



TRANSITIONING FROM TRADITIONAL TO DIGITAL: THE REPRODUCTION OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION-FOCUSED ADVERTISEMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

GELENEKTEN DİJİTALE: GÖSTERİŞÇİ TÜKETİM ODAKLI REKLAMLARIN SOSYAL MEDYADA YENİDEN ÜRETİMİ

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Abstract

Historically, advertising has served as an essential instrument for promoting services, distributing products to consumers, and connecting producers with consumers. The concept of advertising, originating with town criers in ancient marketplaces, has continually transformed alongside technological progress. Advertisements once disseminated through brochures and newspapers with the advent of the printing press in the Middle Ages now show on the internet and social media platforms, albeit with altered content and messaging. Advertisements on visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram present not merely a product, but an entire lifestyle to consumers. Advertisements portraying luxurious lifestyles motivate consumers to construct identity and status through spending. This study aims to determine what luxury firms employing celebrities on Instagram convey and promise to consumers in their marketing through semiotic analysis. It also seeks to figure out how individuals are influenced toward consumption by specific messages in commercials. Although numerous research exist regarding the correlation between social media and consumption, few investigations specifically explore and analyze luxury consumption commercials including domestic and foreign celebrities through semiotic analysis. The study analyzed advertising and social media conspicuous consumption theories, elucidating the relationship between these notions. Furthermore, postings disseminated by the four most followed celebrities on Instagram, both in Türkiye and globally, utilizing the hashtags "#collaboration" and "#advertisement," were examined through the semiotic frameworks of Saussure and Barthes. The results demonstrate that the chosen celebrities direct their following using the language, symbolism, and imagery employed in advertising content. Ultimately, social media advertising has the capacity to reach millions and shape consumer behavior. Their sponsored products facilitate fans' connections with beloved superstars, enabling imitation and enhancement of their life.

Keywords: Conspicuous Consumption, Advertisement, Social Media, Semiotics

Öz

Reklamlar, tarih boyunca ürün ve hizmetlerin tanıtılmasında, tüketiciyi ortak bir noktada buluşturan önemli iletişim araçlarından biri olmuştur. Antik çağlarda pazarlarda çığırkanlıkla başlayan reklamcılık anlayışı teknolojik gelişmelerle sürekli değişmiştir. Orta çağda matbaanın icadıyla broşürlere ve gazetelere taşınan reklamcılık, bugün internet, sosyal medya platformlarında içeriği ve mesajı değişmiş olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Instagram gibi görsel odaklı platformlar aracılığıyla yapılan reklamlar, sadece bir ürünü değil bir yaşam tarzını bireylere tanıtmaktadır. Gösterişli yaşamlar sunan reklamlar, bireylere tüketerek bir kimlik ve statü oluşturmasını teşvik etmektedir. Bu çalışmada Instagram'da ünlüleri kullanan lüks markaların, reklamlarda insanlara ne sunduğu ve onlara vaat ettiği sorusunun cevabını göstergebilimsel analiz ile tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca bireylerin reklamlardaki hangi mesajlarla nasıl tüketime yönlendirildiğini anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Literatürde sosyal medya ve tüketim ilişkisine dair birçok çalışma bulunsa da yerli ve yabancı ünlülerin yapmış olduğu lüks tüketim reklamlarının göstergebilimsel analizle derinlemesine ele alındığı ve karşılaştırıldığı sınırlı sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır. Çalışmada, reklam, sosyal medya gösterişçi tüketim kuramları ele alınmış ve kavramlar arasındaki bağ açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca Türkiye'de ve Dünya'da en fazla Instagram takipçisi bulunan dört ünlünün "#iş birliği" ve "#reklam" etiketleriyle paylaştığı gönderiler, Saussure ve Barthes'in göstergebilim yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, seçilen ünlülerin reklam içeriklerinde kullandıkları dil, semboller ve görseller aracılığıyla takipçilerini yönlendirdiğini göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, sosyal medya reklamları tek seferde milyonlarca kişiye ulaşabilen ve onları bir tüketime yönlendiren etkili bir araç haline gelmiştir. Takipçiler ise sevdiği ünlüler ile bağ kurmak tıpkı onlar gibi olmak yaşam sürmek için önerdiği ürünleri kullanmaktadır. Böylece reklamcılar para kazanırken takipçiler ise kendine kimlik inşa etmektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Gösterişçi Tüketim, Reklam, Göstergebilim

INTRODUCTION

Consumption is defined as a variety of actions individuals engage in to fulfil their fundamental requirements and maintain their existence. Consumption behaviours of individuals fluctuate based on temporal, spatial, cultural, and social factors. Currently, due to technological advancements and widespread advertising, consumer culture is influencing various regions and becoming a prevalent lifestyle globally. The situation has resulted in the blurring of boundaries between communities and cultures. Consumption, a complex phenomenon containing economic, sociological, and psychological aspects, has transcended the fulfilment of basic requirements for individuals, growing into a process of creating an identity within a satisfaction-oriented environment inundated with imagery.

Objects possess both economic significance and symbolic worth; individuals convey their social status, position, and sense of belonging through their consumption choices. Consequently, consuming acts as an influential force that transforms the connection between the person and society. Advertising, an old concept synonymous with consumption, serves as an essential method for communication between producers and consumers. Advertisements are primarily designed to align with the goals of the economic system and encourage individuals to purchase specific things. Advertising, having evolved with technical advancements over time, today engages far broader audiences through digital media. New media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have emerged as arenas for product promotion and for individuals to present themselves as "objects of consumption." According to Ertürk (2025, p.230), in the advertising and fashion industries, it is essential to maintain high consumer demand, so they must persuade consumers to change their established habits and replace old products with new ones.

