

The Investigation of Iranian Cultural and Consumption Values through Foreign Brand Purchasing

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ABSTRACT

This research proposes a comprehensive model that investigates the relationships between individualism-collectivism dimension, consumption values and consumer behavior. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate how Iranian cultural values affect consumption values and behavioral responses in foreign brand purchasing context. Respondents were chosen from among the students of Tehran Islamic Azad University, science and research branch using Stratified Random Sampling Method. A total of 390 questionnaires were used for data analysis. Structural equations modeling by using LISREL was performed to empirically test the relationships between the constructs of this study. Results show that both individualism (vertical and horizontal) and collectivism (vertical and horizontal) are importance predictors of consumptions values in Iranian society. Also, results indicate that three out of four types of consumption values (i.e., functional, emotional, and social values) were positively related to customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, relationship between epistemic value with loyalty and customer satisfaction was not significant. Finally, it suggests that managers should develop different marketing activities to different cultures and emphasis on consumption values to create of loyal and satisfied customers.

KEYWORDS: Individualism-Collectivism, Consumption Values, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Culture is never static. Culture develops and changes with the passage of time. Culture is a complicated construct that represents ways of engaging with the world. Although often thought of in terms of people and their values and traditions, it also comprises those things that people of a culture make, such as structures and institutions [1]. Understanding the customers' behavior, customer values and attitudes has been considered as one of the more important success factors in the global business environment. Thus, investigation of the different consumers' values and needs in the different cultures is one of the important attempts in order to understand the different behaviors of customers in the global marketing perspectives. In this study, among many cultural factors which contribute to shaping consumption values and behavior intentions, we concentrate on individualism-collectivism cultural dimension.

The individualism-collectivism cultural dimension has become one of the most important constructs identifying cross-cultural that affect in consumption values, attitudes, and behaviors. Hofstede (1980) defined this dimension as the extent to which an individual identifies with group-oriented goals and needs at the expense of his/her own personal desires (collectivism); versus an emphasis solely on the individual's needs that include those of his/her nuclear family, when making major decisions (individualism)[2]. Although individualism-collectivism dimension is viewed as cultural level constructs that represent opposite ends of a continuum, some models propose that this concepts can be both operationalized and measured at the individual level [3, 4, 5]. Triandis (1995) proposed that the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension could be reflected in four types: horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism [6]. Generally, values have been always used to explain the difference in individual behavior from different cultures. When people are socialized, their thoughts and behaviors are influenced by norms and cultures [7]. Cultural and consumption values have been studied in different areas. McGregor (2000) found that a country's cultural values have positive relationship with the development of consumer values in that culture [8]. Also, Kim et al. (2002) and Xiao and Kim (2009) found a positive and significant relationship between cultural values and consumption values [10].

Past studies have indicated that value can help explain the differences in consumer behavior of different cultures. However, it seems that there is a lack of research that takes a comprehensive view on constructs linked to cultural values, consumption values and consumer responses and there is need for more research in this context. In this study, we attempt to better understand how cultural value (individualism-collectivism) can affect Iranian consumption values. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of cultural values on Iranian consumption values through foreign brand purchasing. More specifically, the study attempts to examine

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the extent to which (1) the values of collectivism and individualism influence consumption values and (2) the consumption values affect customer satisfaction and loyalty.

This paper is organized as follows: We first review the conceptual framework and concepts that are related to our study. We next present a conceptual model and discuss the relationships among model constructs, along with research methodology and data collection. Finally, we present the findings, discuss implications, and suggest future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Individualism-Collectivism

Culture is a complex construct that represents ways of engaging with the world. Hofstede (1984) distinguished between different cultures by using four dimensions; “Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-Femininity, and Individualism-Collectivism” [11]. In this study we focus on the individualism-collectivism dimension. The individualism-collectivism dimension has been discussed in many contexts in social sciences [6, 10, 12]. Hofstede (1980) defined individualism-collectivism dimension as the extent to which an individual identifies with group-oriented goals and needs at the expense of his/her own personal desires (collectivism); versus an emphasis solely on the individual’s needs that include those of his/her nuclear family, when making important decisions (individualism) [2]. Also, Hofstede (1980, 1984 and 2001) demonstrated how the constructs of individualism and collectivism can be characterized in people's social perceptions and behaviors [2, 11, 13]. Triandis (1995) mention that individualists tend to do what enjoys doing whereas collectivists tend to do what individuals are expected to do [6].

