

Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

The Sociology of Masks: From Face-to-Face to Mask-to-Mask Communication

Maskenin Sosyolojisi: Yüz Yüze İletişimden Maskeli İletişime



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Başvuru Tarihi | Date Received: 12.04.2022
Yayına Kabul Tarihi | Date Accepted: 03.07.2022
Yayınlanma Tarihi | Date Published: 22.07.2022
<https://doi.org/10.17680/erciyesiletisim.1102619>

Abstract

In addition to their function as a health measure, masks have become a sign and symbol during the Covid 19 pandemic. The aim of this study is to reveal the transformation of masks into sociological symbols in fields such as social category, identity, rites of passage, and aesthetics within the framework of the virus-induced social change in addition to its role as a health measure. Different from other body-protecting gears in daily life, masks cover the face. The face is the primary area of communication for humans. Interactions in society inevitably take on different forms for us to express ourselves. Covering the human face, masks have become reflections of people's true desires, thus turning into boards of disclosure. White masks are now replaced by colorful masks flaunting a variety of symbols from cartoon characters for children to symbols of political goals of certain political actors, the expression of identity, aesthetic satisfaction, and names of celebrities; in short, they have transformed into social symbols. The examples given in this research provide evidence for the transformation of masks into a "disclosure board" by turning into tools of social interaction in addition to their role as a health measure.

Keywords: Mask, Indicator, Covid 19 Pandemic.

Öz

Pandemi döneminde hastalığın bulaş riskine karşı insanların taktıkları maskenin sağlığı koruma işlevinin yanında toplumsal simge ve sembollere dönüştüğünü gözlemliyoruz. Bu makaledeki amaç, maskenin sadece sağlığı koruma nesnesi olarak değil aynı zamanda virüsün etkisiyle oluşan yeni toplumsal değişim içinde toplumsal kategori, kimlik, geçiş törenleri ve estetik gibi alanlarda maskenin sosyolojik semgelere dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktır. Maskenin, gündelik hayat içerisinde bedeni koruyan diğer ihtiyaç ürünlerinden farkı; yüzü kaplamasıdır. İnsanlar için yüz, birincil iletişim alanıdır. Toplumda etkileşimin olması kaçınılmaz olarak farklı formlara bürünerek kendimizi ifade etmemizi sağlar. Maske insan yüzünü kapattığı için, kişinin asıl istediği şeyi yansıtır hale gelmiştir bu da maskeyi ifşa panosuna dönüştürmüştür. Beyaz maske yerini birçok renkte; çocuklar için çizgi film kahramanlarına, siyasal aktörlerin politik amaçlarına, kimliğin dışa vurumu, estetik duygu tatmini ve bazı kesim için ünlülerin isimlerinin yazılmasına, kısacası toplumsal semgelere bırakmıştır. Araştırmadaki verdiğimiz örnekler, maskenin sağlık problemini önleyici işlevinin yanında yüzün kapanan kısmında toplumsal etkileşim aracına dönüşüp gösterge olurken "ifşa panosu" olduğunu kanıtlar niteliktedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maske, Gösterge, Covid 19 Pandemi.



Introduction

Our social life has been deeply affected by the introduction of some precautionary rules to cope with the pandemic. One of these rules is the obligation to wear a mask. We have observed that the mask takes on sociological symbols besides its health function. As a method, we used a qualitative data analysis method. From our observations as well as from some photos we obtained on digital platforms and product outlets, we have determined that the pandemic mask has turned into a tool that reflects the separation of social categories, identity and political discourses, an expression of aesthetics and fame, and its symbols in parades.

While the mask was the “we are all the same” mode in the first times of use, after a while, it was seen that the epidemic took the form of social communication and transitioned to the “we are all different” mode. We tried to explain this one by one by explaining that social communication and interaction in the sociological sense, with the pandemic, turned into an indicator in the form of a “mask to mask” for the communication of masks, by replacing the mask instead of “face to face” face to face. Features of the mask that cause the mask to turn into a disclosure board; Masks made of single/multiple, metal, cloth, cheap/expensive fabrics, etc., the colors used, the writings on them, and finally, emblems, signs, symbols. Although these are covered by the face, they do not fully correspond to the color, gesture, mimic and lines on the face, just like these, the colors, lines, amplitudes and writings on the mask are converted into symbols to complete them. With these features, we can say that the mask contains social reflective elements. We tried to give the historical background of the mask before it turned into a disclosure board where we see the social reflections of the pandemic mask. We mentioned that with the epidemic, new norms prevent face-to-face communication in our social life, block it and this creates a chance to make up for it, albeit with the mask of pandemic. In the following pages, we have given the sociological factors underlying the mask’s transformation into a sign. Categorically, which is the social reflections of the pandemic mask; Age and profession, identity, ceremonies, fame, aesthetic concerns were revealed with photographs. We tried to prove that the masks made contribute to social communication through personal preferences and create interaction.

Covid-19 is a disease caused by a virus that was first identified on January 13, 2020. The disease emerged in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and manifested with respiratory symptoms such as fever, coughing, and shortness of breath. After the global spread of the endemic virus, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease a pandemic. Not long after, the pandemic caused the reconstruction of human-human relationships around new rules during a new period of unknown duration (Agamben, 2020:13). The USA Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was airborne and can be transmitted via very small-sized aerosol particles. Larger droplets can leave the air in seconds or minutes, but aerosol particles can be suspended in the air for durations from minutes to hours. In June 2020, the WHO announced that the new coronavirus could suspend in crowded and closed areas in which the risk of “short-range aerosol transmission...could not be excluded” (Anonim n. d.). The scientific studies during the pandemic have highlighted the use of masks as the leading method for reducing the risk of transmission. The European countries have mandated the use of masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and impose fines ranging from 95 Euros to 6 thousand Euros on those who fail to follow this rule (WHO t. y.).

Covid 19 has deeply influenced social life and brought along a need for reorganization. Health measures have introduced new rules to public spaces. Mask use, social distancing, and hygiene have turned into “social norms” and were determined to be defense measures against the risk of transmission. Inevitably ignorant of its outcomes, the measures against the pandemic have been severe and harsh.

The process beginning with the pandemic has necessitated the reconstruction of human relationships. The measures employed during the pandemic have changed social life. The socialization needs of individuals have not been met and isolation measures have hindered social interactions for some time. The introduction of certain that help combat the pandemic has deeply influenced the social life. Daily life has come to a stopping point. Our routines have been disturbed. The society has witnessed this new life in dismay while searching for ways to overcome it. Although being aware of the need to act within the confines of the “new normal”, they struggled to adjust to the new and had difficulty abandoning their typical lives. The global world has indisputably imposed the use of masks as a public health measure against the death, disease, and transmission risks that were brought about by Covid-19.

