

## **DECONSTRUCTING TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY: THE INFLUENCE OF KOREANISATION ON THE INDIAN SOCIETY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study that follows is to demonstrate the numerous ways in which India as a nation has been impacted by Korean culture in general. How the mere growth of this phenomenon has brought about numerous changes, particularly among the country's youth, and contributed in dismantling the stereotypically heteronormative behaviours and the mechanisms governing what is generally and appropriately seen as "masculine." This study aims to show how much Korean culture has nearly pushed young people to engage in taking a route that is different from the norm. India has always had an almost tight set of laws that define the foundations of masculinity. The development of the Kpop industry helped promote discussion on the fundamental principles of the social category of gender itself all over the world in addition to demonstrating the influence it had on using gendered items and apparel for everyone. Last but not least, this research intends to investigate how three forms of consumption—Korean Pop Music, Korean Drama, and Korean Cosmetics—have impacted individuals in India.

**KEYWORDS:** K-POP, K-Drama, Koreanization, Hallyu Wave, Cultural Proximity, Gender-Neutral Clothing, Soft Masculinity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the establishment of Doordarshan , one of the largest broadcasting organisations in India, in 1959, the Indian television industry and music industry have evolved in terms of the subject matter of the content it manufactures, the quality of the content it produces, the target audience it caters to, the multiple socio cultural realities it depicts, and the languages in which the content is produced. This evolution significantly depends on the speed at which the Indian economy grows since the advent of Over the Top (OTT) platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, has caused India to transform from an era of restricted choice of content into an era of unlimited

choice when it comes to content. The OTT market in minutes of consumption in India has risen from 181 billion to 204 billion minutes in 2021, providing the audience with enhanced catalogues full of content they can watch based on their prime interests, including American content, European content, Chinese content and finally the increasingly popular, South Korean content .

Korean digital content is seeing an upsurge of popularity across the globe, with the phenomenon popularly recognised as the Korean or Hallyu wave . The term Hallyu wave also describes the overall spread of Korean culture globally. It includes, but is not confined to, the popularisation of Korean series and Korean pop music, the Korean fashion and makeup industry, Korean food, and even the entry of Korean companies into the Indian market. At present, South Korea has emerged as one of the significant exporters of popular culture. Korean creative industries are now directly endorsed by the Government of South Korea since the end of the 1990s to use the popularity of Korean content and the growing admiration for Korean culture as soft power.

If one tries to understand the origin of this wave in India, one would find that although its reach expanded profoundly during the past two years because of the Covid 19 pandemic, India started being influenced by the Korean wave much earlier. From an economic standpoint, the advent of South Korean companies, such as Samsung, Hyundai and LG, during the liberalisation of the Indian economy during the 1990s, and the ever-increasing demand for their products in the market can also be seen as an outcome of the Korean wave. In the 2000s, the state of Manipur witnessed a huge Korean wave because of the ban of Hindi movies and television programmes by the Revolutionary People’s Front in the state.

People felt inclined to watch pirated films from South Korea and Thailand for entertainment. The Korean satellite channel, Arirang , also added to this popularity by introducing Korean dramas in the state. As its popularity increased, the Korean series became the new normal in Manipuri households, with channels even providing dubbed audios in local languages.

Gradually, this Korean wave spread to the neighbouring states. Several academicians believe that Korean content is popular in the North eastern states of India because of socio-cultural similarities. Professor Ningombam Victoria Chanu in his work, ‘ Mapping Cultural Diffusions,’ (2008) terms these similarities as cultural proximity . According to him, this proximity is reflected in “nationally and locally produced material that is closer to land and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethical, dialect/language, religion and other elements.” (Straubhaar; 1991)

When the Korean pop idol PSY’s song, Gangnam Style, took the world by a storm in 2013, and the Korean boy band Bangtan Boys (BTS) gained popularity in the west due to their single

'Blood, Sweat and Tears' in 2016, India witnessed a massive Korean wave with more people consuming Korean Digital Content and adopting Korean elements into their daily lives, from food, clothing styles, and skincare and makeup routines. This consumption also began influencing behavioural patterns and factors such as how individuals choose to express their gender.

Korean culture, just like Indian culture, is no exception when it comes to a rigid patriarchal system and a binarised understanding of gender, with specific behaviours being associated with either masculinity or femininity. Certain masculine or feminine notions are attached to everyone, dictating how one can behave, talk, and walk to how they cannot, and the violation of the same could invite punishment. An individual does not just regulate their behaviour but also shows intolerance if another person fails to adhere to the gender binary. Hence, such attitudes end up formulating a system that ensures the maintenance of the stereotypical notions attached to the ideas of masculinity and femininity.

However, with the extensive discussions on subjects of sexuality and gender expression since the late 2010s and the evolution of Korean content itself have caused such stereotypical notions to be challenged. Korean content has caused the advent of a new form of masculinity in South Korea, known as **Kkonminam** or soft masculinity.

The rise of this new type of masculinity stands in stark contrast to the traditional conceptions of masculinity visible in India that are expressed often in terms of dominance, strength, and anger. For instance, the male leads in Korean dramas are generally emotionally vulnerable, wear makeup, and do not indulge in violent physical activities. Such a depiction of masculinity plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's views, inculcating an acceptance of different forms of gender expression.

Additionally, with the normalisation of skincare and makeup among men by the Korean entertainment industry, the beauty industry of South Korea is on its way to breaking the gendered notions of makeup. An individual choosing to express their gender through dressing up and applying colourful makeup has become a new normal in South Korea since famous actors and Kpop artists (called idols) express themselves in such ways. The same Korean entertainment industry has also popularised the trend of gender-neutral fashion. This fashion includes specific fits, prints and shades that can be worn by people of all sorts of gender expressions. There have also been instances of popular Korean idols crossdressing.

The audience, especially the youth, that consumes this Korean content then desires to imitate or follow the Korean actors or musicians they appreciate. Professor Kaisii Athiko, in his work, 'Globalisation, Hybridisation and Cultural Invasion - Korean Wave in India's North East,' (2017)

uses the term **Koreanisation** to describe the impact of the Korean wave. Therefore, this research study aims to investigate the extent to which Koreanisation in India has affected how individuals aged 18 and 25 view masculinity. This study analyses the changes in the views on masculinity within the realm of fashion, makeup and skincare and what constitutes the traditional notions of masculinity in India.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The new beauty ideals and forms of expression demonstrated in Korean content and spread globally by the Korean wave offer alternative ways to convey masculinity to the commonly held notion of a workingman household. With digitalisation, the soft masculinity promoted by Korean content can successfully deconstruct gendered attributes and offer a more “female friendly” masculinity that emphasises beauty concepts over physical strength and power.

In his work, ‘Korean Soap Opera and the Coming of the New Masculinity’ (2015), Colby Miyose, a professor at the University of Hawaii, illustrates how the transformation of gender norms is depicted in South Korean content. In his paper, he demonstrates the resemblance between the concepts of ‘new man’, one that possesses traits of “being sensitive, expressive and domestically savvy”, and the Korean concept of ‘flower boy’ or **kkonminam**.

Using the example of a well-known Korean drama, ‘Boys over flowers’, Miyose emphasises how kkonminam is a new vision of masculinity. The concept of kkonminam contradicts the notion of a ‘tough guy,’ and the wide range of gender images presented by K pop boy bands aids in this deconstruction. For instance, in the Korean music industry, Beast idols are men whose bodies and personalities are masculine enough to resemble a ‘beast,’ while ‘flower boys’ are men that have attractive facial features and slim body shapes (Xiaolon, 2013). However, ‘Beast idols’ are also expected to have exceptionally good looking faces and polished skin, emphasising the importance of beauty cosmetics in South Korea. South Korea is the leading market for beauty cosmetics, particularly for men. Initially, women dominated the South Korean cosmetic industry, but a subtle shift in the space is visible since there has been a recent trend to feature male Kpop idols as brand ambassadors. This concept has raised awareness about the normalisation of wearing makeup, regardless of gender, which has, in turn, encouraged young men in South Korea to use beauty cosmetics daily, as evidenced by the number of local young men who imitate the appearance of these idols.

