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İÇİNDEKİLER / CONTENTS

Sosyal Medya Propagandası: El Salvador'un CECOT Hapishanesi YouTube Videolarının İçerik Analizi	1-24
<i>Araştırma Makalesi</i> / Mehmet Keskin	
"The Simulation of Reality" as a Media Topos: Tracing the Historical Trajectory of VR	25-43
<i>Araştırma Makalesi</i> / Arife Hümevra Hüsmen, Ergin Şafak Dikmen	
Visual Journalism on YouTube: Emotion, Representation and Platform Logic	44-62
<i>Araştırma Makalesi</i> / Özge Ercebe	
Hangout Films as Atmospheric Assemblage: Vibing with Dazed and Confused	63-81
<i>Araştırma Makalesi</i> / Mehmet Sarı	
Exploring News Coverage of Education: A Case Study of Turkish News Portals	82-98
<i>Araştırma Makalesi</i> / Alaaddin F. Paksoy, Hakkı Kahveci, Simge Süllü Durul	

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Sosyal Medya Propagandası: El Salvador'un CECOT Hapishanesi YouTube Videolarının İçerik Analizi

Social Media Propaganda: Content Analysis of YouTube Videos on El Salvador's CECOT Prison

Mehmet KESKİN¹ 

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Özet

Amaç: Bu çalışmada, El Salvador'un Terörle Mücadele Merkezi hapishanesine ilişkin YouTube videoları üzerinden sosyal medya platformlarının propaganda süreçlerindeki rolü incelenmektedir. Araştırma, sosyal medyanın hükümet politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve kamuoyu algısını şekillendirme aracı olarak nasıl kullanıldığını çözümlenmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Tasarım/ metodoloji/ yaklaşım: Nitel araştırma yaklaşımı benimsenmiş bu çalışmada, örnek olay incelemesi yöntemiyle 2024 ve 2025 yıllarında yayınlanan, yüksek izlenme oranına sahip beş içerik üreticisinin videoları tematik içerik analiziyle değerlendirilmiştir. Analiz, MAXQDA 24 yazılımı kullanılarak sistematik kodlama yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiş ve dört ana tema belirlenmiştir: hapishane yapısı ve güvenlik önlemleri, mahkûmların yaşam koşulları, yönetim imajı ve kamuoyu oluşturma, çeteler ve suç profilleri.

Bulgular: Videoların seçici bilgi sunumu, duygusal manipülasyon ve otorite vurgusu gibi beyaz propaganda tekniklerinin yoğun şekilde kullanıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte suçluluk durumu kesinleşmemiş bireylerin temsili nedeniyle gri propaganda unsurları da bulunabilmektedir. Bu içerikler, hapishane koşullarını dramatize ederek izleyicilerde korku, güvenlik algısı ve hayranlık uyandırmayı hedeflemektedir.

Araştırma Sınırlamaları/ öneriler: Sosyal medya platformlarının, özellikle YouTube'un algoritmik yapısının, propaganda mesajlarının küresel kitlelere yayılımında etkili olabilecek bir potansiyele sahip olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Ancak bu değerlendirme, platformun teknik işleyişine yönelik doğrudan bir analizden ziyade, literatürde tanımlanan algoritmik dinamiklerle çalışma bulguları arasındaki örtüşmeye dayanmaktadır.

Pratik Çıkarımlar: Çalışma, dijital çağda sosyal medyanın hükümet politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve kamuoyu algısını şekillendirme aracı olarak işlevini vurgulayarak, medya ve hükümet arasındaki ilişkiye dair yeni perspektifler sunmaktadır.

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Özgünlük/ katkı: Bu çalışma hem beyaz hem gri propaganda tekniklerini birlikte inceleyerek dijital medyanın hükümet politikalarını meşrulaştırma süreçlerindeki rolüne dair yeni bir perspektif sunmaktadır. YouTube içeriklerinin sistematik analizi ve propaganda unsurlarının değerlendirilmesi, literatüre teorik ve metodolojik katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal Medya, Propaganda, YouTube, CECOT Hapishanesi*

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the role of social media platforms in propaganda processes through YouTube videos about El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center prison. The research aims to analyze how social media is used as a tool to legitimize government policies and shape public perception.

Design/methodology/approach: Adopting a qualitative research approach, this study employs a case study design. Five high-viewership videos published in 2024 and 2025 by content creators on YouTube were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The analysis was conducted through systematic coding with MAXQDA 24 software, resulting in the identification of four main themes: prison structure and security measures, inmates' living conditions, government image and public opinion formation, and gang and crime profiles.

Findings: The findings indicate that the videos extensively employ white propaganda techniques such as selective presentation of information, emotional manipulation, and emphasis on authority. In addition, elements of gray propaganda may also be present due to the representation of individuals whose criminal status has not been definitively established. The content tends to dramatize prison conditions in order to evoke feelings of fear, security, and admiration among viewers.

Research limitations/implications: The study suggests that social media platforms, particularly the algorithmic structure of YouTube, may have the potential to facilitate the dissemination of propaganda messages to global audiences. However, this assessment is based not on a direct technical analysis of the platform's operational mechanisms but on the overlap between algorithmic dynamics described in the literature and the patterns identified in this study.

Practical implications: The study highlights the role of social media in the digital age as a tool for legitimizing government policies and shaping public perception, offering insights into the relationship between media and government.

Originality/value: By examining both white and gray propaganda techniques together, this study provides a perspective on the role of digital media in the legitimization of government policies. The systematic analysis of YouTube content and the evaluation of propaganda elements contribute to the literature both theoretically and methodologically.

Keywords: *Social Media, Propaganda, YouTube, CECOT Prison*

Giriş

Sosyal medya, bireylerin profiller oluşturarak sosyal ağlar kurduğu, gönüllü içerik üreterek paylaşımlar yaptığı, etkileşime dayalı dinamik dijital platformlar olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Bu platformlar günümüzde bilgi yayılımı ve kamuoyunun şekillenmesinde kritik bir rol oynamaktadır (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Pauketat, 2023; Wike vd., 2022). Özellikle YouTube gibi platformlar kamuoyu oluşturulması kapsamında görsel ve işitsel içeriklerin geniş

kitlelere hızla ulaşmasını sağlayarak hükümetlerin politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve propaganda stratejilerini uygulama süreçlerinde önemli bir araçtır (Munger & Phillips, 2022). Propaganda süreçlerinde bu platformların oynadığı rol, içeriklerin stratejik kullanımına dayanmaktadır. Genel olarak propaganda, bireylerin veya toplumların algılarını, tutumlarını ve davranışlarını belirli bir ideoloji ya da politika doğrultusunda yönlendirmek için sistematik bir iletişim stratejisi olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). Bu strateji, güvenlik politikalarının halk nezdinde kabulünü artırmak ve devlet otoritesini pekiştirmek amacıyla yaygın olarak kullanılmaktadır. El Salvador'un Nayib Bukele hükümeti tarafından inşa edilen Terörle Mücadele Merkezi (İspanyolca: Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo; CECOT) hapisanesi, bu bağlamda sosyal medya üzerinden yürütülen propaganda faaliyetlerinin çarpıcı bir örneğini sunmaktadır. CECOT, çete şiddetine karşı sert politikaların sembolü olarak tanıtılmakta ve YouTube videoları aracılığıyla hem ulusal hem de uluslararası kamuoyuna mevcut hükümet tarafından devlet gücünün bir göstergesi olarak sunulmaktadır.

CECOT hapisanesine ilişkin YouTube video içerikleri, devlet gücünü vurgulayan ve çete şiddetine karşı sert politikaları meşrulaştırmaya yönelik bir stratejik iletişim aracı olarak göze çarpmaktadır. Bu içerikler zaman zaman halkla ilişkiler faaliyeti gibi algılansa da kullanılan anlatım biçimi ve mesajların yapısı itibarıyla propaganda kapsamında ele alınmasının daha uygun olacağı değerlendirilmektedir. İşler (2020), propaganda ile halkla ilişkilerin simya ve kimya gibi birbiriyle bağlantılı ancak özünde farklı düşünce sistemlerinden doğduğunu vurgulamaktadır. CECOT'a dair videolarda ise dramatik sahneler ve güçlü görsellerle oluşturulan sunum tarzı, halkla ilişkiler ile propaganda arasındaki ayrımın daha ayrıntılı biçimde tartışılması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Literatürde, sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki rolü, özellikle algoritmik öneri sistemlerinin içerikleri öne çıkarma mekanizmaları üzerinden incelenmektedir (Burgess & Green, 2018). YouTube'un görsel ve duygusal içeriklere dayalı yapısı, izleyiciler üzerinde psikolojik etkiler yaratma potansiyelini artırmakta ve propaganda mesajlarının yayılımını kolaylaştırmaktadır (Dubovi & Tabak, 2021; Munger & Phillips, 2022). El Salvador örneğinde, CECOT hapisanesine ilişkin YouTube videoları bu yapının bir yansıması olarak, güvenlik, kontrol ve hayranlık duygularını tetikleyen dramatik bir anlatı ile sunulmaktadır. Ancak bu içeriklerde iletilen mesajların niteliği ve kullanılan anlatı stratejilerinin sistematik olarak analiz edildiği akademik çalışmaların sayısı sınırlıdır. Bu makale, CECOT hapisanesine ilişkin YouTube videolarını örnek olay olarak ele alarak, sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki rolünü ve bu içeriklerin kamuoyu algısını şekillendirme potansiyelini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

CECOT hapisanesi, El Salvador hükümetinin çetelerle mücadelesinde sert güvenlik politikalarını temsil eden sembolik bir yapı olarak inşa edilmiştir. Yüksek güvenli yapı, dramatik görselleri ve uluslararası medyada geniş yankı bulması nedeniyle, hükümetin otoritesini meşrulaştırma çabasının bir parçası olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ayrıca CECOT'un YouTube videolarında dikkat çekici şekilde temsil edilmesi, sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki rolünü incelemek açısından anlamlı bir zemin sunmaktadır. Bu nedenlerle, CECOT örneği, dijital çağda medya ve güvenlik politikaları ilişkisini analiz etmek için örnek olay olarak seçilmiştir.

Bu doğrultuda, araştırmada nitel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş ve CECOT hapishanesinin YouTube'daki temsili örnek olay incelemesi yöntemiyle ele alınmıştır. Çünkü bu yöntem, çağdaş bir olgunun gerçek yaşam bağlamında incelenmesine olanak tanımaktadır (Yin, 2018). 2024 ve 2025 yıllarında yayınlanan, yüksek izlenme oranlarına sahip beş içerik üreticisinin (Luisito Comunica, Nick Shirley, Timmy Karter, Joe Hattab ve Ruhi Çenet) YouTube videoları tematik içerik analiziyle incelenmiştir. Veri analizi, MAXQDA 24 yazılımı kullanılarak sistematik kodlama yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiş ve dört ana tema belirlenmiştir: hapishane yapısı ve güvenlik önlemleri, mahkûmların yaşam koşulları, yönetim imajı ve kamuoyu oluşturma, çeteler ve suç profilleri.

Beş başlık altında yapılandırılan bu makalenin ilk bölümünde, El Salvador'un suçla mücadele stratejisi kapsamında CECOT hapishanesi hakkında genel bilgilere yer verilecektir. İkinci bölüm, sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki kullanımına dair temel kuramsal tartışmalara ayrılmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde, araştırma deseni, veri toplama süreci, sınırlılıkları ve analizi detaylandırılacaktır. Dördüncü bölümde, analiz edilen YouTube videoları doğrultusunda CECOT hapishanesinin sosyal medya temsiline ilişkin temel bulgular temalar halinde sunulacaktır. Son bölümde ise elde edilen bulgulardan yola çıkılarak sosyal medyanın hükümet politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve kamuoyu algısını şekillendirme süreçlerindeki rolüne ilişkin ulaşılan temel sonuçlar paylaşılacaktır.

1. CECOT Hapishanesi: El Salvador'un Suçla Mücadele Stratejisi

El Salvador, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) ve Barrio 18 gibi çetelerin neden olduğu yüksek suç oranlarıyla uzun süredir mücadele etmektedir. 2015 tarihinde cinayet oranı bölgenin en yüksek seviyesine ulaşarak "dünyanın cinayet başkenti" olarak anılmaya başlanmıştır (Watts, 2015). Nayib Bukele'nin 2019'da başkan seçilmesiyle çete şiddetine karşı sert politikalar benimsenmiş ve bu stratejinin merkezi unsuru olarak CECOT hapishanesi inşa edilmiştir. 2023'te açılan CECOT, Latin Amerika'nın en büyük hapishanesi olup 40.000 mahkûm kapasitesiyle dikkat çekmektedir (Wells, 2024).

CECOT, Bukele'nin 2022'de ilan ettiği olağanüstü hâl kapsamında çete üyelerine karşı yürütülen büyük çaplı operasyonların bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. 24-27 Mart 2022 tarihleri arasında çete şiddetinden dolayı 92 kişinin öldüğü bir zamanda Bukele anayasal hakların bir kısmını askıya alarak güvenlik güçlerine geniş yetkiler tanımıştır. Bu dönemde şüpheli çete üyelerinin tutuklanması sonucunda mevcut hapishanelerin kapasitesi yetersiz kalmıştır (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Temmuz 2022'de Bukele, 40.000 mahkûm kapasiteli yeni bir hapishane inşa edileceğini duyurmuş ve CECOT, 100 milyon ABD doları maliyetle yedi ayda tamamlanmıştır (Renteria, 2023). Hapishane Tecoluca'da kentsel merkezlerden izole bir bölgede 23 hektarlık bir alanda inşa edilmiş olup çevresindeki 140 hektarlık arazi de hükümet kontrolüne alınmıştır (France 24, 2023). CECOT'un temel amacı çete üyelerini özellikle MS-13 ve Barrio 18 liderlerini toplumdan izole ederek çete faaliyetlerini durdurmaktır (Wells, 2024). Hükümet, CECOT hapishanesini "kaçışın imkânsız olduğu bir tesis" olarak tanımlamakta ve bu tanım Başkan Nayib Bukele'nin suçla mücadeledeki sıfır tolerans politikasının somut bir göstergesi olarak sunulmaktadır (Parnaby, 2024).

CECOT yüksek güvenlikli bir mega hapisane olarak tasarlanmıştır. Sekiz bloktan oluşan tesisin güvenliği 600 asker ve 250 polis memurundan oluşan özel bir birim tarafından sağlanmaktadır (Renteria, 2023). Mahkûmlar 100 metre karelik hücrelerde 60-75 kişi olarak yalnızca iki tuvalet ve iki lavabo bulunan ortamlarda dört katlı metal ranzalarda kalarak günde sadece yarım saat açık alana çıkma hakkına sahiptir (Parnaby, 2024). İç güvenlik yüz tanıma teknolojisi, hareket sensörleri, x-ray tarayıcıları ve sinyal engelleyicilerle sağlanmaktadır (Wells, 2024). Güvenlik önlemleri arasında kesintisiz yapay aydınlatma, 27 gözetleme kulesi ve 11 metre yüksekliğinde çift duvar sistemi bulunmaktadır (Parnaby, 2024). Hapishanenin mimarisinde doğal havalandırmayı sağlayan kavisli çatı sistemleri ve pencereler bulunmaktadır. Mahkûmların hareketleri sıkı kontrol altında tutulmakta ve kelepçe kullanımı yaygın bir uygulama olarak göze çarpmaktadır (France 24, 2023). Ayrıca Mahkûmların günde 23.5 saat hücrelerde tutulduğu, iletişimlerinin ise yalnızca sanal avukat görüşmeleriyle sınırlı olduğu bildirilmektedir. Hükümet bu tasarımı “çete üyelerinin yeniden organize olmasını engellemek” için gerekli görmektedir (Wells, 2024).

Bukele hükümeti CECOT'un açılmasının ardından El Salvador'un cinayet oranlarının dramatik bir şekilde düştüğünü iddia etmektedir. Bukele'nin politikalarını destekleyenler tarafından tarihi bir başarı olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Hükümet, CECOT'un çete liderlerini izole ederek sokaklardaki şiddeti azalttığını ve halkın güvenlik algısını güçlendirdiğini savunmaktadır (Wells, 2024). YouTube videoları gibi medya platformları hapisane yapısını ve Bukele'nin liderliğini yücelten propaganda içerikleriyle bu algıyı pekiştirmiştir (Winstanley, 2025). Ancak bu başarı iddiaları konusunda farklı görüşler bulunmaktadır. İnsan Hakları İzleme Örgütü (HRW) tarafından, El Salvador hükümetinin çetelerle mücadele politikalarını eleştiren bir rapor yayınlanmıştır. Rapora göre, ülkedeki şiddeti önlemek amacıyla yapılan uygulamalarda aşırıya kaçıldığı belirtilmektedir. Ayrıca binlerce kişinin sebepsiz yere tutuklandığı ve bazı gözaltılarda kötü muamele yaşandığı öne sürülmektedir. Ek olarak 2022 tarihinin Mart ve Kasım ayları arasında polis memurları ve askerlerin özellikle düşük gelirli mahallelerde ayırım gözetmeden yüzlerce baskın düzenlediği, bu süreçte 1.600'den fazla çocuğun da dahil olduğu, en az 58.000 kişinin tutuklandığı ifade edilmektedir. Bununla birlikte yetkililerin kitlesel ayırım gözetmeyen tutuklama kampanyası sonucunda çetelerle hiçbir bağlantısı olmayan yüzlerce kişinin gözaltına alınmasına yol açtığı da iddia edilmektedir (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Bukele, bu eleştirilere karşı insan hakları savunucularını çete suçlarını görmezden gelmekle suçlamış ve politikalarının El Salvador halkının güvenliği için gerekli olduğunu savunmuştur (Wells, 2024).

BBC'nin haberine göre, güvenlik politikalarının sembolü haline gelen cezaevine uluslararası gazetecilerin alınması Bukele'nin politikalarına şüpheyle bakanları ikna etme amacı taşıyan bir adım olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu gelişme, insan hakları gruplarından gelen sürekli eleştirilere bir yanıt olarak görülmektedir (Ventas, 2024). CECOT hapisanesi El Salvador'un suçla mücadele stratejisinin hem sembolü hem de tartışma merkezidir. Hapisane, çete şiddetine karşı sert bir yanıt olarak tasarlanmış ve cinayet oranlarındaki düşüşle belirli bir başarı elde edilmiştir. Bu başarı iddialarına rağmen insan hakları ihlalleri, keyfi tutuklamalar ve toplumsal kutuplaşma gibi konularda önemli görüş ayrılıkları bulunmaktadır. Hükümetin ise CECOT'u bir propaganda aracı olarak kullanarak Bukele'nin

liderliğini yüceltmesi özellikle YouTube gibi platformlarda kamuoyunu şekillendirme çabasında olduğu iddia edilmektedir.

2. Propaganda ve Sosyal Medya

El Salvador'un suçla mücadele politikaları özellikle CECOT hapishanesinin inşası Nayib Bukele hükümetinin çete şiddetine karşı sert yaklaşımının bir yansımasıdır. Bu politikalar geleneksel medyada olduğu kadar YouTube gibi sosyal medya platformlarında da geniş yankı uyandırmış ve beraberinde propaganda kavramını yeniden tartışmaya açmıştır. Bu bağlamda propaganda kavramı ve türleri, medyanın propaganda yayılımındaki işlevi ve özellikle YouTube'un bu süreçteki rolü güncel kaynaklar ışığında incelenmeye değerdir.

Propaganda, bireyleri ya da toplumu belirli bir düşünceye, davranış biçimine veya politik duruşa yönlendirmek amacıyla kullanılan sistematik bir iletişim stratejisidir (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). Bu strateji çoğu zaman bir otorite ya da grup tarafından yürütülerek hedef kitlenin algıları yönlendirilmeye çalışılır. Propaganda mesajları, doğru, kısmen doğru veya yanıltıcı bilgiler içerebilir (Ellul, 1973). Literatürde propaganda genellikle üç ana türe ayrılır: beyaz, gri ve kara propaganda (Conserva, 2003; Cull vd., 2003). Beyaz propaganda, kaynağı açık olan ve çoğunlukla doğru bilgilere dayanan içeriklerle yürütülür. Gri propaganda, kaynağı belirsiz olan ve doğruluğu tartışmalı bilgilerle kitleyi yönlendirmeyi amaçlar. Kara propaganda ise kasıtlı yalanlar ve manipülatif içeriklerle kaynağı gizleyerek kamuoyunu yanıltmaya çalışır (Avcı vd., 2022; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001).

Jowett ve O'Donnell (2018), etkili bir propaganda mesajıyla çoğu zaman duygusal çekicilik, korku uyandırma ve otorite vurgusu gibi tekniklere başvurulduğunu belirtir. Özellikle otoriter rejimlerde bu tür teknikler kamuoyunu şekillendirme sürecinde kritik bir rol oynar. Welch (2013)'de benzer şekilde, medyanın kriz anlarında halkın korkularını kullanarak otoriteye yönelimi artırabileceğini savunur. Bu bağlamda propaganda yalnızca bilgi sunumu değil aynı zamanda duygusal ve psikolojik yönlendirme aracı olarak da işlev görmektedir.

Tarihsel olarak medya, propaganda mesajlarının yayılmasında merkezi bir rol üstlenmiştir. Herman ve Chomsky (2012), *Rızanın İmalatı* adlı eserlerinde geleneksel medyanın hükümet ve ekonomik çıkar gruplarının görüşlerini kamuoyuna benimsetme aracı olduğunu savunur. Ayrıca medya, seçici bilgi sunumu, olayların çerçevelenmesi, abartı ve duygusal manipülasyon gibi tekniklerle belirli anlatıların öne çıkmasına katkı sunmaktadır (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001).

