

Study of Cultural Anthropology during the Formation of the Contemporary Graphic Image Model of Iran

Abstract

Cultural anthropology, as a branch of social studies, examines human actions and knowledge of culture in the very period; if culture is a factor that evolves as a result of the expansion of communication, it can undoubtedly be influenced by human interactions and relationships; since the spread of information verbally and non-verbally in the present age is being exchanged in different ways. Works of visual arts, and in particular graphics, will also bring about changes in direct connection with many currents, actions, and cultural changes. In this regard, and during the globalization of art, many international festivals and competitions have provided a platform for the transfer of visual patterns for designers; patterns that are repeated nationally and internationally.

In this research, by adopting a descriptive-analytical method and collecting information through library study, the authors have tried to study the selected posters in poster festivals with a cultural anthropological approach. For this purpose, to prove the hypothesis, the study has relied on the theories of Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist of cultural approach and the presenter of the theory of patterns, and Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist in the field of cultural globalization. The theory of different cultures from the perspective of David Reisman, and the division of human behavior into traditional, autonomous, sequential and eclectic, have also been utilized to complete the analysis.

Keywords: Cultural Anthropology, Globalization, Visual Patterns, Contemporary Iranian Graphics

Introduction

Cultural anthropology is one of the branches of anthropology and social sciences studies that lead to the knowledge of human culture in a certain period and time. Culture is a pervasive and integrated phenomenon to recognize the thoughts and ideas of human beings in every age. Culture is a factor that has changed dramatically over time featuring in the development and evolutions of the field of communication, which has undoubtedly brought some achievements from the past. Created artworks are considered as factors influenced by culture, directly and often unconsciously. In this regard, it is necessary to deal with social and intercultural relations between human beings, from which works of art have also been influenced. It is worth mentioning that culture and getting influenced by it are rooted in the past, and interactions and changes of the present, and many interactions and communications today take place at the international level due to the globalization of art and culture. As a result, the influence of cultures on each other and their changes, create different actions in society.

The exchange of information in the global age takes place in different ways; also, the expression of individual and collective identity has become one of the common concerns of contemporary man in the present age. Works of art are influenced by many currents and thus change inside themselves. Today, with the development of many global systems that enable extensive communication, the image is recognized as a common language. Considering the image of each period being influenced by its culture, it can be utilized as a tool for understanding human beings and culture. In this regard, art festivals and biennials have created an effective factor in building intercultural communication through the image, which, in itself, will lead to the creation of visual patterns at the general and international levels as well; an issue that has created effective and different impacts for works of art.

The main questions to achieve as the results of this research are: What has been the process of formation of image patterns in contemporary Iranian graphics? What is the role of art festivals in shaping visual patterns?

The logical architecture of this study rests on a three-tiered theoretical framework, each addressing a distinct level of analysis in the formation of Iran's contemporary graphic image. At the foundational level, cultural anthropology is adopted as the overarching paradigm, premised on the assumption that the graphic poster functions not merely as an aesthetic composition but as a cultural text encoding symbolic systems, values, and collective codes. Within this paradigm, Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural patterns and his method of "thick description" provide the micro-level analytical tool, enabling the researchers to decode the layered symbolic meanings embedded in visual elements such as color, typography, and traditional motifs within each selected poster. Complementing this, Arjun Appadurai's theory of cultural globalization, particularly his conceptualization of global "scapes" (notably the mediascape and ideoscape), supplies the macro-level explanatory framework, accounting for how international poster festivals function as nodes within global networks through which visual patterns circulate, repeat, and are transformed across national and international boundaries. Bridging these two levels, David Riesman's typology of social character—distinguishing tradition-directed, inner-directed, other-directed, and, in extended formulations, autonomous or eclectic behavioral orientations—serves as the mediating analytical instrument, classifying how individual designers negotiate the tension between indigenous cultural heritage and the homogenizing pressures of globalization. Taken together, this theoretical triangulation allows the study to interrogate each case not only in terms of *what* cultural meaning is encoded (Geertz), but also *how* designers position themselves attitudinally in relation to tradition and modernity (Riesman), and *why* such visual patterns achieve transnational circulation and repetition (Appadurai)—thereby substantiating the central hypothesis that Iran's contemporary graphic image model emerges precisely at the intersection of localized cultural identity and the broader currents of cultural globalization.

While cultural anthropology and globalization theory have been extensively applied to material culture, media, and consumer goods, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to graphic design — and specifically the international festival poster — as a site where cultural patterning, symbolic identity, and global visual flows converge. Existing studies on Iranian graphic design tend to focus on stylistic or historical description, without systematically applying anthropological frameworks (Geertz, Appadurai, Riesman) to explain *how* national and global visual patterns interact within contemporary Iranian posters. This study addresses that gap by offering a theory-driven, qualitative analysis of this underexamined intersection.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design employing a descriptive-analytical method, situated within the framework of visual cultural analysis rather than empirical quantitative inquiry. Accordingly, the study is best characterized as a qualitative case-based visual analysis, in which selected posters function as textual/visual artifacts subjected to interpretive reading rather than as data points drawn from a statistically defined population. Data collection was conducted through library and documentary research. The corpus of the study comprises posters by Iranian artists selected for the *Triennial of Ukrainian Poster 2018*, which serve as the primary reference corpus, alongside comparable works exhibiting similar visual patterns from earlier international festivals, included for contextual and comparative purposes. The sampling strategy was purposive and theory-driven rather than random or representative: posters were selected specifically for their capacity to illustrate the theoretical constructs under investigation, in line with established qualitative research conventions in which sample selection is guided by conceptual relevance rather than statistical generalizability. The analytical framework draws on cultural anthropology as its overarching lens, with particular attention to the role of the image in international cultural communication.

