

Body Image And Gender in Turkish Media: An Analysis of Representation

Türk Medyasında Beden İmajı ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Temsilin Bir Analizi

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Highlights

- Media reinforces gender roles through body image portrayals.
- Youth internalize unattainable beauty ideals.
- Social media blends beauty ideals with cultural norms.
- Male and female bodies are objectified by the media.
- Turkish media merges tradition with global beauty pressures.

Abstract: This study examines the portrayal of body image in Turkish media and its impact on gendered perceptions, particularly among young women and men. It explores how such representations perpetuate gender stereotypes, contributing to body image issues and affecting self-esteem. Drawing on a content analysis of popular television programmes, advertisements, and social media influencers, this study highlights the cultural norms embedded in Turkish media that influence public perceptions of ideal body types. Grounded in Cultivation Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Objectification Theory, the study analyses how prolonged media exposure shapes perceptions of beauty, reinforcing gendered body ideals and leading to internalization of beauty standards and self-objectification, especially among young individuals. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study provides in-depth insights into the symbolic construction of gendered body norms in contemporary Turkish media. The findings suggest that the way that body image is portrayed in Turkish media reinforces traditional gender roles and contributes to an internalization of unattainable beauty standards among young audiences.

Keywords: Body Image, Gender Norms, Turkish Media, Media Representation, Gender Stereotypes

Öne Çıkanlar

- Medya, beden imgesiyle toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarını yeniden üretmektedir.
- Gençler, ulaşılması güç güzellik standartlarını içselleştirmektedir.
- Sosyal medya, güzellik algılarını kültürel normlarla harmanlayarak pekiştirir.
- Erkek ve kadın bedenleri, medya tarafından nesneleştirilmektedir.
- Türk medyası, geleneksel değerlerle küresel estetik baskılar arasında sıkışmıştır.

Öz: Bu araştırma, Türk medyasında beden imgesinin temsilini ve bunun toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı algılar üzerindeki etkisini, özellikle genç kadınlar ve erkekler bağlamında incelemektedir. Çalışma, medya temsillerinin toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargılarını nasıl pekiştirdiğini, bunun beden algısı sorunlarına nasıl

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katkıda bulunduğunu ve özsaygıyı nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır. Popüler televizyon programları, reklamlar ve sosyal medya fenomenlerinin içerik analizine dayanan bu çalışma, Türk medyasına yerleşik kültürel normların ideal beden algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Yetiştirme Kuramı (Cultivation Theory), Sosyal Öğrenme Kuramı (Social Learning Theory) ve Nesneleştirme Kuramı'na (Objectification Theory) dayanan araştırma, uzun süreli medya maruziyetinin güzellik algılarını nasıl biçimlendirdiğini ve toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı beden ideallerini nasıl pekiştirdiğini analiz etmektedir. Bu süreç, özellikle genç bireylerde içselleştirilmiş güzellik standartlarına ve öz-nesneleştirmeye yol açmaktadır. Nitel bir içerik analizi yaklaşımıyla yürütülen bu çalışma, çağdaş Türk medyasında toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı beden normlarının simgesel olarak nasıl inşa edildiğine dair derinlemesine iç görüler sunmaktadır. Bulgular, Türk medyasında beden imgesinin temsilinin geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yeniden ürettiğini ve genç izleyiciler arasında ulaşılması güç güzellik standartlarının içselleştirilmesine katkıda bulunduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Beden İmajı, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Normları, Türk Medyası, Medya Temsili, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Stereotipleri

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values and norms, especially with regard to body image and gender (Murnen & Don, 2012). The portrayal of body image in the media has been extensively scrutinized due to its profound influence on individuals' self-perception and its tendency to promote narrowly defined beauty ideals that may find difficult for many to achieve which can contribute to psychological distress (Paquette & Raine, 2004). This influence can be understood through Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 2017), which suggests that prolonged exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of reality and thereby normalise specific body ideals as the standard of beauty.

Due to its simultaneous engagement with Western consumerist aesthetics and long-standing patriarchal traditions rooted in conservative social norms, Turkey presents a unique context for studying media representation of body image (Liebelt, 2023). This cultural hybridity is evident in the media landscape, where global beauty ideals and traditional gender expectations coexist on television, in advertising, and on digital platforms (Karakaya, 2018). (Rankin et al., 2014). This intersection creates a complex landscape in which media representations both reflect and reinforce deeply ingrained gender stereotypes which affect the self-esteem and body image of young men and women (Murnen & Don, 2012). While television dramas, advertisements, and social media glorify Westernized ideals of beauty—thin, fair-skinned women and muscular, dominant men (Ozbek et al., 2024)—they simultaneously reinforce traditional gender roles that valorise women's domesticity and men's authority, embedding body image within a broader context of gendered

