

Examining the Impact of Social Media Use for Information Seeking and Socialization on Participation in Social Commerce: The Mediating Role of Cultural Identity Change and the Moderating Role of Social Support (Case Study: Transnational Students in Iranian Universities)

Seyedeh Masoumeh. Ghamkhari^{1*}, Elahe. Mollaei¹, Sara. Arjmandnia²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

² MA, Department of Business Management, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

* Corresponding author email address: ghamkhari@pnu.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Ghamkhari, S. M., Mollaei, E., & Arjmandnia, S. (2026). Examining the Impact of Social Media Use for Information Seeking and Socialization on Participation in Social Commerce: The Mediating Role of Cultural Identity Change and the Moderating Role of Social Support (Case Study: Transnational Students in Iranian Universities). *Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering*, 5(2), 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jrmde.202>



© 2026 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB). This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the effect of using social media for information seeking and socialization on participation in social commerce, considering the mediating role of cultural identity change and the moderating role of social support among transnational students in Iranian universities. Given the growing prevalence of social media use among international students and the crucial role of these platforms in shaping attitudes, interactions, and socio-economic behaviors, this research seeks, through an integrative perspective, to explore various dimensions of social media functionality in the process of commercial participation. The research method employed is descriptive–correlational, and data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software. The statistical population consisted of foreign students studying at Iranian universities during the 2023–2024 academic year, and the sample size was determined as 384 participants using Cochran’s formula. Data were collected online through a researcher-made questionnaire. The findings revealed that the use of social media—both in informational and social dimensions—directly and indirectly increases participation in social commerce through cultural identity change. Furthermore, social support plays a significant moderating role in strengthening the impact of these two dimensions on commercial participation. These findings highlight the importance of social media in creating the cultural and social contexts necessary to facilitate social commerce engagement among transnational students.

Keywords: *Social media; Social commerce; Cultural identity; Social support; Transnational students.*

1. Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become a defining force in reshaping the ways individuals interact, construct identity, and engage in social and commercial participation across global societies. The increasing integration of social networking platforms into everyday life has profoundly influenced not only communication patterns but also cultural identity formation, social behaviors, and consumer engagement in social commerce. This transformative capacity of social media has sparked growing scholarly attention to understanding how virtual interactions contribute to the development of social, moral, and cultural dimensions of identity in different populations (Ghasemi, 2023; Hajli, 2015; Motahari et al., 2024).

Social media offers interactive spaces that merge communication, entertainment, and information-sharing functions, transforming them into vital environments for self-expression and collective identity building. Within this context, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter provide arenas where users continuously negotiate between personal authenticity and social desirability (Balick, 2023; Purovanto, 2023). Through activities such as sharing content, following influencers, and participating in virtual communities, individuals engage in complex processes of social comparison, validation, and identity performance. These dynamics have heightened the relevance of examining social media's effects on users' psychological and cultural orientations, especially among youth and transnational populations (Chen, 2025; Pérez-Torres, 2024).

The expansion of digital technologies has blurred geographical and cultural boundaries, allowing individuals to experience hybrid cultural affiliations and multifaceted social roles. As such, social media has become a central site for cross-cultural encounters and intercultural adaptation processes. The mechanisms through which these digital spaces influence cultural identity change have been explored in recent empirical studies highlighting the interplay between online communication, globalization, and cultural assimilation (Alami et al., 2024; Motahari et al., 2024). Particularly among university students, social media not only facilitates the acquisition of information but also serves as a socialization medium that fosters new identity orientations and commercial engagement behaviors (Hu et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2024).

Research has shown that social identity formation in digital contexts is a multifaceted process influenced by

online feedback, peer norms, and perceived cultural alignment (Fan, 2023; Kühn & Riesmeyer, 2025). Adolescents and young adults often internalize virtual interactions into their sense of belonging and self-definition, navigating between online and offline social expectations. For instance, Kühn and Riesmeyer (Kühn & Riesmeyer, 2025) demonstrated that self-presentation on visual platforms like Snapchat functions as a symbolic process of identity negotiation among adolescents. Similarly, Pérez-Torres (Pérez-Torres, 2024) conceptualized social media as a "digital mirror" reflecting and reinforcing emerging identity structures during adolescence. Such findings illustrate that the digital self is not merely a projection of offline personality but a co-constructed outcome of continuous social interaction and feedback loops.

Cultural identity, as a core aspect of social identity, undergoes significant transformation within the context of digital globalization. Online communities expose individuals to diverse cultural narratives, thereby influencing value systems, behavioral norms, and self-conceptualization (Belavadi et al., 2023; Nawaz & Bhutta, 2024). In multicultural or transnational settings, such as among international students, social media plays a dual role—it facilitates social integration while simultaneously generating cultural tension between home and host cultures (Motahari et al., 2024; Obrenovic et al., 2024). As Alami et al. (Alami et al., 2024) and Ghasemi (Ghasemi, 2023) found, prolonged engagement with globalized media environments can gradually reconstruct users' cultural identities, creating new patterns of hybridization that influence both personal attitudes and collective participation in social commerce.

