Factors Influencing the Purchase Intention of Korean Beauty Products among Malaysian Females

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Abstract

The Korean Wave or Hallyu is perceived as mainstream culture today in the 21st century, and it is well-accepted particularly in Asia. Korean entertainment which includes K-pop music, Korean drama series and variety programs have contributed to the immense popularity of the Korean Wave. This has resulted in an increasing interest in and demand for Korean products, including Korean beauty products. Since the K-Wave has also been fairly widely embraced by Malaysians especially females, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between K-Wave, the marketing mix variables (4Ps), and the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females. The independent variables selected for this study were K-Wave, product attributes (specifically product quality and brand), price, promotion and place (distribution), while the dependent variable was purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to test the relationships and the findings confirmed that K-Wave, product quality, price and promotion were significant, implying that these factors did influence the purchase intention of Korean beauty products. However, brand and place (distribution) were found to be insignificant suggesting that there was no relationship between these two variables and the adoption of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

Keywords: K-Wave, Korean beauty products, Malaysian females, purchase intention

1. Introduction

K-Wave or Hallyu (韩流) refers to the globally popular phenomenon of Korean pop culture [86]. In [20] dubbed K-Wave as a cultural powerhouse that has spread across the world and is widely accepted particularly in Asian countries like China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan as well as ASEAN countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia [66]. K-Wave started in the late 1990s to early 2000s with hit drama series such as Winter Sonata, Jewel in the Palace, and Full House that sparked the interest of Asian audiences. Then K-Pop culture rose with legendary artists and K-POP groups including Rain, Super Junior, Wonder Girls, Girls' Generation and many more. Korean entertainment gained immense admiration from Asian audiences, and many K-Pop idols and Korean celebrities mushroomed. K-Wave's status was further recognized internationally when Psy's hit song; "Gangnam Style" stormed the world and still holds the record for the most viewed music video on YouTube [86]. Korean drama series and variety programs are also popular in Asia. For instance, the popular Korean variety program "Running Man" and the hit drama series "My Love from The Other Star", achieved enormous success and gained a wide fan base in Asia. The 2010s are perceived as the golden age of Korean culture. Scholars attribute the popularity of K-Wave to the globalization strategy by South Korea as well the internet as an enabler that aided the spread of Korean entertainment worldwide.

The K-Wave craze's international spread led to increased demand for Korean products, which in turn boosted South Korea's exports and generated billions. South Korea is among the top 10 cultural exporters in the world and the 6th largest export economy. South Korea's exports

amounted to $2.82 billion in 2015 in total partly due to the K-Wave effect via Korean cultural and entertainment content [17]. The Korean mania arising from Korean entertainment witnessed a surge in interest for Korean products including cosmetics, food, electronics and IT gadgets, automobile [49].

The Korean trend is also visible in Malaysia, and perceived to be unique, trendy and stylish and to the liking of Asians as opposed to Western culture [74]. For instance, in [4] [49] explored the K-Wave influence in Malaysia in the fields of socio-culture and economics, and Korean consumption behaviour such as food, entertainment, Korean studies, language, Korean products and even tourism. Malaysians especially females and youngsters admire their idols and adapt to the Korean lifestyle learnt from Korean drama series and K-POP culture [49]. Korean brands in the form of franchises and restaurants, fashion and apparel, IT gadgets, as well as beauty products have also expanded as a result. This has in turn provided opportunities to MNCs to expand into the Malaysian market due to consumer enthusiasm towards Korean products. As South Korea gives the impression of a country that houses good looking people, it is considered a leader in cosmetic innovation. Korean beauty products are widely sought after in Malaysia as fans attempt to mimic the appearance of their idols [21].

Celebrity endorsement or product placement strategy in Korean drama series is a common promotional technique for publicity. Korean beauty trends are often used as the benchmark for latest fashion trends. For example, one of the most popular Korean skin care products is the Aloe Vera soothing gel from Nature Republic, made popular by EXO as the ambassador of the brand. Also, in the hit series "My Love from The Other Star", the main actress Jun Ji Hyun is regarded as a fashionista who made the trend of "nude-make-up" popular [86]. This shows that the Korean cosmetics trend is spearheaded by Korean pop culture. Korea beauty products are sold online and via physical outlets. Companies utilize social media like Facebook, YouTube and Blogs as part of their marketing strategy to increase brand and market exposure. Among the top Korean beauty product brands in Malaysia are The Face Shop, The Skin Food, and Nature Republic [22]. The K-Wave influence from drama series and K-pop is unprecedented and covers consumer electronics and food service, fashion and also the beauty industry resulting mainly from product placement ads with Korean entertainment content [86]. As the Korean culture boomed, South Korea took advantage of it to boost its exports and to enhance its national image and economy. In particular, Asia contributed to more than half (83%) of South Korea's cosmetics exports [44]. No doubt, the Korean fever is a major contributing factor to the popularity of Korean cosmetics. Today, the K-Wave appears to be growing stronger than ever in the 21st century with no sign of slowing down. Asia has become the main absorber of the K-Wave, even among Muslim majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia [27]. It is also widespread in the West where Americans too embrace the K-POP culture [86].

The proliferation of East Asian culture in Malaysia in recent years has been surprising due to the fact that the cultural taste of the mainly Malay population differs from many East Asian populations. The rise of the K-beauty phenomenon has transformed the beauty industry, placing it at the forefront of fashion. In [20] showed that the Korean trend has become mainstream culture in Malaysia. Malaysian society regardless of ethnicity is obsessed with the Korean trend especially among females and youngsters. These groups are interested in various aspects of Korean culture such as food, fashion, beauty products even language, and South Korea has also become a popular vacation destination.

In the Malaysian beauty product and personal care market, in [54] stated that Malaysian consumers prefer imported skincare products to local brands. In [26] reported that Korean products were perceived as having the highest quality among Asian countries behind Japan. This shows the confidence Malaysians have in Korean products. In terms of international trade, South Korea was among the top 5 countries, behind Japan and Thailand, which contributed to the Malaysian cosmetics industry, whereby Malaysia imported USD24,434,300 worth of Korean

beauty products in 2013. In [96] also noted that Korean cosmetic brands see opportunity in Muslim majority countries such as Malaysia.

Much research has been done regarding purchase intention with cosmetics and skin care products as the subject. Numerous researchers have also adopted [46] marketing mix variables namely product, price, promotion and place (distribution) to examine the association between the marketing mix variables and beauty product adoption. For instance, riding on the K-Wave, Korean celebrities are often hired as spokespersons for promotion as they appeal to the Asian market, e.g. Girls' Generation performed at the F1 After-Concert in 2015 [83]. Cosmetics companies too feature famous Korean celebrities as the face of the brand targeted at female consumers [44]. Besides that, social media, e-commerce websites and blogs are some of the common platforms that have made Korean beauty products accessible to potential consumers spearheaded by positive e-reviews.

