

## Korean Beauty Product Branding Trough Men: A Prestige Fulfillment For Fans

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**ABSTRACT:** The visual beauty of entertainment actors is the main attraction for Korean popular culture products, especially beauty trends. Korean wave through beauty products offers a new discourse that beauty is not only absolute for the female but also represented through the male body. This is interesting to research because the preference for consumption patterns of aesthetic culture among Korean fans is not only for women, male fans are also objects of the Korean beauty product market. Interviews were conducted with Korean fans in Bandung, who are members of the Hansamo community and members of the cover dance by face-to-face. The results showed that South Korea successfully marketed beauty products through the perfect visual quality of Korean celebrities, instant branding, pop-up stores with attractive themes, and the provision of free testers. Korean Wave succeeded in utilizing the desire of Korean fans to consume Korean beauty products to fulfill their prestige in achieving the perfect face, fashion (style), and appearance like their idol.

**Keywords:** Korean Wave, Visual, Brand, Beauty Product, Fans



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## INTRODUCTION

Korean beauty products are one of the commodities that have been successfully represented again by Korean fans in Indonesia (Gustam, 2015). Representation occurs because Korean beauty products introduce a new discourse that beauty is not only owned by women, men are also the object of Korean beauty products (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). This representation makes Korean beauty products one of the potential markets in Indonesia (So, 2020). This potential market certainly cannot be separated from the charm of Korean celebrities such as idols, actors, and actresses (Kim et al., 2018). The power of appearance, expertise, personality, professionalism, and perfect visualization of Korean celebrities (Davies & Han, 2011) are important point in the marketing of Korean beauty products. Visualizations of actors, actresses, and idols, both boy

groups and girl groups, are depicted with high noses, double eyelids, big eyes, small body circumference, and white skin color so that it becomes a special charm for teenagers, especially Korean fans ([Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017](#) ; Machmud, Musa, Purba, & Tang, 2020). The Korean Association for Plastic Surgeons mentioned that the percentage rate for aesthetic (beauty) consumption among South Korean men is around 15% ([Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012](#)) in 2010. This new beauty reference gave rise to a new motivation among Korean fans, especially male fans. Motivation is created because of cultural differences and physical appearance, causing a sense of self-inequality ([Madan et al., 2018](#)). It is this gap that drives the formation of consumption behavior. Consumption patterns are also strengthened because fans are figures who always have a desire to imitate their idols ([Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017](#) ; Syafrizal, Purba, & Corry, 2022). The process of consumption of Korean popular culture products is a new social problem because it will threaten the existence of local culture. The shift in consumption patterns also occurs because the enthusiasm of fans in consuming Korean products is only limited to fulfilling their desires and prestige. The statements supported by previous research from ([Wong, 2018](#)) that Korean Wave as “Hallyu” has spread rapidly around the world bringing with it new values about the acceptability of cosmetic surgery and what is considered beautiful and desirable.

Currently, there have been many studies that have examined Korean beauty products, one of which is entitled The New Way of Beauty Experience from Korean Wave as Vocational Guidance in Indonesia by Annuraini and [Nurbayani in 2017](#). This study discusses the views of young Indonesian women in deciding to undergo plastic surgery as an effect of the perfect depiction of a Korean celebrity figure ([Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017](#) ; Amin, Burhanuddin, Shadiq, & Purba, 2021). The research also examined Korean beauty products but only in terms of the views of Indonesian women. In contrast, this study which analyzes the consumption patterns of Korean trends and beauty products by involving male fans. The involvement of male fans as an object of research is something interesting to study because men also have indications as a result of the existence of Korean popular culture products and have not been raised much in previous research. Korean Wave is a product of South Korean popular culture which includes television dramas, movies, K-pop music, games, food, beauty products, fashion, and tourism ([Gun Joo & Won, 2012](#)). Korean Wave also known as Hallyu was created by a journalist from Beijing in mid-1999, this refers to the brief growth in popularity gained by the Korean entertainment industry in China ([Sue Jin, 2011](#) ; Purba et al., 2018). Korean Wave as stated by [Jung \(2019\)](#) could serve as a form of reversed cultural diplomacy by promoting soft power in East Asia. The success of the Korean Wave is currently supported through media, especially digital-based ([Huang, 2011](#); [Min et al., 2019](#)). The role of social media and technology became an important point in the spread of Korean popular culture ([Lee, 2018](#)), even the role of social media in the transnationalization process of the Korean wave is very interesting because it gives rise to production, circulation, acceptance, and consumption ([Huang, 2017](#)). In addition, the popularity of the Korean wave is also evidenced by several Korean artists who dominated the public vote of 420,000 people at the 10<sup>th</sup>-anniversary awards ceremony held in Japan ([Jin & Yoon, 2016](#)). The presence of Korean Wave has existed in Indonesia since 2000. Fanaticism owned by Indonesian fans has succeeded in creating the process of consuming Korean Wave products. Consumption among Korean fans is a free act that involves intellectual and emotional ([Storey, 2006](#)). Emotional engagement among fans resulted in the consumption of Korean Wave products based more on the enthusiasm for purchasing such

