Monthly Picks



September 2026

INNOCEAN

Contents

Marketing Trend Exploring key marketing trends shaping Korea and global markets.

Space-EX Uncovering insights from today's trending spaces.

Rising Icon Discovering up-and-coming brands and artists.

Solo Life 2.0: Solitude as an Aspirational Lifestyle Choice

Consumers increasingly view solitude not as a deficit, but as something to celebrate openly. Here, we explore the emerging marketing playbook for capturing consumers embracing an "alone, not lonely" lifestyle.

Why Being Alone Doesn't Have to Mean Being Lonely

As solo dining and solo travel have become firmly established in the mainstream, people are taking this openness a step further by candidly sharing moments of unplanned solitude—a quiet Friday night or a weekend with no plans. On social media, these honest glimpses into life alone are resonating with a growing audience. This reflects a broader reframing of solitude: it is no longer viewed as the absence of companionship, but as an intentional, self-directed way of living. In this issue, we explore this emerging attitude that refuses to treat being alone as a deficit, along with the brands redesigning experiences for today's solo consumer.

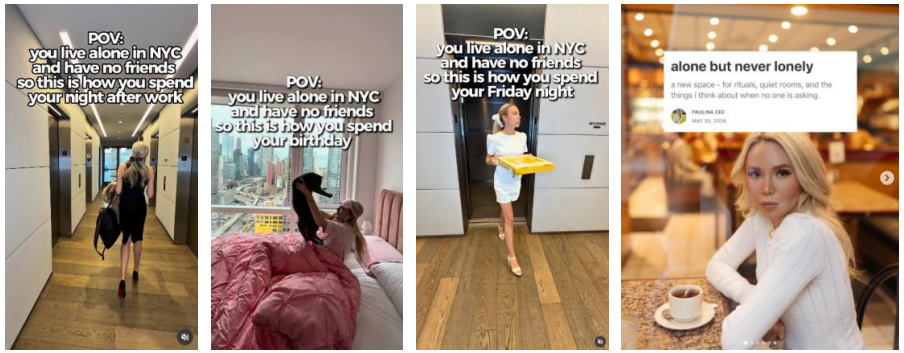
Source: Unsplash

Putting Solo Life on Display

Rather than hiding solitude or treating it as something to overcome, people are openly sharing their solo lives, and their experiences are resonating with many others.

On social media, content showcasing quiet moments spent alone is gaining attention, eclipsing content showing social lives and relentlessly busy schedules. These posts often feature people grocery shopping, cooking, or simply staying home on occasions typically spent with others, such as birthdays or Friday nights. Moments once left unshared are now resonating with a growing audience. New York-based creator Paulina Cee, for example, received more than 11 million views on a video documenting a Friday night spent alone. Nothing remarkable happens, nor does the video follow a narrative of coping with loneliness. Against the vibrant backdrop of New York City, it simply captures an ordinary evening of grocery shopping, having dinner, and enjoying time on her own. As more people openly share their solo lives, international media have begun describing them as "loneliness influencers." Social media has also given rise to terms such as "solomaxxing" and the "no-friends aesthetic," framing solitude not as something to conceal but as a lifestyle choice.

This shift in attitudes toward solitude has also been unfolding in Korea for some time. When MBC's reality show "I Live Alone" first aired in 2013, it largely focused on the somewhat forlorn realities of living alone. Over time, however, it evolved to portray a broader range of single lifestyles, following cast members as they build fulfilling lives around their hobbies, travels, food, and daily routines. Marking the show's tenth anniversary, the show's host Jun Hyun-moo reflected on this change in perspective. The broadcaster similarly noted that the program had evolved with the times, moving away from its early, sympathy-tinged portrayals to spotlight people enjoying single life on their own terms, guided by their individual values and ways of living.
Solitude is no longer a deficit to be hidden. Today, the solo self—and the deliberate way one chooses to live—has become compelling content: something worth sharing that sparks conversation and resonates with others.



Source:
Instagram (@itspaulinacee)



Source: MBC 〈I Live Alone〉, TV-People

From “Doing Things Alone” to Embracing the “Solo Self”

The question used to be “Can I do this alone?” Today, the focus has shifted to “Do I choose to be alone even when I don’t have to?”

This is not the first shift in how society views being alone. As single-person households grew, dining, drinking, and traveling alone became mainstream consumer behaviors. In response, brands steadily expanded their offerings for solo consumers, introducing seating designed for individuals and menus for one. At this stage, the shift largely centered on normalizing the idea that people could do things alone—and feel comfortable doing so. The notion that meals, travel, and leisure could be enjoyed without company gradually gained widespread acceptance.

Later, as attitudes such as JOMO—the “joy of missing out”—made it more acceptable to remain temporarily disconnected, time spent alone began to take on a different meaning. More people began choosing solitude as a way to step back from social relationships and constant connectivity, allowing them to focus more fully on themselves.

More recently, attitudes toward solo living have evolved a step further. Solitude is no longer something to cope with, but one people actively choose on their own terms. Moving beyond the passive acceptance that “it is okay to be alone,” people increasingly view time alone as more comfortable and liberating—an opportunity to focus fully on themselves. At the heart of this shift is the recognition that solitude is not a result of social isolation. Even while remaining meaningfully connected to others, individuals deliberately carve out time for themselves and devote it to rest, personal interests, and self-care. Time alone is no longer a fallback that fills a social void; it is embraced as an intentional, self-designed way of living. Ultimately, the emerging solo lifestyle reflects a fundamental shift in perspective toward solitude—from “It is okay to be alone” to “I actually prefer spending time alone.”





Source:
X (@neferupitoux, @nyetsot)

	Solo Life 1.0	Solo Life 2.0
Core mindset	“It is okay to be alone”	“I prefer being alone”
Attitude toward solitude	Accepted as no longer inconvenient	Actively preferred and chosen
What drives it	Circumstance	A deliberate choice to focus fully on oneself
Core values	Convenience and independence	Comfort, freedom, and self-immersion
How it appears	Doing activities alone, such as solo dining or traveling	Openly sharing everyday life alone

Travel Norms Expand from Together to Solo

Moving beyond the simple concept of traveling alone, the entire travel experience is becoming increasingly tailored to each individual's goals and personal rhythm.

Solo travel itself is nothing new. Now that it's become a familiar travel option, however, a new pattern is emerging: travelers are intentionally carving out time for themselves even on trips taken with others. According to Hilton's 2026 travel trends survey, 48% of travelers said they planned to add solo travel days to their itineraries before or after their family trips. Rather than spending every moment together simply because they are traveling as a family, people are choosing to reserve part of the itinerary entirely for themselves.

This shift is also bringing solo time into types of travel that have traditionally been shared with others. In 2026, wellness resort Sensei Lānaʻi highlighted this trend by introducing the idea of a "solorette," a solo retreat for brides-to-be presented as an alternative to the traditional bachelorette party with friends. Rather than treating togetherness as a given in the familiar ritual of a pre-wedding trip, the concept presents time alone as another meaningful option.

