



## The Role of Cultural Values in Shaping Body Image, Fashion Preferences, and Consumer Behavior

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### Abstract

This study examines the relationships among cultural values, body image, and fashion preferences, and how these factors influence consumer behavior. It addresses a key research gap by developing a conceptual framework that integrates these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their interactions. A quantitative study was conducted with 400 participants from Rangsit University. The findings indicate that cultural norms significantly shape body image perceptions, which in turn influence purchasing decisions and fashion preferences. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and ANOVA. The results indicate that demographic factors, such as age and gender, create significant differences in fashion attitudes, with younger individuals (aged 18–24) and females reporting higher levels of appearance-related pressure. The study concludes that the fashion industry should adopt culturally responsive and inclusive strategies to better align with evolving consumer values and promote body diversity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Values, Body Image, Fashion Preferences, Consumer Behavior, Fashion Consumption

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Culture has a significant impact on human behavior by shaping values, beliefs, social norms, nationality, language, and traditions (AR Naik, 2023). Cultural values establish standards of beauty and dress, determining what is considered acceptable, desirable, or ideal within a particular community. These cultural norms influence consumer behavior, particularly in fashion choices, where individuals use clothing as a means of expressing their self-image and identity.

Body image is defined as an individual's perceptions, attitudes, and feelings toward their physical appearance (Thomas Cash, 2002). In many East Asian societies, slimness and flawless appearance are preferred and regarded as beauty standards, whereas Western societies have shown a growing movement toward body diversity and inclusivity (Merino, 2024). These cultural values influence individuals' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their bodies, which in turn shapes their fashion preferences (Abraham, 2021). The relationship between cultural body ideals and fashion preferences influences consumer purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and engagement with global fashion trends.

Understanding how cultural values shape body image and fashion preferences, and influence consumer behavior, is critical for many stakeholders. This study contributes to the literature on cross-cultural consumer behavior by examining how culture mediates the relationship between identity and fashion consumption. This study aims to systematically analyze the role of cultural values in shaping body image and their impact on fashion preferences and consumer behaviors in the global fashion market.

#### 1.2 Problem Statement

In contemporary society, fashion consumption is strongly influenced by cultural values, body image standards, and social expectations. Cultural norms shape individuals' perceptions of attractiveness and body image, which in turn affect confidence, clothing choices, and purchasing behavior (AR Naik, 2023). Despite



the influence of globalization, social media, and evolving fashion trends, individuals continue to experience pressure to conform to culturally defined beauty standards.

Previous studies have shown that cultural expectations significantly influence body image perceptions and psychological well-being (Abdoli, 2024). Social norms and traditional beauty ideals often establish acceptable body standards that shape individuals' fashion-related behavior (Strahan, 2006). However, most existing research has examined body image and fashion consumption separately. There is still limited understanding of how cultural values simultaneously influence body image perceptions and fashion-related consumer behavior. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the relationships among cultural values, body image, and fashion-related consumer behavior.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how cultural values influence body image perceptions and fashion preferences, and how these factors affect consumer behavior.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1) To examine the influence of cultural values on individuals' body image perceptions.
- 2) To analyze the impact of body image perceptions on fashion consumption.
- 3) To investigate the indirect influence of cultural values on consumer behavior through body image perceptions.

### 1.4 Research Questions

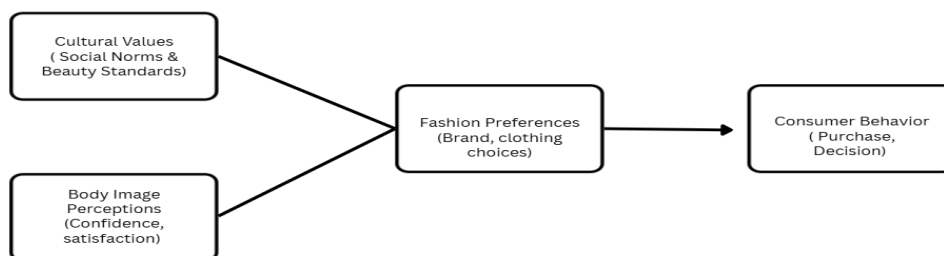
This study is guided by the following key research questions below:

- 1) How do cultural values influence individuals' body image perceptions? This question explores how deeply cultural norms shape consumers' clothing style orientation.
- 2) How do body image perceptions influence fashion consumption? This question aims to identify whether body image perceptions lead to different consumption patterns.
- 3) How do cultural values influence consumer behavior in fashion consumption through body image perceptions?

