

Original Research Article

Effat Sadat Afzal Tousi¹

Ruy Ali Jabr²

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مقایسه شیوه تبلیغات تجاری در تهران و بغداد

Comparison of Commercial Advertising Methods in Tehran and Baghdad*

Abstract

Problem Definition: The structure of commercial advertising messaging is determined according to the type of reception and acceptance of the social culture of each country. The culture of society can play a decisive role in commercial advertising style, production methods, and metaphors. In this research, the commercial advertising style in the two cities of Tehran and Baghdad from Iran and Iraq, as two different societies, is investigated, and the relationship between the forms, the method of selection, and composition of some of the advertising works of these two cities are investigated. Moreover, this study seeks to answer the following questions: «What is the distinctive feature of the visual elements that comprise the commercial advertisements of Tehran and Baghdad?» and «Considering the common cultural background in calligraphy and writing, and the common religion, what characteristics in these two societies are reflected in the differences and similarities of commercial advertisements in Tehran and Baghdad?»

Objective: By examining the elements of commercial advertising, the present research seeks to know the effect of culture on the output of advertising forms in Tehran and Baghdad.

Research Method: The approach of this research is qualitative and its presentation method is descriptive and analytical, relying on field data and library sources.

Results: The findings of this research show that the text in the advertisements of Tehran has played a significant aesthetic role in the advertisements and the letters are a kind of unity in the fonts used. While in the advertising of Baghdad, the emphasis is on the dominance of the image in commercial advertising, and this issue has a significant effect in creating attraction toward the practical and aesthetic goals of advertising. Also, both cities are visually and culturally influenced by modern advertising and its trends.

Keywords

Commercial Advertising, Semiotics, Tehran Advertising, Baghdad Advertising

1. Corresponding Author, Department of Art Research, Faculty of Art, Al-Zahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: afzaltousi@alzahra.ac.ir

2. Department of visual communication, Faculty of Arts, Al-Zahra University, Tehran, Iran.

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Introduction

Advertising industry has been provided by human societies since ancient times. Advertising has gone through various stages of growth and development until it has reached its current level in design, execution, variety, and change in form and purpose. In each stage of its development, advertising has reflected the period in which it has been going on. The essence of commercial advertising depends on intellectual and structural data and many other factors, including those factors related to the society and the cultural environment and the beliefs that the designer adopts in his methods and tools in order to create a connection between the idea and the subject, on the one hand, and between the style of expression and the audience, on the other hand. Accordingly, the present research intends to examine the style of commercial advertising in Baghdad and Tehran. Investigating style or approach means studying the relationship between forms and the selection method in commercial advertisements, which includes the formation and combination of elements and examining the relationships between them. This combination can be examined through two important elements in advertising, i.e. image and text that form an advertising poster and the relationships between them. Visual elements in advertisements, as the major elements that create the message, play a significant role in presenting the visual advertising message and are considered one of the most important elements of communication between designers and audience. Based on this, the study of the commercial advertising styles of Tehran and Baghdad is the subject of this research. Comparative studies of art generally compare or contrast artistic subjects and compare the influences, exchanges, and relationships between arts in one civilization, culture, etc., or between cultures and art and another civilization. Using this framework and reference, the differences and similarities of the commercial advertising methods of the two cities of Tehran and Baghdad are investigated with the hypothesis that they are from two countries with common historical and cultural roots. Therefore, the study aims at looking for an answer to the following questions: «What is the distinctive feature of the visual elements that comprise the commercial advertisements of Tehran and Baghdad?» and «Considering the common cultural background in calligraphy and writing, and the common religion, what characteristics in these two societies are reflected in the differences and similarities of commercial advertisements in Tehran and Baghdad?»

Research Method

This research is qualitative and comparative and the data collection is done through field observations of billboard advertisements in the two cities of Tehran and Baghdad. By exploring the differences and similarities of A and B in a context (including subject, place, culture, etc.) using a framework (reference), this comparative study tries to investigate the type of communication and its structural order. Therefore, according to the point of view of «Kerry Walk», we need a referential framework, context, and structure to discover the relationship between A and B (Piravi Vanak, 2016, p. 6). According to «Alexander's reflection approach», art reflects its society like a mirror and its content shows the values, beliefs, and movements of that society (Turkashvand, 2009, p. 26). In qualitative research, it is possible to use approaches such as inductive reasoning, semiotics, comparison, etc., all of which are done using logical reasoning. Also, in qualitative analysis, the collected data are qualitative data that are performed in three parts and then described, explained, interpreted, and presented. Therefore, this research has been done based on a descriptive, analytical, and comparative method in the field and using some graphic principles and library-based data.