products, so Korean Wave products belonged to the hyper merchandise category ([Leach, 2005](#)). The hyper merchandise category can be seen from the potential of Korean Wave products that cannot be separated from the visual figures of Korean celebrities such as idols, actors, and actresses ([Kim et al., 2018](#)).

The visual appearance displayed by Korean stars constantly through the media with ideals ends up forming a state of hyperreality that encourages excessive consumption patterns due to the absence of selective readings. The concept of Hyperreality is known through the writings of Baudrillard where this theory seeks to understand the nature and influence of mass communication ([Jauhari, 2017](#); [Wahidah et al., 2020](#)). Baudrillard's philosophy itself is more centered on two concepts, namely "hyperreality" and "simulation" ([Azwar, 2014](#); [Wahidah et al., 2020](#); [Sutiah et al., 2021](#)). Hyperreality itself creates a condition in which falsehoods are mixed with authenticity, the past mingles with the present, facts are sympathetic to fabrications, signs fuse with reality, and lies coexisted with truth ([Lechte, 2001](#)). According to Baudrillard, this is the influence of the masses in communication, namely the presence of touch and manipulation phases in the scope of society (Korean fans) ([Leach, 2005](#)). In the process of consumption, there is also a need and satisfaction of consumers ([Baudrillard, 2011](#)) which became a forced and adjusted productive force ([Wahidah et al., 2020](#)).

## METHOD

The main method used in this study is the qualitative method. In-depth interviews were conducted with Korean fans in Bandung. This strategy was chosen to be able to take a closer look at the experience of Korean fans from the interpretations presented individually, which relates to the practice of consuming Korean beauty trend products. The informant is a Korean fan from Bandung who is aged from 17 years – 28 years and was selected by purposive sampling. The researcher's position in this study is as an insider and outsider. The data analysis used by this study is a stage of analysis in phenomenological strategies.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The viewing of dramas, movies, and music videos supported by the perfect visuals (looks) of Korean actors, actresses, and idols ([Wahidah et al., 2020](#)), has succeeded in making the Korean Wave one of the popular culture commodities that can attract people's interest. Just like the Korean trend and beauty products that are never dimly in demand by Korean fans. One of the informants, namely 1<sup>st</sup> Informant (female, 28 years old) stated:

"At first I was interested in dramas with films in 2010, in dramas like a lot of advertisements for Korean products from fashion to makeup, then the visual figures of actors and actresses are also saucy as beautiful but not conspicuous, their real visuals are perfect, right!"

Not only dramas, the music video roles of Korean boy groups and girl groups such as put forward by 2<sup>nd</sup> Informant (male, 23 years old) and 3<sup>rd</sup> Informant (male, 21 years old) have turned them into

fanboys (fan calls for fans of the male sex), as well as managed to get them interested in following in the footsteps of their idols in the world of beauty. 2<sup>nd</sup> Informant (male, 23 years old) revealed:

"Initially, it was from fanboys, just because they joined the dance cover, so they became more courageous to follow Korean trends from fashion, skincare and makeup as well because of how the demands of the stage are with role players like that."

In line with the proposed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Informant, according to 4<sup>th</sup> Informant (male, 18 years old) who is a member of cross dance Black pink, his interest in Korean beauty trends is due to the figure (figure) of the Blackpink member (Jennie), so it starts from imitating dance, then following the dress, to imitating the style of the girl group member Blackpink. The participation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Informant and 3<sup>rd</sup> Informant in consuming Korean beauty trends is partly due to their joining the dance cover community. This proves that the cover dance community as a social group exerts an influence to change the behavior, feelings, and even attitudes of other individuals, because in the community there is also close personal realization due to the similarity of interest and values ([Fauziah et al., 2014](#)). This influence also due to a sense of collectivity (belonging) as part of a member of the cover dance community.

Talking about the power of appearance, 5<sup>th</sup> Informant (male, 20 years old) revealed that Korean idol visuals provide a new reference not only for women, but for themselves as men to be able to look better.

