



CHB1203 Principles of Marketing

Topic 5: Consumer Behavior—Social and Cultural Influences

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Learning Outcomes for This Week

By the end of this topic, you will be able to achieve the following learning goals:

1

Identify

The key **social factors** that influence consumer behavior in everyday purchasing contexts.

2

Explain

How **culture and subculture** shape purchasing decisions across different communities.

3

Describe

The role of **social class, reference groups, and family** in consumer choices.

4

Recognize

Cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior within **ASEAN markets**.



Why Do Social & Cultural Factors Matter?

"Why do university students tend to buy the same smartphone brand as their friends — even if a cheaper option is available?"

The answer isn't always about price or quality. Consumers are social beings—their decisions are constantly shaped by the world around them. Three invisible forces are almost always at work:

Who Surrounds Us

Friends, family, and peers exert powerful normative pressure on what we buy.

What Our Culture Values

Deep-rooted cultural beliefs define what is desirable, appropriate, or aspirational.

Where We Stand in Society

Social position shapes the brands and products we use to signal identity.

Social and cultural forces are often the **invisible hand** behind every purchase decision—operating below the level of conscious awareness.



Overview: Social & Cultural Influences

Consumer behavior is shaped by two major categories of external forces. Together, they determine our **values, beliefs, and buying habits**—often without us even realizing it.

Cultural Factors



Culture

Core values and perceptions learned from society



Subculture

Shared identity within a larger cultural group



Social Class

Ordered divisions based on income, education, and occupation

Social Factors



Reference Groups

Peers, influencers, and aspirational figures



Family

The most powerful buying unit in society



Roles & Status

Products that communicate who we are



CULTURAL FACTORS 1 OF 3

Culture

Culture is defined as the **set of basic values, perceptions, wants, and behaviors** that a person learns from family and society. It is the foundation of all consumer behavior—setting the stage for what people consider normal, desirable, and appropriate.

Learned

Acquired through socialization, not inherited biologically

Shared

Common across members of a group or society

Transmitted

Passed from generation to generation over time

Normative

Defines what is considered "normal" behavior

ASEAN Examples 🇹🇼 🇸🇬 🇻🇳: In **Thailand**, respect for elders means children often defer to parents on major purchases. **Singapore's** achievement-oriented culture drives demand for premium brands. **Vietnam's** collectivist values favor group harmony over individual self-expression in buying choices.





Subculture

A subculture is a group of people who **share a value system** based on common life experiences and situations. Subcultures exist within larger cultures and create distinct market segments with unique needs and preferences.



Nationality

e.g., Malaysian Indian (Tamil) community with distinct Deepavali traditions, strong preferences for gold and jewelry purchases, and temple-related spending during festive seasons.



Geographic Region

e.g., Northern vs. Southern Thai consumers differ in food preferences and dialect-based messaging



Religion

e.g., Muslim consumers requiring Halal-certified products across food, cosmetics, and finance



Age Group

e.g., Gen Z responds to digital-native campaigns while Baby Boomers prefer trust-based messaging

💡 **Marketing Implication:** Shopee Thailand creates separate campaigns for Buddhist festivals (Songkran, Loy Krathong) and Muslim celebrations (Eid al-Fitr) — demonstrating how subcultural targeting drives deeper resonance and conversion.



Subcultural Diversity in ASEAN

Subcultures create unique market segments. Understanding these diverse groups allows for more targeted and resonant marketing strategies, as seen in these examples from across the ASEAN region:



Nationality & Festivals

Malaysian Indian (Tamil) communities demonstrate distinct Deepavali traditions, influencing purchases of gold, jewelry, and specific foods.



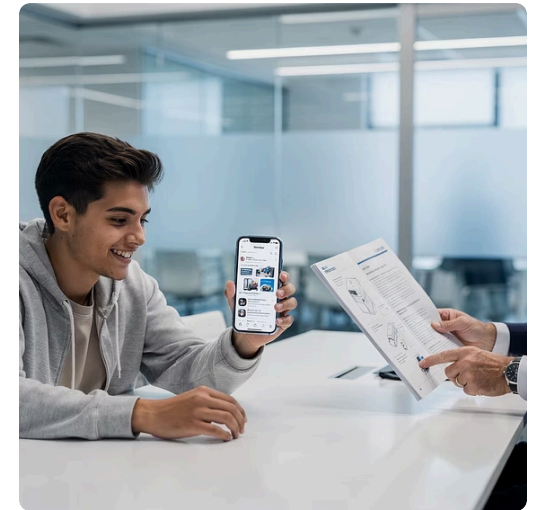
Religious Requirements

Muslim consumers across ASEAN demand Halal-certified products in various categories, from food to cosmetics and financial services.



