



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***CULTURAL FACTORS AND DESIGN ELEMENTS IN IRANIAN
PRODUCT DESIGN***

AHMAD ABEDINI

FRSB 2017 2



**CULTURAL FACTORS AND DESIGN ELEMENTS IN IRANIAN
PRODUCT DESIGN**

By

AHMAD ABEDINI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2017

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DEDICATION

To my father and mother with whom, presence can be defined, love becomes
immortal and hopes get renewed everyday



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CULTURAL FACTORS AND DESIGN ELEMENTS IN IRANIAN PRODUCT DESIGN

By

AHMAD ABEDINI

February 2017

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Faculty : Design and Architecture

Traditional products of Iran were created based on the cultural needs as well as functional needs and they are created based on people's beliefs and customs. Neglecting the cultural needs could raise some anomalies in culture of the society. Traditional products cannot be redesigned unless understanding about the cultural factors that cause these products to be reappeared can be examined. As the nation is progressive in developing facilities for the society in Iran with the increase of global products in current market, traditional products which have strong values for people are facing new challenges. People lives in local with local culture and values which have made their lifestyle during centuries. The adaptation on usage of new the products as well as global products have provided challenges and difficulties for people who are having strong traditional cultural influences beliefs in Iran. People are different in their cognition, perceptions, values due to different cultures and different perception, and different products that will be produced. Iranian government desires to reserve the cultural heritage of Iran society through preserving traditional products with planning for cultural design policy. The new product can be developed based on the integration of understanding between designers, culture and users. In order to hold a place in the globalized market, one needs to fully understand the characteristics of regional culture within the world culture diversity. There is a lack of appropriate methods and in-depth research to support designers for integrating culture into product design especially in Iran.

This study aimed to develop a framework to guide designers in designing new product based on cultural factors for Iranian people. This research identified a gap in the established body of knowledge within the early stage and moved on

to consider the role of the designer in new product development which concern about cultural factors. Through the first stage, the researcher wanted to complete his perception about cultural factors that influenced creating a particular traditional product during centuries and to study how these can contribute to designer practices. In this study, the qualitative method was used to gain a detailed understanding of the problems and the issues to the related field. The qualitative research is suitable for the study of the social relations. The interview has been conducted to identify the traditional products and essential cultural factors that provide opportunity to be investigated. In the next stage, the researcher explored the design elements that has the abilities to represent the cultural factors, which were obtained through the interview with users in their current lifestyle. Sixteen “Cultural Factors” have been identified through interview with users which contributed to production which proves “Design Elements” have various effects in representing the cultural factors.

This research has developed a framework to guide designers in redesigning traditional products, which can be more relevant to the Iranian culture. This work explained how designers could understand the cultural factors and then develop a methodology with design elements for designers to represent those cultural factors to be more compatible for current market in Iran.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