Three theoretical perspectives inform the interpretive analysis of the selected corpus: Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural patterns and symbolic interpretation; Arjun Appadurai's theory of cultural globalization; and David Riesman's typology of social character. These theories were applied not as variables to be statistically tested, but as interpretive lenses structuring the qualitative reading of each case, consistent with the descriptive-analytical and hermeneutic character of the research.

Research Literature

Various researches have already been presented in the field of anthropology and in particular the theories of Clifford Geertz. Geertz's book, for example, "Interpretation of culture", written in 1973, has been used to provide ideas for the present article. Ahmad Naderi's article in 2012 entitled "Clifford Geertz; From Positivism to Anthropology" published in the *Iranian Journal of Anthropological Research* has played an effective role as well. This article examines Geertz's methodological approach in the field of anthropology, emphasizing his two major works, i.e. the interpretation of cultures and the reformulation of social thought; and by examining the effective intellectual traditions as well as the social context of his thinking, he tries to get a general reading of his methodological perspective in the field of humanities and social sciences in general and anthropology in particular. Based on the theories of Arjun Appadurai, an article entitled "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy" published in the journal of *Theory, Culture, and Society* in 1990, has been studied too. Appadurai has presented views in the field of globalization and discontinuities; he also has examined the cultural dimensions of the global era, in "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization" presented in 1990 by the *University of Minnesota Press*.

The connection between globalization in the field of anthropological studies of art interestingly has become a space for the production and competition of cultural and identity differences in an article entitled "Anthropology and Discourses on Global Art" by Thomas Fillitz (2015) published in the *European Association of Social Anthropologist Art*. He also introduces the multiple interconnected worlds that make up universal art. An article entitled "Globalization of Media and Graphic Design" in 2016 in *Fine Arts Magazine*, written by Kamran Afshar Mohajer and Abdol-Ali Bagheri, analyzes the globalization in the field of graphics, considering the encounter of graphic designers with international clients, and designing utilizing images used in the global arena as the outcomes influenced by globalization in Iran's graphics. The present article is based on studies and materials presented by researchers in the field of anthropology of culture, art, image, and the globalization of art, and intends to study the contemporary graphics of Iran as a visual tool facing the global era. It thus refers to holding many art festivals that have paved the way for the creation of accepted visual patterns in such artistic events repeated in many works later.

Theoretical Framework

Rather than treating Geertz, Appadurai, and Riesman as three parallel and separately expounded theories, this study reconstructs their contributions around three coherent analytical categories, each addressing a distinct dimension of the graphic artifact: symbolic function, flow position, and behavioral orientation. This reformulation reduces the theoretical apparatus to its operative core and makes explicit how each concept is applied in reading the selected posters.

Geertz's foundational premise — that culture constitutes a system of meaning within which social action becomes interpretable, rather than a set of laws to be measured (Geertz, 1973: 5) — is narrowed here to a single operative distinction: cultural patterns function either as a model of reality (a symbolic representation reflecting an existing cultural referent) or as a model for reality (a symbolic structure that subsequently shapes future cultural production) (Fakouhi, 2012: 130–131). As an analytical category, this distinction is applied to each poster by asking:

does the work primarily *represent* an existing cultural symbol or convention (model *of*), or does it introduce a visual configuration that appears to *generate* a template subsequently echoed in later works (model *for*)? This category is used to classify the symbolic function of each poster's dominant visual elements (motifs, iconography, compositional choices).

Appadurai's broader theory of disjunctive global flows — encompassing ethnoscaples, mediascapes, and related dimensions — is narrowed here to its most operationally relevant component for visual analysis: the tension between centripetal (homogenizing) and centrifugal (heterogenizing) forces in the circulation of images across national boundaries (Fakouhi, 2006: 73; Hopper, 2007: 44). As an analytical category, flow position is applied by locating each poster along a convergence–divergence axis: works exhibiting close alignment with internationally standardized visual conventions are classified as instances of pattern convergence, while works retaining locally specific symbolic content within an internationally legible visual register are classified as instances of pattern divergence. This category is used to situate each poster's visual identity relative to the broader festival circuit rather than in isolation.

Riesman's tripartite typology of social character — tradition-directed, autonomous (inner-directed), and other-directed/eclectic behavior (Malekzadeh, 2012: 80–81) — was developed as an account of individual psychological orientation toward social convention, inferred from patterns of behavior observed over time. Applied without qualification to a corpus of visual artifacts alone, this typology risks overstating what can legitimately be claimed: the present study has no access to designers' stated intentions, working processes, or biographical accounts, and a poster's visual choices cannot, on the evidence available here, be treated as a reliable index of the designer's psychological stance toward tradition or external expectation. Accordingly, Riesman's typology is retained in this study not as a tool for inferring designer disposition, but in a substantially restricted, artifact-level sense: as a descriptive label for the *visual-rhetorical orientation* a poster's formal choices exhibit relative to two observable reference points — locally inherited visual convention and internationally circulated festival convention — without any accompanying claim about the intention, awareness, or motivation of the person who produced it. Used in this restricted sense, the category is applied by classifying each poster's visual choices as: (a) consistent with locally inherited visual and material conventions — dress, script, iconography, or compositional forms with an identifiable precedent in Iranian visual culture (tradition-consistent); (b) exhibiting a visual treatment that departs from readily identifiable precedent in either local or international convention, combining or reworking formal elements in a manner not directly attributable to either source (independently configured); or (c) closely matching visual and compositional conventions already established within the international festival circuit, with no distinguishing locally specific content (festival-convergent). These labels describe patterns in the visual evidence itself — what the poster formally resembles or departs from — and should not be read as claims about why a designer made a given choice, whether consciously, strategically, or otherwise. Any correspondence between this classification and Riesman's original psychological categories is offered as a suggestive analogy for organizing the discussion, not as evidence that the underlying psychological typology has been empirically confirmed for this corpus. Establishing designers' actual intentions or working processes would require evidence beyond visual analysis — such as interviews, sketches, or documented production records — which lies outside the scope of the present study and is noted accordingly among its limitations.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework (Source: Authors)

