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Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Advertisements have promotional and persuasive roles on social platforms, in addition to their basic role in the presentation of products and services. The ideological aspect of political advertisements brings about their use as the most effective propaganda instrument during the election campaigns. In this sense, political advertisements are, in a way, endorsed as the activities that strengthen the bonds between a political party, along with its candidate, and the public community. Among these advertisements, posters are known to have a significant role as a political instrument of election campaigns. As a powerful conveyor of visual objects, a poster provides deeper insights into the political parties and their candidates through its promotional, persuasive, and explanatory functions. Through a semiotic method of analysis, this study aims to investigate the posters as a political means of communication and to find out the connotations conveyed by the posters. The study included the posters presented in Ankara by the political parties campaigning for the March-30-2014 Turkish Local Elections. These parties were the three parties (AKP, CHP, MHP) which were the top 3 party represented in Turkish Parliament

Keywords: political marketing, voter perception, political party campaigns, political posters, semiotic analysis.

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1. Introduction

Political marketing can be defined as all of the concepts, philosophies and marketing tools used to develop internal relations and the campaigns by political parties and organizations (Lilleker, 2013). Election campaign posters are one of the most effective tools used in political marketing process, through images (Uztug, 1999) that both represent things and put them forward in a powerful way (Parsa, 2007). Burnett (2012) indicates that, converter power of images depends on the tangibility of metaphors. Therefore, instantaneous images of political messages through posters can reinforce the human mind. Although the degree of influence of the poster has not been fully known, semiotic researches tried to put in different aspects forward (Parsa, 2007; Duman & Ipeksan, 2013; Ulugkay, 2006).

In that manner, rather than to understand the success factors of the political marketing or the influence of the poster on voter, in the context of 'market perception of political parties' and 'corporate marketing communication', the images and their referred meanings are the main focus of the paper in order to answer the research questions: 'Are the local election campaigns appropriate with the general image of political parties?' and 'How do the political parties perceive the voter?' by the semiotic analysis of posters used in 30th March Local Elections. The scope of the research is defined as Ankara, the capital city and a metropolitan. Through focusing 3 biggest party of TBMM, the analyzing unit of the research is limited with AKP, CHP, MHP Posters including both general party & leader theme and the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Candidate theme. Semiotic analysis realized in the scope of signifier, signified and sign (Saussure, 1985). By focusing to visual and verbal content in terms of connotation and denotation referring Barthes (2003) who extends the semiotics system of Sassure (Fiske, 2003). Semiotic analysis are presented by the brief tables (Table.1 to Table.6) in order to serve to in depth methodology.

23 analyzed posters exhibited in Figure.1 and Figure.2 are chosen from 670 photographs of all election campaign materials of all parties in North (Yukseltepe-Kecioren) – South (Oran-Cankaya) direction of Ankara including Ulus, Kızılay, Konya Road and many popular crossroads such as Etlik, Bahcelievler, Balgat, Dikmen in 29th Mach 2014 morning before the election prohibitions.



Figure 1. General Leader and Party Posters in 30th March 2014 Local Election

AKP	CHP	MHP
 P.9	 P.14	 P.19
 P.10	 P.15	 P.20
 P.11	 P.16	 P.21
 P.12	 P.17	 P.22
 P.13	 P.18	 P.23

Figure 2. Posters of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Candidates in 30th March 2014 Local Election