FAKTOR BUDAYA DAN ELEMEN REKABENTUK DALAM REKAAN PRODUK IRAN

Oleh

AHMAD ABEDINI

Februari 2017

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Pada masa kini, terdapat banyak produk tradisional yang digunakan dalam kehidupan seharian manusia. Namun begitu, masih ada lagi yang belum pernah melihat produk-produk tersebut. Produk tradisional Iran dicipta berdasarkan keperluan budaya serta fungsi. Ianya dicipta berdasarkan kepercayaan dan adat resam rakyat zaman dahulu. Pengabaian keperluan budaya boleh menimbulkan penyimpangan daripada peraturan yang terdapat dalam sesebuah budaya masyarakat. Produk-produk tradisional tidak boleh direka semula kecuali mempunyai kefahaman mengenai ciri-ciri kebudayaan yang membolehkan produk-produk ini diperiksa dan di muncul semula. Masyarakat yang menjalani kehidupan dalam nilai kebudayaan telah mewujudkan gaya hidup mereka pada abad ini. Walau bagaimana sekali pun, ianya sesuatu yang mustahil untuk mereka keluar daripada budaya mereka sendiri. Setiap kebudayaan masyarakat mempunyai perbezaan berdasarkan persepsi, kesedaran, gaya berfikir, dan nilai-nilainya. Persepsi yang berbeza akan menghasilkan produk-produk yang berbeza. Pihak kerajaan Iran berhasrat untuk menyimpan warisan budaya masyarakat Iran melalui pemeliharaan produk tradisional dengan merancang dasar reka bentuk budaya. Produk-produk ini perlu diperbuat berdasarkan dialog di antara budaya, reka bentuk dan pengguna. Ianya juga membolehkan pereka untuk mereka bentuk produk yang berkaitan dengan ciri-ciri dan memberikan penceritaan serta faedah kepada pengguna. Usaha untuk memperoleh tempat dalam pasaran Reka Bentuk Global, pereka perlu memahami sepenuhnya ciri-ciri budaya serantau dalam kepelbagaian budaya dunia. Terdapat kekangan dalam penyelidikan dan kaedah yang sesuai digunakan untuk membantu pereka bagaimana memperlihatkan budaya bersepadu di dalam produk terutamanya di negara Iran. Kajian ini bertujuan menghasilkan rangka kerja untuk membimbing pereka dalam mereka bentuk produk budaya Iran. Pada

peringkat awal, kajian ini mengenal pasti jurang pengetahuan dan memindahkan kepada pereka untuk memainkan peranan dalam penghasilan produk. Melalui peringkat pertama, penyelidik ingin melengkapkan pandangannya mengenai faktor-faktor budaya yang mempengaruhi penciptaan produk tradisional tertentu pada abad ini dan mengkaji bagaimana ianya boleh menyumbang kepada pereka. Dalam kajian ini, kaedah kualitatif telah digunakan untuk mendapatkan kefahaman yang terperinci dalam permasalahan kajian dan mengenal pasti isu-isu yang berkaitan. Penyelidikan kualitatif merupakan kaedah utama digunakan dalam kajian hubungan sosial. Wawancara dijalankan terhadap kalangan pakar-pakar dan pengguna Iran. Ini adalah untuk mengetahui mengenai produk tradisional yang digunakan oleh peserta dalam kehidupan harian mereka. Tambahan pula, temu bual di antara pengguna dilakukan untuk menggambarkan keperluan kebudayaan mereka berhubung produk-produk tradisional tertentu. Pada peringkat seterusnya, penyelidik mengkaji elemen reka bentuk yang mempunyai kebolehan untuk mewakili faktor budaya yang telah diperolehi melalui temu bual dengan pengguna. Enam belas "Faktor Kebudayaan" telah dikenal pasti melalui temu bual bersama pengguna yang memberi pengakuan kepada sepuluh "Elemen Rekaan" yang mempunyai pelbagai kesan dalam mewakili faktor kebudayaan. Kajian ini telah menghasilkan rangka kerja supaya dapat membimbing pereka dalam mereka bentuk semula produk tradisional untuk budaya Iran. Jelaslah bahawa pereka dapat memahami budaya melalui produk tradisional dan menerapkan unsur-unsur reka bentuk yang digunakan agar dapat mewakili faktor kebudayaan yang stabil pada abad ini.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 21 February 2017 to conduct the final examination of Ahmad Abedini on his thesis entitled "Cultural Factors and Design Elements in Iranian Product Design" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Research Motivation

There are many parameters effect on the culture of society. A huge part of these parameters comes from products which are made inside a country or imported from another country. A product can be influenced by culture and vice versa as described by Rahman and Moalosi (2010) which encouraged design as research instrument to identify stake holders needs and expectations. This will be useful for new product development but products influencing the culture is one of the main potential areas to be explored. This research will be conducted in order to identify the influence of culture on product use with specific user experiences to influence the practice of designer's interested in designing for specific culture. These include the essential cultural factors in product designing for a specific culture.

