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Reception Practices of Azerbaijani Audience for Turkish Television Programs in the Context of Religious Perception

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Abstract

The subject of this study revolves around the examination of the reception processes of Azerbaijani viewers regarding their practices of watching television channels broadcasting in Türkiye within the framework of cultural studies, particularly within the context of religious perceptions. In this regard, employing the viewer-centered reception method within the tradition of Cultural Studies, the reception modes developed by participants living in various cities of Azerbaijan who watch religious content from Turkish television programs were scrutinized. To ascertain the identification of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading forms utilized in audience reception research, and to obtain data regarding meaning-making and reception practices concerning the contents watched by Azerbaijani viewers, a total of 4 different focus group discussions were conducted, consisting of 36 participants. These discussions took place with participants residing in the cities of Baku, Sumqayıt, Ganja, and Nakhchivan in Azerbaijan who follow Turkish television channels. As a result, the study revealed that content containing religious knowledge or broadcasting religious programs through television is received by viewers through various readings. It was understood that viewers engage in diversified negotiated and oppositional readings within the content contexts, generally as participants, regarding religious content presented in various formats.

Keywords: Azerbaijani Audience, Cultural Studies, Reception Practice, Religious Content

Azerbaycan İzlerkitesinin Türk Televizyon Programlarını Din Algısı Bağlamında Alımlama Pratikleri

Öz

Azerbaycanlı izleyicilerin Türkiye’de yayın yapan televizyon kanallarını izleme pratiklerine ilişkin alımlama süreçlerinin Kültürel Çalışmalar bağlamında din algısı çerçevesinde incelenmesi, bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Kültürel Çalışmalar geleneğinde yer alan izleyici merkezli alımlama yöntemiyle, Azerbaycan’ın farklı şehirlerinde yaşayan ve Türk televizyon programlarından dini içerikli yayınları izleyen katılımcıların, bu programlara ilişkin geliştirdiği alımlama şekilleri incelenmiştir. İzlerkitle alımlama araştırmalarında kullanılan egemen, müzakereli ve karşıt okuma biçimlerinin tespitini gerçekleştirmek amacıyla, Azerbaycanlı izleyicilerin izledikleri içerikler bağlamında anlam üretme ve alımlama pratiklerine ilişkin veri elde etmek üzere, toplamda 36 katılımcıdan oluşan 4 farklı odak grup görüşmesi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler Azerbaycan’ın Bakü, Sumqayıt, Gence ve Nahçıvan şehirlerinde yaşayan ve Türk televizyon kanallarını takip eden katılımcılarla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak çalışmada, televizyon aracılığıyla izlenen din bilgisi içeren ya da dini yayınlar yapan kanallarda yer alan içeriklerin izleyiciler tarafından çeşitli okumalar yoluyla alımlandığını ortaya koymuştur. İzleyicilerin, çeşitli formatlarda sunulan dini içeriklere ilişkin geneli katılımcı olmak üzere, içerik bağlamında çeşitlenen müzakereci ve karşıt okumalar gerçekleştirdikleri anlaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azerbaycan İzlerkitesi, Kültürel Çalışmalar, Alımlama Pratiği, Dini İçerikler

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Introduction

Developments in the fields of science and technology, globalization, and rapid advancements in mass communication tools have led to a multifaceted interaction process involving all segments of society. One of these changes, the integration of television into individuals' daily lives, has directly or indirectly influenced viewers from all age groups and social strata. The ways in which these changes and impacts manifest themselves and what kind of consequences they bring forth occupy the attention of both academic circles working in this field and the society at large in evolving contexts.

On the other hand, globalization, reinforced by technological advancements and economic factors, has led to widespread changes in communication methods and techniques. With the development of internet and satellite technologies, the affordability and proliferation of information and communication technologies have accelerated the flow of information, altered perceptions of time, space, and distance, and thereby brought about some changes in societal structures (Yurdabakan, 2002). Factors such as population differentiation, economic transformation, changes in family structures, and lifestyles are just some of the outcomes of these changes. Consequently, these developments have accelerated the process of acculturation and paved the way for the formation of global values (Balay, 2004).

The proliferation of communication tools and the expansion of access areas facilitated by technological advancements have led to the formation of viewer groups in different geographical regions and cultures. One of these groups is the Azerbaijani audience, and the examination of their practices in watching Turkish television programs within the framework of the English Cultural Studies tradition is the starting point of this study. The study aims to identify the viewing and reception practices of television programs produced and broadcasted in Türkiye by Azerbaijani viewers. To achieve this goal, the study primarily aims to examine the processes of acquiring religious knowledge from the television programs followed by Azerbaijani viewers and the reception of content based on religion through the coding-decoding method.

Audience-centered reception studies, which transform the viewer from a passive position into the subject of an active process, have gained importance in research and studies in the field of communication sciences. Reception studies, which analyze the process of content reading exhibited by the viewer during the reception process and present findings, evaluate the relationship between the viewer and the content using qualitative and experimental methods. The examination of reading-reception practices developed by the audience regarding the given text in the content forms a significant axis of communication research.

