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The role of mundane and subtle institutional work in market dynamics: a case of fashion clothing market

Abstract

Research on market dynamics shows that markets (trans)form through the institutional work of a wide range of actors. This literature, however, focuses on resourceful and/or powerful actors who can freely and openly shape the market. Via an inductive analysis of the Iranian female fashion clothing market, we examine the institutional work undertaken by actors who have limited resources and are subject to power structures that constrain their institutional work. We find that consumers, designers, retailers, and social activists engage in ambidextrous practices, secure networks, and stealthy defiance to navigate or moderate their institutional restrictions. Such work contributes to the relaxation of some state regulations and the coexistence of parallel taste structures. The study draws attention to mundane, subtle, and less visible and organized institutional work and extends knowledge on marketplace resistance by showing that everyday acts of resistance can function as unintentional institutional work that contributes to market dynamics.

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1. Introduction

How do markets emerge and change over time? What actors, actions, and processes underlie such evolutions? To date, and under the banner of market dynamics, a large number of scholars have resorted to institutional theory to address these questions (see Chaney, Ben Slimane & Humphreys, 2016; Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Studies show that markets change through the institutional work undertaken by a wide range of actors (e.g., marketers, consumers, activists, technologists, legislators, financiers, and the media). While some markets develop through actors' collaborative efforts (e.g., Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), others evolve through contestations among actors (e.g., Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008, 2012; Kjeldgaard, Askegaard, Rasmussen, & Østergaard, 2017; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Weijo, Martin, & Arnould, 2018). The latter stream's emphasis on conflict resonates with the conception of the market as a contentious site wherein power is both challenged and reproduced (Holt, 2002; Jafari & Goulding, 2008, 2013; Kozinets, 2002; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Saren, Parsons, & Goulding, 2019; Thompson, 2004). That is, actors can resist certain market arrangements and assemble new ones. However, "by definition, most markets operate imperfectly and power relations between actors are usually far from equal" (Saren et al., 2019, p.2). This means that the nature and potential impact of institutional work performed by different actors can vary.

Acknowledging the existence of unbalanced power relations in the market alludes to two theoretical oversights in the existing market dynamics literature. First, scholars often tend to focus on resourceful actors. For example, mobilized consumers (Kjedlgaard et al., 2017; Press & Arnould, 2011; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Weijo et al., 2017), institutional entrepreneurs (Martin & Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013),

engaged consumers (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Giesler, 2008), and the media and

organizations (Coskuner-Balli & Ertimur, 2017; Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler,

2012; Humphreys 2010a,b) employ a wide range of resources (e.g., symbolic, economic, and

political) to alter market arrangements. Yet, actors with limited power and resources also

carry out work that contributes to institutional change or maintenance (Marti and Fernandez,

2013; Martí and Mair 2009). Hence, the role powerless and under-resourced actors play in

shaping market dynamics remains largely unexplored.

Second, researchers mostly examine contexts that allow for the enactment of publicly

visible work. For example, actors freely voice their demands via offline and online protests

(Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Weijo et al., 2017), utilize social media

to recruit advocates (Press & Arnould, 2011; Scaraboto & Fischer 2013), share their tastes

and opinions (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015), disseminate doppelganger brand images (Giesler,

2008); and organize extensive networks such as consumer and trade associations (Coskuner-

Balli & Ertimur, 2016; Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008; Humphreys, 2010a;

Kjedlgaard et al., 2017; Press & Arnould, 2011). Yet, we lack an understanding of the work

actors undertake in settings wherein institutional dynamics confine their actions. As Hwang

and Colyvas (2011) remind us, what actors can do is highly determined by the institutional

rules of a given context.

Given the above-mentioned gaps, our goal in this study is to understand the nature and

implications of institutional work undertaken by actors who are less resourceful and are

subject to power structures that confine their work. We ask: what kind of institutional work

do such actors undertake? And, how does their work contribute to market dynamics? It is

important to address these questions because doing so is a step toward recognizing the

potential impact less resourceful-powerful actors may have on market evolution. Studying

such actors can particularly unfold the varying forms of institutional work that have remained

underexplored in the literature and provide a more detailed account of how power relations shape market dynamics by enabling or precluding certain forms of work. To attain our objectives, we embark on a qualitative analysis of hijab (veiling) and the female fashion clothing market in Iran. This context offers a fertile ground in which to develop theory because it presents an institutional setting that is different to those typically studied in the literature. As we will discuss in detail, although, due to the political structure of the country, certain actors cannot freely and openly participate in the shaping of the market, they do undertake subtle, mundane, and less visible and organized institutional work that plays a role in the evolution of the market. Our findings extend the existing theorizations of market dynamics and marketplace resistance.