However, there are limited studies regarding Malaysian buying behaviour of Korean beauty products. Most of the K-Wave research in Malaysia comprises sociocultural-economic studies [4] and Korean consumption behaviour in Malaysia [49]. Even though consumer purchase behaviour is a widely researched topic, there is hardly any about the determinants of Korean beauty products' purchase intention within the Malaysian context. Furthermore, in [44] suggested further study of the K-Wave effect in cosmetics in other countries, and in [49] recommended focusing on the impact of Korean products instead of the K-Wave effect to the Korean behaviour consumption as a whole in Malaysia. In addition, place (distribution) is also seldom used as a factor in the study of beauty products' purchase intention. It would be interesting to see if there is an association between distribution and purchase intention of Korean beauty products in Malaysia.

As an extension of [49] research, this paper employs the K-Wave influence and marketing mix variables (4Ps) as possible predictors of Korean beauty product adoption among Malaysian females. The main objective of this paper therefore is to examine the relationship between K-Wave and the marketing mix variables [namely product (attributes), price, promotion and place (distribution)] and the purchase intention of Korean beauty products, specifically among Malaysia females.

2. Literature Review

This section confers the following aspects:

2.1. Categories of Cosmetics

Cosmetics are used to enhance the physical appearance of an individual to make one look more attractive than usual [78]. Cosmetics consist of a variety of categories and are not limited to only make-up products, as shown in Figure 1.
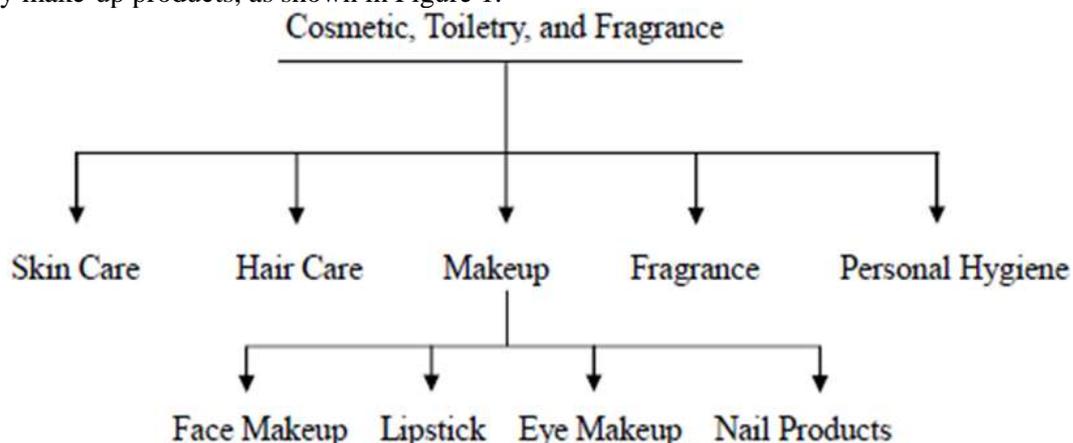
Figure 1: Product Classification of Cosmetics [48]

A general definition of cosmetics is "any substance for human use with the purpose of cleansing, beautifying, altering or preserving the appearance including personal toiletry products (such as hair shampoos and body lotions) as well as beauty products and fragrances" [95]. The U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [18] in addition to the above definition, added that cosmetics are used to colour, condition and protect the human body without harming the body structure. Moreover, beauty products and cosmetics are often perceived to have the same meaning and are used interchangeably. Taking into account the cosmetics categories in Figure 1 and the stated definitions, the term "beauty products" is used as the subject for this study to cover the scope of cosmetics and skin care products to avoid confusion.

2.2. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is among the most researched topics in extant literature. Purchase intention indicates a person's attitudes and beliefs that guide the making of decisions or undertaking certain actions [90]. Some scholars have stated that purchase intention arises from emotions or the perceived possibility of buying promoted products. It is also referred to as the thought (intention) of buying something that translates into actual action arising from an individual's knowledge, meaning "what we think we will buy" [7]. In [94] referred to purchase intention as the tendency toward consumers' future purchase. Several studies also described intention as individuals' propensities based on brand. In [70] stated that consumers' buying behaviour is inclined towards favourable brands or those with strong brand equity, while in [89] claimed that purchase intention is an individual's intended acquisition of a brand. The two prevailing theories on purchase intention in understanding consumer behaviour are the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [1], using attitude and subjective norms as predictors. As the business environment gets more competitive, companies today not only encounter domestic but also international rivalries and increasing product innovation, while consumers have a variety of products to choose from as substitutes. As such, understanding the factors that drive consumer behaviour has become more important than ever.

Hence, apart from TRA and TPB, scholars have also recognized the significance of the marketing mix. In [46] famous marketing mix theory with the notable 4Ps concept are what most scholars use as variables to examine consumer behavioural intention. The 4Ps comprise product, price, promotion and place (distribution). In addition, most research regarding cosmetics has used females as the subject, such as in the studies of [31] in Korea. Moreover, in [8], [49] also found that Korean culture affects females more than men, and chose females as the respondents for their studies. Hence, this study too employs the 4P variables as the centre of the investigation on Korean beauty products' purchase intention among Malaysian females.

2.3. The Korean Wave (K-Wave)

The term K-Wave or Hallyu (韩流), which refers to the boom of Korean pop culture [27], is well known. South Korea is among the top 10 cultural exporters in the world [88]. K-Wave has become a cultural powerhouse in this globalized era, spreading across Asia and Europe. Korean celebrities have become popular through music, films, television drama series and variety shows. For instance, famous Korean celebrities and KPOP idols such as Lee Min Ho, Big Bang, and Girl's Generation, to Korean dramas and variety programs like "My Love from Another Star" and "Running Man". Not forgetting, Psy's 2012 hit song "Gangnam Style" as the most-watched music video ever on YouTube [86].

One of the factors contributing to the immense popularity of Hallyu in Asia is the industrial transformation that South Korea has undergone. The development of media technology by giant transnational media corporations in the 90s made the circulation of South Korean pop culture in

Asia possible. Social media like YouTube and Facebook, Korean based Social Network Sites (SNS) have provided online exposure and easy access to KPOP. At the same time, innovations from MNCs have helped boost South Korea's exports of automobile and information technology products like electronic appliances and digital gadgets [41]. From favourable government policies to increased international trade to active efforts in promoting the K-Wave, with the internet as enabler, the outcome has been an international recognition of Korean products and brands such as Kia, LG and Samsung, as well as indirectly providing a boost to Korean tourism. These have also reinforced the success of the Korean entertainment industry which enabled the Korean cultural proliferation in the first place.

