

## The Speciesist Face of Popular Culture: Nonhuman Animals in Animal-Based Product Commercials

*Popüler Kültürün Türücü Yüzü: Hayvan Temelli Ürün Reklamlarında İnsan Olmayan Hayvanlar*

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### Öz

Günümüzde popüler kültürün en güçlü unsurlarından biri haline gelen reklamlar, yalnızca ürün tanıtımı yapmakla sınırlı kalmayıp, aynı zamanda toplumsal söylemlerin kurulması ve yayılması sürecinde son derece önemli ideolojik araçlar olarak işlev görmektedir. Bu bağlamda reklamlar, tüketicilerin ürünlere dair algılarını şekillendirmenin ötesinde, kültürel değerleri ve sosyal normları da güçlendirmekte veya yeniden üretmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de beyaz/kırmızı et, süt ve yumurta gibi hayvansal ürünlerin satışını yapan Şenpiliç, Banvit, Lezita, Kor Organik Yumurta, Gedik Piliç, Sultan Et, Pınar Et, Maret, Süttaş, Pınar Süt, İçim ve Ekici gibi markalara ait toplam 12 reklam filmini nitel bir yaklaşımla ele alarak, insan olmayan hayvan temsillerinin türücü bir söylem ekseninde nasıl kurgulandığını eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir. Bu incelemede, Roland Barthes’ın göstergebilimsel çözümleme yöntemi, Judith Butler’ın normatif iktidar anlayışı, Carol J. Adams’ın “kayıp gönderge” (absent referent) kavramı ve Adorno ile Horkheimer’in “kültür endüstrisi” yaklaşımı kuramsal çerçeve olarak benimsenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, incelenen reklamlarda hayvansal ürün tüketimini teşvik eden dört temel mitin öne çıktığını göstermektedir: Mutlu Çiftlik Miti, Geleneksel Aile Sofrası Miti, Sağlıklı Olma/Büyüme Miti ve İdeal Erkek/Kadın Miti. Mutlu Çiftlik Miti, reklamlarda insan olmayan hayvanların sanki huzurlu ve doğal ortamlarda yaşadığı, herhangi bir acı veya sömürü içermeksizin sofraya ulaştığı algısını yaratmaktadır. Bu sunum biçimi, endüstriyel hayvancılıkta karşılaşılan yoğun ve çoğu zaman zorlayıcı koşulları perdelemekte, hayvanların bireysel varlıklarına dikkat çekilmesini engellemektedir. Geleneksel Aile Sofrası Miti ise Türk toplumuna özgü olduğu varsayılan heteroseksüel, çocuk merkezli ve hayvansal besine dayalı aile yapısını yeniden üreten, bu yapıyı hem kültürel hem de toplumsal açıdan “doğal” bir gerçeklik olarak benimsetmektedir. Sağlıklı Olma/Büyüme Miti, çocukların ve yetişkinlerin dengeli beslenmesi için et, süt ve yumurta gibi hayvansal ürünlerin vazgeçilmez olduğu fikrini işleyerek, bu ürünlerin tüketilmesini hem toplumsal hem de bilimsel bir zorunluluk gibi sunmaktadır. Böylece hayvansal ürünlerin günlük yaşamda normalleşmesi kolaylaşmakta ve eleştirel bir sorgulama yapılmasının önü kapanmaktadır. İdeal Erkek/Kadın Miti ise kadınları çoğunlukla mutfak ortamında, evin beslenmesinden sorumlu şefkatli figürler olarak temsil ederken; erkekleri ailenin koruyucusu, sağlayıcısı ve karar vericisi konumuna yerleştirmektedir. Bu durum, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini pekiştirerek, kadının ve erkeğin toplumsal rol dağılımını doğallaştırmaktadır. Çalışma, söz konusu mitlerin insan olmayan hayvanları yalnızca bir “kaynak” veya “mal” olarak konumlandırması ile insan olmayan hayvanların bireyselliklerini silip onları araçsallaştırdığını ve böylelikle türücü söylemi doğal ve meşru bir çerçeveye oturttuğunu ileri sürmektedir. Reklamlarda resmedilen “mutluluk” ve “doğallık” unsurları, endüstriyel hayvancılığın gerçekleriyle ciddi bir çelişki içindedir. İneklerin, buzağların veya tavukların geniş, yeşil alanlarda özgürce gezindiği görüntüler, çoğu zaman ağır sömürü pratiklerini gizleyen yanılsamalara dönüşmektedir. Bu yanılsamalar sayesinde tüketiciler, hayvansal ürünlerin üretim süreçlerinde yaşanan etik ve ekolojik sorunlardan uzak tutulmakta, dolayısıyla eleştirel sorgulama zemini zayıflatılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, çalışmada ortaya konan veriler, incelenen reklamların insan olmayan hayvanlara yönelik türücü ideolojiyi pekiştirmenin yanı sıra, tüketicinin zihin dünyasında hayvan sömürüsü gerçeğini görünmez kıldığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, hem hayvan refahı hem de toplumsal bilinç açısından ciddi bir sorun yaratmakta; reklamların, popüler kültür içinde türçülüğü normalleştiren ve yeniden üreten bir mecra olduğunu açıkça ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla, türücü temsillerin eleştirel bir bakışla incelenmesi ve bu söylemlere karşı alternatif, duyarlı yaklaşımların geliştirilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Göstergebilim, türçülük, popüler kültür, reklam, insan olmayan hayvan.

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### Use of Artificial Intelligence

No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. All content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles. Erhan Korkmaz

### Complaints

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## Abstract

In contemporary popular culture, commercials have transcended their traditional function as mere platforms for product promotion, evolving into potent ideological tools that construct, disseminate, and reinforce a multitude of social discourses. As such, they play a pivotal role in shaping cultural structures, influencing consumer perceptions, and molding public attitudes on ethics and social norms. This study critically examines how nonhuman animal representations are fashioned within a speciesist discourse framework in twelve commercials from prominent brands in Turkey—namely Şenpiliç, Banvit, Lezita, Kor Organik Yumurta, Gedik Piliç, Sultan Et, Pınar Et, Maret, Sütaş, Pınar Süt, İçim, and Ekici—that sell white/red meat, dairy, and eggs. Employing a qualitative research design, the analysis draws on multiple theoretical lenses, including Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, Judith Butler's insights on normative power, Carol J. Adams' theory of the absent referent, and Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry. The findings reveal the prevalence of four central myths that perpetuate the consumption of animal products: the Happy Farm Myth, the Traditional Family Table Myth, the Health and Growth Myth, and the Ideal Man/Woman Myth. The Happy Farm Myth constructs an illusion wherein nonhuman animals appear to live carefree lives on picturesque farms, seemingly unaffected by the reality that they will be converted into food. By presenting bucolic images of grassy fields and cheerful animals, these commercials obscure the inherently violent processes of industrial farming. Simultaneously, the Traditional Family Table Myth underscores the idealized image of the Turkish family as heterosexual, child-centered, and reliant on animal-based meals, suggesting that cultural identity is closely tied to consuming meat, dairy, and eggs. This framing reinforces notions of tradition and belonging, making it difficult for viewers to question or deviate from established dietary norms. Meanwhile, the Health and Growth Myth posits animal products as indispensable sources of nutrition, particularly for children, thereby normalizing the idea that a well-rounded, healthy diet must include meat, milk, and eggs. By linking these items to physical development, vitality, and longevity, the commercials amplify societal expectations surrounding conventional dietary practices. The Ideal Man/Woman Myth, on the other hand, entrenches traditional gender roles by depicting women predominantly in nurturing domestic spaces, responsible for meal preparation and child-rearing, while positioning men as protectors, providers, and key decision-makers for the family's welfare. This study argues that these intertwined myths collectively legitimize and perpetuate speciesism by reducing nonhuman animals to mere commodities, stripping them of individuality and moral significance. The portrayal of "natural" and "happy" farm life serves as a strategic narrative device to mask the harsh realities of mass production, including overcrowded conditions and routine forms of exploitation. Consequently, consumers are distanced from the actual processes involved in bringing animal-based products to their tables. By framing the consumption of these products as both culturally integral and biologically essential, the commercials effectively discourage ethical scrutiny of the underlying power dynamics and injustices that sustain the animal agriculture industry. Ultimately, this research highlights the need to expose and challenge the ingrained speciesist ideologies embedded within popular culture. By deconstructing the visual and narrative strategies employed in these commercials, the study underscores how mythic representations obscure systemic violence, normalize exploitative practices, and reinforce societal acceptance of animal consumption as an unquestionable norm.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, speciesism, popular culture, commercial, nonhuman animal.

