



## THE ROLE OF “DETECTIVE DOCTORS” IN EXPOSING THE SKINCARE MAFIA: HEALTH COMMUNICATION TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS

### PERAN “DOKTER DETEKTIF” DALAM MENGUNGKAP MAFIA SKINCARE: KOMUNIKASI KESEHATAN UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KESADARAN MASYARAKAT

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#### Abstract

The beauty and skincare industry in Indonesia is growing rapidly and promising. However, behind this growth, there has been a revelation of numerous ingredients in skincare products that do not match their claims, with many containing harmful substances such as mercury, hydroquinone, and more. This issue began to surface when a beauty doctor, often referred to as the "Detective Doctor," examined and exposed skincare products suspected of being unregistered and containing dangerous ingredients. This research aims to analyze the role of health communication in raising public awareness about the skincare mafia practices through the role of the "Detective Doctor." The method used is qualitative descriptive analysis with case studies of several campaigns conducted by the "Detective Doctor" on social media and other public channels. The results show that the "Detective Doctor" not only reveals dangerous skincare products through scientific research but also plays a role in delivering information to the public via accessible communication platforms such as social media and podcasts. This campaign successfully increased public awareness of the importance of choosing safe beauty products, as well as the importance of verifying skincare product ingredients. This research highlights the significant role of health communication in combating illegal practices in the beauty industry and demonstrates how the "Detective Doctor" can be an agent of change in public health education.

**Keywords :** Detective Doctor, Skincare Mafia, Health Communication, Public Awareness, Harmful Ingredients, Health Education

#### Abstrak

Perkembangan industri kecantikan dan skincare di Indonesia semakin pesat dan menjanjikan. Namun, di balik itu semua mulai terungkap banyaknya kandungan-kandungan di dalam skincare tersebut yang tidak sesuai klaim bahkan banyak di antaranya memiliki kandungan berbahaya, seperti merkuri, hidroquinon, dan masih banyak lagi. Kasus ini mulai terkuak saat salah satu dokter kecantikan yang sering disebut “Dokter Detektif” membedah satu persatu skincare yang dicurigai tidak terdaftar dan mengandung bahan-bahan berbahaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran komunikasi



kesehatan dalam meningkatkan kesadaran masyarakat tentang praktik mafia skincare melalui peran “Dokter Detektif”. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis deskriptif kualitatif dengan studi kasus terhadap beberapa kampanye yang dilakukan oleh “Dokter Detektif” di media sosial dan kanal publik lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa “Dokter Detektif” tidak hanya mengungkap produk skincare berbahaya melalui penelitian ilmiah, tetapi juga berperan dalam menyampaikan informasi kepada publik melalui platform komunikasi yang mudah diakses, seperti media sosial dan podcast. Kampanye ini berhasil meningkatkan kesadaran masyarakat tentang pentingnya memilih produk kecantikan yang aman, serta pentingnya verifikasi kandungan produk skincare. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya peran komunikasi kesehatan dalam memerangi praktik ilegal di industri kecantikan, serta menunjukkan bagaimana “Dokter Detektif” dapat menjadi agen perubahan dalam pendidikan kesehatan masyarakat.

**Kata Kunci :** Dokter Detektif, Mafia Skincare, Komunikasi Kesehatan, Kesadaran Masyarakat, Kandungan Berbahaya, Edukasi Kesehatan.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The beauty and skincare industry has experienced rapid growth worldwide, including in Indonesia. Skincare products have become increasingly popular, particularly among young people actively seeking better skin health solutions. With the advancement of the internet and social media, many individuals search for information—specifically regarding skincare—through popular platforms like TikTok (Pardianti, 2022). Consequently, TikTok has become a primary reference point for many consumers looking to expand their knowledge of skincare products.

The rapid expansion of the skincare industry has encouraged many individuals to start their own businesses, competing to become "Skincare Bosses" due to promising profits and ever-increasing market demand. This trend is further fueled by consumptive and impulsive buying behaviors (Gracelia, 2023). Skincare business owners often capitalize on consumers' susceptibility to free shipping vouchers, price cuts, discounts, and promotions to enhance their brand awareness.

However, alongside this industrial growth, a disturbing phenomenon has emerged: the "skincare mafia" practice. The skincare mafia refers to groups or individuals who market illegal skincare products containing hazardous chemicals that can cause severe damage to the skin and overall health. These products are often sold via social media and online platforms using misleading claims about their benefits.

This issue is exacerbated by a lack of effective supervision over beauty products in the circulation, as well as low levels of public health literacy regarding hazardous ingredients (Laturrahmi, 2020). Despite technological advancements and the ease of accessing information, there is a disconnect with the literacy levels of young people, particularly concerning how to choose safe skincare products (Rahmadanita, 2022). As a result, many consumers fall victim to the skincare mafia, suffering both financial and health-related losses.

Amidst this crisis, a new phenomenon has emerged: the appearance of "Dokter Detektif" (Detective Doctor), a physician from Surabaya whose identity remains mysterious. "Doktif," as she is affectionately known, surfaced on TikTok by creating content that exposes the



hazardous ingredients in over-the-counter skincare. Beyond just identifying dangerous chemicals, *Dokter Detektif* focuses on educating the public and providing accurate information regarding the risks of using products containing harmful substances.

