

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Global Brand Symbols in Children's Literature

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## ABSTRACT

Main purpose of this research is to analyse the global brand symbols that take part in the 'National Geographic Kids' magazine which is known as children's literature publication. The research about analysing the children's literature publications with this focus was considered to be quite important because of the fact that in recent years, the global brand symbols have the power to change the social world and the consumption behaviours of humans. Document analysis method, which is among qualitative research methods is used in the research. The National Geographic Kids magazines, which contain the global brand symbols and are published in 2018-2020, are the samples of this research. Two researchers analysed in detail a total of six children's magazines containing 327 pages of text about global brands. It is seen that the global brand symbols appearing in the analysed magazines are Apple, Google, Nokia, Time, Bitcoin, Amazon, Toshiba, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Tesla, Mercedes and Speedo. According to the other result obtained, the sectors of brands covered by the magazines are IT, communications, finance, technology, social media, automotive and clothing. In summary, it is known that the children's magazines in the study are distributed across a total of 15 different global brands and 7 different sectors. Looking at the results of the research in more detail, it can be said that some of the global brands involved in children's magazines have a direct impact on children's lives, while others have an indirect impact. Based on the results of the research, some key recommendations are made to researchers, parents, authors and publishers regarding global brands in children's literature content.

**Keywords:** Children's literature, national geographic kids, magazines, global brand symbols and financial literacy

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## INTRODUCTION

'In our world of thought, we are using magnificent variety of symbol systems. Linguistic, mathematical, musical, ceremonial. If these types of symbol systems wouldn't exist, there wouldn't be art, science, law and philosophy; there wouldn't be any information in our hands except the fundamental information about civilization. To put it another way, we would be animals.'

Aldous Huxley

### Symbols

Throughout history, it is seen that various symbols and signs have an extensive impact on people. It is stated that the concept of symbol, which is examined within the framework of different theories, is a process that generally represents something by replacing it (Fromm, 2015), expression of the unknown and the hidden (Jung, 2016), contributes to the discovery of one's self (Frye, 2015). It is stated that while humanity does not yet have a common universal language, they actually use the universal language of common symbols (Piercy 2014; Ayaydin 2012). For instance, nowadays, people who see the @ sign can easily infer that they are talking about e-mails, those who see the \$ symbol about the economy, and those who see the # (hashtag) symbol about social networking. Because of this reason, symbols have the power to build the social world through the meaning they established (Burke, 1989). The ability to use symbols provides opportunity to people that represent something in mind, choose, build, define the situation they come across and take action. Therefore, Burke (1966) defines the human being as a symbol-using creature. In this aspect, the use of symbols makes people different from the other living beings. People can understand the social world around them through the use of symbols and inferring meaning from events. In this way, people represent their experiences of the external world symbolically in their minds, think in symbols and give meanings to them.

### From Symbols to Global Brand

Consumption is turned into a behaviour that humans do to prove themselves to other humans beside the fact that it was a quite important need since the first human being and it was changed all the time. With globalization, the borders of the world have disappeared and people now generally prefer world-renowned branded products when consuming. In this respect, the concept of brand is defined as the sum of the meanings that consumers associate with the product (Kapferer, 1992). The word brand, which emerged from the effort to differentiate is derived from the word 'branding' which is the marking made by the villagers while grazing their animals so that they distinguish and do not confuse them. (Aktaş, Özüpek & Altunbaş, 2011). The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines the brand as a name, sign, symbol, design or combination of them are used to distinguish the products exposed for sale from competing products in the market (Karpas, 2004). However, these definitions for the concept of brand are far from reflecting the importance that this concept has gained today. Because the concept of brand includes so much more than the symbols and signs that make brand up. In some way, the brand is seen as a structure that build communication with consumer (Kaplan & Baltacıoğlu, 2009). Consumers experience a positive feeling when using their chosen product and feel the emotional benefit that the product provides. Consumers now act according to the emotional connection they have with the brand rather than looking at the benefits of the product or brand they prefer.