Triandis (1990, 1995 and 2001) proposed that there are different types of individualism and collectivism in societies [6, 14, 15]. For instance, Korean collectivism is not entirely the same as the China collectivism. The individualism in Swedish is different from American individualism. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) contend that “the most important attributes that distinguish among different kinds of individualism and collectivism are the relative emphases on horizontal and vertical social relationships” [16]. Essentially, both individualism and collectivism may be horizontal or vertical. Research has shown that some individualistic cultures, such as Australia and Sweden, emphasize equality whereas other individualistic cultures, such as the United States, emphasize hierarchy. This horizontal-vertical distinction could also be a useful starting point to understand individual differences within a culture. From Triandis (2001) view, individualism-collectivism cultural dimension could be reflected in four types:

Horizontal individualism: where people attempts to be unique and do their own thing.

Vertical individualism: where people want to do their own thing and strive to be the best.

Horizontal collectivism: where people merge themselves with their in-groups, and

Vertical collectivism: where people submit to the authorities of the in-group and are willing to sacrifice themselves for their in-group [15].

Consumption Values

The role of value is becoming an increasing concern to consumers, marketers and managers, because it is one of the most powerful forces in today’s marketplace. Consumption values are considered to guide people’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors across context, cultures and time. Past studies found that values have an important role in shaping individual behavior [17, 18]. Past studies suggested that value can help explain the differences in consumer behavior in different cultures [19]. Consumption values are the consumer’s perceived attribute about product or service [20]. Consumption values have been used by researchers to explain consumer attitudes and behaviors. For instance, Long and Schiffman (2000) used consumption value theory to investigate the range of values that motivate consumer response to airlines’ frequent flyer programs [21].

Sheth et al.’s (1991b) theory of consumption value is used for this study. This theory identifies five consumer values in individuals in order to investigation of the consumer response. These values consist of functional, social, epistemic, conditional and emotional values. In this paper we considered functional, social, epistemic and emotional values. Functional value is “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance”. Social value is “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s association with one or more specific social groups”. Epistemic value is defined as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse feelings or affective states”. Emotional value is “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge” [22].

Customer satisfaction and loyalty

With the growing importance of relationship marketing, the constructs of satisfaction, commitment and loyalty have become increasingly important in many settings during the past decades. The marketing concept suggests that creating customer satisfaction should be the primary goal for firms because customer satisfaction related to profitability. Customer satisfaction is a complex construct and has been defined in various ways. Understanding

what influences consumer satisfaction can help business owners and managers design and deliver appropriate offers that satisfy market demand [23]. Oliver (1980) defined satisfaction as the perceived difference between expectation and actual perceived performance after consumption. If the performance falls short of expectations, the consumer is dissatisfied. If the performance matches the expectations, the consumer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the consumer is delighted [24].

As markets become more competitive many companies recognize the importance of retaining current customers and some have introduced a variety of ways to improve customer loyalty and creating loyal customer [25]. Loyal customers can bring enormous benefits to a company. They allow for a continuous stream of profit, reduce marketing and operating costs, increase referral, and are immune to competitors' promotion efforts [26]. Customer loyalty is defined as: "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" [27]. In fact, Loyalty related to repurchase behavior or recommendation to other people and is activated by company marketing activities such as loyalty programs. In the literatures, customer loyalty is measured in many ways and the most common evaluations are behavioral measures such as repurchasing and recommendation [28].

