
K-POP AND K-DRAMA:
It's Impact on Indian Youth

Afifa Mirza

ABSTRACT

'K-pop' and 'K-Dramas' have been increasingly a part of subculture for 'Gen-Z' and millennials for quite some time now. It's popularity has increased multi-fold during the pandemic, which has led to demand for Korean beauty products and Korean food items. Thus, this introduced the Korean cultural wave in India, which is called 'Hallyu'. Even language learning platforms such as Duolingo experienced a jump in Korean learners. Various data suggests a growing interest of India's Gen-Z and Millennials in Korean culture. This research paper explores the factors behind its popularity and its impact, which is tremendously increasing among Indian youth today!

KEYWORDS: Culture, Gen-Z, Millennials, Youth, India.

INTRODUCTION

Korean culture is one of the oldest continuous cultures present in the whole wide world. If we want to know more about Korean culture, we must be aware of its basic pillars, which hold a culture that is still strong and marvelous at the same time. It is a blend of traditional and modern customs and traditions, consisting of food, national sports, and societal norms: as well, it's a popular culture in the form of music, movies, dramas, and fashion, etc. And those are just some of the small pieces of what the culture is by and large!

"Once you overcome the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films" (Bong Joon-Ho, Golden Speech, 2020). Korean is currently the fastest-growing language in India. The wave of popularity of 'K-Drama's' and 'K-Pop' music in the country, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, isn't unexpected. Most Indians first learned about K-Pop in 2012, when PSY's Gangnam style went viral! This song has also been called an opening door for K-Pop culture and music in various other countries. In the past decade, Korean pop music and Korean daily soap, also known as K-drama and K-pop, exploded among youth.

But recently, in the last 2 years during the lockdown, it started gaining momentum, as if the 'Hallyu' wave (A Chinese term that, when translated, literally means 'Korean Wave'. It is a collective term used to refer to the phenomenal growth of Korean culture, and other popular culture encompassing everything from music, movies, drama, to online gaming, and Korean cuisine just to name a few.) (Martin Roll, Business and Brand Leadership Asia, October 2021) has swept through India with its shows like Squid Game, Crash Landing on You, Heirs, Vincenzo, Descendants of the sun and the music of boy bands like BTS, WayV, Super Junior, EXO, and girl groups like BlackPink, Itzy, and Red velvet.

These had to have their biggest breakthrough moment in India during the pandemic, as more people found the time and inclination to explore different kinds of content until they landed on something that was a perfect mental escape from the anxiety of the times we were in back then. Embracing Korean content requires a lot of time and effort, to understand and read the subtitle that goes down while the video plays simultaneously, and the pandemic helped us cross the barrier very-easily and people have hooked ever since! Also, not to forget the Oscar-winning film 'Parasite' and the Cannes festival-winning award film 'Broker'. These were loved so much that the Indian box office had to screen them up too: they couldn't sell them out completely, but they satisfied many Korean movie watchers and opened up the gates to more such screenings in the coming years. The viewing of K-drama's in India increased by more than 370% in 2020 over 2019 (FP staff, First post: With inputs from The Press Trust of India, October 07, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- to study various factors behind the increasing popularity of K-pop and K-drama in recent years.
- to study its impact on Indian youth.

METHODOLOGY

The study used for the research was quantitative. The quantitative research method aims at discovering how people think, act, or feel in a specific way. The sources that were used to collect the data for this study are as follows:

- Secondary data: The study used secondary data from various sources, such as research papers, blogs, articles, books, magazine and newspaper articles, etc.
- Primary data Was collected through an online and offline survey questionnaire consisting of ten questions. The questionnaire was administered to participants from the northern, southern, eastern, and western regions of India.

The researcher used the purposive sampling method to ensure that the participants were aware of Korea's culture. The sample size for the study was 51.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Dhawan R.K, 2017, "*Korea's Cultural Diplomacy: An analysis of the Hallyu in India*" is a significant study that brings to light the history of Korea. From 1950 to 1996. It's journey from poorest country to becoming the member of OCED. This journey surprised the world and it was considered as 'Miracle on the Han River'. The study emphasises on the growth of Korean Culture in India in some part of North East India has made some impact knowing this new culture, rest of the states largely remain unaware and Korean government is making efforts in promoting the Korean wave in India.