Furthermore, identity development in the digital age extends beyond cultural boundaries, encompassing psychological, educational, and prosocial domains. Studies on educational and moral identity reveal that digital interactions affect motivation, belonging, and moral self-regulation among young people (He et al., 2023; Negru-Subtirica et al., 2023). Online environments encourage self-presentation and peer affirmation, shaping adolescents' values and social competencies (Anwar, 2024). However, this constant exposure to global media content also increases vulnerability to identity disturbances and emotional stress, particularly when online social comparisons evoke insecurity or alienation (Obrenovic et al., 2024; Κωνσταντοπούλου et al., 2022).

The socialization function of social media has been identified as a critical determinant in the development of prosocial behavior and social responsibility. Theories of

social identity suggest that individuals derive meaning and motivation from group belonging, which influences their willingness to cooperate and engage in socially oriented activities (Torres et al., 2025; Xia, 2025). Online interactions can thus foster empathy, moral identity, and prosocial engagement, particularly when mediated by cultural values and supportive digital communities (Li et al., 2024; Sakı & Öztaş, 2024). These processes not only influence personal development but also translate into collective behaviors within digital economies—an aspect directly relevant to the growth of social commerce.

Social commerce, a hybrid of e-commerce and social networking, relies heavily on user participation, trust, and social influence. The integration of social interaction into commercial activities has redefined consumer engagement by emphasizing peer endorsement, emotional connection, and shared cultural values (Hajli, 2015). Hu et al. (Hu et al., 2023) demonstrated that cultural identity change and perceived social support significantly mediate the relationship between social media use and participation in social commerce. This indicates that individuals' involvement in digital markets is not merely a transactional behavior but a socially embedded process shaped by identity transformation and community affiliation.

In this regard, research by Motahari et al. (Motahari et al., 2024) and Alami et al. (Alami et al., 2024) further highlights that among young and transnational users, engagement in online social spaces facilitates a redefinition of self-concept and fosters adaptive cultural integration. These identity shifts, in turn, enhance openness to digital collaboration and participation in social business initiatives. Similarly, Fan (Fan, 2023) and Fatima and Rahman (Fatima & Rahman, 2023) reported that social media acts as a cultural mediator, allowing marginalized or minority groups to construct new identities that align with global communication trends while preserving elements of traditional culture.

Beyond individual identity, social media usage also intersects with structural and societal dimensions. The widespread dissemination of cultural symbols through digital platforms contributes to the emergence of shared online communities that transcend national borders (Ghasemi, 2023; Nugraha et al., 2024). These communities often shape users' commercial attitudes, influencing brand loyalty and collective purchasing behaviors in virtual marketplaces. As digital economies expand, social commerce has evolved into a critical arena for understanding the socio-cultural dynamics that link information exchange,

identity formation, and economic participation (Hajli, 2015; Hu et al., 2023).

However, the influence of social media on identity formation is not unidirectional or universally positive. Excessive reliance on online validation and exposure to conflicting cultural narratives may lead to identity diffusion and psychological distress (Balick, 2023; Obrenovic et al., 2024). Studies by Torres et al. (Torres et al., 2025) and Nawaz and Bhutta (Nawaz & Bhutta, 2024) emphasize that the social outcomes of media engagement depend on contextual factors such as social support, empathy, and security. Cultural identity can either strengthen prosocial engagement or fragment personal coherence, depending on the quality of online interactions and the availability of supportive networks (Li et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024).

Moreover, empirical evidence underscores the mediating role of communication and social-emotional competence in the link between identity and behavioral adaptation (Du & Qi, 2023; Nazarzadeh et al., 2024). Effective communication skills and emotional intelligence can buffer the potential risks of cultural dissonance in digital environments, allowing individuals to leverage social media for constructive identity growth. Similarly, Rostami et al. (Rostami et al., 2023) revealed that moral identity and perfectionism influence prosocial behavior, suggesting that ethical self-concept is an essential factor in predicting cooperative tendencies in online interactions.

Cultural identity formation through social media also intersects with generational and socioeconomic differences. Xia (Xia, 2025) found that moral identity moderates the relationship between social self-efficacy and prosocial behavior, highlighting how self-perception interacts with economic and moral conditions in digital spaces. Likewise, Torres (Torres et al., 2025) observed that culture-related stressors influence prosocial engagement among Latino college students, mediated by cultural identity processes. These findings suggest that social media environments are not only communication channels but also social laboratories where individuals navigate ethical, emotional, and cultural negotiations.

In developing societies, particularly in Middle Eastern and Asian contexts, social media has emerged as a critical cultural bridge linking traditional social values with modern global influences (Alami et al., 2024; Motahari et al., 2024). Among transnational students in Iran, the integration of social media into everyday life provides access to global information, fosters social inclusion, and simultaneously triggers cultural redefinition. This duality—social

connectivity and cultural transformation—positions social media as both a catalyst for intercultural adaptation and a mechanism for participation in emerging digital economies (Hu et al., 2023; Nawaz & Bhutta, 2024).

Consequently, the study of social media's effects on cultural identity and social commerce participation has become essential for understanding how digital interaction translates into behavioral and economic outcomes. Integrating identity theories, social learning models, and cultural adaptation frameworks provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing these relationships. The combination of social support as a moderating factor and cultural identity change as a mediating variable offers a sophisticated understanding of how individuals' digital engagement fosters commercial collaboration and community integration (Hu et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024).

