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# How “K-Style” has influenced the younger generation through local Vietnamese influencers

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## Abstract

This study delves into the dissemination of K-Style in Vietnam, highlighting the multifaceted role of influencers in co-creating Korean culture through vivid videos that embrace and customize K-Style. Our study reveals the interconnectedness of K-Style practice elements (grooming material, styling competence, imagery meaning) and practice systems. We contribute to the understanding of ‘style’ as a concept connected to ethnic contexts and processes. By aligning practice elements, ‘non-carriers’ contribute to constructing the image of ‘Korean style’. Overseas social influencers hold more significant sway over local consumers, adapting to their sociocultural and ethnic characteristics. This study unveils the process through which everyday life accumulates through practice and eventually forms into culture by analyzing the discourse of influencers naturally present in daily life. Our research offers several significant contributions: (1) A topological approach to the hybridization of the K-Style was employed by analyzing real-time cultural transformation captured in videos. (2) Additionally, the process of cultural diffusion by Vietnamese influencers for Korean culture was identified, thus laying the groundwork for future research on consumption culture migration and evolution.

**Keywords:** Networked cultural diffusion, Acculturation, Practice theory, Korean wave (Hallyu), Social media influencer, The Vietnamese market

## Introduction

The burgeoning global captivation with Korean television programs and idols has significantly contributed to the heightened interest in K-Beauty and K-Fashion industries (Jang et al., 2021). This phenomenon, known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu, epitomizes the recent acculturation propelled by interactive social media (Cleveland, 2018). Consumers across the globe actively engage with Korean culture by disseminating memes on social network platforms (Xu et al., 2016) and adapting these cultural elements to their contexts (Shifman, 2012), transcending mere consumption for momentary entertainment.

In Vietnam, Korean culture has attained substantial popularity (Jang et al., 2021). Korean cosmetics, constituting 30% (USD 193.4 million) of Vietnam’s total cosmetic imports, possess the largest market share (Korea International Trade Association,

2020). The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Korea and Vietnam bestows Korean cosmetic products with a competitive edge over French and American counterparts owing to lower prices. Moreover, these products cater to the predilections of younger generations, particularly Gen Z, who seek affordable and distinctive items (Korea Creative Content Agency [KOCCA], 2020). The expansion of the Hallyu phenomenon in Vietnam is anticipated to accelerate following the reduction of Korea-Vietnam FTA tariffs for cosmetics from 20 to 5–6% in 2021. According to the “2021 Global Hallyu Trends,” Vietnam plays a pivotal role in the overseas consumption of Korean beauty and fashion products (KOFICE, 2021), with 40% of Vietnamese individuals utilizing Korean beauty items—the highest proportion among 18 countries.

Hitherto, Hallyu research has predominantly centered on Korean celebrities, rather than the actual local consumer market (Ham & Lee, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Nevertheless, comprehending end-user marketing and local cultural adaptation is vital for assessing global allure and cultural shifts (Chen et al., 2013). Recent trends among Vietnamese consumers exhibit facets unaddressed in prior Hallyu studies (Jang et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2020). These consumers generate novel content by reinterpreting Korean culture and adapting it to their local context (Kotra, 2020; Kang et al., 2020). Furthermore, Vietnamese Millennials and Gen Z (the MZ generation) acquire information about Korean culture through social network platforms (Q&ME, 2020). Given the nature of beauty and fashion categories, YouTube has emerged as a primary online information-sharing platform (Acikgoz & Burnaz, 2021; Gwak & Kim, 2021; Kotra, 2022; Lee & Lee, 84). Influential YouTube personalities with extensive followings serve as cultural conduits (Choi & Lee, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2020). Young Vietnamese consumers, who are generally open-minded, actively explore external cultures via interactive social network platforms (Tran & Nguyen, 2020). Despite the significant role of YouTube in K-Style communication among young consumers, limited research has examined influencer content within the context of cultural diffusion. Consequently, this study aims to augment our understanding of Vietnamese influencers’ content as intermediaries in web-based cultural distribution.

By delving into the acculturation of Hallyu through the lens of local influencers, this study addresses voids present in extant research. Specifically, we conducted process theorization approach for analysis of Vietnamese influencers’ content scripts to scrutinize the cultural diffusion and amalgamation of K-Style. This research endeavors to bolster our understanding and predictability of Hallyu-affiliated industries while providing an initial exploration of social media influencers’ (SMIs) influence on domestic consumers’ perceptions of foreign cultures.

This investigation is steered by the primary research question: How do Vietnamese YouTubers disseminate K-Style to local consumers? To address this query, we draw upon a practice theoretic framework that accentuates cross-cultural contexts (Akaka et al., 2022; Scholz, 2021; Shove et al., 2012). In lieu of concentrating on Korean brands or products, our focus lies on the manner in which overseas consumers partake in K-Style. Consequently, this study examines how the practice elements of the Korean lifestyle (meaning, aesthetic material, and styling competence) traverse through non-face-to-face channels.

## Literature Review

### Networked cultural diffusion

Cultural diffusion encompasses the spread of cultural norms, values, behaviors, and technologies between societies, countries, or ethnic groups (Kinnunen, 1996; Rudmin, 2010) through interconnected social systems (Rogers, 2010). At the societal level, cultural diffusion involves adopting and adapting to a different culture (Lewitt, 1998), signifying that elements of another culture become integral parts of the self (Rudmin, 2010). Since Alfred Kroeber (1940) first developed the cultural diffusion theory, research has been conducted in various fields such as anthropology, geography, and philosophy (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005; Kroeber, 1940; Pemberton, 1936; Robinson, 1999).

