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THE DIMENSIONS OF CUTE: AN EXPLORATION OF CUTE TYPLOGIES WITHIN THE
COSMETIC INDUSTRY

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This thesis expands upon the current scholarly research on the physical and relational attributes of cute as a design concept. Through ethnographic observation of Seoul, South Korea and the Korean beauty industry, four different dimensions of cute were identified—Classical, Whimsical, Cheeky, and Aesthetic. Each of the dimensions has their own unique set of physical attributes and elicits a specific emotional response which allows for different levels of involvement to be established. These findings show that cute is a multifaceted concept that can build upon itself to create a unique consumer experience that is not restricted by a perceived youthful demeanor. The evolution of cute is rooted in interaction and consumption, making it a potentially ubiquitous concept applicable in any industry through design.
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Chapter 1 – Cute in Cultural Context

Understanding the Importance of Design

Design, whether it product or story, involves the processes of doing or planning something with a specific purpose or intention (Design, 2003). First and foremost, design does not happen in a vacuum—it is very intentional on the part of the designer in order to fulfill the desire of the consumer. In the past, consumers’ expectations of products have been oriented around social change, the conservation of resources and energy, emerging environmental problems, and customer oriented trends (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). Design is the natural progression of creating better products and better product experiences for the consumer. Now that there is research that shows that people are able to experience very deep and emotional relationships with their products, and those products can be perceived as having personalities, it is only natural that consumers will continue to expect more out of products aside from functionality (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998).

To supplement the idea that the expectation for products are increasing, design trends show that consumers are interested in products that inspire them, enhance their lives, help trigger emotions, and even potentially evoke dreams (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). With the acceleration of technology and information, the idea of functionality is taken for granted. Consumers are intentionally looking for products that elicit positive emotional responses not only for themselves but in order to use them as a means of communication to themselves as well as others to establish identity and association (Belk, Belk, & Russell, 2010). This opens up a chasm of opportunity for
companies and designers to create indefinitely narratives and storylines for entire brands, different product lines within brands, and even for each individual product. The consumer should be able to understand how the product will benefit them from first observations—seeing the product and reading the name. Due to the nature of product design and semantics, including factors such as shape, form, color, and texture, a statement is always being communicated to potential users and will never be contextually neutral (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003).

This thesis uses these factors to explore the fundamental differences in product designs of cosmetic products and identify the corresponding effects on the consumer, specifically within the category of cuteness. Ngai (2012) explains how capitalism has transformed the cute aesthetic experience to be linked to consumption. In regards to the book, cute is explained as an aesthetic disclosing the surprisingly wide spectrum of feelings, ranging from tenderness to aggression, that we harbor toward ostensibly subordinate and unthreatening commodities. The introduction of cuteness to the cosmetic industry shows that there is a need, possibly a silent desire, for new interpretations and displays of individuality. For an industry that is normally known for its sophistication and maturity, there must be a catalyst for this expansion, some may even say regression, into product design around ideas such as anthropomorphism and animated characters—but what?
Cute and Cosmetics in the United States

In the context of the United States, cuteness has stayed within the realm of toys and entertainment, with characters coming to mind such as Mickey Mouse and the Disney Empire, Troll Dolls (or cabbage patch kids), and Barbie as the classics. These characters and the resulting products that came with their fame provided very little applicable utility, however they create a deep intrinsic representation to youth and fun that children gravitate towards and adults who are familiar empathize with. These designs have stood the test of time and are cornerstones to cuteness historically in the United States, so much so that they have barely changed. However, cuteness hasn’t branched out from entertainment products, or away from children, until recently in the United States.

In a highly competitive industry such as the cosmetic industry, companies constantly compete in order to create another product that stands out from the rest in terms of functionality and prestige, and because of this the design element has fallen flat and become repetitive. From store to product design, the United States beauty industry is monotonous and underwhelming, however overwhelming just from the availability of choices. Mintel explains that younger women express confusion over skincare product ingredients and feel overwhelmed by the number of offerings (Nanninga, 2016). According to the Mintel December 2016 Skincare Ingredient and Format Trend Report, consumers are allocating more funds towards facial skincare and interest in Korean beauty is growing as its presence becomes more prominent and products are offered through an increasing number of retailers due to a trend they call “Gastronomia” (Nanninga, 2016).
“Gastronomia outlines how modern consumers equate beauty with good health and how the growing popularity of beauty from within is influenced by current food and drink ingredient trends (Nanninga, 2016).”

This trend perfectly aligns with the Korean philosophy of wellness as well as how many of their products are developed and marketed. The multidimensionality of cute discussed in this thesis will highlight how these products attributes can not only be successful in the United States cosmetic industry, but in other industries based in consumption as well.
Chapter 2 – An Ethnography Evaluation in Cute: How Much Cuter Can It Get?

There is only so much one can observe about a culture or belief system from just reading and looking at photos. It is known that East Asian cultures have a near obsession with cute culture as apparent through anime and how goods are packaged. In order to gain a clear and distinct understanding of this cultural attribute, I visited Seoul, South Korea for an ethnographic evaluation of how cute plays a role in the cultural structure. I stayed in Myeong-dong, the shopping district of the city, for six days. I visited 30 different sites, both historic and commercial, in order to observe how cute elements were displayed and integrated around the city as well as how individuals interacted with, whether passively or actively.

The Korean Skincare Philosophy

The philosophy around skin care for Koreans is fundamentally different than that of Americans, and even other Western countries. According to the estheticians I spoke with from Shangpree Spa, one of Seoul’s best spas for the last 25 years, the idea is not to purchase products that are meant to be a panacea for a consumer’s dermatological struggles, but rather establish a battalion of products that specifically address each problem individually. The typical daily Korean beauty routine consists of around ten steps, which includes: oil cleanser, foam cleanser, toner, 2-5 steps of serums, a sheet mask, a moisturizer, and finished with a sunscreen for protection. Each layer of the maximalist process is meant to add specific benefits of treatment for preventing and slowing the aging process of the skin. The preventative approach is a serious driver of the product innovation that captivates many users of Korea products, both domestically and
internationally. The ingredients of some products include green tea, chia seeds, Coenzyme Q10, starfish extract, snail protein, bee venom, and even wine, which are much more exotic than the formulation of most cosmetics. However, natural healing is fundamental to traditional Korean wellness practices. The incorporation of these ingredients are a derivative of an ancient Korean medicinal theory called “hanbang,” which believes in the strength of traditional herbal medicine. Hanbang focuses on overall health through four common treatment methods, and health is seen as a state of environmental, social, and physical harmony (Kim, Han, Kim, & Duong, 2002). They live their lives with the idea that their wellness is dependent on what they surround themselves with, whom they surround themselves with, as well as how they treat themselves—each piece just as important as the others.