To obtain experimental (empirical) data, focus group discussions, observations, and individual interviews were conducted, and the relationships of viewers with television-mediated content in the context of communication studies were also examined. In this context, the examination of how texts presented by mass communication tools are received by viewers can point to a quite complex process. The existence of many widely used methods in communication research to date also supports this claim. The presence of various application practices of reception studies can similarly result in differences in identifying how viewers interpret and utilize media content according to various perspectives.

With the emergence of the tradition of Cultural Studies, there has been a departure from the notion that viewers passively consume all messages and texts presented to them through the media exactly as intended. It has been understood that viewers can be subjects of significantly different interpretation practices and can perceive television codes differently throughout the process of decoding. The main reason for this lies in the perspectives based on cultural studies, which highlight the economic, social, cultural, societal, and individual variables to which viewers

belong. It is understood that viewers' reception will vary depending on political and cultural influences, their relationships with dominant societal forces, and their proficiency in using technology (Göker & Keskin, 2015). In this context, it has emerged that viewers interpret the content presented by television in three different ways due to their social and cultural characteristics: they can interpret it as congruent with the content/message, opposing or conflicting with the content, or remaining neutral toward the content.

Viewers, who are seen as the actors in the process of interpreting content presented by mass communication tools and are understood to be active participants in this process, are subject to interpretation through reception studies. Along with reception studies, the understanding of the viewer as an unknown and passive subject has changed. Instead of the understanding that mass communication tools directly exercise hegemony over individuals, it has been observed that interpretation and representation practices are prominent (Yaylagül & Korkmaz, 2008). Reception studies, which provide a new perspective to communication sciences, have introduced a different approach to media content. According to the Reception Model derived from Stuart Hall's "Encoding and Decoding Model," viewers engage in different readings of media contents (Şeker & Çavuş, 2011, p. 86).

Moreover, there have been some other significant academic research conducted in Türkiye related to the perception practices regarding TV programs. For instance, the study titled "The Influence of Religious Television Programs on Adults: Insights from Samsun Province" presents findings on the reception practices of adults residing in the central districts, towns, and villages of Samsun regarding religious content broadcasted on television where the research identifies a preference towards educational-instructive religious programs and religious films (Turan, 2007). In addition, in the research article titled "The Perception of Conservative and Secular Identities on Television Series: 'Kızılık Şerbeti'", an analysis is conducted on the reception practices of secular and conservative viewers regarding the television series and the study delves into the representation of identities in terms of discourse and symbolization, highlighting elements such as "the use of Islamic terminology by characters, the appearance of women in veiled or unveiled attire, the practice of religious rituals such as prayer and fasting, the observance of New Year's celebrations, alcohol consumption, and the presence or absence of beards in men" as distinctive symbolic features in the construction of identities within the series (EFE, 2024). In summary, research on both religious content television programs and series featuring religious elements has been conducted to analyze perceptions within the context of Turkish television broadcasts. The findings underscore a diverse array of perceptual differences stemming from various viewer traits such as personal belief practices, demographics, and social contexts. These findings from Turkish viewers reveal perception practices that align with those of Azerbaijani viewers, albeit with distinct perception strategies regarding the religious content they consume through Turkish television programs. On the other hand, the present study is significant in its investigation of the reception practices of the Azerbaijani audience. While there is existing knowledge and findings indicating that Azerbaijanis watch Turkish television channels with interest, this study specifically explores and interprets the theme of religious perception. This focus on a particular theme within the context of religious perception signifies an important and distinctive approach in the field of communication studies.

Methodology

In this study, utilizing the reception method inherent to the Cultural Studies tradition, the perception, prejudices, as well as intercultural similarities and differences of Azerbaijani viewers towards Turkish culture and society are examined in terms of their practices of perceiving content presented in Turkish television programs. The main framework of the study has been formed by incorporating reception data obtained through focus group discussions into the process of interpretation using qualitative techniques. A review of local and foreign literature regarding

Turkish television programs that could be directly watched in Azerbaijan through original channels (such as satellite) and those broadcasted during the research period has been conducted. Qualitative data collection techniques including reading, observation, and interview methods have been planned, and a descriptive analysis process has been structured to observe perceptible areas and situations through the reception technique, within the context of communication ethnography, objects, discourses, and symbols.

Given that the research is designed to reveal the different characteristics of social structures through individual perceptions shaped by media contents and processes of meaning-making, this study, grounded in the tradition of Cultural Studies, focuses on encoding and decoding methods. As the study aims to examine the mutual interaction between texts presented in various television programs and viewers, viewer opinions regarding program content have been thematically included in the research. In the research, where focus group discussions are structured as a qualitative data collection technique, data collection is planned to be conducted online.

