

Volume: 4
Number: 4
Page: 1131 - 1136

Article History:

Received: 2023-05-09
Revised: 2023-06-15
Accepted: 2023-07-17

MULTIMODALITY DISCOURSES OF THE MISS UNIVERSE BEAUTY PAGEANT AS AN ARENA OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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Abstract:

The Miss Universe beauty pageant is a cultural production arena where the construction of female beauty is formed through an ideal image that is slowly socialized by the media, becoming a standard in society. This research aims to find out and describe the construction of the meaning of beauty built through the Miss Universe beauty contest through the perspective of Discourse Analysis Multimodality, reveal the implied meaning of gestures, and understand the self-identity of the Miss Universe contestants. This qualitative research uses a critical paradigm using document studies, interviews, and literature. Data analysis used multimodality discourse analysis through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The results of this study indicate that: 1) The meaning of beauty at the Miss Universe 2021 pageant is constructed through the depiction of the contestants' perfection, which consists of their physique, attitude, and insight. The contestants' appearances have created beauty criteria that shape the idealization of the female figure and influence the audience's perspective on self-appreciation; 2) Overall, the most frequently shown contestant gestures give confidence and grace according to the message in the Miss Universe slogan, namely confidently beautiful; 3) The identity of the Miss Universe contestants reveals who, personality, where, and what culture is being performed with various styles and uniqueness. This uniqueness can be in the form of personality, interests, favorite food, way of talking, way of walking, and even how the contestants behave when responding to things and questions.

Keywords: Multimodality Discourse, Culture, Beauty Pageants, Miss Universe
Cite this as: HERMAWAN, D., RONDA, A.M., SIGIT, R.R. (2023). "Multimodality Discourses of the Miss Universe Beauty Pageant As an Arena of Cultural Production." *International Journal of Environmental, Sustainability, and Social Science*, 4 (4), 1131 - 1136.



INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a concept that cannot be determined in its form and meaning and is increasingly changing over time from time to time, along with the standards set by society depending on the context of the times. Beauty has become a necessity for women, who, in turn, become victims of the oppression of the beauty culture and the construction of beauty itself (Sayekti & Fitria, 2022). The media has played a role in the production of beauty culture in society, such as the idea, according to Ariani (2015), that the media represents beauty through actresses or celebrities and allows people to interpret the concept of beauty given by the media. The media carry out the exposure to standardization through not only advertisements and films but also event programs such as beauty events or contests.

A beauty pageant is a reality show that competes with beautiful women by walking on a spectacularly styled stage involving contestants from various parts of the world (Kanzulfikar, 2021). Srivastava (2020) posits that beauty pageants, regardless of their scale, serve as dynamic arenas where cultural significance is generated and disputed. Beauty is understood differently in each region and country; beauty contestations such as the Miss Universe have equalized this concept of

beauty in one global understanding. In this case, the Miss Universe contest organizers create a standard that homogenizes the concept of beauty itself in one symbolic form, such as gestures, makeup, costumes, and so on, represented through the figure of the contestant. Some of the concerns are the rules regarding body language designed by Miss Universe choreographers for contestants.

As a result, women's beauty is used as a commodity that can attract attention and generate maximum profit (Wolf, 2017). When the media airs the beauty contest, various product advertisements can be seen simultaneously displayed and attached to the contestants. The beauty contest's portrayal of women's image ultimately commodifies women's bodies, impeding their autonomy (Pratiwi, 2018). This phenomenon then becomes exciting because the Miss Universe contest itself gives meaning to the beauty of a woman who is pitted and contested until this contest finally chooses one woman who is considered to meet the terms and conditions of the established criteria. The phenomenon shows that beauty, which initially had a plural and subjective concept, became a beauty formed and created by the interests of the capitalist world.

This article was created to examine the Miss Universe beauty pageant as an area of cultural production by applying visual literacy in the perspective of multimodality discourse analysis to be used as a benchmark. This article is expected to clearly illustrate the construction of the meaning of beauty built through the Miss Universe beauty pageant through the perspective of multimodality discourse. In addition, this article also reveals, understands, and finds the implied meaning of the gestures and self-identity conveyed by the Miss Universe contestants.

Cultural Studies. According to Hall (2011), cultural studies are a collection of concepts, representations, and behaviors that offer means of articulation, modes of understanding, and behaviors about a specific subject, social endeavor, or institutional undertaking within society. Cultural studies focus on how elite groups, such as the media, exercise power over less powerful groups (subordinate groups) (Barker, 2014).

