



ARTICLE

Sociocultural Factors Hindering Public Communication of Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

Milen Filipov

KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Adel Askarkyzy

KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Mehdi Aqarabi

University of Tehran, Iran; KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the obstacles hindering the promotion of positive body image among women in Kazakhstan by focusing on sociocultural factors influencing their perceptions. Using a network sampling method, this descriptive study surveyed women aged 18–50 in Almaty and Astana, Kazakhstan's two largest cities. Participants were recruited through a questionnaire link shared on Instagram¹ by four enablers, which reached 1,000 potential respondents and resulted in 135 returned questionnaires of which 94 were fully completed, thus achieving a 13.5% response rate and a 9.4% completion rate. The study was conducted with a 90% confidence level. The findings indicated that social media, family influence, and the fashion industry were primary obstacles to promoting positive body image in Kazakhstan. While there has been some progress in accepting positive body image in Almaty and Astana, entrenched cultural norms continue to heavily influence perceptions. Young Kazakhstani women often face negative scrutiny if their bodies do not conform to the thin ideal.

¹ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.
По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

KEYWORDS

Kazakh sociocultural factors, public communication barriers, positive body image, mainstream media, social media, family influence

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers would like to thank the Centre for Media and Communications at KIMEP University for its support in conducting the study.

Introduction

Body perception plays a significant role in shaping women's mental and emotional well-being and influences various aspects of their lives, including self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. Cultural and societal influences from the media, fashion, and family reinforce unrealistic body standards and exacerbate their adverse effects on female well-being (Nazarali & Majumdar, 2020). Comparing oneself to these standards can lead to dissatisfaction and a distorted view of one's body. The existing literature on positive body image has primarily examined the phenomenon from psychological perspectives and explored the influence of media and social media. In modern psychology, the term "body image" typically encompasses four main components: perceptual (apprehension), affective (feelings), cognitive (thoughts), and behavioral (actions) related to one's body (Tylka, 2019).

Body image includes two mutually exclusive aspects: negative and positive (Rogers et al., 2018). Tantleff-Dunn et al. (2011) connected negative body image with normative discontent. It is characterized by persistent dissatisfaction and preoccupation with one's body, decreased self-esteem, disgust, and disappointment with appearance (Hewitt & Murray, 2024). The sociocultural model of body image is critical in developing and maintaining a negative body image by internalizing an ideal thin body standard (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Developing negative body image was more likely for women than men (Swami & Knowles, 2014).

Tort-Nasarre et al. (2023) defined the positive body image as a "multidimensional construct that represents love and respect, acceptance and appreciation of individuals and feeling comfortable with their body, independently of their actual physical appearance, as well as their ability to interpret messages in a way that protects the body" (p. 2).

Positive body image became a focus of psychological research at the turn of the 21st century. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) identified several attributes of a positive body image: appreciation of individual uniqueness, lack of responsiveness to negative comments and media standards, and a focus on one's body positive features. When women focused mainly on positive information and disregarded negative influences, their investment in their bodies lessened, leading to an improved body image, which demonstrates its fluidity. Women also influenced each other positively by encouraging body appreciation, surrounding themselves with supportive individuals, and maintaining their health, which increased positive input.

Mainstream media and social media images significantly influence body image. Polivy and Herman (2002) suggested that media representations of the ideal body contribute to the internalization of thin body ideals and lead to body dissatisfaction (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). Traditional media, such as television programs, magazines, music videos, and films, typically emphasize ideal body shapes. Tiggemann (2005) found that reading fashion magazines leads to a more robust internalization of a thin body, whereas watching television influenced behavioral intentions regarding dieting and excessive exercise. Consistent with Tiggemann's (2005) findings, Grabe and Hyde (2009) found that television shows often featured characters and celebrities with ideal bodies. However, according to Bonfanti et al. (2025) in social comparison theory, people compare themselves with peers rather than models, making social media's peer comparisons especially relevant to body image issues (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Want, 2009).

Kazakhstan presents an exciting research case due to the increasing studies on women's roles and gender equality. However, little scientific attention has been given to Kazakhstani women's body image, particularly positive ones. The only two relevant studies are by Imankulova and Kudaibergenova (2021), who examined the connection between age, self-esteem, and body image satisfaction. They found that age is not a defining factor in how women perceive their bodies. Instead, what emerged as a norm across demographics is a sense of "normative body dissatisfaction," that was largely influenced by societal and media ideals of beauty. Although higher self-esteem tends to correlate positively with a more favorable body image, self-confidence alone does not guarantee high satisfaction with one's appearance, as even women with high self-esteem may still hold moderate views of their own attractiveness. Interestingly, body satisfaction appeared to be unaffected by family or social status, with no significant relationship to being married or having children. Instead, effective coping strategies and a positive self-perception played a crucial role in fostering a healthier body image and response to criticism.

