20th INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

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# PROCEEDINGS OF THE 20TH INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

*"Leveraging Strategic Management for a Sustainable Digital Economy"*

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# UNDERSTANDING INTENTION TO CONTINUE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: A PARALLEL AND SERIAL MEDIATION MODEL OF SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how the socio-cultural environment influences the intention to continue of international students in Türkiye, focusing on the mediating roles of three key constructs: perceived country attractions, academic gains, and perceived value. Drawing on perceived value theory and employing PROCESS Macro Model 80, the study tests a parallel mediation model to explore how each of these mediators transmits the effect of socio-cultural environment on students' behavioral intention to persist in higher education. Data collected from 346 international students enrolled in Turkish universities were analyzed using bootstrapping techniques to estimate the indirect effects. The results reveal that the socio-cultural environment significantly enhances students' perceptions of country attractions and academic gains, which in turn influence their perceived value and intention to continue. Perceived value also functions as an independent mediator. Furthermore, serial mediation effects were observed, indicating that socio-cultural integration indirectly promotes retention by shaping both experiential and evaluative dimensions. These findings contribute to theoretical frameworks on student retention and offer practical implications for enhancing the international student experience through supportive socio-cultural and academic environments.*

## KEYWORDS

international students, intention to continue, perceived value, country attractions, academic gains

## INTRODUCTION

International student mobility has become a significant phenomenon in global higher education (Janik et al., 2023; Miani & Picucci-Huang, 2023; Wu, 2019) In the context of Türkiye, which hosts a growing number of international students, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence their intention to continue their studies (Baraçlı et al., 2024) Previous studies emphasize the socio-cultural environment as a pivotal element shaping student satisfaction and integration (Gao et al., 2024; Seggie & Çalıkoğlu, 2023).

According to the perceived value theory, students' behavioral intentions are largely influenced by their cost-benefit evaluations of their academic and social experiences (Firdousi et al., 2024; Relyea et al., 2008; Zhuang et al., 2015). This paper posits that perceived value mediates the relationship between the socio-cultural environment and students' intention to continue.

To examine these direct and indirect relationships, PROCESS Macro Model 80 (Hayes, 2017) is employed. This model enables the testing of mediation and serial mediation mechanisms, offering a

nuanced understanding of how perceived value functions as a bridge between socio-cultural context and intention to continue.

This research contributes to the literature by extending the application of perceived value theory within international higher education retention models, providing empirical evidence through a robust statistical framework, and offering practical implications for policymakers working to enhance the retention of international students in Türkiye.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the factors influencing international students' intention to continue higher education in Türkiye. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to international students enrolled in various universities located in Istanbul. The instrument included validated scales measuring the following constructs: socio-cultural environment (X) (Bodycott, 2009), country attractions (M1) (Wilkins et al., 2012), academic gains (M2) (Griffin et al., 2003), perceived value (M3) (Del Río-Rama et al., 2021), and intention to continue (Y) (Tasci et al., 2022). All items were rated using 5-point Likert-type scales. A total of approximately 375 students participated in the survey. After data screening and removal of incomplete responses, 346 valid cases remained for analysis.

To test the hypothesized model, PROCESS Macro v4.0 by Andrew F. Hayes was employed in SPSS, specifically using Model 80 which enables testing of multiple parallel and serial mediators between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y). In this model, country attractions (M1), academic gains (M2), and perceived value (M3) functioned as mediating variables in the relationship between the socio-cultural environment and intention to continue. Bootstrapping procedures (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with 5,000 resamples were applied to assess the significance and confidence intervals of direct and indirect effects.

The study sample comprised 346 international students enrolled at universities in Istanbul, Türkiye. Of the participants, 160 were female (46.2%) and 186 were male (53.8%). In terms of age, the majority were between 18 and 27 years old: 110 students (31.8%) were aged 18–22, and 168 students (48.6%) were aged 23–27. Participants represented 31 different countries, with the highest numbers from Syria (n=69), Azerbaijan (n=66), and Turkmenistan (n=36). Regarding institutional distribution, the majority of students (86.1%) were enrolled in foundation (private) universities, while only 13.9% studied at public universities.