Discourse Analysis Multimodality. Multimodality is a theory that explains how a person communicates by utilizing multiple methods simultaneously. Multimodality includes spoken and written text (Schneider et al.). The spoken text includes voice, gesture, intonation, and so on, while the written text includes linguistics, images, colors, illustrations, etc. Multimodal discourse analysis is a new paradigm in discourse studies to study language combined with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music, and sound (O'Halloran, 2011).

Beauty Contest. Beauty pageants can be regarded as significant spaces abundant in symbolism and cultural creation, sharing numerous similarities with other prominent sites of popular cultural production, such as talk shows. Beauty pageants serve as dynamic arenas where cultural meanings are created and challenged, making them a compelling subject of study for sociologists seeking to explore the mechanisms behind collective cultural production (Srivastava, 2020). Beauty pageants can facilitate the formation of cultural and racial significance at both the micro-level, which pertains to interactions within and between individuals, and the macro-level, which encompasses interactions within and between groups, organizations, and institutions (Cohen et al. in Lazar, 2013).

Cultural Production. Gill (2013) defines culture as a comprehensive framework encompassing knowledge, beliefs, procedures, attitudes, and artifacts shared within a specific group. Cultural production is a creative process involving resources, expectations, and imagination that the actors transform to produce a cultural product in a specific time and space (Ingold & Hallam, 2021).

Gestures and Visual Language. Gesture, also known as non-verbal communication, refers to non-verbal behavior involving the movement of hands, shoulders, and fingers (Ayu, 2019). Visuals can be regarded as cultural artifacts individuals possess and interpret based on the individual's perspective and cultural background. Visual messages are superior to verbal messages if the content is emotional, holistic, direct, spatial, and visual. Meaning is immediately apparent at a basic level,

but visual language must be learned for correct understanding (Hermawan, 2021). Visual language has its own "grammar," syntax, etc., like spoken and written language. In spoken language, syntax studies the rules for combining words into grammatical phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. In visual languages, syntax depends on the spatial arrangement of visual elements on the page (Hermawan, 2021).

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach and a critical paradigm. Primary data are videos of the Miss Universe 2021 beauty pageant in the form of preliminary and final videos and 1-2 hours in duration uploaded by the official Miss Universe account on Youtube. The units of analysis are images, attributes, narratives, and dialogues that represent the implied meaning of gestures and self-identity conveyed by the Miss Universe contestants. Data collection uses document studies, interviews, and literature studies. Data analysis used a multimodality discourse analysis approach and a media text analysis using van Leuween's social semiotic analysis. Data analysis was carried out in stages, starting from problem setting, data collection, and after data collection (data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Constructing the Meaning of 'Beauty' in the Miss Universe Contest. The Miss Universe contest as a worldwide beauty pageant has standards set through various requirement points that are further strengthened by the media's involvement as a transmitter of messages, and the media strengthens the construction of beauty standards that are increasingly accepted by the public. Miss Universe Organization (MUO), as the organizing organization and the contestants, assesses the beauty that Miss Universe is aiming for as beauty in a broad sense that does not focus on a similar physique but also on self-characteristics that show confidence. Miss Universe campaigns the meaning of beauty universally to the world by showing a variety of beautiful diversity manifested through the diverse figures of its contestants. However, the concern is that the beauty seen in the Miss Universe show is beauty that has been selected and shaped by the organization in such a way. Contestants are selected based on the requirements set by the organizer so that they can be selected to become contestants who can represent their country.

Women's perceptions of beauty and their bodies can be negatively influenced by idealized images prevalent in the media (Bair et al., 2012). Because women worldwide compete for the title of Miss Universe, the pageant offers greater racial diversity than the Miss America or Miss USA competitions (Auletta & Jaen, 2013). Despite this, contestants still adhere to more conventional notions of beauty (Balogun, 2012). As in Hall's theory of cultural studies, language is involved in forming meaning and knowledge by giving meaning to material objects and social practices that are made visible (Barker, 2016). Cultural studies focus on how elite groups, such as the media, exercise power over non-powerful groups.