The second relevant research study was performed by Amantayeva et al. (2019), who investigated body corrections in plastic surgery and cosmetic improvements. In the sociocultural and business contexts, the researchers investigated the evolving beauty industry in contemporary Kazakhstani society, where beauty ideals encompass physical attributes and broader societal perceptions. They emphasized that beauty is increasingly viewed as an advantage in the competition for social acceptance and success. The study noted a significant role of Kazakh men in assessing women's attractiveness, influencing societal beauty standards and pressuring women to conform.

However, neither study addressed the sociocultural barriers to building a positive body image in Kazakhstan. This research aims to bridge that gap by exploring the following question: What are the strongest factors hindering public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan? Additional research questions (RQ) are included:

RQ1: Which type of media—mainstream or social media—in Kazakhstan exerts stronger hindering effects on positive body image?

RQ2: Is the family circle hindering or helping the positive body image in Kazakhstan?

RQ3: What influence does the fashion industry in Kazakhstan exert on positive body image?

To address the research questions, the following research objectives were set:

- To conduct an extensive literature review on positive body image;
- To describe the sociocultural context in Kazakhstan, which impacts the Kazakh female body.

Literature Review

The Female Body in the Sociocultural Context of Kazakhstan

The portrayal of women and their appearance in Kazakh society has deep historical roots, which is reflected in Kazakh proverbs or idioms. For example, Khanipova (2021) in her study of the image of women in folklore and myths cites the following proverb: “Erkektiñ sulýlyǵy-aqylda, áieldin aqyly-sulýlyqta” [The beauty of a man is in his mind, the mind of a woman is in her beauty]. This suggests that women should cultivate inner and outer beauty, possessing intelligence, patience, hard work, generosity, wisdom, and household efficiency while remaining attractive and well-groomed.

In Kazakh folklore, the beauty of Kazakh women and girls is often characterized by white skin, symbolizing aristocracy and the absence of physical labor, as well as physical attributes such as long necks, thin waists, delicate hands, thick hair, and almond-shaped eyes (Ibadullaeva, 2022). Brovkina (2016) notes that the physical characteristics of Kazakh women have evolved due to changes in lifestyle and diet. Historically, the harsh conditions of the steppe required women to have well-developed muscle mass, short stature, and strong physique. Contemporary Kazakhstani women show meticulous care in household management, emphasizing good health, resilience, and the ability to endure. Modern Kazakh beauty standards have changed significantly under the influence of the media during the Soviet era. In Russian-language media, positive descriptors such as “luxurious,” “ideal,” “stunning,” and “fantastic” are common, which promote a slender woman as the standard of beauty. Conversely, terms such as “gained weight” and “non-model figure” are often used in a negative way (Isina & Beysembayeva, 2023).

Media and Positive Body Image

Mainstream and social media play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of body image, with both flourishing in Kazakhstan. Mainstream media in Kazakhstan benefits from significant opportunities, driven by the fact that political and business elites and the upper echelons of the national intelligentsia and bureaucracy engage with these media platforms (Akhmetova et al., 2020). Additionally, “3,432 periodicals, 660 online media and 249 electronic media were registered in Kazakhstan as of October 19, 2020” (Bokayev et al., 2022, p. 5). Therefore, it can be inferred that the mainstream media could strongly influence attitudes toward positive body image in Kazakhstan.

Van Vonderen and Kinnally (2012) examined the relation between media consumption and body dissatisfaction among female undergraduate students focusing on the internal factor of self-esteem and such external factors as peer and parental

attitudes. Their findings revealed that while comparing oneself to media figures was associated with internalizing the thin ideal, this was less significant compared to the influence of peer attitudes and self-esteem. Peer comparison and self-esteem were found to be stronger predictors of body dissatisfaction, which underscores the significant impact of social and environmental factors on body image perceptions.

David et al. (2009) explored the influence of images of thin models on individuals' body perceptions and self-esteem. This mixed-method study revealed that exposure to thin fashion images increased participants' body dissatisfaction and negatively affected their perceptions of others' bodies, resulting in perceived pressure to conform to media stereotypes. This underscores the importance of media literacy initiatives to help individuals critically evaluate and challenge unrealistic beauty standards.

Martin and Gentry (1997) investigated how idealized models in magazine advertising impact preteen and adolescent girls' self-perceptions and body image. The study revealed that these images negatively affected the girls' self-esteem and body image, with many expressing a desire to emulate the models despite recognizing the unrealistic nature of the beauty standards. However, Halliwell and Dittmar (2004) found that advertisements featuring thin models increased body-focused anxiety more than those with average-sized models or no models. As a result, advertisers can use more diverse body types without compromising ad effectiveness. This study indicated prospects for more inclusive advertising practices in order to reduce the negative impact of idealized body standards on women's psychological well-being.