Regional Preferences

Geographic subcultures, like Northern vs. Southern Thai consumers, exhibit differences in food tastes and preferred communication styles.



Age & Digital Habits

Different age groups, such as digital-native Gen Z and trust-focused Baby Boomers, respond to diverse marketing approaches and product features.



Social Class

Social class refers to **relatively permanent and ordered divisions** in a society whose members share similar values, interests, and behaviors. It is measured across multiple dimensions — not income alone.

How Social Class Is Measured

- **Income** — disposable earnings and wealth
- **Occupation** — professional prestige
- **Education** — academic attainment level
- **Wealth** — accumulated assets over time

Social Classes in Thailand

Class	Characteristics	Marketing Approach
Upper	Luxury goods, international brands	Exclusivity & prestige
Middle	Aspirational, value-conscious	Quality + affordability
Working	Price-sensitive, practical needs	Promotions & bundles

Social class influences **where** people shop, **what** they buy, and **how** they respond to marketing messages — shaping everything from store selection to brand aspiration.



SOCIAL FACTORS 1 OF 3

Reference Groups

Reference groups are **groups that have a direct or indirect influence** on a person's attitudes or behavior. They are one of the most powerful social forces shaping consumer decisions in the digital age.

Membership Groups

Groups you already belong to — family, friends, classmates, colleagues. Influence is direct and personal.

Aspirational Groups

Groups you *want* to belong to — celebrities, influencers, athletes. Drive aspirational purchases.

Dissociative Groups

Groups you want to distance yourself from. Influence by pushing consumers *away* from certain brands.

ASEAN Example 🎵: Thai K-pop fan communities (a powerful reference group) drive purchases of Korean beauty products, fashion, and food brands — demonstrating how aspirational group identity translates directly into purchasing behavior across ASEAN.



REFERENCE GROUPS IN ACTION

K-Pop Fandom: A Powerful Influence

K-Pop fan communities in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, represent a potent example of **aspirational and membership reference groups**. These highly engaged communities drive significant consumer behavior, shaping purchasing decisions far beyond just music.



Merchandise & Albums

Fans purchase official albums, lightsticks, and exclusive fan club merchandise to support their idols and display their allegiance.



Fashion & Beauty Trends

Idols are trendsetters. Fans emulate their fashion styles, makeup looks, and skincare routines, boosting demand for associated brands.



Concert & Event Spending

Significant expenditure on concert tickets, fan meet-ups, travel, and accommodation to see idols live, creating a thriving event economy.



Brand Endorsements

Idols' endorsements translate directly into sales across product categories, from food and beverages to electronics and apparel.

This dedicated engagement creates a loyal market segment, demonstrating how brands can leverage the power of fan culture to connect with consumers on a deeper, emotional level.



Family

Family is recognized as the **most important consumer-buying organization** in society. It shapes both long-term values and day-to-day purchase decisions — making it the single most influential reference group for marketers to understand.

Two Types of Family Influence

Family of Orientation

Parents and siblings shape **core values, attitudes, and long-term preferences** — including religion, politics, and brand loyalty formed in childhood.

Family of Procreation

Spouse and children have a **more direct influence on daily buying decisions** — groceries, appliances, vacations, and more.

Who Decides in a Thai Family?

Purchase Type	Key Decision Maker
Groceries & food	Mother / wife
Electronics	Husband / children
Family vacation	Joint decision
Children's education	Parents together

Marketing Tip: Identify who *initiates*, who *influences*, and who *decides* within the family unit.



Roles & Status

A **role** is the set of activities a person is expected to perform according to the people around them. **Status** is the general esteem that society assigns to that role. Together, they powerfully drive product choices.

People often buy products that **communicate their role and status** in society — transforming consumption into a form of social signaling.



Status Signaling at Work

A young professional in Bangkok buys a premium iPhone to signal competence and status among colleagues.




Role-Appropriate Dress

A university lecturer buys formal attire that aligns with expectations of their professional academic role.



Parental Identity

A parent buys a branded school bag to communicate care for their child's education and social standing.

 **Key Insight:** Marketers must understand the **symbolic meaning** of products within different social roles — because consumers are often buying an identity, not just a product.



Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's framework provides a systematic way to understand **cross-cultural differences** in values and behavior — essential for any marketer operating across international markets.

Dimension	Low Score	High Score
Power Distance	Flat hierarchy, equal treatment	Strict hierarchy, authority respected
Individualism	Collectivist — group first	Individualist — self first
Uncertainty Avoidance	Risk-tolerant, flexible	Risk-averse, rule-following
Long-Term Orientation	Tradition and past-focused	Future-focused, adaptable
Masculinity	Caring values, quality of life	Achievement, competition, success

High Power Distance

Authority figures in advertising (doctors, seniors, experts) are highly effective in Thailand.

