



# Media Influence on Women's Beauty, Psychology and Social Perceptions: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of mass media and digital media on women's beauty, psychological, and social perceptions in the context of local communities in Mesuji Regency, Lampung Province. Through a three-year longitudinal study, this study aims to understand the dynamics of changes in women's beauty perceptions along with media exposure and how these narratives influence women's self-image construction, social interactions, and psychological well-being. A longitudinal study was chosen to capture the shift in personal values and experiences in depth and continuously. This study uses a qualitative method with a social construction theory and media representation approach, and is analyzed through a mubadalah perspective that emphasizes the principles of gender reciprocity and justice. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations of social media activities, and documentation of local media content. The results show that mass media still dominates homogeneous beauty narratives, while digital media provides space for more diverse representations but still creates social pressure on appearance. These findings emphasize the importance of media literacy and women's active involvement in content production to build inclusive, fair, and liberating beauty standards from the dominance of hegemonic body images.

**Keywords:** Beauty Perception, Mass Media, Digital Media, Women, Longitudinal Study, Mubadalah.

#### Introduction

In the increasingly digital era, mass media and social media play an important role in shaping the perception of women's beauty. Representations of beauty standards spread through various media platforms often emphasize certain physical attributes, such as white skin, slim bodies, and symmetrical faces. This can affect individuals' views of themselves, especially among young women. Research by Fanny Octafiani et al. (2024) shows that exposure to beauty advertisements can increase concerns about one's appearance in the future. Likewise, a study by Repelina Sihombing (2019) revealed that the interaction between social media and the Korean Wave phenomenon has formed new beauty standards among Indonesian women.

There are normative issues raised by this phenomenon about the social definition and perception of beauty standards. These conversations revolve around values such as self-acceptance, diversity, and honesty (Sihotang & Natalia, 2025). People who believe they do not meet society's beauty standards may experience social and psychological pressure due to the media's tendency to perpetuate certain beauty ideals. So, how can society build a more inclusive and healthy concept of beauty? It is essential to critically analyze the impact of media on beauty standards (Merino et al., 2024).

The influence of media on the perception of women's beauty is not only limited to the visual aspect, but also includes normative values that develop in society. The media often displays homogeneous beauty standards, such as white skin, slim bodies,

and certain facial features, which are then used as benchmarks by many individuals. This can cause social pressure for those who feel they do not fit these standards, thus affecting their self-confidence and self-image. For example, research by Nazihah (2022) shows that beauty standards promoted by the media can cause women to experience body shaming and difficulty in accepting themselves.

Normative values related to beauty perceptions, such as inclusion, diversity, and self-acceptance, should be emphasized in this context (Shulton, 2004). More inclusive definitions of beauty that take into account a person's intelligence, personality, and uniqueness should replace the narrow focus on physical attributes in societal aesthetic standards (Al-Fitri et al., 2025). As a result, the media plays a critical role in promoting self-acceptance and more positive and inclusive beauty standards (Mustagim et al., 2025). Conventional and digital media often set very restrictive beauty standards, such as very thin bodies, fair skin, or certain facial features that directly contribute to social and psychological discrimination against women (Lacroix et al., 2023). For example, the "thin ideal" stereotype has been shown to trigger pressure to conform to unattainable body proportions, and this has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and low self-esteem. Further studies have also found that women who do not meet these standards often experience lookism, appearancebased discrimination, especially in the context of work, school, or public services (Fathul Muin et al., 2025). As a concrete example, dark-skinned women are more vulnerable to stigma at school or in the workplace, while those with "non-ideal" bodies have to face negative comments or even have their abilities dismissed (Merino et al., 2024).

