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Factor Analysis of Consumerism in Post-Islamic Revolution Iran

Akbar Mohammadi¹; Soroush Fathi²; Mehdi Mokhtarpour³

- 1. Ph.D. Student of Sociology, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
- 2. Associate Professor of Sociology, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
- 3. Assistant Professor of Sociology, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

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Abstract: The concepts of consumption and consumerism are historical-social phenomena and among the key features of human life. Today, with advancements and the development of technology – particularly in areas such as media – consumerism has become a unique, multidimensional issue that deeply influences the social, cultural, political, and economic life of societies. As such, it has drawn significant attention across various scientific fields. All aspects of human life are now affected by this phenomenon. By studying the dimensions, influencing factors, and the systems and sub-systems responsible for consumerism – as well as its consequences - it is possible to establish a desirable framework for governance over consumption and attitudes toward it. Considering the breadth of this topic, the aim of this research is to investigate the contribution and priority of different fields and factors influencing the growth and control of consumerism in Iran. The statistical population consists of all residents (inhabitants of districts 1, 5, and 9 of Tehran) in the year 2024 (2024–2025). Based on Cochran's formula, approximately 400 individuals were selected using cluster sampling and surveyed. The research was conducted using a survey method and a researcher-developed questionnaire. Findings showed that, among six influential factors, the most impactful included: political changes and the rise of the reconstruction government; waves of rural-to-urban migration and increased class mobility after the Revolution and post-war era; expansion of technology; development of international consumer markets; increased oil revenues; and the production of high-quality, diverse foreign brands. Meanwhile, the dominance of material over spiritual values after the war, along with the valorization of wealth and capitalism, also played major roles. In contrast, the least influential factors in the rise of consumerism among Iranians after the war were the erosion of Iranian identity and unbalanced development.

Keywords: Consumption, Consumerism, Islamic Revolution of Iran, Factor Analysis.

Introduction

Consumption is a historical-social phenomenon shaped by the actions and constructions of human beings – human behaviors grounded in goals, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations that stem from social and cultural values, and the frameworks of systems and subsystems. It manifests as a lifestyle shaped by the reciprocal influence between individuals and their social environment, leading to socialization and shaping people's attitudes toward various social phenomena, including consumption. A review of various theorists in the field of consumption and its historical transformation across social classes confirms a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of consumption. Over the course of the twentieth century, the very nature of consumption has changed. Consumption is no longer what Veblen and Simmel once analyzed. This means that consumption is a process with a social structure and a historical evolution. As long as capitalism continues to evolve, consumption will continue to change (Bocock, 2002:67).

Often, consumption is thought of as merely the act of purchasing goods or services. But in its social context, consumption is much more than buying or using products. It can be tied to an individual's identity, social status, and daily life. It helps define a person's place in society. This perspective on consumerism represents what is called the sociology of consumption (Kennedy, 2008:1). The roots of studying consumerism can be found in the work of Karl Marx, particularly in his concept of commodity fetishism, where he described a social relationship embedded within consumerism – not between people

¹ Email: parhammohammadi1990@gmail.com

² Email: fathi.soroush@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

³ Email: mehdi.mokhtarpour@gmail.com

or even between buyer and seller – but in the relationship between goods and money within the market system. Furthermore, Max Weber contributed, especially when he introduced the idea of status symbolism (ibid, 2008:2). This concept indicates an individual's social position in society, expressed through the types of goods and services they purchase. In other words, those who buy more luxurious items tend to position themselves economically above those who can only afford necessities. Therefore, a sociological study of consumerism allows us to understand and perceive this phenomenon beyond the question of how an individual consumes. It gives the researcher the opportunity to explore the hidden ideology behind it – why certain goods are produced solely for specific segments of society, and ultimately how consumption becomes part of individuals' social identity (Hour, 1995:45).

Consumerism, when taken to extremes, is considered a social harm – something that requires scientific understanding and, subsequently, fundamental remedy or, more precisely, strategic planning. Consumption plays a significant role in determining the type, quantity, and form of production and distribution in a society, yet it is itself shaped by the nature and scale of production. If a society's conditions push individuals toward ever-increasing consumption, then a large portion of the society's resources and income will be allocated to consumption. Clearly, in such a situation, the overall level of savings declines and the groundwork for investment is weakened. This leads to decreased production and social impoverishment. Economic deterioration in turn creates fertile ground for cultural poverty and social decay. Together, these factors increase a society's vulnerability to dominant powers and threaten national political independence. If the rising needs of the society are met through imports, then the demand for foreign currency to purchase from global markets will intensify dependency.