Research Background

Today's scientific heritage faces extensive and abundant research that examines various aspects of advertising with degrees of depth and comprehensiveness. «Heydari» (2012), in his dissertation entitled «Representation of symbolic values of Iranian lifestyle in national media advertisements», using semiotics method, seeks to discover the symbolic values of Iranian lifestyle in commercial advertisements to answer the question that in advertisements broadcasted by radio and television, which group of symbolic values of the ancient, Islamic, and modern periods are represented as lifestyle. The images are analyzed based on the theoretical frameworks of Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, and Eco in image semiotics. The results showed that in the cultural context, most of the teasers used national and patriotic traditions and rituals and, in some of them, this ancient look was accompanied by hints of religious values. Among the values of the modern world, individualism, self-reliance, life as a couple, speed, daily busyness, and the desire to gain more comfort in today's life have been represented the most. Also, «Abdollahyan and Hasani» (2012), in a research entitled «How to represent cultural values in commercial advertisements; Semiotic analysis of television advertisements in Iran», using the framework of linguistic structuralism theory, commercial advertisements have been presented as a cultural text based on the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes and addressed the representation of religious values and beliefs and signs of Iranian culture and civilization in television commercials. The analysis of sample ads showed that although religious concepts and elements and symbols of Iranian culture were used in the ads, the use of religious themes is more instrumental, and in Iranian cultural symbols, one can find signs of promoting patriotic attitudes which sometimes becomes a cliché. «Kamran» (2007) has also conducted a research entitled «Semiotics of urban advertising in Iran (with an emphasis on billboards in Tehran)», aiming at identifying the signs and myths governing the environmental advertising of Tehran and its semiotic system. For this purpose, samples of billboards in Tehran have been examined with the approach of semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure and theories of Roland Barthes. The findings of the research represent the myth-making system in Iran's advertisement. Some of these myths are specific to Iranian culture and society, and the other part is influenced by transnational and regional myths and is universal. «Bashir and Jafari Haftkhani» (2007) in a research entitled «Introduction to the application of semiotics in the analysis of advertising messages; Case study: Press ads», addressed the applications of semiotics theory in the analysis of advertising messages, and review advertising images and the influence of culture on interpreting images and ads. In any of its forms, including commercials, advertising uses multiple visual techniques to deliver the most appropriate message. Besides providing techniques to strengthen advertising messages, semiotics is also used in discovering the hidden meaning system or hidden value system in advertising. The analysis of the samples confirms that commercial advertisements, besides the direct effect they have on the introduction and promotion of products and their sales, indirectly and in a long and complex process, through the creation of new semantic structures, also affect the cultural beliefs and values of the society. In his research entitled «Communication discourse between form and content in commercial advertising», «Ahmad Shalal» (2017) investigated what should be done by a communication discourse as an expressive concept related to a specific topic or idea with a purpose according to a functional need to the audience that benefits from that message. Intellectual content is designed through interaction with the overall form, and content is often linked through a visual discourse in relation to the designer's intended meaning or purpose in the recipient's mind. The findings of the research show that the evolution of tools because of scientific and technical development has led to the emergence

of new patterns of communication discourse to highlight the form or strengthen the communication message.