## Introduction

In November 2024, while watching *Mad Men*<sup>1</sup>, I realized commercials shape social and cultural values far more than I had assumed. Before, I used to believe that commercials merely aimed to introduce the functions of products and, in doing so, employed specific cultural motifs to establish a connection with their consumers. For instance, in an advertisement for brand X's ice cream, a phrase such as "Wouldn't you like to enjoy a cool X ice cream with its rich caramel flavor after a family dinner in front of the TV?" seemed to emphasize an intimate bond between the flavor and the traditional family structure in Turkey. However, such commercials also answer normative questions<sup>2</sup> like "What should an ideal family look like?" By aligning with the so-called ideal family values prevalent among communities in Turkey, commercials simultaneously reproduce certain discourses about the family while failing to present an inclusive framework. Individuals who do not have a family, live alone, do not watch television, or follow a vegan lifestyle are excluded from the idealized world that such commercials construct. Thus, commercials' inclusivity is defined by what they exclude, either directly or indirectly. The target audience of commercials typically are those who adhere to conventional discourses, that is, those who embrace the dominant narrative<sup>3</sup>. Let us push the ice cream example to an extreme scenario: "*Wouldn't you like to enjoy a rich caramel-filled X ice cream with your partner after passionate night?*" To what extent would this provocative statement align with the prevailing social values among communities in Turkey, and would it be broadcast without any problem?<sup>4</sup> In this sense, it is evident that commercials remain firmly anchored to conventional norms while simultaneously excluding alternative lifestyles silently yet effectively.

While watching *Mad Men*, the central question was: "How are nonhuman animals represented in commercials, and do these representations reproduce speciesism?" As a vegan and an animal liberation activist, I have always questioned the place of nonhuman animals.<sup>5</sup> In popular culture. However, I began to deeply contemplate how commercials, which reach broad audiences, construct speciesist ideology<sup>6</sup> through the promotion of animal-derived products. At this point, I realized that the representation of nonhuman animals in such commercials is not merely a marketing strategy but functions as an ideological discourse.<sup>78</sup> That both reflect and shape the majority's relationship with nonhuman animals. This awareness drove my motivation to undertake this study, both on a personal and academic level.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mad Men* is an American television drama series created by Matthew Weiner and produced by Lionsgate Television. Airing on AMC between 2007 and 2015, the series received widespread acclaim for its meticulous depiction of social life in 1960s America, its exploration of cultural transformations, and its refined visual aesthetics. The show revolves around Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the creative director at the Sterling Cooper advertising agency in New York, and his colleagues, portraying both their professional and personal lives. Through characters such as Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss)—who starts as Don's secretary and quickly rises to become one of the agency's most competent copywriters—the series examines gender roles, consumer culture, and the influence of advertising on social structures during that time. *Mad Men* achieved both critical and commercial success, winning the Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series four years in a row and securing three Golden Globe Awards (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Normative questions' (e.g. "What should a family be like?") refer to questions that distinguish between "right and wrong" and "ideal and non-ideal" according to a certain social or moral framework.

<sup>3</sup> It refers to the whole of discourses that are accepted as dominant in society, approved and widely adopted by large segments of that society.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that those commercials are examined from a specific perspective. To provide a fair assessment, it would be misleading to claim that all effects of advertising are adverse. Commercials can also serve positive functions, such as running social awareness campaigns, promoting healthy consumption habits, or strengthening social solidarity. However, most commercials promoting animal-derived products, which are the focus of this study, contain discourses and representations that reinforce speciesism to the detriment of nonhuman animals.

<sup>5</sup> I intentionally prefer the term "nonhuman animals" to emphasize that humans are also part of the animal kingdom and to problematize speciesist distinctions in language. I know it is a longer and slightly less fluent expression than "animals." However, this choice is crucial in taking a critical stance against anthropocentric thought. Such minor challenges are worth it, aren't they?

The representation of nonhuman animals in commercials, as exemplified in the ice cream commercial, ensures that the audience perceives them within a framework that aligns with social norms. Such representations reflect a worldview in which nonhuman animals are not regarded as individuals but are instead confined to specific anthropocentric<sup>9</sup> and speciesist roles. For instance, commercials promoting the consumption of animal-derived products such as meat, milk, and eggs do not merely present nonhuman animals as the sources of these products; they also associate them with emotional and cultural values such as compassion, happiness, family unity, or abundance, thereby normalizing speciesism. The depiction of a cow as a cheerful figure in a dairy brand's commercial makes it easier for consumers to accept the production processes of animal products without ethical scrutiny. Similarly, in an advertisement of a meat brand, the portrayal of a nonhuman animal solely as a flavor component disregards its agency and ideologically reinforces the sustainability of speciesism. In this context, the food and beverage industry -where animal-derived products are promoted- provides an ideal domain for analyzing representations of nonhuman animals. This sector offers insight into the diversity of these representations and serves as a crucial ground for understanding how they reinforce societal perceptions of speciesism. My research examines a total of 12 commercial commercials released in the last decade (between 2014 and 2024) by companies in Turkey that sell animal products such as poultry, red meat, dairy, and eggs, including Şenpiliç, Banvit, Lezita, Kor Organik Yumurta, Gedik Piliç, Sultan Et, Pınar Et, Maret, Süttaş, Pınar Süt, İçim, and Ekici. The study aims to reveal how these commercials reproduce social norms and construct the relationship between consumer culture and speciesism. Critically analyzing the representations of nonhuman animals in these commercials is crucial for understanding how speciesism is normalized through media and questioning the ethical and ideological implications of such representations.

In order to understand the social and ideological functions of commercials, I first address Ferdinand Saussure's theory of signs, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic system, and Roland Barthes' concept of "myth" under the section "Semiotics and Advertising". Then, in the section "Speciesism and Advertising", I discuss the critiques of speciesism by thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer, analyzing how commercials represent nonhuman animals within an anthropocentric framework. In the subsequent sections, I outline this study's data collection process and analytical tools under "Research Methodology" and then examine twelve commercials in the "Findings and Interpretation" section. These commercials are analyzed through the lens of Barthes' myth theory, Carol J. Adams' absent referent theory, Judith Butler's concept of normative power, and Adorno and Horkheimer's perspective on the culture industry. Accordingly, I decode four myths embedded in these commercials: the Happy Farm Myth, the Traditional Family Table Myth, the Health and Growth Myth, and the Ideal Man/Woman Myth. By doing so, I aim to reveal how these narratives normalize speciesism and function as ideological strategies. In the final section, I conclude the paper by discussing these representations' social and ethical consequences, making visible the ideological mechanisms that sustain speciesist discourse in advertising.

<sup>6</sup> A discriminatory approach that considers non-human animals less valuable than humans and justifies their exploitation. It was first put forward by Richard D. Ryder and its philosophical foundations were strengthened by Peter Singer.

<sup>7</sup> I approach commercials not only as tools that shape social discourse but also as reflections of the human-animal relationships observed and normalized in society. These two aspects are inherently interconnected.

<sup>8</sup> The ideological function of commercials becomes evident in various instances, such as dairy advertisements depicting cows as willingly "giving" milk or fast-food commercials featuring anthropomorphized farm animals. These and other examples, along with relevant references, will be discussed in detail in the following sections of this article.

<sup>9</sup> The "anthropocentric" approach is a worldview that regards the human being as the most superior and central being in the universe, and determines the value of other living beings by comparing their interests with those of the human being. Although closely related, speciesism goes a step further, systematically justifying or normalizing the exploitation and subordination of nonhuman animals based solely on their species membership. In other words, anthropocentrism sets the stage for viewing humans as paramount, while speciesism actively legitimizes the moral and practical consequences of treating nonhuman animals as inferior.

