

# Exporting and Moulding Ideals of Beauty:

## Boom of the South Korean Cosmetic Industry in the Era of Globalisation

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis focused on analysing the recent opening of the South Korean cosmetic industry to the Western world, in combination to a trade of beauty ideals, facilitated by social media and the internet. More specifically, the study focused on three main levels of inquiry. Firstly, understanding how the South Korean beauty industry advertises its products abroad through social media outlets; secondly, understanding to what extent its foreign and domestic promotional campaigns differ, in relation to beauty ideals and gender norms; thirdly, elaborating the responses and reactions of Western consumers to the said advertisements. The thesis involved qualitative content analysis of selected pieces of literature on gender, beauty and media on a primary level, and the scrutiny and interpretation of cosmetics advertisements on a secondary one, along with consumers' responses to the said campaigns. The promotional content that was taken into account comprised image advertisements, videoclips and official products descriptions from the two South Korean brands Laneige and Etude House. What emerged from the study is an employment of cultural and social codes to promote cosmetic products abroad, which generate consumer satisfaction and brand awareness, however further reinforcing gender-based stereotypes.

**Keywords:** South Korea, Cosmetic Industry, Gender Norms, Beauty Standards, Social Media Marketing, Advertisements, Globalisation.

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## **Abbreviations and Vocabulary**

*K-beauty*: Korean beauty

## **A Note on Korean Names**

All Korean names have undergone a process of romanisation. These are written according to the ALA-LC Romanization Table (ALA-LC, n.d., pp.12–13).

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## **1. Introduction**

The topic discussed in this dissertation revolves around the trade of beauty ideals, often promoted through social media and the internet. More specifically, I refer to the “boom” of the South Korean cosmetic industry, which has recently opened up to the Western world through a remarkably successful marketing campaign. The latter has been carried by a series of social media platforms, and it has greatly contributed to the prosperity of the country’s “new visual economy” (Lee, Moon and Tu, 2019, p.73). Social medias play a substantial role in most people’s lives today, especially among younger generations; “while Facebook has grown exponentially for individuals seeking new ways of connecting with other individuals, the social media website has also become increasingly more popular with companies looking to create a brand or enhance their current brand” (Shen and Bissell, 2013, p.630). Barri, Saerang and Tumiwa (2017) published a study on viral marketing trends of the Korean cosmetic brand Laneige. In their article they state: “Domestic cosmetics manufacturing is experiencing explosive growth. Cosmetic exports rose 44%, while imports grew by only 3.83%, reaching a trade surplus of 1.5 billion dollars last year. The export destination of cosmetics is also becoming more varied” (p. 3952). Since then, the foreign demand for Korean products has significantly risen. Undeniably, there is a cultural push that determines what is beautiful and what is not, and in the same way, there are societal expectations that force gender-based standards in regard to physical appearance. In respect to this, South Korea seems to be evolving fast, and the market appears to be very open in promoting both cosmetic enhancements and cosmetic products that include men as a target audience and potential purchasers.

In earlier studies, Korean beauty ideals mainly have been researched within their domestic context as a question of tradition and change, or in more global, structural terms as an issue of the influence of westernisation or colonialism on domestic beauty standards (Choi, 2018; Glenn, 2008), or as the impact of colourism on the cosmetic industry (Hunter, 2007; Dixon and Telles, 2017). In other words, it has been studied in broad, overall and mostly binary terms. While I recognise the importance of the studies that observe the influence of colonialism on beauty standards, as well as the impact of colourism on the cosmetic industry, I decided to proceed with a different theoretical framework in respect to the present research, without failing however to appreciate the contribution of this entire body of literature; furthermore, it is necessary to note that because of its significance, I will be attentive to all the dynamics and issues presented by it while proceeding with my inquiry.

## 1.1 Research Question

My proposition is to contribute to the field by offering a more fine-tuned analysis based on mid-range cultural and gender theories and extending the study to the new research setting of digital sites. The purpose of this qualitative study is to develop an understanding of how South Korean beauty ideals have been capitalised by South Korean cosmetic industry and transmitted to Western consumer groups through the new digital sites of social media marketing. Of particular interest to the study is how this social media marketing reflect the industry's "reading" of Korean beauty ideals and the Western consumers' desires and aspirations, how various Western, and especially European consumer groups have responded to the marketing culturally have appropriated the beauty ideals and the associated gender norms through consumption, and how Korean beauty standards and gender norms are being globalised and (re)shaped in the process.

The study hinges on three inter-related research questions, namely, *how does the South Korean cosmetic industry promote its products abroad through the use of advertisements and social media, and to what extent does its foreign and domestic marketing differ, especially with regard to beauty standards and gender norms? And specifically, what are the responses from the foreign, and particularly the Western consumers?*

These research questions will be explored through a content analysis of the digital advertisements on social media platforms and online beauty stores of two South Korean cosmetics brands; namely, Laneige and Etude House. The analysis draws upon theories of beauty, gender and media in cultural and feminist studies. The first step of the analysis process consists in a comprehensive collection of multiple pieces of advertisements, both videoclips and photographs, as well as blog posts reviewing cosmetics items. This stage is followed by a careful selection, among the previously collected advertisements, of few pieces that will become the main object of scrutiny for each brand. These will serve as a focal point for the study, and they will be evaluated in accordance to the four categories of Human Beauty Value presented by Kim and Lee (2018); namely superiority, self-development, individuality and authenticity. The employment of these four categories has been created to analyse overall cultural differences in approaches towards beauty standards in broad regional terms. In my analysis however, these will be used to study individual consumers' approaches to beauty consumption as part of singular self-realisation projects. This specific analysis design will be further discussed in the next chapters of the dissertation.



## **1.2 Study Contribution**

With the present study I intend to explore how cultures, gender roles and globalisation affect the South Korean cosmetic industry in influencing individuals both on a personal and collective level. As previously mentioned, the boom of the K-beauty industry has been a fairly recent event, therefore not much has been written on the topic yet. I wanted to provide a perhaps new perspective on the cosmetic industry, and whatever we, as separate but connected communities, perceive as “beauty ideals”. This will be achieved through the application of cultural, feminist and gender theories, and the study of advertisements as productions of specific socio-cultural contexts. An important element in the research is the mediation of social media, which has developed different ways for companies to communicate with consumers.

The perspective I have selected, as briefly suggested earlier, does not directly focus on the issue of colourism and colonialist influence in the industry of cosmetics. That being said, because of the fundamental role they play within this specific business, I have made sure to take into consideration any potential influence these might have on certain matters I have touched upon in my dissertation.

## **1.3 Disposition**

The first chapter of my dissertation will focus on illustrating all pieces of literature and theories needed to understand specific contexts and issues presented throughout the data analysis. This will be followed by a chapter delineating the methodological structure adopted in the research. Later, I will present some basic empirical information needed to better understand the data, which will be laid out in my fifth chapter. This will be a mainly descriptive one, and it will be divided into four sections: the first two focusing on each brand, followed by a comparison and some concluding remarks on the findings at the end. In my sixth chapter I will analyse the data and draw some clarifications about my research questions. The final chapter of the thesis will serve as a conclusion and a summary of all relevant observations gathered from the study.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The following chapter comprises a comprehensive and organised collection of existing literature on the research topic, which directly links to the previously described research question. Because of the theoretically oriented nature of my literature review, this specific portion of the dissertation will also introduce selected theories that will play a fundamental role during the research process.

## 2.1 Beauty, Gender and Media

The social effects of beauty have been at the core of multiple previous studies. Undeniably so, the perpetuation of shared cultural and social standards has evolved overtime, and so did the role of beauty, especially in association with technological innovations. According to Nguyen's (2011) interpretation of Scarry's approach to aesthetics in "On Beauty and Being Just" (1999), "beauty exerts a distributional power (with potentially geopolitical dimensions): extending life in all directions, traversing distances between the viewer and the object of her gaze, pressing the attention given to the beautiful thing into new forms toward other (if less beautiful) things, rescuing beauty from the past and preserving it for the future". The book *Fashion and Beauty in the Time of Asia* (Lee, Moon and Tu, 2019) has been particularly important during the formulation of the present thesis' research question, because it has sparked light upon the evolution of beauty in a number of different Asian cultures, while taking into account the evolution of technology and social media. This book offers a less feral perspective than the one proposed by Scarry, which can be more applicable to contemporary times: Emily Raymundo (pp.103-126) describes in fact the process of putting makeup on as a practice moved by the power of capitalism, dictated by cultural norms that delineate what is beautiful and what is not. In the end, both viewpoints envision the final success of beauty, which can be, on a macro-scale, both bio-political and geo-political. "The Beauty Trade" (McCracken, 2014) further reinforces this perspective which puts beauty in the much larger context of global political economy: "the global economy of beauty is a space where production, marketing, distribution, and consumption of beauty are intertwined with the production of gendered bodies, youth cultures, the blurring of distinction between public and private spheres, and beauty entrepreneurialism".

An interesting point that needs to be made is the link between the consumption of beauty products and the concept of self-expression, with the final goal of personal realisation. Beauty products are, in other words, the means used to mould one's personal identity. Initially considered a strictly feminine practice, the act of applying cosmetics has, over the course of the years, opened up to a variety of genders and races. Interestingly enough, "pre-industrial beauty products were largely unisex" (Whitmer, 2015). What contributed to the widely accepted association between cosmetics and women in the Western world is the beauty industry's tendency of promoting an exaggerated gender differentiation through a series of marketing and branding practices (*Ibid*).

Although the body of literature that studies gender representation in the South Korean cosmetic industry is, as of now, to a certain extent limited, much more was written about this issue in a wider context, which refers to advertisements and social media. First and foremost, Prieler, Ivanov and Hagiwara (2015) have studied the phenomenon of gender representation through media outlets and advertisements within Confucian societies. Advertisements have been proven to be culturally meaningful, as they contribute to a construction of behaviours that “are not natural, timeless or universal but are socially, historically and politically situated” (p. 28). In other words, media outlets have an effect on the audience by producing and perpetuating gender-specific norms and values, which mutate into concrete social and relational behaviours. The study is particularly relevant as it has shown that, to this day, South Korean medias portray very stereotypical examples of gender roles. This hypothesis is further supported by the previous study conducted by Kim and Lowry (2005) which emphasises the nature of the images delivered by media, inherently unrealistic and elusive. This phenomenon specifically refers to the cultivation theory, initially raised by Gerbner and Gross (1976), which claims that the growing exposure to media (which is today boosted by the everyday use of internet and social media platforms) contributes to the artificial construction of an ideal distorted reality.