As with brand topic, it is difficult to find a generally accepted definition of a global brand topic and many researchers have different views on global brand (Barron & Hollinshead, 2004; Ghauri & Cateora 2010; Kim, 2004). A global brand is defined as being recognizable worldwide (Dimofte et. al., 2008) and differentiated from other brands with

the same names, signs and symbols (Ghauri & Cateora 2010). While consumption and brand are perceived as intertwined in terms of meaning among the post-modern children, the brand also has an important place in forming the identity of children. For instance, behaviours such as having meal at Mc Donald's or buying high-tech devices when a child is to be rewarded are increasingly globalized (İnal, 2009). While this situation reshapes the child's relationship with consumption in today's society and puts the child in the position of consuming without reproducing (Taş, 2022), children have also become subjects of a consuming society (Gültekin & Yıldız, 2009).

In the literature, there were many studies examining the relationship between child consumers and brands (Altunbaş, 2007; McAlister & Cornwell, 2010; Sarıyer & Ayar, 2013; Südaş, 2015). In his study, Macklin (1996) emphasized the importance of children, the consumers of the future, acquiring the ability to recognize and distinguish brands. It is seen that brand logos are generally used in studies that examining the effects of brand concept on children (Fisher et. al., 1991; Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2005). In a study conducted by Südaş (2015) with preschool children, it was revealed that the number of brands that children recognize increases with increasing age. According to another study's result that was parallel to these conclusions, it was seen that even young children can easily pronounce brand names (McAlister and Cornwell, 2010). There were also studies showing that the age at which children can distinguish between brands and logos was below three years old. (Brennan et al., 1999: 32; d'Astous & Chartier, 2000).

Today, the success of any brand is closely linked to the image it creates in the minds of consumers. Most brands often prefer to use various symbols to achieve this. With this way, consumers can distinguish one brand from others. Researches tried to understand the consumer's point of view by analyzing the cultural and social dimensions of consumption (Joy & Li, 2012). One of the most prominent approaches has been 'consumer culture theory'. According to this theory that established by Arnould and Thompson (2005), which also forms the theoretical basis of this study, is that symbolic meanings should be emphasized in brands and products in order to reflect consumers' lifestyles, their personal and social conditions, identities and goals. This study can be described as a pioneering study in the field, examining the impact of global brand symbols, which reflect consumer culture, on the publication of children's literature.

Alpaslan and Aksoy (2022) stated that there were few studies that examined the brand symbols on children's literature in Turkey publications. It was stated that children's literature publications that include global brand symbols affect the children's consumption habits directly. In this respect, this study aims to analyze the global brand logos (Tesla, Apple, etc.) in the 'National Geographic Kids' magazine series prepared for children. The sub-problems to be addressed within the scope of the current research were as follows:

- 1) Which global brand symbols were included in the analyzed 'National Geographic Kids' children's magazine?
- 2) Which sectors did the global brand symbols in 'National Geographic Kids' children's magazines belonged to?
- 3) What information was shared about the global brand symbols in the National Geographic Kids magazine?

## METHOD

### Research Design

Document analysis method, which is among the qualitative data collection techniques, was used in the research. Obtaining data as a result of analyzing magazine documents (articles, visual, etc.) related to the subject is called document analysis (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2011). One of the important issues to be considered in document analysis is the necessity of a detailed scanning process in which data related to the research subject will be collected.

## Sample

The population of this study consist of the children's literature publications that include global brand symbols. The sample consist of the 'National Geographic Kids' children's magazine that published between the years 2018 and 2020. Criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in the research. Here, the criterion was determined by the researcher as children's literature publications with global brand logos. In this respect, the publications to be selected must had certain characteristics. The main issue in criterion sampling was that the situations to be selected were substantial in terms of providing information (Marshall, 1996). The most important advantage of choosing purposive sampling was that it facilitated the selection of the study group for researchers and provided the opportunity to work with smaller sample groups. However, the fact that sample selection could be affected by the researcher's prejudices and experiences (Patton, 2005) and it should be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is not a correct approach to generalize the results obtained from the research to the universe. The magazines included in the study group are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Children's magazines used in the study

