



EXPLORING THE RISE IN CONSUMPTION OF
NATIONAL-SYMBOLIC PRODUCTS IN NEW
NATIONS: CASE OF KYRGYZSTAN

Doctorate thesis

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SYMBOLIC PRODUCTS IN NEW NATIONS: CASE OF KYRGYZSTAN**

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FINAL APPROVAL FOR THESIS

This thesis titled “**Exploring the Rise in Consumption of National-Symbolic Products in New Nations: Case of Kyrgyzstan**” which has been prepared and submitted by **Aisanat MAKSATBEKOVA** in partial fulfillment of the requirements in “**Anadolu University Directive on Graduate Education and Examination**” for the PhD. in **Department of Business Administration Business** has been examined and approved on 23/06/2025.

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE RISE IN CONSUMPTION OF NATIONAL-SYMBOLIC PRODUCTS IN NEW NATIONS: CASE OF KYRGYZSTAN

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Graduate School of Anadolu University, June, 2025

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan emerged as an independent state undergoing a postcolonial reconstruction of identity. Against the backdrop of globalization and changing cultural landscapes, there has been a marked increase in the consumption of nationally symbolic products such as clothing and accessories with traditional Kyrgyz motifs. This study examines how Kyrgyz consumers, particularly youth, interpret and engage with these products as expressions of national identity, cultural pride, and everyday style. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist, and phenomenological approach, the study uses in-depth semi-structured interviews and visual content analysis of Instagram posts of Kyrgyz fashion brands to explore both consumer experiences and producer narratives. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, the study seeks to understand the meanings, emotions, motivations, and symbolic associations that shape nationally symbolic consumption in a post-Soviet transition society. Additionally, interview data were used to develop a psychographic typology of national-symbolic product consumers, revealing diverse motivations and patterns of identity engagement across participant groups. Through this dual-method design, the study offers insights into how national heritage is not only preserved but also reimagined through fashion and digital media in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: national identity, national symbols, consumption of national-symbolic products, ethnic fashion.

ÖZET

YENİ ULUSLARDA ULUSAL SEMBOLLER TAŞIYAN ÜRÜNLERİN TÜKETİMİNDEKİ ARTIŞININ KEŞFİ: KIRGIZİSTAN ÖRNEĞİ

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Sovyetler Birliği'nin 1991'de dağılmasının ardından Kırgızistan, kimliğinin sömürge sonrası yeniden inşasından geçen bağımsız bir devlet olarak ortaya çıktı. Küreselleşme ve değişen kültürel manzaraların zemininde, geleneksel Kırgız motiflerine sahip giyim ve aksesuarlar gibi ulusal sembolik ürünlerin tüketiminde belirgin bir artış oldu. Bu çalışma, özellikle gençler olmak üzere Kırgız tüketicilerin bu ürünleri ulusal kimliğin, kültürel gururun ve günlük tarzın ifadeleri olarak nasıl yorumladıklarını ve bunlarla nasıl etkileşime girdiklerini inceliyor. Nitel, yorumlayıcı ve fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım benimseyen çalışma hem tüketici deneyimlerini hem de üretici anlatılarını keşfetmek için Kırgız moda markalarının Instagram gönderilerinin derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerini ve görsel içerik analizini kullanıyor. Çalışma, önceden belirlenmiş hipotezleri test etmekten ziyade, Sovyet sonrası bir geçiş toplumunda ulusal sembolik tüketimi şekillendiren anlamları, duyguları, motivasyonları ve sembolik ilişkileri anlamaya çalışıyor. Ayrıca, görüşme verileri ulusal-sembolik ürün tüketicilerine yönelik psikografik bir tipoloji geliştirmek amacıyla kullanılmış ve katılımcı gruplar arasında farklı motivasyonlar ile kimlik etkileşimi örüntüleri ortaya konmuştur. Bu ikili yöntem tasarımıyla, çalışma ulusal mirasın yalnızca nasıl korunduğuna değil, aynı zamanda çağdaş Kırgızistan'da moda ve dijital medya aracılığıyla nasıl yeniden canlandırıldığına dair içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: ulusal kimlik, ulusal semboller, ulusal sembolik ürünlerin tüketimi, etnik moda.

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STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES

I hereby truthfully declare that this thesis is an original work prepared by me; that I have behaved in accordance with the scientific ethical principles and rules throughout the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis and presentation of my work; that I have cited the sources of all the data and information that could be obtained within the scope of this study, and included these sources in the references section; and that this study has been scanned for plagiarism with “scientific plagiarism detection program” used by Anadolu University, and that “it does not have any plagiarism” whatsoever. I also declare that, if a case contrary to my declaration is detected in my work at any time, I hereby express my consent to all the ethical and legal consequences that are involved.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an era shaped by globalization, cultural boundaries are increasingly porous. Individuals and communities engage in dynamic cultural exchanges, adopt foreign elements, and reconfigure traditions in response to evolving global and local influences. As cultural identities become more fluid and mobile, the distinctions between traditional and modern, global and local, are continuously redefined. This blending often gives rise to hybrid cultural forms, wherein local expression coexists with global aesthetics (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 338).

Since 1990, more than 30 new countries have gained independence, primarily following the disintegration of larger political entities such as the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and various colonial powers (Rosenberg, 2025, p. 1). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of 15 independent republics, including Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. Similarly, the breakup of Yugoslavia resulted in the formation of nations such as Croatia, Serbia, and North Macedonia. Other states, such as Eritrea (1993), East Timor (2002), and South Sudan (2011), achieved sovereignty through anticolonial or liberation movements. These geopolitical shifts marked the beginning of new nation-building processes, where establishing distinct cultural and national identities became a central concern (Kolsto, 2018, p. 5-6; Insebayeva & Insebayeva, 2022, p. 662).

In these contexts, national-symbolic products, including traditional dress, folk motifs, textiles, and crafts, have played a key role in articulating post-independence identity. For example, in Ukraine, the “vyshyvanka” (embroidered shirt) has become a symbol of national pride and resistance, especially during political protests such as Euromaidan (Kiss et al, 2024, p. 91). In East Timor, traditional tais weaving has been integrated into diplomacy and national celebrations as a marker of cultural heritage (Mendonça, 2019, pp. 36-37). Similarly, in post-1991 Ethiopia, various ethnic groups, including the Silti, actively promoted distinctive cultural dress, symbols and colors as a means of asserting their ethnic identity and autonomy within the federal system, especially after gaining self-government and official recognition (Ahmed, 2017, p. 3). These examples reflect what Brubaker (1996, pp. 20-21) calls the “nationalizing state”, a process through which newly sovereign states use material culture to symbolically distinguish themselves and develop a shared sense of belonging.

In postcolonial societies, fashion can be both a tool of resistance and a target of commercialization. Researchers have noted that global fashion often reflects cultural power imbalances, where traditional styles from previously colonized societies are not only underrepresented but often adapted to suit Western tastes, diminishing their original cultural significance (Bassene, 2015, pp. 3-4). However, local designers and consumers also use fashion as a way to reclaim their heritage and express their identity. This study examines how these dynamics play out in one post-Soviet and postcolonial context, Kyrgyzstan, where fashion is used both to reclaim national culture and to succeed in a competitive marketplace.

Kyrgyzstan presents a particularly compelling case for such an investigation. Despite globalization, the diversity of the product supply and, at the same time, the widespread adoption of Western consumption patterns in many developing and transition economies (Yormirzoev, 2018, p. 374), Kyrgyz society has seen a rise in deliberately patriotic consumer behavior in recent years. Since independence, the popularity of goods with national symbols has increased significantly, indicating a renewed interest in cultural heritage and national identity.

Since the Kyrgyz national-symbolic product industry is currently market-based, the market is becoming the main platform on which the producer and consumer interact, cooperate, and agree on the production and consumption of national-symbolic products. As individuals choose to wear or display items featuring traditional Kyrgyz motifs, symbols, or narratives, they participate in a broader conversation about identity, belonging, and cultural expression.

Previous research has explored the relationship between consumption and self-identity, showing how individuals use products to express who they are or who they aspire to be (Tal et al., 2022; Grewal et al., 2019; Morgan, 2019). There is also an extensive body of literature on consumer ethnocentrism and national identification (Balabanis et al., 2001; Dmitrovic et al., 2009; Shoham & Gavish, 2016; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015). However, these studies often focus on attitudes toward foreign versus domestic products, leaving a gap in understanding how individuals engage with national-symbolic goods, those that carry visual, emotional, or cultural representations of the nation itself.

This gap is particularly evident in the context of post-Soviet and post-colonial states such as Kyrgyzstan, where identity formation is still in flux and where national

symbols are being reimagined outside of state propaganda. In such contexts, the consumption of culturally embedded products may not always be driven by nationalism or ethnocentrism, but by more subtle motives such as patriotism, social belonging, nostalgia, aesthetics, global influences, or personal meaning. The case of Kyrgyzstan, home to a historically nomadic culture undergoing rapid modernization, offers a unique opportunity to explore these dynamics.

As Maxwell (2021, p. 5) argues, clothing intended for everyday use, and not just ceremonial clothing, offers particularly compelling insights into genuine national sentiments. While clothing worn at rituals or theatrical performances may reflect symbolic patriotism, it is the choice of everyday national-symbolic fashion that reveals how deeply national identity is integrated into everyday life. In this light, studying Kyrgyz consumption of national-symbolic clothing provides valuable evidence of how national belonging is performed, normalized, and contested outside of official discourse and festive settings.

The aim of this study is to explore and understand the growing phenomenon of nationally symbolic product consumption in Kyrgyzstan. Rather than assuming a purely patriotic or ethnocentric motivation, this research examines how consumers interpret, engage with, and assign meaning to products that reference national culture. It examines how elements such as national identity, heritage symbols, aesthetics, and digital media converge to shape contemporary consumption practices. The study thus contributes to broader debates about cultural expression in transitional societies, the commercialization of identity, and the role of everyday objects in constructing contemporary national narratives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. National Identity

People perceive national identity differently. Most people in Western societies don't think much about it, not because it doesn't matter, but because, for them, national identity is tied to the territory. Being a "citizen" makes you French, Spanish, Canadian. But some in these societies, such as Bretons, Catalans or Quebecers, see their national identity differently (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009, p. 1).

Windari (2021, p. 88) is considering national identity as a fixed sense of belonging to a national social group. Therefore, "own group" and "nation" are often perceived as synonymous (Blank & Schmidt, 2003, p. 294). Consumers adhere to a national identity, and this identity constantly determines their behavior (Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 389).

National identity is defined as a political and psychological concept associated with borders, on the basis that national identity can emerge only within these borders and not beyond (Hall, 1996 as cited in Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 390). It is also related to language, history and culture (Weedon, 2004, p. 20).

Guibernau (2007, p. 25) claims that establishment and maintenance of national identity is the interest of the government. Dissemination of the image of national identity is necessary in order to strengthen the sense of community. This task is solved through the creation and dissemination of a set of symbols and rituals, as well as through the use of the national education system and the media that convey these national symbols, values, traditions, principles, and depictions of the image of a "good citizen".

National identity, which is the commitment of people to a nation, fluctuates on a positive-negative continuum from negative identity (counter-identity) to positive identity with the nation (Blank, 2003, p. 260). However, in most cases, national identity is likely to be positive, as people retain a positive self-image, which they subsequently transfer to the nation they belong to (Mackie et al., 2008, p. 1876).

2.2. National symbols

Weedon (2004, p. 24) stated that national symbols are important in creating an overall sense of "nationality". Collective symbols (anthems, flags, costumes and

celebrations, state rituals, theatrical performances, buildings and monuments, museums, heritage centers, national sports teams) help create and perpetuate stories about who we are and where we come from.

DeSoucey (2010, p. 448) noted that national boundaries emphasize the universality of national symbols, and these symbols become markers of national identity. According to Geisler (2005, pp. 4-5) the most powerful and effective are those "key" symbols that evoke strong feelings and emotions among members of a social group, in our case, a nation. The symbols use a special language, and only those who speak that language will understand them and what they mean. Such symbols tell the story of a nation's past with its rituals and ceremonies, also with national myths and heroes. They are like emotional glues that tie the past with the present and future and keep nations together evoking their memories and consciousness.

Traditional clothes are also related to national symbols. For example, the widespread use of the *qipao* (traditional costume of the Chinese nation) in various social and popular cultural circles indicates that both the Chinese and Westerners regard it as a typical "symbol" of the Chinese nation (Tsui, 2013, p. 582). Other examples are *bunad* (a traditional Norwegian folk costume) as Norway national symbol and *Scottish kilt* (a knee-length, skirt-like garment worn by men as the main element of the traditional national dress of Scotland) as Scottish national symbol (Strand, 2018, pp. 109-110) and *beldemchi* (a warm apron skirt worn by women over a dress to hold and protect from cold and wind as well as to maintain posture) as Kyrgyz national symbol.

2.2.1. Consuming national symbols

The connection between an individual and his/her group plays an important role in the formation of each individual and in the construction of his/her identity (Gusacov, 2019, p. 223). At the center of Maslow's pyramid of human needs are the psychological needs of belonging. As he argues, people need a sense of belonging, belonging to a group, identification with group goals and victories, acceptance or having a place, "at-homeness" (2015, p. 72). People practice their expression of belonging to a national social group through the physical and symbolic consumption of national symbols (Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 396).

Seliverstova, (2017, p. 74) states that apart from language and self-perception, the nation seems to materialize spontaneously and informally, through a mechanism that runs through the aesthetic perception and use of various goods. The consumption of national-iconic products can be an act of preserving a national identity, a response to global flows, or a reminder of the role of the past in shaping the current national identity (Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 390).

Anthropologists and others working in the post-Socialist field have realized that the transition from socialism to post-socialism was characterized by the commercialization of the past and the traditional. The commercialization of the past promotes a "mechanism of shared memory and secret history" that brings customers together in a unique national experience. Russian food companies use aggressive marketing tactics that appeal to consumers' sense of national pride by emphasizing the historic ingredients of their food products (Caldwell, 2002, pp. 307-308).

Foster (1999, p. 279) claims that the practice of consumption allows people to participate in both national and international identities at the same time, thereby making the national identity realized through consumption a personal choice rather than an irresistible social fact.

2.2.2. The role of national symbols in identity formation

National symbols, such as anthems, flags, traditional costumes, state rituals, and national sports teams, play a pivotal role in the formation and reproduction of national identity and unity among people. These symbols act as key instruments in creating and perpetuating collective narratives about a nation's history, values, and shared cultural heritage. Through their symbolic meaning, they provide individuals with tangible ways to connect to a broader national community and reinforce emotional ties across different social and regional groups.

According to Geertz (1973, p. 216), symbols serve as cultural ciphers, assigning meanings to phenomena and facilitating emotional and cultural attachments between individuals and cultural objects. By embodying cultural significance, these symbols enable the construction of a collective sense of belonging, helping people perceive a shared identity despite the numerous factors that might otherwise divide them (Wiltgren, 2014, p. 308).

Moreover, the emotional resonance of national symbols is critical to their unifying power. They evoke strong feelings of pride, solidarity, and belonging, thus reinforcing the emotional foundation of national identity. Through their everyday use, whether in ceremonies, daily clothing, or consumer goods, symbols continually produce and reproduce the idea of the nation within the lives of individuals (Wiltgren, 2014, p. 321). This everyday engagement with national symbols emphasizes their dynamic role, not only as historical or political artifacts but also as living, evolving elements of social life.

2.3. Kyrgyz National-Symbolic Products.

Kyrgyz national-symbolic products represent a meaningful fusion of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary aesthetics, offering a rich expression of cultural identity. Brands such as Tumar, Kancha, and Obbo! have become notable for their work in integrating Kyrgyz heritage into modern product design (Suyarkulova, 2016, p. 255). For instance, the Kancha brand produces handmade felt and leather accessories, such as device cases and wallets, which incorporate traditional Kyrgyz ornamentation (Image 2.1). These designs often draw visual inspiration from the natural landscapes of Kyrgyzstan, symbolic elements such as the sun, mountains, and valleys are stylized into recognizable national patterns. The brand's logo itself references the tunduk, the central element of a yurt's roof, symbolizing home, and unity ([http-1](#)).

Image 2.1. “Kancha” branded laptop sleeve inspired by the Kyrgyz landscape.



Source: [http-1](#).

National-symbolic products extend beyond accessories to include jewelry and personal adornments that reflect both historic and aesthetic traditions. Jewelry holds a special place in Kyrgyz culture as a medium of identity expression, often crafted from silver and adorned with traditional Central Asian motifs (Skjerven, 2014, pp. 26-27). Contemporary designs reinterpret these patterns into modern forms while maintaining their symbolic roots (Image 2.1). Kyrgyz women, especially, continue to wear rings, bracelets, earrings, and decorative headpieces that carry cultural meaning and express femininity and pride in national heritage. Brands such as Qyzyk offer vintage-style accessories with intricate Kyrgyz patterns, demonstrating how cultural continuity can be maintained through updated stylistic expressions (Image 2.2).

Image 2.2. *“Qyzyk” branded vintage accessories with Kyrgyz national pattern.*



Source: <http-2>.

In recent years, designers have also expanded their repertoire by incorporating national motifs into everyday fashion items such as scarves, coats, hats, and bags, products that allow wearers to subtly communicate cultural affiliation in their daily lives. The use of symbols like the tunduk, horn-shaped ram motifs, or stylized florals serves not only decorative purposes but reinforces shared identity and collective memory. These items are increasingly visible at public events, weddings, and even in urban settings, highlighting the role of national-symbolic products in shaping and sustaining a modern Kyrgyz cultural identity.

Ethnic costumes and accessories are also becoming an international brand and "tourist chic" for foreign consumption as well. Ignatkova (2020, p.153) gives another

example of how Western brands are inspired by the national symbols of Asian countries. The fashion house Hermes released the fashion line of scarves and shawls with a spotted horse print. The silk scarf “Appaloosa des Steppes” (Image 2.3), released in the spring of 2017, includes Kyrgyz ornaments and the symbol of the Hermès brand - the motif of a horse, which is an interesting combination of classic motifs for the Hermès fashion house with ethnic ones. Against the backdrop of Kyrgyz ornaments, there is an image of the Appaloosa horse, a special breed of horse, a documentary about which was released in 2015 in the UK. In this film, it was said that the Appaloosa horse is related to the Kyrgyz horse “tchaar at¹”.

Image 2.3. *Hermes' Appaloosa des Steppes scarf - there are a dozen color combinations.*



Source: <http-3>.

Thus, we see those items reflecting national symbols are no longer the consumption of their own ethno-national group, but have become items of international consumption.

1 Tchaar at (from kyrgyz “чаар ат”) is the spotted horse, which is notable for its short stature and great endurance, is very undemanding in food, tolerates both heat and hunger equally well, and most importantly, holds its body firmly and weakens only from complete prolonged starvation. Since ancient times, it has been valued and bred by Kyrgyz nomads, ranging from the Altai Mountains to Central Asia (Turdubaev et al, 2018; p. 69-70).

2.4. Contradictory symbols: National symbols versus religious symbols

Some national symbols also contain religious symbolic meaning. For example, Zionism is the national ideology of Israel, and the followers of this ideology believe that Judaism is not only a religion, but also a nationality. It relies on religious images or artifacts such as the *menorah* (the seven-branched candelabra) and the Jewish prayer shawl that were used to create the national flag and colors of the Jewish people. (Geisler, 2005, pp. 7-9).

However, religious and national identities can also contradict or be uncertain, as in Northern Ireland, where the two identities are often confused in the minds of residents. Catholics have less uncertainty than Protestants in terms of national identity. Irish identification (preferred by Catholics) has often been bound by cultural meaning. Catholics often very clearly denied that they were not British. The meaning of British identification (preferred by Protestants) was often associated with the state. However, young people who self-identify themselves as British have some difficulty assigning meaning to their national identity, as they often fill it with religious meaning instead (Muldoon et al, 2007, pp. 100-101).

Suyarkulova (2016, p. 255) noted that in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority countries, the body of a woman wearing a full-body headdress or veil is the scene of political struggle. In Central Asia, as in other Muslim-majority regions of the world, over the past century, women have been encouraged or forced to veil, unveil and re-veil depending on the changes taking place in their societies and attitudes towards gender relations, religion, and among other things.

Freedom of religion, a fundamental human right, was suppressed during the Soviet era and attempts were made to suppress unwanted religious expressions (Kohoutová, 2013, p. 97). *Hujum* was a series of policies and actions taken by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was concerned with the "liberation" of women in order to turn them into "surrogates", or the proletariat (Kamp, 2009, p. 5). The goal of the campaign was to eliminate all manifestations of gender inequality, especially in the archaic systems of female *hijab* and seclusion practiced in Central Asia. The Soviets believed that by prohibiting it in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) and proclaiming the liberation of women, they could clear the way for the building of socialism. The goal of the campaign was to quickly change the lives of women in Muslim societies so that they could participate in

public life, paid work, education, and eventually membership in the Communist Party (Nortop, 2001, p. 135).

Since gaining independence, the states of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, have faced the problem of forming a viable national identity. The project for the formation of national identity included the mobilization of various ethno-national symbols, such as the Manas epic, to support the national ideology of the state. At the same time, the population of Kyrgyzstan participated in the "Islamic revival" that took place in Central Asia (Artman, 2015, p. 1). As Artman (2015, p. 5) concluded, the religious and political dynamics in Central Asia are complex, with states attempting to establish a stable national identity while part of the population develops an Islamic identity.

Nowadays as women wearing the hijab and veil became more numerous and visible in Kyrgyzstan after independence, many citizens reacted with irritation, and often the discomfort of this new practice was expressed in ethnic terms. It is argued that the fashion for the hijab is alien to this region and its nomadic past, and that Kyrgyz women never wore a veil and had more freedom than their settled sisters (Suyarkulova, 2016, p. 258). Many people were skeptical about the fashion trend they saw of wearing a Middle Eastern hijab, considering it ridiculous and like a costumed role-playing game, "just like wearing an Indian sari" (Alyautdinov, 2011, p. 34). The criticism of the veil was expressed in nationalist paranoia about cultural "Arabization" (Artman, 2019, p. 1736).

Today, there is an alternative proposal that intertwines trans-local Islamic views and Kyrgyz traditional elements, making the hijab less confrontational. For example, there are some Kyrgyz brands that modified shawls similar to traditional *elechek* (a kind of turban up to 30 meters long², intricately wrapped around the head, that used to be worn by married women) and *keptakiya*³ (a women's headdress that used to be worn by unmarried girls) over the shawl (Image 2.4).

² Elechek (turban 5 to 30 meters long), when away from home, was used by women in various emergencies of nomadic life: during childbirth - for swaddling a baby; and as circumstances required, a snow-white elechek could be used as a shroud for someone who had passed away during a nomadic trip.

³ Keptakiya. These headdresses were distinguished by the fact that they opened the braids, in contrast to women's headdresses that hide the hair.

Image 2.4 Adapted kyrgyz traditional headdresses for covered Muslim women. On the left picture: “*elechek-jooluk*” and on the right picture - “*keptakiya*”



Source: <http-4>, <http-5>

In this light, a product of religious significance or a form of national traditional product softens the resistance of the dominant ideology because it can be mobilized for different and sometimes conflicting purposes.

Thus, in general, according to literature above, it can be concluded that modern models of self-identification indicate a high degree of inclusion and overlap between models of religious and national identities, as well as the oppositional nature of these identities and their negative interdependence.

2.5. Consumer Patriotism and Consumption of National-Symbolic Products in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

The concept of patriotism is fluid and contested. Gurova (2021, p. 178) notes that its meanings in literature are not fixed and often debated. Goode (2018, pp. 268-272) distinguishes between official patriotism, which prioritizes public interests and self-sacrifice, and everyday patriotism, a more personal and apolitical attachment to one's homeland and ethnicity, shaped by local culture. Guo (2004, p. 1) adds that patriotism may include ideas like “national interest,” “tradition,” “spirit,” “harmony,” and “nation-ness.”

Although often conflated, patriotism and nationalism differ. Balabanis et al. (2001, p. 158) link both to consumer ethnocentrism but show that patriots are more moderate, while nationalists may adopt extreme views (p. 162). Gurova (2021, p. 143) points out that patriotism can align with either nationalism or cosmopolitanism. Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) highlight that patriots are typically more cooperative and inclusive. Adorno et al. (1950, p. 107) distinguish healthy patriotism, marked by national pride without hostility, from pseudo-patriotism, which promotes superiority.

Blank and Schmidt (2003, p. 292) view both patriotism and nationalism as forms of national identity. Yet patriotism involves critical reflection, while nationalism often entails “blind patriotism” and chauvinism. Nussbaum (2008, p. 79) warns that nationalism may provoke hostility and militarism, threatening international cooperation.

Marketing research on national identity often follows two strands: national branding of products and consumer self-identification through product choice (Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 389). Consumers show patriotism by choosing local brands (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013, p. 131) or avoiding foreign ones (Wang & Wang, 2007, pp. 136-137). Cultural identity also influences the consumption of symbolic goods like traditional sports (Wang, 2013, pp. 365-367), cuisine (Caldwell, 2002, p. 295), fashion (Gurova, 2021, p. 170), and patriotic music (Gao, 2015, p. 484).

Spielmann et al. (2020, p. 389) define product patriotism as expressing national identity through iconic goods, such as wine in France. This is not just economic, it is cultural affirmation. Similarly, rejection of certain products, especially Western brands, may reflect rising nationalism, as observed in China (Wang & Wang, 2007, pp. 145-146). These dynamics echo Veblen’s (1918, p. 44) theory of conspicuous consumption, where goods signal status, but nationalism may lead to their rejection.

Consuming symbolic products can also reflect civic duty: a way to honor and sustain national identity (Spielmann et al., 2020, p. 396). However, abstaining from such goods does not imply a weak national affiliation. Finally, Cayla (2009, p. 149) emphasizes that globalization has not erased national identity. In India, traditional customs remain central in advertising and media despite the presence of Western brands.

In post-Soviet countries like Kyrgyzstan, everyday consumption practices play a powerful role in expressing national identity. As Foster (1999, p. 270) explains, routine consumer behaviors, like celebrating national holidays or wearing culturally significant clothing, help materialize nationality in daily life. Spielmann et al. (2020, p. 396) affirm

that national identity is not only performed in extraordinary rituals but also “inhabited” through ordinary acts of consumption.

While consumers in developing or transitional economies often perceive foreign goods as higher in quality or prestige (Yormirzoev, 2018, p. 374), national or ethnic concerns also strongly influence choices. Dmitrovich et al. (2009, p. 524) argue that in such societies, emotional and normative dimensions, like cultural identity, gain importance in consumer decision-making.

Within consumer culture theory, fashion is a major field for identity construction. Gurova (2021, p. 170) connects fashion directly to patriotism and national identity. A post on the Kyrgyz community page “I am not Kirgiz, I am a Kyrgyz,” illustrates this well. The post, aimed at Kyrgyz men living in Moscow, advertises:

“Genuine leather shoes for genuine (true) patriots of Kyrgyzstan! Kyrgyz ornamented shoes made of genuine leather produced by the company KADAM are now in Moscow!” (http-6). This message reinforces patriotism by linking product origin and ethnic symbolism to national pride. Many Kyrgyz fashion designers draw inspiration from daily life and ancient heritage to create a “modern” Kyrgyz image, often through the revival of traditional fabrics, patterns, and costume forms (Image 2.5).

Image 2.5 *“Modern” Kyrgyz image by rejuvenating traditional Kyrgyz symbols, fabrics and/or costume forms.*



Source: <http-7>.

This phenomenon parallels developments in China, where early designers, constrained by limited global exposure, relied on imagination and historical costume archives to produce charismatic but impractical fashion. In contrast, today's younger designers blend traditional elements with the realities of modern life (Tsui, 2013, p. 597). Thus, in both Kyrgyzstan and broader post-Soviet contexts, product patriotism serves as a tool for negotiating identity: balancing tradition and modernity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, through the symbolic language of consumption.

2.5.1. Types of patriotism discourses in consumption behavior

Gurova (2021, p. 176) identified in her study the following discourses that determine the meaning of patriotism in consumer behavior as an alternative to hegemonic discourse: political patriotic discourse, cosmopolitan patriotic discourse, cultural-patriotic discourse and economic-patriotic discourse.

Political patriotic discourse. This discourse is expressed through fashion items featuring national emblems, political figures such as Vladimir Putin (Image 2.6), or symbolic animals like the bear (a “symbol of Russia”) or the snow leopard (a “symbol of Kyrgyzstan”) (Gurova, 2021, pp. 178-179; [http-8](#), Image 2.7). For the average consumer, clothing with national symbols: flags, maps, or other iconic prints, provides a simple and affordable way to express ethnic belonging.

Image 2.6 *Political patriotic discourse. A dress with Vladimir Putin's portrait on it.*



Source: [http-9](#).

Image 2.7 *Political patriotic discourse. Jacket with snow leopard print on it.*



Source: [http-10](#).

Cosmopolitan patriotic discourse. This form of patriotism includes love for one's country as well as respect for global cultures, nature, and environmental sustainability (Gurova, 2021, pp. 180-182). Appiah (1997, p. 618) supports the idea that one can be loyal to one's homeland while embracing the diversity of the world. Designer Yntymak Abdylдаev advises consumers to take clothes made with natural and environmentally friendly materials. The designer suggests making a preference in favor of sustainable fashion, which is based on the principles of conscious consumption, ethical production, focus on long-term use, care for nature and human beings. "Perhaps it will cost more, but you will wear it longer, besides, no harm to the environment and people", he emphasizes (http-11). (Image 2.8).

Image 2.8 *Cosmopolitan patriotic discourse. 1-Natural velvet Shirt-jacket, fully embroidered with "tush-kiiz"⁴ ornaments; 2- Fine wool dress and natural velvet footwear with national embroideries on it. 3- Felted (woolen) jacket with traditional ornaments.*



Source: <http-7>.

Cultural patriotic discourse. This discourse connects patriotism with historical and cultural heritage. Unlike political patriotism, it doesn't rely on state symbols but instead emphasizes traditional practices, historical landmarks, national sports (Wang, 2013, pp. 365-367), and family values (Kalinina, 2017, p. 11). It reflects pride in roots

⁴ Traditional Tush-kiiz is the art of embroidery passed down from generation to generation by Kyrgyz nomads.

and everyday life of the past (Gurova, 2021, pp. 182-183), and often gives ethnic meaning to patriotism (Goode, 2016, p. 6).

Image 2.9 *Cultural - patriotic discourse. 1st picture - Wedding dress, the design of which contains elements of the old traditional clothes of a young Kyrgyz woman; 2nd picture - T-shirt with petroglyphic art⁵ printed on it; 3th picture - Phone cases depicting a girl in traditional dress and a Kyrgyz writer Chyngyz Aitmatov.*



Source: <http-7>, <http-10>.

Fishler (2019, p. 132) examines nomadic animal art's philosophical heritage, emphasizing its role in expressing the nomads' worldview, especially in Central Asia's steppes. In Scythian and Turkic cultures, animal art served as sacred, universally understood symbols during times with limited writing. Today, animals like horses, camels, the wild antelope saiga, and the ancient deer maral remain revered in Kyrgyzstan. The maral is notably depicted in Ch. Aitmatov's *The White Ship* as the "Mother Maral," symbolizing the Kyrgyz mythological origin (Image 2.9 - 2nd picture).

Clothing communicates identity; men often wear T-shirts or caps with nationalist slogans, many gendered, such as "Derzkiy Kyrgyz" (Cocky Kyrgyz) and "Kyrgyz jigit" (Suygyz lad) (Suyarkulova, 2016, p. 255). Young Kyrgyz reinforce ethnic and masculine identity through traditional sports like *kürösh* wrestling, reflecting a wider post-Soviet celebration of masculinity. In southern Kyrgyzstan, especially Osh, conservative norms encourage boys to be tough (Kirmse, 2010, p. 394).

⁵ Petroglyphs (from the Greek *petra* - stone or rock and *glyphe* - carving) belong to the pre-literate era of mankind; these images reproduce the worldview of prehistoric peoples, and many outstanding examples can be found in Kyrgyzstan (<http-9>).

Economic patriotic discourse. This is a discourse of civic responsibility, where patriotism is expressed through support of the domestic economy (Gurova, 2021, pp. 182-183). Ethnocentric consumers prefer local products, believing foreign goods harm national industries (Lutz et al., 2008, pp. 82–84). Rybina et al. (2010, p. 97) report that consumers associate buying domestic goods with national loyalty and contribution.

In recent years, the creative economy has been growing rapidly worldwide, including in Kyrgyzstan. It is seen as a promising sector fueled by human intellectual potential, driving income growth, job creation, export development, and innovative entrepreneurship. It also allows people to earn from their skills while preserving cultural and historical traditions (Kudryavtseva, 2022, p. 1).

In summary, the four types of patriotic discourse represent different visual languages of patriotism: political discourse uses official national symbols (Images 2.6-2.7); cosmopolitan discourse emphasizes sustainable fashion with durable, natural textiles (Image 2.8); cultural discourse showcases folklore and ethnic motifs (Image 2.9); and economic discourse reflects modern mass fashion aesthetics.

2.6. National Pride, and the Role of National Symbols in National-Symbolic Consumption

National pride serves as a key motivational factor influencing individuals' behaviors toward national-symbolic products. As de Figueiredo and Elkins (2003, p. 171) argue, national pride has significant political and social effects, reflecting deeply rooted ideological attachments. While most studies of national pride have focused on its ideological basis in Europe, similar emotional attachments can be observed globally, including in emerging post-Soviet nations like Kyrgyzstan.

National symbols are pervasive in contemporary societies and are strongly tied to processes of nation-building and the fostering of national pride. These symbols, encompassing flags, anthems, costumes, and other cultural markers, often evoke impassioned emotional responses and behaviors among citizens (Bornman, 2022, p. 283). However, despite their prominence, the psychological processes underlying national symbolism remain an under-researched area (Bornman, 2022, p. 283). Little is known about the specific attitudes, emotions, and behaviors associated with exposure to national symbols, especially in transitional societies.

Moreover, national symbols serve not merely as visual or auditory markers of national identity but also as interactive learning tools. They invite citizens to engage actively through practices like hoisting flags, participating in parades, or wearing national attire during celebrations, thereby deepening their identification with the nation (Bornman, 2022, p. 284).

A sense of belongingness, identified as a fundamental human need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is reinforced through the use of patriotic symbols (Maslow, 2015, p. 67, p. 285). Cabello (2018, p. 21) highlights that, patriotic beliefs fulfill the basic psychological need for social belonging, creating a strong connection between the individual and the national collective. This sense of belonging not only strengthens emotional ties but also helps construct a meaningful social identity.

In the context of postcolonial societies, particularly post-Soviet countries, the struggle to reclaim and reconstruct national identity after decades of external domination is a complex process. As Cabello (2018, p. 32) notes, national identity and patriotism are deeply intertwined; instability in one inevitably affects the other. Similar patterns can be observed in Kyrgyzstan, where the reestablishment of a national cultural narrative post-independence has spurred the revitalization of national symbols, including through consumer goods.

The use of national symbols in everyday consumption practices reflects a broader, global trend where patriotism becomes visible in consumer culture. As Carvalho et al. (2019, p. 312) observe, patriotic sentiments can significantly impact consumers' intention to purchase products featuring national symbols. Consumers motivated by patriotism are more likely to seek out, buy, and display products that represent their national identity, perceiving such products as authentic or holding special emotional value (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 312).

Moreover, the motivations behind the consumption of national-symbolic products are not purely emotional. Factors such as perceived quality, authenticity, and cultural significance also play crucial roles (Geisler, 2005, p. 66). National symbols often embody historical narratives and cultural pride, offering consumers a means to connect with their heritage in tangible ways. These products allow individuals to simultaneously express personal identity and participate in collective national narratives.

Despite the growing body of research on patriotic consumption, Wiltgren (2014, p. 308) points out that the youth's consumption of nationalism, particularly through

objects featuring national, ethnic, and religious symbols, remains an underexplored field. In many cases, young consumers navigate complex global-local dynamics, adopting national symbols not just as markers of patriotism but also as expressions of individuality, resistance, or cultural pride.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, this dynamic is particularly salient. The post-Soviet generation has engaged with national-symbolic products as part of a broader cultural reawakening and reassertion of Kyrgyz identity, often blending traditional motifs with global fashion trends. Kyrgyz consumers' growing interest in national-symbolic goods reflects both a reconnection with their cultural heritage and an adaptation to contemporary consumer culture.

2.7. Nostalgia for a past: National identity in post-Soviet countries

According to Kalinina (2017, p. 11), nostalgia is not only an emotional experience, but also a discursive practice; it establishes an image of the past that opposes the present: in some cases, it advocates the return of "traditional family values". Nostalgia creates a new version of the past that challenges the present.

During the "perestroika" period, the general process of the revival of national identity in the post-Soviet countries was accompanied by an increase in interest in national history. The main task of historiography was to recreate the "true history" banned in Soviet times. For the first time in the narrative of those times appeared the names of Soviet politicians and intelligentsia, who became victims of Soviet repressions, and leaders of anti-Soviet uprisings (Chikovani, 2012, p. 111). The new "ethnic history" emphasized the suffering of people living in the territory of the countries of Central Asia, such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, etc., during the period of sedentary life, collectivization and repression (Schatz, 2000, p. 496). In addition to changing street names, releasing mass media and other publications in the state language, the government has revised history to ethnicize the past of new nations such as Kyrgyzstan (Suny, 2001, p. 882).

National identity expresses the degree to which people identify with the newly created nation-state in the sense that they are proud of their nation, its history and ancestors (Dmitrovich et al., 2009, p. 528).

Dmitrovich et al. (2009, p. 531) state that national identity can change over time and be influenced by situational variables, as is the case in young nation states. The

post-socialist countries carry out their transformation processes, their political and economic reforms with varying speed and degree of success. Ethnic identity may have played a particularly important role in influencing national identity in young states.

Seliverstova, (2017, p. 74) described the role of objects in the post-Soviet context. She emphasized their crucial role in moving the concept of the nation from an ideological to a tangible realm as a way for people to experience a sense of day-to-day belonging to a nation by consuming national symbols.

2.8. Contemporary Trends in National-Symbolic Product Consumption

In contemporary consumer culture, national-symbolic products are increasingly appreciated not solely for their ideological meaning but also for their aesthetic appeal. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, designers have transformed traditional garments such as the *chapan* and skullcaps into practical, fashionable items widely adopted by women and younger demographics. These products are now worn less for their explicit national symbolism and more as expressions of individual style. As one designer emphasized that modernization does not mean abandoning tradition, but rather adapting it: “Our mothers wear crocheted robes. We tried to modernize it and give it a new life” (http-12). Here, usability and adaptation are prioritized, as garments are intentionally designed not as museum pieces but as functional, wearable expressions of heritage. Such aesthetic motivations suggest that national symbols have entered the domain of lifestyle fashion, functioning as culturally coded but visually compelling expressions of identity.

Youth subcultures, especially in post-Soviet countries, are central to the reinterpretation of national symbols. The new patriotic fashion styles have emerged across post-communist Europe and Central Asia, where neo-folk designs appear on everyday items such as T-shirts and accessories, and pop culture figures integrate national symbolism into performance costumes (Novikov, 2017, p. 1). These cases illustrate how younger generations do not reject national motifs, but rather recode them to align with subcultural, artistic, or fashionable expressions of selfhood. This aligns with how Kyrgyz brands present their products on Instagram, not only as wearable artifacts, but as tools of identity performance in contemporary digital spaces.

In many cases, this blend of traditions and modernity reflects broader shifts in how cultural heritage is consumed. Rather than viewing national-symbolic clothing as reserved for ceremonial or historical use, consumers, especially youth, increasingly

incorporate it into everyday life, blurring the boundaries between past and present. Instagram aesthetics, influencer culture, and viral styling videos such as “get ready with me” reels have helped national motifs become part of mainstream fashion. As one designer from Jurt-design stated, “I want to encourage patriotism by wearing national clothes and encourage all Kyrgyz girls to wear our national clothes with pride” (http-13). Thus, national-symbolic products today serve both as aesthetic expressions and as affirmations of cultural resilience in a globalized, digitally connected world.

This trend has sparked concern about cultural authenticity and commodification. In Central Asia, experts have noted that while the global appearance of local patterns may bring recognition, their uncredited use by international fashion brands risks detaching the designs from their cultural roots. A recent controversy involving the Russian brand Yaka, accused of copying Kyrgyz patterns and claiming copyright over them, sparked backlash in Kyrgyzstan. The Ministry of Culture condemned the misuse of national symbols, emphasizing that they are part of the country’s cultural heritage and should be treated with respect. Although Yaka’s founder later apologized, the incident highlighted deeper concerns about cultural appropriation and the commercialization of traditional motifs. For many Kyrgyz, this goes beyond fashion: it’s about protecting cultural identity. The outcry reflects a growing call for legal measures to safeguard national symbols and prevent their exploitation for profit (http-14; http-15). Many national motifs, considered public domain in countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, or Tajikistan, currently lack legal protection, allowing unrestricted reproduction and commercial use (http-16). This reality creates a tension between pride in global exposure and anxiety over symbolic dilution.

2.9. Digital Globalization and the Reinvention of National Fashion in Central Asia

The popularization of national-symbolic products has been significantly accelerated by the global expansion of digital and social media platforms. Instagram, TikTok, and similar digital spaces have become central to the mediatization of fashion, where cultural identities are not only displayed but also aestheticized and circulated through user-generated content and influencer branding (Rocamora, 2017, pp. 509-511). Globalized aesthetics frequently clash with calls to preserve national culture, as users express both enthusiasm and anxiety about “losing rootedness” in the face of

cosmopolitan visual culture (Pieterse, 2019, p. 125). In Indonesia, for example, the government has strategically partnered with influencers to promote national dress at international fashion events, although research suggests this often results in self-promotion detached from authentic national symbolism (Ratriyana et al., 2024, p. 75).

In Central Asia, similar strategies have emerged. Kazakhstan has used national dress as a soft-power tool, gifting traditional chapans to international celebrities such as Nicolas Cage and Cristiano Ronaldo acts intended to project cultural pride and diplomatic identity through textile symbolism (http-17). However, in Kyrgyzstan, preservation efforts are not only state-led but also arise organically from grassroots actors. Designers, craftswomen, and digital influencers increasingly reinterpret national motifs and textiles, adapting them for global audiences. This aligns with observations from post-Soviet societies where citizens now play active roles in constructing national identity through fashion (Zagitova, 2022, p. 64).

At the heart of this movement is a philosophy of cultural improvisation, the fusion of modern aesthetics with traditional elements rather than strict replication of “authentic” or “original” designs. As Botoeva and Spector (2013, pp. 493-494) highlight, Kyrgyz craft-based apparel producers emphasize the competitiveness of their unique interpretations of traditional ethno-culture, seeing their personal contributions as central to building a recognizable national identity. For example, one entrepreneur recalled how her garments tailored for a friend traveling to the U.S. featured “subtle hints” of ethnic design: “I don’t want it to be a theatrical costume, I want it to be ready to wear on an everyday basis, but so that it would be recognizable that it’s from Kyrgyzstan.” Such perspectives underscore the strategic blending of cultural heritage and wearability.

This renewal of interest in cultural heritage also responds to global market trends that increasingly favor authentic, locally rooted design. According to Vézina (2019, p. 8), global demand for authentic aesthetics sourced from local traditions has spurred the visibility of source communities and contributed to the cultural and economic revival of artisanal industries. In Kyrgyzstan, designers like Aliya Kaliyeva (with her collection *The Poppies of the Pamirs*) and Dilbar Ashimbayeva of DILBAR Fashion House exemplify this aesthetic hybridity: merging Kyrgyz traditional embroidery with contemporary silhouettes to produce garments that resonate both locally and internationally (Zagitova, 2022, pp. 62-65).

More broadly, this reflects a global branding logic increasingly tied to cultural identity. In what the United Nations has described as “the century of culture”, many producers seek to differentiate themselves by drawing on intangible cultural heritage: an asset that cannot be imitated (Urde et al, 2007, p. 11). As Ko and Lee (2011, pp. 90-91) suggest, global brands under threat often reposition themselves by returning to cultural roots. For Kyrgyz producers, this strategic return is forward-looking, responding to both identity needs and market opportunities.

In this context, Kyrgyz national dress becomes a vehicle for cultural resilience, global recognition, and entrepreneurial innovation shaped not only by tradition but by creators’ intentional efforts to make heritage relevant in a globalized, digital world.

To deepen the understanding of national-symbolic consumption, it is necessary to explore a range of theoretical perspectives that illuminate its emotional, psychological, cultural, and social underpinnings. The next section examines key theories, including Consumer Culture Theory, Symbolic Consumption and Identity Construction, Postcolonial Theory, Identity Performance, Symbolic Interactionism, Emotional Geography, Diaspora Identity, Ethnic Commodification, Fashion and Subculture Theory, Post-materialist Values, Social Media Influence, the Desire for Uniqueness, Self-Determination Theory, and the dynamics of Cultural Hybridity. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing how national symbols are consumed, interpreted, and adapted, particularly within the context of new nation-building processes such as in Kyrgyzstan.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical approaches revealing patriotism consumption draw useful frameworks about the reasons why consumers prefer national symbolic products. The explanations related to these theories are evaluated below under different headings.

3.1. Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) represents a diverse body of theoretical approaches aimed at understanding the socio-cultural dynamics shaping consumer behavior. Rather than focusing solely on individual decision-making processes, CCT emphasizes the symbolic, experiential, and collective aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). It views consumption as a central mode through which individuals construct and express identity, negotiate social roles, and participate in cultural and ideological frameworks. In this sense, CCT explores how consumer practices are embedded within and contribute to broader systems of meaning, social stratification, and cultural reproduction (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 871).

One of the core tenets of CCT is that consumers do not merely purchase goods for functional purposes; they imbue them with meanings tied to their personal and collective identities. Consumption becomes a way to perform one's social belonging, resist hegemonic norms, or navigate one's place in a globalized world (Holt, 2002, p. 71). This theoretical framework recognizes consumers as active agents in cultural production, individuals who use market resources not only for personal gratification but to construct narratives of selfhood and social affiliation. Consumption thus serves as a stage for identity work, where values, traditions, and aspirations are continuously negotiated and expressed (Holt, 2002, p. 73).

CCT is also particularly attentive to the tension between global capitalism and local culture. In a consumer society influenced by transnational flows, individuals and groups often use local symbols and cultural artifacts as a way to reclaim or protect their distinctiveness (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p. 386). As such, cultural products, including clothing, can be both commodified items and sites of cultural resistance or affirmation. Consumption can simultaneously reinforce dominant ideologies and serve as a tool for cultural preservation or identity assertion in the face of homogenizing global trends (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p. 387).

In the context of post-Soviet states such as Kyrgyzstan, Consumer Culture Theory offers a valuable lens for understanding how market-mediated symbols are appropriated to reconstruct national identity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these societies entered a period of cultural revival and ideological restructuring, during which consumers began to re-engage with their ethnic roots and local traditions (Pilkington, 2002, p. 12; Caldwell, 2004, p. 9). In Kyrgyzstan, this has involved the increasing visibility and popularity of national-symbolic products, items such as clothing, accessories, and crafts that incorporate traditional Kyrgyz motifs and designs. These products function not only as goods for consumption but also as cultural texts through which identity narratives are constructed and communicated.