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis on General Leader and Party Posters of AKP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to logo P.1-P.2-P.3 logo and literati hand	Close position of the logo and YES seal with party leader emphasis the direct link between the vote and the leader that makes them identical. Literati hand is a leading role-model effecting the choice of voter and a promise on welfare and skipping classes. Additionally expecting vote from literati voter.
'TURKEY' in slogan P.1-P.2 red&white big image P.3 'New Turkey'	Target of winning in all Turkey is stressed. Transferring the positive emotion of TURKEY to the party and the leader is aimed.
Local election sign 'New Cities' 'Ak Municipalities' Photo of Party Leader P.1-P.2-P.3 Leader photo in right side of the poster	1 of 3 posters has a local selection sign referring the togetherness of municipality and party providing synergy. With serious facial expression and the dark suit-grey tie, the leader looks up and left to remind past elections and the successes in order to make voter repeat the same behaviour. He stresses the importance of the results by serious self-confident posture and keeps his head high although the hard situation occurred recently but the grey tie represents a negotiation.
Designed Image Absent Colour P.1 white&red P.2 red&white P.3. white-blue-red	Not using designed image is related with direct rhetoric based on realism, pragmatism and tangibility instead of intangibility and sophisticated rhetoric. Using separate posters for a colour (red-intensive and white-intensive) increases the effect and the connotation of the colours. White connotes purity and cleanliness while red represents Turkish Flag. In this manner honesty of the leader & party and the integrative role of the flag is emphasized. Referring to the freedom and serenity meaning of the blue colour in "New Turkey" it is stated that Turkey will be in freedom and serenity.
Slogans and Mottos P.1-P.2 "Nation do not Bow Turkey Undefeated" P.3. "New Turkey, new cities" P.3. "Ak Municipalities Happy People"	Motivates the voter not to be effected negatively by the recent negative news and campaigns about leader while expecting a support against to opponents. In A.2, letter structured one with the other represents unity & solidarity and transfers this positive emotion to the party and the leader. "New Turkey" in blue represents the freedom by referring the past prohibitions and restraints. "New cities" slogan in red aims to spread 'New Turkey' motto in all Turkey and being leader in all cities. The smiling face slogan transfers the purity and honesty of white colour to its Municipalities while promising the happiness.

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis on General Leader and Party Posters of CHP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to logo Absent	Not using YES Seal means, there is not a restraint on the voter to direct or lead them to the party.
'TURKEY' in slogan Absent	Not using word of 'TURKEY' means, there is not a subliminal restraint on the voter by transferring the positive effect of the word.
Local election sign Absent	Not using local election sign can be evaluated like posters targets different voters.
Photo of Party Leader P.4 Leader photo in the middle of the poster	The party leader seems confident and sincere by smiling despite serious suit. Direct look to the objective means directed to citizens. Red tie has a connotation of Turkish Flag, his party CHP and leadership. This can be evaluated as a wish of CHP as a leader party in Turkey.
Graphical Image P.5 A tree with white stem and colourful leaves. Number 90 leaning on the tree.	Using graphical image is related with sophisticated indirect rhetoric and includes more connotations. Mission and ideal of the party is emphasized rather than emphasising the leader, that can be considered as mission is more important and the people are not in front of this mission. In the modern and aesthetic poster, tree image represents Turkey with the leaves in branches in different colours referring the multi-cultural structure as a richness and living friendly in the same root: Republic of Turkey. White stem represents the purity of past and future of Turkey. Additionally white colour includes all colours inside supporting the richness of multi-culturalism and diversity. 90 refers to the foundation of Republic of Turkey as a 90 years long-living plane tree that will be alive with its new sprouts. As a nature friendly act using tree image is also considered as a criticism to cutting down the trees for roads and buildings recently (Gezi Park and Following Cases).
Colour P.4 Light blue and red P.5 Light blue, white, red, green	While Light blue is the colour of freedom and serenity, red tie is the sign of leadership, Turkish flag and the party. White colour represents purity in past of Turkey and unity & solidarity. Colourful leaves Multiculturalism. Light blue background is the freedom and serenity sign.
Slogans and Mottos P.4 "Within presence, Within unity, In the free-form" P.5 "90 giant plane trees, 90 new sprouts, together for 90 years"	Welfare of society and the unity of nation are promised, freedom is emphasised as the style of this promise. While welfare refers to the economic and cultural resources and abundance, unity refers living together with different cultures in a free-form. It is focused on 90 th foundation of Turkish republic and Number 90 reminds the rooted history of CHP is based on Ataturk that can be evaluated as transferring the positive emotion and the power of "Liberation War" and the foundation of Republic. While giant plane trees refer to the past, new sprouts are indicated as the promise of the future of Turkish republic. Solidarity is expected as it has been going on from 90 years. This signs can be evaluated as a criticism of recent cultural separations and regional autonomy view.