2. Institutional Work and Resistance

Institutional work refers to "the broad category of purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 217). The concept emerged as a critique of two traditional accounts of institutional theory (DiMaggio, 1988). First, it argues that instead of focusing on how institutions shape actors and their actions, scholars need to examine how actors also influence institutions. Second, it stresses that the notion of institutional entrepreneurship – that rests largely on the view of the powerful and resourceful actors who are able to resist institutional pressures and initiate change – does not sufficiently acknowledge actors' agency. That is, compared to institutional entrepreneurship, that explains how highly agentic actors step out and formulate alternate arrangements in the field, institutional work advocates distributed agency (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Suddaby & Viale, 2011). It shifts analytical focus away from 'heroes' (Delmestri, 2006) or 'hypermuscular agents' (Suddaby, 2010) to "the myriad, day-to-day equivocal instances of agency that … represent a complex mélange of forms of

agency—successful and not, simultaneously radical and conservative, strategic and emotional, full of compromises, and rife with unintended consequences" (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011, p.52-3). Institutional work brings actors to the vanguard and stresses the coordinated and uncoordinated efforts of a potentially large number of actors in changing an institutional field (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011).

Such conceptualization highlights competency, awareness, skills and reflexivity of actors who can often freely and creatively navigate their institutional environments and insert change. Therefore, it is no surprise that analyses of institutional change largely focus on the work of actors sufficiently resourced to influence their institutional contexts (for exceptions, see Lawrence, Hardy & Phillips, 2002; Marti & Fernandez, 2013; Marti & Mair 2009; Zhao & Wry, 2016). A similar tendency exists in the marketing literature. As we discussed in the introduction, most scholars focus on the strategies of the powerful and/or resourceful actors who effect certain market arrangements. For example, consumers use online platforms (e.g., blogging and the social media) to legitimate the plus-sized fashion market (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) or augment fashion brands (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015), generate doppelganger brand images to delegitimate Botox in the self-enhancement market (Giesler, 2012), or openly protest the legitimacy of certain yoga practices (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015). Hence, the challenge remains to develop an account of the activities that less powerful-resourceful actors carry out in the marketplace. We believe that theoretical insights on resistance can help gain a deeper understanding of such work.

In his analysis of the resistance of the powerless and oppressed, Scott (1990) introduces the notion of 'hidden transcript' to explain how the processes of domination generate a hegemonic public conduct and a backstage discourse. That is, while the public transcript represents the open interaction between subordinate and dominant groups, the hidden transcript constitutes a "privileged site for nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive

discourse" (Scott, 1990, p. 25). In his view, some acts of resistance are quiet, dispersed, and disguised, but some are collective, organized, and dramatic. By differentiating between these two modes of articulation, he draws attention to the 'politics of the weak', or what he calls 'infrapolitics'. Practices of everyday infrapolitics consist of small acts, such as foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, misunderstandings, laziness, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft, that the powerless and oppressed make use of in order to survive and undermine domination. These low-profile forms of resistance may be particularly effective in situations wherein the public display of resistance might be risky and even dangerous.

Recognizing the imbalanced nature of power relations, de Certeau's (1984) also elaborates on resistance by distinguishing between strategies and tactics. Strategies refer to the overarching frameworks of the hegemonic structures such as a corporation, proprietor, or scientific institution, which establish the boundaries of acceptable practices. Tactics, on the other hand, are defensive, improvised, and opportunistic everyday actions of the subjugated who seek to counteract the strategic maneuvers of the powerful. De Certeau sees the potential for resistance in everyday practices (e.g., walking, reading, talking, dwelling, and cooking) through the use of creative tactics that allow for appropriating and manipulating the strategies of the powerful. As such, tactics represent "the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong" and offer an account of how people 'make do' in everyday life by negotiating the constraints that "they have no choice but to accept" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii).

Key to Scott's and de Certeau's theorization is that acts of resistance can range from hidden and invisible subversions to open and public confrontations and may culminate in 'small wins' as well as large scale transformations (Mumby et al., 2017). Such variations are particularly relevant for studying institutional change because "the mechanism by which organizations [and individuals] are able to conform or deviate from established patterns" depend on the configuration of different institutional orders (e.g., state, the market, and

religion) as organizing principles and cultural belief systems (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 244; Thornton et al. 2012). For example, the state plays an important role in structuring markets (Fligstein, 1996). Yet, as Foucault puts it, "the state is nothing more than the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities" (2004, p.79). In some contexts, the state exerts its disciplinary power mainly by creating mechanisms of responsibilization through which individuals discipline themselves (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Rose & Miller, 1992). In others, the state exercises power by limiting individual actions to those that are deemed by the state to be good for everyone (Foucault, 1981). As such, while public confrontations might be the common form of resistance in some settings, in others, actors have to resist or subvert institutional orders through hidden practices. If the strategies used by institutional actors are likely to vary in different contexts (Fligstein, 1997), then, studying markets characterized by different governmentalities can reveal more subtle forms of institutional work that have remained understudied.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Setting

The Iranian female fashion clothing market has significantly evolved over the past century and has experienced numerous changes under different political institutions and regimes of power. Reza Shah's ascendance to the throne in 1925 marked the start of an enforced modernization that continued during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah until 1979. Along with capitalism, consumerism was seen as a key driver behind the country's coming to a modern age (Jafari & Goulding, 2013). At the heart of the 'institutionalization process' (Thornton et al., 2012) of secular modernism was cultural reformation that sought to erase the material and symbolic manifestations of religion from social life. The 1936 act of compulsory unveiling forced women to abandon their hijab in public (Moridi & Rahgozar, (2016).

