Reflections on Young Iranians' Ethnocentric Behaviours: Evidence from Consumer Culture

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Abstract

This exploratory study attempts to shed some light on the ethnocentric behaviours of young Iranians in relation to the global consumer culture. It demonstrates why and how these individuals adhere to their own cultural resources and refrain from consuming the products or daily life practices of other cultures. The analysis of interpretive interviews with twelve participants in Tehran and Karaj reveals that these individuals' ethnocentrism is driven by three discourses of religiosity, nationalism, and patriotism. Given the fact that young Iranians' cultural consumption practices have often been analysed with reference to their receptivity to the global cultural flow (or what generally is perceived as westernisation), findings in this study provide a counterargument stressing that religiosity, nationalism and patriotism play an important role in people's sense of identity and preference for their own cultural practices and resources.

Introduction

In his prologue to *Tehran Blues, Youth Culture in Iran*, Basmenji (2005, p.9) uses the metaphor "Elephant in the Dark" to refer to the multidimensionality of Iranian youth culture. Throughout the book, he rightly problematizes the very notion of youth culture by highlighting the importance of understanding cultural practices amongst young Iranians from the kaleidoscopic lens of historical, aesthetic, cultural, social, political, and economic dynamics that shape and reshape the contemporary youth culture. Despite

the complexities associated with interpreting the multidimensional phenomenon of youth culture, generally there is an assumption (e.g., Moidfar, 2000; Razaqi, 1995; Moaveni, 2005; Cohen and Milani, 2005) that young Iranians are becoming highly westernised. For instance, Moidfar (2000, p.237) writes:

"The 1979 Islamic Revolution was a reaction to the decadence of modern societies; it was an attempt to revive the genuine human identity which had been looked at from a materialistic point of view in the recent centuries. Despite this, once more in Iran we witness the influence of foreign culture and cultivation of materialistic culture and moral decadence among youth. Therefore, definitely, cultural invasion is an obvious problem in the country."

Others (e.g., Khosravi, 2008; Basmanji, 2005) suggest that under the apparent westernisation trend, there are issues of identity contestation between local and global forces that constantly interact on multiple grounds. Closely related to this line of argument, and more specifically, Jafari (2007) and Jafari and Goulding (2013) criticise the prevalence of the westernisation discourse to argue that like many other societies around the world, Iran is undergoing a sociocultural change through the multifaceted interaction of the global cultural flow (Appadurai, 1990) and the local sociocultural, economic, and political dynamics. In this process of change, the authors emphasise, consumer culture is the most useful context in which to study the 'reflexive' nature of globalisation. Jafari and Goulding's emphasis on reflexivity is particularly important as they demonstrate how through an 'intercultural learning process' individuals' sense of

identity changes and how their consumption practices and lifestyle choices manifest the cyclic reconfiguration of people's individual and collective identities and life narratives.

Positioned in consumer culture research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, 2007) , the present paper builds upon and contributes to the above-mentioned studies. As reported earlier, to date, research has largely focused on the reasons why young individuals show interest in global consumer culture and incorporate the globally available material and symbolic resources (e.g., brands, consumer goods, and lifestyles) into their everyday life practices; yet, our understanding of the reasons why and how they choose to adhere to their own cultural resources has remained relatively understudied. This study therefore follows two objectives: 1) to demonstrate the potential of consumer culture as a rich context in which to study issues of sociocultural change; and 2) to divert attention to the less articulated aspects of cultural practices amongst Iranian youth whose very mundane practices have been a focal point for media and public debate. A recent example of this media-centred topic is the Instagram webpage of 'Tehran's Rich Kids' initiated by a series of affluent young Iranians who sought to disclose a different angle of life in Iran to the world whose perception of the country (as an underdeveloped and frightful country) has been shaped mainly by media and western political propaganda. The analysis of this movement and a diversity of reactions it has generated are beyond the scope of this paper; yet, it would suffice to say that young Iranians' everyday life practices have been closely monitored by media and politicians and sometimes over-theorised and exaggerated by social critics over the past three and a half decades (see Jafari, 2007 for a summary of the literature).

