

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BEAUTY AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN FEMALE FRONTLINER RECRUITMENT

Dinda Aulia ^{a*)}, Alfarabi ^{a)}, Neneng Cucu Marlina ^{a)}

^{a)} University Of Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

^{*)} Corresponding Author: dindaaulia835@gmail.com

Article history: received 02 December 2024; revised 16 January 2025; accepted 02 February 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33751/jssah.v5i1.12841>

Abstract. This study explores the role of nonverbal communication in shaping the “good looking” criteria during the recruitment process of female frontliners at BRI Bank Bengkulu. Appearance and nonverbal cues are often perceived as indicators of professionalism and service quality in the banking sector. Using Berger and Luckmann’s social construction theory, the study analyzes how beauty standards are formed and sustained through the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven informants, consisting of Human Resource staff and prospective female applicants, along with documentation of company recruitment policies. The findings reveal that nonverbal communication elements—such as facial expressions, body posture, grooming, and attire play a significant role in constructing an image of professionalism and trustworthiness. However, the “good looking” standard also creates psychological pressure and perceived discrimination among candidates who do not meet visual expectations. These beauty oriented criteria, while reinforcing the corporate image, tend to overshadow technical competence and merit-based assessment. The study concludes that the overemphasis on physical appearance in recruitment reflects a socially constructed norm that perpetuates inequality and calls for a more balanced evaluation system emphasizing skill, competence, and personality.

Keywords: nonverbal communication; good looking; recruitment; social construction; professionalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the professional world particularly in public service sectors such as banking nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in shaping professional image and building interpersonal trust [1]. Nonverbal communication refers to the transmission of messages without words, encompassing facial expressions, posture, gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and appearance [2]. Studies show that more than 65% of workplace communication is nonverbal, influencing how employees are perceived by clients, colleagues, and employers [3]. In the context of customer service, nonverbal cues such as grooming, attire, and facial expression can determine first impressions and signal competence and professionalism [4]. In Indonesia’s banking industry, particularly for frontliner positions which include customer service and teller roles physical appearance and grooming standards often become an implicit yet significant part of recruitment policies [5]. Although not always stated explicitly in job advertisements, the requirement to be “good looking” is widely understood as an internal policy that shapes the recruitment process [6]. The preference for attractive candidates is justified by the belief that an appealing appearance enhances customer comfort, builds trust, and reflects the company’s professional image [7].

However, the emphasis on “good looking” criteria in recruitment introduces complex sociocultural and ethical implications. On one hand, physical attractiveness is perceived as an asset that can enhance an organization’s public image. On

the other, it raises issues of discrimination and gender bias, especially against applicants who may possess strong competencies but do not fit the expected physical standards [8]. Research by Octafia and Setyonaluri (2022) reveals that physically attractive employees tend to receive preferential treatment and higher hiring probabilities a phenomenon known as the “beauty premium” [9]. Consequently, aesthetic criteria may overshadow merit-based selection, contradicting principles of fairness and equal opportunity [10]. The concept of good grooming often used interchangeably with good looking extends beyond physical beauty to include neatness, cleanliness, and harmonious appearance [11]. Within professional settings, grooming represents a form of nonverbal communication that conveys respect, discipline, and credibility [12]. In the case of BRI Bank Bengkulu, nonverbal cues such as professional dress, posture, friendly expressions, and pleasant demeanor have become standard expectations for frontliners who act as the “face” of the institution. Such cues are considered essential in generating positive emotional responses and strengthening customer relationships [13].

Nonetheless, these institutionalized aesthetic standards also reflect a socially constructed reality shaped by cultural norms and media influence. Beauty standards are perpetuated through popular culture, advertising, and digital media, creating homogenized perceptions of attractiveness that influence recruitment and self-presentation in professional environments [14]. These ideals, while culturally embedded, often perpetuate

social inequality by reinforcing narrow definitions of beauty and professionalism, especially for women [15]. The phenomenon of appearance-based selection can be analyzed through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's Social Construction Theory, which posits that social reality is formed through three dialectical processes: externalization, objectivation, and internalization [16]. In this case, organizational policies that prioritize physical attractiveness represent externalized values that become objectified as norms within corporate culture. Over time, these norms are internalized by job applicants, who perceive appearance as a prerequisite for employability. This process creates a feedback loop in which social expectations reinforce institutional practices, and vice versa [17].