Although the ban was removed in 1941 when Mohammad Reza Shah succeeded his father, veiled women were still struggling to find employment in the public sector. As free market economy thrived, many Western brands flooded the fashion market and advertising depicted a Western image of the country (e.g., mini-skirt women) (Jafari 2007; Sedghi, 2007). While the institutions of the market, profession, and corporation in fashion clothing benefitted from the state's pro-Western policies, the fast-paced modernization conflicted with the interests of the institutions of religion, community, and the family. Secularization threatened the cultural values of a family oriented society and capitalism widened the gap between the poor and the rich. Such conflicts contributed to an eventual regime change in 1979 (Jafari & Goulding, 2013).

As a critical event, the Islamic Revolution changed the country's socioeconomic, cultural and political dynamics. Critical events, as Thornton et al. (2012) argue, are field configuring happenings that insert major changes in the institutional environment. Following the coupling of the state and religion and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1980 that coincided with the 8-year war with Iraq (1980-1988), the state reversed the society's 'institutional arrangements' (Thornton et al. 2012) through cultural engineering. Hijab became compulsory and women were encouraged to wear black chador (a long robe) (Sedghi, 2007). Although a majority of women voluntarily remained subscribed to hijab, a large number of them adopted it to avoid 'social stigmatization' (Jafari & Maclaran, 2014; see also Sandikci & Ger, 2010).

The market became widely subject to strict state control. Boutiques and producers were banned from displaying unveiled female mannequins, modelling was prohibited, and limited fashion magazines promoted only modest fashion. Women were asked to follow Islamic modesty and failure to do so in public could result in financial fines or police interrogation (Sedghi, 2007). Such coercive/non-coercive rules, as institutional theory

(Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) informs, resemble the institutional work that valorizes a logic (i.e., modesty) and demonizes another one (i.e., immodesty). This is particularly real when the body becomes an institutional site for the state to practice its symbolic power and materialize its political discourse (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993).

In the post Iran-Iraq war era, the country's reconstruction required increased trade with the outside world and a more open-door policy to facilitate domestic production and imports. The uplift of the wartime rationing triggered consumerism for a nation desiring consumer goods. Parallel with market rejuvenation, the state's strict sociocultural policing relatively relaxed (Modiri & Rahgozar, 2016). The clothing market witnessed the import of global brands and latest fashion that were that were not fully compatible with the state's reading of Islamic modesty. Access to global (social) media paved the way for consumers, producers, designers, and advertisers to benefit, to a certain extent, from the global fashion market (Jafari & Goulding, 2013).

Within the institutional boundaries of the Islamic Republic, different governments (e.g., conservative or reformist) have allowed varying degrees of social freedom to maintain the core disciplinary power of the state. Such policies often manifest in different forms of regulatory practices in the market (Moridi & Rahgozar, 2016). For example, the Fashion and Couture Foundation, established by the Ministry of Culture in 2012, provides fashion hijab designers with license and organizes clothing festivals to showcase Iranian designs. Top political leaders attend such public fashion trade shows to endorse the legitimacy of the female fashion clothing market as well as signal the controlling role of the state.

Despite the continuing dominance of state in defining the acceptable forms of female dress and the functioning of the fashion market, objections to a monolithic view of appearance are present. Online and offline fashion magazines such as Modopia, Rochi, Chimode, Banovan, and Eshragh disseminate a wide range of controversial fashions that are

not fully compatible with the state ideals. Apparel retailers in shopping centers such as Tirazjeh, Kourosh, and Tandis distribute fashions that do not fully comply with the state's vision of Islamic modesty. Debate on compulsory hijab has entered the public domain. A recent report by President Rouhani's office indicates that almost half of the country's population are against compulsory hijab (ISNA, 2018). In 2015, Zaeri, a renowned clergy, criticized the imposition of hijab (Mehrnews, 2015) and Molaverdi, deputy of President Rouhani in Women and Family Affairs, called for changing the hijab law (ISNA, 2017). Such developments have, in one way or another, contributed to the relaxation of some of the state's laws such as arresting the bad-hijab. Yet, clashes between morality police and the bad-hijab are still common. In sum, while the fashion clothing market continues to be heavily regulated, it has experienced some changes in recent years. Alternative meanings and practices of veiling, while still problematic and risky, have become possible to a certain extent.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Given the exploratory nature and objective of the study, and in line with market dynamics research (e.g., Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler and Thompson 2016; Humphreys 2010a; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), we used an inductive qualitative approach to collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data (in-depth interviews and netnographic and archival data) from and about different actors.