1.2 Background of Study

In current market trend, global products have become increasingly similar according to behavior patterns and values and consumers of global products are wearing the same brands, eating the same food(De Mooij, 2010). The global products are sold in many countries and assumed to be produced for similar consumers in their needs (rather than consumers demanding such products, which have strong influence in culture) (Reisinger, 2009).The real global consumers only could find in a genuine global world (Usunier & Lee, 2005). American, European, or Asian consumers cannot be identified in the true global world because there are no differences between the local, regional, and national lifestyles. It could be happened that consumers lifestyle tend to be globalized but local consumption patterns and cultures do not disappear (Reisinger, 2009). The adaptation potential to the consumption patterns and culture of another society is limited and in different countries very different people live and they have dissimilar behavior patterns and cultures but every community should preserve and protect from their cultural identity (UNESCO, 1982). As The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stressed in World Conference on Cultural Policies in 1982 in Mexico City, the dignity and equality of all cultures should be considered and every people has right to preserve the heritage of its culture (UNESCO, 1982). Sariolghalam (1998) argues that Iranian people like many other developing country's people, think modern but their personality is traditional. Because of the globalization their culture changed to modern but there is a strong tendency to traditional in their society (Payandeh, 2003). Believing on importing products, specially from European countries, causes the traditional

products to be disappeared from Iran's market and also it had serious effect on Iranian culture and lifestyle (Karimian & Attarzadeh, 2014). According to "Traditional Product Organization of Iran" report, there was more than 250 types of traditional products before "Industrial Revolution" (1760 -1820) that many of them do not exist (Karimian & Attarzadeh, 2014). Customer personal values are the important factors which affect customer behaviors (Y. Li, Zhao, & Yang, 2012). Cultural conflict may arise when individuals or groups have incompatible behaviors and attitudes (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993).

The culture is the main basis of a person's behavior and needs and people's buying behavior is influenced by these cultural factors: beliefs, religion, language, family relations, customs, values and traditions. The cultural factors make a behavior, such as deciding what food should be eaten, what kind of clothes should be wore, and how people act in their life(Reisinger, 2009). Actually, only the culture could define society's needs for services and products. The main incentive for this research is to extract guidelines for designers to prepare appropriate products for people who live with a specific culture.

1.2.1 Culture is neglected in Product Design

A product contains combinations of the intangible and the tangible factors (Murthy, Rausand, & Osteras, 2008). Culture is considered as a "neglected concept" due to the globalization of products and services(Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006). Many non-physical factors during the most product development processes, has been less considered. In fact, designers care more about the functional features of the products than non-physical needs and non-tangible aspects are neglected by them(Razzaghi & Jr, 2005). It is while the ergonomics principles and international standards related to safety because of their sensitivity have a special place and are considered. The "form follows function" often came to mind when users thought about "design" in the early 20th century. Nevertheless, transferring the "feeling" into the products to represent the emotional communication of user experiences have become a design along with technology progress trend in the 21st century (Ko, Lin, & Lin, 2009). For that, it is important to understand the impact of culture on traditional products and to be able to extract it.

1.2.2 Global Product in Current Market

Globalization is considered as a force that must be opposed due to its results in unification of users' culture through standardization of products(Wang & Wu, 2009). In this case, the process of globalization is in fact imposed on users and variations remain strong in terms of national culture (Moalosi, Popovic, & Hickling-Hudson, 2008). Here, we draw attention, if one can treat all emerging