Teknolojik gelişmelerle birlikte sosyal medya özellikle YouTube gibi platformlar, propaganda araçlarının doğasını değiştirmiştir. YouTube'un öneri sistemi, kullanıcı geçmişi, izleme süresi, tıklama davranışı ve platform içi etkileşimler gibi sinyalleri analiz ederek içerikleri sıralayan bir algoritma yapısına sahiptir (Covington vd., 2016). Bu sistem, kullanıcı profillerine göre videoların görünürliğini artırabilir veya sınırlandırabilir. Bu nedenle YouTube'un algoritmik öneri sistemi kullanıcıların karşılaştığı içerikleri biçimlendirerek belirli anlatıların yayılmasını kolaylaştırmaktadır (Burgess & Green, 2018). Kullanıcıların ürettiği içerikler düşük maliyetle yüksek etkileşim sağlayarak propaganda mesajlarının hızla yayılmasına

zemin hazırlar. Bununla birlikte YouTube'un görsel ve işitsel unsurlar içermesi de duygusal manipülasyonu kolaylaştırmakta ve hedef kitle üzerinde güçlü bir psikolojik etki yaratmaktadır (Munger & Phillips, 2022). Ayrıca Hansson ve Page (2022), hükümetlerin sosyal medya iletişim stratejilerini kullanarak güvenlik politikalarını meşrulaştırdığını ve içerik üreticilerini de bu stratejinin bir parçası haline getirdiğini vurgulamaktadır. Woolley (2022) ise dijital propaganda stratejilerinin yalnızca bot hesaplarla değil aynı zamanda popüler içerik üreticileri üzerinden yürütüldüğünü, bu yapıların kitlelere güvenli bilgi yerine kontrol edilmiş anlatılar sunduğunu ifade etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, öneri sistemlerinin yalnızca bireysel tercihlere değil, algoritmik filtreleme dayalı olarak çalıştığı ve böylece bazı anlatıların daha geniş kitlelere ulaşmasına aracılık ettiği literatürde vurgulanmaktadır. CECOT örneği ise bu stratejilerin algoritmik altyapı aracılığıyla küresel ölçekte nasıl dolaşıma sokulabileceğine dair dikkat çekici bir vaka olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Günümüzde medya yalnızca enformasyonun dolaşımını sağlayan bir kanal olmaktan çıkıp, Althusser (2016) ve Gramsci (2014) tarafından da ifade edildiği gibi hegemonik söylemlerin yeniden üretildiği ve meşrulaştırıldığı bir ideolojik aygıt dönüşmüştür. Demokratik toplumlarda iktidarın meşruiyetini sürdürebilmesi, kamuoyunun rızasını almasına bağlıdır; bu süreçte medya, propaganda faaliyetlerinin temel aracı olarak işlev görerek hegemonyanın inşasına katkıda bulunur (Biber & Turancı, 2014, s. 39). Akçay ve Sütçü (2024, s. 68) sosyal medya üzerinden yapılan propagandanın, bireylerin çoğunlukla farkında olmadan ve direnç göstermeden zihinsel süreçlerini etkilediğini bu nedenle de geleneksel propagandaya göre daha sinsi ve farklı bir etki oluşturduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Dijital mecralarda gerçekleştirilen propaganda pratikleri, özellikle sosyal medya algoritmalarının sunduğu görünmezlik ve yayılabilirlik avantajıyla iktidarın kamusal algıyı yönlendirmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Bu bağlamda El Salvador'daki örüntü, dijital çağda medya ve politika etkileşiminin çözümlenmesi açısından önemli bir analiz zemini sunmaktadır.

3. Araştırma Metodolojisi

Bu çalışma, sosyal medya platformlarında CECOT hapisanesiyle ilgili yayınlanan içeriklerin hükümetlerin güvenlik politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve toplumsal kabul oluşturma süreçlerindeki işlevini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın önemi dijital çağda sosyal medyanın propaganda yayılımındaki etkisini çözümlenmek, El Salvador'daki ceza sistemi sunumu hakkında farkındalık yaratmaktır. Ayrıca akademisyenler ve insan hakları savunucuları için yeni araştırma alanları açmaktır. Bu analizin medyanın politika ve toplum üzerindeki etkisini anlamak için bir örnek olay sunarak literatüre katkıda bulunacağı değerlendirilmektedir.

Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda araştırmaya yön veren sorular şunlardır: (1) CECOT hapisanesiyle ilgili YouTube videoları, sosyal medya üzerinden yürütülen bir propaganda örneği olarak değerlendirilebilir mi? (2) Propaganda olarak değerlendirilmesi durumunda bu videolarda baskın olarak hangi propaganda türleri (beyaz, gri, kara) ve teknikleri kullanılmaktadır? (3) Söz konusu videolarda kullanılan söylem ve kurgu unsurları, suçla mücadele politikalarının meşrulaştırılmasına ve kamuoyu algısının şekillendirilmesine nasıl katkı sağlamaktadır?

Bu çalışma, nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımıyla yapılandırılmıştır. Nitel araştırmalar bireylerin ya da toplumsal yapıların belirli olgulara dair deneyimlerini, anlamlarını ve etkileşimlerini derinlemesine incelemeyi amaçlar (Creswell, 2021). Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden örnek olay çalışmasına dayanan bu çalışmada, CECOT hakkında YouTube'da yayınlanmış videolar bir örnek olay olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu incelemede medya içeriklerinin sosyal ve politik bağlamda nasıl kullanıldığını anlamaya yönelik bir analiz yapılmıştır. Yin (2018)'e göre, örnek olay çalışmaları çağdaş bir olgunun kendi gerçek yaşam bağlamı içerisinde derinlemesine incelenmesini sağlar. Dolayısıyla örnek olay incelemesi belirli bir bağlamda sosyal medya içeriklerinin propaganda potansiyelini anlamak için yapılandırılmış bir yöntem sunmaktadır. Seçilen örnek olay doğrultusunda tematik içerik analizi kullanılmıştır.

Çalışmada YouTube platformunda CECOT hapishanesiyle ilgili yayınlanan video içerikleri başlıca veri kaynağı olarak kullanılmıştır. 01 Ocak 2024–30 Nisan 2025 tarih aralığı filtrelenerek "CECOT prison", "El Salvador mega prison" ve "Bukele prison tour" anahtar kelimelerle YouTube'da aramalar yapılmıştır. Bu tarih aralığı, hapishaneyle ilgili ilk videonun 2024 yılında yayınlanmış olması nedeniyle seçilmiştir. 2024 tarihi öncesinde bu konuda herhangi bir video içeriği bulunmamaktadır. İlk tarama sürecinde toplam 23 video tespit edilmiş; vlog tarzı, alt yazısız, kısa (10 dakikadan az) videolar dışlanmıştır. Kalan videolar arasında içerik bütünlüğü, temsiliyet ve propaganda söylemi açısından en yüksek potansiyele sahip olan beş video örneklem olarak seçilmiştir. Analiz edilen içerikler Luisito Comunica (2024), Nick Shirley (2024), Timmy Karter (2024), Joe Hattab (2025) ve Ruhi Çenet (2025) gibi farklı coğrafyalardan içerik üreticilerinin hapishane turu videolarından oluşmaktadır. Videoların seçiminde erişilebilirlik, yüksek izlenme oranları ve propaganda söylemini yansıtmaya potansiyeli ölçüt alınmıştır.

Creswell nitel veri analizini, ham verilerin sistematik bir şekilde işlenerek tematik sonuçlara ulaşmayı hedefleyen kademeli bir yaklaşım olarak tanımlamaktadır. Bu analitik süreçte araştırmacı öncelikle veri setini detaylı biçimde gözden geçirir ardından anlamlı veri parçalarını belirleyerek bunları kodlama işlemine tabi tutar. Kodlama aşamasında veri parçalarına uygun tanımlayıcı etiketler atanır. Benzer nitelikteki kodlar gruplandırılarak ana temalar oluşturulur ve bu temalar, yorumlama süreciyle birlikte araştırma bulgularına dönüştürülür. Sürecin nihai aşamasında ise oluşturulan temalar yorumlanarak bulguların geçerliliği ve güvenilirliği test edilir (Creswell, 2019). Bu nedenle araştırmanın ilk evresinde ön analiz çalışmaları kapsamında analitik çerçeveye temel teşkil edecek geçici kavramsal yapılar (tematik ögeler, sınıflandırmalar ve analiz birimleri) oluşturulmuştur. Bu süreçte MAXQDA 24 nitel analiz programı kullanılarak sistematik kodlama yapılmış ve temalar belirlenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda ortaya çıkan bulgular metodolojik bir bütünlük içerisinde yeniden yapılandırılarak tematik düzenlemeye tabi tutulmuş ve bu yapılar üzerinden çalışmanın temel problemlerine cevaplar üretilmeye çalışılmıştır. Yapılan kodlama sürecinde elde edilen temalar, kategoriler ve kodlar ile bunlara karşılık gelen örnek ifadeler Tablo 1'de ayrıntılı olarak sunulmuştur.

Tablo 1.**Temalar, Kategoriler, Kodlar ve Örnek İfadeler Tablosu**

Temalar, Kategoriler ve kodlar	Örnek İfadeler
Birinci Tema: Hapishanenin Yapısı ve Güvenlik Önlemleri	
Fiziksel Güvenlik Önlemleri Kategorisi (elektrikli çitler, giriş kontrollerini vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	...9 fitlik elektrikli çitle çevrili (Shirley N.) ...15.000 volt taşıyan elektrikli çit (Çenet R.) ...hatta anüsü bile tarayacak (Shirley N.)
Teknolojik Gözetim Sistemleri Kategorisi (yüz tanıma sistemi, sinyal engelleme vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	...telefon sinyaline izin verilmiyor (Comunica L.) ...Jammer'lar bir alandaki tüm sinyalleri engelledi CECOT'un 2 km yarıçapı... (Çenet R.)i
Mahkûm Kontrol Mekanizmaları Kategorisi (mahkûmların hareket kısıtlamaları vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Kafaları resmen beton duvara yapışmış durumda hareket etmiyorlar (Shirley N.)
İkinci Tema: Mahkûmların Yaşam Koşulları ve Muamelesi	
Fiziksel Koşullar Kategorisi (yiyecek, giyecek ve izolasyon vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Yemek için bile hücrelerinden çıkmıyorlar. Fasulye ve pilav. Tavuk yok, et yok (Hattab j.)
Psikolojik Etkiler Kategorisi (toplu suçlama, kimliksizleştirme vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Her mahkûm aynı beyaz üniformayı giyiyor (Hattab j.)
Disiplin Uygulamaları Kategorisi (dini nasihat, egzersiz vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Burada bir vaiz var. İncil'den kim öğretiyor? Bu bir eğitim türüdür (Shirley N.)
Üçüncü Tema: Yönetim İmajı ve Kamuoyu Oluşturma	
İdari Başarı Sunumu Kategorisi (yönetimin başarısı vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	El Salvador Batı Yarımkürenin en güvenli ülkesi oldu (Karter T.)
Medya Kullanımı ve Kontrolü Kategorisi (sınırlı içerik vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Bu hapishaneye giriş için çok az kişiye izin verilir. ...ilk Arap ben olabilirim (Hattab j.)
Toplumsal Duyguya Hitap Kategorisi (korku ve güven vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	El Salvador'un en tehlikeli suçlusu (Karter T.)
Dördüncü Tema: Çeteler ve Suç Profilleri	
Çete Kültürü ve Semboller Kategorisi (dövme vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	...örümcek ağı dövmesi bir varlığı temsil eder (Çenet R.)
Suç Profilleri ve Mağduriyetler Kategorisi (şiddet içerikli, çocuk yaşta katılım vb. kodları kapsamaktadır)	Burada henüz çocukken korkunç suçlar işleyenler var (Comunica L.)

Tablo 1'deki veriler YouTube videolarının transkriptlerinden elde edilen kodlamalara dayanmaktadır. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerine uygun olarak yürütülen süreçte ilk olarak, YouTube videolarından seçilen içerikler transkript haline getirilmiş ve bu transkriptler analiz için ham veri seti olarak kullanılmıştır. Transkriptlerin hazırlanması sırasında konuşmaların doğal akışı ve bağlamı korunarak doğru bir şekilde aktarılmasına özen gösterilmiştir. Daha sonra bu ham veriler üzerinde sistematik bir kodlama süreci başlatılmıştır. Kodlama aşamasında transkriptlerdeki anlamlı ifadeler ve tekrar eden örüntüler belirlenmiş, her bir veri parçasına uygun tanımlayıcı kodlar atanmıştır. Kodlar verinin içeriğini en iyi şekilde özetleyen ve araştırmanın odaklandığı konuları yansıtan etiketler olarak tasarlanmıştır. Kodlama tamamlandıktan sonra benzer özelliklere sahip kodlar bir araya getirilerek daha geniş kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Kategorizasyon sürecinde kodlar arasındaki ilişkiler ve ortaklıklar dikkate alınmış böylece verinin daha yapılandırılmış bir hale getirilmesi sağlanmıştır. Son aşamada ise bu kategoriler analiz edilerek araştırmanın temelini oluşturan ana temalar ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Temalar, verilerden elde edilen bulguları daha anlamlı ve bütüncül bir şekilde yorumlamayı mümkün kılacak şekilde düzenlenmiştir. Buna ek olarak verilerin derinlemesine incelenmesi için MAXQDA 24 nitel analiz programının sunduğu araçlardan da faydalanılmıştır. Elde edilen temalar, kategoriler ve kodlar, Tablo 1'de örnek ifadelerle birlikte ayrıntılı bir şekilde sunulmuştur. Böylece analiz sürecinin şeffaflığı ve izlenebilirliği sağlanmıştır. Bu yapılandırma araştırmanın bulgularını daha kapsamlı bir şekilde ortaya koymayı ve çalışmanın temel sorularına yönelik derinlemesine bir anlayış geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları beş başlık altında açıklanmaktadır. İlk olarak, yalnızca YouTube platformunda yayınlanan ve yüksek izlenme oranlarına sahip içerik üreticilerinin videolarına odaklanılmıştır. İkinci olarak araştırma dili ve erişilebilirlik açısından yalnızca İngilizce ve Türkçe altyazı ya da anlatım içeren videolarla sınırlandırılmıştır. Videoların çözümlenmesinde YouTube'un sunduğu otomatik altyazılar esas alınmıştır. Bu altyazılar araştırmacı tarafından doğrudan izlenerek cümle cümle doğrulanmış; bağlamın korunması gözetilerek manuel düzeltmeler yapılmıştır. Otomatik çeviri kaynaklı hatalar en aza indirilmeye çalışılmış, analiz öncesi çeviri metinleri ikinci kez kontrol edilmiştir. Üçüncü olarak seçilen videolar belirli bir zaman aralığında (01 Ocak 2024–30 Nisan 2025) yayınlanmış içeriklerle sınırlı tutulmuştur. Bu nedenle propaganda söylemlerinin zamansal değişimlerini veya politik gelişmelere paralel dönüşümünü kapsamlı biçimde ortaya koymak bu araştırmanın sınırları dışındadır. Dördüncü olarak çalışmada yalnızca dijital medya içeriklerine (videolara) odaklanılmış; bu içeriklerin izleyiciler üzerinde bıraktığı etkiler ya da kamuoyundaki algı dönüşümüne ilişkin nicel veriler toplanmamıştır. Son olarak bu çalışmanın kapsamı doğrudan YouTube algoritmasının teknik analizini içermemektedir. Videoların kullanıcıya ne tür önerilerle sunulduğu, SEO çalışmaları, sıralama algoritmaları veya ana sayfa görünürlüğü gibi teknik detaylar bu çalışmanın sınırları dışında tutulmuştur. Dolayısıyla, algoritmanın bu içeriklerin yayılımındaki etkisi doğrudan ölçülmemiş; yalnızca literatürdeki bulgularla ilişkilendirilerek gözlemsel değerlendirmeler yapılmıştır.

4. Bulgular (Temalar)

Makalenin bu bölümünde incelenen YouTube videolarının profil ile erişim bilgilerinden elde edilen verilerle erişim ve etkileşim sayıları analiz edilmiştir. Ardından, seçilen videoların transkriptlerinden elde edilen nitel veriler, içerik analizi sürecine tabi tutulmuştur. Bu süreçte, videolarda yer alan anlatılar detaylı şekilde incelenerek verilerden anlamlı ifadeler kodlanmış, benzer kodlar bir araya getirilerek alt kategoriler oluşturulmuştur. Bu alt kategorilerden hareketle daha üst düzeyde kavramsal bütünlük sağlayacak şekilde dört ana tema belirlenmiştir: (1) Hapishanenin yapısı ve güvenlik önlemleri, (2) Mahkûmların yaşam koşulları ve muamelesi, (3) Yönetim imajı ve kamuoyu oluşturma, (4) Çeteler ve suç profilleri. Bu temalar, CECOT hapishanesinin YouTube'daki temsiline ilişkin öne çıkan söylemleri anlamlandırmak ve bu içeriklerin yapılandırılma biçimini derinlemesine analiz etmek amacıyla oluşturulmuştur.

4.1. Seçilen Videolarının Erişim ve Etkileşim Analizi

CECOT hapishanesiyle ilgili beş YouTuber'ın videolarına ait temel bilgiler Tablo 2'de gösterilmektedir. Videolar 2024 ve 2025 tarihlerinde yayınlanmış olup içerik üreticilerinin uyruğu farklı coğrafi bölgeleri (Orta Doğu, Latin Amerika, Kuzey Amerika, Avrupa ve Asya) temsil etmektedir. Analiz edilen videoların her biri 11 dakika 35 saniye ile 23 dakika 4 saniye arasında değişen süreleriyle detaylı bir anlatım sunmaktadır. İçerik üreticileri arasında Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri'nden Joe Hattab (16,5M abone), Meksika'dan Luisito Comunica (44,4M abone), Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden Nick Shirley (476B abone), Yunanistan'dan Timmy Karter (729B abone) ve Türkiye'den Ruhi Çenet (13,6M abone) yer almaktadır. Bu çeşitlilik CECOT hapishanesinin küresel bir ilgi odağı olduğunu ve farklı kültürel perspektiflerden ele alındığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca Nayib Bukele hükümetinin, hapishaneyi uluslararası alanda duyurmak amacıyla farklı coğrafyalardan gelen içerik üreticilerine erişim izni verdiği anlaşılmaktadır.

Tablo 2.

CECOT Hapishanesi YouTube Videolarının Profili ve Erişimi (30 Nisan 2025)

YouTuber	Uyruğu	Yayın Tarihi	Video Uzunluğu	Abone Sayısı	Görüntülenme	Beğeni	Yorum Sayısı
Joe Hattab	BAE	02.02.2025	23:04	16,5M	50,9M	1,4M	41B
Luisito Comunica	Meksika	07.02.2024	16:48	44,4M	56M	1,1M	41B
Nick Shirley	ABD	26.07.2024	11:35	476B	5,8M	116B	8B
Timmy Karter	Yunanistan	22.10.2024	17:34	729B	3,7M	54B	3B
Ruhi Çenet	Türkiye	09.02.2025	20:51	13,6M	99,7M	1,8M	63B

Tablo 2 incelendiğinde Ruhi Çenet'in videosu 99,7 milyon görüntülenme ile en yüksek erişime ulaşırken, Timmy Karter'in videosu 3,7 milyon görüntülenmeyle daha sınırlı bir kitleye hitap etmiştir. Beğeni sayıları 54 bin ile 1,8 milyon arasında değişirken yorum sayıları 3000 ile 63000 arasında olup izleyicilerin yoğun ilgi gösterdiğini ve tartışmalara katıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu veriler CECOT hapishanesinin hem popüler kültürde hem de toplumsal tartışmalarda önemli bir yer edindiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca videoların ulaştığı yüksek görüntülenme ve etkileşim sayıları, içeriklerin yalnızca izleyici ilgisiyle değil, aynı zamanda YouTube'un öneri sisteminin çalışmasına bağlı olarak da yaygınlaşmış olabileceğini düşündürmektedir.

Videoların çoğunun, benzer içeriklerin izlenmesinden sonra YouTube tarafından "benzer videolar" veya "diğer kullanıcılar bu videoları da izledi" başlıkları altında önerildiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu durum, içerik benzerliği ve kullanıcı davranışına dayalı öneri sistemlerinin çalıştığına dair dolaylı bir bulgu sunmaktadır. Ancak bu gözlemler, algoritmanın teknik analizi değil araştırmacının kullanıcı deneyimine dayalı sınırlı bir tespit niteliğindedir.

