



K-뷰티 스킨케어 실천의 의례와 신화: 세계 시장에서 K-뷰티의 등장

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Rituals and Myths of Korean Skin Care Practices: The Emergence of K-beauty in the Global Marketplace

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(received date: 2020. 8. 6, revised date: 2020. 8. 21, accepted date: 2020. 9. 25)

ABSTRACT

Following K-pop and K-drama, the trend of K-beauty, Korean-style skin care and makeup, made a bold entrance into the global marketplace. The purpose of this study is to analyze how Korean skincare products are presented to English-speaking audiences and how Korean skin care practices are defined on webpages. The theoretical and analytical framework of the present study draws upon consumer research literature on consumption rituals and marketplace myths. The study conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of 68 webpages written in English on Korean skin care practices. Two umbrella themes emerged: Firstly, K-skin care is presented as a new type of consumption ritual. The web content provides ritual scripts. Findings suggest that global consumers satisfy their pursuit of a healthy lifestyle and virtues of self-care in K-skin care rituals. Secondly, this study identifies discourses that mythologize K-skin care. The webpages attribute the merits of Korean skincare products to the legacy of Korean culture and nature-inspired products that harness science and technology. Finally, this study discusses the implications and suggestions for future research in this area.

Key words: K-beauty(K-뷰티), Korean wave(한류), marketplace myth(시장 신화), ritual(의례)

I . Introduction

In the global marketplace, Korean culture, which used to refer to traditional art or ways of life such as calligraphy, ceramics, music, costumes, or Confucian decorum, is now associated with much more current cultural contents. The current and popular culture of South Korea first gained international attention when Korean dramas (K-dramas) and Korean pop music (K-pop) became popular in China followed by Japan, South Asia, and Southeast Asia in the 1990s. The term *Hallyu*(韓流), which translates to *Korean wave*, was spread when Chinese media referred to the success of South Korean popular culture in China (Kim & Kim, 2011). Hallyu first consisted of cultural contents from the entertainment industry, including drama, pop music, film, and other related products. In the 21st century, Hallyu has become a global cultural phenomenon, as fandom continues to rise all over the world. The popularity of K-drama, drama stars, and K-pop stars created a great ripple effect that led consumers to Korean material culture. For example, based on what people observed in Korean dramas or music videos, some became interested in Korean style makeup. Others tried Chi-mac, the practice of eating chicken and beer together in Korea. The range of cultural contents and products continued to expand to film, video games, tourism, food, apparel, cosmetics, and beauty services.

Discourses on Hallyu in Korea are intertwined with discourses that draw upon capitalism and patriotism. The economic value of Hallyu is demonstrated by the increased export of television dramas and entertainment shows, the

growth of inbound tourism, the rise of K-pop in the major American music market, and the increased export of Korean merchandise such as food, cosmetics, and apparel. As the market size of cultural content and related products continued to grow, policy makers, the media, and others have carried out a national identity project. The South Korean government has provided subsidies to increase export of entertainment industry (Lee, 2019). The Korean media gladly interpreted the growing popularity of K-pop as an indicator of content excellence and as proof that Korea maintains cultural power around the world. Policy makers considered the global popularity not only a driving force for economic growth but also as an asset in public diplomacy (Kim et al., 2017). A substantial portion of media coverage has been related to how international press handles K-pop's success and K-pop's influence, portraying K-pop singers almost as diplomats who elevate the national reputation. Koreans take patriotic pride in the global success of K-pop and K-pop stars' cultural influence overseas. The academic community has also participated in the Korean identity project. Significant academic effort has been made to provide practical implications for industry to increase exports in Hallyu-related sectors (e.g., Jeong, 2017).

The national identity project has evolved into a strategy of family branding using *K-* to represent Korea. Institutional efforts have been made to brand all exports of Korean cultural content and products with prefix *K-*. Once a product or entity is exported or consumed overseas, the prefix *K-* is attached (i.e., K-pop, K-beauty, K-drama). In other words, anything designed, produced, or created in Korea, whether original,

traditional, or not, is part of the K-family. Branding with K- is practiced not only in popular and consumption cultural sectors (e.g., K-culture, K-pop, K-beauty) but also in non-cultural and non-commercial sectors (e.g., K-quarantine). In this paper, K-culture, or any object with the prefix K-, refers to Korean-made cultural content, products, or practices that are exported and consumed in the global market.

Although the brand K- apparently denotes the cultural identity of Korea in the context of the global market, there has been limited research by Korean scholars about what constitutes K-style or Koreanness. Research conducted outside Korea has dealt with K-pop fan experiences and fan behaviors (e.g., Noh, 2015; Oh, 2014). Such research provides insights into understanding K-culture based on lived experiences. This paper takes the stance that the identity of K-culture ought to be studied from the perspective of international consumers and fans that actually like, purchase, and use K-products. The questions that need to be addressed include the following: Who creates K-style, Koreans or international consumers? Is there any homogeneity between K-styles of all different genres? How is the K-culture identity formed in consumer culture? Among numerous questions, the present study focuses on how K-beauty is introduced and explained in the global market. What features of K-beauty are appealing to international consumers?