Empirical observations at BRI Bank Bengkulu indicate that the "good looking" criterion is not merely aesthetic but communicative—it operates as a symbolic system that conveys professionalism, friendliness, and service orientation [18]. Yet, it also imposes psychological pressure on applicants, particularly women, who may feel compelled to conform to unattainable beauty standards. Such pressures can lead to self-doubt, anxiety, and even exclusion from employment opportunities [19]. This study therefore seeks to explore how nonverbal communication constructs the "good looking" criterion in the recruitment of female frontliners at BRI Bank Bengkulu, and how these practices shape candidates' perceptions of professionalism, fairness, and identity. Drawing on the framework of social construction theory, this research examines how aesthetic norms are formed, institutionalized, and internalized through the recruitment process. The findings are expected to contribute to communication and organizational studies by providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between nonverbal behavior, corporate image, and gendered beauty expectations in professional environments.

Nonverbal Communication and Professional Image

Nonverbal communication serves as a fundamental dimension of interpersonal interaction that conveys meaning beyond spoken language. According to Knapp and Hall nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, tone of voice, and physical appearance account for over 60% of communication effectiveness in workplace settings [20]. In professional environments particularly in service-oriented industries such as banking nonverbal behaviors play an essential role in constructing impressions of competence, trustworthiness, and professionalism [21]. Scholars emphasize that nonverbal messages are often more influential than verbal communication in shaping perceptions of credibility and warmth [22]. In the context of corporate communication, employees' physical appearance and grooming practices function as nonverbal signals that align with organizational identity and branding [23]. Thus, the way individuals dress, maintain posture, and display friendliness becomes part of the symbolic language used to represent corporate values and service quality [24].

In customer facing roles such as frontliners, physical presentation and emotional expressiveness are particularly significant. A study by Marsini et al. found that clients' trust in banking institutions was strongly correlated with the perceived friendliness and appearance of frontliner staff [4]. This suggests

that physical appearance operates not merely as an aesthetic element, but as a communicative tool that embodies professionalism and corporate credibility.

"Good Looking" as a Socially Constructed Standard

The term "good looking", often used in recruitment advertisements, reflects a social construction of attractiveness shaped by cultural norms and institutional practices. According to Rizqiyah, appearance-based job qualifications in Indonesia are influenced by collective beliefs that equate beauty with competence and trustworthiness [6]. This association is reinforced through social interactions, media portrayals, and workplace expectations that institutionalize aesthetic preferences as part of professionalism [25]. From a sociological perspective, Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality explains how such aesthetic standards emerge through three interrelated processes: externalization (where organizations express their expectations of attractiveness), objectivation (where these expectations become accepted as objective norms), and internalization (where individuals adopt these norms as personal values) [16]. Over time, what begins as a subjective judgment about physical appearance becomes an institutionalized requirement for employability and professionalism [26]. Furthermore, media and popular culture play a crucial role in shaping collective perceptions of beauty. Studies by Soraya and Larasati & Fernando reveal that social media and advertising have normalized "ideal" female images slim, well-groomed, and fair skinned which reinforce unrealistic beauty expectations in professional recruitment [10], [13]. Such ideals not only marginalize individuals who do not fit these standards but also perpetuate gendered stereotypes that privilege women's physical appeal over competence [27].

Gender, Body Politics, and Employment Discrimination

Gendered body politics refers to how physical appearance becomes a site of power negotiation within social and professional hierarchies. According to Bordo, the female body is often disciplined through cultural expectations that link attractiveness to moral and professional worth [28]. In the workplace, this manifests as discriminatory hiring practices that privilege women who conform to dominant beauty standards. In Indonesia, Octafia and Setyonaluri found that female applicants perceived as "attractive" were 25% more likely to be hired for service-sector positions than equally qualified candidates who did not fit aesthetic expectations [9]. This phenomenon, termed the "beauty premium," illustrates how visual bias influences recruitment decisions, often at the expense of merit and fairness. However, this bias also creates a paradox: while "good looking" employees may enjoy professional advantages, they simultaneously face pressure to maintain idealized appearances to sustain perceived value. As Ayu noted, women often engage in "aesthetic labor," where self-presentation becomes part of their occupational responsibility, blending personal identity with corporate image [5]. Such expectations reflect how power, gender, and beauty intersect within institutional structures.