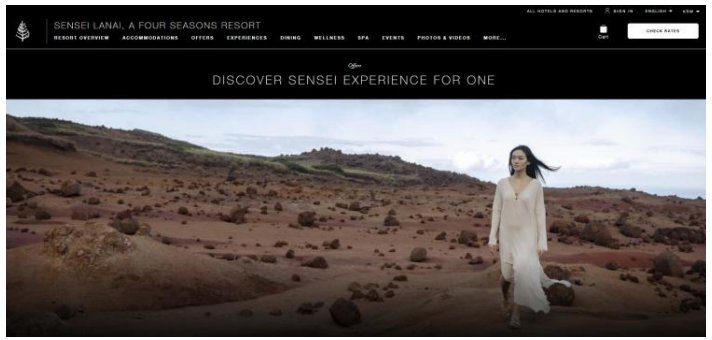
Sensei Lānaʻi also offers "Discover Sensei Experience for One," a program created specifically for solo travelers. Following a pre-arrival consultation, the resort curates each guest's itinerary around their individual goals and needs. Guests can choose from quiet time in the gardens, meditation, and yoga to more active pursuits such as hiking and horseback riding, creating an experience suited to their own interests and pace. Rather than repackaging a standard group experience for one person, Sensei designs the entire stay around the individual guest from the outset.

A notable shift in travel, then, is not simply that more people are traveling alone. Travelers are carving out personal time even on trips taken with others and reimagining traditionally collective rituals as individual experiences. At the same time, hospitality brands are designing experiences around solo guests' needs from the start. As solo lifestyles continue to evolve, solo travel itself is taking on diverse forms as well.









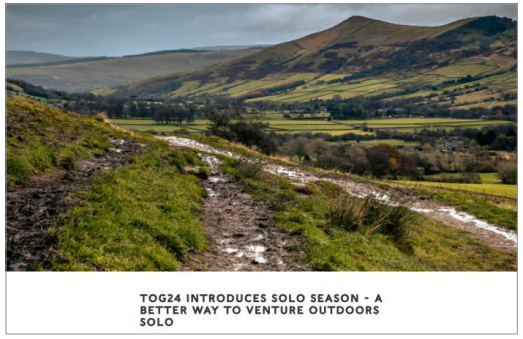
Source: Sensei Lanai

Dismantling the Psychological Barriers to Going It Alone

Brands are moving beyond products and services designed for one to address the psychological barriers that can prevent people from doing things alone.

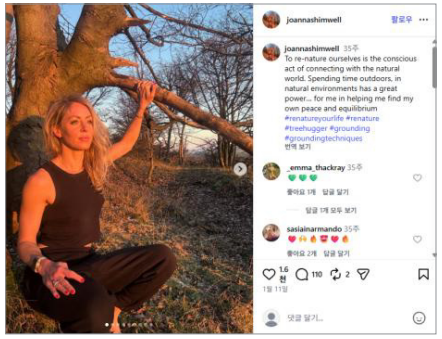
Just because an activity can be done alone does not mean that doing so always feels comfortable. This is especially true of activities such as hiking and trekking, where group participation is often the norm. Practical concerns about getting lost or encountering danger can create hesitation, as can the unease of standing out as someone who has come alone.
In March 2026, British outdoor brand "TOG24" addressed these barriers through its "Solo Season" project. Designed for people who want to explore the outdoors alone but feel unsure about taking the first step, the project researched some of the UK's best-known outdoor destinations and provided practical information on places well suited to solo walks. Rather than simply encouraging consumers to put on TOG24 gear and head out alone, the brand first considered what people actually need to feel confident enough to begin.

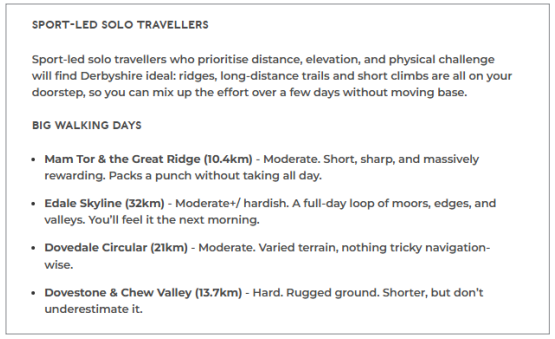
The project drew on psychologist Dr. Charlotte Russell's research on the psychological benefits of spending time alone. These insights shaped the framework for the project's wider content, presenting solitude not as loneliness or disconnection, but as intentional time for emotional rest and recovery. To translate this perspective into practical support and lower the psychological barriers to stepping out alone, TOG24 worked with local creators and partners to develop detailed guides for exploring the outdoors alone. The guides covered everything from beginner-friendly routes, difficulty levels, and transportation options to routes that begin and end near cafés, pubs, and public facilities for added safety, as well as accommodations suitable for solo travelers. Together, these details helped ease the uncertainty and discomfort that often discourage people from pursuing outdoor activities alone.
TOG24 therefore went beyond simply providing services for solo travelers. It also addressed the psychological barriers people face when trying activities alone. The project shows that as solo consumption becomes more common, brands may need to look beyond products and services designed for individuals and address the emotional discomfort and hesitation that arise throughout the solo journey.





Source: TOG24





Source: TOG24

Giving Solitude a New Image

Once depicted through tropes of isolation and melancholy, being alone is being recast as an aspirational, desirable lifestyle.

Just as important as creating new experiences for people on their own is reimagining how they are represented. In advertising and branded content, happiness has long been portrayed through scenes of togetherness—friends gathered around a table and couples traveling together have become familiar images of a fulfilling life. At the same time, individuals shown alone have often served as visual shorthand for loneliness or disconnection.

Streetwear brand "Anti Social Social Club" turned this familiar imagery on its head. On Valentine's Day, when images of romance and couples are everywhere, the brand released a collection built around the message "Alone Not Lonely," decoupling the physical state of solitude from the emotional state of loneliness. Rather than consoling those without a partner or encouraging them to seek new relationships, the campaign affirmed that being alone is good enough in itself, expressing that message through the brand's distinctive streetwear identity.

In its Spring 2026 campaign, fashion brand Calvin Klein captured actress Dakota Johnson spending a day alone at home. Reading a script, listening to music, and relaxing by the pool, she moves through the day without any particular event. Yet the campaign portrays these ordinary moments of solitude through relaxed, sensual imagery. Commenting on the campaign, Johnson explained, "When a woman is alone at home working or reading or doing whatever, it can feel quite liberating and sensual." The concept was intended to celebrate the comfort and freedom of spending time alone on one's own terms.

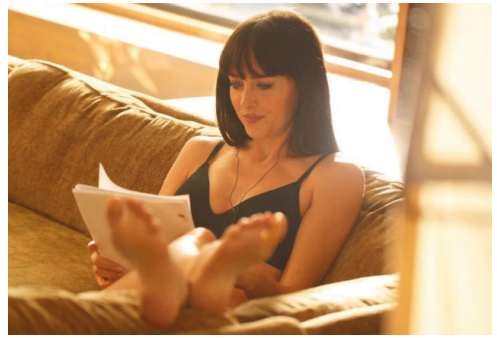
Both campaigns seek to transform the visual language of solitude, recasting moments once associated with loneliness and melancholy as liberating, confident, and desirable. As solo living becomes increasingly accepted as an ordinary and natural way of life, the fashion industry's image of an aspirational, stylish lifestyle is evolving with it.





Source: Anti Social Social Club





Source: Calvin Klein

From Solo-Friendly to Solo-First Experiences

As solo living becomes established as a lifestyle in its own right, brands need to rethink how they approach solo customers. Rather than simply adding a single-person option to experiences designed primarily for groups, brands should treat solo customers as the default and design the entire experience accordingly. From product offerings and spatial layouts to service models and communications, brands should carefully consider every element to ensure the experience never feels incomplete or compromised when enjoyed alone.