Health communication is the key strategy in this effort, as extensive educational campaigns are required to reach the broader community. Health communication involves utilizing communication services to convey messages and influence decision-making regarding the improvement and management of individual and public health (Fauzi, 2022). By utilizing various communication channels—such as social media, webinars, and public campaigns—*Dokter Detektif* plays a vital role in increasing public awareness about the importance of choosing safe beauty products and avoiding unregistered or hazardous items.

This study aims to explore the role of health communication performed by *Dokter Detektif* in uncovering skincare mafia practices and its impact on public awareness regarding hazardous ingredients in skincare products. It is hoped that this research will provide a deeper understanding of how health communication can be utilized to combat illegal practices in the beauty industry and strengthen public health literacy in selecting safe skincare products.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the role of "detective doctors" in exposing dangerous skincare mafia practices and to analyze how health communication is used to raise public awareness (Nugraha, 2025). This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena occurring, as well as the interactions and perceptions within the community regarding the issues being discussed.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### a. The Emergence of the “Dokter Detektif” Phenomenon in Addressing the Skincare Mafia

According to the WHO (World Health Organization), the role of a doctor is to provide medical services covering prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation for patients to improve quality of life and public health. Doctors are expected to maintain individual and community health, as well as handle illnesses accurately and professionally. Additionally, doctors have the responsibility to perform diagnoses by formulating precise assessments based on patient symptoms and medical examination results. Subsequently, doctors provide treatment appropriate to the patient's condition to cure or manage existing diseases. Equally important, doctors play a role in providing education to patients regarding their illnesses and ways to maintain health and prevent future diseases. This is because every individual has the right to know their health condition transparently and comprehensively, as regulated in Health Law No. 17 of 2023 concerning Health (Riyanto, 2024). The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945) regulates the right to health as a fundamental right of every individual. Health is recognized as a right possessed by every living person. In Article 28H paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution, it is guaranteed that everyone has the right to live in physical and



spiritual prosperity, to have a place to live, to enjoy a good and healthy environment, and the right to obtain health services (Brahmana, 2022).

Amidst the proliferation of various skincare products being sold, a doctor emerged calling herself "Dokter Detektif" (Detective Doctor) through her TikTok social media account. Doktif, as she is familiarly called, frequently creates content that educates the public regarding hazardous ingredients contained in many skincare products still sold freely. This is driven by the concerns of beauty experts, leading to the initiative to provide public education by utilizing social media platforms. In the context of the skincare mafia, the role of a doctor is more than just a medical service provider. They also act as "detectives" who identify illegal skincare products circulating in the market. The skincare mafia often markets products with claims that are scientifically unproven and can endanger skin health. Therefore, doctors play a vital role in detecting symptoms or side effects arising from the use of such products in their patients. As "detectives," doctors can recognize various conditions caused by the use of products containing hazardous materials, such as illegal whiteners, mercury, or excessive doses of hydroquinone. Skin diseases, irritation, and allergies caused by these products often show patterns recognizable by experienced doctors. Consequently, early detection by doctors is crucial in reducing adverse impacts on patients and the wider community. Furthermore, doctors also have the responsibility to educate patients on the importance of choosing safe and registered beauty products. Providing evidence-based scientific information about the health risks of using skincare products of unclear origin is an essential part of the doctor's role and the patient's rights (Wahyudi, 2024). With this approach, doctors serve as protectors of patients' skin health and agents of change who help the community avoid the dangers of products with unverified safety.

#### **b. "Dokter Detektif" Communication Strategy**

The emergence of the figure "Dokter Detektif" or often called Doktif on social media immediately became a hot topic of discussion. This is because Doktif voluntarily exposes hazardous ingredients contained in many skincare brands still sold without permits. To date, the true identity of Doktif and the beauty clinic she owns remain uncertain. Since her appearance, Doktif has been flooded with praise and gratitude from many people due to her educational content. Doktif is active in creating content on her TikTok social media, which now has 2.4 million followers. The content presented by Doktif consists of skincare reviews with an average duration of over 3 minutes, covering skincare initials, promised claims, and laboratory test results to see if they match or not. After conducting a review, Doktif does not forget to educate her viewers to continue being careful in choosing skincare and not to be easily tempted by cheap prices. This doctor, who is suspected to have been born in 1981, delivers her education in casual language and uncomplicated scientific explanations, considering many of her followers are young and do not come from a health background. Not infrequently, many followers ask Doktif to conduct "research" on several skincare products they wish to use. With these many requests, Doktif also frequently provides names of skincare products that are safe to use and match the promised benefits. Doktif's content like this has very high interaction



because what Doktif conveys is information highly needed by the public and closely related to occurring phenomena, namely the emergence of new skincare brands competing to sell cheaply with instant benefits.

