Analyzing the Role of Mystic Appeals on Donation Intention

(Bağış Reklamlarında Mistik Tema (Gizem) Kullanımının Bağış Niyeti Üzerindeki Etkisinin Analiz Edilmesi)

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Abstract

Today, together with the increasing population, the social, economic, and environmental problems our World is experiencing are increasing and becoming prevalent. Donation by consumers is one of the essential income items of non-profit organizations that fight against these problems. Furthermore, the increase of these problems creates pressure on businesses, and businesses react to these pressures by organizing donation campaigns within social marketing. Several different methods are being used for delivering these campaigns to consumers, which are analyzed empirically in consumer behavior literature. This study analyzed the effect of mystically designed appeals on donation intention, which can be accepted as one of these methods. It is already known that mystic visuals create positive effects in landscape preference studies. Inspired by this fact, a pilot study was carried out in which the effect of mystical-themed appeals on donation intention was analyzed experimentally. Analysis of the study revealed the negative effect of mystical appeals on donation intention. Findings are discussed together with implications and theoretical contributions.

Öz

Günümüzde artan nüfusla beraber dünyamızın deneyimlediği sosyal, ekonomik ve çevresel sorunlar giderek artmakta ve yaygınlaşmaktadır. Bu sorunlarla mücadele eden kar amacı gütmeyen kuruluşların en temel gelir kalemlerinden birisi tüketiciler tarafından yapılan bağışlardır. Ayrıca, bu sorunların artması işletmeler üzerinde de baskı oluşturmakta ve işletmeler de bu baskıya karşı koyabilmek için sosyal pazarlama anlayışı çerçevesinde çeşitli bağış kampanyaları düzenlemektedirler. Bu kampanyaların tüketicilere ulaştırılmasında çeşitli yöntemler kullanılmakta ve bu yöntemlerin önemli bir bölümü bilimsel olarak incelenmektedir. Bu çalışmada bu kampanyaların iletişiminde kullanılan bir alternatif olarak değerlendirilebilecek olan mistik (gizemli) olarak tasarlanmış reklamların bağış niyeti üzerindeki etkisi analiz edilecektir. Mistik görsellerin manzara tercihi araştırmalarında olumlu bir etki yarattığı bilinmektedir. Buradan ilham alınarak çalışma kapsamında yürütülen pilot çalışmada, mistik temalı görsellerin bağış niyeti üzerindeki etkisi deneysel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Yapılan araştırma sonucunda kullanılan görselin gizemli olarak tasarlanmasının bağış niyeti üzerinde olumsuz bir etki yaptığı görülmüştür. Sonuç kısmında elde edilen bulgular tavsiyeler ve teorik yorumlamalarla birlikte tartışılmıştır.

Introduction

"Ayşecik: Niçin çocuklara acımak, onlara yardım etmek bu kadar zor mu?
Ali: İnsanların dikkatini bir yere çekmek zor.
(Hayat Sevince Güzel, Yeşilçam Filmi, 1971)"

"Ayşecik: Is it so difficult to have mercy to children, to help them?
Ali: It is difficult to draw the attention of people
(Hayat Sevince Güzel, 1971, a Turkish movie)"

Most individuals agree that we live on an alluring planet. We often admire its beauty. One of the most welcomed outcomes of space journeys that seek life outside the World is the pictures of the World in which we can see how our planet is seen gorgeously from space. However, unconceivably, humans are notoriously destroying the planet by exploiting natural resources, killing animals, wiping out rain forests, polluting oceans and rivers. Today, we even have a plastic island in the pacific ocean called as Great Pacific garbage patch (National Geographic, 2019). The deforestation rate of the rain forests is almost 8 million hectares per year (Butler, 2020). In the United States alone, approximately 2.7 million stray animals are killed every year because of insufficient shelters and lack of adoptive homes (Pepelko, 2014). Three hundred children die due to malnutrition globally (Everyone.org, 2012). 2.2 billion people around the globe are not able to access safely managed drinking water, and around 4.2 billion (approximately 55% of the World's population) live without safely managed sanitation (United Nations, 2020).

Most of these social and environmental problems result from unethical or maladaptive consumption behaviors. Market globalization and harsh competition promote businesses to foster these maladaptive and unethical consumption practices. However, today especially in developed markets, businesses are under much pressure from governments, international organizations, and consumers to prevent themselves from stirring up these social and environmental problems and fight against them. Consumers, today, think that businesses have considerable responsibility for these social and environmental issues. One of the current research found that 86% of the consumers think that businesses should take action for social problems, and 64% of them expressed that they will purchase from a brand that takes stand on a social issue (SheltonGrp, 2018).