In summary, existing literature underscores that social media serves as both a space for self-expression and a transformative medium for cultural identity construction. Its influence extends beyond communication, shaping psychological resilience, social belonging, and prosocial economic behaviors across diverse populations (Obrenovic et al., 2024; Pérez-Torres, 2024). Yet, empirical studies focusing on transnational student populations in developing countries remain limited. Therefore, the present research aims to examine the impact of social media use for information seeking and socialization on participation in social commerce, considering the mediating role of cultural identity change and the moderating role of social support among transnational students in Iranian universities.

2. Methods and Materials

This study is a descriptive–correlational research that examines the relationships among the variables and seeks to analyze the effects of social media use and its dimensions (information seeking and socialization) on participation in social commerce, considering the mediating role of cultural identity change and the moderating role of social support. Statistical modeling was used to analyze the data and the relationships between variables. Since the main objective of the research is to explore the correlations and analyze the causal relationships among the constructs, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was applied for data analysis.

Given the broad statistical population, the sample size was calculated using Cochran's sampling formula. Based on this formula, the sample size for the current study was estimated to be approximately 384 participants, selected from among active users of social media platforms. The sampling method employed was simple random sampling. In this approach, each social media user meeting the inclusion criteria was randomly selected from the statistical population.

Data collection was conducted using a researcher-made questionnaire designed to measure the study variables. The questionnaire included the following measurement components:

- **Social Media and Information Seeking:** Items related to the use of social media for obtaining information and the types of sources utilized.
- **Socialization:** Items assessing the ways users communicate and engage in social interactions on social media platforms.
- **Participation in Social Commerce:** Items measuring users' involvement in social commerce and online commercial activities.
- **Cultural Identity Change:** Items evaluating the influence of social media on users' cultural identity.
- **Social Support:** Items assessing the perceived level of social support received through social media.

To ensure the **validity** of the questionnaire, the following methods were implemented:

- **Content Validity:** The questionnaire was reviewed and refined by experts and specialists in the fields of social media, psychology, and social marketing to confirm that all items accurately and comprehensively measure the intended constructs.
- **Construct Validity:** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate construct validity. This analysis accurately modeled the relationships among the variables and assessed the effects of each variable within the overall model.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. According to accepted standards, values above 0.70 for both reliability indices indicate satisfactory reliability, while values between 0.60 and 0.70 are acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 1

Reliability Values of Research Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)
Use of Social Media for Socialization	0.915	0.925	0.929
Use of Social Media for Information Seeking	0.919	0.927	0.931
Cultural Identity Change	0.913	0.920	0.928
Social Support	0.870	0.879	0.896
Participation in Social Commerce	0.921	0.923	0.934

Based on the results shown in the above table, all Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for the research variables exceed the standard threshold of 0.70. This indicates a high degree of internal consistency among the items and uniform measurement of the constructs. Consequently, the measurement instrument used in this study demonstrates satisfactory and acceptable reliability.

3. Findings and Results

One of the essential stages in any scientific research is data collection and analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. Selecting an appropriate research method substantially reduces the likelihood of methodological errors. The application of proper statistical tests consistent with the research design ensures the accuracy and reliability of the obtained results. Accordingly, following the research problem, appropriate statistical techniques were employed in this section to verify or reject the formulated hypotheses.

According to the descriptive demographic statistics of the sample, among the 384 transnational student participants, the majority were undergraduate students, totaling 236 individuals, representing approximately 61.5% of the sample. In contrast, 148 respondents were enrolled in postgraduate programs (master's and doctoral levels), constituting around 38.5% of the total. This distribution indicates that most international students in Iran are enrolled in undergraduate programs, which represents the dominant share in the current analysis.

Regarding the age variable, participants' ages ranged from 19 to 34 years, aligning with the typical demographic of active and potentially engaged university students participating in digital environments and social commerce platforms. Since the questionnaire was distributed online through social media and did not require respondents to provide precise personal information, the gender of respondents could not be definitively identified. Therefore, gender analysis was not included in this study, and the focus remained on the main variables such as media behavior, cultural identity, and commercial participation.

According to data reported by relevant institutions, the number of international students in Iran increased from approximately 1,400 in 2003 to about 26,000 in 2021. This figure excludes students from *Al-Mustafa International University* and *Islamic Azad University*. Moreover, since 2020, the Islamic Azad University has not reported its international student statistics to the Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education.

According to the statistics of the Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, published by the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly in 2021, Iraq has the highest number of students studying in Iran, with a total of 11,747 individuals.

In this study, the statistical population comprised foreign students studying in Iran who use social media platforms as foreign users within the country to obtain information and engage in social interactions related to social commerce. The population includes all individuals who regularly use various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, LinkedIn, and others.

Before testing the research hypotheses, it is necessary to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. First, construct validity is assessed to determine the extent to which the instrument accurately measures the intended concept. At this stage, the factor loadings of the items are examined; higher loadings indicate a stronger association between the item and its corresponding construct.

Next, convergent validity (the correlation among items of the same construct) is assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index, while discriminant validity (the distinctiveness among constructs) is examined by comparing the AVE values with the inter-construct correlations. Following this, the reliability of the constructs is analyzed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability indices to ensure internal consistency among the items. Finally, the overall goodness of fit of the measurement model is evaluated using indices such as the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) or the Normed Fit Index (NFI), to

assess the consistency between the theoretical model and the empirical data. Once these validation steps are confirmed, further analysis can be performed with greater confidence.