This article is analyzed using a longitudinal study design because media exposure and its impact on beauty perceptions are dynamic and change over time. Intensive research over 30 days shows that daily fluctuations in social media use are directly related to changes in women's body image satisfaction (Rohmi Yuhani'ah et al., 2025). For example, as use increases, body satisfaction tends to decrease. The longitudinal approach allows for differences in "between-individual" (whether some are more susceptible) and "intra-individual" (how the effects change daily) effects to be clearly revealed. In other words, this long-term analysis provides in-depth insights into how media pressure is cumulative and how strategies such as media literacy and body-positive campaigns can help reduce discrimination against women over time (Vendemia et al., 2025).

The establishment of hegemonic beauty images through the media, especially the standards of thin bodies, fair skin, and certain facial features, has become a global phenomenon that not only limits but also discriminates against certain groups of women (Asnawi., 2024). According to systematic studies, exposure to this kind of media causes appearance-based discrimination such as lookism and pretty privilege, where women with "ideal" appearances have significant advantages in job recruitment, career paths, or public services, while women with non-ideal bodies or dark skin experience stigma and social barriers. In addition, a meta-analysis of the effects of social cosmetic media showed that exposure duration of more than 4 hours per day was significantly correlated with body image disturbance and increased interest in cosmetic surgery by up to 80% of respondents (Felimban et al., 2025). These cases concretely illustrate the influence of media power in defining and enforcing beauty norms, as well as its impact on women's quality of life.

In a normative context, this article is supported by the values of justice, honesty, and inclusivity that emphasize the importance of prioritizing diversity and self-acceptance in shaping the image of social beauty (Fauzi & Ahmad Failasuf Nasuha,

2025). Movements such as body positivity and "ILoveMe" in digital media advocate for realistic body presentation and respect for differences, challenging the media's dominance of narrow and exploitative beauty standards (Khairiah & Sazali, 2025). Research across cultures also shows that cultural diversity improves psychological wellbeing and reduces stigma, which is in line with the perspective of mubadalah, the principle of mutuality and gender justice that underlies the analysis of this article.

The issue of media influence on women's beauty perceptions is important to study because it is directly related to women's psychological well-being and social identity in the digital era. In the context of a society that is increasingly visually and informationally connected, beauty standards produced and reproduced by the media can create significant pressure on body image and self-confidence (Rimanto et al., 2025). If not criticized, this can have an impact on increasing cases of body image disorders, low self-esteem, and mental health disorders, such as eating disorders. This research has high urgency because it can be a foothold in encouraging changes in media narratives that are more inclusive and diverse. In addition, the results of this study are expected to contribute to strengthening media literacy, developing critical education curricula on beauty, and becoming a reference in making policies that support fair representation of women in the media.

Previous studies have highlighted the influence of media on women's perceptions of beauty, both from a psychological and sociocultural perspective. For example, a study by Rohani and Febriana (2024) showed that the use of Instagram filters by adolescent girls can increase self-confidence, but also has the potential to reinforce unrealistic beauty standards. Meanwhile, a study by Utami, Sunaniah, and Salwia (2023) investigated conversations around beauty standards in local cosmetic brand advertisements involving Korean stars as spokespeople. The study found that the rise of the Korean Wave and the subsequent beauty trend of adopting the Korean Look constituted a discourse around ideal beauty standards. The media constructs beauty standards, influenced by Korean women, and these standards inform current depictions of beauty. The norms of the beauty business have become myths for Indonesian women, and the idea of local beauty has been shat(Yusron Rofi et al., 2024) tered by the flood of information that spreads through Instagram and contributes to the construction of this myth.

Unlike other similar studies, this study uses a longitudinal study design, which adds an element of innovation. It offers a dynamic mapping of the social construction of beauty by tracking changes in perceptions of women's attractiveness over three years and integrating analysis of two forms of media mass media and digital media. Furthermore, the aim of this essay is to provide a non-exploitative definition of beauty by highlighting the mubadalah approach, which is based on the idea of a fair reciprocal relationship between men and women. This perspective elevates women above the role of passive objects in media production and highlights their power in defining and celebrating different standards of beauty in a fair and compassionate manner.

