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SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF "FESTIVAL" AND "BOX OFFICE" POSTERS IN INDEPENDENT FILMS IN TURKISH CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Semiotics is the study of signs, sign systems, codes, and symbols. Posters serve as visual communication tools that convey messages by combining multiple sign systems through signs. **Methodology:** This research employs a semiotic analysis model to identify similarities and differences among signs by categorizing posters created for independent Turkish films into two groups based on their purpose: "festival" and "box office." The study applies Peirce's second triad classification—"icon, index, and symbol"—as its analytical framework. The sample, selected through purposive sampling, comprises international and national film festival posters, as well as box office posters, specifically for the films *Noah Land* (2019), directed by Cenk Ertürk, and *Burning Days* (2022), directed by Emin Alper. **Results:** The analysis revealed consistent and significant patterns within the designs of the six posters, divided into festival and box office categories. **Discussion and Conclusions:** The findings indicate that narrative symbols in both international and national film festival posters are prominently placed at the center, emphasizing their importance, with language being the only notable difference between them. In contrast, box office posters prioritize symbols associated with well-known Turkish actors, positioning these prominently at the center to attract audiences. Moreover, narrative signs and

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symbols in box office posters tend to be less prominent, often receding into the background compared to those in festival posters.

Keywords: semiotics, poster, turkish cinema, noah land, burning days

1. INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is a field of study that examines signs and the underlying systems of meaning behind them. Signs cannot exist on their own and therefore require a system (language). Through this system, signs acquire meaning, can be defined, and can be related to one another. The system is social, and language is based on agreements and consensus among community members. "System formation (language ability) is emphasized as a common feature among humans. What distinguishes all communities is that they speak different languages and form their own unique systems" (Erkman, 1987, pp. 18-38). In this context, natural languages, alphabets, traffic signs, images, movies, musical works, etc., used for communication purposes fall within the scope of semiotics. Posters, which are graphic design products, are a visual means of communication that carry signs, codes, and symbols.

One of the most effective tools for promoting and marketing cinema films is posters. "Posters can be defined as a cultural sign with a lively and aesthetic layout, undertaking the task of reflecting the cultural, political, and marketing characteristics of the country where the graphic design and production are carried out" (Becer, 1999, pp. 202-203). Another definition describes posters as "one of the advertising tools that aims to convey a simple visual design to the audience impressively and quickly" (Teker, 2009, pp. 139-140). Posters can be divided into three different types based on their purpose. Advertising posters are a type of poster used in the corporate advertising sector to promote a product or service. Cultural posters are a type of poster designed to promote and announce culture-specific events such as theater, cinema, exhibitions, concerts, sports, etc. In this type of poster, the emphasis on place and time is used as an important typographic element. Social posters are a type of poster that aims to raise social awareness and contains educational and cautionary messages on social issues, without any commercial concerns (Becer, 1999, p. 202). Film posters, which are a type of cultural poster produced for the cinema medium, are signs designed effectively and strikingly to promote and market the film being produced. They are graphic design products that convey the plot of the film, depict an important scene from the film with visuals, contain information about the lead actors or the setting and time period, and communicate all of this through a design featuring visual and typographic elements (Riyanto, 2023, p. 29; Yudhanto, 2025, pp. 230-232). The fundamental purpose of film posters, which are visual design products, is to motivate the audience to go to the cinema. In this context, the message in posters created through aesthetic creation processes should be presented clearly and concisely. The elements in the design should be appropriate to the content of the film and relevant to the subject (Erzincan, 2022). Poster design, supported by visual images and typographic elements, should encourage and persuade audiences strikingly and impressively.

The first film poster produced in the cinema industry was designed in 1895 to promote Louis Lumière's short comedy film *L'Arroseur Arrosé.* This poster holds the distinction of being the first film poster publicly produced to promote and market a fictional story. Poster designs have evolved alongside technological advances and the development of the film industry over time. They gained particular importance in the 1920s and beyond with the development of the Hollywood film industry (Atabey, 2025, pp. 364-365). Film posters are effective visual tools that arouse curiosity in the target audience and provide information about the theme and atmosphere of the film, establishing the first link between the viewer and the movie. Film posters have limited narrative possibilities. Unlike trailers, which feature moving visual images, film posters are presented as a single photograph, illustration, or completely original design frame. This limited nature necessitates the power of poster design to attract attention and reach the target audience (Yılmazkol, 2023, p. 89). Therefore, it requires the effective and creative presentation of graphic design principles. In graphic design, the use of "balance" in visuals, text, colors, and white space; ensuring attention-grabbing by placing elements that provide visual hierarchy and aesthetic appearance in proportion to the target points; "proportion and hierarchy"; "unity," which ensures that the design is perceived as a whole rather than in parts; "continuity," which presents repetition and similarity between the shapes and sizes of visual elements; and "emphasis" elements, which present the elements that need to be highlighted and those that need to be left in the background through direction, size, shape, texture, etc. (Becer, 1999; Özsoy & Ayaydın, 2016, pp. 70-202). Similarly, color, an important element in graphic design, takes on the task of organizing the visual hierarchy. It can make drawings and typography visible, as well as bring some elements to the foreground and leave others in the background. "In this context, the concept of color is an important element in poster design, with functions such as motivating and directing behavior and symbolizing thoughts" (Teker, 2009, p. 64). Therefore, it is important that film posters, produced as a promotional and marketing tool in the cinema industry, use all creative arguments along with the principles of graphic design to attract the attention of the audience.