Previously, cultural blending occurred through a relatively linear process, where two cultures mixed and transformed (Tomasello, 1999). However, accelerated by ICT, networked globalization has significantly altered the social system, with social media platforms now playing a more prominent role than centralized institutions like governments and firms (Xu et al., 2015). In this boundless social system, cultural diffusion occurs rapidly and unpredictably (Ryoo, 2009). Remote connections to other cultures can facilitate acculturation through digital networks, which refers to “networked cultural diffusion” (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016; Kizgin et al., 2019). Social media content is considered viral when it reproduces exponentially, similar to an epidemic (Shifman, 2012). Moreover, digital cultural blends in social media involve short-term inter-individual collaborations that continually reinvent, multiply, and reproduce unintentionally (Zambrano et al., 2019).

Nonlinear cultural diffusion studies based on network analysis have been conducted in various fields (Derex et al., 2013; Kaufman & Patterson, 2005; Polese, 2009; Whiten et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016; Zappettini et al., 2014). Zappettini et al. (2014) verified that the range of identities for community and belonging we perceive has changed since the era of supranational networks. Polese (2009) proposed a new value creation model for networked culture and Whiten et al. (2016) reviewed cultural diffusion research in humans and animals in the context of culture, complexity, tools, language, and learning methods. Derex et al., (2013) confirmed through a computer fishing game that the larger the group size, the more likely it is to maintain cultural complexity. They explained that this result appears because the continuous collision of cultures maintains diversity in the evolutionary dimension of society. Kaufman and Patterson (2005) emphasized the role of intermediary agents in the process of cultural shift in their study on the factors that contributed to the successful global spread of the British sport cricket. Studies on the diffusion of culture through social networks have been very rare. Several studies on the diffusion of the Korean Wave have been conducted, for example, Xu et al., (2016) examined the characteristics of this consumer-based culture diffusion through networks through the diffusion analysis of collective behaviors that follow similar videos as if challenging.

Studies through social networks have been mainly conducted in areas other than cultural contexts. For instance, fields of communication (Baumgartner et al., 2021), sociology (Almaatouq et al., 2020; Chimento et al., 2022), and public administration (Zheng & Zheng, 2014), numerous studies have revealed the powerful influence of social networks on information proliferation (Cantor et al., 2021; Karsai et al., 2016), social learning (Chimento et al., 2022; Hasenjager et al., 2021), trust (Truong et al., 2018, 2019),

positive emotional effects, and even subjective norms (Truong et al., 132, 133), shaping people's values, ideologies, and collective behaviors (Rodriguez, 2013). Both corporations and governments (Mergel, 2013) actively utilize this influence. However, the central power of social networks resides with influencers resembling "friends" (Kwak & Yoh, 2021).

Despite the importance of understanding the role of influencers in the spread of culture through social networks, there is a notable lack of research employing discourse analysis to investigate this phenomenon. Analyzing the discourse of influencers, who play a crucial role in shaping cultural diffusion, is essential to gain a deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying this process. However, existing literature in this area remains sparse, highlighting the need for further exploration and investigation to fill this knowledge gap.

### **What is K-Style?**

K-Style, a term derived from Korean content like K-Drama, encompasses fashion, beauty products, brands, styling, and images, as well as Korean lifestyle and cultural representation (Hurt, 2022; Park et al., 2021). It has gained recognition internationally due to the Korean Wave and is typically divided into K-Beauty and K-Fashion (i.e., Hurt, 2022). Enthusiasm for the makeup and fashion of Korean celebrities in Korean movies and dramas has contributed to the spread of K-Style (Hurt, 2022; Park et al., 2021; Yu, 2016). Furthermore, contemporary K-fashion is a clothing style that reflects the latest market trends and lifestyle and has inspired fashion brands worldwide through its street style (An et al., 2023).

The term 'style' suggests a recurring daily practice that permeates life (Schatzki, 1996), whereas 'stylish' implies being fashionable and sophisticated, particularly in fashion (Micheal, 2004). Practice theory (Bourdieu, 1997) offers a framework for understanding both the process and the outcome of K-Style. This theory highlights how individuals' daily activities create and reproduce social structures (Giddens, 1984; Thomas & Epp, 2019, p565). Practices, as everyday actions, occur within societies and contribute to the formation of social structures. For these practices to be psychologically distinguishable and reproducible, they must be based on collective outcomes (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Schatzki, 2019, p. 29).

As societies evolve, practices undergo continuous changes, adapting to the environment and members' interactions (Cantor et al., 2021). During this process, individuals acquire and transmit knowledge and logic regarding specific actions in particular situations (i.e., codification) or reinterpret actions and knowledge with new meanings suitable for novel environments (i.e., transposition) (Shove et al., 2012).

Consumer-oriented practice literature incorporates various materials (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). However, given that K-Style's influence is not merely an external result but also includes cultural characteristics stemming from narrative content, it is essential to consider the meaning of this lifestyle. *Habitus*, a core concept in practice theory, refers to the "structuring structure that organizes practices and the perception of practices," encompassing deeply internalized life patterns (Bourdieu & P., 1984: 170). Additionally, language and discourse play a crucial role in establishing identity and social membership (Lee & Lee, 2019; van Dijk, 1997). Therefore, examining

local consumers' lifestyles and K-Style's spread as their habits and practices through the analysis of daily conversations and discussions is highly significant.

### **Streaming K-Style consumption**

Why do young overseas consumers appreciate K-Style? It is essential to review the literature that has analyzed the factors and reasons behind the enthusiasm for Hallyu, or K-Style. Lee (2003) studied the communication effect of Hallyu and analyzed how Chinese consumption of Korean culture impacts their perception and attitude toward Korea. This study emphasized the importance of researching the effect of remote exposure to culture, arguing that repeated exposure to media related to Korean style or K-Style provides overseas consumers with a vicarious experience of Korea through the reality depicted in the media (Lee, 2003).

