

Korean Cosmetics, Social Media, and Global Consumerism among Thimphu College Youth

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Abstract: This qualitative study aims to explore the impact of global consumerism (especially Korean cosmetics and social media) on physical beauty standards and how it affects the lifeways of Thimphu college youth. The study identifies Korean cosmetics and social media in reinforcing the adoption of Korean beauty standards and its products. We show how Korean cosmetics, and their allure, impact the lifestyles of Thimphu college youth as they share their daily routines/steps of using Korean cosmetics and how long it takes. Notwithstanding the cultural and societal differences between Korea and Bhutan, our findings relate to the impact of Korean cosmetics on beauty standards, including identity and gender norms in Bhutanese society.

Keywords: Global consumerism, Korean cosmetics, social media, Gender norms and beauty standards

"To men, a man is but a mind. Who cares what face he carries or what form he wears? However, a woman's body is the woman" (Bierce, 2015).

Introduction

The above quote suggests why beauty is an integral part of most women and why they care about their physical appearance, arguably more than most men. From a young age, women around the world are told that every individual is beautiful, strong, smart and unique in their own ways. Women are taught to value their differences and accept other women for all their flaws (Glass, 2020). Motivational

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speakers regularly preach self-love and that beauty lies within, as opposed to seemingly superficial appearances. At the same time, women are generally part of a world in which the media has an unbelievably strong presence; a presence that manipulates society's interpretation of the standard of beauty. This is true for Bhutan, as it is elsewhere.

It's no secret that the mainstream media are obsessed with the appearance of women. Living in a modern era, the media is a large part of our daily lives, and whether we recognize it or not, it influences our opinion and reshapes our view of the world and ourselves. For many of us, our first instinct when bored is to scroll through social media. In so doing, we become susceptible to self-comparison as we see images of women who are declared beautiful by society, causing us feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. While many of us acknowledge the possibility of Photoshop/editing being used to 'perfect' images before being displayed to the public, we fail to understand that while women are being digitally altered, so are our perceptions of what is truly beautiful, healthy, and realistic (Glass, 2020).

In the first episode of a show called #GirlTALK² (Yeewong Bhutan Multimedia, 2019), which was about self-esteem and body image in Bhutan, a little girl shared how upsetting it was for her when her sister used to call her *Naley-Pem*. *Naley-Pem* is a Bhutanese pejorative name for a person who has a darker complexion. In the same show, Miss Bhutan 2008, Tsokye Tsomo Karchung, also shared that growing up, she was also called *Naley-Pem*, which made her insecure about her appearance. Yet another girl shared about how she would hide from her crush because she was teased for her supposedly "big, fat nose", firstly by her own family, and then by her friends. The insecurities, dissatisfaction and disappointment expressed by the interviewed young girls beg the question: What is the standard of beauty they hold themselves against and who decides this standard in Bhutan?

According to Nagara and Nurhajati (2022), "The emergence of a notion of 'beauty

² This show is produced by Yeewong Bhutan Multimedia Company. Yeewong is Bhutan's first and only women's lifestyle magazine and has maintained its position as the most popular and consistent magazine in the market. (<https://loden.org/entrepreneurs/pema-choden-3/>)

standard' or 'beauty ideals' might often be discussed when we are talking about a woman's beauty from every culture." Every country worldwide has its beauty standards, which vary from one another. Beliefs and culture influence the standard and how society's perspective defines the word 'beauty'. Female beauty, in particular, has changed multiple times throughout history to adapt to the ever-changing ideologies as beauty is a social construct. For example, traditional Korean beauty was earlier average weight, or even slightly overweight, and fair skin as these represented the abundance of the wealthy, who were not required to labour under the sun (Yan & Kim, 2014). In turn, in China and Japan, the women with round and plump faces were considered beautiful. (Lotti, 2018). These examples clearly show that beauty standards are not static over time.