Scholars have noted that in transitional economies, consumption becomes a means of "symbolic recovery", helping societies reclaim suppressed or fragmented identities through everyday practices (Fehérváry, 2002, p. 370; Humphrey, 2002, p. 12). In this regard, Consumer Culture Theory allows us to examine how Kyrgyz consumers utilize national symbols in the marketplace as tools for cultural continuity, pride, and distinction. The resurgence of interest in national motifs, often hybridized with modern design, reflects broader processes of identity negotiation and the reassertion of cultural agency in the face of globalization and past cultural suppression.

Furthermore, consumer culture in Kyrgyzstan is shaped by global forces, including diaspora experiences, digital platforms, and exposure to international aesthetics. Through a CCT lens, these factors are not seen as merely external influences but as actively reshaped by local consumers, who imbue them with new meanings that align with their cultural values (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007, p. 140). This dynamic mirrors global patterns where consumers use global goods and platforms to express local identities, reinforcing the theory's core principle that consumption is an active and meaning-producing practice.

In summary, the application of Consumer Culture Theory to Kyrgyzstan reveals how consumption in emerging post-Soviet nations is not only economically motivated but deeply entangled with questions of heritage, belonging, and identity. It helps explain how national-symbolic products are embedded in the broader cultural fabric, functioning as vehicles for both personal expression and collective memory.

3.2. Symbolic Consumption and Identity Construction

Symbolic consumption refers to the idea that consumers buy and use products not only for their functional utility but also for the symbolic meanings those products carry. These meanings allow individuals to construct, express, and communicate their identity (Solomon, 1983, p. 320). In this view, goods become “symbols” that help individuals define who they are, how they relate to others, and what values they associate themselves with. This perspective stems from the foundational work of sociologists like Baudrillard (2016, p. 25), who argued that consumption has become detached from basic needs and is now more concerned with the semiotics, the signs and meanings of goods.

According to Belk (1988, p. 160), possessions are a major contributor to our sense of self; individuals extend their identity through what they own and display. As he famously stated, “we are what we have”. Consumption is thus a key site for self-expression, particularly in a modern world where traditional social roles are more fluid and fragmented. Symbolic consumption allows people to distinguish themselves or connect to certain communities, often aligning with lifestyle choices, social status, ethnic heritage, or political beliefs (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 134).

In the context of nationhood and ethnicity, symbolic consumption plays a central role in expressing cultural belonging and constructing national identity. Products bearing national symbols, such as clothing, accessories, or household items, carry layers of meaning that resonate with collective memory, pride, and historical narratives. As Tomlinson (1999, p. 37) emphasizes, such practices allow individuals to maintain cultural rootedness while navigating the forces of globalization.

In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, symbolic consumption has gained renewed significance as the country continues to shape its national identity after decades of Soviet rule. Following independence in 1991, there has been a notable resurgence in the use of national symbols in everyday products: from fashion and accessories to interior design items and digital content. This trend represents more than aesthetic preference; it reflects the consumers’ attempts to reconnect with cultural roots and distinguish themselves within both domestic and global contexts.

National-symbolic products, particularly in fashion, are increasingly used by young Kyrgyz consumers as a way to express a modern yet culturally grounded identity. The blending of traditional symbols with contemporary design, often called *modern*

ethno-style, allows consumers to participate in national narratives while also adhering to urban lifestyles and global fashion norms. As discussed by Kalinina (2014, p. 5), such consumption practices in post-Soviet spaces serve not only personal identity-building functions but also act as socio-political statements about who belongs and how culture should evolve.

Moreover, the symbolic meanings embedded in national attire or accessories allow Kyrgyz consumers, especially those living abroad, to perform their identity publicly. Wearing such items becomes a statement of belonging and cultural pride, reaffirming ties to the homeland while navigating foreign environments. This behavior aligns with what Wiltgren (2014, p. 7) described as “strategic identity performances”, where youth use national symbols to negotiate both internal belonging and external recognition.

3.3. Postcolonial Theory and Cultural Reappropriation

Postcolonial theory provides a critical framework for analyzing how formerly colonized societies reclaim their cultural identity and reassert their agency in the aftermath of imperial domination. At its core, postcolonial theory critiques the lingering power structures and cultural hierarchies established during colonial rule and explores how these systems continue to shape identities, knowledge, and representation (Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 3). Central to this perspective is the process of cultural reappropriation, where marginalized communities reclaim symbols, traditions, and narratives that were suppressed or distorted under colonial regimes.

Homi Bhabha’s concept of *hybridity* is particularly relevant here, describing how postcolonial subjects construct identity through the blending of indigenous and colonial cultural forms (Bhabha, 2012, p. 38). Rather than returning to a “pure” or untouched version of tradition, hybrid identities are formed in a “third space” where cultural meanings are constantly negotiated. These dynamic challenges essentialist views of culture and opens possibilities for creative reinterpretation of traditional symbols in contemporary contexts.

Another key concept is *cultural resistance*, which refers to the use of indigenous knowledge and practices to subvert dominant colonial ideologies. National symbols, such as traditional attire, language, and rituals, can act as tools of resistance and pride, reasserting sovereignty and historical continuity (Fanon, 1963, p. 210). In this way,

consumption of cultural goods becomes more than aesthetic preference; it becomes a political act of re-owning the narrative and fostering a sense of autonomy and collective identity.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, postcolonial theory offers valuable insights into the resurgence of national-symbolic products and the role they play in constructing post-Soviet identity. Under Soviet rule, Kyrgyz culture was subjected to systematic standardization, Russification, and repression of traditional customs, language, and religious practices. The Soviet modernization project often portrayed local traditions as "backward" and sought to replace them with socialist ideals. This legacy left a cultural vacuum that many post-Soviet societies, including Kyrgyzstan, are now attempting to fill through deliberate acts of cultural revival. As Artman (2015, p. 1-5) notes, since independence, Kyrgyzstan has faced the challenge of articulating a viable national identity, involving the mobilization of various ethno-national symbols, such as the epic *Manas*, to underpin the state's nationalist ideology. This process reflects efforts to reclaim and reintegrate traditional cultural elements that were marginalized during the Soviet era.

The reappropriation of traditional Kyrgyz symbols, such as the *kalpak* (traditional felt hat), *chapan* (robe), and national ornaments, is emblematic of this reclaiming process. These items, now frequently used in modernized fashion and accessories, symbolize more than heritage, they represent a form of cultural sovereignty and resilience. Their consumption serves as a statement of belonging and defiance against historical erasure, particularly among the younger generation navigating identity in a globalized world.

Moreover, the process is often characterized by *hybridization*, where traditional elements are blended with modern design, creating new aesthetic forms that reflect both cultural pride and contemporary sensibilities. This creative fusion exemplifies Bhabha's (2012, p. 6-10) notion of hybridity, positioning national-symbolic products as expressions of evolving identity rather than fixed tradition.

In diaspora communities as well, Kyrgyz consumers adopt these symbols as part of their identity work abroad, reflecting *cultural ambassadorship* and resistance to assimilation. Wearing national-symbolic clothing or using culturally marked accessories in foreign settings becomes a way to reassert cultural specificity in global spaces.

3.4. Performative Identity

The concept of *performative identity*, rooted in the work of Judith Butler (1990), explores the idea of identity as a stable, inherent quality, instead positing that identity is constructed through repeated social performances. According to Butler, identity, particularly gender identity, is not something one *is*, but rather something one *does*, constituted through repeated behaviors, expressions, and symbols that are recognized and legitimized within cultural contexts (Butler, 1990, p. 25). This theoretical framework has since been extended beyond gender to encompass various identity dimensions, including nationality, ethnicity, and cultural affiliation.

Performance theory suggests that individuals actively construct and express their identities through symbolic acts, such as clothing, language, rituals, and consumer choices (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). These acts are not merely reflections of identity but constitutive elements that bring identity into being. Through this lens, identity is seen as context-dependent and fluid, shaped by both internal aspirations and external social expectations.

In consumer culture, the act of wearing certain types of clothing or displaying particular symbols becomes a form of *identity work*. It communicates one's values, affiliations, and aspirations to others while simultaneously reinforcing one's sense of self. As such, products become props in the performance of identity, and consumption itself becomes a site where identities are staged, contested, and affirmed (Solomon, 1983, p. 91).

Following independence in 1991, post-Soviet society experienced a revival of national symbols, language, and traditional values, elements that had been partially suppressed during the Soviet period (Pelkmans, 2006, p. 199). This theoretical framework is especially relevant in the case of Kyrgyzstan, where young consumers are increasingly engaging in identity performances using national-symbolic products. The consumption of culturally coded items, such as clothing, accessories, or digital content featuring traditional Kyrgyz motifs, serves as a public act of expressing one's connection to national heritage. It is not only an aesthetic choice but a performative gesture that signifies "I belong" or "I am proud of my culture."

In this context, traditional symbols are repurposed and recontextualized in everyday life, from university settings to international events. Young Kyrgyz individuals are seen wearing *kalpaks* during graduation ceremonies or using national

ornaments on their phones and laptops. These acts reflect the *performance of national identity* within both local and transnational social arenas. As Butler (1990, p. 25) emphasized, the repetition of such practices is what reinforces identity, each act of symbolic consumption contributes to the formation and stabilization of cultural self-understanding.

Moreover, performative identity helps to explain the dual nature of this trend: it is both a personal expression of belonging and a strategic presentation to others. Respondents in recent qualitative interviews indicated that such clothing choices are often consciously made when they want to feel more connected to their roots, or when they are in public spaces, especially abroad, where being visibly Kyrgyz becomes an act of cultural ambassadorship. The desire to be seen and recognized as part of a nation aligns with the idea that identities are performed for an audience and gain meaning through recognition (Goffman, 1959, p. 30).

Furthermore, the Kyrgyz consumer's preference for hybrid fashion forms, blending modern silhouettes with national motifs, reflects both a desire for self-expression and a form of cultural negotiation. It allows them to participate in global fashion systems while maintaining a distinct Kyrgyz identity. This mirrors the performative balancing act of being modern yet rooted, which is a common theme in nations undergoing cultural transition (Yessenova, 2005, p. 662).

Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, national-symbolic consumption becomes a performative process of making identity visible both to oneself and to others through embodied practices and symbolic choices. This aligns with broader sociocultural processes in post-Soviet contexts, where identity is continuously reconstructed in response to historical ruptures, globalization, and the search for cultural continuity.

3.5. Nostalgic connections: Emotional Geography and Collective Memory

Emotions are not only individual responses but are also shaped by and embedded within specific social and spatial contexts. The concept of *emotional geography* recognizes that places are not merely physical locations but are imbued with emotional meanings and cultural significance (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524). These emotional attachments are formed through lived experiences, memories, and the symbolic resonance that certain spaces, objects, or cultural practices evoke.

According to Davidson and Milligan (2004, p. 529), emotional geography helps explain how individuals relate to landscapes, clothing, architecture, and symbolic spaces in a way that reflects both personal identity and broader cultural belonging (p. 523). Emotional ties to places and symbols reinforce notions of home, origin, and cultural identity, feelings that are often intensified in postcolonial or transitional societies where identity is renegotiated. As such, cultural symbols, whether in the form of clothing, objects, or motifs can act as emotional anchors, connecting individuals to collective histories and national belonging.

Closely linked to this is the theory of *collective memory*, originally developed by Maurice Halbwachs (2020, p. 14-15), who argued that individual memories are socially constructed and maintained through interaction with the collective. Halbwachs emphasized that what we remember is shaped by the groups we belong to, such as family, nation, or ethnicity, and that cultural symbols play a central role in transmitting these memories across generations.

Collective memory is materialized through tangible symbols, rituals, and commemorative practices that reaffirm group identity and historical continuity. These symbolic forms, whether monuments, songs, attire, or language, create a sense of shared past and imagined community (Anderson, 2020, p. 20). In this way, clothing embedded with national symbols can be seen as “mobile memory objects”, carrying the emotional weight of historical narratives, traditions, and cultural pride.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, both emotional geography and collective memory are central to the post-Soviet process of national identity formation. Following independence, there has been a cultural and emotional reattachment to pre-Soviet traditions, language, and symbols. These elements are often embedded in clothing designs, accessories, or domestic products.

The use of national motifs such as the *tumar*, *kalpak*, or traditional Kyrgyz ornaments can evoke feelings of belonging, nostalgia, and emotional pride. For diaspora communities, these symbols may act as emotional bridges between past and present, homeland and hostland, anchoring identity in a sense of continuity and cultural memory (Laruelle, 2018, p. 31). Within Kyrgyzstan, particularly among younger generations, national-symbolic products often function as tools for reimagining the nation's cultural landscape, reconnecting emotionally with narratives that were suppressed or disrupted during the Soviet era.

Moreover, wearing national symbols in clothing may not only signify cultural loyalty but also reflect a spatial-emotional identity tied to particular geographies - rural areas, childhood memories, or sacred landscapes. Emotional geography thus becomes a lens for understanding how Kyrgyz consumers experience cultural identity through both memory and material forms.

3.6. Diaspora Identity, Cultural Storytelling and Transnationalism

The concept of *diaspora identity* refers to the evolving sense of self and belonging experienced by individuals and communities who live outside their ancestral homelands yet maintain emotional, cultural, or symbolic ties to them. Stuart Hall (1990, p. 235) famously noted that diasporic identity is not fixed or singular but rather constructed through a continuous process of positioning and negotiation. Diaspora communities are often caught between multiple cultural worlds, which leads to hybrid identities that combine elements of both the host and origin cultures.

Transnationalism, as developed by scholars such as Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994), provides a framework to understand how migrants and diasporic individuals sustain multiple attachments across national borders. These ties go beyond physical movement; they include social, cultural, economic, and emotional exchanges. Transnational practices involve the circulation of ideas, traditions, goods, and symbols that help diaspora members maintain a sense of belonging to their origin culture while also adapting to the host country (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1009).

Symbolic consumption of national products cannot be fully understood without considering the role of cultural storytelling. While the previous sections have examined how national identity, pride, and nostalgia shape preferences for nationally symbolic products, it is through storytelling that these meanings are constructed, communicated, and emotionally reinforced. Cultural storytelling acts as a powerful mechanism for preserving collective memory, expressing identity, especially in post-Soviet contexts where people are constantly redefining their cultural positioning (Cruz & Miranda, 2022, p. 294). Stories, whether transmitted orally, visually, or digitally, embed symbols with emotional and historical meaning, allowing consumers to engage in identity work through symbolic objects.

In this context, *symbolic consumption* which is the particularly the use of clothing or objects marked by national symbols, serves as a tool for diasporic individuals to

express and sustain their identity. These practices are often intentional, performative acts that reaffirm one's connection to the homeland, especially during cultural celebrations, festivals, or even in everyday settings. Werbner (2002, p. 119-124) emphasized that diasporas often rearticulate and reinvent their identities through cultural performances, which include food, dress, music, and language.

National-symbolic products like attire, accessories, or crafts can thus act as portable symbols of heritage, carrying emotional and cultural weight that bridges distance and time. These items enable the performance of identity in transnational spaces, providing a sense of pride and visibility but also a medium for cultural transmission to future generations.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the growing diaspora in countries such as Germany, Türkiye, Russia, and the United States has played a vital role in maintaining and transforming cultural identity across borders. Young Kyrgyz diaspora members often engage in symbolic consumption of national items such as wearing *kalpak* hats, *chryptama* jackets, or accessories with Kyrgyz ornamentation to assert and reconnect with their identity abroad.

These practices are not merely nostalgic or decorative; they are acts of transnational identity performance. For example, participating in cultural events or sharing images on social media while dressed in Kyrgyz-inspired fashion serves as a form of emotional and visual storytelling that affirms their roots while navigating their diasporic life.

Moreover, through online marketplaces and social media, diaspora Kyrgyz communities often engage directly with local Kyrgyz artisans and brands. This dynamic reinforces emotional attachments to the homeland while contributing to the circulation of national identity in a globalized world. The consumption of national-symbolic products becomes a medium of community-making, and resistance against cultural erasure.

3.7. Fashion and Subculture Theory

Fashion and subculture theory investigates how style functions as a symbolic system that expresses identity, differentiates groups, and resists dominant norms. Hebdige (1979, p. 18) was one of the first to conceptualize subculture as a form of resistance, arguing that style is not just aesthetic but semiotic, conveying deeper cultural

meanings. In his view, subcultures use fashion as a “refusal”, a deliberate disruption of mainstream codes and ideologies (Hebdige, 1979, p. 95).

Thornton (1996, p. 26) expanded on this by introducing the idea of *subcultural capital*, referring to the knowledge, style, and cultural literacy that grants status within a subcultural group. She emphasized how subcultural groups define themselves in contrast to the mainstream, but also how they may replicate forms of exclusion and hierarchy internally. Meanwhile, Muggleton (2003, p. 209) suggested that in postmodernity, subcultures have become more individualistic, fluid, and hybridized, challenging the rigid structures of earlier subcultural models.

Other scholars have focused on the commodification of subcultural style, observing how fashion industries quickly absorb and market previously resistant styles, often stripping them of their original meanings (Crane, 2000, p. 189). This raises concerns about authenticity and cultural appropriation, especially when traditional or indigenous elements are recontextualized within global fashion trends (Vézina, 2019, p. 10). The rise of modernized ethno-style fashion among youth of Kyrgyzstan reflects many of the dynamics discussed in subcultural theory. Young consumers frequently blend traditional motifs, such as *tumar*, *kalpak*, or *ala-kiyiz* patterns, with contemporary cuts, fabrics, and global fashion sensibilities.

This fashion trend serves as both a cultural statement and a form of **everyday resistance**, as it asserts ethnic identity in the face of global homogenization, echoing Hebdige’s (1979, p. 130) interpretation of subcultural style as resistance. Young Kyrgyz consumers use clothing to look good but to symbolically express national pride and a longing for cultural rootedness in an increasingly globalized world.

However, just as Thornton (1996, p. 191) noted, these subculture styles are also susceptible to commercialization. In Kyrgyzstan, many brands now market ethno-modern clothing to middle-class consumers and tourists. This dual nature of symbolic resistance and consumer appeal reflects the tension between authenticity and marketability.

Furthermore, the youth adoption of national-symbolic fashion could be seen as a form of cultural subcultural capital which is an alternative mode of distinction and identity-making that grants social recognition within culturally conscious circles (Thornton, 1996, p. 26). Social media plays a crucial role in this, enabling individuals to

perform and share their culturally infused style and gain legitimacy within their peer networks.

3.8. Recognition Theory and Nation Branding

Recognition Theory, rooted in the work of Axel Honneth (1996, p. 88), emphasizes the human need for social recognition as foundational to identity formation and self-realization. Honneth posits that individuals seek recognition through three spheres: love, rights, and solidarity. Solidarity relates directly to the public affirmation of one's identity, culture, and values. When individuals or communities receive recognition from society for their cultural practices or identities, their sense of worth and agency is affirmed (Honneth, 1996, pp. 126-129). Taylor (1994, p. 25) argues that recognition is a vital human need, and misrecognition, in this framework, is not simply a lack of acknowledgment but can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false or demeaning mode of being (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

Recognition plays a critical role not only in interpersonal relations but also in the collective efforts of minority or postcolonial groups to assert cultural identity (Taylor, 1994, p. 42-44). When cultural practices, expressions, or identities are devalued or rendered invisible in dominant public narratives, individuals may experience a loss of dignity or self-worth. Therefore, cultural representation in fashion, symbols, and language can become vital tools for reclaiming visibility and dignity within society.

Recognition Theory is particularly relevant in postcolonial and transitional societies where historical processes of domination, marginalization, or erasure have undermined local cultures. Nancy Fraser (2003, pp. 21-23) questions why the recognition of difference has become such a source of conflict in the wake of Soviet-style communism's collapse and growing globalization. This framing positions cultural recognition not only as a moral concern but as a political imperative. In multicultural or postcolonial contexts, individuals from historically marginalized groups often use symbolic and cultural practices to assert their legitimacy and to demand respect on equal footing with dominant identities. Symbolic goods such as traditional clothing, ethnic motifs, and national accessories become vehicles for this assertion. These objects carry the weight of cultural meaning and are often used to express pride, belonging, and continuity. As such, their visibility in public and global spaces represents a form of socio-political recognition of asserting value and resisting erasure.

In parallel, *nation branding* is a concept developed within marketing and international relations, and symbolic resources to create a positive and distinctive image of a country (Gudjonsson, 2005, p. 286-287). Cultural symbols, national attire, traditional patterns become central elements of this branding, appealing both to domestic pride and to international interest in authenticity and heritage (Mentges, 2017, p. 55). Nation branding is not limited to tourism campaigns or economic competitiveness; it encompasses efforts to cultivate national pride and internal solidarity by highlighting distinctive cultural markers, including fashion, design, and national symbols. When done effectively, nation branding can serve as a form of collective self-recognition and a bid for global acknowledgment (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 157).

Nation branding and recognition theory converge in their shared concern with visibility, legitimacy, and identity affirmation. Cultural products embedded with national symbols act as mediums through which individuals and institutions seek not only self-definition but also validation from both domestic and international audiences.

In Kyrgyzstan, the need for recognition is especially pronounced given the country's Soviet past, during which national identity was diluted in favor of Soviet cosmopolitanism. Under Soviet rule, ethnic and cultural distinctiveness was often subordinated to ideological narratives that promoted uniformity and suppressed local traditions (Hirsch, 2005, p. 9). After independence, Kyrgyz society entered a phase of cultural revival and redefinition, wherein national symbols, language, and traditional clothing were revalorized as expressions of authenticity and sovereignty.

These national-symbolic items operate not only in the commercial market but also within the "struggle for recognition", (Honneth, 1996, p. 123) affirming cultural identity in a globalized world where Central Asian cultures often remain underrepresented. In this context, wearing national-symbolic attire became more than a stylistic choice, it emerged as a means of asserting identity and demanding respect for Kyrgyz cultural heritage. National costumes are again fashionable and represented on catwalks (Image 3.1).

Image 3.1 “Baira” brand catwalks.



Source: <http-7> (photo on the left), <http-18> (photo on the right).

Moreover, government-supported cultural festivals, fashion exhibitions, and diaspora outreach initiatives further illustrate how Kyrgyzstan engages in nation branding practices to assert its cultural distinctiveness. These initiatives represent efforts to craft and promote a unified national image that resonates with both internal audiences and international observers.

For many Kyrgyz citizens, especially the younger generation, national symbols worn in public spaces, on social media, or even abroad serve as a medium for seeking recognition not only within the nation but on a global scale. This is especially relevant for diaspora populations, whose visibility in multicultural settings often hinges on symbolic expressions of origin and identity. Displaying Kyrgyzness through fashion and material culture may be interpreted as a response to both past marginalization and present invisibility in global narratives.

Furthermore, for designers, influencers, and artisans working with national-symbolic products, the production and promotion of such goods are not only acts of entrepreneurship but also cultural statements. Their work invites both local and international audiences to recognize and respect the richness of Kyrgyz culture.

3.9. Consumer Nationalism: Loyalty through Local Consumption

Consumer nationalism refers to the tendency of consumers to prefer domestic products over foreign ones as a form of expressing loyalty and pride in their nation (Balabanis et al., 2001, p. 160). This phenomenon transcends purely economic decision-making and reflects a symbolic commitment to national identity. By purchasing locally made goods, particularly those bearing cultural or historical significance, consumers express a sense of solidarity, cultural belonging, and resistance to perceived threats of cultural homogenization brought on by globalization.

Unlike economic protectionism driven by government policy, consumer nationalism is a grassroots form of cultural activism, emerging from everyday consumption choices. It is often triggered during periods of social, political, or economic uncertainty, when citizens are especially inclined to reaffirm their national identity through visible and symbolic means (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 312). In such contexts, products embedded with national symbolism become more than merchandise, they become carriers of collective identity and pride.

In Kyrgyzstan, the rise of consumer nationalism is intricately linked to the post-Soviet search for cultural redefinition. During Soviet rule, local traditions and identities were suppressed or reframed within a homogenizing socialist framework. Since gaining independence, Kyrgyz society has witnessed a strong revival of interest in national heritage, particularly through consumption practices. Items such as *kalpaks*, *chryptamas*, embroidered accessories, and felt-based crafts are now not only symbols of cultural heritage but also expressions of everyday nationalism.

Young Kyrgyz consumers play a central role in this movement. Through their purchasing behaviors, they express preferences for locally made, culturally resonant products, often rejecting mass-produced foreign alternatives. These choices reflect a desire to support local artisans, celebrate Kyrgyz aesthetics, and reaffirm their cultural roots within a modern context. This form of consumption, deeply rooted in emotional and symbolic value, aligns closely with what researchers define as patriotic or nationalist consumption (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 312; Balabanis et al., 2001, p. 161).

3.10. Social Media Influence: Social Learning, Tolerance, and Self-Expression

Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping individual preferences, identity formation, and cultural expression. One of the foundational theories explaining how individuals adopt behaviors observed in digital spaces is Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). This theory posits that people learn new behaviors by observing others, particularly when the observed behavior is rewarded or associated with positive outcomes. In the digital age, influencers, peers, and public figures act as virtual role models, presenting behaviors and consumption patterns that followers may imitate.

In the context of national-symbolic product consumption, when youth see admired figures wearing modernized national attire or accessories, they may be motivated to adopt similar styles to affiliate themselves with those identities or to signal cultural pride in socially approved ways (Özmatyatlı, Cırhinlioğlu, 2019, p. 1102). Social learning through digital media thus becomes a mechanism for the normalization and popularization of symbolic fashion.

Furthermore, digital environments foster increased tolerance and self-expression, especially among younger generations. Social media contributes to this shift by providing spaces for cultural experimentation, where users can freely explore multiple layers of their identity such as national, ethnic, global, and personal without immediate social risk. Visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok enable users to share curated versions of themselves, often emphasizing cultural uniqueness. National-symbolic products, such as clothing, accessories, or home décor, become tools for aesthetic identity performance, allowing users to signal both belonging and distinction in front of a wider audience (Entwistle, 2023).

Moreover, the viral spread of images and trends contributes to the mainstreaming of cultural pride. When traditional symbols are worn by respected influencers or incorporated into contemporary aesthetics, they become socially acceptable even fashionable among wider audiences who may otherwise view them as outdated or "rural." This digital media as a soft power plays key role in shaping ideas about cultural identity, heritage, and values. (Bibi & Hanif, 2024, p. 18).

In addition, in the Kyrgyz context, social media plays a growing role in shaping how young people engage with national-symbolic products and express cultural identity. Kyrgyz youth are increasingly incorporating national motifs into their everyday

aesthetic through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms provide both visibility and validation for wearing items such as kalpaks, felt accessories, or clothing adorned with traditional Kyrgyz ornamentation.

Among urban youth and those living in diaspora communities, digital platforms serve as a key space for identity experimentation. Through curated online appearances, they engage in visual storytelling that blends tradition with modernity, often using national-symbolic products to highlight a sense of pride and individuality. Influencers, designers, and cultural entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan also contribute to this process, acting as digital role models and tastemakers whose posts inspire broader audiences to explore and embrace national aesthetics.

This digital engagement contributes to a form of "soft cultural diplomacy", particularly for Kyrgyz diaspora members who use visual content to connect with their heritage and share it with international audiences. As such, social media in Kyrgyzstan is not merely a communication tool, but a platform where cultural meaning is produced, shared offering youth a space to perform their identity using the language of fashion, visuals, and national symbolism.

In addition to individual expressions of cultural identity on social media, there is a growing digital ecosystem in Kyrgyzstan that actively promotes national heritage and identity, particularly among youth. YouTube podcasts have become an influential medium where experts, artists, and cultural figures are invited to discuss topics such as Kyrgyz ethnicity, traditional customs, history, and identity formation. These platforms provide accessible and engaging content for young audiences, many of whom seek deeper connections with their cultural roots. The popularity of these discussions reflects a broader societal shift toward revaluing and reasserting national identity in contemporary formats.

On Instagram and other platforms, there is also a noticeable rise in pages dedicated to language revival. These accounts promote the correct use of the Kyrgyz language, emphasizing the avoidance of Russian loanwords and encouraging proper grammar and spelling. This digital movement aligns with the larger trend of cultural and linguistic reassertion in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, where the Kyrgyz language is not only seen as a communication tool but as a symbol of national pride. The visibility of these language-focused accounts contributes to a sense of community and cultural participation among Kyrgyz youth.

Moreover, local brands that produce national-symbolic products are leveraging social media to expand their reach and influence. Pages regularly showcase new designs, product launches, and behind-the-scenes creative processes, while also forming partnerships that integrate national motifs into mainstream consumer spaces. One notable example is the collaboration between iStore Kyrgyzstan and the local brand Cutadash, which specializes in modern, aesthetically refined products with national symbolism. Such partnerships enhance brand visibility. Through these digital avenues, Kyrgyz youth are not only consuming content but participating in a broader cultural renaissance shaped by aesthetics, identity, and technological connectivity.

3.11. Intrinsic Motivations: Uniqueness, Self-Determination and Aesthetic Engagement

The desire for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) is a key psychological motivator in consumer behavior, particularly in contexts where identity expression is socially and culturally significant. According for the *Need for Uniqueness Theory*, individuals possess a fundamental psychological drive to see themselves as different from others in meaningful ways. This drive often manifests in consumption behaviors, where people select products that allow them to express their distinctiveness. In consumer research, this is referred to as *uniqueness-seeking behavior*, which serves both individual and social identity goals (Tian et al., 2001, p. 50-52). National-symbolic products, when embedded in daily use or fashion, offer consumers a means to visually stand out while staying grounded in culturally meaningful expression.

In contexts where globalization and mass production tend to standardize consumer goods and fashion, individuals may seek products that reflect cultural specificity, personal values, or heritage. National-symbolic products offer such opportunities. They enable consumers to construct a distinct yet culturally grounded identity, differentiating themselves from mainstream fashion while reaffirming a sense of belonging to their nation or cultural group (Belk, 1988, p. 152).

Uniqueness in this framework is not merely aesthetic but symbolic, a way to express one's cultural knowledge, loyalty, and rootedness (Belk, 1988, p. 160). This is particularly relevant in younger generations who simultaneously navigate global fashion trends and local cultural traditions. In fact, global fast fashion contributes to a standardized and homogenized “look” that dominates youth culture across borders,

prompting many to reassert local identity markers as a counterbalance (Muggleton, 2003, p. 209). They may adopt national-symbolic elements in modern forms (e.g., minimalist kalpak logos, traditional ornamentation on modern attire) to signal their individuality without stepping outside socially acceptable boundaries. These hybrid fashion choices not only blend modernity and tradition but also reflect a negotiation between global belonging and national distinctiveness.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) complements this perspective by emphasizing the psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When individuals voluntarily choose to engage with culturally rooted products such as traditional symbols in clothing or design, they satisfy intrinsic motivations aligned with personal values. This behavior reflects identified regulation, a form of intrinsic motivation where individuals act in accordance with self-endorsed beliefs (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68-69). In the context of national-symbolic consumption, consumers often select items not just for their aesthetic appeal but because they resonate with deeply held cultural or emotional values.

Products that carry national or cultural symbolism may fulfill these needs by enabling consumers to act autonomously (choosing products that resonate with their values), feel competent (expressing identity through socially meaningful choices), and experience relatedness (connecting with a cultural group or shared heritage). These motivations go beyond utilitarian needs and align with deeper identity-affirming processes.

Aesthetic engagement, too, plays a vital role in symbolic consumption. Aesthetics are not merely surface-level experiences; they provide a sense of pleasure, meaning, and identity reinforcement. According to Leder et al. (2004, p. 492-493), aesthetic experiences are processed cognitively and emotionally, leading to gratification and emotional connection. Cultural products with national symbols, be they garments, jewelry, or digital accessories, therefore evoke both visual pleasure and psychological resonance, allowing individuals to experience beauty while asserting identity (Belk, 1988, p. 152; Na'am et al., 2019, p. 654).

According to Marković (2012, p. 2), aesthetic experience involves emotional responses, cognitive appraisal, and personal meaning, especially when the aesthetic elements are socially charged, it is close to spiritual transcendence, which is the feeling of connectedness and unity with other people. National-symbolic items such as traditional

clothing or ornaments may evoke emotions tied to memory, pride, or belonging, enhancing the psychological reward of using or displaying such products.

These frameworks also intersect with embodied aesthetics, where aesthetic experience is shaped through interaction with the physical qualities of objects, textures, handcrafted techniques, colors, shapes often tied to cultural or traditional craft. The act of wearing or displaying these items becomes not only an expression of identity but also a sensory engagement with culture (Mouwitz, 2013, p. 9-20; Na'am et al., 2019, p. 654).

Image 3.2 “Keshte” branded everyday fashion using national patterns.



Source: <http-19>.

In Kyrgyzstan, national-symbolic products have become powerful tools for self-expression among younger generations who seek to assert both individuality and cultural continuity. Urban youth often integrate national patterns into everyday fashion wearing kalpaks with minimalist outfits or using accessories that blend traditional Kyrgyz embroidery with modern design (Image 3.2). This hybrid expression allows them to fulfill their desire for uniqueness within a culturally grounded framework.

Many young Kyrgyz consumers view these choices as a form of visual differentiation not only from Westernized global fashion but also from older, more rigid expressions of tradition. These practices reflect a conscious assertion of autonomy over inherited cultural symbols, as youth remix heritage to suit contemporary aesthetics and lifestyles. This creative autonomy strengthens their sense of ownership over cultural narratives, which had historically been suppressed or shaped by Soviet Union. For consumers in emerging nations, where cultural narratives have been historically marginalized or interrupted, symbolic consumption can fulfill personal and collective psychological needs.

These theories help frame the broader academic inquiry into how individuals engage with national symbols not merely out of tradition, but as a personal and emotionally meaningful act of identity expression within a consumer culture.

3.12. Cultural Hybridity and Global Cultural Flows

In today's interconnected world, the lines between local and global cultures are increasingly blurred, giving rise to hybrid cultural expressions. One such concept is *cultural hybridity*, which refers to the blending of different cultural elements to form new, context-specific meanings. Hybridity challenges the idea of pure or authentic cultures, instead highlighting how traditions can be reimagined and recontextualized in dynamic social environments (Bhadha, 2015, p. 15). In the realm of fashion, hybridity enables individuals to negotiate their identities by integrating national symbols into global forms of dress, thereby asserting cultural belonging while participating in cosmopolitan aesthetics.

Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theory of *global cultural flows* offers a useful framework for understanding how such hybrid forms emerge. According to Appadurai (1996, p.33) modern cultural exchange is shaped by five interrelated flows: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples, that circulate people, images, capital, and ideas globally. These flows create "imagined worlds" in which individuals and communities reimagine their cultural identities and negotiate their place in the global cultural order (p. 53). In this framework, traditional attire is not preserved in isolation but is constantly being reshaped through exposure to new design trends, media influences, and consumer preferences.

Roland Robertson's (1995) notion of *glocalization* further explains how global and local elements interact to create new cultural expressions. Rather than being passive recipients of global culture, local communities adapt and reinterpret it to fit their values, histories, and aesthetics, by blending global and local (Robertson, 1995, pp. 28-31; Choo et al., 2023, p. 1053). Through *glocalized consumption*, individuals wear modernized national-symbolic clothing not as a rejection of tradition, but to make it relevant in contemporary life.

Modernized national dress, such as T-shirts or jackets adorned with traditional motifs, represents a form of glocalized cultural expression. As Bhabha notes, hybrid cultures do not abandon tradition but creating new cultural expressions that challenge normative expectations of development and progress. This process is not about preserving tradition in its original form but about reinscribing it to reflect contemporary realities and aspirations (Bhabha, 2012, p. 3-6). This kind of symbolic transformation can maintain cultural continuity while aligning with the practical, aesthetic, and social demands of modern life (Na'am et al., 2019, p. 653).

In the Kyrgyz context, the rise of modern-ethno fashion illustrates cultural hybridity in a post-Soviet and postcolonial landscape. After gaining independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan experienced a resurgence of national consciousness, which prompted efforts to revive traditional cultural expressions that had been suppressed or marginalized during the Soviet period (Kamp, 2011, p. 133). However, rather than returning solely to historical forms, many young Kyrgyz have embraced hybrid cultural expressions that combine traditional motifs such as national ornaments and patterns with globally recognized styles like streetwear or minimalistic design (Suyarkulova, 2016, p. 258). This process reflects what Bhabha (2015, p. 189) describes as the "third space" of cultural negotiation, where identity is not simply inherited but actively remade.

For many young Kyrgyz, particularly those in urban centers or diaspora communities, modern-ethno products such as sweatshirts, accessories, and tech cases featuring national motifs offer a way to express both cultural rootedness and cosmopolitan sensibilities. These hybrid forms make national symbols more accessible and relevant in everyday life, as they are easier to wear, more fashionable, and socially accepted in diverse environments (Na'am et al., 2019, p. 653). Moreover, global media and transnational communication allow these representations of Kyrgyz identity to

circulate beyond national borders, creating a shared aesthetic across the Kyrgyz diaspora. Social media platforms further amplify this process, as young people engage in identity performances that are simultaneously local and global, personal, and collective.

Summary: The theoretical perspectives outlined above converge around several key analytical themes. To clarify their interrelations and their specific roles in this study, the table below organizes the main and supplementary theories according to thematic domains, analytical levels, and their relevance to the research focus. It organizes the main and supplementary theories according to thematic groupings, analytical levels (macro/micro), and their specific relevance to the study's objectives.

Table 3.1. presents the theoretical framework used in this study, grouped into macro-level, micro-level, and cross-level perspectives. Two core theories: Postcolonial Theory and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), are identified as central to the research framework. The cross-level theory connects both structural-cultural and individual-consumer dimensions, while macro- and micro-level theories provide specific insights into collective and individual identity dynamics.

Table 3.1 *Theoretical Framework: Macro, Micro, and Cross-Level Theories*

Category	Theoretical Perspective	Role in Study	Key Concepts / Application
Cross-Level Theory (<i>Macro ↔ Micro</i>)	Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Central theory)	Explains how individuals construct identity through market-mediated symbolic goods and how those practices reflect broader cultural structures.	Marketplace as cultural space, symbolic consumption, consumer identity work, interpretive cultural systems.
Macro-Level Theories (Cultural Transformation & Collective Identity)	Postcolonial Theory (Central theory)	Explains cultural revival, symbolic resistance, and the historical-political background of national identity in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.	Cultural reappropriation, resistance, hybrid identity, decolonization of symbolic meaning.
	Consumer Nationalism	Frames local consumption as patriotic and identity-affirming.	Loyalty to national products, cultural pride, resistance to globalization.
	Cultural Hybridity & Global Cultural Flows	Explains blending of local and global aesthetics in fashion and symbolic goods.	Hybrid modernity, Bhabha's third space, cultural fusion.

	Recognition Theory	Emphasizes societal recognition through cultural expression.	Visibility, social affirmation, identity politics.
	Diaspora Identity & Transnationalism	Describes how symbolic goods maintain cultural ties across borders.	Digital storytelling, identity preservation, global Kyrgyzness.
	Emotional Geography & Collective Memory	Connects consumption with place, memory, and shared history.	National dress as memory object, emotional links to homeland.
	Nation Branding & Cultural Diplomacy	Situates individual consumption within state-sponsored cultural projection.	Image-making, soft power, projecting national identity globally.
Micro-Level Theories (Individual & Consumer Experience)	Symbolic Consumption & Identity Work	Shows how individuals express self and group belonging through symbolic goods.	Clothing as cultural signifier, meaning attached to visual appearance.
	Performative Identity	Frames identity as something enacted through symbolic choices and repetition.	Visual expression of Kyrgyzness, performance through dress, Butlerian repetition.
	Social Media Influence & Social Learning	Explains how digital platforms shape consumer behavior and identity performance.	Imitation, influence, platform visibility, digital belonging.
	Self-Determination Theory	Shows intrinsic motivations behind engaging with national-symbolic products.	Need for autonomy, relatedness, and cultural competence.
	Desire for Uniqueness	Explains why individuals prefer distinctive, identity-rich items.	Ethnic motifs as personal markers, distinction within cultural conformity.
	Aesthetic Engagement & Emotional Resonance	Emphasizes emotional and visual appeal in product choice.	Symbolic beauty, aesthetic pleasure, cultural emotion in design.

This study integrates Postcolonial Theory and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) to explore the consumption of national-symbolic products from both cultural-historical and individual perspectives. Postcolonial Theory offers a macro-level view, helping to explain how identity is reshaped in the post-Soviet context through cultural revival and resistance. CCT complements this by showing how individuals engage with these identity narratives through symbolic consumption in everyday life. Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding how national identity is expressed, negotiated, and shared, especially in digital and diasporic settings.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study explores this emerging consumer phenomenon through a qualitative, interpretivist lens (Patton, 2015, p. 115; Casula et al, 2021, p. 1712). It seeks to understand how Kyrgyz consumers, particularly youth, make sense of and engage with national-symbolic products such as clothing and accessories that incorporate ethnic motifs, traditional materials, or visual markers of Kyrgyz identity. In addressing this topic, the study responds to a gap identified in the literature by Ko and Lee (2011, p. 107), who note the limited attention given to cultural heritage marketing that is rooted in local history, culture, and aesthetics. Furthermore, existing research tends to overlook how young people in transitional societies engage with national identity through the material consumption of culturally symbolic products (Wiltgren, 2014, p. 308). This study contributes to filling that gap by focusing on the lived experiences and consumption practices of Kyrgyz youth in a post-Soviet context. This inquiry is particularly timely as national identity in Kyrgyzstan is actively being renegotiated in response to global media flows, increased digital connectivity, and a generational shift in values.

Using a phenomenological and interpretivist qualitative approach (Patton, 2015, p. 115), this study focuses on how Kyrgyz consumers, particularly youth, engage with national-symbolic fashion as a form of identity performance and cultural storytelling. While these products have become increasingly popular in both local and diasporic contexts, especially via digital platforms, there is limited understanding of how their meanings are interpreted, emotionally experienced, and visually communicated. This research addresses that gap by exploring the cultural, aesthetic, and social dynamics shaping national-symbolic consumption in the post-Soviet, globalized era.

Main research problem: How do Kyrgyz youth experience and make meaning on national-symbolic product consumption as a form of national identity expression and emotional connection in the newly independent globalized context?

This methodological orientation enables the study to explore the deeper cultural and emotional meanings attached to national-symbolic consumption, beyond utilitarian or economic explanations. It also contributes to the broader literature on identity,

heritage, and market behavior in the newly emerged post-Soviet and postcolonial countries context.

This study aims to explore how Kyrgyz youth engage with national-symbolic products as a means of expressing identity, connecting emotionally to heritage, and participating in cultural storytelling. In addition to examining personal experiences and branding practices, the research seeks to develop a psychographic typology of consumers, identifying key motivations, orientations, and patterns of engagement. Through this, the study offers a culturally grounded perspective on how national identity is performed and negotiated through fashion in both everyday and digital contexts.

4.1. Research Design and Phenomenon of Interest

This study explores the culturally embedded phenomenon of national-symbolic product consumption among Kyrgyz consumers and fashion producers, focusing on the dynamic interplay between national identity, symbolism, and consumer behavior. This focus is especially timely and relevant given Kyrgyzstan's ongoing process of national identity formation in the post-Soviet era and its increasing engagement with global cultural and media flows.

While influenced by phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience, the study adopts a broader interpretivist (Patton, 2015, p. 115) and culturally grounded qualitative design. It investigates how meanings around national symbols are created, performed, and circulated across both personal and digital domains. The aim is not only to document individual experiences with ethnic fashion but to understand how these practices reflect broader social, historical, and aesthetic shifts in contemporary Kyrgyz culture (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 319).

Kyrgyzstan presents a particularly rich site for such inquiry. Following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country has experienced significant socio-political and economic transitions, which have affected both cultural expression and consumer habits. As citizens reimagine what it means to be Kyrgyz, everyday practices like clothing consumption emerge as powerful arenas for performing cultural belonging, especially among youth and creative producers (Arnould & Thompson, p. 874; Wiltgren, 2014, p. 308). National-symbolic products, such as kalpak hats, tribal embroidery, or ala-kiyiz felt ornaments, are no longer reserved for ceremonial use, but

are increasingly adapted into lifestyle fashion, often mediated by Instagram and other digital platforms (Botoeva & Spector, 2013, pp. 493-494; Zagitova, 2022, p. 64).

To capture this phenomenon, the study uses a multi-method qualitative approach combining (1) *semi-structured in-depth interviews* with young Kyrgyz consumers living in Kyrgyzstan and abroad, and (2) *content analysis of Instagram posts* published by leading Kyrgyz fashion brands. This design allows for a layered exploration of the phenomenon from two interrelated perspectives: *the insider view of consumers*, and *the producer/branding perspective* of fashion designers and labels. In addition to thematic analysis, the interview data is analyzed to develop a *psychographic typology of national-symbolic product consumers*. This typology aims to reveal diverse motivations, identity orientations, and patterns of engagement across participant groups.

Qualitative research is particularly well suited to the investigation of such socio-culturally complex phenomena. It emphasizes depth over breadth and allows for the unpacking of *motivations, meanings, and cultural logics* that underlie consumer practices (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 292). In-depth interviews capture subjective experiences, emotions, and values (Flick, 2009, p. 113), while the content analysis reveals how brands communicate and aestheticize cultural identity in public, curated digital spaces (Rocamora, 2017, pp. 509-511; Martinus & Chaniago, 2017, p. 201).

This approach also facilitates analytical triangulation, enhancing the credibility and richness of the findings (Patton, 2015, p. 249). Interview data illuminate how individuals interpret and attach meaning to national symbols in their daily lives, while Instagram content provides insight into how such meanings are constructed and marketed through visual narratives and branding language.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a more culturally nuanced and multi-perspective understanding of how national identity is expressed, negotiated, and performed in Kyrgyzstan through symbolic consumption. It captures both grassroots cultural revival and strategic media-based cultural production, offering insight into the evolving nature of identity, aesthetics, and consumer practice in a post-Soviet and globalized world.

Researcher positionality:

The researcher is a Kyrgyz national completing her doctoral studies in Türkiye, which positions her between cultural familiarity and academic distance. The initial

phase of the research was conducted while residing in Türkiye, where most interviews were carried out via WhatsApp, with only two conducted face-to-face. The second phase took place in Kyrgyzstan during the final year of the doctoral program. While the interviews in this stage were also conducted online, the researcher's physical presence in Kyrgyzstan allowed for closer observation of the social and cultural environment. This included direct exposure to how national-symbolic products are worn and displayed in everyday public life, adding valuable contextual insight to the research. This transnational research experience enabled the researcher to combine insider cultural knowledge with a reflective, comparative perspective shaped by academic training abroad. The shared language and cultural background helped build rapport with participants, while her scholarly position supported a critical and theory-informed interpretation of the findings.

4.2. Research Population and Sample

The focus of this qualitative study is to explore the consumption behavior of Kyrgyz consumers regarding national-symbolic products. The research population consists of Kyrgyz individuals residing both within Kyrgyzstan and abroad, representing a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Given the exploratory nature of the research, a purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants who possess firsthand experience with consuming national-symbolic products (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535). By including individuals from diverse backgrounds and demographic profiles, the study aims to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and insights.