The standardized factor loadings and *t*-statistics between the latent variables and their corresponding observed indicators are presented. The results of the measurement model indicate that all factor loadings exceed 0.40, and all *t*-values are above the critical threshold of 1.96. This suggests that all items significantly and adequately measure their

intended constructs. More precisely, exceeding the 0.40 loading threshold reflects an acceptable correlation between each item and its construct, while high *t*-values confirm the statistical significance of these relationships. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the questionnaire used in this study possesses satisfactory and verified construct validity, and its items have sufficient capability to measure the research variables.

Figure 1

Standardized Factor Loadings of the Research Model Items

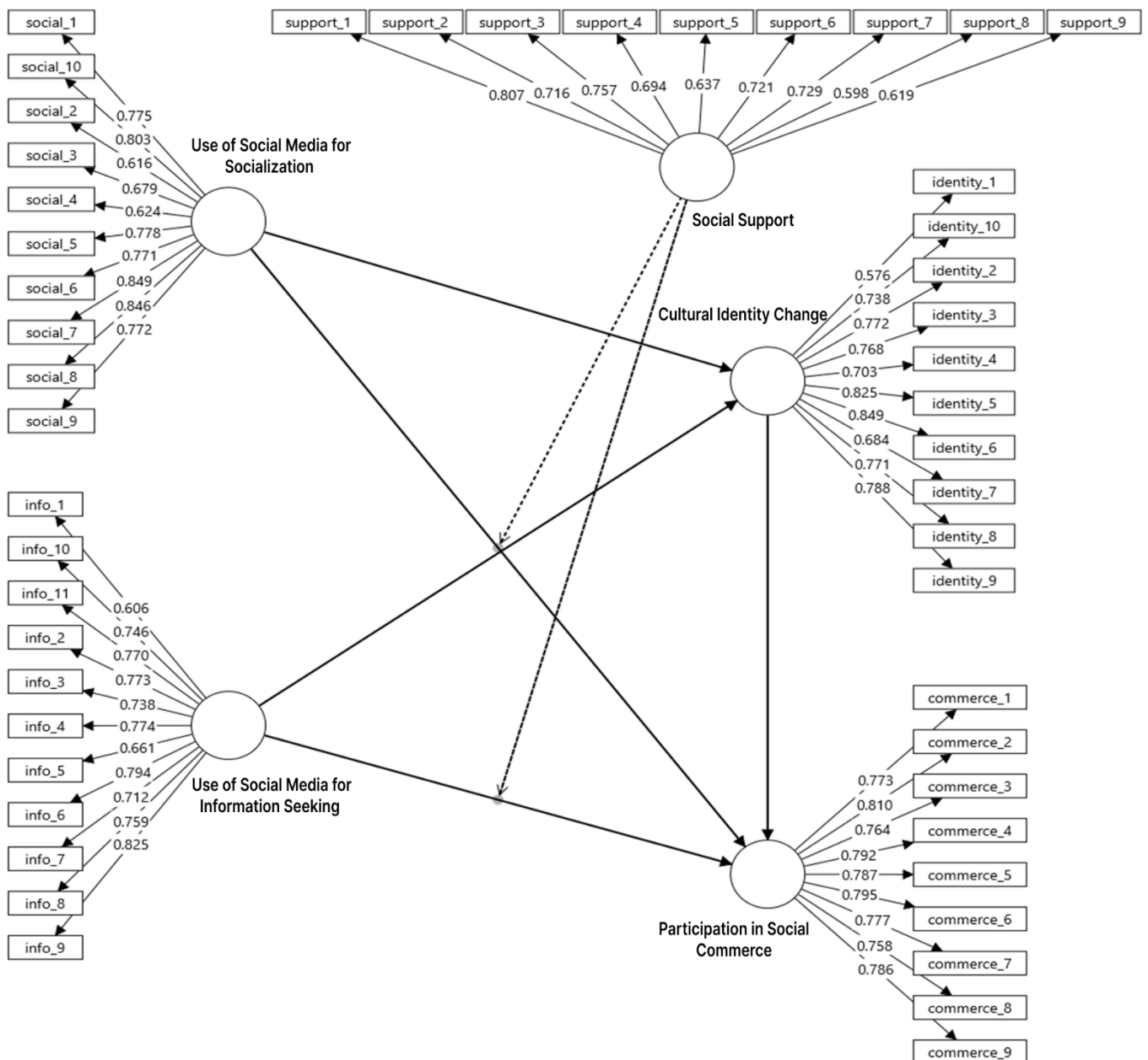


Figure 2

The Operational Model of the Research in Standardized Form

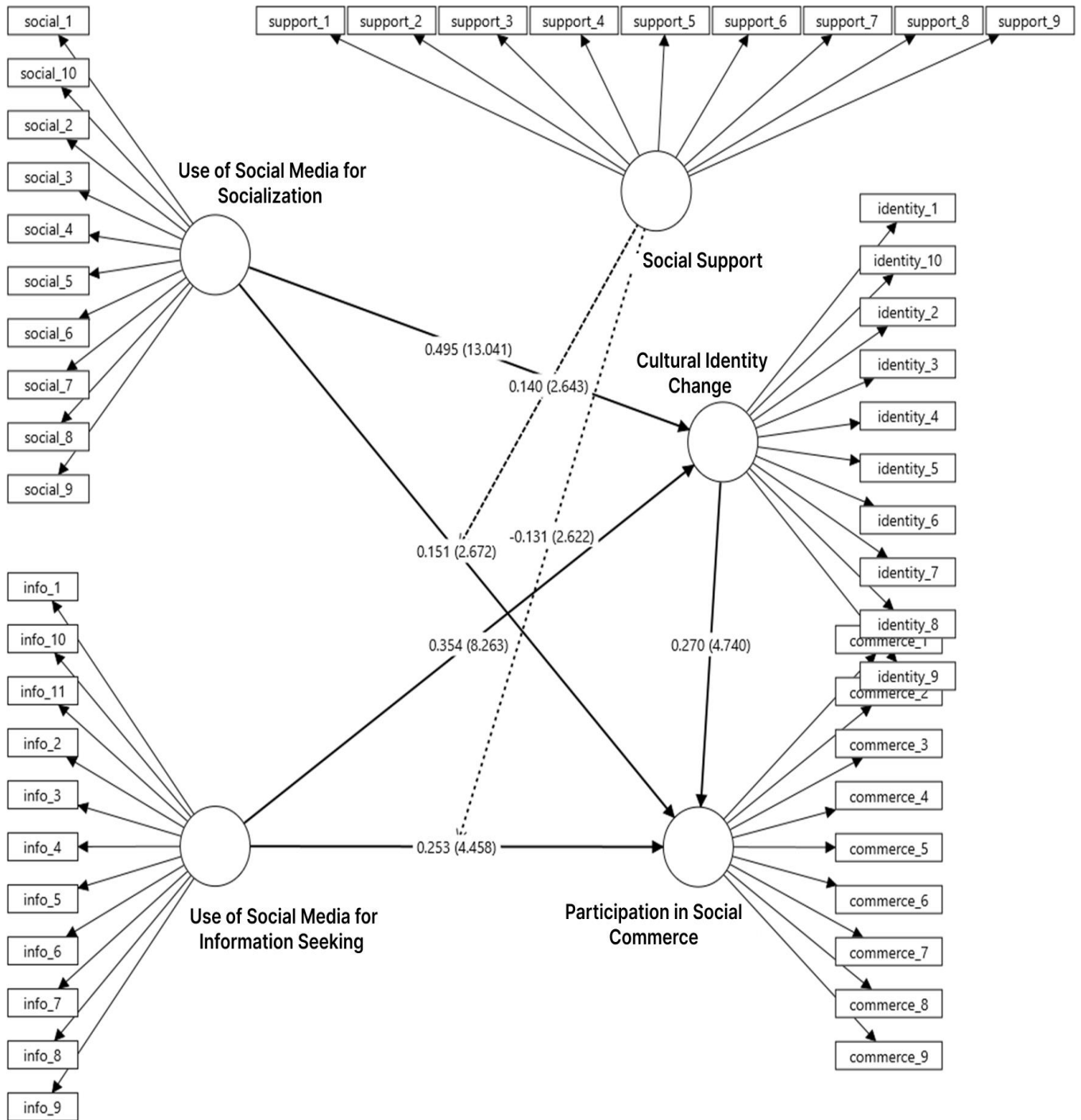


Table 2

Main Hypothesis of the Research

Path	Path Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value
Social Media Use for Socialization → Cultural Identity Change → Participation in Social Commerce	0.134	4.225	0.000
Social Media Use for Information Seeking → Cultural Identity Change → Participation in Social Commerce	0.096	4.382	0.000
Social Support × Social Media Use for Socialization → Participation in Social Commerce	0.140	2.643	0.008
Social Support × Social Media Use for Information Seeking → Participation in Social Commerce	0.131	2.622	0.009

The results of testing the main hypothesis—which investigates the impact of social media use for information seeking and socialization on participation in social commerce—indicate the presence of statistically significant relationships that are conceptually consistent with the theoretical framework of the study.

According to the data presented in the table, in the first mediating pathway, the use of social media for socialization, with a path coefficient of 0.134 and a t -value of 4.225, significantly influenced cultural identity change ($p = 0.000$). Similarly, social media use for information seeking, with a path coefficient of 0.096 and a t -value of 4.382, had a significant effect on cultural identity change ($p = 0.000$). These results demonstrate that users' interactions with social media—whether for social communication or information acquisition—lead to transformations in their identity dimensions. This identity transformation, in turn, promotes greater engagement in social commerce activities. Hence, it can be concluded that the variable *cultural identity change* plays a significant mediating role in the model and facilitates the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