In post-revolutionary Iran, the presence of successive governments with differing ideological orientations has brought about deep changes and significant transformations in patterns of consumption and consumerism across various segments of society. As a result, consumption among groups with lower wealth and limited financial capacity has increased notably. This widespread consumption within lower-income groups has led to the emergence of a new lifestyle pattern, detached from their income level, gender, occupation, or social status. This emerging model produces new behaviors and identities for the Iranian social actor — ones that often contradict their actual social status and role expectations. Consumption is based on perception and the mode of valuing — it is, therefore, a matter of choice that stems from attitudes, values, and individual tastes. It symbolizes the characteristics by which individuals are judged, and lifestyle becomes a structure shaped by the totality of social positions, founded upon these personal choices. Consumption, the attitude toward it, and the types of goods consumed leave both positive and negative effects on society's members. It can either enhance or limit creativity, innovation, and initiative among individuals, and affect their patience, tolerance, and resilience in facing societal problems and challenges. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the extent and priority of various fields and factors that contribute to the growth and control of the consumerism phenomenon in Iran.

Empirical Considerations

- Mohammad Reza Hosseini, Manouchehr Alinajad, and Mohammad Pirinejad (2018), in a study titled *Consumerism and Its Sociological Influencing Factors Among Youth in Tehran*, concluded that the variables of trend-following (0.58), self-expression and self-presentation (0.58), hedonistic values (0.37), body management (0.34), and media advertising (0.26) all have a significant positive relationship with consumerism. Their multivariate regression analysis showed that these variables explain 49% of the variance in consumerism. Trend-following, with a beta coefficient of 0.32, and self-expression, with 0.27, had the highest contribution in explaining the variance of the consumerism variable.
- Talebi and Ramezani (2017) attempted to study the deterrents of consumerism among citizens
 of Kashan. They concluded that religiosity, traditionalism, revolutionary identity, gender
 identity, religious values, and socio-economic status all have significant relationships with
 consumerism.
- Rabiei and Rafiei (2017), in a paper titled Consumerism: From Compulsion to Pleasure, presented a sociological study of consumerism among residents of Tehran. Their findings showed that consumption is not necessarily a one-sided result of structural-class constraints.

Instead, it must be understood as a combination of both subjective and objective factors, linked to themes such as the desire for distinction and hedonism.

- Afrasiabi et al. (2016), in their examination of consumerism with a focus on urbanization among youth in the city of Yazd, concluded that gender and place of birth had a significant relationship with consumerism. In fact, the more societies move toward modernity and urbanization, the higher the levels of consumerism among social actors. In additional, there is a significant and positive relationship between the use of mass communication tools (particularly satellite TV) and globalization.
- Talebi Dalir and Akbari (2014), in a study on media and consumerism, found that among various forms of media, satellite television and the internet had the highest influence on consumerism. Moreover, following foreign media reference groups showed a significant and increasing effect on consumerist behavior.
- Movahed et al. (2010), in research titled Media, Gender, and Consumerism conducted among youth in Shiraz, found a relationship between media usage and consumerism by gender. Men, who used media more frequently, were more consumerist than women. (Movahed et al., 2010, as cited by Hosseini et al., 2018)
- Madandar and Mohammadi Shakiba (2010), in their study on the views of Tehran residents regarding consumerism and the need to reform consumption patterns, believed that the most important causes of luxury-driven consumption and consumerism among the public were competitiveness and peer comparison. The most serious consequences of failing to reform consumption patterns were identified as resource waste, scarcity of facilities, and economic issues such as inflation and high costs.
- Saeidi (2003), in his study on the consumer society and youth, argued that fashion, as one of the major trends in the consumer society, helps young people define their attitudes and values. It is consumerism and the lifestyle of youth that construct their identities and distinguish them from others. He views youth as active consumers of the modern society, who both creatively and reflectively generate new styles, trends, and spaces, while simultaneously using those that already exist.
- Nourbakhsh et al. (2018), in a paper titled *Youth's Conspicuous Consumption: The Future of Consumerism* studied the relationship between youth and key domains of life, including value priorities and behavioral outcomes. According to this study, Iran's current phase of demographic transition into a youthful society, the rising urban population, the presence of class disparities, and the increasing prominence of material values in contemporary urban life, have collectively created a kind of public stage in the city for displaying luxurious consumption.
- Kazemi (2016), in his book *The Everyday in Post-Revolutionary Society*, argued that a review of recent decades in Iran's history reveals the following: while the economic austerity of the war and the revolution pushed society toward uniformity and similarity, the austerity of the reconstruction era did nothing but reopen class divides and inequalities that had only temporarily closed during the war and immediate post-revolution period. One significant consequence of these gaps in later years was the meaningfulness assigned to consumption within society. With the public's changing outlook on life, attitudes toward consumption also shifted—becoming more positive and even religious families eventually reconciled with consumer culture.
- Fathi et al. (2014), in a study titled *Examining the Relationship between Social Media Use and Youth Lifestyle (Case Study: Youth in Khalkhal)*, found that overall, there was not a significant general relationship between social media and lifestyle. However, when looking at the details, certain links did emerge for instance, a significant relationship between variables like cultural interaction and uncensored information exchange with lifestyle. However, there was no observed relationship between gender (men vs. women), marital status (single vs. married), media users vs. non-users, political engagement, domestic and international interactions, or interactions with cultural, social, and political figures and lifestyle.
- Swaydan et al. (2011), in a comparative study conducted in two countries Canada (Montreal) and Tunisia (Tunis) demonstrated that in both cultures, the display of social status had a direct effect on conspicuous consumption. They also found that in individualist societies, the rate of

