

**DEVELOPING DURABLE PRODUCTS  
FROM LUXURIES TO NECESSITIES:  
BRANDING THE ARCELİK COMPANY  
1958-80**

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**Özet**

Tüccarlıktan sanayiciliğe geçen Vehbi Koç, dayanıklı ev eşyalarını Türk yaşamının vazgeçilmez bir parçası yapmıştır. Koç üretime 1960'larda dayanıklı ev eşyalarının ülke içinde üretilmesini öngören korumacı bir ekonomi ortamında başladı. Çoğu Türk üreticisi dayanıklı eşyayı ithal parçalardan monte ediyor, fakat yabancı marka adları ile satıyordu. Ama Vehbi Koç yerli bir ad olan Arçelik'i seçti ve bu ad Türkiye'de dayanıklı tüketim mallarını tüm alanlarda egemenliği altına aldı. Bu başarıyı elde ederken Koç Türk tüketicilerini iki noktada ikna etmek zorundaydı: "konfor aygıtları" lüks değil modern yaşamın gereği idiler ve halk yerli ürünlere rahatlıkla güvenebilirdi.

Önceleri, Vehbi Koç'un ticari şirketleri, küçük çapta da olsa, çoğunluğu geleneksel olan bir toplumda modern yaşamın savunuculuğunu yapmışlardı. Koç'un 1958'de kurulan sanayi şirketi Arçelik Türkiye'de modern yaşam biçiminin en önde gelen iteleycisi oldu. Arçelik müşterilerine yaşadıkları eziyetlere katlanmak zorunda olmadıklarını söylüyordu. Reklamlar halka Arçelik'in sağladığı konfor ve mutluluktan suçluluk duymamalarını öğütüyordu, çünkü halk Arçelik kullanarak uygar yaşama hakkını kullanmaktan öte bir şey yapmıyordu.

İkinci olarak, Koç, Türk ürünlerinin halk arasındaki olumsuz kanısını kırmak zorundaydı. Bunu yaparken, ise güvenilir bir adla başladı: Arçelik saf ve dürüst çelik demektir. Buzdolabı için B-1, çamaşır makinesi için Ç-1 gibi adlar Arçelik markasını dayanıklı ürünlerin biricik



üreticisi gibi gösteriyordu. Bunun da ötesinde, Arçelik kendini diğer yerli üreticilerden ayırmak için sermaye yatırımlarının imgelerini kullandı. Bu imgeler Arçelik'in Avrupa ürünleriyle yarışacak tek marka olduğu izlenimini veriyordu.

Bu çalışma Arçelik'in Türkiye'de dayanıklı eşyaların anlamını değiştirirken yaptığı çabalara bakıyor. Dayanıklı eşyaları lüksten gereksinim konumuna indirirken şirketin giriştiği üretim yatırımı, tasarım, satış ağları kurma ve markalaşma çalışmalarını inceliyor. Çalışma, ayrıca, Arçelik'in Türk modernitesinin bir simgesi konumuna gelirken modern estetiği kullanma biçimlerini de inceliyor.

Sometime in 1947, in the old Ankara neighborhood Keçiören, the family of a prosperous merchant who had risen from a family of shopkeepers received a package at their door [1]. It was an imposing piece of furniture as well as a technological wonder. With the arrival of electricity, Vehbi Koç had bought a refrigerator, making his home one of the first in Turkey to boast one. His mother protested, saying the family was doing fine cooling foods using the traditional method, down the water well [2]. Vehbi Koç, on the other hand, had come to consider modern conveniences as a basic right. As early as 1931, he had seen the benefits that a modern, rapid-paced life had brought to people in Europe's big cities. He recounted lucidly his own deprived youth in sleepy, small town Ankara.

In the 30s and the 40s his trading companies were modest advocates of modern living in a largely traditional society. Founded in 1955, Koç's industrial company Arçelik became the foremost supporters of household modernization in Turkey. Arçelik sought to relegate durables from the realms of luxury into necessities. It invested in advertising, branding, architecture and product design, as well as production technology and product support systems. The Arçelik project is rooted in the post-World War II boom in consumption when fiscal liberalism whet the Turkish appetite for imported-goods and redefined social goals. Consumption of imported goods was halted abruptly, as Turkey's experiment with economic liberalism was exhausted.