The study was conducted face-to-face via a video conferencing application (Zoom) and utilized the reception technique to deeply analyze the findings obtained during these meetings. In focus group discussions, the number of participants was six for each group. Due to the limited opportunity for face-to-face meetings during the pandemic conditions, the participant group discussions were conducted in Zoom-based sessions. Communication with participants who indicated watching Turkish television programs within the scope of the study was carried out in Azerbaijani language, allowing them to express themselves comfortably and without language constraints. Focus groups were formed to understand the thoughts, perspectives, interests, and experiences of viewers regarding Turkish television programs, which constituted the subject of the research. The purpose of focus group discussions is not to interpret meaning but to understand; not to generalize but to describe diversity; not to explain about participants, but to reveal how participants perceive the situation (Krueger, 2014, p.55). In this context, as an essential application of the focus group discussion technique, open-ended questions were posed to the participants, ensuring that their responses were detailed and comprehensive. While various questions were used to guide the expansion of participants' answers, any intervention regarding the content of their responses was avoided.

In the studies conducted by Çokluk et al. (2011), it was stated that in focus group discussions, generally 6-8 people with similar demographic characteristics (age, socio-economic status, occupation, etc.) gather under the guidance of a moderator and discuss the research topic in a group setting (p. 22). Accordingly, the number of participants in the focus group discussions was determined to be six people, thus ensuring both time management for detailed and in-depth discussions and a participant density where all participants could share their views. Additionally, it was identified that careful attention should be paid to time and content management, such as avoiding participants straying from the research topic and addressing issues of repetition or dominance by certain individuals while expressing their views.

Focus groups were formed with the participation of viewers residing in the cities of Baku, Ganja, Nakhchivan, and Sumqayit in Azerbaijan. Two focus group discussions were conducted with six participants each from the capital city of Baku. Additionally, one focus group discussion with six participants was held in each of the cities of Ganja, Nakhchivan, and Sumqayit. The distribution of participants in the focus group discussions aimed to parallel the general population distribution of the country.

Participants in the focus groups comprised individuals who watch Turkish television programs and come from various demographic backgrounds, including homemakers, academics, government officials, and students with different academic degrees in various fields of social and numerical sciences. The diverse demographic composition of the participants facilitated a rich

environment of perspectives related to the research topic. Focus group discussions were conducted with a total of thirty-six participants across six different focus groups in four different cities. The participants were selected without any specific restrictions regarding their selections for TV programs from Turkish channels. Their views for the content or programs containing religious information were thematically included in the study which elaborated the outputs from a wide range of TV channels as well as the programs.

Although the Zoom video communication application allowed for the recording of all discussions both visually and audibly, the majority of participants expressed their sensitivity regarding visual recordings. Therefore, discussions were conducted solely through audio recordings. The audio recordings were transcribed into Azerbaijani and translated into Turkish. In accordance with the law on the protection of personal data and the general principle of safeguarding personal rights and freedoms, the names of participants were kept confidential with approval from the Erciyes University Ethics Committee obtained under application number 434 on November 30, 2021. In referring to the views expressed by participants, a coding system (P1, P2, P3, P4... P36) was used to maintain anonymity. Each code (P1, P2, P3, P4...) was followed by a direct quotation if provided by the participant. In addition, the participants were first reached through a diagnostic questionnaire so as to include them in the related focus groups. The interviews were conducted following the acquisition of the Erciyes University Ethics Committee approval, from 1st of December 2021 on.

In social science research conducted in Türkiye, reception analysis within the context of communication sciences has found widespread recognition in analyzing the processes of decoding television programs within the tradition of cultural studies. Additionally, studies focusing on how Turkish audiences interpret content produced abroad and encountered by Turkish viewers in digital platforms are frequently encountered. Moreover, since it is known that Turkish series are followed by communities settled in different geographical locations, it is also possible to come across studies compiling the reception practices of audiences in these countries. However, both in Türkiye and in foreign sources, there is a lack of a comprehensive body of research regarding the viewing practices and reception processes of Azerbaijani audiences towards Turkish television programs. Therefore, the present study is significant not only in contributing to the relevant literature but also in providing a reference point for future reception studies.

Another context in which the research is considered important is the identification of the evolving cultural structures of two societies stemming from common ethnic backgrounds within the course of history and determining how the cultural codes conveyed through Turkish television channels undergo a process of communication and their impact on cultural convergence and resemblance. Factors such as the use of closely related languages and ethnic similarities, which are significant in a cultural context, are thought to have lost their importance as a result of political differentiations, believed to be a consequence of the cultural policies of the Soviet era. In the period following this era of independence, the interest of Azerbaijani audiences in Turkish television channels reveals the extent to which intercultural communication can be broad. The Azerbaijani people, who are detailed in the first section of the study in terms of their cultural structure systematically constructed over more than seventy years on a different political platform, have gained a new climate of political freedom with their independence and have been nourished by Türkiye, with which they have had a manifest brotherhood since ancient times. Therefore, the study is important in determining the cultural impact of television programs as a tool in this process.

