

The Local Strategies of Global Brands in Turkey: Cultural Signs and Advertisement Messages*

Işıl Zeybek , Volkan Ekin
Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, Turkey

In advertisements directed at consumers within a society or others societies, brands employ cultural signs (values, beliefs, rituals, and heroes and symbols) and in accordance, it can be observed that they consciously make use of the terms "locality" and "globality". In this study, four global food brands' advertisements including cultural codes, locality, and globality have been randomly selected and analyzed. These advertising messages have been analyzed at an intercultural level from visual semiotics perspective. It has been tried to determine the "local" approaches of global brands by revealing the "intercultural" dimension transferred through visual and linguistic signs in the advertisements which we reselected with an eclectic method.

Keywords: linguisticsigns, visuals signs, culturalcodes, interculturality, locality/globality, globalstrategy

Introduction

The advertisement practices have an important place in world's economic system, process, and economic order. In a consumer society, individuals are happy when they consume; they get great pleasure from purchasing status symbols that feed the ego and make one feel like they are living an entirely different life. They express their inner desires through the things that they purchase and emulate the lifestyle of the rich and the famous. Accordingly, the brands products that we come across have both economic and social specifications. The brands that the consumers use in order to express themselves transfer the symbolic meanings to the consumers. As the advertisements are the important media that the brands use while making connections with the consumers, these advertisements are confronted as the effective and efficient practices in order to take a place in the minds of the target audience in a highly competitive market. In this context to secure a place in the minds of the consumers depends on the strategy, practice, and the content of the ads and the consumer variables. Consumers like and are affected by the advertisements which address and make sense to them at an individual level (Aydın, 2011, pp. 1-2). In order to create a liking for a product, visuality, and visual perception can be considered as the elements. Since these elements are universal, they bring "universal communication" along with it and create a "common, universal communication". It is inevitable that the multinational and global institutions use visual perception, visual message as powerful manner in order to connect with the consumers.

* Despite the fact that the nation-state is weaker today in some aspects, it still embodies the cultural differences within it. In order to understand how difficult it is to homogenize and politicize cultural differences, one only needs to look at the "European Community" and their efforts to bring together (Lull, 2001, p. 202).

Işıl Zeybek, associate professor, Department of Communication Arts, Istanbul Kültür University.

Volkan Ekin, assistant professor, Department of Communication Arts, Istanbul Kültür University.

Global communication encompasses the concepts of "culture" and "value". Whether brands are addressing their own societies or international ones, they make use of "cultural" and "value" signs in their advertisement campaigns. Accordingly, the conscious use of globality and locality phenomenon is frequently seen in the advertisement messages.

The concept of culture encompasses habits, attitudes, beliefs, and other important symbols in an individual's life. It allows people to communicate, develop, and express themselves. It gives meaning to the system. Thoughts, values, and habits become cultural products and have cultural codes to them. In short, ads use a variety of cultural signs; heroes, values, symbols, ceremonies... these can be in the form of images, words, photograph, or objects (Küçükeroğlu, 2009, pp. 1-19). However in order to read, interpret, and analyze these signs, the readers should know the meaning of them. In such a position a product can be advertised by showing directly the "iconic signs" or some "social, cultural signs" to the consumers. The other way that the advertisement meets with the consumers is by transferring the characteristic of the "symbolic signs" to the product.

Today, it is a common belief that the best ads messages presenting the brand most commonly use the cultural signs, giving a sense of "think global, act local" concept which is adopted by nearly all international brands. The awareness, recognition, and the recalling of the brands increase as the brands through visual and linguistic signs of the country's cultural values, habits, life styles, and local conditions where the advertisement is published.

In this context multiculturalism, colorfulness, and interactivity come to the forefront. This can be carried out in different ways such as creating brand awareness, strengthening brand image, and being successful in the competitive market place. Although most often this means structuring a single content in the main message.