This study aims to examine the similarities or differing signs in festival and box office posters produced for the same film using a semiotic analysis methodology in independent films in Turkish cinema. In line with the research objective, the selected samples are the film festival posters and box office posters produced for the films *Noah Land* (2019) and *Burning Days* (2022), which have won awards at international and national film festivals. Three posters from each film were included in the analysis due to the limitations of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SEMIOTICS

Semiotics, recognized as a scientific discipline in the 20th century, examines all signs and sign systems. This discipline was developed particularly in Europe by Ferdinand de Saussure and in the United States by Charles Sanders Peirce through their approaches and theories. "Semiotics is a scientific project that investigates how meanings are produced by linking together in narratives, primarily by developing theoretical tools that can reveal this production process." The concept of the sign is

addressed within the context of the opposition between the signifier and the signified in the fields of logic and language. (Rifat, 1992, pp. 14-27; Saussure, 1995). According to Saussure, a linguist who is considered the founder of contemporary semiotics, the concept of sign consists of the opposition between signifier and signified. He defines signs, which are the basic elements of linguistic structures, as a complex whole consisting of an auditory image, which is a form, and a concept that determines meaning. Of the two elements that constitute the sign, the sound image is defined as the signifier, and the concept is defined as the signified. For example, the word tree is the signifier, which is the part we perceive with our senses, while the concept of tree that this word evokes or signifies in the mind is the signified (Saussure, 1995, p. 110). According to Fiske, the existence of a sign depends on culturally specific users accepting it as a sign and reaching consensus. To interpret a sign, a person must have learned it. The meaning of signs is shared by all members of the same culture who share the same language (Fiske, 2014; Saussure, 1995).

Barthes relates the level of meaning in his approaches to the concepts of denotation and connotation. According to Barthes (1976), "denotation is what the sign represents, while connotation is how the sign is represented. Denotation can generally be interpreted at a universal level in people's minds." However, connotations in various communication systems may vary depending on cultures and societies. Therefore, factors such as the culture, myths, and historical context of the society in which connotations are interpreted determine the level of interpretation (Barthes, 2017, p.93).

Peirce's model, based on icons, indices, and symbols, is considered significant in terms of presenting the relationship between signs and their objects and the form of classification. Merrell (2000, p. 37) defines the model developed by Peirce as follows: He argues that the icon can be perceived through similarity and understood through the senses; the index is based on causal and natural relationships and is perceived through perception and inference based on cause and effect; and the symbol can be reached through learning or application based on agreement.

Film semiotics aims to identify the laws that make watching a film possible and to reveal the unique meanings and patterns that give each film or film genre its specific character (Metz, 1990). In this context, Metz (1990) argues from a semiological perspective that cinema possesses a "language" rather than a linguistic ability. He demonstrates that the powerful literal meaning of the images and sounds in films, as well as their figurative capabilities, are an integral part of cinema's linguistic ability. Since cinema is part of culture, it constitutes a rich resource for the field of semiotics. A good example of this is that an image of a rose in the film *Richard III* (1995) is not just a rose, but acquires a secondary meaning as a symbol of the Houses of York and Lancaster (Monaco, 2009, pp. 170-178).

3. OBJECTIVE

In Turkish cinema, especially in independent films, posters with different signs are produced for the same film for use at film festivals, in cinemas, or in marketing processes. This study aims to identify signs that are similar or different in festival and box office posters produced for the same film using a semiotic analysis methodology. This study, which is expected to contribute to the literature, is considered important in revealing how posters produced specifically for festivals, with a focus on symbols, and posters produced for commercial purposes at the box office are presented strategically, and in identifying the changing signs.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

> RQ1: What changes can be observed in the visual elements of festival posters produced for independent films in Turkish cinema and posters produced for box office releases?
>
> RQ2: What are the differing visual elements, signs, and symbols in festival and box office posters produced for independent films in Turkish cinema?
>
> RQ3: Is the "star system" strategy applied in the sample categories of box office posters examined?

