

Influence of Korean Fashion in India

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Abstract:

With the rising global popularity of Hallyu or the Korean wave, various K-cultures, one of them being K-Fashion, are fascinating the world. Korean street fashion has emerged as a distinctive and influential cultural phenomenon, shaped by Seoul's dynamic urban landscape, youth creativity, and the global reach of K-pop and media culture. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Korean streetwear functions as a form of soft power, projecting the country's cultural identity and influencing global fashion sensibilities. Simultaneously K- fashion industry faces critical sustainability challenges, fast fashion, overproduction, consumption patterns, and environmental decline. This research investigates how sustainable design practices can be integrated into Korean street fashion, maintaining its cultural vibrancy while promoting ecological responsibility among teens. This paper demonstrates that urban street-wear, when aligned with sustainable principles, can reinforce Korea's soft power globally while advancing eco-conscious practices in contemporary fashion in India.

Keywords: Hallyu, Korean Fashion (K-Fashion), Korean Food, K-Dramas, K-Pop

Introduction

Korea is known by its trends and fashion (Kim, 2012a; Kim, 2017). The term K-Fashion has been coined by combining the words „K“ for Korea and „Fashion“ for its lexical meaning of “style and trend for clothing and hairstyles that are popular at the time” (Ahn & Geum, 2016). K-Fashion“ is often used interchangeably with „Korean fashion“, the two terminologies certainly do not connote different meanings, Korean fashion“ in simple words, refers to the fashion style and clothes made in or made by Korean designers, brands, and manufacturers, the term „K-Fashion“ means more than just the Korean style of fashion.

The Korean apparel industry is a premium segment that creates value by fusing fashion design, highly sensitive and functional materials, and brand value. Kim, H. and Ha, J. (2010) The K-fashion industry faces pressing sustainability challenges, including overproduction, fast-fashion consumption patterns, and environmental degradation. The apparel industry contributes to employment generation, including the raw materials industry, logistics and distribution channels, and the resource -service industry, which includes merchandisers. Korean street fashion is increasingly integrating sustainable practices, with brands using recycled materials, upcycling waste, and employing waterless dyeing and eco-friendly printing methods. Korean fashion brands and designers have embraced sustainability as a core value, infusing their collections with eco-friendly materials, ethical production processes and responsible business practices. Bigger brands like UL:KIN and PARTsPARTs have gained global recognition for their commitment to sustainable fashion, creating garments that combine aesthetics with a low environmental footprint.

The Korean apparel industry faces many difficulties. The level of growth and profitability is low, and the production base has weakened due to the miniaturisation of companies, an ageing workforce, a

deteriorating working environment and the relocation of production factories overseas. The Korean apparel industry has fallen into a positioning trap, stuck between the checks of advanced countries such as Italy, Japan and Germany, but with weaker price competitiveness compared to developing countries such as China, Vietnam and India. It is struggling to pioneer a global market due to weak price competitiveness with developing countries and inferior brand image and design compared to advanced countries.

What is K- Fashion

Minimalism: “Less is more” is best fitted to describe K-fashion. Korean fashion is known for its simple and minimalistic style that is visually appealing. K-fashion usually goes with neutral shades and basic colors like muted or pastel colors. It also doesn’t add more than two prints in one outfit to make it classy yet chic. (Baek & Bae, 2021).

Oversized clothing: Oversized and baggy clothes have become comfortable and casual for the youngsters. One can style oversized clothes in many ways and is considered fashionable. For example, an oversized t-shirt can be worn with skinny jeans paired with sunglasses and a hobo bag. Either way the way one styles these clothes depends totally on their preferences. On the other hand, pairing it with baggy pants and a tote bag can give off a different vibe.

Influenced by culture: Korean Fashion is influenced by their culture. Though not many people believe in religion in South Korea. They believe that the character of a person depends on their appearance. So, apart from celebrities even common people in South Korea are conscious of their appearance in public and that’s why they have a good fashion sense which makes the world even more attracted to them. Vogue College of Fashion. (2024, May 15)

Influence of Korean Music

Over recent years, the global phenomenon of South Korean popular music (K-pop) has taken the industry by storm. From catchy melodies, synchronised choreographies and visually striking music videos, the genre has captured a diverse global fanbase. Vogue College of Fashion. (2024, May 15) K-pop’s influence goes beyond the music industry, with fashion being a fundamental role in defining the visual identity of a group. K-pop artists, commonly referred to as “idols”, transcend cultural and language barriers, to introduce elements of South Korean culture to the global fashion scene. From vibrant, eclectic outfits to meticulously curated styles, fashion has become a vital way for K-pop groups to convey their unique aesthetics and attract a worldwide audience.