The reasons for the popularity of the Korean Wave are debatable, but social media has facilitated its rapid global growth. As noted by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE, 2020), social network services (SNSs) are the leading contact medium for Korean cultural content in Vietnam, and Vietnamese consumers share information on new trends and products of Korean fashion and beauty via various social media platforms (Jang et al., 2021).

Truong, (2018) highlights the role of social media, where positive product reviews contribute to trust in products and influence purchasing decisions for Korean Wave products via subjective norms. Additionally, the author asserts that social media's growing power and authority among young Vietnamese consumers can be attributed to its ability to affect social behavior by exerting perceived social pressure, thereby accounting for some of the variances in moral, legal, and social norms (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) and surpassing information provided by companies or organizations.

Truong, (2019) also emphasizes the significance of social media for Vietnamese consumers. In line with Truong (2018)'s findings, social media was found to positively affect social norms and trust in this study. Additionally, it positively influenced perceptions of product quality and utility. In this research, the country-of-origin effect had a positive impact on quality perception and product purchasing intent through product involvement (Truong, 2019).

Furthermore, Vietnamese Gen Z's purchase intentions for Korean products are impacted by the norms and trust formed in social networks (Truong, 2018, 2019). Overseas consumers have limited ability to purchase and test a product directly; therefore, they test it through a vicarious experience provided by SMIs before consumption. Consequently, they develop perceptions and attitudes toward a product before using it (Lee & Lee, 2022; Smith, 2006).

Video-oriented SNSs accentuate the visual characteristics of fashion and beauty products (Choi, 2017; Kim, 2022; Wang & Lee, 2021). In this context, YouTube (Khan, 2017) plays an active role in sharing beauty and fashion information by emphasizing product attributes in Vietnam (Kotra, 2021). Vietnam's MZ Generation most frequently uses YouTube to obtain beauty information (Decision Lab, 2020) and watch Korean cultural content (KOFICE, 2020). Vietnam's MZ generation tends to make purchase decisions by referencing information from influencers, such as YouTubers (Q&ME, 2020). Moreover, YouTube allows individuals to create and share videos easily, encouraging them to

creatively reproduce foreign cultures and participate in cultural adaptation, rather than merely consuming content as in traditional media (Shifman, 2012).

Only a few studies have analyzed the proliferation of K-Style through social media in Vietnam (Kang et al., 2020; Kim & Park, 2020; Lee et al., 2020). For example, Kang et al. (2020) used focus group interviews to demonstrate that Vietnamese international students in Korea have internalized beauty ideals through Korean cultural content. Additionally, the image of K-Beauty for the Vietnamese is a natural beauty with white and smooth skin (Yu, 2016), as seen in cosmetic advertisements with K-wave celebrities (Lee et al., 2015).

### **Vietnamese consumer**

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the features of K-Content in Vietnam, it is essential to consider the cultural inclinations and preferences of Vietnamese consumers. Historically, Vietnam, like Korea and other East Asian countries, has been known as a society with a high collectivist tendency (Choi et al., 2022; Hofstede Insights, 2020). However, the country's economic transformation, commonly known as Doi Moi, has significantly shaped consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. This transformation has led to an increased sense of individuality among Vietnamese consumers, which has been observed by Mai (2019). This heightened sense of individuality is reflected in the way that Vietnamese consumers interact with different forms of media and entertainment, including K-Culture.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that a considerable portion of Vietnamese consumers consists of the younger generation. This demographic is proficient in embracing new cultural nuances, as Nguyen (2001) highlighted. Compared to their counterparts in countries like China, they display greater technological confidence (Khan et al., 2019), positively impacting their openness to foreign cultures. This generation has been instrumental in the swift and enthusiastic reception of Korean content and traditions in Vietnam.

Additionally, Vietnam's historical and cultural backdrop has been rooted in thriftiness and a strong community focus (Mai, 2019). Korean culture also shares these values, making it resonate well with Vietnamese consumers. As a result, Vietnamese consumers have been receptive to Korean content and traditions.

However, Truong (2018) argues that consumer ethnocentrism can negatively impact the trust in Korean products among young Vietnamese consumers, ultimately affecting their appeal. According to a study by Vuong and Khanh Giao (2020) on Vietnamese consumers, consumers evaluated that the higher they perceive a brand to be global, the higher the brand's quality and social responsibility, leading to an increased purchase intention. However, if consumer ethnocentrism is high, this effect is weakened.

## **Methods**

### **Selecting representative Vietnamese YouTubers**

We used targeted sampling strategies to obtain snapshots of the characteristics of videos that met specific criteria, indicating that the power of influence and field of content is indisputable. Famous Vietnamese beauty and fashion YouTubers and their popular content were selected as research samples. Initially, we extracted all beauty/fashion YouTubers from Noxinfluencer.com, which provides analyses and information on worldwide



influencers. First, we browsed a list of the Top 250 YouTubers (in order of subscribers) in Vietnam in the “know-how/style” category, which includes beauty and fashion. We selected YouTubers who (1) have more than 100,000 subscribers, which YouTube uses to acknowledge influence; (2) upload videos constantly; (3) have more than 70% beauty or fashion content in their top ten viewed videos; and (4) operate the channel for personal use only. We also added one more mega channel, “Changmakeup,” targeting Vietnamese consumers; it belongs to a Vietnamese influencer, but the “country” on the website is set to “the United States” for global marketing. Subsequently, a total of 29 influencers and their top ten videos (290 videos in total) were selected (see Table 1), and we received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the research.