2. Kaisii.A, 2017, "*Globalization, Hybridization and cultural invasion Korea's wave in India's north east*" claims that the cultural invasion of Korea is spreading throughout India, particularly amongst Indian youth today. They are now witnessing Korean waves.

3. Julia.T, 2018, “Polish K-Pop fandom: Phenomenon, Structure and Communication” presents information on K-pop fandoms, basic information on kpop studies etc. It is a complete package as it is a detail study of Korean music, choreographies, videos, lifestyle, food, cosmetic and everything South Korea has to offer. The study gives a whole perspective on sociological, cultural, psychological and media aspect of Korean society.
4. Arachika.K,2018, “Celebrating Korean wave in India” marks out at the increasing number of K-culture fanatics in the country, the Korean Cultural Centre in India organised Changwon K-POP India 2018 that drew K-pop enthusiasts from all over the country, claiming that the venue was house full and the worldwide event for K-pop fans had a blast. It was an exciting competition, Juchy from Mizoram won the first prize for vocal category, while ‘We Are Family Crew’ from Delhi won in the dance category. The winners will now travel to South Korea for the K-POP World Festival Final on October
5. By India Outbound, 2018, “Korea-India Friendship Competition” this marks out the celebration programme held in new Delhi for the students who are Korean enthusiasts. The friendship quiz competition drew over many students from new Delhi and NCR region putting forward South Korea as a unique tourist destination for Indians and celebrating more than 44 years of relationship between Seoul and New Delhi.
6. Shefali Bhat, ETtech, 2020, “How K-pop and Korean drama had their biggest breakthrough in India amid the pandemic”, defines how the pandemic offered a variety of content to be watched and kept the viewers entertained throughout the breakdown period. India ranking among to fifth or sixth country who contributed to YouTube mass streaming from India with approximately 78,00,000 streams. The increase in Korean language learners from India on Duolingo was 11% before pandemic October 2019-February 2022, 98% during pandemic February 2020-March 2020, 256% during pandemic March 2022-October 2022. Several other data points also indicate India’s growing interest in Korean culture.
7. Rubal.K and Garima.G, 2021, “Article on Cultural proximity and Hybridity: Popularity of Korean Pop Culture in India”. The study points out how the plays an important role of transmitting the communication that takes place listing all of the technologies. Then they explain how South Korea is spreading it’s culture worldwide, through media content, backed up a strong Korean government helping people to know more about it. They also present their view on Korean wave which is becoming synonymous with anything Korean not limited to just K-pop products but also includes tourisms, cosmetics, art, cuisine, technology, clothing etc.
8. Jasdeep.K.C and Kulveen.I, 2022, “Culture shareability of Korean popular media in India: A reflexive thematic analysis of BTS music video” it discusses how BTS’s phenomenon in India was examined in general stating why is their music loved by youth. Not only BTS but stating K-pop MV’s as it was fusion of multiple music genres, cultural hybridity, and loved as an evolutionary process. It was examined that these videos were culturally sharable with anyone within India irrespective of age. Therefore, it created a mere exposure effect among youth which is responsible for growing popularity very rapidly.

9. Namya.S, 2022, “Korean wave: Made in Korea, gorged and loved in India” describes the time during 2019 recommendation of K-dramas which was given to her in general and how she found these dramas were fully packed with culture. Eventually when the pandemic lockdown happened all the focus was given to watch and learn from these dramas. Not only her but many Indian people ended up becoming a full time K-Culture supporters. This also pointed out how Korean culture inspired and motivated people to start Art Poure, people even started working and delivering home cooked Korean meals across Mumbai.

10. Roahni.M, 2022, “Exploring India’s fascination with Korean culture” author shares her experience of her late 2021 of how her Instagram feed was filled with the popular Squid Game show meme, related posts during its hit release and rapid mass viewing by Indian population. She also states that today, BTS and BlackPink enjoy the cult status which was once held by Michael Jackson or The Beatles and how modern Indian society likes to stay in trend and so the people are also a part of this rapid growing culture which is widely followed worldwide.

RESULT:

It deals with the analysis of the data collected for the study, in the country divided by regions in the past few weeks.

