

2018

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Atefeh Yazdanparast

Iman Naderi  
Fairfield University, inaderi@fairfield.edu

Nancy Spears

Robert O. Fabrize

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### Repository Citation

Yazdanparast, Atefeh; Naderi, Iman; Spears, Nancy; and Fabrize, Robert O., "Advertising and Pseudo-Culture: An Analysis of the Changing Portrayal of Women in Print Advertisements" (2018). *Business Faculty Publications*. 184.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/business-facultypubs/184>

### Published Citation

Yazdanparast, Atefeh, et al. "Advertising and Pseudo-Culture: An Analysis of the Changing Portrayal of Women in Print Advertisements." *Journal of Macromarketing* (2018), doi:10.1177/0276146718762475.

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# **Advertising and Pseudo-Culture**

## **An Analysis of the Changing Portrayal of Women in Print Advertisements**

ATEFEH YAZDANPARAST\*

University of Evansville, Evansville, IN 47722

IMAN NADERI\*

Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT 06824

NANCY SPEARS

University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203

ROBERT O. FABRIZE

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA 91768

\* First two authors have equal authorship

To Link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146718762475>

**Abstract**

This study investigates the use of mass media, specifically advertising, in cultural transformation projects to weaken cultures and replace them with a crafted pseudo-culture. We rely on Adorno's theory of pseudo-culture to examine how political ideologies shape cultural transformation using mass-mediated ad images. Following a content analysis and a semiotic analysis of print advertisements over a period of 48 years, we identify five major themes underlying pseudo-culture formation and the advertising strategies implemented to support these themes. This work also identifies four major tools used in pseudo-culture formation and demonstrates how pseudo-cultures may be formed, promoted, and abolished.

**Keywords**

Adorno; Identity; Cultural transformation; Semiotics; Persia/Iran

## **Introduction**

The dynamic interplay between marketing systems and political systems is a substantial macromarketing issue (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Specifically, the role of political systems and ideologies in shaping consumer identities and markets (e.g., Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Jafari 2007; Jafari and Goulding 2008; Sandikci and Ger 2010) has been investigated to show how cultural production systems orient consumers toward certain ideologies (Hung et al. 2007; Spears and Amos 2014; Zhao and Belk 2008a).

Bryan's (1962) analysis of the use of advertising in the former Soviet Union and other then-communist countries provides an example for how economically-informed political systems used various forms of advertising (all fully controlled by the government) to expand their markets and improve distribution when production of consumer goods increased. Zhao and Belk's (2008a and 2008b) study of China's transition from a communist (centrally-planned) to consumerist society also provides an example for cultural transformation efforts by economically-charged political systems. They investigated the ideological shift in advertising and revealed how the political regime effectively used advertising to replace a dominant anti-consumerist political ideology.

Religion-based political ideologies, however, are expected to function differently from economic-based political systems. Religion is one of the world's most important social issues with an acknowledged role as a historical antecedent to market system structures (Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006). Most extant macromarketing research, however, provides a one-sided perspective on the interplay between religion and marketing by focusing on how religion shapes marketing and markets and overlooks the role of markets or marketing practices in shaping and impacting religion (see Drenten and McManus 2016 for a comprehensive review). As such, extant literature lacks a "well-rounded, all-encompassing perspective of the interactivity between

religion and the market” (Benton 2016, p. 374; Drenten and McManus 2016). Moreover and relatedly, the macromarketing literature reveals a paucity of research on the mechanisms that opposing political ideologies (e.g., secular vs. religious, liberal vs. conservative, modern vs. traditional) wield to cement their views in a society when they employ marketing systems, even if such views are incongruent with those of the society (Jafari 2007; Jafari and Goulding 2008, 2013). This gap is due to 1) the overreliance of research on individual responses to political forces rather than the socio-cultural underpinnings of such forces and 2) a scarcity of historical analyses which map out cultural transformation processes. Thus, to better understand the dynamics of consumer identity projects undertaken by religion-based political systems, it is crucial to examine the complex and multi-faceted relationships between religion, consumption culture, and the market in a historical context.

The main objective of the present research is to explain how advertising could be used by political systems to shape consumer identities. Inspired by the theory of pseudo-culture (Adorno 1993), the research employs a broad definition of pseudo-culture (i.e., a culture that is not commonly acquired through shared experiences, but rather is imposed on people) to explain how politically-charged cultural transformation projects could use advertising to impact religious and socio-cultural identities. More specifically, we examine how cultural domination or marginalization takes place in a context where significant socio-cultural conflicts and tensions exist between local and global meanings, systems, and institutions (Jafari and Goulding 2008).

Iran is chosen as the context of this investigation because its modern history is riddled with ideological, political, cultural, and religious contradictions and tensions (Jafari and Goulding 2008, 2013). Over the last 100 years, Iran “has witnessed a back and forth movement from a traditional society to rapid Westernization and modernization under the Pahlavi regime, to a return to

fundamentalism with the Islamic Revolution followed by a brief period of regeneration, economic growth, and consumerism” (Jafari and Goulding 2008, p. 73). These two political regimes offer a fertile ground for investigation, as both relied on centralized media control and their pseudo-cultures have challenged the Iranian culture and made their way into the mass mediated images, such as those of advertisements (Amin 2004; Paidar 1995). Moreover, the sharp contrast between the orientations of the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic regimes and their impact on the status and role of women in the society afford us a distinct opportunity to examine the forces of crafted pseudo-cultures in advertising messages (Adib-Moghaddam 2005). This has especially been the case over the last three decades as Iranians have witnessed that the governing regime’s political forces are geared toward religious domination and the demonization of Western liberal values and materialism (Jafari and Goulding 2008).

We develop a conceptual framework underlying pseudo-cultural formation themes and identify the advertising strategies in line with these themes. Moreover, the research identifies four major tools/processes used for pseudo-culture formation and demonstrates how pseudo-cultures may be formed, promoted, and abolished. The insights gained from this study can prove essential in investigating cultural tensions and pseudo-cultural formation processes in other contexts and shed more light on how political systems use marketing practices to shape consumer ideologies and impose cultural transformation.

### **Culture, Pseudo-Culture, and Mass Media**

Various definitions of culture converge on the fact that it is the learned behavior that is passed on from generation to generation. For instance, culture has been defined as “the collective programming of mind” that distinguishes members of distinct groups (Hofstede 1991; P.5). Social environments in which individuals grow up and collect their life experiences are the sources of

this mental programming. As such, individuals have historically created systems of meaning under the guidance of cultural patterns.

The general assumption is that advertising, as a cultural artifact, manifests these wider systems of meaning by reflecting the way people think, live, relate to each other, and get motivated. Therefore, some researchers consider advertising as a mirror that reflects manifestations of culture (For a review of related discussions refer to Holbrook 1987; O'Barr 1994; Pollay 1983, 1986; Pollay and Gallagher 1990). However, this assumption does not entertain the possibility of using advertising systems to create pseudo-cultures. We define pseudo-culture as a culture that is not commonly learned or acquired through shared experiences, but rather a culture that is superimposed on people in an effort to replace the commonly held shared cultural values. *Pseudo* is a Latin word of German origin which means to some extent like the original but not exactly like the original (Prabhat and Sarkar 1999). Rather than accurately reflecting culture, pseudo-culture acts as a funhouse mirror—distorting what it reflects to create the illusion that pseudo-culture seeks to achieve. As such, advertisements could provide glimpses into historical eras by conveying political and ideological concepts that shape, promote, or abolish pseudo-cultures.

Pseudo-culture was first discussed by Adorno (1993, originally published as "Theorie der Halbbildung" in 1959), a leading member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. As reflected by its genesis and meaning, pseudo-culture does not precede culture, but rather follows it (Adorno 1993). Adorno proposed that industrial mass production created a pseudo-culture through its use of the mass media. Prior to the industrial revolution and the rise of mass communication, individuals acting in relation to one another created traditional culture. However, mass communication helped create cultural goods that were mass-produced, required less effort to produce, and could be acquired easily and cheaply. As a result, pseudo-culture ensued, usurping

prior processes through which individuals acting in relation to one another had created traditional culture.

Adorno's theory of pseudo-culture is an incisive analysis of the crisis of the totally administered society (Piccone 1993). Prabhat and Sarkar (1999) note that pseudo-culture can occur when a particular group tries to weaken the cultural expression of individuals by imposing new ideological underpinnings, ultimately influencing individuals psychologically. In the transmission of, and transition to, pseudo-culture, the genuine spiritual content of the original culture is lost and pseudo-cultural appropriation is reinforced. In fact, any culture that posits itself as autonomous and absolute has become a pseudo-culture (Adorno 1993).

Adorno believed that mass media was central to creating a pseudo-culture by reproducing cultural goods using appropriated elements which are then imposed on a population. These ersatz cultural goods affect the psyche of individuals creating a slavish conformity. In effect, pseudo-culture objectifies individuals for the benefit of the totally administered society. Pseudo-culture pushes aside the traditional culture based on creative connection with others. Adorno referred to this process as the schema of progressive domination and a means of controlling the life-process of society.