## 1. Semiotics and Advertising

Semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that studies signs and the processes through which these signs generate meaning. This approach emerged in the early 20th century within the field of linguistics. Over time, it became a key tool for analyzing both visual and written cultural texts. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure laid the theoretical foundations of modern semiotics. He defined it as 'the science that studies the life of signs within society' and referred to it as 'semiology' (Saussure, 1983). According to Saussure, a sign has two components: the signifier (its physical form, such as a word or image) and the signified (the concept it represents). For instance, in a milk commercial, the image of a pastoral farm (signifier) evokes values such as purity and naturalness (signified) in consumers' minds. This fundamental conceptual framework enables understanding how linguistic and visual signs acquire meaning within a structured system. Saussure's structuralist view was later expanded by Charles Sanders Peirce. Unlike Saussure, Peirce argued that meaning-making is not limited to language. Physical and visual signs also shape meaning. His theory of signs categorized signs into three types based on how they generate meaning: icons (which resemble their referents), indexes (which establish meaning through causal relationships), and symbols (which derive meaning through social conventions) (Peirce, 1955). For example, a mountain landscape in a cheese commercial may function as an icon, visually resembling a natural environment. This image creates an indexical connection by implying that the product is made in a pristine setting, reinforcing naturalness as a cultural symbol. Peirce's sign model provides a crucial framework for analyzing the multi-layered meaning-production process in commercials. Establishing a connection between Saussure's structuralist linguistics and Peirce's multidimensional sign model is critical for expanding the scope of semiotic analysis. Integrating Saussure's signifier-signified distinction with Peirce's triadic classification of signs makes it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of both linguistic and visual texts.

From a semiotic perspective, commercials attract attention not only through the explicit meanings they present on the surface but also through the ideological structures embedded in their subtexts. Among the key figures in the field following Saussure and Peirce, Roland Barthes made significant contributions to semiotics by introducing the concepts of denotation and connotation to analyze underlying meanings (Barthes, 1972).

Denotation refers to the literal, surface-level meaning of a sign; for instance, in a meat commercial, a "fresh and natural" label directly describes a product's quality. However, as Barthes highlights, commercials go beyond this denotative level and introduce a layer of connotation, a level of meaning that is intertwined with social norms and ideologies. For example, the image of an animal shown as having "grown up on a happy farm" in a meat commercial does not merely indicate the product's source. It conveys a myth of naturalness and anthropocentric compassion associated with consumer culture. In his work *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes analyzed how everyday objects, and cultural texts acquire meaning within ideological frameworks, referring to the constructed meanings as "myths" which are perceived by society as natural and immutable realities when, in fact, they are socially and ideologically produced. Barthes says commercials reinforce social values and norms by linking consumer goods to these myths. Barthes' analysis serves as a crucial tool for understanding the ideological function of commercials, as these myths not only shape consumer perceptions of products -associating them with positive or negative connotations- but also legitimize both the consumer and the consumed within the existing ideological framework.

Other theorists who support Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation have also highlighted the ideological function of commercials. In particular, Jean Baudrillard argues that commercials are not merely tools for promoting products but also symbolic representations of consumer culture. As a sociologist within the French postmodernist tradition, Baudrillard extensively explored the relationship between modern societies and consumer



culture. According to Baudrillard, in contemporary societies, consumer goods are no longer defined solely by their use value but, more significantly, by the meanings and symbols they represent. This perspective transforms consumer goods into signs, meaning that products are not primarily designed to fulfill physical needs but serve as crucial instruments for social status and identity construction (Baudrillard, 2020). To explain this phenomenon, Baudrillard introduced the concepts of simulation and simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994). Simulation refers to a condition where the boundary between reality and representation becomes blurred. On the other hand, Simulacra are signs that do not correspond to any real referent but are reproductions of other representations. These simulacra create an illusion of reality that, over time, is perceived as more real than reality itself, which leads to what Baudrillard describes as hyperreality, where representations detached from any material reality ultimately replace the real in consumers' perceptions (Baudrillard, 2020).

In conclusion, semiotics reveals much more than the superficial slogans of commercials—they uncover the ideological structures embedded within their subtexts. The sign theories of Saussure and Peirce, Barthes' myth analysis, and Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality demonstrate how commercials transform products from mere consumer goods into powerful symbols. Thus, commercials function as marketing tools and discursive texts that reinforce social norms and values. By critically analyzing these processes, semiotics makes visible the impact of commercials on consumer culture and societal values, offering an essential perspective for understanding their ideological influence.

## 2. Speciesism and Advertising

Commercials do more than promote consumer goods; they also reinforce social values and ideologies. From a semiotic perspective, advertising, especially in relation to nonhuman animals, creates a mechanism of domination. This mechanism strips animals of their individuality, reducing them to mere "resources" or "products". Carol J. Adams' concept of the "absent referent" provides a crucial framework for understanding domination. Commercials for meat and dairy subtly acknowledge their animal origins while erasing the animals and their suffering (Adams, 1990). This aligns with Barthes' concept of myth, where nonhuman animals are instrumentalized in consumer culture and presented as natural. For instance, in a dairy commercial, the representation of a "happy cow" not only idealizes the milk production process but also completely erases the animal's existence, reducing it to a mere machine for producing milk. This narrative reinforces the domination of nonhuman animals through an anthropocentric worldview, a structure that is ideologically defined as speciesism.

The term speciesism was first used by Richard Ryder in 1970 to describe the exploitation of nonhuman animals for human needs and its justification through an anthropocentric ideology of superiority (Singer, 2005, pp. 43-44). Later, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) gave the concept a philosophical foundation, comparing it to racism and sexism as a form of unjustified discrimination. Singer argues that speciesism prioritizes human interests while ignoring nonhuman animals' capacity to suffer. This ethical critique predates Ryder; Jeremy Bentham had already raised similar concerns in the 18th century. He argued that moral consideration should focus not on an animal's ability to reason or speak but on its capacity to suffer. His famous question -"Can they suffer?" (Bentham, 1789)- became a cornerstone of the modern animal rights movement.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> With this question, Bentham not only challenged the Cartesian mechanistic view, which regarded nonhuman animals as soulless machines (Ryan, 2019: 22; Timofeeva, 2018: 75-77; Ergün, 2020) but also argued that they should be considered moral subjects. Expressing such ideas in the 18th century was difficult, given the societal and cultural conditions of the time. Nonhuman animals were primarily seen as economic resources in agriculture, hunting, and experimentation, with little discussion of their ethical status. Despite this, Bentham's work introduced a radical perspective, laying the philosophical foundation for speciesism critique and the recognition of nonhuman animals as individual beings.

The reproduction of speciesism in advertising goes beyond the objectification of nonhuman animals; it is also reinforced by ideological discourses that present it as natural and inevitable. Judith Butler's concept of normative power provides a critical framework for understanding how speciesist norms are legitimized through commercials. Social norms function as regulatory forces, defining what is considered natural and acceptable. They do not only shape behavior but also determine which lives are deemed valuable and which are disregarded. Thus, commercials serve as tools of normative power. The consumption of animal products is framed as a natural practice and an essential part of society, while the individuality and rights of nonhuman animals are entirely erased. Butler highlights the process of "de-biographization", in which certain beings are stripped of identity and reduced to faceless objects, rendering violence against them invisible (Butler, 2005; cited in Burgan, 2017). This mechanism is a key strategy for legitimizing speciesism in advertising. For instance, a dairy commercial emphasizing that "cows give milk with love" conceals the reality of forced impregnation, separation from offspring, and industrial confinement. Butler argues that such representations systematically erase the faces, names, and histories of nonhuman animals, turning them into mere commodities, which aligns with Butler's concept of "radical erasure", where nonhuman animals are depicted as if they never existed, making their exploitation seem nonexistent (Butler, 2005; cited in Burgan, 2017). This erasure mechanism is reinforced through visual and narrative elements in commercials. For example, a meat commercial's depiction of its product as "a family meal essential" completely removes an animal's individuality, presenting it solely as a product. Butler asserts that such representations legitimize violence by making it appear unreal. Butler's theory of normative power reveals how speciesism functions not only as a social practice but also as an ideological mechanism. She emphasizes that social norms regulate behavior and create an exclusionary system for those who do not conform. Through advertising, speciesist norms not only normalize animal product consumption but also marginalize veganism, portraying it as outside the norm. This parallels Butler's argument in gender theory, where those who do not conform to normative identities face exclusion and punishment. Similarly, commercials reinforce normative speciesism while positioning alternative consumption choices, such as veganism, as deviant.

Butler's concept of normative power, combined with Carol J. Adams' absent referent theory, offers a strong framework for explaining how advertising reinforces speciesism. Adams argues that the imagery and language used in animal product commercials ultimately erode animals' individuality and suffering in production processes (Adams, 1990). In this sense, Butler's de-biographization and radical erasure align with Adams' absent referent mechanism. Such representations create an ideological smokescreen that prevents consumers from questioning the living conditions of animals.

