

## **The Effect of the Korean Wave on K-Beauty Exports in Indonesia: Focus of Gen Z Study as Target Market**

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### **ABSTRAK**

Korean Wave yang mencakup musik, drama, dan gaya hidup Korea telah memberikan dampak signifikan terhadap preferensi konsumen global, termasuk di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh Korean Wave terhadap ekspor produk K-Beauty ke Indonesia, dengan fokus pada Generasi Z sebagai pasar utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui studi literatur sistematis dan analisis data sekunder dari KOTRA, Korea Customs Service, serta wawancara semi-struktural dengan 15 informan Gen Z. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa paparan terhadap budaya Korea secara signifikan meningkatkan ketertarikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa intensitas paparan budaya Korea memengaruhi persepsi nilai, identitas gaya hidup, dan loyalitas merek Gen Z terhadap produk K-Beauty. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi strategis bagi pelaku industri dan pembuat kebijakan dalam merancang strategi pemasaran lintas budaya yang lebih relevan, serta membuka peluang perluasan pasar ekspor K-Beauty di Asia Tenggara melalui pendekatan berbasis budaya populer dan konsumsi terhadap produk K-Beauty. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi penting dalam strategi pemasaran lintas budaya dan perluasan ekspor Korea Selatan.

*Kata kunci: Korean Wave, K-Beauty, Generasi Z, Ekspor, Indonesia, Budaya Populer Korea.*

### **ABSTRACT**

The Korean Wave, which encompasses Korean music, drama, and lifestyle, has had a significant impact on global consumer preferences, including in Indonesia. This research aims to analyze the influence of the Korean Wave on the export of K-Beauty products to Indonesia, with a particular focus on Generation Z as the primary target market. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, collecting data through a systematic literature study and secondary data analysis from KOTRA, the Korea Customs Service, as well as semi-structured interviews with 15 Gen Z informants. Results show that exposure to Korean culture significantly increases attraction. The results show that the intensity of exposure to Korean culture influences Gen Z's perceived value, lifestyle identity, and brand loyalty towards K-Beauty products. The findings have strategic implications for industry players and policymakers in designing more relevant cross-cultural marketing strategies, as well as opening up opportunities for the expansion of the K-Beauty export market in Southeast Asia through a popular culture-based approach and consumption of K-Beauty products. The findings have important implications for South Korea's cross-cultural marketing and export expansion strategies.

*Keywords: Korean Wave, K-Beauty, Generation Z, Export, Indonesia.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Korean Wave, also known as *Hallyu*, has become a global cultural force with a significant impact on various industrial sectors, not only in South Korea but also in several other countries. This

phenomenon encompasses various aspects of Korean popular culture, including music (K-pop), television dramas (K-dramas), culinary arts, fashion, and even beauty products known as K-Beauty. The Korean Wave has existed since the 1990s, initially spreading only in China and Japan, but its popularity subsequently increased and spread widely throughout Asia (Aqmarin, 2024). In Indonesia, this phenomenon emerged in the early 2000s and has grown rapidly, attracting the attention of millions of fans not only in Indonesia but also worldwide (Jannah et al., 2023). The success of the Korean Wave as a global phenomenon is inseparable from the South Korean government's strategy of actively utilizing popular culture as an instrument of soft power to shape the country's image while increasing exports of culture-based products. This strategy has not only succeeded in shaping the global perception of "Korea as a cultural trendsetter" but also generated real economic benefits through increased consumption of Korean products in the international market. One sector that has shown rapid growth due to the effects of soft power is the K-Beauty industry.

Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence other countries not through direct military or economic force (hard power), but rather through the appeal of its culture, values, and image, which shape positive perceptions in the eyes of the international public. In this context, South Korea is one of the countries that has successfully implemented a systematic soft power strategy through the spread of popular culture, commonly known as the Korean Wave. Soft power does not force, but instead creates attraction so that other countries or individuals willingly accept the influence. In the context of South Korea, the spread of popular culture is a form of soft power that has successfully shaped positive perceptions of its products in the global market.

According to official data from KOTRA and the Korea Customs Service (2023), the export value of South Korean cosmetic products increased significantly from USD 3.91 billion in 2018 to USD 7.57 billion in 2022. South Korea has become one of the world's largest cosmetic exporters. This growth is driven not only by technological excellence and product quality, but also by the close connection between Korean cultural imagery and its cosmetic products. The K-Beauty industry leverages the visual and narrative power of Korean cultural figures to build positive associations with global consumers. K-Beauty is also recognized for its research-based product innovations and holistic beauty philosophy (Valenciana & Pudjibudojo, 2022).