markets as a single pool of cultures with similar needs or not. In other words, we need to care about the differences on the needs of people. For example, the main challenge of household appliances design for Indian market is uncertain water supplies and the frequent power outages. However, Korean LG Electronics has been conducted a research in rural markets in India. In this case, the company developed “Stars of India” as a brand for the market of India, which offers wide range products such as washing machines with semi-automatic mechanism and plastic body and auto-restart after a power outage, and refrigerators keeping food cold for long time with no electricity power and it comes to the market with colors like maroon to avoid staining from spices such as traditional Indian cooking oils and turmeric (Goncu Berk & DeLong, 2013). LG produced a microwave oven, which allows to the Indian customers to cook Indian foods in a traditional way. For instance, Nokia has been leading mobile phone market in Africa and India by doing customer needs analysis to understand market needs in rural contexts. Nokia found out in many rural contexts that families share one phone (Moalosi, 2007). De Mooij (2010) has shown that globally homogenous markets do not exist evidently and probably, there are global products but there are no global people. People lives in local with local culture and values which have made their lifestyle during centuries. In this way, the connections between culture and design have become close increasingly in the global market era (Ko et al., 2009). Then the cultural features embedded into a product are considered to be a unique character for both the enhancement of product identity in the global market and the fulfillment of the individual consumer’s experiences (K. P. Lee, 2004; Leong & Clark, 2003). For instance, French people placed emphasis on “kills germs in the mouth” for a global product such as toothpaste and American people rated the same product based on attributes such as “well-known brand” and “freshens the mouth” which are not related to the primary function directly. By the way, Brazilian people put emphasis in attributes such as “color of the paste” and “ease of squeezing the tube” (Goncu Berk & DeLong, 2013). In order to improve product value, the designers have noted the importance of transferring the cultural factors into the products by using local features in their design to generate product identity in the global market (RT Lin, 2007).

1.2.3 Culture is inseparable from People

“Cultural differences are here to stay and they would force designers to adapt and to differentiate their products for different cultures” (Evans, Moutinho, & Van Raaij, 1996). Despite of how hard people try, divesting themselves from their own cultures impossible. In fact, day life and the culture of consumers are based on the set of values, norms, behaviors and opinions. In this way, the designers must be sure that the features of a product and its benefits are adapted to the cultural values. People's attitudes could be regulated including cultural values in products and the values which combined in products give cultural identity to the users (Moalosi, 2007). In this case, designers can design

products with considering the cultural factors involve preserving the cultural values.

1.2.4 Different Culture Will Make Different Product

People are different in their cognition, perceptions, values in order to different cultures (Peranginangin, Chen, & Shieh, 2013) and it is important to thoroughly understand different cultural traits in designing products for other users (J. Kim & Lee, 2005). For instance, the Western cultures represent different users' preferences from Eastern ones based on Nokia's report (Christian, Turkka, & Harri, 2003). In this case, with different perception of cultural values, different product will be produced.

1.2.5 Challenges in Designing for Culture

Industrial Design has a significant role in the process of including cultural factors into the products and improving their values in the competitive global market (Rungtai Lin, 2009). Therefore, designing a product with local culture has become a critical problem in product design in order to highlight its cultural value (R. T. Lin, 2005; Wu, Hsu, & Lin, 2004). The development of product design is face of conflict between localization and globalization due to the impact of economic globalization, (Huang, Houng, & Lin, 2011). Razzaghi and Ramirez (2005) stated five main reasons for why manufacturers don't interest to use the cultural factors in the product development process: Additional costs for the cultural research, Gap in manufacturers' knowledge, The lack of industrial designer' knowledge in the cultural design, The Globalization of the products and both designers and manufacturer prefer to work on the technological case.

1.2.6 Preserving on Local Culture for Traditional Products in Iran

Preserving on local culture on traditional products is one of the main concerns of the Iranian society. So regarding to this point, there are several examples in official high level documents that makes it as a priority for Iranian government, such as preserving cultural heritage of traditional products to be applied in Iranian current lifestyle which is mentioned in "Sixth overall policy of development" by supreme leader of Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei (Khamenei, 2015). The "6th Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran" also emphasized on strengthening the capacity of Iranian traditional products and intangible cultural heritage in the face of global exchange (Islamic Parliament of Iran, 2016). Believing on importing products, specially from European countries, causes the traditional products to be disappeared from Iran's market and also it had serious effect on Iranian culture and lifestyle (Karimian & Attarzadeh, 2014). Also imitation of traditional

