

Gender Myth-Making in a Digital Beauty Campaign: Masculine Symbolism in the Somethinc x Batman Instagram Reels

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how feminine representations and the strength of Batman's character are combined in Something's beauty campaign, which was published via Instagram Reels videos. The approach used is a semiotic analysis based on Roland Barthes' theory, which focuses on the meaning of signs and symbols in visual and verbal messages. This study examines how the soft, feminine image and Batman's strong character complement each other to form a unique advertising message that captures the attention of a female audience. Data collection techniques include a literature review and observation of digital documents in the form of Somethinc x Batman campaign Reels videos taken from Somethinc's official Instagram account. The data obtained was then analyzed using denotative significance, connotative significance, mythic revelation, and triangulation through the Expression, Relation, and Content (E-R-C) sign structure in Something's Instagram Reels video content. The research findings indicate that the Something and Batman campaigns successfully created a more progressive and bold representation of femininity compared to conventional beauty advertisements. However, this representation remains a product of the commodification of heroism. The myth of strength constructed through the Batman character serves as a powerful emotional draw to attract modern female audiences, who yearn for agency and self-authority, yet are ultimately still directed to become consumer subjects within the 2025 digital beauty industry. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of the use of semiotics in digital marketing strategies that incorporate popular cultural symbols to influence consumer perceptions.

Keywords: Batman; Beauty; Femininity; Myth; Semiotics.

1. Introduction

In contemporary digital culture, beauty representation has evolved from a matter of physical appearance into a complex arena of ideological construction. The proliferation of social media platforms has significantly transformed how bodies, identities, and gender norms are visually communicated and interpreted. Instagram, as a dominant visual platform, facilitates not only self-presentation but also strategic brand communication that embeds social values within aesthetic forms (Henriques & Patnaik, 2021). Visual imagery on digital platforms operates as a system of signs through which meanings of femininity and masculinity are continuously produced and circulated. Consequently, beauty campaigns today function simultaneously as promotional tools and as cultural texts that shape public understandings of gender (Sisti et al., 2021).

The transformation of beauty discourse in the global cosmetics industry reflects broader sociocultural shifts. The representation of women in advertising is increasingly shifting from traditional portrayals that emphasize gentleness and passivity toward narratives that highlight independence, self-confidence, and strength (Stryker & Blackston, 2022). This shift indicates an effort to move away from stereotypical constructions of femininity. Nevertheless, the incorporation of empowerment narratives in commercial advertisements still presents theoretical complexities. Although women are represented as active and assertive subjects, such representations continue to operate within a capitalist structure that relies on the commodification of identity.

In Indonesia, the rapid growth of local beauty brands has intensified competition in the digital marketing space. Social media campaigns increasingly rely on symbolic differentiation to capture audience attention. The use of cinematic visuals, contrasting color schemes, and cross-cultural collaborations reflects a strategy to imbue products with emotional and ideological value. In this context, the collaboration between Something, a local beauty brand, and the global superhero character Batman presents an intriguing case of symbolic integration. However, the incorporation of a masculine superhero figure into a beauty campaign raises critical questions regarding how symbols rooted in masculinity are recontextualized within a realm traditionally associated with femininity. This situation simultaneously highlights conceptual challenges in understanding how empowerment, commodification, and gender symbolism intersect within digital beauty campaigns.

To analyze this phenomenon, this study employs Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic framework. Barthes views signs as operating on two levels: denotation as literal meaning, and connotation as meaning shaped by cultural context. When such connotative meanings are naturalized and widely accepted, myths emerge as ideological narratives that appear to be natural. In the context of advertising, myths serve to normalize certain values through visual structures that appear in everyday life. In this study, Barthes' framework is used not only to identify visual signs but also to examine how these signs construct ideological meanings related to gender and power within the context of digital advertising. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how visual elements in the Somethinc x Batman campaign shape gender meanings through the interaction between femininity and masculinity in short-form digital content.

Batman occupies a significant position in global popular culture as a symbol of vigilance, rationality, authority, and masculine heroism (Pearson & Uricchio, 2023). Historically, the character has been associated with strength, resilience, and disciplined self-control. These attributes are traditionally coded within dominant constructions of masculinity. When such a symbol is inserted into the domain of beauty marketing, an industry historically associated with femininity and aesthetic self-care, a negotiation of gender codes becomes visible. The symbolic convergence between a masculine superhero icon and cosmetic products creates a visual dialogue that challenges fixed gender boundaries.

