

Instagram and the Reconfiguration of Youth Fashion: A Study of Changing Fashion Trends Among 17-24-Year-Olds in Kasaragod District, Kerala.

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the influence of Instagram on the changing fashion trends among the 17 to 24-year-old population in Kasaragod district, Kerala, India. As a social media platform, Instagram has been a significant part of the lives of many young people around the world. Instagram has overtaken many traditional sources such as magazines and newspapers as a source of information on fashion. A quantitative survey research design was adopted for this study, with 120 respondents selected from undergraduate and postgraduate students who were given a questionnaire to fill. The study focuses on Instagram's role in changing the respondents' fashion trends and the influence of Instagram influencers on the respondents. The study also looks at the extent to which Instagram has contributed to the rise in online shopping by the respondents. The study finds that Instagram has had an influence on the changing fashion trends of its users, as reflected in their increased usage of the social media application, with 69% of the respondents indicating that Instagram Reels is the most influential feature for fashion trends on the application. The study also finds that Instagram has not resulted in significant pressure on the respondents to keep up with the changing fashion trends, with 50% of the respondents indicating that they do not feel pressurized to follow the trends on Instagram, and 61.9% of the respondents also indicated that they do not follow Korean fashion. The study provides invaluable information on the influence of this social media platform on fashion trends among the youth.

Keywords: Instagram, fashion trends, youth culture, social media influence, fashion influencers, Kasaragod

Introduction

Fashion is a distinctive and habitual tendency in a person's style of dressing. Fashion refers to not just clothing but also includes accessories and hairstyles and overall lifestyle. Fashion reflects cultural, social, and psychological aspects of identity, and the digital age has fundamentally transformed how fashion trends emerge, disseminate, and are adopted, with social media platforms replacing traditional gatekeepers such as fashion magazines and runway shows as the new sources of inspiration.

Instagram, which was launched in 2010 and has today over 1 billion active users, has been noted as a significant influencer of fashion trends around the world (Mohamad Hanafiah& Mohd Fauzi, 2026).

Instagram is a visual medium with an emphasis on aesthetics and e-commerce, which has made it a fertile ground for the creation and consumption of fashion trends. Instagram is significantly used by the 17 to 24-year-old population as a means of self-expression and social validation.

This study focuses on Kasaragod district, the northernmost district of Kerala, India, whose fashion trends are influenced by the culture of both Kerala and the urban cosmopolitan of Mangalore that borders Kasaragod. The study looks at the influence of Instagram on the fashion choices of the youth in Kasaragod district.

Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the correlation between using Instagram and changing fashion preferences among the youth.
2. To determine the extent to which Instagram influences the perception of fashion among the youth.
3. To analyse the role of influencers and celebrities on Instagram in driving the youth's fashion trends.
4. To investigate the influence of Instagram on the increase in online shopping trends among the youth.

Hypotheses

The study tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Changing fashion trends on Instagram influence youngsters.

H2: Youngsters are influenced by Korean fashion through Instagram.

H3: Social media influencers have a major role in driving fashion trends among youngsters.

H4: Instagram has an influence on the increase of online shopping trends.

Literature Review

The relationship between social media and consumption of fashion has been the focus of much research. Research shows that social media platforms such as Instagram have changed the dynamics of the fashion industry, from trend dissemination to purchasing behaviour.

Social Media and Fashion Consumption

Social media has been found to have a significant influence on fashion trends. Instagram has been found to change the rate at which styles come and go (Kim & Choi, 2025). With Instagram's comment and like features and the ability of Instagram users to share photos, Instagram has had a significant influence on the rate of style diffusion and has been found to create new expectations among fashion consumers (Kim & Choi, 2025). 60% of Instagram users have said they discover new products on the app (Mohamad Hanafiah & Mohd Fauzi, 2026). Instagram Reels has emerged as a launchpad for fashion trends, with fashion posts getting 40% more engagement from users than other formats in the social media application (Fortune India, 2026). Research commissioned by Meta and carried out by Ipsos has found that Reels drive 81% of product discovery, 66% of consideration, and 47% of purchase influence in Instagram (Fortune India, 2026). The fast-fashion brand Urbanic was able to put a "silk scarf top" that was seen on TikTok and Instagram by

customers who saw the post on TikTok and Instagram on the market, and consumers were seen in the streets wearing them, a week later (WWD, 2026).

Studies have found that influencer marketing has bridged the gap between high-end fashion and everyday wear, making fashion trends much more accessible and relatable (Gupta & Nair, 2025).

