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# *Audience and Player Preferences Regarding the Cultural Localization of (Non)Interactive Multimedia Products in Iran*

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## *Abstract*

Existing survey-based user-centric game localization studies lack a detailed approach to audience preferences regarding the cultural aspects of (non)interactive multimedia localization. Thus, the present study seeks to provide an account of the culturalization preferences of the Persian audience in the context of video games and movies. By providing 209 Persian-speaking participants with a 23-item questionnaire based on content subject to modification in video games and movies (religious issues, sociocultural issues, and sociopolitical references), the results showed that the existing culturalization practices in Persian multimedia localization do not align with Persian audience preferences, except in dealing with sociopolitical references made to Iran. Demographic factors such as gender, age, and consumption habits influenced preferences, alongside strong correlations between views on game and movie localization and negative perceptions of censorship's impact on quality. These findings have implications for more informed Persian game localization decisions, both for agencies and for policymakers.

Keywords: Culturalization, audiovisual translation, video games, localization, censorship, interactive media, non-interactive media

## *1 Introduction*

Ensuring the proper acceptance and reception of localized multimedia products in different locales calls for a more refined approach to handling culturally sensitive content, among other factors (Dong and Mangiron 2018). As an important mechanism through which content can be modified to align with the values of the target market, censorship has generally been viewed in a negative light (Ellefsen and Bernal-Merino

2018). Studies addressing the cultural aspects involved in the localization of video games have gained traction in recent years, especially those focusing on the reception of localized products. Crucially in game localization, the traditional notion of linguistic equivalence is challenged, and what stands as “true” or “false” is heavily influenced by the knowledge and insights offered by the final receivers of the product (Fernández Costales 2016).

Such insights are of particular interest in Game Translation User Research (GTUR), which is a participant-oriented strand of research focused on how users of localized products receive localized game versions (Deckert et al. 2024). Of particular interest in this regard is the concept of quality, which can be addressed in terms of factors that can play a pivotal role in positively or negatively affecting player experience in the context of localization.

Given the negative light that is usually associated with censorship, it is one of the factors that could be linked to the perceived low quality of localized video games, especially in a locale such as Iran (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020). Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) addressed the mechanisms through which modifications are made in Persian-localized video games, which were mostly argued to be suboptimal and prone to undermining players’ gameplay experience (e.g., removing game cut-scenes to ensure that culturally sensitive information is removed in the Iranian market).

Such insights raise critical questions regarding whether the utilization of proper culturalization practices would lead to improvements in users’ perceptions of Persian-localized video games or whether the Iranian audience generally leans more heavily toward the original titles. Against this backdrop, and drawing on the identified instances of censorship as a mechanism for the cultural localization of video games by Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) and movies by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022), we attempt to shed light on the reception and perception of the culturalization practices employed by official Iranian game localization companies.

Moreover, users’ preferences regarding these practices are addressed alongside their preferences regarding non-interactive audiovisual products. This is done to ascertain the existence of a possible correlation, or lack thereof, between players’ preferences for video games and their preferences for the consumption of filmic products.

Thus, our study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the preferences of Persian video game players regarding the culturalization practices employed in Persian game localization?
2. What are the preferences of Persian video game players regarding the culturalization practices employed in Persian non-interactive multimedia localization?

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3. Is there an association between video game players' preferences for the culturalization of video games and non-interactive multimedia localization?

## *2 Culture and Censorship in Localization*

The cultural aspects of localization pose great challenges to game localization practitioners. This speaks to the idea that video game translators are required to have a solid background in and grasp of the cultural sensitivities of the locale to which they are translating (Zoraqi and Kafi 2025). Any form of negligence toward the sociocultural values of the target locale can lead to backlash either from state authorization bodies or from the general public.

Closely connected to the cultural values that need to be heeded in the process of localization is the corresponding age rating system (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Rating systems are widely used for labeling media content, especially to give parents an idea of what their children will be exposed to as a result of consuming certain media content (Gentile 2008). Depending on the locale, various rating systems have been developed and are currently employed (e.g., USK in Germany, PEGI in Europe, ESRB in the United States, and ESRA in Iran).

Felini (2015) makes the critical observation that certain age rating systems (PEGI and ESRB in their case) focus more on the negative aspects included in video games (e.g., sex, profanity, discrimination, etc.) than on the positive aspects. Along similar lines, Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) provide a descriptive account of the rating criteria employed in the Iranian rating system, ESRA, and note the lack of clarity in this system with regard to what is considered "inappropriate."

Given such complexities, it should come as no surprise that rating systems are generally ignored by video game players (Hollett et al. 2022) and/or are not clear enough for parents to develop a solid understanding of (Azam 2023).

Such rating systems draw extensively on censorship and cultural gatekeeping practices to ensure that certain content is edited out. Censorship and cultural gatekeeping practices have been explored extensively in the context of audiovisual translation. With regard to Iran, it has been suggested that official Iranian broadcast channels consistently censor and filter out themes such as (non)verbal sexuality, profane language, Christianity-related symbolism and rituals, violence, sensitive political references, and extramarital affairs in Persian dubbing (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2021). However, it has been suggested that the implementation of these practices is applied inconsistently in non-interactive media localization, especially through dubbing (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022).

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Overlaps and lines of analogy can be drawn between themes subject to censorship and filtering across Persian game localization and the localization of non-interactive media such as films. As mentioned previously, religious issues (in the form of ensuring proper dress codes) and sensitive political references consistently constitute sensitive themes in official Persian game localization. However, issues such as foul language and violence are not consistently filtered out in localized game versions in the official Persian market (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024).