Methodology

In this study, we have specified four advertisement messages as corpus which include cultural codes, globalization, and localization concepts in their texts. The advertisements were chosen at random and analyzed with an eclectic method based on visual semiotics. These advertisements were selected among static magazine advertisements and especially focused on food advertisements just because sample selection requires a classification as the necessity of being scientific: Carte D'Or→France; Lipton→England; Knorr→Germany; and McTurco→USA.

The interculturality in the advertisements is evaluated through the visual and linguistic signs and the cultural codes are tried to be determined in the study which is based on visualsemiotics.

This study aimed to find out "globalization/localization opposites used in global brands' advertising messages and how it reached to the target market by using cultural signs in Turkey".

Four advertisements were chosen and evaluated according to aim that is stated above. The first ad is an ice-cream ad of "Carte D'Or"; the second ad is a tea ad of "Lipton"; the third ad is a soup ad of Knorr, and the fourth ad is McDonald's "McTurco".

Visual Signs

The advertised shredded wheat ice-cream is located at the center of the page, where it directly grabs the attention of the consumer. The ice-cream is on a white plate, where half of it is the shredded wheat desert, and the other half ice-cream scoops. The heart shape creates a feeling of warmth, and pleasure as well as an urge to

taste what constitutes it. Symbolically the heart shape refers to “taking and feeling pleasure” and “passion” and creates an understanding in the consumer that if they were to eat the ice-cream heart, they will passionately become attached to it and will not get enough of it. The light sparkle located on the right hand corner of the ice-cream plate as well as on the ice-cream box indicates newness. The gold yellow script in the ad gives a meaning of excellence and privilege. Furthermore, the soft edges of the round plate and oval ice-cream box create a feeling of “softness”, “tenderness”, and “perfection” (See Figure 1).

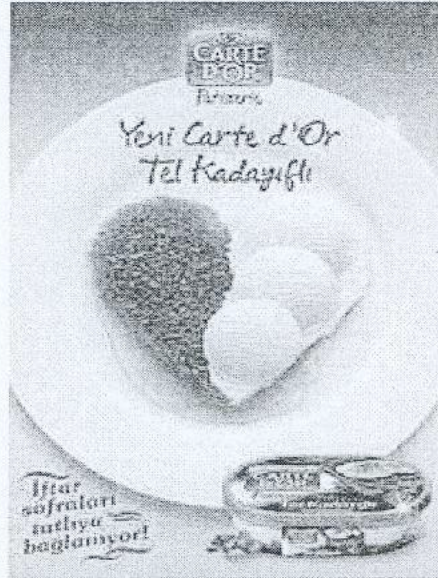


Figure 1. Carte D'Or shredded wheat ice-cream. Source: Retrieved from <http://www.bildirgec.org>.

Shredded wheat desert: Deserts have a big place in the food culture of Turkish society. The shredded wheat desert especially is a traditional one for Turks. The coming together of this desert with Carte D'Or has created a new flavor perfectly suited to Turkish taste.

Linguistic Signs

The ice-cream box is located on the right bottom corner of the ad and the name of the brand is repeated three times. This allows for it to stick in the mind of the consumer and creates recognition. The statement *iftar meals are smoothed over* is used as a cultural sign. It is well-known that Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims and they fast all through the month. In the evening during the *iftar* meal, deserts are never forgotten at the table and traditional Turkish deserts are always a first choice. The product in the ad is not only a desert special to Turkish people and recognized by them, but also an ice-cream type that is prepared especially for the month of Ramadan. In this sense, the cultural and the symbolic signs used in the ad give a message to the consumer that they can consume new shredded wheat ice-cream with pleasure instead of traditional Turkish desert. Moreover, the product becomes an ideal option for those who have a soft spot for ice-cream as well as more traditional deserts. Furthermore the product creates an emotional bond for those who both like ice-cream and shredded wheat desert.

Visual Signs

The focus of this ad is directed at the tea-filled glass cup. Behind the glass, natural environment of Black Sea mountains where the tea is grown attracts the attention (See Figure 2).