## **2.2 Globalisation, Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty**

“Marketing can be thought of as a cultural industry that seeks to connect the producers of consumer goods and services with their potential markets, and indeed, to bring those markets into being” (Sinclair, 2012, p.2). In the past, advertisers were mainly connecting to their audiences through print and television media outlets. Nowadays however, this trend has been replaced by the use of internet and social media as the main platforms to promote certain products and to more generally grow the notoriety of brands. Undeniably, this emerging marketing approach needs to be observed not only as a merely commercial operation, but also as a social, cultural and global phenomenon. “As a form of social communication, advertising reflects a society’s culture and values. Messages in the media mirror social and psychological beliefs and attitudes about, and values associated with, beauty, which can affect consumers’ perceptions of their beauty ideal” (Yu, Park and Sung, 2015, p.686).

Social media is at the core of this research: the influence produced by these internet platforms has shown a multitude of effects since their inception. In the very same way social media has changed the way people interact with each other, it is clear how it has also changed the way companies communicate with their customers. In respect to the South Korean cosmetic industry, social media advertising has been the key to its international success, as it played the

fundamental role of reaching out to an audience that had no other connection to the brand other than through the internet. When referring to the brand Laneige, for instance, a research carried by Barri, Saerang and Tumiwa (2017, p.3952) has shown that “there is positive influence between Social Networking Platform (Facebook), Video Sharing Platform (YouTube) and Photo Sharing Platform (Instagram) on Brand Awareness”. Similarly, in a study published in 2013, which observed the use of Facebook as a marketing platform to promote beauty products, it has also been stated that “the ultimate goal of creating and developing branding strategies is to enhance customers’ brand loyalty” (Shen and Bissell, 2013, p.629). Brand loyalty is a crucial goal of social media marketing, because it ensures that the customer will regularly repurchase products from the same brand multiple times over the course of time. In order to build brand loyalty a company needs to not only promote, but also effectively produce consumer satisfaction. (Nam, Ekinici and Whyatt, 2011).

In respect to the present study, a fundamental link that needs to be made is the one combining culture to consumer behaviour. Hema Patil (2012, p.41) argues that, in the new millennium’s increasingly cross-cultural world economy, “consumption decisions cannot be viewed as an independent event – these are closely related with values and social relationship and cultural allegiance”. In other words, a series of commonly shared core values are pushing people from the same country to make certain purchasing choices. In some way, cultures can be considered as malleable items that can be turned into profitable goods by the capitalist market. Patil’s research plays a particularly relevant role within this study, as the framework used to analyse cross-cultural consumer behaviour is meant to promote a clearer understanding of the relationship between cosmetics marketers and their consumers.

It can be stated that South Korean pop culture has greatly helped in promoting Korean cosmetics abroad, prompted first and foremost by globalisation. More often than not, this export of pop culture has been defined by the locution “Korean wave”. The “cosmetic industry accepted cultural phenomenon of Korean wave positively, reinterpreted it industrially and settled in overseas field successfully as well as diagnose the directivity” (Choi, Cho and Lee, 2012, p.334). The “wave” has moved towards foreign audiences particularly after the beginning of the new millennium; this comprises a series of symbols that represent South Korea through a process of simplification and generalisation of cultural concepts at a very elemental stage. Through this process, the cultural code morphs into an industrial one (*Ibid*), turning culture into a desirable product. One of the most heavily promoted symbols refers to the Korean ideal of beauty, which became viral in recent years among Western audiences because of the

rigid skincare regimen required by it. More often than not, this ideal is also pushed further when combined to an advertisement that promotes it through the support of Korean celebrities, such as pop singers, actors and models. This point brings me to an important elaboration on the matter. The paper “Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Gender and beauty in the cosmetics sector” (Kim et al., 2013) shows how the South Korean cosmetic industry utilises the so-called *Kkot Minam* to endorse its beauty campaigns. *Kkot Minam* are male models or celebrities who possess a “softer masculine beauty”; they are innocent and youthful looking men, who would ideally trigger the maternal side of women who represent a brand’s audience. This habit of promoting cosmetic products through *Kkot Minam* has surfaced in response to the growing emergence of gorgeous female ambassadors, which has produced an inevitable difficulty for brands to stand out. In the paper, the authors argue that “The preference of *Kkot Minam* was argued to be a sign of increasing women power. As the socioeconomic status of women rises, their changed view of men appears to promote the feminization of men”. The authors also suggest that this preference, which appears to be quite successful in South Korea, might not reach the same level of effectiveness in other countries where it is used as a marketing strategy, even if greatly supported by the effects of the Korean wave. This might be due to historical and societal values which differ from country to country, and that put South Korea in a unique socio-economic environment. The paper is particularly relevant in regard to the present study, as it shows how the equal or unequal distribution of power between genders influences the perception of femininity within a society. In this specific case, it can be argued that South Korea accepts “feminine” boys in its advertisements, whereas another country, in which the power distance index is more uneven, might not welcome them in the same way. When it comes to the Korean society per se, Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012, p.59) claim that “while aesthetic surgery continues to be generally understood as a ‘feminine’ practice, Korean men are also having aesthetic surgery in increasingly significant numbers”. This goes to show how the general acceptance of aesthetic enhancing practices (and, more generally, self-care and grooming ones) are well-welcomed among the society and approved for both genders. The body of literature which studies gender and aesthetics often highlights the distinction between feminine and metrosexual beauty: both are marketed in the cosmetics and grooming industry, but they are aimed for different audiences and for different purposes. Furthermore, it can be argued that both definitions fall under the trend of “commercial masculinity” (Harrison, 2012), with the first one representing a more soft, innocent type of masculinity, and the second one maintaining the standardised expectations of masculinity, but in a more groomed and put-together way.

### 2.3 Skin Complexion and Colourism

This section of the Literature Review serves a general overview of the issue relating to colourism and the East-West divide within the beauty industry. Despite not being the main focus of this dissertation, this matter is still extremely important within the body image and aesthetics-related literature, and it serves as an important point of discussion that needs to be taken into account when analysing the cosmetic industry. The body of literature that studies this topic is relatively large, and it is currently experiencing a rapid expansion.

The increasing consumption of skin-lightening treatments in the Eastern world has been potentially linked, at least to a certain extent, to the problem of colourism. This type of racial discrimination involves a process that privileges lighter skin colours in multiple areas of society, affecting different layers of human relations (Hunter, 2007). Colourism often entails not only a bias for a lighter skin-tone, but also for a set of aesthetic ideals that might involve hair texture, eye colour and somatic characteristics. This issue has often been highlighted within societies that have had a long history of colonialism, and it is a problem that affects numerous contemporary societies, such as the American one. When it comes to Asia, it is argued that skin lightening practices might have developed over the years separately from racism-related concepts. “In recent years, however, colour consciousness and white supremacy appear to have been increasingly united, globalized, and commodified, as exemplified by the global multibillion-dollar skin-lightening industry” (Dixon and Telles, 2017, p.405). In response to this, Bissell and Chung (2009) claim that “while some studies have examined the cross-cultural adoption of beauty ideals, what is not known is how or if newer forms of technology have increased or decreased the Westernization of these image ideals”. In her dissertation, Eunji Choi (2018, p.12) makes an interesting remark related to this concept, as she talks about the hairstyle trends observed in multiple issues of the South Korean magazine *Céci*, between the years 2013 and 2017: “Song and Yoo did not mention why people may prefer wavy hairstyles rather than straight ones, although I suspect that this preference is related to hair hierarchies and preferences for White or European beauty ideals tracing back to the time following the Korean War”. This claim is currently a significant assumption about different beauty practices, including plastic surgery and skin lightening. Although it can only be considered an indefinite conjecture based on subjective observations, it suggests how easily beauty ideals have been influenced by external forces in the past. If different concepts of beauty have permeated in foreign societies during such early times, it is clear how the magnitude of this force is today amplified by the power of globalisation through internet and social media.

## 2.4 Human Beauty Value and Lookism

The concept of human beauty value, recently introduced by Kim and Lee (2018), is presented as a structure based in four principle dimensions, which help understand the general perception of beauty shared by specific communities. The study only focuses on the perceptions of women, therefore the research might appear limited in this respect; nonetheless, the paper is particularly interesting as it highlights all factors that influence ideals of beauty. These are superiority, or more specifically the “relatively superior competitiveness to surpass others with appearance and physical beauty”; self-development, which refers to the continuous and evolving process of beauty improvement; individuality, aiding the pursuit of beauty through personal distinction; authenticity, which emphasise the impossible replicability of natural beauty through artificial procedures. The four dimensions are mediated by a hierarchical process which revolves around social comparison, social competition, and social norms, and that inevitably produce a series of consequences manifested through emotions, attitudes and behaviours. What emerged from the study is that different cultures presented different processes of human beauty value which reflected specific cultural and social characteristics. The ultimate result of this research is a reflection of a series of contrasting perceptions of beauty. From the prevailing viewpoint, East Asian countries seem to share similar ideals of beauty, however it was proven that each culture has its own, distinctive perception of beauty.