Theoretical Foundations

Style: «Man chooses forms for his desired meaning and content. This selection results from a balance between the mental personality and the human environment. The relationship between the forms and the way of its selection is called style or method, which includes the formation of elements and the examination of the relationships between them. In other words, it can be said that style is a way of expressing a relationship. This relationship is between the mind and the object, or, in other words, objectification of mentalities as recognized social forms, in such a way that others understand this relationship. Style is a collection of forms related to social content and has a close relationship with social reality, which is itself the result of the development and transformation of objective culture into mental culture» (Navabakhsh, 2014, p. 53). According to some, «style in graphics refers to the visual aesthetic elements of particular time and place; elements such as desire in choosing a particular writing space, selecting the overall set of space, the type of designer's thinking in choosing visual elements and using decorative and functional elements, are all among the features of style» (Kakaei Foroushani, 2001, pp. 113-114). Accordingly, in this article, the style of commercial advertising was compared in two different cities in two countries with common religious roots, while the style of advertising can be considered an important thing in the way of advertising. «In general, style is considered an important element in distinguishing arts, and in concept, it follows the function and composition of the elements of the work. Every society has a specific style and uses a particular pattern to express that time and place have prominent effects in the formation of this pattern. There are two important and effective factors in determining style: 1. Social environment, that part of society in which a person influences and is influenced by it. The social environment is the first factor to form and visualize the style, and the style can be determined through the social environment because style is the best way to express the social environment. 2. Culture is the intellectual result that a person gets from all methods of education besides the cultural heritage of society and his human thought» (Al-Hosseini, 2008, pp. 212-213).

Form and Shape: «In graphics, the form has the main and basic function in conveying the message. Even writings and words depend on the quality of creative use of the form in terms of the degree of success. The form has a particular precision and general inclusiveness in communicating visually with the audience. In this regard, the more explicit the form is, the more general and wide its degree of inclusion will be, to where it will move towards cultural symmetry among the audience» (Eisazadeh, 2014, p. 70). Design includes meaningful forms that show the designer's thought process in the work, and this turns it into a meaningful symbolic image. Because the designer seeks to create a system of relationships, with a uniform performance of outputs with guided meanings in the work, and what reaches the receiver results from the interaction of the set of relationships of forms and symbolic function. The effectiveness of any set results from a form, and any expression is possible to produce a single meaning. To communicate effectively, the designer deals with signs and symbols that convey intellectual content to the recipient. These symbols are understood unconsciously by the receiver and make him think and interact commonly. This communication is as a visual language and the tools of this language are words, images, and elements comprising symbols and signs (Mohammad Enad, 2015, pp. 52-53). «From the perspective of semiotics, form is the place of interaction of multiple sign systems, volume, texture, color, etc. are each a sign system. However, it should be noted that this is the

difference between a signal and a sign. «Umberto Eco» has made a difference between the two processes of communication and signification in his book entitled «A Theory of Semiology». In a communication, a signal is transmitted from a source to a receiver through a medium. This signal is simply a stimulus and transmits some information to the receiver. However, a sign creates an interpretive process at a much higher level and causes the transfer of meanings» (Maghsoudloo, 2017, p. 40). Therefore, it can be concluded that visual discourse is a system of symbols, images, and meaningful forms whose purpose is to convey the message to the audience in a simple and smooth way and the influence of visual discourse in sending signals, symbols, and signs in a simple way that makes the receiver (the audience) accept and believe his message (Ahmad Shalal, 2017, p. 170).

Image and its effect: Image and photo are considered a branch of visual semiotics. In the science of semiotics, the image can never be assumed as an obvious fact. Reality is always created and understood by humans through a special semantic system. The works written by «Roland Barthes» in photography, cinema, and painting are widely used. According to some experts, his famous book called «Rhetoric of the Image» is a big step in the application of semiotics in the analysis of advertising messages. In this book, he studies the mutual relationship between the image and the advertising message and from the mentioned study, he concludes three types of messages: (linguistic message, coded symbolic message, and non-coded symbolic message). Language messages can be interpreted on two levels; direct meaning and implicit meaning. Some also believe that signs are involved in every communication process. Accordingly, some theorists believe that it is better to consider semiotics as a science that reveals culture (Bashir & Jafari Haftkhani, 2007, pp. 155-156). «In a general view, images appear in realistic, abstract, and symbolic frames, and each of these types includes a special meaning circle. Realistic images have a more limited expression, abstract images have a broader expression, and symbolic images have a deeper expression. Recognizing this feature in images matters in shaping a graphic style» (Nejabati, 2019, p. 18).