power dynamics (Beldagli, 2021). Although body image and gender representations have been widely studied in Western contexts, there is still a significant gap in the research focusing on how Turkish media, shaped by both patriarchal structures and globalised beauty ideals, uniquely constructs and sustains gendered body norms. This study addresses this gap by offering a culturally situated analysis of body image portrayals in multiple media forms in Turkey. Here, the coexistence of traditional and modern influences creates a distinctive ideological environment. The implications of these representations are far-reaching. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that individuals, particularly young audiences, learn behaviours and norms by observation and imitating of models around them, including those presented in the media. In Turkey, the portrayal of idealised body types serves as a model for viewers, influencing their perceptions and behaviour. Exposure to this can lead to the internalisation of unrealistic beauty standards, contributing to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem (Calado et al., 2011). For young women, this often results in the pursuit of extreme thinness. Meanwhile young men may feel pressured to achieve hyper-muscular physiques which are frequently portrayed as prerequisites for success and social acceptance (Grossbard et al., 2011).

Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) further elucidates the psychological impact of these media portrayals. Women, in particular, are at risk of internalising an outsider's perspective of their bodies, which can lead to self-objectification and a heightened focus on appearance. This is exacerbated in Turkey, where media representations simultaneously echo traditional patriarchal values and westernised beauty ideals. This creates an environment full of conflicting messages about femininity and appearance (Nas, 2018). Men are not exempt from this type of objectification. They are under increasing pressure to conform to ideals of muscularity that emphasise physical appearance as a central aspect of masculinity. The duality of media representation in Turkey poses unique challenges to society as it grapples with the pressures of modernisation while also contending with entrenched patriarchal norms (Maritato, 2020). While many studies in the Turkish context have examined gender stereotypes on television (Şakrak, 2020; Gürer & Gürer, 2020), few have analysed how camera framing and character positioning visually construct these ideals. This study aims to bridge that gap by conducting a multimodal analysis grounded in Objectification Theory.

This research aims to delve into the intricate relationship between media representations of body image and gender norms in Turkey, examining how these portrayals influence the perceptions and behaviours of young people (Eyal & Teleni-Harari, 2013). By analysing content from both traditional media (television and advertising) and digital platforms (social media), this study aims to uncover how different media forms contribute to the construction of gendered body

ideals. While traditional media tends to disseminate top-down, professionally curated representations, social media introduces peer-driven, algorithmically amplified content that blurs the line between consumer and producer. Together, these forms reflect not only societal expectations, but also actively shape them. This perpetuates a cycle of gendered stereotypes with tangible consequences for mental health and social behaviour. Situating this research within the understudied context of Turkish media enables the study provide new empirical and theoretical insights into the influence of hybrid media environments on body-related identity formation. Ultimately, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the media contributes to the construction and maintenance of gendered body ideals in Turkey. By offering insights that could inform both academic discourse and public policy, the study could help to promote healthier and more inclusive representations of body image in the media. To better understand the influence of Turkish media on body image and gender norms, this study draws upon several theoretical perspectives, which are outlined in the theoretical framework section.

The Cultural Politics of Body Image: Media, Gender, and Identity in the Turkish Landscape

The portrayal of body image in the media has been widely recognized as a significant factor in shaping societal values and norms, particularly concerning gender and self-perception (Kaziga et al., 2021). Globally, media representations often promote idealized and unattainable body standards, which can lead to body dissatisfaction and reinforce harmful stereotypes (López-Guimerà et al., 2010). In Turkey, the media landscape presents a particular context in which to analyse body image representation. This context is shaped by the coexistence of long-standing conservative gender norms and the growing impact of Western consumer aesthetics (Keyman & Özbudun, 2002). Rather than being unique in a geographical sense, what makes the Turkish case is analytically significant because both traditional patriarchal discourses and globally circulating beauty ideals are visible simultaneously within mainstream and digital media (Keyman & Özbudun, 2002). However, despite this cultural complexity, there remains a lack of in-depth, context-specific research that addresses how Turkish media navigates and merges these opposing influences. Most existing studies have focused on Western contexts, often overlooking the ideological tensions in societies such as Turkey, where globalised beauty standards interact with conservative gender expectations. This study fills the existing gap in the literature by focusing on Turkey's hybrid media environment, which simultaneously reinforces traditional roles while also promoting modern appearance ideals.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories elucidate the influence of the media on body image and gender norms. **Cultivation Theory** (Gerbner & Gross, 2017) posits that prolonged exposure to media can shape viewers' perceptions of reality by normalizing specific ideals. In Turkey, where patriarchal norms are prominent, media representations often reinforce the conventional standards of femininity and masculinity. This suggests that a woman's worth is tied to her beauty while a man's worth is tied to his strength (Akanyıldız, 2010). Turkish media's persistent portrayal of these ideals can cultivate a societal acceptance of narrow beauty standards, affecting the self-image and behaviours of young people, particularly young women (Murnen & Don, 2012). While Cultivation Theory addresses the long-term shaping of perceptions of reality through repeated exposure to media narratives, Objectification Theory complements this by explaining how these narratives are internalised, shaping one's relationship with their own body in the process. **Objectification Theory** (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) offers another lens through which to understand body image issues, suggesting that media representations can lead individuals, especially women, to internalise an external observer's perspective. This self-objectification can result in a heightened focus on appearance, often at the cost of mental well-being (Daniels et al., 2020). Research has shown that objectification is particularly prevalent in Turkish media, where representations tend to emphasise women's physical beauty and men's muscularity (Grossbard et al., 2011). This phenomenon is further compounded by **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977), which explains that individuals learn behaviours through observation and imitation. Social media influencers in Turkey, for instance, play a role in perpetuating idealised body images, with young audiences modelling their appearance and behaviour after these figures (Eyal & Teleni-Harari, 2013). Together, these frameworks not only illuminate how body ideals are promoted, but also how they become self-regulatory mechanisms embedded in daily life. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the present study.