The consumer culture of Korean skin care, which is part of K-beauty, was chosen for analysis for several reasons. K-beauty received attention from international audiences when K-pop or K-drama stars became popular in the main-

stream spotlight. In the eyes of K-pop or K-drama audiences, Korean makeup accentuates flawless skin, and the Korean makeup style differs greatly from the Western style of contouring and defining facial features.

K-beauty is a generic term that refers to all skin care, makeup, and bath-and-body products imported from Republic of Korea (Wood, 2016). Although K-beauty was brought onto the global market due to Hallyu celebrities, K-beauty has grown into its own entity (Jeong, 2017). Some major retail stores (e.g., Target, Sephora) have K-beauty sections in the cosmetic department.

The growth of the K-beauty industry is reflected in trade volume. The total sum of cosmetic exports in 2019 was approximately US \$6.5 billion, which is the result of an average of 33% yearly increase over the past decade (Foundation of Korea Cosmetic Industry Institute, 2020). The volume of cosmetic exports increased by 716%, and the proportion of cosmetics in the entire exports increased by 500% from 2009 to 2019 (Foundation of Korea Cosmetic Industry Institute, 2020), which reflects the growth of the beauty industry in the Korean economy and the growing importance of cosmetics in trade (Foundation of Korea Cosmetic Industry Institute, 2020). The present study concentrates on K-skin care practice. Korean skincare products comprise the greatest portion of exports in the cosmetic sector. In the first quarter of 2020, the sum of skincare products and sheet masks occupy 45.7% and 6.2%, respectively, and the rest include makeup products, and cleansing products (Shin, Choi, Shin, & Lee, 2020).

The purpose of the study is to analyze how K-beauty products are portrayed and how K-

beauty practices are represented on English-speaking webpages. English websites and accompanying images were analyzed. The findings of this study will shed light on the emergence and growth of K-skin care practices in the global market and will help understand what constitutes Koreanness in the global cosmetic market.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and analytical framework of the present study draws on consumer research literature of consumption rituals (Rook, 1985) and myths in consumer marketing (Kniazeva & Belk, 2007). The concepts of consumption rituals and myths provide good tools for understanding the process of developing meanings for everyday consumer experiences and the cumulative nature of consumer discourse on K-skin care practice.

1. Rituals

Rituals, as presented in cultural anthropology, refer to a type of expressive and symbolic activity that meets the following conditions: a series of performed behaviors in a fixed episodic sequence as if in a scripted drama, which are repeatedly acted over time and carry symbolic meanings (Rook, 1985). Humans experience many day-to-day activities that are composed of multiple behaviors repeated in a fixed sequence. Among those, consumer research on rituals focuses on behaviors that are particularly meaningful to individuals or groups (e.g., baptism, Thanksgiving Day) or mundane routines (e.g., meal and food consumption, grooming) that identify deep-seated meanings and emotions (Hur & Choo, 2016; Marshall, 2005; Rook, 1985;

Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991).

Repetition and regularity keep rituals alive (Sassatelli, 2007). Compared to habits, rituals carry symbolic meanings and involve multiple behaviors performed in a sequence. Rituals communicate meanings in a more condensed manner (Tetreault & Kleine III, 1990). Although habits are routinized behavior, rituals involve a higher level of cognitive processing and are more resistant to change (Tetreault & Kleine III, 1990). For example, a female's grooming rituals might consist of washing her face, brushing her teeth, applying makeup, blow drying her hair, changing clothes, spraying perfume, and selecting shoes. Through the process, the female transforms herself from private self to public self (Hur & Choo, 2016). Her choices of item may signify her decision on how to present herself in public. A person who has deep involvement with self-expression would be more cautious about what messages her outfit may express or a person who is scheduled to have an important meeting with a buyer would pick her best suit for that day. Not all rituals are habitual (e.g., wedding), although some, such as grooming rituals, are habitual to some degree (Rook, 1985).

The four elements of ritual experience are ritual artifacts, a ritual script, ritual performance roles, and a ritual audience (Rook, 1985). Ritual artifacts are various kinds of man-made objects that are used in the ritual process. Almost all ritual experiences in the present time involve using consumer products. Ritual artifacts of grooming may include soap, toothbrush, cosmetics, clothes, and more.

A ritual script is a type of storyline that guides how to use artifacts and dictates the be-

havioral sequence. The strictness of the ritual script varies by on the nature of the ritual. Most religious rituals are formally scripted and codified, while there are many casual rituals in which the sequence can be changed or a portion can be skipped, such as family mealtime rituals (Rook, 1985). Ritual performance roles are subject to the ritual script. Some roles are specifically defined in the script while others are vague. The last element that Rook (1985) proposed, a ritual audience, may only apply to some rituals. As Rook (1985) noted, many personal rituals (e.g., grooming rituals) or private rituals (e.g., bedtime rituals) may not have a clearly defined target audience.