4. METHODOLOGY

The research universe consists of film posters. In the study, one of the semiotic analysis models, C. S. Peirce's (1984, pp. 274-306) second triad classification, the "icon, index, and symbol" model, will be used to analyze the sample film posters. The methodology for each movie poster is structured in two stages. First, a descriptive analysis of the sample posters will be conducted in terms of graphic language, followed by a semiotic study of the selected samples using the semiotic analysis methodology.

With his approaches in the field of semiotics and his proposed definition and classification of the concept of signs, C. S. Peirce created a series of signs based on triads. By classifying semiotic phenomena, he developed the "icon, index, and symbol" approach, which is also used as an analysis model based on his second triad. According to this approach (Erkman, 1987; Peirce, 1984, pp. 274-306; Rifat, 1992, p. 22; Sayın, 2007):

- *Icon:* A sign that refers to an object due to the qualities possessed by that object. Icons can be examples such as pictures, maps, diagrams, and photographs. At this point, even if we do not perceive objects in all their details, certain lines help to evoke the object. Anything that directly represents the object it refers to or stands in for, and establishes a physical similarity relationship, is an icon.
- *Index:* An index is a sign that loses the qualities that make it a sign when its object disappears. Indices have a direct relationship with their objects through an invisible necessity. Indexes neither resemble nor are completely unrelated to what they represent; they merely indicate what they reflect. A person's fever

being high is an index of that person having a health problem, while seeing smoke is an index of a fire. Indexes are based on a cause-and-effect relationship.

- *Symbol:* Peirce offers two different definitions of symbol. The first definition is that a symbol is a sign that depends on the interpreter to fully interpret the quality it represents. The second definition is that a symbol is a sign that refers to an object, expressing the commonality of general ideas. It can be seen that the relationship between the symbol and the "thing" it represents is based on a social agreement/consensus. "For example, words in language are symbols based on agreement; because a word conveys the thing it denotes only because we understand it to mean that." The symbol of the concept of justice in most societies is the "scales." It evokes the relationship of justice with the principle of equality. Similarly, the alphabet, numbers, musical notes, flags, and traffic lights are examples of symbols.

Samples were selected from independent films that won awards at film festivals and were screened at the box office, in line with the research objective. Independent films can be defined as films that encompass an alternative film production process outside the mainstream cinema industry, are not financed by large-scale cinema studios, and focus on representing social realities and different social identities (Park, 2009). The production, distribution, and screening processes of independent films are supported by various institutions and organizations, or their funds.

In this study, samples were selected from independent films where festival and box office posters for the same film differed significantly.

The posters for the film *Noad Land* (2019), which won the Best Screenplay Award at the Tribeca International Film Festival and the Best Film, Best Director, and Best Cinematography awards at the 26th International Adana Golden Boll Film Festival held in Turkey, have been selected as examples. The posters for the film *Burning Days* (2022), which had its international premiere at the 75th Cannes Film Festival, won the Best International Film award at the Pula International Film Festival, and won the Best Film award at the 55th Turkish Film Critics Association Awards (SIYAD) held in Turkey, and have been selected as examples.

In line with the purpose and questions of this research, the scope of the study is limited to international, national, and box-office posters of samples selected from the independent film category in Turkish cinema. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the design has been structured to include an in-depth analysis using a two-stage methodology. Therefore, in order to enhance the quality of the findings, the scope of the study has been limited to six film posters. The criteria used to limit the sample addressed in the study were that the film had won awards at international and national film festivals and that it was an independent film that had been screened in mainstream cinemas. The second reason for the limitation was that significant changes/differences in the sign systems of festival and box office posters were observable.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Analysis of the Graphic Language of the Noah Land Film International and National Film Festival Posters

Directed by Cenk Ertürk, the film *Noah Land* (2019) stars Ali Atay (Ömer), Haluk Bilginer (İbrahim), Mehmet Özgür (Cevdet), and Hande Doğandemir (Elif). The plot centers on Ömer, who takes his dying father back to the village, where he must confront his father and his estranged wife. Ömer's father's final wish is to be buried under the sacred Noah Tree in the village. The villagers' opposition to this situation, combined with İbrahim's past feuds and conflicts with the villagers, escalates the tensions.

Figure 1.

Noah Land Festival Posters

Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8090580/
Access Date: August 12, 2025.

The background colors of the poster are presented as a cloudy sky with shades of blue and gray reminiscent of dusk and night. The time established in the film is mostly depicted through night scenes. The night scenes, in particular, become a cinematic time in which the characters Ömer and İbrahim, as father and son, confront their pasts and secrets hidden in their family relationships, which are revealed. Therefore, the concept of time depicted on the poster establishes a meaningful relationship with the plot of the film. The blue and gray color codes, which are cold colors, are meaningful in terms of the relationship established between the visual language and the narrative. At the center of the poster is the sacred Noah's Tree in the countryside, one of the film's main locations, depicted as a black silhouette using the backlighting technique. The characters Ömer and İbrahim come into conflict with the villagers because of this tree. Therefore, the Noah Tree is not only an important location in the film but also a powerful element of conflict in the narrative. Next to the Noah Tree are the film's two main characters, Ömer (son) and İbrahim (father). Due to the use of backlighting in the

photograph, the silhouettes of these two main characters resemble the tree. The positioning of the characters at the center of the poster suggests that they are the protagonists of the film. They appear in black on the ground cover at the bottom of the poster, creating contrast to highlight the typographic elements.

