

A Content Analysis on Brand Communication on Instagram During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Instagram is one of the most used social media platforms and is one of the important tools for brands to communicate with consumers. With the beginning of the pandemic, brands have started to share posts on their social media accounts regarding this process. This study conducted a content analysis of pandemic-related Instagram posts from five brands listed among Türkiye's most valuable brands in Brand Finance's 2020 ranking, in terms of advertising appeals, themes used and creative strategies. Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom, were included in the study. It was found that the brands made a total of 501 posts until September 1, 2020 and 171 of these (34,1%) contained components related to the pandemic. It is seen that health appeal is present in 51,5% of the posts, followed by convenience appeal (36,3%) and security/precaution appeal (19,3%). Staying at home (46,8%) and social distancing (29,2%) stand out among the themes discussed. Among the creative strategies, use occasion stands out with a ratio of 43,9%. It was observed that after June 1, 2020, brands significantly reduced the number of posts containing pandemic-related components. While nearly 60% of the Instagram posts before June 1, 2020 contained components related to the pandemic, this ratio decreased to 5% between June 1, 2020 and September 1, 2020.

Pandemi Sürecinde Instagram'da Marka İletişimi Üzerine Bir İçerik Analizi

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ÖZET

Günümüzde Instagram, en çok kullanılan sosyal medya platformlarından biri olarak markaların tüketicilerle iletişim kurması için önemli araçlardan biridir. Pandemi sürecinin başlaması ile markalar bu sürece dair sosyal medya hesaplarında paylaşımlar yapmaya başlamışlardır. Bu çalışmada Brand Finance'in 2020 yılı Türkiye'nin en değerli markaları listesine giren beş markanın (Ziraat Bankası, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik ve Türk Telekom) pandemi ile ilişkili öğeler içeren Instagram gönderileri içerik analizine tabi tutulmuş ve reklam çekicilikleri, kullanılan temalar ve yaratıcı yaklaşımlar açısından ele alınmıştır. Markaların Covid-19 pandemi süreci ile ilgili yaptıkları ilk paylaşımdan, 1 Eylül 2020 tarihine kadar toplam 501 gönderi yaptıkları; bunların 171 adedinin (%34,1) pandemi süreci ile ilgili bileşenler içerdiği bulunmuştur. Bu gönderilerde kullanılan reklam çekicilikleri incelendiğinde, sağlık çekiciliğinin gönderilerinin %51,5'inde bulunduğu, onu kolaylık çekiciliğinin (%36,3) ve güvenlik/önlem çekiciliğinin (%19,3) takip ettiği görülmüştür. Ele alınan temalarda ise evde kalmak (%46,8) ve sosyal mesafe (%29,2) öne çıkmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak maske kullanımı %12,9; dezenfektan kullanımı ve dezenfekte



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etmek %9,4; ekonomik destek %7,6 oranında gönderilerde yer almıştır. Yaratıcı yaklaşımlardan ise kullanım durumu %43,9'luk oranı ile öne çıkmaktadır. Markaların 1 Haziran 2020 tarihinden sonra ise pandemi süreci ile ilgili bileşenler içeren gönderiler paylaşmayı önemli düzeyde azalttığı görülmüştür. Markaların Covid-19 pandemi süreci ile ilgili yaptıkları ilk paylaşımından 1 Haziran 2020 tarihine kadar yaptıkları Instagram paylaşımlarının %60'a yakını pandemi ile ilgili bileşenler içerirken, 1 Haziran 2020 ile 1 Eylül 2020 tarihleri arasında bu oran %5'e düşmüştür.

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INTRODUCTION

It is essential for brands to be present where their target audience is. Social media serves as a significant platform that connects brands with consumers, allowing consumers to follow brand-related developments in real-time and engage directly with them. As in advertisements, it is crucial to use appeals and creative strategies tailored to the target audience in Instagram posts to produce messages that capture consumers' interest and influence them. During the Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the whole world, it is seen that brands have started to appeal to consumers in different ways (Valinsky, 2020).

The World Health Organization declared pandemic due to the virus that began to spread from China to the whole world at the end of 2019. This situation has negatively affected many areas such as health, economy, education, and tourism all over the world (Gedik, 2023, p. 1274). According to Üztemur and Dinç (2022, p. 238), there has been an increase in social media usage due to the impact of the pandemic and social media has attained a prominent position in the daily lives of its users.

In this study, 501 posts shared on the Instagram accounts of Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom were evaluated. These brands were among the first brands in Brand Finance's ranking of Türkiye's most valuable brands in 2020 (Brand Finance Brand Directory, 2020). It was found that 171 of the brand posts contained pandemic-related components and these posts were subjected to content analysis for a deeper examination. Advertising appeals, creative strategies and themes used were analyzed.