K-Beauty not only offers high-quality products but also prioritizes a fun and educational user experience. With a diverse range of products, including facial cleansers, serums, and creams, K-Beauty has successfully captured the attention of consumers worldwide, such as those in Indonesia (Rahmawati & Ahsan, 2021). K-Beauty products often contain natural ingredients and advanced technology, making them superior to beauty products from other countries (Nurliana, 2024). For example, many K-Beauty products use ingredients such as green tea extract, aloe vera, and fermented ingredients, which are known to have extraordinary benefits for the skin. These K-Beauty products also contain ingredients specifically formulated for Indonesian skin. Furthermore, attractive

and aesthetic product packaging is also a major draw for consumers, especially among Gen Z, who pay close attention to visual aspects when choosing products.

In this context, it is essential to understand how the Korean Wave contributed to the rise in K-Beauty exports and how this influenced consumer behavior, particularly among the younger generation, namely Gen Z. The global success of K-pop and K-dramas also fuels the Korean Wave. K-pop artists like BTS and BLACKPINK are not only music icons but also serve as brand ambassadors for K-beauty products (Octaviani et al., 2021). They are often seen using Korean beauty products in music videos and public events, indirectly promoting these brands to their fans worldwide (Korompis, M., & Koleangan, C, 2023). K-dramas, on the other hand, often feature characters with flawless skin and attractive appearances, which makes viewers interested in imitating their styles and beauty routines (Aqmarin, 2024).

However, challenges remain, such as competition from local products and import regulations. In Indonesia, the popularity of K-Beauty is increasing along with the growth of social media and digital platform users. Younger generations, especially Gen Z, are highly active on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where they frequently share their experiences and offer beauty product recommendations. Influencers and beauty vloggers also play a crucial role in promoting K-Beauty products, with many of them having large and loyal followings. Their content often includes product usage tutorials, reviews, and skincare tips that appeal to their audiences (Maulana et al., 2023).

Previous research has highlighted the influence of the Korean Wave on consumer behavior. Lee and Kim's (2019) study showed that high exposure to Korean cultural content can increase purchase intentions for Korean products, including cosmetics. Choi (2020) emphasized the crucial role of social media and influencers in strengthening this cultural influence on consumer decisions. Meanwhile, Damayanti (2023) and Amelia & Wulandari (2022) demonstrated that Korean celebrity brand ambassadors significantly increase perceived quality and symbolic value of products, thereby increasing consumer loyalty to K-Beauty products.

However, most of these studies still focus on general consumer behavior aspects, such as purchase intention, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, without further exploring the relationship between popular culture consumption and economic factors, including exports. This creates a significant research gap, especially in the context of Indonesia, a country experiencing growth in Korean cultural consumption and simultaneously becoming a strategic market for K-Beauty exports. There are still a few studies that directly link the popularity of the Korean Wave, changes in the consumption behavior of Indonesian Gen Z, and the increasing volume of South Korean K-Beauty product exports. Yet, in the context of the cultural economy, understanding the relationship between popular culture and international trade is crucial for designing more effective and sustainable culture-based economic strategies.

This study aims to address this gap by offering a more contextual and integrative approach. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate cultural and economic analysis, this study attempts to combine the two by exploring how exposure to the Korean Wave can shape Gen Z's consumption preferences and how these preferences contribute to the increase in K-Beauty product exports to Indonesia. By focusing on Generation Z as the primary subject, this study provides perspectives from a group at the center of attention in today's digital market dynamics.

Methodologically, this study also offers novelty through the use of a combination of primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews with Gen Z informants, as well as secondary data from official institutions such as KOTRA, the Korea Customs Service, and Statista. This triangulative approach strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between cultural dynamics and export performance. By utilizing a systematic literature review and analysis of actual trade data, this study fills a gap in the literature and contributes to interdisciplinary studies linking cultural communication, international marketing, and the creative economy.

K-Beauty has become a growing global trend, with product innovation and adaptive marketing strategies. Several studies have shown that Gen Z is more likely to be influenced by digital content and recommendations from influencers, which creates opportunities for K-Beauty brands to expand their reach in the Indonesian market. However, a deeper understanding of the factors influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions in the context of K-Beauty is still needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of the Korean Wave on Gen Z's preferences and purchasing behavior towards K-Beauty products in Indonesia, as well as to examine the increase in K-Beauty exports in the Indonesian market and identify the factors influencing their purchasing decisions. The results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the existing literature by offering new insights into the relationship between the Korean Wave and K-Beauty in Indonesia. In addition, the results of this study can serve as a reference for stakeholders in the K-Beauty industry to formulate more effective marketing strategies for reaching Gen Z.