During a baseline study that we conducted, as part of the "HAPPY Project",³ to assess the factors influencing the purchase intention of Korean cosmetics in Bhutan, it was found that, beyond product effectiveness, significant themes emerged, such as changes in lifestyles, confidence related to skin issues, and the impact of social media and societal pressure. Building upon our earlier baseline study, and focusing on college youth in Thimphu, this article offers a deeper understanding of how Korean cosmetics, as integral to global consumerism, influence their lifestyles. We then examined the connections between these lifestyles and individual confidence levels. In overall terms, we look at the impact of Korean cosmetics, and associated lifestyles, on the beauty standard. By examining the impact of Korean cosmetics on beauty standards, we further aim to shed light on the role of social media and social pressure in reinforcing these standards within Bhutanese society.

This study holds significant implications for understanding the impact of cultural globalization on beauty perceptions and the adoption of new beauty norms, with particular reference to urban Bhutan. The findings contribute to the existing body of

³ This Erasmus+ KA2 Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) Project was proposed in early 2020 and successfully awarded a grant in 2020. The Project involves Bhutanese and European partners working towards developing capacity for the teaching-learning of qualitative research methods (QRM) at all colleges in Bhutan which teach social sciences and humanities programmes at the Bachelor's level. Dr. Lorraine Nencel, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, VU University, Amsterdam guided the team to write this paper by providing valuable feedback and through feedback during research retreat conducted Oct 2023. Find out more about "HAPPY project here: <https://happy-project.eu/>

knowledge on the influence of popular culture on society and shed light on the potential implications for individuals' self-esteem, social interactions, and lifestyles. The findings of this research can also have cultural implications by letting our society understand how the physical beauty standards have been transformed with the introduction of Korean beauty standards and Korean cosmetics in our country. By examining respondents' perceptions of global consumerism and the influence of social media related to beauty, the research also contributes to discussions on societal change, identity formation, and the influence of globalisation.

Using purposive sampling, we selected 12 females studying at Royal Thimphu College (RTC) in various programmes who use or have used Korean cosmetics. We used purposive sampling, which allowed for a focused selection of respondents who met the specific criteria of being users of Korean cosmetics. Semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation methods were used to collect data on K-beauty and its impact on beauty standards from our respondents. Semi-structured interviews served as our primary data collection method to investigate the use of Korean cosmetics, and its influence on perceptions of physical beauty standards, as well as the impact of beauty influencers and social media. To supplement these interviews, we integrated photo elicitation as a supplementary technique. During this process, participants were asked to share images of individuals they considered beautiful. Many of these visual references were drawn from popular social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Additionally, we utilised the photo-elicitation method to facilitate a comparative analysis of these images, enabling a deeper understanding of the participants' underlying beauty standards. For ethical considerations, strict measures were implemented to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of our participants. This involved the removal of any identifying information from the data collected, such as names, contact details, and any potentially revealing elements. Additionally, informed consent was obtained, and the respondents were assured that their information would be used solely for research purposes, further reinforcing our commitment to preserving their privacy and confidentiality.

Korean Standards of Beauty

Korean beauty standards are known for being distinct and so high that it is almost unachievable with criteria such as double eyelids, a modest to medium-sized nose bridge, a V-line face/jawline, round shaped forehead, clear skin and porcelain white skin (Siena, & Claire, 2019). The high standards of beauty in Korea had a humble beginning when Dr David Ralph Millard, in 1953, after the Korean War, was commissioned to provide humanitarian relief in the form of plastic surgery (DiMoia, 2013). Millard's practice of facial reconstruction then gave Koreans a sense of control over facial transformation. Ever since Korea has been so competitive that people need to resort to plastic surgery to better their chances in marriage or jobs. The effort put into surgeries by an individual in Korean society means they are dedicated to performing well in terms of these standards (Leem, 2016).

