

# Analysis of the Effect of Media and Social-Structural Contexts on the Tendency of Urmia University Students to Newfound Mysticism

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the social-structural factors and contexts that contribute to the tendency of Urmia university students to newfound mysticism and the direct effects of collective media on this event. The approach of this research is realistic and exploratory, which using a retroductive strategy, is systemized as a theoretical model. The research method is written survey, where the required information was gathered from 500 Urmia university students. The sampling method in this research is cluster sampling, and the identification of effective factors is done on two levels, social (fundamental contexts) and communicative (mechanisms). The results of this research indicate that the average tendency toward newfound mysticism is about 34 (on a scale of 0 to 100). Regression analysis shows that the independent variable predicts more than 68% of the changes in dependent variables. Among the variables relating to the media, satellite Television Channels, and among social-structural contexts, religious tendencies, have the most effect on dependent variables.

**KEYWORDS:** Newfound Mysticism, Mass Media, Social-Structural Contexts, Realistic Method, Cultural Invasion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

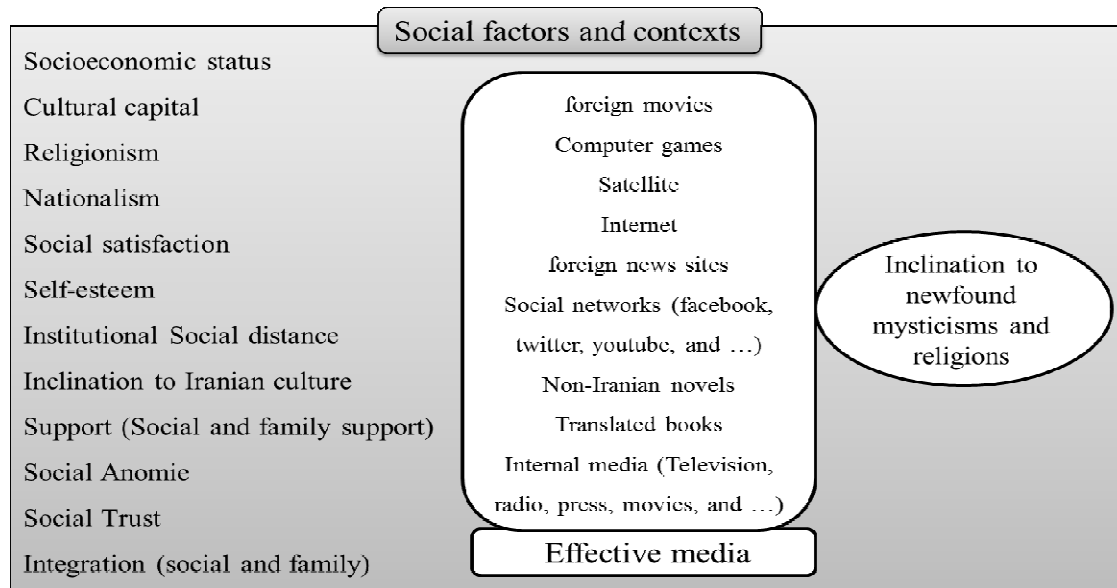
According to Lower [1], in all social systems, young people are not devoted to social order and are after transformations. Inglehart [2] also notes that the older (previous) generation shows resistance to change; whereas the younger generation accepts the changes and transformations in institutions, the superior order, and order on a smaller scale, more easily. Margaret Mead [3] states that rapid changes and transformations in the cultural system on a large scale, is the basic factor that generates gaps between generations. The process of regeneration, and the high rate of population growth after the revolution in 1978, has created concerns in the younger generation which has caused a generation gap, and a tendency toward foreign cultures.

This study searches for the contexts and the channels that affect the inclination of university students to newfound mysticism. Obviously the analysis of mass media requires reconsideration and scrutiny of the messages of these groups. But since the messages of these groups are not accessible in a concise and clear way and that the level of influence of the newfound mysticism and even their nature is not analyzed scientifically in the country, using the retroductive strategy and as studies to identify contexts, this study aims to evaluate the level of inclination of university students toward newfound mysticism. Furthermore, with a realistic view of the social and personal contexts and structures of both, the individuals and the society, it scientifically evaluates the channels, the methods, and the media that affect the inclination toward the ideas and thoughts of newfound mysticism. The main question of this study is: in which social-structural contexts and by what processes (media) the newfound mysticism have penetrated Urmia universities?

