

## User-Centered Gym Bag Design: Hygiene, Identity, and Indigenous Textiles as Cultural Elements

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural and social meanings embedded in gym bag practices among fitness enthusiasts in Northern Luzon, Philippines, using Material Culture Theory, Practice Theory, and user-centered design. It investigates how gym-goers construct meanings around hygiene, organization, and identity through everyday bag use, and how indigenous textiles influence perceptions of cultural value and sustainability. Although situated in the Philippine context, the research addresses a broader gap in the literature by exploring how traditional handwoven textiles are integrated into contemporary lifestyle objects within emerging fitness cultures—an intersection largely overlooked in Asian social science scholarship. The study developed a co-designed gym bag prototype incorporating Northern Luzon weaves such as Inabel and Binakul, highlighting how design thinking can merge functional needs with culturally grounded material expression. Findings reveal that the gym bag operates as a cultural artifact that mediates social expectations, supports bodily discipline, and expresses cultural identity through heritage-based aesthetics. The results resonate with wider South and Southeast Asian patterns in indigenous textile revitalization, hygienic social norms, and sustainable consumption. Overall, the study demonstrates how everyday objects contribute to cultural continuity, identity-making, and socio-material transformation in contemporary Asian contexts.

**Keywords:** Material culture; Practice theory; Indigenous textiles; Identity performance; Design thinking

### INTRODUCTION

Although the present study focuses on gym-goers in Northern Luzon, the cultural patterns that emerged resonate strongly with broader South and Southeast Asian contexts. Similar to Sri Lankan Dumbura weaving, Indian ikat traditions, and Bangladeshi jamdani practices, the use of indigenous textiles such as Inabel, Binakul, and Cordilleran weaves reflects shared regional movements toward cultural preservation, artisanal revival, and ethically grounded consumption. Hygienic routines, material care, and identity performances observed in the Philippine gym culture also mirror social expectations present in many Asian societies, where bodily discipline, respect for shared spaces, and the symbolic use of everyday objects are central to social life. By situating material practices within a wider Asian cultural landscape, this study contributes to comparative regional social science and offers insights relevant to scholars examining cultural continuity, sustainable consumption, and identity-making in South Asia.

Objects used in daily life—such as bags, clothing, and accessories—function as more than utilitarian items; they are material expressions of social identity, cultural affiliation, and embodied practice. In contemporary Filipino urban and semi-urban settings, the rapid rise of fitness culture has produced new norms surrounding bodily care,

organization, and public hygiene. Gym bags, although often overlooked, play a crucial role in structuring these practices by organizing personal belongings, managing sweat-contaminated garments, and supporting routines associated with fitness participation.

Parallel to this cultural shift, the Philippines has experienced a renewed appreciation for its indigenous textiles, especially those originating from Northern Luzon. Textiles such as Inabel, Binakul, Ifugao ikat, Kalinga weaving, and Gaddang beadwork represent centuries-old traditions, spiritual meanings, and community identities. Increasingly, these woven materials are being integrated into modern lifestyle products, reflecting a broader turn toward sustainability, heritage preservation, and economic support for weaving communities.

This study connects these two domains—fitness culture and indigenous textile culture—by investigating how a user-centered gym bag, co-designed with gym-goers and incorporating Northern Luzon handwoven textiles, reflects evolving cultural values related to hygiene, identity, sustainability, and social transformation. Through this intersection, the research highlights how everyday objects mediate meaning and contribute to wider conversations about material culture and cultural continuity in contemporary society.

