

The Implementation of Conspicuous Consumption on Gender as Indicated on Jax's Victoria's Secret

Annisa Deby Aulia¹, Axlinabila Annisa Annasai², Rommel Utungga Pasopati³

Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Dr. Soetomo University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: annisadeby1@gmail.com¹, axlinabilaa@gmail.com²,
rommelpasopati@yahoo.com³

Abstract

This research focuses on implementation of conspicuous consumption on gender as indicated on Jax's song entitled Victoria's Secret. As a woman, there is an unwritten standard regarding beauty and perfection of what body shape should be. There is passionate desire when seeing figure of beautiful woman with slender body and flawless skin. This can be seen in many women with slim bodies as models from various beauty brands. Then how may conspicuous consumption be implemented through gender on Jax's Victoria's Secret? In the song, Jax reveals how frustrating it is to live under pressure of what our bodies must look like to live as women. In fact, women in various forms are exclusive standards emphasized in society. This article uses qualitative method to explain the lyrics in the song Victoria's Secret through theory of conspicuous consumption by Thorstein B. Veblen. In conclusion, this study examines whether the beauty standards set by the brand in Jax's song Victoria's Secret create the idea that these clothes and products are expensive because the clothes are modelled by slim, smooth-skinned models.

Keywords: Conspicuous Consumption; Gender; Jax; Thorstein B. Veblen; Victoria's Secret

A. Introduction

The song *Victoria's Secret* by Jax is widely used by Tiktok application users in retelling their various experiences about their bodies (GeniusMedia, 2022). The song lyrics reflect body positivity anthem in raising the confidence of women in various parts of the world. Women are born in various forms and it is not a necessity. Women are told to have bodies like the models

who are slim, and smooth without any flaws (Segal & Podoshen, 2013; Woodside, 2012). Then, the question is; how may conspicuous consumption be implemented through gender on Jax's *Victoria's Secret*? The lyrics of *Victoria's Secret* are analyzed through conspicuous consumption by Thorstein B. Veblen. People spend their wealth on those luxury items only because those things was

represented by models that are very slim, tall, and have flawless skin.

B. Research Method

By using qualitative method, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between Jax's *Victoria's Secret* and conspicuous consumption indicated by Thorstein B. Veblen. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The following analyses include how the lyrics show the beauty standards set by the brand in Jax's song *Victoria's Secret* create the idea that these clothes and products are expensive because the clothes are modelled by slim, angel-like, and smooth-skinned models.

C. Results and Discussions

The Chronicles of Standardized Beauty Standards

Victoria's Secret is a pop-rock song by American singer-songwriter, Jax, in June 2022 (GeniusMedia, 2022). People make the song as an anthem of body positivity because

the lyrics represents various frustrations of women who have suffered because of the judgment they received for their bodies. Here are the full lyrics of *Victoria's Secret* by Jax;

[Verse 1]

*God, I wish somebody would
have told me when I was
younger
That all bodies aren't the same
Photoshop itty bitty models on
magazine covers
Told me I was overweight
I stopped eating, what a
bummer
Can't have carbs and a hot girl
summer
If I could go back and tell
myself when I was younger
I'd say, "Psst!"*

[Chorus]

*I know Victoria's secret
And, girl, you wouldn't believe
She's an old man who lives in
Ohio
Making money off of girls like
me"
Cashin' in on body issues
Sellin' skin and bones with big
boobs
I know Victoria's secret:
She was made up by a dude
(Dude)
Victoria was made up by a dude
(Dude)
Victoria was made up by a dude*

[Verse 2]

*I wish somebody would've told
me that thighs of thunder
Meant normal human thighs
The fuckin' pressure I was under
To lose my appetite and fight
the cellulite*

*With Hunger Games like every
night
If I could go back and tell
myself when I was younger
I'd say, "Hey, dummy"*

[Chorus]