In this landscape, censorship is generally frowned upon in the context of game localization. Part of this can be explained by the practices employed by game localization companies to achieve this aim. In the Persian context, Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) have suggested that Persian game localization companies tend to expunge traces of inappropriate dress codes for female characters, references to alcohol, foul language, and sociopolitical references through a variety of channels, including removing cut-scenes, applying graphical changes, and silencing the soundtrack. Such “clumsy” practices for making products sellable in the target locale could lead to pessimism toward the practice of game localization, depending on the norms of the recipient context.

### *3 User-centric Studies in Game Localization*

The history of user-centric game localization studies can be traced back to the late 2000s, with O’Hagan (2009) setting out to assess the impact of embedded cultural assumptions in game design in the context of localization from the viewpoint of a single participant. Using the player’s trajectory and hand movements, along with think-aloud protocols, post-task interviews, and player logs, she highlighted the importance of addressing the cultural assumptions underpinning original game designs during the process of localization. This study proved insightful in that it revealed the determining role of game design in player experience. However, this work was significantly limited by the fact that it employed only one participant.

O’Hagan (2016) conducted a follow-up, larger-scale study using an eye tracker and galvanic skin response by recruiting 21 participants with three different native languages. This cross-cultural study did not point to any significant differences in players’ experiences. Other cognition-based user-centric studies have primarily been concerned with accessibility in game localization (e.g., Mangiron 2016; Larreina and Mangiron 2025; Oliva-Zamora and Mangiron 2025).

Perception-based user-centric studies have been an especially fruitful area of investigation, as they have helped reveal some of the major areas that call for more robust empirical analysis on the one hand, and how currently localized game titles are perceived by target users across different locales on the other (Ellefsen and Bernal-

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Merino 2018; Kudła 2021; Fernández Costales 2016). One of the first such scholarly endeavors was that of Geurts (2015), who addressed the preferences of Dutch gamers using an online questionnaire. One of the major findings of the study concerns the idea that Dutch gamers were mostly optimistic about the increasing number of video games being localized into Dutch, a sentiment that may not be common among gaming communities across different locales.

In a similar perception-based study, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2020) studied Persian players' perceptions of game titles localized into Persian. Drawing on the findings of questionnaires, they revealed that Iranian players tended to favor titles that maintained the cultural flavor of the original and were inclined to support the localization of more titles into Persian. Yet, players' perceptions of currently localized Persian game titles were not very positive when it came to localization quality, mostly due to censorship (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020, p. 201).

Having highlighted some of the most relevant insights generated so far in GTUR, we seek to advance our knowledge of how Persian players' perceptions of cultural localization in video games can shape their understanding of game localization quality and the levels and mechanisms of modification considered acceptable from their perspective.

## *4 Method*

This is a quantitative, survey-based study that was prepared and distributed online through Qualtrics via relevant gaming channels on Telegram in Iran.

The questionnaire on players' cultural game localization preferences was developed to collect the data required to answer the research questions addressed in the present study. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section was directed at collecting respondents' demographic information and addressed age, gender, weekly playtime of (non)localized video games, and weekly watch time of movies and films (4 items).

The second section was concerned with capturing players' preferences regarding the cultural localization practices of video games and movies. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings of Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) regarding the cultural localization practices currently employed in the Persian game localization market. Additionally, the study by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022) regarding the censorship practices applied in the Persian context for the cultural localization of multimedia products was also drawn upon.

Given our focus on cultural localization in the fields of video games and movies, these two studies provided a kaleidoscopic view of how cultural localization is carried out in

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(non)interactive multimedia materials. In this respect, the second section of the questionnaire consisted of 14 items focused on modifications revolving around dress codes, sexual acts, references to alcohol, violence, dancing (by women), foul language, and negative references to Iran in both video games and movies.

Additionally, a third section was included to account for the role of age ratings, the quality of cultural localization (i.e., whether censorship and modifications are carried out overtly or covertly), and respondents' perceptions of how censorship can impact the quality of localization (5 items).

As already mentioned, the questionnaire was distributed through relevant gaming channels on Telegram in Iran, and the choice of Telegram as the primary platform was due to the fact that it is the most widely used messaging application in Iran (Dursun 2017). The questionnaire was available from May 2, 2024, to November 5, 2024.

The aims and interests of the study were explicitly stated at the beginning of the questionnaire, and participants were required to declare their consent to participate in the study. Additionally, they were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that they were free to leave the questionnaire at any stage. They were also informed that their information would be kept confidential.

The face validity of the questionnaire was ensured by conducting a pilot survey with 10 potential participants (whose responses were not included in the final analysis). Through this pilot testing, 2 items were excluded based on the feedback received from the initial participants. In terms of content validity, two experts in the field of audiovisual translation (one specializing in Persian audiovisual translation and one in a non-Persian context) were consulted. Based on the feedback received, 5 additional items were excluded on the grounds of potential overlap with other items. Eventually, another phase of pilot testing was conducted with 10 more participants to ensure that the questionnaire had acceptable face validity (these responses were included in the final analysis).

The analysis was primarily carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics. Regarding the latter, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to perform cross-group comparisons, as this non-parametric approach is suitable for skewed survey data and small subgroups, avoiding parametric assumptions such as normality while detecting significant differences.

