



Korean Beauty in International Relations: From Neoliberalism to Soft Masculinity

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ABSTRACT

This research wants to explain the Korean Beauty phenomenon from the perspective of International Relations, especially neoliberalism. The Korean Beauty phenomenon as part of the Korean Wave is often seen from the perspective of cultural or media studies. Meanwhile, in International Relations, many people discuss the Korean Wave and other derivative cultural products from the perspective of public diplomacy or soft power. This study aims to look at Korean Beauty from the perspective of neoliberalism as an approach in International Relations and the concept of soft masculinity that upholds the values of globalization, as well as 're-locating' the Korean Wave, in this case especially Korean Beauty, as part of the capitalization and commercialization of culture which leads to an increase in economy.

Keywords: *globalization, neoliberalism, capitalism, Korean Beauty*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have paid attention to this issue since the last few years researching and enjoying South Korean cultural products through the Korean Wave. Since participating in forum-based online communities regarding skin care, researchers have found that products from Korea are very popular. Researchers also found that there were certain trends from Korea that were followed enthusiastically by forum members, for example when there was a trend for glowing skin and glass skin. Even though the trends originating from Korea are not always suitable for Indonesia's climate conditions, fans always look forward to and look forward to anything that comes from K-Beauty. Long before, the term skincare and the stages of skincare have now become familiar terms in Indonesia, even though the term which is a trend in using skin care products also comes from Korea. Kwon's research discusses that ten skincare steps were popularized in Korea. This makes researchers want to know how K-Beauty affects women in Indonesia. Moreover, the beauty standards being discussed are no longer focused solely on western-looking, but rather come from the Ginseng Country. From head to toe, products used, how to use them, and so on, beauty trends from South Korea are able to grab the attention of consumers, including in Indonesia.

The use of brand ambassadors from South Korea by local products from Indonesia strengthens the researchers' assumptions. For example, Kim Seon Ho who is contracted by Everwhite, Song Jong Ki by Scarlett Whitening, Han So Hee by Somethinc, and Sehun



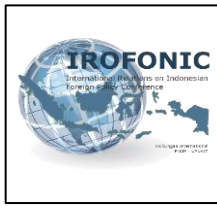
EXO who is contracted by Whitelab, and others. To this day, the list continues to grow, as many Korean faces are contracted to become brand ambassadors for these beauty products. What's impressive is that the faces on these advertisements are not limited to women, but also men.

Apart from that, researchers are also interested in the various stigmas in Indonesia that still uphold certain beauty standards, especially with white skin or light skin being the same as 'beautiful'. The stigma attached to white skin being beautiful, clean and well-groomed also has the same values as the beauty standards of South Korean women, which show skin that is as white as milk. Therefore, this white stigma is further strengthened by K-Beauty. It's not surprising that brightening products are products that are often released by skincare manufacturers. Thus, there is a connection between Indonesian women's perception of beauty and also K-Beauty which presents the same thing. This makes K-beauty easily accepted and adopted by local skincare brand manufacturers (Oktaviani, 2022). Researchers are becoming more interested in this topic because they believe that the stigmatized situation within society should not be taken for granted. This implies that there is a social construction that also makes it easy for Indonesians to accept culture from outside of themselves.

Agustina and Lukman's research states that in Indonesia, which prioritizes halal products, there is a hybridization between halal certification and the K Beauty trend, so it can be said that there is cultural acceptance of these two elements, namely 'Korean Beauty' and 'Halal Certification'. However, what is interesting is that if we look further, the trend is carried out by local brands to attract potential buyers. An example is an advertisement from a well-known brand from the Paragon Company, Wardah, which is similar to Korean skincare advertisements where it convinces beautiful women that they are white, glowing, and have smooth faces like Korean stars (Agustina & Lukman, 2017).