When examined from a typographic perspective, the poster features the film's title in large white letters at the top. To enhance the visual impact, the title contrasts with the background in terms of color and tone, accompanied by typographic textures and stains designed specifically for the poster. Above the area where the film's name appears, there are logos and typographic elements representing the "Best Actor" and "Best Screenplay" awards won at the Tribeca Film Festival, held annually in the United States. The festival's official logo and year are highlighted in larger fonts. In the center of the logos, typographic elements specific to Cenk Ertürk, who wrote and directed the film, are presented in a different font style. At the bottom of the poster, the actors who stand out in the film are presented in white tones and with texture and stain elements also used in the film's title. Below the actors' names, the production team's job titles (assistant director, hair and makeup, cinematographer, etc.) and team names are displayed in gray and blue tones, referring to twilight. The team names are highlighted in bold font. At the very bottom of the poster, the logos and names of supporting institutions and organizations are displayed in white tones. The visibility of these logos is achieved by contrasting them with the black background of the poster. When international and national film festival posters are compared, it is seen that language differences are presented in Turkish and English only in terms of typographic elements. The typographic elements that change in the international film poster are identified as the name of the film (Noah Land), the names of the awards won at the Tribeca Film Festival, the names of the screenwriter and director, and the names of the production team. Therefore, when international and national film festival posters are examined comparatively, no changes other than language differences are observed.

5.2. Semiotic Analysis of Noah Land Film International and National Film Festival Posters According to Peirce's Model

The analysis of the festival posters for the film *Noah Land* (2019) according to Peirce's model is presented in the table below.

Table 1.

Analysis of the Noah Land Festival Poster According to the Peirce Model

	Signs Featured on the Noah Land Poster	**Context**
Icon	Official Award Logo: Tribeca Film Festival Award	Similarity
Index	Twilight Sky: Night Rural Area: Countryside	Causal and Physical
Symbol	Noah's Tree	Non-causal and Dependent on Agreement

Source: Own elaboration.

The international and national film festival posters for the film *Noah Land* (2019) were analyzed according to Peirce's second triad classification. The two official award logos at the top of the poster directly represent the visual representation of the awards received from the Tribeca Film Festival. The second signifier element is the sky, presented in twilight and gray tones, which occupies the majority of the poster and signifies "night." This is meaningful and establishes a causal relationship, as the majority of the time in the film under consideration consists of night scenes. The second element of the sign is the geography, which presents a rural area with a single tree and soil cover, identified as a sign of the countryside. This is because the film's plot takes place in a village where the Noah Tree is considered sacred. Therefore, the element of the sign establishes a causal and physical relationship with the film's plot and setting.

The third element, the symbol, is the Noah Tree, which is the narrative sign of the film and is located at the center of the poster. This fictional symbol, related to the plot of the film, holds significant value within the narrative. According to the plot, the Noah Tree, considered sacred by the villagers, was planted thousands of years ago by the Prophet Noah. It is a widespread rumor among the villagers that Noah's Ark will come to this region. The last wish of Ibrahim, one of the main characters of the film, before he dies, is to be buried under the Noah Tree. This wish causes conflict between his son Ömer and the villagers. Therefore, this symbolically produced symbol establishes a relationship dependent on reconciliation with the narrative.

5.3. Analysis of the Noah Land Film Box Office Poster from a Graphic Design Perspective

Figure 2.

Noah Land Box Office Poster

Source: https://www.paribucineverse.com/dram-filmleri/nuh-tepesi-filmi-izle
Access Date: August 13, 2025.

A new poster has been designed for the theatrical release of the film *Noah Land* (2019) for use at the box office or in marketing campaigns. At the center of this poster are the film's two main characters, Ömer (Ali Atay) and İbrahim (Haluk Bilginer), standing back to back, their facial expressions showing furrowed brows and a state of nervousness and anger. Although the plot of the film shows a conflict between father and son, they are fighting back-to-back in a dispute with the villagers over Noah's Tree. In this respect, the positioning of the main characters on the poster and their facial expressions establish a meaningful relationship with the plot. The background of the poster and the rear of the main characters depict the village where Noah's Tree, the setting of the film's plot, is located. At the bottom of the poster, Elif (Hande Doğandemir), the wife of Ömer, one of the supporting characters in the film, who is about to get divorced, looks sad. The main conflict between Ömer and İbrahim involves the village headman Cevdet (Mehmet Özgür), who has a stern look on his face, and the village imam Ahmet (Arin Kuşaksızoğlu), who is at odds with the villagers. Therefore, in terms of visual hierarchy on the poster, the main characters are given more space, while the other supporting characters are given relatively less space. The Noah Tree is located right next to the supporting characters and, unlike the festival posters, is presented in the background.