Redesigning Products and Services Around the Single User

Brands must move beyond adding separate options for solo customers or offering scaled-down versions of services originally designed for groups. Instead, they should treat one person as the default unit of use from the outset. This means identifying experiences that become more comfortable and liberating precisely because they are enjoyed alone, then incorporating those qualities across products, spaces, and services. Designing through a solo-first lens can also unlock new possibilities for features and services that may have been overlooked from a group-centered perspective.

Designing the Emotional Experience of Being Alone

Even when products and services are available for individuals, self-consciousness and discomfort can still create barriers to participating alone. Brands must pay close attention to the psychological unease people may feel when dining, staying, or participating on their own, then design experiences that make solitude feel comfortable and natural. The goal is to turn experiences once avoided because of being alone into accessible, comfortable choices.

Source: Unsplash

Seoul: Where Global Brands Are Reimagined

Seoul has emerged as a global stage for brand innovation. Brands reinterpret Korean culture through their own lens, using the city as a launchpad for global expansion.

From Seoul to the World:
Where Global Brands Launch "Firsts"

Global brands are choosing Seoul as the launchpad for their latest "firsts." From world-first flagships and global strategic stores to entirely new, concept-driven formats, brands are opening distinctive spaces across the city. What stands out is that these locations represent far more than conventional retail expansion. Through monumental art installations, creative collaborations, exclusive dining experiences, and programs rooted in local culture, each space incorporates elements of Korean culture in its own distinctive way—prioritizing immersive brand experiences over straightforward retail transactions.

This strategy is designed to appeal not only to Korean consumers but also to international visitors. For global brands, success in Korea's highly discerning, trend-sensitive market can signal broader global potential. At the same time, the growing influence of K-culture has turned Seoul itself into a valuable brand asset. In this issue, we examine three cases to explore why global brands are choosing Seoul for their milestone "firsts" and how they bring Korea's spirit to life in their physical spaces.

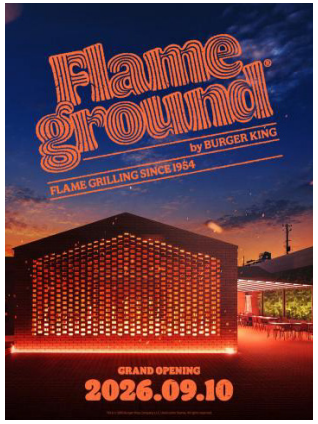
Source: Unsplash

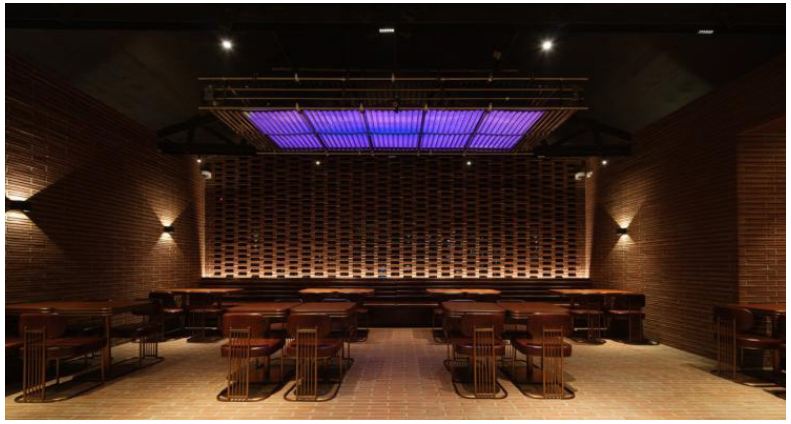
Burger King “Flameground”

The Slowest Fast Food in Seongsu

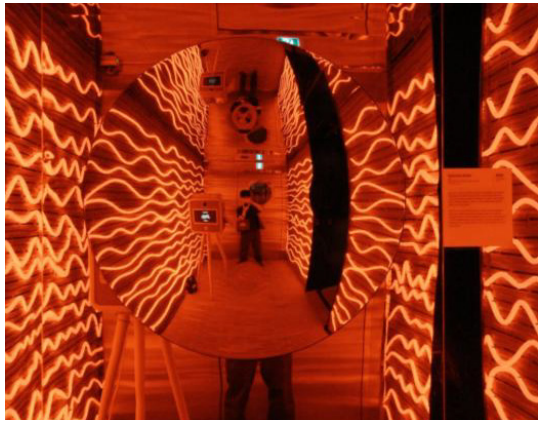
Global fast-food chain Burger King opened its flagship store, “Flameground,” in Seoul’s Seongsu district in September 2026. Unveiled on August 26 and officially opened on September 10, it marks the brand’s first-ever global flagship. The store is particularly significant because it represents a mainstream fast-food giant pioneering a flagship concept—territory traditionally reserved for luxury and fashion houses. Spanning about 560 square meters, the space centers on Burger King’s signature “flame-grilled” flavor. The flagship translates the brand’s 70-year flame-grilling heritage into space, food, and art. Inside the red-brick building, visitors enter an environment designed to evoke a working kitchen, with glowing red lines reminiscent of a heated grill wrapping around the interior. Design elements inspired by the broiler used to grill Burger King’s patties extend along the corridors, while charcoal-inspired sculptures throughout the space heighten the sense of immersion. Together, these elements transform the brand’s defining asset—its signature flame-grilled flavor—into something visitors can see, feel, and experience firsthand.

Art is another defining feature. In collaboration with five emerging Korean artists, the flagship showcases a series of works throughout the store, including robotics-based kinetic displays, media art that recreates the broiler’s movement through sound and light, and installations inspired by flames and heat. Together, these pieces transform flame grilling from a cooking technique into a multisensory experience.
The flagship’s most distinctive feature is “The Gastro,” a reservation-only, multi-course dining experience. An industry first for a quick-service restaurant, the program reimagines the Whopper as a full-course meal. Its familiar components—including the patty, bun, pickles, and onions—are presented as individual courses, transforming a burger typically eaten whole into a series of dishes to be savored slowly. In the process, the ingredients and the brand’s identity unfold as a cohesive narrative. Led by a head chef with experience in Michelin-starred restaurants, The Gastro recasts the familiar Whopper through the language of fine dining—turning one of the world’s fastest and most accessible foods into a slow, extraordinary experience.





Flameground store poster and interior views (Source: Burger King Instagram)



Art installations throughout Flameground (Source: HeyPop)



Courses at The Gastro (Source: Instagram @burgerboy_dino)

The decision to open this one-of-a-kind concept store in Seoul's Seongsu district stems from the natural intersection between the brand's core asset and the neighborhood's identity. Burger King has built its 70-year heritage around flame grilling, while Seongsu's history as an industrial hub is rooted in metalworking and fire. The brand's signature flame-grilled flavor therefore resonates naturally with the district's industrial past. By weaving its core identity into the neighborhood's heritage, Burger King has created a compelling form of localization, while using Seongsu as a stage to retell its brand story in a new way.
The choice of location serves a dual purpose: reinforcing the brand's core identity while helping it stand out in a destination that draws visitors from around the world. Seongsu has become a must-visit neighborhood for many international travelers, making it an ideal setting for Burger King to leave a lasting impression with its first global flagship. Above all, the concept is not simply about moving the brand upmarket; it is about expanding the overall brand experience. Unlike a conventional quick-service restaurant designed for customers to eat and leave quickly, Flameground brings together space, food, art, and merchandise in a single destination—giving visitors more reasons to visit and stay.