Advertising, a cultural good created by mass media, works by reconfiguring cultural symbols to sell consumer goods (Zhao and Belk 2008b). Advertising is also recognized as a medium that echoes political and socio-cultural ideology by reconfiguring signs and symbols for appropriation in ad gestalts. According to Adorno, expanding access to these cultural goods is not enrichment of cultural life or liberating people. Rather, it opens a space for commercial forces that disseminate pseudo-culture and destroy memory (what Adorno refers to as the necessary tool for imagination, judgment, and freedom). Hollywood idols, pop tunes, and fashion systems (i.e., the



broader socio-cultural aspects of fashion as opposed to the business aspects of the fashion industry) are all instances that Adorno (1993) provides to illustrate this process. Indeed, according to Adorno, these are used by modern mass media in the process of cultural decomposition with the purpose of reducing interrelated and dynamically interdependent elements of traditional culture to dismembered contents that no longer orient to the development of a larger whole.

The degradation of culture and the atomized contents of pseudo-culture make it difficult for individuals to perform self-formation, as the function of pseudo-culture is to transform people into objects of manipulation. The only way to escape such an imposed transmission is through critical reflection on pseudo-culture. It is the process of analyzing and challenging the validity of pseudo-culture's assumptions (e.g., ideas and beliefs) and scrutinizing their appropriateness in terms of how they relate to one's real life experiences. Such assessments yield efforts to transform those assumptions in order to make them more appropriate for future actions and practices (Mezirow 1990).

### **Persian Culture**

With over 2500 years of history, Iran is home to one of the world's richest and most complex cultures (Daniel 2001). Over the millennia, simple cultures have gradually coalesced into a bigger and more complex civilization known as Persia. Persian culture refers to the cultural sphere of Iranian civilization which historically extended from present-day South Asia through the Middle East to Africa and parts of Europe (Berkley Center for Religion 2013). Whereas this is true at the macro level, centuries of migration and conquest have made Iran a multiethnic, multicultural society that comprises people of Indo-European, Turkish, Arab, and Caucasian origins, among others. While Persian (Farsi) is the official language of Iran, various ethnic groups speak other languages including Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, and Azerbaijani. Islam as a religion entered Iran

during the seventh century CE. Starting in the early sixteenth century, the Safavid Dynasty made Shi'a Islam the official religion of the nation. Currently, about 98% of the population of Iran are Muslims with the majority being Shi'a, whereas Zoroastrianism was the national faith of Iran prior to Islam (Berkley Center for Religion 2013).

We refer to Persian culture as a baseline for comparisons in this investigation, but we do not claim that Persian culture is an 'authentic' culture that has developed independently and consists of ancient local traditions free of external influences. In fact, over the last few centuries, all cultures were changed almost beyond recognition by a flood of global influence (Harari 2015), and Iran is no exception. The Islamic and the pre-Islamic historical eras have both had significant roles in shaping Persian culture. Figures 1a to 1h provide instances of women's appearance in various eras of Iranian history. The painting shown in Figure 1a provides a depiction of women as evidenced in historical and cultural artifacts such as paintings, literature, and other historical records (e.g., Divan of Hafez, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Persian paintings and miniatures). This depicts women as not fully covering their long, black hair, but covering their bodies with colorful outfits with distinctive styles and designs. The makeup they used was made of natural ingredients and limited to *sormeh* (eyeliner), *sorkhab* (blush), and *sefidab* (skin whitening powder).

[Insert Figures 1a to 1h about here]

## **Investigation of Historical Facts**

### *Pre-Revolution Era (1925-1979)*

The Pahlavi regime (former government of Iran, 1925-1979) was determined to modernize the country, and one aspect of this modernization was to eliminate the Islamic veil (a.k.a. hijab) for Iranian women appearing in public. The government of Reza Pahlavi claimed such a change would liberate women by saving them from the hijab as a symbol of backwardness and regression (Khaz

Ali 2010). Supporters of this idea held that the veil impeded physical exercise and the ability of women to enter society and to contribute to the progress of the nation. The Women's Awakening Project and its policies of encouraging (in 1935) and then compelling (in 1936) the unveiling of women in public until 1943 (when the policy was officially cancelled) are critical factors in the recent history of Iran.

When Mohammad Reza Pahlavi took over from his father (in 1941), he followed the same path using more moderate methods. Rather than focusing on the issue of hijab, this new approach promoted ideas about how modern Iranian women should look (Amin 2004). The government-owned and controlled press was used as an effective tool to influence public opinion and promote this new ideology. The advocated modernization process was accompanied with rapid economic growth and importing a wide variety of products from well-known foreign brands (mostly European) into the country. In the pages of the press, the image of modern Iranian womanhood was increasingly informed by the latest fashions and cosmetic practices of the West. Iranian women became visible consumers of a variety of products associated with a Western style *beauty culture* (Amin 2004). Similarly, the movies portrayed a world in which women would socialize more freely with men and be out in public places, which were considered inappropriate behaviors based on the traditional Islamic values. This new image seemed to deliver a sense of personal freedom (to look and act as you wish) that was lacking elsewhere in the Iranian society (Amin 2004).

#### *Transition Period from Pre- to Post-revolution*

The Pahlavi process of modernization, blind to pre-existing values, provoked a traditionalist response. A lack of cultural and ideological cohesion, a common side-effect of any pseudo-culture, undermined Iranian identity leading to a state of *culturelessness* (Adorno 1993) and paved the way

for the reconstruction and adoption of a traditional religious identity that provided a critical reflection on the reinforced pseudo-culture. The problem of cultural identity and the concern about the erosion of indigenous culture and lifestyle by *the invited attack of the West* produced an underlying cultural feeling for the preservation of the cultural personality of Iran and its traditions as a vital antidote to the impact of Westernization (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1990).

Signs of opposition to Westernization were first witnessed in the 1950s under the label *return to the self* (Khaz Ali 2010). This movement was best articulated by Jalal Al-e Ahmad's term *gharbzadegi* (or West-struck-ness) which referred to both the loss of Iranian cultural identity through the adoption and imitation of Western models and the transformation of Iran into a passive market for Western goods. While promoting Islamic values in the press was not formally banned by the law (since Iran is a Muslim-majority country), the majority of the publications had strong political/financial ties with the government and supported the ideals of the governing regime in prioritizing and promoting modernization through Westernization. Especially following the 1953 coup, in an effort to further screen and audit the press, the regime dismissed several newspapers and magazines in 1962 and then in 1974, limiting the total number of periodicals to 133, the majority of which belonged to three main publishing groups. *Keyhan* publishing group, founded with financial support from the Pahlavi regime, for instance, focused on portraying a positive image of the regime. The outcome, however, was not what the regime had hoped for. Signs of the coming revolution began to emerge as early as 1963 and resulted in the fall of the Pahlavi regime and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 (Amin 2004).

#### *Post-Revolution Era (1979 to Present)*

The newly-established Islamic Republic highly valued the religious, home-bound values of women as mothers and wives. As a result, women became a major emblem of Islamification (Afshar 1998)

and soon after the revolution (1983), the hijab was coerced (Sedghi 2007). Specifically, article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code of Iran (IPC) states that women who appear in public without a proper hijab should be imprisoned from ten days to two months or pay a fine. As a result, whenever women appeared in public, they had to cover their hair (Lewis 1987) and wear loose-fitting, modest outfits covering the entire body except for hands and face.

In the few years following the revolution, the government re-structured mass media, and a strong position was developed against cultural and media imperialism (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1990). The content of periodicals and other means of mass communication were controlled to assure no anti-Islamic values were promoted. Iran's Press Law of 1985 (chapter IV, article 6) specifically bans: (1) spreading canonically sinful and immoral acts and publishing photos, pictures, and materials against public decency and morality (section 2); (2) promotion and propagation of extravagance (overconsumption) and wastefulness (section 3); and (3) objectification of people (both women and men) whether in pictures or other materials, and promotion of acts of lavishness and luxury that are legally prohibited or against Sharia (Islamic) law (section 10). Additionally, advertising cosmetic products on television, radio, and billboards was prohibited (Barraclough 2001).

After the revolution, the Islamic views were enforced to replace the Western imitated values promoted during the Pahlavi regime, aiming to create a rejection of, and isolation from, Western values in conjunction with changes to women's status. However, the powerful ideology of the Islamic revolution that sought to restrict the role of women in public life eased over time because of the following. First, the exigencies of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) required women to work outside the home to support their families. Second, the post-war reconstruction phase (1989-1997) and economic growth required the expansion of a skilled labor force (Khiabany and

Sreberny 2004), which was filled by women who worked outside the home. Lastly, the subsequent reform movement (1997 to 2005) advocated greater social freedom (Jafari 2007).

## **Empirical Research**

### *Selection of Ads*

This research follows a mixed approach to investigate the meanings of ads. Our empirical investigation is based on a content analysis and then a semiotic analysis of archival data in the form of print advertisements over a period of 48 years from 1964 to 2012, supported by the information gathered and analyzed from other relevant historical records. This is in line with prior research examining women's representations in the ads to gain insights about idealized female roles and femininity in the society (Redmond 2003; Sandlin and Maudlin 2012; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998; Spears and Amos 2014; Sun 2015). In fact, ad images provide glimpses into the visual culture and play an important role in controlling or manipulating societal identities (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998).