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis on General Leader and Party Posters of MHP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to logo Absent	Not using YES Seal means, there is not a restraint on the voter to direct or lead them to the party.
'TURKEY' in slogan Absent	Not using word of 'TURKEY' means, there is not a subliminal restraint on the voter by transferring the positive effect of the word.
Local election sign 'Ankara', 'municipality'	Both 3 posters are related with local election against the AKP and CHP general party posters.
Photo of Party Leader P.6-P.7-P.8 Leader photo in the middle and left of the poster	The party leader seems serious in terms of face expression and dark suit. Although the direction of his look is directed to the citizens, the image is formal rather than sincere. Grey tie has a connotation of balance between black&white and negotiation, that can be evaluated as a less competitive image when the aggressive image and the colour of the part is considered.
Designed Image Absent	Not using designed image is related with direct rhetoric based on realism, pragmatism and tangibility instead of intangibility and sophisticated rhetoric.
Colour White-Red-Black	Purity and honesty is represented by white colour while red presents a compatible usage with the party colour more than the flag and leadership by the highlighting role. Clarity and sharpness of the promises and keeping the promise is presented with the black letter on white in a classic and formal style. This classic style can be evaluated as the criticism of popular and vivid campaigns of rival and being classic is underlined as a feature.
Slogans and Mottos P.6 "Now Word is Yours Ankara" P.7 "productive municipality: municipality combining service and social benefit" P.8 "productive municipality: municipality making urban unobstructed"	By the emphasis on 'now', it is expected from the voter to change their past choice and current leader in Ankara. 'Ankara' word is highlighted in red colour, which refer to the change and success in Ankara. Focusing 'municipality' word and definitions can be considered as giving information to the voter about what should be a municipality instead of what is going on. 'Social benefit' and 'unobstruction' are the key promise words of the slogan. Lower case letters represents a modern and sincere image against the formal posture of the leader.

Table 4. Semiotic Analysis on Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Candidate Posters of AKP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to logo P.9-P.10- logo and literati hand	Literati hand is a leading role-model effecting the choice of voter and a promise on welfare and skipping classes. Additionally expecting vote from literati voter.
'TURKEY' in slogan P.9 red&white	Transferring the positive emotion of TURKEY and 'New Turkey' motto to the candidate.
Photo of Candidate P.9-P.10-P.11 Candidate photo in right side of the poster	With a smiling facial expression the leader looks up and left to remind past elections and the successes in order to make voter repeat the same behaviour. Whilst dark suit represents serious look, light colour tie represents honesty. Although photo with general party leader seems as the supporting act, backward position puts forward the general leader rather than the candidate and expecting votes referring him.
Colour P.9 red&white P.10 blue-white-yellow P.11 blue-white	White connotes purity and cleanliness while red represents Turkish Flag. In this manner honesty of the leader & party and the integrative role of the flag is emphasized. Referring the colour of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality with dark blue colour represents stability of authority and sedentariness. As the party colour yellow transfer the positive image of the party to the candidate.
Slogans and Mottos P.9 "Once again Ankara in the way of New Turkey" P.10. "Nation Forever, Service Forever" P.11. "My president" P.9-P.10 "Ak Municipalities Happy People"	"New Turkey" in red represents the freedom by referring the past prohibitions and restraints. "once again" refers the previous success of candidate and directing the voter to the same behaviour. "Nation Forever, Service Forever" indicates the continuity of service with its party. But the continuity promise used in a temporary yellow colour while symbolizing the party. "My President" expression has a subliminal effect directing the voter to accept the vice versa "I am the president" expression. As a smiling face slogan transfers the purity and honesty of white colour to its Municipalities while promising the happiness.
Project Posters P.12 "Ankapark is opening in August" P.13 "Cay Yolu Subway is opened"	Candidate is promising to finish the Ankapark project if he will be the president again. By opening the subway few days before the election, vote is requested from the rival party intensive region. All projects that are presented in the posters are tangible and related with daily life.

