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Nationalism in Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis of Centennial Campaigns in the Republic of Türkiye

Bir Ulusun Yüzüncü Yılına Reklamla Bakmak: Milliyetçi Temsillerin Göstergebilimsel İncelemesi

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ABSTRACT

Patriotic appeal in advertising is a widely utilized strategy by brands, particularly during national holidays, to influence consumer behavior. In the process of creating these ads, ad agencies often employ various social or cultural themes. However, the specific themes that are predominantly emphasized in these ads warrant further investigation. This study addresses this issue by analyzing ads prepared for the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye, which was celebrated on October 29, 2023. Out of a total of 53 ads themed around the centennial, seven were selected based on criteria such as view counts, duration, and content richness. These ads were analyzed with the guidance of a table adapted from Rutherford's Advertising Tracking Model. The analysis reveals that one of the primary themes in the ads celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic is the emphasis on the Republic's achievements. Among these achievements, gender equality was identified as a central focus. Notably, most of the selected ads featured female actors in prominent roles. In contrast, it was observed that brands predominantly used male voices for narration. Additionally, the theme of following Atatürk's footsteps emerged as another significant element. The study also found that brands extensively employed images of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish Flag to amplify the impact of the ads.

Keywords: Republic of Türkiye, advertising, nationalism, semiotic analysis, representation

ÖZ

Milliyetçilik çekiciliği içeren reklamlar, markalar tarafından özellikle milli bayramlarda tüketicileri etkileme amacıyla sıklıkla başvurulan bir reklam stratejisidir. Bu reklamların yaratım sürecinde ise reklam ajansları çeşitli sosyal veya kültürel temalar üzerinden hareket etmektedir. Buna karşılık bu temaların genel olarak hangi konulara yoğunlaştığı ise önemli bir soru işareti olmaktadır. Bu noktadan yola çıkarak Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin 100.yılına kutlandığı 29 Ekim 2023 için hazırlanan reklamların analiz edilmesi bu çalışmanın ana çıkış noktasını oluşturmuştur. Buna göre 100. Yıl temalı 53 reklam üzerinden yedi tanesi izlenme sayıları, süreleri ve içerik zenginliği gibi kriterlere bağlı olarak seçilmiş ve Rutherford'un "Reklam İzleme Modeli" üzerinden uyarlanan tablo rehberliğinde analiz edilmiştir. Analizlere göre markaların Cumhuriyet'in 100. Yılına kutlama amaçlı hazırladıkları reklamda öne çıkan temalardan biri Cumhuriyet'in kazanımlarının vurgulanması olmuştur. Bununla beraber markaların üzerinde durduğu en büyük kazanım ise cinsiyet eşitliği olarak saptanmıştır. Öyle ki, seçilen reklamların çoğunda kadın oyuncular ana karakter olarak yer almıştır. Buna karşılık markaların dış ses olarak yoğun bir şekilde erkek sesi kullandığı saptanmıştır. Ayrıca Atatürk'ün yolunu takip etme, adımlarını izleme teması da öne çıkan bir başka tema olmuştur. Ayrıca markaların reklamların etkisini artırma amacıyla yoğun bir şekilde Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ve Türk Bayrağı'nı kullandığı görülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: cumhuriyet, reklam, milliyetçilik, göstergebilim, temsil



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Introduction

In today's world, it is widely acknowledged that consumers of all ages increasingly engage in behaviors aimed at avoiding ads. Many go as far as paying monthly or annual fees for various applications to escape exposure to ads. This trend has made it progressively more difficult for brands and advertisers to reach and influence their target audiences. Despite these challenges, certain ads manage to resonate profoundly with consumers. This is particularly true in societies with a strong collectivist culture, such as Türkiye (Hofstede, 1984), where ads featuring nationalist themes or national symbols hold significant appeal. Many national and international brands now create nationalist-themed ads to be aired during key national events, aiming to foster a positive relationship with their consumers by incorporating cultural values, notable figures, traditional music, and even the national flag into their content. A deeper analysis of these ads, however, could yield important insights for both academics and advertisers, enhancing our understanding of their impact and effectiveness.

Although various studies in the literature have examined the effects of nationalist-themed ads on consumer behavior and the communication strategies employed, there is a lack of sufficient empirical research regarding which social and cultural themes are emphasized in the creative process of these ads. Existing studies generally address the overall effects of nationalist discourse and symbols, while offering a limited number of examples for the content analysis of ads produced within the framework of a specific national event. This situation reveals a significant research gap for both advertisers and scholars.

The 100th anniversary of the Republic has provided brands with a significant opportunity to integrate national symbols, historical narratives, and cultural values into their ad campaigns. However, the social and cultural themes emphasized in the creation of these ads, as well as the strategic choices made by brands, constitute an important area of research. This study aims to analyze ads prepared for the Republic's centennial using a semiotic approach, guided by an adapted version of Rutherford's Advertising Tracking Model. Through this analysis, the study seeks to examine how brands employ nationalist appeal to shape consumer perception and engagement.

Literature Review

In the process of creating messages in ads, there is a need for a creative strategy known as "appeal." The concept of appeal is at the core of the advertising creation process, serving as a guiding framework for determining all elements of the ads, including text, visuals, and sound. The types of appeals used in the production of ads are generally categorized into rational and emotional appeals. Rational appeals focus on highlighting the economic and technical advantages of products or services, and they are

particularly aimed at persuading industrial buyers through persuasive communication (Baker, 1998, p. 230). In contrast, emotional appeals focus on addressing the psychological needs of consumers. These messages emphasize the potential rewards of using a product or service, or the possible penalties of not doing so. Through these appeals, the aim is to evoke various emotions in consumers, influencing their perceptions and encouraging them to take specific actions (Davies, 1993, p. 52). At this point, the most commonly used appeals include sexuality, humor, fear, and nationalism.

In Türkiye, nationalism and the cultural codes associated with it are extensively utilized in ads, to the extent that an entire advertising tradition is nearly built upon them (Bilsel, 2005, p. 227). Another term for nationalism appeal in the literature is pride appeal. Pride appeal can be briefly defined as a type of appeal that uses various symbols associated with a country, nation, or specific group, or employs visual, auditory, and musical elements such as flags and historical achievements or victories to elevate and encourage individuals or groups to engage in or refrain from certain behaviors (Ateş, 2016, p. 90).

