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Western buying behavior of Korean beauty products: passing trend or permanent shift?

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<p>This study examines the impact of Korean skincare products on Western consumers. The more specified question formed for this study would be "How Western consumer behavior has changed in the past years by the impact of Korean beauty trends?". The aim of this study was to find out how the Korean skincare industry has affected Western consumer behavior, what factors have affected these changes, and whether these changes will remain permanent or not. This was achieved by using the consumer behavior theory as a foundation for this research as well as the diffusion of innovation to study the differences between the selected respondents.</p> <p>Consumer behavior is an essential when researching better ways to market products and services. This study is important considering that majority of the Western society are customers in this predominant industry. The challenges of this research topic were related to the newness of this topic and whether it will remain as permanent change or just as a trend. This thesis' outcome and goal is to produce new data of this topic as well as some sort of predictions of the popularity of the Korean beauty products. However, further studies of this topic will be very useful as there's not knowing how long this movement will last and how it'll constantly keep evolving.</p>	
Keywords	Consumer behavior, Diffusion of innovation, Skincare industry, Trends

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Literature review	2
3	Marketing	2
3.1	Marketing strategies	3
3.1.1	Segmentation and targeting	3
3.1.2	Branding	4
3.1.3	Positioning	5
3.2	Maslow's hierarchy of needs	5
3.3	Porter's five forces	7
3.4	Product life cycle	8
3.5	Diffusion of innovation	9
4	Consumer behavior	11
4.1	Consumer behavior theory	11
4.2	Factors affecting the consumer behavior	11
4.2.1	Cultural factors	12
4.2.2	Psychological factors	12
4.2.3	Social factors	13
4.2.4	Personal factors	14
4.2.5	Other factors to consider	14
4.3	Perceptual process	16
4.4	Consumer decision making process	17
5	The Korea trend	18
6	Methodology	20
6.1	Research question	20
6.2	Data collection	22
6.3	Validity and Reliability	23
6.4	Interview	24
6.5	Data analysis	25

7	Results	26
7.1	Demographics of the respondents	26
7.2	Daily skincare routines	28
7.3	Korean trends and products	33
8	Analysing the results	35
9	Conclusion	36
	References	38
	Figure references	42
	Appendices	
	Appendix 1. Interview questions	

1 Introduction

The main goal for this research has been gaining a deeper understanding of which factors are primarily responsible for influencing Western consumer behavior specific to the Korean beauty industry. Conducting frequent studies of the targeted consumers and the beauty industry allows companies to offer better buying experiences for their present-day customers. The personal care industry is growing exceptionally fast and people are expecting more from their products than they did before. The global cosmetics industry has experienced a significant amount of growth between the years of 2010 and 2015. It has been estimated that there will be an annual increase of 3.2% from 2017 to 2021. Applying to the US only, this makes up a total revenue of over 64 billion dollars in 2017 (Dai, Pelton 2018).

What has also been rising in popularity are the Korean cosmetics brands. Part of this study is to figure out how much the people in Western countries have heard about the products and most importantly, have had the chance to try them themselves. According to a survey on the global popularity of South Korean beauty products in 2020, 43.1% of respondents said that Korean beauty products have become very popular in their country. Nearly 60 percent of these respondents were from Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and China but also from South Africa. This was also reported by 29.4% of respondents from the US. In addition, 24.7% of respondents from Europe stated that they have had very positive impressions of the quality of Korean beauty products (Statista Research Department 2021).

There is a gap in studies concerning the Western consumers who are familiar with these products and how invested they are in them compared to the other consumers. This research first presents the relevant theoretical framework concerning this topic. This will then be following up with the proper methodology and the results of this research. Finally, the conclusion and possible recommendations of this topic will be discussed. Given that the personal care industry is constantly evolving, there will always be more space for further studies, because the literature established from a decade ago is lacking the crucial observations and experiences from the current

consumers. Therefore, updating the previously gathered information would be ideal in order to have a more accurate understanding of this industry as a whole.

2 Literature review

In order to identify the impact that Korean skincare products have had on Western consumers, it's first important to review the theories related to marketing and consumer behavior. This section will focus on the theoretical approaches relevant and required for understanding the nature of this study.

3 Marketing

Marketing plays a significant role in the success of a product or service and while defined in many ways, one of the most widely accepted definitions is by Dr. Philip Kotler.

Marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires (Kotler 2001-2019).

For every industry, especially when it comes to personal care, it is important to identify the needs of the consumers in order to offer successful customer experiences and create a profitable business model. Creating value for targeted consumers as well as understanding their wants and needs can be considered as the main purposes of marketing. Marketing is about creating a relationship between the consumer and the company (Kotler and Armstrong 2012). However, there are many dimensions in marketing and all of them play a role in a product's success.

3.1 Marketing strategies

3.1.1 Segmentation and targeting

A good place to start when looking into the customer value relationships in marketing, are the target marketing and segmentation processes. They are both important when finding the right customer base for the product. Market segmentation can be described as isolating the market into smaller subsets by splitting a heterogeneous market into homogenous segments based on unique characteristics. These characteristics include geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural factors (Claycamp, Massy 1968).



Figure 1. Marketing strategy (Kotler and Armstrong 2012: 48)

Finding the most suitable group of people to target is very helpful for efficient resource allocation. This way the individuals who are the most interested in the product or service will be selected. In order to best match the customers' needs with the most applicable products, you first need to divide the market into different segments. The process of target marketing and segmentation can be considered a key element in increasing the company's sales by attracting new customers (Sarin 2010).

3.1.2 Branding

Branding is another marketing tool used by companies to attract new customers and maintaining these relationships. In the book "Marketing: an introduction" by Armstrong and Kotler (2007), a brand is defined as a "name, term, sign, symbol or a combination of these that identifies the maker or seller of the product".

The brand the company creates represents the business itself. Branding helps companies to differentiate their products from other similar ones in the market. Becoming memorable and creating an expectation for the brand is a big part of what makes a company the most appealing choice for the consumer. Branding can be implemented by using distinctive design choices, such as unique color schemes or symbology. Colors can make a great difference for a brand. Brands can have color ownership which other brands can't copy, setting them apart from their competition. The psychology of color selection is also something to be considered. For example, the color blue in brand's logo could represent trustworthiness in the company's actions (Keller 2012).

A positive brand image can be achieved by company's actions as well. Ethical and sustainable actions are already a basic requirement for many companies around the world. Especially with cosmetics, the use of animal testing is often a factor that makes consumers unhappy with a brand. Europe is currently the leader with replacing the process of animal testing with other ethical alternatives. Since 2009, animal testing related cosmetics has been banned in the EU and from all countries in the world the UK currently has the highest standards when it comes to the welfare of animals (European Commission n.d.).

Despite the fact that several companies have started practicing Corporate Social Responsibility and other sustainable, green initiatives, it doesn't mean that they've become completely ethical. CSR is a voluntary act and a type of self-regulation that many modern companies willingly partake in. It helps the large businesses to keep track of their ethical, sustainable and environmental actions and goals (Sahota 2014). South Korea has made a significant amount of effort to implement CSR activities in their cosmetics testing. Out of the two hundred existing corporations, more than 86 percent

promote green initiatives and 97 percent realize that there is a need for more responsible and conscious activities (Choi, Chung and Young 2019). However, companies sometimes tend to only practice these actions in order to improve their brand image. They may only implement a small part of the recommended regulations in their companies' actions in order to look better for their consumers (Chin, Jiang, Mufidah, Persada, Noer 2018).

3.1.3 Positioning

Similar to how branding is a method to make a product more identifiable, positioning is used to create a perception of a product, brand or company identity (Trout 1969). Positioning is also defined by Keller (2012) as the way of designing the company's offering and perception in a manner that creates a valuable place in the target customers' mind. It is an important mechanism for the companies to use in order to remain memorable.

The image of the brand is extremely important when competing with the other products. An effective positioning strategy can be established by using the four Ps (as Figure 1 illustrates). Price, place, product and promotion offer many possibilities in achieving great positioning. For example, a skincare product's price could be set higher or on a more competitive level. The product could also be made of a higher quality, in order to ensure that's how the consumers will perceive it as well. The more perfected the company's positioning efforts become, the more successful the results of it will be. The consumers will start to recognize that this product is more desirable than its alternatives (Keller 2012).

3.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Knowing the consumers' needs and desires from a psychological perspective is an useful tool when marketing a product. A helpful way to understand the basic needs and wants of consumers is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy can be used to predict purchasing actions and to show the motivation behind consumers' purchases (Ohio University 2020).