According to the decision numbered 434 dated 30/11/2021 of the Ethics Committee of Erciyes University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, the study has been deemed ethically appropriate.

Findings and Discussion

With Azerbaijan gaining independence from the Soviet Union, there has been a notable increase in respect for and commitment to religious values as a departure from the influence of Soviet-era policies, such as the obstruction of Islamic traditions during the seventy years under Communist rule (Yusifov & Veliyev, 2009, p. 1). This emotional shift towards religion has positively impacted social events. In this process of change and enlightenment, the role of Turkish television channels followed by Azerbaijani viewers has emerged as a prominent theme in the research, alongside the activities of official institutions in Azerbaijan.

Television, beyond being merely an entertainment medium, also promotes a rapidly growing discourse on religion by presenting religious messages and patterns of meaning in soap operas, mini-series, television films, advertisements, and similar content (Setiawan, 2022, p. 2.). In this context, the relationship between media and religion has been the subject of numerous social science studies, which aim to understand the relationship between religion and media and its impact on viewers. The main reason behind these endeavors is the potential of television to inform about religion, shape religious identity, and instill religious behavior or attitudes, thus being considered as a widespread tool for religious education in contemporary times (Çinemre, 2021, p. 81).

Within the scope of the research, it was determined through the data obtained from the participants that presentations of religion and belief on television programs occur through religious television programs, channels entirely dedicated to religious content, and encoded religious content in other productions. Examples identified in this regard include iftar and suhoor programs broadcast during the holy month of Ramadan, which are aired on channels such as Diyanet TV, Mesaj TV, and Meltem TV, as well as drama series, films, lifestyle, and entertainment programs.

The majority of the participants interviewed stated that they follow programs aired on television channels during the month of Ramadan, where religious information is shared, and question-and-answer sections are included. In other words, participants answered the question “Do you watch religious-contented TV programs or religious-content-only TV channels through Turkish TV channels?” and their replies indicated their confirmation. Moreover, some participants mentioned that they learn about concepts such as fasting, tarawih prayers, and religious gatherings through these programs and emphasized that they have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of religion through these programs:

I listen to Nihat Hatipoğlu as much as I can. When I watch his program, I imagine that Ramadan has arrived and Muslims all over the world have started fasting. You don't feel the arrival of Ramadan very much in Baku, though. Of course, there are people fasting, but you don't see people buying Ramadan bread like you see on Turkish channels and news. While watching Nihat (Hatipoğlu), I pay attention to the religious stories he tells and his conversations about Ramadan (P7)

Sometimes, TRT broadcasts live tarawih prayers, and I watch them. It gives me peace. It's beautiful to see how Islam is such a beautiful religion, and many Muslim brothers and sisters come together to pray and make supplications (P15)

No one in my family prays or fasts. But on days when I intend to fast, I turn on Channel 7 before iftar. I not only get information about the benefits and virtues of fasting from religious scholars but also lose track of time. I've learned about Ramadan and its place in the Islamic religion from these programs and books I've been watching and reading since childhood (P5)

One of the things that surprised me when I went to Türkiye was the numerous mosques I saw in all the cities I visited. There's almost a mosque on every street, especially in Istanbul. Unfortunately, we don't have that many mosques here. In fact, you can almost hear the call to prayer being recited at every prayer time in Türkiye. I guess it took us a while to reconnect with Islam after the Soviet era, and it's still taking time. Almost everyone in Azerbaijan, except for a few exceptions, says they are Muslim. However, our perspective on religion and therefore our approach to religious rituals, such as prayer or fasting, is a bit different from our Turkish brothers and sisters. But as time goes by, I personally see a significant increase in the number of people who are improving their

religious knowledge, reading books, and trying to understand and read the Quran. As I see this, I am pleased. This is where Turkish television's religious broadcasts are doing great work. When Ramadan comes, you can find almost a religious program on every channel. Seeing and watching Islamic scholars who explain Islam, Muslimhood, and our Prophet helps improve religious knowledge. Personally, when Ramadan comes, I prefer to watch many of these programs. While fasting, you also need to protect yourself from evil, refrain from lying, and learn to do good, and any of these broadcasts will be enough to learn from (P7)

When Ramadan comes, there is a suhoor program broadcast on Fox TV, and I watch it when I wake up at night. While preparing the suhoor meal, I also listen to what the scholar says. It increases my knowledge, and I feel that we are in Ramadan (P19)

As evident from the participants' statements, Azerbaijani viewers engage in a participatory reading of the content provided by following broadcasts that offer Ramadan, fasting, and basic religious knowledge. They express learning the religious requirements of being a Muslim through these programs. It can be said that Turkish television channels' broadcasts play an important role in religious education, not only for Turkish viewers but also for Azerbaijani viewers, as Ramadan holds a significant place in the observance of Muslims. Additionally, it was found that some Azerbaijani viewers also follow various channels that offer religious content outside of Ramadan. In light of the findings, it is understood that viewers benefit from these broadcasts in terms of their perception of the Islamic religion, as well as the exchange and development of their pre-existing religious knowledge, learning about religious commandments, prohibitions, rules, and other related topics:

I witnessed the final years of the Soviet era. So, I know very well how we lived during that period and what the situation of religion and society was like. I believe that the greatest harm caused by the Soviets was actually in terms of religion. Every kind of religious activity was prohibited, and I think because society lived under these prohibitions for years, people neither talked about religion nor engaged in any discussion related to the Islamic faith. We had a neighbor from the Ukrainian Soviet, but I never saw her talk about Christianity or practice any form of worship related to that religion. So, these prohibitions or restrictions were not only directed at Islam or Muslims but were aimed at all religions. I don't recall having any lessons or education related to religion at school. But according to our customs, I remember my grandmother covering her head and praying. When these prohibitions were lifted and we became the owners of our own state, people started to think about religion and began to access the religious knowledge that was missing from their lives. Various methods came into play, of course. We had mullahs, for example, who became well-known. They started reaching out to people and explaining the Islamic faith. Of course, it wasn't easy to suddenly explain Islam to people who had been under religious prohibitions for years and expect them to adhere to these prohibitions and rules by saying, 'If you do this, you'll burn in hell.' However, I believe that our Turkish brothers emerged as an important and beneficial example for us. During the era of Communist prohibitions, people in Türkiye were freely practicing Islam. There was much we could learn from them, and I still believe there is. Regarding the Turkish people being a good example, I should also mention that the Iranian regime also saw this gap in teaching Islam. They also stepped in to explain the Islamic religion through their own sects and interpretations. At this point, I should mention what answers your question. The books, newspapers, or magazines of our Turkish brothers were prohibited in Azerbaijan for a long time. I don't know if you're aware of this. But nobody can interfere with what someone watches in their own home. From that era until today, Turkish television channels have done good work. Personally, I am a Muslim, but I learned much of the Islamic religion from the books I read and the Turkish television channels I watched. For example, there used to be TRT Diyanet, which later became Diyanet TV, and it was one of the channels I watched. Or there were times when I watched Mesaj TV. These channels were the ones I watched, listened to, and learned from during the periods when I questioned myself (P14)

As discerned from the detailed perspectives of the participants, throughout the years of the Soviet era, there existed a robust mechanism of control directed towards all avenues of religious knowledge acquisition among Azerbaijani Muslims. Consequently, a prevailing sense of reservation towards religion and obtaining religious knowledge emerged among the populace, and access to all perceived sources of religious knowledge was systematically delimited by censorship, thereby perpetuating this distance among the younger generation. Turkish television programs, perceived through a participatory reception, have assumed a significant role in Azerbaijan during the post-independence period. Apart from entertainment programs, numerous channels broadcasting from Turkey, bolstered by the absence of a language barrier, have served as a source of religious

knowledge for Azerbaijani viewers, both through their religious content and exclusively religious broadcasts.

I like the TGRT channel, especially the movies with religious stories. Learning about the life of a friend of Allah, seeing how they worshiped, and how they behaved also led me to question myself (P31)

The Islamic religion, thank God, is the most beautiful religion in the world. I am also a Muslim, and I worship as much as I can. Sometimes at home, I follow the conversations on Diyanet TV with my wife and children. I believe I have learned quite useful information (P10)

When I saw our Turkish brothers praying for our soldiers in the mosques during the Karabakh War on television, my eyes filled with tears. Along with them, I said 'Amen.' Our religion is one, our language is one. The whole world saw that even though we are two different states, we are one nation. May Allah be pleased with them. Then, I thought of Shia Iran like us. Besides knowing that they don't pray, I know they curse our soldiers. Are they our religious brothers, or are our Turkish brothers? (P35)

Furthermore, it is understood that the religious programs and content broadcasted on Turkish television channels were discussed and interpreted by the participants in the study. Especially in religious talk shows, some of the Islamic and Muslim content presented by religious opinion leaders or scholars/imams was perceived with an oppositional reading practice:

When Ramadan comes, generally a preacher gives a talk on Turkish channels, and then people participating in the program ask questions. I listen carefully to the questions asked every year because some of them also bother me. There have been times when I found answers to my own questions. But sometimes the questions are just the same. Every year, 'Does this break the fast?' or 'If I consume this, will my fast be accepted?' When I hear these questions, I change the channel (P36)

I watch religious programs whenever I get the chance. But to be honest, sometimes I wonder if they're real. For example, on Friday mornings, I sometimes watch Necmettin Nursaçan's program. People call in and ask questions to the preacher. When I hear the questions, I think of very different things. I wonder if everyone has such different problems. Someone asks, 'How can I tell if magic has been cast on me?' Magic is a topic that frequent viewers ask about. There's an old and knowledgeable preacher sitting there; shouldn't they ask better questions? Like, 'How do I perform this worship?' or 'Which prayer should I recite?' The preacher patiently answers every question (P24)

Participant statements indicate that programs featuring religious scholars, closely followed by the Turkish community especially during the Ramadan month, are also closely monitored by Azerbaijani viewers. These statements have revealed opposing readings regarding questions posed to religious scholars, which bear traces of the cultural, religious, and daily life practices of the Turkish society. As discerned from participant expressions, a perception has emerged that there is a problem regarding the acquisition of answers to frequently asked questions, particularly during the question-and-answer segments of these regularly followed programs.

