

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Representation of Turkish Identity and Norms in the Media: 2020 Karabakh War*

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Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia became one of the most critical agenda items in the international community again in 2020, resulting in thousands of casualties from both countries due to the conflicts.

This study discusses Türkiye's attitude towards the 2020 Karabakh War in the context of international relations, based on the constructivist theory. It focuses on explaining how the country's national identity, as well as the international norms it adheres to, played a decisive role in its current foreign policy implementation. To do this, news articles related to the 2020 Karabakh War were gathered from Turkish and Azerbaijani news portals and subjected to content analysis.

The analysis findings revealed that both Turkish and Azerbaijani media heavily emphasized messages related to shared identities and norms that play a significant role in shaping the perception and identities of the parties involved in the conflict. Furthermore, the media depicted the war as a matter of national identity and sovereignty.

Keywords

Identity, norm, foreign policy, Karabakh War, Türkiye-Azerbaijan, media.

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Türk Kimlik ve Normlarının Medyada Temsili: 2020 Karabağ Savaşı*

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Öz

Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan arasında yaşanan Dağlık Karabağ sorunu 2020 yılında tekrar uluslararası kamuoyunun en önemli gündem maddelerinden biri hâline gelmiş, yaşanan çatışmalarda her iki ülkeden binlerce kişi yaşamını yitirmiştir. Bu çalışma, uluslararası ilişkiler bağlamında Türkiye'nin 2020 Karabağ Savaşı'yla ilgili medyaya yansıyan tutumunu yapılandırmacılık teorisi ekseninde tartışmakta, ülkenin ulusal kimliğinin yanı sıra bağlı olduğu uluslararası normların mevcut dış politika icrasında ne denli belirleyici unsur olduğunu açıklamaya odaklanmaktadır. Bu noktadan hareketle Türkiye ve Azerbaycan haber portallarında 2020 Karabağ Savaşı'yla ilgili yer alan haberler araştırma kapsamına alınarak içerik analizi yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Analiz bulguları Türk ve Azerbaycan medyasının haber tasarımında çatışmaya dâhil olan tarafların algı ve kimliklerinin şekillenmesinde önemli bir rol oynayan ortak kimlik ve normlarla ilgili iletilere yoğun olarak yer verdiğini ve medyanın savaşı bir ulusal kimlik ve egemenlik meselesi olarak tasvir ettiğini ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kimlik, norm, dış politika, Karabağ Savaşı, Türkiye-Azerbaycan, medya.

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Introduction

International relations and identity have long been included in academic research domains, with various theoretical studies exploring the international system, relationships between states, and the role of media in shaping the subject. The theoretical framework of this study focuses on constructivism in international relations. Constructivism, which emerged in the United States in the late 1980s (Rosyidin), is an increasingly important social theory aimed at illuminating the main elements of international politics, upon which international relations theories are also built. The term “constructivism” in international relations was first used by international relations scientist Nicolas Onuf from Florida International University in his 1989 study “World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations” (Onuf Rule and rules; Onuf, World of Our Making). Constructivist theory posits that international relations are shaped not only by material factors such as military power or economic resources but also by ideas and norms that shape the behaviors of states and other actors in the international system. The immaterial dimension manifests in the identities, norms, and interests of the actors. Material factors alone have no inherent meaning; what matters is how they are interpreted. States or other actors are akin to rational and conscious individuals, gaining identity through interaction. Constructivist theory characterizes identity as a socially constructed concept shaped by various factors, including media representations. Identity and norms are crucial in constructivist research models, functioning both as dependent and independent variables. As independent variables, they can define the motivations behind actors’ actions. As dependent variables, they are products of social construction (Rosyidin). According to constructivist theory, norms guide actors in choosing actions consistent with widely accepted principles and rules, considering the actors’ identities. Constructivism posits that social structure results from the interaction between actors and structure. Constructivism posits that social structure is the result of social construction generated by the interaction between the actor and the structure.

Constructivism in international relations developed from an understanding inspired by the theory of symbolic interactionism in sociology. International conflicts and cooperation arise from the construction of national identities

within symbolic interaction (Hopf). Assuming that national identity is often unique, citizens of a nation are expected to conform to a specific character or participate in a unique lifestyle that distinguishes them from 'others' beyond their borders. Otherwise, there would be no ontological justification for a nation's existence (Skey). A nation exists within 'a complex of other nation-states' (Billig). Postmodernists contend that constructivism is as much an ontology as it is an epistemology, asserting that theories, in the most literal sense, construct the world (Wendt 49). The epistemology of constructivism is founded on the relationship between structure and actors, which is crucial. Constructivism, by contextualizing Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, emphasizes that the relationship between structure and actors is always a reciprocal and cyclical process. In Giddens' structuration theory, in this cyclical process, actors, actions, and interactions are on one hand constrained by the structural dimension of social reality, while on the other hand, they reproduce this structure (Giddens and Turner 15).