This approach extends beyond the space itself to products and collaborations. Burger King partnered with Seongsu-based craft brewery Seoul Brewery to offer exclusive beers, including a lager brewed with Seoul-grown "Gyeongbokgung Rice." According to Burger King, the collaboration was designed to connect the brand's flame-grilled identity with Seongsu's creative energy. The flagship's signature "K-Cube Galbi Burger" further reinforces this local connection by reinterpreting the flavors of Korean-style grilled ribs through Burger King's signature flame-grilling technique. Together, these initiatives connect the global brand's identity with Korean culture across the space, menu, and local collaborations.
In a food service market increasingly shaped by price competition and delivery, Burger King introduces a new paradigm in which mainstream brands compete through experience rather than price. Viewed in this light, Flameground represents a mainstream fast-food brand using Seongsu as the stage for its most experimental concept yet. For visitors, it offers an opportunity to rediscover a familiar name in an unexpected way; for Burger King, it provides a chance to refresh and reinvigorate its brand image.



Flameground's signature menu (Source: Burger King Instagram)





Flameground-exclusive beers (Source: Seoul Brewery Instagram)

Loewe Perfumes Seongsu Flagship Store

A Fragrance Atelier Infused with Korean Craft

In January, Spanish luxury house Loewe opened the world's first standalone flagship dedicated exclusively to its fragrance line, "Loewe Perfumes," in Seoul's Seongsu district. As the brand's first dedicated fragrance space globally, Loewe chose Yeonmujang-gil as its landmark starting point, placing it on the main street running through the Seongsu neighborhood. Spanning approximately 344 square meters across two floors, the flagship features a central garden, rooftop terrace, and café. Its concept draws on the botanical origins of the Loewe Perfumes collection, combining the intimate atmosphere of an art collector's home with the meticulous curation of a botanical archive. Rather than simply displaying and selling fragrances, the store invites visitors to immerse themselves in the brand's world. The first floor showcases the full Loewe Perfumes range, including signature fragrance collections such as the Crafted Collection, as well as home scents and bath products. On the second floor, the café serves beverages and desserts inspired by the brand's products.

What is particularly notable is how deeply Korean elements are woven into the space. The central garden, known as the "Patio," draws inspiration from the spatial layout of traditional hanok architecture, subtly blending Loewe's Spanish sensibility with a distinctly Korean design language. Across both floors, Loewe's curated collection of contemporary art and craftworks lends the space additional artistic depth. Most notably, a knitted pendant installation created specifically for the store by Korean artist Lee Kwang-ho extends vertically through the soaring interior, serving as the space's visual focal point. The installation is complemented by a traditional Korean moon jar crafted by artist Moon Pyeong. By layering the tactile and visual qualities of Korean craft onto the olfactory experience of fragrance, the space allows visitors to engage with the brand on multiple sensory levels.

Loewe Perfumes' flagship in Seongsu (Source: Shinsegae International)







Knitted pendant installation by Lee Kwang-ho (Source: Eyesmag)



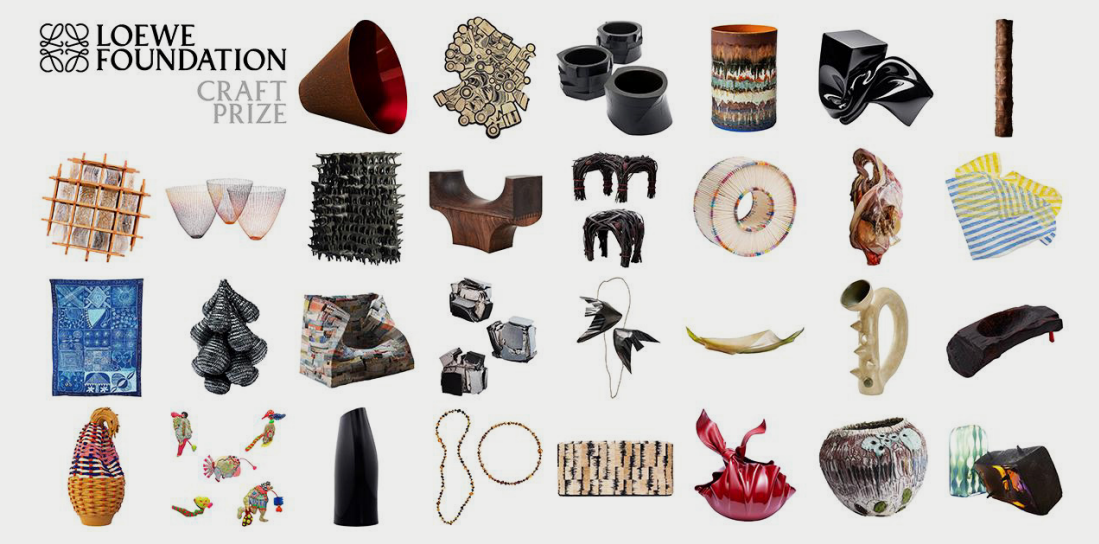
Moon jar by Moon Pyeong (Source: Naver Blog)



Loewe's decision to open its first fragrance flagship in Seoul—and specifically in the Seongsu district—stems from the clear connection between the location and the brand's identity. Founded as a leather workshop in 1846, Loewe has long placed craftsmanship and artisanal excellence at the heart of its brand. Through the annual Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, it continues to discover and support craft artists worldwide. For Loewe, craft is a language in itself. Against this backdrop, placing Korean craft artists' work at the forefront of the store is more than a decorative choice. It reflects a deliberate effort to find common ground between Loewe's artisanal roots and Korea's craft heritage. Seongsu follows the same logic. Once home to factories and warehouses, the neighborhood has repurposed these industrial spaces as galleries, boutiques, and cafés, creating a distinctive environment where old and new coexist. Loewe's approach to reinterpreting heritage through a contemporary lens aligns naturally with Seongsu's creative revival of its industrial past. By choosing Seongsu rather than a conventional department-store setting for its first fragrance flagship, Loewe is also presenting a younger, more experimental side.

This approach demonstrates how far luxury-brand localization can go. Rather than simply borrowing elements of local culture, Loewe created a space where its defining strengths—craftsmanship and artistry—meet Korea's craft traditions and hanok architecture. Visitors may come to browse fragrances, but they also encounter works by Korean artisans and a hanok-inspired spatial layout. These experiences become part of how they remember the brand. In essence, Loewe has translated the intangible nature of scent into a tangible, multisensory experience through Korean craft. Crucially, the flagship goes beyond simply targeting the domestic Korean market. By opening its first-ever fragrance flagship in Seoul, Loewe has positioned the city as a symbolic launchpad for its global fragrance business. As interest in K-culture continues to grow and more international travelers visit Seongsu, the experience created here reaches audiences worldwide through visitors' social media feeds. Seoul thus becomes both a global hub for Loewe's fragrance business and a platform from which the brand can project its image worldwide.