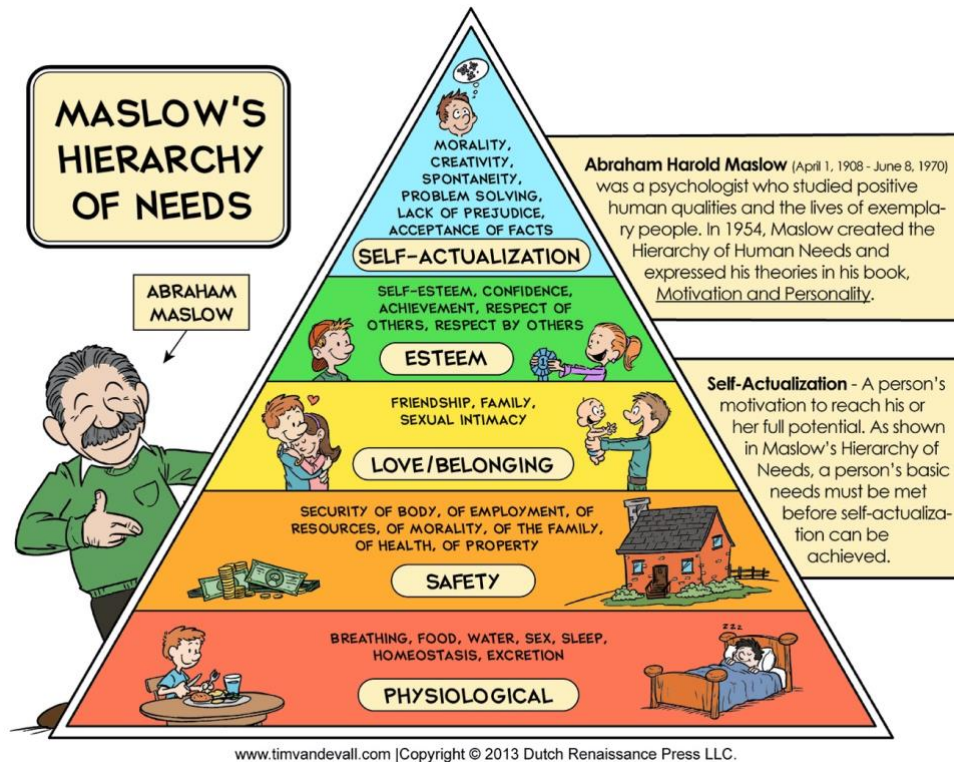


Figure 2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943)

This tactic has been used to send marketing messages to consumers in order to show that a product is essential for them. In skincare industry, a product that has been promoted in this manner recently, has been sunscreen. It is an essential item and it's effectively been branded as part of a healthy lifestyle and as a preventative necessity against skin cancer and premature aging (Rud 2019).

From the Maslow's hierarchy of needs it can be interpreted that sunscreen can be seen in the hierarchy as a Safety need, which is why it's also viewed as a priority purchase in the consumers' eyes. In Korean and Asian markets sunscreen has been a social necessity product for much longer time than in the Western part of the world. They are considered to be high quality products, created with careful testing in order to achieve the most truthful results of the protective barriers of sunscreen. The superior formula and the innovative ingredients make the Korean sunscreens very desirable in consumers' eyes. They are also extremely competitive, because of the harmony between their cost and quality relationships (Long, Khoi 2020).

3.3 Porter's five forces

In order to measure the competitive intensity of a company, it's important to determine the attractiveness of the industry that is being studied. Porter's five forces; the buyer power, supplier power, threat of new entrants, threat of substitutes and competitive rivalry help to assess the level of competitive intensity of a company or market (Porter 1979). It is important to determine the amount of competitors, quality of products, customer loyalty and if there's an existing threat of substitutes in the market that's being entered.

Porter's five forces work as useful tools to estimate companies' marketing practises. These five tools can be used to determine if a company is differentiating their products successfully from others. The five forces also help to assess how much leverage the buyers possess in that particular market and what strengths and weaknesses the company itself is affected by (Porter 1979: 137–145).

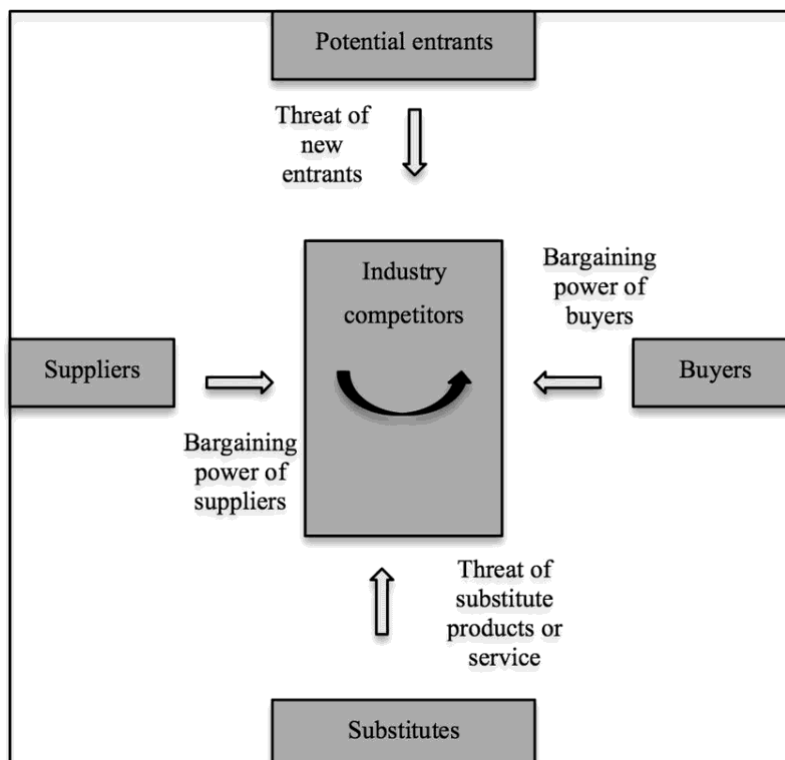


Figure 3. Porter's five forces (Porter 1979)

When roughly analyzing how Porter's five forces work in the skincare industry, the results may differ depending of the country and company that it's being applied to. However, generally it is to be expected that threat of new entrants, buyer power and the competitive rivalry is going to be high and the reason for this is that the cosmetics industry is considered to be extremely competitive. There are many alternatives available and the buyers often hold the power because of this. The skincare companies have to try to differentiate their products from the other ones using different measures.

With proper differentiation techniques, the threat of substitutes may be low, but as it is such a vast industry and because every company keeps constantly evolving their products, this seems very unlikely. The supplier power is to be expected to be quite low, because there'll always be other suppliers available, considering the size of this industry. Analyzing the market from all these different aspects is important when bringing a new product into it in order to be prepared for any appearing changes or surprises (Porter 1979: 137–145).

3.4 Product life cycle

Evaluating the market is also what the product life cycle aims to do. It describes a product's or service's journey from the beginning to its declining stage in the market. The product life cycle is a process that starts with a product being introduced into the market, ending with when it declines or when it is removed from there. The product life cycle has four stages that include introduction stage, growth, maturity and decline stage (Vernon 1966).

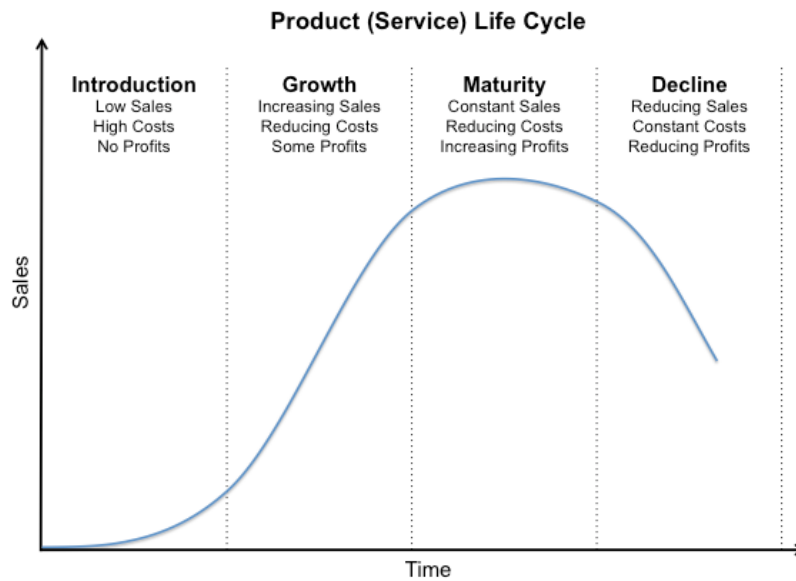


Figure 4. The product life cycle process (Vernon 1966)

The curve of product life cycle does not necessarily always look as illustrated in Figure 4. It may be depended on the product that's being brought to the market as well as the brand (Armstrong and Kotler 2007: 250). An important first step is that a product is introduced to market before the demand even occurs. In the beginning, sales are usually low and only growing slowly. In the growth stage, demand begins to rise and the size of the market increases rapidly. This is often called the "Take off Stage" of the process. In the maturity stage, the demand of the product remains more consistent and remains still rising. Sales also begin to peak and then slow down. Finally, in the decline stage, a product starts to lose its attractiveness and sales start go down (Vernon 1966). This process may also transpire with the upcoming and existing trends of different industries.

3.5 Diffusion of innovation

The product's popularity is desired to last, so understanding the different types of consumers as well as their values is very important for the sake of this research. Consumers hold the key position when it comes to making a product popular. Especially when looking into the fast spreading trends of the personal care industry, it's also

relevant to discuss the process of diffusion of innovation. This theory will also assist with the research and result part of this study.

