



how thin is too thin?

New survey reveals overwhelming global support for "Too Thin" fashion models debate

Four out of five global consumers say female fashion models are "too thin"

In world's fashion centres – New York, London, Paris and Madrid – nearly 90% of consumers say models are "too thin"

MILANO, 30 JANUARY 2007 - With the micro-mini being hailed as one of summer 2007's strongest trends, dieting to be 'thin enough' to wear new season mini skirts will be top of mind for fashion-conscious women around the globe

But as leading figures in the world's multi billion dollar fashion industry prepare for upcoming Fashion Weeks in London and Milan, the focus is not on hemlines nor the "next big thing" in fashion. Instead, the headlines surrounding the Fashion Weeks are much more controversial - how thin is too thin? And will the international fashion industry bow to widespread campaigns and public lobbying to stop promoting unhealthy, ultra-thin images of women?

"Globally, consumers have already voted on this contentious issue making headlines across Europe and the US. An overwhelming 81 percent of online consumers agree that female fashion models and celebrities are 'too thin'," said Patrick Dodd, President, ACNielsen Europe, a unit of The Nielsen Company.

A recent online survey conducted by The Nielsen Company asked over 25,000 respondents in 45 countries if they thought female fashion models and many celebrities were 'too thin'. Survey results found a strong link between the concept of beauty and thinness in relation to a country's quality of life.

Norway, (94%) New Zealand and Switzerland (92%), and Australia (90%) topped global rankings for the 'too thin' debate.

Coincidentally, the same countries also consistently top global rankings for having the best quality of life. "These countries believe in the healthy concept of beauty and culturally also reject super skinny model type that follow fashion trends," said Dodd.

"New Zealand and Australia boast top international models like Elle Macpherson and Rachel Hunter who reached the top of their game without starving themselves to unhealthy proportions," he observed.

Other "anti-skinny" countries include the UK, Brazil and Canada (89%) and Austria and Spain (88%).

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President, ACNielsen Europe

In the USA – the most recent battleground for this debate during New York Fashion Week, 87 percent of respondents said female fashion models are "too thin." In France, where the Paris haute couture shows just took place, 88% of consumers say female fashion models are 'too thin'.

Attitudes towards the 'too thin' debate reflects interesting gender and age group opinions. In the UK, 93% of female respondents agreed that female fashion models are too thin with the most vehement anti-too thin segment coming from the 45-49 year old females where 97% agreed with the anti too-thin campaign. This was followed by 93% of 35-39 year old females – ironically, the two age group segments with the highest disposable income to spend on designer fashion brands.

The 'too thin' model debate has intensified since the death of two Latin American models last year. Since then, medical professions, governments and public opinion groups have

joined forces to lobby the fashion and modeling industry against presenting unhealthy, underweight images of models that promote eating disorders. Perhaps it has taken the well-publicized deaths of top fashion models to bring this issue to the fore, but families of those models are leading an international campaign to ensure these girls did not die in vain.

"Not surprisingly, Latin American consumers are among the world's most against the 'too thin' model debate, with 91 percent of Argentinians and 89 percent of Brazilians supporting the notion that fashion models are too thin. "The issue is becoming more heated and controversial and is set to be a primary news focus of every international Fashion Week until a global consensus is reached," said Dodd.

"The 'Health' trend is definitely the most important and largest lifestyle trend of this millennium so far. Never before have consumers been so aware and educated about leading a healthy life and much of this focuses on our eating habits. At the same time, consumers are enforcing new levels of social responsibility that affect all levels of society. Public outcry at the fashion industry backlash for promoting unhealthy body images is part of this social revolution driving other issues such as the environment and social and corporate responsibility," noted Dodd.

In Italy, the venue of the most famous of all Fashion Weeks - and where the image of 'la bella donna' is as much a part of the culture as its food and wine - 83 percent (six points below the global average) believe that fashion models are too thin. Interestingly, Italy's government and fashion industry officials joined forces late last year in a campaign against anorexic models and have banned models with a BMI of less than 18.5 from catwalk shows.

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Consumers in Asia and emerging Eastern European markets are least likely to say that female fashion models are too thin. "Geographically, world fashion centres of Milan, London and New York are far from Asia and it's simply not a hot social media issue in Asia." Compared to other regions, Asia still lags behind when it comes to making international fashion headlines in terms of high profile international designers and top models..

Vietnamese consumers (59%) are least likely to think that models are too thin, followed by 64 percent of Indians and 63 percent of Japanese. In Eastern Europe, 65 percent of Lithuanians and 72 percent of Russians top the 'not too thin' rankings.

Consumers' obsession with popular celebrity culture has also reached new heights in recent years, sparking a trend that has seen the launch of more celebrity-based magazines on newsstands and according to Nielsen's market data and insights, a trend that has provided record growth and profits for health and personal care products as well as beauty products. ●

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