Scholarly research has extensively examined gender representation in advertising and media texts. Using semiotic approaches, Hidayat et al. (2023) demonstrated how Instagram-based beauty advertisements negotiate race, culture, and feminist discourse. Similarly, Lutfiyah and Kinanti (2020) identified shifts in gender stereotypes within Indonesian advertising through Barthesian analysis, highlighting the transformation from passive female representation toward more independent portrayals. Mutiara (2022) further explored the reconstruction of masculinity in cosmetic advertising aimed at men, revealing that gender attributes in marketing discourse are not static but subject to reinterpretation. However, these studies tend to examine gender representation in isolation and have not specifically addressed the integration of global masculine symbols within female-oriented beauty campaigns in digital contexts.

Although these various studies indicate that gender representations in the media are dynamic and constantly shifting, most studies still focus separately on femininity in beauty advertisements or masculinity in cosmetic products targeted at men. Consequently, these

studies have not specifically addressed how masculine symbols, particularly those derived from global popular culture, are appropriated and integrated into beauty discourses historically associated with women, especially within the context of short-form digital visual content such as Instagram Reels.

Previous studies similar to Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis of representations of beauty include the research conducted by Sahira Meidina Jasmin, Yola Amanda, Hasan Sazali, and Maulana Andinata (2023), titled "Representations of Female Beauty in the Drama True Beauty (A Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis of the Drama True Beauty)." From this study, it can be concluded that physical beauty is still highly valued by the majority of people in every part of the world. Society tends to ostracize and treat people who are deemed not to meet the beauty standards they adhere to poorly. This can be seen in several scenes in the drama True Beauty, which repeatedly depict oppression and unequal treatment between those considered "beautiful" and those considered "ugly" by the surrounding community.

A related study, conducted by Rizma Indah Rahmah, Tellys Corliana, and Sri Mustika (2025), is titled "Representations of Female Beauty in the 2024 Scarlett AHA Body Serum Advertisement (A Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes)." The results of the study confirm that the advertisement constructs the female body, where female beauty is not only displayed through physical appearance but also implies that women are considered ideal only if they meet certain standards. Thus, this study concludes that the advertisement indirectly shapes the perception that women's bodies must be maintained in a certain way to be socially accepted. Advertisements function as a medium for conveying symbolic messages about beauty standards that help shape society's perspective on women.

The uniqueness of this study compared to previous research lies in its combination of feminine concepts (beauty) with masculine concepts (Batman), which is uncommon in beauty research. This study focuses on social media (Instagram Reels), a popular and influential platform in shaping public opinion on beauty, and the use of a fictional character (Batman) in beauty campaigns. This study analyzes the myth of Batman's strength within the context of beauty, offering a new perspective on understanding feminine representation. Consequently, its uniqueness and distinction from previous research make this study a significant contribution to understanding feminine representation and the myth of character strength within the context of beauty campaigns on social media, particularly Instagram. The message conveyed by Somethinc in

the collaborative campaign video on Instagram Reels does not merely deliver a direct marketing message. The use of Batman in this campaign implies a beauty myth that no longer refers solely to fair skin and a slim body, but also to strong, brave, and confident women.

The choice of the Instagram Reels platform as the subject of this study adds to the complexity of the issue. Unlike static print advertisements, Reels videos rely on the synchronization of fast-moving visuals (fast-cut editing), dramatic sound effects, and other interactive features. The speed of transitions in Reels videos can create a very powerful identity transformation effect, turning an unmade-up face into a figure resembling a heroic character in a matter of seconds. This dynamic reinforces the myth of the ease of achieving power through product consumption. To dissect the layers of meaning hidden behind this digital aesthetic, a method is needed that can systematically reach the depths of the sign structure (Aini & Khaerunnisa, 2024).

Therefore, Roland Barthes's theory of semiotics, with its Expression, Relation, and Content (E-R-C) model, as reformulated by Azhar Pratama (2023) in the context of digital branding, serves as the most appropriate analytical tool. The E-R-C framework allows researchers not only to describe what is visible on the screen (Expression) but also to trace how ideological relations (Relation) are constructed between the Batman symbol and modern feminine values, thereby producing a content of meaning (Content) that ultimately crystallizes into a cultural myth in 2026. Through a two-stage analysis of signification (denotation and connotation), researchers will be able to reveal how Batman's masculine power is deconstructed to create a new representation of femininity that is both empowered and commercial.

This limitation is important to note given the increasing use of popular culture symbols in digital marketing strategies, which serve not only as aesthetic elements but also as a medium for the construction of meaning and identity. In this context, the emergence of masculinity symbols such as Batman in beauty campaigns raises fundamental questions regarding how these symbols are recontextualized, as well as how gender meanings are constructed through the visual strategies employed.

Conceptually, this study focuses on Roland Barthes's semiotic approach as the primary analytical framework, particularly in understanding the process of signification at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. This approach is used to identify how visual elements not only represent literal meaning but also construct cultural meanings that are internalized as something that appears natural.

