# Social media sparks K-beauty boom on UK high streets with Gen Z leading demand



# K-Beauty Takes Over UK High Streets: A Trend Fuelled by Social Media

Korean beauty, or K-beauty, is making a bold transition from the digital realm to physical retail spaces across the UK, spurred on by the captivating influence of social media. Popular ingredients—often described in whimsical terms such as "snail slime" or "salmon sperm"—have captured the curiosity of British consumers, melding the realms of skincare and viral marketing.

This growing trend is evidenced not only by an influx of K-beauty brands but also by the rapid expansion of retailers eager to capitalise on the TikTok and Instagram phenomena driving consumer interest. Previously encountered primarily through niche online platforms, products such as Cosrx’s skin essence and Anua’s face serum are now available at well-known high-street chains like Superdrug and Boots. These retailers are now actively promoting K-beauty lines, fuelled by a significant uptick in consumer demand.

As Georgia Stafford of Mintel insights, “Social media is the driving force behind K-beauty’s popularity in the UK, where 34% of users have bought a beauty or grooming product after seeing it on social media, rising to 58% of Gen Z users.” This demographic, particularly attuned to the aesthetics of the so-called “glass skin” look—characterised by a dewy, intensely hydrated complexion—shows a pronounced inclination towards K-beauty products. With 21% of Gen Z individuals purchasing these products versus only 8% of the overall population, this segment is setting a strong narrative in consumer preferences.

The financial landscape appears optimistic as well, with data indicating total spending on pharmacy, health, and beauty products was 10.2% higher in early 2024 than in the same period the previous year, according to Barclays. Stores like Boots have even reported selling a Korean skincare product every 15 seconds during the peak of winter, reflecting an impressive level of consumer engagement.

Part of the allure of K-beauty is its affordability; Stafford notes that K-beauty products generally offer consumers a chance to explore new textures and formulations at a lower price point than many established premium brands. Notably, ingredients like PDRN—which supposedly promotes collagen production—have intrigued consumers not only for their functional benefits but also for the conversations they spark about unconventional sources.

The physical presence of K-beauty is expanding as well, with the launch of retail outlets such as Moida's in London's Westfield shopping centre. Moida’s vibrant, inviting store design mirrors the appeal of K-beauty, emphasising accessibility and community. The shop’s close proximity to cultural hubs contributes to its allure; locations that already feature Korean grocery stores and dining options offer a comforting familiarity for shoppers drawn to these products. Savills' Matt Peters acknowledges this strategy as beneficial for retailers, stating, “These retailers see this as a long-term movement; this isn’t a flash in the pan.”

The phenomenon of K-beauty is further powered by the growing fascination with the broader spectrum of South Korean cultural exports. Known colloquially as the Korean wave or “hallyu,” the influence of K-dramas, music, and cuisine has set the stage for a robust demand in skincare products. Forecasts predict that K-beauty will soar to an $18.3 billion global market by 2030, with an impressive annual growth rate of 9%.

As retailers respond with ambitious expansion plans, the likes of Korean brands such as PureSeoul and Skin Cupid are cementing their foothold in the UK. The latter successfully transitioned from a temporary pop-up to securing a decade-long lease in central London, underscoring the growing permanence of K-beauty’s influence in the retail landscape.

With consumers increasingly prioritising self-care and wellness among their spending habits, K-beauty retailers are poised to explore markets beyond London as their loyal online customer bases dictate new physical locations. This movement signals not only an evolving beauty landscape but also a cultural exchange that transcends traditional market boundaries.

