

# **A comparative study of multimodality in English and Persian spam letters of advertising**

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## *Abstract*

The aim of this study is to identify patterns of multimodality and determine whether these patterns relate in any way to social and religious statuses of the *Persian and English communities*. To this end, by sending an announcement to an Iranian social network, network users were requested to forward their spam letters to one of the researchers' emails. Then, 70 Persian and 70 English spam letters were randomly selected for the rhetorical analysis of the language *mode* and the image *mode*. The results of the study indicated that for the image mode, similar strategies were utilized in both Persian and English spam letters. However, some general distinctions were found in the images. For the language mode, clear differences were observed in the employment of rhetorical figures between the spams. Distinctions rooted in cultural and religious values account for the differences in applying the strategies for the image and language modes.

Keywords: Spam letter, advertisement, image mode, language mode, rhetorical figures, multimodality

## **1. Introduction**

Advertising is a significant way to cajole customers into buying products or services. According to Dyer (1982), **advertising** is one of the most important forces imposed upon societies, having become an institution that produces

**advertisements** within a political economy of technical specialization. It has become part of people's daily life as they are confronted with advertising everywhere and in various ways (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers, Internet, and so on).

Communication has rarely been limited to language and it tends to include some other means too. The means by which we convey meaning is called mode (Rajandran, 2009). Based on the way that they advertise their products, producers may choose both language and image. Language and image are always combined in order to account for the textuality of the text (Eckrammer, 2004). Multimodality or utilization of different modes in a context shows that communication is a mixture of different modes that help to reach holistic communication (Rajandran, 2009). Communication is typically multimodal and monomodal communication is rarely used (Stöckl, 2004).

Considering spam letters from a multimodal perspective, this study aimed to focus on advertising sent to the spam section of customers' emails and to analyse the language and image modes employed in those texts. The goal was to identify what modes of communication are exploited by spam senders, and how these modes relate in any way to social and religious statuses of the Persian and English communities. Comparing the nature of English and Persian spam letters of advertising may help customers to become more conscious of the use of multimodal strategies, and of the ways advertisers exploit to win the acquiescence of the public. In addition to that, since advertisers use different modes to attract the attention of customers and consequently persuade them to buy the advertised product or service, the results of this study may help teachers and learners in developing persuasive strategies in writing.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted on the domain of multimodality and effective communication covering a variety of topics. These studies have focused on such issues as whether spam letters belong to promotional genre (Barron, 2006). They have also explored probiotic web advertising exploiting critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate how producers try to

generate trust for their products using shared values (family values, wild nature/rustic imagery and importance of good impressions) and high-tech science functions (Koteyko & Nerlich, 2007) in web-based sources. Other studies have analysed advertisements on men's scents/perfumes in British magazines, integrating a social semiotics framework and a critical discourse analysis methodology (Gregorio-Godeo, 2009). They have also explored the contribution of multimodality and word formation in printed advertising (Plescher, 2010), using a deductive approach inspired by multimodal critical discourse analysis in Spanish cosmetic surgery advertising (Lirola & Chovanec, 2012), and a multimodal approach in cigarette advertisement billboard using both images and text to guide the audience's attention (Triristina, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a transition in the attitude of advertisers. They have shifted focus away from products and towards the customers. Advertisers have attempted to create product imagery in order to make it easier for the consumers to recall and identify with the product (Woodward & Denton, 1988 as cited in El-daly, 2011). The emphasis of the advertisers is on the advantages of exploiting a product instead of focusing on the products (El-daly, 2011). They tend to impact the subconsciousness of consumers (Beasley & Danesi, 2002 as cited in El-daly 2011) in order to purchase their products or services. The foregoing studies attempted to shed light on how advertisers use different modes to gain customers' trust and attract attention.

Spam letters have also been the subject of a few investigations. For instance, in one study the macro-textual structure of 121 medical spam letters was investigated (Barron, 2006) to explore whether spam letters belong to the promotional genre, an idea raised by Bhatia (2004). Similarly, in another study Nigerian scams were compared with sales promotion letters to determine whether they could be a genre of their own (Budge, 2006).

The aforesaid studies only focused on the textual organization of spam letters in English. Further insights may be gained both by cross-linguistic (cross-cultural) studies and by a multi-modal approach. As yet, neither possibility has been exploited. In other words, comparative studies of spam letters across

languages have largely remained unaddressed. Thus, knowing how these letters might vary linguistically across different cultures and contexts represents an area in which further research is warranted. The current study adopts a comparative approach to analysing English and Persian advertisements sent to Persian customers' emails (spam section). Comparing the nature of English and Persian spam letters of advertising may help customers become more conscious of the use of multimodal strategies and of the way advertisers tend to garner their attention. Therefore, the present study leads to the understanding of the discourse of spam advertising in English and Persian and offers a novel scholarly position.

### **3. Theoretical Frameworks**

In the current research, we utilized two separate frameworks for each mode: Clark's (1998) framework, with 78 rhetorical figures, was used for the rhetorical analysis of language, while Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework was employed for the analysis of the image mode. Their method of image analysis considers the various ways in which an image could imply meaning, and has the capacity to operate in different contexts (advertisements, magazines, web pages, textbooks, and newspapers).