This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the Korean Wave's influence on the export of Korean beauty products (K-Beauty) in Indonesia, with a primary focus on Generation Z as the target market. This study aims to analyze how Korean popular culture phenomena, such as K-pop, K-drama, and the lifestyle of Korean idols, shape the perceptions and preferences of Gen Z consumers towards K-Beauty products. In addition, this study aims to identify the factors of the Korean Wave that play the most significant role in influencing the purchasing decisions of K-Beauty products, as well as examine the extent to which social media and digitalization accelerate the spread of Korean culture and strengthen the presence of K-Beauty products in the Indonesian market. Furthermore, this study aims to evaluate the contribution of the Korean cultural image to increasing the export of K-Beauty products, as well as to develop strategic recommendations for Korean beauty

industry players in designing effective and relevant marketing strategies tailored to the characteristics of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia.

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts Joseph S. Nye's (2004) Soft Power theory as the primary conceptual framework to explain the relationship between Korean cultural influence and the growing export of K-Beauty products to Indonesia. Nye defines soft power as a country's ability to shape the preferences and behavior of other actors not through coercion or economic incentives, but through the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policy. In this context, South Korea has effectively utilized the Korean Wave, encompassing K-pop, K-drama, celebrity lifestyles, and visual aesthetics as a cultural diplomacy tool that strategically aligns with its national economic goals, particularly in promoting its beauty industry exports.

The widespread dissemination of Korean popular culture has significantly influenced the cultural preferences and consumption patterns of Indonesian Generation Z, the central demographic of this study. As digital natives, Gen Z actively engages with platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where Korean idols and lifestyle representations dominate cultural content. This continued exposure fosters emotional attachment and symbolic identification, where K-Beauty products are consumed not only for their skincare functions but also as expressions of an aspirational lifestyle, modernity, and social identity. In this sense, soft power operates by embedding Korean cultural values into the identity formation of young Indonesian consumers.

This shift in cultural preferences triggered by Korea's soft power has had a direct impact on increased consumption behavior. Gen Z Indonesians demonstrate strong brand loyalty to Korean cosmetic brands such as Innisfree, Laneige, Etude House, and Sulwhasoo, largely influenced by celebrity endorsements from K-pop and K-drama figures. The appeal of these idols enhances the perceived credibility and quality of products, reinforcing the notion that soft power not only shapes perceptions but also generates real demand in overseas markets. Consumption thus becomes a manifestation of Korea's successful cultural diplomacy in transforming aesthetic appeal into economic opportunities.

The correlation between cultural appeal and export performance is evident in trade data. According to reports from the Korean Customs Service and KOTRA, South Korean cosmetics exports to Indonesia increased from USD 41 million in 2018 to USD 55 million in 2021. This growth reflects not only competitive product quality or trade efficiency, but also the effective application of cultural soft power and nation-branding strategies that position Korea as an innovative and trendsetting nation. Thus, Korea is not simply exporting beauty products; it is exporting values, symbols, and lifestyle narratives that have become ingrained in the consciousness of Indonesian consumers.

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study is structured as follows: first, Korea's soft power channeled through the Korean Wave generates a strong cultural appeal; second, this appeal transforms Gen Z's cultural preferences and strengthens their identification with Korean aesthetics; third, this transformation stimulates active consumption of K-Beauty products; and finally, increased consumption leads to a measurable increase in Korean beauty product exports to Indonesia. This framework advances the field of international relations by demonstrating how cultural instruments serve as effective tools in achieving economic and diplomatic goals. It asserts that soft power is not merely symbolic but also has a real impact in shaping cross-border market behavior in the global creative economy.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research method employed was a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to understand the influence of the Korean Wave on K-Beauty product exports to Indonesia, with a primary focus on the behavior of Gen Z consumers as the target audience. This method was chosen to systematically and factually describe how the Korean Wave influences the interests and behavior of Gen Z consumers towards K-Beauty products in Indonesia. This research does not measure data in the form of numbers, but rather focuses on deepening the understanding of the meanings, perceptions, and narratives of informants, allowing this research to explore the meaning behind consumer preferences interpretively, rather than simply measuring behavior in numerical terms.

The research strategy employed was an exploratory case study with an interpretive approach, focusing on exploring the experiences, perceptions, and engagement of Indonesian Gen Z towards K-Beauty products and their exposure to Korean Wave elements, such as K-pop, K-drama, and Korean-themed digital content. This strategy enables the study to understand the relationship between popular culture, consumer perceptions, and their implications for export dynamics within a specific local market context.

Data were collected through three main stages. First, a systematic literature review was conducted to identify relevant theories and findings from academic journals, industry reports, and official sources such as KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency), the Korea Customs Service, and articles from Statista and digital marketing research sources that discuss Gen Z behavioral trends and the growth of K-Beauty exports. This literature review provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between Korean popular culture and trends in K-Beauty product exports. Second, secondary data analysis was employed to provide an overview of the statistical trends in K-Beauty product exports from South Korea to Indonesia from 2018 to 2023, as well as to study digital data from social media and e-commerce platforms, including TikTok, Shopee, Tokopedia, and Instagram Insights. This data provides an overview of trade trends and dominant digital distribution channels in Indonesia. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Gen Z informants who were purposively selected based on certain criteria: aged 18–25, actively

following Korean culture for at least the past year, active on social media, and regularly using K-Beauty products at least twice a month. The interviews aimed to delve deeper into their perceptions, preferences, and motivations behind their purchasing decisions for K-Beauty products, as well as how they interpret the relationship between Korean culture and their self-identity as young consumers.