In this paper I argue that quite contrary to the general perceptions about Iranian youth culture, in this large population there are tendencies towards rejecting some aspects of the global cultural flow and adherence to domestic resources and cultural values. The analysis of in-depth interviews with twelve young Iranians in Tehran and Karaj indicates that these individuals reflexively make choices between domestic and foreign resources and ethnocentrism plays an important role in their preference. My thematic analysis of data reveals three themes of religiosity, nationalism, and patriotism as the key driving motives behind the participants' sense of ethnocentrism. These themes will be discussed in the following pages. Yet, prior to this, I will present a concise review of the concept of cultural reflexivity in relation to the globalisation and consumer culture. I will also provide a brief account of consumer ethnocentrism before explaining the methodology employed in the study.

Cultural Reflexivity and Consumer Culture

Through its influx, cultural globalisation produces a strong basis of 'knowledge' (Kim, 2005), and 'an information overload' (Featherstone, 2004) which generates an excess of 'signs' and 'images' (Nijman, 1999) whereby reflexivity, as a way of "self-analysis and self-confrontation" (Beck, 1994, p.5), is fostered. Cultural globalisation has provided people with a plethora of 'new' signs, meanings, values, lifestyles, and identities (Featherstone, 2004; Waters, 1995; Friedman, 1994). In confrontation with other cultures, people 'compare and contrast' (Lemish et al., 1998) themselves with other people around the world. Faced with a series of questions (e.g., 'who are they?/who am I?' or 'what do they have?/what do I have?'), people therefore experience an

unprecedented condition in which their 'being' (identity) is 'measured' against how they have been defined so far in their own society and is 'redefined' in comparison to how other individuals in other social contexts are. Such changes, as Giddens (1999, p.11) indicates, are the immediate outcome of the powerful forces of globalisation whose "existence alters the very texture" of our lives.

"Globalisation affects everyone" because it "presents them with a world context which influences them in some of their doings" (Archer, 1990, p.2). Globalisation, according to Giddens (1994, p.42), sets "in play pervasive processes of detraditionalisation in everyday social activities." Detraditionalisation, as Giddens further explains, means "an acceleration of the reflexivity" of the people who 'reflexively respond' to the "new social universe" (p.42). The 'new social universe' is the outcome of globalisation that carries with itself new forms of social relations (Giddens, 1991), modes of beings (Fırat and Venkatesh, 1995), lifestyles (Giddens, 1994), identities (Nijman, 1999), and so forth. Encountering these new facets results in individuals' 'metamorphosis', a process of "self-analysis and self-confrontation" (Beck, 1994, p.5). 'Selfhood' (Ger and Belk, 1996), is the primary stage of this metamorphosis, in which they defamiliarise themselves with their cultural values and identity. Embracing this selfhood, however, requires a person "not just to be a reflexive actor, but to have a concept of a person (as applied both to the self and others)" (Giddens, 1991, p.53). It is in such conditions that people are exposed to 'others' and start to 'explore' themselves and their 'biography' (as the manifestation of their identity) reflexively in relation to other people and their life conditions (Giddens, 1991).

As such, consumer culture plays a significant role in the globalisation process. It both accelerates and is accelerated by globalisation. That is, on the one hand, the presence of consumer goods and services, signs and symbols around the world provides people with the means of accessing a diversity of lifestyle choices and identity projects; and on the other hand, the expansion of consumer culture speeds up the globalisation process by enriching the content of the global cultural flow (see Kieldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Jafari and Goulding, 2013).

Consumer Ethnocentrism

Literature on ethnocentrism is broad; therefore, for the purpose of this study, I present a concise introduction of the topic with reference to some classical papers and immediate relevance to consumer behaviour. In their investigation of American consumers' 'tendency' toward imported goods, Shimp and Sharma (1987, p.280) use the term 'ethnocentrism' to "represent the beliefs held by American consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products." Shimp and Sharma classify individuals into two groups: "ingroups (those groups with which an individual identifies) and outgroups (those regarded as antithetical to the ingroup)", and write:

> *In general, the concept of ethnocentrism represents the universal proclivity for people to view their own group as the centre of the universe, to interpret other social units from the perspective of their own group, and to reject persons who are culturally dissimilar while blindly accepting those who are culturally like themselves.* (p.280)