Korean Beauty (K-Beauty) which came along with the Korean Wave has undeniably brought a new standard of beauty trend that has never existed before. A slim face, clean skin without blemishes, eyes with aegyo-sal or under-eye folds like children, and eyes with folds on the eyelids. For men too, Korean Beauty shows a soft masculinity value that is different from Western masculinity. If in the past men were only depicted as tall and handsome, men in South Korea, especially those who work as public figures, are depicted as taking good care of their faces, bodies, and hair, wearing makeup and are required to appear perfect like women. Even for product marketing strategies or advertisements based on beauty products that were previously dominated by women, now male idols are also taking part.

In a study discussing Colorism that leads to skin color stratification (Oktaviani, 2022), this beauty standard according to researchers, is no longer just about discourse on skin color as in previous studies, but goes beyond that. However, similarities in terms of culture and proximity as both from the 'East' make South Korean culture easy to enter and be accepted by Indonesian society (Said, 2016). Regardless of the issue of cultural infiltration, this study wants to reaffirm that Neoliberalism considers the market to be



very important. The Korean Beauty phenomenon as part of the Korean Wave is often viewed from the perspective of cultural or media studies. Meanwhile, in IR, many discuss the Korean Wave and other derivative cultural products from the perspective of public diplomacy or soft power. This study wants to see Korean Beauty from the perspective of Neoliberalism as one of the approaches in International Relations that upholds the values of globalization, and 're-situates' the Korean Wave in this case, especially Korean Beauty, as part of the capitalization and commercialization of culture that leads to economic growth.

The researcher assumes that economic gain is actually still the main goal of soft power that wins the hearts and minds of the people. Both women (who are always demanded to be perfect) and men (who are portrayed as figures with soft masculinity), both are Markets. Insecurity or feelings of discomfort and hatred with one's own body will always be presented by advertisements and as one of the strategies for selling products. Previously, researchers have conducted research on the Korean Wave entitled: Korean Wave (Hallyu) and Youth Perceptions in Indonesia: The Role of South Korean Media and Public Diplomacy published by the *Insignia Journal of International Relations* Vol 8 No 1 2021. In this study, researchers conducted FGDs with students who like the Korean Wave, using qualitative methods. Interestingly, in this study, researchers also found that there was an influence of age and maturity of thinking of International Relations students in responding to the Korean Wave phenomenon (Pramadya & Oktaviani, 2021).

Lee's dissertation paper states that women's choices and views on beauty are derived from their geopolitics. The view of beauty today is rooted in a deep history of neocolonialism and is produced in a complex discourse, namely the relationship between culture, medicine, tourism, and other elements in it. The rapid and massive development of the Korean Wave also pushed the idea of beauty standards and self-care management to a different level, namely with the new 'Korean Dream', namely undergoing plastic surgery in South Korea. This plastic surgery has increased rapidly 5 times, from 2007 which was only 20,000, to 100,000 (Lee, 2012). In another study, in 2011 it was recorded that 650,000 plastic surgeries were performed in South Korea. This is because of the belief in Korea that physical is everything or what we know as 'beauty privilege' to be able to succeed in various areas of life (Hamdon & Timur, 2021).

Halim and Kiatkawsin's research reveals how the relationship between the Korean entertainment world, celebrity worship, brand awareness affects the purchase of Korean products and the desire to visit Korea. From around 327 samples of Indonesian women, it was found that there is indeed a relationship between emotional preference variables towards the Korean entertainment industry and celebrities with the purchase of Korean beauty products and the desire to come directly to Korea (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021). Quantitative research conducted by Shalehah et al on repeat purchases of K-Beauty products in Indonesia revealed that, questionnaires from 411 samples, from a Business science perspective, explored various factors that influence consumers to repurchase K-Beauty products in terms of product characteristics. The results of this study, various variables that influence repeat purchases of the brand include, brand



name, product quality, product design, promotion, and loyalty to a particular brand that has a significant factor by customers to make repeat purchases in the future. Among all factors, the most important factor is customer loyalty to the product. If customers are loyal to a particular brand, then they will repurchase products from that brand and no longer care about other brands. Because this loyalty is the strongest variable, this study suggests that K-Beauty brands improve other variables, such as building brands, improving product quality, maximizing promotions, so that customer loyalty to the brand will arise (Shalehah et al, 2019).

