There are many reasons for paying attention towards cultural consumption and youth. The most important reason is that a large segment of population in the global south consists of youth. According to last census report (2006), more than half of Iran’s population is under 24 years. The youth population in India in the age group of 13-35 years was 459 million in the year 2009. This constitutes about 38 per cent of the total population of the country according to the National Book Trust-National Council of Applied Economic Research National Youth Readership Survey (NYRS).

Recently in Iran, the Institute of Youth was turned into the Ministry of Youth and Sports because of the importance of youth. Managements and organizers of activities and programmes believe that it is important to organize programmes for the youth to foster their appreciation of culture and cultural activities. Policy for promoting ways of spending leisure activities, education and culture based occupation has been suggested for the promotion of culture among the youth.

We need surveys to gauge the situation of youth and their cultural tastes and leisure activities. But such studies are not many and there is little attention to comparing cultural practices across different societies, domains and boundaries. Most of the studies concentrate on one single society.

As a result of aforementioned issues and my interest toward cultural study and youth, I decided to compare the trends of cultural consumption among youth in both countries in the context of university. The choice of the university setting is based on the role of modern university in the modern world in shaping cultural identity and influencing the process of evolution of cultural capital and cultural lifestyle among students.

As an Iranian researcher in India who had visited the country few times earlier, I was not very familiar with the culture and social milieu. But I thought that it may be relatively easy to understand the youth, in a metropolitan city in India. As someone who is acquainted with the preferences of the youth in urban Iran, I thought that a comparative description of the Iranian and Indian youth’s consumption behavior would be possible if I adopt the survey method. I also wanted to understand my own cultural knowledge which is generally acquired in one of two ways. Objective or factual information is obtained through communication, research, and education. Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, can be acquired only by being involved in a culture other than one’s own. I had the latter kind of exposure to Iran and hoped to use the former to cover India.
I learnt a great deal during field work in both countries. But as someone who has passed the student age, I had initial difficulties in establishing contact with the young students who were busily moving around in the colleges. In India it was more tedious collecting data and getting interview schedules filled. Initially, I decided to collect my data in Hindi then I found out that most students in Delhi University are from upper and upper middle class and they are more comfortable with English. Thus, I used English as medium of communication in my questionnaires and for data collection. Another important point is that Delhi University gets best students from different parts of the country as it is regarded highly by students who aspire to perform well in their degree courses. A large majority of students therefore are likely to come from a reasonably well-off economic background with educated parents. A large section of Delhi’s youth may be left out of university education.

In the context of selection of university, I put emphasis on the role of modern university in this study more than caste system in India as well as in Iran. I did not attempt to include caste which as a variable is difficult to handle in a survey like this. Besides I did not have an idea how to ask about it. Because of these complexities, I planned my research as a quantitative research rather than qualitative. I provided several dimensions of cultural items which is general in both countries and elsewhere. However, even in the single society understanding of respondents are different, that is why before implementation of questionnaire I pre-tested the questionnaire. I collected data first in Iran while I was waiting for my research visa. I did all stage of survey, for example pre-test, etc. but when I came to India I did all the stages again and collected data for pre-test after revising the questionnaire I added 8 more items to the Indian questionnaire.

Comparing variables is not easy especially in the cultural context. In the last decade, several studies were conducted about cultural consumption in Iran. These were about music consumption more than other kind of cultural goods. However, overview of researches even in international setting on cultural consumption field showed that most of the research is in the context of music context only.

Data collection was problematic. At the beginning some PhD students from my center came for data collection but because of their lack of experience in survey, I preferred to collect the data myself. I started in the first of April and it took around 2 months. Communication with graduate students in university of Delhi in around 80 colleges and in four main subjects of engineering, sciences, humanity and arts, was excellent and worthwhile experience for me. There are also memorable experiences, some with easygoing and others with strict people.
Interesting point of observation in my opinion was the similarities between engineering and art students in both countries, it seemed that engineering students in both countries were from rich family, most of them both men and women have a car, especially in India because they had parked their car in the hostels and even used the car inside the campus as I observed them. Art students in both countries were fashionable and almost different from students in other subjects. And this was also true of Teheranian students.

Another point is one of the repetitive experiences in my survey is regarding the demographic questions, especially on the issue of parents’ income in the Indian context. Of course, we had the same problem with Iranian students too. There were several issues of comparison such as the occupational classification in Iran and India that were solved one after the other so that the comparisons are reasonably logical.

Even as a descriptive, statistical study, this research has taken a lot of time and effort in systematic collection of data from about 400 informants each in two countries. The pilot studies and revision of questionnaires was carried out meticulously to ensure reliability and comparability. The analysis and tabulation followed by tests of significance of the results has been another huge task. While there is always much more that could have been done, the experience of conducting this comparative, cross cultural survey has been one of immense learning and I hope will stimulate many more such cross national comparisons among developing societies.

I hope this research gives an accurate perspective and image of cultural lifestyle among students in both countries and also shed light on the impacts of social background on cultural consumption in the Bourdieusan sense.