There are several ways for businesses to cope with this pressure and most of these ways are in the responsibility of marketing departments like; cause-related marketing campaigns, green marketing applications, sustainable marketing practices, and charity campaigns. The common goal of all these efforts is to encourage consumers to engage in prosocial consumption behavior. According to White, Habib, & Dahl (2020), prosocial consumer behavior can mean any act that includes *helping or benefitting a specific person or persons but could also reflect more general behaviors that benefit wider society* (p.2). Accordingly, all these behaviors can be classified under the concept of prosocial

consumption: charitable giving (monetary or non-monetary), blood or organ donation, ethical buying, engaging in cause-related campaigns, and consumer activism.

Today, we witness businesses, non-governmental organizations, sports clubs, and even governments running charity campaigns. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Turkish government organized a donation campaign to support those negatively affected economically, lost his job, or had to have break working because of curfew (Hurriyet Daily News, 2020). In parallel with the increase of these campaigns, consumer behavior literature began to seek the most effective way of creating donations or other social marketing appeals.

As Prothero et al. (2011) remarked, today, marketing literature needs novel approaches and perspectives to help to boost sustainable consumption and implementing sustainable marketing strategies. The effectiveness of many different approaches in designing social marketing appeals is tested empirically (e.g., Wang, Mukhopadhyay, & Patrick, 2017; Brennan & Binney, 2010; Winterich, Gergana, & Gonzales, 2019). Nevertheless, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is no attempt in the literature that discussed the mystic appeals. In the current study, it is tried to analyze the effectiveness of mystic appeals on donation analyzed. Mystic appeals refer to appeals that contain limited and promising information with lower visual access. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, studies related to social marketing appeals are summarized. Second, the mysticism in environmental studies is briefly discussed, considering the main inspiration of designing appeals mystically was findings in this field. Third, a pilot study was conducted in which a charity campaign's mystically designed appeal is tested. Finally, findings are discussed together with implications and avenues for future research.

1. Social Marketing Appeals

The efforts of social marketing are rapidly increasing since it is introduced in the 70's. Kotler and Zaltman (1971; p.5) explained how marketing techniques begin to apply in social issues as follows:

> *"Marketing men have advised churches on how to increase*
> *membership, charities on how to raise money, and art museums*
> *and symphonies on how to attract more patron."*

They implied that social marketing is started by basically applying classical marketing techniques to achieve a social goal. In parallel with this, a comprehensive definition of social marketing created as follows *'the adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes as a means to induce behavioral change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal* (Dann, 2010, s. 151). Along with the rise of the social marketing paradigm, marketing researchers increasingly seek answers about the effectiveness of these social marketing efforts mostly by analyzing how appeals are presented.

According to Noble, Pomering, and Johnson (2014), rational appeals are not effective as emotional appeals. Correspondingly, many studies focused on

emphasized emotions in appeals such as guilt, sadness, hope, fear, pride, and shame. In an early study, Bagozzi and Moore (1994) found that sadness can enhance empathy and lead to prosocial behavior. Guilt and fear appeals[1] also accepted as effective, thus widely used by marketers (Hoog, Stroebe, & Wit, 2007; Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). However, some scholars claimed that these negative emotional appeals could backfire (Snyder & Blood, 1992; Kohn et al., 1982) thus, marketers should employ positive emotions like optimism (Peter & Honea, 2012) or pride (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). According to Henley, Donovan, and Mooerhead (1998) main points that differentiate positive appeals to negatives are those (p.48); (1) *Eliciting or promising positive or negative emotions, (2) appealing to positive or negative motivations, (3) offering rewards or punishments, (4) promoting benefits vs. disbenefits, (5) promoting adoption of desirable vs. cessation of undesirable behaviors.*

Brennan & Binney (2010) called marketers to use these negative appeals by caring for consumers' core emotional and psychological well-being, and Gallopel-Morvan et al. (2011) suggested using fear appeals by combining with self-efficacy and cessation support messages. Another study showed that although it is not affecting donation intention, a negative (vs. positive) Karma connotation[2] in donation appeals significantly lessens satisfaction and consumers' intention to revisit (Sharma, 2021).