Sample Selection Criteria: The sample selection criteria include Kyrgyz individuals who have consumed at least one national-symbolic product, regardless of their location, so we use a “purposeful sample” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523; Flick, 2009, p. 123) to identify respondents.

Sampling Method: A purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 539). This method ensured that participants were chosen based on their ability to provide rich and insightful perspectives on the consumption of national-symbolic products. Additionally, the study used a snowball sampling method to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is especially useful for reaching individuals who may be difficult to

identify or contact through conventional means. This method involves initial participants referring other participants who meet the study criteria, thereby expanding the sample through networks of participants (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535).

Sample Description: Study is focusing on young consumers aged 20-33, comprising 13 females and 9 males. The age range of 20-33 was purposefully selected for this study due to the sociocultural and developmental significance of this demographic within the context of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Individuals in this cohort were born after the country's independence in 1991 and have thus been socialized entirely within a period marked by intensified nation-building, cultural revival, and exposure to global consumer and media influences. This generation is particularly relevant for examining the consumption of national-symbolic products, as they occupy a unique position at the intersection of tradition and modernity. Their active engagement with digital platforms, especially visual and identity-driven spaces such as Instagram, makes them key agents in the performance and circulation of cultural aesthetics. Furthermore, this age group aligns with what Arnett (2000, p. 261-265) defines as "emerging adulthood": a developmental stage characterized by heightened identity exploration, self-definition, and openness to symbolic practices that communicate social belonging and cultural orientation. As such, this cohort provides critical insight into how national-symbolic products are reinterpreted, aestheticized, and integrated into contemporary expressions of Kyrgyz identity.

Sampling continued until saturation had reached (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 260). These changes ensure the study remains relevant to the trend of national-symbolic consumption, which is primarily associated with younger generations. While excluded, their insights were retained for comparative purposes.

11 of the participants currently reside abroad due to study or work commitments, while the other 11 reside in Kyrgyzstan. All participants have experience of consuming national-symbolic products and were selected based on their willingness to share their insights and experiences. By including individuals from diverse backgrounds and demographic profiles, the study aims to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and insights (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535). Appendix 1 presents a table with participants' demographics and interview details, including age, gender, location, interview mode, date, and duration.

For the **content analysis**, the research focused on Instagram posts published by leading Kyrgyz fashion brands between May 2024 and June 2025 (Spillane et al., 2021, p.2). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select accounts that are highly active and widely recognized within the national-symbolic fashion landscape, including @keshte, @baira.kg, @cutadash_official, @ethnic.kg, @olpok_, @aisanat.brand, and @moimol_. These brands were chosen based on their consistent engagement with Kyrgyz cultural motifs, popularity, activity level on Instagram, and their relevance to the study's research questions. All data were collected from publicly available posts and no photo of identifiable user content was analyzed. Where faces appeared in the posts, they were intentionally blurred to protect individuals' privacy. Randomly sampled 15-30 posts from each account were (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 49), resulting in a total corpus of 140 posts, and the posts were included if they featured national-symbolic elements, such as traditional patterns motifs, or garments, and demonstrated intentional cultural messaging through captions or visuals. Additionally, posts with higher engagement (generally 100+ likes) were prioritized to focus on content that had stronger audience reach and resonance. This approach allowed for a rich, varied sample of curated brand narratives to be analyzed as representations of producer-side identity construction in the digital space.

4.3. Procedure and Data Collection

The data collection process commenced with the development of a semi-structured interview guide, informed by the gaps identified in the literature review and the research objectives.

The development of the semi-structured interview questions was grounded in a review of literature on consumer culture, national-symbolic consumption, and symbolic meaning-making. Drawing on established theoretical frameworks, the initial questions focused on themes such as identity expression, emotional attachment to national symbols, and the everyday use of culturally significant products. To assess clarity and coherence, three pilot interviews were conducted with participants who matched the study's target profile. Based on their feedback, minor refinements were made to wording and structure, and one additional question were introduced. Because the overall design remained consistent, and with the participants' consent, the pilot interviews were included in the main analysis. The new question was later asked in follow-up

conversations with the earlier interviewees, ensuring that all participants responded to the same final set of questions. This iterative process helped strengthen the guide's depth and alignment with the study's interpretive aims.

The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed responses from participants regarding their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to the consumption of national-symbolic products.

Interviews included questions about personal characteristics influencing clothing choices and external pressures, such as societal reactions (e.g., admiration or criticism). Mostly open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses and to allow participants to share their experiences in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 165). Additionally, one yes-no questions were included, followed by complementary questions depending on the initial response, to further explore specific aspects of the participants' experiences.

Interview questions included:

1. How would you describe yourself in a few words?
2. How do you see your role in society, both in the world as a whole and in Kyrgyzstan?
3. Can you describe your recent experiences with purchasing national-symbolic products? What motivated these purchases?
4. When was the last time you wore or used a product like this? What was the environment like? How did you feel? Did you receive any comments about your outfit/accessories?
5. What are your basic feelings about using clothes, accessories containing such symbols?
6. Are there any specific national symbols or motifs that hold particular significance for you (or your generation)? If so, can you explain why?
7. What are external influences, (such as family traditions, peer groups, or community events, cultural events) that shape your attitudes and behaviors towards national-symbolic products? Can you describe their significance?
8. How influential do you believe social media platforms and influencers are in shaping your preferences for national-symbolic products? Can you provide examples of instances where social media influenced your purchasing decisions?
9. How does using ethnic clothing/accessories containing national symbols make you different among your friends, your social circle?
10. How do you envision the future of consumption trends for national-symbolic products in your country? What factors do you think will shape these trends?
11. In your opinion, what are the potential benefits and challenges associated with the increasing consumption of national-symbolic products in your country?

12. How do you think the globalization of markets and the availability of imported goods impact the consumption of locally produced national-symbolic products?
13. What is your favorite ethnic clothing/item? Can you share a picture of it?

Individual interviews were conducted with selected participants, allowing for in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives (Patton, 2015, pp. 106-107). The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accurate capture of participants' narratives and facilitate subsequent analysis. Since it was virtually impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews with most participants due to their location, data collection was conducted through telephone calls or Zoom, WhatsApp calls, depending on the preference or convenience of the participant. This method of data collection did not allow for field notes to be taken to document contextual factors and nonverbal cues that could assist in the interpretation of interview data. However, participants were also asked to share their favorite national-symbolic products at the end of the interview. All participants shared photographs of these products through WhatsApp, which provided additional contextual information and visual evidence to enrich the qualitative data. (Renz et al., 2018, p. 824). All participant photographs included in Appendix 3 have been edited to blur faces in order to protect anonymity and comply with ethical research standards.

All the interview recordings were transcribed and translated into English using an online translation program (www.onlinedoctranslator.com). To ensure accuracy, the transcriptions were reviewed and corrected manually to exclude translation errors. The photos provided by participants were also added to the interview files. After this thorough process, translated interview transcripts served as the raw data and were ready for the study (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 521).

Content analysis of Instagram posts data collection procedure:

To systematically investigate how Kyrgyz fashion brands construct and convey cultural narratives, a qualitative content analysis was carried out using publicly accessible Instagram posts. The procedure began with a detailed examination of selected brand profiles, where each relevant post was documented (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 49). For each entry, the brand name, publication date, full caption (including emojis, hashtags, and tagged accounts), and a descriptive summary of the image content were recorded.

Recognizing the multimodal nature of Instagram communication, both textual and visual elements were analyzed in parallel (Highfield & Leaver, 2016, p. 47). Caption analysis focused on identifying recurring keywords, heritage references, and branding strategies. Hashtags were examined to reveal how brands position themselves within broader cultural, social, or market-driven discourses.

Visual analysis centered on stylistic elements such as clothing types, traditional motifs (e.g., kalpak, ala-kiyiz, petroglyph embroidery), and model presentation, including pose, facial expression, setting, and props. These visual cues were interpreted not only as aesthetic choices but as components of cultural storytelling.

This integrated approach allowed for a holistic understanding of how brands use Instagram not just for marketing, but as a platform for cultural storytelling and “identity work” (Martwick, 2015, p. 144).

4.4. Data Analysis

This study employed a rigorous qualitative methodology to identify patterns, themes, and underlying meanings embedded within the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research, was chosen to systematically explore recurring themes, differences, and nuanced interpretations in participants’ narratives (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 107). Through detailed coding and interpretation, the analysis aimed to illuminate how Kyrgyz consumers engage with national-symbolic products and what meanings they associate with these practices (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 91).

In line with the qualitative framework of the study, which is based on in-depth interviews, data analysis was conducted using the “thematic coding” technique. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify patterns in the data that help explain the research phenomenon and answer the research question. During the interviews, efforts were made to collect comprehensive and context-rich data through extended dialogue. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed into written text. The researcher followed the thematic analysis guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87).

The analysis process involved the following six phases, as proposed by Braun and Clarke:

Familiarization with the data - The researcher immersed herself in the transcripts by reading and re-reading the interviews while noting preliminary reflections and ideas.

Generating initial codes - Key features of the data were coded systematically across the dataset, and relevant extracts were collated under initial codes (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63).

Searching for themes - Codes were grouped into potential themes, supported by relevant and coherent data segments.

Reviewing themes - Themes were refined by checking their internal consistency and relevance to the dataset as a whole, resulting in a thematic map of findings.

Defining and naming themes - Each theme was clearly defined, with attention to the narrative it conveyed (Nigbur & Chatfield, 2025, p. 5-7).

Producing the report - The final phase involved weaving the themes into a coherent analytical narrative, supported by rich examples, and linked to the research questions and relevant literature.

In the initial phase, consistent with the inductive principles of qualitative data analysis (Pope et al., 2000, p. 114), the researcher thoroughly read the data and translated the transcripts into English. This allowed for careful attention to phrasing, contextual meaning, and the correction of translation-related inaccuracies. Focusing on specific expressions, events, and behavior patterns helped preserve the authenticity of participants' voices.

In the second phase, an open coding process was initiated to identify analytical concepts and explore the dimensions and properties of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). In qualitative inquiry, a code is typically a word or short phrase that captures a significant or evocative feature of a data segment (Saldana, 2015, p. 4). The length of coded content varied from single words to full sentences or paragraphs. Initially, approximately half of the interviews were manually analyzed to develop an initial set of codes. These were generated by reading the transcripts, identifying striking content, and listing codes along with brief explanations on a separate document.

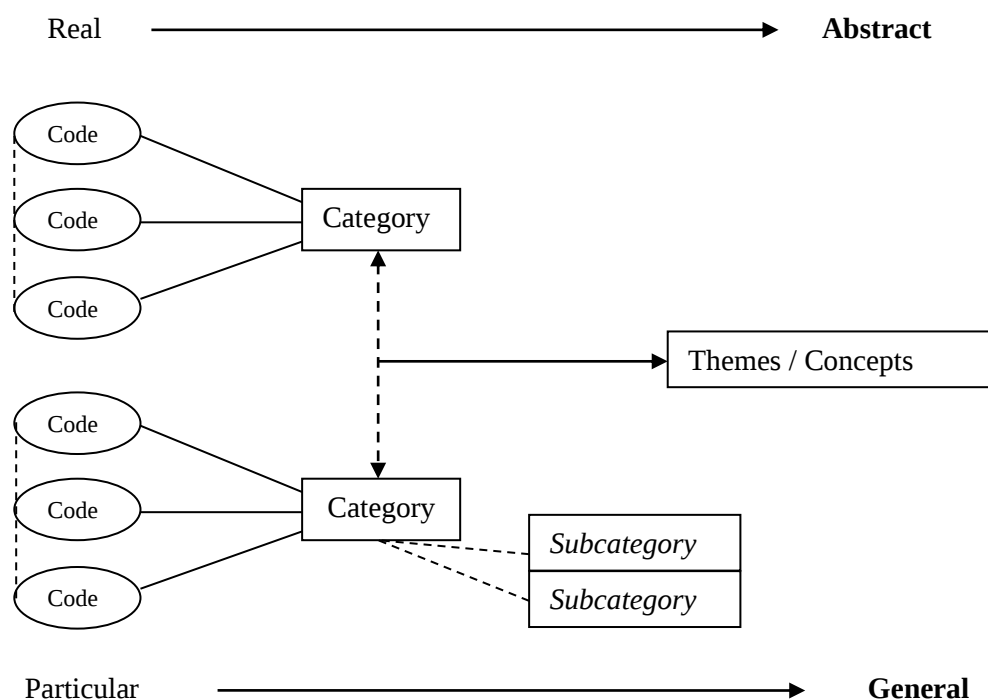
To ensure analytical rigor and consistency, MAXQDA software was then employed for systematic coding and data management. Previously analyzed transcripts were revisited and re-coded in the software, while newly conducted interviews were coded directly within the platform. The AI-assisted features of MAXQDA supported the

identification of recurring topics and helped organize analytical memos for each file, ensuring that no critical insights were overlooked.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher maintained reflexive notes to record personal reactions, emerging ideas, and methodological observations. While interpretation in qualitative research is inherently subjective, reflexivity helped distinguish personal impressions from data-driven insights, thereby enhancing transparency and analytical objectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

In the third phase, the process of discovering categories was guided by Strauss and Corbin's (1998, p. 113) approach, which involves reducing the number of coded units by grouping them into broader conceptual categories based on relationships and patterns. This step included inductive and deductive reasoning processes such as constant comparison and iterative questioning. A category represents a phenomenon or concept that explains a specific issue, event, or behavior considered significant by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Visual representations such as tables and mind maps were used to assist in identifying overarching themes from related codes. Subthemes were developed from the coded data, which were then consolidated into main themes (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 *Thematic coding analysis process (Saldana, 2009, s. 12)*



In the fourth phase, the emerging findings were reviewed, and interpretations and suggestions for refinement were made by the researcher.

In the fifth phase, based on feedback from the thesis advisory committee, themes and codes were revisited and reevaluated. As a result, certain categories were reorganized to improve conceptual clarity.

Before advancing to the final stage, a form of *member checking* was conducted. Five participants were contacted again to provide feedback on the results, including the emerging codes and themes. This step, recommended to enhance validity, involved verifying whether participants felt the results accurately reflected their views and experiences (Başkale, 2016, p. 24). Participants offered evaluations, comments, and recommendations, which were integrated into the final analysis.

In the sixth and final phase, participants' feedback, theoretical framing, and existing literature were used to finalize the categories and structure the findings section of the thesis. The final thematic coding process resulted in 5 main themes and 9 subthemes. Each theme and subtheme were discussed in detail, with selected participant quotes included to illustrate key insights. Themes were chosen and organized based on their frequency, uniqueness, and relevance to the research questions.

Contents analysis of Instagram posts:

In parallel, the same six-phase thematic analysis process was adapted for Instagram content analysis and applied to the brand-generated data on Instagram (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The data corpus consisted of posts from seven distinct Kyrgyz national-symbolic fashion brands, selected for their consistent engagement with heritage motifs and active digital presence. From each account, 15 to 30 posts were randomly sampled, resulting in a total dataset of approximately 140 to 180 posts. These posts were treated as multimodal units, integrating visual and textual elements: captions, hashtags, and imagery, as carriers of symbolic meaning.

The analysis began with an extended familiarization phase, where all captions and images were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring motifs, emotional tones, symbolic elements, and narrative framings. In line with multimodal content analysis principles, each post was analyzed holistically, taking into account how textual and visual components worked together to construct meaning. Particular attention was paid to poetic language, references to cultural traditions or figures, product placement, color

symbolism, and stylistic choices in framing. Visuals were also described narratively to convert image content into analyzable text for coding.

Thematic coding was conducted using MAXQDA, which allowed the integration of both image descriptions and caption texts within a single analytical framework. Codes were applied to elements referencing national identity (e.g., heritage, Kyrgyz patterns), emotional or symbolic language (e.g., pride, roots, timeless), and branding strategies evident in hashtags (e.g., #ethnostyle, #nomadicidentity, #handmade). Posts were not restricted to a single code; instead, multiple codes could be applied simultaneously when different symbolic layers intersected within the same post.

This coding process led to the identification of 14 distinct codes, which were subsequently clustered into five thematic groups: (1) Cultural Identity and Heritage Narratives, (2) Modern Ethnic Fashion, (3) Contemporary Wearability and Functional Design, (4) Craftsmanship and Sustainability, and (5) Personal Identity and Empowerment). These themes emerged inductively but were also cross-referenced with the themes from the in-depth interview analysis, creating analytical consistency between producer discourse and consumer interpretation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 89).

This multimodal approach enabled a nuanced, interpretive reading of how national-symbolic fashion is visually and discursively constructed on social media. By combining aesthetic analysis with thematic coding, the study revealed how Instagram is used not only as a commercial platform but also as a performative space for cultural storytelling, where national identity is communicated, aestheticized, and emotionally anchored through fashion branding.

4.5. Rationale for Separate Presentation of Content Analysis and Interview Findings

Although the content analysis of Instagram posts and the thematic analysis of interview data yielded overlapping categories and thematic codes, they are presented separately in this study to ensure methodological clarity, analytical precision, and the integrity of different data types.

First, the two datasets reflect distinct epistemological perspectives. The in-depth interviews capture the emic (insider) view, the lived experiences, emotions, and meanings that Kyrgyz consumers assign to national-symbolic products. This aligns with

a constructivist paradigm that emphasizes subjective meaning-making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). In contrast, the Instagram content analysis represents the external/producer perspective, showcasing how brands communicate identity, values, and tradition in a curated, public-facing manner. Separating these analyses allows for a more nuanced comparison of how identity is consumed versus how it is constructed and commodified in digital media (Pink et al., 2016, p. 176).

Second, the data sources differ in form and function. Interview data comprises verbal narratives gathered through dialogic interaction, yielding context-rich and reflective accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 411). Meanwhile, Instagram posts are multimodal artifacts, comprised of images, captions, hashtags, designed for strategic self-presentation and audience engagement (Highfield & Leaver, 2016, p. 58). Keeping these analyses distinct respects their different communicative structures and ensures analytic integrity (Gibbs, 2018, p. 103).

Third, this distinction supports methodological transparency. Presenting each dataset independently enables the reader to clearly trace how themes emerged from each mode of inquiry, reflecting good practice in multi-method qualitative research (citation). Although thematic overlaps exist such as cultural pride, empowerment, or modern reinterpretation, the way these themes are articulated, framed, and visualized in brand content versus personal interviews differs substantially. For example, consumer narratives often use emotive, personal language, while brand posts employ poetic or marketing-driven rhetoric.

Fourth, treating content analysis separately allows the researcher to examine how producers construct and circulate cultural narratives on public platforms, which may influence or contrast with consumer interpretations. As Pearson (2009) notes, social media platforms function as performative spaces where users actively construct and manage their identities, rather than merely reflecting who they are.

Fifth, this separation enhances the interpretive depth through a crystallization approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 565). Presenting each dataset as a distinct analytic strand enables the phenomenon to be viewed from multiple angles, consumer and producer perspectives, textual and visual data, much like the facets of a crystal refract light differently. By layering interview narratives with brand-generated Instagram content, the analysis reveals how identity is both felt and framed, allowing for a richer, multidimensional account of national-symbolic fashion in Kyrgyzstan.

In summary, presenting the interview and Instagram data separately helps keep the analysis clear and meaningful. Each type of data has its own purpose and way of communicating ideas: interviews reflect how people personally experience and talk about national symbols, while Instagram shows how brands present those symbols to the public. By keeping them apart, the study gives a fuller and more accurate picture of how national identity is both lived by individuals and promoted by fashion brands in Kyrgyzstan.

4.6. Development of Psychographic Consumer Typology

Following the thematic and content analysis, a separate typological synthesis phase was conducted to develop a detailed typology of consumer profiles based on how participants interacted with national symbolic products. The goal of this phase was to go beyond thematic coding and construct consumer typology that reflect the deeper motivational orientations, emotional logic, and symbolic attachments embedded in individual narratives.

This approach was based on the principles of qualitative typological analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) and applied thematic synthesis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011), emphasizing the emergence of unique consumer profiles from recurring orientations toward national symbolic products across cases (i.e., across participants). In contrast to content analysis (which focused on how brands convey symbolic meaning) and thematic analysis (which identified common conceptual patterns), this phase aimed to typology participants based on how they positioned themselves in relation to symbolic consumption.

The dataset included 22 in-depth interviews with Kyrgyz from both local (within the country) and diasporic contexts. These interviews had previously been coded using MAXQDA into thematic codes such as cultural pride, aesthetic appreciation, purposeful distinctiveness, craftsmanship, nostalgia, support for local economy, and identity expression etc. Building on this coded base, the typology development process re-engaged the case-level data, interpreting participants' narratives holistically to uncover motivational configurations, that is, distinctive orientations in how symbolic products were valued and integrated into personal identity.

The analytical process unfolded in the following stages (adapted from Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 71-73; Guest et al., 2011, pp. 168-170):

1. **Re-familiarization** with all coded passages at the individual level, paying attention to emotional tone and recurring metaphors.
2. **Identification of interpretive orientations** such as aesthetic sensibility, political resistance, emotional nostalgia, or cultural awakening.
3. **Grouping participants** into cross-cases based on common motivational traits.
4. **Naming types** using labels that encapsulate the dominant interaction mode (e.g., *Self-Discovery Seekers*, *Ethical and Ideological Consumers*).
5. **Validation and differentiation**, ensuring that each consumer typology is internally coherent but substantively distinct from the others.

Each participant was assigned to one main consumer typology based on the most salient and consistent motivational thread in their narrative. Although some participants displayed overlapping traits, the analysis focused on the dominant interpretive position in order to maintain typological clarity.

Importantly, although the process of typology was based on psychographic logic, emphasizing subjective values, feelings, and motivations, it was also complemented by a layer of demographic synthesis. Each consumer type was analyzed for recurring demographic characteristics such as gender, location (Kyrgyzstan or diaspora), and social roles. Although demographic factors were not used to define the typology, they helped illustrate distributional patterns and added contextual richness to each profile.

This process resulted in the development of six distinct consumer types.

Each of these consumer types is presented in the Results chapter with detailed narrative descriptions, illustrative participant quotes, and associated demographic trends. The consumer typology is not intended to be rigid typology, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, they serve as interpretive tools that reveal the diversity of symbolic consumption practices among Kyrgyz consumers and the many ways in which national identity, emotion, style, and socio-political values intersect in the act of wearing culture.

4.7. Validity and Trustworthiness

Ensuring the validity and trustworthiness of this qualitative research was a central concern throughout the study. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, the study draws on multiple strategies to enhance the credibility, dependability, and

confirmability of its findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 582; Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 255).

First, ***prolonged, and sustained engagement*** with the data supported in-depth understanding and strengthened analytic accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260; Guba, 1981, p. 84). The researcher remained immersed in both the interview and content analysis processes over an extended period, which facilitated sensitivity to patterns and contextual nuances. This prolonged engagement helped ensure that the interpretations were grounded in the realities of both consumer voices and brand discourse.

Second, ***rich data*** were gathered through both detailed in-depth interviews and social media content (Renz et al., 2018, p. 824). Interview transcripts included participants' elaborations on emotions, memories, and behaviors, while Instagram posts offered multimodal cultural expressions via visuals, language, and symbols. The combination of image analysis, captions, hashtags, and narrative interpretations from both datasets ensured the comprehensiveness of the data (Highfield & Leaver, 2016, p. 58). Photographs of national-symbolic products submitted by participants further enriched the context of the interviews.

Third, respondent validation (also referred to as ***member checking***) was applied to increase credibility. Five participants were re-contacted and asked to review the preliminary analysis and thematic framework. Their feedback helped confirm that the findings authentically represented their perspectives (Porter, 2007, s. 84; Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263)

Fourth, ***methodological triangulation*** was employed by analyzing interview data and Instagram content separately before identifying overlapping themes, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Patton, 2015, p. 247). This separation also reflected a crystallization approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 565), allowing the phenomenon to be explored from multiple angles: consumer and producer, textual and visual, thereby revealing how national-symbolic fashion in Kyrgyzstan is simultaneously experienced and constructed.

Fifth, the research respected ***communicative differences*** between datasets. While interviews reflected *insider* views, Instagram content offered *external/producer* representations. Analyzing these datasets separately helped maintain analytical clarity of each mode of data (Pink et al., 2016, p. 176).

Sixth, the research incorporated ***persistent observation***, especially during the prolonged engagement with both interview transcripts and Instagram content over several months. This ongoing immersion allowed the researcher to identify subtle patterns, inconsistencies, and deeper contextual meanings (Guba, 1981, p. 85).

Additionally, ***purposeful sampling*** (Patton, 2015, p. 46) was used to ensure that participants had direct, relevant experience with national-symbolic consumption, maximizing the potential for information-rich cases.

Lastly, ***thick description*** was employed to convey findings. Themes were supported with rich participant quotes, direct Instagram captions with date-based citations, and visual examples. This approach offers readers interpretive depth and supports transferability, the possibility of applying insights to similar cultural or consumer contexts (Guba, 1981, p. 86; Patton, 2015, p. 40).

To further support credibility, emerging themes and coded findings were presented and discussed with academic juries (thesis advisors and committee members), who provided critical feedback and suggested revisions. This ***peer debriefing*** process enhanced analytical rigor and helped challenge potential biases in theme interpretation.

In summary, by integrating strategies such as prolonged engagement, rich data, triangulation, member checks, purposeful sampling, persistent observation, thick description, peer debriefing, this study meets the established criteria for qualitative validity and trustworthiness (Guba, 1981, pp. 84-88). The resulting findings aim to be both authentic and methodologically transparent, grounded in rigorous and reflexive analysis.

4.8. Research Ethics

This research adhered to the highest standards of ethical conduct in social science research. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Anadolu University. The committee reviewed the research proposal, methodology, and data collection instruments and issued a formal decision approving the study. The official ethics approval document (*Etik Kurulu Karar Belgesi*) was issued on 02.07.2024 under Protocol No: 745533, and is provided in Appendix 4.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights to anonymity and confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw at any stage without

consequence. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews, and all data was handled in accordance with ethical guidelines for qualitative research. Audio recordings, transcripts, and visual materials were securely stored and anonymized during analysis and reporting.

In the case of digital content analysis (e.g., Instagram posts), only publicly available material was used, and any identifying details of individuals were either anonymized or excluded to protect privacy. Where images of people were analyzed, facial features were blurred to preserve anonymity unless permission had been explicitly granted.

This ethical approach ensured that the study was conducted with integrity and respect for the individuals and communities whose experiences and cultural expressions it sought to understand.

5. RESULTS

This chapter presents the main findings of the study, organized around thematic and content analysis, which explore the multifaceted role of national symbolic products in contemporary Kyrgyz society. The findings are structured into three main parts, reflecting different aspects of the research study.

The first section presents a detailed thematic analysis derived from the qualitative data, revealing five interrelated themes that illuminate how cultural identity, generational change, globalization, personal expression, and economic factors shape the use and perception of national symbolic products. These themes delve into the ways in which cultural symbols reinforce national identity, evoke emotional connections, and are continually reinterpreted by younger generations amid changing social norms. The impact of global and digital influences, including media and social influencers, is also considered, along with how individuals incorporate cultural aesthetics into their personal identities. Finally, this section highlights the tensions and opportunities within the cultural economy, focusing on the production, commercialization, and everyday availability of symbolic products.

The second section analyzes Instagram content from Kyrgyz fashion brands, providing insights into how narratives of heritage, contemporary ethnic fashion trends, functionality, craftsmanship, and sustainability are communicated across social media platforms. This analysis reveals how brands balance tradition and innovation to appeal to contemporary consumers.

The chapter concludes with a psychographic segmentation of consumers of nationally symbolic products, offering nuanced insights into their motivations, values, and behaviors.

Taken together, these findings provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and consumption in the context of new nations, with this study focusing on the case of Kyrgyz consumers of nationally symbolic products, laying the foundation for the subsequent discussion and conclusions.

5.1. Thematic Analysis of In-Depth Interviews with Consumers of National-Symbolic Products

The thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed five major themes that encapsulate the complex and multifaceted relationship between Kyrgyz consumers and

national-symbolic products. These themes reflect not only the deep cultural meanings attached to such products but also the social, generational, and market forces that influence how individuals perceive, engage with, and incorporate these symbols into their everyday lives. The analysis uncovered a rich tapestry of insights into how national identity, personal expression, and broader societal dynamics intersect within the context of national-symbolic consumption. These themes collectively highlight the ways in which national-symbolic products serve as important vehicles for cultural continuity, negotiation of modernity, and articulation of both individual and collective identities in a rapidly changing world. Table 5.1. summarizes the key themes, subthemes, and associated codes identified through the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with consumers of national-symbolic products. A detailed list of analysis codes along with their explanations are provided in Appendix 2.

Table 5.1 Summarizes the key themes, subthemes, and associated codes identified through thematic analysis.

#	Themes	Subthemes	Codes
1	Cultural Identity and Expression	1.1 Strengthening National Identity Through Symbols	• National Identity and Belonging • Patriotism, Cultural Pride • Independence Symbolism • Cultural Revival / Reclaiming Roots • Linguistic Nationalism • Cultural Education Through Clothing
		1.2 Emotional Resonance of Cultural Symbols	• Emotional Attachment • Homeland Connection • Childhood Nostalgia • Cultural Identity as Confidence Booster • Appreciation of National Symbolism • Cultural Unity (Symbols Unite Us)
2	Generational and Societal Dynamics	2.1 Youth and Cultural Reinvention	• Youth Empowerment / Generation of Freedom • Rebellious Spirit • Youth Subculture / Cultural Renaissance • Modern-Ethno Adaptations
		2.2 Evolving Social Norms and Cultural Acceptance	• Social Attention and Positive Affirmation • Societal Judgments and Norms • Social Circle Influence • Mainstream Normalization
3	Culture in a Global and Digital World	3.1 Cultural Assertion in Global Contexts	• Cultural Ambassadorship Abroad • Concerns About Loss of Cultural Roots and Attempts to Preserve Culture • Aspirations for Cultural Uniqueness in Global Arena • Desire for Global Recognition and Acceptance

			• Balancing Modernity and Authenticity
		3.2 Media and Influencers as Cultural Catalysts	• Brand Visibility on Social Media • Influence of Public Figures • Global Audiences, Local Symbols
4	Personal Identity and Cultural Styling	4.1 Cultural Self-Expression and Aesthetic Values	• Purposeful Distinctiveness / Desire for Uniqueness • Aesthetic Appreciation • Self-Discovery and Identity Exploration • Cultural Individuality in Expression
5	Cultural Economy and Everyday Use	5.1 Cultural Production and Commercial Tensions	• Support for Local Economy • Craftsmanship, Quality, and Pride in Local Production • Concerns About Commercialization of Culture
		5.2 Accessibility and Everyday Integration	• Diverse Accessibility and Price Range • Practicality of Modernized Styles • Concerns About Trend Longevity

The first theme, *Cultural Identity and Expression*, examines how national-symbolic attire reinforces cultural identity, evokes collective memory, and nurtures a sense of belonging. Participants emphasized the symbolic value of such attire in expressing patriotism, reclaiming cultural roots, and promoting cultural education and unity.

The second theme, *Generational and Societal Dynamics*, highlights the influence of age, peer groups, and evolving norms on perceptions and practices related to national-symbolic attire. Young people, in particular, were found to reinterpret traditional elements through modern aesthetics, often as a form of cultural empowerment and self-assertion, while also navigating societal expectations and judgments.

The third theme, *Culture in a Global and Digital World*, explores how national-symbolic attire is shaped by the forces of globalization, migration, and digital media. Respondents expressed both a desire to preserve cultural authenticity and a motivation to represent their heritage in international and digital arenas. Social media and influencers were seen as key actors in popularizing and transforming cultural symbols.

The fourth theme, *Personal Identity and Cultural Styling*, focuses on the individual use of national-symbolic attire as a means of self-expression and identity exploration. Participants described how their clothing choices reflect a balance between cultural pride, personal aesthetics, and a search for uniqueness.

The final theme, *Cultural Economy and Everyday Use*, addresses the material aspects of national-symbolic attire, including its production, accessibility, and commodification. While many valued the role of local craftsmanship and supported the cultural economy, there were also concerns about the commercialization and short-lived nature of certain trends.

Collectively, these themes reveal the complex and evolving meanings attached to national-symbolic attire and demonstrate its significance as both a cultural artifact and a contemporary mode of identity expression.

5.1.1. Theme 1: Cultural identity and expression

This theme explores how individuals connect with their national identity and heritage through various cultural practices, including clothing, symbols, and language. It emphasizes both the ideological and emotional dimensions of cultural expression, illustrating how these practices strengthen collective belonging and personal attachment to Kyrgyz identity.

The use of national symbols plays a central role in the ideological aspect of cultural identity. As highlighted in *Subtheme 1.1: Strengthening National Identity Through Symbols*, these symbols, such as traditional attire, visual art, and music, serve as powerful expressions of cultural belonging. They embody the core values and traditions of Kyrgyz culture, enabling individuals to connect with their heritage. Whether through the intricate patterns on national garments or the melodies of folk music, these symbols provide tangible markers of identity, especially for those living abroad, helping them assert their cultural presence and stay connected to their roots.

On an emotional level, cultural symbols evoke deep feelings of attachment, nostalgia, and pride. As explored in *Subtheme 1.2: Emotional Resonance of Cultural Symbols*, these symbols are not just aesthetic elements but emotional anchors. They evoke personal memories and collective experiences, fostering a sense of belonging. For many individuals, these cultural items, whether it be a piece of clothing or a musical instrument, serve as living symbols that connect them to their past, family, and heritage. The emotional resonance of these symbols provides comfort and continuity, particularly for those far from home.

In addition, engaging with cultural symbols can enhance personal confidence and cultural pride. Wearing traditional clothing or displaying cultural symbols helps individuals assert their identity in both personal and public spaces. This is particularly significant for those living outside Kyrgyzstan, as these symbols help them navigate social situations with a stronger sense of self and rootedness.

The emotional impact of cultural symbols is also reflected in how they evoke childhood memories and familial bonds. These symbols, often passed down through generations, serve as emotional touchstones, linking individuals to their past and creating a sense of continuity. They are not just relics but living symbols that provide a deep sense of security and belonging.

In conclusion, the exploration of subthemes *Strengthening National Identity Through Symbols* and *Emotional Resonance of Cultural Symbols* highlights the multifaceted role of cultural symbols in shaping and reinforcing Kyrgyz identity. These symbols serve as powerful vehicles for expressing and affirming one's cultural heritage, fostering emotional connections, and creating a sense of belonging and pride. Through these practices, individuals maintain a strong link to their heritage, celebrating both their personal and collective identity.

5.1.1.1. Subtheme 1.1: Strengthening national identity through symbols

This subtheme explores the crucial role of national attire and cultural symbols in reinforcing Kyrgyz identity. Through cultural symbols like traditional clothing and visual motifs such as the tunduk, individuals affirm their connection to Kyrgyz culture, history, and sovereignty. These symbols serve not only as aesthetic elements but also as ideological markers, contributing to a shared understanding of identity and acting as daily reminders of national roots, values, and independence.

National attire fosters a sense of belonging to the Kyrgyz nation, providing individuals with a tangible way to express cultural pride. Wearing traditional garments becomes more than an aesthetic choice, it symbolizes patriotism, independence, and a connection to the broader national community. *National Identity and Belonging* is highlighted as cultural products, like traditional attire, serve as visible markers of shared identity, fostering a sense of connection to the Kyrgyz community.

The symbolic significance of national attire extends beyond pride and belonging, linking to sovereignty and the reclamation of cultural roots. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,

traditional clothing has become a symbol of independence, marking freedom from external influences and colonial history. *Independence Symbolism* is reinforced through the act of wearing national attire, which celebrates Kyrgyzstan's unique cultural identity.

A key aspect of the cultural resurgence is the reclaiming of Kyrgyz traditions and symbols once suppressed during the Soviet era. *Cultural Revival / Reclaiming Roots* is evident in the growing embrace of traditional garments, particularly among younger generations eager to reconnect with their heritage, signifying a broader movement of cultural renewal and national identity strengthening.

The promotion of the Kyrgyz language also plays a vital role in reinforcing national identity. *Linguistic Nationalism* is seen in the growing emphasis on speaking Kyrgyz, aligning with national attire as part of a larger movement focused on cultural pride and preservation. Both the language and traditional dress work together to reinforce a shared cultural narrative.

National attire also serves an educational purpose, offering younger generations a tangible connection to Kyrgyz history, values, and cultural practices. *Cultural Education Through Clothing* helps transmit knowledge of the nation's heritage, reinforcing national symbols' role in fostering a cohesive and resilient identity.

In summary, national attire and cultural symbols are central to the reinforcement of Kyrgyz national identity. They serve as markers of belonging, pride, and cultural continuity, offering visual expressions of patriotism and means of cultural education. These symbols will remain central to Kyrgyzstan's efforts to assert its independence and preserve its cultural heritage. The following sections provide deeper insight into each of these dynamics.

Code: National Identity and Belonging

For many respondents, national attire is far more than clothing, it is a powerful symbol of cultural identity, personal pride, and collective belonging. Traditional garments and accessories are viewed as visual and emotional representations of Kyrgyz heritage, embodying values, history, and ancestral memory.

- “It is not just an appearance, but a symbol of who I am, my connection with the history and culture of my country.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

Wearing traditional attire becomes a conscious act of cultural continuity. Participants described how national clothing, adorned with meaningful patterns and motifs, evokes a sense of rootedness and pride. These symbols act as anchors in a globalized world, reminding wearers of their unique place in a shared cultural narrative.

- *“Even the patterns remind me of my roots, of Kyrgyzstan, of who I am.”*
(Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)
- *“It seems to me, [traditional attire] can be seen as a sign of respect for the national culture and our traditions. It carries some history, traditions, some virtues.”* (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

These reflections show how clothing becomes a repository of collective memory and moral values, turning daily attire into an active expression of cultural identity. Beyond the visual, these garments represent emotional and ideological connections to one's nation.

In diaspora settings, these cultural expressions become even more significant. Respondents emphasized that their sense of Kyrgyzness extends beyond clothing to include everyday behaviors, language, and attitudes shaped by cultural upbringing.

- *“I am Kyrgyz in many aspects, starting from cultural characteristics, starting from food, even ending with some basic moments. For example, punctuality.”*
(Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)

For globally minded youth, including those who describe themselves as “citizens of the world”, cultural identification through clothing or language remains an important form of emotional grounding. Cultural affiliation provides a sense of safety and community in a rapidly shifting world.

- *“In Bishkek there are such young people [who] may not know very well about Kyrgyz values, who are considered citizens of the world, but still, they want to classify themselves as belonging to some kind of culture... we feel safer that we are part of some society.”* (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

Visual symbols like the *kalpak* emerged as especially potent cultural markers. Participants highlighted how such items make cultural affiliation immediately visible and recognizable in both local and international contexts.

- *“I know men who wear kalpaks, they really show that they are from Kyrgyzstan.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Some participants extended this symbolic identification to tribal heritage. For instance, T-shirts bearing the signs of one’s tribe were described as a way to reconnect with localized histories and express multi-layered identities within the broader national context.

- *“I saw T-shirts with the symbol of the tribe. Since ancient times, we have had 40 tribes, and now I see people wearing T-shirts with the sign of their tribe.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The act of wearing national attire thus goes beyond self-expression; it is a form of advocacy and participation. Respondents saw it as a contribution to cultural preservation, a signal of pride, and a visible reminder that Kyrgyz identity continues to thrive through modern reinterpretations of traditional elements.

- *“I think about who I am, I am Kyrgyz, and I will wear our national clothes. In this way, I feel I am contributing to our society.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

In general, national symbolic clothing functions as both a personal and public declaration of identity and is also a manifestation of national pride that strengthens social ties and confirms a person’s place in the Kyrgyz community. It connects wearers to their cultural past, affirms their presence in the modern world, and reinforces a shared sense of belonging across generations and geographic regions. Here, clothing becomes a means of cultural contribution and participation. It signals not only a personal commitment to Kyrgyz identity, but also a desire to actively support its preservation and visibility.

Code: Patriotism, Cultural Pride

Patriotism emerged as a deeply rooted motivation for engaging with national-symbolic attire among the respondents. This form of cultural expression goes beyond aesthetics or personal style: it functions as a symbolic statement of allegiance, love, and pride toward the homeland. For many participants, wearing national attire is a deliberate act of representing and honoring their Kyrgyz identity, both within the country and in the global arena.

Respondents often described patriotism not just as an internal feeling, but as something they actively perform and embody through clothing. This sense of pride in one's cultural background is closely linked with national identity, especially when national symbols are worn or displayed publicly.

- *“I think that in me, a very strong sense of patriotism prevails, somehow on a special scale.” (Ian, man, 23 years old, Korea)*

For some, donning national attire is a celebration of the uniqueness and richness of Kyrgyz culture. It offers a tangible reminder of one's heritage and becomes a way to differentiate themselves positively on the cultural spectrum.

- *“When you wear such clothes, you feel such patriotism, that you have such a culture, such a rich culture that you will not find anywhere else.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The symbolism embedded in national garments also strengthens emotional ties to the homeland. Whether worn domestically or abroad, these items serve as visual affirmations of belonging and loyalty. Participants described how such clothing enhances their sense of representation and connects them more deeply to the values and traditions of their nation.

- *“Wearing these clothes makes me feel proud, like I'm representing Kyrgyzstan wherever I go.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

The act of wearing national symbols, especially in public or international settings, becomes a public declaration of identity and loyalty. This is particularly true for male

figures who wear traditional items like the kalpak, which are often interpreted as strong statements of cultural and national commitment.

- *“I know men who wear kalpaks, they really show that they are from Kyrgyzstan, that they are patriots, love their country, represent their culture.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

For some participants, patriotism is not static, it is something that evolves with time and awareness. As individuals grow older or gain more perspective, their appreciation for cultural heritage intensifies, prompting them to take pride in visible symbols of their roots.

- *“I am influenced by patriotism, which grows with age and appears with awareness.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Importantly, this patriotism does not exist in isolation. It intersects with broader cultural flows and global identities. When Kyrgyz individuals wear national attire abroad or on digital platforms, they act as informal cultural ambassadors.

Ultimately, the choice to wear national-symbolic products reflects a complex interplay of personal emotion, collective pride, and social responsibility. It becomes a powerful act of reclaiming and celebrating Kyrgyz identity, an assertion of belonging in both local and global contexts.

Code: Independence Symbolism

For many respondents, wearing traditional Kyrgyz attire is deeply intertwined with expressions of national independence and cultural sovereignty. These garments and symbols are not merely decorative or aesthetic but are perceived as visual affirmations of Kyrgyz identity in a post-Soviet context. National dress serves as a counter-narrative to past political domination, representing a reclaiming of cultural autonomy and historical depth.

- *“Most likely this is since we left the Soviet Union not so long ago, and now we probably want to show ourselves who we are. The fact that we are not part of Russia, part of Russian culture. The fact that we are Kyrgyz, there is a country*

that has used these things since ancient times, and everything, every pattern has its own deep meaning.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)

This statement reflects a broader sentiment among participants that national-symbolic products, particularly traditional clothing and patterns, are mediums through which historical narratives and political autonomy are asserted. In this context, clothing becomes a statement of identity and resistance, aimed not only at reclaiming cultural pride but also at distancing oneself from colonial legacies.

- *“People began to actively emphasize their national identity, to declare that they are Kyrgyz, and this became a kind of symbol of independence.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)*

These expressions are particularly potent among younger generations who were born after independence but still feel the lingering effects of Soviet influence in language, education, and cultural representation. Their use of traditional attire becomes an act of conscious differentiation and affirmation, declaring not just who they are, but also who they are not.

- *“This happens due to the problems of language, nationality, and internal independence after we gained state independence.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

Moreover, the emotional and psychological empowerment associated with wearing national symbols is strongly present in respondents’ narratives. The act of donning such clothing is described as liberating, offering a sense of personal freedom and cultural pride in the face of lingering historical trauma.

- *“I wear such things freely, with a sense of freedom.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

In this way, traditional attire transcends its function as clothing, it becomes a mobile, embodied declaration of political identity. For Kyrgyz youth especially, the act of wearing these symbols in public or abroad communicates a message of cultural confidence and independence. These visual declarations are essential in the continued

formation of post-Soviet national identity, helping young Kyrgyz reclaim ownership over their history, cultural narrative, and place in the world.

Code: Cultural Revival / Reclaiming Roots

Cultural revival emerged as a powerful theme in respondents' narratives, particularly among younger Kyrgyz individuals who seek to reconnect with their ancestral heritage. This process of reclaiming roots is not merely nostalgic, it is an intentional and often emotional journey of cultural rediscovery. Respondents described how wearing national attire and embracing other cultural symbols served as a means to explore and re-establish a relationship with their heritage, particularly in the wake of Soviet-era cultural suppression.

- *“We are returning to our roots, we want to know our past better, dig deep in history, and return to our roots.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Now we dig deep, dig into our past, who we were before the Soviet Union.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These sentiments illustrate an active desire to reconstruct identity through cultural means. Rather than passively inheriting traditions, respondents are engaging in a process of selective cultural revitalization: choosing meaningful elements of the past and integrating them into modern life. This pursuit is often triggered by a broader societal interest in reclaiming what was once considered "backward" or irrelevant under previous ideological regimes.

The revival extends beyond clothing. For many, it includes an effort to embrace Kyrgyz language and cultural practices previously neglected or overshadowed by Russian influence.

- *“I, being a person who grew up in a Russian-speaking family, was also socialized in a Russian-speaking environment, in terms of friends from school and so on, I can say that I speak Kyrgyz with an accent. But nevertheless, for the last five years I have been trying very hard to actively study the language, not to dwell on the knowledge that I have, and to practice more often, even if I am bad at it.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

Language revival and engagement with traditional attire are often intertwined, forming part of a broader process of decolonization and cultural healing. By reclaiming symbols of national identity, individuals reaffirm their connection not only to a place or language but to a lineage of traditions, ancestors, and collective experiences.

- *“When you wear such clothes, you feel like you belong to this group. And automatically it seems to reflect you, your ancestors, your spirit of quality.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

This connection to heritage also evokes a deep sense of pride and duty. For younger Kyrgyz, cultural revival is not simply about preserving history, it is also about contributing to its continuation in meaningful, modern ways.

- *“Clothes in general very well show that now we are very proud that this applies to us, that we know and study.” (Aruuke, female, 21 y.o, Kyrgyzstan)*

Overall, national-symbolic products act as entry points into a larger cultural revival movement: empowering individuals to reclaim, reinterpret, and reintegrate their heritage into contemporary identity practices.

Code: Linguistic Nationalism

For many respondents, the revival and use of the Kyrgyz language was described as a central component of their national identity. Beyond being a mode of communication, Kyrgyz was viewed as a powerful symbol of cultural pride and resistance against historical erasure and linguistic dominance, particularly during the Soviet era when Russian was prioritized in public and institutional life.

Participants frequently tied their sense of national belonging to the ability to speak Kyrgyz fluently and correctly. This aligns with linguistic nationalism, a concept suggesting that language is a key marker of group identity and nationhood. For these individuals, reclaiming the Kyrgyz language is both a personal and collective project of cultural preservation.

