

Belif: Repositioning a Korean Skincare Brand for Gen Z America

Role: User Researcher

Client: Belif (LG H&H)

Timeline: September 2025 – Present

Methods: Focus groups, 1:1 interviews, lifestyle research, product testing, analytics review

Deliverables: Consumer archetypes, personas, journey maps, insight reports, branding pathways

Overview

Belif, a Korean skincare brand under LG H&H, has built strong brand loyalty in Korea. Now, they're looking to reposition for the US market — specifically targeting Gen Z consumers rather than their traditional millennial base.

Before Belif could reposition for the US, it needed to answer something more foundational: *Who is Belif — not just in Korea, but in the eyes of American Gen Z? Who can it best serve? And how should it appear to this new audience?*

This project pushed me to look beyond product benefits and into the deeper motivations, tensions, and identity work that shapes how young consumers relate to skincare. In an industry as saturated as beauty, the answers don't come from surveys alone — they come from observing what's said and unsaid, done and not done.

Context

The skincare market is crowded. For a heritage Korean brand to break through with American Gen Z, Belif needed more than a product refresh — they needed to understand a new consumer from the ground up.

Korea HQ commissioned this research to inform a potential rebrand and US market strategy. The core questions:

- Who can Belif best serve with its current and future products?
 - What do US consumers actually need and want from skincare?
 - What draws American Gen Z to a brand — beyond ingredients and efficacy?
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Empathize

Research Approach

I conducted research with 50+ US-based Gen Z consumers through a mix of methods:

Method	Purpose
Focus Groups	Surface shared attitudes, language, and social dynamics around skincare
1:1 Interviews	Deep-dive into individual routines, values, and decision-making
Lifestyle Research	Understand consumers holistically — not just as skincare buyers
Product Testing	Evaluate existing Belif products and an unreleased new product
Analytics Review	Ground qualitative insights in behavioral data from Belif

Research was conducted through biweekly sessions with the Belif research team, ensuring continuous alignment between US insights and Korea HQ.

Why Lifestyle Research?

Consumers don't buy skincare in a vacuum. Their choices are shaped by identity, values, social context, and life stage. By expanding beyond product-focused questions, we could see how skincare fits into larger patterns of self-care, self-presentation, and aspiration.

Define

Key Insights

1. The Effortless-Intentional Tension

Consumers want to be *intentional* about their choices — deliberate, informed, in control. But they also want to *appear* effortless — like good skin just happens. This tension shapes everything from product selection to how they talk about routines publicly vs. privately.

2. Skincare as Relationship

Gen Z wants to buy from brands they can have a relationship with — not just a transaction. They're drawn to brands with personality, values, and a sense of reciprocity.

3. Acne as Origin Story

For nearly every consumer we spoke with, acne was their introduction to skincare. It's a shared entry point that shapes early attitudes, product choices, and even self-image.

4. Necessity vs. Indulgence

Consumers navigate between skincare as *necessity* (maintenance, problem-solving, discipline) and skincare as *indulgence* (ritual, pleasure, self-care). Different consumers — and the same consumer at different moments —

lean into each framing.

Consumer Archetypes

From the research, we developed three consumer archetypes representing distinct motivations and behaviors:

Archetype	Core Motivation
The Mindful Explorer	Curious, research-driven, wants to understand what they're putting on their skin
The Effortless Achiever	Wants results without complexity; values simplicity and efficiency
The Validation Seeker	Motivated by social proof, community, and external affirmation

These archetypes exist on a spectrum — consumers may embody traits from multiple types depending on context.

Deliverables

- 3 consumer archetypes with behavioral profiles
- 3 detailed personas
- Consumer journey maps
- Insight report with key tensions
- Prioritization matrix for strategic focus

Ideate

From Archetypes to Strategy

The three archetypes informed three distinct branding pathways — each representing a different strategic direction for how Belif could position itself in the US market.

Rather than choosing one archetype to "win," the pathways explored how Belif's brand DNA could authentically connect with each consumer type.

These pathways were presented to the Belif branding team in the US and Seoul, Korea in December 2025.

Test & Implement

Stakeholder Response

The December presentation landed well. Stakeholders found strong alignment with the archetypes — the framework gave them shared language to discuss their target consumer.

The outcome: Belif chose to pursue **two branding pathways** simultaneously, with the next phase focused on finding the intersection between them. The hypothesis is that the overlap may reveal Belif's most authentic and differentiated positioning for Gen Z.

This work is ongoing.

Reflect

On Challenge

The hardest part has been balancing **existing brand equity with innovation**. Belif has a heritage and loyal base in Korea. The question isn't just "what do Gen Z want?" — it's "how can Belif stay true to itself while evolving for a new consumer?"

There's no formula for that. It requires holding multiple truths at once.

On Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Working across US and Korea teams taught me that communication is its own skill to learn and relearn. The same way you'd learn Spanish to speak with a Spanish-speaking person, a researcher must learn to speak in the language of their partners — whether that's designers, marketers, or executives in Seoul.

It's not always required, but when it clicks, alignment follows.

On the Craft

This project reinforced why I love research. Skincare is saturated. The answers aren't sitting on the surface. You have to listen for what's said and not said, observe what's done and not done. You have to care about people beyond the transaction.

That's the work.

What's Next

- Explore the intersection of the two selected branding pathways
- Refine positioning recommendations for Belif's US relaunch
- Support the transition from research to brand and marketing execution

Summary

Phase	Timeline	Key Activity
Research	Sep – Dec 2025	50+ participant study; focus groups, interviews, product testing
Synthesis	Nov – Dec 2025	Archetypes, personas, journey maps, insight reports
Strategy	Dec 2025	Presented 3 branding pathways to US and Seoul teams
Next Phase	Jan 2026+	Intersection mapping; positioning refinement

Designer by training. Researcher by instinct. Strategist by obsession.