How detergent advertisements can bleach national identity: Postcolonial content analysis of Iranian TV advertisements

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Abstract: This explanatory, descriptive non-experimental research investigates Iranian State TV advertisements during 2011–2016 in terms of using western or western-like signs in detergents. Since the method is content analysis based on postcolonial classification scheme, the aim is to examine the myth of western superiority in the most recent detergent advertisements aired during five years on the anti-colonial, state-governed TV in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Edward Said’s postcolonial theory is used as the framework to draw upon the ideological aspect of advertisements. It is inferred that the advancement of western economy attracts the attention of most Iranian companies to associate their products with the west. The reason for this assumption is embedded in the postcolonial term popularized by Iranian scholar, Al-I Ahmad, ‘Westoxication’. The findings illustrate that, despite the dominant anti-capitalist and anti-colonial ideology in Iran, more than two-thirds of the advertisements (74.40%) shows the dominance of western culture by utilizing western-like setting, personages, music, and authentication in all detergent advertisements. It is concluded that though Iranians maintain some of their religious, traditional, and cultural values, the myth of the superiority of west is reflected in their consumption culture. The results of this study can be of interest to the

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
This explanatory research investigates Iranian State TV advertisements during 2011–2016 in terms of using western or western-like signs in detergents. It aims to examine the myth of western superiority. It reveals how the advancement of western economy attracts the attention of Iranian companies to associate their products with the west. The findings illustrate that, despite the dominant anti-capitalist and anti-colonial ideology in Iran, more than two-thirds of the advertisements (74.40%) shows the dominance of western culture by utilizing western-like setting, personages, music, and authentication. It is concluded that though Iranians maintain some of their religious, traditional, and cultural values, the myth of the superiority of west is reflected in their consumption culture. The results can be of interest to the...
people in authority of advertisement studies in anti-colonial, developing countries with emerging markets.

**Subjects:** Mass Communication; Visual Communication; Cultural Studies; Media & Film Studies

**Keywords:** Iran; advertisement; postcolonial studies; state TV; West

1. Introduction

The influence of advertisement on the marketplace is undeniable. Hundreds of advertisements are shown on Iranian State TV daily and the effect they have on the audience is cumulative and unavoidable (Brujerdi Alavi & Hadad, 2012, p. 214). Foreign words and foreign-looking personages are exploited in advertisements all over the world, even in America (Neelankavil, Mummalaneni, & Sessions, 1995, p. 25). Scholars have examined the frequency of English words in print advertisements (Haarmann, 1989; Shooshtari & Allahbakhsh, 2013). Nonetheless, the stance of this paper for analyzing audiovisual advertisements, covering five years, is both innovative and comprehensive.

Since Iran is a developing country, there are always modifications in different areas, especially the economy that directly influence advertisement, consumption market and culture. This fact justifies the significance of the present research, as this paper considers the most recent advertisements on Iranian State TV. The greater number of TV audience in comparison with magazines is the other reason to justify the significance of this research (Abdollahian & Hasani, 2012, p. 91). Furthermore, Iranian State TV is the only authority that can distribute advertisements nationally.

This paper concentrates on the case of detergents, while the previous studies of advertisements include other domains like beauty products (Amouzadeh & Tavangar, 2004), food industries (Azin & Hossein, 2015) and gender roles (Haghighi Nasab & Hedoyati, 2005; Kazemi & Nazer Fasihi, 2007). The objective of this paper is also different since it traces the signs of western superiority represented in the form of western setting, appearance, and authentication in the advertisements of a state-governed TV in an anti-colonial country.

The use of foreign words or signs is worldwide, whereas it can have different reasons in different countries. Moreover, each sign from each country can have a special connotation and thus, a different impact. Based on the postcolonial stance of this research, the profound influence of the west upon other countries is of significance. Since detergents are closely associated with modernity and west (Swett, Wiesen, & Zatlin, 2007), they are one of the most reliable representations of the myth of western superiority among different types of advertisements. After the scrutiny of all detergent advertisements aired during 2011–2016 (i.e. 789 cases), the results show how and to what extent the myth of western superiority is present Iran’s cultural realm. On the other hand, western signs—including western setting, personages, and authentication—are hardly used for advertising agricultural products. Because of Iran’s fertile soil, long history, and rich civilization, most Iranians privilege agricultural and historical products over the foreign ones (Vafadari & Cooper, 2010, pp. 166-179; Mojtabah-Zadeh, 2007, p. 20); furthermore, Iran is one of the biggest producers of a wide variety of grains and fruit (Rasekhi, 2007, pp. 97-99; Riasi, 2015, p. 365). However, national self-confidence is mostly limited to these few productions; in other cases, western manufacturing, excluding agricultural or historical products, deliver the sense of prestige and modernity (Amouzadeh & Tavangar, 2004). The results of this research familiarize the reader with the myth of western superiority in an anti-colonial, Muslim country like Iran.

