

# Analysing K-Beauty Brands from the Consumer–Brand Relationship Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

beauty consciousness, foreign brand halo effect, self-brand connection, willingness to pay more, age

### Kata Kunci:

Kesadaran Kecantikan, Efek halo merek asing, Koneksi self-brand, Kemauan untuk membayar lebih, Umur.

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This study examines relationships between foreign brand halo effect and beauty consciousness on self-brand connection in beauty consumption. It also investigates the moderating role of age on these relationships. Data is gathered through an online survey focusing on two South Korean beauty (K-beauty) brands. The results contribute to consumer–brand relationships and international marketing literatures. There is no difference between young adult female and mature adult female consumers in the influence of beauty consciousness on self-brand connection. However, there are substantial differences between the two groups of consumers in the influence of the foreign brand halo effect on self-brand connection. Also, the halo effect exhibits the greatest influence on willingness to pay more. Consumers are also willing to pay more for brands from countries that have a positive image.

## SARI PATI

*Penelitian ini menguji hubungan antara efek halo merek asing dan kesadaran kecantikan pada hubungan merek dengan diri konsumen dalam konsumsi produk kecantikan. Penelitian ini juga menyelidiki peran moderasi usia pada hubungan tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei online yang berfokus pada dua merek kecantikan Korea Selatan (K-beauty). Hasil penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur hubungan konsumen-merek dan pemasaran internasional. Tidak ada perbedaan antara konsumen wanita muda dan wanita dewasa dalam pengaruh kesadaran kecantikan terhadap hubungan merek dengan diri konsumen. Namun, ada perbedaan substansial antara kedua kelompok konsumen dalam pengaruh efek halo merek asing pada hubungan merek dengan diri konsumen. Selain itu, efek halo menunjukkan pengaruh terbesar pada kesediaan untuk membayar lebih. Konsumen juga bersedia membayar lebih untuk merek dari negara yang memiliki citra positif.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the international marketing literature, previous studies in various developing countries generally show that consumers have a strong and positive preference for products and brands from countries with a positive image. The image of the country of origin plays a critical role in consumer evaluation of foreign brands (Han, 2020). The consumer-brand relationship can be positive or negative and is characterised by either positive emotions such as admiration, loyalty, love, like, evangelism, or negative ones such as hate, anti-brand, and avoidance (Fetscherin et al., 2019). One important facet of consumer-brand relationships is the self-brand connection (SBC), which is defined as “the extent to which individuals have incorporated a brand into their self-concept” (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 329). Researchers have presented various drivers of the relationship and brand managers focus on strengthening brand relationships with consumers. Brands are important instruments in consumers’ lives and determine the intimate relationship between the consumer and the brand (Sichtmann et al., 2019). However, previous studies regarding the antecedents and consequences of SBC are still inadequate as it is received little attention among researchers, thus there is still a lot that has not all been revealed (Moliner et al., 2018).

Consumers in developing countries are increasingly familiar with and prefer foreign products and brands to fulfil their tertiary needs (Zakaria et al., 2020) including beauty consumption. However, even though there are many previous studies that have examined beauty consumption (e.g. Wallström et al. 2010; Koubaa et al., 2011; Sobh, 2011; Kim et al., 2013; Pileliene & Ontaitė-Petkevičincė, 2014; Hassani et al., 2015; Alserhan et al., 2015; Moslehpour et al. 2017; Ahmad et al., 2015; Pudaruth et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2016; Ghazali et al., 2017; Assawavichachairoj & Taghian, 2017; Madan et al. 2018; Ahmad & Omar, 2018; El Jurdi & Smith, 2018; Li et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2020; Clemes et al., 2020; Majeed et al., 2020; Kadirov et al., 2020) none have yet tested the role of a brand’s country of origin

image in consumer relations with foreign brands of beauty products. Consumers form inferences about all brands from a particular country based on their image of or stereotypes about that country (Mandler et al., 2017). This image creates a foreign brand halo effect (Sulhaini et al., 2019). No previous studies have investigated the role of foreign brand halo effect (FBHE) on SBC in beauty consumption. For the purpose of the study, we focussed on South Korean Brands. This country is very popular with its beauty industry. According to Mulyaman (2020), South Korean beauty companies expand the main target market in ASEAN i.e. Indonesia and spread the Korean culture in the country. South Korean beauty products and brands become imminent in Indonesia.