Sensory Experience

Cuteness, on the entire spectrum, is the structure of this culture. As I waited for the subway to pick me up from one of the metropolitan centers, a jingle alerted passengers of their arriving train. It was an uplifting tune that sounded something like that of an entrance song for the opening credits of a kid’s television show about a cowboy. They were all very toy-like and playful tunes, creating a very faint sense of excitement and anticipation that I had never felt in any other city, just to take the metro one stop to the closest beauty store chain. And there wasn’t just one jingle—there were at least three, all with different musical themes ranging from classical and melodic to adventurous and alert. When I pressed a help button when I was stuck after losing my metro card, it first played a computerized version of the “Fur Elise” before I was greeted by someone else on the other side. Funny enough, the same version of the song was played from the
airport golf carts as they zoomed in between people. This little detail, the incorporation of jingles, created such a whimsical experience for such a mundane, regulated thing like public transportation only meant that everything from there could only get cuter.

I was part of a story—a story that the South Korean culture was building around me rather than one I developed myself. There is a strong need to be associated with a group it seems as everyone walks down the street arm in arm with their friends, some of which are wearing the variations of the same outfits or even just the same outfit all together.

It was very interesting to see everyone operated with the same quiet and reserved demeanor on a personal level—extremely polite, poised, and polished which seemed like a disposition that would see cuteness as trivial. Yet, these people, both men and women alike, would flock to stores with oversized plush animals in display windows.

After three days of observing how different brands organized their storefronts and the consistent types of consumers that were drawn to them, I found that there seemed to be archetypes of people that were reflective in the brands that they were most interested in and catered more to specific identities:

**Bubbly School Girl**—enjoys the color pink, living like a princess, and having sweet treats

**Rebellious Cool Girl**—is “Too Cool for School,” enjoys living life in the city and wearing vibrant colors

**Natural Wholesome Girl**—prefers natural ingredients, cares deeply about health, likes being surrounded by plants

These three archetypes neatly align with three of the cute typologies, however it does not show the fluidity between preferences of each archetype based on the actual products. When I
walked into each of the stores that seemed to brand itself directly to one of these archetypes, there would be product lines that differentiated among the four cute dimensions I later outline and explain. This shows that cute is a multifaceted concept that cannot simply be identified in its entirety on the first impression; a brand that is positioned as classically cute can implement elements of both whimsy as well as cheeky in order to create a richer, more unique experience for the consumer. These observations of both the stores and the consumers added depth to the typologies by showing that excitement around purchasing cosmetics is established before the customer even steps in the door of the store. A type of cute identity is created from the storefront, most likely the one that resonates most strongly with a potential consumer in order to get them in the store. From that point on, the store itself is part of the entire experience and the different products allow the consumers to add different layers of cute upon the original one established by the brand.

**Cosmetics Observation**

It wasn’t strange to walk down the street and pass three different spaces for the same store on the same block—each with a slightly different layout and sometimes different product offering. Customization is not a neat add-on to a product, it is part of the specific business model of every single product offered in stores. While in the Innisfree store, a brand focused on natural ingredients and simple, yet distinguishable packaging design, there was a very elaborate wall fixture of different patterns and colors displayed on identically sized circles, but at a closer look they were different packaging to choose from to place their signature product, a BB cream.
compact cushion, which only offered four different options for color. Even though many people could purchase the same makeup color, they are given the opportunity for individuality through packaging. From another perspective, this gives consumers who shop together, like the previously discussed group shoppers, can create a unified identity or bond through picking the same packaging even if they are different shades of the makeup.

Etude house released another line of lipstick however took a twist on the product since it is already a very saturated market, consumers were able to separately buy the lipstick tube as well as the container—offering thousands of combinations that could be completely unique to each person. They even promoted that if you bought more than one, then you could switch the tops of the containers to add even more customizations. Etude House phrased it as “finding the packages best friend.”

The strongest delineations of cuteness, however, wasn’t found in the cosmetic stores—rather in the neighboring general stores that sold everything from pens and stationary to luggage and houseware that all had some sort of cute theme. The consumption of cute was taken to an extremely literal level. Aside from just buying goods, on every corner there was a street vendor or bakery that was selling bungeo-ppang, a fish shaped pastry filled with treats such as red bean paste, bananas, cream custard, or Nutella. There were many various of this concept—an ear of corn, characters of famous cartoon characters, and a variety of little animals. The eating experience became equally about the aesthetics experience of the food as well as the quality of taste.

It is virtually impossible to avoid interaction with cuteness within the Korean culture, something that is extremely foreign to the United States. Their interpretation and demonstration of the grasp they have of cuteness far surpasses anything we have here in the US, which gives
them an edge in this new means of product marketing. To us, it’s new. It’s fresh. It’s novel. To them, it’s the standard of living, with a few new variations now and again.
Chapter 3 – The Dimensions of Cute

What constitutes something as cute? Is there only one type of “cute,” or can two objects both be considered cute and elicit different responses?

The broad concept of cute can be defined as being attractive in an adorable and endearing way (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013; Nenkov & Scott, 2014). There is currently extensive scholarly research available exploring the physical form and personal responses that comes from kindchenschema cuteness, “baby cute”, which is the traditional idea of cute with attributes such as small, pink, and childish. Lorenz (1970) is considered the father of kindchenschema, and identified that the features associated with babies elicit a behavioral response in adults such as increased attention and protective behavior (Nenkov & Scott, 2014; Lorenz 1943). Nenkov and Scott (2014) added to the scholarly research of cute, arguing there is another type of cute that is closer related to “fun” and the act of play, which is known as “whimsical.”

All of the dimensions have their own set of unique physical and relational attributes, as well as relatable levels of maturities that seem to position them for specific consumers. The first is “cheeky,” which is similar to whimsical in the sense of fun and playfulness, however differs due to its unconventional nature and portrayed “tongue in cheek” attitude. The other, “aesthetic,” is the most mature out of the four dimensions and achieves its cuteness through the quality of shape, color, and texture of the packaging.

This creates a total of four types of cuteness: classical, whimsical, cheeky, and aesthetic. The physical attributes are defined as the size, shape, texture, and color. These will suggest how to identify, differentiate, and categorize products among the dimensions. They also suggest a
level of maturity of each of the products found within the dimension: which relates to the age of
the consumer or how closely they identify with the product. The relational attributes are
perceived emotional response, personality and energy of the product, level of involvement of the
consumer, and maturity.

The exploration of these concepts and dimensions are in the context of South Korean
cosmetics and East Asian culture, so there must be a distinction made in regard to the cultural
differences of the idea of cute. For the sake of this research, the term “kawaii” will be used to
broadly categorize the cultural idea of cuteness of East Asian cultures.