There are studies examining advertisements made during the pandemic in Türkiye, in the context of advertising appeals and/or creative strategies. Ersöz and Duğan (2022) examined ten commercials, Altınbilek Yalçınkaya and Sabuncuoğlu İnanç (2021) examined five commercials, and Yetkin Cılızoğlu, Dondurucu and Çetinkaya (2020) examined 15 commercials specific to GSM operators. It can be seen that these studies focus on commercials. This study differs from the aforementioned studies in that it examines 171 pieces of content in different formats, including commercials, shared as posts on brands' Instagram accounts. In addition, the fact that this study compares posts from two different periods is important in terms of revealing the change brought by the period called the “new normal”. Thus, this study contributes to the COVID-19 brand communication literature by extending research to social media posts, specifically Instagram.

Social Media

Social media provides people with the opportunity to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships. It differs from traditional media in that everyone can produce content and comment on and contribute to the content produced. It can be in formats such as text, audio, video, and image (Scott, 2020, p. 62). Social media has become an important part of daily life with the rapid development of the internet. Social media primarily comprises user-generated content, including personal experiences, news, ideas, cultural exchange, and the interactions of consumers with such material. Social media can affect people's daily experiences as well as their worldviews (Özdemir and Önal, 2024, p. 94).

There are many advantages to using social media to communicate with consumers for brands. Shimp and Andrews (2013, p. 381) list some of these advantages as follows:

- Flexibility: Social media provides flexibility in marketing and advertising planning thanks to the ability to quickly edit posts and ads.
- Reach Options: Demographic targeting options allow access to very wide or very narrow audiences.

- Two-Way Communication: Consumer feedback and new product, price, distribution and promotion ideas can be obtained.
- Integration and Traffic Redirection: Social media content can help direct consumers to other sites belonging to the brand.
- Cost Effectiveness: Compared to the cost of advertising on traditional channels, social media can be quite advantageous.

By maintaining a presence on social media, brands can enhance their visibility, boost sales, and safeguard their reputation and public image (Laman and Topçu, 2019, p. 11). In addition, brands can reach potential customers through social media, provide customer support, conduct comprehensive analyses related to customers, obtain new ideas from customers, direct visitors to the brand's websites, advertise to a narrow target audience, and conduct crisis communication (Newberry, 2018). Since brands can share as much as they want on social media, they have the opportunity to express themselves better. In this way, consumers will be able to get an idea about the brand more easily, and the brand will be able to take a prominent place in the consumer's mind (Aydın, 2017, p. 327).

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), the internet, which was initially used to consume content, is now used to create, change, share and discuss content with social media. This is an important situation that determines the reputation, sales and even the life of the brand. Therefore, they have revealed seven functional blocks of social media for brands. These blocks are identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and group. The focus of each social media platform is different. For example, LinkedIn's focus is identity; for YouTube it is sharing. On Facebook, relationships are more dominant.

Instagram is among the most popular social media platforms in the world. According to Statista (2025) Instagram ranks third in terms of monthly active users, after Facebook and YouTube. Pew Research Center (2024) highlights the platform's old and new roles in the users' lives: Previously, it was the place "where friends and family share photos"; now, it is "a destination for brands, memes, and entertainment". They also underline Instagram's role as a news source. According to Decker (2025) about 90% of users follow at least one business on Instagram, so it is clear why brands want to be where their audiences are. McLachlan (2023) posits that Instagram accounts are akin to business cards. According to McLachlan, there are multiple ways to use Instagram for marketing: Organic content, paid content, influencer marketing and shopping tools. Organic content is brands posting photos, videos, reels, and stories. However, when it is social media under question, the word "algorithm" inevitably arises. Instagram algorithm is "a system used by the social media platform to determine the order in which content is displayed in a user's feed" (Gagliardi, 2025). Mosseri (2023) argues that Instagram employs not one but multiple algorithms in order to "make the most of people's time".

Message Strategies and Advertising Appeals

The message strategy is about the basic idea of an advertisement, how the idea will be implemented and the justification. It has three components: (1) Verbal component: What the advertisement will say, points that may affect the choice of words, the relationship between the text and the media (2) Non-verbal component: The general structure of the advertising graphics, the visuals that must be used, the relationship between the visuals and the media (3) Technical component: The preferred implementation approach and requirements (Weigold and Arens, 2018, p. 198).

Researchers working in the field of advertising usually examine advertising messages by dividing them into two categories. Aaker and Norris (1982, p. 61) state that sometimes the terms informational or cognitive are used to express the rational category, while the words image or feeling may be preferred to express the emotional category. Some researchers also make this distinction as informational and

transformational (Puto and Wells, 1984, p. 638).