Table 5. Semiotic Analysis on Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Candidate Posters of CHP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to logo Absent	Not using YES Seal means, there is not a restraint on the voter to direct or lead them to the party.
'TURKEY' in slogan Absent	Not using word of 'TURKEY' means, there is not a subliminal restraint on the voter by transferring the positive effect of the word.
Photo of Candidate P.14 P.17 Candidate photo in right side of the poster P.16 Candidate photo in left side of the poster	With a positive and self-confident posture candidate represent a happy, sincere and public oriented image. This image is supported by the red sweater, which can be considered as a leader connotation in a relaxed and challenging style. Whilst taking risk with red sweater in general poster, a more formal and serious expression is preferred in Cankaya poster with red tie and a suit. That can be considered not to take risk in the party's core area by the classic style.
Photo of Party Leader Absent	It is aimed to put forward the candidate rather than party and party leader in order to extend the voter area.
Designed Image P14. Blue Sky and green area with trees P.14. P.15 "Slow Brother Slow"	The design of the poster with background and slogan connote a family film poster with its outgoing and relax style. Sincere and nature is the main theme of the design and a local speech is used in 'slow brother slow' slogan, which is written with a special characters. Whilst the poster has an original and different visual style, it has also has a critical approach to cutting down the trees and represents a nature friendly image. This can be considered as a populist presentation of critical rhetoric in order to effect all voters.
Color Light blue-green-red	Blue sky represents freedom and, serenity and hopefulness from the future. Green represents the nature and hopefulness. Using red on the candidate himself instead of a part of the poster can be considered highlighting the candidate in a power-full way that is related with challenging style.
Slogans and Mottos P.14 "Love wins, respect wins, honesty wins: My Passion is Ankara" P.14-A.15 "Slow Brother Slow: Mansur Yavas is Coming" P.16 "Water is 10 TL per a month for supported families" P.17 "Let' Cankaya Target is Ankara" P.18 "Vote: 24 Hours Transportation"	By the universal values as love, respect and honesty; recent corruption claims and wordings are referred and criticised. The passion of Ankara is underlined which means dreaming and working for a better Ankara. Candidate challenges and plays a saviour role by the local speech which means 'Be careful, I am here' while using ryming with his surname (Slow). Candidate motivates Cankaya voter for the success of CHP in Ankara. Votes of the currently supported families are aimed with cheap water while referring the expensive and unhealthy water in taps. 24 hours transporsturation is also a practical service for low-income and nature friendly literati voter.

Table 6. Semiotic Analysis on Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Candidate Posters of MHP

SIGN	Signifier + Signified = SIGN = 2 nd LEVEL SIGNIFIER for the Political Parties' Perception into the Voters and the Appropriateness of Election Campaigns with the General Image of Political Parties
Signifier	Signified
YES seal to promise P.19-P.20-P.21	While yes seal to logo means a direct pressure in voter to vote the party, yes seal to promise has an indirect and partial leading.
'TURKEY' in slogan Absent	Not using word of 'TURKEY' means, there is not a subliminal restraint on the voter by transferring the positive effect of the word.
Photo of Candidate P.19-P.20-P.21-P.22-P.23 Candidate photo in the middle of the poster	Candidate is directed to voter with a self-confident and expert image by hanging a pen in his hand and 'Prof. Dr.' title. Blue tie represents freedom and serenity while red tie is the sign of leadership, flag and Turkey. In one of the 4 posters candidate hugs a 6-7 years old boy which underlines the importance of new generations. Smiling and sincere expression is exhibited in all posters especially green background last poster where he didn't use tie.
Designed Image Red Panoromic Ankara silhouette	Red panoramic Ankara silhouette stresses the promise to protect all tangible and intangible values of Ankara while calling for all areas of Ankara. Red colour demonstrates leadership, flag and party colour. Name of candidate in white letters represent honesty and purity of the candidate as a new face and remind Turkish Flag.
Colour Red-blue-black-white	White connotes purity and cleanliness while red represents leadership, Turkish Flag and party colour. Using red party logo in front of the red Ankara silhouette decreases visibility and the power of the images.
Slogans and Mottos P.19-P.20-P.21 "Ankara will win with you" P.19 "Limitless transportation to student 1TL" P.20 "To protect our values" P.21 "To have a safe future" P.22 "Karakaya to Ankara" P.23 "New face and new power of Ankara"	'Will win' Word in red is put forward while 'Ankara with you' in blue is less visible which can be considered as the transfer of winning action to the candidate in a subliminal style. Both tangible and intangible promises are indicated while criticizing the current practices about expensive transportation. Also anxiety about the future and the values are underlined as intangible issues targeting the all families. 'To protect our values' represent a sensitive approach and a criticism on losing economic and cultural values. By the 'new face and new power' and 'Karakaya to Ankara' slogans, it is expressed that Ankara voter needs and worth such an expert and literati president.