Özellikle Ruhi Çenet ve Luisito Comunica gibi yüksek abone sayılarına sahip içerik üreticilerinin videolarının sırasıyla 99,7 milyon ve 56 milyon gibi oldukça yüksek izlenme rakamlarına ulaştığı görülmüştür. Bu izlenme rakamları ise içeriklerin yalnızca ulusal izleyicilerle sınırlı kalmadığını, ayrıca çok sayıda farklı kültürden izleyiciye ulaştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Beğeni ve yorum sayılarının da bu doğrultuda yüksek olması izleyicilerin videolara yalnızca pasif tüketici olarak değil aktif bir biçimde etkileşimde bulunan kullanıcılar olarak katıldığını göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla CECOT hapishanesinin dijital medyada viral bir fenomen haline geldiğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

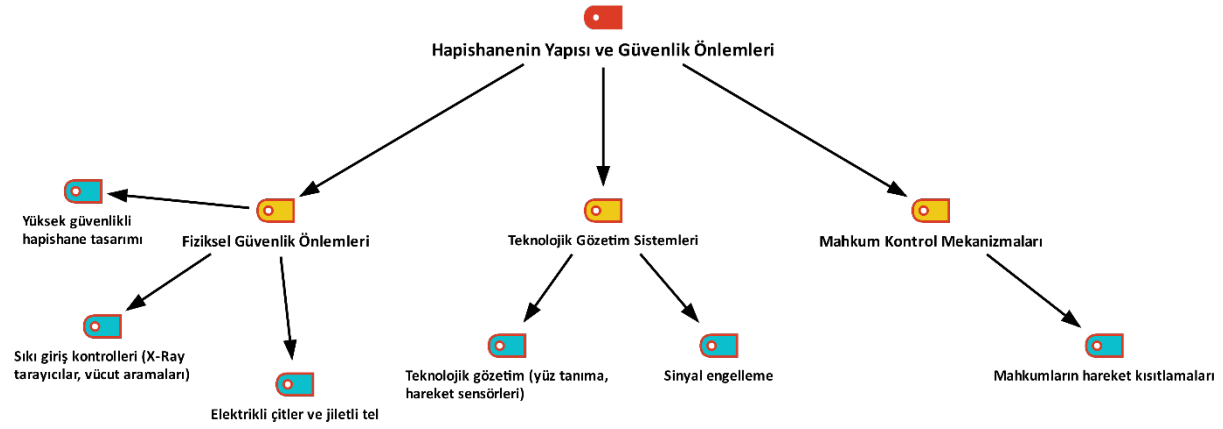
Öte yandan Nick Shirley ve Timmy Karter gibi daha düşük abone sayılarına sahip içerik üreticilerinin videoları da milyonlarca izlenmeye ulaşmıştır. CECOT'un konusunun yalnızca büyük YouTuber'lar tarafından değil daha küçük ölçekli içerik üreticileri tarafından da etkili biçimde işlenebildiği anlaşılmaktadır.

Tüm bu veriler bir arada değerlendirildiğinde CECOT hapishanesine yönelik videoların dijital ortamda hem erişim gücü yüksek hem de kullanıcı etkileşimi bakımından yoğun içerikler olduğu görülmektedir. YouTube gibi platformların cezaevi gibi politik ve toplumsal açıdan tartışmalı konuların kamuoyuna sunulmasında ne denli etkili bir mecra haline geldiği anlaşılmaktadır. Böylece dijital medya yalnızca bilgi aktaran bir araç değil aynı zamanda toplumsal algıların şekillendiği ve sorgulandığı bir tartışma zemini işlevi görmektedir.

4.2. Birinci Tema: Hapishanenin Yapısı ve Güvenlik Önlemleri

Kodlanan video transkriptleri üzerinden yapılan analizler sonucunda, "fiziksel güvenlik önlemleri", "teknolojik gözetim sistemleri" ile "mahkûm kontrol mekanizmaları" kategorilerinden oluşan "hapishanenin yapısı ve güvenlik önlemleri" teması Şekil 1'de gösterilmiştir.

Şekil 1.
Hapishanenin Yapısı ve Güvenlik Önlemleri (Hiyerarşik Kod Alt Kod Modeli)



Şekil 1’de görüldüğü üzere analiz edilen YouTube videolarında hapishanenin yapısı ve güvenlik önlemlerine dair unsurlar dikkat çekmektedir. Kodlanan verilerde özellikle şu ifadeler dikkat çekmektedir: “güneş görmüyorlar”, “tuvalet mahremiyeti yok”, “sadece beton”, “hareket edemiyorlar” ve “hiçbir iletişimleri yok.” Bu tür tasvirler bir hapishanenin sadece güvenlik önlemlerini betimlemesinden ibaret değildir. Aynı zamanda bir otoriter güç gösterisinin görsel araçlarıdır. Özellikle sosyal medya platformlarında yayınlanan görüntüler kamuoyunu bilgilendirmekten ziyade hükümetin otoritesini pekiştirmek ve muhalefet ya da potansiyel suçlular üzerinde caydırıcı bir psikolojik etki yaratmak için kullanılmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, bu tür içeriklerin yalnızca iç kamuoyu için değil, uluslararası kamuoyuna yönelik mesajlar taşıdığı da düşünülebilir. Özellikle El Salvador’un güvenli bir ülke olduğu izlenimi yaratılarak turizm gibi ekonomik alanlarda imaj geliştirme çabası da bu stratejinin bir parçası olabilir. Dolayısıyla bu durum Lasswell’in (1938) klasik tanımında ifade ettiği gibi, propagandanın “belirli bir grubun görüşlerini, duygularını ve davranışlarını kontrol etme girişimi” olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

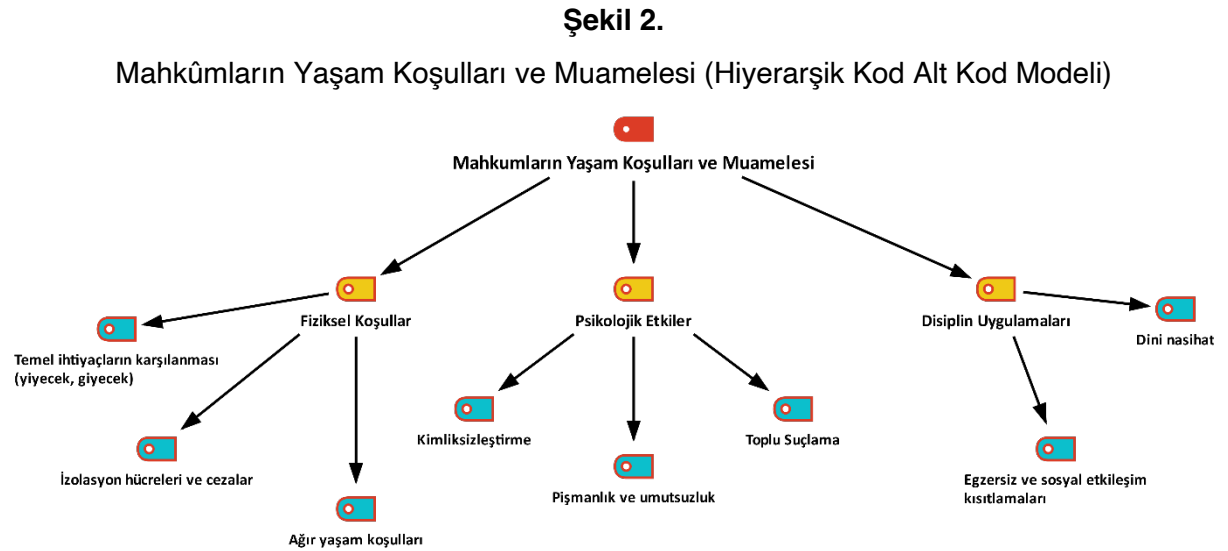
Hapishane videolarında kullanılan sert görseller mahkûmların sıra halinde dizilmesi, yere çömeltilmiş halde tutulmaları ve fiziksel temastan uzak soyutlanmış halleri ise simgesel bir düzende hükümetin mutlak gücünü yansıtmaktadır. Bu görseller, Jowett ve O’Donnell (2018)’in de belirttiği gibi, propagandanın bilişsel yönü yani izleyicide yaratılan anlamlar aynı zamanda korku, güvenlik, cezalandırma arzusu gibi duygusal tepkiler üretmeyi de amaçlamaktadır. Söz konusu görseller, devletin kontrol ve disiplin kapasitesini vurgularken, izleyicilerde otoriteye saygı uyandırmayı hedeflediğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

Öte yandan bu tür görselliklerin özellikle YouTube gibi sosyal medya platformlarında dolaşıma sokulması, yeni medya çağında propaganda biçimlerinin dönüşümünü de göstermektedir. Günümüzde propaganda yalnızca yukarıdan aşağıya bir manipülasyon biçimi değil aynı zamanda kullanıcıların gönüllü olarak içerikleri yaymasıyla güç kazanan ağ tabanlı bir olgu haline gelmiştir (Gerbaudo, 2012).

El Salvador hükümetinin de bu ağ mantığını kullanarak, güçlü ve kararlılık imajını dijital kitlelere ulaştırmayı hedeflediği görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda CECOT örneği yalnızca fiziksel olarak yüksek güvenli bir hapishane değil aynı zamanda devletin sosyal medya üzerinden yürüttüğü propaganda stratejisinin merkezinde yer alan simgesel bir sahnedir. Bu strateji hem iç kamuoyu için caydırıcı hem de uluslararası kamuoyu için meşruiyet sağlayıcı bir mesaj taşımaktadır. Dolayısıyla CECOT'un görsel temsilleri, devletin otoritesini pekiştiren bir anlatı oluştururken aynı zamanda sosyal medyanın etkileşim dinamikleriyle küresel çapta yankı uyandırmaktadır.

4.3. İkinci Tema: Mahkûmların Yaşam Koşulları ve Muamelesi

Kodlanan video transkriptleri üzerinden yapılan analizler sonucunda, “fiziksel koşullar”, “psikolojik etkiler” ile “disiplin uygulamaları” kategorilerinden oluşan “mahkûmların yaşam koşulları ve muamelesi” teması Şekil 2’de gösterilmiştir.



Şekil 2’de CECOT hapishanesindeki mahkûmların karşılaştığı zorlu yaşam koşulları detaylı bir şekilde ortaya konulurken, videoların propaganda odaklı bir dil içerdiği dikkat çekmektedir. İçerik üreticileri mahkûmların yaşam koşullarını abartılı bir şekilde sunarak izleyicilerde hükümetin sert güvenlik politikalarına yönelik destek oluşturmayı hedeflemektedir. Örneğin Nick Shirley’nin “bir çarşaf veriliyor, yastık bile verilmiyor ve ışıklar hiç sönmez” anlatımı mahkûmların temel ihtiyaçlardan yoksun bırakıldığını öne sürerek cezalandırıcı bir algı oluşturmaktadır. Bu ifadeler Ellul’un (1973) propaganda ile bireylerin tutumlarını şekillendirmek için duygusal manipülasyonun kullanıldığı görüşünü destekler niteliktedir.

“Fiziksel koşullar” kategorisinde mahkûmların barınma, beslenme gibi temel ihtiyaçlarının sunumu ve izolasyonları incelenmiştir. Joe Hattab’ın “hiç ışık yok, burası tek kişilik hücre, sadece bir

çimento parçası var” ifadesi, hücrelerin zor koşullarını dramatize etmektedir. Luisito Comunica'nın “tek ışık girişi tavandaki bir delik” ifadesi ise izolasyon hücrelerinin zorluklarını vurgulamaktadır.

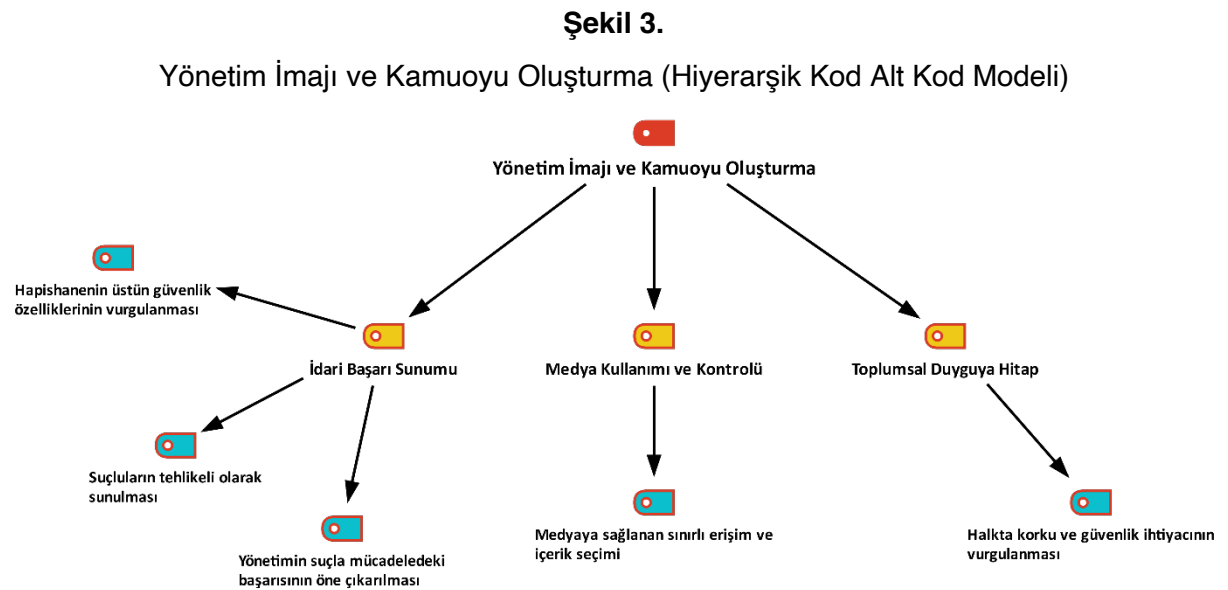
“Psikolojik etkiler” kategorisinde mahkûmların kimliksizleştirme, toplu suçlama ve pişmanlık gibi duygusal durumları ele alınmaktadır. Ruhi Çenet'in “aileni hiç göremiyorsun... ve ...bazen ağlarım” ifadesi, mahkûmların yalnızlık ve umutsuzlukla başa çıkma mücadelesini yansıtırken, Nick Shirley'nin “eğer kaka yapmak istiyorsan veya idrarlarını herkesin önünde yapmak zorunda kalıyorlar” anlatımı kimliksizleştirme üzerinden psikolojik baskıyı vurgulamaktadır.

“Disiplin uygulamaları” kategorisinde egzersiz kısıtlamaları ve dini nasihat gibi disiplin yöntemleri incelenmektedir. Timmy Karter'in “günde sadece 30 dakika hücreyi terk edebilirler” ifadesi, sosyal etkileşimin minimal düzeyde olduğunu göstermektedir. Ruhi Çenet'in “vaiz burada bazı şeyleri öğretiyor İncil'den önemli dersler” anlatımı ise disiplinin dini bir araç olarak kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır.

İçerik üreticilerinin CECOT hapisanesine ilişkin anlatımları, mahkûmların yaşam koşullarını dramatize ederek izleyicilerde duygusal tepkiler uyandırabilmekte ve hükümetin güvenlik politikalarını meşrulaştırma yönünde bir etki yaratabilmektedir. Fiziksel ve psikolojik zorlukların abartılı bir şekilde sunulması ise seçilmiş gerçekler aracılığıyla hedef kitlenin algısını etkileme potansiyeli taşımaktadır. Bu bağlamda söz konusu anlatımların Bektaş (2013)'de belirttiği üzere, beyaz propagandanın karakteristik özellikleriyle benzerlik gösterdiği ve seçilmiş doğruların hedef kitleye aktarılması stratejisiyle ilişkili olabileceği düşünülebilir.

4.4. Üçüncü Tema: Yönetim İmajı ve Kamuoyu Oluşturma

Kodlanan video transkriptleri üzerinden yapılan analizler sonucunda, “idari başarı sunumu”, “medya kullanımı ve kontrolü” ile “toplumsal duyguya hitap” kategorilerinden oluşan “yönetim imajı ve kamuoyu oluşturma” teması Şekil 3'te gösterilmiştir.



Şekil 3'te Nayib Bukele hükümetinin halk üzerindeki algıyı şekillendirme çabaları detaylı bir şekilde ortaya konulurken, suçla mücadeledeki başarılar, kontrollü medya kullanımı ve halkın güvenlik duygusuna yönelik vurgular dikkat çekmektedir.

"İdari başarı sunumu" kategorisinde, yönetimin suçla mücadeledeki başarıları ve hapishanenin güvenlik özellikleri ön plana çıkarılmıştır. Joe Hattab'ın "On yıllardır dünyanın suç merkezi hâline gelmiş bir ülkeyi günümüzde dünyanın en güvenli yerlerinden biri hâline getirdi... Tüm bunların mimarı... Başkandır. Kendisi Nayib Bukele" ifadesi, liderin suçla mücadeledeki rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Nick Shirley'nin "El Salvador'da Birleşik Devletler'den daha fazla... kelimenin tam anlamıyla en güvenli ülke" ve "El Salvador'da en büyük ve en modern hapishane bulunmaktadır" anlatımları, suç oranlarındaki düşüşü ve hapishanenin üstün özelliklerini övmektedir. Ayrıca Ruhi Çenet'in "Arkamda gördüğün şey, dünyanın bu mega yapısı: en katı ve en büyük hapishanesi" ifadesi, hapishanenin fiziksel büyüklüğünü ve güvenlik özelliklerini dramatize etmektedir. Aynı videoda 2023'e gelindiğinde çete bağlantılı suçların sayısının önemli ölçüde düştüğü belirtilmekte, bu durum da hapishanenin suçla mücadeledeki etkinliğiyle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Luisito Comunica'nın "Güvenlikli cezaevi benim gibi basit bir vatandaşa belli bir güçlenme duygusu veriyor" sözleri ise halk nezdinde güven hissini desteklemektedir. Propaganda kapsamında değerlendirildiğinde bu anlatımlar başarıların abartılması tekniği ile örtüşmektedir. Nayib Bukele'nin ülkeyi dünyanın en güvenli yerlerinden biri hâline getirdiği yönündeki vurgular liderin etkisini idealize ederek kamuoyunda hayranlık uyandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tür söylemler yöneticinin bireysel yetkinliğiyle elde edilen başarıları mutlaklaştırarak, mevcut yönetimin alternatifsiz olduğu algısını pekiştirir (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018).

"Medya kullanımı ve kontrolü" kategorisinde, hapishaneye sınırlı erişim ve içerik seçimi dikkat çekmektedir. Joe Hattab'ın "Bu hapishaneye giriş için çok az kişiye izin verilir... İçeride çekim yapmak için izin alan ilk Arap ben olabilirim" ifadesi, medyaya sağlanan kısıtlı erişimi ortaya koyarken, Luisito Comunica'nın "özel basın izinleriyle bölgeye girebiliyoruz" anlatımı, içeriğin kontrollü bir şekilde sunulduğunu göstermektedir. Nick Shirley'nin "CECOT'a giren tek yabancılardan biri olduktan sonra" ve Ruhi Çenet'in "aylar sonra medya olarak davet edildiler" ifadeleri, medyanın yalnızca belirli bir anlatıyı yansıtacak şekilde yönlendirildiğini teyit etmektedir. Timmy Karter'in "... ben azınlıktanım" sözleri ise bu kontrollü erişimin bir parçası olarak değerlendirilebilir. Propaganda kapsamında değerlendirildiğinde bu anlatımlar bilgiye seçici erişim ve medya kontrolü teknikleriyle ilişkilendirilebilir. Hapishaneye yalnızca belirli içerik üreticilerinin erişebilmesi ve bu kişilerin deneyimlerinin öne çıkarılması, hedeflenen anlatının dışındaki olasılıkların dışlanmasıyla propaganda etkisi yarattığı söylenebilir. Alternatif bakış açılarının sınırlandırılmasından dolayı halk yalnızca belirli bir çerçeveden bilgiye ulaşır ve yönetimin sunmak istediği imaj güçlenir (Ellul, 1973; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001).

"Toplumsal duyguya hitap" kategorisinde, halkın korku ve güvenlik ihtiyacı vurgulanıp yönetimin bu ihtiyaçlara yanıt verdiği algısı yaratılmaktadır. Ruhi Çenet'in "suçun artık hoş görülmediği açıktır ve ceza çok ağır" ve "bir zamanlar en yüksek can kaybı oranına sahipti" ifadeleri, halkta güvenlik duygusunu güçlendirmeyi hedeflerken, Nick Shirley'nin "sokaklar her zamankinden daha güvenli çünkü bütün bu

bulunan resimlerden hangi çetelere mensup olduklarını görebiliyoruz” ve “çoğu Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) veya Barrio 18 atıfta bulunur” anlatımı, çete sembollerinin tarihsel düşmanlıkları yansıttığını göstermektedir. Ruhi Çenet’in “18 veya 666 gibi... şeytani sembolize ederler... ölümle burun buruna gelmekle aynı şey” ifadesi, dövmelelerin çetelerin acımasız kimliğini nasıl ortaya koyduğunu dramatize etmektedir. Ayrıca Timmy Karter’in “gördüğünüz her dövmenin bir anlamı var” ve “çeteye ait olup olmadıklarını veya hangi çeteye aitler” sözleri, dövmelelerin polis tarafından çete tespitinde kullanıldığını belirtmektedir. YouTube videolarında çete üyelerinin dövmeleleri ve suç geçmişleri dramatik bir şekilde sunularak, izleyicilerin duygusal tepkileri tetiklenebilir. Bu tür sunumlar, duygusal propaganda olarak adlandırılan bir teknikle ilişkilendirilebilir. YouTube videolarında kullanılan propaganda teknikleri izleyicilerin duygularını etkileyerek belirli mesajların benimsenmesini sağlamaktadır (Kadir vd., 2016).