The diffusion of innovation is a process that aims to explain “how, why, and the rate at which a product, service, or process spreads through a population or social system” (Rogers 1962). The diffusion of innovation consists of five categories of adopters: Innovators, the first ones willing to always try new products, Early Adopters, those who also like trying out new ideas, Early Majority, those who try new products before an average person and Late Majority, the people who will try the product only after it’s been accepted and adopted by most of the population. Lastly there are Laggards, the very traditional ones and who are the last ones purchasing trending products (Rogers 1962: 22).

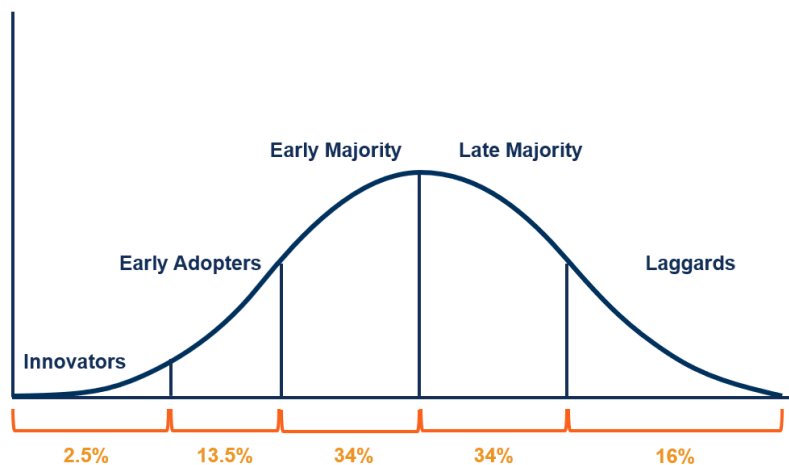


Figure 5. Diffusion of innovation (Rogers 1962)

People from all of these different stages possess different values and preferences when it comes to products or services. Innovators represent 2.5% of the group, Early Adopters 3.5% and 34% are Early Majorities. The last 34% of the group are Late Majorities and 16% of the population are Laggards (Rogers 1962). From these numbers it can be seen that the Innovators represent the smallest part of the group, which is quite noticeable when compared to the amount of Laggards, which is over six times more than that. However, the biggest representation in this theory comes from the Early and Late majorities, which is why many of the products are often directed towards them.

4 Consumer behavior

4.1 Consumer behavior theory

Consumer behavior theory allows to comprehend and evaluate the purchasing thought process as well as explain what affects it from a psychological perspective. Kotler (2011) defined it simply as of "how people buy, what they buy, when they buy and why they buy". The current status of the literature found on this topic suggests of its high importance in marketing. By having the direct information of the customers' needs and wants, allows companies to adjust their marketing efforts further towards the desired direction.

Marketers who understand and take advantage of the consumer behavior data are automatically ahead of their competitors when aiming to reach their targeted audience (Kotler and Keller 2011). According to a theory by Egan (2007), the consumer purchasing behavior has a positive impact on a country's economic state as well. This literature suggests that the quality of goods is exceptionally good in countries where the concept of consumer purchasing behavior is being actively studied. This also increases the competitiveness of the country both in the domestic and international market, therefore increasing the country's potential in exporting as well (Egan 2007).

4.2 Factors affecting the consumer behavior

There are numerous factors influencing the consumer behavior, including factors such as psychological, social and personal factors. Cultural and economic factors are also factors that influence individuals' purchasing behavior. Money, life situation and personal values are all elements that determine what choices the consumer will and can make (Kotler and Keller 2006). People's life situation still majorly dictates what they can buy, how and how much (Young, Hwang, McDonald, Oates 2010). It selects whether they can afford more high-end products and what things are the most essential for them.

Therefore, the importance of researching the differences between people's lives is a relevant part of this study.

4.2.1 Cultural factors

The people close to an individual influence greatly how they perceive and react to certain things. Culture can be defined as a combination of meanings, rituals, norms and traditions that are shared by a society or an organization (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg 2006). To start with, every culture has their own rituals. In some cultures, it is important to look good and have certain, consistent beauty rituals. This kind of rituals are often enforced in their society as well. In the western culture, because of its individualistic mindset specifically, it is very common to place a great value on taking care of ones looks. Many beauty rituals that women practice daily show the value that their culture puts on the expected beauty standards that are being projected on them (Solomon 2006).

Besides the rituals, each culture has their own subcultures. These also affect a person's behavior significantly. Religions and nationalities are both examples of subcultures. These subcultures can often be very important to an individual, because they help them to identify as well as socialize with people who have the same type of values and norms as them (Kotler and Keller 2006).

4.2.2 Psychological factors

There are several psychological factors affecting the consumer behavior, the commonly known ones including motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes as well as memory (Kotler and Keller 2011). It is harder to measure the impact of these psychological factors as they are considered as internal factors, but it doesn't make their effect any less impactful. These factors are very central for the companies to understand because they play an important role in consumers' purchasing processes and decisions (Kotler and Keller 2011).

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs (demonstrated in Figure 2) is a motivational factor affecting the consumer buying behavior. It explains why people are driven by a certain need at a specific time (Kotler and Keller 2011). Another psychological factor, that can also be considered as a social factor, is the environment and the people individuals surround themselves with. People are often being influenced by the other consumers and this is why environment plays a crucial role in individual's purchasing actions (Kotler and Keller 2011). These people can be from the individual's close circle, such as their family or friends or they can also be their school or work colleagues (Kotler 2017).

4.2.3 Social factors

Socializing and being around people logically has an effect on consumers' behavior as well. The social factors can be divided into reference groups in order to categorize their qualities and impacts that they have accordingly.

A person's reference group consists of all the groups that have a direct (face-to-face) or indirect influence on the person's attitudes or behavior (Kotler 2017).

Groups that have a direct influence on an individual are called membership groups. Social factors that greatly affect the consumer behavior are family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. These are considered as the primary reference groups (Kotler 2017). The secondary groups, such as religious groups, professional groups and trade unions, are more formal groups that involve less interaction (Kotler and Keller 2011).

There's also the aspiration and dissociative groups. The person is not a member of the aspired groups, but they admire their habits and buying patterns. People from these groups are often considered to be celebrities and/or social media influencers. The dissociative groups instead are the ones that the individual dislikes. They are the ones whose habits and preferences the consumer purposefully tries to avoid (Kotler and Keller 2011).

4.2.4 Personal factors

Personal characteristics are very impactful when influencing the consumer's behavior, because the personal factors are about the buyer themselves. These personal factors include aspects such as age, stage in life, occupation, economic factors, personality, self-concept, lifestyle and values (Kotler and Keller 2006).

A person's preferences and the taste of buying goods vary at different points in life. This explains why companies sometimes create products specifically based on the different stages of life cycles and different ages of consumers (Kotler 2017: 147). For example, different skincare products can be directed to different ages, life situations and skin types of consumers.

Economic factors are also part of the personal factors. Economic factors include properties such as personal income, family income, income expectations, savings, liquid assets of the consumer, consumer credit as well as other economic factors. Other economic factors include things like business cycles and inflation (Ali and Ramya 2016). The economic circumstances naturally also affect the consumer's purchasing decisions between different brands and products (Ali and Ramya 2016). For example, the more you earn dictates the kind of products you will purchase (Kotler and Keller 2011). This also applies to the kind of lifestyle the consumer is used to so far. Consumers tend to purchase products that are compatible with the image they've created of themselves in the society (Kotler 2017).

4.2.5 Other factors to consider

There are also few other factors to consider when it comes to consumer behavior, one of the most obvious one being the products' price. According to Evans (1996: 270), price is something that a consumer has to give up in order to purchase a certain product. Consumers tend to value a good price-quality ratio. Consumers frequently reason that the higher the price of a product is, the better its quality must be. This happens especially when there is not much information available or previous personal experience gathered

of the product. However, price becomes less important aspect to consider for the consumer, as they gain more information about the product and its qualities (Evans 1996: 284).

Values and goals are personal factors that also have an effect on the consumer behavior, because they determine the type of goals people have for themselves. Solomon (2006) states that people buy products because they believe that those products are going to assist them to reach their value-added goals. In skincare, an example of this would be when a consumer seeks to purchase skincare and beauty products that will make them appear younger or to have better skin. This indicates that those things are more valuable for them than the alternative, which is to have wrinkles or uneven skin.

Evans, Moutinho as well as Van Raaij (1996: 25) mention two types of values. These values are termed as the instrumental values and terminal values. The first stated instrumental values contain things such as honesty, friendliness and morality. These values help the individual to have far more and deeper connections with other people. Terminal values are almost the opposite of that as they are goals that people set only for themselves. The terminal values are for example wisdom, inner harmony, freedom and equality. They are often linked to personal growth and self-actualization (Evans, Moutinho and Van Raaij 1996).

