

CONSTRUCTING BEAUTY: A LINGUISTIC FEATURES ANALYSIS OF KOREAN SKINCARE ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the ideology of beauty constructed in Korean skincare advertisements through Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, focusing on the textual dimension. The analysis specifically examines how linguistic features in advertising texts contribute to the construction of beauty ideology within the context of gender and social inclusion. The data consist of six video advertisements from Mediheal, Nature Republic, Innisfree, Sulwhasoo, Laneige, and COSRX, collected from each brand's official YouTube channels. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with documentation and content analysis techniques, this study identifies key linguistic features such as pronouns, evaluative adjectives, repetition, conjunctions, modality, and disjunctive phrases. The findings indicate that these linguistic strategies construct a narrow and idealized representation of beauty that emphasizes flawlessness, youthfulness, and skin perfection. Such representations implicitly marginalize alternative identities related to age, skin texture, and skin tone, thereby reinforcing non-inclusive beauty standards. From a GESI perspective, the advertisements position women as primary subjects of beauty discipline, subtly pressuring them to conform to idealized norms through continuous product consumption. This discourse reflects the intersection of capitalist and patriarchal ideologies, where women's bodies become sites of control, normalization, and commercialization. This study concludes that Korean skincare advertisements function not only as commercial texts but also as ideological instruments that reproduce gendered expectations and social exclusion. By privileging a limited definition of beauty, these advertisements contribute to unequal power relations that shape women's self-perception, reinforce gender bias, and constrain social inclusion in contemporary beauty culture

Keywords: *Advertisement, Beauty, Fairclough, Linguistic, Skincare.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap ideologi kecantikan yang dikonstruksi dalam iklan perawatan kulit Korea melalui kerangka **Analisis Wacana Kritis (Critical Discourse Analysis/CDA)** tiga dimensi Norman Fairclough, dengan fokus pada dimensi tekstual. Analisis ini secara khusus menelaah bagaimana fitur-fitur linguistik dalam teks iklan berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan ideologi kecantikan dalam konteks **kesetaraan gender dan inklusi sosial (GESI)**. Data penelitian terdiri atas enam iklan video dari merek Mediheal, Nature Republic, Innisfree, Sulwhasoo, Laneige, dan COSRX yang dikumpulkan dari kanal YouTube resmi masing-masing merek. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik dokumentasi dan analisis isi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi linguistik seperti penggunaan pronomina, adjektiva evaluatif, repetisi, konjungsi, modalitas, dan frasa disjungtif berperan penting dalam membangun representasi kecantikan yang sempit dan teridealisasi, yang menekankan kesempurnaan, kemudahan, dan kulit tanpa cela. Representasi tersebut secara implisit meminggirkan identitas alternatif yang berkaitan dengan usia, tekstur kulit, dan warna kulit, sehingga memperkuat standar kecantikan yang tidak inklusif. Dari perspektif GESI, iklan-iklan tersebut memposisikan

perempuan sebagai subjek utama disiplin kecantikan dan secara halus menekan mereka untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan norma-norma ideal melalui konsumsi produk yang berkelanjutan. Wacana ini mencerminkan pertautan ideologi kapitalis dan patriarkal, di mana tubuh perempuan menjadi arena kontrol, normalisasi, dan komodifikasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa iklan perawatan kulit Korea tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai teks komersial, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen ideologis yang mereproduksi ekspektasi gender dan eksklusivitas sosial. Dengan mengutamakan definisi kecantikan yang terbatas, iklan-iklan tersebut berkontribusi pada relasi kuasa yang timpang, membentuk persepsi diri perempuan, memperkuat bias gender, serta membatasi inklusi sosial dalam budaya kecantikan kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Fairclough, Ideologi, Iklan, Kecantikan, Skincare.*

INTRODUCTION

Media plays a significant role in shaping social values and cultural norms in contemporary society. The rapid development of digital technology has transformed advertising into an omnipresent phenomenon that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Advertising and promotion are no longer confined to traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, or television, but have expanded into digital platforms, particularly social media (Aliyatur et al., 2023; Lane, King, & Reichert, 2011). Within this digital landscape, advertisements function not only as tools for product promotion but also as powerful discursive practices that transmit ideological meanings, including dominant constructions of beauty.

The ideology of beauty refers to culturally produced beliefs and expectations regarding physical appearance that shape how individuals, especially women, perceive their bodies and social value. In beauty product advertisements, this ideology often manifests through representations that privilege flawless skin, youthfulness, and specific aesthetic norms. From a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) perspective, such representations raise critical concerns regarding inclusivity and bias. Beauty advertisements frequently reinforce non-inclusive standards by marginalizing variations in skin tone, skin texture, and age, thereby positioning certain bodies as more desirable or socially acceptable than others.