Despite the growing body of literature on indigenous textile revitalization and the expanding scholarship on fitness lifestyles in Asia, limited research has examined how everyday lifestyle objects integrate traditional material culture with contemporary social practices. While previous studies have explored cultural identity in textile production and consumption, and others have examined bodily discipline and hygiene norms in gym environments, the intersection of these domains remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by investigating how a user-centered gym bag prototype—incorporating Northern Luzon handwoven textiles and co-designed with gym-goers—embodies emerging cultural values and material practices. Specifically, the research seeks to understand: (1) how gym-goers construct meanings around hygiene, organization, and identity through their everyday bag practices; (2) how indigenous textiles shape perceptions of cultural identity, sustainability, and aesthetic value in contemporary lifestyle products; and (3) how design thinking facilitates the integration of functional needs with culturally grounded material expression. By articulating these connections, the study contributes to broader discussions on material culture, cultural continuity, and socio-material transformation in South and Southeast Asia.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Material Culture Theory

Material Culture Theory positions everyday objects as active components of social life, shaping identities, relationships, and cultural practices. Miller (2008, 2010) argues that material things are central to how individuals structure meanings and negotiate social realities, functioning not merely as passive possessions but as influential agents embedded in daily routines. Within this perspective, a gym bag transcends its utilitarian purpose as a storage item and becomes a symbolic cultural artifact associated with lifestyle discipline, bodily management, and adherence to hygiene norms. The ways gym-goers select, organize, and use their bags reflect how they construct identity and navigate social expectations in fitness environments, illustrating the intimate intersection of materiality, embodiment, and contemporary cultural practice.

### Practice Theory

Practice Theory conceptualizes social life as a constellation of routinized, embodied actions shaped by cultural norms, social structures, and shared understandings. Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) notion of *habitus* highlights how deeply internalized dispositions influence repetitive practices such as fitness routines, hygiene habits, and organizational behaviors. Reckwitz (2002a, 2002b) further describes practices as “bundles” of bodily activities, material artefacts, competencies, and meanings. In this context, the gym bag emerges as a key material element within the practice bundles of gym-goers, enabling sweat management, odor control, clothing transitions, and self-presentation rituals. These practices reflect culturally embedded routines that help individuals manage expectations in shared fitness spaces, demonstrating how material objects and embodied habits co-produce social life.

### Social Norms Theory

Shared gym spaces are governed by implicit social norms that structure expectations related to cleanliness, odor control, personal organization, and responsible conduct. Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management provides insight into how individuals modify their behaviors and the objects they carry to maintain a positive public image. Recent empirical research supports this dynamic: Jang et al. (2024) show that the servicescape of fitness centers—including social interactions—significantly shapes members' hygiene behaviors, organization routines, and accessory choices. Thus, gym bag preferences are influenced not only by practical needs but also by peer expectations and perceived social judgments. Selecting a clean, organized, or culturally distinctive gym bag becomes

a way for users to present themselves as disciplined, hygienic, and socially compliant members of the fitness community.

### **Sustainable Consumption Theory**

Sustainable Consumption Theory explains how consumer decisions increasingly reflect environmental ethics, cultural identity, and support for traditional craftsmanship. Islam et al. (2024) found that consumers are more likely to purchase sustainable products when these align with ecological awareness, perceived benefits, and personal values. Similarly, Sindhuja et al. (2025) emphasize that slow fashion and eco-conscious choices are driven by a growing desire for meaningful, culturally grounded, and ethically produced materials. In this study, the integration of Northern Luzon indigenous handwoven textiles into gym bag design reflects a broader shift toward sustainability and cultural preservation. Selecting such products represents a form of consumer-driven social change, supporting artisan livelihoods, reducing environmental impact, and reinforcing cultural identity through everyday material choices.

### **Design Thinking as Social Praxis**

Design Thinking operates not only as a creative problem-solving method but also as a **social praxis** that reveals the cultural contexts, values, and aspirations of users. Brown (2009) highlights the role of empathy, co-creation, and iterative feedback in fostering user participation and uncovering deeper social meanings. Recent research in lifestyle and fashion consumption shows that design choices are shaped by identity performance, lifestyle aspirations, and cultural meanings (Perera et al., 2024). When applied to the development of a gym bag that integrates hygiene solutions and indigenous Northern Luzon textiles, Design Thinking becomes a cultural tool that captures the interplay between fitness norms, sustainability values, and local material traditions. Through participatory design, users contribute to meaning-making processes that produce objects resonant with both personal and cultural significance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Fitness Culture, Hygiene Behavior, and Social Expectations**

Contemporary fitness environments are increasingly shaped by evolving social norms surrounding bodily management, cleanliness, and organization. Jang et al. (2024) found that the servicescape of fitness centers—including interactions with peers and staff—influences members' hygiene routines, organizational habits, and perceptions of fitness identity. These findings support Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management, suggesting that gym-goers' accessories and routines contribute to self-presentation in shared spaces.