George Herbert Mead, a philosopher and social psychologist representative of symbolic interactionism, enriches constructivist theory by questioning, from an anthropological perspective to what extent every form of human knowledge-seeking is simultaneously an interaction within a social context (Alver 20). He interaction developing in the process of constructing the social structure described by constructivism occurs through symbols and gestures between structure and actor, contributing to the development of social identity through the socialization of individuals. An individual grows up hearing, seeing, and using concepts constructed with language within the social environment they are born into. This form of interaction also marks the beginning of communication. Communication involves assigning meaning to symbols and gestures and interpreting the world through these meanings. The mind can be said to exhibit symbolic behavior. According to Mead's theory of action, individuals cannot be separated from their own social environments. As social beings, the determination of meaning among individuals with whom they interact is possible through the interpretation of symbols and gestures via social interaction (Şenol 25; Alver 20). The communication form emerging from interactions that enable the interpretation of symbols and gestures in symbolic interactionism shapes the mind and molds perceptions on national identity. The mind utilizes indicators of previously learned symbols. In other words, it understands

and responds to reactions by interpreting the symbols it has learned during communication with others. In this context, symbolic interactionism not only analyzes the design of socio-cultural identities and national identities in the media and the positive or negative outcomes of this design from a communication perspective but also addresses questions about how national identities are constructed and perceived.

According to Krotz, media communication can be perceived as a form of symbolic action and a modification of interaction (Alver 37). States can enhance their relationships and modify their policies through the media. National identity has a significant impact on news coverage (Rowling et al.; Shahin; Song et al.). When national identity is at stake, journalists are likely to overlook professional values and frame events to favor the elites of their own nations. News related to foreign policy activates the national identity of journalists and their use of relevant symbols, resulting in news production that mirrors the decisions of policymaking elites. Policymakers are influenced by national identity when designing foreign policy. The news industry can shape collective identities impacting international relations. Media representations of nations, individuals, and groups can either reinforce existing identities or generate public opinion against them, affecting how countries interact. Through language and symbols, the media can support a nationalist agenda or pursue opposing policies, leading to cooperation or tensions between countries.

In the realm of foreign policy, the identities and interests of actors hold significant importance. To accurately analyze issues such as culture, identity, national identity, national interests, security, and state identity within international relations, as well as to evaluate the role of law in international politics and understand how states determine their foreign policy preferences, the constructivist approach serves as a crucial tool. As states become more familiar with and engage in exchanges with one another, they can achieve mutual understanding and resolve any conflicts or issues without resorting to confrontation or war, facilitated by the constructivist approach.

The constructivist theory posits that knowledge and reality derive from social constructs, emphasizing how language and symbols shape social reality. Within this framework, the aim of this study is to examine the foundational principles of constructivist theory in international relations

and to elucidate its explanatory potential alongside its limitations for media analyses. Understanding how the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War was linguistically and culturally represented by the media from a constructivist perspective holds particular significance within the realm of international relations. Media representations are intricately intertwined with societal and ideological contexts. Given the shared ideological inclinations in Turkish and Azerbaijani media, as well as the robust political, military, societal, and strategic ties between the two nations, news coverage aligned with common interests may shape the media's portrayal of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. An examination of the actors, symbols, and discourses present in both Turkish and Azerbaijani media allows for a comparative analysis with foreign media representations, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of both disparities and similarities.

Within this framework, this study discusses the representation of Turkish identity norms in the media in the context of the 2020 Karabakh War and focuses on explaining the importance of national identities and international norms in the field of international relations. The study aims to contribute to the existing literature on news framing by analyzing news reports published in Türkiye and Azerbaijan regarding the presentation of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War using content analysis methodology. Based on the assumption that the media can frame events within the axis of government-media relations, incorporating its own ideological perspectives, thereby shaping international relations, emphasizing international cooperation, and establishing various norms, the study formulates the following questions: Within the framework of constructivism, to what extent are Türkiye's national identity and adherence to international norms, particularly the constructive role it embraces with the principle of "peace at home, peace in the world," determinative in its active foreign policy stance regarding the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War? Considering Türkiye's deep-rooted historical ties with Azerbaijan, characterized by both physical resemblances (religion, language, culture, and identity) and non-physical similarities (ideals, shared strategic objectives), as well as its sustained political and economic relations based on the concept of "two states, one nation," how does the media approach the conflict within the framework of Türkiye's official policy? What are the dominant frames in the media integrated into national identity?

Historical Background

The historical background of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh can be traced back to the Soviet era when Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The conflict transcends ethnic groups and involves states, yielding international ramifications. As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1988, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh voted to secede from Azerbaijan and join Armenia. The ensuing war, which ended in a ceasefire in 1994 mediated by Moscow, resulted in the de facto establishment of a republic under Armenian control in Karabakh. Diplomatic efforts led by the OSCE Minsk Group failed to produce a resolution, and the issue remains unresolved. The complexities of finding a lasting solution stem from entrenched ethnic nationalism in both countries and the involvement of regional actors with geopolitical interests in the region.

The origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue can be traced back to the Treaty of Kurekchay in 1805 between Iran and Russia. As a result, the independent Khanate of Karabakh was annexed to the Russian Empire, marking the beginning of a significant influx of Armenians from Russia and Iran into Azerbaijani territories. The tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians date back to the first Russian Revolution of 1905. Initially sparked by disturbances in Baku, the unrest spread to Shusha, the site of the first ethnic uprisings in Western Karabakh. The violence escalated, resulting in the massacre of over 10,000 Azerbaijanis in cities such as Baku, Nakhchivan, and Ganja. In May 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Democratic Republic of Georgia were established, followed shortly thereafter by the proclamation of the Armenian Democratic Republic in Tiflis. However, this situation was short-lived. While the Azerbaijani army was engaged in suppressing an Armenian uprising in Karabakh, the Red Army entered Baku in 1920, and subsequently, the Bolsheviks seized control of Yerevan, Tbilisi, and the entire Transcaucasus region.