A semiotic method will be used in the analysis, utilizing the conceptual frameworks of Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure to examine advertising and discern the messages they communicate to customers. This study will analyse the advertising content on the Instagram profiles of four domestic and international celebrities selected as brand ambassadors by luxury firms.

THE EVOLUTION OF ADVERTISING: FROM TOUTS TO DIGITAL VANITY

Diverse marketing methods are employed to enhance the distribution of a product from the manufacturer to the consumer. Several methodologies have been employed in this marketing process, from historical to contemporary times. Advertising is one of these methods. The content and definitions of advertising have evolved in tandem with its historical development. Advertisements are a method of presentation used to encourage individuals to acquire a product or service willingly, convey information about the product, and illustrate the satisfaction or identity that can be attained after use.

In modern civilizations, advertising has evolved into a multifaceted process that encompasses not only commercial activities but also societal and psychological aspects. Upon examining the advertisements, it becomes evident that their history extends back significantly. Since the emergence of humanity in history, it has altered both itself and the natural environment and society in which it exists. Throughout this process, people have occasionally garnered assistance from nature, at other times from science and technology, and at yet other instances from financial resources. In ancient times, humanity inscribed their presence upon stone walls, proclaiming, "I am here." Today, motivated by the urge to assert their existence, individuals disseminate their photographs on social media to convey, "I am here and I am alive." In this perspective, one might assert that humanity's attempt to articulate itself has been consistent from the beginning to the present. In the archaic period, humans painted the animals they hunted on walls to show them to future generations, while today they continue this habit by showcasing the products they use on social media accounts, their pets, or their bodies. It would not be wrong to say that humanity's use of its own work and body as an advertising tool is an old habit.

The oldest instances of advertising were product and event notices inscribed on stones in Ancient Greece, Egypt, Babylon, and Rome. During this period, producers seeking to sell their products in the markets attempted to promote them through touts (Elden, 2009, p. 147). Russell and Lane (1990, p. 4, cited in Balta Peltekoğlu, 2010, p. 62) emphasize that the history of advertising dates back much further, stating that the first examples of advertising are found on clay tablets used in the Babylonian civilization



around 3000 BC. Advertising, with a history spanning 5,000 years, is evolving across time, location, and society, while also leveraging contemporary technologies. Advertising, a pervasive element throughout history, serves numerous functions in everyday life. White (1988) asserts that advertising serves the dual purpose of informing and persuading, elucidating the situation as follows:

- “• *To enhance brand awareness and highlight its attributes*
- *To motivate non-users to adopt the product*
- *To prompt existing users to increase consumption and reinforce brand loyalty*
- *To persuade both users and non-users that the brand surpasses competitors for specific reasons*
- *To educate consumers”*. (1988, p. 63)

Berger (1986, p. 18), who assesses commercials in relation to consumer demands, claims that advertisements promise to transform individuals' lives by encouraging them to make purchases. They assert that the acquired products enhance consumers' lives. Solomon (2006, p. 26) describes the manner in which advertising is seen by customers as follows:

“Advertising is significantly more than merely communicating information regarding items and services. Consumers enthusiastically adopt the metaphors and themes from advertising and incorporate them into their lives. In the context of consumerism, advertising constitutes a blend of entertainment and realism.”

Lasn (2004, p. 41), analysing advertising from the producer's perspective, underscores that advertisers play a substantial role in contemporary communication, establishing this as a prevailing norm. Advertisements propel progress for enterprises and communities in global economic, cultural, and political contexts (Karpat Aktuğlu, 2006, p. 3). Among social media platforms, Instagram emerges as a prominent digital advertising tool for firms today. Celebrities possessing substantial followings on this platform, who embody brand identities and guide their followers towards particular trends, are central to the contemporary advertising and promotional strategies of brands (De Veirman et al., 2017). Today, advertising has evolved from merely being a means of product advertising to an integral component of the meaning-making process. Advertisements today engage the individual's subconscious through narratives, visuals, and symbols, fostering consumption by addressing notions of identity, belonging, desire, and status. During this period, advertising adopted a multi-channel and multi-layered structure due to technological advancements, marking a transition to an era where individuals served as both the target and the producers of advertising through social media, digital platforms, and interactive content. In summary, whereas advertising in antiquity was driven by necessity, contemporary advertising emphasizes meaning, imagery, and identity.

Use of Celebrities in Advertising

The continual advancement of technology in contemporary times has led to significant changes in the understanding of advertising. Companies are formulating diverse ways to engage broader audiences with their products and services. One strategy is to use celebrities in advertisements. Companies aim to capitalize on celebrity fan bases to rapidly and efficiently expand their target markets through promotional efforts. Philip Kotler (2003, p. 27) asserts that "Companies began employing the allure of celebrities to enhance their own reputations." This phrase precisely exemplifies the manifestation of this scenario in the marketing realm. Ersavaş (2005) states that when selling any product or service, advertising associates or endorses it with a celebrity. Tanses Gülsoy (1999, p. 511) analyzes the concept of "celebrities" or "star" within a comprehensive framework, defining it as "A star, a celebrity, highly successful artist; an individual showing exceptional success in a profession."

