

K-BEAUTY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOUTH KOREA'S NATION BRANDING IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of K-Beauty as an instrument of South Korea's nation branding in Indonesia during the 2018-2024 period. The analysis was conducted using Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon framework, which encompasses six dimensions: exports, culture, government, society, tourism, and investment and immigration. With a qualitative descriptive approach based on literature studies, this study show that K-Beauty is not merely a consumption trend but also a soft power instrument that supports a positive image of South Korea. In the export dimension, Korean cosmetic products are growing rapidly in the Indonesian market and have become symbols of creativity and innovation. The cultural dimension demonstrates K-Beauty's close connection to the Korean Wave, which has shaped local beauty standards. From a governance perspective, institutional support is evident through the organization of the K-Beauty Expo Indonesia and the adoption of halal certification, building South Korea's image as an adaptable nation that values local values. In the people dimension, Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors strengthen emotional connections with Indonesian consumers. The tourism dimension is reflected in the increase in visits to shopping destinations like Myeong-dong and Gangnam, while the investment and immigration dimensions are demonstrated through trade agreements, the expansion of the cosmetics business, and the growing number of Indonesian students and workers in South Korea. In conclusion, K-Beauty serves as a strategic nation-branding instrument, strengthening South Korea's image while fostering socio-cultural and economic ties with Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTIONS

In the 1990s, South Korea's international image was shaped by its industrialization and technological exports. The country was seen as economically successful but perceived as lacking cultural visibility abroad. In this context, South Korea's international image remained limited and associated with North Korea, the Korean War, a closed society, and the lack of a clear identity (Kim, 2011; Yomjinda, 2013). The concept of nation branding emphasizes how a country actively manages its reputation by leveraging culture, policies, and trade to create positive associations in global perceptions (Anholt, 2007). In the contemporary global order, the cultural industry has emerged as a crucial instrument in shaping international perceptions and strengthening the country's position in the global economy. One of the most illustrative examples of this influence is the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*, phenomenon, which refers to the global spread of South Korean popular culture. The term *Hallyu* (한류), derived from Han (한/Korea) and Ryu/yu (류/wave), refers to the spread of Korean popular culture. *Hallyu* spread throughout Asia, gaining popularity through dramas, music, films, animation, games, and celebrity fandoms in 1999 (Mee, 2005; Mustikawati, 2020).

Over the years, *Hallyu* has gained a wider global reach, particularly among young people in Southeast Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and Russia. The promotion of this cultural phenomenon has become a source of national pride and strategic importance for South Korea. In 2019, *Hallyu* has grown into an increasingly prominent industry, as evidenced by the proliferation of Korean restaurants, dance competitions imitating *K-Pop* idols, and cosmetics outlets, particularly in Indonesia (Glodev et al., 2023). Within the *Hallyu* industry, cosmetics or skincare products known as Korean Beauty (K-Beauty) have emerged as a significant cultural export. *K-Beauty*, or Korean Beauty, is a term that refers to all beauty products originating from South Korea (Kwon, 2020; Wood, 2016). The popularity of *K-Beauty* initially began with imitation of the style and appearance of Korean celebrities, and interest in the cosmetics they use, eventually evolving into direct purchases of *K-Beauty* products (Zhao et al., 2016).

The growth of the *K-Beauty* industry in Indonesia reflects the dynamics of regional markets responding to global trends and serves as concrete evidence of the influence of popular culture across borders. Furthermore, *K-Beauty* products are highly sought after in Indonesia due to their innovative skincare formulations and use of natural ingredients. This high demand has encouraged an increasing number of retailers, both online and offline, to stock South Korean cosmetics and skincare products, further accelerating the growth of the *K-Beauty* industry in Indonesia (Siregar, 2025). In recent years, imports of *K-Beauty* products to Indonesia have continued to increase significantly. Indonesia has become one of the largest and most dynamic consumer markets in Southeast Asia. Market growth is driven by cultural familiarity with Korean beauty standards, the rise of digital platforms, and a preference for products made from natural ingredients. Trends such as high-tech skincare, personalized routines, and the use of eco-friendly packaging have made *K-Beauty* products popular in Indonesia (Credence Research, 2025).