Hypotheses Development

Individualism / Collectivism and Consumption Values

Individualism-collectivism dimension has emerged as one of the most important constructs to describe cultural differences and similarities. In a review of individualism and collectivism literature, House et al. (2004) identified over 1,400 articles devoted to individualism and collectivism dimension [29]. But, few studies have reported relationship between this dimension and consumer attitudes and behaviors. Koch and Koch (2007) suggested that individuals in the individualistic cultures, emphasize on their self-interest to seek individual goals, and they survive in independent units, whereas in the collectivistic culture individuals became interdependent with group members and focused more on group harmony and participate in groups [30]. Cultural values have a significant relationship with development of consumer values in that culture [8]. Past studies revealed a strong relationship between cultural values and consumption values. Kim et al. (2002), revealed a significant relationship between cultural values (individualism, collectivism) and consumption values. They in their research found that individualistic values significantly affect consumers' functional, social, and experiential needs for apparel product purchases [9]. Also, Xiao and Kim (2009) found a positive relationship between cultural values and consumption values [10]. As a consequence, our hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between vertical individualism and the following consumption values: functional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value.

H2: There is a positive relationship between horizontal individualism and the following consumption values: functional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value.

H3: There is a positive relationship between vertical collectivism and the following consumption values: functional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value.

H4: There is a positive relationship between horizontal collectivism and the following consumption values: functional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value.

Consumption values, customer satisfaction and loyalty

Customer satisfaction is the result of a customer's perception of the value received in a transaction, and the expected value is derived from the consumer needs. In fact, consumers bring their needs to the consumption process, thus, the basic goal of marketing activities is to satisfy consumer needs and creating value for them. Empirical studies discovered that perceived value positively influences customer satisfaction in most cases [17, 31]. Turel and Serenko (2006) revealed that perceived value is positively related to customer satisfaction [32].

In the marketing literatures, establishing a durable and long-term relationship to improve customer loyalty by meeting consumer needs is in general the fundamental axiom of relationship marketing. In recent years perceived value has obtained more attention in predicting consumer buying behavior [33]. Researchers agree that perceived value has a significant influence on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions [34, 35, 36]. Anderson and Lindstad (1998) found that value has a significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction in developing a customer loyalty model in a complex service context [37]. As a consequence, our hypotheses are as follows:

H5: There is a positive relationship between consumption values (functional value, social value, emotional value and epistemic value) and customer satisfaction.

H6: There is a positive relationship between consumption values (functional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value) and customer loyalty.

Research Model

Based on preceding literature, the hypothesized relationships are shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, which investigates the effects of cultural values on consumption values and consumer behavior.