Primary sources of meaning and behavior in ritual experiences are diverse, including cosmology, cultural values, group learning, individual aims and emotions, and biology (Levy, 1978). Among these, rituals driven by cultural values, group learning, and individual aims and emotions are usually of interest to consumer researchers. Rites of passage (e.g., marriage and graduation) and cultural events (e.g., Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving Day) place emphasis on the social observance of events and thus strengthen social cohesion (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Group learning rituals also sustain shared meanings and values in the community, small group, or family, and social inclusion is the major function of participating in those rituals (Rook, 1985). Compared to civic or cultural rituals, some rituals allow individual units to develop their own ritualistic scripts. For example, each family has unique rituals for New Year's Day in Korea, such as what to eat, the formality of ancestral rites, or what activities they engage in.

Previous research has focused on the collective nature and social functions of rituals (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). When members of rituals enact the storyline of the ritual scripts and the meanings are shared and transferred, social norms and orders are communicated and observed (Rook, 1985). Although Rook's (1985) concept of ritual encompasses very personal rituals to communal, civic, and societal rituals, Tetreault & Kleine III (1990) confined their definition of rituals to those with public enactment that occur socially and emphasize the collective representation. Although the research on consumption ritual presents fairly useful theoretical implications for examining appearance management behaviors, only a handful of studies employed the concept of rituals (e.g., Hur & Choo, 2016; Rook, 1985). Grooming is one of the few rituals that is personal and is driven by individual aims and emotions (Rook, 1985). From a strict viewpoint, grooming does not fall under the category of ritual. It could be categorized as ritualized behaviors, which refers to those with private enactment that emphasize idiosyncratic representation, if Tetreault & Klein III's (1990) concept is applied.

The present study considers the ritual analysis of appearance management behaviors to be valid, as personal and private acts are not completely free from socially prescribed goals, means, and community mores. Hur & Choo's (2016) study showed that grooming rituals signify the transition from private self to public self. Grooming rituals involves various decision-making process of what to wear and not to wear based on social circumstances of the day (Hur & Choo, 2016). To community members, groom-

ing communicates an individual's social status, maturity, aspirations, conformity, or morality (Rook, 1985). In contrast, Tetreault & Kleine III (1990) maintained that ritual occurs in social time, while private ritual behaviors occur in self time. As mobile technology penetrates our daily lives, the boundaries of the real world and the virtual world become blurry, which leads to the notion of hybrid space (de Souza e Silva, 2006). Thousands of selfies taken during the process of grooming (e.g., selfies with hair rollers) are shared on social media (Kwon & Kwon, 2018), and many consumer reviews on apparel or cosmetics, which were created in self time, are voluntarily provided in the hybrid public space. In other words, grooming rituals are often sustained in the social media timeframe. The grooming process is documented and presented to the public via social media, which floats in the hybrid space between self and social time. Considering the hybridity of time and space, new aspects of grooming rituals are understudied in literature.

2. Marketplace Myths

Since the seminal work of Levy (1981), consumer research has applied Levy's idea that myths are "ways of organizing perceptions of realities, of indirectly expressing paradoxical human concerns" to understand the meaning of consumption practices in people's daily lives (p.52). A culture's myths are stories that are inherited through generations and that contain symbolic elements, representing the empathetic emotions and ideals of the culture (Solomon, 2020).

Scholars with the symbolic perspective of myth examine the emergence of meanings con-

structed through individuals' actions and interactions (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). The symbolic perspective notes that the narrative structure of myth contains an dichotomous understanding of the world: the world consists of "past and present; dead and alive; man and woman; mind and body; being and non-being" (Tillotson & Martin, 2014, p.186). Lévi-Strauss (1966) stated that myth embodies the principle of humankind, signifying that human beings overcome the contradictions and binary oppositions through interactions with nature. Campbell (1949) presented a universal narrative of mythology, which he called a monomyth. Many Hollywood movies follow the structure of monomyth. According to Campbell (1949), a monomyth consists of the separation, initiation, and return stage. The separation stage refers to a state when a person suffers disjunction. Then, the person discovers transcendence in the duality of death and rebirth at the initiation stage. The hero finally brings the transcendental knowledge to human society at the return stage (Campbell, 1949). Marketplace myths are often created for the sake of marketing. The story of Nike's waffle sole or the unlikely tale of Nordstrom's tire return portrays their brand as a hero transcending the bounds of reality with innovative technology or supreme service, respectively.

Ritual and myth are closely connected. Ritual provides a way to construct, enact, and sustain myth (Campbell, 1949). Tillotson & Martin (2014) added the role of consumption objects to the ritual-myth dynamic. While past rituals were carried out through spirituality, materiality has replaced spirituality in the ritual of the present (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Marketplace myths

or myths embedded in popular culture often integrate the marketer's involvement with the consumer's spontaneous actions (Solomon, 2020). For example, Disney weddings provide stages for consumers to become part of fairy tales. Despite all the obstacles that could disrupt the completion of love, a bride and a groom finally overcome and transcend the oppositions on the day of their Disney wedding. The wedding signifies the advent of the live-happily-ever-after state, which is the happy ending of the myth.

