, 2017) and how plus-size influencers resist dominant norms while also participating in capitalist and aesthetic logics (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Building upon these studies, this research focuses on the Indonesian context, where discourses around beauty are shaped not only by global media flows but also by local cultural and historical narratives. By exploring how Adithira Hanim constructs her digital persona, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of body politics, visual culture, and the localization of body positivity within Southeast Asian media landscapes.

Adithira Hanim, as an influencer, utilizes Instagram to construct an alternative beauty narrative by showcasing her plus-size body in various styles, fitness activities, and daily routines. This challenges the conventional beauty myths, which has historically been exclusive and discriminatory. Instagram allows her to both produce and consume meaning, positioning herself as an agent in reshaping beauty standards (Cohen et al., 2019). Her post reflect a complex negotiation between self-expression, algorithmic visibility, and marketability, echoing the tensions found in postfeminist media culture (Gill, 2007).

To unpack the layered meanings within Adithira's content, this study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly his concept of myth. Semiotic is relevant to this study because it allows for a deeper reading of how visual and textual signs operate to naturalize particular ideologies about the body. Through Barthes' two-order signification model, denotation and connotation, the study examines how Adithira's posts simultaneously affirm challenge dominant narratives. Her representation as a plus-size woman engaging in fashion, fitness, and beauty rituals becomes a site of meaning-making that speaks to broader issues of femininity, desirability, and cultural acceptance.

Social media plays a significant role in shaping beauty standards in the digital era, influencing how women perceive beauty and their self-confidence. External opinions often impact women's perceptions, creating uncertainty about their appearance (Dimitrov & Kroumpouzos, 2023; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Beauty is frequently exploited by media, using discourse, illusion, and manipulation to shape public preferences and social ideology (Basir et al., 2022; Cholidah, 2015). Over time, beauty standards have evolved across different cultures and historical periods. In Indonesia, conventional beauty ideals emphasize fair skin, a symmetrical face, and slim figure, marginalizing those who do not fit these criteria (Islamey, 2020). This rigid definition of beauty pressures women to conform to societal expectations, reinforcing the idea that beauty is essential for social acceptance (Wolf, 2002). However, beauty is dynamic construct shaped by cultural and social structures, constantly evolving through new media and exposure to diverse influences (Dimitrov & Kroumpouzos, 2023).

Post-colonial perspectives highlight how beauty standards are influenced by historical and cultural contexts. In Indonesia, preferences for fair skin originated from pre-colonial Indian influences and were reinforced during Dutch and Japanese colonial rule (Saraswati, 2013). The colonial legacy promoted whiteness as a symbol of status and modernity, shaping beauty ideals that persist in the contemporary era. Furthermore, modern media continues to favor Westernized beauty standards, often overlooking Indonesia's diverse ethnic and physical characteristics (Prianti, 2013). The concept of "affect" plays a crucial role in shaping beauty perceptions, where societal emotions and historical narratives influence admiration, insecurity, or exclusion. Feelings of "shame" may arise when individuals do not conform to dominant beauty norms, reinforcing internalized colonial ideals. To counter this, there is a growing movement to embrace more inclusive and locally rooted definitions of beauty that celebrate Indonesia's cultural diversity and challenge the homogeneity imposed by global media.

This tension between conformity and resistance is also reflected in other cultural texts such as the Indonesian film *Before, Now & Then (2022)* (Agani & Lukmantoro, 2024). The film illustrates how women's identities are continuously negotiated within patriarchal and socio-political systems, where expressions of selfhood are both constrained and refined by cultural expectations. Reading this alongside contemporary beauty discourses reveals that women's bodies, whether in historical narratives or in today's digital culture, are never free from systemic frameworks. Instead, they must strategically navigate these constraints to assert agency, which resonates with struggles of plus-size women in Indonesia who use social media to challenge and renegotiate dominant beauty myths.

The idealized beauty standards portrayed in modern media, particularly on social media, often depict unrealistic images of women with slim bodies, tall figures, flawless white skin, and long legs. These images are heavily edited through lighting, makeup, and digital enhancements, creating unattainable expectations. Such portrayals negatively impact women's mental health, leading to body dissatisfaction, weight concerns, and even eating disorders due to the internalization of the thin ideal (Cohen et al., 2019). In response to these unrealistic beauty norms, the Body Positivity Movement emerged as a counter-narrative. Originating from the Fat Acceptance Movement in 1969, this movement protests discrimination against larger body sizes and challenges the narrow portrayal of beauty in media (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). The movement promotes acceptance of diverse body types, embracing differences in size, shape, weight, and skin tone (Fasoli et al., 2023).