One of the primary reasons for the use of nationalism as a persuasive element in advertising in our country is the strong presence of consumer ethnocentrism. Consumer ethnocentrism refers to the preference of consumers in a country for purchasing products or services made domestically rather than those originating from foreign sources. This approach by consumers is not driven solely by economic or functional concerns but also by moral considerations. Consumers in countries with high levels of ethnocentrism often believe that purchasing foreign products harms the local and national economy, leads to unemployment, and fundamentally contradicts patriotic values (Shimp, 1984, p. 285).

Advertising and semiotics are two closely intertwined domains in communication studies. While advertising functions through signs and symbolic persuasion, semiotics provides the tools to analyze and deconstruct these structures of meaning. In this sense, semiotics enables a deeper understanding of how cultural codes, myths, and ideologies are embedded within visual and verbal media. As contemporary societies become increasingly saturated with symbolic representations, especially in commercial contexts, the ability to critically engage with these signs has gained greater importance. Within advertising, signs do more than inform — they shape identities, evoke emotions, and construct collective narratives. Semiotic analysis allows us to trace how meaning is constructed, circulated, and interpreted in these persuasive messages.

Semiotics, which involves processes such as interpreting, meaning-making, producing, or understanding signs, emerged as a scientific field based on the systematic analysis of all

these factors. Semiotic analysis aims to decode, elaborate, and interpret the meaning systems containing myths, codes, and metaphors that are embedded within a study (Mollaoğlu, 2023).

Semiotics, as a popular analyzing method, is particularly used in the fields of communication and advertising today, and this has undoubtedly been made possible through Barthes' work. Barthes (1979) views semiotics as a field aimed at understanding and interpreting the elements of social life, and advertising, as an influence on an individual's life, could be a domain that semiotics might engage with. One of Barthes' works that provides valuable insights for advertising analysis is *Mythologies* (1957). In this work, Barthes examines how myths function in contemporary media and popular culture, offering significant suggestions on how cultural symbols and images transform social contexts. Roland Barthes' *Rhetoric of the Image* (1964) also has become one of the seminal works in semiotics and advertising analysis. According to him, images include two types of meaning: denotative (literal or objective meaning) and connotative (secondary meaning, often derived from cultural and social contexts). Barthes analyzed several ads through these two types of meaning and concluded that images are not limited to what they directly depict. According to Barthes, the visuals in ads can reinforce or falsify specific ideologies, and viewers can attribute new meanings to these images based on the culture they inhabit and the context in which they live.

While Barthes has significantly shaped the application of semiotics in media and advertising, later theorists expanded the field by offering new ways to understand how signs operate in contemporary culture.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) proposed a structuralist view in which signs gain meaning through the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*. Meaning is not inherent but produced through differences within the system of language. Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), meanwhile, introduced a triadic model comprising the *representamen* (the form), the *object* (the referent), and the *interpretant* (the meaning generated). His classification of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols added a nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed across different modalities.

Post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers further questioned the stability and authority of signs. Umberto Eco (1976) argued that texts are inherently "open," meaning is negotiated by readers, and interpretation is shaped by cultural context. Jean Baudrillard (1994) introduced the concept of hyperreality, suggesting that in the postmodern era, signs often refer only to other signs, detaching entirely from real-world referents. In such a context, representations—especially in media—become simulations that blur the boundaries between the real and the imagined.

Studies that explore nationalist elements in ads and their possible effects, utilizing semiotics as a methodology, are quite limited in both international and national literature. One example is a study conducted in the Republic of Cyprus, which analyzes print ads published between 1960 and 2010. According to this study, ads emphasize emotions such as collectivity, national pride, authenticity, cultural tradition, and sentimentality (Zantides, 2019). Another study in this field is Tatlı (2014)'s analysis of ads published by political parties based in Germany, France, and Sweden, using semiotic methods. According to this study, ads from all three countries feature symbols that include anti-immigrant and anti-foreign sentiments, using signs in an exclusionary, alienation manner, and even extending to Islamophobia. Although semiotics was not used as a method, another study on nationalist ads examined the ads of Turkish Airlines. According to this study, the Turkish Flag is identified as one of the most important and emotionally charged symbols of national identity in these ads (Özcan, 2021). Another study analyzing the semiotic methods used in Coca-Cola's Ramadan commercials concluded that the brand incorporates religious signs, such as mosque, minaret, mahya (religious banners), and traditional music, alongside cultural symbols like Ramadan drummers, ney (flute) sounds, and traditional containers used for carrying food (Erdoğan & Taşdelen, 2019). A study analyzing 10th November ads through a semiotic lens examined corporate ads, concluding that all the ads analyzed contained symbols referencing Atatürk's reforms (Çetin & Keskin, 2021). A study that explored the semiotic analysis of nationalist images in ads, while also investigating their impact on the viewers' engagement levels, found that ads generally reference common culture and traditions, leaving a positive impression on the audience. Viewers think these types of ads to be intriguing, creative, interesting, and meaningful (Aydın & Yegen, 2019).

Aim & Methodology

One of the widely accepted notions in advertising is that it is nourished by the culture in which it exists. Naturally, advertising also nourishes and influences the culture to which it appeals. In a society like Türkiye, where the collective culture is strongly felt, it is a very natural strategy for ads to include elements of collective culture and to attempt to influence target audiences through this approach. Brands and agencies incorporate such elements into their advertising strategies during special occasions. Thus, the ads aim to serve as a form of public relations between the brand and the target audience, therefore seek to establish mutual affection and respect.

The starting point of this study is the analysis of ads prepared to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Republic, focusing on the use of nationalist appeal as a strategic tool in marketing through a semiotic approach. This study aims to identify the prominent social and cultural themes in ads created to commemorate the

Republic's centennial within the context of both marketing strategies and nationalist discourse. In line with this objective, the study examines the visual and auditory elements predominantly used in these ads. Additionally, it seeks to address key questions regarding the core strategies employed by brands and their target audience selection—specifically, how brands convey nationalist messages and which consumer segments they aim to reach. To answer these questions, seven selected ads were analyzed using an expanded semiotic approach.