**Contextualizing Kawaii**

*Kawaii* is an attributive adjective in modern Japanese language that is often translated to English
as “cute,” yet there are subtle nuances between the words that allow cultural factors to play a
more prominent role (Nittono, Fukushima, Yano, & Moriya, 2012). In order to justify the
broadness of the term and its applications, I sought out to find the original dictionary definition
to identify how it can encapsulate more than just a classical cute perspective.

The definition of kawaii was provided by Nittono (Nittono, 2016) as followed:

**kawai-i (adjective);**

(1) looks miserable and raises sympathy. pitiable. pathetic. Piteous.
(2) attractive. cannot be neglected. cherished. Beloved.
(3) has a sweet nature. Lovely.

(a) (of faces and figures of young women and children)
adorable. attractive.

(b) (like children) innocent. obedient. touching.

(4) (of things and shapes) attractively small. small and beautiful.

(5) trivial. pitiful. (used with slight disdain).

The variation between the definitions are at times contradictory, which Nittono attributes to the history of the word. However, this variation suggests that the concept of kawaii can be segmented into different types of kawaii. The variations within the idea of kawaii are the foundations of the dimensions and how they can be slotted to elicit different consumer responses. The deconstruction of form (small), personality (innocent, obedient, sweet nature), and emotional response (pitiable, sympathy) allows for consumers to create their own interpretation on what they find kawaii. Hellen (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013) references different scholarly work on the meaning of ‘cute’ in Japan suggests that there is likely to exist several more dimensions or sub-dimensions of childlike anthropomorphic products. Yano (2004) makes an archetypical argument of the physical features that structure something as Kawaii, while Allison (2004) concluded that kawaii is linked to more relational, personality, and affective attributes such as sweet, dependent, and gentle—which is also covered by the original definition. The observational research within this thesis argues that the term kawaii represents an umbrella term for the stylistic design and application of products and experiences that come from East Asian cultures, rather than a specific emotional response.

Nittono makes an important distinction from all other literature that associates kawaii directly with baby schema—that the study of kawaii is neither a subdivision of the study of human
reactions to baby stimuli and parental behavior, nor the study of the baby schema effects (Nittono et al., 2012). Instead, he believes that there are factors other than the baby schema that can elicit the same feeling of kawaii. The baby schema is an example of the broader category of stimuli that can induce kawaii feelings (Nittono et al., 2012). These factors, both physical and relational, are the foundation of the typologies, and they all can create a unique feeling that is then linked back to the idea of kawaii due to the original association with the East Asian Culture.

Kawaii has more so aligned with the classical understanding of classical anthropomorphic cute because of its relationship to characters such as Hello Kitty and Pokémon (Nittono, 2016; Nittono et al., 2012). However, character design and portrayal has developed and expanded away from just entertainment and into many different industries within both Japan and South Korea. Japan has even developed characters such as Kumamon, a large black bear with an eerily unblinking stare, as a mascot for the bullet train line in the city of Kumamoto in order to increase tourist traffic and engagement. Kumamon is just one of many other mascots developed as means of a marketing initiative built off kawaii principles. Kawaii has become a means of character development and design ideology in order to create an entry point for consumers to engage with products or organizations on a friendlier level. Though kawaii is a word of Japanese origin, it takes on the general idea and perception of cuteness for East Asian culture. There are a number of collaborations between Sanrio and Korean beauty brands currently available in the market today. South Korea has even developed its own versions of Sanrio, LINE Friends and Kakao Friends, that are featured on everything from phone cases to chapstick. The designs and applications of this ideology continue to evolve as more people become engaged with products.
Nittono developed a model around the concept of Kawaii as an emotion, which will be used as a framework to establish an identifiable pattern in recognizing other dimensions of cuteness that fall within the Kawaii category. I will not be analyzing kawaii as a specific emotional response to a stimulus, as Nittono did, because differences between the relational responses of each type would be missed. The model is as follows:

Figure 1 "Kawaii" as an Emotion
The classical idea of cute is most likely the most readily identifiable to most consumers, regardless of culture or industry, and also has the most extensive history of scholarly research currently available. Starting with Lorenz’s (1943) original exploration of kindchenschema and the “cute” response, an instinctive behavior of protection, classical cute, or as it will sometimes be referred to as classic throughout this thesis, is mean to tap into the “aww” factor of products and make consumers continue to purchase as a means of collecting and protecting.

**Physical Attributes**

*Size*

Because of the relationship classical cuteness has with babies, these products are more often small or miniature versions of larger, or adult, counterparts to denote its baby-like qualities. The size of an object is extremely important because of the need of the consumer to feel as if they are able to tend to or take care of the product, which would not be possible if it was too large to hold or carry. In the context of cosmetics, most products are made to fit to a consumer’s hand, or easily carried around, whether by hand or in a bag, due to the nature and purpose of the product. The details of the packaging tend to be small as well, creating a delicate design structure.
Color

Color poses a strong cultural association to childlike associations—the most familiar being pastels and the association to babies (Nittono et al., 2012). Pale colors, such as pinks, blushes, and lavender are most frequently used, however there are instances of darker colors such as blues and blacks. Objects with softer colors will be perceived as cuter than objects with strong, dark colors because light color is associated with the fact that babies have paler skin and hair than their parents (Cho, 2012; Etcoff, 1999; Frost, Sprangel, Sprigen, & Greenberg, 1988).

The amount of color used is very intentional in order to maintain a level of simplicity, as well as brand alignment. For most products there is not more than one or two colors present on the product. Color for classical cute is not as critical and uniform as size and shape, however it does create a very distinct differentiation when it is present. The brand that reflect classical cute within the South Korea cosmetic industry is Etude House, a princess inspired brand that is built around the color pink. Each of their storefronts are made to resemble a castle or cottage, with a pink roof, pink walls, and pink chandeliers hanging inside. The products sold come in colors...
other than pink; however, the delicate and dainty brand image the brand strives for is reinforced through the shopping experience.