Nur Azizah and Ainun Dwiyantri, professors at the University of Jakarta, in their work highlighted that the Korean male idols are becoming the representatives of soft masculinity, and its impact is visible in the number of young men in South Korea that try to emulate the typical looks sported by the idols. There is a social construction of lookism that influences the everyday

life of the society in South Korea, and these celebrities become role models for others. Male idols in South Korea openly use and promote their beauty regime, from skincare to makeup which could influence the consumer's decisions in buying a product.

In his work, 'Not So Soft After All: Kkonminam Masculinities in Contemporary South Korean Popular Culture', Jo Elfving Hwang, Associate Professor of Korean Studies at The University of Western Australia argues that the representation of soft masculinity in the Korean popular culture is a process of re negotiation towards the existing hegemonic construction of masculinity in the social structure and that it is beyond the cosmetic shift. The popularity of Kkonminam as an image is highly influenced by Korean pop idols, according to the director of the Korea Institute at The Australian National University, Roald Maliangkay. Kkonminam men, as opposed to the hegemonic masculine attributes, features men as attentive, sensitive and expressive. They are also well groomed and well dressed and are excessively concerned about their looks.

These notions of the qualities that define Kkonminam men are spreading to other countries. In their work 'Men and Korean Dramas: The Construction of Self among Male Viewers of Laguna', Katrina Bianca Lat and Kristine Joy Tacla illustrate that the self presentation of male Filipino viewers is significantly impacted by their exposure to South Korean dramas. Such male viewers not only inculcate South Korean language, fashion, and food but also alter their personal views and how they socially interact. The researchers found out that male Filipino viewers are drawn to romantic comedy Korean dramas because most of them see Korean dramas as a form of stress reliever. Since it influences them mentally, it acts as a motivation for the participants to apply and adapt to the content of Korean dramas in their self-presentation, considering that the said dramas appeal to their emotions, thus, creating a temporary escape to reality. The longer and more frequently they are exposed to Korean dramas, the more dynamics they accept and apply in the presentation of themselves.

However, due to the mixed cultural content, the participants as the performer to an audience present themselves in different ways. Study findings indicated that since performers seek personal recognition from their audience, it causes them to adjust their self-presentational behaviour depending on their audience. Hence, the research participants presented themselves differently with their friends who have similar interests. They exchange thoughts and use Korean dramas as a form of the topic in contrast to the laid back communication with a friend who is not a Korean drama fan.

Research done by Min Gyeong, published in 2015, revealed that the respondents and participants both have positive views about the fashion styles portrayed in Korean dramas. However, the study also depicted that positive views and influence are two different things since although the Filipino students have optimistic views of Korean fashion and trends, they choose to conserve

their culture.

Research conducted among selected students of a high school in the Philippines in 2020 demonstrated that the impact of watching Korean content was so influential that it caused the establishment of a Korean market that specifically catered to Filipino watchers. The respondents of the research expressed that their attention to Korean culture had become intertwined with their usual awareness in numerous ways since it affects their perspective, standards, and social inclinations. The justification for why fans are so into Korean content despite social and language contrasts is a question asked by many individuals. They responded by stating that being a K pop fan fills in as a "cheerful pill". "Cheerful pill" is a portion of joy felt when their idols sing, dance, and fans or act. There is an inborn inspiration that drives the fans. Thus, there is an odd delight that stays inside that only they can comprehend, regardless of how diligently they attempt to explain it to non fans.

Mary Ainslie, a professor at the University of Nottingham, and her research about Malaysian masculinity and Hallyu fandom also demonstrated similar findings. The popularity of Korean products among a section of male Malaysian consumers is significant due to the alternative form of masculinity such products represent during a period when constructions of identity are both rigidly controlled by authorities and increasingly contested by citizens. From studying the South Korean fandom amongst a small number of young Malaysian males, Ainslie argues that for these individuals, such products assist in constructing an accessible and alternative form of masculine identity in a context where society makes hegemonic masculinity only accessible to consumers of a certain race, religion or political position. The model of soft masculinity contained in Hallyu products is very different to the repressive forms of masculinity participants associate with contemporary Malaysia, instead of adhering to notions of personal expression and freedom. Korean society then becomes a desirable model of gender relations through which participants can project their frustrations and dissatisfactions with Malaysia.

In his thesis, 'Conceptually androgynous: The production and commodification of gender in Korean pop music,' Petter Almqvist from the Ingersoll Umea University argues that similar responses to the Hallyu Wave are visible in other East Asian countries, such as Malaysia. In the previously mentioned study by Mary Ainslie, the author says that because of the hegemonic and physical nature of masculinity in Malaysia- here seen as a tool for the current government to assert its dominance over its population - the soft power that Korean pop has brought with it is seen as a threat to the national identity. Ainslie writes that the new beauty ideals and forms of expressions offer alternative ways to form and express one's identity and are, therefore, seen as rebellious by the individuals in power.

In her research, 'K-pop's Influence on Redefining Masculinity within Heteronormative



Regimes,' Katherine Stolez from the Denison University analyses the "K-pop industry's influential contribution towards redefining the term masculinity". The progressive and liberal movements have rendered the traditional notion of masculinity obsolete. The research primarily focuses on how masculinity is unique to specific cultures and has to be understood within a broader spectrum and not within the parameters of traditional gender norms. It goes on to explain how Korean pop has emerged as a significant factor in terms of breaking the toxic masculine notions. The research proceeds to explore how cultural productions like K-pop is fundamental in terms of setting the foundation for a gender-fluid society. It talks about how the Korean-pop business has attempted to make a "transnational personality" that Korean Idols should stick to make themselves appealing. It further states that masculinity cannot be characterised by a solitary society since it changes regionally. However, the Korean-pop business has figured out how to make a "cross breed masculinity."

The research titled, 'Unpacking K-pop in America: The Subversive Potential of Male K-pop Idols' Soft Masculinity,' by Jeehyun Jenny Lee, Rachel Kar Yee Lee and Ji hoon Park from the University of Washington, demonstrated blended responses to the "softer" masculinities encapsulated by K-pop teen pop groups. The research claims that Asian men have been depicted as a "demasculinized stereotype," evidently encapsulating characteristics like dedication, modesty, contemplation, and tirelessness. Although these cliché attributes are not altogether bad, they do- not often squeeze into the glorified American norms and perception of what they attribute manliness with, as Asian men are depicted as shy or not in the usual way the White men are presented. Therefore, the new broadly acknowledged image of them as provocative, attractive, alluring, and manly, is a result of the fame of male K-pop idols.

According to Sun Jung's 2011 research titled 'Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption,' manufactured adaptable masculinity plays a crucial role in the Korean Wave's trans-national success, as icon groups can bid transculturally to fans across borders with their flexible manly characters. Jung defines the concept of "manufactured versatile masculinity" as being "multi-layered, culturally mixed, simultaneously contradictory, and most of all strategically manufactured". It involves a more intentional mixing of Korean and "global masculinities," including traditional concepts of Korean masculinity, soft masculinity, kawaii (i.e. "cute" masculinity), and metropolitan masculinity as part of the processes that Korean media industries use to develop an idol group's transcultural image.

Korean pop idol groups used to almost entirely focus on the pretty-boy, soft-masculine image, but in the last decade, more "tough, manly, and beast-like" groups have emerged. He further states that these variety shows serve as a venue for manufactured idol characters to meet the desires of the general public through which aegyo was highly popularised. Aegyo in South Korean refers to a cute display of affection often expressed through a cute voice, changes to

speech, facial expressions, or gestures. Aegyo means behaving in a flirtatious, coquettish manner, and both male and female Korean pop idols are expected to behave in such a manner. This expectation further proves the very different portrayal of masculinity that exists in South Korea as a country and how these factors affect and influence its consumers.

## **OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The new breed of masculinity propagated by South Korea has been a fundamental challenge to the traditional notions of masculinity as propagated by the regional media. Thus, the Hallyu wave has resulted in a reconsideration of the stereotypical notions with regard to masculinity in particular worldwide. India is no exception in terms of being exposed to this deconstruction of masculinity through Koreanisation. Nevertheless, an inadequacy in terms of the research and scholarly material which investigate this phenomenon against the backdrop of India was noticed. Hence, the paper attempts to investigate how this concept of kkonminam has influenced the idea of masculinity amongst the Indian youth.

