
Cultural Influence of Celebrities on Adolescents: The Role of Electronic Advertising and Reference Groups

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the asymmetric effects of exchange rate fluctuations on the automobile, housing, and stock markets, as well as the consumer price index (CPI), in Iran over the period 1991–2022 (1370–1401 in the Persian calendar). To analyze the data, positive and negative exchange rate shocks were first computed using the Nonlinear Autoregressive Distributed Lag (NARDL) model. Subsequently, the impacts of these shocks on the prices in the automobile, housing, and stock markets, as well as on the CPI, were examined. The empirical findings reveal both short-run and long-run nonlinear relationships among the variables under investigation. Specifically, the analysis of asymmetric exchange rate shocks indicates that automobile and housing market prices respond significantly only to positive exchange rate shocks, with the magnitude of the effect being greater in the automobile market than in the housing market. In contrast, negative exchange rate shocks exert no statistically significant influence on either market. Regarding the stock market, the results demonstrate that it is sensitive to both positive and negative exchange rate shocks, with negative shocks exerting a more pronounced impact on stock prices than positive ones. Furthermore, the dynamic relationship between the CPI and the exchange rate shows that the CPI is influenced solely by positive exchange rate shocks, while negative shocks have no significant effect. Consequently, quantifying exchange rate volatility represents a critical policy implication across countries, particularly in developing economies such as Iran.

KEYWORDS: Exchange rate, automobile market, housing market, stock market, consumer price index.

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1. Introduction

Culture is a fundamental aspect of any society. Many successes and failures of individuals and even nations are rooted in the prevailing culture. The significance of culture is such that international organizations often designate culture as a distinct domain with specific programs and policies (Khakian et al., 2021, 68). The scope of culture is so vast that any other subject appears incomplete without considering its cultural dimensions. Today, cultural warfare has been incorporated into the defense and military strategies of nations alongside other forms of conflict. Undoubtedly, the development of the internet and cyberspace, if not properly examined and managed, can itself serve as a tool for cultural warfare. Nevertheless, the proper use of these tools can foster the growth and development of a country's culture (Khosh-Andam & Shojaei, 2021, 26).

The influence of culture is extensive, encompassing areas such as promoting literacy, adherence to traffic regulations, dress codes, civic behaviors, interpersonal interactions, and even responses to phenomena like rumors on social media. This domain is so significant and broad that cultural marketing has emerged as a subset of cultural management, attracting considerable attention from researchers (Brannen, 2020, 285). The importance of culture and cultural management becomes even more evident when considering the emphasis placed by figures such as the Supreme Leader in the country's development programs and overarching policies. According to his statements, every social, economic, or developmental plan must include a cultural appendix. This cultural appendix reflects how individuals engage with the subject. For instance, in the context of optimal energy consumption, alongside technical equipment, the culture of usage is highly influential. While culture may not resolve all issues, its substantial role cannot be overlooked (Markazi Moghadam, 2020, 60). In other words, although cultural management and cultivation may not suffice to resolve a crisis, their presence and consideration are undeniably essential (Khosh-Andam & Rostami, 2022, 144).

Terms such as cultural invasion, soft warfare, and the clash of cultures underscore the importance and position of culture. While culture is significant at every age and across all societal segments, studies indicate that the roots of many positive and negative cultural behaviors are established during youth, particularly adolescence. These behaviors become ingrained in a generation, shaping their mindset and often leading to attitude changes that may require significant material and spiritual costs to rectify (Markazi Moghadam, 2020, 61). Consequently, many countries direct a substantial portion of their cultural programs toward adolescents. Even in the realms of the internet, films, and advertisements, so-called liberal Western countries are highly sensitive about the information adolescents are exposed to and the content they encounter. In many nations, access to certain topics for adolescents is strictly controlled. This highlights the need for national and cultural authorities to focus on adolescents if they aim to promote a specific culture within the country (Quan et al., 2022, 4).

To succeed in this arena, it is imperative to identify the channels that influence adolescents' cultural behavior. Various studies have highlighted some of these factors. Although the number of influencing factors can be extensive, celebrities, reference groups, and electronic advertising have been identified as primary contributors with a significant impact. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of celebrities, electronic advertising, and reference groups on the cultural behavior of adolescents.