*Texture and Shape*

Classic cute has evolved over time as a derivative of childlike anthropomorphism and Kindchenschema. Anthropomorphism is considered as the action of ‘attributing human-like physical features to nonhumans, such as a face or hands’, and childlike anthropomorphism is specifically the application of childlike physical features (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013; Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010). In many cases, animals are anthropomorphized—given the ability to walk upright and wear clothes, however, anthropomorphism is not restricted to just animals; it can also include things such as flowers, foods, and general inanimate objects. The shape of something that would be considered classically cute is almost as important as the size because it establishes the pertinent association to youth and babies.
Kindchenschema is characterized by the familiar features of a baby include roundness of a baby’s head, cheeks, and big eyes and we are able to inherently identify those traits and associate the features with cuteness (Golle, Lisibach, Mast, Lobmaier, & Masataka, 2013). These characteristics tend to be grossly over-exaggerated in cute products. A great example is Hello Kitty, the pinnacle of classic cute and anthropomorphic to come out of Asian culture that is still relevant today. Hello Kitty’s oversized head and squat, rounded body resembles that of a toddler, suggesting a level of approachability. It has been found that humans prefer rounded objects in comparison to more angular ones because sharp transitions in contour has the potential to convey a sense of threat, triggering a negative bias (Bar & Neta, 2006). Bar (2006) conducted an experiment using everyday products, fonts, and patterns to identify whether angular or rounded products are more visually preferred and found that compared to controlled and angular objects, rounded objects were significantly more preferred overall. They attribute this to the negative biases towards more conventional angled objects such as knives and semantic meanings, which then bleeds over to objects that are structurally similar, yet not functionally.
While proportionally baby-like features were over-exaggerated, the overall depictions of characters are extremely simplified. Only the bare minimum of illustration is used in order to get the point across to the consumer—simple shapes and lines. The Korean cosmetic brand TolyMoly incorporates this directly into their packaging—many of their hand creams and mask jars are designed to look like the description of the product. They have a product line of sleeping masks that are in jars that resemble little animals—one being a panda and the other a pig. The combination of anthropomorphism and soft, rounded features makes the product more approachable and non-threatening, or friendly. The designs of these products tend to be more simple, rather than complex and intricate.

**Relational Attributes**

**Emotional Response**

Fournier (1998) suggests that the consumers’ acceptance of anthropomorphism of brands and products suggests a willingness to entertain them as vital members of the relationship dyad. Generally, childlike and anthropomorphic products evoke overall positive feelings—such as happiness and enjoyment (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013). Given the previous physical description
of attributes that make up a classical cute design and its close association with babies, it can be assumed that these objects create a warm feeling of connection on behalf of the consumer. Konrad Lorenz (1943) explained that Kindchenshema works as a trigger for the instinctive behavior of caregiving, such as holding a child (Golle et al., 2013). Exposure to classical cute elicits a certain type of response from consumers that embodies acts of care, and the phenomenological and motivational correlates of care, demonstrating the effects it has on cognitive processes and behaviors (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). Consumers feel innately inclined to interact with these products because they are viewed as non-threatening and potentially friendly.

Overall, classical cuteness triggers protective, caretaking, attentive, and careful behavior—suggesting that exposure to these products in the marketplace would lead to less indulgent behavior (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). Since cosmetic products do not fall under the category of products that need to be tended to, but rather products meant to serve a purpose and address a need of the consumer, the intention of the emotional response must align with the needs of the brand. This warm and caring feeling can act as a means of disarming consumers, making them feel more inclined to interact with the products, or even enter classical cute stores, without feeling intimidated by potential unfamiliarity.
**Personality and Energy**

Many of the products that fall within the parameters of the physical attributes of classical cute share a very similar disposition. The products that show characters or faces exude a simple, calm demeanor that almost mirrors the expressionless face of a child—which suggests a high level of innocence, naivety, and immaturity. The lack of expression suggests a demeanor of sweetness and simplicity. Hellén (2013) found that people closely relate classic cute with traits such as friendly, sweet, adorable, cheerful, pleasing, and likeable. The combination of size, color, and shape of the products reflects the simple nature of the product, which builds upon the brand personality. The expressions and character structure of the anthropomorphized products do not suggest a deeper level of thought or character development—they are only as much as they appear to be. For these products, the personality does not tend to change or evolve based on context of the product. Most are shown in the same pose, doing the same activity, and wearing a similar outfit. Each time the consumer interacts with the product, they find it just as it was before, creating stability and an expectation of consistency within the relationship and the functionality of the product.

**Level of Involvement**

There is a high level of emotional involvement on the behalf of the consumer with classical cute products. The nature of anthropomorphism fosters consumer-brand relationships, strengthening
the bond created by the consumer, making it more unlikely that they would replace the product with another since it is perceived as being related to a living thing (Aaker, 1997; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Fournier, 1998). A focus on childlike anthropomorphic product design makes the functionality of a product much less important to a consumer as compared to if the product was not anthropomorphized. Once a product is anthropomorphized, it changes the overall emotional quality of the consumers’ experience and relationship with the product, prompting strong emotional ties.

**Maturity**

Among the four different types of cute, classical is the oldest one in terms of research, however, it would be considered and identified as the youngest maturity level due to the associations with babies. As shown through the explanation of personality and energy, these products and characters are not highly developed or complex, which parallels that of a child’s.

Though Sanrio is almost 60 years old, they have not strayed away from their simple character development and still maintains a global presence, as well as a cult-like following from people of all ages. Etude House develops lines of products for women over the age of 18, including lines for anti-aging and wrinkle prevention, however panders to the commonplace childhood desire to grow up and be like a princess.
Whimsical

Whimsical is characterized by its strong interactive element with customers. These products are perceived as fun and novel, which makes them “cute”, and exciting to use and have rather than just own and look at. The focus is functionality, and the hook is the cuteness. Whimsical cuteness has been largely overlooked in marketing and consumer behavior, and just recently was differentiated from classical cuteness triggered a different underlying process and response (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). Whimsical cute does appear within the context of Korean cosmetic design as well, which creates a novel way of making the purchase and use of products more fun.

Physical Attributes

Size

Whimsical cuteness has a small range of potential sizes. In order to experience something that is whimsically cute, the consumer needs to physically engage with the product, not just observe it. This is due to its association with the act of play, so in order to achieve a level of play the product must be able to be held or gripped. In the experiments conducted by Nenkov and Smith (2014) to measure the effects of whimsically cute objects, they used an ice cream scooper, a stapler, a gift card, and a cookie. The size of an intended whimsically cute product is important because it is a prerequisite to interaction.
The color scheme around whimsical cuteness does not follow particular patterns, like those of classical and cheeky cute. A notable characteristic for whimsical cute products is the extensive incorporation of color. There is hardly any use of the colors white, black, grey, or anything that is considered a neutral or earth tone hue. The use of color solidifies the humorous and fun nature of the product, as it acts as a communicator of emotion. The colors used tend to be bright, and at times contrasting in order to create a more visually pleasing experience for the consumer. Nenkov and Smith (2014) describe a “tropical dress with pink flamingos” as whimsically cute, which suggests that bright colors, such as yellows, pinks, oranges, and reds, creates a perception of fun. The hue of the color does not seem as important as the vibrancy and saturation—any color or combination of colors can be used to depict whimsical cuteness as long as it is vibrant and bright. Dark colors and muted colors, such as black or pastels, don’t make many appearances within whimsical cute products. This distinction can be due to the association to positive emotions and experiences are often depicted in terms of lightness (rather than darkness), so lightness is metaphorically linked to good (“seeing the light”) rather than bad (“in the dark”) (Elliot, 2015).
Since there is high overlap on what could be considered visually whimsical versus visually cheeky in the cosmetic industry, this thesis will be excluding the use of anime and cartoon characters from the whimsical category because the use of those characters in packaging design will be defined in its own dimension. Whimsical cute is focused more around inanimate objects, rather than something that has been anthropomorphized or an animated character. Some of the most popular objects used are different types of food (fruits, fast foods, and drinks) or non-anthropomorphized animals. The use of both fruit and animals on the packaging of the products is meant to expand upon the known features and benefits of the shown fruit or animal. The health benefits of fruits are universally understood, and the packaging creates a parallel between the benefits associated with the fruit to the benefits and efficacy of the product. It also plays on the interpretation of consumption. Food is literally consumed through the process of eating, which for most can be considered an enjoyable and fun activity.