Kwon researched the rituals and myths related to skincare routines, especially Korean skincare. The results that Korean skincare always wants are hydrated, smooth, blemish-free, and acne-free skin, or in terms popularized by Korean skincare: glass skin, flawless, dewy skin. To achieve this skin condition, Korean skincare recommends 10 steps of Korean skincare consisting of facial cleanser, exfoliation, and applying products to moisturize the face from toner, ampoule, serum, moisturizer, sheet mask, to sunscreen in the morning and mask at night (Kwon, 2018). The study conducted by Fong sought to find positive associations between Korean beauty standards and self-image, self-confidence and life satisfaction levels, from the perspective of Asian Americans. Out of 178 people, there was a correlation between the various variables mentioned earlier (Fong, 2021).

In this study, Besman et al identified whether there was a change in beauty standards due to the infiltration of the Korean Wave with the research location in Bandung City, Indonesia. Primary data were obtained by conducting a survey in June 2017. A set of questionnaires was developed to collect respondents' beauty values. This questionnaire represents the pattern of information received by respondents. Anatomical cuts of the face from magazine covers were also asked in the questionnaire as a parameter of the beauty category. The results of this work indicate that there is no influence of the infiltration of Korean Wave culture in the mass media on the value of beauty standards for people in Bandung City. Beauty standards for people in Bandung City are still heavily influenced by western culture, which is characterized by a flat nose, round eyes and an oval face.

Ultimately, this study attempts to “re-locate” the Korean Wave (Hallyu), especially K-Beauty, in the context of commercialization and cultural capitalization. It shows that Korean pop culture serves not only as a means of cultural expression, but also as a significant economic instrument. This commercialization has had a major economic impact through the expansion of the Korean beauty industry globally, and this study seeks to show how these cultural aspects support South Korea’s economic growth.

METHODS

This study uses qualitative methods using critical discourse analysis to see how the media, the Korean beauty industry, and other global actors depict "soft masculinity" in the context of international relations. This study also analyzes advertisements, Korean



dramas, and beauty promotion campaigns that are popular globally. The focus of this study is on the Hallyu (Korean Wave) phenomenon that spreads softer masculine beauty standards, and how this is connected to South Korea's influence in cultural diplomacy by taking examples of Korean actors, singers, and influencers who can be used as subjects of analysis. In this study, researchers also conducted FGDs with International Relations students who had concerns about the Korean Wave in responding to the current Korean Wave phenomenon. In the end, the study explains how the concept of Korean beauty impacts South Korea's gender perception and soft power on the international stage, which ultimately brings great economic opportunities for the country.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Neoliberalism

Neoliberals view globalization based on classical liberal arguments that view the international economic process as a harmonious process, namely free trade that is able to spread wealth and improve the quality of life of all parties involved in it. This will also have an impact on politics (spillover effect) through the spread of liberal democratic institutions where freedom, liberty, and justice for all will be guaranteed because the people hold political power. This is the reason classical liberals believe that the economic process must drive the political process. In the era of globalization, classical liberal principles become the neoliberal expression of "globalization", namely three processes that occur simultaneously and for the good of humanity: 1. Economic liberalization (such as free trade. 2. Political democratization (power to the people). 3. Cultural universalization (some people call it "Americanization").

Neoliberals define "globalization" as the international dissemination of liberal institutions, practices, and economic, political, and cultural processes (Weber, 2021). The world as we know it now is the result of the three factors mentioned above, which have penetrated national borders to make it simple for one nation to export commodities or services to another. Due to America's victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War, it was a pioneer in spreading the universal values that we hold dear today. This is why the point of cultural universalization that some refer to as "Americanization" or even "McDonaldization" was actually present at the time.