## 4.1 Participants

A total of 238 responses were collected, but 29 responses were discarded due to incompleteness, suspension for patterned answers, or straight-lining (i.e., choosing the same answer for a number of consecutive questionnaire items). For the identification

of such cases, the quality check mechanisms of Qualtrics were relied upon, through which responses that met the abovementioned criteria were flagged. Eventually, 209 responses were retained, the descriptive information for which is provided in Table 1.

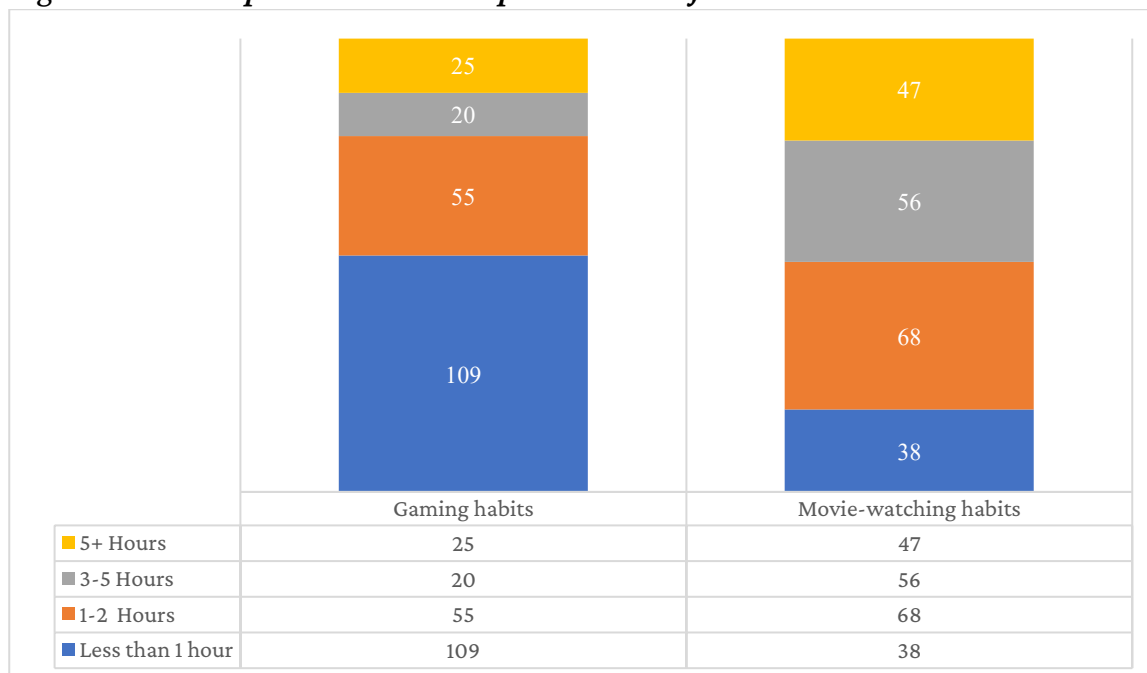
Table 1. *The Age and Gender Distribution of the Participants.*

Age range	No.	Gender	No.
18–19	106	Male	51
20–29	82	Female	153
30–39	18	Prefer not to say	5
40–49	1		
50–59	2		

Further lines of differentiation can be drawn between non-players (less than 1 hour of playtime weekly), casual players (between 1 and 5 hours of playtime weekly), and hardcore players (more than 5 hours of playtime weekly). The same differentiation can be made with regard to movie-watching habits: non-movie consumers (less than 1 hour of watch time weekly), casual movie consumers (1–5 hours of watch time weekly), and hardcore movie consumers (more than 5 hours of watch time weekly).

The frequency of each of these groups of respondents is provided in Figure 1, along with their consumption habits as movie watchers.

Figure 1. *The Respondents' Consumption Habits of Video Games versus Movies.*



As shown in Figure 1, the majority of respondents reported playing video games for less than 1 hour per week ( $n = 109$ ), followed by 1–2 hours ( $n = 55$ ), 3–5 hours ( $n = 20$ ), and more than 5 hours ( $n = 25$ ). With regard to movie consumption habits, the majority of respondents reported watching movies for 1–2 hours per week ( $n = 68$ ), followed by 3–5 hours ( $n = 56$ ), more than 5 hours ( $n = 47$ ), and less than 1 hour ( $n = 38$ ). Accordingly, the gap between individuals engaging with video games for shorter periods per week and those who play for longer periods is more pronounced, while the same cannot be said for movie-watching habits.

To gain deeper insights in this regard, players were asked whether they had experience playing Persian-localized video games. The relevant details are provided in Figure 2.

The number of respondents with experience playing Persian-localized video games (50%) was almost equal to those who did not have such experience (50%). To gain deeper insights into players' gaming habits and their experience with Persian-localized video games, it was revealed that of the total 113 respondents who played video games for less than one hour per week, almost half of them (48.3%) had played Persian-localized video games, while slightly more than half (51.7%) had not.

Gathering insights from participants with such a diverse range of consumption habits could help develop insights into how players expect Persian-localized video games to appear (through the perspectives of players who had not played Persian-localized video games) and how players have received the products of official Persian game localization.

Having outlined the demographic profile of the participants taking part in our study, we now move on to present the results regarding participants' preferences toward the various dimensions of cultural localization practices in (non)interactive multimedia materials.

## ***5 Results***

This section presents the results of our study regarding the experiences of video game players and consumers of non-interactive multimedia products with respect to the various dimensions of cultural localization into Persian.

### **5.1 Culturalization Preferences**

This section of the questionnaire focused on how Iranian (non)players' preferences were shaped with regard to the handling of social, political, and cultural considerations. Therefore, religious issues, sociocultural issues, and sociopolitical issues are addressed here.