In this day and age, we cannot eliminate all risk factors. We must accept the emergence of a new sociological process (Günerigök, 2018:22). We can see how the use of masks was facilitated by the necessity brought along by the transmission risk during the pandemic. Social isolation has become the leading measure against the transmission of the disease. Face-to-face communication has come to a halt due to social isolation, leading to a disengagement that necessitated the reestablishment of interactions through other channels. Individuals have tried to compensate for this disengagement with virtual reality and have met their human needs through the connections in the virtual world. The rejection and inaction of certain communities during the pandemic have culminated in irreparable crises. For example, the United Kingdom did not take any measures against the pandemic at its initial stage, which resulted in a dramatic number of patients, leading to taking measures such as the use of masks and social distancing rules (Zizek, 2021:22).

The primary thought of individuals in this new normal has become not contracting the disease and the search for safety. Agamben views the fear of losing one’s life as: “fear is a bad guide, but it can unravel many things humans may otherwise ignore.”(Agamben, 2020:13). Fear has brought along the masked life which functions as a safeguard against the transmission of the disease. The disease has the risk of death that brings along a fear that goes beyond the risk and creates a state of uncertainty. The medicinal sciences and society’s insufficient knowledge of the pandemic and the mutation of the virus into many variants posed a danger origin of which was unbeknownst to us and the safest protection against which was masks.

Masks are known to have had various functions since the early ages. Masks were used for religious and ritualistic purposes in the hunting-gathering and agriculture societies and health purposes in industrial society. Different philosophers have speculated about masks. Keeping theater at arm’s length, Plato had a negative view of masks. According to Plato, the truth is made up of ideas. He regarded art as mimicry and postulated that it could not shed light on the world of ideas. To him, everything in the universe has a source of truth and people could not see the existing truths and can only see their reflection on the world of appearances. The truth we see is mere copies of God reflecting on the world of appearances. This can also be applied to the use of masks during the pandemic.

Masks cannot replace the face that is the truth. Due to its role as a reflection during the pandemic, this false tool has strengthened self-disclosure and connection with the truth to enhance interactions with other people.

Masks are interesting and impressive face models that cover the face, and sometimes the entire body, and that is made up of natural plants or animal skins; it, thus, turns animals, supernatural creatures, and ancestors into animations (Anonim t.y.). Masks close people off from the outer world and take on the form of an identity that helps self-expression (Güner, 2006:3). Masks leave a great impression on people by not giving out a clue about what they are covering. They cover everything and thrust themselves forward. Masks draw their strength mainly from their ability to cover everything behind them. Masks are excellent in that they manage to overshadow everything behind them and emerge as single beings. The impact of masks comes from not knowing what is behind them (Elias, 2010:379). Masks cover something but assert another thing. There is something that is essentially hidden. The society-wide use of masks due to the virus their “social language” has found the interaction and paved the way for social communication. During the pandemic, masks have gained a different function. The Covid 19 pandemic/period was the first time when masks were used for purposes other than their function. Masks have been used in health units and heavy industrial zones. Before the pandemic, the use of masks was limited to hospitals, mining workers, and chemistry factories; but now, the limit of masks has extended to the common living spaces of people. The use of masks has become a prerequisite anywhere humans come together.

Masks have become objects of sociological research following their new status as a global phenomenon, society-wide use, conversion into a social communication and interaction form due to the social change during the Covid-19 pandemic. Society faced a blockage of face-to-face communication after the restrictions and then, opened the gates to communication through the use of masks. During this period, the world scene has turned into a “live performance” through masks with its actors and spectators.

Face as an Area of Social Interaction

The face is defined as the “front side of the head on which the forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, and chin are located”(Anonim t.y.). It is our first introduction and interaction with others. The face is defined as the body part that is readily noticed and distinguishes us from others. The face is the manifestation of the self and emotions and the tangible expression of our outpouring inner intangible world. Our face is not just one and only to others but to ourselves, our personalities, and perceptions. We identify ourselves with our faces. Our face is the clearest symbol of our individual identities.

The face sociologically functions as a communication tool in social interactions. The sameness of the emotions such as fear, hope, and desire that are reflected on the human face differs from the sameness of the feared, hoped, or desired objects. People attach meaning to faces differently and the personality and education of the person affect the meaning. We may not find the same expression on the same face just by looking at it. We can liken the effort to learn the motives of people from their actions alone and do it without comparing to ourselves or discerning the situations that can alter the event to opening a door without a key. We can be mistaken if we talk assuredly about a person just by looking at their faces. The person who is doing the act of knowing might not be good or bad themselves (Anonim t. y.). A person cannot fully know a person by just looking at the things they do. We need to establish intimacy to know a person (Hobbes, 2007:18).

The face can be viewed as a window of a person they allow others to look at. On the other hand, the face can function as a mask that disguises the truth. People in society first interact with face-to-face communication as the most basic form of expression. This face-to-face relationship carries certain judgments and meanings. The conveyance of the color, mimics, and gestures on a face to someone is the face that the person chooses to show to another. Although the appearance of a person is specific to that person, the way they express it is under the influence of the social life they live.

Baudrillard says that a Native American person says to the white person who asks them why they live naked: "Everything I am is my face". This remark implies that the face is not only the area covering our nose, mouth, chin, and ears but also the body itself. The body is the face itself and has the ability to look (Baudrillard, 2005:47).

According to Georg Simmel, "The face is the area on which personal experience reflects and experiences leave traces. The face does not act like the other organs or the hands, feet, and entire body; it acts as an exporter form of information and never supports the internal or practical behaviors of people, just expresses them to others." (Simmel, 2015:223). Pierre Bourdieu claims that a person interacts with certain groups since childhood and constantly recreates themselves and their belonging to the group. The experiences a person gains within the group/groups form the identity of a person to an extent (Kocabay, 2014:218). Wearing the mask of a place a person feels belonging to can also be viewed as assuming the role that their group expects from them. The face essentially turns into a mask, provides interaction with the group of a person, and the person defines themselves using their masks.

By saying "the world is a stage", Erving Goffman adopted the theatrical modeling of social interaction (Goffman, 2012:13). Interpersonal interactions approach all face-to-face relationships as theatrical performances. The use of masks during the pandemic has turned this performance into a "live performance" and turned the world stage into a theater stage.

The expression of one's self with masks and the establishment of "us" reveal that masks have a dynamic structure. Unlike masks, the face is not a detached reality from the person and is viewed as a product of human interaction. The difference between the masked face and the face lies in masked face's openness to change at any time and disposability.

Mask manifests itself in every area. It coincides with Carl G. Jung's persona archetype. The "shadow" concept described in the persona archetype could be safely defined as a mask (Kavut, 2020:685). Masks could be a mediator for self-camouflage, self-protection, or self-display with a different identity. They can appear in the form of different identities that are imposed on us by social roles. Each identity manifests itself anew with a new mask. Although the face is the area on which emotions and thoughts are expressed, it does not always reflect the truth. It sometimes turns into a mask and sometimes becomes the simplest reflection of a person. The use of masks during the pandemic has transformed the face into a board of disclosure beyond the natural emotions and reactions of the face and has responded to the need to exist in the social space.