The central argument in Shimp and Sharma's analysis is that ethnocentric consumers do not show tendency toward foreign-made products because based on a sense of 'identity' and belongingness' (amplified by 'bias' and 'childhood socialisation ethnocentrism'), they believe that purchasing other countries' products "hurts the domestic economy, causes loss of jobs, and is plainly unpatriotic" (p.280). Similarly, other researchers have suggested that ethnocentrism plays an important role in consumers' preference for their domestic products and services than those from foreign origins. For example, Watson and Wright's (2000, p.1153) work indicates that in the absence of domestic alternatives, ethnocentric consumers have "more favourable attitudes toward products imported from culturally similar countries than products from culturally dissimilar countries." In another investigation, Balabanis et al. (2001) distinguish between 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' and argue that consumers' ethnocentrism can be based on either nationalism or patriotism, or both. Balabanis et al.'s study further indicates that ethnocentricity is affected by a series of socio-historical (e.g., collectivism/individualism, the relationships between countries), and demographic (e.g., age, income, and education) factors and differs from one context to another. Kaynak and Kara's (2001) comparative analysis of consumers in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan also demonstrates that in comparison with high-income consumers, individuals from less-affluent backgrounds show more ethnocentric tendency toward their domestic products. Similarly, the economic factor seems to play a significant role in Bruning's (1997) investigation of Canadian air travellers' choice of international airlines. That is, Canadians' loyalty to domestic airlines is affected by the 'value for money' factor. In a different study conducted among Indian students, Upadhyay and Singh (2006) propose

that demographic factors do not affect Indians' ethnocentrism and conclude that Indians are ethnocentric in general. Furthermore, Javalgi et al.'s (2005) research shows that the country of origin and the functional attributes of products are important factors in purchasing decision making of the French (who are generally perceived to be ethnocentric). Last, but not least, Sandikci and Ger (2002) demonstrate that nationalism and religiosity do influence Turkish consumers' preference for their domestic products. The religiously driven ethnocentrism is more fuelled by consumers' sense of identity in the sense that they evaluate cultural practices from a religious identity lens.

In sum, ethnocentrism provides an analytical tool to explain the behaviour of those who participated in the study. I should acknowledge that ethnocentrism is not the only theoretical approach one can adopt to study the topic at hand; it is only one out of many other options (e.g., anti-globalisation movements, de-secularisation movements, social psychology, etc.) that can explain why people prefer their own cultural resources. Yet, as indicated in the introduction, my key objective in this paper is to demonstrate the potential and importance of studying sociocultural dynamics in the context of consumer culture as it tangibly manifests such dynamics.

Methodology

The data used in this study are extracted from a larger pool of data collected during 2006-2008 as part of a larger investigation on cultural consumption practices amongst Iranian youth. Given the explanatory power of the data and their relevance to the contemporary issues of consumption and cultural practices, in this study I refer to such

data that come from twelve in-depth interviews undertaken through snowball sampling in Tehran and Karaj. The respondents were middle-class educated young female and male Iranians. As a result of snowball sampling, people from upper and lower middle-class backgrounds did not happen to participate in the study. This means that the findings of the study are representative of all young adult Iranians; rather they are indicative of major discourses that emerged from their intention for preferring their own cultural practices. In terms of data collection, throughout the research process it was important to establish a rapport with the participants. In building this relationship, in-depth interviews played an important role in creating 'intimacy' (Wallendorf, 1987) with the interviewees. Interviews took place in different locations such as the interviewees' work place and cafés. Interviews progressed from open-ended chats to semi-structured conversations. All interviews, originally conducted in Farsi, were transcribed and then carefully translated into English. With regards to analysis, I used a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to the data. That is, I looked for similarities, differences and patterns and relationships (Goulding, 2002). The analysis followed a number of stages starting with open coding and description, through to more abstract coding and the development of concepts that offered an insight into the participants' behaviour. Throughout the analysis, it was noticed that reflexivity played an important role in the participants' reasons for preferring their own cultural practices. Amongst many emerging themes, religiosity, nationalism and patriotism were identified as more consistent discourses. I will discuss these themes in the following section.

Findings

My analysis indicates that through the process of self-reflexivity, participants evaluate their own cultural assets to be more constructive in their identity projects. The meaning of ethnocentrism in this study is not limited to Shimp and Sharma's (1987) definition of consumer ethnocentrism in terms of 'purchasing' tendency only. Rather, ethnocentrism in this study is highly related to the concept of 'cultural identity salience' (Russell, 2004) (nationalism, religiosity, and patriotism) and is generally reflected in the individuals' rejection of non-domestic (mainly Western) cultural trends, everyday life practices, as well as goods. What is also noteworthy is the fact that ethnocentrism (with the exception of nationalist individuals) for the young Iranians does not mean that they perceive their country or culture as 'the centre of the universe' (Shimp and Sharma, 1987) or 'superior' (as a characteristic of ethnocentric attitude) to others. Rather, underpinned by 'reflexivity', they believe that by refraining from using *some* resources of other societies, they can strengthen *some aspects* of their culture and home country. In other words, those who showed ethnocentric attitudes in this study 'take pride' in *some*, and *not all*, of "their own values, symbols and people, and hold in contempt the objects and values of other groups" (Upadhyay and Singh, 2006, p.60). In what follows, three distinct forms of ethnocentrism will be discussed under the headings of religiosity, nationalism, and patriotism.

