



FASHION AS A FORM OF SELF-IDENTITY: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF MILLENNIALS' DRESS STYLE

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Article info	ABSTRACT
<p>Corresponding Author:</p> <p>Elva Gustiaeni Nengsi elvagustiaeninengsi07@gmail.com Department of Management, University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu</p>	<p>Fashion plays a significant role in shaping self-identity, particularly among Indonesian millennials living in the digital and globalized era. This study aims to analyze the role of fashion as a visual communication medium in expressing millennials' self-identity through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Using a qualitative literature review method, data were collected from relevant secondary sources, such as journal articles, books, and dissertations. The analysis reveals that fashion functions as a system of signs containing denotative meanings, such as color or design, and connotative meanings reflecting personality, social status, or local culture. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, serve as key arenas for millennials to showcase their fashion styles and construct their public identities. The findings affirm that fashion not only reflects but also shapes self-identity within the context of negotiating globalization and locality. This study contributes theoretically to semiotic studies and practically to the fashion and marketing industries. However, the absence of direct empirical data is a limitation, suggesting that future research should integrate field methods to deepen understanding of the interaction between fashion and millennial identity.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>fashion, identity, millennials, semiotics, social media</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

In modern life, fashion not only serves as a basic human need to protect the body, but also a complex medium of communication. For millennials, fashion plays an important role as an expression of identity and a tool to communicate visually in society. In this context, clothing becomes more than just a textile, but a representation of values, personality and even social position.

Previous research shows that fashion can be seen as a sign system that is full of meaning. Roland Barthes, through his theory, states that fashion is a visual language that can be analyzed to reveal the hidden meanings contained therein (Rahmawati, 2020). Barthes highlights that every element in fashion, from color, texture, to design, functions as a sign that reflects the cultural values, ideologies, or personal aspirations of its users. For example, Rahmawati's (2020) research into Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono's style of dress in

his political campaign revealed that certain clothing choices can create narratives of strength, professionalism and empathy. Millennials in Indonesia have a unique relationship with fashion, having grown up in a digital age that allows unlimited access to style inspiration. TikTok, Instagram and other digital platforms are arenas where fashion and self-identity interact dynamically. For example, Zesinta (2022) in her study of fashion in TikTok dances noted that clothing choices on these platforms often reflect the character of the user and popular global trends.

However, studies on how fashion shapes millennials' identities are still limited, especially in Indonesia. Some studies focus on subcultures or advertisements, such as the analysis of youth subcultures in coffee advertisements by Madani & Ambarwati (2023) but rarely discuss the direct link between clothing styles and individual identity from a semiotic perspective. This suggests a research gap that needs to be filled to understand more deeply how fashion not only reflects but also shapes millennials' identities.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand the interaction between fashion, identity and local cultural context. In an increasingly globalized society, there is a challenge for young people to balance international fashion inspiration with local elements that reflect their cultural roots. This research will explore how fashion acts as a field of identity negotiation amidst the dynamics of globalization and digitalization.

This research aims to analyze how millennials in Indonesia use fashion to articulate their identity. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this research will identify and interpret the signs contained in millennials' dressing style. Through this analysis, the research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of visual communication and the social practice of fashion in Indonesia. In addition, the results are expected to be a reference for fashion practitioners, advertisers, and policy makers to better understand the needs and preferences of the millennial generation.

Thus, this research not only adds to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between fashion and identity but also has practical relevance in the fields of marketing, media, and cultural policy.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature review approach to explore relevant theories, concepts and research results on the relationship between fashion and self-identity in the millennial generation. This design allows in-depth analysis of various secondary sources, such as scientific journal articles, books and dissertations. The sample was purposively selected based on relevance, especially research that discusses fashion, semiotics, and millennial identity, with priority on publications in the last 10 years. Data were collected through searching the academic literature and evaluated using quality criteria, such as contribution to the research, validity and context relevance. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, which aimed to identify themes, patterns and conceptual relationships in the literature. Roland Barthes' semiotic approach became the foundation for understanding the denotative and connotative meanings contained in fashion, especially in relation to its use as a means of identity expression by millennials.