Furthermore, for female consumers, age and beauty become an integral part of their life and consumption (Barak, 1985), since they desire to retain a youthful appearance as they grow older. They use all possible ways to look younger and be more competitive in their daily life (Yang, 2011). However, none of the previous studies in the literature have examined the role of age in consumer relationships with beauty product brands. The aforementioned research studies tend to focus on certain age groups, for example, young adult or older adult consumers only, or even ignore the age difference in their analysis as if age does not factor in consumer behaviour towards brands of beauty products. However, Chaplin and John (2005) argue that consumers’ self-concept and consumer-brand relationship evolve according to consumer age and the relationship grows stronger and deeper as a consumer’s age increases. Therefore, in this study we include age as a moderating variable.

Age is a critical demographic variable and influences consumer behaviour, including pre and post purchase (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2015). As consumers age, consumer behaviour will evolve and change consumer-brand relationships; thus, young adult consumers will exhibit different behaviour from older adult consumers. Moliner-

Velázquez et al. (2015) state that the role of age needs to be investigated further. Therefore, the present study addresses research gaps in the consumer–brand relationship and international marketing literature. First, we examine the links of beauty consciousness (BC) and FBHE to SBC. Second, we examine the moderating role of age on these links by focusing on two different age groups of female consumers in Indonesia: young adult and mature adult. Third, this study analyses the impact of BC, FBHE and SBC on willingness to pay more (WTPM). Hence, we advance the discussion on international marketing and consumer–brand relationship by investigating beauty consumption.

#### Literature review

##### *Self-brand connection (SBC) and its drivers*

Sheth (2017) states that relationship marketing practice and theory needs to be revitalised by shifting attention from “share of wallet” to “share of heart” which is accompanied by a shift from managing relationships with consumers to managing joint ventures with consumers. One of the steps that can be taken is to focus on consumer relationships with purpose-driven brands. The choice and use of a brand allows consumers to self-actualise through their consumption activities to achieve a more meaningful life.

Consumer–brand relationships view brands as partners (Fournier, 1998) or relationship builders (Fetscherin et al, 2019). According to Fournier (1998), the consumer–brand relationship includes a strong self-connection between a consumer and a brand that is viewed to deliver consumer identities; brands are not viewed as passive objects of marketing transactions. Consumers can develop meaningful ties with brands that can actively involve defining and redefining these relationships.

SBC is the most important concept in the consumer–brand relationship literature (Tan et al., 2018). It refers to the strong and meaningful ties that consumers forge with brands and is an integral part of consumer self-identity (Sarkar et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Fetscherin et al. (2019) explain SBC is energised by consumer passion towards a brand. Consumer passion is when a consumer has strong passionate feeling of being actively engaged in a relationship with a brand and other consumers who have similar feeling towards the brand. Therefore, the brand becomes the glue that connects people in a relationship. Consumers utilise brands as instruments and partners to understand themselves and display their “self” to others in their society (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2020), thereby building their self-image and social image. Analysing the drivers of SBC is paramount for more deeply understanding consumer–brand relationships. For the purpose of the study, we posit two constructs as the drivers, namely beauty consciousness and foreign brand halo effect.