Interviews were conducted online using a Google form with several questions to be filled out by the informants. The interview questions were structured around five main themes: (1) level of exposure to Korean culture, (2) motivation for consuming K-Beauty products, (3) perception of product quality and aesthetics, (4) influence of Korean public figures/idols on purchasing decisions, and (5) brand loyalty to certain products. Examples of questions asked were: "What is the main reason you choose K-Beauty products over local products?" and "Are there any Korean celebrities who made you interested in trying certain Korean cosmetic products?" All interviews were conducted voluntarily by the informants and transcribed for further analysis.

Several key concepts were operationalized to clarify the limitations of this study. First, "high engagement" is defined as actively interacting with Korean Wave content at least three times a week via social media or streaming platforms. Second, "regular consumption" refers to consistently purchasing and using K-Beauty products twice a month. Third, "perceived quality" is defined as a positive perception of product quality based on visual imagery, user experience, and association with Korean idols. Finally, "brand loyalty" is measured by the tendency to repurchase the same product and recommend it to others on social media or in one's circle of friends.

The data obtained from interviews and documents were analyzed. The analysis process began with the reduction of interview data, followed by the presentation of data in the form of tables or matrices. The data were then analyzed, and the findings were verified using triangulation techniques. Each theme was then analyzed in depth to explain the relationship between exposure to the Korean Wave and K-Beauty product consumption behavior and linked to secondary export data as a form of data triangulation. The analysis was conducted inductively and contextually to ensure valid and relevant interpretations of the social reality being studied. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and data-driven understanding of how Korean popular culture influences market behavior and impacts the dynamics of Korean beauty product exports to Indonesia, with a focus on the Gen Z consumer segment as agents of change in the global beauty industry.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study indicate that the Korean Wave plays a significant role in shaping consumption patterns and beauty product preferences among Indonesian Generation Z. One key finding is that 13 out of 15 informants (around 87%) stated that they started using K-Beauty products after seeing K-pop idols or Korean actors using them in advertisements, dramas, or social media

posts. For example, an informant admitted that he first tried Innisfree products after seeing Wonyoung from IVE as its brand ambassador. This indicates that the emotional and symbolic connection between Korean celebrities and Gen Z consumers is very strong, significantly influencing their purchasing decisions. This finding aligns with the concept of "affective branding," which posits that consumer loyalty can be fostered through emotional connection to public figures associated with the brand.

The Korean Wave is a concrete manifestation of the "soft power" strategy (Nye, 2004), which refers to a country's ability to influence others through cultural appeal, rather than economic or military pressure. The South Korean government has strategically promoted the Korean entertainment industry and lifestyle as a tool of cultural diplomacy. In interviews, informants stated that they felt proud, modern, and more confident when using K-Beauty products, as they felt like they were part of Korean culture itself.

This attachment is reinforced by the visualization of the ideal Korean lifestyle through K-Drama and K-Pop, where healthy skin, minimalist looks, and narratives of perfection are consistently portrayed. K-Beauty has become a symbol of Korean soft power, transformed into an economic commodity consumed globally. In other words, soft power serves as a bridge between popular culture and the penetration of South Korea's export market.

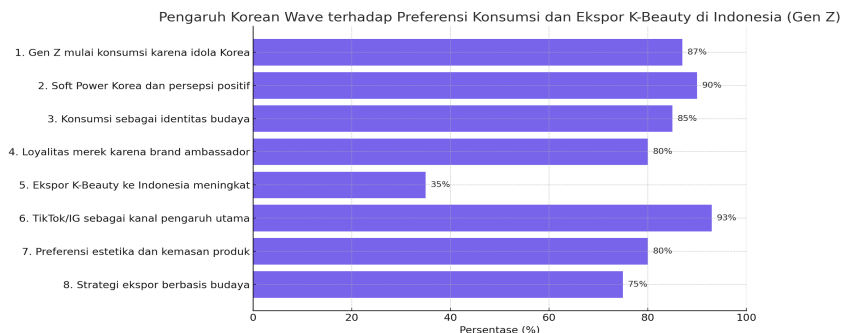
This finding can also be explained through the "Consumer Culture Theory" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), which emphasizes that consumption is not only about functional needs, but also reflects values, symbolic meaning, and social identity. In this context, the Korean Wave serves as a cultural framework that gives meaning to K-Beauty consumption. Gen Z not only buys skincare because they want healthy skin, but also because they want to be part of the Korean cultural narrative that is considered modern, clean, and visually ideal. The Korean Wave becomes a medium that combines product consumption with lifestyle aspirations.