The three main sources of the K-Wave influence include K-drama, K- variety shows and K-Pop [42]. The Korean fever began in the late 90s, spreading across Asia starting from China to Taiwan, followed by Japan, Hong Kong and other ASEAN countries in the early to mid-2000s. The term K-Wave was initially used by Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism (MCST) to market Korean pop music to other adjacent countries [27]. It started with the popular drama, "Winter Sonata" [43]. Other notable drama series such as "Autumn in My Heart" and "Jewel in the Palace", were also well-received in Asia [49]. With the success of Korean drama series, Korean pop music soon arose. The Big three music entertainment companies, SM, YG and JYP led the Korean music industry, debuting KPOP groups and idols including TVXQ, Girl's Generation, Big Bang and many more that took the world by storm. They created a new buzz in the global music industry and managed to attract an unprecedented number of followers not only in Asia, but Europe and North America as well [79]. In [87] included in his studies a model of the Stages of Hallyu adopted from [45] research that was designed by Samsung Research Institute (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Stages of Hallyu [45]

Stages of Hallyu	Explanation	Countries of Region
1. Popularity of Korean culture	Korean dramas, movies and KPOP become popular outside of Korea. Other countries start broadcasting Korean dramas.	Philippines, Malaysia, Russia, Uzbekistan, United States, South America, Europe and Africa
2. Purchase of Korean products	Apart from Korean dramas also movie, ticket sales and DVD sales start rising. Also foreigners start buying k-pop records and attend concerts.	Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Brazil, Iran
3. Purchase of other Korean products	Hallyu inspires countries to buy Korean products related to the Korean popular culture such as food, Korean language, plastic surgery and tourism.	China, Hong Kong, Japan
4. Favourable Impression of Korea	Other countries get a new positive impression of South Korean lifestyle and culture.	Taiwan

From a cultural perspective, K-Wave is regarded as the Asian version of modernity [43]. Many scholars examined the sociocultural evolution and impact of K-Wave, in Asia and worldwide [93]. From [92] studies, Korean culture is seen as a combination of Western modernity and Asian merits. This is why, experts claim, K-Wave is perceived to be positive and attractive among Asians and even widely accepted and followed globally. The assimilation and embodiment of Western and Asian cultures are what many scholars such as [84] dubbed Pop Asianism, and linked to the concept of cultural hybridity introduced by [76] to explain the K-Wave cultural phenomena. The hybridity of Korean culture allows Hallyu to appeal to other nations, competing with American and Japanese pop culture. Korean music, dramas, variety programs and movies symbolize this hybrid culture as they have the Korean identity as well as Western elements [87]. In other words, K-Wave is the outcome of globalization via the integration of modernization, capital expansion and homogenization of global culture [14].

The K-Wave influence which arose from Korean entertainment also extends to other areas including cosmetics, food, electronic and IT gadgets, automobile, tourism and even the Korean language (culture) [42]. In [50] used the Google search trend, YouTube views and the "Psy effect" to explain the impact of K-Pop on Korean product exports. The results showed the COO (Country of Origin) effect being significant in the automobile industries, heavy industrial goods, durable consumer products, and fashion (apparel and cosmetic products), which led to an export boost. The K-Wave has contributed financially to the Korean economy, generating billions in earnings from export of its cultural products [88]. In short, Hallyu has successfully built a favourable brand image for Korean products allowing Korea to be a trend setter, fashion icon and also a market leader of technology on the global scene [93].

2.4. Korean Wave Influence in Malaysia

It's been over 10 years since K-wave debuted in Malaysia, and it is growing stronger than ever with no signs of slowing down [29], especially after the Psy effect. In [26] reported that Korean products were ranked the highest in quality among Asia countries, behind Japan. This shows the confidence Malaysians have in Korean products. In [4] explored the K-Wave influence in Malaysia with respect to socio-cultural and economic aspects, and interest towards Korean culture. No doubt the K-Wave has penetrated Malaysia and gained traction especially among females and the younger generation, resulting in a preference for Korean products, partly because KPOP fans wished to have a glimpse of the Korean lifestyle [49], seeing how it was at the forefront of fashion. Research in [27] reported that more that 30% of individuals in Kuala Lumpur had purchased Korean products least once. As stated by [34], K-Wave has led to a mushrooming of Korean products, brands and restaurants in Malaysia that cater to the demand arising from the K-Wave, concentrated mainly in Kuala Lumpur.

Korean artists and idol groups constantly have concerts or fan meetings in Malaysia, and event organizers use renowned artists as endorsers to market their products which include cosmetics, fashion and apparel, electronical products and digital gadgets like smartphones and even Korean restaurants [49]. Korean beauty products have been chosen as the topic for this research due to the fact that Korean cosmetics have been shown to be a direct beneficiary of the K-Wave. Korean cosmetics are perceived to be unique as they give a natural effect coupled with skin care benefits [8]. As South Korea gives the impression of a country that houses good looking nationals, Korean cosmetic brands such as The Face Shop, Skin Food and Nature Republic can be readily found in major shopping malls and retail outlets in Malaysia [49]. These cosmetics companies employ famous Korean idols and celebrities as their ambassadors including Kim Soo Hyun, EXO, Lee Jung Suk, Hyuna, etc. They aim to attract female consumers and youth [4]. A feel-good emotion is generated from the admiration and adoption of KPOP culture by fans who aspire to mimic the appearance of their idols, and this has contributed to a purchase intention of Korean beauty products [49]. As such, further to and as an extension to [49] paper on K-Wave influence among Malaysians, the first hypothesis was proposed as follows:

H1: K-Wave has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.5. Marketing Mix Influence

Marketing mix is a key concept in modern marketing. In [46] are the notable authors of marketing mix theory, commonly known as the 4Ps which include product, price, promotion and place (distribution). According to them, the basis of marketing is to satisfy consumers' needs and wants and influence demand in relation to market changes. The 4P elements are essential for companies to position themselves in the market, as well as to achieve sustainability and to be a market leader.

2.6. Product Attributes

Product is the first element of the marketing mix, and is defined as anything that can be offered to market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need [46]. Product here focuses on two of the more popular product attributes namely product quality and brand that are frequently found in cosmetics purchase intention articles [2]. This is also in line with [18] research which identified brand name, product quality, distribution and also price as being among the four factors most likely to affect skincare cosmetics purchase. Product attributes can be tangible or intangible. In [65] mentioned that product is a combination of goods and service, and product quality and brand are two of the more noteworthy product attributes. In extant literature, many scholars have used product quality and brand as factors related to purchase intention. Intrinsic cues refer to the physical attributes of a product, while extrinsic cues are product related attributes [16]. Brand name and image are categorized as extrinsic cues that signal quality. Some have cited product quality as an intangible attribute. In [80] also categorized quality and brand as elements of product attributes in their research. Subsequent to the above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Product attributes have a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.7. Product Quality

Product quality is one of the most popular factors found in journals of consumer behaviour. Some scholars use it as an element of brand loyalty and brand equity while others view it as a component of product attributes. In [25] defined quality as the condition of a product free from defects and the criteria of product excellence that convinces customers to purchase. In [2] mentioned that quality comprises features and characterises that are able to satisfy customers' needs and expectations, and defined product quality as "fitness for use". Quality conscious consumers in particular desire products or services of the highest quality. The quality aspect is essential to gain strategic advantage, and quality enhancement becomes a major concern to companies [73].