Nonverbal Communication as a Reflection of Corporate Culture

Corporate environments often encode appearance and behavior into their organizational culture. Within the banking industry, frontliners are expected to represent the company's

integrity, efficiency, and reliability through both verbal and nonverbal communication [23]. Holilah argues that organizations utilize nonverbal cues such as uniform design, grooming standards, and emotional demeanor to communicate symbolic meanings about professionalism, hierarchy, and customer orientation [17]. In BRI Bank Bengkulu, the “good looking” requirement functions as a semiotic system a structured set of visual and behavioral codes that symbolize corporate values [18]. The frontliner’s posture, facial expression, and attire act as a form of branding that reinforces customer perceptions of order, trust, and comfort. This interpretation aligns with Fiske’s semiotic theory, which posits that nonverbal cues operate as signs that carry cultural meaning within institutional communication [29]. However, while such codes enhance corporate image, they may also produce exclusionary effects by prioritizing uniform physical aesthetics over individual diversity. This calls for a critical examination of how nonverbal communication policies can maintain professionalism without reinforcing discriminatory norms.

Drawing upon the theories and studies discussed, this research integrates two key frameworks: (1) Nonverbal Communication Theory and (2) Social Construction Theory. Nonverbal communication provides the lens through which physical appearance and grooming are analyzed as symbolic expressions of professionalism. Social Construction Theory explains how these aesthetic standards are socially produced, legitimized, and internalized within recruitment practices. Together, these frameworks support the study’s central argument: that the “good looking” criterion in BRI Bank Bengkulu’s frontliner recruitment is not merely an aesthetic preference but a socially constructed communication system that conveys meaning about professionalism, trust, and institutional identity.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how nonverbal communication constructs and reinforces the “good looking” requirement in the recruitment of female frontliners at BRI Bank Bengkulu. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth examination of individuals’ lived experiences and subjective interpretations of social phenomena [30]. This method aligns with the study’s theoretical foundation Berger and Luckmann’s Social Construction Theory which posits that reality is socially produced through shared meanings, interactions, and institutional practices [16]. By integrating phenomenology and social constructionism, the study aims to understand how organizational standards of “good looking” are formed, legitimized, and internalized through communication and behavior within the recruitment context.

The study was conducted at Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) Regional Office in Bengkulu, focusing on the recruitment process of female frontliners a category that includes customer service officers and tellers. BRI was selected because of its reputation as one of Indonesia’s largest state-owned banks and its long-standing practice of prioritizing frontliner appearance as part of customer service excellence.

The bank’s organizational culture provides a relevant site for examining how aesthetic norms and nonverbal communication codes are institutionalized in a corporate setting [32].

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that enables the selection of informants who possess specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research focus [33]. The participants included: Three Human Resource (HR) officers involved in recruitment; Five female frontliners (customer service and teller staff); Two managerial staff responsible for staff supervision and evaluation. This composition allowed the researcher to triangulate perspectives from decision-makers, employees, and administrators involved in implementing appearance-based recruitment. To ensure credibility and variation, participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) direct involvement in BRI’s recruitment or frontliner service operations; (2) at least one year of work experience; and (3) willingness to participate in recorded interviews [34].

Data were collected using three primary techniques: In depth semi-structured interviews Conducted with each participant to explore perceptions, motivations, and interpretations related to nonverbal communication and appearance standards. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent [35].

Observation Conducted in BRI Bengkulu’s customer service area to record nonverbal cues such as posture, attire, facial expressions, and interaction styles of frontliners [36].

Document analysis Included job postings, recruitment guidelines, and internal memos related to grooming and appearance policies. This provided contextual understanding of institutional norms and expectations [37]. Field notes and reflexive journals were used to capture contextual nuances and researcher reflections during data collection.

Data analysis followed the phenomenological reduction process outlined by Moustakas, consisting of four main stages: Epoche (bracketing) – Setting aside researcher bias to engage authentically with participants’ perspectives. Horizontalization – Identifying significant statements related to participants’ experiences. Textural description – Describing what participants experienced regarding appearance-based communication. Structural description – Explaining how the experience occurred within institutional and cultural contexts [38].

Themes were then developed by synthesizing individual meanings into shared essences, categorized under dimensions such as organizational communication norms, aesthetic expectations, and gendered professionalism. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in coding and thematic clustering.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, four validation criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba were applied: Credibility: Achieved through data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Transferability: Enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research context. Dependability: Ensured through consistent documentation of procedures and coding reliability checks. Confirmability: Maintained by keeping an audit trail of analytic decisions and reflexive memos [39]. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy and authenticity of interpretation.

