

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

Azerbaijani TV Viewers' Practices of Watching Turkish Television Programs In The Context of Cultural Studies: Turkish Culture And Tourism

Kültürel Çalışmalar Bağlamında Azerbaycanlı TV İzleyicilerinin Türk Televizyon Programlarını İzleme Pratikleri: Türk Kültürü ve Turizm

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Abstract

The aim of present study is to explore the reception processes of Azerbaijani viewers' of television channels broadcasting from Turkey within the framework of Cultural Studies pertaining to Turkish culture and tourism. Employing the audience-centered reception approach within the tradition of Cultural Studies, this study examines the reception patterns exhibited by participants residing in diverse cities in Azerbaijan who watch Turkish television programs. Four separate focus group interviews involving a total of 36 participants were conducted to investigate the dominant, negotiated, and oppositional styles of perception prevalent in audience reception research, thereby gathering data on the interpretive practices and reception behaviors of Azerbaijani viewers regarding the content they consume. The findings were thematically synthesized to elucidate the viewers' reception styles. Consequently, the research indicates that diverse television content is interpreted by the audience through various reception frameworks concerning Turkish culture and tourism incentives. It was observed that Azerbaijani viewers, watch a broad spectrum of Turkish television programs, engage in understanding Turkish culture, with the majority of participants demonstrating a propensity towards dominant interpretations.

Keywords: Azerbaijani Viewers, Cultural Studies, Reception Analysis, Turkish Televisions, Turkish Culture.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Türkiye'de yayın yapan televizyon kanallarının Azerbaycanlı televizyon izleyicileri tarafından gerçekleştirilen alımlama süreçlerinin Türk Kültürü ve turizm bağlamında Kültürel Çalışmalar açısından incelenmesidir. Bu bağlamda, Kültürel Çalışmalar geleneğinde yer alan izleyici merkezli alımlama yöntemiyle, Azerbaycan'ın farklı şehirlerinde yaşayan ve Türk televizyon programlarını izleyen katılımcıların alımlama pratikleri incelenmiştir. Alımlama araştırmalarında kullanılan katılımcı, müzakereci ve karşıt okuma şekillerini belirlemek amacıyla, izleyicilerin anlam oluşturma ve alımlama biçimleri hakkında veri elde etmek üzere toplam 36 katılımcıyla 4 farklı odak grup görüşmesi düzenlenmiştir. Odak grup görüşmelerinde elde edilen bulguların Türk Kültürü ve turizm bağlamında alımlama biçimleri incelenmiştir. Çalışmada, televizyon aracılığıyla izlenen farklı içeriklerin Azerbaycan izleyicileri tarafından Türk Kültürü ve turizm motivasyonları açısından çeşitli alımlama biçimleriyle algılandıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Çoğunluğu hâkim okuma biçimi sergileyen katılımcıların bulunduğu tespit edilen çalışmada, Azerbaycanlı izleyicilerinin geniş bir yelpazede Türk televizyon programlarını takip ettiği ve Türk Kültürü hakkında bilgi edindiği ve turizm faaliyetlerinde bu bilgilerden yararlandıkları saptanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Azerbaycan İzlerkitlesi, Kültürel Çalışmalar, Alımlama Analizi, Türk Televizyonları, Türk Kültürü.

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Introduction

Developments in the fields of science and technology, globalization, and ultimately rapid advancements seen in mass media have given rise to a multifaceted interaction process that encompasses every segment of society. With television, which is one of these changes, taking its place in individuals' daily lives, the mentioned effects are observed directly or indirectly on viewers from every age group and layer of society. The question of how these changes and effects result in what kind of outcomes occupies not only the academic circles working in this field but also the agenda of society in changing contexts.

On the other hand, globalization, strengthened by technological developments and economic factors, has led to widespread changes in communication methods and techniques. With the development of internet and satellite technologies, the cheapening and proliferation of information technologies have accelerated the flow of information, changed perceptions of time, space, and distance, and this situation has led to some changes in societal structure (Yurdabakan, 2002, p. 63). Population differentiation, economic transformation, changes in family forms, and lifestyles are just some of the elements of these changes. Therefore, these developments have accelerated the process of acculturation and laid the groundwork for the formation of global values (Balay, 2004, p. 61).

