

## INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON KOREAN FOOD TRENDS AMONG GEN Z IN MUMBAI

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### ABSTRACT

The global rise of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has significantly increased the visibility of Korean cuisine through digital platforms; however, its influence on young consumers in the Indian context remains underexplored. This study investigates how social media influences Korean food trends among Gen Z in Mumbai. The research aimed to examine the role of social media in shaping awareness and popularity of Korean food, explore the influence of food content on Gen Z's decision to try Korean food, and assess the cultural associations driving consumption patterns. A mixed method was employed, including surveys of 100 respondents, structured interviews with three café managers, content analysis of 170 Instagram posts, and 50 Zomato reviews. Findings indicate that while 88% of respondents have tried Korean food at least once, only 22% consume it regularly. Instagram emerged as the dominant platform, with 79% of respondents acknowledging its role in enhancing desirability. Peer influence (71%) and viral food trends (55%) were more impactful than traditional influencer marketing. Café insights revealed that 20–50% of customer visits were driven by online exposure. Content analysis showed a strong preference for reels (82%), with nearly half incorporating cultural elements such as K-pop and K-dramas. Zomato reviews highlighted authenticity (76%) and ambience or “Instagrammability” (46%) as key drivers, while affordability remained a constraint. The study concludes that social media plays a significant role in shaping awareness and desirability of Korean cuisine among Gen Z in Mumbai, though sustained consumption depends on pricing and continued innovation.

**Keywords:** Gen Z, Korean Wave (Hallyu), Korean Cuisine, Korean Food Trends, Social Media Influence, Consumer Behaviour, Instagram Marketing, Food Reels, Influencer Marketing, Cross-Cultural Consumption, Food Trends in Mumbai.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“La destinée des nations dépend de la manière dont elles se nourrissent.”

(“The fate of nations depends on the way they eat.”)

(Brillat-Savarin, 1970)

Food is seen not merely as nourishment but also as a cultural ambassador, promoting cross-cultural appreciation, transnational connections and enhancing global familiarity.

Korean cuisine has evolved into a powerful tool of soft power, benefiting from the global popularity of the Korean Wave, also called ‘Hallyu’, which is a significant cultural phenomenon viewed by its worldwide domination and fame spotlighted with the rise of K-pop, K-dramas, K-fashion, K-beauty trends and the Korean language.

Korean cuisine focuses on fermented foods like kimchi and doenjang, along with balanced meals such as bibimbap and nutrient-rich soups. As health becomes a major global concern, Korean food stands tall for marrying flavour with function, offering both taste and nutritional value.

From Korean BBQ to hotpots, the emphasis on communal dining and shared meals has redefined eating as a social ritual. Millennials and Generation Z resonate with this trend, who value shared experiences.

Mukbang culture (a South Korean trend where individuals live-stream themselves eating large quantities of food while engaging with their viewers) and social media trends further amplify Korean food’s visibility and desirability. These enhance online interaction, challenge participation, and community building around Korean dishes.

Korean food’s success not only lies in its authenticity but also in its adaptability. Chefs across the world incorporate Korean flavours into fusion dishes and also offer dishes that are plant-based and suit the local palates.

Korean food is not just a trend; it is a global cultural movement. It thrives on the intersection of media, health, identity and innovation.

The researchers are interested in studying the influence of social media on the popularity and consumption of Korean food trends among Indian Gen Z using a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. This literature review explores existing studies on social media-driven food culture, the impact of the Hallyu wave, and youth consumer behaviour to provide a foundation for the research.

## 2. SIGNIFICANCE

This study is highly significant as it examines the intersection of the rising influence of social media, the phenomenon of cultural exchange through globalisation, and consumer behaviour among the youth. In recent years, Korean culture has witnessed a massive surge in popularity worldwide, including in India. This trend, among Gen Z, is largely fuelled by social media platforms.

The phenomenon of cultural exchange is not merely limited to food; it examines the deeper nuances of shifts in how we interact with culture, its impact on identity as a global citizen, and global trend adoption.

This study would contribute significantly to understanding cultural globalisation through food. Food is one of the primary pillars of a culture, and Korean food has become a hallmark symbol of the larger Korean wave (Hallyu) that has been widely embraced. It would also offer insights into the transformative role that social media plays in shaping food preferences and consumer behaviour. Through studying and deeply examining how Indian Gen Z consumes and interacts with content, the research would reveal how social media not only becomes a driving force but also facilitates the localisation, discovery, popularity, and desirability of foreign food trends.

By exploring these facets, the study would be able to add valuable contributions to the branches of globalisation studies, consumer behaviour, food culture, and media studies.

## 3. RELEVANCE

This topic is highly relevant due to the presence of the K-factor in pop culture globally. From food, fashion and skincare, every lifestyle trend begins with a 'K'. From making dalgona coffee at home in the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown era to binge-watching the final episodes of Squid Game Season 3 on Netflix in 2025, the Hallyu wave has grown year by year. 2025 has already seen Korean artists (Jackson Wang and Wave To Earth) visit India for their concerts and promotions, paired with the rise of Korean cafés and their experiential Korean barbecue.

Social media is one of the major contributors to the rise of the K-wave in India. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Weverse, etc., have now made Korean content more accessible to fans, increasing conversations and connections with the Korean culture online as a sense of belonging and comfort. The K-wave also proved to be a new cultural product for streaming platforms. Netflix, in a survey, found that over 60% of its members have watched Korean titles in 2023 alone. At the same time, Prime Video by Amazon also largely increased Korean content options on its platform (Korea Centre, 2025).

This rise of Korean content on OTT has reflected on the content on social media, the Gen Z playground, which shapes their opinions, preferences and exposure to international cultures. Reels, Mukbang and ASMR eating videos, and influencer posts have become the driving force behind adapting Korean cuisine among the urban Indian Gen Z, who are digital-first and

consume large volumes of content daily. Korean food products are taking over every shelf in Indian supermarkets, while Korean-inspired cafés and restaurants are booming across the country's metropolitan areas. Online presence has become a crucial aspect for establishments trying to enter the Korean market. Understanding how social media influences these food choices is highly relevant in today's times for marketers, cultural researchers, and businesses aiming to succeed in the expanding Korean food space in India. More broadly, the study highlights how digital platforms are transforming Indian Gen Z in terms of consumer behaviour, developing tastes and adapting to cultural practices in a globalised market.

#### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

From being a comfort cuisine in South Korea to becoming a global cultural crown, Korean food has grown into much more than just food on shelves in Korean convenience stores. With the rise of Hallyu and digitalisation, food has become a way to connect, express and explore cultures, especially for Gen Zs who thrive online. This literature review aims to explore and bring together the symbolic power of food, the influence of the Korean Wave, and the way digital media shapes cultural exchange. It covers multiple themes like the emotional and aspirational appeal of Korean food, its role as a soft power tool, the rise of influencers and food bloggers, and how platforms like TikTok and Instagram create and sustain food trends.

##### **4.1 FOOD: A SYMBOLIC AND CULTURAL MEANS**

Food is a constant and shared element in human societies throughout history. It creates a deeper symbolic and cultural meaning while essentially being important for survival.

Food is a "nonverbal means of sharing meanings" in which everyday choices, such as who eats first or how food is served, reflect deeper cultural structures. We're moving further from recognising food as a source of nourishment to a "main factor in how we view ourselves and others". Food is essentially a medium through which we express ourselves. Food practices help people navigate their identity in a world that is increasingly global, commercial, and image-conscious.

The increasing popularity of food-related media, from celebrity chef shows to Instagram, demonstrates how food has become a performative spectacle. What we eat is now part of how we brand ourselves, consume culture, and share identity online.

Food is no longer merely functional; it is curated, photographed, and ritualised for public display. This reflects how food has entered the domain of mass communication, creating a cultural feedback loop between audience, identity, and meaning (Stajcic, 2013).



Figure 1.1 Courtesy Image: Guillaume Belvèze for Le Monde

#### 4.2 FOOD AS SOFT POWER

A country's culture, political values, and foreign policies make up for its soft power. When others admire a country's values, culture, or policies, they are more likely to align with their interests voluntarily. In contrast to hard power, which involves the use of military force or economic incentives.

Food as a vehicle of soft power carries symbolic and cultural meanings that can communicate ideologies and values from one society to another. Soft food power operates on three levels: Cultural Propaganda – exposure and adoption of foreign foods; Democratic Change – shifts in public values leading to policy influence; and Systemic Change – deep integration of foreign food values into national systems. Food's power lies not in the food itself but in its cultural-symbolic associations (Reynolds, 2012).

### 4.3 HELLO HALLYU, THE KOREAN WAVE



Figure 1.2 Images: Shutterstock

By the late 1990s, Korea had established itself as a key player in transnational popular culture, exporting its media products to various Asian countries, including Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. The global rise of Korean culture became known as the Korean Wave or “Hallyu” — a term that refers to the rapid surge in popularity and enthusiasm for Korean cultural exports such as K-pop, films, fashion, cosmetics, cuisine, and lifestyle.

The Korean culture industry was developed for socio-economic, cultural and political reasons in the late 1990s. In the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Korean government started funding television and film production, subsidising music companies and negotiating trade deals to lower barriers for Korean media abroad. This turned “Hallyu” into a pillar of national economic policy, helping cultural hits generate billions of dollars and boosting Korea’s visibility worldwide.

In the past, most of the world watched Western (especially American) shows and listened to Western music. But now, Korean media is also being watched and loved in the West. This is called a “contra-flow”, where culture flows both ways. Korean dramas often use Hollywood-style storytelling, and K-pop mixes in Western music styles. Western artists are now teaming up with Korean stars. This give-and-take is changing who influences global entertainment.

Devoted fans around the world have posted on social media, helping Korean content spread virally online, making new shows and songs reach international audiences instantly (Kim, 2013).

### 4.4 DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Digital platforms like social media, discussion forums and virtual groups are powerful tools that connect people across borders, encouraging cultural interaction and exchange,

collaboration and understanding. These platforms allow individuals to explore and share diverse cultural expressions, such as literature, art, music, and food, worldwide.

Asia is home to immense cultural diversity, and with the rise of rapid globalisation and digital innovation, it has become a vital landscape for cross-cultural exchange via technology. Social media platforms have become informal cultural hubs with audiences sharing and discussing customs, traditions and everyday practices. Platforms like YouTube and Netflix help globalise Asian content (e.g., Korean dramas, Japanese anime) by localising it through subtitles and dubbing.

The transformative power of online communities goes beyond casual interaction. They represent the microcosms of global society, where shared interests create a space for cultural blending, idea exchange and collaboration. Digital platforms become tools for global connection, cultural sustainability, and social innovation. (Banerjee et al., 2019).

#### **4.5 KOREAN CULTURE AND MEDIA**

For many countries, especially those seeking to enhance their global image, the media has become a powerful tool of soft power, a way to cultivate cultural appeal and influence international audiences without coercion.

Among the countries that have successfully leveraged media for global recognition, the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea, stands out as a prime example. Traditionally known for its technological prowess, shipbuilding, robust economy, and some of the fastest internet speeds in the world, Korea has now become globally synonymous with a cultural phenomenon called the Korean Wave or Hallyu. This cultural movement encompasses the worldwide appeal of Korean pop music, television series, movies, skincare and beauty trends, fashion, and culinary traditions.

Initially aimed at boosting South Korea's influence in East and Southeast Asia, the Korean Wave has grown to captivate audiences throughout the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and other regions worldwide. It represents more than just entertainment; it offers a dreamlike world of aesthetic perfection, emotional depth, and rich cultural values. Through carefully curated media content, Korea exports not only products but also human values, ideologies, and a way of life that deeply resonates with global audiences. This has contributed significantly to Korea's cultural diplomacy, national branding, and economic growth.



*Figure 1.3 Psy's "Gangnam Style" Courtesy Photo*

A landmark moment in the globalisation of Korean pop culture was the 2012 viral hit “Gangnam Style” by PSY. Though rooted in localised satire about the wealthy Gangnam district in Seoul, the song gained explosive international attention thanks to platforms like YouTube, where it became the first video to reach one billion views.

One of the defining characteristics of Hallyu is its ability to evolve. The so-called "Second Wave" of Korean pop culture, driven by the global rise of K-pop groups like BTS, EXO, and BLACKPINK, is a testament to its adaptability. South Korea’s rise as a cultural powerhouse is driven by creativity and widespread digital access (Anand & Baek, 2024).