Based on this objective, the conceptual model and research hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Celebrities influence the cultural behavior of adolescents in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 2: Electronic word-of-mouth advertising influences the cultural behavior of adolescents in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 3: Reference groups influence the cultural behavior of adolescents in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 4: Celebrities influence reference groups in the cultural domain in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 5: Electronic word-of-mouth advertising influences reference groups in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 6: Reference groups mediate the relationship between celebrities and the cultural behavior of adolescents in Mashhad.

Hypothesis 7: Reference groups mediate the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth advertising and the cultural behavior of adolescents in Mashhad.

2. Literature Review

2-1. Celebrities

According to Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell, endorsement is a technique in which a brand, product, or company is recommended, supported, or promoted by a prominent or famous individual—either an expert in the field or a celebrity. An endorser is described as a public figure or private citizen who provides a written or spoken testimonial praising the virtues of a product. Testimonials are typically provided by ordinary citizens, while endorsements are given by celebrities (Calvo-Porrá, 2021, 225).

Celebrity endorsements transfer positive associations and connections linked to the celebrity to the brand. This transfer creates a positive brand image and ultimately enhances the endorsed brand's equity. Celebrities are well-known individuals (e.g., television stars, movie actors, successful athletes, pop stars, entertainers) who have gained fame due to their achievements. By establishing a connection between consumers and the promoted brand, celebrity endorsements lead to higher advertising recall rates and improved engagement with potential customers. Ultimately, celebrities enhance product sales by helping to overcome cultural barriers and repositioning a brand or company image. Consequently, the influence of celebrities extends beyond product and brand sales, impacting various aspects of popular culture and, in turn, shaping consumer attitudes and perceptions (Hussain, 2020, 3).

Celebrities' attributes—often characterized by unique skills, charisma, desirability, and an appealing lifestyle—imbue brands with meaning. Celebrity endorsements are more effective than endorsements by other professionals, such as product experts or company executives. Indeed, these endorsements serve as an attraction for the product, drawing attention to the brand and increasing advertising and brand awareness. The efficacy and effectiveness of using celebrities

largely stem from consumers perceiving them as highly dynamic, attractive, and likable (Sun et al., 2021, 63).

2-2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising

Word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising is one of the oldest methods of information transmission, and various definitions have been proposed for it. One of the earliest definitions, provided by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1966), describes it as the exchange of marketing information between consumers in a way that fundamentally shapes their behavior and alters their attitudes toward products and services. Other authors have defined WOM as a tool for interpersonal communication that freely provides received information about a brand, product, or service to others (Filieri et al., 2021, 665). Similarly, WOM is defined as communication between consumers about a product, service, or company, where the information sources are considered independent of commercial influence. These interpersonal exchanges provide greater access to consumption-related information than formal advertising, extending beyond the messages delivered by companies and inadvertently influencing individual decision-making. WOM is widely recognized as one of the most significant factors influencing consumer behavior, particularly for intangible products that are difficult to evaluate before consumption, such as tourism or hospitality services. Consequently, WOM is considered the most critical information source in purchase decisions and intended consumer behavior (Verma & Yadav, 2021, 114).

A modern form of WOM in online communication is known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This form of communication has gained particular importance with the rise of online platforms, making it one of the most influential information sources on the web, for example, in the tourism industry. As a result of technological advancements, these new communication tools have led to changes in consumer behavior by enabling consumers to influence one another and share information about companies, products, or brands (Akdin, 2021, 241).

One of the most comprehensive conceptualizations of eWOM was provided by Litvin et al. (2008), who described it as all informal communications conducted via the internet, directed at consumers, and related to the use or characteristics of goods, services, or their sellers. The advantage of this tool is its accessibility to all consumers, who can share their reviews and opinions with other users through online platforms. While consumers once relied on WOM from friends and family, today they seek online reviews (eWOM) to gain information about a product or service (Verma & Dewani, 2021, 114).

2-3. Reference Groups

As proposed in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the second factor influencing an individual's behavioral intention is subjective norms. Additionally, in many models, subjective norms are considered a factor influencing attitudes. Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure an individual feels to perform or refrain from a target behavior. Individuals often act based on their perceptions of what others (e.g., friends, family, colleagues) think they should do, and their intention to adopt a behavior is potentially influenced by those with whom they have close relationships (ShirKhodaie et al., 2015, 155).

Merton's Reference Group Theory is situated within the functionalist sociological tradition. According to functionalism, the existence and survival of a social institution or structure depend on its ability to fulfill functions that meet the essential needs of the social system, ensuring its continuity and stability. Merton emphasizes that individuals align their behaviors and evaluations with the groups they select as their reference frameworks. Reference groups are not limited to sociological social groups but also encompass "social categories," "social collectives," and even "individuals" (Lester, 2016, 38).