## 5.1.1 Religious issues

In this category, the focus was on how players and movie-watchers preferred the tackling of religious issues in Persian-localized products. Accordingly, the items revolved around dress codes, intimate relationships between characters, alcohol, and women’s dancing.

### 5.1.1.1 Dress codes

The category of dress code concerns the extent to which consumers of Persian-localized video games and movies would prefer the clothing styles of characters to be modified to align with Iranian-Islamic values. Table 2 provides the respective descriptive statistics.

Table 2. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Dress Codes in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
1) Dress codes should undergo modifications in localized video games.	37.8%	24.4%	24.9%	9.1%	3.8%
2) Dress codes should undergo modifications in localized movies.	41.1%	25.8%	22%	7.2%	3.8%

CD: Completely Disagree; D: Disagree; U: Undecided; A: Agree; CA: Completely Agree

As observed in Table 2, participants’ preferences regarding the various dimensions of religious issues in the process of cultural localization are approximately similar when it comes to (non)interactive multimedia products. Regarding the first aspect, that is, the modification of dress codes to ensure alignment with Iranian-Islamic values, the majority of participants (completely) disagreed with dress codes undergoing any sort of modification (62.2% for video games and 66.9% for movies).

To better interpret these findings, a Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to identify any differences between male and female users’ preferences. Accordingly, significant differences existed between users’ gender and their preferences regarding characters’ dress codes and clothing ( $H = 10.522, p < .05$ ). Female respondents were more lenient toward the modification of source dress codes in video games ( $M = 2.32$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.23$ ), while male respondents showed a greater preference for the maintenance of such items in localized games ( $M = 1.67$ ) and movies ( $M = 1.59$ ). These insights contribute to the longstanding discussion about female characters being designed to please the male audience as “eye candy” in the male-dominant gaming market (Downs and Smith 2010; Malkowski and Russworm 2017).

Speaking in terms of age, statistically significant differences were found between participants' age and their preferences for dress code modifications in video games ( $H = 10.132, p = 0.038$ ). However, based on the values yielded by the Kruskal–Wallis test, the same cannot be said for users' preferences in this regard in movies ( $H = 11.763, p = 0.019$ ). The results of the pairwise comparison revealed this difference to occur between participants aged 18–19 and those in their twenties ( $H = 18.244, p = 0.033$ ). Participants between 20 and 29 years of age did not show much support for the modification of source-culture dress codes in video games ( $M = 1.99$ ) and movies ( $M = 1.87$ ). By contrast, the younger age group expressed less leniency toward the lack of modification of such content in video games ( $M = 2.42$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.32$ ).

### 5.1.1.2 Intimate inter-character relationships

The focus here is on how the displays of affection or intimate physical contact (e.g., kissing, hugging, etc.) should be handled throughout the process of cultural localization. The relevant descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Intimate Inter-Character Relationships in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
3) Display of affection or physical contact should undergo modifications in localized video games.	22%	14.8%	26.3%	23.4%	13.4%
4) Display of affection or physical contact should undergo modifications in localized movies.	24.4%	19.6%	24.4%	19.1%	12.4%

According to Table 3, participants' views in this regard were almost identical across both media. Almost one-third of participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the censoring of intimate physical contact in video games (36.8%), while almost half of the participants held the same opinion regarding movies (44%). Conversely, 36.8% of participants (strongly) agreed with censoring such content in video games, compared to 31.5% in movies. Over a quarter (26.3%) were undecided in the case of video games, and slightly under a quarter (24.4%) were undecided in the case of movies.

To gain deeper insights, we factored in the variables of age and gender to account for To gain deeper insights, we considered the variables of age and gender to account for any potential differences across groups. Based on the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test, statistically significant differences existed between the two gender groups in terms of how they would prefer the handling of scenes containing intimate relationships

between characters in video games ( $H = 20.061, p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 22.001, p = 0.001$ ). Female participants showed a greater preference for the exclusion of scenes containing sexual intimacy in video games ( $M = 3.17$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.02$ ), whereas male respondents were more lenient toward the preservation of such material in video games ( $M = 2.20$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.00$ ). This polarizing perspective reflects how men and women tend to react differently to visual sexual stimuli, with men generally being more prone to respond to such stimuli (Rupp and Wallen 2008).

In terms of age differences, significant differences were found regarding respondents' preferences in video games ( $H = 11.644, p = 0.020$ ) and movies ( $H = 18.153, p = 0.001$ ). Based on the results of the pairwise comparisons test, this significant difference was observed between participants aged 18–19 and those aged 20–29. The younger age group showed a greater preference for censoring such material in video games ( $M = 3.16$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.08$ ), whereas the older age group was less supportive of this practice in video games ( $M = 2.65$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.38$ ).

In terms of players' experience, significant differences were observed regarding preferences for the display of affectionate contact in video games ( $H = 10.984, p = 0.012$ ). Drawing on pairwise comparisons, nonplayers and hardcore players differed significantly in this respect ( $H = 40.570, p = 0.002$ ). Nonplayers mostly preferred such content to be filtered out from video games ( $M = 3.12$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.88$ ). However, hardcore players were less supportive of such practices in video games ( $M = 2.20$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.24$ ).

This may indicate that hardcore players develop stronger consumption habits regarding (localized) video games due to prolonged exposure to certain types of content, while their comparatively lower exposure to movies may result in less established attitudes in that domain. In other words, it could be argued that players do not necessarily transfer their expectations from gaming contexts to non-gaming contexts.