The study followed standard ethical research principles concerning participant consent, confidentiality, and data protection. Before interviews, participants were briefed about the study objectives and their rights to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity, and data were stored securely on password-protected devices. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bengkulu.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Non-verbal communication is communication in which a message is presented in a form that does not use verbal signs such as speech, either in the form of conversation or writing. Nonverbal communication can be in the form of symbols such as gestures, colors, facial expressions, and others. Based on interviews that have been conducted, nonverbal communication plays an important role in shaping the perception of "good looking" in the recruitment process for female frontliners at Bank BRI Bengkulu. The informant described that nonverbal communication such as neatness of dress, friendly facial expressions, firm body posture, and eye contact can create a positive impression during the interview.

Physical Appearance as an Indicator of Professionalism

Attractive appearance is one of the important things at Bank BRI Bengkulu, as conveyed by several informants, prospective frontliners feel expected to have a neat, fragrant, and physically attractive appearance. This requirement, although sometimes not explicitly mentioned in recruitment advertisements, has been considered an internal policy that must be met. Nonverbal communication through aspects such as neat clothing and friendly expressions is a sign of professionalism in the eyes of HRD and customers. Appearance is considered the first form that represents the company and plays a role in giving a comfortable impression to customers.

As a supervisor at BRI Bengkulu bank, MM informant emphasized that in addition to serving customers, frontliners are also expected to be able to represent the company's image, attractive appearance has become very important, especially for frontliners who interact directly with customers. According to him, the attractive appearance here includes several aspects, such as neat, polite, clean, and comfortable to look at. In addition, a fragrant body scent also needs to be considered, because this gives a fresh and professional impression. A friendly facial expression is important, because the frontliner is the first person to welcome customers.

He also emphasized that this has become an unwritten rule inherent in the work environment of BRI banks. As a supervisor, the MM informant further explained that attractive appearance is not only judged from the physical aspect, but is also seen as a form of nonverbal communication that gives a message to customers that they will get good service. A neat and polite appearance makes customers feel comfortable and believe that the bank has high standards, both in terms of service and the quality of human resources. In addition, he said that a friendly and polite attitude in service is also a very important added value.

"When customers feel comfortable with the appearance and attitude of the frontliner, they will have more confidence in the professionalism of the bank" (MM Informant, In October 2024)

He added that while technical skills are also important, these aspects can be developed through training, while the first impression created through appearance is something that cannot be ignored because it is immediately felt by the customer. From his explanation, it is clear that attractive appearance has become part of the work culture at BRI Bengkulu bank. This standard not only aims to increase customer trust, but also to strengthen the company's image in society.

This confirms that attractive appearances are not only to meet physical standards, but also to ensure that customers feel comfortable and trust the professionalism of the bank. An attractive appearance, coupled with a friendly attitude, is important in building a positive impression and a strong relationship between the bank and customers, and confirms that professionalism is something that can be seen even at first glance.

"The frontliner is the same as the face, first impression, because he also deals directly with customers. So indeed appearance is important so that customers are also comfortable, if it is for how they serve, that ability must be a consideration as well and later it can be trained and of course there are also standards for the ability itself." (MS Informant, in October 2024)

Researchers found that attractiveness is a form of non-verbal communication that is indirectly internalized in the BRI bank environment itself. Attractive physical appearance is not only considered a general aspect, but also a reflection of the company's values instilled in BRI's work environment. In the interviews conducted, it can be seen that attractive appearance plays a role as a form of nonverbal communication that is able to create a positive first impression for customers. This awareness of the importance of first impressions encourages companies to internalize the appearance standards on frontliners, as they are considered the "face" of the company that interacts directly with the public.

The Pressure To Conform To "Good Looking" Standards

The existence of this criterion puts social and psychological pressure on potential applicants, especially for those who feel that they do not meet the perceived "good looking" standards of the bank's internal policies. Most prospective applicants admit that they are motivated to take additional care such as dressing up, maintaining weight, and doing physical exercise. However, these efforts also create anxiety and doubt in themselves.

Some informants revealed that they felt pressured to meet company expectations, such as by dressing up, maintaining weight, and making various other physical efforts to be considered viable. One of the informants, AYB, said that he did not feel confident to reapply for the frontliner position after experiencing rejection, even though he previously felt confident in his appearance, including his height that was considered to meet the criteria. However, the existence of other

candidates who are considered more physically attractive makes him feel unworthy. The same thing is also felt by DAD, an informant who is currently undergoing an internship at one of the banks. She admitted that even though she has tried to meet criteria such as dressing up and having enough height, she still feels insecure because her weight is considered less than ideal and her skills in dressing are still limited.

This statement shows that the pressure to conform to the standards of appearance does not stop at the initial selection stage, but continues during the apprenticeship or even afterwards. Despite trying to perform as expected, anxiety remains, especially when the standard is considered difficult to achieve or requires more than just work ability.