- *“The number of people who speak Kyrgyz is increasing.” (Jakyp, male, 33 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The concern for linguistic purity and proper use of the language was not merely about grammar but tied to deeper concerns about authenticity and cultural continuity.

- *“They don’t treat Russian-speaking Kyrgyz very well, saying “you don’t know your native language. But we know, we represent our culture.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This reclaiming of language can be read as a response to cultural colonization. In this sense, Kyrgyz youth view fluent use of their national language not only as a personal duty, but also as a cultural and political statement.

- *“Even Kyrgyz people who live in Russia or Cyprus wrote to me that they want to bring back authentic Kyrgyz things to everyday life, to return back to the original Kyrgyz language, that is, to the pure Kyrgyz language, not mixed, as well as to the old Kyrgyz traditions.” (İlan, male, 23 years old, Korea)*

Respondents note that some people, particularly those who do not speak Kyrgyz, may face social pressure to learn the language and respect Kyrgyz culture. This suggests that there may be some social expectations or norms around cultural expression.

- *“For those people who do not speak Kyrgyz, who speak only Russian, among them I saw that there are some people who can put pressure on them.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

Social media plays a role in this movement, with participants referring to Instagram pages and YouTube channels that promote pure Kyrgyz language use, highlight common linguistic errors, and celebrate indigenous terms. These digital platforms serve as tools of linguistic activism, providing both education and affirmation.

- *“There is one blogger. Her knowledge of the Kyrgyz language, the way she speaks and writes, may not be at such a level that she would blog, but she seems to really want to blog in Kyrgyz. And I have already subscribed to it, probably for seven years. And sometimes it happens that, in the last year or two, very often I noticed some moments in her stories when she writes only in Kyrgyz. She writes, still with mistakes, but she does it anyway. And she says exactly that it’s*

not a shame to somehow make a mistake or speak with an accent, but a shame not to speak your native language.” (Aruuke, female, 21 y.o, Kyrgyzstan)

In this context, linguistic nationalism is an evolving expression of identity. It blends traditional pride with contemporary mediums, allowing young Kyrgyz to reconnect with their roots in ways that are meaningful, modern, and socially resonant.

Code: Cultural Education Through Clothing

For many young Kyrgyz, national clothing and symbols serve more than just an aesthetic choice; they are powerful tools that inspire cultural curiosity and learning. The visual presence of traditional patterns, designs, and clothing styles acts as a subtle but constant reminder of their roots and identity, making the younger generation want to explore the meanings of these national symbols, the cultural history of their people, and delve deeper into what they wear.

- *“You just walk down the street, you look, well, if you see pattern, it probably reminds you of your roots, of Kyrgyzstan, a reminder of who you are, something native.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

This visual exposure is not only emotionally resonant but also intellectually stimulating, often encouraging people to learn more about the origins and meanings behind these symbols.

- *“Wearing ethnic clothes, it seems to me, also influences people to value their culture and traditions... Maybe thanks to this they begin to study the history of where these patterns came from and so on.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Respondents noted that such products act as gateways into cultural education, sparking questions about traditional materials, symbols, and ways of life:

- *“They can study the history of the Kyrgyz people, Kyrgyzstan, talk about Kyrgyzstan and think, like, know their history better, know their way of life, traditions, why exactly these patterns were used, why these particular decorations. In this way they will know their country better, know their national*

clothes better, why they wore these particular ‘chapans’, why they were made of leather, why they made these things from any particular material. I think this is a huge plus.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)

For some, clothing becomes a means of reclaiming cultural pride and engaging more confidently with one's own language and history:

- *“It seems to me that this is where clothes even help a lot and push us to speak our native language, study our native history and not be ashamed of it... the younger generation already feels our culture much more strongly within themselves.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The use of national symbols in everyday products is seen as particularly important in multicultural societies, where cultural identity can easily blur:

- *“Supporting and wearing products with national symbols helps young people strengthen their cultural, national identity, especially in multinational societies... Interest in products with national symbols can stimulate education and awareness of the culture of our history and traditions of the country.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

For many, this journey begins with visual appreciation but evolves into deeper learning:

- *“Today they are interested in clothes, and tomorrow they will begin to study even more and somehow know more about their history.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

As one respondent put it simply, the visual draws them in, but the cultural exploration sustains their interest:

- *“We will learn more about our culture, what clothes were like, why they were like that.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

In this way, national symbols in clothing act as quiet yet powerful teachers, reminding, educating, and inspiring a generation to reconnect with its heritage.

5.1.1.2. Subtheme 1.2: Emotional resonance of cultural symbols

This subtheme examines how national attire and cultural symbols evoke emotional responses, linking individuals to their heritage, family traditions, and collective memory. These symbols are central to personal and collective connections with national identity. For many participants, national-symbolic products such as traditional clothing, music, and visual art serve as powerful emotional connectors, evoking memories of home and heritage. These symbols are not merely cultural artifacts but emotional narratives that shape individual identity, particularly for those living abroad. Cultural items like Kyrgyz patterns on clothing or traditional instruments create a bridge to past experiences, fostering feelings of nostalgia, warmth, and belonging.

One key theme from the interviews is the strong *Emotional Attachment* participants feel toward cultural items. These symbols, from handcrafted garments to music, often evoke deep emotional responses, such as pride and collective recognition of shared heritage. These responses are intertwined with a sense of cultural ownership, where items passed down through generations represent both personal and historical narratives. National symbols transcend functional roles, becoming potent symbols of cultural identity.

Additionally, cultural symbols offer a *Homeland Connection* for Kyrgyz individuals abroad, helping them maintain ties to their roots and providing comfort in foreign environments. For these participants, national symbols serve as psychological anchors, reinforcing cultural identity and offering continuity despite geographical distance. Whether through traditional clothing or family heirlooms, these symbols provide a tangible link to Kyrgyzstan, fostering a sense of belonging.

Childhood Nostalgia also emerged as a strong theme, with respondents noting how national symbols triggered memories of family life in Kyrgyzstan. These objects, often passed down through generations, connected individuals to their past, evoking warmth, safety, and identity. The emotional power of these symbols was heightened by their familial and historical significance.

National symbols also acted as a *Cultural Identity Confidence Booster*, giving individuals a sense of pride and self-assurance. Wearing cultural symbols, whether in daily life or special occasions, reinforced participants' sense of belonging and cultural pride, especially for those living abroad. These symbols empowered individuals to assert their identity and navigate social spaces with confidence.

Finally, there was an *Appreciation of National Symbolism*, with participants admiring the design, meaning, and cultural significance of Kyrgyz patterns and motifs. These symbols, such as the 'tunduk' or images of mountains, conveyed stories of strength, unity, and the nomadic heritage of the Kyrgyz people. This appreciation extended beyond aesthetics to the emotional resonance they held for individuals, reflecting identity and values.

Together, these insights demonstrate how cultural symbols are emotional anchors that help individuals connect with their past, assert their identity, and navigate their present. The interplay between *Emotional Attachment*, *Homeland Connection*, *Childhood Nostalgia*, *Cultural Identity as Confidence Booster*, and *Appreciation of National Symbolism* underscores the multifaceted role of cultural symbols in shaping and reinforcing national identity.

Code: Emotional Attachment

Respondents frequently described how cultural symbols, such as ornaments, melodies, handmade items, and family heirlooms, trigger strong emotional responses rooted in pride, warmth, and nostalgia. These items serve not only as aesthetic objects but as deeply personal and historical connectors, reinforcing an individual's sense of belonging to the Kyrgyz cultural narrative.

- “*Even the sound of the komuz, I don’t remember what year it was, but in some year during the Nomad Games thousands of komuz players performed ‘Mashbotoy’. And listening to this performance, I just cried. I do not know how to explain it, but some feeling made me cry. National spirit woke up then.*”
(Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)

Such moments of emotional resonance highlight the sensory and symbolic power of national heritage. Traditional music and visuals evoke a collective memory, what it means to be Kyrgyz, not through logic or explanation, but through a felt experience of identity. These symbols are woven into participants' personal and familial histories, and their presence can reignite forgotten connections to homeland and ancestry.

Respondents often emphasized the value of handmade or inherited items, underscoring their authenticity and emotional weight. Craftsmanship was seen not

simply as a technical process but as a form of cultural storytelling, passed down with care.

- *“It is even better when these patterns, all these ornaments are made by hand. Somehow it gives you a greater feeling that it was done with love.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“I think that since all this was passed on to us, by our ancestors, then these are the very things with which we are able to become happy.” (İlan, male, 23 years old, Korea)*

These responses reveal that traditional items, especially those handmade or linked to heritage, carry with them not just aesthetic value but an emotional narrative. For many, national symbols evoked feelings of joy, warmth, and comfort, comparable to emotional experiences typically associated with family ties or home:

- *“It evokes positive emotions in me, probably. Warmth and joy.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“It is immediately associated with family, with warmth. Because of this, if there is a tunduk symbol in clothing or some accessory, then it will be very valuable to me.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“These things seem to me like something special, something warm.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

Participants spoke of these items as “alive” with cultural energy. Rather than passive relics of the past, they are seen as emotional vessels that carry meaning into the present. They are physical manifestations of a lineage, a cultural journey, and a set of values still relevant today.

- *“When I wear clothes or accessories with national symbols, it always evokes deep, very touching feelings in me... I was especially glad that at the fair you could find unique handmade items that are not only visually attractive, but also carry a deep cultural meaning.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This emotional bond to cultural artifacts goes beyond pride or appreciation, it becomes a form of cultural intimacy. Participants express that these objects evoke their “inner Kyrgyzness” and carry an energy that binds them not only to their families but to a broader, collective Kyrgyz memory.

Together, these reflections demonstrate how tangible symbols like clothing, crafts, and music serve as vessels for deeply felt emotions. They are more than markers of tradition, they are living, emotional archives that enable individuals to carry their cultural identity forward in a personal, affective way.

Code: Homeland Connection

For many respondents, national attire and symbolic products serve as emotional bridges to their homeland, especially for those living abroad. These items offer a tangible link to Kyrgyzstan, helping individuals stay connected to their cultural roots despite physical distance or changes in environment.

Wearing clothing adorned with Kyrgyz patterns, colors, or traditional elements is more than a fashion choice, it evokes a feeling of belonging, a memory of home that remains constant across borders. One participant explained how even styling these items brought a sense of familiarity and comfort:

- *“If we look at the situation abroad, then these things, it’s not enough for me that I could style them, and it looked cool and interesting for me, it was also a memory of home.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Others emphasized that these visual elements are deeply rooted in their early memories, and seeing or wearing them abroad stirs personal reflection and cultural pride:

- *“There were patterns that I grew up seeing in my childhood, and I wanted to carry those patterns outside the country.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

This emotional pull toward the homeland was especially strong for respondents who had assimilated into new societies. Despite feeling comfortable in their new

environments, the presence of Kyrgyz symbols rekindled a powerful sense of national belonging:

- *“I feel that this is my homeland, I grew up there, and still, I feel somehow confident there. I feel a sense of belonging to this country, to this nation. Even if I live abroad and have assimilated, there is still some connection.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

For others, maintaining proximity to Kyrgyz culture was an intentional act, national symbols became tools for holding on to identity, especially in multicultural or globalized settings where identity can be diluted:

- *“This is important to me, because when I'm abroad, I want to be closer to my culture.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)*

Collectively, these reflections suggest that cultural products do not merely symbolize identity; they actively preserve it. They help individuals sustain a continuous narrative about who they are and where they come from, especially in moments when cultural distance feels most pronounced. National symbols act as both reminders and motivators, prompting individuals not only to remember but also to participate in the preservation of their heritage.

Code: Childhood Nostalgia

Nostalgia emerged as a powerful emotional lens through which respondents relate to national symbols. Many participants described how traditional patterns, artifacts, and clothing styles stirred childhood memories and evoked a strong sense of connection to family, home, and Kyrgyz heritage. These emotional associations highlight how cultural identity is not only learned through formal traditions, but also absorbed through early sensory experiences.

Respondents often spoke about growing up surrounded by Kyrgyz symbols in their everyday environment, such as ornaments on carpets, clothing, or household items. These visuals were not just decorative, they were markers of identity that imprinted themselves onto memory, later reactivated in moments of cultural reflection or national pride.

- *“Kyrgyz patterns, drawn clothes, handkerchiefs, photographs... It reminds me that wherever I see it, it is warm for me, and that I grew up looking at them on the carpets at home, which I have always encountered and seen since my childhood.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“These elements of Kyrgyz, the fact that this was left to us from our ancestors, and this is probably something that is inherent in us at the genetic level. And therefore, I do not know, it is like they draw these patterns on bowls, I think it’s like associations occur from childhood.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

For some participants, these memories have become a source of emotional resilience and continuity, especially when living abroad. Wearing or seeing familiar patterns becomes a comforting act, evoking home and childhood security in unfamiliar environments.

- *“There were patterns that I grew up seeing in my childhood, and I wanted to carry those patterns outside the country.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

The emotional power of these symbols is often reinforced by their connection to family heritage. Objects that are passed down through generations, such as heirloom jewelry or traditional garments, become more than physical possessions; they are infused with the presence of ancestors, stories, and cultural values.

- *“I have a ring that was passed down from generation to generation... it’s made of silver, but it’s very well preserved.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These heirlooms serve as tangible links to the past, strengthening intergenerational ties and reinforcing identity. Participants viewed such items not only as beautiful artifacts but as guardians of memory, objects that carry the emotional weight of history and lineage.

Together, these reflections illustrate how cultural nostalgia is rooted in early experiences and family traditions, forming an emotional landscape that shapes how

respondents engage with national symbols today. Whether through the touch of a grandmother's ring or the sight of a familiar pattern abroad, these memories help Kyrgyz individuals navigate their identity with a sense of rootedness and emotional continuity across time and space.

Code: Cultural Identity as Confidence Booster

For many participants, national-symbolic products are not just decorative or nostalgic, they are tools for psychological empowerment. Cultural identity, when made visible through clothing and symbols, becomes a source of self-confidence and personal strength. Respondents emphasized that wearing items rooted in Kyrgyz heritage helped them assert themselves more boldly, both at home and abroad.

Several interviewees described how donning traditional attire increased their self-assurance and affirmed their identity. One respondent shared:

- *“I feel proud because I am Kyrgyz, and I wear my national things. That gives me even more confidence.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

This sense of pride appears to translate directly into a deeper emotional stability and courage in public settings. For many, national symbols became a form of grounding, reminding them who they are and where they come from.

The connection between cultural belonging and social confidence was also highlighted in another interview:

- *“It somehow gives more self-confidence, when you in any case consider yourself to be part of society.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This sense of participation, of having a place in a larger cultural narrative, appears to foster a stronger sense of self. Rather than feeling isolated or anonymous, respondents described feeling anchored by their heritage, especially when wearing symbols of it in everyday life.

Wearing national-symbolic items also enhances pride in one's roots and traditions. One participant explained:

- *“I am especially proud of the culture of my people when I wear clothes or other items with national patterns.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

Here, clothing becomes more than a fashion choice, it turns into a symbol of cultural continuity, a reminder of identity that travels with the wearer.

For others, confidence grew as a response to external reactions. Feeling seen and recognized often boosted internal pride. One respondent expressed how public interest in her national attire added to her sense of empowerment:

- *“When people are interested, especially then I begin to talk, to feel, patriotism directly exceeds all this inside...” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

This quote underscores the powerful interaction between cultural self-expression and social validation. Recognition from others not only affirms the identity being presented but also amplifies the emotional response, turning personal pride into a shared experience.

Taken together, these reflections reveal that cultural confidence is both internal and performative. Through symbolic clothing, Kyrgyz individuals not only express who they are but also reinforce how they want to be seen, strong, proud, and rooted in a living cultural tradition.

Code: Appreciation of National Symbol

Many respondents articulated a deep appreciation for the symbolic meanings embedded in traditional Kyrgyz clothing and design elements. For them, national-symbolic products are more than just visually appealing objects, they are rich carriers of historical, cultural, and emotional significance. The motifs and patterns featured in attire are recognized as cultural signifiers that connect individuals to ancestral narratives, shared memories, and collective values.

- *“It depicts a yurt, horses, and the nomadic way of life... The prints were in the national... with national prints, that added a special touch... for people from the outside, it might just be pictures and patterns or something else, but for me, it's such a cultural belonging to something big and important, and ancient.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The symbolic resonance of national patterns goes beyond surface aesthetics. Respondents often linked specific motifs to core Kyrgyz values such as unity, strength, freedom, and family. The preference for certain symbols was rooted in individual identity and emotional connection to the meanings they represent.

- *“I like the sign of ‘Mother Umai’ (Mother Deer) and the eagle. In my opinion, why I like the eagle is because in Kyrgyz it gives the idea of height and determination.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*
- *“For me the most valuable is the symbolism of ‘tunduk’... because for me it means family, unity.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Such expressions show how these traditional symbols serve as personal and spiritual anchors for many individuals, fostering a sense of rootedness and continuity in their cultural narrative. Moreover, natural imagery, especially landscapes and elements specific to Kyrgyzstan, plays a prominent role in participants’ symbolic appreciation.

- *“I like patterns more. It has a special meaning for me, and mountains with white tips are everywhere, but I can find the mountains in Kyrgyzstan among thousands of photographs because that mountain is still different... It's white and blue at the tip and then it's green, and the underside turns green.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“We come from Kyrgyzstan, nomads from the mountainous areas. We have such clothes, and we belong to such a people, to such a culture, to such a race.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The imagery of mountains, yurts, and wildlife are not just reflections of the environment, they are symbolic of identity, resilience, and a distinct nomadic history. For several participants, the preservation and adaptation of these elements into modernized forms enhanced their symbolic value.

- *“Initially I liked that it was such a modern approach to our nomadic, well, we are like nomads, and I really liked that.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

Through the thoughtful selection and appreciation of national motifs, Kyrgyz consumers express an intentional desire to remain connected to their roots. This appreciation for symbolism reflects a broader cultural awareness and a desire to keep traditional meanings alive, even as they evolve in new forms suited for modern life.

Code: Cultural Unity (Symbols Unite Us)

Cultural symbols such as clothing, accessories, and patterns play a vital role in fostering a sense of collective identity and emotional solidarity among Kyrgyz people. These items are not only personal expressions of heritage but also social connectors that visually and emotionally unite individuals across geographical and generational lines. For many respondents, wearing national-symbolic products served to feel part of a larger cultural whole, especially in contexts where they might otherwise feel isolated.

- *“It makes me feel... that there are people like me, and that I am not alone.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

This sense of connection was especially important for participants living outside Kyrgyzstan or navigating cosmopolitan urban environments. In these settings, cultural attire often functions as a silent but powerful indicator of belonging, signaling shared values, history, and pride. When worn in public, these items can spark conversations, affirm mutual understanding, and build bridges between individuals who may have never met but feel culturally aligned.

- *“Products with ethnic elements can also become an object of common interest for young people who share common cultural attachments and traditions. This helps to create community, a community based on common interests and traditions.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Moreover, respondents emphasized that such symbols create unity in a peaceful and inclusive manner, avoiding some of the divisive dynamics often associated with language or political discourse. Instead, national symbols worn visibly in everyday life, on hoodies, jewelry, or accessories, help normalize Kyrgyz identity and build a collective presence in both public and digital spaces.

- *“It unites people, unites them in a kind way, and does not divide, as it is sometimes present in moments of tangent language, for example, or the national purpose of your appearance.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The growing popularity of these symbolic items is seen as a positive trend, signaling increasing cultural engagement among Kyrgyz people, particularly youth. Participants expressed hope that this unity-through-symbolism would continue to expand as more individuals adopt and display their heritage through everyday fashion.

- *“I believe it will only increase from year to year, because I notice that the number of people who wear it is increasing.” (Jakyp, male, 33 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Altogether, these reflections underscore how cultural symbols foster interpersonal connection and collective pride. They serve not only as markers of identity but also as instruments of community-building, empowering Kyrgyz individuals to feel part of something larger than themselves.

5.1.2. Theme 2: Generational and societal dynamics

This theme examines how generational perspectives and social environments influence the adoption, meaning, and visibility of national-symbolic attire, with particular focus on how younger generations redefine cultural norms while negotiating societal expectations. It explores the shifting relationship between tradition and modernity, highlighting the evolving roles that cultural symbols play in contemporary society and how they shape both individual and collective identity.

One of the key aspects of this theme is captured in *Subtheme 2.1: Youth and Cultural Reinvention*. Here, younger generations are seen as actively reshaping traditional symbols to reflect contemporary tastes, personal identity, and even social resistance. National attire is no longer just a symbol of heritage but is reimagined as a form of self-expression and creativity. Young people view these cultural symbols through a new lens, transforming them into statements that reflect their values and aspirations. This transformation challenges the norms and conventions set by previous generations, as youth incorporate traditional elements into modern fashion and lifestyle, infusing them with new meanings and relevance. The process of reinvention allows for

cultural symbols to remain dynamic and adaptable, providing a sense of empowerment to younger generations who can assert their identities through these redefined expressions of heritage.

On the other hand, *Subtheme 2.2: Evolving Social Norms and Cultural Acceptance* delves into how societal perceptions of national attire are shifting. What was once seen as outdated, rural, or old-fashioned is gradually being integrated into mainstream culture and recognized as a symbol of pride and respect. As national attire becomes more normalized in everyday settings, there is a greater acceptance of these cultural symbols in various social contexts. This shift represents the growing integration of tradition with modernity, where national symbols, once reserved for special occasions, are now worn with pride and affirmation. Despite lingering societal judgments, particularly those tied to past stereotypes, there is a broader movement towards embracing cultural attire as part of everyday identity, signaling a deeper cultural renewal. This normalization allows individuals to wear these symbols as representations of not only personal heritage but also a collective social identity, making them visible and valued in contemporary spaces.

In conclusion, the exploration of subthemes *Youth and Cultural Reinvention* and *Evolving Social Norms and Cultural Acceptance* highlights the multifaceted role of cultural symbols in shaping and reinforcing Kyrgyz identity. The generational shift in how national attire is perceived and adopted demonstrates how younger generations are redefining tradition, while also negotiating societal expectations. As cultural symbols evolve from symbols of rural or outdated identity to representations of pride and modern expression, they become essential tools for both individual self-definition and collective belonging. The dialogue between older and younger generations, alongside the influence of social environments, ensures that national symbols remain dynamic, adaptable, and deeply embedded in the ongoing construction of Kyrgyz cultural identity. This interplay underscores the importance of cultural symbols as both markers of heritage and as living expressions that resonate across time and generations.

5.1.2.1. Subtheme 2.1: Youth and cultural reinvention

This subtheme highlights how younger generations are not only inheriting but also actively reshaping cultural symbols to align with contemporary identities and values. Young respondents demonstrated a strong inclination to reimagine national attire as

more than a historical or ceremonial element; they perceive it as a canvas for *youth empowerment* and individual expression. The traditional is no longer seen as something to be passively preserved but rather as a dynamic cultural resource that can be personalized, reinterpreted, and made relevant in modern settings.

The narratives suggest that this generation feels a sense of ownership over their cultural heritage, treating it as a domain where they exercise autonomy and creativity. Many respondents articulated that through *modern-ethno adaptations*, they blend traditional patterns, cuts, or fabrics with modern silhouettes and streetwear aesthetics, resulting in new forms of fashion that feel both distinctly Kyrgyz and globally stylish. These adaptations make cultural expression accessible and wearable in everyday life, removing it from the confines of formality or ritual.

At the same time, this creative engagement often carries a *rebellious spirit*. For some, incorporating traditional symbols into their daily appearance is a subtle yet meaningful way of resisting mainstream or Westernized fashion norms. It also challenges local social expectations that may still associate national attire with conservatism, rural identity, or special occasions only. In this way, cultural reinvention becomes a strategy to disrupt stereotypes and expand the boundaries of what it means to be Kyrgyz today.

This movement among youth reflects the emergence of a *youth subculture* centered around national pride and cultural revival. Traditional symbols are no longer viewed as outdated relics but are infused with new life and relevance, transforming into lifestyle choices that express creativity, heritage, and even subtle political commentary. This cultural shift is not happening on the margins but is gaining momentum as part of a broader *cultural renaissance*, in which national attire and symbols are being woven into everyday experiences, fashion markets, and online identities.

Importantly, this reinvention is not perceived as a rejection of tradition but rather as its evolution. Young people frame their engagement as a generational contribution to cultural continuity, where the past is honored but not confined to its original forms. Their practices illustrate how traditional symbols can remain vital by being adaptable, reflective of personal meaning, and responsive to the spirit of the times.

In sum, this subtheme illustrates that youth are central agents in transforming the role and meaning of national-symbolic attire in contemporary Kyrgyz society. Through *youth empowerment*, *rebellious spirit*, *youth subculture*, and *modern-ethno adaptations*,

they are not only revitalizing heritage but also redefining its place in the social and aesthetic landscape of everyday life.

Code: Youth Empowerment / Generation of Freedom

A recurrent theme among respondents is the sense of belonging to a generation raised in the context of national independence. The younger generation positions itself as freer and more empowered in cultural expression compared to older generations who lived under Soviet influence. This perceived freedom manifests in their open engagement with Kyrgyz identity, symbols, and heritage through lifestyle choices.

- *“And now we are such a generation, young people are a generation that is already growing up in an independent state, and we can more independently express and live our culture.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

The transition from Soviet-imposed cultural suppression to post-independence self-definition provides Kyrgyz youth with a unique opportunity to reclaim and redefine cultural norms. Respondents frequently referenced the freedom to make choices that align with their identity, be it the language they speak, the clothes they wear, or the cultural events they participate in. For many, wearing national-symbolic attire represents not only a stylistic choice but also an act of empowerment grounded in a new socio-political reality. The youth are no longer passively inheriting culture; they are actively shaping it.

- *“I think this is since now is a different generation. And this generation seems to think a little differently. That is, this is probably a generation of freedom. And the fact that they do not feel any restrictions... It seems to me that this relates to the fact that if we were somehow embarrassed before this, because we were in system that was built by our parents, and their system was built by the Soviet Union. This current generation, as I noticed, they are very far out of this system, it seems to me.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This generational empowerment also connects to educational and digital literacy improvements, allowing youth broader access to historical narratives, ethnic traditions, and cultural knowledge that were previously inaccessible or de-emphasized. Social

platforms serve as accelerators of this self-directed learning and expression, reinforcing a sense of freedom to articulate identity with pride.

Code: Rebellious Spirit

Closely related to empowerment is the notion of rebellion, although a subtle one, through which youth challenge both the norms of the older generation and globalized aesthetic standards. For some respondents, national-symbolic expression is not only cultural but also political, signaling a conscious move away from the homogenizing tendencies of contemporary fashion or the assimilative pressures of Soviet-era cultural norms.

- *“The fact is that the new generation is growing up without the influence of any Soviet power... It seems to me that, on the contrary, we want to show [our identity] even more, and clothes are also a way of self-expression...These young people, these teenagers, they like everything that breaks the system, and they can afford to wear traditional things in new ways.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This quote exemplifies how the adoption of national motifs becomes a form of identity assertion that resists both erasure and conformity. While their parents may have conformed to Soviet ideals or kept their heritage private, the younger generation is reclaiming visibility through aesthetic rebellion, reinterpreting traditional forms into modern fashion, incorporating Kyrgyz into everyday speech, and engaging with their heritage openly.

- *“We hear from some of the Turkish people that the Russians exploited you or that the Russians make you speak Russian instead of your language. Some people even thought that the Russians alienated you from religion and some of you believed in Christianity. And I think it would be evidence that young people engage in such consumption by telling them the exact opposite.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

Respondents frequently noted distinct generational differences in how national attire is perceived and utilized. Older generations often associate traditional clothing

with special occasions, such as weddings or holidays, while younger individuals integrate these symbols into their daily lives.

- *“My grandmother wears it only for weddings, but I wear it to university.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Younger generations reinterpret established traditions to align with contemporary values and lifestyles. The younger generation's embrace of national symbols signifies both a continuation of heritage and a redefinition of its relevance in modern society.

In contrast, older generations maintain a more formal relationship with traditional attire, treating it as a sacred or ceremonial artifact rather than a part of everyday fashion.

- *“The older generation usually wears these clothes only on holidays, but for me, they are part of who I am every day.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

In this context, the “rebellion” is not about aggression or protest but about visibility, authenticity, and intentional differentiation. The strategic use of national symbols allows youth to occupy a middle ground maintaining modernity while quietly resisting cultural dilution. The result is a unique cultural positioning that critiques both global homogenization and internal neglect of heritage.

Code: Youth Subculture / Cultural Renaissance

Many participants noted a distinct cultural revival, or renaissance, being led by Kyrgyz youth. Unlike the previous generation, which often limited traditional clothing or customs to holidays and formal events, today's youth are weaving national identity into their daily lives blurring the line between “ethnic” and “ordinary.”

- *“This idea of national identity and presenting it beautifully is what the younger generation is doing. The adult generation did not do this, that is why it didn't exist.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“The fact is that the new generation is growing up without the influence of any Soviet power... and now the younger generation already feels our culture much more strongly within themselves.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

- *“In recent years, the consumption of such products has grown very strongly, because it seems to me that young people feel that they are losing their identity.”*
(Ían, male, 23 years old, Korea)

Respondents observed that younger individuals are increasingly proud of their heritage and seek to reclaim cultural practices that were previously neglected or stigmatized.

- *“I noticed that young people now are proud to wear national clothes. It’s not like before when it was considered old-fashioned.”* (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

This revival contrasts with the attitudes of earlier generations, who often viewed traditional clothing as outdated or impractical. Younger individuals see their choices to honor their culture while making it relevant for modern audiences.

- *“This generation is different. They don’t feel restricted. They are proud of who they are and want to show it”* (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

This renaissance is facilitated by the fusion of tradition with aesthetics, transforming national symbols into fashionable, accessible, and desirable elements of everyday identity.

- *“I am increasingly noticing trends such as young people in Kyrgyzstan, even Russian-speaking and Russian-educated young people, trying to learn Kyrgyz language and moving away from speaking Russian, and at the same time, the use of patterned t-shirts and national symbol sweatshirts is increasing.”*
(Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)

This adaptability is not only a form of self-expression but also a way to challenge societal norms and stereotypes about national attire. By wearing traditional elements in innovative ways, younger generations redefine what it means to engage with their cultural heritage.

Respondents mentioned brands, online platforms, and social initiatives that are part of this grassroots cultural movement. Their fashion is not only rooted in pride but in aesthetic reinvention modernizing without diluting.

- *“I recently saw a company on Instagram. This company produces clothes, national clothes. They created a collection called “12 months”. I saw their product, I really liked it, but in a modern style.” (Jakyp, male, 33 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Furthermore, this youth-led renaissance also reflects deeper shifts in how culture is transmitted, less through formal institutions and more through peer networks, digital spaces, and collaborative creativity. As a result, the cultural revival among youth is dynamic, decentralized, and visually engaging, making it more sustainable and relatable to younger generations.

Code: Modern-Ethno Adaptations

Modernized ethno-style has emerged as a vibrant form of cultural expression for Kyrgyz youth, representing a generational reinterpretation of heritage through aesthetics. Rather than adhering strictly to traditional forms, respondents highlighted how elements such as patterns, motifs, and materials have been thoughtfully integrated into contemporary, wearable designs. This stylistic fusion enables them to express their cultural identity in a way that is compatible with daily life and modern sensibilities.

One of the defining characteristics of modern-ethno fashion is its practicality. Participants described it as a rethinking of traditional Kyrgyz style into accessible formats, allowing for symbolic engagement without sacrificing comfort or style.

- *“As for modern-ethno, it is more comfortable and lighter, because it is a rethinking of Kyrgyz ethno into a modern model. That is, there can be some element on trousers in the form of embroidery, in the form of a print, maybe colors, maybe a texture of fabric that carries the culture of Kyrgyzstan. Or, for example, tebiteykas that can be worn every day. There, on the way from home to work or to school.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This integration of traditional elements into mainstream styles signals a broader cultural shift. What was once viewed as the domain of older generations, attire reserved for ceremonies or national holidays, is now being embraced and reimagined by young people. The once rigid boundaries between "traditional" and "modern" have blurred, giving rise to a more fluid, creative form of self-representation.

- *“Previously, it seemed to us that only old people, grandparents, wore this. Grandfathers wear a cap, grandmothers wear these ‘beldemchi’, ‘zhouluk’ [shawl]... Then, over time, they began to modernize these things and now everyone uses them. Starting from small children to adults.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“Initially I liked that it was such a modern approach to our nomadic, well, we are like nomads, and I really liked that.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

These modernized symbols do not represent a break from the past but rather a dynamic continuation. For many, this trend has made cultural expression more accessible and emotionally engaging. The ability to incorporate familiar symbols into everyday clothing has allowed young Kyrgyz to confidently assert their heritage in a way that aligns with their lifestyle.

- *“Now I started to see them (national symbols) in modern clothes, in normal t-shirts and tops, and in crop tops. And I think this combination of traditional and modern excites young people more. And young people like this thing, and I like it too.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

Respondents also noted how this trend is youth-driven and increasingly visible in Kyrgyzstan's fashion landscape. Casual wear, especially sweatshirts and outerwear, is frequently designed with national patterns, allowing for symbolic expression that fits seamlessly into everyday life.

- *“I think, from 17 to 30 years old [consumers]. Yes, that is about the age that people wear [national-symbolic attire]. They wear things like sweatshirts, sleeveless jackets, with national symbols. They are releasing modern things with national symbols.”
(Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

For some, this trend has broader cultural implications, contributing to the ongoing relevance of national identity in a globalized world. Rather than treating culture as static or nostalgic, modern-ethno styles offer a living canvas through which individuals negotiate both pride in their roots and a desire to remain stylistically current.

- “They admire how elements of national symbols can be integrated into modern style and how this helps to preserve our traditions in the context of globalization.”

(Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

Ultimately, the rise of modern-ethno style among Kyrgyz youth is about more than aesthetics. It reflects a creative assertion of identity that bridges tradition and innovation, making cultural symbols not only visible, but vibrant and alive in the everyday experiences of a new generation.

5.1.2.2. Subtheme 2.2: Evolving social norms and cultural acceptance

This subtheme examines how the perception and social treatment of national-symbolic attire have changed over time, particularly within urban, social, and everyday contexts. Where traditional clothing was once associated with outdated customs or rural origins, it is increasingly embraced as a respected and even fashionable expression of cultural identity. This shift reflects not only changing attitudes but also the influence of interpersonal dynamics and social recognition in either encouraging or discouraging cultural visibility. The subtheme highlights the gradual, yet impactful, integration of traditional elements into the mainstream, revealing how culture is continuously negotiated within society.

A notable change observed among respondents was the way national attire now often draws *social attention and positive affirmation*. Compliments, questions, and conversations sparked by traditional clothing reinforce a sense of cultural pride and validation. These social cues play a crucial role in motivating individuals to express their heritage openly and confidently, especially in public or semi-formal settings. Cultural visibility becomes a positive experience, supported by curiosity and admiration from others.

However, this positive attention coexists with lingering *societal judgments and norms* that still influence how traditional attire is received. Some participants recalled past experiences where national dress was associated with ruralness, backwardness, or ceremonial exclusivity. These memories indicate that while perceptions are evolving, subtle forms of stigma remain, particularly among older generations or within formal

institutions. This duality shows that cultural acceptance is still in flux and often context dependent.

Additionally, the role of *social circle influence* emerged as a powerful factor. Family members, peers, and authority figures such as teachers can either encourage or hinder the adoption of national attire through their reactions and attitudes. For some, supportive environments helped build the confidence to wear traditional symbols regularly, while for others, negative feedback or perceived indifference discouraged cultural expression. These interpersonal dynamics highlight how acceptance is often shaped not only by broader society but also by the immediate social environment.

Despite these challenges, many respondents observed a clear trend of *mainstream normalization*. National attire is no longer reserved solely for holidays, weddings, or cultural performances. Instead, it is becoming increasingly common in workplaces, universities, and casual settings, often in the form of modernized designs or symbolic accessories. This broader visibility marks a shift in how tradition is integrated into contemporary lifestyles, with cultural expression becoming part of everyday aesthetics and self-representation.

Overall, this subtheme captures an evolving cultural climate where national attire is steadily moving from the margins to the mainstream. Through the interplay of *social attention, norms, influences, and normalization*, traditional symbols are no longer confined to moments of national celebration but are becoming integrated into daily life. This normalization process not only expands the cultural relevance of national attire but also reflects a deeper negotiation between past and present, between individual expression and collective acceptance. The following sections provide deeper insight into each of these dynamics.

Code: Social Attention and Positive Affirmation

Positive societal feedback plays a significant role in encouraging the use of national-symbolic clothing and reinforcing cultural pride. Participants frequently shared how wearing such items in public draws attention and curiosity, often leading to conversations about their origins, meanings, and craftsmanship. These interactions foster a sense of affirmation and satisfaction, reinforcing the individual's connection to their heritage.

- *“It attracts attention. Most people come up and ask. They ask where this thing comes from.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This visibility, although sometimes unexpected, often affirms the wearer’s cultural identity and transforms fashion into an opportunity for cultural ambassadorship. Participants expressed joy and pride in moments when their clothing sparked interest from strangers or friends.

- *“When do people start to show interest, when they are there: oh, what is so unusual about you, what is this pattern? That is when I get some special feeling... I have reached my goal, people are interested.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“When people look, I feel proud. I like that people are interested.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)*

Such responses demonstrate that social validation becomes part of the symbolic meaning of national attire. Compliments and inquiries from others serve as micro-affirmations, turning everyday fashion into an empowering act of cultural expression.

- *“They may just come up and ask where I bought it, where they can also get such a bag or such a jacket... very often I receive positive compliments.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“They are immediately different and catch the eye, people ask, give compliments, ask where they can buy them, and give them further thoughts about purchasing this kind of thing.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“My friends really like the way I live now, and they are very interested in seeing elements of our national culture on me in this variation, in which I chose to be today.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“It happens quite often that passers-by or people driving by in cars, if I walk along the alley, look, or when I go into a store, people say, yes, your vest is good or beautiful, and I notice that many are interested.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These reactions show how public acknowledgment contributes to cultural confidence. For many respondents, the act of wearing symbolic items becomes more than personal, it is also a dialogical and performative practice that invites others into a conversation about Kyrgyz culture. However, the attention is not always neutral. Some participants expressed that while compliments are encouraging, the visibility of national attire in public spaces can also be met with surprise or discomfort in certain social settings. Nevertheless, overall, participants view social approval as a powerful motivator for maintaining and expanding the everyday visibility of national-symbolic expressions.

Code: Societal Judgments and Norms

Respondents frequently reflected on how societal perceptions shape both the visibility and acceptability of wearing national attire in everyday life. While there is growing cultural pride, especially among younger generations, this pride is often negotiated through the lens of public opinion, community expectations, and fear of judgment. In particular, participants described how traditional clothing can elicit both admiration and criticism depending on the context, age group, or region.

One respondent described how their peers perceived traditional clothing as outdated, evoking associations with rural life or older generations:

- *“Among my former classmates it is perceived not as something fashionable, but rural. Or they think that I dressed like an old man.” (Kyrgyz, male, 24 years old, Germany)*

For many participants, these perceptions were rooted in past experiences. Several described how, during childhood or adolescence, wearing traditional clothes outside of ceremonial contexts was discouraged or met with ridicule.

- *“A lot of people used to be afraid of seeming old-fashioned, as if they were... some kind of old, historical thing.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“In my childhood it was considered something shameful. Not to say shameful, but it seemed unusual to wear national clothes in everyday life. We say, ‘What*

will people say?’ That’s exactly what we said in childhood.” (Ian, male, 23 years old, Korea)

Despite this, many respondents emphasized that these attitudes are changing. Traditional attire is increasingly seen as a point of pride, and wearing it is becoming more normalized among youth. However, some individuals still feel constrained by lingering stereotypes. The term “Kyrgyzbai”, for example, carries derogatory connotations suggesting someone is “rural” or “outdated” discouraging individuals from publicly expressing their cultural identity.

- *“Usually we call such people ‘Kyrgyzbai’, which means ‘a visitor from the village’. That is why I felt uncomfortable.” (Ian, male, 23 years old, Korea)*

Gender expectations also add complexity to these perceptions. Women, in particular, reported feeling pressure to embody modesty when wearing national attire, as cultural expectations often tie national dress to traditional feminine behavior.

- *“Initially a Kyrgyz woman should be modest. And since you want to wear something of your national origin, you must follow certain rules. If you want to wear a corset in the national style, then you should not wear a miniskirt.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These comments reveal an ongoing tension: while respondents want to embrace and modernize their culture, they are still navigating societal boundaries that dictate what is considered “appropriate.” This internal conflict often emerges as a struggle between expressing cultural pride and avoiding social stigma, especially in urban or diasporic contexts where public scrutiny is heightened.

Together, these insights highlight that cultural expression through attire is not just a personal decision, it is also shaped by societal forces that can either validate or constrain national identity. As such, the normalization and acceptance of traditional elements in contemporary clothing remain a dynamic and contested process.

Code: Social Circles Influence

For many respondents, the adoption of national-symbolic products was not an isolated decision but one shaped by the behaviors and preferences of those around them. Friends, family members, colleagues, and even educators were often cited as important influences in developing interest toward wearing or purchasing items with national motifs. These social examples served not only as inspiration but as validation, normalizing cultural expression in everyday life.

Close family members, such as sisters, mothers, and aunts, were frequently mentioned as role models in embracing national attire or accessories:

- *“My mom wears such clothing. And specifically with national identity, my sister, aunts also wear them. Today, by the way, I saw... I met with a friend and his sister. She also had a bag. A bag with national patterns.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“My sister uses it. She started using it a lot after she went abroad. She also uses such things a lot in her everyday clothes.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

Friends also played a strong role in shaping aesthetic and cultural choices, particularly when their fashion incorporated Kyrgyz symbols in contemporary ways:

- *“She [my close friend] wears backpacks and shoppers with national elements and ornaments... And, what probably fits in very well, is that she often makes braids when she puts them on, specifically national ornaments.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I have a lot of girls around me who wear corsets with Kyrgyz and national patterns, as well as jewelry.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“My Kyrgyz friends also wear such ‘chapans’, outerwear, raincoats, and ‘kalpak’ worn by men.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Teachers and mentors were also cited as influential figures. Their emphasis on cultural knowledge encouraged early symbolic adoption:

- *“The teacher who taught us the Kyrgyz language explained the features of the national kalpak... since the sixth grade I always wore a hat to school.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

Even professional peers contributed to spreading interest in cultural goods:

- *“I have a former colleague; she really loves national symbolic products and is a very frequent consumer. Through her, we always learned about various products with national symbols... And after that we also acquired them.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These responses show that national-symbolic consumption is often cultivated within social environments where such expressions are already visible and encouraged. Seeing others confidently embody cultural pride helps individuals feel more comfortable and motivated to do the same. Thus, social circles play a powerful role in normalizing, encouraging, and spreading cultural engagement.

Code: Mainstream Normalization

A recurring theme among respondents was the increasing normalization of national-symbolic attire in everyday life. What was once reserved for holidays or special events is now becoming part of the daily wardrobe, no longer perceived as unusual or eccentric, but rather as a stylish and acceptable form of cultural expression.

Respondents noted a significant shift in how society views traditional clothing and accessories. Many observed that what was once considered bold or unconventional is now integrated into mainstream fashion:

- *“It is important that national clothing does not remain something unique for holidays, but becomes a part of everyday life, so that people begin to perceive it as a norm, and not as something unusual.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Before that, I wore it only on holidays or at some events. And now I integrate my identity, or national things that include national elements, and so on, into everyday life.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Georgia)*

This growing familiarity has also led to reduced social pressure. Wearing culturally symbolic clothing is no longer a cause for self-consciousness:

- *“I noticed that if previously it was considered that a person wears some very national things and so on, it was considered a little unethical, a little out of place. But now it’s so fashionable and normalized that she can walk like this every day and feel normal.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I notice that in this 2024, wearing a kalpak or wearing a chapan is a very common phenomenon in my observation... people started wearing it calmly, with joy, they feel free.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Exposure in media and fashion industries also plays a role in this shift. As national symbols become more visible through social channels and commercial platforms, their presence is increasingly accepted:

- *“The more it appears in the media, the more it is normalized, more familiar to the eye, and cultural awareness increases.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I noticed that even these well-known fast fashion brands, Manga, Zara, Stradivarius, they have also recently begun to produce things with national symbols.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

This mainstreaming of tradition has changed how people interact with and perceive cultural fashion:

- *“It probably aroused some interest, but now people have become more accustomed to this phenomenon, and yes, I don’t feel any special attention.” (Jakyp, male, 33 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

However, some respondents also reflected critically on the widespread acceptance, noting that cultural fashion may risk becoming commercialized and losing its deeper meaning:

- *“It’s become so mainstream and so every day that the idea of identity through these clothes isn’t being promoted as much as it used to be. It just feels like a*

product that's being sold, and there's no real ideology behind it.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)

Overall, respondents agreed that normalization is a powerful force in making national attire a familiar and accepted part of daily life. Yet, they also emphasized the importance of preserving the meaning behind these symbols as they become more commercially popular.

5.1.3. Theme 3: Culture in a global and digital world

This theme explores how processes of globalization, transnational migration, and the rise of digital media influence the meaning, visibility, and reinterpretation of Kyrgyz cultural identity. It highlights how individuals engage with cultural symbols not only as representations of tradition, but as strategic tools for cultural navigation in a rapidly changing, interconnected world.

As examined in *Subtheme 3.1: Cultural Assertion in Global Contexts*, respondents, particularly those living abroad, use national-symbolic elements to affirm their identity and maintain a sense of cultural rootedness. In the era of globalization, wearing traditional attire or incorporating national motifs into everyday fashion becomes a visible marker of Kyrgyz identity. This assertion is often driven by a fear of cultural loss and a desire to remain connected to one's heritage. Participants describe these acts not merely as expressions of pride, but as conscious efforts to safeguard cultural authenticity in the face of assimilation and cultural homogenization.

At the same time, digital platforms have emerged as powerful tools for shaping and disseminating Kyrgyz cultural identity, as detailed in *Subtheme 3.2: Media and Influencers as Cultural Catalysts*. Social media influencers, artists, and designers play a key role in reviving and modernizing traditional elements. Through visually engaging content, they amplify the appeal of national attire and symbols, particularly among younger generations. These online representations not only popularize cultural aesthetics but also reshape perceptions of what it means to be Kyrgyz in the 21st century.

Together, these two subthemes *Cultural Assertion in Global Contexts* and *Media and Influencers as Cultural Catalysts* reveal how cultural identity is continuously negotiated in global and digital spaces. National-symbolic products are no longer

confined to ceremonial or historical contexts, they are actively adapted, shared, and redefined through international mobility and digital visibility. This dynamic process allows individuals to both preserve and innovate, contributing to a living, evolving sense of Kyrgyz identity.

5.1.3.1. Subtheme 3.1: Cultural assertion in global contexts

This subtheme explores how cultural expression becomes a strategic and symbolic act when Kyrgyz individuals navigate global and multicultural environments. In these contexts, national attire and symbols take on heightened meaning, not just as elements of personal style or tradition, but as visible declarations of identity. Engaging with culture abroad often requires more intentionality, as individuals become conscious of how their heritage is seen, interpreted, or misunderstood by others. This results in a proactive form of cultural positioning, where people use symbols to affirm their roots and differentiate themselves in global spaces.