**Table 1** List of popular Vietnamese Youtubers analyzed (Filtered by: April 2022)

No	Channel	URL
1	Changmakeup	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/TrangTracy">https://www.youtube.com/user/TrangTracy</a>
2	Trinh Pham	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/trinhtrontrinh">https://www.youtube.com/user/trinhtrontrinh</a>
3	Hương Witch	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKIZSYrRvVqewNWrfamig">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKIZSYrRvVqewNWrfamig</a>
4	Sí Thanh Official	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfEQ5MbmtVOFFonsGnYm8KQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfEQ5MbmtVOFFonsGnYm8KQ</a>
5	Góc Cửa Rủ	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/c/g%C3%B3cC%C3%B3cc%E1%BB%A7aR%C6%B0/featured">https://www.youtube.com/c/g%C3%B3cC%C3%B3cc%E1%BB%A7aR%C6%B0/featured</a>
6	Quach Anh Makeup Artist	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHQO9xPSROEHYHUK_T82l6w">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHQO9xPSROEHYHUK_T82l6w</a>
7	Nguyen NEWIN	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy8JA6KapiwayGfe58wWAg/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy8JA6KapiwayGfe58wWAg/videos</a>
8	Phuong Ha	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdFi5vDpKZ8VuArXi2sgl0A?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdFi5vDpKZ8VuArXi2sgl0A?sub_confirmation=1</a>
9	Quynh Anh Shyn	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/quynhanhh212">https://www.youtube.com/user/quynhanhh212</a>
10	An Phương	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS1_ujD4DegoDNI4XC-AbIQ?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS1_ujD4DegoDNI4XC-AbIQ?sub_confirmation=1</a>
11	CON THỎ	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfnwPEf10QmrwDPPMSizEA?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfnwPEf10QmrwDPPMSizEA?sub_confirmation=1</a>
12	Chloe Nguyen	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxoErupGtPCyb-45WR_-MFA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxoErupGtPCyb-45WR_-MFA</a>
13	Làm Đẹp Mỗi Ngày	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCApqDem_E7heljFKPaWcmkw/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCApqDem_E7heljFKPaWcmkw/videos</a>
14	Mai Van Trang	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXKXjEkoK1RBtyd2uK71T8Q?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXKXjEkoK1RBtyd2uK71T8Q?sub_confirmation=1</a>
15	Tiny Loly	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC005ldXFTn5f_8smRGpIikQ?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC005ldXFTn5f_8smRGpIikQ?sub_confirmation=1</a>
16	Q U I N	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeum3sDKFPIUUmgrhZMWVrw?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeum3sDKFPIUUmgrhZMWVrw?sub_confirmation=1</a>
17	Hùng Việt Makeup	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpWXzgHGDdWs9acxmDJIBUQ?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpWXzgHGDdWs9acxmDJIBUQ?sub_confirmation=1</a>
18	LA's Little Castle	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/c/LAsLittleCastlelife/featured">https://www.youtube.com/c/LAsLittleCastlelife/featured</a>
19	Cô Em Trendy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/c/C%C3%B4EmTrendy/videos">https://www.youtube.com/c/C%C3%B4EmTrendy/videos</a>
20	Ling Makeup	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUX0-mnOMMy5GjP9eOwSjxw">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUX0-mnOMMy5GjP9eOwSjxw</a>
21	Hồng Beauty	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSluGHtqOc6APJrlbNSh2-Q?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSluGHtqOc6APJrlbNSh2-Q?sub_confirmation=1</a>
22	Chanchan Eyemakeup	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiadxFbVa_yLS5v-H-EBP1Q?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiadxFbVa_yLS5v-H-EBP1Q?sub_confirmation=1</a>
23	CHLOE DO	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP_PWfbd9INW_eUbi0owZNg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP_PWfbd9INW_eUbi0owZNg</a>
24	Kiều Chinh	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPZIVcCuUnkdshFfG45DDQ/videos">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPZIVcCuUnkdshFfG45DDQ/videos</a>
25	Beauty in Your Way	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7mNFUfi0IAydb5gAmv7JQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7mNFUfi0IAydb5gAmv7JQ</a>
26	Linh Trưởng	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/TheMakeAHolics">https://www.youtube.com/user/TheMakeAHolics</a>
27	Phương Ly	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/PrettyMuchChannel">https://www.youtube.com/user/PrettyMuchChannel</a>
28	Trinh Meow	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3Zo5jYge_dZY2p7-vPCEuw?sub_confirmation=1">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3Zo5jYge_dZY2p7-vPCEuw?sub_confirmation=1</a>
29	The Cloud VLOG	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDskjiDyieiYeeTTUJGwvQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDskjiDyieiYeeTTUJGwvQ</a>

### Research procedure

Our study aimed to understand how K-Style is disseminated, so we focused on Korea-related video content among a total of 290 videos (29 influencers \* 10 videos). The criteria for determining whether a video was Korea-related were based on two factors: (1) the influencer's mention of Korea or anything associated with Korea in the video (Y/N), and (2) the influencer's use of Korean products in the video (Y/N). Even a brief reference to Korea (e.g., "This product is from Korea"), or mere exposure of Korean brand products can impact Vietnamese consumers' perceptions of Korea through imagery (Janiszewski, 1993). Videos meeting at least one of these criteria were included in our analysis.

We employed the following procedure to compile a list of videos satisfying these criteria. First, two bilingual researchers (fluent in both Vietnamese and English) reviewed all 290 videos. They coded each video based on the aforementioned criteria. Second, 20% of the videos were randomly sampled and cross-checked, yielding a coding confidence of 85%. Consequently, 150 out of the 290 videos met at least one criterion. Upon a second review (as of April 2023), one video had been made private; thus, our final sample consisted of 149 videos ( $n = 149$ , 51.4%; Table 2 and Additional file [1]: Appendix A).

Two Vietnamese researchers converted the narratives of the 149 YouTube influencers into scripts, closely monitoring each video. These scripts were then translated into English using AI translation programs, Google Translate and Naver Papago. After randomizing and cross-checking 15% of the text from both translations, we achieved a confidence score of 87.9%. Two bilingual researchers conducted additional reviews by re-examining the Vietnamese and English transcripts and the original video sources.