As a natural consequence of globalization, the world described with the allegory of the 'global village' has brought together cultures located in vastly different geographies, where previously there was no interaction. Globalization, in other words, has not only created an impact seen solely in economic activities but has also facilitated the movement of cultures and the interaction of different cultures. These new interactions have brought about a period where the effectiveness and power of the media have significantly increased. It is thought that globalization enables the production of a global culture and that this new global-scale culture penetrates, transforms, and ignites the process of resemblance with local cultures through the media. Television, as a spreading area of global culture, creates an interaction space between local culture and global culture, or in other words, between global popular culture and regional subcultures. As a result of these developments and transformations, the fact that the content presented on Turkish television channels addresses a large audience in Azerbaijan, located in a different geography and culture, is a significant example of this situation.

The subject of the present research is to examine the reception practices of television channels broadcasting in Turkey based on the practices of reception by audiences in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Turks are descendants of the Oghuz who conquered and settled in Iran, Azerbaijan, Northern Iraq, and Eastern Anatolia towards the end of the 11th century (Onuş, 2018, p. 108). The present study investigates the significant interest of Azerbaijani Turks residing in Azerbaijan in Turkish television channels since the 1990s. As in the rest of the world, in Azerbaijan, although initially watched via terrestrial broadcasting, with the developments in information technologies and the proliferation of digital-based broadcasting platforms, such as satellite, internet broadcasting, and social media platforms, television content has reached a wide audience. Starting from the acceptance that Azerbaijani viewers who interact with content presented by Turkish television channels through both terrestrial and other internet-based platforms are in an active viewer position and are the subject of the process of meaning production, the framework of the research subject is formed within the context of reception practices of Cultural Studies tradition. According to Stuart Hall (2001), who has made significant

contributions to Cultural Studies and reception practices, it should be investigated in what ways the meanings produced by the audience and the processes of meaning production take place rather than the message itself (p. 52). In the present century, the examination of the effects of the content offered by the "screen," which is undoubtedly a part of contemporary human life, is considered a process that should be carried out based on the cultural assets of the viewers. From this perspective, the viewing of Turkish television channels by Azerbaijani viewers and thus the determination of the reception processes constitutes the subject of the research.

Turning to Audience-Centered Theoretical Approach

The concept of the audience, which gained significance with the emergence of mass media, initially corresponded to a phenomenon thought to perceive the presented content in the form in which it is presented or intended-constructed. Subsequent research has shown that the presented content may not have a simple structure, but could be complexly structured, capable of producing complex and different meanings. Furthermore, the idea that the meanings of messages would not change throughout the process from the production process to the transmission process has also been left behind. With the increase in studies aimed at understanding the effects of media content from the 21st century onwards, according to Radway (1988), in today's internet-mediated communication society where individuals' sender and receiver roles undergo unlimited change and transformation, the announcement of power has become as important as the existence of power (p. 360). All these changes in mass media and impact-related studies have led to changes in the power balance between the ruling and the ruled, affecting power and domination practices of the rulers.

In other words, from the assumption that the viewer is only the actor of a one-way action, in internet-mediated media products where communication takes place, the viewer can be considered in a position to produce content and provide instant reactions to the consumed content. In fact, not only employees of media organizations but also every internet user has come to a position where they can act as gatekeepers (Kafiliveyjuyeh, S., 2018, p.37).

Mass communication can be defined as the process of sending messages or content to masses, i.e., an audience that cannot be delineated. In this context, it is seen that a large part of the research in communication studies tries to understand how and to what extent masses are affected by the messages sent to them. Mass communication studies conducted in different contexts, such as researching the influence of individuals' political thoughts, include variables such as ethnic origin, belief system, and class in the process. In other words, the coding strategies used by viewers are also related to social structural relationships, political and cultural orientations, and access to relevant technology (Stevenson, 2015, p.134). Therefore, in the stages where the structures of meaning production of viewers are examined, it is important for the research to determine the position of the field where the research is conducted and the media, which is the actor in the message production process.

In accordance with the quest for how the message production process is realized, two culture-oriented approaches might be taken into consideration: Cultivation Theory and Reception Theory in Cultural Studies. Cultivation is a sociocultural theory regarding the role of television in shaping viewers' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values (Gerbner & Gross, 2017, p. 27). The theory focuses not so much on viewing messages conveyed to

the audience through television as a “marketing” or “advertising” strategy, but rather on the ideological content of these messages and the effects of prolonged exposure to these messages on viewers’ perceptions of reality. In other words, according to the theory, attitudes or perceptions are largely gained through exposure to different types of stories conveyed on predominantly relevant subjects, making the invisible visible through the stories, characters, events, and presentation styles that create a world (Gerbner, 2010, p.8).