Since the present dissertation focuses on observing both the younger and older audiences, a brief remark needs to be made regarding the relationship between age and cosmetic use. Yang (2011) made a point on China’s beauty economy, as she presented the two concepts of *nennu* and *shunu*. The first one refers to a younger type of feminine beauty, while the latter is linked to a more mature one; *nennu* is the ideal of beauty the women tend to seek out for, and that is greatly promoted by the beauty industry as the generally favoured end goal. The two are used to emphasise the role of women while associating feminine beauty to the country’s economy. This concept can be efficiently transposed to South Korea’s beauty industry as well, as it pushes aging women to strive for regaining youthfulness and sexual appeal, while developing consumer behaviours, reinforcing gender roles and controlling women’s body in a very subtle but forceful way. In other words, through this perspective, “the female body and its erotic-aesthetic functions are celebrated to enhance consumption”. This can be directly associated to the problematic structure of most patriarchal societies, where the eroticisation of the female body is one of many aspects of the entire system. The latter not only is culturally produced, but it also revolves around the satisfaction of male desires. Capitalism and the eroticisation of the

female body work hand-in-hand, transforming the body into a lucrative object (Stratton, 1996). Laurie Penny (2011), who studied the oppression of the female body by the capitalist system, does not fail to observe how our bodies are being continuously “punished and policed”, from all directions. “We are bombarded every day with countless thousands of messages, informing us that we do not look young enough, slim enough, white enough and willing enough, messages that come to us subtly and not so subtly, through film, television, advertising, print media and casual acquaintance, messages from which there is not reprieve” (*Ibid*, p.1).

One of the most explicit results of the objectification of the human body is the phenomenon of lookism, which has produced a considerable amount of concern in regard to multiple levels of the South Korean society. In the journal article “Lookism Hurts” (Lee et al., 2017), it is claimed that “while discrimination based on physical attractiveness is prevalent in almost every society, it has become a crucial form of discrimination in South Korea”. The potential and perhaps most probable cause for this occurrence is the growing competitiveness that South Korean people experience since early life. Jiyoung Chae (2019) associates lookism to other concepts often discussed in the body image literature, such as the internalisation of beauty ideals, namely the personal acceptance of socially-agreed norms about one’s appearance, and appearance orientation, the act of investing into one’s personal image. The author then proceeds to explain how the acceptance of lookism among society is mainly influenced by two elements: media practice and belief formation. Belief formation specifically refers to background factors that influence one’s current assumptions about appearance. In the case of South Korea, lookism is a very critical underlying issue, which poses a number of detrimental effects on society. “Regardless of their actual weight, both men and women in Korea are held to be obsessed with dieting and body modification” (Han, Brewis and Sturtz Sreetharan, 2018). This obsession, which is experienced by both genders, has produced among the Korean community high percentages of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction, while developing a discriminatory environment for people who do not aesthetically conform to the socially accepted norm of beauty.

## **2.5 Feminist Theory on Ageing, Beauty and Gender Norms**

Several pieces of feminist theory play a fundamental role throughout the present study. The work produced by Meeta Rani Jha (2016) has proposed some especially relevant reflections on the relationship between beauty, gender and globalisation. In the preface of her book, she refers to the concept of “beauty capitalism”, which implicates the commodification of females’ bodies within the current consumer culture that inevitably reduces them to mere marketing



expedients; the writer further observes that beauty standards are also often used to maintain control over women's personal choices and lives. The reason why this paper is particularly important within my research is its explicit focus on studying how gender, inequality and cultural and media globalisation are influencing what we perceive as beauty standards, while maintaining an intersectional framework.

One important concept that is often brought up in beauty and gender literature is the relationship between body and consumer culture. The latest capitalist society displays a particular emphasis towards the preservation of the female youth on the basis of external appearance: this can be achieved through cosmetic products, aesthetic procedures and exercise, "with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression" (Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner, 1991, p.170). This issue has been better explained in the previous section, however it needs to be reiterated not only because of its importance within numerous feminist theories, but it is also something that needs to be kept in mind when analysing the cultural and societal dynamics that influence the way the cosmetic industry communicates with the public.

The concept of feminine beauty is seen as a "privilege" by society, and it is often treated as a type of capital. It allows a higher economic mobility, both on a working level, as it permits access to better jobs, and on a marital level, granting a wider range of choices in both categories (Jha, 2016). Beauty as a social capital, however, is heavily dependent on the natural experience of getting older. Ageism works in relation to stereotypes of gender roles: "For women, appearance in terms of sexual attractiveness prevails; for men, appearance means looking like one can 'perform'" (Calasanti, 2005, p.10). If the value of women strictly relies on their physical appearance, while ageing being an inevitable part of life, this means that dissatisfaction in oneself is inevitable, caused by the perpetual search for an unattainable beauty ideal and the objectification that the same women have to endure since early in life. Men are similarly submitted to a series of socially-agreed judgements and prejudices, which are interconnected to principles that perpetuate paradigms of toxic masculinity, such as the ideals of manhood and physical resistance despite the inevitable deterioration of one's body (Calasanti, 2005). In respect to this, capitalism may perpetuate what Marcuse (1991) defines as "false needs", socially imposed needs that are used to repress an individual's will, who has absolutely no power over. These result in a momentary and unstable feeling of happiness, which is in reality rooted into a sense of ultimate restlessness towards these unattainable desires that are effectively felt as needs by individuals. "Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others

love and hate, belong to this category of false needs” (*Ibid*, p.7). The need of preserving one’s youthful appearance is therefore an elusive and inaccessible goal which promotes self-hatred in individuals, particularly in the case of women. Tehseem and Kalsoom (2015) proposed an analysis of the ideology hidden in cosmetics advertisements through a feminist perspective: what emerged from the study further supports the theory of false needs, while suggesting a twist to the presented concept. The advertisements of cosmetics not only was portraying an idealistic image of women, which was ultimately making the female audience realise that they could never become the beautiful and powerful selves that they aspired to, but it was also making them believe, in a very subtle way, there would be no way out from remaining subservient to men. What is particularly interesting about this study, and what also makes the research extremely relevant in regard to the present one, is the analysis of the words used in advertisements, organised in a series of categories that allow a manifestation of hidden ideologies. For instance, cosmetics brands use a combination of positive words (i.e. “powerful”, “worth”, “stunning”) and negative ones (i.e. “fear”, “risk”, “younger-looking”). Some of these carry an emotive nuance, some others may invoke inadequacies and unreal representations. This combination of carefully chosen terms lures women into purchasing products, by forging a comparison between “us” and “them” and selling a dream that it is both unrealistic and unattainable, eventually solidifying women’s position in society (*Ibid*, pp. 93-95).

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

What can be drawn upon from the content presented in the previous sections is a series of theories and concepts that will later be fundamental in processing the data obtained through the research process.

First and foremost, my analysis will observe beauty as a bio-political, geo-political, cultural and social power (Scarry, 1999), especially when taken into consideration in relation to media and globalisation (Lee, Moon and Tu, 2019) and within the context of global political economy (McCracken, 2014). I will focus on the self-expression and self-realisation goals of the customers, and how they are linked to unnatural and constructed expectations from different gender roles, which are perpetuated through advertisements (Whitmer, 2015; Prieler, Ivanov and Hagiwara, 2015). One goal that I will try to achieve through my analysis is proving how the elusive and unattainable images endorsed by the said advertisements promote a distorted idea of reality through the support of cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Kim and Lowry, 2005).

Part of the analysis will focus on marketing and branding practices of the South Korean cosmetic industry through internet and social media platforms. Social media marketing will be investigated as a cultural, social and global phenomenon (Sinclair, 2012; Yu, Park and Sung, 2015). This has generated a revolution in communication approaches between companies and customers, with the ultimate goal of enhancing brand awareness (Barri, Saerang and Tumiwa, 2017) and brand loyalty (Shen and Bissell, 2013), while effectively producing consumer satisfaction (Nam, Ekinici and Whyatt, 2011). The information obtained from studying these practices will be ultimately used to understand the relationship between culture and purchaser behaviour (Patil, 2012). Specifically, I will concentrate on understanding how cultures can be turned into profitable goods by the capitalist machine, as well as trying to grasp how purchasing choices are affected by pop culture through the simplification of cultural codes, with a specific reference to the “Korean Wave” (Choi, Cho and Lee, 2012). Two interesting aspects of the South Korean cosmetic industry are the promotion of products through the use of *Kkot Minam* as campaigns models (Kim et al., 2013) and the general attitude towards practices that would be in other countries considered “feminine” (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang, 2012), but that are both increasingly accepted and encouraged. These elements may be the result of an attempt at challenging gender-based stereotypes, and they will surely be taken into account during the analysis process.

A brief note needs to be made in regard to colourism and the East-West divide when it comes to the cosmetic industry. Colourism is an important issue that has been vastly talked about, especially in the last few decades, which entails a discrimination based on skin tone and aesthetical appearance and that entails a privilege for those who possess Eurocentric characteristics (Hunter, 2007). Although this argument is not the primary focus of this research, it is important because of the wide-spread use of skin-lightening products in East Asia (Dixon and Telles, 2017), as well as the frequent accusations, however only alleged, of Westernisation of images and ideals through advertisements of cosmetics in Asia (Choi, 2018; Bissell and Chung, 2009).

The theory of human beauty value, developed by Kim and Lee (2018) and introduced earlier in the chapter, is a four-dimension concept that is useful in understanding the personal experience of women towards beauty. This experience greatly revolves around social competition, norms and culture, and it manifests concretely through attitudes of the individuals studied. This theory will be applied in a different way from Kim and Lee, as it will focus on understanding the response of the individual customers towards the experience of purchasing

and applying Korean cosmetics products, in light of which the self-achievement goals they aim for and their own perceptions of selves. In my analysis I will try to bring light to how the eroticisation and the lucrative objectification of the female body are related to the way women are perceived in society, and how they are used to overpower and control women (Marcuse, 1991). In the same way I will try to understand how women perceive beauty standards and the unachievable goals that leave them in a state of perpetual inadequacy (Stratton, 1996; Penny, 2011). Beauty capitalism revolves around the commodification of the female body, in a society where beauty is considered a social capital that allows economic mobility (Jha, 2016). In this context, I will observe social issues such as lookism (Lee et al., 2017) and ageism (Calasanti, 2005), which are affecting women and their way of relating and competing with others.

My analysis will furthermore refer to the work of Tehseem and Kalsoom (2015). Through the study of language in selected pieces of cosmetics advertisements, they brought to light a series of themes and ideologies subtly hidden in the same ones. Similarly, I will take as primary pieces of data videos, images and descriptions of South Korean cosmetic products from a series of social media outlets and website pages.