A strong sense of *cultural ambassadorship abroad* emerges, where individuals feel they represent their nation and heritage through clothing, language, and customs. Wearing national attire or displaying cultural symbols serves as both a personal affirmation and a public statement, a way of introducing Kyrgyz culture to new audiences. These acts often open up space for cultural exchange, visibility, and pride.

At the same time, there are underlying *concerns about the loss of cultural roots and attempts to preserve culture*, particularly in settings dominated by foreign values or among Kyrgyz youth growing up with limited exposure to tradition. These concerns often translate into efforts to actively maintain cultural practices, speaking Kyrgyz, celebrating traditions, or integrating symbolic items into everyday life, as a safeguard against erasure or assimilation.

This assertion is fueled by *aspirations for cultural uniqueness in the global arena*. National attire and other symbols are treated not only as traditional remnants but as distinctive markers that set Kyrgyzstan apart from surrounding cultures. There is a desire to highlight what makes Kyrgyz heritage special and recognizable, to make it stand out, rather than blend in.

Concurrently, a *desire for global recognition and acceptance* motivates many to promote an accurate and respectful understanding of Kyrgyz culture internationally.

This includes challenging common misconceptions, correcting misidentifications, and seeking platforms that give Kyrgyz traditions the dignity and attention they deserve.

All of this unfolds in a careful negotiation between *balancing modernity and authenticity*. Individuals reflect on how to modernize expressions of identity while maintaining their symbolic value. Whether through fashion, design, or everyday practice, the challenge lies in updating tradition without diluting its meaning, to remain relevant in the present without breaking ties to the past.

Overall, this subtheme captures how cultural symbols function as tools of self-definition and collective representation in global settings. As individuals navigate foreign environments, traditional symbols take on renewed meaning, simultaneously preserving identity and projecting it outward. Through the interplay of *cultural ambassadorship abroad*, *concerns about the loss of cultural roots* and *attempts to preserve culture*, *aspirations for cultural uniqueness in the global arena*, *desire for global recognition and acceptance*, and *balancing modernity and authenticity*, national symbols become active sites of negotiation between rootedness and adaptation. This evolving cultural practice reflects a broader desire not only to maintain connection with Kyrgyz heritage, but to have it recognized, respected, and differentiated on the global stage. The following sections provide deeper insight into each of these dynamics.

Code: Cultural Ambassadorship Abroad

Many respondents see themselves as cultural ambassadors of Kyrgyzstan, particularly when living or traveling abroad. In foreign environments, national attire takes on new meaning: it becomes more than a garment; it is a powerful symbol of identity, heritage, and pride. Through dress, participants actively construct and project their cultural image, striving to showcase the richness and distinctiveness of Kyrgyz traditions.

- *“I feel like I’m representing my people when I wear national clothes in other countries... This role is like a knight. If, for example, now I am abroad, and here I feel as if I am a representative of my people, and I am trying to show it from the best side.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

For many, the act of wearing national-symbolic attire abroad is a conscious decision to engage in cultural storytelling. Participants described this performative

identity as a responsibility, one that involves preserving and promoting Kyrgyz identity in contexts where it is less known or recognized. Through fashion, they seek to inform and inspire curiosity among foreigners.

- *“When I travel to other countries, I wear my national culture and especially clothes with national symbols. Through this I would like to convey our culture or our distinctiveness... And this certainly arouses interest and raises questions about what kind of people they are. Then we will say: We are Kyrgyz, have been consuming such products since ancient times.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

In diasporic settings, participants reported an even stronger emotional attachment to cultural symbols. Being physically distant from their homeland heightened their connection to tradition and inspired a deeper sense of responsibility to uphold and share it.

- *“When I was abroad, these ornamental patterns became more impressive to me. I felt a stronger connection to my roots.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“I feel like a Kyrgyz woman, and not as a separate Nurayim. And, I do not know, even my behavior may change because I am there representing not only myself, but my entire country.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“I wanted to show my foreign colleagues (when I was abroad) our national image, through it to introduce them to the culture and the country as a whole.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Respondents consistently described how national symbols served as visual cues that attracted interest and prompted meaningful intercultural interactions. These moments of engagement allowed participants to narrate their culture on their own terms.

- *“People see the patterns and ask about them. It gives me a chance to tell them about Kyrgyz culture and traditions.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

- *“I always want, if they ask me, “Oh, is this something cultural of yours?” I want to say, this is our national, this is from Kyrgyzstan, that is, I somehow always want to show this in other countries. I think this is cool, this is how I show my commitment to our people, because I am Kyrgyz.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

Notably, several respondents shared how these experiences made them more aware of their cultural identity. In some cases, appreciation from foreigners sparked reflection on how Kyrgyz traditions are viewed at home.

- *“Appreciating our culture is not enough. We need to show it in practice, and wearing our national clothes is one way to do that... When I arrived in Türkiye, I found out that there are a lot of people here interested in our culture... and I just got this certain feeling of patriotism. Strangers appreciate it. Why don’t we?” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

These narratives reveal how national attire can function as both a personal anchor and a public declaration of identity. In global contexts, traditional clothing becomes a meaningful tool for visibility, fostering pride, and inviting cultural recognition. It turns everyday wear into acts of soft diplomacy, expressing who Kyrgyz people are, not just to others, but also to themselves.

Code: Concerns About Loss of Cultural Roots and Attempts to Preserve Culture

Across multiple interviews, participants voiced strong concerns regarding the gradual erosion of Kyrgyz cultural identity, traditions, and language. This anxiety was particularly pronounced when discussing the impact of globalization, digital media, and post-Soviet cultural shifts on younger generations. Participants expressed a shared fear that, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, core elements of Kyrgyz identity may be diluted or even forgotten.

- *“Now we have a problem in our country that there is a tendency that the Kyrgyz may lose their language. And with it our culture.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The perceived weakening of the Kyrgyz language was seen as a direct threat to cultural continuity. For many respondents, language acts as both a vessel and a shield for tradition, and its erosion is emblematic of broader cultural loss. This fear was heightened by the influence of global digital culture and social networks on young people:

- *“Nowadays everything is globalized through social networks. Children are born with social networks, and they see a completely different world.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Participants often referenced globalization as a double-edged sword: while it brings connectivity and exposure, it also accelerates the abandonment of national customs and values. Some respondents noted a growing sense of detachment among youth, describing how global media, Western fashion, and cultural mixing have blurred the boundaries of national identity.

- *“In this globalization many people, you could say, have lost their identity, and we also started with language, our clothes, that is why many people started to lose themselves.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

The country’s post-Soviet legacy was also identified as a root cause of disconnection. Interviewees highlighted how years of cultural suppression and homogenization under Soviet rule have left gaps in generational knowledge and cultural continuity, prompting a recent wave of rediscovery and revival.

- *“Some difficulties on the path of this trend’s development. For example, the fact that we have a lot of things mixed up after the Soviet Union and a lot of things have been forgotten during this time... In recent years, the consumption of such products has grown very strongly, because it seems to me that young people feel that they are losing their identity.” (Ian, male, 23 years old, Korea)*

In response to these anxieties, many respondents described their use of national-symbolic products not simply as aesthetic choices, but as deliberate acts of preservation. For some, purchasing or wearing such items is a form of cultural stewardship and resistance against forgetting.

- *“Buying such items is not just buying things, but also a way to preserve our cultural heritage for future generations, so that it does not disappear over time.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Clothes in general very well show that now we are very proud that this applies to us, that we know that this applies to us, we know and study. There is no such thing as us forgetting anything... Now young people are trying to resist not because there is something wrong with the West. But because we already have something worthwhile ourselves. We have our own culture of values.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Now young people are moving away more from the traditional, from traditions, from their roots. And there is a part of the population that does not want to break this thread with their roots and want to preserve traditional clothing.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These reflections reveal a critical awareness among respondents about the fragility of cultural heritage. For many, the engagement with national symbols is not passive, but rather a conscious, emotionally driven choice to maintain a connection to their roots. National-symbolic products thus serve as everyday tools for cultural continuity, education, and intergenerational memory.

Code: Aspirations for Cultural Uniqueness in Global Arena

A prominent theme throughout participant narratives is the strong desire to emphasize Kyrgyz cultural uniqueness in an increasingly globalized world. Respondents voiced a deep appreciation for the distinctiveness of their cultural symbols and traditions, highlighting how national attire, ornaments, and patterns serve as markers of identity that set them apart both at home and abroad.

- *“Each nation is unique, has its own characteristics, and efforts to preserve these characteristics are important.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

This appreciation for uniqueness was often positioned against the backdrop of globalization. As global boundaries become increasingly blurred, the motivation to maintain a culturally grounded identity becomes more urgent. Participants discussed

how global interconnectedness has, paradoxically, made cultural differentiation more desirable.

- *“The period of globalization, when the world is so global that it is so easy for you to fly from Bishkek to Australia now. In this global world, people are somehow trying to stand out and show that they belong to something different.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

Rather than resisting global exchange, respondents emphasized the importance of showcasing what makes Kyrgyz culture special. National-symbolic attire and products were described not only as fashion statements but as tools to communicate identity, especially in diverse and multicultural settings.

- *“Culture is what allows us to remain unique in a world that is rapidly changing and prone to globalization.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Several interviewees drew attention to the visual and symbolic specificity of Kyrgyz motifs, emphasizing that these markers cannot be easily replicated or found in other cultures. This authenticity is seen as a source of national pride and an important way to position Kyrgyz identity within the broader global landscape.

- *“This is very original, because such symbols cannot be found in other nations, in other countries, and these symbols show our culture.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“It will be a good distinctive feature, that is, no other people will have such national clothes, so to speak, national symbols, as we do.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*

The concept of cultural uniqueness also intersects with personal identity and the psychology of self-expression. Several respondents suggested that the appeal of unique cultural symbols is connected to a broader desire for individuality and self-recognition. The distinctiveness of Kyrgyz symbols not only connects people to their roots but also allows them to stand out in a world where sameness is often the norm.

- *“And we realized that this is our feature, this is our ‘highlight’, this is what makes us unique. And when people like uniqueness, they want to stand out, and they have come to appreciate what makes us unique. And they began to somehow realize that this turned out to be something special, something precious, something valuable.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Together, these reflections highlight how the use of national-symbolic products is driven not only by tradition but also by a forward-looking aspiration, to be recognized, valued, and distinct on the global stage. The participants’ narratives underscore a growing cultural confidence and desire for Kyrgyz culture to be both preserved and proudly displayed as a unique contribution to global diversity.

Code: Desire for Global Recognition and Acceptance

For many participants, the use of national-symbolic attire and products is not only a personal or cultural statement but also a deliberate effort to gain recognition for Kyrgyz culture on the global stage. Their narratives reveal a strong desire for Kyrgyz identity to be understood, respected, and appreciated independently, without being mistaken for or overshadowed by dominant regional cultures such as Russian or Chinese.

- *“It will no longer be the case that some American will tell us that we are simply from Russian culture, that we do not have our own culture. That is, everyone will know who we are without associating us with other countries.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Being such a small, small country in Central Asia, and at the same time carrying such a rich cultural baggage. I really want to show that we have it, that we are very creative. In fact, I think that our people are very creative. And, how can I say this, not to really stand out, but I really like this moment, since, for example, China is so big, and we Asians are associated only with the Chinese and are not aware of other nationalities.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

National attire functions not only as a marker of cultural pride but also as a strategic tool for advocacy and self-representation. Respondents frequently described

how wearing Kyrgyz clothing allowed them to challenge stereotypes, both abroad and within their own society, and assert a distinct cultural identity. This was particularly important in contexts where Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia remain largely unknown or misrepresented.

- *“Abroad, where they know little about Central Asia, many people mistake us for Chinese or Japanese. Wearing our national clothes helps them see who we really are.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

By choosing to wear garments embedded with symbolic meaning, participants actively corrected misconceptions and educated others about Kyrgyz history, traditions, and values. These visual symbols prompted curiosity and conversations, offering opportunities to reclaim cultural narratives and project a more authentic image of their identity. The use of national attire thus became a subtle yet effective form of cultural diplomacy.

Participants emphasized that visibility through clothing, patterns, or symbols is one of the most accessible tools to counter this invisibility. By showcasing their heritage through fashion, they hope not only to promote their identity abroad but to elevate the cultural status of Kyrgyzstan internationally.

- *“In the future, perhaps, this will be associated with Central Asia, our national clothing. For example, it is like with China, if I hear the word ‘red dragon,’ then for some reason I immediately think about the Chinese New Year, something like this.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“We want to show this through our style. I now understand that by saying this, I want them [people abroad] to accept me as such.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*
- *“Abroad, I strive to promote Kyrgyzstan as a country with a unique culture and a rich heritage that deserves attention and respect.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

- *“This probably raises our patriotic spirit. We see our flag waving on the podium, I think this also had an effect. And I think that as Kyrgyzstan develops, so does our national self-awareness.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This external recognition often strengthens participants’ own sense of pride and belonging. Being seen and appreciated by outsiders seems to validate the worth of Kyrgyz heritage, inspiring individuals to engage more deeply with their traditions. For some, this recognition from foreigners even sparked reflection on their own cultural responsibilities.

- *“However, the person wearing it was not a famous Kyrgyzstani, but a foreigner from another country. Then I became very interested: Why do people from foreign countries wear our national clothes with interest, but not many of us wear them?” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

Additionally, respondents noted how national attire helps differentiate them from broader ethnic categories like "Asian", offering a more precise and proud assertion of their identity.

- *“I noticed that in places where there are few Asians, we consider ourselves Asians. But when we wear our national clothes, we can show we are Kyrgyz, distinct from other Asians.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

Overall, this section reveals a strong link between personal identity, global representation, and national pride. Through fashion and cultural symbols, Kyrgyz individuals aim not only to preserve their traditions but to claim a rightful space for their culture in the broader international narrative, one that recognizes and respects their unique contributions to the world.

Code: Balancing Modernization and Authenticity

The emergence of modernized ethno-style has sparked a dynamic conversation among respondents about the balance between innovation and cultural authenticity. While many view the adaptation of national symbols into contemporary designs as a

creative revival of tradition, others express concerns that excessive modernization could dilute the original meaning and reduce cultural expressions to fleeting fashion trends.

Some respondents emphasized that introducing traditional elements through modern styles has played a key role in making national-symbolic products more appealing, especially to younger generations. For instance, modern adaptations of traditional items like the “chekelik” (a traditional headpiece) or corset designs have sparked renewed interest among youth who might otherwise find traditional attire impractical or unfamiliar.

- *“When people were given this in a modern format, that’s when people began to become interested. It seems to me that, for example, corsets came out in the national style, some chekelik, and then people, when they found out that this could be combined, there were more of them.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

The process of integrating these elements into everyday clothing is also deeply personal. Participants described their efforts to blend cultural identity with contemporary life, embracing innovation while maintaining symbolic meaning.

- *“I’m trying to somehow combine it with our modern clothes and wear it.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*
- *“And when people learned that you can somehow... stylize it with casual, they started wearing it more.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

These reflections suggest that modernization is not necessarily seen as a threat but as a strategic way of keeping cultural traditions visible and meaningful in modern life. Some respondents viewed this fusion as a form of cultural negotiation: an act of adaptation rather than abandonment.

- *“But it is not completely 100% traditional authentic clothing. And they simply introduced some moments, some styles, some elements from the traditional ones into everyday life. But still, it seems to me, it is also better than not wearing them at all.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

- *“No one wears fur anymore. Although somewhere in the clothes there is some fragment of fur, it may indicate that our ancestors hunted, yes, they were nomads somewhere.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This ability to reframe traditional materials and styles in a contemporary context illustrates how clothing becomes a living archive: preserving cultural memory in evolving forms. Rather than rigidly replicating the past, respondents highlight the value of flexible, personalized adaptations.

- *“I think you can respect your traditions, but at the same time also keep up with the world, so to speak, keep up with the world, not just honor old traditions, but also create new ones.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

Others went further, affirming that modernization itself is an act of cultural ownership, a way of reinterpreting tradition to reflect modern identities while still honoring ancestral roots.

- *“We are not rejecting tradition; we are making it our own.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Traditions can harmoniously coexist with modernity.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The view that modernization can actually serve to revive interest in more authentic cultural practices is also expressed. When done with intention and awareness, modern formats may act as an entry point for deeper engagement with heritage.

- *“If the idea was that we would increase the interest of the population by applying national symbols to modern things, and thus the interest of the population in traditional things would increase, then good.” (Nursultan, male, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Finally, respondents also discussed the importance of balancing global influences with local traditions. While they acknowledge the benefits of globalization, such as increased visibility for Kyrgyz culture, they are cautious about its impact on authenticity and sustainability.

- “Globalization helps us show our culture to the world, but it’s important that we don’t lose what makes it special” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)

Altogether, this section reveals a nuanced perspective among Kyrgyz youth: while authenticity remains important, modernization is not seen as contradictory to cultural preservation, but rather as an evolving, inclusive expression of identity that makes tradition relevant to contemporary lives.

5.1.3.2. Subtheme 3.2: Media and influencers as cultural catalysts

This subtheme examines the pivotal role of digital media and opinion leaders in reinvigorating interest in national symbols. In an era where online visibility can make or break cultural trends, social platforms act as modern marketplaces and stages for national attire. Through curated content and strategic storytelling, designers, influencers, and everyday users amplify the appeal of Kyrgyz symbols, making them accessible, fashionable, and relevant to a broad audience.

Small brands and independent designers leverage *Brand Visibility on Social Media* to showcase national-symbolic products. By posting high-quality images, behind-the-scenes creation stories, and styling tips on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, they engage younger audiences who might otherwise overlook traditional motifs. This digital presence not only drives sales but also educates followers about the meanings behind patterns and materials, fostering a deeper appreciation of cultural heritage.

At the same time, *Influence of Public Figures* accelerates the normalization of national attire. When bloggers, musicians, stylists, and celebrities feature traditional garments in their content, whether at red-carpet events, music videos, or daily outfit posts, they send a powerful message: national symbols are not relics but living elements of contemporary identity. Their endorsement lends prestige and desirability to cultural products, encouraging fans to explore and adopt these styles in their own lives.

Digital platforms also facilitate the intersection of *Global Audiences, Local Symbols* by allowing Kyrgyz individuals to showcase and affirm their cultural identity on an international stage. Through posts featuring traditional attire, patterns, or performances, national symbols become tools of visibility, pride, and cultural storytelling. This online presence sparks curiosity and engagement across borders,

turning local traditions into globally recognized expressions of identity and deepening appreciation for Kyrgyz culture within a diverse digital landscape.

Overall, this subtheme demonstrates how social media and influencers act as catalysts for cultural revival. Through *Brand Visibility on Social Media*, *Influence of Public Figures*, and *Global Audiences*, *Local Symbols*, digital platforms transform national symbols into dynamic, shareable experiences. They bridge generations and geographies, ensuring that Kyrgyz heritage remains vibrant and visible in the digital age. The following sections delve into each of these mechanisms in detail.

Code: Brand Visibility on Social Media

Respondents also highlighted how Kyrgyz designers and small businesses strategically use social media to promote their work, using influencers and visual storytelling to make traditional patterns more accessible and desirable. These platforms allow local creators to reach broader audiences, both within Kyrgyzstan and abroad, fostering a grassroots cultural movement driven by visual appeal and social validation.

- *“It’s great when I see Kyrgyz designers creating beautiful, modern clothes with traditional patterns and promoting them online.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*
- *“I bought a vest with national patterns because I saw it on social media. It looked so beautiful.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“I have seen before a product of the ‘Baira’ brand, similar to the national coat. I saw this on social network. And I really liked it.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

The use of engaging content formats, such as "get ready with me" videos, aesthetic product shoots, and street interviews, further supports the normalization and visibility of these products.

- *“On Instagram it was a store, I do not remember the name. They made all sorts of videos, like ‘Get ready with me.’ Or just photos, a few photos. Let's say there is some kind of Kyrgyz belt, with national patterns, or some kind of ‘chiptama’, vest, something like that.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

Collaborations with social media personalities also help brands amplify their cultural message. The involvement of bloggers increases the visibility of these products and builds credibility within younger, trend-sensitive audiences.

- *“He (manufacturer) sent these T-shirts to some bloggers. Maybe you saw ‘Oh my babyzee’? His nickname on Instagram is this. Many bloggers wear good T-shirts. This also has an effect, it seems to me.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Even bloggers, these podcasts, these are simply not the media, they are just such independent bloggers, media, create content, and they also dress themselves, firstly, somehow, they make such T-shirts with interesting logos and patterns, and somehow decorate their studios.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

These insights collectively illustrate how digital media platforms serve as both a marketing tool and a cultural stage, redefining the relevance of traditional symbols for a new generation. Social media thus becomes not only a driver of aesthetic consumption but a facilitator of cultural continuity in the digital age.

Code: Influence of Public Figures

Public figures, especially bloggers, stylists, musicians, and podcast guests, play a significant role in normalizing and promoting national-symbolic attire and heritage practices. Many respondents pointed out that these individuals, through their wide visibility on social media, shape perceptions of what is fashionable, meaningful, and culturally appropriate. Their influence can transform what was once considered outdated into something aspirational and modern.

Several participants highlighted how celebrities and influencers who incorporate Kyrgyz cultural elements into their style or speech directly impact audience behavior. By publicly embracing national symbols, whether in music videos, Instagram posts, or podcasts, these figures help redefine cultural expression for a younger generation. As one respondent explained:

- *“Basically, we watch bloggers precisely because we are impressed by them. And then you realize that this person wears a national adornment and practices, for example, archery... She writes her blog in Kyrgyz, and it influences how you start to look at it. It becomes fashionable, and it’s not even strange anymore.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This transformation of perception, from strange to stylish, is a key function of cultural influencers. Their presentation of tradition as trend helps younger viewers overcome hesitation and engage with their heritage more confidently.

Participants frequently mentioned musicians, stylists, and podcast guests as cultural ambassadors whose wardrobe choices influence consumer behavior:

- *“I noticed that famous singers and actors are invited to podcasts, who are dressed in clothes with national motifs.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*
- *“Many bloggers wear them for events, speeches, or even in everyday life. Now this is also quite fashionable - clothing of a national character. Even podcasts by our local bloggers have national carpets in the background.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This visual normalization, especially when associated with influential and creative personalities, inspires admiration and imitation. Another respondent noted:

- *“If you see something that a blogger wears all the time, it’s like confirmation that the thing is cool. This is also the influence of social networks.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Such validation by public figures gives national attire not only visibility but also social legitimacy. These influencers function as cultural role models, shaping trends and encouraging identity-driven consumption.

In some cases, the influence was very direct and transactional, participants discovered and purchased national-symbolic items after seeing them worn by influencers:

- *“A couple of months ago, I saw one blogger, who is a stylist, and he had a jacket with Kyrgyz ornaments, which I was very interested in. Well, I thought that I would like one too.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The effect of this cultural visibility is cumulative. It generates pride, normalizes cultural expression, and empowers individuals, particularly youth, to embrace symbols of their identity.

- *“I can say that before it was absolutely unpopular. But now it is becoming popular. And this very much depends on presentation, and very much on social networks... If influencers wear it, then it becomes relevant.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*

Ultimately, the widespread use of national attire and symbols by public figures does more than shape fashion, it reshapes cultural narratives, turning everyday consumption into acts of identity affirmation and cultural pride.

While respondents acknowledged the positive impact of media, they also expressed concerns about its potential to promote superficial engagement with national symbols. They worried that social media’s emphasis on aesthetics could overshadow the deeper meanings and histories associated with traditional attire.

- *“I sometimes feel like people wear these things just for likes on Instagram, without understanding what they represent” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Code: Global Audiences, Local Symbols

While globalization is often associated with cultural homogenization, many respondents described it instead as an opportunity for cultural expression and visibility. Social media was highlighted as a powerful tool through which Kyrgyz cultural symbols, especially traditional attire, and ornaments, could be shared with broader audiences and appreciated both locally and globally.

Respondents noted that visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow for the widespread circulation of national patterns, contributing to greater interest and

recognition of Kyrgyz culture. Rather than perceiving global exposure as a threat, participants framed it as a space to proudly assert their heritage.

- *“The world is learning about us through our culture and clothes. It’s a chance to show what makes us unique.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This form of digital cultural ambassadorship was described not only as beneficial for international audiences but also for Kyrgyz people themselves, especially younger generations, who are rediscovering pride in their heritage by seeing it reflected and celebrated online.

- *“Seeing our patterns on a global stage makes me proud, and it encourages others to embrace their heritage too.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“When people see our patterns on social media, they get curious about our culture. It’s a way to introduce Kyrgyzstan to the world.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

The symbolic power of visibility is particularly meaningful in the context of smaller nations like Kyrgyzstan, where global cultural recognition can serve as a form of soft power and identity affirmation. Participants expressed that when their traditions were shared or represented online, it evoked a sense of communal pride and motivated others to follow suit.

- *“I see my friends posting photos in national clothes, and it makes me want to do the same. It’s like we’re all rediscovering our culture together.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

In this way, globalization and social media were not seen as threats to authenticity, but as accelerators for cultural renaissance. For many, these platforms serve not only as outlets for personal expression but also as stages where Kyrgyz identity can be celebrated, shared, and affirmed, at home and abroad.

5.1.4. Theme 4: Personal identity and cultural styling

This theme explores how individuals engage with national-symbolic products, such as clothing, patterns, and accessories, not only as representations of heritage, but as tools for shaping and expressing personal identity. It highlights how traditional cultural elements are actively reinterpreted to align with individual tastes, lifestyles, and creative preferences.

As explored in *Subtheme 4.1: Cultural Self-Expression and Aesthetic Values*, national-symbolic products offer a meaningful avenue for aesthetic innovation and cultural self-expression. Rather than following traditional norms strictly, respondents often reimagine heritage elements in ways that reflect their personal style. This includes integrating ornaments into modern jackets, combining traditional patterns with streetwear, or even using cultural designs in tattoos and digital content. Such adaptations are driven by a desire to maintain a connection to Kyrgyz roots while asserting a unique visual identity.

This creative use of tradition is particularly important for those navigating multicultural or international environments, where cultural identity becomes both a personal statement and a social narrative. Through fashion and design, individuals express who they are, bridging past and present, local and global, traditional and modern. These personalized expressions not only celebrate heritage but also challenge fixed notions of what Kyrgyz culture should look like in contemporary life.

In conclusion, *Cultural Self-Expression and Aesthetic Values* reveals how national-symbolic elements are transformed into flexible and expressive mediums of identity. They become tools for navigating personal, cultural, and aesthetic terrains, allowing individuals to honor their heritage while shaping their own distinct cultural narratives.

5.1.4.1. Subtheme 4.1: Cultural self-expression and aesthetic values

This subtheme explores how individuals engage with cultural symbols as tools of personal expression, aesthetic admiration, and self-definition. Rather than treating national attire solely as a relic of tradition, respondents describe how they actively incorporate it into their visual identity and creative practice. Cultural elements become flexible resources, styled, adapted, and reimagined to align with individual values and

lifestyle. This approach reveals how cultural pride and individualism are not opposites, but often intertwined.

A strong theme of *Purposeful Distinctiveness / Desire for Uniqueness* emerges as respondents describe national-symbolic clothing as a way to stand out and visually assert their individuality. Rather than blending into mainstream fashion, individuals intentionally incorporate traditional elements into their style to express originality and cultural pride. This distinctiveness is both aesthetic and meaningful serving as a creative outlet and a reflection of personal identity. National symbols are seen as visually striking and inherently different, offering an alternative to homogenized global styles. Through modern adaptations and personal styling, national attire becomes not only a cultural statement but a tool for bold, self-assured expression.

The theme of *Aesthetic Appreciation* reflects how respondents admire national attire and ornaments not only for their symbolic meaning but also for their visual and tactile qualities. Beauty, modesty, fine craftsmanship, and harmonious design are commonly cited values. Respondents are drawn to the elegance of traditional forms, noting how these can align with contemporary style. Their appreciation is often visual and emotional, bridging tradition and fashion in ways that feel graceful and authentic.

Self-Discovery and Identity Exploration is another key insight within this subtheme. For some, wearing culturally significant items helps answer questions of belonging, origin, and self-understanding. National attire becomes a way to reconnect with forgotten aspects of identity or to make sense of one's place in the world. Respondents describe how traditional clothing can stir emotions, memories, or a renewed sense of self, becoming not just an outfit but a reflection of inner transformation.

The theme of *Cultural Individuality in Expression* highlights how traditional motifs serve as a flexible and creative canvas for personal style. Respondents often blend national elements with modern clothing, adapting patterns and ornaments into everyday wear that reflects their unique tastes and contemporary lifestyles. This fusion allows them to honor their cultural heritage while expressing autonomy and creativity, moving beyond rigid traditions. Many see this approach as a way to make Kyrgyz identity visually compelling and relevant, especially for younger generations and those living abroad. By reimagining traditional designs in innovative and stylish ways, whether through modern cuts, unexpected combinations, or digital representations,

individuals create a dynamic cultural expression that resonates both locally and globally. In this way, national symbols become living, evolving markers of identity that celebrate both heritage and personal growth.

Overall, this subtheme captures how cultural symbols function as tools of self-expression, aesthetic appreciation, and personal meaning. As individuals blend tradition with contemporary identity, these symbols become more than heritage, they transform into forms of visual storytelling and individuality. Through the interplay of *purposeful distinctiveness / desire for uniqueness, aesthetic appreciation, self-discovery and identity exploration*, and *cultural individuality in expression*, national attire becomes a living medium through which people define themselves and their values. This evolving practice reflects a broader movement toward personalized yet culturally grounded identities. The following sections provide deeper insight into each of these dynamics.

Code: Purposeful Distinctiveness / Desire for Uniqueness

For many respondents, national-symbolic clothing is not only a reflection of cultural identity but also a tool for standing out. The desire to be distinctive in appearance and expression motivates people to incorporate national elements into their everyday attire in ways that feel both personal and bold. Wearing traditional patterns, accessories, or garments allows them to escape visual uniformity and make a unique style statement.

- *“Through the desire to stand out and find one's individuality in a world that is often prone to monotony.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

National attire is seen as different from mainstream or imported fashion, and that difference itself becomes appealing. In a globalized world where styles are often homogenized, cultural uniqueness becomes a visual advantage. These clothes catch attention, spark curiosity, and help the wearer feel “seen.”

- *“Our society has already been saturated with imported fashion and styles. We tried everything... And now, seeing some of our traditional clothes, people began to appreciate them, to notice them. Because it is different.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Many participants shared that national clothing made them feel not only unique, but proud and empowered. It was often described as both expressive and elegant, offering the wearer a sense of agency over how they present themselves.

- *“It probably looks unusual from the outside... but it was fun to wear because you feel a little proud. This is diversity - to be a little special, unique, and bold.”* (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)
- *“It will emphasize individuality, that it’s stylish, fashionable, modern, youthful.”* (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

Respondents noted that national symbols can be styled in modern ways to suit individual preferences, often combining traditional elements with contemporary pieces for a unique look. This allowed for personal creativity while staying rooted in cultural identity.

- *“I want to buy beautiful national things and style them with a modern touch. It feels like a way to stand out while showing my culture.”* (Ian, male, 23 years old, Korea)

Others described how wearing something different, especially abroad, gave them a sense of ownership over their identity and representation. National attire became a way to express both their roots and their modern individuality.

- *“It’s not just that you stand out, it’s very creative. Also, you are wearing something that is national, especially if you are wearing it in another country. When you are in another country, you especially want to show that you belong to the nomads, to our people.”* (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)

Some respondents even expressed a preference for items that were less common, avoiding mainstream trends in favor of more unique expressions.

- *“I wouldn’t buy them, because many people wear them, and somehow, I would like to be more individual, in terms of style.”* (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)

These reflections show that for younger Kyrgyz, national-symbolic clothing is more than a cultural signifier, it is a tool for creative self-expression, purposeful distinction, and a visual assertion of identity. Whether through bold design choices or subtle ornamentation, they use these clothes to express who they are, both culturally and individually.

Code: Aesthetic Appreciation

For many respondents, national clothing is not only a symbol of cultural identity but also an embodiment of aesthetic appeal, modesty, and elegant minimalism. Traditional garments are appreciated for their graceful design, practical materials, and the ability to combine beauty with cultural values.

- *“In our culture, in our traditions, these clothes are very modest. They promote modesty, aesthetics, and minimalism. Even with bright colors, there is a sense of balance. Just one material, felt is used, but masterpieces are created from it.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“In clothes that modestly stand out like Kyrgyz, or also simple hanging bags with national ornaments.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

For some, certain garments hold special significance because of how they flatter the body while maintaining cultural values:

- *“As clothing specifically, I really love the beldimchi, because it shows the figure very gracefully, femininely. Beautiful clothes.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

The appeal of national attire also lies in how well it fits with contemporary fashion and can be worn across different settings:

- *“It’s very stylish and can be worn with any clothes.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

- *“I liked the style, how it looked, how it fit... You can wear it in Kyrgyzstan, but you can also wear it abroad. It’s very cool.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

Respondents noted that these clothes not only look good but also make them feel good, combining cultural pride with personal style:

- *“A feeling of pride, a feeling of pleasure that you wear beautiful clothes.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

Even casual or humorous interpretations of national symbols are appreciated for their creativity and style:

- *“There is a t-shirt with a granny drinking coffee and eating chak-chak. And I think it’s really cool. Cool design.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*
- *“Besides having national symbols, it’s also a stylish shirt. I liked the style, and it fit me well.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

National attire, therefore, serves not only as a marker of heritage but also as a way to embody style, confidence, and individuality, rooted in tradition, yet resonating with modern tastes.

Code: Self-Discovery and Identity Exploration

For many respondents, engaging with national-symbolic elements is part of a deeper journey of self-discovery. Wearing traditional clothing or using cultural symbols is not just about heritage, it becomes a mirror for exploring personal identity, origin, and inner values. This introspective process helps individuals reflect on who they are and how they wish to be seen, both personally and culturally.

- *“Every person probably asks himself the question of who he is, where he comes from... And he finds [answers] in such things, for example. ‘I am Kyrgyz, I am a person who uses such things. I am the one who thinks it is beautiful to wear such things and use them.’” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

The process of self-definition often begins with a growing interest in one's roots. Several respondents described how this curiosity about their origins has become a widespread cultural trend, particularly among younger people seeking authenticity and meaning.

- *“Recently it has become very popular to study your origins.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

This revival is not just about looking back, it's also about self-expression in the present. Cultural elements offer tools for articulating identity, enabling individuals to shape their public image in a way that feels true to themselves.

- *“This is the need for self-expression... and now it has had a very strong influence, that right now I really want to express myself and understand who I am.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Some respondents reflected on this process as a form of personal exploration, where clothing and symbols become visual extensions of inner development.

- *“I am simply interested in seeing myself in this image, seeing myself through the new history of my own country. This is a rather interesting process for me, because through my specific visual images I learn a little about myself.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

For others, this journey is ongoing. Engaging with national attire or symbols is part of an evolving process of figuring out where they belong and who they are becoming.

- *“I'm still a person who is searching, searching for himself.” (Jakyp, male, 33 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Together, these reflections show that cultural identity is not static, it's a personal and ongoing journey. National-symbolic products serve not only as links to the past but as tools for constructing and expressing one's evolving sense of self.

Code: Cultural Individuality in Expression

Respondents frequently emphasized that national-symbolic clothing provides a creative outlet to express their individuality within the cultural framework. Rather than following traditional rules rigidly, many participants preferred to reinterpret Kyrgyz heritage in ways that reflect their personal tastes, aesthetics, and modern lifestyle.

- *“Most people do it through their platforms... I found another style where I can express myself through national individuality and through national elements.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

The integration of ornaments and patterns into unconventional contexts, such as modern jackets, tattoos, or digital content, was seen as a way to claim national identity while creatively standing out.

- *“Ornament, national elements... I think it is very unusual, beautiful, and you can use these ornaments anywhere. Even if you make a T-shirt, a tattoo... such a unique, universal feature of nationality.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*

For some, this creativity stems from a desire to present their culture in a way that is not only respectful but visually compelling, especially for younger audiences and in international settings.

- *“This idea of national identity and presenting it beautifully is what the younger generation is doing.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Respondents expressed admiration for how Kyrgyz traditions could be reimaged in new and meaningful ways, reflecting both aesthetic innovation and cultural pride. Modern designs were appreciated for preserving the essence of heritage while making it accessible and stylish.

- *“Well, and if national uniqueness can be shown differently, if it's also creatively and cleverly designed, that also plays a role. If it's modern interpretations of our Kyrgyz culture, Kyrgyz way of life, that's also very interesting.” (Almaz, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Cultural creativity is especially meaningful for those living abroad, who often feel the need to “translate” their culture into something visible and relatable. Participants described how dressing in modernized national attire allowed them to share their culture confidently in global environments.

- *“I like to wear something traditional but mix it with modern clothes. It’s how I show both my culture and my personality.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

These reflections reveal how traditional elements are not simply preserved; they are transformed. Through colors, cuts, and combinations, participants turn national attire into a flexible, expressive medium that connects them to their roots while allowing space for personal evolution.

5.1.5. Theme 5. Cultural economy and everyday use

This theme explores how national-symbolic products operate not only as cultural expressions but also as commodities within a broader economic landscape. It examines how these items are produced, valued, and incorporated into everyday life, reflecting both cultural meaning and material realities. The findings highlight how practical considerations, market dynamics, and personal choices interact to shape the way individuals engage with their cultural heritage.

As outlined in *Subtheme 5.1: Cultural Production and Commercial Tensions*, the production of national-symbolic products reflects a complex relationship between tradition and commerce. Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of preserving cultural authenticity through skilled craftsmanship and traditional methods. Locally made garments and handmade ornaments were highly valued for their quality and symbolic significance. However, participants also expressed concern about the growing commercialization of these items. The mass production of national designs, often aimed at profit rather than preservation, was seen as a potential threat to the cultural depth and uniqueness of these products. This tension reveals a broader dilemma: how to promote and sustain cultural industries without compromising the heritage they aim to represent.

Meanwhile, *Subtheme 5.2: Accessibility and Everyday Integration* highlights how national-symbolic products are increasingly woven into the fabric of daily life. Rather than being limited to ceremonial use, these items have become part of everyday wardrobes and lifestyle choices, particularly for younger generations. The popularity of modernized, affordable, and easy-to-wear designs has allowed for wider access and broader participation. Respondents noted that the adaptability of traditional elements into casual clothing, accessories, or even digital content makes it easier to express cultural identity in contemporary contexts. This shift reflects not only changing fashion trends but also evolving cultural habits, where tradition is not abandoned but made more accessible and relevant to modern life.

Together, these subthemes illustrate how the cultural economy surrounding national-symbolic products is shaped by both symbolic values and everyday practicalities. The intersection of tradition, creativity, and market forces offers opportunities for cultural expression, but also raises important questions about sustainability, authenticity, and the future of heritage. Through conscious choices in what they wear and buy, individuals navigate this terrain, honoring their roots while adapting to the realities of contemporary life.

In conclusion, the exploration of subthemes *Cultural Production and Commercial Tensions* and *Accessibility and Everyday Integration* reveals the dual role of national-symbolic products as both meaningful heritage and functional commodities. They are not only vessels of cultural memory but also tools for everyday identity-making, shaped by economic contexts and individual preferences.

5.1.5.1. Subtheme 5.1: Cultural production and commercial tensions

This subtheme explores the complex relationship between preserving cultural authenticity and participating in a growing consumer market. As national symbols become more visible and desirable, local producers: artisans, designers, and craftspeople, find themselves balancing traditional methods with contemporary demands. The respondents highlight both admiration for local craftsmanship and concern about cultural symbols being reduced to commercial commodities. This dynamic reflects broader tensions between heritage preservation, economic opportunity, and the risks of cultural dilution.

Support for Local Economy emerges as a strong motivator behind consumer choices. Participants often emphasized their deliberate support for Kyrgyz-made products, linking purchasing habits to broader goals of sustaining local businesses, communities, and cultural continuity. For many, buying from local artisans is not only an economic act but also a moral and cultural one, rooted in solidarity and pride in national identity.

The value of *craftsmanship, quality, and pride in local production* was consistently highlighted. Respondents appreciated the skill, time, and cultural depth embedded in handmade or authentically crafted items. These products are often contrasted with mass-produced goods, which may lack the symbolic weight or durability of artisanal work. Quality is not only a material concern but also a marker of cultural respect and artistic integrity.

At the same time, *concerns about commercialization of culture* were expressed by participants who feared that the growing popularity of national-symbolic fashion might lead to its superficial use. When traditional elements are reproduced on a mass scale or stripped of context, their meaning risks becoming hollow. This tension is especially pronounced when symbols are used for aesthetic appeal without acknowledgment of their origins or cultural significance.

Overall, this subtheme highlights the dual role of cultural production as both a means of economic empowerment and a site of cultural negotiation. Through the interplay of *support for local economy, craftsmanship, quality, and pride in local production*, and *concerns about commercialization of culture*, participants illustrate how cultural symbols are embedded in a wider matrix of value, meaning, and market forces. The following sections provide deeper insight into each of these dynamics.

Code: Support for Local Economy

Many respondents highlighted their conscious choice to support Kyrgyz designers and local artisans as a meaningful act, both economically and culturally. Purchasing locally made national-symbolic products was seen not only as a fashion or identity choice, but as a form of cultural preservation and economic empowerment.

Respondents emphasized that by supporting domestic brands, they are actively contributing to the survival of traditional crafts and skills. These purchases become more than transactions; they are expressions of cultural commitment.

- *“It’s important to support our local brands and designers. They keep our traditions alive while creating something beautiful and unique.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*
- *“When I buy something made here, I feel like I’m helping keep our traditions alive. It’s not just about clothes; it’s about preserving who we are.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

For some, the motivation to support local producers stems from a desire to help start-ups and small businesses grow, especially those rooted in Kyrgyz culture.

- *“Sometimes I really want to buy something, support it by buying it, out of such intentions. Especially if it is a start-up business, I’d like to really support it if it’s something like ours.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*
- *“I want to support the domestic manufacturer.” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“[I am the one] who loves their country and want to make a contribution.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This growing awareness reflects a deeper connection between economic choices and cultural identity. For many, buying from Kyrgyz designers means preserving not just the heritage in symbolic form, but also the livelihoods and knowledge of those who keep it alive.

- *“When I see the ‘Made in Kyrgyzstan’ label there, I have a greater desire to buy it, I want to support it more, but, sometimes it is not of very high quality, to be honest... If we don’t support our local artisans, these traditions might disappear. Buying from them is a way to protect our culture and help our people.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Through these reflections, it becomes clear that national-symbolic consumption is closely tied to local economic empowerment. Supporting domestic production is perceived not only as a patriotic act but as a strategy for ensuring that Kyrgyz cultural practices, symbols, and values endure for future generations.

Code: Craftsmanship, Quality, and Pride in Local Production

A strong appreciation for the craftsmanship and quality of Kyrgyz national-symbolic products emerged across many interviews. Respondents expressed pride in the skills of local artisans, highlighting both the traditional knowledge passed down through generations and the evolving excellence of modern Kyrgyz design.

Local producers were frequently praised for their superior sewing techniques, attention to detail, and the use of high-quality, sustainable materials. This contrasted sharply with fast fashion, which was often described as low in durability and lacking cultural value.

- *“Our industry is very developed, and it is developing well, and our seamstresses, in terms of the market, are in great demand... People recognize how well our clothes are made.” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA)*
- *“It’s handmade, that’s what I also wanted to note - it’s handmade, environmentally friendly, and we support talented people, yes, what they create with their own hands.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I think the quality [of national clothes] is quite good, because they are produced in-house. As for mass markets, I think the quality of these listed brands has deteriorated... there’s now a bias towards fast fashion.” (Tolgonai, female, 22 years old, Türkiye)*

For many, choosing locally produced items was about more than design, it was a conscious choice rooted in sustainability, authenticity, and cultural continuity. Respondents saw national clothing not just as fashion, but as lasting, meaningful pieces worth investing in.

- *“Lately I’ve noticed that Kyrgyzstan has started to produce more high-quality products that represent this national symbol. The fact that the vests are made of better fabric makes them more valuable and more expensive.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*

- *“In Kyrgyzstan you order from high-quality designers who use high-quality goods and materials... they last a long time.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“90% of the cases are of very high quality because they’re natural... I have a bag made of felt, but they require more careful care... they are handmade, they are more valuable.” (Gulzat, female, 28 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Several respondents also connected local craftsmanship to broader trends in sustainable fashion. They appreciated how national clothing, rooted in eco-friendly practices and cultural tradition, offered an ethical alternative to global fast fashion.

- *“I do not really like fast fashion either, because it is not environmentally friendly. But traditional clothes - this is sustainable fashion... If I have to choose between new clothes and something authentic, I will choose the authentic because I know it will last longer.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“I think that our market is excellent, especially in national clothes, it is only growing, and due to competition, the quality and design are improving.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“The quality and design of this type of clothing began to improve.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*

Even among younger consumers driven by aesthetics, there was a recognition that local, culturally-rooted products offered both artistic appeal and superior quality.

- *“I usually don’t look at the quality first, because it’s the design that attracts me... But 100%, I think national things are better, because they are made in more detail.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Kyrgyz designers are doing amazing work. They’re taking traditional patterns and making them fit into modern life.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*

Ultimately, these reflections reveal a deep respect for the artistry behind Kyrgyz national-symbolic clothing. Whether handcrafted from felt and wool or modernized

with sustainable fabrics, such products serve as powerful symbols of heritage, pride, and the resilience of local knowledge.

Code: Concerns About Commercialization of Culture

A prominent concern among respondents is the commodification and commercialization of traditional attire and symbols. As national patterns and motifs gain popularity, particularly among younger generations and in the global fashion market, some participants express unease about the potential loss of cultural depth and authenticity. These individuals fear that treating national symbols merely as decorative trends may strip them of their original meanings, reducing culturally significant items to mere consumer products.

- *“I worry that these patterns will lose their uniqueness and just become another trend. It’s important to remember what they mean.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

This anxiety speaks to a broader discomfort with the rapid mainstreaming of cultural heritage through commercial channels. While the aesthetic appeal of national elements may attract attention, respondents emphasized that the real value of these symbols lies in their history, spiritual meaning, and connection to ancestral traditions. Without this contextual grounding, mass-produced or stylized versions of traditional items may risk becoming superficial representations.

- *“The popularization of national symbols can lead to its commercialization and erosion of true values and meanings that are associated with these symbols.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“There were patterns that were depicted only on headwear, some only on shoes, some only on clothes. And it is extremely important to preserve these rules. Because they have a deep meaning. It is important that the use of such symbols is conscious and respectful, and not reduced to a simple fashion or trend.” (Erik, male, 30 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

For some, this fear is compounded by the influx of low-quality, foreign-made imitations that adopt Kyrgyz motifs for profit but fail to uphold their cultural integrity.

- *“Quality may suffer. But this is natural in the future when there is competition. Now, for example, Chinese manufacturers, they already produce a lot of things, clothes with our national elements, ornaments, but of very poor quality, from artificial materials.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

This growing market demand for national aesthetics has created space for local entrepreneurs and businesses to produce cultural goods, yet even this trend is met with ambivalence. While entrepreneurship is encouraged, some respondents questioned the sincerity of these efforts when cultural symbolism is used primarily as a marketing tool.