Meanwhile, perspectives on gender representation and feminist discourse are used as a supporting framework to strengthen the interpretation of the resulting constructions of meaning, without shifting the primary focus of the analysis away from the semiotic framework. Therefore, the research question in this study is how the expression, content, and relationship (E-R-C) systems both denotatively and connotatively manifest in the visual and verbal elements of the Something and Batman campaign Reels videos.

To address this gap, this study analyzes selected Instagram Reels from the Something x Batman campaign to examine how visual elements construct gender meanings through the interaction of femininity and masculinity. By focusing on the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, this research aims to identify how masculine symbolism is articulated within beauty discourse and how gender ideology is embedded in short-form digital advertising. Through this analysis, the study contributes to visual communication scholarship by demonstrating how myth operates within contemporary social media environments and how global popular symbols are adapted within Indonesian branding practices.

2. Method

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach to analyze how meaning is constructed in visual communication within digital campaigns. This approach allows researchers to examine gender representations as the result of symbolic processes, rather than merely as descriptive visual depictions.

2.1 Research Type and Approach

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes's semiotic framework. This approach was chosen because it allows for an analysis of how meaning is formed through a system of signs in visual communication. Within Barthes's framework, the process of signification is understood through three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth, which are used to identify how ideological meaning is constructed in visual representations. This study is grounded in a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of symbolic construction and cultural representation. In this context, advertisements are understood as cultural texts that reproduce ideological values through visual strategies. (Barthes, 1977).

Barthes conceptualizes signification as operating at two levels: denotation and connotation, which may further develop into myth when connotative meanings become naturalized within culture. This

framework has been widely applied in analyzing visual media texts, including advertising and cultural rituals (Qalyubi & Misrita, 2023; Wibisono & Sari, 2021). By applying this model, the study seeks to interpret how visual elements in the Something x Batman campaign construct gender meanings at multiple levels of signification.

The research is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as shaped through symbolic interaction and cultural representation. Within this paradigm, advertising is treated as a cultural text that reproduces ideological values through aesthetic strategies.

2.2 Research Objects and Subjects

The object of this research consists of selected Instagram Reels from the Somethinc x Batman campaign published on the official @somethincofficial account. The focus is placed specifically on short-form video content, as Instagram Reels represents a dominant format in contemporary digital marketing strategies.

This study does not involve human participants as research subjects. Instead, the visual and audio elements contained in the selected Reels are treated as cultural texts. In semiotic research, media texts function as primary data through which symbolic meanings can be interpreted (Barthes, 1977).

The analysis focuses on visual components such as color palette, lighting, framing, camera positioning, facial expression, costume, product placement, and logo integration, as well as textual elements appearing on screen. The analysis of these visual elements also takes into account the socio-cultural context of Indonesia as the space in which the campaign is produced and circulated. This is important because symbolic meanings are not universal; rather, they are influenced by local contexts that shape how signs are interpreted by the audience.

2.3 Procedures and Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through digital documentation and structured observation of the selected Instagram Reels. The selection of three Reels was based on purposive sampling using the following criteria:

- a) The videos were published during the initial launch phase of the Somethinc x Batman collaboration.
- b) The content explicitly integrated Batman iconography, including logo placement or superhero symbolism.
- c) The videos represented different narrative phases of the campaign (brand introduction, model-centered representation, and product-focused emphasis).

Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research when the objective is to select data that are analytically relevant rather than

statistically representative. These criteria are used to ensure that the selected data are analytically relevant for examining the integration of symbols of masculinity in beauty campaigns; thus, the sample selection is not random but rather based on conceptual considerations aligned with the research objectives.

Each Reel was downloaded and segmented into key analytical frames based on significant visual transitions, including changes in camera distance, lighting, product emphasis, and logo visibility. Across the three Reels, twelve focal frames were identified for detailed examination. This segmentation enabled systematic analysis of dynamic visual progression rather than treating the video as a static image.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Barthes' (1977) three-stage semiotic model:

a) Denotative Analysis

The first stage identified literal visual elements observable within the frames, including color dominance, costume design, lighting direction, facial expression, product display, and camera framing.

b) Connotative Analysis

The second stage interpreted culturally embedded meanings associated with these visual elements. For example, dark color schemes may connote authority or strength, while frontal gaze may signify confidence or control. Connotative interpretation was conducted by relating visual signs to broader cultural associations of masculinity and femininity.

c) Mythological Analysis

The final stage examined how repeated connotative associations formed a naturalized ideological narrative. Following Barthes (1977), myth is understood as a second-order semiological system in which culturally constructed meanings appear self-evident. At this stage, the analysis focused on how masculine superhero symbolism and beauty imagery converged to construct a gender myth.