Apart from emotions, several different factors affect the success of prosocial appeals. One widely used method is emphasizing norms (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). In one example, authors found that emphasizing descriptive norms (what other people commonly do) can be more effective than traditional messages (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). However, when most people do undesirable actions (e.g., high rate of littering), emphasizing these descriptive norms can backfire (Cialdini, 2003). Also, it is found that emphasizing injunctive norms (what other people approve) can also lead to sustainable behaviors (Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993).

The focused benefit in the presented information intended to lead sustainable behaviors also plays a crucial role. For example, Thompson and Stoutmeyer (1991) found that focusing on the long-term environmental benefits of water conservation was more effective in decreasing water waste than solely focusing on the personal economic benefits (Thompson & Stoutemyer, 1991). White and Peloza (2009) found that self-benefit appeals are more effective when consumer's responses are gathered in a private setting; on the other hand, other-benefit appeals can be more useful when the setting is public (White & Peloza, 2009). In other words, other-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers are publicly accountable for their responses.

Consumers also can be motivated through how the information related to social identity is emphasized. For instance, when consumers learn that other associated

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[1] While the fear appeal is defined as a persuasive communication attempting to arouse fear to promote precautionary motivation and self-protective action (Ruiter, Abraham, & Kok, 2001, p. 614), guilt appeal means a psychological and rhetorical strategy in persuasive communication such as advertising, classified as both emotional and negative, which seeks to arouse in the individual feelings of guilt which the desired response would be perceived as likely to assuage (Oxford Reference, n.d.).

[2] Messaged that framed within Karma philosophy.

group members engaged in sustainable action, they are more inclined to do so (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). Another study found that consumers are more inclined to engage in recycling when they learn their dissociative groups performs well in recycling (White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012)

Another widely discussed issue about appeals is self-related messages. Consumers are inclined to support their current views and protect self-identity; thus, messages that threaten self-identity [e.g., political identity, Hart and Nisbet (2012)] can demotivate consumers to engage in the prosocial act. Hence, scholars called for the endorsement of self-affirmation (Prooijen & Sparks, 2014). One study found that self-esteem messages motivate people to buy e ugly (safe, edible, but aesthetically unattractive) fruits and vegetables that are not generally preferred (Grewal et al., 2019).

Prompting - placing reminders just before the behavior occurs (e.g., "turn off lights when leaving room" or "put recyclables out tomorrow [Osbaldiston & Schott, 2012, s. 272]) - is another widely used strategy in encouraging prosocial behavior. Prompts are modification messages given just before the behavior occurs to remind the consumer what the desired sustainable behavior is. It should be noted that rather than persuasive appeals, prompts are simple reminders and works when the desired action requires minimal effort (Lehman & Geller, 2004; Vermeir et al., 2020).

The role of used visual elements in appeals is also widely discussed in marketing literature. Wang, Mukhopadhyay, and Patrick (2017) found that *Kindchenschematically*[3] cute visuals trigger prosocial and sustainable behaviors by increasing feelings of tenderness (Wang, Mukhopadhyay, & Patrick, 2017). Winterich, Gergana, & Gonzales (2019) demonstrated the positive effect of transformation salience on recycling in designing appeals. They activated transformation salience by placing images that show how recycled items transform a new product. Koo, Oh, & Patrıck (2019) showed how the anthropomorphization of old (not fresh) visuals of fruits and vegetables enhances consumers' preference.

It should be noted that several psychological and demographic characteristics can affect the response to these appeals. In general, the literature suggests that women, younger, and educated people are more inclined to engage in prosocial consumption (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Also, there is some specific evidence about the gender-based differences in reaction to social marketing appeals. For example, Noble et al. (2014) found that females respond more strongly to negative emotional appeals. Brough et al. (2016) illustrated that males are afraid of being eco-friendly because of the prevalent association between green behavior and femininity.

2. Mysticism in Environmental Studies

Environmental psychology studies analyzed landscape preference by comparing judgments on landscape scenes of individuals. One of the widely discussed frameworks is put forward by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989). According to this preference

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[3] Baby-like appearance.

matrix (Table 1), all four predictors (Coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery) will be positively related to preference (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, s. 53).

Table 1: The Preference Matrix

	Understanding	**Exploration**
Immediate	Coherence	Complexity
Inferred, predicted	Legibility	Mystery

Among these predictors, mystery is one of the most empirically analyzed landscape features, whether in a street view or in a forest setting. Mystery, in this context, is a matter where a place promise to learn more if one goes deeper. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) defined mystery in environmental context as; `*Something in the setting draws one in, encourages one to enter and to venture forth, thus providing an opportunity to learn something that is not immediately apparent from the original vantage point*' (p. 55). A similar conception created by Appleton called as secondary prospect that represents to a prospect where viewer cannot experience directly from the place where currently stands (Hagerhall, 2000). Both concepts are related to individuals' curiosity; in other words, both concepts are about intention to explore more. Curving pathways, partial concealment, and shadows increase the perception of mystery (Herzog & Bryce, 2007).