Religiosity

Religiosity affects the participants' consumption patterns and everyday life practices. However, the concept of religiosity for these young individuals differs from its

traditional form. As Orye (2004) also notes, under the impact of globalisation, like culture, religion has also undergone a transformation. That is, in order to preserve their faith in the conditions of 'rational modernity' and 'reflexive globalisation', individuals have to 'justify' their *traditional* religious beliefs in comparison with other 'beliefs', traditions, and "ways of doing things" (Giddens, 1999, p.45). Therefore, young Iranians 'reflexively' evaluate their religious beliefs 'from inside their society' (Orye, 2004) and come to this conclusion that their religious values (albeit interpreted, evaluated, and selected in personal ways) are worth 'preserving' (Giddens, 1999). For them, religion 'endures' because it 'offers' things that they need (Muñiz and Schau, 2005). That is why as part of their religious identity, they reject those cultural aspects of other societies that, according to them, are 'not right' and adhere to those of theirs that 'are right' for them. This kind of view is reflected in the following excerpts, where individuals' consumption patterns are affected by religious beliefs:

Ehsan (22-year-old male student in Tehran):

> *"I am in love with Hazrate Ali…even here you can see how my love toward him is reflected [pointing at Imam Ali's medallion on his neck]. It is my identity, of course. Elm…it shows my beliefs and mentality as a Muslim. Hazrate Ali is the symbol of …elm…I cannot really define it…elm…the symbol of greatness…this ring on which Imam Reza's [the 8th Imam of the Shia's] image is engraved, is the symbol of generosity…I personally don't like our youth wearing strange medallions that men wear in, for example, Western societies. I don't want to judge their personality and say that they are bad people, but when we have so many beautiful symbols that are related to our own religion, why do they wear such things?... If Islam says that wearing gold for men is not good, it is not good. Why shouldn't I believe it? If I like wearing medallions, well, I do it in the way that Islam recommends. I don't follow what Westerners do; what they do is good for them not for me."*

Ehsan is a religious person who defines his being Muslim as "different from the clichéd perception of Islam." For him, Islamic identity is epitomised by "Hazrate Ali" who represents "manliness" and "greatness", as human values. By wearing a carnelian ring with the image of Imam Reza on it and a medallion with the portrait of Imam Ali, he 'differentiates' his 'religious orientation' (Sandikci and Ger, 2002) from two other groups: 1) the *Hezbollahi* (those generally known as defenders of religious values in society); and 2) those who follow Western models of consumerism and lifestyle: *"Muslimness is not just about making claims and shouting to the world that 'hey people! I am Muslim, therefore I'm better than you…it's about true belief in the behaviour and manners of the great men and women of Islam."* By avoiding gold medallions and rings and the way other young people use Western patterns or symbols, Ehsan remains committed to his religious identity. As Coşgel and Minkler (2004, p.342) assert, "religious commitment is often at the core of an individual's sense of identity." Therefore, "once an individual has decided upon a religious identity, there is often the need to communicate that choice" (Coşgel and Minkler, 2004, p.343). That is why Ehsan also communicates his personal religiosity with others in his society. A similar attitude is seen in Abbas' (20-year-old male student in Tehran) case:

> *"Religion is an important part of my identity…I know that black is Makrooh [in Islam referred to things that are better to abandon] in Islam and even saying prayers with it is not good. But for me I think it is an obligation. I should create culture in my own turn. I remember that last year the following day of Ashura I went somewhere and walked a long distance. I was the only one who was wearing black. Imagine, the day following Ashura! Nobody was wearing black. This shows that I have strong ideas. My black shirt shows that I have Basiji ideas. Then I feel that I am obliged to wear black 60 days in a year to present my ideas to the society. Me and people like me, we wear beard, but our beard is simple and not stylish. We are not like those who wear very long beard or in strange styles. We don't wear long beard so that people call us Taliban…it is nowadays a fashion for*

some people to wear beard in Jewish style. They wear long beard and then trim it straight like a triangle…these fashions belong to Western culture. We don't have such beard models in our culture."