This multi-layered approach has been applied in previous semiotic studies of advertising and visual media (Hidayat et al., 2023; Lutfiyah & Kinanti, 2020). Although interpretations at the level of connotation and myth are subjective, the analysis in this study was conducted by ensuring consistent application of Barthes's framework to each unit of analysis. Thus, the interpretations are not arbitrary but are based on recurring visual patterns and their connection to broader cultural constructions of meaning.

2.5 Data Validity Techniques

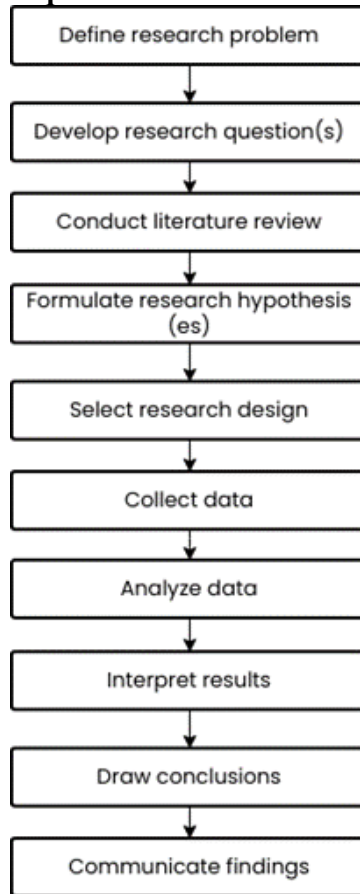


Figure 1. Research Flowchart
Source: Compiled by Researchers (2026)

As an interpretative semiotic study, this research does not employ statistical validation or inter-coder reliability testing. Instead, validity was strengthened through analytical transparency and theoretical consistency.

First, theoretical consistency was maintained by systematically applying Barthes' three-level framework to each selected frame. Second, reflexive memo-writing was conducted during analysis to document interpretive reasoning and identify potential alternative readings of visual signs. This reflexive practice helps reduce interpretative bias in qualitative research.

Additionally, findings were continuously cross-checked against existing semiotic scholarship to ensure conceptual alignment (Qalyubi & Misrita, 2023; Wibisono & Sari, 2021). The study does not claim

generalizability beyond the analyzed corpus but aims to provide contextual interpretation grounded in established theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the validity of this study is not based on statistical generalizations, but rather on the depth of interpretation and theoretical consistency. Analytical transparency is maintained by systematically documenting the interpretive process, thereby allowing for a re-examination *of the relationship between visual signs and the meanings they convey*.

The research was conducted in six systematic stages:

a) Preliminary Literature Review

Identification of relevant theoretical frameworks and prior studies on gender representation and semiotics.

b) Data Selection

Identification and purposive selection of three Instagram Reels meeting the established criteria.

c) Data Documentation

Downloading and segmentation of Reels into twelve analytical frames.

d) Denotative Coding

Identification and documentation of literal visual elements within each frame.

e) Connotative and Mythological Interpretation

Interpretation of cultural meanings and identification of ideological narratives.

f) Synthesis and Reporting

Integration of findings into thematic discussion linking visual analysis with gender myth construction.

Through these stages, the study seeks to systematically interpret how visual signs operate within a digital beauty campaign to construct gender ideology. This process is not strictly linear but rather iterative, meaning that the interpretation process may return to previous stages to further explore the visual meaning as needed for the analysis.

3. Results

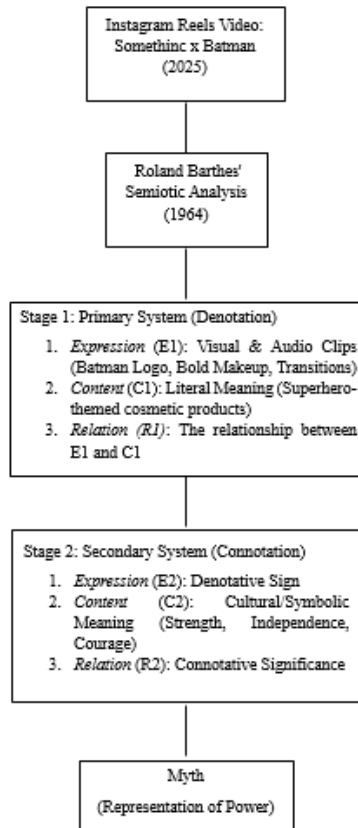


Figure 2. Relationships Between Themes
Source: Compiled by Researchers (2026)

This section presents the findings of research based on observations of the visual content of the Somethinc x Batman campaign on the Instagram platform, particularly on the main Reels that were the focus of the study. The presentation of the results focuses on the representation of visual, verbal, and audio signs that appear in the campaign material and their relevance to the construction of femininity and masculinity within it. The findings of the observation are not only presented descriptively but also analyzed interpretively using Roland Barthes's semiotic framework to identify the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings contained in the campaign's visual representations.