The use of animals has a different strategy; the product becomes more of a temporary toy in addition to the cosmetic benefits. There are many Korean brands that sell face masks, that look
like animals once they are placed on the face. Some animals include pandas, tigers, seals, dragons, raccoons, dogs, pigs, and monkeys. This development of product design has a strong association to the act of play since it is meant to make the user look like the animal of their choice, making it into a fun activity. SNP, a Korean face mask brand, has built its popularity on this product design concept and since its introduction, many other brands have followed in its strategy.

TonyMoly, a Korean beauty brand that is quickly gaining popularity in the United States, is the best example of how whimsical cute is integrated into product design. Many of their products have packaging that describes the scent of the product. For example, they sell hand creams and lip glosses that smell like peaches, blueberries, and apples and the packaging for those product will be a peach, blueberry or apple. There are also products that look like other
fruits, latte mugs, eggs, and even mayonnaise bottles—all of which address a specific beauty concerns. These objects are familiar to most people, which simplifies the product in the eyes of the consumer, making them more willing to engage.

**Relational Attributes**

*Emotional Response*

The idea of whimsical cute has been built off the idea of whimsy and fun, and research has found that exposure to whimsically cute products leads consumers to mirror the whimsical nature of the products (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). The response after being exposed and interactive with whimsically cute products is meant to prime consumers to be more indulgent with their products, leading to more self-rewarding tendencies. This is defined by Nenkov and Scott (2014) as the focus on desirable outcomes and rewarding experiences. This suggests that there is a positive emotional response, however that response may have a weak staying power and may not be able to continue once interaction with the product has stopped. An important distinction from classical is that research also found that whimsical cute does not create the same feeling of warmth and protection, which suggested that consumers to not create as strong of a bond or relationship to their whimsical products (Fournier, 1998; Nenkov & Scott, 2014).
Personality and Energy

Whimsical is defined as “characterized by deviation from the ordinary as if determined by mere caprice; fantastic, fanciful; freakish, odd, comical” ([http://oxforddictionaries.com](http://oxforddictionaries.com)). Since most of the products under the whimsical dimension are very objective and don’t change with context, the personality for these products is one dimensional and straightforward. The concept of the idea behind the product is what makes it interesting and fun from the perspective of the consumer. The combination of the form and the color scheme of whimsical cute products is what creates its excitable and bright energy. Aaker (1997) describes a brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand,” however due to the lack of intention of whimsical cute aside from fun and play, the personality associations are limited. Since the main portrayal of whimsical cuteness is through fruits, there is not an expression present since the fruits don’t have faces, which limits the ability to develop a dimensional personality.

Level of Involvement

Whimsical cuteness is particularly intended for adults, and the representation of fun increases the consumers’ focus on self-reward, which then leads to indulgent consumption choice (Nenkov & Scott, 2014). In the context of cosmetics, this can be interpreted as purchasing more products that share a similar form or theme, or an increase in product usages after purchase. Both of these options would lead to more consumption of the product. It can be argued that whimsical cute does not have as strong as emotional involvement with consumers as other types of cute because it does not create a deep dialogue with the consumer. Consumers would choose a product that is
whimsically cute because they find it fun and enjoyable, not as something that is reflective of their level of commitment.

*Maturity*

The strong association with playfulness and fun, suggests an adolescent level of maturity that does not discriminate against the potential consumer. It would not be strange for an adult to purchase or use these products because it would create a sense of nostalgia, or association with personal preference of how one prefers to play and have fun. The use of color and form does not line up with a specific gender or age range, making whimsical cute overall a very interactive and inclusive dimension.
Cheeky

Cheeky cute is a close relative to classical cute, comparatively almost like a sibling, but with more complex and engaging elements. Products and objects that would be considered cheeky cute are more likely than not to reference an already established character--such as an anime or movie character. The complexity comes from the previously established personality of that character, and then how the brand incorporates with their products. As a result, many products that fall within the cheeky category are licensed deals or collaborations between the two brands. For example, Gudetama--an angsty egg character developed by Sanrio, was featured extensively in a collection for Holika Holika. The character is the product that is ultimately being sold.

Physical Attributes

Size

Size is specifically used to establish a level of intensity in regards to cheeky cute. The larger something is, the more pronounced and dramatic the action or depiction is meant to be. There does not seem to be a general minimum or maximum size directly associated with cheeky cuteness. For general merchandise, goods that are cheeky can range from being a keychain to a ten-foot statue. Kumamon, previously explained as one of Japan’s many tourist mascots, has been expanded
across any type of product. There are phone cases to make your phone look like Kumamon, backpacks in the shape of Kumamon, and even adult sized hooded onesies that allow someone to become Kumamon.

In the context of cosmetics, there is only so much room on the packaging, and the product surface area is only so large, that it comes down to how much of the product emphasizes the character. The size can be seen as representative of the level of association the user has with the product—the greater the size, the higher the involvement, commitment, or affiliation. Size can also refer to repeated use of a character or product within a single context. There are some products that show a character in multiple poses, showing character evolution, printed all over a product’s surface. This can be either on one product or across an entire line of products, encouraging devote customers to buy them all. LINE friends licensed its brand to Missha, a popular cosmetic brand, to use on their products for an exclusive line of makeup and skincare products. Most words were removed from the packaging, which was changed to be the same color as the featured character—either Brown the bear or Sally the duck—and only showed the character’s face, making it look as if you were dispensing your product directly out of the character. Every product featured the same face whether it was lip gloss, eyeliner, soap, or eyeshadow—using only the character as descriptors. Missha also obtained the licensing rights to use Minions, characters made famous by Pixar’s movies Despicable Me and Minions, to use on a limited edition collection. In this collection they
changed the expression of the characters, but kept the same size composition and strategy as the LINE collection.