#### **4.6 KOREAN FOOD AS THE RISING STAR OF HALLYU**



*Figure 1.4 Image Source: allkpop*

The Hallyu wave, born as an influence of K-drama and social media, has resulted in over 600 Korean enterprises operating in India, both small and large, and also establishments that offer Korean food, many at several locations across India. K-dramas are not just pure entertainment but also shape aspirations among viewers. Viewers get curious about the stories, fashion, and especially the food shown on screen. This has caused a significant increase in demand for Korean foods such as kimchi, ramen, and soju in Indian markets, leading to record-high exports. Social media has played a huge role in this shift, with platforms like Instagram filled with Korean drama fan pages, Mukbang challenges, influencer posts and food content. The trend took over the internet massively during the 2020 COVID pandemic. Interestingly, the study found that the influence of K-culture, including food, is consistent across different age groups, genders, and education levels. This hints that trends and food preferences driven by social media are widely embraced among Indian Gen Z, regardless of background (Naidu et al., 2023).

#### **4.7 KOREAN FOOD: AN AFFORDABLE CULTURAL PRODUCT**

Many fans cannot afford K-pop merchandise because of the high import costs and customs fees. Korean food has replaced K-pop merch as a more affordable way to engage with Korean culture. K-dramas often show characters eating gimbap, japchae, tteokbokki, and kimchi fried rice, and as viewers watch, they learn how to make and consume these foods as well. This, with the rising number of Korean cafés and Indian supermarkets that are now carrying more Korean ingredients, has made Korean food more common in Indian homes. Korean food is not just about the taste for many; it's about feeling the emotional bond that has been developed around experiencing Korea (Biswas & Roy, 2023).

#### **4.8 GLOCALISATION AND THE ASPIRATIONAL APPEAL BEHIND K-CULTURE**

The rising popularity of Korean food among the Indian Gen Z stems from a form of glocalisation, as described by sociologist Jan Pieterse (1994) as “structural hybridisation” in globalisation, where “people assert local loyalties but want to share global values and lifestyles”. South Asia (India) offers “fertile soil for K-pop and K-dramas to flourish due to its relatively young generation and growing internet and smartphone penetration rate” (Gosh, 2002). It further boosted this hybridisation, especially in metro cities like Kolkata, where Korean cafés offer not just food but an experience of the Hallyu wave itself because Korean food lovers are not just in it for the foodie factor but also enjoy the Korean entertainment culture and are keen to learn Korean table etiquette as well as the language for their aspiration to visit South Korea.

#### **4.9 THE POWER AND SUBTLETY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Brands are getting smarter with how they sell food and drinks on social media. Influencers play a huge role, especially those who seem relatable and trustworthy. People are more likely to notice and remember ads when influencers include personal stories or make the product part of their everyday life. Emotional content tends to grab more attention than plain product shots.

Even the way a post looks, colours, captions and hashtags make a difference (Afandi & Marsasi, 2023).

#### 4.10 TIKTOK TAKES OVER GEN Z'S FOOD CHOICES

TikTok creators and influencers affect the food-buying decisions of Gen Z and play a huge role in the food choices of the youngsters right now. It finds these 3 traits - communication skills, trustworthiness and attractiveness strongly affect whether Gen Z are likely to buy the food products advertised. When influencers seem loyal and confident in the product they are promoting, look appealing and are genuine, their followers are more likely to trust and follow their suggestions. It builds a clear framework, compiling these qualities/traits to explain how purchase intentions are shaped (Radhi et al., 2024).

#### 4.11 RESTAURANT MARKETING IN THE YOUNG DIGITAL SPACE

Social media has emerged as the primary marketing medium in the food and restaurant industry. Facebook, Instagram, Zomato, and X (formerly Twitter) are being used not only to advertise but also to engage directly with consumers. Zomato, being the most effective platform for discovering restaurants, and consistent campaigns, promos, and influencer engagement, increased customer footfall, especially among tech-savvy consumers. Gen Z consumers today actively seek out popular content and real experiences, and social media has made it possible to target them through campaign-based visibility, personalised feedback loops, and trust-building (Deshwal et al., 2018).

#### 4.12 SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE AND DINE-OUT CULTURE



*Figure 1.5 Courtesy Image: James Tran*

Social media has a big impact on what people buy because they are constantly seeing trends, influencers, and content made by their peers. About 74% of young Indian consumers use social media to decide what to buy, looking at reviews and seeing what other people have to say about products instead of traditional brand messages (Bharucha, 2018).

Millennials are using Instagram as their new restaurant guide. For them, it is not only about food quality or word-of-mouth, but also about how the experience looks online. They often avoid places with an unimpressive Instagram presence and rely on geotags, hashtags, and restaurant profiles before dining, making Instagram a visual menu and brand identity. To meet these expectations, restaurants design their interiors and presentations to be photo-worthy. As a result, user-generated posts act as free marketing, reinforcing Instagram as a form of social proof (Tobin, 2017).

In today's digital age, dining is not just about food but also about experiences, visuals, and sharing. It has become a form of self-expression and social identity, where influencer content and user-generated media shape consumer choices. Consumers actively share their experiences to recommend or critique restaurants, helping others make informed decisions. They rely on likes, shares, and reviews as social proof, while also selectively interpreting content based on personal preferences (Kesa & Koufie, 2020).

Sharing experiences online has become second nature for Millennials and Gen Z, driven by self-expression, social recognition, and the desire to document moments. Factors such as food quality, service, atmosphere, and cultural authenticity influence this behaviour. Gen Z, in particular, frequently shares real-time content, while Millennials show a stronger link between sharing and loyalty, making them more likely to revisit or recommend restaurants (Poyoi et al., 2024).

#### **4.13 WHY GEN Z IN BANGKOK ARE DRAWN TOWARDS KOREAN FOOD CHAINS**

The decision to eat K-food isn't random but rather is influenced by how easily accessible and affordable it is, along with how much they enjoy it. This idea, called "perceived behavioural control" (a person's belief about how easy or difficult it is to perform a specific behaviour), turned out to be the biggest factor in shaping their intention to eat at Korean franchises. It shows how much the Korean Wave has impacted young Thai consumers' food choices (Siripiyaphat, 2023).

#### **4.14 GANJANG GEJANG: FOOD CREATIVITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN INDONESIA**

Social media and new product ideas have influenced people's love for a Korean dish called Ganjang Gejang, made by a brand called Daebag.e in Indonesia. The thing that stood out the most was that creativity in food and social media marketing didn't just boost sales, but it also made customers happier overall. What people see online, and the uniqueness of the product, go hand in hand in shaping loyalty (Dumatubun & Tambunan, 2025).