On July 7, 1923, Nagorno-Karabakh was established as an Autonomous Region within Soviet Azerbaijan. In 1988, the region sought to secede from Azerbaijan and requested annexation by Armenia. Following the rejection of this decision, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh decided to unite with the Republic of Armenia, a decision ratified by the Armenian Parliament in

December 1989. Then ethnic conflicts ensued, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency in Baku. This resulted in significant casualties and injuries among civilians. In 1991, the unilateral declaration of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic by the Armenians in the region sparked a full-scale war. In February 1992, the Khojaly massacre occurred, wherein 613 Azerbaijani civilians were killed by Armenian forces. The conflict saw the occupation of Shusha and Lachin by Armenian forces. This resulted in Armenia gaining control over approximately 20% of Azerbaijani territory, including Upper Karabakh and surrounding areas, with one million Azerbaijani citizens becoming refugees. The demographic structure of the region changed drastically, with many Azerbaijanis displaced from their homeland. After the conflict which caused approximately 30,000 deaths, on November 11, 1993, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 884, condemning the attacks on Azerbaijani territories. The resolution demanded the immediate unilateral withdrawal of occupying forces from newly seized regions, particularly Zangilan and the city of Horadiz. A ceasefire agreement was signed on May 12, 1994, with Russia acting as a mediator. During the OSCE Budapest Summit on December 5-6, 1994, the heads of state and government of OSCE participating states established the Minsk Conference co-chairmanship to coordinate mediation efforts within the OSCE framework. The Minsk Group, comprising 17 members including Türkiye, is co-chaired solely by the United States, Russia, and France.

The ceasefire process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in place since 1994, faced its most serious violation in April 2016. Armenian military provocations led to the bombing of densely populated Azerbaijani regions, resulting in significant casualties. The Four-Day War ended with heavy losses for the Armenian army and the recapture of strategic positions by Azerbaijani forces, boosting their morale. Türkiye's support for Azerbaijan during the conflict caused disappointment in Armenia and further strained relations between two countries.

Following its defeat, the Armenian army attacked Tovuz, located along the Azerbaijan-Armenia border, on July 12, 2020, reigniting conflict in the region. The region garnered heightened attention, prompting Türkiye to reiterate its unwavering support for Azerbaijan, its geostrategic partner,

which it categorizes as a fraternal nation within the realms of military and political cooperation. As a NATO member, Türkiye engaged in shuttle diplomacy, acting as a neutral mediator while pushing the OSCE to address the issue on an international platform. High-level contacts between Turkish and Azerbaijani officials intensified, leading to joint military exercises. Aside from Türkiye's national identity, the influence of pro-Azerbaijani sentiment in domestic politics, rising nationalism, cultural and linguistic connections, and the establishment of key joint ventures like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and the South Caucasus natural gas pipeline, have all positioned Türkiye as a stakeholder. Türkiye has adopted a foreign policy supportive of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict. Türkiye's assistance in the political and military domains using unmanned aerial vehicles facilitated the rapid conclusion of the war. In response to the attack launched by Armenian forces on September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan conducted counterattacks with unmanned aerial vehicles, causing significant casualties to the Armenian army and liberating cities like Shusha, Jabrayil, and Agdam from occupation. The victory decisively belongs to Azerbaijan. During the 2020 Karabakh War, Türkiye, as one of the main actors in the region, preferred to shift its foreign and security policy from a line of soft power to a harder stance. Türkiye's policy not only turned the balance in favor of Azerbaijan but also demonstrated to Russia that a game in the region's future could not be established without Türkiye's involvement.

After Soviet Union's dissolution, bilateral relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan developed rapidly, bolstered by ethnic and cultural similarities as well as mutual support from both societies. At the end of 1991, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Azerbaijan and Armenia declared their independence. Within less than two years, Azerbaijan lost control over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and most of the areas that were predominantly Azerbaijani. From the onset of the conflict in 1988, more than one million Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homes and living areas in Armenia, Karabakh, or the surrounding regions.

During the conflict, Azerbaijan faced isolation internationally, with the U.S., Russia, and even Iran, despite its status as an Islamic state. However, Türkiye stood by Azerbaijan, backing its legitimate claims due to shared cultural, religious, and linguistic ties. Facing strong Armenian advocacy

on international platforms, Türkiye declared its support for Azerbaijan and announced that it would enforce an embargo on Armenia as long as Armenian forces occupied Azerbaijani lands. Türkiye clearly conveyed consistent support Azerbaijan in its Karabakh policy.