“Suç profilleri ve mağduriyetler” kategorisinde, çete üyelerinin işlediği suçların şiddeti, çocuk yaşta çetelere katılmaları ve suçluluk duyguları ele alınmıştır. Joe Hattab’ın “her biri 200’den fazla kişinin öldürülmesine, tecavüze ve diğer pek çok suça karışmıştır” ifadesi, işlenen suçların şiddet içerikli doğasını ortaya koyarken, Ruhi Çenet’in “bir zamanlar en yüksek can kaybı oranına sahipti” ve “her 100.000 kişiden 104’ü öldü” anlatımı, suçların toplumsal etkisini vurgulamaktadır. Çocuk yaşta çetelere katılım hikayeleri ise dikkat çekicidir; Joe Hattab’ın “sadece 11 yaşında bir çocukken çeteye katılmış!” ve Timmy Karter’in “12 veya 13 yaşından itibaren... onlardan bazıları kendi anne babalarını öldürüyorlar” ifadeleri, bu durumun trajik boyutunu yansıtmaktadır. Pişmanlık duyguları ise Ruhi Çenet’in “Aileni hiç göremiyorsun... bazen ağlarım” ve Luisito Comunica’nın “annemi görmek istiyorum, karımı görmek istiyorum, kızımı görmek istiyorum gibi bir şey yok” sözleriyle mahkûmların duygusal çöküntüsünü göstermektedir.

Genel olarak bu temada, çete üyelerinin sunumunda belirli stereotiplere başvurulduğu görülmektedir. Hu ve Dittmann (2019), medyada çete üyelerinin tanımlanmasında yasal tanımların yetersiz olduğunu ve bireysel hikâyelere odaklanıldığını belirtmektedir. Dolayısıyla YouTube’da çete üyelerinin dövmeleleri ve suç geçmişlerinin belirli bir anlatı çerçevesinde sunulması, izleyicilerin duygusal tepkilerini tetikleyerek belirli düşünce kalıplarını pekiştirebilir. Bu tür içerikler, propaganda teknikleriyle ilişkilendirilebileceği gibi izleyicilerin çete üyeleri hakkında genelleştirilmiş yargılara varmasına da neden olabilmektedir.

Sonuç

Bu çalışmada, El Salvador’un Terörle Mücadele Merkezi (CECOT) hapishanesine ilişkin YouTube videoları analiz edilerek, sosyal medyanın hükümet politikalarını meşrulaştırma ve kamuoyu algısını şekillendirme süreçlerindeki rolü ortaya konulmuştur. Araştırmada CECOT videolarında özellikle beyaz propaganda türüne özgü tekniklerin öne çıktığı, seçici bilgi sunumu, duygusal manipülasyon ve otorite vurgusu gibi anlatım biçimlerinin yoğun bir şekilde kullanıldığı saptanmıştır. Bununla birlikte, videolarda sunulan anlatıların, tüm mahkûmların suçluluğunun kesin olarak bilinmemesi ve içerik üreticilerinin bu konuda yeterli bilgiye sahip olmaması gibi nedenlerle, gri propaganda unsurları da

taşıyabileceği değerlendirilmektedir. Bu durum, suçluluğu kesinleşmemiş bireylerin de “suçlu” temsili üzerinden sunulmasıyla ortaya çıkan retorik yapı ile ilişkilidir. Videolarda hapisane yapısı, mahkûmların yaşam koşulları, yönetim imajı ve çete profilleri gibi temalar üzerinden Nayib Bukele hükümetinin suçla mücadele politikaları yüceltilerek, izleyicilerde korku, güvenlik algısı ve hayranlık gibi duygusal tepkiler uyandırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, çalışma bulguları, Munger ve Phillips’in (2022) dijital platformların özellikle duygusal manipülasyon teknikleriyle propaganda süreçlerini pekiştirdiğine dair bulgularıyla örtüşmektedir. Ayrıca Woolley (2022), içerik üreticilerinin hükümet politikalarını destekleyici söylemler geliştirdiğini ve bu içeriklerin algoritmalar aracılığıyla yaygınlaştığını vurgulamaktadır. Dolayısıyla El Salvador örneğinde hükümet yanlısı mesajların seçici biçimde sunulduğu ve küresel izleyiciye ulaşmada YouTube’un etkili bir araç olarak işlev gördüğü değerlendirilmektedir.

YouTube’un algoritmik öneri sisteminin, içeriklerin görünürlüğünü belirli anlatılar lehine şekillendirebildiği ileri sürülmektedir (Burgess & Green, 2018; Munger & Phillips, 2022). Bu yapı, hükümet yanlısı propaganda söylemlerinin daha geniş ve küresel kitlelere ulaşmasında etkili olabilecek bir kanal işlevi görebilir. Ancak bu değerlendirme, platformun öneri sisteminin doğrudan teknik bir analizine değil, literatürdeki genel çerçeveye ve analiz edilen videoların görünürlük biçimlerine ilişkin gözlemsel verilere dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma özelinde, analiz edilen videolarda kullanılan dramatik anlatı yapısının, izleyici algısını yönlendirmeye hizmet ettiği ifade edilebilir. Dolayısıyla bu çıkarımlar, YouTube’un algoritmik yapısının propaganda içeriklerinin küresel düzeydeki yayılımını kolaylaştırma potansiyeline işaret etmektedir. Ancak bu yönün daha kapsamlı analizlerle desteklenmesi, gelecekteki çalışmalar açısından önemli bir ihtiyaç olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Çalışma, sosyal medya platformlarının propaganda süreçlerindeki dönüştürücü etkisini anlamak için önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır. Literatürdeki mevcut kuramsal çerçeveye, dijital çağda propaganda pratiklerinin ağ tabanlı ve kullanıcı odaklı doğasını vurgulayan yeni bir perspektif eklenmiştir. Özellikle CECOT örneği, hükümetlerin sosyal medya üzerinden simgesel anlatılar inşa ederek hem ulusal hem de uluslararası kamuoyunu yönlendirme kapasitesini ortaya koymuştur. Dolayısıyla bu durum önceki çalışmalarda genellikle geleneksel medya odaklı propaganda analizlerinin aksine dijital platformların propaganda stratejilerindeki merkezi rolünü öne çıkarmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmanın bulguları, medya ve iletişim çalışmaları ve siyaset bilimi gibi disiplinler arasında köprü kurarak, sosyal medyanın politika ve toplum üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak için disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşımın gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Araştırma sorularından elde edilen sonuçlar, CECOT videolarının propaganda olarak sınıflandırılabilirliğini göstermektedir. Bu videolarda baskın olarak beyaz propaganda teknikleri tespit edilmekle birlikte, suçluluk durumu kesinleşmemiş kişilerin temsili nedeniyle bazı anlatıların gri propaganda özellikleri taşıyabileceği de dikkate alınmalıdır. Söylem ve kurgu unsurları suçla mücadele politikalarını meşrulaştırmada önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu sonuçlar sosyal medyanın hükümet otoritesini pekiştirme ve toplumsal algıyı şekillendirme süreçlerinde nasıl bir ideolojik aygıt haline geldiğini anlamak için somut bir örnek sunmaktadır. Çalışma akademik alana, sosyal medya içeriklerinin politik anlatıları güçlendirme potansiyelini sistematik olarak inceleme gerekliliğini hatırlatmaktadır.

Gelecek çalışmalarda sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki rolünü daha iyi anlamak için YouTube dışındaki platformlar (örneğin TikTok, X veya Instagram) incelenerek platformlar arası farklılıkların propaganda yayılımındaki rolü çeşitlendirilebilir. Ayrıca İngilizce ve Türkçe dışındaki dillerde (örneğin Arapça veya Fransızca) üretilen içerikleri kapsayan veri setleriyle, kültürel ve bölgesel bağlamların propaganda anlatılarına katkısı araştırılabilir. İzleyici algılarını daha iyi anlamak için içerik analiziyle birlikte anketler veya sosyal medya yorumlarının duygu analizleri gibi yöntemler kullanılabilir. Dolayısıyla bu perspektif, içeriklerin kamuoyu üzerindeki etkisini daha ayrıntılı bir şekilde inceleme fırsatı sunabilir. Bunun yanı sıra propaganda içeriklerinin toplumsal etkilerini uzun vadede değerlendirmek için zaman serisi analizleri veya vaka çalışmalarıyla bu içeriklerin toplumsal algı ve davranışlar üzerindeki olası etkileri incelenmesi önerilmektedir. Bu yaklaşımlar metodolojik çeşitliliği artırarak propaganda süreçlerinin farklı bağlamlarda daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkı sağlayabilir.

Elde edilen sonuçlar, medya ve iletişim çalışmaları dışındaki alanlara da uygulanabilir. Örneğin hukuk alanında yapılacak araştırmalarda, hapishane koşullarının ve suçla mücadele politikalarının medyada nasıl sunulduğu incelenebilir. Bu tür çalışmalar, toplumun ceza sistemine ilişkin algısını daha iyi anlamaya katkı sağlayabilir. Öte yandan siyaset bilimi bağlamında, dijital medyanın iktidarların kamuoyu oluşturma stratejilerindeki rolü incelenebilir. Bu incelemeler, dijital propaganda pratiklerinin demokratik süreçler üzerindeki etkilerine dair önemli veriler sunabilir. Bu çalışmanın, sosyal medyanın propaganda süreçlerindeki rolünü anlamaya yönelik araştırmalara katkı sağlayacağı ve dijital çağda medya, siyaset ve toplum arasındaki karmaşık ilişkilerin çözümüne yönelik yeni araştırma yolları açacağı değerlendirilmektedir.

Structured Extended Abstract

Research Background & Problem

Social media platforms, particularly YouTube, have emerged as powerful tools for shaping public opinion and disseminating propaganda, enabling governments to legitimize policies and reinforce state authority (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Munger & Phillips, 2022). Propaganda, a systematic communication strategy to influence perceptions and behaviors (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018), has evolved in the digital age, leveraging algorithmic systems to amplify emotional and visual content (Burgess & Green, 2018). In El Salvador, the Nayib Bukele administration's construction of the Terrorism Confinement Center prison (Spanish: Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo; CECOT), designed to combat gang violence, has been prominently featured in YouTube videos. These videos, often showcasing the prison's harsh conditions and high-security measures, serve as a case study for examining how social media facilitates state-driven propaganda. While prior studies have explored propaganda in traditional media (Herman & Chomsky, 2012), the role of user-generated content on platforms like YouTube in legitimizing security policies remains underexplored. Existing literature highlights the emotional and psychological impact of visual media (Dubovi & Tabak, 2021), yet systematic analyses of propaganda types (white, gray, black) and techniques in social media contexts

are limited. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how CECOT prison videos on YouTube construct narratives that legitimize El Salvador's anti-gang policies, shape public perception, and reinforce government authority, contributing to the broader discourse on digital propaganda.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing a case study design to examine the representation of CECOT prison in YouTube videos, as outlined by Yin (2018). The methodology involves thematic content analysis of five high-viewership videos published in 2024 and 2025 by content creators Luisito Comunica, Nick Shirley, Timmy Karter, Joe Hattab, and Ruhi Çenet. These videos were selected based on accessibility, viewership, and their potential to reflect propaganda narratives. Data collection entailed transcribing the videos, preserving their natural flow and context, and analyzing them using MAXQDA 24 software for systematic coding. The coding process followed Creswell's (2019) qualitative data analysis framework, identifying meaningful data segments, assigning descriptive codes, grouping codes into categories, and deriving four main themes: prison structure and security measures, inmates' living conditions, government image and public opinion formation, and gang and crime profiles. The rationale for this approach lies in its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of contemporary phenomena within their real-life context. Limitations include the focus on a single platform (YouTube), the exclusion of videos in languages other than English, Spanish, and Turkish, and the reliance on qualitative interpretation, which may introduce subjective bias. The study also excludes quantitative data on audience perceptions, limiting insights into the videos' societal impact.

Research Results

The thematic content analysis revealed four primary themes. First, prison structure and security measures emphasized physical and technological controls, such as electric fences, facial recognition systems, and restricted inmate movement, as evidenced by phrases like "9-foot electric fence" (Shirley) and "no phone signals allowed" (Comunica). Second, inmates' living conditions and treatment highlighted harsh physical conditions (e.g., "only beans and rice, no meat"-Hattab) and psychological impacts, including dehumanization and isolation e.g., "they do everything in front of others" (Shirley). Third, government image and public opinion formation showcased the Bukele administration's success in reducing crime rates e.g., "El Salvador is now the safest country" (Karter) and controlled media access e.g., "only a few are allowed inside" (Hattab). Fourth, gang and crime profiles focused on gang culture, particularly tattoos as identifiers e.g., "tattoos show which gang they belong to" (Hattab), and the violent nature of crimes, including juvenile recruitment e.g., "joined the gang at 11" (Hattab). The videos collectively garnered over 200 million views, with Ruhi Çenet's video achieving 99.7 million views, indicating significant global reach and engagement.

Conclusion & Discussion

This study demonstrates that YouTube videos of El Salvador's CECOT prison operate as white propaganda, utilizing selective information, emotional manipulation, and authority glorification to legitimize the Nayib Bukele administration's anti-gang policies. The findings align with Jowett and

O'Donnell's (2018) framework, propaganda's reliance on emotional and cognitive manipulation. For instance, phrases like "El Salvador is now the safest country" (Karter) and "the world's most secure prison" (Çenet) idealize Bukele's leadership, fostering admiration and reinforcing government legitimacy. By dramatizing harsh prison conditions such as "no sunlight, only concrete" (Shirley) and "no privacy, even for basic needs" (Hattab), these videos evoke fear and a sense of security, positioning CECOT as a symbol of state power for domestic deterrence and international messaging. The study advances the understanding of digital propaganda by highlighting how social media, through user-generated content and YouTube's algorithmic dissemination, amplifies state narratives, diverging from traditional media-focused analyses (Herman & Chomsky, 2012). Controlled media access, as noted in "only a few are allowed inside" (Hattab), ensures a curated narrative, aligning with Ellul's (1973) concept of selective truth in propaganda. This interdisciplinary analysis bridges media studies and political science, underscoring social media's role as an ideological apparatus (Althusser, 2016). Limitations include the focus on high-viewership YouTube videos, exclusion of non-English, Spanish, or Turkish content, and the lack of quantitative data on audience perceptions. Future research should pursue multi-platform analyses, incorporate diverse linguistic contexts, and employ mixed methods to evaluate long-term societal impacts. This study provides a robust foundation for exploring how digital platforms shape policy perceptions, advocating further investigation into algorithmic influences and cross-cultural propaganda dynamics.

Açıklamalar

Etik Kurul Onayı: Bu araştırmada herhangi bir insan faktörü araştırma nesnesi olarak kullanılmadığı için etik kurul onayı gerektirmemektedir.

Yayın Etiği: Bu çalışma, "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır. Ayrıca, makale intihal tespit yazılımlarıyla (Turnitin) taranmış ve herhangi bir intihal tespit edilmemiştir.

Yazar Katkı Oranı: Uygun değildir.

YZ Kullanımı ve Beyanı: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında yapay zekâ aracı kullanılmamıştır.

Çıkar Çatışması: Çalışmanın yazarı herhangi bir kurum veya bu kurumun çalışanlarıyla araştırmayı etkileyebilecek düzeyde doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak herhangi bir finansal, ticari, hukuki veya profesyonel ilişkisi/çıkarı söz konusu değildir.

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Yazar Beyanı: Çalışma bir tezden üretilmemiş, kongre/sempozyum/konferansta sunulmamıştır.

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“The Simulation of Reality” as a Media Topos: Tracing the Historical Trajectory of VR

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Abstract

Purpose: This study argues that contemporary VR technology reflects a longstanding media topos: the simulation of reality. To support this claim, the historical trajectory of VR technology is traced across eight stages, from the 19th-century panoramas to contemporary VR.

Design/methodology/approach: This study is based on a review of canonical scholarly works on VR, from which eight stages are identified as the trajectory of the simulation of reality topos. Drawing on Erkki Huhtamo’s media archaeological approach, a topos is understood as a recurring cultural pattern that shapes how media technologies are perceived. For each stage, the study examines the key technological developments using available sources, including patents, technical research by innovators, and publicity materials.

Findings: Recreating and simulating physical reality have often been presented as a novelty of VR and promoted as its primary affordance. However, this analysis reveals that VR is only a 21st-century manifestation of a centuries-long endeavor. This study shows that VR technology is not a novel development; rather, it is a continuation of earlier technological and discursive efforts, shaped by a specific sociotechnical imaginary and topos.

Research limitations/implications: One limitation of this study is its focus on canonical texts and mainstream technologies, which leaves peripheral forms outside its scope. Future research could examine these forms.

Practical implications: Practitioners may benefit from understanding how cultural and social expectations shape perceptions of VR as a device for simulating reality.

Originality/value: This study is the first to examine VR through the lens of the simulation of reality topos, situating it within a historical trajectory rarely considered in previous research.

Keywords: VR, Virtual Reality, Topos, Media Archaeology, Simulation

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Introduction

In the early 2010s, major tech companies such as Meta, Google, HTC, and Microsoft made considerable efforts to promote VR as a mainstream consumer technology. Since around 2020, VR has secured its place as a mass-market product. Reality technologies entered everyday use with the advent of consumer VR and content production continued to expand. The process of legitimizing VR began in the 2010s with an emphasis on the novelty of the technology. What was considered novel was its affordance to create experiences that feel as real as those in the physical world. However, neither this assumed affordance of the technology nor the hype surrounding it was truly novel. As Evans states, the VR technology of the 2010s was only a revival, since the first wave emerged in the 1980s and the second in the 1990s. VR technology has been promoted through sociotechnical imaginaries, both today and during the first two waves (Evans, 2019, pp. 1–32).

According to Jasanoff and Kim, sociotechnical imaginaries are collective perceptions surrounding scientific and technological developments. They are the shared visions that shape the limits of a technology's accessibility and applicability, as well as its intended purposes of use and affordances. These visions can be shaped by certain groups, corporations, and professionals (Jasanoff, 2015). From this standpoint, the idea that the primary function of VR is to simulate reality stands out as one of its dominant sociotechnical imaginaries. However, this imaginary is not limited to VR alone.

VR is a technology that continues certain historical efforts and fantasies aimed at simulating or recreating physical reality, evident throughout the evolution of various media forms (Grau, 2002). The development of media technologies like VR has been shaped by longstanding attempts to capture physical reality with high fidelity. Along this historical path, the legitimization of a medium has often been judged by how convincingly it replicates reality, which itself has generated an ongoing discourse. In this regard, 2010s VR technology can be seen as part of an ongoing discourse and can be subjected to a media archaeological analysis.

The approach in this study is based on Erkki Huhtamo's media archaeological approach, which is built on the concept of topos. Topoi (plural version) are cultural themes, motifs, and images that recur throughout media culture and appear in different historical and contextual settings. A topos, as a discursive construct shapes the sociotechnical imaginaries surrounding media tools and technologies. Following the trajectory of a specific topos allows researchers to reveal repetition of certain themes and discourses in history (Ganahl, 2016; Huhtamo, 2011). Recognizing these recurrences reveals that technologies frequently portrayed as new are grounded in particular sociotechnical imaginaries.

In the context of contemporary VR technology, the simulation-oriented topos, illustrated by statements such as "transfers physical reality into the virtual environment" and "produces experiences indistinguishable from reality," are actually a continuation of a discourse. Concepts such as "presence" and "immersion," often framed as affordances unique to VR for delivering realistic experiences, can in fact be traced back to media practices predating the digital era. The endeavor to render the physical world in a virtual environment with existing technologies has a long history. It also constitutes a complex,

multi-layered network connecting social and technological imaginaries, personal narratives, and marketing strategies. Understanding VR technology and the discourses surrounding it requires a re-examination of this historical trajectory.

Drawing on these historical moments, this study aims to demonstrate that the excitement surrounding VR in the 2010s was merely a recurrence. To establish this claim, the historical trajectory of VR technology will be examined. Although the trajectory of VR technology have been linked to earlier media, they have rarely been examined through the lens of a topos such as the simulation of reality. The key contribution of this study is to demonstrate that VR imaginaries are not unique to the technology itself, but rather continuations of discourses observable in earlier media. Research questions leading the study are: How has the simulation of reality topos evolved over time, and through which media has it been articulated? And, how can VR be situated among these media? Can it be regarded as their continuation, or does it constitute a genuinely novel medium?

To answer those questions, this study is based on a qualitative analysis of certain historical phases through an interpretative perspective. Huhtamo's topos analysis focuses on patterns and themes and on revealing their discursiveness (2011). To focus on the themes of simulating reality throughout history, concepts such as realism, presence, and immersion commonly associated with VR were taken into account, and a literature review of canonical scholarly works was conducted as the first step. This review is discussed in the "Simulating Senses" section of the study. The literature review resulted in a historical trajectory divided into eight stages, structured around key technological developments associated with simulation of reality with high fidelity. After identifying the stages, further reading focused on the technologies that are central to them. In the second phase of the literature review, sources such as patents, technical research by innovators, and publicity materials were selected according to their availability. These materials revealed discursive themes surrounding the historical trajectory and the associated technologies. However, one limitation of this research approach needs to be noted. This interpretive reading, focused on canonical literature and dominant, popular technologies, resulted in the exclusion of forms positioned at the peripheries of cultural field.