The sampling frame was selected from print advertisements in *Zan-e Rouz (Today's Woman)* magazine due to several considerations. First, in the early years of this period, print ads in newspapers and magazines were the dominant advertising tool as both television commercials and billboard advertisements were rare. Second, *Zan-e Rouz* is one of the few magazines for a mainly female readership that has been published in both pre- and post-revolution eras, providing a consistent medium to explore print ads. Lastly, the main theme of this magazine has remained consistent over the past decades, focusing on women and their issues. *Zan-e Rouz*, first published in 1964 as part of *Keyhan* publishing group, was a weekly magazine and soon became the most popular women's magazine in Iran. More than half-full of advertisements and pictures, *Zan-e Rouz* concentrated on food, family, and fashion (Khiabany and Sreberny 2004). In the heat of the

revolution, the publication of the magazine was discontinued and a fully Islamicized version reappeared in the summer of 1980.

### *Procedure*

A two-stage procedure was followed to conduct the analysis. First, advertisements in *Zan-e Rouz* from 1964 to 2012 were collected and examined. It is noteworthy that the pre-revolution issues of the magazine are hard to find because *Zan-e Rouz* headquarter has not digitally archived all of its past issues. Overall, we were able to collect ads from multiple issues printed during the analysis period, except for years that the magazine was not published (i.e., the immediate years before and after the revolution, 1977 to 1979, and during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980 to 1988; Saei 2006).

In examining the ads, and for practical considerations, ads that covered at least half of a magazine page were selected. This process resulted in a sample of 393 ads (half page, full page, or two-page print ads) from which 116 ads belonged to the pre-revolution and 277 were printed after the revolution. Second, repeated ads were removed from the pre- and post- revolution samples (21 and 84 ads, respectively), resulting in a final sample of 288 ads (95 ads belonged to the pre-revolution era and 193 belonged to the post-revolution period). This stage was then followed by content analysis of the ads which was conducted in three levels: (1) analyzing the surface meaning of ads, (2) identifying the advertisers' intended meanings, and (3) uncovering cultural or ideological meanings (Frith 1997). Analysis of the surface meaning requires noting the objects and people in the content as well as design elements to gain an overall impression of the ad. Uncovering the advertiser's intended meaning of the ad reveals the message that advertisers attempt to communicate to audience—typically the expected benefits from using the brand—which can be communicated explicitly or implicitly. Revealing the cultural or ideological meaning offers insights into the ad within its cultural context and requires an understanding of the ad's underlying

messages about cultural values shared by members of the culture. This type of deconstruction requires decomposing the ad and going beneath the surface to find the deepest ideological and social messages available (Frith 1997).

The pool of ads were closely coded and analyzed using four major coding themes that reflect a society's consumption characteristics. The coding themes focused on: (1) the advertised products: the nature of products, their promoted usage purposes, and country of origin; (2) physical representations of women in the ads: women's look, body exposure, and clothing; (3) women's social representations in the ads: social presence of women and their promoted roles; and (4) the use of visual illustrative techniques in the ads: woman's salience in the ads and ad appeals. The coding process was conducted by two cultural experts. First, a small sample drawn from the pool of ads was examined and coded independently, and the findings were compared and contrasted. In cases of ambiguity or inconsistency, the coders elicited comments from other members of their own culture as well as the third author, to aid in interpreting the ads and reaching consensus. Out of the 3,168 items (11 items in 288 ads) coded, the overall inter-coder reliability was 97.3% and ranged from 87.5 to 99.6%, depending on the items coded (Perreault and Leigh 1989). Items on which disagreement occurred were re-examined until any remaining inter-coder discrepancy was resolved and complete agreement was reached. The Appendix section provides summary results of the content analysis.

Second, and informed by the results of the first stage, a more in-depth analysis of the ads was conducted which followed a semiotic analysis approach (Barthes 1977; Holdcroft 1991). The criteria for analysis consisted of visual and verbal contents of the ads (postures, slogans, designs, etc.), as well as their spatial composition, the way certain objects were represented in the ads, and their discursive style (Ourahmoune et al. 2014; Zhao and Belk 2008b). This was guided by the



three analytical issues suggested by O'Barr (1994) to articulate social and cultural ideologies in advertising. First, *what is the ideal image of people in a particular social category?* This is identified by looking for the recurrent images in how advertising portrays people. For instance, what are the desirable attributes of women in society? Second, *how do people in the ad socially relate to others?* In addition to assigning attributes to people, advertisements also depict social relationships. For instance, how are women's interactions with others depicted in the ads? Finally, *how is the quality of the relationships depicted in terms of inequity and power?* This question could be answered by looking for signs of dominance and subordination in the social relations depicted in the ad. For instance, how are male-female relationships represented in the ads? The first two authors separately examined every ad according to these criteria, and then discussed the findings. This process revealed similarities and differences in discourses and signifiers in the ads of each era.

### **Analysis and Findings**

Five major themes emerged from the analysis of the ads, namely (1) foreign vs. domestic idealism, (2) consumerism vs. anti-consumerism, (3) ideal feminine image presentation, (4) redefining women's role in society, and (5) reconstruction of norms. These themes, discussed below, were frequently observed (although in opposite directions) in both pre- and post-revolution samples.

#### *Foreign vs. Domestic Idealism*

This theme refers to how advertisers in both pre- and post-revolution periods used the information related to a brand's country of origin in their persuasive messages. Our content analysis revealed that 81% of the ads in the pre-revolution era promoted Western brands, while only 23% of the ads from the post-revolution era did the same. This theme is further categorized into two sub-themes, which are discussed next.

*Superior quality.* This sub-theme refers to how advertisers emphasized the country of origin as a strong indicator of product quality in their messages. A recurring theme was revealed during the pre-revolution period, in which foreign products and brands (especially European) were clearly positioned and promoted as superior in quality. Sometimes, the ad message explicitly associated foreignness (here, Western) with superior quality. For instance, the message in an ad from Jean d'Avèze (1973), a French manufacturer of cosmetics read: 'Why Jean d'Avèze products cannot be compared with other brands of cosmetics? Because Jean d'Avèze is not just a regular cosmetic brand. Jean d'Avèze cosmetics are made exclusively in Paris for skin's health and rejuvenation.' A similar message was communicated in another ad from the same brand (1976): 'Jean d'Avèze lipstick from Paris: Different from other lipsticks, just like how Jean d'Avèze is different from other cosmetic brands.' Other times, the audience was expected to associate foreignness with high-quality. For instance, an ad from L'Oreal (1964) read: 'Dop Tonic is the most sold shampoo in Europe' (see Figure 2). The audience was expected to reach the conclusion that 'the most sold shampoo in Europe' must be of high quality due to high quality standards in Europe.

During the post-revolution period, in contrast, advertisers' focus mainly shifted from foreign to domestic products and brands, encouraging consumers to support Iranian companies. In doing so, the high quality of Iranian products was highlighted in the ads either directly or indirectly (stressing the fact that the product was being exported to other countries and thus implying its high quality). For instance, Tolidaru uses 'Tolidaru: A trustable name in personal care industry' and Tidi uses 'Everything from Tidi is the best in its category' as their slogans. Similarly, Paxan, an Iranian manufacturer of cleaning, personal care, and beauty products, frequently brags as being 'one of the most successful [Iranian] companies that exports its high quality products' in its ads.

The analysis of the ads during this era also revealed that Iranian brands occasionally promoted the quality of their products by highlighting their international certifications (e.g., Behbar hair remover: FDA approved formulation from the USA) or by emphasizing the foreign origins of products along with their domestic assembly (e.g., National vacuum cleaner: assembled in Iran, motor made in Japan; Kachiran sewing machine: German technology). Such ads exemplify advertisers' efforts in boosting quality perceptions of their products by stressing that the technology behind them was originated in developed countries such as Germany and Japan. In very few instances after the revolution (6%), foreign products were advertised. These advertisements, however, were limited to home appliances, which is in sharp contrast with the pre-revolution sample. Examples include a Tefal fast cooker (2008) and non-stick cookware (2009), both made in France, and a Janome sewing machine made in Japan (2008).

*Aspirational reference groups.* The second sub-theme identified through our analyses concerns the ads in which advertisers during the pre-revolution era attempted to promote their products and brands by emphasizing that people in developed countries were frequent users of those products. In doing so, Western consumers were presented as aspirational reference groups whose looks and behaviors should ideally be emulated by Iranian consumers. This pattern was first discovered in the content analysis phase showing that from the pool of the ads that depicted female models, 71% of the pre-revolution ads used Western models compared to only 35% of the post-revolution ads. It appears that a majority of the ads printed before the revolution simply replicated their original copy for Western consumer markets (e.g., blond hair, light skin tone, blue or green eye color, and Western outfits; see Figures 2 and 3). The use of original ads with minimum efforts to localize the content for the Iranian market appears to have been the easiest way to promote foreign superiority.

[Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here]

In addition to the idealization of a Western look in the ads, this sub-theme emerged from the semiotic analysis of the ad messages. For instance, this was a recurring theme in the ads from L’Oreal, a French manufacturer of beauty and personal care products, (e.g., Imédia hair color in 1964: L’Oreal from Paris, the capital of beauties; Elnett hairspray in 1965: Beauties from Paris choose Elnett, the unrivaled product from L’Oreal; Imédia cream in 1973: L’Oreal from Paris, the favorite brand among French women). This theme was also clearly the main persuasive message in an ad for Fingerlure nail art stickers (1974) which read: ‘Today, fashionable Europeans are talking about this latest fashion product everywhere.’