conspicuous consumption is higher than in collectivist ones. The researchers defined conspicuous consumption in their study as the purchase of visible brand-name products to demonstrate social status and enhance self-confidence.

- Wei and Pan (1999) conducted a study titled *Mass Media and Consumerist Values in China*. Using a survey method and a probabilistic sample from one of China's largest cities, they aimed to answer two questions: What consumerist value orientations are linked to Chinese individualism? And how do mass media contribute to the emergence of such values? They identified three consistent consumerist value orientations: luxury consumption, a desire for self-actualization, and admiration of the Western lifestyle. Younger, more educated individuals with better financial conditions were more likely to hold these values. They also found that holding such values was correlated with the frequency of reading consumer magazines and exposure to foreign advertising.
- Bukodi (2007), in a study aimed at examining social stratification and cultural consumption in Hungary, highlighted three influential factors social status, education, and income in relation to book reading. The study's findings indicated that reading tendencies were dependent on an individual's and their family's social position. A significant relationship was found between cultural goods consumption and higher social status, higher education, and sufficient income. That is, individuals with higher education, adequate income, and elevated social standing were more inclined toward cultural consumption.
- Torech (2007), in a study conducted in Canada on the factors influencing participation in cultural consumption concluded that family income, education, and type of economic activity were key contributors. The results also showed that individuals engaged in financial, managerial, and commercial work had the highest levels of participation in cultural consumption compared to others. Moreover, those involved in production-related jobs and individuals with educated parents also showed higher participation. Beyond activity type and education, material status and place of residence were also significant factors influencing participation in cultural consumption.
- Paek and Pan (2004), in a study titled The Expansion of Global Consumerism: The Impact of Mass Media and Advertising on Consumerist Values in China, sought to show how advertising and the nature of media content especially content originating in the West play a key role in shaping consumerist orientations among urban residents in China. Analysis of data from three of China's most economically advanced cities showed that exposure to Western media content and consumerist-themed programming led to the adoption of two key consumerist values: quality-oriented consumption and innovative consumption. It also fostered more positive attitudes toward advertising, ultimately resulting in increased consumption.

Methodology

This study is survey-based, and the required data were collected through a questionnaire. The statistical population of this research consists of all citizens living in districts 1, 5, and 19 of Tehran in the year 1403 (2024–2025). The sampling method in this section of the study is multistage cluster random sampling. In this method, the target population is divided into several hierarchical layers, with larger layers encompassing smaller ones. The researcher randomly selects several larger layers and, in the next step, randomly chooses a number of sub-layers from within those selected. This sampling continues down through the layers until reaching the smallest sampling unit. In summary, in this method, individuals and main elements are selected across more than one stage (multi-stage), and at each stage, random sampling techniques are applied to select elements from the chosen clusters. In multistage cluster sampling, clusters are selected in the first stage, and then in the second stage, individuals from each selected cluster are chosen randomly.