Although it is crucial for advertising messages to capture attention, featuring a celebrity enhances the product's significance, rendering it and the brand more easily identifiable (Belch & Belch, 2013, p. 369). Erkal (2013) asserts that the star system is commonly employed in commercials and is among the most efficacious strategies in advertising. This strategy, in which a prominent individual or personality associated with the product is utilized to emphasize the brand or product, or to accelerate its rise to prominence, is referred to as the "Star Strategy" (Kocabaş, 1994, cited in Erkal, 2013, p. 29).

The selection of celebrities for commercials is very crucial. The efficacy of an advertising campaign hinges on selecting a celebrity who aligns with the product or service, considering the person's recognition, credibility, and societal status. Choosing persons who fail to match these criteria results in the ineffectiveness of advertising initiatives. The selection of celebrities for commercials is very crucial. The efficacy of an advertising campaign hinges on selecting an influential person who aligns with the product or service, taking into account the individual's recognition, credibility, and societal standing. Choosing persons who do not satisfy these requirements results in the failure of advertising initiatives. The persona, appeal, and efficacy of the celebrity in the advertising influence the brand and the product's image during the marketing process.

Advertising persuades consumers who resonate with this product to buy it by affecting their emotions, attitudes, and intent to purchase. Consumers acquiring this commodity simultaneously invest in an image and personality (Belch & Belch, 2013, p. 370). In accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for acceptance and approval drives individuals to increase their consumption. The individual's principal objective is to obtain validation from a person of superior social standing and to experience a sense of worth. Thus, consumers seeking validation and enhanced social standing through the products of a relatable celebrity are increasingly engaging in conspicuous consumption to display their wealth. Using celebrities in product or brand endorsements might enhance sales, although this strategy presents both benefits and drawbacks. İnce et. al (2019) state this circumstance as follows:

"The utilization of celebrities in advertising offers possible benefits, including heightened consumer interest in the product or brand, enhanced brand promotion through informative content, cultivation of the ideal brand image in consumers' perceptions, repositioning of the brand image, and attraction of a diverse audience. Nonetheless, there are inherent hazards, including the potential for the celebrity to eclipse the brand, public discourse stemming from scandals to detract from the brand, deterioration of the established image, and the substantial expense associated with celebrity endorsement. The celebrities featured in these advertising can elicit greater attention than the product itself, potentially eclipsing it." (2019, p.499)

THEORY OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

The notion of consuming, the primary focus of the study, has transcended its basic function of fulfilling human wants and has emerged as a multifaceted phenomenon with varied interpretations. The notion of consuming, the primary focus of the study, has transcended its basic function of fulfilling human wants and has emerged as a multifaceted phenomenon with varied interpretations. Bocoock (1997) asserts that in the pre-modern era, individuals created and consumed solely what was necessary, selling any excess production to fulfil further need. This instance exemplifies behaviour molded by the Puritan moral paradigm of the day. Bocoock claims that a consumer revolution occurred in the 18th century. This era highlights the emergence of consumption as a pivotal factor in individual lives, enabling individuals to differentiate themselves from different social classes. Bocoock characterizes consumption in the post-industrial era as a mechanism that imparts social identity to individuals (Bocoock, 1997, pp. 24–25).

Thorstein Veblen (2005), who originated the term 'conspicuous consumption' in the late 19th century, asserts that this concept was originally pertinent to the leisure class. Veblen (2005) argues that, grounded in the notion of property, only slaves engage in arduous physical labour.

A novel social class has arisen, comprising bureaucrats, warriors, and artists who have attained notoriety via intellectual endeavours, which Veblen termed the leisure class. The term "idle" is employed in this context to refer to consumption without production, rather than to highlight laziness (Veblen, 2005, p. 20).

Veblen (2005) claims that wealth and power are insufficient for those in the upper class. Individuals must earn respect by exhibiting these qualities. The defining characteristic of the leisure class is its consumption without production, executed with ostentation. Conspicuous consumption increases the disparity between social classes. The preferences of the leisure class fluctuate based on individual

affluence. Members of this class typically exhibit an interest in bureaucracy, the military, sports, and hunting (2005, pp. 60-63). Veblen (2005) states that the leisure class values quantity over quality, prioritizes an object's value over its utility, and considers the affordability of the affluent as essential. The leisure class also considers the presence of peers while acquiring an object to display. Çakır (2019) argues that individuals' consumption actions serve as a marker of their social status. Consequently, it is underscored that the leisure class maintains a competitive and intimate network of interactions among its members (Veblen, 2005, p. 71).

The desire of individuals seeking a higher social status than their peers through conspicuous consumption will persist. When an individual resorts to conspicuous consumption to evade a lower status, they are compelled to persist in their financial rivalry within the class they attain (Eke, 1982, p. 417). Individuals' choices in consumption activities are frequently interconnected. Consequently, individuals bear the imprints of their socioeconomic class. Moreover, individuals observe the consumption patterns of the class they aspire to join. Consequently, economic, psychological, and social underpinnings significantly influence an individual's consumption (Parasız, 1988, p. 84).

Upon analyzing individuals' consumption patterns, it is evident that their behaviour corresponds with the fluctuations in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Contemporary dress trends, mobile devices, automobiles, and dining establishments reflect the social class or economic standing to which individuals belong or aspire (Kırboğa, 2019, p. 386). As a result, individuals are increasingly competing to display their possessions on social media to gain social recognition. Individuals endeavouring to provide these posts on social media are fabricating a contrived and favourable identity.