The Blockage of Face-to-Face Communication

The pandemic has blocked the channels for face-to-face communication. The risk of transmission has pushed people from public spaces to specific spaces. The relationship between people and their social circles has become almost non-existent and social

relationships have been carried out around the digital world. Efforts were made to fulfill the human need for communication and interaction with other people through the virtual. Albeit a shortcoming, the adjustment to the new normal did not seem too easy considering health concerns and the thought of death.

The social person will try and open new communication channels when they become aware of certain circumstances that are not satisfied by the fictitious world. The human-human contact has become a grand issue, except in the cases of certain basic needs. The closure of social spaces has threatened this need. Parks, markets, and shopping centers have subsided into silence. The first year of the pandemic continued under almost a “full lockdown”.

The lockdowns have triggered people’s desire to go out and meet other people. The medicinal sciences (the institution of health) and digital governance (the institutions of law and safety) have gained importance in the reconstruction of our social world. Although we maintain that we could pursue our old lifestyles, the belief that this is no longer possible has become dominant (Zizek, 2021:27). The comfort of voyeurism we acquired through the digital world does not seem to leave our lives any time soon. Although easing staying at home, it blocked social interaction for a long time.

The control of the use of masks was compensated by their emergence as a new form of expression. The digital “Life Fits into Home Code” was created to help controlled circulation after the pandemic was under control. The new measures helped people travel, but the natural circulation of human togetherness was no more.

The regulations to prevent the spread of the disease have turned into social norms. Social distancing has become a social rule and led to the end of face-to-face contact and one-on-one interaction and communication.

The Transformation of the Face into a Disclosure Board/Symbol

The prevention of human’s going out to public spaces has suspended the interaction of the face as a form of communication with other faces. As an alternative to this blocked communication channel, masks turned into a tool of symbols for social differentiation and transformed into a disclosure board, replacing face-to-face communication.

Change and transformation are inevitable in social life. The triggers of this transformation and the inspiration for masks are nature and animals. In the book entitled “Masks: Faces of Culture”¹, this is exemplified using a frog species called Bufo. This species has inspired a masked rite of transformation in many ancient cultures. People were inspired by frogs not only in ancient cultures but also in many modern cultures. Today, performances are made wearing frog masks during the Jonkunnu Festival in the Bahamas (Nunley ve Cara, 1999:30). The main trigger of the use of masks during the pandemic has been the risk of transmission. This distinguishes their use on certain days and carnivals as it relates to our trust in hygiene. The use of masks in the form of symbols and representations of fertility, strength, and staying young was replaced by their use as symbols of the reflection of people’s inner worlds in response to the act of closure.

Masks hide the person behind them with the new portrait they offer; they transform and change their identity. They sometimes represent death and face itself as in the example of ancient Egypt (Güner, 2006:2). Masks gain their appearance within the framework of where they are used and the purposes of their use and thus, have a large variety. Masks

are made of various materials and attain their expression with the costume they come with, with the show they are a part of, with their actors, and with their spectators. When considered independently from rituals, masks merely have aesthetic importance (Güner, 2006:3). Masks are the oldest identity transformers and new identity installers (Nunley ve Cara, 1999:15). Masks can hide, change, or transform people (Samuel, 2021). Masks attain this ability through not having mimicry, which is an anatomical feature of humans and reflects momentary changes. Masks emphasize that nothing before them can create change in them with their stable and constant expression. Masks acquire their stable expression by covering the face that shows varying features through the mimics. Mimics are the clearest examples of people's openness to change. Regardless of the outcomes of the change, masks go against the motile and varying structure of the face with their constant structure (Elias, 2010:377). Masks are the frozen expressions and awe-inspiring echoes of emotions that are both loyal, hidden, and perfect (Santayana, 1922:132).

In addition to their various functions, masks (Anonim n. d.) symbolize the transition from "we are all the same" to "we are all different" by taking on the form of social communication. The differentiation of masks is not limited to the pandemic. One of the appearances of masks in the Turkish culture emerges in the discussions about the transcription of the *Kanmuldıg-Hovu* Inscription among the 158 Yenisei Inscriptions. In addition to the differences in the pronunciation of "flag/cover" and "face/complexion", the inscription is colloquially referred to as "father with a covered face". We know that plaster masks were placed on the faces of the dummies that represent the dead by the Turkic Tribes in South Siberia and Yenisei Kyrgyz. The headstones also reveal certain class distinctions. For example, maskless tombs belong to poor people and the locals refer to them as "plain faces" (Useev, 2018:646).

Social communication and interaction are carried out face-to-face. On the other hand, the virtual world assumes the load of human interaction to an extent so much so that the virtual channels may entirely surround human life. The cultural differences, identities, ideologies, and sexist attitudes of people were extinguished by the growing global impact of the pandemic, leading to focusing on how we can get together again. Seeing each other's faces has become as important as health. Humans have tried to virtually rebuild social "communication and interaction". Masks tried to become a "form of communication" with their shapes, colors, and inscriptions to remedy the reflexes of people that were brought about by the pandemic. Masks have been an attempt at rebuilding a natural and interactional world.

A symbol is anything that signifies something (Anonim t. y.). Symbols in sociology are signs used in social spaces. Sociologically, not all signs are symbols. The signs should initially have a meaning and motivation. The social connection of certain signs is not arguable if the meaning of the sign is only known to a specific person and the sign does not carry motivation. For example, wearing black masks indicates grief in the Turkish culture while indicating the unknown and perfection in the Japanese culture. To qualify as a sociological symbol, an object must be associated with common emotions and thoughts by a group or society.

The backdrop of the transformation of masks into symbols is explainable using two circumstances. First, masks are used by everyone to combat the risk of transmission. The use of masks is collectively approved in consideration of social responsibility, empathy, and punitive sanctions. Second, society has turned masks into "social boards" by attaching

social appearances to them due to society's need to reconstruct social connections during this isolation period.

a. The requirement for general mask use and the transformation of masks into a social norm:

- The universal use of masks indicates the assumption of personal responsibility. Regardless of age, gender, and race, the universal impact of the pandemic led to regarding masks as positive contributors to public health, except for certain cases of neglect and protest. Wearing masks can be viewed as a collective action to protect public health. The majority believe that those who do not wear masks avoid social responsibility and risk the majority of society. Most believe that wearing masks is necessary.
- The restrictions on going out to public spaces without wearing a mask also justify the use of masks. The private space is where the obligation to wear masks is lifted and is the place of shelter for a person. The others exist in public spaces. For free circulation in the public space, a person must wear a mask.
- People with chronic diseases have to wear masks with the added risk of the pandemic, which also contributes to wearing masks in every setting.
- Masks have provided a new space in response to new daily restrictions and helped people socialize and participate in many activities. They became mediators of the pursuit of our old lives in parks, shopping centers, cafeterias, etc.

b. The exposure of social differences by masks and diversification of masks using different colors, shapes, materials, and models:

- Another cause of the role of masks as social symbols is the coverage of the face. The coverage of the face as a strong way of social communication indicates weakened social connections.
- The transformation of masks into social symbols is also facilitated by their ability to easily assume different colors and patterns.
- The purchase of masks depends on people's statuses, incomes, and the need to purchase them stems from individual or group ideas, which lead to the transformation of masks into social symbols.
- The market economies' effort to catch more market opportunities and serve advertisements became one of the driving forces behind the transformation of masks.