## RESULTS

The conceptual model proposed in this study was tested using PROCESS Macro Model 80, which allows for the examination of both mediation and serial mediation effects. Specifically, the model investigates how the socio-cultural environment influences international students' intention to pursue higher education in Türkiye through key mediators: country attractions, academic gains, and perceived value. The results derived from the PROCESS Macro analysis demonstrate both direct and indirect pathways, highlighting the complex interrelations among these variables. The hypothesized model is illustrated in Figure 1.

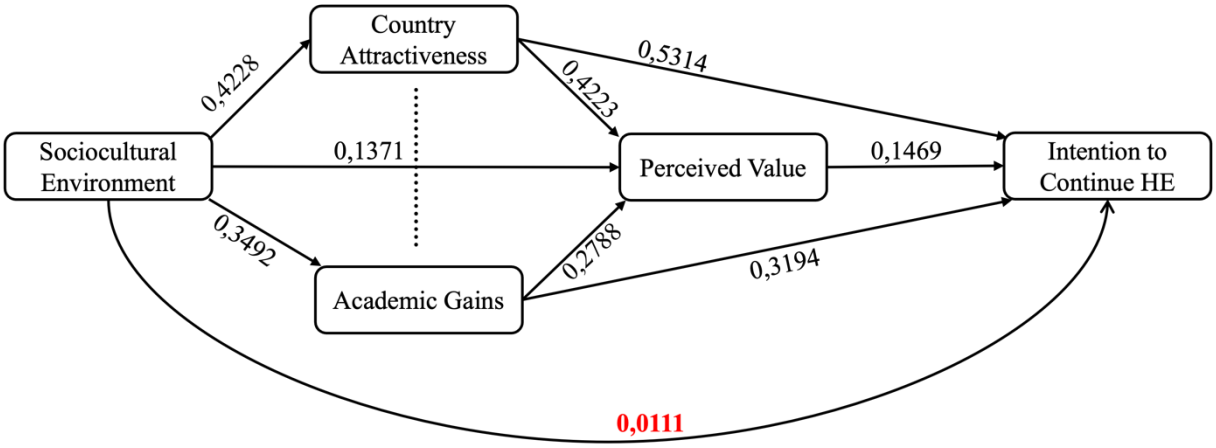



**Figure 1** Conceptual model and B coefficients.

The results of the direct and indirect effect analyses are presented in Table 1. These findings provide insights into how the socio-cultural environment and related constructs influence international students' intention to continue higher education in Türkiye.

**Table 1** Direct and indirect effects of the socio-cultural environment on the intention to continue

| Hypothesis | Pathway | B (Coeff.) | p | LLCI | ULCI | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Direct Effects** | | | | | | |
| H1a | The socio-cultural environment positively and significantly affects country attractions. | 0.4228 | 0.0000 | 0.3394 | 0.5063 | Supported |
| H1b | Country attractions positively and significantly affects intention to continue. | 0.5314 | 0.0000 | 0.4275 | 0.6352 | Supported |
| H1c | The socio-cultural environment positively and significantly affects perceived value. | 0.1371 | 0.0043 | 0.0433 | 0.2308 | Supported |
| H1d | Perceived value positively and significantly affects intention to continue. | 0.1469 | 0.0007 | 0.0629 | 0.2309 | Supported |
| H1e | The socio-cultural environment positively and significantly affects academic gains. | 0.3492 | 0.0000 | 0.2835 | 0.4150 | Supported |
| H1f | Academic gains positively and significantly affect intention to continue. | 0.3194 | 0.0000 | 0.1933 | 0.4454 | Supported |
| H1g | Country attractions positively and significantly affects perceived value. | 0.4223 | 0.0000 | 0.2988 | 0.5459 | Supported |
| H1h | Academic gains positively and significantly affect | 0.2788 | 0.0005 | 0.1220 | 0.4355 | Supported |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | perceived value. | | | | | |
| H1i | The socio-cultural environment directly affects intention to continue. | 0.0111 | 0.7717 | -0.0639 | 0.0860 | Not Supported |