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Pilot Study**

Previous research has made use of various kinds of frameworks in relation to the analysis of multimodal texts (e.g., see Clark's 1998). Although these frameworks are considered reliable, it is likely that in novel situations, existing frameworks fail to offer a comprehensive account of a multimodal text. Stated differently, these frameworks usually reflect attitudes and tendencies prevailing in an English community and tend to be somewhat Western. Thus, in the Persian context which is the concern of this study, these frameworks might cease to function appropriately. In order to determine if the selected frameworks (Clark, 1998; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) are adequate for analysing spam letters, the analysis of the texts was done heuristically in this research. For this purpose, about 15

percent of the data was randomly selected and read carefully, suggesting that while comprehensive in its own right, Clark's (1998) framework fails to provide a comprehensive account of the language mode of spam letters, as there are items not covered in the model. Notice that the following expressions that could not be classified according to the categorization made by Clark (1998):

- Attention summer enrolments
- Secure lowest Rate
- Hiring immediately
- Start now
- Get new car prices

To classify the above examples, Clark's framework was modified by adding more figures. Consequently, our pilot analysis attested to the need to read the texts again and add new rhetorical figures to Clark's (1998) language usage framework. In addition to that, there were rhetorical figures in the framework which were not observed in our data, for example elements such as ambiguity, balanced sentence, oxymoron, metonymy, and pun. Consequently, we decided to curtail those absent rhetorical figures for the modified framework (see below for the modified framework). In order to compute the reliability of our judgments, we used SPSS software (for further information see Table 3). Finally, our pilot study revealed Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework to be adequate for analysing images of spam letters. Therefore, the rest of the data was analysed based on the modified framework.

## **4.2 Data Normalization**

Persian spam letters were found to be lengthier than the English spam. Word count was determined in order to obtain the number of words for the Persian as well as the English spam letters. Data normalization is the process of reducing the amount of data in order to minimize data redundancy.

## **4.3 Material and Procedures**

The advertisements for this study were selected from spam letters sent to customers' emails. Graduate and undergraduate students were asked to forward

their spam letters to one of the researchers' emails. The spam letters were advertisements of various brands and services such as the advertising for utensils, recently published books, various products for whisking, beauty products, watches, perfumes, various types of furniture, medicines, medical services, games, tours for different areas, and so on collected for four consecutive months (February to May 2012).

For ease of access to the data, we used a social network ([www.cloob.com](http://www.cloob.com)) in order to announce the notification for sending spam letters. Altogether, about 1400 spam letters were forwarded, of which we chose 600 (300 English and 300 Persian) randomly. Having a commercial nature was the major criterion for the selection of the spam. Thus, spam letters with some other themes (advertisements for sex products) as well as repetitive spam letters fell outside the scope of this study and were thus omitted from the collected data. After filtering those spam letters with similar themes and strategies (those spam letters which used repetitive rhetorical figures), 140 spam letters (70 English and 70 Persian) were chosen. It is worth noting that, for both language *mode and image mode*, we utilized bottom-up and top-down analyses in our study. For the heuristic (bottom-up) analysis, we randomly selected 10 English and 10 Persian spam, and piloted and analysed them twice carefully. Based on the results of the pilot study, the selected framework for the linguistic mode was modified and analysis of the rest of the data proceeded accordingly. That is, the letters were analysed by applying the modified framework.

Generally, sentences may denote more than one rhetorical figure. When we encountered such examples, in our quantitative analysis the sentence was counted as representing all those rhetorical figures. Two examples are given below.

**English spam:** Get a free Dell Studio XPS 17 Laptop (Imperative, Free, and Jargon)

**Persian spam:** Chai saz va ghahve joushe hamrah, hamrah hamishegiye shoma (Personification, Alliteration)

In order to increase the reliability of analysis, the data were analysed by another experienced researcher. Consequently, the intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability were estimated and the results fell within an acceptable level.

Table 1. Intra-rater reliability

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	4.289	22	1.000
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	5.834	22	1.000
<b>Linear-by-Linear Association</b>	.007	1	.933
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	1049		

Table 2. Inter-rater reliability

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	4.093	22	1.000
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	5.638	22	1.000
<b>Linear-by-Linear Association</b>	.005	1	.945
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	1042		

The occurrences and frequencies of linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the spam letters in the two contexts were compared via Chi-square. Chi-square is a non-parametric statistical technique enabling researchers to specify whether the research groups are different on one or more variables. Analysis of the data led to the modification of Clark's (1998) framework of rhetorical figures. Consequently, we arrived at a framework consisting of 25 rhetorical figures for the conceptual analysis of the rest of the data. A modified framework for the language mode, along with definitions and examples from the data, are presented in the following. The rhetorical figures in bold are the ones added to the existing model.