In the next step, the moderating role of social support was examined across two distinct pathways. First, the interaction effect between social support and social media use for socialization, with a path coefficient of 0.140 and a t -value of 2.643 ($p = 0.008$), indicated that higher levels of social support enhance the effect of socialization through social media on participation in social commerce. Second, the interaction between social support and social media use for information seeking, with a path coefficient of 0.131 and a t -value of 2.622 ($p = 0.009$), further confirmed that social support serves as an amplifying factor in transmitting the influence of social media on social commerce engagement.

Overall, these findings reveal that social support, as a contextual resource, moderates the strength of social media's impact on individuals' commercial participation tendencies through cultural identity change. Therefore, the main hypothesis of the research is fully supported—indicating that the use of social media for information seeking and socialization, mediated by cultural identity change and moderated by social support, has a positive and significant effect on participation in social commerce among transnational students at Iranian universities.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that the use of social media for both information seeking and socialization significantly and positively affects participation in social commerce among transnational students in Iranian universities. This relationship operates directly and indirectly through the mediating role of cultural identity change and is further strengthened by the moderating effect of social support. These results highlight the transformative function of social media as both a communicative and cultural mechanism that reshapes users' identity structures while facilitating engagement in digital commercial ecosystems. The outcomes are consistent with the growing body of research emphasizing the role of digital platforms in redefining how individuals construct identity, interact socially, and participate economically in the online environment (Alami et al., 2024; Ghasemi, 2023; Hajli, 2015; Motahari et al., 2024).

