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Globalization and Beauty: A Historical and Firm Perspective*

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Abstract

This paper uses the beauty industry to explore the impact of globalization over the very long run. When the first wave of modern globalization struck in the nineteenth century, a homogenization of global beauty ideals began—one which has, to some extent, continued until the present day. This has had enormous societal and cultural consequences, and business enterprises are at the heart of this process. The paper explores how entrepreneurs and firms translated societal values into brands, globalized them, and changed societal perceptions of beauty as a result. It also shows the limitations of the homogenization achieved by firms even at the high point of globalization, before making the case that contemporary globalization is working to facilitate greater diversity in beauty ideals again.

Key Words: Beauty, globalization, culture

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* This article builds on, and develops, arguments presented originally in Jones (2010a). Documents were consulted in the following archives: records of Avon held at the Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware; the records of J. Walter Thompson held by the History of Advertising Trust, Norwich, Britain; the records of Procter & Gamble held in Procter & Gamble corporate archives, Cincinnati; records of Unilever NV held in Unilever Archives, Rotterdam.