A functionalist perspective on mythology suggests that myth strengthens social solidarity (Durkeim, 2008). Symbolic representations imply collective values and social obligations, and collective unconscious represented through myth contributes to social cohesion (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Going one step further, critical theorists illuminate the ideologies that myths carry (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Thompson, 2004). Thompson's (2004) analysis of the natural health market myth illustrates the two ideological discourses that support the quasi-magical practices of holistic healing: the ideology of Romanticism about nature, which holds Edenic paradise and forbidden knowledge, and Gnostic myth, which reflects consumers' desire to connect technology and spirituality. Critical studies have focused on myth research from the organizational cohesion to agency and emancipatory consumption under hegemonic oppression in the marketplace (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Arsel & Thompson (2011) showed how hipster consumers attempted to demythologize a consumption ideology by identifying their strategies: aesthetic discrimination, symbolic demarcation, and proclaiming consumer sovereignty.

III. Methods

This study conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of webpages, including editorial articles and blog entries on Korean skin care practices. An analysis of webpages written for an English-speaking audience was chosen. English is a language of global importance, with 1.2 billion native and non-native speakers (Yaghi, 2019). In addition, the U.S. ranks third in the quantity of K-beauty imports, following China and Hong Kong (Shin et al., 2020). The present study analyzed webpages retrieved by entering search words including K-beauty, Korean skin care, and Korean makeup. Among the search results, 68 articles that met the following criteria were selected for analysis. The webpages selected were published in English between January 2017 and June 2020. Some of the websites specialized in beauty while others were fashion and style websites or websites for newspapers or lifestyle magazines. The website authors were from diverse countries (e.g., U.S., Australia, U.K., Philippines). For some websites, information on the authors was not available.

The main topic is Korean skin care, specifically beauty trends, tutorials, tips, and product reviews. The webpages analyzed fall into three categories: beauty blog entries operated by beauty product retailers (e.g., Glow Recipe, Soko Glam), editorial articles published by the established press (e.g., Cosmopolitan, Elle), and blog posts or self-published articles written by independent self-claimed beauty experts (e.g., Snow White and the Asian Pear). Out of 68 articles, there were 30 retailer-operated blog articles, 24 editorial articles, and 13 independent

articles. Although webpages whose main purpose is product review were excluded, many of the web articles still contain some aspect of product reviews.

One could question possible bias in the retailers' blogs. They were included, because it is difficult to draw a clear line between commercial and non-commercial webpages when it comes to beauty-related web content. Some retailers established their reputations as K-beauty experts first and then expanded their business to commerce (e.g., Alicia Yoon, Charlotte Cho). Few webpages on skin care were completely free of product information and brand names. Brand names and product names seem to be indispensable in regards to beauty consumption-related content.

Data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 Pro. The process of the qualitative content analysis was both inductive and deductive (Cho & Lee, 2014). Through reading approximately one third of data, I conducted open coding to obtain meaningful words (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Then I conducted axial coding. The relationships among various codes obtained as a result of open coding were then explored, and I developed a draft of coding scheme. The draft of coding scheme consisted of three categories: 10-step K-skin care routine, beliefs on Korean culture, and characteristics of K-skin care. Seeing the results of open coding and axial coding, I discovered the two main themes emerging, rituals and marketplace myths of K-skin care. I decided to apply the two concepts for analysis. The coding schemes were revised as I completed coding.

IV. Findings and Discussion

1. Ritualization of K-skin care practice

1) Skin care as a new type of consumption ritual

The first theme that emerged is the ritualization of K-skin care practices. In the reviewed webpages, Korean skin care practices were equated with multi-step skin care routines that include applying various kinds of products onto the face. Charlotte Cho, a Korean-American esthetician who is considered one of the most influential K-beauty experts (Cho, 2020), coined the term *10-step Korean skin care routine* in 2014 to describe the multi-step skin care routine for American consumers. Since then, the phrase has been adopted in subsequent texts related to Korean skin care.

The ten steps typically consist of (1)oil-based cleansing, (2)water-based cleansing, (3)exfoliating, applying liquid or creamy products including (4)toner, (5)essence, and (6)serum or ampoule, applying (7)sheet mask, (8)eye cream, and (9)moisturizer, and (10)ending with applying sunscreen for the daytime and a sleep pack or night cream for nighttime. Although the routines may vary slightly, the basic concept is to propose a ritual of skin care that is separate from a makeup routine.

The four elements of ritual experience (Rook, 1985) are applicable to K-skin care rituals. Firstly, major ritual artifacts for skin care ritual include all kinds of skincare products. The notion of ritual is quite effective and efficient for Korean skincare products that are known for their affordable prices, a variety of products and brands, and low brand awareness.