The literature shows that efforts to simulate reality through certain technologies are grounded in a desire to simulate the senses. While efforts focusing on visual and auditory senses are more conspicuous, the historical trajectory of the topos of simulating reality reveals that olfactory and tactile/haptic senses have long also been part of the objective of simulating reality. Thus, in this study, the trajectory of the topos of simulating reality is outlined in eight stages addresses beyond the visual senses: 19th-century panoramas and stereoscopic imaging experiments; 20th-century attempts to incorporate olfactory senses into cinematic experiences along with flight simulators emphasizing haptic feedback; Morton Heilig's Sensorama (Heilig, 1962), which aimed to simulate all five senses; advancements in computer technology and the rise of interactivity; the first wave of VR technology in the 1980s; VR as an arcade attraction; digital games in the 1990s; and, finally, contemporary VR technology of the 2010s.

The trajectory traced through the topos of simulation of reality serves two purposes: first, to situate contemporary VR technology within its historical context; and second, to demonstrate that the purported affordance of creating photorealistic experiences in certain technologies is a discourse rather than an inherent necessity. Due to the limited scope of this study, the techniques and technologies addressed in the trajectory exclude practices situated at the periphery. The scope of the analysis is confined to the popular forms of media culture. The following discussion provides an overview of sensory simulation in the context of simulating reality, before proceeding to the analysis of each historical trajectory.

1. Simulating Senses

VR, short for "virtual reality," is used to refer to a technology that allows users to access digital environments through a headset. Along with the headset, a handheld device enables interaction with the virtual environment. This description corresponds to a standard VR setup, which integrates tracking systems with sensor fusion technology and is equipped with an advanced display. VR users experience a 360° view with binocular vision enabled by stereoscopic visuals. In a VR system, the goal is to replicate the human field of view as closely as possible. However, this hardware-focused definition is insufficient to fully reflect the context in which VR imaginaries are situated.

VR first captured public interest in the late 1980s, with attention focused primarily on the hardware system and the novel experiences it offered; what was at the focus of this fascination was the technology. However, scholars such as Jonathan Steuer argued that a definition of VR based on hardware components such as sensors, gloves, and trackers does not allow for a full understanding of VR in the context of communication. To establish a theoretically sound framework for VR, Steuer emphasized its contextualization as a communication technology. From this perspective, Steuer proposed presence as a concept linking VR to other communication devices. Defining presence as being in the immediate environment, he referred to the concept of telepresence as the perception of an environment mediated through a medium. As Steuer suggests, the perception of telepresence is not created only through VR; even talking to someone over the phone can generate a sense of telepresence (1992)

Steuer's contextualization continues to hold relevance today. A media archaeological approach necessitates this kind of contextualization in order to trace the historical trajectory of VR and the related topos. VR-related imaginaries should be analyzed in related contexts by examining which affordances of the technology are emphasized. Owing to its technical capabilities, VR is regarded as a technology that can most effectively simulate the feeling of being in a particular place. This is because VR is believed to elicit a sense of telepresence by integrating human sensory perception into digital environments as fully as possible.

Bown et al. argue that the sense of presence generated by VR differs from that of other media in the richness of sensory information it presents. This is related to the concept of the "ultimate display," whereby the richer the sensory input, the closer the experience approaches the ideal of an ultimate

display (2017, pp. 239-243). Sutherland's metaphor of the "ultimate display" is one of the most widely recognized examples of design imaginaries aimed at simulating virtual environments so convincingly that they appear indistinguishable from reality (1965). Although achieving the ideal of the ultimate display remains a distant prospect, the path toward it is evident: to simulate the five senses as realistically as possible.

Following this ideal, the topos of simulating physical reality can be defined by the principle that the most convincing reproduction of the physical world is achieved through the high-fidelity simulation of human sensory experience. The richest sensory experience is assumed to provide the most compelling simulation. Aligned with this objective, VR clearly emerges as a leading technology. However, when VR is considered as an effort to recreate physical reality in a virtual environment, the trajectory of this endeavor can be traced back to the pre-digital era. Without going too far back and losing the focus of this study, 19th-century panoramas and stereoscopic images can be the starting point for this trajectory.

2. The 19th Century: Panoramas and Stereoscopic Images

Within the scope of this study, panoramas and stereoscopic viewing devices can be considered the conceptual precursors of VR and the simulation of reality topos. Both devices were popularized as entertainment forms in the 19th century. According to LaValle, these two media can be considered as techniques that extend visual experience beyond the boundaries of a frame. As panoramas extended the field of view, offering circular images, stereoscopic viewing created a 3D-like effect by presenting subtly different images to each eye (2023, pp. 1–30). Both techniques were perceived as immersive. While panoramas laid the conceptual groundwork for 360° viewing modalities, stereoscopic viewing represented a significant step in stereoscopic technology. The principles of stereoscopic viewing still underlie the design of contemporary VR lenses. These forms, which can be seen as mediated realities, found a market and enjoyed great popularity in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Many writers compare the immersion of panoramas with that of VR, since both aimed to create a sense of presence in a virtual environment (Bown et al., 2017; Grau, 1999; Taboada, 2020; Nedelcu, 2013; Sherman & Craig, 2019). Essentially, panoramas are a type of wall painting, but they were distinguished from murals at the time of their invention due to their placement on cylindrical walls. Panoramas offered audiences access to spaces and experiences otherwise beyond their reach. Audiences felt as if they were in an "exotic" location, a fashionable city of the time, a captivating landscape, or even a war zone, which was a popular panorama genre (Huhtamo, 2013, pp. 4–5). Panoramas transported visitors away from their immediate reality into a virtual one. The use of light and sound effects enhanced the immersive quality of these experiences, engaging multiple senses within the scenery. Sounds and décor, appealing to the haptic senses, were important elements of panorama designs.

While panoramas were experienced collectively, stereoscopic viewing provided a form of home entertainment for the public. The first stereoscopic viewer was introduced by Charles Wheatstone in

1830. It was designed to demonstrate the functioning of binocular vision. The principle of the stereoscope is to present each eye with slightly different images, which, when viewed through a lens, appear to the eye as a single image with three-dimensionality. This technology became popular in the 1800s, coinciding with the invention of photography, which facilitated the mass production of stereoscopic cards (Zone, 2007, pp. 5–18). Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose version of the stereoscope became renowned in the USA, described it as “a dream-like exaltation of the faculties, a kind of clairvoyance, in which we seem to leave the body behind us and sail away into one strange scene after another, like disembodied spirits.” He praised being able to experience the Alps or the pyramids from the comfort of one’s home, referring to them as “stereographic trips” (1864, pp. 177–178). O. W. Holmes’ words could easily be applied to describe contemporary VR today.

When they were popularized, panoramas and stereoscopic images generated public interest similar to the enthusiasm surrounding contemporary VR, and it was 200 years ago. However, with technological advancements, the simulation of reality topos extended beyond visual-focused techniques such as panoramas and stereoscopes. In the 20th century, the focus shifted toward haptic, kinesthetic, and olfactory experiences. During the 20th century, attempts to replicate sensory experiences became evident through technologies such as flight simulators and cinema.

3. 1900s: Enhancing the Visual Experiences

The earliest instances of sensory simulation beyond vision were designs intended for entertainment, such as flight simulators and cinema. The 1931 Link Trainer, designed by Ed Link to simulate flight maneuvers and sensations, was initially an entertainment device but was later adopted for pilot training (Jeon, 2015; Link, 1931). The motions of the Link Trainer were based on firsthand studies of actual aircraft performance. Subsequent advances in simulation techniques allowed for an even closer approximation of real-flight conditions (Page, 2000, pp. 5–9). Flight-simulation tools can therefore be considered devices that exemplify the concept of simulating reality.

However, even before the Link Trainer, there were initiatives aimed at enriching entertainment; with cinematic experiences standing out in particular. Efforts to simulate different senses and enhance visual experiences for marketing films have contributed to advancements in cinema. Considering that Tom Gunning referred to the early era of cinema as the “cinema of attractions” (1986), these endeavors were not unexpected. In the early 20th century, film audiences were drawn to attractions designed to create the impression of being transported to places they had never been or could not otherwise experience. Among many examples of cinematic experiences, a notable one aimed at simulating reality was Cineorama.

Cineorama was a simulation of a hot air balloon ride, incorporating a spherical design with a screen composed of ten projectors. By expanding the visual field of a typical cinema experience, the immersive structure design of Cineorama provided audiences with 360° moving visuals as early as the year 1900 (Card, 1953). Efforts to enhance the visual experience focused on widening peripheral vision. A notable example was the 1950s Cinerama, which spanned nearly 150° of the human visual field

across three giant screens (Reeves, 1999). Cinerama, employing wide formats and 3D imagery and it was marketed as an immersive visual experience that immerses the viewer: “recreates as accurately as is possible what the eye actually sees, and the ear actually hears, by reproducing on film virtually the entire range of human vision and hearing” (Hefele, 1953). Similar efforts; Circarama, Totalrama, and, later IMAX in the 1970s, continued to offer wide formats for cinema (Mascia, 2020) and sought to simulate reality with high fidelity.

Some cinematic experiences, on the other hand, extended beyond visuals, incorporating olfactory elements to attract audiences to the theatres. For instance, AromaRama (1959) infused odor into the theatre. Another design, Smell-O-Vision, delivered scents to individual seats, while scratch-and-sniff cards such as Odorama (1981) provided synchronized odors with the images on the screen (Spence, 2020). While olfactory simulation gradually lost attention, they remained notable attempts at sensory simulation. A promotional phrase used for AromaRama illustrates both sensory realism and the topos of simulation of reality: “See it! Hear it! Smell it! Now you can actually smell the exotic and the rare aromas of the far east ...” (Columbus Dispatch, 1960).

Whether appealing to the sense of smell or widening the field of vision, these alternative cinematic experiences were focused on showcasing the affordances of the technology they utilize. This is Cinerama (1952), the debut production of Cinerama, was a documentary featuring immersive scenes such as a water-skiing show, a roller coaster ride, and a boat trip in Venice. The scenes were filmed from a first-person perspective, creating a resemblance to VR images. Subsequent productions continued to tell stories that immersed audiences in experiences of landscapes and cityscapes. Through helicopter and wide-angle shots, these films exploited the potential of the widescreen format, with cinematography designed to immerse the audience in the photorealistic visuals.

Flight simulators were no different from Cineorama’s balloon ride in their use of mediated environments to provide audiences with a specific real-life experience. Given that the visual aspect is central to cinema, efforts naturally focused on enhancing it, while the exploration of olfactory senses represented another step in sensory simulation. The common thread across these efforts was the pursuit of sensory experiences designed to create a sense of “presence,” in line with the discursive framework of the topos of simulation of reality. However, of all the projects that emerged from the possibilities of film technology, Sensorama was by far the most ambitious.

4. 1960s: Sensory Stories

During the 1950s, Morton Heilig was striving for an art form designed to simulate all five senses. Heilig argued that consciousness is grounded in sensory information, which he regarded as fundamental to the experience of reality. According to him, in the earliest stages of human communication, people relied on words to share their experiences. Over time, however, the advent of machines enabled more advanced ways of imitating and conveying sensory information, thereby simulating an experience. In 1955, amid techniques such as 3D and widescreen and other attractions, Heilig conceptualized a machine designed to engage all the senses, which he described as “the cinema of the future.” In Heilig’s

vision, sight was not the only sense simulated in the cinema of the future. To achieve a more complete cinematic experience, he envisioned a multi-sensory experience as resembling "a magnetic tape with a separate track for each sense material" (Heilig, 1992/1955, p. 283). Heilig brought this vision to life with Sensorama, a project even more ambitious than the VR technologies of the 2010s.

Sensorama was a machine in which the audience sat, placing their head in a designated place. It featured 3D and peripheral vision, surrounding sound, and a system that produced breeze effects accompanied by scent emitting materials. The seat also delivered a haptic experience through vibrations (Heilig, 1962). The experiences offered by Sensorama were essentially simulations of particular situations. While Heilig aspired to create richer, more contextual, narrative-based experiences, the actual implementations remained limited to simple simulations such as riding a motorcycle or bicycle, taking a helicopter trip, or watching a belly dancer perform (Rheingold, 1991, p. 53).

With these experiences, Sensorama not only revisited the topos of simulation of reality but also offered a technical design that nearly made this vision achievable. Sensorama was not even the first device Heilig invented for creating immersive experiences. The Telesphere Mask, a personal use "stereoscopic television apparatus" (Heilig, 1960), can be considered an early precursor to today's HMDs. Commenting on these innovations, Rheingold noted that although virtual reality had not yet been fully realized, Heilig's visionary ideas pointed toward the field's future direction. In their work on fully computer-generated environments, computer engineers were exploring this direction (1991, p. 46). Computer-based virtual environments were designed to simulate physical reality through digital means. Achieving the desired sense of photorealism in simulations was not possible with analog technologies. As the simulation of reality shifted to digital media, the trajectory began to advance alongside computer technologies.

5. 1960s and 1970s: Digital Spaces and Interaction

In pre-digital attempts to simulate reality, interactivity was not a central concern. With the advent of digital media, however, the simulation of reality topos became inseparable from interactivity. To continue along the trajectory of this study, it is necessary to address the concept of interaction, which has been used to define human-machine communication. The possibilities of simulating the physical world broaden when considered in relation to a medium that allows communication and feedback. In devices like VR, which aim to map physical actions into digital environments, this requires reproducing physical movements in the virtual world as closely as possible. In this context, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) can be seen as a central strand in the trajectory of the topos of simulation of reality.

The concept of interaction gained attention with the arrival of computer technology, through endeavors directed at improving communication between humans and machines. The discipline of human-computer interaction (HCI) was established in the 1960s through work conducted in universities and corporate research labs. With the introduction of personal computers, the field turned its attention toward refining interfaces and input devices to enhance usability. Devices such as cursors and pointing devices, still common in today's computers, were developed to support effective interaction between

humans and computers (Myers, 1998). To replicate real-world physical actions in virtual environments, researchers focused on designing new interaction modalities and interfaces, leading to the development of devices and interface designs such as VR headsets, controllers, and virtual hands. VR headsets are a key technology design that expanded the scope of interaction by tracking the head and body movements of the user through sensors.

One of the first efforts to recreate physical actions more realistically in digital environments occurred in 1965. Ivan Sutherland, a pioneer of head-tracking systems, made one of the earliest contributions to reality simulation in digital environments. Sutherland began with his concept of the “Ultimate Display,” envisioned as a system that could deliver a sensory experience that achieves a fidelity that made it indistinguishable from real life. Sutherland stated that in the virtual world accessed through the Ultimate Display, a bullet could be as deadly and a chair as solid as in the real world. Despite the Ultimate Display being an unattainable imaginary, Sutherland held that computers, leveraging their memory potential, could one day turn this vision into reality (Sutherland, 1965). The head-mounted display invented by Sutherland (also known as the Sword of Damocles) was an important development in bringing sensory simulation into computer technology. Theoretically grounded, Sutherland’s HMD embodied the topos of computers as instruments for simulating reality with high fidelity.

The main purpose of Sutherland’s HMD, as he described, was to provide the user with a “perspective image.” A “mechanical arm suspended from the ceiling” supported the ocular component of the system to track the user’s head position and movements. As a result, the user was constrained to a specific area, able to move only three feet (Sutherland, 1968, pp. 758–762). Although the range of motion it provided to the user was limited, Sutherland’s VR design laid the foundation for contemporary headsets. While the term “virtual reality” was not yet in use, the idea of producing reality within a digital environment was already evident. Experimental efforts like Sutherland’s, realized through computer technology, are early instances of the simulation of the reality topos in digital environments.

6. 1980s: Virtual Reality

As digital technologies advanced, efforts to realize the vision provided by the topos of simulation of reality were continued by wide-field display designs. These developments took place in the field of virtual reality, which progressed alongside computer technology. In the 1960s, with the advent of integrated circuits, the microelectronics revolution began, and prices decreased. By 1977, minicomputers had evolved into personal computers and had become accessible to users. During the 1980s, user-friendly interface designs and hardware developments fueled rapid growth in the computer industry (Campbell-Kelly et al., 2014, pp. 189–251). Computer technology reached broader commercial availability and public accessibility, coinciding with the development of the first VR head-mounted displays, bearing a resemblance to modern designs.

These developments led companies to launch the first commercial efforts to sell VR equipment. In the 1980s, the development of marketable headsets began, driven by projects from NASA and private companies. NASA’s VIVED, initially designed as a head-mounted display to deliver virtual environments,

developed into VIEW, an integrated system with tactile inputs, head-tracking, and stereoscopic imaging. By 1987, the project's focus shifted toward designing low-cost, accessible HMDs, with a simple visual output to facilitate interaction (Fisher, 2016). However, photorealistic visuals alone were insufficient; to simulate a sense of presence, users needed to interact with the virtual environment. Enabling this interaction, the DataGlove, designed by Tom Zimmerman, became an essential part of VR systems.

While Thomas Zimmerman contributed to NASA projects with the DataGlove, he was also involved in VPL (Virtual Programming Languages) Research. Zimmerman, motivated by his enthusiasm, introduced the DataGlove to Jaron Lanier and colleagues, which led to the founding of VPL Research in 1984. With VPL Research, the role that personal narratives played in shaping the topos of simulation of reality becomes evident. In the 1980s, initiatives by VPL Research generated public enthusiasm for VR and helped shape a sociotechnical imaginary. The field became closely identified with the term "virtual reality," largely due to Jaron Lanier's frequent use of it.

VPL Research produced several devices, including the EyePhone, which ranged in price from \$10,000 to \$50,000 based on the model, and the DataGlove. They also introduced a virtual reality system, RB2 (Reality Built for Two), featuring a full-body DataSuit. Enthusiasts often repurposed the EyePhone and DataGlove, writing custom code to adapt the devices to their needs. Yet, the RB2 full-body suit was very expensive, resulting in sales mainly to private organizations for project-based applications. These high costs, alongside other issues within the company, eventually resulted in bankruptcy (Lanier, 2018, pp. 190–192).

VPL Research evolved through a marketing approach that emphasized simulating sensory experiences. When introducing the devices, Lanier stated: "by wearing computerized clothing right over your sense organs, you transport your sensory system into a reality that can be of any description" (Kinolibrary, 2017). However, technological developments in the 1980s were not sufficient to achieve a perfect simulation of reality. The vision to bring VR to life persisted despite limited display quality and refresh rates. Thus, while VPL Research's products were among the first publicly available VR technologies, they remained largely confined to a niche audience of early adopters and technology enthusiasts, and the bankruptcy was inevitable.

Despite its short existence, VPL Research focused both on haptic technologies, a cornerstone of contemporary VR, and on creating systems that supported full-body immersion. As of 2025, these ambitious and costly goals remain unattainable for consumers, while VPL Research continues to be recognized as part of the trajectory of companies built around the topos of simulation of reality.

In the 1990s, it became clear that the topos of simulation of reality did not fully align with available technological affordances and was an overly ambitious endeavor. During this period, core technologies central to modern VR, including displays, processors, and graphics, were insufficient to present the intended level of quality. The available VR technology needed further development to meet anticipated expectations and realize the imaginaries of simulating reality. However, interestingly, the bankruptcy of VPL Research did not halt efforts in the VR field, and these technically demanding

imaginaries continued into the first half of the 1990s. Efforts in the 1990s gave rise to the first commercial wave of VR. VR had a brief period of popularity, appearing as an arcade-based attraction and a home console. This effort sought to benefit from the 1980s video game trend that equated photorealism with a higher-quality experience.

7. 1990s: The Surge of VR Gaming

Jonathan Waldern, the founder of W Industries (Virtuality Group) said that “In the beginning days, we thought a lot about how to get VR out to the general public -- and we decided arcade games were the easiest way to introduce the concept” (StrasselStaff, 1997). Waldern’s words clearly indicate that video games were strategically chosen to position VR as a consumer-oriented technology. Motivated by profit, Waldern aimed to popularize VR among consumers and to establish a market for it. These marketing endeavors drew on the simulation of reality topos.

Yet, in a short time, W industries, faced with financial limitations and had to partner with an entertainment company to produce VR units called Virtuality. The 1000 CS, introduced in 1991 at around £32,000, set the stage for subsequent consumer VR models. However, its steep price made it impractical for home use, restricting it to a “location-based” entertainment. Designed to simulate multiple senses interactively, Virtuality systems were in the form of capsules or kiosks to enhance immersion (Krueger, 1991; Stone, 1993).

Although Virtuality had deployed 400 VR arcade games globally, the company went bankrupt in 1997 due to issues similar to those that affected VPL Research: rising costs and poor sales performance. Reporting on the bankruptcy, StrasselStaff said that VR “is not as good as the promoters that wanted investment says” (1997). This was a clear indication that the claims surrounding VR as a technology that can transport physical reality into virtual ones were still unmet. Though the topos of simulation of reality was being used for promotion, the technology was not sufficient to support it.

In the 1990s, alongside Virtuality’s efforts to produce arcade machines, attempts to make VR available for home use and make it more accessible repeatedly ended in failure. At a time when game consoles were on the rise, efforts were made to integrate VR into this emerging trend. The story of Virtual Boy, one of the most memorable devices of the era, is a good example of this. One of the marketing slogans for Virtual Boy was “three-dimensional high-resolution graphics so detailed and clear you’ll swear you can reach out and grab them.” (Nintendo, 1995). Judging by the graphics of the Virtual Boy, it is easy to see how exaggerated this claim was. The device had a short lifespan, with production discontinued in 1995.

In 1995, VR console initiatives progressed, Atari teamed up with Virtuality to create a headset for the Jaguar console (Horsman, 1995), while Philips and Takara also planned VR devices (Edge, 2013). Most, however, failed during design or promotion before reaching the market (Electronic Gaming Monthly, 1993, p. 56). While some designs never came to fruition, those that were produced quickly disappeared from the market due to low sales.