This interpretation is further supported by the fact that significant differences also emerged as a result of respondents' movie consumption habits and their perspectives regarding the modification of such content in video games ( $H = 18.184, p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 27.617, p = 0.001$ ). In the context of video games, these significant differences occurred between the preferences of hardcore movie watchers and casual watchers ( $H = 37.895, p = 0.001$ ), as well as between hardcore watchers and non-watchers ( $H = 50.945, p = 0.001$ ).

Regarding movies, in addition to differences between hardcore movie watchers and non-watchers ( $H = 63.580, p = 0.001$ ) and between hardcore movie watchers and casual watchers ( $H = 45.849, p = 0.001$ ), differences were also observed between regular watchers (3–5 hours) and hardcore watchers ( $H = 35.937, p = 0.002$ ). Hardcore movie

watchers were generally in favor of maintaining the depiction of affectionate contact in video games ( $M = 2.23$ ), though less so in movies ( $M = 1.96$ ). By contrast, casual watchers were more supportive of modifying such content in video games ( $M = 3.12$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.00$ ), while regular watchers were somewhat less supportive of removing such scenes in video games ( $M = 2.94$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.73$ ).

Although interesting, this finding should not be surprising, as casual movie watchers may not be exposed to movies or video games long enough to develop strong preferences regarding each aspect of cultural localization. However, this calls for further analysis, which will be complemented by analyses of the upcoming issues below, as well as correlational analyses.

### 5.1.1.3 References to alcohol

In this category, the participants' views regarding the depiction of alcohol in video games and movies was addressed. The descriptive information for this category is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Alcohol in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
5) References to alcohol should undergo modifications in localized video games	33.5%	19.6%	23.4%	14.8%	8.6%
6) References to alcohol should undergo modifications in localized movies.	34.4%	21.1%	23%	13.4%	8.1%

As shown in Table 4, over half of the respondents were (strongly) against the modification of references to alcohol in video games (53.1%) and movies (55.5%). Around a quarter of the participants did not have a clear opinion on the matter in the case of video games (23.4%) and movies (23%).

In this regard, significant differences existed between female and male respondents for video games ( $H = 24.643$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 23.371$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Female respondents were mostly in favor of filtering out references to alcohol in video games ( $M = 2.71$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.63$ ), while male respondents did not share the same opinion in video games ( $M = 1.75$ ) and movies ( $M = 1.73$ ).

Significant differences were also observed between participants in terms of age in the case of video games ( $H = 19.249$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 24.164$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Drawing

on the results of the post hoc test, the differences occurred between participants in the age ranges of 18–19 and 20–29 in video games ( $H = 31.467, p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 34.634, p = 0.001$ ). In the case of movies, in addition to the aforementioned age groups, differences were also observed between individuals aged 18–19 and those aged 30–39 ( $H = 43.101, p = 0.004$ ).

Based on the results, the youngest age group was more lenient toward censoring alcoholic content in video games and movies ( $M = 2.79$  and  $M = 2.78$ , respectively). This preference was observed to a lesser extent among participants aged 20–29 ( $M = 2.10$  and  $M = 2.00$ , respectively). Among participants aged 30–39 ( $M = 2.06$  and  $M = 1.83$ ), preferences were largely in line with those of participants in their twenties ( $M = 2.11$  and  $M = 2.02$ ). This additional difference in the case of alcoholic depiction could be explained by the fact that, in our study, older age groups were more inclined to watch movies than to play video games.

#### 5.1.1.4 Female dance

Dancing is another theme that is subject to strict censorship in the Persian (interactive) media. The descriptive statistics of the participants' responses are provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Female Dance in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
7) Female dancing scenes should undergo modifications in localized video games.	42.6%	17.2%	29.7%	6.7%	3.8%
8) Female dancing scenes should undergo modifications in localized movies.	45%	21.1%	23.4%	6.7%	3.8%

In this category, we focused particularly on female dancing themes because they have been suggested to be subject to strict modification in the process of media localization (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022). Interesting insights were gained in this regard. To be precise, more than half of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of female dancing scenes in video games (59.8%) and movies (66.1%). Slightly less than a quarter of the participants were undecided in this regard in the case of video games (29.7%), and almost one-fourth held a similar opinion in the case of movies (23.4%).

Analyzing these figures further, the Kruskal–Wallis test revealed interesting differences across groups in terms of age for video games ( $H = 15.891, p = 0.003$ ) and movies ( $H =$

15.429,  $p = 0.004$ ). In video games, these differences occurred between participants aged 18–19 and 20–29 ( $H = 22.589, p = 0.007$ ) and between participants aged 18–19 and 30–39 ( $H = 42.104, p = 0.004$ ). The mean score of participants aged 18–19 ( $M = 2.37$ ) was higher than that of participants aged 20–29 ( $M = 1.94$ ) and those aged 30–39 ( $M = 1.56$ ). Similarly, in the case of movies, a comparable hierarchy of mean scores was observed (18–19:  $M = 2.28$ ; 20–29:  $M = 1.84$ ; 30–39:  $M = 1.50$ ). Accordingly, participants aged 30–39 generally preferred that no modifications be made in this regard in video games, followed by those aged 20–29 and those aged 18–19.

Participants' gender also affected their preferences regarding the depiction of female dancing in video games ( $H = 14.056, p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 10.047, p = 0.007$ ). For male respondents, a mean score of 1.59 was calculated for both video games and movies. However, these scores were calculated as 2.13 and 2.27 for female respondents, respectively. In other words, male participants were more in favor of retaining scenes involving female dancing in video games compared with female respondents.