### **Therefore, the objectives of the study are:**

1. To investigate if Korean culture has led to an increase in androgynous forms of expression in India.
2. To assess the influence of Korean culture in normalising makeup and skin care amongst men.
3. To analyse the manner in which Korean Culture is countering toxic masculine notions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The sample was selected through systematic random sampling and consisted of students studying in colleges based in Delhi and the National Capital Region with some exposure to Korean content. The sample consisted of 26 individuals altogether, with sixteen females and ten males, respectively. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, and telephonic interviews were organised with the participants that were not available physically. The interviews were conducted on students aged between 18 to 25. They were semi-structured, had a duration of 15-20 minutes, and were individually administered. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. This format was chosen to collect the diverse opinions of the participants on specific topics without restricting their perspectives with a structured questionnaire. The responses received through the interviews in this research were then tabulated and analysed into quantitative and qualitative data.

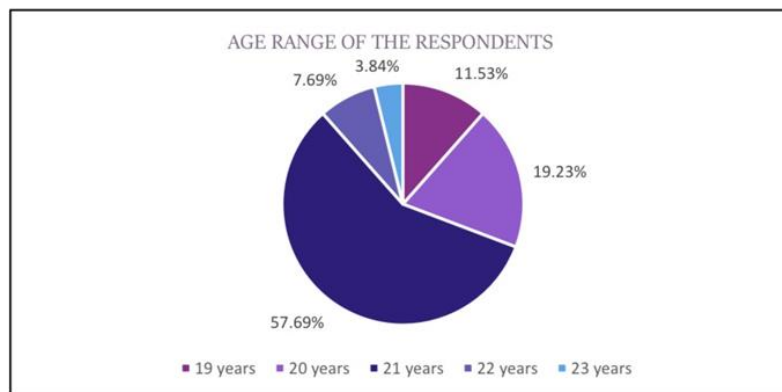


## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

26 individuals were interviewed for the purpose of this research study. All 26 respondents are students studying in colleges based in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), and have a significant exposure to Korean-content. The demographic profile of the respondents is given below.

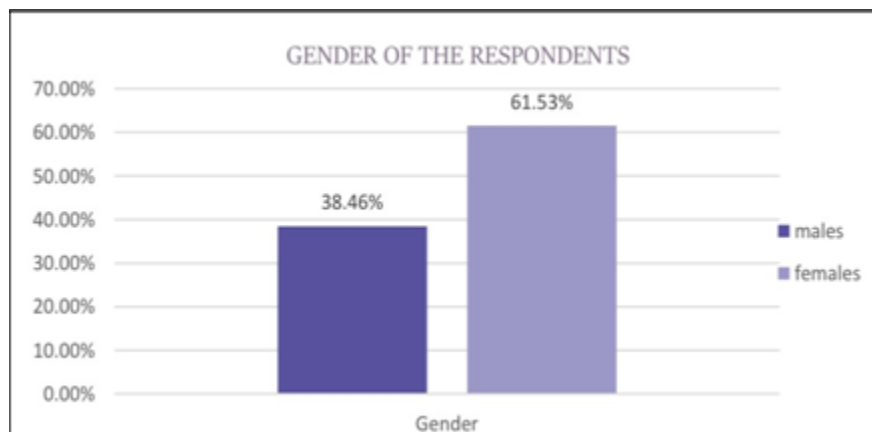
#### *Age*



The age range of the respondents for this study ranged between 19-23 years. The majority (57.69%) of the respondents were 21 years old.

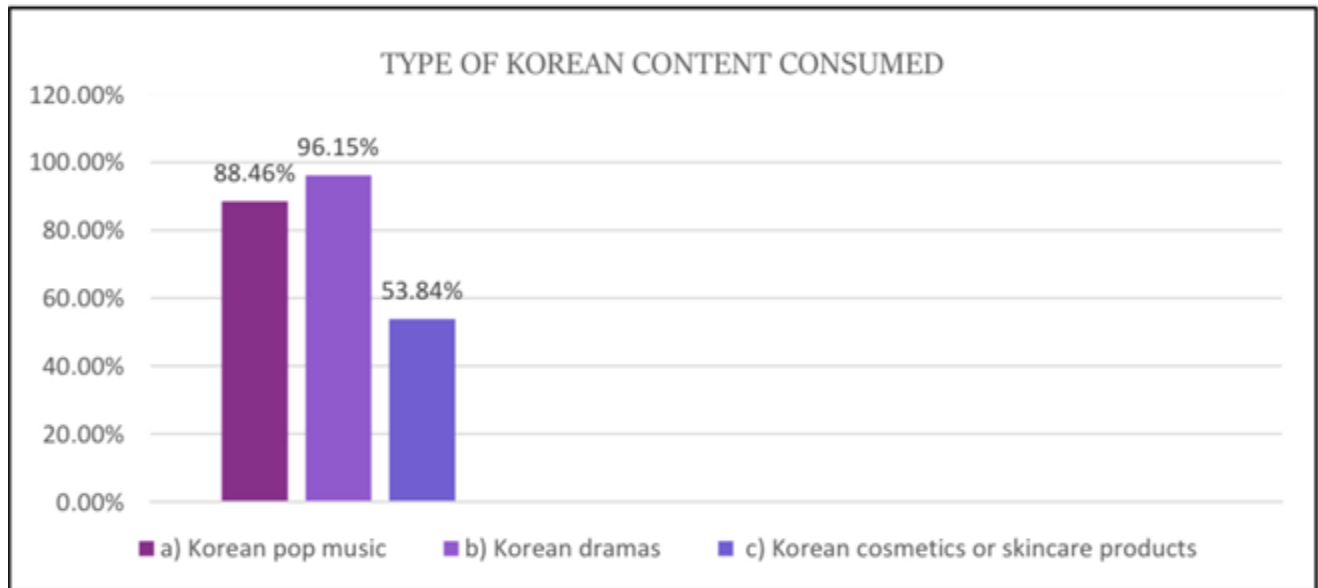
#### *Gender*

This research study consisted of 16 female respondents, constituting 61.53% of the sample, and 10 males that formed 38.46% of the entire sample size.