In this explanatory, descriptive, non-experimental study, the following research questions are proposed:
(a) What signs (in setting, model’s appearance, and authentication) are more prevalent in Iranian State TV detergent advertisements after the content analysis?

(b) What is the reason of the prevalence of those signs?

The hypotheses are as follows:

- The majority of detergent advertisements reveals the dominance of western signs.
- Postcolonial theory can serve as the scheme to classify and analyze the advertisement and expose the reason behind this dominance that is the myth of western superiority.

In each advertisement, the hypotheses will be tested based on the deviations from the anti-colonial ideology in Iranian State TV (i.e.: the dominance of western signs). Said’s Postcolonial theory sheds light on the reasons behind this frequency. To discuss the “myth of western superiority”, a phrase widely utilized by Postcolonial scholars, one can assign different labels to the advertisements varying from an ideologically charged word like Al-I Ahmad’s “Westoxication” to a more neutral phrase like “western signs”. As the interpretation is based on qualitative studies, statistical software is not used for the testability of the hypotheses. All unique advertisements have been counted to concretize the claim and prove the hypotheses. The source of analysis consists of all detergent advertisements (i.e. 789) broadcast by Iranian State TV in 21 national channels for five years (2011–2016). All of them were watched and scrutinized closely to portray a complete picture of detergent advertisements in the consumer culture of current Iran. Each unique advertisement was meticulously studied to discover if it was deviating from the dominant ideology that is Islamic, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist.

Since the research concerns with the use of western or western-like signs on State TV advertisements, after review of literature, the postcolonial discourse will be discussed. The analysis of discourse and the impact of western culture on advertisements were conducted through the application of postcolonial theory. Postcolonialism is conceptualized in terms of systematic analysis of the myth of western superiority in advertisements’ setting, actors’ appearance, and western authentication.

2. Literature review

Empirical studies and other similar attempts were directed at analyzing advertisements. The first studies devoted to advertisements in the Middle East focus on innovations in advertisements and their relationship with social standards (Luqmani, Yavas, & Quraeshi, 1989). However, this paper does not concentrate on how the western culture affects the consumer culture in the host country (i.e.: Saudi Arabia). Needless to mention that there is a great difference between Arab and Iranian customers. The views of two powerful political parties in Iran toward the west shape different discourses in Iranian State TV advertisements (Ghandeharion & Yazdanjoo, 2017). Those studies that focused on Iranian customers have not thoroughly analyzed the social effect of western-like advertisements. Though the influence of advertisements on Iranian audience is discussed (Feiz, Fakharyan, Jalilvand, & Hashemi, 2013), how Iranian advertising companies reflect the myth of western superiority is still unobserved.

Shooshtari and Allahbakhsh (2013) emphasize the repetition and mimicry of English words; however, they conduct their research on print advertisements distributed in two Iranian magazines. The bulk of research on Iranian advertisement is limited to the representation of women and gender stereotypes (Amini, 2010; Ghandeharion & Rostami, 2017a, 2017b; Kianpour & Aslani, 2015; Lalami, 2007). Azin and Tabrizi (2015) analyze “gender roles” in Iranian State TV with only a brief reference to similar gender patterns in western advertisements. Through Barthes visual semiotics, they focus on “image of women” in Iranian TV commercials. The interrelationship between gender roles and marketing is studied in Schroeder’s and Borgerson’s (2015) critical analysis. Thus, rather than an external factor, (i.e.: superiority of west), most studies have focused on the internal relationship of gender and marketing.

Jafari and Maclaran (2014) examine how Iranian women challenge traditional gender stereotypes in advertisements. For Jafari (2007), Iran is in a transitional state where traditional and...
sociocultural values are continuously negotiated in the age of globalization. He highlights individual inclination toward western behavioral patterns among the young customers: riding expensive cars, wearing western brands, listening to Hip Hop and Rap music, etc. Some researchers claim that for the Iranian traditionalists, globalization is reworded as “Westoxcation” or “cultural invasion” (Jafari & Goulding, 2013, p. 85). However, they emphasized the macro levels of Iranian society. To fill this gap, this research focused on the micro level (i.e. advertisements). Some critics claim that in the Middles East, fashion system is highly dependent on the west; consequently, the type of product and customer country is under the influence of western language and model (Drumwright & Kamal, 2015; Neelankavil et al., 1995; Sobh, Belk, & Gressel, 2014). The present research demonstrates that not only fashion system and beauty products, but also detergent advertisements are influenced by myth of western superiority.