A significant difference between box office posters and festival posters is that in Turkey, famous actors such as Ali Atay, Haluk Bilginer, Hande Doğandemir, etc., are prominently featured on box office posters. This situation is used as a box office strategy in these posters, like Hollywood's star system approach. During the golden age of Hollywood's Studio System in the 1930s and 1940s, each studio and film genre had its own specific stars. During this period, mass advertising techniques were used to ensure that the film's important stars were prominently featured on the posters with undeniable appeal. The star image became an important strategy for attracting audiences to theaters (Gomery, 2003). It has been determined that this poster design also makes use of the star system.

The film's title is presented as the central typographic element on the poster, in white and large font, with a similar design to festival posters, incorporating typographic texture and stain elements. The background uses black tones to highlight the film's title. At the bottom of the poster, the phrase "In Theaters March 6," indicating the film's release date, is presented in large font with a black tone on a yellow background. The names of the film's screenwriter and director, as well as the actors' names, are designed in white tones with similar font styles in smaller fonts. Among these typographic elements, the names of the film's two famous main characters, Ali Atay and Haluk Bilginer, are highlighted more prominently. Below the actors' names are the job titles and names of the film's production team. The team names are highlighted in bold font. At the bottom of the poster, the logos of the supporting institutions and organizations are presented in white tones.

5.4. Semiotic Analysis of the Noah Land Film Box Office Poster According to Peirce's Model

The analysis of the box office poster for the film *Noah Land* (2019) according to Peirce's model is shown in the table below.

Table 2.

Analysis of the Noah Land Box Office Poster According to the Peirce Model

	Signs Featured on the Noah Land Poster	Context
Icon	*Icon Not Detected*	Similarity
Index	Two Male Main Characters' Body Posture and Facial Expressions: Conflict Rural Area and Village Image: Countryside Female Supporting Character's Facial Expression: Sad and Unhappy Male Supporting Character's Facial Expression: Conflict	Causal and Physical
Symbol	The Noah's Tree	Non-causal and Dependent on Agreement

Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the poster for the film *Noah Land* (2019) according to Peirce's second triad classification, no icons were identified. The second element, the sign, features the stern, frowning gazes of the two male protagonists, Ömer and İbrahim, and their body positioning, which suggests they are preparing for a back-to-back struggle, indicating a conflict. The character Ömer, positioned in front of his father İbrahim, is shown to be the central element of the conflict. In the plot, after Ömer and İbrahim claim that Noah's Tree is on their land and ask to be buried next to it when their father dies, the villagers become hostile towards these two characters. Ömer never gives up this struggle and does everything to fulfill his father's last wish. Therefore, this signifier identified in the poster establishes a meaningful and causal relationship with the film's plot.

The second signifier element is the image of a rural area and village on the poster's background, which indicates that the plot will take place in the countryside, far from the center and the city. Vast forests, small two-story houses, and a mosque are the visual elements that form this village image. This is because the film's plot takes place in a village where the Noah Tree is located. From this perspective, this element on the poster's background establishes a causal and physical relationship with the plot. Other elements are the sad and unhappy facial expression of the female supporting character, Elif, at the bottom of the poster, and the stern and frowning expression of the other male supporting character, which indicates a conflict. According to the plot, Elif is in a depressive state throughout the film as she is in the process of divorcing Ömer. One of the key elements of the conflict between Ömer, his father, the Nuh Tree, and the villagers is Cevdet, the village's needy resident. Therefore, the facial expressions of both supporting characters establish a causal relationship with the plot. The third

element, the symbol, is identified in this poster as the Tree of Noah. Placed beside the secondary characters and behind the vision date, this symbol is left in the background, unlike festival posters, and is an important narrative sign in the film.

5.5. Analysis of the Graphic Language of the Posters for the Burning Days Film International and National Film Festival

Directed by Emin Alper, the film *Burning Days* (2022) stars Selahattin Paşalı (Emre), Ekin Koç (Murat), and Selin Yeninci (Zeynep), among others. The film's main plot revolves around young prosecutor Emre, who is assigned to the town of Yanıklar and fights against lawlessness and social and moral decay. As the election approaches, tensions rise in Yanıklar, a town facing a water crisis and political conflicts. Prosecutor Emre and opposition journalist Murat are under pressure in their fight against the corrupt system.

Figure 3.