With the rise of social media, platforms like Instagram have become powerful tools for spreading body positivity through images and videos shared by influencers, celebrities, and models. Research suggests that positive body-related content enhances self-acceptance, boosts confidence, and fosters a healthier body image among women (Fasoli et al., 2023). Unlike traditional media, social media allows users to be both consumers and creators of content, giving individuals the power to redefine beauty narratives. Instagram facilitates global awareness and community-building around body positivity, encouraging people to appreciate their bodies without conforming to harmful beauty ideals (Cohen et al., 2019). The movement emphasizes six key aspects of positive body image: body appreciation, self-love, a broader definition of beauty, self-care, inner positivity, and selective media consumption (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). By promoting these values, the body positivity movement reshapes mainstream perceptions of beauty, health, and self-worth in a more inclusive and affirming way.

Although body positivity emerged as a movement of resistance, scholars such as Darwin & Miller (2021) have noted that the movement has grown increasingly entangled with postfeminist sensibilities. Post feminism promotes the idea of women's empowerment, confidence, and choice, yet often within a framework of individualism, self-regulation, and consumerism. Darwin and Miller explains that body positivity today does not exist as a unified front but is divided into several ideological factions. These include: (1) mainstream faction, embraces body positivity as a tool for self-love an confidence, often within the boundaries of conventional health and beauty standards; (2) radical faction, grounded in capitalist, anti-racist, and queer frameworks, focusing on dismantling oppressive structures rather than promoting individual empowerment; (3) fat positivity faction, centers fat bodies and calls for systemic change, pushing back against health-ism and respectability

politics; (4) neutral faction, seeking body neutrality, shifting focus away from appearance altogether and emphasizing bodily function, care, and presence without the pressure to feel beautiful.

In the context of this study, Adithira Hanim's presence on Instagram most closely aligns with the mainstream faction. Her content promotes body confidence, visibility, and representation, especially for plus-size women in Indonesia. At the same time, her engagement with fashion, beauty aesthetics, and brand collaborations reflects a postfeminist sensibility that values empowerment through self-expression, yet still operates within the logic of curated visual and algorithmic appeal. Rather than rejecting dominant ideals entirely, her narrative subtly negotiates space within them, making body positivity more approachable for wider audiences while still offering a meaningful alternative to exclusionary norms.

Previous studies have begun to explore how social media shapes beauty discourses and women's self-presentation, yet the representation of plus-size women in Indonesia remains underexplored. For instance, Milathisofa, Kusrin, & Arindawati (2021) analyzed audience reception of Tara Basro's body positivity posts, showing that content challenging dominant beauty standards can foster self-acceptance and body diversity. Similarly, Angellia, T. F. & Kusuma (2023) examined the self-presentation of plus-size influencer, Intan Kemala Sari, highlighting how women influencers can disrupt entrenched stereotypes of beauty. At a broader level, Cohen et al. (2019) showed that body positivity content on Instagram represents diverse body shapes and appearances more broadly and realistically than traditional media, emphasizing messages of acceptance and appreciation. These studies indicate growing academic attention to body image and representation in digital spaces. However, none has specifically focused on how plus-size influencers negotiate beauty meanings on social media through semiotic processes. This study therefore contributes to the literature by combining Barthe's semiotics with a postfeminist framework to analyze how Adithira Hanim constructs alternative narratives of beauty within Indonesia's digital culture.

This study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine the alternative beauty narratives constructed in Adithira Hanim's Instagram content. Semiotics is used here as a tool to uncover how meanings about the body are constructed, layered, and made to appear "natural" through visual signs. Through Barthes' concept of myth, the research explores how Adithira's content both contests and conforms to dominant narrative, constructing a version of beauty that is inclusive, yet still shaped by broader cultural and media structures. By analyzing her visual and textual content, this research aims to identify how her representation differs from traditional beauty ideals, and how plus-size individuals can participate in reshaping societal perceptions through digital platforms.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach, aiming to gather and analyze data to develop a comprehensive understanding of how beauty is constructed through the Instagram account of plus-size model Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon). The qualitative methodology is suitable for exploring meanings and social constructs, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the subject within its socio-cultural context.

The research is guided by a constructivist paradigm, which posits that social reality is shaped through human interaction and media representations. Constructivism views media, particularly social media, as a tool that actively constructs meanings rather than merely reflecting reality. Through this perspective, the study seeks to explore how Instagram functions as a space for redefining beauty standards and challenging conventional beauty ideals.