- *“Businesses just picked up on this trend, and small businesses, especially young people, started making business out of it. Maybe in their heads they are promoting culture, but in reality, it doesn’t always feel like a real cultural process.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)*

Beyond concerns about commodification, respondents expressed apprehension that modernization may go too far, leading to symbolic distortion. For example, one participant reflected on the trend of adding national ornamentation to Western clothing items such as corsets or ties, which have no traditional place in Kyrgyz culture.

- *“I am also afraid that they will do it too much in a modern style... it will lose its uniqueness, its originality, and will become... an addition to modernity. Usually, modern clothes with national ornaments are good to some extent, but if this is abused... it will spoil it... for example, a tie in the national style - it seems to me that this is something wrong.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

This negotiation between cultural preservation and innovation reflects a broader generational shift. While younger Kyrgyz increasingly embrace national motifs in daily fashion, they also grapple with maintaining respect for traditional boundaries. Respondents seek a middle path, where modernization enhances, rather than overshadows, the symbolic and historical weight of national attire. The underlying

message is clear: cultural elements must evolve, but they must do so with care, consciousness, and connection to their roots.

5.1.5.2. Subtheme 5.2: Accessibility and everyday integration

This subtheme explores how practical considerations, such as affordability, comfort, and style, affect the everyday integration of national-symbolic products. As Kyrgyz cultural motifs enter mainstream fashion, their accessibility becomes central to their adoption, especially among younger generations. Respondents highlight how adaptations in price, material, and design have made it easier to wear traditional symbols beyond ceremonial contexts. This shift from exclusivity to inclusivity reflects how cultural identity can be both personal and pragmatic.

Diverse accessibility and price range of national-symbolic products plays a crucial role in making cultural expression available across different socioeconomic groups. Respondents noted that national symbols are now present in a wide range of products, from luxury designer items to affordable mass-produced clothing. This variety enables more people to engage with cultural heritage, regardless of their financial background, making symbolic participation more democratic.

The *practicality of modernized styles* is another key factor in the everyday use of traditional elements. Participants appreciated how national attire is increasingly available in forms that align with daily routines, such as casual jackets, accessories, or T-shirts with symbolic patterns. These modernized adaptations retain cultural meaning while offering comfort, convenience, and relevance to contemporary lifestyles, particularly for urban youth and working professionals.

However, some respondents raised *concerns about trend longevity and sustainability*. They questioned whether the current popularity of national-symbolic fashion is deeply rooted or simply a passing trend. There is a shared hope that this wave of interest will grow into a more enduring and meaningful engagement with culture, rather than fading with shifting fashion cycles.

Overall, this subtheme highlights how cultural expression is shaped not only by identity and values but also by economic access and everyday utility. Through the interplay of *diverse accessibility and price range of national-symbolic products*, *practicality of modernized styles*, and *concerns about trend longevity and sustainability*, national symbols are being redefined as everyday wear. This shift supports broader

participation while inviting reflection on how to sustain cultural depth within popular adoption. The following sections delve deeper into each of these dynamics.

Code: Diverse Accessibility and Price Range

While traditional national attire has long been available in Kyrgyz markets, recent years have witnessed the rise of modernized versions, making national-symbolic products more visible, varied, and adaptable to everyday life. Respondents noted that both traditional and contemporary styles are now widely accessible, though their affordability and usage depend on factors such as production methods, materials, and branding.

Increased access to both styles has expanded opportunities for cultural participation. Respondents highlighted how national-symbolic products are no longer difficult to find, and how social media and local designers have contributed to their popularity:

- *“You can see them everywhere and hear about them.” (Meerim, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Such products have become easier to find in the last 3 - 4 years... I noticed that they are more easily accessible, and I myself was able to find them easily, for example, when I went there last summer.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“The product itself is easy to find, there are many types and there are many options.” (Naizabek, male, 25 years old, Georgia)*
- *“Previously, for example, all ordinary people wore them only for special occasions, some performances, or special occasions. And now these things are very popular and fashionable, beautiful, that practical, beautiful types of accessories and clothing items are often produced, that they are worn every day, every day in life, adding some zest to your image.” (Elvis, female, 32 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Affordability, however, varies depending on quality and production. While traditionally made garments, especially those from branded designers using felt, silk, or handmade embroidery, tend to be more expensive due to craftsmanship and materials, there are also budget-friendly options available, especially in modernized formats.

- *“Mass market / fast fashion, they are very competitive in price, and they also produce styles that are comfortable to wear... but the Kyrgyz [authentic traditional] ones, which are designer, if I have good money, I want to buy them too.” (Nurayim, female, 28 years old, Türkiye)*

These modern, affordable alternatives, such as hoodies, T-shirts, and sweatshirts with printed ornaments, provide young people with accessible entry points into cultural expression. Respondents appreciated the variety of styles and price points, which allow them to connect with their identity without financial strain.

- *“It has become accessible not only in the sense that you can easily find and buy... but also financially... Previously, it was very expensive and rarely found anywhere.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Basically, it’s expensive, and... some national things, ethnic things [authentic traditional] may be inaccessible, first of all, to our own people.” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

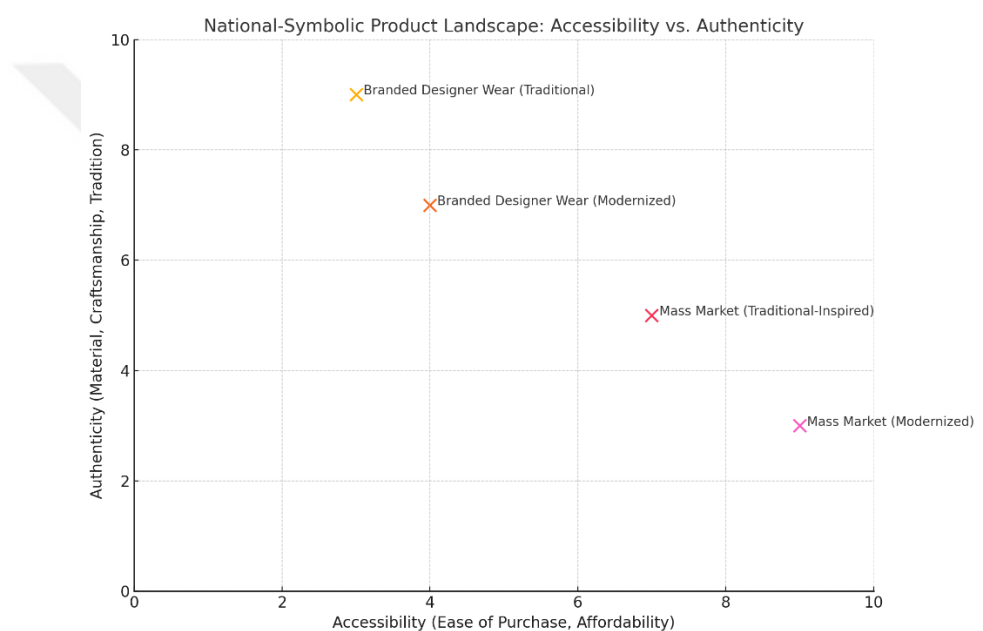
This contrast highlights the emergence of a dual-market reality: one segment consists of designer national wear that caters to cultural sophistication and exclusivity, while the other provides symbolic products tailored for everyday consumers at more accessible price points.

While higher-end options are appreciated for their craftsmanship, authenticity, and material quality, respondents also emphasized the importance of affordability, particularly for younger people eager to incorporate national symbols into their daily wardrobes. These accessible products expand cultural participation, allowing individuals across socioeconomic backgrounds to engage with their heritage in both visible and meaningful ways.

To better illustrate this diversity, a dual-axis diagram (Figure 5.1) mapping national-symbolic products along two intersecting dimensions: price (affordable to

high-end) and style orientation (traditional to modernized). This framework helps to visualize how various product types occupy different positions in the cultural consumption space. For example, traditional hand-crafted kalpaks or chapans made of felt or silk often fall into the high-quality, high-price quadrant, while printed T-shirts and hoodies with Kyrgyz patterns occupy the modernized and affordable zone. Some mid-range products blend both axes, offering authentic aesthetics in updated formats that appeal to a broader audience.

Figure 5.1 National-Symbolic Product Landscape: Accessibility vs. Authenticity



Note*: Accessibility (how affordable and easy to find); Authenticity (in terms of materials, craftsmanship, and cultural accuracy)

At one end of the spectrum, *branded designer wear rooted in traditional techniques*, such as garments made from hand-felted wool or adorned with hand embroidery, stands out for its *high cultural authenticity*. However, these pieces often come with *limited accessibility* due to their high cost and exclusivity.

Slightly more accessible but still artisanal, *modernized designer wear* blends craftsmanship with updated silhouettes and colors. These items appeal to those seeking a balance between tradition and trend, though they are still typically priced at a premium.

Moving toward mass-market options, *traditional-inspired products*, like factory-produced “chapans” or jewelry with stylized ethnic motifs, offer *moderate authenticity*. They are affordable and easy to find, yet they often lack the depth of handcrafted detail and symbolic precision found in designer items.

At the most accessible end, *mass-market modernized styles* such as printed T-shirts and hoodies carry *low levels of authenticity* but are highly effective in engaging younger audiences. Their affordability, comfort, and visibility on social media have made them popular tools for casual, everyday cultural expression.

Ultimately, the current marketplace offers a broad continuum, from premium, traditionally crafted designer garments to mass-market, modernized styles. This diversity in accessibility and price ensures that national-symbolic clothing is no longer confined to special occasions or privileged circles. Instead, it is becoming a widely available and personalized means of cultural expression.

Code: Practicality of Modernized Styles

While traditional Kyrgyz clothing holds deep symbolic and cultural value, many respondents emphasized that it is not always practical for everyday use. Their concerns ranged from the physical bulk of certain garments to limitations posed by modern lifestyles, such as transportation, work environments, and comfort needs.

For many, traditional attire remains meaningful but is seen as more suitable for special occasions rather than daily routines. This sentiment was echoed across multiple interviews:

- “Many people think that a national thing [authentic traditional] is inconvenient, it is beautiful, but inconvenient.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)

This view reflects a broader tension between heritage and functionality. Even when respondents admire the aesthetics of traditional garments, they hesitate to wear them regularly due to concerns about practicality. Expense and maintenance were cited as additional barriers:

- “I think it's also inconvenient to wear every day. It might be expensive, wear it every day, and it might get dirty. It seems to me that comfort and style are the most important factors.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)

Certain items were specifically named as impractical for daily use, especially in urban and mobile settings. Clothing such as chepken and chapam, traditional coats often made of thick felt or embroidered fabric, were described as cumbersome in environments that demand agility and ease:

- *“It can be too bulky or uncomfortable, especially for everyday life, such as on public transport. Original national outfits, such as ‘chepken’ and ‘chapam’, can be heavy and uncomfortable.” (Aidin, male, 24 years old, USA)*

In cities, practicality becomes even more critical due to professional dress codes and social norms. Respondents working in office settings noted that wearing full traditional attire could seem out of place, even inappropriate:

- *“After all, you won’t wear such a super-traditional Kyrgyz dress or Kyrgyz men’s suit every day. It’s not very convenient, not very practical. In Bishkek, again, I work in offices... there is a certain dress code, and you can’t come in such a traditional outfit... it’s somehow incorrect, it’s uncultured.” (Karina, female, 23 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

In contrast, modernized national styles were praised as a solution that balances cultural expression with daily usability. Respondents highlighted modern chapans, jackets, vests, and accessories as comfortable and fashionable options that still preserve symbolic value:

- *“You know, these chapans (modernized), it seems to me, are relatively popular, comfortable in everyday life.” (Dosbol, male, 24 years old, Germany)*

Some even emphasized that modern adaptations offer functional benefits beyond style. For instance, winter coats made in traditional designs are not only culturally expressive but also warmer and more durable than some mainstream options:

- *“These are warm jackets that are still worn to this day, and they are warmer than ordinary jackets that are in the mass-market.” (Janik, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan)*

Moreover, the use of traditional, natural materials in both original and some modernized garments was seen as a positive feature, aligning with environmental values and contributing to everyday comfort:

- *“Our authentic clothes have always been created from environmentally friendly materials. This is the same cotton, this is felt, this is wool... They are all made of natural fabrics.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Altogether, these reflections show that the shift toward modernized ethno-style is not only an aesthetic choice but also a practical one. It enables individuals to maintain a connection to their cultural roots while meeting the demands of contemporary life, whether that means commuting, working, or simply feeling comfortable in one’s own skin.

Code: Concerns About Trend Longevity

A related concern that emerged from respondents is the fear that the rising popularity of modernized national-symbolic products may be short-lived. While many appreciate the renewed interest in cultural symbols among younger generations, they worry that this revival might be a fleeting trend rather than a meaningful, sustained engagement with heritage.

- *“Fashion changes quickly. What if in 10 years no one wears these things anymore? Then what happens to our traditions?” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

This concern reflects broader anxieties about the durability of fashion-driven cultural practices. Respondents note that when cultural elements become popular primarily through visual or social media appeal, they risk losing their deeper significance. The fear is not just about the trend fading but about cultural detachment and forgetfulness once visual exposure decreases.

- *“There is such a word ‘out of sight, out of mind’, when people begin to distance themselves visually, when they no longer encounter this every day, they gradually begin to forget, this is a common, it seems to me, human phenomenon.” (Nuria, female, 23 years old, Türkiye)*

Some participants expressed ambivalence about the recent surge of interest in national symbols, wondering whether this wave of popularity, especially among the youth, could result in disinterest once the novelty wears off. The concern is that the cultural movement might not be strong enough to withstand the rapid cycles of fashion trends.

- *“On the other hand, I am afraid. Increasing such use may cause this to decrease again and reduce ethnic repetition. So, I think it might go out of fashion. Because, as I have noticed, there has been such a rise among young people in the last 3-4 years, and I also think that if these young people get bored of this, they might get bored. I mean, this can of course change, maybe he will not get bored. Maybe on the contrary, it will make it more normal for daily use, but I think they may get bored.” (Erkeayim, female, 25 years old, Türkiye)*
- *“Everything changes very quickly. The whole world, our whole society. This could be the main difficulty in the duration of this particular trend, in relation to traditional clothing in everyday life.” (Marina, female, 25 years old, Italy)*

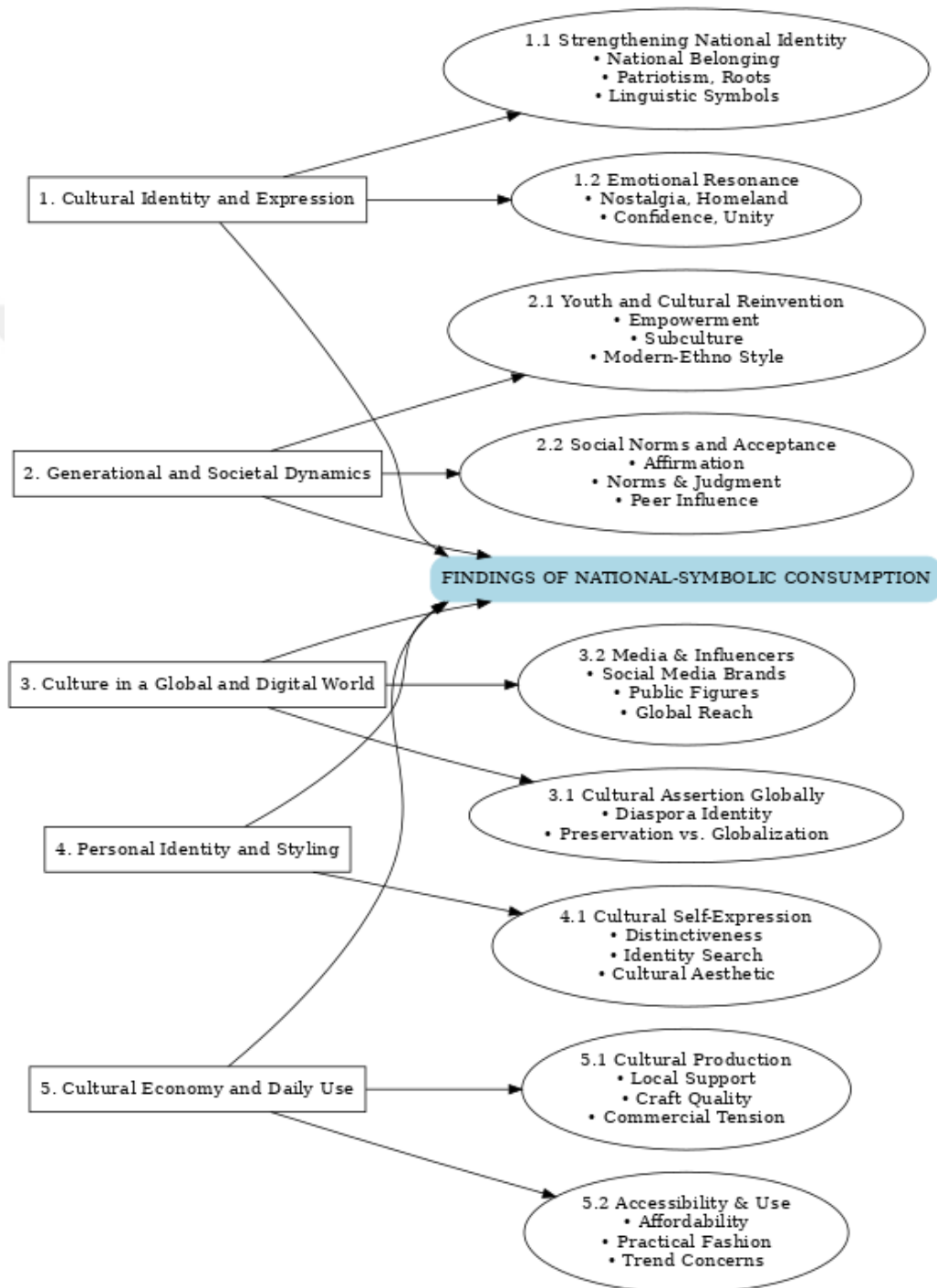
These reflections point to a deeper concern about ensuring cultural continuity in an era of fast-paced change. While modernized cultural symbols offer an accessible and attractive way to engage with national identity, respondents emphasize the importance of embedding these practices within longer-term cultural education and values, not merely relying on fleeting visibility. The hope is that what begins as a trend can transition into a normalized and meaningful form of daily cultural expression.

Summary:

The analysis of interview data led to the identification of 5 core themes and 9 subthemes, which are visually represented in the thematic map (Figure 5.2). This map illustrates the hierarchical structure of the findings, highlighting both overarching categories, such as cultural identity and expression, generational and societal dynamics, culture in a global and digital world, personal identity and cultural styling, cultural economy and everyday use; as well as the nuanced subthemes that emerged within each. By organizing the data in this way, the map clarifies how participants’ narratives

clustered around specific dimensions of national-symbolic consumption, and how individual experiences intersected with broader cultural and postcolonial discourses.

Figure 5.2 *Thematic Map Showing Main Themes and Subthemes Derived from Interviews*



5.2. Instagram Content Analysis of Kyrgyz Fashion Brands

This section presents key findings from the analysis of Instagram content posted by prominent Kyrgyz fashion brands. Unlike previous sections, which explored how consumers experience and interpret national-symbolic products, this section turns attention to the role of producers, specifically designers and fashion labels, in shaping public perceptions of Kyrgyz identity, culture, and symbolism through digital media.

The analysis focuses on the ways in which brands communicate cultural pride, national heritage, and symbolic meaning in their posts. Drawing on selected Instagram content from seven fashion labels (@keshte, @baira, @cutadash_official, @ethnic.kg, @olpok_, @aisanat.brand, and @moimol_), this section identifies how cultural narratives are embedded in visual aesthetics, product descriptions, hashtags, and brand storytelling. Posts were selected based on recent activity (May 2024 to June 2025) and engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), emphasizing content that generated visible interaction.

The Instagram posts were grouped into thematic clusters that reveal common messaging strategies and symbolic expressions shared across the analyzed brands. These themes such as *Cultural Identity and Heritage Narratives*, *Modern Ethnic Fashion*, *Contemporary Wearability and Functional Design*, *Craftsmanship and Sustainability*, *Personal Identity and Empowerment*, illustrate how fashion producers draw from Kyrgyz heritage while simultaneously adapting to modern tastes, global aesthetics, and digital storytelling techniques. These themes are detailed in Table 5.2, which outlines their conceptual focus and representative codes that emerged from the analysis.

Table 5.2 Themes and Codes from Instagram Analysis of Kyrgyz Fashion Brands

#	Theme	Explanation	Codes
1	Cultural Identity and Heritage Narratives	Focuses on how Kyrgyz fashion brands embed traditional symbols and cultural stories into their products, reinforcing national pride and collective memory.	Cultural storytelling; Heritage branding
2	Modern Ethnic Fashion	Highlights the blend of Kyrgyz cultural motifs with contemporary fashion styles, appealing especially to younger audiences seeking modern expressions of identity.	Modern-traditional fusion; Youth adaptation; Global-local blend

3	Contemporary Wearability and Functional Design	Highlights the importance of comfort, practicality, and design innovation, making national-symbolic clothing suitable for everyday urban life.	Comfort & utility; Everyday use; Symbolic practicality
4	Craftsmanship and Sustainability	Centers on handmade production using natural materials, promoting durability, eco-consciousness, and respect for cultural heritage.	Artisanal craft; Natural materials; Sustainability focus
5	Personal Identity and Empowerment	Portrays fashion as a means for personal expression and empowerment, especially highlighting especially women's roles as cultural agents and creators.	Self-expression; Female empowerment; Symbolic pride

These producer-focused themes also serve to enrich and extend the insights gained from the interview-based analysis. Whereas consumer narratives emphasized emotional resonance, self-expression, and cultural belonging, the Instagram content offers a complementary perspective: how meaning is intentionally crafted, visually represented, and communicated for public engagement. The convergence between these two data sources, particularly around themes of identity, heritage revitalization, and modern adaptation, highlights a shared symbolic language between designers and consumers in the evolving landscape of national-symbolic fashion.

5.2.1. Cultural identity and heritage narratives

Instagram content from Kyrgyz fashion brands such as @keshte, @baira.kg, @cutadash_official, @ethnic.kg, @olpok_, @aisanat.brand, and @moimol_ consistently centers on expressions of Kyrgyz identity and collective memory. Through both imagery and text, brands frame clothing not merely as commercial products, but as vessels of cultural meaning and pride.

Traditional Kyrgyz symbols: ala-kiyiz felt appliqué, tribal embroidery, kalpak hats, and bel tamgas, are widely integrated into contemporary designs. For instance, Olpok emphasizes its exclusive use of Kyrgyz ornaments in all products, from corsets to jackets (@olpok_). Baira refers to its collection as “clothing with ethnic identity of Central Asian nomads”, linking design to nomadic heritage (@baira.kg, Apr 2025). Similarly, Moimol states that their products replicate outfits worn “during the time of eternal nomadism” (@moimol_, Sep 2024). Keshte reinforces this heritage visually, posting an image of a woman in national-symbolic attire beside a horse, likely a deliberate reference to Kyrgyzstan’s nomadic past (@keshte.kg, Aug 2024) (Image 5.1).

Image 5.1 *Keshte's posting an image of a woman in national-symbolic attire beside a horse (@keshte.kg, August 2024)*



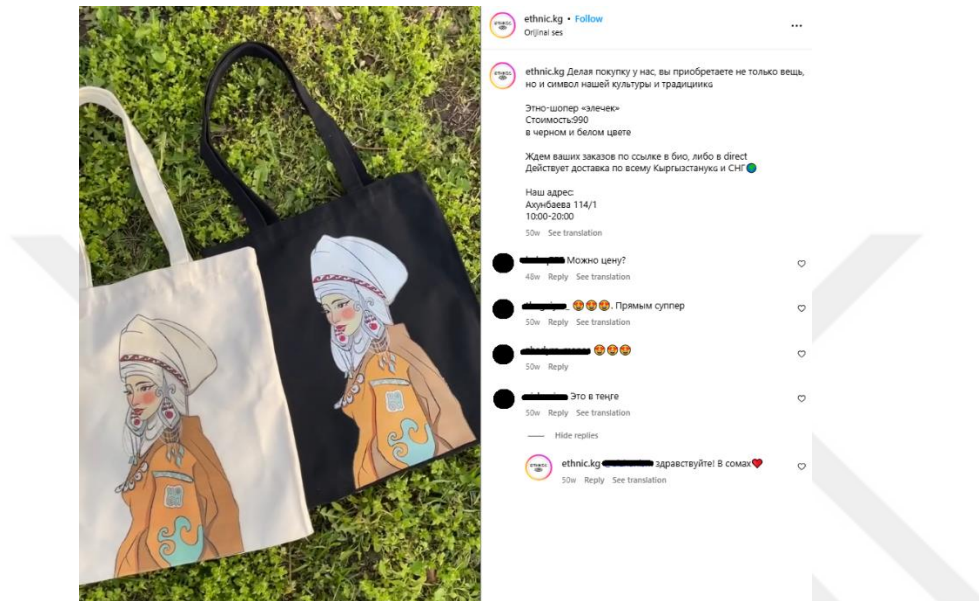
Visual storytelling is often accompanied by symbolic language. Keshte describes itself as “the voice of Kyrgyz traditions” (@keshte.kg, Apr 2025), while Ethnic.kg calls its children’s T-shirts “a touch of culture” (@ethnic.kg, Apr 2025). Moimol strengthens cultural memory by naming collections after historical Kyrgyz women: Kurmanjan Datka, Tattybubu, Bubusara, thus embedding feminine strength and history into the product line (@moimol_, Oct 2024).

Historical references are not limited to names. Baira incorporates petroglyphs from Saimaluu-Tash into its embroidery designs, linking ancient heritage with wearable art (@baira.kg, Mar 2025). These branding choices closely reflect Interview Theme 1: *Cultural Identity and Expression*, where respondents described ethnic wear as evoking pride, belonging, and nostalgia. As one participant said, these garments serve as “powerful expressions of belonging.”

A notable example of symbolic storytelling through everyday objects comes from @ethnic.kg’s (June 2024) Instagram post featuring their “ethno-shopper” tote bags. The bags display a stylized illustration of a woman in traditional Kyrgyz dress, combining ethnic visual motifs with a minimalist aesthetic. The caption reads: “By purchasing from us, you are acquiring not just an item, but a symbol of our culture and traditions” (@ethnic.kg, June 2024) (Image 5.2). This framing positions the tote not merely as a functional accessory, but as a portable emblem of Kyrgyz identity. By embedding

national symbolism into accessible products, the brand reinforces cultural memory in daily consumer life and extends heritage into ordinary routines, an approach consistent with the wider trend of using fashion to carry collective narratives.

Image 5.2 *Ethnic.kg’s Instagram post featuring their “ethno-shopper” tote bags (@ethnic.kg, June 2024)*



Events like Keshte’s 10th anniversary show “Masterpieces Beyond Time” (@keshte.kg, Feb 2025) further deepen these cultural narratives by highlighting perseverance, continuity, and the preservation of values over time. Collectively, these strategies position Kyrgyz fashion not only as trend-aware but as culturally embedded and historically resonant.

5.2.2. Modern ethnic fashion

The fusion of Kyrgyz symbolism with contemporary aesthetics forms a key brand strategy. Brands like Keshte, Aisanat, and CutADash experiment with silhouettes and design logic that blend modern wearability with traditional motifs.

Keshte’s “Timeless Masterpieces” collection visualizes this fusion by styling modern garments, like fitted dresses and bomber jackets, with Kyrgyz embroidery and beldemchi motifs (@keshte.kg, Feb 2025). Aisanat brand openly reflects on this

transformation: “When tradition meets modernity, such images are born: free but expressive, comfortable but stylish” (@aisanat.brand, Feb 2025).

Similarly, Moimol describes its items as “a unique combination of Kyrgyz traditions and modern design” (@moimol_, Dec 2024), and “every detail reflects ethnicity in a modern interpretation” (@moimol_, Feb 2025). CutADash’s minimalist cube bag, with ethnic prints, exemplifies how symbols can be embedded in functional accessories (@cutadash_official, May 2024). Ethnic.kg offers T-shirts and hoodies with simplified national motifs, suited for youth and everyday styling (@ethnic.kg, Feb 2024).

Keshte’s post presents a jacket and bag combining modern denim with Kyrgyz ornaments, inviting users to “feel tradition in every detail” and “create your ethno-chic style” (@keshte.kg, April 2025). This fusion of global fashion with local motifs reflects the brand’s strategy of making heritage modern and stylish, positioning national identity as part of everyday, contemporary life (Image 5.3).

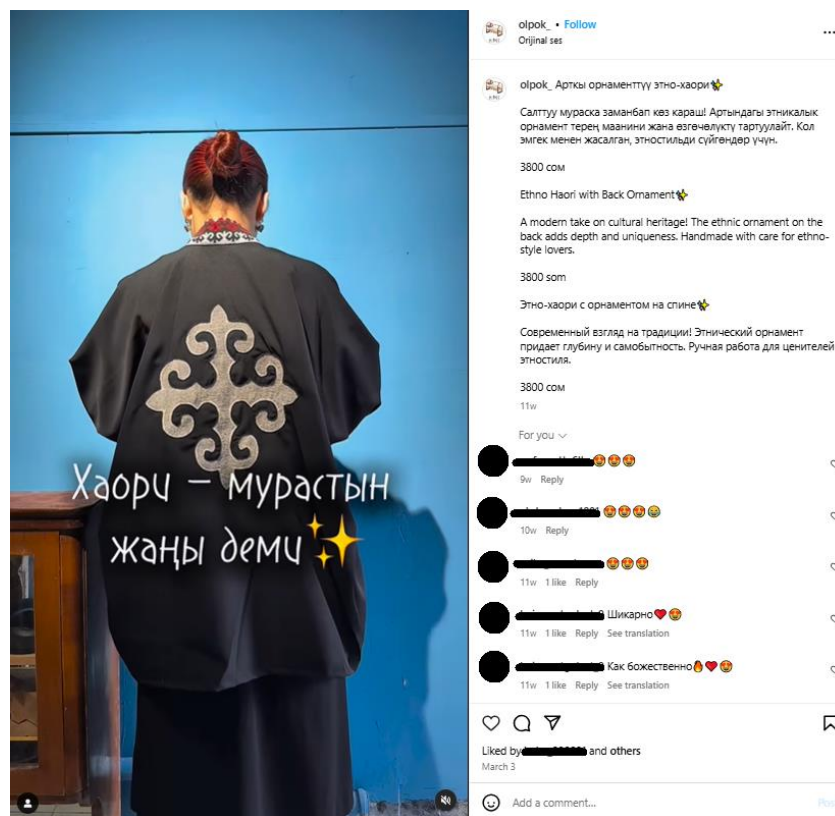
Image 5.3 Modernized denim jacket and denim bag with national symbols against the backdrop of a Kyrgyz yurt (@keshte.kg, April 2025)



Another example, Olpok presents a video of a young model showcasing a straight-cut jacket with a bold Kyrgyz ornament on the back (@olpok_, March 2025). The caption reads: “A modern take on tradition! The ethnic ornament adds depth and uniqueness. Handmade for connoisseurs of ethnic style.” The video features the phrase “Haori - a new breath of heritage”, reimagining the haori, a garment traditionally

associated with Japanese culture, through a Kyrgyz aesthetic lens (Image 5.4). By blending a globally recognized silhouette with local symbols, this post exemplifies the brand’s modern ethno-fashion approach, where cultural fusion becomes a form of wearable storytelling.

Image 5.4 Screenshot of the video of a young model showcasing a straight-cut jacket with a bold Kyrgyz ornament on the back (@olpok_, March 2025)



These examples align with Interview Subtheme 2.1: *Youth and Cultural Reinvention*. Respondents noted the rising popularity of “modern-ethno” styles, crop tops, trousers, jackets, that reflect cultural identity while embracing current fashion. Aisanat even draws design inspiration from the chapana worn by shepherds, reinterpreting it into bomber jackets for city life (@aisanat.brand, Feb 2025).

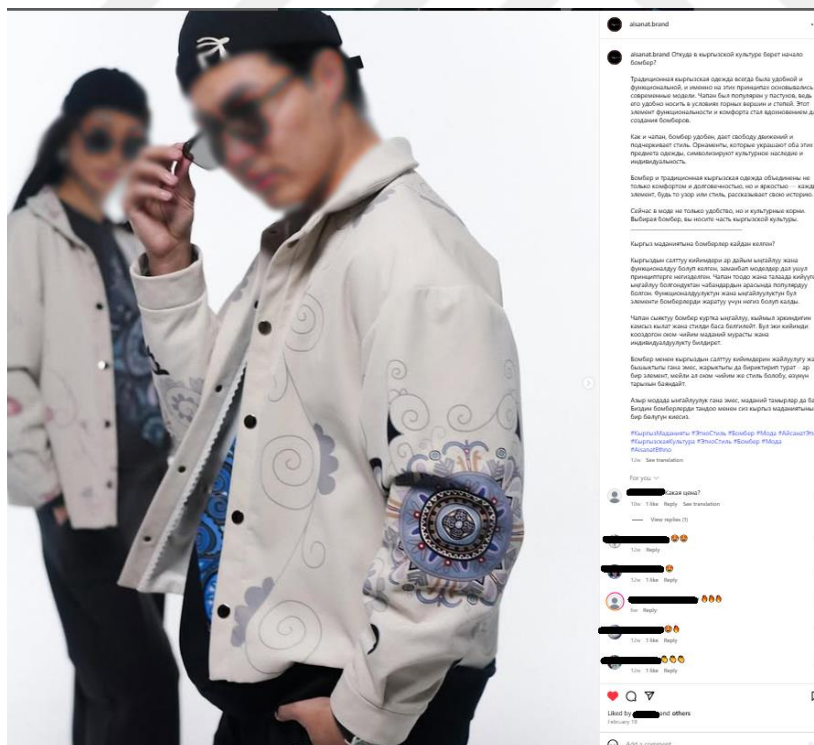
Moimol underscores this goal in another post: “Our aim is to make tradition wearable” (@moimol_, Dec 2024). Such adaptations are not just aesthetic; they reflect an ideology of renewal and continuity, linking past and present through fashion.

5.2.3. Contemporary wearability and functional design

Kyrgyz brands intentionally position national-symbolic attire as part of everyday life, making heritage accessible through comfort, utility, and design innovation.

Phrases such as “freedom of movement”, “daily wear”, “style and comfort”, and “urban casual” are frequently used across brand captions. Aisanat Brand highlights oversize silhouettes and breathable fabrics like cotton and viscose (@aisanat.brand, Jan-Feb 2025), describing a two-piece cotton set as “perfect for an active day” (@aisanat.brand, July 2024). Similarly, Aisanat Brand posts the bomber highlighting how both garments share values of comfort, freedom of movement, and cultural symbolism. By stating that “choosing a bomber means wearing a part of Kyrgyz culture”, Aisanat reframes modern outerwear as an evolution of heritage (@aisanat.brand, Feb 2025) (Image 5.5). These stylistic choices reflect a merging of traditional aesthetics with modern lifestyle needs.

Image 5.5 Aisanat Brand's bomber jacket (@aisanat.brand, Feb 2025).

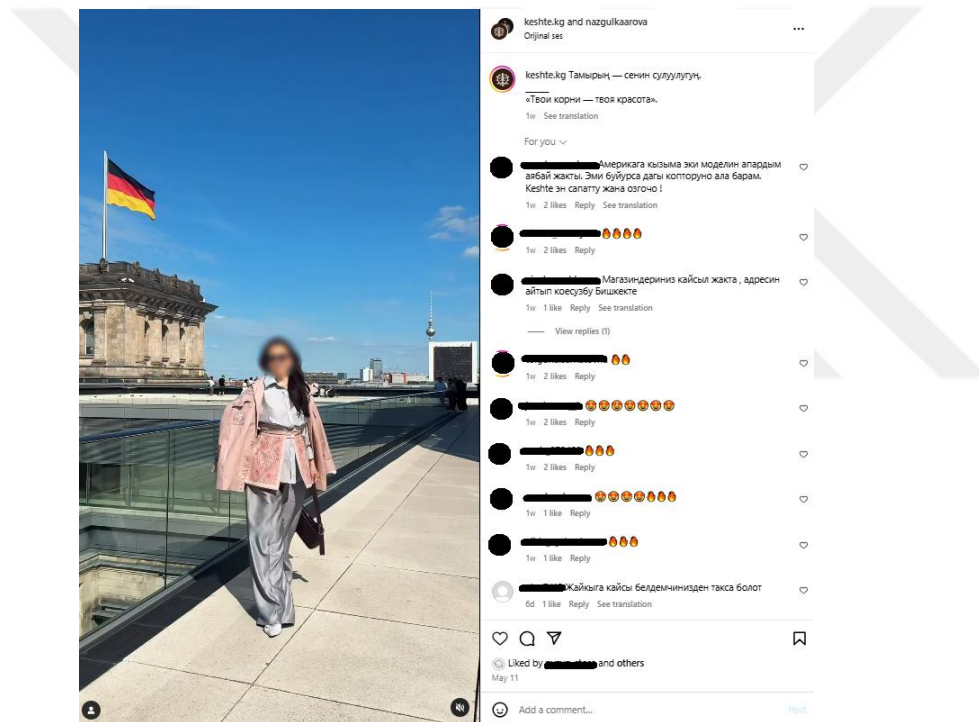


Moimol's garments are also presented as practical and stylish for everyday use, especially for children and young adults. One post describes the brand's approach as creating “a unique combination of Kyrgyz traditions and modern design” (@moimol_

Dec 2024), while emphasizing that ethnic garments should “feel comfortable and light throughout the day” (@moimol_, May 2025).

Keshte integrates this functional ethos into its branding strategy: its pieces are described as “designed for those on the go” and “relevant and stylish” even in fast-paced urban settings (@keshte.kg, Mar 2025). One striking post features a model walking through Berlin in a modernized beldemchi and blazer (Image 5.6), captioned “Your roots are your beauty” (@keshte.kg, May 2025), symbolically embedding Kyrgyz identity into global fashion capitals.

Image 5.6 *Keshte’s modernized beldemchi and blazer (@keshte.kg, May 2025).*



CutADash promotes accessories that prioritize both form and function. Its best-selling bag is described as “small but surprisingly spacious” (@cutadash_official, May 2024). Another post shows a look with an asymmetrical skirt and jacket styled with snow leopard motifs, labeled as “tradition and modernity in one image” (@cutadash_official, Mar 2025). These design choices illustrate how symbolic imagery can be embedded into wearable, everyday formats.

These messages align with Interview Subtheme 5.2: *Accessibility and Everyday Integration*. Respondents confirmed that ethnic motifs increasingly appear in schools,

workplaces, and digital spaces. Social campaigns like “get ready with me” and hashtag-driven styling contests further normalize Kyrgyz fashion as part of daily youth culture. Participants particularly valued items that balance symbolic meaning with practicality, allowing them to integrate national pride into routine life without sacrificing comfort or style.

5.2.4. Craftsmanship and sustainability

Kyrgyz fashion brands frequently position craftsmanship and sustainability as interconnected values, grounded in national heritage and creative integrity. These themes appear consistently in brand messaging across Instagram, through statements about handmade techniques, locally sourced natural materials, and cultural storytelling that critiques fast fashion and emphasizes durability.

Aisanat brand frequently highlights the artisanal nature of its designs. Posts describe signature Kyrgyz patterns like joogazyn as “handcrafted” and note that “hand embroidery adds uniqueness” (@aisanat.brand, Nov 2024). Another post frames the brand’s work as a result of “deep cultural respect” and “harmony between tradition and design” (@aisanat.brand, July 2024). Phrases like “crafted to last” and “timeless style” underscore the brand’s commitment to both longevity and heritage.

Moimol consistently emphasizes material authenticity. Several posts stress that products are made from 100% natural silk and wool sourced from Kyrgyzstan (@moimol_, Apr 2025), presented not only as environmentally responsible but also as intrinsic to Kyrgyz identity. Moimol’s tone ties environmental care directly to cultural continuity: the use of organic materials like cotton, wool, and silk is portrayed as both sustainable and traditional (@moimol_, Feb-Apr 2025).

CutADash explicitly combines ecological ethics with cultural expression. Its tagline, “Art x Ethno x Ecology” (@cutadash_official), reflects a brand philosophy built around sustainability and identity (Image 5.7). One post introduces a nature-inspired collection, stating: “We embodied in the collection the images of the guardian of the forest and the river nymph, each of which represents protection and care for nature” (@cutadash_official, June 2025).

Image 5.7 CutADash's Instagram page with the concept of “Art x Ethno x Ecology” (@cutadash_official)



This metaphorical language links environmental responsibility to Kyrgyz myth and aesthetics. Another post showcases the brand’s best-selling cube bag, described as “small but surprisingly spacious” (@cutadash_official, May 2024), merging functionality with ethnic symbolism. A March 2025 post features an asymmetrical skirt and a tufted jacket with snow leopard motifs, captioned as “tradition and modernity in one image” (@cutadash_official, Mar 2025), again reinforcing the balance of aesthetic design and cultural storytelling.

Keshte does not frame its message explicitly around sustainability but contributes to the discourse through its emphasis on durability, quality, and timelessness. The anniversary collection is described as “Beyond trend - connected to legacy” (@keshte.kg, Feb 2025), reflecting a critique of fast fashion and a vision of style as cyclical and enduring. The brand also emphasizes craftsmanship in a show described as “a tribute to national art, craftsmanship, and history” (@keshte.kg, Feb 2025).

A compelling example of craftsmanship is demonstrated in a video post by Baira, which offers a behind-the-scenes look at the brand’s production process (@baira.kg, March 2025). The video documents each stage of garment creation: from initial design sketches and cutting patterns to the detailed stitching of traditional Kyrgyz ornaments onto fabric (Image 5.8). By highlighting the labor-intensive, collaborative nature of fashion production, the post foregrounds the value of skilled artisanal work and collective effort. The caption: “We create with love ❤️” reinforces this emotional connection, suggesting that each item is not only handcrafted but infused with cultural

pride and dedication. Through this post, Baira affirms that cultural meaning is embedded not only in design but also in the labor and love behind each creation.

Image 5.8 The video documents each stage of garment creation: from initial design sketches and cutting patterns to the detailed stitching of traditional Kyrgyz ornaments onto fabric. (@baira.kg, March 2025)



These branding strategies strongly echo sentiments from interviewees, particularly those reflected in Interview Theme 5: *Cultural Economy and Everyday Use*. Many participants associated artisanal craftsmanship with pride and sustainability, viewing handmade items as long-term investments with emotional and cultural weight. As one respondent noted, traditional Kyrgyz clothing is “not fast fashion... it carries meaning and lasts.”

Other brands support this narrative through visual and verbal cues. Posts often include hashtags such as #ручнаяработа (#handmade) or #authentic, and some describe items as “exclusive author work.” These phrases reinforce the sense that Kyrgyz fashion is not mass-produced, but rather carefully constructed cultural labor, each item a reflection of the maker’s story, and the nation’s heritage.

In sum, sustainability in Kyrgyz fashion is most often expressed through the craft-based, local production model: the use of natural, enduring materials and the rejection of disposability. While many brands avoid explicit certifications or metrics, they convey environmental and ethical commitments through symbolic, poetic, and heritage-based

storytelling. This approach ties cultural pride to ecological consciousness, constructing a fashion system that values meaning over mass, care over convenience.

5.2.5. Personal identity and empowerment

Kyrgyz fashion brands frequently position national-symbolic clothing as a tool for personal empowerment and self-expression. Posts emphasize confidence, individuality, and emotional connection, particularly through messages that center women as cultural carriers and creative agents.

Moimol exemplifies this approach by naming its collections after iconic Kyrgyz women such as Kurmanjan Datka, Tattybubu, and Bubusara, positioning its designs as cultural tributes that highlight strength and historical continuity. The brand's caption: "The true beauty of a woman is a combination of her appearance, intelligence, character and inner strength" (@moimol_, Oct 2024), frames its fashion line as a medium for expressing both internal and external qualities of empowerment.

Moimol's branding strategy reached a symbolic milestone when the brand shared a post showcasing the First Lady of Kyrgyzstan, Aigul Japarova, wearing one of its products. The caption read: "We are proud to say that our elegant First Lady of Kyrgyzstan, Aigul Japarova, is wearing a monochrome silk scarf from our brand" (@moimol_, July 2024). Similarly, Keshte's promotional post from the red carpet of the Bishkek International Festival (@keshte.kg, June 2025) featured actress Okeana and her husband, where actress is wearing garments that fuse traditional Kyrgyz ornamentation with contemporary silhouettes (Image 5.9). The caption emphasized that Keshte is "not just clothing, but a language of culture, a connection to roots, and a tradition in every seam", thereby positioning the brand as both a cultural storyteller and a modern fashion innovator.

These posts function as high-impact forms of symbolic endorsement, positioning Moimol and Keshte not merely as fashion labels but as custodians of national elegance and identity. By associating their products with prominent public figures and nationally significant events, these brands enhance the cultural legitimacy and aspirational value of their collections. This reinforces each brand's broader narrative of national pride, aesthetic refinement, and modern femininity, while aligning with their mission to empower Kyrgyz women through heritage-driven design.

Image 5.9 *Keshte's posting the actress, wearing one of its products. (@keshte.kg, June 2025)*



Aisanat Brand reinforces this theme through poetic and motivational language. Posts encourage followers to “be an inspiration to others” and “wear culture with pride” (@aisanat.brand, Jan 2025), blending fashion with emotional affirmation. These statements align with Interview Theme 4: *Personal Identity and Cultural Styling*, where respondents described ethnic attire as a form of self-definition and resilience.

Visuals also reflect this messaging. Designers, particularly women, are frequently featured modeling or crafting garments, underlining their role not just as creators but as representatives of cultural agency. Both Moimol and CutADash feature their designers in behind-the-scenes and modeling posts, presenting female leadership as central to the production and storytelling process (@moimol_, Apr 2024; @cutadash_official, Mar 2025).