Soft Masculinity

The construction of soft masculinity is a phenomenon spreading in Pan-East Asia that depicts an androgynous physique, with a V-shaped chin face, styled hair, fair skin and a slim body, use of fashion and makeup, and a gentle and adorable personality. In Japan it is called a beautiful boy, in China it is called little fresh meat, while in South Korea it is called a Flower-like boy (Gammon, 2024). The acceptance of this soft masculinity is mainly by women, which has an impact on the rise of a consumer culture that encourages self-care for men (Gammon 2024). The problem is that this celebration of



soft masculinity is on the one hand favored but also opposed because it is a threat to the established mainstream standards of masculinity.

There needs to be further research that is broader and more in-depth, looking at how perceptions of Korean Beauty and Soft Masculinity are accepted by society with qualitative research to find out clear reasons for the acceptance of this culture. Previously, there was a study that discussed Soft Masculinity in Riau, one of the provinces in Indonesia (Afli & Olivia, 2023). The public opinion in the research locus remains that what male idols do, such as makeup and skincare, is for entertainment or stage purposes exclusively, rather than portraying the everyday manly nature of men, as the 'values that should be' suggest. Since they are merely enthusiasts or admirers and do not need to apply or adopt soft masculinity in their everyday lives, women who are idol fans do not find soft masculinity offensive. Gender observers, however, believe that the masculinity in issue must not equate to toxic masculinity, which includes the patriarchal traits that have been associated with it thus far, such as being rough, tough, aggressive, furious, jealous, and so on. This research will be interesting considering that Indonesian society as a society with a strong Eastern culture still sees 'soft' and 'masculine' itself as something contradictory. The majority Muslim Indonesian society also firmly opposes 'men who look like women'. For Indonesian society, it is still very taboo to discuss men and women outside the binary opposition that follows.

Neoliberalism in K-Beauty Industries

Aside from our enthusiasm for the extremely fast Korean Wave, we return to the main argument, which is South Korea's rapid and advanced economic progress. The way that globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism interact with the South Korean beauty (K-Beauty) business may be observed in the way that these economic theories affect the success and global expansion of K-Beauty brands. Neoliberalism encourages deregulation and free markets, which makes it easier for K-Beauty brands to penetrate foreign markets. Free trade policies supported by neoliberalism enable the import and sale of South Korean beauty items in nations with low levels of regulation and substantial tariff constraints.

Under the neoliberal framework, market competition and privatization have allowed K-Beauty enterprises to expand quickly. Businesses that compete in both domestic and international markets include Innisfree, Etude House, Laneige, and Sulwhasoo. They constantly innovate in product and marketing to cater to a variety of market needs. Additionally, consumerism—in which consumer preferences and trends control markets—is encouraged by neoliberalism. K-Beauty has been effective in capitalizing on international trends like "glass skin" and "skincare minimalism," drawing customers from all over the world to buy Korean goods presented as cutting-edge beauty solutions.

Worldwide cultural connections brought up by globalization have made it possible for K-Beauty to spread quickly through a variety of media, particularly Hallyu or the Korean Wave, which consists of Korean music (K-Pop), dramas (K-Drama), and lifestyle. One of



the main ways that Korean beauty products are introduced to the world is through popular culture in Korea. Globalization has allowed K-Beauty products to reach markets across the world, including those in Asia, Europe, North America, and even Africa. International customers can easily obtain K-Beauty products through specialist websites like YesStyle and Soko Glam and global e-commerce giants like Amazon and eBay.

The global dissemination of Korean beauty trends is largely caused by social media. Global demand for K-Beauty products is generated by influencers and beauty vloggers from diverse nations who market the items to their millions of followers. This expedites the proliferation and assimilation of Korean cosmetic items across global markets. K-Beauty sells products that promise not only beauty but also a "lifestyle" and image connected with Korean celebrities and culture, capitalizing on the commodity of beauty as a consumer need, a trend driven by market capitalism. K-Beauty aggressively taps on breakthroughs and trends that appeal to customers seeking for novel approaches to beauty, like skincare products with a natural base. K-Beauty businesses are driven by market capitalism to constantly innovate and develop new items in response to consumer demand.