For data collection, this research utilizes the documentation method, focusing on selected Instagram posts from Adithira Hanim. According to Ratnaningtyas, E. M. (2022), documentation as a data collection technique involves analyzing textual, visual, or multimedia content that serves as a historical or social record. In this study, Instagram posts, including captions, images, and reels, serve as primary data sources. The selection of posts is based on engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, ensuring that the most impactful content is analyzed. A total of 5 posts from March 8, 2022, to March 23, 2024, were chosen for their relevance to body positivity and beauty representation.

Table 1. Content Data List

No.	The Selected Content Data
1.	
2.	

Versi Online: http://journal.ubm.ac.id/
Hasil Penelitian

Bricolage ; Jurnal Magister Ilmu Komunikasi
Vol.11 (No. 2) : 405 - 420. Th. 2025
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e-ISSN: 2615-6425

3.

tiraemon and kinandally
Coogie • Movin' & Movin' (feat. Bla$eKid)

tiraemon ✔ hari ini tepat satu tahun aku konsisten olahraga, rasanya masih gak percaya. aku yg mageran & suka bgt sama rebahan ternyata bisa mengubah kebiasaanku. semakin hari rasayanya semakin bisa memahami diri sendiri & semakin sayang sama diri sendiri 🫶
-
workout set : @kinandally
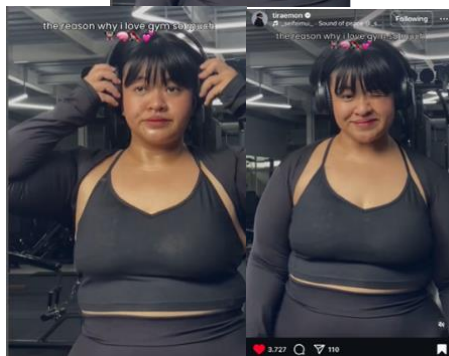-
📍 @one0onegym
📷 @muhammadilafauzan
Edited · 75w   See translation

4.
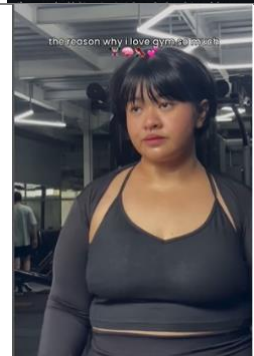
tiraemon ✔ • Follow
seifeimui • Sound of peace @_seifeimui_

tiraemon ✔ therapy 🧘
48w

5.

tiraemon ✔ • Follow
Bad Bunny • MONACO

tiraemon ✔ i give my body the love and respect it deserves 🥰
-
pants : @fixupofficial
62w

The selection of Instagram posts for this study was conducted using purposive sampling based on two main criteria to ensure relevance and analytical depth. Posts were selected based on: (1) engagement, specifically the number of likes and comments, as active interactions reflect the content's social appeal and its potential to foster two-way communication between Adithira Hanim and her followers. As Malthouse (2013) explains, engagement represents a participatory interaction that involves attention, emotion, and audience response, making these posts ideal for analyzing how beauty meanings are negotiated in digital spaces; (2) body positivity, fashion, fitness, and self-love themes, which are central to plus-size body representation ad are frequently discussed in postfeminist media

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studies as personal expressions and responses to narrow beauty ideals. These themes not only resonate with Adithira's content but also serve as key arenas where new narratives of beauty are constructed.

After selecting the content data, the analysis will be conducted based on the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis refers to the elements or objects that constitute the primary focus of a study. It is defined as the entity being examined or analyzed, which may include organizations, groups, individuals, or events (Neuman, 2014). In this study, data are obtained from the content of the Instagram account @tiraemon. The unit of analysis consists of specific elements within the content, including caption text, conveyed messages, settings, objects within the content, and the mood used in content delivery.

The research employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis as the primary method of data analysis. Barthes' semiotic approach is particularly relevant for studying digital media content, as it examines the relationship between denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural or symbolic meaning), and myth (deep-seated societal beliefs). This framework is applied to uncover how Adithira Hanim constructs an alternative beauty narrative through her Instagram presence.
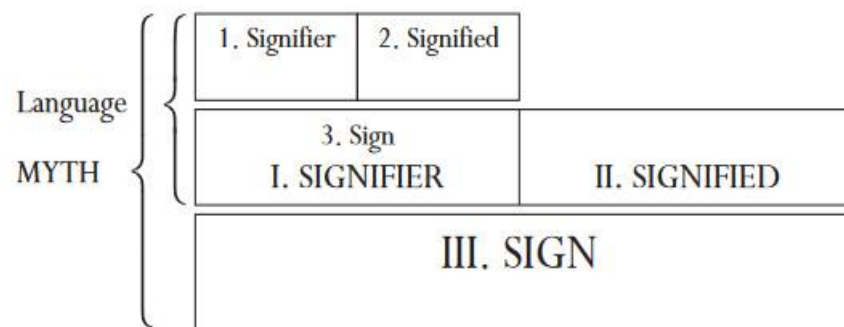
PICTURE 1. Barthe's semiology (Allen, 2003)