The widespread accessibility of digital advertisements enables advertisers to shape public perception more effectively, particularly in the beauty industry. Many beauty advertisements implicitly communicate how women “should” look, reinforcing stereotypical ideals and normalizing unattainable standards of perfection (Aliyatur et al., 2023; Nikmah et al., 2024; Sutton, 2009; Yulis, 2010). Advertisers strategically combine visual imagery and linguistic elements to construct persuasive sign systems that associate beauty with social success, confidence, and self-worth. As a result, advertisements become powerful instruments that discipline women’s bodies and identities, subtly pressuring them to continuously pursue idealized beauty through consumption.

This study focuses on beauty advertisements disseminated through YouTube, a major digital platform with extensive reach and influence. While visual elements play a crucial role in shaping beauty ideals, language also functions as a key mechanism in constructing and legitimizing ideological meanings. Therefore, this research analyzes six Korean skincare brands—Mediheal, Nature Republic, Innisfree, Sulwhasoo, Laneige, and COSRX—to investigate how beauty ideology is linguistically constructed in their advertisements. Employing Norman Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, this study concentrates on the textual dimension, with particular attention to linguistic features that reflect power relations, gendered expectations, and social exclusion.

By situating beauty advertising discourse within a GESI framework, this study seeks to reveal how language in skincare advertisements contributes to the reproduction of gender inequality and limited social inclusion. The findings are expected to provide critical insights into how beauty discourse not only influences consumer behavior but also shapes women’s self-perception, reinforces unequal power relations, and sustains dominant beauty ideologies in contemporary media culture.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the selected data. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to examine the vocabulary used in beauty commercial discourse. The data in this study are in the form of verbal texts taken from advertising videos of six Korean skincare brands, namely Mediheal, Nature Republic, Innisfree, Sulwhasoo, Laneige, and COSRX. The main data source comes from official videos uploaded on each brand's YouTube channel. The selected advertisements feature narratives, model speech, slogans, and product descriptions that contain ideological content about beauty.

The data collection included a few steps. First, opening the YouTube app. Second, searching for the official YouTube channel of each skincare brand. Third, selecting six video advertisements. Fourth, downloading and saving the selected video. Last, transcribing the spoken content from the advertisements in Korean and translating it into English to facilitate analysis. After completing the data, the process of data analysis in this study will be carried out in a few steps. First, organizing and reviewing the collected advertisement transcripts. Second, categorizing the data of linguistic features: pronouns, adjectives, syntax, conjunctions, repetitions, and modalities. Then presenting them in tables. Third, describing the data by analyzing pronouns, adjectives, syntax, conjunctions, repetitions, and modalities to address the linguistic features. Last, drawing conclusions based on the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After the data was collected and analyzed, six linguistic features were found in Korean skincare advertisements, namely pronouns, adjectives, syntax, conjunctions, repetitions, and modalities. The detailed results of this discussion are presented in the table in the following section:

1. The Use of Pronoun

Table.1 The Use of Pronoun in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text	Type of advertisement
Gentle and clean for sensitive skin. Perfect skin clearing with non-irritating cica! Let your skin be yours . Non-irritating cica care. Mediheal Tea Tree Biome.	MEDIHEAL
1. In one sunblock. 2. Beyond ultraviolet and infrared protection at the same time. 3. This moment equipped with fluffy. The sun becomes just a light to illuminate us . READY SET ALL, Sun blockbuster. Day and night, Inside and outside, I will keep you fluffy anytime, anywhere. Sun blockbuster, WE ARE THE NATURE NATURE REPUBLIC	NATURE REPUBLIC