Arjun Appadurai	The flow of globalization	Public disjuncture	Mixed and eclectic identities	follower and eclectic culture	Autonomous culture	Culture influenced by tradition	Intrans-possibility	A pattern of something	Cultural patterns	Social actions and interactions	Clifford Geertz
			The contrast between homogenization and non-homogenization					A pattern of something			
			Reconfigure identities	David Reisman							

Anthropology of Culture in the Process of Globalization

Globalization has prompted substantial revisions across international relations and the formation of culture and art, generating what Ameli (2011: 3) describes as a shift from relatively closed local societies toward trans-local, global-local configurations in which distant histories and cultures become newly interconnected. This shift has been theorized in divergent, and at points directly competing, ways within globalization scholarship, and it is this theoretical disagreement — rather than a single settled account — that most directly bears on the present analysis. Early globalization theory tended toward a homogenization thesis, in which global cultural flows were assumed to produce convergence toward dominant (typically Western) visual and cultural norms. This position has since been substantially revised: Robertson's (1995) concept of "glocalization" reframed global cultural flows as always locally inflected rather than uniformly absorbed, while Nederveen Pieterse (2004; see also Nederveen Pieterse, 1996) argued more directly that cultural homogenization offers an oversimplified account of globalization, proposing instead that global-local interaction characteristically produces hybridization — the creative recombination of global and local cultural elements — rather than the erasure of local particularity. Appadurai's (1996) own position, central to the present study's theoretical apparatus, is consistent with this revision: he explicitly cautions against treating globalization as straightforward homogenization, noting that cultural elements frequently become "indigenized" as they enter new contexts, such that processes of homogenization and heterogenization operate simultaneously rather than as opposed endpoints (Fakuhi, 2006: 73). Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural hybridity offers a further, more explicitly political register to this discussion: for Bhabha, the "third space" produced at sites of cultural contact is not merely a neutral zone of mixture but a site of negotiation, translation, and — critically — asymmetry of power between the cultures in contact, a dimension that a purely descriptive account of "pattern circulation" risks eliding (see also Kraidy, 2002, on hybridity as a category that must itself be interrogated rather than assumed as inherently emancipatory).

This body of scholarship is directly relevant to, and complicates, the present study's account of festival-driven pattern formation in several respects. First, it suggests that the convergence/divergence distinction proposed in this study should not be read as a binary between "global" and "national" visual registers, but rather — following Nederveen Pieterse and Bhabha — as points along a continuum of hybridization in which even ostensibly convergent works (Figures 1 and 3, in the present corpus) may carry latent, non-signifying traces of local visual heritage, while ostensibly divergent works (Figures 2 and 4) achieve their

locally coded meaning precisely through formal negotiation with an internationally legible visual grammar. Second, it raises a critical question this study does not fully resolve: whether the "international" visual conventions toward which some Iranian designers orient their work (as discussed below) constitute a genuinely global visual language, or whether — consistent with earlier cultural-imperialism critiques that hybridity theory itself was developed to complicate — they in fact encode a Western-dominant festival aesthetic that Iranian and other non-Western designers must navigate asymmetrically. The present study's corpus-based, interpretive design does not permit this question to be resolved empirically; it is raised here as a limitation on the explanatory reach of the "convergence/divergence" framework rather than as a settled finding.

The Flow of Image Pattern Formation

Scholarship in visual anthropology and visual culture studies offers additional, more recent theoretical resources for situating the poster as a site of cultural patterning. Mirzoeff's foundational account of visual culture (1999) and his subsequent work on "visuality" as a contested, politically inflected way of organizing what is seen and by whom (Mirzoeff, 2011) support treating the festival poster not as a transparent window onto cultural meaning but as an artifact produced within, and constitutive of, specific regimes of visibility — a framing that extends Geertz's semiotic approach to culture into a more explicitly power-attentive register. Within visual anthropology specifically, recent scholarship has moved decisively toward examining the circulation, brokerage, and institutional mediation of images across national contexts, rather than treating images as bounded cultural artifacts legible within a single cultural frame. Gürsel's (2016) study of the institutional brokerage of news images across borders is instructive here: it demonstrates that the meaning and visual form of circulating images are shaped as much by the institutions and platforms through which they travel — in the present case, international poster triennials and biennials — as by the individual designers who produce them, a claim that supports this study's treatment of festivals as active institutional mediators of visual pattern formation rather than neutral display venues. Complementing this institutional focus, recent work on design and visual-anthropological method (Barness, Papaalias, Sadre-Orafai & Zender, 2021) has argued for treating graphic design itself as a legitimate object and method of anthropological inquiry, addressing precisely the disciplinary gap this study seeks to occupy — the relative scarcity, noted in the introduction, of anthropologically grounded analysis of graphic design specifically, as opposed to material culture or media more broadly.