Social Media

Kazakhstan demonstrates substantial digital connectivity with 18.19 million Internet users and a 92.3% Internet penetration rate. The country has 14.10 million active social media users, which represents almost 72% of the total population. Social media has thus surpassed mainstream media in influence. TikTok² and Instagram³ are the two dominant social networks, with 14.10 million users aged 18 and above on TikTok and 12.10 million on Instagram³ (Kemp, 2024). Consequently, social media arguably exert a stronger and more rapid influence on positive body image than traditional media.

Kudaibergenova (2019) explored the influence of social networks, particularly Instagram³, on body image and sexual identity within authoritarian contexts, focusing on the interplay with national concepts of power and individual identity in post-Soviet states, particularly in Russia and Kazakhstan. The study analyzed Instagram³ accounts of popular Kazakhstani and Russian bloggers to examine how these platforms blend globalized gender norms with traditional practices. It highlighted the role of social networks in shaping perceptions and opinions and noted governmental efforts to control access and regulate online discussions because of their significant societal influence.

² TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

³ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Ayupova et al. (2018) compared the impact of Facebook⁴ on body image and eating disorders in Kazakhstan and the USA highlighting the differential influence of social media across cultural contexts. Through surveys and interviews, they discovered that increased Facebook⁴ usage correlated with higher body dissatisfaction and a greater risk of disordered eating behaviors in both Kazakhstani and American participants. However, the mechanisms and cultural influences differed: Kazakhstani participants were swayed by both Facebook⁴ imagery and local beauty standards, whereas American participants were more affected by the competitive nature of social media's portrayal of perfection. These results underscore the complex relationship between social media use, societal norms, and self-esteem issues, and stress the importance of culturally tailored programs to enhance self-esteem and promote healthy eating habits to counteract social media's adverse effects.

In a different sociocultural context, Belogai et al. (2022) investigated how societal and media stereotypes promoting unrealistically thin bodies impact the perceptions of preschool girls during their early stages of body image formation. The study emphasizes the role of sociocultural and educational factors, including media and the Internet, in shaping individuals' body image perceptions, mainly by disseminating unattainable beauty standards. The findings indicated that exposure to images of unrealistically thin bodies influenced the girls' preferences; they showed a distorted perception of their bodies and ideals as early as ages 5–6. This study underscores the significant impact of societal and media influences on shaping young children's early perceptions of body image.

Kraus and Martins (2017) conducted a systematic content analysis of body images in online fashion blogs in proposing that these platforms might present a healthier alternative to the idealized images in traditional media. By examining images of 481 individuals from five street-style blogs, the study focused on authentic style, featuring ordinary people without Photoshop⁵ who were not professional models or celebrities. The analysis revealed that a majority of women (72%) and men (62%) were below-average weight, and 60% of women conformed to traditional gender stereotypes (Kraus & Martins, 2017, p. 360). The study concluded that, despite their reputation for featuring "regular people," these blogs perpetuated the same beauty ideals as mainstream media.

Family and Positive Body Image

The Kazakh family, the nuclear family and the extended family, is a complex system of interpersonal relations. The nuclear family connections prevail due to the individual's recognition, respect, and identification among family members. "This is manifested in the prevailing family- and children-centric orientation, respect and veneration of

⁴ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

⁵ Photoshop™ is a trademark of Adobe Systems Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. <https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop.html>

older family members ... and on the degree of relationship to the father, mother or the spouse” (Kabakova & Maulsharif, 2012, p. 640). Therefore, it can be assumed that the opinion and comments of elderly nuclear family members, particularly the mother, on young women’s body image has significantly influence. In a different cultural context, this assertion is also true. For example, Deek et al. (2023) examined the impact of family dynamics and sociocultural factors on young women’s body image and eating habits. The research focused on the roles of mothers and sisters in fostering body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors in Australia. Their findings revealed the significant influence of mothers and sisters highlighting the impact of “fat talk” on young women’s body image and eating behaviors. This research emphasized the importance of familial factors in shaping body image and eating habits and suggested the potential for family-based interventions to foster positive body image and healthy eating practices among young women.

Arroyo and Andersen (2016) focused their research on the effects of conversations about appearance between mothers and daughters on body image outcomes. They aimed to understand how discussing weight and age between mothers and daughters influences their behaviors and perceptions of body image. The study specifically examined the role of family communication dynamics within mother–daughter relationships. The researchers applied actor–partner interdependence models to analyze the data. Their study revealed significant correlations between mothers’ and daughters’ fat talk, indicating a shared pattern of appearance-related discussions with negative body image outcomes. Moreover, mothers’ fat talk was positively correlated with daughters’ bulimia and body dissatisfaction. These findings underscore the detrimental impact of appearance-related communication within mother–daughter relationships on body image outcomes.