##### *Beauty consciousness (BC)*

Beauty consumption is driven by a strong desire to achieve a better personal and social life. Therefore, beauty products are not only intended to help women look beautiful, but also feel beautiful (Pathak & Nichter, 2018). Women use beauty products to present a modern lifestyle, for social identity, and to be accepted in their social environment. Physical appearance, especially facial beauty, is very important in women’s self-expression and social life (Assawavicchairoj & Taghian, 2017). Facial beauty is important part of feminine identity and social functioning (Jung, 2018). Thus, beauty consumption is driven by the personal and social needs of female consumers to look beautiful and feel beautiful. For the purpose of the study, BC is defined as the tendency of female consumers to maintain their appearance, i.e. look beautiful and attractive, for the sake of themselves and their social environment by using all the resources they have.

Women endeavour to maintain an attractive appearance by using clothes, jewellery, makeup or cosmetics, etc., and spending money on facial and body beauty treatments. For women, facial beauty is a priority because the face serves as a

major part of self-identity (Hassani et al., 2015) and is the self-image of the consumer. To maintain the beauty of her body, McCabe et al. (2017) and Kadirov et al. (2020) state that women use various beauty products and brands and carry out various efforts and rituals to ensure a beautiful and attractive appearance to improve their self-confidence and assert their identity as women in their society. Beauty products and brands help women feel more confident and comfortable because looking beautiful makes them feel more suitable, liked and accepted by others. Thus, products and brands become vital instruments in maintaining the appearance and beauty of female consumers.

In beauty consumption, consumers are highly motivated to seek pleasure and satisfaction (Ghazali et al., 2017). Consumers will get pleasure and satisfaction when a product or brand is seen as having been able to fulfil their desire to look and feel beautiful. Consumers who have a strong desire to look beautiful will prefer and form close attachments to brands that they perceive as capable of fulfilling their desires and orientation to beauty. Thus, our first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H1:** The stronger the beauty consciousness, the stronger the self-brand connection.

Consumers prefer brands they perceive as capable of providing both utilitarian and hedonic values. Consumers with strong BC are willing to spend money and time to maintain their beauty and tend to purchase expensive beauty care product brands. These consumers spend considerable money on treatments at beauty clinics or perform their own treatments with brands they view as able to maintain their beauty, especially the beauty of their skin. In short, they are willing to pay a premium for their beauty. Therefore, our second hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H2:** The stronger the beauty consciousness, the stronger the willingness to pay more.

### ***Foreign Brand Halo Effect (FBHE)***

Consumers often generalise all brands from a country based on the image of the country concerned, with brand origin information acting as a cognitive cue for consumers that allows them to infer brand attributes based on the country of origin (Mandler et al., 2017). The image of a brand's country of origin acts as a halo, whereby consumers create a uniform view of the brand based on their image or stereotype about the country of origin. This view affects consumers' evaluations of brands originating from that country, especially when consumers are unfamiliar with a particular brand (Qiu et al., 2017). The image of the country of origin can give a certain impression of brands originating from that country, where a favourable image of the country of origin is reflected in positive consumer evaluations of all brands from the same country (Sulhaini et al., 2019).

Countries can benefit from positive stereotypes due to their advantages in certain industries. For example, the popularity of South Korea's beauty products and brands has gone global, and cannot be separated from the popularity of South Korean culture. South Korean culture, which is often referred to as the "Korean wave", has long swept the world, including Indonesia (Kim et al., 2013; Madan et al., 2018). The country's beauty industry, both beauty care products and plastic surgery, is growing rapidly and is marked by the emergence of popular brands from the country called K-Beauty brands (Kang et al., 2020). South Korea already enjoys a positive reputation as a source of brands for beauty products including skin care, so it can be assumed that consumers will like, be close and attached to brands from this country due to positive stereotypes. Thus, our third hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H3:** The stronger the foreign brand halo effect, the stronger the self-brand connection.

