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EXAMINATION OF THE CORPORATE IMAGE OF FURNITURE MANUFACTURING BUSINESSES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMERCIAL FILMS

MOBİLYA ÜRETİCİ İŞLETMELERİN KURUMSAL İMAJININ REKLAM FİLMLERİ PERSPEKTİFİNDEN İNCELENMESİ

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Abstract

Corporate image represents the positive or negative perceptions of internal and external stakeholders about a company. Corporate commercials play an important role in creating a good corporate image, which is essential for furniture manufacturing businesses to compete in the global market. In this regard, the aim of this study is to examine the corporate image of different furniture manufacturing businesses from the perspective of commercial films through personification analogies. The sample of the research consisted of the corporate commercial films of 10 furniture manufacturers with dealership systems in Türkiye. The Corporate Character Scale developed by Davies et al. (2004), which measures the image evaluations of both internal and external stakeholders through personification, was used in the study. The visuals generally used in these commercials portray similar themes, such as “Agreeableness”, “Chic” and “Enterprise”. In this regard, it was observed that image-building practices in the commercials of furniture manufacturing businesses were neither distinctive nor remarkable.

Keywords: Corporate image, furniture manufacturing businesses, commercial films, content analysis, The Corporate Character Scale

Öz

Kurumsal imaj, iç paydaşların ve dış paydaşların şirket hakkındaki olumlu veya olumsuz algılarını temsil eder. Kurumsal reklamlar, kurumsal imaj oluşturmada önemli bir yere sahiptir. Mobilya imalatı yapan işletmelerin küresel pazarda rekabet edebilmeleri için iyi bir kurumsal imaja sahip olmaları gerekmektedir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmanın amacı, mobilya üreticisi işletmelerin kurumsal imajlarını reklam filmleri perspektifinden kişileştirme analogileri aracılığıyla incelemektir. Araştırmanın örneklemini Türkiye’de bayilik sistemi bulunan 10 mobilya üreticisinin kurumsal reklam filmleri oluşturmuştur. Davies ve diğerleri tarafından geliştirilen Kurumsal Karakter Ölçeği. (2004) hem iç hem de dış paydaşların imaj değerlendirmelerini kişileştirme yoluyla ölçen çalışmada kullanılmıştır. Mobilya imalatı yapan işletmelerin reklam filmlerinde genellikle kullanılan görseller “Uzlaşılabilirlik”, “Şıklık” ve “Girişimcilik” gibi benzer temalara sahiptir. Bu bağlamda mobilya imalat işletmeleri arasında reklam filmleri bağlamında farklı ve dikkat çekici bir imaj çalışmasına rastlanmadığı söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal imaj, mobilya imalat işletmeleri, reklam filmleri, içerik analizi, Kurumsal Karakter Ölçeği

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Introduction

Nowadays, in an increasingly competitive environment, corporate image has gained importance. In fact, the corporate image of an organization is considered to be an indicator of the communication strategy it employs with its stakeholders (Duğan et al., 2022: 168). In other words, the corporate image of a company represents the positive or negative perceptions of internal stakeholders (shareholders and employees) and external stakeholders (consumers, suppliers and competitors) about the company itself. In addition, corporate image is deemed to be a valuable strategic tool that can facilitate the longevity and continued success of the business (Aksoy & Bayramoğlu, 2008: 86; Bravo et al., 2012: 232). Therefore, an effective corporate image creates a brand value that attracts the attention of internal and external stakeholders (Kim et al., 2014: 89, 132) and supports the continuity of the company by ensuring the dependency of stakeholders on the corporate structure (Aktan, 2018: 76). As such, creating a strong corporate image is one of the primary tasks of marketing and management (Otay Demir, 2010: 248).

Through a corporate image, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, feelings, and ideas of the stakeholders about the company are visualized (Tran et al., 2015: 88). It has further been reported that the emotional meanings attributed to the product by its stakeholders are more important and permanent than the functionality of the product (Torlak & Uzkurt, 2005: 17) and that matching the personality traits and psychosocial needs of the individual with the brand is an effective means of forming this emotional bond (Nandan, 2005: 267; Tosun, 2017: 136).