The effectiveness of the font: Apart from its function of informing, writing is also considered a form and is not separate from the image and completes the picture. Typography is one of the most powerful communication tools for designers. The purpose of typography is to communicate and convey a message and create visual appeal. «Masoud Nejabati» believes: «when we use typography in a work, we have actually created an image with writings. In some graphics schools and courses, one of these two is abandoned; in a period, an image and in a period, writing. Now we are in a period where the presence of writing has become more prominent in the effect of graphics» (Maaroufi, 2006, p. 31). «Roland Barthes», a philosopher, believes that «in the past, photographs depicted text, today, writing carries images with them and mixes images with culture and imagination» (Maaroufi, 2006, p. 32). «The visual form of writing, which is considered an important factor in conveying a message, has created various branches of its applications throughout history. Therefore, before any reading, the appearance of the letters can communicate with the viewer. The shape of the letters has character and features that should be used in the right place» (Afzal Tousi & Ansaryan, 2016, p. 72).

Advertising of Tehran

1. Carpet sales center: the style used in this advertisement (See Figure 1) is a realistic style as expression where we find it through the expressiveness of the red color, the form of the writing, and the expression of the mood in the image. In order to attract the audience's attention in the primary structure of the ad, a realistic image has been used that points to the

message and text of the ad by hand. The writing is in the red frame to emphasize the Shahr-e Farsh logo. We also observe duality in the writing form: The traditional writing form of script, which is considered in its original form with serifs, has been designed for ease of reading and under the design of the logo letters without serifs. The style in this ad directly affects the audience and conveys the message of the ad as clearly as possible. The composition in this ad is rotated simply. The image of a young man is placed in the left corner and he points to the center with his finger and then to the slogan of the advertisement. Also, the color of the photo and text has notable contrast. The red color is the color of the product's organizational identity. In other words, instead of more explanation and text about the product, the red color, which is the color of the Shahr-e Farsh logo, has been emphasized.



Figure 1. Commercial advertisement of carpet sales center in Tehran 2019. Source: Authors.



Figure 2. Commercial advertisement of Iranian Bank (Mellat Bank) in Tehran 2019. Source: Authors.

2. Mellat Bank: The style used in this advertisement (See Figure 2) is minimalism, with an expressive tone in terms of color and shape of writing. In this style, unnecessary elements and colors are avoided and minimal elements are used to create an effective ad, and the composition of this ad is regular in the center. One effect of abstraction in this ad is the flat color with no tonality. The principal subject is placed in the middle of the frame in a geometric shape and with a contrasting color (white) and evokes the feeling of a magic box for the audience. This ad, with minimal form and color metaphor that refers to Mellat Bank's organizational color and minimal text in Persian and English, is a simple but effective design.

3. Alibaba Travel Company: The style used in this ad (See Figure 3) is a surrealist or fantasy style, and the fictional character designer shows the story of Alibaba on a flying carpet suspended in space. In the center of a horizontal frame, there is a symbolic image of Alibaba, which is also the name of the travel company. The photomontage technique has shown the visualization of Alibaba's flight with flying carpet in a surrealistic space. In terms of color, we see that the dominant color in this ad is yellow. If we carefully examine the elements of the ad, it seems that each element overlaps with its reference (Alibaba Travel Company with a yellow organizational color).



Figure 3. Commercial advertisement for a travel company in Tehran 2019. Source: authors.



Figure 4. Commercial advertisement of car sales website in Tehran 2019. Source: Authors.

4. Car sales website: The style of this ad (See Figure 4) is realistic minimalism. In this ad, minimal elements are used, and it conveys the message to the audience with a simple and clear expression. The composition is central and symmetrical. The technique used is realistic photography. Also, focusing on the color (yellow) of the organizational identity of the website in the car image and the written texts on the black background has brought unity in the visual elements. The writing design (typeface) has appeared in sans-serif logo and in the title for greater readability and clarity. It should be noted that serif fonts are easier to read than sans-serif fonts. Fonts that have a fancy form, as well as fonts that are mono-line or manually executed, are script and sans-serif fonts.

5. Food product (Pech Pech): The style of this ad (See Figure 5) is largely fantasy or surrealism, and through the arrangement of elements, it depicts a fantasy scene. Pech Pech pastries float like a kite among the clouds and prizes (cars, etc.) are attached to their ropes. The composition in this ad is radial and central. The techniques used in this advertisement and the way they are organized are different, and it has been implemented using the technique of photomontage and visualization (background and clouds). Perhaps the front-on view in this ad can be attributed to the composition of positions in Iranian paintings. The subject or food product is prominently and clearly displayed face-to-face according to its importance. The actual product color shown is unchanged. Regarding the text structures, it can be said that the constituent lines are non-geometric and script lines that are executed manually and obtained from the product logo font.