Abbas is a religious person for whom religiosity comes before nationalism. He is a devoted Basiji who wants to communicate his religious Basiji ideology with his social setting. Based on his religious orientation, he wears a simple beard and associates stylised types of beard to the Western culture which he cannot relate to. As Coşgel and Minkler (2004, p.343) stress, "each religion typically provides its followers with…a coherent and stable set of norms, institutions, traditions, and moral values that provide the basis for an individual to establish and maintain a secure identity." Therefore, Abbas also follows the Islamic doctrines of 'simplicity' and avoids the Western beard fashions to protect his religious identity. Moreover, based on Coşgel and Minkler's (2004) proposition, the level of religious commitment varies among individuals. That is why unlike Ehsan, whose religiosity is limited to just wearing the medallion and the ring, Abbas takes further actions. His religious identity is so important for him that he wears a black shirt for 60 days and walks on the streets of Tehran just to remind people that it is the time of Moharram and Safar[1]. These two examples, therefore, show how religiosity determines individuals' disapproval of other cultural practices.

Nationalism

The findings suggest that 'nationalism' is another major discourse in which the interviewees negotiate their identity and self-actualisation projects and reject other cultures. Nationalism, according to Balabanis et al. (2001, p.160), "encompasses views

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[1] Moharram and Safar are two mourning months for the Shia Muslims.

that one's country is superior and should be dominant." Based on this definition, those who displayed a strong sense of nationalism had a hostile view toward Arab countries. They distinguished between two sets of identities: Iranianism and Islamism. They perceive the former as their 'genuine' and the latter as an 'imposed' identity. When asked how they have come to this conclusion, the informants said that when they compare themselves with other people around the world, they see that all countries have a clear set of *national bindings* to their past, but they do not. They believe that their real culture is the genuine ancient Persian civilisation:

Laleh (24-year-old female student in Karaj):

> *"Once, our culture was very rich,... the Persian civilisation had contributed so much to the world and we can still see the impact of that culture on the world...of course I'm proud of that heritage and would like to maintain the strong culture of my country...being Iranian is real pride for me...I'm proud of sticking to the cultural values of my own Iran and it is a mistake to be blindfolded and follow other cultures in all matters...well, they have some positives as well as we do, they also have negatives just like us, but we should do our best to support our own national values before referring to other nations..."*

Sahar (24-year-old female student in Karaj):

> *"Islam is a part of our identity, it's true, but even before Islam came to Iran, Iran was an important pillar of human civilisation...many people unfortunately don't understand that national values of Iran need support from Iranians themselves and everybody with a bit of national pride should do to their best to keep these values alive...I see this as a responsibility for myself...I try to keep my country's national identity alive...I wear clothes that show these values and promote Iranian culture and I also encourage others to do so...you can see how other countries promote their national values and strengthen their identity and culture in their tourism, branding, consumer goods, etc...why shouldn't we do the same?!...This does not mean that I am not rejecting other countries values,...but I prefer my own national values that I have inherited from my elders and those who built this magnificent culture."*

What is interesting in the above narratives is that these individuals' perception of their national identity, as a 'collective narrative' (Goulding and Domic, 1999) is based on their reference to pre-Islam Iran. As emerged during the interview, participants of the study made references to the importance of sustaining one's national identity in a global era. Such conceptions, therefore, indicate that the rise of a sense of nationalism among these young people is not primarily related to the general 'forces of globalisation' (as the cause of increasing nationalistic consciousness among nations) (Balabanis et al., 2001), but more specifically to the reflexivity embedded within the discourse of globalisation. In other words, based on the 'reflexive knowledge' (Kim, 2005) they gain about themselves, these young individuals analyse their every life situation from 'inside' their society (Orye, 2004) and find the roots of their identity sentiments in relation to other cultural values that become visible to them through the global consumer culture. Such expressions of nationalism are driven by witnessing how other nations preserve and promote their national cultures through heritage management, branding, consumer culture and arts.