We began by identifying the key actors in the market. Inspired by previous research on the dynamics of the fashion clothing market (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Jafari & Maclaran, 2014; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), we created a list of potential actors including consumers, designers, retailers, journalists, and regulators. An emic understanding of the evolution of the market required us to resort to archival data (see Table 1). Our analysis

of fashion magazines, news articles, and history websites showed that changing state policies over the past century had significantly influenced the market. We also noticed that that social media (i.e., Instagram and Telegram) play an important role in the functioning of the contemporary market. Therefore, we embarked on understanding the activities that take place on these digital platforms. Our initial netnographic analysis indicated that designers largely promote their work online. To explore their activities in further depth, the first author contacted five designers via Instagram and Telegram. They were kind enough to participate in the study and spread the word to others who would be interested. They provided insights into how the market operates, who the key actors (consumers, designers, retailers, regulators, and social activists) are and what they do. They also directed the researcher to two public fashion clothing events in Tehran where more participants were recruited. Overall, twenty three individuals (see Table 1) were interviewed by telephone or face to face in interviewees' workplace, home, or cafés between November 2017 and March 2018. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes. They were conducted in Persian, tape recorded, transcribed, and carefully translated into English. Upon the participants' request, their names were pseudo-anonymized.

Semi-structured interviews focused on individuals' views on their institutional constraints (in the past and now) and what they would normally do to navigate them. For example, designers and retailers were asked to explain how they would promote and sell their work if the state shows little tolerance for immodesty. Similarly, consumers were invited to explain how they would quench their thirst for fashion. During the interviews, we realized that social media platforms were vital to the creation, promotion, and dissemination of fashion in the market. Therefore, our netnography sought to explore different actors' online activities. For example, it was interesting to see how designers would use creative methods to display their less modest work without violating the state law of modesty. We took notes of our observations and the visual data for further analysis. As part of our archival analysis, we

also kept monitoring the popular Iranian news websites (ISNA, ILNA, Kayhan, Etelaat, Jomhoori Eslami, and Shargh) for updates on hijab and fashion dynamics.

--------- Insert Table 1 about here --------

With regard to analysis, we followed the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Data were shared between the three authors on Dropbox. While the interviews were available in transcripts, the archival data were organized as summary documents of key political changes and how they influenced the market. Netnographic data were summarized as word documents of images and explanatory texts signposting the related interview/archival data. Although data collection and analysis were simultaneous, the systematic analysis began by the first author's open coding (Spiggle 1994) and searching for similarities and differences in data. Focus on actors' institutional work helped identify a number of mundane and subtle activities (e.g., resisting, altering, bypassing, or compromising). These thoughts were then meticulously discussed with the second and third authors. In line with grounded theory's code of theoretical explanation (Strauss and Corbin 1998), the research team focused on finding theoretically informed higher order patterns in the data through axial and selective coding. Extensive brainstorming and iteration between data and the literature on institutional work helped researchers reach consensus on the interpretation of data and the development of three thematic categories of work (i.e., ambidextrous practices, creating secure networks, and unsettling rules). These themes included a series of activities actors would undertake in their everyday life experience with(in) the market. As we discuss next, although small, mundane, and subtle in nature, such institutional works contribute to market dynamics.

4. Findings

Our analysis reveals three forms of institutional work undertaken by actors who are less resourceful-powerful: engaging in ambidextrous practices, creating secure networks, and

unsettling rules. Such work helps actors navigate their institutional constraints and create localized spaces for pursuing alternative meanings and actions. Similar to everyday infrapolitics, subtle and hidden institutional work entails both resistance and compliance. By undertaking ambiguous, small-scale and mostly individual efforts, actors deviate from the prevailing norms while camouflaging their dissent and remaining (seemingly) compliant.

4.1 Engaging in Ambidextrous Practices

Ambidexterity means that institutional actors subscribe to two contradictory logics in order to pursue their own intended goals (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micellota, & Lounsbury, 2011). As our interview data show, consumers, designers and retailers work through the restrictions they face by devising solutions that respond to the conflicting demands of different logics. These solutions entail everyday, improvised, and practical acts that enable actors to negotiate sartorial expectations without engaging in overt opposition.

As explained earlier, the morality police have long been tasked with maintaining the Islamic order in society. As such, traditionally and in urban public spaces, morality police officers would stop and, in extreme situations, arrest those women who appear 'provocatively' (i.e., according to the state ideals, they do not cover their body and hair properly). Such disciplining, as Foucault (1981) argues, manifests the way the state uses 'pastoral power' to regulate individuals' behavior based on its own interpretation of social order. Yet, there are ways to circumvent the state discipline and bypass the law. For example, Valerie (33 years old) searches for the right place and time (where and when the police forces are less likely to be present) to practice her own desired clothing style without confronting the morality police:

> "*In some shopping malls there are some morality police officers and you have to cover your hair properly. They can stop and ask you to pull your scarf forward to*

cover your hair or do the buttons of your manteau, but if you go to a restaurant in a posh place, you don't find any morality police officers. You can identify such safe locations. Go there without worrying about facing the police."

Valerie's choice of different styles for different spaces resonates with the idea of compartmentalization – separation of compliance with different sets of expectations into different temporal and spatial units (Kraatz and Block, 2008). Her covering style changes across locations to demonstrate her shifting alignment to the state's vision of appropriate hijab or the requirements of a fashionable look. Maria (40 years old), on the other hand, switches between logics by revealing or concealing her commitment to their conflicting prescriptions.