### 1.5 Statement of Hypotheses

- H1: Cultural values significantly influence individuals' body image perceptions.
- H2: Body image perceptions significantly influence fashion preferences and brand choices.
- H3: Body image perceptions mediate the relationship between cultural values and consumer behavior.

### 1.6 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework of the study

This framework proposes that cultural values and social expectations influence individuals' body image perceptions. These perceptions, in turn, influence fashion preferences and consumer behavior. Body image serves as a mediating factor, explaining how cultural influences shape fashion preferences and



purchasing decisions. This framework emphasizes the relationship between culture, self-perception, and fashion consumption.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is defined by its population, sample size, methodology, and timeframe to ensure a focused examination of how cultural values shape body image and fashion preferences among Rangsit University students aged 18 to over 35 years. Data will be collected through survey questionnaires targeting individuals interested in fashion consumption, including purchases made through both physical stores and online platforms. However, this study does not cover all aspects of consumer behavior in the fashion industry nor provides a detailed analysis of specific brand preferences.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature and relevant studies, including theories, academic concepts, and prior research related to the topic.

### **2.1. Cultural Values and Body Image**

According to previous research, beauty standards are internalized through repeated exposure and social expectations, and are transmitted through family, peers, and social media (Perloff, 2014). Cultural contexts that support body diversity and authenticity tend to promote more positive body appreciation. Individuals who place greater emphasis on perfectionism or conformity tend to experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Hanson, 2024). Therefore, it is critical to understand how cultural influences shape body image to explain why different populations have varying experiences (Abdoli, 2024).

Psychological factors, such as social comparison and internalization, mediate these effects. Individuals compare themselves with idealized images, which may lead to self-evaluation and potential body dissatisfaction (Myers, 2009). Studies further demonstrate that social conditioning shapes one's self-schema and identity (Jaehee Jung, 2006). The growing influence of media and digital platforms further complicates this relationship by combining traditional cultural values with newly popularized standards of beauty. As a result, young consumers may experience tension between authenticity and conformity.

### **2.2. Body Image and Fashion Preferences**

Research indicates that body image perceptions directly influence fashion consumption. Media and marketing campaigns often promote narrow beauty standards, shaping consumer attitudes toward fashion products, and creating pressure to conform to socially accepted norms (Sumita Joshi, 2024). This, in turn, may directly influence clothing preferences and purchasing behavior. Body dissatisfaction often leads consumers to seek clothing styles that conceal or reshape perceived body imperfections (Flair, 2025). Personality traits, demographic factors, and social status may indirectly influence the relationship between body image and fashion preferences (Rosińska, 2024). Research further indicates that consumers tend to have more positive attitudes toward fashion advertisements featuring by models with idealized body types (Hallberg, 2023). Although brands are increasingly adopting body-positive advertising to reflect evolving consumer values and promote inclusivity, fashion marketing continues to rely on influencer and luxury branding to reinforce social beauty standards (Bowman, 2020).

### **2.3. Influence of Cultural Values on Fashion Preferences**

Beyond influencing body image, cultural values have a direct impact on consumer behavior and fashion preferences, as they shape what fashion means to consumers and how it is used to communicate identity. Cultural traditions often encourage individuals to select clothing that reflects modesty, respect, and social appropriateness, while modern fashion trends increasingly emphasize self-expression and individuality. Furthermore, individuals with different body types face distinct challenges in finding suitable clothing as body shape awareness influences choices that enhance comfort and confidence (Felicita, 2020). Therefore, cultural acceptance of body diversity also plays a significant role in shaping fashion preferences and clothing satisfaction.



