

Ideal Beauty Standards: A Preliminary Analysis of Ethnicity and Skin Tone Features

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Rationale and Objectives: Ideal beauty standards vary across generations, cultures and societies. For instance, East Asian women highly desire a lighter skin tone and therefore, select cosmetic products which make their skin fair (Bray, 2002). On the other hand, Caucasian women highly desire a tanned skin tone and think it is fashionable (Miller, Ashton, McHoskey, & Gimbel, 1990). Previous research supports the notion that different cultures prefer different skin tones (e.g., Xie and Zhang, 2013). For instance, based on a content analysis, researchers found that models which appeared in Chinese skin beauty advertisements had fairer skin compared to models that appeared in American skin beauty advertisements (Xie and Zhang, 2013). Further, Caucasian models that appeared in Chinese skin beauty advertisements also had a lighter skin tone compared to Caucasian models in American skin beauty advertisements (Xie and Zhang, 2013). While previous research points to the notion that culture shapes different skin beauty standards, there is not a clear understanding of consumers' response to skin beauty advertisements based on ethnicity or skin tone of the model. This lack of research is surprising, particularly because skin and beauty brands are increasingly conducting business all over the world, entering new markets where consumers have different ethnicity and skin tone beauty standards. For instance, Korean skincare routines and K-beauty cosmetic products have continuously achieved an international following in the recent years, and are one of the mainstays within the U.S. beauty industry in 2017 (Benner, 2017). Thus, model type (i.e., ethnicity of model) and skin tone for K-beauty advertising may matter in internationalization. For this reason, the objectives of this experimental study are: (i) to determine which ethnicity of model (i.e., Caucasian vs. Korean) is most attractive to U.S. consumers and (ii) to determine whether ethnicity has an effect on model evaluations according to skin tone color. Researchers choose U.S. females as the study sample since Korean beauty products are steadily entering the U.S. market.

Method: A U.S. female online consumer panel (n=163) was exposed to either a Caucasian (n=81) or Korean (n=82) model (i.e., between subjects factor) that varied in skin tone: i) light, ii) medium, and iii) dark (i.e., within subjects factor). Females were chosen for this study since they are a main target audience for skincare and beauty products (Xie and Zhang, 2013). Following exposure to model images, participants responded to measures for model evaluations (i.e., how attractive do you think the model is?) (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2008; Elliot & Niesta, 2008) on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=far below average, 7=far above average), attractiveness of model (e.g., unattractive/attractive; Ohanian, 1990) on a 7-point semantic differential scale and demographic questions. Respondents' age varied from 21 to 70 years old, with an average age of 42. Respondents were well educated, with the majority (n=91, 55.8) possessing a 4-year degree. Income was well-distributed.

Results: To test the first objective of this study, between subjects ANOVA was conducted. The result shows that the Caucasian model ($M= 6.279$) was more attractive than the Korean model ($M= 5.637$) to U.S. consumers ($F=22.566, p=.000$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics for Objective 1

Dependent Variable	Between Subjects Factor	N	Mean Attractiveness	F	p
Attractiveness	Caucasian model	81	6.279	22.566	.000
	Korean model	82	5.637		

To test the second objective of this study, between subjects repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Tests of between subjects effects indicated that skin tone evaluations differed according to ethnicity ($F=7.328, p=.008$). Additionally, multivariate tests indicate that there was an overall significant difference between the means according to skin tone color ($F=3.192, p=.044$), and there is a significant interaction between ethnicity and skin tone color ($F=3.396, p=.036$). As seen from Table 2 and Figure 1, the Caucasian model received overall higher evaluations when compared to the Korean model, with the greatest evaluations when the Caucasian model's skin was a medium tone and the lowest evaluations when the Caucasian model had dark (i.e., very tanned) skin. For the Korean model, while evaluations were overall lower than the Caucasian model, greatest evaluations were produced when the model had a medium and dark skin tone.

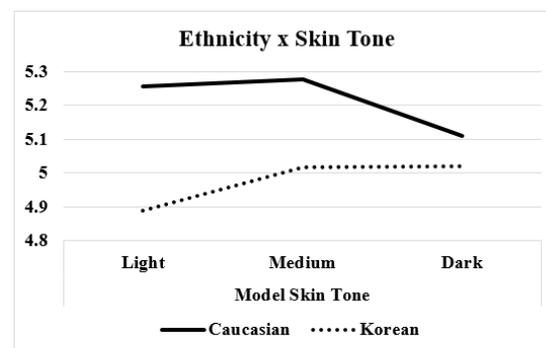


Figure 1. Effect of Ethnicity x Skin Tone on Model Evaluations

Table 2. Statistics for Objective 2

Factor	N	Mean Evaluation	
Light Skin Tone Evaluation	Caucasian	81	5.256
	Korean	82	4.890
Medium Skin Tone Evaluation	Caucasian	81	5.278
	Korean	82	5.018
Dark Skin Tone Evaluation	Caucasian	81	5.111
	Korean	82	5.021

Discussion and Implications: Caucasian women, generally, prefer a Caucasian model over three different skin tones when compared to a Korean model. This may be due to the beauty standards of U.S. female participants. Also, there is a large difference between a light skin tone for Caucasian and Korean models. Since Caucasians usually prefer tanned skin, they might feel that a lighter skin tone of a Korean model is too fair. Results also indicate that a medium skin tone had the highest evaluation among the three skin tones. This finding seems to align with the claim of Rhee, Woo, and Kwon (2012), that different ethnicities have different models of ideal beauty. In this study, regarding skin tone, the Caucasians clearly preferred medium skin tone, no matter

the model ethnicity. Overall, these results demonstrate the perspective of ideal skin beauty for U.S. female customers. These results provide preliminary data that may be helpful for foreign (e.g., Korean) cosmetic companies entering the U.S. market. They suggest that Korean cosmetic companies may find greater success by using Caucasian models with medium skin tone in their advertising. To gain more detailed information about how K-beauty models can attract customers in the U.S., we suggest further experimental research that tests the most effective K-beauty model for U.S. customers. In particular, researchers should examine realistic K-beauty advertisements and test the most effect model ethnicity and skin tone to attract U.S. female consumers.

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