Advertising appeals can also be categorized as rational and emotional. Advertising appeals, sometimes referred to as message appeals or persuasion appeals (Elden and Bakır, 2010, p. 75) and sometimes as communication appeals (Copley, 2004, p. 124), can be defined as approaches used to attract consumers' attention and influence their feelings towards a product, service or idea (Belch and Belch, 2018, p. 303). De Pelsmacker et al. (2013, p. 213) state that rational advertising appeals include features, practical information, and testable claims that can be used as evaluation criteria, while the main aim of emotional appeals is to create emotional reactions and convey an image.

There may be different approaches to the classification of appeals. Pollay (1983, pp. 80-84) identified 42 appeals, Hetsroni (2000, pp. 60-61) 25 appeals, Elden and Bakır (2010, p. 75) 31 appeals. However, there are also researchers who keep this number much lower. Clow and Baack (2018, p. 181) mention a total of seven basic appeals: Fear, humor, sexuality, music, rationality, emotions, and scarcity.

Table 1
Hetsroni's Classification of Appeals

Appeal	Description
Adventure	Using the product is clearly associated with exceptional boldness, bravery or taking risks more than in everyday life
Beauty	The ad asserts that using the product enhances the beauty of its user, or suggests that the people in the ad are handsome because they use the product.
Collectivism	The people in the ad, who are typical users of the product, are depicted as a group whose members spend time together and help each other. It is the product that brings these people together.
Competition	Distinguishing the product from its counterparts in one characteristic or more than one characteristic (but counting is necessary), and comparing the product with alternative brands
Excellence	Stressing that the product excels in one or more characteristics (but counting is necessary) without referring to alternative brands.
Convenience	Stressing that the product is easy to use.
Courtesy	Politeness and friendship towards the consumer are associated with the product.
Saving	Stressing the low price of the product, mentioning discounts, free bonuses, gifts or special paying arrangements.
Efficiency	Emphasizing the product's capacity to accomplish the goal for which it is used.
Joy/happiness	Suggesting that the use of the product makes one happy or causes joy, by showing happy people and contending that they are happy because they use the product.
Family	Showing family life in a positive manner, and stressing that the product can be used by all the family members or is intended for family use.
Health	Claiming that the product enhances the strength of the body, increases vitality or improves other health aspects.
Individualism	Stressing that the product can help its user to become self-reliant or free him of his dependence on others.
Leisure	Showing that using the product leads to relaxation, or depicting scenes of leisure that are clearly the result of using the product.
Modernization	Stressing that the product is innovative, based on a new technology.

Charity	Suggesting that helping other people without seeking a reward is an indispensable positive virtue of the product, or showing that helping other people without seeking a reward is a result -clearly desirable- of using the product.
Patriotism	Suggesting that love for the homeland, loyalty to the state, sacrificing one-self for the country, and so forth, is a positive virtue that is clearly related to the product.
Popularity	Emphasizing the large number of people who use the product, mentioning that some brand is very heavily consumed (perhaps more heavily than other brands).
Quality	Stressing the overall superb and durable character of the product without referring to any specific virtue.
Safety	Asserting that the product is safe to use and using it does not carry any harmful short-term or long-term effects.
Sex	Suggesting that using the product is either related to or enhances sexual activity in the broadest sense of the word (from flirting through petting and erotic body contact to full intercourse), or saying that the product enhances its user's sexual attractiveness.
Tradition	Stating that the product enjoys a long impressive history, or suggesting that using the product helps to transmit values and beliefs from generation to generation.
Wealth	Suggesting that using the product can make one rich. Merely showing rich people is not enough for coding in this category unless it is specifically mentioned that it was the use of the product that made these people rich.
Wisdom	Explaining that it can help one to become smarter or showing that the product is needed for academic learning.
Youthful spirit	Emphasizing that the product can help one feel younger or look younger. Merely showing young people without referring to their younger look/youthful spirit in relation to the product is not enough for coding in this category.

Laskey et al. (1989) evaluated creative message strategies under two main headings: informational and transformational. Informational strategies are comparative, unique selling proposition (USP), preemptive, hyperbole, and generic-informational. Transformational message strategies are user image, brand image, use occasion, and generic-transformational.

Informational Message Strategies: The first one is comparative strategy. This strategy is about advertisements where competing brands are explicitly shown and compared. In such advertisements, competitor brands are not implicitly suggested; the brand is explicitly stated. Another one is unique selling proposition (USP), which is about highlighting a unique feature of a brand. Having a beneficial feature of the product or the ability to objectively verify or prove the highlighted feature is important for this strategy. In preemptive strategy, as in the USP strategy, the highlighted feature must be provable. However, there is no claim of uniqueness or mention of competing brands as in comparative advertisements. The aim of this strategy is to make competitors say “me too” with the proposed feature. In hyperbole strategy, messages with unverifiable excessive claims and exaggeration are involved. Lastly, generic-informational strategy, where informative messages are focused on the general product class rather than a specific brand.