In research, questions about subjective norms or reference groups are designed based on Merton's theory. Accordingly, the focus is primarily on the extent of influence from family, friends, and colleagues. In the next stage, depending on the research type, questions about secondary groups (e.g., celebrities, religious figures, actors, athletes) may also be considered. Studies such as Paul et al. (2016, 124) provide examples of measuring subjective norms.

2-4. Behavioral Intention

According to Ajzen and Fishbein, the intention to adopt a behavior is one of the most critical steps in the diffusion and adoption process and is considered the most sensitive and prolonged stage of adoption. Similarly, Lichter views behavioral intention as an appropriate predictor of actual individual behavior (Bagheri, 2011, 55). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, the most significant determinant of an individual's behavior is their behavioral intention, which Fishbein and Ajzen define as an individual's subjective judgment about the likelihood of performing a specific behavior. An individual's intention to perform a behavior is a combination of their attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms (Ghasemi et al., 2018, 63). Other equivalent definitions of intention include commitment and decision to perform an action or achieve a goal, as well as choice, decision-making, and planning. Intention or inclination serves as an indicator of how much effort an individual is willing to exert in planning. These definitions are broad, encompassing motivation and planning. Intention may immediately translate into action or may take time to manifest (Khosh-Andam, 2017, 35).

According to Fishbein, an individual's intention to perform a behavior is a function of their attitude toward performing that behavior in a specific situation, the norms governing the behavior in that situation, and their motivation to comply with those norms. What is particularly important is that attention is directed toward the individual's attitude toward performing a behavior, not their attitude toward an object. Second, the attitude must be measured in a highly specific situation. Finally, the attitude toward the intended action is a function of the individual's beliefs about the potential consequences of performing that action and their evaluation of those beliefs. Bent and Hurl argue that a better understanding of consumers' behavioral intentions can help marketers establish stronger connections with their target audience (Saeida Ardekani & Jahanbazi, 2015, 56).

Narmenji et al. (2020) investigated the impact of information-sharing behavior on social media on social capital. Moradi and Mohammadi (2020) examined the role of social media in shaping social fear and changing lifestyles. Rezvani et al. (2020) explored the impact of electronic word-of-mouth marketing on social media on creating shared value in the tourism industry. Heidari et

al. (2020) studied the influence of the soft power of satellite television networks on social modeling and lifestyle changes among women.

3. Research Methodology

Given that the results of this study are applicable to all cultural sectors and organizations active in the cultural domain, the research is classified as applied. Additionally, it is a descriptive-survey study, as it describes the behavior of individuals within a population and utilizes a questionnaire for data collection. Data for the theoretical framework were gathered from library resources and reputable domestic and international scientific databases. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Firman et al. (2021), with its validity confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis and its reliability assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Table 1 presents the number of items related to each variable and their reliability scores:

Table 1: Questionnaire Items and Reliability Measures

Research Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Celebrities	1-5	0.761
Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising	6-10	0.802
Reference Groups	11-13	0.777
Behavioral Intention	14-16	0.728
Total	16	---

In this study, the statistical population consisted of adolescents in the city of Mashhad. Based on Morgan's table and considering the unknown size of the population, a minimum sample size of 384 was determined. Ultimately, 408 questionnaires, collected through non-probability convenience sampling, were analyzed. To ensure that adolescents' responses were not influenced by political contexts or other background factors, the cultural topic under investigation was defined as behaviors related to environmental preservation. It is evident that influencing one cultural behavior can extend to other cultural aspects, including ideological ones. Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using structural equation modeling with AMOS software.

4. Findings

4.1. Normality Test of Data

To assess the normality of the data, the skewness and kurtosis of the data distribution were compared with a normal distribution. If the difference falls within the range of (-2, 2), the distribution is considered normal. Table 2 presents the results of the normality test:

Table 2: Normality Test Results

Variable	Sample Size	Skewness	Kurtosis	Result
Celebrity Endorsement	408	-0.768	1.023	Normal
Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising	408	-0.151	0.912	Normal
Reference Groups	408	-1.266	1.698	Normal

Variable	Sample Size	Skewness	Kurtosis	Result
Purchase Intention	408	-1.107	1.946	Normal