Post-pandemic research strengthened these observations. Kim and Lee (2021) demonstrated that individuals in communal environments maintain heightened hygiene-oriented behaviors, such as segregating clean and sweat-soaked garments and disinfecting personal accessories. Similarly, Gnanavel et al. (2023) reported that gym members associate odor control, neatness, and structured personal items—including gym bags—with responsible citizenship and respect for communal norms. These studies collectively show that gym bags function as tools for performing hygiene-conscious, socially compliant fitness identities.

### **Material Culture and Everyday Embodied Practices**

Recent work on material culture emphasizes that personal objects play central roles in organizing routines and shaping embodied actions. Fisher (2021) observed that accessories and wearable items act as "material companions" that influence behavior, confidence, and identity performance. Shove et al. (2020) similarly argued that objects are integral to hygienic and comfort-driven practices, particularly in bodily activities such as fitness.

In Southeast Asia, Reyes (2020) highlighted that Filipino urban dwellers assign deep emotional and identity-based meanings to everyday objects that help manage aspirations and social belonging. Prieto and Tan (2021) further demonstrated that physical routines—such as dressing, packing, or carrying items—are simultaneously practical and symbolic, shaping embodied practices and reinforcing cultural identities. These studies support the view that a gym bag functions not merely as a container but as a cultural artifact embedded in bodily and social practices.

### **Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Material Preferences**

Research from 2019 to 2025 shows a marked rise in consumer preference for sustainable, culturally grounded, and ethically produced materials. Islam et al. (2024) found that consumers increasingly prioritize ecological responsibility and cultural authenticity in selecting apparel and accessories. Hanss et al. (2022) further demonstrated

that eco-conscious consumers evaluate products based on symbolic meaning and cultural value in addition to function.

Kumar and Jain (2023) reported that sustainable product adoption increases when items incorporate culturally significant materials, particularly traditional or indigenous textiles. Similarly, a systematic review by Sindhuja et al. (2025) confirmed growing interest in slow fashion and heritage-based textiles due to heightened concerns for environmental sustainability and support for artisan livelihoods. These findings underscore the cultural and ecological relevance of integrating Northern Luzon handwoven textiles into contemporary product designs such as gym bags.

### **Indigenous Textiles, Cultural Identity, and Modern Adaptation**

Philippine and Asia-Pacific studies highlight a resurgence of indigenous weaving traditions as part of cultural identity reaffirmation. Fernandez (2019) documented how Ilocano Inabel textiles increasingly appear in modern lifestyle products to reinforce local pride and sustain rural livelihood. Martinez (2021) observed similar patterns among Cordilleran weaving communities, where textiles carry deep symbolic meaning and cultural memory.

International work supports these observations. Ling and Yee (2022) found that indigenous textile integration in fashion enhances consumer perceptions of authenticity and cultural value. Likewise, Vongpradhip (2022) demonstrated how Thai handwoven textiles are incorporated into contemporary design to promote cultural sustainability. Together, these studies validate the integration of Northern Luzon textiles into the gym bag prototype as both culturally meaningful and aligned with global trends in heritage-based sustainable innovation.

### **User-Centered and Design Thinking Approaches in Lifestyle Product Design**

Design Thinking has emerged as a key framework for culturally embedded and user-centered product development. Jahan and Al-Hussein (2022) showed that design methods rooted in empathy, iteration, and user participation create lifestyle products that resonate with cultural contexts. Similarly, Lee and Kim (2023) found that user-centered approaches enhance acceptability and relevance in everyday-use items such as bags and wearable accessories.