After the revolution, however, this subtheme was completely absent with only one exception from an Iranian brand of body shampoo (Nattel) which read: ‘Nowadays, people in developed countries use body shampoo instead of soap’ (1994). Overall, a sharp contrast was observed in the two samples regarding this theme. Pre-revolution advertisers’ focus was on idealization of foreign products and consumers while domestic idealism was enforced in the ads after the revolution by positioning Iranian brands as high in quality and depicting Iranian consumers as typical users of these products/brands. Despite these seemingly contrasting approaches, both eras used a similar process to achieve their pseudo-culture formation goals. Each era used mass mediated advertising as a tool to promote their unique consumption-related position. These ideologies (advocated by each era’s political propaganda) were materialized using advertising techniques and were supported by commercial forces.

### ***Consumerism vs. Anti-Consumerism***

The analysis of the pre-revolution ads revealed an orchestrated effort by advertisers to encourage consumption of more products in general as well as to present hedonic products like cosmetics as

necessities. A significant portion of the ads from the pre-revolution period (84%) promoted grooming products and focused on hedonic usage of products (72%), compared to 51% grooming products and 50% hedonic usage depiction in the ads from the post-revolution era. Moreover, the content analysis revealed that in 57% of the pre-revolution ads, emotional appeal was used compared to only 20% of the post-revolution ads, highlighting the focus on enjoyment of consumption and its prestige/status-related feelings regardless of the rational/logical reasons for product consumption. This theme is further discussed by focusing on two sub-themes, 'fashion-forwardness' and 'hedonic products as new necessities.'

*Fashion-forwardness.* This sub-theme refers to the prominent promotion of the European fashion in the pre-revolution ads, which encouraged consumption of products that were considered modern and new and positioned their consumer as a fashion-forward person who follows the latest styles and trends of the West. These efforts are indeed instrumental in pseudo-culture formation, as they engage in the inception or genesis of new consumption-related habits and their associated consumption culture. The ad for Fingerlure's nail art stickers (1974) read: 'The newest innovation in fashion of 1974' followed by a rather long paragraph describing this new fashion: '... this latest fashion product which was introduced in the beginning of 1974 ... is spreading quickly among fashion-forward women, especially young women.' Similarly, Koleston hair color cream ad in 1974 read: 'With Koleston, you become a modern woman. Koleston has the most complete set of modern style colors.' Biba cosmetics ads in 1975 is another instance for promotion of fashion-forwardness: 'With Biba makeup products, take a journey to the mysterious land of fashion and style.' Cutex nail polish (1973 and 1975), Helena Rubinstein cosmetics (1975), and Mum sprays (1975) are just a few other examples related to this sub-theme.

This sub-theme is, however, largely absent in the post-revolution sample. Advertisers in this era do not typically encourage fashion-forwardness, and in fact, very rarely are style and fashion used to encourage consumption of products (even in cases where the product is fashion-related in nature). With the exception of an ad by Maxim clothing in 2002, other ads in this era neither used the term ‘fashion’ nor directly promoted style and trendiness. The ad for Saviz nail polish (2002), for instance, highlights one specific nail polish color and even presents the color number in the center of the ad, but does not make any effort to justify why this color should be used and makes no reference to the trendiness of the advertised color as a reason why consumers should buy it. These findings indicate that the post-revolution era’s use of mass mediated advertising has focused on eliminating the consumption-related inceptions of the pre-revolution era.

*Hedonic products as new necessities.* Another sub-theme related to consumerism which was identified in the pre-revolution sample was how products were presented as new solutions for old (or even new) problems in consumers’ lives to encourage more product purchase. These ads typically provided product usage instructions to facilitate the new product adoption process and reify consumption. Most of the ads following this theme were personal care and grooming products that may not be considered necessities, but advertisers tried to build the case for why and how they should be used on a regular basis. The 1972 ad for Lancomia facial cream, for instance, read: ‘Lancomia forces your skin to rest and takes it to a dreamy escape.’ The ad provided paragraphs answering questions such as ‘When should I apply Lancomia?’ and ‘How should I use Lancomia?’ in an effort to convince the reader to start using the product and see its ‘miracles’ firsthand. A 1972 Nivea cream ad was another instance of such efforts. The ad depicted a Western-looking little girl applying the product on her belly, and the caption read: ‘Nivea has little friends in all over the

world.’ This was followed by another caption in larger fonts which read: ‘Everyone needs Nivea every day.’

Figure 3 (printed in 1965) illustrates another method of encouraging consumerism. The ad promotes the use of Taft hairspray for hedonic purposes and shows a picture of a man and a woman at a glamorous party. The woman is wearing fancy earrings and holding a glass of champagne, reflecting a luxurious lifestyle associated with Western consumerism. The small black-and-white picture at the bottom left corner of the ad depicts a woman using the product to illustrate how the product should be sprayed on hair. The ad tagline on the bottom read: ‘Taft, the invisible hair net,’ providing an alternative for the net or scarf as old solutions to protect the hairstyle. Similarly, Nivea’s sun oil spray ad (1974), promotes the product as an alternate and superior solution for protecting skin from the sun as opposed to covering it up in clothing (Figure 4). The ad for 8×4 spray (1976) represents another case for this theme. The ad depicts a blonde model spraying the product to her underarm. The caption further argues that the product could solve the problems of today’s consumers with active lifestyle and also provides usage instructions: ‘Every morning spray it under your arms only once and experience freshness and happiness the entire day.’

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

This approach is mainly absent in the post-revolution sample. Regardless of the fact that the proportion of grooming and hedonic products to functional products is significantly decreased in this era, advertisers rarely encouraged consumption of such products as necessities. In contrast, ad messages focused on durability and long lasting qualities of products, implying less need for spending money on more products. This finding refers to the post-revolution era’s use of advertising and commercial forces to plant an anti-consumerism seed in the society’s consumption culture. The ad from Denis Trico (1974), producer of women’s clothing, is an example. The ad

depicted two sketches of women wearing scarves and mantos with a caption on top of the ad that read: 'Denis Trico, the reminder of beauty and durability.' Similarly, durability is the dominant message in the ad from Sadaf Plastic Sima (2004), an Iranian manufacturer of hair brushes, emphasizing the long lasting quality of its products. The only exception among the ads in this period was an ad for Nattel body shampoo (1994) in which the product was positioned as a replacement for regular soaps (i.e., promotes consumption of a new product).

The findings show that advertisers in pre- and post-revolution periods tried to encourage differing views regarding consumerism. The use of advertising and commercial forces to spread the desired values and behaviors is a common tool in the effort to form a pseudo-culture in both eras.

### ***Ideal Feminine Image***

Efforts to idealize, promote, and encourage certain appearances for women were witnessed in both pre- and post-revolution samples by focusing on how women were portrayed in the ads. The reconfiguration of signs and symbols of appropriateness in both eras represents yet another tool utilized to form pseudo-cultures. The content analysis provided convincing evidence for such efforts. As reported earlier, in the pre-revolution sample, 71% of the ads depicted female models that looked Western (e.g., blond hair, blue or green eyes, light skin tone). In addition, in 40% of the ads in this period, women's clothing styles looked Western. After the revolution, female models only appeared in 12% of the ads, but in the few cases that portrayed women, 55% depicted an Iranian look. Furthermore, only 1% of the ads in this era showed women in Western clothing.

In the pre-revolution sample, numerous ads portrayed Western women and focused on their looks as a means to attract attention and succeed. For instance, the ad for Max Factor eye shadow (1973) depicted a female model with blond hair and a Western hairstyle, blue eyes, and light skin



tone. The Western model was wearing a blue eye shadow complementing her blue eyes. The caption highlighted that the advertised product creates a mysterious and dreamy look for eyes using a variety of hot color options. It added: ‘a warm and burning look with the pleasant shine that will never change or wrinkle...’ implying that the ideal feminine image is a sexy, hot, and attention grabbing one that seduces men. The 1965 ad for Taft hairspray (Figure 3) is another example, which appears to be a simple replication of its original for Western markets. The woman’s hair is not covered, and her facial characteristics (a trendy Western hair style, blond hair, and light skin) as well as her Western outfit represent a Western appearance. As discussed, adopting original ads without any modification to make them appropriate for the Iranian market was a common practice among advertisers to promote an ideal image for women similar to those in Western societies. The ad headline read: ‘Taft makes you confident,’ implying that using this product can assure women that they look their best and that confidence is related to their appearance. The ad for Laura nail polish and lip stick (1975) provides another example. The caption read: ‘With the beautiful and newest shiny and matte colors of Laura nail polish, make eyes stare at the beauty of your hands. With the choice of shiny and matte colors of Laura lip sticks, give your lips an eye-catching, new look.’ Other instances of this theme included Fingerlure nail stickers in 1974 (‘Fingerlure converts your nails to a small, beautiful tableau and gives the delicate hands of young ladies stunning attraction and beauty’) and a Golnar body soap ad (1973) which depicted a Western-looking model for a soap made in Iran.

Even in cases where female models did not have a Western look, the hair style and clothing resembled those of Western models. Another Taft hairspray ad in 1972 provides an interesting case for this theme (Figure 5). The ad showed a picture of a male pilot (airplane captain) with a caption asking: ‘Mr. Pilot, who is your ideal wife?’ The ad then listed several characteristics that

the pilot had supposedly mentioned including ‘kind and honest,’ ‘healthy and happy,’ and ‘lovely and stylish.’ These factors were then followed by a final factor (larger font size) that ‘she has pretty and stylish hair,’ which was immediately followed by the slogan: ‘Taft, ideal for an ideal woman.’ It is noteworthy that being a pilot at the time was among the most prestigious jobs in Iran, putting it on top of the wish-list of any young woman in Iran. As such, the factors that such a high-profile man would consider for selecting his future wife were presented as ideal characteristics for women.