### **3. Methodology**

The present chapter serves as a guide to the methodological structure adopted in the analysis. The first section provides an insight into the study, and it displays an account of the data collection process, followed by a description of the methods employed in the data analysis. The two remaining subchapters focus on all the potential complications that might arise during the research.

#### **3.1 Study design and data collection**

The strategic approach of the dissertation was achieved through the combination of two main research stages, both characterised by a qualitative approach. The first one, which was extremely important as it set the bases for the entire study, revolved around qualitative content analysis of selected pieces of literature. Bryman (2016, p.291) outlined this method as an “approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts”. The materials used in this first step were secondary sources comprised academic pieces, such as books, journal articles and conference papers. The study took into consideration informal online articles as well; however too unreliable to be used as sources in the study, this type of material can be considered a useful tool to understand the general public’s reaction to the expansion of the South Korean cosmetic industry. The second stage adopted to

first collect, and later analyse primary data was from advertisements and commercials. The study revolved around two South Korean cosmetic brands: Laneige and Etude House, both incorporated into the conglomerate Amorepacific, which specifically focuses on beauty and personal care. Each one of them was chosen because they represent different ways of turning Korean culture into desirable products for Western consumers. They differ with regard to their targeted consumer groups, marketing approaches, and product characteristics. While Laneige is currently being sold in all Sephora shops, focusing on skincare products and targeting a more mature audience, Etude House is instead promoting make-up products to younger customers, advertised through the support of both American and Korean pop-culture.

The data sources of the present research are promotional campaigns of the two selected brands targeting foreign consumers during the years 2016-2020. These advertisements have been collected from Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Data from the domestic campaigns during the same period of time has been collected as well, with the exception of Etude House Korea's YouTube channel, whose data went back to 2011. The kind of data that I have collected can be divided into four categories: image advertisements, video advertisements, product descriptions and reviews, either in video form or written form, produced by the customers. What I intended to do at the beginning stages of my research was analysing advertisements from a visual perspective, however, as I was conducting my study, I realised that the linguistic aspect of advertisements plays an extremely important role in marketing.

### **3.2 Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data has been organised in three stages, with three slightly differing analysis approaches. This decision was taken because I wanted to dedicate each section to one research question at a time. The data collected in the first stages of research has been firstly analysed through a process of coding. This has been applied to all three sections. Bryman (2016, p.13) defines it as a “a process whereby the data are broken down into their component parts and those parts are then given labels. The analyst then searches for recurrences of these sequences of coded text within and across cases and also for links between different codes”.

The first part of my analysis revolved around the marketing, branding and promotion of South Korean cosmetics products abroad, with the support of social media and the internet. This portion of text focused on analysing concrete pieces of advertisements that are proposed to the foreign public by Laneige and Etude House. Similarly to the work of Tehseem and Kalsoom (2015), a particular attention has been dedicated to the use of words and symbolism in

advertisements. Secondly, the focus was directed to a comparison between foreign and domestic marketing, with a particular regard to beauty standards and gender norms. In this specific case, the analysis has been carried through the concrete comparison of images and social media posts; nevertheless, this part greatly relied on the topics of gender and aesthetics presented in the literature review. The third stage of analysis mainly focused on the response from the foreign consumers to the previously presented advertisements, as well as the products themselves. The four categories of human beauty value have been applied, to a certain extent, to understand the reactions of the audience on an individual level. Because the focus has been slowly shifted from the makeup companies to the actual consumers, I analysed mainly blog posts and reaction videos responding to different marketing practices in this specific part.

### **3.3 Limitations**

The study presents few limitations that need to be addressed prior to the further elaboration of the thesis. Firstly, during the process of quest for suitable literature, I have encountered a lack of previous research material in a language that I am comfortable using in my study. One considerable limitation is in fact a lack of knowledge of the South Korean language, which is widely adopted in the cosmetic industry-related literature. Furthermore, the opening of the South Korean beauty industry to the international market is still a fairly recent development, which inevitably caused a scarcity in academic material which specifically refers to the phenomenon. Analysing advertisements can in this case alleviate the issues arising from this limitation, as branding pieces usually rely on the visual impact of images.

It is also important to underline the specific lens used to carry the study: although the research was conducted on different marketing strategies used by makeup companies, my personal knowledge in the marketing field is, as of now, fairly limited. Possessing a broader understanding of this sphere could have surely supported the research process. Nonetheless, this study is intended to serve as an elaboration of those same advertisements under the light of social sciences, more so than the process of selling a product in its most basic form. By this I mean that my intent was to highlight all the cultural and social aspects that ideals of beauty inherently carry, and that are very often hidden if observed at a superficial degree.

### **3.4 Positionality**

The concept of positionality is a fundamental element to consider in this specific study. First and foremost, as a European female studying foreign perceptions of beauty, and most particularly the South Korean one, I might end up falling in the Orientalist trap by perpetuating

erroneous considerations of a foreign culture; this might trigger a generalisation of characteristics specific to an unfamiliar society. However unavoidable this dual problem is, throughout my entire study I have tried to push away any bias generated by my background and cultural identity.

Furthermore, it is a fundamental indication that I have been, in my personal life and throughout the past five years, an active purchaser of South Korean cosmetic products. Even before Europe started opening up to the market, I was collecting Korean cosmetic products through websites, which allowed me to grow an interest in the field. By being myself both a researcher and a consumer at the same time, I have suffered certain limitations, which were however balanced out, to a certain extent, by some beneficial elements as well. By that I specifically refer to the weakness of being part of the advertisement's target, which makes me perceive the cosmetic industry under a very subjective light, perhaps even manipulated at times by the ongoing beauty trends and commercials that I am subjected to. It appears clear to me how it is nearly impossible to completely separate my personal sphere with the academic one. That being said, it has been advantaging on my part to be closer to the identity of the consumer, as it promoted an understanding of the message pursued by the companies' advertisements on a more introspective level, and it might have eventually lead to an interesting perspective on the matter.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Because this research does not involve any type of fieldwork, the ethical issues that could potentially arise have not weighted on any specific individual. Aside from this aspect, there certainly are a few ethical considerations that need to be made regarding the process of data collection, as well as its further elaboration and analysis of the findings.

Particularly, when studying the concept of beauty within a specific culture, I had to keep in mind its connection to a series of other subjects of interest, such as gender, mental health issues, body image issues, lookism and the role of beauty within society. Because South Korean beauty standards have often caught the attention of multiple media outlets, this specific discourse demands particular carefulness. All of these aspects can be considered very sensitive, and they have been treated with the necessary caution and objectivity that they require.

## **4. Empirics**

As presented by *Table 1*, the two brands have very specific characteristics in terms of targeted audience, promotion of products and their overall popularity in the Western world. The next

two sections will provide some general and essential information about the companies, which will serve as a foundation in understanding further elaborations of the data.

#### 4.1 Laneige

This Korean brand, owned by the corporation Amore Pacific, has quickly gained a massive amount of success in the Western world, since its introduction on all Sephora shelves, as well as beauty online stores. Some of the products have caught the attention of the public, often publicised by public figures and celebrities that the audience appreciates and relates to. The products are usually on the pricier side. The packaging are characterised by a minimalistic, clean look. The products are especially popular among women, from young adults to mature, although the cosmetic company targets all genders.

#### 4.2 Etude House

Like the previous brand, Etude House is owned by Amore Pacific. This brand is heavily supported by an advertisement system based on pop culture references, which can vary between cartoons, celebrities and food items. Generally speaking, the success of this brand revolves around a smart use of collaborations with other companies and brands that younger generations are familiar with. The products are fairly cheap as well, and they are often characterised by colourful exterior packaging, which also aim at attracting teenagers' gaze. This brand is not sold in physical stores in the Western world, however the easy access to online shops made the brand fairly popular among foreign purchasers as well. Social media platforms are heavily used to interact with the global market, which facilitated its relative success.

<b><i>Brand Name</i></b>	<b>Laneige</b>	<b>Etude House</b>
<i>Parent Company</i>	Amore Pacific	Amore Pacific
<i>Targeted Audience (Gender, Age)</i>	Females and males, from young adults to mature.	Mostly females, from teenagers to young adults.
<i>Preferred Social Media Platform</i>	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
<i>Packaging Style</i>	Clean and simple, minimalistic.	Colourful, fun, usually referencing pop culture.



<i>European Sales Platform</i>	Sephora, Online Shops (YesStyle.com, Korean beauty websites)	Online Shops (YesStyle.com, Korean beauty websites)
<i>Popularity and Presence in Europe</i>	Very High	Medium-Low

Table 1.

## 5. Findings

In the following chapter I will present my findings in more descriptive terms. I will first focus on each brand, one by one, before rounding off with a comparison of the two. The chapter will then end with some considerations on the data obtained. My primary data on the two companies has been organised into the four categories earlier presented in the Methodology chapter. All the images I refer to throughout the chapter are listed in the Appendix.

### 5.1 Laneige

Perhaps the most renowned K-beauty company in the Western world, Laneige has earned its fame from well thought social media marketing campaigns and by targeting a broad range of customers over the years.

The brand is active on multiple social media platforms, however, for the purpose of this paper, I decided to focus on their most popular ones, meaning the ones that are frequently updated and have larger audiences. It must be noted that the brand promotes products on separate accounts for the Korean audience and for the foreign one. Many countries (such as Thailand, India and Canada) have a territory specific brand profile, whose following and activity may vary. My research specifically takes into consideration the Instagram, YouTube and Facebook pages of the brand targeting customers from the United States of America and South Korea.