In Azerbaijan, it wouldn't be right to discuss sects with anyone. I don't think it's right. Everyone believes in the religion they want and lives as they wish. In our society, Islam and Muslim faith are accepted beliefs by everyone. However, whenever the topic of Shia or Sunni comes up, the conversation doesn't go well. Everyone knows this. Therefore, when I respond to the topic of Islam, I try to be careful. There have been times when I watched Mesaj TV or Meltem TV to learn about Islam, and I also watched TRT Diyanet channel. I've seen a lot of differences between these channels. Different things are told in one, and different things are told in the other. Meltem TV constantly does the same political propaganda, and it talks about Islam too, but I don't want to hear the same things anymore. Religion is one thing; politics is another (P18)

As can be gathered from these statements, in Azerbaijan, even during the post-independence period, maintaining a distance from religious topics, stemming from the lingering influence of Soviet governance, is perceived as a rare occurrence to engage in discussions or questioning conversations with others about Islam and Muslim identity. This cautious attitude has rendered television channels as avenues for individuals to freely educate themselves on religious matters, serving both as a comfort zone and a means to evade societal judgment.

Some series have sorcerers. They ruin the lives of ordinary people by casting spells and doing evil deeds. Or sometimes there are 'fortune-teller' type preachers. I think both of them are wrong characters. A religious person shouldn't harm others. I'm both surprised and very afraid (P12)

Sometimes when I watch Diyanet TV, I tell myself I'm definitely going to hell. Sometimes the speakers on the program say things that make it seem like everyone is going to hell. If you do this, it's a sin; if you do that, Allah will send you to hell. Women should preserve their chastity, cover their hair. Shouldn't men? Why are all the prohibitions in religion directed at women? Or it's said that women should do the cleaning, get along with their mother-in-law. What about men? What will they do at home? Come, eat, and sleep? In my opinion, Islam cannot be a religion that constantly blames and directs women as it is portrayed there. Even while listening, it feels very strange to me, and I get angry (P9)

I don't miss most of the religious discussions, especially on Fridays; they're on every channel. I also try to follow them as much as I can during Ramadan. Learning about the Islamic religion is already very important to me. But sometimes I am amazed at the topic being discussed or the words of the guest preacher, can it really be true, I wonder. Especially about marriage, it's very difficult to believe what they say. For example, in one program, a woman said she couldn't get along with her husband, but they have children, she said she did everything she could but her husband treated her badly all the time. Even her husband's mother, her mother-in-law, treated her very badly all this time. I was very surprised to hear the preacher's interpretation. The preacher said she should endure as much as she can and try to serve her mother-in-law to win her love. Divorce is not right, for example, divorcing is not a very right thing religiously. It's impossible to agree with this. None of the complaints the woman made mattered anymore after what the preacher said (P32)

During the Soviet era in Azerbaijan, individuals were completely prohibited from receiving religious education, and the restrictions and limitations imposed on religious education and instruction during this period led to the detachment of the population from religion (Musayev, 2013, p.177). With the attainment of independence, the prohibitions of the former regime were lifted, and the people began to access religious knowledge through various means. In this context, television serves as a widely used educational tool through "indirect learning," wherein individuals develop knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes in their daily lives (Armstrong, 2000, p.225). Similarly, it can be inferred from the statements of the interviewees that religious content presented on Turkish television channels is perceived differently by Azerbaijani viewers, reflecting varying interpretations of the channels broadcasting religious content and the topics covered in these broadcasts.

Program content providing objective information about Islam and Muslim beliefs was perceived through participatory reading; in other words, the reception of opinions regarding programs that present dogmatic information accepted as unquestionably correct, including religious commandments and prohibitions, was largely through participatory reading. Furthermore, it was observed that subjective interpretations or views presented on original topics or individual problems, such as women's marital or current life issues, were read through a deliberative or oppositional reception.

It is evident that Azerbaijani viewers perceive Turkish television channels, which serve as sources of access to religious knowledge during the period of independence, as playing a functional role in the teaching of Islam through religious programs and channels such as Diyanet TV.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Following the Russian occupation in 1920, a new era of censorship commenced in the Azerbaijani press. Newspapers and magazines published after this date transformed into organs of Soviet Russia. This Russian-centric publishing period, lasting approximately 60 years, continued until the Gorbachev regime of the 1980s (Akarslan, 2019, p. 20). On the other hand, following independence, there has been a significant increase in respect for and attachment to religious values, and this emotional shift towards religion has had positive effects on social events. For instance, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is announced to the public through communication channels, and the return of pilgrims is widely celebrated (Taştan, 2003, p. 27). As a result of these developments, new mosques have been constructed in every village and town, numerous madrasas and faculties of theology have been established for higher religious education, and programs about Islam have been organized on the press and television, creating environments where people can comfortably discuss religion (Mürselov, 2013, p. 94). Aligned with these

advancements, a resurgence in religious belief practices has been observed in Azerbaijan, where Turkish television programs play a significant role with their religious content and dedicated religious TV channels.