"*I usually buy textile and have a tailor make my manteau without buttons. This is the style that I like, because when you do the buttons of a manteau, you cover the rest of your clothes and no one can see what you are wearing under it. You know, it is important for me to focus on what I wear, but to avoid police interrogation, I wear a long scarf to cover the open front of my manteau. They either don't notice it or if they do, they ignore it*".

Maria's ability to creatively rearrange her appearance through simple altercations allows her to obscure the reality of her style while keeping her covering practice within the acceptable boundaries. Such improvised, tactical styling maneuvers also provide a means to reduce the risk of being picked by the police: "*I wear a long manteau and ripped jeans because this would not attract the attention of the police…the long manteau can cover my body almost entirely when I wrap myself*" (Fiona, 38 years old). As evident in Valerie's, Maria's and Fiona's accounts, compartmentalizing logics and switching between them and their associated practices enable actors to perform their opposition "behind the scenes" (Ybema and Horvers, 2017) without attracting the disciplinary power of the state.

Another way of engaging in ambidexterity is expanding practice repertoire by combining elements of past and present. We observe this to be a more common tactic among designers. For example, while Madalyn (40 years old) resorts to a past myth to reverberate the ancient Iranian pre-Islamic identity in clothing, Nathalie (29 years old) gets inspirations from the 1950s:

> "*One of my main concepts is Iranian Queens. All Iranian women have a sense of dignity inherited from the past. I find it really important in our society's present conditions where women are under scrutiny and are continuously required to observe hijab. The ancient Iranian styles offer a great opportunity. I want to bring this sense back so they can feel respected.*" (Madalyn)

> "*I use the 1950s Iranian fashion which is modest. In those days, women would wear long clothes and hats that covered their hair and most of their body. Such long clothes are more in line with the current rules of the society…for manteaus I don't use buttons because this is the trend now, but they are all designed as oversized way because wind cannot easy open them wide in front.*" (Nathalie)

Research (e.g., Brunk, Giesler & Hartmann, 2018; Holt, 2004) shows that commercialization of past memories can play a vital role in creating markets. In our study, where the state tries to produce a new collective memory for society, designers' use of past memories functions as a creative way of producing a clothing style that paradoxically both aligns with (because the ancient female clothes covered the body from shoulders to ankles) and contradicts (the state demonizes monarchy) the state's logic of Islamic modesty (Jafari & Goulding, 2013).

Retailers also resort to ambidexterity. Our interviews with apparel shop owners indicate that they are caught between two contradictory logics. As the below quote from Kevin (30 year-old shop owner) explains, on the one hand, they are required by the state to

refrain from offering clothes that do not comply with the state taste; and on the other hand, they are faced with demands from consumers who increasingly seek fashionable clothes:

> "*One side is the state authorities who pressurize us to avoid fashionable clothes; the other side is the customers who want these clothes, trendier, more stylish, and the things that they see on satellite TV…but the reality is that the authorities are not my customers; they are only a force above me…my business depends on my customers, and if I don't satisfy their needs I won't have a business at all.*"

Explicit subscription to either logic can jeopardize retailer's business. Ignoring the state law can end up in financial fines or closure of their business, and failure to respond to consumer demands can mean loss of trade. In this situation, retailers use different tactics. Some retailers like Martin (55 years old) use diversification:

> "*In this chaos, we do everything in order to keep the business, it's very difficult…we offer conservative and fashionable styles, we do women's outdoor clothing and indoors, baby clothing and toys…when you do all types, then you are not under the radar all the time…some of your activities automatically hide behind others.*"

Martin's pragmatic approach, adjusting the store's merchandise to accommodate conflicting demands, highlights the fact that the logics of state and fashion are intertwined. That is, responding to the state's demands fosters a sense of compliance and provides a relatively ambiguous space for the enactment of activities governed by the fashion logic.

Compared to Martin's adjustment tactic, Mark (a 62 years old boutique owner) takes a riskier approach: "*When authorities send us warning, based on past experience, we know when they will come to inspect… we remove all the fashionable clothes that can cause us trouble and keep them in the basement and put them back on display later*". The success likelihood of such a hide-and-seek tactic, as our interviewees explained, depends on how thorough inspections might be. Yet, as appears from our data, the state's main concern is

about the *public* display of clothing that are overtly incompatible with the state's code of Islamic taste, and they may ignore it if shops keep such clothing away from their vitrines.