Other sociological causes can also be mentioned for the use of masks. The role of masks as social reflectors goes beyond health needs and turns into an expression of participation in social spaces. The change in social conditions does not revoke people's need to be "seen". People will assume other forms to be seen in their interactions with other people. People have tried to remedy "loss of face" during the pandemic using masks. The extinguished expressions on faces with the use of masks are rekindled by the social reconstruction of masks in different sizes, colors, and signs. Although disguising the face, masks have become indicators of gender, age, and identity.

The silencing of public space, transition to private spaces, and almost non-existent social life underlie the transformation of masks into social symbols and the reconstruction of social memory. Wearing masks somewhat means the dedifferentiation of all spaces. The covering of all faces points to the indistinction of individual identities. The compulsory use of masks causes faces to hinder self-presentation. Having a covered face limits

people's communication. The insufficiency of public communication shakes common sharing spaces and creates strange spaces for individuals. The collective stance that is offered by covered faces turned people into disconnected masses. Social life reappeared on the stage with instruments that can reconstruct it, with masks being the most colorful one of them all.

The features of masks that contribute to their transformation into disclosure boards are the use of single/multiple, metallic, cloth, cheap/expensive fabrics, their colors, inscriptions, emblems, signs, and symbols. Despite disguising the face, these features perfectly correspond to the gestures, mimics, and lines of faces. The features of masks harbor socially reflective elements. The fashion of masks contributes to social communicant and gives birth to interaction through personal preferences.

The Social Reflection of Masks

Masks have replaced our real faces by reconstructing socialization (Çil, 2021:241). The use of masks emerged in the form of visibility and self-presentation in public. Wearing masks, individuals can use their appearances as means to convey desirable signals at the public level. A person cannot have the same age, gender, ideology, identity, sports team, and aesthetic concerns as those of the community they live in. How they use masks reflected people's worldview in different colors and shades. Masks have also served as the manifestation of social memory. The difference between the use of masks during the pandemic and their other uses lies in its continuity in daily life and the transformation of masks into disclosure boards through opening the previously closed communication channels. Considering this function, the use and communication side of masks have naturally changed over time. Ancient people approved the use of masks to communicate with nature and other people while in this age when appearances have come to the forefront, masks have been reduced to the roles that people assume with their abstract manifestations. We can clearly observe this on the pandemic masks.

Different from ties, bonnets, and hats, masks became more like clothes that cover our entire bodies. Masks reveal individuals' social categories, identities, social integration, aesthetics, and relationship with the market economy. Below is the categorization of the social reflections of masks with explanatory examples.

Social Categorization of Masks

Social categories indicate the grouping of people in view of certain common features despite their similar appearances. The categories are formed with respect to certain criteria such as age, education, and occupation. The use of masks does not significantly differ depending on age group. Although there are masks that are made specifically for children, no masks are manufactured for older people. The masks that are worn by healthcare workers and security staff reflect the occupational group they belong to.

Mask Use by Age

The use of masks differs depending on the age factor. The colors and shapes on the masks might vary depending on age.



Figure 1. Kids Pandemic Masks

Children's masks display cartoon characters and fun figures, leading children to make connections between the pandemic and play. In fact, some children were observed exchanging masks with their close friends (Anonim n. d.). The presentation of children's masks in this manner facilitates the use of masks by children. The designing of masks to the liking of children despite their function as protections against the pandemic indicates their transformation into symbols.

Mask Use by Occupation



Figure 2. Occupational Pandemic Masks

Healthcare workers have been on the frontlines in combat against the pandemic, followed by the police and security forces. Healthcare workers have worn double masks and visors due to being in direct contact with Covid-19 patients, which distinguished them from members of other occupational groups. In addition, security forces have worn masks that are embellished with logos and occupational colors, thus indicating their occupational group and, even, the unit they belong to. Thus, we can argue that the face is disguised but the occupation is exposed.

Identity and Masks

Identity is the process of symbolic interaction. It changes and takes form in time. Identity is affected by the nature of the instruments and objects that are brought along by social structures. Identity-mirroring symbols differ in time. For most people, the formation of their identities is limited to the space they live in. In the social world the person lives in, the conveyance of their identities was based on verbal communication and in harmony with the facts of life. The identities were relatively stable and tangible in the traditional period, but they have taken on a time- and context-dependent character and have partially lost their stability and tangibility in the postmodern age. The pandemic masks have become symbols of identity during this period.

As the symbols of identities, masks did not create new identities but, rather, turned into instruments that convey the symbols of existing identities. When reflecting a person's identity, masks signify the mottos of "This is who I am" or "I belong to this group". The use of masks during this challenging time helps reflect the changing world of the identities that we feel belonging to, or we hope to become. John Rudlin argues that masks create identities and exemplifies the revoking of masked men's right to carry guns during the carnival seasons in Medieval Italy in consideration of their nonaccountability due to assuming a new identity when wearing a mask (Yasan, 2011:19). However, during the

pandemic, masks are worn during the flow of life and people are accountable for their actions. The identity that a person wants to show increasingly causes people to face negative judgments. Since the postmodern world highlights fragmentation rather than wholeness, identities are fractionally positioned rather than as a whole (Bauman, 2017:132). In the same vein, the easy disposability of masks as objects added to the advantageous use of identities.

During the pandemic, masks have turned into mirrors of sexual, ideological, religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities. A person can enter many settings and interact using masks in various colors, lines, and qualities. A person can circulate among other social interaction networks with a mask.

Mask use by Gender

The covering of faces with masks might hinder discerning gender differences. The need to clearly express one's gender has led to the use of masks in different colors. The use of masks in line with one's sexual identity makes this identity visible to society.



Figure 3. Sexist Pandemic Masks

Some women wear pink masks, and some men wear black masks, thus emphasizing gender perception. To oppose the general gender perception of society, the different appearances of gender are also reflected on masks as exemplified by the use of rainbow-colored masks by the members of the LGBTQ community.

Gender and sexuality are human properties that have been historically disguised and undisclosed, and their manifestations take on the form of aesthetics as civilization progresses. People are expected to earn their social statuses with their skills and functions rather than their sexuality. People who want to reveal their sexual identity with their masks rather than revealing them, and who directly convey the message “I am a woman, I am a man, I am gay” to their addressees can also push the threshold of social acceptance. Although this is viewed as an act of courage, it may trigger verbal or actual harassment of certain people. Someone who identifies themselves with their hometown, belief, family, and traditional values may harm the person who they think have attacked these values publicly. In this respect, we can foresee that wearing certain masks with sexual connotations in some social environments may disrupt the social order. While people's sexual orientations and attitudes only concerns them, it seems strange that they shout this out in social situations. When we see someone shouting, “I am a man, I am a woman, I am gay” at school or hospital, we call the security forces and demand that the person be removed from the setting, because this is not “normal”. An image with an overly meaningful message on a mask might attract such a reaction. Because printing or typing heavily loaded symbols or messages on the object that replaces the face may disturb people. In cases where the individual health conditions differ, this conflict may also inflame the discussion.