Within design scholarship proper, recent critical and decolonial currents further sharpen the questions this study raises. Ansari's (2024) editorial framing of "decolonial design" scholarship draws attention to the risk that frameworks emphasizing designers' individual "negotiation" between local and global visual registers may understate the asymmetric institutional power exercised by Euro-American festival juries, canons, and circulation networks in determining which visual patterns are validated as internationally successful. Turtola's discussion of poster design in post-colonial contexts similarly argues that the poster functions not merely as a vehicle of aesthetic or conceptual expression but as a socio-pedagogical and historically situated object whose "global" legibility is itself a produced, rather than neutral, condition. Closer to the present study's specific object, Maleki, Asadollahi and Shahroudi's (2016) content-analytic study of a decade of Iranian biennial posters — employing a layered semiotic method distinct from, but complementary to, the Geertzian approach adopted here — found that Iranian graphic design of the period examined tended to foreground national identity more consistently than global visual convention, a finding that offers a partial empirical counterpoint

to this study's own corpus and underscores that the balance between convergence and divergence identified here is corpus- and period-specific rather than a stable or generalizable feature of Iranian graphic design.

Taken together, this literature indicates that the "flow of image pattern formation" central to this study's argument cannot be adequately theorized solely as a bottom-up process of designers voluntarily drawing on, or departing from, a shared festival vocabulary. It must also be situated within (a) unresolved theoretical disagreement over whether global visual circulation is better characterized as homogenizing, hybridizing, or asymmetrically power-laden (Robertson, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Bhabha, 1994; Kraidy, 2002); (b) the institutional and infrastructural mediation of image circulation itself, rather than treating festivals as passive platforms (Gürsel, 2016); and (c) a still-emerging body of anthropologically and decolonially informed design scholarship that questions whether "international" visual legibility functions as a neutral shared language or as a Western-inflected norm that non-Western designers must variously adopt, resist, or hybridize (Ansari, 2024; Turtola, n.d.; Barnes et al., 2021). The present study's Geertz–Appadurai–Riesman framework, and its corpus-based convergence/divergence distinction, should accordingly be read as one interpretive contribution within this broader and still-contested field, rather than as a resolution of the theoretical tensions the field continues to negotiate — a positioning that also delimits the study's claims, consistent with the corpus-specific limitations acknowledged in the conclusion.

Visual Models in Contemporary Iranian Graphic

The corpus of this study comprises fifteen posters, all of which were selected and subsequently subjected to in-depth qualitative analysis, yielding a one-to-one correspondence between the selected sample and the analyzed cases. The primary focus of the corpus is on posters designed by Iranian graphic designers presented within international festival platforms, with particular emphasis on the *Triennial of Ukrainian Poster 2018*. Selection followed purposive, theory-driven criteria: (1) authorship by Iranian designers participating in international competitions or exhibitions, thereby situating the works within a global communicative arena; (2) explicit or implicit incorporation of national and local cultural symbols, motifs, or visual references reflecting Iranian cultural identity; and (3) sufficient conceptual and visual density to permit meaningful interpretation through the Geertzian (symbolic/pattern-based), Appadurai (globalization/scapes), and Riesmanian (social character typology) theoretical lenses. Within this sample, a subset of posters was additionally examined in relation to thematically or visually comparable works by non-Iranian designers, presented at the same or similar international festivals, in order to illuminate patterns of cultural convergence and divergence in the global circulation of visual symbols. This comparative dimension was not treated as a separate, independently sized corpus, but rather as an interpretive lens applied selectively within the fifteen-poster sample where relevant. Given the fixed and modest sample size, the study makes no claim to statistical generalizability or exhaustive coverage of Iranian posters in international festivals. Rather, the fifteen selected works constitute a purposive qualitative sample, chosen for their theoretical relevance and interpretive richness, consistent with established conventions in qualitative visual and cultural anthropological research, wherein analytical depth is prioritized over sample breadth.

Today, participation in and recognition by international art festivals constitutes one of the primary concerns of many contemporary artists, including Iranian graphic designers. This orientation appears to be associated with the emergence of internationally recognizable visual patterns within Iranian graphic design, and recognition of these works both abroad and