Successful models included VictorMaxx's CyberMaxx, a headset relying on an external computer, designed with the understanding that standalone VR units could not support photorealistic graphics, and advertised for use with IBM computer systems. CyberMaxx offered games and also an experience called Ghost Train, which was a haunted mansion ride. Ghost Train exemplifies the simulation of reality topos built around the VR technology at the time: "A virtual reality amusement park ride, in which the headset wearer is fully immersed in a computer-generated haunted house.... A wonderful introduction to the State-of-the-Art tracking capabilities and 3D stereoscopic point of view of the Cybermaxx headset." (Calculus, 1995, p. 42). The VFX1 Headgear, developed by Forte, was another prominent example. Featuring games like MechWarrior 2, it was advertised as "Bringing out fear, anger, aggression, and other animal instincts" (Forte, 1996). However, these devices, grounded in the simulation of reality topos and claiming to deliver photorealistic representations in virtual environments, were short-lived; due to high prices, they never became accessible to a wider audience in the 1990s.

According to Chesher, in the 1990s, VR emerged from the cultural periphery and generated excitement among the public. Promoted as a new frontier to be explored, it aimed to transform computing. Yet, the available software and hardware capabilities were unable to live up to these expectations (1994). In short, marketing an expensive technology that had yet to be fully realized, based on the promise of simulating reality, ended in failure. In the second half of the 1990s, the trajectory of the simulation of reality topos was temporarily disconnected from VR, only to resurface in the 2010s. In the meantime, the topos continued through video games during the 2000s.

8. 1990s–2000s: Video Games

From the late 1990s into the early 2000s are often remembered as a stagnant phase in the progress of VR technologies. Up to the 2010s, when Palmer Luckey developed a headset that raised hopes for a commercially viable home device, the simulation of reality topos and immersive technologies were no longer centered on VR. However, the value of experiences continued to be assessed in terms of how closely they simulated reality. In the 1990s, the rise of digital gaming, built around the simulation of reality topos, reshaped the entertainment industry. Game developers pushed photorealism through environment design and digital assets, while also making interactivity a defining feature of digital experiences. Advances in digital technologies led to the development of game engines and authoring tools, offering new methods and greater flexibility in game design. Over the course of two decades, advances in gaming hardware and software laid the groundwork for VR's revival in the 2010s.

The interest in virtual reality during the 1980s and 1990s coincided with the golden age of arcade games and the emergence of home consoles. Since the early days of video gaming, there has been a clear pursuit of creating fully immersive 360° environments. However, as the digital game industry expanded, the pursuit of realistic experiences was legitimized through the adoption of cinematic techniques and narrative styles. Video games first appeared in research laboratories but reached the public in the 1970s with the growth of arcades. Games of these early years were simple, as graphics

were still in their infancy. Pong, for example, consisted of nothing more than a pixelated ball and two vertical bars as paddles. These stripped-down designs reflected the limited graphic technology of the time. However, with technological advancements, game design approaches started to incline towards realistic narratives, immersive environments, and the simulation of real-world experiences.

The development of circuit boards, processors, and graphics technology enabled smoother 3D environment rendering by the mid-1990s. The increased storage capacity of CDs and VCDs paved the way for a new era in gaming, while personal computers also grew in popularity. As Wardyga states, gaming grew into a profitable industry, shaped by genres and conventions like adventure games, puzzle games, real-time strategies, first-person shooters (FPS), and role-playing games (RPGs) (2023). At the heart of all these developments was the enduring goal of simulating reality and translating it into virtual environments.

Early efforts aimed to simulate lifelike spaces, characters, and objects. This trend saw a major development in 1993 with the release of Doom, which introduced the concept of the “game engine” (Lowood, 2016, pp. 203–208). Game engines are software platforms that streamlined automated tasks enhancing game mechanics, and simplified developers' work through the pre-made digital assets from libraries (Paul et al., 2012). Technological advances in hardware and software, including the advancements of game engines, enabled games to adopt a more photorealistic aesthetic. This vision of realism was realized through complex textures, nuanced lighting techniques, and visual elements designed to create a more “lifelike” appearance in virtual environments.

Cinema has long been seen as a more serious or respected form of popular culture compared with video games. This perception encouraged game developers to aim for a cinematic feel as a way of enhancing realism, a goal that continues to guide their work today. The cinematic approach in games has included attention to fine details such as lens flares and distortions, depth of field effects, camera placement, advanced color grading, and more. Developers have recreated effects such as raindrops on the screen, fisheye lenses, and nuances like flickers and scratches on celluloid, all aimed at enhancing the sense of realism conveyed (Brooker, 2009, pp. 125–127). These applications, borrowing the aesthetic language of tools designed to capture physical reality, are attempts to support the claim of realism in digital representations and reflect the simulation of reality topos.

These aesthetic choices, along with the software and hardware developed to implement them and the broader efforts to simulate reality in digital games, laid the groundwork for VR. In the 2010s, this foundation allowed VR to gain the momentum that it had not reached in the 1990s. Since the photorealistic aesthetic gained prominence in game development pipelines, game engines were designed accordingly. With these affordances, game engines have become one of the primary platforms for creating VR experiences. Thus, gaming and VR can be discussed as converging fields in the trajectory of the simulation of reality topos.

9. 2010s: VR Technology as an Empathy Machine

Any discussion of contemporary VR would be incomplete without reference to Oculus and its creator, Palmer Luckey. As Harley stated, before Luckey's 2012 Oculus prototype, VR was not regarded as a technology that could reach a wide audience (2019, p. 1). While the VR field experienced a period of stagnation after the 1990s, there were still various experimental efforts. However, Palmer Luckey's prototype was the closest to delivering on claims of photorealistic visuals and a wide field of view.

What continued the topos of simulating reality in the 2010s was a video game endeavor. The Oculus prototype was designed by a gaming enthusiast to enhance the gaming experience by making it more realistic. The prototype was demonstrated at a major industry event (E3) featuring a VR version of Doom 3, a popular video game developed by John Carmack (Gamereactor, 2012; Meta Quest, 2012). With the introduction of Oculus in 2012, VR captured attention, driven by the promise of enhanced realism in gaming. Technical advancements such as the use of controllers to enable user interaction and incorporate the sense of touch, the expansion of the visual field, and the use of spatial audio, were all integrated to heighten the sensory simulation.

Following the excitement generated by the Oculus prototype at an industry event, two months later, Palmer Luckey launched the "Oculus VR" Kickstarter campaign. Although the target was \$250,000, the campaign raised nearly ten times that sum (Oculus, 2012). In 2014, Facebook (currently Meta) officially announced that it had acquired Oculus VR for \$2 billion. Their stated intent was: "Facebook plans to extend Oculus' existing advantage in gaming to new verticals, including communications, media and entertainment, education and other areas" (Meta, 2014). VR's role as a medium for simulating reality quickly extended beyond video games into other fields. Meta's entry into the VR market stimulated the industry, leading many tech companies, including Google, Samsung, HP, HTC, Sony, and Microsoft, to revive shelved projects or develop new prototypes.

In the 2010s, the simulation of reality topos was reflected in industry discourse, with VR being framed as an "empathy machine." In 2012, before presenting the Oculus prototype at E3, Palmer Luckey used it as the platform to showcase the VR experience *Hunger in L.A.* (2012). *Hunger in L.A.* is a six-minute VR experience that reenacts a news event. In the experience, the user finds themselves in a food bank line alongside people in need. At one point, a man collapses due to diabetic shock, causing panic in the crowd, and an ambulance is called. The experience is digitally reconstructed from authentic audio recordings to provide the most realistic experience possible. The reason *Hunger in L.A.* was showcased in VR via Oculus was its supposed affordance to enhance realism through 360° viewing and six degrees of freedom (6DoF), thereby strengthening the audience's empathy with the event.

The link between virtual reality and empathy was strengthened with the advent of non-fiction 360° content, encompassing i-Docs, immersive journalism, and immersive documentaries. Beginning in the mid-2010s, virtual reality's potential to foster empathy has been a central narrative in its marketing. VR came to be regarded as an "empathy machine," based on its affordance to immerse users in lifelike experiences that allowed them to "step into someone else's shoes."

Building on this premise, during contemporary the early years of contemporary VR, 360° video has been actively utilized by many humanitarian aid initiatives and media organizations, including the BBC News, The Guardian, United Nations, New York Times, and Al Jazeera. *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015), a 360° video addressing refugee issues, was the most frequently discussed example. The project was co-produced by Chris Milk, who described VR as the “ultimate empathy machine” (TED, 2015). His statement sparked debates about the relation between VR and empathy.

Rose observes that VR’s interactive capabilities have resulted in producers perceiving it as an “experiential” tool and reinforced the belief that it allows users to step into the experiences of others. Thus, immersion in the struggles and challenges faced by others via VR is considered capable of producing a unique empathetic response unmatched by any other medium. Many have argued that this form of compassion, rooted in empathetic understanding, is beneficial for addressing social and humanitarian challenges and is considered instrumental to society (2018).

At the core of the “empathy machine” narrative was the desire to place users directly within a simulated version of another person’s sensory experience. With this, it is believed that another person’s experience can be simulated as faithfully as possible. It is thought that the experiences of the person whose sensory perceptions are being simulated can be experienced by the VR user in the same manner. Through the “empathy machine” discourse, the simulation of reality topos aims not only to recreate physical reality but also to simulate and reconstruct unique experiences and personal lived moments.

The “empathy machine” approach, which remained superficial, later faced criticism, as this role was assigned to VR only to promote its adoption by a broader audience base, and it was only a revised version of the simulation of reality topos. Critics such as Nakamura have noted that the “empathy machine” discourse was largely an industry-driven rebranding effort, framing a game-oriented technology as a moral device (2020), and that any empathy it produced often amounted to a superficial sense of humanity and compassion (Kool, 2016). Although the “empathy machine” discourse declined after 2020, it was a version of the simulation of reality topos, making it a fitting final example to conclude the trajectory of this study.

Conclusion

Sociotechnical imaginaries shaped around a media topos frame a technology and influence how it is perceived by society. Within the framework of the simulation of reality topos, specific media forms and technologies have been assigned the role of presenting photorealistic visuals and translating the physical reality into virtual environments with high fidelity. This study examined VR technology as the latest stage in the trajectory of the specified topos. The primary aim, however, was to demonstrate that the simulation of reality topos is not an inherent affordance of the technology itself, but rather a discourse shaped by sociotechnical imaginaries. For this purpose, we traced the trajectory of the specified topos, showing that the preference for photorealistic visuals and experiences is not unique to VR.

Considering that the topos of simulating physical reality aims to convey the world in ways aligned with human perception, the trajectory it shapes can likewise be mapped around the simulation of the

senses. As shown in this study, when traced through eight distinct stages, the first stage in this trajectory can be identified as 19th-century panoramas and stereoscopic viewing devices. In the following decades, as cinema becomes a popular medium, attempts also emerge to incorporate the olfactory and haptic senses into the simulation of human perception. In the 1960s, Sensorama tries to simulate all five senses. During the same period, as digital technologies advances, efforts to simulate reality shifts into digital environments and the concept of interactivity gets integrated to the topos. Influenced by the advancing computer technologies of the 1980s, the topos of simulation of reality reaches the point where it first intersects with the concept of VR. Although these ambitions persist throughout the 1990s, the simulation of reality topos shifts its focus toward the growing video game industry since VR is not yet advanced enough to realize the ambitions it promised. VR remains mostly absent from the trajectory of the topos until the 2010s until when it experiences a resurgence aimed at elevating digital gaming. As the industry works to reach a broader audience, a new version of the simulation of reality topos gets introduced, with VR marketed as an "empathy machine." The discourse today associates the topos of simulating reality with an ethical discourse and claims that the affordances of VR not only recreate physical reality but also allow users to experience the perspectives of others.

The eight-step trajectory outlined in this study shows that simulating physical reality is not an affordance exclusive to VR. It is a sociotechnical imaginary grounded in a discourse of reproduction and imitation within the context of media technologies. The assertion that a device can take people to places they cannot see, know, or be, reflecting the simulation of reality topos, positions certain technologies as tools for recreating physical reality. The simulation of reality topos is not new; historically, it has repeatedly shaped media imaginaries, demonstrating that the affordances attributed to technologies are socially constructed. Recognizing the patterns of a topos is important because it shows that the affordances ascribed to a technology should not be limited to a single function. Technologies serve a variety of purposes as the affordances are diverse. Viewing a technology like VR primarily through its affordance to simulate sensory experiences realistically is a limited perspective. VR is a technology with the potential to simulate reality and at the same time provide opportunities for expressive and creative experimentation. Highlighting the diversity of VR applications requires a research effort broad enough to be the focus of a separate study. This study has shown that the simulation of reality is a topos, observable over decades across different media, and that it is not imperative for technologies such as VR.

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Visual Journalism on YouTube: Emotion, Representation and Platform Logic

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how YouTube thumbnails and titles operate within the platform's attention economy and algorithmic visibility in digital news. It focuses on three Turkish news outlets—Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope—to show how editorial positioning is translated into visual and textual packaging.

Design/methodology/approach: The study adopts a qualitative design combining visual framing analysis with a broader interpretive framework drawn from platformization, affective publics, and Chouliaraki's aesthetics of witnessing. Rodríguez and Dimitrova's four-level model structures the analysis of 77 thumbnail-title pairs published between 28 April and 4 May 2025. Thumbnails and titles are treated as a single visual-textual unit and examined in terms of descriptive content, stylistic features, emotional cues, and ideological messages.

Findings: The findings reveal distinct outlet-specific strategies. Sözcü emphasizes conflict, urgency, and oppositional tension; A Haber foregrounds national unity, security, and threat through symbolic and emotionally charged framing; Medyascope adopts a more restrained aesthetic and analytical tone that encourages interpretive distance.

Research limitations/implications: The short sampling period and focus on highly viewed videos limit generalizability. Future research should expand the timeframe and include audience reception and video content.

Practical implications: The findings offer practical insight for digital news producers, editors, and platform-based journalism practitioners by showing how visual design choices carry editorial, emotional, and ideological consequences. They also highlight the need for greater awareness among journalists and media managers regarding the tension between visibility-driven optimization and editorial integrity.

Originality/value: The study contributes to the literature by bringing together visual framing, platform logic, and affective publics in the analysis of YouTube news presentation in Turkey. Its originality lies in treating thumbnails and titles as a single unit of analysis and in showing how platform affordances, emotional intensities, and ideological positioning intersect in routine news representation. In doing so, it offers a context-specific contribution to debates on platformized journalism and the visual transformation of news.

Keywords: *Visual Framing, Affective Publics, Platformization, YouTube, Turkish Media*

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Introduction

Digitalization has profoundly reshaped traditional media structures, shifting journalism away from a model centered primarily on information delivery and toward a visual and affective mode of communication shaped by competition for visibility. As van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue, platformization reorganizes news production around visibility, user engagement, and aesthetic appeal. The movement of news into platform environments therefore represents more than a change in channel or format. The economic, technical, and cultural arrangements embedded in platforms have altered the infrastructural conditions of journalism itself (Hartley et al., 2023; Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023). Under these conditions, affective publics, as conceptualized by Papacharissi (2015), also take on a different form. Digital publicness no longer refers simply to a space where users encounter content and respond emotionally; it increasingly operates as an interaction regime in which emotions are algorithmically ordered, made visible, and sustained through continuous circulation. As news production and distribution become more deeply dependent on platform infrastructures, journalism's operational logic is reconfigured at multiple levels. YouTube provides one of the clearest examples of this transformation, reshaping both the circulation of news and its visual and discursive design.

Within this platformed visibility regime, two elements structure the audience's first encounter with content: the thumbnail and the title. The thumbnail condenses a video into a single image, while the title acts as an immediate cue that can arouse curiosity and prompt a click (Lee, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Existing research shows that facial expressions in thumbnails, emotional emphasis in titles, and the informational density of textual elements directly influence viewership rates (Shimono et al., 2020; Tafesse, 2020). As central mechanisms organizing the relationship between media and audiences, thumbnails and titles make it necessary to examine news representation together with the interactional logic through which engagement is generated.

Although international scholarship has increasingly examined the visual framing of news content on platforms such as YouTube (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Thurman et al., 2019; Trilling et al., 2017), the visual strategies of news videos remain underexamined in the Turkish context. Existing research in Turkey has focused largely on self-presentation, popular culture, and bodily representation (Güler & Uludağ, 2020; Yılmaz, 2019), leaving the relationship between news imagery, platform logic, affective representation, and ideological orientation insufficiently explored.

To address this gap, the study adopts a three-part theoretical framework for analyzing the layered structure of news thumbnails. Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics provides the main framework for understanding emotional circulation and attachment, but the study revisits this concept by emphasizing its entanglement with algorithmic flow and mechanisms of continuity. Chouliaraki's (2006) approach to the aestheticization of media helps explain how images are shaped through aesthetic choices, while Rodríguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-level model of visual framing provides an analytical basis for unpacking layers of meaning within visual content. Taken together, these

perspectives move the analysis beyond visual discourse alone and make it possible to examine how visual discourse is shaped through the combined effects of platform affordances, algorithmic reward mechanisms, and editorial choices.

Within this framework, the study offers a comparative analysis of the thumbnails and titles used in current YouTube content published by three Turkish media outlets with distinct ideological orientations: Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope. The sample is also important to the comparative logic of the study. Whereas Sözcü and A Haber extend journalistic practices associated with traditional television broadcasting into the YouTube ecosystem, Medyascope began publishing directly within that ecosystem. In this respect, the sample also speaks to Ertuna and Aşık's (2025) argument that YouTube functions in Turkey both as a space of escape from the constraints of mainstream media and as an alternative site of journalistic production.

The study is guided by three questions. First, which figures and settings are foregrounded in the thumbnails of Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope, and how do these representations relate to the operational logic of the platform? Second, how do formal and aesthetic choices vary in response to YouTube's attention economy and algorithmic flow? Third, what kinds of affective associations and ideological cues are embedded in these thumbnails, and through which visual strategies are these attachments constructed? By pursuing these questions, the analysis shows that news thumbnails on YouTube function not simply as visual thresholds, but as representational interfaces that shape affective relations with audiences and structure ideological positioning.

1. Theoretical Layers of Representation in Digital Journalism

1.1. Platformization and the Restructuring of Journalism

In the digital age, transformations in media production extend beyond changes in content form and involve broader shifts in the infrastructural and economic organization of media systems (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5). One of the key concepts for understanding this transformation is platformization. van Dijck et al. (2018, pp. 2-4) define platformization as a socio-technical restructuring process that exceeds the technical sphere and operates simultaneously across media, the economy, politics, and culture.

News production and presentation are increasingly shaped by platform logic (Gillespie, 2018). This logic emerges through the interaction between the mechanisms identified by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) —datafication, commodification, and algorithmic curation—and what Bucher (Bucher, 2020) describes as algorithmic flow. As Bucher (2020, p. 65) argues, algorithmic flow is not a fixed ranking system but a dynamic structure that is continuously updated in response to users' prior interactions, pauses, and reactions. By determining which content becomes more visible, it functions almost like an "invisible editor." At the core of this process is an infrastructural logic that rewards content capable of keeping users on the screen longer, generating engagement through likes and comments, and, above all, increasing clickability. In an environment that privileges visual and textual strategies designed to attract attention, provoke emotional response, and arouse curiosity before accuracy or

depth fully enter the frame, news organizations are increasingly positioned as content providers that must adapt to the platform's attention economy (Carlson, 2020; Napoli, 2019). In this sense, the attention economy is not simply a matter of capturing user interest; it operates as a structural regime produced through the interaction of reward and visibility mechanisms embedded in algorithmic flow (Terranova, 2022; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

Hartley et al. (2023) place this dynamic in a more specific analytical frame with regard to news media, emphasizing the ongoing tension between the editorial autonomy of news organizations and their unavoidable dependence on technological infrastructures. This does not mean that editorial control has disappeared in a linear or one-directional process. Rather, it points to a shifting power relation in which editorial values repeatedly come into conflict with platform logic and are continually recalibrated in response to it. As news organizations adopt the codes of the attention economy in pursuit of visibility, they are also compelled to adjust their institutional values to this emerging structure (Hartley et al., 2023, p. 1381). Nielsen and Fletcher (2023) make a similar argument, suggesting that growing structural dependence on technology companies has reduced publishers' capacity to operate as autonomous actors controlling their own channels of distribution and has left them increasingly subject to platform rules and formats.

YouTube provides a particularly clear example of how this structure reshapes the formal and aesthetic organization of news. Through its audiovisual architecture and algorithmic recommendation system, the platform configures news videos not only as informational content but also as attention-generating forms designed to produce affective intensity and aesthetic impact. Existing research suggests that this aesthetic transformation gives rise to an economy of affect shaped by user engagement (Ballejo et al., 2021; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Papacharissi, 2015). In adapting to the logic of visibility, news organizations increasingly rely on recurring color palettes, dramatic compositions, striking facial expressions, and emotionally charged headlines in their thumbnails. These choices are not merely stylistic. They also contribute to the ideological positioning and affective framing of news (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Rogers, 2021). On YouTube, such visual strategies—and the presentation of news as a “product” aligned with algorithmic visibility—transform thumbnails from simple attention-grabbing devices into strategic signifiers competing within the attention economy.