Hallyu and K-Culture

The Korean Wave is divided into three categories: “Hallyu 1.0,” “Hallyu 2.0,” and “Hallyu 3.0” (Kim, 2021) with elements such as the core genres, reaching audiences, media distribution channels, and content platforms taken into consideration. There have been various governmental policies to promote Hallyu from the early 1990s to up until now, and consequently, the fourth stage has been named “New Hallyu” or “K-Culture” under the New Hallyu Promotion Policy in 2020 by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. During the stages of Hallyu 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 from the late 1990s to the late 2010s, the target audience of Korean culture has shifted from few manias in Asian countries to the global citizens of all ages (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange [KOFICE], 2021), and the core genre has broadened from K-Drama and K-Pop to various other cultural contents. Now, the faster transmission

speed thanks to 5G network service led to an increase in sales and attracting customers from all over the world. K-Pop, followed by K-Food, and K-Drama were the images that foreigners associated the most with Korea (KOFICE, 2021) and they have been studied in association with Korean wave by many scholars. Among them, K-Pop and K-Drama are closely related to K-Fashion, as K-Fashion is often perceived as what the Hallyu stars are wearing by Hallyu fans. Especially, K-Pop is exerting great power in the fashion world, as the K-Pop stars are the centre of attention in the fashion industry nowadays, making them the ambassadors of the world-famous luxury fashion houses. The fashion styles displayed by K-Pop stars have been examined by many scholars as well, which includes fashion images and styling of K-Pop stars (Park, 2012; Kim, 2012; Na & Jang, 2012), fashion images of K-Pop girl groups (Kim, 2010; Chung & Yoo, 2013), fashion presentation of K-Pop stars (Ryu & Han, 2001), images of Korean boy groups (Hong & Kim, 2012), and aesthetic characteristics of K-Pop fashion Song et al., 2014). Meanwhile, because of its diversified subjects, K-Drama is receiving greater love from global fans, and it is perceived as a good visual resource that reflects how Korean people dress in real lives

The power of 3: The trend of wearing trench coats, blazers, and puffer jackets is increasing in popularity, not only among women but also men. Korean girls can't show their shoulders or chest and that's why the power of three is distinguishable in Korean trends. K-fashion emphasizes mixing clothes with different styles and making one's own style. For example, Korean men dress in white casual T-shirts, and a blazer paired up with formal slacks, this attire is known as the boyfriend look.

Unisex: Fashion doesn't have any gender and so it is believed by Korean fashion. It is unisex in nature which means both men and women can wear it. Korean clothes, sneakers, and accessories are not arranged by gender but by size and price. For example, blazers and coats are worn by both men and women making it preferable for many youngsters.

Formation and Globalization of Fashion Culture

Socio-cultural changes that occurred after the Industrial Revolution that affected human life would be the great development of technology. Industrial Revolution, the fashion industry system centred on the royal family and aristocrats, and the production and distribution of clothing were strictly restricted, leaving the poor and the lower class alienated from the fashion system (Joo & Ha, 2016). However, today, in the digital age, the means of collecting and sharing information, and the consumption method of fashion culture and systems have changed accordingly from the past form. There have been systematic changes in the fashion industry (Joo & Ha, 2016): the birth of fast fashion brands, the rapid growth of smartphone users and the expansion of the mobile market, and the interrelationship built between producers and consumers. The Internet, the gap between fashion producers and consumers narrowed, and consumers became the main body in the production process (Joo & Ha, 2016). Fashion brands are communicating through digital media, especially online and digital media have been more actively used in marketing and communication due to the global pandemic since 2020 (Baek & Bae, 2021).

Finally, today, the leaders of the fashion system are changing according to media changes, with ordinary citizens becoming "cultural capitalists" (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2013; Kim, 2019) through social media platforms giving birth to non-traditional fashion influencers. Overall, it can be said that digitalization has allowed the fashion culture to become more globalized and connected the fashion consumers and producers in the world closer than ever. Fashion has reflected socio-cultural changes. Fashion Industry is directly related to the Industrial Revolution (Morton, 1943/1964). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the fashion industry system centred on the and aristocrats & royal family, and the production and distribution

of clothing were strictly restricted, leaving the poor and the lower class alienated from the fashion system (Joo & Ha, 2016). However, today, in the digital age, the means of collecting and sharing information, and the consumption method of fashion culture and systems have changed accordingly from the past. There have been systematic changes in the fashion industry (Joo & Ha, 2016): the birth of fast fashion brands, the rapid growth of smartphone users and the expansion of the mobile market, and the interrelationship built between producers and consumers. Through the Internet, the gap between fashion producers and consumers narrowed, and consumers became the main body in the production process (Joo & Ha, 2016). Fashion brands are communicating through digital media, especially online and digital media have been more actively used in marketing and communication due to the global pandemic since 2020 (Baek & Bae, 2021). The leaders of the fashion system are changing according to media changes, with ordinary citizens becoming “cultural capitalists” (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2013; Kim, 2019) through social media platforms giving birth to non-traditional fashion influencers. Overall, it can be said that digitalization has allowed the fashion culture to become more globalized and connected the fashion consumers and producers in the world closer than ever.