Last factor that affects the consumer behavior is the attitudes that consumer has. According to Kotler and Keller (2006) attitude is a lasting favorable or unfavorable feeling, emotion, evaluation or action towards an object or idea. It has also been deliberated how attitudes are shaped by personal experiences and how those mindsets influence the individuals' purchasing behavior. If the consumer has had good experiences with specific brands and products, they have formed an opinion about them and are more likely to purchase them again if the desired satisfaction level was reached with the initial purchasing experience. Same type of logic can be applied when talked about the dissatisfied shopping experiences and their effect on people.

4.3 Perceptual process

Perception can be defined as the way one interprets the world around them through senses that stimulate different parts of the brain. These senses include things such as sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. The way that these senses are used together or separately makes a difference. For example, the visual interpretation may impact the overall attitude towards a product or brand if it's used by itself without any other senses (Burnett 2008).

People pay attention to things both consciously and unconsciously (Kotler and Keller 2006). Usually, people tend to notice things that match their current needs and wants. When applied to the use of cosmetics, person who is in a need of a certain product will pay more attention to the advertisements promoting for them, than a person who doesn't care about those type of products (Kotler and Keller 2006). Consumers are likely to recall only the affirmative aspects about a product or brand they like and don't even deliberate the positive properties of a competing product or brand.

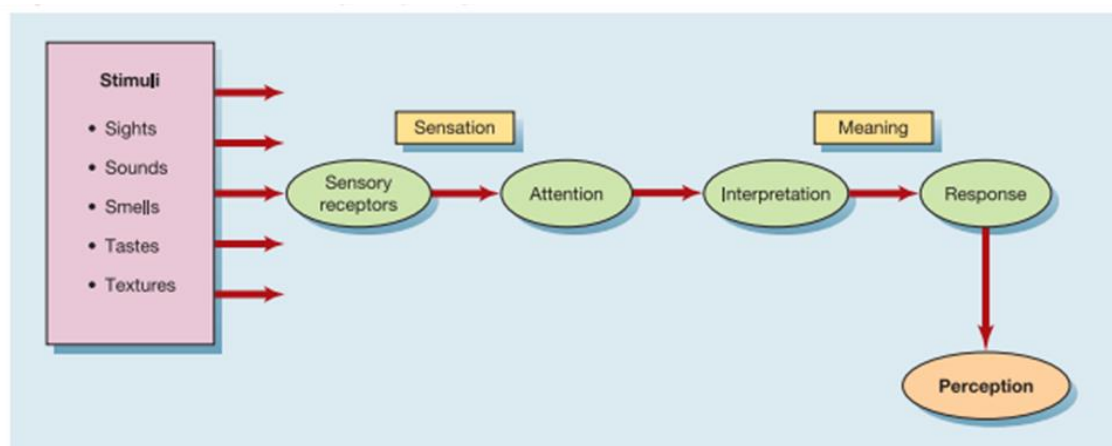


Figure 6. The perceptual process (Solomon, M., Bamossy, G. and Askegaard, S. 2002)

The way how different stimuli and sensations affect a person's sensory system is largely affected by the cultural background of the individual. For example, women and men often have differing reactions to each other's' hygiene and personal care products (Solomon 2006).

4.4 Consumer decision making process

Aside from the factors affecting the consumer buying behavior, customer decision making process is also an important part of understanding the buyers' thought process while purchasing a product. The first step of this process is when a consumer identifies that they have a need for a product or service. This then follows with problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchasing decision and the post-purchase evaluation process (Kotler and Keller 2006).

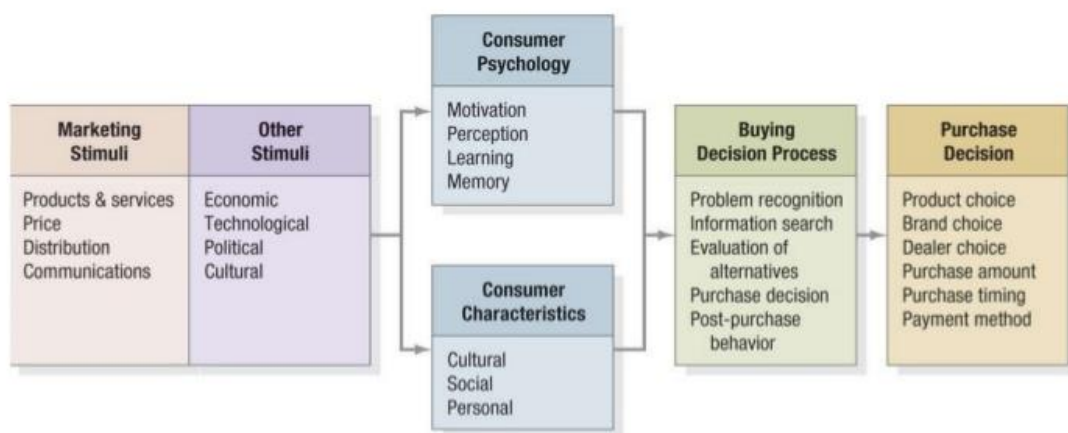


Figure 7. Consumer decision making process p.184 (Kotler and Keller 2006)

There are three possible outcomes after the consumer purchases the product. The first one is that the customer is satisfied with the product, because the product matches their expectations. There's also the option of the product surpassing the customer's expectations and that they'll be pleasantly surprised. The last option is that the product doesn't match the customer's expectations at all (Kotler and Keller 2006).

The reason why people are so pleased with the Korean products is because they offer much cheaper price compared to the high quality and dermatologically tested ones here in the Western world. People like that the Korean skincare products are affordable, but still of high quality and made out of natural ingredients. Ingredients like bee venom and snail mucin are hardly seen in the Western beauty products, but in Korean products

they've managed to harvest their natural qualities of remedy into effective products, which people currently value (Long, Khoi 2020).

In the consumer decision making process, it's important to achieve either the satisfaction or surpass their expectations. Not matching the consumer's expectations ultimately leads to dissatisfaction with the product as well as the brand itself. It's important to also evaluate the customer's dedication towards different products. If the topic is important to the consumer, they will use a lot more time in their decision making process and analyze all products, brands and prices. However, sometimes the process can also be quicker and missing some of the seen steps (Figure 7.) if the consumer has had previous experiences with the product (Solomon 2006).

5 The Korea trend

After deliberating the theoretical network of this study, discussing the Korea trend briefly is also essential in order to fully understand this topic. There's not much previous knowledge about this topic written by professionals, as this trend has just emerged in the last five years. However, there are many sources that discuss this phenomena, but professional articles or books about it are far more difficult to find. It's important to determine if the Korea trend is a long term shift in the skincare industry or if it's just a fad. Fads are often seen as sudden, quick-spreading, and short-lived trends, which people follow impulsively and after a while, these trends fade away just as quickly as they emerged (B. E. Aguirre, E. L. Quarantelli and Jorge L. Mendoza 1988).

The Korea trend refers to the emerging popularity of Korean brands and lifestyle. Popular things emerging from the South Korea to the Western part of the world, include things such as the culinary, fashion, K-dramas, K-pop artists and the South Korean skincare and beauty regime. It was reported that in 2017, South Korea's beauty industry was estimated to be worth over 13 billion dollars (Russon 2018).

South Korea's beauty industry is estimated to be about 10-12 years ahead of the rest of the world (Russon 2018). By the impact of media, people from Korea are often perceived

as “perfect” and many people aspire to reach this same kind of appearance. Their beauty products possess innovative, natural ingredients as well as good cost-quality ratio. However, there’s also a big plastic surgery trend that’s part of the Korean culture and their looks are often not achieved by just using their personal care products. That being stated, they have many interesting techniques related to their skincare routines. The Koreans often go by the 5-step or 10-step skincare routines. The 5-step skincare routine is identical to the 10-step one, just missing the extra steps of double cleansing, masks and serums.

Table 1. The Korean Skincare routine

Korean skincare routine	
1	Makeup remover / oil cleanser
2	Water-based cleanser
3	Exfoliator
4	Toner
5	Essence / Serum
6	Treatments
7	Sheet masks
8	Eye cream
9	Moisturizer
10	Sun Protection

It will be interesting to see how exactly these products and routines are being embraced by both the younger and older respondents of this study. Many of these products and habits have been familiarized in the Western culture before, but the order in which the Korean skincare routines are executed in order to maximize the products’ effectiveness, has been only recently introduced by the Korean culture.

6 Methodology

This part of the research will assess the type of methods which could be applied to this study. All of the discussed methods as well as reasons why specific methods were picked, will be established in this part of the study. Firstly, all three different types of research methods will be discussed and after that the data collection and analysis processes are explained. Justifications for why these methods were ultimately chosen will also be presented. At the end of this methodology part, the validity and reliability of this study will be discussed and evaluated accordingly and lastly, the interview created for this study will be presented and examined.

6.1 Research question

The research question of this study can be defined as "How Western consumer behavior has changed in the past years by the impact of Korean beauty products?". The goal of this research is to study whether or not the popularity of Korean products and beauty habits have or will spread in the Western culture. In order to pick the correct research method for this study, first the three types of methods will be reviewed. According to Creswell's book (2007), there are three types of designs: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

The qualitative and quantitative methods are usually explained in a way that makes them seem very different from one another. With the qualitative method there's more use of words, rather than numbers comparable to the quantitative method. Also the quantitative hypothesis consists of more closed-ended questions rather than the open-ended questions seen in a qualitative research. However, qualitative and quantitative approaches shouldn't be viewed as a completely polar opposites (Newman and Benz 1998). A study can be more qualitative than quantitative and the other way around. Mixed methods research on the other hand, possesses qualities from both of these previous research methods and incorporates elements from them both (Creswell 2007).