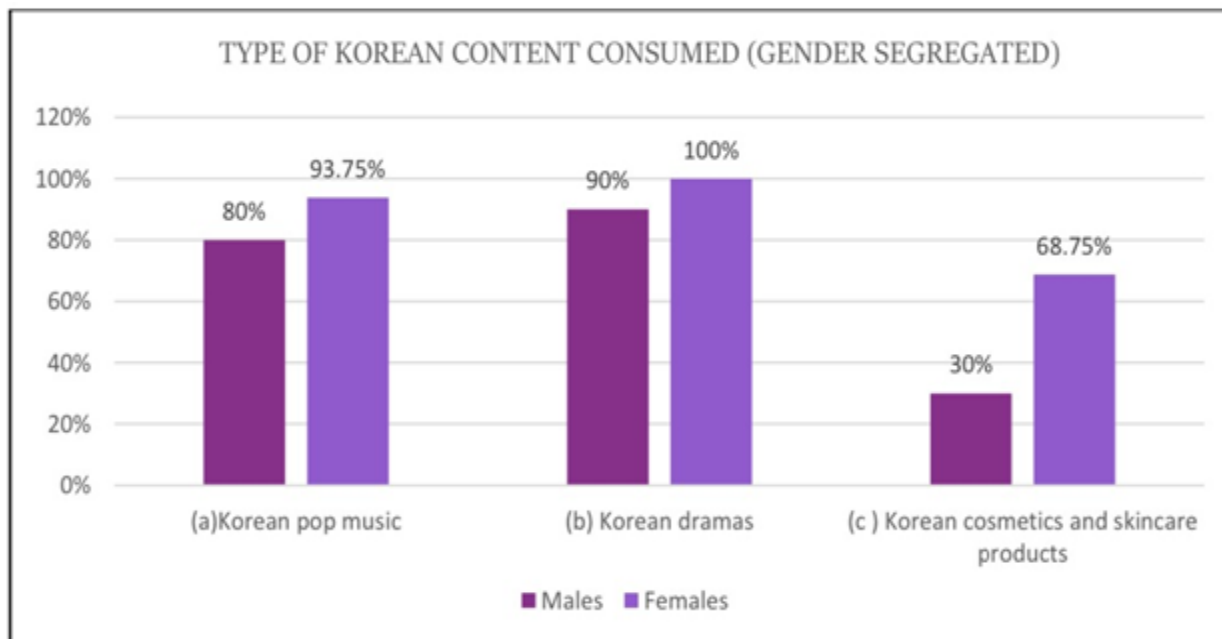


**CONSUMPTION OF KOREAN CONTENT**

*Type of Korean content consumed*

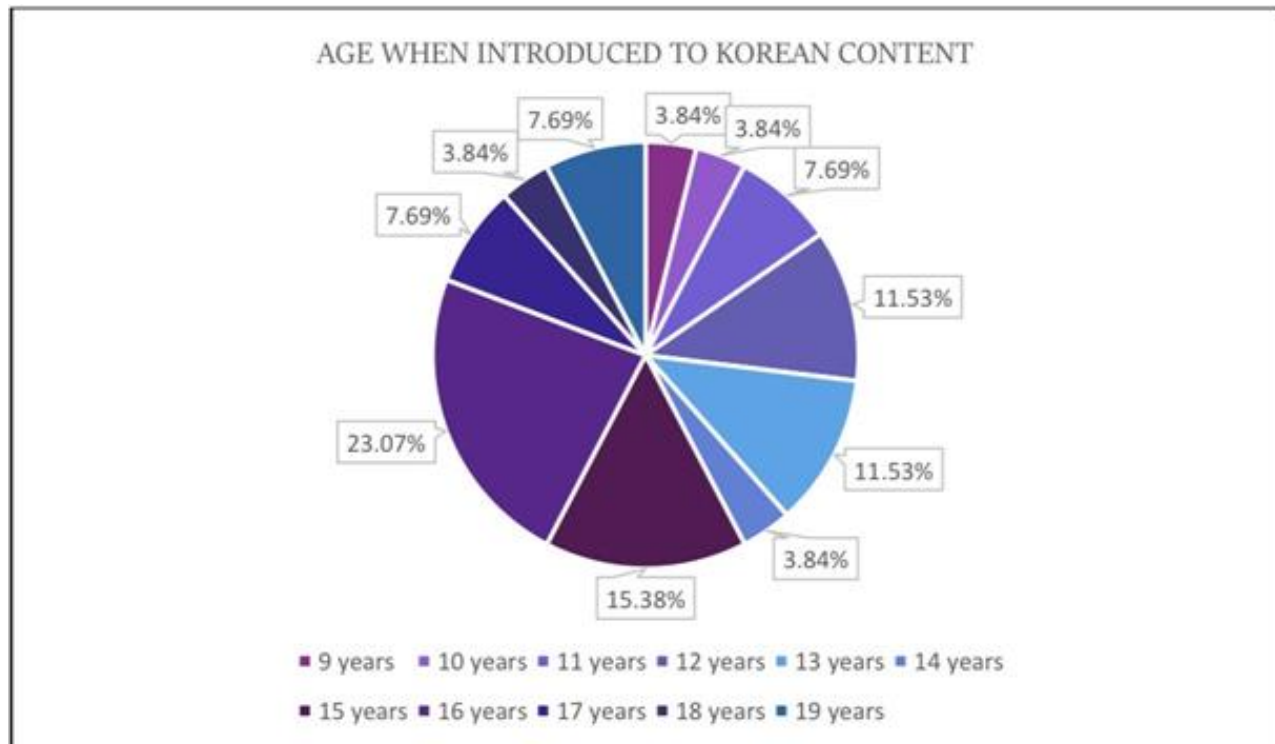


23 individuals consumed Korean pop music (88.46%), while 25 individuals watched Korean dramas (96.15%). 22 (84.61%) individuals indulged in both Korean pop music and Korean dramas. Finally, 14 individuals (53.84%) used Korean cosmetics or skincare products.



A majority of the male and female respondents consume both Korean pop music and Korean dramas, with Korean dramas being popular among all the females interviewed. However, only three males use Korean cosmetics.

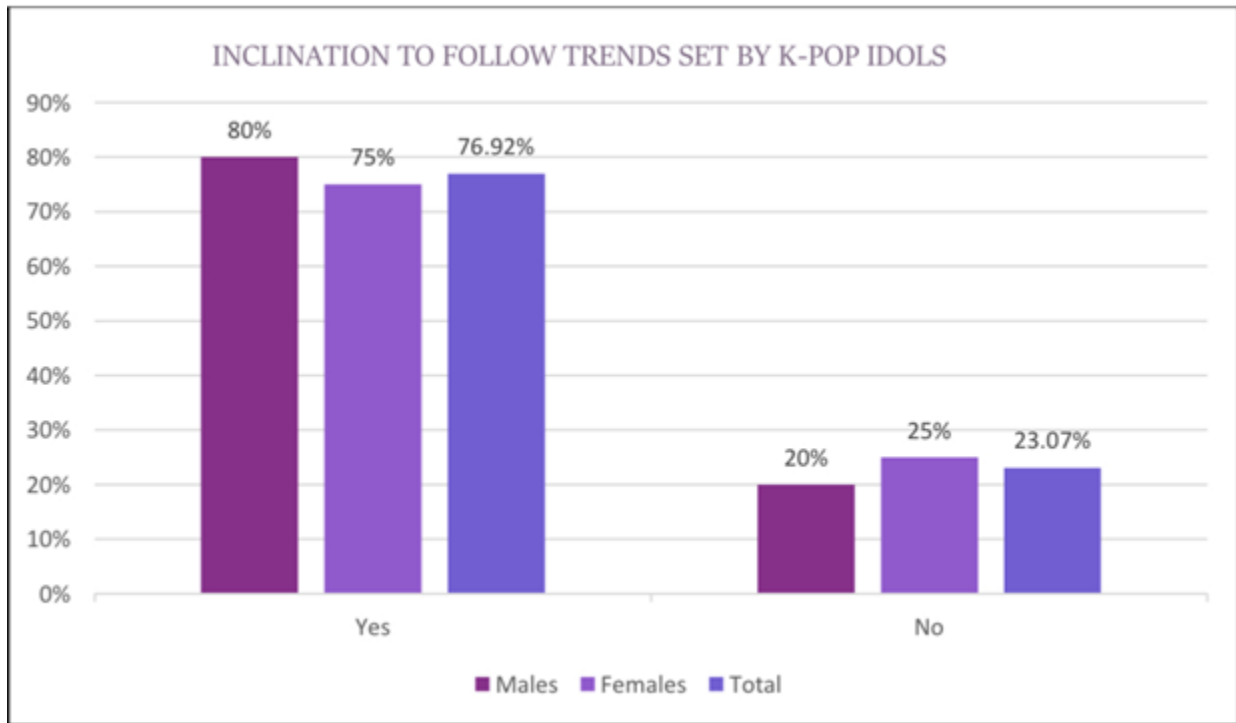
***Age when introduced to Korean content***



One respondent got introduced to Korean content when they were nine years old (3.84%), one when they were ten years old (3.84%), two when they were eleven years old (7.69%), three when they were twelve years old (11.53%), three when they were thirteen years old (11.53%), one when they were fourteen years old (3.84%), four when they were fifteen years old (15.38%), six when they were sixteen years old (23.07%), two when they were seventeen years old (7.69%), one when they were eighteen years old (3.84%), and two when they were nineteen years old (7.69%). Thirteen respondents got introduced to Korean content because of their friends and relatives, such as cousins. The majority of the males in this research study began consuming Korean content due to their kith and kin. While six respondents got their first exposure to Korean content because of the South Korean boy band Bangtan Boys (BTS). Five respondents got recommendations of Korean content on social media platforms like YouTube. Three respondents got introduced because of watching dubbed Korean dramas that were televised in their regions in their local languages.

