

Comparative Study on Korean Fashion and Italian Fashion

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Abstract

Objectives The main objective of this article is to examine the similarities and differences in how fashion is showcased and promoted in Italy and Korea.

Methods The approach to writing this article involved reviewing and synthesizing information from multiple reputable journals and drawing on proper experience. To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, each used source has been carefully evaluated, looking for relevant, accurate, and reliable information. This way, different perspectives on the topic and a well-rounded view of the issue are provided, incorporating both empirical evidence and personal insights.

Conclusions Besides the differences in culture and background of fashion panorama, the article demonstrates the common role of Fashion Weeks in promoting and showcasing new styles and trends, as well as the impact of fashion influencers such as K-idols and fashion bloggers on shaping fashion preferences and driving consumer's demand. By examining these commonalities, it may be possible to identify new opportunities for collaboration and exchange between the Italian and Korean fashion industries.

Keywords Hallyu, K-idols, Fashion bloggers, K-fashion, fashion industry, Italian fashion, Fashion week

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Contents

1. Introduction
 2. Fashion influencing drivers in Korea: the K-idols
 3. Fashion influencing drivers in Italy: the Fashion Bloggers
 4. Seoul Fashion Week
 5. Milan Fashion Week
 6. Conclusion
-
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1. Introduction

Korean fashion and Italian fashion are two distinct styles that have captivated the world with their unique designs, innovative approaches, and influential cultural influences. While each has its own aesthetic and approach, both have had a significant impact on the global fashion industry. In recent years, the Hallyu, or Korean Wave has gained significant traction across the world, leading to a surge in popularity of Korean fashion.

As a result, many are curious about how Korean fashion style and Italian fashion style compare and contrast. The influence of K-idols and fashion bloggers is the main driver of purchasing behavior in Korean and Italian fashion panorama. Therefore, paragraphs 2 and 3 investigate how they have shaped trends and fashion preferences in the country. Moreover, Paragraphs 4 and Paragraph 5 analyze the role of fashion weeks held in Korea and Italy, respectively, to give a contribution to the comparison.

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2. Fashion influencing drivers in Korea: the K-idols

The K-Wave phenomenon began with the export of Korean TV dramas to neighboring countries, but in recent years, young K-pop singers have become the driving force behind the movement. Indeed, just think that the Hallyu effect on the Korean economy is also known as the “BTS effect,” which refers to Bangtan Sonyeondan's (BTS, the top K-Pop band) influence. According to Forbes, BTS contributed more to the GDP of South Korea, as a whole, than Togo, Fiji, and the Maldives all together.

On the other hand, even if mostly associated with music and TV series, Hallyu is a collective term used to represent the broad range of Korean popular culture, including dramas, movies, online games, cuisine, beauty, and fashion. Despite this success, the Korean fashion sector is still struggling to establish itself on the global stage.

South Korea has capitalized on its well-known celebrities and compelling dramas to become a leader in the export of popular culture and to increase interest in South Korea as a country. It is one of the few if not the only, countries that have prioritized increasing its “soft power” through the export of popular culture.

As a result, this small Asian nation has quickly developed into the eleventh strongest economic country in the world, with a fashion industry and market that are highly interested in and sensitive to the trends and styles worn by celebrities. Indeed, unlike American sportswear or swanky French fashion, Korea still lacks a defined aesthetic or image for itself and while people claim they want to express their individuality, they act by contrast as if they need to feel to belong to something. Meanwhile, there appears to be a growing worldwide interest in Hallyu stars (Park, J. 2015).

In Korea, every generation, even the elder one, gets informed about superstars' latest fashion trends. This means that television dramas have been able to influence the Korean purchasing behavior of clothes in a way that whatever is being worn by characters, instantly becomes a hit. For instance, this happened with clothing and accessories worn by Jeon In-Hwa, an actress in her forties, while starring on the popular show *Baking King*, Kim Tak-ku, quickly sold out after the episodes where she wore

the items aired (Cho, H. 2010). This event has become so popular that new terms have been invented to refer to celebrities who contribute to the phenomena as a “wanpan-nyeo,” for female idols, and as a “wanpan-nam,” for male celebrities (“Nyeo” means “woman” and “nam” means man), both of which incredibly influence shopping decisions of their fans until sold out.