Figure 5. Commercial advertisement of a food product in Tehran 2019. Source: Authors.



Figure 6. Commercial advertisement of a jewelry store in Tehran 2018. Source: Authors.

6. Jewelry store: The style used in this ad (See Figure 6) is extremely realistic, which draws the attention of the audience and the effectiveness of the image using a very large ring with clear details and in vivid and bright colors in contrast with the navy and blue background. This ad is based on two basic divisions, one for the image structure (ring) and the other for the text structure. This has created a balance in the general space of advertising; While the blue background creates depth in the space and pushes the advertising elements to the front. The typeface in the traditional serif store logo and the composition in this ad are symmetrical. The technique used for this ad is photography. This type of technique creates immediate and direct excitement in the audience.

Advertising in Baghdad

1. Hair care product: The style used in this ad (See Figure 7) is realistic with an expressive mode, in which the image of a young man draws the attention of the audience with the image of the product (hair spray). It is a photography technique. This ad is focused on the characteristics of the color and appearance of the product and its sign, and the composition in this ad is divided into two unequal parts. The name of the product is in the middle and top in san-serif font. The title font is script (Fonts that are executed manually and do not have serifs) and the rest of the text is sans-serif. The expression style of this simple and direct advertisement affects the audience.



Figure 7. Commercial advertisement of hair care product in Baghdad 2020. Source: Authors.



Figure 8. Commercial advertisement of entertainment-business complex in Baghdad 2020. Source: Authors.

2. Commercial complex: The style of this ad (See Figure 8) is fantasy and imaginative in terms of the color and shape of the characters. The composition in this ad is presented centrally. Also, unnecessary elements and colors are avoided in order to create an effective ad with minimal components. This ad with the technique of illustration and by simplifying the characters in the work's composition allows the eye of the audience to move successively among the elements. Also, the curved line in the picture matches the written form.

3. Telecommunication company: The style used in this advertisement (See Figure 9) is realistic. An image of a man with his hands up is used as a visual attraction point. The composition in this ad is rotating. The types of writing form are serif, sans-serif, handwritten or script. In this image, the writing form (typeface) in the title is serified and using traditional script for ease of reading. In the other part, the script font is used in a modern way on a red background. The technique used is realistic photography and collage, and because of the variety of fonts and the combination of several photos, we see contrast and movement in the visual space. The dominant color in this advertisement is red, which is a metaphor for the color of the company's organizational identity and attracts the attention of the audience and the effectiveness of the image.



Figure 9. Commercial advertisement for a telecommunication company in Baghdad 2020. Authors' source.



Figure 10. Commercial advertisement of an online shop in Baghdad 2020. Source of the authors.

4. Online shop: The style of this ad (See Figure 10) is realistic in a fantasy way, which is seen through the illustrated forms in a simple way. Its composition is symmetrical and regular in two main parts: image and text. The written forms have appeared in sans-serif, in different sizes, shapes, and colors and are suitable for the advertising space. Visual elements used in advertising have a geometric form, and the flat colors of red, black, and blue are used in contrast to the white background.

5. Food product (Pasteurized milk): The style used in this ad (See Figure 11) is extremely realistic, in the middle, the big image of the product (pasteurized milk) with clear details, expresses the idea of the ad. Also, all the elements (from farm, cow, pasteurized milk, etc.) are presented in a realistic scene but in imaginary dimensions and proportions. The technique used is photomontage. The pasteurized milk pocket in the middle of the image attracts the attention of the audience compared to other elements with exaggerated dimensions and proportions. In writing, various fonts differ from each other; some of them are traditionally and manually executed, and others are taken from the font of the product logo. The design of this ad has defined the product by focusing on the product and doubling its dimensions.



Figure 11. Commercial advertisement of food product in Baghdad 2020. Source: Authors.



Figure 12. Commercial advertisement of cleaning product in Baghdad 2020. Source: Authors.