In terms of brand loyalty, informants admitted to frequently repurchasing the same product because it suited their needs and because their idols continued to serve as ambassadors for the brand. This reinforces the finding that "brand loyalty" in the K-Beauty context is heavily influenced by "cultural endorsement" and the continuity of public image. Furthermore, almost all respondents stated that they also recommended the product to friends or shared their experiences on social media. This means they act as voluntary marketing agents, expanding cultural influence and strengthening the position of Korean products in the local market.

Gen Z's exposure to Korean Wave elements is very high. Their involvement with K-pop, K-dramas, and imitation of Korean lifestyles has made Korean culture part of their everyday identity. Gen Z actively accesses digital platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where content featuring Korean celebrities directly or indirectly recommends K-Beauty products, creates an



aspirational effect, and increases interest in these products. Informants stated that they feel more confident and modern when using K-Beauty products because they see their idols using them.



*Source: Data processed by the author*

The Korean Wave has been demonstrated to enhance the perceived quality of K-Beauty products by utilizing Korean celebrity brand ambassadors. K-pop celebrities like EXO, BLACKPINK, or NCT, who serve as the faces of various K-Beauty products, significantly influence purchasing decisions. As mentioned in interviews, the majority of respondents admitted to choosing products based on endorsements from their idols. This suggests that Korean celebrity imagery not only increases brand popularity but also enhances perceived product quality and credibility.

There is a strong correlation between the popularity of the Korean Wave and the increasing volume of K-Beauty product exports to Indonesia. Data from KOTRA and Statista shows that the export value of Korean cosmetic products increased from USD 41,044 in 2018 to USD 55,293 in 2021. This increase is closely linked to the growing popularity of the Korean Wave in Indonesia, particularly among urban youth. This suggests that South Korea's soft power, as demonstrated through popular culture, is driving export growth in the beauty sector.

Social media serves as a catalyst in spreading Korean culture and strengthening K-Beauty's presence in the Indonesian market. The use of social media by Indonesian beauty influencers and vloggers, who actively review and recommend K-Beauty products, has accelerated the spread of this consumer culture. Social media interactions not only create promotional opportunities but also create a community of users who share testimonials and recommendations, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty.

Gen Z exhibits a high preference for visual aesthetics and product innovation. K-Beauty offers attractive packaging and formulas deemed suitable for tropical skin needs. Informants stated that cute and "Instagrammable" packaging is one of the reasons they choose K-Beauty products over other brands. Furthermore, they also perceive K-Beauty products as more innovative and natural than local or Western products (Vivian, S., & Parmono, V.R, 2021).

Interviews revealed that Gen Z takes pride in using visually appealing and social media-worthy products. This demonstrates the importance of visual identity in K-Beauty branding. It demonstrates that the Korean Wave has become a strategic factor influencing Gen Z consumption patterns and opening up vast export opportunities for the South Korean K-Beauty industry. Popular culture is no longer merely a form of entertainment, but also a global economic force that drives trade flows and transforms consumer behavior across borders.

### **The role of the Korean Wave in shaping beauty and consumer awareness through digital media**

The Korean Wave (Hallyu) has significantly shaped beauty ideals globally, particularly in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Gen Z, as the largest users of digital forums, is highly exposed to Korean popular culture through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Several studies (Lee & Kim, 2019; Choi, 2020) show that the aesthetics depicted in Korean dramas (K-Dramas) and music videos often serve as benchmarks for beauty standards among young audiences.

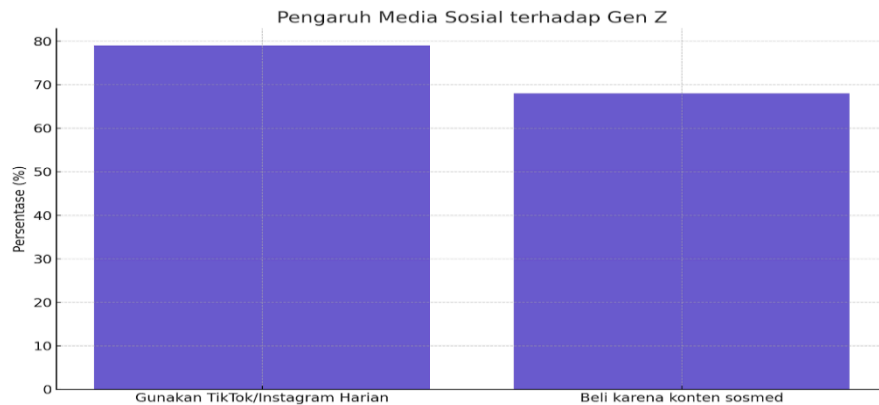
In Indonesia, this influence is reflected in the widespread adoption of Korean skincare routines and makeup styles. Interviews with Gen Z consumers revealed that many prefer Korean beauty products due to their association with flawless skin, minimal makeup, and a healthy appearance, which aligns with portrayals of Korean celebrities on screen. The aspirational element of K-Beauty, which enables consumers to achieve a celebrity-like appearance through accessible routines, is a key driver of consumer interest.