Methodology

During war and crises, national media often emphasizes symbols and values tied to the dominant national identity in domestic politics. It is increasingly accepted that countries with close strategic and diplomatic ties will also adhere to these. Based on this premise and guided by constructivist theory, this research aims to analyze the emphasized elements and dominant news frames in publications from news portals with varying ideological perspectives in Türkiye and Azerbaijan during the 2020 Karabakh War. These countries, considered fraternal due to their ethnic and cultural roots, have shared social memories that influence their media portrayals. This study employs content analysis as its primary research method. Content analysis is a technique used to interpret message content such as texts, images, symbols, or audio data (Gheyle and Jacobs). The objective of content analysis is to systematically transform large volumes of data into a highly organized and concise summary (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz 94). In brief, it can be described as an effort to identify and define the intentions, themes, and trends in texts as a whole. There may, and often should, be an anticipated relationship among the variables measured in content analysis (Neuendorf 44). Every content analysis must consider the content and form characteristics of the messages. Content analysis studies aim to guide future academic research within the scope of the topic under consideration and determine the overall trend on the subject (Ültay et. al. 190).

The analysis focuses on the 2020 Karabakh War, which commenced on September 27, 2020, with an Armenian attack on Azerbaijani military positions and civilian settlements. This conflict lasted for 44 days, ending with the Azerbaijani army's response. The study examines news articles published on six of the most followed news portals in Türkiye and Azerbaijan: *Cumhuriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Yeniçağ* from Türkiye, and *Trend*, *AzadlıqRadiosu*, *Azertac* from Azerbaijan. The research is limited to Turkish and Azerbaijani news portals, with the selection criteria based on their ideological perspectives. In the research, news articles related to the war

were selected from a universe of news coverage across six news portals using purposive sampling. The selected articles span a total duration of ten days, covering the initial three days, the middle three days, and the final four days following the war's onset. A total of 717 news articles, published between October 1, 2020, and November 10, 2020, were analyzed.

Based on the questions of the study, the assumptions of the research are as such:

H.1. Türkiye's national identity and adherence to international norms are fundamental in its active foreign policy during the 2020 Karabakh War. Türkiye's independent and peaceful identity is reflected in its mediation role in resolving international conflicts and its membership in various organizations, notably the United Nations.

H.2. The analyzed news portals have covered the 2020 Karabakh War in a manner that aligns with the official foreign policies of their respective governments. Türkiye's official positions and strategies concerning the 2020 Karabakh conflict mirror its national identity and its commitment to international norms.

H.3. In Turkish news portals' coverage of the 2020 Karabakh War, prevalent ideological themes highlighting Azerbaijan's historical ethnic makeup were favored, with visuals reinforcing these symbols.

H.4. Turkish and Azerbaijani news portals' contents primarily rely on the output of national news agencies. Due to limited production from foreign news agencies, the number of news items is restricted. Consequently, the composition of the news content produced is shaped by the interplay between structure and action.

H.5. The news coverage of the 2020 Karabakh War in the analyzed news portals is predominantly influenced by the perspectives of the news actors involved.

Assessment of the Acquired Results

The quantitative and qualitative content analysis findings of the news articles published on the selected portals are presented below.

Quantitative Analysis of the News

Table 1

Number and Proportions of News on the 2020 Karabakh War in News Portals

<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
58	8.1	112	15.6	125	17.4	159	22.2	29	4	234	32.6
Total 717									100%		

Source: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr>; <https://www.milliyet.com.tr>; <https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr>; <https://az.trend.az>; <https://www.azadliq.org>; <https://azertag.az>

Table 1 presents that according to 717 news articles analyzed across six news portals, 32.6% were published on *Azertac*, 22.2% on *Trend*, 17.4% on *Yeniçağ*, 15.6% on *Milliyet*, 8.1% on *Cumhuriyet*, and 4% on *AzadlıqRadiosu*. The highest number of news articles was published on the *Azertac* news portal.

Table 2
Organizations Producing News on the 2020 Karabakh War

Organization Generating News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
Turkish News Agencies	20	34.5	68	60.7	37	29.6	5	3.1	0	0	3	1.3
Russian News Agencies	0	0	0	0	2	1.6	4	2.5	0	0	0	0
Azerbaijani News Agencies	0	0	1	0.9	4	3.2	86	54.1	6	20.7	167	71.4
International Agencies	3	5.2	3	2.7	1	0.8	7	4.4	5	17.2	10	4.3
Social Media Accounts	3	5.2	3	2.7	19	15.2	13	8.2	1	3.4	9	3.8
Self Generated	27	46.6	26	23.2	21	16.8	33	20.8	12	41.3	20	8.5
Mix Generated	5	8.6	11	9.9	41	32.8	11	6.9	5	17.2	25	10.6
Total	58	100	112	100	125	100	159	100	29	100	234	100

According to Table 2 news portals prioritize their own productions. So, *Cumhuriyet* stands out as the news portal that predominantly features its own productions, with 46.6%. Except for *AzadlıqRadiosu*, ranking second, the other five news portals utilize Turkish news agencies (34.5%), followed by a mixture of national news agencies from respective countries. International agencies and social media accounts of political actors are used as sources of news content to a lesser extent, with a minimum rate of 5.2%. According to Table 2, *Milliyet* is the news portal that utilizes Turkish news agencies the most, with 60.7%, while *Azertac*, with 1.3%, is the news portal that utilizes Turkish news agencies the least. This news portal, with 74.4%, prefers to use Azerbaijan news agencies the most as a source.