The ideological dimension of speciesism in animal product commercials is reinforced through individual representations and a broader cultural mechanism. Accordingly, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the culture industry provides a crucial framework for understanding how these mechanisms operate. The culture industry is an ideological apparatus that dulls individuals' critical thinking and steers them toward a consumer-driven lifestyle. Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize that commercials are an integral part of this system, stating:

*"Culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so strictly bound to the law of exchange that it becomes non-exchangeable; it is consumed so blindly that it ceases to be usable. Hence, it merges with advertising. As advertising becomes increasingly meaningless under monopolistic conditions, culture simultaneously attains an all-encompassing power. The motives behind this are economic. It is evident that life could continue without the culture industry, as the saturation and indifference it fosters in consumers are immense. (...) Advertising is the lifeblood of the culture industry. (...) In a competitive society, advertising once served a social function by guiding buyers in the*

*marketplace, facilitating choices, and helping lesser-known suppliers reach relevant consumers with more useful products. Rather than wasting time, it saved time. However, in today's era, where the free market has reached its end, advertising conceals the system's dominance, further strengthening the ties that bind consumers to large industrial conglomerates. (...) The advertising expenditure, which ultimately flows back into the pockets of industrial conglomerates, eliminates the need to defeat unwanted competitors in fierce market battles. These expenditures secure the exclusivity of those in power, ensuring their closed status against outsiders. In this sense, advertising resembles the economic committees in totalitarian states that determine which enterprises may open and which may continue to operate." (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2014, p. 215)<sup>11</sup>*

As the quotation shows, advertising is the "lifeblood" of the culture industry because it ensures its sustainability. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industry turns nature, labor, and nonhuman animals into commodities through reification and commodification (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1996). Commercials enhance the appeal of commodities and obscure their production processes, relational contexts, and ethical implications. The culture industry frames consumption as more than an economic activity; it becomes a ritual reinforcing social norms. In this way, speciesist advertising legitimizes the consumption of animal products as part of societal values, strengthening the systemic nature of speciesism.

Speciesism in advertising functions as an ideology that reinforces social norms. Carol J. Adams' absent referent theory explains the invisibility of nonhuman animals, while Judith Butler's concept of normative power clarifies how this invisibility is naturalized. Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry shows how speciesist discourse circulates widely, normalizing consumption. This framework highlights how commercials shape individual choices and a broader speciesist worldview. By turning representations of nonhuman animals into ideological tools, advertising institutionalizes and naturalizes speciesism, underscoring the need for a detailed explanation of the research methodology.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study analyzes 12 commercial films from 12 brands operating in Turkey that sell animal products such as white/red meat, dairy, and eggs through a semiotic and critical lens. The theoretical framework is built on Roland Barthes' concept of myth, Carol J. Adams' absent referent, Judith Butler's theory of normative power, and Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry to reveal how commercials reproduce speciesist ideologies.

This study employs a critical qualitative research model, which analyzes texts and visuals beyond description to uncover their ideological and social implications. Using Roland Barthes' (1972) concepts of denotation and connotation, the analysis deciphers both explicit and underlying messages in commercials. Four dominant myths - Happy Farm, Traditional Family Table, Health and Growth, and Ideal Man/Woman- are discussed within this theoretical framework. The commercials aired between 2014 and 2024 on television, the internet, and social media (specifically on official YouTube channels) were selected through content screening. The key criteria for sampling were nationwide reach and the direct marketing of animal products. One advertisement per brand from the past decade was chosen, resulting in 12 commercials, each lasting between 20 and 60 seconds.

During the analysis, commercials were first transcribed, then dialogues, slogans, jingles, and key audiovisual elements were categorized. Next, a coding process identified concepts reinforcing speciesist narratives, such as "naturalness," "happiness," "tradition," "family values," and "ideal man/woman." These codes were then grouped through thematic analysis under four central myths: Happy Farm, Traditional Family Table, Healthy & Growth, and

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<sup>11</sup> This quotation is my translation from the Turkish edition of the work.



Ideal Man/Woman. This approach integrated semiotics with theoretical concepts like the absent referent and normative power. Finally, the commercials were holistically evaluated to examine how they instrumentalize animals and legitimize speciesist discourse through narrative strategies.

This study employs a triangulation strategy to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, applying multiple theoretical approaches (Barthes, Adams, Butler, Adorno & Horkheimer) to the same data. Analyzing identical commercial sequences from both semiotic and ideological critique perspectives reinforces the consistency of findings. Since the study focuses on publicly available commercials, no special ethical approval was required; however, names and private details of individuals appearing in the commercials were omitted, referring only brands and publication dates. The main limitation of this method is the small sample size—while findings from 12 commercials do not allow for broad generalizations about all animal-based product commercials in Turkey, the goal is to reveal how speciesist discourse is reproduced in the media. Future studies could expand the sample size, incorporate other industries (e.g., cosmetics, fashion), or analyze different media formats (e.g., social media campaigns and print ads) for a more comprehensive and comparative approach.

#### **4. Research Findings And Interpretation**

This study analyzes 12 commercials from Turkish brands selling animal-based products through a semiotic framework, identifying four key myths based on Barthes' (1972) concept of myth: Happy Farm, Traditional Family Table, Health and Growth, and Ideal Man/Woman. These myths frame animal product consumption as a natural extension of social norms and cultural values rather than a personal choice.

The Happy Farm Myth portrays nonhuman animals in commercials as content and willingly serving, concealing their actual living conditions and production processes while naturalizing speciesism. Carol J. Adams' (1990) absent referent explains this mechanism: animal bodies are reimagined in pastoral scenes despite being products of industrial exploitation. Jean Baudrillard's (1994) simulacrum highlights this hyperreality, where idyllic farm imagery removes ethical concerns and normalizes animal exploitation in the public conscience.

The Traditional Family Table Myth emerges from portraying animal-based products as symbols of family unity in commercials. Shared meals and barbecue scenes are linked to cultural values like hospitality and togetherness. These products serve as unifying symbols at the connotative level (Barthes). However, from Judith Butler's (1993) normative power perspective, this idealized narrative excludes vegans, child-free individuals, and nonheteronormative identities, reinforcing societal norms.

The Health & Growth Myth constructs the idea that babies, children, adults, and patients "heal" or "gain strength" through animal products. Using scientific terms like protein, calcium, and energy provides a rational foundation at the denotative level (Barthes). In contrast, at the connotative level, these products are linked to vitality and bodily integrity. By framing them as essential, commercials subtly imply that avoiding such products leads to weakness, deficiency, or an "abnormal" life. This myth aligns with Foucault's concept of biopolitics, where medicine rationalizes the body as part of social governance (Foucault, 2001:137)—associating animal products with health influences both individual choices and public health policies. Through this biopolitical discourse, commercials construct a health norm tied to consuming animal-based foods, potentially marginalizing those who abstain—such as vegans, framing them as unhealthy or even socially deviant. Ultimately, the Health and growth Myth reinforces speciesism while presenting health as an individual responsibility, making dietary choices part of biopolitical control and shaping broader societal norms.

The Ideal Man/Woman Myth reveals how commercials reinforce gender roles and the intersection of speciesism and sexism. This myth demonstrates how patriarchal norms are reinforced through the consumption of animal-based products. Patriarchy, broadly defined, refers to social and cultural structures organized around male dominance, marginalizing women and other groups while centering masculinity.<sup>12</sup> This system not only reinforces gender inequalities but also shapes economic, social, and cultural structures in favor of male authority (Walby, 1990). Speciesism and patriarchy are interconnected, as Carol J. Adams (1990) highlights, through the instrumentalization and commodification of both animal bodies and women. Commercials often depict women in domestic roles - cooking, setting the table, or feeding children- framing their labor as a natural extension of patriarchal norms and legitimizing the consumption of animal products. This intersection of speciesism and sexism is evident in commercials where men are portrayed as dominant figures, such as a father grilling meat, reinforcing masculine authority, while a mother setting the table or serving food reinforces nurturing and caregiving roles. This representation integrates animal product consumption into social and cultural norms, reinforcing both patriarchal structures and speciesist ideologies.

These myths frame the consumption of animal-based products not merely as an economic activity but as an integral part of social norms, cultural values, and identity construction through ideological strategies. The following sections examine how these four myths operate in 12 commercials from brands in Turkey in detail. Corporate information about the brands and the content of the commercials is presented in two separate tables in the Appendix. The analysis follows the order of white meat (poultry), eggs, red meat, and dairy sectors.

### **Şenpiliç Commercial**

The ad opens in a village setting, evoking a warm, traditional atmosphere. A woman making chicken pilaf sends her child to share it with a neighbor, reinforcing hospitality and community values through the phrase "Guests bring abundance." The pastoral imagery romanticizes animal-based products as a natural and abundant ritual.