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

Post-revolution ads, however, promote and idealize a different feminine image—one that is covered in hijab and does not wear makeup to avoid attracting men’s attention to her physical beauties. The ad for Pars Khazar vacuum cleaner (2009), an Iranian manufacturer of home appliances, is a good example of such efforts (Figure 6). The ad depicts a woman holding a baby with a motherly smile. The woman is not wearing any makeup, and her hair and body are covered in hijab. Iran National vacuum cleaner ad (2004) also depicts a woman wearing no makeup whose body is fully covered in a loosely-fitting manto and her hair is covered by a scarf. The ads for Tefal cookware (2009 and 2010; Figure 7) and Denis Trico (1994) present other instances. The Denis Trico ad went even further and did not present a real picture of a woman, and instead presented a painting sketch of two women. These ads provide further evidence for the efforts to portray an ideal image for women (covered by veil with no makeup), in line with Islamic guidelines.

[Insert Figures 6, 7, and 8 about here]

Our analyses, however, revealed a few exceptions. Figure 8 shows an ad from 2004 for Procsa hair color cream. This ad is one of the few instances in which we can notice the tension between pre- and post-revolution standards. Procsa cosmetic products are produced by Professional Cosmetics, a Spanish company. However, the country of origin of the product is not

mentioned in the ad. Interestingly, the black-and-white background of the ad depicts the uncovered hair and partial face of a woman. This faded image in the background is similar to the one on the product container. The ad designer wisely kept the color theme of the background neutral to make it less eye-catching (and perhaps less problematic). Also, in contrast to most ads in this era, the brand name is only printed in English followed by a slogan in Persian that reads ‘complete your beauty with Procsa’. This slogan, by itself, is a clear departure from the ideal image presented in post-revolution ads, as it places emphasis on the beauty and appearance of women. This illustration of a woman with uncovered hair (to this extent) to promote a foreign product is simply an exception, resonating with the repressed interests of the younger Iranian consumers for foreign products and reflecting the advertiser’s awareness of the tensions between the two ideologies. Figure 9, an ad for Behbar hair remover powder (2008), depicts the faces of two male and female models, indicating that the product is for both men and women. The female model has Western facial characteristics such as lighter skin and eye color. She is wearing makeup and is smiling, and her hair is mostly faded into the background of the ad. However, we can still see part of her hair despite the effort to cover it with a white daisy. The headline on the top reads: ‘skin cleanliness, youthfulness and joy forever.’ Similar to the previous ad, the Behbar ad slightly deviates from the advertising standards of the post-revolution era, using an unconventional presentation of women (Western look, partially uncovered hair, and makeup) while attempting to adhere to the advertising regulations of the regime. This may be the result of a calculated risk to take advantage of the tensions between the two ideologies and appeal to a certain target market.

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

The analysis of the ads in both eras revealed efforts at portraying an ideal image for women. This is an effort to instantiate a set of signs and symbols that represent desirable values in the

society. Note that the use of commercial forces to spread new values embedded in the advertised products was repeatedly evidenced in both eras. While the focus of pre-revolution ads was on the exterior beauty of women (following Western standards) and the importance of their looks, the post-revolution ads avoided illustrating women in ads or presented an image of women that did not focus on physical appearance.

### ***Redefining Women's Role in Society***

One of the critical themes that emerged from the content analysis was how advertising was used as a means to redefine women's role in the society by portraying women occupying different roles or by associating various role-expected activities with women in both eras. In the pre-revolution sample, 85% of the ads depicted female models (60% alone and 25% with others). In addition, within the sample of the ads that conveyed a message regarding a specific role for women, 56% promoted or portrayed a modern public/social role (e.g., working independently, shopping, partying), whereas 44% encouraged or illustrated a traditional family role (e.g., mother, housewife). After the revolution, in contrast, female models were not socially present in a significant majority of the ads (88%), while in the remaining 12% portraying women, 8% showed women alone and only 4% in the company of others. Additionally, within the sample of ads with a role-related message, only 23% promoted or depicted public roles compared to 77% of the ads encouraging or portraying family/housewife roles. Moreover, the types of products advertised in the two eras showed a drastic change (9% household products and home appliances vs. 39% in pre- and post-revolution ads, respectively), implying that such products are what women need and should care about. These findings are in line with the initial speculation that advertising in both periods demonstrates a systematic effort to redefine the status and role of women in the society by reconfiguring or introducing symbols of appropriateness.

In the pre-revolution sample, numerous ads were found in support of this theme. For instance, two ads from Countess 2000 deodorant (1973 and 1976) portrayed women as independent and active members of the society (i.e., one at a taxi station hailing a cab and the other driving alone). They both had underarm sweat stains on their clothes, and the caption read: ‘With Countess 2000 this will never happen again.’ In another example from Melli (an Iranian brand of shoes) in 1973 (Figure 11), women were depicted in different social occasions unreservedly talking and laughing, walking or crossing a street, or hanging out at a street café. The main caption read: ‘Everywhere under their feet: they wear chic and comfortable shoes and walk across the entire city.’ This tagline along with the visual portrayal of women clearly promotes an independent and active social lifestyle for women.

[Insert Figure 11 about here]

From a slightly different angle, the Taft hairspray ad (Figure 3) illustrates a woman drinking, socializing, and perhaps flirting with a man at a party. In addition, two couples are dancing a waltz (not typical in Iran) in the faded background of the image. The ad headline (‘Taft makes you confident’) and its tagline on the bottom (‘Taft, the invisible hair net’) jointly imply that using this product can assure women that they will look their best throughout their social activities. These signs highlight the social aspects of women’s life as independent members of the society and cleverly promote a social role for women, as they can freely interact with men, drink, and dance.

Further, the ad for Nivea sun oil spray (1974; Figure 4), which was previously examined under the consumerism theme, could also be reanalyzed here. As noted, the ad compares and contrasts two different approaches to skin protection. The context of this comparison is described on top of the ad which read ‘In summer, at the beach or swimming pool, while swimming or getting

a sun bath, there are two ways to protect your skin against the sun.’ The selected context promotes a hedonic usage for the advertised product and is in line with the current theme (redefining women’s role) because these role-related activities implicitly recommend a lifestyle in which women can freely appear in public, and have fun independently, while traditional Iranian culture encourages otherwise.

In contrast, the analysis of the post-revolution sample revealed that a completely different role has been promoted and/or portrayed for women (i.e., women as mothers and housewives). For instance, two ads for Iran National vacuum cleaner (2003 and 2004) portrayed women using this product at home, suggesting that household chores are solely women’s responsibility. Similar efforts in this direction were found in the ads such as Tefal nonstick cookware ad (2009; Figure 7) showing a woman in the kitchen watching her husband removing a piece of steak stuck to the pan and Saya food processor ad (2006) in which the main caption read: ‘Saya, in charge of the kitchen, after the lady of the home.’

Pars Khazar vacuum cleaner (2009; Figure 6) provides more evidence of such efforts in redefining women’s role as a dedicated mother and housewife. The ad depicts a woman who passionately looks at her child, implying the importance of family and parenting. This is further reinforced by the message on the top left that read: ‘childhood and cleanliness.’ This message is followed by more information about the importance of women’s focus on their children and cleanliness of the environment in which children are raised. This representation of woman in the ad explicitly promotes two simultaneous ideal female roles as a mother and a housewife since it associates motherhood (with the primary focus being on children) to a housewife role running the home and cleaning the house. The association made between these two conceivably independent roles, equalizing a less essential role (housewife) to a universally valued role (mother), is an

attempt to promote a vacuum cleaner as a product which contributes to undertaking motherhood responsibilities.

The final groups of the ads supporting this theme after the revolution were those in which the promoted female role was conveyed in a more subtle way. For instance, the traditional role of being a loving wife was embedded in an ad for BIC cologne (1994) with a caption that read: ‘BIC for men, the perfect gift for your beloved husband.’ Similarly, the ads for Neptone swivel sweeper (2009) and Pars Khazar home appliances (2009) promoted the products as appropriate gifts for Women’s Day and Mother’s Day, evidently relating household products to the expected roles for women.

The findings show that advertisers in pre- and post-revolution periods tried to redefine and promote different roles for women, following a similar process (i.e., instantiation of symbols and signs that represented the desired values).