In this study, which focuses on the viewing practices of Azerbaijani audiences of Turkish television programs within the framework of cultural studies, the ways in which the contents presented in broadcasts are perceived by Azerbaijani viewers have been analyzed. The central problem of the study is how the program contents broadcasted on Turkish television channels are received by Azerbaijani audiences, and in what manner they are perceived, which reading types are employed in the perception. The changing communication channels brought about by advancing technology, globalization, popular culture, and mass culture, which constitute the subjects of social sciences, have opened the way for academic research focusing on how societies and cultures differ or converge with the dynamics of this emerging technological age. In this context, while the effects of television and its content on viewers in terms of culture continue to be the subject of many studies, the data obtained regarding how Turkish television programs are read by Azerbaijani audiences have been analyzed using the Cultural Studies Tradition.

One of the significant findings of the study is that religious content and belief-based broadcasts are followed by Azerbaijani viewers, who develop different reading styles towards the content. It has been observed that, following the belief-based practices of the Soviet era, the religious awakening process in Azerbaijan during the independence period has been nourished from various sources. During this period of reawakening, it is seen that religious programs and belief-based content broadcasted on Turkish television channels play an effective role. It is understood that these effects are observed through the participatory reading of the presented content, especially with the increasing interest of viewers in these programs during times considered sacred for Muslims. It is also among the findings that deliberative or opposing readings towards belief-based broadcasts affect individuals' worldview.

The inclusion of the contents shaped based on Turkish-Islamic understanding by Turkish television programs in the dominant reading process of Azerbaijani audiences indicates a completely opposing reception process, pointing to the observed different code decoding practices in cultural and belief forms. Additionally, the observation that Azerbaijani viewers follow channels broadcasting religious content only with a didactic-dominant reception indicates the active functionality of television broadcasters as platforms for sharing religious knowledge. On the other hand, while the dominant reception practice regarding programs dealing with religious topics is not observed, this is not the case for programs where participants share their religious questions and problems. The main reason for this difference can be explained by the different socio-cultural structures existing in Türkiye compared to those prevalent in Azerbaijan, particularly in terms of religious beliefs. Moreover, further studies might be conducted to include Azerbaijanis living abroad (Iran, Georgia etc.) and watching Turkish TV channels. Future studies related to Azerbaijani diaspora might reveal any difference that might exist would mold a different horizon for different disciplines.

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Azerbaycan İzlerkitesinin Türk Televizyon Programlarını Din Algısı Bağlamında Alımlama Pratikleri

Vahit İLHAN*
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Geniřletilmiş Özet

İzleyici arařtırmaları alanında, Kültürel Çalıřmalar geleneğinin ortaya çıkmasıyla, izleyicilerin medya aracılığıyla sunulan tüm mesajları ve metinleri tam olarak istendiği gibi, edilgen bir şekilde tüketmeleri düşüncesinden bir kopuş gözlemlenmeye başlamıştır. İzleyicilerin oldukça farklı yorumlama pratiklerinin özneleri olabileceği ve kodlanan içerikleri alımlama süreçlerini gerçekleştirirken, kodlama sürecinde amaçlanandan farklı algılayabilecekleri anlaşılmıştır. Bu farklı algılama süreçlerinin ana nedeni, kültürel çalıřmalara dayalı bakış açısının genel kabulünden kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu evrilen bakış açısında, izleyicilerin ait oldukları ekonomik, sosyal, kültürel, toplumsal ve bireysel değişkenlerin kodaçımı sürecinde sahip oldukları önemli etkisine vurgu yapmaktadır. Politik ve kültürel etkiler, toplum üzerinde büyük etkiye sahip olan güç odaklarının yayın ve yapımcılarla ilişkileri ve teknolojiyi kullanma becerilerine bağlı olarak izleyicilerin alımlama tepkilerinin değişeceği anlayışı ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, izleyicilerin sosyal ve kültürel özelliklerine bağlı olarak televizyon tarafından sunulan içeriği üç farklı şekilde yorumladığı ortaya çıkmıştır: İçerik/mesajla uyumlu olarak yorumlama (Katılımcı Okuma), içeriğe karşı veya çatışan bir şekilde yorumla (Karşıt Okuma) veya içeriğe karşı tarafsız kalma (Müzakereci Okuma).

