Gendered Language in Indonesian Skincare Advertisements

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Abstract

Language in advertising functions not only to promote products but also to construct gendered identities and influence consumer perceptions. In skincare advertising, linguistic choices can represent masculinity and femininity through action-oriented expressions, evaluative adjectives, and direct forms of address. This study aims to analyze and compare gendered language features and persuasive strategies in Indonesian men's and women's skincare advertisements. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a comparative design, this study examines six official commercial videos from Kahf, Garnier Men, Men's Biore, Wardah, Senka, and Emina, focusing on voiceover scripts and in-video text. Guided by Robin Lakoff's (1975) Women's Language theory, the analysis identifies linguistic features and broader gendered strategies in the advertisements. The findings reveal that men's skincare advertisements tend to emphasize action verbs, informal pronouns, direct address, confidence, and active lifestyles, while women's advertisements emphasize evaluative adjectives related to brightness, softness, glow, and skin appearance. Lakoff's ten Women's Language features are only partially represented, suggesting that contemporary skincare advertisements construct gender through broader persuasive strategies. Overall, gendered language in Indonesian skincare advertising is flexible and functions as a commercial resource for constructing consumer identities and promoting product benefits.

Keywords: *Advertising discourse; Gendered language; Robin Lakoff; Skincare advertisements.*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary instrument of social communication that humans use to convey ideas, foster interaction, and construct meaning in social life (Luqyana et al., 2021). Over time, language has expanded beyond the exchange of objective information; it has become a powerful tool of persuasion in commercial and advertising discourse (Rosyidah et al., 2024). In advertising, word choice, sentence structure, and writing style are carefully crafted by copywriters to influence public perception, shape brand image, and guide consumer behavior (Luqyana et al., 2021). The use of language in modern advertising employs psychological strategies to build a strong emotional connection with the audience, so that the promotional messages conveyed feel relevant, communicative, and persuasive. Language use in society is not neutral; rather, it is closely tied to social factors, one of which is gender (Ginarti et al., 2022). Sociolinguistic studies show that men and women tend to have different communication styles, reflecting the social constructions, roles, and gender norms

prevalent in society (Nadhifa et al., 2025). In advertising discourse, these gendered linguistic differences are contextually utilized to construct masculine or feminine identities for the products being offered (Ginarti et al., 2022). Marketers deliberately manipulate gendered linguistic characteristics to target specific consumer groups, thereby making language the primary means of shaping social standards of beauty, handsomeness, and self-care.

The main theoretical framework for gendered communication is based on Robin Lakoff's (1973) "Women's Language" theory, which identifies ten linguistic features characteristic of women's language: lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation in declarative sentences, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, emphatic stress, and precise color terms (Victoria Utomo, 2022; Wahyuningtyas, 2008; Made et al., 2024). In modern advertising discourse, these features are commodified through the strategy of synthetic personalization, in which copywriters utilize affective adjectives (empty adjectives) and intensifiers to project warmth and emotional intimacy with the audience (Dendo & Hikmah, 2025; Karjo & Wijaya, 2020). In contrast, advertising discourse for men's products theoretically adopts a framework of functional masculinity dominated by action verbs and neutral or strong adjectives to emphasize the practicality and efficiency of the products in the market (Dina et al., 2017).

A number of empirical studies have examined the use of gendered linguistic features in various digital media and public discourses. Studies on beauty vloggers' content on YouTube show that content creators predominantly use intensifiers and empty adjectives to foster intimate and familiar interactions with their audience (Indra et al., 2019; Karjo et al., 2020. Explorations of feminine linguistic features have also been found in personal blog posts (Thiffanah Thuffailah et al., 2020), fictional dialogue in film scripts (Oktapiani et al., 2017), and promotional discourse for local fashion brands on Instagram (Luqyana et al., 2021). In the realm of beauty products, Dina (2017) examined gender differences in television skincare advertisements, while Dendo et al. (2025) analyzed the representation and reconstruction of masculinity among Korean male actors in skincare advertisements.