The development of *K-Beauty* products began in 2018 with sales reaching 32.2 million USD, a growth of 21.6 million from the previous year. In 2020, despite a slowdown in the Chinese cosmetics market due to the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea surpassed China to become the largest cosmetics exporter to Indonesia with imports worth 47.4 million USD (The Economic Complexity Observatory, 2023). Besides being an economic commodity, *K-Beauty* is also closely linked to South Korea's national image. South Korea's high level of innovation is reflected in *K-Beauty* products such as cushion foundations, BB creams, sheet masks, and sophisticated formulas that highlight South Korea's reputation for creativity and modern aesthetics. Famous *K-Beauty* practices such as the 10-step skincare routine have also gained popularity among Indonesian consumers, thus instilling the Korean beauty lifestyle in everyday life (Siregar, 2025). A statistical study by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), analyzed by Statista, shows that the popularity of *K-Beauty* products in Indonesia increased from 47.2% in 2018 to 59.8% in 2022 among respondents familiar with South Korean content (KOFICE, 2023; Michin, 2024).

Referring to the concept of nation branding proposed by Anholt (2007), this research uses the six main dimensions of the Nation Brand Hexagon, exports, governance, culture, people, tourism, and investment and

immigration as an analytical framework. Several previous studies have highlighted the use of *K-Beauty* within South Korea's diplomacy and soft power framework (Dayang & Jatmika, 2022; Mulyaman & Oley, 2020; Nabila & Cipto, 2022; Sari & Prasetya, 2022). These studies essentially emphasize the role of *K-Beauty* in strengthening South Korea's positive image globally. However, there is still limited research specifically addressing how *K-Beauty* functions as an instrument of South Korea's nation branding in Indonesia, particularly from 2018 to 2024.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by positioning *K-Beauty* not merely as a popular consumption trend, but as a strategic instrument that directly contributes to enhancing South Korea's national image. Thus, *K-Beauty* is understood not simply as a commercial cultural product, but also as part of an effective cultural diplomacy practice in expanding South Korea's soft power influence, particularly through interactions with Indonesian consumers and society. This research is limited to the period from 2018 to 2024. Therefore, this expected give contribution in understanding *K-Beauty* as South Korea's nation branding instrument in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft power is a country's ability to influence others to achieve desired outcomes, achieved through persuasion or attraction (Nye, 2008). Soft power is considered crucial for safeguarding national interests because fostering friendship and mutual understanding between nations enhances a nation's security. This fosters peaceful coexistence, strengthens diplomatic relations, and strengthens cooperation in achieving national goals. Meanwhile, the foundation of a nation's soft power lies in its assets, which generate attraction. The three primary sources of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy (Nye, 2004). Lee (2009) states that the sources of soft power are ideas, images, theories, knowledge, education, discourse, culture, traditions, and national or global symbols. Both Nye and Lee consider culture to be a key soft power resource. Culture is considered a vital soft power resource because it is non-coercive. Instead, it attracts voluntary attention through a nation's ideas, values, and traditions. Nation branding is a concept that can be understood as a strategic communication tool for soft power.

Nation branding is the process by which a country's image is created, monitored, evaluated, and strategically managed with the aim of enhancing or improving its reputation among target international audiences (Fan, 2010). Nation branding is a multidimensional combination of factors that provide a country's distinct cultural identity and make it relevant to the international community (Dinnie, 2008). Nation branding serves as a metaphor for how countries compete for positive perceptions, whether in terms of exports, governance, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, or society (Anholt, 2007).

