

Construction of the image of healthy living in a digital germ campaign: Kritis Analysis Jean Baudrillard

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The increasing use of social media by the Indonesian government as a platform for health promotion has led to the construction of visually appealing and idealized representations of healthy living. In the context of the Healthy Living Community Movement (GERMAS), these representations often emphasise symbolic aesthetics over everyday realities. This study aims to critically analyze how the digital GERMAS campaign constructs the image of healthy living through Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and simulacra.

Methods: This research employed a qualitative case study design conducted from August to October 2025, focusing on digital content disseminated through the official platforms of the Ministry of Health, including Instagram, YouTube, and the website kemkes.go.id. Data were collected through digital documentation, online observation, and in-depth interviews with ten informants from risk-vulnerable groups, comprising six adolescents and four homemakers. Thematic analysis was employed to identify symbolic patterns and narratives, which were then interpreted through the lens of Baudrillard's conceptual frameworks.

Results: Findings indicate that the GERMAS digital campaign constructs healthy living as a modern, visually attractive lifestyle that is often disconnected from the lived realities of the target audience. Adolescents perceived the content as aesthetically pleasing yet overly idealized, while homemakers viewed it as informative but challenging to implement due to economic and contextual barriers. Both groups highlighted that the campaign's imagery often functions as a performative symbol rather than a reflection of authentic health practices.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the digital campaign reinforces hyperreality, where symbolic representations of health are consumed more actively than the practices themselves. To achieve a meaningful behavioral impact, digital health communication must adopt more contextual and participatory approaches that resonate with everyday socio-economic conditions.

Keywords: Adolescent; Health Communication; Healthy Lifestyle; Health Promotion; Social Media.



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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by profound physical, emotional, and social transformations that significantly shape lifelong health trajectories (Supriati and Kusumastuti, 2024). During this stage, individuals establish behavioral patterns related to diet, physical activity, substance use, and media consumption patterns that often persist into adulthood (Wijayanti and Nurseskasatmata, 2024). In many countries, including developing nations, adolescents are increasingly exposed to risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary habits, and early initiation of smoking or vaping (Suprpto Dewi Nurhanifah, Muh Yunus, Lumastari Ajeng Wijayanti, 2025). These behaviors contribute substantially to the growing global burden of NCDs, making adolescents a critical target group for health promotion and disease prevention. As such, effective health communication strategies are urgently needed to promote a healthy lifestyle among adolescents and to address emerging risks in ways that resonate with their lived experiences and social environments (Suprpto and Ihsan Kamaruddin, 2025).

The rise of digital technology and social media has dramatically shifted the landscape of health communication. Adolescents today are among the most active users of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which they rely on not only for entertainment but also for information, social identity formation, and community building (Sylvia Bawiling and Suprpto, 2025). This creates both opportunities and challenges for public health actors. On the one hand, social media offers unprecedented reach, interactivity, and visual appeal, enabling health promotion campaigns to deliver messages in formats that are both attractive and relatable to young audiences (Andersen *et al.*, 2025). On the other hand, the same platforms are saturated with conflicting information, unrealistic health imagery, commercial influences, and algorithm-driven content flows that may distort adolescents' perceptions of what constitutes a "healthy" lifestyle (Latif, Adam and Kamaruddin, 2025).

A growing body of research highlights that adolescents often encounter idealised representations of fitness, beauty, and wellness in social media images that tend to emphasise aesthetics, body shape, or aspirational lifestyles rather than evidence-based health practices (Thompson *et al.*, 2025). These portrayals can produce misunderstandings about health, reinforce body dissatisfaction, and create psychological pressure to conform to unrealistic standards (Peyyety *et al.*, 2025). As a result, what adolescents interpret as "healthy lifestyle" may be heavily influenced by symbolic or performative content rather than genuine health-promoting behaviors (Brailovskaia, 2024). This presents a significant challenge for health communication, which seeks to encourage informed decision-making and sustainable habits rather than superficial or short-term compliance driven by online trends (Salmerón-Ruiz *et al.*, 2025).