Consumers have preconceived notions of brands depending on their country of origin (Han, 2020). Consumers in developing countries tend to believe

that brands from other, more developed countries must be better and superior to local brands. This is because they have a more positive image of the foreign country compared to their own country (Diamantopoulos et al., 2018). Developed countries tend to have a positive reputation and enjoy a positive perception of their brands' abilities to fulfil consumer desires such as the need for uniqueness, social status, symbols, prestige and luxury (Sulhaini et al., 2020). Consumers favour foreign brands for luxury and believe that luxury costs more. The image of the country of origin of a brand becomes a halo that affects consumer evaluations of the appropriateness of the price of brands originating from the same country. Consumers have a stronger desire and commitment to brands originating from countries with a positive image (Gómez et al., 2017). Brands from more developed countries are seen as more capable of providing stronger value (hedonic and utilitarian) and therefore deserve to be sold at higher prices; thus, consumers are willing to pay more for brands from those countries. Our fourth hypothesis is as follows:

**H4:** The stronger the foreign brand halo effect, the stronger the willingness to pay more.

#### ***Age as a moderating variable***

Age is a demographic factor that has been recognised as having an impact on consumer behaviour. Consumers, as they get older, will exhibit changes in behaviour. Consumers are aware of and categorise themselves in social groups based on their age (e.g. young adult or mature adult) which affects their preferences and choices for products and brands (Trepte & Loy, 2017). This can also be seen in beauty consumption (Barak, 1985).

Beauty consumption is driven by the desire to beautify oneself which varies depending on the age and stage of life the female consumer (Pathak & Nicther, 2018). Therefore, the consumption pattern of beauty products and brands depends on the age of the consumer. The aging process is a natural process that cannot be avoided yet

many consumers believe that the process can be delayed by various means and procedures, such as using skin care products and even cosmetic surgery. Women are generally concerned with the appearance of signs of aging in themselves (Sobh, 2011). As women get older and the signs of aging become more apparent, they do beauty treatments and become familiar with brands of beauty products that they believe are able to reduce signs of aging. Thus, our fifth hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H5:** The effect of beauty consciousness on self-brand connection is stronger for mature adult female consumers and weaker for young adult female consumers.

Harmon-Kizer et al. (2013) argue that consumers form relationships with brands to express themselves but there are differences between young adult and mature adult consumers. Mature adult consumers already possess a strong identity while young adult consumers are still forming their identity. Steenkamp (2019) states that consumers with a positive attitude towards global consumer culture are generally younger, while older consumers generally possess a more positive attitude towards local consumer culture. This indicates that young adult consumers will be more open to and have stronger preferences for and relationships with foreign/global brands, whereas more mature consumers are not as open or attached to foreign brands. Younger consumers are a more open segment and crave foreign brands (Pham & Richards, 2015). Therefore, it can be assumed that young adult consumers have a stronger relationship with foreign brands than mature adult consumers. Our sixth hypothesis is as follows:

**H6:** The foreign brand halo effect on self-brand connection is stronger for young adult female consumers and weaker for mature adult female consumers.

#### ***The outcome: willingness to pay more***

In developing countries, consumers have an

emotional attachment to brands originating from countries that have a positive reputation/image. They believe that brands from developed countries are better or better able to fulfil their desires (Sulhaini et al., 2020). Culture in Asian countries often places importance in one’s social appearance (Pham & Richard, 2015); thus, consumers in these countries have strong relationships with foreign brands which makes them willing to pay higher prices. When consumers feel close to a brand, they express brand loyalty and have an increased tendency to pay premium prices (Haumann et al., 2014). The suitability of and their proximity to a foreign brand will increase its monetary value in the minds of consumers and makes them willing to pay a premium for the brand (Thomas et al., 2015). Thus, we propose our seventh hypothesis:

**H7:** The stronger the self-brand connection, the stronger the willingness to pay more.

**METHODS**

**The survey and samples**

Data collection for this study is carried out through online questionnaires using Google Forms. Online questionnaires provide various benefits (An et al.,

2018) such as cost and time efficiency, convenience for respondents, avoidance of data input errors and suitable during the covid-19 pandemic. The total data sample consists of 259 women (67% live in Bali and islands in Nusa Tenggara, 15% in Java, 11% in Borneo and 7% on other islands). Forty-two percent are unemployed students. For the purpose of this study, age is measured on an interval scale (i.e. “17–20”; “21–25”; “26–30” and >31). The total sample is divided into two groups where 17–25 is regarded as the young adult consumer group while >25 is classified as mature consumers. Young consumers comprise 52.6% of our sample and mature consumers comprise 47.4%.