#### **2.4. Industry Responses: Inclusivity and Cultural Sensitivity**

The fashion industry both reflects and constructs cultural values. Although many brands have historically promoted narrow beauty ideals, there is growing pressure for inclusivity, representation, and cultural sensitivity (Tayal, 2023). Inclusive marketing strategies, such as featuring diverse body types, ethnicities, and genders, are positively associated with consumer trust and emotional engagement (Gopinath, 2025). Recent literature emphasizes the growing importance of inclusive representation in fashion marketing, as consumers increasingly prefer brands that promote diversity, authenticity, and body positivity (Pittaway, 2020). This transformation reflects broader changes in cultural norms driven by globalization, social media, and increased awareness of diversity (Sumita Joshi, 2024).

#### **2.5. Limitations and Gaps in the Literature**

Although most previous studies have focused on body image, cultural influence, and fashion consumption separately, limited research has examined how cultural values simultaneously influence body image perceptions and fashion-related consumer behavior. Moreover, methodological limitations, such as cross-sectional designs, small sample sizes, and limited causal inference, remain prevalent in the existing literature. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships among cultural values, body image perceptions, and fashion consumption within a unified conceptual framework.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design and Approach**

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships among cultural values, body image perceptions, fashion preferences, and consumer behavior. A survey design was employed using a structured online questionnaire consisting of 24 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Convenience sampling was used to collect primary data from respondents with an interest in fashion consumption. Statistical methods were applied to identify relationships among variables and to examine how cultural values influence body image and fashion purchasing behavior.

#### **3.2 Population and Sample**

##### **3.2.1. Population**

The population of this study consists of individuals who engage in fashion consumption and are exposed to cultural values, body image ideals, and fashion-related media influences. Specifically, the target population includes students aged 18 to over 35 years, studying at Rangsit University. This population was selected because individuals within this age range are considered more sensitive to cultural influences related to body image and fashion consumption.

##### **3.2.2. Sample Size**

The sample size of this study was determined using Yamane's (1973) formula, which is commonly used in social science research to calculate an appropriate sample size for large populations.

$$n = N/[1+N(e)^2]$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error

n = 384.6

A 5% margin of error was applied, resulting in a minimum required sample size of approximately 385 respondents. To enhance data reliability and account for potential incomplete responses, the final sample size was increased to 400 participants.



### 3.3 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to address the research objectives and test the hypotheses. The responses were carefully analyzed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and general perceptions related to cultural values, body image perceptions, and fashion consumption. All data analyses were performed using statistical analysis software. Correlation analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between cultural values and body image perceptions, as well as the relationship between body image and fashion consumption behavior. In addition, an ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether demographic factors influenced body image perceptions and fashion-related consumer behavior. These statistical techniques were appropriate for testing the proposed conceptual framework of this study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Demographic profile of all participants

The survey was distributed to 400 participants, detailing their age, gender, and monthly consumption spending were collected. Most respondents (63%) were in the 18-24 age group, while 31.5% were aged between 25 and 35 years old. In terms of gender distribution, 70.3% of the sample were female, and 24% were male. In terms of monthly consumption spending, 64.8% of participants reported spending between 10,000 and 20,000 baht per month.

Hypothesis 1: Cultural values significantly influence individuals' perceptions of ideal body image.

- $H_1$ : Cultural values significantly influence individuals' perceptions of ideal body image.
- $H_0$ : Cultural values do not significantly influence individuals' perceptions of ideal body image.

#### 4.1.2 Descriptive statistics by Cultural Value Groups

Respondents were categorized into three groups based on cultural value scores.

**Table 1** Body Image Perception by Cultural Values Level

Cultural Value Level	N	M	SD
Low	126	2.89	0.61
Moderate	198	3.07	0.58
High	76	3.26	0.63
Total	400	3.06	0.60

The results indicate an increasing trend in mean body image perception across different levels of cultural values. This result indicates a statistically significant difference in perceptions of ideal body image, with mean scores increasing as cultural values strengthened (Low:  $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ; Moderate:  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ; High:  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

H2: Body image perceptions significantly influence fashion preferences and clothing brand choices.