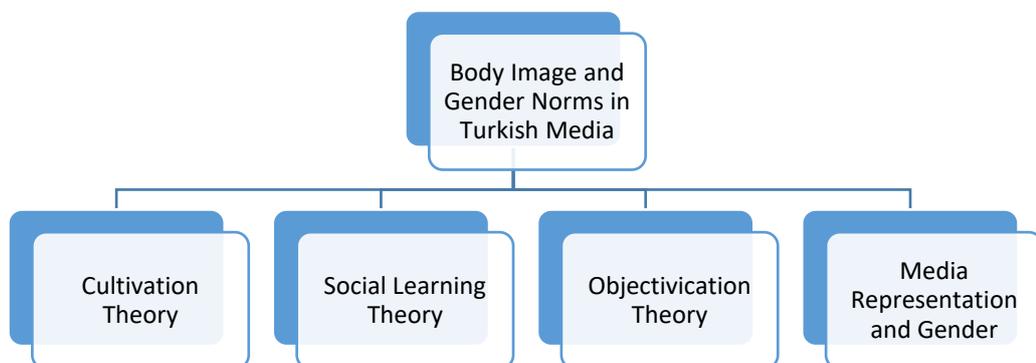


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Media Representation and Gendered Body Ideals in Turkey

Turkish media, including television and social media, often reflects and amplifies traditional gender roles through its portrayal of body image. Studies of Turkish television particularly dramas such as *Kuzey Güney* and *Yargı*, reveal that female characters are often portrayed as hourglass-shaped and slim, while male characters are depicted as muscular and dominant (Beldagli, 2021). These portrayals reinforce gendered stereotypes by linking femininity to beauty and domesticity, and masculinity to authority and physical strength (Williams, 2013). Research indicates that such portrayals contribute to body dissatisfaction among viewers, as they internalise these narrow standards as societal norms (Maritato, 2020). Advertising in Turkey further commodifies beauty by promoting products that emphasise slimness and youthfulness for women and muscularity for men (Serttas et al., 2023). This trend aligns with the findings of Western studies, which have shown that advertisements promote body ideals that are linked to consumerism and success (Ando et al., 2021; Atkinson et al., 2022; Schmitt et al., 2022). However, unlike in some Western contexts where body positivity movements are challenging these narrow standards, Turkish advertisements largely reinforce traditional beauty ideals. This intensifies the pressure on individuals to conform (Sarı, 2020).

Social Media Influence and Body Image

Social media has a profound impact on body image, particularly among young audiences who are frequent users (Rounsefell et al., 2020). Turkish influencers, such as Gamze Karta and Goril Faruk, often present highly curated images that align with idealised body standards, promoting a blend of Western beauty ideals and local cultural values (Ozbek et al., 2024). The reach of these influencers means that their followers regularly see images emphasising slimness for women and muscularity for men (Sumter et al., 2022). The result is an environment where traditional gender norms and modern beauty ideals coexist, creating complex standards for self-presentation (Calado et al., 2011). The influence of social media on body dissatisfaction is well documented globally. Turkey's unique cultural blend magnifies this impact (Çetin, 2014).

Research has shown that body image issues are a global phenomenon (Grogan, 2021; Marks et al., 2020; Neumann & Herodotou 2020). While Western media has seen some shifts towards greater diversity in body representation, Turkey's media landscape remains conservative (Onur, 2024; Özyürek, 2006), with a continued focus on traditional gender roles alongside modern beauty ideals (Sastre, 2014). Studies suggest that the lack of body diversity in Turkish media contributes to heightened body dissatisfaction among young people, who feel under pressure to meet unattainable standards (Ata et al., 2007). These ideals persist in contrast to emerging Western

trends towards inclusivity, which may exacerbate mental health issues associated with body dissatisfaction (Paquette & Raine, 2004).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis to examine the representation of body image in Turkish media, and its impact on gender norms. Media content has been selected that includes popular television programmes, advertisements, and social media influencers in order to provide a comprehensive view of how body image ideals are portrayed. The study adopted thematic coding procedures to identify recurring patterns, symbols, and gendered messages related to body image that appeared across different media formats. The codes were developed using two different approaches: deductive (based on theoretical frameworks) and inductive (emerging from the data).