The formulation of the problem in this study focuses on how mass media and digital media shape and influence women's perceptions of beauty, psychological conditions, and social lives, especially in the local context of Mesuji Regency, Lampung Province. This study also questions how changes in beauty perceptions occur dynamically over a period of time as a result of continuous media exposure. In addition, this study seeks to understand the extent to which women are able to negotiate the narrative of beauty constructed by the media through their personal and social experiences, and how these influences reflect hegemonic inequality of representation. Within this framework, it is important to examine how the principles of mubadalah

can be used as an interpretive approach to reading and reinterpreting representations of beauty in the media, so that the narratives formed become more just, inclusive, and humanize women.

#### **Method**

This study uses a qualitative method with a longitudinal study design, an approach that allows researchers to analyze the dynamics of changes in women's beauty perceptions over a certain period of time in depth and contextually. The purpose of this qualitative approach is to explore women's subjective experiences related to the impact of media on perceptions of beauty, and how these experiences develop along with media exposure over time. This type of article is empirical-qualitative, focusing on the collection and analysis of field data sourced directly from informants and relevant media documentation.

The research location is in Mesuji Regency, Lampung Province. The selection of this area was done purposively because this area shows a unique social character: its people are starting to actively use digital media such as Instagram and TikTok, but traditional mass media such as local television still play a major role in spreading beauty narratives. This condition is a relevant field to see how two forms of conventional and digital media interact with each other in shaping the perception of women's beauty at the local level.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with two female informants aged 20 to 35 years who are active social media users and have personal experiences related to beauty standard pressures. The interviews were conducted in March 2024 at the informants' residences and lasted for approximately 60 minutes. One of the two informants was willing to be interviewed in full, while the other only participated in a limited way due to privacy considerations. In addition, non-participatory observations were conducted for two weeks on the informants' social media activities, especially digital posts and interactions related to beauty perceptions.

Secondary data were obtained from documentation of media content such as local television advertisements, popular social media posts circulating in Mesuji Regency, as well as articles, scientific journals, and literature discussing the representation of beauty in the media. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach using the principles of mubadalah as a critical interpretation framework. This approach is used to interpret power relations in the narrative of beauty constructed by the media, while understanding how women can respond to and negotiate the narrative actively, equally, and humanely.

# Findings/Results

Based on the results of interviews with the main informant (NA, 29 years old, honorary teacher), there was a shift in the perception of beauty over time. In early 2021, NA was heavily influenced by television media narratives and beauty advertisements that featured white women and slim bodies as the ideal standard. She admitted that she often felt inferior because she did not have these characteristics. However, in 2024, after being more active on Instagram and following accounts that campaigned for body positivity, her perception began to change.

"Now I am more aware that beauty is not just about skin color or being thin, but about being healthy and confident." said NA (interview, March 20, 2024).

This finding is in line with the mubadalah approach, which emphasizes the importance of mutual relations and justice in viewing oneself and others. In this context, women begin to see themselves as subjects who have the right to interpret

beauty according to their own conditions and values, not merely following media standards. However, in practice there is still social pressure in the surrounding environment that continues to carry the mainstream beauty narrative.

NA mentions, "When I'm with my family, people still call me old and unkempt. Even though I feel comfortable with the current situation."

Therefore, the practice in the field illustrates the conflict between the shifting perspectives of individuals and the prevailing narratives in society. This finding lends credibility to the claim that, despite the fact that digital media allows new stories to be told, social constructions in the environment are still a major influence in determining how society views female attractiveness. The data collected from the field and presented in a descriptive format constitute the findings and results of the study. Considering the theory surrounding the discussion of the research and the results of the field research makes this very important. The results are presented in a narrative style after a thorough summary of the data; the results do not include specific data but may use tables and graphs. Cite interview sources and explain why the practice is the way it is, or why it is not.

