

The Influence of Social and Cultural Factors on Consumer Behavior in Purchase Decisions

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Abstract Consumer purchase decisions are shaped not only by personal preferences but also by the social environments and cultural systems in which consumers live. This article examines how social factors (family, reference groups, peers, and social status) and cultural factors (values, traditions, religion, and subculture) influence purchase decisions, with particular attention to Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative literature review was conducted. The corpus consists of foundational consumer-behavior texts, three foundational journal articles, and twelve empirical or review articles published between 2021 and 2025, which were identified through web-based searches and examined mainly at the level of abstracts and publication records. Thematic synthesis shows that (1) social influence, especially subjective norms and group expectations, is a recurrent correlate of purchase intention across countries; (2) cultural values and religion act as interpretive frames, visible in Indonesian evidence on halal food, local brands, and retail choices; and (3) quantitative studies in Indonesia report inconsistent direct effects of social and cultural variables, which suggests that effects depend on product category, measurement, and context. The article proposes that marketers treat social and cultural factors as conditions that shape how other marketing stimuli are interpreted, and it recommends mixed-method and more representative studies. No new empirical data were collected, so all conclusions are conceptual.

Keywords: consumer behavior; social factors; culture; purchase decision; Indonesia

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Consumer behavior is a core concern of marketing because decisions about products, prices, promotion, and distribution ultimately depend on how people choose, buy, use, and evaluate what is offered to them. Kotler and Keller (2016) describe consumer behavior as the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and evaluate goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and wants, and they identify cultural, social, personal, and psychological characteristics as the main influences on buyers. Of these four, cultural and social factors are the external forces that consumers seldom choose deliberately and often barely notice, which makes them both powerful and easy to overlook in marketing practice (author's analysis).

Indonesia is an instructive setting for studying these forces. Indarti (2025) characterizes Indonesian society as strongly collectivist and argues that this trait shapes consumption

through the expectations of family, community, and peers. A review of consumer-behavior research in Indonesia covering 2015 to 2024 concludes that rich socio-cultural values, together with growing technology use, have changed how Indonesian consumers interact with markets, while noting that longitudinal studies and research outside urban areas remain scarce (Rialisnawati et al., 2024). Religion is a further cultural anchor: Zuhri et al. (2023) point out that Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, which makes religious norms directly relevant to everyday purchases such as food.

The empirical record, however, is not uniform. Sudaryanto et al. (2021) report that Hofstede-type cultural dimensions significantly affected buying decisions in retail stores in East Java. By contrast, Chan and Raharja (2021) found no significant effect of cultural and social factors on purchases of creative-industry products in Bandung, and Zaky et al. (2024) reached a similar result for online purchasing among university students. This apparent inconsistency, together with the shift of social influence into digital spaces (Indarti, 2025), motivates a structured synthesis of what the literature says about social and cultural influences on purchase decisions.

1.2 Problem Formulation

This article addresses three questions: (1) How do social factors, namely family, reference groups, peers, and status, shape consumer purchase decisions? (2) How do culture, tradition, values, and religion shape consumption preferences and habits, particularly in Indonesia? (3) How consistent is the evidence across product categories such as food, clothing, beauty products, and local products, and what does it imply for marketing strategy?

1.3 Objectives

The objectives are to explain the role of social and cultural factors in purchase decisions, to compare findings from recent studies and identify their similarities, differences, and gaps, and to draw practical implications for firms operating in Indonesia.

1.4 Benefits

Theoretically, the article consolidates scattered findings into one framework suited to a Consumer Behavior course. Practically, it offers marketers a cautious, evidence-aware reading of how social and cultural factors can inform segmentation, communication, and

product positioning. For future researchers, it maps inconsistencies and unanswered questions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Behavior and the Purchase Decision

Kotler and Keller (2016) model the purchase decision as a sequence of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Solomon (2020) similarly emphasizes that consumption is a social process in which products carry meanings shared within groups. A theoretical bridge between society and individual choice is the Theory of Planned Behavior, in which Ajzen (1991) defines the subjective norm as perceived social pressure to perform or avoid a behavior; this construct, together with attitude and perceived behavioral control, shapes intention. Several studies reviewed below use this framework (Cunningham, 2023; Zuhri et al., 2023).

