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Decoding the myth of luxury in cosmetics herbal products advertisements

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Abstract. The study begins with a perilous standpoint of lovely images (female/male/child) in the mass media being regularly developed a formulaic typecasting concept of beauty. Quite a few feminine beauty myths have been grown in India during the contemporary times. The rise of cosmetic herbal advertisements portraying regressive images of womanly beauty to endorse products. Cosmetics perception of herbal integration is observed in respect to beauty myths portrayed by the media. The authors examine the structures of beauty myths of cosmetic herbs in India and their fundamental features. This is because of deep rooted androcentric dogma which portrays and objectifies the certain gender (especially women). Media vehemently disseminates much distorted concept of “beauty”. Brand changes their entire appearance with varied makeup products. There are evidently many products are available in the market which promises to bring a change in color/look/appearance altogether which is not always true but the study argues that the narratives of these cosmetic herbal products is creating an illusion. Roland Barthes's theory of mythology has been taken into consideration to understand the luxury of myth, and attributes of misleading information of media content. The study further directs to assimilate the perception of the consumers along with the semiology in depicting the beauty myth. There is a huge gap between women in reality and representative women in the mass media. It is very crucial to have a balanced perception of perceived images presented or drive by the mass media.

Keywords: beauty myth, Indian beliefs, Roland Barthes, mythology theory

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Расшифровка мифа о роскоши в рекламе косметических средств растительного происхождения


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Аннотация. Образы прекрасного (женского/мужского/детского) в средствах массовой информации регулярно разрабатывают шаблонную типологическую концепцию красоты. В Индии в современную эпоху сформировалось довольно много мифов относительно женской красоты, множится реклама косметических натуральных средств, изображающих регрессивные женские образы для продвижения продукции. Цель исследования – рассмотреть фундаментальные особенности мифов красоты в рекламе косметических растительных средств в Индии. Имеет место глубоко укоренившаяся андроцентрическая догма, которая изображает и объективирует определенный пол. СМИ настойчиво распространяют искаженное представление о красоте. На рынке существует множество продуктов, которые обещают полностью изменить внешность, что не всегда соответствует действительности: установлено, что рекламные нарративы косметических растительных продуктов создают иллюзию. Для понимания мифологии и атрибутики вводящей в заблуждение информации медиаконтента применялась теория мифологизации Ролана Барта. Наряду с семиологией в изображении мифа о красоте изучено восприятие потребителей. Существует огромный разрыв между женщинами в реальности и репрезентативными женщинами в СМИ. Таким образом, необходимо сбалансированное восприятие воспринимаемых образов, представленных или созданных средствами массовой информации.

Ключевые слова: миф о красоте, индийские верования, теория Ролана Барта

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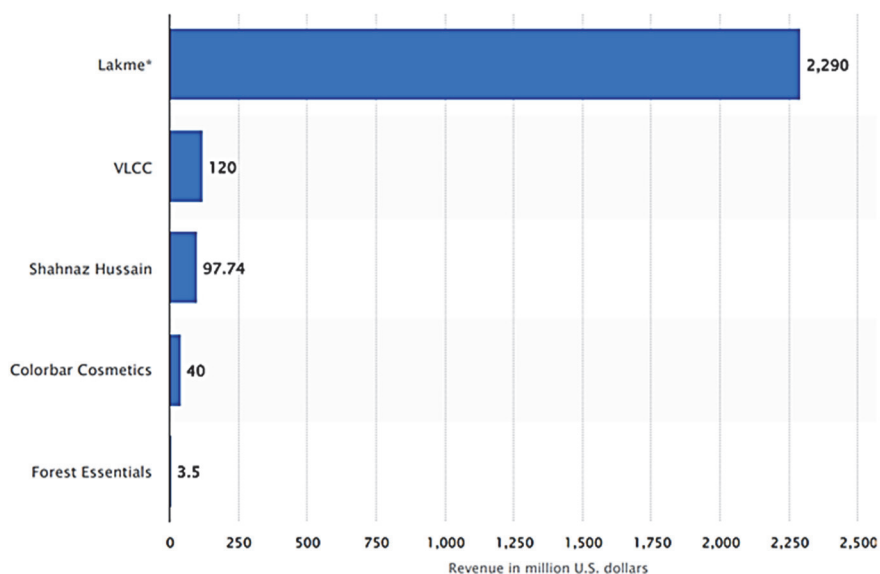
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Introduction