In the 1957 elections Turkey's panicked government asked for another 30 years to create a "little America" out of Turkey.[3] It was not to be. It would take a whole new approach to make durable products which were now considered necessities, available for the masses. Vehbi Koç became the agent of their provision in Turkey. His method was to mass invest, mass produce, and mass distribute them. Around 1953, he did this with two simultaneous enterprises: one for casting iron and another for shaping metal. His steel goods factory would provide the market with a cornucopia of products beginning with American style Office furniture that had become popular in private offices.

Koç did not possess the specialized knowledge of any given trade so he relied on the help of technician Lütfi Doruk. He did not have the capital, thus he approached Turkey's primary distributor of durable goods, Burla, as well as the state as investing partners. His challenges were manifold. To make domestic goods accepted, he employed several modes of design, created a name as a design element, made capital investments transparent, presented a factory as an icon of modernity, fashioned a trustworthy brand image, and gradually introduced competitive product styling. All of these factors contributed to acceptance of Arçelik products.

The steel-goods factory opened in 1955, as Erel Çelik, without much fanfare [4]. However, it was the most significant private investment in Turkey up until that date. It was not a workshop but an industrial factory designed by a professional architect. Sütlüce was shaped, using "pickaxes and shovels" on what architect Aydın Boysan called "a wretched piece of land." Boysan, nevertheless, managed to erect a relatively impressive four-story, concrete frame building.

In 1957, a conflict over the name rights for Erel Çelik gave the partners the opportunity to establish their company with a trustworthy brand name. They came up with the phrase "Ar Çelik" which meant pure and honest steel. To name a durable product with a domestic brand name demonstrated a degree of self-confidence — at that time domestic producers were

thought to be incapable of producing even decent cooking stoves.

When it released its first machine in 1959, Arçelik had to appeal to a customer group that was loyal to foreign durables and prove to them that Arçelik products could rival those from Europe and America. The company did this by making its capital investment visible to the public in gradual steps, before it even released its humble durables.

A few months before it released its first washing machine, Arçelik produced an image of the factory in Sütlüce. Rendered in line art that showcased the concrete frame and cast-iron window grid (figure 1), it was an iconic image reminiscent of another icon of industrialization, Ford's turn-of-the-century assembly plant. This was especially true of the factory in Louisville, a location Koç executives visited for their business meetings with General Electric.



Figure 1. Arçelik ad, 1958



This image proved the substance behind Arçelik. It was not a typical Turkish private business, but "one founded with a large capital investment and full knowhow, where the state sector and private enterprise [had] joined hands." It was, "...equipped with the exact same means" "well-known European and American companies."

[Namely]

Technical personnel who [had] the full grasp of modern Western technique...

Qualified workers who [knew] their trade... a brand new concept of work... full quality control... and painstakingly chosen quality materials"

The following year, when the washing machine was finally introduced, an image of the giant machine press appeared, its power and precision were regularly demonstrated to the factory's visitors.[5] Months later, a row of mass-produced washing machines sprang from the factory. The imposing presence of the factory coupled with the equally impressive brand name, served as a guarantor of what were actually hand-assembled, pieced together washing machines.

With the inclusion of several other durables, a product range emerged. With more confidence of its future prospects the company began systemizing its range with bold model names. Product names like G-1 for gas stove number one, W-1/C-1 for a washing machine, and R-1/B-

1 for a refrigerator reinforced Arçelik as the quintessential producer of durables in Turkey.

In the early 1960s, as the government steered the country toward the planned import substitution economy, many producers had entered manufacturing. They were selling domestic durables but under foreign brand names, giving the illusion that the scarcity of foreign goods was over. Who needed Arçelik? Arçelik was forced to remind its customers, "Since the importation of refrigerators and washing machines has been restricted for years, every brand ... sold is made in Turkey...and only ARÇELİK is manufactured in a modern factory like this." [6]



Figure 2. Arçelik ad, 1963

The ad coupled the phrase "modern factory" with an equally modern image (figure 2). It was more or less the same building. But the isometric drawing emphasized the L-shape. The line drawing de-emphasized the window grids in favor of horizontal bands that built-up to the floating roof. The factory was presented as a self-standing object, a modern icon. It now had a strong resemblance to the iconic Bauhaus School of Design that Walter Gropius had designed in 1926 — with its choice of angle, highlighted details, and stark negative background (figure 3).