The significant mediating role of cultural identity change in the relationship between social media use and participation in social commerce indicates that online engagement leads to shifts in users' cultural orientations. When individuals use social media to seek information or interact socially, they are not merely consuming content but are also internalizing new values, behavioral norms, and social expectations that transform their cultural frameworks. This aligns with the findings of Hu et al. (Hu et al., 2023), who demonstrated that cultural identity change serves as a mechanism linking social media use to behavioral outcomes such as social participation and digital commerce engagement. Similarly, Motahari et al. (Motahari et al., 2024) and Alami et al. (Alami et al., 2024) reported that social media promotes cultural hybridization among youth and transnational populations, leading to greater adaptability in social and economic interactions. These studies suggest that digital exposure allows individuals to navigate between their native cultural identity and emerging globalized cultural systems, which, in turn, fosters active engagement in online communities and commerce.

The current findings also resonate with theoretical frameworks that conceptualize social media as a socio-cultural ecosystem where identity is continuously negotiated. Balick (Balick, 2023) described online environments as "careful cultures" where individuals selectively present themselves to align with evolving social

expectations. Within this process, identity change becomes a product of ongoing comparison, validation, and social adaptation. Chen (Chen, 2025) similarly found that Chinese adolescents' self-identity was shaped through digital interactions that blurred traditional social boundaries. These results parallel the current study's findings that social media usage facilitates cultural evolution and cognitive openness, both of which promote participation in social commerce by fostering trust, shared meanings, and collective identity among users.

Another critical finding of this study pertains to the moderating role of social support. The results demonstrated that the impact of social media use on participation in social commerce was stronger among individuals who perceived higher levels of social support. This suggests that social media not only provides access to information and networks but also creates affective and normative bonds that reinforce user engagement. The importance of social support as a facilitator of digital participation has been emphasized by Li et al. (Li et al., 2024), who argued that social interactions embedded in supportive contexts enhance prosocial tendencies and moral identity, leading to cooperative online behaviors. Similarly, Hu et al. (Hu et al., 2023) found that perceived social support amplifies the positive effects of social media engagement on social commerce involvement by fostering a sense of belonging and trust. These findings support the current study's assertion that social support acts as a psychosocial resource that strengthens individuals' confidence and willingness to engage in shared economic activities within digital spaces.

Furthermore, the current research confirms the proposition of Hajli (Hajli, 2015), who conceptualized social commerce as a framework grounded in trust and interaction-based influence rather than purely transactional motives. In this sense, social support functions as both an antecedent and enabler of digital trust, which is essential for encouraging social commerce participation. Users who experience emotional and informational support from online communities are more likely to interpret digital interactions as safe and reliable, thereby reducing perceived risks and increasing engagement levels. This perspective aligns with studies conducted by Torres et al. (Torres et al., 2025) and Xia (Xia, 2025), who demonstrated that prosocial orientation and supportive environments strengthen individuals' moral efficacy and collective engagement in digital contexts.

The mediating role of cultural identity transformation also reflects the interdependence between individual psychology and collective culture in shaping online

behaviors. Anwar (Anwar, 2024) emphasized that social media provides a psychosocial environment where individuals' identity development processes are influenced by online recognition and group membership. Pérez-Torres (Pérez-Torres, 2024) described this process as a "digital social mirror," where continuous interaction within online communities encourages self-reflection and identity reformulation. This theoretical lens aligns with the current findings, suggesting that transnational students who frequently engage with diverse digital networks develop more inclusive and dynamic cultural identities that predispose them to collaborative and commercial participation.

Additionally, the observed positive relationship between socialization-based media use and participation in social commerce underscores the socio-interactive dimension of digital economies. Participation in online networks allows users to cultivate trust-based connections, exchange experiential knowledge, and co-create digital value. Studies by Nugraha et al. (Nugraha et al., 2024) and Ghasemi (Ghasemi, 2023) demonstrated that social interactions within digital platforms not only facilitate information exchange but also enhance social cohesion and economic cooperation. The integration of informational and social dimensions of media use, therefore, contributes to the formation of shared digital cultures conducive to social commerce participation.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the findings also align with research highlighting the transformative role of social media in cross-cultural adaptation. Nawaz and Bhutta (Nawaz & Bhutta, 2024) observed that cultural identity among social media users in Chitral evolved through continuous exposure to digital content and intercultural dialogue. Similarly, Belavadi et al. (Belavadi et al., 2023) examined the influence of media narratives on collective identity formation during socio-economic crises, finding that online discourse serves as a stabilizing mechanism during periods of uncertainty. In the context of the present study, transnational students may use social media to negotiate cultural boundaries, balancing integration into Iranian academic environments with the preservation of their original cultural identities. This balance likely explains why cultural identity transformation mediates the link between media use and commercial participation.