<p>Jeju is the first place in Korea to see spring. But it's not just cherry blossoms that start spring in Jeju. The bright and colorful king cherry blossoms. Can't we transfer that brightness to our skin? Innisfree searched for ingredients that would make the skin clearer and more vibrant by using 2 slices of Jeju royal cherry tree. The result is Jeju Royal Cherry Blossom Moisture Revitalizer. The brightening effect of royal cherry leaf extract makes skin tone clear and radiant. My July betaine extracted from sugar beet moisturizes without drying. Take off the all-foam moisture and play tone. Innisfree.</p>	<p>INNISFREE</p>
<p>Sulwhasoo Knows, that skin has the power to repair itself. Let's return the stagnant skin to its glow. With the power of consonant and lymphatic naxis. To awaken the skin's ability and speed up the flow. Glow or skin again. Yunju Essence, Sulwhasoo.</p>	<p>SULHWASOO</p>
<p>Here's a truth about micro dark spots. What's visible isn't everything. Dull skin is caused by non-visible micro dark spots. With vitamin c clear them away before they appear. Correct micro dark spots before visible to your eyes. Radiant sea cream, Laneige.</p>	<p>LANEIGE</p>
<p>This product has reduced my acne scars and it has also made my skin so hydrating. It's literally my best friend. I damaged my Skin Barrier completely by using way too many products, and now I finally strengthened it back up with just this one product. The ingredients are so hydrating, it has completely transformed my skin. Get this serum in between my hands and put it all over my skin, and I do this every single day. I finally feel confident enough to leave the house without make-up on. Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence. FRIENDLY DERMA FOR ALL, COSRX.</p>	<p>COSRX</p>

As in the data above, pronouns such as “you”, “your”, “I”, “we”, “our”, “my”, and “let's” are used. In MEDIHEAL and LANEIGE ads, phrases like “your skin” and “your eyes” advertisers use second-person pronouns to establish a connection with the audience, so that they feel closer to the ad (Cruz et al., 2017). Thus, the product feels more relatable. It also shows that advertisers want consumers to feel more connected to the product. in NATURE REPUBLIC, INNISFREE, and SULHWASOO advertisements, pronouns such as “I”, “we”, “us”, and “our” are used. These first- person references help humanize the brand and present it as a relatable entity, which in the COSRX advertisement uses the pronoun “I” in a testimonial-style narration to make the ad feel authentic and personal. The speaker shares her experience, which builds trust with potential consumers.

2. The Use of Adjectives

Table.2 The Use of Adjectives in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text “Positive Adjective”	Example in the text “Negative Adjective”
<p>MEDIHEAL</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gentle and clean for sensitive skin. 2. Perfect skin clearing with non-irritating cica! 	<p>MEDIHEAL</p>
<p>NATURE REPUBLIC</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This moment equipped with fluffy. 2. READY SET ALL 3. I will keep you fluffy anytime, anywhere. 	<p>NATURE REPUBLIC</p>
<p>INNISFREE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The bright and colorful king cherry blossoms. 2. Innisfree searched for ingredients that would make the skin clearer and more vibrant by using 2 slices of Jeju royal cherry tree. 3. The brightening effect of royal cherry leaf extract makes skin tone clear and radiant. 4. My July betaine extracted from sugar beet moisturizes without drying. 	<p>INNISFREE</p>
<p>SULHWASOO</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let's return the stagnant skin to its glow. 2. Glow or skin again. 	<p>SULHWASOO</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let's return the stagnant skin to its glow.
<p>LANEIGE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With vitamin c clear them away before they appear. 2. Radiant sea cream, Laneige. 	<p>LANEIGE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Here's a truth about micro dark spots. 2. Dull skin is caused by non-visible micro dark spots.
<p>COSRX</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This product has reduced my acne scars and it has also made my skin so hydrating. 2. ... and now I finally strengthened it back up with just this one product. 3. I finally feel confident enough to leave the house without make-up on. 4. Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence. 5. FRIENDLY DERMA FOR ALL, 	<p>COSRX</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I damaged my Skin Barrier completely by using way too many products.

COSRX.	
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Adjectives in advertisements serve to highlight the desirable qualities of the products. The positive adjectives in the ads such as "clean", "gentle", "non-irritating", "perfect", "fluffy", "bright", "clearer", "vibrant", "brightening", "radiant", "glow", "hydrating", and so on are refer to the good value of the product. It shows that if the consumers buy the product, they will get all those good value as returns. All the problems the consumers have will be gone and those positive adjectives are going to be the result after they used the product. Meanwhile, the negative adjective used in the SULHWASOO, LANEIGE, and COSRX advertisement, the word "dull", "stagnant", "micro dark spots", and "damaged" are refers to the issue or the experienced that the consumers have before using the product. So that the consumers will think after they using these products all the problems that have before will gone. This contrast creates a compelling narrative: the consumer's current "problematic" state is addressed by the positive transformation the product offers. Furthermore, the use of adjective phrases in advertisements can serve to promote a product by emphasizing its function and superior qualities (Zhou, 2018). This aligns with the primary purpose of advertising language, which is to persuade and drive sales.