Although the seven previous studies have made valuable contributions, there are specific research gaps in each of these studies. Indra, Marnita, and Ayumi (2018) examined female language features in the speech of beauty vloggers; however, their study focused only on unscripted spoken discourse and thus did not examine scripted commercial discourse. Karjo & Wijaya (2020) examined differences in the linguistic features of male and female influencers on YouTube, but their research did not address the visual text that appears on screen. Thiffanah Thuffailah, Kurniawan & Imperiani (2020), analyzed feminine linguistic features in personal blog posts, but did not explore how these linguistic features are manipulated for commercial persuasion. Oktapiani, Natsir, and Setyowati (2017) identified feminine linguistic features in fictional film dialogues, but their study did not extend to real-world promotional discourse for skincare products. Dina (2017) examined gendered features in skincare advertisements on conventional television, but did not contrast

language use across modern digital platforms in a cross-media analysis. Dendo & Hikmah (2025) investigated the representation of masculinity among male actors in skincare advertisements, but did not compare these linguistic strategies in a balanced manner with those in women's skincare advertisements. Lugyana & Imperiani (2021) analyzed persuasive linguistic features in fashion advertisements on Instagram, but did not conduct a comparative, cross-platform analysis of advertising discourse for men's and women's skincare products.

The lack of comparative studies on these two channels creates a high level of academic and practical urgency. Indonesia's digital skincare industry is growing rapidly with increasingly aggressive marketing strategies, shaping modern standards of male attractiveness and female beauty through the formation of new gender identities. Revealing how copywriters artificially manipulate gendered linguistic features is crucial for understanding the mechanisms of commercial persuasion in digital media. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in filling this gap by examining a comparative, dual-channel dataset (voiceover and in-video text) from three men's skincare brands (Kahf, Men's Biore, Garnier Men) and three women's skincare brands (Wardah, Senka, Emina) side by side in the Indonesian market.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze and compare the application and persuasive functions of the "feminine language features" from Robin Lakoff's theory in men's and women's skincare advertisements in Indonesia. Specifically, this study addresses two research questions, namely, what feminine language features (based on Robin Lakoff's theory) found in the voiceover scripts and on-screen text (in-video text) of men's skincare advertisements (Kahf, Men's Biore, Garnier Men) and women's skincare advertisements (Wardah, Senka, Emina) in Indonesia, and how linguistic choices and persuasive strategies differ between men's and women's skincare advertisements in constructing gendered promotional messages for consumers in Indonesia.

B. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a comparative design to contrast the use of gendered language features in advertising discourse for men's and women's skincare products in Indonesia. The research data consist of linguistic units-such as words, phrases, and clauses-that contain gendered language features based on Robin Lakoff's (1975) theory of Women's Language, as well as the choice of adjectives and action verbs. The data sources consist of transcriptions of six official commercial videos on digital platforms (YouTube and Instagram), comprising three men's skincare commercials (Kahf, Men's Biore, and Garnier Men) and three women's skincare commercials (Wardah, Senka, and Emina). The transcription covered two main text channels: the spoken narration by the narrator or actor (voiceover script) and the visual text that appears directly on the video screen (in-video text).

Data collection was conducted using non-participant observation and gradual

documentation. The researcher selected commercial videos from each brand's official channel, then observed and listened to the videos repeatedly to understand the context of the promotional narratives presented. Next, all spoken dialogue was transcribed verbatim and combined with notes on the visual text appearing on screen. All collected text was then compiled into a single corpus of raw data, ready for further classification and analysis.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which comprises three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. In the data condensation stage, the transcript data is filtered and classified into a categorization matrix based on Lakoff's (1975) ten features of "feminine language" as well as the grouping of lexical items into adjectives and action verbs. In the data presentation stage, the findings are presented in the form of a comparative narrative analysis that contrasts the linguistic strategies between male-and female-targeted advertisements in a balanced manner. Finally, in the conclusion stage, the researcher analyzed the persuasive function of each gendered language choice to show how copywriters strategically manipulate linguistic style to influence target consumers in the Indonesian market.

C. FINDING

1. Gendered Language in Men's Skincare Advertisements

The analysis of the three men's skincare advertisements Kahf, Garnier Men, and Men's Biore shows a frequent use of action-oriented expressions, direct address, and vocabulary associated with activity, confidence, and masculine identity.

- Subtitle: "*Main bersih wajah juga harus bersih*"
- In-video text: "*Kahf Face Wash*"



Figure 1. Ad Scenes of Kahf Face Wash: Kahf "*Main Bersih*" Advertisement
Source: Kahfeveryday, 2022



Figure 2. Ad Scenes of Kahf Face Wash: Kahf "*Menang Kalah Pilih Main Bersih*" Advertisement

Source: Kahfeveryday, 2022

The Kahf advertisement uses the expression "*Main bersih wajah juga harus bersih*" to connect facial cleanliness with the broader idea of clean and fair behavior. The repetition of *bersih* emphasizes both the physical benefit of the product and the value of "playing clean." This meaning is reinforced by action-oriented expressions such as *bersihkan wajah*, *menggiring bola*, and *menolong*, which associate skincare with an active lifestyle and positive behavior.