Burning Days Festival Posters

Source: https://www.imdb.com/it/title/tt14859416/mediaviewer/rm1950232321/
Access Date: 07/29/2025

The image of a sinkhole[2], one of the film's main locations, is depicted in sepia and brown tones at the center and bottom of the poster, matching the color tones of the surrounding landscape. The soil covering the upper part of the sinkholes is also presented as treeless and barren land to depict drought and thirst. According to the film's plot, sinkholes are forming in the town of Yanıklar, which is experiencing drought and a water crisis, due to the misuse and overuse of groundwater in various projects. The only house with a constant supply of water is that of the mayor. The

[2] Sinkhole: These are deep, circular or elliptical depressions resembling large chimneys or natural wells, formed in karstic plateaus composed of soluble sedimentary rocks due to the dissolution of underground limestone and the subsequent collapse of the ceiling sections of underground cave systems. Irregular and improper use of groundwater, incorrect irrigation techniques, or delay in switching to drip irrigation cause sinkholes (Ertek, 2009, p.67).

solution to the water crisis is one of the biggest promises in the upcoming election in Yanıklar. At the top of the poster, the film's protagonist, Prosecutor Emre (Selahattin Paşalı), is placed in the background, wearing a black suit with a stern and determined expression on his face. The fact that he is the only character featured on the poster allows for the interpretation that he is the main character. Blood trails in the shape of a line can be seen immediately below the character of Prosecutor Emre. Presented as a design element in the form of a straight line, the blood organizes perception and directs the gaze towards Prosecutor Emre, who contrasts with the background in terms of color tone. In this context, it can be seen that the line and color codes are used functionally as design elements that organize perception in this poster.

From a typographic perspective, when examining the poster, the film's title (in the largest font size), screenwriter and director Emin Alper, and the names of the two actors featured in the film, Selahattin Paşalı and Ekin Koç, are prominently displayed in white tones horizontally across the center of the poster. The blood trails starting at the top also direct the perception and gaze to these typographic elements. At the bottom, the names of the production team and members (cinematographer, art director, editor, etc.) appear in smaller fonts and a different font style. At the very top of the poster, the official logo of the 75th Cannes Film Festival's *Un Certain Regard* section, where the film had its international premiere, is featured in black tones. At the bottom of the poster are the logos and names of the supporting institutions and organizations. The background is blurred to increase the visibility of these logos and names. It has been determined that the fundamental difference in international and national film festival poster designs lies solely in typographic elements reflecting language differences. In international film posters, language differences are seen in English: the film's title (Burning Days), the screenwriter and director credits, and the job titles of the production team members. Therefore, when international and national film festival posters are examined comparatively, no changes other than language differences are observed.

5.6. Semiotic Analysis of the Posters for the International and National Film Festival Burning Days According to Peirce's Model

The analysis of the festival posters for the film *Burning Days* (2022) according to Peirce's model is presented in the table below.

Table 3.

Analysis of Burning Days Festival Posters According to the Peirce Model

	Signs Featured on the Burning Days Poster	**Context**
Icon	Palme d'Or Logo: Cannes Film Festival	Similarity
Index	Male Character Costume and Body Language: Prosecutor Rural Area: Countryside Barren Land and Sinkhole: Drought	Causal and Physical
Symbol	Blood Trails Sinkhole	Non-causal and Dependent on Agreement

Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the international and national film festival posters for the film *Burning Days* (2022), according to Peirce's second triad classification, the Palme d'Or logo at the top of the poster serves as an icon of the Cannes Film Festival due to the representational relationship it establishes with its object. When examining the second element, the character's costume and body language on the poster, when interpreted in the context of the film's plot, establish a causal and physical relationship and are included in the sample as an indication of his role as a prosecutor. It is seen that the costume choices of the film's protagonist, Public Prosecutor Emre, are similar to those on the poster. In terms of indication, the second element is that the poster predominantly indicates that the film is set in a rural area. This is because the plot of the film takes place in a small town called Yanıklar and establishes a causal relationship in a manner consistent with the poster. The third element, barren land and sinkholes, indicates an arid and infertile geography, thus appearing on the poster as a sign of drought. When the graphic language on the poster is combined with a semiotic approach, the signs present establish a causal and physical relationship.

According to this model, the third element, the symbol, is identified in the blood trails and the sinkhole. When interpreted within the context of the film's plot, the blood trails become a narrative symbol. The film's opening sequence begins with a scene in the town of Yanıklar, where the people are hunting pigs. The prosecutor drives his car over the blood trails left by the pig hunt. The pig hunt scene is presented with powerful cinematography as a demonstration of the wild and primitive nature of the men of Yanıklar village. In the film's final sequence, after the townspeople win the election, the film ends with a scene in which Prosecutor Emre and journalist Murat, seen as opponents of Yanıklar, are placed in a position of being "hunted" in a manner similar to the pig hunt scene, and are attacked. In this sense, the blood trails on the poster establish a symbolic relationship, representing protagonist Emre's bloody and arduous journey in Yanıklar town. The sinkhole, the second symbolic element, represents the town of Yanıklar, which is experiencing numerous political, moral, and social collapses alongside a water crisis. When interpreted within the context of the film's plot, the sinkholes symbolize the social and moral division and collapse in Yanıklar. A representational relationship can be established between the town of Yanıklar, which

is in a state of collapse due to numerous crimes and criminal elements such as corruption, rape, and evidence obscured by the justice system, and the sinkholes.