Figure 1 Nation Brand Hexagon by Simon Anholt



Source: Simon Anholt

Anholt (2005) introduced the concept of the nation brand hexagon, which refers to the synthetic representations, preferences, and perceptions individuals form when thinking about a particular country. Nation branding can be understood through six core dimensions. First, *exports* relate to how international consumers perceive

a country's products and services, and whether they actively seek or avoid them based on their country of origin. Second, *governance* concerns public opinion about the government's competence, fairness, and commitment to global issues (Ipsos, 2021).

Third, *culture and heritage* reflects the appreciation and production of contemporary culture, including film, music, art, sports, and literature. Fourth, *people* refers to a population's reputation for competence, openness, friendliness, and tolerance. Fifth, *tourism* is measured by the level of global interest in visiting a country, which is shaped by its natural and cultural attractions. Finally, *investment and immigration* represent a country's ability to attract individuals to live, work, or study there, influenced by perceptions of its quality of life and business environment (Ipsos, 2021). Based on the concept of nation branding, this study positions *K-Beauty* as a tool South Korea uses to project its national image abroad to Indonesia. Referring to Anholt's six-dimensional nation brand hexagon, the popularity of *K-Beauty* in Indonesia illustrates how exports and cultural practices strengthen South Korea's global image.

METHODS

Research methods can be understood as the overall strategies and techniques used for a study (Kothari, 2004). This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach as it was deemed most appropriate for analyzing the role of *K-Beauty* as an instrument of South Korea's nation branding in Indonesia from 2018 to 2024. Through this approach, this study sought to explore how *K-Beauty* contributes to shaping perceptions of South Korea. The data collection process for this study was obtained from secondary sources using a literature review technique. This technique provided a theoretical foundation and conceptual insights relevant to the research focus (Sukardi, 2003). This approach was deemed relevant because it allowed researchers to explore how *K-Beauty* is positioned not only as a cultural commodity but also as a strategic tool in strengthening the country's image through Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon conceptual framework. Thus, Anholt's concept serves as the primary analytical framework in examining the *K-Beauty* phenomenon as part of South Korea's nation branding practices in Indonesia.

Primary sources included academic publications accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Scopus, which served to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual framework. In addition, official documents from institutions such as the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO) were used to examine the South Korean government's policies and strategies in supporting *K-Beauty*'s expansion in Indonesia. Reports from The Economic Complexity Observatory Credence Research and the ZAP Beauty Index were also analyzed to understand market trends. This research is limited to the period 2018 to 2024 and focuses specifically on the Indonesian context. Indonesia was chosen as a case study because it represents one of the fastest-growing *K-Beauty* markets in Southeast Asia, supported by strong consumer demand, a large young population, and the influence of the Korean Wave.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Exports

Exports are one of the most tangible channels through which the South Korean *K-Beauty* industry contributes to nation branding in Indonesia. A country's exports are valued not only for their economic value but also for the symbolic capital they generate in shaping global perceptions of a country's creativity, innovation, and capabilities. Indonesian consumers' interest in *K-Beauty* stems from the influence of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*), South Korean popular culture. *K-Pop* and *K-Drama* fans often imitate the lifestyles of their favorite celebrities, from their food and fashion choices to their use of cosmetics and skincare products. This trend is further fueled by Korean celebrities acting as brand ambassadors and the placement of *K-Beauty* products in broadcast dramas (Yunita, 2023). At the same time, Indonesia offers a promising market for *K-Beauty* exports. This potential is driven by a large young population, high digital adoption, and changing consumer preferences. Coupled with this large demographic base, Indonesia presents a significant opportunity for *K-Beauty* to expand its market (Mintel, 2025).