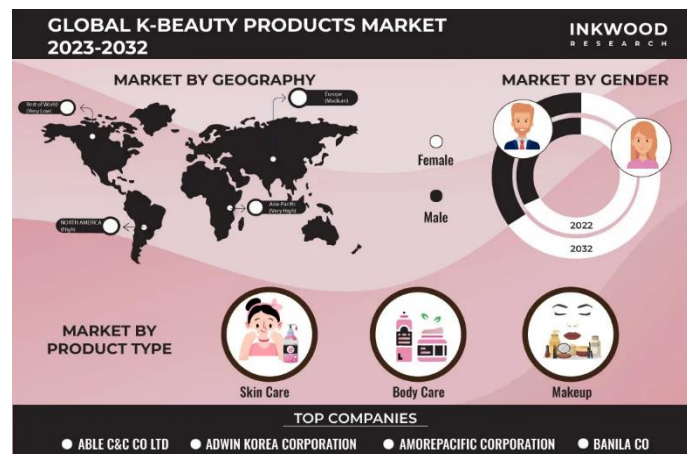
According to a study on Korean Beauty in Riau, fans are aware that Korean Pop stars' flawless looks and often hyperrealistic personas are merely a part of the stage world (Afli & Olivia, 2023). Put another way, this hyperreality will always be emphasized to demonstrate that people can have such flawless physical appearances, even when they are either the product of plastic surgery or makeup. In actuality, though, this draws in fans. Remember that plastic surgery is currently one of the growing medical tourism and tourist industries in South Korea. The subconscious will unintentionally harbor insecurities, which will promote the selling of goods meant to cure, eradicate, or disguise any number of these "deficiencies."

Researchers found that the obsession with beauty according to Korean standards contributed 57.6 percent to dissatisfaction with self-image and body image in a quantitative study of 205 teenagers. This, in turn, led to 3.1 percent of the participants' purchasing behavior for skincare products. Not surprisingly, 42.4 percent of respondents preferred Korean skincare products as their product (Natasya et al, 2024). South Korea's brand image was determined to be highly important and positive in relation to purchase interest in a quantitative study conducted by Rahmawati and Ahsan. Because of the new and unique developments in their products, respondents were interested in buying products from South Korea. Serum was the most popular product category, and Some By Mi and Nature Republic were the most well-liked brands. However, other factors, such as the impact of celebrity endorsers, place of origin, and electronic word-of-mouth (recommendations, suggestions, and comments on social media), had no effect on the desire to buy South Korean beauty goods (Rahmawati & Ahsan, 2021).

In particular, the growth of K-Beauty in Indonesia, has made the South Korean government highly aware of the economic potential that arises from the Korean Wave. According to Fadhilah and Jatmika's research, the South Korean government is

facilitating a rise in Korean beauty product exports, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. To boost South Korean beauty product exports to Indonesia, one strategy is to expedite the ratification of IK-CEPA. With the intention of lowering tariff barriers between the two nations, the Indonesia-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement is known by its acronym, IK-CEPA. In paragraph 22, soap and cosmetic products are one of the items where the Indonesian government has raised import tax rates since 2018.

Following the ratification of IK-CEPA, these imported goods will no longer be subject to tariffs, allowing for lower prices and more competitive pricing with other goods on the Indonesian market (Fadhilah & Jatmika, 2022). Additionally, buying K-Beauty goods isn't the same as simply buying other products. Due to the fact that consumers are truly treated to five senses, shopping is an experience as much as a place to purchase goods. Due to the influence of Korean culture, cutting-edge skincare trends, and effective international marketing, sales of Korean beauty (K-Beauty) products have increased dramatically in a number of nations in recent years. The market for K-Beauty is predicted to be valued at USD 12.39 billion globally in 2023 and increase at a compound yearly growth rate (CAGR) of 8.4% to reach USD 23.62 billion by 2032. North America and Asia Pacific are two regions that lead the way in K-Beauty product sales. North America's market share is expected to be approximately 35% in 2022, with Asia Pacific expected to grow at the quickest rate, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.6% from 2023 to 2030. The growing consumer awareness of skincare is also driving up demand in the European market, particularly in Germany and the United Kingdom.