To provide sufficient answers to the research questions, the semiotic method, which has been extensively used for many years in the field of advertising research, has been employed. Particularly in social sciences and related fields, semiotics, as a social science discipline, treats culture and consumer behaviors as systems of signs and symbolic rituals, viewing these systems as organized by codes and open to objective analysis (Oswald, 2015, p. 14). Semiotics is fundamentally defined as the study of signs and their modes of operation. Additionally, for a comprehensive analysis, it is necessary to examine three distinct areas: the sign itself, the codes or systems in which the signs are organized, and the culture that is processed through these codes and signs (Fiske, 1990, p. 62). Over time, based on Fiske's assumption, practitioners and scholars conducting semiotic analysis have developed various analysis techniques, and the analytical process has expanded beyond the mere Saussure's "signifier-signified-sign" framework.

Although many scholars have conducted their analyses through various tables and questions in the process of analyzing media texts using semiotic methods, it is particularly noted that the "Advertising Tracking Model" (Rutherford, 1994, p. 212) provides a highly comprehensive analytical framework. The form to be used in this study has been adapted from the works of Rutherford.

The population of the research consists of advertisements broadcasted to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye. The criteria for selecting the ads include that the advertising brands must be profit-oriented and that the ads were shared through the corporate YouTube accounts of these brands. Accordingly, the researcher accessed a total of 53 different ads. In the process of forming the sample among these ads, the outlier sampling method, which is a purposive sampling technique, was utilized. The Outlier Sampling is fundamentally a sampling method used to select cases that are exceptionally or distinctly prominent, and typically located at the ends of the normal distribution curve, thus providing data that is rich in information (Patton, 2014, p. 418). Accordingly, 7 distinct ads were selected from the 53 ads. These ads were chosen due to their extremity compared to others in terms of advertisement duration, view counts, and the richness of content offered from a semiotic perspective. The data regarding view counts were obtained on July 12, 2024. The details of these ads are as follows:

Table 1. Information about the sample

Brand	Slogan	Duration	View counts
Eti	Mutluluk Denince Akla, Hemen Onun Adı Gelir: Cumhuriyet (<i>When Happiness Comes to Mind: It is the Republic</i>)	35 second	12 million
Boyner	Cumhuriyet, Cumhuriyet gibi Yaşanmak İster (<i>The Republic Desires to Be Lived as a Republic</i>)	83 second	9.7 million
Türkiye İş Bankası	Açtığın Yolda Yürüyoruz İlelebet. Bizi Biz Yapan Seni Çok Seviyoruz Cumhuriyet (<i>We Walk Forever on the Path You Opened. We Love You very much, Republic, for Making Us Who We are</i>)	119 second	6.7 million
Garanti BBVA	100 Yıldır Adımların Adımlarımız Cumhuriyet Kanatlarımız (<i>For 100 Years, His Steps Have Been Our Steps, the Republic Has Been Our Wings</i>)	88 second	4.5 million
Akbank	Ayrılamayız Cumhuriyet Yolundan (<i>We Cannot Part from the Path of the Republic</i>)	80 second	3.4 million
Eczacıbaşı	Ona En Çok Cumhuriyet'in Yolundan Gidenler Benziyor. 100 Yıldır Olduğu gibi... (<i>Those Who Resemble It the Most are the Ones Who Follow the Path of the Republic. Just as It Has Been for 100 Years...</i>)	45 second	2.7 million
Koç Holding	Çok Yaşa Cumhuriyet! (<i>Long Live the Republic</i>)	93 second	684k

The seven different ads listed in the table above were analyzed using the semiotic table adapted by the researcher as a guide. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the analyses conducted by the researcher were sent to four faculty members from three different universities, who are experts in the relevant fields, for their comments. Based on their feedback, necessary corrections were made to the analyses, and the findings were

finalized. To facilitate an easier understanding of the findings, each ad was tabulated separately.

Findings

Akbank/ Ayrılamayız Cumhuriyet Yolundan (We Cannot Part from the Path of the Republic) Ad Analysis

Table 2. “Ayrılamayız Cumhuriyet Yolundan” ad semiotic analysis

Main structure		
Strategy: Akbank celebrates the 100 th anniversary of the Republic through its main message, supporting the dreams of this country.		
Target audience: Turkish Society		
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity), productivity		
Slogan: Ayrılamayız Cumhuriyet Yolundan (<i>We Cannot Part from the Path of the Republic</i>)		Hashtag #AyrılamamYolundan
Duration: 80 sec.		
Comparison: Yes (aimed at showing no difference between the early years of the Republic and its 100 th anniversary)		
Visual/audio balance: Balanced		
Visual/audio aesthetics		
Number of actors/actresses: 30	Voice-over: None	
Genders: Female, male	Music: Rock music	
Ages: Children, youth, middle-aged and elderly	Song: Duman-Gönül İster	
Race: White	Other sounds: The brand-specific heartbeat sound occurs twice throughout the ad	
Class: Not distinguished.		
Lifestyle: Productive, education-focused		
Camera angles: 49 shots, scene change average 1.63 sec.		
Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Mustafa Kemal Atatürk	Founder and first president of Türkiye	Guiding, encouraging, and inspiring
Split-screen with multiple scenes	Making comparisons	Conveying the message of serving the same purpose on Atatürk’s path
Groups of people, students	People working and studying together	Acting with unity, moving toward the same goal

Analysis

From the first second of the ad, the screen is divided into two parts, black-and-white and colored. According to Barthes, this scene can be seen on a denotative (literal) level as a visual distinction between the past and present of the Republic. However, on the connotative (implicit) level, this separation conveys that the Republic has maintained its essence over time, with an inseparable connection between the past and present. The brand's visual choice reinforces a strong ideological discourse, emphasizing national unity and continuity.

The black-and-white scene featuring Mustafa Kemal Atatürk refers, semiotically, to his role as the founding leader of the Republic. In this context, Atatürk's presence strengthens the representation of the Republic's ideology. This visual evokes the meaning that the Republic has progressed according to Atatürk's ideas in the collective memory of the audience.