Within the context of purchase intention, quality is a major criteria prompting customer purchase [61]. They state that consumers generally use factors such as brand, price, material, style, packaging, brand, price and even country of origin as indicators of quality. Similarly, in [35] identified quality as the most important criteria among the marketing mix factors that stimulates buyers' purchase intention. Customers use quality to make purchase decisions, and these two constructs have a positive significant relationship between them [85]. In [39] also included colour, brand, design, features, packaging, durability, purpose, characteristics, benefits and functions to the construct of quality. In other words, quality is something that provides value to consumers, and buyers rely on the extrinsic and intrinsic cues of quality to evaluate the performance of a company's offerings [28]. Shoppers mostly consider quality upon purchase, and good product quality will lead to repeat purchase and customer loyalty, otherwise, they will

switch to other brands [39]. As for cosmetics, the benefits that customers seek in cosmetics deemed of quality are user-friendliness, attractive product design and packaging, ingredients, features and functions such as quick-dry, water-proof, smudge-free, durable and long lasting, and most importantly functions and benefits towards skin care [35].

Scholars agree that quality plays an important role in consumer purchase behaviour. In discussions on cosmetic products, quality is used as a benchmark [33]. In [26] study confirmed that Malaysians value quality more than other factors when buying foreign brands, while in [23] study in Malaysia also showed that product quality is the strongest predictor of consumers' cosmetic purchase intention. In [8] too reported that quality is the most important criteria for Korean cosmetics purchase in Bangkok. However, in their study, in [80] rejected the hypothesis that quality impacts men's cosmetics usage. Furthermore, surprisingly, in [37] study found a negative relationship between quality and consumers' willingness to pay for skin care products. Consequently, in using product quality as an element of product attributes for this study, the following hypothesis was developed:

H2a: Product quality has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.8. Brand

Brand is commonly regarded as one of the intangible components of product attributes [33] that drives consumer brand loyalty [18] and brand equity [10]. This is supported in [77] literature, as numerous findings show the chain effect of favourable brand image leading to brand loyalty, equity, purchase behaviour and brand performance. The association between brand and purchase intention has been widely examined. The present study focuses on brand which covers brand name and brand image.

Research on the behavioural components of brand sheds light on how customers perceive brands [3]. A brand reflects the company's identity made up of its name, term, design, symbol or any distinctive feature that differentiates its offerings from its competitors. Firms use brands to position themselves in the market in order to attract customers' attention and to become their preferred choice. A brand identity gives direction and meaning to a brand, creates uniqueness and value as a tool of differentiation for companies to secure their place in the competitive environment [13]. In [2] defined brand name as something beyond a label, constituting a main product attribute. A brand name evolves in the minds and hearts of potential clients.

In general, brand image is a group of characteristics that consumers associate with the brand name, a set of perceptions consumers hold in their memory as reflected by brand associations [38]. Brand image has been measured based on attributes, benefits and values. As indicated by [32], a distinctive brand image allows consumers to connect with the brand and make rational purchase judgements, which in turn increases their likelihood to purchase [77]. Marketers use brand name and image to build consumer confidence for their product offerings. Desired brand or product messages are conveyed via the marketing mix, focusing on the needs of the market segment. Companies with high brand reputation can serve customers better with outstanding product quality and benefits, satisfy customer needs and in turn gain competitive advantage that drives its market share and performance [39]. Customers' positive experience will lead to repeat purchase and reduce price-related switching [25].

Research on the importance of brand as a predictor of consumer beauty product purchase includes [37] who found that branding and consumers' willingness to purchase skin care products are strongly related, and brand name drives consumers' skin care purchase intention. In [60] discovered that brand is perceived to be important in men's skin care purchase decision making. In [36] found in their studies that brand image and brand name are the top two determinants of acquisitive and impulsive buying of beauty products respectively. Similarly, in [67] reported that brand image influenced the purchase pattern of eco-friendly cosmetics and

beauty care product in Mauritius, India. However, in [15] noted that brand image positively affected customer loyalty but had no effect on satisfaction. In [54] paper went on to state that brand was not significant in predicting consumers' cosmetics adoption. Furthermore, in [33] study on halal cosmetics purchase intention found that brand was negatively related to purchase intention of Halal cosmetic products as consumers prioritize the Halal factor more than brand. In summary, as a result of the preceding review, the following hypothesis was put forth:

H2b: Brand has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.9. Price

Price is another popular variable used by researchers to examine the purchase behaviour of consumers [33]. Adopted from [46], price is defined as the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the sum of the values that customers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service. According to [9], price is one of the most important intrinsic cues for consumers to make purchase decisions. In [30] opined that price may have both a positive as well as negative role that affects consumer decisions as it signals the quality of a product. In [81] stated that price reflects the value of the product perceived by consumers and determines their willingness to pay. Previous studies found that a rise in price would lower consumer perception of the value when they think the price is unreasonably high [47]. On the other hand, in [38] noted that consumers did not mind paying higher prices based on brand loyalty. In terms of microeconomic theory, with all other factors being equal, an increase in price will result in a decrease in demand [25].

Scholars have often used price to investigate consumer buying behaviour. In [52] demonstrated that consumers have a set of remembered (reference) price experiences to evaluate the acceptable price range with regards to the value and quality affecting their purchase preferences. Price also conveys the intended value positioning of a company for its product and brand in the market and price conscious consumers will find the best value product. In [65] pointed out that since price is the only element in the marketing mix that acts as a source of income to companies, marketers have to make wise price setting decision to maximize profit. In [5] study in Indonesia, it was shown that price had an influence on customer purchase during shopping. In [6] also highlighted price as being among the top two most important factors in the purchase decision. Consumers will be satisfied when quality and price match their perception and expectation of product value.

For studies on cosmetics purchase intention, price is also recognized as a crucial factor. Price is used as a differentiating factor, coupled with other factors (cost, quality, brand name, competition) targeting various consumer profiles in the cosmetics market via suitable pricing strategy [60]. In [33] reported that price affects buying behaviour for halal cosmetics. In [42] also found that price is the number two factor besides brand that Chinese tourists take into consideration when buying Korean hair cosmetics, while in [67] showed that price-conscious decisions affect the purchasing pattern of eco-friendly cosmetics and beauty care products among females in Mauritius. However, rather interestingly, in [60] paper, price was the main reason men refused to use skin care products. The extant research is therefore settled that price has a relationship with consumer purchase behaviour of cosmetics and beauty products, be it a negative or positive one. The resulting hypothesis was therefore proposed as follows:

H3: Price has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.10. Promotion

Promotion is also regarded as marketing communication and includes advertising, sales promotion, personally selling and publicity [39]. It is one of the main factors within the

marketing mix that influences consumer behaviour. In [46] defined promotion as activities that transfer the merits of products and services to the public as well as persuade their target customers to make a purchase. In [65] stated that promotion covers advertising and sales promotion. Firms use mass promotional media such as TV, newspaper and radio (traditional advertising media) to reach out to the mass audience. Besides, marketers these days not only rely on traditional promotion media but also non-traditional promotion media including public relations, sponsorship, internet and social media marketing (such as Facebook, YouTube, Blogs and Instagram), direct marketing (e.g. mail, catalogues, internet, e-mail, telephone, direct response TV), guerrilla marketing, e-active marketing, database marketing, etc. Another popular promotional method is personal selling. These channels are used to promote product awareness, reaching out to both trade and consumer markets [46].