Despite increasing scholarly interest in digital health promotion, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on the effectiveness of social media campaigns in terms of reach, engagement metrics, or knowledge improvement, with limited attention to how adolescents interpret and negotiate the symbolic dimensions of health messages presented online (Grupp *et al.*, 2025). Second, existing research often overlooks the discrepancy between adolescents' real-life contexts and the idealized lifestyle promoted on digital platforms. For instance, adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may struggle to relate to content that depicts expensive foods, private gym environments, or highly structured routines. This gap between representation and reality can diminish the impact of health promotion efforts and reduce adolescents' motivation to adopt healthier behaviors (Conway *et al.*, 2025).

Third, relatively few studies critically examine how the visual and narrative elements of health promotion campaigns contribute to the construction of health-related meanings. In the age of social media, health messages are no longer neutral information; instead, they are mediated through aesthetics, influencers, and platform-specific cultures. This environment can blur the boundary between authentic health communication and commodified lifestyle branding. Understanding how adolescents interpret these symbolic elements is crucial for designing interventions that genuinely support healthy behavior rather than inadvertently reinforcing hyperreal or commercialized ideals of wellness.

The novelty of the present study lies in its integration of health communication, adolescent health behavior, and critical media analysis to explore how healthy lifestyle messages are constructed and perceived within social media environments. Unlike conventional approaches that emphasize behavioral outcomes or message dissemination, this study focuses on the interpretive processes through which adolescents make sense of health promotion messages. By examining both the content of digital campaigns and adolescents' lived experiences, the study offers a deeper understanding of the tensions between representation and reality in contemporary health promotion. Furthermore, the study contributes new insights into how social media can both facilitate and hinder the adoption of healthy behaviors among adolescents. It highlights the importance of culturally grounded, context-sensitive communication strategies that move beyond appealing visuals and catchy slogans. Effective health promotion for adolescents must bridge the gap between digital representations of "health" and the everyday conditions that shape young people's ability to practice healthy behaviors. By foregrounding adolescents' voices, perceptions, and challenges, the study proposes a more participatory and authentic approach to digital health communication.

This research highlights the need to reassess health promotion strategies for adolescents in the digital era. It argues that promoting a healthy lifestyle requires more than disseminating visually attractive messages; it requires understanding adolescents' social realities, the symbolic dimensions of social media content, and the structural barriers that shape health behaviors. The findings aim to inform the development of more effective, empathetic, and contextually appropriate health communication models tailored to the unique needs of adolescents in the contemporary digital landscape.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a critical case study design to examine how the digital campaign of the Gerakan Masyarakat Hidup Sehat (GERMAS) constructs the image of a healthy lifestyle. The crucial case study method allows the researcher to explore symbolic meanings, discursive formations, and representational practices embedded in digital health communication, particularly within the socio-cultural context of Indonesia. This design aligns with Baudrillard's theory of simulation and simulacra, which necessitates a thorough interpretive analysis of signs, images, and symbolic representations in media.

Research Setting and Data Sources

The research was conducted within the digital ecosystem of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia. Three official platforms were selected as primary data sources due to their central role in disseminating GERMAS content, including Instagram (@kemenkes_ri), where visual posters, infographics, reels, and campaign hashtags are featured. YouTube (Kemenkes RI channel) promotional videos, animations, and public service announcements. Official website (kemkes.go.id) articles, policy statements, and campaign materials. The study was conducted over

a three-month period, from August to October 2025. This duration provided adequate exposure to the campaign cycle and ensured the collection of a diverse set of digital artefacts.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants consisted of 10 individuals from vulnerable health-risk communities, including six urban adolescents (aged 15–21), three homemakers, and one informal worker. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants whose demographic characteristics aligned with the primary target audience of GERMAS. The selection prioritised individuals who actively use digital media and are regularly exposed to online health information and campaigns. This sampling ensured rich, relevant, and contextualised interpretations of how campaign messages are perceived and internalized.