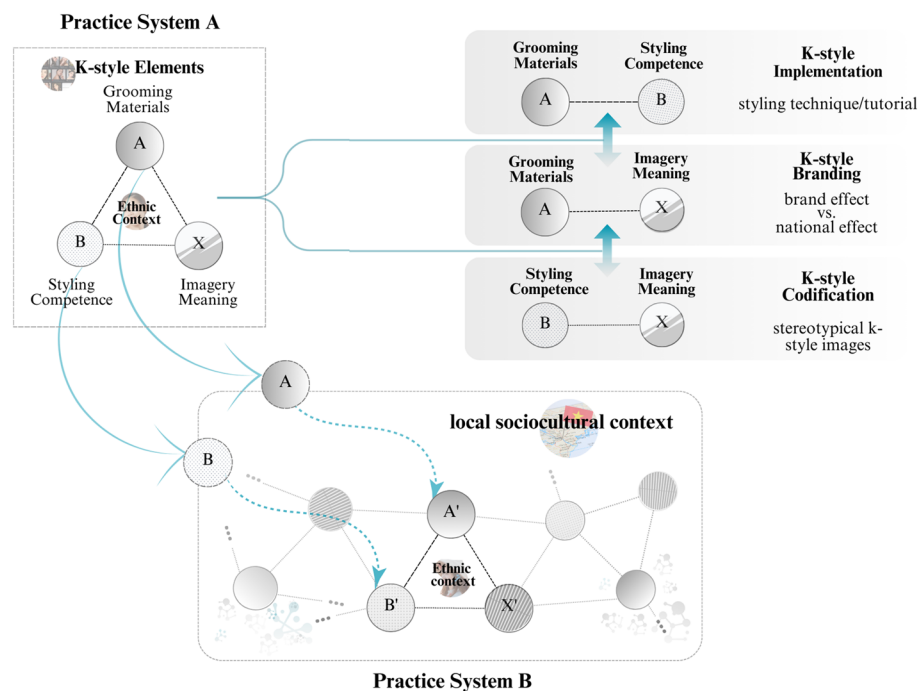
To identify how YouTube influencers spread K-Style and its related themes, we repeatedly viewed the videos until we were familiar with the content. We initially extracted seven elements for the theorization approach and one to eight sub-topics. Subsequently, we refined our analysis, identifying three main elements, three links, and two context elements, and reorganizing the sub-elements into two or three categories based on their content. To effectively illustrate the process through which influencers disseminated K-Style, we employed a topological approach to visualize our findings as guided by the process theorization approach (Giesler & Thompson, 2016) (Fig. 1).

**Table 2** Average views of Korean-related videos

Year	Korean-related mention		Use of Korean products	
	Views(AVG)	Top-viewed videos average ratio (%) <sup>a</sup>	Views(AVG)	Top-viewed videos average ratio (%)
2014	1,239,964	79	1,587,622	101
2015	1,239,949	82	1,573,465	104
2016	1,356,132	107	1,131,573	89
2017	1,190,042	74	1,691,654	105
2018	1,531,438	93	1,345,109	122
2019	1,961,678	138	1,769,113	125
2020	499,179	89	393,226	70
Total (Mean)	1,505,813	104	1473186	102

<sup>a</sup> This figure refers to the ratio of the average views of Korean-related videos to the average views of all top-viewed videos analyzed





**Fig. 1** Process of K-style diffusion

## Results and Discussion

To investigate the manner in which Vietnamese influencers promote K-Style, a topological approach is employed to identify the transformation and reorganization of K-Style element structures within a cross-cultural setting (Akaka et al., 2022; Collier, 2009).

In addressing the main research question (How do Vietnamese YouTubers disseminate K-Style to local consumers?) in the study's results section is answered by analyzing the discourse in Vietnamese YouTubers' videos. A thorough examination of this discourse reveals that the K-Style practices they aim to convey to local consumers can be categorized into three elements:

(1) Grooming materials or resources, which include products used as tools or brands (Akaka et al., 2022; Scholz, 2021), and in this study, it means all the capital that consumers/influencers can apply (or have potential) to care for themselves or in their daily life; (2) Styling competence, which refers to proficiency, techniques in makeup diffusion studies on social media (Scholz, 2021), and here, 'styling' is not only for hair but also for all other 'beautifying' behaviors or techniques, including management, and styling competence refers to all such capacity; (3) Imagery meaning, which signifies vivid configurative ideas, images, or the legitimacy of practices (Glaveanu et al., 2020; Shove et al., 2012, p. 14) or the cultural context-specific significance of each course, and in this study, pertains to the Korean representative images, ideas, or relationship with other K-Content.

### K-Style elements processual linkages

Prior research on practice elements has indicated that each element can function independently and can be transmitted and diffused across generations and cultures (Hui,

Schatzki, & Shove, 2016; Shove et al., 2012, p. 39). However, the present study observed that K-Style elements, as portrayed by influencers, were typically delivered in combinations of two or more elements rather than as purely independent components. This finding suggests that a unique dynamic arises based on the balance and interplay of factors created by influencers (Akaka et al., 2022). The results differed from those of Shove et al., (2012) and Akaka et al., (2022), as imagery meaning did not consistently serve as a bridging element between other two. Instead, the combination of other elements, such as grooming materials and styling competence, could facilitate the dissemination of technique or enhance quality of life due to the functionality associated with Korean products.

***K-Style implementation: alignment between practice elements of 'grooming material' and 'styling competence'***

The influencers shared their daily lives through videos on dressing or putting on makeup and shared know-how, management methods, and 'life hack' makeup techniques (i.e. styling competence). In the process, they used Korean products or mentioned Korean celebrities. By connecting the two elements, it is redefined in the new environment of K-Style. Additionally, some of them expose product information and URL paths that their followers could purchase on video subtitles.

