

From Tiktok to Clinic: Understanding and Responding to Tiktok Beauty Trends in Dermatology

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Abstract

Introduction: TikTok is a video-sharing social media application with over a billion users. It ranks as the fifth most popular social media platform globally and has evolved from being solely entertaining to an educational hub, especially in beauty and skincare. Although TikTok can serve as a source of beauty information, it has its challenges – including the spread of false information and the promotion of harmful beauty trends. Influencers and dermatologists have leveraged TikTok to educate and engage people. Dermatologists need to play an essential role in understanding and responding to beauty trends, and this requires a preemptive approach.

Objective: This review analyses the intersection of TikTok beauty trends and dermatology, and the implications of these trends for clinical practice.

Methodology: Studies were identified through PubMed, Google Scholar, and grey literature from 2018 to 2025, analyzing TikTok's influence on dermatology, with a focus on viral beauty trends. Only articles published in English were included in this write-up.

Result: These trends included Korean beauty, skin cycling, skincare routine, skin slugging and organic skincare. The dermatologist's responses to these trends include observing beauty trends that have gone viral on TikTok, subscribing to blogs, online resources, and publications focused on beauty and skincare, and engaging with patients on these trends. Dermatologists can provide accurate information and address potential risks associated with current beauty trends.

Conclusion: Dermatologists must adapt to evolving beauty trends by proactively engaging, ensuring dermatological care aligns with the principles of evidence-based medicine, and promoting safe skincare practices.

Keywords: TikTok, dermatology, beauty, beauty trends

De Tiktok à la clinique : Comprendre et répondre aux tendances beauté sur Tiktok en dermatologie

Résumé

Contexte : TikTok est une application de partage de vidéos sur les réseaux sociaux comptant plus d'un milliard d'utilisateurs. Cinquième plateforme la plus populaire au monde, elle est passée d'un simple outil de divertissement à une plateforme éducative, notamment en matière de beauté et de soins de la peau. Si TikTok peut être une source d'information beauté, elle présente aussi des défis, comme la diffusion de fausses informations et la promotion de tendances beautés néfastes. Influenceurs et dermatologues utilisent TikTok pour informer et interagir avec le public. Les dermatologues ont un rôle essentiel à jouer pour comprendre et répondre à ces tendances, ce qui nécessite une approche proactive.

Objectif : Cette revue analyse l'intersection entre les tendances beauté sur Tiktok et la dermatologie, ainsi que leurs implications pour la pratique clinique.

Méthodologie : Les études analysant l'influence de Tiktok sur la dermatologie, et plus particulièrement les tendances beautés virales, ont été identifiées via PubMed, Google Scholar et la littérature grise entre 2018 et

2025. Seuls les articles publiés en anglais ont été inclus dans cette analyse.

Résultats : Ces tendances de beauté incluent la beauté coréenne, le cycle de soins de la peau, les routines de soins, le « skin slugging » et les soins bio. Les dermatologues réagissent à ces tendances en observant les tendances beauté devenues virales sur TikTok, en s'abonnant à des blogs, des ressources en ligne et des publications spécialisées en beauté et soins de la peau, et en échangeant avec leurs patients sur ces tendances. Les dermatologues peuvent fournir des informations précises et aborder les risques potentiels associés aux tendances beautés actuelles.

Conclusion : Les dermatologues doivent s'adapter à l'évolution des tendances beauté en s'engageant activement, en veillant à ce que les soins dermatologiques soient conformes aux principes de la médecine factuelle et en promouvant des pratiques de soins de la peau sûres.

Mots-clés : TikTok, dermatologie, beauté, tendances beauté

Introduction

TikTok is a social media platform that allows users to create and share short videos. It is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance and has over 1.5 billion users.^{1,2} TikTok is the 5th biggest social media platform and is fast-growing.³

In early 2024, Nigeria had 23.84 million active TikTok users, making it the country with the highest number of active users in West Africa and ranking 19th globally in terms of TikTok usage.⁴ TikTok is used primarily for entertainment but has evolved into an information hub.⁵ In recent times, TikTok has played a prominent role in the beauty and skincare industry. Although this is not peculiar to TikTok, as beauty and skincare content are prominent on all other social media platforms. Healthcare professionals, including dermatologists, use TikTok for patient education, and this has contributed to the platform's scientific impact. Top dermatology-related TikTok videos include patient experiences or testimonials, educational content, clinical demonstrations, product reviews, beauty trends, and skincare tips.⁶ However, with the ease of access to information and short duration of videos, averaging 30 to 60 seconds via TikTok, there is a potential for propagation of false, misleading or harmful information.⁷ Another downside of TikTok is that users can be influenced into embarking on an 'odyssey' in pursuit of beauty and skincare trends.