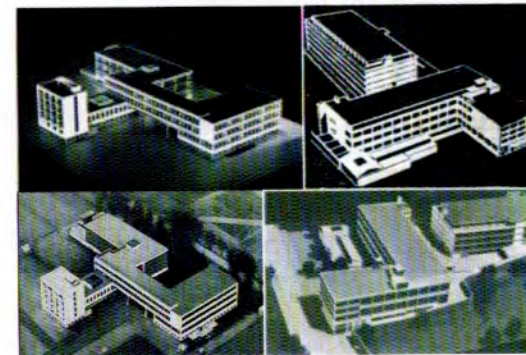


Figure 3. Bauhaus building, Walter Gropius, 1926  
Arçelik Factory, Aydın Boysan, 1955

Yet another challenge emerged as AEG entered the market with an established brand name and a large investment. As early as 1962, its Turkish producer Profilo used the prominence of the AEG brand as a leader in the field of electrical goods. The ads suggested that AEG's quality, reliability and superiority came from its world class name, and that the customers could choose it blindfolded (figure 4). Later the ads

suggested that being a prominent foreign product justified its higher price, too [7]. In response, Arçelik highlighted that all the refrigerators sold in the nation's markets were manufactured in Turkey, adding that Arçelik models were cheaper thanks to superior production volume. There was not a single reply from AEG who used imagery of its capital investments that were always supported with the heavy masonry of the AEG logo.



Figure 4. AEG ad, 1963; 8. 1964; 9. 1964; 10. 1965

The following year (1966), AEG entered the market as a serious competitor with many



models and powerful prestigious ads (figure 5). The ads hit Arçelik in a sensitive spot: which one was the more beneficent company for the nation's development? The ads pointed to AEG's long presence in Turkey that made possible vital infrastructure projects. Moreover, AEG provided a link between its Turkish workforce and its giant technical pool of know-how. The ads carried this message with a sophisticated graphic voice: calm and dignified.

Arçelik responded by mirroring these text-heavy messages with a typographic voice of its own, one that spoke louder, and one that accused AEG of "hiding behind a foreign name." One ad explained that the truth came from comparing the companies. "Arçelik [was] still the market leader despite the fifteen-something brands who [were] resting themselves on foreign names in order to dazzle the customers"[8]. Another one called on customers not to let foreign brand names fool them because the first condition of quality was where and how the product was made. Arçelik didn't simply apply a foreign brand name but invested in a modern factory. Moreover, Arçelik ...[was] [the people's] very own product[9]. Arçelik [wasn't] a foreign name but the finished work [of art] all of its ingredients [came] from [the public], the Turkish nation [10].



Figure 5. AEG prestige ads, early 1966

These ads featured a new sans serif logotype. A small abstract symbol also made its appearance in the corner of some of them — a symbol to speak for Arçelik succinctly and with weight. The company wanted to unify its presence for its customers, dealers, production and service

personel. The old vernacular logos (figure 6) were purged in search of a modern emblem with a design competition in 1965. The winning design (figure 7) was a letter mark (monogram) that seemed to spell the letters a, c and e, from the name Arçelik, as well as a picture mark (pictogram) that suggested the primary function of the factory, that is, to give form to rolled sheet steel.



Figure 6. Arçelik's old logos, 1958-1964



Figure 7. Arçelik's new logo, 1965

The logo was produced by Mehmet Gülerüz, a young designer from Mengü Ertel's prominent design studio [11]. All six runner-ups also used letter marks that carried heavy and imposing linear strokes (figure 8). Gülerüz's emblem was perhaps the most elegant solution that went beyond formal simplicity and graphic assertiveness and connected with the substance in a more intimate way.



Figure 8. Runner-ups for the Arçelik logo competition, 1965

In the 1960s, under the banner of international typographic style, rationalized, controlled lines replaced trade marks from an individual hand, reflecting a changing business culture that championed corporate anonymity. New trademarks were also paragons of power and modernity, such as those propagated by New York design firms like Chermayeff and Geismar. At the time, the Arçelik company aspired to join the same league. Its production was not nearly as advanced as foreign industrial giants, but its public image came to surpass some of them in its modernity. Later, Çamas combined the emblem with matching sans serif capitals to form the classic Arçelik badge (figure 9) with which the company suggested a family crest that embraced the company, its personnel, and its



customers all in one. When it came to the product itself, design arrived in stages, first inscribed on their surfaces and finally becoming a factor that helped fortify the brand-name.