Secondly, the foremost role of the webpages is to create guidelines on ritual scripts for Korean skin care. Although the composition of the routine and its sequence may differ slightly between websites, the backbone of the K-skin care ritual is the notion of multi-step skin care that incorporates cleansing, moisturizing/nourishing, and sun protection. Topics discussed include the proper step sequence, relevant products for each step, and the overall efficacy of the K-skin care practice.

The scripts of the rituals detail the behavioral sequence and artifacts to be used (Rook, 1985) and the significance of and reasons for practicing each step. The articles about 10-step routines explain the rationale for each. The 10-step routine may be overwhelming to ordinary consumers at first. Explaining the rationale for each step lowers the psychological barrier and persuades consumers to act out the storyline. The following are some examples of the rationale: Double-cleansing using both oil-based and water-based cleanser completely washes the face. As a preparation process before adding any good ingredients, exfoliator removes dead cells and toner recovers pH-balance of the skin after washing, which makes the skin ready. When the skin is ready, follow with the application of four to five kinds of skincare products. Essence, eye cream, and moisturizer are mainly for hydrating the skin, but they vary in consistency and where they should be applied. The remaining products would be either serums or ampoules. Some users refer to this step as treatment. While the moisturizing step is presented for all consumers, the webpages recommend that the treatment step be customized for each individual

according to skin condition. In other words, individuals should select what to apply for this step. The treatment step is to provide solutions to one's skin problems or needs (e.g., acne, wrinkles, lifting, and pore).

Many of the reviewed webpages suggest that the steps for applying sheet masks and sunscreen make K-skin care unique and very Korean. Sheet masks are believed to be an innovative product of K-beauty that provide essence or serum in high concentration. The notion of integrating a sheet mask into one's ordinary skin care routine is what makes the K-skin care ritual different:

With its ability to instantly make you look like an axe murderer, this is the show pony of the K-beauty family. Korean women use a sheet mask between two to seven times a week. Trust us, 15 minutes of looking like a serial killer is worth it when you end up with lush skin. A helpful tip for the sheet mask rookie—don't leave it on longer than the prescribed time as the sheet mask will begin to try and suck the moisture from your skin! (Im, 2018, para. 9)

Including sunscreen as part of a basic skin care routine is perceived as new to many Western consumers, who are particularly fond of tanned skin. In K-skin care, UV rays are portrayed as an enemy from which one should protect skin in order to keep the skin in healthy condition:

To complete the last nine steps and skip the 10th is almost sacrilegious in Korean skin care. Sun damage is the primary cause of all external skin concerns, from pigmentation and dehydration to premature ageing. In Korea, ... the sun is treated as the enemy. They bring out all weapons to protect against it: visors, sunglasses, gloves, but most importantly, SPF (Allen, n.d., para. 16).

K-skin care has presented skin care routines as a type of daily self-care ritual. Skin care used to refer to special experiences such as going to a spa, getting a pricey facial from estheticians, or getting dermatological treatment. Washing one's face and applying lotion or moisturizing cream used to be considered part of one's grooming ritual (Hur & Choo, 2016). The data suggests that K-skin care creates a separate consumption ritual that encompasses the process from cleansing through sun protection. The K-skin care ritual script suggests that the significance of the skin care ritual lies in creating the time for self-care to address one's skin issues, and fight a battle such as acne.

A consumer may take the ritual performance role of self-caregiver. Similar to grooming rituals, which are fairly private, a ritual audience for skin care practice does not always exist. However, in this era when nearly everything is shared on social media, the world is potentially a ritual audience. One can make social media viewers a ritual audience the moment a person decides to open one's private skin care ritual to the public. In fact, it is not difficult to find people wearing sheet masks on Instagram.

2) Legitimacy of the K-skin care ritual

The findings include several characteristics of K-skin care rituals that contribute to establishing the legitimacy of K-skin care rituals. When it comes to K-beauty, skin care is framed as a matter of healthcare. The most frequent phrases that describe the goal and the result of Korean skin care are *glass*, *flawless*, or *dewy* skin, which means hydrated, smooth, acne-free, and trouble-free skin. These skin care goals are con-

nected to the notion of health and wellness. Many of the webpages suggest that such skin conditions demonstrate that a person is in good health:

[From an interview with] Alica Yoon: Founder of Peach & Lily

"Honestly, the 10-step Korean skin-care routine is not a real thing. ... Korean women don't think, 'Oh, I have to do my 10-step regimen.' Instead, what they think is that flawless, radiant skin that is very healthy is a sign of true beauty. It goes back historically for centuries, where the noble class never went outside in the sun and had porcelain-like skin—healthy skin. I think it boils down first and foremost to achieving healthy skin from the inside out. It's not about symptomatically getting rid of acne or fine lines, it's about how your skin health is really doing—your skin's inner environment (Lehava, 2018, para. 16)."

