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## An Examination of the Impact of Cultural Values on Brand Preferences in Tehran's Fashion Market

Fahimeh Chegini<sup>a,\*</sup>, Saeed Baghayi Molan<sup>b</sup>, Somaye Sanei Kashanifar<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Management, Faculty of administrative & Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

<sup>b</sup>Department of Management, Science & Technology, Amirkabir University of Technology, Tehran, Iran

<sup>c</sup>Department of Management, Khatam Institute, Tehran, Iran

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### Abstract

Consumers' brand preferences and loyalty is what has obsessed minds of consumer behavior analysts for many years. There are, definitely, many factors influencing this process but undoubtedly, culture is the most effective factor on a consumer's behavior which is presented in the values and norms a society emphasizes. Culture affects consumer's buying behavior due to its emergence in the values they focus. Since values are long lasting, efforts to change them are useless. So, marketers almost always try to swim along the waves of culture rather than against them. Every culture consists of a series of values which are transferred to its members. One of the most common views in brand preferences studies is the self-congruity theory, according to which a consumer's behavior is to a great extent defined by comparing one's self image with the brand personality of a product. This theory plays an important role in marketing as it is mentioned that consumers are mainly influenced by their self-image, especially when making fashion buying decisions. This paper focuses on how much brand preferences are identified by cultural values of consumers and to what extent each construct of values can explain brand preferences in Iranian context. Brand preference in this research is measured using a brand personality scale. Values are also measured using list of values (LOV). Hence, a sample of 313 consumers of Adidas, Nike and Holiday sports clothes was selected in Tehran. Structural equation modeling technique and one-way ANOVA were utilized for data analysis.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +98 912 580 2006  
E-mail address: [fahimeh.chegini@gmail.com](mailto:fahimeh.chegini@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

With international marketing growing, firms should decide whether to opt a global marketing strategy or a local one? Global strategy is based on a belief that needs of consumption and ways to respond to them remain the same in different markets around the globe, therefore, it is not necessary to change the marketing mix for and with regard to every country's specifications. Local strategy is, on the other hand, based on a fact that there should be different marketing plans according to each country's needs, values, habits and buying power (Roosta,2007). With the emergence of global market segments, marketing and branding managers in firms with markets of multiple cultures and countries have to face the challenge of common consumption-related behavior with logos and brands of special meanings to them, if they seek to serve these markets effectively (Gammoh et al.,2011).

To guide managers who seek an effective way to improve their brand equity in the competitive global market, Alden et al.(1999) has depicted a new brand positioning strategy called "global consumer culture positioning" (GCCP), versus two other strategies: foreign consumer culture positioning (FCCP) and local consumer culture positioning (LCCP) (Gammoh et al.,2011). In his paper, Gammoh et al.(2011) proposes GCCP strategy as the one with the most acceptance and appeal for consumers. Hence, the effect of culture on brand positioning in global markets scale is one of the most important issues for marketing managers. Commercial firms use standardized brand image strategies rather than local brand image strategies with no strong evidence; especially, when implementing a series of international advertising activities, they ignore cultural values in local markets. Brand images in international markets should reflect the differences in cultural values which represents different needs of consumers among various nations. Rajagopal in his paper (2009) reports some factors to be of most importance for powerful brand strategic positioning, one of which is cultural values. He also states that brand personality traits can contribute to consumers' brand preferences and can be longer lasting than functional attributes due to the symbolic meaning and the emotional tie they create. Many scholars have also tested the influence of cultural values on brand awareness and come to a conclusion that values have significant effect (Foscht et al., 2008; Buil et al.,2009; Mulyanegara and Tsarenko, 2009; Park and Rabolt, 2009; Rajagopal, 2009; Gammoh et al.,2011; Sung et al.,2011; Paasovaara et al.,2012).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Brand preferences

Research into brand preferences has gained the interest of many marketing scholars since 1970s when they began to examine attributes of brand preferences over a range of products. One of the most popular concepts in brand preferences is the theory of self-congruity. According to this theory a consumer's behavior is partially identified by a comparison of an individual's self image with a product's brand image (Mulyanegara and Tsarenko, 2009).

Whether marketers like it or not, brands gain a personality and reputation among consumers which will influence their buying decisions. This is why marketing and brand managers should plan for their brands' personality (Hawkins et al., 2004). Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand." Researchers, in consumer behavior studies, have done some research into how a brand personality enables consumers to express their own self, ideal self or specific dimensions of self through a brand (Aaker, 1997).

Foscht et al.(2008) in a six-nation research of brand perception of the same brand concludes that the same brand is perceived differently in various cultures. He then questions this and states that if a firm chooses to be more market-oriented, in order to make the brand more relevant to that market's self-concept, should emphasize the brand characteristic that is desirable in that market, though may not desirable in other countries.

### 2.2. Brand Personality

Brand personality, in marketing literature, was first mentioned in the early 1950s, when Gardner and Levy (1955) proposed that brands own traits which are conceived by consumers in complex ways. This continued to interest others (Levy, 1959; Landon, 1974; Crask and Lasky, 1990) who concluded that brand personality can (Mulyanegara and Tsarenko, 2009):

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