As TikTok becomes more popular, its impact is significant in developing countries such as Nigeria and other African nations. In these regions, access to accurate dermatological information may be limited, making TikTok a primary source of skincare-related information.

A beauty trend is a popular product, style, or behavioural pattern that has gained prominence in the beauty and cosmetic field over a given period. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat have played a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining these trends.⁸ This is achieved through social media advertising and influencer promotion. Dermatologists and other healthcare professionals should not only be abreast of TikTok beauty trends but also be at the forefront of navigating them and understanding their implications for clinical practice.

Objective

This review aims to analyse the intersection of TikTok beauty trends and dermatology and to provide insights to navigate their influence effectively in dermatology clinical practice.

Methodology

The study design was a narrative review that synthesised current evidence and insights on TikTok beauty trends and their implications for dermatology practice. A literature search was conducted using PubMed, Google Scholar, and grey literature sources (including professional blogs, industry reports, and TikTok analytics pages). The search covered publications from January 2018 to April 2025, capturing the period when TikTok gained significant global traction.

Various combinations of the following keywords and Boolean operators were used: "TikTok" OR "social media" AND "dermatology" OR "skincare trends" OR "beauty trends" OR "skin care routine" OR "organic skincare" OR "K-beauty" OR "Korean beauty" OR "skin slugging" OR "skin cycling."

Inclusion criteria were articles addressing TikTok beauty trends and their importance to dermatology or skincare; studies, reviews, or reports in English; and peer-reviewed publications and grey literature sources relevant to clinical practice. Exclusion criteria included articles unrelated to dermatology or TikTok, studies focused solely on other platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) without mention of TikTok, and non-English publications.

Results

The literature search yielded approximately 29 relevant sources after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. These comprised:

- 17 peer-reviewed journal articles, including original studies and narrative reviews on social media trends, dermatology, and TikTok-related health content.
- 12 grey literature sources, such as industry reports, professional blogs, and TikTok analytics pages, which included trending hashtags and popularity metrics for specific beauty trends.

This literature review highlighted five major beauty trends that have recently dominated TikTok. These include:

1. Skincare routines

Skincare routines comprise a series of steps and practices that involve the regular use of products to improve the appearance of the skin. The desire for people to adopt a skincare routine is on the rise, and this trend will persist over the next two decades.⁵ During the COVID pandemic lockdown, people were stuck indoors and had more free time.⁵ This led to an increased consumption of social media, particularly TikTok. With this extra time, many people shifted from applying a full face of makeup to dedicating more time to their skincare and adopting new skin routines.^{9,10} The surge in video call-based meetings during the lockdown further heightened interest in facial skincare products. Interestingly, there is also a growing pandemic of the use of skincare products among preadolescents, which is driven by social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook and Instagram.¹¹

Zhang et al. found that routine skin care with

effective, high-quality products improved self-esteem and positively affected self-image.¹² This explains the growing trend of skincare routines, which has become popular among social media users.

The drawbacks of blindly following TikTok-promoted skincare routines include overuse of active ingredients, unsubstantiated product claims and promotion of unrealistic expectations. A 'one-size-fits-all' skincare routine will not cater to the different skin types.

Within our clinics, it is essential to emphasise the importance of a consistent skincare routine with appropriate products and the need to adjust it based on each individual's dermatological needs. Educating on the timing of application (day or night) and on layering cosmeceuticals to achieve maximal effect and minimise side effects or contact dermatitis is key.

Having a tailored skincare routine can help manage existing skin conditions, such as acne and hyperpigmentation and can complement specific dermatological treatments and procedures.

2. Korean beauty

This is also known as K-beauty and has increased in popularity on TikTok. Similar to K-drama and K-pop, K-beauty has made a bold entrance into the global marketplace. The expanding influence of Korean beauty is attributed to its integration of cosmetic technology and product innovation, which uses 'unconventional' natural ingredients.^{13,14} Emerging as one of the top 10 beauty markets in the world, South Korea had an estimated market size of \$3.9 billion, reflecting its significant influence and consumer demand for K-beauty products.¹⁵ Korean beauty emphasizes products that provide hydration and have anti-ageing and lightening effects. This beauty trend intersects with dermatology as our patients increasingly use skin-lightening agents and anti-ageing products.