- Subtitle: "*Waktunya buat #BeraniLebih*"
- In-video text: "*MOMEN #BERANILEBIH BERSAMA* CAPTAIN GARNIER MEN"



Figure 3. Visual and Textual Representation of Masculinity in Garnier Men Advertisement: Gaming Scene with "*#BeraniLebih*" Slogan,

Source: Garnier Men Indoneisa, 2023



Figure 4. Visual and Textual Representation of Masculinity in Garnier Men Advertisement: Model Close-up Shots with Acne Care Subtitle

Source: Garnier Men Indoneisa, 2023

The Garnier Men advertisement uses direct and action-oriented expressions to encourage consumers to deal with skin problems. The slogan "*#BeraniLebih*" is combined with the verb *lawan* in *lawan jerawatan*, presenting acne as a problem that should be actively confronted. The expression "*Segar Banget*!" also contains an intensifier, as *banget* strengthens the adjective *segar*. Meanwhile, the use of *lo* in "*GILIRAN LO UNTUK #BERANILEBIH SEKARANG*" creates an informal and direct relationship with the audience.

- Subtitle: "*Gua ngaku kalah sama* Men's Biore. Acne Bright Care. *Gua sadar adanya gua di muka luh tuh sebenarnya normal. Dan lu gak perlu* insecure *pas komplotan gue datang. Langsung aja cucui muka pake*"
- In-video text: "-"

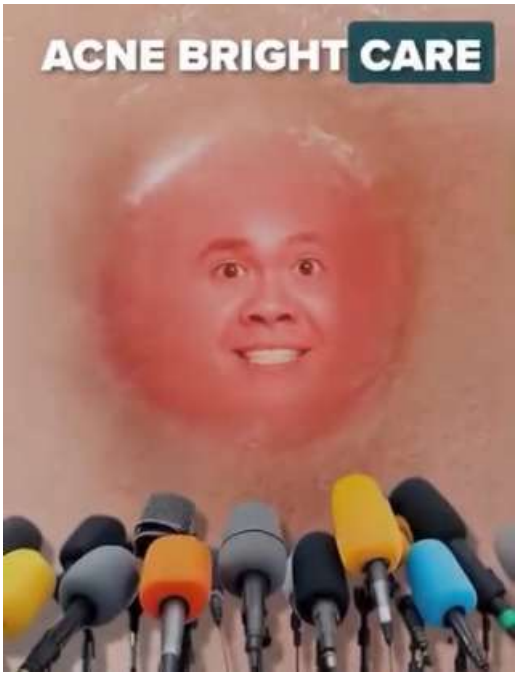


Figure 4. Biore Acne Bright Care Advertisement.
Source: @idmensbiore, Instagram Reel, 2025

Men's Biore uses an even more informal conversational style through pronouns such as *gua, lu,* and *gue*. Expressions such as *lawan jerawat*, *angkat minyak*, and *wajah cerah* combine action verbs with product benefits. The advertisement also uses the expression *jadi pusat perhatian lagi*, presenting skincare as a means of restoring confidence and social visibility. This language creates a casual and relatable masculine persona rather than a formal beauty-oriented discourse.

Overall, the men's advertisements tend to construct skincare through action, confidence, activity, and direct interaction. This pattern is consistent with the use of action verbs and informal address, although not every linguistic feature can be directly classified as Lakoff's feminine language.

2. Gendered Language in Women's Skincare Advertisements

The three women's skincare advertisements Wardah, Senka, and Emina show a stronger emphasis on appearance, skin condition, texture, and desirable beauty outcomes.

- Subtitle: "*Setelah* all out beraktifitas, *bersih, cerah, bebas minyak* is a must"
- In-video text: "-"



Figure 5. Visual and Textual Representation of Femininity in Wardah Advertisement: Active Female Model Scene

Source: WardahBeauty, 2022



Figure 6. Visual and Textual Representation of Femininity in Wardah Advertisement: Product Display Shot.

Source: WardahBeauty, 2022

The Wardah advertisement places strong emphasis on desirable skin conditions through evaluative adjectives such as "*bersih*," "*cerah*," "*bebas minyak*," "*lembut*," and "*glowing*." These expressions highlight the physical results associated with the product. At the same time, action verbs such as *menghapus* and *bersihkan* describe the product's function in removing oil and impurities. The combination of appearance-related adjectives and functional claims presents skincare as a way to achieve clean and glowing skin.