Pareek and Rema (2023) studied the connection between family dynamics and body image among young adults. They examined how the family, as a core institution that offers emotional support and influences social development, affects the formation of body image perceptions. The research emphasized that positive elements of the family environment, including emotional support through praise and encouragement, can protect against negative sociocultural influences and promote a positive body image in adolescents. In contrast, critical comments about appearance from family members were associated with negative body image and low self-esteem, which could adversely affect eating behaviors and overall well-being.

Curtis and Loomans (2014) investigated body image dissatisfaction among young women in New Zealand and noted its prevalence and adverse effects were akin to those in other Western countries. The study found that body image dissatisfaction, defined as a discrepancy between perceived and ideal body appearance, extends beyond traditional concerns of being “overweight.” The study participants reported that comments from friends, familial critiques, well-meaning advice, and the internalization of societal ideals all contributed to their body dissatisfaction. Despite the small sample size, this research underscored the complex interplay of familial and peer influences on body image perceptions among young women.

Akbar et al. (2022) examined the impact of family, peer, and media pressures on body image dissatisfaction among employed women. They surveyed 250 employed women to evaluate how these sociocultural influences predict body image dissatisfaction within this demographic. The findings highlighted the socially constructed and dynamic nature of cultural influences demonstrating that societal pressures regarding appearance increase the likelihood of body dissatisfaction in this group. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of self-esteem and showed that women with lower self-esteem were more susceptible to body dissatisfaction than those with higher self-esteem. This research highlighted the influence of family dynamics, social pressures, and psychological factors on body image perceptions among employed women.

Fashion and Positive Body Image

The fashion phenomenon significantly shapes social life by designating particular objects and individuals as culturally significant, which influence behavioral norms and various social dimensions. Fashion trends dominate diverse spheres of life and are pivotal in molding societal behaviors and norms (Ayupova et al., 2018; Hollett et al., 2023). Regrettably, these influences often lead women to perceive their bodies through societal expectations, which negatively impacts their body image, as underscored by various studies.

For instance, Ajwani (2020) explored the connection between clothing psychology and body image perception to reveal that attire serves multiple functions beyond mere protection and influences how others perceive individuals and provides psychological satisfaction. The study highlighted how societal norms frequently link clothing choices with body image projection, even though individual perceptions may not always align with societal standards. Ajwani emphasized that positive body image correlates with self-acceptance and emotional well-being, while negative body image can result in reduced self-confidence and potential depressive states. Similarly, Rudd and Lennon (2001) illustrated how women's dissatisfaction with their bodies affects their clothing choices, particularly in larger sizes that often lack fashionable options tailored to prevailing ideals.

The rise of virtual fashion influencers has perpetuated stereotypes and gender hierarchies (Shin & Lee, 2023) by examining and critiquing their portrayal of bodies in the digital realm. Shin and Lee found that virtual fashion influencers utilize social platforms to affect fashion trends and ideals, thus blurring the distinction between virtual and real identities. The virtual interactions facilitated by online shopping channels have also influenced women's perceptions of body image (Hollett et al., 2023).

Methods

This descriptive research examined the factors hindering the public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan. Given the understudied nature of this phenomenon, the research aimed to identify and describe these barriers by surveying a convenient sample of women aged 18–50 residing in Almaty and Astana, the two

largest cities in Kazakhstan. The age limit was selected due to cultural perception of Kazakh women should conform to a socially acceptable standard of slimness throughout life. Unlike older women, who experience a degree of cultural acceptance for weight gain with age, younger women face stricter expectations to maintain a slim figure. However, even as they age, women are still expected to retain a feminine appearance (Kosherbayeva, 2019).

Descriptive research was the most appropriate as it allowed for a detailed depiction of a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015) without focusing on causal relationships (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019).

Data Collection Instruments

A structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed to gather data on respondents' perceptions of sociocultural influences, the impact of mainstream and social media, and the fashion industry's influence on positive body image in Kazakhstan. The 4-point Likert scale was selected due to the limited funding of this pilot research and compliance with the study's objectives. By removing the neutral option, the researchers aimed to minimize central tendency bias. Following Garland's (1991) recommendation, they increased response clarity by requiring the convenient sample to commit to specific attitudinal or behavioral responses. Consequently, the researchers intentionally avoided a 5-point or 7-point Likert scale, despite Croasmun and Ostrom's (2011) findings on the high internal reliability these options typically offer.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

1. *Demographics*: Age, city of residence, and occupation.
2. *Media Consumption*: Frequency and type of media consumed (mainstream vs. social media).
3. *Sociocultural Influences*: Perceptions of body image-related comments and behaviors from family, friends, and significant others, as well as the cultural acceptance of body types outside the thin standard in Kazakhstan.
4. *Fashion Industry Impact*: Attitudes of Kazakhstani designers toward bodies outside the thin standard and the importance of clothing for self-concept determination.