**Instruments and measurements**

We carefully prepare and develop the questionnaire for this survey in two stages. First, we review the extant literature with a focus on building an in-depth understanding of the nature of each variable and identifying their dimensions. Specifically, we adopt and adapt items that have been developed by previous researchers for the SBC variables (Escallas & Bettman, 2003) and FBHE (Sulhaini et al., 2019). To measure SBC, we focus on the two most popular K-beauty brands, i.e. Nature Republic and The Face

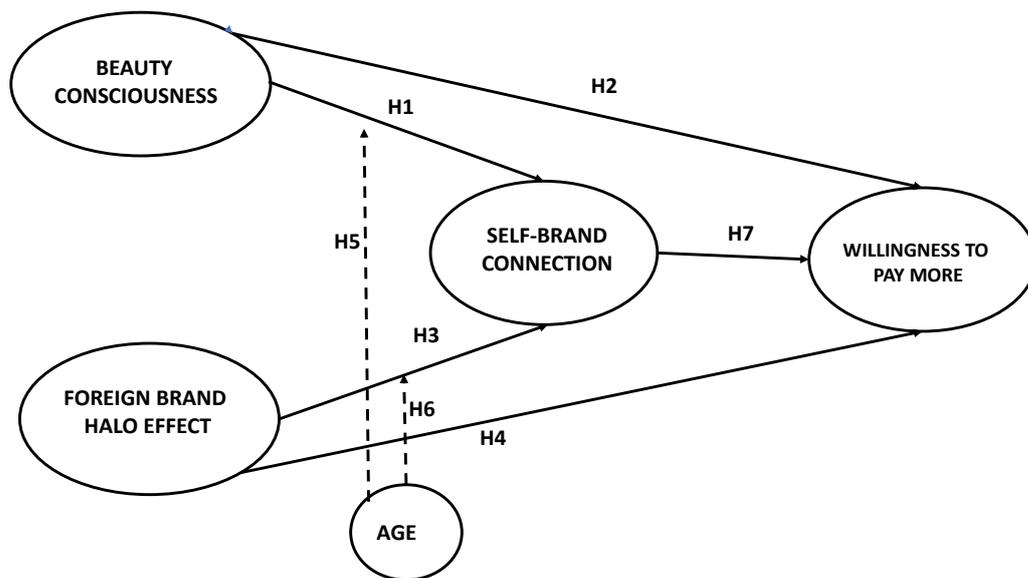


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Shop. For this study, items to measure BC were developed based on a qualitative study of McCabe et al. (2017). Second, we conduct interviews with three young adult consumers and three mature adult consumers. This stage allows us to revise and adapt the questions that have been developed in the first stage. For measurement, all variables use a Likert scale with a choice of 0–7 points, where 0 is assigned to strongly disagree and 7 is assigned to

strongly agree. The questionnaire statement items are shown in Table 1.

The results of model fit on the CFA model are as follows: chi square = 302.700 (df = 164), GFI = 0.894, AGFI = 0.864, CFI = 0.9768, TLI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.057 and NFI = 0.949. Overall, the results indicate a high model fit. The measurement model explains the validity and reliability of the constructs

