

“I want to be beautiful and rich:” Internalization of consumer culture ideals and influence on fashion consumption

Srikant Manchiraju, Florida State University, USA
Mary Lynn Damhorst, Iowa State University, USA

Keywords: Body image; materialism; fashion involvement; cultural ideals

Modern consumer culture is dominated by two ideals—the body perfect and the material good life. For example, mass media is replete with depiction of these two ideals (Dittmar, 2008) and these two ideals often are portrayed in conjunction in mass media (Ashikali & Dittmar, 2012). The combined influence of these two cultural ideals’ on individuals has been explored only recently. For example, Gudnadottir and Gardarsdottir (2014) found that internalization (i.e., cognitively buying the belief) of the body perfect and the material good life ideals are detrimental to individuals’ well-being. They found a positive relationship between internalization of the two cultural ideals and disturbing body image behavior (e.g., excessive dieting) among Icelandic males and females. In the present study we explored the role of two cultural ideals and their influence on consumption behaviors—specifically, *fashion consumption*. Additionally, the study examined sociocultural antecedents that might contribute to cultural ideals internalization among individuals.

To meet the objectives of this study, extensive literature related to body satisfaction, materialism, and fashion involvement were reviewed. Based on this literature, a research model was proposed, consisting of 10 hypotheses (see Figure 1a). To test the model, data were collected from over 600 U.S. adult participants via Amazon Turk Mechanical (AMT) in two stages.¹ Existing measures were shortened on the basis of factor analysis of preliminary data collection through AMT. All the measures had excellent reliabilities ($> .80$), which demonstrated internal consistency. SEM was conducted on the main data.

In total, 9 of the 10 hypotheses were supported. Findings revealed that parents, peers, and mass media have contributed to materialism and body ideals internalization, which, in turn, influenced an individual’s level of body satisfaction via two mediating mechanisms—appearance internalization and appearance comparison to others. Furthermore, a positive relationship between an individual’s level of body satisfaction and fashion involvement was found. The hypothesized model was valid across gender, but some nuances related to gender differences were found.

This study employed the widely used model in body image literature—the Tripartite Influence Model (TIM) (Keery, Van den Berg, & Thompson, 2004)—to understand consumption issues related to the body and fashion. Furthermore, the TIM was extended to include the

¹ In Stage I (n = 177) scales were shortened to avoid survey fatigue. In total, 112 items were reduced to 54 items. Statistical procedure were conducted, which insured that the scales employed had adequate internal consistency (alphas $> .80$). In Stage II (n = 472), the proposed model was tested.

materialism construct. In sum, the present study’s model explained about 20% of the variance of the terminal construct (i.e., fashion involvement), which was significant at $p = 0.0001$ level.

The present study is the first to explore the role of the two cultural ideals’ internalization and their relationship to fashion consumption behaviors. *Implications, limitations, and future directions* based on the present study and its findings are discussed. For example, the proposed model in this study could be employed to understand the *dark side* variables of consumer behavior such as compulsive buying. Future studies must also address the validity of the proposed model in cross-cultural studies and among different age cohorts.

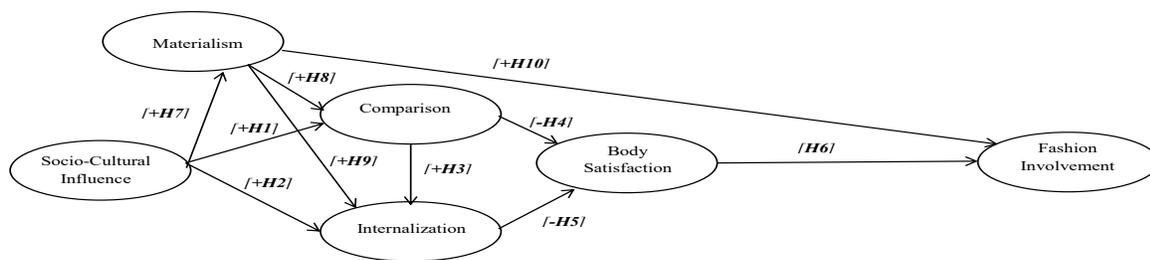


Figure 1a. Proposed Theoretical Model: Materialism and Socio-Cultural Factors’ Influence on Body Satisfaction and Fashion Involvement

Table 1. SEM Path Coefficientsⁱ

Hypotheses	β (sig.)	Hypotheses	β (sig.)
H1	.560 ($p < .001$)	H6	.133 ($p < .001$)
H2	.179 ($p < .001$)	H7	.334 ($p < .001$)
H3	.492 ($p < .001$)	H8	.208 ($p < .001$)
H4	-.523 ($p < .001$)	H9	.237 ($p < .001$)
H5	-.043 [non-sig]	H10	.457 ($p < .001$)

References

Ashikali, E-M., & Dittmar, H. (2012). The effect of priming materialism on women’s responses to thin-ideal media. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 51*, 514-533.

Dittmar, H. (2008). *Consumer culture, identity and well-being: The search for ‘good life’ and the ‘body perfect.’* London, UK: Psychology Press.

Keery, H., Van den Berg, P., & Thompson, J. K. (2004). An evaluation of the Tripartite Influence Model of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance with adolescent girls. *Body image, 1*(3), 237-251.

Gudnadottir, U., & Gardarsdottir, R. B. (2014). The influence of materialism and ideal body internalization on body-dissatisfaction and body-shaping behaviors of young men and women: Support for the Consumer Culture Impact Model. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 55*, 151-159.

ⁱ Due to space constrain, several additional models related to the study have not been included. For example, decomposed, fully-recursive and optimum models were also analyzed. Likewise, multi-group [MGSEM] model testing gender moderation was also conducted.