The researchers are interested in studying the influence of social media on Korean food trends among Indian Gen Z using a mixed methodology of surveys, in-depth interviews and content analysis.

Overall, the literature highlights the growing role of Hallyu in shaping global cultural consumption, the increasing importance of social media in influencing food preferences, and the use of food as a medium of cultural expression and soft power. However, these studies are often examined in isolation. There is limited research that integrates these perspectives to understand how Korean food trends are constructed and experienced within specific urban contexts, particularly among Gen Z in India.

## 5. RESEARCH GAPS

Overall, the literature establishes three key gaps:

1. Food functions as a symbolic and soft power tool in global cultural exchange.
2. Hallyu has expanded beyond media into everyday lifestyle practices, including food.
3. Social media plays a central role in shaping contemporary food consumption patterns.

Existing studies remain fragmented across these domains, with limited research integrating soft power, Hallyu, and digital media influence to examine how Korean food trends are constructed and consumed in specific urban contexts.

While global and regional studies provide valuable insights, there is a lack of city-level, India-specific research, particularly on Gen Z consumers and their everyday interactions with Korean food on social media platforms. These studies conclude that the Korean wave, through celebrity endorsements, country-of-origin image, cultural values, and uniqueness, positively affects consumers' purchase intentions, positioning Korean cuisine as a powerful tool of soft power and a broader cultural movement.

The Korean wave has recently witnessed a massive surge in popularity in India, especially among Gen Z, largely fuelled by social media platforms, with the trend accelerating during the 2020 COVID pandemic. This highlights the need to understand the diverse purchasing patterns of Indian consumers with respect to Korean products and to assess the growth potential of Korean cuisine in India. While existing studies address the broader influence of K-culture, they often lack specific city-level insights and a focused examination of everyday food consumption trends driven by social media in metropolitan contexts such as Mumbai. This paper addresses these gaps by exploring the following research question.

## 6. RESEARCH QUESTION

How does social media influence Korean food trends among Gen Z in Mumbai?

## 7. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the role of social media in shaping the popularity and consumption of Korean food among Gen Z in Mumbai, India.
2. To explore the relationship between influencer content and Gen Z's interest in trying Korean food in Mumbai.
3. To assess the impact of social media platforms on increasing awareness and desirability of Korean food trends among Gen Z in Mumbai.
4. To understand how online engagement affects Korean food choices and dining behaviour among Gen Z in Mumbai.
5. To explore how Korean restaurants and cafés in Mumbai perceive the impact of their social media content on consumer footfall and engagement.

## 8. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H1: Increased exposure to Korean food content on social media positively influences Gen Z's intention to try Korean food in Mumbai.

H2: Influencer marketing on platforms like Instagram has a significant positive impact on Korean food consumption among Gen Z in Mumbai.

H3: The more frequently Gen Z in Mumbai interacts with Korean food content online, the greater their likelihood of dining at Korean restaurants.

## 9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 9.1 Research Design

This study uses a mixed-method approach to explore how social media influences Korean food trends among Gen Z in Mumbai. Both qualitative (survey) and quantitative (interviews and content analysis) methods were used to gain comprehensive insights into consumer behaviour and market perspectives. Data triangulation across surveys, interviews, and content analysis was used to strengthen the credibility of findings.

### 9.2 Data Collection

#### 9.2.1. Primary Data:

- **Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 100 Gen Z respondents (aged 18–25) residing in Mumbai. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions designed to assess social media usage patterns, exposure to Korean food-related content, and its influence on consumption behaviour. The instrument was self-designed based on themes identified in existing literature on digital influence, food trends and was structured to align with the research objectives and hypotheses.
- **Interviews:** Structured interviews were conducted with managers from three Korean cafés in Mumbai. The interviews focused on understanding consumer demand, the role of social media in driving footfall, and observed shifts in customer preferences. Each

interview followed a consistent set of questions to ensure comparability across responses.

### 9.2.2. Secondary Data:

- **Content Analysis:** A content analysis was conducted on 170 Instagram posts and 50 customer reviews from Zomato. Instagram posts were selected from the official accounts of seven popular cafés across Mumbai, within a defined timeframe of three months, to ensure consistency and relevance. The posts were selected based on relevance, engagement levels, and consistency of posting among Korean cafés in Mumbai. Posts were further filtered based on their focus on Korean food items and promotional or engagement-driven content.

Similarly, Zomato reviews were collected from the same cafés, with emphasis on recent customer feedback that referenced Korean food experiences. Reviews were selected based on recency, relevance to Korean cuisine, and availability of detailed user feedback.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, wherein recurring patterns, themes, and sentiments were identified and coded. This enabled the study to examine how social media content and user-generated reviews contribute to shaping consumer perceptions and interest in Korean food.

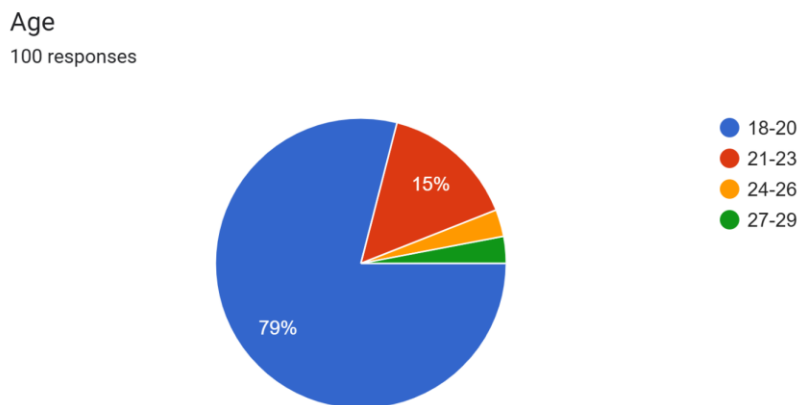
### 9.3 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who are familiar with or actively consume Korean food, ensuring direct relevance to the research objectives. Similarly, cafés included in the study were selected based on their prominence and active presence within Mumbai's Korean food segment. The selection was also influenced by the limited number of cafés in Mumbai that exclusively serve Korean cuisine, as well as the willingness of café managers to participate in the study.

While the sample size of 100 survey respondents and three café interviews provides meaningful insights, it may limit the generalisability of the findings. The respondent pool was intentionally restricted to individuals who had prior experience consuming Korean food, which further narrowed the eligible sample but ensured the relevance and accuracy of the data collected. Despite this, the study offers a valuable context-specific understanding of consumer behaviour within a defined demographic and geographic setting.

