

More than a Sport: Running as a Lifestyle

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More and more people are taking up running, a simple yet fundamental sport. Social media, technological advancements, and the rise of running communities have further fueled this trend, turning running into more than just a workout. As it continues to evolve, running is expected to expand beyond personal fitness.

Running Becoming a Major Fitness Trend

The rising interest in running is evident across various platforms. The number of mentions of the keyword running indicates that the running boom, which gained momentum during the pandemic, has continued to expand, reaching its peak in 2024. Google Trends reflects this enthusiasm, showing a consistent rise in searches for terms, such as running and running crew.

According to KREAM's 2024 second-half insight report, there has been a sharp increase in global transactions of running brands. While established brands like Nike and Adidas continue to thrive, specialized running brands such as Hoka, Brooks, and On Running have gained a significant amount of sales volume.

Among them, Satisfy has experienced the most dramatic growth, with its transaction volume increasing by approximately 5,160% compared to the first half of 2024. Additionally, On Running and Hoka recorded growth rates of 1,252% and 70%, respectively, highlighting the rising demand for high-performance running gear.

Signs of the running boom are also evident in the domestic market. According to the Korea Federation of Textile Industries, the total value of the domestic running shoes market has surpassed one trillion won, driven largely by the growing number of young runners in their 20s and 30s.

This growth is also fueled by the rising demand for high-performance running shoes, some of which are priced at over 300,000 won per pair. As a result, terms like the running shoes hierarchy have emerged, reflecting the premiumization of running gear.

The trend can also be observed through application



KHU's plogging program in Jeju Island

Photo: KHU (khu.ac.kr)

installation rates. Runable, a popular running application, saw a roughly 25% increase in 2024 compared to 2023, largely due to its integration with major events like the Seoul Marathon. Similarly, applications like Run Day and Nike Run Club (NRC) recorded 15% and 10% year-over-year, respectively, reinforcing the idea that running has firmly established itself as a dominant trend.

Why Running Has Gained Widespread Popularity

Running's widespread appeal lies in its accessibility and flexibility. Unlike other sports that require specific facilities or expensive equipment, running can be started by anyone, anywhere, at any time. Kim Young-jun, the president of Kyung Hee University (KHU)'s official running crew, Running With Kyung Hee (RWK), shared his thoughts, "I think the good thing about running is that there are no barriers to entry. Everyone can start anytime. Especially, the fun of running with the crew gives you the strength to continue running."

One of the factors sustaining the running trend is the running crew. Through these communities, runners are able to find both pleasure and motivation in running together. Since 2023, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has operated the 7979 Running Crew program, which runs from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. The program has recruited participants weekly and conducted running sessions throughout the city. Compared to 2023, the number of participants in 2024 has roughly doubled to around 5,000.

Kim shared his running crew memory regarding the motivation, "Looking back on my experience with the crew, my first open run was very challenging. But the memory of my RWK teammates cheering me on continues to motivate me to run consistently."

Kim Jin-uk, the president of the Sunday Seoul Running Crew (SSRC), added, "With the crew, you can enjoy running more and have extra fun. I cannot wait for the running day every week. Also, especially during marathons, giving and

receiving support to each other is very helpful in continuing running."

Another key factor sustaining the running trend is increasing running application usage and activation of social media. With running applications like Run Day and NRC, runners can track, analyze performance and share their achievements.

Kim from RWK commented, "I have seen a lot of cases where not only RWK but also non-RWK friends post NRC proof shots on Instagram stories and feeds. This makes me realize how strong the running trend is."

Kim from SSRC added, "You can find informations about the activities of the running crew through social media, and you can also join the running crew through these platforms."

The Future of the Running Trend

As running's popularity continues to grow, companies and organizations are leveraging this trend for marketing by sponsoring running crews, hosting events, and creating

dedicated spaces for runners to foster new opportunities within the running community.

For example, the Seoul Metropolitan Government has opened Seoul Runner Station in Yeouinaru, serving as a rest hub for runners exercising along the Hangang. Through this facility, it has also promoted the Fun Station project, which is part of the subway station innovation project.

Another emerging aspect of the running trend is its alignment with environmental initiatives. Some running crews have incorporated "plogging," a combination of jogging and picking up litter. For example, KHU organized a plogging program in Jeju Island, aiming to help students improve both their fitness and environmental responsibility.

Moreover, RWK has participated in a local cleanup project, called Hoegi Cleanup, reinforcing the idea that running can be a socially responsible activity. Kim from RWK said, "I am optimistic about how environmental protection and running are combined through plogging. I believe running has the potential to become a sustainable lifestyle rather than just a passing trend."

Running's accessibility, strengthened by technology and social media, has made running one of the popular trends of recent years. The rise of running communities has transformed it into a social experience, while its connection to sustainability has given it a broader purpose beyond individual fitness goals.

With all these elements combined, running is no longer just about how fast or how far one can go. It is about who they run with, what values they uphold, and how they contribute to a larger movement.

As this trend continues to grow, running seems to likely remain not just a popular sport, but a lifelong, sustainable lifestyle embraced by generations to come.



Sunday Seoul Running Crew

Courtesy of SSRC



Running With Kyung Hee's plogging activity

Courtesy of RWK