In postmodern civilizations transforming due to technical innovations, consumption behaviors are influenced by individuals' aspirations to imitate upper-class identities, as dictated by the capitalist framework. (Ertürk, 2024) Individuals have begun to emphasize conspicuous consumption through technology in an effort to ascend the social hierarchy (Gürbüz & Aydoğdu, 2020, p. 165). Widjajanta et al. (2018) assert that social media usage, especially on Instagram, effectively fosters and disseminates conspicuous consumption behaviors, significantly influencing individuals with poor self-esteem. Akçam (2024) claims that individuals with low self-esteem levels tend to increase their spending on conspicuous consumption. Individuals with low self-esteem not only possess the products they acquire but also assimilate their identity with the significance ascribed to those products, thereby procuring a new identity. In essence, when consumers purchase a product, they are simultaneously acquiring the associated imagery linked to that commodity (Binay, 2010, p. 24). A woman purchasing Louboutin stilettos is not merely acquiring footwear; she is also acquiring connotations of intelligence, elegance, femininity, and affluence, thereby constructing a new identity for herself.

In conspicuous consumption, images are prominent. Therefore, the physical benefits of the product fall short of the image it presents itself as. Individuals also consider how they will be perceived by others when purchasing a product. In conspicuous consumption, individuals strive to identify with the wealthy while avoiding association with the poor (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997, p. 56).

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A NEW SHOW CENTER

Social media, being an essential aspect of contemporary life, has radically transformed lifestyle patterns and has profoundly impacted both individuals and society. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define it as a collection of internet-based programs that facilitate the contemporary web-based economic and political framework, enabling users to publish, change, and delete their own content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, cited in Barutçu and Tomaş, 2013, p. 8). Some users engage with social media as a personal space, while others perceive it as a commercial platform for advertising products and businesses, as well as educating consumers. Consequently, the adaptable framework of social media offers significant potential for both individuals and the economy. Although social media platforms are currently valued in the billions, they have also evolved into markets with a financial volume in the billions. Tajvidi and Karami (2017) highlighted in their research that social media platforms have occurred as the most effective tools for organizations' marketing and communication policies. Research indicates that the utilization of social media has a positive influence on the financial performance of 384 hotels in the UK (2017, p.6).



Users publish their thoughts, experiences, photographs, videos, narratives, and images across many platforms in this novel medium, integrating their authentic lives into the virtual realm (Ryan, 2014, p. 201, cited in Sarıtaş, 2018, p. 64). On social media, users often exploit the platform for personal objectives, allowing them to grow their networks at will, regulate the duration of their engagement, and curate a community of their choosing (Fuchs, 2011, p. 141). The adaptable framework of social media offers individuals extensive opportunities, expanding their economic and psychological spheres of influence. They can meet on social media to exchange hobbies and experiences, discuss their expertise, and offer assessments on sports, politics, or companies. Mavnacıoğlu (2009) delineated the fundamental characteristics of social media and encapsulated its description as follows:

"It constitutes a network of online apps where sharing and discourse are fundamental, unconstrained by temporal and spatial boundaries.

• Individuals can effortlessly disseminate their own generated material across internet and mobile platforms.

• Individuals serve as both followers and leaders on social media platforms.

• The foundation of social media relies on the principles of authentic dialogue rather than on communication governed by predefined protocols." (2009, p. 64)

This self-generated virtual space has a significant psychological impact on individuals. Social media programs disseminate substantial personal information about users, hence raising privacy concerns. Individuals may disclose their private lives on social media to seek attention or attain notoriety. It transforms personal secrets into communal knowledge and serves as the focal point of a lynching culture (Budak, 2018, p. 152). The promotion of oneself as a product on social media has led to a decline in face-to-face connections, causing even commonplace interactions to shift to social media platforms. This circumstance compels individuals to allocate additional time on these platforms for social interaction. The promotion of oneself as a product on social media has led to a decline in face-to-face communication, causing even commonplace relationships to evolve through social media platforms. This circumstance compels individuals to allocate additional time on these platforms for social interaction. The extensive time users dedicate to social media has resulted in the rise of social media addiction, with research conducted to demonstrate its prevalence. Kıran et al. (2020) argue that findings regarding social media addiction can be assessed from various viewpoints. Kıran et al. examine the ramifications of social media addiction as follows:

"Diminished and substandard sleep, excessive cognitive fixation, recurrent thoughts regarding the regulation or restriction of usage, inability to resist the urge to engage, increased duration of online activity, yearning when offline, reduced participation in real-world activities, further decline in academic performance, and interpersonal difficulties" (2020, p. 436).

As social media becomes an integral part of daily life, individuals are showcasing their extravagant, visually striking lifestyles and idealized appearances to their followers, striving to mainstream these representations. Hung et al. (2017) state that individuals utilize social media to enhance their self-image and portray an idealized representation of themselves. Individuals exhibiting narcissistic tendencies amplify this behaviour, constructing an idealized identity to present to their followers, so influencing others in the process. The psychological influence of social media facilitates access to individuals' subconscious minds. The extravagant consumption displayed by influencers and superstars on social media captivates their followers and sparks desire. Sabuncuoğlu (2015) indicates that social media serves as a medium for conspicuous consumerism in the following manner:

"Some individuals perceive social media as a platform to showcase consumption behaviours, enabling them to share their luxury possessions, travel destinations, leisure activities, culinary experiences, and overall opulent lifestyles with others. Individuals seeking to validate their social media personalities through consumption generate material centred on conspicuous consumption, utilizing brands that are socially favoured and signify power, prestige, and success". (2015, p. 369)