The point of qualitative research is to explore and understand the meaning of individuals and groups related to the topic at hand. This involves asking detailed questions and collecting data directly from the respondents. The researcher will then make interpretations of the collected data's meaning. By implementing the qualitative method, the final written report ends up having more of a flexible structure that is not as statistically driven. The study will focus more on the individual meaning as well as remembering the importance of complexity of a particular study (Creswell 2007).

Quantitative research on the other hand is meant for testing the already existing theories by examining the relationships between different variables. These variables can be measured by collecting new data so that they can be then analyzed using different statistical practices and then added up to the already existing information. The final written report from a quantitative research usually has more of a set structure that consists of an introduction, then literature review, methods, results and the discussion (Creswell 2008).

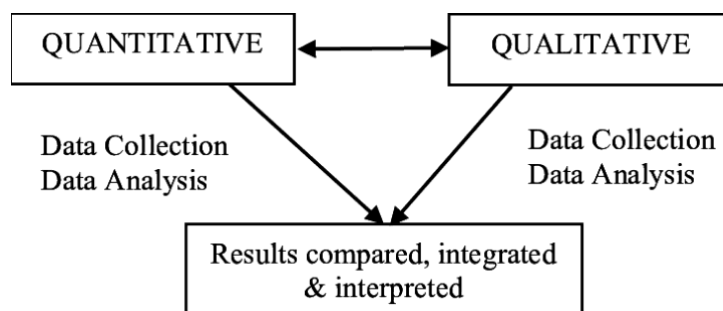


Figure 8. Method options (Creswell 2007)

The mixed methods approach involves many philosophical assumptions and the use of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in one study. It is more than just collecting and analyzing the both types of data, as it also involves the use of both approaches together. By doing so, the overall strength of the study is greater than either in qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007).

6.2 Data collection

The method chosen for this research's data collection is the qualitative research. The reason for choosing this method is that the data of this study will be collected in the form of interviews, either in person or through zoom or email. Quantitative study would have been more impractical as the level of contacts was limited and the goal of this study was to go in more detail and less statistical with the results. The results of this study will be illustrated by using simple graphs, showing the amounts of people and the way their answers were divided in different topics. The point is to analyze the results in a more compliant manner, with more words instead of statistics.

What makes this study to also possess qualitative qualities is the fact that the data will be collected from less than a dozen people. The reason for doing this is to try to have more detailed answers from the recipients and to be able to assess them in a more thorough manner. The goal is to ask them specified questions about the cosmetic products that they use regularly as well as their daily skincare routines.

The goal for the interviews would be to have recipients from different regions of Europe and the UK. However, it is to be expected that many of the respondents might be Finnish, so it's better to ask for an interview from multiple people, so that a larger group of foreign people would be able to participate to this study. Getting data from other countries and regions would result in more accurate and diverse answers and this could help to achieve somewhat accurate data analysis. This type of data collection method enables access to having a good variety of specified answers from the interview questions.

The goal for the interviews would be to conduct them with people who have a more in depth skincare routines and who are regular users of different cosmetic and skincare products. The qualitative research doesn't require as many interviewees as the quantitative surveys often would. This study was also more focused on the people paying attention to their skincare, so that the Korean trend could be investigated more thoroughly.

The interviews of this study are a part of convenience sampling method. The reason for choosing this method was that it was suitable for the type of the research as well as the researcher. Convenience sample a non-probability sampling method where the study is focused on a group of people that are easy to contact and interact, such as friends, family and acquaintances. There's not really much criteria to this type of sampling, except for the fact that the people participating will be available and willing to contribute to the study (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2012).

6.3 Validity and Reliability

Every research method possesses different strengths and weaknesses. The qualitative research is the type of research that doesn't use any statistical or empirical calculation methods when defining its validity. It seeks the same results through different methods that work better to a the matter that's being researched (Brink 1993). A valid study is meant to show what truly exists and it's supposed to be measured using valid instruments. Reliability on the other hand refers to research method's ability to gather consistently the same results over repeated testing times (Brink 1993).

The main key factor affecting validity and reliability of this type of research is error on different parts of it. Error is natural in all studies and is related to the validity and reliability of the research (Brink 1993). The greater the error the less exact and truthful the results will be. This is why the researchers must be attentive to pay attention to their possible sources of error, both when planning and implementing their studies. The major sources of error are categorized as follows: the researcher, the subjects participating in the project, the situation or social context and the methods of data collection and analysis. If the researcher is biased, if the subjects are not being truthful, if the subjects behave differently in different social settings or if the researcher is being vague expressing the respondents' answers can all lead to issues with reliability and validity of a qualitative study (Brink 1993: 35-38).

6.4 Interview

The data collection for this study was done by conducting an interview through email, Zoom or in person. This method was chosen because in qualitative research it is important to get detailed information from the respondents in order to achieve reliable results. This interview made that possible and it was meant for people who were already familiar with skincare and had regular skincare habits. This is why all of the chosen respondents were women, as women tend to have more experience on skincare products and have more steps in their daily routines. The respondents of this interview consisted of friends, family and the friends and coworkers of them. The goal was to have 10 respondents, which were picked out of the 20+ women the interview was sent to.

The interview was in a simple Word-document format that was easy to answer, both in person and online. The interview consisted of 10 screening questions, that were all yes or no questions. Then there were 10 interview questions, where the respondents answered in detailed sentences and more in depth about their skincare habits as well as their knowledge about the Korean skincare industry. The interview was conducted in English, as it was sent to people from different countries of Europe and the UK. However, the Finnish respondents were allowed to answer in Finnish as well, if it would allow their answers to be in more detail.

The point of this interview was to have two people from each of the stage of the diffusion of innovation. These stages include the Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majorities, Late Majorities and the Laggards. Having only 10 respondents in total allowed to put more focus in each of the respondents in order to get more information out of their skincare habits, personal values and attitudes. The screening questions were general questions about the individuals' everyday life. They were formulated so that the correct stage of the diffusion of innovation to which the individual fit would be able to be determined. The questions were meant be designed in a way that would be fun, easy and interesting for the respondents to answer, so that they'd want to share more and go more in depth with their answers.

In the beginning of the interview, the respondents were also asked to give their name, which wouldn't be published but would be there so that results wouldn't get mixed. The respondents were also asked to give their age in decades; early/mid/late 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. Lastly, there was a question concerning their current life situation, which in this study referred to their occupational status, whether they were studying or working part- or full-time. The chosen respondents all then answered this interview within a week, most of them answering typically within the first few days. The exact form of this interview can be found in the appendix of this research.

6.5 Data analysis

The interview was used as the primary data collection method for this study. The different age groups were analyzed separately and together as a group. It's important to do both of these things, so that the similarities and differences between the age groups could be noticed and examined.

In addition to the respondent's age, their life situations and their interests towards the topic, their knowledge of the Korean skincare products were measured. This was considered to be very essential part of this study as it was the main topic that was being researched. Many of the people who weren't familiar with the trend were then filtered out and not chosen for this research. Having this sort of criteria ensured more accurate, relevant and in-depth answers from the chosen respondents.

Some of the answers were then put into Excel in order to create graphs, so that the results could provide a clear, visual picture of the topic as well. With the graphs, it's easier to see how the different respondents were similar or different from one another.

7 Results

7.1 Demographics of the respondents

This study was focused on both the younger people and people with more mature skin. The targeted ages of this interview were 18-25 years old and 40-55 years old, because of the different stages of life and types of skin. This interview was sent to about twenty people in total, from which then ten most suitable ones were then selected based on the screening questions and their answers on the interview questions. The people interviewed for this study were all from different Western countries, EU and the UK. People from the US were not selected for this study.