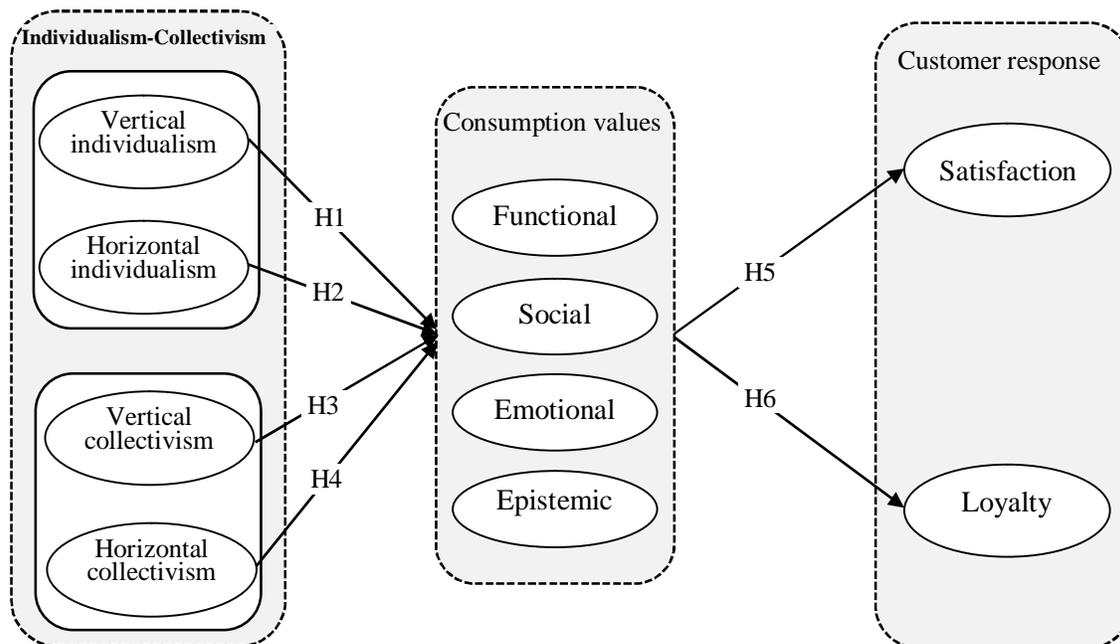


Figure 1: research conceptual model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Measurement items, Sample population and Data Collection Procedure

Items from prior research were used as the basis of measures for the research constructs. We modified the wording of specific items to reflect the focus of Study. The variables in this research were all measured using five-point Likert scales, where 1 reflected “strongly disagree” and 5 reflected “strongly agree”. Horizontal individualism was measured with three items [6, 38, 39]. Vertical individualism was measured with three items [6, 38, 39]. Horizontal collectivism was measured using four items [6, 38, 39]. Vertical collectivism was measured with four items [6, 38, 39]. Consumption values consist of functional value, social value, emotional value and epistemic value were assessed with twelve items [10]. Customer satisfaction was measured with three items [40]. Loyalty was measured with four items [41].

In this survey, data were collected in Tehran, Respondents were chosen from among the students of Tehran Islamic Azad University, science and research branch, using Stratified Random Sampling Method (commensurate with the size). However, the method of selecting respondents was systematic random sampling. Respondent were asked to complete self-administered questionnaires about individualism and collectivism, and then answered questions about consumption values and behavioral intentions through foreign brands purchasing. Finally, Data collected from 450 students. A total of 390 usable questionnaires were retained. The demographic characteristics of the sample were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 demographic characteristics

Demographic variables	n	%
Gender		
Male	180	46.15
Female	210	53.85
Total	390	100.0
Age (Years)		
below 30	290	74.35
30 – 40	78	20.00
40 – 50	22	5.56
Total	390	100.0
Educational level		
Bachelor student	89	22.82
Master student	186	47.70
PhD student	115	29.48
Total	390	100.0

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) by using LISREL for Windows was performed to test the relationships between constructs in this study. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), in this study data were analyzed by using the two-step approach in which the measurement model was first confirmed and then the structural model was tested [42].

Measurement model estimation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was directed to test the factor structure of the measurement model in this paper [42]. The main purpose of CFA is to assessing the convergent and discriminant validities of the construct measures. Table 2 presents the factor loadings and Cronbach’s alphas of the items on the latent constructs as estimated by the CFA. Cronbach’s alphas of latent constructs were acceptable for all ten constructs (0.66–0.88). Values were all above 0.60 as suggested by Churchill (1979), and therefore indicated internal consistent [43].

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha

Constructs	factor loadings	AVE	Cranach's α
Vertical Individualism		0.64	0.67
Vertical Individualism 1	0.72		
Vertical Individualism 2	0.62		
Vertical Individualism 3	0.64		
Horizontal Individualism		0.72	0.66
Horizontal Individualism 1	0.81		
Horizontal Individualism 2	0.68		
Horizontal Individualism 3	0.80		
Vertical collectivism		0.66	0.68
Vertical collectivism 1	0.66		
Vertical collectivism 2	0.62		
Vertical collectivism 3	0.73		
Vertical collectivism 4	0.64		
Horizontal collectivism		0.54	0.69
Horizontal collectivism 1	0.51		
Horizontal collectivism 2	0.56		
Horizontal collectivism 3	0.60		
Horizontal collectivism 4	0.63		
Functional value		0.65	0.76
Functional value 1	0.70		
Functional value 2	0.71		
Functional value 3	0.67		
Social value		0.70	0.79
Social value 1	0.74		
Social value 2	0.80		
Social value 3	0.76		
Emotional value		0.80	0.82
Emotional value 1	0.77		
Emotional value 2	0.85		
Emotional value 3	0.81		
Epistemic value		0.67	0.81
Epistemic value1	0.73		
Epistemic value2	0.63		
Epistemic value3	0.66		
Satisfaction		0.63	0.88
Satisfaction 1	0.79		
Satisfaction 2	0.78		
Satisfaction 3	0.81		
Loyalty		0.71	0.87
Loyalty 1	0.72		
Loyalty 2	0.77		
Loyalty 3	0.82		
Loyalty 4	0.80		