In sum, in all these cases, actors' ambidexterity involves finding ways around constrains while avoiding confrontation with the state. These findings are in stark contrast to those of previous research (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) where actors freely engage in a wide variety of visible actions to legitimate certain logics. Following de Certeau (1984) and Scott (1990), we interpret such practices as implicit and small forms of disobedience aimed at creating some agentic freedom within the institutional constraints of a regime of power. Such resistance is a direct product of a regime of power that prescribes and proscribes certain patterns of behavior (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

4.2. Creating Secure Networks

Networks play a vital role in creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions because they help actors recruit new members and generate advocacy for their own logic (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Thornton et al. 2012). Prior research on market dynamics (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Martin & Schouten, 2014; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Weijo et al., 2018) shows that through networking with other constituents, consumers, entrepreneurs, media bloggers and event organizers can manage to legitimate certain logics and expand the boundaries of markets. Yet, in contrast to these studies where actors liberally engage in open networks, designers in our study have to develop closed circles of individuals such as family and friends. Similar to ambidextrous practices, creating and working through secure networks are means of performing resistance while remaining compliant. Because "the powerless are often obliged to adopt a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful" (Scott, 1990, p.xii), secure networks stage acquiescence by providing designers with limited visibility.

As Niki and other designers such as Miriam (31 years old) and Sheryl (25 years old) explained in depth in their interview, the pressure of the state on compliance with Islamic modesty had significant impact on the dynamics of the fashion market. Many producers found importing (e.g., mainly through systematic smuggling from Turkey, China, and Vietnam) more convenient than producing locally. As a result, the bespoke fashion clothing market that would appeal to certain consumers faced a vacuum to be filled by home-based fashion entrepreneurs. Economic downturns and rising unemployment among youth also motivated some young women to start their small business by making clothes for their relatives and friends.

However, unlike fashion entrepreneurs in previous research (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), designers in our study are restricted in promoting and expanding their business. Models not/less compatible with Islamic modesty cannot be patented and showcased via online and offline platforms. Therefore, designers seek to safeguard their commercial interests by controlling access to their products. For example, as Niki (a 45-year-old designer) explains, small businesses often share their catalogues only within a network of trusted consumers:

> "*The designers have their own catalogue and they don't share it anywhere; it is becoming very private, they just share it with their customers…we [designers] cannot risk [our business] because our designs can be easily copied by others, especially the [less modest] models that cannot be licensed and displayed online …we are small businesses and don't have much maneuvering power.*"

Restricting access to certain designs resonate with what Scott refers to as "a diagonal politics" – "a careful and evasive politics" that avoids direct confrontation with the authority (2012, p.113). Rather than openly challenging the rules of permissible dress, Niki and other fashion entrepreneurs promote their fashions in secrecy, outside the policing gaze of the state.

Given the state law of Islamic modesty, designers have traditionally organized private modelling shows in their home-based studios. Such shows are especially banned if they include a mixed audience of men and women. Thus, presenting their work to an exclusive group of customers allows these businesses to evade confrontations with authorities. Moreover, as some consumers may require designers to respect their privacy, controlling attendees helps foster a sense of trust and tolerance:

"...of course constraints do exist, but I run a business and I need to find a way to showcase my designs even if it is limited to few people...I work based on the norms of society; the law on hijab is there but I see what most customers want...if they want the shows to be private, I cannot ignore their request...at the end of the day we all live in this society and have to respect norms." (Miriam, 31-year old designer)

In addition to modelling shows, social media play an important role in disseminating fashion. The privacy of these networks facilitates the promotion of clothes via word of mouth and safe online webpages on Instagram and Telegram:

"*In the beginning, I was using Facebook but because it is now blocked [by the state], I use Instagram and Telegram...these have their own difficulties too...my page on Instagram is private, but some people may request to follow me and I don't know that person but can't ignore their request, I have to [respond to their request] because of my business, but this person might be problematic for me, maybe they are online morality police, so I try to use modest photos on my webpage even if it is private*".

(Susan, a 37-year-old designer)

A majority of designers we interviewed stressed that given the growing online presence of fashion designers, compared to the past, their activities are less disrupted by the online morality police. Yet, to be on the safe side, they do their best so that only trusted individuals can access their webpages and sample designs. Even so, and as our netnography confirms, in

displaying their designs, they avoid live models and instead use flowers or miniature paintings to cover the human face.

Overall, by creating secure networks, designers seek to construct a space for pursuing activities that deviate from the existing institutional arrangements. While the publicly visible marketing practices (e.g., flowers on website) appear to be in line with the state's vision of modesty, hidden, private activities (e.g., mix gender modelling shows) indicate opposition. Such variations in practice recall what Ybema and Horvers (2017) call backstage and frontstage resistance. The former refers to openly supporting imposed policies while acting against them behind the scenes; the latter refers to openly contesting impositions while complying with them in private. As our analysis indicates, backstage resistance constitutes a form of infrapolitics that allows actors to engage in hidden acts of defiance that are difficult to censure. While such practices might lack real emancipatory potential, they provide a coping mechanism against the pressures of a power regime (de Certeau, 1984; Scott, 1990).

4.3.Unsettling Rules

The practices that we have discussed so far exemplify individual and hidden efforts of generating alternative, oppositional meanings and behaviors behind the controlling and disciplining gaze of the state. However, as previous research indicates, transformative institutional work often involves collective mobilization of actors (e.g., Giesler, 2008; Kjedlgaard et al., 2017; Weiji et al., 2018). Such institutional work, manifested commonly as consumer movements, can lead to significant changes in the market arrangements. In our data, we also find some evidence for collective forms of opposition. However, unlike movements that publicly challenge the authority, dissonance in our case is expressed mostly through collective forms of infrapolitics (Mumby et al., 2017). That is, collective yet

disguised, anonymous and often parodic, forms of resistance seek to unsettle the dominant discourse but do not generate immediate change.