Transformational Message Strategies: User image strategy contains messages focused on the brand's users and their lifestyles. In brand image strategy the focus is on the brand. Messages are about the brand's own image, and reference is made to brand personality. Use occasion strategy is about a connection is established between the brand and its usage environment and context. The brand's usage experience is described. Lastly, generic-transformational strategy, where transformational messages are focused on the product class.

METHOD

In this study, a content analysis was conducted on the posts shared by brands on Instagram to systematically identify and compare the appeals, themes, and creative strategies used in pandemic-related messaging. Content analysis was chosen because it enables the systematic, replicable, and objective description of communication content (Krippendorff, 2018, p.24, Berelson, 1952, p.18). The study's research questions require identifying and categorizing the specific appeals, themes, and creative strategies used in Instagram posts, as well as comparing these elements before and after June 1, 2020. Content analysis is particularly well-suited for this purpose because it allows the researcher to quantify the presence of specific message components, examine patterns of communication over time, and make comparisons across different periods or groups. It can be briefly defined as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). By using content analysis, this study systematically examines how brands adapted their messaging strategies during the pandemic, providing empirical evidence on shifts in communication practices related to appeals, themes, and creative strategies in social media advertising.

According to the 2020 ranking of Türkiye's most valuable brands by the international brand valuation organization Brand Finance, the top five brands are Turkish Airlines, Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, and Arçelik (Brand Finance Brand Directory, 2020). Since Turkish Airlines, which holds the first position on the list, targets not only Türkiye but also a global audience on its Instagram account, the sixth-ranked brand, Türk Telekom, was included in the analysis instead. General information about the selected brands and their Instagram accounts is provided on the table.

Table 2
General Information on Brands' Instagram Pages

Brand	Number of Followers	Number of Posts
Ziraat Bank	202k	996
Garanti BBVA	114k	963
Turkcell	324k	1507
Arçelik	208k	718
Türk Telekom	187k	431

In this study, a total of 501 posts shared by Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom brands on their Instagram accounts between March 13 and September 1 were examined, and 171 posts containing components related to the pandemic process were examined in terms of appeals, themes and creative strategies.

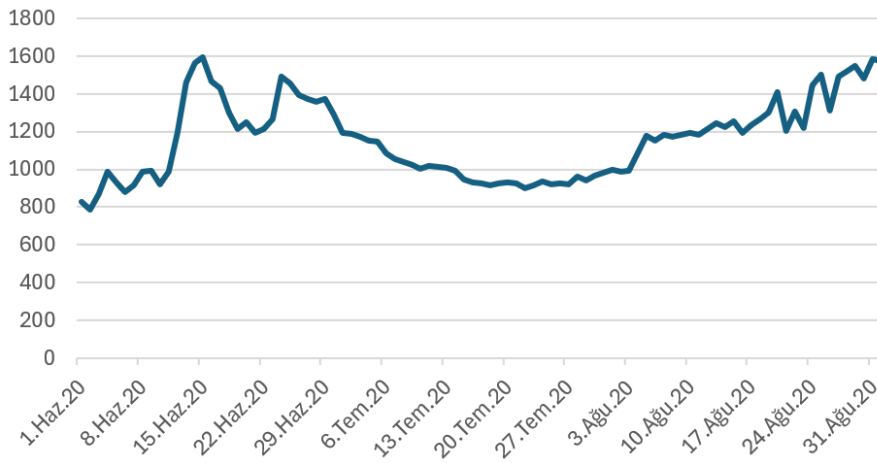
Among all social media platforms, Instagram was selected for this study. As Tufan Yeniçıkçı (2016, p.100-101) posits, Instagram's growing popularity has made it an ideal platform for communication because it offers a versatile environment well suited to managing a variety of strategic initiatives for brands. Its inherent visual power gives brands unique opportunities to stir users' emotions through shared imagery about the brand. Many well-known brands maintain active Instagram accounts for the promotion of their products. This is supported with the data presented by BoomSocial, which compares the Turkish social media accounts of brands across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. A quick analysis of engagement metrics shows that Instagram generally achieves higher numbers (Boom Social, 2025). Thus, upon reviewing brand accounts on several platforms, it was concluded that Instagram is the most suitable platform for this study.

