An Analysis of the Impact of the Villagers' Consumerism on their Social Relations (Case Study: Village of Radkan, Chenaran County)

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction
Over the last decades, many researchers have noticed the fact that one aspect common to all human beings is that they are consumers and they consume resources to meet their real or unrealistic needs. Consumerism, as a social process, appeared in the 20th century while extending to the third world and developing countries and even rural areas. It has affected all aspects of human life including those of the villagers. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the consequences of consumerism, which is a kind of social harm in various economic and social dimensions. Therefore, this study made attempts to investigate the impact of consumerism on rural areas as a phenomenon arising from the rapidly expanding globalization and to analyze its effects on social relations of the villagers. Thus, the study seeks to examine and analyze the impact of rural consumerism on social and economic dimensions as well as its effects on changing their individual and social relationships. Accordingly, the main research question is to what extent has rural consumerism changed the social relationships among the villagers of the study area?

2. Theoretical framework
In the sociology of consumerism, three categories of theories are attributed to the consumer society. The first category includes those who advocate Baudrillard
(1984) and believe that consumers and objects associate positions in the system of objects and goods in the social world. The second category advocates Douglas and Isherwood (1979) and argue that consumers use goods for building a smart world and developing and maintaining social relationships; the third category advocates the ideas of those like Pierre Bourdieu, Veblen (1984), and Simmel who believe that consumers’ attempt to use goods is an attempt to demonstrate their social differentiation. Nevertheless, all theories believe that consumerism in any form and scale is viewed as a widespread phenomenon in the contemporary world, which often affects the human life. Consumerism in general causes a change in social relations that has negative consequences such as creating greed, urbanization and migration, creating a feeling of deprivation, individualism and social rupture, all of which have other negative consequences for the village, such as rural-urban immigration, abandoned villages, increased suburbanization in large cities, inattention to production, etc. which have totally hindered the development.

3. Methodology

The present research is an applied one being conducted with a descriptive-analytical method. The data were collected using questionnaires, observation, and interviews. Independent variable (consumerism) was quantified in social dimensions with 13 indicators, economic dimensions with 14 indicators, and dependent variable (social relations) with 11 indicators. The study was done in Radekan Rural District (central district of Chenaran). There are 1580 households in the sample villages. According to Cochran formula and with the error rate of 0.07%, the sample size for households in the sample villages was 175, which was calculated with regard to the number of households in each village. The samples in each village were selected based on simple random sampling method. Using SPSS package, descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson & Spearman correlation test, single sample t-test, multivariate regression, and Chi-Square) were executed to analyze the data. Grayscale analysis was used to rank the rural areas in terms of consumerism (the weighing used in the analysis of the Gray-matter relationship in the FAHP model), was used to rank the rural areas in terms of consumerism, and GIS was used to show the ranks obtained from the Gray-matter analysis.

4. Results

Examining the mean of the variables for each village revealed that the highest mean of socioeconomic dimension belonged to the variable of “consumerism and social relations” of Ghezel Hesar village, and the lowest mean of dimensions and research variables belonged to Abgahy village. Besides, in theses villages, the social relations of villagers who have been affected by consumerism have not been in a good status. The relationship between
consumerism and its dimensions and social relationships in the study is significant. The regression results showed that consumerism has changed the social relations of the sample villages. The Gray relational analysis model showed that the villages of Moghan and Abgahy had more consumption tendencies, while Muchan and Ghezel Hesar villages had less consumption than other villages.

5. Conclusion

The increasing consumerism has paved the way for changing the social relationships among the villagers, as in some of the villages of the study, villagers are building luxury houses, while the capital that could be used for rural development, makes it way into consumerism and luxury life and leads to negative consequences such as growing greed, urbanization, migration, creating the feeling of deprivation, individualism and the social class split among rural households. Therefore, according to the research findings, the following suggestions can be made:

- The first and most important step in reducing the harmful effects of consumerism of in the community is to promote the level of public awareness and change their attitudes towards life;
- To increase the public participation and raise the public awareness towards the proper use of facilities and resources;
- To change the consumption system commensurate with indigenous and local culture;
- To reform the national educational system.

Key words: Consumerism, Social relations, Rural community, Social split, District Radekan

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