The song "Ayrılamam Yolundan," playing in the background, creates a cultural myth that strengthens the emotional bond between the Republic and the people when considered within Barthes' concept of myth. This song reinforces the national identity and sense of belonging, supporting the primary message of the ad in an emotional context.

The divided screens throughout the ad contain visual references to Atatürk's reforms after the foundation of the Republic. The

parallel presentation of developments in education, agriculture, art, industry, transportation, and technology on both sides of the screen reinforces the idea that the Republic has been a continuous development project from the past to the present. Additionally, scenes that depict Atatürk's human side are an important element in meaning production. For instance, in the black-and-white section, Atatürk is shown lying on the beach, while in the colored section, a young man lies on the grass. This scene portrays Atatürk not only as a political figure but also as someone relatable to the public, strengthening the bond between the leader and the citizens. Here, Atatürk emerges as a "symbol," as this scene positions him not only as a historical figure but also as a living value that illuminates the present.

In conclusion, the visual and auditory signs in the ad construct a narrative about the continuity and unchanging values of the Republic. According to Barthes' concept of myth, the message of continuity between the past and present of the Republic, and the idea that this continuity follows Atatürk's path, is presented to the audience within a mythological structure. The semiotic elements within the advertisement effectively convey the message of adhering to the values of the Republic and carrying this legacy into the future.

Boyner/ Cumhuriyet, Cumhuriyet Gibi Yaşamak İster. (The Republic desires to be lived as a republic.) Ad Analysis

Table 3. "Cumhuriyet, Cumhuriyet gibi Yaşamak İster" ad semiotic analysis

Main structure	
Strategy: Commemorating the 100 th anniversary of the Republic by highlighting key achievements made possible by the extraordinary courage of the Turkish nation throughout its history.	
Target audience: Turkish Society	
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity), courage	
Slogan: Cumhuriyet, Cumhuriyet gibi Yaşamak İster. (The Republic Desires to Be Lived as a Republic.)	Hashtag #dahailkyüzyılımız (#It'sjustourfirstcentury)
Duration: 83 sec.	
Comparison: A comparison has been drawn between the Turkish nation, which has shown courage under the theme of "those who do not say..." and the "those who do say" as an underlying narrative.	
Visual/audio balance: Balanced	
Visual/audio aesthetics	
Number of actors/actresses: Six main characters of varying ages and genders, plus supporting roles.	Voice-over: Yes, female voice
Genders: Female, male	Music: Folk song.
Ages: Children, adolescents, middle-aged individuals, and older adults.	Song: Zülfü Livaneli-Yiğidim Aslanım
Race: White	Other sounds: Ambient sounds (e.g., battle sounds, applause)
Class: Not distinguished.	
Lifestyle: Courageous, productive	
Camera angles: 41 shots, scene change average 2 sec.	

Table 3. Continued

Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
A man in traditional Turkish military boots (Çarıklı)	Military personnel, from private to general	Message of bravery and national service aimed at inspiring today's youth
Female member of parliament	Representative, legislator	Emphasizing gender equality as a key achievement of the Republic
Fuselage	The main fuselage of the aircraft	Refers to the technological advancements made under Atatürk's leadership with the advent of the Republic

Analysis

The ad begins with a black-and-white depiction of a war scene from the very first second. When evaluated through Barthes' semiotic, this choice operates on the denotative level as a direct representation of a wartime environment, while on the connotative level, it constructs a narrative emphasizing that the Republic was established despite significant challenges. This narrative aims to evoke a sense of national pride and gratitude in the audience. The background sounds of explosions and gunfire serve as supplementary signs that reinforce the scene's realism and enhance its emotional impact.

Accompanying this sequence is a female voice-over delivering the line: "They say geography is destiny, but our heroes were those who refused to accept this." This statement functions at the mythological level, implying that the Republic defied a deterministic worldview and instead built its history upon desire and perseverance. The emphasis on the "single shoe" is another significant symbol, reinforcing the notion of deprivation and sacrifice, thereby intensifying the viewer's sense of gratitude. In the subsequent scenes, depictions of elderly individuals transporting ammunition to the front lines further contribute to the mythologization of unity and solidarity. These images, which portray both young and old working toward a common ideal, support a broader narrative that highlights the contributions of all segments of society in the construction of the Republic.

At the 40th second of the ad, a scene still presented in black and white depicts a female character entering the Turkish Grand National Assembly. On the denotative level, this image represents the political participation of women, but on the connotative level, it transforms into a powerful symbol of the opportunities granted to women by the Republic. Additionally, the background applause and the voice-over's references to democracy and freedom contribute to a myth surrounding the Republic's progressive achievements.

At the 50th second, the ad shifts to a scene presented from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's perspective, emphasizing his

visionary leadership. This moment does more than depict him as a historical figure; it elevates him into a national symbol, reinforcing a narrative that places him at the center of the Republic's modernization process. The factory scene is presented through Atatürk's eyes as an indicator of the Republic's industrial and technological progress. The actors' expressions of pride and admiration as they look at Atatürk further support this symbolic portrayal of his revered status in the national consciousness. Simultaneously, the voice-over's reference to Atatürk's famous quote, "All my hope is in the youth," not only delivers a direct message to younger generations but also reinforces the mythological narrative positioning youth as the Republic's primary custodians.

At the 70th second, the visual presentation transitions to full color. This sudden shift symbolizes the Republic's continuity from the past to the present, reinforcing that it remains a dynamic and enduring ideal. The scene featuring a young woman sitting in a university classroom with a serious and proud expression serves as a visual representation of the Republic's embodiment in younger generations. As the camera angle expands to reveal that she is looking at a portrait of Atatürk, the connection between the Republic and its founding leader is further solidified, presenting a strong symbolic narrative.

Finally, in the pack shot, the hashtag "#dahailkyüzyılımız" ("#StillOurFirstCentury") appears, employing a storytelling strategy integral to Barthes' concept of myth-making: the projection of an aspirational future. This phrase is a symbolic message emphasizing that the Republic's journey is far from over and that the country remains youthful. Consequently, the ad does not merely invite viewers to commemorate the past but also seeks to instill a sense of responsibility for shaping the future. In conclusion, the semiotic analysis of this ad reveals a strong narrative structure centered on the achievements of the Republic and its modernization process. By integrating visual and auditory signs, the ad constructs a myth that activates feelings of national identity, gratitude, pride, and responsibility in the audience.

