

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder the world over

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Western culture is increasingly obsessed with physical appearance and beauty, but vanity is nothing new, nor is it limited to just one culture. Moreover, differences in our perception of physical beauty have an enormous impact on the fashion, cosmetics, and weight control industries, and more recently on aesthetic surgery trends. Understanding how culture and region alter the perception of beauty is therefore not only of anthropological and social interest but underpins multibillion dollar industries across the globe.

According to Anil Mathur of Hofstra University in New York and colleagues there and at the City University of New York, marketers can hope to expand their reach into overseas markets but they cannot build brand equity if they lack regional knowledge and an understanding of consumer characteristics and preferences across cultures. Mathur and colleagues have now tested a physical vanity scale across China, India and USA and have established that the scale could be used across culturally diverse countries.

"Given that modern consumer research and theory building have been largely conducted in the West, a recurring concern is the need to verify if the same theories and findings are applicable to other non-Western cultures," the team explains.

The team found that while the details concerning [beauty](#) perception may differ, their data supports the notion that physical vanity is a universal construct that applies across cultures. "While the research found that not

all measurement properties of the physical vanity scale match exactly across the three countries studied in this research, we have demonstrated the value of physical vanity scales in terms of reliability and validity," the team says.

"Physical vanity relates to a person's, often excessive, concern for [physical appearance](#) and/or positive view of appearance," says Mathur. "The study presented in the paper attempted to examine whether a scale developed in the West (Netemeyer et al, 1995) to measure physical vanity could also be used as a consumer measure in non-Western cultures. Data collected from three culturally diverse countries (China, India and USA) were used to assess this and verify if physical vanity is a universal trait. The results from a series of confirmatory factor analyses indicate that the physical vanity scale is indeed applicable to culturally diverse countries."

More information: "Physical vanity across cultures: measurement and validation" in *J. Global Business Advancement*, 2010, 3, 313-324

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