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Due to some factors such as the freshness of the subject being considered, and theoretical circles not explaining scientifically the inclination toward newfound mysticism and religions, it became necessary that the strategy of this study for gaining an answer to the main question of the study to be a retroductive strategy. Hence, to identify and determine the dimensions of the issue under study, and to identify the factors and the contexts that affect the inclination of university students toward these mysticism and their teachings, interviews with informed and competent individuals was used; the results of these in-depth interviews were categorized, and based on classic library studies and matching the obtained information from the study of documents with the qualitative findings obtained from these interviews, a conceptual framework was formed on social and structural levels and the channels and the mechanisms of media in distributing these newfound mysticism. The theoretical framework of this study has been formed integrally and with a realistic view. Such that not only does it regard the social contexts on a large scale and the structural contexts of the society, but also the media

which affect the inclination of university students toward newfound mysticisms independently and as an interface. The media can only perform their objective (inclining university students toward newfound mysticisms) when the social and structural context is set for divergence from original Iranian culture and thought bases; under such conditions, newfound mysticisms and religions attract university students via the media. Paying attention to role of the media gains more importance since in the past few years, in order to control and prevent the distribution of the ideas of newfound religions and mysticisms, many foreign books and novels (Western cultural productions in general) have been prevented from being translated and published. Therefore, to identify the near and far causes and factors and processes that incline university students to the aforementioned schools of thought, the best theoretical method is the realistic method. To this end, the hypotheses of this study have been extracted and tested from this model.



**Figure 1.** Study Theoretical Model

According to the above model, the hypotheses of the study are the relations between contextual variables (gender, marital status etc.); variables related to social contexts, variables related to mass media, and the dependent variable (the degree of inclination to newfound mysticisms).

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The strategy of this study is retroductive. In the studies that the researcher has performed on this subject, he has concluded that in the context of newfound mysticisms, neither in the national level, nor in the international level, a strong theoretical framework has not been offered. Hence, for the developing accurate hypotheses, using qualitative methods, the researcher collects the required information and forms his initial theoretical model. Next, using accurate observation methods, he tests his hypotheses and theoretical model, until ultimately offer an excellent model which is very reliable and has validity; this process is retroductive strategy. And, its research approach is a realistic one, such that the socio-structural contexts and the mechanisms affecting the issue under question are analyzed simultaneously and in a controlled manner. For measuring the level of the inclination of university students toward newfound mysticisms and identifying the contexts and the influential factors in statistical population, the survey method was used which is performed as a cross sectional study (from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of march, 2014), and was measured using a field study, and the hypotheses were tested using a description method and correlations and multivariate analysis. The tool for measuring this survey was written respondent-oriented questionnaires, where most of its scales were standard ones. Altogether, the validity and reliability of all items, regardless of self-made or standardized, were tested and confirmed statistically and theoretically. The statistical population of this survey is all students who attended the Urmia universities (Public, Elmi karbordi, Azad and Payam Nour) in the year 2014. The size of the required samples was determined by the Cochran formula and the discretion of the researchers to be 500 individuals. The sampling was done using the cluster sampling technique (PPS) which moves university to class, and ultimately in each class the required number of students were selected.

#### **Conceptualization and the Definition of Inclination to Newfound Mysticisms**

According to empirical literature, it is clear that many newfound religious and mystic groups are active in Iran. Thus the main focus of this study is these cultural and intellectual groups of newfound mysticisms. A survey analysis of a

dependent variable such as inclination to newfound mysticisms is faced with a multitude of methodological difficulties since the number of these groups is very large and each has its own specific attributes. To solve this problem, we focused on the similarities of these groups. According to Sharifi [4] based on the research he has performed in this area, all these groups are based on modernity and Western culture [5], and for this reason they are compliant to their principles. Therefore, the common attributes of all these newfound mysticisms are: being against religions, epistemological suspiciousness, impracticality of knowledge and values, multiplicity of epistemologies and religions, secularism and worldliness and sexual liberalism which include: fashion-oriented, separation of religion and the society, intellect-oriented and humanism, separation of religion and politics, scientism, open and free sexual relations, advertisements on clothing, luxury-oriented behaviours, conflict between science and religion, and Sufism. These indexes and dimensions were used in this study for the operationalization of the inclination to newfound mysticisms [6].