3. Postcolonial theory as the classification scheme
Advertisements, as an inseparable part of the discursive discourse, are the scene to study cultural practices and ideology. Thus, culture is felt, practiced, understood, revisited, and evaluated in TV advertisements. Compared to other media, TV is one of the most effective ones (Abrams & Harpham, 2009; Ansari & Joloudar, 2011; Barker, 2004; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992). The reason to examine the advertisements that were broadcast on Iranian State TV is this medium’s considerable influence on people. Advertisements try to resolve ideological contradictions by celebrating the prevailing social order. They provide and revise models of identity (Kellner, 2003, pp. 15–26). The way the definition of identity portrayed through Iranian advertisement can be best analyzed by a postcolonial perspective. Postcolonialism shows how the identity of non-westerners can depend on western cultural classifications leading to the myth of superiority of the West. Some critics believe that Iran, like other countries, tackles with the results of globalization of English (Baumgardner & Brown, 2012, pp. 295–297). By discussing the advertisements of developing countries, many researchers have claimed that the use of English words is a sign of prestige, sophistication, technology, and modernity (Chetia, 2014; Haarmann, 1989; Martin, 2008).

Iran was not directly colonized, yet the effects of cultural imperialism cannot be overlooked in this country since its neighbors have been directly colonized (Hanson, 1983). Colonization is introduced into cultural values of the colonies and it defines their self-image as negative, unreliable and regressive (Tyson, 2006, pp. 417–423). Cultural imperialism is a tool to alienate local and national traditions from global music, fashions, sports, cinema, and consumerism (Golding & Harris, 1999; Said, 1994). The powerful culture of the colonizer disparages everything associated with the Orient, be it language, cultural products, tradition, literature, or even the ideal beauty (Hamadi, 2014). Edward Said (1935–2003) conceptualizes this alienation in its radical form. In Orientalism (1978), the touchstone of postcolonial studies, he criticizes the process by which western anxieties construct eastern “Other”. In Culture and Imperialism (1994), he notes that Arabic is “a foreign language” in Algeria drawing on the speech of French Minister in 1938 (Said, 1994, p. 180). Said highlights the birth of Orientalism, the institutionalized Europe’s “other”, since the eighteenth century that marks the cultural dominance of the west (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 49); the results are still present in the 21st century.

Orientalism is a political vision which “promoted the difference between the familiar (Occident, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (Said, 1978, p. 43). This differentiation is not a fact but rather an artifact of human production (Said, 1985, p. 37). The binary opposition makes the Occident stronger since the Orient is the debased recurring image of the Other for Western countries (Said, 1978, pp. 1–2). By the process of othering, the Orient considers the Occident as superior and itself as inferior, alienated, and marginalized. This is the result of the “web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, [and] dehumanizing ideology”, especially felt by Muslims (Said, 1978, p. 27). By the same token, anything used by the Occident, even the language and physical look, seems superior to the Orient.

Though the current society of Iran values traditions, national identity has undergone some revision, since western impact can be increasingly seen as a result of globalization (Hanson,
Postcolonialism defines globalization as a cultural imperialism (Golding & Harris, 1999). To elaborate on this concept, introducing the Iranian definition of cultural imperialism is essential. The term, ghārzbādeghi, is translated as Westoxication, West-struck-ness, Westomania, Westitis, Occidentosis and Euromania (Rosyad, 2006, p.18). Westoxication has been first presented by Jalal Al-I Ahmad (1923–1969), the Iranian political activist and writer; it “became the popular expression for a broad rejection of ‘Western’ subjectivity and a return to an ‘authentic’ Iranian ‘Self’” (Matin-Asgari, 2005, p. 335). This idea is developed by Muslim thinkers like Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari (1919–1979), a religious Shi’ite activist and Ali Shari’ati (1933–1977), a sociologist who integrated Islam with national identity.

Although Al-I Ahmad does not coin ghārzbādeghi, “Westoxication”, he has an influential role in popularizing the term (Hanson, 1983, p. 8). Al-I Ahmad, the Iranian writer, and critic of Modernization, defines this term as “a destructive obsession with the west and America that had infected Iranians” (Peterson, 2010, p. 123). His book Gharbzadeghi [Westoxication], also translated as Occidentosis: A Plague from the West, is a classic in Iranian political studies that analyzes westernization of Iran through a cultural and historical perspective. In the past, the East and the West have experienced reciprocal influence (Hanson, 1983, p. 9). Now the entire East (not just Iran) is considered inferior and the West exerts a powerful influence over Eastern life (Al-I Ahmad, 1982, pp. 12–18). Al-I Ahmad compares ghārzbādeghi to a disease which kills wheat from within, with two faces: the West and the ghārzbādeh (the ‘westoxicated’ native)” (Hanson, 1983, p. 8). For Al-I Ahmad, like Said, the West, and the East, stand in sharp contrast. The West is “developed, industrialized, rich, processors of raw materials, and exporter of finished products [and] culture” while the East is “underdeveloped, agricultural, poor, producer of raw materials, and consumer of Western products [and] Western culture” (Hanson, 1983, p. 8).