[Bridge]
*I know Victoria's secret
And, girl, you wouldn't believe
She's an old man who lives in
Ohio
Making money off of girls like
me
Cashin' in on body issues
Sellin' skin and bones with big
boobs
I know Victoria's secret:
She was made up by a dude*

[Chorus]

[Outro]
*I know Victoria's secret
She was never made for me and
you (GeniusMedia, 2022)*

In verse 1, Jax wants to describe her life experiences when she was younger. This can be seen from the first lyric; *"God, I wish somebody would have told me when I was younger"*. Jax expresses a little frustration when remembering her youth, when not too many people understood and accepted the concept that beauty is very diverse (GeniusMedia, 2022). In her form, it is also seen that Jax has an eating disorder as implied in the lyrics *"I*

stopped eating, what a bummer" and *"Can't have carbs and a hot girl summer"*. Continuing the chorus, Jax gives facts about a well-known fashion clothing brand that is known to always use slim models and smooth skin. Jax says the brand's owners do business with women's bodies (GeniusMedia, 2022). This is implied in the lyrics *"Making money off of girls like me"*, *"Cashin' in on body issues"* and *"Sellin' skin and bones with big boobs"*.

In verse 2, Jax again recounts her experience of suffering from the demands of an ideal body standard, as implied in the lyrics *"The fuckin' pressure I was under"* and *"To lose my appetite and fight the cellulite"*. Then after verse 2, the song repeats the chorus to the bridge section until finally in the outro section. Jax writes that actually clothes from this brand are not made for women (GeniusMedia, 2022). In the lyrics of *"She was never made for me and you"*, Jax wants to say that brand of clothing is made only as a business, despite the diversity of beauty standards for all women. Jax says that she suffered from eating

disorders and body dysmorphia when she was teenager (GeniusMedia, 2022). She was drawn to model body type of an underwear company, which strategically advertises tall, slim, and smooth bodies for representing beauty of women.

Anyhow, Jax's perspective is unique since she approaches the reality through her own experience that is actually known widely by others as well (GeniusMedia, 2022). The lyrics initially underline the song to show that beauty standards are not natural at all. It could be said that the standards are standardized based on business clothing lines especially underwear. The models are not only the advertisement for the underwear but they are the normalized role models for the beauty standard (GeniusMedia, 2022).

The Bodily Fashion and Its Conspicuousness

Fashion is never totally about clothing as the main idea. It is bodily experience that liven up merely fabric (Woodside, 2012). Fashion will never be separated from the aspect of those who wear that. The

mode may change and return for a couple of times, but the models must remain in the same shape (Frijters & Leigh, 2008). They are standardized to fit in the clothes, but not in reverse. Indeed, this makes problems of bodies come to surface regarding fashion matters. Bodies in fashion are seen not as the soul of the fashion but the complementary of the core. The periphery of the bodies will never shift the main idea of being fashionable (Woodside, 2012). If a body would like to be fashionable, it has to fit various measurements. It has to follow many standards set by the mode of the fashion. The bodies must blindly nod to any kind of definition, if those would like to be suited as fashionable. Moreover, the concept of beauty is the same as it becomes more standardized and furtherly normalized (Currid-Halkett et al., 2019; Frijters & Leigh, 2008). Body is no longer seen as it is but how it could fit to certain aspects. Its flexibility shifts from its natural process into nurturing even forcing matters. It lost its meaning to its essence, since only regarded as suited or unsuited to existential

surface of mass prestige (Barrera & Ponce, 2020; Woodside, 2012).

The problems arise when people think that the existential one is the essential one. Fashion is recognized as the ultimate while the body is only the complementary. Body is pushed to do more not for its own healthiness, but it is to follow unending trends (Bakti et al., 2020; Widjajanta et al., 2018). The term of beauty pageant and catwalk in fashion shows have long been debates among women, including men either. The beauty of women is so typical with its various common specifications. From hair to toe, appearance is prioritized to show how a body could be shaped to fit into clothing (Barrera & Ponce, 2020). If it is fatter then more diet could be done and if things are not big enough then more implants could be added. Body is really like dead thing that could be modified with this and that. However, its originality has lost its content (Bakti et al., 2020; Barrera & Ponce, 2020).