- $H_1$ : Body image perceptions significantly influence fashion preferences and clothing brand choices.
- $H_0$ : Body image perceptions do not significantly influence fashion preferences and clothing brand choices.

#### 4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics by Body Image Perception Groups



Respondents were grouped into low, moderate, and high body image perception categories based on their mean scores.

**Table 2** Fashion Preferences by Body Image Perception Level

Body image perception Level	N	Mean	SD
Low	118	2.84	0.62
Moderate	201	3.06	0.59
High	81	3.29	0.64
Total	400	3.05	0.61

The results indicate a progressive increase in fashion preference and brand choice scores as levels of body image perception levels increase. This result indicates a statistically significant difference in fashion and brand choices, indicating that higher body image perception scores are associated with higher fashion preference scores (Low:  $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ; Moderate:  $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ; High:  $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

H3: Body image perception and fashion preferences mediate the relationship between cultural values and consumer behavior.

- H1: Body image perception and fashion preferences significantly mediate the relationship between cultural values and consumer behavior.
- H0: Body image perception and fashion preferences do not mediate the relationship between cultural values and consumer behavior.

#### 4.1.4. Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in H3

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics of Cultural Values, Body Image Perception, Fashion Preferences, and Consumer Behavior

Variable	Mean	SD
Cultural Values	3.09	0.89
Body Image Perception	3.06	0.91
Fashion Preferences	3.05	0.61
Consumer Behavior	3.11	0.88

The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in the predictive model when body image perception and fashion preferences were included as mediating variables. (Cultural Values:  $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ; Consumer Behavior:  $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

#### 4.1.5 Conclusion

The findings confirm that body image perception and fashion preferences partially mediate the relationship between cultural values and consumer behavior, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3

## 4.2 Discussion

The results of this study indicate that cultural values substantially influence body image perceptions, fashion preferences, and consumption behaviors. Younger respondents, particularly those aged 18–24, reported higher levels of appearance-related pressure, suggesting that this demographic is more vulnerable to socially constructed beauty standards. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that younger consumers are more susceptible to media-driven standards of attractiveness.

The findings further indicate that female respondents exhibit higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than male respondents. This finding aligns with existing literature, which suggests that women are more likely to internalize cultural and societal expectations likely physical appearance. Such pressures



may increase individuals' awareness of their fashion choices as they attempt to conform to perceived norms of beauty and social acceptance.

In terms of consumer behavior, the study indicates that body image perceptions act as a mediating factor between cultural values and fashion-related decisions. Individuals who perceive a stronger need to conform to cultural beauty standards are more likely to engage in fashion consumption as a form of self-expression or social adaptation. This supports the argument that fashion is not merely functional but also symbolic, reflecting both individual identity and cultural belonging.

However, the findings also suggest a shift toward a more flexible balance between cultural expectations and personal identity. Many respondents indicated that their clothing choices are influenced not only by cultural norms but also by situational contexts and individual preferences. This may be attributed to the growing influence of globalization and social media, which expose consumers to diverse fashion trends and alternative beauty ideals.

Compared with previous studies that have examined body image and fashion consumption independently, this study provides a more integrated perspective by linking cultural values, psychological perceptions, and consumer behavior within a single framework. This contributes to the literature by offering a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and social factors interact to shape fashion consumption patterns. However, the study is subject to certain limitations. The sample is restricted to a specific geographic and cultural context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider more diverse populations and cross-cultural comparisons to further validate and extend these findings.

## 5. Conclusion

This study confirms that cultural values play a significant role in shaping individuals' body image perceptions and fashion-related consumer behavior. Body image acts as a key factor in influencing clothing preferences and purchasing decisions. In contemporary fashion environments, individuals are exposed to diverse style influences through globalization and social media. However, consumers continuously negotiate between cultural values, personal identity, and contemporary fashion trends. Future research should include more diverse cultural groups and adopt longitudinal approaches to gain deeper insights into these relationships.

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