Table 3

Use of Visuals in News Coverage of the 2020 Karabakh War

Use of Visuals in News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %
Color photos	49	71	434	87.3	174	83.7	228	93.8	33	66	679	94.3
Black and White photos	6	8.7	17	3.4	4	1.9	0	0	0	0	1	0.1
Video content	10	14.5	26	5.2	22	10.6	12	4.9	15	30	37	5.1
Graphics	1	1.4	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Map Photos	3	4.3	18	3.6	8	3.8	3	1.2	2	4	3	0.4
Total	69	100	497	100	208	100	243	100	50	100	720	100

The use of visuals in news coverage on the 2020 Karabakh War is presented in Table 3. According to this, colored photographs are favored to a greater extent than black and white photographs across all the news portals subjected to analysis. In the sharing of colored photographs, *Azertac* ranks first among news portals with 94.3%, followed by *Trend* with 93.8%, and *Milliyet* ranks third with 87.3%. The use of black and white photographs is highest at *Cumhuriyet* with 8.7%, while *Trend* and *AzadlıqRadiosu* do not include any black and white photographs. Advancements in digital technologies have led to a reduction in the prevalence of black and white photographs within news design, concurrently facilitating an upsurge in the incorporation of video content. The findings indicate that *AzadlıqRadiosu* has notably embraced video content, accounting for 30% of its articles, with *Cumhuriyet* following at 14.5%. Analysis of graphic use across all news portals reveals low incidence, with a notable preference for map photographs delineating the spatial progression of the conflict. *Cumhuriyet* emerges as the frontrunner in this regard, with a utilization rate of 4.3%, while *Azertac* exhibits the lowest adoption rate at 0.4%.

Qualitative Analysis of News

Table 4

Actors Involved in News Coverage of the 2020 Karabakh War

News Actors	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %
Government Representatives	27	39.1	72	40	62	35.7	113	50	20	40	151	44.7
Military Personnel	16	23.2	40	22.1	37	21.2	30	13.3	8	16	27	8

International Organizations	4	5.8	8	4.4	4	2.2	4	1.8	0	0	2	0.6
NGOs	0	0	6	3.3	4	2.2	10	4.4	1	2	35	10.3
Scientists	6	8.7	4	2.1	7	4	20	8.8	7	14	32	9.5
Public	5	7.2	33	18.2	36	20.7	33	14.6	7	14	60	17.6
Opposition	3	4.3	5	2.8	12	6.9	10	4.4	5	10	10	3
Politicians	6	8.7	9	5	2	1.2	1	0.4	2	4	11	3.2
Popular Figures	2	2.9	4	2.1	10	5.8	5	2.2	0	0	10	3
Total	69	100	181	100	174	100	226	100	50	100	338	100

Table 4 presents the numbers and proportions of news actors utilized in news articles related to the 2020 Karabakh War. Across all news portals, government representatives are the primary news actors, followed by military personnel. Azerbaijani news portals, government representatives are featured more prominently compared to Turkish portals. Among Turkish news portals, *Milliyet* emerges as the most frequent user of government representatives (39.1%), while *Yeniçağ* is identified as the least frequent (35.7%). Among Azerbaijani news portals, *Trend* features government representatives most frequently (50%), while *AzadlıqRadiosu* features them least frequently (40%). Military personnel are predominantly depicted as news actors, with *Cumhuriyet* exhibiting the highest frequency (23.2%),

while *Yeniçağ* demonstrates the lowest frequency (21.3%). Azerbaijani news portals exhibit a lower usage rate of military personnel as news actors compared to Turkish counterparts. The involvement of international organizations and NGOs as news actors is notably limited across all news portals. *Cumhuriyet* notably highlights international organizations at 5.8%, while it does not incorporate any representatives from NGOs. In contrast, *AzadlıqRadiosu*, despite lacking any representation of international organizations as news actors, prominently features representatives from NGOs. Conversely, scientists emerge as the most prominently featured news actors at *AzadlıqRadiosu*, constituting 14% of the total, whereas the general public is predominantly represented in articles on *Yeniçağ*, with 20.7%. Opposition figures are prominently featured at *AzadlıqRadiosu*, comprising a 10%, while politicians are most frequently portrayed on *Cumhuriyet* at 8.7%. Popular figures feature most prominently on *Yeniçağ*, representing 5.8%.

Table 5

Message Contents in News Published on 01-03.10.2020 Regarding the 2020 Karabakh War

Message Contents in News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
Azerbaijan's Independent National Identity and the Legality of the War under International Law	11	20	38	19.5	28	42.4	33	31.4	4	36.3	102	36.4

Armenia's Occupying Identity and the Warrior Norm	7	12.7	34	17.4	10	15.1	18	17.1	0	0	74	26.4
Turkish Identity and Türkiye's Peaceful Norm	15	27.3	35	17.9	14	21.2	24	22.9	3	27.3	61	21.8
The Influence of Armenian Lobbies on the War	1	1.8	7	3.6	0	0	2	1.9	1	9.1	7	2.5
International Norms	18	32.8	80	41	11	16.7	27	25.7	3	27.3	35	12.5
Other	3	5.5	1	0.5	3	4.5	1	1	0	0	1	0.3
Total	55	100	195	100	66	100	105	100	11	100	280	100