3.1 Visual Representation of the Somethinc x Batman Campaign

Visual observations of the Somethinc x Batman campaign video uploaded via the official @somethincofficial account on Instagram Reels show that the visual narrative is constructed through three main

segments: the opening, middle, and closing. Each segment has different sign elements, including color, lighting, costumes, text, and object composition, which together form a visual representation of the collaboration between the world of beauty and superhero characters.



Figure 3. Opening Frame of Something x Batman Reels
Source: Screenshot of @somethincofficial Reels (2024)

The opening frame of the reels features a textured gray cement background with a pastel purple Batman logo above the Something logo. This simple visual composition conveys a formal and exclusive impression. The gray color element serves as a neutral background that highlights the logo colors, while the light purple color of the bat symbol gives a soft and modern feel. The even lighting without strong shadows creates a clean and professional tone. Denotatively, this look introduces the brand collaboration's identity, while visually signifying the initial meeting between two symbolic worlds: beauty and heroism.



Figure 4. Mid-Frame Model with Superheroic Visual Elements
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

In the middle of the reels, a female model appears with bold makeup and hair styled into two horns resembling the silhouette of Batman's mask. The bright purple background highlights the model's

face, while soft lighting effects reflect a glow on her skin and the product she is holding. The model holds a compact powder product while staring directly at the camera with a serious and confident expression. Large typographic text that reads “BANG!” appears in dark purple at the front of the frame, reinforcing the dynamic and energetic impression typical of the comic hero style. Visually, the combination of colors, lighting, and body gestures presents an image of a strong, modern, and confident woman.



Figure 5. Something x Batman Campaign Closing Frame
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The closing frame of the reels shows a row of Something x Batman products arranged on a white surface with a night city-style background. The lighting focuses on the products, creating a metallic sheen effect on the purple and black packaging. At the top of the frame, the Batman logo and Something lettering appear side by side, emphasizing the identity of the collaboration. The launch date “24.01.2025” appears at the bottom in purple with a soft shadow effect. These visual elements mark the climax of the overall narrative, which is the introduction of the products at the heart of the campaign. The symmetrical layout and dominance of dark purple colors give a strong, elegant, and futuristic impression. This visual description serves as the basis for the semiotic analysis in the following section, which examines how these elements construct gendered meanings ideologically.

3.2 Denotative Analysis

Denotative analysis aims to identify the literal meaning that is visually apparent in the Something x Batman campaign on Instagram Reels. Each sign is observed based on its shape, color, lighting, expression, and image composition without connotative or mythological

interpretation. The results of the observation show three main visual components, namely the product display, the female figure in a black costume, and the makeup display using the product. The following analysis is based on the visual units identified in each key frame of the Reels, so that each element is systematically analyzed according to Barthes's semiotic stages.



Figure 6. Display of Something x Batman collaboration products
Source: Screenshot of Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The first display shows a row of Something x Batman cosmetic products, consisting of an eyeshadow palette, eyeliner, and mascara, arranged on a white block with a backdrop of city buildings at night. The dominant colors are black, white, and metallic gray, with the addition of a purple bat logo on the packaging. Each package features illustrations of Batman and Catwoman in comic book style. The lighting comes from above and the side, creating sharp shadows and light reflections on the product surfaces. Visually, the composition places the products as the center of attention, while the city backdrop adds to the nighttime atmosphere.



Figure 7. A woman wearing black clothing with a night city backdrop
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

In photo 5 above, a woman is seen wearing black synthetic leather clothing with an asymmetrical cut and one open shoulder. Her hair is styled high into two rolls resembling cat ears. The background shows purple and golden city lights. The model stands upright, facing the camera, without a smile. The light from the left creates a shine on her skin and clothes, highlighting the texture of the fabric. There are no noticeable gestures or body movements, with a stable and upright body position. The frame composition shows the female figure with contrasting lighting in the middle of the nighttime visual atmosphere.



Figure 8. Makeup and Batman-branded products

Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

In photo 6, there is a close-up of a woman's face with full makeup and a neutral expression. Her eyes are accentuated with thick black

winged eyeliner, curled eyelashes, and soft purple lipstick. The skin looks glowy due to the reflection of light from the right side. The model holds a round cosmetic product with the Batman logo parallel to her right cheek. Her gaze is directed straight at the camera, without a smile or additional expression. The background is bluish purple, reinforcing the focus on the face and product. The composition places the face, hands, and product packaging in one main focus area.