**INFLUENCE OF KOREAN CONTENT ON FASHION**

*Inclination to follow trends set by K-Pop idols*



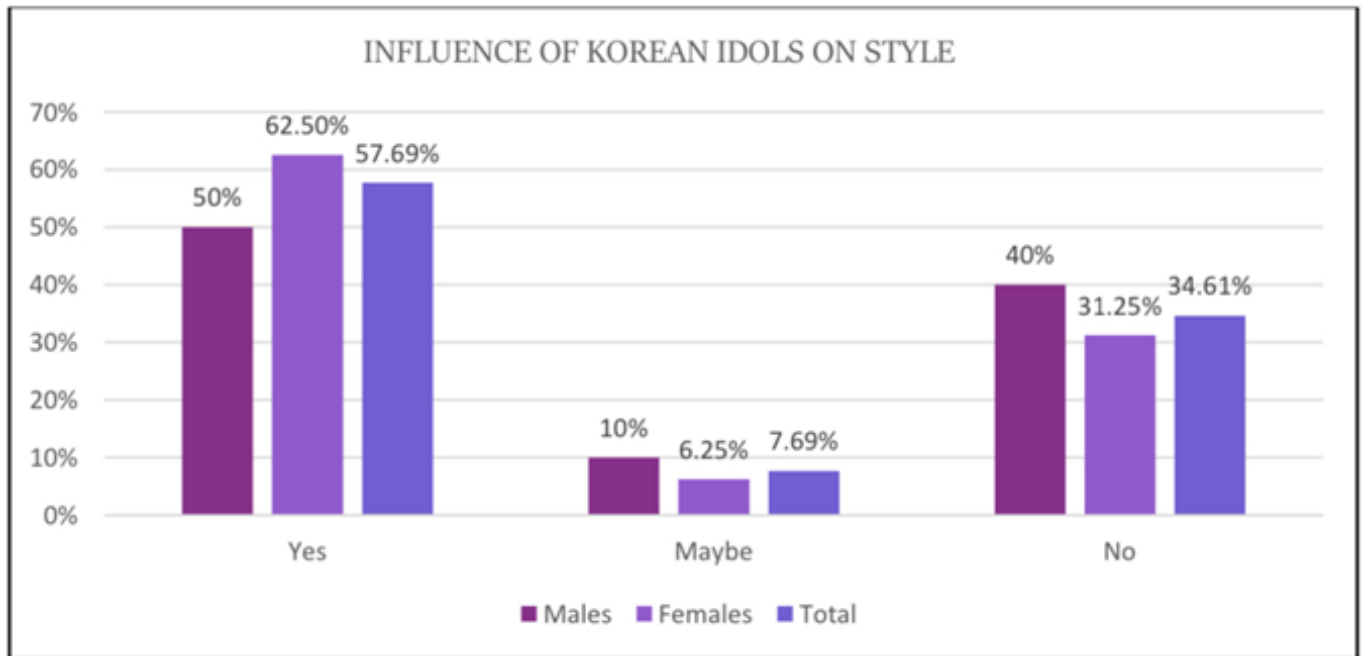
Eight males (80%) said that they personally or their friends feel inclined to follow trends set by Korean pop idols, while two males (20%) said no. Simultaneously, twelve females (75%) said yes, and four females (25%) said no.

As stated by a respondent, it is now impossible to escape the trends set by Korean idols since Koreanisation has firmly established itself among the youth, especially among individuals aged between 13 and 25 belonging to Generation Z. Generation Z now adopts Korean styles, products and living standards, and these trends will continue to escalate in the future. For instance, a male respondent stated that he briefly felt encouraged to study biology because of a Korean series based on doctors. Another respondent claimed that her male friends could clearly identify the Korean makeup and accessories and made remarks such as "Oh this looks Korean", demonstrating the influence Koreanisation now has in the country.

Some respondents felt inspired to colour their hair and buy particular beauty products because of their favourite Korean-pop idols. A respondent claimed, "When your idols perform certain actions then you try to understand why they do that. At first, I did not think much about hair colours and makeup but later realised that they are more than just hiding your insecurities, but

also a form of art and expressions.” A few respondents had tried Korean dishes such as Kimchi, tteok-bokki, and kimbap.

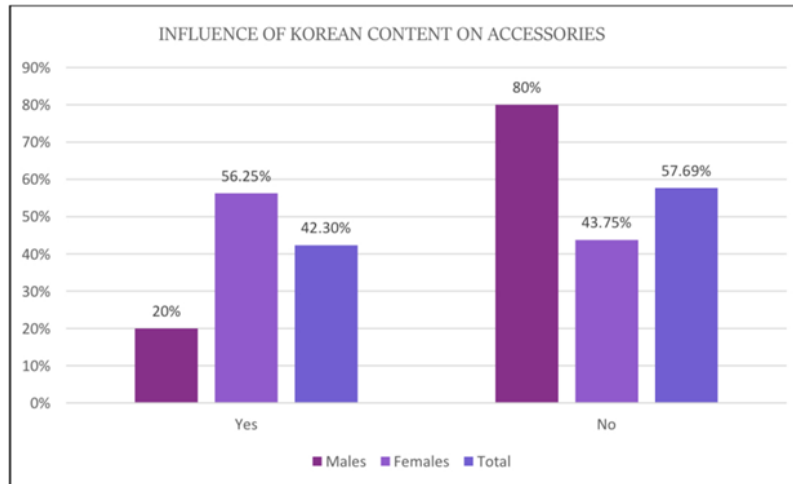
***Influence of Korean idols on style***



Five males (50%) said that Korean pop idols had influenced their style, one male (10%) said that he was not sure if Korean idols had influenced their style, and four males (40%) said that they had not. While ten females (62.50%) said it had, one female (6.25%) was not sure, and five females (31.25%) said they had not. The fashion styles promoted by Korean idols are comparatively different to the fashion visible in Indian society.

Many respondents chose to incorporate elements of Korean style because they regarded it as “stylish” and “good-looking,” as mentioned by one respondent. It has become easier for many respondents to accept new styles because of their exposure to Korean content. These styles included oversized clothes, which many respondents of the study themselves wore or informed that their friends wore. Some of the male respondents informed that they found it difficult to integrate elements of Korean fashion into their style. For instance, a male respondent stated he held his Indian identity closer, and believed that an individual’s style generally depended on their social context and tended to be localised. Thus, he could not adopt fashion elements that are considered Korean because of the fear of judgment.

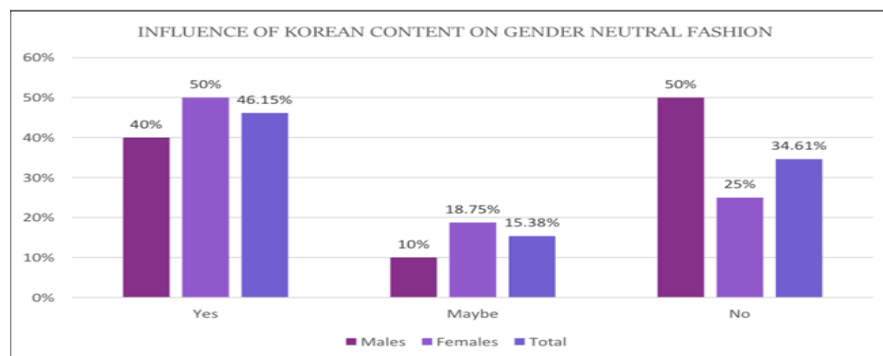
***Influence of Korean content on accessories***



Two males (20%) said that their choice of accessories had been influenced by Korean content, and eight males (80%) said that it had not. Nine females (56.25%) said that it had influenced their accessories, while seven females (43.75%) said it had not. For a few female respondents, exposure to Korean content has influenced their choice of accessories. A female respondent stated that accessories worn because of Korean influence helped in making a style statement and gave an individual a sense of satisfaction.

However, she informed that she had only seen her North-eastern friends wear Korean-inspired accessories, thus believing that this trend is limited to North-East India. Accessories did not seem popular among the males interviewed for the study. 80% of the males said that their choice of accessories had not been influenced due to consuming Korean content. However, one male respondent admitted that he was influenced by Korean content and was wearing a pearl necklace and earrings, accessories believed to be popular because of Koreanisation, during the interview.

***Influence of Korean content on gender neutral fashion***





Four males (40%) said that consuming Korean content had influenced them to incorporate elements of gender-neutral fashion in their style, one male (10%) was not sure if Korean content had influenced them to embrace such styles, while five males (50%) said it had not.