Mask Use in the Political/Ideological Area

Masks have been used as tools of propaganda and means to put their own political parties to the front by politicians. Political actors have sometimes written their political discourse on masks. Feminists and greens have engrained symbols opposing violence on masks, which has turned their political ideas and ideologies into reflectors.



Figure 4. Political Pandemic Masks

Masks can also be used for the purposes of ideological appearance, performance, and protest. In this form of use, masks turn into passive resistance objects and put forth ideas, attitudes, and demeanors in place of the face they cover. In these examples, masks expose group belongingness or organizational commitment. To our belief, people who reflect these symbols on their masks believe their identities will be hidden behind masks and they will be passivized in society. They have used masks as instruments of symbolic attack and tried to get rid of the perception of indistinctness and ineffectiveness that is caused by the passivized identities.



Figure 5. Protest Pandemic Masks

An icon reflecting the feminist movement is inscribed on the mask in the first picture. In the second picture, a purple-colored hand making the stop sign symbolizes violence against women. The last picture portrays masks that express a stance against racism.

Mask Use as Religious Identity

Most religions include writing prayers on papers or objects to find a cure for a disease. Humankind has created certain rituals to protect themselves against unknown entities. For this purpose, they have appealed to certain supernatural entities and carried charmed objects in which they believed. Since the invention of writing, humankind has replaced the objects with their written names. People have gravitated towards supernatural powers when they couldn't prevent disease, death, and any bad happenstance (Uygun, 2012:213).

In Muslim societies, practicing certain metaphysical elements is forbidden, but amulets (*muska*) have been used as protection against the *bad eye* and certain undesired events. In certain communities including Muslim, Christian, and Jewish people, amulets that carry holy names or inscriptions have been used (Çelik, 1974:167).



Figure 6. Religious Pandemic Masks

People have been using charms, believing that they will bring good luck (Özkarlı, 2000:66). In Eastern cultures, objects without inscriptions are referred to as “*uğurluk*” (Uygun, 2012:215). In the same manner, religious motives have been inscribed on masks both for protection against the pandemic and for mirroring their religious identities. In the first picture, one of God’s names in Islam, the name “shafii” is inscribed on a mask for protection against the pandemic. In the second picture, the seal of Solomon as the symbol of the Jewish prophet is inscribed on a mask for protection. In the last picture, the dove of peace in the Christian culture is inscribed on a mask as a positive wish against the course of the pandemic.

Mask Use of Sports Fans

In sports competitions, wearing the symbols of people’s teams indicates the desire to be one with their team. We have observed that those who support their national teams during international competitions have worn masks that display many figures of their nationality. This is to signal their own culture and values to their communities.



Figure 7. Nationalist Pandemic Masks

The inscription of the emblems and flags of soccer teams indicates people’s adoption of their teams. Wearing the mask of a sports fan takes on the form of assuming the identity of the team. The person tries to get across the message of “I am here for my team” and exposes their belongingness to their team.



Figure 8. Sports Team Pandemic Masks

As seen in the pictures, masks have examples of national soccer federation emblems and symbols. The flags and emblems of nationalities and sports are inscribed on the masks. This indicates that the identity diversity in sports is exposed through masks.

Rites of Passage and Masks

Mask Use at Funerals

Durkheim mentions that places where rites of ancient people were carried out and tombstones on which ritual sacrifices were made were tombs (Durkheim, 2011:77). The masks of death represent the deceased. The images on masks stem from the desire to keep the dead alive. Therefore, these masks resemble the deceased. Wearing such masks dares death. Taking the mold of the deceased's face signals that the deceased is still with the community. Wearers of the masks preserved the masks as reminders. The mask of an elite is kept under sheltered conditions. In Rome, wearers of the deceased's mask gave life to the deceased. In Europe, the death masks of royalties were molded from their faces and passed down from generation to generation (Demircioğlu, 2015:162). Death has always been a feared occurrence. The faces of famous people such as Alfred Hitchcock, Abraham Lincoln, and Napoleon were molded into masks, which were worn while they were alive or after their death (Demircioğlu, 2015:163).



Figure 9. Funeral Parade Pandemic Masks

People who have been to funerals feel death closely and mourn. Society attaches emotions to colors, thus vitalizing colors. Each color gives a fresh air of a different life. Black is the color of sadness and reminds death to most for being the symbol of grief in many cultures. Black is the symbol of deep pain and death. In the Turkish culture, however, black is the color of grandness and sovereignty but is also known as the color of grief and sorrowful days and events as it does in many cultures (Yağbasan ve Aşkın, 2006:127). The expression from *Dede Qorqut*, "Let the black death give passage when it comes", shows that death was directly defined by blackness (Gökyay, 2000:66). Traditionally, the color black has been associated with death, mourning, and grief in Turkic cultures (Gönen, 2005:17). Before the pandemic, black scarfs, glasses, and bows were worn to funerals while these reflectors of grief have been replaced by masks during the pandemic.

Mask use at Weddings

Inscribing figures that introduce the groom and the bride on masks helped guests to recognize them. The mask use at weddings, thus, facilitated the distribution of social roles.



Figure 10. Wedding Ceremony Pandemic Masks

Weddings are places of joy. People are under social pressure to feel joyful at weddings even if they are not. Therefore, wearing plain and simple masks is almost impossible. In these ceremonies where the dresses are picked among the most expensive and flashy dresses, the concealing of identities and emotions by the masks is intolerable. If mask use is mandatory during the ceremony, all parties at the wedding pick the masks together, just as they do when picking the wedding dresses and suits.

Other prominent guests of weddings also wear masks that symbolize the ceremony. The immediate families and second-degree relatives of the bride and groom will pick flashy, light-colored, or shiny masks to insinuate their presence and their ownership of the wedding in addition to their clothes.

The mask of the groom fashions a bowtie and mustache indicating being the groom with shapes and objects in addition to the groom's gender. Although a wedding dress is the clearest demarcation of a bride, the exaggerated red of the lips and wearing tulle masks on top of cloth masks further expose the person as the bride.

Aesthetics and Masks

Aesthetic operations are defined as all operations or methods to fix an otherwise imperfect organ (Anonim t. y.). Humans are mostly motivated by their aesthetic concerns. In social living spaces, people should have perspectives that correctly reconstruct interpersonal communication and help have the same understanding of similar events and phenomena. The standards of judgment are among the most important factors that build this similarity. Considering how people make subjective judgments resulting from orientedness to objects and the world of objects, aesthetics can be referred to in the same vein as it expresses judgments about appearances.

Masks have an aesthetic value of their own. Ancient societies also had human or animal-shaped masks. The masks were in clay, paint, or ropes. The furs, gestures, and mimics of animal and, maybe, their merciless hunting skills lie behind the choice of primitive humans to wear the masks of their game animals during hunting. Animals have inspired a ritualistic order. They not only evoke wildness and savagery but also form an important portion of rituals with their gestures, mimics, and games, which remind us of the theatre (Baudrillard, 2005:111).