Participants' gaming background was not found to affect their preferences regarding the depiction of female dancing scenes in video games and movies.

## 5.1.2 Socio-cultural Issues

This category was concerned with how players and movie-watchers preferred the handling of sociocultural issues in Persian-localized products. Accordingly, the items revolved around the treatment of violence and foul language.

### 5.1.2.1 Violence

The depiction of violence in video games and movies is a controversial topic (Shao and Wang, 2019). Here, our focus is on how (non)players view the depiction of violence in video games and movies. The overall descriptive statistics in this regard are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Violent Content in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
9) Violent content undergo modifications in localized video games	25.4%	15.8%	20.6%	27.8%	10.5%
10) Violent content should undergo modifications in localized movies.	25.4%	20.6%	17.2%	26.8%	10%

In the case of video games, the majority of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with (41.2%), and a bit less than a quarter of the participants were undecided on the topic (20.6%). Regarding movies, this proportion of (strong) disagreement was even more pronounced (46%), while 36.8% of the respondents (strongly) agreed with such modification. To further break down these numbers, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences across age groups in video games ( $H = 17.537$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) and movies ( $H = 17.192$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). More specifically, the post-hoc test revealed this difference to lie between the 18–19 and 20–29 age groups. The younger age group was more in favor of modifying the violent content in video games ( $M = 3.08$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.06$ ) compared to the older age group ( $M = 2.44$ ;  $M = 2.35$ , respectively).

Similarly, significant differences were observed between male and female participants in video games ( $H = 39.463$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 34.477$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). A staggering percentage of male respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of violent content in video games (76.5%) ( $M = 1.86$ ) and movies (76.8%) ( $M = 1.88$ ); a minority of the respondents (strongly) agreed with such modifications in each case (15.7%). Female respondents evinced more or less the opposite pattern in that opinions were split in this regard. Almost half of the respondents (46.4% in video games and 45.1% in movies) favored such modifications in video games ( $M = 3.16$ ), and the same could be said for movies ( $M = 3.07$ ).

Significant differences also held in terms of gaming experience for violence in video games ( $H = 16.642$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 13.363$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The significant differences were established between non-players and hardcore players in video games ( $H = 42.574$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 43.627$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). More interestingly, significant differences were also revealed between non-players and regular players ( $H = 42.469$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ).

### 5.1.2.2 Foul Language

The improper treatment of foul language in the context of movies (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022) and video games (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024) was the reason for the inclusion of this category in the questionnaire. The overall descriptive statistics are provided in Table 7.

Table 7. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Foul Language in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
11) Foul language should undergo modifications in localized video games.	20.6%	17.2%	18.7%	26.8%	16.7%

12) Foul language should undergo modifications in localized movies.	23.4%	21.1%	18.2%	23%	14.4%
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Unlike the previous cases, in the case of foul language in video games, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the modification of such language (37.8%), whereas almost half of the respondents held the opposite view (43.5%). As for movies, however, the opinions were somewhat different in that almost half of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with any such modification (44.5%), and a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the matter (37.4%).

Significant differences arose in this regard between participants aged 18–19 and 20–29 in video games ( $H = 24.771, p = 0.005$ ) and movies ( $H = 24.617, p = 0.005$ ). While 18–19-year-olds were more in favor of having the foul language modified in video games ( $M = 3.28$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.09$ ), this preference was much less pronounced among 20–29-year-olds for video games ( $M = 2.72$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.55$ ).

In terms of gender, significant differences existed between the two groups for video games ( $H = 31.879, p = 0.001$ ) and movies ( $H = 26.594, p = 0.001$ ). Female respondents were more in favor of having foul language modified in video games ( $M = 3.35$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.12$ ), whereas this preference was much less pronounced among male respondents for video games ( $M = 2.06$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.02$ ).

Players' gaming background was revealed to modulate players' preferences in this regard for both video games ( $H = 14.516, p = 0.002$ ) and movies ( $H = 13.316, p = 0.004$ ). For both video games and movies, the difference was observed between non-players and hardcore players ( $H = 45.001, p = 0.001$ ) and ( $H = 44.501, p = 0.001$ ), respectively. Non-players mostly favored the modification of foul language in video games ( $M = 3.31$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.08$ ), while hardcore gamers argued against such modifications ( $M = 2.24$  and  $M = 2.04$ , respectively).

### 5.1.3 Socio-political References

Socio-political references concern how politically sensitive issues are handled in the cultural localization of (interactive) multimedia products. Thus, we specifically focused on how positive and negative references to Iran should be handled in the localization of video games and movies.

#### 5.1.3.1 Negative References to Iran

Negative meta-references to Iran have to do with how negative references or mentions to Iran have to be treated during localization. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 8 below.

Table 8. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Negative Political References to Iran in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
13) Negative references to Iran should undergo modifications in localized video games.	17.7%	17.7%	20.6%	27.8%	16.3%
14) Negative references to Iran undergo modifications in localized movies.	17.7%	18.2%	24.9%	24.9%	14.4%

According to Table 8, rather polarizing responses were expressed regarding the handling of meta-referential material related to Iran. In video games, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of negative references to Iran (35.4%), while almost half of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the modification of such references (44.1%). Regarding movies, similarly, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) opposed the application of any such modifications (35.9%), whereas 39.3% of the respondents held a (strongly) agreeing view.