*Everyone when applying (THE SEAM) concealer, remember to brush around a bit to melt the border. I will use a little bit for the upper eyelid area because the eye area is always darker than the surrounding skin; I will use a little to raise the eye skin tone A little. Then I won't use eye color, so I don't need to use a lot of concealer on my upper eyelid I just use a little to even out the color. (YouTuber 99)*

*Today I will send you a makeup tutorial clip Every day is naturally beautiful, but it's not like Song Hye-kyo. This type of makeup is done very quickly and simply. No high technical requirements, you can easily follow. And suitable for makeup every day, going to school, going to work, dating in the morning, fresh and youthful. Now let's start, I will use a sponge to curl my hair. Up is an extremely useful method to create a natural curly hairstyle. No need to use heat, you can have a little Styling gel before curling to keep the hair in place longer..(YouTuber148)*

***K-Style branding: alignment between elements of 'grooming material' and 'imagery meaning'***

Vietnamese influencers have been found to assess Korean products using two primary criteria: the reputation of the brand or product, and the overarching national image associated with Korea in instances where the brand is unfamiliar. As grooming material acquire new imagery meanings within novel contexts, alterations in the practices and preferences of the target group may emerge, contingent upon the level of brand recognition in the local market (e.g., the interplay between Brand Effect and Country Effect). For brands that have already garnered popularity among Vietnamese consumers, influencers tend to evaluate them based on their pre-existing perceptions of the brand, often without reference to the country of origin. Conversely, for newly introduced or lesser-known

brands, influencers tend to rely on generalized stereotypes associated with Korea as a proxy for evaluation.

i. Well-known Korean brand in Vietnam

*The new TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL click concealer is amazing. There is always a tip to cover the dark circles first, dab the cream on the acne spots, and then use a brush to brush them carefully. (YouTuber 110)*

*Use MISSHA's brown-toned cheek cream to blend on your nose and cheekbones. Use a brush to spread evenly. Also, for the product of MISSHA's cheek cream, I use a light pink tone to lightly spread it on pink cheeks. (YouTuber 14)*

ii. Not well-known Korean brand in Vietnam

*There are also two suggestions for everyone. First, it's CELL FUSION C of Korea, I have reviewed it in detail for everyone in the video on how to choose sunscreen for each skin type. (YouTuber 34)*

*Here is a brand, which is called the company ROMAND, this company is a Korean company, which she was given as a gift when she came to Korea; this lipstick is very nice to use. (YouTuber 56)*

*I noticed it recently; it's this mask, this is a mask from MEDIHEAL, then I must have found this very popular, so I bought a box like this when traveling to Korea. (YouTuber 48)*

***K-Style codification: alignment between practice elements of 'styling competence' and 'imagery meaning'***

In general, the recognition of a fashion product or style worn by others in everyday life begins with its application by the individual. That is to say, initially, the external imagery of the applied styling is created rather than focusing on the 'product' itself. K-Style codification can be defined as styling, behavior patterns, or techniques that possess a Korean essence, even in the absence of tangible materials. Since brand images are characterized by customers' associations and beliefs about a brand (Anselmsson et al., 2014), this concept can be extended to include the brand, country, or the nation's culture (Vahie & Paswan, 2006). Renowned Vietnamese YouTubers primarily shaped a national image of Korea through past experiences across various channels. This was achieved by aligning styling competence with imagery meaning related to the national image. The K-Style forms they associate with include *Effortless naturalness*, *Lightness for daily wear*, and *Visual moderateness*.

i. Effortless naturalness

*Now, I am going to use Tree Company CC cream... it serves to balance skin pigmentation. It works for all skin tones. The cream is quite smooth and silky and has a highlighter that makes your face bright and looks natural, like a Korean girl. (YouTuber 54)*

ii. Lightness for daily

*When I go to school or work every day, I think it is better to wear Korean-style makeup, which is light. (YouTuber 84)*

*This eyeshadow palette is so pretty. The matte colors are light and easy to blend, suitable for those who like Korean-style dewy makeup. (YouTuber 33)*

iii. Visual moderateness

*For Korean makeup, I will draw lightly horizontally, neither too sharp nor too thick. (YouTuber 96)*

K-Style was compared with other countries, and its characteristics were emphasized. Vietnamese influencers compare Korean culture with other cultures in the process of appreciating Korean products and culture. They consider Korean makeup styles as representatives of Asian makeup, contrasting Western makeup styles. For example, Vietnamese YouTubers share their perceptions of the characteristics of Korean products in contrast to Western products, commenting on the rare and frequent usage of nude tones in Korean and Western beauty products, respectively. Moreover, they believe that Western makeup and Thai makeup are similar—sharp and attractive—and that Korean makeup is primarily bright and cute.

*Speaking of Asian makeup, Korean makeup is okay, so I will do Korean makeup in this video; I will use the cushion. About this cushion, it's a bit white for me, so I will use it all the way down to my neck... (YouTuber 96)*

*This is an orange-brown color, really very rare in Korean lipstick palettes that look very western and very attractive.....This lipstick color is perfect for those of you who like western and Thai makeup with accentuated eyes and lips...there are a variety of nude tones that are closer to western colors that break the prejudices of Korean makeup. (YouTuber 118)*

### **Interactive K-Style adaptation**

These elements have also been transformed and gradually adapted through the process of reconnecting with elements of other practices within the context of the new culture, Vietnam's local social system and context. While evaluating or forming attitudes toward Korean products, Vietnamese YouTubers assess these products based on their suitability to their ethnic (i.e., skin color tone), cultural (i.e., lifestyle, characteristics), and geographic (i.e., climate) contexts.

