



(Un) Filtered Expression: Juxtaposing American and Indonesia Male Beauty YouTubers

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Abstract. YouTube is integral in everyone's everyday lives. Despite being highly saturated, beauty contents outweigh other categories. In 2019, three out of four most-subscribed beauty YouTubers were male, which is an anomaly because 'male' and 'beauty' are never used to define one another. *The predicament shifts as* user-generated contents facilitated by social media give rise to male beauty YouTubers. Although early beauty YouTubers were mainly Americans, their subscribers came from all around the world. Witnessing them expressed their true selves and achieved success attracted their subscribers, including those in Indonesia, to be creators as well. Given the socioeconomic and cultural differences between the US and Indonesia, this research aims to compare the American and Indonesian male beauty YouTubers. Within Transnational American Studies, production analysis of popular culture is used to analyze three American male beauty YouTubers: James Charles, Jeffree Star and Bretman Rock; and three Indonesian male beauty YouTubers: Jovi Adhiguna, Andreas Lukita and Yudhistira El Vedayadi. The findings show Pieterse's three paradigms of globalization. (1) Cultural differentialism is apparent in their aesthetic and their attitude regarding their sexual orientation. (2) Cultural convergence is noticeable as they all talk in drag lingo, accompanied by over-the-top feminine body language. (3) Cultural hybridization is seen as they accentuate femininity, yet still maintain masculinity. In sum, offline lives are transported into online lives. Subscribers demand authenticity from the YouTubers they watch, the unfiltered ones thus can gain global success, while the filtered ones cannot.

Keywords: gender, globalization, identity, popular culture

INTRODUCTION

YouTube has become an integral part in people's decision-making process. Besides a source of entertainment, the video-sharing platform is highly saturated that it covers a wide range of categories that caters to everyone's need for recommendation. In 2018, beauty contents heavily contributed to the view count of YouTube as a whole with 125 billion views [1, 9]. Clearly, the category outweighed other categories. Interestingly, three out of four most-subscribed beauty YouTubers in 2019 were male [2].

The phenomenon is an anomaly because the words 'male' and 'beauty' are never used to define one another. From dictionary's definition to daily usage and media discourse, the word 'beauty' and its derivatives are reserved for women. The beauty industry, which should not care whoever buys their products, tends to target women and disregard men. Men showing even the slightest interest in makeup are labelled effeminate.

The predicament has been shifting when the internet emerges and reshapes the landscape of media. Cyber media are prosumer-oriented [3, 282], making ways for user-generated contents [4, 34]. What is broadcasted is no longer controlled or censored by

gatekeepers, such as government, media or the industry itself [5]. Now everybody can be content creators exhibiting their likings. One of which is male creators sharing about makeup.

Historically, male creators achieved financial success and popularity as fashion bloggers during the heyday of blogs. It was not until social media moved away from still photos and favored video-based contents [1, 9] that male content creators started to share make up-related contents. Whether in form of tutorials, reviews, favorites, challenges or daily vlogs, their channels are filled with videos revolving around cosmetics. Without strict restrictions, like in traditional media [6], they were finally put front and center with their true selves as beauty YouTubers.

Being an American-based social media, early beauty YouTubers were mainly Americans. Their subscribers, nonetheless, came from all around the world. Beauty YouTubers were seen as a pinnacle of self-expression and become a source of inspiration. As their channels grew, they branched out to other areas. For instance, they were able to make their own makeup lines and collaborate with established brands. This notoriety then attracted mere subscribers to be creators as well. Male beauty YouTubers then emerged outside of the US [7], including in Indonesia.

However, the level of achievement gained by Indonesian male beauty YouTubers is merely a fraction of what their American correlatives acquire [8]. Statistically, the numbers of male beauty YouTubers in Indonesia is not even as many as those in the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In the globalized world, phenomena happening in one place can incite for it to happen in another. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze the phenomenon of male beauty YouTubers that flourished in the US, but did not in Indonesia.

Given the socioeconomic and cultural differences, it is intriguing to compare the American and Indonesian male beauty YouTubers. This research aims to disclose the elements in their videos, including, but not limited to, their manner of speaking, gestures, aesthetic preferences and personal lives. The findings of this research can serve as a historical overview upon researching newer social media.