On the other hand, through reception studies where the idea emerges that the viewer, often associated with a passive position in the television viewing process, develops an active process of constructing meaning, it has been highlighted that the viewer is the subject of generating new meanings based on messages. In other words, Hall (1999) argues that the effects of media and content inevitably manifest in changing forms within a sociological context (p. 53). In other words, the change in the meaning of a message presented in media content is closely related to the cultural environment of the viewer who constructs the meaning of the message.

Cultural Studies underwent a transformation in the field with the inclusion of Stuart Hall and began to conduct studies on text analysis and understanding the meaning patterns of the text. In this context, in the Cultural Studies tradition, the term ‘text’ refers to any phenomenon that carries meaning and allows interpretation, unlike the traditional understanding, as seen in the postmodern approach. The main reason for the Cultural Studies tradition addressing television-mediated content is explained by the fact that the mainstream researchers before it defended the view that media products had an absolute power and thus evaluated the viewer in a completely passive position. The critical approach led by Hall differs fundamentally in focusing on ideology and hegemonic power relations (Hall, 1999, p.78). This difference in approach fundamentally explains that, according to Raymond Williams, one of the founders of Cultural Studies tradition, “hegemony and the consent of the masses to a certain order are never final and unquestionable,” emphasizing that hegemonic practices have rich and contradictory natures (Arık & Akgün, 2021, p.116). With the opening up of the understanding that the assumption that hegemonic practices produce unquestionable consent needs to be debated, it became necessary to explain the limits of the decisive power of the media in Cultural Studies, which focuses on the study of media effects and processes of consumption and production. In this context, according to Turner, cultural researchers conducting studies in the Cultural Studies tradition have focused on television programs to explain and interpret the effects of mass communication tools and media on society (Turner, 2015, p.157).

In the critical approach led by Hall, encoding and decoding model contributed to the development of reception studies, and the interest of the Cultural Studies Center in popular culture products increased. In this context, ethnographic methods were used to reveal the effects of popular culture. Therefore, research has focused more on liking, pleasure, sexist reception forms, and contextual aspects of reception (İnal, 1996, p.155). According to Barrett, “the coding/decoding model is also important in placing the phenomena of power and ideology at the heart of media studies (Barrett, 1998, p. 95). It emphasizes that the process of message production and the process of deciphering the message or the processes of meaning production and consumption cannot be considered independently of social power relations. Placing the concept of power at the center of cultural processes, Hall treats culture itself as an integral part of power”. In this context, meanings follow a formation process that includes social relationships and societal

structures, and they can be integrated into different societal positions through various political and cultural actions and reproduce their societal functions as long as they can do all these. It is not possible to speak of a constant and unconscious existence of viewers who continuously show a passive existence (Hall, 1999, p. 91).

Contrary to the assumption that messages presented in the media undergo a direct intended interpretation process, Hall, who opposes the understanding of a passive viewer, has put forward in his coding-decoding method that the audience will make different readings due to the different individual and societal characteristics of the audience. According to Hall, factors effective in the production process, such as information about production activities, techniques developed in the historical process, the process of constructing national ideology, institutional contextual definition, information, and assumptions, should be considered because events and phenomena cannot produce meaning in their own nature, they need to be made understandable as a symbol (Hall, 1972, p.119). According to this approach, the term 'coding' denotes the process of creating a symbolic language.

The meaning developed by viewers regarding media content in the reception analysis process corresponds to the term 'decoding.' In the decoding process, the individual's ethnicity, social and economic environment, education level, gender, and belief system can be effective. This differentiation shows that there are three different types of readings: dominant reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading (Yaylagül & Korkmaz, 2008, p. 180). As can be understood from this differentiation observed in reading forms, the production of intended meaning in the coding process is not always possible, and different features of individuals result in different readings.

Method

In this study, the reception method was used to examine the perceptions, biases, and cultural assimilation and differentiation processes of Turkish television program viewers living in Azerbaijan regarding Turkish culture and society. The main framework of the study was designed to include theoretical and applied methods. Reception data obtained through focus group discussions were included in the interpretation process using qualitative techniques. A literature review of local and foreign literature was conducted on Turkish television programs that could be directly viewed in Azerbaijan from their original channels through numerical methods (satellite, etc.) and that were being broadcast during the research period. Based on the findings of the literature review, it was necessary to outline a theoretical framework for the scope of the thesis in terms of the variables to be examined. Qualitative data were obtained using reading, observation, and interview techniques. Communication ethnography was used to construct a descriptive analysis process of observable areas and situations using the reception technique within the context of objects, discourses, and symbols.