#### ***Interactive adaptation in local sociocultural context***

i. Cultural context

*YouTubers considered fitness, noting that the context of using Korean products may not match Vietnamese people's general lifestyle or characteristics. Korean curly hairstyles may not be suitable for consumers who commute with motorbikes, Vietnam's*

*primary means of transportation. In addition, influencers mentioned concern about the creative use of Korean products being restricted due to Vietnamese consumers' immovable makeup rituals:*

*Today, I will show you a loose Korean hairstyle. A certain length from here to here; If it's too long, you can't. It can be challenging for motorcyclists. (YouTuber 52)*

*I think we show our passion and understanding on our own faces. In the world, there are many ways in which we express our creativity in makeup. But as I was in Vietnam, I encountered many limitations. That is, many Vietnamese friends just like to wear simple and normal makeup. (YouTuber 52)*

## ii. Geographic context

While accepting Korean products or styles, influencers analyzed the usage suitability by considering various factors, including geographical characteristics, mainly the climatic factor. In general, the K-Style was not accepted as it was due to the higher temperature and humid climate of Vietnam:

*As PONY is in Korea and the weather is cool there, the gel will hold up well. Sorry, but this will not work well in Vietnam. (YouTuber 62)*

*Today, I will use an Innisfree cushion box. (...) It makes your face look like a Korean by making it shiny. However, it is better suited to a colder country than Vietnam. (YouTuber 19)*

## **Interactive adaptation in ethnic context**

Vietnamese influencers adopt Korean products to suit their individual preferences. They evolve their consumption behaviors based on their evaluations and attitudes while using Korean products. Through trial and error, they search for either the most suitable product or other products with complementary features. For example, they use Korean makeup products, but they often make adjustments due to Vietnam's humidity. Influencers share their consumption knowledge and tips through YouTube:

Vietnamese YouTubers discussed whether K-Style or products were suitable for most skin tones or oily skin types in Vietnam:

*This is based on a pink tone, so this color is only suitable for white-skinned people, such as Korean girls; otherwise, just forget it. (YouTuber 137)*

*I chose Korean products today because I want to have brighter white skin with this peach tone. Therefore, I think using these Korean products is a proper choice. If you have oily skin, this product will help to keep your skin from becoming greasy. (YouTuber 37)*

*If you go to buy a cushion and choose a Korean product, I advise you to choose the darkest tone because Korean women have very white skin. If you wear it in an extremely white tone, it does not suit Vietnam's yellow skin tone. (YouTuber 23)*

*We are in Vietnam, and the climate here is much hotter and more humid than in Korea, so we need to apply powder after the cushion so that it does not shine and last longer. (YouTuber 23)*

*Korean friends usually do not like to apply powder. (...) However, Vietnam is hot and humid. Everyone, if you are watching this video, please remember that you need to apply the powder to your skin. (YouTuber 24)*

Vietnamese YouTubers discussed whether K-Style or products were suitable for most skin tones or oily skin types in Vietnam:

*This is based on a pink tone, so this color is only suitable for white-skinned people, such as Korean girls; otherwise, just forget it. (YouTuber 137)*

*I chose Korean products today because I want to have brighter white skin with this peach tone. Therefore, I think using these Korean products is a proper choice. If you have oily skin, this product will help to keep your skin from becoming greasy. (YouTuber 37)*

When Korean products or styles do not satisfy their needs, they boldly choose better alternatives. For example, if they do not find many warm or nude tones in Korean cosmetics, they recommend using products from other countries. They have a specific image or idea of Korean products; if the product lacks accurate information, influencers' refusal or alternative actions affect consumers through videos:

*One more thing that I almost forgot to say is that L'Oréal's cushions have a warmer tone than the pink tones of other Korean brands' cushions. Therefore, if you are curious about warm-tone cushions or have not yet found the warm tone you want, try L'Oréal cushions. (YouTuber 57)*

The spread of k-style found that the practice elements of grooming material, styling competence, and imagery meaning and the practice system (e.g., environment, art, social structure, etc.) are closely related to each other. In particular, the discovery that 'style' is different from other practices is a concept connected to the ethnic context, that is, the meaning of the human body and the self, as well as a process, which is the greatest contribution of this study and an insightful step board for future research.

Fig. 1 expands the delineation of the practice elements and their connections examined by Shove et al. (2012) and the cultural migration process discussed by Akaka et al. (2022) to fit the findings of this study (Epp et al., 2014; Phipps & Ozanne, 2017).

This study elucidates the dissemination of K-Style in Vietnam and demonstrates the multifaceted role of influencers in co-creating Korean culture. By examining how Vietnamese YouTube influencers affect their local followers through vivid videos of embracing and customizing K-Style, the findings contribute to the existing literature on consumer behavior, social media influence, and the role of influencers.

As a result of this study, it was found that a positive attitude toward Hallyu culture through influencer videos had a positive effect on product purchase intention. This is consistent with the results of Truong (2018, 2019) that a positive attitude toward the Korean Wave leads to product purchase intention. In addition, in the branding process



that connects ingredients and meaning, when brand awareness is low, influencers label the product as a 'Korean brand' and emphasize the quality of the product through a national image, which has a positive effect on quality perception.

Truong (2018) identified the young core generation in Vietnam as Generation C, emphasizing the noteworthy effect of Hallyu 4.0 social media and the younger generation's ethnocentrism on their decision to purchase Korean products. The present study validates that social media not only affects trust but also subjective norms, which in turn induce attitudes and purchase decisions. It is noteworthy that the study provides tangible evidence of social media's impact on Korean product purchase decisions, as previously indicated by Truong (2018, 2019). Vietnamese influencers build trust with viewers by presenting themselves as relatable consumers or by using products directly, supporting Nielsen's (2009) finding that peer information is more trustworthy than company-generated information.

Kaufman and Patterson's (2005) cross-national study on the spread of cricket, a traditional British sport, emphasizes the role of influential mediators in shaping cultural meaning and institutional access. This perspective expands our understanding of consumer culture diffusion by highlighting the importance of mediators, or influencers, in the dynamics of cultural dissemination.