Data Collection Methods

Three main data collection techniques were utilized: Digital Documentation. The researcher collected and archived all relevant GERMAS-related digital materials, including posters, video content, textual captions, hashtags, and user engagement metrics. This documentation served as the corpus for semiotic and representational analysis. In-Depth Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to explore: their interpretations of GERMAS content, personal experiences related to healthy living, perceived gaps between campaign imagery and real-life conditions, and the influence of digital aesthetics on their attitudes and behaviors. Interviews were conducted online through WhatsApp or Zoom, with each session lasting 30–45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Online Observations. The researcher observed interactions within the comment sections of the campaign posts, tracking trends in audience reactions, patterns of engagement (likes, shares, reposts), and sentiment markers. This technique provided insights into the discursive dynamics of digital audiences.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, as outlined by [Braun and Clarke, \(2006\)](#), which consisted of six systematic steps: familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Coding focused on identifying patterns related to: symbolic constructions of a “healthy body,” visual narratives of modernity and ideal lifestyles, contradictions between representation and lived experience, and indicators of simulation and hyperreality. Jean Baudrillard’s concepts of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality provided the analytical lens for interpreting how digital images can detach from socio-material realities and produce idealised representations that are consumed by the public.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed Triangulation of data sources (visual documents, interviews, and digital observations) and Peer debriefing through consultation with experts in communication studies and public health. Member checking by validating interpretations with selected informants. Thick description to ensure transferability to similar digital health campaign contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before the commencement of data collection. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing all personal identifiers. Data storage followed secure digital protocols.

RESULT

The results of this study present a comprehensive overview of how teenagers and homemakers perceive and interpret the healthy lifestyle imagery embedded within the GERMAS

digital campaign. Drawing from in-depth interviews, digital content observations, and documented campaign materials, the findings highlight both the strengths and limitations of the campaign's visual and narrative strategies. While most informants were familiar with GERMAS messages circulated through Instagram and YouTube, their responses reveal a noticeable gap between the idealized representations of healthy living showcased in the media and the realities of their everyday lives. The following subsections detail these perceptions, emotional responses, and the broader implications for how digital health campaigns construct and communicate the meaning of a "healthy lifestyle."

Table 1. Summary of Research Results

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence from Informants	Implications
Exposure to the GERMAS Campaign	Most informants (teenagers & housewives) have seen GERMAS content on Instagram and YouTube.	Recognition of hashtags such as <i>#Gerakan30Menit</i> and <i>#KerenDimakan</i> .	Digital platforms effectively reach the intended audience.
Perception of Healthy Lifestyle Imagery	Campaign visuals are visually appealing but perceived as unrealistic and idealised.	"Too perfect... the people are slim, food is colourful... but at home we eat whatever is available."	Visual representation creates a gap between ideal and actual living conditions.
Relevance to Daily Life	Content is viewed as inspirational, but it is not easily applicable due to economic and social constraints.	Difficulty buying fruits daily; challenges in encouraging children to eat vegetables.	A healthy lifestyle appears "expensive" or impractical for lower-middle-income groups.
Motivation and Engagement	Engagement exists but is short-lived; challenges are not sustained over time.	Participants joined <i>30 Minutes Movement</i> but later stopped due to a lack of social support.	The campaign lacks mechanisms to sustain real behavioral change.
Symbolic Consumption of 'Healthy Image'	A healthy lifestyle becomes a symbolic identity rather than a real practice.	Teenagers like watching the content, but do not adopt it.	Shows the emergence of <i>hyperreality</i> (Baudrillard): symbols consumed more than practices.
Emotional and Practical Appeal	Teenagers enjoy entertaining content; homemakers prefer practical tips.	Need for cheap recipes, simple home exercises, and community-based support.	Suggests the need for more contextual and participatory communication strategies.