**Color**

Similar to classical cute, the color scheme for cheeky is quiet simple, however it plays a much larger role in the characters’ personalities. Cheeky cute consists of two main color groups: primaries and neutrals. Primary colors include blue, red, and yellow, while neutrals include black, white, and brown. All characters are outlined with a thick black line, which has been found to make objects seem cuter (Cho, 2012). Primary colors are the foundation of all colors, meaning that you cannot mix two colors with each other to create a primary color. Neutral colors are associated with natural and fundamental characteristics. The use of a combination of these
Color categories suggest that these characters are meant to be seen as very basic, and also universal.

![Figure 17-Line Friends Characters](image)

Color is marginally important when considering cheeky cute because the designation of color is really meant to draw more attention to the characters’ personalities. No shading is used on these characters which creates a flat image that lacks depth—an extremely simple character form. It’s not important of who they are, but what they are doing and what they stand for. Characters that are mostly black and white often have a mark of distinction that is of a primary color. The personality constructed for these characters inversely mirror the complexity of their color composition.

These color schemes are apparent in both LINE Friends and Kakao Friends characters. Kakao friends consist of eight childlike anthropomorphized animals and LINE Friends originally was made up of seven anthropomorphized characters, a combination of animals and objects. Of the original characters, all follow mentioned color composition—an explanation of the paired color composition and character personality will be covered in the personality and energy section.
Texture and Shape

It has already been established that humans prefer curved objects, and cheeky cute products follow a similar childlike anthropomorphic structure as classical cute (Bar & Neta, 2006). Cheeky cute design deals more with the character design rather than the packaging of the actual product. Cheeky cuteness brings together simple shapes, normally rounded or oblong, apparent in the body, head, and eye of each character. The structure of the cheeky characters shares the same childlike anthropomorphic features of those in the classical cute dimension. The shapes are meant to allows for expression and personality to be more easily by providing a simple canvas.
**Relational Attributes**

*Emotional Response*

The response when encountering cheeky can at times be jarring. There is an assumption at first due to the similarity of form to classical cute that the characters will create that same feeling of warmth and compassion, which occurs until the context of the character changes. Similar to whimsical due to the closeness in age, cheeky cute has a strong element of “fun”, which conveys a strong sense of happiness. Fun has a strong association to the “play,” and play in essentials is the act of not being boring or serious—which encourages approach from individuals and a carefree attitude (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). The bond and preference that is created through the childlike anthropomorphic design is then supplemented by the perceived humor, which creates a dialogue between product and consumer (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003; Doyle, 1998; Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013).

Cheeky cuteness is meant to catch the viewer by surprise, since the character and placement tends to be unpredictable and out of place. Since most of the characters used in this form of product design are well established personalities, the brands are able to build upon the established associations and create news means of involvement. Holika Holika, a South Korea
A cosmetics brand focused on eye-catching, uses the Sanrio character Gudetama for the packaging and actually product design. The character structure of Gudetama is extremely simple, he is simply the yolk of an egg—with a face, arms, and legs. The packaging is meant to look solely like the product, making it look more like a toy than a beauty product. They even sell face masks, extremely popular in South Korea, that makes your entire face look like the anxious egg. This level of engagement, as a toy and as a beauty product, creates a strong positive emotional response (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003).
Personality and Energy

Cheeky cuteness is the most expressive and dynamic of the dimensions. Characters that fall under the cheeky dimension are portrayed on emotional extremes—one character is depicted as completely void of expression—almost comically emotionless—while others that are closely associated with them will be hyper-animated. Classical cute characters may be shown with a slight smile, while cheeky cute characters are shown with their mouth wide open in a smile and their eyes twinkling with stars, creating a much more engaging and in-depth personality. Common expressions seen among cheeky cute characters include elation, confusion, indifference, angst, infatuation, rage, and exhaustion.

Where classical cuteness is built off of consistent naivety, sweetness, and innocence, cheeky cute adds a layer of mischief on top of those traits. Cheeky cute characters are normally in the state of action—they are portrayed as doing something—whether peeking over a ledge or actively moving and interacting. This state of action, or “play,” builds an association to fun and amusement, which in turn engages the consumer in the storyline (Demirbilek & Sener, 2003). One potential purpose for creating an air of mischief is to keep the consumer engaged in wondering what the character may do next. Since there are characters that are portrayed with a
range of expressions, it allows for consumers to choose their preference in relation to how they personally identify themselves.

There seemed to be a relationship between how much color is present on the character, with how expressive that character is portrayed. Character that are mainly black and white seem to have more emotional variation than those that are completely colored in—simple personalities have a

Figure 23-Kakao Friends Emotional Variation
more complex form, while complex personalities have a simpler form. This variation is apparent in both the LINE Friends, as well as Kakao Friends. Among the LINE Friends characters, Brown is a fully colored in brown bear, with a perpetually blank expression, while one of his close friends, Kony, an all-white rabbit, is usually portrayed with an open mouth smile and expressive eyebrows. The pattern holds with Kakao friends with Apeach, a love-struck anthropomorphized peach, with a white body and Ryan, an ever-quizzical teddy bear.

The character as a whole, in form and personality, is meant to strike a very strong balance. The balance is also achieved across an entire brand and character line. This balance creates versatility among the characters, which increases availability of consumer choice. The element of cheeky comes out of how they all interact together, individually some may be cheeky and some may be closer to classical, but their relationship makes them all cheeky.

*Level of Involvement*

Cheeky cute allows the consumer to decide how involved they want to be with the product and character. As with classical cute, the use of anthropomorphism with cheeky cute characters creates a deeper bond between consumer and product (Aaker, 1997; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Fournier, 1998). The relationship positioned for these products are built on having fun, rather than being protective like classical. These products are meant to be light-hearted and playful, but
makes a statement in the sense that there shouldn’t be a natural connection between the character and what it is representing—the fact that it is a cartoon or cosmetic good it is positioned similarly to a toy. Timpano (2012) found that the practice of anthropomorphism, and the subsequent bonds made from it, are linked to purchasing and acquiring behaviors. Each different emotion depicted on a character is like a derivative of that character prompts more engagement, which could lead to more intense acquiring habits.

**Maturity**

Cheeky cute is a blend of both classical and whimsical cute and reflects an adolescent level of maturity—suggested by the anthropomorphism, emotional fluctuations, and strong drive to play and be playful. Cheeky is definitely older than classical, but only slightly more mature than whimsical because of the versatility of emotion. The representation of emotional variation can also be reflection of that of a child when they are going though significant emotional change when they go through puberty. There also is not a stronger gender alignment with cheeky cute. While whimsical, classical, and even aesthetic align with more feminine characteristics, cheeky is neither overtly feminine or masculine.
Aesthetic

It is only natural that there would be a strong relationship between the beauty industry and the concept of aesthetics. The ideology of the cosmetics industry is to provide products as a means to attaining a level of beauty desired by the consumer. The aesthetic cute dimension expands this desire for beauty to also include the way the packaging looks to match the preferences of the consumer. Aesthetic cute is an abstract interpretation of the types of cute previously discussed.