products, without recourse to its identity led in some traditional products to be mere decoration instead of practical and fruitful (Karimian & Attarzadeh, 2014). Since the traditional products rely on internal resources and typically more than 90% added value domestically produced including labor, materials and equipment, hence any increase in the production and sale of these products has a direct impact on income per capita (Chitsazian, Joybari, & Baharloo, 2000). In addition, these traditional products are tools to show society's values and spirituality. They are an important part of social and cultural identity that is transmitted through generations (Mustafa, 2011). In addition, in the twenty-first century cultural industries is considered, the new economic opportunities for all countries (Y.-D. Lin & Li, 2010; Shoja Nouri, Jamali, Shoja Nouri, Honarbakhsh, & Akbari, 2016). Iranian government desires to reserve the cultural heritage of Iran society through preserving traditional products with planning for cultural design policy.

1.2.7 Traditional Products are going to be vanished

It was stated "the early Walkman model clearly drew upon Japanese tradition in that it used simple colors (especially black) and had a linear form reflecting traditional 'tatami' mats with their straight lines." by the former Head of Sony Design Centre (Yasuo Kuroki) quoted by (Du Gay et al., 2013). It seems that as many developing country, Iran is going to involve more and more in the global products and the initial effects of this involving are extinction of the traditional products and changing users' habit. There are many evidence from the current market in Iran that the traditional products with the strong cultural background are replacing with modern products that saturated by the global market. According to "Traditional Product Organization of Iran" report, there was more than 250 types of traditional products before "Industrial Revolution" (1760 -1820) that many of them do not exist (Karimian & Attarzadeh, 2014).

1.2.8 The Customers will be More Satisfied with Localized Product

Localization plays important role in the globalization, especially in the employment of cultural creativity (Ko et al., 2009). In this matter, the products should be constructed based on a dialogue between design, users and culture and designers could use the relevant features in designing that give users benefits. This can simplify the process of acceptance and satisfaction of products (Moalosi, 2007).



Figure 1.1: Modern market is the sign of Globalization
 (Source: <https://zoomtech.ir/samsung-new-shop-in-charsou>)

DeAngeli, Coventry and Johnson, (2002) observed that when a product generate in another culture it will influence on acceptance of products by users. Actually, the guest culture will be rejected by the host culture. The cultural framing affects people's relative working, how they interpret the product defines it will cause to use or do not use a particular product and the process of integrating design and cultural factors in their practice should be emphasized by designer as people are cultural beings (Richie Moalosi, 2006). Market needs could be interpreted by designers and transformed into product properties, which give them benefits. These challenge the designer to foster cultural diversity through localization of products in cooperation of globalization. As an instance, in conducted study by Samsung Design, it is revealed that "users around the world are no longer willing to simply settle for one-size-fits-all products with standardized designs" (Delaney, McFarland, & Yoon, 2002). In this matter, they argue that users' demand in wide range of shapes, materials, sizes, features and colors become main factors for producing successful products. Japanese designers draw based on their cultural features of simplicity which means that users demand their cultural needs to be satisfied with more localized solutions(Aula, Pekkala, & Romppainen, 2003).

1.2.9 Market Demands on Local Designed Product

In order to hold a place in the globalized design market, one needs to fully understand the characteristics of regional culture within the world culture diversity (L. Li et al., 2008). Based on the market globalization, the influence of culture on user interface design has been attracted a lot of Interest. Although, the globalization advocates for a free-market economy, liberal democracy, good governance, gender equality and environmental sustainability among other holistic values for the people of the global village, but the process of globalization itself can often make such goals impossible. For instance, it could be argued that denying or ignoring cultural identity caused globalization strives for cultural compatibility and destroys its diversity in the process (Moalosi et al., 2008). i.e. the specific needs should be satisfied with more

localized solutions based on the users demand (Aula et al., 2003). We now live in a small world, facing a global market and the design tends toward "localization" while the market heads toward "globalization". So one must "think globally" to the market, and "act locally" in terms of the design. In this case, it seems that the use of the local features on a special product is pretty much important if not, the products will lose their identity due to the similarity in their function and form (Handa, 1999).