3.3 Connotative Analysis

At the connotative level, visual observations reveal a construction of meaning that combines elements of strength and beauty through the use of color, lighting, and symbols. The dominance of dark colors and purple lighting evokes an impression of both assertiveness and gentleness. Each visual element not only highlights aesthetic aspects but also contributes to building an image of women who are bold, confident, and in control of themselves. In the series of scenes, strength is depicted not through action, but through gazes, symbols, and objects related to self-care.



Figure 9. Reflection of a Woman's Face with a Dark Makeup Palette
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The visual in photo 7 above shows the reflection of a woman's face in a mirror with a contrasting purple and dark background. Her eyes appear sharp and focused, emphasizing her self-confidence. The makeup palette held in the foreground of the image presents a feminine element, but is framed in shades of color commonly associated with strength. The reflection of light around the face creates a glow that gives a firm yet elegant impression. The dark colors that dominate the background and objects support the visualization of courage, while the facial expression shows self-control and inner calm.



Figure 10. Batman Logo on Compact Powder Collaboration
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The dark-colored compact powder with a bat logo is the main point of attention. The shape of the cosmetic product reflects its connection to the realm of beauty, while the bat symbol evokes associations with strength and resilience. The shiny surface of the object creates an exclusive impression, showing a combination of aesthetic function and symbolic power. The contrast between the smooth material of the product and the masculine symbol implies the integration of two images: softness and assertiveness. Through this object, strength is not displayed aggressively, but is integrated into personal identity through everyday objects used by women. In this context, the construction of meaning not only represents visual aesthetics but also reproduces cultural associations regarding masculinity as a symbol of strength and control, which are then integrated into representations of femininity.

3.4 Mythological Analysis

At the mythical level, analysis not only identifies symbolic meanings but also examines how those meanings are naturalized as ideologies that appear self-evident within the context of visual culture. The Somethinc x Batman collaboration not only showcases cosmetic products but also builds an ideology of beauty based on strength and courage. Through a combination of Batman's masculine symbols and feminine aesthetics, these video reels instill the idea that modern beauty is no longer about passive softness, but rather the capacity to empower oneself. Visual connotations such as dramatic dark lighting, the women models' assertive expressions, and the use of black and blue colors

reconstruct the image of women as figures of authority, not merely objects of gaze. In the context of Indonesia's digital culture, this myth reflects the shift in the representation of women from aesthetic objects to subjects who hold authority over their visual identities, while also demonstrating how global symbols like Batman are recontextualized in local branding practices.



Figure 11. Woman Applying Lipstick

Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The close-up visual of lipstick application shows a process of self-transformation consciously undertaken by women. The focus on the lips and the product shows that beauty is chosen and constructed, not simply given. The precise movements emphasize women's control over their bodies and appearance. The details of the eye makeup and the glow of the face reinforce a strong visual presence, different from the traditional image of softness. There are no coy smiles; instead, serious expressions appear, as if to emphasize that the act of applying makeup is a form of identity affirmation. On a mythical level, this gesture rejects the view that beauty is futile, instead asserting that beauty is a strategic act. Women appear not to be passively admired, but to define who they are.



Figure 12. Woman Showing Lipstick Product
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

The frontal gaze and hand position show the product presents women as representatives of power over symbols. The product is not only displayed, but “controlled” through a gesture of gripping it with a large ring, resembling a weapon accessory. This image depicts that beauty is no longer passive, but ready to face challenges. Women are not only promoting the product, but also demonstrating their authority over it. The relationship between the body and cosmetics is presented as a relationship of power, not dependence. There is no seductive expression, but rather a gaze that establishes distance with the audience. Here, women appear as figures equal to the cold, tough, and unaffected symbol of Batman. The myth that is constructed is that of armed beauty, that owning the product means having symbolic protection, the power to fight in the social arena.



Figure 13. Woman Posing Firmly
Source: Screenshot from Reels @somethincofficial (2024)

A firm pose with open shoulders and head raised shows women in a heroic position. There are no gentle movements or comforting smiles;

what appears is a claim of space. This visual affirms the presence of women as the main subject, not a supporting backdrop. The spotlight that splits the background creates an atmosphere similar to a battle stage, reinforcing the woman's position as a figure ready to face challenges. Strength and elegance are united in one uncompromising body. On a mythological level, this pose breaks the stereotype that strength is the domain of men. Women become icons who guard the new myth that beauty is a manifestation of the courage to appear and persevere.