In a "lookism society" where an individual's beauty influences everything, it is without a doubt that one would strive for perfection. In recent years, Korean celebrities' skin has been said to be fairer than ever and in order to achieve fairer-than-ever fairness, no blemishes, and even tone and glowy skin, most celebrities rely on Photoshop or camera applications such as SNOW, Foodie, B612, and SODA, which help modify pictures (Park and Hong, 2021). Such duped beauty ideals are then portrayed to the world, and on such beauty ideals, Korea has constructed a whole economy (Holliday & Elfving-Hwang, 2012). Similarly, despite our respondents knowing the expensive cosmetics, surgeries and editing that goes behind those poster pictures, the respondents try to conform by enhancing their own features through makeup or filters. The participants also mentioned that they do so because of the pressure to meet beauty standards and the influence of societal expectations. The following reflects some of the remarks made:

"Yes, as we live in a very judgmental society, I see many people judging people's physical appearance. I used to be pretty chubby when I was young, and then I would be teased a lot for that, and I have also tried skipping meals. However, as I grew up, I moved on from it as I was more concerned about mental health."

"The people who have influenced me have their professional makeup artist with much experience. For us, even if we try our

best to look like them with no experience, it is not a match. They also use costly creams and moisturisers as they can afford. As I cannot afford all those expensive creams, I often mix cheap creams with my makeup, so the combination does not work. However, I always try to meet the standards even if I cannot meet them."

"Yes, I feel that if the person is beautiful, they are more comfortable to face the crowd. I have noticed that most of the people who come on stage are those people who are more beautiful than others, and they also seem to be much more confident."

The enhanced importance of one's appearance in today's society has also led to a growing consumption of beauty products (Eze et al., 2012). Moreover, as stated by Fredrickson and Robert (1997), the most aggressive purveyor of sexual objectification is the mass media. Taking advantage of mass media, Korean beauty emerged as a global trend, becoming the fourth largest export country for global cosmetics (Korea Economic Daily, 2021).

Korean Cosmetics as a Global Consumer

The combination of global connectivity and global consumer culture can be called globalisation. Theodore Levitt coined this term in a Harvard Business Review article that stated, "The globalisation of markets is at hand" (Levitt, 1983). Globalisation created a market in which products and services could be sold to the masses. However, globalisation is now defined as "the worldwide diffusion of practices, expansion of relations across continents, organisation of social life on a global scale, and growth of a shared global consciousness" (Holt et al., 2004).

From a sociological angle, consumerism focuses on the role of consuming lifestyles in shaping social boundaries. People use their consumption choices to create affiliations or distinctions within their social groups. Marketing plays a crucial role in this process by creating brands that individuals can identify with and remain loyal to. Through marketing strategies, products gain inner meanings that bring users of the brand together, thereby forming new social groups. While creating these groups is not marketing's primary goal, it aims to cultivate a broad base of brand loyalists.

The consumer society's identity is reflected in the lifestyle it generates, encompassing product preferences, shopping locations, fashion choices, and more. Factors like income, social class, and economic indicators also influence consumer behaviour. In an effort to enhance brand image, notions of charity and compassion are often leveraged, giving consumers a sense that their purchases make a positive impact on others (Dzurová & Paholková, 2016).

With Korean cosmetics gaining immense popularity worldwide, the beauty industry has witnessed a significant surge in global consumerism. Korean beauty products are known for their innovative formulas, appealing packaging, and emphasis on skincare. This rise can be attributed to effective marketing strategies, affordability, and the globalisation of beauty standards. The K-beauty phenomenon has transformed into a global trend, with consumers seeking out Korean skincare routines and makeup products (Shi, Z. 2020). This has led to the convergence of beauty standards. Korean cosmetics often align with the beauty ideals that have become widespread internationally, emphasising flawless skin, innovative skincare, and makeup routines. The appeal of these products lies in their ability to help consumers achieve these shared beauty standards. Our respondents have also emphasised these characteristics when asked to define beauty:

“I would describe it as someone who has a really fair complexion, has a radiant, glass skin type and then maybe with big eyes. And big mouths may be. Physical beauty is important. In a lot of ways, because when I was in middle school, looks were very important. Looks are important everywhere, not to deceive people or anything, but looks are important. Because, look says something like if we had a daughter or a son, you wouldn't want them marrying someone who's hideous, you know, we would love them to marry a person who's more beautiful, beautiful. It's just like I can't... have a particular word for it, and I can't explain it, but then I think that beauty does matter.”