- Subtitle: "-"
- In-video text: "*GENTLE. DERMATOLOGIST-TESTED. 8 HOURS LONG LASTING MOISTURIZATION*"



Figure 6. Representation of Gentle Skincare and Moisturization in Senka Commercial: Lathering Dense Foam Demonstration

Source: SENKA INDONESIA, 2024

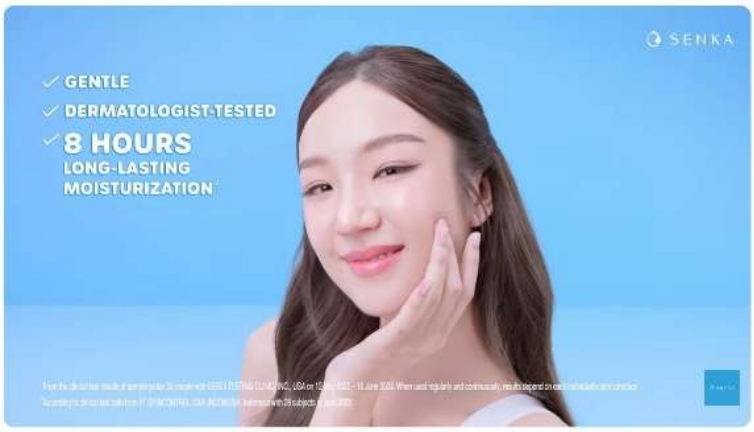


Figure 7. Representation of Gentle Skincare and Moisturization in Senka Commercial: Female Model with Product Benefit Subtitles

Source: SENKA INDONESIA, 2024

The Senka advertisement mainly communicates its message through in-video text, using expressions such as "rich," "dense," "gentle," and "long lasting moisturization." These adjectives emphasize the texture and moisturizing qualities of the product. Meanwhile, action verbs such as squeeze, lather, and cleanse describe the process of using the facial foam. The phrase "dermatologist-tested" further supports the product's credibility by presenting it as tested and suitable for the skin.

- Subtitle*:* "*kulit cerah* glowing *dan* bouncy emina bright stuff"
- In-video text: "for bouncy glowing skin"



Figure 7. Visual and Textual Analysis of Emina Bright Stuff Advertisement: Model Close-up Displaying Bright Skin

Source: Emina, 2024



Figure 7. Visual and Textual Analysis of Emina Bright Stuff Advertisement: Product Display and Campaign Tagline.

Source: Emina, 2024

The Emina advertisement emphasizes visual skin results through expressions such as "*cerah*," "glowing," and "bouncy." The phrase "2.7x brighter faster" further strengthens the promotional message by presenting a specific claim about the product's effectiveness. In addition, terms such as niacinamide, summer plum, and oxybiome introduce product-related and scientific-sounding vocabulary. These choices combine aesthetic descriptions with product benefits to create an appealing image of brighter and healthier-looking skin.

3. Comparison of Men's and Women's Skincare Advertisements

The comparison indicates differences in the linguistic emphasis used to address male and female consumers. Men's advertisements frequently employ action verbs, direct address, informal expressions, and vocabulary associated with activity and confidence. Examples include *lawan*, *angkat*, *menggiring*, *menolong*, and *berani lebih*. These choices present skincare as something connected to action and

everyday masculine activities.

In contrast, women's advertisements more frequently emphasize evaluative adjectives related to physical appearance and skin condition, such as *cerah*, glowing, *lembut*, gentle, and bouncy. These expressions highlight the desired aesthetic outcome of using the product.

However, the distinction is not absolute. Both groups use action verbs to describe product functions, and both use positive descriptions to persuade consumers. Therefore, the advertisements demonstrate different linguistic emphases rather than completely separate masculine and feminine language systems.

4. Lakoff's Women's Language Features

When examined through Lakoff's (1975) framework, the data show that the ten proposed features of women's language are not all clearly present in contemporary Indonesian skincare advertisements. The clearest example is the use of an intensifier in Garnier Men's "*Segar Banget*!", where *banget* strengthens the adjective *segar*.

However, the transcripts do not provide clear evidence of several other Lakoff features, such as tag questions, lexical hedges, super-polite forms, precise color terms, or avoidance of strong swear words as a distinct advertising strategy. Therefore, the findings suggest that Lakoff's framework remains useful for identifying particular linguistic features, but it does not fully explain the broader gendered strategies found in contemporary skincare advertising.