1.2. Affective Publics and Aesthetic Representations

The development of digital media has diversified access to information while also transforming how information circulates, generates effects, and acquires social meaning (Deuze, 2008; Papacharissi, 2015). Social media environments have given rise to a communicative regime in which news derives meaning not only from informational content but also from emotional force. Moving beyond the classical view of news as an instrument of rational deliberation, Papacharissi (2015) proposes the concept of affective publics to describe forms of public engagement that emerge through the interaction of emotions, identities, and personal experience in digital environments.

According to Papacharissi (2015), content shared on social media helps organize and circulate collective feeling, often generating publics shaped around polarization, belonging, anger, or empathy.

These publics do not operate according to the classical public-sphere ideal of open debate and shared reason. Instead, they take shape through forms of social participation structured by feeling (Papacharissi, 2015, pp. 16-20). From this perspective, the form, tone, and expressive language of news imagery are selected not only for aesthetic reasons but also for their capacity to activate particular affective orientations (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 56). Wahl-Jorgensen (2020, p. 172) similarly treats emotion as an epistemic resource in journalism that helps make sense of complex social realities. Under contemporary platform conditions, however, user interaction is increasingly steered by systems of algorithmic flow and visibility (Bucher, 2020; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Emotions therefore become more than momentary responses; they take on a structural role in sustaining the continuity of the attention economy.

Nielsen and Fletcher (2023), in their comparative study, show that although platforms are globally widespread, the degree of platformization in news varies considerably across contexts. Their findings suggest that platform logic does not operate as a universal model but takes shape through interaction with local media systems. In the Turkish case, this process becomes more pronounced as media organizations produce affective representations that consolidate communities aligned with their political positioning, moving beyond the level of individual engagement. Polarized media actors repeatedly reproduce emotional tones such as anger, threat, and pride in order to sustain audience attachment and strengthen ideological belonging, and these strategies align easily with YouTube's algorithmic reward mechanisms. In this sense, affective publics function not merely as spaces of audience interaction but as representational fields that reinforce the platform's visibility regime and sustain continuity through a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

To interpret the visual manifestations of this representational field in practice, Chouliaraki's (2006) concepts of aestheticization and spectacular representation provide a complementary framework. The notion of the spectatorship of suffering addresses the dramatic and aestheticized presentation of themes such as war, crisis, and victimhood in media discourse. This study does not limit its analytical focus to crisis-related themes. Instead, it approaches spectacular representation as a broader strategy of aesthetic and affective coding that cannot be reduced to images of suffering alone. From this perspective, the principles of aestheticization and visualization developed by Chouliaraki (2008) offer an additional lens for interpreting the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of visual news representations. In this broader sense, aestheticization refers not only to the presentation of suffering but also to a more general media strategy through which emotions are organized by formal and visual codes.

Chouliaraki (2008) deepens this discussion by conceptualizing the affective shaping of news in terms of "regimes of pity." Within this framework, modern journalism places audiences in particular affective positions, guiding them at ethical, political, and aesthetic levels. Two aesthetic regimes are especially relevant here: the pathos formula and the tableau vivant. The pathos formula seeks to produce strong moral resonance through dramatic imagery, close-up framing, dense metaphorical cues, and emotional triggers. In this formulation, witnessing means more than visually observing an event; it

also involves being directed toward an ethical response. As Chouliaraki argues (2008, pp. 520-522), the news object is coded within an atmosphere of “moral urgency,” inviting viewers into a position oriented toward action. On visually driven platforms such as YouTube, the pathos formula becomes visible through high-contrast imagery, exaggerated facial expressions, striking headlines, and colors that evoke urgency.

By contrast, the tableau vivant stages moments of suffering or crisis, aestheticizes them, and generally reflects a regime of visualization marked by emotional restraint. This narrative form presents the reality of war or social conflict within a compelling yet distanced aesthetic, positioning the viewer less in a reactive mode than in a reflective one. In this case, witnessing is grounded not in emotional involvement but in aesthetic observation (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 522). The distinction between these two aesthetic regimes is shaped not only by visual choices but also by the imagined communities into which viewers are invited. The pathos formula positions audiences within a distinction between “us” and “them” through the affective representation of national or political belonging, whereas the tableau vivant privileges individual reflection and critical distance over collective action. This perspective offers a productive framework for evaluating the thumbnails analyzed in this study not only in terms of their aesthetic features but also in terms of the forms of witnessing and belonging they seek to construct. At the same time, affective frames can generate empathy and attachment while also carrying risks of manipulation and polarization (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020, p. 177).

In sum, Papacharissi’s (2015) concept of affective publics provides a central theoretical basis for understanding how news imagery establishes emotional relations with audiences, while Chouliaraki’s framework of aestheticization and regimes of witnessing makes it possible to analyze how those emotions are organized visually and discursively. Considered alongside arguments that digital platforms accelerate the circulation of emotional expression and turn emotional storytelling into a normative feature of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020, p. 175), platformization provides a broader analytical ground for examining the emotional and aesthetic choices of news organizations in relation to both visibility strategies and editorial positioning.

1.3. Visual Framing Theory and Discursive Representations

News images are more than illustrations; they are discursive devices that shape narrative structure, influence affective orientation, and intervene directly in processes of reception (Chouliaraki, 2006; Messaris & Abraham, 2001; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Media frames do not simply define content; they also guide audience perception (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). As discussed in the previous sections, framing on platforms such as YouTube emerges under conditions shaped by the visibility criteria that govern the flow of content (Hase et al., 2023). Thumbnails are therefore produced at the intersection of editorial practice and the platform’s own visibility logic.

Visual framing reveals not only what is represented but also which elements are selected, which are excluded, and how they are arranged (Seppänen & Väiliverronen, 2003). Karki et al. (2025) show that facial expressions, object placement, and textual elements in YouTube visuals are directly related to the emotional responses expressed in audience comments. This finding suggests that news

thumbnails function as discursive devices shaping viewers' affective orientations and ideological positioning.

Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011) systematize this approach by proposing four levels for the analysis of visual framing: descriptive content, visual style, affective associations, and ideological message. This multilayered structure makes it possible to understand not only what an image shows, but also how and for what purpose it is presented. The first level, descriptive content, includes the people, objects, and settings directly observable in the image. The level of visual style focuses on formal choices such as color, framing, angle, and composition. At the level of affective associations, analysis turns to emotions such as hope, fear, anger, or empathy that the image may evoke. The final level, ideological message, addresses the social and political meanings carried by the image by examining which values, identities, and political positions are legitimized (Rodríguez & Dimitrova, 2011, pp. 680-683).

On platforms such as YouTube, these four levels are reshaped by the visibility logic of algorithmic flow. Metrics such as watch time, click-through rates, and user engagement help determine which elements are foregrounded and which recede within the algorithmic attention economy (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Napoli, 2021). Visual framing therefore reflects not only the formal organization of representation but also the filtering processes through which platform infrastructures shape visibility (Hase et al., 2023).

The ideological effects of visual representations arise not only from their political content but also from platform logic, which structures digital circulation and generates tension between editorial autonomy and platform dependence (Hartley et al., 2023). Stuart Hall's argument that representation does more than reflect the external world and instead functions as a process of meaning production - bringing some realities into view while rendering others invisible through cultural codes (Hall, 1997, p. 15) - therefore requires renewed consideration under contemporary conditions shaped by algorithmic flow.

Taken together, platformization, affective publics, and visual framing provide an integrated framework for analyzing digital news imagery across multiple dimensions. Platformization helps explain how images attract attention, circulate, and gain prominence within the dynamics of algorithmic flow and the attention economy. The concept of affective publics clarifies how such images establish emotional relations with audiences. Visual framing, in turn, offers an analytical basis for examining how this transformation is structured at formal and discursive levels and reproduced at the intersection of ideological implication and technical dynamics. From this relational perspective, the digital news images in the selected sample are examined as an interconnected whole shaped by visibility codes, affective effects, and aesthetic choices under platform conditions.

2. Methodology

This study examines how digital news videos are visualized on YouTube and through which aesthetic and affective frames these visual strategies are organized. To analyze visual representations

and discursive codes, the study adopts a visual framing approach grounded in qualitative content analysis and informed by the model developed by Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011).

The sample consists of video thumbnails and titles published on the YouTube channels of three Turkish media outlets that occupy distinct political, institutional, and quantitative positions: Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope. As organizations rooted in traditional television broadcasting, Sözcü and A Haber adapt an established news aesthetic to YouTube's attention economy and the dynamics of algorithmic visibility. Medyascope, by contrast, is a digital-born outlet that uses the platform as a central space of journalistic production. It is marked by more restrained typography, lower affective intensity, and a more analytical mode of presentation. These institutional differences make it possible to compare how the platform reshapes news production not only at the technical level but also at aesthetic and discursive levels.

Within the sample, Sözcü and A Haber stand out as high-reach actors on YouTube. At the time of data collection, the YouTube channel of Sözcü Television had 2.2 million subscribers, while A Haber had 1.2 million. Medyascope, by contrast, operated as an independent digital outlet with 565 thousand subscribers. Despite its more limited audience reach, it uses YouTube not merely as a distribution channel but also as a space for editorial autonomy and alternative journalistic production. It is further distinguished by its effort to preserve professional journalistic norms and to maintain a publishing style that offers an alternative to the pressures of algorithmic visibility. Taken together, these three channels occupy distinct positions that reflect both the structure of Turkey's media system and different manifestations of platformization, while engaging with YouTube's attention economy and visibility logic in markedly different ways.

The dataset was constructed from videos published on these channels between 28 April and 4 May 2025. This period was selected because it represented a relatively typical week without an exceptionally intense news agenda, making it possible to observe routine news flow. The aim was to facilitate comparison across the routine publishing practices of the selected outlets while limiting the distortions created by extraordinary developments.

For Sözcü and A Haber, the four most-viewed videos for each day within 48 hours of publication were selected, resulting in 28 thumbnails for each outlet over the course of the week. For Medyascope, the three most-viewed videos per day were selected in line with the channel's publishing pattern, yielding 21 thumbnails. The scale of audience reaches achieved by the most-viewed videos is also reflected in the peak figures recorded during the sampling period: a single video reached 332,930 viewers on Sözcü, 123,422 on Medyascope, and 118,303 on A Haber. The final corpus consisted of 77 thumbnail-title pairs. Only content categorized as news, commentary, interviews, or current affairs evaluation was included. Promotional videos, Shorts, fixed institutional statements, and advertising content were excluded.

For each video, the thumbnail and title were treated as a single visual-textual unit of analysis. The data were collected manually from the YouTube interface and tabulated together with publication date, view count, number of likes, and number of comments. The analysis followed Rodríguez and

Dimitrova's (2011) four-level model of visual framing: (1) descriptive content, referring to the persons, objects, and settings directly observable in the image; (2) formal features, including color, framing, typography, and composition; (3) affective associations, referring to responses such as anger, fear, empathy, and curiosity; and (4) ideological implications, referring to political and social positions as well as underlying value systems.

Each of these four levels was operationalized prior to analysis and specified through explicit indicators for manual coding. At the level of descriptive content, the coding scheme covered persons, objects, settings, and symbols. At the level of formal features, it included color contrast, framing, typography, and composition. At the level of affective associations, the indicators included anger, empathy, fear, hope, and excitement. At the level of ideological implications, the scheme focused on the representation of political figures, the framing of social identities, and the use of value-laden symbols.

The analysis was conducted by a single researcher. To strengthen coding consistency, recoding was carried out at regular intervals, and detailed observation notes were kept for ambiguous cases. Reflective memos were also used throughout the analysis to maintain awareness of the interpretive process and reduce the influence of personal judgment. This methodological structure was designed to support the systematic, transparent, and replicable production of findings.

Within this framework, particular attention was paid to recurring graphic elements in thumbnails, the use of contrasting colors, attention-grabbing facial expressions, and large-font text, as well as to striking wording, value-laden concepts, and highly suggestive lexical choices in titles. Thumbnails and titles were evaluated together as a unified meaning-making structure. Video descriptions and the audio-visual content of the videos themselves were excluded from the analysis in order to keep the unit of analysis limited to the visual-textual pair formed by the thumbnail and the title. In this respect, the methodological design further supports the transparency and replicability of the study.

3. Findings and a Layered Analysis of Representations: Visuality, Affect, and Ideology

3.1. Visibility Strategies and the Attention Economy in YouTube News Channels

On algorithm-driven platforms such as YouTube, the digitalization of journalism reshapes not only the circulation of content but also the formal presentation of news. As outlined in the theoretical framework, platformization suggests that news production is shaped not only by editorial decisions but also by platform-oriented criteria such as visibility, engagement, and shareability. In Bucher's (2020) account, algorithmic flow refers to a dynamic process continuously updated in line with users' prior interactions, whereas algorithmic visibility refers to the outcome of this process: the degree to which content is made prominent on the platform. From this perspective, examining visibility strategies associated with algorithmic flow helps clarify how news organizations position their content within platform environments.

Video thumbnails and titles function as key thresholds through which content becomes visible. Research showing that algorithms tend to privilege videos generating high levels of engagement, including clicks, likes, and comments (Bakhshi et al., 2014), suggests that formal choices such as close-up facial framing, dramatic color palettes, and large-font text operate as strategic tools in the competition for visibility. Under these conditions, news videos may, in some cases, move closer to advertising aesthetics, with content presented less as an informational object than as a visually striking package designed to attract attention.

Table 1.

Indicators of Algorithmic Visibility

Feature	Sözcü	A Haber	Medyascope
Large-font Headlines	High	High	Low
Use of contrasting colors	High	High	Moderate
Close-up facial framing	High	Moderate	Low
Engagement prompts	High	High	Low
Click-driven headlines	High	Moderate	Low

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the visual strategies of Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope and the logic of algorithmic visibility on YouTube. Across the sampled week, Sözcü relied most heavily on the codes of the attention economy, particularly through large-font text, strong color contrast, close-up facial framing, and click-oriented headlines. A Haber also displayed a high level of adaptation to visibility logic but did so through a denser symbolic structure that combined affective intensity with political and national cues. Medyascope, by contrast, maintained a more restrained aesthetic, with lower emphasis on visual intensity and a stronger orientation toward informational coherence. The comparison suggests that the editorial lines of these outlets intersect with YouTube's algorithmic requirements to different degrees.

Figure 1.

Formal Features



The examples examined in this section show that formal choices vary systematically across the thumbnail designs of the three outlets. Sözcü (2025a) pursues visibility through some of the clearest codes of the attention economy, including large-font text, contrasting colors, and dramatic close-up facial

framing. A Haber (2025a) combines text and image with denser symbolic elements, using references such as the parliamentary chamber, prison bars, or the national flag to construct a visual arrangement that supports affective and ideological mobilization. Medyascope (2025a), in turn, adopts more restrained typography and more moderate color contrast, favoring an information-oriented aesthetic that gives greater weight to coherence than to immediate visibility.

Taken together, these differences point to the role of algorithmic flow and visibility logic in shaping digital news production alongside editorial preferences. Each outlet appears to have developed a distinct visual strategy in response to YouTube's competitive environment, and these strategies are shaped by the interaction between political positioning and platform incentives.

3.2. Visual Framing Strategies: Aesthetic Representation and Affective Layers

On visually oriented platforms such as YouTube, the presentation of news plays an important role in shaping the relationship established with audiences. Thumbnails function as communicative forms that extend beyond the capture of attention and carry affective associations, aesthetic choices, and representational priorities. Drawing on Rodríguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-level model of visual framing, this section examines descriptive content, visual style, and affective association. Dominant patterns are interpreted in relation to Chouliaraki's (2006, 2008) aesthetic regimes and Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics, with particular attention to the contemporary restructuring of media and platform dynamics in Turkey. This framework makes it possible to ask what images show, how they show it, and what kinds of affective or aesthetic responses they appear to invite.

Table 2.

Affective Tones and Aesthetic Formation

Affective/Aesthetic Element	Sözcü	A Haber	Medyascope
Anger/Tension	High	Moderate	Low
Hope/Unity	Low	High	Moderate
Curiosity/Threat	High	High	Low
Aesthetic elements	Red-yellow palette, face-centered framing	Clear background, symbolic imagery	Light background, typographic emphasis

Sözcü's thumbnails present political figures within symbolically charged scenes of conflict and produce a relatively high level of affective intensity. In the context of political polarization, these patterns suggest an oppositional framing that also aligns with YouTube's click-oriented logic. High-contrast colors and striking headlines appear to serve the dual purpose of increasing algorithmic visibility and generating immediacy and tension. The resulting visual strategy positions viewers less as distant observers than as participants in a shared oppositional affective frame.

In A Haber's thumbnails, actors representing state authority, especially the President and security forces, appear together with images of crisis and disaster. Markers of victimhood, such as children or funerals, are combined with national symbols, producing a visually dense and affectively charged frame. Contrasting colors dominated by red, white, and black, dramatic framing, and exclamatory headlines create a pathos-oriented narrative that addresses viewers directly. Read through the concept of affective publics under platformized conditions, A Haber's representational mode can be interpreted as a nationally coded spectacle journalism that reinforces political legitimacy. *Sözcü*, by contrast, sustains an oppositional affective register organized around emotions such as anger and resistance.

At the descriptive level, *Medyascope*'s thumbnails center less on the event itself than on commentators speaking about it. Single figures or pairs of figures usually look directly at the camera, while backgrounds featuring bookshelves, maps, or simple graphics suggest an approach that prioritizes clarity and coherence over visual intensity. The formal aesthetic is marked by restrained pastel tones and white typography. The preference for question-based headlines and analytical phrasing, rather than sensational wording, produces a more distanced and reflective visuality, one that recalls the aesthetic of the *tableau vivant* rather than dramatic agitation.

Figure 2.

Affective Tones and Aesthetic Element in YouTube Thumbnails



The examples summarized in Figure 2 and Table 2 indicate that the three outlets respond to platform logic in different ways. *Sözcü* (2025b) organizes its presentation around conflict and oppositional affect, whereas A Haber (2025b) combines national unity with the language of victimhood. *Medyascope* (2025b), by contrast, addresses viewers through critical curiosity rather than through anger or belonging, relying on lower affective intensity and analytical questioning. The descriptive, formal, and affective levels identified in Rodríguez and Dimitrova's (2011) model vary in line with each outlet's political positioning. At the same time, all three channels are articulated with platform logic as part of broader strategies for producing differentiated affective communities. This differentiation also corresponds to the findings of Ertuna and Aşık (2025), who show that journalists in Turkey use YouTube as a space of limited autonomy within an authoritarian media system. In the cases of *Sözcü* and A Haber, ideological orientations become visible through populist and national affective registers, whereas in *Medyascope* they appear in the form of a more analytical presentation aligned with professional journalistic norms.

3.3. Aesthetic Codes and Modes of Affective and Discursive Representation in News Imagery

YouTube's algorithmic flow also influences which forms of representation gain visibility in news imagery (Hase et al., 2023; Napoli, 2021). The visibility regime produced under such conditions creates selective pressure for visual and discursive choices aligned with platform-specific metrics such as affective intensity, clickability, and engagement. This section examines the ideological message and implication of thumbnail frames that gain visibility through platform incentives by drawing on Rodríguez and Dimitrova's (2011) model. At this level, the model makes it possible to analyze the political and cultural meanings carried by images, the value systems they legitimize, and the imagined communities they propose to viewers. From this perspective, the ideological forms of representation found in the thumbnails and titles of Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope are compared in relation to the platform's logic of flow.

Table 3a.

Ideological and Aesthetic Differences in Representation

Theme/Category	Sözcü	A Haber	Medyascope
Leader-centered representation	Erdoğan, opposition figures	Erdoğan, the state, the public	Commentators, experts
Crisis/tension framing	High	Moderate	Moderate
Oppositional/critical tone	Explicit	Closed	Neutral/analytical
Aesthetic manipulation	Strong dramatic emphasis	Official style / dense symbolism	Restrained visual interpretation

Table 3b.

Comparison of Concrete Visual Elements

Representational Element	Sözcü	A Haber	Medyascope
Political figures	Close-up portraits, face-centered framing	Erdoğan, the state, the public	Commentators, experts
Spatial framing	Courthouses, crowds, sites of crisis	Official buildings, crowds, podiums, sites of crisis	Studios, interview backdrops
Visual symbols	Flags, buildings, slogans	Flags, uniforms, microphones	Text-overlay visuals

Sözcü's (2025c) framing style foregrounds an explicitly oppositional position. Headlines such as "The Palace Is Shaken by This Allegation" and "Claim of the Year: A Meeting of 16 AKP Deputies Saying 'This Cannot Go On Like This'" call into question the ruling bloc's image of power and stability, and this tendency is reinforced through visual coding. The presentation of ruling figures in darker tones and opposition figures in brighter ones, for example, can be read as ideological markers that sharpen the distinction between "us" and "them." Such a dramatic representational mode corresponds closely to YouTube's preference for affective intensity and engagement and helps sustain an oppositional political frame.

A Haber's (2025c) YouTube visuals present a narrative that integrates nationalist discourse with visual and affective codes. Symbols such as the flag, the military, and state officials represent the unity of the nation-state coded as "us," while headlines invoking Erdoğan's authority support affective identification with the state. Crisis, attack, and victory are staged in dramatic form, addressing viewers through fear, anger, and national pride. The red-and-white color palette, together with categorical headlines such as "Teknofest Disturbed Athens," reinforces this affective intensity. Within this structure, the power and legitimacy of the state are aesthetically emphasized, and a collective sense of belonging

Figure 3.

Ideological Framing in YouTube Thumbnails



is reproduced.