The time frame in this study starts with March 13, which is the date of first content a brand posted about the pandemic. In addition, one of the important dates during the pandemic is June 1, 2020. On this

date, various restrictions that started with the pandemic process began to be eased. Travel restrictions and curfews were largely lifted, civil servants returned to normal working hours, and many businesses, including various venues where people gathered together, were opened (EuroNews, 2020). However, experts have expressed concerns that the process after June 1, 2020, also known as the “new normal” and in which a return to normal life was planned within various rules, was misunderstood (Şenses Kurukız, 2020). As can be seen in Figure 1, prepared according to the General Coronavirus Table data of the Ministry of Health, the number of daily cases fell below 800 during the “new normal” process, but then, began to increase (T. C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2022). This was a warning sign, a reminder that it was important to continue being cautious during this period. Therefore, a comparison was made between the posts of brands before and after June 1, 2020 within the scope of this study. This study ends at September 1 which makes the before and after periods roughly three months.

Figure 1

Number of Daily Cases Between June 1 and September 1



Coding Table

In this study, the classification of advertising appeals put forward by Hetsroni (2000, pp. 60-61) was taken as the basis for coding advertising appeals. However, based on the data obtained as a result of the pre-test, some changes were made to the final list of appeals. Fear and humor appeals, which were not included in the aforementioned classification, were included in the study. These two appeals are among the key appeals, and it was important to obtain results pertaining to their usage rates. Additionally, it was decided to add the titles “Respect for Elders”, “Respect for Healthcare Workers” and “Respect of the Brand to Its Own Employees”. Security appeal was evaluated in the context of Covid-19 measures, named as “Security / Precaution”. A list of the appeals used in this study can be found on Table 5. In addition, under the title of themes, there are “Mask Use”, “Social Distance”, “Staying At Home”, as well as “Home Education” and “Working From Home”. For creative strategies, the study of Laskey et al. (1989, pp. 38-40) was used. Coding was done by two coders, disagreements were discussed and agreed upon. The level of agreement between the coders was calculated as 95%.

Limitations

This study is limited to the posts shared on Instagram accounts of Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom brands between March 13 and September 1. Posts made with Instagram's stories feature were not evaluated in the study. Appeals, themes and creative strategies were examined only in posts containing components related to the pandemic. The comparison in this study is

intended to compare brands' pandemic-related posts before and after June 1, 2020. Brands' pre-pandemic content was not included in the sample.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the differences in brands' posts containing pandemic-related components before and after June 1, 2020?
2. What are the (a) appeals, (b) themes and (c) creative strategies used by brands on the posts containing pandemic-related components between March 13, 2020 and September 1, 2020?

FINDINGS

The findings regarding the posts analyzed in the study will be discussed under this heading.

Table 3

Distribution of brand posts

Brand	First Post	Before June 1			Between June 1 – Sept. 1			All Posts		
		Posts	P.R.P .*	%	Posts	P.R.P. *	%	Posts	P.R.P. *	%
Ziraat Bank	March 17, 2020	43	26	60,5	47	0	0	90	26	28,9
Garanti BBVA	March 17, 2020	54	39	72,2	51	3	5,9	105	42	40
Turkcell	March 13, 2020	79	37	46,8	64	4	6,3	143	41	28,7
Arçelik	March 19, 2020	51	23	45,1	47	1	2,1	98	24	24,5
Türk Telekom	March 20, 2020	40	34	85	25	4	16	65	38	58,5
Total		267	159	59,6	234	12	5,1	501	171	34,1

* P. R. P. : Pandemic-related posts

Table 3 shows the number of posts by all brands before June 1, 2020 and between June 1, 2020 and September 1, 2020, and the number of posts related to the pandemic. After June 1, 2020, many pandemic-related bans were lifted and a normalization process was started within various rules (EuroNews, 2020), but experts emphasized that the easing of bans in this period, referred to as the “new normal” and “normalization process”, should not be misunderstood, as the virus threat continues and the number of cases increases as complacency sets in (Şenses Kurukız, 2020; Durdak, 2020). Despite this, it is striking that the number of posts by brands containing pandemic-related components decreased significantly after June 1. While pandemic-related components were used in 59,6% of all posts before June 1, this rate dropped to 5,1% on June 1 and after. One of the brands examined did not share any posts containing pandemic-related components between June 1 and September 1.

Table 4

Distribution of Rational and Emotional Appeals

	Ziraat Bank		Garanti BBVA		Turkcell		Arçelik		Türk Telekom		All Posts	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Rational	24	92,3	34	81	31	75,6	15	62,5	26	68,4	13	76
Emotional	2	7,7	12	28,6	12	29,3	10	41,7	20	52,6	56	32,7

The distribution of rational and emotional appeals in posts containing pandemic-related components can be examined in Table 4. It should be noted that posts may contain both types of appeals, so the totals may exceed 100%. It is noteworthy that posts containing rational components are higher for all brands. The brands that use such components at the highest rate are Ziraat Bank (92,3%), Garanti BBVA (81%), and Turkcell (75,6%). Posts using emotional components are at a lower ratio than posts using rational components for all brands (32,7%). The brands that use such components the most are Türk Telekom (52,6%), Arçelik (41,7%), and Turkcell (29,3%). Table 4 contains the corresponding n values.