2.2 Social Factors

Kotler and Keller (2016) group social influences into reference groups, family, and social roles and status. Reference groups provide comparison points and standards for evaluating products, and peers are among the most immediate of them (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2020). The family is treated in the consumer-behavior literature as a primary unit of consumption and socialization, where preferences and product knowledge are transmitted across members (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Bearden and Etzel (1982) showed that reference-group influence varies by product type: it is generally stronger for products consumed publicly and for luxuries than for products consumed privately and for necessities. Status also matters; in a study of premium alcohol, status consumption showed the strongest relationship with subjective norms (Cunningham, 2023).

2.3 Cultural Factors

Kotler and Keller (2016) regard culture as the most fundamental determinant of a person's wants and behavior, transmitted through family and institutions, and they identify subcultures based on nationality, religion, ethnic group, and geography as meaningful market segments. Hofstede et al. (2010) conceptualize culture as shared mental

programming that distinguishes one group from another, and Hofstede (2011) summarizes national culture along six dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. Traditions and societal values enter consumption by defining what is appropriate, valued, or taboo, for example in food choices governed by religious norms (Zuhri et al., 2023).

2.4 Linking Social and Cultural Factors to Purchase Decisions

Based on the sources above, this article treats cultural factors as the broader frame that defines acceptable and meaningful consumption, and social factors as the channels through which that frame is enacted in daily interaction. Purchase decisions then result from the interplay of these influences with personal and psychological factors. This framing is the author's synthesis and is used here as an organizing device, not as an empirically tested model.

3. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative literature review. Searches were carried out in October 2026 through a general web search engine, which returned records hosted on publisher websites and on indexing services such as DOAJ and Garuda (Kemdiktisaintek). Google Scholar, SINTA, and Crossref were not queried systematically. Bibliographic details (journal, volume, issue, pages, and DOI) were taken from the publisher or indexer pages displayed in the search results.

Search terms, in English, included combinations of social and cultural factors, consumer purchase decision, Indonesia, reference group influence, subjective norms, Hofstede cultural dimensions, collectivism, family influence on purchase decisions, and halal food purchase. Foundational theory was not restricted by year; journal articles were prioritized for 2021 to 2026.

Inclusion criteria were: (a) the work addresses social or cultural influences, including reference groups, family, norms, religion, or cultural dimensions, in relation to purchase decisions, intention, or loyalty; (b) the work is a journal article or an established textbook; (c) bibliographic details could be verified; and (d) the work is in English or Indonesian. Indonesian studies were prioritized, and international studies were included for

conceptual comparison. Exclusion criteria were theses, non-scholarly web pages, records whose bibliographic details could not be verified, and articles only tangentially related to purchase behavior.

Selection proceeded by screening titles and abstracts and then checking publication details. The final corpus contains twelve journal articles from 2021 to 2025, three foundational journal articles (Ajzen, 1991; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Hofstede, 2011), and four books. The number of records initially screened was not systematically logged and is therefore not reported. Only Indarti (2025) was examined in full text; the other recent articles were examined at the level of abstracts and publication records, so findings are reported only as far as those abstracts state them. Where Indarti (2025) summarizes other studies, they are described as reported by that review. Data were analyzed thematically: each source was coded for context, approach, and reported findings, grouped into themes (social influence, culture, family and reference groups, religion and tradition, product category), and compared across sources. The main limitations are the non-exhaustive search and the reliance on abstracts.

4. Results and Discussion

Each subsection distinguishes theory, findings reported by sources, and the author's analysis.

4.1 The Role of Social Factors

Theory. Social influence reaches the individual through perceived expectations, which Ajzen (1991) captures as the subjective norm.

Reported findings. Cunningham (2023), using PLS-SEM on 251 responses, found that attitude and subjective norms positively and significantly affected the purchase intention of premium alcohol. In Vietnam, Nguyen and Ho (2022) found that the subjective norm raised both emotional value and perceived quality of a foreign footwear brand, and that face consciousness strengthened the indirect effect on purchase intention. In Banda Aceh, Zuhri et al. (2023) found strong relationships between attitude, subjective norm, and the purchase intention of halal-certified products, and between intention and purchasing behavior.

Analysis. In these studies, social influence appears to work mainly through intermediate evaluations such as attitude, emotional value, and perceived quality rather than as a direct push to buy. The strongest social effects also appear in socially visible or status-laden products, which is consistent with the public-versus-private logic of Bearden and Etzel (1982), although none of these authors tested that logic directly.