The most mature and artistic of the types, Aesthetic focuses exclusively on the natural and holistic associations with the product and develops the packaging to enhance that message. Aesthetic cute most closely resembles product design that is apparent in western cultures. There are no associations to characters or anthropomorphism, which could be due to the higher quality and luxury positioning of the products that fall under this category. As stated earlier hanbang is the term used to describe traditional medicine and wellness in Korea and it is characterized by herbal healing and finding balance (Kim et al., 2002). For aesthetic products there is an effort to create balance between clarity of benefits, simplicity of use, and intricacy of formulation, which is then articulated through the packaging. There are two types of aesthetic cute: one that takes a minimalist approach, and another that luxurious, royal approach.

They are both considered aesthetic because it asks the customer to judge based not on brand association and personality, but rather the quality and tradition of using natural ingredients as a means of remedy and treatment.
Physical Attributes

Size

After extensive observation online, in stores, and in Seoul, size does not seem to be a defining characteristic in regards to aesthetic cute because its distinction is rooted in intricacy of design. The best example of a well-seasoned aesthetic cute design is that of the tea set. In Seoul, there are a number of tea therapy shops and apothecaries that had unique tea pots and cups that are derivatives of darye, the traditional form of tea ceremony practices in Korea. Similar to other East Asian cultures, the Korean darye translate to etiquette for tea and is characterized by the enjoyment of tea in a casually formal setting. The similarity of packaging design to the ceremonial tea cups takes on this combination of formality and casualness, which then helps establish the poise of these products.

Color

Simplicity is key when it comes to minimalist aesthetic cute. Many, if not all, products will feature the color white. By using the color white, a clean background is created to contrasts the imagery of the product. The imagery is normally made up of one specific color and takes up the majority of space on the packaging. This dichotomy of color creates a uniform and fresh design.
as to not distract from the intention of the imagery or type on the product. The use of color is only meant to enhance the perception of quality of the product. If there is not an image on the packaging, then the color is used to supplement the type by reflecting the intention of the words through the color scheme. For example, Neogen, a Korean brand based in dermatology, has a line of exfoliating pads that come in green tea, lemon, and wine, and their respective packaging colors are green, yellow, and purple.

However, the luxury form of aesthetic cute takes a distinctly different approach. The practice of *hanbang* make use of many medicinal herbs and flowers in order to treat illness and create physical harmony, so many colors that are present in aesthetic cute reflect those natural quality, such as greens and pinks, as well as other earthy tones (Kim et al., 2002). The products that are on the highest price point are packaged in iridescent silver, gold, and pearl, which have strong associations to luxury. This suggests that the quality and value of what is actually stored within the containers is extremely high since each of these colors are meant to represent wealth and prestige.


**Texture and Shape**

The attention to detail are much clearer and intentional in aesthetic cute compared to the other dimensions. The patterns and shapes used for aesthetic cute products are minimalist, geometric, and follow simple repetitive pattern. Most often the packaging features high resolution images of the main ingredient of the product, popular ones being green tea, honey, caviar, ginseng, and a wide range of flowers. This depiction of the ingredients in their natural state creates an ethos around the product, implying that it is only made of the best ingredients and that it is critical for the consumer to see that before experiencing the product. Shapes are not often used on packaging, but when it is they are usually circles, which commutates a holistic intention, and as previously discussed people visually prefer rounded shapes to ones with hard angles (Bar & Neta, 2006). Overall, the packaging on minimalist aesthetic products emphasizes the quality and efficacy of the product.

![Figure 30--History of Whoo Lipstick](image)

The more expensive and traditional products resemble old pottery jars, usually they are wide and squat or oblong shaped. The lids on the jars are engraved with designs that are similar to the patterns found painted on the ceilings in the historic Korean palaces, such as Gyeongbokgung. These palaces were home to the royal families from the 12th to 17th century, and hold great historic sentiment and sovereignty. These products also incorporate other elements of traditional Korean designer including calligraphy brushstrokes and
Hangul, the Korean primary character writing system, preserving the history and culture of South Korea within the product.

**Relational Attributes**

**Emotional Response**

The use of and association to natural products for healing is meant to make the consumer become more aware of their health when they come in contact with these products. The products use terms such as soothing, anti-aging, and nourishing in order to establish the idea of holistic benefits with calming results. Consumers would perceive these products as something that is inherently good for them and part of a healthy and wholesome lifestyle. Some of the more eccentric ingredients that are not normally expected to have cosmetic benefits, such as horse fat and donkey milk, can potentially be intriguing to some consumers and off-putting to others. According to Mintel, since December 2016 there has been an increased interest from younger consumers in these exotic natural ingredients and benefit from the “food-to-face” trend, which is the fusion of food ingredients in skincare products (Nanninga, 2016). The general energy and design of the product would elicit a positive or neutral emotional response of a low intensity that is focused around making consumers more conscious about the state of their health.
**Personality and Energy**

Aesthetic cute does not exude an exorbitant personality like those of the other cute dimensions because it lacks a character or figure to deliver and develop one. What the consumer sees on the product is what the consumer should expect because the packaging establishes the stated ability and quality of the products in both cases of aesthetic cute. Aesthetic is defined as “of or relating to perceptions by the senses” and “of or relating to the perception, appreciation, or criticism of that which is beautiful” ([http://oxforddictionaries.com](http://oxforddictionaries.com)). Since none of the design is anthropomorphic or complicated, the beauty that comes from the simplicity creates a very elegant and sophisticated energy associated with the products. The size of the detailing portrays a level of delicacy, the color scheme makes it formal while quiet, and the repetitiveness of the shapes used makes is steady and measured. These products encapsulate the richness and formality of Korean culture, by preserving traditional art forms and packaging it to consumers as a luxury experience.

**Level of Involvement**

Observing something that is aesthetically cute is similar to the process of observing and experiencing a piece of art. It follows the structure of a satisfaction model where the consumer is first intrigued with the visual representation of the product and the creativity behind the development, in the case of Korean cosmetics this is the intricacy and clarity of design on the packaging. From that point, if the consumer enjoys what the product represents and the
philosophy behind the traditional medicinal healing rituals they will most likely purchase it, otherwise they wouldn’t be willing to pay the price premium these products normally have. Aesthetic cute is not meant to represent the identity of the customer, but rather fulfill a certain lifestyle and quality desired. Overall, the focus is on how the customer feels after the use rather than before, which is directly opposite than the other three dimensions.