#### 4. FINDINGS

This survey was performed among 500 students of Urmia Universities (public, Azad, Payamnoor, Elmi-karbordi, and medical science universities) based on the cluster sampling method. According to the findings of the study, the number of males and females was almost equal. The average age of students was 23, and 15% were married. And more than 80% of students were studying for a bachelor's degree.

The findings of the study regarding the inclination of Urmia universities students are as follows: more than 35% of respondents were inclined to the common premises of newfound mysticisms more than average. This number shows the importance of the issue. Furthermore, the distance evaluation parameter of the average inclination of Urmia university students on a certainty level of 95% show that their inclination levels were between 32.33 and 35.45 on a scale of 0 to 100. On the other hand many of the students clearly indicated that they were quite familiar with the teachings of some of the newfound mysticisms.

Furthermore, the findings of measuring of the familiarity of the students with the teachings of mystic groups were introduced in the questionnaire: Data was gathered through closed questions with 20 streams, with over 20 mystic and religious schools. The response distribution indicates that 7.2% of the respondents did not answer this question. 57.8% of them selected the "none" choice. But 8.4% have noted yoga, 6.8% energy healing, and more than 5% in the "other" choice, have indicated the freemasonry affair. 5.4% of them were familiar with the "Divine guidance" affair (Ramollah – Peyman Fatehi). While cosmic mysticism, Paulo Coelo, Sufis and Dervishes, Satanism etc were in the later rankings of familiarity.

**Table 2.** The results of multiple regressions using the Enter method

Independent variables	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant		3.384	0.001
gender	0.108	-1.127	0.605
Age	0.061	1.388	0.167
Level of Education	0.017	0.339	0.735
<b>Effective and inducing tools and media</b>			
Virtual Social networks	0.223	4.090	0.000
Foreign news sites	-0.48	-0.922	0.385
Satellite Television Channals	0.255	5.218	0.000
Internet	0.012	0.275	0.784
Domestic mass media	-0.140	-2.731	0.007
Computer games	-0.020	-0.444	0.658
Novels and non-Iranian stories	0.124	2.382	0.018
Translated foreign books	0.047	0.883	0.378
Non-Iranian movies	0.058	1.182	0.239
<b>Social and structural contexts and factors</b>			
Religionism	-0.276	-5.318	0.000
Society and family integration	-0.261	-5.218	0.000
Society and family support	-0.095	1.914	0.050
Social satisfaction	-0.160	-3.019	0.003
Institutional social distance	0.105	2.353	0.025
Socio-economic status	-0.138	-2.700	0.008
Social anmie	0.086	2.589	0.014
Familiarity and preferring the Iranian culture	-0.007	-0.149	0.881
Self-esteem	-0.101	-2.157	0.032
Social trust	-0.044	1.987	0.068
Nationalism	-0.142	-2.568	0.011
<b>F=18.35</b>	<b>df=25</b>	<b>sig=0.000</b>	<b>R=0.681</b>
			<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=0.674</b>

It should be noted that none of the students were familiar with groups such as TSM, Akankar, Saybaba, riki, debi ford, TM, Usho, win dayer, and others. To avoid prolongation, the results of the descriptive variables of independent variables are omitted from this study.

Examining the correlation between dependent and independent variables show that between inclination toward newfound mysticisms and the age, gender, and location variables there is no significant relationship, but there is a significant relation between the level of education and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms, such that the higher the level of education, their inclination to such groups is less. In addition, among the universities, the students of Azad universities show the most inclinations to such groups.

Considering the statistical analysis instructions, to obtain the net effects, and a multivariate equation to predict the dependent variable, the following method was used for multivariate analysis. As the Table 2 shows, the value of F in the one-way variance analysis test is 18.35 which is statistically significant based on the reported p-value. Based on the above table, the coefficients for determining independent variables in predicting the dependent variable is 68.1%, which means the estimated variables in this equation explain more than 68% of the changes in the inclination of students to newfound mysticisms. In other words, the independent variables identified in this study, including social and structural contexts, and types of media, have been introduced experientially. This table shows the way social and structural contexts and mass media directly and significantly affect the inclination of students to newfound mysticisms. Based on the results of this table, by summarizing the contextual variables, the media, and structural variables and social contexts, a multivariate regression equation can be formed for the prediction and the determination of the level of inclination of students to newfound and false mysticisms. This equation is as follows:

Inclination toward newfound mysticisms = (0.233) virtual social networks + (0.255)Satellite television Channels + (0.208)Non-Iranian novels and stories + (-0.276) Religionism + (-0.261)Social and family integration +(-0.095)Social and family support + (-0.16) Social satisfaction + (0.105) institutional social distance + (-0.138) socio-economic status + (0.086) Social anomie + (-0.101) Self-esteem + (0.142) Nationalism + (-0.14) Domestic mas media (local and national)

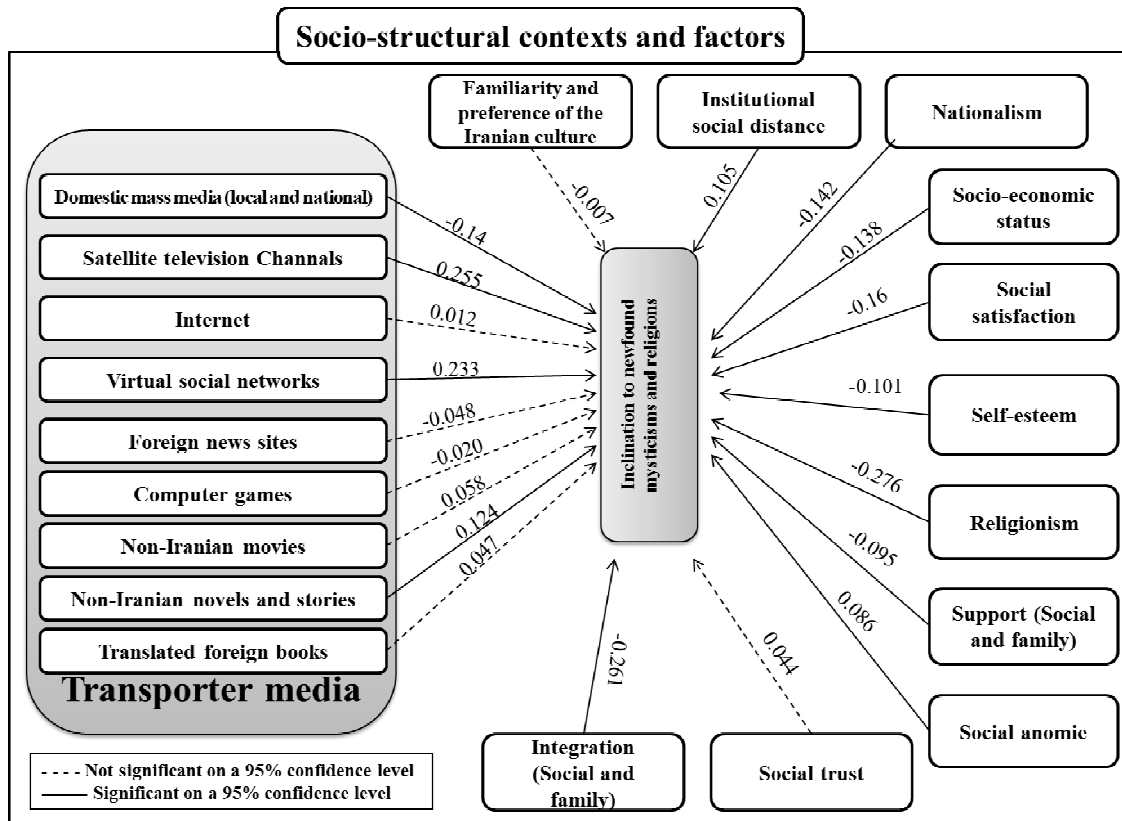


Figure 2. Path Analysis

Figure 2 also shows the tested theoretical model, the coefficients of the independent variable path, and the level of generalization or rejection each of these relations. Such that the social variables are viewed as the contexts, and various media are viewed as the channels for transfer and attracting of students to the teachings of newfound mysticisms. According to this model, domestic media have a preventive effect on the inclination toward newfound mysticisms, and satellite television Channels, the use of virtual social networks, and foreign novels and stories cause an increase in the