Şenpiliç commercial reinforces social norms and cultural values through animal product consumption while strengthening speciesist and patriarchal narratives. The image of a headscarf-wearing woman preparing and serving chicken pilaf embodies the Ideal Man/Woman Myth, reinforcing domestic female labor and male roles in public life. Scenes featuring children highlight the Traditional Family Table Myth, where their eager consumption of chicken associates animal products with hospitality and sharing, portraying them as essential to cultural rituals. This enthusiastic eating also supports the Health/Growth Myth, framing animal products as necessary for development. The voiceover phrases, "*Our meals are made in forty homes and shared with forty others*" and "*A neighbor's plate is never returned empty*" romanticize tradition and generosity, further linking these values to animal consumption - excluding those who do not partake, such as vegans or non-traditional family structures.

In the final scene, pastoral village life is idealized, reinforcing the Happy Farm Myth. The notion that "Guests bring abundance" frames animal products as symbols of prosperity and solidarity. This hyperreal depiction erases the individuality of animals and the ethical dimensions of production, aligning with Adams' absent referent concept. The chicken appears solely as a product, while village life normalizes animal consumption as a natural, unproblematic reality.

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<sup>12</sup> In this study, patriarchy is considered in its basic sense as an ideological system that reproduces gender roles through patriarchal norms. For a more in-depth reading, relevant works by Walby (1990), Hartmann (1979), Federici (2004), Kandiyoti (1988), Butler (1990), Ahmed (2017), Tekeli (1998), and Berktaş (1996) can be consulted.

### Banvit Commercial

Banvit's commercial presents white meat as an essential part of everyday life. Banvit's emphasis on 'white meat' clearly reflects the mechanism of *absent referent*: The existence of the nonhuman animal is ignored and the product is reduced to a mere food category.

In the opening scene, a male chef in a restaurant is framed as an authority in the public sphere, while a mother making chicken broth for her sick child at home reinforces patriarchal gender roles. This division reflects societal norms where professional cooking is male-dominated, while domestic food preparation is assigned to women. Similarly, the barbecue scene at the end, with a man grilling, reinforces the link between masculinity and meat consumption, aligning with Adams' analysis of the sexual politics of meat.

The sports scene emphasizes the health narrative, where the phrase "*for those who never skip protein*" ties white meat to the Health/Growth Myth. The mother immediately prepares chicken broth for her child, further reinforcing this belief. The advertisement constructs an ideal diet centered on animal protein, ignoring plant-based alternatives. The Traditional Family Table Myth appears in the large family gathering, and the voiceover states, "*Barbecue fun is complete with Jumbo sausages.*" Here, togetherness and joy are tied to meat consumption, excluding vegans from this idealized happiness. By portraying meat as the sole food, the commercial legitimizes speciesist ideology by merging cultural values like picnics and shared meals with animal products.

The final scene features a Banvit truck with the slogan, "*Turkey says yes to Banvit,*" echoing Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry critique. Large-scale industrial production is framed as a national and unifying value, suggesting that white meat is an indispensable part of Turkey's diet. Ultimately, the commercial normalizes speciesist and patriarchal norms by reducing chickens to "white meat," reinforcing gender roles in cooking, glorifying masculinity through barbecuing, and linking chicken broth to healing. The exploitation of animals is rendered invisible through linguistic framing, health narratives, and family rituals.

### Lezita Commercial

Lezita's commercial captures attention with a humorous yet aggressive traffic scene before transitioning into a product-focused narrative that makes animal-based food appealing. It opens with a young man in a luxury car yelling at a smaller vehicle, evoking a power dynamic between luxurious and modest cars- a classic masculinity performance. As four large men exit the smaller car, the tension turns comedic, portraying aggression and masculinity as normalized, even entertaining, aspects of daily life in Turkey. The absence of female characters reinforces a male-dominated world, subtly accepting gender inequality as a given.

The sudden shift to stuffed chicken highlights *absent referent* concept. The commercial presents crispy chicken filled with sausage, spinach, and mozzarella, erasing any reference to the living animal or the slaughter process. Instead of acknowledging a chicken's existence, the focus is on the "crunchy outside" and "legendary inside," reducing the animal to a mere food product.

Ultimately, the Lezita commercial sells novelty, entertainment, and flavor while making animal exploitation invisible. The emphasis on texture and fillings removes any trace of the chicken as a living being. Meanwhile, the opening scene's aggressive masculinity, softened with humor, helps make speciesist and patriarchal structures seem ordinary and unquestioned, subtly normalizing industrial farming and gender exclusion in the public sphere.

### Gedik Piliç Commercial

Despite its brevity, Gedik Piliç's commercial merges tradition and taste, framing animal product consumption as a national and familiar value. It opens with a frying chicken scene, accompanied by traditional music and the

phrase “tender as lokum”, evoking Turkey’s culinary culture. The voiceover, engaging in a self-dialogue, describes a 60+ woman as a tradition-lover, implying that chicken is just as timeless and enduring as she is.

Although no family gatherings or large tables are shown, the term “tradition-lover” is an extension of the Traditional Family Table Myth. The message suggests that chickens have always been a beloved, nostalgic staple, appealing to consumers' emotions. *Absent referent* is evident here, as the chicken is reduced to “tender drumsticks,” erasing its existence as a living being. The commercial does not mention industrial production or the animal's individuality, focusing solely on the sizzling chicken and the joy of eating. Ultimately, Gedik Piliç's commercial romanticizes tradition, taste, and nostalgia, normalizing animal product consumption. The elderly woman's representation of a “tradition-lover” reinforces chicken as comforting, timeless food. At the same time, the reality of an animal's life remains hidden beneath the pleasure of consumption and the romance of tradition.

### **Kor Yumurta<sup>13</sup> Commercial**

Kor Yumurta's commercial frames animal product consumption as a natural and nurturing process by centering motherhood, family unity, and organic production. It opens with a pregnant woman caressing her belly, followed by a mother lovingly feeding her baby, reinforcing motherhood's protective and nurturing role through phrases like “*you wait patiently*” and “*you feed your child with care*.” A family sitting around a table presents a “normal” and “happy” family dynamic, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

The commercial then introduces a chick looking at the camera and two hens roaming freely, implying the Happy Farm Myth. The voiceover states, “*We raise them with patience and care so they can give you eggs as pure and valuable as mother's milk*”, implying unconditional animal happiness while glorifying the organic label. However, *absent referent* becomes evident -by emphasizing organic production, the commercial conceals industry realities, such as the killing of male chicks and the slaughter of hens before they reach their natural lifespan. The phrase “*as pure as mother milk*” reinforces the Health/Growth Myth, framing eggs as an essential food for child development and family strength, legitimizing speciesist ideology. The scene of children joyfully tapping eggs together transforms egg consumption into a family ritual, aligning with the Traditional Family Table Myth, where happiness and unity are tied to animal-based foods.

In the final scene, the brand name “Kor Organic Egg” is repeated, reaffirming the organic label, while industrial farming realities are entirely absent. The farm and chicks are portrayed through themes of patience and care, making animal exploitation invisible. By merging speciesism with patriarchal family ideals, the ad invites consumers into a “pure, innocent, flower-fed” world, romanticizing and normalizing both animal exploitation and gender norms.

### **Sultan Et<sup>14</sup> Commercial**

Sultan Et's commercial legitimizes animal product consumption within social norms and cultural values by emphasizing traditional family roles, gender dynamics, and motivations for eating meat. In a short span, it presents meat consumption as a personal choice and a social expectation rooted in tradition.

All women in the commercial are shown preparing meat in the kitchen, reinforcing the Ideal Man/Woman Myth, where women’s domestic labor is central while men take no active role in food preparation, reinforcing patriarchal norms. It also highlights different age groups' motivations for eating meat. A young woman prepares a meat-based burger, while her daughter and husband consume meat for different reasons. The husband’s exaggerated

<sup>13</sup> “Yumurta” means “egg” in Turkish.

<sup>14</sup> “Et” means “Meat” in Turkish.

enjoyment portrays meat as a desirable and satisfying experience, while the child's curious gaze suggests that this behavior may not be as unquestioned as it seems. The voiceover states, "*One eats to grow fast, the other to stay healthy*", reinforcing the Health/Growth Myth, positioning meat as essential for physical development while disregarding alternative diets.

Finally, the commercial closes with the voiceover stating, "*And they all choose Sultan Et -for health, freshness, and reliability. Turkey's Butcher: Sultan.*" This reinforces the Health/Growth Myth, presenting meat as safe and essential while simultaneously erasing the exploitation and suffering of animals. Associating meat with health and quality ensures consumer trust, but by omitting the individual lives of animals and their suffering, the commercial objectifies animals and renders their exploitation invisible.