According to [61], promotion acts as a starting point in the communication process to consumers and markets, and links to other marketing efforts of a company. Also, in [71] defined the promotion mix as the information flow directed towards people and organizations which results in demand. Firms employ various promotional tools to advertise their products and services which stimulate potential buyers' buying behaviour and interest [55]. Impulse purchase behaviour is triggered via numerous promotional methods and marketing strategies [36]. Firms also use celebrities for their product and service endorsement for brand promotion [2].

In the 21st century, internet marketing is in trend. Since people surf the internet and social media such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs almost on a daily basis, they are also exposed to online ads and online user sharing on social media [12]. In this regard, many scholars recognize the concept of online word-of-mouth or E-Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) or E-Review as an important influencer of purchase intention. EWOM refers to the sharing of experience, advice and knowledge on specific topics with other people on the Internet [53]. In [63] stated that consumers perceive e-reviews to be more credible than marketers because they are based on users' own experience. In [53] showed that EWOM has a substantial effect that drives Korean cosmetic purchase in China. In [19] reported that Facebook had a positive influence on the behavioural attitude of Millennials, while in [11] found that blogs have a positive relationship to cosmetics purchase intention in Thailand.

Another aspect of promotion apart from advertising is sales promotion. Sales promotion tools are used by most organizations in support of advertising and public relations activities, targeted toward consumers as final users [25]. In [51] study on promotion tools defined sales promotion as the combination of different incentive tools to accelerate sales. Sales promotion is a short-term tactic to boost sales and its purpose is to trigger immediate purchase via added value provided to customers, which will bring about the desired sales result and future sales as well. Sales promotion was also shown to be more cost effective than advertising [24]. In [2] perceived sales promotion as a support to advertising and public relations activities. Studies in Malaysia have claimed that sales promotion tools like coupons, price discount, free samples and bonus packs are effective in stimulating purchase among Malaysians as they enjoy visible savings.

In [68] study showed that promotion has a huge influence on consumer buying behaviour in Thailand while shopping. Whereas, in the area of cosmetics, in [51] found that cosmetics ads promoted product features and benefits via portrayal of a beautiful and youthful appearance which enhanced consumer confidence, thereby triggering a desire for the product. In [42] reported that the majority of their respondents were affected by TV and internet advertisements derived from Korean drama series and KPOP songs in relation to the purchase of Korean hair cosmetics product.

In [2] study showed that promotion does affect the purchase of skin care cosmetics among Saudi females. In [62] indicated that promotion is an important factor that drives consumer satisfaction to purchase and repurchase skin care online, while in [8] investigation also verified that promotion affects Thai females' purchase of Korean cosmetics. However, in [23] study

rejected price and promotion's influence on Gen Y's cosmetics buying intention, concluding that they were more concerned with product quality and did not mind paying a higher price, while in [60] study claimed that advertising and promotion had little effect on men's skin care product purchase in Karlstad, Sweden. The bulk of extant literature reviewed, however, appears to favour the importance of promotion to purchase intention. Consequently, the following hypothesis was put forth:

H4: Promotion has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.11. Place (Distribution)

The concept of place in marketing mix theory from [46] is also known as distribution, the flow of product and service from manufacturers to customers. It encompasses the various company activities involved in making its offerings available to the target market. Place does not only mean location, it involves several channel members (multiple layers) in the supply chain such as retail stores, direct mail, salespeople (salesforce), middleman, brokers and dealers, agents, wholesalers, franchise distribution, network distributor sales and service centre and trade fairs [8]. The levels within the distribution channel depend on how companies wish to engage with end users; directly with no middleman or via website, and indirectly using middlemen as mentioned. According to [46], the efficiency and effectiveness of the distribution channel widens a company's coverage area to reach its customers, thus increasing sales opportunities to achieve overall marketing objectives. In [82] reasoned that intermediaries allow companies to reach their customers more efficiently and effectively, and this requires collaboration among channel members.

In [75] referred to place as where and when a product or service is delivered. Marketers need to have sound knowledge of their target market's purchasing preferences (where and how) to make wise channel decisions. The type of products companies sell, directly affects how they should be produced and distributed [60]. Cosmetics distribution channels have evolved in the 21st century. According to a research report regarding global beauty industry trends by [56], online retailing drives growth of the cosmetics market. In Malaysia, cosmetic products can be found in supermarkets, department stores, pharmacies, direct sales, specialty stores and even via websites [54].

As for whether place is an important factor or otherwise in predicting consumer purchase behaviour, the results obtained from past research are mixed. In [68] found that place influenced the frequency of customer purchase during shopping in Bangkok, Thailand, and the same result was obtained by [5] in Indonesia. Within the context of cosmetics purchase intention, place is seldom used as a predictor, with only limited research available. One of them is by [18] who examined the perception of women skincare cosmetics on the importance of major distribution components namely the wide availability of brands in stores and the number of brand outlets. Both factors were found to be positively significant to cosmetics adoption in India, with the first factor (wide availability of brands in stores) being of much greater importance than the latter (number of brand outlets). In [62] study, place was also found to be significant to consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention of cosmetics in Bangkok as they perceived convenience of selection to be crucial. However, the results in [8] study proved otherwise, that place is not significant in influencing Thai women's purchase decision of Korean cosmetics. In [80] study also rejected distribution type (place) as a factor in men's skin care purchase intention in Thailand. Moreover, despite the positive result discovered in [18] study mentioned previously, the said author also stated that place was the least important factor compared to the three other marketing mix elements tested. In [37] also rejected place as being influential to cosmetics preferences. The mixed results obtained from past research arguably make place an interesting factor to be tested in this study to determine whether it would indeed be a predictor of purchase intention. Consequently, the following hypothesis was developed for testing:

H5: Place (distribution) has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

2.12. Conceptual Framework

Pursuant to the literature review and subsequent hypotheses developed, a conceptual framework (Figure 2) was constructed.
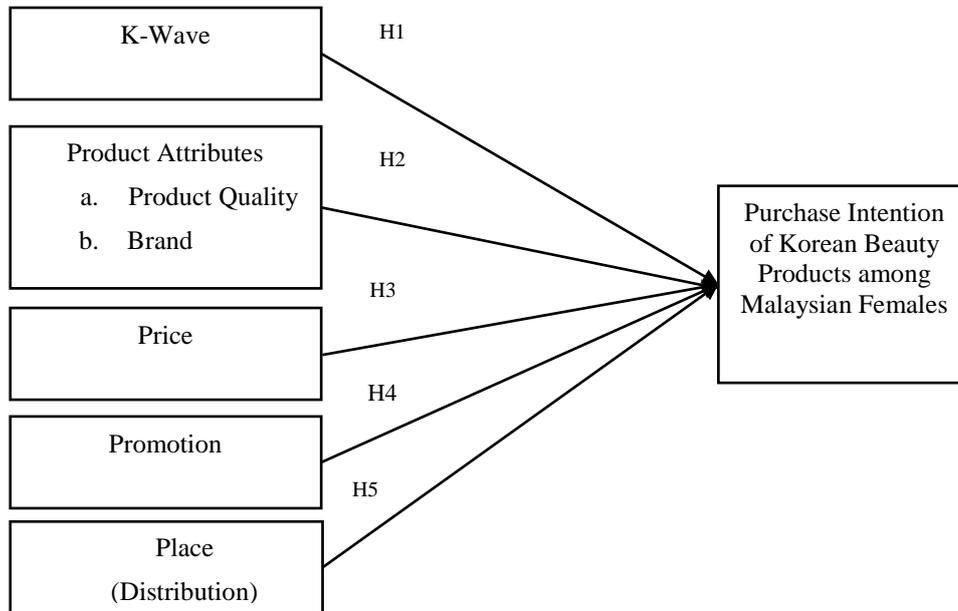