Commercials are frequently used as a means to create an image and awareness of the product in the target audience. Accordingly, they are among the most important promotional tools for creating demand in the market, promoting the product, and reaching sales targets (Kırarslan and Akbulut, 2018: 37-39). Commercials are therefore considered to be not just an important step but a necessity for branding (Ries and Ries, 2012: 37; Ayhan, 2012: 60). Although Uzoğlu-Bayçu and Uluyağcı (2005: 81) posit that the most important function of commercials is to make people want to consume more regardless of their financial situation, corporate commercials are less concerned with selling products and more interested in creating brand *awareness* to influence the target audience through the use of a lasting and impactful image (Okay and Okay, 2016: 369).

To create and maintain an effective corporate image, it is necessary to first measure stakeholders' perceptions with a valid measurement tool. Corporate image is an abstract concept and different approaches can be used in its measurement (Uluçay, 2017: 103). If the image of a company is considered to be a set of common visuals unifying various stakeholders in relation to a single company, it is stated that personification analogies can be used as a basis of measurement (Otay Demir, 2010: 248). In the relevant literature, different corporate personality scales have been developed using personification analogies. Aaker (1997: 347) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”, while Azoulay and Kapferer (2003: 151) describe it as “the set of personality traits related to and applicable to brands”. Both definitions are based on the assumption that stakeholders view brands as human-like and attribute human characteristics to them. Aaker (1997: 353) developed the *Brand Personality Scale* consisting of 42 personality adjectives under the five headings of sincerity, competence, excitement, power, and culture. Alternatively, Davies and Chun (2002: 145) developed the *Corporate Character Scale* to assess the perceptions of internal (employees) stakeholders representing an organization's identity and those of external (consumers) stakeholders representing the organization's image. The scale can be used to identify areas where the organization's image may be misaligned with its identity, or where it may be falling short of stakeholder expectations. It can also be used to track changes in corporate character

over time and to assess the impact of different initiatives on the organization's image. For example, a company that is launching a new social responsibility campaign could use the scale to measure how effective the campaign is in changing stakeholders' perceptions of the company's agreeableness and social responsibility. This scale has been used in a variety of research studies to examine how corporate character influences organizational outcomes such as employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, and financial performance. Davies et al. (2004: 136) found that corporate agreeableness, competence, and enterprise were all positively correlated with employee satisfaction and Chun and Davies (2006: 144) revealed that corporate agreeableness, competence, and chic were all positively correlated with customer loyalty. Enterprise was reported by Whelan and Davies (2007: 43) as being the best indicator of customer satisfaction with competence being reported as the second most important factor.

Currently, there is strong competition in global marketing among furniture manufacturing businesses (Oblak et al., 2020: 80), and a good corporate image is necessary for success and effectiveness in this competitive environment. Consequently, many of these businesses attach great importance to branding strategies for their image (Yıldırım and Aslan, 2022: 284-289). In this regard, the aim of this study is to examine the corporate images of furniture manufacturing businesses from the perspective of commercial films using personification analogies.

Method

Research Model

In the present study, the features of the audio and visual messages of the corporate assets included in the commercial films of furniture manufacturing businesses were examined through personification analogies.

The research questions are as follow:

1. Which corporate images come to the fore in commercial films?
2. What kind of a connection has been established between the characters/animals in the commercial films and the corporate image?
3. What kind of a connection has been established between the colour/colours used predominantly in commercial films and the corporate image?
4. What kind of a connection has been established between the sounds used in commercial films and the corporate image?
5. What kind of a connection has been established between the objects used in the commercial films and the corporate image?
6. What kind of a connection has been established between the locations used in commercial films and the corporate image?

Universe and Sample

Ten furniture manufacturers producing in Türkiye and with a dealership system were selected using purposive sampling. The most recent corporate commercial films broadcast by these businesses on YouTube in 2022 and 2023 and accessed between March 20 and April 20, 2023, constituted the sample.

Data Collection Tool

In the study, the *Corporate Character Scale* developed by Davies et al. (2004), consisting of seven dimensions and 49 items and measuring the image assessments of both internal and external stakeholders through personification, was used (Table 1). The furniture manufacturing businesses were taken as real persons for the purpose of the current study and the corporate image-related messages emphasized in the commercial films were coded within the context of their personality traits.