Moreover, the luxury sector, like the Korean fashion industry, has recently seen an increase in popularity among Koreans and at an international level with his success certainly given mainly to the idols and K-pop stars followed by many in South Korea and abroad, but the quality and innovation brought by Korean fashion designers played an important role as well. The avant-garde and visionary ideas of many modern Korean designers propelled the K-fashion industry outside the country's boundaries. On the other hand, Korean consumers would lean towards foreign luxury brands because many idols wore them, and their behavior influences many followers' buying patterns (Kim, Kim, Lee 2010). This is due in part to their mistaken belief that American and European brands are superior, as well as the fact that many of the superstars they idolize choose expensive international labels.

As a result, since Korean designers do not have the same influence as Korean celebrities, they are mutually dependent. Celebrities require designers since serving as a designer's muse and attending launch parties and fashion shows increases exposure and keeps them current, while designers depend on celebrities to publicize their brands and project a “cool” image. This kind of celebrity-designer relationship is an intriguing aspect of Korean popular culture that provides valuable insights into Korean society.

In conclusion, K-idols have a big influence on Korean consumers' fashion preferences. They inspire a sense of aspiration and desire in their fans, who frequently try to imitate their style, thanks to their carefully crafted and visually appealing image. In order to further increase their influence in the fashion business, numerous K-idols have partnered with fashion companies and introduced their own clothing lines. It is impossible to forecast whether Hallyu will become a passing trend, reach its pinnacle and stop developing, or continue to flourish and diversify indefinitely. However, their popularity and influence in Korea are still strong and are expected to have a long-term

impact on consumers' behavior and fashion trends. Hence, notorious celebrities in Korea who reach the height of their fame shall be working hard to gain as much money and develop as strong of a position as possible before the public swiftly moves on to the next "hot" star.

3. Fashion influencing drivers in Italy: the Fashion Bloggers

Over the past decade, fashion bloggers have emerged as key players in the fashion industry, disrupting traditional fashion media and advertising. In Europe, and particularly in Italy, a number of fashion bloggers have been at the forefront of this shift, using their social media platforms and blogs to create new trends, promote emerging designers, and challenge traditional fashion norms.

The figure of fashion bloggers in Italy is renowned for their immaculate taste and distinctive approach to dressing, which frequently fuses traditional Italian elegance with contemporary styles and global influences.

Italian fashion bloggers are well-known internationally for their knowledge of fashion, and many of them work with leading fashion companies, go to Fashion Weeks, and take part in editorial shoots. They play a significant role in the fashion business because of their influence on the introduction of new fashion trends and styles.

One of the most influential fashion bloggers in Italy is Chiara Ferragni, who started her blog "The Blonde Salad" in 2009. Ferragni has since become a global fashion icon, with over 23 million followers on Instagram and collaborations with top prestigious design houses such as Chanel and Dior. Her success has paved the way for other Italian fashion bloggers, who have followed in her footsteps and gained international recognition for their fashion expertise.

Over time, bloggers' roles have evolved. The earliest bloggers were first seen as complete outsiders by the fashion business and industry specialists, who regarded them with caution and distrust (as it was for Chiara Ferragni as well). These early blogs were obviously private, and they took a typical amateurish approach as opposed to the

professional manner of those who work in the fashion industry. Early blog posts mainly consisted of written texts, descriptions of outfits, and a few photos. On the other hand, in the last 10 years, the figure of the fashion blogger has been significantly altered by the expanding readership and the growing acceptance of a significant portion of the fashion system, as well as by the diffusion of social media like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

The advent and spreading of social media allowed postmodern customers to become prosumers, that is, being able to co-produce goods and services thanks to the engagement and the feeling to be “closer” to their favorite and followed social media characters. Indeed, Web 3.0 established conversational connections with the readers in order to disseminate knowledge through social interaction.

Some bloggers started to realize their role's potential for profit. As a result of the rise in popularity of some blogs and the increasing professionalism with which these bloggers approached the fashion industry, they were able to establish themselves as thought leaders by showcasing their individual sense of style. These bloggers demonstrated their knowledge of fashion to their readers, inspiring many users to copy the look or choose a product for their own use (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013). Fashion bloggers developed into role models to the point where they were essentially used as a benchmark.

Based on the public's acceptance of their fashion leadership, the bloggers' reputations were now utilized in a self-marketing strategy (Pedroni, 2015) that allowed them to advertise themselves and boost the viability of their blogs as businesses. However, McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips (2013) assert that readers who follow blogs do so in search of fashion advice and aesthetic inspiration; as a result, they become audience rather than members of a community (Pihl, 2014).

The most popular fashion bloggers act as a resource for customers, influencing their taste and ultimately determining if a brand or product is successful commercially. The credibility that customers give to the opinions of the more well-known fashion bloggers depends on a transparent trust system. While readers recognize the uniqueness and value the blogger's personal style, they also respect the blogger's judgment and think

his or her recommendations are free from any influence from the fashion industry. To help their readers get knowledge and perspectives on trends and lifestyles, fashion bloggers are thought to be able to introduce them to the world of fashion.