Indian society for a longer period of time has a fixed notion of beauty and aesthetics on women. These notions appear to be imposed more on women but not on men always. The ideation of rigid unvarying notions about female beauty, seem to be wrapped in myth. Through the various means of communication (visual, auditory, rhetoric and interpersonal) the myth of “beauty” ingrained with social ubiquitous which may go against with the aesthetics and geographical structured of places in India. Media plays an important role for constructing the myth which is egreious and turns out to be widespread. It furthermore disseminates and became the ideology through impactful images and narratives via interactive media

in a stringent manner. This creates to the culture of hyper-image, hyper-notion which is far away from the reality. Cosmetics herbal products on the other hand have always apprehended a significant place in the lives of the people. It has been ingrained in our lives from ancient times as because the impression been established and it has been made people to believe. The substances are deep-rooted and establishes the idea been derived from natural sources only and there are chemical composites (less significant and lesser emphasized) or a mix of both. These herbal cosmetics include personal care, skincare, makeup, fragrances, and what not. It helps to protect, clean, and enhance one’s body.

According to Statista research department data of 2022, L’Oréal Paris tops the list of best ten leading cosmetic brands which has brand value worth 11.22 billion US Dollar. Based on the survey, skin care category is the largest cosmetics industry among six categories¹ and there are handful MNC’s (multi-national corporations) which are ruling in global market² (Figure).



Revenue of Indian Cosmetics, 2016

Source: India – revenue of cosmetics brands by selected companies 2016. Statista. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/877041/india-revenue-of-cosmetics-brands-by-selected-companies/>

There is a paradigm shift in the cosmetic industry in India which has evolved substantially. The changing lifestyles and improved awareness are the major factor for this. This can be understood by the data of for the year 2020,³ which had seen \$20 billion growth (includes mainly bath and shower items) top

¹ L’Oréal: 2021 Annual Report. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://www.loreal-finance.com/en/annual-report-2021/>

² Bharti. (2022, February 2). Top 10 best cosmetic companies in India in 2022. *Inventiva*. Retrieved June 20, 2022, from <https://www.inventiva.co.in/trends/top-10-cosmetic-companies-india-2022/>

³ India – revenue of cosmetics brands by selected companies 2016. *Statista*. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/877041/india-revenue-of-cosmetics-brands-by-selected-companies/>

the way. The unorganised market sector controls the India's FMCG and retail sectors, which accounted for a greater percentage of total sales than online channels, in spite of the rapid expansion in online mode in contemporary times.

Research context

A recent research paper is published "Purchasing natural personal care products in the era of fake information of news content or through mainstream media? The moderation effect of brand trust" in 2021. In this paper, researchers tried to investigate the association between fake information of news content or through mainstream media and purchasing behavior related to natural personal care products. The researchers studied this association based on the theory of Stimulus Organism Behaviour Consequences. The result showed openness to change is associated with perceived benefit and risk. Also, the perceived benefit and trust are associated with the purchase, which is associated with a tendency to believe in fake information of news content or through mainstream media and act upon it (Kumar et al., 2021).

The recent research paper is published on "Social media to check and verify fake information of news content or through conventional media info associated with product marketing: the false misleading content of ads corpus" on 2022. The researchers aimed at creating a fake advertisement corpus that includes tweets of product advertisements. This study aims to understand the impact of fake (misleading and disinformation) of news and advertisements or marketing of specific products targeted through Twitter to grab consumer attention. The corpus is a unique technique with specific stories and fine-grained annotation. Annotation is guided by domain experts (Alnazzawi et al., 2022).

The research article is published in "Aging skin and food supplements: the myth and the truth" on 2021. The researchers investigated the myth of the anti-aging treatment of skin which is correcting from the inside with. The study wants to find whether active ingredients used in the oral treatment of skin aging have been effective in its use or not as per scientific evidence (Rona, Berardesca, 2022).