Indonesian cross-sectional studies that use a broad composite of social factors report weaker results. Chan and Raharja (2021), with 216 consumers of creative products in Bandung, found that cultural and social factors had no significant effect, while personal and psychological factors did. Zaky et al. (2024), with 108 students, reported the same pattern for online purchasing, and Muhrayanti andutama (2023) found that social factors had no effect on purchasing at an Alfamart store in Sumbawa Besar. A plausible but untested explanation is that composite social-factor scales blur specific mechanisms such as norms, recommendations, and status, and that social influence is harder to detect when consumers shop alone or online. This is the author's interpretation.

4.2 The Role of Culture

Theory. Culture shapes values and expectations that frame what consumers want (Hofstede, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Reported findings. Sudaryanto et al. (2021), surveying 112 retail consumers in Situbondo, East Java, reported that Hofstede's cultural dimensions, brand image, and price significantly affected buying decisions, and that price was the primary consideration given the strength of Islamic culture in the region. Muhrayanti andutama (2023) found a positive effect of cultural factors on purchasing, and a significant joint effect of social and cultural factors, in the Alfamart case. Outside Indonesia, Matharu et al. (2024) examined organic food purchasing in India and found that uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence significantly moderated the link between intention and behavior, whereas power distance, collectivism, and masculinity did not.

Analysis. These findings suggest that culture seldom acts as a uniform direct driver. It more often shapes how other determinants, such as price, intention, or brand image, are weighed. The result of Matharu et al. (2024) also cautions against assuming that collectivism automatically amplifies social influence in every purchase context.

4.3 Family and Reference Groups

Theory. Family and reference groups are core social influences (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019), and their strength depends on the product (Bearden & Etzel, 1982).

Reported findings. A mixed-method study in India found that children noticeably influence family purchases across various product categories, with demographic factors moderating that influence (Nandita et al., 2025). Indarti (2025) reports that the studies she reviewed show Indonesian consumers tending to follow recommendations from their community and group trends, particularly in culinary purchases. Suwandi and Balqiah (2023) examined Generation Z and local cosmetic brands and included susceptibility to normative influence among the mediators between brand love and loyalty.

Analysis. Family decisions appear multidirectional, since influence can flow from children to parents as well as the reverse. The Indonesian evidence in this corpus about family specifically is thin, and most Indonesian findings concern peers, communities, and online groups. This is an evidence gap, not proof of weak family influence.

4.4 Tradition and Societal Values in Indonesia

Reported findings. Zuhri et al. (2023) and Sudaryanto et al. (2021) both place religion at the center of purchase decisions in the Indonesian settings they studied, in halal-certified product choices and in the primacy of price in a strongly Islamic region. Indarti (2025), summarizing ten studies from 2021 to 2025, reports that social values and group identity influence brand recommendation and loyalty, that consumers favor brands that convey solidarity and cultural values, and that online communities have become a digital form of collectivism. Rialisnawati et al. (2024) similarly report that social media and e-commerce growth coexist with persistent socio-cultural values.

Analysis. Religious norms and values such as solidarity appear to work as legitimacy filters: they influence whether a product is acceptable before preferences about price or features come into play. Marketers who treat tradition only as decoration, for example festive packaging, may therefore miss its more basic role. This interpretation goes beyond what individual sources state.

4.5 Applications by Product Category

Food. Evidence is strongest here. Zuhri et al. (2023) link attitude and subjective norm to halal product purchasing; Indarti (2025) reports community and public opinion as important in culinary decisions; and Muhrayanti andutama (2023) studied convenience-store purchasing.

Clothing and fashion. Direct evidence on clothing in Indonesia is limited in this corpus. Fashion was one of the product groups in Chan and Raharja (2021), where cultural and social factors showed no significant effect, and the footwear study by Nguyen and Ho (2022) offers an international contrast in which subjective norms mattered for a foreign brand. Conclusions for clothing must therefore remain tentative.

Beauty products. Suwandi and Balqiah (2023) show that normative influence and social media engagement are relevant to loyalty toward local cosmetic brands among Generation Z.

Local products. Indarti (2025) reports that collectivist values can strengthen preference for domestic brands as an expression of social solidarity and identity. Because this is a secondary report, it should be read as a hypothesis for further testing rather than a settled finding.

4.6 Implications for Marketing Strategy

The following implications are the author's recommendations derived from the synthesis, not findings of the cited studies.