Sampling and Data Collection

A convenience sample was used to conduct the survey due to resource and time constraints; therefore, representativeness was not the primary objective. According to the Kazakhstan National Bureau of Statistics, Almaty has a population of 2,228,677, of which 1.1 million are women, and Astana has a population of 1,430,117, with 724,200 women (Bureau of National Statistics, 2024).

Participants were recruited with a network sampling strategy. Four enablers were selected to share the Google⁶ Forms survey link with their followers. To qualify as an enabler, individuals had to be female, within the specified age range,

⁶ Google™ and the Google Logo are trademarks of Google Inc. in the U.S. and other countries.

and have at least 100 female Instagram⁷ followers. Two of the enablers were required to be between the ages of 18 and 32, who were acquaintances of one of the researchers. The other two needed to be between 33 and 50 and were close relatives of the same researcher. Thus, the researchers tried to cover the age range of the sample. The survey was administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was shared on the Instagram⁷ pages of the four enablers, reaching a total of 1,000 potential respondents. The study period was the second week of March 2024. The study focused on Instagram⁷ for its large user base in Kazakhstan, with 12.1 million users, representing 61.4% of the population, and 59.9% of its audience being women (Kemp, 2024). By comparison, Facebook⁸ had only 2.6 million users during the same period in early 2024. Despite TikTok's popularity, particularly among 18–24-year-olds with a reach of 63.4% in that age group, it was not selected for this study. Although specific data on the overlap of TikTok and Instagram⁷ users in Kazakhstan is unavailable, the high popularity of both platforms suggests that many TikTok users likely also have Instagram⁷ profiles, especially among younger audiences who frequently use multiple platforms.

The survey took approximately seven minutes to complete. A total of 135 responses were received, of which 41 were incomplete (31 from men and 10 from women) and excluded from the data. Consequently, 94 fully completed questionnaires were collected, yielding a response rate of 13.5% and a 9.4% completion rate. The confidence level was set at 90%, respectively, and the margin of error was 8.10%.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The survey involved 94 female respondents from Almaty and Astana. Of these, slightly more than 69% ($n = 65$) resided in Astana, while 31% ($n = 29$) were from Almaty.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group of respondents were women aged 21–23, who accounted for more than 33% ($n = 31$) of the total number of survey participants. This was followed by women aged 18–20, who constituted 17% ($n = 16$) of the participants. Approximately 12% ($n = 11$) of the respondents were aged 48–50. Women aged 30–32 and 42–44 years represented slightly more than 8% ($n = 8$) of the total. Women aged 24–26 comprised slightly more than 7% ($n = 7$) of the sample, while those aged 33–35 constituted slightly above 6% ($n = 6$). The smallest groups were women aged 36–38 and 45–47 years, each accounting for about 2% ($n = 2$) of the respondents (Table 1).

⁷ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

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Table 1
The Distribution of the Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18–20	16	17.0
21–23	31	33.0
24–26	7	7.4
27–29	3	3.2
30–32	8	8.5
33–35	6	6.4
36–38	2	2.1
39–41	0	0
42–44	8	8.5
45–47	2	2.1
48–50	11	11.7
Total	94	100.0

Regarding employment status, a majority of respondents, 55.3% ($n = 52$), worked full-time. Approximately 27% ($n = 25$) were university students. Freelancers comprised 7% ($n = 7$) of the sample, and just over 6% ($n = 6$) were housewives. Only 3% ($n = 3$) of the participants were engaged in part-time work, and one respondent was unemployed.

Results

Sociocultural Background for Acceptance of Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

Of the respondents, 67% ($n = 61$) agreed (34%) or fully agreed (33%) that there is a tendency toward accepting positive body image in Kazakhstan. However, 29.8% ($n = 28$) disagreed with the statement, and 3.2% absolutely disagreed with it (Table 2).

Table 2
Tendency Toward Accepting Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

Answer Option	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	3	3.2
Disagree	28	29.8
Agree	32	33.0
Absolutely agree	31	34.0
Total	94	100.0

Regarding location distribution, nearly 56% ($n = 17$) of the Almaty respondents and 70% ($n = 46$) of the Astana respondents agreed or absolutely agreed with the above statement. However, nearly 38% of Almaty respondents ($n = 11$) disagreed with the statement compared. From the total of Astana respondents, 35% ($n = 23$) agreed that there was a tendency toward positive body image, whereas 26% ($n = 17$) disagreed (Table 3).