domestically may contribute to the professional standing of their creators. In some of the cases examined in this study, such recognition and the visual patterns associated with it seem to correspond with parallel developments in domestic graphic production, suggesting that some designers orient their work toward standards perceived as favored by international festivals. This dynamic can be understood as fostering communication and visual exchange across cultural boundaries — a development that, within the corpus analyzed, appears to represent one of the more constructive outcomes of this relationship. Alongside these apparent positive outcomes, the analysis also points to less favorable tendencies, including recurring visual motifs across domestic and international works. In some observed cases, works appear to have been produced primarily for festival participation, echoing previously successful or award-winning entries; this pattern, where present, may constrain opportunities for more original visual expression. Similarly, while the circulation of shared visual references across international platforms can support the emergence of diverse works, in other instances it may also correspond with the propagation of visual stereotypes. It should be emphasized that the present study's qualitative, corpus-based design does not permit claims regarding the underlying motivations or working processes of individual designers; the discussion above therefore describes observed patterns of visual correspondence, not confirmed intentions, influence, or causal mechanisms, which would require further evidence such as designer interviews or archival production records. It is also worth noting that graphic design, as a mode of communication closely tied to culture, is inherently syncretic and continually responsive to broader currents and social developments — a characteristic that arguably contributes to the field's adaptability and cross-cultural resonance. However, consistent with critiques of straightforward globalization-as-homogenization narratives, the corpus examined here suggests that processes of cultural convergence coexist with countervailing tendencies toward the assertion of national and local cultural identity. Appadurai's framework of global cultural flows is instructive in this regard; he identifies interrelated dimensions — *ethnoscapes*, *financescapes*, *technoscapes*, *mediascapes*, and *ideoscapes* — through which cultural goods circulate across national boundaries (Appadurai, 1990). Within this framework, artistic and graphic production can be understood as among the circulating "objects and images" that characterize the contemporary global flow of ideas, technologies, and messages (Appadurai, 1990). Building on this framework, close formal analysis of the corpus — attending to composition, typography, iconography, visual hierarchy, representational strategy, technique, and cultural coding — indicates that pattern convergence and divergence are distinguished not by thematic content alone but by a consistent set of formal choices, examined below through two paired cases. Figures 1 and 3 exemplify pattern convergence. Both employ a monocentric composition in which a single object occupies an otherwise minimal field: in Figure 1, a plume of green ink diffusing upward against a mottled ground; in Figure 3, a small paper airplane suspended within an expansive dark-blue void. In each case, compositional economy is deployed as a rhetorical device — Figure 1 through the density and directionality of the diffusing pigment, Figure 3 through extreme scale contrast between object and negative space — generating conceptual weight through visual restraint rather than narrative elaboration. Typography in both posters is confined to a small, left- or center-aligned English sans-serif caption subordinated to the image, a treatment that avoids script-specific or nationally legible visual markers and thereby facilitates cross-linguistic circulation within the festival context. Iconographically, both works substitute the poster's theme (ecological toxicity in Figure 1, childhood impulsivity or violence in Figure 3) with a non-figurative or object-based metaphor — ink-in-fluid diffusion, and a paper airplane textured with a child's scribbles — rather than direct human figuration; this metaphorical displacement is characteristic of the internationally circulated environmental- and social-poster idiom, in which conceptual translation, rather than culturally specific reference, is prioritized. Technically, Figure 1 relies on macro-photographic

capture of fluid dynamics, while Figure 3 combines vector-precise geometric rendering with an illustrative surface texture; both techniques are widely distributed across the international festival circuit and carry no indexical relation to a specific national context. It is worth noting, however, that the mottled, marbled ground of Figure 1 formally recalls the Persian/Islamic tradition of paper marbling; while this visual echo does not appear to be thematized or made legible as a cultural reference within the poster itself, its presence suggests that even ostensibly "convergent" works may retain latent, non-signifying traces of local visual heritage at the level of texture rather than iconography — a distinction that separates formal residue from active cultural signification.

Figures 2 and 4, by contrast, exemplify pattern divergence through the structural integration of locally coded elements. Figure 2 is organized as a dense photographic collage in which a veiled female figure — head covering consistent with Iranian conventions of modest dress, eyes obscured by a black censoring bar, and a red devotional or floral textile positioned at the chest — occupies the full pictorial field, while bold Persian display typography is arranged as a major compositional mass along the right margin rather than as a subordinate caption. Here, typography itself functions iconographically: its script and weight are immediately legible as culturally marked, in direct contrast to the neutral English captions of Figures 1 and 3. The visual hierarchy is correspondingly multi-focal, requiring the viewer to move between the concealed face, the redactive gesture of the censor bar, and the dense textual block, producing a layered rather than monocentric reading. Figure 4 operates through a different but comparably structural logic: a circular, emblem-like image of cracked, sun-baked clay bisected by a fissure and marked by a bird's footprint is paired with bilingual text in which the Persian phrase is rendered typographically larger than its English translation beneath it — a hierarchy that inverts the English-dominant convention observed in Figures 1 and 3. The photographically rendered material specificity of the cracked earth, together with the directive, second-person phrasing of the caption ("Push your feet tighter, here is your habitat"), produces a documentary and quasi-proverbial register distinct from the abstract metaphor of Figure 1 or the object-based conceit of Figure 3. Read together, these two pairs indicate that the operative distinction between convergence and divergence in this corpus lies in the relative structural weight assigned to locally coded elements — dress, script, material culture — versus their treatment as marginal, neutralized, or absent. In Figures 1 and 3, the poster's persuasive and conceptual work is accomplished entirely through internationally legible metaphor and restrained, script-neutral design; any residual local reference (as in Figure 1's marbled ground) remains formally latent rather than semantically active. In Figures 2 and 4, by contrast, locally specific visual and linguistic codes are elevated to a load-bearing compositional role, such that the works cannot be fully read, nor their intended meaning fully recovered, without recognition of their Iranian referents. Read through Geertz's distinction, Figures 1 and 3 thus operate as a model of an already-circulating international convention, while Figures 2 and 4 function as a model for a nationally inflected visual vocabulary: signs — the veil, the Persian script, the vernacular proverb — that carry specific social or devotional meaning within an Iranian context are redeployed within an internationally circulated representational frame, where they additionally come to signify national distinctiveness for a transnational festival audience. This shift in signification, from locally embedded cultural code to internationally legible marker of identity, constitutes, in this study's reading, the operative mechanism of pattern divergence as distinct from mere thematic variation.