The research model was conducted to examine the social and cultural interaction levels aimed at determining the framework of similarities and differences between Azerbaijani-Turkish cultures for Turkish television program viewers living in Azerbaijan. In this context, attempts were made to determine the perceptions and forms of cultural and intercultural communication of Azerbaijani viewers and to evaluate cultural assimilation through interview forms. The research was designed as a case study to determine how reading practices of Azerbaijani viewers living in a different culture differed or showed similarity in Turkish television programs and to examine the content-viewer relationship.

The structure of the research was based on the examination of reading practices related to distinguishing cultural similarities and differences and to cultural elements in the interaction of television programs and viewers in the intercultural interaction context. The perceptions of Turkish television programs by viewers living in various cities of Azerbaijan, how they established identification with the cultural elements presented in these programs and how they perceived differences between the Turkish and Azerbaijani cultures were examined in terms of reception practices in cultural studies.

Participants in the focus groups included individuals watching Turkish television programs, including housewives, academics, civil servants, and students from various academic backgrounds in social and numerical sciences. The generally diverse demographic backgrounds of the participants ensured a rich environment for discussing the research topic. Focus group discussions were conducted with six different focus groups in four different cities, with a total of thirty-six participants.

As mentioned in Akova's (2014) doctoral dissertation, focus group discussions were conducted within the ideal timing of 90-120 minutes (Akova, 2014, p. 155). Although Zoom (instant visual communication application) allowed all discussions to be recorded both visually and aurally, the majority of participants expressed sensitivity to visual recording, so the discussions were conducted only through audio recording. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were made in Azerbaijani and translated into Turkish. In accordance with the law on the protection of personal data and the general principles regarding personal rights and freedoms, Erciyes University Ethics Committee Approval was obtained on 30/11/2021 with application number 434, and the names of the participants in the research were kept confidential; when referring to the views expressed by the participants, a coding system such as K1, K2, K3, K4... K36 was used. In each coding, if a direct quote of the views was used, the code given to the participant was given after the quote.

Ethics Committee Permission

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Erciyes University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee dated 30/11/2021 and numbered 434; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Findings

With the development of technology, significant and fundamental changes have occurred in the field of communication, and both interpersonal and international communication have shown great progress. The increasing prevalence of mass media has transformed the relationships between different nations and has made intercultural interaction possible. The economic, political, social, and cultural developments emerging in this new era of fast and effective communication can be evaluated under the title of globalization (Taylan & Arklan, 2008, p. 86). With globalization occurring through mass communication channels, the concept of intercultural communication has emerged, defined as communication among individuals with differences in working styles, age, nationality, ethnic origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth (Khan, 2020, p. 36). The present study is grounded in data indicating that Azerbaijani audiences, who report viewing a diverse array of television content including cartoons, soap operas, historical series and films, music programs, music channels, news programs and channels, documentaries, represent a notable instance of intercultural communication facilitated by television programming.

According to Gill (2013), while sharing cultures, we often witness how conflicts between cultures can lead to disagreements through mechanisms of stereotyping and weakening, yet the fact that culture can contribute to both innovation and understanding continues to persist (Gill, 2013, p. 72). However, it is widely known that some form of “conflict” or “difference” among masses belonging to different cultures is quite natural, and in eliminating conflict, mass communication channels, especially television, play a significant role (Rehman, 1993). It can be inferred from the statements of interviewees that television programs serve as an interactive and communicative space between Azerbaijani viewers and Turkish culture:

“After watching Turkish series, our family started to become interested in Turkey and Turkish culture. It’s not that different from us, but there’s a completely different way of life there. When I saw the neighborhoods with those old houses in Istanbul in the series, I started to become very curious personally. Especially, we made holiday plans to see the structures belonging to Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire in place.” (K27)

In the development of bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries, historical factors, political and ideological elements, national identity, solidarity, shared Turkish cultural and spiritual heritage, language, religion, culture, morality, unity always carry great importance (Uslu & Ok, 2013). Therefore, the situation of conflict arising from cultural differences in intercultural communication is largely not observed between Azerbaijan and Turkey due to the common culture and history that has existed between them since ancient times.