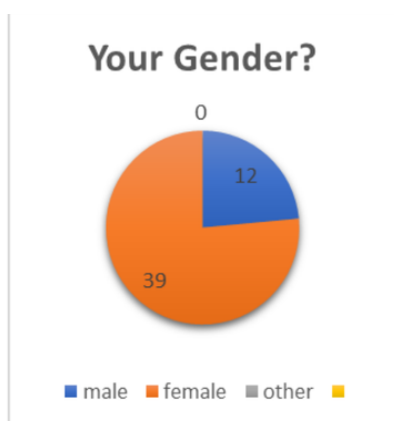
FINDINGS:

(Table N.o 1.1)

What is your age?		
Results		
Options	%	Count
15-22	74.51	38
23-30	15.69	8
31-38	3.92	2
38 and above	5.88	3

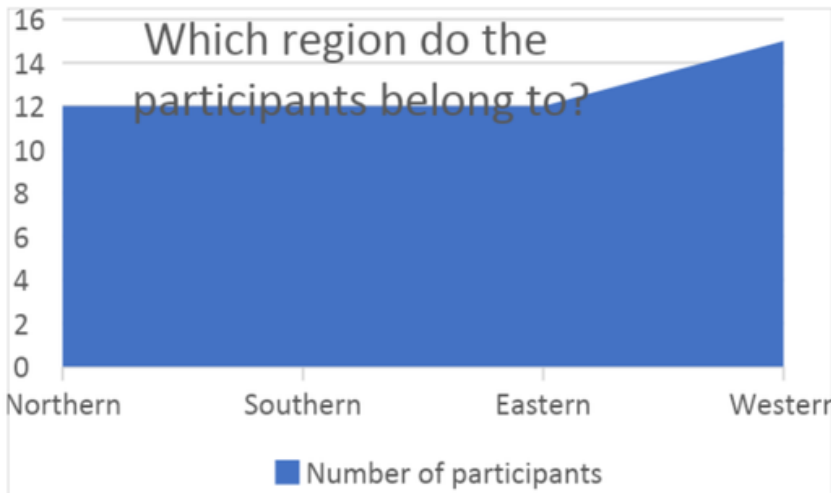
According to the survey conducted 74.51% people belong to the age group of 15-22 years, this could be because the teenagers are more involved in this culture than the older generation. 15.69% of people belong to the age group of 23-30 years followed by 3.92% people from 31-38 years age bracket. Then the last response from the survey was from the age group of 38 and above years with 5.88%.

Figure N.o 2.1



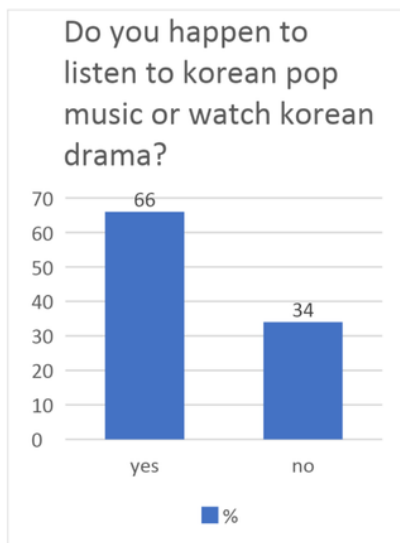
According to the survey conducted, most respondents were females, with an outstanding 76.5% of responses and with only a few number of male respondents of 23.5%. 0% from other gender respondents.

Figure N.o 2.2



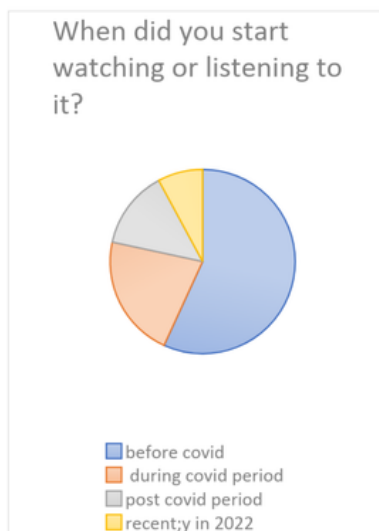
The survey was conducted in India divided by the four regions. The respondents were 12 in count from northern, southern and eastern regions of India. 15 respondents were from western region of India which was taken personally by the researcher.