Herzog and Bryce (2007) found that if visual access is high within a forest context, mystery is positively related to preference. To put it differently, when the visual access is more explicit, mystery positively affects landscape preference, but mystery backfires if the visual access is very low. The lower visual access enhances the perception of danger which is negatively related to preference (Herzog & Smith, 1988). In a virtual experiment, Nasar and Cubukcu (2011) found that individuals' preference in street view setting increased together with perceived mystery and surprise. Although it sounds similar, surprise is about current feelings, and mystery is about the future responses (Nasar & Cubukcu, 2011). To put it differently, in surprise, anticipated new information suddenly revealed however, in mystery, new information is currently available and continuous (Herzog & Bryce, 2007). Overall, mystic views are considered as promising views with low (not very low as dangerous views) visual access.

3. Current Study; Mystic Appeal and Donation Intention

Within the context of this study, a mystic appeal was designed for testing its effectiveness by taking environmental studies' conceptual framework into consideration. To the best of the author's knowledge, the idea is not tested empirically in previous literature; accordingly, the current investigation is designed as a pilot study (limited sample, fewer variables, and only two appeals tested). The visual used in the appeal is designed mystically; information is limited but inviting (e.g., questions are used instead of sentences in the text that are placed in appeal), and the used visual is less apparent compared to control appeal (Appendix A).

Both control and experimental appeal asked participants to support a project which aims to help stray animals. The text under the appeal says that food and shelter will be provided with generated money for stray animals that live in the gardens of mosques and other religious places. Thus religiosity in the data analysis was taken as

a control variable. Prior work illustrated that most Turkish people make donations to religious institutions such as; mosques, Quran schools, or religious associations and philanthropy mostly seen as fulfilling religious obligation (Çarkoğlu & Aytaç, 2019, p. 38-39,56-57).

It is predicted that the inviting nature of mystic appeals will enhance consumers' intention to engage in prosocial action. Thus;

H₁: Mystic (vs. control) appeal enhance consumers' intention to donate a cause

4. Method

Participants and Procedure. Participants were invited to the study with an online link via the author's social media channels and a Turkish university's portal. Participants who failed to fill attention check item correctly and the item *'I understand that current project is not associated with any religious parties or groups'* are excluded from the study. Participants were randomly assigned one of two conditions (mystic appeal vs. control appeal). Before seeing appeal, they filled Turkish adaptation of intrinsic religiosity scale (Allport & Ross, 1967; Ok, 2011, α=.903). Following this, participants were exposed to appeals with a text. Both appeals have the exact text just under a cat picture. The cat picture also contains another text, 'which is differentiated for both appeals'. The color of the picture is adjusted for creating mystery (Appendix A). The perceived mystery was measured with a manipulation check item *'How much mystical do you think the appeal was?'* with a 7-point type Likert scale (1= Not mystical at all, 7= Very mystical).

Following the appeal, participants' intention to support the project was analyzed. One item with a 7-point Likert type scale (1= I would definitely not support; 7= I would love to support) was used for measuring donation intention. The amount of money they want to donate monthly (in Turkish Liras) is measured with an open-ended question. Survey finished with manipulation check items and demographics.

4.1. Results

Manipulation Check. Participants who were exposed the mystic appeal had higher responses than those who were exposed to control appeal, to the manipulation check item: *'How much mystical do you think the appeal was?'* ($M_{mystic\ appeal}$= 5.09, SD=1.05; $M_{control\ appeal}$=3.76, SD=1.76; $t_{(137,133)}$ = 5,877, p=.00).

Donation Intention. An ANCOVA analysis is run for comparing both groups' intention to support asked charity campaigns. Contrary to expectation, participants who were exposed mystic appeal significantly stated less intention to support charity campaign ($M_{mystic\ appeal}$ =5.92, SD=1.43; $M_{control\ appeal}$=6.32, SD=1.21; $F_{(1.160)}$ = 4.34, p=.039) when controlling intrinsic religiosity (p = .463; η^2 = .003). Thus H1 is not supported.

Would you support this project?