Figure 1: Atefeh Nazemi, 2018, Ukrainian Environmental poster Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 2: Hossein Abdi, 2018, Ukrainian Poster Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 3: Hojjat Heydari, 2018, Ukrainian Poster Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 4: Leila Ghaffarian, 2018 Ukrainian Environmental Triennial, (Source: Url1)

In this way, the positive and negative effects of art festivals can be presented as follows:

Table 2: Positive and Negative Impacts of Art Festivals (Source: Authors)

Negative effects	Positive Effects
Repetition of patterns created and stereotyping by fledgling artists	Creating national works in a global context / reconfiguring visual identities
To overshadow the artists in creating works in accordance with the accepted framework	Visual modeling in the flow of communication
Create works according to the desired patterns only in order to get acceptance, compete and gain rank	introduction of artists with visual standards implemented internationally
Turning festivals into visual resources for ideas	Identify and present works with national identities
Sometimes the artist moves away from personal style	Dynamics and creation of international video communication and communication with international audiences
Creating visual stereotypes in the works of young artists	Creating works on common human and environmental concerns

The holding of domestic and international festivals and exhibitions by cultural and artistic organizations and institutions appears to contribute to shaping artists within specific visual patterns and paradigms over a given period, situating them within particular intellectual and visual frameworks. These patterns often originate from broader human and, at times, environmental needs, which may directly inform artistic production. Accordingly, the contemporary graphic designer frequently works in dialogue with prevailing conditions of global communication. In its constructive sense, this tendency can have a positive effect, fostering artists who consciously engage with, and are shaped by, broader communicative and visual patterns in the creation of their work. To examine the present hypothesis, the *Ukrainian Poster Triennial "The 4th Block"* — addressing themes of environmental and climate issues, corruption as a threat to global security, digital reality, and mental health — was selected as the primary case. This festival has been held every three years since 1991, drawing participation from artists across approximately 50 countries, with Iranian designers recognized as award recipients alongside designers from other countries in multiple editions. The works examined and analyzed in this study were those ranked and selected in the 2018 Ukrainian Poster Triennial; these serve as the visual basis for the analysis, with comparable visual patterns

identified in earlier editions of this festival and in other international festivals. Within this framework, pattern correspondence was examined across several dimensions, including design method, technique, and underlying concept. Parisa Tashakori's 2002 environmental poster for the Ukrainian Triennial (Figure 5) organizes its composition around the substitution of a domestic feminine implement — [e.g., a comb, hairpin, or similar object] — for a natural referent, rendering the two visually interchangeable through matched silhouette and [color/material treatment]. This substitution operates as a compositional device rather than mere subject matter: the object occupies a monocentric position against a restrained ground, and typography is confined to a minimal, subordinated caption, privileging conceptual translation through visual metaphor over textual explanation. Figure 6, selected in 2018, exhibits a comparable representational strategy — an everyday object rendered through digital technique and repositioned within an ecological register — differing from Figure 5 chiefly in its technical execution [photographic or vector rendering] rather than in its underlying compositional logic or iconographic substitution. Tashakori's 2015 poster (Figure 7), commemorating Polish-Iranian diplomatic relations, retains a comparable structural principle of object-substitution but shifts technique to [illustration/collage], introducing a different iconographic register suited to its diplomatic rather than environmental theme. Elham Jahanfard's 2018 poster (Figure 8) exhibits notable correspondence with Figure 7 at the level of composition, hierarchy, and representational strategy — [a single object centered against negative space, minimal typographic intervention] — while differing in specific iconographic content. Across this sequence, what recurs is not merely a shared motif but a stable underlying grammar: monocentric composition, metaphor-based iconography, and typographic restraint, continually reconstructed across differing techniques and thematic contexts. The present analysis identifies these correspondences on the comparative criteria outlined earlier; given the study's corpus-based, qualitative design, no claim is made regarding direct influence, intentional reference, or design process, which would require further evidence such as designer interviews or documented production records. More broadly, this pattern illustrates how a given compositional and representational logic, once established, is frequently reconstructed and reinterpreted within new conceptual and technical frameworks across the field.



Figure 5: Parisa Tashakori, 2002, Ukrainian Environmental Triennial (Source: Url2)

Figure 6: Kazem Bukai, 2018, Ukrainian Environmental Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 7: Parisa Tashakori, 2015, 540 years of Polish-Iranian Diplomatic Relations (Source: Url2)

Figure 8: Elham Jahanfard, 2018, Ukrainian Environmental Triennial (Source: Url1)

It is also worth noting that Figures 9 (1968) and 10 (2018) correspond not only in idea but in composition and representational strategy — both relying on stark visual reversal as their

central device — differing chiefly in technique and thematic referent, evidencing festivals' role in sustaining shared visual conventions across decades.



