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Recognizing the Capability of National and Traditional Images in Identifying the Packaging of Products for Export (Case Study: Iranian Edible Export)

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Abstract

Identity is a complicated and significant issue in contemporary era in such a way that attention to its status forms the basis of the present study. One of the areas that can play a role in representing identity is relying on images used in packaging. Packaging is an applied art known as essential in contemporary societies and it is present everywhere. Packaging with national and traditional visual components is an important way to create and transfer identity. The necessity of this research is to reach patterns and theoretical viewpoints related to the concept of identity and to focus on recognizing its aspects through the images on the packaging of products for export. On this basis, the present study was conducted to recognize identifying elements used in the packaging of Iranian edible products for export. This basic research is descriptive-analytic in nature. Observation and combination were used for data gathering. Along the conducted study and based on the findings of the research, the results show that among all identity aspects in this research, by representation geography aspect, Persian language and writing, Iranian arts and historical aspect are respectively the most effective agents in identifying the packaging of Iranian products for export.

Keywords: Identity, Traditional and national images, Packaging, Iranian edible export products.

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INTRODUCTION

As an important phenomenon in modern world, packaging has turned into a necessity of life. Nowadays, almost all products are supplied in packaging. No circulation enjoy the capability of packaging to be distributed everywhere and to be in direct contact with people. Silayoi and Speece (2007) divide packaging into two groups informative elements (info on packaging) and visual elements (graphic, color, shape and size). People recognize packages through looking at images on them. Accordingly, different consumers around the world communicate more with some shapes, colors, writing or special patterns and feel a spiritual property that results in their loyalty to that special type of product (Ghasemi; Toudeh Roosta, 2012: 15). They identify product on this basis.

Among products, souvenirs that include handicraft and food products in Iran are special products tending especially to export. According to Nouraei, the packaging of Iranian products will easily represent Iran in case they have Iranian color and symbolize Iranian color and civilization in a proper manner. Iranian packaging can introduce Iranian identity unconsciously and indirectly. Besides Iranian practical culture outside Iran, Iranian products with packing, as been non-political ambassadors, can well carry Iranian identity and culture (Nouraei, 2006: 7). Attention to images on the packaging of products for export is very important to market shows significance of study in this regard; consequently, writers intend to recognize identity dimension of these products by studying Iranian food products, emphasizing the images of national and traditional heritage of Iran.

Considering the subject of the study, it is necessary to select samples in such a way that they include Iranian food products for export so that a comprehensive vision on identity could be obtained in the packaging of these products.

Research Question

This study intends to answer the question: Which factors can influence the identification of products packaged for export?

METHODOLOGY

To examine society and gather considerable information on the subject of the study, descriptive-analytic method was used. In this phase, to record data, works are observed and typical samples are identified in a defined statistical society. A combination of library and filed study was used to conduct the study.

The society of Iranian food product for export includes saffron, tea, gaz (candy), dates, sohan (toffee), etc. that use visual images of traditional and national heritage in their design. The researchers of the present study intend to select study samples among a selected group of the packaged products mentioned above to provide a suitable result of the position of packing of Iranian products for export in Iran, emphasizing the content of the study. The sample size includes 55 images.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the studies conducted, it can be said that similar studies have referred to special points among the conducted researches on the subject. Some important studies on the subject include:

Maryam Mashayekhi (2011) examined visual elements present in food packaging in Japan. A unique property of graphic design of Japanese packaging is the coexistence of modern and traditional design elements.

Niloofer Roosta (2015) studied mascot characterization in food packaging in Iran. Most mascot present in Iranian food packaging lack Iranian identity. Sandra Lindsay Bulmer (2011) concluded in her thesis that national identity is communicated to customer through national images and stories as a consequence of relationship with brand. Brands influence the formation of national identity and brands have identity as compared to the past.

Watcharatorn Pensasitorn (2015) discusses The Use of Images in Graphic Design on Packaging of Food and Beverages and concludes that among different types of images in the graphic design, picture has the highest influence. Zhao Chao (2010) entitled the impacts of multi-culture on modern packaging designs showed that cultural variety leaves its impact on the packaging of products and now a variety is observed which is influenced by different cultures.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition of identity and its aspects

Regarding the wide range the concept of identity covers in contemporary era, different theorists have discussed this word and have provided different interpretation for it now, to reach different aspects of identity, a selection of different opinions by these theoretical authors have been provided here.