The rise of e-commerce platforms, combined with digital marketing strategies, has accelerated the distribution of *K-Beauty* products, allowing more people to easily access a wide variety of *K-Beauty* products online. E-commerce players also provide dedicated *K-Beauty* product sections, often highlighting exclusive promotions and discounts to attract consumers and encourage them to explore *K-Beauty* offerings (Credence Research, 2025). These digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping South Korea's export-oriented nation branding strategy, ensuring consistent Korean brand visibility across all regions in Indonesia. Over the past eight years, imports of *K-Beauty* products to Indonesia have increased significantly, totaling USD 44.8 million since 2018. This growth is linked to the successful market entry and expansion of leading Korean cosmetic brands such as Innisfree and Nature Republic in Indonesia. Meanwhile, some popular *K-Beauty* products in Indonesia include face creams, skincare products, lip makeup, eye makeup, powder, acne treatments, and sunscreen (Chang-hyun, 2021; Yu-jin, 2018).

Figure 2 South Korean cosmetic (*K-Beauty*) export figures to Indonesia 2018-2023



Source: *The Economic Complexity Observatory*

According to data from The Economic Complexity Observatory, exports of beauty products to Indonesia from 2018 to 2023 showed significant growth. In 2018, sales were recorded at USD 33.4 million, then increased in 2019 to USD 41.4 million, reflecting the increasingly strong penetration of Korean products in the domestic market. Growth continued in 2020, reaching USD 47.1 million, and even soared sharply in 2021 to reach USD 59.2 million. However, in 2022 there was a significant decline to USD 41.6 million, before the market showed a recovery in 2023, with sales reaching USD 56.7 million, indicating that *K-Beauty*'s appeal in Indonesia remains high and has prospects for sustainable growth (The Economic Complexity Observatory, 2023). The Indonesian *K-Beauty* market is expected to grow significantly to around 162.95 million USD by 2032 with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.30% between 2024 and 2032 (Credence Research, 2025).

Governance

The governance dimension encompasses how a country's political and regulatory systems are perceived abroad, including the extent to which its policies are perceived as fair, transparent, and accountable. While the South Korean government may appear less directly involved with *K-Beauty*, which operates as a private sector, in practice, the regulatory framework and institutional support behind this industry significantly enhance South Korea's nation branding in Indonesia. In 2019, the success of *K-Beauty* prompted the South Korean government to support *K-Beauty* companies in achieving their goal of becoming one of the world's three largest cosmetics exporters. The government's long-term strategy for developing the industry focuses on increasing competitiveness through initiatives such as the establishment of *K-Beauty* clusters for large-scale promotions and exhibitions, providing production support, and developing raw materials and technology (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, this is evident through the government's involvement in organizing an annual trade exhibition specifically for the *K-Beauty* sector, the K-Beauty Expo Indonesia. The K-Beauty Expo is a trade show promoting the Korean beauty industry (*K-Beauty*) and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in accessing

the global market. It was first launched in 2009 by Gyeonggi Province. In 2019, the exhibition officially expanded to seven Asian countries, including Indonesia. This demonstrates South Korea's strategy to expand the *K-Beauty* market in Southeast Asia, with support from the Korea International Exhibitions & Convention Center (KINTEX) and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) (Gyeonggi Province, 2019). The first *K-Beauty* Expo in Indonesia was held from April 4 to 6, 2019, at the Jakarta International Expo (JIE expo) Kemayoran, in conjunction with the 10th Indo Beauty Expo (yofamedia, 2019).

The exhibition brought together 130 companies, including 63 *K-Beauty* manufacturers from South Korea, promoting a variety of products such as skincare, makeup, hair care, body care, beauty tools, and medical services (Hye-in, 2019). To optimize results, South Korea provided various forms of support such as booth participation subsidies, transportation assistance, and translation services for *K-Beauty* companies (Gwang-an, 2019). Meanwhile, the event successfully attracted around 8,000 visitors over three days (Gyeonggi Province, 2019).