#### 5.1.1 Image Advertisements

What can be observed about Laneige is a particular attention to the type of audience that the brand is targeting. When it comes to the promotion of cosmetics in North America, this not only involves a specific focus towards distinct ethnic groups, but also other minorities, such as the LGBT community (*Image 3*). Overall, the advertisements presented by the brand appear to strongly promote inclusivity, while offering, to a certain extent, a break from gender-based stereotypes. As I started examining the South Korean and USA Instagram profiles of the

company, a significant difference emerged at a very first glance. While the South Korean platform only uses Asian female models, the USA one is instead much more inclusive. Black, Asian and Caucasian girls are the “faces” of the brand (*Image 1*). In some occurrences, however very sporadically, the social media account even promotes the products through male influencers (*Image 3*). In the case of the Facebook accounts, it is possible to identify one main difference between the domestic and foreign platforms as well: the South Korean one is used to repost the same advertisements shared on the Instagram account, while the USA one mainly focuses on reposting articles that positively review Laneige products, especially when they are being praised by celebrities and internet influencers. On this note, both the South Korean and USA platforms heavily rely on notorious individuals and online personalities to promote their products (*Image 2*). For instance, the first North American ambassador for the brand is the Olympic star gold medallist Chloe Kim, whose parents originate from South Korea (Laneige US, 2016).

An interesting comparison that can be made between the South Korean and USA social media profiles is the general perception that can be drawn by looking at the models chosen. In the domestic account, all the girls that promote the products are young, innocent looking ladies. They all have a flawless white skin, red lips, a cheerful smile on their face, but most importantly, they all share a graceful and natural type of beauty. In the foreign one, the models still present the same type of natural beauty, but with some consistent differences. As I mentioned, there is much more inclusivity in this case, and the brand seems to concentrate on offering a much more relatable type of beauty to the customers. There is no interest in hiding the models’ skin texture, and the main American ambassador, Chloe Kim, gained notoriety through her discipline and strength, instead of her beauty.

Overall, the brand promotes diversity and it appears to be mindful of the audience’s preferences towards country-specific ideals of beauty. The company also relies on relatable content that the customers can connect with and aspire to.

### **5.1.2 Video Advertisements**

When it comes to YouTube, the Korean account appears to be far more active than the USA counterpart, with a significantly higher number of followers and videos uploaded. While the American channel only contains brief instruction videos on how to use the products – and still, there is a very limited number of clips uploaded – the Korean one is very active, and it offers a variety of videos. First of all, every new launch is introduced in a form of video advertisement,

either showing the product by itself or presented by a model. But the channel is not only limited to that: it also contains instructions, make-up tutorials, and there is a vast use of pop culture as a recurrent theme. Many celebrities are in fact involved in the promotion of the brand's cosmetics. Among them, a decent amount being male. Interestingly enough, the age of those men varies between young adults and adults, with the oldest one being Park Myung-hoon, a forty-four years old actor (Laneige Korea, 2019). All the ambassadors, both males and females, are South Korean actors and singers.

Because of the unsurmountable language barrier, it was impossible for me to get access to the translations for most of the words used in the YouTube videos. What I could obtain however comes from the latest series of products launched by the brand, as the clips provided both Korean and English words. One of these is a video dated 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 and titled "Thirst for life", pushing the viewer to engage in life more fully, as a series of phrases appear on the screen: "Speak up", "Let your feelings out", "Show your passion", "Change the world", "Live in the moment", "Dive in deep" (Laneige Korea, 2020).

Visually speaking, all video advertisements present the same format as the pictures posted by the brand on the South Korean Instagram page; namely, fair-skinned, pretty, young female models. This of course with the addition of male models as well, as mentioned earlier in the section. Not as much can be said about the American YouTube channel: some of the advertisements have been taken from the Korean account and translated for the foreign audience. No males have been included in the footage.

In summary, the brand is mainly active on the Korean YouTube channel, sending messages of self-growth and self-care beyond the mere act of applying cosmetics. Just as for image advertisements targeting the foreign audience, the brand promotes inclusivity and relies on pop culture in its videoclips.

### **5.1.3 Product Descriptions and the Use of Words**

"Cosmetic adverts deliberately use certain conventional signs to instigate their viewers to buy the beauty product" (Tehseem and Kalsoom, 2015, p.84). Semiotics play an important role in the process of luring the audience into purchasing an item, especially if, like in the case of cosmetics, the same audience is subjected to a process of self-comparison and projection of a future self. In other words, units of language are used as symbols for a series of representations that are mediated by specific social and cultural contexts.

The starting point of understanding the brand's line of conduct is the brief introduction presented by the Laneige official web page. The range of products is divided into three main categories: skincare, make-up and homme. The general focus of all products is providing hydration to the customers. The brand often emphasises its innovative technology, which is undergoing persistent developments. On the official website, the first section, illustrating the history of the brand, is called "Luminous Life". This page recites: "Healthy and Luminous Beauty, Positive Value. Someone with healthy self-esteem and cares for the inside, instead of the fleeting beauty that remains on the outside. You, who pursues and practices a healthy sense of beauty and your own values which gives off a positive vibe all around and radiates a pure and clean glow from within, is the star of a luminous life" (Laneige, n.d.).

The most compelling aspect about the website is the obvious difference between the promotion of products for women and men, both from a visual and a semiotic standpoint. For reference, I decided to select two product descriptions in particular (*Image 4* and *Image 5*). As for almost all women's products advertisements on the website, *Image 4* presents the picture of a model with very minimal make-up, and a natural type of beauty. The packaging of the product is minimalistic, and it falls into light-neutral tones. The description of the toner called "Perfect Renew Skin Refiner" is combined to the hashtag #babyface. The text moves onto endorsing the contrast between "old" and "new", by associating the term "wrinkle" to "skin's youthful energy". When it comes to *Image 5*, however, no male model is used to advertise the product. As for all products in the same category (nonetheless, this is a very common aspect for all cosmetics products for men), the packaging falls into the shades of black, dark blue and white. The set of products called "Blue Energy EX Duo" is in this case combined to the hashtag #intense. The description uses words such as "powerful" and "vitality".

When it comes to cosmetics, even the name of each single product might induce a feeling or emotion in the targeted audience. For instance, one can take Laneige Layering Lip Bar as an example. This lipstick comes in twenty shades, each one characterised by a label: "Jealousy Red", "Orange Pleasure", "Alluring Red", "Quiet Pink", "Shy Beige" and "Fierce Fuchsia" are only some of the titles used to identify different colors of lipsticks. Each shade is also combined to a description. For instance, when selecting "Quiet Pink", the sentence "Natural pink for a pure, elegant and romantic look" appears on the screen (Laneige, n.d.).

By observing the description of the brand concept and, secondly, the description of the products, some dynamics come to light. First of all, the company promotes a positive message that encourages customers to take care of themselves and their mental health, before anything else.

When it comes to the cosmetics' descriptions however certain gender-based stereotypes are being kept in place, as they emerge through the choice of words used by the company.

#### **5.1.4 Customers' Reviews**

Overall, the general impression that can be drawn by online reviews is a very positive one. Laneige has imposed itself as the leading company of K-beauty abroad, by even occupying an important spot in Sephora stores.

In my research, I decided to gather as many impressions of the brand as possible, however, in most cases, the foreign audience is overall satisfied with the results obtained from using the products. In some instances, some customers have complained that certain Laneige products are overrated, or that they do not work well for specific issues that an individual might have. These opinions are of course influenced by a number of reasons, as it is very common for skincare products to not fit every single person's needs. It is also important to mention that most of the comments I reviewed were written or filmed by women, which might be an indication that these products are being especially appreciated by the female audience.

The company heavily relies on relatability and building a connection with its customers. First of all, Laneige regularly launches Instagram challenges, in which, broadly speaking, customers engage by posting a picture of their products alongside a caption. On this note, Instagram is the most active platform for the company, as Laneige regularly interacts with customers in the comment section of its profile. I have noticed that the brand is even willing to confront negative reviews and use them as feedback to improve its formulas. Something that is also worth noting is the company's focus on keeping the skin supple and hydrated, in line with the "glass skin" trend that absolutely took over the beauty industry in 2019. This trend, which originated from South Korea, had later been adopted by the Western cosmetic industry, becoming a proper beauty ideal among younger generations. At the moment, the "glass skin" look is still a dominating trend all over social media, and people often recommend using Laneige products to achieve the desired appearance. Customers seem to be thoroughly enjoy all of the campaigns launched by the brand. The newer concepts have also been highly praised by the audience.

Overall, the foreign audience is satisfied with both the products and the campaigns launched by the company, as the main focus of Laneige is to propose relatable standards and content. The communication between brand and customers, for the most part happening online, is also very effective and prompt.

## 5.2 Etude House

Lesser known than Laneige, and with a much more limited targeted audience, Etude House is a colourful make-up brand, especially loved by very young audiences (from teenagers to young adults). The brand is active on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Among these, the Instagram and YouTube accounts are used to reach both the domestic and foreign audience. Only on Facebook there are separate accounts, a South Korean one and a Global one.

### 5.2.1 Image Advertisements

First and foremost, Etude House does not create separate promotional content for separate targeted groups. This will perhaps make the research flow faster; however, it will be limited to a certain extent, at least in comparison to the brand I presented earlier. Nonetheless, a lot can be said about the company, and there are many observations to unfold as well.

A first point I want to make about the brand is a description of its advertisements' visual impact. There is a certain concept that Etude House has proposed overtime: adjectives such as feminine, sweet, youthful and light-hearted are perhaps the best ones to describe it. This sort of concept is immediate to the eye, even at a first encounter with the make-up company, from the all-pink logo, to the sparkly and pastel-toned pictures of its Instagram account. All models used in the advertisements are young Asian females. Their make-up looks vary from natural to slightly more dramatic ones, but with a consistent focus on flawless porcelain skin. There is not a big variety in terms of representation; for instance, I was able to discover a series of promotional pictures displaying Bae You-jin, a half Korean half Nigerian teen model (*Image 6*). Other than that, I could not find any picture that would display any ethnicity other than the Asian one. On the Instagram account no men were used to promote the products.

An element that I consider an essential part of the brand, as well as being one of its strongest selling points, is the consistent amount of collaborations and references to pop culture. The brand regularly selects new ambassadors, who have all been, for the past ten years, k-pop singers. The current ones, the pop group Red Velvet, are very popular not only in South Korea, but also in the rest of the world, including Europe and America (Etude House, n.d.). In terms of collaborations, Etude House has worked with numerous animated shows for children, such as Tom and Jerry, Winnie the Pooh, Donald Duck and many more, making it suitable and appealing to the very youngest audiences, who perhaps are being introduced to the world of make-up (*Image 7*). Among Etude House products, desserts are a recurrent theme as well, from

the packaging to the cosmetics' scent. *Image 8* shows the latest collaboration of the brand with Hershey's chocolate. Once again, this might be the most appealing to the younger audiences.