Year	Theme	Author/s	Illustrator
2018	Parasını Yöneten Çocuklar	Özlem Özyurt	Ece Zeber
2019	Tasarıma İlham Veren Doğa	Şenay Kasap and Zehra Kasap	Ece Zeber
2019	Nicola Tesla	Alper K. Ateş	Ece Zeber
2019	Medyayı Sorgulayan Çocuklar	Alp Gökalp	Ece Zeber
2019	Türkan Saylan	Nesrin Erdoğan	Ulaş Erdoğan
2020	Steve Jobs Gibi Yap	Havva Kınay and Pınar Kadioğlu	Ece Zeber

According to the table, one of the children's magazines examined belongs to 2018 and the other to 2020, while 4 magazines were published in 2019. While the authors of the magazines constantly change according to the years, the illustrations in the magazines were generally made by the same person.

## Procedure

Before starting to the study, the design and sample that was going to be used for the research was discussed by researchers. Primarily, two bookstores where children's literature publications were sold that take part in two different cities and the children section of academic library was visited for the purpose of deciding the sample that will be used in this study. The illustrated children's literature publications that were found here was scanned in detail. The process of combing through the children's bookstore and library has lasted approximately 2 weeks. It was noticed that the global brand symbols agreed to be examined was not present in the illustrated children's books. Because of the absence of the global brand symbols in the illustrated children's books, it was decided that examining different children's literature publications would be a better option. During the research carried out in the library, it was found that global brand symbols were present in the children's magazines. It was seen that only the six children's magazines had the global brand symbols out of the children's magazine series that examined. The research process was started with five of the children's magazines from the library and one from a children's bookstore. First, the information about the authors and illustrators of the magazines was tabulated (Table 1). In the next phase, the process of scrutinization of the magazines that included global brand symbols has begun. Symbols that took part in the magazines were examined in a week by two researchers. Brands that did not have logo in the magazines and only mentioned by their name were not included. Not only the logos

were analyzed but also the explanations about the logos that took part in the text was considered. In addition, the researcher questioned the suitability of the content of the study to the theoretical framework of the study with the question "Are these selected documents suitable for the study?" to the field experts before the study and at the same time ensured validity. After the process of questioning, the data collection and analysis process has begun.

## Data Collection

In the first step of data collection, it was checked whether global brand symbols were present in different types of children's literature products. For this purpose, extensive investigations were carried out in children's book stores and children's libraries in different provinces. It was found that illustrated children's books in the narrative genre did not contain global brand symbols, most likely for copyright reasons. For this reason, the 'National Geographic Kids' children's magazine series, which is also among children's literature products, was selected. In the research, data collected from the six 'National Geographic Kids' magazines by document analysis and by considering the sub-problems. During the data collection process, 327 pages and the texts about brands that were part of the six children's magazines were completely examined by two researchers.

## Data Analysis

First and foremost, during the analysis process, the authenticity of the documents that were accessed was checked from a critical point of view. In order to understand the documents, detailed and repeated checks were carried out by two researchers. Following these processes, it was decided on the data that obtained with the use of document analysis method was analyzed with the use of content analysis method. In the content analysis, interpretations are used to construct and classify the meaning that matter, generalizing from qualitative to quantitative with the purpose to put forward the common aspects of the text contents (Gökçe, 2006). In other words, the content analysis method was utilized to classify the data systematically and transform them into codes and themes. During the process of content analysis, all of the global brand symbols that was in the magazines has been revealed primarily. After that, these brand symbols were divided into different themes according to sectors of operation. In conclusion, it could be said that while the decisions to determine the areas of activity of global brands were influenced by the personal views of the researchers.

## RESULTS

This section presents the global brand symbols in the magazines examined, the sectors in which they operate and how the brands are examined in the magazines. It was seen that global brand symbols in the magazines were; Apple, Google, Nokia, Time, Bitcoin, Amazon, Toshiba, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Tesla, Mercedes and Speedo. It is reached to top theme by classifying the revealed symbols according to their sectors. Table 2 shows the global brand symbols and their sectors.