4. Discussion

The results of the study show that the Somethinc x Batman campaign formed a new construction of beauty through a combination of symbols of femininity and masculinity presented in Reels visuals. The use of dark colors, dramatic lighting, and bat symbols created an impression of strength that is unusual in traditional beauty campaigns. This finding is in line with Roland Barthes' (1977) concept of myth, that visual signs not only convey literal meaning, but also contain naturalized ideology. In this context, beauty is no longer positioned as passive softness, but as a form of control and courage. This phenomenon shows a transformation in the representation of women from objects to meaningful subjects. Lutfiyah & Kinanti (2020) state that modern media has begun to portray women as independent figures, not merely aesthetic icons. Thus, this campaign offers a new interpretation that beauty can be a symbol of personal power, reinforcing the notion that the beauty industry is shifting toward narratives of empowerment and self-strength.

These findings can be further understood through the lens of representation, where social meaning is shaped through visual language and cultural symbols. Within this framework, the figure of Batman—which historically represents masculinity, strength, and authority—is recontextualized within the aesthetic realm of beauty. This process demonstrates that symbols are not fixed but can be negotiated according to the needs of the discourse. As explained by Khanna & Karamchandani (2021), the use of popular cultural icons in marketing enables the formation of strong emotional associations with products. In this campaign, such associations are not merely commercial but also ideological, as they establish a new relationship between femininity and strength. The model's gestures, conveyed through a firm gaze and controlled poses, demonstrate that power is not always manifested through aggression, but rather through self-control and emotional stability. Thus, the visuals presented construct a “powerful beauty”

narrative that represents a paradigm shift in beauty from passive to active and empowered.

From a contemporary feminist perspective, this representation signifies a shift from the logic of the male gaze toward a more autonomous form of representation. Mulvey (1975) critiques how women in the media are often positioned as visual objects for the male gaze. However, in this campaign, women are no longer portrayed as passive objects but as subjects who have control over how they are represented. Gill, as cited in Ali (2024), emphasizes that third-wave feminism underscores the importance of agency in the management of the body and visual imagery. This is evident in the visualization of actions such as makeup application, which is no longer interpreted as a passive beauty ritual but as a conscious form of identity construction. The models' expressions, which tend to be serious and rarely smiling, further underscore this shift, where femininity is no longer associated solely with gentleness but with strength, control, and assertiveness. In this context, beauty functions as a strategy for self-affirmation, not merely a tool of consumption.

Furthermore, from a persuasive communication perspective, this campaign demonstrates how visual elements can effectively construct meaning without relying on verbal messages. Within the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the use of purple, cinematic lighting, and the Batman symbol serve as peripheral cues that trigger an emotional response in the audience. This strategy aligns with the AIDA concept (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) described by Apriandi et al. (2023), where strong visuals are used to capture attention and build interest. In this context, the symbolic power of Batman not only enhances visual appeal but also reinforces the association between the product and the value of strength. This indicates that the meaning constructed in the campaign is not merely rational but operates on an affective level, thereby creating a deeper emotional connection between the audience and the product.

On a mythological level, this campaign constructs a new ideology that positions beauty as a form of personal power. Barthes (1977) explains that myths operate by naturalizing ideological constructs so that they appear to be a matter of course. In this context, the integration of the Batman symbol, the use of dark colors, and the models' dominant expressions serve to normalize the idea that strength and beauty can coexist. Henriques & Patnaik (2021) assert that the representation of the body in digital media has become an arena of ideological struggle, where meaning is not only consumed but also produced and negotiated. This

campaign demonstrates that women are no longer positioned merely as visual objects but as subjects actively shaping their own identities. Thus, beauty is no longer understood as a passive attribute but as an existential strategy tied to power and self-control.

In the Indonesian cultural context, the use of global symbols like Batman also indicates a process of meaning localization in digital branding practices. Symbols originating from global popular culture are adapted to resonate with local audiences, while simultaneously creating new meanings relevant to the local socio-cultural context. This demonstrates that digital campaigns function not only as promotional media but also as dynamic spaces for the production of meaning. As explained by Henriques & Patnaik (2021), digital media enables a blurring of boundaries between consumption and identity, so that audiences are not merely recipients of messages but also active interpreters of the symbols presented.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the *Something x Batman* campaign not only combines visual elements from two distinct domains but also constructs a new ideological framework regarding the relationship between femininity and masculinity. This campaign represents beauty as a form of strength, not weakness, and demonstrates how symbols of masculinity can be appropriated to strengthen women's identities in the digital space. Thus, digital marketing practices in this context not only generate commercial value but also contribute to shaping and negotiating gender meanings within contemporary visual culture.

Practical Implications

The results of the E-R-C analysis indicate that at the expression level (visual elements such as dark colors, high-contrast lighting, costumes, and bold typography) denotatively represent the distinctive aesthetics of superheroes, while connotatively evoke the masculinity, strength, and mystery inherent in the Batman character. The practical implication is that brands can strategically leverage these iconic visual elements to reinforce a campaign's identity without having to explicitly state the message they wish to convey.