From this discussion, the researcher found that the standard of "good looking" in the world of work, especially in positions that face the public such as frontliners, not only demands that they look neat and attractive, but also have an impact on the anxiety of applicants. This standard makes some applicants feel that they must continue to prioritize their appearance in order to be accepted and considered fit for work. As a result, they become more focused on physical appearance than actual abilities or job skills. This leads to feelings of lack of confidence and ongoing worry.

Social Impact of the "Good Looking" Criteria

Prospective applicants face pressure from society and the social environment that considers frontliner jobs to require an attractive physical appearance. This perception creates a social view that only "good looking" individuals have the right to fill the position. As a result, prospective applicants who feel they do not meet these criteria experience a decrease in confidence and even feel discriminated against. Such as the statement from the KS informant which shows that the standard of "good looking" plays a very important role in the social environment and creates pressure. Fear and anxiety will be rejected simply because an appearance that is considered less attractive makes informants feel burdened and doubt their chances in the world of work. The informant felt uneasy because his environment often said that if he did not have a beautiful face, he would not be able to work. These worries not only affect their confidence, but also make them doubt their true abilities and potential. Researchers found that this kind of social pressure further reinforces the notion that attractive looks are the main requirement to be accepted in a job, even more important than skills or abilities. As a result, many prospective applicants feel compelled to focus on improving their physical appearance rather than improving their skills. This shows that the standard of "good looking" in the world of work has an impact not only on appearance, but also on the psychological state of applicants, who feel judged by their physical appearance before their abilities are fully recognized.

Social Construction Process in Prospective Applicants

In the context of the "good looking" criteria in the recruitment of female frontliners at Bank BRI Bengkulu, there are three stages of the social construction process experienced by prospective applicants, namely:

Externalization

Externalization is the stage in which individuals express their ideas and actions into the social world. Externalization occurs when a group performs an action that is considered right

or effective, and then the action is repeated. This process includes a variety of interactions, including the formation of norms and meanings in society. At BRI Bengkulu bank, this process occurs when the standard of "good looking" or attractive appearance for prospective frontliners begins to be conveyed to the public through various forms of expression, both from company policies and from the social environment. First, the company's policy emphasizes that frontliners, as the first person to interact with customers, must have an attractive, neat, and professional appearance. This requirement is always included in every job vacancy advertisement, prospective applicants can also deduce from observations of employees who work in frontliner positions. Frontliners at banks always look neat, dress up, and wear modest and professional clothes. By looking at these standards in the bank environment, potential applicants begin to realize that appearance is an important part of the job.

As revealed by the KR informant, what he knows is that bank recruitment always includes good looking requirements, sometimes even sorted in the first requirement. He also saw that bank employees, especially the frontliner position, always looked attractive and neat. Bank BRI Bengkulu emphasizes the importance of physical appearance through company values that require prospective frontliners to appear attractive and professional. In this case, prospective applicants obtain information regarding their performance expectations from the bank through internal and external sources.

This externalization process is also strengthened through social interaction between prospective applicants and their environment, such as friends, family, or the surrounding community. Many potential applicants hear from those around them that attractive physical appearance is an important factor in the world of work, especially in jobs that are directly related to clients. They may get advice or views that looking attractive can increase their chances of being accepted into a frontliner position. The views of the people around this increasingly emphasize to potential applicants that "good looking" is not just a demand from the bank, but also part of a widely accepted social expectation.

In this externalization stage, the value that good physical appearance is the standard for frontliners at Bank BRI Bengkulu begins to be accepted and considered as information by prospective applicants and the public. Overall, this externalization process shows how the criteria of "good looking" as part of professionalism in non-verbal communication at Bank BRI are communicated to prospective applicants, both through company policies and through social views.

Objectification

The objectification stage is the process by which the ideas and norms that have been expressed in the externalization stage begin to become real reality and are accepted by many people. Objectification arises when these actions continue to be carried out so that they begin to be seen as rules or norms. In this context, the standard of "good looking" appearance for female frontliners at Bank BRI Bengkulu began to be considered something natural. At this stage, prospective applicants and the public begin to consider that having an attractive appearance is part of professionalism in a frontliner

position. This statement is no longer considered as a mere policy or individual perception, but as something that makes sense in a bank environment. Prospective applicants who see frontliner employees always looking neat, dressing up, and dressing formally begin to accept that these are the standards that must be met to interact with customers well. Through this observation, they consider that attractive visual impressions are not only a demand from the company but also an important part of the identity of the frontliner job itself.