Table 2. Sectoral distribution of global brand symbols

Global Brand	Sector	The Theme of the Magazine
1- Apple	Informatics	1-2- Steve Jobs Gibi Yap
2- Google		
3- Nokia	Communication	3- Türkan Saylan
4- Time		4- Nikola Tesla

5- Bitcoin	Financial	5- Parasını Yöneten Çocuklar
6- Amazon 7- Toshiba	Technology	6- Steve Jobs Gibi Yap 7- Medyayı Sorgulayan Çocuklar
8- YouTube 9- Twitter 10- Facebook 11- WhatsApp 12- Instagram	Social Media	8-12- Medyayı Sorgulayan Çocuklar
13- Tesla 14- Mercedes	Automotive	13- Nikola Tesla 14- Tasarıma İlhan Veren Doğa
15- Speedo	Clothing	15- Tasarıma İlhan Veren Doğa

In Table 2 above, we see that logos of 15 different global brands appear in magazines, while logos appear in 7 different sectors.

Figure 1. Logo of Apple



There are different theories about why the fruit image in the Apple symbol is partially missing. The most common one is to emphasize that it is an apple and should not be confused with fruits like cherries. The logo, which once used rainbow colors, was later switched to a plain black design. It is thought that this change will help maintain the logo's recognisability and symbolism of knowledge, especially when the logo is reduced in size.

Figure 2. Logo of Google



In Google's logo, 5 out of the 6 letters are made up of primary colors, except for one. There is actually a message intended to be conveyed here. The red color symbolizes excitement and passion. The blue color communicates trust and honesty. The yellow color evokes brightness and joy. The green color, which is not a primary color but still finds its place in the logo, carries the main message that Google officials want to convey to us.

Figure 3. Logo of Nokia



Nokia, which has been using the same logo for nearly 60 years, announced that it has changed its iconic logo to signal a shift in strategy. Many people remember Nokia as a phone manufacturer. Today, however, Nokia is a producer of telecom equipment. It is on its way to becoming a new brand that is very focused on networks and industrial digitalization. The company's new logo consists of five different shapes that form the word NOKIA.

Figure 4. Logo of Time



Time magazine, founded in 1923, is a weekly news magazine that covers a wide range of topics, including politics, business, technology, and entertainment. It is known for its in-depth coverage of current events and its thought-provoking articles and essays. In its nearly 100-year history, Time magazine changed its cover logo for the first time. Signaling the upcoming presidential election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, the magazine invited its readers to vote.

Figure 5. Logo of Bitcoin



The "B" symbol in the Bitcoin logo is written in white and placed on an orange circle background. These two colors, white and yellow, have symbolic meaning. The color orange symbolizes creativity, success, change, freedom and excitement. These features align with the characteristics of the cryptocurrency market and express the strong emotions associated with the significant innovation Bitcoin has brought to the financial world. In addition, the white color in the

logo represents innocence, security, simplicity, and protection.

Figure 6. Logo of Amazon



Jeff Bezos preferred the name of his online shopping company to start with the letter A so it would appear early in alphabetical order. While searching for a name in the dictionary, he decided on Amazon, named after the world's largest river, hoping his company would one day be just as large.

Figure 7. Logo of Toshiba

# TOSHIBA

It actually emerged from the merger of two companies. Founded in 1890, Hakunetsusha changed its name to "Tokyo Denki" in 1899, and the merger with Tanaka Seizoshu, which changed its name to Shibaura Seisakusho in 1904. The combination of "To" from Tokyo Denki and "Shiba" from Shibaura gave birth to the Toshiba brand.

Figure 8. Logo of YouTube



The old YouTube logo consisted of the words "You" and "Tube". The first word was written in clear, black letters, while the latter was written in white letters in a red, softened triangle. Only a few existing YouTube users knew the meaning of the word "Tube". The company soon realized this and decided to make some changes to the emblem. The new YouTube logo has a much more current appearance with a greater emphasis on the button on it. This button is the "Play" button. The GESs have also become outdated, but the button design emphasizes the change of era and the scientific-technological revolution. This design symbolizes the world's most popular site, visited by at least half of internet



users every month.