Table 1. Davies et al.'s (2004) Corporate Character Scale: Dimensions, facets and items

Agreeableness	<u>Warmth</u> Friendly, pleasant, open, straightforward	<u>Empathy</u> Concerned, reassuring, supportive, agreeable	<u>Integrity</u> Honest, sincere, trustworthy, socially responsible
Enterprise	<u>Modernity</u> Cool, trendy, young	<u>Adventure</u> Imaginative, up-to-date, exciting, innovative	<u>Boldness</u> Extrovert, daring
Competence	<u>Conscientiousness</u> Reliable, secure, hardworking	<u>Drive</u> Ambitious, achievement-oriented, leading	<u>Technocracy</u> Technical, corporate
Chic	<u>Elegance</u> Charming, stylish, elegant	<u>Prestige</u> Prestigious, exclusive, refined	<u>Snobbery</u> Snobby, elitist
Ruthlessness	<u>Egotism</u> Arrogant, aggressive, selfish	<u>Dominance</u> Inward-looking, authoritarian, controlling	
Machismo	Masculine, tough, rugged		
Informality	Casual, simple, easy-going		

Findings

The introductory data of the commercial films accessed within the scope of the review is given in Table 2. All businesses had a special slogan for their commercial films. In terms of the duration of the commercials, Istikbal (45 sec.), Bellona, Ergül, Kelebek (43 sec.) and İpek, Kilim (30 sec.) were the longest, while in terms of the number of views on YouTube, Istikbal (5.8 m.), Ergül (5.3 m.) and Kilim (4 m.) were the most-watched.

Table 2. Introductory data on commercial films

	Furniture Manufacturer	Year	Slogan	Duration (sec.)	Views
1	Bellona	2023	Every Design is a Bellona Classic	43	3.6m
2	Divanev	2023	Love is Enough	25	648k
3	Enza Home	2023	Mostly You	25	3.7m
4	Ergül	2023	Comfort and Elegance is in Ergül	43	5.3m
5	İpek	2023	Embrace Life with İpek Mobilya	30	171k
6	İstikbal	2023	Everywhere is Pretty with İstikbal	45	5.8m
7	Kelebek	2022	Love at First Sight	43	1.1m
8	Kilim	2022	Start Living Your Style Today with Kilim Mobilya	30	4m
9	Konfor	2023	Open Your House to Comfort	20	1m
10	Mondi Home	2023	Discover Your Style with Mondi Home	29	1.7m

The messages of the corporate images in commercial films were analysed in line with the dimensions, facets, and items in Davies et al.'s (2004) Corporate Character Scale. Within the *Agreeableness* dimension, the items “pleasant” (7/10) under the "warmth" facet, “reassuring” (8/10) under the "empathy" facet, and “sincere” (7/10) under the "integrity" facet were emphasized. Within the *Enterprise* dimension, the items “young” (9/10) under the "modernity" facet, “up-to-date” (7/10) under the "adventure" facet, and “extrovert” (5/10) under the "boldness" facet were overemphasized. Under the *Chic* dimension, “stylish” (9/10) under the "elegance" facet, “prestigious and refined” (4/10) under the "prestige" facet, and “elitist” (3/10) under the "snobbery" facet were overemphasized. No facets or items within the dimensions of *Competence*, *Ruthlessness*, *Machismo*, or *Informality* were coded (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of messages in commercial films according to Davies et al.'s (2004) Corporate Character Scale: Dimensions, facets and items

DIMENSIONS, FACETS AND ITEMS	Furniture Manufacturer									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
AGREEABLENESS										
<u>Warmth</u>										
Friendly			+		+	+	+			+
Pleasant		+	+	+	+	+		+		+
<u>Empathy</u>										
Reassuring	+		+	+	+	+		+	+	+
Supportive		+	+		+					
<u>Integrity</u>										
Sincere		+	+	+	+	+	+			+
Trustworthy		+								
ENTERPRISE										
<u>Modernity</u>										
Cool	+		+	+	+	+	+		+	+
Trendy	+		+	+	+	+	+		+	+
Young	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<u>Adventure</u>										
Imaginative	+					+		+	+	+
Up-to-date	+		+	+	+	+			+	+
Exciting	+		+		+	+			+	+
Innovative	+		+			+			+	+
<u>Boldness</u>										
Daring	+					+			+	
Extrovert	+				+	+			+	+
CHIC										
<u>Elegance</u>										
Charming	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Stylish	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Elegant	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
<u>Prestige</u>										
Prestigious	+		+			+			+	
Exclusive	+								+	
Refined			+	+		+	+			
<u>Snobbery</u>										
Elitist	+					+			+	

The characters/animals used in the commercial films were also examined. Young people were featured in all commercial films. Animals were used in only three commercial films while only one commercial film had a child character. Celebrities, which included a famous male singer with his wife, a famous male actor with his wife, and a famous female singer, were featured in three commercial films.