Perera et al. (2024) argued that consumers evaluate fitness-related products based on identity expression, comfort, cultural symbolism, and lifestyle alignment—all central to Design Thinking processes. These insights support the relevance of incorporating both user feedback and indigenous material elements in developing the gym bag prototype.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the cultural meanings, hygienic routines, and organizational practices embedded in gym bag use among fitness enthusiasts in Northern Luzon. Guided by Material Culture Theory and Practice Theory, the research adopted an interpretivist stance, recognizing that everyday objects, bodily routines, and cultural identities are shaped through lived experience. The study also incorporated a user-centered design (UCD) perspective to ensure that participants' insights directly informed the development of a culturally grounded gym bag prototype. Fifteen gym-goers were purposively selected from three fitness centers in Northern Luzon based on their regular use of gym bags and active engagement in fitness routines. The sample included participants of varying gender, age, and fitness backgrounds, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives on material preferences and cultural meanings. Interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached, ensuring that data collection continued only while new insights were emerging.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews enriched by photo-elicitation prompts and informal conversations. These interviews explored participants' hygiene habits, organizational systems, textile preferences, and perceptions of gym bag functionality. Participants were also shown textile swatches and preliminary design sketches, enabling them to articulate cultural meanings, aesthetic considerations, and desired features. Interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with informed consent, while field notes captured contextual observations of packing routines, material interactions, and social etiquette within gym spaces.

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach. Manual coding was conducted through repeated readings of transcripts, the creation of handwritten codes, and the organization of patterns using coding tables and simple spreadsheets. This iterative process allowed the identification of themes that reflected how gym-goers negotiated hygiene, order, cultural identity, and textile preferences. The resulting themes also guided the functional and cultural considerations integrated into the gym bag prototype.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed several qualitative rigor strategies. Checking was used to confirm the accuracy of initial interpretations with participants, while peer debriefing with the researcher enhanced the credibility of coding decisions and thematic development. Reflexive journaling supported transparency by

documenting the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and analytic decisions throughout the inquiry. Thick descriptions strengthened transferability, and an audit trail of interview notes, coding tables, and design iterations contributed to dependability. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's institution, and all participants provided informed consent.

The user-centered design process unfolded across three stages: needs identification, co-design feedback, and prototype refinement. Participants described the hygiene challenges and organizational frustrations they encountered during fitness routines, which informed initial design criteria. During co-design sessions, participants evaluated compartment layouts, textile placement, ventilation mechanisms, and material choices. Their feedback shaped the final prototype, which incorporated a ventilated compartment for sweaty clothing, a plastic-lined shoe pocket to prevent contamination, structured accessory sections, and textile paneling using Inabel, Binakul, and other Northern Luzon weaves. This iterative process ensured that the prototype reflected both functional fitness needs and deeper cultural values related to sustainability, identity, and heritage.

Ethical protocols were observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent and were assured confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage. No identifying information was included in transcripts or reports. The voluntary nature of bag audits was clearly communicated, and cultural sensitivity was emphasized during discussions of indigenous textiles, acknowledging their heritage value and significance to local weaving communities.

## RESULTS

### Cleanliness as Social Etiquette

Participants consistently described cleanliness as a socially expected behavior within gym environments rather than merely a personal preference. Sweat-soaked clothing, odor, and the potential for cross-contamination were among the most frequently cited concerns, particularly because they were perceived as affecting not only the individual but also others in the shared fitness space. One participant stated, "If my bag smells or looks messy, it feels disrespectful to everyone working out." Cleanliness therefore emerged as both a moral obligation and a form of social etiquette.

These findings echo research showing that fitness environments are governed by communal expectations of bodily regulation and hygiene (Gnanavel et al., 2023). Post-pandemic studies similarly emphasize that individuals maintain heightened hygiene routines in shared spaces, including segregating sweaty garments and disinfecting personal accessories (Kim & Lee, 2021). Participants in this study enacted cleanliness through the material routines of how they arranged, separated, and protected items inside their bags. This is consistent with Material Culture Theory, which suggests that social norms are enacted and maintained through objects and their everyday use (Miller, 2008; Shove et al., 2020). For many gym-goers, the gym bag served as a key tool for performing cleanliness, order, and respect in communal gym settings.