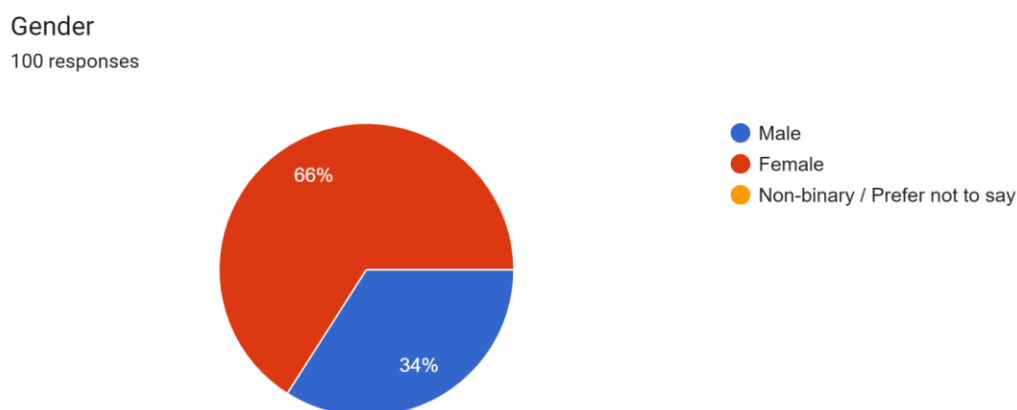
## 10. FINDINGS

### 10.1. ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS



*Figure 2.1*

The demographic data reveal that the majority of respondents, 79%, fall within the 18–20 age bracket, followed by 15% in the 21–23 age group, and very few above 24, meaning that the sample is largely reflective of the target audience, i.e. Gen Z.



*Figure 2.2*

To understand the demographic dynamics, the above figure shows the sex of the respondents. 66% are female, 34% male, and none reported non-binary/prefer not to say. The higher female participation may indicate greater engagement among women with food-related trends and influencer content.

How often do you eat Korean food?

100 responses

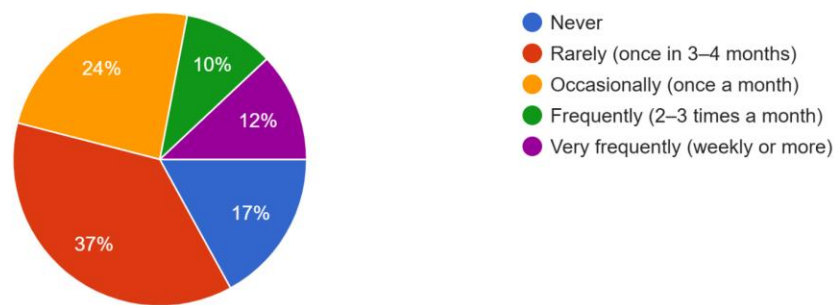


Figure 2.3

The data on consumption frequency indicates that Korean food is a familiar but niche cuisine among the respondents. While a substantial portion (17%) has never consumed it, the majority have. However, regular consumption is limited, with 37% eating it rarely (once every 3–4 months) and 24% consuming it occasionally (once a month). Only a small minority reports frequent (10%) or very frequent (12%) consumption. Most respondents have tried Korean food at least once, though regular consumption is still limited. Exposure is present, but not fully translated into routine eating habits.

How often do you come across Korean food content on Instagram?

100 responses

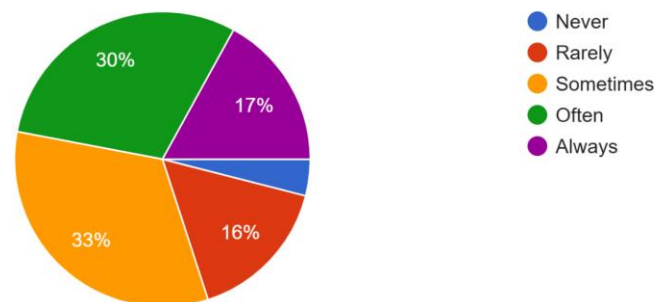


Figure 2.4

The analysis of online exposure to Korean food content indicates the significant role of social media in driving awareness, regardless of whether this exposure leads to frequent consumption. 33% sometimes come across it, 30% often, and 17% always. This indicates that a majority of Gen Z in Mumbai are frequently exposed to Korean food content online. Instagram appears to play a significant role in awareness, even if not all of them end up consuming the food regularly, they are still exposed to such content types.

Instagram has influenced my awareness of Korean food.

100 responses

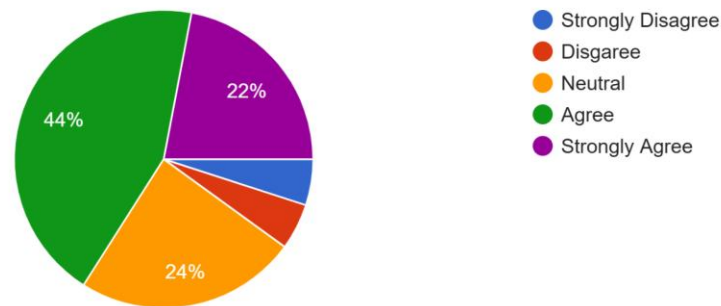


Figure 2.5

A significant portion, that is 66% of respondents, agree that Instagram has played a vital role in driving their awareness of Korean food, indicating that it is a strong platform that perpetuates trends and also an impressionable medium for Gen Z.

I am more likely to try Korean food if recommended by an influencer I follow.

100 responses

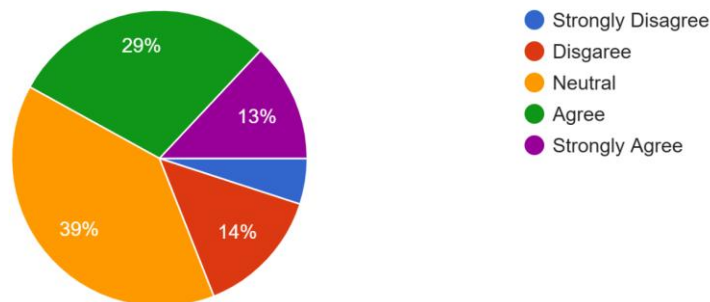


Figure 2.6

Regarding the influence of influencers, a combined 42% of respondents reported being positively influenced (29% agreed and 13% strongly agreed), while 19% were not. A large neutral group of 39% indicates that while influencers are a significant factor, their impact is not universal, and other variables, such as peer recommendations, also play a crucial role in decision-making.