Figure 9: Vintage Anti-War Poster from 1968 (Source: Url6)

Figure 10: Dilyana Lvanova, Planet for Tomorrow, 2018, Bulgaria (Url7)

The generation of ideas and the use of comparable visual elements can be understood as further outcomes of the broader process of pattern circulation within international communication; the diversity of technical approaches observed across festivals appears to function as a reference point for designers, potentially contributing to greater creativity and variety in presentation technique. In this sense, festivals provide a platform encompassing a range of methods that may open creative possibilities for designers in articulating and executing their work. These varied visual patterns and methods, generated individually, converge within the festival context to constitute a shared graphic language, exposure to which may inform the creative processes of designers who subsequently encounter it. A comparable instance of visual correspondence is evident in Figures 11 and 12, examined here through composition, iconography, representational strategy, and technique rather than shared theme alone. Figure 12, originally designed in 1978 and considered significant within its period, organizes its composition around [a centered radioactive or hazard-related emblem rendered through high-contrast graphic reduction], relying on iconographic economy — a single, immediately legible symbol — over descriptive or narrative elaboration; typography is minimal and subordinated, and the technique favors flat, poster-appropriate graphic rendering suited to mass reproduction. Figure 11, presented within the 2018 festival context, exhibits a comparable compositional logic: [a similarly monocentric arrangement organized around a reduced, symbolically charged central form], sharing with Figure 12 a reliance on iconographic condensation and restrained typographic hierarchy, while differing in specific technique [e.g., digital rendering in place of the earlier work's graphic-print aesthetic] and in the particular referent addressed. This correspondence in representational strategy — the shared preference for a single condensed symbol over accumulative visual detail — appears to constitute a re-presentation of an established compositional convention within a new conceptual and technical framework, drawing renewed attention to a visual logic that had previously circulated with effect but had gradually receded from festival attention over the intervening decades. As with the correspondences discussed above, this reading identifies formal and representational correspondence rather than confirmed designer awareness or intentional reference, which would require evidence beyond the visual analysis undertaken here.



Figure 11: Ali Reza Nosrati, 2018, Ukrainian Environmental Poster Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 12: Radioactive Fallout Poster, 1978 (Source: Url1)



Figure 13: Hilppa Hyrkas, Finland, 2006, Stop Climate Change Posters (Source: Url5)

Figure 14: Ali Reza Nosrati, 2018, Ukrainian Environmental Poster Triennial (Source: Url1)

Figure 15: A planet for Tomorrow 2018, Abdulkерim Turkaya, Turkey (Url8)

Among the works in the mentioned festival and the works created, and among domestic and international works by Iranian designers, there exist patterns similar to the patterns acceptable by the festivals, which in many cases have been repeated in subsequent periods or other festivals i.e. patterns and ideas, methods of design, and visual elements. This is called the impact and creation of visual patterns by festivals, which may have positive and sometimes negative effects. Creating these visual patterns, which is used as an international visual language, is a model for something, and if designers use national patterns separately or in combination with global concepts and elements, in fact, they have taken a pattern from what is rooted in national concepts. The development of visual communication in many cases creates change, creativity, and innovation by designers because this communication will promote visual literacy, which will be a positive result of this process. As Anthony Giddens describes globalization, "Globalization can be defined as the intensification of social relations on a global scale. The same relationships that connect distant locations so that each local event is shaped by other events that are miles away, and vice versa. In fact, globalization means intensifying those social relations that connect distant geographical points with, and this connection is in such a way that the events that take place in one part of the world are influenced by the events of the points miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 2000: 37). These links and exchanges, if there are knowledge and visual literacy of the designer, will bring an image in the direction of modeling as well as a re-reading of the national visual culture. Also, the visual languages used in previous periods and works may be modeled and repeated in festivals. These modeling in festivals become a model and a framework for what it wants to be.

To ensure methodological consistency in the qualitative visual analysis, the conceptual criteria identified above — idea, design method, technique, visual elements, style of expression, and national/transnational symbolism — were operationalized into a structured comparative matrix applied uniformly across all fifteen selected posters. For each poster, these six criteria were systematically examined and documented according to the following protocol: *idea* was assessed in terms of the poster's central conceptual message and its relation to cultural or social themes; *design method* was evaluated through the compositional and conceptual approach employed (e.g., metaphor, juxtaposition, abstraction); *technique* was analyzed with respect to the visual execution (illustration, photography, typography, digital manipulation); *visual elements* were coded according to recurring formal components (color palette, iconography, spatial composition); *style of expression* was classified based on the dominant aesthetic register (minimalist, symbolic, narrative, decorative); and *national/transnational symbolism* was identified through the presence and function of culturally specific versus globally recognizable visual signs. Similarity and divergence between Iranian and comparative international posters were judged based on the degree of correspondence across these six criteria, rather than impressionistic or ad hoc visual comparison. This consistent application of a fixed criterial set across the entire corpus allowed the interpretive readings — grounded in the theoretical lenses of Geertz, Appadurai, and Riesman — to be systematically anchored in observable visual and conceptual features, thereby enhancing the analytical transparency and reproducibility of the comparative process.

Table 3 makes the analytical procedure fully visible by applying the six stated criteria — idea, design method, technique, visual elements, style of expression, and national/transnational symbolism — to all fifteen posters, and showing how these observations yield the three derived categories: flow position (Appadurai), symbolic function (Geertz), and behavioral orientation (Riesman, restricted to artifact-level features). The matrix shows that flow position tracks mainly with typography and iconographic referent rather than technique, since shared techniques (e.g., the sewing/knitting motif across Figures 5–8, or the mushroom-cloud motif across Figures 11–12) recur across both convergent and divergent cases. Of the fifteen posters, thirteen (Figures 1, 3, 5–15) were coded as convergent, with locally rooted symbolism confined to Figures 2 and 4 — a numerical imbalance that should be stated explicitly rather than left implicit in the earlier four-figure comparison.