Celebrities and influencers generate revenue via social media by promoting companies that resonate with their audience, resulting in a rapid surge in sales for such brands. Ketelaar (2016, pp. 2603-2604) claims that social media platforms serve as a crucial conduit for advertising evolution in the postmodern era, allowing individuals to engage in advertising endeavours predicated on their follower counts and the socio-economic frameworks they establish, utilizing advertising and collaboration tags. The capacity of followers to view uncensored social media advertisements from celebrities or influencers on their personal accounts offers a competitive edge over alternative platforms. According to Aydın (2016), social media has a profound effect on how people decide to spend their lives and interact with others. It also contributes to the development of new forms of communication that are based on conspicuous consumption (Aydın, p. 382). This process involves enduring transformations in economic, psychological, and cultural dimensions. The culture of likability stems from the economization and monetization of culture. Cultural products prioritize taste under consumer pressure, resulting in a conflation of art and consumerism. Artists create in response to market demands, resulting in creativity becoming an economic strategy and diminishing its originality. (Chul-Han,2020, pp.16-17)

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This study has two phases: a theoretical framework and its analyses. A literature review was performed in the theoretical framework part to elucidate the concepts underpinning the investigation. The analytical segment evaluated Instagram posts of two local and two international celebrities, who represent luxury companies with the highest follower counts globally and in Türkiye, using data from the social media reporting system BoomSocial. The study analyzed four Instagram posts including advertising content from four celebrities, identified using a non-random sampling procedure, employing semiotic analysis. The posts were examined through the lens of denotation and connotation, as proposed by Barthes, alongside Saussure's notions of signifier and signified, thereby elucidating the meanings and messages embedded in the advertisements.

Language serves as a medium that enhances human communication, enabling individuals to articulate their thoughts and emotions with greater ease. Some individuals articulate their thoughts vocally, while others convey them through bodily movements. Language serves as a crucial medium that enables communication among individuals and societies. Semiotics is a scientific discipline that examines languages, signs, and symbols. Semiotics, the study of meanings, can analyse all factors related to communication. Rifat (2012) posits that semiotics is a scientific discipline concerned with the construction of meaning and the interpretation of signs. The history of semiotics reveals that the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure established its foundational principles. Saussure characterizes semiotics as "the connection that links the name to the object" (Saussure, 1998, p. 109). Charles Sanders Peirce is another linguist specializing in semiotics. Semiotics analyzes society, whereas Peirce assesses it through logical and theoretical frameworks. Pierce (1984) defines a sign as "a comprehensive network of relationships among the object it denotes, the sign that conveys the object, and the interpretant that emerges in the mind of the intended recipient of the sign" (1984, p. 28). Saussure (1998, p. 200) posits that a sign is a physical object that conveys meaning, consisting of two essential components: the "signifier" and the "signified." The signifier denotes the tangible, sensually felt aspect of a concept, whereas the signified represents the cerebral concept to which this physical element alludes. The signifier represents the tangible sign, whereas the signified denotes the meaning that this sign elicits in our cognition.

Roland Barthes is another notable figure who contributed to the field of semiotics. Dönmeçelik (2023, p. 88) claims that Barthes' assertion regarding the nonexistence and inaccessibility of objective reality prompts discourse on the representation of reality within society, particularly through communication mediums in the digital era. According to the study's samples, Barthes (1993) explains the necessity of employing semiotics in advertising analysis as follows: "As individuals engage with the product through advertising language, they ascribe meaning to it, thereby converting its mere utility into a cognitive experience." Semiotic methods, which elucidate the conditions and processes of meaning generation in advertising message analysis, are therefore employed (Barthes, cited in Küçükkerdoğan, 2009, p. 196).



Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the concealed indicators within advertising texts that initially appear comprehensible, specifically what the text conveys and what it aims to communicate, through the lens of semiotic analysis. The data acquired from these analyses will be evaluated from the perspective of conspicuous consumption theory to uncover the presence of consumption-oriented advertising discourses and determine how commercials facilitate conspicuous consumption. This study aims to analyze the promotional strategies of luxury brands that utilize celebrities with the highest Instagram followings in Türkiye and globally, to elucidate the impact of these celebrities' posts on their followers' luxury consumption behaviors, and to investigate how advertising content fosters conspicuous consumption. This research employs semiotic analysis to clarify the latent meanings within advertising and offer an alternative viewpoint in the discipline. The study is significant for elucidating how conspicuous consumption is stimulated by advertising content that promotes consumption, as well as the meanings conveyed by the symbolic codes embedded in advertising texts.

Universe and Sample

The study implements the "purposive sampling" method, a form of non-probability sampling, as a scientific analytical approach in advertising analysis. This strategy selects persons and adverts deemed most likely to yield the most appropriate responses to the research (Aziz, 2017, p. 55). Furthermore, the researcher's inherent biases impact the selection phase. Purposive sampling is a technique that facilitates the acquisition of a comprehensive and precise dataset by guaranteeing the inclusion of pertinent issues associated with the study subject (Arslan, 2022, p. Ö401). A total of four celebrities were selected through a process that identified individuals with the highest global and Turkish Instagram followership, utilizing the social media analytics engine Boomsocial. The celebrities comprised two domestic and two foreign individuals, encompassing both genders. Each commercial or partnership tag published from the official accounts of the chosen celebrities is the only Instagram post that qualifies as a used advertisement. Posts containing advertising or collaboration tags from a variety of industries, including jewellery, luxury retail chains, and baggage, make up the cosmos of becoming accustomed to. Advertisements from relevant sectors were selected for the study, and the methodology was implemented using these images. Several adverts exist on social media. Nevertheless, although they ranked highly on social media, the affordable products chosen from their proprietary brands were omitted from the assessment due to their noncompliance with the tenets of conspicuous consumerism. Four distinct commercial texts (Louis Vuitton, AliBinali Luxury Retail, Blvgari, Pomellato) were evaluated through a semiotic approach, employing Roland Barthes' denotation and connotation aspects.