Rank the following in terms of how much they influence you to try Korean food (1 = Most influence, 5 = Least influence):

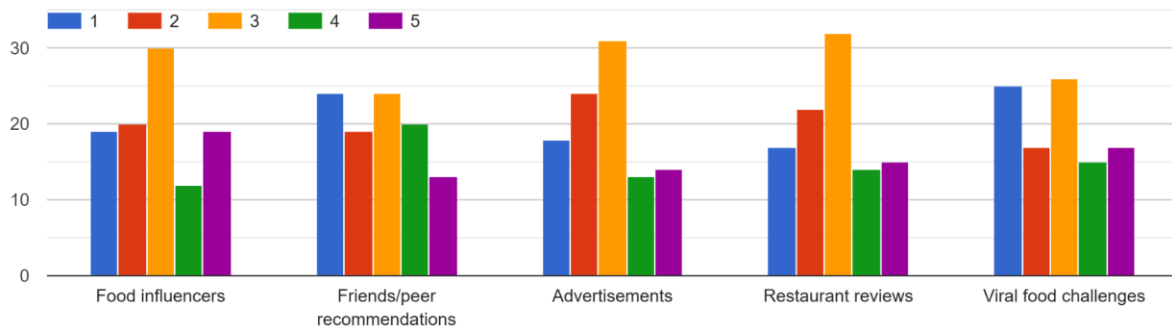


Figure 2.7

The ranking of influential factors reveals that viral food challenges were identified as the most influential element (25% of respondents chose it as Rank 1), closely followed by friends/peer recommendations (24%). This suggests that authentic, peer-driven, and trending content has a greater influence on the initial decision to try Korean food than professionally curated influencer content or traditional advertising.

Have you ever tried Korean food because of an influencer post?  
100 responses

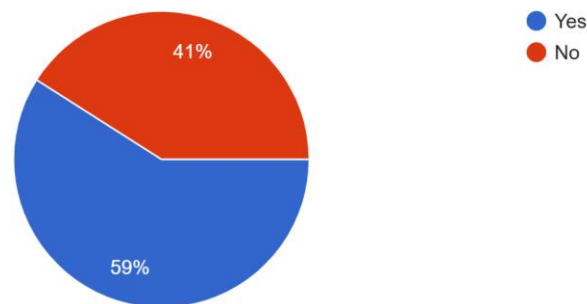


Figure 2.8

The data reveals that over half of the respondents have tried Korean food directly due to influencer marketing. This suggests that social media may play a major role in encouraging first-time trials of Korean food.

Which type of content makes you most curious to try Korean food?

100 responses

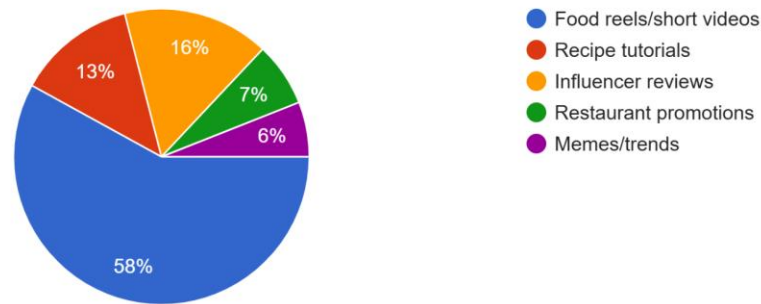


Figure 2.9

Consistent with current digital consumption trends, food reels and short videos were identified as the most effective content format, with 58% of respondents reporting that it made them most curious. This finding underscores the preference of Gen Z for concise, visually dynamic, and easily digestible content.

Viral Korean food trends (e.g., dalgona coffee, ramen challenge and mukbang, etc) encourage me to try them.

100 responses

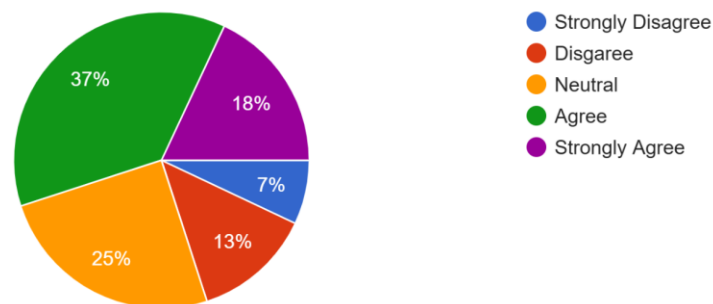


Figure 2.10

A combined 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that viral food trends encourage them to try the food. This indicates the effectiveness of viral challenges and trends in piquing interest and encouraging a hands-on experience with Korean food.

Engaging with Korean food posts (liking, commenting, sharing) increases my interest in trying it.  
100 responses

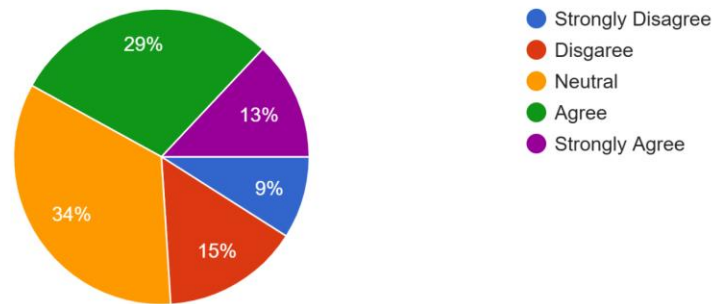


Figure 2.11

While a combined 42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that actively engaging with Korean food content increases their interest, a significant 34% remained neutral. This implies that while a segment of the audience is directly influenced by active engagement, a large portion are passive consumers whose interest is not directly tied to interactive behaviours such as liking, commenting, or sharing.

If you see friends posting about Korean food, how likely are you to try it yourself?  
100 responses

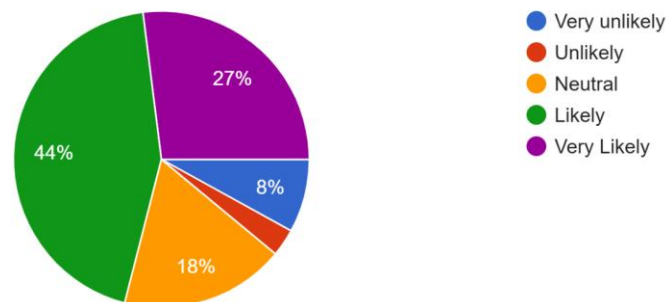


Figure 2.12

A combined 71% of respondents are likely or very likely to try Korean food if they see their friends posting about it. This highlights the power of peer influence on social media, making friends' posts a highly effective driver of curiosity.