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the hypothesized relationship between the Independent Variables and Dependent Variable

3. Methodology

A quantitative research design was used to analyse factors affecting purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females, while a self-administered questionnaire was used for primary data collection. Questionnaires were distributed manually as well as online via the Google Doc application. Data collected via the survey and subsequent statistical analysis of the same enabled, inter alia, an examination of the hypotheses put forward. The target population for this study was Malaysian females, and the population was 15,141,741 women [57]. Non-probability convenience, specifically convenience-judgemental sampling, was chosen due to time constraints and selection of respondents was based on some part of the researcher's judgement being used to choose respondents [58]. Based on the fact that there are no rules of sample size under non-probability sampling [72], and in [97] rule of thumb whereby a sample size of 30 to 500 is appropriate for most research, a sample of 350 Malaysian females respondents was chosen for this study.

The survey questionnaire was in English and comprised 55 close-ended questions. Section A comprised 3 questions related to the usage behaviour of Korean beauty products among females, while Section B comprised 6 questions regarding the demographic profile of respondents. A total of 46 statements were included in Section C, and were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for strong disagreement with the statement to 5 for strong agreement. Statements testing the independent variables were all adapted and modified from previous studies to fit this research context. Each variable was measured with at least one statement reversed (stated in a negative form) for confirmation purposes. The independent variable K-Wave was measured using of 9 statements, product quality 5 statements, brand 5 statements, price 6

statements, promotion 8 statements, place (distribution) 8 statements and finally the dependent variable, purchase intention of Korean beauty products, 5 statements.

Prior to questionnaire administration, pilot testing was carried out with 30 sets of questionnaires, to test the consistency of the answers from respondents to ensure reliability. The feedback helped reduce possible issues that might arise from ambiguous questions or difficult terms and language usage. A benchmark Cronbach Alpha Coefficient value of 0.7 was used to denote acceptable reliability. The statements used for this study were obtained and modified from past research using K-Wave and the marketing mix variables as construct measures. Marketing mix theory is among the most popular determinants applied in the study of consumer purchase intention. Likewise, the success of K-Wave has garnered much attention from scholars who have conducted research across different countries in socio-cultural, economics and consumer behaviour studies. Thus, these constructs are generally perceived to be applicable (valid). However, due to the different settings (e.g. country, industry and areas like fashion apparel or online consumer behaviour) and the background of respondents, as a precautionary step, the validity of the questionnaire was still tested and comments given were used to improve on the statements. Some changes were subsequently made such as restructuring options in the demographics section, deleting redundancies, adding definitions of terms, rephrasing and simplifying language, words used and sentences.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) Version 22. Two types of data analyses were conducted, namely descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to explain findings for all 3 sections of the questionnaire. Sections A and B, consisting of questions regarding the usage behaviour of Korean beauty products and the demographic profile, were described based on frequencies and percentages. Information generated from the Likert Scale responses in Section C were presented based on the respective means, frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics, however, were limited to multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship (if any) between the independent variables and the dependent variable, i.e. to test the various hypotheses developed.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. Response Rate and Respondent Profile

A total of 350 questionnaires were sent out. However, only 283 of them were returned, resulting in a response rate of approximately 81%. Pursuant to data cleaning of the 283 questionnaires received, 265 were deemed complete and usable for the study. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

There were 6 questions regarding demographic profile of the respondents including age, ethnicity, marital status, occupation, income level and highest education level. Gender was not asked as the unit of analysis of this study was limited to females. Most of the respondents were from the 20-29 age group consisting of 148 women (55.8%), while the bulk of them (169) were Chinese (63.8%). The majority of the respondents, or 200 women, (75.5%) were also single, with 68 (25.7%) respondents holding executive/supervisor positions. Most of the respondents (158 or 59.6%) had a bachelor's degree, while 119 women (44.9%) had a personal monthly income of between RM2001 and RM4000.

Three questions were asked regarding usage behaviour for Korean beauty products. The first was on past purchase of Korean beauty products, while the second was on length of usage. From a total of 265 respondents, 209 (78.9%) had purchased Korean cosmetics and skin care products in the past. From among the users, most i.e. 68 (25.7%) had been using Korean beauty products for a period of between 1 to 2 years. As for the third question regarding the amount respondents spent or were willing to spend on a single purchase of Korean beauty products, the majority, i.e. 91 (34.3%) selected 'RM51 to RM100'.

Table 2: Respondents' demographic profile (n=265)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20	2	0.8
	20 – 29	148	55.8
	30 – 39	76	28.7
	40 – 49	22	8.3
	50 – 59	17	6.4
	Total	265	100
Highest Education Level	Certificate/SPM/STPM	31	11.7
	Diploma	19	7.2
	Bachelor's Degree	158	59.6
	Master's Degree	57	21.5
	Total	265	100
Marital Status	Single	200	75.5
	Married	65	24.5
	Total	265	100
Occupation	Housewife/Homemaker	12	4.5
	Student	64	24.2
	Academician/Lecturer	30	11.3
	Professional	34	12.8
	Manager/Head of Dept.	2	0.8
	Executive/Supervisor	68	25.7
	Non-executive	24	9.1
	Salesperson	14	5.3
	Self-employed	10	3.8
	Others	7	2.6
	Total	265	100
Income Level	RM 2000 and below	81	30.6
	RM 2001 – RM 4000	119	44.9
	RM 4001 – RM 6000	49	18.5
	RM 6001 – RM 8000	8	3.0
	RM 8001 – RM 10000	7	2.6
	Above RM 10000	1	0.4
	Total	265	100
Ethnicity	Malay	82	30.9
	Chinese	169	63.8
	Indian	14	5.3
	Total	265	100

4.2. Mean Scores

Table 3: Mean Score for each Variable

	N	Mean
K-Wave	265	3.2288
Product Quality	265	3.7824
Brand	265	3.5213
Price	265	3.5903
Promotion	265	3.4830
Place	265	3.3664

Purchase Intention	265	3.4717

Based on Table 3, the independent variable with the highest mean is product quality with a score of 3.7824, followed by the second highest mean score of 3.5903 for price, 3.5213 for brand, 3.4830 for promotion, 3.3664 for place and 3.2288 for K-Wave. The mean score for purchase intention (the dependent variable) is 3.4717. The mean figures indicate that all variables are positively skewed.