Table 3
Tendency Towards Accepting Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan Across Almaty and Astana

Answer Option	Almaty	Astana	Both Cities
Absolutely disagree	1	2	3
Disagree	11	17	28
Agree	9	23	32
Absolutely agree	8	23	31
Total	29	65	94

Nearly 61% ($n = 57$) of the respondents concurred that cultural norms in Kazakhstan affect the acceptance of a positive body image. Of these, 50% ($n = 47$) agreed, and almost 11% ($n = 10$) absolutely agreed. Only 34% ($n = 32$) disagreed, and slightly more than 5% ($n = 5$) absolutely disagreed (Table 4).

Table 4
Impact of Cultural Norms Across the Age Categories of Respondents

Answer Option	Age											Total by answer option
	18–20	21–23	24–26	27–29	30–32	33–35	36–38	39–41	42–44	45–47	48–50	
Absolutely disagree	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Disagree	6	17	3	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	32
Agree	7	10	3	1	4	4	1	0	6	2	9	47
Absolutely agree	1	3	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	10
Total by age category	16	31	7	3	8	6	2	0	8	2	11	94

The highest disagreement regarding the cultural influence on positive body image was observed among the 21–23-year-old respondents. Specifically, 18% ($n = 17$) of this age group disagreed, representing nearly 55% of all respondents ($n = 31$) within this age range.

Despite the emerging tendency toward accepting positive body image in Kazakhstan, nearly 65% ($n = 61$) expressed the opinion that Kazakhstani women are negatively judged if their body goes against the thin body ideal; 35% ($n = 33$) held an opposing opinion (Table 5). The data also indicated that young respondents aged 18–29 concurred that women were judged if their bodies did not conform to the thin body standard prevalent in Kazakhstan. In contrast, female respondents over 30 years old disagreed with this perspective. However, approximately 60% of the respondents did not feel compelled to believe that they should dislike their bodies if they did not conform to the thin body ideal. Nevertheless, nearly 40% of the respondents concurred with this statement.

Table 5
Answers to the Questionnaire Statement “Kazakhstani Women Are Negatively Judged If They Do Not Fit Into the Thin Body Ideal”

Answer Option	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	4	4.3
Disagree	29	30.9
Agree	43	45.7
Absolutely agree	18	19.1
Total	94	100.0

Although approximately 40% of the respondents did not report feeling pressured to dislike their bodies if they did not conform to the thin body ideal (Table 6), nearly 80% ($n = 75$) indicated that they edit their body discrepancies in visual or video content shared on Instagram⁹. In contrast, slightly more than 20% did not edit their bodies in pictures or videos for social media. Notably, the largest group of women who agreed with using filters for their visual or video content were aged 18–29, most of whom were university students. Conversely, 20% of participants disagreed with this practice. The majority of female respondents who disagreed were over 40 years old.

Table 6
Answers to the Questionnaire Statement “Kazakhstani Women Do Not Feel Pressured to Dislike Their Bodies If They Do Not Conform to the Thin Body Ideal”

Answer Option	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely disagree	6	6.4
Disagree	50	53.2
Agree	28	29.8
Absolutely agree	10	10.6
Total	94	100.0

Kazakhstani Media and Positive Body Image

The data yielded inconclusive results regarding whether Kazakhstani mass media promotes the acceptance and appreciation of diverse female body types, distinct from the thin body ideal. This uncertainty arose because nearly 47% ($n = 44$) of the respondents did not engage with mass media. Among those who did consume mass media content, approximately 27% expressed disagreement, while an equal percentage (27%) agreed that Kazakhstani mass media promoted positive body image. However, nearly 80% ($n = 75$) of respondents agreed that women in Kazakhstan edit their body mismatch with the thin body standard for social media (Instagram⁹, TikTok).

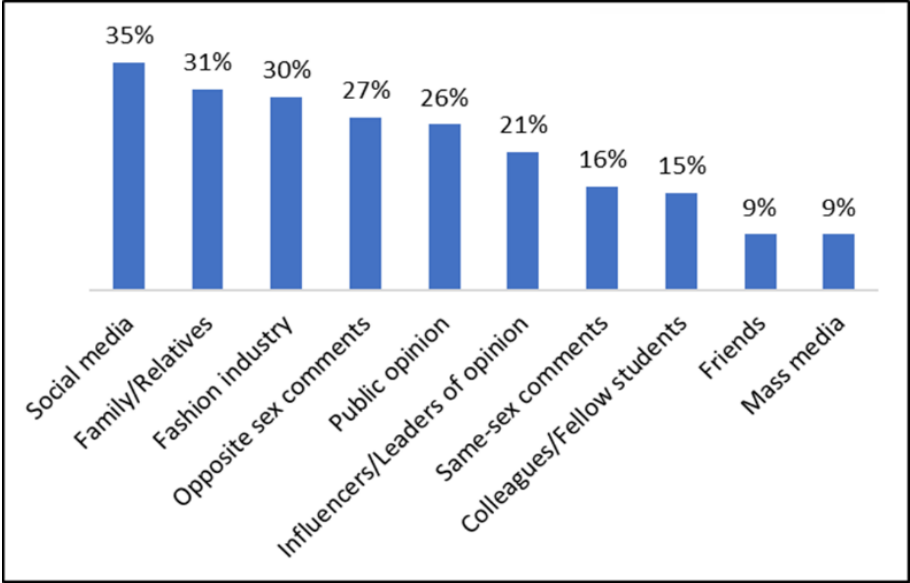
⁹ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Factors Negatively Impacting the Positive Body Image