inclination toward newfound mysticisms in Urmia university students. The effect of media, such as the internet, foreign movies and books, computer games, and foreign news Channels, are not statistically significant and cannot be generalized to the population study.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The students of Urmia universities, more than average, were inclined to the commonalities of newfound mysticisms. On the whole, among all universities, Azad university students were more inclined toward newfound mysticisms. In a research performed by the National Youth Organization on the inclination of students (from 12 cities) to mysticisms was that most were inclined toward Iranian mysticism and literature, next toward Islamic mysticism, next toward eastern mysticism, and finally toward western mysticism. The multivariate analysis in this study was performed by including all independent variables including social and structural and mass media variables. The result of this multivariate and comprehensive analysis shows that the variables included in the equation clearly explain more than 68% of the changes in the dependent variable (inclination toward newfound mysticisms). In other words, the measured independent variables in this analysis to a 68% degree can explain the inclination of students to newfound mysticisms; this amount of prediction is considerable for a complex dependent variable such as the dependent variable of this study. Seyyed Hassan Miri [7] in his MA thesis titled "influential factors on the inclination toward newfound mysticisms", has examined the level of inclination toward newfound mysticisms and the effective social factors using a survey method. Based on the results of correlations in this study, the variables including legitimacy of the ruling order, the associates, belief in humanism and secularism, and the originality of welfare, had a significant relation with the inclination to newfound mysticisms. However, but the variables: becoming romantic, aesthetic individualism, and feeling low self-esteem, did not show a significant relationship with the inclination toward newfound mysticisms. From reviewing the past studies in this area, it is clear that enough attention has not been paid to the social and relational factors that affect the inclination toward newfound mysticisms among the youth.

Therefore, in this study both social and relational factors have been tended to. The results are categorized on socio-structural levels, as follows:

Socio-economic class and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the results show that these variables don't have a bivariate significant relationship with one-another. But in the regression equation, the effect of the socio—economic status on the inclination toward newfound mysticisms is significant, and its beta value is -0.13. Therefore the students that belong to lower classes of the society are exposed to the inclination to these mysticisms.

Nationalism and inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the relationship between these two variables is reversed, and statistically may be generalized to the all of population study. The beta value for the effect of nationalism on reducing the inclination to these lost groups is -0.142 which shows that nationalism and strengthening the national personality can directly decrease the inclination to these mysticisms.

Religionism and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: analyzing the correlations between this variable and the dependent variable shows that the type of relationship between these two variables is also reversed. This relation is very strong and significant. The analysis of the regression equation shows that the religionism variable, among all the independent variables, has the most effect on the dependent variable (inclination toward newfound mysticisms). The beta value of this effect is -0.276 but the negative direction indicates that by increasing religionism substantially decreases the inclination of students to newfound mysticisms.

Social integration and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: results show that these variables have an inverse, significant relation with one another. Results of the performed regression analysis shows that by controlling other variables, the net and direct effect of social integration on the inclination toward newfound religions and mysticisms, second to religionism, has the highest beta associated with it (beta=-0.261). Therefore this is one of the most effective social variables which affect inclination toward newfound mysticisms among university students.

Social support and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the results of the correlation tests between these two variables show a reversed and significant relation between them such that by increasing the level of social support, the inclination toward false religions and mysticisms decreases. The regression equation also shows that support from the society and family decreases the inclination toward newfound mysticisms with a beta of -0.095.

Social anomie and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the results of the correlation test show a direct and significant relation between the variables, with a coefficient of 0.13. This means that an increase in social anomie causes an increase in the inclination to these mysticisms. The amount of this variable's regression beta, in the multivariate regression equation is significant (beta=0.086). This beta value shows the net and direct effect of social anomie on the dependent variable. Even though the indirect effect of social anomie on the inclination toward newfound mysticisms is much more than its direct effect.

Social trust and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the relation of this variable and the dependent variable is bivariate and significant and the direction of the relation is reversed. So an increase in trust leads to the reduction of inclination toward false mysticisms. But this relation, in the multivariate regression equation is not significant, meaning that

social trust does not have a significant net and direct effect on the dependent variable. But its indirect effect is significantly more ( $\beta = -0.101$ ).

Social satisfaction and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: the results of the test show that these two variables do not have a significant relationship with one another, but the results of multivariate analysis show that by controlling the effects of other variables, the net and direct effect of social satisfaction of the students on the inclination toward newfound mysticisms is great ( $\beta = -0.16$ ), and can statistically be generalized to the statistical population.

Self-esteem and inclination toward newfound mysticisms: according to the correlation test there is a reversed significant relation between these two variables. The value of  $\beta$  of the effect of self-esteem on the inclination to these mysticisms is equal to  $-0.101$  which shows that the more the self-esteem of students, the inclination toward new mysticisms is less.