METHODS

This research is conducted within Transnational American Studies, which highlights the significant roles of the US as an integral part of global interrelation [9, 43]. It also embraces the idea of borderless American culture because interactions through technological means are equally as strong as tangible ones [10, 2]. The discipline then can help seeing the crisscrossing influences from the US to other countries, and vice versa, in the age of globalization. Globalization is “widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual” [11, 2]. Globalization has brought people in the whole wide world to interact with each other. Nevertheless, their interactions can result in both positive as well as negative outcomes [12, 16].

According to Pieterse [13, 1389], there are three paradigms as the impacts of globalization. (1) Cultural differentialism, or ‘clash of civilization’ [14, 121], emphasizes the strength of a local culture is vindicated from absorbing foreign cultural streams to preserve its own characteristics and remain unchanged. On the contrary, (2) cultural convergence refers to the assumption of ‘homogenization’ threatening the local cultures being erased as foreign culture is penetrating. As the in-between of both paradigms, (3) cultural hybridization, or ‘glocalization’ [15, 54], [16, 25], happens when a foreign culture

flows to a local culture uniting features of the two or more cultures into a fusion of a new culture in a “global mélange” [17, 147].

These paradigms will be used to analyze the three most subscribed male beauty YouTubers from the US and Indonesia, as follows.

Table 1. List of Chosen Male Beauty YouTubers

No	Name	YouTube Channel	Citizenship
1	James Charles	https://www.youtube.com/@JamesCharles	American
2	Jeffree Star	https://www.youtube.com/@jeffreestar	American
3	Bretman Rock	https://www.youtube.com/@BretmanRock	American
4	Jovi Adhiguna	https://www.youtube.com/@JoviAdhigunaH	Indonesian
5	Andreas Lukita	https://www.youtube.com/@AndreasLukita	Indonesian
6	Yudhistira El Vedayadi	https://www.youtube.com/@yudhistirawr	Indonesian

After watching the videos on their channels, screenshot images and utterance transcripts are collected. The data will be analyzed through production analysis of popular culture emphasizing on the constraints and politics in the creation process of their videos [12, 26]. Besides YouTube channels, the data are also taken from their other social media accounts, such as X, Instagram and TikTok, as well as their interviews with both print and online publication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three globalization paradigms are found in American and Indonesian male beauty YouTubers. (1) Cultural differentialism is apparent in their aesthetics. Even by merely glancing at their video thumbnails, their stark difference is unavoidable. The American male beauty YouTubers wear bold and colorful makeup and wigs.



FIGURE 1. Star’s look [18]



FIGURE 2. Rock’s look [19]

The US is often dubbed as the free country, where freedom of speech and the press are protected by the constitution [20]. The First Amendment allows its citizens to express and explore their personality without fear being harmed or criminalized. It gives them courage to put on extravagant looks, regardless how far they are from heteronormativity. A stark difference can be easily spotted as the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers opt for soft and natural makeup and hair.



FIGURE 3. Adighuna's look [21]



FIGURE 4. Rock's look [22]

Indonesia is the largest Muslim population, “suspected to be more conservative and intolerant of adherents of different religious beliefs” [23]. It makes them prone to discrimination and assault, as experienced by Adhiguna being called “waria [transwoman]” [24, 2:25] and “bencong [sissy]” [25, 1:39]. Indonesian male beauty YouTubers, or any man wearing makeup, could have been in danger if they galivant around with bold and colorful looks.

Another cultural differentialism between male beauty YouTubers in the US and Indonesia is their attitude regarding their sexual orientation. The American ones are open about being gay.

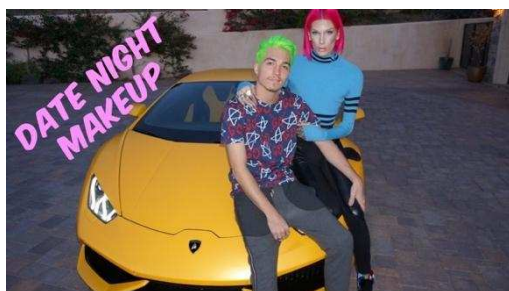


FIGURE 5. Star and boyfriend [26]



FIGURE 6. Rock and boyfriend [27]

Star features his then-boyfriend, Nathan Schwandt, as early as February 14, 2016, until the announcement of their breakup on January 12, 2020 [28, 0:23]. Since then, he teases to have dated NBA players. Recently, Rock has been displaying his romance with Justice Fester. Fester is the first boyfriend Rock posts, but he talked about his ex-boyfriends in the past. As for Charles, although he has not yet been involved in romantic relationships, he has tweeted his desire to have one with a male partner, “why can't I find a **boyfriend** I'm amazing someone date me” [29]. It can be felt that being gay is less stigmatized than wearing bold and colorful makeup. US states had been legalizing same sex marriage since 2004, before it was legal nationwide in 2015 [30]. It makes it possible for LBGQTQIAP+ to be out and proud of their sexuality.