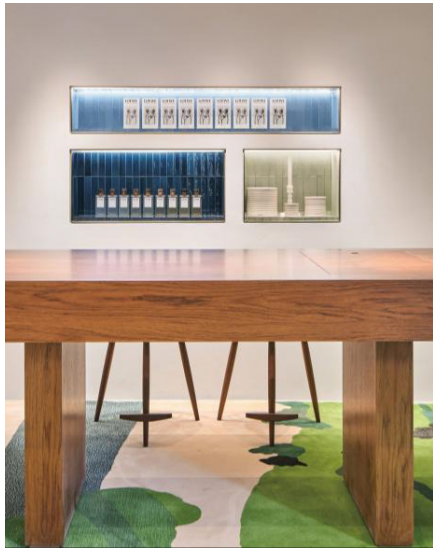
The annual Loewe Foundation Craft Prize upholds craftsmanship.
(Source: Loewe Foundation)



Garden patio at the Loewe Perfumes Seongsu flagship store
(Source: Happicker)



Products on display at the flagship store
(Source: Singles Magazine)



Salomon Trail Run Seoul

A New Checkpoint for Seoul Runners

In April 2026, French mountain sports and lifestyle brand Salomon opened “Salomon Trail Run Seoul”—the world’s first trail-running concept store—in Tongui-dong, Seochon, in Seoul’s Jongno district. Notably, the brand chose not its home country of France, but Seoul, as the launchpad for this global first. Spanning approximately 132 square meters across two floors, the store represents far more than standard retail expansion. It forms part of a broader global strategy that taps into Korea’s distinctive topography and its rapidly growing market for high-performance outdoor gear. Seochon’s geographical advantages were central to the decision. The neighborhood provides direct access from the city to Inwangsan, Bugaksan, and Ansan mountains, allowing runners to move seamlessly between urban streets and natural trails. This has made Seochon a natural hub and regular gathering point for Seoul’s trail-running community. Korea’s broader landscape offered another compelling reason: around 70% of the country is mountainous, and many trails are easily accessible from urban centers. With a steady flow of local runners already passing through the area, Salomon identified Seochon as the ideal place to bring its core brand values to life.

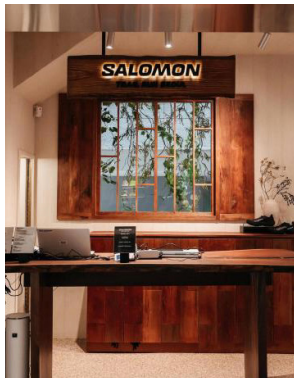
The store is built around the core trail-running concept of a “checkpoint,” or “CP.” During a race, a checkpoint is where runners rehydrate, catch their breath, and prepare for the next leg. More than simply a place to rest, it marks a pivotal moment of transition before moving forward again. Drawing on this idea, the store evokes the atmosphere of a basecamp in Chamonix in the French Alps, reflecting Salomon’s Alpine roots. This familiar setting is then reimagined through the architectural language of the traditional Korean hanok and the distinctive character of Seochon. The result is a unique setting where the heritage of a Western mountain sports brand meets traditional Korean architecture. The store’s layout also emphasizes experience. On the first floor, a pathway from the courtyard leads into the interior and opens onto a community space where runners can rest and connect. The product selection includes trail-running footwear, apparel, and accessories, as well as Salomon’s premium S/LAB performance line. Unlike a conventional running store, the space lets visitors compare products by foot width, ground-contact patterns, and individual running styles. It is designed as a natural entry point for urban runners looking to transition into trail running. Meanwhile, store-exclusive collaborations add another layer of distinction and another reason to visit.

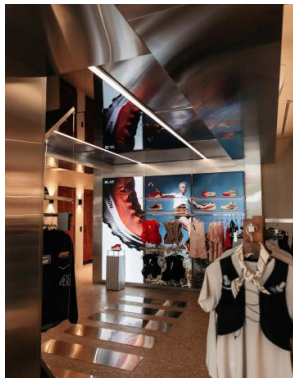





Official launch poster and concept imagery
(Source: Salomon Instagram)





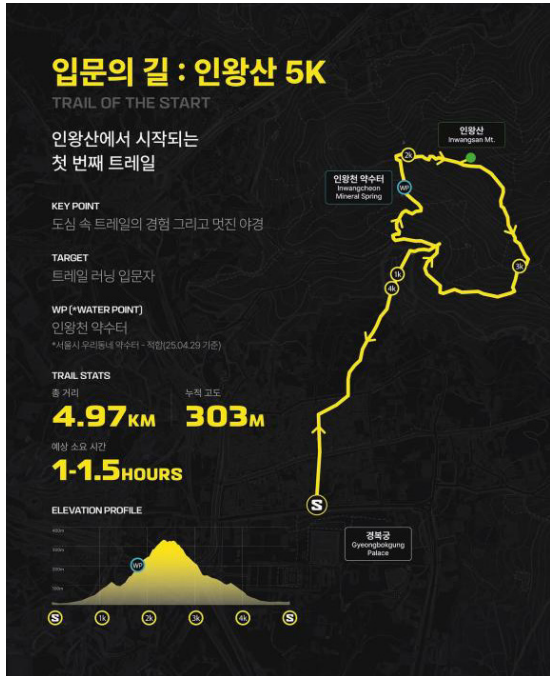


Salomon Trail Run Seoul store
(Source: Salomon Instagram)

Salomon took it a step further by linking Korea's hiking culture to its brand philosophy. To coincide with the store opening, the brand launched the "Yaksu (spring water) Trail Run" campaign, reinterpreting its core focus on hydration through a distinctly Korean lens. Built on the insight that spring water is the mountain's oldest form of hydration, the campaign positioned the Seochon store as an urban checkpoint where runners could recharge before setting out again. In doing so, Salomon connected its hydration philosophy with Korea's long-standing tradition of stopping at mountain springs for water during a hike. The campaign extended beyond the store itself. Starting from the Seochon location, Salomon introduced three trail-running routes, each passing a local mountain spring: the Inwangsan-Inwangcheon Spring route (5.62 km), the Ansan-Baegam Spring route (9.32 km), and the Bugaksan-Noksan Spring route (12.37 km). Designed to provide a quick transition from city streets to mountain trails, the routes make full use of Seochon's geographical advantages. Rather than treating local culture as a decorative motif, Salomon identified an authentic connection between Korean hiking tradition and its brand philosophy, then translated it into a tangible running experience—demonstrating an effective approach to localization.

This connection extends beyond a one-off campaign. Every Thursday evening, the Seochon Trail Run Club brings runners together on routes connecting the city's mountains and natural springs. The program offers coach-led sessions ranging from a beginner-friendly 5K on Inwangsan Mountain to an intermediate 9K on Ansan Mountain. By giving runners a reason to return regularly, the store becomes a recurring community checkpoint, drawing people back week after week. Through this approach, Salomon's Seochon location has moved beyond conventional retail to become a hub for the local trail-running community and lifestyle. Rather than existing purely to sell products, it serves as the starting line for a distinct running culture that connects Seochon with the surrounding mountains. The store shows how a global first can also be deeply rooted in a local environment, and how effectively a global brand can translate Korea's terrain and culture into its own brand language.









Yaksu Trail Run route map (Source: Salomon Instagram)

Seoul:
Where Brands Test, Prove, and Scale

The three brands differ in industry, retail setting, and approach, but they share one common thread: each chose Seoul to launch a milestone “first” while weaving elements of Korean culture into its physical space. From world-first flagships to strategic bases for global expansion, these brands view Seoul as more than a place to sell. They see it as a dynamic testing ground where new concepts can be validated and their global presence scaled.

Point 1 Driving Brand Growth: Seoul as a Showcase and Proving Ground

Global brands choose Seoul for their milestone “firsts” because the city serves as a powerful proving ground. Its highly discerning consumers, rapidly evolving trends, and far-reaching social media influence reinforce the belief that what works in Seoul can work anywhere. This logic is reflected in Burger King’s decision to use Seongsu as a platform for brand expansion and Loewe’s launch of its first standalone fragrance store in Seoul. Local success and global expansion are no longer separate phases; in Seoul, they unfold on the same stage.