The impact of Korean culture, particularly Korean beauty standards, has extended beyond the borders of South Korea and has made its presence felt in East and Southeast Asian countries, including Bhutan. This influence can be attributed to the increasing global interest in Korean pop culture products, fuelled by the accessibility

of K-dramas, music, and films through various media platforms (Lee, 2011). Bhutan, in particular, has witnessed a rise in the popularity of Korean beauty products, with a surge in demand for skincare and cosmetic items (Lhaden, 2020). Korean Pop music invaded Bhutan first, followed by Korean beauty products. Sonam Pelden, the owner of the K-Beauty store in Thimphu, said that when she restocked skincare products after the lockdown due to COVID-19, there was a long queue of customers waiting outside the shop. The influence of Korean culture in Bhutan has become increasingly evident with the emergence of physical and online stores dedicated to Korean beauty products. Bhutanese girls and women took to the K-products like fish to the water. Furthermore, by the look of it, K-Beauty and skincare craze will likely be the biggest preoccupation and business in the country (Lhaden, 2020).

The so-called "K-beauty" trend has gained popularity in recent years, and Korean brands have become known for their innovative skincare and makeup formulations. Our respondents admitted that appearance has become essential in everyday life, even though sometimes people are reluctant to acknowledge it. Korean cosmetics are expensive, and the girls (our respondents) usually spend Nu. 3000 (36.23 USD) to Nu. 5000 (60.21 USD) monthly from their pocket money (which is usually given to them either by their parents or relatives). While these amounts are substantial, they think it is worthwhile since it improves their skin. None of the respondents complained about the price, and everyone mentioned K-cosmetics' effectiveness. Global consumerism has enabled economies of scale, making Korean cosmetics more affordable for consumers in Bhutan. The availability of these products, both in physical stores and online, has made them accessible to a wider audience. As mentioned by one of the respondent:

"I don't think it is that expensive. Since, I buy everything in bulk (toner, serum, essence, moisturizers and sunscreens) and I buy it within the interval of 2 months and spend around 4000 to 6000. It costs more if I buy Korean makeup but it lasts long. I don't buy it every month and compared to other American or European brands, Korean cosmetics are quite reasonable."

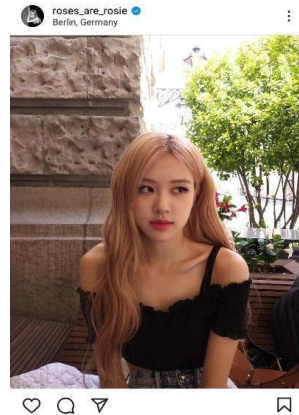
Background on Beauty Standard of Bhutanese Women

Beauty standards in Bhutan are often described in Buddhist texts, poetry and songs

as mentioned by the Bhutanese elderly. According to them, the Buddhist textual description of beauty is often compared to that of a Goddess and expects beautiful women to be the depiction of the Goddess. The descriptions found in the poetry and songs are mainly metaphorical descriptions in order to please the women and seduce them. These give us the idea that beauty has been an important part of women.



Picture 1. Queen Pema Dechen in 1932. She was considered beauty icon of Bhutan. (From 1932, <https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-5tW0M829V5g/TnNpk90kV7I/A>)



Picture 2. Rosie of Black pink (K-pop idol) (Park, R., 2019)

To gain insights into the historical changes in beauty standards among Bhutanese women and how they have transformed over time, we conducted an interview with one of the language teachers at RTC, who possesses knowledge about the subject matter. On top of that, we looked at the pictures of the Bhutanese women who were considered beautiful at that time, and we asked around 4-5 elders who were all aged between 40-50 years old. According to the language teacher, Bhutan's beauty standards have changed over the years, based on his knowledge from his grandmother, parents, and people who served the 2nd and 3rd monarchs of Bhutan. He mentioned two types of beauty that were considered when they related to females in Bhutanese society. The first focused solely on the face, where a beautiful face was enough to be considered beautiful, regardless of height. The second type of beauty considered overall health, favouring individuals who were not skinny, had white skin, and prominent body features. A famous Bhutanese saying used to describe beauty is "*Za ma za dong lu ta,*" (meaning, facial appearance is the outcome of how well you were fed) indicating a person's beauty based on certain criteria by looking

at their face. A woman with red cheeks on their face and a healthy body was considered beautiful compared to someone pale.