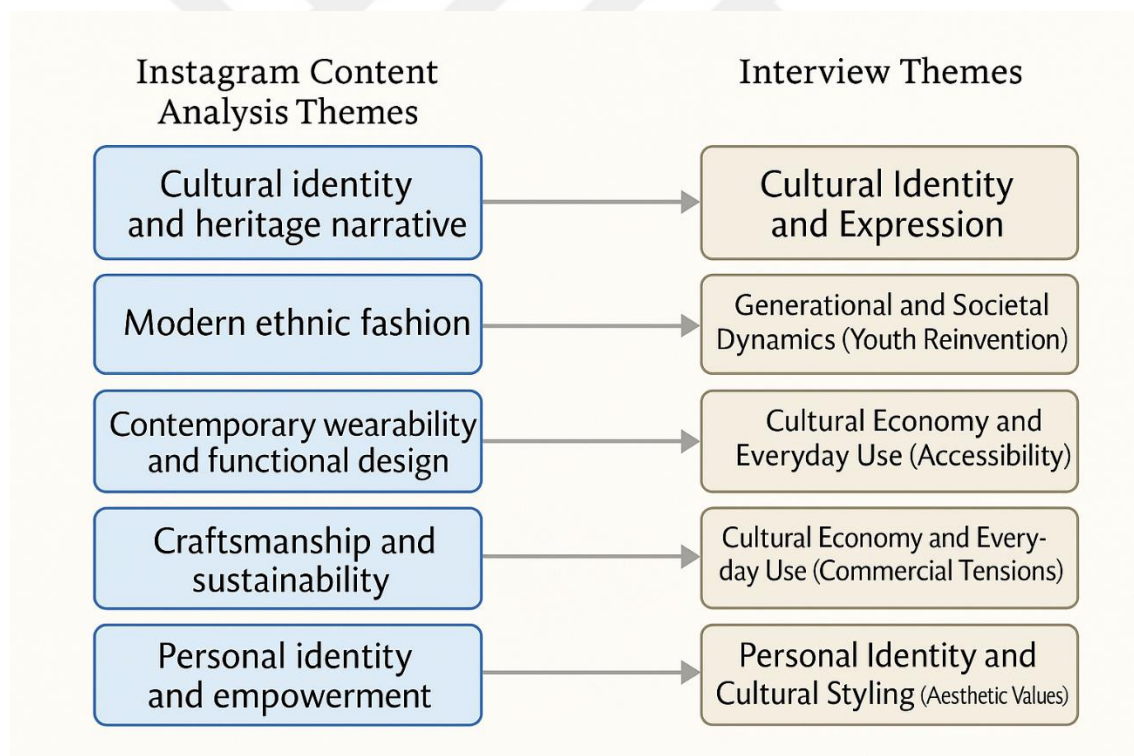
Even accessories are imbued with personal meaning. For instance, Baira presents a bag printed with a snow leopard as “the embodiment of freedom and inner strength” (@baira.kg, Mar 2025), emphasizing personal values through symbolic motifs.

In sum, this theme reflects how Kyrgyz fashion brands construct fashion not only as cultural heritage but as a language for expressing personal values, confidence, and identity, especially for women.

5.2.6. Thematic Links Between Instagram Brand Narratives and Consumer Perspectives

This section presents a visual synthesis of the key thematic connections between the Instagram content analysis and the in-depth interview findings. Each Instagram content theme, identified through the visual narratives and branding strategies of Kyrgyz fashion brands, is systematically mapped to the corresponding theme that emerged from consumer interviews. This mapping reveals the coherence between how national-symbolic products are portrayed by producers and how they are experienced and interpreted by consumers. The convergence of these perspectives highlights the effectiveness of national-symbolic fashion as a medium of cultural communication and identity negotiation.

Figure 5.3 *Thematic Links Between Instagram Brand Narratives and Consumer Perspectives*



As illustrated in Figure 5.3, the theme “*Cultural identity and heritage narratives*” aligns with the interview theme “*Cultural Identity and Expression*”, emphasizing how social media content that evokes pride and belonging mirrors consumer narratives of symbolic national attachment. The theme “*Modern ethnic fashion*” corresponds to “*Generational and Societal Dynamics (Youth and cultural reinvention)*”, showing how

contemporary reinterpretations of ethnic wear on Instagram resonate with young people's efforts to modernize cultural expression. Meanwhile, "*Contemporary wearability and functional design*" links to "*Cultural Economy and Everyday Use (Accessibility and everyday integration)*", demonstrating how both producers and consumers value practical integration of national motifs into daily life.

Furthermore, "*Craftsmanship and sustainability*" is directly tied to "*Cultural Economy and Everyday Use (Cultural production and commercial tensions)*", reflecting the dual motivations of preserving cultural traditions and achieving commercial viability. Finally, the theme "*Personal identity and empowerment*" relates to "*Personal Identity and Cultural Styling (Cultural self-expression and aesthetic values)*", underlining how fashion serves as a platform for self-expression and empowerment. This figure not only confirms the thematic overlap between content creators and consumers but also reinforces the symbolic power of national fashion in shaping cultural identity in post-Soviet Kyrgyz society.

5.3. Psychographic Typology of National-Symbolic Product Consumers

While the previous sections examined recurring thematic patterns from the interviews and visual strategies used in the brand's content, this section introduces a more interpretive layer of analysis: a psychographic consumer typology derived from participants' lived experiences and narratives. Drawing on thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, the framework identifies six distinct consumer profiles, each shaped by specific motivations, emotional investments, and forms of engagement with nationally symbolic products.

In contrast to demographic segmentation, which is based on observable attributes such as age, gender, or geographic location, psychographic typology process captures subjective dimensions of consumption: how people perceive, interpret, and position themselves in relation to objects imbued with Kyrgyz national identity. This approach highlights the diversity of identity-related practices and emphasizes the multiple ways in which national symbols are understood, embodied, and performed.

The six consumer types were developed through a comparative case-based analysis based on consistent discursive patterns found in the participants' narratives. Each consumer type is supported by direct quotations and accompanied by a corresponding demographic profile that highlights observed trends in gender, location,

and age. These demographic characteristics, although not used as the basis for typology development, enrich the contextual understanding of each group.

An overview of the consumer types, their defining motives, and demographic trends is presented in Table 5.3 Psychographic Typology of Consumers of National-Symbolic Products.

Together, this typology offers nuanced insights into how national-symbolic products mediate personal and collective identity, aesthetics, values, and belonging in contemporary Kyrgyz society and in its diaspora communities.

Table 5.3 *Psychographic Typology of National-Symbolic Product Consumers*

#	Consumer Types	Motivation / Orientation	Defining Features	Sample Quote	Demographic Profile
1	Cultural Ambassadors and Identity Advocates	Pride, representation, visibility	Use clothing to publicly assert Kyrgyz identity; visible cultural performance abroad	“I am there representing not only myself, but my entire country.” (Nurayim, F, 28, Türkiye)	Predominantly diaspora (USA, Germany, Türkiye); students, bloggers, cultural advocates
2	Emotionally Rooted Traditionalists	Nostalgia, memory, emotional attachment	Engagement driven by family memory, warmth, intergenerational connection	“Kyrgyz patterns... remind me that wherever I see it, it is warm for me.” (Erkeayim, F, 25, Türkiye)	Young diaspora women (Türkiye, Italy); students, young professionals
3	Aesthetic-Driven Consumers	Style, visual appeal, cultural taste	Combine traditional motifs with modern fashion; trend-aware or modest fashion values	“It’s also a stylish shirt... I liked the style, and it fit me well.” (Almaz, M, 30, Kyrgyzstan)	Kyrgyzstan-based; mix of men and women; students, professionals
4	Ethical and Ideological Consumers	Ethics, anti-globalism, sustainability, cultural politics	Treat fashion as activism; support local, handmade, anti-fast fashion consumption	“We have to stop consuming from Western fast fashion brands... We need to support our own people and crafts.” (Aidin, M, 23, USA)	Ethically/politically engaged individuals in diaspora and Kyrgyzstan; both gender
5	Self-Discovery Seekers	Introspection, cultural re-immersion, self-acceptance	Explore Kyrgyz identity through personal journeys; culturally in-between	“For me this is a very strong immersion in this identity.” (Aruuke, F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)	Reflective individuals in Kyrgyzstan; identity fluidity

6	Traditional Patriots	Loyalty, cultural duty, ancestral preservation	Regularly wear symbolic items; emphasize authenticity, habit, and moral responsibility	“A very strong sense of patriotism prevails in me, somehow on a special scale.” (Ian, M, 23, Korea)	Conservative-leaning men in Kyrgyzstan and diaspora; tradition-focused
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5.3.1. Consumer type 1: Cultural ambassadors and identity advocates

Psychographic Profile: This consumer type includes Kyrgyz individuals, primarily in the diaspora, but also some based in Kyrgyzstan, who use national-symbolic clothing as a public assertion of cultural identity. They consciously wear Kyrgyz symbols to represent their culture, express pride, and initiate conversations about their heritage. Some see this as a form of cultural ambassadorship, while others emphasize visibility, self-affirmation, or patriotic sentiment. Their symbolic consumption is performative and intentional, with clothing functioning as a means of telling, showing, and defending Kyrgyz identity in multicultural spaces.

Demographics: The majority live abroad (USA, Germany, Türkiye), while two participants are based in Kyrgyzstan. However, both are actively engaged in international contexts, through travel, education, or global networks, which likely shapes their outward-facing cultural perspectives. They are students, bloggers, or cultural workers with active public presence or community engagement. Their approaches range from diplomatic cultural sharing to visible pride in representing Kyrgyz culture.

Participants: Dosbol (M, 24, Germany); Kyrgyz (M, 24, Germany); Nurayim (F, 28, Türkiye); Marina (F, 25, Italy); Erik (M, 30, Kyrgyzstan); Janik (F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)

Quotes:

- “I am very proud that I am from Kyrgyzstan, from such a culture, I am very proud of my country.” (Dosbol, M, 24, Germany)
- “When I left for Germany, I took with me as gifts a map of Kyrgyzstan, a flag, magnets and pens with images of Kyrgyzstan’s landmarks... So that they would know at least a little about Kyrgyzstan.” (Kyrgyz, M, 24, Germany)

- *“I will feel like a Kyrgyz woman... I do not know, even my behavior may change because I am there representing not only myself, but my entire country.” (Nurayim, F, 28, Türkiye)*
- *“People come up and ask where I bought it... You introduce them your culture, your people.” (Janik, F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)*

5.3.2. Consumer type 2: Emotionally rooted traditionalists

Psychographic Profile: This consumer type includes young diaspora Kyrgyz women who engage with national-symbolic products through emotional, familial, and nostalgic channels. Their attachment to national symbols is shaped by intergenerational memory, childhood familiarity, and sensory connection to Kyrgyz aesthetics. These symbols often evoke warmth, maternal memory, or comfort, they are worn not to make a public statement, but to sustain an emotional bond with one’s heritage. Most began wearing symbolic items more often after moving abroad as a way to reconnect with their origins.

Demographics: Participants are Kyrgyz women (ages 22-25) living abroad. They are students or young professionals who spent much of their adolescence or adulthood outside Kyrgyzstan. Their symbolic consumption is intimate, reflective, and often mediated by memory or tradition.

Participants: Erkeayim (F, 25, Türkiye); Nuria (F, 23, Türkiye); Marina (F, 25, Italy); Tolgonai (F, 22, Türkiye); Elvis (F, 25, Türkiye)

Quotes:

- *“Kyrgyz patterns... remind me that wherever I see it, it is warm for me, that I grew up looking at them on the carpets at home.” (Erkeayim, F, 25, Türkiye)*
- *“I am Kyrgyz, and I feel that the nation exists in me... I feel my belonging to the nation.” (Marina, F, 25, Italy)*
- *“I felt that... I belong to my homeland, my people... somehow it gives you a greater feeling of this, that it was done with love.” (Nuria, F, 23, Türkiye)*

- *“I feel... a sense of belonging to this country, to this nation. Even if I live abroad and have assimilated, there is still some connection.” (Tolgonai, F, 22, Türkiye)*

5.3.3. Consumer type 3: Aesthetic-driven consumers

Psychographic Profile: This consumer type consists of individuals who are primarily motivated by visual appeal, style, and aesthetic quality in their consumption of national-symbolic products. They appreciate national motifs for their design value, beauty, and creative adaptability, often incorporating them into daily or occasional fashion in tasteful, expressive, or fashionable ways. Some in this consumer type treat these motifs as fashion-forward statements, blending them with contemporary trends and sharing on social media. Others approach them through a more principled aesthetic lens, emphasizing modesty, authentic materials, minimalism, or local craftsmanship. What unites the group is a strong design sensitivity and appreciation of how tradition can look good, whether as stylish remix or as ethical craft. They are not driven primarily by identity politics or deep emotional heritage, but by a belief that national motifs are visually compelling and culturally valuable.

Demographics: Mostly participants live in Kyrgyzstan and are a mix of students, professionals. The group includes both women and men who are media-savvy, fashion-aware, and oriented toward both traditional and contemporary values. Their clothing choices reflect a desire to merge cultural aesthetics with lifestyle preferences.

Participants: Almaz (M, 30, Kyrgyzstan); Ayzirek (F, 21, Kyrgyzstan); Nursultan (M, 21, Kyrgyzstan); Meerim (F, 32, Kyrgyzstan); Jibek (F, 25, USA)

Quotes:

- *“Besides it being with national themes, it's also a stylish shirt. I liked the style, and it fit me well.” (Almaz, M, 30, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“The decorations also look very nice. It is very nice to wear them... I would like to be more individual, in terms of style. (Ayzirek, F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I was motivated by the beauty of these things...” (Meerim, F, 32, Kyrgyzstan)*

- *“When I go to events, I prefer a national-style jacket. I like things with a national ornament: subtle, not loud, just to give it character.” (Jibek, F, 25, USA)*

5.3.4. Consumer type 4: Ethical and ideological consumers

Psychographic Profile: These individuals approach national-symbolic fashion through a value-driven lens. Their clothing choices reflect deliberate ethical stances on sustainability, cultural survival, anti-colonial resistance, and resistance to fast fashion or cultural homogenization. They reject global mass-produced fashion in favor of handcrafted, local items that align with their beliefs. Their symbolic consumption is often framed as activism or cultural advocacy, and their decisions are shaped by commitments to ecological integrity, cultural equity, or spiritual modesty.

Demographics: Located in both the diaspora and Kyrgyzstan, male and female. They are thoughtful, politically, or environmentally conscious individuals who engage with national products as part of a broader lifestyle and ideological orientation.

Participants: Gulzat (F, 28, Kyrgyzstan); Naizabek (M, 25, Georgia); Aidin (M, 24, USA)

Quotes:

- *“This is naturalness... they take it from nature. No synthetics, no chemicals... In our culture... this is minimalism and practicality.” (Gulzat, F, 28, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“I always prefer national things. I wear them every day, not for a trend. I have a chapan, I wear a kalpak regularly... For me, this is about identity and resistance.” (Naizabek, M, 25, Georgia)*
- *“We have to stop consuming from Western fast fashion brands... We need to support our own people and crafts.” (Aidin, M, 23, USA)*

5.3.5. Consumer type 5: Self-discovery seekers

Psychographic Profile: This consumer type includes individuals who engage with national-symbolic products as part of an introspective journey. Their symbolic consumption is not performative or trend-driven, but rooted in cultural curiosity,

personal healing, or a desire to anchor themselves within Kyrgyz identity. They often speak about being in-between cultures or having grown up outside traditional frameworks. For them, clothing and motifs are tools for cultural re-immersion, self-affirmation, or making peace with identity tensions.

Demographics: Participants are women, who reflect deeply on their cultural roots. They are often in transitional or self-reflective life stages, actively seeking knowledge and belonging.

Participants: Aruuke (F, 21, Kyrgyzstan); Karina (F, 23, Kyrgyzstan)

Quotes:

- *“I try to learn more about the culture. Because, since I grew up in different places, I knew very little about the culture.” (Aruuke, F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“That is, for me this is a very strong immersion in this identity... it somehow gives more self-confidence when you consider yourself to be part of society” (Aruuke, F, 21, Kyrgyzstan)*
- *“Through my specific visual images, I learn a little about myself. It is an experiment... I see myself through the new history of my country.” (Karina, F, 23, Kyrgyzstan)*

5.3.6. Consumer type 6: Traditional patriots

Psychographic Profile: These participants emphasize cultural loyalty, ancestral values, and the preservation of Kyrgyz heritage in everyday life. Their symbolic consumption is habitual and value-driven: traditional hats, vests, or accessories are worn regularly as a moral and national responsibility. They resist cultural dilution or commodification, seeing symbolic fashion as a living duty to past generations. Their expressions are straightforward, sincere, and rooted in a belief that tradition must be visible and lived.

Demographics: Participants are men, one based in Kyrgyzstan and one in diaspora (South Korea). They are community-oriented and highly motivated to protect and promote cultural authenticity.

Participants: Ian (M, 23, Korea); Jakyp (M, 33, Kyrgyzstan)

Quotes:

- “*I always try to wear them in everyday life... young people feel that they are losing their identity... I think that in me, a very strong sense of patriotism prevails, somehow on a special scale.*” (Ian, M, 23, Korea)
- “*...I am Kyrgyz, and I represent my nation... The Kalpak... I always wear it.*” (Jakyp, M, 33, Kyrgyzstan)

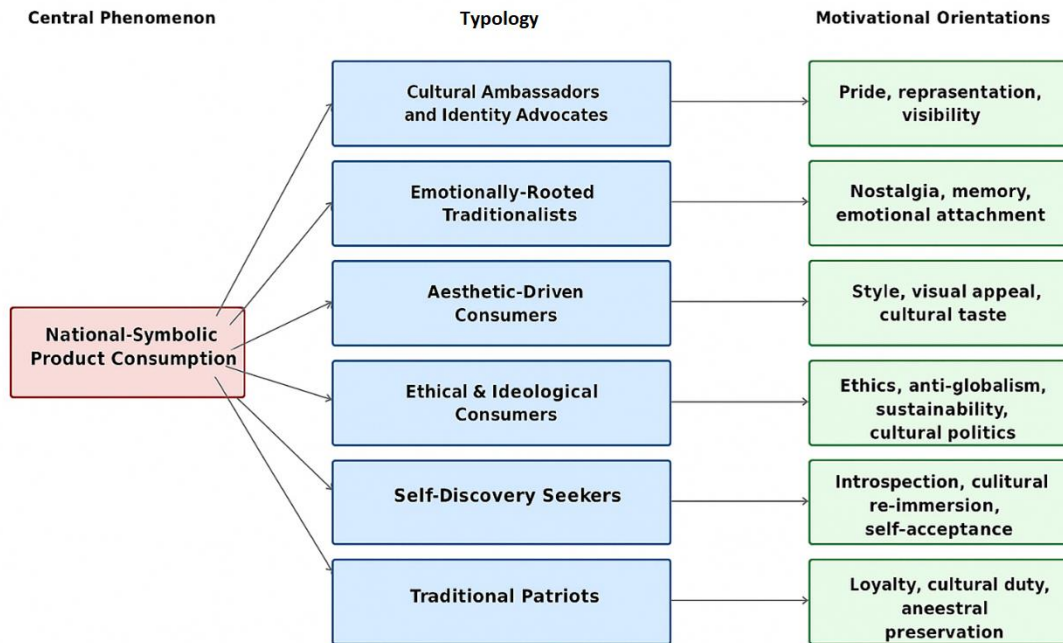
5.3.7. Consumer typology and motivational overlap

While the consumer typology is presented as discrete categories for analytical clarity, in practice, most participants demonstrated affinities with multiple types. Their motivations for engaging with national-symbolic fashion were often complex, layered, and evolving, combining emotional, aesthetic, political, and identity-related dimensions. However, in each case, participants were assigned to a prevailing consumer typology based on the dominant logic or primary motivation evident in their narratives. For instance, a participant might appreciate the aesthetic design of national ornaments (Consumer type 3) while also expressing diasporic pride (Consumer type 1); or combine ethical consumption values (Consumer type 4) with emotional nostalgia (Consumer type 2). These overlaps reflect the multifaceted nature of symbolic consumption and identity formation, especially among younger generations navigating both global and local cultural terrains. The consumer typology development approach thus acknowledges nuance while emphasizing prevailing orientations to interpret broader patterns.

These six types illustrate a nuanced landscape of national-symbolic consumption, where traditional products serve not only as markers of identity, but also as aesthetic choices, ethical positions, and tools of cultural negotiation. While Kyrgyz symbols carry shared cultural weight, individuals engage with them through distinct personal, emotional, and social logics.

To visually synthesize this interpretive framework, the following diagram maps the central phenomenon of national-symbolic product consumption and traces its differentiation into six consumer types, each defined by a prevailing motivational orientation (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 *Consumer Typology and Motivations in National-Symbolic Product Consumption.*



Although a general attachment to Kyrgyz cultural heritage is evident across the participant pool, the meanings attributed to symbolic products, and the intensity and mode of engagement, vary considerably. For some, these items express patriotic pride; for others, they are vehicles of visual creativity, ethical resistance, or personal self-discovery. This diversity underscores the idea that national identity is not a fixed or uniform experience, but rather a dynamic process shaped by memory, migration, politics, and generational change.

The typology developed here offers a conceptual foundation for the Discussion chapter, where these consumer profiles are analyzed through broader lenses of nationalism, post-socialist identity formation, consumer citizenship, and cultural commodification in the Kyrgyz and diasporic context.

6. DISCUSSION

The rise in the consumption of national-symbolic products in Kyrgyzstan reflects a complex interplay of cultural identity, generational dynamics, globalization, and digital influence. This study has explored how Kyrgyz consumers, particularly youth, engage with these products as expressions of national pride, personal identity, and cultural continuity in a post-Soviet context. Through in-depth interviews and Instagram content analysis, we have uncovered the multifaceted motivations, emotions, and social influences that shape this phenomenon.

The findings reveal that national-symbolic products serve as powerful tools for identity construction, emotional connection, and cultural revival. Themes such as cultural identity and expression, generational reinvention, and the role of digital media highlight the evolving nature of Kyrgyz identity in a globalized world. Additionally, the psychographic typology of consumers demonstrates the diverse ways in which individuals interpret and perform their national identity through consumption.

In this discussion, we synthesize these insights, connecting them to broader theoretical frameworks such as Consumer Culture Theory, Symbolic Consumption, and Postcolonial Theory. We also examine the implications of these findings for cultural preservation, market dynamics, and national identity formation in transitional societies. By situating the results within the existing literature, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how national symbols are consumed, commodified, and reimagined in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

6.1. Interpretation of Findings

This section presents an interpretation of the main empirical findings derived from participant interviews and content analysis of Instagram posts. The interpretation focuses on the cultural, emotional, and social meanings participants attach to these products, as well as the different motivations and identity strategies that emerged across consumers. Each subtheme is analyzed in relation to broader socio-cultural dynamics such as generational change, urbanization, digital influence, and the evolving role of tradition. These interpretations lay the groundwork for the following section, which explicitly connects the findings to the theoretical framework established in earlier chapters.

Fashioning Cultural Identity: Emotion, Belonging and Memory

The findings of this study show that Kyrgyz consumers imbue nationally symbolic products with rich meanings of *identity, nostalgia, and pride*. Participants portrayed ethnic clothing and motifs as “expressions of cultural meaning and pride”, echoing Anderson’s notion of the nation as an imagined community built on shared symbols. In interviews, consumers repeatedly linked Kyrgyz designs to belonging and heritage. For example, one respondent described wearing traditional motifs as “a powerful expression of belonging”. This is consistent with cultural research suggesting that shared artifacts and stories reinforce group identity (Anderson, 2020, p. 20).

Similarly, Kyrgyz fashion brands reinforce these narratives in their marketing. Instagram posts by local brands typically present clothing as a *living heritage, celebrating nomadic history, heroism, and national pride*. For example, brands reference iconic images (women with horses, ancient petroglyphs, famous Kyrgyz heroines) to situate their designs within a distinctly national history. This framing of heritage by producers complements consumer meanings: both sides see national motifs as expressions of *cultural continuity* and *collective memory*. As one brand states, clothing is “not just an object, but a symbol of our culture and traditions.” Overall, both consumers and brand narratives converge on the idea that ethnic fashion affirms Kyrgyz identity and keeps cultural memory alive in everyday life.

This also reflects what Butz (2009, p. 783) describes as national symbols acting as *emotional anchors*, evoking deeply felt feelings of *belonging* and *identity security*, especially during periods of cultural uncertainty. In this sense, Kyrgyz youth engage with national-symbolic clothing as a way to affirm their *emotional connection to heritage* and navigate identity in a changing social landscape. This emotional significance is confirmed by González (2010, p. 19), who argues that fashion is not simply a frivolous form of self-decoration, but a vital means for expressing complex narratives of identity in response to historical and social change. DeNipoti (1994, p. 4) also argues that fashion should be understood not only as a class marker, but also as a *psychological* and *historical* tool that reflects both societal shifts and individual aspirations. This idea supports the emotional geography in the stories of Kyrgyz consumers: fashion acts not only as a symbol of traditions, but also as a mirror of values,

aspirations and feelings. This supports the idea that fashion conveys deeper psychological states such as *nostalgia*, *pride* and *rootedness*.

Beyond emotional meaning, Kyrgyz fashion items also function as powerful symbolic and material tools for communicating cultural narratives and group belonging. In line with theories of *symbolic consumption* (Solomon, 1983, p. 320; Belk, 1988, p. 160), goods such as kalpaks or embroidered accessories become *semiotic anchors*, what Baudrillard (2016, p. 25) called signs divorced from utility, that allow individuals to assert identity, enact cultural continuity, and differentiate themselves from both local uniformities and foreign influences.

These symbolic functions are also closely linked to emotional geography and collective memory. According to Davidson and Milligan (2004, p. 524), emotional attachment to cultural objects and spaces enhances feelings of home and belonging. National motifs such as the kalpak or traditional ornaments serve as “*mobile memory objects*” (Halbwachs, 2020, pp. 14-15), connecting people to collective narratives, sacred sites, and ancestral memories. This is especially important in the post-Soviet context, where emotional attachment to pre-Soviet traditions plays a central role in reconstructing national identity.

Everyday Nationalism: Youth Agency and Reinvention of Tradition

For many young Kyrgyz consumers, wearing ethnic fashion is a conscious act of cultural resistance and creative reinvention in everyday life. Rather than preserving tradition in static forms, they reimagine it through daily style, combining ethnic motifs with contemporary garments in ways that express both heritage and individuality.

Participants often framed this act as a kind of generational freedom. They saw themselves as part of a youth-led cultural renaissance, contrasting their freedom to wear ethnic symbols with older generations who suppressed them under Soviet homogenization. This generational pride was accompanied by a rebellious spirit: wearing symbolic fashion was described as a subtle but powerful form of protest cultural forgetting and erasure.

Kyrgyz fashion brands are actively participating in this cultural renewal. Their marketing materials frame clothing as both stylish and meaningful, aligning tradition with movement, freedom, and youth culture. Consumers in the study described ethnic fashion as an act of *cultural reinvention*, a kind of *rebellion* against Soviet erasure that

makes tradition visible in everyday life. Brand content reflects this shift: collections are named after legendary Kyrgyz women, denim jackets are adorned with tribal embroidery, and Instagram captions read, “*When tradition meets modern, these looks are born.*” This emphasis on wearable tradition fulfills a dual desire: to remain rooted in one’s past while being visibly modern.

These contemporary ethnic designs address the desire of Kyrgyz youth to wear heritage in a way that aligns with their urban, stylish lives. This supports Maxwell's (2021, p. 3) concept of “*banal nationalism from below*”: everyday, unremarkable practices such as wearing ethnic motifs to class or to cafes that quietly reinforce national identity without state intervention. It also resonates with Sedakova’s (2019, p. 28) study of *oppositional fashion* during the Soviet “perestroika,” where youth used fashion to challenge official norms and present themselves as independent cultural agents.

The use of traditional motifs in youth fashion in Kyrgyzstan also reflects broader *subcultural dynamics*, where fashion becomes a medium for expressing resistance, creativity, and cultural positioning. According to Hebdige (1979, p. 130), subcultures often use style as a form of symbolic resistance to dominant norms. In the Kyrgyz context, integrating ethnic elements into streetwear, such as embroidered denim, modernized “chapans”, or stylized felt accessories, allows young people to assert national identity while distinguishing themselves from both global mainstream fashion and Soviet-style uniformity.

This practice also contributes to the accumulation of what Thornton (1996, p. 26) calls *subcultural capital*, insider knowledge and style that confer status within culturally conscious groups. Riello (2011, p. 3) highlights that fashion objects serve as both material artefacts and social signifiers. The integration of national motifs into youth fashion can be understood through the lens of the “material culture of fashion”, where garments acquire value not only through aesthetics but also through their embedded cultural narratives and emotional resonance in everyday practice.

Malíčková’s (2021, p. 123) idea of fashion as a cultural intertext provides a fitting lens: youth fashion doesn’t merely replicate historical symbols: it remixes them, inserting personal narratives into collective memory. In doing so, Kyrgyz youth reassert their voice in a society still negotiating its postcolonial identity.

Hybridity and Cultural Sovereignty: Reclaiming Identity through Design

The blending of tradition and modernity in Kyrgyz fashion illustrates how hybrid cultural expressions can challenge Eurocentric narratives and reclaim cultural autonomy's emphasis on cultural reappropriation. Under Soviet rule, Kyrgyz culture was often marginalized or standardized (Hirsch, 2005, p. 9). Today's revival of traditional dress, jewelry, and language represents a return of cultural sovereignty.

Bhabha's (2012, pp. 6-10) theory of cultural hybridity is particularly relevant: it highlights how identity in postcolonial societies is formed in "third spaces," where global modernity intersects with local tradition. In Kyrgyz fashion, this hybridity is evident in garments that combine bold embroidery with minimalist silhouettes or tribal motifs with urban wear, creating new aesthetic languages that are neither wholly Western nor entirely traditional, allowing consumers to assert cultural pride while embracing *creative autonomy*.

Özüdoğru (2015, pp. 3-4) supports this view, highlighting how postcolonial fashion systems challenge Eurocentric models by blending traditional dress with contemporary aesthetics. Kyrgyz designers and consumers developing their own fashion systems that are rooted in local knowledge, yet responsive to global trends. Similarly, Jansen and Craik (2016, pp. 1-3) argue that fashion in non-Western contexts is not merely a passive appropriation of Western aesthetics but a historically rooted and active system of its own.

By disrupting binaries like traditional vs. contemporary or local vs. global, Kyrgyz hybrid fashion challenges dominant discourses and reclaims cultural space. This disruption is evident in how Kyrgyz designers foreground national motifs not as nostalgic ornamentation but as *central design logic*. Bassene (2015, pp. 2-3) highlights the concept of "*epistemological imperialism*", where Western ideas distort local meanings, while Kyrgyz designers offer a counterexample by placing national aesthetics at the core of contemporary expression. Nezhoghlu (2017, pp. 2-3) similarly emphasizes how post-Soviet identity reconstruction relies on reviving myths, history, and cultural signs that were once suppressed. This *selective revival* positions national-symbolic fashion as a tool of postcolonial expression.

Rosignolo (2018, p. 81) explains this hybridity through the lens of "*complementation*" rather than replacement. In Kyrgyz fashion, traditional and modern elements coexist, resulting in a *multi-layered negotiation of identity* rather than a

simplistic return to the past. This aligns with Bassene's (2015, pp. 8-9) notion of a "*Creole identity*", a blend of local memory and global aesthetics rooted in postcolonial self-definition. Designers from Dakar or Lagos, as well as in Kyrgyzstan, challenge the narrative of cultural disappearance by re-rooting fashion in local epistemologies.

In short, Kyrgyz fashion demonstrates how cultural hybridity, glocal aesthetics, and postcolonial expression can converge to challenge established fashion hierarchies and promote new narratives of identity. This phenomenon can be better understood through the lens of *cultural hybridity*. Rather than simply preserving traditions, young Kyrgyz consumers blend local cultural elements with global aesthetics to create hybrid identities. As Bhabha (2015, p. 15) notes, cultural hybridity challenges notions of "pure" culture, instead positioning identity as a dynamic negotiation. In the Kyrgyz context, this is visible in contemporary ethno-fashion: sweatshirts, jackets, or accessories featuring traditional embroidery but taking on contemporary forms. These hybrid products allow young people to assert rootedness while participating in global fashion narratives (Na'am et al., 2019, p. 653).

Appadurai's (1996, pp. 33-53) theory of *global cultural flows* helps contextualize this practice: media, people, and ideas cross borders to form new cultural identities. Robertson's (1995, pp. 28-31) concept of *glocalization* further explains how global aesthetics are localized and local heritage is modernized. In this process, national motifs are reimagined in ways that reflect both cultural pride and contemporary lifestyles. In doing so, hybrid fashion becomes a key site of cultural creativity, what Bhabha calls the "*third space*" of cultural negotiation (2012, p. 189). These designs circulate both within Kyrgyzstan and in diasporas, reflecting a shared commitment to visibility, reinvention, and cultural continuity.

Dagmar Reichardt (2021, pp. 209-210) reinforces this by defining fashion as a *transcultural and semiotic language*, constantly negotiating between global flows and local identities. Using the concept of "glocality", she shows how fashion carries the double weight of heritage and cosmopolitanism, as in the Kyrgyz context where youth wear traditional motifs in global settings such as diasporas.

In short, Kyrgyz hybrid fashion challenges dominant hierarchies in fashion by creating new aesthetic vocabularies rooted in cultural confidence. It allows young people to engage with global trends without abandoning cultural specificity, turning fashion into a space where identity is not just remembered, but rewritten.

This identity construction is particularly relevant in the post-Soviet context. As Sedakova (2019, p. 14) notes, Soviet fashion policies, imposed uniformity and suppressed individuality within the framework of collectivist ideals. In contrast, today's Kyrgyz youth use fashion as a tool for constructing "*creative identities*", much like the opposition artists of the 1980s. Similarly, Maxwell (2021, p. 6-7) introduces the concept of "*clothing sovereignty*", in which young people and marginalized groups reclaim control over cultural boundaries through clothing. The current study supports this, with participants describing a sense of empowerment to reimagine tradition "on their own terms".

Malichkova (2021, p. 126-131) similarly discusses "costume" as a radical expression of identity, a medium that reflects worldview, values, and even resistance. In post-Soviet countries, where tradition was previously suppressed, symbolic clothing can act as a form of cultural sovereignty.

From Margins to Mainstream: Social Norms, Recognition, and Cultural Validation

While many Kyrgyz youth use fashion to express pride and cultural identity, their choices are often shaped by a broader social landscape that includes both encouragement and constraint. Participants described how wearing nationally symbolic clothing in everyday settings, such as schools, cafes, or urban streets, attracts attention that can be either affirming or judgmental. This duality reflects an ongoing *negotiation between visibility and social approval*.

Some respondents mentioned receiving compliments, questions, or expressions of admiration from peers or strangers when wearing clothing with national motifs. Such social affirmation reinforced their sense of cultural legitimacy and confidence. This aligns with Goffman's (1959, p. 30) theory that identity gains meaning through recognition by others, especially in social settings where clothing serves as a visible marker of who one is and where one belongs.

However, other participants reported hesitation to wear symbolic fashion publicly, fearing that they might appear "too traditional", "rural", "backward" or face ridicule for standing out. These anxieties reflect the presence of unspoken social norms that govern which forms of cultural expression are seen as acceptable, modern, or stylish. Butler's (1990, p. 25) concept of *performativity* is relevant here: identity is not simply expressed

but enacted and negotiated through repeated behaviors, such as clothing choices, that are always interpreted within a particular social context.

In this sense, national-symbolic fashion becomes a stage where both affirmation and anxiety play out. The presence of positive reinforcement, such as likes on social media, compliments from friends, or approval from family, can increase cultural confidence. Conversely, negative reactions or perceived judgment can lead to self-censorship. As one participant put it, “If it is something national, maybe earrings and so on, it does not have to be something old-fashioned” (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan).

Bandura’s (1977, p. 3) *social learning theory* helps explain how these behaviors spread or are inhibited. Influencers, friends, and family members model attitudes toward ethnic fashion, their visibility and confidence can normalize symbolic clothing, making it more socially acceptable. When admired figures embrace cultural symbols in stylish and public ways, they lower the social risk for others to do the same. Others follow suit, reinforcing symbolic consumption as a *socially validated* and emotionally meaningful behavior (Özmatyatlı & Cırhinlioğlu, 2019, p. 1102).

As traditional motifs move from ceremonial use into mainstream fashion, they are continuously tested, affirmed, and negotiated within the framework of evolving cultural norms. Over time, this contributes to the gradual normalization of ethnic fashion in public spaces, where once-marginal expressions of identity become socially accepted and even celebrated (Maxwell, 2021, p. 5).

Digital Ambassadorship and Global Self-Presentation

In an increasingly interconnected world, Kyrgyz youth are navigating cultural identity not only within national borders but also across digital and transnational spaces. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as central arenas where national-symbolic fashion becomes a powerful tool for both self-expression and cultural ambassadorship.

Many participants in this study, especially those from the diaspora, reported that wearing culturally significant clothing in global contexts helped them stay connected to their heritage and affirm their Kyrgyz identity abroad. These practices reflect what Werbner (2002, p. 119) describes as cultural performances in transnational space, everyday acts that assert visibility and belonging in multicultural environments. In this

way, symbolic fashion becomes a portable expression of national identity and emotional rootedness.

This dual cultural positioning aligns with Appiah's (1997, p. 618) notion of *cosmopolitan patriotism*, where individuals proudly assert their cultural heritage without rejecting global influences. Kyrgyz fashion brands have embraced this dynamic through deliberate visual storytelling: images of embroidered jackets in Berlin, kalpaks in Paris, or tribal patterns in urban New York signal a fusion of tradition with cosmopolitan aesthetics.

The theory of glocalization (Robertson, 1995, pp. 28-31) helps frame this phenomenon. Traditional motifs are not replaced but recontextualized in global visual narratives, allowing for simultaneous expressions of local pride and global fluency. Social media, therefore, allows national identity to be reimagined as stylish and modern, expanding its relevance beyond traditional or ceremonial spaces. Brands like Keshte and CutADash incorporate urban imagery and international aesthetics, such as placing Kyrgyz-inspired clothing in European cityscapes, symbolically inserting "your roots" into cosmopolitan spaces. This also resonates with Appadurai's (1996, pp. 33-53) view of *global cultural flows*, where media, symbols, and meanings travel across borders and form new hybrid identities.

Social media does more than just display cultural fashion, it reshapes how identity is experienced and constructed. Influencers, brand accounts, and online creators act as cultural intermediaries, modeling symbolic consumption as desirable, stylish, and modern. Bandura's (1977, p. 3) *social learning theory* provides a useful lens: by observing admired figures who incorporate national symbols into contemporary attire, young people learn to associate these choices with cultural pride, style, and social affirmation.

As Özmatyatlı & Cırhinlioğlu (2019, p. 1102) note, others follow these modeled behaviors, reinforcing symbolic consumption as a socially validated and emotionally meaningful act. Platforms like Instagram provide a curated space for individuals to blend traditional aesthetics with contemporary fashion, offering both visibility and control over how their identity is presented.

Consumer culture theory also emphasizes how digital environments function as spaces for identity construction and experimentation (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Kyrgyz youth are not only consuming cultural symbols; they are actively

reshaping them through curated self-presentation. Platforms like Instagram offer a low-risk space to try on multi-layered identities: national, ethnic, cosmopolitan, without the constraints of traditional community settings.

Among both urban youth and diaspora communities, this digital presence functions as a form of *soft cultural diplomacy*, where self-expression becomes a means of cultural transmission and preservation across borders (Bibi & Hanif, 2024, p. 18). Kyrgyz youth use fashion, through visuals, stories, hashtags, and campaigns, not only to express themselves, but also to educate global audiences, strengthen diasporic ties, and assert cultural pride where Kyrgyz identity is often overlooked. Influencers, brands, and podcasts act as cultural ambassadors, promoting Kyrgyz heritage in modern ways. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube support not just fashion, but also language revival and cultural literacy, creating vibrant digital spaces for national identity and engagement (Entwistle, 2023; Bibi & Hanif, 2024, p. 18).

In these digital arenas, symbolic clothing is not simply worn, it is performed, broadcasted, and reinterpreted. As a result, national identity becomes both deeply personal and globally shareable, forming part of an evolving narrative of what it means to be Kyrgyz in the 21st century.

Aesthetic Identity and Personal Style Construction

For many Kyrgyz youth, fashion is not only about representing cultural heritage, it is also a deeply personal process of identity construction, aesthetic exploration, and self-differentiation. National-symbolic clothing serves as a medium through which individuals perform both cultural belonging and personal uniqueness, blending visual tradition with their own sense of taste and style (Minowa & Belk, 2017, pp. 330-331, 343).

Participants in this study frequently emphasized the visual beauty and distinctiveness of ethnic motifs. They expressed admiration for the craftsmanship, patterns, and textures of national designs, which they described as “unique,” “expressive,” and “beautiful.” These reactions align with *Need for Uniqueness Theory* (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), which suggests that individuals seek to stand out in meaningful ways, particularly when self-expression is tied to cultural identity. The need to perceive oneself as distinct can manifest through adopting cultural symbols that differentiate individuals from others and, by belonging to a culturally distinct group,

individuals can integrate the group's uniqueness into their personal identity, with ethnic motifs serving not only as aesthetic expressions but also fulfilling the need for uniqueness and distinctiveness, particularly in cultural contexts where such differentiation enhances self-esteem and well-being (Debrosse et al., 2015, p. 750). In the Kyrgyz context, this uniqueness was often achieved by combining traditional elements with minimalist or global fashion pieces, for instance, a kalpak paired with a blazer or tribal embroidery worn with sneakers.

These stylistic choices reflect not only aesthetic preference but also a deeper psychological need for cultural individuality. According to Tian et al. (2001, pp. 50-52), people who integrate cultural aesthetics into their appearance use style to signal both personal values and group affiliations. In doing so, they assert not only who they are, but also what they stand for: tradition, awareness, pride, and cultural literacy.

Beyond style, this aesthetic engagement carries emotional weight (Riello, 2011, p. 3). As Leder et al. (2004, pp. 492-493) and Markovic (2012, p. 2) suggest, aesthetic experiences, particularly those linked to cultural memory and identity, can evoke feelings of *unity*, *pride*, and *transcendence*. Participants described feelings "joy", "beauty", and emotional resonance when interacting with handcrafted items, traditional textures, and wearing clothing that reflected their heritage, reinforcing Naam et al.'s (2019, p. 654) findings of *embodied aesthetics*.

Malíčková's (2021, pp. 126-131) notion of fashion as a *cultural intertext* further supports this. She argues that clothing is a narrative device that allows individuals to connect their personal stories to broader collective identities. This is visible in how Kyrgyz youth incorporate meaningful motifs into casual or urban outfits, creating a personal "style text" that weaves together past, present, and future.

Moreover, aesthetic consumption often intersects with emotional needs for *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*, as theorized by Ryan and Deci's (2000, pp. 68-69) *Self-Determination Theory*. Participants in the study indicated that symbolic fashion empowered them to feel in control of their identity presentation, skilled in their cultural knowledge, and emotionally connected to their roots.

In this way, aesthetic fashion choices are never just decorative, they are psychological affirmations. They fulfill both expressive and emotional functions, helping individuals anchor themselves in a cultural narrative while also distinguishing their identity in an increasingly globalized visual world. Fashion becomes both a mirror

of the self and a stage for identity performance, allowing individuals to be simultaneously traditional and original.

Authenticity, Commercialization, and Ethical Tensions

The rise of national-symbolic fashion in Kyrgyzstan reveals a nuanced tension between *cultural authenticity* and the realities of *commercialization*. While participants celebrated the expressive power of ethnic motifs, they also voiced concerns about the dilution of meaning through mass production and market-driven aesthetics.

Many participants highlighted their preference for locally crafted and handmade items, which they viewed as “genuine,” “honest,” or “meaningful.” These items were valued not just for their design quality, but because they seemed to embody a deeper cultural truth, one that mass-produced versions were seen as lacking. This reflects a widespread desire to maintain symbolic integrity in the face of market expansion.

This concern is echoed in Halter’s (2000, p. 17) argument that the quest for authenticity often emerges from nostalgia for an idealized past, especially in times of accelerated modernity. As people experience cultural fragmentation and artificiality, they may turn to symbolic goods to *recover a sense of rootedness and emotional purity*. In this light, traditional motifs are not just admired for their historical origin but cherished for the emotional security they offer in a fast-changing world. In this sense, modernity paradoxically fuels the desire for tradition.

However, as Jansen and Craik (2016, p. 11) and Regev (2007, pp. 125-127) explain, authenticity in fashion is inherently unstable: fashion is always the product of *cultural exchange* and *hybridization*. The very concept of authenticity becomes slippery, based more on perception and emotional resonance than on historical accuracy. What matters most is whether consumers feel that a design reflects their culture truthfully, not whether it is “authentically” old. In this way, brand and consumer perspectives complement each other by emphasizing heritage and quality.

Participants also raised *ethical concerns* about the commercialization of sacred motifs, particularly when these were used in stylized or Westernized ways, such as screen-printed petroglyphs on t-shirts or traditional patterns featured in influencer marketing campaigns. These concerns reflect not just aesthetic disappointment but *moral discomfort*. As Haidt et al. (1993, p. 613) and González (2010, p. 29) suggest,

symbolic consumption often evokes moralized emotional responses, including intuition about what is “right” or “sacred” to share with the market.

Despite these concerns, this ambivalence does not lead to a rejection of symbolic consumption. Rather, it reinforces a selective and value-based consumer nationalism in which the purchase of culturally significant goods becomes a form of everyday activism.

In response, many Kyrgyz brands have sought to position themselves as both *culturally respectful* and *commercially viable*. Labels such as CutADash emphasize ecological sustainability, local artisanship, and symbolic storytelling in their branding, highlighting the connection between environmental ethics and cultural preservation. This reflects a balancing act: producers rely on symbolic authenticity for brand appeal, but also operate within market pressures.

This dual strategy illustrates the interdependence of consumer values and brand narratives. While consumers may critique commercial motives, they also support brands that align with their vision of authenticity, emphasizing heritage, local knowledge, and craft. In doing so, they engage in what Balabanis et al. (2001, p. 160) and Carvalho et al. (2019, p. 312) describe as value-driven *consumer nationalism*, where buying symbolic goods becomes a form of resistance to cultural homogenization, transforming everyday purchases into acts of resistance and pride.

As Maxwell (2021, p. 9) argues, the *authenticity of national dress is not determined by its historical origin*, but by how people relate to it. Even contemporary or reimagined designs can be “authentic” if wearers believe in their symbolic significance. In Kyrgyzstan, youth affirm tradition not by replicating the past, but by investing emotional and cultural meaning in reinterpreted forms.

Ultimately, the commercialization of ethnic fashion does not signal cultural erosion. Rather, it reveals an *ongoing negotiation* between pride and profit, symbolism and commerce. In this space, authenticity becomes not a fixed attribute, but a shared conviction, one continually shaped by consumer choices, brand positioning, and the evolving emotional landscape of cultural identity.

Maxwell suggests that the debate over the authenticity of nationalized clothing is similar to a famous debate in nationalism studies called the “Warwick debate”, which asks whether nations are ancient and natural or modern and invented (Maxwell, 2021, p. 9). Similarly, people may argue about whether traditional clothing is truly ancient or a recent reconstruction. However, what matters most is not when the clothing was created,

but how people relate to it. In Kyrgyzstan, even when traditional clothing is remade in a modern style, it still carries deep cultural meaning. This shows that authenticity lies not only in historical accuracy, but also in emotional connection and symbolic value. Clothing becomes authentic when its wearers *believe in its meaning* and use it to express their identity.

Cultural Assertion in Global Contexts: Visibility, Recognition, and National Distinctiveness

In an era of intensified globalization, where cultural boundaries are increasingly fluid, the desire for national recognition and distinctiveness has taken on new urgency. For Kyrgyz youth, national-symbolic fashion is not only a means of personal expression but also a vehicle for asserting identity in multicultural and transnational spaces. It allows them to stand out, not just as individuals, but as members of a culturally rich and sovereign nation.