The webpages explain that skin care and healthcare are not two different things, so a proper skin care practice should be integrated into a healthy lifestyle:

"I also drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and healthy. I know that a big part of having healthy skin comes from what you eat and how you live. Taking care of your skin means taking care of your overall health. Beautiful skin is an outcome of a healthy lifestyle: eating well, sleeping well, and exercising enough, and, of course, using products with great ingredients that are right for your skin type. It's about also your attitude toward life—embracing the future, embracing getting older, and having a great attitude at each stage of life (Montell, 2019, para. 20)."

The webpages reviewed often call the skin care routines *skin care regimens*, which rhetorically suggests that following the routines is a way to stay healthy, as is true of good food and exercise. The data suggests that K-skin care rituals are framed as appearance management rituals as part of a health-conscious lifestyle. It is a paradigm shift, as applying lotion used to be

the preparation process for makeup. According to the literature, skin care and healthcare behavior have the positive effect on self-esteem (Gallitano & Berson, 2018). Framing K-skin care as part of healthcare is surely a strong advantage.

The next theme that legitimizes the K-skin care ritual is the notion of self-care. The concept of self-care or self-treatment has a thread of connection with consumer agency. Many of the webpages explain that the number of steps and the selection of products should be tailored for each individual to fit the skin type and lifestyle. To some degree, the flexibility in ritual artifacts and script relates to the market conditions. K-beauty trends are not led by a few powerful brands. K-beauty-related contents are full of reviews of numerous products. Every year, endless new alternative products enter the market and survive the test by beauty experts and consumers. The affordability of the products also enables consumers to try the whole new routine easily.

K-skin care rituals enable consumers to treat themselves on their personal terms and budget. Even if a person add more steps, it will cost far less than medical treatment or brand-name product. The webpages also explain that K-skin care rituals require long-term care to obtain results:

The most important thing in K-beauty is consistency. Again, it's like working out. Some people really only want to work out for half an hour a few times a week to maintain their desired level of fitness while others really want to put more work in. So get to know your skin and see what's right for you.
I personally have more than 10 steps in my routine, but I've got it down pat, so it takes only a few minutes each morning and evening. So a multilayered routine doesn't have to take a long

time and/or be disruptive to your day! It's my "me time" and a soothing moment for me to bookend each day. Other than keeping my skin healthy, it's a part of my day I love and look forward to (Yoon, 2020, para. 19-20).

2. Myths of Korean skin care practice

The second theme that emerged from the webpage analysis is the mythologizing of Korean skin care. Myths on Korean skin care reinforce the legitimacy of K-skin care practice. Two kinds of discourses were found: discourses on the roots of K-skin care and those on the mythic combination of nature and technology.

1) It all comes from Korean culture

Some of the webpage authors attribute the current K-skin care practice to Koreans' high involvement with skin, and others attribute K-skin care's popularity to Korean tradition or legacy in the long term. Discourses on high involvement with skin mention Korean women's daily skin care practices and lifestyles. Some discourse focused on frequent sheet-masking, extremely high standards for skin, and Korean women's willingness to put extra efforts into skin care.

Some webpages attributed the use of natural ingredients to home-based skin care traditions (e.g., mung bean face-packs) that have been handed down from mother and grandmother. These ingredients are framed as Korean and natural. Others trace natural ingredients further back to the ancient Korea and historic beliefs on healthy skin and the Eastern philosophical stance on beauty. Dr. Kraffert, a certified dermatologist state,

"The first key to understanding the Korean skin-care industry is to understand the legacy

behind it, Koreans have among the longest documented historical civilized legacies (dating back to 8,000 BCE) in the world. ... Skin-care interest has been documented since the earliest Korean writings (700 BCE), and the Dongui Bogam, an ancient Korean medicinal text, has an entire section (the Tangaekpyeon) on preparation and use of herbal ingredients, including for skin concerns (Lehava, 2018, para. 30)."

Discourses tracing the history of skin care practices serve to authenticate the skin care practice and serve as a ground for today's research and development of innovative products:

I spoke with historians and visited museums in Korea, where I'm from, to understand the rich beauty legacy and traditions passed down through the generations, shaping it into what it is today. ... During these times, natural ingredients like camellia, mung bean, and rice were popular for the rich antioxidant benefits and hydrating properties, and they would be kept in small celadon tubs in tiny amounts as preservatives weren't used as much back then. It's amazing that this history of time-tested natural ingredients has been passed down and is still incorporated into today's beauty formulas (Yoon, 2020, para. 10-11).

Whether the story above is valid or not, the discussions help readers accept unknown brands' products with new or exotic ingredients. Authors occasionally quote testimonials by those who have cultural capital in Korean skin care culture or Korean cosmetics. Two types of people seem to be qualified: those of Korean heritage and skin-care specialists. It is not a coincidence that K-beauty experts such as Charlotte Cho are Korean American. It is not difficult to find articles on K-beauty written by people of Korean heritage. They occasionally add personal stories about their families or personal episodes related to Korean culture, which reinforce the authenticity of their writing. Endorsements from

dermatologists are powerful, because their support for Korean skincare products signify scientific objectivity to readers.