1. Segment by social context and product visibility, since social influence is likely to matter more for visible, status-related purchases (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Cunningham, 2023).
2. Build community-based and peer-based communication, including online brand communities, which Indarti (2025) identifies as an important channel for trust and engagement.
3. Treat religious and cultural legitimacy as a baseline requirement, for example clear halal information for Muslim consumers (Zuhri et al., 2023).
4. Position local brands on identity and solidarity cautiously, and test whether the appeal holds for the target segment (Indarti, 2025; Suwandi & Balqiah, 2023).

5. Test regional and religious subcultures separately instead of assuming one national consumer (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Sudaryanto et al., 2021).

4.7 Comparison of Prior Studies, Similarities, Differences, and Gaps

Study	Context	Approach	Reported finding on social or cultural factors
Sudaryanto et al. (2021)	Retail, East Java	Survey, 112 respondents	Hofstede dimensions significant; price primary
Chan & Raharja (2021)	Creative products, Bandung	Survey, 216 respondents	Cultural and social factors not significant
Nguyen & Ho (2022)	Foreign footwear, Vietnam	Survey, 257 respondents	Subjective norm raised emotional value and perceived quality
Cunningham (2023)	Premium alcohol	Survey, 251 responses	Subjective norms significant; status link strongest
Muhrayanti & Utama (2023)	Alfamart, Sumbawa Besar	Associative study	Social not significant; cultural positive; joint significant
Suwandi & Balqiah (2023)	Local cosmetics, Gen Z	Survey	Normative influence among mediators of loyalty
Zuhri et al. (2023)	Halal products, Banda Aceh	TPB, SEM	Attitude and subjective norm strongly related to intention

Study	Context	Approach	Reported finding on social or cultural factors
Matharu et al. (2024)	Organic food, India	Moderation analysis	Three of six Hofstede dimensions moderated
Zaky et al. (2024)	Online purchase, students	Survey, 108 respondents	Cultural and social not significant
Rialisnawati et al. (2024)	Indonesia, 2015 to 2024	Literature review	Socio-cultural values and technology reshape behavior
Indarti (2025)	Indonesia, collectivism	Review of 10 studies	Group identity and solidarity shape purchase and loyalty
Nandita et al. (2025)	Family decisions, India	Mixed methods	Children influence family purchases

Similarities. Studies that model specific social constructs, especially the subjective norm, consistently report significant effects on intention (Cunningham, 2023; Nguyen & Ho, 2022; Zuhri et al., 2023). Reviews agree that social and cultural values remain relevant while digital channels transform their expression (Indarti, 2025; Rialisnawati et al., 2024).

Differences. Studies using general cultural or social factor scales report mixed or null direct effects (Chan & Raharja, 2021; Muhrayanti & Sutama, 2023; Zaky et al., 2024), whereas Hofstede-based and norm-based designs more often detect effects (Sudaryanto et al., 2021; Matharu et al., 2024).

Gaps. First, the inconsistency of direct effects calls for designs that separate norms, recommendations, status, and cultural values and that test moderators such as product visibility. Second, samples are often students or young consumers (Indarti, 2025; Zaky et al., 2024). Third, longitudinal and non-urban studies are lacking (Rialisnawati et al.,

2024). Fourth, evidence on Indonesian family decision-making and on clothing is limited in this corpus. Fifth, the psychological mechanisms linking culture to purchase decisions need deeper study (Indarti, 2025).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This review set out to explain how social and cultural factors shape purchase decisions. For the first question, the literature suggests that social factors influence decisions mainly through subjective norms, reference-group expectations, status concerns, and family dynamics, usually by shaping attitudes and perceived value. For the second, culture, religion, and tradition appear to set the frame that defines acceptable and meaningful consumption, and in Indonesia this is visible in halal food choices, price sensitivity in religious regions, and the attraction of solidarity-based local brands. For the third, evidence is strongest for food and beauty, tentative for clothing, and mixed for direct effects across product categories. Because this was a literature review based largely on abstracts, no empirical effect sizes are claimed.

For companies, the recommendations are to segment by social context and product visibility, to use community and peer channels, to treat religious and cultural legitimacy as a baseline, and to validate local-identity appeals with their own target market. For future research, the recommendations are mixed-method or multi-group studies with specific social and cultural constructs, samples beyond students and major cities, comparisons across ethnic and religious subcultures, longitudinal designs, and a full systematic review using Google Scholar, SINTA, and Crossref with documented screening counts.

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