In summary, the brand does not focus very much on producing country-specific promotional content, but instead relies on pop culture and appealing designs to attract the audience's attention (mainly consisted of young individuals). The concept of the brand seems to portray a very stereotyped ideal of feminine beauty.

### **5.2.2 Video Advertisements**

As previously mentioned, Etude House is represented by only one YouTube channel globally, which means that most of the content presented on the account is only available in Korean. Aside from that, a portion of the clips have been reposted in combination to English subtitles. Because the main focus of the brand revolves around make-up, the majority of videos posted are either tutorials or promotional recordings used to inaugurate the launch of new products.

The oldest videos posted on the channel are around nine years old. During this early stage of social media, the brand was including men (that would easily fall in the category of *Kkot Minam*) to promote the products. In this case, a k-pop group called Shinee, at the time particularly appreciated by young teenagers. Interestingly, the boys wear make-up in all of the clips, however very natural looking and barely noticeable (Etude, 2011). At a further stage of research, I discovered that the company had dedicated a collection of tinted lip balms to the boy band, as they even became brand ambassadors at some point between 2011 and 2012 (Etude House, n.d.). After them, men kept being included in promotional videos, however sporadically. It seems that, at this point in time, the purpose of men had changed from being the main characters to fulfilling a particular role in the clips: the boy who feels attracted to girls wearing the products being promoted. During this period, Etude House's video advertisements seemed to follow a specific pattern: these were created as short films in which the girl models suddenly attracted happiness and love from wearing the brand's cosmetics (Etude, 2014). Another evolution happened in 2016, when the forty-nine years old Korean American actor Ma Dong-seok participated as the main character in a promotional video for Etude House. Here, the man wears a pink polka-dots apron, while describing the benefits of Etude Any Cushion Cream Filter Foundation. I found this video interesting as the actor would be stereotypically considered "manly" (i.e. he has a very deep voice, he wears a beard and he is older than the usual male representatives in cosmetics advertisements), however there is a very refreshing contrast between him and his clothing, as well as the general style of the video (Etude, 2016).

Lately, men have been introduced in Etude House videos as beauty experts and professional make-up artists showing how to apply certain products or giving advice on their usage. The role and appearance of female models has not changed drastically overtime. Perhaps in earlier stages the brand was promoting an exclusively girly concepts, in which pink was the dominating colour. The girly concept has certainly not disappeared; however, there is much more space for personal expression and a wider variety of possibilities on the usage of make-up products, offering girls the opportunity to experiment and have fun with different looks.

Etude House has used male models to promote its products for a very long time. In some instances, those models have broken gender-based stereotypes (i.e. Ma Dong-seok's clip), in some other cases they have conformed to those same ones. While the role of men in the video advertisements has changed overtime, the women's role has not drastically evolved.

### **5.2.3 Product Descriptions and the Use of Words**

In order to search for an accurate description of the brand, I decided to look for the Etude House official website. As I came across the "About" page, I was introduced to three main portions of text. These recite:

"ETUDE LOVELY. With Etude, girls can express their unique sweetness and share lovely pink sentiments which will uplift you and excite you with stories you had only imagined";

"ETUDE TRENDY. A girl's sweet imagination of becoming a beauty icon can come true at Etude. New ideas and creative attempts can be discovered at Etude, and this can inspire girls to turn their ordinary lives into a special one. Enjoy a new sweet life as a trend-setter!";

"ETUDE PLAYFUL. The joy of choosing various sensuous colours and the pleasure of meeting Etude's alluring products will make your everyday makeup more fun and playful with others. Discovering another beautiful side of you with Etude is another sweet festival for girls" (Etude House, n.d.).

The use of the word "sweet" is being reiterated, in this case, multiple times, perhaps in accordance to the brand's motto "Life is Sweet". What emerges from this introduction is a tendency in catering young girls, who are starting to create projections of their future selves, while wishing to conform with society's expectation from them. This portion of text definitely offers many points of reflection, both on a semantic and a socio-cultural level.

Although mainly focused on younger audiences, Etude House offers skincare products that fit more mature skins as well. The brand has in fact a wide range of products, from cosmetics to



face masks, creams and even hair dyes. On the official website, there is even a section dedicated to men's skincare. This line is very limited, with only three products available. The packaging of these products is very different than what one would expect from Etude House, although it fits with the mainstream appearance of products designed for men, by being minimal and falling into neutral tones of black and grey (*Image 9*). As previously mentioned, the packaging of products is a distinctive element of the brand. In combination to a series of carefully chosen words, the description of beauty items is a helpful tool for companies to lure customers into purchasing cosmetics. As shown by *Image 10* the Etude House Dear Darling Water Gel Tints are small colourful lipsticks, packaged in ice-cream-shaped boxes. As many other products marketed by the company, the cosmetics are compared to literal snacks, evoking once again the "Life is Sweet" concept. In this case, three main characteristics are being evoked by the description. The first one being the long-lasting moisturising power of the product, followed by the possibility of enhancing one's "pure and bright skin tone" through the contrast with the red lips. Lastly, the lips are promised to become "moist and lively" because of the natural extracts used in the formula.

It can be stated that the words used by the company to describe the brand's overall concept are conforming with society's expectation of "feminine" behaviours and life purposes, which are very generic, simplified and stereotyped.

#### **5.2.4 Customers' Reviews**

While looking for customers' reviews on Etude House, I discovered many mixed opinions. In multiple cases, customers specify that some products work very well, while others not as much. What everyone seems to be agreeing on is however an appreciation towards the creative value, the dessert-like smell of the products and the collaborations made with various types of companies. The audience reacted positively to Bae You-jin, the earlier mentioned half Nigerian model, which was involved in one of the brand's campaigns. An Instagram user commented under her picture (*Image 6*): "Use more black models!"; another responded to the campaign with: "Wow we love a diverse brand". Overall, customers have appreciated this step forward, especially considering that the company has always shown a decisive preference for Asian models, despite having gained popularity all over the world.

From my point of view, I also had the impression that there was not a very effective connection between the company and the customers. This might be related to the fact that the company did not create country-specific advertisements and profiles catering singular audiences. A

problem that emerged from this decision has been the unfitting beauty ideal proposed by Etude House. In other words, the beauty standards that the company tried to sell do not fit with the Western ones. For customers to want to achieve a certain look, they need to be familiar with it, at least to a certain extent. The African American YouTuber Kennie J. D. also expressed her disappointment in most Korean brands (mentioning, among others, Etude House) for not being inclusive enough in their range of products. She particularly specified that the shades spectrum in Korean foundations is so limited that most Koreans themselves cannot find matching colours to their skin tone. Furthermore, she specified that being “K-beauty is a very intentional international export. [...] Korean brands are not only made for Koreans” (Kennie J.D., 2018).

Even though foreign customers have urged Etude House to be more inclusive, the choice of models is still very limited. The brand seems to not be understanding of the target’s needs and requests, a tendency that is also reflected in their poor range of fitting shades of make-up. Despite that, for customers who aspire to Korean ideals of beauty, the company is proven to be fairly satisfactory.

### **5.3 Comparison of the Brands**

When it comes to the promotion of beauty products abroad, there are many ways for companies to work their way through towards the audience. Generally speaking, social media marketing is, at the moment, the best way to reach out to both old and new customers. While this is partially a commercial operation, it is important to analyse it as a socio-cultural phenomenon, impacting purchasers on a global and individual level. But social media marketing is not, as I will shortly present in my discussion, a one-way street.

When taking into account Laneige, the company shows a clear interest in trying to create some level of relatability with the customer. This is created on a primary level by offering country-specific social media accounts and advertisements, which offer the customer a closer experience with the brand. On a secondary level, Laneige has shown an interest in promoting diversity, by introducing models of different ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations. Although not as inclusive as some other cosmetics brands, there is a clear willingness in moving forward and opening the beauty industry to a wide range of customers. A note that needs to be made is the use of strictly Korean models in the Korean advertisements. My supposition is that, being South Korea is an extremely homogeneous country, there is not as much of a need of promoting a more inclusive image of the brand.

Etude House, on the other hand, does not seem to focus as much on creating a sense of relatability, but instead directs its attention to promoting a series of ideals and projections. Although Laneige uses this technique to sell products as well, the brand is much more interested in making the audience feel closer, engaged and accepted. In the case of Etude House, the company creates an idealistic fantasy for the customer to aim for. This tendency becomes particularly obvious when examining the words used to describe the brand concept. The sentence: “A girl’s sweet imagination of becoming a beauty icon” is the perfect example of this inclination, as well as a reiteration of terms such as “imagine”, “discover”, “ideas” and “attempts”. Perhaps due to the focus on younger girls, which are starting to figure out their own selves, this is the preferred method of attracting new customers, while keeping the older ones engaged. On the other hand, this type of message highlights an issue that does not have much to do with marketing and selling, but with a problem that is deep rooted within society. Women are constantly being told how to behave, how to look and what to want throughout their lives. This means that the commodification of females’ bodies, which is an important part of capitalism, plants its foundations very early on. There is a diffused obsession among most societies in preserving one’s “natural” youthfulness, especially when the target of this obsession is a woman. This type of perspective is being reflected through the choice of words that the companies decide to use in their advertisements. Both in the case of Laneige and Etude House there are several examples of this specific dynamic. In the first case, the brand uses the hashtag “#babyface”, in combination to the words “renew”, “refiner”, “anti-wrinkle” and “youthful” (*Image 4*). The ideal of reversing ageing processes is both unrealistic and unattainable, pushing women to keep purchasing products in a desperate attempt of fighting the natural course of life. Beauty capitalism (Jha, 2016) perpetuates this sense of obligation towards preserving women’s appearance overtime, through the imposition of false needs (Marcuse, 1991) onto them. Etude House is no different in this respect. The “girly” concept of the brand encloses a series of gender-based stereotypes that are once again reflected in the use of words and imagery. The ideal girl imagined and idolised by the company is sweet, docile, delicate and feminine, with the dream of becoming a “beauty icon” and “trend-setter”. Through the numerous video advertisements, it is also possible to perceive some level of objectification of the woman, who suddenly earns value from catching the attention of men. In capitalism, a woman’s worth is only based on her ability to attract the men’s gaze.