Sampling Process

A purposive sampling method was used to select popular Turkish television dramas and soap operas known for their wide reach and cultural influence. Programmes such as *Kuzey Güney* (2011) and *Yargı* (2024) were selected because they often depict characters in a manner that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Selection was guided by viewership ratings, genre popularity (drama/soap operas), and social media engagement metrics indicating their resonance among youth demographics (ages 15–29). Episodes were selected based on their portrayal of main characters in contexts that highlight body image and gender roles.

The advertisements were selected from a combination of sources, including commercial breaks during the analysed television series, standalone online advertisements, and social media campaigns. While some ads appeared as traditional commercials during programme intermissions, others involved branded content and influencer collaborations on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Product placement within TV series was not included in the analysis unless the promotional content was explicit and identifiable as a marketing strategy. Brands such as Avon (2018) and Joom (2024) were included due to their emphasis on specific body ideals for both men and women. Visibility and reach were determined by frequency with which advertisements were placed across television and digital platforms, YouTube view counts, Instagram ad impressions, and inclusion in national campaigns aired during primetime. The advertisements were selected based on their prevalence and visibility in Turkish media, ensuring they have a significant impact on public perception. Social Media Influencers: Influencers were selected based on their popularity and number of followers on platforms such as Instagram. Influencers such as Gamze Karta and Goril Faruk were included because of their role in promoting idealised body standards through

curated imagery and lifestyle content. The selection criteria also took into account follower demographics (primarily Turkish youth), rates of engagement with posts (likes, shares and comments), and frequency body-related content. Posts that explicitly or implicitly conveyed messages about body image and gender norms were selected. To address the breadth of media formats analysed including television series, advertisements, and social media influencers, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. This strategy was guided by popularity, reach, cultural relevance, and thematic alignment with body image and gender representation.

For television series, two highly rated Turkish dramas (Kuzey Güney, 2011; Yargı, 2024) were selected based on their national popularity (as reflected in rating data), long-running broadcast history, and frequent engagement with themes of gender roles and physical appearance. Specific episodes (e.g., Season 1, Episode 1 and Season 2, Episode 10 from Kuzey Güney; Season 3, Episode 2 from Yargı) were chosen for their explicit visual and narrative emphasis on body image, such as scenes highlighting clothing, attractiveness, or muscularity.

For advertisements, selections included TV commercials aired during the broadcast of these series (collected via YouTube replays and archived ad breaks), as well as digital advertisements from brands like Avon and Joom promoted through beauty and fitness-related campaigns. Ads were selected based on their visibility (measured via views, broadcast frequency, and ad recall metrics available via open sources) and thematic relevance to body image and gendered marketing. Product placement within series was excluded unless it was explicitly branded and central to character behaviour.

For social media influencers, the selection focused on two Turkish content creators: Gamze Karta and Goril Faruk, who both actively post content related to fitness, beauty, and lifestyle. They were selected based on their high follower numbers on Instagram (Karta: ~800k; Faruk: ~650k), their consistent levels of engagement (likes and comments), and their thematic relevance. Posts from the six months prior to data collection were reviewed, and 8–10 posts per influencer were selected based on visual focus on body image, gender presentation, and audience engagement (e.g., body-related hashtags, comments discussing appearance). By narrowing the sample within each platform and applying clear inclusion criteria—visibility, popularity, content relevance, and representativeness—the study ensures a manageable yet thematically coherent dataset.

While the study incorporates multiple media platforms—television, advertising, and social media—to capture the multifaceted nature of body image representation in Turkey, the sampling strategy is necessarily selective. The analysis is limited to a small number of television episodes, specific advertising campaigns, and two prominent social media influencers. As such, the findings

do not claim to represent the entirety of Turkish media, but rather aim to offer a contextually grounded and theory-informed snapshot of the prevailing body image and gender portrayals. Future research could expand the scope by including regional television, a broader range of influencer demographics, and user-generated content allowing for greater representativeness and diversity of media perspectives.

Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic content analysis was conducted using a coding framework that combined theory-driven (deductive) categories derived from Cultivation, Social Learning, and Objectification theories, as well as emergent (inductive) themes identified during the media review process.

Television Content: Selected episodes were analysed to identify and categorize portrayals of body image, focusing on visual elements such as body type, clothing, and behaviour. The analysis also considered the roles assigned to female and male characters, evaluating whether these roles align with traditional gender expectations.