“I had read Dede Korkut tales when I was a child. Even my grandfather and my father occasionally told very captivating stories to children during holidays or on the eve of Nowruz, and we all listened as if spellbound. Hearing about our ancestors’ past was very exciting. Later, when I saw the series of these stories on the TRT Children’s channel, I was very surprised. A program about Azerbaijani history was being aired on a channel in Turkey. At that time, I understood that we shared a common history, and most importantly, a common culture.” (K20)

“In the Soviet era, it is possible to say that we did not have much information about the Ottomans or that detailed information was not given in history books. Generally, it was mentioned that the Ottoman Empire was our neighbor and was governed according to Islamic rules. I don’t remember learning that it consisted of Turkish society or that it was a state that shared common national values with us. So, the period before Turkey was not a very well-known period for Azerbaijanis. I think Turkish television series about Ottoman Empire have also served an educational purpose. Especially ‘Payitaht Abdülhamid.’ I have to say that I experienced different feelings while watching the series. It was very interesting to learn how Ottoman Empire was, how Islam was, how it collaborated with the German Empire. I learned from this series that Ottoman Empire was established by our kinsmen and ruled over a very large geography.” (K18)

Moreover, many series and films providing information about the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and the Seljuk State have aroused great interest among Azerbaijani viewers. The majority of the interviewees stated that they learned about Turkish history and culture from television series and films they watched; they expressed that they formed close emotional bonds with the characters in the series.

“I must mention the ‘Diriliş Ertuğrul’ series that I admired while watching. When the series started, at our house, there was complete silence; everyone watched quietly. What will happen in this episode? Will something happen to Ertuğrul? There was one episode where Ertuğrul Bey was thrown into prison, and his father, Süleyman Shah, went to Elazığ to ask for his son’s release. I was deeply moved by the scene there. He said we trust in Allah and fear only Him. We all said, may it be lawful! This meant being Turkish was being Muslim, and Turks feared no one

but Allah. Since ancient times. It doesn't matter if it's Azerbaijan or Turkey. We are all Turks, and we were proud of Süleyman Shah's roar!" (K22)

"I saw how women dressed during Ottoman period, the Harem, the warrior spirit of Ottoman soldiers, the items inside Ottoman palaces, and the splendor in the 'Muhteşem Yüzyıl' series. It was so fascinating. Life in the palace, especially in the Harem, seemed very interesting to me. The women's dresses, their daily lives... Everything seemed very beautiful both to the eye and to the ear. Yes, I have also watched series about Ottomans, but I also saw the early years of Republic of Turkey and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from this series. There was a scene in the series where they hoisted the Turkish flag with the crescent moon and star over a building where Greek flag was flying. In that scene, I felt proud as if our own flag had been raised." (K19)

"It is necessary to mention the 'Diriliş Ertuğrul' series starring Engin Altan Düzyatan. I saw from the series where Turkish culture came from historically, and how Turks value Islam. His clothes, riding a horse, his respect for his father, everyone in the tribe loving and respecting him... Oh, and there was a blacksmith who made swords in the tribe. He used to tell stories from history to the children of the tribe in the evenings. Would you believe it, I would be enchanted as I listened to those stories. It was as if he was telling war stories from my own past. Riding a horse holds an important place in our culture. I felt like I was seeing traces of my own history while watching the series." (K11)

"While watching the times of Greek occupation of Izmir, my heart ached. I had different feelings as I saw how our kinsmen were subjected to the oppression of the Greeks, and the great pains of that period. 'Vatanım Sensin' not only talks about the Turkish occupation by the Greeks, of course, I learned about Izmir, Aegean, Anatolian people, and daily life from this series. I had decided to go to Izmir, see the waterfront, and even Aegean villages I saw in the series. The women's dresses, headscarves, conversations... Everything seemed very beautiful both to the eye and to the ear. Yes, I have also watched series about the Ottomans, but I also saw the early years of the Republic." (K2)

Television programs, especially series, are encoded within the culture where production takes place; the technical infrastructure facilitating the encoding of meanings and the decoding process distinguishes production relationships from information frameworks and culture, and the encoding of media texts is not a mechanically neutral process (Küçük et al., 2021, p. 21). It can be said that Turkish television channels undertake the role of cultural ambassadors and are positively received by Azerbaijani viewers who already have close cultural values. As mentioned by the participant (K25) living in Gence, "When watching Turkish series, I sometimes feel like I'm watching an Azerbaijani channel. Respect for parents, importance given to home cleanliness, lace decorations on display shelves...". As evident from the participant's statement, there is a significant overlap between the culture encoded in Turkish television and the culture perceived by Azerbaijani viewers.