From the city of Tehran, three districts were selected to represent upper-class, middle-class, and low-income areas. District 1 of Tehran, including neighborhoods such as Niavaran, Velenjak, Qeytariyeh, Fereshteh, Farmanieh, Zafaraniyeh, Tajrish, Darabad, Elahieh, Ozgol, Mahmoudieh, and Aghdasieh, had a population of 487,508 according to the last official census in 2016. Based on economic indicators, this district was selected as representing the affluent class.

District 5 of Tehran, including neighborhoods such as Punak, Shahr-e Ziba, Shahran, Aryashahr, Farahzad, Ekbatan, Jannat Abad, Bagh-e Feyz, Sardar-e Jangal, and Apadana Town, had a reported population of 856,565 and was considered representative of the middle class.

District 19 of Tehran, including Khani Abad-e No, Shariati Town, Abdol Abad, Nemat Abad, Saleh Abad, Dowlatkhah, and Bokharaei Town, had a population of 295,627 and was classified as a low-income district. Therefore, the statistical population of this study consists of citizens aged 18 to 65 residing in districts 1, 5, and 19 of Tehran. To determine the sample size, Cochran's formula was used, and the number of selected participants was 384:

In Cochran's formula for calculating sample size, the preliminary value of n is calculated using the following formula:

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Then, to compute the final value of n, it is inserted into the Cochran formula, where n represents the size of the statistical population:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{\left(n_0 - 1\right)}{N}}$$

Accordingly, the population of residents in districts 1, 5, and 19 of Tehran amounts to approximately 1,638,700 individuals. With a 5% margin of error, the resulting sample size is 384 participants, which we increased to 400 to enhance the confidence level.

Findings

The age distribution of the study population is as follows: 13% were under 20 years old, 45% were between 20–29 years old, 24% were aged 30–39, 12.5% were in the 40–49 age group, and 5.5% were above 50. This distribution indicates that the average age of the sample population was 39.49 years. Moreover, half of the respondents were above 37 years old, and the other half below. Besides, the highest concentration of respondents, in terms of age, was found in the 35-year age group. Gender-wise, 39.9% of respondents were men and 60.1% were women.

As for educational level, 23.2% had a high school diploma or lower, 43.5% had associate degrees, 24.7% held bachelor's degrees, 6% had master's degrees, and 2.6% had PhD degrees or higher.

Regarding socio-economic status, 35.3% of the respondents were in the lower class, 39.7% in the middle class, and 25% in the upper class. This distribution shows that half of the respondents belonged to middle or higher socio-economic strata, and the other half to lower ones. The greatest accumulation of respondents based on socio-economic status was observed in the middle class.

Findings of the Factor Analysis Test

This study aimed to conduct exploratory factor analysis and identify the influential factors and contexts of consumerism in Iranian society after the Islamic Revolution. In this regard, the results of the first factor analysis statistic, known as the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, was 0.883, indicating the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed the suitability of the data for this method. The results showed a test value of BT = 9378.271, with a significance level of Sig = 0.000. Therefore, sufficient correlation exists between the variables for factor analysis to proceed.

Table (1): Results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test in Exploratory Factor Analysis

KMO	0.768
BT (Bartlett's Test)	937.271
DF (Degrees of Freedom)	32
Sig (Significance Level)	0.000

In this analysis, the number of factors was determined using the eigenvalue criterion, where the minimum acceptable eigenvalue for factor selection is greater than one. Accordingly, two factors were extracted using orthogonal rotation via the Varimax method. Further results indicated that the total explained variance was estimated at 64.166%.

In the following table, the contribution of each factor and the corresponding variables (items) associated with six factors are presented.