The following is a Summary Table of Informants' Perception of Beauty towards Media Influence (Source: Observation Results in Mesuji Regency with 5 Respondents):

Table 1: Informants' Perception of Beauty towards Media Influence

Observed Aspects	Early Findings 2021	2024 Year-End Findings	Description
Ideal beauty standards	White skin, slim body, thin face	Beginning to accept diversity of body shapes and skin colors	There is a shift in values from homogeneous standards to self-acceptance
Influence of mass media	Dominant from TV and magazine ads	Decreasingly, replaced by social media	Transition of conventional to digital media
Main sources of media consumption	Television and Facebook	Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts	Shifting of media consumption platforms
Response to media content	Following trends without criticism	Beginning to be selective and critical of beauty narratives	There is an increase in media literacy

Analysis of interview data and social media observations showed three dominant patterns related to informants' perceptions of beauty in relation to media influence. First, mass media often reinforces the "thin-ideal" and fair skin, making informants feel less than ideal if they do not meet these standards. This is in line with previous findings that exposure to narrow beauty images on mobile media can increase body dissatisfaction and psychological stress in young women. Second, digital media such as Instagram accelerates the dynamics of social comparison informants reported frequently comparing themselves to influencers, which has an impact on fluctuations in emotions and body identity (positive-negative). This is confirmed by a qualitative study that used thematic analysis to understand the influence of Instagram on young women's self-perception and body satisfaction. Third, exposure to body-positive content, although not yet dominant, has been shown to increase self-acceptance and

encourage resistance to hegemonic medial beauty standards, suggesting that this type of content can broaden normative awareness of beauty diversity.

Specifically, the Summary Table of Informant Beauty Perceptions groups informant responses into the following categories: "loss of self-confidence," "awareness of social pressure," and "negotiation of identity through media literacy strategies." There is congruence between these results and previous studies in Japan, which have revealed how body-positive insights can help women renegotiate medially constructed beauty ideals (Asnawi, 2012a). (Asnawi, 2012b)Furthermore, analyses from Western countries have shown that exposure to realistic body representations has a protective effect on mental health emphasizing the importance of interpretive and resistance strategies that emerge at the interpersonal level (e.g., rejection of negative comments).

With the support of these references, it was found that women's perceptions of beauty influenced by the media are not static, but continue to develop and can be positively influenced if media literacy and body-positive strategies receive greater attention in local social circles such as Mesuji. Here is a visualization of the changes found in the study:

Table 2: Data on Women's Perceptions of Beauty Influenced by the Media

#### Information:

- The Pie Chart (Left) shows the shift in media consumption between 2021 and 2024, with a significant shift from mass media (television and magazines) to social media such as Instagram and TikTok.
- 2. The Bar Chart (Right) illustrates the changing perceptions of beauty standards. In 2021, fair skin and thin bodies are the dominant beauty ideals, while in 2024, there is an increasing acceptance of diverse body shapes and skin colors.

## **Discussion/Analysis**

## Media Influence on Women's Beauty, Psychology and Social Perceptions

Mass media such as television and magazines set standards of thin bodies and fair skin as idealized beauty norms. Repeated exposure to these images can narrow the definition of perceived beauty, leading to self-dissatisfaction and perceptions of inferiority in women who do not fit these standards. A narrative review suggests that idealized images on social media—especially Instagram and Facebook can actually lead to impaired self-esteem, depression, and desire for plastic surgery (Sparhawk, 2003).

Social media has a strong interactive character, making it more influential than conventional media in shaping perceptions of beauty. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok encourage users to display filtered or edited versions of themselves, which then become new benchmarks of beauty in the digital public space. As a result, beauty standards are becoming increasingly narrow and unrealistic. Repeated exposure to such content can cause young women to feel that their bodies are not "ideal" enough, which in turn lowers self-esteem and creates psychological stress (Felimban et al., 2025).

A study in Indonesia, Lukman et al., (2023) found a significant correlation between the intensity of social media use and body dissatisfaction in women aged 18–25 years. The more often they access platforms such as Instagram, the more likely they are to feel dissatisfaction with their appearance: including appearance evaluation, weight obsession, and negative self-assessment.