The research paper is published in "Herbal Cosmetics: Trends in Skin Care Formulation" on 2009. The researchers reviewed scientific data on herbal cosmetic formulation and tried to find the cosmetic importance of herbs that can be used in the formulation (Ashawat et al., 2009).

Research is done and published as an article with the title "Ethnopharmacological relevance's of herbal plants used in cosmetics and toiletries preparations" on 2021. The researchers tried to investigate different pharmacognostic and other important information related to medicinal plants used as key ingredients in cosmetics and toiletries making (Motule et al., 2021).

The research article is recently published with the title "Potential use of essential oils in cosmetic and dermatological hair products: A review" on 2021. The researchers tried to do a bibliographic review of essential oils used in hair care. They aimed at highlighting potential findings and results of research on essential oils used in hair care. The result of this bibliographic review showed cosmeceuticals containing essential oils are applied on the scalp to solve topical problems. Oils are mostly used to intensify the brightness of hair and fix hair color. Thus, research

demonstrated the usefulness of essential oil in cosmetic products or oil carriers to satisfy the need for the treatment of scalp dysfunction (Abelan et al., 2021).

There is research done in the area of purchasing herbal products in the era of fake information of news content and the effect of brand trust in it. There is further research in the area of detection of fake information of news content or through mainstream media related to product marketing in social media. There is research work done in the area of herbal active nutrient usage in the treatment of aging skin. Research is done on the area of herbal ingredients' effectiveness in cosmetic formulation. How useful are medicinal plant usage in cosmetic products and toiletries are some other areas where research has already taken place. But there is hardly any case study-based research on decoding myth related to herbal cosmetic products.

Objectives and research agenda

Various advertisements of cosmetics disseminate an intentional glamorizing concept of beauty. The stereotypical perception of "beauty" conforms to aesthetic principles by Indian Media. The images of cosmetics advertising have turned to an appropriate text to evaluate female beauty myths adopted by the various media in recent times. The advertised images of the ten best-selling companies have been selected. These images were further divided into two basic signs: imaginary sign and lingual sign. According to preselected measures, few figurative images have been chosen to reflect the frequency of average of cosmetics advertisements for 2021–22 year. Selected cases have been taken into consideration to find out the myths, debunk, and accuracy of commitment of select brands. There are some cases which have been reported, published in the form of article (leading national daily) and blogs (website) been selected to understand the misinformation, misnomers of the 'mythic concept of beauty'. Furthermore, Roland Barthes' Mythology theories have been preferred as a research method because of its appropriateness of inspecting myths and principles through image study (of advertisements and products). According to Roland Barthes, tri-dimensional pattern – the signifier, the signified and the sign is an integral part to be understood and examining with. Myth is often been integrated or derived from a semiological (objects, gestures and pictorial images) system which inherits with sign which often creates the perception at first and signifier forms after it.

To examine the advertising messages through semiotic analysis, preselected feminine images, two research questions have been formed:

1. What happens to be the archetypal beautiful women from the year 2015, based on Indian cosmetics advertisements?
2. How the concept of female beauty myth integrates in public messages through advertisement's and how its concealed dogma been reflected in Indian cosmetics advertisements?

The objective of the study is to examine the structures of beauty myths of cosmetic herbals in India and study their fundamental features.

The ten best-selling cosmetics companies in India are – Himalaya Herbals, Lotus Herbals, Khadi Natural, Vaadi Herbals, Just Herbs, Biotique, Forest Essentials, Ayur Herbals, VLCC, Jovees herbal.

Among them, all are unisex products, only Just Herbs do not use female models and human figures in their advertisements, are nine brands of these com-

panies have multiple different products for different categories (skin care overall, baby care, beauty care). Following cases will try to understand how the beauty of myth been promulgated.