### Organization as Identity Performance

Organization also emerged as a prominent form of identity signaling. A neatly arranged gym bag was perceived as projecting discipline, preparedness, and commitment to fitness. Participants frequently used descriptors such as "organized," "professional," and "serious about fitness" to characterize individuals who maintained orderly belongings. These meanings extend Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management and align with Miller's (2010) claim that objects participate in constructing and expressing personal identity.

Through compartmentalization, dedicated pockets, and systematic arrangements, gym-goers used their bags as material expressions of who they were—or aspired to be—within the fitness community. This identity signaling guided the design of the gym bag prototype, which was developed using design thinking (Brown, 2009) and user-centered design approaches (Jahan & Al-Hussein, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2023). The resulting external structure of the prototype reflects visual cues associated with orderliness, intention, and disciplined identity performance.



**Figure 1.** Exterior View of the Gym Bag Prototype

*Represents the symbolic and aesthetic characteristics associated with orderliness, preparedness, and disciplined identity performance among gym-goers.*

### Prototype Integration: Material Translation of Themes

The interior design of the gym bag prototype embodies participants' hygiene practices and organizational routines. Participants emphasized the need for separate, designated spaces for sweat-soaked garments, clean clothes, accessories, and footwear. In response, the prototype incorporates a plastic-lined shoe compartment—one of the most requested features—designed to prevent soil, dust, and moisture from contaminating other items. The material is easy to wipe clean, water-resistant, and durable, providing a practical solution to hygiene concerns articulated during interviews.

The prototype's compartment system enables users to separate “dirty from clean,” reduce odor buildup, and avoid cross-contamination—behaviors strongly tied to gym etiquette and social expectations (Kim & Lee, 2021; Gnanavel et al., 2023). Its structured interior also reinforces identity-driven meanings related to discipline, preparedness, and professionalism. This translation of user insights into design features reflects the interdependence of materials, competencies, and meanings discussed in Practice Theory (Reckwitz, 2002). In this way, the gym bag becomes not just a storage container but a material agent facilitating social norms, identity performances, and everyday gym routines.



**Figure 2.** Interior View of the Gym Bag Prototype

*Shows the functional compartment system, including the plastic-lined shoe compartment designed to isolate dirt and moisture, reinforcing hygiene and organization practices described by users.*

### Sustainability as an Emerging Value

Sustainability emerged as a significant and increasingly influential value in participants' narratives. The use of indigenous handwoven textiles in the gym bag was widely perceived as aligning with environmentally responsible and socially ethical consumption. Participants described these materials as reducing dependence on synthetics, supporting rural weaving communities, and embodying slow fashion principles.

These perspectives mirror global trends indicating that consumers are increasingly drawn to products combining cultural authenticity with ecological responsibility (Islam et al., 2024; Sindhuja et al., 2025). Participants used terms such as “purposeful,” “eco-friendly,” and “supportive of local artisans” to describe the inclusion of Inabel, Binakul, and Cordilleran weaves. Thus, sustainability for participants encompassed not only environmental protection but also cultural renewal, economic support for artisans, and responsible, meaningful consumption. The textile paneling therefore provided the gym bag with dual value—ecological and cultural—reinforcing its role as an ethically grounded product.

### The Prototype as a Cultural Artifact

The final gym bag prototype—featuring a vented compartment for sweaty clothing, a plastic-lined shoe pocket, structured sections for gloves and accessories, and textile paneling made from Northern Luzon weaves—was consistently perceived as more than a utilitarian accessory. Participants viewed it as an artifact that embodied their cultural identities, lifestyle commitments, and personal values.

Functionally, the ventilated section addressed odor buildup and cleanliness norms, the plastic-lined shoe compartment prevented contamination between items, and the structured interior supported the desire for organization and professionalism. These design choices reflect and materialize participants' values surrounding hygiene, discipline, and social etiquette in fitness spaces.

Equally important were the cultural meanings embedded in the indigenous textiles. Participants described the Inabel, Binakul, and Cordilleran weaves as “authentically local,” “emotionally meaningful,” and “distinctive.” The

paneling supported cultural pride, strengthened ties to heritage, and expressed solidarity with local weaving communities. Through the integration of ergonomics, hygiene-centered design, and cultural aesthetics, the prototype functioned simultaneously as a practical gym accessory, a marker of identity, and a carrier of cultural narratives.