The cultural elements depicted in Turkish series containing historical and geographical information have increased interest in the cities where the programs are produced; besides major cities like Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara, the influence of programs depicting rural life has also been noted. The increase in this interest has resulted in preferences in favor of Turkey in the context of cultural tourism.

"Istanbul is so fascinating; how could one not be curious about it? Almost every series I watched, I would see Istanbul and be amazed. When I had the chance to go, my admiration grew even more. It's such a huge city... The historical peninsula and palaces were among the places I visited first. While visiting Topkapi Palace, where Muhteşem Yüzyıl" was produced and where sultans walked, I felt like traveling through history. Hagia Sophia, Eminönü, Basilica Cistern... I visited them all." (K8)

"I already knew about Turkey, Istanbul, Ankara, and Antalya even before visiting them. It's

impossible not to hear their names on TV news or in series. When my husband and I first went to Istanbul, we always had 'Muhteşem Yüzyıl' or 'Hürrem Sultan' in mind as we visited historical sites." (K3)

"There was a travel program called 'Şoray Uzun Yolda' on Kanall 7; he traveled all over Turkey, tasted the food of the women living in the villages he visited, and had a chat with them. I always wished I could go to those villages and see them, talk to the people, and learn about their food. The villages looked very similar to ours. The houses, kitchens, utensils they used were almost the same. Recently, I watched the Erzurum and Kars programs again on YouTube. The way people in those villages spoke was very similar to us. It's astonishing." (K14)

On the other hand, some Azerbaijani viewers have critically interpreted some of the programs and cultural contexts broadcast on Turkish television; they have expressed the view that the cultural codes in the content do not fully reflect real life, daily practices, and even belief systems. The statement of the participant from Gence (K27), "There is a big difference between the life depicted in 'Kurtlar Vadisi' and the life people live. Not everyone wakes up thinking about what they will do that day and doesn't go around killing people like Memati." indicates a non-participatory reading. Similarly, some related comments are noteworthy for some youth dramas or love stories:

"I watched 'Kiralık Aşk' from beginning to end. As I saw how luxurious and extravagant the characters lived in their daily lives, I realized that it didn't have anything to do with the life in Istanbul and Ankara where I had seen and experienced. Moreover, when I saw that at least one meal a day was eaten at chic and expensive restaurants and that there was a secretary who specially prepared his favorite dishes for Ömer at his home, I found it very strange. Which secretary works in the office with her boss and then goes to his house to cook diet meals? It didn't seem very realistic to me. Moreover, the life shown in the series, the houses with a view of the Bosphorus, luxurious cars... How many families in Istanbul have such facilities?" (K5)

"The questions that came to my mind while watching 'Masumlar Apartmanı' were always different. Which family completely fills a huge apartment in a big building with dirty sheets? Especially in a place like Istanbul. Wouldn't anyone notice the smell? Or wouldn't it draw anyone's attention that they buy a new sheet every day? Moreover, the strangest thing is which father continues to be a tenant in the house of his deceased daughter's husband? Wouldn't he leave the apartment out of grief and sorrow? Especially Naci's love for Safiye. Turks must fall in love with someone and then marry someone else, I thought to myself. While Safiye (the character Naci falls in love with) remains in love, faithful to her love on one hand, on the other hand, Naci is married, even has a daughter. Then Safiye accepts this situation as a character. I couldn't help but wonder about the concept of love among the Turks. I saw the same situation in other series too. The man falls in love with someone when he's young, then for economic reasons or other reasons, they can't be together. Then he goes and marries someone else, has a child. Years later, he goes after his first love. In 'Adımı Feriha Koydum', Feriha's mother used to go to the house of her first love for cleaning. The man is already married, wants to see his first love one last time on his deathbed. How does this happen? If you get married, you forget your past love, it's a big shame to go after it. You're married too. What will happen if you find him years later?" (K14)

Conclusion

This study examines the viewing practices of Azerbaijani audiences regarding Turkish television programs within the framework of cultural studies within Turkish Culture and tourism frame. The perception process in which Azerbaijani viewers decode the content presented in broadcasts are analyzed. The issue of how Azerbaijani audiences perceive and interpret the content of broadcasts on Turkish television channels forms the basis of the study. The changes in communication channels brought about by advancing technology, theories such as globalization, popular culture, and mass culture, which constitute the subjects of social sciences, have paved the way for academic research

focusing on the dynamics through which societies and cultures differentiate or resemble each other in this new era of technology. In this context, while the effects of television and the content it offers on viewers continue to be the subject of numerous studies from a cultural perspective, data on how Turkish television programs are interpreted by Azerbaijani audiences have been analyzed using the Cultural Studies Tradition.