**Figure 9.** Logo of Twitter (X)



About 4 years later, in 2010, the company decided to invent something that could reflect the nature of Twitter. A text logo was no longer sufficient. They created the bird as a representation of how a tweet feels: posts are quick and short, much like something a bird would do. And the bird seemed like a symbolic representation of the services Twitter offered. This bird was a bit more intricate than the previous one, with a bit of feathers and the second wing in the background. In 2012, the company decided to make some changes once again. They became so famous that the name in the logo was no longer needed. The only change they made afterward was to remove the letters in the logo. The concept of the bird itself didn't change much, but it shed its feathers and the wing was shaped by three overlapping circles. They enlarged it and changed its color to dark blue, making it more enjoyable to look at for a wider audience. The company's symbol was created, and people would recognize Twitter just by seeing the bird.

**Figure 10.** Logo of Facebook



It is stated that the Facebook network first made publicly available in 2006. The primary expression of the logo is in Facebook blue with a single white 'f'. The Facebook icon has gone through a number of changes, although you may not have noticed unless you were paying attention. With each redesign, the icon has become more minimalist.

**Figure 11.** Logo of WhatsApp



It is stated that WhatsApp's first meeting with users was in the year 2009. WhatsApp is one of the most popular mobile messengers in the world and is used by millions of people all over the world for instant messaging, voice and video calls and file, music and photo sharing. The primary logo shows a phone receiver surrounded by a text bubble, which clearly shows how the app works. The text bubble symbolises instant messaging. It is probably the most commonly used icon to represent the text messages that you receive in a wide range of applications and on a wide range of networks. The right-pointing tail symbolises an incoming message.

**Figure 12.** Logo of Instagram



It is explained that first shared photograph through Instagram was in the year 2010. The initial icon featured a brown camera, striking a balance between realism and style, tailored to appeal to the application's primarily photographer user base at its inception. At the same time, the Instagram icon features a vibrant gradient square backdrop with rounded corners, encompassing a prominent white outline. Nested within this outline is a circular shape, also outlined in white, with a solid white dot positioned to the right. Its simplicity contributes to its effectiveness and memorability.

**Figure 13.** Logo of Tesla



Just like Space X, Tesla's logo was also designed by RO-Studio, a New Jersey-based design company. The logo, which was determined for Tesla with its range values and speed in mind, consists of the first letter "T" of the brand and a line positioned above it. This suggests the idea that such a logo was chosen because it represents the initial letter of the brand's name. However, Musk clarified that this is not the case. Musk, explaining the meaning behind the logo determined for Tesla via his official Twitter account, stated that the letter "T" represents one of the bars in the rotor of the electric motor, and the second line above the "T" represents a portion of the stator (the stationary part of the electric motor).

Figure 14. Logo of Mercedes



The three-pointed star was originally surrounded by laurel borrowed from the Karl Benz company. Benz adopted them because of the countless victories and awards his cars won. Simplifying the logo was certainly not a contemporary thing to do. And the laurel turned into a simple circle. However, no matter how much it was simplified, the symbol cannot be called insignificant. Today, it is one of the most popular symbols of wealth and quality. There is an alternative perspective on the formation of the symbol. They say it's not just a combination of two logos. Initially, the star was supposed to symbolize the power to govern three spheres. The three elements are water, earth, and wave. This could be a hidden meaning of the Mercedes logo. The company produces engines not only for cars but also for airplanes and all kinds of fleet transportation.