The popularity of Korean celebrities, such as BTS, BLACKPINK, and Song Hye-Kyo, plays a significant role. Their endorsements of K-Beauty products directly influence consumer preferences. According to Robbani (2023), visual marketing featuring K-pop idols enhances brand credibility and trust, which in turn leads to increased consumer loyalty and purchasing behavior (Robbani, 2023).

Furthermore, the “soft power” of Korean culture, as described by Nye (2004), has been systematically leveraged through government initiatives and global media platforms to increase demand for products. South Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism collaborates with brands to combine cultural promotion with economic diplomacy, increasing the appeal of Korean products, including cosmetics. Gen Z consumer behavior is closely tied to digital media. Their purchasing decisions are often influenced by user-generated content, online reviews, and influencer endorsements. A study by Korompis & Koleangan (2023) highlighted that Gen Z in Indonesia relies heavily on TikTok and Instagram to discover products.

Social media usage among Gen Z in Indonesia is indeed very high. Data from Jakpat (2023) show that 79% of Gen Z users use TikTok and Instagram daily, and 68% of them stated that they have purchased products influenced by social media content. In this context, social media is not only a promotional tool, but also a space where cultural identity and consumption are collectively formed. Visual, engaging, and relatable content is key to the success of K-Beauty marketing in Indonesia. Our

observations of online platforms revealed that skincare tutorials, product unboxing videos, and transformation videos featuring K-Beauty products receive high engagement. Influencers act as cultural intermediaries (Abidin, 2016), translating Korean beauty rituals into local contexts. For example, local influencers reviewing K-Beauty products in Indonesia increase engagement and encourage experimentation among their followers.

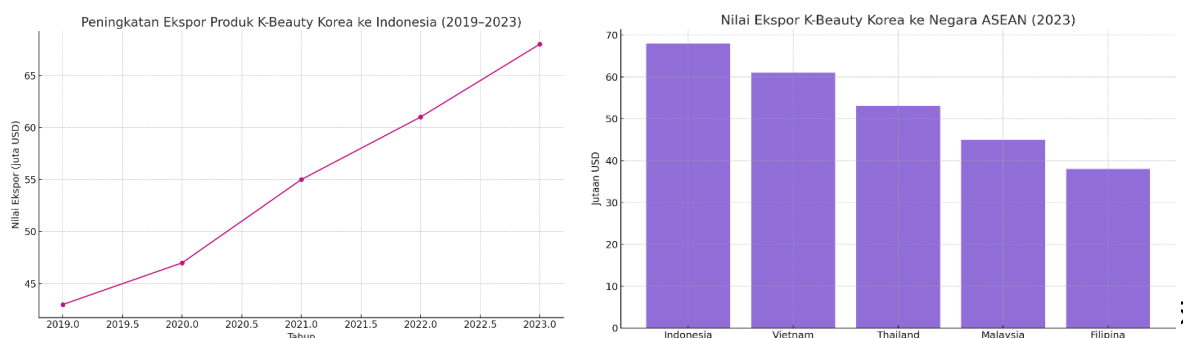


*Source: Data processed by the author*

Additionally, the presence of influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) promoting K-Beauty products on social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, reinforces positive perceptions and fosters consumer trust. Interview results indicate that 93% of informants initially discovered K-Beauty products through platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. They discovered products from local and international beauty influencer posts, reviews, facial transformation videos, and interactive advertisements from major brands. This reinforces Abidin's (2016) theory of "influencers as cultural intermediaries," which posits that influencers serve as translators of global culture into local contexts. One informant said, "I often see skincare routines from Indonesian celebrities who like K-pop. If they like Korean products, I become curious and want to buy them too." Studies show that 85% of Gen Z Indonesians admit that social media influencers influence their purchasing decisions.

### The impact of the Korean Wave on K-Beauty export growth

Statistical data from the Korea Customs Service and KOTRA show a significant increase in K-Beauty exports to Indonesia, from USD 41 million in 2018 to USD 55 million in 2021. This growth aligns with the increasing popularity of Korean Wave content during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by a surge in digital consumption. According to Imani (2024), this surge is not only driven by demand but also the result of strategic trade and cultural diplomacy. The Korea-Indonesia



Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), ratified in 2020, provides tariff reductions for cosmetics imports, facilitating smoother market penetration (Imani, 2024). A report from the Korea Customs Service also places Indonesia among the top five ASEAN countries with the fastest growth in imports of Korean cosmetics. This data strengthens the argument that the increase in exports is influenced not only by distribution or price factors, but also by digital consumption and consumers' emotional attachment to the product's country of origin.

