CREATING WITH PURPOSE

FOCUS, FLOW, AND DEEP WORK IN K-BEAUTY BRANDING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Have you ever encountered a brand like TirTir, COSRX, or Laneige? Or even heard the term "glass skin," which has become a global beauty phenomenon?

If so, you're likely familiar with the popular sensation of Korean beauty, also known as K-Beauty. This industry's massive success thrives not only in international markets but also domestically. However, even with this success, companies still face fierce competition from countless beauty clinics, skincare brands, and cosmetic lines all competing for consumer attention.

In this extremely competitive environment, a new generation with constantly shortening attention spans has dramatically reshaped the industry. This has created a relentless demand for a constant stream of content, including both long-form and short-form, that is unique, engaging, and deeply resonates with its audience. This high-pressure, rapid-fire content cycle often leads to a decline in originality and creates widespread burnout among creative teams.

This white paper argues that a more effective and sustainable method for creating innovative content and achieving brand consistency can be found by strategically using three core principles: focus, flow, and deep work. By integrating these three elements, companies can move beyond the repetitive cycle of trend-chasing content and inspire their teams to produce more original, meaningful, and globally resonant material. The following sections will break down the problem, explore these principles, and propose practical methods for implementation.

THE PROBLEM

"...nearly 50% of users surveyed by TikTok said that videos longer than a minute long were stressful"

— **Jui Zaveri**

In today's modern age, social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have replaced traditional media as the main stage for consumer attention. This shift has made cable television advertising feel almost irrelevant, especially with newer generations consuming content that is rapid, interactive, and ad-free, delivered with the speed of a finger swipe.

Features like Instagram Reels, TikTok trends, and YouTube Shorts have accelerated this shift, creating a culture of trends where an idea is popular one moment and gone the next, very similar to the rise and fall of fast fashion. In this environment, companies are pressured to churn out constant content, often with speed prioritized over substance.

The challenge is compounded by shrinking attention spans. A TikTok experiment I conducted found that only 30% of users finished watching an eight-second test clip, with the average watch time at just 5.6 seconds. This aligns with **wider studies** showing that Gen Z and younger millennials tend to multi-task heavily online, making it increasingly difficult for content to hold attention.

For K-beauty, this challenge is especially critical. This is an industry built on storytelling, aesthetics, and consumer trust. From the feeling of a skincare routine to the cultural phenomenon of "glass skin," K-beauty thrives when its stories feel authentic. However, the overwhelming need for speed often strips this content of its uniqueness. Instead, brands begin to mirror one another with identical product swatch videos, overused trending audios, and recycled short-form templates.

THE PROBLEM
(CONT.)

"(48%) of Gen Z respondents agreeing that they often feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of time they spend engaging with screens"

— Mike O'Connor

Some brands, like **TirTir** and **Espoir**, have made noticeable strides toward inclusivity, offering expanded shade ranges for darker skin tones and marketing toward global audiences. But even these efforts risk being drowned out by the flood of sameness when they are presented in similar formats. In a society of oversaturated content, even groundbreaking steps toward inclusivity or product innovation can feel invisible without fresh, memorable storytelling.

The burden ultimately falls on creatives, such as designers, editors, and marketers, who face unrealistic expectations to deliver constant output. As deadlines pile up, burnout becomes inevitable, leading to rushed content that lacks depth. This cycle not only drains the talent pool but also prevents brands from achieving the long-term global recognition they seek. Additionally, audiences may also become tired from content without depth, already adding to today current technology fatigue.

A LOOK INTO
FOCUS, FLOW, AND DEEP WORK

So how do we break the cycle? The answer lies in focus, flow, and deep work, three psychological and productivity principles that, when applied properly, can transform creative processes in the beauty industry.

FOCUS

At its core, focus is the ability to direct attention toward a single task or goal without distraction. In creative environments, this might mean blocking off ninety uninterrupted minutes to brainstorm a campaign or design new graphics. As Johann Hari explains in **Stolen Focus**, distractions such as email notifications, messaging platforms, or even constant Slack pings chip away at creativity. By deliberately cultivating focus, employees reclaim the ability to think deeply and generate unique ideas instead of regurgitating trends.