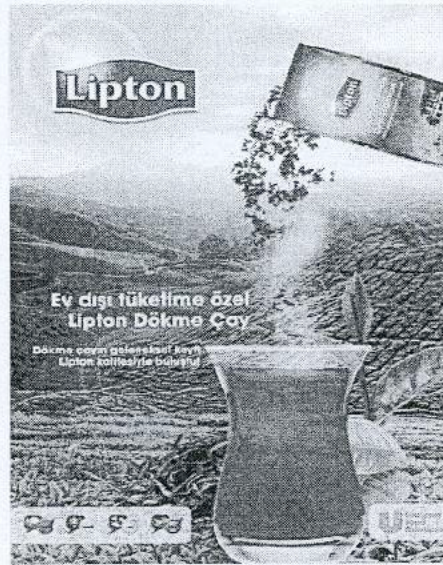


Figure 2. Lipton Brewed Tea. Source: Retrieved from <http://www.culinarymag.com>.

Tea: Drinking tea is an integral part of Turkish culture. Whether it is at breakfast, after lunch, or in between meals, tea is an inseparable aspect of Turkish lifestyle. Besides, the Turkish people prefer to brew their tea and drink it in a small glass cup. This is a cultural fact indeed.

Glass cup: Lipton is a British brand. In Britain, the way of drinking tea is very different from that of Turkey. For example, the traditional iconography of British tea drinking is in a porcelain cup with a porcelain plate underneath it. Milk is usually added to the tea as well. However, Turkish people are more inclined to drink their tea in a glass cup where they can see the color of their tea. The advertisement shows a glass cup into which actual tealeaves are poured. This image of “real” tea as opposed to tea bags, which are usually associated with Lipton, is engraved into the minds of the Turkish populace because they have a direct connection and familiarity with it. It gives the meaning that Lipton tea can have a taste appropriate to Turkish traditional tea, where individuals do not have to change their tea drinking habits at all. The drinking and preparing style of the tea, the tools used while preparing it and also the time and style of drinking it show intercultural differences; it is like a ritual.

Linguistic Signs

The word “Lipton” is used four times in the advertisement, which creates a more permanent effect in the minds of the targeted audience. They remember it as a brand. With the sentence “Special Lipton Brewed Tea for consumption outside of the household”, Lipton proves that it has created a tea that Turkish people can enjoy. In other words, Lipton has taken into account and internalized Turkish “values” and has created a tea especially for that people and that consumer group. The sentence “The traditional pleasure of brewed tea meets with Lipton quality” indicates that Lipton caters directly to the needs and traditions of the Turkish people, but with the quality of Lipton, a recognizable brand.

Visual Signs

In this ad, there is a Knorr brand ready soup package placed on a table. This soup package particularly targets consumers in Istanbul. While having soup before a meal is common for Turkish families, this one goes

beyond that and is much more regional. On the cover of the package, a bowl of hot soup is being spooned. On the background of the image, the Bosphorus, a ferry, and redbud flowers can be seen (See Figure 3).

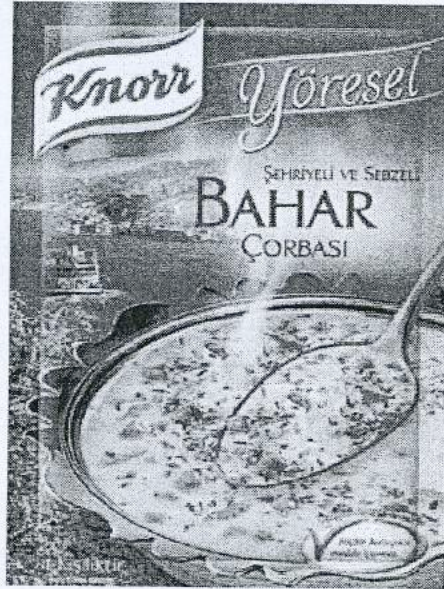


Figure 3. Knorr regional noodle and vegetable spring soup. Source: Retrieved from <http://www.mumsad.org.tr>.

Redbud flower: The redbud flower is in a way the symbol of the city of Istanbul, where they bloom in the spring and autumn and decorate the coastline of the Bosphorus. There are many legends and myths about the purple colored flower. It is believed by some that after Judah betrayed Jesus he hung himself on a redbud tree. Furthermore, its color is the hardest one to attain naturally, and thus represents richness and authority.