The notion of prevention is also attributed to Korean legacy. Some authors explain that the notion of preventing skin from aging and protecting skin from sun damage go hand in hand with the ideology of preventive medicine, which is a characteristic of traditional Korean medicine:

The second component of the Korean skin care philosophy is a focus on preventing problems before they happen. In medical speak, this is called preventative medicine. Basically, take great care of your skin all the time to prevent blemishes and dry skin from forming in the first place. This is completely opposite of the approach most U.S. women take to skin care. Too many of us do the bare minimum until we notice problem. But this isn't the Korean approach to achieving beautiful, long-term, skin wrinkles ashy skin, and then it's a mad dash to the pharmacy to find something to treat the problem. But this isn't the Korean approach to achieving beautiful, glowing skin long-term (Guldager, 2018, para. 11-12).

The quote above shows the very Eastern idea of prevention has been incorporated into the very Western idea of control in K-skin care rituals.

2) It is an amalgam of nature and technology

Many of the articles explain the two types of special ingredients in Korean products. Firstly, the new natural ingredients that give the competitive edge include snail mucin, pig collagen, black mud, volcano water, Centella asiatica, or coptis root. Another type that often appears is scientific jargon that implies technological advancement, such as epidermal growth factor (EGF), micellar water, beta hydroxy acids (BHA) alpha hydroxy acid (AHA), hyaluronic acid, or

niacinamide. These ingredients may not be exclusive to Korean products. Nature-inspired cosmetics are also found in Western products (e.g., tea tree oil). What is unique about K-skincare products is that the products are positioned as an outcome of amalgam of nature and technology:

On why Korean products are different than North American products...

"Novel skin-care ingredients and ingredient research and refinement are something for which Koreans have a great reputation. The state-of-the-art Korean skin-care technologies (and there are several) really do lead the world. These include unique ways of processing (and fermenting) plant extracts, utilizing nanotechnologies such as nano-sulfur and nano encapsulation of both EGF (Epidermal Growth Factor—aka human oligopeptide 1), and retinol, as well as unique ways of formulating with silicone-based emollients. A very different way of deploying emollients is actually a much sensed but little understood key component to the uniqueness and desirability of Korean products (Lehava, 2018, para. 31)."

Associating with nature is a way of mythologizing origin in consumer marketing (Kniazeva & Belk, 2007). The myth integrating nature, science, and technology coincides with the structure of natural health marketplace mythology. Thompson (2004) presented two ideological bases for the natural health marketplace: the Romantic mythos and the Gnostic mythos. In the mythic formation, nature is equated with the Romantic notion of Edenic paradise, while science and technology are like forbidden fruits that human beings obtained by disobeying the commandment of God (Thompson, 2004). The Garden of Eden and nature are the world where everything is in balance and in harmony, while technology can make ill effects on the harmonious world. Thompson (2004) connected this notion of nature to the Romantic adoration of nature:

"Nature is an organic, dynamic, fecund, and mystical force where disenchanting souls could find spiritual rebirth and sustenance" (p.164). The Romantic view on Eastern wisdom or alternative medicine is located at the opposite side of mainstream science (Thompson, 2004). The discourses on K-skincare products' natural ingredients reflect the mythology of nature (i.e., the Romantic sanctification of nature).

Thompson (2004) pointed out the Gnostic mythos as another ideology that holds the natural health market myth. The Gnostic perspective holds the stance that science and technology can transcend the constraints of humankind, and science and technology can dominate nature (Thompson, 2004). This techno-utopian dream comes out of the consumers' desire to connect technology and spirituality (Thompson, 2004; Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Thompson (2004) maintained that internal contradictions are embedded in natural health marketplace myths and American culture.

As seen in the quote above, the contradiction of technophilic and technophobic viewpoints is also embedded in discourses on K-skin care products. Through beauty products from the East, people encounter ingredients from the Romantic nature. Those ingredients can restore the harmonious state in their skin. However, the recovery is possible only because scientific innovation and technological advancement win against nature's punishment (i.e., sun damage, aging, dehydration).

V. Conclusion

Findings of the study illustrate that K-skin

care is presented in the form of a new consumption ritual among English-speaking audiences. K-skin care rituals consist of facial self-care performances that consist of cleansing, applying liquid or creamy emollients, applying sheet masks, and applying a sunscreen product. The ritual is structured with various artifacts (i.e., skincare products) in a specific sequence. The analysis suggests that consumers construct their skin care ritual scripts based on guidelines provided by the so-called 10-step Korean skin care routine. Another finding is that the ritualization of K-skin care practices have paved the way for constructing and sustaining marketplace myths about Korean skin care in the global marketplace (Campbell, 1949) and myths about Korean skin care culture and products reassure international consumers who would be hesitant about adopting unknown products from Korea.