There is an idea that underlines how every human situation is actually about consumption. From

food to information, human beings will never stop consuming anything (Atik & Şahin, 2011; Bakti et al., 2020). More than that, people do reproducing after action of consumption. They recreate the meanings that they have consumed before. Most of the time, human beings are what they consume every day. First they are the actors of consumptions but in any way they are the consumed ones (Atik & Şahin, 2011; Currid-Halkett et al., 2019). People could get drown in their own consumption and nod to everything they experience.

That idea is supported with consumption that is conspicuous. It is not suspicious but so out of any opaqueness that everyone could see its clarity. Visibility is the main idea here alongside with attracting attention from others. Initially, consumption is done for survival for human beings (Bakti et al., 2020; Widjajanta et al., 2018). People consume foods to have energy for their bodies. People read news to know wider aspects worldwide. People buy clothes to defend their bodies from heat of the sun or cold of

the rain. Then, consumption is about trends (Atik & Şahin, 2011; Currid-Halkett et al., 2019). It is beyond any normalcy since the products consumed do not reflect its value. It is intrinsically applicable to similar matters but its extrinsic grades is to show extravagant condition.

Theory of conspicuous consumption is stated by Thorstein B. Veblen. He argues that consumption is done for conspicuous as he relies on the relationship between society and economy on class differences (Atik & Şahin, 2011; Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). He even emphasizes that conspicuous consumption are the purchases made by the upper social class and the other classes trying to emulate them for the purpose of showing off (Frijters & Leigh, 2008; Lewis & Moital, 2016). The true consumption of luxury goods is intended for the convenience of the consumer itself. It is out of merely primary or even secondary consumption. It is activity that requires luxuries to be consumed in which it does not really essential at all for individuals and even societies

(Bakti et al., 2020; Lewis & Moital, 2016).

That consumption even is not similar to tertiary needs since it is beyond that. If tertiary needs shows how complementary technology is to human beings, conspicuous consumption find further peculiarities in any good that is available to society (Bakti et al., 2020; Memushi, 2013). Wearing gold bracelet is tertiary need, but wearing Swarovski diamond as prosthetic teeth is conspicuous. Having a car as a primary private transportation is tertiary, but to drive a Ferrari to the school or college is conspicuous. Putting on silky underwear is tertiary, but to wear Victoria's Secret as matter of confidence is conspicuous. In short, tertiary needs are quite imaginable by common people, but conspicuous one is beyond any normal thought at all (Bakti et al., 2020; Lewis & Moital, 2016).

The term of conspicuous consumption appears to criticize the consumption style phenomenon in the 20th century where people consume to seek a higher social

status influenced by intuition, politics, and society (Frijters & Leigh, 2008). Economic strategies tend to see this conspicuousness as intellectual choices to show different classes between people. As consequences, noble idea in consumption to widespread equalities has shifted to crucial differentiations made by those who have money to those who do not (Barrera & Ponce, 2020; Potluri et al., 2014).

Veblen challenges the conventional neoclassical economics view of the time and results in theory of status-driven consumption (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2010; Noel et al., 2019). He argues that consumer demand for services and goods stems from the need to build social networks and the desire to imitate higher social classes and economic groups. Indeed it could drive economic towards better prosperities, but the sacrifice given from those who really needs help is imbalance at all. Consumption then has become further consumerism, in which things are consumed without further consent (Chaudhuri &

Majumdar, 2010; Memushi, 2013). People start to race who will wear more luxury things even if they are in debt in able to buy those. Morality value degrades as people are only recognized merely from appearance rather than being humble persons in society. Money-oriented thoughts then become one main worst consequences of that conspicuousness (Barrera & Ponce, 2020; Potluri et al., 2014).