Advertisements: The visual and textual elements of the advertisements were examined to understand how they convey messages about body image. Particular attention was given how products are marketed to different genders, with a focus on the emphasis placed on physical appearance as an indicator of success or desirability.

Social Media Posts: The use of imagery, language, and themes related to body image in influencer content was analysed. This included assessing the frequency of posts promoting specific body ideals, as well as the overall messaging these influencers convey about body image and self-presentation.

This methodological approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how various media formats contribute to the construction and perpetuation of gendered body ideals in Turkey. Examining a diverse range of media content, the study provides insights into the cultural norms and stereotypes embedded in these representations, as well as their potential impact on young audiences. All coding and theme development were conducted manually, using a structured coding matrix developed by the researcher. Although no software was used, methodological rigor was ensured through iterative coding, researcher memoing, and thematic comparison across the television, advertisement, and social media data.

Results

Television Shows and Gendered Body Ideals

Turkish television dramas such as *Kuzey Güney* (2011) and *Yargı* (2024) offer clear examples of how body image and gender roles are reinforced. The depiction of women with slim, hourglass figures (Figure 3) and men (Figure 2) as muscular and strong upholds conventional beauty standards that emphasize women's physical attractiveness and men's dominance. Figure 1 illustrates how the male protagonist in *Kuzey Güney* is consistently presented with a sculpted, muscular physique, reinforcing ideals of strength and masculinity, while Figure 3 depicts the female lead in *Yargı* conforming to the slim, flawless beauty ideal, symbolizing societal expectations tied to femininity. This consistent portrayal leads to the normalisation of these gendered body ideals, resulting in the internalisation of these standards among viewers, particularly young audiences. This phenomenon aligns with Cultivation Theory, which suggests that continuous exposure to these idealized representations shapes societal perceptions of reality. In Turkey, these portrayals do not merely reflect social norms but also actively participate in constructing them, reinforcing traditional patriarchal values. Women's worth is often tied to their appearance, while men are portrayed as strong protectors, cementing traditional masculine roles. This further emphasises the gendered expectations placed on individuals based on their physical appearance, thereby reinforcing societal stereotypes about gender roles. The implications of this for gender norms are significant. For young women, the portrayal of slimness as the ideal body type may lead to dissatisfaction with their own bodies, low self-esteem, and unhealthy behaviours such as extreme dieting. For young men, the emphasis on muscularity creates pressure to conform to hyper-masculine ideals, which may result in dissatisfaction with their bodies and lead them to engage in practices such as excessive exercise or steroid use. In both cases, these portrayals reinforce the notion that physical appearance is central to personal and social success, thereby perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes. These televised portrayals provide an insight into how traditional and modern gendered ideals are visually embedded in scripted content. Building on this foundation, the subsequent section explores how these same ideals are commercialized and disseminated through advertising campaigns.



Figure 2. Kuzey Güney (Kanal D, 2011)



Figure 3. Yargı (Kanal D, 2024)

Advertising and the Commodification of Beauty

The analysis of advertisements, such as those from Avon (2018) and Joom (2024), reveals how media commodifies beauty and reinforces narrow standards of attractiveness (see Figure 4 and Figure 5) for both genders. Figure 4 features an Avon campaign portraying thin, fair-skinned woman using beauty products, reinforcing youth and slimness as feminine ideals. Figure 5 highlights a Joom advertisement showcasing a muscular male model, representing masculinity as tied to physical power and dominance. Women are targeted with products emphasizing slimness, beauty, and youthful appearance, while men are marketed fitness and muscularity as symbols of masculinity and success. This commodification has broader social implications. The emphasis placed on achieving a particular body type in order to be considered attractive and successful reinforces the idea that physical appearance is crucial to personal and social value. For women, this focus can lead to problems such as eating disorders and insecurity about their body image. For men, the promotion of hyper-muscular physiques (Figure 5) can lead to unhealthy practices such as steroid use or excessive exercise. In Turkish society, where both Western and traditional values coexist, these advertisements create a conflict for individuals trying to navigate between modern ideals of beauty and traditional gender roles. Advertisements play a significant role in reinforcing these dual pressures, especially for younger audiences who are particularly susceptible to media influence. While television narratives often implicitly embed beauty and gender norms within character arcs, advertising presents a more overt commodification of these ideals. Moving beyond curated commercial content, the next section examines a more interactive and participatory space: Social media.