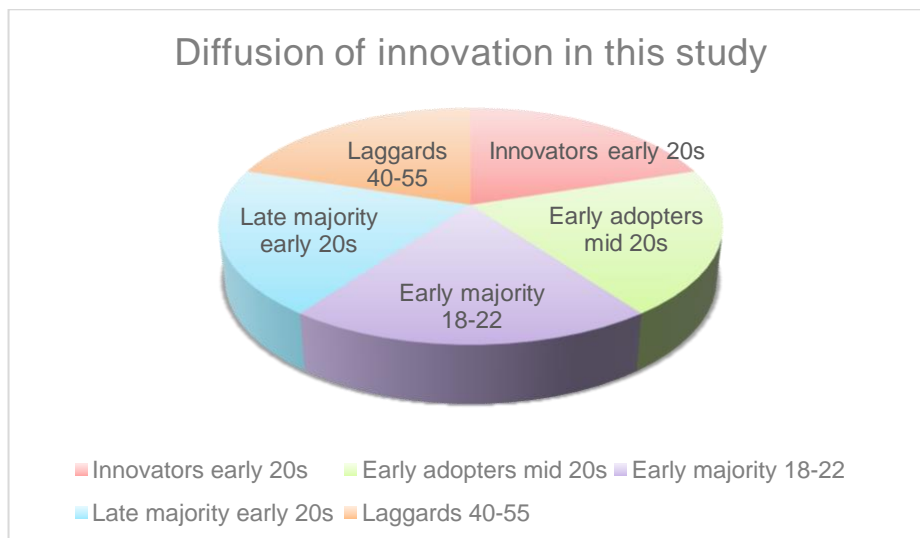


Figure 9. Diffusion of innovation in this study

The structure of this study was to have two people represent each stage of the diffusion of innovation. The respondents picked for this study were not chosen based on their age to fit in a certain category of the diffusion of innovation, but based on their answers in the screening questions instead. It is interesting to notice how the Innovators and the Early Majority both consist of the youngest respondents of this research. Similarly, the respondents in the Laggard section were both over 40 years old. This was not intended

when conducting this study, as people can be informed and interested in beauty as well as its related trends despite their age.

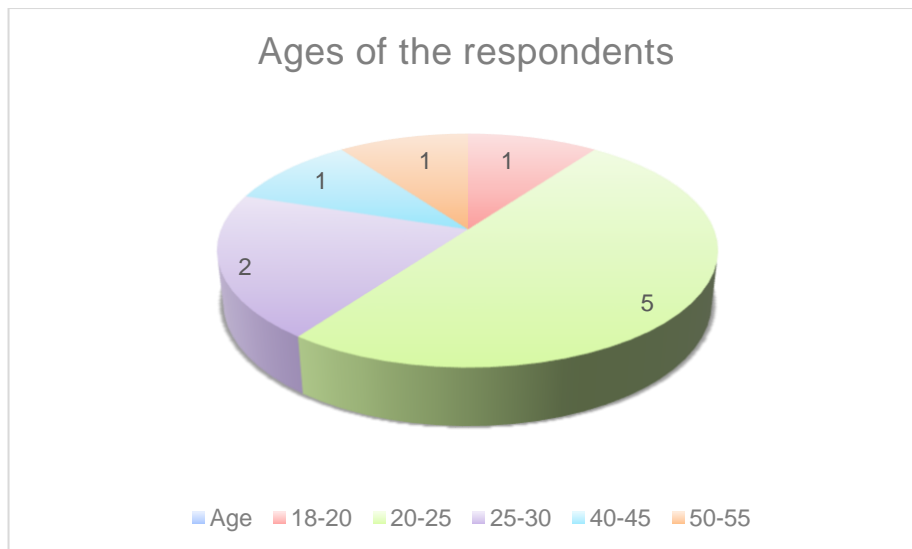


Figure 10. Ages of the respondents

The age of the respondents was designed to be divided equally. However, these chosen respondents were the most suitable ones for this study based on their answers, which was the top priority. As the age of the respondents in each category was not the most important factor, the chosen respondents ended up being mostly in their twenties. The way the ages were divided in this study wasn't necessarily a problem, as it was to be expected that people in their early 20s were the most interested and invested in their skincare as well as aware of the current Korean skincare trends.

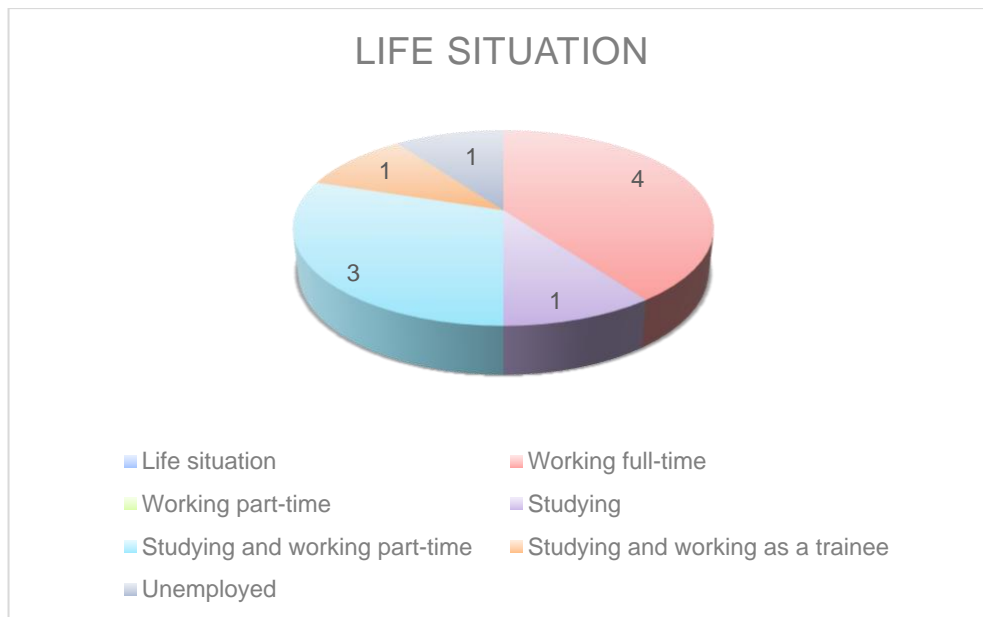


Figure 11. Life situation

When looking into the respondents' life situation, four of them were working full-time and three of them were studying. Some were also working part-time in addition to studying and only one respondent was both working and studying full-time. There was also only one unemployed respondent in this research. By knowing more about the recipients' life situation, it'll be easier to investigate why they purchase products with certain characteristics as opposed to others and whether price will be an affecting factor in their purchasing choices.

7.2 Daily skincare routines

All of the women interviewed had a daily skincare routine. This was to be expected, as the people chosen for this study were all women who've had plenty of experience with skincare products. The results show that the products that every respondent uses are facial cleanser and moisturizer. In addition to cleanser and moisturizer, seven of the respondents use a toner daily, six use sunscreen and different kinds of facial serums and three of the respondents use eye cream. This suggests of daily dedication put into skincare as well as knowledge of the different skincare products and what they can do to their skin.

Five of the respondents also mentioned other products that they use such as facial oils, niacinamide and different types of skincare tonics. Reasons for using these type products were listed to be uneven skin, hyperpigmentation or ads on social media. Additionally, nine of the respondents reported to use face masks weekly or monthly in their skincare routines and many of them mentioned to have had tried the Korean face masks before as well. However, because the respondents don't use these products daily, they were not mentioned in Figure 12, as the goal was to determine specifically the respondents' daily skincare habits.

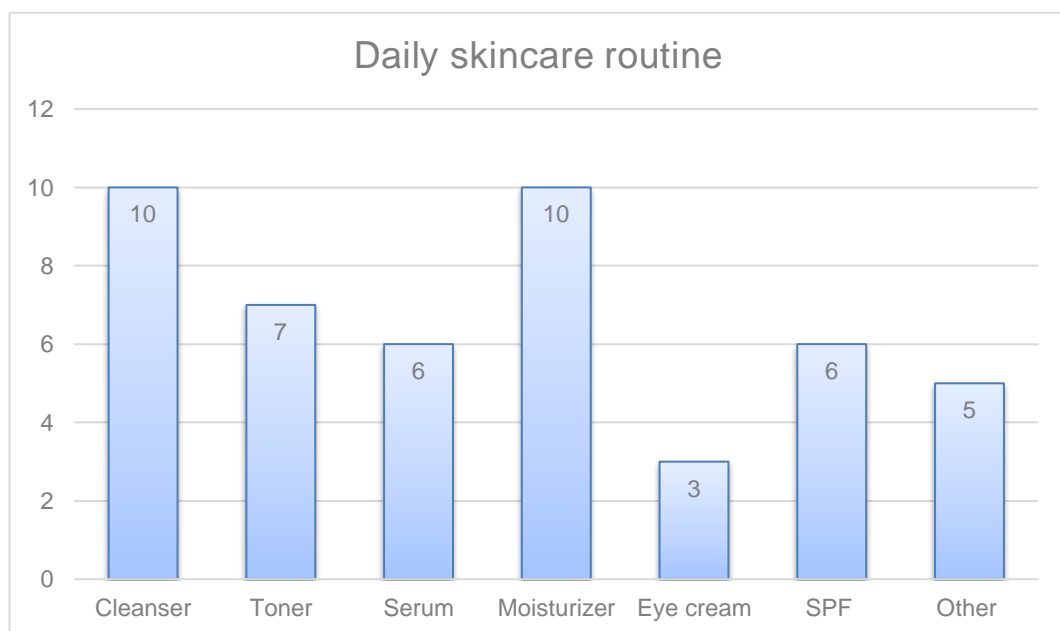


Figure 12. Daily skincare routine

When talked about favorite brands and type of products, the brand mentioned by three of the respondents was the Ordinary. This brand gained much of its popularity through social media and its various positive reviews. The company specializes in different serums and facial tonics. The interviewed recipients enjoyed their products, because that they were effective products with decent ingredients. Other mentioned products by more than one people were Ole Henriksen, Caudalíe and Lumene. Only one respondent told her favorite products to be Korean products. These mentioned brands were Whamisa, Klairs, Laneige and TOUN28. This person was from the Innovators group. The one

respondent who said that they don't have any favorite brands, they just use what they have available, was from the Laggards group.