The findings indicate that Convergent validity was indicated because factor loadings on their underlying constructs were significant at 0.05 [42]. All latent variables also satisfy the criteria for discriminant validity since average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than the variance explained between the associated constructs [44]. These results indicate an acceptable reliability and validity for the operationalization of the latent variables. The overall evaluation of the model fit was based on multiple indicators. These indicators included the χ^2 ;

the normed fit index (NFI), the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI). The fit statistics showed that the measurement model fit the data reasonably well ($\chi^2= 682.52$, $df =403$, $GFI = 0.90$, $NFI = 0.92$, $NNFI = 0.97$, $CFI = 0.97$, $RMSEA = 0.047$ and $AGFI = 0.85$).

STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS

After assessing and confirming the total measurement model, the structural model was estimated. Estimates are used to verify the hypothesized relationships. In addition, the structural model showed acceptable fit. The results of the standardized parameter estimates and t-values are reported in the Table 3. For the overall model, based on model-fit indices ($CFI= 0.97$, $NFI= 94$, $NNFI=0.96$, $RMSEA= 0.047$, $GFI= 92$ and $AGFI= 0.86$), the estimated model provided a good fit to the data. The results demonstrate that vertical individualism has a positive and significant effect on functional value (coefficient = 0.28, $t = 2.52$). As predicted, vertical individualism was positively related to social value (coefficient = 0.18, $t = 2.04$). Also, relationship between vertical individualism and emotional value was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.48, $t = 5.13$). Vertical individualism also was positively related to epistemic value (coefficient = 0.63, $t = 6.76$). As expected relationship between horizontal individualism and functional value was significant and positive (coefficient = 0.44, $t = 4.54$). Horizontal individualism was positively related to social value (coefficient = 0.61, $t = 5.78$) and as hypothesized, horizontal individualism was positively related to emotional value (coefficient = 0.32, $t = 3.13$) and epistemic value (coefficient = 0.33, $t = 3.28$). Research findings revealed that vertical collectivism has a positive relationship with functional value (coefficient = 0.85, $t = 14.84$). Also, relationship between vertical collectivism and social value was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.24, $t = 2.34$). As predicted, vertical collectivism was positively related to emotional value (coefficient = 0.35, $t = 3.45$) and epistemic value (coefficient = 0.70, $t = 7.80$). Also, results demonstrate that Relationship between horizontal collectivism and functional value was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.29, $t = 2.76$). Horizontal collectivism was positively related to social value (coefficient = 0.41, $t = 4.35$). Also, findings revealed that horizontal collectivism have a positive and significant relationship with emotional value (coefficient = 0.54, $t = 5.79$) and epistemic value (coefficient = 0.49, $t = 5.96$). The result suggested that Functional value has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction (coefficient = 0.77, $t = 12.78$). Also, the path for the relationship between functional value and customer loyalty was significant (coefficient = 0.45, $t = 4.89$). As predicted, relationship between social values and customer satisfaction was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.22, $t = 2.18$). Also relationship between social values and loyalty was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.71, $t = 8.50$). Hypothesized path for the relationship between Emotional values and customer satisfaction was positive and significant (coefficient = 0.76, $t = 10.54$). However, relationship between emotional values and customer loyalty was not significant (coefficient = 0.13, $t = 0.84$). Also, results demonstrate that Relationship between epistemic values, customer satisfaction (coefficient = 0.12, $t = 1.16$) and loyalty (coefficient = - 0.06, $t = - 0.45$) was not significant.