In terms of age, significant differences were observed between participants aged 18–19 and those aged 20–29 ( $H = 35.867, p = 0.001$ ) for the localization of video games. Similarly, for movies, significant differences were revealed between the same age groups ( $H = 36.582, p = 0.001$ ) and between 18–19-year-olds and 30–39-year-olds ( $H = 49.222, p = 0.001$ ). Participants aged 18–19 were more in favor of modifying the negative references made to Iran in video games ( $M = 3.44$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.339$ ). Yet, participants aged 20–29 were against such modifications ( $M = 2.65$  and  $M = 2.60$ , respectively). As for the 30–39-year-olds, they almost shared the same opinion as the 20–29-year-olds for the case of video games ( $M = 2.78$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.39$ ).

Gender was also revealed to be influential in this regard ( $H = 17.884, p = 0.001$ ). Female respondents were more lenient toward a modifying approach for video games ( $M = 3.32$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.25$ ) compared to males ( $M = 2.45$  and  $M = 2.35$ , respectively).

No significant differences were observed between (non)players of different calibers in either movies or video games.

## 5.2 Localization Consumption Behavior

The second section of the questionnaire was directed at gaining insights into how consumer behavior is shaped around the localization practices and preferences revealed in the present study. This section encompassed such areas as age ratings, proper culturalization attitudes, and quality perceptions.

### 5.2.1 Age Rating

As already mentioned, the age rating system used in Iran is ESRA. Participants were required to provide information regarding how heedful they are of the age rating of video games prior to making their purchase (or free download). Note that only the age ratings of video games were taken into account, since movies are not distributed with explicit age ratings on Iranian streaming platforms (e.g., Filimo). The majority of the participants (62.6%) were considerate of the age ratings assigned to localized video games prior to their consumption of the product, while only 15.3% disregarded such information. No significant differences were observed in terms of age and gaming habits. In terms of gender, where significant differences were observed ( $H = 11.782, p = 0.003$ ), female respondents were suggested to be more heedful of such information ( $M = 3.81$ ) compared to male respondents ( $M = 3.14$ ).

### 5.2.2 Proper Censorship Attitudes

Proper censorship here means if the cultural aspects of localization are carried out neatly and covertly in a way that users would not recognize the potential occurrence of any modifications. Table 9 provides the respective descriptive statistics.

Table 9. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Proper Censorship Attitudes in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
15) I would play video games that are properly censored.	18.2%	14.4%	34.4%	27.3%	5.7%
16) I would watch movies that are properly censored.	26.8%	19.6%	26.3%	22.5%	4.8%

In this regard, over one-third of the respondents were undecided regarding video games (34.4%). A bit less than one-third (strongly) disagreed with the consumption of covertly censored video games (32.6%), while another one-third expressed support for properly culturalized video games. Regarding movies, around half of the respondents argued against the consumption of products that are even properly culturalized (46.4%), while 27.3% expressed a preference for the consumption of such products. No significant differences were observed between participants in terms of age.

In terms of gender, it was revealed that significant differences existed between male and female respondents for video games ( $H = 12.893, p = 0.002$ ) and movies ( $H = 7.378, p = 0.025$ ). While male respondents were more negative regarding the consumption of properly culturalized video games ( $M = 2.35$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.72$ ), female

respondents expressed a more positive attitude in this regard for video games ( $M = 3.06$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.74$ ).

We also found players' gaming habits to be impactful on how they view properly culturalized video games ( $H = 13.399$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Non-players and hardcore players differed significantly in this regard ( $H = 44.469$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Non-players were more positive regarding the consumption of properly culturalized video games ( $M = 3.04$ ) and movies ( $M = 2.69$ ) compared to hardcore players ( $M = 2.08$  and  $M = 2.04$ , respectively).

### 5.2.3 Quality Perceptions

Lastly, we were interested in how users' quality perceptions are affected by censorship and culturalization practices. In this vein, we concluded our questionnaire with two items addressing this issue, the descriptive information for which is provided in Table 10.

Table 10. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Quality Perceptions in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
17) In my opinion, censorship negatively affects the quality of localized video games.	3.3%	14.8%	27.3%	26.8%	27.8%
18) In my opinion, censorship negatively affects the quality of localized movies	4.3%	11.5%	23%	25.8%	35.4%

Per Table 10, it could be concluded that the majority of the respondents viewed censorship negatively in video games (54.6%) and even more so in movies (61.2%). Only a very small percentage of the respondents viewed censorship positively. This unanimously negative view is reflected in the absence of any significant differences across different age groups and gaming profiles. However, significant differences were established between participants with different gender profiles ( $H = 22.714$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Overall, female respondents had a more positive perception of the interplay between quality and censorship in video games ( $M = 3.39$ ) and movies ( $M = 3.55$ ) compared to men ( $M = 4.18$  and  $M = 4.29$ , respectively), although, as evident, neither of the two groups perceived censorship in a positive light.

### 5.3 Correlations between Players' [Interactive] Multimedia Products

In an attempt to answer the final research question, we conducted Spearman's correlational analysis to identify potential correlations between (non)players' culturalization preferences regarding (interactive) multimedia products. The results of Spearman's correlational analysis are provided in Table 11.

Table 11. *Spearman's Correlational Analysis Results.*

Item	GLP	MP
GLP	---	.960**
MP		---

\*\*  $p < .01$ . GLP: Game localization preferences; MP: Movie preferences

Per Table 11, it was revealed that strong correlations between the participants' game localization preferences and their preferences for how non-interactive multimedia products need to be handled. In other words, we revealed that, in the case of our research, participants tend to transfer their preferences in one digital milieu to another.