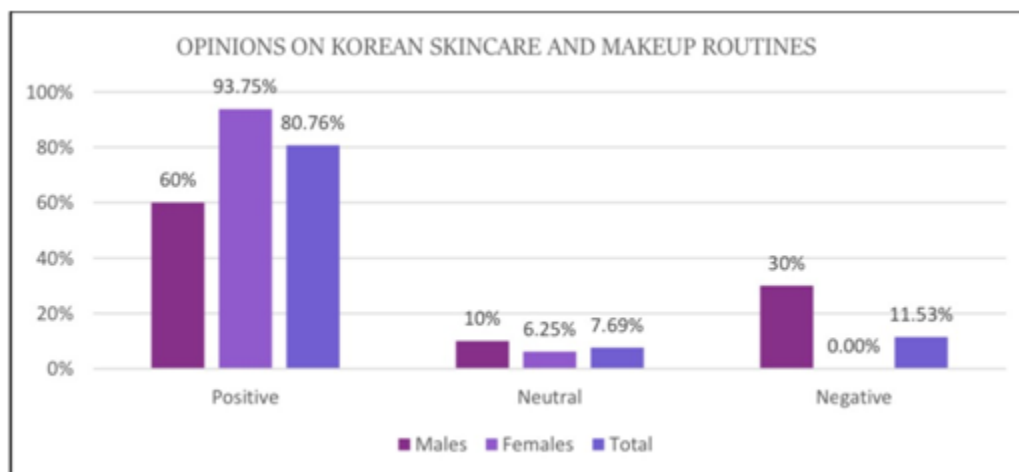
Simultaneously, eight females (50%) said Korean content had influenced them to incorporate such elements, three females (18.75%) were not sure, and four females (25%) said it had not. From the interviews conducted, it can be inferred that the prominence of Korean content in India has assisted in bringing reform in fashion and popularised gender-neutral clothing.

However, the majority of the male and female respondents stated that while Korean content had normalised the idea of gender-neutral fashion when seen on other people, they would personally not adopt such trends. A male respondent said that he is now more accepting of gender-neutral fashion because of his exposure to Korean dramas, but he still hesitates to try such trends himself and has only explored this to a certain extent. A female respondent similarly said she initially found it odd when she saw Korean pop idols wear skirts, but she has gotten accustomed to it.

Contrarily, a female respondent also stated that gender-neutral clothing is more common amongst Korean idols than amongst actual Korean citizens. Hence, it is doubtful if gender-neutral fashion will escalate in Indian society. This argument was supported by another female respondent who stated that gender-neutral fashion does not exist even in Korea since they too distinguish between women's and men's clothing. A few respondents also seemed doubtful if their wearing clothes regarded as gender-neutral fashion is due to their exposure to Korean content.

## **INFLUENCE OF KOREAN CONTENT ON SKINCARE AND MAKEUP ROUTINES**

### *Opinions on Korean skincare and makeup routines*



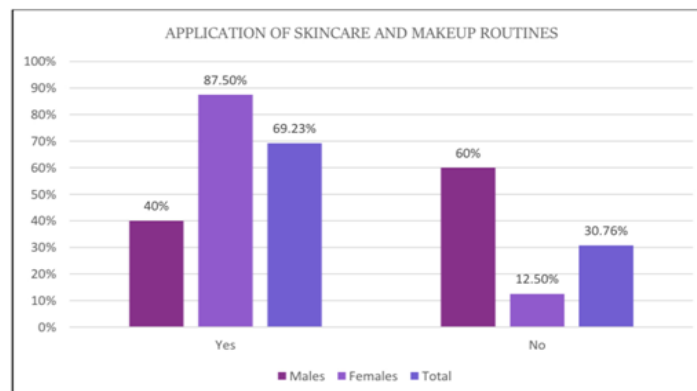
Six males (60%) had a positive opinion about Korean skincare and makeup routines, one male (10%) had a neutral opinion, while three males (30%) had a negative opinion. Simultaneously, fifteen females (93.75%) had a positive opinion, and one female (6.25%) had a neutral opinion.

Most of the females positively responded when asked their opinions on skincare and makeup routines, with fifteen of them stating that they liked Korean skincare and makeup products. A female respondent said that she trusts Korean skincare and makeup brands because they are of high quality, and she knows how seriously the Korean society takes their skin because they desire acne-free, clear, and white skin. The males also mostly responded positively, with one male respondent stating that makeup which once only catered to females, is now also catering to males, and this is generally due to the Korean pop industry's usage of makeup on both males and females. A female respondent claimed that before Korean content got popular, she believed makeup and skincare were limited to women.

However, her exposure to Korean content broadened her perspective and recognised that men could also explore skincare and makeup. Even the males that did not follow these routines personally said that their perspective on such matters had broadened because of their exposure to Korean content. A male respondent said they found it impressive when other people followed skincare routines, even though he was comfortable with his own "soap and lotion" skincare. Another male respondent stated that he got the "motivation from Koreans" to take care of his skin. As for makeup, while he did not apply it himself since he fears society's judgement, he would accept other males using makeup if they did not exceed its use since Korean content has helped normalise this for him to a certain extent.

One male respondent did believe that since the beauty standards for Indian men are very different from that of Korean men, men here do not require skincare routines since they prefer to look more rugged.

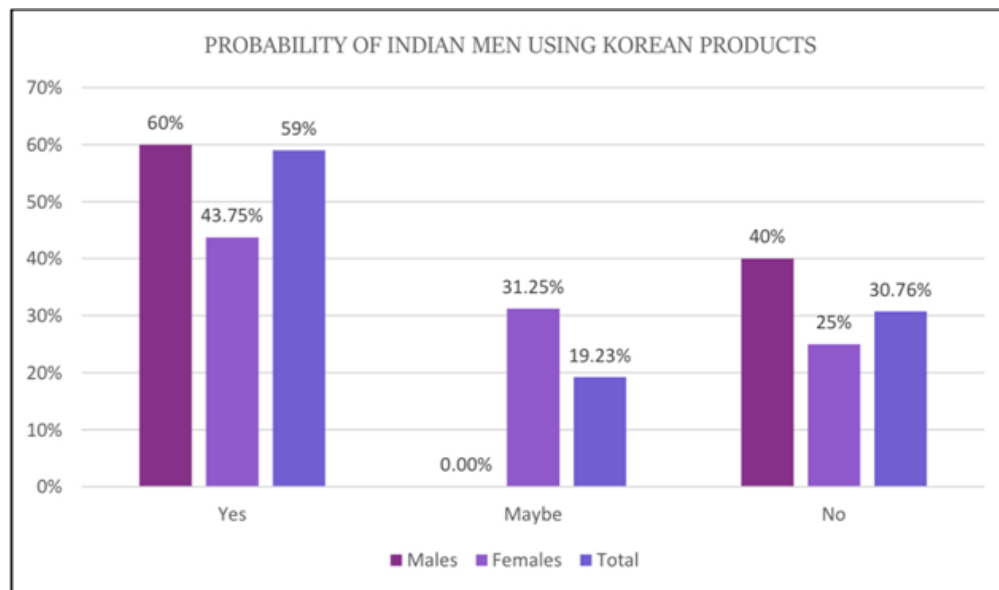
***Application of skin care and makeup routines***



Fourteen female respondents (87.50%) of the study have tried skincare and makeup routines, and two females (12.50%) said they had not. Four males (40%) said that they had tried such routines. While the six males (60%) that stated they had not tested skincare and makeup routines, had an optimistic attitude towards such routines generally.

One male respondent stated that he did not indulge in skincare consumerism for a long time, but the exposure to the Korean industry has helped him develop a more consistent skincare routine. A female respondent believed that exposure to Korean skincare and makeup routines has opened up people's minds regarding this and claims that even some Indian influencers abide by it. However, another female respondent said that while she tried the makeup and skincare routines, she found it toxic since this desire to achieve perfection when it comes to beauty can be unethical and problematic.

***Probability of Indian men using Korean products***



Six males (60%) said that Korean skincare and makeup routines encouraged Indian men to use Korean products, and four males (40%) said it did not. While seven females (43.75%) said that such routines encouraged Indian men to use Korean products, five females (31.25%) said they were not sure, and four females (25%) said it did not.