- 1- Alliteration: The recurrence of initial consonant (as opposed to vowel) sounds.  
Persian example: *Poste Pishtaz*  
Translation: *Express Post*  
English example: *Student Support*
- 2- Antithesis: Establishes a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas by joining them together or juxtaposing them, often with a parallel structure.  
Persian example: *na tanha zarari baraye mouhaye shoma nadarad, balke moifid niz mibashad.*  
Translation: *Not only does it do no harm to your hair, but also it is good for it.*  
English example: *People who came here to lose usually end up gaining.*
- 3- **Attention:** Using language in order to attract attention.  
Persian example: *tavajohetan ra be mavarede zir jalb minamayim:*  
Translation: We draw your attention to the following:  
English example: *Urgent attention needed*
- 4- Cliché: Any over-used and worn out expression; any phrase that is not fresh and original.  
Persian example: *Behтарin hediye baraye kasanike dousteshan darid.*  
Translation: *The best present for those whom you love*  
English example: *They can't fight it alone.*
- 5- Colloquialism: Colloquial language is the language suitable for conversation.  
Persian example: *vasilei ke hameye bacheha asheghesh mishan...*  
Translation: *Something that all children will love*  
English example: *Let me start by introducing myself.*
- 6- **Discount:** Using language to show reduction in the price of the products/services.  
Persian example: *gheyamat ba takhfife vizhe faghat 14900 Toman*  
Translation: *Special discounted price just 14900 Toman*  
English example: *25% discount*
- 7- Elatives: Use of comparatives and superlatives.  
Persian example: *baraye avalin bar dar Iran*  
Translation: *For the first time in Iran*  
English example: *Best car insurance rates*

- 8- Ellipsis: The shortening of the construction of a sentence by omitting a word or words which may be readily supplied from the context.  
Persian example: *botri abe jadouyi, ghabele shostoshu asan, fogholade shik va sabok*  
Translation: *Magical water bottle, easy to wash, very chic and beautiful*  
English example: *Find a top-rated Pm's – reliable & licensed*
- 9- Exclamatory: A statement written as an exclamation.  
Persian example: *in vasile cheghadr mitavanad baraye shoma komak bashad!*  
Translation: *How useful this product could be for you.*  
English example: **No evidence found in data.**
- 10- **Free:** Using language to show that people can take advantage of something without having to pay for it.  
Persian example: **No evidence found in data.**  
English example: *30-day free trial*
- 11- **Guarantee:** A word or phrase showing that the product/service has a warranty or showing that the use of this product has no side effects and insuring that the product does not put the users' health in danger.  
Persian example: *100 darsad tazmini ba yeksal guarantee*  
Translation: *100 percent guaranteed with a one-year warranty*  
English example: *Secure and safe*
- 12- Hyperbole: An extravagant exaggeration of fact.  
Persian example: *in saat hame ra heyratzadeh khahad kard.*  
Translation: *This watch will astonish everybody.*  
English example: *Look and feel your best.*
- 13- Image: A picture created in the reader's mind, e.g. (a) Concrete image - created by accurate and evocative description; or (b) Figurative image - created by the use of metaphor or simile.  
Persian example: *in atre zanane ke mohtaviye zate yekrouze tabestani darenglisast...*  
Translation: *This ladies scent which is a symbol of a summer day...*  
English example: *Save big on tires*

14- Imperative: An order or command.

Persian example: *jahate sabte sefareshe interneti klik konid*

Translation: *Click to order the product online*

English example: *View photos of Millionaires near you*

15- Jargon: The specialized language used for a specialized occupation.

Persian example: *mojahaz be USB dakheli*

Translation: *Equipped with an internal USB*

English example: *Get a free Dell Studio XPS 17 Laptop*

16- Logo: (Logogram) A sign or symbol in shorthand.

Persian example:



English example:



17- **Lassitude:** Using language to make the reader/hearer feel that they are not confident or are inconvenienced by their situations and that they really need to get rid of the source.

Persian example: *aya az tame chai dam nakeshide khaste shodeid?*

Translation: *Are you tired of drinking unstewed tea?*

English example: *You won't want to sleep without this!*

18- **Novelty:** Using language that shows that the product is the newest version.

Persian example: *saate zananeh alangouyi tarhe tavousi jaded*

Translation: *New peacock-shape bracelet watch*

English example: *New openings updated daily*

19- **Originality:** Phrases or words showing originality of the product and assuring that it is not a mock product

Persian example: *100% asl*

Translation: *100 percent original*

English example: **No evidence found in data.**

20- Paradox: A statement that seems absurd and self-contradicting but which is in fact true.

Persian example: *lezate keshidane sigar bedoune ankezarari dashte bashad*

Translation: *The pleasure of smoking a cigarette without any harmful impact*

English example: *Know you are safe even when you are not there with a spy camera*

21- Personification: A metaphor or simile in which an inanimate object or an abstract concept is given human qualities.

Persian example: *chai saz va ghahve joushe hamrah, hamrahe hamishegiye shoma dar mahale kar va manzel*

Translation: *Hamrah tea-maker and percolator, your everyday company in office and home*

English example: *Spy camera*

22- **Prompt service/response?** Using language to persuade customers to apply for the product urgently.

