Boys to men

Is the male beauty industry finally all grown-up and ready to move beyond basic grooming?

Ranges like Tony & Munro's three-step set (below) and Shakeup's tinted products (overleaf) provide makeup options for men.

Looking at the man in the mirror

Google searches for 'male makeup looks' increased by nearly 80% between 2019 and 2020, according to analytics company Moz.

Male beauty brands are finally going beyond the stereotypical 'masculine' packaging and messaging we've become so used to. What's more, you're just as likely to find a teenage TikTok star endorsing a new male beauty brand as you are an athlete.

Thanks to less rigid gender boundaries, the younger generation are blowing open the market for men's makeup and colour cosmetics. And companies are starting to target them more intelligently. The market in China alone is booming. Influencer Li Jiaqi, also known as the 'lipstick queen', tests out lipstick shades on a live stream, and has reportedly sold 15,000 lipsticks in five minutes through online shopping platform Taobao. Alibaba also had to call in 3,000% more men's beauty products between 2019 and 2020 for an annual shopping festival, Jing Daily reports. And while China steams ahead, other countries are now looking to close the gap.

With so much room for innovation, we speak to industry experts, from brand owners to beauty consultants in Australia, Malaysia, the UK and China, to get their take on what's next.



THE PANEL



EB/TT

Ewan Belsey and Tony Tsianakas are the co-founders of Tony & Munro, an Australian beauty brand fusing skincare and makeup products for men. They founded the brand in 2019.



Fiona Glen works

at The Red Tree, a beauty and cosmetics consultancy firm that works with both established and new brands on product development and global expansion.



Huey Fen Cheong is a researcher at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. focusing on gender representation and language in marketing. In particular, she looks at male grooming.



JX/SCX

Jake Xu and **Shane Carnell-Xu** are the founders of Shakeup Cosmetics. a UK-based men's makeup and beauty brand, Shakeup has recently expanded into China.



Lee Kynaston is a journalist and brand consultant. He runs The Grooming Guru blog and recently started an Instagram account focused on skincare products for men.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Skincare for men has been on the up for a while. Makeup is also starting to gain some traction. Why now?

LK: 'Estée Lauder launched a men's makeup range 20 years ago that it discontinued after a year. The men's makeup industry has never really taken off until now. It's partly because we [now] lead lives that are largely on screen. Whether it's social media posts, dating profiles or Zoom calls, we all want to present ourselves well online. And we're essentially all our own brands now, and men want to make their brand look the best they can.'

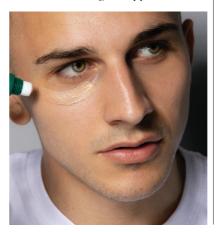
EB/TT: 'Over the past 30 years, there has been a gradual shift. Men started wearing fragrance, then hair products and then skincare and moisturiser became popular. We know now that men, especially in Asia and Europe, are going beyond traditional skincare to look after themselves.'

JX/SCX: 'More people are embracing gender neutrality and fluidity. But despite their best intentions, gender-neutral brands haven't managed to effectively engage a male target audience. There is a real need to cater to men, and it's a necessary step towards more inclusivity in beauty.'

WHO'S USING WHAT?

Which male beauty products are the most popular in your regions?

FG: 'Within Europe, the most popular product is concealer, which illustrates that European men have a targeted approach



WHY ASIA IS SO FAR AHEAD

and, in South Korea, 58% of men born after 2000 indulge in 'lengthy' beauty after 2000 indulge in 'lengthy' beauty treatments once a week, according to a survey by GlobalData. Compare that with 34% of South Korean men overall When UK brand MMUK Man launched

When UK brand MMUK Man launched a lipstick in 2019, it racked up \$100,000 of orders from China and Korea.

'Male beauty brands rely on social media channels like Douyin [Tiktok in China], content-sharing platform Xiaohongshu and video-sharing platform Bilibili to educate male popular category, lipsticks, eyeliners, eyebrow pencils, foundations and

to makeup. In Asia, since the use of cosmetics is more mainstream, foundations and BB creams are more prominent.'

EB/TT: 'Australians are maybe a little late to adopt new cultures and technologies, but we wanted to jump ahead of the curve and put Australian-made cosmetics on the map. We do this by leveraging south-east Asian communities and men who live in Australia and are used to wearing cosmetics. So we've started with the more simple products: an eye gel and a BB cream in three different shades that is positioned as a moisturiser.'

HFC: 'What is more interesting between the UK and Malavsia is the way that products are perceived in each region. In the UK, products need to appeal to individual consumers as "men" whereas in Malaysia, makeup is still seen as a product for women. So the functional benefits, like skin health and

protection, are emphasised. Then men will rationalise a way to use these products.'

JX/SCX: 'In Asia, male beauty has been completely redefined, thanks to the massive social influences from K-pop and Mandopop bands, as well as the rise of the xiao xian rou - that translates to "little fresh meat", which refers to a growing group of androgynous young male celebrities and influencers with boyish looks and flawless, glass-like skin. According to Tmall sales data, the bestselling product by far among men in China is tinted moisturiser. Since our launch in China, we've seen sales of our tinted moisturiser grow tenfold in just four months.'

BRAND POSITIONING

Male beauty can be a difficult sell. How have brands positioned themselves to appeal specifically to men?

HFC: 'Introducing a new or relatively rare practice – like makeup for men – that challenges a social norm requires brands to test the waters on social acceptance. Gradually, brands have broken down the gender barrier bit by bit. In Malaysia, men's skincare ranges initially tackled oily and dry skin, and eventually shifted towards ageing skin, which is typically a feminine preoccupation.'