Since postcolonialism is politically and ideologically engaged, it interprets every cultural product in terms of oppositional poles of western colonizer/eastern colonized. In the case of detergent advertisements, many signs and objects in the setting are reflect western authentication, technology, and modernity. As for Said, associating technology and modernity with the west is a sign of cultural imperialism. It seems that detergent advertisements try to privilege western cultural myth since the developing country finds itself impotent to translate technological words or indigenize the setting. Hence, imitation happens. Not just the technology but also the sense of inferiority and ignorance are imported to a developing country. Said and Al-I Ahmad never find the usage of other languages, and models or multilingualism naïve mostly when the foreign language is that of the colonizer. For Said and Al-I Ahmad, internationalism and globalization are the strategy of imperialism for the implementation of colonizer’s ideology. For Kellner (2003), appearance, consumer behavior, and fashion, metamorphose consumers’ identity and dictate their value (pp. 94–101). Thus, if the model of beauty has the white, Caucasian look, the Middle Eastern audience feels alienated and unpleasant. For postcolonial thinkers, cultural products and language are not neutral. Hence, any sign associated with colonizer, in any context must be analyzed to fit the objective of the postcolonial approach. This is particularly true of advertisements, where everything is purposefully used.

4. Methods, materials, and objective
According to the explanations provided by Johnson and Christensen (2008), this study is an explanatory, descriptive non-experimental research. It has benefitted from a content analysis method that approaches any type of communication objectively. Neuendorf (2016) proposes two major approaches in content analysis to advertising: 1) “marketing advertising professional” with the aim of more affective ads, and 2) “social effects” with the aim of analyzing the impact of advertising in the individual and social realm (pp. 203–204). This method is used by other scholars who analyzed Iranian advertisements (Amouzadeh & Tavangar, 2004; Ghandeharion & Rostami, 2017a; Ghandeharion & Yazdanjoo, 2017; Jafari, 2007). Thus, it is replicable for similar studies. Content analysis is the process of coding raw messages including textual, visual, or audiovisual cases according to a classification scheme (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002).
Postcolonialism has built the classification scheme of this paper. The key concept is the myth of western superiority.

Since the concern is social effects, the objective of this study is to scrutinize the significance of the frequency of western signs on Iranian State TV advertisements with the focus on detergents. Besides, this article exploits the frequencies of the advertisements for its postcolonial objective and the results are analyzed based on qualitative content analysis, more space to statistical tests was not dedicated. In fact, the purpose of this article does not require such acts and the data analysis strategy. Among 789 unique advertisements, 587 items (74.40%) portrayed the prevalence of western culture. Compared with other Iranian products like carpets, pottery, copper cookware, agricultural products, and stationery items, detergents seem to be more concerned with the notion of modernity and technology. Because modernity and technology are associated with the west and its myth of superiority, postcolonialism is a reliable vehicle for the analysis.

All the detergent advertisements broadcast during 5 years in 21 national channels of State TV were collected (2011–2016).Benefiting from Iranian State TV advertisement archive available online, the company’s name and the year each advertisement was released are traced. The significance and reliability of materials are assured because state TV’s commercial advertisements are one of the leading advertising areas in Iran consisting of 79.2% of all advertisement production (Abdollahian & Hasani, 2012, p. 91).

Since the paper’s intent axis was inductive to the research questions, it examined the communication messages in all the unique advertisements. It is focusing on the visual aspects of the advertisements. As proposed by Kondracki et al. (2002), the paper emphasized on the content categories, themes and key words in the advertisements to provide new insights about Iran. All the unique advertisements in this span of time were meticulously examined and they were not sampled randomly. Needless to mention that the authenticity of the data is confirmed since Iranian State TV and radio, also known as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, is the only responsible organization to air national advertisements. All cases were carefully watched to detect the sign of western superiority, in the “setting”, “appearance”, and the “motto” or “concluding remark” that signifies the sense of “authentication” of the product.