K-beauty is no fleeting trend; it has firmly established itself within the cultural and commercial consciousness of the UK. As shoppers eagerly explore the enticing world of innovative ingredients and skincare rituals, it appears that the future of K-beauty is bright—and distinctly within reach.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[3]](https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/beauty/k-beauty-tik-tok-skin-care-influencers/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/27/promise-of-glass-skin-drives-surge-in-sales-of-k-beauty-products-in-uk)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/27/promise-of-glass-skin-drives-surge-in-sales-of-k-beauty-products-in-uk)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[6]](https://www.euromonitor.com/press/press-releases/august-2024/dupes-tiktok-and-natural-ingredients-boosting-uk-beauty-and-personal-care-sales-euromonitor-international)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[4]](https://www.cosmeticsbusiness.com/cosmetics-business-reveals-the-top-5-k-beauty)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[5]](https://fashnfly.com/2023/10/how-tiktok-brought-back-k-beauty/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/27/promise-of-glass-skin-drives-surge-in-sales-of-k-beauty-products-in-uk)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets), [[6]](https://www.euromonitor.com/press/press-releases/august-2024/dupes-tiktok-and-natural-ingredients-boosting-uk-beauty-and-personal-care-sales-euromonitor-international)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/may/08/snail-slime-salmon-sperm-k-beauty-boom-hits-uk-high-streets> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/sep/27/promise-of-glass-skin-drives-surge-in-sales-of-k-beauty-products-in-uk> - This article discusses the surge in sales of K-beauty products in the UK, driven by the desire for the 'glass skin' look. Retailers like Boots are expanding their K-beauty ranges, with brands such as Skin1004 and Round Lab being added to their offerings. The piece highlights the rapid emergence of new brands achieving cult-like status within weeks, and notes that K-beauty is expected to become a $18.3 billion industry by 2030, with demand climbing at almost 10% annually.
3. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/beauty/k-beauty-tik-tok-skin-care-influencers/> - This article explores how TikTok has reignited interest in K-beauty, with brands like Laneige, Innisfree, Beauty of Joseon, and Cosrx going viral on the platform. It notes that the hashtag #kbeauty has 9.5 billion views on TikTok, and the term 'Korean glass skin' saw 134% year-over-year growth on the platform over a six-month period ending April 30. The piece also mentions that the viral Cosrx Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence is now the number one best-selling beauty product on Amazon after taking off on TikTok.
4. <https://www.cosmeticsbusiness.com/cosmetics-business-reveals-the-top-5-k-beauty> - This report reveals the top five K-beauty trends of 2025, including the rise of innovative ingredients like salmon sperm PDRN and heartleaf, and the popularity of Korean formats such as toner pads and hydrogel masks among Western beauty consumers. It highlights that K-beauty is in the midst of a powerful second wave, with demand soaring and the market forecasted to grow by a compound annual growth rate of 8.43% to 2032. The report also notes that Korea has surpassed France as the number one exporter of cosmetics to the US, with $1.4 billion in exports between January to October 2024.
5. <https://fashnfly.com/2023/10/how-tiktok-brought-back-k-beauty/> - This article discusses how TikTok has led to a resurgence of K-beauty, with brands like Laneige, Innisfree, Beauty of Joseon, and Cosrx going viral on the platform. It notes that the hashtag #kbeauty has 9.5 billion views on TikTok, and the term 'Korean glass skin' saw 134% year-over-year growth on the platform over a six-month period ending April 30. The piece also mentions that the viral Cosrx Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power Essence is now the number one best-selling beauty product on Amazon after taking off on TikTok.
6. <https://www.euromonitor.com/press/press-releases/august-2024/dupes-tiktok-and-natural-ingredients-boosting-uk-beauty-and-personal-care-sales-euromonitor-international> - This press release from Euromonitor International discusses how TikTok and the popularity of 'dupe' products are boosting UK beauty and personal care sales. It highlights that 43% of global consumers have made purchases of beauty, personal, and healthcare items via livestreaming in 2024. The release also notes that consumers are becoming 'skintellectuals,' spending more time researching products online and seeking authenticity in beauty products, with a growing demand for natural ingredients and multifunctional products.
7. <https://beautymatter.com/articles/trends-that-took-over-tiktok-in-february> - This article discusses various beauty trends that took over TikTok in February, including the rise of snail mucin in skincare products. It notes that the most popular product containing snail mucin is COSRX’s Advanced Snail 96 Mucin Power, which contains 96% mucin to help repair and moisturize damaged skin. The article also mentions that the product has sparked a trending challenge on TikTok named #snailslap, encouraging participants to stretch the substance between their hands.