Table 1. The measurement

Items	Loading Factor	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Alpha Cronbach
<i>Beauty orientation</i>				
I always feel more confident after using my beauty products and rituals.	0.866	0.934	0.672	0.931
I always feel happy after using my beauty products and rituals.	0.839			
I look good by using beauty products.	0.734			
I am reluctant to appear in public without beauty products/beauty rituals.	0.772			
I have to look beautiful in public.	0.904			
I have to show that I am a beautiful woman.	0.843			
Every woman must look attractive.	0.766			
<i>Foreign brand halo effect</i>				
All brands from this country are of high value.	0.924	0.967	0.856	0.966
All brands from this country have a remarkable performance.	0.950			
All brands from this country are of high quality.	0.954			
All brands from this country are great.	0.958			
All brands from this country are symbols of advanced technology.	0.835			
<i>Self- brand connection</i>				
This brand reflects who I am.	0.909	0.958	0.852	0.958
I can identify with this brand.	0.971			
I feel a personal connection to this brand.	0.943			
This brand suits me well.	0.866			
<i>Willingness to pay more</i>				
I tend to buy this brand even though it is more expensive than other brands.	0.868	0.941	0.799	0.940
Even though it's more expensive than local brands, I choose this brand.	0.905			
This brand deserves to be sold at a higher price.	0.914			
This brand is a high-quality brand and deserves to be sold at a high price.	0.888			

of the four variables in the hypothesis model. Construct validity and reliability are explained by the loading factor, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). The measurement model has good validity and reliability and exceeds the thresholds of 0.50 for loading factor and AVE, and 0.70 for composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha (Hair et al., 2014).

In order to carry out a discriminant validity test, we compared the square root of each construct’s AVE to its correlation with the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The correlation coefficient between constructs is lower than the AVE root, so it can be concluded that discriminant validity has been maintained (Table 2.)

Furthermore, factor loading does not decrease significantly from the measurement model compared to the measurement model with the addition of a common latent factor. None of the items decrease more than 0.15, which is the recommended limit for a sharp decline (Min et al., 2016). The decrease in factor loading ranges from 0.001 to 0.031 with an average of 0.003. The greatest decrease in the correlation coefficient is in the relationship between BC and FBHE, from 0.442 to 0.441. From these results, it can be concluded that the contribution of the common method bias in this model is very low.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results of hypotheses testing**

The results of the fit of the model on the hypothetical model, chi square = 471.285 (df = 226), GFI = 0.865,

AGFI = 0.835, CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.952, RMSEA = 0.066 and NFI = 0.922. Overall, the results confirm a high model fit. The results of the ratio of chi square to degrees of freedom are in the range of 2–3, GFI and AGFI more than 0.80, and RMSEA less than 0.08, which is a good indication of absolute fit. CFI and TLI are more than 0.95 and NFI is more than 0.90, also indicating the existence of a good incremental fit.

In order to test the moderation property of age, we test the interaction coefficient. The interaction coefficient of beauty orientation and age (agexBC) of 0.051 (p=0.310) is not significant. Therefore, age does not moderate the effect of BC on SBC. The interaction coefficient of FBHE and age (agexFBHE) of -0.108 (p=0.032) was significant, indicating age moderates the effect of FBHE on SBC.

Moreover, in order to assess the predictive ability of the research model, we calculate the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>). According to Hair et al. (2014), it is difficult to set a rule of thumb for an acceptable level of R<sup>2</sup> value as it depends on the model complexity and the research discipline. Nonetheless, they consider the R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.20 as high in consumer behaviour studies. The R<sup>2</sup> values for predicting SBC and WTMP are 0.39 and 0.56. The results indicate that all values of R<sup>2</sup> are above the critical value, suggesting the model has a high predictive power for both groups.

**Discussion**

We expected that BC strengthens both SBC and WTMP and the data support these hypotheses

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Beauty orientation</i>	5.35	1.07	(0.820)			
<i>Foreign brand halo effect</i>	4.61	1.55	0.442	(0.925)		
<i>Self-brand connection</i>	3.95	1.48	0.484	0.639	(0.923)	
<i>Willingness to pay more</i>	4.21	1.52	0.466	0.697	0.703	(0.894)

All significant at p < .05, the diagonal (in italics) shows the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct

Table 3. The results of hypotheses tests

Hypothesis				$\beta$	t value	Conclusion
H1	SBC	←	BC	0.260	4.867**	supported
H2	WTPM	←	BC	0.106	2.140*	supported
H3	SBC	←	FBHE	0.557	10.250**	supported
H4	WTPM	←	FBHE	0.421	7.126**	supported
H5	SBC	←	Age x BC	0.051	1.015	<i>unsupported</i>
H6	SBC	←	Age x FBHE	-0.108	-2.139*	supported
H7	WTPM	←	SBC	0.399	6.442**	supported

Note: Significant at \*p < .05 and \*\*p < .001

(H1 and H2). The results of this study indicate that Indonesian female consumers who have a strong BC have an affinity towards foreign skincare brands and a strong willingness to pay a premium for these brands. This shows that when female consumers have a strong desire to maintain or improve their appearance, they develop strong connections to brands that they believe can help them achieve this and do not hesitate to pay more for such brands. The brand is a trusted and suitable partner to help them feel and look good, and inspire consumers' desire to sacrifice more for the beauty they want. Therefore, a favourable and reliable beauty brand is worth a premium price.

Our results also show that FBHE strengthens consumers' relationships with foreign brands and they are willing to pay more for foreign brands, thereby supporting H3 and H4. The positive image of South Korea in the beauty industry puts brands originating from there at an advantage. FBHE encourages the formation of strong relationships between consumers and brands from favourably viewed countries. Like BC, FBHE can predict the strength of SBC. However, when compared to BC, FBHE wields a much greater influence on SBC. Consumers who have a positive perception of South Korea as a source of good brands for beauty products are willing to pay a premium for brands from that country.

According to H5 and H6, we expected to find significant differences between young adult and mature adult consumers in evaluating SBC with

K-Beauty Brands. These two hypotheses suggest that there is a moderating effect of age on the relationships between BC and FBHE on SBC. However, our results indicate that age does not play a role in the relationship between BC and SBC; therefore, H5 is unsupported. It seems that young adults and mature adults alike have a strong BC, which strengthens the consumer's relationship with a brand. From a young age, Indonesian women develop a strong BC and maintain their relationships with brands they see as capable of maintaining their beauty.

Age, however, does exert a moderating effect on the relationship between FBHE and SBC; thus, H6 is supported by our results. The older the female consumer, the weaker the influence of FBHE on SBC. These results indicate that young adult female consumers are more open to brands from countries with a positive image in the beauty industry and they display an affinity towards foreign brands. Meanwhile, older adult female consumers do not show a strong influence of FBHE on SBC. Among mature adult female consumers, SBC is formed more strongly because of a strong BC, and not because of the image of the country of origin. Their closeness to a foreign brand of beauty products is more due to a strong desire to be beautiful and it is highly likely that they are ambivalent about the image of the brand's country of origin. For mature adult female consumers, the image of the country of origin is not prudent and cannot strengthen their relationship with foreign brands. This result contradicts the findings of Chaplin and John (2005).

We assert that the older the consumer, the stronger the consumer's relationship with the brand is in line with the development of the consumer's self-concept and the more the consumer views the brand as an important part of themselves or their community. However, Chaplin and John's (2005) study suggests that from a young age, female consumers already display a strong willingness to look beautiful and have strong feelings of oneness with K-Beauty brands. This difference in results may be explained by the age range of study participants, namely Chaplin and John (2005) focusing on the childhood (7–8) and adolescence (12–13) groups while this study uses young adults and older adults as data samples. In these two age groups, it seems that the consumer self-concept has been well established.

H7 predicts that SBC encourages consumers to pay a premium for brands. The results of our final hypothesis test show that SBC strengthens the desire of female consumers to pay more for the brands they like, thereby supporting H7. These results are in line with the findings of Sarkar et al. (2021). SBC is able to predict consumer loyalty by consumers' willingness to pay a premium price for brands they perceive as suitable and reliable partners.