Persian example: *be dalile esteghbale ghabele pishbini va zarfiyat mabdoud ta bargozariye tour harche saritar sabtenam farmayid.*

Translation: *Because of the expected welcome and limited capacity of tour, please register as soon as possible.*

English example: *Buy Nitro Pro 7 today and save \$30*

23- Repetition: Using some words or sentences repeatedly

Persian example: *mesle range cheshm, range mou, va ...*

Translation: *such as eye color, hair color, and ...*

English example: *We will process your ATM card or your certified Bank Check*

24- Rhetorical question: A statement in the form of a question asked not to gain a reply, but to achieve a rhetorical emphasis stronger than a direct statement.

Persian example: *chegoune mitavan mokalemate faransavi ra dark kard?*

Translation: *How can we understand French conversations?*

English example: *Would you go back to school if you qualified for a grant?*

25- Rhyme: The identity of the final accented vowel and all following sounds in two words.

Persian example: *ziba va delroba*

Translation: *beautiful and attractive*

English example: *View photos and videos*

For the image mode, we took advantage of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework which our pilot study revealed to effectively account for the images in spam letters. In the following, a short description of their model is provided.

As a prerequisite, it should be mentioned that images involve two kinds of participants: represented participants (the people, the places, and things illustrated in images) and interactive participants (the people who communicate with each other through image, the producers and viewers of images).

### **1. Image act**

There are two types of image acts: Demand and Offer.

- *Demand image act*: When represented participants look directly at the viewer, vectors formed by their eye-lines connect the represented participants to the viewer. The represented participants' look and gaze is a way to show that s/he is demanding something from the viewer; it is like they are demanding viewers to enter into some kind of imaginary relation with them.
- *Offer image act*: The offer image act happens when the represented participants do not establish a look with the viewers, and the viewer is the subject of the look

instead of being the object of the look. In this case, the represented participant is the object of the viewers' dispassionate scrutiny. In other words, there will be no contact between the represented participants and the viewers of the image, and it could be said that in these kinds of images the viewer role is an invisible onlooker. These kinds of images offer the represented participant to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation.

➤ Note that the represented participant may be human (or animal) or a quasi-human object.

## **2. Size of frame**

With the choice of distance, producers of images could depict the kind of relation which holds between the represented participant and the viewer. In everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance we keep from one another. Everyone carries with oneself a set of invisible boundaries through which only certain people are allowed to enter.

*Intimate distance:* Only face or head can be seen at this distance.

*Close personal distance:* Head and shoulders can be seen at this distance.

*Far personal distance:* From this distance we can see the other person from waist up.

*Close social distance:* The whole figure can be seen from this distance.

*Far social distance:* The whole figure and the space around it can be seen from this distance.

*Public distance:* The torso of at least four or five people can be seen from this distance.

➤ The system of social distance and size of frame can also apply to the representation of objects, environments, and landscapes.

- Size of frame and objects

*Close distance:* At this distance, the object is presented in a way that the viewer appears to be engaged with it as if s/he were using the machine, reading a book or a map, preparing or eating food. In cases in which the object is so small, it is shown only in part, and often the image will be depicted in user's hand; for instance, a knife is scraping the soft margarine in an advertisement.

*Middle distance:* At this distance, the object is shown in full, but without much

space around it. The object is represented as if it is in the viewer's reach, but not as actually used.

*Long distance:* An invisible barrier exists between the viewer and object at long distance. The object is there for viewer's contemplation, out of reach, as if on display in a shop window or museum exhibit.

- Size of frame and landscapes

*Middle distance:* Landscapes can be seen from middle distance with the foreground objects suggesting as if the viewers were imaginarily located within the landscape, but stopping there for some minutes and trying to take stock of what is around them.

*Long distance:* At this distance, viewers look at the landscape from a high angle or from a "look out" position; in many geography books, these kinds of images are available.

### **3. Perspective**

Expressing subjective attitudes towards represented participants is a crucial element for producing an image. The system of perspective allows images to become informed by subjective points of view. Perspective rests on an impersonal, geometric foundation, a construction which is a quasi-mechanical way of recording images of reality. Generally, there are two kinds of images: *subjective* and *objective* images, or images with perspective and images without perspective. In *subjective images*, the viewer can see what there is to see only from a particular point of view. In *objective images*, the image reveals everything there is to know about represented participants, even if it is necessary to violate the laws of naturalistic depiction or the laws of nature.

### **4. Horizontal angle**

Horizontal angle is a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the image-producer and the frontal plane of the represented participants. The image-producer and the represented participant can either be parallel or form an angle. Generally, an image can take two points of view: *frontal* or *oblique*. Having a frontal or an oblique point of view is a matter of showing involvement and detachment respectively. The horizontal angle can help to manifest whether the image-producer (and hence the viewer) is involved with the represented participant or not.

### **5. Vertical angle**

Camera height is an important factor to express attitudes towards an image. From vertical angle, an image can have three different positions:

*High angle:* A high angle makes the represented participant look small and insignificant. In this case, the relation between the interactive participants (the image-producer and hence, willy-nilly the viewer) and the represented participants is depicted as one in which the interactive participant has power over the represented participant; in other words, the represented participant is seen from the point of view of power.