5. Persuasive Strategies and Gendered Representation

The findings show that gendered promotional messages are constructed through more than Lakoff's ten linguistic features. In the men's advertisements, action verbs, informal pronouns, direct address, and confidence-related expressions help construct skincare as compatible with active lifestyles and masculine identities. In the women's advertisements, evaluative adjectives and appearance-related expressions emphasize brightness, softness, glow, and other desirable skin qualities.

These patterns demonstrate that contemporary skincare advertising constructs gender partly through lexical choices and persuasive strategies. At the same time, the overlap between the two groups indicates that gendered advertising is not completely fixed. Both male- and female-targeted advertisements combine product functions with positive descriptions to make skincare products desirable to their intended consumers.

D. DISCUSSION

The findings show that gendered language in Indonesian skincare advertisements is constructed through various linguistic choices rather than through Lakoff's (1975) ten features alone. Men's advertisements tend to emphasize action, confidence, direct interaction, and active lifestyles, while women's advertisements more frequently emphasize appearance, skin condition, softness, brightness, and

visible results. However, both groups also use positive product descriptions and action verbs, indicating that the distinction between masculine and feminine advertising language is not absolute.

In relation to Lakoff's (1975) framework, only limited features are clearly identified in the data, with *banget* in Garnier Men's *"Segar Banget!"* providing a clear example of an intensifier. The limited presence of other features suggests that contemporary skincare advertisements do not simply reproduce traditional forms of women's language. Instead, gendered meanings are also constructed through adjectives, action verbs, direct address, and product-benefit claims.

These findings extend previous studies on gendered language by examining commercial skincare advertising in contemporary digital media. While previous research has examined gendered language in beauty vlogs, YouTube discourse, blogs, film dialogue, and television advertisements, the present study focuses on the comparison between male- and female-targeted skincare advertisements across digital platforms. The findings also support previous observations concerning masculinity in skincare advertising by showing the association of men's skincare with action, confidence, and activity, while demonstrating that appearance-related concerns are also present in men's advertisements.

Overall, the findings suggest that gendered representation in Indonesian skincare advertising is flexible rather than strictly divided into masculine and feminine language. Advertisers combine linguistic features with product benefits and persuasive strategies to construct messages for their target consumers. Thus, gender in contemporary skincare advertising is communicated not only through specific linguistic features proposed by Lakoff but also through the broader relationship between language, identity, and advertising persuasion.

E. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined gendered language in Indonesian skincare advertisements by comparing the voiceover scripts and in-video texts of three men's skincare brands: Kahf, Garnier Men, and Men's Biore. And three women's skincare brands: Wardah, Senka, and Emina. Drawing on Robin Lakoff's (1975) theory of Women's Language, the analysis shows that contemporary skincare advertisements construct gendered promotional messages through different linguistic emphases rather than through completely separate language systems.

The findings indicate that men's skincare advertisements tend to employ action-oriented verbs, direct forms of address, informal pronouns, and expressions associated with confidence, activity, and strength. Words such as *lawan*, *angkat*, *menggiring*, *menolong*, and *berani lebih* present skincare as an active and practical part of men's everyday lives. In contrast, women's skincare advertisements more frequently use evaluative and appearance-related adjectives, including *cerah*, glowing, *lembut*, gentle, and bouncy. These expressions construct skincare as a means of achieving desirable physical results, such as brightness, softness, cleanliness, and healthy-looking skin.

The analysis also demonstrates that Lakoff's ten features of Women's Language are only partially represented in the advertisements. Among the clearest examples is the use of intensification in Garnier Men's expression *"Segar Banget!"*, in which *banget* strengthens the adjective *segar*. However, features such as lexical hedges, tag questions, super-polite forms, precise color terms, and avoidance of strong swear words are not consistently found as prominent advertising strategies. This suggests that Lakoff's framework remains useful for identifying particular linguistic features, but it cannot fully account for the wider gendered and persuasive strategies used in contemporary commercial discourse.

Overall, gender in Indonesian skincare advertising is constructed flexibly through the interaction of lexical choices, product claims, direct address, action verbs, evaluative adjectives, and representations of identity. Although men's advertisements generally associate skincare with action, confidence, and practicality, and women's advertisements associate it more strongly with appearance and emotional or aesthetic desirability, both categories also contain overlapping strategies. Both use positive descriptions and functional claims to make their products attractive to consumers. Therefore, gendered language in skincare advertising should not be understood as a rigid opposition between masculine and feminine speech styles. Instead, it functions as a commercial resource through which advertisers negotiate gender identity, consumer expectations, beauty ideals, and product persuasion in the Indonesian digital media context.

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