### ***Reconstruction of Norms***

Reconstruction of cultural norms is the final emerging theme of our analyses. Norms are rules of behavior that create the framework of cultures. Values give rise to norms, and thus, cultural values will be ultimately impacted by the reconstruction of norms. Both pre- and post-revolution ads provide instances of such efforts, despite different types of norms being highlighted in each era. Advertisers in the pre-revolution era mainly focused on reconstructing cultural norms that promoted individualism, uniqueness, and exclusivity (more in line with Western cultures) as opposed to family and in-group orientation, similarity, and harmony (more in line with Persian culture; Javadian and Dastmalchian 2003). For example, an ad for the Italian brand of Eau de Cologne, Pino Silvestre, from 1972 read: ‘only one... only one in every 10,000 uses men’s Pino Silvestre cologne.’ Our findings show that liberalization was the most prevalent effort in

reconstruction of norms in this era. These norms were at odds with cultural norms emanating from the conservative values of Iranian culture. The ad for Toshiba's portable TV (1974; Figure 10), for instance, shows a small outdoor picnic in which an Iranian woman and two male friends seem to have a pleasant time. This illustration, by itself, could be interpreted as an effort for norm reconstruction (i.e., a woman going out to have fun with two men in public was far from accepted norms of the time). The woman appears to be the center of attention (both men are looking at her). She is directly looking and smiling at the man sitting in front of her (norm violation), who does not wear a wedding ring signaling that they are just friends. The ad also shows both men are drinking in public (another violation of the norms). This ad is one of the instances of the ads that were specifically designed and developed for the Iranian audience. The female and her male companions look Persian with dark hair and facial characteristics typical of Iranians.

[Insert Figures 10 and 11 about here]

Another ad for Pino Silvestre (1972) is a prominent example of liberalization efforts by reconstructing the norms (Figure 11). In contrast to the Toshiba TV ad, this ad seems to be adopted from its original Western version. The only adaptation effort is the use of Persian language in the caption. The ad conveys a hedonic message with the use of sex appeal (norm violation/reconstruction). The upper bodies of the models are fully exposed, demonstrating an intimate relationship. The caption loosely translates to 'Invite your body to the joy of embracing Pino.' The Persian word used for 'embracing' has a lateral meaning of 'sleeping with' or 'making love with' someone. Although the advertised product is a men's cologne, it appears from the message that the ad was designed for a female audience. Nothing in this ad fits the accepted norms of Iranian society about the relationship between a man and a woman; the body exposure of the models as well as the persuasive message subtly encouraging sexual pleasure are both culturally



inappropriate in discussion or practice. Hence, such efforts could be interpreted as attempts to reconstruct the traditional norms in Iranian society concerning nudity and intimate relationships in public. These efforts are supported by content analysis findings revealing that in 84% of the ads in this era women were shown in the ads, and in 54% of such instances, more than 50% of the woman's body (nudity) was exposed in the ad.

The ad for Nivea sun oil spray (1974; Figure 4), which was previously discussed, presents another case in support of this theme. In this ad, the image on the right illustrates a woman in a modest dress with long sleeves. Although the model's hair is not covered, her dress covers a significant portion of her body, conforming to Persian cultural norms for how women should appear in public. Contrary to this image, the one on the left depicts the same model in a bikini, a swimsuit directly adopted from Western fashion industry. The more liberal representation of the model at the beach is compared with the more conservative image on the right. This ad not only compares the two approaches (for skin protection), but also draws a conclusion by clearly offering the the solution that 'The better way is to use Nivea sun oil.' Although drawing a conclusion, as suggested in advertising research, is an appropriate strategy when message complexity is high or involvement is low (Sawyer and Howard 1991), we argue that the drawn conclusion here is intended to encourage change in behavioral norms rather than merely encourage the product purchase. In this context, it is not the surface message (i.e., the use of the product) but rather the subtle meaning conveyed (i.e., change of norms) that is complex and comprises a high involvement decision. The present argument is further fortified by the fact that Persian language reads from right to left and thus the Iranian audience follows the information provided in the ad (both written and visual) in the same manner. The presentation of the images in the ad, considering this

directionality, suggests the shift from the conservative approach (on the right) to the desired, liberal one (on the left), reflecting the tension between the two ideologies.

The post-revolution efforts in reconstructing the norms were focused on how women should be seen. The ads following this theme typically depict women at home while wearing hijab and covering their hair, which is not what women are required to do in reality according to Islam. The ads for Iran National vacuum cleaner in 2003 and Pars Khazar vacuum cleaner in 2009 are examples of efforts in which women are depicted in full hijab even at home. It is noteworthy that, according to Islam, women's hair does not have to be covered in private or when with their immediate family. Another effort in reconstructing the norms in this era emerges from the frequent use of flowers in the ads as surrogates for women (as identified in the content analysis). These surrogates could be the ultimate use of symbolism in the pseudo-culture formation process. The conservative view that a woman should reveal her beauty only to her husband and never show off her beauty in public is the center of attention in these efforts. In 88% of the ads in this era, woman were not shown at all, and 96% of the ads did not show a woman's body at all. As such, the advertisers have opted to comply with this conservative norm and completely remove women from the ads (even in the ads for products enhancing woman's beauty), and instead replace her with flowers as surrogates (19.3% of the ads). For example, the 1994 ad for '101' lightening cream by Tolidaru, an Iranian producer of personal care products, depicts three shades of flowers from dark purple to white on the top of the ad while the caption reads 'bright, brighter, and even brighter' right under the picture of the product. This is followed by another caption that read: 'By using lightening cream 101, make your facial tone brighter.' A Saviz nail polish ad in 2002 is another example in which the tips of petals are depicted at the margins of the ad, resembling women's nails covered in the nail polish colors that are presented at the center of the ad. Again, this is an effort

in using flowers as surrogates for women and their beauty in an effort to construct a norm that condemns any presentation of women's beauty in public.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Our content analysis and semiotic analysis of print ads in pre- and post-revolution eras revealed five underlying pseudo-culture formation themes. Table 1 shows these themes along with their supporting socio-historical evidence and further identifies the main ad execution strategies utilized by advertisers in each era. These five themes were instrumental in forming pseudo-cultures in each era. Despite drastic differences in their orientations (e.g., pro- vs. anti-consumerism), our analyses indicate that the core processes that supported these themes were similar. As such, we identify four tools (or processes) that are instrumental in pseudo-culture formation (Figure 12). As in the case of pseudo-culture formation in pre- and post-revolution in Iran, a pseudo-culture shows major deviations from baseline cultural forms, ideas, and values. When the new cultural standards were not naturally embraced by the society, the imposing party used four tools/processes to encourage, spread, and reinforce the new culture. These processes are interrelated and interdependent rather than sequential and are employed in conjunction to one another during a pseudo-culture formation project (see Figure 12).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

[Insert Figure 12 about here]

The *inception* process is aimed at creating non-preexisting cultural goods. This process gives rise to a culture that commodifies cultural goods and reifies their consumption. According to Adorno (Adorno 1993), consumers relate to these cultural goods as status makers. The underlying themes of consumerism vs. anti-consumerism and foreign vs. domestic idealism are in line with the use of this process in an effort to create pseudo-cultures. The efforts of advertisers

(in the pre-revolution era) were mainly aimed at encouraging consumerism not only by highlighting fashion-forwardness and promoting trending styles, but also by encouraging consumption of products (even hedonic ones) as necessities for consumers in their daily lives. Moreover, Western products were represented as high quality and their consumption was encouraged by depicting Western consumers as an aspirational reference group with the inherent benefit of status and prestige. The efforts of the post-revolutionary regime in forming pseudo-culture focused on eliminating and downgrading the cultural goods promoted and introduced during the pre-revolution regime. As a result, fashion-forwardness and use of trendy, hedonic products were rarely advertised. Moreover, idealization of foreign (vs. domestic) products and highlighting (vs. underplaying) their consumption choices provide further support for the implementation of this process. The analysis of the post-revolution ads questions the generalizability of Pollay's (1986) argument that advertising is to blame for increased materialism and decreased religiosity in the society.

*Instantiation* is another pseudo-culture formation process in which the political regime tries to reconfigure signs and symbols of appropriate values. Re-construction of norms is a pseudo-culture formation theme that is in line with this process. Even though the pre- and post-revolution ads reveal efforts in promoting drastically different norms, the use of this process as a tool to form the desired pseudo-culture is evident. Redefining women's roles and depicting an ideal image for women are other important themes that have been used in line with the instantiation process to give rise to norms, values, and symbols supporting the desired pseudo-culture.

The inception of new cultural goods and instantiation of supportive values and norms in the society will not succeed without the *propagation* and *eradication* processes. The main goal of the propagation process is to introduce the new symbols using mass communication such as

advertising. Finally, by following the *eradication* process, the imposing party employs commercial forces to spread the new values and diminish the traditional values. As evident from our content and semiotic analyses, advertisements were significantly different in the pre- and post-revolution eras, with each era's ads focusing on promoting and highlighting the desired values, norms, and symbols in line with the desired pseudo-culture.

The results also shed light on cultural tensions during each era identified through the ads. For instance, these tensions were observable in ads comparing the old versus the modern to imply the superiority of the modern values while being aware of the traditional values. Although these new cultural views lacked the essential legitimization for melting into the indigenous culture (Hall 1997), the government continued these pseudo-cultural development efforts by using mass communication through sponsored media. The resultant pseudo-culture tried to weaken collective values to draw attention away from issues in the public domain (Droge et al. 1993).