Because of their influence, fashion brands have progressively included the most well-known bloggers in their marketing tactics to promote and expedite their brands. As a result, they expanded their operations by making appearances at events, establishing design collaborations, and working as brand ambassadors (Kurutz 2011). Fashion bloggers today have expanded their operations to writing sponsored posts and selling ad space. Fashion houses, but also Hotels, and beauty shops to cite some examples, make use of their popularity to promote their products and services by gifting their products, and inviting them to their locations and events to obtain advertisements through their posts. Due to their great visibility and significant market impact, fashion bloggers provide excellent targets for effective word-of-mouth marketing campaigns (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013).

Fashion bloggers' independence from the undue meddling of the fashion industry, according to Pedroni (2015), is a crucial concern. In fact, businesses are more exposed to the fashion blogosphere, which might transform these sites into ineffective marketing tools capable of promoting both their own brands and the reputations of their authors (Pedroni, 2015). Additionally, a solid connection with the most well-known fashion bloggers provides marketers with ongoing updates on new trends - a kind of trend tracking (Rickman, Cosenza, 2007) - and prompts reader response on the ensembles or items displayed on the site.

Overall, the phenomena of fashion blogging and the fashion bloggers' quick ascent to celebrity status have given marketers a chance to advertise their products and services. Bloggers are thought to be the newest leaders of the postmodern era due to their vast commercial influence and unrestricted online reach that renders them able to dictate law in the fashion realm.

4. Seoul Fashion Week

The main stage where the new outcomes of K-fashion are presented to the world is the biannual Seoul Fashion Week (SFW). The multi-million business hosts the collections of many national designers, all innovative in their own ways and ever more appreciated by experts and fans. Seoul Fashion Week's first edition was held in 2000, since then it has expanded and has gained a reputation that aims to be up to par with the Big Four (London, Milan, New York, and Paris Fashion Weeks). The Seoul Metropolitan Government organizes the event in Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), a modern avenue situated in one of the most important hubs for fashion, and high-end label shopping in the whole country.

The main purpose of the show, for the participants, is to attract people from around the world to see the designers' collections and publicize their brands. The awareness for local brands is not very well-diffused, mainly due to the distribution system, which differs from other countries. The big distribution doesn't provide a system where the creations of designers can be sold on a large scale and spread around the country in the many malls and stores. Instead, they are sold in independent mini-brand shops inside department stores which the designer must pay for (Park 2015). Items are not accessible to everyone because the stores are not widely diffused. Naturally, there is another powerful channel at the designer's disposal: online retail. Recent research showed that "the size of the domestic online luxury market increased by about 11% in 2020 compared to 2019" (Gwak, Lee 2022). The positive data prove the sector has developed marvelously and support the idea that K-fashion has the potential to expand in the coming years. As a matter of fact, Korean fashion is aiming to become one of the relevant styles world-wide, setting trends and followed by millions. Since the distribution system differs from other countries, as previously explained, there are no direct buyers attending the shows. Or better said, there might be retailers interested in the items presented, but cutting deals with the designers to buy their works is not the reason why they attend. The whole retail system works in the opposite way; hence, the retailers do not buy the designers' outfits for reselling. Instead, the designers take

advantage of the occasion to broaden their brand awareness and make contacts, for a second time the networking activity will transform into room for their single-brand mini-shops inside department stores. Of course, increased sales are an indirect result of the event, but the main appeal for a designer to attend Seoul Fashion Week is the “promotion, image-making, and publicity” that come with it (Park 2015).

The runway presents many designers and their collections, but outside there is a whole other event happening. SFW is attended by many idols and K-pop stars, showing their most recent outfits and attracting many fans. The hype is highly felt by Millennials and Gen Z. It often happens that these celebrities are photographed while attending the SFW and the photographs have an effect similar to advertisements (Park 2022). The relationship between designers and idols is symbiotic, they need one another. The designers need idols to publicize their outfits, whereas idols benefit in popularity and fun-base growth from being a designer’s muse. The consequences of a celebrity wearing a specific brand serve as an actual advertisement, which influences purchasing habits and potential customer attitudes toward the label (Kim 2010, Min 2019).

