

Student's Lifestyles: Cross Cultural Research (Thailand and Australia)

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine and compare the lifestyles of Australian and Thai undergraduates. There were 213 students who participated in the study; 112 were Thai and 101 were Australian. The instrument included a questionnaire containing six lifestyle categories. Cronbach's alpha coefficient revealed that the questionnaire's reliability ranged from 0.71 to 0.92. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The result indicated that the overall lifestyle score of students from both countries was moderate. However, there were differences between the two groups' lifestyles. The Australian participants favored the healthy lifestyle, whereas the Thai participants favored the conservative and homey lifestyles. Interestingly, the Australian participants' trendy lifestyle score was the lowest, while the Thai participants' night going lifestyle score was the highest. Comparing the two groups revealed a statistically significant difference of 0.05. This indicated that the Thai participants' lifestyles were more apparent than those of their counterparts. Only the night going lifestyle and the healthy lifestyle were rated higher by Australians than by Thais. The findings illustrate the differences in lifestyles between two countries, reflecting the complexity of lifestyle development in various dimensions. Understanding this complexity is therefore crucial.

Keywords: lifestyles, university students, Thailand, Australia

1. Introduction

Global economic competition has intensified as the world has become more industrialized. The 21st-century population emerges as a key asset in this competitive landscape. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept that the economic system does not solely rely on basic resources but also on a well-educated population. The quality of the population is perceived as the user of technological advancements for the improvement of efficiency and innovation. Consequently, the development of human capital is crucial for modern society to pave the way for an enhanced global community with higher standards.

Various social factors, such as population growth, demographic shifts, and migration, have played a role in shaping the transformation of social organization. The influential factors driving social changes could encompass external factors, such as the impact of dominant cultural forces, the rise of novel political and governance structures, and the advent of innovative technologies, fashion, music, architectural styles, and inventions. Recently, the concept of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world has become a prominence in discussion concerning the complexities of the contemporary era. This phenomenon carries significant implications for individuals and their lifestyles.

It is essential to consider that lifestyle is associated with human behaviors, personalities, cultures (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004), and consumption patterns (Cosmas, 1982), all of which exhibit unique individual traits. Furthermore, lifestyle has been employed in various scholarly investigations and defined in diverse manners, as specific frameworks have been formulated by different academic disciplines (Brivio et al., 2023), including a social cognitive perspective (Conner & Norman, 2005), risk assessment (Fischhoff et al., 2000), as well as gender, age, and socio-economic differences in lifestyle preferences (Thirlaway & Upton, 2009). The current scholarly literature concerning lifestyle has not yet come to a consensus on the definition of the term, as indicated by the presence of various distinct interpretations (Veal, 1993). To define lifestyle solely through a single concept poses challenges.

A central concept of lifestyle has been derived from Adlerian psychology (Veal, 1993) and has recently gained

widespread acceptance among psychologists and sociologists. Adler posited that the term “style of life” denotes a distinct set of attributes, actions, and routines that each person strives to attain (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) in the early 1980s acknowledged the proliferation of the concept of lifestyle and clarified it as a series of choices (behaviors) accessible to individuals based on their socio-economic conditions, from which an individual selects to exhibit behavior in a particular manner more frequently than other behavioral patterns (Thirlaway & Upton, 2009). Veal (1993) further posits that lifestyle outlines the clear structure of personal and societal behaviors that differentiates an individual or a group. This encompasses engagements with family members, friends, acquaintances, and coworkers, patterns of consumption, leisure activities, professional pursuits, as well as participation in societal and religious matters. These behavioral trends are associated with values and socio-demographic attributes, and evolve through a process that entails a spectrum of choices. In a similar vein, Honório et al. (2021) describe lifestyles as a variety of intermediary frameworks that reflect a wide range of behaviors, mindsets, and societal principles influenced by economic and societal circumstances, educational attainment, age, and other factors. For that reason, lifestyle refers to individual actions which are manifested in how they engage in specific activities, interests, and articulate their ideas in managing their finances and time (Ertina & Ibrahim, 2018). As such, lifestyle is a unique pattern of individual’s characteristics, behavior, and habits that they opt to engage in.