For many participants, the gym bag represented a harmonious fusion of functionality, sustainability, and cultural expression. This demonstrates the role that user-centered design can play in supporting cultural revitalization, encouraging socially responsible consumption, and enabling everyday expressions of regional identity.

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the gym bag functions not merely as a utilitarian item but as a cultural artifact embedded in the social practices, identity performances, and material values of gym-goers in Northern Luzon. Consistent with Material Culture Theory, the gym bag becomes a mediating object through which users express discipline, responsibility, and hygiene consciousness. The practice of separating sweaty and clean items—reinforced by the inclusion of a plastic-lined shoe compartment—mirrors regional and global findings showing that cleanliness within fitness environments is increasingly tied to social etiquette and collective responsibility (Gnanavel et al., 2023; Jang et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, cleanliness has long been embedded in bodily practice and urban social norms, where organized bodily routines signify respectability and self-care (Reyes, 2020).

The results also reinforce Practice Theory's claim that routines and material arrangements co-constitute one another. Participants' organizational habits—compartmentalization, spatial sequencing of items, and disciplined packing—represent what Reckwitz (2002a) describes as “bundles of practices” where objects, meanings, and embodied actions converge. These behaviors align with regional scholarship showing that Southeast Asian consumers increasingly use lifestyle accessories to project aspirational, wellness-oriented identities shaped by discipline, preparedness, and orderliness (Haque & Yamoah, 2021). Similarly, Perera et al. (2024) demonstrate that fitness-related objects serve as tools of identity signaling, allowing individuals to communicate seriousness and legitimacy within gym cultures. This suggests that gym bags in Northern Luzon do not merely store items but participate actively in identity performance and social positioning.

A significant cultural dimension emerged through the integration of indigenous Northern Luzon textiles in the gym bag prototype. Participants associated Inabel, Binakul, and Cordilleran weaves with cultural pride, emotional meaning, and authenticity. This aligns with local studies documenting the revitalization of handloom weaving traditions and their recontextualization in contemporary Filipino life (Fernandez, 2019; Martinez, 2021). At the Southeast Asian level, similar movements are visible: in Vietnam, traditional textiles are increasingly incorporated into eco-fashion as markers of authenticity and sustainability (Ngo & Huynh, 2020), while in Thailand, handwoven textiles are integrated into modern fashion as part of cultural preservation and creative industry development (Vongpradhip, 2022). These patterns demonstrate that indigenous textiles across Southeast Asia function as material anchors of identity, heritage, and community continuity. In this study, the textile paneling transformed the gym bag into a cultural narrative—an everyday object that allows users to carry regional identity into contemporary lifestyle settings.

Sustainability also emerged as a salient value. Participants valued the use of indigenous textiles for their reduced environmental impact, support for weaving communities, and alignment with slow fashion principles. These preferences reflect broader shifts in Asian consumer behavior, wherein young consumers prioritize ethical sourcing, cultural authenticity, and ecological responsibility (Nguyen & Hoang, 2021). Regional analyses similarly show rapid growth in sustainable and circular fashion consciousness across Southeast Asia, driven by cultural pride and environmental awareness (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). The gym bag thus serves as a conduit for ethically grounded consumption, embodying the interconnection between cultural heritage and sustainable material practices.

Finally, the co-design approach highlights how Design Thinking can surface cultural values and integrate them with functional needs. Participants shaped the prototype's features—ventilation, waterproof shoe pocket, textile paneling—demonstrating the generative power of participatory design. This aligns with research showing that co-design processes in Southeast Asia enhance cultural ownership, deepen product meaning, and strengthen the socio-cultural relevance of lifestyle goods (Ling & Yee, 2022). As Brown (2009) asserts, design thinking enables the translation of users' latent values into tangible objects. In this study, the final gym bag prototype merged practicality with heritage and sustainability, illustrating how everyday objects can bridge modern lifestyles with traditional material culture and contribute to cultural revitalization and socio-material transformation in the Southeast Asian region.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the cultural and social meanings embedded in gym bag use among fitness enthusiasts in Northern Luzon, revealing how hygiene practices, identity performances, sustainability values, and cultural preferences intersect in a seemingly ordinary object. The gym bag functions as a material-cultural node through which individuals navigate social expectations, express self-discipline, and participate in the moral order of communal fitness spaces. Practices of cleanliness and organization—amplified by the design of compartments such as the plastic-lined shoe pocket—highlight the interdependence between bodily management and social etiquette.