(Fig N.o 2.3)



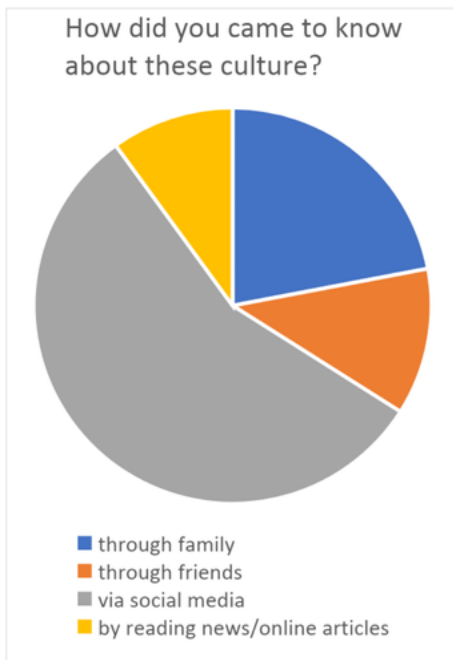
The survey denotes that 66% of people listen to Korean pop music, have a keen interest in the culture and watch Korean dramas as well because they go hand in hand; the remaining 34% of people are unaware about this culture exploding in India.

(Fig N.o 2.4)



As per the survey conducted, 56.86% of the respondents were aware about this culture way before covid period was started so we can say that people were aware about this but covid period with 22.57% of the new viewers came to know about this which gave it a push. Post covid period helped with 13 % viewers. And recently matching with the trend 7.83 are new to this.

(Fig N.o 2.5)



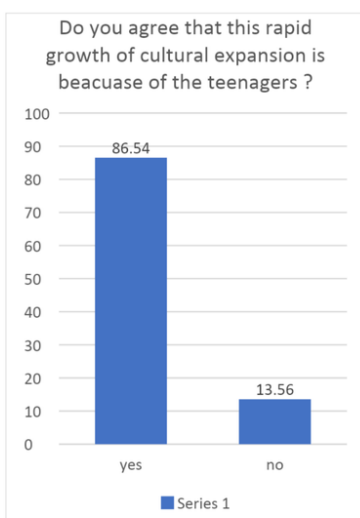
According to the survey conducted it states that the highest count of percentage which concludes that the people came to know about this culture was through social media with the help of Instagram the most, Facebook and Twitter at large with 56% of people who connected breaking the barriers as media played a key role. Following through their family members mostly teenagers who were exposed to these media with 22%. Through friends with 12% and lowest by reading news and online articles with only 10%.

Table N.o 1.2

Results	
Options	%
Social media	81.13
OTT platform	16.98
Newspaper and online ar...	1.89

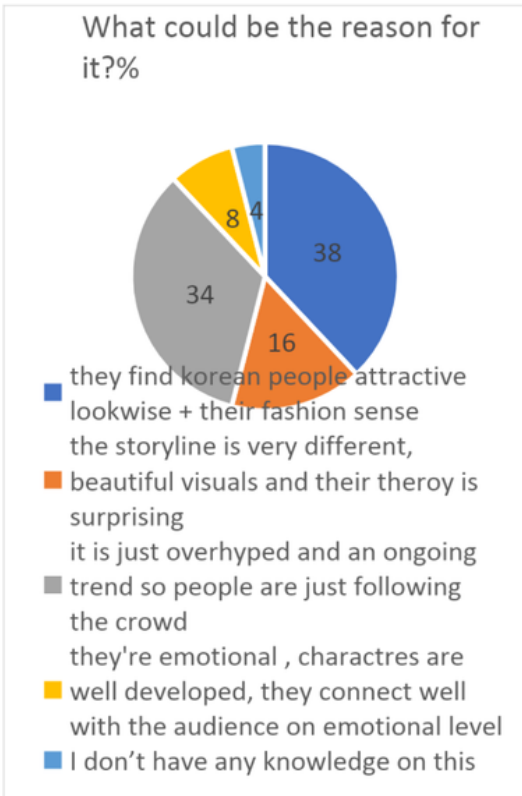
The survey states that the respondents feel that social media has helped them in knowing this culture following it with 81.13% as they connected worldwide without restricting them being in their own zone. OTT platforms such as Netflix, Viki Rakuten, and other sites and apps which allowed people to watch K-drama's and Korean vlogs (paid and unpaid version) concluded with 16.98% of respondents. And the least with 1.89% that helped the respondents was newspaper and online articles. Rest of them are unaware.