Roland Barthes' semiology extends Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of signs by exploring the relationship between the signifier and the signified while introducing the concept of myth. Barthes argues that myth is a constructed meaning within mass culture, where connotative meanings lead to widely accepted interpretations (Huda, 2021). He differentiates between denotation, which represents explicit meaning, and connotation, which is subjective and context-dependent (Hoed in Sobur, 2014). By establishing a second-order semiological system, Barthes illustrates how myths shape societal perceptions through the manipulation of signs and symbols (Allen, 2003).

According to Barthes, myth operates by utilizing pre-existing signs found in texts, images, music, clothing, and more to create new meanings. This process generates a superficial understanding that naturalizes myths, preventing society from critically engaging with their deeper meanings (Sulaichah in Huda, 2021). Interpretation plays a crucial role in demystifying myths, as they develop over time and become ingrained in cultural consciousness. To uncover the underlying messages behind myths, Barthes emphasizes the need for deconstruction and analysis, revealing how ideology is embedded within everyday semiotic systems (Huda, 2021).

The analysis process involves five steps based on Roland Barthes' semiotic method:
1. Denotative Identification: Identifies the literal, explicit meaning of a sign, establishing its direct reference to reality.

2. Connotative Analysis: Examines the secondary, implied meanings that arise from cultural and ideological associations.
3. Code Interpretation: Investigates the underlying structures and codes that influence the meaning of signs within a specific cultural context.
4. Myth Analysis: Explores how connotative meanings contribute to the construction of myths, reinforcing dominant ideologies.
5. Narrative Formation and Interpretation: Analyzes how myths shape collective narratives and influence societal perceptions through storytelling and media representation.

Results and Discussion

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the analysis of five selected Instagram posts by Adithira Hanim reveals the interplay of denotation (what is explicitly seen), connotation (the implied meanings), and myth (the broader cultural ideologies being reproduced or challenged. The findings table is presented below:

Table 2. Findings Table

Content	Denotation (what is seen)	Connotation (what it signifies)	Myth (cultural ideology challenged)
Post 1	Appearing confident in various trendy outfits at cafes and studio, with the caption: "*114kg to 90kg*" as a reflection of her transformation journey.	Fashionable despite being plus-size, emphasizing courage and self-worth rather than merely numbers.	Challenging the old myth by showing that larger bodies can be active and undergo physical transformation as a form of self-empowerment.
Post 2	Sitting on a chair with a white background, wearing a black tank top and white shirt, in a photo shoot with a white tank top and jeans, conveying messages of confidence and self-love, *"curvy and confident"*.	Bright colors create an impression of confidence and optimism, with self-love as the central message.	Breaking the myth that beauty must always appear flawless, small, slim, and without imperfections. Whatever a woman's body shape may be, she is beautiful if she loves, appreciates, and feels confident in herself.
Post 3	Wearing sportswear and short green leggings, posing while exercising with a gym machine. The caption emphasizes working out and self-love as resistance against old habits (such as laziness).	Exercise is framed as a form of body acceptance, not as a dieting requirement.	The old myth that a larger body equals laziness is replaced with the narrative that plus-size bodies can be active and healthy.
Post 4	Tira wearing a black sports outfit with an open neckline, her expression shifting from gloomy to smiling after putting on a headset, posing in a gym mirror, with the caption: *"the reason why I love gym so much."*	Exercise can be done by anyone regardless of body shape and helps improve mood, making people feel happier.	The myth that exercise is only meant for weight loss is challenged by Tira, who shows that working out also has a significant impact on mental health.
Post 5	Tira poses in a sheer pink top and bright brown pants, carrying a handbag and smiling, with the caption *"I give my body the love and respect it deserves"*.	Style as creative self-expression, bright colors on plus-size women convey confidence when worn.	The myth that bright and revealing clothing can only be worn by slim women is challenged by Tira.

Source : Author

Redefining Inclusive Beauty Through Instagram: Visual Negotiation in Digital Culture

Social media, particularly Instagram, has emerged as a significant platform in redefining beauty standards by enabling individuals to construct alternative narratives of beauty through visual content and interaction. As Milathisofa, Kusrin, & Arindawati (2021) explain, social media functions not merely as a medium for displaying images but as a space for users to interact, negotiate meanings, and collaboratively shape new understandings of beauty. However, platforms like Instagram are not neutral arenas. They are regulated by algorithmic visibility, audience preferences, and dominant visual aesthetics that influence how content circulates and is perceived (Islamey, 2020).