Familiarity and preference of Iranian culture and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: results show a significant and reversed relation between these two variables. However, since the effect of this variable on the inclination toward newfound religions and mysticisms in the regression equation is not significant, it is concluded that familiarity and preference of Iranian culture does not directly prevent the inclination of students to these false religions and mysticisms, but is effectual indirectly.

Institutional social distance and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms: one of the basic concepts measured in this study is the broad concept of institutional social distance which according to the operational definition, is analyzed with regards to the four main institutions of family, education, economy, and politics. The research hypothesis is that the more the distance between the students and the social institutions, the more inclined they are toward new and false religions and mysticisms. This claim was tested, and the test showed that the relation between these two variables is significant and the direction of the relation is positive. The multivariate analysis also confirms the effect of institutional social distance on the dependent variable, with a  $\beta$  of  $0.105$ . The net and direct effect of this variable on the dependent variable is  $0.105$ , while its indirect effect on the inclination of students toward these mysticisms is  $0.24$ . Thus, the institutional social distance variable effects the inclination of students toward newfound mysticisms both directly and indirectly.

The society, by moving in the path between tradition and modernity leaves mechanical relations and enters a new cycle of social relations. Therefore, the degree of social anomies increases and more people are inclined to individualism and lose social support and integration, namely their social capital; on the other hand, according to many prominent theories, modernity causes social actors to become isolated and introspective. Many use the concept of becoming romantic to describe today's society. On the other hand if social satisfaction increases due to the unorganized social situation, the likelihood that the young fall distant from the main and abstract institutions, including economy, family, politics, education, and etc, becomes greater; all these can play important roles in inclination toward new spiritualities, as the results of the study confirm; also based on the opinions of expert individuals, the level of religionism and nationalism play an important role in the prevention of inclination toward newfound mysticisms, such that if the young people in Iranian-Islamic culture and civilization are satisfied, the likelihood that they search for peace and their desired answers in other cultures and schools of thought will be greatly reduced.

To theoretically explain the issue, theories such as the exchange theory can be mentioned, which relates to the action of the actor, and the effect of the environment on the next action of the actor. From another viewpoint, when an individual is not attracted by socializing institutions (family members, friends and peers group, political leaders and politicians and policymakers, authorities of education affairs, cultural opportunities generated by the authorities of cultural, economic, mental systems, etc) because of inability of basic social institutions and as a result, he is not fully socialized, he turns to other situations, organizations, groups, cultures, and civilizations, and if he receives a reward and sense of satisfaction from them, he will repeat his behaviour and fall distant from his own culture and ultimately be absorbed in another culture (here: newfound religions and mysticisms). But we should pay attention that the variables discussed in this section only emphasize their social and structural role, whereas in the age of communications, the role of the media is emphasized as the channel and the main mechanism for the distribution of cultural events.

## 6. CONCLUSION

According to the results of the study, when the social condition for inclination toward newfound mysticisms is favorable, these groups propagate their teachings through media, including satellite television Channels, the internet, foreign news sites, virtual social networks, and foreign sources and media (computer games, novels, translated books, and foreign films and serials) and lead university students who utilize these media to incline toward newfound mysticisms. Of course this occurs in conditions where the socio-structural condition is evaluated as unsatisfactory. In these conditions the role of domestic media (local, and national) is reversed: the findings of the study show that in the event the social factors for the inclination toward newfound mysticisms are present, domestic media can play a preventive role such that these media can decrease the inclination toward these kinds of spiritualities in two ways; by affecting other variables including religionism and nationalism, and directly, by increasing their awareness to the present mysticism. In addition to what has been mentioned, the result of multiple regression analysis, which by controlling the relations between independent variables, measures the direct effect of each variable on the dependent variable, indicate that in a condition where social variables are

controlled (i.e. the absence of socio-structural factors that affect the dependent variable) and the social condition is suitable, still some media play a role in the inclination of students toward newfound mysticisms. These media consist of satellite Television Channels, virtual social networks, and domestic media (local and national). The process of their effect is as follows: through satellite Television Channels, or virtual social networks (including facebook, twitter ...), students become more familiar with the teachings of newfound mysticisms and will probably incline toward them. While by controlling the effect of other variables, the relation between the use of domestic media and the inclination toward newfound mysticisms is reversed. In other words, utilization of the domestic media prevents students from inclining toward new spiritual groups. Hence, more emphasis should be placed on domestic media as a powerful mechanism for preventing the inclination toward new religions.

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