ETİ/ Mutluluk Denince Akla, Hemen Onun Adı Gelir: Cumhuriyet (When happiness comes to mind: it is the Republic) Ad Analysis

Analysis

The ad begins with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's speech when he declared the Republic. Atatürk's figure here is not merely

Table 4. "Mutluluk Denince Akla, Hemen Onun Adı Gelir: Cumhuriyet" ad semiotic analysis

Main structure		
Strategy: Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic, inspired by the brand's traditional slogan, "When happiness comes to mind"		
Target audience: Turkish Society, kids, and youths		
Appeal: Community (national identity, public spiritedness, unity), happiness		
Slogan: Mutluluk Denince Akla Hemen Onu Adı Gelir: Cumhuriyet (When Happiness Comes to Mind: It is the Republic.)		Hashtag #MutluluğunCumhuriyeti #TheRepublicofHappiness
Duration: 35 sec.		
Comparison: None.		
Visual/audio balance: Balanced		
Visual/audio aesthetics		
Number of actor/actress: Primarily child characters, 2 older adult characters, and 2 university students		Voice-over: Yes. male voice.
Genders: Female, male		Music: Eti's corporate music
Ages: Child, young, elderly		Song: None
Race: White		Other sounds: Ambient sounds (laughter, classroom, applause, tractor, bicycle)
Class: Not distinguished		
Lifestyle: Educated, productive, happy, living with family		
Camera angles: 32 shots, scene change average 1.09 sec.		
Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Sun	The source of heat and light located at the center of the planets	Represents children rising like the sun in the future, filled with hope and happiness

a historical figure, but also functions as the founding symbol of the Republic. The image is presented as if it were from a primary school textbook, incorporating symbols related to the Republic's connection with education.

Subsequently, the ad features scenes related to agriculture. The farmers are depicted here as a symbol of rural areas where the foundations of the Republic were laid and the role of peasants in this development. Moreover, scenes such as land and labor establish the myth of national development and production. The voice-over phrases like "Preserve the Fertility of the Land" and "Overcome All Difficulties Together" reference the symbols of unity and solidarity. This scene not only emphasizes the importance of agriculture but also conveys meanings related to societal unity and the self-sufficiency of the community.

At the 15th second of the ad, the tractor wheel transforms into a bicycle wheel. This transition symbolizes a transformation that addresses different segments of society. The change in wheels is not just a physical alteration but also symbolizes the merging of social diversity. The mother and child riding the bicycle serve to remind the audience that the Republic is a value encompassing people of all ages. This scene also contains indicators of societal harmony and unity, conveying messages through universal themes like family and happiness.

The children enjoying theater, the young people interested in technology, and individuals of different ages smiling happily all suggest that values such as art and culture contribute to the Republic's goal of building an advanced and modern society.

In the subsequent scenes, the smiling faces of people from different age groups, especially the smiling image of Atatürk, help to create the symbol of a leader who is deeply connected with the people. While this scene is perceived as a political figure at the Barthes' denotative level, it is interpreted as the visual representation of a leader who is an integral part of the community at the connotative level.

The background music, "When Happiness Comes to Mind," evokes the concept of happiness, the iconic symbol of the ETİ brand. The announcement of the word "Republic" at the end of this song strengthens the symbolic connection between the brand and the Republic. ETİ aims to position itself not merely as a commercial brand but as a brand contributing to the national values and social unity of the community.

Eczacıbaşı/ Ona En Çok Cumhuriyetin Yolundan Gidenler Benziyor, 100 Yıldır Olduğu Gibi... (Those who resemble it the most are the ones who follow the path of the Republic. Just as it has been for 100 years...) Ad Analysis

Table 5. "Ona En Çok Cumhuriyet'in Yolundan Gidenler Benziyor. 100 Yıldır Olduğu gibi..." ad semiotic analysis

Main structure	
Strategy: Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic with a focus on following the path of the Republic and Atatürk	
Target audience: Turkish Society	
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity, unity), productivity	
Slogan: Ona En Çok Cumhuriyet'in Yolundan Gidenler Benziyor. 100 Yıldır Olduğu gibi... (Those Who Resemble It the Most are the Ones Who Follow the Path of the Republic. Just as It Has Been for 100 Years....)	Hashtag # CumhuriyetinYolundanGidenler (Those Who Follow the Path of the Republic)
Duration: 45 sec.	
Comparison: Comparison between Atatürk and the characters who follow his path.	
Visual/audio balance: Balanced	
Visual/audio aesthetics	
Number of actor/actress: Five main characters, consisting of 4 women and 1 man, along with supporting characters	Voice-over: Male.
Genders: Primarily female, male	Music: Symphonic (background, secondary to voice-over)
Ages: Children, young, and middle-aged	Song: None
Race: White	Other Sounds: Scene dissolve sounds
Class: Not distinguished.	
Lifestyle: Productive, educated, determined	
Camera angles: 34 shots, scene change average 1.3 sec.	

Table 5. Continued

Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Teacher	Someone whose profession is teaching	A figure who raises future generations and works tirelessly for the Republic
Female volleyball players	Someone who plays volleyball	Determined Turkish women who never give up

Analysis

The Eczacıbaşı ad stands out as another example that begins with a classroom scene. This classroom scene symbolizes the high importance the Republic places on education, emphasizing the deep connection between education and the Republic. In the first few seconds of the ad, a character named “Şafak Teacher” is seen teaching students in the classroom. The voice-over comments on how much this character resembles Atatürk. In this scene, according to Barthes, Şafak Teacher is perceived on the denotative level as a female teacher, while on the connotative level, she is portrayed as an educator who follows in Atatürk’s footsteps, training future generations.

The following scene shows a female doctor working in a laboratory. In this scene, the voice-over highlights the doctor’s curiosity and open-minded approach to life, similar to Atatürk’s attitude. This scene aims to create a myth that emphasizes Atatürk’s value of science and technology. The scene also provides a powerful signifier of Atatürk’s identity as a visionary leader who valued science and technology.