2. Conclusion

Basing on the comparison of the semiotics analysis on general party posters in local election and the posters of Metropolitan Municipality Candidates, one of the question of the research: 'Are the local election campaigns appropriate with the general image of political parties?' is answered for 3 parties. Analyses show that, AKP and MHP display a more appropriate image with general party image compared with CHP in the metropolitan municipality candidates Posters. General party and candidate posters of AKP have a team image that supports the same motto: 'New Turkey' with same cognitive style in terms of focusing on leader and directing the voter by subliminal messages by a vivid presentation. MHP presents a social responsibility with a didactic and criticizing rhetoric in its classic style on the focus of ideal mission and practices. On the other hand, general posters of CHP reflect the familiar CHP rhetoric directed to literati voter with its elegant and sophisticated style focusing on universal values. However posters of Metropolitan Municipality Candidate display a popular and more sincere style on the same values in the local side, which can be evaluated as an attempt of extending

the voter and the responsibility area. Although the diversity in style, by tree theme in its different creative designs and criticizing approach CHP exhibit an identical content.

Evaluating the total signs of the general posters and municipality candidate posters of parties the other question of the research: 'How do the political parties perceive the voter?' is also answered for 3 parties parallel to the first research question. As the size and the quantity considered, we can say that AKP posters have a reaching advantage rather than CHP and MHP posters, that is related with governmental position of the party both in Turkey and Ankara. Although this reality, size case is out of analysis and sign in the posters are focused. In that manner following context are appeared basing on the signs: *direct vs indirect rhetoric, tangible vs intangible promises, economic vs social side, subliminal vs supraliminal, simple vs sophisticated, short term benefit vs long-term benefits, populist vs idealist, easy accessible-hard accessible, enforcement-non enforcement, daily thinker vs future thinker, thankful vs worthy*. Basing on subliminal usage of big punts, big photo of leader, clear and easily understandable simple slogan and direct rhetoric; we can indicate that AKP General Posters are the sign of AKP' s perception into the voter who tend to be leaded and stay safe under the shadow of a powerful leader and who are not well educated and don' t have a critical thinking. Additionally to 'easy going voter' perception of AKP, municipality candidate posters demonstrates a thankful voter for the municipality services and prefer daily, short-term and tangible benefits. On the other side, basing on the creative sophisticated design without a leader photo, that has a indirect rhetoric and need to stop, read and think to understand; it can be said that general posters of CHP is the sign of CHP' s perception into the voter who is 'literati', critical thinking, idealism focused rather than leader, responsible for universal values society and nature. Additionally to intangible value focused voter, CHP municipality candidate posters shows a 'worried voter' perception who need to be relaxed and need to be get near to the top management in a sincere style. Smilar to CHP' s perception into the voter who is 'idealist and value focused', additionally in both general and in municipality candidate posters are the sign of MHP' s 'worthy voter' perception who needs to protect the universal values and future with humanist and sensitive approach not ignoring the needy public and next generation.

In conclusion, AKP has a *realist-populist* style that is aimed to protect and control the voter who is perceived easily accessible by enforcement and tangible, economic and short-term benefits and worthy as a voter rather than a worthy public. CHP has a *populist-idealist* style targeting to reach more voter who is perceived hard accessible and worthy for both tangible and intangible practices. MHP has a *didactic-idealist* style aiming to inform and educate next generation in the scope of intangible long-term values.

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