According to Chalabi, the national identity includes the following aspects:

- 1- Social aspect,
- 2- Historical aspect,
- 3- Geographical aspect,
- 4- Political aspect,
- 5- Religious aspect,
- 6- Cultural aspect or cultural heritage,
- 7- Linguistic and literal aspect, (Chalabi, 1999: 31).

Iranian art, Persian languages, theosophy and Islamic beliefs, customs and tradition, celebration, etc. all are fundamental elements of national identity forming through ages and centuries emanating as celebrities and figures, ethics and literature, spirituality and unity, sympathy and compassion and most important in Iranian artwork (Ravasani, 2001: 22).

Generally, according to the features that can be stated for national identity, national identity is recognized with the following elements in the present study:

- 1- Language aspect,
- 2- Literature aspect,
- 3- Geography aspect,
- 4- Social aspect,
- 5- Historical aspect,
- 6- Religion aspect,
- 7- Art aspect.

Language and literature aspect

Besides a communicative role, language has an emotive role here, Persian language and literature has the highest status both linguistically and artistically-historically in preserving cultural, national identity in such a way that Iranian history, lifestyle, temperament, behavior, opinions, customs and habits could be reflected in them. Persian old literature is so rich both historically and intellectually that it acts as an effective, civilizing element in national and international cultural arena (Farshidvard, 2001: 208). Language has always been an important tool and the reason of solidarity between all ethnic groups and social classes in Iran. It also acts as an instrument to prevent chaos, dispersion and separation (mir Noori, 1996: 890). Despite blending with foreign languages, Persian language has preserved its authenticity (Mir Mohammadi, 2004: 320-321).

Geographic aspect

In historic and religious heritage of Iran, land has been considered as the most important characteristic and symbol of Iranian identity since ancient times (Ahmadi, 2011: 381). Delimitating the boundaries of a special territory is absolutely necessary to the formation of a unified national identity. Definition of identity in geographic aspect includes a positive look at land, readiness for defending the land in case of danger, preference to live in native country or lack of tendency for immigration, acceptance of the land as native country, interest for land integrity in future, positive attitude toward mother land, feeling peace and relief in case of living there (Abolhasani, 2009: 75-76).

Historical aspect

History involves the common awareness of a community regarding their historical past and feeling interest to it (Abolhasani, 2008: 15). This definition includes three aspects:

- 1- Historical knowledge, that is, awareness of the most important events and characters in history,
- 2- Historical interest, that is, positive and negative events and characters,
- 3- Historical insistence, that is, the amount of attention paid to history as compared with other cases (Nafisi, 2009: 75).

Social aspect

A social aspect of national identity is concerned with the quality of an individual's social relations with social system on micro level. In case the relations of an individual with society are reinforced, collective identity forms for an individual on national level and the so called national us forms (Chalabi, 1999: 31). The components of social aspect of national identity in Iran includes: belief in an Iranian-national society, feeling dependency to an Iranian-national society, commitment to preserving an Iranian-national society (Abolhasani, 2008: 19).

Religions aspect

Religion is a set of beliefs, rite and practices in ration to an extra-experimental, eminent fact that conducts the following tasks: unification, identification, clarification of collective experience, responsibility against the nature and basis of individual and social life of people (Paul William, 1998: 173). Each religion includes seven aspects. A material aspect involves the buildings that religious people build, the artistic works they leave, etc. Social and institution aspects involve the institutions each religion owns such as mosque, etc. (Malekian, 2007: 6).

Art aspect

Besides litterateur, culture, history, civilization, etc. the aspect that keeps alive Iranian Islamic-national identity in global arena, especially Western countries, is art and its different forms (Sharif qtd. Radfar, 2009: 47). The institution of “art” and its different representations including literature, cinema, theatre, architecture, music and painting, are among the sources of identifying national identity. Cultural and artistic backgrounds are among the most important sources of artistic creation in each society (Hayati, 2007: 109-110).