The K-Beauty Expo was originally planned to be held annually, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed for two years and returned in 2021. This commitment strengthened confidence in South Korea's regulatory capacity and cooperation between the two countries, thus strengthening South Korea's perception as a reliable and well-governed partner. At the 2021 K-Beauty Expo, the South Korean government subsidized booth participation, including transportation costs, amounting to 3.86 million won (K-Beauty Expo Office, 2021). Furthermore, in 2022, the expo attracted approximately 5,000 visitors. In addition to booth displays and product launches, the main highlight of the *K-Beauty* event was the trend of organic cosmetics made from natural ingredients and the increasing demand for OEM (original equipment manufacturing) production from local cosmetic companies (Korea Cosmetic Association, 2022). In 2023, participation increased by 25% compared to the previous year, with a total of 200 participants joining the expo (Setyawan, 2023). By consistently supporting this trade show, the South Korean government demonstrates responsibility, adaptability, and effective institutional support for the *K-Beauty* sector.

In addition to providing trade show facilities, the South Korean government also responds to regulatory needs in the international market, particularly regarding halal certification, which is a crucial factor for consumers in Muslim-majority countries. Starting October 17, 2026, Indonesia officially mandated halal certification for all cosmetic products sold in the Indonesian market (Salama, 2025). This policy requires cosmetic companies, including *K-Beauty* producers, to ensure that every stage of production, from raw material selection and processing, through the manufacturing process, to final distribution, fully complies with Islamic sharia principles as stipulated by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) (AIF ASEAN, 2023). Therefore, compliance with halal standards is not only an administrative requirement but also a crucial strategy for maintaining the competitiveness of *K-Beauty* products in the Indonesian market.

In response, the Korea Halal Authority (KHA) and the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) signed a Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) with Indonesia's Halal Guarantee Agency (BPJPH). Under the agreement, halal-certified cosmetic products from both Korean institutions are recognized without the need for separate certification (KOTRA, 2024). The South Korean institutions' willingness to obtain halal certification reflects their sensitivity to the needs of Indonesian consumers. This projected Korea as a country that respects diversity and adapts to partner country regulations. Therefore, this action will expand beyond cosmetic products to include South Korea's image as respectful of consumers, especially the majority of Indonesian consumers who are Muslim.

Culture and heritage

Culture and heritage is a crucial dimension shaping how a nation is perceived abroad through its arts, heritage, and popular culture. In the case of South Korea, the popularity of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has transformed cultural exports into significant soft power. Among these, *K-Beauty* has emerged as one of the most influential cultural industries in Indonesia. The spread of *K-Beauty* serves not only as a commercial product but also as a cultural practice and identity, embodying Korean lifestyles, aesthetics, and values in everyday life. The influence of *K-Beauty* is inseparable from the Korean Wave as a successful popular culture. *K-Pop* and *K-Drama* create cultural narratives that showcase Korean beauty standards. Indonesian consumers are inspired by Korean celebrities who have clear, radiant, and healthy skin. In this way, *K-Beauty* blurs the boundaries between commerce and culture.

One aspect that defines *K-Beauty* as a cultural export lies in its skincare philosophy. Unlike the Western cosmetic industry, which focuses on covering or correcting skin imperfections, *K-Beauty* emphasizes prevention and skin care through a “skin-first” ideology (Diplo Team, 2025). *K-Beauty* is characterized by a “10-step skincare” regimen designed to achieve flawless skin (Awanda et al., 2025). This regimen results in radiant skin, commonly referred to as “glass skin”. Meanwhile, “glass skin” is a popular Korean beauty trend in Indonesia, referring to healthy, well-hydrated, and glass-clear facial skin. This trend has become popular due to its natural appearance (Metaderma, 2024).