The ingredients used in these products include the following:

Animal-based additives

- a) Snail secretions, also known as snail mucin

These are the secretions of the mollusc, *Cryptomphalus aspersa* – the brown garden snail.

The secretions contain growth factors, glycosaminoglycans, and hyaluronic acid, and thus have hydrating, antioxidant, anti-ageing, and antimicrobial properties. Several studies have demonstrated its use in photoaging, burns, atopic dermatitis, skin cancer and skin rejuvenation.^{13,16,17}

- b) Bee glue – Propolis¹⁸
- c) Horse oil¹⁹
- d) Donkey milk²⁰

Marine-based additives include salmon egg extract, seaweed, starfish powder, and pearl powder.^{13,21–24}

Plant-based additives

These include aloe vera, birch, bamboo, bearberry, chamomile, cherry blossom, ginseng, green tea, turmeric, licorice and pomegranate.^{13,25,26}

Fungi-based additives

Common ones are Galactomyces ferment filtrate, Tremella fuciformis and Truffle.^{13,27,28}

The incorporation of these exotic ingredients showcases the innovative nature of K-beauty products. The goal of K-beauty is for users to achieve 'glass skin,' which means dewy, flawless, poreless skin resembling glass. A 10-step Korean skincare routine helps accomplish this.²⁹

Although these unconventional cosmeceutical ingredients are undergoing validation, medical literature is scarce on their safety and efficacy.¹³ Some of these ingredients, such as snail mucin, have shown therapeutic potential in dermatological conditions such as atopic dermatitis, acne, psoriasis, radiation dermatitis and burns.³⁰ It is essential for dermatologists to be aware of these ingredients.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the hot and humid climate increases the risk of occlusion and breakouts when heavy, layered products are used. There is a risk of irritation from the ingredients in K-beauty products.

3. Skin cycling

It is an old concept that involves rotating skin care products on a 4- or 5-day cycle.^{31,32} It is based mainly on the expert opinion of a US dermatologist, Dr Whitney Bowe.³³

It entails using active ingredients on certain days, followed by rest days. For instance, using an exfoliant

on Monday, followed by retinol on Tuesday. For the remaining 3 days, a topical bland emollient is applied. This alternating regimen reduces irritation caused by increased retinol penetration, with the use of an emollient on rest days. The cycle is repeated.

This trend intersects with current dermatology practice, which involves retinol rest days or free days. Skin cycling will likely be ineffective for those with certain skin conditions such as severe acne, rosacea and psoriasis. However, there is currently no clinical study on skin cycling.

4. Skin slugging

Skin slugging is a viral TikTok beauty trend that involves slathering a petrolatum-based ointment on the skin as the last step in evening routines.³⁴ It has gained significant traction. The rationale is that petrolatum jelly helps repair the skin barrier and enhance moisture retention.³⁵ Petrolatum jelly, although believed to be non-comedogenic, is an occlusive agent that reduces transepidermal water loss, thereby increasing hydration.³⁴ Additionally, it improves the penetration of topical medication.

In our clinics, we have loosely used the skin slugging technique in patients with atopic dermatitis, ichthyosis and diaper rash. While it can be effective in some instances, it is crucial to be aware of the risks - pomade acne as well as allergic reaction to the mineral oil in petrolatum jelly.³⁵ It can also be messy and feel too heavy for some individuals, making it undesirable. Dermatologists should be aware of this trend to identify 'sluggers' and educate them appropriately. There is a paucity of scientific evidence supporting the use of skin slugging.

5. Organic skin care

Organic skin care products are formulated with natural and organic ingredients. There has been a significant increase in sales of these products, likely driven by rising health awareness of 'chemical-free' products and a preference for eco-friendly options.³⁶ In sub-Saharan African countries, especially Nigeria, there is a growing demand for organic skin products because they are perceived as safer. Some of these products are touted to deliver quick and immediate results, fueling their popularity. However, this demand has led to the proliferation of fraudulent

organic skincare businesses.³⁷ The majority of these products are not developed by properly trained cosmetic formulators or cosmetic chemists and contain high quantities of steroids, hydroquinone and other chemicals which are damaging to the skin.³⁸ Compounding this issue is the lack of regulation in the industry. This intersection is for dermatologists to identify patients who use these products through proper history-taking. Dermatologists respond by educating patients about the harmful effects of unregulated organic skincare products and treating patients with adverse effects from their use. Engaging in public health campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of using unregulated organic skincare products and advocating for stronger regulation of their sales and products can be helpful.