Aesthetic is the culmination of people's "good", "ugly", and "nice" reactions to the outside world. These reactions can be regarded as reflections of a person's inner world and, thus, are subjective orientations (Mazhar, 2000:10).



Figure 11. Aesthetic Pandemic Masks

Aesthetic operations are performed so that people become not themselves but someone other themselves. The person changes their face due to their dislike of it. They do so to look beautiful. Beauty is valuable. The idea of perfection surrounds our sense of beauty (Baudrillard, 2004:167). Aesthetic interventions are made to look beautiful, and masks appear as aestheticized instruments to appear beautiful.

A person's aesthetic concerns are reflected on their masks. Although factoring in their communities' views when choosing between dichotomies such as right or wrong, fake or real, and good or bad, a person will ultimately act in the direction pointed out by their emotions. This motivating aesthetic concern is also mirrored by our masks. The covering of our faces with masks might be viewed as an imperfection by some.

The different colors and shapes of masks can be regarded as the expression of aesthetic concerns. As seen in the pictures, the gold mask was picked in response to aesthetic concerns. Its gold color also indicates power as it implies monetary value. The mask has allowed its wearer to look embellished. Men's choice to wear masks that go with their suits can be explained by the relationship between masks and aesthetic concerns. The price of a mask also points to a person's social class. Aesthetic concerns underlie the choice of fabric and brand.

Fame and Mask Use

In the sociological sense, fame requires constantly appearing "alive". This can be in different styles. Today, fame functions as social acceptance by taking on the form of virtual identities. People act considering the statements, acts, or attitudes of famous people (Bauman, 2016:72).

In the modern world, subjects have turned into numbers. The authority of celebrities is the derivative of the authority of numbers. This is clearly observed in the relationship between celebrities and their fans. Watching the stories of celebrities is not an insignificant need for attention. The number of followers increases with the increasing number of likes. The power of numbers turns the person on display into an authority. The authority of numbers makes authority examples of "people in the limelight" add to the weight of their lead. Their power comes from giving what is worth watching (Bauman, 2005:1). "The keen viewer not only hopes to find the bearableness of their highly familiar loneliness but also the comfort offered by seeing how their loneliness can turn into something useful with a bit of luck and skill. However, the viewer who overhears the confessions of celebrities are rewarded with the long-awaited sense of belonging; with each passing day (almost every minute), what is offered to them is a flock of unbelongingness, a unison of the loners. They cheer up when listening to stories about sad childhood memories, depressed periods, and crumbling marriages, thus believing loneliness means inclusion in a large group and acting alone turns them into a congregation"(Bauman, 2005:75). Demi-celebrities instantly become famous and suddenly wane. A lottery winner might suddenly become famous for the money they earned and might be forgotten after a short time. This is a common story for demi-celebrities (Rojek, 2003:24).

Rule-breaking or improper actions of celebrities may be excused by society (Rojek, 2003:35). According to Morin, the need to be charmed corresponds to the star image in the modern social order that is dominated by rational thought. Although, at its inception, the image is created to picture things that are not there, it lasts longer than the thing it pictures. An image refers to how something is perceived and interpreted by people (Berger, 1990:10). Celebrities did not forget to use images on their masks that remind us of them and produced masks to maintain their fame and promote themselves.

The symbols of fame represent individual differences and distinct qualities. People who are on the front of society's scene have enjoyed this advantage to its last drop. A famous person gets detached from society. Fame gives an image to the person that portrays them.

Thus, their names come to the fore and their faces and names become one. The ambition to become famous can lead to using any means necessary (Rojek, 2003:187).



Figure 12. Celebrities Pandemic Masks

To remedy the miscommunication that can stem from covering their famous faces on social media and channels, celebrities used masks of certain brands or masks that show the visuals or words of firms that made financial offers to them. They have felt the need to re-introduce their hidden faces using unique styles. The first picture exemplifies a famous TV host who made their guests wear masks that were printed with the name of the host. In the second picture, we see how a famous Youtuber, Enes Batur, made themselves known using a gas mask-like mask with spikes that distances them from the outside and reminds us of aliens. In the last picture, we see a brand that used masks as advertising boards to promote their products.

Conclusion

Masks have been forms of communication since ancient ages. They have been used by people in their interactions with nature and other people. Masks have emerged in different colors, sizes, and materials. Masks have been used by ancient people for protection and offensive purposes, during rituals and social get-togethers, and festivities.

The health protection function of masks has been acknowledged and adopted by the public after the Covid-19 pandemic, which was followed by the transformation of masks into symbols of social categories, rites of passage, and aesthetics. The pandemic mask is distinguished from other masks in view of various reasons. The most basic distinction lies in the transformation of the pandemic mask into disclosure boards that expose the ontological concerns of people about the lockdowns. Following the blockage of face-to-face communication, the lack of communication has been remedied by masks.

Despite acting in similar manners, the reflections on objects are not the same, which is evident from the colors, way of wearing, inscriptions, and pictures of masks. The social circulation of masks related masks to people and their needs, communication capacity, talents, and the need for social interaction. Masks have turned into instruments that mirror social categories and the colors and textures of social groups.

The risk posed by the pandemic has interrupted the visibility of social differences. During this period, significant social changes have emerged, and people were forced to follow the rules of social distancing. Masks emerged as alternatives to the blocked communication channels and thereafter have turned into instruments to symbolize social differentiation, i.e., to boards of disclosure, which was achieved by engraving images and words on masks. The pandemic has suspended social gatherings for a period, but, not long after, people managed to use masks to reflect cultural differences, ideological differentiation, political discourse, social identities, aesthetic concerns, and the language of fame. The transformation of masks into social symbols is sociologically indicative of the mobility of society to adopt a new form of communication in response to a new order.

Masks exemplify how an object can be used for different purposes after fulfilling its social function. Masks have been used in arts and healthcare but have taken on new meanings and left their previous specific uses after the pandemic. The ontological concerns of humankind partially underlie the new meanings of masks. Individuals strive for having a ground on which their statuses and roles will be based, having a group that they feel belonging to, and presenting their identities. Masks have been used for health purposes during the pandemic, covered people's faces and partially blocked face-to-face communication, which were followed by masks' transformation into symbols and instruments to mirror the political, social, and class statuses and identities of people. In this manner, the pandemic mask offered the chance to convey a person's or a group's message while also covering the faces.

In conclusion, society takes naturally occurring identity-free objects (masks), fills them with meanings, and brings them to life by turning them into symbols. After their social circulation, masks can take on different meanings in different forms. They can assume the colors of social movements and turn into tools for protesting. Masks might lose their social significance after a while. In the sociological sense, social face-to-face communication and interaction were replaced by mask-to-mask communication and interaction with masks turning into symbols and disclosure boards.