How often do you check online reviews before visiting a Korean restaurant?  
100 responses

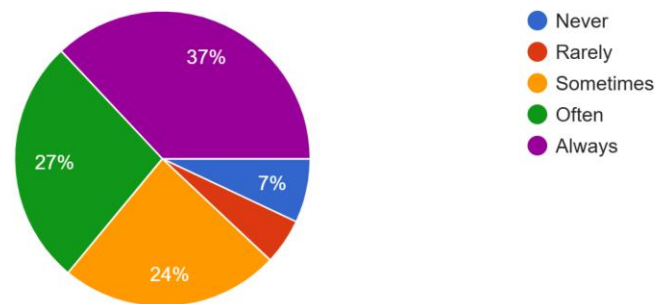


Figure 2.13

A significant majority of respondents, 64%, either often or always check online reviews before visiting a Korean restaurant. This shows that checking online reviews is a standard and habitual part of the decision-making process for Gen Z, making a strong online presence crucial for businesses.

Which factors most influences your choice of a Korean restaurant in Mumbai?  
100 responses

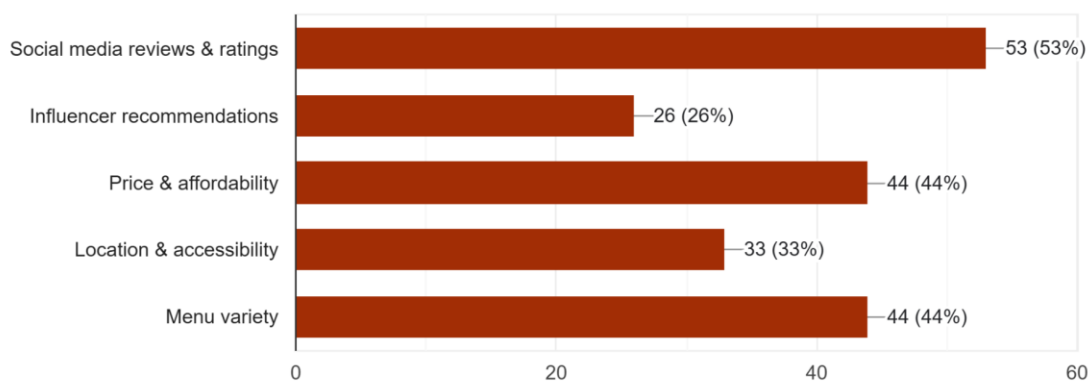
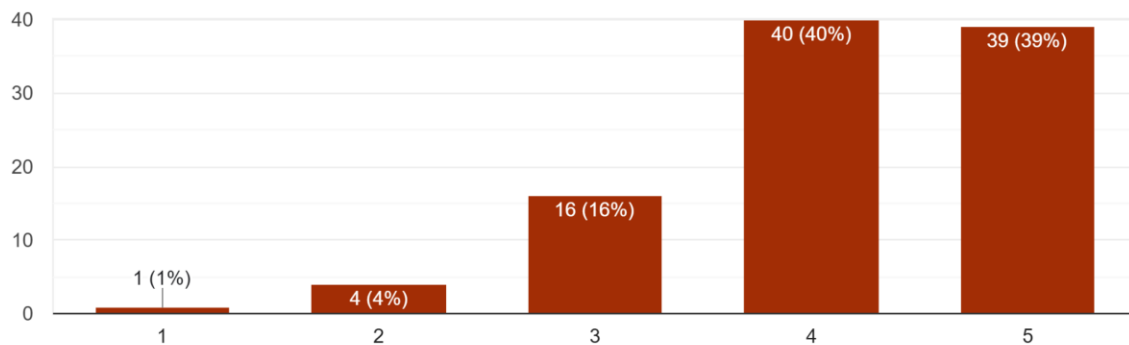


Figure 2.14

Social media reviews and ratings were identified as the most significant factor, with 53% of respondents citing it as their top influence for choosing a Korean restaurant. This indicates that for Gen Z, digital word-of-mouth is more influential than traditional factors like price and menu variety when making a dining decision.

On a scale of 1–5, how strongly do you agree that Instagram has made Korean food more desirable to Gen Z in Mumbai? (1= Not at all, 5= Very strongly)

100 responses



*Figure 2.15*

79% of respondents rated their agreement with Instagram's role in making Korean food desirable as a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5. This data confirms that Gen Z in Mumbai sees Instagram as a major platform that has successfully elevated the desirability and popularity of Korean cuisine.

## 10.2. INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The interviews with café managers highlighted clear patterns regarding the influence of social media on Korean food trends among young consumers in Mumbai. All three cafés agreed that their primary customer base consists of young people, particularly students, K-pop and K-drama fans, and young professionals. Customers often visit not only to try the food itself but also to immerse themselves in the broader Korean cultural experience, suggesting that consumption is as much about cultural identity as it is about taste. This can be understood through Soft Power, where Korean cuisine functions as a cultural extension influencing global consumer behaviour.

The interviews concluded that social media is a key driver of this trend. Managers consistently emphasised the role of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and food vlogs, with content like reels, mukbang videos, and influencer content encouraging curiosity and trial. The influence of online content on customer visits appeared to be significant, with one café estimating that 40–50% of their younger customers were influenced by social media, another reporting 20–30%, and a third suggesting that nearly all their customers came in after exposure to online trends. While two cafés noted that demand for Korean food has grown substantially, one observed that the initial craze had started to decline, with only certain popular dishes, such as ramen and corn dogs, retaining their mass appeal. This indicates that while social media has been a critical driver, its effect may be more concentrated on certain popular items.

A key insight from the interviews was the deep integration of Korean food with broader cultural aspects. Managers shared that customers often referenced K-dramas, K-pop idols, or Korean lifestyle trends when ordering dishes. This reflects a deeper cultural participation where food becomes a medium for expressing a globalised identity. The cafés also expressed differing future outlooks. Two cafés were optimistic and actively preparing for continued growth, while one was concerned and diversifying into other Asian cuisines, highlighting that the trend's sustainability may depend on a café's ability to innovate and maintain a dynamic online presence.