When evaluated within the context of the Cultural Studies and Reception Analysis method, which is the starting point of the study, it has been observed that television viewing practices and reception processes are shaped by various factors, and different interpretations are made regarding the content presented in different programs. In the study, which benefited from the focus group discussion method, it was also understood that the decoding processes that emerged during the reception of content presented on Turkish television channels and coded with Turkish culture are influenced by contexts such as globalization, popular culture, subcultures, as well as variables such as the gender and profession of the research participants. Indeed, it is understood that the demographic differences of individuals also shape their preferences and expectations regarding the television programs they watch. Additionally, this differentiation in the programs watched can also be observed in readings and interpretation practices of the given texts within the contents. For example, while relatively young viewers are observed to move away from the traditional television viewer profile and shape their television viewing methods more internet-based, it was found that viewers aged middle-aged and above follow television programs via satellite broadcasts. The observation of this differentiation has brought along differences in viewing practices, including concepts of time and space allocated for viewing the content. Thus, it is possible to mention the existence of viewers who wait for the broadcast time of a series they follow, as well as viewers who follow the series via the relevant channel's website and have the opportunity to watch some parts again.

Some of the findings suggest that some of the content offered by the media carries a high motivational feature, directly influencing daily life practices, while some content does not have such an effect, on the contrary, it is read entirely oppositely. The fact that media products do not always lead to the desired or planned effect or reading can be considered as an indicator of how much viewers are influenced by their own living spaces, the culture they belong to, and their individual demographic structures, and thus can be considered as a confirmation of the fundamental starting points of Cultural Studies, namely the terms 'audience' and 'reception'. Just as in many studies conducted in the field of social sciences, it is not possible to speak of the existence of a single and fixed finding in this study.

The majority of Azerbaijani viewers have stated that values, norms, and general elements related to Turkish culture are mostly encoded in TV series and films, and they have evaluated much of the cultural context they encounter with a participatory perspective. In this way, it can be said that Turkish culture largely resembles their own culture, and the values and social relationships presented in the programs they watch are in harmony with those in Azerbaijan. This harmonious perception is closely related to the common history, language unity existing between Azerbaijani and Turkish cultures. However, some participants have critically evaluated the social, interpersonal relationships, and socio-economic context given in some popular series. These findings parallel various studies analyzing the reception practices of Turkish viewers. For instance, Koçak et al. (2022) conducted a study analyzing the reception of "The Protector" series by Turkish viewers and found that a significant majority of the participants eagerly followed the places shown in the series and wanted to visit them (Koçak et al., 2022, p. 516).

In conclusion, it has been observed that television program contents containing historical information and bearing traces of the intersection of Turkish history with Azerbaijani history constitute a significant point of interest for Azerbaijani viewers. Indeed, as a natural consequence of Soviet-era practices that historically separated their own history and ethnic existence from those of Turkey and Turks living therein, Azerbaijanis have discovered through these historical productions broadcasted on Turkish television channels a shared history and ethnic identity. Consequently, they have established an emotional connection to Turkey and Turkish history, and by witnessing an alternative narrative of their own history, they have embarked on an exploration of Turkish ethnic structure and culture.

In addition, this historical discovery has also led to an increased interest in the culture of compatriots living in Turkey. As evident from the participants' statements, in addition to the historical periods such as the Seljuk Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the War of Independence presented in Turkish television programs, the regional lifestyle practices showcased in travel programs have also contributed to the formation of sympathy and interest. Thus, within the context of culture and tourism motivations, which form the theme of the study, a development of sympathy and interest has been observed among Azerbaijani viewers, leading to their desire to visit Turkey. The statements of the viewers indicate that the discovery of this resemblance seen and learned from television programs has become a strong motivation for traveling to Turkey.