The general response from both males and females about the probability of men using Korean skincare products seemed optimistic. A female respondent claimed that with people becoming aware and caring about their skin due to the current general trends followed globally, Indian men feel motivated to try specific Korean products. This claim was supported by two male

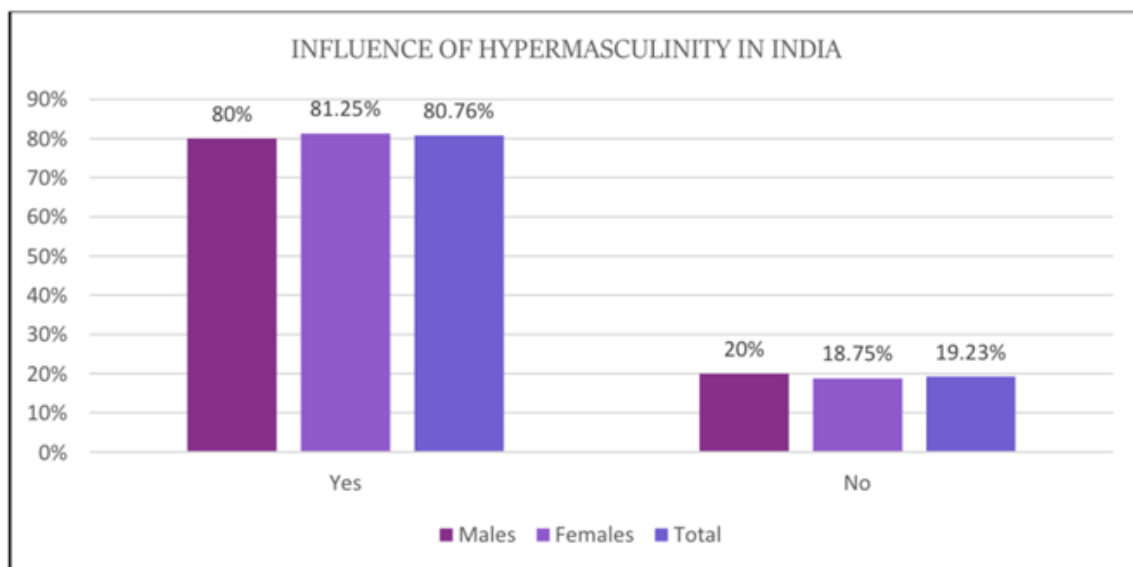
respondents that stated Indian men felt encouraged to use Korean products, and they would recommend such products personally. The brothers of two female respondents also started using Korean products because of their exposure to Korean content and continued to use them once they realised that the products were “effective” and “safe”. Another female respondent’s male friends have begun caring about their skin to achieve the Korean skin type, although they are reluctant to be open about it.

However, many respondents seemed doubtful about men using Korean makeup brands. For instance, a female respondent felt that the general attitude toward skincare was changing, although she was not sure if the same applied to makeup. A male respondent said that Koreanisation was merely one of the many factors because of which makeup among Indian men was becoming popular.

A female respondent conveyed that while Indian men do make positive comments, Korean products are generally not popular among men. Thus, even though there is acceptance, there is also an equal amount of hate. This claim got reinforced by a statement made by one male respondent, “makeup is not meant for men. Maybe Korean males can use it but it is not normal for men in India to use makeup products.” Further, a female respondent shared that when she offers products such as sheet masks to her male friends, they make comments like “these are for girls.”

### INFLUENCE OF K-CONTENT ON THE PERCEPTION OF MASCULINITY

#### *Influence of hypermasculinity in India*



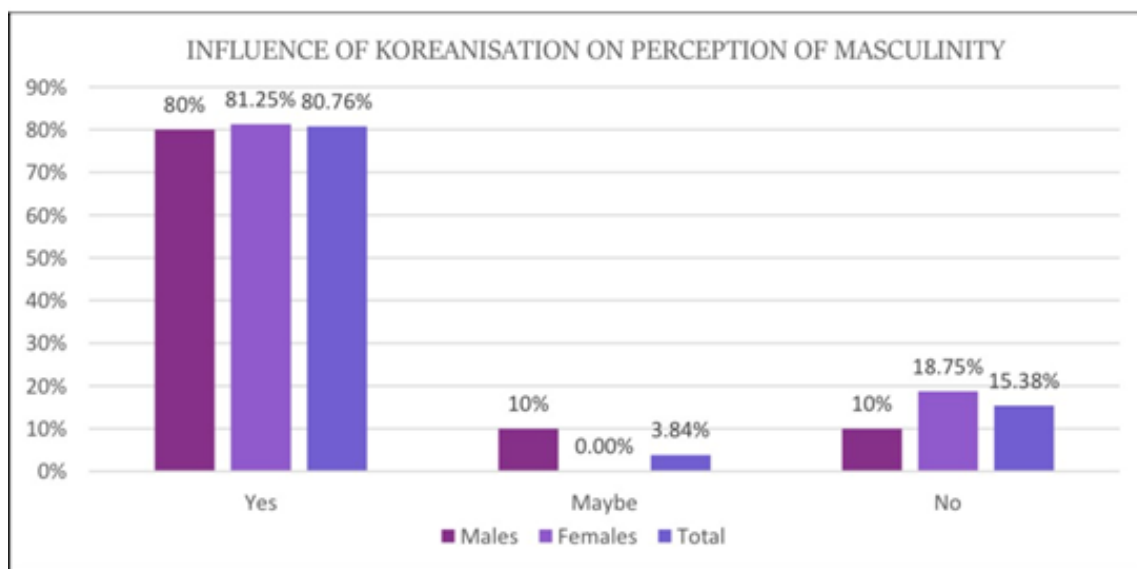
Eight males (80%) said that they had been influenced by the hypermasculinity prevalent in India, and two males (20%) said that they had not. Simultaneously, thirteen females (81.25%) said that they had been influenced, and three females (18.75%) said that they had not.

The majority of the male and female respondents of the study stated that hypermasculinity did affect their perception of masculinity since they are socialised from a young age to practice certain stereotypical norms.

A female respondent expressed that Indians are taught from a young age to internalise notions such as men should not cry, they should not show emotions, or should not like the colour pink. Another female respondent said that while having a conversation with a friend, she realised that men begin showing various emotions when drunk because of being forced to suppress their feelings when sober. However, many respondents believed that with maturity and exposure to other forms of masculinity, their ideas of masculinity are changing.

Some respondents agreed that their perception of masculinity was influenced by the prevalence of hypermasculinity but did not necessarily criticise it. A male respondent claimed that hypermasculinity as a concept is ideal for the social context in India. Another male respondent stated that the lack of exposure and awareness among parents in rural setups causes them to have a narrow-minded understanding of concepts such as hypermasculinity because they are irrelevant in their context. A female respondent also expressed that her opinions on masculinity are rightfully influenced by hyper-masculinity in India because it seems realistic to her.

***Influence of Koreanisation on perception of masculinity***



Eight males (80%) said that Koreanisation had influenced their perception of masculinity, one male (10%) was not sure, while one male (10%) said that they had not been influenced. Thirteen females (81.25%) said that Koreanisation had influenced their perception of masculinity, and three females (3.84%) said that Koreanisation had no impact on their notions of masculinity.

For a few respondents, they assumed that only the masculinity promoted in India existed. However, by indulging in Korean content, they have realised that there are significant differences between the masculinity depicted in Korean content and the hypermasculinity prevalent in India.