### **Pınar Et Commercial**

Pınar Et's commercial legitimizes animal product consumption through a speciesist ideology, primarily reinforcing the Traditional Family Table Myth and the Health/Growth Myth. The narrative centers on a family member stating, "*In our home, everyone is after each other's Pınar AÇ Bitir*" creating a sense of harmony and togetherness. By showing each family member consuming the product in different contexts, the commercial presents animal-based foods as the "ideal" solution for all occasions, reinforcing their role in social norms.

The Traditional Family Table Myth is at the heart of the commercial. The final scene, where the family joyfully gathers around the dinner table, reinforces the heteronormative nuclear family, marginalizing alternative lifestyles such as veganism. Positioned as a post-workout protein source, a breakfast staple, or a quick snack, AÇ Bitir strengthens the Health/Growth Myth, suggesting that animal products are essential for a healthy life. Even the product's name, "AÇ Bitir" (Open & Finish), normalizes fast and effortless consumption.

By addressing the audience with "*in our home*", the narrator invites viewers into a collective identity, implicitly defining this "home" through animal product consumption. Veganism and ethical concerns surrounding animal agriculture are entirely excluded, reinforcing speciesist norms as natural and unquestionable while systematically erasing any critical perspective on consumption choices.

### **Maret Commercial**

Maret's commercial adopts a short and playful format, portraying animal-based products, particularly sausages, purely through their functionality, reinforcing a speciesist narrative. Through visuals and on-screen text (e.g., "Quantity," "Taste," "Convenience"), the commercial highlights the product's superior qualities, ensuring that consumer focus remains solely on its practical aspects. This erasure of the animal's identity, reducing a once-living being to a processed food item, directly aligns with *absent referent* concept.

Although the commercial does not explicitly promote the Health/Growth Myth, it presents sausages as a quick, delicious solution, emphasizing taste and convenience. The phrase "*One to finish in one go*" reinforces a fast-consumption culture, aligning with broader consumerist narratives. Ultimately, the commercial positions animal products as tools to satisfy consumer needs, reinforcing speciesist ideology. Its lighthearted tone and emphasis on convenience create the illusion that animal consumption is a natural, effortless practice, utterly detached from exploitation and violence. In this sense, the ad simultaneously upholds fast-consumption ideals and speciesist discourse, further erasing the individuality of animals.



### **Sütaş<sup>15</sup> Commercial**

Sütaş's commercial reinforces the Happy Farm Myth, Health and Growth Myth, and Traditional Family Table Myth to legitimize animal product consumption. The depiction of cows speaking through a voiceover suggests they are willingly present and happy on Sütaş farms. The phrase "*This is Sütaş's wonderful world, the home of happy cows*" romanticizes industrial dairy farming, erasing its harsh realities. Lush green fields, freely roaming cows, and calves create a hyperreal illusion, omitting crucial industry practices, such as the forced separation of calves from their mothers at birth. The commercial strongly links milk to health through phrases like "*Natural feed, healthy milk*" and "*Our milk is nutritious; our milkmen are knowledgeable*." Milk is portrayed as essential for family nutrition, particularly for children's growth, reinforcing the Health/Growth Myth while disregarding plant-based protein alternatives.

The idealized family structure is also significant. A heterosexual couple with two children at the dinner table represents the "ideal family", reinforcing heteronormativity. This depiction excludes individuals who do not consume dairy, those without children, and non-heterosexual families, reinforcing social exclusion. The language and images of the commercial strengthen the speciesist ideology. The speaking cows and utopian farm setting erase animal individuality, framing them solely as production units. Carol J. Adams' absent referent shows that the exploitation of cows remains entirely invisible while the commercial constructs a sanitized, idyllic image of dairy farming.

### **Pınar Süt Commercial**

Pınar Süt's commercial reinforces speciesist and gendered narratives through the Health/Growth Myth and the Ideal Woman/Man Myth. It associates the Pınar brand with children's healthy growth and the caregiving role of an ideal mother. Animal milk is not just a product but is glorified as essential for children's physical and social success. The commercial begins with a child failing at football, followed by his mother's encouragement. The child's failure is framed as a deficiency, implying that Pınar Süt compensates for his lack. Here, the Health/Growth Myth extends beyond physical development to include social achievement. In the end, the child's football success is directly linked to the benefits of milk, reinforced by the voiceover: "*Pınar takes care of him, raising him with health*." This positions animal milk consumption as a norm.

The mother's role centers entirely on her child's health and success. Throughout the commercial, she is shown at home, in the kitchen, and attending to her child, reinforcing traditional domestic responsibilities. The key phrase, "*I am a Pınar mother*", directly ties motherhood to the Pınar brand, idealizing caregiving. This aligns with the Ideal Woman/Man Myth, where women are defined by motherhood and household duties. The mother's individuality is erased, as her identity is reduced to serving her child and family. The final scene, where the child succeeds in football, links this achievement to milk consumption and maternal care. Additionally, it idealizes a heteronormative family structure, portraying motherhood and traditional parenting roles as fundamental while excluding alternative family models.

### **İçim Labne<sup>16</sup> Commercial**

İçim Labne's commercial reinforces gender roles and heteronormative family structures through the Ideal Woman/Man Myth and indirectly, the Traditional Family Table Myth. While highlighting labneh's versatility and convenience, the commercial also conceals speciesism by reducing the product to a functional and appealing food item.

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<sup>15</sup> The company's name, "Sütaş", is derived from the combination of the word "milk" and the word "as", which means food in Turkish. Roughly speaking, it means something like a milk meal.

<sup>16</sup> Labneh is mild cream cheese.

Throughout the commercial, all individuals preparing and serving labneh are women, reinforcing the idea that domestic labor and kitchen responsibilities belong to women. The upbeat, cheerful song further romanticizes these gender roles, presenting them as natural and unquestionable. Women are shown using labneh in various dishes, positioning them as creative and productive figures in the kitchen. This is a direct manifestation of the Ideal Woman/Man Myth, where women are idealized for providing delicious and aesthetically pleasing meals for their families. In the final scene, a family gathers around the dinner table as a woman in her 40s serves labneh-spread bread to her husband and children. This reinforces not only the association of kitchen labor with women but also the glorification of a heterosexual, child-centered family as the societal norm. The Traditional Family Table Myth is emphasized through labneh as a unifying element -the family shares "happiness" through food, while the ad excludes vegan families, child-free individuals, and nonheteronormative family structures, implying they fall outside this idealized narrative.

### **Ekici Peynir Commercial**

Ekici Süzme Peynir's commercial blends health, taste, and family themes while reinforcing speciesist narratives through the Health/Growth Myth and the Traditional Family Table Myth. The commercial personifies cheese as a speaking, human-like character, delivering its message through a humorous yet profound ideological framework.

The cheese narrates its own story at the center of the commercial: *"They said you are süzme; they said you have no place at this table."* This phrase plays on the double meaning of "süzme" in Turkish - referring to the cheese-making process but connotatively linked to negative slang like "foolish". This linguistic play aligns with Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation, using humor to create an engaging narrative while subtly reinforcing speciesist messaging. The commercial emphasizes the cheese's "high calcium content" and "award-winning" status, positioning it not only as a delicious product but also as an essential part of a healthy life. The joyful depiction of children eating cheese further suggests that it is indispensable for family members' well-being. The cheese being "accepted into the family" is a metaphor for strengthening family bonds, positioning the product as a key element of the ideal family table. The family structure depicted in the commercial is a heterosexual, child-centered household, reinforcing heteronormative ideals. By presenting this as the "ideal" model, the commercial excludes non-traditional family structures and non-vegan individuals, framing animal product consumption as a natural and necessary part of family life. Ultimately, the commercial romanticizes dairy consumption while erasing the ethical concerns surrounding animal exploitation.

### **Discussion And Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that commercials for animal-based products are not just innocent marketing tools but key instruments in reinforcing speciesism. These 12 commercials have reached 71.2 million viewers, nearly equivalent to Turkey's population, underscoring their widespread societal impact. By repeatedly depicting joyful family meals, traditional imagery, happy animals, and health benefits, these commercials normalize nonhuman animal exploitation while reinforcing patriarchal norms. Through visuals like "happy cows" and "organic chickens," they erase animal individuality and suffering. For instance, Süttaş's commercial presents an idyllic farm scene, hiding the reality behind dairy production. Similarly, Kor Yumurta's claim that eggs are "as pure as mother milk" obscures the mass killing of male chicks and the extreme confinement of hens. Romanticized imagery of free-roaming animals in lush fields creates a pastoral illusion, diverting attention from the violence and exploitation inherent in industrial farming.