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Azerbaijani TV Viewers' Practices of Watching Turkish Television Programs In The Context of Cultural Studies: Turkish Culture And Tourism

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Extended Abstract

Globalization and technological advancements have led to profound changes in communication methods and societal structures. Particularly, the proliferation of mass communication tools like television has facilitated the convergence of global and local cultures, enabling the emergence of an interactive space where audiences engage with both global and regional content. This study aims to investigate how Azerbaijani viewers interact with Turkish television channels.

By considering the active role of viewers in the process of meaning-making, the study focuses on reception studies, a viewer-centered theoretical approach that questions the traditional concept of passive viewership and emphasizes the active role of viewers in interpreting media messages and generating meaning from them. Drawing from reception studies commonly utilized in cultural studies, the study seeks to identify the socio-cultural contexts that are significant in the viewer reception process of television programs, and it aims to elucidate how these contexts influence the decoding processes, particularly within the framework of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model.

In the context of Cultural Studies, it is observed that the majority of reception studies conducted for Azerbaijani audiences have focused on Turkish series. However, alongside series, Turkish television productions encompass various other program genres. In future research within the field, examining different television programs would contribute significantly to the field. For instance, studies aimed at determining how Azerbaijani viewers perceive comedy programs, educational shows, distance learning programs, or current affairs broadcasts airing on Turkish television would create an important area of investigation.

Audience studies focusing on multiculturalism, diverse ethnic backgrounds, individuals of different religions, ethnic minorities, and forced migrants in Azerbaijan correspond to an untapped audience domain. Therefore, findings obtained from viewers in Azerbaijan who possess these diverse characteristics and watch Turkish television have the potential to significantly contribute to Cultural Studies by affirming the undeniable impact of individual differences on reception practices, as advocated by the field.

In this research, the reception method was utilized to examine the perceptions, biases, as well as the processes of intercultural assimilation and differentiation among viewers of Turkish television programs living in Azerbaijan, and the behavioral changes that emerge within these processes. The study was structured to encompass theoretical and applied methods. Reception data obtained from focus group discussions were interpreted using qualitative techniques. A review of local and foreign literature was conducted to identify Turkish television programs that could be directly accessed in Azerbaijan through numerical methods (such as satellite) and were broadcast during the research period.

As for current study, utilizing reception studies to examine Azerbaijani viewers' viewing practices of Turkish television content, the research employs focus group discussions and qualitative analysis methods to explore viewers' processes of cultural assimilation and differentiation. The study examined the views of participants residing in Azerbaijan who watch Turkish television programs. The research was conducted with television viewers living in following cities: Baku, Ganja, Nakhchivan, and Sumgayit. The study conducted four focus group discussions with thirty-six participants in total. The findings from the discussions were subjected to qualitative interpretation, with a specific focus on Turkish culture and tourism themes.

The study reveals a differentiated relationship between Turkish television programs and Azerbaijani viewers. While the majority of participants express cultural proximity and emotional attachment to the content presented by Turkish television channels, some participants engage in critical readings of content encoded with social values presented on television. These various reception practices identified regarding content aired on Turkish television channels underscore the importance of personal interpretations and socio-cultural dynamics in the decoding process.

In conclusion, the present study illustrates that Turkish television channels assume the role of cultural ambassadors among Azerbaijani viewers by fostering a sense of belonging and shared cultural identity. Similarly, participants acknowledge the positive impact and motivational force of watching Turkish television channels and the content offered during tourism activities. However, the identified negotiatory and oppositional reading practices contribute to affirming the significance of cultural differences and socio-economic contexts in the encoding/decoding processes of media representations. Moreover, it can be argued that the scope of further research might be expanded into a changing axis from television to internet-based communication tools to encompass Cultural Studies-Reception Analysis. In recent years, it has been observed that audiences consume content not only through television but also through social media platforms. Similarly, there is a distinct audience for digital content such as series, films, and podcasts on digital platforms, and it is important to examine how viewers perceive and interpret this content. In this context, future reception analysis studies should be designed to explore how content delivered through internet-based platforms is interpreted by audiences/users from different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Azerbaijani Audience, Cultural Studies, Reception Analysis, Turkish Television Channels, Turkish Culture.

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

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author..

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

Etik Kurul İzni | Ethics Committee Permission

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Erciyes University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee dated 30/11/2021 and numbered 434; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu'nun 30/11/2021 tarihli toplantısında alınan 434 sayılı karar çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.