To follow the objective of this study, after examining each unique advertisement, the results are thematically categorized into three groups: Authentication, Setting, and Appearance. First, the paper introduces the most frequent group, western authentication, which is seen from the very beginning of the advertisement in its caption or logo to its very end or the concluding remarks of the companies that assert their validity with the help of western confirmation. The next step is analyzing the background and scenery, which gives the audience a general view of the product’s function (i.e.: setting). Then, it moves to the actors, their dress codes, and their behaviors (i.e.: appearance). For example, if the company asserts that western corporations or countries guarantee the quality of its products, the advertisement is classified in “Authentication”; any advertisement that was disregarding traditional Persian mise en scène is counted in the “Setting” category; or if the actor had a western look, the advertisement is included in “Appearance” group. To overcome the repetition and redundancy, if an advertisement is counted in one category, it has not been included in another group. Though the advertisement is not numerically counted, its thematic postcolonial inclination is not neglected. Thus, it is analyzed in the theoretical and thematic discussions to fit the objective of this study.

Based on explanatory, descriptive non-experimental nature of this research, each advertisement is studied to discover if it is deviating from the dominant ideology that is Islamic, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist. The frequency of these deviations, being seen or heard in each advertisement, is meticulously counted for the objective of this research. This study is qualitative in its in-depth critical view. It can be considered quantitative only in its analysis of the frequencies in each category. Though the research is basically qualitative, demonstrating percentages, tables, and graphs for each category can crystalize the hypotheses. To calculate the percentage, the frequency
of advertisements in each group is compared with the total number (i.e. 789) and the number in each category (i.e. 231, 221, 135). The base of the categorization scheme is the postcolonial theory that was introduced by Edward Said and Jalal Al-I Ahmad. Al-I Ahmad’s theory of “Westoxication” is the Iranization of Said’s Orientalism, most notably regarding the binary opposition between the East and the West. Al-I Ahmad (1982) believes that one can recover from this disease by coming back to Iranian identity (pp. 32–47).

5. Research findings
The paper provides empirical insights about how Iran in micro-level, like an advertisement, deviates from its anti-colonial stance. Contrary to Iran’s antagonistic view toward west as the colonizer, reflected in the popularity of the term “Westoxication” (Asgharzadeh, 2007, pp. 37–38), detergent advertisements borrow many western signs and words from the lands of industry to add to the validity and prestige of their products. The overall results illustrate different ways of using western elements in advertisements. Among 789 unique advertisements, 587 items (74.40%, Table 1) portray different signs of western setting, appearance, and western authentication. The signs portraying the myth of western cultural superiority are categorized in three groups: Western Authentication, Western Setting, and Western Appearance.

As for western Authentication, the findings confirm that 231 advertisements out of 789 (29.28%, Table 2) choose the names of foreign countries, brands, and their certificates. Confirmation by Germany, Switzerland, France and Europe, English logos and ISO label (International Organization for Standardization), Henkel quality of Germany, and western trademarks are prevalent. These instances show how western confirmation signifies prestige and reliability. It seems that the company’s preoccupation with western authentication results from Al-I Ahmad’s Westoxication and asserts the myth of western superiority.

Table 1. The general proportion of the Ads in terms of frequency and percentage

| Different categories of ads revealing western influence | Frequency | Percentage in westernized ads (total no, 587) | Total percentage (total no of ads, 789) |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Western authentication                                  | 231      | 39.35%                                      | 29.28%                                 |
| Western setting                                         | 221      | 37.65%                                      | 28.01%                                 |
| Western appearance                                      | 135      | 23.99%                                      | 17.11%                                 |
| Total                                                  | 587      |                                             | 74.40%                                 |

Other ads, 202, 25.60%

Table 1. The general proportion of the Ads in terms of frequency and percentage

DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF ADS WITH THE INFLUENCE OF THE WEST
It is observed that 221 out of 789 (28.01%, Table 3) advertisements used western Setting by mimicking movies like *Harry Potter* series, *Transformers* series, *Pink Panther*, and pirate movies. Using the music of *Harry Potter*, *Pink Panther*, Western-animated media franchise and western classics during the concluding remarks of the advertisement or the motto of the company is of significance. They also used western houses and decoration, western cars, the stage of catwalk, and the setting of fashion industry. Associating the product with western countries is inferred from those advertisements. Postcolonially speaking, it seems that the Iranian setting is incapable of delivering the sense of modernity, technology, or prestige. Hence, only those products affiliated to the west are marketable.

As for actors’ western Appearance, the results show that 135 advertisements out of 789 (17.11%, Table 4) portrays actors with a western demeanor like blond hair, light skin and blue, hazel or green eyes. This appearance seems to be the ideal and authentic definition of beauty in Iran because of the impact of cultural imperialism. This can be a sign of Westoxication and myth of western superiority. It is based on the assumption that every product coming from the west or being advertised by the westerners is more reliable than its national counterpart.