Figure 4. Avon (NTV, 2018)



Figure 5. Joom (Joom, 2024)

Social Media Influencers and Body Image

Social media platforms like Instagram, with influencers such as Gamze Karta (see Figure 5), Goril Faruk (see Figure 7), Uzunmakarna (see Figure 8), Ahmet Can Dündar (see Figure 9), Meryem Can (see Figure 10), and Mete Kayagil (see Figure 11), offer a unique space where body image ideals are constantly promoted. For instance, Figure 6 shows Gamze Karta posing with digitally enhanced images that emphasize thinness and facial symmetry, echoing Eurocentric beauty standards. Figure 7 presents Goril Faruk displaying a hyper-muscular physique in a gym setting, illustrating the performative nature of masculinity on social platforms. These influencers, with their carefully curated images, often present a narrow and unattainable standard of beauty, contributing to distorted perceptions of what is realistic and attainable. For young audiences, this exposure to edited and often unrealistic images can lead to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn behaviours by observing others, and influencers, who are seen as aspirational figures, play a significant role in shaping perceptions of body image. As a result, the constant pressure to conform to these online ideals can have detrimental effects on mental health, especially for individuals who feel they do not meet these standards. Social media platforms also contribute to the global dissemination of body image ideals, merging Western beauty standards with local values. This creates a hybrid form of representation where traditional gender roles are maintained, but modern beauty standards are imposed. In Turkey, this fusion exacerbates the challenges individuals face when trying to reconcile traditional expectations with modern ideals. As social media merges personal branding with mass influence, the gap between passive viewership and aspirational self-presentation is bridged. In order to contextualise these patterns in national media, the final section compares Turkish representations with global trends, revealing both parallels and unique cultural inflections.



Figure 6. Gamze Karta (Karta, 2024)



Figure 7. Goril Faruk (MSN, 2024)



Figure 8. Uzunmakarna (Haberjet, 2024)



Figure 9. Ahmet Can Dündar (Haberler, 2024)



Figure 10. Meryem Can (Ensonhaber, 2024)



Figure 11. Mete Kayagil (Yeni Bakış, 2023)

Comparative Analysis: Turkish Media versus Global Contexts

While Turkish media reflects unique cultural values, particularly at the intersection of Eastern and Western influences, there are also notable similarities with global trends in media representation (Çetin, 2014). In Western media, Figure 12 (DW Documentary, 2019) and Figure 13 (Netflix, 2024) provide examples of similar portrayals. Figure 12 captures scenes from a documentary on digital beauty filters, highlighting the pervasive influence of social media on self-perception in global contexts. Figure 13 features a promotional still from *The Witcher* series, where characters embody hyper-sexualized and idealized body forms, comparable to portrayals in Turkish dramas. However, the coexistence of these modern ideals with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms is what makes Turkish media distinct (Keyman & Özbudun, 2002). In Western contexts, there has been increasing resistance to narrow beauty standards, with growing movements advocating for body positivity and diversity in media representation (Sastre, 2014). In contrast, Turkish media often continues to reinforce traditional gender roles alongside these modern beauty ideals, creating a complex environment for individuals to navigate (Sarı, 2020). The comparative analysis highlights how body image issues are not unique to Turkey but are part of a broader global phenomenon shaped by media representation. However, the unique blend of conservative and modern values in the Turkish context presents specific challenges that could exacerbate the impact of these representations on gender norms and societal expectations.



Figure 12. Too Beautiful (DW Documentary, 2019)



Figure 13. The Witcher (Netflix, 2024)

Discussion

Broader Implications and Theoretical Integration

The portrayal of body image in Turkish media, as revealed in this study, underscores the media's powerful role in shaping and normalising societal expectations regarding gender and physical appearance. Grounded in Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 2017), the findings demonstrate how repeated exposure to idealized images of femininity and masculinity fosters a distorted perception of reality, particularly among younger audiences. In the Turkish context, female worth is frequently linked to thinness, fairness, and beauty, whereas masculinity is equated with muscularity, dominance, and control. These portrayals closely mirror the assumptions embedded in Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which explains how individuals—especially women—internalise an outsider's perspective of their bodies, leading to chronic self-monitoring and psychological distress.

While these dynamics are not unique to Turkey, the Turkish case illustrates a distinct cultural fusion between traditional patriarchal norms and globalized beauty ideals. Similar trends are observed in South Korea, where K-pop culture promotes extreme body management among both men and women, reinforcing slimness and aesthetic perfection (Kwon, 2022). In Brazil, media representations are deeply intertwined with racialised and sexualised ideals of femininity, pressuring women to meet Eurocentric and hyper-feminine standards (Borba & Milani, 2019). In contrast, Western societies such as the UK or Canada have increasingly embraced body diversity through media campaigns and policy initiatives. However, the public reception and commercial success of these initiatives have varied (Cukier et al., 2021). In Turkey, however, this convergence of traditional and global narratives places individuals under a dual burden, forcing them to navigate two sets of expectations that are often contradictory. The result is a heightened vulnerability to body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, particularly among young women and men who are developing their identities within a hybrid cultural space (Uluyol, 2023). This pattern is consistent with empirical research from diverse contexts indicating that internalisation of media ideals correlates with poor self-image and harmful behaviours, including disordered eating, depression, and compulsive exercise (Calado et al., 2011; Grossbard et al., 2011; Kwon, 2022). By situating Turkey within this broader global discourse, the study reaffirms the universal relevance of media effects theories and emphasises the necessity of culturally nuanced interpretations. The Turkish case shows that Western-based frameworks such as Objectification Theory remain applicable but must be contextualised within localized gender politics and media ecologies.