Through an examination of existing literature, the present research adopts six categories of lifestyle, providing a framework for understanding the diverse range of human behaviors, tendencies, and values. The identified six lifestyles encompass homey, night going, hedonistic, trendy, conservative, and healthy. The homey lifestyle reflects an individual’s inclination towards domestic activities like gardening, cooking, unwinding, involvement in religious and intellectual pursuits, and visits to libraries and museums (Bell & Hollows, 2005; Binratkeaw & Piriyaikul, 2018). The night going lifestyle is characterized by a preference for going out at night for dancing, drinking, and smoking, as well as a generally positive attitude toward drugs and luxury goods, while viewing tradition as obsolete (Buapan, 2016). A person with a hedonistic lifestyle engages in numerous activities, enjoys freedom and challenges, cares greatly about their appearance, and enjoys taking risks (Sholeh, 2017; Ertina & Ibrahim, 2018). The trendy lifestyle is characterized by an individual’s preference for self-improvement activities, his or her interest in communicating with others, especially those who share the same interests, and his or her high level of self-confidence. A person with a conservative lifestyle prefers to adhere to societal norms, lives cautiously, values healthful behaviors such as eating well and exercising, and enjoys traveling (James, 2014). The healthy lifestyle is the way in which an individual cares for his or her health, engages in healthy activities, and participates in sports (Want et al., 2012; Açıkgöz Çepni & Kitiş, 2017). Notably, an individual may embody multiple lifestyles, yet only one is typically favored.

University students are in a transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, a period where lifestyle patterns are established, making them susceptible to adopting unhealthy behaviors (Schmidt, 2012; de-Mateo-Silleras et al., 2018). A growing body of literature is dedicated to investigating the lifestyles of university students, illustrated by the research conducted by Whatnall et al. (2020) that scrutinized lifestyle patterns in conjunction with health risk indicators within a group of Australian university students. A total of 3,077 students from the University of Newcastle (UON) in Australia were invited to participate in a self-report questionnaire referred to as the UON Student Healthy Lifestyle Survey 2017. The results revealed that unhealthy lifestyles of the participants encompassed failure to adhere to vegetable consumption recommendations, surpassing the recommended limits for alcohol consumption, and inadequate levels of physical activity. Concurrently, their health vulnerabilities comprised being either overweight or obese, exhibiting a high or very high susceptibility to psychological distress, and experiencing food insecurity. Llorent-Bedmar et al. (2022) investigated healthy lifestyles among students at the University of Seville, Spain. A total of 1,478 students participated in the questionnaire survey. The results indicated that the students perceived themselves as possessing healthy lifestyle habits, despite certain deficiencies in specific habit formations, notably observed during examination periods.

It is essential to acknowledge that lifestyles are closely interconnected with beliefs, motivations, opportunities, and the formation of one’s lifestyle is shaped by specific factors associated with cultural, social, and economic dimensions (Thirlaway & Upton, 2009; Honório et al., 2021). For instance, Schmidt (2012) explored the influence of socio-demographic factors on Swedish university students’ lifestyle behaviours and self-rated health. The findings indicated that socio-demographic factors such as gender, mother tongue, and parents’ educational level could predict lifestyle behaviours (physical activity, perceived stress, and dietary behaviours) and self-reported health to a certain extent. Thus, it is highly beneficial to compare the lifestyles of people from different countries in order to gain a deeper understanding of these influences. This study focuses primarily on examining and comparing the lifestyles of university students from Thailand and Australia. The purposes are to investigate Thai