Patriotism

Using Druckman's (1994) definition of 'patriotism', Balabanis et al. (2001, p.158) differentiate between nationalism and patriotism and write: "patriotism is commitment - a readiness to sacrifice for the nation - while nationalism is commitment plus exclusion of others, a readiness to sacrifice bolstered by hostility towards others." Patriotism, according to these scholars refers to "strong feelings of attachment and loyalty to one's

own country *without* the corresponding hostility toward other nations" (p.160). They further refer to Adorno et al.'s (1950) specific definition of patriotism and divide patriotism into two categories:

> *There is a difference between 'healthy patriotism' (love of country) which is not related with bias against outgroups and 'ethnocentric patriotism' (or pseudopatriotism) which is accompanied by such bias. Ethnocentric patriotism is one's 'blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other nations as outgroups'.* (p.160)

Reflecting on Balabanis et al.'s definition of patriotism (as healthy patriotism), the findings of this study indicate that young Iranians reject foreign goods because they simply want to support their own country's 'economy' (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Bruning, 1997). For instance, as long as there are Iranian alternatives, Davood (27-year-old male stock market broker in Tehran) prefers Iranian products to foreign alternatives:

> *"As an Iranian, I should show my love to my country by supporting it. The least I can do is to buy my own country's products. I know that other countries may produce better-quality products in some areas, but if there is the Iranian alternative, I should consume the Iranian one. As long as there is something Iranian, I always prefer that to its similar foreign products."*

In another story, Mohammad (22-year-old male self-employed in Karaj) prefers Iranian alternatives where his intended product is not hi-tech:

> *"It depends on what I want to buy; if it is not really hi-tech, I prefer the Iranian ones. We should start from somewhere. Now that people invest their money in industries, we should support them."*

In depth reading of Davood and Mohammad's loyalty to their country reveals the fact that their patriotism is also the result of their reflexivity. They compare and contrast their own country with other countries:

Davood:

> *"If Japan is Japan now, they have worked hard for their country. After the World War, they really undertook pain to rebuild their country. We should also learn from Japan or Germany to work hard and build our country."*

Mohammad:

> *"It's true, but it's a shame. We have nothing less than other countries, but why do they have better products?...you see this in the market and people's perceptions of Iranian products is unfortunately low which I think is related to the opportunistic behaviours of the sellers who make more profit on imported goods...but also I think it is the advertising industry which has created this perception that made-in-Iran is of low quality...other countries promote and support their products very much and we should do the same."*

Therefore, these narratives show that young Iranians' rejection of other countries' products can be born out of their reflexive patriotism which seeks to enhance their country's socio-economic position amongst other countries. This sense of patriotism is obviously triggered by witnessing how other societies are doing in terms of improving their socioeconomic conditions. All of these patriotic gestures therefore come with the visibility of globally available consumer goods and services which convey a reflexive message to those who have more patriotic sentiments.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

The narratives I presented in this study indicate that the participants' ethnocentrism is rooted in their reflexive awareness of the environment around them. Their ethnocentrism, however, does not detach them from the global context. In other words, their adherence to their own cultural values and resources does not mean that these individuals do not participate in the global consumer culture. Rather, motivated by

religious, nationalist, and patriotic sensibilities, they embark on using their own local values in a global context. This attitude towards one's own local values support the idea that there are multiple routes to modernity (Sandikci and Ger, 2002; Jafari and Goulding, 2013) that are not necessarily western in nature. The ethnocentric attitude of the participants provided a strong case for a counterargument as opposed to those who see young Iranians' involvement in global youth culture as a one-way road towards westernisation. The global consumer culture in its modern form has undoubtedly started in the west (Jafari et al., 2012), but people's engagement with consumer culture is not certainly homogenous. The presence of global consumer cultures avails people with a plethora of meanings to communicate a wide range of identity issues that vary from one sociocultural context to the next.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the limited number of participants in this study, I have no intention of generalising my argument to the Iranian youth context. Rather, I have sought to demonstrate how and why westernisation thesis can be contested by looking at the less articulated aspects of youth culture. In the case of Iran in particular, the over-theorisation and exaggeration of youth culture is due to the focus of western media which have often stereotyped non-western countries like Iran. In a similar manner, misunderstandings and misinterpretations of youth culture as a western project arise from a lack of sufficient understanding of the dynamics of consumer culture and the globalisation discourse. The reflexivity I discussed in this study is a powerful tool to use in analysing the emergence and existence of different sociocultural phenomena such as youth culture in different societies. Youth is a transient stage of

people's life and their aspirations and lifestyles change once they pass through this transient stage. Yet, their involvement in youth culture practices can convey a variety of meanings about the dynamics of that given society. Future research should therefore explore how youth cultures emerge and evolve over time in which sociocultural, political, and economic conditions. Researchers in particular should look for a diversity of meanings that underlie in youth culture. The westernisation perspective is certainly the easiest but not necessarily the most useful explanation for the changes that are happening in non-western societies.

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