As our data show, a number of social activists engage in contesting the state's law on hijab by highlighting women's right to freedom of choice. The following excerpt from Nora's (57 years old) interview epitomizes such a view:

"*Iranian women have long been deprived of their basic right for personal choice; whoever comes tells them something…wear this, don't wear that, this is Islamic, that is un-Islamic…there is widespread discontentment amongst liberal women about compulsory hijab…these women want to be fashionable…they don't want guardians to always tell them what to wear and what not to wear.*"

Social activists increasingly use online platforms such as blogs and social media as means of increasing their reach to society. As Marta (40 years old) explains, social media engagement is an effective way of educating women on their rights:

"*I don't want to change the world or a society; I just want to educate people and gradually one by one they themselves will make the change…the media can make women more powerful and make them realize that they are not alone… the focus is now on international media. When women see each other on international media platforms, they can become more powerful and feel they are united and thus more enabled.*"

Such online connectedness, as previous research (e.g., Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) confirms, can help actors achieve a sense of solidarity to boost their logic. Yet, unlike these studies, the online space in Iran is also heavily monitored by the state. Blogs and webpages that contest certain social issues such as hijab can be blocked by the state. More importantly, as we found out during the investigation, a majority of prominent social activists that try to push the boundaries of hijab and fashion in Iran live abroad and are

physically outside the institutional reach (e.g., potential consequences such as interrogation by the police) of the power system they criticize. When asked about the ironies of preaching from a privileged stand, activists acknowledged that certain tactics can allow women to practice their agency within their means and institutional constraints:

> *"I thought it should not just be online…we need to bring our activities to the offline. Since the state promotes the idea of black chador as ideal, we could use the same technique but in a counter color...on 'White Wednesdays' women use white hijab to show their objection to compulsory hijab…yes I know situations are different…its' not possible for them [women in Iran] to do whatever they want."* (Marta)

White Wednesdays, as Marta mentions, is a social movement whose advocates ironically protest compulsory hijab by wearing white headscarves. What is interesting is that this kind of resistance – aimed at disrupting the moral foundations of a regime of power – does not take place outside the institutional boundaries of the regime; rather, it operates within a safety zone using the very same framework (hijab) and means (headscarves) of the institutional power it seeks to criticize. White Wednesdays, therefore, begs rethinking the agentic power of citizen consumers whose agency cannot function apart from the institutions and power structures that authorize certain level of freedom of behavior (de Certeau, 1984; Arnould, 2007). Our analysis shows that social activists' use of (social) media successfully draws the attention of international media such as the Guardian: "Police in Iran's capital have arrested 29 women accused of being 'deceived' into joining protests against a law that makes wearing the hijab compulsory" (The Guardian, 2018). Yet, as acknowledged by the activists, ordinary people's approach to change and practicing agency is more mundane and subtle, using tactics that can create temporal and micro emancipation within the power structure of an institution (de Certeau, 1984).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The fashion clothing market we have studied is embedded within an institutional setting that does not facilitate certain actors' overt participation in the shaping of the market. Yet, under the condition of imbalanced power relations, the less resourceful-powerful actors do not totally succumb to a regime of power that describes and prescribes the rules of the game. On the contrary, by engaging in ambidextrous practices, creating secure networks, and unsettling rules, consumers, designers, retailers and social activists play a role in molding the market. Subtle, mundane, less organized, and at times hidden, forms of institutional work contribute to the coexistence of two different taste structures. While the state's logic of modesty continues to govern the market, the subordinate's demand for diversity drives the production, promotion, distribution, and consumption of alternative tastes. Interactions between these taste structures manifest as ambiguous market offerings and practices that are neither fully Islamic nor fully un-Islamic. Beneath the visible market, there is a multitude of less tangible institutional work that contributes to the gradual evolution of the market. Given the general domain of the state power and control over society, it is hard to establish which institutional work has inserted which specific change in the market. For example, it is not clear whether the state's initiative to allow fashion shows (albeit within the limits of the state law) is meant to augment Islamic modesty or it is a setup for future relaxations of the state dress code.

Our findings advance theory in two ways. First, we contribute to the market dynamics literature. Prior research has already recognized that markets can encompass multiple, and at times conflicting, taste structures or meaning systems (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008, 2012; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Thomson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Weijo et al., 2018). These studies associate market evolution largely with institutional entrepreneurs as actors who leverage diverse resources to openly and freely insert change in the market by, for example, (de)legitimating certain market

offerings or practices. We, in contrast, draw attention to the institutional work of less powerful-resourceful actors who can circumvent their institutional impediments and contribute to market dynamics through subtle, mundane, hidden, and less organized work. The practices that we have identified add to the repertoire of institutional work discussed so far in the marketing literature.