The post-revolution ads depict a religiously-informed cultural system whose purpose has been to abolish the advertising systems of the Pahlavi regime and replace them with different ones. Specifically, our analyses indicate that the post-revolution regime has attempted to supplant the Western imitated pseudo-culture with a religion-based ideological system. The aftermath of these attempts, however, is not much different from Adorno's predictions because critical reflections on the religiously-enforced pseudo-culture have already been noted in society. Khiabany and Sreberny (2004, p. 37) argue that "Islam is certainly an aspect of Iranian culture and has been for over twelve centuries." However, it is only one aspect of the Iranian culture, and Islamists are not the only influencers in societal developments. As a result, the reinforcements of fundamental Islamic rules are not embraced by all Iranians (Adib-Moghaddam 2005) and some groups (mainly the youth) favor relaxation of some strict religious rules (Jafari 2007). Such diversity of views

among Iranians was again a strong source of tension and conflict in the ads during the post-revolution era. The advertisers tried to take advantage of the opposing views (which favor conservative values to a lesser extent) and incorporated less conservative elements in their ads to distinguish themselves and to appeal to the less-conservative target audience. This situation is different from the Islamic struggles in Malaysia that are rooted in different versions of modernity and its relationship with Islam as noted by Wong (2007). It is also distinct from the strategies adopted by female Muslim consumers in Qatar and Sharjah to reconcile the seemingly opposing notions of fashion and Islam, to be modest while vain and traditional while modern (Sobh et al. 2014).

### ***Theoretical Contributions***

The present work combines ideas drawn from the theory of pseudo-culture, historical analysis in advertising, and the evolution of female images in an investigation focusing on Iran. It introduces pseudo-culture as a theoretical lens to expand the boundaries of extant research on historical advertising (e.g., Spears and Amos 2014; Zhao and Belk 2008a). Likewise, the study contributes to our understanding of how one ideology works to expunge another, and how those processes are ultimately revealed in ad strategies (e.g., Hung et al. 2007; Zhao and Belk 2008b). The results contribute to our understanding of the dynamic interplay between political systems and marketing systems and present a case for how politically-charged cultural transformation projects could use marketing practices to impact religious and socio-cultural identities. Five major themes that underlie the pseudo-culture formation in the investigated historical eras of Iran are identified. Moreover, the interconnections of the themes highlight the use of similar tools/processes (i.e., *inception, instantiation, propagation, and eradication*) in each era to create and promote a desired pseudo-culture.

Prior research has mainly relied on consumer perspectives to investigate identity construction projects (Coulter et al. 2003; Jafari 2007; Jafari and Goulding 2008; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Wilk 1995). Following a different perspective, the present research focused on the use of mass mediated advertising in cultural transformation projects. The results contribute to macromarketing literature by identifying the processes that are involved in cultural transformation projects. While recognizing the common tools used for pseudo-culture formation, the results showcase the variations in the themes and techniques as reflected in mass mediated advertising efforts of each historical era (see Table 1).

The application of pseudo-culture as a theoretical lens enhances our understanding of the manner in which a superimposed culture seeks to overshadow and replace one that has been previously shared. Several theoretical contributions are noteworthy. First, the analysis expands our understanding of pseudo-culture (Adorno 1993) by revealing how mass-media's initial launch of the pseudo-culture or the *inception* process is situated in the origin of the created goods, whether it be foreign or domestic. Such a process frames both the nature of the goods and the nature of the individuals who consume them. One aspect of the *inception* process is mass-media's unveiling of the dominant themes of the originators of the newly imposed and promoted goods, such as consumerism. At a more macro level, it may be that inceptions of pseudo-cultures have origins in different emerging ideologies, such as the social movements of feminism, or perhaps religious or political movements within a country.

Second, the findings contribute to pseudo-culture theory by unmasking *instantiation* processes that appropriate mass-mediated ad symbols, such as women's roles and images. The analysis contributes to CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005) by underscoring the role of the origin of the mass-promoted goods and reconfigured ad symbols, whether it be geographic or even

religious or political ideologies, in mass-media's efforts to predispose consumers to the construction of certain types of identity projects.

Third, the study contributes to our understanding of how pseudo-culture advances and declines with the *propagation* and *eradication* processes. The study adds to our understanding by finding that societies' members can be predisposed to participate in a marketplace replete with the images and roles of a superimposed pseudo-culture. The findings contribute to our understanding of CCT by suggesting that, while consumers develop their own culture and traditions over time, such an evolving process can become derailed and sidelined when an imposed culture is broadly propagated (Arnould and Thompson 2005). At a macro level, the results suggest that the advancement and decline of such cultures may be bounded by historical events, such as wars, crises (economic, religious, political, and social), and ideologies (protectionist or expansionist).

Finally, the study enhances prior understanding of the role of pseudo-culture in mass-mediated ad symbols. It reveals the malleable, fluid, and ever-changing nature of imposed mass-mediated ideas aimed at reshaping consumer identity—identity that is itself just as malleable, fluid, and ever-changing. The cyclic nature of the proposed pseudo-culture formation model reveals the ineffectiveness of efforts to forge collective identities in the form of modernism, nationalism, secularism, or religiosity. This is in line with Jafari's view (2007) referring to the failure of Reza Pahlavi's project to secularize the Iranian society and highlights the role of society members as active interpretive agents rather than passive receivers of identity construction projects. After all, "we must make sure that the images we create do not generate beliefs that are individually or socially destructive" (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998, p. 161).

### ***Macromarketing Implications***



The present investigation contributes in multiple ways to the macromarketing domain by applying the theory of pseudo-culture to investigate the dynamic interactions between marketing systems, culture, politics, religion, and society. This research demonstrates that a marketing system such as advertising could be potentially used as a powerful tool by political systems to advance their own ideologies while simultaneously undermining and overwriting traditional ideologies. The study expands our current understanding of how superimposed pseudo-cultural viewpoints that challenge indigenous ideas find a voice in mass-mediated female ad images. Likewise, by examining conflicting cultural trends revealed in ad strategies, the investigation contributes to a macro level understanding of how shifting national themes relate to pseudo-culture formation efforts.

The research contributes to our understanding of image-specific macromarketing efforts by discovering how ad strategies navigate multiple pseudo-culture conversations and accommodate such voices in female images that are culturally vulnerable to malleable interpretations. The present research also contributes to the debate over the role of advertising in manipulating values (like a mold) versus merely reflecting them (like a mirror; Holbrook 1987). The present work supports the manipulative role of advertising as a formative influence to shape thoughts and feelings of the public. However, from a pseudo-cultural point of view, such manipulative advertisements actually provide a *reflection* of distorted values of the pseudo-culture rather than the indigenous cultural values. The present research, therefore, helps address Holbrook's question regarding who-distorts-what in this process. Note that the *propagation* and *eradication* tools used in pseudo-culture formation projects rely heavily on the power of advertising to reinforce certain values (i.e., those desired by the political/ideological system pursuing the formation/replacement of pseudo-cultures) more frequently than others. Thus, the

research underscores the interconnectivity and complexity of the power relations between the globalization forces and the political dynamics and traditional/institutional forces that are behind identity formation projects (Jafari 2007).

The focus on Iran as the specific context of the study contributes to the extant understanding of this market and examines the culture and identity of Iranian consumers from a socio-historical perspective (Jafari 2007). The insights gained from present research could shed light on understanding of pseudo-culture formation efforts in other societies. The identified processes could be applied to other contexts to understand the major underlying pseudo-culture themes and identify the cultural tensions and consumer responses in those societies. Some of these contexts include socio-cultural contexts under socialist regimes, former Soviet states (before and after communism), and even developed societies and their identity fabrication efforts concerning ethnic identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The interplay between marketing and political systems is a significant macromarketing issue and the present research was inspired to extend this body of research. Specifically, our goal was to explain how advertising could be used to form a pseudo-culture in the presence of socio-cultural conflicts and tensions. In doing so, the theory of pseudo-culture was used to develop a conceptual framework underlying pseudo-cultural formation themes and to identify major tools/processes through which pseudo-cultures may be formed, promoted, and/or abolished. This work was an initial attempt in using the pseudo-culture theory in macromarketing domain. Future researchers are invited to further push the boundaries of extant knowledge by investigating other macromarketing applications of this theory.

**Table 1. Summary of findings**

	Underlying Pseudo-Culture Formation Themes	Evidence of Pseudo-Culture Formation Efforts	Ad Execution Strategies
Western-Imitated Pseudo-Culture	Consumerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latest Western products and brands were widely available</li> <li>• Grooming products with hedonic usage were prevalent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging fashion-forwardness</li> <li>• Using hedonic and emotional ad appeals</li> <li>• Associating Western products with a modern, luxury lifestyle</li> </ul>
	Foreign Idealism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western products were presented as better solutions for consumer needs</li> <li>• Foreign consumers were presented as aspirational reference groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizing Western manufacturer of products</li> <li>• Promoting Western products as superior</li> <li>• Replicated original copies of ads used in Western consumer markets</li> </ul>
	Ideal Feminine Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western style beauty culture became visible in the pages of the Iranian press</li> <li>• The ideal image of modern Iranian woman was informed by the latest fashions and cosmetic practices of the West</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portraying women as Western blond, wearing modern and trendy outfits</li> <li>• Highlighting women's looks as a means to attract attention and succeed</li> </ul>
	Redefining Women's Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new world in which women socialized more freely with men</li> <li>• Women's appearance in public places was promoted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing female salience and presence in ads</li> <li>• Showing women's public activities as they freely socialize</li> </ul>
	Reconstruction of Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New norms were at odds with conservative values of Iranian culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighting exclusivity, individuality, and uniqueness in ads</li> <li>• Using images with nudity in ads</li> <li>• Comparing liberal norms with conservative norms</li> </ul>
Religiously-Imposed Pseudo-Culture	Anti-Consumerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion and propagation of overconsumption and wastefulness was prohibited</li> <li>• Promotion of acts of lavishness and luxury that are against Sharia law was prohibited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizing the functional purposes of products</li> <li>• Emphasizing the durability rather than fashion-forwardness of products</li> <li>• Using rational rather than emotional ad appeals</li> </ul>
	Domestic Idealism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American products and media imports were banned</li> <li>• Self-dependence and use of domestic products were vastly encouraged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizing the domestic origin of products</li> <li>• Avoiding Western manufacturers</li> <li>• Emphasizing the quality of domestic products</li> </ul>
	Ideal Feminine Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The content of mass communication was strictly controlled to be consistent with Islamic guidelines</li> <li>• Advertising cosmetic products on television, radio, and billboards was prohibited first and then controlled heavily</li> <li>• Objectification of people (both women and men) was prohibited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iranian women were depicted rather than Western models</li> <li>• Depicting women with no make up</li> <li>• Depicting women in hijab (based on Islamic and conservative values)</li> </ul>
	Redefining Women's Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women were to be accorded with high respect as mothers, daughters, and wives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depicting women in family roles (dedicated housewife or mother)</li> <li>• Dedicating more ad space to household items and kitchen appliances</li> <li>• Recommending household items as gifts for mothers' (women's) day</li> </ul>
	Reconstruction of Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of women in public life was restricted, and total rejection of, and isolation from, Western values were promoted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using surrogates (flowers, baby girls) to replace women in ads</li> <li>• Depicting women in hijab while at home</li> </ul>