Table 5

Distribution of appeals

Appeal	n	%	Appeal	n	%
Health	88	51,5	Charity	15	8,8
Convenience	62	36,3	Patriotism	15	8,8
Security / Precaution	33	19,3	Modernity / Latest Technology	15	8,8
Happiness	32	18,7	Respect for Elders	13	7,6
Opportunity	29	17	Courtesy	6	3,5
Social Solidarity	28	16,4	Brand's Respect for Its Own Employees	6	3,5
Family	23	13,5	Nostalgia	3	1,8
Home / Leisure	22	12,9	Environmentalism	2	1,2
Respect for Healthcare Workers	17	9,9	Quality	2	1,2
Optimistic Future	16	9,4	Fear	1	0,6

Table 5 lists the appeals used in all posts containing pandemic-related components from all brands. It is no surprise that health appeal can be found on 51,5% of the posts. However, it is noteworthy that the convenience appeal (36,3%) is in second place. The security/precaution appeal is used at a rate of 19,3% in posts.

Table 6
Cross-tabulation of appeals and brands

Appeals	Ziraat Bank		Garanti BBVA		Turkcell		Arçelik		Türk Telekom	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Family	1	3,8	0	0	7	17,1	6	25	9	23,7
Respect for Elders	1	3,8	1	2,4	1	2,4	4	16,7	6	15,8
Environmentalism	0	0	1	2,4	0	0	1	4,2	0	0
Home / Leisure	0	0	4	9,5	7	17,1	5	20,8	6	15,8
Opportunity	0	0	3	7,1	9	22	2	8,3	15	39,5
Security / Precaution	0	0	12	28,6	6	14,6	7	29,2	8	21,1
Optimistic Future	0	0	2	4,8	6	14,6	4	16,7	4	10,5
Quality	0	0	0	0	2	4,9	0	0	0	0
Convenience	9	34,6	21	50	16	39	4	16,7	12	31,6
Fear	0	0	1	2,4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brand's Respect for Its Own Employees	1	3,8	1	2,4	2	4,9	0	0	2	5,3
Modernity / Latest Technology	6	23,1	3	7,1	1	2,4	3	12,5	2	5,3
Happiness	1	3,8	0	0	11	26,8	3	12,5	17	44,7
Courtesy	0	0	1	2,4	1	2,4	2	8,3	2	5,3
Nostalgia	0	0	0	0	1	2,4	1	4,2	1	2,6
Health	22	84,6	32	76,2	14	34,1	13	54,2	7	18,4
Respect for Healthcare Workers	1	3,8	5	11,9	5	12,2	3	12,5	3	7,9
Social Solidarity	2	7,7	5	11,9	7	17,1	4	16,7	10	26,3
Patriotism	3	11,5	5	11,9	1	2,4	2	8,3	4	10,5
Charity	2	7,7	6	14,3	2	4,9	5	20,8	0	0

Ziraat Bank made its first post about Covid-19 on March 17, and a total of 43 posts were made until June 1. More than half (60,5%) of these posts included components related to the pandemic. During the second period (between June 1 and September 1) 47 posts were made, but none of them included components related to the pandemic. As can be seen in Table 6, the most used appeals in the brand's posts containing pandemic-related components were health with 84,6%, convenience with 34,6%, and modernity/latest technology with 23,1%. It should be noted that a post may contain more than one appeal, so the total percentage exceeds 100. Garanti BBVA brand also made its first post containing pandemic-related components on March 17. A total of 54 posts were made between this date and June 1. 72% of these posts included components related to the pandemic. Between June 1 and September 1, 51 posts were made, and 5,9% of them contained components related to the pandemic. The brand's most used appeals were health (76,2%), convenience (50%), and security/precaution (28,6%). One of Garanti BBVA's posts also used a fear appeal. Posts using a fear appeal were not found in other brands. Turkcell made its first post about Covid-19 on March 13, and shared a total of 79 posts until June 1. 46,8% of them contained components related to the pandemic. Between June 1 and September 1, 64 posts were made, and 6,3% of them contained components related to the pandemic. The most used appeals in Turkcell's posts containing pandemic-related components were convenience (39%), health (34,1%), and happiness (26,8%). Arçelik made its first post about Covid-19 on March 19. A total of 51 posts were made until June 1, and 45% of these posts contained components related to the pandemic. Only 2% of

the posts between June 1 and September 1 contained components related to the pandemic. The brand's most used appeals were health (54,2%), security/precautions (29,2%), and family (25%). Türk Telekom, which made its first post about the pandemic on March 20, made a total of 40 posts until June 1, and 85% of them contained components related to the pandemic. A total of 25 posts were made between June 1 and September 1, and 16% of them contained components related to the pandemic. The most used appeals in the brand's posts were happiness (44,7%), opportunity (39,5%), and convenience (31,6%).