## **Conclusions and managerial implications**

### *Theoretical implication*

This study contributes to marketing literature, such as the consumer–brand relationship and international marketing, in various ways. First, the consumer–brand relationship suggests that consumers' connection with brands can be driven by consumer lifestyle and values. Beauty consumption implies female consumer lifestyle covering their everyday tasks and goals. A brand becomes a crucial resource or instrument for a female consumer when constructing her own lifestyle and identity. A brand also becomes a reflection of what is important for individual consumers and valued shared within her community (Sihvonen, 2019). A brand can be a consumer's partner when it is perceived to be suitable to consumers interest and values shared

within her community. In addition, this study provides further explanation that a brand which satisfies individual consumer psychological needs (feeling good as a beautiful woman), strengthens their identity and improves their image (looking good as a beautiful woman) may cultivate strong connections with its consumers.

Second, this study indicates that SBC can be strengthened by a positive image of a brand's country of origin. This is illustrated by FBHE's greater impact on SBC when compared to BC. The positive image of a country nurtures the relationship between the consumers and the brands. This is particularly strong among young adult female consumers. This result also contributes to the international marketing literature. Steenkamp (2019) argues that younger consumers hold a more favourable view towards foreign brands. Age demonstrates a strong effect on consumer attitudes towards global consumer culture, thereby impacting consumers' openness to foreign brands. Younger consumers tend to be xenocentric and like to seek out things that are new, modern, not tied to the past and tradition and adventurous. Accordingly, the current study suggests that younger consumers have stronger connections to foreign brands. They are open and develop a strong affinity for foreign brands. Meanwhile, mature consumers display a lower SBC to foreign brands. This indicates that for older consumers, foreign brands may not be the best choice as a partner. Older consumers are attached to foreign beauty brands more so because of the perception of the brand's ability to help them stay beautiful and not because of the positive image of the country of origin.

Furthermore, strong SBC reflects consumer loyalty to a brand, and consumers strong connections and oneness encourage them to pay higher prices for certain brands even though other brands (for example, local brands) in the same product category are readily available in the market. Our study reveals that WTPM is corroborated not only by SBC, but also by BC and FBHE. However, among

the three, FBHE wields the strongest influence. Female consumers have a strong desire to pay more for a brand depending on the image of the country of origin and its reputation as a producer of a particular product (Gómez et al., 2017). The results of this study indicate that for Indonesian female consumers, a strong positive image of the country of origin encourages their desire to pay more for beauty product brands from that region. This indicates that brands originating from countries with good reputations in the beauty industry can stimulate consumers' willingness to pay more. This is the advantage of brands that come from more developed countries.

#### **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION**

As the study suggests, SBC motivates consumers' intentions to pay at a higher price. SBC energises consumers' greater commitment to a brand. Managers must therefore expand their knowledge of the drivers of SBC. Regardless of consumer age, when a brand is viewed as the best partner in pursuing beauty, consumers develop strong ties with the brand. We recommend managers explore consumer values and lifestyles that nurture their ties to brands. In advertising, managers should emphasise the superiority of their products for consumer beauty. Our study also suggests that age has different moderating effects on the link between FBHE on SBC. We believe managers should take these results into consideration when forming their

segmenting, targeting and positioning strategies. The emphasis in advertising needs to be adjusted according to the age of the consumer. For younger consumers, the emphasis on advancements in the beauty industry of brand's country of origin in comparison to their home country will prove advantageous. Meanwhile, for more mature consumers, advertisements should emphasise the benefits of brands for their beauty and adaptation to local culture, such as using local brand names, can also be an option.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE AVENUES OF RESEARCH**

No research is perfect. Our research has some limitations that provide opportunities for future studies. This research is limited to brands from one Asian country in one product category, namely skin care. Future research should examine various brands coming from other countries or continents. Different research approaches such as qualitative methods will enrich our knowledge on the consumer-brand relationship with foreign brands. We also recommend that future studies sample various consumer segments from different countries or continents. Research on the consumer-brand relationship which explores brands in other product categories is also needed in order to further deepen our knowledge of consumer behaviour towards foreign brands. ■

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