The survey results identified three primary factors contributing to a negative impact on positive body image among Kazakhstani women. *Social media* (Instagram¹⁰, TikTok) was indicated by 35% ($n = 33$) of respondents, *family/relatives* by 31% ($n = 29$), and the *fashion industry* by 30% ($n = 28$). *Comments from the opposite sex* were cited by 27% ($n = 25$) of respondents. *Public opinion* was highlighted as a significant barrier by 26% ($n = 24$) of participants, while influencers were mentioned by 21% ($n = 20$). Additionally, 16% ($n = 15$) of respondents indicated that *comments from the same sex* had a negative impact. *Colleagues/fellow students* were considered a factor by 15% ($n = 14$) of respondents. The *mass media* and *friends* were reported to have the least negative impact on positive body image, with each indicated by nearly 9% ($n = 8$) of the respondents (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Factors Negatively Influencing Positive Body Image by Kazakhstani Women



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Fashion Industry in Kazakhstan and Positive Body Image

In the survey, 57% ($n = 54$) of the respondents agreed that Kazakhstani fashion designers prefer bodies that conform to the thin body ideal, while 42% ($n = 40$) disagreed. Notably, more respondents absolutely agreed ($n = 16$) than those who absolutely disagreed ($n = 1$). The age group 18–23 had the highest agreement, with many respondents indicating that fashion designers favor the thin body ideal. Moreover, the data showed that 61% ($n = 57$) of respondents confirmed that Kazakhstani fashion

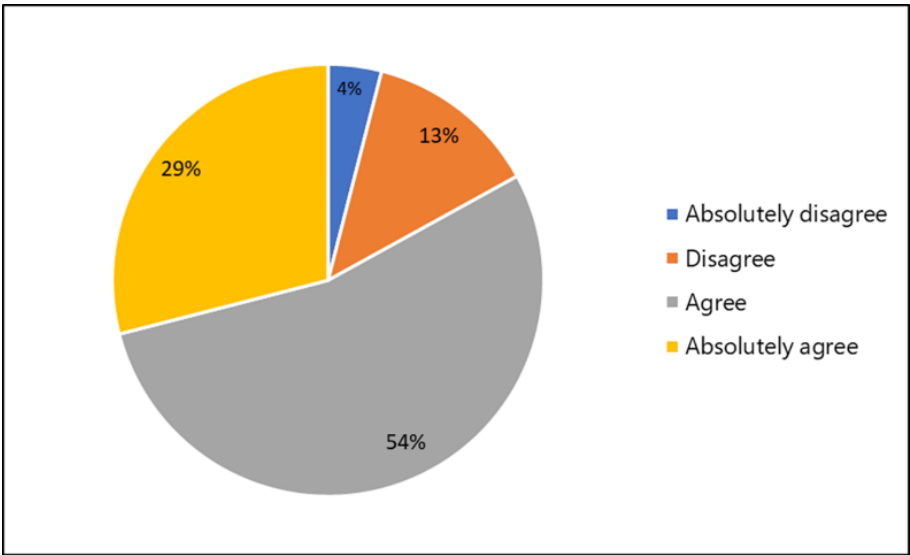
¹⁰ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

promotes the thin body stereotypes, while 39% disagreed. There was a 14% difference between the two extremes.

Fashion was indicated as a primary factor affecting positive body image, as respondents considered clothing an essential factor for the perception of their bodies. The data revealed that 83% ($n = 78$) of the respondents considered clothing a critical factor in their perception of their bodies. For 43% ($n = 40$), clothes were absolutely essential, and for 41% ($n = 38$), clothes were essential. Conversely, 17% ($n = 16$) of the respondents indicated that clothing was not significant for their body perception, with 12% ($n = 11$) stating it was unimportant and 5% ($n = 5$) indicating it was absolutely unimportant. Moreover, 83% ($n = 76$) of respondents considered clothing an expression of a woman's body perception. In contrast, just over 17% ($n = 16$) disagreed with this statement (Figure 2). Additionally, 47% ($n = 44$) of respondents expressed a desire to have a body as thin as the models hired by fashion designers to promote their clothes, while 53% ($n = 50$) did not share this desire.