Through her 5 posts above, Adithira Hanim, a plus-size influencer, strategically navigates these dynamics to present an alternative beauty narrative. At the denotative level, her posts display images of a plus-size woman confidently styled in fashionable outfits, gym attire, or casual poses. Moving into connotation, these visuals convey empowerment, body acceptance, and self-love, curated in ways that resonate with Instagram's aesthetic culture through high-quality imagery, engaging captions, and fashion styling. At the level of myth, her presence challenges the entrenched cultural narrative that equates beauty with thinness and fairness, instead proposing an inclusive vision of feminity that disrupts restrictive ideals within Indonesia's postcolonial context. This reflects Gill's (2007) concept of postfeminist sensibility, where women' empowerment and agency are articulated through personal choice and self-expression, yet remain embedded within consumer-driven visual culture.

Adithira's posts consistently showcase her plus-size body with confidence, through a combination of vibrant fashion in content 5, active lifestyle portrayals in content 3 and 4, and self-affirming messages in content 1 and 2. Read semiotically, the denotation shows fashion styling, exercise routines, and personal captions; the connotation suggests strength, resilience, and authenticity; while the myth being dismantled is that beauty must be slim, flawless, and Eurocentric. These visual codes do not merely serve representational purposes but act as tools for constructing new meanings of beauty that challenge the narrow ideals perpetuated by mainstream media (Cohen et al., 2019).

However, Adithira's approach also reflects an understanding of Instagram's system. By adopting aesthetically appealing visual standards, her content aligns with the platform's algorithmic preferences, allowing it to maintain visibility and engagement within Instagram's competitive visual culture. This indicates that her act of resistance is not performed outside the system but rather negotiated within it, utilizing the very tools of visibility and engagement that govern digital media culture. At the mythic level, this demonstrates how resistance does not always require total rupture but can emerge through reworking dominant aesthetic from within. This aligns with Gill's (2017) concept of Visibility Labor, where women content creators must continuously manage their self-presentation to remain visible in competitive digital spaces, balancing authenticity with platform demands.

Furthermore, Gill (2017) emphasizes that such visibility labor is often intertwined with Affective Labor, as influencers like Adithira engage emotionally with their audiences to build trust and relatability. Through sharing personal narratives of body shaming and her journey toward self-acceptance, just like in content 2 and 1, Adithira fosters emotional resonance, turning her Instagram feed into a dialogic space where followers, especially plus-size women, feel seen and validated. Semiotic analysis shows that at the denotative level these appear as simple captions or emotional expressions, but at the connotative level they signify intimacy and solidarity, while at the mythic level they disrupt the narrative that plus-size women are invisible or undesirable. As Islamey (2020) highlights, Instagram provides a space for more inclusive beauty standards that align with real social conditions, where personal stories become powerful instruments of redefining collective perceptions of beauty.

Thus, Instagram functions not only as a platform for visual representation but also as a space where beauty discourses are continuously negotiated. This dynamic supports argument that beauty standards are socially constructed and therefore can evolve through mediated interactions and cultural dialogues (Dimitrov & Kroumpouzos, 2023; Wolf, 2002). Through strategic visual and affective labor, and read through Barthes' triadic framework (denotation, connotation, and myth) influencers like Adithira demonstrate that redefining beauty does not always occur through radical opposition but can also emerge from within existing systems, through subtle yet impactful interventions in the way beauty is visualized and understood in digital spaces.

Similarly, the dynamics of negotiated freedom can also be seen in Indonesian cinema. The film *Before, Now & Then (2022)* portrays the life of Nana, a woman who seeks her own voice and agency within the constraints of patriarchal culture. As discussed by Agani & Lukmantoro (2024), the film illustrates that women's freedom is never absolute but always situated within social and culture structures that regulate how femininity is expressed. This resonates with Adithira's digital

activism, where her empowerment is articulated not through radical opposition but through strategic self-presentation that remains compatible with Instagram's aesthetic norms. Both cases show that women's acts of resistance emerge as negotiations within dominant systems, subtly transforming the cultural narratives from the inside.

Body Positivity, Post feminism, and the Legacy of Postcolonial Beauty Myths

Body positivity is a social movement that challenges narrow and restrictive beauty standards embedded in society. Rooted in the Fat Acceptance Movement of the late 1960s, the Body Positivity Movement initially emerged as a protest against the marginalization of fat bodies and the pervasive stigma surrounding larger body sizes (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015). Over time, it has evolved into a broader movement advocating for self-acceptance, body diversity, and the deconstruction of unrealistic beauty ideals perpetuated by media and culture. Tylka & Wood-Barcalow (2015) define a positive body image as an appreciation of one's body without conforming to limiting societal ideals. This contrasts with traditional media representations, which often portray thin, fair-skinned women as the primary standard of beauty. In response, social media has become a powerful platform for body positivity, allowing individuals to redefine beauty beyond the constraints of thinness and whiteness.