**Figure 1a.** Persian miniature (pre-Islamic representation; source: Farshchian 1968)



**Figure 1b.** Qajar dynasty era (1785-1925; source: Antoin Sevruguin photography collection)



**Figure 1c.** Qajar dynasty era (1785-1925; source: Antoin Sevruguin photography collection)



**Figure 1d.** Reza Pahlavi era (1925-1941; source: Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies)



**Figure 1e.** Mohammad Reza Pahlavi era (1941-1979; source: Sabernews.com)



**Figure 1f.** Mohammad Reza Pahlavi era (1941-1979; source: khodnevis.org)



**Figure 1g.** Islamic Republic era (1979-present; source: fardisan.com)



**Figure 1h.** Islamic Republic era (1979-present; source: fardisan.com)



**Figure 2.** L'Oreal (1964)



**Figure 3.** Taft (1965)



در فصل تابستان، کنار دریا و استخر، هنگام شنا و حمام آفتاب

برای محافظت پوست بدن در مقابل نور خورشید دو راه وجود دارد



راه بهتر استفاده از نیوآ سان اویل است:

**NIVEA** SUN OIL SPRAY

نیوآ و سان اویل اسبری، با عصاره طبیعی بادام گرد و آواز سوختگی پوست بدن در مقابل اشعه سوزان آفتاب جلوگیری کرده و آنرا نرم میکند



اسبری

Figure 4. Nivea (1974)

آقای خلبان ...

زن ایده آل شما کیست؟

زن ایده آل من :

با حقیقت و مهربان

سالم و باشماط

کدبانو و خوش سلیقه

دوست داشتنی و ...

متین و پرازنده

باکیسوانی شگفت و آراسته

گیسوان شگفت و آراسته با تافت

\* تافت ایده آل برای زن ایده آل









Schwarzkopf international

Figure 5. Taft (1972)



Figure 6. Pars Khazar (2009)



Figure 7. Tefal (2009 and 2010)



Figure 8. Procsa (2004)



Figure 9. Behbar (2008)



Figure 10. Toshiba (1974)

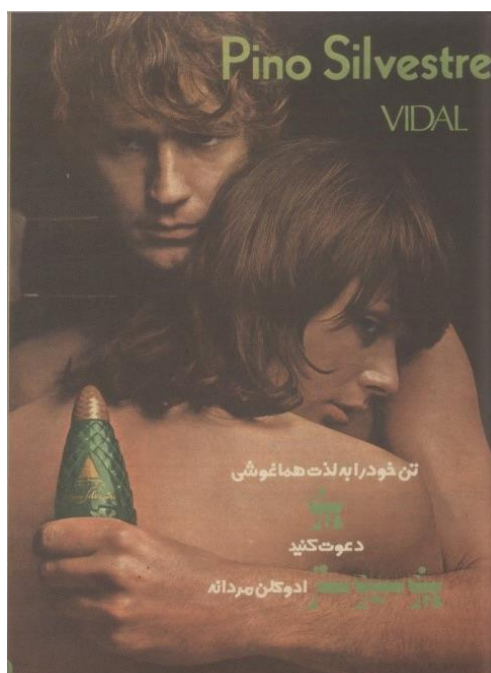
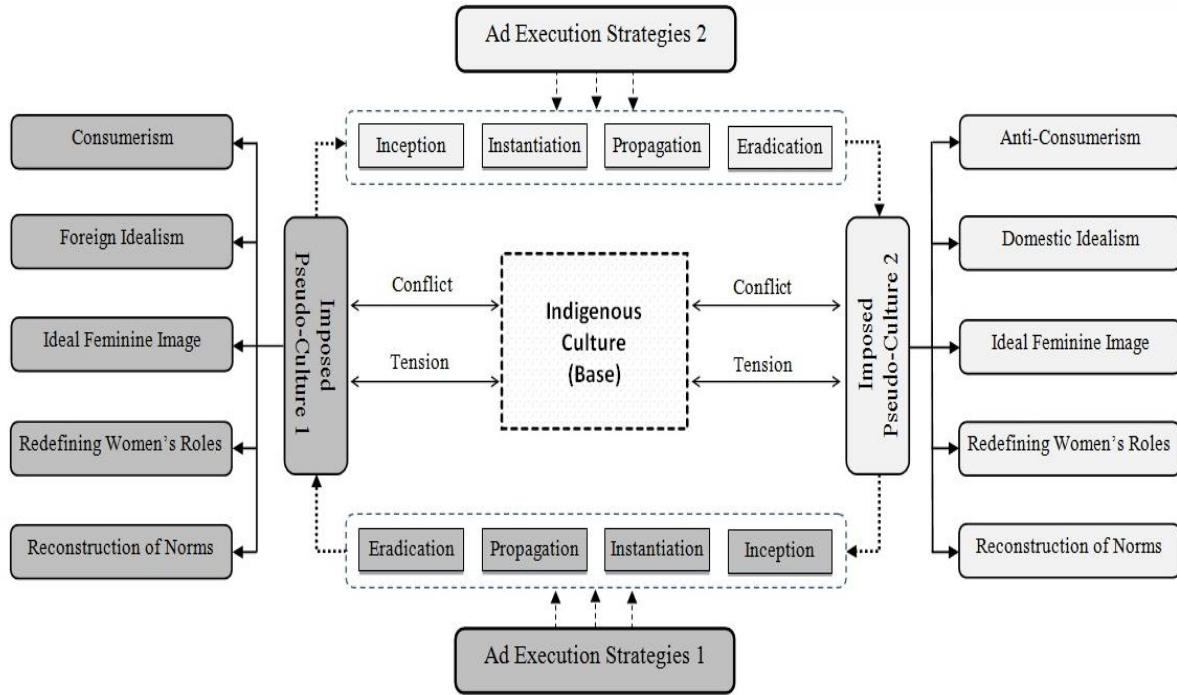


Figure 11. Pino Silvestre (1972)



**Figure 12.** Proposed conceptual framework

### Appendix. Content analysis results

Coding Categories	Pre-Revolution Observations	Post-Revolution Observations
1) Advertised Products		
- <i>Nature of Products Advertised</i>		
<i>Grooming</i>	84%	51%
<i>Household</i>	9%	39%
<i>Other</i>	7%	10%
- <i>Promoted Usage Purposes</i>		
<i>Hedonic</i>	72%	50%
<i>Functional</i>	28%	50%
- <i>Country of Origin</i>		
<i>Western</i>	81%	6%
<i>Iranian</i>	9.2%	77%
<i>Western Licensed</i>	9.8%	17%
2) Physical Representations of Women in the Ads		
- <i>Presence of Woman in the Ad</i>		
<i>Present</i>	84%	12%
<i>Absent</i>	16%	88%
- <i>Women's Look</i>		
<i>Western</i>	71%	35%
<i>Iranian</i>	26%	55%
<i>No Facial Presentation</i>	2.5%	10%
- <i>Body Exposure</i>		
<i>Less than 50%</i>	20%	4%
<i>More than 50%</i>	56%	0%
<i>Body Not Shown</i>	24%	96%
- <i>Style Of Clothing</i>		
<i>Western</i>	40%	1%
<i>Traditional/Regular</i>	31%	4%
<i>Not Shown</i>	29%	95%
3) Women's Social Representations in the Ads		
- <i>Social Presence</i>		
<i>Alone</i>	60%	8%
<i>With Others</i>	25%	4%
<i>Not Shown</i>	15%	88%
- <i>Promoted Roles in the Ads</i>		
<i>Public Role</i>	56%	23%
<i>Family Role</i>	44%	77%
4) Use of Visual Illustrative Techniques in the Ads		
- <i>Woman's Saliency in the Ads</i>		
<i>Foreground</i>	77%	6%
<i>Background</i>	7.4%	6%
<i>Not Shown</i>	15.6%	89%
- <i>Ad Appeals</i>		
<i>Emotional</i>	57%	20%
<i>Rational</i>	38%	58%
<i>No Appeal</i>	5%	22%

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