## 6 Discussion

The concern of the present study was to identify Persian-speaking players' preferences regarding the cultural localization of video games. Additionally, we sought to explore possible correlations between players' culturalization preferences in the context of video games and movies. Drawing on the data gathered from a total sample of 209 Persian consumers of (non)interactive digital products, insights were obtained regarding (non)players' culturalization preferences in terms of religious issues (dress codes, inter-character intimacy, alcoholic references, and female dance), socio-cultural issues (violence and foul language), and socio-political references (meta-references to Iran).

Our findings most notably point to the impact of gender differences on how (non)players' preferences are shaped with respect to the culturalization practices employed for the localization of (non)interactive multimedia content. In general, female respondents evinced a more conservative approach regarding the depiction of female dress codes and dancing, inter-character intimacy, and alcoholic content. These findings point to the established conservative nature of women regardless of their religious beliefs (Mercer and Kohn 1979). The idea that religious beliefs might not fully account for female sexual conservatism points to the possible role of sexual disgust (Kubinski et al. 2018), which is suggested to impact vocational and affective decisions (Al-Shawaf et al. 2018).

Having touched upon the potential impact of gender differences in culturalization, we also provided evidence for the role of age-group differences. Notably, there were differences between dress-code and inter-character intimacy preferences across the age groups of 18–19 and 20–29 in non-interactive contexts. These differences could be accounted for by the more pronounced role of religiosity among adolescents compared to older age groups (Aalsma et al. 2013). Additionally, these differences could be approached more carefully given the greater exposure of Iranian players aged 20–29 to video games. Indeed, as published in the latest report of the Digital Games Research Center of Iran (DIREC), the average age of video game players in Iran is 23 years (DIREC 2021). Thus, having more experience interacting with video games could contribute to the formation of more refined preferences regarding the culturalization practices employed in video games.

Similarly, the same gender differences were observed between men and women in terms of the depiction of alcohol. As a country with strict measures against alcohol consumption, it should come as no surprise that female participants preferred the filtering out of alcoholic depictions. This could also be approached from the perspective that women tend to be less liberal in their approach toward alcohol consumption, as evidenced in a case study in Poland (Podstawski et al. 2019).

One of the areas where content modification was more favored by the participants had to do with foul language. This could be explained by the fact that foul language is generally considered inappropriate in the cultural and religious values of Iran (Floor 2015). Yet, our results point to significant differences in this respect across different age and gender groups. Most notably, the stronger preference of female participants for the modification of foul language usage could be attributed to the idea that men tend to resort to foul language and exhibit aggressive behaviors more often than women (Güvendir 2015).

Lastly in this regard, we addressed socio-political references concerning whether negative references to Iran should be censored. This category suggested some alignment between the actual culturalization practices that are in place for movies and video games (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022; Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024), where the majority of the participants were in favor of modifying negative representations and mentions of Iran.

The last point of interest in our research lay in how the consumption of Persian culturally localized products is shaped by such culturally embedded considerations as local rating systems (ESRA in our case). Our findings point to the fact that Persian audiences tend to rely more on the age ratings assigned to localized video games and movies. This is not in line with the preferences of users in other locales (e.g., Australia),

where it has been suggested that they tend to rely more on fan communities and Twitch streams to obtain the information they need.

The relatively high number of undecided responses (20–30% across items such as dress codes, violence, and dancing) likely reflects participants' ambivalence toward complex cultural localization issues, where personal media habits clash with normative expectations, rather than indifference. This is particularly true among casual consumers lacking firm stances. This indecision underscores nuanced preferences and warrants future qualitative exploration in GTUR.

As it stands with the current culturalization practices in video games, where enjoyment is suggested to occupy a secondary position to rapid market release in the Persian market (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024), we provided evidence for how the existing practices have led to distrust among users. In this vein, there were apathetic attitudes toward proper culturalization and negative quality perceptions regarding the use of censorship as a mechanism for ensuring cultural suitability. This suggests that while certain modifications are welcomed by users (e.g., socio-political references), others are not considered equally favorable (e.g., religious issues).

It is worth mentioning that the perceptions of the participants in our study must be viewed in terms of a scale and not as absolute values. Furthermore, our findings are not generalizable, and further large-scale studies adopting a more detailed approach to the various constructs introduced in this research are required. Disproportionate response rates, primarily from females (73%) and younger participants (18–29 years: 90%), along with the low number of hardcore gamers (12%), may limit generalizability to broader Persian media consumers, potentially skewing findings toward more conservative preferences regarding censorship.

## *7 Conclusion*

The present study was an attempt to understand Persian audiences' preferences regarding the culturalization practices of (non)interactive multimedia products. Additionally, we sought to address the interplay between censorship as a mechanism for ensuring cultural suitability and quality perceptions among Persian audiences. Our findings highlight a lack of agreement between existing culturalization practices and audience preferences. Additionally, we highlighted the importance of a more nuanced approach to user profiles, as gender, age, and experience levels were revealed to introduce different opinions in certain regards. The importance of this consideration is further emphasized given the existing correlations between audience preferences in the context of video games and movies. Thus, our study provides both practical and pedagogical implications for the localization market by offering insights into the role of demographic variables as well as the particular socio-cultural contexts in which the

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task of multimedia localization is carried out (in our case, Iran). Additionally, such user-oriented perspectives gained in our study could complement other studies (e.g., Tondello et al. 2018) addressing the role of user preferences in shaping gaming experiences.

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