Comparative Context with Global Media

Although body image is shaped by media across cultural contexts (Coleman, 2008; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Huang et al., 2021), the Turkish media landscape reflects a particularly complex synthesis of Eastern traditions and Western consumerist ideals (Nas, 2018; Mammadov, 2023). As is the case in many parts of the world, the Turkish media perpetuates narrow definitions of attractiveness, valorising thinness, muscularity, and youthfulness (Açer, 2020). However, the ways in which these ideals are presented and internalised vary markedly across regions (Negi et al., 2022). In Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, there has been a growing emphasis on body diversity and inclusion (Yan et al., 2022). Campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" (Johnston & Taylor, 2008) or Aerie's "#AerieREAL" (Rodgers et al., 2019) have introduced plus-sized models and challenged conventional beauty norms in the mainstream media (Mabry-Flynn & Champlin, 2018). These efforts, although commercial in nature, reflect an increasing public awareness of the psychological harms caused by unattainable ideals (Selensky & Carels, 2021). Moreover, regulatory institutions and advocacy groups in these countries have pushed for inclusive representation in advertising and media content (Yan et al., 2022). By contrast, beauty standards in countries such as South Korea, are equally rigid, but are embedded in a highly aestheticised pop culture narrative (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2021). The K-beauty industry and idol culture have normalised cosmetic surgery and intense body management for both genders (Oktaviani et al., 2025). Similarly, in Brazil, idealised body types are frequently racialised and sexualised, emphasising curvaceousness for women and physical prowess for men, within a culture of spectacle (Hubson, 2012). Turkey's media operates at a unique crossroads, merging the conservatism of Middle Eastern gender scripts with globalised visual aesthetics (Donmez-Colin, 2019). Unlike Western countries where body positivity campaigns are increasingly visible, Turkish media largely resists this movement, favouring idealised forms of femininity and masculinity that uphold heteronormative and patriarchal values (Demirtaş, 2024). The result is a dualistic narrative in which modern beauty ideals coexist with traditional gender expectations, often without critical interrogation (Puri, 2002). This cultural synthesis imposes a distinctive psychological burden for young people in Turkey, who are under pressure to adhere to both global standards of beauty and to socially sanctioned norms related to modesty, gender hierarchy, and honour (Liebelt, 2023). These combined pressures intensify internalised body surveillance and dissonance in self-image formation, contributing to a unique configuration of body dissatisfaction not always captured by Western models (Weiss, 2010). In sum, while the objectification of bodies and the dissemination of idealised beauty images are global trends (Sari et al., 2022), the Turkish context amplifies these effects due to its specific socio-

political and cultural landscape (Demirtaş, 2024). Recognising these differences is essential for crafting both media literacy interventions and policy frameworks that are culturally responsive rather than universally imposed (Goldfarb, 2002).

Empirical Evidence and Support

The findings of this study are aligned with a substantial body of international literature documenting the psychological effects of media exposure on body image. Numerous empirical studies have shown that recurrent exposure to idealised body representations—whether in television, advertising, or digital platforms—can lead to increased body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and engagement in harmful behaviours, including disordered eating and compulsive exercising (Ata et al., 2007; Blond, 2008; Calado et al., 2011; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Grabe et al., 2008). These effects are particularly pronounced among adolescents and young adults, who are in critical stages of identity formation and are especially susceptible to sociocultural pressures (Blond, 2008; Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005). In Western contexts, longitudinal studies have confirmed that media consumption correlates with internalisation of unrealistic body ideals, with lasting impacts on mental health and self-perception (Anasari, 2024). Similarly, studies conducted in East Asia (e.g., Darling-Wolf, 2014; Ling, 1999) and Latin America (e.g., Figueroa, 2003; Rubin et al., 2003) have revealed how locally adapted media perpetuates beauty norms that resonate with—and often reinforce—traditional gender expectations. These global findings reinforce the cross-cultural applicability of Objectification Theory, while also pointing to the necessity of contextual adaptation.

In the Turkish context, this study builds on earlier research but expands it by demonstrating how the convergence of Western aesthetics with local patriarchal norms creates a compounded effect. Media messages not only promote thinness and muscularity, but also assign moral and cultural value to these ideals physical appearance with social acceptability, virtue, and success (Heede et al., 2005). This dual coding of body norms intensifies their psychological impact, especially on young people who are navigating the tensions between modernity and tradition (Daiy et al., 2023). Moreover, this study contributes to empirical debates by focusing on multiple media forms simultaneously—television, advertising, and social media influencers—offering a more holistic view of how media ecosystems collectively shape body-related ideologies. By triangulating across these platforms, the research provides robust support for the idea that the persistence of gendered body ideals is not the result of a single genre or channel, but rather the outcome of a convergent media environment deeply embedded in cultural structures. Ultimately, this study’s empirical contribution lies in its ability to contextualise global theories within

Turkey's specific media and gender culture. It illustrates how universal patterns of objectification are refracted through national values, institutional norms, and cultural tensions.