Table 7
Cross-tabulation of themes and brands

Themes	Ziraat Bank		Garanti BBVA		Turkcell		Arçelik		Türk Telekom		All Posts	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Staying at Home	1	3,8	29	69	21	51,2	5	20,8	24	63,2	80	46,8
Social Distancing	20	76,9	9	21,4	6	14,6	6	25	9	23,7	50	29,2
Using Masks	0	0	9	21,4	6	14,6	4	16,7	3	7,9	22	12,9
Using Disinfectants and Disinfecting	0	0	1	2,4	4	9,8	7	29,2	4	10,5	16	9,4
Economic Support	2	7,7	6	14,3	2	4,9	2	8,3	1	2,6	13	7,6
Home Education	0	0	1	2,4	6	14,6	1	4,2	3	7,9	11	6,4
Working Hours Regulation	0	0	2	4,8	2	4,9	1	4,2	2	5,3	7	4,1
Working from Home	0	0	2	4,8	2	4,9	0	0	2	5,3	6	3,5
Using Gloves	0	0	0	0	1	2,4	3	12,5	0	0	4	2,3

Table 7 shows the themes used in posts. It can be seen that the theme of “Staying at Home” is used intensively by brands other than the Ziraat Bank. When all of the posts are examined, it can be said that the theme of “Staying at Home” is present in almost half of the posts with 46,8%. “Social Distancing” was used in 29,2% of the posts, and “Using Masks” can be found in 12,9% of the posts. The table shows the n values.

Table 8
Creative strategies used in brand posts

Creative strategies	Ziraat Bank		Garanti BBVA		Turkcell		Arçelik		Türk Telekom		All Posts	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Use Occasion	22	84,6	12	28,6	18	43,9	9	37,5	14	36,8	75	43,9
Brand Image	3	11,5	12	28,6	9	22	8	33,3	9	23,7	41	24
User Image	0	0	0	0	2	4,9	2	8,3	13	34,2	17	9,9

The creative strategies used in the posts are listed in Table 8. The “Use Occasion” strategy was used in 43,9% of the posts, the “Brand Image” strategy in 24% of the posts, and the “User Image” strategy in 9,9% of the posts. The rest of the creative strategies were not included in the table because their rates were close to zero.

Table 9

General information about brand posts

	Ziraat Bank		Garanti BBVA		Turkcell		Arçelik		Türk Telekom		All Posts	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Video	2	7,7	2	52,4	33	80,5	18	75	2	52,6	95	55,6
Promoting a product or service	4	15,4	1	33,3	30	73,2	16	66,7	1	47,4	82	48
Advertising spot	2	7,7	3	7,1	16	39	6	25	9	23,7	36	21,1

As the table presents, 55,6% of the posts are videos, 21,1% are advertising spots, and 48% are promoting a product or service. It is noteworthy that almost half of the brands’ pandemic-related posts are associated with a product or service.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, 501 posts shared on Instagram accounts of Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom, which were among the first brands in Brand Finance's ranking of Türkiye's most valuable brands in 2020, were examined, and 171 of these posts that contained components related to the pandemic were subjected to content analysis. After identifying the first post of each brand that contains pandemic-related components, two sets of posts were analyzed: Before June 1, and between June 1-September 1. While posts about the pandemic process were intensively shared until June 1, it was found that the number of these posts decreased significantly between June 1 and September 1. While 60% of the posts up until June 1 contained components related to the pandemic, such components were found in only 5% of the posts made in the following period. It can be said that the decreasing number of new cases until June 1 and the perception that the virus was defeated were effective in causing brands to stop sharing posts on this subject.