In particular, practices are reproduced as their elements are copied by imitation by 'non-carriers' who wish to participate in the practice but do not yet engage in it (Akaka et al., 2022). In this manner, K-Style has been constructed as an image of 'Korean style' from the non-carrier perspective observed from the outside. Overseas social influencers hold more sway over local consumers because recognizing national characteristics, based on their direct or indirect experiences or assumptions, carries greater significance in forming a national image than an internal influencer's viewpoint.

Truong's (2018) findings indicate that Vietnamese consumers exhibit strong consumer ethnocentrism, with consumer nationalism playing a crucial role in evaluating Korean products. Remarkably, this characteristic is more prominent in Vietnam than in other countries' adoption of K-Style. Although this generation has been exposed to a global perspective, they remain critical of both their own and other cultures (Nguyen, 2022). A study on Filipino consumers' attitudes towards Korean products found that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control did not negatively impact purchase intention, while attitudes towards Korea had a strong positive effect (Cayaban et al., 2023). Furthermore, Garcia-Gutiérrez et al.'s (2020) research demonstrates that subjective norms are not related to multicultural consumer behavior. However, consumer ethnocentrism has been shown to negatively affect trust in foreign brands (Truong, 2018, 2019; Vuong & Khanh, 2020). It is also evident that stereotypes (cognitive), ethnocentrism (affective), and social distance (conative) play a pivotal role in intercultural communication competencies and attitudes toward other cultures, as highlighted by Wiseman et al., (1989). This study underscores the importance of grasping the concept of consumer ethnocentrism and how it influences the modification of foreign culture. As social media platforms grow and provide insights into global cultures, marketers focusing on diverse audiences should immerse themselves more in understanding those cultures. Thus, it is essential to delve deeper into the culture, heritage, and ethnicity of the business target consumer.

### **Theoretical and managerial contribution**

The present study offers several vital contributions. Firstly, it illuminates the acculturation process of Vietnamese influencers in relation to Korean culture, revealing their attitudes and experiences as consumers. This paves the way for future research on their exposure, acceptance process, and attitudes towards Korean culture. The study also extends the traditional cultural diffusion model in the context of networked media, enhancing our understanding of video-based SNS platforms, which are highly favored by the MZ generation. Secondly, this research is the first to investigate the digital hybridization of the Korean Wave through social media influencers (SMIs) by analyzing scripts that embody acculturation in real-time. Although previous studies have focused on influencers (Feng et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021), none have specifically analyzed their utterances as evidence of cultural change. The findings suggest that Vietnamese consumers share more similarities with Korean influencers (Choo et al., 2022) and gain popularity by demonstrating the application of Korean products and styles to the Vietnamese region and ethnicity. This corroborates prior findings that consumers' identification with a speaker impacts the speaker's attractiveness, credibility, and content (Min et al., 2019; Shan et al., 2020; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019).

From a managerial standpoint, the study offers critical insights. It underscores the importance of observing Vietnamese consumers' K-Style adoption behaviors, which have significant implications for local marketing strategies of Korean products and styles. Consequently, marketers should promote products suitable for Vietnam's climate or emphasize color and type preferences of Vietnamese consumers. Moreover, the study highlights the need for companies targeting the Vietnamese market to thoroughly analyze ethnic tendencies and characteristics of consumers.

Furthermore, Vietnamese influencers' emulation or modification of famous Korean YouTubers' consumption behaviors underscores the diversification of the stages and directions of Korean beauty and fashion dissemination. As the influence of the Korean Wave expands, it is no longer restricted to the domestic market. Lastly, the study reveals that as the penetration of the Korean Wave and K-Style increases among Vietnamese consumers, popular brands are recognized for their inherent quality rather than their association with South Korea. Thus, marketers aiming to expand in Vietnam should focus on brand image marketing and product quality rather than relying on Hallyu's popularity. Finally, we show that cultural migration and reproduction happen through the copying behavior by 'intermediaries' who are not directly involved (Akaka et al., 2022). This research is a significant contribution to the field of cross-culture cultural migration and has laid an essential foundation for further investigation.

### **Limitations and future research**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis sample may exclude recently emerging popular content due to the selection criteria based on YouTube influencers' views. To capture the latest trends, future research should consider the most recent content instead. Secondly, young Vietnamese consumers are increasingly engaging with global consumers through intelligent platforms such as live streaming, AR/VR platforms, and the metaverse (Choo, 2019; Kim et al., 2014). Consequently, further research is needed to investigate Vietnamese consumers' acceptance of Korean

culture through these platforms. Thirdly, as K-Style has spread across diverse countries and channels, follow-up research should explore the dissemination of Korean culture among influencers active in various media in other Asian countries or Europe. Finally, considering empirical evidence substantiating the profound influence of large-scale global phenomena, such as pandemics, on the awareness of cosmetic products, as elucidated by Choi et al. (2022), future research should investigate the potential effects of global crises on the phenomenon of cultural diffusion.

#### Abbreviations

Gen Z	Generation Z
FTA	Free trade agreement
KOCCA	Korea creative content agency
KOFICE	Korean foundation for international cultural exchange
K-Style	Korean style
MZ	Millennials and Gen Z
SNS	Social network service
SMI	Social media influencer

#### Supplementary Information

The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40691-023-00359-3>.

**Additional file [1]:** Summary of Korean-Related Videos Analyzed Among Top-Viewed Vietnamese Influencers' contents.

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#### Authors' contributions

Both of authors developed the conceptual approach as well as analyzed data. HK mainly collected data collection, and developed the results and conclusion. HJC modified research framework, supported to improve overall research design, and interpreted results. Both authors contributed to the formatting and editing of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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#### Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

#### Declarations

##### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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