### 6. Analysis and discussion: the conceptualization of postcolonial theory

To analyze the use of western signs on Iranian State TV advertisements, detergent ads are examined through a postcolonial lens. It is true that advertisers’ usage of western culture can be due to Country of Origin Effect (COE) (Höarmann, 1989, p. 206). However, it seems that the internalization of inferiority of the East results in the lack of trust or confidence in national products. Despite the product is made in

| Different types of confirmation by the west | Total frequency (total no. of category’s ads, 231) | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Germany (including German trademarks and companies) | 110 | 47.62% |
| Other western trademarks and countries | 69 | 29.87% |
| Western standard-setting organization | 34 | 14.72% |
| Western brands on the product’s package | 18 | 7.79% |

Total 231 out of 789 29.28% of all TV ads
Iran, it prefers to use signs associated with the west. In this section, the discussion of results and the analysis are presented. The advertisement frequency is mentioned in terms of the repetition of western theme. Since the head of State TV is appointed by the highest official rank in Islamic Republic of Iran, it is expected that all programs reflect the anti-colonial ideology. However, there are traces of cultural myth of west in this system. Advertisements are filled with numerous examples like western setting, western appearance, confirmation, logos, words, and names.

6.1. Authentication
It is believed that the goods produced in advanced countries are of a better quality, while it is not always the case since they can only export their products earlier and faster (Rivera-Batiz & Oliva, 2003, p. 116). Consequently, advertisements use labels that signify western authentication to add to their reliability. The total amount of such advertisements is 231 out of 789, consisting 29.28% of the whole. Thus, more than one-fourth of the advertisements relies on foreign confirmation despite the fact that national standardization system was introduced to Iran’s industry in 1925, (i.e.: ISIRI, Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran). ISIRI is the most authentic institute of standardization in Iran that has issued a national certificate of quality since 1953.

“Damestos” announces its brand as the first Iranian detergent that is confirmed by Switzerland. Trust and dependence on western authentication rather than national qualification can reflect the
postcolonial aspect of cultural inferiority. Presenting western certifications shows how western confirmation can add to the prestige and reliability of the product. Most of the advertisements manage to include English words, logos with English alphabets or other emblems of western standard-setting organization like ISO (International Standards Organization). Furthermore, the letters in the trademark and logo of the companies are mostly depicted in English. The frequency, consistency and the duration of these advertisements justify the priority, marketability, and importance of western authentication in Iranian consumer culture.

Paksān’s advertisement for its washing powder named “Sepid” (white) shows how the quality is confirmed by a German man. When this spy-like actor claims that his mission in Iran is accomplished, his return to Germany is postponed because he spills the tea on his shirt. Since the stain is removed, he authorizes the quality of the detergent “Sepid” by mentioning that his new commission will be in Germany. He takes “Sepid” as a souvenir and the code to remember his mission in Germany. The lack of frequency of this specific advertisement is probably because of the spy theme at the background, which can be ideologically foregrounded in terms of national threat. It is very probable that the company has been unaware of the ideological undertone and its aim was advertising the reliability and superiority of the product. Other brands keep “Germany” or “German companies” (i.e.: Henkel) as the hallmark of superiority rather than benefiting from an actor with German appearance because State TV may not allow the circulation of this type of advertisement. The prevalence of German trademarks and companies (110 out of 231) compared with other western brands (69 out of 231) can signify the common belief in Iran that West, especially Germany is associated with technology (Land of Car Industry, 2018; Land of European Industry, 2018).

Apart from the western brands, “Softlan Talāyi” exploits multinational companies like Samsung to advertise its quality. Although Samsung is celebrated for its mobile phones and TV sets in Iran, “Softlan Talāyi” claims that its bleaching superiority is confirmed by Samsung. It is essential to

Table 4. Western appearance

| Different types of western appearance | Total Frequency (total no. of category’s ads, 79) | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------|
| Physical traits (blond hair, blue eyes,...) | 109 | 86.08% |
| Western dress code and behavior | 13 | 9.63% |
| Western actors’ body-double | 8 | 5.93% |
| Western actors | 5 | 3.70% |
| **Total** | **135 out of 789** | **17.11% of all TV ads** |

DIFFERENT TYPES OF WESTERN APPEARANCE

- Physical traits (blond hair, blue eyes,...), 109, 80.74%
- Western dress code and behavior, 13, 9.63%
- Western actors’ body-double, 8, 5.93%
- Western actors, 5, 3.70%
mention that only the technological and western aspect of Samsung is indicated rather than its eastern culture (i.e.: Korean). Another brand, “5040”, boasts about its plan for exportation; it proudly claims that the product ‘deserves’ the attention of developed western countries. Similarly, ‘Attack’, ‘Pril’, ‘Persil’, ‘Cif’, ‘Home Care’, ‘Home Plus’, ‘Net Plus’ ‘Spif’, ‘Vernel’, ‘Primax’, “Posh” and “Roof” are unanimously associating themselves with Europe and its standards.