| Hypothesis | Indirect Pathway | B (Coeff.) | LLCI | ULCI | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Indirect Effects** | | | | | |
| H1j | The effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue is mediated by country attractions. | 0.2247 | 0.1476 | 0.3098 | Supported |
| H1k | The effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue is mediated by academic gains. | 0.1115 | 0.0515 | 0.1805 | Supported |
| H1l | The effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue is mediated by perceived value. | 0.0201 | 0.0003 | 0.0514 | Supported |
| H1m | The effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue is serially mediated by country attractions and perceived value. | 0.0262 | 0.0043 | 0.0530 | Supported |
| H1n | The effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue is serially mediated by academic gains and perceived value. | 0.0143 | 0.0007 | 0.0313 | Supported |

The socio-cultural environment positively and significantly influenced country attractions (H1a: B = 0.4228, p < .001), perceived value (H1c: B = 0.1371, p = .0043**),** and academic gains (H1e, B = 0.3492, p < .001). These findings indicate that socio-cultural integration facilitates both favorable perceptions of the host country and meaningful academic experiences.

Country attractions significantly predicted intention to continue (H1b: B = 0.5314, p < .001), while academic gains also exerted a strong positive effect (H1f: B = 0.3194, p < .001). Furthermore, perceived value significantly impacted students' intention to continue their studies (H1d: B = 0.1469, p = .0007).

Additionally, country attractions (H1g: B = 0.4223, p < .001**)** and academic gains (H1h: B = 0.2788, p = .0005) were both significant predictors of perceived value. These findings support a network of positive interactions among predictors.

However, the direct effect of socio-cultural environment on intention to continue was found to be non-significant (H1i: B = 0.0111, p = .7717), suggesting that its influence is transmitted entirely through indirect pathways.

Mediation analysis revealed several significant indirect effects linking the socio-cultural environment to international students' intention to continue. Specifically, the socio-cultural environment was found to influence intention to continue indirectly through country attractions (H1j: B = 0.2247, 95%

CI [0.1476, 0.3098]), through academic gains (H1k: B = 0.1115, 95% CI [0.0515, 0.1805]), and through perceived value (H1l: B = 0.0201, 95% CI [0.0003, 0.0514]). These findings confirm the presence of significant mediating pathways, indicating that the effect of the socio-cultural environment on students' behavioral intentions operates primarily through these intermediate variables.

Furthermore, serial mediation analysis provided additional insights. The socio-cultural environment significantly affected intention to continue through a chain of effects involving country attractions and perceived value (H1m: B = 0.0262, 95% CI [0.0043, 0.0530]) as well as academic gains and perceived value (H1n: B = 0.0143, 95% CI [0.0007, 0.0313]). These results suggest that socio-cultural factors first shape students' perceptions of the host country's appeal and their academic experiences, which in turn influence their evaluation of the educational experience's overall value-ultimately guiding their intention to remain in the higher education system.

Notably, the socio-cultural environment did not have a direct effect on intention to continue. However, it significantly influenced students' perceptions of country attractions, academic outcomes, and perceived value, each of which served as critical mediators in the model. Among the mediating pathways, the strongest indirect effects were observed through country attractions and academic gains, both independently and in conjunction with perceived value. These findings underscore the importance of adopting a value-based and experience-driven framework to better understand and support the retention of international students in higher education.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of how the socio-cultural environment influences the intention to continue of international students in Türkiye through indirect pathways. The findings reveal that the socio-cultural environment does not exert a significant direct effect on students' intention to continue their studies. Instead, its impact is fully mediated by key factors such as country attractions, academic gains, and perceived value, which serially shape students' decisions to remain enrolled. This nuanced understanding extends existing literature by highlighting the critical role of social and cultural integration alongside academic experiences in fostering international student retention.

The socio-cultural environment construct in this study encompasses several pivotal dimensions: opportunities to engage with and understand Turkish culture, the diversity and inclusiveness of student clubs and communities, perceptions of crime and ethnic discrimination, and the climate conditions of Türkiye. These elements collectively represent the students' lived social and cultural contexts, which profoundly affect their overall educational experience. Notably, the results underscore the importance of positive socio-cultural engagement opportunities-such as cultural learning and active participation in student organizations-in enhancing students' sense of belonging and satisfaction within the host country.