The findings indicate that the GERMAS digital campaign successfully attracts attention through visually appealing and modern content. However, the constructed imagery of a "healthy lifestyle" often reflects an idealized scenario that does not align with the everyday realities of the target audience, particularly teenagers and housewives from lower to middle-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Perception Reality Gap. Informants consistently described the campaign visuals as aesthetically pleasing, colourful, and inspirational, yet distant from real life. This confirms that the digital portrayal of health tends to create an ideal standard of healthy food, perfect body shapes, and neat environments, which many participants found difficult to achieve. This aligns with Baudrillard's concept of simulation, where symbols replace the complexity of real-life health struggles, such as hyperreality and Symbolic Consumption. Interview data show that healthy lifestyle imagery is consumed symbolically, particularly among teenagers. They enjoy watching

GERMAS content because it is visually entertaining, trendy, and associated with online self-image. However, this consumption rarely translates into behavioral change. The concept of a “healthy lifestyle” becomes a hyperreal symbol, more visible and influential than actual health practices.

Practical Barriers Reduce Adoption. Housewives emphasized the difficulty in implementing healthy habits due to a limited budget for fruits and vegetables, a lack of time, and uncooperative family members. This highlights the economic and structural barriers that limit the campaign’s practical effectiveness in the short term. Digital challenges, such as the “30 Minutes Movement,” initially attracted interest, but motivation decreased over time. This suggests that digital campaigns can spark initial enthusiasm but lack sustained social or community reinforcement. A more continuous support system, such as digital communities or supervised online programs, may help maintain engagement. Informants prefer content that is simple, affordable, applicable to daily routines, and emotionally engaging. This suggests that future campaigns must move beyond aesthetic visuals toward real-life contextualization.

The GERMAS digital campaign constructs an idealized image of healthy living that functions more as a symbolic representation than a reflection of reality. Although visually appealing, the campaign often falls into the domain of hyperreality, where the representation of health becomes more dominant than authentic health practices. To enhance effectiveness, campaigns must be contextual (relevant to socioeconomic realities), participatory (involving communities), and supportive (providing ongoing guidance and support). Such improvements would enable GERMAS not only to create a visual impact but also to foster meaningful behavioral change.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the digital GERMAS campaign constructs an appealing and modern image of healthy living. Yet, this representation does not fully align with the daily realities experienced by the target audience. Through Baudrillard’s lens of simulation and simulacra, the digital messages disseminated by the Ministry of Health demonstrate tendencies toward producing an idealized version of health, one that is visually attractive, socially desirable, and symbolically powerful, but often detached from the practical challenges faced by communities, particularly adolescents and homemakers. First, the results highlight that adolescents respond positively to the aesthetic features of the GERMAS campaign (Levin *et al.*, 2025).

Visually engaging graphics, bright colours, relatable language, and the involvement of influencers effectively capture their attention (Rodríguez-Barniol, Pujol-Busquets, 2024). However, their engagement tends to be superficial. Most adolescents admitted that they interacted with the content because it “looked cool” or resonated with popular social media trends, rather than being motivated by health awareness. This aligns directly with Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, in which the symbol of healthy living becomes more important and more “real” than the actual practice of healthy living itself. In this case, adolescents may participate in GERMAS challenges or share campaign content to curate an image of themselves as active, disciplined, and health-conscious, even if their real behaviors do not reflect these values (López-Carril *et al.*, 2025). This symbolic participation reinforces the idea that social media encourages performative rather than substantive actions. The GERMAS campaign, by relying heavily on polished visuals and aspirational narratives, inadvertently contributes to this performative culture. As a result, health becomes a consumable aesthetic rather than a practiced behavior. Social media often prioritises visual engagement over educational depth, thereby strengthening the argument that

digital campaigns may reproduce symbolic representations rather than foster genuine behavioural change (González-Salgado *et al.*, 2025).