The incorporation of indigenous Northern Luzon textiles into the gym bag prototype underscores the enduring relevance of traditional material culture in contemporary consumer life. Participants valued the cultural symbolism, distinctiveness, and heritage embodied in Inabel, Binakul, and Cordilleran weaves. This integration affirms ongoing movements toward cultural preservation, artisan support, and identity affirmation while aligning with global shifts toward sustainable and ethically grounded consumption.

Through the lens of Design Thinking, the study demonstrates that user-centered innovation offers a platform for cultural expression and sustainability-oriented product development. The co-designed prototype embodies not only functional needs but also cultural and ecological values. As such, the gym bag becomes a cultural artifact that bridges tradition and modernity, offering practical utility while carrying narratives of heritage, identity, and responsible consumption.

Overall, this study contributes to the *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change* by illustrating how everyday objects mediate identity, sustain cultural knowledge, and promote socially and environmentally conscious practices. Future research may expand to other regions or compare fitness cultures to further understand how material objects shape evolving cultural landscapes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should broaden the participant base by including gym-goers from diverse regions, age groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds to capture variations in hygiene norms, organizational routines, cultural identities, and sustainability values. Comparative studies across different fitness cultures—both within and beyond Northern Luzon—would deepen insights into how material practices, such as bag organization and hygiene management, vary across gender, generations, and regional contexts.

The findings also highlight the importance of engaging directly with indigenous weaving communities to deepen cultural understanding and strengthen heritage integration in product design. Ethnographic work with Ilocano, Cordilleran, and Gaddang weavers can illuminate symbolic meanings, production narratives, and cultural protocols surrounding textile use. Likewise, market-oriented studies exploring consumer acceptance, willingness-to-pay, and commercialization pathways may support local MSMEs and social enterprises that aim to incorporate indigenous textiles into mainstream lifestyle products.

Finally, researchers and designers are encouraged to expand the application of heritage-based and sustainability-driven design principles to other lifestyle products such as travel bags, backpacks, or sports accessories. Exploring circular design approaches—using biodegradable or recycled materials alongside indigenous weaves—can further contribute to environmental responsibility. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine whether continued use of culturally integrated products strengthens consumer identity, cultural awareness, and sustainable consumption behavior over time.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers culturally grounded insights into gym bag use among fitness enthusiasts in Northern Luzon; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted within a specific geographic and cultural context, which may limit the transferability of findings to other regions in the Philippines or Southeast Asia. The purposive sampling strategy and relatively small sample size, consistent with qualitative inquiry, emphasize depth rather than generalizability. Participants' accounts were self-reported, creating the possibility of social desirability bias, especially regarding hygiene practices and identity-related behaviors.

Second, although reflexive thematic analysis provided a rigorous interpretive framework, the development of themes was influenced by the researcher's positionality and interpretive lens. While strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing enhanced credibility, some degree of subjectivity remains inherent to qualitative research. Third, the co-designed prototype was informed by user experiences but was not subjected to broad consumer testing, material durability assessments, or long-term product trials. As such, the prototype reflects

culturally and socially meaningful design preferences rather than comprehensive engineering or market feasibility constraints.

Lastly, the study incorporated selected Northern Luzon indigenous textiles, which represent only a subset of the Philippines' weaving traditions. The cultural interpretations linked to these materials may differ from those associated with other types of indigenous textiles across the country. These limitations provide opportunities for future research to broaden participant diversity, explore regional comparisons, assess long-term product performance, and investigate additional textile traditions in lifestyle product design.

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