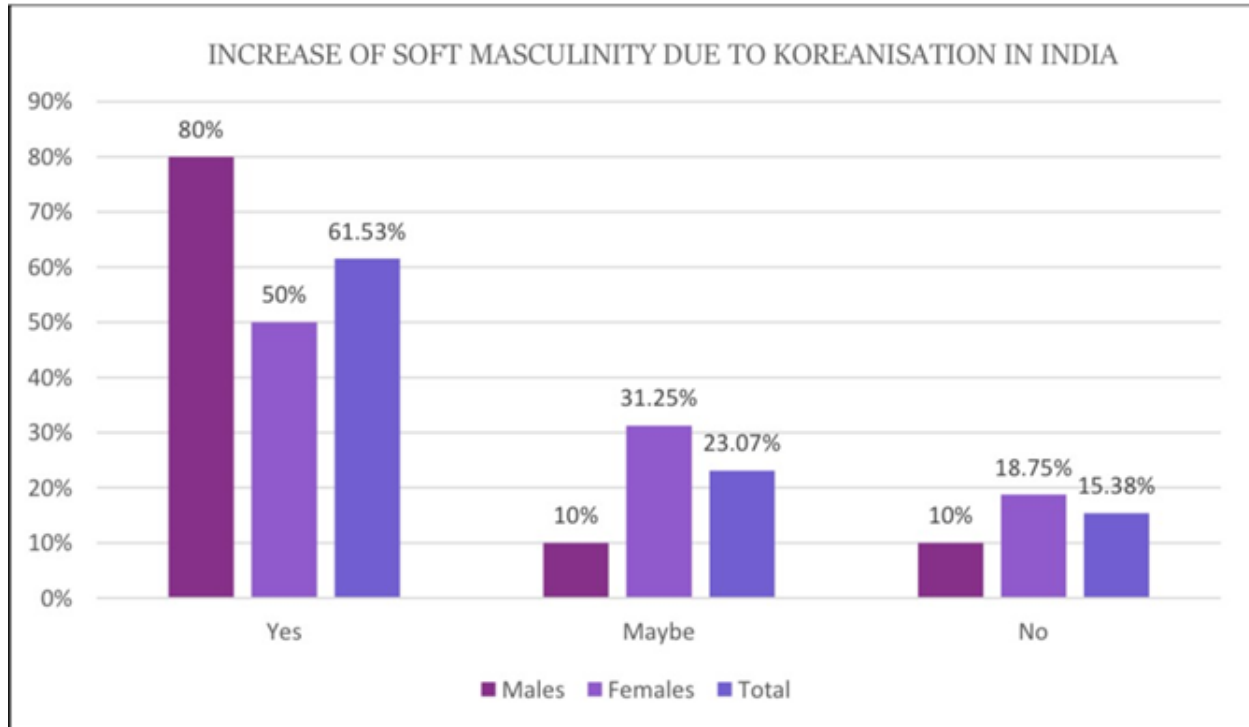
For instance, a female respondent stated that Korean content presents a unique form of masculinity. She compared Indian and Korean male characters, emphasising that male idols that are feminine, cry easily, and wear feminine clothing, are not teased but celebrated. Some respondents indicated that Indian men need to be aggressive, with facial hair being a must, to demonstrate their masculinity. However, a male respondent observed that fight scenes in Korean dramas are inherently less violent than the fight scenes in India, explaining how in a situation of conflict, while Indian series show severe use of violence, Korean series tone it down.

Many respondents also claimed that Korean men looked more comfortable being emotionally vulnerable. A female respondent expressed that Korean dramas present gentlemen that are more sensitive toward women. Further, certain dramas emphasise the concept of consent and depict clear communication, aspects that this respondent enjoyed. In terms of interaction, a female respondent highlights that Indian men hesitate to be affectionate towards each other for fear of their sexuality and masculinity being questioned. However, Korean dramas depict men that feel comfortable being emotionally vulnerable with each other and even generally.

A male respondent claimed that while it has not personally changed the individual's notion of masculinity, he asserts that he would be more accepting of men that behave like that shown by Korean content even if he would initially find it jarring. He has also become more accommodating of particular ideas due to his recent exposure to Korean dramas. Another male respondent stated that his exposure to Korean content made him realise that India promotes toxic masculinity. He believes that indulging in Korean content has normalised the expression of emotions for him personally. For a few female respondents, Koreanisation is also raising the standards for how men can behave.



***Increase of soft masculinity due to Koreanisation in India***



Eight males (80%) believed that Koreanisation has caused an increase of soft masculinity in India, one male (10%) was not sure about its influence, and one male (10%) denied the increase of soft masculinity in India because of Koreanisation.

While most of the respondents believed that Korean content could lead to the emergence of soft masculinity in India, they clarified that it would take age and time for a broader range of men to accept such notions. Such change could only occur in the future because, as mentioned by a female respondent, the men belonging to Generation Z have already been socialised into accepting hypermasculinity.

This argument was supported by statements made by a male respondent who denied that Koreanisation is leading to the acceptability of soft masculinity in India since traditional notions are still entrenched in society. He further stated that discussions revolving around types of masculinity and gender expression, in general, are only relevant in cosmopolitan settings. However, while the male respondents of the study did not seem to personally incorporate traits considered softly masculine, they had become more accepting of people that do demonstrate soft masculinity.

Thus, as mentioned by a female respondent, while acceptance of particular notions has increased,

the ideas revolving around masculinity have not changed.

Furthermore, another female respondent mentioned that Korean content is still mostly restricted to the women population, due to which such notions about masculinity are currently hardly reaching the males. Hence, a respondent stated that exposing males to Korean content from a young age could cause them to adopt newer notions of masculinity conveniently. For instance, her younger brother is more sensitive and respectful towards others because of his exposure to Korean content from a tender age.

While its influence on men remains restricted, the concept of soft masculinity introduced by Korean content is encouraging women to abandon stereotypical notions of masculinity prevalent in India. A female respondent stated that she now desired a partner that demonstrated qualities she had seen in the Korean content she consumes. Another female respondent believes that her attraction toward Jimin, a member of BTS, is a result of her exposure to Korean content and her acceptance of the concept of soft masculinity.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, an analysis of the responses received from 26 individuals depicts that Korean pop music and Korean dramas have become a popular form of entertainment that both males and females consume. However, while Korean cosmetics and skincare products remain popular among females, males personally remain sceptical about such products even if they have generally developed an optimistic attitude towards them. The respondents were introduced to Korean content between nine to nineteen years of age.

Furthermore, as is visible globally, most of the respondents stated that they did feel inclined to follow trends set by Korean idols in the form of changing their hair colour or wearing a specific type of clothes. However, they are not obsessed with the Korean idols they follow, and many cannot observe such trends even if they desire to do so because of financial restrictions. Similarly, when it comes to style, females seemed more open to incorporating elements of Korean fashion in their style. While males appeared reluctant because of the fear of judgement, even if they were open to the idea of seeing other men include Korean fashion in their style.

Thus, there was an awareness among the respondents about the cultural differences between the Indian and Korean society, with many choosing to not indulge in specific activities because they might not be accepted in the Indian social context. This apprehension among the males was most evident in their decision to not wear accessories influenced by Korean idols since it is not a commonly-accepted idea to see men wearing accessories in India. Even when asked about their views on gender-neutral fashion introduced because of Koreanisation, the males seemed to have become more open-minded to accept such ideas because of their exposure to Korean content.

However, while their approach towards such concepts had broadened overall since many claimed that they would not mind seeing other men display such fashion, there was a lot of reluctance personally. Therefore, it can be inferred that Koreanisation has caused an increase in androgynous forms of expression among females.

However, while males acknowledge the existence of androgynous fashion and their reaction towards it has now become positive, they still hesitate to try such fashion on a personal level. Secondly, as seen in fashion, the majority of the females in the study had tried Korean skincare and makeup routines since most of them trusted Korean products because of the good results they had consistently seen. The males of the study also appeared to find such skincare and makeup routines fascinating, generally demonstrating an optimistic attitude towards Korean products.

A few men also appeared to be all right with trying skincare routines since Korean content promotes good skin because of the beauty standards established in Korean society. However, many respondents seemed doubtful about men using Korean makeup or skincare brands. Indian society has not normalised makeup and skincare yet because of which, if there is acceptance, there is an equal amount of hate. Therefore, men remain reluctant to try skincare and makeup routines even if they might now be more open to the idea of testing them themselves.

Lastly, the male and female respondents agreed that Korean content had exposed them to new forms of masculinity that opposed the hyper masculine notions of masculinity they had been socialised into believing. Male respondents of the research study stated that they had become more comfortable with being emotionally vulnerable, sensitive, and less aggressive.

Some males also expressed that they had stopped being judgmental of seeing other men demonstrating stereotypically feminine traits. Most of the respondents also agreed that Korean content could lead to the emergence of soft masculinity in India. However, they clarified that it would take age and time for a broader range of men to accept such notions since traditional ideas of masculinity remain ingrained in society. While its influence on men remains restricted, the concept of soft masculinity introduced by Korean content is encouraging women to abandon stereotypical notions of masculinity prevalent in India. The qualities that women consider attractive in the opposite sex are also changing. Females are now becoming more open to being involved with males with no beards and those that perform soft masculinity.

Therefore, based on the responses received, it can be deduced that while the hypermasculinity prevalent in India is not necessarily getting deconstructed because of the popularisation of Korean content in India, acceptance of concepts foreign to the Indian audience is now increasing. Many respondents still strongly feel inclined to preserve their culture. However, they will not

immediately be judgemental towards individuals that display traits generally associated with kkonminam men.

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