Second, the perspectives of homemakers illustrate another dimension of dissonance between representation and reality. Although many appreciate the informational value of GERMAS content, particularly regarding nutrition and disease prevention, they perceive the portrayed lifestyle as inaccessible (D'Andrea *et al.*, 2025). Limited household budgets, difficulty encouraging children to adopt healthy eating habits, and a lack of supportive environments are among the constraints that hinder actual implementation. In their view, the campaign romanticizes healthy living by showcasing ideal families, abundant access to fresh foods, and harmonious routines that do not reflect socio-economic constraints. This contrast highlights the campaign's inadequate foundation in the lived experiences of its target audience (Jung and Cho, 2025).

In Baudrillard's terms, the digital GERMAS materials function as simulacra images of health that pretend to represent reality but are detached from real-life complexity. The healthy meals displayed are vibrant and neatly arranged; the exercise routines are depicted in clean environments with coordinated outfits; and the families portrayed are invariably cheerful and cooperative (Ullberg *et al.*, 2024). The constructed imagery suggests that healthy living is simple and universally attainable, when in fact structural, economic, and cultural barriers significantly shape health behaviors. As a result, the campaign risks alienating segments of society who may view the portrayed lifestyle as irrelevant or unachievable (González-Serrano *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the gap between symbolic health and practiced health identified in this study echoes the broader critique of digital health communication strategies (Lin *et al.*, 2025). Campaigns that rely predominantly on visual persuasion may succeed in raising awareness but fail to enable action. Awareness alone does not translate to behavior change without contextualized guidance, community support, and structural facilitation (LaRose *et al.*, 2021). Participants in this study expressed a desire for more practical, context-sensitive resources such as affordable recipes, realistic exercise recommendations, and interactive community-based initiatives. This suggests that digital campaigns should shift from a one-directional persuasion model to a participatory communication approach that acknowledges and addresses real-life constraints (Jebero *et al.*, 2025).

Another critical finding concerns emotional engagement. Although adolescents found the content entertaining and homemakers considered it informative, neither group experienced strong emotional motivation to alter their routines. Emotional resonance is crucial in behavior change communication; without it, messages remain cognitively processed but not behaviorally internalized. The campaign's focus on aesthetics may therefore undermine its potential to generate meaningful personal connections or sustained behavioral commitment. Overall, the discussion suggests that the GERMAS digital campaign is effective as a tool for visibility and symbolic persuasion, but falls short as a transformative health promotion strategy. Its reliance on idealized imagery produces a hyperreal version of healthy living that is visually appealing yet detached from socio-economic realities. To enhance its impact, the campaign must incorporate culturally grounded storytelling, participatory engagement mechanisms, and content that reflects diverse lived experiences. By doing so, it can transition from merely generating impressions to fostering genuine behavioural change.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the digital GERMAS campaign successfully raises public awareness and builds an appealing symbolic image of healthy living; however, this constructed image tends to be idealized and often disconnected from the daily realities of

vulnerable groups such as adolescents and homemakers. The campaign's firm reliance on visual aesthetics and ideal representations contributes to the formation of hyperreality, where the image of healthy living becomes more influential than authentic behavioral practice. As a result, healthy lifestyles are frequently perceived as aspirational symbols rather than attainable routines, limiting the campaign's potential to drive meaningful behavioral change.

To strengthen its effectiveness, the GERMAS digital campaign should integrate more context-based communication strategies that reflect the socio-economic diversity of its audiences. Practical and accessible content, such as low-cost healthy recipes, simple home-based exercise guides, and interactive online communities, may enhance engagement and support real behavior change. Additionally, adopting a participatory approach encouraging dialogue, feedback, and user-generated content can bridge the gap between symbolic representation and everyday reality, ensuring that digital health promotions not only look appealing but also produce sustainable, real-world health improvements.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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