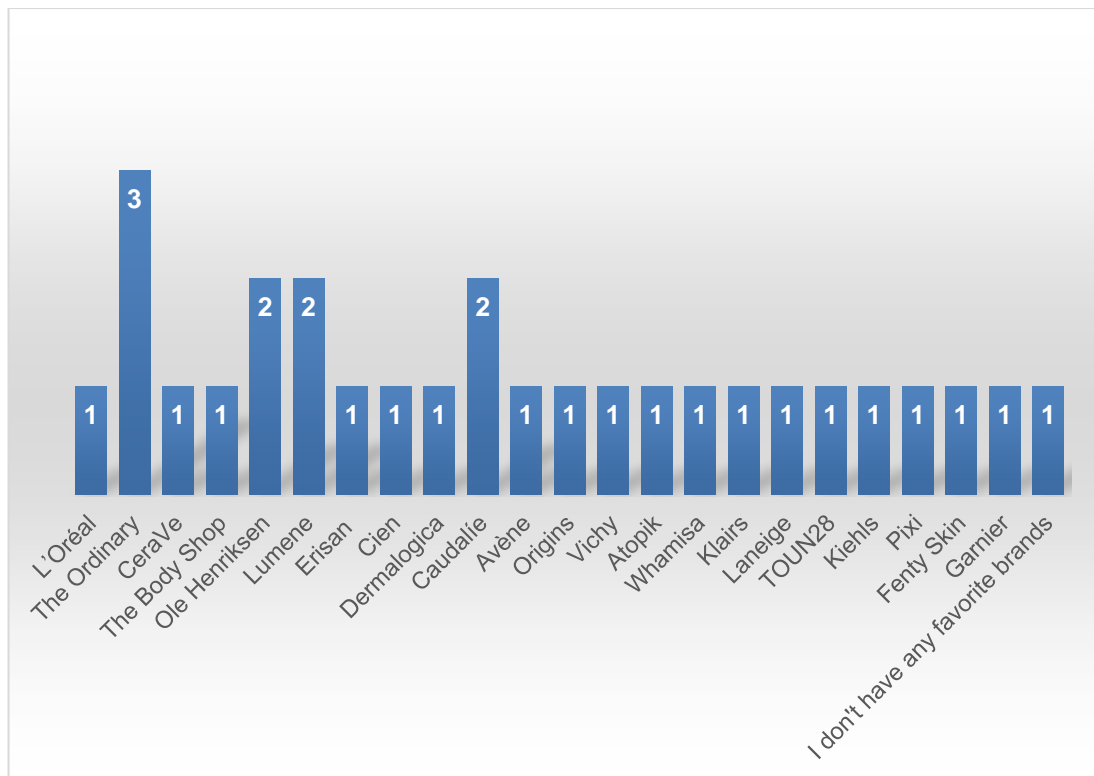


Figure 13. Favorite products

The reason for listing all of these different brands is not to look at them statistically, but to catch some similarities in order to make assumptions of the Western consumer behavior and Korean beauty trends. The reason was to also compare them to the answers where the respondents were asked to describe what makes a skincare product to seem attractive to them and what encourages them to purchase those products again.

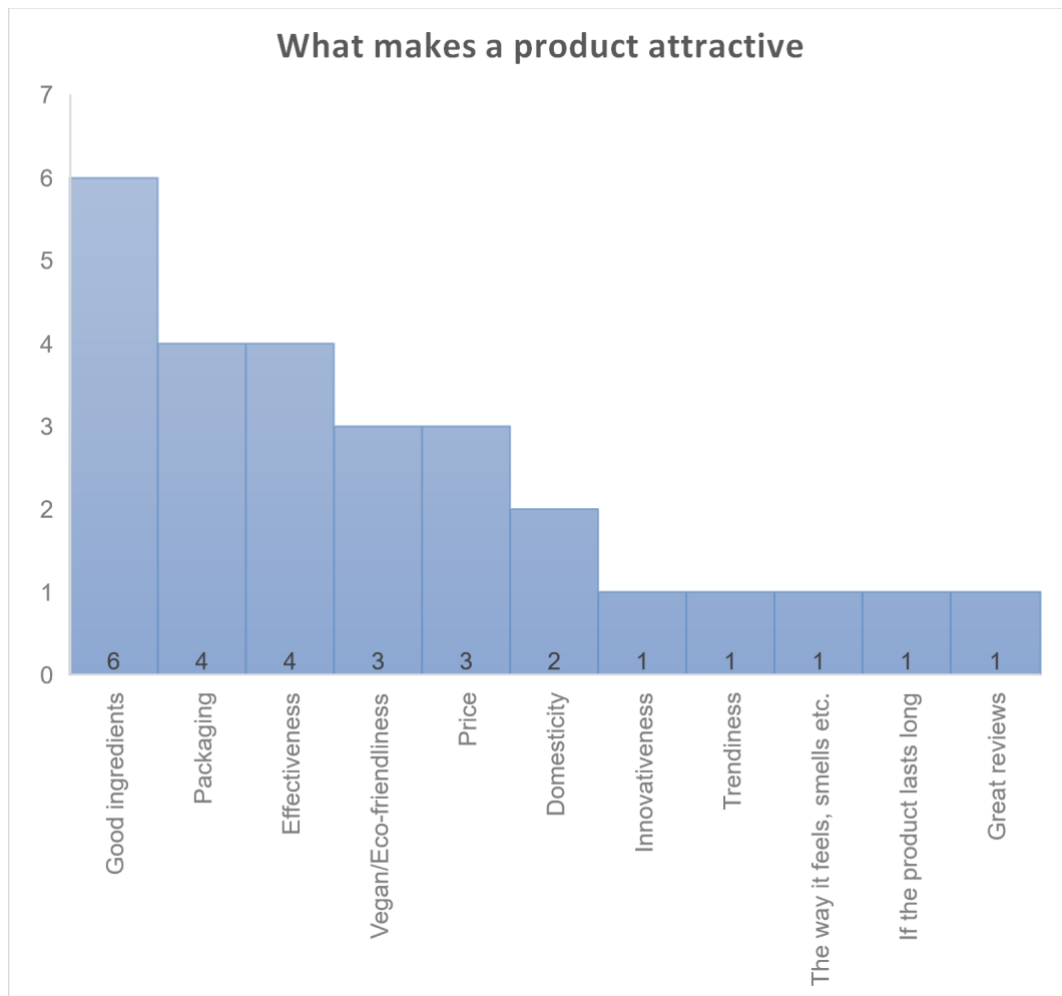


Figure 14. What makes a product attractive to the respondents

When asked about what makes a product seem attractive to the respondents, six of them reported that a product has to have good ingredients in order for it to be worth buying for. They also detailed that by good ingredients they meant natural ingredients, ingredients that work efficiently and ingredients that are not harsh on their skin. Many of the respondents also mentioned the importance of price. The ones who mentioned the price factor, were from the Laggard and the Early Majority groups. However, the respondent who was from the Early Majority group was also unemployed at the time of this interview, so perhaps this factor also influenced their answer as well as their purchasing preferences.

In addition to the good ingredients, the respondents valued many other aspects. Things such as packaging, product's effectiveness and their eco-friendliness were also important factors mentioned among the respondents. They elaborated that when products have aesthetically pleasing packaging, it makes them seem more appealing to them because great packaging is often a sign of superior quality. The design and the size of the product were also mentioned and one respondent specifically described that an endearing form of packaging with light pastel colors was what had drawn her towards the Korean skincare products to begin with. This suggests that the visual aspect of a product is very important as well, including the use of color schemes that seem positive and provide a good impression of the product.

The older respondents, the Laggards of this interview, were purchasing their products farther apart from the younger respondents. The women above 40 appreciated more traditional and convenience based aspects with their products; they wanted them to be able to last longer, be easily accessible and that they wouldn't cost much as much.

Another thing that was mentioned by two of the respondents was the domesticity of the products. What was interesting with this particular answer was that the two people who mentioned it were from the opposite sides of the diffusion of innovation, Innovators and Laggards. This suggests that this has to do more with the individual's personal preferences that are dependent on their own values. Eco-friendliness in this interview refers to cruelty free actions of a brand. This was also brought up in the interviews and many of the respondents perceived animal testing as an extremely unnecessary and unethical practice that would make them choose more environmentally friendly alternatives instead.

One respondent also mentioned the impact of the perceptual process. Especially how the way products look, feel and smell were important to them. The rest of the factors discussed in the interviews were innovativeness, trendiness and great reviews. The respondents said to have read reviews online as well as got them from their reference groups.

7.3 Korean trends and products

According to the results, people have a great image of the Korean products. Eight of the respondents were familiar with them and four had tried their products themselves and been very happy about their purchasing decision afterwards. Only one respondent was not familiar with the Korean beauty products and this respondent was from the Laggard section.