*Low angle:* A low angle makes the image look awesome and imposing. The relation between the interactive participants and the represented participants is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant.

*Eye-level:* If the image is at eye-level, then the point of view is one of equality and no power difference exists between represented participants and interactive participants.

## **5. Qualitative Analysis of the Image Mode**

In this section, the interactive interactions, discussed in Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), are analysed for the image mode. The relations between the represented participants (characters in images) and the interactive participants (viewers of images) implicitly convey the illusion of existing through images. Persian and English spam letters utilized quite similar strategies in their images. In the following, some examples of the images in the two contexts are presented.

Image 1. An offer image in Persian spam letters



As seen in image 1, the *offer image act* is used in this Persian spam, offering the represented participant to the viewer as an item of information and contemplation; the viewer is invisible to the character and they are unrelated to each other. The character is holding a cup of tea made in the advertised tea maker, and she is smiling and enjoying her tea while appearing unaware of onlookers. The image conveys the message to the viewers that if they use the same product as she uses, they could be smiling and enjoying their tea and life too. The image is at far personal distance, the closeness of two friends, unconsciously, conveying loyalty and trust; therefore, the viewer may feel that the character is not acting, and she really is satisfied with the tea made by the advertised tea maker. This image is subjective, close to reality, natural, at eye-level, and it has an oblique point of view. However, the degree of obliqueness in this image is not so tangible; hence, the viewer does not feel so detached from the represented participant. This slight degree of obliqueness is to convey the message to the viewers that they cannot have the same feeling as the character now, because she uses the advertised product and they do not.

Image 2. A demand image in English spam letters



Image 2 displays the *demand image act* used in this English spam. The participant's gaze demands that the viewer conjure up some kind of imaginary relation (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition to looking directly at the viewer, the characters are smiling to the viewer. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the facial expression of smiling shows that characters are asking viewers to establish a relation of social affinity with them. In addition to that, it seems that the characters are trying to show their satisfaction with VA Loans, and implicitly they convey this impression that the viewers could be as happy as them if they apply for VA Loans too. The *social distance* of the character in the image is public distance between the people who are supposed to remain strangers (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Since this picture is depicting a record of reality, from the *perspective* point of view the image is *subjective*. Analysing from the *horizontal angle*, the image has a frontal point of view, and from the *vertical angle* the image is at eye-level. The frontal view and eye-level image connote the fact that participants and viewers are of equal power in terms of relations. As such, connections can be easily established.

Image 3. A demand image in Persian spam



In image 3, the *demand image act* is used. As obvious from the image, advertisers have used a picture of the famous actor Tom Cruise to testify to the worth of their own product. Implicitly, Tom Cruise conveys the message to his fans that if you want to be like me you should use this product. The *social distance* of the character in the image is intimate distance. Persian advertisers use intimate distance to evoke customers' emotions and make them feel affinity with this famous actor. The image is subjective, at eye-level, and frontal.

Image 4. An offer image in Persian spam



The character in image 4 does not establish eye contact with the viewer, hence an *offer image act*. The image is at close personal distance, oblique, subjective implying that even though she is physically close to the viewer it nevertheless does not entails close relations as the oblique angle does not allow contact to be established, with the character looking somehow from a low angle,

conveying the message that the represented participant has power over the interactive participant (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The character in the image is wearing an Adidas watch, thus being superior to the viewers who do not wear this watch.

Image 5. A demand image in English spam



Image 5 is a demand *image act*, objective, and at far personal distance. The image has violated the laws of naturalistic depiction; it is representing the character in a way that the viewer can see more of what is really observable in the real situations, and from the *horizontal angle* and the *vertical angle* the image has a frontal point of view and a low angle respectively which in essence would mean that the image has more power over the viewer. Nevertheless, in this context it is not as powerful in regards to human relations.

For a non-human represented participant, we can only consider three of the five criteria discussed in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework (*size of the frame, perspective, and vertical angle*). In order to analyse the *image act* and the *horizontal angle* of an image, it is essential for that image to have a human or quasi-human character.

Image 6. A middle distance image in Persian spam



Being subjective and at eye-level, the advertised perfume in image 6 is at the *middle distance*; the distance shown in full but without much space around it. The object is easily accessible to the viewers, as though they were using it (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). This type of representing item is very common in advertising.

Image 7. A close distance image in Persian spam



Image 7, being subjective and at eye-level, shows the advertised mp3 player at close distance. Because of its small size, the product is shown in the user's hand.

Image 8. A middle distance image in English spam



Subjective and at eye-level, image 8 is at the middle distance; it looks like the viewer is imaginatively located within the landscape, and she or he is attempting to take stock of his or her surroundings.