5.7. Analysis of the Graphic Language of the Burning Days Film Box Office Poster

Figure 4.

Burning Days Box Office Poster

Source: https://www.paribucineverse.com/dram-filmleri/kurak-gunler-filmi-izle
Access Date: 31.07.2025

With the release of *Burning Days* (2022) in theaters, a new poster was designed, distinct from the posters used for international and national film festivals. At the center of this poster are the film's two main characters, Prosecutor Emre (Selahattin Paşalı) and opposition journalist Murat (Ekin Koç). These two main characters are positioned in opposition to each other. Throughout the film, a similar frame is mostly presented. The ambiguity surrounding whether Prosecutor Emre and journalist Murat are allies or enemies is a conflict element highlighted in the movie. The characters' costumes are presented in a manner consistent with the costumes worn in the film. An important reason for featuring two famous actors prominently on this poster (image and typography) is that they are placed on the box office poster in a manner similar to Hollywood's star system. The two powerful symbols of the film on the background of the poster, the sinkhole and the blood trails, have been left in the background, unlike festival posters.

From a typographic perspective, the poster features nine identical award logos (SIYAD Best Film, Best Director, Best Cinematography, etc.) at the top, along with one official logo for the 75th Cannes Film Festival's *Un Certain Regard* section. The 9 identical award logos were designed specifically for the poster, and the different awards received at the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival are presented as typographic elements in black tones. The names of two important actors (Selahattin Paşalı, Ekin

Koç) are prominently displayed in black tones among the typographic elements at the center of the poster. The names of the screenwriter and director, as well as the film's title, are prominently displayed in white tones. The film's title is the largest typographic element on the poster. Below it, the names of the production team and members (cinematographer, sound design & final mix, art director, editor, etc.) are presented in smaller fonts with a different font style. Below this section, the film's release date (December 9), an important sign for box office posters, is added in a larger font. At the very bottom of the poster are the logos of the supporting institutions and organizations.

5.8. Semiotic Analysis of the Burning Days Film Box Office Poster According to Peirce's Model

The analysis of the box office posters for the film *Burning Days* (2022) according to Peirce's model is presented in the table below.

Table 4.

Analysis of the Burning Days Box Office Poster According to the Peirce Model

	Signs Featured on the Burning Days Poster	**Context**
Icon	9 Standard Award Logo: Film Festival Award Palme d'Or Logo: Cannes Film Festival	Similarity
Index	Two Male Main Characters Positioning and Facial Expressions: Conflict Rural Area: Countryside	Causal and Physical
Symbol	Blood Trails Sinkhole	Non-causal and Dependent on Agreement

Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the poster for the film *Burning Days* (2022) according to Peirce's second triad classification, the nine identical award logos at the top of the poster serve as a visual signifier representing the different awards received at the film festival, establishing an association by directly representing the object they refer to or stand in for. The Palme d'Or logo, similar to the sign featured on festival posters, is identified as an icon representing the official logo of the Cannes Film Festival's *Un Certain Regard* section. The identified icons are used as a means of persuasion to draw audiences to cinemas.

The second element in the poster is the positioning of the two main characters in the center of the poster, facing each other, and their stern and determined expressions, which indicate that they will face each other in the plot and that a conflict is imminent. This is because, within the plot of the film, these two characters, who appear to be opponents of the people of Yanıklar, have an ambiguous and tense relationship with each other. Prosecutor Emre and opposition journalist Murat stand against the municipality in a lawsuit concerning the municipality's misguided projects that caused the water crisis and sinkholes. However, prosecutor Emre suspects that Murat is

manipulating him and constantly following him with a hidden agenda. Therefore, the signifier on the poster establishes a meaningful and causal relationship with the film's plot. Another significant element is the rural landscape depicted in the background of the poster, which indicates that the film's plot will take place in the countryside. This element establishes a representational connection between the film's setting and the town of Yanıklar, which is experiencing drought and a water crisis. The third element, the symbol, is identified by the blood trails and the sinkhole. These two important symbols on the background of the poster are positioned behind the main characters and left in the background. The representational relationship it establishes with the narrative bears similarities to the analysis of festival posters.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Film posters function as visual instruments of communication designed to promote films and draw audiences to theaters, strategically integrated into broader media planning. Within the scope of Turkish cinema, this study analyzed independent film posters by classifying them into two categories: *festival posters* and *box office posters*. The findings, aligned with the research questions and objectives, demonstrate that each category maintains a meaningful and contextually coherent internal logic. Designed for distinct venues (film festivals and mainstream cinemas) and addressing distinct target audiences (festival-goers and mainstream audiences), these posters convey their messages through carefully constructed signs. One of the significant outcomes of this research is the identification of a strategic approach to poster design in Turkish independent cinema, tailored specifically to audience type and exhibition context.