At the content level, both visual and verbal (narrative, tagline, caption), the denotative meaning presents the cosmetic product as the primary object, while the connotative meaning shifts the focus to symbols of empowerment, self-confidence, and self-transformation. This demonstrates that the use of storytelling based on popular characters can enhance the emotional appeal to the audience, enabling marketing

communication practitioners to integrate the symbolic value of these characters to deepen engagement.

At the relational level, the relationship between visual and verbal elements forms mutually reinforcing meanings. Denotatively, visuals and text appear merely as complements; however, connotatively, both construct a heroic narrative that using the product can “transform” the user, much like the character Batman. The practical implication is the importance of consistency between visuals and verbal messages to create a strong, unified meaning in the audience’s mind.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses only on a single Reels video, so it cannot yet fully represent the brand’s overall digital campaign strategy. Second, the semiotic approach is interpretive in nature, meaning that connotative meanings are highly dependent on the researcher’s subjectivity, which may differ from the perceptions of other audiences. Third, this study does not directly involve audience data (e.g., through interviews or surveys), so it cannot yet measure the extent to which the interpreted meanings are actually accepted or understood by the audience. Fourth, the cultural context and background of the audience were also not analyzed in depth, even though these factors can influence the interpretation of signs.

Directions for Future Research

Future research is recommended to broaden the scope of the study by analyzing more campaign content from Somethinc or other brands that collaborate with popular characters such as Batman, thereby yielding a more comprehensive comparison of meaning patterns. Additionally, further research could combine a semiotic approach with other quantitative or qualitative methods, such as audience surveys or focus group discussions, to determine how denotative and connotative meanings are actually perceived by social media users. Future research could also explore other aspects, such as the effectiveness of campaigns on brand engagement, brand image, or purchase intention, so that the analysis does not stop at meaning but also examines the impact of the communication. Finally, cross-cultural studies are also important to determine whether the interpretation of signs in similar campaigns carries different meanings in different cultural contexts.

Comparison with Other Studies

Previous research applying Roland Barthes’s semiotic analysis to representations of beauty, such as the study by Jasmin et al. (2023) on the drama “True Beauty,” shows that standards of physical beauty are still highly valued in global society. The findings reveal that individuals who

do not meet beauty standards often face discriminatory treatment and social exclusion. This is illustrated in various scenes depicting differences in treatment between characters deemed “beautiful” and “not beautiful,” thereby underscoring the powerful social construction of beauty in everyday life. Further research by Rahmah et al. (2025) on the 2024 advertisement for Scarlett AHA Body Serum indicates that the advertisement not only highlights women’s physical beauty but also constructs an ideal standard that must be met. The advertisement indirectly shapes the perception that women’s bodies need to be maintained according to certain standards in order to be socially accepted. Thus, the advertisement serves as a symbolic medium that conveys beauty values and influences society’s perspective on women.

The differences between the findings of this study and previous research are as follows: First, the media context used is different; this study focuses on Instagram Reels content, which is more dynamic, interactive, and closely aligned with Gen Z’s digital culture, thereby allowing for more flexible meanings that are not entirely bound by conventional beauty standards, as seen in dramas or advertisements. Second, the collaboration with the Batman character introduces a new beauty myth, a blend of femininity and strength (empowerment) that emphasizes not only physical aspects but also character, courage, and self-identity. In addition, these differences are also influenced by the messaging approach used, as Somethinc’s campaigns tend to promote self-expression and self-confidence, in contrast to previous research that highlighted the dominance of ideal beauty standards and social pressures. This indicates a paradigm shift in the representation of beauty, moving from a normative and restrictive approach toward a more inclusive and empowering one, particularly within the context of social media, which is more responsive to shifting societal values.

5. Conclusions

Overall, this study demonstrates that the Somethinc x Batman campaign does not merely function as a form of popular culture collaboration but also constructs new representations of femininity and masculinity through visual communication. Femininity is no longer positioned as passive gentleness, but as an active form of strength that operates alongside the symbolic masculinity of Batman. Through semiotic analysis, meaning is shown to operate across denotative, connotative, and mythological levels, ultimately constructing the idea of “beauty as power.” At the level of myth, the campaign naturalizes the notion that beauty functions as a form of autonomy and control rather

than passive appearance. This finding highlights the role of digital visual media as a site for negotiating gender meanings and ideological narratives. Therefore, this study contributes to visual communication scholarship by demonstrating how contemporary beauty campaigns operate not only as marketing strategies but also as cultural practices that reshape gender discourse in digital contexts.

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