The statistical analysis demonstrates that the socio-cultural environment significantly predicts country attractions and academic gains, confirming that social integration facilitates favorable perceptions of the host nation and supports meaningful academic outcomes. For instance, when international students have ample opportunities to immerse themselves in Turkish culture and participate in diverse student groups, they tend to develop a stronger attachment to Türkiye as an educational destination. This heightened country attractions, in turn, plays a pivotal role in motivating students to continue their studies.

Similarly, a positive socio-cultural environment fosters enhanced academic gains by creating a supportive setting where students can thrive academically. Social inclusion and cultural familiarity reduce psychological and social barriers, allowing students to focus more effectively on their studies and achieve better academic results. Consequently, the socio-cultural environment contributes indirectly to intention to continue by elevating students perceived academic success.

The mediating role of perceived value is particularly noteworthy in this model. Perceived value captures students' overall evaluation of the benefits derived from their educational experience relative to the costs incurred. It synthesizes academic achievements, social integration, and country-level perceptions into a single evaluative judgment that guides behavioral intentions. This study finds that perceived value significantly mediates the relationships between attractiveness, academic gains, and intention to continue, suggesting that students who perceive high value in their academic and socio-cultural experiences are more likely to persist in their studies.

Further, the research reveals important serial mediation effects that elucidate the serial mechanisms underlying intention to continue. The socio-cultural environment first influences intermediate variables-country attractions and academic gains-which subsequently affect perceived value, culminating in increased intention to continue. This serial mediation highlights those social and cultural integration shapes students' perceptions of the host country and their academic success, which then jointly inform their assessment of overall value and commitment to continue education in Türkiye.

These findings carry significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study enriches perceived value theory by situating it within the context of international higher education retention. It confirms that social and cultural factors, alongside academic outcomes, jointly contribute to students' value perceptions and educational persistence. This integration offers a more holistic framework to understand international student behavior beyond traditional academic performance metrics.

Practically, the results underscore the importance of enhancing the socio-cultural environment as a strategic approach to increase international student retention in Türkiye. Policymakers and university administrators should prioritize initiatives that facilitate cultural immersion, social engagement, and inclusivity. For example, expanding programs that promote intercultural exchange, increasing the diversity and accessibility of student clubs, and creating supportive environments that counteract discrimination and social exclusion can significantly strengthen students' social connectedness and satisfaction.

Moreover, efforts to improve academic support systems remain essential. By addressing academic challenges and providing resources that enable students to maximize their learning outcomes, institutions can indirectly boost perceived value and intention to continue. Thus, academic and socio-cultural interventions should be designed as complementary strategies that collectively enhance students' holistic experience.

The study also points to the importance of contextual factors unique to Türkiye, such as the country's climate and cultural richness, in shaping international students' experiences. Recognizing and promoting these distinctive attributes can further enhance Türkiye's attractiveness as a destination for higher education.

Limitations of this research include the reliance on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, and the cross-sectional design, which limits causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to better capture changes in perceptions and intentions over time and explore additional factors such as economic or institutional variables that might influence student retention.

In conclusion, the present study confirms that the socio-cultural environment influences international students' intention to continue in Türkiye through a complex network of indirect effects involving country attractions, academic gains, and perceived value. By fostering a supportive and inclusive socio-cultural context alongside strong academic programs, higher education institutions can effectively enhance international students' satisfaction and commitment. These insights provide a valuable foundation for policy development and institutional practices aimed at improving student retention and promoting Türkiye as a competitive destination for global higher education.

## DECLARATIONS

This study is derived from the doctoral dissertation titled “An Analysis of Factors Influencing the Intentions of International Students in Türkiye to Pursue Higher Education”, written by Alperen Şahin as part of the Global Marketing Doctorate Program at the Institute of Social Sciences, Marmara University, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. T. Sabri Erdil. Res. Ass. Ph.D. Bahadır Ayar, contributed to the data analysis and reporting sections of the study. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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