4.3. Reliability

Table 4: Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Strength
1. K-Wave	0.914	9	Excellent
2. Product Attributes			
a. Product Quality	0.865	5	Very Good
b. Brand	0.787	5	Good
2. Price	0.891	6	Very Good
4. Promotion	0.878	8	Very Good
5. Place	891	8	Very Good
6. Purchase Intention of Korean Beauty Products	0.873	5	Very Good

From the reliability test conducted, all the variables had values of above 0.7, and were therefore deemed acceptable. K-Wave had the highest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.914 which indicated that it was highly reliable. Next, product quality, price, promotion, place and purchase intention had values of 0.865, 0.891, 0.878 0.891 and 0.873 respectively, indicating that they were reliable as well. Brand, however, posted a value of 0.787, which is also of acceptable reliability according [59]. In short, all variables were found to be reliable in being able to determine whether or not they influence purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

4.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

In order to test the influence of the independent variables on purchase intention of Korean beauty products, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Interpretation of the multiple linear regression model was based on the significance level which was set at p=0.05, and any value smaller than the set p-value was deemed significant. The adjusted r2 value obtained was 0.590, indicating that 59% of variation in the dependent variable (purchase intention of Korean beauty products) could be explained by variations in the independent variables selected for the study. The remaining 41% remained unexplained by the variables adopted. A significance value of 0.000 from the ANOVA table also implied that the regression model was a good fit.

4.5. Hypotheses Testing

H1: K-Wave has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

Based on Table 5, the standardized coefficient β of K-Wave is 0.586 with a p-value of 0.000. Since p-value is less than 0.05, the result is significant indicating that there is a relationship between K-Wave and purchase intention. Thus, H1 is accepted, and the positive β value also shows that the relationship is positive. This outcome is supported by previous research, e.g. in [42] showed in their study that Chinese tourists buy Korean cosmetics in South Korea because they are highly aware and partial towards K-Wave, wishing to look like Korean celebrities. In [8]

study also indicated that Korean entertainment led to cosmetics purchase by Thai women in Bangkok, while [44] in their research showed that Indonesian consumers were partial to Korean male artist endorsement for beauty product brands. Ha (2010) mentioned that the Korean Wave affected the attitude and usage of Korean products in Malaysia, while in [49] discussed the exposure to global culture and mass media, particularly within the context of Korean culture and entertainment, leading to increased Korean product (e.g. Korean cosmetics) consumption among Malaysians. In short, the results from extant research support the finding that K-Wave is significant and does influence the buying intention of Korean cosmetics in Malaysia.

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Model

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	-.628	.338		-1.857	.064
	K-Wave	.659	.169	.586	3.906	.000
	Product Quality	.697	.163	.613	4.283	.000
	Brand	.070	.074	.055	.935	.351
	Price	.615	.191	.574	3.219	.001
	Promotion	.561	.179	.496	3.120	.005
	Place	.117	.088	.081	1.337	.182

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

H2a: Product quality has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

From Table 5, the standardized coefficient β of product quality is 0.613 with a p-value of 0.000. Since p-value is less than 0.05, the result is significant indicating that there is a relationship between product quality and purchase intention. Thus, H2a is accepted, and the positive β value also shows a positive relationship. This result is in line with most extant literature. In [64] noted that among the numerous attributes of cosmetics, quality was perceived to be the most important one. Likewise, in [23] study too reported that product quality was the strongest predictor of Malaysian consumers' cosmetics purchase intention. In [8] also found that quality was the most important factor influencing Korean cosmetics purchase in Bangkok. These support and reinforce the fact that product quality bears the highest β value of 0.613 with the highest total mean of 3.7824 in this study. This shows that product quality is the strongest variable among all to influence the purchase intention of Korean beauty products.

H2b: Brand has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

Table 5 also shows that the standardized coefficient β of brand is 0.055 with a p-value of 0.351. Since p-value is greater than 0.05, the result is not significant and indicates that there is no relationship between brand and purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females. Therefore, H2b is rejected, which means that brand did not influence the purchase intention of Korean beauty products in this study.

This result is surprising as it contradicts past research that showed the significance of brand towards consumer cosmetics purchase behavior. For instance, in [35] indicated that consumers emphasize the brands of beauty products, while in [42] reported that brand affects the purchase of Korean cosmetics. However, in [33] discovered that a negative relationship existed between brand and the purchase intention of Halal cosmetics, stating that Muslim consumers prioritize the

Halal logo and label over brand when buying Halal cosmetics in Malaysia. Furthermore, in [80] study in Bangkok showed that the belief in brand as being part of product attributes was rejected as a predictor driving skin care product buying behaviour in Bangkok. Likewise, in Malaysia, in [54] study found that brand was not a significant determinant to provoke consumers' online cosmetic purchase intention. These findings appear to match the results obtained in the present study.

H2: Product attributes have a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

From the contradicting results obtained between product quality and brand whereby product quality is significant but brand is not, H2 is only partially supported/accepted.

This signifies that not all product attributes influence the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females. This outcome aligns with [80] study regarding male consumer purchase behaviour of skin care products in Thailand. Not all of the product attributes used in their conceptual framework were accepted either, and one of it was brand.

H3: Price has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

As per Table 5, the standardized coefficient β of price is 0.574, with a p-value of 0.001. Since p-value is less than 0.05, the result is significant and shows that there is a relationship between price and purchase intention. Therefore, H3 is accepted, and the positive β value also reflects a positive relationship. The outcome appears in line with most past research. in [35] discovered that price was the most influential factor affecting impulsive cosmetic purchase, while in [2] also found price to be significant in consumer's cosmetic purchase. In [42] reported that price was among the top 2 factors (behind quality) that consumers take into consideration when buying beauty products. Their findings appear consistent with the results obtained in this research whereby price had the second highest β value of 0.574 among the 4P variables (excluding K-Wave) that influenced the purchase intention of Korean beauty products.

H4: Promotion has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

Based on Table 5, the standardized coefficient Beta β of promotion is 0.496, with a p-value of 0.005. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the result is significant indicating that there is a relationship between promotion and purchase intention. Thus, H4 is accepted, and the positive β value also shows that the relationship is positive. The results are congruent with much of past research. Particularly with respect to Korean beauty products, in [42] study showed that the majority of their respondents were affected by TV and internet advertisements derived from Korean drama series and KPOP songs in relation to the purchase of Korean hair cosmetics product. Likewise, in [44] study showed that consumers exhibit a positive attitude and interest toward cosmetics brands that are promoted using Kkot Minam (Korean flower boys) as brand ambassadors. Likewise, in [53] showed that E-Word-of-Mouth (E-reviews) had a substantial effect that drove Korean cosmetics purchases in China. In short, these results regarding the effects of promotion on Korean cosmetics adoption support the findings of this research. Therefore, promotion does influence the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

H5: Place (distribution) has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.