*Source: Data processed by the author*

Theoretically, these findings support the Consumer Culture Theory framework (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), which posits that consumption encompasses not only practical functions but also identity and cultural meaning. In this context, the Korean Wave serves as a cultural framework that provides symbols and values internalized by Gen Z in Indonesia. They not only buy products, but also buy lifestyles, status, and cultural affiliations associated with South Korea. Data triangulation from interviews, literature, and secondary sources confirms that export growth is directly correlated with the consumption patterns of Gen Z. Their interest in Korean culture creates a ready market for imported products that reflect their cultural aspirations.

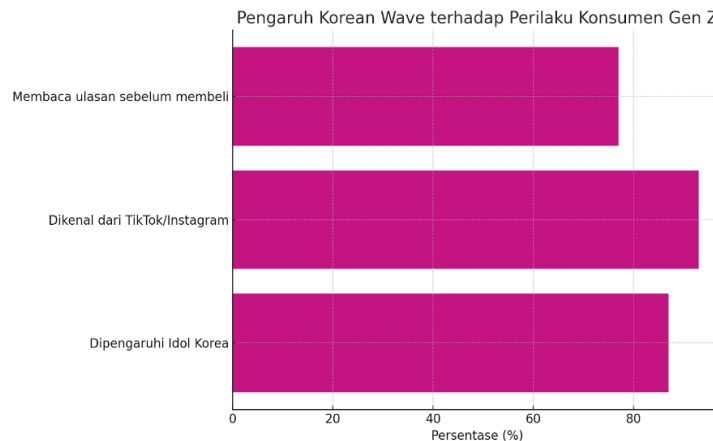
### **Cultural Branding and Its Influence on Purchasing Decisions**

K-Beauty products are marketed not only as skincare solutions but also as cultural artifacts. Brands such as Innisfree, Etude House, and Laneige incorporate elements of Korean tradition, nature, and aesthetics into their product designs and campaigns. According to Vivian & Parmono (2021), brand equity is significantly enhanced by cultural associations. The use of Korean script, traditional motifs, and celebrity stories in packaging and advertising strengthens emotional resonance. Informants in this study reported that purchasing K-Beauty products made them feel connected to the Korean lifestyle (Vivian, S., & Parmono, V.R, 2021). This cultural branding strategy aligns with the concept of the "country-of-origin effect," where the quality and appeal of a product are influenced by its national identity (ELA, 2022). Korean products are perceived as innovative, safe, and trendsetting, particularly in the cosmetics sector, which supports higher price tolerance and brand loyalty (Fitria, 2022).

Furthermore, this phenomenon can also be explained through the concept of soft power economics (Nye, 2004), where a country's cultural strength can be transformed into economic benefits through symbolic influence and cultural diplomacy. The rise in K-Beauty exports is not only due to efficient trade strategies, but also to the cultural affinity created through K-pop, dramas, and lifestyles consistently portrayed in the media.

Damayanti's (2023) study supports this finding by stating that K-pop idol brand ambassadors have the power to influence consumer perceptions of product quality and trust. This is also confirmed by a report from Populix (2023), which found that 65% of Indonesian Gen Z consumers tend to buy

cosmetic products based on who their brand ambassadors are. In this context, brands like Innisfree, Laneige, and Etude House utilize celebrities like Girls' Generation's Yoona, Suzy, and Red Velvet's Irene as their ambassadors to create strong emotional bonds with consumers. Sulwhasoo also appointed Song Hye Kyo and Blackpink's Rosé as brand ambassadors for their products.



*Source: Data processed by the author*

These findings have several important implications. First, for the Korean K-Beauty industry, it is crucial to continue building connections between Korean popular culture and its product brand image. The use of relevant brand ambassadors, aesthetically designed packaging, and a strong cultural narrative will enhance product competitiveness in the Indonesian market. Second, marketing strategies must be digital based, particularly utilizing TikTok and Instagram as primary platforms for interacting with Gen Z consumers. Collaborating with local beauty influencers who are knowledgeable about Korean culture and the Gen Z lifestyle will be key to success.

For South Korean policymakers, these findings underscore the importance of integrating cultural diplomacy with national export strategies. Institutions such as KOTRA, the Korea Foundation, and the Korea Culture Centers can play a crucial role in strengthening cultural ties with partner countries through cultural promotion activities directly linked to strategic industry sectors such as beauty. This not only expands the market but also builds Korea's national image as a culturally superior and industrially innovative nation.