The third character in the ad is Mr. Yılmaz, who teaches young people in a factory. This character is also associated

with Atatürk’s identity as a hardworking, industrious figure focused on production. In all three scenes, the main characters are visually transformed into representations of Atatürk, which reinforces the narrative through visual cues.

At the 28th second, the ad shifts to scenes featuring the volleyball team sponsored by Eczacıbaşı. In these scenes, three female volleyball players are likened to Atatürk through the myth of “never giving up.” The portrayal of the characters in each scene as embodying different aspects of Atatürk shows that Atatürk is not just a political symbol, but also a powerful and inspirational figure.

At the end of the ad, the voice-over declares, “The ones who resemble him most are those who, just as for the last 100 years, follow the path of the Republic.” This line creates a sense of national unity, completing the ad’s holistic approach, and offering a reference to the unity and continuity of the Republic.

Garanti BBVA/ 100 Yıldır Adımların Adımlarımız Cumhuriyet Kanatlarımız (For 100 Years, His Steps Have Been Our Steps, The Republic Has Been Our Wings) Ad Analysis

Table 6. “100 Yıldır Adımların Adımlarımız, Cumhuriyet Kanatlarımız” ad semiotic analysis

Main structure	
Strategy: Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic through the promise of following in Atatürk’s footsteps	
Target audience: Turkish Society	
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity)	
Slogan: 100 Yıldır Adımların Adımlarımız, Cumhuriyet Kanatlarımız. (For 100 Years, His Steps Have Been Our Steps, the Republic Has Been Our Wings)	Hashtag #GarantiBBVA #100.Yıl (#100thanniversary)
Duration: 88 sec.	
Comparison: None	
Visual/audio balance: Auditory oriented.	
Visual/audio aesthetics	
Number of actors/actresses: 6	Voice-over: Male, Halit Ergenç (<i>Turkish Celebrity</i>)
Genders: Female, male	Music: Folk song
Ages: Children, young adults, and older adults	Song: Engin Arslan, Zeynel Demir-Çakal Çökerten Zeybeği
Race: White	Other sounds: Finger snapping, eagle sound

Table 6. Continued

Class: Not distinguished		
Lifestyle: Both rural and urban		
Camera angles: 30 shots, scene change average 2.9 sec.		
Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Mustafa Kemal Atatürk	The founder and first president of Türkiye	Guiding, inspiring figure
Selecting actors with contrasting characteristics	Diversity within the advertisement	Emphasizing Atatürk's and the Republic's unifying role across society

Analysis

The ad “Adımların Adımlarımız” by the Garanti opens with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk raising his hand and snapping his fingers before beginning to perform the Zeybek dance. According to Barthes’ semiotic analysis, this gesture can be interpreted at the denotative level merely as an action to signal the start of the music. However, at the connotative level, it can also be perceived as a symbolic initiation of the Republic and modern Türkiye.

As the music begins, Atatürk starts performing the “Zeybek” dance. While the background is dominated by dark tones, a focused light on Atatürk serves as a symbol indicating that the audience—or in a broader sense, the people—wish to watch him. In the following scenes, individuals of different ages and identities join Atatürk. Initially, he dances with a young man, followed by a traditionally dressed woman in the next scene. Shortly thereafter, a dancer representing the modern, urban woman appears. The sequential positioning of the rural and urban women in front of Atatürk is a reference to both the roots of the Turkish nation and its modernization process. At the same time, these scenes reinforce the myth that Atatürk is embraced and admired by various segments of society.

At the 46th second of the ad an elderly man dressed in traditional attire enters the scene, followed by a young boy dancing. Similar to the contrast between rural and urban women, the juxtaposition of the elderly man and the child symbolizes how the Republic and Atatürk are embraced across all layers of society.

At the 72nd second, Atatürk’s expression of pride towards the dancing boy can be interpreted at the denotative level as a mere sign of appreciation, whereas at the connotative level, it signifies Atatürk’s hope and pride in children and young generations. The dance sequence concluding with this young character emphasizes the significance of youth within the overarching narrative of the ad.

As the music and dance come to an end, the voiceover delivers the slogan “Adımların Adımlarımız, Cumhuriyet Kanatlarımız” (Your Steps Are Our Steps, The Republic Is Our Wings), making a strong reference to Atatürk’s guiding and visionary identity, thus completing the ad’s semiotic meaning.

Koç Holding/ Çok Yaşa Cumhuriyet (Long live the Republic) Ad Analysis

Table 7. “Çok Yaşa Cumhuriyet!” ad semiotic analysis

Main structure	
Strategy: Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic by emphasizing its achievements in individual freedoms and personal rights	
Target audience: Primarily young adults and the entire Turkish society	
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity, unity), productivity, freedom	
Slogan: Çok Yaşa Cumhuriyet! (Long Live the Republic)	Hashtag # CokYasaCumhuriyet (#LonglivetheRepublic)
Duration: 93 sec.	
Comparison: The methods for celebrating the Republic are described through contrasts.	
Visual/audio balance: Balanced	
Visual/audio aesthetics	
Number of actors/actresses: Two main female characters, plus supporting characters	Voice-over: Male

Table 7. Continued

Genders: Primarily female, male		Music: Symphonic
Ages: Child, young adult, and middle-aged		Song: None
Race: White		Other Sounds: Ambient sounds
Class: Not distinguished		
Lifestyle: Urban, arts-focused, and education-focused		
Camera angles: 95 shots, scene change average 0.97 sec.		
Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Woman raising her hand	A person who wishes to speak	A courageous Turkish woman freely expressing her opinion
Turkish flag fluttering in the windy air	A fabric used as a national symbol	A resilient Turkish flag standing firm in the face of adversity

Analysis

Similar to other ads, this ad begins in a classroom, reinforcing the connection between the Republic and education. In the background, the İzmir March plays softly, imbuing the ad with a nationalistic tone. On Barthes' denotative level, this march is merely a musical piece, whereas, on the connotative level, it can be perceived as a march that unites the nation. In the following scene, a female student holding a reading paper walks towards the podium with a worried expression. Meanwhile, the voiceover states, "Is the Republic always celebrated in the same way?" This statement, in conjunction with the visual elements, conveys the Republic's role in enabling individuals to break free from conventions and embrace freedoms.