FLOW

"The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile,"
— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

This is flow: a mental state where individuals are so immersed in a task that they lose awareness of time. For creative teams, flow may look like a designer spending hours perfecting a launch video or a copywriter getting lost in crafting product descriptions that feel poetic. Flow occurs when a task strikes the right balance between difficulty and achievability, challenging enough to stimulate, but to the point where it is so difficult it sparks frustration.
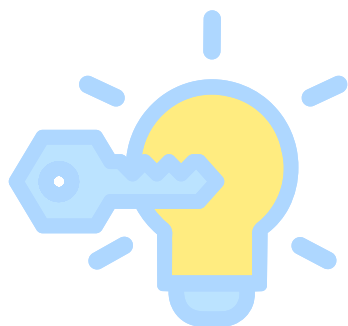
DEEP WORK

"Even if we feel motivated for a while, our brains are fickle things and sometimes get distracted anyways. It helps to have additional layers of motivation to help us stay motivated to work towards our goals. It's like multiple hands pushing you in the direction you want to go"
— **Zain Rizvi**

Cal Newport, who popularized the idea of deep work in his book **Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World**, defines it as cognitively demanding work performed without distraction. It is the state where new value is created, skills are improved, and originality flourishes. Imagine a brand strategist dedicating days to crafting a unique brand narrative for a skincare launch, rather than recycling trending audios. That narrative could set a brand apart for years to come.

DEPTH

While not a core principle, depth complements these three. **Hari** reminds us that:

"depth takes time and reflection."

Without it, content remains shallow, unable to connect meaningfully with consumers. Achieving depth requires letting go of surface-level distractions and pursuing creative work that digs into human emotions and cultural connections.

WHY THIS MATTERS
WITHIN THE K-BEAUTY INDUSTRY

The beauty industry thrives on emotion, identity, and aspiration. Unlike tech products or household goods, beauty items are inherently tied to how people feel about themselves. A serum isn't just skincare, it's the promise of transformation, of self-care, of embodying a certain lifestyle.

This is why focus, flow, and deep work matter. If creative teams cannot work in environments that foster these principles, they risk producing content that feels generic, even if the product itself is innovative. Without authentic storytelling or the emotional connection, the heart of beauty marketing is lost. We can look at Innisfree as a case study. Known for its natural and affordable products, **Innisfree** consistently produces content that feels genuine, not forced. An **Instagram reel** of theirs featured everyday people reacting to product prices while using them. Simple, yet effective, sparking authenticity and relatability. Their consistent visual palette and community-driven storytelling overall work together excellently to build a cohesive brand identity.

Compare this to **Rom&nd**, which is beloved for its cosmetics, but often leans many different types of visuals, often leaving consumers confused as to what their brand identity and narrative is. Both are strong brands, however, Innisfree's deeper storytelling stands out more in a crowded market.

THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is simple: by implementing focus, flow, and deep work into their creative processes, K-beauty brands can break free from trend-chasing and instead create sustainable, emotionally resonant, and globally distinctive content.
But what does that actually look like in practice?

A LOOK INTO THE
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

DIGITAL DETOX PERIODS

"This is a period of time during which you intentionally reduce the amount of time you spend online on your devices. You may even opt to disconnect completely."

— **Shishira Sreenivas**

A data detox, as its name suggests, is a period of time where a user detoxes (or halts) any digital activities. This can range from anything like temporarily refraining from using streaming services to completing deleting all social media apps. While this wouldn't be permanent, since social media is essential to running a brand nowadays, it would create the opportunity for creative employees to rest from seeing the same type of content, in turn allowing them to create more unique ideas. This temporary halt from social media would also allow for more time towards brainstorming and the process of ideation, compared to simply just scrolling.

Blocking Off Specific Hours

"What makes the Pomodoro Technique so effective is that it builds consistency. It helps you establish routines and consistent work habits rather than waiting for inspiration to hit."

— **Todoist**

The next step would be blocking off certain periods of time for different tasks, following a similar structure as the **Pomodoro Technique**. But what is this technique?

The Pomodoro Technique consists of working for a set period of time, usually in increments of twenty-five minutes, followed by a break, which tends to be anywhere between fifteen to thirty minutes. These time periods can be changed as the employee sees fit, however, the main purpose is to break tasks into more manageable and easy-to-complete sections, oftentimes leading to higher levels of productivity and often preventing any frustration or burnout.