Indonesia is a country where this beauty trend is growing rapidly, and demand for skincare products that achieve this effect is increasing. The Korean Wave has influenced beauty standards in Indonesia, as Indonesian consumers now prefer bright, radiant skin, similar to Korean beauty standards (Pramusita, 2021). Based on the 2019 ZAP Beauty Index Survey conducted on 6,460 respondents aged 13 to 65 years in Indonesia, it showed that 57.6% of Indonesian women preferred South Korean skincare products, followed by Japanese products at 22.7% and American at 20.1% (ZAP Beauty, 2020). Therefore, by adopting *K-Beauty* routines, Indonesians are indirectly involved in a form of cultural participation and increasing the visibility of their national image in Indonesia.

People

The people dimension relates to how a country's citizens are perceived abroad. A positive impression of a country's people can significantly strengthen its international. In this context, *K-Beauty* contributes significantly to this dimension through the visibility of Korean celebrities. One key factor is the use of *K-Pop* idols and *K-Drama* actors/actresses as brand ambassadors for *K-Beauty* brands. Brand ambassadors act as company representatives designed to drive communication and consumer engagement. The goal is to increase brand awareness and attract consumer interest, which in turn contributes to overall business sales (Lea-Greenwood, 2012; Rahmadani & Anggarini, 2021). This marketing strategy is commonly used by *K-Beauty* brands, capitalizing on the widespread international popularity of Korean celebrities. *K-Pop* groups such as EXO, NCT, Blackpink, and BTS, as well as individual celebrities such as Song Hye-kyo and Lim Yoona are frequently featured in Korean beauty brand advertisements.

The example of this strategy is the collaboration between Lim Yoona, a member of the popular idol group Girls' Generation and actress, and the renowned cosmetics brand Innisfree. Yoona has been an Innisfree brand ambassador since 2009. Her popularity as a *K-Pop* icon with a large fan base has contributed to increasing consumer awareness and appeal for Innisfree products. This collaboration extends beyond visual campaigns to in-person events. In 2017, Yoona visited Jakarta to support the launch of Innisfree's newest product, the Volcanic Color Clay Mask, strengthening the emotional connection between the brand, the idol, and Indonesian consumers (Othman, 2017).

Another example is the collaboration between *K-Pop* group EXO and Nature Republic, which developed a promotional strategy involving direct interaction with fans through various large-scale events, including in Indonesia. One such event was the 2019 fan meeting in Jakarta, "A Journey to Get Around the Nature with EXO," attended by three members of the group: Suho, Chen, and Kai. The event attracted approximately 8,000 fans and offered exclusive interaction opportunities through product purchase packages (The Seoul Story, 2019). This initiative demonstrates the power of *K-Beauty* events to build people-to-people connections. *K-Beauty* consumers not only purchased cosmetics but also interacted directly with the Korean celebrities promoted by *K-Beauty*. This example of personalizing nation branding by portraying Koreans as approachable and culturally influential. The enthusiasm of Indonesian fans demonstrates how admiration for Koreans can extend to shaping positive perceptions of the nation as a whole.

Tourism

The tourism dimension highlights how a nation is viewed as a destination that provides not only recreational activities but also cultural values and symbolic meaning. South Korea's tourism appeal in Indonesia has been significantly strengthened by the expansion of the Korean Wave, in which *K-Beauty* plays a significant role. *K-Beauty* products and practices serve as a cultural gateway, encouraging Indonesian consumers to seek authentic experiences in South Korea. *K-Beauty* has become one of the primary motivations for Indonesian tourists to visit South Korea. Shopping districts such as Myeong-dong and Gangnam are now being promoted as beauty destinations. Myeong-

dong's transformation into "Cosme Road" illustrates how the global flow of South Korean popular culture, the *K-Beauty* industry, and tourism can shape a region's identity (Oh, 2018).

Figure 3 Number of Indonesian tourists to South Korea (2018-2023)



Source: Korea Tourism Organization (KTO)

According to data from the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), the number of Indonesian tourists to South Korea between 2019 and 2023 experienced significant fluctuations. In 2019, 208,085 tourists visited, marking the highest number before the pandemic. However, from 2020 to 2021, the number dropped drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following year, the number of Indonesian tourists recovered and increased to 106,750 in 2022. This positive trend continued in 2023, with a total of 250,249 tourists, even surpassing the 2019 figure (Korea Tourism Organization, 2024b).