As revealed by the TSW informant, he said that appearance is quite important in the frontliner position, according to him customers will feel comfortable if they are served by employees with attractive, neat and friendly appearances.

The support of the social environment, both from friends and family, also strengthens this process of objectification. Many potential applicants receive advice or views from those closest to them that attractive appearance is an important factor in a job that involves direct interaction with a client or client. This factor puts additional pressure on potential applicants to feel that without meeting those standards, their chances of being accepted become smaller. This social environment also forms the perception that having an attractive appearance is a common requirement in frontliner work.

Ultimately, this stage of objectification creates a new reality for prospective applicants. Attractive appearance is no longer considered just a complement, but has become the main requirement that must be met to meet the expectations of companies and society. This "good looking" standard is finally attached as part of the "ideal image" of a frontliner. In the process of objectification, this norm develops into an unwritten rule that is fully realized by potential applicants, where they feel that attractive appearance is considered equivalent to competence in frontliner jobs.

Prospective applicants not only seek to meet these criteria because of the company's demands but also because of the perception that their appearance will have a direct impact on the assessment of professionalism and service. They realize that looking attractive can be an effective way to build a positive impression on customers, create a friendly atmosphere, and give them a sense of comfort. This perception reinforces that appearance is no longer just a company's demand but also a social demand that is believed by the general public to determine the quality of a frontliner.

With this norm, prospective applicants are even willing to give up time, effort, and money to maintain their appearance. Many have started taking extra care, buying beauty products, and even taking training or dressing courses to be better prepared to meet these standards. This norm then becomes something that is considered commonplace and becomes a standard accepted by all parties, from the applicant to the bank itself.

In the end, this stage of objectification brings the standard of "good looking" from something that was initially just an idea or perception to a reality that is accepted as fairness in the eyes of society. This is the stage where the initial perception of the externalization stage is finally accepted and strengthened by the applicant, the community, and the work

environment, thus forming a mutually agreed view of the importance of physical appearance in frontliner work.

Internalization

Internalization is when individuals absorb and live these norms through the process of socialization, until finally the norm feels natural and becomes part of themselves in society. These three processes are interrelated, forming a cycle in which humans create society, but at the same time are reshaped by that society. At the internalization stage, this norm has become commonplace in society, but many prospective applicants for BRI Bengkulu bank show a critical attitude towards the "good looking" appearance standard as a criterion for frontliner positions. While they understand that attractive looks are part of the requirements at the bank, most applicants question the relevance of this policy in reflecting professionalism. Rather than fully accepting these standards of appearance as something that needs to be upheld, they see it as a norm that should not dominate the assessment of a person's suitability for a job, especially for those who have sufficient competence and skills.

"If it's for good looking, in my opinion, it can be said that it's just a stepping stone, because yes, in my opinion, the most important thing is experience, skills and also how he serves customers, it must be friendly, of course, because for example the person is difficult to communicate with, awkward, I think, even though good looking is useless"

Informant KS, In October 2024

This critical view also creates pressure on applicants, especially as they still feel the need to meet the company's visual expectations in order to be accepted. For some applicants, these demands are a source of anxiety that adds to the burden during the recruitment process. However, they still try to focus more on skill development and improving the quality of work. However, this pressure still creates discomfort, especially when they feel their chances of being accepted become smaller if they don't meet the expected performance standards.

In this internalization process, applicants feel that the standard of "good looking" does not reflect the true essence of professionalism. Some informants argue that this standard has the potential to reduce the assessment of other more important aspects of the frontliner's role, such as communication skills, expertise in providing services to customers, and a deep understanding of the bank's products. Most applicants feel that the visual aspect should not dominate the assessment of one's ability to provide quality service. The opinion of the AYB informant, affirmed the critical view of the "good looking" standards applied in frontliner recruitment at BRI Bengkulu bank. AYB argues that policies that focus too much on physical appearance as a key criterion need to be re-evaluated. According to him, there are other competencies that are more relevant for frontliner positions, such as English language skills, service skills, and mastery of other special skills that have more influence on the quality of customer service.

Applicants who question this "good looking" standard argue that this policy should be re-evaluated, especially since frontliner's duties are more related to service and interpersonal skills than physical appearance. They assessed that policies that

focus too much on the visual aspect can limit the opportunities of people who have potential, but may not meet certain visual criteria. For them, fair recruitment should emphasize competence and quality of service rather than appearance.