Generally, Persian spam advertisers utilized significantly more images than English spam advertisers in their advertisements. The results showed that about 25.72% of English spam letters did not contain any image at all and the remaining 74.18% of them only used one image in their contents. On the contrary, not only did all the Persian spam letters have an image in their contents, but they also had more than one image in their contents. It seems that Persian spam letters of advertising are more visual-oriented than English spam letters. Furthermore, the results revealed that Persian advertisers had the tendency to take advantage of using photos of famous foreign actors/actresses and singers in order to make a good publicity for their products or services. They utilize the photos of famous people intentionally to misuse customers' interests of their favourite artists. In contrast to Persian spam advertisers, English spam advertisers did not specifically make use of famous artists' photos.

## **6. Quantitative Analysis of the Language Mode**

We can now turn to an analysis of the results. The two sets of data were scrutinized and the occurrences of rhetorical figures were counted. Since, in most cases, Persian spam letters were lengthier than English spam letters the total occurrences of the rhetorical figures in English and Persian spam, after normalization, were 1122 and 1488, respectively. In order to compare the two sets of data, the chi-square test was computed using the SPSS software as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of the rhetorical figures in the English and Persian spam letters of advertising

Rhetorical figures	Chi-Square		English		Persian	
	Value	P-value	Freq	%	Freq	%
<i>Alliteration</i>	0.793	0.373	113	10.8	100	6.7
<i>Antithesis</i>	1	0.317	3	0.3	1	0.1
<i>Attention</i>	0.692	0.405	8	0.7	5	0.3
<i>Cliché</i>	13.235	0.000	1	0.1	16	1.1
<i>Colloquialism</i>	8.340	0.004	33	2.9	61	4.1
<i>Discount</i>	4.840	0.028	7	0.6	18	1.2
<i>Elatives</i>	22.588	0.000	27	2.4	75	5.1
<i>Ellipsis</i>	12.094	0.001	49	4.4	90	6.1
<i>Exclamation</i>	----	----	0	0.0	1	0.1
<i>Free</i>	----	----	33	2.9	0	0.0
<i>Guarantee</i>	6.081	0.014	11	1	26	1.7
<i>Hyperbole</i>	39.185	0.000	4	0.4	50	3.4
<i>Image</i>	33.471	0.000	76	6.8	166	11.2
<i>Imperative</i>	215.252	0.000	503	44.9	133	8.9
<i>Jargon</i>	85.165	0.000	21	1.9	137	9.2
<i>Logo</i>	18.114	0.000	56	5	111	7.5
<i>Lassitude</i>	4.455	0.035	2	0.2	9	0.6
<i>Novelty</i>	3.522	0.061	7	0.6	16	1.1
<i>Originality</i>	----	----	0	0.0	9	0.6
<i>Paradox</i>	0.333	0.564	1	0.1	2	0.1
<i>Personification</i>	2.273	0.132	3	0.3	8	0.5
<i>Prompt Service</i>	64.122	0.000	70	6.2	2	0.1
<i>Repetition</i>	442.112	0.000	34	3.1	356	23.9
<i>Rhetorical Question</i>	3.571	0.059	39	3.5	24	1.6
<i>Rhyme</i>	27.968	0.000	21	1.9	72	4.8
<b>Total No. Rhetorical</b>	Critical $\chi^2 = 3.8414$ $\alpha = 0.05, df = 1$		1122	100.0	1488	100.0

An important consideration is to determine which strategies are being used more frequently in English and Persian spam letters of advertising. Table 3

shows that *Imperatives* was the most frequently used strategy in English spam. *Imperatives*, that is, using encouraging, forceful, and short phrases, are used in order to inspire customers to purchase or urge their want and willing (Goddard, 2002) whereas *Repetition* was opted for in Persian spam. In speech, it is often normal to mention something more than once, for it can be considered as a help to the listeners' memory. However, in writing if the reader forgets some information s/he can go back and double check the forgotten part. Advertisers use this strategy (*Repetition*) for the purpose of emphasis (Goddard, 2002).

Other strategies utilized in English spam letters were *Alliteration*, *Image*, *Prompt service*, listed in their order of frequency while the figures that were deployed in Persian more frequently constituted *Image*, *Jargon*, *Imperative*, *Logo*, *Alliteration*, *Ellipsis*, and *Elatives* respectively. *Image* was used significantly more in Persian spam letters than English spam. Often times, advertisers use this figure to conjure up a good image of the product in customers' minds. *Jargon* was the next figure that occurred more in Persian spam. There was a sharp difference in using this item in Persian and English spam. Advertisers utilize *Jargon* to manifest that the product is somehow related to a special community. Table 3 also displays a significant difference in using *Prompt service* in the two contexts. Using *Prompt service* is a good strategy, used in English, to persuade and push potential customers to buy the advertised product as soon as possible. Another figure that was used slightly more in Persian spam letters than English spam letters is *Logo*. Advertisers use symbols in order to give customers a sense of belonging and recognition. *Logos* are symbols that companies use as a mark to help customers to identify their product or service (Goddard, 2002). As shown in Table 3, *Ellipsis* was used in both Persian and English spam. *Ellipsis* occurs when a shared knowledge exists between the interlocutors. According to Goddard (2002), advertisers try to account for the spoken language conditions by elliptical structures and in this way they establish (an imaginary) closeness with their potential customers.