(Fig N.o 2.6)



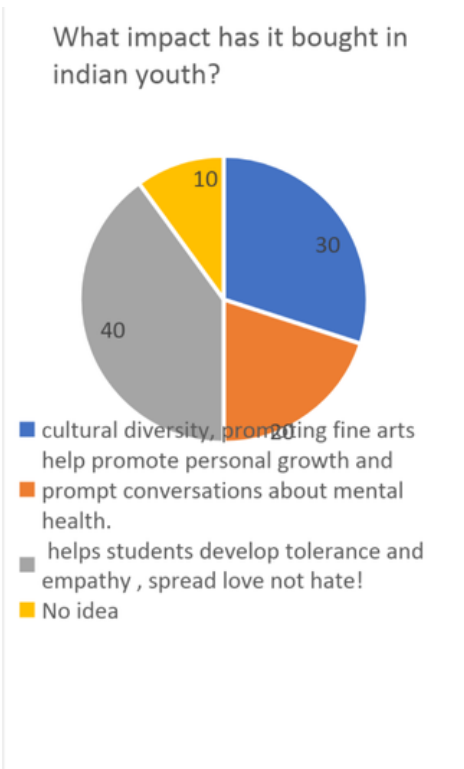
According to the survey most of the respondents with 86.54% of them agreeing that this rapid expansion is because of the teenagers as they're constantly on their phone being available and following all the latest trends that are happening all around the world. 13.56% disagree with this statement as they feel other reasons being the cause of this cultural expansion.

Figure N.o 2.7



According to the survey conducted, the respondents marked out that the teenagers being attracted to them look wise and it's a place where they put a lot of value on looks , how they dress up etc was selected with the highest percentage of 38% of the people agreeing to it, following by 34% for the reason that they're following it rigorously as it is an ongoing trend.16% of respondents noted out the reason that it could be because the storyline is very different and it connects on with the audience on emotional basis, so the teenagers might get motivated through them. Rest 8% respondents have no idea about it.

Figure N.o 2.8



According to the survey it concludes the impact these cultures have brought in with 40% people stating that it has helped students because most dramas show only positive sides, helping them to voice out and motivate them in various ways. With 30% agreeing it has brought huge cultural diversification promoting the entertainment industry and fine arts. 20% stating listening to their music has made a huge impact as an individual in itself and helped them grow into a better human being and have a lot of focus on self care as it gives a lot of value in being a better human. And the rest 10% of the population have no idea about it.

DISCUSSION

OBJECTIVE 1: ‘To study various factors behind the increasing impact of Korean drama and Korean pop music in India’. The objective was achieved with questions like “Do they watch or listen to dramas and music made by the Korean industry? Which platform helped Indian people learn about these customs? When and how did they learn about Korean pop and Korean drama culture?”

With these questions, the researcher got responses in favour of saying that yes, the culture of watching K-dramas and listening to K-pop music is rapidly spreading and most people are aware of it (Fig 2.3). As per (Table 1.2,) 56% of the people residing in India got to know about this culture in general through social media, which played an important role in spreading these customs and culture at large by promoting their music, fashion, food, etc. Those who are aware of this are only aware of it because of the curiosity that has risen to know more about the culture, so they got the information via Google. The rise took place during COVID (Fig 2.4), where the shows gained momentum and people started binge-watching them with no source of new entertainment and tired of watching the same genre when people were exposed to Korean dramas they hooked up and ended up watching so many of them and recommending them to others as well. Watching these shows was sort of a guilty pleasure for them. India rankings have increased in 2020 over 2019 on OTT platforms by 370%. Catering to the rising demand, Jawaharlal Nehru University is also running a Korean language teacher training course as well as a regular subject in collaboration with KCCI. The craze has been around ever since, but the pandemic gave it a push.

OBJECTIVE 2: ‘To study its impact on Indian youth.’ This objective was achieved by putting forward questions like what might be the reason for this wide-spread cultural expansion and its impact on the youth.

With these questions the researcher was able to elicit responses on factors influencing the expansion of K-Pop and K-Drama culture. The reason for this expansion is basically due to their fashion sense, attractiveness, and how hardworking they’re. Also, the drama is used as a tool for empowering the young generation to speak up for themselves and fight against injustice. They relate to each individual on an emotional basis and create solidarity between the character and the viewers so they can stay till last. Showcase love, struggle, empathy and sympathy within their 16-episode dramas. (Fig 2.7) The music that is curated to be listened mostly has a meaning or more of a theory behind it. Each fan connects to their idol on a different stage level, as if it’s just made for them.