"Interested in following Korean beauty trends because you want to be a metropolitan man who is pleasing to the eye and of course handsome like a member of a boy band"

5<sup>th</sup> Informant statement around being "not pleasing to the eye and handsome like a boy band member" is a sign that represents a metropolitan figure to him. This proves the statement ([Baudrillard, 2011](#)) that consumption in postmodern society is understood as a sign system. The sign also reinforces that metropolitan male icons are attached to Korean boy bands. In line with what was put forward by Pierce ([Gogali, 2016](#)) a sign is something that favors a person in some way or capacity. Korean Wave through the media succeeded in providing a sign of ideal construction for the female or male body in caring for their skin ([Yoonso, 2018](#)). This was also stated by 6<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 20 years old):

"Korean artists must have visuals with a smooth face, glowing, and a slim body. Even though I am a girl but seeing a beautiful girl like that, so I want to know why can she is beautiful and wanna follow it too"

6<sup>th</sup> Informant's statement proves that a fan always has a passion for imitating the figure of her idol ([Nurbayani & Annuraini, 2017](#)). In fact, dramas, movies, and K-pop music videos are visual media that are engineered (tailored to the needs and desires of fans). Researchers concluded that Korean Wave creates a brand image continuously for Korean fans through the visual performances of its actors, idols, and actresses so that what is displayed in the world of simulacra is a reality justified by Korean fans. When the real reality has not been proven to be the same as that shown, here the process of hyperreality is proven.

Brand Image created by Korean beauty products was also stated by 6<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 20 years old):

"Korean beauty products are more inclined to carry a natural concept even though they are advertised to use makeup but the toughness is just natural"

The natural concept is indeed a beauty standard that has always been favored by Korean beauty products. This is supported by the statements of other fans 7<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 19 years old) slogans such as free alcohol, animal-free, and free parabens are often the core slogans of Korean beauty products, so the beauty displayed by Korean Wave products is usually inconspicuous and not thick. The existence of these 3 (three) slogans researchers sees as an emphasis made by Korean beauty products that their products use natural ingredients. This is the strategy of the brand image ([Tjahyadi, 2006](#) ; Fitri & Purba, 2023) as a result of fans' positive expectations of Korean actors, idols, and actresses. In fact, fans consider the visuals of Korean actors, actresses and idols to be their benchmark in consuming Korean beauty products and trends. The natural slogan in Korean beauty products also shows that Korean beauty manufacturers pay great attention to healthy skin conditions, this is supported by Korean beauty producers being selective about ingredients regarding formulas. The slogan of natural is also revealed by previous findings from [Seo et al. \(2020, p1\)](#) reveal that *Korean Beauty* is characterized by three paradoxical themes: hypersexual cuteness, 'kaleidoscope of harmony', and artificial naturalness.

The brand image of aesthetic culture is also evidenced by the role of the South Korean government in 2008, where the government was willing to spend billions of funds to invest in advertising South Korean beauty products ([Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012](#) ; Purba et al., 2019). Government of South Korea ([Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012](#)) pay great attention to medical-based beauty tourism and make it a national asset. This also results in a good reputation for the South Korean country in terms of aesthetics (beauty), where fans believe that South Korean beauty brands tend to pay attention to skin conditions with natural and healthy results. This reputation is the strength of Korean beauty products in terms of country of origin ([Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012](#)), where Korean fans in Bandung have a good perception of the South Korean state as a reflection of the Korean Wave.

In addition to slogans with the concept of being natural, according to 1<sup>st</sup> Informant (female, 28 years old) gimmicks, such as instant branding are also often introduced through Korean beauty trend products, one of which is through jeans products (Figure 1) which offers a slimmer look of 5kg after wearing the jeans. In fact, the jeans have such a cut, so they can make the person who wears them look slimmer. Talking about the price of Korean beauty products is not the cheapest price, but according to 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) Korean beauty products are very worth it and affordable for consumption, although it is quite expensive but the Korean products never disappoints. The Korean beauty trend is becoming a sign that symbolizes the self-identity of fans. The brand and price of the purchased Korean beauty products became a symbol of the social class among fans.





**Figure 1.**  
**Chuu Jeans Products -5Kg**

Source: Google (2019).