The language teacher and the other elderly we interviewed also agreed that big features and faces were considered beautiful during their ancestors' time, and individuals with dark skin and curly hair were not deemed beautiful. The royal family's beauty standards matched these ideals as well. Moreover, in the eastern region of Bhutan, beauty was associated with having a flat back head, achieved by placing new-borns on hard, flat surfaces. Additionally, oiling the hair with cow butter or shing mar (an oil extracted from a plant) was considered beautiful, while dry hair was not.

When asked about changes in the perception of physical beauty, the respondents mentioned that it varies based on location. In villages, the traditional idea of beauty remains prevalent, focusing on healthy women rather than skinny ones, which are considered unhealthy. In contrast, town areas tend to emphasise thin body features, which might be influenced by technology, globalisation, and the availability of beauty products. The respondents recalled one incident when products like "Fair and Lovely" and "Boroline"⁴ was forcefully applied to their face to achieve a fair complexion. The language teacher further noted a shift in hairstyles, where he shared how he feels everyone prefers long straightened hair in Bhutan. "In the past women usually kept their hair short, except for the royals who had time to maintain long hair. Certain features such as double eyelids, big eyes, and long black hair were considered epitomes of Beauty in Bhutan ", he said. "Blonde and coloured hair was not the trend and was not regarded as beautiful", he added.

The analysis of our respondents' descriptions of their ideals revealed several common themes. Facial features play a significant role, with respondents admiring specific attributes like foxy eyes or big and round eyes, double eyelids, and straight eyebrows (just like the Korean idol photo no. 2 as shown by our respondents during the photo-elicitation). Fair complexion and glowing skin were often associated with beauty. Respondents also paid attention to body figures, preferring a perfect weight. The influence of makeup and styling was evident, as respondents mentioned being inspired by celebrities, influencers, and Korean beauty trends. Korean beauty

⁴ Both Fair Lovely and Boroline are products of India and are imported in Bhutan.

standards and cosmetics notably impacted their perceptions, mentioning the "no makeup" look and "glass skin." Personal transformations and individual preferences were also expressed, highlighting the unique perspectives on beauty.

Role of Social Media in the Global Consumption of Korean Cosmetics

Social media enjoys phenomenal success in terms of adoption and usage levels in places across the globe, including Bhutan. These causes paradigm shifts in how people connect and communicate with each other, how they express and share ideas, and even how they engage with products, brands, and organisations. Moreover, social media has become a significant network of consumer knowledge (Fotis, 2015). Social media has played a vital role in the global spread of Korean cosmetics. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are powerful marketing tools that beauty influencers and brands use to showcase and promote these products. Influencers provide reviews, tutorials, and before and after content, influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Social media's reach and influence amplify trends, contributing to the widespread adoption of Korean beauty products.

One such example is how advertisers convey the message of what is considered beautiful. The advertisement for Fair & Lovely, a popular fairness cream in India, conveys a message of freedom and unhindered movement in public spaces. The advertisement features a woman with her face covered by a *dupatta* (veil), similar to how urban Indian women use veils to shield their faces from the sun and prevent skin darkening. The product promises to provide glowing skin without the need to cover the face. This portrayal of facial covering as resembling a veil invokes associations with the image of oppressed women and traditional practices. By linking the use of the fairness cream to discarding the veil, the advertisement cleverly suggests that consuming the product leads to freedom from patriarchal constraints and represents a progressive and empowered choice. It reframes the act of using beauty products, moving away from the perception of personal vanity, and instead positions it as a means to challenge societal norms and gain independence in public spaces (Pathak & Nichter, 2021).