Case 1: Aromatherapy creams and associated myth

Aromatherapy creams are believed to have essential oils. All herbal creams are of dirt or off-white color due to the addition of bee wax to it. Aromatherapy products have natural oils in them which is why they are unscented. If the product is scented then there is the synthetic product in it. If the natural products are colored then that is synthetic color in it. The synthetic product reduces the effectiveness of aroma oils. All natural products use essential oils or aroma oils. So, while buying natural products, the consumer must check these facts and not get convinced by brand name, packaging, or scent.⁴

Case 2: Natural skincare products are safer but not always

Times of India has reported that during one survey by the Centre of Science and Environment in 2014, on leading cosmetic brands, found the presence of heavy metals and harmful chemicals in synthetic cosmetic products. Consumers preferred natural products due to the notion of the long-term side effects of synthetic cosmetic products. Now the question arises regarding the notion of so-called herbal products being *safe*. Industry expert and cosmetologist opined those manufacturers tagging this cosmetic product as herbal are not well-regulated in the Indian market. Experts also opined those cosmetics claiming herbal can have one or two elements of herbs along with chemical elements. These are tagged herbal products to lure more consumers.

Moreover, products claimed to be 100 percent natural are misleading as they require more chemicals to stabilize the base; their shelf life will decrease to a maximum of six months. Apart from this more advanced technology is required to stabilize the base of 100 percent natural products which will increase the overall cost of production and so the selling price will be very high. Experts also advised that herbal products can be allergic to the user.

Moreover, total extract can be harmful as there are many other components present which are not suitable for the skin. Fake claims in the advertisements for herbal cosmetic products are further confusing to consumers.

Experts and doctors of cosmetic consultancy firms have given examples for misinformation; aloe vera does not have cleansing properties so advertisements claiming it by associating aloe vera with facewash are pure misinformation. Most importantly the consumer never sues the company or brand that does this false claim or does not provide the exact ingredient that they promise.

The litigation process in India is long-drawn, so most people never sued even if the product does not satisfy the claim in the advertisement or hurts their skin. However, consumer forum is nowadays playing an effective role in addressing consumer grievances. So, slowly the trends of people are coming for grievance redressal. Recently mobile applications are developed to identify ingredients in

⁴ Herbal products myths & facts. (2020, August 10). *Juvena Herbals*. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://juvenas.com/2020/08/10/herbal-products-myths-facts/>

cosmetics and understand their effect on human skin. Think Dirty, Cosmetic safety, and Cosmetic Ingredient Dictionary is some of the apps which give details about ingredients in cosmetics and their possible health impact.⁵

Case 3: Skincare myths-debunked

After the 2020 pandemic consumers of natural care products have increased manifold. Consumers of synthetic cosmetics started finding interest in natural products given the side effects of long-term use of such products. There are lots of myths about natural products which need to be busted. There is an increase in demand for skin care products like castor oil and wax made out of castor oil, products made of coconut oil, aloe vera, etc.

The myth that chemical preservatives are required in natural skin care products as base material is not true for all-natural products. Some natural products are water-based and required more chemical bases. Some natural skin care products are 100 percent original natural products without any chemical preservatives like coconut oil, castor oil, etc. Many consumers are of the notion that natural skin care products are hardly effective on the skin. It is a matter of fact that repairing, rejuvenation, and healing require time. Instant relief is possible through chemical usage but it is short-lived. So generally authentic natural products require a long time to heal and it is permanent.

Natural skin care products are considered very expensive compared to chemical synthetic counterparts. Even though expensive but it does not create recurring costs rather gives a one-time permanent solution. Whereas synthetic chemical product lures with instant relief but repeated buying as relief is short-lived. There is a myth that switching skincare products makes skin perfect. It is not true because the skin reflects the internal health of the body so to make it look perfect one need to maintain healthy internally. Skin is the largest organ of our body whose health depends on internal health. So, to make skin healthy looking perfect one needs to take care of internal health.⁶

Case 4: Debunking age-related myths for skin care products

Taking proper skincare can be a bit tricky. There is lots of myth related to skincare products. Many myths are not based on scientific research. In reality, age has nothing to do with skin type and skincare. Another myth that is popular in the skincare industry is that age creates spot-on skin. According to experts with an increased intake of vitamin C and using sunblock cream, one can avoid it. Acne is not an age-related problem any age group can have this problem which has to be treated to control it.