The Bosphorus: The Bosphorus is a 30-km long waterway that separates Europe and Asia. It is the symbol of Istanbul, and by using it in the advertisement, Knorr directs this product to the Istanbul folk.

Ferry: The ferry present in the advertisement is also very symbolic to Istanbul. The first thing that comes to mind when speaking about Istanbul is the image of a ferry on the Bosphorus. Furthermore, it is also a sign of the lifestyle of the people of Istanbul.

Linguistic Signs

The words “spring” and “regional” are written in bold and different characters. These words become one with the image of spring and the lifestyle of Istanbul, creating a unity between the image and the words. The word “regional” indicates that a “global” brand (Knorr) uses a “local” strategy.



Figure 4. McDonald's McTurco. Source: Retrieve from <http://karmahaskickedmyass.wordpress.com/2009/08>.

Visual Signs

In this McDonald's ad there is a special McTurco menu prepared for Ramadan that is known as one of important religious feast. On the background two kinds of soup, akeşkül (traditional Turkish desert), a drink, a box of fried potatoes, and a meat burger (meatball placed in two pitta bread) are placed among the mosque silhouette (See Figure 4).

Within the frame of McDonald's global marketing strategy the advertising prepared for Turkish style meat burger (McTurco) invites the Turks to the menu by making "feel special and giving pleasure with taste appropriate to them". Hence, the Turkish cultural values are referred by using the visual images like mosque, keşkül, and meatball placed in two pitta bread. These images are also used to emphasize that menu is special to Turks. Besides, the meaning transfer is reinforced by linguistic message.

Mosque: Mosques which are the holy places of worship for followers of Islam gain more importance in the holy month of Ramadan. The Muslims visit mosques more frequently in Ramadan as a ritual.

McTurco menu's visual: In the month of Ramadan, the Muslims fast. While they are fasting they do not eat or drink for a certain period of time. In *iftar* that which refers to the meal when Muslims break their fast, various delicious foods take place on tables. Especially starting the meal with soup and continuing it with different Turkish style main courses and ending the meal with desert is a ritual for Turks. Eating Pitta bread is another ritual. Accordingly it can be seen that Turks do not prefer fast food during *iftar* meals. This visual is associated with Ramadan and calls Turks with the statement referring "they can consume this menu with pleasure in Ramadan" too. Furthermore, the other cultural signs in the visual are lentil and tomatoes soup packages.

Lace: In this ad the food menu is given an impression as it is put on a lace table cloth. This image is used consciously as another cultural sign. Lace which is one of the important signs of Turkish culture is used as an indispensable accessory at homes. In this ad the speciality, privilege, and value of the lace refer to a meaning as McTurco has privilege and it is special to Turks.

Linguistic Signs

Primarily the statement "Ramadan Menu by McDonald's" takes attention of the target audience. This statement looks like the apothegm which is especially written in month of Ramadan with lights between the two minarets of the mosque. The linguistic signs in the ad also give the meaning "the menu is apart from the ordinary and common menus". It proves that this menu is specially prepared by McDonald's according to Turkish taste. The content of the menu is written right below the statement. This content is informative since it shows what kind of a menu is presented to the target audience and what makes this menu privileged. This product produced by a global brand caring the local values transfers its message clearly by using "McTurco" name. In the message:

Mc → exhibits the "globality"

Turco → exhibits the "locality" opposition or in other words hybridization/interaction.