None of the respondents had heard bad things about the Korean beauty products, none had tried them and not liked them and none of the respondents' friends who'd tried them had not enjoyed them. It appears so that every one of the respondents who'd heard about the products or tried them have only had positive experiences. It's also important to notice that some respondents answered both of the questions, if they'd heard about the Korean products as well as tried them. Some only answered to one of those questions and this is why the amount of people is higher (in Figure 15.) than the actual amount of the participated respondents.

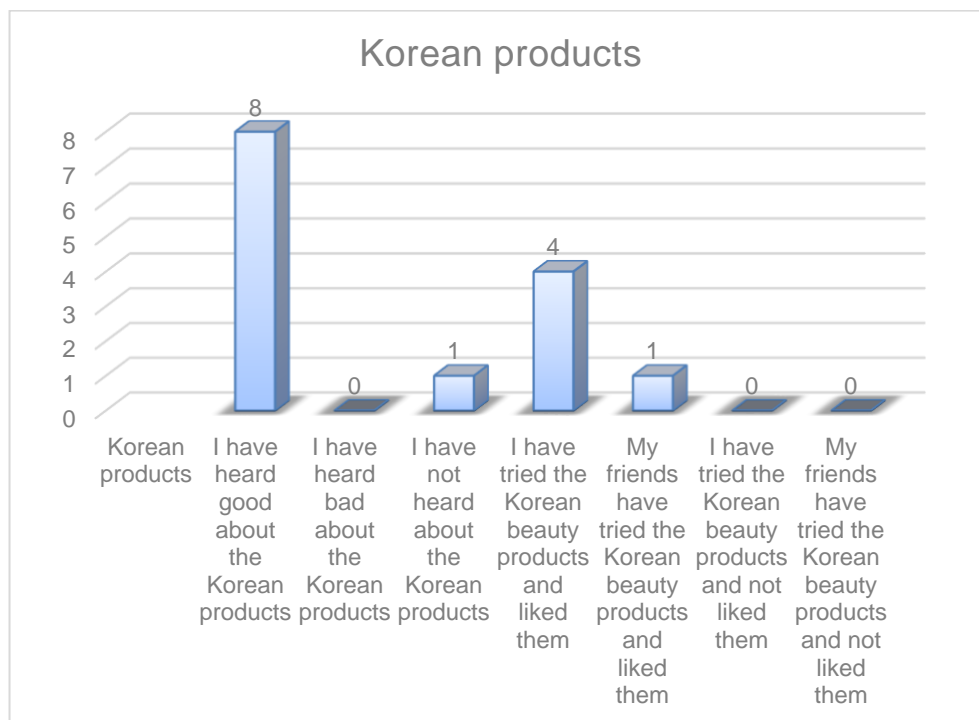


Figure 15. Attitudes towards Korean products

When asked about when the respondents had heard about the Korean trend, many of them reported that they'd heard about it within the last 1-5 years. The reasons for this were listed as the effect of social media, K-dramas and the Korean music industry. People are enjoying other aspects of the Korean culture and not just their skincare brands.

What attracted the respondents to the Korean products was their good quality, their innovative developments, natural ingredients as well as their effectiveness, as Koreans are known for their beautiful and good skin. People also liked how the Korean products had aesthetically pleasing packaging. They also seem to have several different brand options, which makes them a great option when looking for both budget friendly or luxury items. As Korean makeup tends to look very natural, it is perfect for people who aspire to achieve the natural look as well.

When asked about the cons of the Korean products, the respondents mentioned the lack of availability, lack of translation and lack of representation in the Western media. People don't see many ads about the products and they felt like the products didn't always list all the ingredients and instructions in English. Also, many of the respondents wished to test their beauty products before purchasing them and some of them preferred still to buy them from stores as opposed to online.

Lastly, when asked about if the popularity of the Korean products will endure or grow, nine out of ten of the respondents answered that they think that the popularity and visibility will only continue growing. The one respondent who didn't address the situation was the same person who was not familiar with the Korean beauty products. According to the respondents, the Korean skincare brands will gain even more popularity worldwide when they become even more available in actual stores and offer more options with translation on their products. Overall, everyone seemed to have an optimistic view on the subject and interested attitudes towards it.

8 Analysing the results

According to the results gathered from these interviews, all the women seemed similar with their answers in many ways despite their ages and them belonging to different stages of diffusion of innovation. All of them had consistent daily skincare routines and almost all were familiar with the Korean skincare products and had heard good things about them. Majority of the people from different stages of diffusion of innovation represented their categories fairly well and had very fitting answers. The Laggards especially had answers that matched their personal qualities really well, even though one of them had been familiar with the trend.

All in all, the interviewed women had very similar habits and values when it came to skincare. People appreciated a good quality-price relationship. However, there were also some differences. The younger women were more aware of Korean skincare and its effects on mass media. They also had skincare routines that matched many of the Korean skincare preferences. The older women had more simple routines with less steps and less interest in the products that they use. Accessibility and price seemed to be more essential for them than the products having innovative ingredients.

The majority of women in this study considered the price of skincare products to be a determining factor when choosing which product to buy. Also, one aspect that raised attention based on the answers of the interviews, was the fact that the reason that many respondents didn't consider the Korean beauty products as their first choice, was because they thought they were not yet as easily accessible. This might suggest that some people still prefer shopping in actual stores as opposed to shopping online. Perhaps if people would be able to try the products themselves, for example have samples and products available in their local cosmetic and department stores, the products would gain popularity even faster.

Last aspect that raised attention, is that people also listed lack of translation as a con of the Korean products. It may be beneficial if the Korean skincare companies would advertise and add instructions to their products in English as well. After resolving the accessibility and the translation issues, it would be very much expected that even a

larger amount of people would review their products, because they do retain a great reputation. All in all, after reviewing the people's answers on this interview there's no obstacles for the products' popularity soaring in Western countries as it has already in many parts of Asia.

When analyzing the reliability and validity of this study, the first thing to be noted is that the amounts of people from different countries were not listed nor were the different ways the respondents were interviewed compared. These aspects could've been taken more into account with this research as it may also affect its results. People from different countries may have different preferences. Also, it's difficult to determine how all Western people feel about this topic since only ten people were interviewed in this study.

However, many of the results matched both the diffusion of innovation theory and the ages of respondents. The older respondents were less aware of the trends and were more traditional and price oriented with their choices. Every one of the younger respondents knew of the trend and had some of experience on it. Things affecting this research were also the fact that few of the interviewed participants didn't go in much detail with their answers as opposed to others, so their exact preferences were not necessarily covered entirely.

9 Conclusion

The differences between the 18-25 year olds and the 40-55 year olds weren't that considerable. To get more specific results it would be good to go more in depth with the topic while also interviewing people from other continents as well. More ages could also be taken into account so that it would be possible to study more thoroughly their similarities and differences in purchasing behavior.

For further studies it would be interesting to see what the situation would be like in few years and if the popularity of the Korean beauty products would truly rise. Also, it would be interesting to research what factors the future Western consumers value in

their products and what type of adjustments the companies will make based on these preferences.

This particular study was meant to examine the current situation of the Western consumers' preferences and behavior more in depth with the chosen individuals. Most important factors to consider for this topic were being able to understand what consumers currently value in their products and what kind of products they prefer over others. For the companies, it would be beneficial to further study their current customers' preferences, as purchasing behavior has met with some changes. People know and use more time with skincare and have more steps in their daily skincare routines.

Based on the results, skincare is appreciated by the ages that were studied in this research. It would be great to compare the importance of skincare products to, for example, makeup products and which one of these would be more valued by Western women. Even though people value good and natural ingredients in their products, price is still an important factor extensively affecting the purchasing behavior. This topic can be researched from many aspects and comparing the price and naturalness of the products offers many possibilities for this.

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Interview questions

Questions for people from different stages of diffusion of innovation

April 2021

Name (will not be published):

Age (mentioned as decades; early/mid/late 20s, 30s, 40s etc.):

Life situation (working, studying or both):

Screening questions (yes/no):

1. Are you interested in new ideas?
2. Do you often find new products before they become popular?
3. Do you enjoy change in your daily routine?
4. Do you enjoy learning and researching about new products?
5. Do you often need evidence of the product's effectiveness before you're willing to try it?
6. Do your friends' advices and recommendations affect your purchasing decisions?
7. Do you only feel comfortable spending money on a product when most people have embraced it as well?
8. Do you need a lot of proof that the product is effective?
9. Do you consider yourself to be traditional?
10. Does pressure from other people affect your decision when buying a product?

Interview questions:

1. Do you have a daily skincare routine?
2. Do you often stick with the same products? If so, can you name some of the brands you use?
3. What makes a personal care product attractive to you?
4. Are you familiar with the Korean beauty products? If so, what have you heard?

5. When do you think you first heard about the products?
6. Do you consider the Korean beauty products to be popular? Why or why not?
7. Have you tried the products yourself? If so, what were your experiences like?
8. What other things do you attach to the popularity of Korea right now? Music, entertainment, etc.
9. Do you think this trend will last and perhaps gain even more popularity? Why or why not?
10. What do you think are the pros and cons of the Korean beauty products?
11. Any additional comments of the topic?