Conspicuous consumption is also implemented on matter of gender especially when goods are considered expensive but needed in the name of beauty improvements (Potluri et al., 2014; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). It is not beauty that is needed but the usage of luxuries that actually have the same essence from usual matters. Brands have been the main attraction for certain gender to consume rather than its own main purposes. Both man and woman have been trapped in illusion of beauty that has standardized everything rather than made them have freedom from the beginning (Potluri et al., 2014; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). The choices, no

matter how many, are given by brands that their intentions are always profit-based.

Consumer Behavior and Conspicuous Consumption on Fashion and Gender

Consumer behavior in society is certainly influenced by some factors, needs, desires, or other hidden factors (Potluri et al., 2014; Todorova, 2013). Hidden factors may include different things and they are triggered or based on different things. This consumption behavior particularly affects the lifestyles of people in developing countries as they are consumers of goods produced in developed countries (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Memushi, 2013). The goods reflect consumption of meanings either. Any kind of consumption comes alongside with perceptions of good itself. There is no free-value in consumption as every deed taken reflects meanings from the producers to the consumers (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Noel et al., 2019). Therefore, consumption is related with matter of behavior as it reflects

idea of psychological attitude as well.

Consumption research has developed rapidly. Different perspectives and explanations make consumer behavior a complex phenomenon that is difficult to explain and unpredictable (Koliofotis, 2022; Memushi, 2013). The consumption behavior that is part of today's society and is pervasive is the consumer behavior that is done solely to show off one's wealth and show one's presence in society. In the society, consumption by individuals are performance of identities as well (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012; Koliofotis, 2022). As consumption relates to power, any action is also to show preferences of certain social statuses. Usual consumption may only reflect matter of survival, but high class one represents idea of showing things off to various levels of societies. While consumption at first is so predictable that it directly emphasizes getting rid of death, recent consumption may vary from simply take a choice to political and also economical ones

(Currid-Halkett et al., 2019; Niesiobędzka, 2017).

Consumerism can be mentioned to indicate the social classes that exist in society. However, there is a desire in society to show its presence in the social leisure class, where even low-income people can be seen as part of high society (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012; Koliofotis, 2022). After that, it also became a business opportunity for some people. Some businessmen, like the theory proposed by Veblen, believe that some people can consume and produce products in order to obtain personal satisfaction and a kind of pride in themselves by purchasing them. Those kind of pride push producers to make some products that will eventually arise conspicuous consumption (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012; Todorova, 2013). More than merely products, producers need models as a trendsetter for consumers. They become examples in showing the advantages in consuming the products. However, the advantages are illusions since the appearance is asserted while the essence is quite

the same from other similar products (Koliofotis, 2022; Noel et al., 2019).

One main aspect about conspicuous consumption is fashion that is shown alongside the bodies. Fashion goes beyond any kind of basic idea of clothing. While clothing is mainly used to make body comfortable, fashion brings in certain trends to accentuate bodies to matter of class (Faucher, 2014; Widjajanta et al., 2018). Those who wear luxury fashion reflect lavish lifestyle that wants to be accentuated. Brands sell things with added values that are told will bring more confidence to the wearers. Somehow, the values are not fixed at all. People are pushed to consume more as they consequently become more involved in consumerism. They follow the trends consciously then absorbs the values unconsciously as known in bandwagon issue (Campbell, 1995; Niesiobędzka, 2017). What the models do and wear then become standards for beauties starting from the outer appearances to inner minds. It extends matter from fashion from clothing eras to economical points

then to standardized aspects of roles of individuals in societies.

Gender is another factor that affect the extent of conspicuous consumption. Both male and female got pushed by this consumption to consume more and produce less from their own social capitals (Campbell, 1995; Faucher, 2014). However, women are usually the most targeted market in the business world, as they tend to be more agile and consumerist. As the social bond between women became stronger, conspicuous consumption as a social signal should be more present to them (Faucher, 2014; Niesiobędzka, 2017). In this case, for women, following trends of fashion automatically intends to go with any value behind that setting. Bodies need to be more modified to follow the fashion. Women start to add more implants, to do more make-ups, and to wear more open clothes. Besides, they are also reducing fat, cellulite, and also modifying their bodies more often.