The ideological dimension of speciesism extends beyond the exploitation of nonhuman animals; it also reinforces patriarchal gender roles. In Pınar Süt's commercial, the mother is depicted as the caregiver responsible for providing her child with a safe and nourishing product, reinforcing domestic labor as a female duty while excluding men from this role. The commercial portrays motherhood and nurturing as fixed, natural norms, as the mother helps her child overcome failure through milk consumption. Similarly, speciesism intersects with gender oppression by exploiting animals based on their reproductive abilities. Female-identified animals are systematically used for their reproductive capacities, while male-identified animals are often excluded from production. For example, cows are forcibly impregnated using devices referred to as "rape racks," separated from their female calves at birth, while male calves are immediately sent to slaughterhouses. Female chicks are raised for egg-laying in egg production, whereas male chicks are ground up alive. These practices expose how both women and female nonhuman animals are objectified through their reproductive capacities, illustrating patriarchy's cross-species impact.

The idealization of heteronormative and non-vegan family structures is another recurring theme in advertising. Banvit's commercial with the phrase "Barbecue fun is complete with Jumbo sausages" and Pınar Aç Bitir's slogan "In our home, everyone is after each other's Aç Bitir" position animal product consumption as not just a dietary choice but a fundamental element of family unity and happiness. These narratives idealize the heterosexual, child-centered core family while excluding vegan families and individuals who do not conform to traditional norms. Similarly, Süt's commercial reinforces it through the phrase "May our tables always be filled with natural flavors", framing animal consumption as an inherent part of family life while erasing alternative lifestyles that reject it.

The Süt's commercial's slogan, "Natural feed, healthy milk", appears as a neutral, science-based claim. However, it employs a powerful manipulation technique that ensures consumers' unquestioned acceptance of "natural" and "healthy". The term "natural" is one of the modern food industry's most widely used hyperreality strategies. Industrial processes entirely detached from nature are romanticized through images of green fields, happy cows, and pastoral landscapes. The consumer envisions an idealized "natural feed", whereas, in reality, industrial feed production is a mechanical and systematic process. The lack of a clear definition of "natural" allows consumers to project their idealized perception of nature onto the commercial. Similarly, "healthy milk" reinforces the myth that nonhuman animal milk is both natural and essential for human consumption. This unquestioned narrative equates cow's milk with maternal nourishment, constructing a myth of universal necessity. By presenting cow's milk as essential for all humans, the commercial ignores species-specific biological differences and dismisses alternative diets or potential health risks associated with dairy consumption.

A pressing question arises from this study: "How much further can this system shape social values through a speciesist lens?" Every commercial systematically erases the violence and exploitation nonhuman animals endure. Through pastoral imagery and playful slogans, they contribute to the commodification of both nonhuman animals and humans (mainly women). This process is not only an ethical issue but also an ecological one. The production of animal-based products not only violates the rights of nonhuman animals but also disrupts ecological balance. Activities such as deforestation for livestock farming reduce biodiversity and lower carbon storage capacity. At the same time, greenhouse gas emissions and excessive water consumption from animal agriculture pose serious threats to environmental sustainability. In commercials, such as "natural" and "healthy" obscure the complex and harmful realities of these production systems.

Raising critical awareness about the speciesist and sexist nature of advertising is not pointless agitation but a step toward challenging the dominant ideological order. This effort should not be limited to appealing to consumer

conscience but must also expose advertising as one of popular culture's most potent ideological tools. As long as the advertising industry refuses to rethink its hegemonic narratives -from "happy cows" to "nurturing mothers" and "meat-obsessed masculine desires"- it falls on researchers, activists, and alternative media producers to develop counter-narratives.

Ultimately, this study has revealed that commercials for animal-based products do not just reinforce speciesism but also reproduce sexism, heteronormativity, and patriarchal values. Their multi-layered ideological structure extends beyond individual consumption habits, shaping and reinforcing broader societal norms. Speciesism, by aligning with other oppressive ideologies, strengthens its legitimacy within a broader ideological framework. If we truly seek to end the exploitation of nonhuman animals, we must boldly expose the ideological manipulation behind these "colorful and cheerful" commercials. Otherwise, speciesism -wrapped in catchy jingles, happy family dinners, and claims of "health"- will continue to oppress both nonhuman animals and humans quietly. This struggle is an ethical necessity and an essential step toward a more just and sustainable society.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Corporate Information of the Brands

Brand	Foundation Year	Production Capacity / Variety	Featured Information
Şenpiliç	1978	The company produces 500,000 tons of broiler meat annually and operates 29 breeding farms, three hatcheries, and three food factories.	With an 18% market share and revenue exceeding 19 billion TL, the company employs over 3,700 people. It ranks 60th among Turkey's top 100 industrial enterprises, making it one of the leading integrated broiler meat producers.
Banvit	1967	Integrated broiler meat and processed meat production takes place at its Bandırma-based facilities.	In 2017, 79.48% of its shares were transferred to BRF and the Qatar Investment Authority, solidifying its position as one of Turkey's leading poultry producers.
Lezita	2006	With an annual production of 290,000 tons of broiler meat and 82,000 tons of processed meat, the company offers a variety of frozen and processed products.	Based in Izmir, the company has approximately 3,500 employees, exports to 70 countries, and has rapidly gained prominence in the industry as an international brand.

Gedik Piliç	1968	Operating two slaughterhouses, the company slaughters 400,000 chickens daily and produces 7,000 tons of processed products (such as döner and delicatessen items) monthly.	With over 2,000 employees, the company ranks among Turkey's top 500 firms and exports to 36 countries.
Kor Yumurta	1996	Collaborating with 53 organic producers, the company produces organic eggs using organic feed and free-range chickens.	Headquartered in Izmir, the company is recognized for producing "natural, organic, and flower-fed" eggs.
Sultan Et	1973	Offering nearly 300 products across 10 different categories, the company produces red meat and processed meat varieties.	Based in Ankara, the company has ranked among the largest 1,000 industrial enterprises nationwide for the past four years.
Pınar Et	1973	It manufactures processed meat products, such as sausage and salami, alongside red and white meat production.	Operating under Yaşar Holding (Pınar Süt, Pınar Et, Pınar Su), the company employs over 5,000 people and exports extensively, particularly to the Middle East.
Maret	1984	The company engages in cattle farming and processed meat production.	Spanning 740,000 m <sup>2</sup> , the company claims to operate "Turkey's largest cattle fattening farm."
Sütaş	1958	The company operates four plants across different cities, spanning forage crop production, dairy farming, organic fertilizer, and energy facilities.	With over 7,500 employees, the company sources milk from 20,000 producer families and exports to 47 countries.
Pınar Süt	(1973).	It produces dairy products such as milk, yogurt, kefir, ayran, and cheese.	Under Yaşar Holding, the company (Pınar Et, Pınar Süt, Pınar Su) has over 5,000 employees and exports significantly to the Middle East and surrounding regions.
İçim	1998	With a daily milk processing capacity of 5,000 tons, the company offers over 200 products across 10 categories, including milk, yogurt, cheese, kefir, clotted cream, and pudding.	The company has quickly become one of Turkey's key dairy brands, with six production facilities.
Ekici	1957	The company operates a 42,000 m <sup>2</sup> factory in Antalya with a daily capacity of	Employing around 500 people, the company ranks among Turkey's top 1,000 companies and exports to countries including Cyprus, Jordan,

		480 tons of milk processing, specializing in cheese and dairy derivatives.	Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Iraq and Kyrgyzstan.
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## Annexe 2: Commercial Content and Technical Information