Many people have also stated that their music has helped them save their lives, as ‘*life*’ for them was too bothersome, but the music helped them come out of that dark pit hole and be a form of comfort. Being overwhelmed by their stories has created a positive effect on each individual which also promotes a healthy lifestyle, delicious food, and being presentable (which is a must for a Korean individual) (Fig 2.8).

Many people have been following them now, and a great demand for Korean food restaurants has emerged. Many Korean brands have opened up their shipping policy to India for their customers to fulfil the demand and need. Also, to promote these cultures at large, ever since the COVID restriction has eased, many Korean fairs have setups showcasing their tremendous love and support for Korea. Not to forget a young Bollywood actress 'Anushka Sen' is soon to be debuting in the Korean industry and is progressing towards her dream that started during COVID and ever since looked up to their entertainment industry. This will really be an opening gate for Indian entertainers.

The first person to fit in the Korean industry is 'Shreya Lenka', an 18-year-old girl from Odisha who became the final fifth member of the group named 'Black Swan'. Many of them are unaware of this fact. The second Indian K-pop idol and their youngest member of 'X:IN' is Aria, whose birth name is Gauthami, is 20-year-old from Kerala. More opportunities are opening up for people as they see these two as their hope and rising stars, and nothing seems impossible now.

CONCLUSION

Korean culture has expanded very rapidly, following and covering all the states of India. Cultural expansion brought into notice that this is due to the teenagers, where the first trace of knowing K-pop by Indian people was found back in the north-eastern region of India in the early 2000's (Pramesha Saha, India-Korea Relations in the Emerging Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, 2023) The rise in Korean culture was noticed during COVID period. Due to lockdown, everyone was at home and had no new source of entertainment. People started watching Korean shows, web series, movies, and music videos online on various platforms: social media and OTT. There was a jump in streams from India as the content were very relatable to the Indian audience. As a result, people started recommending them, and it also started gaining viewership. Most of the dramas about being family-friendly took the lead and started gaining momentum during that time.

However, Indian interest in Korean dramas can be noticed before the COVID period in 2014, when the Bollywood industry introduced them to the Indian audience. The dubbed version of these dramas was seen on the 'Zindagi TV' channel, where they starred 'Descendants of the Sun', a popular Korean drama, and various other famous dramas from all over the world as well. Within no time, Korean dramas became so popular as they were known for portraying true emotions.

The impact of Korean culture is evident from the fact that the Korean language has been introduced in the New Education Policy. *'It is also the fastest-growing language'* (Jessie Yeung, CNN, 2023). The most learned language in India after English, Hindi, and French is Korean now. (Annual Report, Duolingo, 2022) Indian millennials and Gen-Z want to be connected to local as well as global culture, so they increasingly use virtual learning platforms that are full of fun. Also, South Korea is an emerging study destination, as various scholarships are provided by them to Indian students to have a free education.

Due to its rising popularity, people wanted to feel connected and follow the same patterns, trends, and lifestyle. For instance, Korikart, an online store that sells Korean products in India, witnessed a phenomenal spike in sales during the pandemic. “The brand has seen a spike in sales owing to the pandemic and has witnessed 300 percent growth in sales since March 2020. It is currently reporting over 40-50 percent month-to-month growth. The pandemic had its downside, but for Korikart, it also came with a silver lining since the work-from-home scenario gave people exposure to try K-drama, K-pop, and K-products, and that worked in Kori kart’s Favor,” said Seo Young Doo, CEO and founder of Korikart. (Namya Sinha, *Korean Wave: Made in Korea, Gorged and Loved in India*, 2023)

India is witnessing a Korean Wave, which was initiated by the popularity of K-Dramas, which enchanted the Indian audience with their captivating stories and emotions. This has also impacted the Indian pallet; Korean restaurants have mushroomed all over India, and their demand is increasing day by day. This cultural impact through K-pop, K-drama, K-beauty, and K-foods will foster a strong bond between the two countries. No wonder people would ask for a packet of ramen instead of Maggie, but only if.

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About the Contributor:

Afifa Mirza has a keen interest in exploring the intersections of East Asian popular culture and it’s influence on global youth. She holds a degree in Arts, Sociology from Royal College of Arts, science and commerce. Currently pursuing her Masters for the same. And has conducted this extensive research on the ‘K-pop and K-Drama :its impact on Indian youth’ demographic, particularly in Indian context. This paper reflects her dedication to understanding the dynamics of cultural exchange and it’s implications on societal norms and values and she hope it reflects the same.