Picture 1. Global K-Beauty Products Market 2023-2032

Source: <https://www.inkwoodresearch.com/reports/k-beauty-products-market/>

The picture above explained that the global K-beauty products market was valued at \$11643.01 million in 2022 and is expected to reach \$29285.70 million by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 9.71% during the forecast period 2023-2032. Due to their cutting-edge ingredients, distinctive packaging, and focus on skin health, K-beauty products have garnered global attention. They also opt for more traditional, healthier approaches to beauty as they become more selective in their lifestyle decisions. This has expanded the



global market for K-beauty products and raised the demand for organic and natural components in cosmetic & personal care products. One of the main factors driving the sales of K-Beauty products is the trend of veganism and the demand for natural and organic ingredients. Products such as fermented skincare and herbal components are gaining popularity, especially in markets such as India and the United States. In addition, online sales channels are also growing rapidly, with a projected increase of 11.2% CAGR until 2030, especially in emerging markets such as China and India, where e-commerce is a major driving force. With continuous innovation and adaptation to global trends, K-Beauty products continue to expand their market in various parts of the world.

Capitalism and the Commodification of Soft Masculinity in K-Beauty

In contrast to traditional masculinity, which is frequently linked to physical power, dominance, and aggressiveness, soft masculinity is the idea of a softer and gentler kind of masculinity. Soft masculinity is important in creating new standards of attractiveness for men in the context of K-attractiveness (South Korean beauty products), which in turn affects the men's beauty product market in different nations. A softer masculinity that prioritizes appearance, self-care, and a more androgynous aesthetic is reflected in soft masculinity. This idea demonstrates that men can maintain their masculinity without being viewed as having lost it by taking care of their skin, applying cosmetics, and being conscious of how they look.

Soft masculinity has gained popularity in South Korea thanks to K-Drama and K-Pop performers, who frequently display smooth skin, well-groomed hair, and heavy makeup applications. Instead than displaying the harsh notion of traditional Western masculinity, this photograph exudes refinement, tranquility, and self-care. Men in South Korea can participate in skincare and cosmetics without facing significant societal shame thanks to soft masculinity. This gives K-Beauty the chance to create and promote goods exclusively for guys, like BB creams, cleansers, moisturizers, and light makeup items that were previously thought to be for women alone. The market that K-Beauty targets has expanded due to the rise of soft masculinity. In South Korea and around the world, the beauty industry is starting to recognize males as a rising market category. Focusing on skincare, haircare, and even makeup, several well-known Korean beauty firms are beginning to launch product lines just for men.

The export of Korean culture through Hallyu (Korean Wave) has played a major role in spreading the image of soft masculinity around the world. K-Pop stars such as BTS, EXO, SEVENTEEN, and G-Dragon project a soft image, with flawless skin, minimal makeup, and stylish clothing styles. Their popularity has changed the way the global community views masculinity, especially among international fans. Soft masculinity has facilitated the acceptance of men's beauty products in the international market. In countries such as Japan, China, the United States, and even Europe, the concept of self-care for men is increasingly accepted. Many men around the world have started using K-Beauty products for skin care, following the standards brought by Korean soft masculinity.