Table (2): Contribution of Each Factor

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Sixth Factor	Fifth Factor	Forth Factor	Third Factor	Second Factor	First Factor	Items
-	-	-	-	-	0.846	The rise to power of the Reconstruction Government in the 1990s under President Rafsanjani and his policies fueled consumerism among Iranians.
-	-	-	-	-	0.824	The surge in rural-to-urban migration during the 1990s led to increased consumerism.
-	-	-	-	-	0.777	Universal access to higher education for all social groups after the war and the revolution contributed to the rise in consumerism.
-	-	-	-	-	0.704	The ease of social mobility after the revolution is one of the reasons behind the tendency toward consumerism.
-	-	-	-	-	0.683	Widespread and universal access to media after the revolution and war led to a growing consumerist inclination among Iranians.
-	-	-	-	-	0.672	The normalization and promotion of capitalism after the war, along with encouragement of capital accumulation, are among the drivers of increased consumerism in Iran.
-	-	-	-	-	0.645	The rise in attractive advertisements and the portrayal of luxury lifestyles in television series after the war pushed Iranians toward consumerism.
-	-	-	-	-	0.643	Promoting consumerism has been one of the strategies used by politicians to keep the public preoccupied.
-	-	-	-	0.846	-	Technological expansion has contributed to increased consumerism in our society.
-	-	-	-	0.834	-	The development of consumer markets at both national and international levels has been a factor in the growth of consumption in Iranian society.
-	-	-	-	0.798	-	Increased oil revenues resulting from the global economy, especially after the war, triggered a tendency toward consumerism among Iranians.
-	-	-	-	0.791	-	The drive for higher profits among the merchant class has contributed to the rise in consumerism.
-	-	-	0.840	-	-	The availability and production of high-quality foreign brands have intensified Iranians' appetite for consumption.
-	-	-	0.834	-	-	Attractive and persuasive foreign advertisements play a significant role in creating an insatiable desire to consume.
-	-	-	0.799	-	-	The wide range and variety of foreign products have been a factor in the tendency toward constant consumption.
-	-	-	0.676	-	-	Distrust in domestic products has led to abnormal and unbalanced consumer habits among Iranians.
-	-	0.890	-	-	-	The dominance of material over spiritual values after the war has encouraged people to embrace consumerism.
-	-	0.889	-	-	-	The expansion and normalization of wealth display in society have led different social classes to turn toward consumption.
-	-	0.837	-	-	-	Wealth has replaced morality as a core value in society.

Sixth Factor	Fifth Factor	Forth Factor	Third Factor	Second Factor	First Factor	Items
-	-	0.798	1	ı	-	The widespread culture of rivalry and comparison, even among lower classes, is one of the cultural drivers behind increased consumerism in Iran.
-	0.859	-	ı	1	-	The impact of oil-based economics on Iran's unbalanced consumerism is undeniable.
-	0.826	-	-	-	-	The disconnection between the ruling system and the realities of Iranian society has led to the emergence of unbalanced consumer growth.
-	0.727	-	ı	ı	-	The implementation of capitalist structures in Iranian society, despite anti-capitalist laws, has created imbalance and hindered development.
0.807	-	-	ı	1	-	The Iranian identity has shifted from being a producer of technology to merely a consumer of it.
0.614	-	-	-			Consumerism has led to a weakening of Iranian identity.
0.506	-	-	-	-	-	Virtual space is eroding the authenticity and identity of Iranians, turning them into thoughtless, consumer-driven beings.

The above table categorized the factors influencing consumerism in post-revolution Iranian society into six groups.

Ranking of Influential Factors and Contexts of Consumerism in Iran after the Revolution

To examine and compare the effective factors and contexts influencing Iranian consumerism, the Friedman test was used – a non-parametric test that is the equivalent of the parametric repeated measures ANOVA. The results of the Friedman test are shown in the table below:

Table (3): Friedman Test Results

Mean Rank	Factor	Rank
7.36	Political developments after the war	First
7.27	Appeal and quality of foreign products	Second
7.18	Valorization of wealth and capitalism	Third
6.18	Influence of the global community on Iranian structure	Fourth
6	Erosion of Iranian identity	Fifth
5.52	Uneven development	Sixth

Chi-square = 47.26 | Significance level = 0.000

The results indicate that the calculated mean ranks are as follows: uneven development (5.52), erosion of Iranian identity (6.00), influence of the global community (6.18), valorization of wealth and capitalism (7.18), appeal and quality of foreign products (7.28), and political developments after the war (7.36). The chi-square value of 47.26 and a significance level of 0.000 indicate a statistically significant difference between the influencing factors of consumerism among Iranians. In summary, it can be said that, in order of impact, factors such as political changes and the rise of the Reconstruction Government, the wave of rural-to-urban migration and ease of class mobility after the revolution and post-war period, the expansion of technology, the development of international consumer markets, and the increase in oil revenues, the production of diverse and high-quality foreign brands, the dominance of material over spiritual values after the war, and the valorization of wealth and capitalism had the greatest effect. In contrast, the erosion of Iranian identity and uneven development had the least impact on consumerism among Iranians after the war.