and Australian university student lifestyles and to examine the similarities and differences between two countries. The reasoning for this is rooted in the contrast between Thailand's adherence to Eastern cultural norms and Australia's representation of Western cultural values. The two cultures display differences in several aspects. For example, individuals from Eastern culture exhibit characteristics such as passivity, submissiveness, contemplativeness, and a propensity for followership; on the other hand, individuals from Western culture is characterized by diligence, assertiveness, a preference for leadership roles, and a proclivity for decision-making (Wang, 2007; Bhatia, 2015). More interestingly, Komin (1990, as cited in Moussa et al., 2022) contended that *interpersonal relationships* and *individualism* held significant importance in Thai society. The concept of individualism may be contradictory because of its Eastern culture; however, this situation can be attributed to the doctrines and values of Buddhism, which stress the self as a central locus of power. These values exert a profound influence on the lifestyle of Thais. Consequently, the examination of their way of life becomes exceedingly intricate. It is thought-provoking to examine the impact of a specific culture on the lifestyles of individuals dwelling in a geographically distant place. The expected findings are whether the different categories of lifestyles are differentially associated with social and cultures.

2. Method

2.1 Participants of the Study

The study utilized a convenience sampling technique to enlist 213 undergraduate students registered at educational institutions in Thailand and Australia, comprising 112 Thais and 101 Australians. Due to budget constraints, the researchers expected to receive 100 responses from each student group. Although a thousand responses might enhance the accuracy of estimations, 100 participants suffice for parametric estimation (Healey, 2016). Credibility, which depended on the variety of participants, was a primary concern in this procedure. This issue should be monitored to prevent its escalation. If variation is found to be unequal and there are fewer than 30 participants, "Z" testing may be used to determine the level of significance. In addition, estimation would be more precise if two sample groups contained more than 30 individuals (Dowdy, Wearden, & Chilko, 2004).

Both groups of participants were requested to voluntarily engage in an online survey, providing informed consent through online. Data gathering took place in Thailand and Australia during the year 2019. Details regarding the demographic attributes of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants (Thailand: n = 112, Australia: n = 101)

		Australia	%	Thailand	%
Gender	Male	37	36.64	23	20.54
	Female	64	63.36	89	79.46
	Total	101	100.00	112	100.00

2.2 Instrument and Data Collection

The research instrument consisted of a 25-item questionnaire assessing six lifestyle categories, namely, homey, night going, hedonistic, trendy, conservative, and healthy. The participants were asked to indicate how much they agree with the statement on a 6-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = quite disagree, 4 = quite agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree*). The following are examples of statements used to evaluate each lifestyle category:

- Homey lifestyle (3 items): e.g. "During weekend or holiday, I prefer to stay at home rather than going out", "Cooking on my own at home is my cup of tea"
- Night going lifestyle (5 items): e.g. "I like to go to party and dance", "I like to hang out in the crowded place with good music"
- Hedonistic lifestyle (3 items): e.g. "I think that physical appearance is the most important thing in attracting romantic partners", "I prefer purchasing products with a good and beautiful package"
- Trendy lifestyle (4 items): e.g. "I enjoy attending exhibitions to see new innovations in technology", "I think news and technology is necessary"
- Conservative lifestyle (6 items): e.g. "When participating in a social event, my top priority is to adhere to tradition", "I think everyone should give a priority to Thai/Australian gesture and manner"
- Healthy lifestyle (4 items): e.g. "I exercise at least three times a week", "I choose to eat only organic and

healthy foods”

The Conbach’s alpha values for the lifestyle questionnaire were as follows: homey lifestyle .7629, night going lifestyle .8723, hedonistic lifestyle .7113, trendy lifestyle .9203, conservative lifestyle .8876, and healthy lifestyle .7510. The questionnaire was initially developed in Thai, then translated to English and subsequently back-translated to Thai to ensure language accuracy. Thai participants were provided with the Thai version, while Australian participants were given the English version.

This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of Mahasarakham University, Thailand (No. 105/2018).

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed, as follows:

- 1) Using Initial Eigenvalues to find Component Factor in structural validity analysis of instrument (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).
- 2) Using T-test to examine discrimination of instrument by categorizing into higher and lower groups and use 27 and 73 percentile techniques to test research hypothesis.
- 3) Using Alpha Coefficient to examine reliability of instrument.
- 4) Using frequency and percentile to display general information of samplers such as mean and standard deviation for describing variables.

