

# The Woman in the Intercivilizational Reading of the Starbucks Poster from the Perspective of Gérard Genette's Hypertextuality\*

Safieh Hatami<sup>1</sup>, Akram Mohammadizadeh<sup>2\*</sup>, Arezo Khanpour<sup>3</sup>

1. PhD Candidate in Islamic Arts, Faculty of Islamic Handicrafts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran. Email: sa.hatami@tabriziau.ac.ir

2. Corresponding Author, Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Arts, Faculty of Islamic Handicrafts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran. Email: mohammadizadeh@tabriziau.ac.ir

3. Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Arts, Faculty of Islamic Handicrafts, Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran. Email: a.khanpour@tabriziau.ac.ir

## Introduction

The concept of intercivilizational works has risen to significant prominence in artistic analysis and cultural studies in the contemporary era, where intercultural interactions and the conflict of civilizations have become fundamental issues in art and thought. Intercivilizational artworks frequently endeavor to critique, represent, or recreate the identity and value components of various civilizations. The representation of women in Western and Islamic cultures is a prominent topic in this field. The hypertextual aspects of this intercivilizational work are the focus of this article, which aims to analyze a poster designed by Masoud Nejabati, which was inspired by the global Starbucks logo. Starbucks, the world's largest coffeehouse chain, has a logo that was inspired by Siren, a mythological Greek female figure. Starbucks has endeavored to utilize the Siren's beauty, allure, and seductiveness as a representation of its own appeal to consumers (Clark, 2007: 23). Nejabati's work is not merely a visual adaptation; it is a critique of the discourse of dominance and the commodification of women within the Western capitalist system.

Gérard Genette provides a structural and semantic analysis of intertextual relations through his definition of five categories of transtextual relationships, which includes hypertextuality. Today, his theory of hypertextuality is utilized as a research methodology for the examination of latent relationships among a variety of works, with a focus on the concept of derivation between literary and artistic works. The present research is theoretically underpinned by this approach, which analyzes the Starbucks logo as the hypotext and Nejabati's poster as the hypertext. The primary research inquiries are as follows:

1. What semiotic systems are involved in the process of deriving the Starbucks poster from the original logo, and how have they undergone homogeneity or heterogeneity?
2. What are the explicit and implicit, concordant or conflicting meanings associated with the representation of women in the Starbucks logo and its poster version?

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\* **Note:** This article is from the doctoral dissertation of the first author, titled "An Analysis of Posters Derived from Logos in the Last Decade in Iran with a Hypertextuality Approach", conducted under the supervision of the second and third authors at Tabriz Islamic Art University.

By examining the theoretical background in three distinct areas—hypertextuality theory, graphic design, and Starbucks logo analysis—this research demonstrates that no previous study has concentrated on the comparative analysis of hypertextuality in the Starbucks logo with another artistic work, particularly an Iranian art work. Thus, this article is regarded as innovative in terms of its subject matter.

## **Methodology**

Utilizing a descriptive-analytical methodology, the current investigation is a qualitative and fundamental investigation. Semiotic analysis and library studies were implemented to gather the data. The work in question is a design by Masoud Nejabati that was deliberately chosen for analysis because of its explicit derivation from the Starbucks brand logo. First, the primary elements of the two logos (hypotext and hypertext), which encompassed three semiotic systems—verbal, visual, and color—were analyzed separately and presented in comparative tables. These modifications were subsequently explicated and interpreted in the context of Genette's six categories of hypertextuality. Additionally, the quantitative (reduction, addition, substitution) and qualitative types—such as transvaluation, transmotivation, and transcharacterization—are examined within the observed heterogeneities, as well as complementary concepts from narratology.

## **Findings**

Nejabati's hypertext design has witnessed significant semantic transformations in certain semiotic systems in comparison to the original Starbucks logo, according to the research findings.

Color system: Transferred to the hypertext without change, hence indicative of homogeneity.

Verbal system: The Persian translation of "Woman, Slavery, Trade" replaced the English phrase "Starbucks, Coffee," a change that is not only linguistic and cultural but also content-related, representing a heterogeneity of the substitutional type. The popular Iranian slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" serves as an implicit hypotext in this transformation. Thus, the resulting heterogeneity in the text conveys a derogatory and paradoxical perspective, constituting a case of travestissement, as Nejabati's work intentionally criticizes and distorts its hypotext.

Visual system: The hypertext maintains the decorative and formal components (circles, stars) in their original state. However, the central component—the female figure (Siren)—is significantly altered:

- A quantitative heterogeneity of the reductive type (elimination of content) is observed by removing the tails, which replaces the mythical Siren with a contemporary woman figure.
- An additive quantitative change has been effected by the addition of chains to the Siren's wrists.
- A substitutive heterogeneity has been established by modifying the Siren's happy and content facial expression.

These changes lead to transcharacterization (from the mythical Siren to the modern woman), transmotivation (from showcasing beauty and charm to indicating criminal motives), and transvaluation (from positive valorization to anti-heroism and negative valuation) at the conceptual level of the hypertext. These heterogeneities, when viewed through a critical lens, are intended to deconstruct Western ideology and its representation of women, thereby positioning the visual system as a whole under a travestissement-type heterogeneity.

## **Conclusion**

The core concept of the Starbucks logo is the theme of woman, a popular topic in intercivilizational artworks, which Nejabati has appropriated, resulting in an intercivilizational and oppositional artwork. The objective of this investigation was to evaluate the artwork from the perspective of hypertextuality. This framework is of paramount importance in the interpretation and critique of intercivilizational works, in addition to its contribution to their formation. Accordingly, the explicit and implicit meanings, as well as the latent relationships, of Nejabati's work have been clarified in comparison to the work of another culture, which has values that are either opposing or dissimilar. This has resulted in an innovative and distinctive approach that is distinct from other research in this field.

Nejabati's logo may not appear to have been substantially altered at first glance. Nevertheless, it is evident that the heterogeneities that have been introduced have superimposed new implicit meanings—including oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and captivity—over the previous concepts, particularly upon deconstructing its elements and interpreting the latent semantic implications. The Western woman is transformed into a negative, anti-heroic figure as a result of the creation of this hypertext. Additionally, concepts that are traditionally regarded as valuable or even sacrosanct in the Western context, particularly by Starbucks' owners, are completely devalued and transformed into counter-values. This work not only critiques Western slogans but also presents a novel perspective on womanhood that is rooted in the Iranian-Islamic cultural context. This reading underscores the theoretical force and capacity of hypertextuality theory to analyze contemporary graphic productions and dominant discourses. The study recommends future research into hypertextuality in other Iranian graphic works on similar themes and cultural-artistic responses to such works.

## **Conflict of Interest**

This article is derived from the doctoral dissertation of the first author. The authors affirm that they have no conflict of interest with any individual or organization in writing and publishing this material.