Conclusion

Consumerism takes shape within the framework of society and public culture, and non-economic factors also play a role in its formation—factors that must be acknowledged. Consumerism is a phenomenon that began with the rise of the industrial revolution in the West and intensified with the mass production of industrial capitalism. In Iran, consumerism began during the reign of the second Pahlavi monarchy and intensified in the 1950s with inflation, rising prices, increased imports of foreign goods, a global rise in oil prices, higher oil revenues, and a surge in demand. Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the transition from monarchy to the Islamic Republic, many foreign and domestic policies were reshaped with an anti-Western and anti-Eastern stance. Not long after the revolution, Iran was attacked by Iraq's military, leading to an eight-year war that caused significant human, social, and economic losses. The early post-revolution years, along with war and Western sanctions, were harsh. Imports and domestic production of goods declined, to the extent that even consuming necessities was considered a luxury. After the war, while sanctions persisted, the focus turned toward reconstruction, production, and development. Imports, especially from Eastern countries like China, grew rapidly year by year, and consumerism gradually regained ground. Rising demand was met through imported goods and raw materials – a trend that continues to this day. Now, in the early 1400s (2020s), despite sanctions, inflation, price hikes, the devaluation of Iran's currency against the dollar, and ongoing challenges in domestic production, consumerism continues to grow. Domestic research on consumerism has mostly used deductive strategies, applying and imposing preexisting theories onto the social reality of Iran, while rarely grounded in the actual context and texture of Iranian society.

In response to the study's main question regarding the ranking and prioritization of factors influencing the tendency of different social classes in Iran toward consumerism after the revolution, a quantitative method was employed. The findings from this section are as follows: Among the six main factors, those with the greatest impact include, in order: political changes and the rise of the Reconstruction Government, rural-to-urban migration and ease of social mobility after the revolution and war, technological expansion, development of international consumer markets and oil revenue growth, the production of diverse and high-quality foreign brands, the post-war dominance of material values over spiritual ones, and the increased value placed on wealth and capitalism. The erosion of Iranian identity and uneven development had the least influence on post-war consumerism in Iran.

The findings and results of this study are consistent with the following previous research:

Nourbakhsh et al. (2018), in a paper titled "Youth's Conspicuous Consumption: The Future of Consumerism", examined the relationship between youth and key areas of life, including value priorities and behavioral consequences. According to this paper, Iran's current phase of demographic transition into a youthful population, the growing urban population, the presence of class divisions, and the rise of materialistic values in modern urban life have created a kind of social stage in the city for displaying the consumption of luxury goods. In the present study, it was also shown that the dominance of material over spiritual values after the war is one of the most influential factors driving society toward consumerism.

Afrasiabi et al. (2016), in their paper "Examining the State of Consumerism with Emphasis on Urbanization among Youth in Yazd", empirically investigated the factors related to consumerism among young people in Yazd. The findings showed that the more societies move toward modernity and urbanization, the more consumerist behavior increases among social actors. A significant positive relationship was also found between the use of mass media (particularly satellite television) and globalization. These results align precisely with the current study's quantitative findings, as the expansion of technology and rural-to-urban migration were also identified as influential factors in this process.

Kazemi (2016), in his book "The Everyday in Post-Revolutionary Society", argues that looking at the history of recent decades in Iran reveals the following: while the economic austerity brought on by war and revolution pushed society toward unity and sameness, the austerity of the Reconstruction Era (Dolate Sazandegi) only served to reopen class gaps and inequalities that had been temporarily bridged following the revolution and wartime conditions. One of the key consequences of these later disparities was the meaningfulness assigned to consumption within society. As people's outlook on life changed,

their view of consumption also became more positive – even religious families eventually reconciled with consumer culture. In the present study as well, political changes and the rise of the Reconstruction Government were named as influential and high-priority factors in the post-war development of consumerism in Iran.

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