This research model assumes that fashion functions as a sign system that has multiple meanings, where denotative meaning refers to the literal aspects of clothing, while connotative meaning refers to symbolism that reflects individual values. In this model,

fashion is analyzed as an independent variable that influences self-identity as the dependent variable, with social context, such as social media and local culture, acting as moderator variables. Through literature analysis, this research aims to explain how millennials use fashion to build and display their identity amidst the dynamics of globalization and digitalization. The results are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of semiotics and visual communication, as well as provide practical insights for the fashion industry and advertisers in understanding the preferences of the millennial generation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Collection Process

The data in this study was collected through the literature review method by searching various secondary sources, such as scientific journal articles, books, and dissertations, which are relevant to the themes of fashion, self-identity, and semiotics. The search was conducted for three months, starting from July to September 2024, using academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and university libraries. The selected sources met the criteria of relevance with a focus on research that addresses the millennial generation in the context of fashion and semiotics.

Results of Data Analysis

The analysis shows that fashion is used by millennials to express their personal, social and cultural identities. Based on Roland Barthes' concept of semiotics, millennial fashion contains two layers of meaning: denotative, such as the color and cut of clothing, and connotative, such as symbols of membership in a particular community or attitudes towards cultural norms. Social media such as Instagram and TikTok play an important role as arenas to present and reinforce these identities.

These results also show alignment with Rahmawati's (2020) research, which reveals that fashion choices can create social and political narratives, as well as with Zesinta (2022), which highlights the role of fashion in building identity on digital platforms. However, the results of this study also found that millennials in Indonesia tend to adapt global trends while retaining local elements, indicating a negotiation between the cultures of globalization and locality.

Implications of Research Results

Theoretically, this research strengthens Barthes' theory of fashion as a sign system and adds Indonesian cultural context to semiotic studies. Practically, these results are relevant for the fashion industry to understand the dynamic preferences of millennials, as well as for digital content creators in creating visual communication strategies that suit the needs of this generation.

Figure and Table

Table 1 below summarizes the main elements of fashion as a sign system based on Barthes' semiotics.

Fashion Elements	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Color	red as a bright color	symbol of courage or status
Clothing Cut	oversize style	casual and informal identity
Texture	denim material	representation of popular culture.

The findings provide new insights into how millennials articulate their identity through fashion in the digital age.

The results show that fashion has an important role in shaping the identity of millennials, both as individuals and as part of social groups. Analysis based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory reveals that fashion in the millennial generation contains denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meaning includes literal aspects, such as the color or cut of clothing, while connotative meaning refers to symbolism that reflects certain values, such as social status, personality, or community affiliation.

Millennials use fashion as a means of visual communication, especially on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This medium allows them to dynamically display their identity and gain social validation. For example, casual dressing with local elements is often used to show a combination of openness to global trends and pride in local culture. This finding is consistent with studies by Rahmawati (2020), who highlighted how fashion can create identity narratives in a political context, and Zesinta (2022), who observed the role of fashion in interactions on social media.

However, this research also adds a new perspective by identifying the negotiation between globalization and locality in millennial fashion preferences in Indonesia. This phenomenon reflects the need to maintain local cultural values while remaining relevant to global trends. This characterizes millennials in Indonesia, who seek to balance the influence of modernity with their cultural identity.

CONCLUSIONS

This research concludes that fashion has significant role as visual communication medium in the formation of millennials' self-identity in Indonesia, which combines denotative and connotative meanings as explained by Roland Barthes' semiotics. Fashion is used not only to express personality, but also to show membership in a particular community and respond to the dynamics of globalization and cultural locality. Social media such as Instagram and TikTok become strategic spaces for millennials to showcase their fashion style and gain social validation, reflecting their preference for global trends while maintaining elements of local culture. Theoretically, this research enriches the semiotic approach with local cultural contexts, while practically, the findings provide insights for the fashion industry, advertisers and content creators to understand this generation's unique preferences. However, this research has limitations in terms of methods that only rely on literature review, thus not exploring empirical data directly from millennials. Therefore, future research is recommended to use qualitative field methods, such as in-depth interviews or observation, to understand more specifically how fashion shape's identity in everyday life. In addition, further exploration of the role of gender, economy and technology in millennial fashion preferences is also recommended.

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