The myth positions K-skin care products as the transcendent integration of the two opposing forces, the Romantic nature and cutting-edge science and technology. K-skin care routines and innovative products are mythologized with a close affinity for nature and technology. Interestingly, the ideological ground for K-skin care is fairly close to that of the natural health market (Thompson, 2004). In the process of ritualizing, both the Romantic notion of nature and the Gnostic belief in science and technology shape the characteristic of Korean products and sustain the skin care rituals. The marketplace myths surrounding K-skin care present a variety of enemies of the skin, such as UV rays, aging, acne, or dehydration, and K-skin care practices are provided as a mythological solution to the issues.

K-skin care practice as a skin care ritual and

the mythologizing discourses are integral in constructing the identity of Koreanness. The findings of the study support Kim's (2020) argument that the identity of Koreanness in skincare products is created through editorial articles and user-created content on the Internet and social media. Kim (2020) maintained that Koreanness is imagined and has been created through media. Koreanness in the eyes of global consumers serves as an important source of popularity and has led to increased exports of Korean cosmetic products. The analysis illustrates that by participating in K-skin care routines, consumers form the meaning of pampering themselves and pursuing healthy skin. I carefully conclude that the pursuit of healthy skin and pampering oneself are portrayed and would be perceived as important part of identities of K-skin care.

A few important features that explain popularity of K-skin care are found. Firstly, K-skin care practice was accepted as everyday skin care routine rather than as ethnic practice. Although natural ingredients are emphasized, the nature as the origin of ingredients is not somewhere in the East, but the Romantic nature whoever dreams of. What is explained as Korean heritage is rather conceptual: the Korean philosophy of skin care and health care and Korean's high involvement with good skin. The Korean heritage is thus safe and actually supports the value system of beauty experts. Secondly, the notion that K-skincare products are an outcome of innovative technology with which natural ingredients are processed is appealing in the global marketplace where science and technology have been treated as a positive good. Thirdly, particularly the notion of healthcare is combined with

the notion of consumer agency when it comes to K-skin care. Compared to leading global cosmetic brands that dictate the terms of skin care, K-skin care allows consumers to be in control of product choice. The design of skin care routine based on the wealth of information on the Internet and the social media, which is expected to reinforce the consumer empowerment.

Although it was not the focus of the analysis, the findings indirectly support the thesis that K-beauty also takes on hybrid identities. The term hybridity reflects the perspective of post-colonial cultural studies. Hybrid identities embody the transnational context where global and local culture intersect and where the power relations between the center and the periphery have transformed (Bhabha, 1994). Korea used to be powerless in the global cosmetic market until early 2000s, but has now embraced the Western system of beauty products and the cosmetic industry. However, K-skin care products created the unique formula of integrating global and local features and Korean cosmetic brands negotiate with global form, as seen in the case of K-pop music which is also known for the cultural hybridity (Shim, 2006). I agree with the postcolonial viewpoint that the hybrid practice of cultural expression negates the homogenization, or westernization of global culture, which is called rhizome of culture (Lee, 2018; Pieterse, 2004). In other words, the diffusion of K-skin care practices are autonomous and horizontal in the global marketplace. K-skin care practice is neither exotic nor familiar to English-speaking audiences at first. Like K-pop, K-beauty has been diffused horizontally by word of mouth on social media. Even though they technically re-

place some of cleansing or moisturizing products from cosmetic conglomerates, K-skin care practice would rather be perceived as new ritualistic behaviors to learn.

The current study presents theoretical and practical implications. Previous literature on rituals paid little attention to the personal side of consumption rituals. The findings reveal a new form of consumption ritual that is created with the diffusion of popular cultural genres such as K-pop or K-drama. The study shows that the personal ritual is not separate from societal value system particularly in the era of web 2.0 when nearly everything is shared and communicated. Practical implications are found with regard to K-beauty marketing. The findings provide an outline of the information global consumers may need to know and how information should be delivered. Marketers for the Korean cosmetic industry could gain insights from the present analysis in pursuit of global expansion. Lee and Lee's (2018) study on YouTube suggested that the audiences for K-beauty videos are likely to keep exploring similar contents. Media consumption of K-culture, that is, the search volume on Google and YouTube has a direct impact on exports of Korean cosmetic products (Lee & Lee, 2017).

The limitations of the study include the small scale of data. As the study was exploratory in nature and was thus designed to conduct a qualitative analysis, I stopped data collection when the two umbrella themes were saturated. Considering the purpose of the qualitative content analysis, the data size was sufficient enough to extract the major messages that are embedded in the discourses on K-skin care products

and to understand how the trend of K-skin care emerged in the global market. The type of information was limited to only web content, and the analysis did not take the country of audience into account. As social media such as YouTube or Instagram are important platforms for communicating beauty-related information, a future study is needed to clarify the nature of different media and the context.

The significance of the study is found from the attempt to understand from the viewpoint of global consumers. While Korean products may be made in Korea, the perception of K-culture is created outside Korea. It is thus significant to analyze how K-skin care is portrayed in the international media and to understand the lived experiences of international consumers. Further study is needed to investigate global beauty consumers in the field.

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