Throughout the ad, the voiceover and visuals make references to traditional means of celebrating the Republic, such as anthems, songs, poetry, and parades. From the 34th second onwards, the ad employs contrasts to depict the diverse ways the Republic can be celebrated. Through statements like "It can be celebrated together, it can be celebrated alone," symbols of inclusivity emerge, emphasizing that the Republic belongs to all segments of society, regardless of differences. At the same time, this conveys symbols of national unity and pride.

At the 40th second, a female character raises her hand in protest in a predominantly male setting, resembling a parliamentary environment. This scene contains strong symbolic references to the rights and advancements granted to women under the Republic. Furthermore, it evokes myths related to individual

freedom of thought. Subsequent visuals are carefully synchronized with the voiceover, reinforcing the ad's central message: the Republic serves as a guiding force for modern Turkey and its people, demonstrated through various celebratory acts.

For example, the phrase "The Republic is celebrated by working" elevates the act of labor and sends a clear societal message. This notion is further reinforced with statements like "By producing, by embracing one's work with dedication." Additionally, the phrase "It is celebrated by raising hands, it is celebrated by opening hands" subtly references Turkey's Islamic cultural heritage, intertwining national and religious identity.

In the following scenes, a young woman performing modern dance appears at different moments throughout the ad, symbolizing both the brand's and the Republic's modern and progressive identity. Towards the end, the voiceover states, "It is celebrated freely; it is celebrated even more," supported by corresponding visuals. In the pack shot, the advertiser's name, "Koç Holding," is reversed to form the word "**Çok**" (meaning "a lot" in Turkish). This final scene can be interpreted as the brand positioning itself as an integral part of the Republic, aligning its corporate identity with the national values it promotes.

Türkiye İş Bankası/ Yaşasın Cumhuriyet (We walk forever on the path you opened. We love you very much, Republic, for making us who we are.) Ad Analysis

Table 8. “Yaşasın Cumhuriyet” ad semiotic analysis

Main structure		
Strategy: Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic through scenes that emphasize its timeless nature		
Target audience: Turkish Society		
Appeal: Community (patriotism, national identity, unity)		
Slogan: Açtığın Yolda Yürüyoruz İlelebet. Bizi Biz Yapan Seni çok Seviyoruz Cumhuriyet. (<i>We Walk Forever on the Path You Opened. We Love You very Much, Republic, for Making Us Who We are.</i>)		Hashtag #YaşasınCumhuriyet (#Long Live the Republic)
Duration: 119 sec.		
Comparison: None.		
Visual/audio balance: Balanced		
Visual/audio aesthetics		
Number of actor/actress: 1 female child as the main character, supporting actors		Voice-over: Male
Genders: Female, male		Music: Yes.
Ages: Child, young adult, middle-aged, and elderly		Song: Coşkun Sabah-Aşığım Sana (revised)
Race: White		Other sounds: Actor dialogues and ambient sounds
Class: Not distinguished.		
Lifestyle: Not distinguished.		
Camera angles: 71 shots, scene change average 1.67 sec.		
Semiotic meaning		
Signifier	Literal meaning	Signified
Peasant women and livestock	A scene from village life	Patriotic Turkish women who transported ammunition during the war of independence
Pilot woman	A person operating an aircraft	The value the Republic and Atatürk placed on empowering Turkish women

Analysis

The ad begins with a mother asking her daughter, “Are we ready?” On the denotative level, this scene can be perceived simply as a dialogue between a mother and her daughter. However, on the connotative level, it can be interpreted as a symbol of the shared excitement for the celebration of the Republic, encompassing people of all ages. In the subsequent scenes, people from various segments of society are shown moving towards a gathering place. These scenes are designed to evoke excitement and curiosity in the viewer while constructing a narrative around the unifying power of the Republic.

At the 14th second of the ad, a war veteran enters the scene in his wheelchair and gazes at his horse, conveying a strong emotional message. On the denotative level, this scene can be seen as depicting a veteran and his horse, while on the connotative level, it creates a powerful narrative about the Republic being won through sacrifice and devotion. The song playing in the background, “Today, I thought of you and kept thinking,” reinforces this narrative and emphasizes the emotional connection of the Republic from the past to the present.

In the following scenes, various individuals from different professions and social backgrounds are seen gathering enthusiastically. These include teachers, students, women dressed in traditional attire, deputies leaving the parliament, miners, divers, and athletes. These scenes can be interpreted as they contain powerful symbols indicating that the Republic is embraced by all segments of society. The song “I’m in love with you, I can’t get enough,” played throughout the ad, creates a myth that strengthens the sense of belonging to the Republic.

The prominence of female characters in key roles in the ad is also noteworthy. Figures such as teachers, nurses, and pilots, along with the main character being a little girl, present strong indicators of the Republic’s achievements regarding women’s rights and gender equality.

At the 71st second of the ad, a scene is included where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk addresses the people. In the following scene, the main character, the little girl, is making an effort to see Atatürk. It can be said that this scene symbolizes Atatürk’s love and admiration for children. When the little girl is overwhelmed with tears, a Turkish soldier says, “Don’t cry, we saved this

homeland not for you to cry, but for you to smile,” creating a powerful narrative that highlights both the heroism of the Turkish soldier and the fact that the Republic is a gift primarily for children.

In the final scene of the ad, the continuity from past to present is emphasized when the little girl completes Atatürk’s speech. Finally, as the voiceover says, “We will walk forever on the road you opened, we love you so much, Republic,” images emphasizing Atatürk and the guiding role of the Republic appear on the screen. In this way, the emotional attachment and gratitude of society towards the Republic is strongly reinforced.

Discussion & Conclusion

When examining the strategies brands employ in their ads celebrating the Republic’s 100th anniversary, two prominent themes emerge. The first is the emphasis on “achievements of the Republic,” highlighted by Boyner and Koç Holding. The second theme focuses on “following in the footsteps or tracing the steps,” as seen in ads by Eti and Garanti BBVA. Meanwhile, Akbank emphasizes the “dreams of the Republic,” while İş Bankası underscores the timelessness of the Republic. Eti, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from other brands by associating the Republic with happiness, aligning with its brand motto. Additionally, Koç incorporates elements of individual freedom and personal rights, while Boyner adds themes of courage to its ads.