Although Korean soft masculinity is widely accepted in many countries, adaptation is still needed. In the Western market, the concept of traditional masculinity is still strong, so K-Beauty products are often marketed with an approach that emphasizes skin care as "skin health" or "grooming" rather than "beauty". This is done to avoid the negative stigma associated with the use of beauty products by men. The concept of soft masculinity has been successfully capitalized on by the K-Beauty industry to sell products to men. Men who want to achieve the “ideal” look of K-Pop stars buy a variety of skincare and beauty products, from facial cleansers to BB creams. K-Beauty companies see this as an opportunity to develop products that can meet the needs of the growing male market.

K-Beauty marketing techniques heavily rely on social media. Products are displayed and men's skincare instructions are offered on social media sites including YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Consumers are educated on daily beauty routines by male celebrities who on social media represent soft masculinity, such as cleansing and the application of light makeup like cushion foundations and BB creams. Multipurpose goods are a common feature of K-cosmetic businesses, as they cater to male consumers who might not be accustomed to intricate cosmetic regimens. Men who want a simple way to take care of their skincare without using numerous products are drawn to products like BB creams or tinted moisturizers that serve both skincare and makeup purposes (giving them all-around UV protection, hydration, and even skin tone in one).

Many K-Beauty businesses modify their product packaging to appeal to male consumers who might be hesitant to purchase beauty goods, even though the concept of soft masculinity is emphasized. Men's beauty products are more likely than women's to be packaged in stark, dark colors like black or gray, and in "masculine"-looking bottles. Global market capitalism is largely responsible for the global diffusion of men's grooming trends with Korean influences. Here, soft masculinity has been a crucial factor in redefining the necessity for men to take care of their looks, something that was unacceptable in many societies before. Global sales of men's beauty products have also increased as a result. In many nations, the concept of masculinity has shifted due to soft masculinity. In Western countries, which have traditionally had more rigid stereotypes of masculinity, men are starting to open up to the idea that grooming and beauty are not “unmasculine.” This has made it easier for the market for men's beauty products to expand in the area.

Soft masculinity has contributed to the normalization of men's skincare in nations including the US, Thailand, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Cleansers, toners, serums, and sunscreens are among the skincare products that males in these nations are using more often than women did previously. In many different nations, soft masculinity has also developed to fit in with the cultural standards. Certain areas continue to blend this gentle masculinity with more conventional masculinity, resulting in a distinctive cultural fusion.



In Western countries, the concept of soft masculinity in K-Beauty has been adapted by emphasizing self-care as part of skin health and grooming. Rather than using the term “beauty,” products such as facial moisturizers, cleansers, and BB creams are marketed as part of a man’s grooming routine. Brands like Dr. Jart+ and Sulwhasoo emphasize skin health benefits such as hydration and protection from pollution, which are more acceptable to Western male consumers. While traditional masculinity still holds strong in some segments of the Western market, the influence of Korean popular culture through K-Pop and K-Drama has introduced a softer alternative to masculinity. Many men in the United States and Europe are now adopting K-Beauty products as part of their daily routines, following a trend started by Korean celebrities and influencers. However, there is still resistance to makeup for men, so brands are focusing more on skincare products.

In Japan and China, the Korean concept of soft masculinity was relatively easy to accept due to cultural similarities in grooming and male beauty standards. In both countries, men taking care of their skin and appearance is more socially acceptable than in Western countries. The K-Beauty industry adapted with marketing strategies that emphasize a clean, youthful, and refined aesthetic, which is in line with local beauty ideals. In addition to K-Pop, Japan has its own pop culture influences such as J-Pop and anime, while China has actors in domestic films and dramas who also promote an image of soft masculinity. K-Beauty brands used this opportunity to partner with local celebrities and introduce products that suit local consumer preferences. Products such as sheet masks, moisturizers, and serums have become very popular among young men in Japan and China.

In Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, the adaptation of K-Beauty products involved adjusting formulas to suit tropical climates. Due to the hot and humid weather, many K-Beauty products are designed for oily or combination skin, which tends to be prone to acne and shine. Products with lightweight ingredients such as gel moisturizers and water-based sunscreens are popular among men. In Southeast Asia, social media influencer marketing strategies have also been very effective. Male influencers who promote an image of soft masculinity, such as men with smooth, flawless skin, use platforms like Instagram and YouTube to introduce simpler yet effective skincare routines for men. This marketing is often linked to Korean pop culture, which is already very popular among young people in the region.