### **Challenges and Competition of K-Beauty Products in the Indonesian Market**

While K-Beauty is experiencing rapid growth in Indonesia, this market also presents increasingly complex challenges. One of the main challenges is competition from local brands, which are starting to adopt strategies similar to K-Beauty, from packaging and active ingredients to digital campaigns. Local brands like Somethinc, Skintific, Azarine, and Wardah have successfully captured the interest of Gen Z consumers with more affordable pricing, formulations tailored to tropical skin needs, and culturally relevant product narratives (e.g., halal certification). This has created intense competition, particularly in the daily skincare and light makeup categories.

In addition to price competition and positioning, regulations and distribution barriers also pose challenges for exporting K-Beauty products to Indonesia. Cosmetic products from abroad, including those from Korea, must meet the standards set by the Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM), which includes safety testing, distribution permits, and, in many cases, halal certification. The lengthy registration process and high costs can be a barrier for new Korean brands seeking entry into the Indonesian market. Furthermore, logistical issues and fluctuating international shipping costs, especially in the post-pandemic period, add to the complexity of consistently distributing products across both e-commerce and offline retail.

Another equally important challenge is the need to adapt to local consumer preferences, which are dynamic and sensitive to trends. Gen Z in Indonesia is highly responsive to new trends and exposed to information from various digital platforms. This requires K-Beauty brands to continuously innovate rapidly, both in product development and collaboration with local influencers, as well as in campaign approaches that feel emotionally and socially relevant. Korean brands that fail to adapt their product narratives and visuals to local tastes risk losing their competitive edge, even if they possess high quality. Therefore, the success of K-Beauty is determined not only by product excellence but also by cultural adaptability and contextual marketing strategies.

### **The Strategic Role of Social Media and Influencers**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a cornerstone of K-Beauty promotion. Celebrities like NCT Dream, IU, and Jennie (BLACKPINK) are not only brand ambassadors but also content creators who shape consumer perceptions. In Indonesia, local influencers with Korean lifestyles act as cultural translators. For example, beauty vloggers with Korean-inspired aesthetics have formed strong parasocial relationships with their followers, enhancing the credibility of product endorsements.

Field findings also show that 93% of respondents first learned about K-Beauty products through TikTok and Instagram, either from brand posts or influencer content. This supports the theory of "influencers as cultural intermediaries" (Abidin, 2016), which posits that influencers not only promote products but also translate Korean cultural values into local contexts.

Community marketing through online forums, beauty subreddits, and Telegram groups facilitates peer recommendations. Informants stated that they frequently check forums like Female Daily or K-Beauty Review ID on Instagram before making a purchase. These communities validate product benefits and provide practical tips, boosting consumer trust.

A preference for visual aspects also emerged in these findings. As many as 80% of informants stated that they were drawn to minimalist, cute, and aesthetically pleasing K-Beauty product packaging. These products are considered "Instagrammable" and can enhance self-image when displayed on social media. This supports the findings of Vivian & Parmono (2021), who stated

that South Korea's aesthetic values and country brand equity play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions of product quality and uniqueness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Korean Wave plays a significant role in influencing the consumption behavior of K-Beauty products among Generation Z in Indonesia. Through intensive exposure to K-pop, K-dramas, and various digital content featuring Korean culture, Gen Z not only becomes familiar with K-Beauty products but also internalizes the aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural values associated with them. The use of Korean cosmetic products is not only about practical functions such as skin care, but also a form of self-expression, lifestyle affiliation, and emotional connection to Korean culture. Gen Z, as digital and trend-conscious consumers, responds to K-Beauty not only as a product, but also as a representation of an aspirational lifestyle. Popular culture is not only a tool for entertainment, but also a strategic economic force that drives export growth.

Qualitative findings from interviews and secondary data indicate that Gen Z consumer loyalty is influenced by factors such as Korean idol brand ambassadors, appealing product aesthetics, the power of cultural narratives, and the significant role of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram in shaping opinions and purchasing decisions. This has directly contributed to the increasing value of K-Beauty product exports from Korea to Indonesia, which has steadily grown over the past five years.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on Consumer Culture Theory, soft power economics, and cultural branding by emphasizing the importance of the relationship between cultural consumption and cross-border trade activities. This study also confirms that Gen Z is not merely a passive consumer but an active cultural actor in disseminating cultural values through digital media. Practically, these findings provide implications for K-Beauty industry players and policymakers in South Korea to continue strengthening the connection between popular culture and export strategies. Culture-based marketing strategies, collaboration with local influencers, halal certification, and research-based innovation are key to successful market penetration in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Thus, the Korean Wave can be understood as a soft power platform that directly impacts Korea's economic performance through the export of K-Beauty products. In the context of cultural globalization and the digital economy, understanding the interaction between culture, technology, and markets is increasingly crucial for formulating sustainable creative industry strategies and economic diplomacy.

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