Meanings in Miss Universe Contestants' Gestures. Various gestures and visual appearances shown by the Miss Universe contestants have meanings. Overall, most of the contestants' gestures give confidence and grace by the message in the slogan owned by Miss Universe, namely, confidently beautiful. Each contestant's gesture shows a well-trained and polished movement, and there is no excessive movement, so the contestant's gesture remains polite. The gesture then strengthens the impression of a contestant who is full of confidence and shows elegance in every movement. The research informants' statements show no special arrangement from the Miss Universe organizers in shaping the contestant's gestures. However, the training and debriefing

provided give the contestants a leading role model that can be emulated to show graceful and confident gestures that follow the Miss Universe slogan and are appropriate to be shown on stage.

Some of the gestures most often shown by contestants include a firm catwalk, a posture with a backbend (both hands on the waist), clasping hands in greeting, covering the mouth with hands, and putting on a smiling facial expression giving the impression of complete confidence in a contestant. In the study of model gestures, the body pose with the waist down can give confidence to the subject of the photo, and in psychology, the waist down gives the impression of power so that the culprit feels confident (Emeksiz, 2021). Based on the study of Parzuchowski et al. (2014), the hand gesture on the chest symbolizes honesty and increases honesty with oneself. The contestants had smiling facial expressions, which gave the impression of happiness radiating from them (Sülflow & Maurer, 2019). Costumes with mini-dress models give the impression that the body looks sexier and show the user's confidence (Kidd, 2022) in their body to the audience. Limb movements as a form of nonverbal communication are a product of culture; in this case, the Miss Universe beauty contest is a contestation that produces culture. Ekman (1965) in Piana et al. (2016) found that cues from the head and face, and hand movements describe what emotions are being experienced, while body movements indicate how intense these emotions are.

Miss Universe Contestant's Self-Identity. The self-identity of the Miss Universe contestants can be seen through symbols and visual elements such as gestures and appearance. The contestant's overall appearance ranging from physicality, and attitude to insight on stage that is owned, can show the self-identity of a contestant. This is because a person's appearance usually follows that person's will or personality like the Miss Universe contestants presented with various styles. The appearance aims to reveal who, personality, from where, and what culture is being carried by a Miss Universe contestant. A person's self-identity can be seen from the most minor things. The uniqueness can be in the form of personality, interests, favorite food, how to talk, how to walk, and even how a person responds to something. Beauty pageants can be seen as a cultural form of collective self-identity as well as a point of production of embodied cultural identity, where contestants from various countries and states present their identity to the audience but on the other hand, also present the cultural identity where they come from and build a new collective culture in the Miss Universe contest.

In his book *Social Identity* cited by Hornung et al. (2019), Jenkins explains that identity is our understanding of who we are and who others are and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and others. Identity is something that can be negotiated and created in the process of human interaction. Beauty pageants serve as platforms for the cultivation and development of individuals who possess the potential to become queens rather than merely being venues for selecting such individuals. From a cultural perspective, beauty pageants can be interpreted as a means of collectively expressing and defining one's self-identity while also serving as a platform for manifesting cultural identity through physical embodiment. Beauty queens encompass more than mere performers engaging in collective cultural identity rituals; they also serve as shared elective representational systems, observers/spectators, vehicles for symbolic production, embodiments of *mise-en-scène*, and wielders of social power (Spillman and Conway in Hearty, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The meaning of beauty at the Miss Universe 2021 event is built through the depiction of the contestants' perfection consisting of their physique, attitude, and insight. The contestants' appearances have created beauty criteria that shape the idealization of the female figure and influence the audience's perspective in appreciating themselves. Overall, the contestants' gestures that are most shown give confidence and grace following the message in the Miss Universe slogan,

namely, confidently beautiful. The self-identity of the Miss Universe contestants reveals who, their personality, from where, and what culture is being presented with various styles and uniqueness. The uniqueness can be in the form of personality, interests, favorite food, how to talk, how to walk, and even the contestant's attitude when responding to things and questions.

Based on the empirical findings of this study, every aspect of visual symbols and discourses built in the Miss Universe beauty contest is created by interested elite groups such as the organizing organization, media corporations, beauty equipment companies, and so on. Miss Universe then becomes an arena for the production and contestation of cultural meanings that shape the meaning of beauty itself as a universal beauty standard. The results of this study strengthen the assumptions in Hall's theory of cultural studies that the power of several groups is linked to the formation of popular cultural practices such as the Miss Universe contest and can influence perceptions that shape people's culture.

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