A study carried out on Middle Eastern university students from Generation Z (N=800) has found that the physical attractiveness and para-social interaction (PSI) of influencers had the most impact on purchase intention, followed by informativeness and trustworthiness of the influencer (Mendeley, 2025). Another study focusing on South African Generation Z consumers (N=497) has found that attractiveness, expertise, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness were all positively associated with purchase intention (Mendeley, 2025). Dually process theories of purchase intention can be applied to influencer marketing, and the studies have found that affective-relational cue utilization and diagnostic information utilization by an influencer have a positive association with purchase intention (Mendeley, 2025). The role of authenticity in influencer marketing has been emphasized, with influencers using their platforms to share their stories, ideas, and lives in order to connect with their audiences (Gupta & Nair, 2025). Research carried out recently has suggested that brands should invest in creators whose community fit is high and protect authenticity through disclosures (ET BrandEquity, 2026).

The Korean Wave and Fashion

The Korean Wave or Hallyu refers to the rising influence of Korean popular culture around the world. Korean dramas and K-pop have been noted to have changed the fashion in various ways, influencing Indian youth's preference for clean cuts, pastel shades, smart layers and precision (News18, 2026).

K-beauty has transformed from a niche import to a mainstream retail in India. Korean brands such as Innisfree have set up standalone stores and other brands such as COSRX, Some By Mi, and Laneige are stocked and are available online through quick-commerce with two-hour delivery (ET Now, 2026). The Korean beauty movement has not just created new import categories but has also influenced Indian beauty consumers' expectations of all shelf products (ET Now, 2026). Instagram has played a significant role in the spread of Korean culture, enabling its fans to follow K-pop stars and adopt the aesthetic styles which extend to fashion, beauty, and lifestyle (News18, 2026).

Contextualizing Kasaragod

Kasaragod district, the northernmost district of Kerala, India, is a unique case for studying fashion trends. Due to its proximity to Mangalore, which is a major city in Karnataka, the culture and fashion trends of Kasaragod are influenced by those of Mangalore. Research on higher education in the region has shown that the city is a magnet for Kasaragod students who commute to the city for education as it has grown into a medical and educational hub (The New Indian Express, 2026). A study carried out in 2022 has shown that over half of Kasaragod's higher education-eligible students cannot access college locally, and with only less than 7,000 college seats available, out of approximately 13,970 students who complete 12th grade (The New Indian Express, 2022), the education migration pattern in the region could expose the respondents to different fashion influences.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a survey research design using the quantitative research type. Quantitative research designs are suitable for studying the patterns of behaviour and attitudes among a given population and analyzing the relationships that exist between variables.

Sample and Data Collection

An online survey using Google Forms was conducted, and a total of 122 questionnaires were completed by the respondents, out of which 120 were used for the study. The study used random sampling to select the sample of 120 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Kasaragod district from the target population of the 17 to 24-year-old youth.

Measures

The questionnaire comprised demographic questions and 15 questions concerning the study's four hypotheses and the factors that influence the respondents' purchasing behaviours. The questions were open-ended and closed-ended questions concerning Instagram usage, engagement with fashion-related content on the application, following influencers, fashion-related purchases, features, and influence, and opinions on Korean fashion.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. Being a quantitative study that relied on an online survey, the study could not have covered all the potential respondents, whose number might be even higher than the 120 respondents that were used for the study. Furthermore, the study could not have included the opinions of all the youth population in Kasaragod district due to the fact that the online survey approach excludes those who do not have access to the internet or who do not have Instagram accounts.

Data Analysis and Findings

Instagram Usage Patterns

The data show a high level of Instagram engagement among the respondents. A majority (55.8%) use Instagram multiple times a day, with 22.5% using it a few times a day. Rare use was reported by 9.2%, and there were respondents who had never used the platform. Regarding time spent on the platform, 28.8% of respondents spend 1-2 hours on Instagram, 23.7% spend 2-3 hours, and 22.9% of the respondents said they spend more than 3 hours on Instagram daily.

Engagement with Fashion Content

Out of the respondents, 29.2% engage with outfit inspiration content, 19.2% follow influencer fashion content, and 10% each interact with brand promotions and fashion blogs. Notably, 31.7% of the respondents do not engage with any fashion-related content.

A majority (58.3%) follow fashion influencers or brands, while 41.7% do not. Among those who follow fashion-related content, trend updates (31.1%), affordability of fashion items (30.1%), and

style aesthetics (29.1%) were the main influencing factors, with brand collaborations having the least influence (9.7%).