Although the "good looking" standard is already part of the hiring policy, most applicants do not fully accept this standard as a reasonable or relevant requirement for a frontliner position. Such critical attitudes towards appearance standards show that social views on physical appearance as a sign of professionalism in frontliner jobs are not always aligned with the applicants' understanding. Instead, applicants value professionalism based on work skills and the ability to provide real service to customers. The attitude of those who question this standard reflects the perspective that the visual aspect should not be the primary determinant in assessing a candidate's suitability to work in a bank. This emphasizes the importance of a fair recruitment process, by prioritizing the competence and expertise of applicants.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Social construction in prospective applicants is evident in the recruitment selection process at Bank BRI Bengkulu, where physical appearance, especially the "good looking" criteria, is one of the important factors that affect the decision to accept female frontliner candidates. This process is formed through three main stages in social construction, which begins with the externalization, values about ideal physical appearance, which include an attractive face and a proportionate body. These values are widespread in society through posters, social policies and prevailing norms, and are beginning to form a general view of what is considered a decent appearance in the workforce. The results of this study are able to provide an in-depth understanding related to the problems raised in this study, namely how nonverbal communication through the criteria of "good looking" is applied in the recruitment process of female frontliners at Bank BRI Bengkulu, as well as what impact it has on the social construction of prospective applicants. From the results of the research, it can be seen that nonverbal communication is indeed an important part of this selection process. Bank BRI not only looks at aspects of speaking ability, but also assesses the way applicants carry themselves, such as friendly facial expressions, good posture, neat and fragrant appearance, to the ability to give a professional and polite impression in front of interviewers. The "good looking" criteria applied did not appear out of nowhere, but were the result of a social construction that was gradually formed. First, at the externalization stage, the company introduces values related to "good looking" through promotional media, posters, and internal policies. Things like attractive faces, proportional bodies, and friendly expressions are used as standard images of the ideal frontliner. This value is then accepted and institutionalized in the selection process, or the so-called objectification stage. In this stage, the criteria become part of the official procedures applied, such as during interviews or direct visual assessments. Finally, the internalization stage shows how these standards impact potential applicants, especially women. Many feel overwhelmed by feeling

overwhelmed by not meeting expectations, which often leads to insecurity or even psychological distress. However, this study also found that the criteria of "good looking" are actually not only about physical appearance. Nonverbal communication such as smiles, eye contact, standing, and body language are also important things to consider. This shows that companies want frontliners who are able to create a positive impression in the eyes of customers, not only physically, but also from the way they communicate without words. The results of this study also explain that although the "good looking" criterion is an important requirement, there is still criticism from some prospective applicants who feel that this criterion is too restrictive and unfair. Many hope that ability, personality, and competence will also be the main consideration in the selection process, not just visual factors. On the other hand, this study also reveals that focusing too much on the "good looking" criteria also has a negative impact. Standards that are too high can narrow the opportunities for prospective applicants who actually have good competence and employability, but feel insecure because they don't meet performance expectations. In the long run, this can lead companies to lose talented candidates who may have a significant contribution in terms of performance. Another impact that needs to be considered is public perception of the company's recruitment policy. If the criteria of "good looking" are narrowly understood, companies can be considered more concerned with visual aspects than capabilities. Therefore, companies need to ensure that the application of these criteria does not detract from the main essence of recruitment, which is to find candidates with the best competencies. This research not only answers the formulation of existing problems, but also provides a new view of how the recruitment process at BRI bank runs. This research is beneficial for potential applicants because they can better understand what the company expects and prepare better. On the other hand, this research can also be a reflection for companies, especially to consider fairer criteria without ruling out individual competencies. That way, the selection process can be more balanced and provide equal opportunities for all applicants. Although physical appearance, especially related to the "good looking" criteria, is a factor of great concern in the recruitment process for female frontliners at Bank BRI, there is discomfort and disapproval from some individuals, especially women who feel that they do not meet these criteria. This social construction of physical appearance creates inequality, where those who do not meet standards feel marginalized and undervalued. Therefore, it is important for Bank BRI and other institutions to reflect on existing recruitment criteria and consider other factors that are more relevant, such as individual abilities, competencies, and character, so that the selection process becomes fairer and more inclusive, without ignoring the potential possessed by each prospective applicant.

REFERENCES

- [1] W. Kustiawan et al., "Introduction to Nonverbal Communication," *Journal of Communication Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 15–28, 2022.