It is still true that many trends are set by idols, and people simply copy them, but recently streetwear, “baggy”, and “comfy” style emerged from the youngsters populating the streets of Seoul. People hanging around DDP dress up in glamorous, extravagant, and eye-catching outfits, with the aim of impressing photographers and passersby aficionados. It is possible to catch the attention of the many photographers in the area, who will take pictures of the outfits and based on the overall styles shown in the streets, a common trend will be identified. In all its history, SFW has witnessed many different styles, from minimalistic, predominantly black apparel to leather jackets and tooled jeans. With a hint of gothic and punk coming out sporadically (Vogue). Recently, the dominant style could be defined as casual-cool: comfortable clothes that can be worn for hours during long days spent at work, oversized but still refined and sophisticated.

SFW can be considered the lighthouse of Asian designer fashion, as described by Forbes in the article “5 Highlights From Seoul Fashion Week” about the 2023 Spring edition, “Seoul Fashion Week is hailed for having the best street style, most innovative Asian designers have their runway shows here: streetwear, workwear and [...] an

upscale touch on sporty looks.” Being the pioneer of the Far East fashion style, SFW needs to experiment even further to acquire more relevance in the international stage. Matching foreign designer brands in their audacity and extravagance will allow Korean fashion to play a guiding role in the setting of trends, establishing its influence and diffusing its style worldwide.

In an article by CNN “Hyejeong Cho, a director in charge of Seoul Fashion Week, said interest in Korean fashion is growing, and that the city's government is actively supporting Korea's leading designers and brands to enter the European market”(CNN 2022). New investments in the industry and a recently developed interest coming from outside national borders would suggest that, in the following years, the Korean fashion style will be a fully-fledged main actor on the international stage. With this regard, Louis Vuitton has just held its first fashion show ever in South Korea, installing a catwalk under the Banpo Bridge in Seoul on last 29th June 2023, while the Gucci fashion show is expected to be hosted in 2024 at Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul.

5. Milan Fashion Week

Milan's international importance is the result of a long evolution that started in the second half of the 20th Century when the clothesector opened upto the American market and Paris lost them on opoly of the fashion industry after the Second World War (Merlo,Polese,2006). Inthe beginning, many relevant Italian cities clashed for the title off a shion representative in the international lands cape. Milandominated over other cities like Rome and Florenceasa direct result of the industrialization processand due to the socia land economicenvironment: distant from the Pope, subject to international influences, and “anorthern industrial city with good manufacturinglink” (Merlo, Polese, 2006).

The birth of Italian fashion shows dates back to 1951, when the aristocrat Giovanni Battista organized clothes exhibitions at Pitti Palace, in Florence. Afterwards, other main cities like Rome, Milan and Venice started hosting fashion shows. The need to have

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a national fashion show recognized at an international level put an end to the rivalry between the aforementioned cities; to do so the National Chamber for Italian Fashion was created in 1958 with the purpose of organizing, promoting and further developing the fashion industry. Hence, Milan was selected and, in the same year, the first Milan Fashion Week was established, becoming one of the Big Four.

Sometimes referred to as MFW, Milan Fashion Week serves the primary aim of showcasing the most recent collections from upscale fashion designers and companies in Milan, Italy. Along with the fashion weeks in Paris, New York, and London, MFW is one of the most significant occasions in the world for fashion. Designers have the chance to showcase their newest creations to global customers, the media, celebrities, as well as to establish the trends for the following seasons.

The Italian fashion industry, which is renowned for its workmanship, luxury, and creativity, uses Milan Fashion Week as a crucial venue. The occasion helps the Italian fashion sector get recognition and expand on a national and global level. An event acclaimed by all the major brands worldwide, awaited all year long by many designers, who look forward to presenting their collections for the season. In the audience, many resellers and shop owners are usually found. The system is based on resellers that own independent stores, family-run. Twice a year the events attract people from all around the world and designers prepare their year around the Big Four. The events are hosted in different locations/spots spread all around the city. The guests are often invited to attend many fashion shows daily, so it is common to witness invited people dashing across the streets to reach the next show hosted in a different avenue, on the other side of the city.

Milan Fashion Week is very felt by the locals, the excitement surrounding the shows, which are spread around the city is the presence of famous actors and VIPs, as well as the previously mentioned Fashion Bloggers, ready to diffuse their catwalk experience through their social networks' profiles. The chance to take a photo with them motivates fans to wait in line for hours outside the spots where the shows are hosted and famous people are expected to appear. Another reason for waiting outside is that sometimes, with any luck, fans are able to access the main event if there are some spots left,

when normally an invitation is needed. However, the majority of the attendees have received invitations that grant a pass for entrance.