By dedicating attention to one task at a time through specific blocks of time, while using this technique, employers may feel more productive as they can also have small breaks to quickly refresh their mind and focus if needed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLS

There are a variety of easily accessible tools available today, some of which include:

ClickUp, Wrike, Trello, Anasa, and Monday.com

just to name a few. In fact projects management softwares are said to have a variety of benefits. **Some of these said benefits** include having improved task organization and management, enhanced communication and collaboration, increased efficiency and productivity, better visibility, a reduced risk of errors and so on.

Although many of these project management software have subscriptions tied to them, especially for team membership, they are still extremely beneficial for their features alone. To give an idea, a project manager or creative head would be able to set different filters including: deadline, priority, assignee, and related information. Besides this, whoever's assigned to the task can also leave updates on the project in the comment section, similar to a thread, and anyone can attach files related to a project.

In a way, these softwares are very reminiscent of an extremely organized database of information and files that can always be referenced/referred back to.

ASSIGNING WORK RELATIVE TO STRENGTHS

The environment where creatives thrive the most is when they play to their own strengths. A designer passionate about motion graphics may bring more originality to the table with product launch videos than to static Instagram posts.

By aligning projects with individual strengths, teams maximize their productivity, as well as enjoyment in completing the task. As commonly known, when one is more passionate about what they do, the more likely it is to be enjoyable for them which would eventually lead to a better product/result.

ASSIGNING WORK RELATIVE TO STRENGTHS (CONT.)

Of course, cross-training is valuable, as it allows creatives to get experience in different areas, however, ensuring people regularly work on tasks they enjoy improves productivity and prevents burnout as well.

BUILDING REFLECTION TIME INTO WORKFLOWS

This step is extremely reminiscent of college days where assignments often had a critique period before the final presentation. But why?

Honestly, depth requires reflection and there's no better reflection than having multiple people take a look at a piece of content. Instead of filling schedules with back-to-back deadlines, managers can allocate reflection periods, which would consist of days where employees are encouraged to step back, evaluate ideas, and refine them. Additionally teams may even be able to work with other small groups and trade feedback, encouraging more collaboration and allowing for immediate feedback. In fact, staring at one project can be so daunting that the creative assigned to it may miss any errors or mistakes. These pauses can be as important as they serve as a refresh period, similar to the Pomodoro method, and allow for a fresh set of eyes to view a project before it goes out for good. For example, giving a strategist two days post-brainstorm to refine their pitch can elevate the quality of campaigns.

CROSS-INDUSTRY INSPIRATION

Despite their extreme differences in content, it's likely that K-beauty can also learn from outside industries, whether it's tech or even the music industry. Oftentimes companies like **Apple**, or even musical groups like TOMORROW X TOGETHER emphasize storytelling through their promotional content including advertisements and music videos.

CROSS-INDUSTRY INSPIRATION (CONT.)

While a design team may not have the luxury of three minutes for short-form content, encouraging employees to draw inspiration from art, film, or even music can create fresh perspectives. This avoids the copy-cat effect where every brand follows the same TikTok trend.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The K-beauty industry is at a critical crossroad, one that requires effective decision making, risking the future of their engagement and employers.

On one side lies the path of trend-chasing, something that will always be rapid, repetitive, shallow content that risks burnout and sameness. Brands will have to come and ask themselves: What happens when there are no more unique trends to pursue because everything is the same?

On the other lies the path of depth: original, emotionally resonant, and impactful storytelling created as a result of focus, flow, and deep work. While other companies may still tend to hop on trends, at least companies can say they were the first to start this, or even that it stays true to who they are as a brand. If Korean beauty brands commit to building these principles within their creative teams, as well as a whole, they can reclaim originality and build sustainable global influence. The industry has already proven its ability to set worldwide standards ranging from "glass skin" to inclusive shade ranges. The next step is ensuring the way those stories are told is just as innovative as the products themselves.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS
(CONT.)

By rethinking how creative teams work, including implementing a handful of strategies and possible changes such as utilizing project management tools, incorporating methods like the Pomodoro Technique, taking occasional data/social media detoxes, and many other possibilities, taking inspiration from other brands that use unique storytelling techniques, K-beauty can not only survive the pressures of a fast-paced digital age but thrive as a leader in both beauty and brand storytelling.

CONCLUSION

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