We also argue that it is the institutional features of the context (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011; Meyer, 1994) that shape the nature and goals of the work undertaken. For example, while the market dynamics literature broadly deems actors' network expansion essential to their success, we show how certain actors may actually seek to keep their network limited. Similarly, while previous research (e.g., Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015) suggests that market actors can manage conflicting demands of different logics by freely and selectively combining their elements that best fit to their goals, we find that for less resourceful/powerful actors subscribing to contradictory logics is a necessity to avoid direct confrontation with power.

Our second contribution concerns marketplace resistance. Previous studies (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008, 2012; Goulding & Saren, 2007; Holt, 2002; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Kozinets, 2002; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Thompson, 2004; Thomson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Weijo et al., 2018) depict resistance mostly as a deliberate act of revolt aimed at openly rejecting certain market ideologies, practices, or products. We, however, argue that everyday acts of resistance can function as unintentional institutional work that contributes to market dynamics. Our actors' institutional work does not aim to overturn the existing market arrangements; rather, it allows for temporary emancipatory spaces in which the subordinate can manage their everyday lives. For example, consumers' and retailers' bypassing the state law of modesty are instances of resistance that help them enjoy their taste for fashion (consumers) or increase their sales (retailers). Cautious of the potential risks of

confrontation with the state, these actors turn to acts of 'tactical resistance' and 'infrapolitics' (Scott, 1990). These forms of institutional work instantiate the 'practical element of agency' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). That is, actors choose to devise certain tactics, among other possible options, to respond to the dilemmas, restrictions, and necessities of their immediate environment. Such 'procedures and ruses' (De Certeau, 1984) enable them to perform work that, although insufficient to change institutional arrangements, help negotiate the symbolic and material obligations of a regime of power and bring about 'small wins' (Mumby et al. 2017) for them.

Overall, we observe that market dynamics rest not only on power struggles in the field but also on the way different actors choose to deal with power. A majority of studies we cited earlier (e.g., Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008, 2012; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Thomson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Weijo et al., 2018) demonstrate how actors strive to insert change in the market. Our study, however, shows that actors make compromises to avoid confrontation with the powerful. This highlights Martí and Fernández's (2013) point the powerless actors' own actions (e.g., compromises and silence) can contribute to power asymmetries. No wonder why in contrast to the subtle work of certain actors who, despite their limited power and resources, seek to alter their institutional arrangements (Martí & Mair, 2009), the institutional work of actors in our study aims largely at coping with the conditions of the institutional context.

Our study has been predicated on the institutional influence of the state and religion on market dynamics. We have shown that what actors can do depends on the institutional characteristics of their environment. Future research should, therefore, examine how different inter and intra-institutional configurations shape markets. The hegemonies, collaborations, competitions, and evolutions of institutional orders (i.e., the market, corporation, professions, state, family, community, and religions; see Thornton et al. 2012) can offer different

governmentalities under which markets operate and evolve over time. As such, a number of questions warrant further research. For example, what institutional actors can exist? How do they interact with each other? What power relationships exist between them? What work can they undertake? How may their work contribute to market dynamics? Moreover, and as we have discussed, small and/or hidden forms of institutional work can remain unnoticed simply because researchers often tend to spot the more visible and readily influential work. While acknowledging the epistemological and methodological challenges of identifying small and hidden institutional work, we invite fellow scholars to study market dynamics in institutional contexts that do not encourage change or are riddled with imbalanced power relations between different institutional orders and their actors.

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Table 1. DATA SOURCES

1.1 Interview data

Name	Gender	Age	Role
Alex	Male	37	Designer
Miriam	Female	31	Designer
Dana	Female	42	Designer
Daisy	Female	36	Designer
Fabian	Male	42	Designer
Madalyn	Female	40	Designer
Nathalie	Female	29	Designer
Niki	Female	45	Designer
Susan	Female	37	Designer
Sheryl	Female	25	Designer
Maria	Female	38	Designer
Kevin	Male	30	Retailer
Martin	Male	55	Retailer
Mark	Male	62	Retailer
Tania	Female	32	Consumer
Fiona	Female	38	Consumer
Maria	Female	38	Consumer
Melinnaz	Female	28	Consumer
Norah	Female	60	Consumer
Valerie	Female	33	Consumer
Marta	Female	40	Social activist
Nora	Female	57	Social activist
Alex	Male	36	Social activist

1.2 Archival Data

Type	Exemplary sources
News websites	ISNA, ILNA, Iran, Aftab, Fars News, Kayhan, Etelaat, Jomhoori Eslami, Shargh, BBC, Mehr News, DW
Fashion magazines	Zanerooz, Modopia, Rochi, Iranmode, Chimode, Banovan, Eshragh, Digistyle
History websites	beytoote.com, asemooni.com, aftabir.com, jamejamonline.ir

1.3 Netnographic Data

Type	Exemplary sources
Fashion weblogs	Modiseh, Tagmond, ihome, mehanmode, luxetehran
Instagram and Telegram	30 accounts (identities withheld)