Figure 9. The Arçelik Badge, c.1969

Between 1960 and 65, the company simply produced refrigerators designed by a small Israeli firm called Amcor, a subsidiary of Philco, affiliated with Ford. Lütfi Doruk, Arçelik's co-founder and technical director had, however, set up an industrial design department with the help of a German manager. In 1965, Turkish director Feridun Civelekoglu took over and a young Turkish interior architect by the name of Umur Çamas was hired as part of a team — by which time the company began to focus on "structural construction" ("konstrüksiyon").

The company defined its product development principles in its annual report in 1966. Arçelik goods were produced according to both structural ("konstruktif") and aesthetic principles, as well as to respond to consumer tendencies [12]. Besides its reliability, durability, proven quality, compliance with consumer's desires, economy, and safety, the Arçelik

product had to "to please the eye with its outer appearance"[13].

The ads emphasized that design was the starting element to ensure Arçelik's quality. "The modern lines, ease of use, economical aspects of all [the] beloved Arçelik products [were] the works of meticulous and patient investigations"[14].

In late 1965, the efforts of Arçelik's construction/design department produced its first result, the company's first line of refrigerators. It consisted of four models whose cabinets were designed to make the most of the existing molds. Metal forming machines helped designers add original details like the door handles designed by Mehmet Ali Peker,[15] and the emergence of plastic forming vendors in Istanbul allowed fine details to be added to the interiors. These were all subtle and sophisticated applications of the sheer form style (figure 10), a postwar American design style that was introduced in high-end refrigerators like Frigidaires.

Compared with the rather collaged look of the previous models (figure 11), Qamas's design for Arçelik's first original line brought harmony to the interiors and the exteriors in terms of color texture, and typography. Each consecutive line in the 1960s introduced a completely different look determined by the availability of resources such as components, production machinery and capable outside vendors.



Figure 10. Arçelik's 1965 model refrigerator, Detail of handle, typography on Arçelik's 1965 model refrigerator



Figure 11. Arçelik's 1962-4 model refrigerator B-3 (top right)

As the style of its refrigerators changed from year to year, and as the Arçelik name was given to an increasing number of other products, the

company made other efforts to bring visual unity to its products. The annual report of 1966 unified Arçelik's flagship products, of disparate design and technical resources, with a crisp graphic line (figure 12). It also featured sketches by Umur Camas that sought to unify the graphic displays by giving them a minimalist and dignified look (figure 13). The sketches evolved into a corporate identity standard applied across various media: user guides, annual brochures, dealer windows, warehouse buildings, and transport vehicles.



Figure 12. Linear drawings of Arçelik's products from the cover of its annual, c.1966

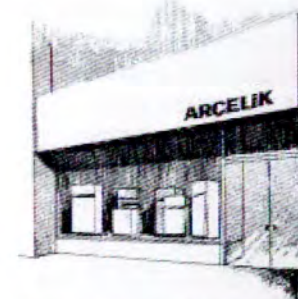


Figure 13. Sketches that became the basis of Arçelik's graphic standard, 1966







The ad featured drawings of traditional homes which puffed "hearts of love" from their chimneys, suggesting that Arçelik was a democratic power bringing happiness — not just to the apartment-dwelling folk — but also to the more humble, traditional inhabitants of Turkey.

In the late 1970s, design and Turkey's resources reached a limit in continuing import-dependent industrial production, in this new period, Arçelik was forced to radically transform. However, the company had accomplished an important mission. Arçelik's manufactured goods, but it also prepared the social conditions for their acceptance in a frugal, developing nation of citizens with limited disposable incomes. As one ad suggested, Arçelik was permeating every hour of a family's life with one of its products, through which households "grasped the meaning of modern life...while [Arçelik] disseminated comfort to all income groups." [22]

Koç helped people to bridge the disparity between aspiring and living with the comfort and convenience of household durables. In the new era, former competitors were absorbed by their parent companies and Arçelik struggled, but survived. Product development and design - though they were limited and began as verbal and visual discourse and surface application, were part of the Arçelik project from the beginning. Architectural, advertising, and branding design contributed and added value to its products from day one. The identity that culminated from several modes of design included its customers as members of the

Arçelik family. This inclusion completed the circle of trust around this brand and ultimately forged a paragon of Turkish modernity.

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