Policy Recommendations and Practical Application

Media Regulation and Guidelines: It is crucial to establish regulatory guidelines for media producers and advertisers to promote diverse and inclusive representations of body types. This could involve collaboration with media organizations to set standards that ensure a variety of body types and gender expressions are portrayed in television programs, advertisements, and social media content.

Media Literacy Programs: Integrating media literacy into educational curricula can empower young people to critically evaluate media messages. Educational initiatives should focus on helping students recognise and deconstruct unrealistic portrayals of body image and gender norms. Workshops and seminars that engage students in discussions about media influence can foster critical thinking and resilience against harmful stereotypes.

Collaboration with Influencers: Given the significant impact of social media influencers on young audiences, collaborations with influencers who promote body positivity and diverse representations can be a powerful tool. Encouraging influencers to showcase a range of body types and challenge traditional norms can help to shift societal perceptions towards a more inclusive understanding of beauty.

Support for Mental Health Services: It is essential to provide access to mental health resources for individuals who are struggling with body image issues. Schools and communities should offer counselling and support services to address the psychological impact of media representations and provide a safe space for individuals to discuss and cope with these pressures.

Contribution to the Field and Future Research

This study contributes to the field by offering a comprehensive analysis of how Turkish media constructs and reinforces gendered body ideals. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the cultural dynamics involved in media representation. The research also emphasises the importance of considering the cultural context when examining the media's impact on body image, highlighting how the interplay of traditional and modern values creates a unique environment in Turkey. Future research could build on this study by exploring how effective media literacy programmes and interventions are at mitigating the impact of harmful media portrayals. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of media exposure on body image and self-esteem would also provide valuable insights.

Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons with media representations in other non-Western contexts could further elucidate the global nature of media influence on body image and gender norms. In conclusion, Turkish media plays a critical role in shaping societal perceptions of body image and gender norms. There is potential to challenge harmful stereotypes and support the development of a healthier and more inclusive societal values by implementing policy changes, promoting media literacy, and fostering inclusive representations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Turkish media—through television programming, advertising, and social media influencers—plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of body image and gender norms. The dominant portrayal of thin, fair-skinned women and muscular, authoritative men reflects and reinforces a narrow understanding of beauty and gender roles. These representations can lead to internalised body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and the normalisation of rigid gender expectations, particularly among young people. By situating Turkish media within a global comparative context, the study reveals that these challenges are not isolated but are intensified by Turkey’s unique cultural positioning. Unlike some Western societies where body diversity is increasingly represented, or East Asian contexts where appearance management is hyper-commercialised, Turkish media presents a hybrid landscape. Here, Westernised beauty ideals coexist with deeply rooted patriarchal norms, placing individuals—especially young women and men—under dual and often conflicting pressures. To address these tensions, the study emphasises the importance of diversifying media representations and implementing coordinated strategies across sectors. Regulatory oversight must be strengthened through institutions such as the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), which governs broadcast standards in Turkey. Content policies should be supported by educational programmes developed under the Ministry of National Education, and psychological health initiatives coordinated with the Ministry of Health. These public bodies should collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local municipalities, and media producers to foster more inclusive content creation and dissemination. Efforts to promote media literacy must be systematically integrated into national education curricula, particularly for students aged 11 to 18. These programmes should include classroom-based lessons, digital learning platforms, and school-community workshops, designed in collaboration with academic institutions and civil society organizations. The aim is to equip young people with the critical tools they need to recognise, question, and resist unrealistic portrayals of the body and gender stereotypes. Partnerships with social media content creators and influencers can also play a transformative role in the digital space. Through publicly supported campaigns, creators can be encouraged to promote more authentic and diverse body images, thereby helping

to reshape audience expectations from within the platforms themselves. Future research should move beyond generalised calls for awareness and instead pursue targeted, data-driven inquiries. Longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies are needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of media literacy programmes on Turkish adolescents. Researchers should also examine platform-specific dynamics, such as how Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube Shorts uniquely influence self-image and gender perceptions. Comparative studies between urban and rural populations would further illuminate how regional media access and local cultural norms mediate media influence. In conclusion, this study offers a culturally grounded and globally connected account of how Turkish media contributes to the construction of gendered body ideals. Meaningful progress requires evidence-based interventions, institutional accountability, and educational reforms that are tailored to the complex sociocultural realities of contemporary Turkey.

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