Message contents in news published on 01-03.10.2020 regarding the 2020 Karabakh War are presented in Table 5. These indicate a significant emphasis on Azerbaijan's independent national identity and compliance of the war with international law across all news portals and during the early stages of the War. So, *Yeniçağ* features relevant message contents most prominently, with 42.4%, while *Milliyet* exhibits the least emphasis at 19.5% among Turkish news portals. Azerbaijani news portals, on the other hand, prominently feature designs highlighting Azerbaijan's independent national identity and the compliance of the war with international law in nearly half of their news content, portraying the conflict from their perspective to naturally legitimize it for their audience. Regarding message

contents related to Armenia’s occupying identity and warrior norm, *Azertac* features them most prominently at 26.4%, while message contents related to Turkish identity and Türkiye’s peaceful norm are most frequently encountered at *Cumhuriyet* and *AzadlıqRadosu*, both at 27.3%. Message contents concerning the influence of Armenian lobbies are featured at *AzadlıqRadosu* at 9.1%, while *Yeniçağ* does not feature any content on this topic. The table shows that message contents related to international norms (involving participating countries, EU, ECtHR, UN, OSCE Minsk Group, the destructive impact of the war, and achieving a peaceful resolution) are prominently featured across all news portals, with *Cumhuriyet* exhibiting the highest frequency at 32.8%.

Table 6

Message Contents in News Published on 18-20.10.2020 Regarding the War

Message Contents in News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %	Number	Prop. %
Azerbaijan’s Independent National Identity and the Legality of the War under International Law	14	42.4	20	37	39	37.5	58	44	5	31.2	99	40.2

Armenia's Occupying Identity and the Warrior Norm	11	33.3	13	24	29	27.8	29	22	4	25	71	28.9
Turkish Identity and Türkiye's Peaceful Norm	4	12.1	9	16.6	26	25	35	26.5	4	25	56	22.8
The Influence of Armenian Lobbies on the War	0	0	2	3.7	0	0	1	0.8	0	0	0	0
International Norms	3	9	9	16.6	9	8.6	8	6	3	18.8	20	8.1
Other	1	3	1	1.9	1	1	1	0.8	0	0	0	0
Total	33	100	54	100	104	100	132	100	16	100	246	100

Data on the message contents in news published between 18-20.10.2020, on the 2020 Karabakh War, is presented in Table 6. A comparison between the message contents reveals an increase in the emphasis on Azerbaijan's independent national identity and compliance of the war with international law across all news portals towards the middle of the conflict. Alongside these messages, content regarding Armenia's occupying identity and warrior norm, which contributes to legitimizing the conflict from Azerbaijan's perspective, ranks second among the most frequently used message contents in news. Thirdly, there is a notable emphasis on news concerning Turkish identity and Türkiye's peaceful norm.

Table 7

Message Contents in News Published on 07-10.11.2020 Regarding the War

Message Contents in News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
Azerbaijan's Independent National Identity and the Legality of the War under International Law	11	31.4	27	44.2	29	46	99	47.3	26	53.1	113	54.1
Armenia's Occupying Identity and the Warrior Norm	1	2.9	6	9.8	3	4.8	20	9.6	1	2	23	11
Turkish Identity and Türkiye's Peaceful Norm	8	22.9	15	24.6	17	27	54	25.8	3	6.1	59	28.2
The Influence of Armenian Lobbies on the War	0	0	1	1.6	0	0	2	1	1	2	3	1.5

International Norms	14	40	12	19.7	13	20.6	33	15.8	15	30.6	11	5.2
Other	1	2.9	0	0	1	1.6	1	0.5	3	6.1	0	0
Total	35	100	61	100	63	100	209	100	49	100	209	100

Table 7 delineates the message contents characterizing the concluding phase of the 2020 Karabakh War, disseminated between 07-10.11.2020. Notably, Azerbaijan’s independent national identity and the war’s adherence to international law persist as prominent thematic elements. Concurrently, there is a discernible proportional augmentation in message contents pertaining to Turkish identity and Türkiye’s peaceful norm, alongside an increase in news incorporating international norms. During the specified period, *Azertac* prominently featured message contents concerning Azerbaijan’s independent national identity and the war’s conformity to international law, accounting for the highest proportion at 54.1%, whereas *Cumhuriyet* exhibited the lowest proportion at 31.4%. Messages on Turkish identity and Türkiye’s peaceful norms were predominantly featured on *Azertac*, accounting for 28.2% of the content, whereas messages concerning international norms (involving participating countries, EU, ECHR, UN, OSCE Minsk Group, the destructive effects of war, and peaceful settlement) were chiefly found on *Cumhuriyet*, representing 40% of the total content.