Groups (N=162)	Mystic	Control
	5,92	6,32

Y-axis: 7-point Likert-Type Scale
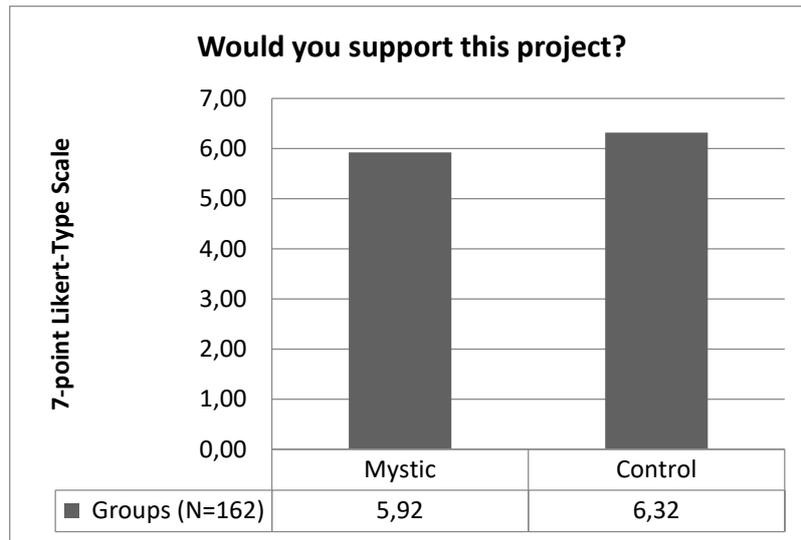
Donation Amount[4]. Another ANCOVA analysis was conducted to compare groups' stated amount of money to donate monthly to the asked charity campaign. Similar with donation intention, participants in the control condition stated that they are able to donate more money monthly (M mystic appeal =24.25, SD=24.04; M control appeal=31.83, SD=39.29) but not significantly (F (1.160) = 2.04, p=.15) when controlling for intrinsic religiosity (p = .97; η2 = .00).

How much money would you monthly donate this project ?

Grup (N=162)	Mystic	Control
	24,25	31,83

Y-axis: Turkish Liras (₺)
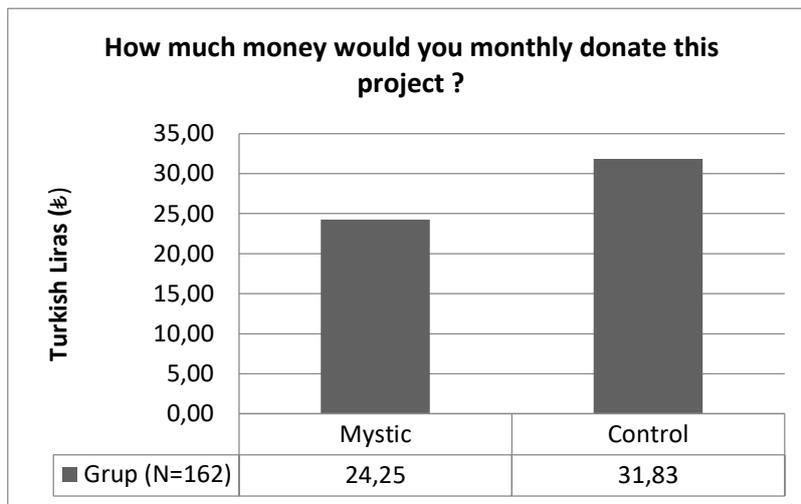
4.2. Discussion

In this study, contrary to the developed hypothesis, it is found that appeals that created mystically decrease consumers' intention to donate. Because the offered campaign includes some religious motives, intrinsic religiosity is controlled. No significant difference is found between groups in terms of the monthly donation amount.

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[4] Participants who did not fill this item were deemed as donating 0 Turkish Liras.

5. Conclusion

Increasing social problems creates pressure on social marketers to find novel ways to encourage people to engage in prosocial behaviors. In the current investigation, a new communicative way is borrowed from environmental psychology for social marketing appeals. Because environmental preference studies found that mystic views enhance preference, the same positive effect is expected for social marketing appeals due to abstract information and promising views being considered preferable compared to detailed information and more explicit exposure. However, it is found that these mystic appeals can backfire. Because no positive effect was found, further studies in which underlying mechanism could be questioned are not conducted in the current research. A possible explanation of this counterproductiveness may be; limited information and lower visual access could create insecurity and fear. It is already known that when experienced fear is not moderate, it can result with inaction (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).