The most common themes in the posts are staying home (47%), social distancing (29%), and mask use (13%). In addition, the theme of using disinfectant and disinfecting products/stores is used in 9,4% of the posts, and the theme of using gloves is used in 2% of the posts. Posts about working hours regulation due to the pandemic are 4%. Brands also cover the themes of home education (6,4%) and working from home (3,5%). 7,6% of the posts discuss how the brand supports the economy or what they do to meet the needs of society. These findings are in line with Yetkin Cılızoğlu et al. (2020). The authors examined the advertisements shared on YouTube by three GSM operators operating in Türkiye during the pandemic between March 11 and April 11, 2020, in terms of their creative strategies and appeals. It was concluded that the creative strategies of the brands examined were informative both about their products and services and about the methods of combating the pandemic, while creative tactics changed. According to their findings, GSM operators used message strategies that focused on ways to protect from the disease and public health. It is seen that advertisements using emotional creative

strategies focus on the importance brands place on public health. In addition to the emphasis on the importance of staying home to ensure social distance/isolation, unity/togetherness, hygiene, and the right to life of other living beings; GSM operators also created messages with the themes of entertainment, education, uninterrupted communication, etc. on how they would make the process bearable for users with the products/services they offer.

Communicating appeals such as happiness and fear might be important in a pandemic setting. Bağcan (2021) examined the advertisements of five brands during the pandemic through semiotic analysis. The findings revealed that adding positive themes of hope to messages of trust, community, and togetherness strengthened the overall message, while negative elements related to fear were conveyed in a limited or indirect manner. Similarly, Altınbilek Yalçınkaya and Sabuncuoğlu İnanç (2021) analyzed the advertising appeals of five brands that gained prominence at the beginning of the pandemic using semiotic analysis. The study concluded that emotional advertising appeals were more prevalent in these brands' advertisements, featuring messages of unity, solidarity, hope, happiness, protection, and health. This study, employing content analysis technique on brand posts, found that happiness appeal is among the most common appeals (18,7%), however, fear appeal is used in just one of the posts (0,6%). In addition, rational appeals are more common in brand posts. It is not surprising that rational appeals (76%) are more prevalent than emotional appeals (32,7%) during a period characterized by “new normal”, which significantly threatens public health both socially and economically. In addition, none of the posts included humorous appeals. It is understandable in a time when infection and death rates related to the virus are being shared daily, causing widespread anxiety. The most commonly used appeals are health (51,5%), convenience (36%), security/precaution (19%), happiness (18,7%), opportunity (17%), social solidarity (16,4%), and family (13,5%). These results are in line with Yetkin Cılızoğlu et al. (2020), where the authors found that brands focus on the promotion of services with appeals such as convenience, effectiveness, technology, cheapness, and difference; and that they give responsible messages about the process of combating the pandemic with messages such as health, security, society/community, being a savior, and modesty.

In this study, it was also found that the most commonly used creative strategy is the use occasion (44%). Based on this, it can be said that brands are trying to convey the convenience they offer to consumers who are facing various restrictions during the pandemic with their products and services. It can also be said that brands are adopting more cautious messaging, emphasizing appeals that highlight their concern for consumers' health and safety. Looking at the overall distribution of appeals, it is evident that those encouraging and fostering positive emotions are predominantly employed.

This study is based on Brand Finance's ranking of Türkiye's most valuable brands, and the first brands on this list are examined (Ziraat Bank, Garanti BBVA, Turkcell, Arçelik and Türk Telekom). In addition, this study is limited to Instagram accounts of these brands. Future researchers working on this topic are encouraged to include a broader range of brands and different social media platforms. Another limitation that should be mentioned is the omission of “stories” shared by the brands, since this study only evaluated posts. The “story” feature of Instagram might reveal more about brands' use of social media. It should also be highlighted that this study focuses on content of pandemic-related posts, not all posts, during the selected timeframe. Future studies might analyze all posts, and might include before, during, and after periods in the comparisons. Researchers could also study the effects of pandemic-related messaging strategies on consumer preferences. Lastly, this study has a limited timeframe, thus studying extended periods of time might reveal more insights.

Suggestions should also be made in terms of brands' communication efforts. As discussed above, brands, on their pandemic-related posts, tend to use positive appeals (such as happiness, opportunity, social solidarity, family, respect, and optimistic future). It is reasonable for brands to avoid reinforcing

the negative atmosphere of the pandemic in their communication efforts. However, during significant global events like pandemics, it is advisable for brands not to discontinue posts that encourage preventive measures. According to the findings, posts that include pandemic-related components have decreased significantly during the second period analyzed (between June 1 and September 1). This is a surprising finding. Messages about the pandemic might be distressing for the target audience of these brands, especially when the bans were easing at the start of summer. Nevertheless, as part of their social responsibility to society, it is important for brands to share the measures they have taken to prevent the further spread of the virus and to encourage their target audience to adhere to the precautions. The importance of such messaging becomes clear when number of daily cases are considered during the second period (see Figure 1).

Ethical Statement

This paper is an extended and revised version of the study originally presented at the Balkan Summit 3rd International Social Sciences Congress in Edirne, on Nov. 28-29, 2020.

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable.

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Sustainable Development Goals: 3 Good Health and Well-being

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