Bu çalışmada, bahse konu Kültürel Çalıřmalar geleneğine özgü alımlama yöntemi kullanılarak, Azerbaycanlı izleyicilerin Türk kültürü ve toplumu hakkındaki algıları, önyargıları, ayrıca kültürel benzerlikler ve farklılıklar, Türk televizyon programlarında sunulan içerikleri algılama pratiklerinin dini bilgi edinme bağlamında incelenmektedir. Çalışmanın ana çerçevesi, nitel teknikler kullanılarak yorumlama sürecine odak grup görüşmeleri aracılığıyla elde edilen alımlama verilerinin dahil edilmesiyle oluşturulmuştur. Azerbaycan'da doğrudan izlenebilen Türk televizyon programlarına ilişkin yerel ve yabancı literatürün, arařtırma dönemi boyunca yayınlanan orijinal kanallar aracılığıyla ve arařtırma döneminde yayınlananlar da dâhil olmak üzere incelenmiştir. Okuma, gözlem ve mülakat yöntemlerini içeren nitel veri toplama teknikleri planlanmış ve iletişim etnografyası,

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nesnel, söylemler ve semboller bağlamında, resepsiyon tekniği aracılığıyla algılanabilir alanları ve durumları gözlemek için betimsel bir analiz süreci yapılandırılmıştır.

Araştırma kapsamında katılımcılardan elde edilen veriler doğrultusunda televizyon programlarında din ve inanç sunumlarının dini televizyon programları, tamamen dini içerik sunan kanallar ve diğer yapımlarda kodlanmış dini içerikler aracılığıyla gerçekleştiği belirlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda belirlenen örnekler arasında, Ramazan ayı boyunca yayınlanan iftar ve sahur programları yer almaktadır. Diyanet TV, Mesaj TV ve Meltem TV gibi kanallarda sunulan dini içeriklere ek olarak ayrıca diziler, filmler, yaşam tarzı ve eğlence programları gibi farklı program türleri de bulunmaktadır.

Katılımcıların çoğunluğu yapılan görüşmelerde, Ramazan ayı boyunca televizyon kanallarında yayımlanan programları takip ettiklerini, dini bilgilerin paylaşıldığı soru-cevap bölümlerinin de izleme alışkanlıkları içinde bulunduğunu ifade edilmiştir. Bazı katılımcılar ise bu programlar aracılığıyla oruç tutma, teravih namazı ve dini toplantılar gibi kavramları öğrendiklerini belirtmiş ve bu programlar sayesinde din konusundaki bilgilerini genişletme fırsatına sahip olduklarını vurgulamışlardır.

Çalışmanın önemli bulgularından biri, dinî içerikli ve inanç temelli yayınların, farklı okuma tarzları geliştiren Azerbaycanlı izleyiciler tarafından takip edildiğidir. Sovyet döneminin inanç temelli yasaklayıcı uygulamalarını takiben, bağımsızlık döneminde Azerbaycan'da dinî uyanma sürecinin çeşitli kaynaklardan beslendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu uyanma döneminde, Türk televizyon kanallarında yayımlanan dinî programlar ve inanç temelli içeriklerin etkili bir rol oynadığı çalışmada elde edilen bulgular arasında yer almaktadır. Bu etkilerin, özellikle Müslümanlar için kutsal kabul edilen zamanlarda izleyicilerin bu programlara artan ilgisiyle birlikte sunulan içeriğin katılımcı okumasıyla alımlandığı anlaşılmaktadır. İnanç temelli yayınlara karşı müzakereci veya karşıt okumaların bireylerin dünya görüşleriyle şekillenebileceği de bulguları arasındadır.

Türk televizyon programlarının Türk-İslam anlayışına dayalı şekillendirilmiş içeriklerinin Azerbaycanlı izleyici kitlesinin katılımcı okuma sürecine dahil edilmesi, kültürel ve inanç biçimlerinde gözlemlenen farklı kod açımı uygulamalarına işaret eden tamamen karşıt bir alımlama sürecine ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, Azerbaycanlı izleyicilerin yalnızca dini içerik yayınlayan kanalları didaktik-katılımcı bir alımlamayla takip etmeleri, televizyon yayınlarının dini bilgi paylaşım platformları olarak aktif işlevselliğini göstermektedir. Öte yandan, dinî konuları ele alan programlar için katılımcı okuma uygulamasının gözlenmediği, ancak katılımcıların dinî sorularını ve sorunlarını paylaştıkları programlar için aynı durumun geçerli olmadığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu farklılığın temel nedeninin, Türkiye'deki mevcut sosyo-kültürel yapıların, özellikle dini inançlar açısından, Azerbaycan'da yaygın olanlardan farklı olması konusu ön plana çıkmaktadır.

Çalışmanın Etik İzin Bilgileri / Ethics Committee Approval

Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu'nun 30/11/2021 tarihli, 434 başvuru nolu kararı çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.

According to the decision numbered 434 dated 30/11/2021 of the Ethics Committee of Erciyes University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, the study has been deemed ethically appropriate.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları eşittir.
Authors' contribution rates in the study are equal.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

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.

İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy

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