Also wearing make-up does not cause acne problems. The only caution in wearing make-up that one needs to follow is that it has to be removed at the end of the day to have healthy skin.⁷

⁵ Aggarwal U. (2014, February 21). Safer? Not always: The myth of herbal. *ETimes*. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/beauty/safer-not-always-the-myth-of-herbal/articleshow/30734851.cms>

⁶ *Top 5 natural skincare myths, debunked!* (2022, January 19). Ambuja Solvex Pvt. Ltd. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://www.ambujasolvex.com/blog/top-5-natural-skincare-myths-debunked/>

⁷ Stop believing these myths the beauty industry has told you. (2022). *DoctorNDTV*. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <http://doctor.ndtv.com/living-healthy/stop-believing-in-these-myths-the-beauty-industry-has-told-you-1780374>

Implications

Nowadays, brand changes their entire appearance with varied makeup products. So many products are available to bring a change in look. For example – contour kits, eyebrow shapers, lip plumper, etc. Consumers heavily rely on cosmetics in everyday life and this is the very reason of mushrooming many brands (international, national and local as well) in market.⁸ In addition to this, there is a rise of startups which emphasizes on *organic beauty* products such as Biotique, Skincraft, mCaffeine, Plum, Purearth, Kama Ayurveda, SoulTree, etc. According to Roland Barthes, this myth of luxury in cosmetics herbal products can be further viewed as Cosmetic Herbal Product: beauty product, herbal cosmetics, organic beauty and Ayurveda (Table).

Summary of Indian brands of beauty products

Cosmetics Beauty Product	Herbal Cosmetics	Organic Beauty	Ayurvedic Beauty Products
Sephora Revlon Maybelline Colorbar Lakme L'Oreal Paris M.A.C Huda Beauty Swiss Beauty Sugar	Himalaya Herbals Lotus Herbals Khadi Natural Vaadi Herbals Just Herbs Biotique Forest Essentials Ayur Herbals VLCC Jovees herbal	Biotique Skincraft mCaffeine Plum Purearth Kama Ayurveda SoulTree	Roopmantra Keya Seth
Summary			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enriched with keratin, vitamins, castor oil. ● Micro hyaluronic acid for fine line reduction. ● Salon like smoothening treatment. ● Spa at home. ● Long lasting make-up for bold and free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Traditional knowledge with modern technology. ● Herbal Ingredients of diverse products bereft of chemical based synthetic cosmetics. ● No artificial preservatives or synthetic fragrances 	Beauty goods (skincare and haircare) are home-made, plant-based substances and goodness of Ayurveda. Organic-herbs/plants used for haul out raw materials are also observed from its nascent stage hence the end product turns out to be organic	Tailams (oils) and Ghritas (clarified butter or ghee) beautify the face and skin based in Ayurveda, which largely been used and propagated by different brands. Ayurveda – accessible to the world

Source: performed by the authors.

It is associated with all the myths:

- enhances brightness of the ski;
- fairness;
- anti-ageing and anti-wrinkles;
- rejuvenation of skin;
- stay youthful;
- radiant skin;
- true happiness with “Ayurvedic”/“Herbal”/“Homemade” mantra;
- richness of the nature;
- go brighter go whiter;
- new members of vitamin range (products);
- aroma therapy in beauty products;

⁸ Bharti. (2022, February 2). Top 10 best cosmetic companies in India in 2022. *Inventiva*. Retrieved June 20, 2022, from <https://www.inventiva.co.in/trends/top-10-cosmetic-companies-india-2022/>

- make your skin younger with “stoppage”;
- blemish free skin naturally;
- skin enhancement with protection naturally.

Socio-economic stature:

- less attention to the detrimental effects of these skin care or beauty products;
- blurred line of cosmetics-herbal-ayurveda-organic.

Effective brand association (for example, *winter ready glowing skin* – Vaadi Naturals, *who needs chemicals to reverse ageing* – Lotus Herbals):

- compromised price;
- age categories
- delicacy for working professionals;
- special emphasis for bridal package;
- youth care;
- teen age problems;
- above 40 years (anti-ageing/anti-wrinkles);
- homemade phenomenon for home makers.