On the other hand, I have observed an opposed direction to the one I have just described. Both companies have employed men in the promotion of cosmetic products. Firstly, in the Western

world, skincare and make-up products for men are not yet fully accepted by societal norms. South Korea appears to be much more open in offering men different options, which are not only limited to face creams but proper make-up items, such as foundations, lipsticks and eyeliners. It is possible to recognise both a preservation of gender roles' expectations as well as a fracture of the same ones. For instance, earlier in the text, I mentioned how actor Ma Dong-Seok wore a polka-dot pink apron, while promoting an Etude House cushion foundation. Another advertisement that seemed to break gender-based expectations was the "Thirst for life" Laneige campaign, which used positive affirmations that pushed women to "speak up" and "change the world". None of the terms used had any type of reference to the female body. It appears as though Laneige has put quite some effort, especially in the latest years, in trying to encourage women to build a healthy relationship with themselves. Even though there are still many controversial elements in the current advertisements, due to their harmful relation with gender norms, I have observed a definite step forward towards helping women into accepting their own selves.

While Laneige presents country-specific advertisements and social media accounts, Etude House creates content for the Korean audience and offers it to the Western public in combination to brief English translations. I have noticed however that for countries in which products are being sold in physical stores, (such as Philippines, Thailand or Singapore) the brand has created country-specific profiles, however it uses the same promotional pictures that can be found on any other account. It is nonetheless very important to mention that Laneige is far more popular in the Western world in comparison to Etude House. While products made by the first brand can be found in numerous physical stores, Etude House is much harder to get to. There are certainly many K-beauty online shops on the internet, however being promoted by Sephora and other major beauty stores has definitely been a considerable source of success. Although it is impossible to declare which are the causes for the fame that Laneige has gained in comparison to Etude House, it is possible instead to draw the essential characteristics that make the two brands different from each other, and perhaps more or less liked by the audience. One of my hypotheses focuses on the perceptions of different standards of beauty. It appears as though Laneige offers a closer image of what the customer wishes to achieve. Many advertisements focus on evoking flawless dewy skin, a natural but realistic type of beauty. As most girls, the models promoting the products show minimal make-up and visible pores. In the case of Etude House, most girls advertise a type of beauty that does not fit within the lines of Western typical canons. Firstly, all models wear very light-coloured foundation. In Western

countries there is a higher appreciation for tanner skin tones, perhaps due to the assumption that going on holiday in warmer countries might be a direct link to a higher status in society. This means that Western girls not only use tanning products, but also bronzers and powders to alter their skin tones. On top of this, Korean eye make-up products are known to be hardly pigmented, with a primary focus on emphasising the lips. This is due to the fact that Korean make-up styles are trying to reproduce a youthful, innocent look. In the West, make-up is usually employed to achieve sensual, mature looks, especially among younger generations.

Previously, I offered some of the reactions that customers had in response to the two Korean brands. I will now try to focus on the foreign audience's general impression, partially separated from technical reviews of the products, and instead directed towards the messages that can be drawn from the advertisements. First of all, I will analyse which types of reactions Laneige has generated since its arrival in the Western world. On an individual level, most customers that are introduced to the brand, have a tendency to grow a certain level of brand loyalty, which pushes them to repurchase the products they have tested, and even try different ones. This happens because the company creates efficient relations with the audience, who, once engaged, develops a range of feelings and behaviours linked to the previously fabricated projections of beauty ideals. For instance, the company uses different terms or images which trigger different emotions in women. The use of words such as "happy", "smile" or "pleasure" have a hidden but positive effect on customers, making them subconsciously think that by purchasing a product they will be able to achieve a certain emotional state.

The brand seems to be very attentive to the type of audience it is targeting, as well as the desires craved by the same one. Relatability is definitely an important element in this respect. I have mentioned the engagement shown by the company in interacting with its customers, and its willingness to accept any feedback, whether positive or negative. The brand also stays on trend, meaning that it focuses on what the audience is looking for in a product during a specific period of time. The "glass skin" look is a very popular make-up trend right now, and Laneige fully embraces it in its promotional content. Another element of relatability is the choice of models used in the promotional pictures, which show a high level of inclusiveness and diversity. This has been very much appreciated by the audience, especially during the last few years.

Etude House, on the other hand, has had a different approach with customers. First and foremost, by utilising the same promotional advertisements and social media profiles for different types of audiences, there was not as much engagement on the company's part in trying to get closer to the customers. This greatly limited the ways in which the projections of beauty

ideals were being constructed. Foreign audiences seem to struggle in reflecting their own identity into the images proposed by the company. One aspect that gets the audience closer to the brand is through pop culture: those who are more familiar with the Korean Wave appear to be appreciating the company more. As previously mentioned, Etude House has worked with multiple Korean singers, usually those who are famous on a global level. This supposedly might help selling make-up products to foreign audiences, especially cosmetics lines made in collaboration with the celebrities. A request that multiple foreign customers have advanced is for the company to be more inclusive. These types of comments started emerging as soon as the brand used a half-black model in one of its campaigns; the foreign audience loved her and ask for the company to feature more black girls. Some customers also complained that the shades of the make-up items being sold by the company are too limited, as they only fit very light-skinned girls.

#### **5.4 Considerations on the Empirical Findings**

Before moving onto the Analysis of my empirical data, I want to make some considerations on the employment of it in answering my research questions.

What I obtained from my investigation is a significant difference between the two brands' marketing choices. In summary, Laneige chooses to promote two contrasting ideals abroad: the first one, pushing women to have a healthy relationship with their body and mind (Laneige Korea, 2020) while embracing diversity (*Image 1; Image 3*), and the second one, promoting ageism and gender-based stereotypes through the choice of words used in the products' descriptions (*Image 4; Image 5*). Etude House, on the other hand, advertises an exaggerated and superficial ideal of feminine beauty, which revolves around being "lovely", "trendy" and "playful". *Kkot Minam* (Kim et al., 2013) are however employed as campaigns models, and the company shows an accepting attitude towards men's skincare and grooming. Overall, it can be stated that there are definitely different approaches that a company can take in order to promote its products abroad. What is really important however in influencing the customers' purchasing choices is an attention towards the impact of culture and society, which the brand needs to be aware and mindful of.

Because of the descriptive nature of my Findings chapter, I was able to obtain enough data to formulate some plausible answers to my research questions. The question I had the most difficulty formulating an answer for is perhaps the one concerning customers' reviews, because of the vastity and variety of opinions that can be discovered online. Despite this problem, I

tried to focus on the most popular opinions, in order to provide the most agreed-on impressions of the brands.

## **6. Analysis**

What my study may suggest is that social media marketing can be utilised in multiple ways, without a unique approach for K-beauty companies to promote products in foreign countries. That being said, a series of messages consistently permeates through the advertisements, often reaching the audience in a subtle manner. My research indicates that the current cosmetic industry, in the context of global political economy (McCracken, 2014), relies on specific social and cultural symbols to not only sell the products, but to also manipulate the ideals and aspirations of the customers. In line with the theories of Sinclair (2012) and Yu, Park and Sung (2015), the social media promotion of Korean cosmetics seems to have impacted the foreign audience's perception of beauty. An example of this inclination is the "glass skin" look I have mentioned in my previous chapter. This influence would have perhaps not been possible without the employment of certain commonly agreed values, which reinforce gender roles and the control of women's bodies by the capitalist power (Whitmer, 2015; Prieler, Ivanov and Hagiwara, 2015). The perpetuation of socially constructed values and beliefs seems to be displayed by both of the brands' lines of conduct, with specific differences coming to light between the two.

What my observations may indicate is a conflicting approach towards gender roles between Western countries and South Korea. While Western countries still consider applying cosmetic products as a "feminine" practice, South Korea instead encourages men to take care of themselves. Although it might appear as a step forward in terms of gender equality, it needs to be pointed out that the ideal of beauty that is being pushed onto men seems to be influenced by toxic masculinity ideals. This hypothesis emerges by observing the semiotic meaning of the words used in product descriptions, as well as the cosmetics' packaging. It can be argued that although the Western beauty industry puts almost all pressure on women, the K-beauty one might be potentially detrimental for both genders. This statement is in line with Marcuse's (1991) theory of false needs, which are used by the capitalist machine to overpower an individual's personal will. This happens because there is a diffused notion of self-expression potential carried by the human body (Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner, 1991, p.170), which is in reality very much limited to a series of constructed societal standards that end up repressing individual choices. Furthermore, from my own perspective, it appears as though the

Western market might not be ready to normalise male grooming and self-care practices yet, due to a series of constructed misconceptions.

The commodification of the female body in the K-beauty industry appears to be a major issue. Very often, companies promise a better future through the idealisation of unattainable beauty ideals and the illusion of reverting one's ageing process. Because of this, lookism (Lee et al., 2017) and ageism (Calasanti, 2005) have been two prominent themes in numerous pieces of promotional content. There is an impression emerging from the said advertisements that the female body is considered as a type of capital, which allows economic mobility when fitting in the normalised standards of beauty (Jha, 2016). In this case, the advertisements might try to convince the consumer that applying make-up will make them valuable to males and, more generally, to society.

As previously illustrated, when it comes to foreign and domestic social media marketing Laneige and Etude House have taken distinct approaches. While Laneige has prioritised the needs and requests of its different targeted groups, Etude House has instead proposed the same concept to all types of audiences. The assumption that emerged while analysing these two lines of conduct has mainly revolved around the simplification of cultural codes. Specifically, when referring to Etude House, as the company decided to propose a standard of beauty that does not fit into the ideals of Western consumers, it instead relied on pop culture and the Korean Wave (Choi, Cho and Lee, 2012). With this expedient, the brand has turned culture into a profitable good for the foreign audiences, while proposing a fitting standard of beauty to the domestic one. The issue that emerges when simplifying these codes is an inevitable inaccuracy of the images and cultural concepts proposed to the public. This is a potential (but unavoidable) issue that the company develops among the foreign customers. It goes without saying that Laneige, by utilising cultural and social codes that the audience is close to, generates a considerably lower level of miscalculation in this regard. What both brands might instead be guilty of is the promotion of elusive and idealistic images that promote a distorted idea of reality, as illustrated by the cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Kim and Lowry, 2005).