Existing scholarship reinforces this line of argument, highlighting the strategic use of posters across diverse contexts. Pooranalingam (2024, pp. 1-19), for example, identified four distinct types of strategic design in film posters based on semi-structured interviews, revealing recurring stereotypes in composition and design within film genres. His findings suggest that the genre-specific strategic use of poster design influences audience preferences as a dimension of consumer behavior. One of the key findings of the study is a strong correlation between film genres and posters in terms of color schemes. Particularly in broad film genres such as horror, action, and comedy, clusters associated with genre-specific stereotyping have been identified (Souza et al., 2025, pp. 26900-26901). Similarly, Mahlknecht's (2012, pp. 137-168) research on Hollywood adaptations of literary works established that poster design privileges star actors over the author or literary structure, thereby limiting originality. More recently, Suárez-Carballo et al. (2024, pp. 201–216) demonstrated that digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime have driven significant changes in poster design, particularly in orientation (horizontal/vertical) and device adaptability (television, computer, mobile). Nonetheless, their study confirms the persistence of star-centered imagery, which perpetuates the "star system" as a dominant marketing strategy. This approach, widely adopted in the media industry, emphasizes commercial imperatives by maximizing poster marketability and remains among the most effective methods for increasing box office performance (Collado-Alonso, 2015, p. 74; Mahlknecht, 2012).

This study's findings reveal that both international and national posters for *Noah Land* (2019) display official award logos, depict the temporal (dusk/night) and spatial (rural) setting, foreground the protagonists, and highlight the Noah Tree—a central symbol of conflict. The only distinction between the international and national versions lies in language (English/Turkish). In addition, the poster emphasizes two well-known Turkish actors in leading roles, while other narrative signs (time/place) and symbolic references are relegated to the background. In the case of *Burning Days* (2022), both international and national festival posters feature the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or logo alongside depictions of the rural and barren setting, the sinkhole, and the main character (the Prosecutor). Here, however, the central imagery privileges symbolic elements—the blood trails and the sinkhole—while the protagonist appears in the background. Once again, the only variation between international and national posters is linguistic. By contrast, box office posters for the same film prominently display nine award logos in addition to the Palme d'Or, reinforcing its status as an "award-winning" production. These designs highlight two well-known Turkish male actors at the center, while symbolic and narrative signs are relegated to secondary positions in the composition.

The comparative analysis thus indicates recurrent patterns within Turkish independent cinema poster design. Festival posters prioritize symbolic systems and narrative-specific signs—such as Noah's Tree, the blood trails, or the sinkhole—that demand interpretive engagement from audiences. As such, these designs appeal primarily to a "festival audience," who are expected to decode and interpret complex symbolic references. Conversely, box office posters are crafted for a "mainstream audience" and function primarily within promotional and marketing frameworks. Consistent with the Hollywood star system, they prioritize recognizable actors, positioning them prominently at the center of the composition to attract audiences. These findings align with and extend the arguments advanced by Mahlknecht (2012), Collado-Alonso (2015), and Suárez-Carballo et al. (2024), while also revealing the adoption of Hollywood strategies in the marketing of Turkish independent films. In conclusion, this study establishes that festival posters foreground interpretive signs and symbols, while box office posters emphasize star-centered imagery and minimize narrative symbolism. Consequently, mainstream audiences are not expected to engage in interpretive analysis; instead, poster design leverages celebrity recognition as a persuasive tool.

The findings of this research demonstrate that producers and film distribution companies in Turkish cinema employ a strategic practice of altering film posters to market independent productions. Accordingly, the strategic presentation of signs—either directly or indirectly (with an emphasis on symbolic elements)—based on the medium and target audience underscores the central role of visual communication in poster production. The results reveal that, throughout the visual design process, signs are arranged in the most visually striking manner according to the characteristics and expectations of the intended audience. In terms of its contribution to the semiotics literature, this study is significant for its original categorization of independent film posters into two types—"festival" and "box office"—and for uncovering sign

strategies that differ according to the target audience. By linking semiotic interpretation to audience segmentation (festival-oriented and mainstream viewers), the study demonstrates that festival and box office posters generate two distinct, verifiable, and coherent sign systems. Future research is encouraged to build upon these findings by examining national and international festival and box office posters of independent films in other cultural contexts, thereby advancing the field further.

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