Figure 15. Logo of Speedo



Speedo, founded in Australia in 1914, is one of the leading brands in the world-renowned swimming and water sports industry. With its roots in Australia and known for its boomerang symbol, Speedo has become a symbol of innovation and quality in the swimming world.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In today's world it is known that many people's consumption habits are under the influence of global brands. The most important group that affected by it without any doubt is children. The topic of how the children's consumption habits are affected by various brand logos that include in the children's literature publications' content has been a subject of curiosity. Therefore, in this research, it is aimed to examine the global brand symbols that take part in 'National Geographic Kids' children's magazine which is partake in the children's literature publications. Examined children's magazines included 15 different global brands across 7 different sectors. It was seen that some of the sectors had one brand while some of them had two or more brands. Global brand symbols in the study were divided into informatics, communication, finance, technology, social media, automotive and clothing sectors. Some of the emerged sectors were concerned children directly while others were affected children's life indirectly.

Children tend to acquire some of these products due to seeing brands and advertisements of the products (Karaboğa, 2018). In addition, according to Karaboğa (2018), the media started to see children as a consumer generation instead of a productive generation and they focused on children's consumer identity. Consumption habits of children should be paid utmost care due to how childhood consumption experiences shape adulthood behaviors (Ward, 1974). Children gain consumer behaviors in real life at an earlier age. There are various factors that affect the socialization of children as consumers (Madran & Bozyiğit, 2013). These factors are actually a process and children become part of the consumption culture with or without consciousness from the moment they arrive on this earth.

A review of recent studies with primary school students in the literature shows that students' financial literacy skills and conscious consumption habits have been emphasized (Çarıkçı, 2019; Çelikten et al., 2023; Ünlüer, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2022). The financial literacy skills and conscious consumption habits of primary school students have been emphasized in the literature (Çelikten et al., 2023; Ünlüer, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2022). Researchers emphasize that financial literacy education, which shapes consumption habits, should be provided to primary school children at an early age (Akhan, 2013; Çarıkçı, 2019; Çelikten & Doğan, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, given that today's children are exposed to intense advertising and branded content, it is very important to raise them as individuals who can make the right decisions in financial matters (Fabris & Luburic, 2016). Children who develop basic financial awareness at an early age are expected to become more conscious consumers in the years to come.

There were many studies that closely examined the children's consumption habits (Fan & Li, 2009; Meyer &

Anderson, 2000; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Yücel, 2003). In these studies, it was emphasized on the fact that parents were an important variant during the process of establishing children's consumption habits. Children generally learn the positive sides of consumption from their parents. There might be lack of information about the global brands for children when they examine these magazines. At this point, it is quite important for parents to give explanations about these brands to their children. According to some researchers, it is revealed that peers have more effect on the children's consumption habits than parents (Moore & Bowman, 2006; Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Singh, Kwon & Pereira, 2003). Children are considerably affected by their peers who are the greatest socializing tools as they grow. Children are acquired their consumption habits from their peers' example since they spend most of their time with them instead of their families.

## **RECOMMEDATIONS**

Based on this study research, some recommendations will be made for researchers, curriculum organisers, parents, authors, and publishers. When the literature was reviewed, it was seen that the researches about children's literature and global brands were almost non-existent. It is recommended that researchers look at the publications of children's literature in terms of the different brand symbols and their content. Curriculum organisers will be able to introduce topics such as consumption and finance into the curriculum at an earlier age. Parents are advised to pay attention to global brand symbols in these publications' contents when choosing books for their children. Sometimes these brands do not set an appropriate example for the physical and mental health of children. It is suggested that authors and publishers choose the brand symbols they use not only based on commercial concerns but also taking into consideration the developmental level of children. As the global brands used in children's books have an impact on children's consumption habits, attention should be paid to the brands used in children's literary publications.

Nowadays, understanding the consumption habits and financial behaviors of children is becoming increasingly important, and researchers working on financial literacy with children should take this into account. In particular, these studies should focus on closely examining children's attitudes, habits, and tendencies regarding spending and saving money. Furthermore, these studies should provide guidance for developing children's financial knowledge and skills. Additionally, the results of these studies can be used to support parents and educators in raising children's awareness of financial matters and equipping them with the ability to make sound financial decisions. In this way, financial literacy research can help strengthen children's future financial well-being and foster sustainable consumption habits.

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