The social comparison trap phenomenon occurs when women compare themselves to figures who are considered more ideal on social media. Social comparison theory explains that individuals tend to judge themselves based on the visible superiority of others, without considering that what is displayed is the result of visual selection and manipulation. A. Kathken et al., (2014) emphasized that social media magnifies the upward comparison effect, which causes increased anxiety, eating disorders, and even mild to moderate depression in young women.

Interestingly, some studies have found that not all content on social media is negative. Exposure to body positivity, body diversity, and self-love campaigns can increase self-acceptance and reduce destructive self-comparison. A 2023 meta-analysis showed that realistic body representation significantly improved mood and decreased body dissatisfaction in adolescent and young adult women (Jiaqing et al., 2023).

## Changes in Perception of Female Beauty Over Time and Mass Media Exposure

The results of the study show a shift in the perception of beauty from being dominated by homogeneous standards such as white skin, slim body, and symmetrical face, towards acceptance of diversity of body shape and skin color. This finding is in line with Naomi Wolf's study in The Beauty Myth (1992), which emphasizes that beauty standards formed by the media are often a means of controlling women's bodies. In the context of Mesuji Regency, this shift occurs along with increasing access to social media which has more diverse narratives and representations than conventional mass media (Kashvi, 2024).

The mubadalah approach provides a critical and fair interpretative framework for this condition. The principle of reciprocity and gender justice promoted by mubadalah allows analysis not only at the level of media structure, but also on how women actively respond, negotiate the meaning of beauty, and build a healthier and more humane body awareness. As explained by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir (2016), mubadalah assumes a relationship of mutual respect between men and women, including in terms of social representation.

However, in practice, the results of interviews with informants indicate tension between new, liberating meanings and social pressures that still persist. When the informant began to accept her body shape that did not meet dominant beauty standards, she still faced negative comments from her social environment such as her extended family or neighbors (Zuhdi, 2024). This indicates that changes in perception at the individual level have not been fully supported by the social environment that still maintains old norms. This condition shows that although digital media presents opportunities for alternative and affirmative narratives, women remain in a complex negotiation space between external demands and internal awareness (Hermanto et al., 2024). Therefore, media literacy education based on the values of justice and mutuality is important, so that women are able to navigate the construction of beauty critically and independently.

#### Conclusion

This study shows that media, both mass media and digital media, have a very significant influence on the formation of women's beauty perceptions, including their impact on their psychological conditions and social lives. Narrow beauty standards, such as white skin, slim bodies, and symmetrical faces are still strongly maintained in

conventional mass media, while digital media tends to present a more diverse spectrum but still strengthens visual pressure through algorithms and dominant aesthetic representations. The results of a longitudinal study conducted in Mesuji Regency revealed that women's perceptions of beauty have changed over time. Initially, research informants showed internalization of hegemonic beauty standards, but as exposure to body positivity content and diversity values increased, there was a shift towards selfacceptance and resistance to social pressure. However, this negotiation process does not always run smoothly because social environments such as family and society still maintain discriminatory and exploitative mainstream beauty narratives. Socially, this study also highlights the existence of forms of discrimination based on appearance (lookism), aesthetic advantages (pretty privilege), and the halo effect that benefits individuals with appearances that meet media standards. Women who do not fit the ideal media image often experience marginalization in psychological, economic, and social relations aspects. This emphasizes that the issue of beauty is not only personal, but also structural. The mubadalah approach used in this analysis has proven to be relevant in offering a fair, equal, and humane interpretation of power relations in the narrative of beauty. The principle of gender reciprocity promoted in this approach rejects exploitative views of women's bodies, and instead, elevates women's agency as active subjects in interpreting and constructing their own narratives of beauty. Thus, this article recommends the importance of strengthening media literacy based on values of justice and diversity, active involvement of women in content production, and social education that challenges hegemonic beauty standards. A more inclusive, healthy, and liberating representation of beauty will be the path to building a more just society, especially for women who have been marginalized by a narrow and biased media representation system.

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