4.2. Inferential Statistics

Questionnaire Validity: Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the validity of the questionnaire. According to Kline (2015), a factor loading greater than 0.3 indicates that the item effectively measures the corresponding variable. Figure 2 displays the factor loading values:

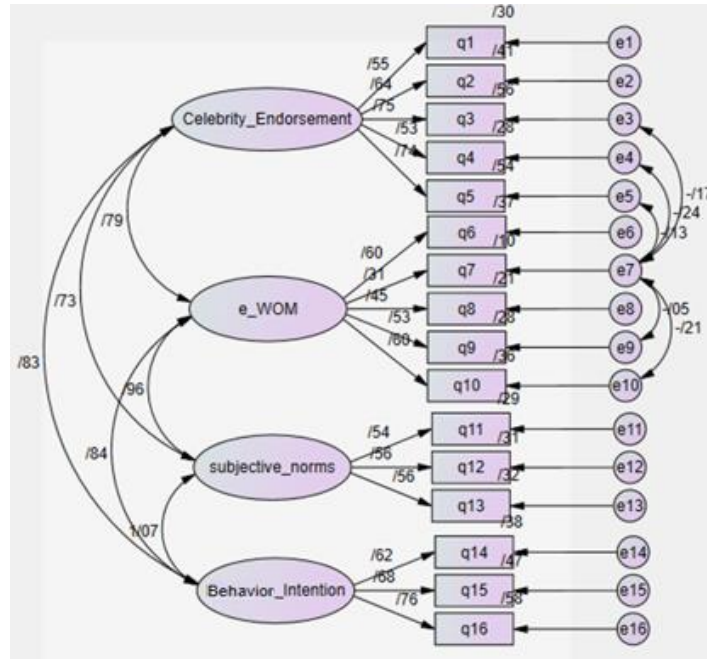


Figure 1. Factor Loadings

Questionnaire Validity: Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess the validity of the questionnaire. According to Kline (2015), a factor loading greater than 0.3 indicates that the item effectively measures the corresponding variable. Figure 2 illustrates the factor loading values.

Fit Indices: Table 3 presents the fit indices for the proposed model, all of which fall within acceptable ranges. Therefore, it can be concluded that the hypothesis results are statistically reliable.

Table 3: Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	χ^2/df	SRMR	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	IFI
Acceptable Range	2-5	$x < 0.05$	$0.05 < x < 0.08$	$x > 0.9$	$x > 0.9$	$x > 0.9$	$x > 0.9$	$x > 0.9$
Obtained Value	2.475	0.043	0.06	0.921	0.933	0.950	0.978	0.981

Following confirmation of the model’s fit, hypothesis testing was conducted using t-statistics and path coefficients. Figure 3 depicts the conceptual model designed and executed in AMOS software, with path coefficients specified.

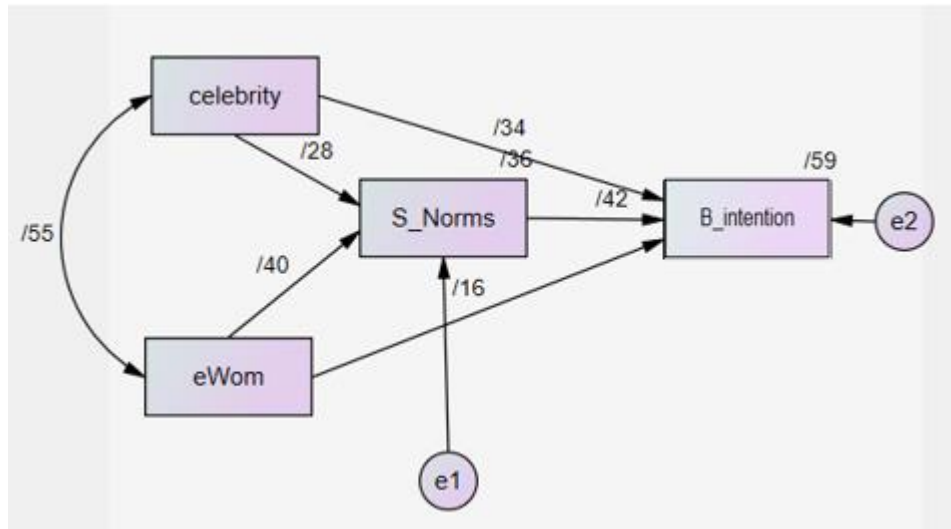


Figure2: Path Coefficients of Hypotheses

Based on the software outputs, Table 4, summarizing the results of hypothesis testing, has been completed:

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Results

No.	Direct Hypotheses	T-Statistic (t)	Path Coefficient	Result
1	Celebrities → Behavioral Intention	8.515	0.34	Confirmed
2	Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising → Behavioral Intention	3.942	0.16	Confirmed
3	Reference Groups → Behavioral Intention	10.590	0.42	Confirmed
4	Celebrities → Reference Groups	5.970	0.28	Confirmed
5	Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising → Reference Groups	8.357	0.40	Confirmed
6	Celebrities → Reference Groups → Behavioral Intention	---	0.117	Confirmed
7	Electronic Word-of-Mouth Advertising → Reference Groups → Behavioral Intention	---	0.168	Confirmed

5. Conclusion

Based on the results, the role of celebrities in shaping adolescents' behavioral intentions is significant (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, celebrities have the ability to influence reference groups (Hypothesis 4). The trustworthiness, reputation, credibility, and real-life behavior of celebrities in the cultural domain can significantly impact the behavioral intentions of their audience. Today, social media platforms easily facilitate the sharing of individuals' daily activities, serving as a basis for judging celebrities' behavior regarding cultural issues. Undoubtedly, the greater the discrepancy between their actions and words, the less influential their authority becomes.

Therefore, special attention must be paid when investing culturally in celebrities. Moreover, celebrities—whether actors, artists, athletes, academic or cultural figures, political personalities, or even social media influencers—each have their own unique followers. These followers are not limited to specific age groups, genders, or characteristics. Given the influence of reference groups on adolescents' behavioral intentions (Hypothesis 3), it is advisable to utilize a diverse range of celebrities to promote a cultural behavior or belief effectively.

Another factor influencing adolescent behavior is electronic word-of-mouth advertising (Hypothesis 2), which can be conducted by celebrities or others. The critical issue is adolescents' susceptibility to the influence of virtual spaces. Today, virtual spaces have solidified their role as authoritative media, and their influence appears to be growing. So much so that other audio, visual, and written media have entered this space to maintain their relevance and impact. Although managing content in this competitive environment is challenging, adhering to professional strategies can enhance influence over adolescents' cultural behavior. Proposed strategies include delivering cultural messages through humor and engaging content, gamification, networking (offering rewards based on sharing frequency), planning for long-term engagement, and creating short-term challenges for specific cultural themes. Electronic word-of-mouth advertising also influences reference groups (Hypothesis 5). Reference groups may include family, friends, like-minded communities, or influential individuals for a particular person. Consequently, it is essential for cultural institutions and authorities to maintain an active presence on social media and virtual platforms. In virtual spaces, presenting topics with positive reasoning is more effective than prohibition. In other words, adolescents prefer to receive news and information from channels that are positive and encouraging rather than restrictive. This suggests that promoting positive behaviors with reasoned arguments may be more effective than emphasizing prohibitions, at least until adolescents are drawn to specific groups. Subsequently, the negative consequences of failing to adhere to a cultural behavior can also be addressed.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be offered to cultural authorities to establish specific cultural behaviors among adolescents. These behaviors may range from environmental and social responsibility to adherence to traffic regulations, social norms, lifestyle choices, and interpersonal interactions. Accordingly, the following suggestions are proposed:

- When selecting celebrities, prioritize their reputation and commitment.
- The credibility of content produced by celebrities is crucial, as it significantly influences judgment and acceptance by the target audience.
- Initially, the popularity of celebrities or groups favored by adolescents should be carefully assessed.
- Utilize a diverse range of celebrities to influence various societal segments, ensuring that content, tone, and presentation are tailored to the target audience's characteristics.
- Given the dynamic nature of society, continuous monitoring of the social and cultural environment and adapting programs to environmental changes are vital. Cultural institutions should be granted greater autonomy in decision-making to minimize the time between recognition, decision, and action, thereby enhancing effectiveness.
- Employing young individuals who align more closely with the new generation in terms of age and mindset is essential for both execution and decision-making.

- An active presence of cultural institutions and individuals on social media platforms popular among adolescents and the target audience is a necessity. Legal barriers to this should be minimized as much as possible.
- Leveraging the potential of religious seminaries in producing cultural content and encouraging sharing through social media via competitions, campaigns, and financial or non-financial incentives should be prioritized as an actionable program.
 - Continuous and enhanced engagement between religious seminaries, as key cultural institutions, and the younger generation should be facilitated.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.