A number of strategies were moderately used in the two groups of figures, such as *Colloquialism*, *Elatives*, *Guarantee*, *Rhetorical question*, and

*Rhyme*. In order to create a close relationship with customers, advertisers use colloquial speech instead of formal speech. Table 3 shows that *Colloquialism* was used in about 4.1% and 2.9% in Persian and English spam letters respectively, followed by *Elatives*, which are used slightly more in Persian spam letters than English spam. More often than not, advertisers do not compare their own products with their rivals' products directly (Goddard, 2002). To show that their product has warranty and it has little or no side effect, advertisers utilize *Guarantee* in order to gain their customers trust. Both Persian and English advertisers used this figure occasionally. Rhetorical questions are a sensible form of attracting attention (Mardh, 1980, as cited in Jalilifar, 2010); by raising a problem using a rhetorical question, advertisers use a problem-solution format. First, they bring out the problem and then push forward the solution. They make it clear that whatever the problem is, the solution is in their hands (Goddard, 2002). *Rhyme*, used slightly more in Persian spam letters than in English spam, is a clever choice for making advertising dulcet to the ears and winning the acquiescence of the customers. There were no traces of Exclamatory and Originality in English spam letters though they occurred sporadically in Persian spam. On the contrary, the term 'Free' did not occur in Persian spam letters at all, while it was observed, though infrequently, in English spam.

## **7. Discussion of the Findings**

Communities are recognized by their own particular cultures and beliefs which determine ways of living. Every aspect of a society is influenced by culture; culture directly influences the way members of a community think and act in their lives (Kramsch, 2004; McCarty & Hattwick, 1992). Each community has its own cultural values which govern the ideas and guide principles for thought and action in a society (Srikandath, 1991). A good means to observe the cultural values of a society in order to get more insight about that culture is through advertisements. Therefore, communities with different cultural values may exploit various persuasive strategies to persuade customers into buying the brands that they advertise. In this section, we discuss the patterns of multimodality and the

different strategies employed in Persian and English spam letters from the social and religious points of view.

## **7.1 Images and Spam Letters of Advertising**

In order to build an imaginary interaction with their potential customers, Persian and English spam advertisers shared common strategies for their image mode. Similar results were seen in other contexts such as Malaysia (Rajandran, 2009). It is true that Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework is primarily Western, but it seems that globalization has led to outstretch these strategies for creating images even in eastern countries. Nevertheless, there were unique differences between Persian and English spam Letters.

For the first time, Hall (1976) raised the concepts of *high-context* and *low-context* cultures. People behave based on their membership in their own cultures. Most eastern countries are known to have high-context culture and, on the contrary, most Western countries tilt to a low-context culture. High-context and low-context complement each other and provide a framework for looking at culture. They refer to the tendency in a culture to choose a communication style. According to Hall (1976), in a low-context culture, communicators are expected to be straightforward, concise, and efficient in telling their messages. They value logic, fact, and directness. On the contrary, communicators in a high-context culture are more governed by intuitions and feelings than by logic. They tend to be more indirect and more formal. People with a high-context culture prefer to use elements other than only verbal elements in their communications. In other words, other than the language mode they incorporate other modes, such as image, too. Unlike English advertisements, in spam advertisements in Persian (a high-context culture) images are good substitutions preferred by advertisers in their spam.

Another conspicuous difference in the two contexts was the way spam advertisers depict characters in their spam. In some of their images, English advertisers showed a photograph of couples displaying their happiness and satisfaction after using the advertised product/service (see images 9 & 10).

Culturally, Westerners are used to seeing the display of intimate relation of couples (husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend) in their media; and of course they are confronted with such intimate relations in public.

Image 9. An image of happiness in English spam letters



Image 10. An image of happiness in English spam letters



On the contrary, such images are rarely observed in the Persian spam. The official religion of Iran projects its principles and practices on peoples' lives and cultures; following Islamic rituals, in the Persian culture exhibiting the intimacy of relations between two opposite sexes will be considered as taboo and the ignorant will be penalized. According to Kalliny and Gentry (2007), manifesting intimacy is very much proscribed in communities based on Islamic instructions, and members learn not to express their affection in public. Therefore, most images in Persian spam letters contain the pictures of female or male characters alone or alongside a child (see images 11 & 12).

Image 11. An image of happiness in Persian spam letters



Image 12. An image of happiness in Persian spam letters



One of the main cultural differences manifest in Persian and English spam letters of advertising lies in using the sexuality factor and depicting partial nudity in some advertisements. In contrast to Persian spam, English spam letters contain pictures which intend to hook customers by evoking sex appeal in their advertisements and persuading them to buy the advertised product/service. Image 13 depicts a photo of an old man, seemingly rich, and a young blonde, charming girl exposing part of her body. Alongside the photo, a big catchy phrase is displayed: *Make Your Dreams a Reality!* The English advertiser is conveying the message that if you want something like what is displayed in the picture (something which apparently you dream about!), you should apply for our service.