Social media platforms, as discussed by Fasoli et al. (2023), provide individuals with the opportunity to challenge dominant beauty narratives. Influencers and activists use digital spaces to normalize body diversity, advocating for the recognition that all body types, skin tones, and facial features possess beauty. By sharing their experiences and embracing diverse representations, they work to dismantle the myth that beauty is tied to a singular, Eurocentric ideal.

One example is Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon), a plus-size influencer who confidently showcases her personal style and challenges conventional beauty stereotypes. At the denotative level, her content presents straightforward visuals like fashionable outfits, bright colors, gym attire, and confident poses. In connotation level, these signs communicate self-love, empowerment, and the right to self-definition, exemplified in her post 2, *"Every woman has the right to define herself. They know the best version of themselves."* At the mythic level, her presence disrupts the persistent belief that beauty and health must conform to thin, fair, and athletic, replacing it with an inclusive narrative that normalizes diverse bodies. This message reflects a postfeminist sensibility, where empowerment and self-definition are articulated through acts of personal agency, yet remain negotiated within the visual culture of social media (Gill, 2007, 2017).

Adithira's overall content operates within a postfeminist media culture, which Darwin & Miller (2021) describes as a paradoxical space where narratives of confidence, choice, and self-love are embraced, but often within a neoliberal framework of self-regulation and consumerist aesthetics. Through curated visuals, polished imagery, fashion styling, and aspirational messaging, Adithira navigates Instagram's algorithmic visibility dynamics while embedding body-positive narratives. At the denotative level, this is visible through high-quality portraits and fashion shoots, the connotation emphasizes discipline, style, and self-assurance, while the mythic level, her work resists the idea that only slim bodies deserve aspirational representation. This aligns with Gill's (2017) concept of Visibility Labor and Affective Labor, where influencers manage both their aesthetic presentation and emotional connection with audiences to maintain relevance in digital spaces.

The construction of beauty standards in Indonesia is deeply influenced by colonial history. Saraswati (2013) argues that beauty ideals shift according to historical and cultural contexts, with colonialism playing a significant role in shaping Indonesia's preference for fair skin and slim bodies as symbols of modernity and social class. These ideals were not internalized but became enduring markers of status and desirability in postcolonial Indonesian society. However, Saraswati (2020) further develops this argument by introducing the concept of Cosmopolitan Whiteness, emphasizing that these beauty ideals are not static relics of colonialism but are continuously re-articulated in contemporary media through globalized consumer culture. In semiotic terms, the denotation of fair skin and slim figures in advertising connotes status, aspiration, and cosmopolitan identity, while at the mythic level, whiteness itself becomes commodified as a symbol of modernity and upward mobility.

This dynamic is evident in Indonesia's beauty and fashion industries, where fair skin, slim figures, and Western beauty aesthetics continue to dominate advertising and media representations

(Prianti, 2013). Adithira Hanim's digital presence actively resists this cosmopolitan whiteness by presenting plus-size bodies and local identities as equally beautiful and worthy of admiration. Through her curated 1-5 contents, the denotation reveals bold fashion, gym activity, and bright color choices, the connotation affirms confidence and stylish femininity, and the mythic level, she destabilizes the belief that only Eurocentric traits represents beauty. Rather than abandoning existing visual aesthetics, her content demonstrates how femininity and style can be navigated flexibly, allowing alternative body representations to enter mainstream visibility without discarding culturally familiar beauty codes (Priyatna, 2023).

Through her Instagram content, Adithira redefines beauty by promoting self-acceptance and empowerment. In content 2, she states, *"Regardless of your body shape or skin color, you have the right to feel beautiful in your own way."* At the denotative level, this is just a statement, while at the connotative level, it signals empowerment, and at the mythic level, it overturns the long-standing belief that beauty is conditional upon conformity to thinness or whiteness. By sharing personal stories and showcasing alternative representations, she fosters emotional resonance with her audience, particularly plus-size women who see their own struggles and aspirations reflected in her posts. This practice embodies Gill's (2017) notion of affective labor, wherein influencers cultivate emotional intimacy with their followers as a strategy for building trust and relatability.