ANALYSIS OF IDENTIFYING ASPECTS IN IMAGES

Saffron’s packaging (Image 1) is an example of what is analyzed in this study; consequently, a collection of 55 samples are studied here, which will be presented in details. Table (1) provides indices of 5 aspects out of 7 aspects that could be identified in saffron packaging.



Image 1: Toranj saffron packaging

Table 1: Analysis identifying aspects of saffron packaging images.

Aspect	Art aspect	Religious Aspect	Literature Aspect	Language Aspect	Geographic Aspect	Historical Aspect	Social Aspect
Indices	*	*	-	*	*	*	-

As an ancient land, Iran has exclusive food products that persuade tourists to select some Iranian products as souvenir; this is a marvel of Iran. Most Iranian food products are exported to many different countries. "Emphasizing local or national identity and the use of well-known, traditional or national symbols is necessary in designing packages especially when the product has national or traditional aspects. The exposure of local or national identity represents authenticity and excellence of products such as Iranian saffron, Gaz and pistachio. For example the so-called Gaz of Esfahan should be presented with traditions related to this product; consequently, emphasis on local or national identity affects how much it is welcomed. A design which is significant and has identity which is related to the defined identity of the product and whose elements and style are properly selected will act as an important communicative message to the consumers. Using themes, levels, lines, and signs in different colors and forms as well as the expression of elements together help the formation of designs on packages" (Kermani Nezhad, 2006: 40, 112).

This kind of packaging does not solely belong to Iran. For example, a combination of black and yellow is prevalent in the packaging of African products; slogans, moral points or even patriotic words in east Asian products, shapes or patterns symbolizing cultural archaism or historical solidity of a special geographical region (Italy, Greece and Iran) could also be seen on packages (Ghasemi; Toudeh Roosta, 2012: 15).

In the present study, the sample food packages belong to food products in different cities of Iran. They represent Iranian souvenirs such as Gaz of Esfahan, Sohan of Qom, pistachio of Kerman, saffron of Khorasan, etc. Saffron is a famous, Iranian spice which is also the most important food product for export. Considering the good history of Iranian saffron, proper packaging can display its worth more than ever. Such a viewpoint can help Iranian saffron to find its real status among Iranian food product exports.

Beliefs are thoughts that signify our life. Belief is an important aspect in introducing national identity. Belief in preserving identity along with concentrating on popular beliefs is matters that should be taken into account in designing saffron packages. Belief in prayers used to be common in ancient popular culture and was considered as an ancient customs in such a way that spells used to be written by saffron on cloth. This has caused designer to have a positive attitude toward this belief and use native shapes in saffron packaging to represent the culture of Iranian people.

Historical events can influence the society of addresses by creating a nostalgic atmosphere based on archetypes rooted in thoughts and human characteristics (Mahmoudi, 2011: 21). Considering the historical life of saffron in Iran and using historical images (lion and sun emblem), designer not only introduces the history of the product but also highlights the Iranian nature of saffron. Emphasizing the emblem of lion and sun and its revival in the form of spell-like images somehow values the product and reminds our interest in the past, this way local flavor is given to saffron packaging.

"The emblem of lion and sun has taken different meanings throughout history. The oldest symbolic meaning of this emblem is its planetary concept which has a life of 4000 B.C." (Ettinghausen, 1954: 349). In the sample under study, the religious aspect can be defined considering the emblem of lion and sun. "The religious concept of this emblem can be seen as a symbol of Shiism in religious places and items since Seljuk era" (Khazaei, 2002: 32).

A country cannot exist without special geographical boundaries. Geography can be compared to identity. The name of Iran finds this meaning only when its geographic boundaries are taken into account. From centuries ago, images of historic building of Iran are preserved in the framework of Iran's geography. This has resulted in preserving national identity. Hence, national identity requires geography and land in which the concept finds significance. As a food product, saffron is related to Iranian geography and images used on its packaging represent the territory of Iran. The different look by designer in creating ideas somehow

valuates and respects the geographical boundaries of Iran and shows the positive attitude of the designer toward Iran.