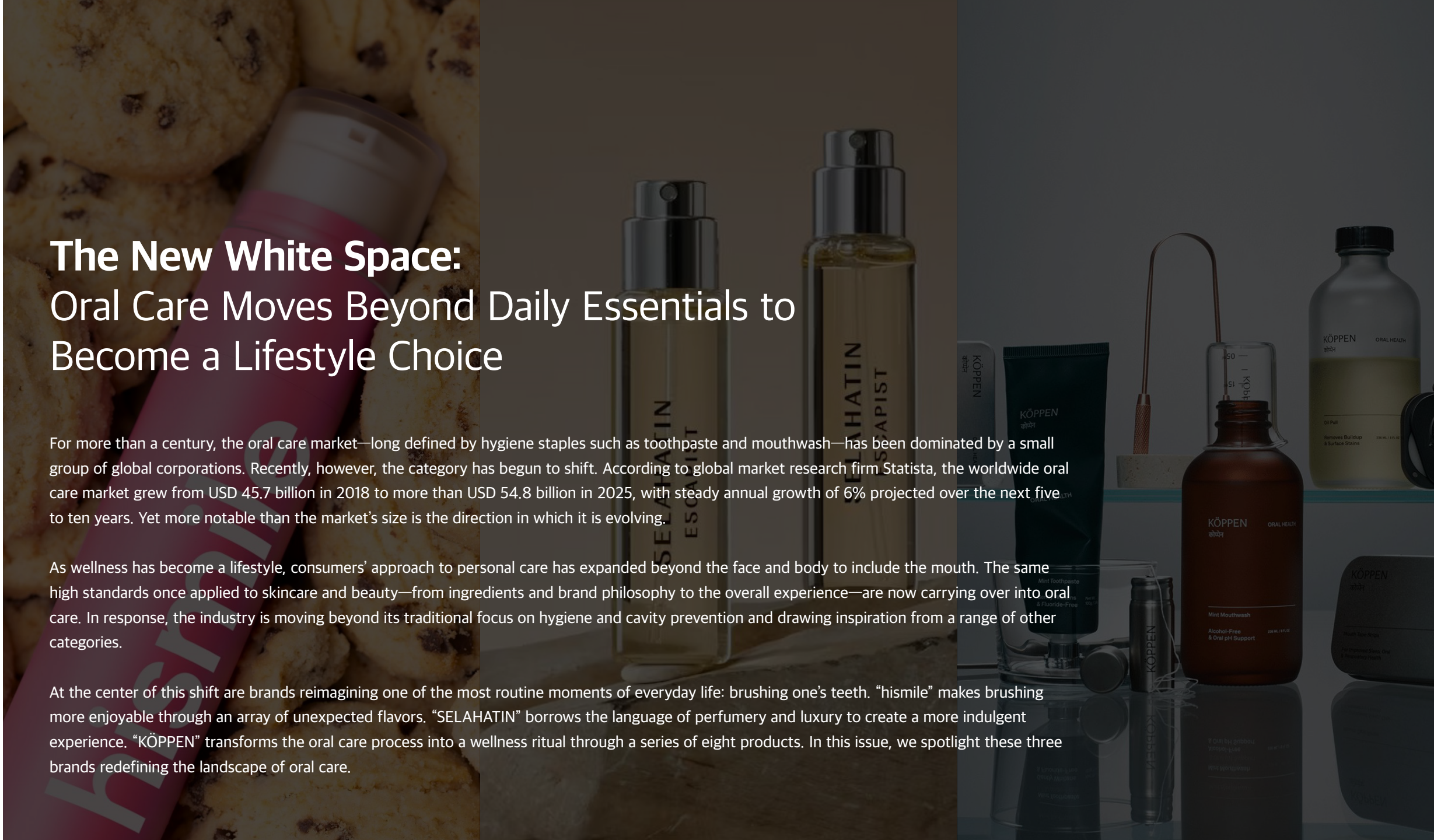
Point 2 Reimagining the Familiar: Translating Local Context into Brand Language

Simply launching a global “first” in Seoul is not enough. What truly distinguishes these three brands is that they went beyond simply displaying local culture. Instead, each found a meaningful connection to its own identity and reinterpreted the local context through the brand’s language. Burger King connected Seongsu’s industrial history of metal and fire with its flame-grilling heritage. Loewe linked its artisanal roots with Korean craft and hanok architecture. Salomon translated Korea’s mountain-spring tradition through its philosophy centered on hydration. By translating local context into brand language, these spaces offer domestic consumers a fresh experience in a familiar setting while giving international visitors a location-specific experience that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Source: Design Camp Moonpark DMP

The New White Space: Oral Care Moves Beyond Daily Essentials to Become a Lifestyle Choice

We brush our teeth three times a day—nearly 90,000 times over a lifetime. Here, we explore three brands reimagining this easily overlooked routine through their own distinctive lenses.



The New White Space:
Oral Care Moves Beyond Daily Essentials to Become a Lifestyle Choice

For more than a century, the oral care market—long defined by hygiene staples such as toothpaste and mouthwash—has been dominated by a small group of global corporations. Recently, however, the category has begun to shift. According to global market research firm Statista, the worldwide oral care market grew from USD 45.7 billion in 2018 to more than USD 54.8 billion in 2025, with steady annual growth of 6% projected over the next five to ten years. Yet more notable than the market's size is the direction in which it is evolving.

As wellness has become a lifestyle, consumers' approach to personal care has expanded beyond the face and body to include the mouth. The same high standards once applied to skincare and beauty—from ingredients and brand philosophy to the overall experience—are now carrying over into oral care. In response, the industry is moving beyond its traditional focus on hygiene and cavity prevention and drawing inspiration from a range of other categories.

At the center of this shift are brands reimagining one of the most routine moments of everyday life: brushing one's teeth. "hismile" makes brushing more enjoyable through an array of unexpected flavors. "SELAHATIN" borrows the language of perfumery and luxury to create a more indulgent experience. "KÖPPEN" transforms the oral care process into a wellness ritual through a series of eight products. In this issue, we spotlight these three brands redefining the landscape of oral care.

hismile

Making Brushing Fun with Flavored Toothpaste

Founded in Australia, hismile began with a simple question: Why does brushing your teeth always have to be boring? The brand recognized the universal nature of toothbrushing. Some people may take little interest in skincare or haircare, but nearly everyone brushes their teeth several times a day throughout their lives. hismile saw enormous potential in bringing a small moment of joy to such a universal, lifelong routine—an idea that could resonate on a global scale. With this insight, the brand made a bold bet on "flavor." Breaking away from the assumption that toothpaste must taste like mint, hismile offers more than 50 unconventional flavors, including Cotton Candy, Cinnamon Donut, and Tiramisu. Yet the brand's real strength lies not only in the flavors themselves, but in how it presents them.

hismile also generates buzz through bold collaborations. Chocolate has long been viewed as one of the leading culprits behind tooth decay. Upending this conventional wisdom, hismile partnered with Reese's—one of America's most iconic candy brands—to bring an unlikely idea to life: a limited-edition Reese's Peanut Butter Cup toothpaste. When the collaboration was unveiled in late February, the brand teased the launch with the phrase "This is not a drill," fueling curiosity and anticipation well before the product officially went on sale. The campaign quickly gained traction on social media, attracting attention far beyond Australia and New Zealand, where the toothpaste was available. Consumers worldwide lamented that their own markets had missed out on the release.

hismile also partnered with KFC to launch a flavor few would ever associate with toothpaste: fried chicken. The limited-edition product sold out within just two days. The KFC Fried Chicken Toothpaste sparked intense curiosity, generating a very different kind of content from conventional toothpaste reviews. Consumers and creators posted videos capturing their reactions as they tried the product, with the results resembling snack tastings or mukbang ("eating webcast") content. Immediately after the launch, social media was filled with unfiltered responses ranging from visible confusion to gagging. These reactions became a key driver of the product's virality. In essence, hismile adapted the familiar taste-test format typically used for new snacks and unusual beverages to the oral care category.