6. Conclusion

To conclude the study on the comparison between the Korean and Italian fashion industries, an analysis of the commonalities and differences between the fashion-influencing drivers in both countries is presented in the following paragraph.

Even though fashion trends have a significant impact on both Italian and Korean consumers, their motivations to purchase are different. Italian customers frequently seek the advice and reviews of fashion bloggers as a source of ideas and knowledge for their wardrobe decisions. On the other hand, K-idols, who act as role models and trendsetters in the industry, have a big impact on how Korean customers dress. Both strategies represent the distinct cultural values and traditions of each nation, even though they may boost sales and attention for fashion firms. In order to succeed and remain relevant, the global fashion industry must ultimately manage these cultural quirks and adjust to the distinctive preferences of consumers everywhere.

While Korean consumers look to K-idols as trendsetters and role models, Italian consumers look to fashion bloggers for information and inspiration. Similar to Milan Fashion Week, Seoul Fashion Week places a greater emphasis on up-and-coming designers and both of them exploit this idolization phenomenon to promote their fashion products worldwide.

As the most representative emblem of the whole sector, National Fashion Week is taken as a reference for comparison. Starting from the common aspects, the two shows are held twice a year, for the Fall/Winter season and the Spring/Summer collection. They both last one week and to attend, invitations are issued.

Even though in some respects the two shows are similar, there are many differences that distinguish the two attractions and shape their background. Firstly, it is noticeable that SFW takes place in a single location, Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), whereas

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MFW is spread around the city in different avenues. Another peculiar characteristic is the approach of the photographers, who try to catch the vibe in the streets outside of DDP's main hosting building. Their role is to capture the most striking outfits flaunted by the attendees with the purpose of identifying the trends currently taking hold amid the population.

In Milan, on the other hand, photographers pay attention only to famous people; immortalizing the moment when they attend a show and display a new outfit by a designer. The VIPs attending the shows in Italy are mainly fashion bloggers and models. Very different from Korean idols, which are predominantly singers and actors. A fundamental difference between the two events is the purpose of the shows: in Seoul, designers take advantage of the publicity the brand gains from the exhibition. Whereas, in Milan, many resellers witness the events as a way to observe directly the new collections and ponder the decision of buying the items for their stores. A totally different system from Korea, as we already explained in detail in Chapter 4.

Overall, we can say that Milan is an already established event, with a reputation built in decades of history. Seoul Fashion Week is young in comparison and still growing in fame, with great potential to become a future contestant for the Big Four. In terms of their aims and concentration, Milan Fashion Week's strategy and Seoul Fashion Week's differ. MFW is a forum for presenting high-end luxury companies and designers as well as for highlighting the talent and workmanship of the Italian fashion industry. Seoul Fashion Week, by contrast, is more concerned with promoting up-and-coming designers and streetwear businesses, and it embodies the young and vibrant ethos of Korean fashion.

The distinct cultural values and traditions that influence each nation's fashion business are highlighted by these disparities in customer behavior and fashion events between Italy and Korea. The wide mix of cultures and traditions that make up the global fashion industry as a whole contributes to its vitality and innovation. Fashion firms and designers may connect with customers worldwide and produce goods that speak of their distinct beliefs and interests. By acknowledging and respecting these differences, the two nations shall take advantage for possible future scenarios of cooperation and

joint businesses.

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한국 패션과 이탈리아 패션의 비교연구

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한국어 요약

연구 목적 이 글은 이탈리아와 한국에서 패션, 패션 유행의 경향을 살펴보고 이를 통해서 K-패션이 지닌 특성을 살펴보는 것이 목적이다.

연구 방법 본 연구를 위해서 각종 문헌 자료, 연구 논문 등을 검토하고 종합하며, 이에 의거하여 K-패션의 특성을 작성하였다. 본 연구에서 사용한 각 연구 결과의 신뢰성과 유효성을 확보하기 위해서 정확하며 신뢰할 수 있는 정보를 찾아 신중하게 살펴보았다.

결론 패션 파노라마의 문화와 배경의 차이 외에도, 이 기사는 새로운 스타일과 트렌드를 홍보하고 선보이는 패션 위크의 공통적인 역할과 K-idol 및 패션 블로거와 같은 패션 인플루언서가 패션 선호도를 형성하고 소비자의 수요를 주도하는 데 미치는 영향을 보여줍니다. 이러한 공통점을 조사함으로써 이탈리아와 한국 패션 산업 간의 협업과 교류의 새로운 기회를 확인할 수 있을 것입니다.

핵심어 한류, K-아이돌, 패션 블로거, K-패션, 패션산업, 이탈리아 패션, 패션위크

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