Furthermore, Adithira's approach illustrates how body positivity on social media is not merely about self-expression but also about representing marginalized groups within the fashion and beauty industries. Her content, especially content 2 and 1, consistently challenges narrow beauty standards, promoting diversity not only in body shapes and skin tones but also in lifestyles and self-expression. This strategy aligns with Priyatna (2023), to negotiate between the celebratory aspects of femininity and its constraining cultural prescriptions, allowing women like Adithira to subvert restrictive norms through creative self-representation. By showcasing stylish outfits and highlighting confidence as the essence of beauty, she reshapes the notion that plus-size women can be both fashionable and active, like in content 3, 4, and 5.

As social media continues to shape contemporary beauty discourse, it offers an alternative to traditional media's often exclusionary ideals. Fasoli et al. (2023) emphasize that platforms like Instagram democratize representation, giving individuals the opportunity to participate in redefining beauty from the ground up. Semiotic analysis through Barthes' framework makes visible how Adithira's activism works across layers, denotation (images of her plus-size body in fashion, lifestyle, and gym contexts), connotation (messages of empowerment, confidence, and inclusivity), and myth (the dismantling of Eurocentric, postcolonial ideals of thinness and cosmopolitan whiteness). In line with Priyatna's (2023) proposition, Adithira's activism exemplifies how feminist resistance in Indonesia can emerge not from radical opposition but through the nuanced reworking of visual and cultural symbols within existing systems. Here, the act of self-presentation becomes a strategy of navigating beauty expectations, where individuals adjust and reinterpret prevailing aesthetics to create space for different body types and appearances to be seen and appreciated by a wider audience.

Constructing Inclusive Beauty: Plus-Size Women's Fashion and Active Lifestyle Narratives

The construction of beauty is deeply intertwined with how individuals express their identities, and for plus-size women, fashion and active lifestyle have become powerful mediums to redefine beauty beyond narrow societal expectations. Traditionally, the fashion industry has marginalized plus-size bodies, offering limited choices and often promoting clothing that aims to conceal or correct body shapes (Czerniawski, 2012). However, the growing visibility of plus-size influencers like Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon) has challenged these outdated norms, illustrating that fashion is not exclusive to thin bodies.

In Adithira's content, like in content 5, fashion is a deliberate tool for self-expression and body positivity. At the denotative level, her images show bold outfits, sheer fabrics and bright colors. At the connotative level, these signify self-confidence, refusal to hide and the celebration of curvy femininity. At the mythic level, her styling resists the entrenched belief that plus-size women should dress modestly or conceal their bodies to be social acceptable. Grogan et al. (2013) emphasizes that clothing choices can serve as a form of agency for women, allowing them to reclaim autonomy over

how their bodies are viewed and valued. Adithira's fashion narratives align with Gill's (2007, 2017) notion of postfeminist sensibility, where empowerment and agency are articulated through consumerist aesthetics and self-styling, but strategically turned into acts of resistance against exclusionary beauty culture.

This visual negotiation aligns with Islamey's (2020) perspective that media plays a significant role in shaping beauty standards, often excluding diverse body types from mainstream visibility. However, social media platforms like Instagram offer spaces where plus-size individuals can actively participate in reshaping these discourses. Through her allover posts, Adithira embodies what Cohen et al. (2019) describe as an act of meaning-making, where influencers not only produce content but also generate alternative narratives that contest dominant beauty myths.

Beyond fashion, Adithira integrates an active lifestyle into her content, like in content 3 and 4, challenging the pervasive stereotype that equates plus-size bodies with laziness or poor health. At the denotative level, the posts simply depict gym routines or workout poses. At the connotative level, they communicate joy, discipline, and a holistic approach to well-being. At the mythic level, these images dismantle the long-standing myth that large bodies cannot be healthy or active. Kvam et al. (2016) argue that the link between thinness and health is socially constructed and reductive. By showing that fitness is not about size but about mental and physical nourishment, Adithira reframes exercise as empowerment. This is exemplified in content 4, where her message, *"The reason why I love gym so much"* signals not only physical activity but also mental healing, a framing of wellness as both self-care and self-expression.

Tylka & Wood-Barcalow (2015) further support this idea by framing body care as an adaptive investment in well-being rather than a reaction to external pressures. Adithira's content reflects this mindset, as she often frames exercise not as a weight-loss strategy but as an act of self-love and mental nourishment, like in content 1 and 3. This is evident in a post where she shares her emotional journey in the gym, captioning a video where her expression shifts from sadness to joy with words in content 4, Abelea et al. (2024) highlight how physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, contributing to improved mood, motivation, and relaxation. Adithira's portrayal of fitness emphasizes these psychological benefits, encouraging her followers to view exercise as a joyful and empowering experience, rather than a burdensome obligation. Additionally, Adithira advocates for a holistic approach to health and beauty, emphasizing that wellness encompasses physical, emotional, and mental care. Her messaging challenges the dominant narrative that equates thinness with health, advocating instead for balanced nutrition, emotional resilience, and the importance of self-acceptance. By normalizing active lifestyles for plus-size individuals, she fosters a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be healthy and beautiful.