In a different manner than their American compeers, the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers are discreet about their sexual life.



FIGURE 7. Adhiguna and alleged boyfriend [31]



FIGURE 8. Vedayadi featuring man in reviews [32]

Adhiguna intentionally throws around the word ‘pacar’, gender-neutral word in Bahasa for one’s romantic partner. However, when repeatedly asked to show his *pacar* and how serious they are, his vague response is, “aku gak ngelakuin video bareng sama dia itu karena satu dan lain hal, bukan karena apapun, karena ada *something* lah tapi kalau memang udah memungkinkan *I will* [I won't do a video together with you guys because of one thing or another, not because of anything, because there's something, but if it's possible, I will]” [33: 11:55]. Not long after, a man named Ronald Simanjuntak keeps making appearance in his videos. Despite never confirming their relationship status, they gradually show more affection to each other. In 2023, Simanjuntak surprised Adhiguna with a ring, as if he was being proposed to by the alleged boyfriend [34].

Uniformly, Vedayadi also never explicitly discusses his sexual orientation, but often features some men as collaborators, whether in photoshoots [35], reviews [36] or sketches [37]. Featuring men be grasped as the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers to vaguely share their romantic lives, without having to openly confirm their sexual preference. It is largely due to, culturally mixed with customary law of Muslims, Islamic law is applied in both civic and legal customs, condemning homosexuality “a forbidden action; a major sin” [38].

(2) Cultural convergence is crystal clear in their speech. They all speak in drag lingo, a speech community spoken by drag performers, or drag queens. It is marked by the presence of contradicting linguistic features reflecting their marginalized condition and gender fluidity [39, 131]. It is noticeable from the beginning of the American male beauty YouTube videos.



FIGURE 9. Charles’ opening line [40, 0:01]



FIGURE 10. Star using “Big Mama” [41, 0:35]

Since 2017, Charles using the noun ‘sisters’ to refer to his subscribers denotes that they share a bond of sisterhood, even though he is a male and not every subscriber of his is female [42]. In a recent video, he states “You know what **mommy**’s here to serve the kids dinner” [43, 0:11]. In Star’s outlandish utterances, words, such as “Big Mama” and “Miss” [41, 4:29], would be thrown around.

Likewise, female-specific nouns are also noticeable in the videos of their Indonesian counterparts, one of which Adhiguna says, “Kerjasama dong sama **teteh** [please work

with big sister]” [44, 6:43]. Drag queens uses the noun ‘mother’ and other older female figure terms to refer to “the person who first introduced them to gay society” and took them “under their wings as their ‘daughter’” [39, 133], denoting that these beauty YouTubers are role models that their subscribers can look up to. This gender inversion is a mean to create and perform their collective kinship where they can identify and support one another.

Besides gender inversion, drag lingo relies heavily on word choice. In both English and Bahasa, it can also be recognized scattered throughout the Indonesian male beauty videos.



FIGURE 11. Adhiguna addressing subscribers [45]



FIGURE 12. Lukita's persuasion [46, 6:17]

Adhiguna addresses his subscribers with “miluvs”, which is a play on the pronunciation of ‘my love’ to show his affection. Similarly, Vedayadi repeatedly uses “say” [47, 1:40], which is an abbreviation of ‘sayang [beloved]’, similar to ‘hon’ for ‘honey’. Meanwhile, Lukita utters “capcus”, which is an indirect derivation of ‘ayo meluncur [let’s go]’ as a call to action to persuade his subscribers to buy the product he is reviewing. Noticeably, none of male beauty YouTubers use male-specific nouns, like ‘dude’ [48, 4:33] and ‘cowboy’ [41, 0:47], except for comedic or sarcastic purposes.

Besides with the word choices, drag lingo is distinguishable by their distinctive emphasis on how their words are pronounced.