It was observed that all the businesses which were examined highlighted more than one colour in their commercial films. Among these colours, cream-white, grey, blue, brown and grey were the most prominent.

Independent objects (other than furniture) are highlighted in accordance with the subject in the commercials. Musical instruments (piano, guitar, saxophone, etc.) and music players (record player, radio, cassette player) were used in six commercial films. Three commercial films featured vintage objects (fountain pens, record players, typewriters, old-fashioned video game consoles, old-fashioned televisions, etc.).

In all of the commercials, the interiors of different houses were shown in accordance with the nature of the use of the furniture, including a winter garden in two commercial films. In two commercial films, there were open spaces and historical/tourist sites (the grounds of a historical mansion, the fairy chimneys of Ürgüp, Galata Tower). In two commercial films, the events taking place in the corporate sales store of the company were included in the flow.

A voice-over (narrator) was used in seven of the commercials. Brand-specific jingles were used in four commercials and background music was used in six. Speeches by famous characters were used in three commercial films (Table 4).

Table 4. Highlighted objects, places, sounds, colours and characters/living creatures in commercial films.

Furniture Manufacturer	Objects	Venue	Voices	Colours	Characters / Beings Featured
Bellona	Classical Western musical instruments, colourful balloons	A spacious interior with large doors and windows, high ceilings, old accents, a modern winter garden, a waterside mansion by the Bosphorus	Voiceover, background music	Cream-white, blue, brown	Two young women playing instruments, two young male musicians
Divanev	---	Different parts of a house interior	Background music, voiceover, birds chirping	Grey, cream-white, blue, brown	A young couple, their two children, birds
Enza Home	Fountain pen, turntable, record, books	Different parts of a house interior	Jingle, voiceover	Grey, cream-white, blue, brown	Two young women, two young men, dog
Ergül	Notebook, piano, fireplace	Different parts of a house interior	Jingle, male and female characters' conversations	Grey, black, cream-white, brown	Famous young male singer, his wife, dogs

İpek	Guitar, clock	Different parts of a house interior	Jingle, female artist's conversation	Cream-white, green, yellow, blue, brown	Famous young female singer, her two female friends
İstikbal	Candle, white balloons, zeppelins	Galata Tower, the fairy chimneys of Ürgüp, riverside, terrace, workshop, different parts of a house interior	Jingle, voiceover	Blue, cream-white, brown	A young female dancer, a young female, a group of four young people, a group of three young people, two couples, a young female, a couple, a young female, two young people, a young female
Kilim	Flowers, tablet computer	Different parts of a house interior	Background music, voiceover	Blue, cream-white, grey	A young female
Kelebek	---	Different parts of a house interior, store	Characters' conversations, background music	Cream-white, grey, yellow	Famous young actor, his wife, female salesperson, female on the phone
Konfor	Books, typewriter, note papers, gift box, guitar, record, terrarium	Different parts of a house interior, winter garden	Background music, voiceover	Grey, green, blue, brown	A young female, a couple, a single young man, a single young female
Mondi Home	Old-fashioned video game console, old-fashioned television, radio, tape recorder	Different parts of a house interior, store, game room	Background music, voiceover	Yellow, cream-white, orange, brown	A single young female, a group of six young friends, a single young male customer

Discussion

The importance of a successful corporate commercial lies in its ability to help businesses create an image and reputation. It has been seen that the corporate commercial films of the 10 big furniture manufacturer businesses examined within the scope of this study wish to portray warmth through pleasant themes, empathy through reassuring themes, and ethics through sincere themes when portraying their corporate image. The cool, trendy and young emphasis points to a brand's modernity while the up-to-date, exciting and innovative themes draw attention to its adventurousness. The elegance of a brand is highlighted through the themes of charming, stylish and elegant. In terms of overall image, "Agreeableness" is observed at the highest rate among commercial films. Here, an image of good business relations with stakeholders is formed. "Elegance" was determined as the second-highest overall image. This image is related to their furniture sales policies, which is one of the main objectives of the manufacturing businesses. A close third in general image is "Enterprise". In this regard, a state of equilibrium is achieved with the three images. The overall images of "Ruthlessness" and "Informality", which would create negative perceptions for the stakeholders of the companies and harm their corporate image, were not observed in the content of the commercial films. However, the absence of "competence" could be considered a weakness, as this image could make the brand more prominent and stand out from its competitors. As it stands, there is little to distinguish one brand from any other in terms of image-building. In a study conducted on 546 consumers in the Slovak Republic, the Corporate Character Scale was used to measure the corporate image and identity of two well-known furniture sales companies (IKEA and Merkury Market). In this study, IKEA was most often associated with the terms enterprise, competent, agreeable, and chic, while Merkury Market was seen as agreeable, competent and enterprise, in line with its scores near the neutral part of the scale (Maťová et al., 2015: 225).