Indonesian tourists visit South Korea for several primary purposes. Shopping ranks first at 92.8%, primarily for products such as cosmetics and fashion. Second, 71.7% of tourists enjoy natural attractions, including Jeju Island and other natural attractions. This was followed by 68.6% of tourists exploring historical sites such as Gyeongbok Palace, a frequent filming location for Korean dramas. Fourth, culinary delights attracted 66.4% of tourists, especially traditional foods like kimchi and tteokbokki. Fifth, 49.4% of tourists sought traditional cultural experiences such as wearing hanbok, and finally, around 47.5% visited museums and exhibitions, including the National Museum of Korea, which is popular among Indonesian tourists.

Meanwhile, the most frequently purchased items included perfume and cosmetics with 64.3%, groceries with 63.1%, clothing with 58.11%, and ginseng or herbal medicines with 17.1% (Korea Tourism Organization, 2024a). Based on these data, it can be said that shopping is the main reason Indonesian tourists visit South Korea, with cosmetics and fashion dominating their purchases. This further proves how *K-Beauty* plays a role in improving South Korea's image and then acting as a bridge between everyday consumer practices in Indonesia and the desire to visit South Korea.

Investment and immigration

The investment and immigration dimensions highlight a country's attractiveness as a place to live, work, study, or invest. In Indonesia, the allure of the *K-Beauty* sector can be seen in the growing popularity of *K-Beauty* cosmetic brands, partnerships within the *K-Beauty* sector in Indonesia, and the influence of the country's positive image as a reason for Indonesians to live in South Korea. On the investment side, *K-Beauty* is a driving force behind South Korea's economic relations with Indonesia. This is demonstrated by the trade and investment agreement between the two countries worth USD 296.10 million at the Trade Expo Indonesia (TEI) from October 9-12, 2024. This agreement covers various sectors, including original equipment manufacturer (OEM) cosmetic products and direct investment commitments in Indonesia (ANTARA, 2024).

Well-known *K-Beauty* brands such as Innisfree, Nature Republic, Skin1004, and COSRX have expanded into the Indonesian market through official outlets, e-commerce platforms, and partnerships with local distributors. Indonesian distributors frequently collaborate with *K-Beauty* suppliers, such as Infinisia Sumber Semesta Co., Ltd., a cosmetic raw material distributor that collaborates with seven South Korean partners. Furthermore, many Indonesian cosmetic brand owners rely on original design manufacturer (ODM) services to create cosmetic products aligned with

K-Beauty trends (Hadiwidjaja, 2025). An example is PT Pyridam Farma Tbk's collaboration with CNT Dream, the largest ODM in South Korea (PYFA Group, 2024). At the same time, Korean companies view Indonesia as an attractive production base and investment destination, driven by its large consumer market and relatively low labor costs (Hadiwidjaja, 2025). This report highlights how *K-Beauty* has become a crucial sector in the South Korea-Indonesia trade relationship.

From an immigration perspective, *K-Beauty* itself is not directly a factor in Indonesian migration to South Korea. However, *K-Beauty* plays a significant role in further strengthening the appeal of South Korean culture. A survey conducted by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Indonesia revealed that 30% of Indonesians want to study, live, or work in South Korea as their primary destination, followed by Saudi Arabia (12.1%), Japan (10.4%), the United States (6.4%), and Malaysia (5.5%). The top reasons cited included high wages (24.4%), ample job opportunities (17.8%), quality education (9.2%), and the desire to meet idols (9.1%) (Daily Indonesia, 2023). Indonesian citizens constitute a significantly growing segment of South Korea's foreign labor force. In 2023, there were 63,226 Indonesian citizens, including 36,053 workers. This makes Indonesia a major contributor to South Korea's migrant labor force (On & Iskandar, 2025).