Notlar

1 See. *Masks: Faces of Culture: The volume carries its reader between centuries and continents and presents masks from around the world. 200 color plates, the intricately sculpted crowning mask from Cameroon, an exquisite gold Egyptian mummy mask, colorful Mexican Dia De Los Muertos masks, and the breathtaking Noh theatre masks from Japan.* "The pictures are accompanied by essays that trace the functions of masks throughout history and were written by academicians in art history, anthropology, decorative arts, design, and theatre. John Nunley analyzed masks and crossdressing men in masquerades as women were not allowed to wear masks in many societies." "John Emigh and Lesley K. Ferris explore the theatrical role of masks stemming from ritualistic performances. Cara McCarty examines how masks have come to the forefront in the movie medium. However, these artistic examples are not the only masks in societies. McCarty also discusses the spread of masks for physical protection in fields such as wars, sports competitions, and space research.

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Maskenin Sosyolojisi: Yüz Yüze İletişimden Maskeli İletişime

Mahmut ERDİL (Ph.D.)

Genişletilmiş Özet

Covid-19, ilk olarak Çin'in Vuhan Eyaleti'nde Aralık ayının sonlarında solunum yolu belirtileri olan ateş, öksürük, nefes darlığı gelişen bir grup hastada yapılan araştırmalar sonucunda 13 Ocak 2020'de tanımlanan bir virüsdür. Endemik olan virüsün dünya geneline yayılmasından sonra uluslararası sağlık kurumu (WHO) tarafından "pandemi" ilan edildi. Covid 19 toplumsal hayatımızı derinden etkilediği ve bu etkinin yeniden bir düzenlemeyi beraberinde getirmiştir. Sağlığı koruma önlemleri kamusal alanlara yeni kurallar getirmiştir. Maske, mesafe ve temizlik "toplumsal norm" halini almış, virüsün bulaşma riskine karşı mücadele unsurları olarak belirlenmiştir. Salgının ne tür sonuçlar doğuracağı kestirilmediğinden, ona karşı alınan önlemler de ciddi ve sert olmuştur.

Salgınla başlayan bu süreç insan ilişkilerinin yeniden kurgulanmasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Salgındaki uygulamalar bireysel, toplumsal hayatı değiştirmiştir. Bireylerin sosyalleşme ihtiyaçları karşılanamamış, izolasyon önlemleri, toplumsal etkileşimleri bir süreliğine de olsa sekteye uğratmıştır. Salgınla başa çıkmada önlem amaçlı birtakım kurallar getirilmesiyle sosyal hayatı derinden etkilenmiştir. Gündelik hayat durma noktasına gelmiştir. Hayatın rutini bozulmuştur. Toplum bu yeni hayatı hayretler içinde gözlemlerken bir yandan da bu durumun nasıl üstesinden gelme durumunu sorgulamışlardır. Bireyler "yeni normal" çerçevesinde hareket etmeleri gerektiğini bildikleri halde bu yeniye kolay uyum sağlayamamış, kendi kalıp dünyalarından da vaz geçemedikleri için zorlanmışlardır. Küresel dünya Covid-19 un getirdiği ölüm, hastalık ve bulaşma riskine karşı öne çıkan maske, toplum sağlığını koruma amaçlı kullanımını tartışmasız kabul ettirmiştir.

Çağımız artık hiçbir şekilde risk faktörünü minimize edecek durumu ortadan kalkmıştır. Covid-19 salgını sonrasındaki toplumsal değişimden kaynaklı küresel bir olgu halini alan maske, toplum/toplumlar tarafından kullanılması, maskenin toplumsal bir iletişim ve etkileşim formuna dönüşmesiyle sosyolojik alanda araştırma nesnesi haline gelmiştir. Toplum salgının getirdiği kapanmadan sonra yüz yüze iletişimin tıkanmasına daha sonra bu iletişim kanalını maskelerle açma sürecine girmiştir. Goffman'ın tiatral sahnesi, orada sergilenen bilgi, bedene sahip olandan değil, seyirciler tarafından işlenecek olayların oluşturduğu tüm hareketleri bu sahneden aldığı gerçeği hakimdir. Bu dönemde maskelerle adeta dünya sahnesi "canlı performans" sergileyerek oyuncular ve izleyicilerle birlikte sahneye dönüşmüştür.

Yüz herkes için insanın ötekine gösterdiği bir pencere olarak görülebilir. Başka taraftan yüz gerçeği kapatan bir maske yerine de geçebilir. Toplum hayatındaki bireyler etkileşimlerini ilk en temel ifade biçimi yüz yüze temas ile yaparlar. İnsan etkileşimlerindeki bu yüz yüze ilişki bazı yargılar ve anlamlar taşır. Bu yüzdeki renk, mimik ve jestler karşıya iletilerek aslında bireyin karşı tarafa gösterdiği kendine ait yüzüdür. Kişinin görünüşü kendine has olmakla birlikte onu ifade biçimi daha çok içinde bulunduğu sosyal hayatın etkisi altındadır.

Pandemi yüz yüze iletişim kanalının tıkanmasına neden olmuştur. Salgının bulaşma riski insanları kamusal alandan özgül alanlara itmiştir. İnsanın sosyal çevresiyle olan ilişkisi sanal kanallar dışında yok denecek kadar azalmış ve sosyal münasebetler ağı dijital dünya

etrafında yürütülmeye çalışılmıştır. İnsanın doğası gereği başka bir insana duyduğu iletişim ve etkileşim ihtiyacı bir süre bu sanal alemle giderilmeye yoluna gitmiştir. Bu bir eksiklik olsa da sağlık ve ölüm düşüncesi etrafından bakıldığında bu yeni normale alışmak pek de kolay gözüküyordu.

İnsan kamusal alana çıkışının önlenmesi iletişim formu olan yüzün başka yüzlerle etkileşimini askıya almıştır. Çok geçmeden tıkanan iletişim kanalına alternatif olarak maske, toplumsal farklılaşmanın gösterge aracı halini alarak ifşa panosuna dönüşmüş ve yüz yüze olan iletişim maskelerle sağlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Maske birçok işlevinin yanında yaşadığımız dünyada salgının ilk ortaya çıkmasından sonra “hepimiz aynıyız” modu iken bir süre sonra, salgının toplumsal iletişim halini alarak “hepimiz farklıyız” moduna geçişi simgelemektedir. Yüzün yerini alan maskeye sosyal görünüm kazandırarak adeta birer “sosyal panoya” dönüşmesinin altında; maskenin toplumsal norm halini alarak toplumun genelinin maske takmasının bir zorunluluk halini alması ve maskenin toplumsal farklılığı ifşa etmesi; farklı renk, biçim, madde ve model maskelerin üretilerek kullanım alanının çeşitlenmesidir.