In the context of these strategies, although the general target audience in the ads is primarily the Turkish public, some ads specifically highlight children, young people, and particularly women both as actors and as primary target audiences. For example, in Eczacıbaşı’s ad, four of the five main characters are women. Eti’s ad prominently features child characters, which not only shifts the focus from a purely corporate or 100th-anniversary celebration to a more marketing-oriented approach but also suggests a strategic intent. The single main character in İş Bankası’s ad is a young girl, while Koç Holding’s ad features two female main characters. Thus, it appears that the desired impact of the seven analyzed ads is primarily aimed at women and children. Additionally, the choice of these actors in all the ads may be strategic, as it is suggested that the use of women or children might be more effective in conveying the message and influencing the audience.

Another prominent finding from the analyzed ads is the frequent use of comparisons by the brands. In the Boyner ad, a comparison is made between “those who speak and those who do not.” Akbank contrasts the early years of the Republic with its 100th anniversary. Koç Holding uses comparisons and contrasts to describe the methods of celebrating the Republic. Eczacıbaşı compares Atatürk and Turkish society

proportionally, suggesting that Atatürk and those who follow his path have done the same things. Among the seven analyzed ads, three do not feature comparisons.

When examining the auditory aspects of the ads, it is observed that only one ad utilizes a female voice for the voice-over. In Boyner’s ad, a female voice narrates the text, whereas ads from Eczacıbaşı, Eti, Garanti BBVA, İş Bankası, and Koç Holding employ a male voice-over. Akbank’s ad, however, does not use a voice-over at all. The preference for male voice-overs in these ads aligns with existing literature, which suggests that male voices are generally more effective than female voices in ads (Demirci, 2021, p. 121; Strach et al., 2015, p. 189). Additionally, while there are studies on the impact of voice-over gender on consumers, these studies typically focus on product or service ads (Milner & Collins, 2000, p. 77; Paek et al., 2011, p. 197). At this point, the question of whether the gender of voice-overs used in corporate ads creates any significant difference remains an open area of inquiry.

The analysis of the visual elements extensively used in the ad and their semiotic meanings reveals that brands particularly emphasize the achievements of the Republic. Many visuals reference gender equality. For instance, in Boyner’s ad, one of the main characters is a woman elected as a parliamentarian. Eczacıbaşı’s ad also highlights gender equality, featuring female volleyball players and a woman teacher in prominent roles. Garanti BBVA’s ad includes visuals related to gender equality in its before/after style narrative, underscoring the Republic’s achievements. Other examples include female pilots and patriotic peasant women in İş Bankası’s ad, and courageous women raising their hands and protesting in Koç Holding’s ad.

Another prominent visual theme in the ads is the notion of struggle and perseverance in the face of adversity. Examples include Koç Holding’s Turkish flag fluttering in the wind, the Turkish soldier in traditional footwear in Boyner’s ad, and the weary and dirt-covered Turkish soldier in İş Bankası’s ad. Additionally, a notable visual theme is the Republic’s contributions to technological advancement. This is exemplified by the aircraft skeleton and construction process featured in Boyner’s ad, and the robotic hand shown in Eti’s ad.

The cultural references that stand out in the ads celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic generally focus on two main elements: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag. Atatürk is portrayed throughout the entire Garanti BBVA ad through an actor and appears in a total of 32 scenes in the Akbank ad. In total, Atatürk features in approximately 60 different scenes across the seven ads. In contrast, the Turkish flag appears in 14 different scenes and is prominently displayed throughout various scenes in the Koç Holding ad. Additionally, some scenes feature traditional-clad village men and women, and a

scene in the Koç Holding ad shows a woman with open hands in prayer, representing a cultural element.

The use of national elements in ads has long been a strategy employed by brands. Research indicates that the appeal of nationalism in ads is effective not only on special occasions but also in many sales-driven campaigns. Incorporating cultural values into ads adds extra value to them (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990, p. 369). Another study demonstrates that shared culture, values, and traditions in nationalist ads positively influence consumer behavior. The analysis of the brands studied in this work shows that they are all perceived as “Brands Representing Republican Values” in the eyes of the public (Aydın & Yegen, 2019, p. 961). However, one study concludes that nationalism alone is not sufficient to impact consumers effectively; rather, it should be supported by additional appeals (Varsha, 2008, p. 46). The analyzed ads generally show that, in addition to the appeal of nationalism, they are also supported by other appeals such as productivity, courage, and similar themes.

These findings reveal that the ads do not merely celebrate the centennial of the Republic but function as multilayered narrative structures that produce ideological meanings through visual and symbolic codes. Drawing from Barthes’ semiotic theory (1957), especially his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, the ads can be interpreted as creating a mythologized narrative of the Republic. For instance, the repeated use of Atatürk and the Turkish flag at the denotative level signifies patriotism; at the connotative level, it evokes feelings of unity, progress, and shared identity; and at the mythic level, it constructs an ideological message about the eternal legacy and moral superiority of the Republic’s founding principles. In this sense, the ads serve not only as commemorative messages but also as modern myth-making tools aligned with national ideology. Additionally, Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of hyperreality could be applied here, where the representations of nationalism in the ads—heavily aestheticized and emotionally charged—replace the complexities of historical reality with a consumable and idealized version of the Republic.

This study is specifically focused on ads celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Republic. Future research could expand the scope by selecting all ads containing nationalist appeal from a particular year and repeating the analysis. Additionally, since this study employs a semiotic approach, it is also possible to conduct a comparative analysis of ads released on two different special dates. For example, ads aired on July 15 could be compared with those aired during a selected national holiday. Moreover, applying different methods such as content analysis, neuroscientific analyses, and in-depth interviews could provide valuable insights into the potential effects of these ads on the sample and consumers, offering significant contributions to the field.

Ethical Declaration

In this study, all the rules stated in the “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research (Türkiye) and Publication Ethics Directive” were followed.

Ethics Committee Approval

The author declare that the research is one of the studies that does not require ethical committee approval.

Conflict of Interest and Financial Contribution

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