Researchers can conclude that position of actors, idols and actresses occupy the position of celebrity endorse (Siswandi & Djawoto, 2019) in dramas and music videos, which will drive fans' decision to consume Korean beauty products and trends. (Kotler & Keller, 2008) reveals celebrity endorsers are the use of interesting and popular figures in advertisements. The celebrity endorsement position makes Korean fans in Bandung yearn for the same appearance as their idols. Cultural differences create new motivations to adjust, increasing the level of consumer inequality that encourages consumption behavior (Madan et al., 2018). The process of media consumption such as watching Korean dramas, Korean movies, or MV Korean boy groups/girl groups that gives rise to the desire for imitation among Korean fans in Bandung. Korean drama as expressed by Kang (2021) argued that drama have the potential to generate synergistic economic effects impacting other areas of culture, such as tourism, aesthetics such as *Korean Beauty*, television, and webtoon. The process of media consumption is certainly very determined by how interesting the content of the content is, whether through drama, film, music, or even trends, through the help of mass media that present visuals of the characters (Zpalanzani & Piliang, 2010).

There are several Korean beauty trends that fans follow, as revealed by 1<sup>st</sup> Informant (female, 28 years old):

"For makeup, I follow how to ombre lips using lip tint, if for skincare it is more about sheet mask with aloe vera masks, the same way to make eyebrows so that they are natural but still neat. If it's fashion because I often go to Korea, I usually like to buy Korean women's clothes that are hype"

Even for 1<sup>st</sup> Informant (female, 28 years old) jackets, pants, bags, and shoes that hype among Korean artists often also influences him to buy these items. In contrast to 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) who prefers Korean skincare trends such as 3 (three) stages of step cleansing, and 10 (ten) stages of Korean-style facial care. Regarding Korean skincare steps, the 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) also applied the trend of one day one sheet mask (one day, one mask before going to bed) to get a glowing face like Korean artists. For male fans such as 5<sup>th</sup> Informant (male, 20 years old) the use of skincare, as well as masks, is not a taboo, besides those bb cream products

(whitening creams for foundations) are Korean beauty trend products that must be used before leaving the house. Even if 5<sup>th</sup> Informant is a man, the application of the lip ombre is not unusual to follow.

For 4<sup>th</sup> Informant (male, 18 years old) the beauty trends that he followed from the results of consuming Korean popular culture are more focused on fashion, such as the use of hair colors, glasses, clothes and even hats. What his idol bought, will be a reference for him to buy the item. However, for 9<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 17 years old) in terms of fashion, she must be more selective to choose clothes that match her hijab, on the other hand, it must also be in line with the fashion idol she plays. 9<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 17 years old) revealed:

"Because I still have to wear a hijab while they (other members of the group) don't, automatically from the clothes, I also have to be able to choose so that they are not lame with my hijab. But, even if wearing a hijab can still make the fashion very Korean-style, such as being a member of a girl group wearing a hijab can add stockings or leggings to cover the area (part of the body which may not be visible while performing/showing for woman)."

The 9<sup>th</sup> Informant statement (female, 17 years old) implies that there is an alignment between the hijab that has become a part of her life and the Korean-smelling fashion like her idol. She tried to harmonize Korean idol fashion such as the combination of skirts with the addition of stocking accessories or leggings to match the hijab she wore. The alignment carried out by her proves the statement (Hermes, 2005) ; Napitu et al., 2020 ; Ingyas et al., 2021) that in popular culture, usually people tend to choose the shapes and types they like from a popular culture. Her performance indirectly proves that the local identity in fans is not completely lost. Beauty products used by Bandung fans in terms of skincare and makeup include the brand's Nature Republic, Innisfree, Etude House, Laneige, Cosrx, Tony Moly, Missha, Nacific, and Peripera. The presence of a pop-up store (Figure 2) of Korean beauty products in Bandung received a very positive and open response from Korean fans.



**Figure 2.**

**Innisfree Pop-up Store in Paris Van Java Mall Bandung.**

Source: Research Data (2020).

According to 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) the existence of a Korean beauty product store in Bandung is one of the interesting media because usually the Korean make-up pop store has certain themes, and many provide free testers (Figure 3) for store visitors. In fact, according to 9<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 17 years old) states that:

"Pop stores like Innisfree and Etude let us as buyers to try their products first before buying, sometimes if you don't buy it too it's okay, it's unique so if we buy it won't regret, it because we tried it first and then the employees also remained friendly even though we didn't buy it"

Even though not all of these beauty stores are in the Bandung area, the availability of online shopping platforms such as Shopee and Tokopedia makes everything easier. The consumption of beauty products from Korea makes the prestige as a fan has been fulfilled, even some fans feel that their social status has increased because the price of Korean beauty products themselves is not a friendly price, with a normal price range of 18,000 (eighteen thousand) rupiah up to more than 1,000,000 (one million) rupiah. In fact, they do not hesitate to re-purchase Korean beauty products that are suitable.