This desire for recognition is not limited to the diaspora. Even within Kyrgyzstan, many participants express a strong wish to be seen and acknowledged by the broader world. Their fashion choices reflect aspirations to insert Kyrgyz identity into the global cultural conversation, whether through digital platforms, international events, or visual representation in cosmopolitan environments. As participants said, “The period of globalization, when the world is so global ... In this global world, people are somehow trying to stand out and show that they belong to something different” (Jibek, female, 25 years old, USA), and “[I want] to show that we have our own national clothes, that we value our culture. It seems to me that many people abroad do not even know that there is such a country as Kyrgyzstan, for example, in America” (Ayzirek, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan). In this sense, national fashion becomes a form of *cultural diplomacy*, asserting visibility in a global landscape where small nations often remain unseen.

Among the Kyrgyz diaspora, symbolic clothing plays a particularly strategic role (Hall, 1990, p. 235). Participants living in countries such as Türkiye, Italy, Germany, and the United States described how wearing culturally significant attire, even in subtle forms, helped them stay emotionally connected to their roots. These fashion choices were especially visible during national holidays, cultural events, and online representation. Such practices reflect what Werbner (2002, p. 119) describes as *cultural*

performances in transnational space, in which migrants negotiate visibility and belonging through deliberate acts of identity display.

This sense of visibility is deeply intertwined with the concept of recognition. According to Honneth (1996, pp. 126-129), cultural identity is affirmed through public acknowledgment and solidarity, which reinforces one's sense of self-worth. Taylor (1994, p. 25) similarly argues that *recognition* is a *basic human need*, and its absence, or misrecognition, can lead to a diminished sense of identity. Participants in this study echoed this theory: they reported feeling proud, confident, and emotionally grounded when wearing national motifs, especially in environments where Kyrgyz identity was unfamiliar or marginalized. In this context, clothing became a social signal and a symbolic anchor, a way to both represent one's culture and demand its acknowledgment.

These identity practices are also linked to the desire for cultural uniqueness. In a global fashion market often dominated by Western aesthetics, Kyrgyz youth deliberately choose ethnic motifs to resist homogenization. They use national symbols to stand apart, not just from other individuals, but from global style norms. As one participant noted, "Everyone will know who we are without associating us with other countries" (Aruuke, female, 21 years old, Kyrgyzstan) This desire for distinction is not just stylistic but political, reflecting a broader movement toward cultural sovereignty and national dignity.

Contemporary fashion traditions in postcolonial societies actively resist homogenization by re-constructing cultural heritage within contemporary aesthetics. Jansen and Craik (2016, p. 4) note that global flows do not necessarily dilute local identities but can instead *stimulate cultural heterogenization*, with fashion becoming a means of resistance and difference in a globalized world.

Regev (2007, pp. 132-134) also offers a powerful sociological interpretation of this global-local interplay. He suggests that claims for cultural recognition and status motivate marginalized or non-Western cultural producers to create globally recognizable yet locally rooted works. For Kyrgyz youth, fashion becomes a vehicle for asserting both *aesthetic uniqueness* and *symbolic modernity*. This process reflects what Regev calls a "social demand for works" that combine *ethno-national identity* with *contemporary global aesthetics*, allowing participants to position themselves as full actors in world culture. In doing so, fashion becomes not only an expression of cultural

identity but also a medium of recognition and symbolic status in the “great war of recognition”

The emotional dimension of this visibility is significant. As Finney (1990) suggests, cultural identity strengthens psychological well-being and empowerment. Participants described symbolic fashion as a source of inner pride, helping them feel “confident” “respected,” and “belonging to something bigger.” These benefits extended beyond personal style, they were linked to national affirmation, especially in global environments where Kyrgyz culture remains underrepresented.

In a society like Kyrgyzstan, where national identity is still being redefined after decades of Soviet suppression, symbolic clothing becomes both a social signal and an internal affirmation of belonging and value. As Davis (2008, p. 10) explains, fashion functions as a symbolic language that helps people “anchor” themselves in culturally resonant narratives, promoting self-confidence and continuity.

Nation branding further extends this dynamic by promoting national motifs in public forums: fashion shows, festivals, diaspora campaigns, and digital storytelling, as markers of identity and cultural pride (Gudjonsson, 2005, pp. 286-287; Aronczyk, 2013, p. 157). In Kyrgyzstan, these practices allow both consumers and producers to assert the dignity of Kyrgyz culture in global and local narratives, turning clothing into an instrument of collective recognition.

In this context, national-symbolic fashion becomes more than a private or aesthetic matter, it becomes a public performance of identity. It satisfies both personal and collective needs for recognition, providing a form of symbolic resistance to invisibility and assimilation. Whether in diaspora settings or within Kyrgyzstan itself, these fashion practices affirm the enduring relevance of cultural identity in a world that is at once interconnected and fragmenting.

Selling Symbols: The Role of Fashion Brands in Shaping National Aesthetics

Across the themes explored in this study, brand narratives and consumer perspectives largely complement each other in affirming cultural heritage, yet subtle divergences in emphasis and intention also emerge. Both actors center national symbols as carriers of meaning, but from different vantage points. Brands tend to construct idealized, aestheticized narratives, highlighting heroic figures, nomadic heritage, and proud iconography, to evoke shared identity and cultural pride. Consumers, while

echoing this pride, often speak about these symbols in deeply personal terms: as ties to childhood, family memory, and emotional resonance. For them, wearing symbolic clothing is not only an act of group belonging but also a form of identity reflection.

This dual framing, personal and collective, enables brands to market products as both fashion and heritage. For instance, the label CutADash promotes accessories through the language of empowerment and symbolism (e.g., snow leopard emblems as signs of strength), while MOIMOL names collections after historic Kyrgyz women, tying contemporary wear to a lineage of courage. This layering of personal empowerment with collective memory illustrates how brands tap into self-expression without losing cultural legitimacy.

Such dynamics align with Cerulo's (1995, p. 6) view of national symbols as social instruments that both unify and motivate, guiding individual identity choices while integrating people into larger cultural frameworks. In this sense, brands and consumers participate in the same symbolic economy, but with differing degrees of emphasis on autonomy versus storytelling, empowerment versus cohesion.

Where tensions surface most clearly is in the question of authenticity and agency. Consumers frequently frame the purchase of national-symbolic products as a deliberate act of cultural participation, a way to "support our own" and protect heritage in a globalized world. Brands, however, tend to avoid overt political messaging, instead emphasizing visual storytelling and aspirational aesthetics. While they adopt national symbols, they rarely articulate them as patriotic acts. This disconnect reveals an asymmetry of expectations: consumers seek meaningful cultural representation and ethical production, while brands must also satisfy market logics of appeal and trend. Participants' ambivalence toward commercialization often stemmed from this mismatch.

This tension became especially visible during the backlash against cultural appropriation, notably the case of the Russian brand YAKA attempting to copyright Kyrgyz designs. The public reaction was swift and visceral. Social media campaigns with messages like "Stop stealing our culture!" illustrated that national-symbolic motifs are not seen as neutral designs, but as culturally sacred artifacts. For both consumers and domestic producers, these motifs carry moral weight and symbolic ownership. As Butz (2009, p. 789) and Haidt et al. (1993, p. 613) suggest, national symbols are emotionally charged, and their unauthorized use can trigger moral outrage rooted in shared cultural intuition.

The visual culture of fashion further intensifies this dynamic. As Terracciano (2017, pp. 403-404) argues, social media transforms clothing into performative texts, where gesture, setting, and posture co-construct meaning. Kyrgyz brands capitalize on this by staging models in meaningful urban environments or traditional poses, embedding symbolic garments within broader visual narratives of place, pride, and movement. These curated images not only display products but also participate in a visual language of cultural affirmation.

Finally, the symbolic potency of national fashion lies not only in its storytelling or performative potential, but in its postmodern recontextualization. As Rosignolo (2018, pp. 115-118) explains, fashion today operates through post-production logic: it does not merely invent but revives and reprograms existing symbols. Kyrgyz designers exemplify this approach by transforming traditional elements, like embroidery or historic patterns, into globally wearable forms like sneakers, hoodies, or bomber jackets. In doing so, they turn tradition into an aesthetic language of the present, producing fashion that is not nostalgic, but strategically hybrid.

Consumer Typology and the Plural Performance of National Identity

The six consumer types: Cultural Ambassadors and Identity Advocates, Emotionally Rooted Traditionalists, Aesthetic-Driven Consumers, Ethical and Ideological Consumers, Self-Discovery Seekers, and Traditional Patriots, each reveal distinct consumer motivations, yet they intersect through shared cultural meanings and emotional investments. These profiles not only exemplify symbolic consumption practices (Holt, 2002, p. 71; Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869) but also illustrate how national identity is continuously constructed, performed, and personalized in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Cultural Ambassadors and Identity Advocates utilize national-symbolic fashion as a means of cultural diplomacy and visibility, especially in diasporic settings. Their motivation is shaped by a desire to present a recognizable Kyrgyz identity abroad, resonating with Anderson's (2020, p. 20) "imagined community" and Gurova's (2021, p. 182) concept of cultural-patriotic discourse. This group mirrors Brubaker's (1996, pp. 20-21) idea of the "nationalizing state," but inverted, where individuals, not institutions, perform national distinctiveness. These consumers engage in "identity advocacy," using

Instagram and other digital platforms to express national pride, consistent with Rocamora's (2017, pp. 509-511) notion of mediatized identity performance.

Emotionally Rooted Traditionalists relate to national symbols as vessels of memory and belonging. Their use of national-symbolic products is driven by familial nostalgia and collective memory, reflecting Halbwachs' framework and Wiltgren's (2014, p. 321) analysis of emotional resonance in national symbols. This attachment is often linked to maternal figures and intergenerational identity, reinforcing Kalinina's (2017, p. 11) view of nostalgia as a discursive practice. Such symbolic consumption serves as a way to cope with geographic and emotional distance, particularly in the diaspora, as highlighted in Botoeva and Spector's (2013, p. 494) study of Kyrgyz cultural reproduction.

Aesthetic-Driven Consumers prioritize visual appeal and stylistic integration over ideological intent. For them, symbolic consumption is an act of self-styling (Belk, 1988, p. 129), often aligned with Instagram-driven visual culture. Their appreciation of national motifs resembles what Foster (1999, p. 279) terms "voluntary national affiliation," where national identity becomes an aesthetic resource. This consumer type reflects the cosmopolitan hybridization noted by Craig and Douglas (2006, p. 338), in which cultural markers are selectively adapted for globalized tastes.

Ethical and Ideological Consumers demonstrate a strong alignment with value-based consumption, grounded in ecological, anti-globalist, or anti-colonial ideologies. This aligns with Gurova's (2021, p. 180) cosmopolitan patriotic discourse and Ashcroft et al.'s (2003, p. 3) theory of postcolonial resistance through cultural production. Their choices reflect a deliberate rejection of mass-produced fashion and a preference for sustainable, ethically sourced products, echoing Vézina's (2019, p. 8) argument that global demand for authenticity fuels the revival of artisanal practices. Their consumption is not only personal but political, a form of activism through fashion.

Self-Discovery Seekers navigate symbolic consumption as part of an introspective identity journey. These consumers are often bicultural, conflicted, or fluid in their self-perception, using fashion as a tool for narrative construction (Wiltgren, 2014, p. 308). Their use of national-symbolic items is exploratory and often ambivalent, suggesting identity is not fixed but performed and revised (Butler, 1990, p. 25). This consumer type illustrates the importance of emotional geography (Cabello, 2018, p. 32) and symbolic interactionism in identity work, especially in contexts of migration or cultural hybridity.

Traditional Patriots maintain a principled and routine engagement with national-symbolic products. Their consumption is guided by duty, pride, and a sense of continuity, closely tied to Gurova's (2021, p. 183) definition of economic and cultural-patriotic discourses. Unlike other consumer types, this group rejects commodification or modern reinterpretation, instead prioritizing heritage and authenticity. Their behaviors reflect the "protective" form of product patriotism discussed by Spielmann et al. (2020, p. 396) and the stabilizing function of tradition in identity formation described by Dmitrovich et al. (2009, p. 528).

It is important to acknowledge that most participants exhibit motivations across multiple types. Someone who values aesthetics may also express pride; a politically motivated consumer may also feel nostalgic. This fluidity illustrates the multiplicity of motivations behind symbolic consumption and supports Holt's (2002, p. 73) argument that identity construction is dynamic and situational. Moreover, the findings confirm that national-symbolic products serve not only as reflections of belonging, but also as tools of resistance, self-expression, and emotional continuity, especially salient in post-Soviet, transitional societies such as Kyrgyzstan (Seliverstova, 2017, p. 74; Artman, 2015, p. 1).

6.2. Theoretical Integration of Key Findings

It is possible to state that the findings obtained from the research overlap with the theories presented in the literature/theoretical framework. For example, subtheme **1.1 Strengthening National Identity Through Symbols** (under *Cultural Identity and Expression*) aligns with ***Symbolic Consumption*** and ***Consumer Culture*** theories. ***Symbolic Consumption*** posits that goods convey identity meanings (Solomon, 1983, p. 320) and extend the self (Belk, 1988, pp. 152-160). Ethnic fashion was not seen merely as clothing, but as an extension of cultural heritage. Participants expressed that wearing traditional motifs provided a sense of belonging, echoing Anderson's (2020, p. 20) idea of the nation as an imagined community, where shared symbols act as "mobile memory objects." This reflects ***Consumer Culture Theory*** and Holt's (2002, p. 71) view that consumption performs social belonging. Brands reinforced these meanings by narrating folklore through their products, supporting ***Consumer Culture Theory***, which emphasizes identity construction through goods (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, pp. 869-

871). Similarly, Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998, p. 134) argue that **symbolic consumption** connects individuals to heritage.

Subtheme **1.2 Emotional Resonance of Cultural Symbols** connects with **Emotional Geography** and **Collective Memory** theories. Symbols like the kalpak or embroidered garments were described as emotional anchors, tangible links to home and ancestry, supporting Davidson and Milligan's (2004, p. 524) view that places and objects reinforce identity. Halbwachs (2020, p. 14-15) emphasized how cultural artifacts preserve shared memory. Participants' feelings of nostalgia and pride align with Butz (2009, p. 789) and González's (2010, p. 29) emphasis on national symbols as affective tools. The *Emotionally Rooted Traditionalists* cluster reflects this emotional attachment, highlighting how fashion functions as a vessel of memory, in line with **Collective Memory** theory.

Subtheme **2.1 Youth and Cultural Reinvention** relates to **Performative Identity** and **Cultural Hybridity**. Butler (1990, p. 25) argues identity is enacted through repeated performances. Young consumers blended Kyrgyz motifs with global fashion, consciously constructing identity through style. This hybrid expression reflects Bhabha's (2015, p. 189) **Third Space** as a site of negotiation between cultures. Brands embraced this blend, supporting Maxwell's (2021, p. 3) concept of **Banal Nationalism from Below**, nation-building through daily acts. This generational reimagining also echoes Yessenova's insights on youth navigating post-Soviet modernity and tradition.

Subtheme **2.2 Evolving Social Norms and Cultural Acceptance** corresponds with literature on **Social Learning, Tolerance**. As national fashion became more visible, public approval grew, affirming Foster's (1999, p. 270) claim that everyday consumption can nationalize routine life. Contemporary designs emphasized practicality, supporting **Intangible Heritage Branding** (Urde et al, 2007, p. 11). The *Traditional Patriots* cluster embraced this normalization, while others took a more cosmopolitan approach, aligning with Appiah's (1997, p. 618) ideas on **Cosmopolitanism** and Gurova's (2021, p. 183) take on **Cultural Patriotism**.

Subtheme **3.1 Cultural Assertion in Global Contexts** supports **Diaspora Identity, Transnationalism, and Recognition theory**. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004, p. 1009) describe how migrants integrate identities from multiple cultural contexts. Participants used national symbols abroad to assert distinctiveness, aligning with Werbner's (2002, pp. 119-124) view of diasporas as sites of cultural reinvention. Laruelle (2018, p. 31)

sees symbols as emotional bridges between home and hostland. These practices reflect **Cultural Flows** (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 33-53) and extend Anderson's imagined community into global space. Even within Kyrgyzstan, many participants express a strong wish to be seen and acknowledged by the broader world. Taylor (1994, p. 25) similarly argues that *recognition is a basic human need*, and its absence, or *misrecognition*, can lead to a diminished sense of identity.

Subtheme **3.2 Media and Influencers as Cultural Catalysts** draws from **Social Learning Theory** and **Self-expression concept**, particularly Rocamora's (2017, pp. 509-511) notion of social media as a stage for performance. Participants highlighted influencers as key in reviving ethnic motifs. This supports Askegaard and Kjeldgaard's (2007, p. 140) idea that digital media are tools for culturally specific meaning-making. Online performances aligned with **Subcultural Identity** (Thornton, 1996, p. 26) and **Presentation of Self** (Goffman, 1959, p.17). The *Cultural Ambassadors* cluster exemplifies how media amplifies symbolic consumption, as emphasized in **Consumer Culture Theory** and **Mediatized Identity** frameworks.

Subtheme **4.1 Cultural Self-Expression and Aesthetic Values** corresponds with **Extended Self** and **Self-Styling** theories (Belk, 1988, p. 129, p. 160). *Aesthetic-Driven Consumers* used national motifs for visual appeal, reflecting **Voluntary National Affiliation** (Foster, 1999, p. 270) and **Sign Value Consumption** (Baudrillard, 2016, p. 25). Brands emphasized empowerment, aligning with Elliott and Wattanasuwan's (1998, p. 134) idea that consumption helps link personal and cultural identity. These behaviors support **Consumer Culture Theory** by illustrating fashion as a medium for identity negotiation.

Subtheme **5.1 Cultural Production and Commercial Tensions** engages with **Postcolonial Theory** and **Ethical Consumption**. Ashcroft et al. (2003, p. 3) note that consumption can resist cultural domination. *Ethical and Ideological Consumers* favored artisanal over mass-produced goods, reflecting Appadurai's view of global-local tensions. Branding based on **Cultural Authenticity** (Urde et al., 2007, p. 11; Ko & Lee, 2011, pp. 90-91) was common, with brands emphasizing sustainability. However, some lamented the commodification of tradition.

Finally, subtheme **5.2 Accessibility and Everyday Integration** aligns with **Banal Nationalism** and **Everyday Ethnicity**. Foster (1999, p. 270) argued that daily consumption routines can carry national significance. Low-cost, casual items (e.g.,

patterned caps, accessories) made ethnic expression more accessible. This supports Maxwell's idea of ***Nationalism from Below***. The *Traditional Patriots'* routine use of national motifs also supports Spielmann et al. (2020, p. 396) concept of ***Protective Patriotism***, while reinforcing ***Consumer Culture Theory*** and the idea that identity through consumption is dynamic and situational (Holt, 2002, p. 73).

Overall, the research themes and subthemes largely corroborate the theoretical propositions of consumer culture theory, symbolic consumption, postcolonial identity, performativity, emotional geography, and cultural hybridity. Each theme, whether about identity, generational change, globalization, self-expression, or market dynamics, finds support in the literature. For instance, the interplay of aesthetics and ideology in our *Aesthetic-Driven* and *Ethical* consumers mirror **Need for Uniqueness theory** (Tian et al., 2001, p. 50-52) and Ashcroft et al. (2003, p. 3) **Theory of Postcolonial Resistance**, while the varied motivations across clusters affirm Holt's (2002, p.73) view of identity as multifaceted and voluntary. In sum, Kyrgyz consumers' engagement with national-symbolic products functions as an ongoing negotiation of heritage, modernity, and self, just as the theoretical framework predicts.

6.3. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes significantly to the marketing and consumer research literature by offering novel insights into symbolic consumption, identity construction, and cultural performance in the context of a newly independent, post-Soviet nation. By examining how national-symbolic products are consumed in Kyrgyzstan, the research reveals complex emotional, aesthetic, and ideological dimensions of consumption that differ from traditional understandings of patriotic or ethnocentric consumer behavior. The following theoretical implications are especially notable:

Mobile memory objects: This study conceptualizes national-symbolic products, particularly fashion items, as "mobile memory objects," emotionally charged and portable carriers of collective identity. While prior research (e.g., Wiltgren, 2014, p. 308; Geisler, 2005, p. 3-8) discusses national symbols as tangible expressions of memory, this study diverges by showing that such symbols are constantly reinterpreted through everyday use and fashion, not preserved as static heritage. In contrast with most studies that focus on monuments, rituals, or mass events, this research illustrates how individual consumers use material culture, such as a jacket embroidered with traditional motifs, as

an active, dynamic means of emotional anchoring in daily life. This reframes symbolic consumption in transitional societies as an intimate and ongoing negotiation with the past.

Performative identity consumption: Building on Butler's (1990, p. 25) theory of performativity, this study finds that the act of wearing national-symbolic products functions as a social performance of identity. While Rocamora (2017, pp. 509-511) and Bhabha (2015, p. 15) argue that identity is visually and discursively constructed, this study offers a unique perspective by showing how these performances take shape in both physical and digital spaces, including Instagram and diaspora communities. Unlike earlier studies that frame identity expression as politically reactive or ideologically motivated, this research illustrates that Kyrgyz consumers often wear national motifs for emotional, aesthetic, or self-affirming reasons. It thereby expands the literature by identifying everyday fashion as a subtle, non-confrontational arena of identity expression in post-independence societies.

Postcolonial reappropriation and hybrid aesthetics: Extending the work of Ashcroft et al. (2003, p. 3) on cultural resistance and Craig and Douglas (2006, p. 338) on hybrid cultural identity, this research documents the emergence of a distinct "modern-ethno" aesthetic in Kyrgyz fashion. Consumers and designers are shown to blend traditional symbols, such as *tündük* motifs or felt embroidery, with global trends like denim jackets and streetwear cuts. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the erosion of tradition under globalization, this study shows the opposite: tradition is actively reimagined and revitalized. The hybrid aesthetic is not only a site of cultural resistance but also of playful innovation and global participation, offering a more optimistic account of heritage negotiation in postcolonial, post-independence contexts.

Consumer nationalism in everyday practice: Where earlier literature frequently links patriotic consumption to protectionist motives or anti-global sentiment (Balabanis et al., 2001, pp. 158-160), this study highlights a broader range of drivers behind national-symbolic consumption. Castelló and Mihelj's (2017, p. 568) distinction between political consumer nationalism and symbolic consumer nationalism proves especially relevant. This research supports and extends their view by demonstrating that Kyrgyz consumers express national pride through subtle, symbolic acts embedded in routine choices, such as selecting locally designed fashion or culturally meaningful accessories. While a minority of consumers are motivated by economic nationalism or

support for local industries, the more dominant motivations include emotional attachment, aesthetic value, and cultural recognition. These findings contribute to a more layered understanding of how national belonging is lived and felt through consumption in transitional societies.

Diaspora's role in cultural storytelling: Building on Hall's (1990, p. 235) view of diasporic identity as fluid and evolving, this study highlights how Kyrgyz diaspora communities not only preserve tradition but innovate national-symbolic expression. While earlier studies examined diasporic identity through material culture (Savaş, 2014, p. 185) or moral and ritual networks (Werbner, 2002, pp. 119-124), this research focuses on cultural storytelling through everyday fashion. Items like kalpak hats and chyptama jackets serve as narrative tools to express belonging, memory, and pride. Shared on digital platforms, these stories merge traditional symbols with modern aesthetics. Rather than reflecting nostalgia alone, diasporic fashion here shapes symbolic trends both abroad and at home, positioning diaspora members as creative agents and cultural ambassadors of national identity.

Psychographic segmentation of national-symbolic consumers: A further contribution lies in the development of six psychographic profiles, including Cultural Ambassadors, Ethical Consumers, and Self-Discovery Seekers. While previous research often portrays patriotic consumers as a homogenous group, this study reveals the diversity of identity-related motivations within a single cultural context. Drawing on Foster's (1999, p. 279) notion of identity as voluntary affiliation, the segmentation demonstrates that national identity is not uniformly performed but negotiated across a spectrum, from ancestral loyalty to personal development. This consumer-centered framework offers a new lens for interpreting symbolic consumption as an interplay of emotional, aesthetic, ethical, and ideological dimensions.

Integration of multi-theoretical perspectives: Finally, this study advances a multidimensional approach to symbolic consumption by synthesizing concepts from consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869), performative identity (Butler, 1990, p. 25), emotional geography (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524), and postcolonial studies (Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 3). Whereas prior research tends to apply these frameworks in isolation, this study combines them to show how consumers navigate memory, identity, aesthetics, and belonging through both material and digital culture. This integrative perspective deepens the theoretical understanding of how

national identity is not passively inherited but actively constructed and redefined in newly independent societies.

This study opens important avenues for future research in marketing, cultural studies, and identity theory. Scholars may build on this framework to explore symbolic consumption in other newly independent, post-colonial, or re-identifying societies. In particular, the role of social media, diaspora influences, and hybrid aesthetics offers rich ground for further study.

6.4. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for fashion designers, brand managers, and cultural entrepreneurs working in post-Soviet or identity-sensitive markets. These implications echo findings in symbolic consumption literature that link aesthetic expression with identity work (Belk, 1988, p. 129), particularly in transitional cultural contexts. working in post-independent or identity-sensitive markets. First, the strong emotional and cultural resonance of national symbols suggests that brands should emphasize authenticity and storytelling. As several participants noted, garments with traditional Kyrgyz motifs felt meaningful when they were tied to family heritage or cultural memory. Fashion businesses can enhance this effect by communicating the history and symbolism of their designs, positioning their products as embodiments of cultural continuity (Wiltgren, 2014, p. 321).

Second, the popularity of modernized traditional garments, lighter jackets, contemporary cuts, and accessories with stylized motifs, suggests that successful national-symbolic fashion must balance heritage with usability. Brands should continue experimenting with materials and forms that retain symbolic meaning but meet the lifestyle demands of urban, mobile consumers. This aligns with global trends toward adaptive cultural fashion (Vézina, 2019, p. 8).

Third, brand strategies should consider the psychographic diversity identified in this study. For instance, aesthetic-driven consumers may respond best to high-design, minimalist adaptations of traditional motifs, while traditional patriots may prefer items that preserve recognizable heritage elements. Ethical and ideological consumers, meanwhile, may prioritize locally sourced, handmade goods over mass-produced items. Segmenting audiences by symbolic motivation can help tailor communication and

product strategies more effectively (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 338; Foster, 1999, p. 279).

Finally, social media remains a critical tool for brand visibility and narrative framing. As the Instagram analysis showed, visual storytelling plays a key role in shaping consumer perception. Collaborating with cultural influencers and diaspora creators who align with brand values can amplify messaging and strengthen emotional resonance (Rocamora, 2017, pp. 510-511; Cabello, 2018, p. 35).

6.5. Policy Implications

This study highlights the broader cultural and economic significance of national-symbolic products, suggesting a role for policy in preserving and promoting these expressions (Gurova, 2021, p. 182; UNESCO, 2003; Artman, 2015, p. 1). First, the government and cultural institutions should recognize fashion as a legitimate medium for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Supporting artisans, craftspeople, and designers who work with traditional patterns, through grants, training, or certification, can enhance both cultural preservation and economic development (Vézina, 2019, p. 8; Gurova, 2021, p. 180).

Second, legal protections for traditional motifs and designs should be strengthened. As participants noted, foreign appropriation or commercialization of Kyrgyz symbols without attribution risks cultural dilution. National and regional intellectual property frameworks could be adapted to protect cultural elements, particularly those that carry sacred or communal meaning (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2; Bendix et al., 2013, p. 9).

Third, the importance of national dress among diaspora participants suggests that cultural diplomacy initiatives could benefit from including fashion. Programs that promote Kyrgyz clothing at international cultural fairs or diaspora events can reinforce national identity and strengthen ties with expatriate communities. Supporting digital platforms that archive and educate about national symbols may also extend the reach and relevance of cultural policy (Kalinina, 2017, p. 13).

Finally, symbolic consumption offers opportunities for tourism branding and international trade. Featuring Kyrgyz patterns in public events, uniforms, or national marketing campaigns can reinforce a coherent national image and create new avenues for soft power. Policymakers should consider symbolic fashion a tool not only for

heritage protection but also for economic and diplomatic engagement (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 338; Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 3).

6.6. Methodological and Analytical Limitations

As a qualitative study, this research prioritizes depth over breadth, offering nuanced, context-specific insights into symbolic consumption in Kyrgyzstan. However, the reliance on self-reported experiences and perceptions may introduce biases, such as social desirability and retrospective recall (Quinio & Lam, 2021, p. 205), as well as limitations stemming from participants' self-awareness. This issue is particularly significant when addressing psychological impacts, motivations, and emotional attachments, as participants may lack the requisite understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying their experiences (Maksatbekova & Argan, 2025, p. 6477). However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 22 participants, though appropriate for qualitative analysis, limits generalizability. The study primarily involved urban, educated young adults, with half residing abroad. As such, the perspectives of older, rural, or less digitally connected Kyrgyz populations may be underrepresented.

Second, the use of purposive and snowball sampling may have introduced self-selection bias. Participants with strong cultural engagement were more likely to volunteer, potentially skewing the findings toward highly motivated consumers.

Third, while Instagram content provided valuable visual and narrative data, the selection process, favoring posts with higher level of interaction, may have excluded niche brands or individuals whose content did not meet that threshold.

Fourth, thematic coding and interpretation are inherently subjective, though this study employed reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and member-checking to enhance credibility. Still, researcher positionality may have influenced theme identification.

Finally, the study focuses on fashion and accessories, but national-symbolic consumption spans other domains such as food, rituals, and interior design. The insights offered here, while detailed, should be viewed as one lens into a broader cultural phenomenon.

6.7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to different stakeholders:

For Fashion Brands:

- Continue to build authentic brand stories around Kyrgyz symbols and heritage. Use local motifs creatively but respectfully, and share the cultural meanings with customers.
- Tailor offerings to different consumer typology: minimal, comfortable, functional pieces for aesthetic consumers; prioritize quality and sustainability and produce ethically sourced products for ideological buyers, and highly authentic traditional patterns for heritage-focused audiences.
- Leverage social media and diaspora influencers to expand reach while maintaining a clear cultural message.
- Avoid over-commercialization; emphasize craftsmanship to preserve cultural significance.
- Protect intellectual integrity: self-police against trivializing or misusing sacred symbols; even pledge not to copy colleagues' designs without permission, to maintain consumer trust.

For Cultural and Economic Policymakers

- Recognize symbolic fashion as a form of intangible heritage and offer grants, legal protections, and promotional support.
- Develop certification schemes to ensure authenticity and protect local artisanship.
- Integrate national fashion into cultural diplomacy and diaspora outreach programs.
- Integrate traditional crafts education (weaving, felt-making, embroidery) into vocational training and public school curricula to ensure skill transmission.
- Promote “Made in Kyrgyzstan” branding both domestically and abroad, positioning national-symbolic products as part of national identity.
- Foster industry standards that balance commercialization with authenticity (e.g. certification for “authentic Kyrgyz handicraft”).
- Encourage educational campaigns and museum initiatives to foster deeper understanding of symbolic motifs.

For Future Researchers:

- Extend research to rural, older, or underrepresented communities, who may view ethnic fashion differently.
- Conduct quantitative studies to measure the prevalence and economic impact of national-symbolic consumption, perhaps via surveys or sales data.
- Conduct cross-national comparative studies in other post-Soviet or postcolonial societies.
- Investigate the role of religion: how do Islamic identity and Kyrgyz nationalism intersect in the realm of symbolic consumption?
- Explore symbolic consumption beyond fashion, for example, in food, architecture, or crafts.
- Examine producer-side motivations and branding narratives to complement consumer-focused perspectives.

Each recommendation draws directly on the study's findings, for example, the clear link between products and identity suggests marketing and policy actions that emphasize authenticity and community pride, while acknowledging the study's qualitative context. These steps can help ensure that the value expressed by Kyrgyz consumers in national-symbolic products is translated into sustainable cultural and economic benefits.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken an in-depth exploration of the rise in national-symbolic product consumption in Kyrgyzstan, a context marked by postcolonial transformation, cultural revival, and increasing global interconnectedness. Beginning with the recognition that identity in post-Soviet states is fluid and negotiated, this thesis focused on how Kyrgyz consumers, particularly youth and diaspora, actively construct, perform, and reinterpret national identity through the consumption of symbolic fashion products.

Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in semi-structured interviews and Instagram content analysis, the research illuminated the affective, aesthetic, ideological, and cultural dimensions of symbolic consumption. Participants described national motifs not simply as decorative but as meaningful markers of memory, belonging, pride, and resistance. The results affirmed that symbolic consumption is deeply emotional, drawing from nostalgia, patriotism, and a desire to maintain cultural distinctiveness in the face of globalization.

The development of six psychographic consumer types offered new theoretical and practical insight. These profiles, ranging from emotionally rooted traditionalists to self-discovery seekers, highlight that symbolic consumption is not driven by a singular logic, but rather shaped by overlapping motivations and shifting contexts. The emergence of a “modern-ethno” aesthetic, wherein Kyrgyz heritage is reimagined through global fashion sensibilities, signals that national identity is not static but evolving, crafted through both tradition and innovation.

This thesis contributes to scholarship by extending theories of symbolic consumption, national identity, and postcolonial cultural expression. It provides empirical support for claims that fashion is not only an economic or aesthetic practice but also a political and psychological one. It confirms that in transitional societies, material culture becomes a site of identity negotiation, where meanings are constantly being produced, resisted, and reshaped by consumers and producers alike.

Beyond academic contributions, this research sheds light on the power of fashion to act as a bridge between generations, geographies, and values. In Kyrgyzstan, the revitalization of traditional symbols in clothing reflects more than a market trend, it is a collective effort to reclaim cultural narrative, assert autonomy, and connect to a broader national story. This process is visible both in urban centers and online spaces, where visual self-expression becomes a form of cultural dialogue.

As national-symbolic products become more visible on global platforms, they open opportunities and raise critical questions. The study has identified both the potential and the risks: while symbolic fashion can foster pride and community, it can also be commodified, stripped of meaning, or co-opted by foreign entities. This duality underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity, legal protection, and authenticity in both policy and practice.

Ultimately, the thesis affirms that in the contemporary Kyrgyz context, national-symbolic fashion is not merely clothing, it is a living expression of history, emotion, and future aspiration. The study has successfully met its primary research aim: to explore and understand how consumers in Kyrgyzstan, particularly youth and diaspora, engage with national-symbolic products in ways that reflect, reshape, and perform cultural identity. Through the identification of motivational patterns, emotional meanings, and aesthetic strategies, the research addressed its guiding questions regarding the symbolic, emotional, and ideological dimensions of consumption.

The conclusion of this research is that national-symbolic consumption in newly independent post-Soviet country Kyrgyzstan is a dynamic process of identity-making, shaped by emotion, cultural memory, and global-local negotiation. In doing so, the study confirmed that national-symbolic products are not only expressions of heritage, but also tools of self-expression, resistance, and cultural negotiation in everyday life. These findings validate and expand existing theoretical perspectives while offering grounded, context-specific insights into the evolving role of national symbols in market-based identity practices. By achieving its objectives, the research contributes meaningfully to the understanding of identity formation in post-Soviet societies and provides a foundation for future studies at the intersection of culture, consumption, and national belonging.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND INTERVIEW DETAILS

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Location	Interview Mode	Interview Date	Duration (min)
1	Almaz	30	Male	Kyrgyzstan	Zoom	19.04.2024	82
2	Janik	21	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	20.04.2024	33
3	Naizabek	25	Male	Georgia	WhatsApp	23.04.2024	25
4	Nuria	23	Female	Türkiye	Face-to-face	26.04.2024	45
5	Erkeayim	25	Female	Türkiye	Face-to-face	28.04.2024	70
6	Aruuke	21	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	30.04.2024	69
7	Jibek	25	Female	USA	WhatsApp	30.04.2024	58
8	Nurayim	28	Female	Türkiye	WhatsApp	02.05.2024	47
9	Tolgonai	22	Female	Türkiye	WhatsApp	02.05.2024	59
10	Meerim	32	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	11.05.2024	50
11	Ayzirek	21	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	11.05.2024	45
12	Elvis	32	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	11.05.2024	44
13	Gulzat	28	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	13.05.2024	50
14	Kyrgyz	24	Male	Germany	WhatsApp	12.11.2024	28
15	Marina	25	Female	Italy	WhatsApp	13.11.2024	37
16	Ian	23	Male	Korea	WhatsApp	13.11.2024	23
17	Dosbol	24	Male	Germany	WhatsApp	16.11.2024	37
18	Aidin	24	Male	USA	WhatsApp	16.11.2024	37
19	Karina	23	Female	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	19.11.2024	34
20	Nursultan	21	Male	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	26.11.2024	31
21	Erik	30	Male	Kyrgyzstan	Voice Recording Submission	14.12.2024	30
22	Jakyp	33	Male	Kyrgyzstan	WhatsApp	16.12.2024	32

APPENDIX 2: CODES AND EXPLANATIONS

No.	Codes	Explanations (Condensed Semantic Units)	Frequency	Included in Categorized Themes?
1	National Identity and Belonging	Strong emotional connection to national identity and sense of belonging.	9	Yes
2	Patriotism, Cultural Pride	Expressing pride and love for one's country through cultural symbols.	11	Yes
3	Independence Symbolism	National symbols representing freedom and independence.	6	Yes
4	Cultural Revival / Reclaiming Roots	Reconnection with pre-Soviet or ancestral cultural identity.	7	Yes
5	Linguistic Nationalism	Use of language as an expression of cultural/national pride.	7	Yes
6	Cultural Education Through Clothing	Clothing as a means to educate or inspire cultural awareness.	4	Yes
7	Emotional Attachment	Deep emotional bond with cultural heritage and symbols.	6	Yes
8	Homeland Connection	Emotional affinity to homeland; symbols acting as bridges to origin.	5	Yes (combined with Homeland Affinity)
9	Childhood Nostalgia	Cultural elements that recall early life experiences.	3	Yes
10	Cultural Identity as Confidence Booster	Wearing cultural attire increases self-esteem and pride.	3	Yes
11	Appreciation of National Symbolism	Positive regard for symbolic representations of culture.	11	Yes (combined with Symbolic Importance)
12	Cultural Unity (Symbols Unite Us)	Belief that symbols strengthen group cohesion.	8	Yes
13	Youth Empowerment / Generation of Freedom	Young people using cultural fashion to express freedom from past constraints.	4	Yes
14	Rebellious Spirit	Youth resisting societal norms via national-cultural attire.	3	Yes (combined with Resistance to External Cultural Influence)
15	Youth Subculture / Cultural Renaissance	Cultural revival and identity building among youth.	4	Yes
16	Modern-Ethno Adaptations	Blending traditional styles with contemporary fashion.	18	Yes
17	Social Attention and Positive Affirmation	Wearing symbolic attire to gain approval or attention.	8	Yes (combined from multiple related codes)
18	Societal Judgments and Norms	Awareness of how culture-based fashion is judged socially.	4	Yes (merged with Social Judgement codes)
19	Social Circle Influence	Influence of peers or family on symbolic clothing choices.	8	Yes
20	Mainstream Normalization	National-symbolic clothing becoming part of everyday culture.	8	Yes
21	Cultural Ambassadorship	Representing Kyrgyz culture internationally through attire.	13	Yes

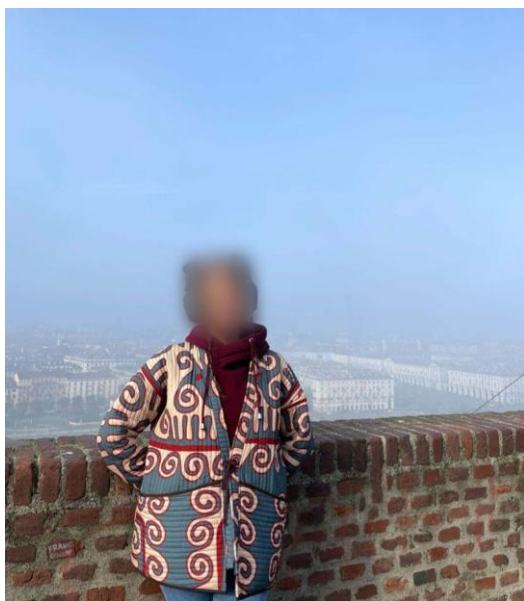
	Abroad			
22	Concerns About Loss of Cultural Roots	Anxiety about forgetting or abandoning traditions.	8	Yes (combined from Cultural Disconnect)
23	Aspirations for Cultural Uniqueness in Global Arena	Desire for national culture to be distinct and respected globally.	11	Yes
24	Desire for Global Recognition and Acceptance	Seeking international validation for one's cultural identity.	6	Yes
25	Balancing Modernity and Authenticity	Managing the tension between innovation and tradition.	10	Yes
26	Brand Visibility on Social Media	Prominence of cultural fashion brands on platforms like Instagram.	9	Yes
27	Influence of Public Figures	Celebrities or influencers shaping cultural fashion trends.	8	Yes
28	Global Audiences, Local Symbols	Using local motifs in globally visible contexts.	6	Yes
29	Purposeful Distinctiveness / Desire for Uniqueness	Intentional styling to stand out culturally.	13	Yes
30	Aesthetic Appreciation	Admiration of the beauty and visual appeal of national designs.	12	Yes
31	Self-Discovery and Identity Exploration	Using fashion as a means of personal and cultural identity work.	5	Yes
32	Cultural Individuality in Expression	Unique incorporation of culture into personal style.	6	Yes (merged with Individuality)
33	Support for Local Economy	Purchasing local products as a patriotic/economic act.	8	Yes
34	Craftsmanship, Quality, and Pride in Local Production	Valuing skill and tradition in locally made items.	9	Yes
35	Concerns About Commercialization of Culture	Fear that cultural meaning is lost when commodified.	6	Yes
36	Diverse Accessibility and Price Range	Concerns or praise regarding the affordability and availability of symbolic products.	6	Yes
37	Practicality of Modernized Styles	Preference for functional, wearable traditional garments in urban settings.	6	Yes
38	Concerns About Trend Longevity	Worries that current interest in national fashion may fade.	3	Yes
39	Gendered Expression in Traditional Wear	How cultural fashion is interpreted differently by men and women.	3	No (Low prevalence and not thematically central)
40	Religious-Cultural Overlap	Overlap and tension between national symbols and Islamic expression.	2	No (Insufficient frequency for distinct theme)
41	Lack of Awareness about Cultural Symbols	Participants not recognizing or misinterpreting cultural motifs.	2	No (Too minor to build theme)
42	Challenges in Diaspora Contexts	Difficulties maintaining cultural expression abroad.	2	No (Addressed indirectly under

				Cultural Ambassadorship)
43	Resistance to Fashion Trends	Individuals deliberately avoiding fashionable expressions, even if cultural.	1	No (Overlap with Rebellious Spirit)
44	Frustration with Stereotypes	Pushback against reductive or romanticized depictions of Kyrgyz identity.	1	No (Important nuance but not thematic)
45	Motivation Gaps Among Generations	Perceived lack of interest in cultural dress from older or younger generations.	1	No (Single-instance insight)
46	Identity Reflection in Foreign Environments	Impact of being in a foreign context on cultural admiration or identity shift.	3	No (Overlap with Emotional Attachment)
47	Cultural Exchange in Global World	Interplay between cultures in modern global interactions.	2	No
48	Local Industry Development	Perceived growth or importance of local fashion or textile industry.	5	No (Overlap with Diverse Accessibility and Price Range)
49	Prominent Brand Mention	Reference to leading Kyrgyz brands influencing the fashion scene.	5	No (Supportive but not analytically rich enough for theming)
50	Cultural Autonomy with Openness	Valuing one's culture while staying receptive to innovation.	1	No (Single-instance insight)
51	Fear of Loss of Authenticity	Worry that modern adaptations compromise original cultural value.	1	No (Overlap with Concerns About Commercialization of Culture)
52	Cultural Pride Triggered by External Attention	Feeling pride when cultural identity is appreciated externally.	1	No (Single-instance insight)
53	Government-Driven Nationalism	Institutional policies promoting symbolic nationalism (e.g., uniforms, school practices).	2	No (Not a lived experience in sample)
54	Critical Awareness of Colonial Impact	Awareness that postcolonial experiences shape identity or cultural detachment.	6	No (Used in interpretation, not a participant-led theme)
55	Clothing as a Catalyst for Cultural Engagement	Cultural fashion motivates deeper heritage engagement (e.g., language, research).	4	No (overlaps with Cultural Education)
56	Influence of Mass Market on Local Trends	Concern or observation that fast fashion brands alter local preferences.	4	No (Important but more of a market-level issue)
57	Intergenerational Knowledge Gap	Cultural understanding gap between older and younger generations.	2	No (Single-instance insight)
58	Sentimental Value of Handmade Items	Emotional meaning tied to handcrafted items.	3	No (overlap with Emotional Attachment)
59	Underrepresentation	Lack of Kyrgyz culture's global visibility or presence.	1	No (Single-instance insight)
60	Shared Cultural Experience	National fashion facilitating communal bonding.	1	No (Overlap with Cultural Unity)
61	Sustainability as a	Preference for culturally	2	No (Overlap with

	Marker of Quality	sustainable and durable fashion.		Craftsmanship, Quality...)
62	Acceptance of Impermanence	Cultural identity as fluid and adaptable.	1	No (Important, but single expression, not discussed further)
63	Travel-loving Person	Association of cultural attire with travel, freedom, or worldliness.	1	No (Anecdotal)
64	Socially Influenced Person	Consumer decisions heavily shaped by peers and societal standards.	1	No (Already covered in Social Circle Influence)
65	Person with Spiritual Aspirations	Cultural attire linked with or influenced by spiritual beliefs.	1	No (Single expression)
66	Passionated Person	Individual showing deep enthusiasm toward cultural revival or fashion.	1	No (Single expression)
67	Attention Seeking Person	Wearing national-symbolic attire to attract attention rather than cultural expression.	1	No (Perceived motivation, not explored in depth)
68	Routine Attire - Daily Use	National-symbolic fashion becoming integrated into daily clothing habits.	2	No (Already included under Mainstream Normalization)
69	Sense of Unsuitability	Feeling that some traditional items don't suit modern life or personal identity.	1	No (merged with Practicality codes)
70	Cultural Parallels	Drawing comparisons between Kyrgyz and other cultural expressions.	5	No (Useful as comparative reflection, not central to findings)
71	National Style Home Decor	Use of traditional motifs not only in fashion but also in interior design.	2	No (Outside scope of fashion-focused analysis)

APPENDIX 3: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS















APPENDIX 4: ETİK KURULU KARAR BELGESİ

Evrak Kayıt Tarihi: 13.06.2024

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ANADOLU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERÎ BİLİMLER BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİĞİ KURULU
KARAR BELGESİ

ÇALIŞMANIN TÜRÜ:	Doktora Tez Çalışması
KONU:	Sosyal Bilimler
BAŞLIK:	Yeni Uluslarda Ulusal Semboller Taşıyan Ürünlerin Tüketimindeki Artışının Keşfi: Kırgızistan Örneği Exploring the Rise in Consumption of National-Symbolic Products in New Nations: Case of Kyrgyzstan
PROJE/TEZ YÜRÜTÜCÜSÜ:	Prof. Dr. Sevgi AYŞE ÖZTÜRK
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