- [2] A. S. Hadiwijaya, "Synthesis of Social Construction Theory and Mass Media Construction Theory," *Dialektika Komunika: Journal of Communication and Regional Development Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 75–89, 2023.
- [3] R. A. P. Effy Wardati Maryam, *Psychology of Communication*, 1st ed., Sidoarjo: UMSIDA Press, 2020.
- [4] N. Marsini et al., "Enhancing Professional Image through Appearance and Communication in the Workplace," *Journal of Community Service Nusantara*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 2902–2906, 2024.
- [5] A. N. Ayu, "Appearance as Nonverbal Communication among Women in the Workplace," *Journal of Gender and Communication*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 40–52, 2021.
- [6] A. N. A. Rizqiyah, "Application of Appearance-Based Qualifications in the Context of Human Rights and Social Justice," *PUSKAPSI Law Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 20–34, 2023.
- [7] M. H. Octafia and D. Setyonaluri, "Beauty Premium of Working Women in Urban Indonesia," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 85–94, 2022.
- [8] A. Raissa, "Protection for Job Seekers from Discriminatory Corporate Qualifications," *Mimbar Keadilan*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 260–270, 2019.
- [9] T. P. Octafia and D. Setyonaluri, "Physical Attractiveness Bias and Gender Discrimination in Employment," *Asian Journal of Human Resource Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 88–102, 2023.
- [10] S. L. Soraya, "Depictions of Women's Bodies in Job Recruitment Advertisements," *Airlangga University Research Repository*, 2020.
- [11] A. Mardiah, "The Influence of Fashionable Appearance on Female Career Development in Banking," *Marwah: Journal of Women, Religion, and Gender*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 133–144, 2018.
- [12] S. Khoerunnisa et al., "Nonverbal Factors Influencing Social Behavior in the Workplace," *Journal of Social Work and Services*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 123–130, 2023.
- [13] Y. G. Larasati and H. Fernando, "Objectification of the Female Body in Job Recruitment Ads on Instagram: Questioning Empowerment," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Community Development*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 85–106, 2023.
- [14] K. Adi, "Information Processing and Consumer Perception in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 Era," *Majalah Ilmiah Pelita Ilmu*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 35–44, 2019.
- [15] R. Sari, "The Social Meaning of Beauty among Female University Students," *Journal of Social and Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1–15, 2020.
- [16] P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Anchor Books, 1966.
- [17] I. Holilah, *Communication Theory*, Banten: UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Press, 2020.
- [18] D. Aulia, A. Alfarabi, and N. C. Marlina, "Nonverbal Communication and Professional Image in Banking Service Roles," *University of Bengkulu Working Paper Series*, 2024.
- [19] R. Alexandra, "Public Perception of 'Attractive Appearance' Qualifications in Job Advertisements," *UPN Veteran Yogyakarta Journal of Media Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–14, 2023.
- [20] M. L. Knapp and J. A. Hall, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, 9th ed., Boston: Cengage Learning, 2020.
- [21] D. Burgoon, L. Guerrero, and K. Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication*, 3rd ed., New York: Routledge, 2021.
- [22] E. T. Hall, "The Silent Language of Human Interaction in Business Contexts," *Journal of Organizational Communication*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 41–55, 2021.
- [23] S. W. Littlejohn and K. Foss, *Theories of Human Communication*, 12th ed., Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2021.
- [24] G. Ting-Toomey, "Cultural Influences on Nonverbal Communication in Multinational Organizations," *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 88–102, 2022.
- [25] L. R. Fitria and M. R. Anggraini, "Appearance-Based Employment and Beauty Capital in Indonesian Service Industries," *Southeast Asian Journal of Communication Research*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 63–77, 2023.
- [26] B. Holtz and P. Berger, "Norm Internalization and the Maintenance of Social Realities," *Sociology of Knowledge Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 101–115, 2021.
- [27] F. Suryani and R. Prihantoro, "Media, Gender, and the Construction of Beauty Standards in Indonesian Advertising," *Journal of Cultural Communication Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 120–133, 2022.
- [28] S. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 3rd ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021.
- [29] J. Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 3rd ed., London: Routledge, 2020.
- [30] E. M. van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2020.
- [31] J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- [32] R. Nugroho and D. Safitri, "Corporate Image and Communication Practices in Indonesian Banking," *Journal of Business Communication and Management*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 140–153, 2022.
- [33] M. Bloor and F. Wood, *Keywords in Qualitative Methods: A Vocabulary of Research Concepts*, London: SAGE, 2021.
- [34] P. Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, 5th ed., London: SAGE Publications, 2021.
- [35] K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 3rd ed., London: SAGE Publications, 2020.
- [36] J. Spradley, *Participant Observation*, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2020.
- [37] S. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 277–294, 2020.

- [38] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994.
- [39] Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1985.