Through her integration of fashion and fitness, Adithira constructs a new form of beauty that is dynamic, diverse, and unapologetically authentic. She demonstrates that personal style and an active lifestyle are not reserved for conventionally attractive bodies but are accessible to everyone. This aligns with Tylka & Wood-Barcalow (2015) vision of positive body image, where individuals engage in body care practices out of love and respect for their bodies, rather than societal obligation.

Ultimately, Adithira's content illustrates that beauty is not confined to a singular body type or aesthetic but is fluid, personal, and worthy of celebration in all forms. This perspective resonates with Grogan et al's (2013) argument that self-perception and body satisfaction are deeply influenced by how individuals choose to present themselves and resist external expectations. At the denotative level, Adithira presents fashion and fitness, at the connotative level, these signify empowerment, joy, and visibility, and at the mythic level, they dismantle restrictive cultural codes, including the stereotype that beauty and health are exclusive to slim, Eurocentric bodies. Her work thus exemplifies how postfeminist negotiations, performed within consumerist and digital systems, can be reworked to create inclusive, liberating, and empowering narratives for plus-size women.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse of postfeminist media studies by highlighting how digital platforms such as Instagram serve as arenas where beauty standards are negotiated rather than simply imposed or resisted. By applying Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the study unveils how visual codes, such as fashion choices, body poses, and lifestyle representations, function as signs that carry layered meanings about body positivity, self-acceptance, and societal beauty norms. Furthermore, this research aligns with the concept of Visibility Labor and Affective

Labor (Gill, 2017), illustrating how plus-size influencers like Adithira Hanim navigate within the aesthetic and algorithmic demands of digital media to construct alternative beauty narratives. This intersection of semiotics, postfeminist theory, and digital culture expands the theoretical understanding of how marginalized identities negotiate self-representation in visually regulated spaces, suggesting that beauty is not a fixed reality but a fluid construct shaped through continuous interaction between media systems and individual agency.

As stated in the constructivist research paradigm, this study successfully demonstrates that beauty is not an objective or universal reality, but a socially constructed concept that evolves through human interactions and media representations. By analyzing Adithira Hanim's Instagram content, the research deconstructs the dominant beauty narratives that have historically privileged thinness, fair skin, and Eurocentric aesthetics. The findings reveal how Adithira's strategic visual self-presentation—through fashion, fitness, and personal storytelling—challenges these narrow standards and introduces a more inclusive and diversified understanding of beauty. The study shows that deconstruction of beauty myths is not solely about opposing mainstream ideals but involves a nuanced negotiation within existing visual and cultural systems. This reflects the essence of the research paradigm, where meanings are not absolute but are continuously reconstructed through dynamic socio-cultural engagements, especially within the digital landscape.

Conclusion

Social media, particularly Instagram, has transformed how beauty standards are constructed and negotiated, shifting from rigid, exclusionary ideals to more dynamic and participatory representations. Unlike traditional media that often upholds a singular aesthetic of thinness and Eurocentric features, Instagram enables individuals to craft and share their own beauty narratives. Adithira Hanim (@tiraemon) exemplifies this shift by integrating fashion and fitness into her content, presenting a confident, stylish, and active plus-size identity. Rather than using fashion to conceal or fitness to achieve an "ideal" body, she reframes both as acts of self-love and agency. Through her curated visual content, she challenges the narrow association between body size and beauty, constructing an inclusive narrative where confidence, authenticity, and self-expression define beauty on one's own terms.

Beyond representation, Adithira's content illustrates how beauty is continuously negotiated within digital spaces regulated by platform algorithms and audience expectations. Her strategic use of aesthetic visuals and personal storytelling embodies forms of Visibility Labor and Affective Labor, where influencers must navigate the demands of digital visibility while fostering emotional connections with their audience. This process not only deconstructs long-standing beauty myths but also exposes how beauty is a fluid and socially constructed concept, shaped by interactions between media systems and individual agency. As body positivity continues to intersect with postfeminist sensibilities and challenges the legacy of cosmopolitan whiteness, influencers like Adithira play a crucial role in expanding societal perceptions of beauty. Future research could further explore how these negotiated narratives impact audience perceptions and contribute to a more inclusive, evolving discourse on body and identity in digital media culture.

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