Our respondents expressed being influenced by social media platforms like

Instagram and YouTube, where they were introduced to Korean cosmetics and followed beauty vloggers and influencers for recommendations and tutorials. Respondents also mentioned looking up to celebrities, influencers, and family members who embody these standards. These reflect the influence of societal beauty ideals on individual perception. Respondents emphasised the significance of clear skin and mentioned using skincare products like cleansers, moisturisers, and concealers to achieve it. They also discussed using Korean cosmetics to address skin concerns such as acne, pigmentation, and scarring. This suggests that achieving clear and healthy skin is crucial in their perception of beauty and self-confidence. They also emphasised the importance of physical appearance. One of them remarked thus:

"In many ways, physical beauty matters because when I was in middle school, looks were significant. Looks are important everywhere; not to deceive people or anything, but looks are important. Because, look says something like if we had a daughter or a son, you wouldn't want them marrying someone who's hideous, you know, we would love them to marry a person who's more beautiful, beautiful. It's just like I can't... have a particular word for it, and I can't explain it, but then I think that beauty does matter."

Korean Cosmetics and its Impact on the Lifestyle

Korean cosmetics have significantly impacted the lifestyle to meet the beauty standard among women, not just in Korea but worldwide. Our literature review revealed that Korean cosmetics' impact on beauty standards has spread across China, the USA, Indonesia and Japan. Under the study we have carried out, our respondents confirmed that the use of Korean cosmetics to meet the physical beauty standard set by each one of them impacts their daily lives. Furthermore, it has become a part of their daily routine. The kind of beauty standards such as fair skin, double eyelid, and thick lips is described and demonstrated through the photo-elicitation method where our respondent showed pictures of celebrities or social media influencer who meets their ideal beauty standards, such as Jennie from Black Pink, Kylie Jenner, Lhakyila (a social influencer from Nepal), Phuntsho Kinrab, Jitshenn and Damemariika (social influencers from Bhutan). One of the critical ways that Korean cosmetics have impacted their lifestyle is through the emphasis on skincare. Korean skincare routines

often involve multiple steps, including cleansing, toning, treating and moisturising, and can take 10 to 15 minutes or more to complete. This focus on skincare as a daily ritual has encouraged our respondents to prioritise caring for their skin and has increased demand for high-quality skincare products. They also shared that before Korean cosmetics, they used products imported from India, which were easily available to us as the neighbouring country. Most respondents shared about spending at least 10 minutes in the skincare routine in the morning and even in the evening. Some even shared that spending more than 30 minutes or an hour putting on makeup has become their daily habit. The following are some of the responses we received:

"Daily, I use toner, and after toner, I use lotion, and after lotion, I apply cream, and after that, I use regular sunscreen."

"I use the Innisfree mist in order to achieve fair skin. After the makeup, I started from the beginning, I used my toner and then base a moisturiser, which is of a new brand. Did you see it, madam? Ya, it's Cosrx, the one with the transparent cover. I used that in the morning. And then there's an Innisfree cream, Jeju cherry blossom toner cream, which makes you white. And then there's the mist that I use. And then there are also some cosmetics that I use. Some of them are like the eyebrow eyebrow pencils and the Etude house eye clipper tool kit and eyeliners. Most of them are etude house brands, and in the night, I don't really have a night routine, but then sometimes when I feel like my face is getting dehydrated, I use Innisfree slipping marks."

"I would say it takes an hour. My class starts at 10 am; I wake up at around 8:30 am, wash my face and start putting on my makeup for another hour."

According to Ziteng Shi (2020), college students are also easily influenced by the opinions of friends and family. Consumerism in Korean cosmetics also depends on factors such as corporate image, brand image and self-congruity (Anggrila & Tunjungsari, 2021). Many consumers first started using Korean cosmetics because of referrals from either family or friends. However, after a period of use, some of the consumers started to research the product ingredients and their skin types to search for their skin fit (Yeng, 2018). There are also various marketing strategies which help

boost the sales of Korean products, such as loyalty schemes whereby if a customer is regular, then for every purchase, the customer will be awarded points, which later can be used for discounts or free trials for the customer to try the products, good customer services and reasonable prices (Shi, 2020). Similarly, during the interviews with the respondents, it was found that the respondents recommend and take recommendations of K-products from their friends and family, which shows that Korean cosmetics have become a common topic in daily conversations among the girls who use them. Most of the girls are self-conscious about what their peers and family say about their looks and when their friends and family share their positive experiences with some products, and our respondents have agreed that such positive remarks on products ignite the desire to improve their appearance with the suggested products.