In the Middle East, the concept of soft masculinity is adapted to take into account local social and religious norms. K-Beauty products for men in the region are often marketed with a focus on healthy, natural skincare, avoiding associations with makeup or beauty that may be considered controversial. K-Beauty products introduced to the Middle East market tend to emphasize the use of natural and halal ingredients, which are more in line with local consumer preferences. Marketing campaigns highlight the benefits of healthy skin and hygiene, and present soft masculinity as part of self-care that does not conflict with traditional masculinity norms in the region.



However, like female beauty standards, soft masculinity has also been criticized for creating new beauty standards that can be burdensome for men. The need to have perfect skin or conform to the image of K-Pop celebrities can put pressure on men to purchase beauty products, which can have an impact on their mental health. The soft masculinity promoted by the K-Beauty industry often focuses on a very specific image—smooth, clear, and flawless skin—which can create a narrow standard of beauty for men. This can make men feel pressured to conform to these standards, even though beauty is supposed to be inclusive and diverse. Soft masculinity in K-Beauty has brought about a major shift in the way men view grooming and beauty, both in South Korea and in other countries. The concept leverages the power of Hallyu and globalization to introduce a more refined and flexible masculinity that is globally acceptable. The K-Beauty industry has successfully capitalized on this trend to create a new, thriving market among men. However, while soft masculinity offers a more inclusive alternative to masculinity, the concept also faces criticism regarding narrow beauty standards and the potential for over-commercialization.

CONCLUSION

Globalization has facilitated the quick dissemination of K-Beauty through a variety of media, most notably Hallyu or the Korean Wave, which encompasses Korean music (K-Pop), dramas (K-Drama), and lifestyle. The main way that Korean beauty products are introduced to the world is through popular culture in Korea. Globalization has allowed K-Beauty products to reach a wider audience through a number of international e-commerce platforms that make it simple to distribute K-Beauty items to customers around the world. K-Beauty has been able to enter foreign markets with little difficulty due to neoliberal policies that promote free trade. As a result of trade barriers being lowered and markets being liberalized, K-Beauty items have found easy access to North American, European, and Southeast Asian markets. Due to globalization, the K-Beauty craze has quickly expanded outside of South Korea. Loved by people all around the world, Korean popular media content has helped Korean beauty businesses get more recognition and open up new markets in nations where they were previously unknown.

Supporting the soft masculinity marketing approach in K-Beauty are practical multifunctional goods, the utilization of K-Pop singers as worldwide icons, and packaging and marketing themes tailored to appeal to male consumer tastes. In the meantime, local social, cultural, and climatic standards are taken into consideration when adapting the concept of soft masculinity in other places. K-Beauty in the West places a strong emphasis on skin health and grooming, while in East and Southeast Asia, products are made to address climate-related differences in skin needs and minor aesthetic preferences. In the Middle East, the idea is introduced in a more broadly accepted manner thanks to modifications to social and religious standards. Due to market capitalism, K-Beauty is able to stay innovative and meet the ever-increasing demand in the market.



Korean beauty firms are under pressure to consistently provide innovative and distinctive products that both set and follow international beauty trends. The creative beauty goods that consumers around the world seek is one of the main factors driving the industry's economic expansion. The global success of the K-Beauty business is largely shaped by the forces of neoliberalism, globalization, and market capitalism. Globalization expands the reach of Korean culture and beauty products, market capitalism fuels ongoing innovation and consumer demand, and neoliberalism and the emergence of the concept of soft masculinity in the K-Beauty industry have created a policy environment that allows for free market expansion. For writers who are interested in digging deeper into this topic, the interconnectedness also presents problems with excessive consumerism, narrow beauty standards, and global economic interdependence.

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