Image 13. A sex appeal image in English spam



In another example, image 14 is part of an advertisement for laser hair removal. The character in the image is not dressed up and her shoulder is naked in the picture. The picture conveys the message that this young beautiful girl used laser hair removal product and now she looks like a million dollars. On the contrary, Image 15, a Persian spam, is advertising a product which is almost doing the same thing as the laser hair removal product. The girl in the photo seems charming but not in a sexy way. Strict religious restrictions and social norms coerce Persian advertisers into being cautious in the way women are targeted in their advertisements.

Image 14. A sex appeal image in English spam



Image 15. A charming image in Persian spam



In order to compensate for such imposed religious curbs, Persian advertisers resort to a replacement strategy to attract the attention of their potential clients. Deliberately, they exploit the pictures of celebrities in spam letters to convince customers that these celebrities have used and confirmed the advertised product (see image 16). When celebrities are shown in advertisements, they testify to the worth of the product/service. It should be mentioned that, in our data, Western advertisers who usually use the strategy of depicting celebrities in their media to attract consumers hardly used this strategy in their spam. However, further studies are needed to acknowledge or challenge our claim.

Image 16. A celebrity's image in Persian spam letters



## 7.2 Rhetorical Figures and Spam Letters of Advertising

Persian advertisements were longer than English advertisements, contained more words and sentences, and in most cases the number of utilized rhetorical figures in Persian spam letters outweighed English spam. As mentioned above, *Imperative* was the most frequently used rhetorical figure in English spam; on the contrary, *Repetition* outnumbered other figures in Persian spam letters. We believe this skew towards one strategy rather than another reflects the social preferences of the two cultures. In low-context cultures, individuals say exactly what they mean (Ahmed, 2000; Hall, 1976). English spam advertisers asked directly from their audience to do or see something. On the contrary, Persian spam advertisers, who belong to a high-context culture, utilized less *Imperative*. People from high-context culture opt for an indirect communication style. *Imperative* occurs as a result of direct imposition, but *Repetition* occurs as a result of indirect imposition.

The concept of *ta'arof* (an aspect of politeness in Persian) can also account for the lower frequency of *Imperative* in Persian spam. Using polite language arises as a consequence of *ta'arof* to conform to socially agreed codes of conduct. It is considered as a proper behaviour to treat others with regard and respect. Therefore, Iranians try to avoid direct ordering (*Imperative*) in order not to be marked as impolite.

Another figure which was utilized significantly in Persian spam letters is Jargon. A belief which has been formed in the Iranian society is that they think if they use products which are made in Western societies, it will bring social prestige to them, and so part of luxurious life. As Steininger (2013) mentions, Iranians in comparing themselves to Westerners have a deficient conception of self-esteem. Knowing about the deficiency, Persian spam advertisers utilize Jargon to promote foreign brands and persuade their potential customers to purchase the products.

Utilizing figures such as *Rhyme*, *Alliteration*, and *Image* abundantly in Persian spam letters is a reflection of the ancient history of Persian literature and the interest of the Persian people in rhetorics. Persian Literature enjoys great poets, such as Saadi Shirazi, Hafez, and Ferdowsi who abundantly made use of

these rhetorical strategies in their masterpieces. Gully (1996) claims that these figures regularize the pattern of utilizing language in Arabic advertisements. Tahmasbi and Ghorgani (2013) argue that looking historically into Iranian cultural taste and Persian literature reveals that Iranians are interested in rhetorical figures and poetic language.

## **8. Concluding Remarks**

Generally speaking, using a variety of advertisements, lengthier and more rhetorical figures and images than English, Persian advertisers are likely to take the spam section of emails more seriously as a means for advertising their products and services. All kinds of products and services are seen in Persian spam letters, such as jewellery, utensil, clothes, beauty products, watches, perfumes, games, medical services. In English spam, on the other hand, most of the advertisements offer services like banking, insurance, medical treatment, and educational offers. In fact, the distinction in cultural and religious values explains general differences in applying the strategies for the image mode and language mode in the two sets of data. The use of some of the strategies would mean crossing a predefined redline for the Iranians. Both Islamic values and the cultural modesty of Iranians make the employment of some of the strategies impossible for the advertisers.

Despite the differences, the resemblance in using the strategies is the result of globalization which outspreads through different means such as the internet, satellite, etc. As globalization “continues to bring people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds closer together, the default form of communication in everyday life for many people is becoming instances of intercultural communication” (Sharifian, 2013, p. 2). Certainly, the influence of cultural and social values affects the way advertisers use figures for the language mode. Both Persian and English advertisers apply strategies that are more congruent with and harmonious to the cultural values of their audiences in order to be able to persuade them to apply for the advertised products/services. Customers respond more positively to those advertisements which are congruent

with their cultures (Boddewyn, Soehl, & Picard, 1986; Zhang & Gelb, 1996; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007). Advertisers must be vigilant and aware of cultural and religious values of a community if they want to present an effective advertisement and persuade their potential customers; the ignorance of cultural and religious views might even have an adverse effect; customers might feel insulted and consequently decide not to buy the product or service.

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