Discussion

Chen and Cheng recently published a research paper on “Consumer response to fake news about brands on social media: the effects of self-efficacy, media trust, and persuasion knowledge on brand trust” (2020). The researchers tried to test a model that gives guidelines to explain how consumers respond to fake news about brands on social networking sites like Facebook. Result showed consumers identify fake news about brands from their knowledge persuasion based on brand trust and self-efficacy.

In paper “Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs” researchers tried to investigate the relationship between social media influencers (SMI) and followers on the basis of the attachment development mechanism and the factors causing it and its effects. Findings revealed that content curation ability is the main factor that creates human brand for social media influencers. These SMIs fulfilled their need for ideal, competence and relatable, thereby creating positive emotion and positive influence on the followers (Ki et al., 2020).

C. Schwemmer and S. Ziewiecki published recent research paper on “Social Media Sellout: The Increasing Role of Product Promotion on YouTube+” (2018). Researchers tried to empirically analyze product promotion by using the original data set of YouTube videos from German youtube channel from 2009 to 2017. Automated content analysis was applied and the findings revealed that there is an ever-growing promotion of products through this platform in the beauty and fashion sector.

K. Pilgrim and S. Bohnet-Joschko published a research paper on “Selling health and happiness how influencers communicate on Instagram about dieting and exercise: Mixed methods research” (2019). The researchers tried to analyze sustainable health-promoting programmes in the context of social media usage of the younger generation. The study revealed younger generation uses social media to gather information and exchange experiences. During this process, influencer

plays an active role in influencing their buying behavior. The researchers have performed exploratory research on health communication which is non-campaign driven especially on diet and exercise by social media influencers. Their techniques, content and visuals are analyzed by researchers. Mixed methods were applied where Instagram platform is chosen and 1000 posts from influencers were considered. Findings revealed that influencers used body shaped visual driven content to create a notion of perfect body shape for the followers with whom they have friendly and trustworthy relations. Targeted communication plays a vital role in direct advertising or surreptitious advertising.

Some researchers analyzed Instagram posts on body positivity that included different body sizes and appearances. Findings revealed the appreciation of diverse body appearances, the themes consist of messages with body positivity. There are only 43% of posts depict larger body sizes which do not represent the entire population. Moreover, there are posts with contradictory messages like encouraging weight loss or praising extremely thin bodies (Lazuka et al., 2020).

Researchers examine tension over social media influencers' authenticity that might arise out of social media influencer and brand collaboration. Findings suggested two strategies of authenticity management, transparent authenticity, and passionate authenticity. The result provides guidance to marketers and influencers to reduce tension and work for the best outcome as partners (Audrezet et al., 2020).

D. Cooley and R. Park-Yancy published a research paper on "The effect of social media on perceived information credibility and decision making" (2019). They investigate how influencers, celebrities, and people whom they knew personally, influence the way in which the younger generation uses social media to get informed about consumer products. The results suggest that even though influencers and celebrities have a positive impact on people's awareness about consumer products but marketers should value feedback from consumers as important as people tend to depend on the feedback of their known people's purchase experience of that product. Findings also revealed that celebrity and social media influencers' promotion does not substitute targeted marketing to build consumer trust.

Conclusion

The pervasive advertisements generate the ideation of brand image through the narratives of myth in the *concept of beauty*. The association of fake and misleading content of mainstream media is responsible for a deep impact on the minds of the consumer which reflects in their purchasing habit. The stereotypical and orthodox cultural practices also have some correlational effects on the decision-making and purchasing habits of the consumers/customers. Nowadays, social media influencer marketing is yet type of advertising where followers get positively influenced by the influencer's personalized story about promoting any product. In the healthcare and beauty industry, this strategy of marketing is very effective but the true facts related to what the brand claims about any products are yet to be demystified by them.

The study analyses the myth of beauty in cosmetic herbal products in the Indian market scenario which focuses on various cases and studies in a systematic manner. The different cases have been examined and cross-checked via the lead-

ing daily or national mainstream media in debunking the myth and ambiguity in disseminating the information. The study is limited to qualitative methods (case study) and Roland Barthé's theory of mythology has been critically analyzed in order to understand the luxury of myth, and attributes of misleading information of media content. The study can further direct to have the perception of the consumers and semiological analysis can be done in the portrayal of this beauty myth as a brand association.

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