Pandemi nedeniyle takılan maske, toplumsal alandaki yansımalarla kendini göstermiştir. Maske gündelik hayatta, sosyalliği yeniden inşa ederek gerçek yüzümüzün yerine geçmiştir. Maske kullanımı görünür olma ve toplum içinde kendini sunma olarak çıkmıştır. Bireyler, maske ile dış görünüşlerini, toplum seviyesinde istedik iletilerin gönderilme yöntemi olarak kullanılabilir. İnsan, toplum hayatında aynı yaşa, cinsiyete, ideolojik görüşe, kimliğe, spor takımına ve estetik kaygıya sahip olması mümkün değildir. Maskenin kullanım şekli, bireyin dünyaya bakışını farklı renk ve tonlarda yansıtmıştır. Maske aynı zamanda toplumsal benliğin dışavurumu gerçekleşmiştir. Pandemi maskelerin diğer maske kullanımlarından farkı; gündelik hayattaki sürekliliği ve kapanan iletişim kanalını açarak ifşa panosuna dönüşmesidir. Maskenin bu işlevinden yola çıkarak zaman içinde kullanım biçiminin ve doğal olarak iletişimsel yönünün değiştiğini söylemek mümkündür. İlk insanlar, doğayla ve diğer insanlarla iletişim kurmak için maske takmayı gerekli bulurken günümüzde görselliğin ön planda olduğu çağda maske daha çok soyut tezahürleriyle insanların takındıkları rollere indirgenmiştir.

Maskenin ifşa panosuna dönüşmesine neden olan maskeye ait özellikler; tekli/çoklu, madeni, bez, ucuz/pahalı kumaşlarla vb. yapılmış maskeler, kullanılan renkler, üstüne yazılan yazılar, son olarak amblem, işaret, sembollerdir. Bunlar yüzün kapatmasına rağmen yüzdeki renklere jestlere mimik ve çizgilere tam karşılık gelmeyebilir. Tıpkı bunlar gibi maske üzerindeki renk, çizgiler, amblem ve yazılar bunları tamamlamaya yönelik sembollere dönüştürülmeye yoluna gidilmektedir. Bu özellikler maskenin toplumsal yansıtıcı unsurları barındırmaktadır. Yapılan maskeler kişisel tercihler aracılığıyla toplumsal iletişime katkı sunarak etkileşimi doğurmaktadır.

Maskenin toplumsal yansımalarından ilki, maskenin yaş faktörüne göre farklı şekillerde olduğu görülmektedir. Yaşa göre maske renkleri ve üstündeki şekiller değişebilmektedir. Çocukların maskeleri üzerinde çizgi film kahramanları ve eğlenceli figürleri bulunmaktadır. Sağlık çalışanları Covidli hastalarla birebir muhatap olmalarından çift maske ve siperlik kullanmışlardır. Bu maske kullanımı diğer meslek gruplarından farklı olarak yansıtmıştır. Güvenlik güçleri de taktıkları maskelerdeki logolardan ve meslek renklerinden maskeleri takmaları onların güvenlik mensubu hatta hangi kolluk gücünde yer aldıklarını gösterir. Maskelenen yüz ancak ifşa edilen meslek olmuştur.

Maskenin toplumsal yansımalarından bir diğeri kimliğı ifşa etmesidir. Bu dönemde kimliğin bir göstergesi olan maske yeni kimlikler yaratmamış, mevcut kimliklerin simgelerini ileten araçlara dönüşmüştür. Kişi tarafından kullanılan maske, kişinin kimliğini yansıması “ben buyum” veya “gruba aitim” mottosunu simgeler. Pandemi döneminde maske cinsiyet, ideoloji, din, dil ve etnisite gibi kimliğin yansıtma aracına dönüşmüştür. Kişi yanında bulundurduğu değişik renk, çizgi ve nitelikte maske ile birçok ortama girebilir ve etkileşebilir. Bunun için bürüneceği kimliğı yansıtıcı bir maskeyi yüzüne takması yeterlidir. Bu maske ile diğeri toplumsal etkileşim ağlarıyla dolaşıma girebilir. Kadınların pembe, erkeklerin siyah maske takarak toplumsal cinsiyet algısını ortaya çıkarttıklarını görmekteyiz. Toplumun genel cinsiyet kimlik algısının tersine cinsiyetin farklı görünüşleri de maskelere yansımaktadır. LGBT’lilerin simgeleri haline getirmeye çalıştıkları gökkuşağı renkli maskeleri buna örnek verebiliriz. Maskenin siyasetçiler tarafından kendi partilerini öne çıkarma ve propaganda aracı, Siyaset aktörleri kendi politik söylemlerini yansıtma ve spor müsabakalarında taraftarların takımlarını simgeleyen maskeleri takmalarını örnek verebiliriz.

Maskenin toplumsal yansımalarından bir diğeri Geçiş Merasimleridir. Cenaze Merasimlerde kullanılan maske, matem havasını, üzüntü ve ölümü yansıtan bir araca dönüşmüştür. Düğünlerde maskenin kullanımı gelin ve damada göre ayrı ayrı tanıtıcı figürleri kullanılması gelen misafirlerin onları ayırt etmesine yaramıştır. Toplumsal rollerin dağılımını olanak vermiştir.

Maskenin bir diğeri toplumsal yansıması estetik alanındadır. Estetik olarak kullanım Maskeler başlı başına estetik değeri olan objelerdir. Maskelerin estetize edilerek takılması onu estetik yansıtıcı bir işlev kazanmasına neden olmuştur.

Maskenin toplumsal yansımaların bir diğeri yönü ise toplumca tanınmış bazı kişilerin sosyal medya ve mecralarda şöhretli yüzlerin tanınmamasından kaynaklanacak iletişimsizlikleri bastırmak için maskelerini markalarla ortaya çıkarttıkları ya da kendilerine ekonomik değeri sunan firmaların metin ve görsellerini maskelerine yansıttıkları görülmüştür. Kaybolan yüzlerini tanınır biricik tarzlarla sunmak gereğini duymuşlardır.

Covid salgını ile beraber maskenin sağlığı koruma işlevi kabul edilip toplumca benimsendikten sonra, toplumsal kategorilerin, kimliğin, geçiş törenlerinin ve estetiğin göstergesi olmaya başladı. Pandemi maskesini diğeri maskelerden ayıran birçok gerekçe sunulabilir. En temel ayırım, Pandemi maskesinin tam kapanmaya karşı insanın ontolojik kaygılarının ifşa eden bir araca dönüşmesidir. Yüz yüze iletişim kapanmasından sonra iletişim maske ile telafi edilmeye başlanılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak; toplum, doğada bulunan kimliksiz nesnelere (maskeleri) alır ve onları anlamla doldurur, onlara birer gösterge olarak hayat verir. Maske toplumsal dolaşıma girdikten sonra başka şekillerde de anlamlar kazanabilir. Sosyal hareketlerin renklerine bürünerek onların protesto aracına dönüşebilir. Bir sonra süre maskeler toplumsal anlamını da kaybedebilir. Sosyolojik manada toplumsal iletişim ve etkileşimin pandemiyle birlikte yüz yüze “face to face” yerine maskenin yüzün yerine geçerek maskelerin iletişimine “mask to mask” şeklinde birer göstergeye adeta birer ifşa panosuna dönüşmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maske, Gösterge, Covid 19 Pandemi.

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In this study, the rules stated in the “**Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive**” were followed.

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile **çıkar çatışması** bulunmamaktadır.

There is no **conflict of interest** with any institution or person within the scope of the study.