Conclusions

The rapid developments in social life in Turkey which adopted the free market economy, brought the increase in commercial and cultural interaction along with it. This interaction has reflections in ad in Turkey with cultural and symbolic signs. This is because the ad is one of the most important media providing the

efficient and effective communication between the consumers and brands. The purpose is to create a change in the attitudes and behaviors of consumers by addressing to their emotional feelings and their logics. This is achieved by using cultural and symbolic signs. In this context with the help of global advertising strategies it is aimed to determine a strategy in order to awake the consumer's feelings such as happiness, pleasure, and fantasy by featuring the cultural elements of the target market and benefit from the linguistic and visual signs according to these cultural elements. In this way the facts internalized by the globalization concept such as "interaction" and "multiculturalism" become functional in terms of cultural values, traditionalism, beliefs, life styles, and attitudes. Some advertisers mention the importance of preparing a message according to the target consumers' life styles, aside from the global advertising messages. Hence the places, objects, colors, shapes, and music that gain symbolic meanings with cultural signs have a great impact on consumers.

The concept that can be defined as the localization of standardization has its impacts on advertising strategies within globalization/localization dimensions. In today's Turkish society, the signals of modern and new lifestyles can be seen in global brands and also in their advertisements. The cultural signs can be found in these brands' advertisements in Turkey within the scope of globalization/localization contradiction.

In an age when competition is at its peak, global brands that sell similar products need to work hard in order to create or increase brand recognition and brand addiction. These brands make use of many different tools such as visual and linguistic signs that address both universal and local cultures. In accordance, when talking about advertisement messages, three functions through which signs gain meaning appear: (1) the sign itself; (2) the codes utilized in the sign's specific mechanism; and (3) the cultural environment where the sign assumes functionality. The following factors stand out in the four advertisements used in this study (See Table 1):

Table 1
The Cultural Signs in the Advertisements

Brand name	Cultural (symbolic)	signs
CarteD'Or	Visual sign	Linguistic sign
	Heart shape shredded wheat desert	Iftar Meals
Lipton	Glass cup	Traditional
	Brewed tea Redbud flower	
Knorr	Bosp horus	Regional
	Ferry	
	Regional soup	
	Simit (Bagel)	
McTurco	Ferry	Turco
	Mosque	
	Soup	
	Keşkül (Milk puding with almond)	
	Pitta bread	
	Meat ball	
	Lace table cloth	

As a result of the analysis of the study that focuses on food sector among global brands, it is tried to search out how the global brands use cultural signs in order to reach the target market with the aim of "acting local". According to the analysis of the ad messages, it is observed that the global brands sometimes use "values"

(Ramadan, love, sharing, etc.), “beliefs” (Ramadan, holiness, mosque, iftar, etc.), “rituals” (having soup before meal and having desert after meal, drinking tea with glass cup, etc.), and “symbols” (glass cup, redbud flower, Bosphorus Bridge, etc.) while giving messages to the target audience. In other words, these ads transfer “local” messages by using “other’s” cultural signs. However it is true that apart from the locality concept the signs transferring the “globalization” are also added in all these messages. In the sample of Mc Donald’s “Ramadan Menu” ad, the existence of “Coca Cola” in the ads message instead of “ayran” which is one of our traditional sign shows the global and local combination. Carte D’Or ad message associates the same situation since it services traditional Turkish desert with ice cream which is new.

In the globalization process, the brands gain competitive advantages by adopting global strategies. These brands adopt the strategy “think global, act local” by combining globalization and localization concepts. In other words they adopt “glocal” strategy. Coca Cola, McDonald’s, and Burger King can be given as some of the best examples of this strategy. In this study, the researchers have analyzed the ad of McDonald’s McTurco menu that is special to Turkey and Turks. In the context of McDonald’s glocal strategy it can be seen that McDonald’s prepares special menu such as Teriyaki Burger in Japan, Veggie McNuggets in India according to local “tastes” of these countries (Canbulut & Hiçüşenmez, 2010).

In the frame of glocal strategy, global brands should prepare their advertising messages within the “semiosphere” (as Lotman mentions) of “other s” by using the “other” culture’s cultural signs.

As a result of the analysis of advertising messages it is observed that: (1) The global turns to local; (2) The message calls both local and global; (3) Global and local combine; (4) The values, beliefs, rituals, and symbols (cultural signs) reflect on brands’ qualifications; (5) The products are adopted to the countries’ cultures whereas the brands are standardized; and (6) The global brands’ strategies are flexible since they transfer “local” messages according to the country’s cultural values.

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