Collectivist Culture

"Everyone is doing it" messaging and group endorsements resonate strongly across ASEAN.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Warranties, customer reviews, and money-back guarantees significantly reduce purchase anxiety.



CASE STUDY

Shopee Thailand

How Shopee Masters Social & Cultural Influences

Shopee is Southeast Asia's leading e-commerce platform, operating in 7+ ASEAN markets. Its success is a textbook demonstration of social and cultural marketing done right.

Social Influences at Work

Reference Groups

Shopee Live uses influencers and everyday sellers to create peer-based buying pressure and social proof.

Family

"Shopee for Mom" and family bundle deals target household purchase decision-makers.

Social Class

Premium "Shopee Mall" vs. budget flash deals — something for every class segment.

Cultural Influences at Work

Culture


Campaigns aligned with Songkran, Loy Krathong, and Chinese New Year drive seasonal purchasing spikes.

Subculture

Dedicated Halal product categories and Muslim-friendly seller programs serve ASEAN's Muslim consumers.

Social Class Signals

Shopee Mall (premium aspiration) vs. regular sellers (everyday value) — distinct class appeals.

 **Discussion Question:** Which reference group does Shopee target most effectively — and why?



Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior in ASEAN

ASEAN is not a monolithic market. Significant cultural differences between countries mean that a strategy that works in Thailand may fail in Indonesia or Singapore. Understanding these **nuances is non-negotiable** for international marketers.

Factor	Thailand 🇹🇭	Indonesia 🇮🇩	Singapore 🇸🇬	Vietnam 🇻🇳
Decision Style	Collective	Collective	More Individual	Collective
Price Sensitivity	Moderate	High	Lower	High
Brand Loyalty	Moderate	High	Moderate	Growing
Digital Behavior	High social media	High mobile	High fintech	High TikTok
Key Cultural Events	Songkran, 12.12	Lebaran (End of fasting), Harbolnas (Hari Belanja Online Nasional Sales)	CNY, GSS (Great Singapore Sale)	Tết (first day of the first Vietnamese lunisolar month), 11.11

📌 **Implication for International Business Students:** Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for any brand operating across ASEAN borders. Never assume one market mirrors another—always research the local cultural context first.



Cultural Sensitivity in Marketing

Ethical Responsibility in Cross-Cultural Marketing



Respect

Never mock or minimize cultural values — even unintentionally. What seems trivial to one culture may be sacred to another.



Research

Always research before you target a new cultural market. Assumptions lead to costly and reputation-damaging mistakes.



Represent

Portray diverse communities accurately and fairly — avoid stereotypes or tokenism in visuals and copy.



Reflect

Adapt visuals, language, and timing to match cultural context — including colors, symbols, and religious calendars.

⚠️ **Famous Cross-Cultural Mistakes:** Using **white** in a product launch in Southeast Asia (associated with mourning); using offensive **hand gestures** in advertising; ignoring **religious observances** in campaign timing. Ethical and culturally sensitive marketing is not just good practice — **it is a professional responsibility.**



Assignment 2: Cultural Consumer Analysis

Apply this week's frameworks to a real brand operating in ASEAN. Your analysis should demonstrate both conceptual understanding and cultural sensitivity.

Brand Requirements

- Operates in at least **one ASEAN country**
- Has a **clear target consumer group**
- Shows evidence of **social or cultural influence** on its consumers

Submission Details

Print out and submit at the assignment box (Dr. Nalin) in front of the lecturer's room on the 4th floor (the box is located next to the staircase)

Length: 1-2 pages (A4) with references

Group Work: 4-5 members

Submission Date: 3 April 2026

Required Structure

01

Brand Overview

What is the brand? Who are its core consumers?

03

Social Factors Analysis

Reference groups, family dynamics, roles, and status.

02

Cultural Factors Analysis

Culture, subculture, and social class as they apply to the brand's consumers.

04

Marketing Implications

How should the brand adapt its strategy based on your analysis?



Week 5 Summary

This week, we explored how the social and cultural environment shapes consumer behavior — often in ways consumers themselves are unaware of. Here are the core concepts to carry forward:

Culture

Shapes core values — learned from family and society, passed across generations.

Subculture

Shared identity within a larger culture — religion, nationality, age, and region.

Social Class

Influences aspirations, brand preferences, and shopping behavior across segments.

Reference Groups



Peers, influencers, and aspirational figures shape attitudes and purchase choices.

Family

The most powerful buying unit in ASEAN — with distinct roles by purchase type.

Roles & Status

Products signal who we are — consumers buy identity as much as function.

  **Coming Up — Week 6:** The Consumer Decision-Making Process — How do all these factors come together in the 5-stage buying model?

"Marketing is not about selling products. It's about understanding people."