3. Results

The mean scores for the lifestyles of Thai and Australian students highlight distinct trends. It is evident from the data presented in table 2 that Australian students prioritize a healthy lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 3.95$) the most, followed by a night going lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 3.78$) and a hedonistic lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 3.27$), respectively. These three types of lifestyles are perceived to be at a moderate level. Of note, Australian students exhibit the least preference for a trendy lifestyle with a mean score of 2.84, considering as a lower average level. In contrast, Thai students exhibit the highest preference towards a conservative way of living ($\bar{X} = 5.00$), a homey lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 4.56$), and a hedonistic lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 3.97$), respectively, with a night going lifestyle ($\bar{X} = 2.99$) being the least favored option.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation, fundamental statistic values of lifestyle and subordinates among Thailand and Australia

Variables	Australia			Thailand		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Ranking	\bar{X}	S.D.	Ranking
Lifestyles	3.31	.53		3.94	.44	
1) Homey Lifestyle	3.24	.95	4	4.56	.66	2
2) Night Going Lifestyle	3.78	.85	2	2.99	.78	6
3) Hedonistic Lifestyle	3.27	.90	3	3.97	.77	3
4) Trendy lifestyle	2.84	.90	6	3.79	.72	4
5) Conservative lifestyle	2.85	.74	5	5.00	.53	1
6) Healthy Lifestyle	3.95	1.09	1	3.22	.98	5

When examining the lifestyles of Thai and Australian students, the analysis indicates a statistical difference with a significance level of 0.05. The data depicted in Table 3 clearly indicates that the mean scores for various lifestyles among Thai students outperform those of Australian students. The exceptions to this trend are the mean scores for night going and healthy lifestyles, which are higher among Australian students compared to their Thai counterparts.

Table 3. Statistical results from T-testing for comparing lifestyle (including overall perspective and six subordinated types) between students from Thailand and Australia

Variables		N	\bar{X}	S.D.	T	p-value
Lifestyle	Australia	101	3.3085	.53425	-9.510	.000
	Thailand	112	3.9446	.44107		
Homey Lifestyle	Australia	101	3.2409	.94882	-11.684	.000
	Thailand	112	4.5625	.65916		
Night Going Lifestyle	Australia	101	3.7842	.84791	7.096	.000
	Thailand	112	2.9929	.77943		
Hedonistic Lifestyle	Australia	101	3.2706	.89779	-6.109	.000
	Thailand	112	3.9673	.76584		
Trendy lifestyle	Australia	101	2.8366	.89682	-8.533	.000
	Thailand	112	3.7924	.71651		
Conservative lifestyle	Australia	101	2.8498	.73918	-24.179	.000
	Thailand	112	5.0030	.53129		
Healthy Lifestyle	Australia	101	3.9530	1.09071	5.182	.000
	Thailand	112	3.2188	.97729		

4. Discussion

Based on the results, the majority of Australian students prioritize a healthy lifestyle over a trendy lifestyle. On the contrary, the majority of Thai participants favor a conservative way of life, showing a strong inclination towards conservatism and a lack of preference for a night going lifestyle. These variations can be attributed to the cultural backgrounds of the two groups. Australia's cultural landscape, shaped by diverse heritages, has led to the emergence of numerous intercultural practices. As a result, Australians exhibit differences in behavior, daily routines, and ethical beliefs. A significant portion of Australians take pleasure in outdoor and water-based activities like swimming, boating, and communal cookouts. Thailand's cultural and social fabric is heavily influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism. Furthermore, Thailand's geographical location in a lush tropical region abundant in natural resources shapes familial norms and societal structures, fostering an inclusive environment with a marked emphasis on individualism in professional settings (Veerapong, 2017).