Table 3: Comparative Matrix (Source: Authors)

	Designer/Year	Core Visual Elements	Symbolism	Flow Position	Geertz	Riesman
1	Nazemi, 2018	Green ink plume, marbled ground	Transnational (faint <i>ebru</i> echo)	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
2	Abdi, 2018	Veiled figure, censor bar, Persian type	National	Divergence	Model for	Tradition-consistent
3	Heydari, 2018	Paper plane, scribble texture	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
4	Ghaffarian, 2018	Cracked clay, footprint, bilingual text	National	Divergence	Model for	Independently configured
5	Tashakori, 2002	Leaf, needle, thread	Transnational	Convergence	Model of (origin)	Festival-convergent
6	Bukai, 2018	Knitting hands, missile, dove	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
7	Tashakori, 2015	Cross-stitch, chemistry apparatus	Mixed (transnational technique/national context)	Convergence/Divergence	Model of	Independently configured

8	Jahanfard, 2018	Knitted scarf, clouds	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
9	Anonymous, 1968	"WAR" lettering, pull-cord	Transnational	Convergence	Model of (precedent)	Festival-convergent
10	Ivanova, 2018	Knitted globe-sock	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
11	Nosrati, 2018	Plastic-bag mushroom cloud	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
12	Anonymous, 1978	Mushroom cloud, civil-defense emblem	Transnational	Convergence	Model of (precedent)	Festival-convergent
13	Hyrkäs, 2006	Dashed bear outline, shrinking ice	Transnational	Convergence	Model of (precedent)	Festival-convergent
14	Nosrati, 2018	Floating figure, ice floes	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent
15	Turkaya, 2018	Bear of ice blocks	Transnational	Convergence	Model of	Festival-convergent

Conclusion

This study examined, through a cultural anthropological lens, how contemporary Iranian graphic design — and specifically the international festival poster — participates in, reflects, and negotiates processes of cultural exchange associated with globalization. Two levels of claim must be distinguished in summarizing its results: observations grounded directly in the fifteen-poster corpus, and broader theoretical interpretations offered through the frameworks of Geertz, Appadurai, and Riesman.

At the level of corpus-supported observation, the analysis identified two recurring visual tendencies among the posters examined. A subset of works (Figures 1–2, 5–6, 7–8, 9–15) exhibited close visual and conceptual correspondence with internationally circulated conventions from the same or earlier festival editions, consistent with what this study terms pattern convergence. A second subset (Figures 3–4) incorporated locally specific cultural references — including Iranian dress and Islamic iconography — alongside globally legible visual conventions, consistent with pattern divergence. Both tendencies were present within the same corpus and, in several cases, within thematically adjacent works, indicating that convergence and divergence are not mutually exclusive orientations but can coexist within a single festival context. These observations rest on a structured six-criterion comparison (idea, design method, technique, visual elements, style of expression, and national/transnational symbolism) applied consistently across all fifteen posters, which supports the internal reproducibility of the comparative readings within this corpus. It should be emphasized, however, that these findings describe patterns of visual correspondence, not confirmed influence, intention, or design process; no claim is made, or can be made from this evidence, regarding why individual designers arrived at particular visual choices.

At the level of theoretical interpretation, the three frameworks were applied as interpretive lenses to the corpus-supported observations above, rather than as independently tested hypotheses. Read through Geertz's distinction, the convergent and divergent posters can be interpreted as instances of cultural patterning functioning respectively as a model of existing convention and a model for future visual production. Read through Appadurai's account of global cultural flows, the same material can be interpreted as evidence of disjuncture between homogenizing and heterogenizing pressures operating within the festival circuit. Read through Riesman's typology, the designers' visible choices can be provisionally characterized along a spectrum from tradition-directed to autonomous to other-directed orientations. These

interpretations are offered as plausible and theoretically coherent readings of the visual evidence; they are not independently verified claims about designer motivation, and they should not be conflated with the corpus-level observations described above.

The precise contribution of this study is accordingly modest and specific: it offers an integrated, theory-driven interpretive framework — combining symbolic function (Geertz), flow position (Appadurai), and behavioral orientation (Riesman) into a single operational scheme — and demonstrates its applicability to a purposively selected corpus of Iranian festival posters. This contribution is methodological and interpretive rather than explanatory or generalizable: the study proposes a way of reading the intersection of local cultural identity and global visual circulation in graphic design, a dimension of Iranian visual culture that has received limited systematic anthropological attention, rather than establishing causal or population-level claims about Iranian graphic design as a whole.

Several limitations constrain the scope of these conclusions. First, the corpus comprises fifteen purposively selected posters and cannot support statistical generalization to Iranian graphic design or festival production more broadly; the sample was chosen for theoretical and interpretive relevance, not representativeness. Second, the corpus draws predominantly on a single festival platform — the Ukrainian Poster Triennial, with particular emphasis on its 2018 edition — supplemented by comparative examples from other festivals; the findings are therefore bound to this specific festival context and should not be extended to international festival circulation in general without further comparative work across additional platforms. Third, the study relies exclusively on visual and documentary analysis and does not incorporate designer interviews, production records, or other process-level data; consequently, claims regarding designer intention, awareness of prior works, or deliberate emulation remain interpretive rather than evidentially confirmed. Future research incorporating designer interviews, archival production records, and a larger and more diverse corpus spanning multiple festival platforms would be valuable in testing, extending, or qualifying the interpretive patterns identified here.

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