6.2. Setting

Sometimes TV advertisers try to use unfamiliar settings that do not build the national or cultural bond with the audience. Table 3 portrays the details of a western setting. The total amount of such advertisements is 221 out of 789, consisting 28.01% of the whole. Therefore, almost one-third of the whole advertisements on State TV choose western setting. The detergent advertisements that choose house as their location are often taking place in the kitchen or bathroom. Though the place is not culturally conscious, most of the houses do not conform to Persian patterns or Iranian decoration assets like Persian carpets, rugs, or pottery. Sometimes, western melodies, especially Hollywood movies, are played at the background. The frequency of this type of advertisements is a considerable amount (156 out of 221), proving how advertisements often try to show western ideals. The music of Pink Panther (Grosvenor, 1993) is prevalent because this western animation is popular among Iranians (Iran’s name in Pink Panther, 2014).

The other setting is that of clothes show and catwalk stage associated with fashion show industry in the west. In Iran, the ideological disproval of fashion show industry (Fashion show in Iran, 2017) is rooted in the denunciation of capitalism, consumerism, and the objectification of women. In these advertisements, a group of or young girls/women or a woman literally performs catwalk in front of the judging men to introduce the new product. This act of female objectification or male voyeurism is ideologically and religiously condemned in Iran (Jurisdiction of Gaze, 2017). The company tries to prove the detergent’s ability in magnetizing the viewer’s attention, as if it is the object of gaze in fashion industry. Devoid of their own definition of style and culture, colonies associate modernity, fashion industry, prestige, and ideal beauty with west (Fee, 2014, p. 309). Instead of the detergent, the focus is more or less on the woman/women. This representation of women is a new scene in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The adaptations of Harry Potter is postcolonially significant. Iranian audience is familiar with Harry Potter since State TV has aired the cinematic adaptations several times (Mehrabi, 2006). The adaptations are widely available in video rental shops. Thus, the Iranian audience is acquainted with the setting. “Taj” advertisements keep all the details of Harry Potter adaptations. Moody the Teacher, Harry Potter, and Ron Weasley, are the exact replica. Hermione Granger is the only absent major character in this advertisement, probably because of the ideological considerations embedded in women’s dress code in Iran. If Hermione’s dress code is recontextualized and she wears hijab, the western spirit of the advertisement is lost. The advertisement proves that it is Harry Potter who makes the magical powder with the help of his wand, being called the eight wonders of “Taj” (company’s brand). The repetition of this advertisement in one-third of a year justifies its significance and popularity.

Using a western popular novel and its adaptation in Iran’s advertisements shows the myth of western literary superiority, confirmed by postcolonial theories. Furthermore, the Godless world of Harry Potter, in which all power is in the hand of magic, does not conform to the cultural discourse of Islamic Republic of Iran. While Harry Potter’s ideology does not obey the ideology of the nation, its presence on TV shows the popularity, familiarity, marketability, and the wide audience. Postcolonialism justifies how eastern cultural inferiority privileges western culture, settings and media over its own values (Said, 1994, p. 292). They attract the attention of the audience since they are repeated in many advertisements.

“Attack” employs the idea of Hollywood Transformers series when the bottle of dishwashing liquid changes to robot-like creatures. The product’s English name, “Attack” is linked to what
happens during this advertisement thought the Iranian audience may not understand this linguistic innuendo. It shows the fatal combat between dirty kitchen utensils and the transformed detergent that is a strong fighter robot. Expectedly, the robot representing “Attack” detergent is the winner warrior in war between evil dirt and good detergent. As this idea is originated from Hollywood, it is not much related to the ideological context of anti-colonial Iran. Thus, the market tries to attract the audiences by using the popularity of American culture and setting. Shimi Ghahramāɴ Company applies the same marketing strategy, utilizing the context of Hollywood pirate movies like stage props, clothing, and makeup. Similarly, “Rino” and “Damestos” benefit from different personages created by Walt Disney, Pixar and Dream Words in Shrek, Monster, Inc and Implacable Me animated media franchise. The losers and ugly villains, germs and dirt, are modeled after the disagreeable characters.

6.3. Appearance
It seems that cultural imperialism dictates the ideal beauty and the privileged model of identity in Iran (135 out of 789, 17.11%, Table 4). The scarcity of blond hair and blue eyes among Iranian ethnicity has increased the popularity of western look. Most of the actors in advertisement with western demeanor do not have light eyes and natural blond hair. Wearing colored contact lenses and dyeing hair blond is not limited to Iran. All over the world, cream-colored makeup foundation is bought in large quantities by women to copy the ideal western beauty (Glenn, 2009, pp. 12–18). Plastic surgery also helps people fulfill their dream of western ideal beauty (Glenn, 2009, pp. 121–123). Many advertisers believe such appearance, especially for women, can attract more audience and consequently, more customers, since the general taste demands such impression.