*Maturity*

Aesthetic cute is almost ageless, a timeless interpretation of history, culture, and beauty. However, these qualities definitely position the dimension to be for older consumers, or those who identify with being mature, because there is no direct association to youthful culture, but instead the goal of attaining a more youthful appearance and healthy lifestyle. Young people are generally not as concerned about their health, so it wouldn’t be a primary focus for them when in search for products. The appeal of these products is the richness of experience associated with them, and there needs to be a level of understanding on the part of the consumer for them to be able to appreciate the entire concept of the product, which is more likely to occur in older and more mature consumers.
Perceptual Maps

Based on my ethnography and analysis of the cosmetics industry, it became evident that cute is a complex concept sub-categorized by several attributes. These perceptual maps are meant to show how the four dimensions compare to each other on two attributes. The dimensions are plotted for maturity versus color, maturity versus personality, color versus personality, and maturity versus shape. There are perceptual maps when dimensions are plotted twice because of the previously discussed variability of that attribute. In all of the perceptual maps the circle represents Classical, the pentagon represents Whimsical, the triangle represents Cheeky, and square represents Aesthetic.
Maturity vs Color

This perceptual map shows that a lot or not much color does not fall within the realm of cuteness, regardless of maturity. Products that fall outside of this range, for example mature and muted, creates an underwhelming palette that no longer embodies any cute intentions of applications—stripping the intended enjoyment out of that product.

Figure 31--Color vs Maturity Perceptual Map
Whimsical is plotted twice on this perceptual map since there are two distinct personality representations within the dimension. It is apparent that there is an absence of cute that is both very youthful with little expression, as well as very youthful and highly expressive. This could be due to the fact that creating such a distinct personality for a youthful product will make it seem more mature and detract from its simple baby-like qualities. On the other extreme, cute does not fill the area of mature and expressive personalities, which may be because creating too
much personality within mature products would undermine the steady quietness that draws the consumer to the product in the first place.
Whimsical is plotted twice again because of the distinction of personality representation within the dimension. It is interesting that there is a dimension that lies within each extreme of the perceptual map except expressive and bright. Products or characters with this combination of color and personality would align with an entirely different dimensional category, such as cool or zany because of the intense physical and relational expression. This perceptual map shows that cuteness must create a parallel between how it looks and how it is perceived.
Aesthetic is plotted twice due to the two different types of aesthetic cute—minimalist and luxury. The map shows that cute cannot exist in an oversimplified form. There needs to be a level of complexity, which can be identified through a character or series of shapes, in order to deliver the idea that the subject matter is cute, regardless of the dimension.
By evaluating current scholarly work around cuteness and conducting ethnographic research in Seoul, South Korea, I was able to identify four distinct types of cuteness that are characterized by a unique set of physical attributes that elicit different relational responses in consumers. This research shows that cute is not a simple concept, and has the potential to become more versatile by simply manipulating physical characteristics such as color, shape, texture, and size. Typically, cute has been over-generalized, only encompassing the attributes identified as classically cute, which underestimates the reach and capacity of the term. Cute no longer just means small, pink, and adorable—it can now be represented as oversized, colorful, and extremely expressive. Within some of the perceptual maps some of the dimensions were split, which begs the question on whether those should be their own dimensions as well.

This deconstruction of cuteness has the capability to be influential outside of the realm of beauty. As observed through my ethnographic observations, cute is a format for consumption in many different forms, including the literal act of consuming foods. The food industry is similar to the cosmetic industry in the sense that there are many products that are offering similar benefits that can potentially confuse and overwhelm customer. Cereal is a product that uses its packaging to signal to consumers who the target consumer is for the product. A simplified application of the dimensions is used, however, more concise designs could increase product involvement and change emotional responses to lead to higher consumption. Marketers can use this information to understand how to tailor a narrative around their products in order to elicit a certain outcome from the consumer by tapping into innate human responses triggered by specific visual stimulus. These concepts and dimensions can be applied to logo design, product design,
packaging design, and even website design. Understanding where a brand or product aligns with one of the dimensions provides vision on how it can evolve or morph into one of the others. For example, if a cosmetic brand has products that feature anthropomorphized animals and pale pinks wants to develop a line that still reflects the brands core identity, but appeals to a more mature audience, it could maintain the simplicity and color of the design, focus on the ingredients, and remove the animals in order to make it more aesthetic.

Cute in the United States is not as pervasive in the culture as it is in others, however there are ways it can matriculate through established channels. Apple products and the overall brand align with the aesthetic cute dimension due to its minimalist design, and would not be considered conventionally cute. However, emojis—the small digital icons used through electronic communication—reflect all three of the remaining dimensions and are used extensively through texting and social media suggesting that cute is becoming more normalized globally.

Cute has the potential to quietly become a powerful force in how consumers engage with their products, and with others. This thesis revealed that cute has a social agenda that is rooted in interaction. In order for it to come to full fruition, it is reliant on the marketer to make it easier to consume, and an unyielding hunger for it from the consumer.


Academic Vita

ASIA GRANT

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University | The Schreyer Honors College University Park, PA
Smeal College of Business, Bachelor of Science in Marketing Class of 2017
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milan, Italy
Fashion and Luxury Business Management Fall 2015

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Helicase, LLC Washington, DC
Summer Associate June – August 2016
 Independently designed and implemented company rebranding strategy encompassing web content writing, website mockup, and logo design
 Launched Google Analytics and SEO fundamentals initiatives to track website performance and viewer engagement
 Streamlined employee research efficiency through individualized Google Alerts

The Dannon Company White Plains, NY
Commercialization Intern May – July 2015
 Constructed master planning pivot table used by cross functional teams to maximize project timing efficiency and savings
 Independently developed and managed eight new product innovations to be released in 2016
 Generated synchronized project timelines across multiple business lines to improve efficiency resulting in a cost savings of at least $1 million

Embry Cosmetics LLC West Chester, PA
Founder January 2014 – January 2015
 Self-funded an artisanal cosmetics company focused on creating a suite of products ranging from facial toner to hand soap
 Researched industry best practices to discover and exploit new trends
 Collaborated with vendors across the supply chain to coordinate product development

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

START Diversity Enhancement Committee University Park, PA
Head Corporate Representative November 2013 – Present
 Liaised with and created schedules for ten corporate representatives from Fortune 500 companies
 Organized and executed a day-long conference of 350 students and faculty members

Presidential Leadership Academy University Park, PA
Member March 2014 – Present
 Selected as one of thirty students from the entire freshman class for a three-year Academy experience focusing on the development of leadership and critical thinking
 Engaged in weekly discussions with President Eric J. Barron and Dean Christian Brady about the role of ethics and societal challenges

ACHIEVEMENTS & SKILLS

 Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholar
 Penn State Bunton-Waller Fellowship Award Recipient
 Skills and Interests: JavaScript (basic), Python (basic), Microsoft Excel (Intermediate), Color Theory