1.2.10 Lack of Resources about Product Designing Base on Culture in General and Specific Culture Specially in Iran

It is obvious that the culture is a main part of user's cognitions, behaviors, values and preferences according to product design's perspective. In this case, it is important to know how the products is adapted and is influenced by users. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss about influence of cultural factors on the product's needs (Hsu, Lin, & Lin, 2011). However, there are insufficient investigation in this field and lack of systematic approach for its processing. For that designers should consider the cultural features in their designing (Rahman & Moalosi, 2010). In addition to market research and function analysis, product's meaning needs to be considered in designing process to satisfy user needs (Hsu et al., 2011). It is obvious, the quality improvement and adding extra value to the product are necessary for the improvement of product performance (Hsu et al., 2011). There is a lack of in-depth research and appropriate methods to assist designers on how culture can be consciously integrated in product design (Moalosi et al., 2008) and the research about the effects of culture on industrial design of products also repine from lack of available literature (Hofvenschiold, 2002, 2003).

1.3 Problem Statement

When we imagine the consumer's needs, designers should suppose these needs are only for their duty (Korhonen & Ainamo, 2003). The issue of design in the representation of it in new-product planning turns on designer's opinion to the changing circumstances (Chung, 1989). Given the nature of industrial design, it can be both impressed and impresses in different respects and from various angles of view, in human communities, the industrial designing career is of special importance, involved in interacting with man in a wide range and enjoys highly special position in different sciences. According to Chung (1989), designers certify the marketing, manufacture and economics that involved in designer's hand. They have to attend that every products has an obvious intention (Korhonen & Ainamo, 2003).

In addition, using a product with a different culture signify some kind of respect and concern to that culture. In this case, we can see the effect of product

on user's culture definitely, and it will cause that the users desist from their own culture during a long time. As design is like a superstructure science it can be said that what it shows in its content will mostly be affected by beliefs which is like an infrastructure science. Because of the great use of the industrial design in production and its close connection with art, the industrial design as a practical art is affected by this content. Like handicrafts, as roots of the industrial design, this influence is reflected in different nations and cultures. This research aimed to develop a framework to lead designers who are interested in designing for specific community group by considering their culture including their beliefs and elements that they inherit from their ancestors. The following questions, are expressed the problems which this research aimed to solve.

1.3.1 Research Question

1. What are the cultural factors that effected design of traditional products in Iran society?
2. What are the design elements involve in designing traditional products in Iran society?
3. How involve cultural factors with design elements when designing a product for Iranian culture?
4. What are the implications for designers in designing for Iranian traditional product?

1.3.2 Research Objectives

1. To identify the cultural factors that affected the design of the traditional product in Iranian society.
2. To identify the design elements that affected the design of the traditional product in Iranian society.
3. To analyze the cultural factors and design elements when designing for Iranian culture.
4. To propose implications for designing Iranian traditional product.

1.4 Conclusion

Regarding to the objectives, this research has some great opportunities for the future of design. This research will demonstrate a guideline to extract cultural factors through products that designed culturally and Iranian users still are using them. We can use resulting cultural factors to emerge design elements that influence culturally localized design. Without connecting cultural factors that comes from past, we cannot understand the real needs of the users and also cannot keep them. Interpreting the cultural factors with design perspective can help us to find a new connection for our future design. In next chapter (chapter 2), the author will prepare some documents and literature to prove and organize the knowledge about this research and in chapter 3 will explain the research planning and methodology to form the research skeleton.

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