Although attracting an audience by ideal western beauty is the main reason for producing such advertisements, authentication of the product is also involved. Since it is generally believed that westerners use high-quality products (Bates, 2012, p. 388; Tai, 2010, p. 14) and the actors who use the product have western look, the product must have excellent features. These advertisements promote their sales by suggesting that the customer deserves the western lifestyle and prestige. Postcolonially speaking, Iranian identity is belittled by highlighting the myth of western superiority. The body-double of famous western actors can also signify the cultural domination of the west. Agatha Christie’s (1890–1976) and Arthur Conan Doyle’s (1859–1930) fictional characters are frequent personages in the advertisements aired during these five years. Though the number of unique advertisements devoted to these characters is of little significance in the bulk of detergents, the durability and the repetition of the same advertisements in every season reveals the significance of these fictional characters (1.01% among all ads and 5.93% in this category). Beside the popularity of their translations in Iran, Christie’s and Doyle’s movie adaptations have been aired by State TV (Masterpieces of Sherlock Holmes, 2017; Why Miss Marple, 2017). Joan Hickson’s Miss Marple, David Suchet’s Hercule Poirot and Jeremy Brett’s Sherlock Holmes body-double are recreated in the advertisements to narrate the story of new detergent.

After scrutinizing the detergent advertisements in five years (2011–2016), it is observed that western signs are absent in some cases. Actually, 111 advertisements out of 789 conform to the cultural context of Iran (14.06%). In these advertisements, the actors are carefully chosen to have Iranian appearance and the settings are tightly connected to Iranian culture, avoiding western words and confirmation. State TV broadcasts these advertisements in a special occasion with Islamic or Iranian significance. They are aired during celebrations of religious rituals like Ramadan, a month of fasting to commemorate the revelation of the Holy Quran, or national rituals like Norouz, Persian New Year. The repetition of national events and the culturally conscious setting of the advertisements reveal how Iranians still maintain their Iranian and Islamic heritage in special instances.
7. Conclusions

Advertising is a scene for competition. When one product uses some words or a particular setting and wins customers’ attention, the rival companies try to follow the same strategy to allure more customers. Sometimes, one special word, theme music or fictional character becomes epidemic because all companies aim to deliver the same message; their association with the west signifies prestige, technology, modernity and reliability of the product. The message can be the same, but the marketing tactic is different. While the reliability and prestige of the product is embedded in western authentication, words, settings and appearances, some products try to be recognized as Iranian. However, Iranian confidence is limited to goods with a historical or agricultural background. The detergent advertisements show national concerns only when they are aired during religious or national celebrations. For most products, the myth of western superiority is the prevalent consumer culture (Shooshtari & Allahbakhsh, 2013; Sobh et al., 2014). Hence, this study has focused on detergents that are the best scene to practice postcolonial theory of Edward Said and his counterpart in Iran, Jalal Al-I Ahmad.

The results of such research can be helpful to the authorities in TV advertisements and cultural products in the emerging market of Iran. In recent centuries, the western countries have improved their economy and industry. They serve as an example for the developing countries, like Iran, to be followed in the course of industrial and scientific advancement. Instead of setting the technological foundation, these countries take a detour by using western signs, words, appearances, and settings from the industry or culture to add to the validity of their products. This act can be interpreted through postcolonial lens. The more economically successful a country is, the more valuable its culture is assumed. In a consumer culture, economic prosperity brings prestige. Therefore, if the west has a successful industry, the marketing strategy asks the companies to exploit blond people with western behavior in a western house, filled with western music, using a western or western-like name for the product, and ultimately exploiting western authentication.

This research cannot compare and contrast its result with previous studies because of the relatively small bulk of literature related to the postcolonial reading of Iranian State TV advertisement. This article does not trace the sales statistics to judge if the companies that use western features are finically successful. It analyzed how detergent advertisements employ all or some of these strategies to claim that their reliability is guaranteed. Besides the economic and political results of Westoxication and the myth of western superiority, the cultural aspect of this myth is what Al-I Ahmad, the Iranian postcolonial thinker, labels as “a problem” in eastern countries. Al-I Ahmad believes that easterners are under the growing influence of cultural imperialism. For him, the problem can be solved only if they go back to their own identity and origin. Yet, a romanticized version of Endemic precolonial state is what many postcolonial thinkers disapprove (Fanon, 2007, p. 15–18). Iranians still uphold their time-honored religious and cultural traditions, albeit not constantly and insistently.

Cover image
Source: Author.

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