Figure 2

Clothes as an Expression of the Female Body in Kazakhstan



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Discussion

This research aimed to identify the most influential factors hindering the public communication of positive body image in Kazakhstan. While there is some progress toward acceptance of positive body image, particularly in Almaty and Astana, this trend is heavily influenced by prevailing cultural norms. Unfortunately, young Kazakhstani women, particularly those in their 20s, often face negative judgment if their bodies deviate from the thin body ideal. Within this sociocultural context, the survey results indicated that social media, family/relatives, and the fashion industry are the three most significant barriers to promoting positive body image in Kazakhstan. Social pressure

frequently compels women to be concerned about their appearance and pushes them to strive to conform to societal ideals of beauty (Runfola et al., 2013).

Social Media

RQ1: Which type of media—mainstream or social media—in Kazakhstan exerts stronger hindering effects on positive body image? Social media emerged as the leading barrier to public communication of positive body image, which is consistent with findings by Fardouly et al. (2018), who suggested that Instagram¹¹ use may distort women's beliefs and attitudes toward their appearance. Our research found that nearly 80% of respondents edited their pictures to minimize discrepancies with the thin body standard before uploading them on Instagram¹¹ or TikTok. The study results were inconclusive regarding the role of Kazakhstani mass media in promoting acceptance and appreciation of positive body image distinct from the thin body ideal. However, the fact that half of the respondents did not consume traditional media content suggested that mainstream media in Kazakhstan played a marginal role.

Family/Relatives

RQ2: Is the family circle hindering or helping the positive body image in Kazakhstan? The immediate and extended family members strongly influenced the body's appearance in Kazakhstan. This finding aligns with Abraczinskas et al. (2012), who suggested that family dynamics significantly influence fostering a child's positive body image, with mothers playing a crucial role in shaping their children's body image perceptions and beliefs (Bäck, 2011). Therefore, public communication about positive body image can face strong opposition. This opposition is intensified by judgmental comments of the opposite sex, particularly for young women, and the general public opinion.

Fashion and Positive Body Image in Kazakhstan

RQ3: What influence does the fashion industry in Kazakhstan exert on positive body image? Fashion was identified as the third factor hindering positive body image in Kazakhstan. Fashion designers were believed to favor models who conform to the thin body ideal, thereby promoting thin body stereotypes. Consequently, nearly half of the respondents expressed a desire to have a body as thin as the models used by fashion designers. This finding is consistent with Rudd and Lennon's (2001) observations regarding women's dissatisfaction with their bodies related to difficulties in finding clothing and accessories that enhance their appearance. Most respondents considered clothing an essential factor in their perception of their bodies. This aligns with the findings of Guy and Banim (2000) regarding the sense of self-expression women experienced with their clothing choices. Additionally, respondents viewed clothes as an expression of who they were as women, which was in line with the role clothing played in priming self-knowledge and self-perception (Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

¹¹ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Practical Implications

There are multiple practical implications of promoting a body image among women in Kazakhstan. Targeted interventions and strategic initiatives are crucial to overcoming the communication barriers identified in media, family relationships, and the fashion industry.

Regarding social media interventions, it is vital to create campaigns that advocate for body positivity and diversity because of the media's influence on shaping body image perceptions. Encouraging social media platforms to implement policies that discourage body standards is essential. Collaborating with Kazakhstani influencers who support body positivity can be instrumental in reshaping the narrative around body image. Health organizations, educational institutions, and influencers can also produce content that educates the public on the importance of body image and the risks associated with pursuing thin body ideals. Additionally, educational programs focused on enhancing media literacy among women can empower them to critically evaluate the content they consume and alleviate the pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards.

Regarding family and community education, recognizing family members' role in shaping body image underscores the importance of implementing family-based education programs. These initiatives can equip parents with resources to foster body perceptions in their children. Workshops and presentations can be arranged to inform families about the effects of body conversations and the significance of creating a supportive household environment.

The perceptions and consumption habits related to fashion and beauty have undergone changes in Kazakhstan. These changes illustrate relationships among clothing, body image perception, and digital portrayals within Kazakh society. The intricate interplay between values and global beauty standards underscores the importance of the fashion sector in Kazakhstan in accepting and advocating for body diversity. Encouraging fashion designers and brands to showcase models with body types and sizes different than the thin body standard is essential. Collaborations with fashion schools can incorporate body positivity into the curriculum, influencing designers to embrace different approaches. Furthermore, fashion campaigns that celebrate body shapes can help alter perceptions and lessen the pressure to conform to a slim physique ideal.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. The small sample size of 94 participants was exclusively taken from Kazakhstan's two largest cities, Almaty and Astana. This restricted sample concentrated geographically, along with a distribution of participants from each city, limits the applicability of the results. As a result, these findings may not accurately represent Kazakhstan's population. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the research laid the groundwork for further comprehensive studies in the future.

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