3. The Use of Syntax (Disjunctive)/Phrasal Sentences

Table.3 The Use of Syntax (Disjunctive)/Phrasal Sentences in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text	Type of advertisement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gentle and clean for sensitive skin. 2. Perfect skin clearing with non-irritating cica! 3. Non-irritating cica care. 4. Mediheal Tea Tree Biome. 	MEDIHEAL
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In one sunblock. 2. Beyond ultraviolet and infrared protection at the same time. 3. Sun blockbuster. 4. Day and night, 5. Inside and outside, 	NATURE REPUBLIC
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The bright and colorful king cherry blossoms. 2. Take off the all-foam moisture and play tone. 3. Innisfree. 	INNISFREE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With the power of consonant and lymphatic naxis. 2. To awaken the skin's ability and speed up the flow. 3. Yunju Essence, Sulwhasoo. 	SULHWASOO

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With vitamin c clear them away before they appear. 2. Radiant sea cream, Laneige. 	LANEIGE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence. 2. FRIENDLY DERMA FOR ALL, COSRX. 	COSRX

The initial speech function pertains to presenting the product’s formula. Secondly, all of the advertisements utilize poetic functions to emphasize the message being delivered to consumers. Third, the speaker outlines the product’s advantages in order to capture the target audience’s interest and encourage them to make a purchase. Fourth, the advertiser employs language designed to attract customer attention, reinforcing the persuasive nature of advertisements. It is important to note that persuasion is closely linked to imagination and creativity. Consequently, when persuasive elements are embedded in a text, both its general interpretation and its translation can present significant challenges. Short, impactful phrases such as “Perfect skin.” or “Sun blockbuster.” are common. These disjunctive or fragmented sentences: mimic natural speech, create memorable slogans, dan emphasize product features. They support the poetic and persuasive function of the ad by enhancing emotional and stylistic appeal.

4. The Use of Conjunctions and Cohesion

Table.4 The Use of Conjunctions and Cohesion in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text	Type of advertisement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gentle and clean for sensitive skin. 	MEDIHEAL
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beyond ultraviolet and infrared protection at the same time. 2. Day and night, 3. Inside and outside, 	NATURE REPUBLIC
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. But it's not just cherry blossoms that start spring in Jeju. 2. The bright and colorful king cherry blossoms. 3. ... would make the skin clearer and more vibrant by using 2 slices of Jeju royal cherry tree. 4. The brightening effect of royal cherry leaf extract makes skin tone clear and radiant. 5. Take off the all-foam moisture and play tone. 	INNISFREE

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sulwhasoo Knows, that skin has the power to repair itself. 2. With the power of consonant and lymphatic naxis. 3. To awaken the skin's ability and speed up the flow. 4. Glow or skin again. 	SULHWASOO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With vitamin c clear them away before they appear. 2. Correct micro dark spots before visible to your eyes. 	LANEIGE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This product has reduced my acne scars and it has also made my skin so hydrating. 2. I damaged my Skin Barrier completely by using way too many products, and now I finally strengthened it back up with just this one product. 3. The ingredients are so hydrating, 4. Get this serum in between my hands and put it all over my skin, and I do this every single day. 	COSRX

A conjunction is a part of speech that functions as a connector, linking words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence. It establishes logical relationships between these elements, thereby unifying the ideas they express. In advertising content, conjunctions play a vital role in maintaining coherence and fluidity. They enable writers to construct more extended expressions without creating awkward or disjointed language. The frequent use of the conjunction "and" in advertisements serves to complete the conveyed information smoothly and naturally, without disrupting the flow of the message. The conjunctions "but", "or", and "so" are used to show the relationship between two equivalent ideas. They also provide clues that support the previous statement. Its purpose is to provide information for the next sentence. The conjunction "that" is used to introduce a clause that serves as the object or subject of a sentence. The conjunction "before" is used to express the time relationship between two events. It shows that one event happened earlier than the other. This conjunction is also used to suggest that someone should do something first, or to prevent something from happening. We can infer from this that phrases can be linked together by repeating important words from one utterance to the next.