6. Cleaning product: The style of this ad (See Figure 12) is realistic with an image of the product and the woman who advertises it. The blue color of the background, in contrast with the white color (a can of cleaning materials...), while creating a bright color and attracting the attention of the audience, induces a sense of cleanliness. The composition of the elements on the two front levels, including cleaning materials and the second horizon line of the woman who introduces it, comprises a little depth of field. The product logo at the top of the ad is the point of importance and focus, and it has found a symbolic position through the form, color, and shape of the text. Visual attention in this ad is applied based on the way of reading, which is eye movement from right to left so that the audience's gaze is directed from one side to the other.

Comparative analysis of billboard advertisements in Tehran and Iraq

Today's man has been influenced by the tools and methods that have entered most areas of his life. Among these tools are commercial advertisements, which have become one characteristic of the times because of the huge technological changes that happened after the second half of the 20th century. Considering the technical and stylistic progress that we have witnessed in communication tools and achieving communication, and convergence between people and transferring cultures, commercial advertisements are one of the most important tools of mass communication, which play an important role in transferring ideas and information. Message transmission in commercial advertising happens with the combination of visual elements, including image and text design and communication between them. Using visual elements and the interface between them, as shown in the research examples, can be subject to the cultural interests and tastes, and sometimes the geography of a society and region. The examples of the two regions of Baghdad and Tehran, despite the similarity between the visual language (the expressive language of the poster in modern graphics) and the use of visual elements that have created similarities in using fonts for writing and photos, also include differences. Artistic taste, including the prominence of writing, has a long history of Iranian culture and art, and it differs from Baghdad's artistic taste and expression in highlighting and importance to images and illustrations in works. This difference between the two methods of advertising in Tehran and Baghdad is visible, despite the common visual language and common culture. These differences and similarities that were described in the analyzes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of billboard advertisements in Tehran and Baghdad. Source: Author.

Billboard	Text (text font)	Image	Color	Commonalities
Commercial advertisements of Tehran	Predominance of writing structure as a function of organizational identity/sans-serif	Image usage	Symbolic colors	Common alphabet Common belief roots and culture
Commercial advertisements of Baghdad	Font variation	Predominance of image and imagery	Free colors	Influenced by modern graphics

Conclusion

In the commercial advertisements of Tehran, the most obvious visual element is text and font, which has a significant contribution to the composition. In most of the fonts used in Tehran advertisements, the font of the organizational identity of the advertised product has been used in modern sans-serif shapes. In general, visually, the letters in Tehran advertisements included a kind of unity in the fonts used in the advertisements. In other words, it can be said that writing in Tehran has played a significant aesthetic role in advertising. The aesthetic value of the written form in Tehran advertisements is an effective means to achieve attractiveness in the design of commercial advertisements. In Tehran, the dominant element of color is defined as a symbol of the color of the product's organizational identity. In general, the composition of Tehran advertisements, which includes written and image elements, is more clear. Simplification is clear in using elements and their composition. This view can be attributed to the official view in Iranian painting; Therefore, the direct view angle of simpler planning is used. In the commercial advertising of Baghdad, the most obvious visual element is the image. Emphasizing the activation of dominance (image) in commercial advertising has a significant effect in creating image attractions with photography or visualization in a realistic and surreal expression. The metaphor of color in Baghdad advertising originates from the idea of advertising, which plays a role in receiving and reading the sign from the point of view of meaning. The fonts used in Baghdad advertisements had more variety. Also, the fonts had a traditional form that is consistent with the social environment. However, they did not have an active presence in advertisements and they have been used to provide advertisement information. Composition in Baghdad advertisements contains different structures, including several images or several types of writing forms in the advertisement space. Contrary to the simplicity in the composition of advertisements in Tehran, which causes visual beauty, and at the same time the audience receives the advertising message quickly, this has led to a kind of crowding in the advertisement space in Baghdad advertisements. So it can be concluded that according to the common tools and methods of visual expression and according to the cultural similarity, the choice of some methods by the artists of the two countries can differ from each other because of the popular taste or the mentality of the artist. In the artistic community of Iran, the discussion of diversity in the design of writing and the use of various fonts are current debates, which have been preserved in its traditional form in Baghdad advertisements and represent a more traditional society than the atmosphere of Tehran society. Regarding commonalities, it can be said that the most important and prominent common approach between Tehran and Baghdad is the alphabet of letters. Besides some cultural features, such as religion and multi-ethnicity, these cultural features are less depicted in advertisements. Also, both cities are visually and culturally influenced by advertisements in modern graphics and their trends.

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