Table 3 Structural parameter estimates and hypotheses results

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	t-value	results
VI → Functional	0.28	2.52	Supported
VI → Social	0.18	2.04	Supported
VI → Emotional	0.48	5.13	Supported
VI → Epistemic	0.63	6.76	Supported
HI → Functional	0.44	4.54	Supported
HI → Social	0.61	5.78	Supported
HI → Emotional	0.32	3.13	Supported
HI → Epistemic	0.33	3.28	Supported
VC → Functional	0.85	14.84	Supported
VC → Social	0.24	2.34	Supported
VC → Emotional	0.35	3.45	Supported
VC → Epistemic	0.70	7.80	Supported
HC → Functional	0.29	2.76	Supported
HC → Social	0.41	4.35	Supported
HC → Emotional	0.54	5.79	Supported
HC → Epistemic	0.49	5.96	Supported
Functional → Satisfaction	0.77	12.78	Supported
Social → Satisfaction	0.22	2.18	Supported
Emotional → Satisfaction	0.76	10.54	Supported
Epistemic → Satisfaction	0.12	1.16	Not Supported
Functional → Loyalty	0.45	4.89	Supported
Social → Loyalty	0.71	8.50	Supported
Emotional → Loyalty	0.13	0.84	Not Supported
Epistemic → Loyalty	- 0.06	- 0.45	Not Supported

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Individualism and collectivism dimension has been widely used to interpret differences across cultures in various fields. This paper conceptually explored the potential influence of Individualism and collectivism on Iranian consumption values in foreign brand purchasing setting. The primary objective of this research was to examine the impact of cultural values on Iranian consumption values through foreign brand purchasing. As hypothesized, vertical and horizontal individualism have a positive and significant relationship with consumption values (functional, social, emotional and epistemic) in foreign brands purchasing context. These results are similar to Xiao and Kim (2009) findings [10]. Also, Cukur and et al (2004) found that there is a positive relationship between vertical and horizontal individualism and value types [12]. As predicted, vertical and horizontal collectivism have a positive and significant relationship with consumption values (functional, social, emotional and epistemic). These results are similar to Xiao and Kim (2009) and Cukur and et al (2004) findings [10, 12]. In fact, this study showed that both individualism (vertical and horizontal) and collectivism (vertical and horizontal) are importance predictors of consumptions values in Iranian society. Also, these finding showed that choice of a product or service is multidimensional phenomenon involving multiple consumption values. This research finding also showed that relationship between functional, social and emotional value with customer satisfaction was positive and significant. These results are supporting previous studies findings [17, 31]. Also, these results conform to previous studies that the hedonic and utilitarian functions of products and services are important to consumers [45]. But, these results not supporting findings of Hnzaee et al. (2012) [46]. Ryu et al. (2010) found that there is a positive and significant relationship between hedonic and utilitarian values and customer satisfaction [47]. However, relationship between epistemic value and customer satisfaction was not significant. Also, research findings showed that functional and social value have a positive and significant relationship with customer loyalty. These results support the previous studies findings [9, 48]. But, relationship between emotional and epistemic value with customer loyalty was not significant. In general, this study findings showed that cultural value are a strong power in shaping consumer values in product purchasing. Findings also showed that consumptions values are important in developing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. These results offer some marketing implications for managers and marketers. By investigation the cultural and consumption values of sample of consumers in Tehran, this study provide insights that cultural values affect consumption values and consumption values affect individuals' post consumption behaviors. Thus, marketers and managers have to create more values in satisfying customer needs and develop different marketing activities to different cultures.

Limitations and Suggestions for further research

Present study has some limitations that proposed directions for future research and research findings must be considered within the limitations of the research. First, our data were obtained from college students, so results cannot be generalized to all Iranian consumers because cultural values and consumption behaviors vary greatly from region to other region in Iran. Additional research is needed to examine these relationships within and across additional sectors. Another limitation stems from the use of self-administered measures of affective and cognitive bases. These explicit measures are more likely to be tied to deliberative affect and cognition, because they encourage with special active search in memory for specific emotional experiences and cognitive beliefs associated with such experience. Finally, the important cultural other dimension that may affect customers in environment can be considered widely.

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