Dokter Detektif has successfully captured public attention and changed consumer behavior using various effective persuasion techniques. One approach often used is strong visualization. By showing laboratory results of hazardous materials in skincare products, she manages to leave a deep impression on the audience. Additionally, emotional narratives also serve as effective tools to build audience trust in making decisions to be cautious about using dangerous skincare products (Adrianto, 2021). This makes her messages feel closer and more memorable. By combining these persuasion and education techniques, Doktif has successfully built public trust and encouraged changes in consumer behavior by not only providing information but also inspiring the audience to become smarter and more critical consumers.

### **c. Health Communication to Increase Public Awareness**

Health communication plays a vital role in conveying correct and accurate information to the public regarding health issues, including skincare problems. To achieve effective communication, it is important to understand the purpose of the message to be delivered (Dewi, 2021). This research shows that communication carried out by doctors can be an effective tool in increasing public awareness about the importance of choosing safe and standardized skincare products. Through evidence-based counseling, doctors can inform the public about the dangers of using skincare products containing hazardous chemicals or those not registered with health authorities. Doctors can utilize various communication channels, both directly through consultations with patients and through social media, to convey these health messages, such as in the form of health articles or research results obtained in the field (Setiaji, 2022). The effective use of social media allows doctors to reach a wider audience, especially the younger generation who are more frequently exposed to skincare product advertisements through digital platforms. In this context, clear, simple, and evidence-based communication is crucial so that the public can understand the information provided and make wiser decisions in choosing skincare products.

Health communication is highly needed in the health field as it is a key factor in achieving improvements in the quality or level of public health (Lestari, 2022). Health communication serves as a bridge between health professionals and the community. With effective communication, the public can more easily understand health information, which ultimately helps them make wiser decisions regarding their health. The main goal of health communication is to encourage behavioral change, provide public education, and convey appropriate and easily understood information. Furthermore, health communication must be managed by the right communicators, who are responsive and skilled, because health issues relate to the interests of all levels of society, including medical professionals (Rakhmaniar, 2021). Health communication is not just about providing information but also aims to motivate the community to implement healthy behaviors in daily life (Maulida, 2020). For example, through health campaigns, the community can be encouraged to be more active in exercising,



eating a balanced diet, quitting smoking, or undergoing routine health checks, which includes being careful in using health products, in this case, skin health. The public must implement the habit of cross-checking before buying, ensuring that the ingredients in the product are safe and appropriate for the skin's needs.

#### **d. Role of the Government and Related Institutions**

The beauty industry has been tainted by the actions of the skincare mafia who produce hazardous cosmetic products. The dangerous chemicals they use can damage consumers' skin and threaten public health at large. These actions are not only legal violations but also irresponsible acts that harm many parties. The clamor regarding "fake" skincare on social media has finally reached the ears of the government and related institutions. The National Police (Polri) and the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM) have agreed to take action against the skincare mafia. The crimes of the skincare mafia are certainly very detrimental to the public. They produce and distribute cosmetic products containing hazardous materials such as mercury, hydroquinone, and corticosteroids. These substances can cause severe skin damage and even cancer. The actions of the skincare mafia clearly violate the law. Article 435 of Law Number 17 of 2023 concerning Health explicitly prohibits the manufacture and distribution of cosmetics that do not meet safety standards (Permadhi, 2024). By using hazardous materials and lacking distribution permits, the skincare mafia has violated the provisions of the law. They can be subject to imprisonment and significant fines. The issue, which began on social media, has now become an increasingly serious topic of conversation.

Although the government and related institutions have expressed their commitment to be more vigilant in ensuring the quality of food, medicine, and beverages safe for the public, in reality, many people are still disappointed with the government for being perceived as slow in taking steps and actions. Phrases like "Wait until it goes viral first," "Where have you been?," "What has BPOM been doing?," and various forms of criticism and satire still flood the authorities. This certainly serves as a lesson and evaluation for the authorities in carrying out their duties. Many impacts will occur if the government is slow to act, ranging from the longer it is left, the harder it is to track the perpetrators, consumers continuing to be victims of hazardous cosmetic products circulating in the market, to the tarnishing of the cosmetic industry as a whole due to the actions of the skincare mafia. In fact, in this era of rapidly developing technology, tools like artificial intelligence and big data can be utilized to help detect and track illegal cosmetic products. The government needs to allocate a larger budget for the supervision of cosmetic products and increase the number of supervisory officers. There needs to be closer cooperation between the government, industry, and the community to overcome this problem so that the public continues to be educated. Not stopping there, this massive problem must be eradicated to its roots by taking firm action against the skincare mafia with heavy sanctions to create a deterrent effect.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

The "detective doctor" phenomenon has successfully highlighted a serious issue in the beauty industry: the proliferation of counterfeit skincare products containing hazardous ingredients. By employing effective communication strategies, the doctor has successfully raised public awareness and driven changes in consumer behavior. However, challenges remain, such as the potential spread of misinformation and unfair competition. To comprehensively address this issue, strong collaboration between government, industry, academia, and the public is required. The government needs to strengthen regulation and oversight, the industry must commit to producing safe and high-quality products, and the public needs to become more discerning consumers. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of this phenomenon and develop more effective strategies to protect consumers.

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