Source: hismile Website

More recently, hismile collaborated with Netflix's "Stranger Things." At first glance, a science-fiction thriller and toothpaste appear to have little in common. Yet the brand homed in on one memorable detail—Eleven's love of waffles—and turned it into a waffle-flavored toothpaste. Beyond these partnerships, hismile boldly departs from the hygiene-first conventions of traditional oral care marketing. Instead, it experiments with approaches more commonly associated with food and wellness brands. For dessert-inspired flavors such as Red Velvet and Tiramisu, for example, hismile uses the tagline "Zero Guilt"—language more commonly found in diet and food marketing than in oral care.

hismile has also consistently created opportunities to listen to its customers. A prime example is "Smile School," a campaign that invited hundreds of children to submit ideas for new toothpaste flavors. The children dreamed up imaginative concepts, and fans voted for their favorites. After receiving a wide range of submissions, hismile narrowed the entries to three finalists based on creativity, design, and flavor. Chocolate Marshmallow ultimately took the top spot, beating Vanilla Waffle and Toast. Following a final round of voting, the winning concept is now set for an official launch. Through initiatives like this, brushing one's teeth—once a private and repetitive routine—becomes a shared event that sparks conversation and participation. Rather than promoting a toothpaste that cleans better, hismile offers a brushing experience consumers can actually look forward to, tapping into an element long overlooked by the traditional oral care market: fun.

1 ——— hismile x KFC collaboration (Source: hismile Instagram)
2 ——— Review of the hismile x KFC toothpaste (Source: TikTok @munchwithdes)
3 ——— "SAME FLAVOUR, ZERO GUILT" (Source: hismile Instagram)
4 ——— Smile School campaign (Source: hismile Instagram)



1



2



3



4

SELAHATIN

Elevating Oral Care to a Luxury Ritual

SELAHATIN

Paradoxically, Selahatin is an oral care brand that first gained recognition in the luxury world. The brand was born from the deeply personal experience of Kristoffer Vural, a Stockholm-based designer and former magazine editor. At just 25, Vural suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed and undergoing rehabilitation in a hospital for a year. In the aftermath, his senses of smell and taste became extraordinarily heightened. In this condition, conventional mint toothpastes felt generic and overly chemical, and having to use them day after day became an ordeal. Determined to transform the small, repetitive routines that occupy so much of life into rituals of self-care, Vural set out to create “perfume for the mouth.”

True to its philosophy of creating “perfume for the mouth,” Selahatin’s products resemble fine fragrance. Much like a perfume described through top, heart, and base notes as its scent evolves, Selahatin presents each toothpaste flavor as a layered composition of notes. The product development process also mirrors perfumery. In Vural’s studio, a library of more than 100 aromatic raw materials sourced from the French fragrance house Robertet forms the foundation of the brand’s flavor compositions. Drawing from this library, Selahatin boldly introduces ingredients traditionally associated with fine fragrance—such as bergamot and clove—into oral care. Vural’s cultural upbringing in Turkey has also profoundly shaped the brand. Drawing on memories of freshening his mouth after meals with traditional aromatic botanicals such as clove, he expanded the definition of freshness in oral care.

This philosophy extends to the packaging. Rather than relying on loud commercial cues, Selahatin’s visual identity embraces restraint and minimalism, expressed through contemporary Scandinavian design. The toothpaste comes in recyclable aluminum tubes, with every detail—from the typography to the color palette—considered with the same care as a fine fragrance bottle. The result is a product that feels more like a design object meant to be displayed on the bathroom counter.



Source: Selahatin Website

Rather than using conventional product names based on flavor or function, Selahatin gives its products poetic titles inspired by works of art. One of its signature products, “Of Course I Still Luv You,” draws inspiration from Andrew Wyeth’s painting “Christina’s World.” Echoing the painting’s contrast between luminous tones and a darker emotional undercurrent, the formula pairs bright notes of bergamot and verbena with deeper accents of pine and cardamom. Vural describes these compositions as “paintings for the mind,” reflecting the brand’s ambition to create a new realm of oral care by bringing together function, fragrance, and elevated design.

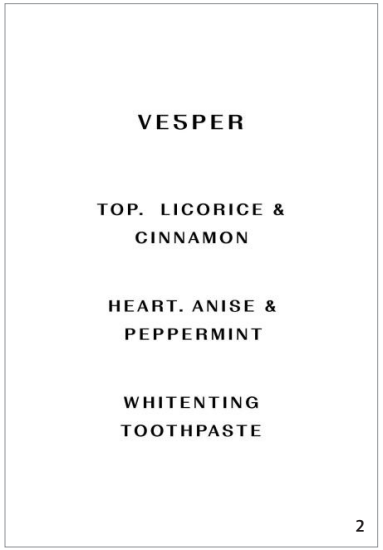
Selahatin’s artistic and bold approach captured the attention of the fashion industry. Leading publications hailed it as “the world’s most sophisticated toothpaste brand” (Monocle) and “one of the best grooming brands in the world” (GQ). More recently, the brand launched an official collaboration with fashion designer Rick Owens, a longtime Selahatin devotee. The partnership grew from their shared spirit of defiance, attraction to darkness, and deep commitment to ritual.

For the collaboration, Selahatin created a new signature fragrance that translates Rick Owens’s distinctive monochrome aesthetic into scent. The collection also features a handcrafted toothbrush made from animal horn and boar bristles, turning a functional item into a collectible design object. The toothbrush uses horn sourced as a by-product of the meat industry and is made without synthetic chemicals. As horn is a natural material, each piece varies subtly in color and nuance, making every toothbrush one of a kind. The pricing reinforces this sense of rarity, with a 65 ml tube of toothpaste retailing for €22 and the Rick Owens collaboration toothbrush for €65.

Selahatin has transformed brushing one’s teeth—one of the most ordinary and easily overlooked moments of daily life—into a sensory ritual. Born from the founder’s personal journey through loss and recovery, the brand demonstrates that luxury is ultimately less about what one owns than about what one experiences and how one experiences it. Even the most ordinary habit can become art when approached with care and full sensory attention, as Selahatin powerfully demonstrates.



1



2



3

1 ——— “Of Course I Still Love You” product display (Source: Selahatin Website)
2 ——— Vesper product description (Source: Selahatin Instagram)
3 ——— Rick Owens x Selahatin (Source: Selahatin Website)

KÖPPEN

Transforming Oral Care into an All-Day Wellness Ritual

Köppen reimagines oral care beyond toothbrushing, reframing it as an all-day wellness ritual. The brand is rooted in Ayurveda, an ancient Indian system of medicine that siblings Parag and Priya Shah encountered from an early age. Practiced for more than 3,000 years, Ayurveda centers on restoring balance between body and mind through natural remedies such as herbs and oils. Köppen began in 2021 as an online store specializing in Ayurvedic products. In 2023, the brand launched the “Copper Tongue Scraper,” which established the foundation of its current identity. Tongue scraping is a long-standing Ayurvedic practice in India. At the time of the product’s launch, the ritual was gaining traction on TikTok alongside content focused on eliminating bad breath. Köppen’s scraper became a viral success, generating nearly 10 million views and selling 40,000 units.