South Korea is also a favorite study destination for Indonesian students, supported by the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS), which allows Indonesian students to pursue higher education at renowned universities in South Korea (Rahman et al., 2024). Based on UNESCO UIS data on the Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, South Korea ranks tenth as a study destination for Indonesian students, with 1,185 students enrolled in universities (Aisyah, 2023). The number of Indonesian students in South Korea has grown by 15% per year over the past decade, underscoring the growing interest in continuing their education in South Korea (Rahman et al., 2024). This suggests that *K-Beauty* contributes to South Korea's image in Indonesia by attracting investment, strengthening Korea's role as a major trading partner, and indirectly encouraging educational and labor migration. By combining cultural appeal with economic and academic opportunities, South Korea strengthens its image as a country with an innovative economy and a desirable place to study, work, and live.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *K-Beauty* plays a role in South Korea's nation branding efforts in Indonesia from 2018 to 2024. Referring to Simon Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon concept, *K-Beauty* demonstrates its influence across six dimensions: exports, governance, culture, society, tourism, and investment and immigration. In the export dimension, the rapid growth of *K-Beauty* products in Indonesia illustrates South Korea's innovative capabilities and enhances its global commercial identity. In the governance dimension, it demonstrates South Korean institutional support for *K-Beauty's* expansion, projecting South Korea as a responsive and reliable partner. In terms of culture, *K-Beauty* is integrated with the Korean Wave. This shapes beauty standards in Indonesia and instills the South Korean lifestyle in everyday practices. In terms of society, this dimension is enhanced through the visibility of Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors, strengthening people-to-people ties between the two countries. While tourism is closely linked to *K-Beauty*, this is evidenced by the emergence of cosmetics and fashion shopping as the primary motivation for Indonesian tourists to South Korea. Investment and immigration also demonstrate how *K-Beauty* can enhance South Korea's attractiveness in trade relations, as well as as an educational and employment destination. Therefore, this study highlights how beauty products can serve more than just commercial purposes, but also operate as strategic instruments for nation branding.

The study demonstrates that *K-Beauty* played a central role in South Korea's nation branding efforts in Indonesia between 2018 and 2024. Referring to Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon, *K-Beauty* demonstrated influence across six dimensions: exports, governance, culture, society, tourism, and investment and immigration. On the export side, the rapid growth of *K-Beauty* products in Indonesia illustrates Korea's innovative capabilities and enhances its global commercial identity. Governance is reflected in South Korea's institutional support for *K-Beauty's* expansion, including halal certification compliance and the annual *K-Beauty* Expo Indonesia, which projects Korea as a responsive and reliable partner. Culturally, *K-Beauty* is integrated with the Korean Wave, shaping Indonesian beauty

standards and instilling the Korean lifestyle into everyday practices. The people dimension is enhanced through the visibility of Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors, strengthening people-to-people ties between the two countries. Tourism is also closely linked to *K-Beauty*, with cosmetics shopping emerging as a primary motivation for Indonesian tourists to South Korea, particularly in hubs like Myeong-dong and Gangnam. Investment and immigration also demonstrate how *K-Beauty* aligns with Korea's broader economic diplomacy and enhances its appeal as an education and employment destination. The surge in Indonesian workers and students in Korea, coupled with multi-million dollar trade agreements, highlights the cultural industry's significant impact on bilateral relations. By situating *K-Beauty* within Anholt's framework and Nye's concept of soft power, this study highlights how beauty products transcend their economic value and operate as strategic instruments of nation branding. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on *K-Beauty* as part of the Hallyu consumption trend, this study highlights its multidimensional role in shaping perceptions of South Korea in Indonesia. Therefore, *K-Beauty* functions not only as a cultural export but also as a vital tool of soft power, strengthening Korea's global reputation and diplomatic influence.

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