FIGURE 13. Rock's intro [49, 0:12]



FIGURE 14. Adhiguna's closing [50, 6:17]

As Rock describes himself with gender inversive nouns “actor” and “actress”, his introductory remark is followed by his elongated pronunciation of the word ‘day’ into “dayayayayaayy” and ‘side’ into “siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiide”. Similarly, Adhiguna pronounces the word ‘bye’ as “baaaaaylalululalululoooo” [24, 8:18]. According to Barrett [51 250], drag lingo involves “skillfully switching between a number of linguistic styles and forms”. The way they pronounce their words represents shared ways of reinterpretation within language behaviors.

Furthermore, the drag lingo uttered by American and Indonesian male beauty YouTubers come from an ethno-linguistic root in each country. Drag lingo in the US has its root from the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) [52], as seen on RuPaul’s Drag Race.

Words are used connotatively into words, like “sickening” [53, 8:59] meaning that something is good, ‘deceased’ [54, 3:14] meaning that the speaker is impressed, and ‘baddest’ [55] meaning the best. Meanwhile, drag lingo in Indonesia is called *Bahasa Gaul* [slang], popularized by Debby Sahertian, believed to have rooted from Medan, North Sumatera [56]. A part or a whole of Standard Bahasa is either taken or suffixed into a new, mostly lengthened word, such as “endooool” from ‘enak [yummy]’ [57, 1:54], “panasyonik” from ‘panas [hot temperature]’ [58, 11:20], and “cucok meong” [58, 14:28] used as a compliment for expensive things or outstanding accomplishments. In addition, the use of each drag lingo by male beauty YouTubers from both countries is accompanied by over-the-top gestures.



FIGURE 15. Rock’s facial expression [59, 0:05]



FIGURE 16. Adhiguna’s movement [60, 12:45]

The male beauty YouTubers talk with exaggerated body language, including dramatic facial expressions, hyperbolic head turns and intricate head movements, which are parts of drag queen dance style called voguing, which serves as “a symbol of queer resistance and empowerment” [61].

(3) Cultural hybridization is seen in their appearance since they mix aspects accentuating femininity and maintaining some aspects of masculinity. Despite doing their face and hair with woman-targeting products, the male beauty YouTubers do not wear clothing categories made for women, such as dresses or bikinis. It is visible in the American male beauty YouTubers.



FIGURE 17. Star wearing blazer [62]



FIGURE 18. [63]

Whether sitting on his studio or attending product launches and meet-and-greets, Star is mostly seen wearing blazers, bathrobes and tracksuits.

In a similar fashion, the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers appear in their videos wearing gender-neutral clothing.



FIGURE 19. Adhiguna wearing suit [64, :]



FIGURE 20. Lukita wearing tracksuit [65, :]

When attending events, Adhiguna is seen dressed up in formal suit, while Lukita gets dressed in a tracksuit. Despite having the unanimous outcome, the reasons of avoiding female-centric clothing differ between the two origins. Identical to why the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers do not wear bold and colorful makeup and hair, they do not wear gender-specific clothing for women because they can be banned, ridiculed, harassed or even prosecuted [66].

With such menaces do not take place in the US, the American male beauty YouTubers dress in non-binary outfits is to separate themselves from other orientations in the acronym LGBTQIAPN+. By retaining masculinity, they distinguish themselves from transgenders. It is also evident from them appearing shirtless in their videos.



FIGURE 21. Star shirtless [67, 16:00]



FIGURE 22. Rock shirtless [68]

As Star is getting ready, he is recorded not wearing a top when going to a pool. Meanwhile, Rock often films himself working out or lounging around the house topless, showing his muscular torso. The same decision is also made by their Indonesian fellows.



FIGURE 23. Adhiguna shirtless [69, 24:51]



FIGURE 24. Vedayadi shirtless [70]

Adhiguna and Vedayadi also display their bare chest when going to the beach or when changing clothes. Them opt not to wear female undergarments show that they do not have breast, signifying that their gender is still men [71, 345].

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the cultural distinctions between the US and Indonesia, which naturally spawn differences, similarities and hybridity are also found between American and Indonesian male beauty YouTubers. They talk in drag lingo with over-the-top gestures. In a crisscrossing means, they not only accentuate femininity, but also maintain masculinity. The two origins differ in their aesthetic and attitude about their own sexual orientation. While the Indonesian male beauty YouTubers are covert, their American counterparts are overt. Ultimately, offline lives are transported into online lives. As YouTube audience subscribe to a channel because of the person whose name written in it, they demand authenticity in the videos they watch, which in turn makes the unfiltered ones can gain global success, but the filtered ones cannot.

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