Building on this foundation, the founders expanded Köppen’s core concept into a complete oral care ritual. Moving beyond the traditional view of oral care as toothbrushing alone, they reimagined it as an end-to-end system that supports oral health throughout the day. The product lineup is organized into three phases: Detox, Protect, and Support. The morning Detox phase begins with the Copper Tongue Scraper and cold-pressed oil pulling, designed to clean the tongue's surface and remove bacteria that accumulate overnight. The daytime Protect phase consists of toothpaste, mouthwash, and bamboo silk floss. The formulas minimize artificial ingredients such as bleaching agents and triclosan, instead using botanical extracts and plant enzymes. The gentle mouthwash supports a balanced oral pH and reduces odor, while flossing completes the phase by reaching areas brushing may miss. The Support phase, used during quiet moments throughout the day or before bed, includes lip balm, mouth mints, and mouth tape. Formulated with organic oils, the lip balm helps hydrate and protect the lips’ natural barrier, while the mints support enamel repair and surface remineralization between brushings. Finally, the mouth tape keeps the mouth closed and encourages nasal breathing during sleep, helping reduce the risk of cavities.



Source: KÖPPEN Website

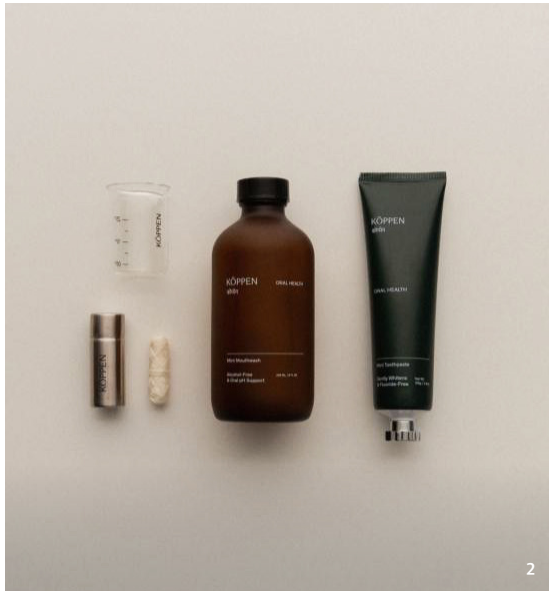
Ultimately, what Köppen has created is a “whole-mouth” care system that supports the entire oral environment—not only the teeth and gums—including the tongue, saliva, and oral microbiome. Priced at approximately $265 for the complete system, it brings a series of previously fragmented rituals together into a single, integrated routine. The brand’s slogan captures this ambition: “Oral care, reimagined.” Köppen moves away from the clinical, hygiene-first language of conventional oral care and instead adopts the vocabulary of premium lifestyle and skincare brands. Its lip balm is positioned through the skincare concepts of hydration and barrier protection, while its mints highlight functional ingredients such as parsley and xylitol and are presented as an oral wellness product for use between brushings. Restrained design and a carefully curated visual mood are also central to the brand’s identity, transforming oral care products into objects worth owning. Köppen communicates the belief that brushing—a daily routine repeated throughout a lifetime—deserves to be elevated and approached with intention. For the brand, the mouth is where health, wellness, beauty, and confidence intersect.

Köppen limits distribution to create scarcity. The brand made its retail debut at Laurel, a luxury grocer in Los Angeles, where its full product range sold out multiple times. It has since expanded selectively into luxury hotels such as Oberish and fashion retailers such as Revoleve, while deliberately avoiding mass distribution.

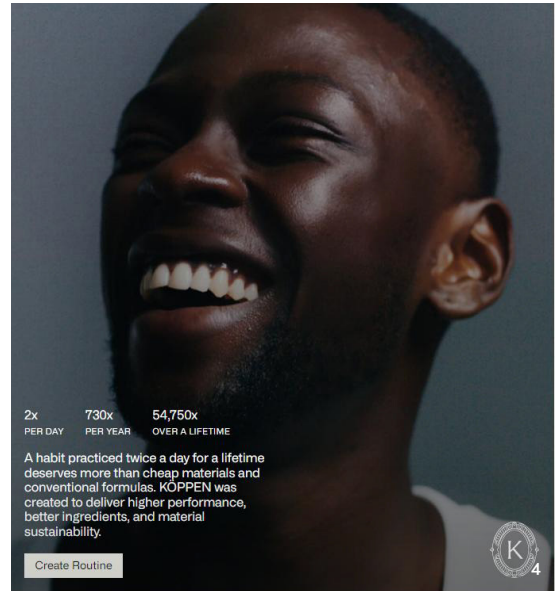
Ultimately, what Köppen has designed is not merely a collection of individual products, but a routine that unfolds throughout the day. The remarkably consistent subscription rates across all eight products—from lip balm to toothpaste—suggest that consumers are buying into the complete system rather than purchasing standalone items. The brand shows that as wellness becomes more sophisticated, both the price point of oral care and how consumers engage with the category can evolve with it.

1 ——— Detox Set (Source: Köppen Instagram)
2 ——— Protect Set (Source: Köppen Instagram)
3 ——— Support Set (Source: Köppen Instagram)
4 ——— Köppen brand philosophy (Source: Köppen Website)









Good Hygiene Alone Is No Longer Enough

The competitive landscape of oral care has moved beyond functional performance. The question is no longer how effectively a product cleans, but how brands can reimagine toothbrushing—a mundane, repetitive task performed over a lifetime. Success now depends on transforming this daily obligation into an experience consumers genuinely look forward to by introducing elements of fun, ritual, and sensory richness.

Borrow the Code

Adopting the codes of other industries.

All three brands have moved beyond the hygiene-led conventions of oral care by drawing inspiration from other categories. hismile borrows the element of “fun” from various flavors and media franchises such as Reese’s, KFC, and Stranger Things. Selahatin adopts the sensory language of perfumery and luxury, while Köppen draws on skincare’s concepts of ritual and system-based care. Importantly, these brands go beyond collaborations. Selahatin incorporates perfumery’s system of fragrance notes and its product-development process, while Köppen applies the luxury industry’s scarcity playbook to its distribution strategy.

Key Strategies

- Identify the conventions and assumptions within the category, then match them with codes from adjacent industries—particularly those that consumers already associate with greater value.
- Go beyond collaborations by exploring how another industry’s language, product-development processes, or distribution strategies could be adapted to the category.

Beyond Brushing

Expanding the experience to the moments before and after toothbrushing.

All three brands build a competitive advantage not through brushing alone, but through the touchpoints around it. hismile builds anticipation with collaboration teasers and viral taste-test content. Selahatin designs its products as aesthetic objects, keeping the brand visible even when they are not in use. Köppen identifies oral care moments throughout the day and connects them into one cohesive system. Ultimately, the opportunity lies not only in reimagining brushing itself, but also in reshaping the moments that come before and after it.

Key Strategies

- Identify and claim overlooked moments in the customer journey that competitors have yet to occupy, such as the time a product spends on shelf between uses.
- Connect fragmented actions into a unified sequence, creating a distinctive branded routine that competitors cannot easily replicate

INNOCEAN

Strategic Solutions Division

Any unauthorized alteration and distribution of this material is prohibited.