Table 8
Frames of News Coverage on the 2020 Karabakh War

News Circles	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Radiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
National Identity	2	3	5	3	10	6.4	14	5.2	1	2.6	15	3.7
Peace, Decisive Victory, and Independence	32	47.8	93	56.4	78	50	131	49.1	28	71.8	197	48.4
Unconditional Ceasefire	9	13.4	11	6.7	8	5.1	2	0.7	0	0	1	0.2
Armenia's Unlawful Claims	9	13.4	28	17	17	10.9	48	18	1	2.6	95	23.3
Economy	2	3	4	2.4	3	1.9	15	5.6	0	0	22	5.4
Political, Social and International Support	12	17.9	24	14.5	37	23.7	54	20.2	6	15.4	77	18.9
Other	1	1.5	0	0	3	1.9	3	1.1	3	7.7	0	0
Total	67	100	165	100	156	100	267	100	39	100	407	100

Table 8 presents news coverage frames on the 2020 Karabakh War. The majority of news frames in the news portals revolve around the themes of peace/decisive victory and independence, emphasizing Azerbaijan's justness and strength. In terms of number and proportion, the second most prevalent theme is political/social and international support, followed by Armenia's unlawful claims. This is followed by calls for an unconditional ceasefire. Turkish news portals feature messages of peace, decisive victory, and independence, with rates of 47.8% on *Cumhuriyet*, 56.4% on *Milliyet*, and 50% on *Yeniçağ*. From Azerbaijani portals, *Trend* utilizes these messages at 49.1%, *AzadlıqRadiosu* at 71.8%, and *Azertac* at 48.4%. Themes related to political, social, and international support are featured on *Cumhuriyet* at 17.9%, *Milliyet* at 14.5%, *Yeniçağ* at 23.7%, *Trend* at 20.2%, *AzadlıqRadiosu* at 15.4%, and *Azertac* at 18.9%. Regarding frames concerning Armenia's unlawful claims, *Cumhuriyet* features them at 13.4%, *Milliyet* at 17%, *Yeniçağ* at 10.9%, *Trend* at 18%, *AzadlıqRadiosu* at 2.6%, and *Azertac* at 23.3%. Concerning the theme of an unconditional ceasefire, *Cumhuriyet* features it at 13.4%, *Milliyet* at 6.7%, *Yeniçağ* at 5.1%, *Trend* at 0.7%, and *Azertac* at 0.2%, while no coverage is found on *AzadlıqRadiosu*. News frames focused on an unconditional ceasefire highlight the statements of countries advocating for a ceasefire without considering demands for the return of Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia, with news reports noting that these demands are not accepted by Azerbaijan and Türkiye. News portals provide coverage of economic and national identity frames in approximately equal proportions, with the least coverage observed in other categories of news frames.

Table 9
Messages Regarding Culture and Identity in the News

Culture and Identity in the News	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>		<i>Milliyet</i>		<i>Yeniçağ</i>		<i>Trend</i>		<i>Azadlıq Rudiosu</i>		<i>Azertac</i>	
	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%	Number	Prop.%
Common Language/ Religion/Historical Background	1	1.6	7	4.9	10	5.9	17	7.3	0	0	23	6.4
Turkish Identity	13	20.3	32	22.5	55	32.5	110	47	9	25	179	50
Solidarity and Fellowship	9	14.1	51	35.9	51	30.2	65	27.8	8	22.2	102	28.5
A Few in One	41	64.1	52	36.7	53	31.3	42	18	19	52.8	54	15
Total	64	100	142	100	169	100	234	100	36	100	358	100

Table 9 depicts the news messages on culture and identity concerning the 2020 Karabakh War. All examined news portals predominantly feature messages containing various elements related to culture and identity, as formulated by researchers. Messages containing multiple elements (common language/ religion/historical background, Turkish identity, solidarity, and brotherhood) are most prevalent on *Cumhuriyet* at 64.1%, followed by *AzadlıqRudiosu* at 52.8%, *Milliyet* at 36.7%, *Yeniçağ* at 31.3%, *Trend* at 18%, and *Azertac* at 15%. Turkish identity-related messages rank second, and solidarity and brotherhood-related messages rank third. The proportion of these messages is found to be *Cumhuriyet* at 14%, *Milliyet* at 35.9%, *Yeniçağ* at 30.2%, *Trend* at 27.8%, *AzadlıqRudiosu* at 22.2%, and *Azertac* at 28.5%.

Conclusion and Discussion

The constructivist theory within international relations underscores the significance of ideas, norms, and identities in influencing the conduct of states and their global consequences. This serves as a valuable tool for elucidating the dynamics of conflict and collaboration in foreign affairs, by accentuating the role of historical and cultural backgrounds. Our analysis illustrates how the constructivist theory in international relations offers insights into the 2020 Karabakh War, portraying it as an outcome of the interplay between historical and cultural identities and narratives that shape the perspectives and behaviors of the involved parties.

This study employs a constructivist lens to examine the portrayal of the 2020 Karabakh War in the media, with a specific focus on identity and normative frameworks. It becomes evident that both Turkish and Azerbaijani media outlets play pivotal roles in shaping the perceptions and identities of the conflict's stakeholders, framing the war as a question of national identity and sovereignty. Particularly noteworthy is the stance taken by the Turkish media, which, influenced by historical and cultural bonds, adopts a discourse in its coverage of the 2020 Karabakh War that aligns with one side, characterizing the conflict as an act of aggression. This finding lends support to our second hypothesis.

The study indicates that news portals predominantly prioritize their own generated news content, with the exception of *AzadlıqRadiosu*, which predominantly sources from Turkish news agencies and media outlets. This data underscores the effective collaboration between Turkish media and their support for Azerbaijani media. Using official social media accounts of political figures as sources by all news portals during the war underscores the significant role of social media in war reporting.