General information of Instagram accounts of Celebrities

Table 1. Boomsocial Statics (All Countries) (4.11. 2025)

	Selena Gomez	Christiano Ronaldo
Number of Followers	417.254.920	667.223.669
Ranking in their Gender	1	1
Number of Follow	354	615
Number of total Post	2137	3961
Number of Likes (Related Post)	3.600.000	41.532.423
Number of commands (Related Post)	29	495.000
Number of Shares (Related Post)	28.900	28



Table 2. Boomsocial Statics (Türkiye /All Industries/All Sectors) (4.11. 2025)

	Hande Erçel	Burak Özçivit
Number of Followers	32.265.235	25.449.968
Ranking in Gender	1	4
Number of Follow	667	334
Number of total Post	823	499
Number of Likes (Related Post)	803.000	448.000
Number of commands (Related post)	5681	3313
Number of Shares (Related Post)	1963	70

FINDINGS

The study sample, comprising Louis Vuitton, AliBinali Luxury Retail, Bvlgari, and Pomellato, was examined through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach of denotation and connotation.

Semiotic Analysis of Messi and Louis Vuitton Advertisement



Figure 1. Advertisement of Messi & Luis Vuitton (Instagram: @Messi)

Lionel Messi, who has 505 million followers on Instagram, posted a picture of Cristiano Ronaldo playing chess while sitting on a Louis Vuitton suitcase prior to the 2022 World Cup. The caption said, "Victory Is a State of Mind." This photograph was captured by Annie Leibovitz for Louis Vuitton. This photograph was concurrently shared on Instagram by two footballers prior to the World Cup, sparking global excitement. With the caption, "The post received 32.9 million likes on Messi's page, while the same post got 47.5 million likes on Ronaldo's Instagram account."

From a semiotic standpoint, the post depicts two athletes, regarded as the greatest football players in history, engaged in a game of chess on a luggage. Both footballers are intensely concentrated on the match. Two players are positioned in front of stones. The photograph is notable for its portrayal of players with one side of their faces obscured by their hands, exhibiting a solemn look, and illuminated from the upper right against a blue and gray backdrop. The athletes are observed donning trousers and athletic sweaters primarily in hues of blue and gray. Both players are intensely focused on the game and are carefully contemplating their strategic moves. Messi's hand is positioned on his chin, revealing an obvious watch tattoo on his ring finger and bare arm. The connotative meaning of the post reveals Messi's watch tattoo on his arms, underscoring the concept of time. Time is an invaluable entity that

cannot be purchased and symbolizes eternity.

The iconic design of the Louis Vuitton luggage alludes to the accomplishments of Messi and Ronaldo, regarded as the greatest players in history, who will be commemorated for years to come. It also emphasizes that the brand is a significant asset and a product that can be recalled and utilized for years ahead. The brand associates itself with the achievements and worth of the athletes. Messi's ring symbolizes marriage and underscores in the advertisement that the items are family-centric, holding value akin to that of family. The game of chess and its pieces symbolize both the game itself and the concepts of intelligence, strategy, and victory. With chess pieces, the brand's slogan "Victory is a state of mind" highlights that victory is inherent in human nature and can be achieved by acquiring Vuitton. The luggage in the package symbolizes a voyage. The luggage depicted in the post, along with its chessboard design, suggests that this will be the final World Cup for the two footballers, who are nearing the conclusion of their careers owing to age, and that the match's loser will be eliminated.

The message given to the recipient is also presented in the form of a suitcase-shaped chessboard, which implicitly constructs the meaning that the loser of the two football players will not only lose a football tournament but also a game of intellect. In the context of conspicuous consumption, the post suggests that luxury is closely linked to intelligence and achievement. The post asserts that luxury invariably attracts the brightest minds and prosperity, encouraging individuals to engage in luxury consumption. Moreover, the perception that these two athletes, recognized as elite football players, embody the upper class serves to communicate to individuals that acquiring Louis Vuitton products is essential to emulate their status.

Furthermore, the chessboard depicted in the text symbolizes intelligence and strategic thinking. Consequently, the essay highlights that success in a physically demanding sport, such as football, may also be achieved through cerebral strategic fortitude. This mental strategic power in the post, when examined through the prism of conspicuous consumerism, reveals that the company is simultaneously projecting an image of being "culturally affluent" to its consumers as a "privilege." This image is embedded in the individual's mind within a connotative framework.

Table 3. Semiotic Parameters of Messi and Louis Vuitton Advertisement

Signifier	Iconic Sign	
	Denotation	Connotation
L Messi & C.Ronaldo	Football Player	The greatest footballers of all time (GOAT), unforgettable, always valuable, fair play, elite
Chess	Board Game	Intelligence, Strategy, Victory, Victory comes from birth
Luggage	Travel	End of career / international fame/mobility
Ring	Marriage/ Family	Precious as family/ family deserves product
Tatto (watch)	Time	Brand's timeless product and brand is precious

Semiotic Analysis of the Selena Gomez and Ralp Lauren & Blygari Advertisement





Figure 2. Selena Gomez Ralph Lauren & Bvlgari Advertisement (Instagram, @selenagomez)