Future studies should test this kind of appeals in different consumption contexts such as luxury products. Creating mystery on a luxury product may be charming because of limited information, and low visuality can enhance the perception of luxury by sending signals about the uniqueness or scarcity of the product. Also, the effectiveness of mystic appeals should be tested on different social marketing campaigns. As Herzog and Bryce (2007) found within a forest context mystery positively affects preference, mystical appeals may create a positive effect for social marketing campaigns that aim to protect nature.

Furthermore, it should be noted that every prosocial consumption research should be carefully conducted in Turkey considering the interpersonal trust level is among the lowest countries. This distrust reflects on charitable giving campaigns, especially for those running by organizations. In one research, it is found that only 21% of the respondents agreed to the statement that *'most people can be trusted'*, only 62% of them stated that they did not donate for anybody within last year, and only 12% of them said they could prefer giving through an organization (Çarkoğlu & Aytaç, 2019, s. 22-23, 30-31). Accordingly, for more robust findings, future studies can test mystic appeals in a different cultural context.

In the current study, a mystic message was created minimally and traditionally, just adjusting the text and the colors. Creating mystic messages with more sophisticated technologies like interactive screens or virtual reality could create effective mystic social marketing appeals.

Acknowledgments

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Appendices
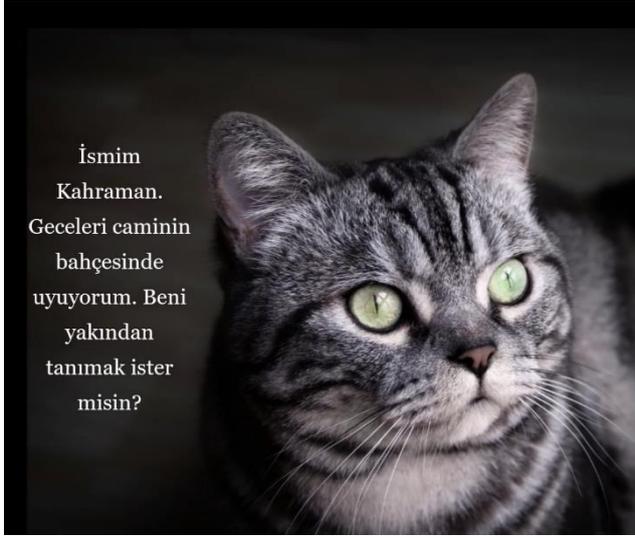
Figure 1. Control Appeal
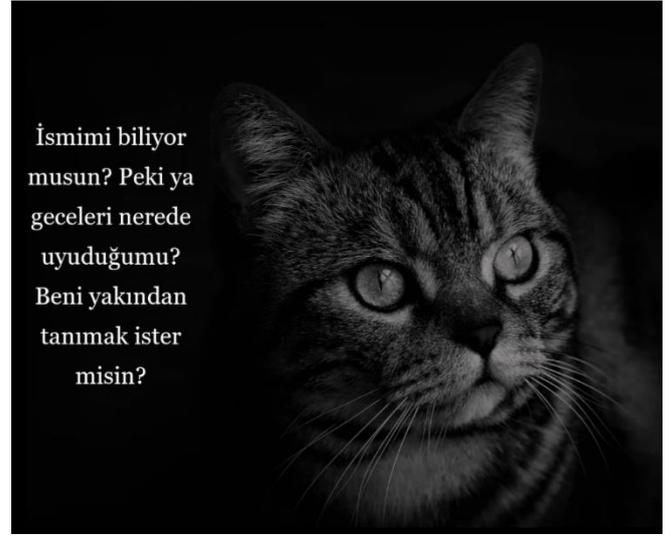
Figure 2. Mystic Appeal

The text in the Control Appeal (In English): My name is Kahraman[5]. I am sleeping in the yard of the mosque at night. Do you want to get to know me better?

The text in the Mystic Appeal (In English): Do you know my name? And where do I sleep at night? Do you want to get to know me better?

The text at the bottom of appeal (In Turkish): 2021 yılı itibariyle çeşitli illerde sokak hayvanlarına yardım edebilmek için bir kampanya düzenlenmesi planlanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda sokak hayvanlarının sık yaşadığı camii ve diğer dini mekânlarda yerleştirilecek olan mama ve su kaplarının düzenli olarak doldurulması planlanmaktadır.

The text at the bottom of appeal (English Translation): As of 2021, it is planned to organize a project to help stray animals in various cities. Thus, it is planned to regularly refill the food and water feeders in mosques and other religious sites where stray animals often live.

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[5] Kahraman a Turkish name, means 'hero' used both for humans (mostly male) and animals.