This phenomenon of conspicuous consumption on gender could also be seen in the lyrics of

Jax's song *Victoria's Secret*. Chorus of Jax's song contains lyrics that show businessmen trying to exploit the weaknesses of women and turn them into phenomena that create or cause consumerism in society. As in the lyrics of "*Making money off of girls like me*", Jax says business owners can create business opportunities by targeting women. She also sees how businessmen taking inspiration from women from indirect imagination and direct interpretation. Business strategies on fashion uses woman as gender role to show who she really is but by giving them labels according to several trends as well.

From the lyrics of the song: "*Cashin' on My Body Issues*", Jax feels that the businessman in question is benefiting from the woman. It is the negative side of fashion that pushes woman more to consume. The fashion world seems to have answers for every bodily problem that women have. However, more consumption must be done followed with added values that somehow is irrational (Bakti et al., 2020). The idea is seen in the

following text, “*Selling skin bones with big boobs*”. Jax feels that businessmen is playing a very unrealistic character in the product they are selling. This is a character that should not be the norm for certain things. However, it later turns into a business opportunity as well. They make several standards that seem to be the best for women, but actually those are done to increase their profits (Sundie et al., 2011). They make their own modern standards for women while they will not be considered beautiful if leaving out the rules.

Global consumer goods, in the form of brands, collectively convey cultural and status consumer identities to individuals interested in social advancement. In today's society, women are preoccupied with luxury and limited things. They compete to show that they enter into an exclusive zone that has been created by the owners of the brands (Bakti et al., 2020). It also raises various stigmas in society, especially for women. According to Veblen, a group of people can choose objects considered a luxury by the group in

order to maintain a positive image (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Sundie et al., 2011). The behavior can create conspicuous consumption because it tends to consume. The popularity of prestige brands has fostered consumer lifestyle preferences, and price competition in the luxury goods industry has made owning and displaying goods of outstanding value more accessible to the middle class (Campbell, 1995; Sundie et al., 2011).

The Jax's song explicitly shows that there is something wrong with consumptions done by women recently. The consumptions are so conspicuous that underlines luxuries than the main idea of clothing itself. The brand of Victoria's Secret is underwear clothing that should be used hidden behind usual clothing (GeniusMedia, 2022). However, the brand makes it so obscene shown to people and watched by them as well. On a hand, it shows great confidence to be a model of underwear. She must have magnificent body to be looked at by everyone. For women who intentionally follows that, it could bring better understanding to

their own conditions of bodies (GeniusMedia, 2022). On the other hands, the underwear becomes trends that underlines luxuries in clothing. The price is so expensive that emphasizes matter of conspicuous consumption (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). The brand really understands the trends and using women to exploit their needs to be more confident. The brand's idea is nothing but profit, so the fashion itself is actually an abuse to women bodies (Noel et al., 2019). The beauty standards are not natural at all but set to utilize woman's behavior to fashion into money to be earned.

D. Conclusion

Conspicuous consumption in society indicates that humans actually consume things to imitate higher social classes and economic groups. It is also implemented on matter of gender especially when goods are considered lavish but needed in the name of beauty improvements. Brands are the main attractions for certain gender to consume and to follow although the main essence is quite abandoned.

Both man and woman have been trapped in illusion of beauty that standardizes everything rather than makes them have freedom from the beginning. The choices, no matter how many, are given by brands that their intentions are always profit-based. This phenomenon of conspicuous consumption on gender could also be seen in the lyrics of Jax's song *Victoria's Secret*. Chorus of Jax's song contains lyrics that show how businessmen trying to exploit the weaknesses of women and to push them to consume more as stated in consumerism worldwide.

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