The findings also corroborate moral and social identity theories emphasizing the role of empathy, prosocial motivation, and moral cognition in online collaboration. Li et al. (Li et al., 2024) and Rostami et al. (Rostami et al.,

2023) demonstrated that moral identity and prosocial orientation mediate the relationship between social interaction and cooperative behaviors. These theoretical perspectives reinforce the notion that digital environments promoting empathy and social inclusion encourage active engagement in prosocial commercial behavior, as reflected in this study's sample of transnational students.

Furthermore, the link between identity change and behavioral participation can be understood through the lens of developmental psychology. Negru-Subtirica et al. (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2023) emphasized that identity construction during adolescence and emerging adulthood is shaped by educational and social experiences that promote goal orientation and social responsibility. Similarly, He et al. (He et al., 2023) and Du and Qi (Du & Qi, 2023) found that professional and academic identity mediates adaptive learning behaviors, suggesting that identity formation serves as a cognitive anchor guiding social participation. The current findings mirror this logic by demonstrating that cultural identity reconstruction through digital exposure fosters openness to social commerce engagement.

In addition to mediating and moderating mechanisms, the broader implications of the findings point toward the emergence of a globalized cultural economy, where digital identity becomes a form of social capital. Purovanto (Purovanto, 2023) illustrated how self-presentation on Instagram functions as a means of constructing digital identity that translates into social and economic opportunities. Similarly, Saki and Öztaş (Saki & Öztaş, 2024) revealed that identity management in online communities enhances self-awareness and behavioral regulation, both of which are critical for sustained engagement. The consistency between these findings and the current study reinforces the argument that identity transformation in online spaces is not merely symbolic—it has tangible behavioral and economic consequences.

The results also suggest that social media functions as a cultural bridge for transnational populations, enabling them to integrate into host societies while maintaining connections with their cultural origins. Zhu et al. (Zhu et al., 2024) found that identity and socialization processes mediate the impact of parental cultural experiences on behavioral adjustment, highlighting the intergenerational transmission of cultural adaptation mechanisms. Applied to the current context, transnational students may rely on social media to manage cross-cultural identities, develop new affiliations, and participate more effectively in collaborative economic practices.

Overall, the findings of this study extend existing literature by demonstrating that social media serves as an interactive arena where cultural identity change and social support collectively shape users' participation in social commerce. This reinforces the multidimensional nature of social media—simultaneously informational, social, and cultural—and situates it as a key driver in digital behavioral economics. The results support a model in which cultural identity transformation acts as an intermediary process linking cognitive engagement and behavioral participation, while social support moderates the strength of this relationship by providing emotional, normative, and structural resources (Hu et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Motahari et al., 2024).

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality between variables such as social media use, cultural identity change, and participation in social commerce. Longitudinal or experimental designs would provide more robust evidence of causal mechanisms. Second, data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce common method bias or social desirability effects. Additionally, the sample consisted exclusively of transnational students in Iranian universities, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Variations in digital access, media literacy, and cultural exposure across countries may yield different results. Finally, the study did not consider potential confounding factors such as language proficiency, length of stay, or prior cross-cultural experiences, which may influence both identity change and social commerce behavior.

Future research could adopt longitudinal methodologies to trace the trajectory of cultural identity change over time, exploring how continued social media engagement shapes long-term behavioral outcomes. Comparative cross-cultural studies would enrich the understanding of how regional and cultural differences moderate the relationship between social media use and social commerce participation. Researchers should also integrate qualitative approaches, such as digital ethnography or in-depth interviews, to capture the nuances of identity negotiation in online spaces. Moreover, future studies could examine the role of algorithmic exposure and platform design in influencing cultural adaptation and economic engagement. Investigating additional psychological variables—such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and moral reasoning—may also reveal more comprehensive models of digital participation behavior.

Practically, the findings of this study offer implications for policymakers, educators, and digital platform designers. Universities hosting transnational students should promote digital literacy programs that enhance intercultural competence and responsible social media use. Social commerce platforms can leverage community-based support systems to foster trust, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity among diverse users. Furthermore, institutions could use social media strategically to facilitate networking, peer mentoring, and cross-cultural collaboration, thereby transforming virtual environments into productive spaces for both learning and entrepreneurship. By recognizing social media as a cultural and social bridge, stakeholders can design interventions that promote not only economic participation but also social integration and cultural harmony in increasingly interconnected digital societies.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