Brand	Commercial Information	Synopsis
Şenpiliç	"40. Yıl Reklam Filmi" was released on January 15, 2018, with a runtime of 53 seconds and reached 189,230 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial highlights themes of sharing and hospitality. Mustafa delivers a meal from his mother to his uncle. At the same time, various family scenes illustrate the generosity of shared meals, neighbor relations, and the welcoming of unexpected guests, narrated by a voiceover. The ad concludes with multiple families dining together in a village setting.
Banvit	"Türkiye Banvit'se Tamam Diyor" is a 43-second commercial released on December 3, 2021, accumulating 88,369 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial opens in a boutique restaurant, where a chef adds chicken to a large pot. The voiceover emphasizes the value of white meat, addressing those who preserve traditional flavors, such as chefs who prepare chicken-infused milk desserts. The scenes then shift to a mother making chicken broth for her sneezing daughter, young athletes, two friends enjoying crispy chicken, and a family grilling sausage, chicken, and Jumbo sausages. The ad concludes with a Banvit-branded truck driving on the road, as the voiceover delivers the message: "Turkey says yes to Banvit."
Lezita	"LEZİTA İÇLİ TAVUK – 'ARABA'" is a 37-second commercial released on January 12, 2022, amassing 1,580,480 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial begins with two young men stuck in a narrow street in a luxury car, frustrated with the small car ahead. When the driver reacts angrily, four large-built men step out of the small car with a stern demeanour, causing the young man to panic. The voiceover states, <i>"Sometimes you never know what is inside, but with Lezita Stuffed Chicken, you do"</i> , introducing the product. The scene then transitions to a visualization of Lezita Stuffed Chicken, revealing crispy chicken filled with sausage, spinach, and mozzarella. The ad concludes with the slogan: <i>"Crispy outside, legendary inside... So, so Lezita."</i>
Gedik Piliç	"Herkes Gedik Sever   Geleneksever" is an 18-second commercial released on December 22, 2022, reaching 472,310 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial opens with chicken frying on the stove, and the voiceover asks, <i>"Who loves chicken sauté with tender drumsticks?"</i> The scene shifts to a woman over 60, who points to herself and responds, <i>"Of course, a traditional lover!"</i> She then takes a piece of chicken and expresses its deliciousness through her facial expression before the camera returns to the plate. The ad concludes with the voiceover stating, <i>"Just between us, everyone loves Gedik."</i>
Kor Yumurta	"Kor Organik Yumurta Reklam Filmi" is a 31-second commercial released on November 26, 2015,	The commercial begins with a pregnant woman gently touching her belly as traditional music plays. The voiceover states, <i>"You wait patiently..."</i> transitioning to a mother lovingly holding her baby: <i>"And then the moment comes; you embrace with care and nourish with devotion."</i> The

	with 4,074 views on YouTube by 2024.	scene shifts to the brand's production facilities, chicks, and free-range chickens. The voiceover continues, <i>"We raise them with patience and care so we can offer you organic eggs as pure and valuable as mother's milk."</i> The ad ends with a family joyfully having breakfast and clinking their eggs together as the brand name "Kor Organik Yumurta" is announced.
Sultan Et	"Sultan Et TV Reklam Filmi" is a 56-second advertisement released on January 12, 2021, with 2,634 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial opens with a woman taking beef entrecôte from the fridge and frying it. The scene then shifts to individuals of different ages consuming meat for various reasons. The voiceover states, <i>"Some eat it because they love meat, others because they must finish their plate... Some eat it to grow fast, others to stay healthy"</i> , emphasizing meat consumption habits. The scene continues with a lighthearted debate about whether meat tastes better in a pan or an oven. Finally, a woman serves meatballs and lamb chops to the family table. The ad concludes with the voiceover stating, <i>"And they all choose Sultan Meat because it is healthy, fresh, and reliable. Turkey's Butcher, Sultan."</i>
Pınar Et	"Aç Bitir Reklam Film 2017" is a 28-second commercial released on September 14, 2017, reaching 9,164,853 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial starts with a woman in her twenties speaking to the camera, saying, <i>"In our house, everyone is after everyone else's Pınar Aç Bitir."</i> As the scene progresses, her brother eats it as a snack at the office, her mother enjoys it at breakfast, her father uses it in a sausage omelet, and her sister makes a sandwich after working out. While reaching for her Aç Bitir in the fridge, the woman smiles and says, <i>"Let us not mix things up, right?"</i> The ad ends with the entire family happily gathered around the dining table.
Maret	"Maret Pratik Sosis" is a 15-second commercial released on December 8, 2016, with 289,838 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial opens with the voiceover humming a melodic <i>"Tik tike tik..."</i> as a young woman picks up Maret sausages in a supermarket and later cooks them in her kitchen. The screen displays "Quantity" with a checkmark. The sausages are served with a salad to smiling children, as the words "Taste" and a checkmark appear. As the children enjoy their meal, the voiceover rhythmically repeats, <i>"Tik tik tik, Maret Pratik."</i> The final scene showcases Maret products, with the voiceover concluding, <i>"Maret is practical, a one-bite delight."</i>
Sütaş	"Çiftlikten Sofralara Sütaş'ın Harika Dünyası" is a 38-second commercial released on January 1, 2024, garnering 29,959,073 views on YouTube within the same year.	The commercial begins with a cheerful voiceover greeting, <i>"Hellooo!"</i> as visuals of the Sütaş factory surrounded by lush greenery appear. Alongside free-roaming cows, the voiceover states, <i>"This is Sütaş's wonderful world, the home of happy cows."</i> Scenes of harvesting feed crops, producing natural feed, and caring for cows on the farm follow. The voiceover continues, <i>"Everyone on the farm takes great care of us; you are one of a kind!"</i> reinforcing the idea of well-treated animals. At the Dairy Farming Training Center, a veterinarian is seen educating farmers, with the voiceover adding, <i>"Our milk is healthy, our dairy farmers are knowledgeable -enjoy your lesson!"</i> As Sütaş products move along the production line, the voiceover states, <i>"Each step carries the Sütaş signature with expertise and mastery."</i> The final scene features a family at the dinner table enjoying Sütaş products, with the voiceover concluding, <i>"May all our tables be filled with natural flavors."</i> The commercial ends with the tagline, <i>"Founded with a love for milk. From farm to table, Sütaş's wonderful world."</i>

Pınar Süt	"Ben Bir Pınar Annesiyim – Pınar Sütüm" is a 50-second commercial released on April 20, 2015, accumulating 51,025 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial begins with a child playing soccer in the neighborhood, repeatedly failing to block goals and being excluded by his teammates. He returns home, feeling defeated, where his mother warmly welcomes him. The voiceover, accompanied by a song, states, " <i>He is my dearest, my greatest gift...</i> " The mother gives her child Pınar Milk and trains him at home to improve his goalkeeping skills. As the seasons change, the child continues to practice with determination. One day, he returns to the field, using Pınar Milk cartons as goalposts, and successfully blocks the shots. Watching proudly, his mother smiles as the voiceover concludes, " <i>Pınar takes good care of him, helps him grow strong -this is why I am a Pınar mother.</i> "
İçim	"İçim Labne Lezzeti Bir Başka!" is a 22-second commercial released on February 8, 2019, reaching 28,572,274 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial opens with an energetic song: " <i>Finally, I understand, İçim Labneh is something special...</i> " In the first scene, a woman takes İçim Labneh from the fridge, then another spreads it on bread and enjoys it. Subsequent scenes show women using labneh for cakes and pastries while a little girl happily eats her labneh-covered bread. In the final scene, a mother brings labneh-spread bread to her family, and the children eat joyfully. The ad ends with the song's lyrics: " <i>I will spread it, I will eat it, I will savor it, heeey!</i> "
Ekici	"Ekici Süzme Peynir Reklamı!" is a 33-second commercial released on February 15, 2019, with 826,688 views on YouTube by 2024.	The commercial features a first-person narration from the strained cheese itself. The scene focuses on a dining table, where the cheese says, " <i>They said I did not belong, that there was no place for me. However, they never left me out again once they tried me.</i> " Rapidly shifting scenes show family members and children happily eating cheese, accompanied by voiceover remarks: " <i>It is delicious, it is award-winning, rich in calcium.</i> " The ad concludes with the voiceover stating, " <i>We made strained cheese, and we made it great. Ekici Strained Cheese.</i> "

### Sustainable Development Goals:

This study is particularly related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 (Gender Equality), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 15 (Life on Land). In the commercials analyzed, women are portrayed primarily as nurturing figures in the kitchen while men are depicted as protectors and providers, prompting a critical discussion around gender equality (Goal 5). Furthermore, the romanticized portrayal of industrial animal farming, detached from its harsh realities, aligns the study with Goal 15 by highlighting concerns around both animal welfare and ecological sustainability. The critical perspective on the consumption of animal-based products also speaks to fostering more responsible and sustainable production and consumption patterns (Goal 12). Nevertheless, the study only indirectly touches upon Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 13 (Climate Action). While it briefly addresses issues such as the public health risks and climate implications associated with large-scale animal farming, these themes remain secondary to the central focus on uncovering speciesist representations in commercials.

Finally, the study does not directly address Goals 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 4 (Quality Education), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 14 (Life Below Water), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), or 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Therefore, it establishes no explicit linkage with these particular goals.