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2019), the term "culture" originates from the 15th century and encompasses the entirety of human knowledge, beliefs, and autonomous behaviors. The transmission of knowledge through beliefs, social constructs, and norms from one generation to the next was an achievement of humankind. Essentially, culture functions as a gauge of life objectives concerning human norms, ideologies, understanding, and societal establishments. The influence of culture, as noted by Kingsley (1982), extends to behavior, character, symbolism, and manipulation. In a society comprising multiple systems, each system will have its own distinct subcategories, within which all cultural investigations are typically conducted. These subcategories of cultures are fundamental to humanity as they define objectives, beliefs, characteristics, behaviors, and symbolic manipulation among the population. Broadly speaking, the consideration of culture hinges on social systems, which encompass an array of intricate structures and elements. This aforementioned social system represents a spectrum of potential relationships (Newstrom, 1993), while cultural systems are essentially portrayed as exerting influence on other systems. The interconnection between culture and society is profound and indivisible, with cultures not being able to exist independently from society. In addition to beliefs, norms, and individual traits, cultures play an essential role in shaping desirable conduct. Consequently, each society possesses its own distinctiveness that simultaneously fosters and impedes societal transformations. The results of this study align with the research conducted by Li and colleagues (2018) on healthy lifestyles and their impact on life expectancy. This endeavor aimed to explore the reasons behind the United States having a lower average lifespan compared to other affluent nations. The hypothesis postulated that the diverse lifestyles prevalent in wealthy nations contribute to a range of health issues. The outcomes of this study indicated that embracing healthy lifestyles (among the five areas examined) could enhance the average lifespan of American adults and avert premature mortality.

The study results indicate a significant difference in the lifestyles of the two groups, with a statistical significance of 0.05. Specifically, Thai students exhibit a more distinct lifestyle in comparison to Australian students, except for the aspects of nightlife and health-related behaviors. This differentiation can be attributed to a combination of genetic, environmental, and situational influences, contributing to the development of unique individual traits

(Carson, 2019). Furthermore, emotions, sentiments, personalities, and cultural backgrounds play a key role in shaping the various dimensions of each lifestyle element (Ashton, 2018; Favaretto et al., 2019). This circumstance poses challenges for researchers aiming to comprehensively explore obscured aspects of personalities. The identification holds significance in unveiling living arrangements, which have connections to Cosmas's (1982) investigation on consumption habits and lifestyles. The primary focus of this research lies in the realm of marketing, aiming to dissect consumption trends associated with different lifestyles. The findings highlighted that diverse lifestyles are linked to unique consumption behaviors. Moreover, Hofstede and McCrae (2004) delved into a study concerning personalities and cultures, examining the interplay between traits and cultural facets across varying epochs. This initiative involved a comparison of the personalities and conducts of individuals from the 18th and 20th centuries, showcasing the substantial influence of cultural contexts on personality transformations.

This research not only reflects the impact of culture on the way of life of students from distinct cultural backgrounds but also contributes to the comprehension of the intricate nature of lifestyle formation. According to Komin (1990, as cited in Moussa et al., 2022), the Thai community is shaped by the teachings of Buddhism, which highlight individualism and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the spread of Western culture among Thai youngsters holds great significance. However, due to the traditional foundations of Thai society, Thai students continue to prefer a conservative lifestyle. Hence, it is imperative to conduct additional research that centers on investigating the impact of families, peers, and the educational framework on lifestyle decisions.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that each lifestyle presents a range of advantages and disadvantages; for instance, individuals from Australia prioritize a healthy lifestyle over one driven by high ambition, while participants from Thailand lean towards conservatism rather than embracing nightlife. Those individuals seeking a peaceful way of life could greatly benefit from adapting themselves within the cultural milieu. In this study, a quantitative cross-sectional approach was utilized for data collection. As a result, the outcomes of this research may not cover all aspects comprehensively. Therefore, employing a qualitative methodology with a longitudinal structure would offer a more effective approach for further exploration of this topic.

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Assoc. Prof. Rungson Chomeya, Asst. Prof. Araya Piyakun, and Asst. Prof. Gunniga Prinsri were responsible for study design, data collection, and revising. Assoc. Prof. Rungson Chomeya drafted the manuscript and Asst. Prof. Araya Piyakun revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. In this paragraph, also explain any special agreements concerning authorship, such as if authors contributed equally to the study.

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