Gender Norms and Beauty Standards

Our study revealed that cosmetics contribute to reinforcing or challenging gender norms and beauty standards. Our respondents variously share that they use Korean cosmetics to express themselves, experiment with their appearance, and assert their individuality beyond prescribed gender expectations. Through the use of social media, our respondent has also been religiously following make-up artists and influencers who we believe often showcase diverse gender expressions, encouraging others to embrace their unique beauty.

While interviewing, we observed that ambivalence can arise from the tension between using cosmetics as a form of self-expression and the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards. Individuals may question how much of their cosmetics use aligns with their desire for self-expression versus their desire to fit into gendered beauty norms. Ambivalence in the context of gender and cosmetics reflects the complex interplay of personal identity, societal expectations, and self-expression. The use of cosmetics can evoke mixed emotions and attitudes, highlighting the need for open dialogue, understanding, and acceptance of diverse gender identities and expressions.

Cosmetics empower individuals to express their gender identity and creativity. It allows them to redefine beauty on their terms, regardless of societal expectations. For

many, using cosmetics is a form of self-expression and a way to communicate their gender identity authentically. Beauty is very subjective, therefore, in this article, we are only talking about physical beauty and what kind of standard is set by each of them through using Korean cosmetics and social media. Two of our respondents thus expressed:

"Yes, if we are beautiful, then we also feel included in many social groups, and then if we are not pretty, then it is also difficult to find/get a friend. According to me, especially in Bhutan, one needs to be fair skin with a white tone; then, people don't dare tease them and make fun of them on their faces. Whereas people with dark skin like me, we are often teased and made fun of. It also affects us mentally to some extent."

"Yes, on the day when I don't get time to do my makeup, I don't even feel like coming to college and showing up also, my classmates would always tell me I look very different when I don't wear my makeup."

Historically, gender norms have heavily influenced beauty standards, dictating how individuals should present themselves based on their gender. However, the rise of gender inclusivity and awareness has challenged traditional norms. Beauty standards are evolving to embrace diverse gender identities, encouraging self-expression regardless of societal expectations. The beauty industry is gradually moving towards inclusivity, showcasing individuals of various genders in advertising and product lines.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the interplay between global consumer culture, beauty standards, and the influence of Korean cosmetics on the perceptions of beauty among Bhutanese women. The exploration reveals that the impact of cultural globalisation, particularly through the popularity of Korean beauty products, has significantly shaped the beauty standards and lifestyles of the respondents. The notion that beauty standards are dynamic and subject to cultural shifts is evident, both historically and in the contemporary context of Bhutan. The impact of Korean beauty standards is not just limited to physical appearance but extends to lifestyle

choices. The study highlights how the adoption of Korean cosmetics has become an integral part of daily routines, with respondents dedicating significant time and resources to achieve the beauty standards set by both societal expectations and personal preferences. The emphasis on skincare, the meticulous application of makeup, and the reliance on specific beauty products contribute to a lifestyle shaped by the influence of global consumerism.

Moreover, the role of social media, especially platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, emerges as a factor in shaping beauty perceptions. The constant exposure to curated images and beauty influencers on these platforms creates a standard of beauty that is often unrealistic and contributes to self-comparison, feelings of inferiority, and societal pressures. The participant's acknowledgement of the digital manipulation of images underscores the need for a critical understanding of the mediated nature of beauty standards. The study also sheds light on the intricate relationship between beauty standards, self-esteem, and societal expectations. The participants' narratives reveal that the pursuit of beauty is not only driven by personal choice but is also influenced by societal judgments and the desire for social acceptance. The emphasis on physical appearance as a determinant of confidence and societal recognition highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the psychological and social implications of beauty standards.

This study contributes insights into the transformative impact of global consumer culture, specifically through Korean cosmetics, on the beauty standards and lifestyles of Bhutanese women. The evolving nature of beauty ideals, the role of social media, and the interplay of personal agency and societal expectations provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding perceptions of beauty in the context of cultural globalisation. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced discourse around beauty, self-expression, and identity in Bhutanese society.

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