### 10.3. INSTAGRAM CONTENT ANALYSIS

The dataset of 170 Instagram posts/reels from seven cafés (Aegyo, Heng Bok, Sun and Moon, Mirai, Eat Good Seoul, Arirang, The Bunsik) highlights clear trends in how Korean food is marketed on social media to attract Gen Z consumers.

#### **Post Type and Engagement:**

Reels dominated the dataset, accounting for 82% (140/170) of total posts, while static posts made up only 18% (30/170). Reels consistently generated higher engagement, with an average of 12,500 likes per reel compared to 1,800 likes per static post. The highest engagement was observed in Aegyo's reels (e.g., 151,678 likes, 3.9M views) and Eat Good Seoul's viral content (up to 1.1M views). This confirms that short-form video is the preferred medium for influencing Gen Z food trends.

#### **Visual Content:**

- 68% of posts (115/170) featured close-ups of dishes or spreads.
- 21% (36/170) highlighted ambience and décor.
- 11% (19/170) focused on events or experiential content (e.g., BTS-themed nights, karaoke).

This distribution suggests that while food itself is central, ambience and cultural experiences are strategically showcased to boost Instagrammability.

#### **Cultural References:**

Across the dataset, 49% of posts (83/170) included explicit Korean cultural cues such as K-pop, BTS, K-dramas, Hangul, or Korean décor. For example:

- Sun and Moon heavily integrated BTS references, with BTS-themed posts making up 70% of its content.
- Heng Bok incorporated K-pop music or Hangul text in 30% of its posts.
- Eat Good Seoul blended K-drama/K-pop songs in 40% of posts.

This demonstrates that nearly half of Instagram marketing for Korean cafés is built on cultural associations rather than food alone. This also reflects Soft Power, where cultural elements enhance the appeal of associated products.

**Captions and Language:**

- 56% of posts (95/170) used informative captions (menus, promotions, event details).
- 34% (58/170) used trendy/fun language with emojis, Hinglish, or memes.
- 10% (17/170) adopted authentic/traditional tones (heritage, chef origins).

Language was predominantly English (72%), followed by Hinglish (18%), with Korean words included in 10% of captions. This reflects how cafés balance global appeal with local relatability. It also reflects processes of Glocalisation, where global cultural content is adapted to suit local audiences.

**Call-to-Actions (CTAs):**

- 40% (68/170) posts included CTAs like “Visit us” or “DM to book.”
- 32% (55/170) used peer-tagging prompts such as “Tag your friends.”
- 18% (31/170) encouraged sharing/saving.

This shows cafés are deliberately using Instagram-native tactics to convert online engagement into offline visits.

**10.4.ZOMATO REVIEWS ANALYSIS**

The analysis of 50 Zomato reviews provides quantitative support for the research objectives. The reviews show that ambience and "Instagrammability" are critical factors, with 46% of reviews describing the atmosphere as aesthetic or Instagram-worthy. This further suggests the role of social media in shaping the dining experience beyond just the food.

The link between social media and cultural associations is also evident. At two cafés, 33% of reviews referenced Korean cultural products, compared to just 6% at another. This suggests that cafés that integrate cultural branding may benefit more from social media-driven consumer behaviour.

In terms of taste, 76% of reviews rated the food as authentically Korean (Code 1), while 18% described it as lacking authenticity or being overly Indianised (Codes 2–3). This suggests a consumer preference for authenticity but also a notable openness to fusion which can also be linked to Glocalisation, where global cuisines are adapted to local tastes. Finally, while social media drives initial footfall, price remains a constraint for Gen Z consumers, as 10% of reviews specifically highlighted the food as expensive.

**10.5. INTERPRETATION**

The findings from all four research methods collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the research questions and objectives. The survey and interviews confirm that Gen Z in Mumbai is the key consumer demographic and that social media appears to be a key factor influencing their awareness and consumption of Korean food. This suggests that social

media functions not only as a source of information but also as a cultural intermediary that shapes perceptions of desirability, identity, and trend participation among Gen Z. The findings support the proposed hypotheses, as they indicate a strong association between social media exposure, engagement, and the likelihood of trying Korean food. The Instagram content analysis reveals the specific strategies businesses use to leverage this, focusing on short-form video and cultural associations. These patterns can be understood through Soft Power, where the cultural elements enhance the desirability of Korean food among global audiences. It also reflects a broader process of digital cultural exchange, where global cultural elements are circulated, adapted, and integrated into local consumption practices through social media platforms. The Zomato reviews further confirm that ambience, cultural authenticity, and online reviews are critical factors in a consumer's decision-making process. However, as the study is limited to a specific demographic and relies on self-reported data, the findings indicate correlation rather than direct causation.

## 11. LIMITATIONS

1. **Sample Size and Representation:** The survey included 100 respondents, which provides useful insights but may not fully represent the entire Gen Z population in Mumbai. Most respondents were in the 18–20 age bracket, which may limit generalizability to older segments of Gen Z.
2. **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling was used to focus on consumers of Korean food and cafés serving it. While effective for targeting, this approach may introduce bias and exclude other perspectives (e.g., those unfamiliar with Korean cuisine but exposed to related content).
3. **Self-Reported Data:** Survey responses relied on self-reporting, which is subject to recall bias, exaggeration, or social desirability effects. Respondents may have overstated or understated their exposure to social media and its influence.
4. **Geographic Scope:** The study is limited to Mumbai, a metropolitan city with high exposure to global cultural trends. Findings may not apply equally to smaller cities or rural areas where access to Korean food and social media trends is different.
5. **Time-Bound Data:** Social media trends, particularly food trends, are dynamic and rapidly changing. The Instagram posts, Zomato reviews, and survey data reflect a specific time period and may not capture long-term shifts in consumer behaviour.
6. **Secondary Data Constraints:** The content analysis of Instagram posts and Zomato reviews depended on publicly available material. Not all posts or reviews may reflect genuine consumer behaviour, as content can be curated by brands and reviews may sometimes be biased or inauthentic.
7. **Qualitative Depth:** While café manager interviews provided valuable insights, the sample size of three cafés is small and may not capture the diversity of strategies or customer experiences across all Korean food establishments in Mumbai.

## 12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research establishes that social media is not merely a marketing tool but a central platform for cultural diffusion in Mumbai. For Gen Z, Korean food is consumed as part of a broader, globally influenced identity, and their food choices are closely influenced by their online engagement.

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