From Table 5, the standardized coefficient β of promotion is 0.81, with a p-value of 0.182. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result is not significant and shows that there is no relationship between place and purchase intention. Therefore, H5 is rejected. Within the context of purchase intention for cosmetics, place isn't often used as a predictor. The result obtained

appears inconsistent with several studies, although it does align with some others. Firstly, in [60] study demonstrated the existence of a relationship between place and men's skin care purchase intention. In [62] also confirmed place as being significant to consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention of cosmetics in Bangkok. However, in both [18], [60] studies, despite the existence of a relationship between place and cosmetics buying intention, it had the weakest relationship when compared to other marketing mix variables (product, price, promotion). Furthermore, in [8] found that place was not significant in influencing Thai women's purchase decision of Korean cosmetics, while in [37] too, rejected place as being a factor in beauty product adoption. These findings appear to be more in line with the results of the present study.

Table 6 provides a summary of the results of hypotheses testing. Four out of the six independent variables (i.e. K-Wave, product quality, brand, price and promotion) used in this study had p-values< 0.05, and were therefore significant. With positive values of standardized coefficients β, this showed that these variables positively influenced purchase intention of Korean beauty products. On the contrary, brand and place (distribution) did not have any influence on purchase intention as they had p-values > 0.05. Among the 4 independent variables that were shown to be significant, product quality had the strongest influence with a standardized coefficient β of 0.613, followed by K-Wave with a β value of 0.586, price with a β value of 0.574 and finally, promotion with a β value of 0.496.

Table 6: Result Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Standardized Coefficients (Beta, β)	Significance Value	Result
H1: K-Wave has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.586	0.000	Accepted
H2a: Product quality has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.613	0.000	Accepted
H2b: Brand has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.055	0.351	Rejected
H3: Price has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.574	0.001	Accepted
H4: Promotion has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.496	0.005	Accepted
H5: Place (distribution) has a significant influence on the purchase intention of Korean beauty products among Malaysian females.	0.081	0.182	Rejected

5. Conclusion
5.1. Theoretical Implications

Limited studies have been conducted in Malaysia on determinants of purchase intention of Korean products, and of these, none have been within the context of Korean beauty products. Currently available research is mostly on the socio-cultural and economic impact of K-Wave in Malaysia and not on marketing. Since the Korean Wave is a global phenomenon and widely accepted in Malaysia, this paper is among the pioneering studies which can serve as a foundation

for future research. Factors identified as influencers of Korean beauty product purchase intention include product quality, followed by K-Wave, price and promotion. In contrast to much of previous research however, brand and place were found to be insignificant in influencing purchase intention.

5.2. Managerial Implications

In a nutshell, this paper provides insights to managers on the importance of product quality, price and promotion. Since product quality was found to be the most important criteria customers seek in a beauty product, managers should pay extra attention to delivering the quality aspects of Korean beauty products sought by customers. For instance, riding on the Korean Wave, a popular cosmetics ingredient representative of Korean beauty products is Aloe-Vera for hydration purposes. Manufacturers can consider adding this ingredient into their products so that consumers can associate them with the benefits of Korean skin care products. Furthermore, since price is also an influencing factor, marketers should consider undertaking specific pricing strategies that target different customer segments, e.g. the younger generation who are more receptive towards the K-Wave do not have high incomes. In this case, value-based pricing would be more effective as it prices a product deemed acceptable based on its perceived value, coupled with promotional pricing to prompt purchase and boost sales.

As for promotion, strategies such as celebrity endorsements and social media promotion have been deemed effective by past research for Korean beauty products. One of the reasons why brand is not significant in this research may be due to the fact that consumers are first attracted to the Korean element (such as a Korean celebrity) of a product, before the brand itself, e.g. the Korean beauty brand Sulwhasoo has low brand recognition in Malaysia as they have no Malaysian website and the brand has not been promoted by any popular Korean celebrity in Malaysia. On the other hand, the Korean beauty brands, Nature Republic and The Face Shop have high recall rates due to their distinctive brand images as they have famous Korean celebrities, EXO and Kim Soo Hyun endorse their products [22]. This indicates that Korean brands have to combine promotion with publicity through celebrity endorsement to boost brand name and image rather than just market the brand alone without any popular face as ambassador. A similar strategy can be seen in recent events whereby marketers invited famous Korean celebrity, Lee Min Ho for the promotion of Korean fast food franchise brand, KyoChon in Pavilion [69], and Lee Kwang Soo for the launch of Samsung Galaxy S7 in KLCC in March 2016 [40]. These 2 events attracted phenomenal crowds and successfully created brand awareness. Prior to the event, Lee Kwang Soo also announced via social media his intended presence with several videos that had gone viral over the internet. This also indicates that social media is an effective viral marketing tool for publicity and audience engagement.

From a marketing perspective, information on consumer behaviour is crucial. It was stated in [22] that the skin care market in Malaysia is at the maturity stage, which means that it is somewhat competitive. With increasing interest in Korean beauty products, the fact that the present study identifies variables significant in influencing consumer purchase behaviour can assist marketers with the right marketing strategies for effective positioning. After all, the basis of marketing is to satisfy the needs and demands of consumers by selling products deemed valuable to them. This in turn will help firms gain profits and be able to sustain themselves within a dynamic business environment.

5.3. Limitations

The main limitation for this study was time constraint, and consequently, the study applied non-probability convenience sampling. Specifically, convenience judgemental sampling was used in some parts of respondent selection as deemed necessary by the researcher, and this introduced a certain degree of bias. As the survey focused only on respondents from Klang Valley, and used non-probability convenience and judgement sampling, the results obtained were

also not generalizable to the Malaysian female population. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents interviewed were Gen Y. According to [91], Gen Y covers the age range of between 20 and 37, while Gen X covers the ages between 38 and 48. As 85% of respondents were below age 39, most of the respondents were Gen Y and the remaining 15% were mostly Gen X. As a result and for similar reasons, the results of this study are not representative, and hence cannot be generalised as being representative of the characteristics of the entire female population of Malaysia, as different age groups might elicit different responses.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

There are several possible areas for expansion of this study. Firstly, probability sampling could be undertaken in future with a longer research time frame using simple random sampling or stratified sampling. The results will then be more representative of and generalizable to the population. Additionally, mix-mode research using quantitative and qualitative approaches can be carried out, adding face-to-face interviews to generate opinions from respondents to enhance findings. Researchers can also consider a comparative examination between say Gen X and Gen Y to see whether there is any difference between them in terms of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable used in this study. The findings should provide a better understanding of consumer behaviour across different age groups. Besides, other factors of product attributes such as colour, features, packaging, product design, can also be used to test their significance in influencing consumer cosmetics adoption. Similarly, different promotional tools can also be used as variables to examine which promotional methods, such as social media marketing, public relations, traditional media advertising, and even sales promotions methods are significant in stimulating Korean beauty products purchase intention. Apart from beauty products, studies on other categories of Korean products resulting from the interest related to K-Wave can also be undertaken, such as the purchase intention of Korean fashion and apparel, IT gadgets and smartphones, determinants of Korean food interests or Korean restaurant patronization, or even drivers of Korean tourism among Malaysians.

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