The foreign audience seems to have not only accepted K-beauty, but to also have incorporated some of its elements in everyday routines. Inevitably so, globalisation encourages these types of exchanges, especially emphasised by social media and the internet. On the other hand, there are certain limitations to this statement. For instance, Laneige has proposed country-specific campaigns. This means that the inherent message sent by the company did not have so much



to do with the Korean culture specifically. The cultural and social symbols were much closer to the customers, putting leverage on relatability more than anything. In the case of Etude House, the cultural symbols were distorted in order for them to appeal to the audience (Patil, 2012). On top of that, the brand did not gain as much notoriety in the Western world compared to Laneige in the first place. My study suggests that the foreign audience is susceptible to the types of images that it is subjected to. But because social media allows a closer level of interaction between company and consumer, customers are more open to advance their specific demands from the brands. These have been manifested, in the case of Etude House, through multiple requests for its advertisements to be more inclusive; the same complaint has been moved towards the range of shades proposed by the company. This might be a reflection of the preferences that the audience appears to have in today's day and age, which is more appreciative of realistic beauty standards. It can be noted that there is definitely a higher level of awareness towards the ideals produced by the capitalist system.

According to the theory of human beauty value (Kim and Lee, 2018), superiority, self-development, individuality, and authenticity are mediated by social comparison, competition and norms. In my study, I was able to observe that the mediating dimensions, which in reality regulate society in all of its aspects, are utilised by the cosmetic industry to promote the four categories as ultimate ideals. With the notion that capitalism and patriarchy push women to be in competition with each other, advertisements seem to promote the illusion that through make-up products women will be able to have their own individuality, by supposedly surpassing others in terms of physical appearance. This would be of course another deceptive projection of the cosmetic industry, but a very effective one on female consumers.

## **7. Conclusion**

The present study aimed to provide an analysis of the capitalisation of beauty standards through the marketing of South Korean cosmetic products abroad, and specifically to Western consumers. Through the scrutiny of promotional content and online reviews, I tried to formulate answers to each research question. These were further backed up by a series of gender and feminist theories on beauty and media.

First of all, I tried to understand the ways in which the cosmetic industry promotes products to foreign audiences. This was achieved through an organised and descriptive account of different elements found in promotional content, which can be discovered on social media. A second level of inquiry has been represented by a comparison of domestic and foreign marketing

practices, especially in relation to gender norms and beauty ideals. The third and final question revolved around the responses of the Western consumers to the K-beauty industry and its products. What emerged from the study is two different lines of conduct for the separate brands. Even though Laneige and Etude House have, in some respect, certain common traits (such as utilising social and cultural codes or the use of pop culture), they definitely differ in the ways they communicate with the audience. Furthermore, they have a contrasting understanding when it comes to beauty ideals. In my research, I tried to investigate gender roles within the cosmetic industry. Through this analysis, I aimed for a comparison of the overall perception of male products in the West and in South Korea. At a first glance, these two seem to occupy opposing positions. But on a deeper look, even though South Korea appears to be more open to the fracture of gender-based stereotypes, the cosmetic industry seems to be still very much dominated by toxic masculinity ideals. The image of women perpetuated in advertisements is no better. My study suggests that capitalist and patriarchist models are still heavily dominating the cosmetic industry. Women's bodies are being commodified to please the male's gaze, while beauty is interpreted as the only valuable asset a female can have. This belief appears to be especially displayed by Etude House, while Laneige has shown a much more positive attitude towards women's capabilities and true worth. When trying to figure out the customer's perception of K-beauty, I encountered an overall appreciation of the products and an openness to adopt certain trends. This was perhaps caused by effective marketing strategies that involved projections of self-development and individuality, through the mediation of social and cultural codes.

The topic of this analysis is, as I mentioned early in the paper, still a very recent one. In my opinion, the cosmetic industry is worth being investigated as a vehicle for patriarchist values, now more than ever. It would be interesting to read more work on the construction of gender-based stereotypes, and how they affect beauty ideals. I have observed that these kinds of expectations work in a circular way with the cosmetic industry. By this, I mean that the cosmetic industry is at first influenced by socially constructed beliefs, selling an ideal to women by perpetuating those same beliefs. The more they are being preserved, the more they are being advertised by cosmetics companies. With my own work, even if on a very small scale, I tried to contribute to the field by proposing a study based on concrete empirical evidence. This research, which focused on gender, beauty ideals and media, was intended to reveal issues that cross borders and cultures, and that connect women all over the world.

Finally, I would like to address an issue that I was not able to properly cover in my analysis, but that it is a very important argument within the beauty discourse. The colourism theory has been mentioned various times when referring to the brands' lines of conduct, however it has not been explained in its integrity and with the attention that it deserves. Being my study a very small one, and mainly focused on a different direction, I was not able to examine it in its whole completeness. This does not diminish its relevance within the field. In the same way, it would be impossible to capture all the diversity that culture, and specifically, Korean culture of beauty, is being carried and moulded by social media platforms.

## 8. Appendix: List of Commercial Advertisement Images with References

### References:



Image 1.

Laneige U.S., 2020. *Lip Sleeping Mask for smooth & kissable lips*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 20 February. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8zbj8xp739/> [Accessed 14 May 2020].



Image 2.

Laneige U.S., 2020. *Sealed With A Kiss set to help keep lips moisturized and supple*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 10 February. Available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/B8ZXCTWJL\\_J/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B8ZXCTWJL_J/) [Accessed 14 May 2020].



Image 3.

Laneige U.S., 2019. *Getting cozy with our loved ones*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 20 December. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B6S7P1KpCTp/> [Accessed 14 May 2020].



#Babyface toner  
#Skin energy skin

### Perfect Renew Skin Refiner

“

Gel type anti-wrinkle toner that boosts the skin's youthful energy and fully moisturizes the skin without a sticky feeling

---

120ml

*Image 4. Reference:* Laneige International, n.d. *Perfect Renew Skin Refiner*. [Advertisement on [www.laneige.com](https://www.laneige.com)]. Available at: <https://www.laneige.com/int/en/skincare/perfect-renew-skin-refiner.html> [Accessed 14 May 2020].



#Elasticity up  
#Intense care

### Blue Energy EX Duo Set

“

LANEIGE Homme Blue Energy line with the pure powerful vitality found in the ocean for clean and supple skin for men

---

180ml +125ml

*Image 5. Reference:* Laneige International, n.d. *Blue Energy EX Duo Set*. [Advertisement on [www.laneige.com](https://www.laneige.com)]. Available at: <https://www.laneige.com/int/en/homme/blue-energy-ex-duo-set.html> [Accessed 14 May 2020].

## References:



Image 6.

Etude Official, 2019. *Colorful Tattoo Tint Chicly*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 3 June. Available at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/ByO1HZ\\_hrR9/](https://www.instagram.com/p/ByO1HZ_hrR9/) [Accessed 14 May 2020].



Image 7.

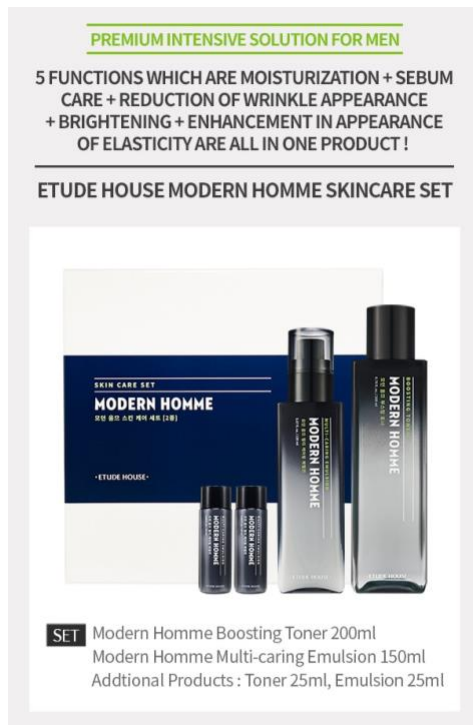
Etude Official, 2018. *Happy With Piglet*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 27 December. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Br4ouAzh00E/> [Accessed 14 May 2020].



Image 8.

Etude Official, 2020. *A heart melting Collaboration*. [Advertisement on Instagram]. 1 February. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8AiNxPhZPb/> [Accessed 14 May 2020].





**Image 9. Reference:** Etude, n.d. *Modern Homme Skincare Set*. [Advertisement on [www.etude.com](http://www.etude.com)]. Available at: <https://www.etude.com/int/en/index.php/skincare/homme/modern-homme-skincare-set.html> [Accessed 14 May 2020].

EtudeHouse  
 DEAR DARLING WATER GEL TINT 4.5G

**WINTER SNACK'S DARK COLOR WITH DEEP AND RICH TEXTURE**  
 SWEET WATER GEL TINT

- 01 VIVID HIGH-COLOR TINT FULL OF MOISTURE**  
 Long lasting moisturization with adhesive moisture helps to express vivid lip color.
- 02 MAKES BRIGHT SKIN TONE WITH WINTER RED COLOR !**  
 Dark red color emphasizes your pure and bright skin tone.
- 03 MOIST & LIVELY LIPS WITH FRESH FRUIT EXTRACTS !**  
 Tons of Mineral & Vitamin from Soap Berry extracts make your lip moist & lively !

**Image 10. Reference:** Etude, n.d. *Dear Darling Water Gel Tint*. [Advertisement on [www.etude.com](http://www.etude.com)]. Available at: <https://www.etude.com/int/en/index.php/dear-darling-water-gel-tint-ice-cream.html> [Accessed 14 May 2020].

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