The consistent adherence of media coverage to the official government policies of their respective countries and the framing of issues through the perspectives of news elites aligned with their ideologies, as revealed by the analysis results, also confirms our fifth hypothesis. News portals predominantly featured heads of state, government representatives, and military personnel as news actors, while also incorporating scientists, experts, and representatives of civil society organizations. This approach

aimed not only to garner political support but also to establish credibility by referencing scientific and societal realities.

News messages on war were analyzed in three separate tables: three days at the beginning of the war, three days towards the middle of the war and four days towards the end of the war. In all three tables, considering the content of the news messages, it was observed that in all news portals, Türkiye's peaceful norm was the most common, in the second place, news about Azerbaijan being the strong and justified side in the war, and in the third place, news about Russia being decisive in the war, especially in the last days of the war, were included. The UN Security Council has accepted resolutions in favor of Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue four times under different numbers: 822, 853, 874, and 884. In contrast to the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the 2020 conflict has frequently underscored Azerbaijan's strong position with its modern weaponry and trained soldiers. News coverage has extensively featured content regarding the biased behavior of countries such as France, Russia, the United States, and China, as well as international actors like the EU, ECHR, UN, and the OSCE Minsk Group. Reports have been disseminated regarding the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group's mission to produce a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, with criticism directed at the group for allegedly stalling Azerbaijan for 28 years. Throughout the duration of the conflict, the Armenian army has intermittently launched missile attacks on civilian areas in Terter, Ganja, Barda, and Mingachevir, resulting in significant damage. The analysis found that news portals covered reports suggesting Armenia's collaboration with the terrorist organization PKK/YPG. As the operations advanced, it was observed that, in addition to PKK militants, individuals from far-right French groups, volunteers, and mercenaries of Armenian origin from different countries, including Russia, as well as armed militias engaged in the occupation of Crimea, were reportedly participating in combat on the Armenian side. Moreover, news articles have underscored the partial actions of nations such as Russia, France, the United States, China, Iran, along with international entities like the EU, OSCE Minsk Group, and the ECHR amid the ongoing conflict. In this context, our first and second hypotheses were also confirmed.

During the ceasefire-focused communications, Armenia, France, Russia, and the United States have called for a ceasefire without mentioning the return of Azerbaijani territories under occupation, yet their demands were not accepted. There were reports indicating numerous citizens in Türkiye expressing their willingness to volunteer for the Azerbaijani army. Politicians and NGOs have frequently voiced their support for Azerbaijan on various platforms.

The analysis of all examined news portals revealed the predominant use of frames portraying peace/decisive victory and independence, emphasizing Azerbaijan's just and strong position. There has been considerable coverage of Armenia's unlawful claims. Throughout the war, Armenia has persistently disseminated false information on social media platforms, claiming that Armenia was actually at war with the Republic of Türkiye rather than Azerbaijan, attempting to mislead the international public opinion. The Turkish Ministry of National Defense refuted claims made by Armenian officials on their official accounts regarding the involvement of Turkish aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and armed drones (UCAVs) in operations in Armenia. Images showing the Azerbaijani armed forces possessing the capabilities to achieve victory independently were presented to the public via satellite imagery.

In scrutinizing cultural and identity-related narratives within news coverage, it became apparent that alongside variables identified within the "multiple identities" category (inclusive of shared language, religion, historical background, Turkish identity, solidarity, and fraternity), there were also discussions concerning Türkiye's economic partnership with Azerbaijan and assertions about Turkish military involvement using F-16s. Certain news pieces were presented in the form of one or more sentences accompanied by photographs, such as the report on "Pashinyan's meeting with Putin." While news outlets prominently featured narratives centered on solidarity and fraternity, they allocated comparatively less space to narratives pertaining to shared language, religion, and historical background.

The findings concluded that both Turkish and Azerbaijani media outlets, during the 2020 Karabakh War, strategically sought to shape public opinion in support of Azerbaijan by incorporating Turkish identities and norms into their narratives, thereby aligning themselves with official foreign policies of their respective governments. Common cultural and identity norms are determinants in crafting and framing news narratives concerning the conflict.

In conclusion, comparing the findings derived from the constructivist theory perspective with those to be obtained from various theoretical perspectives by different researchers and analyzing the impact of these perspectives on media representations is expected on a global scale to contribute to the development of a multidimensional scientific understanding of the subject. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the gleaned outcomes will furnish instructive data for forthcoming researchers in conducting comparative analyses of the depiction of the 2020 Karabakh War across varied media platforms (including newspapers, television, etc.). The constraints of this study are poised to spark further scholarly exploration. Carrying out a similar study centered on American and European media would elucidate how media entities from nations professing allegiance to Western norms but unmistakably adopted partisan stances in the 2020 Karabakh War (whilst also holding membership in international organizations) framed the conflict and constructed a societal narrative through linguistic and symbolic constructs. The findings posit that engaging in discourse on media within normative theories of international relations and transparently disseminating research outcomes will academically contribute to addressing acute structural challenges within the news ecosystem. Independent investigation, bolstered by autonomous funding, and the augmentation/advancement of the authorial and editorial network as a perpetual norm through bilateral, regional, and international partnerships, will elevate the scholarly caliber of the discipline.

Contribution Rate Statement

The authors' contribution rates in this study are as follows: Betül Pazarbaşı 80%; Selma Koç Akgül 10%, Sehavet Neciyev 10%.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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

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