Selena Gomez, with 417 million Instagram followers, holds the top position globally on the Boomsocial website. The artist has been involved in the entertainment sector since childhood, working as an actor, musician, and entrepreneur. Upon examination of Gomez's Instagram account, it is evident that she shares posts highlighting her personal life and products from her makeup line with her followers. Furthermore, Gomez disseminates information regarding her collaborations at events she participates in during important occasions. Upon analyzing Gomez's post through the lens of semiotics at the denotative level, the image depicts her positioned in front of a wall inscribed with "Oscar," illuminated by artificial lighting, and captured from a frontal perspective. On the red carpet, Gomez donned a pastel-colored, stone-embroidered gown, complemented by a substantial necklace, earrings, and rings. Gomez poses for the cameras with her arms at her sides, showcasing her hourglass silhouette, short dark hair, and understated pastel makeup. When assessed using Barthes' semiotic analysis, the photograph was captured prior to the Oscar story. The Academy Awards, the most prestigious award in the film industry, are an event attended by the industry's elite and affluent, epitomizing the upper echelon. The Oscar inscription signifies prestige, accomplishment, and prominence, conveying the message, "If you are not on this platform, you are lacking." A hallmark of fame is being on the "red carpet." The message conveys that requirements such as possessing a prestigious career and achieving happiness and success must be fulfilled. The Oscars event marks the pinnacle of achievement in the film industry. Her attitude, characterized by a confident posture and a sensuous, proportioned physique reminiscent of the goddess Aphrodite, accentuates Gomez's attractiveness. The diamond jewellery worn by Gomez highlighted affluence, achievement, allure, and prestige. Jewellery signifies socio-economic superiority to others. Gomez's powder-colored dress, although alluding to a fashion icon such as Ralph Lauren, also evokes the idea of an attractive woman dressed in a handmade gown. Messages like attractiveness and class consciousness are communicated explicitly through attire. Photography communicates social, cultural, and economic messages to audiences. Consequently, an implicit message is ingrained in the consciousness of advertising consumers: "To gain visibility, one must present oneself at an elite event, on the red carpet, adorned in luxurious clothes and jewellery."

Table 3. Semiotic Parameters of Selena Gomez Ralph Lauren & Bvlgari Advertisement

Iconic Sign		
Signifier	Signified	
	Denotation	Connotation
Selena Gomez	Hourglass-shaped form woman	Healthy high feminine energy, desirable, goddess
Dress	Shiny nighth dress	Beauty, elegance, haute couture, exclusive,
Jewel (necklace ring earrings) Hourglass form	Diamond-encrusted thick necklace, diamond ring, diamond earrings	Wealth, beauty, elegance, success, status, custom design,
Oscar	Cinema award ceremony	Success, the elite class
Red Carpet	Award ceremony	Fame, success, recognition, prestige, wealth

Semiotic Analysis of the Burak Özçivit and AlibinAli Retail Advertisements



Figure 3. Burak Özçivit AlibinAli Retail Advertisements (Instagram, @burakozcivit)

Burak Özçivit, with 25.5 million followers, is positioned 4th in Turkey on the Boomsocial platform. Özçivit was selected because his predecessors were proprietors of catering companies and politicians, along with ethical considerations. Analysing the photo through Barthes' connotation reveals an upscale business that endeavours to integrate natural aspects through lighting and floral displays. Burak Özçivit symbolizes an attractive, wealthy, and influential individual. Their clothes, consisting of comfy clothing and sneakers, signify their affiliation with the upper class. According to Barthes' connotative analysis, this image can be seen as illustrating how modern masculinity is imbued with notions of power, grace, and exclusivity. Upon scrutinizing the photograph, Özçivit is seen seated in a sophisticated suit. The official before him is presenting a ring. Özçivit's posture at the centre, composed, discerning, and authoritative, signifies his embodiment of the "elite male" image. This role also confers power and authority upon Özçivit. These events, as articulated by Barthes, embody a "naturalized ideology" within the realm of partisanship, with Özçivit depicted as an "icon" of the contemporary masculinity founded on opulence and conspicuous consumption. The costly watches offered to Özçivit on a red surface

further reinforce this notion. The image of employees in suits attending to Özçivit with extreme seriousness communicates that the brand upholds ideals of hygiene, meticulousness, and professionalism, as evidenced by the white gloves worn by the staff. This message further suggests that time is "valuable and elusive." Consequently, the glove signifies that handling the watch is an activity reserved for exceptional persons, inaccessible to the general populace. The gloved attendant imparts an element of reverence to the premium watch presentation. The photograph may also be construed as a reflection of the care exhibited towards the products and the consumer in encouraging luxury purchases. The watches on the table, awaiting selection, symbolize that both time and the watches themselves are as valuable as jewels, reflecting the importance of personal accomplishment and status to their owners.

Table 4. Semiotic Parameters of Burak Özçivit and AlibinAli Retail Advertisements

Iconic Sign		
Signifier	Signified	
	Denotation	Connotation
Burak Özçivit	Tall brunette handsome man	Masculinity, power, wealth, attractiveness
Luxury Watch	Wealth prestige	Power, Wealth, Belonging
White Gloves	Rigor, attention	The glorification of luxury
Suit	Seriousness, servicer	Modernity, Masculinity, Business World
Sport Suit	Confidence	Wealth, luxury, sovereignty

Semiotic Analysis of the Hande Erçel and Pomellato Advertisements



Figure 4. Hande Erçel and Pomellato Advertisements (Instagram, @handemiyy)