By using youthful characters in their commercials, the furniture manufacturing businesses emphasize young people as their target audience while also drawing attention to the modern image of the brand. Although young people have an important share in the market as consumers (Ünal and Erciş, 2007: 321), furniture manufacturer businesses should not exclude the older adult consumer group. The brand's image of warmth, empathy and morality was supported by the emphasis on family in three of the commercial films. Finally, the purpose of using celebrities in three of the films (a male singer and his wife, a male actor and his wife, and a female singer), is to both attract the attention of the target audience and attribute the positive characteristics of these people, such as physical attractiveness, popularity and reliability, to the product. By using famous people, the businesses wished to transfer the image of warmth, morality, modernity, elegance, and prestige to their brands. In fact, this is a popular approach by businesses to give a soul and personality to their brands (Özcan, 2021: 105; Kır Elitaş and Akyol, 2022: 515).

All of the furniture manufacturing businesses featured more than one colour in their commercial films. These colours were cream-white, grey, blue, and brown, which are frequently used in contemporary furniture and interior design. The colours used in the commercial films were generally relaxing and made small spaces appear more spacious. Colour is also considered to influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers, so businesses should make ample use of colour to strengthen their brand image and gain permanence in people's minds. The colour white and its tones carry meanings such as purity, light, cleanliness, happiness, joy, and trust. Blue, a popular colour in branding and corporate identity, embodies feelings of peace, confidence, serenity, and success. Brown expresses comfort and determination and evokes images of power, wealth, and solidity. The colour black, which contains meanings such as elegance, power and strength, luxury, and seriousness, creates

perceptions of robustness and reliability in the world of technology (Demirdöğmez, 2021: 94, 99-101). In terms of the colours featured most prominently in the commercials, it is clear that a warm, empathetic, moral, snobbish, prestigious and elegant image is trying to be emphasized. In addition to colour, the use of neon lighting and illumination in commercials evokes the concept of increasing consumption.

In most of the commercial films examined within the scope of this study, voice-overs were used to speak behalf of the brands and represent them. As such, the choice of voiceover is linked to the credibility of the brand (Demirci, 2021: 121). It can be said that the reliability of the brand and an image of morality are emphasized. The use of brand-specific jingles, background music and voice-overs in commercial films increases consumers' awareness of the brand. The intonation of some music or sounds may also affect the audience. Apart from these, an exciting and striking flow was achieved through the accompaniment of the narrations with background music and jingles, which also supported the adventurousness of the corporate image. A connection is established between the old and the new through the musical instruments, old and new television sets, radios, and turntables shown in the commercial films. The message conveyed here is that the time has come to adapt to today's conditions and to leave tradition behind. This focus on innovation further emphasizes the adventurous image of the brand. In addition, the animal-friendly and warm image of the brand was conveyed through the use of pets (dogs) which implied the suitability of the furniture for every living creature within the household.

In the commercial films, the interiors of different houses were always shown in accordance with the nature of the use of the furniture, and their accessibility was emphasized through the image of modesty. In two commercial films, there are open spaces and historical-touristic places (the grounds of a historical house, the fairy chimneys of Ürgüp, Galata Tower). By incorporating the outdoors, an adventurous corporate image has been created, accentuating the brand's imaginative and exciting style.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It could be argued that the strongest competitive advantages of the furniture businesses examined in this study are low prices and product diversity. While the businesses reflect these advantages to their customers in their commercial films, they also convey messages about their corporate image. These commercials make use of similar themes, with particular emphasis on "Agreeableness", "Chic" and "Enterprise". Highlighting "enterprise", which is the most important predictor of customer satisfaction, has been a successful move. However, it can be said that the images portrayed in the commercials of these businesses are not distinctive or particularly remarkable. It would be possible for some of the businesses to stand out from their competitors by portraying an overall image of "Competence" and "Machismo" through appropriate commercial films.

In recent years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, the furniture industry in Türkiye has been going through major changes. In order to improve their presence in the international market by reaching a wider audience, furniture manufacturing businesses should consider placing their commercial films on a variety of digital platforms.

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