Korean Fashion in the Global Market

The Korean government has been trying to support the domestic fashion industry with various measures. One of them is the scheme to globalize the traditional Korean custom, Hanbok, under the Han style promotion comprehension plan from 2007 to 2011 by re-branding and re-designing it (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2007). Also, programs have been organized and run at an institutional level, including Concept Korea, Seoul’s 10 Soul, „K-Fashion“ Project, and „Fashion Korea“ Project (Kim, 2017). Each project is designed to give support and advice to Korean fashion brands and designers to grow as global fashion brands and to successfully enter global markets. Especially due to the accelerated digitalization since COVID-19, the Korean fashion industry is aiming to showcase digital runways and showrooms to international buyers, and the organizations such as Korea Creative Content Agency [KOCCA] are helping them in successfully doing so. While Korean fashion brands are gaining global recognition, Korean fashion brands sold at global retailers are also increasing. As it is recognized for its fast production of trend-sensitive and creative designs (Park, 2017), domestic fashion brands are receiving love calls from overseas buyers and some famous select shops. For example, young designer brands such as „Ader Error“ and „Andersson Bell“ are worn by global K-pop stars such as BTS, and they are already on global online fashion retailers to reach global customers more easily. To be in line with the global market's transition to e-commerce, K-Fashion companies are strengthening non-face-to-face online order methods as a means of the transaction (Lee, 2020) and running the Direct-To-Consumer [DTC] online stores to communicate with customers from foreign countries effectively. As such, with the bigger opportunities given by the active usage of media platforms worldwide, Korean fashion brands are growing to become more global.

Why has it become so famous in India?

The rise of K-pop and K-drama has had a significant influence on Indian fashion, with many young consumers seeking to emulate their favourite Korean celebrities’ styles. Korean fashion brands have capitalized on this trend by offering unique and trendy designs that cater to a younger demographic.

Additionally, Korean brands' online presence and affordable pricing have made it easier for Indian consumers to access their products and stay updated with the latest fashion trends. The success of Korean fashion brands in India underscores the importance of brand differentiation and cultural relevance in today's global fashion market.

The Impact of K-fashion on India.

The impact of K-fashion on India can be significant, as it offers unique and trendy styles that may not be commonly found in Indian fashion. Indians who are exposed to K-fashion can be introduced to new styles, silhouettes, and colors that they may not have previously considered, broadening their fashion horizons and inspiring them to experiment with their own style. This is particularly relevant to the youth who are always on the lookout for new and trendy fashion styles.

With the growing popularity of K-fashion, there may be an increased demand for Korean clothing and accessories in India. This could lead to more Korean fashion brands entering the Indian market, making it easier for Indians to access and purchase K-fashion. As a result, K-fashion can boost the Indian fashion industry, create new job opportunities, and generate revenue for the country.

The popularity of K-fashion in India can also lead to a cross-cultural exchange between Korea and India. Indians may become more interested in Korean culture and vice versa, leading to a deeper appreciation and understanding of each other's cultures. This can foster greater cultural ties between the two countries and create a shared platform for artistic and creative expression.

Furthermore, K-fashion can inspire Indian designers to incorporate Korean elements into their designs, leading to a fusion of Korean and Indian fashion. This can create a new and unique style that appeals to both Indian and Korean audiences and has the potential to influence the global fashion industry.

Conclusion:

Though K-pop, K-drama, K-food, and their growing technology have made the world in awe. Now K-fashion has also joined forces with them. The impact of K-fashion on Indians can be a positive one, leading to a greater diversity of fashion styles, increased cultural exchange, and a boost to the Indian fashion industry. It is an exciting time for the Indian fashion industry as it embraces new trends and styles from around the world.

The popularity and consumption of K-Dramas and K-Pop is such that Korean couture aesthetics and culinary traditions have entered Indian popular culture as symbols of aspirational lifestyle leading to cultural alignment with East Asian modernity. The literature provides insights that Indian fandom, particularly youth, urban, and mostly females, engage with Korean culture through the lens of K-Dramas, K-Pop, and social media both emotionally and performatively by choosing the Korean fashion, food habits, digital fandom practices, etc. Most of the studies were based out of the North-Eastern and South regions, indicating how this cultural engagement unfolds in context specific ways. North-Eastern people find similarity with the Koreans and are vulnerable to adopt the culture. However, the gaps persist in the literature as studies are not pan-Indian, they also do not cover all age groups, and much of the existing research in this area remains descriptive and localized. More work needs to be done covering these gaps and discovering deeper insights about the cultural hybridization of Korean culture in India.

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