On April 17, 2025, Hande Erçel was appointed as the brand ambassador for the jewellery company Pomellato. Consequently, Erçel, possessing 31.9 million Instagram followers, disseminates posts endorsing the pertinent brand on her account. The post, distributed from Erçel's account, analyzed through the lens of denotation in accordance with Barthes' semiotic theory, depicts a self-assured woman



gazing downward from an elevated perspective, tilting her head to the right, adorned with rings on her fingers, a necklace around her neck, and earrings in her ears. Her hair is styled high, and she wears understated pastel-coloured makeup. The jewellery is prominently shown in the foreground against a white artificial light background. Upon analysis of the image's significance, the youthful, attractive woman embodies the quintessential notion of beauty for her audience. The lesson presented is that femininity and plain attractiveness are not the same. The impeccable makeup on Erçel's face not only highlights the capitalist ideal of perfect beauty but also alludes to Pomellato's nude series through the application of nude colours. Erçel's relaxed posture, assured personality, financial acumen, and connection with the upper class underscore her status. The right-side top-down perspective suggests an attempt to perceive oneself as part of the upper class and to assert dominance over others. The old money aesthetic influences Erçel's hairstyle and attire. The clothes, hairstyle, and cosmetics imply a contemporary, minimalist, sophisticated, and opulent lifestyle. The jewellery showcased by Erçel is understated and sophisticated, yet it communicates notions of affluence and connection with the elite class. The old money aesthetic influences Erçel's hairstyle and attire. The attire, hairstyle, and cosmetics imply a contemporary, minimalist, sophisticated, and opulent lifestyle. The jewellery showcased by Erçel is understated and sophisticated, yet it communicates notions of affluence and affiliation with the elite class. Moreover, jewellery serves as an enhancement to a woman's beauty and worth. The image portrays both Erçel and the jewelry, exuding an aura of richness through simplicity, representative of the upper echelons of society.

Table 5. Semiotic Parameters of Hande Erçel and Pomellato Advertisements

Iconic Sign		
Signifier	Signified	
	Denotation	Connotation
Young and beautiful women (Hande Erçel)	Beauty, femininity	Self-confidence, extraordinary beauty
Flawless Make up	Beauty, perfection	Idealized representation of women
Posture and facial expression	Looking down, strength	Inner depth, knowing what you want, superiority
Hair and Dress	Simple and straightforward,	Modernity, elegance, beauty
Jewel (necklace,ring earrings)	Wealth, taste, femininity	Wealth, luxury, status symbol

CONCLUSION

The advertising concept has undergone constant changes throughout history and has also adapted to evolving consumption practices. This transformation, from the products hawked by town criers in ancient times to AI-powered social media advertisements, demonstrates that advertising is not merely a process of selling a product; it has also become a tool for gaining visibility, achieving status, and creating a sense of belonging among individuals. Today, collaborations and social media advertisements promote products, creating a lifestyle and identity for individuals. In the four examples examined in the study, regardless of whether the images featured watches, jewellery, suitcases, or a store chain, it was observed that consumers were presented with an identity template based on the "ideal" image of a rich, powerful man or a beautiful woman. Furthermore, people who buy these products may feel that some celebrities' traits will be handed down to them. In this scenario, the number of consumers who feel they can acquire the ideal female physique with a dress or jewellery, or transform into a powerful and clever guy with a suitcase, is enormous.

Beyond possessing all these physical attributes, individuals who engage in luxury and conspicuous consumption buy themselves a lifestyle. The desire to belong to the upper class and conspicuous consumption also bring interdependent consumption habits. This situation signifies the production of a



new identity and status. In conspicuous consumption, the product or service purchased is not just a material object but a powerful symbol of how individuals position themselves in daily life and on social media. Conspicuous consumption increases individuals' desire to show off what they have or their experiences, both in their daily lives and on social media. Products are not only purchased to "meet" or "be used" for individual needs; they are also bought to be "seen" and "pointed at.". Therefore, consumption is now carried out with an understanding far from need, emotion, and aesthetics, and disconnected from reality. One of the basic principles of conspicuous consumerism is the belief that "I must be better than everyone else." An individual's sense of rivalry gradually transforms into pressure, leading them to abandon sensible consumption patterns in order to stand out. Social media actively promotes this type of competitive behaviour. The idealized lives presented on social media trigger feelings of inadequacy and exclusion in individuals, leading to increased conspicuous consumption as a means to fill this void. When considering the example of Türkiye, individuals adapt the luxurious lifestyles they see on television or social media to their own lives in various ways. Conspicuous consumption habits in Türkiye are shaped by elements such as the type of phone individuals use, their car, the cigarettes they smoke, or their home location.

A significant segment of Turkish society adopts conspicuous consumption habits in these areas. Although luxury consumption seems to appeal to only a small minority in our country, its impact has spread throughout society. From a historical perspective, it can be seen that the fundamental motivation has remained the same throughout the process, from town criers to today's digital town criers – namely, celebrities and influencers – despite changes in the form of discourse. The goal is to attract attention and increase consumption. However, social media has made this process more targeted and personalized. Advertisements tailored to individuals' screens are displayed based on their social media usage habits, interests, behaviours, and consumption patterns. For example, individuals who like a car or jewellery post are shown similar content more frequently. This also leads to conspicuous consumption becoming more systematic and individuals unconsciously integrating into this order.

In conclusion, the conspicuous consumption-focused advertisements on social media are not merely promotions but also a digital showcase of social norms, identity quests, and status struggles. These representations encourage individuals to consume and display what they consume, gain approval, and constantly desire more. While the language and techniques of advertising have evolved throughout time, the message they transmit remains the same: "Consume, show off, get likes." This triple loop is more apparent and influential than ever in the digital era.

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