**Figure 3.**

### **Korean Beauty Products Tester**

Source: Research Data (2020).

Popularity is another requirement for Korean idols, actors, and actresses to be able to become brand ambassadors (ambassadors of a certain brand) of Korean beauty trend products. This popularity is the strength of Korean celebrities as part of marketing and advertising products (Kim et al., 2018) 7<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 19 years old) argued that popularity is what makes her idol figure become an ambassador of a certain beauty brand. According to 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) the role of the popularity of her favorite girl group that made Red Velvet (SM Entertainment girl group) as the brand ambassador of one of Korea's beauty products.

"Because Red Velvet is the brand ambassador of Etude House, so I join in buying Etude House products also"

Investors (capital owners) from Korea also have a big role in determining consumption patterns among Korean fans in Bandung. The involvement of Korean actors, actresses and idols to visit



other countries in person, makes fans increasingly participate in consuming Korean beauty products. The 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) stated that currently there are many Korean products, both skincare (facial care) and makeup (beauty tools) that work with Korean idols such as Innisfree x EXO, or BT21. This involvement is a role for investors because Korean fans are usually more interested in packaging (branding) than the composition of the product, even Korean fans are also famous for their loyal attitude. This attitude is supported by the statement of 1<sup>st</sup> Informant (female, 28 years old) who is willing to buy Korean beauty products for more than 1,000,000 (one million) rupiah in order to get Yoona fan-sign tickets (artist signature event) from Korean beauty products, namely Innisfree. Similarly, the 8<sup>th</sup> Informant (female, 24 years old) said that she was willing to buy 5 etude house lipstick products at once for 700,000 (seven hundred thousand) rupiah for a photo card signed by Red Velvet (Korean girl group). The statements of some fans prove Baudrillard's statement that the high consumption of one product in society today occurs due to the high enthusiasm for purchasing the product ([Leach, 2005](#)). This is what makes Korean beauty trend products can be categorized as merchandise that is included in hyper merchandise. For 5<sup>th</sup> Informant (male, 20 years old) eye-catching (attractive) look on Korean beauty brands makes himself more consumptive, because buying Korean beauty products without thinking about the benefits of the product.

The beauty trend shown by the Korean Wave has changed the culture of consumption in our society, especially among Korean fans. Korean beauty trends offer products that can also be used by male fans. In addition, most beauty trends are consumed by Korean fans, based on the branding of the product (looks attractive, eye-catching, just fulfilment of fans' prestige, even for the sake of meeting their idol (sometimes the product is not really needed) ([Wahidah et al., 2022](#)). Some fans have ruled out the benefits and functions of the beauty product. This shows that today's society indeed only consumes objects no longer based on the benefits or functions of those objects (without reference, without reading, without selection). Rather it is on the basis of signs, symbols and even prestige ([Suhaeb & Kahfi, 2018](#) ; Syafrizal & Purba 2023). Even if, appearing to be beautiful or handsome is the dream of all human beings and this is of course universal, this is where the Korean Wave comes into play by using the dependent desire of Korean fans to market their beauty products so that fans spend more to achieve a perfect face, fashion (style), and body like their idols. The satisfaction of fans as a consumption society becomes a production force imposed and adjusted by Korean manufacturers, because they will constantly update Korean beauty products to meet the wants and needs of the market ([Baudrillard, 2011](#)).

Korean beauty products and trends are currently transformed into a set of tools to show the status of fans, show who they are/their identity, consciously want to show the prestige they have to other societies. As Baudrillard argues that through objects, either through individuals or each group, individuals find their respective places in order, and society is stratified so that they will remain in a certain place ([Ritzer, 2003](#)). So that the nature of the cultural results is hyper culture ([Leach, 2005](#)) closely tied to Korean beauty products and trends.

## CONCLUSION

The consumption of Korean beauty products ranges between fashion, makeup, and skincare. These three products have succeeded in attracting Korean fans due to the creative branding concept and visualization of the brand ambassador of Korean beauty products. This visualization becomes an ideal body construction among fans of both women and men. The ideal body construction encourages fans to participate in taking care of their bodies to look the same as their idols. In addition, the consumption of Korean beauty products is an identity that shows who the fans are, this can also be seen from the relatively expensive prices of Korean beauty products. This identity shows the sign that fans consume through Korean beauty products. Korean fans, both women and men, are the figures affected by the existence of the Korean Wave.

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