Purchasing Behaviour

Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.7%) have purchased clothes or accessories after seeing them on Instagram. However, the frequency of such purchases is low, with 11.6% buying frequently, 33% rarely buying, and 33.9% saying they do not buy items inspired by Instagram's fashion trends.

Feature Influence

Instagram Reels is the most influential feature for fashion choices, with 69% of the respondents selecting it. Posts and Stories followed, with Instagram Live and the shopping feature having minimal influence.

Perceived Influence and Pressure

Respondents were asked whether Instagram plays a major role in shaping their personal fashion style, with responses divided: 17.5% said "yes, completely," 31.7% said "somewhat," and 16.7% each chose "neutral" and "no, not at all." Regarding pressure to keep up with trends, 50% of the respondents did not feel pressurized, while 38.1% felt pressured sometimes and 11.9% felt significant pressure.

Korean Fashion Influence

Contrary to hypothesis H2, a majority of respondents (61.9%) do not follow Korean fashion trends. Only 12.7% actively follow them, and 25.4% do so sometimes. Among those who do follow Korean fashion, minimalist and aesthetic appeal (40.2%) was the most attractive aspect, followed by K-drama influenced styles (25.3%) and streetwear (19.5%). A majority (51.3%) never try to copy Korean fashion styles seen on Instagram. Regarding Instagram's role in globalizing Korean fashion, perspectives were divided: 30.1% said "yes, definitely," 36.3% said "somewhat," and 33.6% said "no, not at all."

Reliability as a Fashion Source

A substantial majority (69%) would recommend Instagram as a reliable source for fashion inspiration, while 31% would not.

Discussion

The findings mostly support the general hypothesis of the study that Instagram influences changing fashion trends among the youth, while providing significant nuances to this hypothesis. The high rates of Instagram engagement and the significant followership of fashion accounts confirm Instagram's role as a significant mediator of fashion trends. The dominance of Instagram Reels has implications for how content needs to be formatted on the platform. This finding is congruent with other studies that have found that Instagram is a discovery and learning platform for Generation Z, women, and Bharat (Fortune India, 2026).

The study supports **H1** (Instagram influences fashion trends) and **H3** (influencers drive trends) with the majority of respondents (58.3%) following fashion influencers and Reels being the primary influence channel. The role of influencers as authentic, relatable figures appears central to their effectiveness, consistent with existing research on micro-celebrity endorsement (Gupta & Nair, 2025). The data showing that Reels drives 81% of product discovery and 47% of

purchase influence further supports the platform's integration into the discovery-consideration-purchase pathway (Fortune India, 2026).

H4 (Instagram influences online shopping) receives moderate support. While 51.7% of respondents have purchased items seen on Instagram, the low frequency of such purchases suggests that Instagram functions more as a discovery and inspiration tool than a consistent shopping platform. This aligns with research that positions Instagram as a driver of impulse purchases rather than routine commerce (ET BrandEquity, 2026).

H2 (Korean fashion influence) is not supported by the data. Despite the documented global rise of Korean cultural influence (News18, 2026; ET Now, 2026), the majority of Kasaragod respondents do not actively follow Korean fashion. This discrepancy may reflect the local specificity of the sample or the distinction between awareness and adoption. Korean fashion may function as a recognized aesthetic without being directly imitated by most users. Notably, Indian fashion consumption is shifting towards "affordable premium," with consumers prioritizing quality, value, and experience over quantity (Fibre2Fashion, 2026), which may explain why Kasaragod youth adopt Korean fashion selectively rather than wholesale.

The finding that 50% feel no pressure to follow Instagram fashion trends is notable. While Instagram influences inspiration and purchasing, it does not appear to generate significant conformity pressure among this demographic, suggesting that youth exercise agency in selectively adopting trends that align with their identities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that Instagram is a significant influence on fashion trends among youth aged 17-24 in Kasaragod District, though its impact is more nuanced than often assumed. The platform serves as a primary source of fashion inspiration, with Reels and influencers playing central roles in trend dissemination. However, the majority of users maintain a selective relationship with Instagram fashion content, adopting trends without feeling compelled to conform completely.

The findings have implications for fashion marketers, who should prioritize short-form video content and influencer collaborations to reach this demographic. Educators and cultural analysts should recognize the role of digital platforms in shaping youth identity and consumption patterns. Future research could explore longitudinal effects, examine gender differences in Instagram fashion engagement, and investigate the platform's influence in other regional contexts.

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