JX/SCX: 'The overall trend is subtlety. Men want to look fit, fresh and healthy, as naturally and undetectably as possible. Many of them feel overwhelmed and confused by the vast



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product ranges on the market, so simplicity and efficacy are key.'

LK: 'Men are still after products that solve "problems". If you can explain to men that a concealer can mask the signs of a hangover, or that you can use a makeup product to cover up spots, that will help them to understand.'

BRAND PRESENTATION

What about the brand names, messaging, communications and packaging? How do you convince men to try makeup?

LK: 'We're still in a transition period.
Brands producing men's makeup
are still very careful about
the language they use and will
often reframe products by using
explicitly masculine language.
But we're on the cusp of not

BRANDING BY REGION

Male beauty brands in Asia tend to keep their packaging concepts simple, with gender-neutral colours. This adds to their positioning as easy-to-use products, as well as signalling that they are somewhat subverting the mainstream narrative of masculinity.

Brands in Europe and North
America, on the other hand, often take
the opposite approach, turning up the
cues of conventional masculinity
across their packaging. For instance,
War Paint – a name with macho
connotations – has chosen all-black
packaging, as has New York-based
Stryx and London-based Benny
Hancock for Men.



needing to for much longer. Younger men are not only not bothered by products explicitly for men, but are actually quite hostile to that branding.'

JX/SCX: 'For us, it's about actively raising awareness of the benefits of using cosmetics to boost self-esteem and mental wellbeing. Our packaging is classy and gender-neutral. We don't drown in the sea of black, white, silver and blue elsewhere in the men's skincare aisles.'

EB/TT: 'We want to give men something they can own from both a rational and emotional standpoint. Men won't use a product that looks 'feminine', which is why we've settled on neutral colours. That way, men won't feel afraid to take it to the gym. We also position our products as fusion cosmetics – it makes for an easy transition for the market to expand into.'

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Does makeup for men differ much from makeup for women?

JX/ScX: 'We don't believe one size fits all. Male consumers deserve products designed specifically for men's skin and concerns. Yes, makeup doesn't have a gender, but skin does. On a general level, there are major physiological differences between men's and women's skin.'

EB/TT: When we started developing the products, we wondered whether we could do a unisex

F BRANDS TO WATCH

A number of brands that cater specifically to men's skincare needs are popping up. Here are a few to keep an eye on around the world.

- O Japan: Fiveism x Three houses a range of base layer makeup and enhancing products, such as nail paints and mascaras, as well as application tools. Mr, a brand by skincare company Orbis, has developed a combination beard-and-eyebrow pencil, as well as colour control tools.

 @fiveismofficial @orbis_mr
- O Europe: Sweden-based brand
 Recipe for Men has been producing
 men's skincare since 2002,
 including an anti-blemish cover
 stick and bronzing gel. It has since
 expanded into the US and Brazil.
 War Paint stocked in high-end
 retailers like Mr Porter and Harvey
 Nichols was founded by Danny
 Gray with the aim of destigmatising
 makeup for men. @recipeformen
 @warpaintformen
- O USA: Formen's corrective makeup is focused on removing under-eye bags, concealing acne or getting rid of excess oil. Stryx's curated makeup kits are accompanied by a YouTube channel of tutorials for men who are new to makeup.

 @houseofformen @stryx_official

House of Formen's under-eye concealer and mask (left) brighten skin; War Paint's wide product range (below) has something for everyone.





product that didn't necessarily exclude women. But the more we researched, the more we found that men's skin is very different. It's 25% thicker and more oily. Men also have larger pores, which leads to more acne and shine. So, while women's makeup favours a dewy, translucent look, men would prefer a matt finish and a non-greasy formula.'

FUTURE INNOVATION

What sort of product innovations should we look out for in the male beauty space?

FG: 'Trends that are driving innovation in women's beauty – clean beauty, hybrid makeup and multifunctional makeup – have yet to be fully explored in the men's makeup industry. SPF and blue light are also interesting spaces to watch – LifeJacket is starting to champion SPF for men.'

JX/SCX: 'In terms of year-onyear growth, lip and brow products have seen a huge uplift. And in terms of product design, a customer survey showed that customers are seeking instant gratification from their products, looking for multipurpose and multi-functional solutions. They are savvy consumers who care about ingredients and long-term skin health.' LK: 'Multifunctional approaches will mean that men will buy less, but be more inclined to buy better. Makeup will eventually settle into being a product that is integrated into a normal daily routine, rather than being seen as an exotic product.

Men will also be looking more for the superhero ingredients in mainstream skincare, like retinol.'

#GuyBeauty

Late teenage and young adult influencers are taking to social media to showcase makeup tutorials and deficience of the conventional definitions of masculinity. That's increasingly the case in India: well-known Indian influencers such as Siddharth Batra, Shakti Yadav and Ankush Bahuguna are taking to Instagram to challenge male beauty norms using the hashtag #GuyBeauty.

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A report by Mintel found that more than a fifth of men between the ages of 18 and 34 in India followed these content creators, who are putting on makeup and grooming tutorials. It also found that the average Indian man spends 42 minutes every day on grooming, rising to more than an hour in urban areas. In late 2020, Nykaa, one of India's largest online retailers of beauty and wellness products, launched Nykaa Man, a dedicated men's beauty sales portal.

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