According to Shayestehfar and Khazaei, "Each package which is provided should communicate with its addressees. In designing packages, there should be hidden messages in order to disclose its real identity for consumers. These messages are, actually, messages from producers of the product for its consumers" (2014: 38). Message is communicated through language. Language is the line that separates the identity of nations. It acts as a unifying factor that preserves solidarity, language is important in keeping relations. The involvement of language in the formation of identity and culture is not restricted to a special time or place. All around the world, people have started movements to defend their national language (Warschauer: 2003: 3).

As an aspect of nation's identity, languages are a distinctive feature between nations. Using national language on packages both preserves and promotes identity and symbolizes Iran by acting as an authenticating agent. In saffron packages and similar packaged food products for export, a necessity is felt to combine Persian and English language. This seems undeniable. Torang is an original of packaged saffron. Since this product is for export, its particulars are also given in English, besides in Persian, in order to meet the needs of different consumers.

Lines and figures, image, visualization, etc. all are important in the formation and design of packaging (Kermani Nezhad, 2006: 118). Nowadays, designing packages has turned into a valuable art that should be well used to value Iranian products. The basis of designer's attitude towards artistic aspect and designing saffron package as the product cover is a formative agent for the idea. Because saffron is an important product both in Iran and other countries, it requires a unique, identifiable design. Torang saffron design is formed by a creative idea which both beautifies and identifies the product. Undoubtedly, the conscious use of images of Iranian artworks in packaging not only displays Iranian culture but also identifies and distinguishes Iranian packaging from other non-Iranian packages.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The authors of the study examined 55 packaged products to analyze the concept of identity in images on packaged food product. This study examined food product including *Gaz*, *Dates*, *Sohan*, *Saffron*, and other Iranian food products for export. Table (2) represents the result of studies by the researchers. The seven aspects of identity are the agents according to which national and traditional images on packaged food products are recognized. It needs to be mentioned that in this paper due to the high volume of images it is not possible to show all works; then, the methodology of the study is exclusively applied to saffron packaging as a sample the results of examining other samples will be provided in statistical tables. The following Table 2 is resulted by conducted observation. It reports the absolute and relative frequency of each aspect of national identity.

Table 2. Frequency of identifying aspects in the packaging of food products under study

Aspects	Art	Literature	Language and Handwriting	Religion	Geography	Historical	Social
Absolute frequency	47	6	50	13	55	45	21
Relative Frequency (percentage)	85.45	10.9	90.9	23.63	100.0	81.81	38.18

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Packaging is the most important factor in atoning customers. It is also a basic principle in succeeding to export the product. Many countries propose their products to global markets in package with visual beauty. What seems important here is the effect of image on packaging. National images provide identity for addressees and play a significant role in recognizing the culture of the exporting country. Focus on this capability both carries the name of the country exporting the product and dignifies its identity by belief in this, having identity causes the survival of the name of products in the mid of different customers around the world. Using identified packaging in harmony with national dignity is highly influential in authenticating product for export. It is desirable for addressees to see national identity reflected through visual capability. Food products for export which are usually souvenirs are not only touristic product but also it shows Iranian valuable heritage. It will last only if it is valued. This is understood considering the background of Iranian civilization. Images of national and tradition heritage of Iran are good sources to be used for packaging food product for export. Inducting a sense of identity through packaging distinguishes and authenticates trademarks. Paying attention to the export of food products can push the boundaries of target market so that the product can pass all geographical boundaries and occupy global markets. This way the limit in which a product is supplied expands from a country to the whole world. Using this thought, this study on national and traditional images has defined its path, so, it seems necessary that a sample population of packages be selected, works with salient identifying agents be recognized and studied in order to answer the question of the study.

The results of the study show that according to the seven key aspects defined in this study, the identifying agents in Iranian packaged products for export could be categorized as follows: geographical aspect could be identified in 55 images on packaged products. As well, in 50 samples, images were evident through Persian language and handwriting. In 47 samples, images showed Iranian art and in 45 images, historic aspect was apparent. Also, in sample images provided, the aspects of religion, society and literature could be observed.

Revealing different capacities of national and traditional works in identifying Iranian packaged products for export are included among the results of the research. Focusing on this subject can significantly affect the identification of Iranian products for export in international markets.

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