Factors affecting the success of TikTok Beauty Trends

The success of these TikTok beauty trends can largely be attributed to the influence of beauty influencers, also known as 'Skinfluencers'. Influencers are people who can sway the opinions of large numbers of people.³⁹ They are marked by significant followings and high engagement rates. Consumers often perceive them as relatable and trustworthy sources of information. Interestingly, influencers have played a key role in social media marketing, creating a ripple effect by inspiring imitation behaviour, recommending products, and stimulating interest. Furthermore, TikTok's online advertisements have influenced consumer purchasing decisions.⁴⁰ These advertisements are meticulously crafted to be relevant to consumer needs and stimulate appeal to consumers.⁴⁰

Dermatologists can collaborate with these influencers by co-creating educational content, hosting live question-and-answer sessions, and providing dermatologist-approved product recommendations.

Impact of TikTok beauty trends on patients' behaviour

TikTok influences users' decision-making ability. Because users are exposed to a myriad of beauty content, this exposure gradually shapes their perceptions of dermatological outcomes and the efficacy of specific products or procedures.^{40,41} As a

consequence, dermatologists may encounter patients who come to the clinics, armed with information obtained from TikTok, desiring to replicate popular trends or achieve a specific aesthetic goal seen on the platform. This promotes unrealistic expectations.⁴²

Risks of TikTok trends

TikTok has been described as a "double-edged sword", acknowledging both the risks and benefits.³⁹ While there are benefits, which include the provision of information and social support, there are significant risks associated with it. The abundance of information by non-experts makes it daunting for some users to find reliable information. A study by Bressler et al. revealed that dermatologists expressed greater concern about the risks associated with TikTok beauty trends than about the potential benefits.⁴³ These concerns include the substitution of professional dermatological care with unqualified providers, as well as the promotion of non-evidence-based products. Other risks include using multiple skincare products, which may interact and cause adverse skin reactions. Moreover, there is a risk of misinformation.

Additional risks include the platform's potential to encourage harmful behaviours, boost the popularity of products lacking scientific backing, and foster dissatisfaction with one's appearance and self-dysmorphia due to the prevalence of filtered images.³⁹

Responding to TikTok beauty trends in our clinical practice.

Responding to TikTok beauty trends requires a proactive approach. Dermatologists must stay abreast of trends in beauty, skincare products, skincare routines and do-it-yourself (DIY) treatments. This can be achieved by actively observing beauty trends, hashtags and challenges, following influential TikTok accounts run by dermatologists and other relevant accounts, regularly monitoring blogs, online resources and publications focused on beauty, skincare and dermatology, and engaging with our patients by openly discussing their skincare routines, products and concerns. By being aware of these trends, dermatologists can have informed discussions with their patients, addressing misconceptions or potential risks associated with the trends. Integration of these TikTok beauty trends - proper skincare

routines, modified skin slugging, modified skin cycling, use of certain Korean beauty products- into clinical practice allows dermatologists to apply these trends while ensuring the well-being of their patients.

Role of Dermatological Societies and Healthcare Institutions

Apart from individual dermatologists addressing these trends, dermatology societies and healthcare institutions play a pivotal role in this effort. Their influence carries significant weight. These organizations can remain current with emerging beauty trends and address them through their official social media platforms. Launching educational campaigns on TikTok and other social media platforms to share accurate information is another effective strategy. Furthermore, researching popular beauty trends can help provide scientific validation or debunk myths. Collaborating with influencers to promote safe beauty practices and advocating for stronger regulation against misleading or harmful skincare content are also critical measures.

Conclusion

TikTok has come to stay. It has a significant influence on its users engaging with content related to beauty, skincare routines and product reviews. Although TikTok has become a platform for health education, it also presents challenges such as misinformation and the promotion of harmful practices.

As dermatologists, embracing a proactive approach to TikTok beauty trends requires us to stay informed about emerging trends, engage on the platform, and work with patients to address their skincare concerns and provide accurate information. Beyond individual efforts, collaboration is vital. Dermatologists should partner with social media influencers to educate people. Dermatology societies and regulatory bodies can further amplify the dissemination of accurate information related to these trends. Establishing guidelines for safe skincare content on social platforms can help curb misinformation and protect public health.

Funding: Nil

Conflict of interest: Nil

Ethical approval: Nil

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