References

- Alami, P., Saeidi-Pour, M., Motahari, M. S., & Pekani, P. (2024). The impact of social media on the formation of social identity. Proceedings of the Fourteenth National Conference on New Research in Education, Psychology, Jurisprudence and Law, and Social Sciences,
- Anwar, M. (2024). The Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Identity Formation and Mental Health: Opportunities, Risks, and Policy Implications. *Psychology*, 2(2), 66-79. <https://doi.org/10.61194/psychology.v2i2.496>
- Balick, A. (2023). Social Media, Identity, and Careful Culture: How Online Social Networks Limit Identity, Amplify Difference, and Diminish Social Cohesion. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 43(1), 24-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690.2023.2160190>
- Belavadi, S., Gardikiotis, A., & Hogg, M. A. (2023). Social Identity Uncertainty During the Greek Financial Crisis: The Role of Media Narratives. *Psychology of Language and Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.58734/plc-2023-0005>
- Chen, Y. (2025). Analyzing the Impact of Social Media Usage on the Formation of Self-Identity Among Chinese Adolescents. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 85(1), 186-192. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/2025.21366>
- Du, Y., & Qi, Z. (2023). Teacher-Student Relationship and Prospect Identity among Students: The Mediating Role of Social-Emotional Competence and Student Satisfaction. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3076579/v1>
- Fan, P. (2023). The Shaping and Influence of Virtual Communities on Adolescent Identity in the Social Media Era. *Media and Communication Research*, 4(7). <https://doi.org/10.23977/mediacr.2023.040709>
- Fatima, S., & Rahman, M. (2023). Social media and identity construction among Muslim youth: Opportunities and challenges. *Youth Studies Quarterly*, 19(1), 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ysq.2023.5643>
- Ghasemi, A. H. (2023). The role of social media in cultural and social changes. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference and Sixth National Conference on New Findings in Management, Psychology, and Accounting,
- Hajli, M. N. (2015). Social commerce constructs and consumer's intention to buy. *International Journal of Information Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.12.005>
- He, Z., Liang, Q., & Wu, H. (2023). The influence of professional identity on academic achievement among university students: The mediating role of academic self-efficacy. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8, 1555-1561. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v8i.4519>
- Hu, S., Ji, F., & Li, D. (2023). Impacts of Social Media Usage in Facilitating Social Commerce: The Roles of Social Support and Cultural Identity Change. In (pp. 276-285). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35921-7_19
- Kühn, J., & Riesmeyer, C. (2025). Adolescents' Norms of Self-Presentation on Snapchat: Bitmojis as an Expression of Identity Development. *Social Media + Society*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251342793>
- Li, P., Jiang, Y., Ye, J., & Xiong, Z. (2024). The Impact of Empathy on Prosocial Behavior Among College Students: The Mediating Role of Moral Identity and the Moderating Role of Sense of Security. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(11), 1024. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14111024>
- Motahari, M. S., Alami, P., Saeidi-Pour, M., & Pekani, P. (2024). An examination of the impact of social media on the formation of the cultural identity of youth. Proceedings of the Fourteenth

- National Conference on New Research in Education, Psychology, Jurisprudence and Law, and Social Sciences,
- Nawaz, Z. J., & Bhutta, D. M. H. (2024). Usage of Social Media and Cultural Identity in Chitral: An Exploration Through Mix-Method Approach. *CRSSS*, 2(2), 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.59075/wsyr1071>
- Nazarzadeh, M., Nekoeiyan, T., & Mikaili, M. A. (2024). Examining The Mediating Role Of Communication Skills In The Relationship Between Social Identity And Social Adjustment Among High School Students. *Teaching and Learning Research*, 20(2), 18-30. https://tlr.shahed.ac.ir/article_4296.html
- Negru-Subtirica, O., Damian, L. E., Pop, E. I., & Crocetti, E. (2023). The complex story of educational identity in adolescence: Longitudinal relations with academic achievement and perfectionism. *Journal of personality*, 91(2), 299-313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12720>
- Nugraha, A., Kurnia, A., Putra, P. I. P., Rahman, A., & Dikrurahman, D. (2024). The Impact of Social Media on Social Interaction and Self-Identity in Indonesian Society. *Journal of Social Research*, 3(9). <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v3i9.2254>
- Obrenovic, B., Godinić, D., Du, G., Khudaykulov, A., & Gan, H. (2024). Identity Disturbance in the Digital Era During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Adverse Effects of Social Media and Job Stress. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(8), 648. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14080648>
- Pérez-Torres, V. (2024). Social Media: A Digital Social Mirror for Identity Development During Adolescence. *Current Psychology*, 43(26), 22170-22180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-05980-z>
- Purovanto, S. (2023). Digital Identity Construction in Social Media: Instagram as a Space for Self-Presentation. *Media and Society*, 35(1), 19-37.
- Rostami, H. A. G., Zeinali, S., Yazdani, A., & ahmadin, z. (2023). Moral Perfectionism and Pro Social Behavior: The Mediating Role of Identity. *I(1)*, 63-74. <https://doi.org/10.34172/srhs.2023.006>
- Sakı, Ü., & Öztaş, M. (2024). The Effect of Prosocial Behaviour Manageability on Conscious Awareness in University Athletes: The Mediating Role of Athlete Identity. *Rol Spor Bilimleri Dergisi*, 5(4), 750-763. <https://doi.org/10.70736/jrolss.469>
- Torres, M., Carlo, G., & Davis, A. N. (2025). The Associations Between Culture-Related Stressors and Prosocial Behaviors in U.S. Latino/a College Students: The Mediating Role of Cultural Identity. *Adolescents*, 5(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/adolescents5010004>
- Xia, X.-Q. (2025). Effects of Socioeconomic Status on Online Prosocial Behavior: The Mediating Role of Social Self-Efficacy and the Moderating Role of Moral Identity. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 18(2), 50-56. <https://doi.org/10.54097/mvnxzg31>
- Zhu, Q., Wang, C., & Cheah, C. S. L. (2024). Parental Identity and Socialization Mediate Parental Racial Discrimination's Impact on Child Adjustment. *Journal of marriage and family*, 86(4), 965-987. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12992>
- Κωνσταντοπούλου, Γ., Mavroeidi, E., Ntanellari, E., Morfi-Bonikou, M.-M., & Mentis, M. (2022). An Investigation of the Impact of Social Media on the Process of Identity Exploration and the Emergence of Eating Disorders in Student Life. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejsss.v8i1.1360>