5. The Use of Repetition

Table.5 The Use of Repetition in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text	Type of advertisement
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<p>Gentle and clean for sensitive skin. Perfect skin clearing with non-irritating cica! Let your skin be yours. Non-irritating cica care. Mediheal Tea Tree Biome.</p>	<p>MEDIHEAL</p>
<p>1. In one sunblock. 2. Beyond ultraviolet and infrared protection at the same time. 3. This moment equipped with fluffy. The sun becomes just a light to illuminate us. READY SET ALL, Sun blockbuster. Day and night, Inside and outside, I will keep you fluffy anytime, anywhere. Sun blockbuster, WE ARE THE NATURE NATURE REPUBLIC</p>	<p>NATURE REPUBLIC</p>
<p>Jeju is the first place in Korea to see spring. But it's not just cherry blossoms that start spring in Jeju. The bright and colorful king cherry blossoms. Can't we transfer that brightness to our skin? Innisfree searched for ingredients that would make the skin clearer and more vibrant by using 2 slices of Jeju royal cherry tree. The result is Jeju Royal Cherry Blossom Moisture Revitalizer. The brightening effect of royal cherry leaf extract makes skin tone clear and radiant. My July betaine extracted from sugar beet moisturizes without drying. Take off</p>	<p>INNISFREE</p>

<p>the all-foam moisture and play tone. Innisfree.</p>	
<p>Sulwhasoo Knows, that skin has the power to repair itself. Let's return the stagnant skin to its glow. With the power of consonant and lymphatic naxis. To awaken the skin's ability and speed up the flow. Glow or skin again. Yunju Essence, Sulwhasoo.</p>	<p>SULHWASOO</p>

<p>Here's a truth about micro dark spots. What's visible isn't everything. Dull skin is caused by non-visible micro dark spots. With vitamin c clear them away before they appear. Correct micro dark spots before visible to your eyes. Radiant sea cream, Laneige.</p>	<p>LANEIGE</p>
<p>This product has reduced my acne scars and it has also made my skin so hydrating. It's literally my best friend. I damaged my Skin Barrier completely by using way too many products, and now I finally strengthened it back up with just this one product. The ingredients are so hydrating, it has completely transformed my skin. Get this serum in between my hands and put it all over my skin, and I do this every single day. I finally feel confident enough to leave the house without make-up on. Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence. FRIENDLY DERMA FOR ALL, COSRX.</p>	<p>COSRX</p>

Based on the findings above, it was revealed that advertisers frequently utilize repetition as a persuasive technique. In the advertisement for NATURE REPUBLIC, the repeated word is “fluffy”, in SULWHASOO's advertisement, the recurring word is “glow”, and in the COSRX ad, the word “hydrating” is emphasized. Advertisers intentionally repeat these keywords to reinforce them in the minds of consumers, encouraging recognition and recall of the products associated with those terms (Zhou, 2018). The more frequently these words are heard, the stronger the association becomes between the word and the advertised product. Therefore, repetition serves as a crucial element in advertising, as it plays a significant role in influencing consumer memory and perception.

6. The Use of Modality

Table.6 The Use of Modality in Korean Skincare Advertisements

Example in the text	Type of advertisement
	<p>MEDIHEAL</p>
<p>1. I will keep you fluffy anytime, anywhere.</p>	<p>NATURE REPUBLIC</p>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can't we transfer that brightness to our skin? 2. Innisfree searched for ingredients that would make the skin clearer and more vibrant by using 2 slices of Jeju royal cherry tree. 	INNISFREE
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Modality plays a crucial role in scientific writing, with modal verbs being the most prominent and commonly used means of expressing it. In the context of advertisements, modal verbs serve to inform audiences about the degree of certainty or obligation associated with the promoted actions or outcomes (Sari et al., 2020). Modality can be conveyed through various lexical choices, including specific verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns, which may either intensify or diminish the intended message. The repeated use of the modal verb “will” in the advertisements functions as a persuasive tool, offering assurances regarding the effectiveness and quality of the product. This usage encourages consumers to trust that the promised benefits will indeed materialize if they choose to use the product. In this study, modality was only identified in the data presented in Table.6, and no other forms of modality were found across the six selected advertisements.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Korean skincare advertisements strategically use linguistic features—such as personal pronouns, evaluative adjectives, repetition, conjunctions, and modality—to construct persuasive and memorable messages. These strategies collectively promote an idealized concept of beauty defined by brightness, cleanliness, smoothness, youthfulness, and the absence of imperfections, positioning such attributes as standards that must be achieved through product consumption. From a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) perspective, this discourse reinforces non-inclusive beauty norms by privileging certain skin tones, textures, and youthful appearances while marginalizing diversity. Moreover, women are positioned as primary targets of beauty discipline, subtly pressured to pursue perfection as a measure of self-worth and social acceptance. Consequently, Korean skincare advertisements function not only as commercial texts but also as ideological tools that reproduce gender bias, sustain unequal power relations, and limit inclusive representations of beauty in contemporary media.

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