Medyascope (2025c), by contrast, foregrounds critical and analytical interpretation rather than an explicitly partisan discourse. Its visual strategy can be read as a media language that invites viewers to develop their own interpretive stance. The use of commentator portraits against simple backgrounds and with direct eye contact suggests an effort to establish a more individualized intellectual mode of contact with the audience. Distanced from dramatic agitation, this approach recalls a tableau vivant aesthetic that privileges reflection and commentary. Analytical questions in headlines such as "At What Stage Is the Process?" and "Is the Old Political Equation Coming to an End?" open space for multidimensional evaluation rather than pushing viewers toward emotional extremes. In that sense, Medyascope positions viewers more as critical interpreters than as affectively mobilized subjects. This approach may be read as one form of journalism's search for a space of digital autonomy in Turkey (Ertuna & Aşık, 2025).

Within this framework, affective association functions less as a means of intensifying the distinction between "us" and "them" and more as a basis for encouraging curiosity, informed engagement, and reflective participation. Through its visual aesthetics, Medyascope makes visible a value-oriented mode of discourse structured around analytical distance and interpretive openness.

Taken together, the cases of Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope point to the importance of the interaction between algorithmic flow and political meaning production in the aesthetic design of news thumbnails.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that the differences among Sözcü, A Haber, and Medyascope are better understood as political strategies of representation than as simple aesthetic preferences. On YouTube, news thumbnails emerge at the intersection of platform imperatives and algorithmic flow. Digital news imagery therefore contributes to a media language shaped not only by the attention economy but also by institutional positioning at the level of ideology and discourse. As van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue, platformization indicates that news content is shaped by editorial decisions together with structural pressures such as clickability and user engagement. Aesthetic and narrative choices in news imagery thus reflect an ongoing tension between adaptation to the technical rules of digital environments and the preservation of editorial autonomy (Hartley et al., 2023; Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023). As visibility strategies on YouTube become increasingly organized around high engagement, dramatic composition, and affective intensity, journalism appears to develop a representational language that is more closely attuned to algorithmic incentives. Under such conditions, the public-information function of news becomes more closely tied to visual performance and digital visibility.

Papacharissi's (2015) concept of affective publics provides a useful framework for interpreting these patterns. News discourse appears to move away from a model grounded primarily in rational deliberation and toward representations of digital collectivities organized around affective response. The cases of Sözcü and A Haber show how emotions such as anger, threat, and pride circulate within a polarized media environment and reproduce distinctions between "us" and "them." Medyascope, by contrast, presents a different affective structure, one that preserves greater critical distance through analytical language and positions news through intellectual engagement rather than emotional intensity. The findings suggest that, under contemporary digital conditions, affective publics are increasingly intertwined with forms of continuity shaped by algorithmic flow.

Chouliaraki's (2006, 2008) concept of regimes of witnessing also offers a productive way of understanding the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of these affective representations. The dramatic pathos aesthetic found in Sözcü and A Haber produces a representational mode that addresses viewers through collective feeling, whereas Medyascope's more distanced tableau vivant aesthetic privileges reflective witnessing and analytical engagement. The analysis indicates that news imagery on platforms performs affective and political functions within regimes of digital visibility. This pattern points to a restructuring of news production away from information transfer alone and toward a practice increasingly organized around affect, visibility, and power, and more tightly articulated with the technical and emotional logic of digital platforms.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that news thumbnails on YouTube are produced within affective, aesthetic, and ideological structures shaped by platformization. Journalistic practices are increasingly reorganized

in line with the logic of algorithmic flow, affective continuity, and regimes of visibility. In the cases examined here, Sözcü adapts to this environment through polemic and tension, A Haber through narratives of national unity and threat, and Medyascope through a more distanced and analytical mode of presentation. The findings therefore illuminate not only media strategies but also broader transformations in public communication in Turkey.

The sharp “us/them” distinctions constructed by Sözcü and A Haber turn political polarization into affective communities reproduced in digital space, whereas Medyascope’s analytical language points to a limited yet still meaningful possibility for sustaining a more reflective mode of public engagement within the same ecosystem. At a broader level, epistemic value and objectivity in digital journalism appear increasingly pressured by affective performances optimized for algorithmic visibility. Under such conditions, the audience member is increasingly positioned less as a subject seeking rational information than as a participant who consumes and reproduces the emotional narrative of a community. This pattern also supports Nielsen and Fletcher’s (2023) argument that news organizations have partly lost their autonomy and become increasingly dependent on platform-defined regimes of visibility.

Medyascope’s case can be read as one example of the search for independent journalism emphasized by Ertuna and Aşık (2025), while actors rooted in traditional television, such as Sözcü and A Haber, illustrate how the digital environment creates a new field of competition and legitimacy within established media capital. In this sense, platformization carries the democratic potential of alternative journalism while at the same time institutionalizing journalistic visibility within an algorithmic regime organized around clickability and dramatic presentation.

The study’s main contribution lies in its multilayered analysis of political meaning production in digital news imagery through the combined use of Rodríguez and Dimitrova’s (2011) visual framing model, Papacharissi’s (2015) concept of affective publics, and Chouliaraki’s (2006, 2008) framework of aesthetic regimes, considered in relation to platform dynamics. The findings suggest that, particularly in politically contested contexts such as Turkey, affective representations call for renewed discussion of the boundaries of public information and ethical journalism.

Several limitations should also be noted. The analysis is confined to a specific one-week period, and longitudinal research across different news agendas or election periods would strengthen the broader relevance of the findings. Audience reception also remains outside the scope of the study. Future research could examine how users interpret these visuals and how they respond to them affectively. A broader analytical framework could also be developed by analyzing thumbnails together with video content and user comments, thereby offering a fuller account of the wider dynamics through which YouTube reshapes journalism.

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Hangout Films as Atmospheric Assemblage: Vibing with *Dazed and Confused*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the “hangout film” as an informal genre that privileges atmosphere, temporal flow, and character interaction over plot progression. It addresses a gap in genre scholarship by questioning narrative-centered classification models and proposing an alternative account of how hangout films are recognized and experienced. In film and media studies, it focuses on viewer engagement.

Design/methodology/approach: The study uses a qualitative single-case design centered on Richard Linklater’s *Dazed and Confused* (1993). It combines atmosphere-oriented aesthetic criticism with phenomenological description. Through close reading and a first-person lens, the analysis investigates how pacing, character interactions, cinematography, and sound co-produce the hangout atmosphere for the viewer.

Findings: The analysis shows that hangout films derive genre identity less from narrative formulas than from an emergent atmospheric assemblage generated through the interaction of form and reception. The “hangout vibe” functions not as background mood but as a shared, embodied process of affective attunement between film and viewer.

Research limitations/implications: Because the study is based on a single-film case and interpretive analysis, its claims are not generalizable. Future research could test this framework through comparative corpus studies, cross-cultural samples, and audience-oriented empirical methods.

Practical implications: The findings offer criteria for filmmakers, critics, and festival programmers by showing how pacing, ensemble interaction, and sensory design can be orchestrated to create engagement beyond plot-driven storytelling.

Originality/value: The study introduces “atmospheric assemblage” as a conceptual tool for rethinking hangout films and contributes an affect-centered perspective to genre theory by integrating aesthetics, phenomenology, and attunement.

Keywords: *Hangout Film, Atmosphere, Genre, Affect, Attunement*

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Introduction

A unique bond can occasionally emerge between a viewer and a film. This connection may arise for various reasons: a particular scene might evoke a personal memory, or a character may resonate by reflecting some aspect of the viewer's identity. In some cases, a film becomes meaningful simply because it offers a moment of pleasure or escape. Such instances reveal that the cinematic experience is shaped not only by aesthetic or narrative elements but also by its psychological resonance and emotional impact. Certain films can even make viewers feel as though they are spending pleasant time hanging out with their friends. These films are referred to as "hangout films." In a discussion of *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1959), director Quentin Tarantino explains (*Waterbucket*, 2007):

There are certain movies that you hang out with the characters so much that they actually become your friends. And that's a really rare quality to have in a film...and those movies are usually quite long, because it actually takes that long of a time to get past a movie character where you actually feel that you know the person and you like them...when it's over, they're your friends.

According to Tarantino, his first point about hangout films is that the characters' transformation into friends is a quality inherent to the film itself. However, what fundamentally makes a film a hangout film depends on the relationship established between the viewer and the film. In this sense, these films rely on both textual construction and the affective engagement they elicit during the viewing experience.

A survey of online articles and lists about hangout films reveals a recurring canon of key movies and directors. The most frequently cited examples are: *The Big Lebowski* (Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, 1998), *Dazed and Confused* (Richard Linklater, 1993), *Slacker* (Richard Linklater, 1991), *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks, 1959), *Before Sunrise* (Richard Linklater, 1995), *Everybody Wants Some!!* (Richard Linklater, 2016), *Friday* (F. Gary Gray, 1995), *Clerks* (Kevin Smith, 1994), *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (Quentin Tarantino, 2019), *Licorice Pizza* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2021), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jim Jarmusch, 2013), *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1985), *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989), *Napoleon Dynamite* (Jared Hess, 2004), *Boyhood* (Richard Linklater, 2014), *Diner* (Barry Levinson, 1982), *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1972), and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) (Berg, 2019; James Dewayne, 2024; Nielsen, 2022; Orthwein, 2017; Vasquez, 2022; Wessman, 2022; Whitenstall, 2022). Although they belong to different periods and genres, hangout films share certain qualities that invite their consideration as a cohesive group. Defining the hangout film as an "informal genre," Şensöz (2018, pp. 203–204) states that these films, which violate the "rules of classical narrative structure" and derive their strength from dialogue, focus on the "conversations that take place among characters in their everyday drift, lacking a specific goal." A hangout film, which challenges the concept of "genre," is "a work of immersion and close study of a character ensemble where you get the feeling of familiarity. As if you and the people on-screen are friends, enjoying the journey no matter where it takes you" (Nielsen, 2022). These films are also referred to as "slice of life" films. Free from a goal or

mission that drives the events of the story, these films can also be described as “a glimpse into life” (James Dewayne, 2024). These films, which occupy a distinctive position in terms of the viewing experience, possess a unique charm of their own: “The charm of hangout films—whether they are designed as such or have been retroactively tagged with the designation—comes from, well, simply hanging out in their worlds” (Vasquez, 2022).

It is significant to consider how these films draw viewers into the narrative world and how the lack of emphasis on plot allows attention to shift toward character interactions and the emotional experiences they share. On the other hand, the reasons behind grouping these films under the label of “hangout film” warrant further investigation. This article proposes a theoretical framework to understand hangout films not merely as a loose narrative genre but as a mode of atmospheric and affective engagement – an “atmospheric assemblage” – between film and viewer.

For a long time, film genres have been classified based on narrative structures, iconographic elements, and thematic conventions. Although hangout films may also be open to analysis in this way, these approaches tend to overlook the affective impact genres have on audiences. To determine a work’s genre, we should attend not only to its observable features but also to its affective impact, namely the atmosphere it produces. Employing the concepts of atmosphere and atmospheric assemblage, this study aims to investigate the following research questions: How do hangout films generate a distinctive emotional experience in viewers? What formal and affective characteristics define a film as a hangout film? And to what extent can the hangout film be approached as a cinematic genre (or subgenre)?

This study draws on recent developments in affect and atmosphere theory to explore how hangout films evoke immersive and mood-driven experiences. The theoretical framework of the study is built upon the work of several key theorists. The views of Sinnerbrink (2024), who draws attention to the environmental and collective aspects of atmosphere; Warner (2024), who defines atmosphere as a formal and affective whole, and Strpko (2024), who argues that the viewer can interact with the film through “sympathetic attunement,” have been analyzed. The approaches of theorists such as Hven (2022), Spadoni (2020), and Groves (2014), who view film not merely as a mental narrative but as an embodied experience, suggest that the viewer perceives the film as a lived world rather than evaluating it as a mere text. The creative path opened by Böhme’s atmospheric approach in the field of aesthetics has influenced the approaches of the aforementioned theorists as well as Christiansen (2019) and Andiloro (2023). This study seeks to examine the generic status of hangout films by analyzing the viewer’s embodied and affective engagement, framing this experiential mode through the theoretical lens of cinematic atmosphere. It focuses on how the formation of atmosphere and the construction of immersive worlds contribute to a recognizable film genre or modal identity, even if not formally codified. Building on Andiloro’s (2023, p. 560) claim that genres can be recognized through their atmosphere as a “wholistic affective and embodied experience,” this study investigates whether hangout films can be conceptualized in similar terms. Rather than being defined by plot or narrative conventions, hangout films may instead be characterized by a shared mood of vicarious presence and relational attunement.

The film analyzed in the study is *Dazed and Confused* (1993), written and directed by Richard Linklater, and the central argument of the study is that its recognition as a landmark hangout film stems from the atmosphere it generates. Accordingly, the study first addresses the taxonomic status of the hangout film. After questioning whether it can be evaluated within the context of genre theory, atmosphere theory is examined as a suitable framework for approaching the hangout film. Subsequently, a four-step approach has been adopted to analyze the atmosphere created by the film.

1. A Taxonomic Enigma: Defining the Hangout Film

While the term “hangout” refers to “a favorite place for spending time,” the expression “hangout film” denotes films that evoke the feeling of leisurely spending time with friends, characterized by aimless yet enjoyable relaxation. Hangout films are mostly found within American cinema, yet they can also emerge from various film genres or movements. While viewers and critics use the term to describe a particular viewing experience, the films most commonly cited as hangout examples tend to be strikingly similar. However, Silberman (2021) emphasizes that classifying hangout movies is not that straightforward:

First: what exactly is a ‘hangout’ movie? Is it a film genre? An aesthetic? An absence of a three-act plot maybe? A film that contains characters that you’d want to hang out with if they were real? Or is it just hanging out and watching an enjoyable film? The answer is: yes, it is. It’s all of those things and more than all of them too.

According to him, hangout films, though present across various genres like comedy, drama, or even horror, are often better understood as an aesthetic rather than a traditional genre. Classifying a group of films as a genre presupposes that this group possesses a specific set of shared characteristics that distinguish it from other genres. According to Turner (1999, p. 97), genre is “a system of codes, conventions, and visual styles which enables an audience to determine rapidly and with some complexity the kind of narrative they are viewing.” To assess whether the hangout film can be considered a genre, it is first necessary to clarify its recurring patterns and function.

Rick Altman’s semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach to genre can be adopted for this purpose (Altman, 1999, pp. 207–215). Altman introduces a tripartite approach to understanding film genres. The semantic approach defines a genre in terms of its observable features, such as the cowboys, horses, and gunfights conventionally associated with the Western. The syntactic approach examines the structural relationships and narrative patterns within a genre. The pragmatic dimension emphasizes the role of institutions (such as film studios) and audiences in shaping and defining genres (Altman, 1999).

Semantically, while classic genres typically feature distinctive iconographic elements, hangout films lack easily identifiable unique iconographies, as they are set in vastly different worlds (e.g., events in *Rio Bravo* unfold in a frontier jail, whereas *The Big Lebowski* is set in 1990s Los Angeles, and *Clerks* in a small convenience store). Syntactically, the only commonality overtly present in hangout films is the absence of strong teleology. A group of characters spends time together within a limited timeframe, and

the minor events they experience form the skeletal structure of the plot. Thematically, similar themes such as friendship, the youth experience, the meaning of everyday life, nostalgia, and the feeling of transience are present. However, these themes are not exclusive to hangout films and can be observed in other film types; therefore, mere thematic similarities are insufficient to constitute a distinct genre. Pragmatically, when evaluated from the perspective of the industry and audience, it is not easy to assert that the hangout film is an official genre category. Film studios and distributors have not yet been observed to label a film as “hangout.” Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the concept has gained a unique acceptance within cinema culture. The term hangout film is widely used, particularly among film critics and cinephiles, and has established itself in popular culture as a sub-cultural phenomenon. Despite its cultural prevalence, in a general sense, the hangout film cannot be considered a genre in the traditional understanding. On the other hand, as Altman himself states, genres are not predetermined, fixed categories. Genre classifications are not static; they evolve over time with audience perceptions and market dynamics.

In today’s dynamic transmedia environment, the concept of genre remains functionally critical. Freeman and Smith (2023) argue that, while genre-based approaches may have seen a decline in academic prominence recently, the necessity of genre has become increasingly evident, particularly within scholarly discourse. In a context where media convergence permeates all aspects of communication, audiences are fragmented across various platforms and channels, exhibiting complex consumption patterns. In the era of digital platforms, with their vast and fragmented architectures, genre continues to be an indispensable reference point for making sense of the contemporary media landscape (Freeman & Smith, 2023, pp. 1–2). Especially in an era of inter-genre hybridization of contemporary media, rethinking genres not as fixed categories but as emotional and experiential “intensities” can be fertile ground for research.

While the concept of genre offers a rich framework for cinema and media studies, it is also marked by contradictions and can even be considered “impossible.” As Tasker (2022) explains, the “impossibility” of genre stems from the question of how a specific genre can ever be fully known or defined. It is not feasible to comprehensively account for the multitude of texts and intertextual relationships that constitute a genre, nor to fully encompass the complex development of genres over time. Nevertheless, Tasker observes that genres “feel familiar” and are “intuitively knowable” (Tasker, 2022, p. 38). Viewers recognize certain patterns and effectively navigate the ontological ambiguities of genre. According to Tasker, genre analysis is useful not only for audiences but also for scholars, as it provides a way to make sense of numerous texts and to interpret them in reference to one another (Tasker, 2022, pp. 37–38). For these reasons, it is essential to introduce diverse perspectives to approach the hangout film (and other cinematic formations) as a genre. To substantiate this, it is first beneficial to outline the attributes that characterize the hangout film.

It can be argued that the most distinctive feature of hangout films is their loose narrative structure. These films typically avoid major dramatic conflicts, complex plots, and high-stakes climaxes, focusing instead on everyday, ordinary situations and privileging moments that might be characterized

as ‘uneventful.’ Characters might spend an evening together, share a conversation, idle away their time, or embark on small-scale adventures; yet all these moments feel like “the spaces in between events” (Orthwein, 2017) serving no explicit purpose or goal. A “languid, almost meandering pace” is cited as a hallmark of hangout films (Orthwein, 2017). Kevin Smith’s cult film *Clerks* (1994) depicts an ordinary day in the lives of two store clerks who spend their idle time engaging in casual conversations, while George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973) revolves around a group of teenagers driving around and chatting during a summer evening in 1962.

Hangout films avoid conventional narrative structures such as the classic three-act form, favoring instead a looser, character-driven progression. In these films, events unfold not through tightly plotted causality but through everyday interactions and the atmosphere surrounding the characters. While a narrative might still exist, it tends to remain subtle or secondary to mood and presence (Silberman, 2021). In hangout films, characters typically gather in everyday locations and engage in natural, spontaneous conversations rather than sharp dramatic exchanges. This approach creates a sense of normalcy for the viewer, enriching the characters’ world and immersing viewers in their lived experience.

According to director Carson Lund, who intends to make a hangout film with his 2024 film *Eephus*, the hangout film “is a film that prioritizes character interaction at the expense of forward plot momentum. It’s more about just enjoying, as a viewer, spending time with these people” (O’Falt, 2025). The personalities, interactions, and dialogues of the characters take center stage, while events remain secondary. The viewer is invited to become acquainted with the characters and to spend time with them. The camera often remains alongside the characters, observing their conversations, thereby creating a sense of the viewer ‘being present’ within the film rather than merely watching it. This characteristic contributes to the emergence of iconic characters within these films. Such films frequently feature characters that resonate with the audience as authentic or intimately familiar.

For a film to be designated as a hangout film, it is necessary for the viewer to like the film and to derive pleasure from spending time with its characters. Audiences who are drawn to these films often return to them repeatedly, much as one might seek regular reunions with friends whose company one enjoys. Hangout films are capable of establishing an implicit “experiential contract” with the viewer. This is not considered a standard criterion when it comes to genre. To classify a film within a conventional genre, its affective nature or the appeal of its characters can be irrelevant; its subject matter and/or formal characteristics are sufficient. In this regard, the particularity of the hangout film concept, can provide new perspectives in film analysis.

Hangout films cultivate a shared affective ground by presenting the audience with a relaxed, intimate, and familiar sense of “hanging out.” The reception of the genre, which is predicated on a quasi-informal social atmosphere, suggests that genre films are defined not merely by their narrative conventions but also by the emotional experience and holistic atmosphere they generate. Consequently,

it is pertinent to analyze hangout films within the context of atmosphere theory, a theoretical approach that has recently gained prominence in the fields of aesthetics and film theory.

2. Cinematic Atmosphere: The “In-Between” Experience

In recent years, film theory has increasingly foregrounded spectators' immediate bodily and emotional involvement in cinema, focusing in particular on affect and mood. Sinnerbrink (2024, pp. 227–228) highlights how the concept of affect in film theory has expanded significantly over the past two decades, moving beyond simply describing emotions to encompass bodily feelings, intense states, and even aesthetic forms. He identifies three main theoretical currents: “analytic-cognitivist representationalism,” which views affect as conventional bodily and emotional responses; “affect theory/film phenomenology,” which emphasizes a non-representational, impersonal sense of affect as autonomous bodily intensities; and “neo-phenomenology/extended affect approaches,” which extend affect beyond the subjective to manifest in objects, landscapes, and social environments. The latter approach suggests that affect can be not only ‘felt’ but also possess a quality that exists in the environment, surrounds us, and is collectively shared. This perspective, according to Sinnerbrink, paves the way for understanding moods and atmospheres.

The broadened understanding of affect, particularly its extension into the environment, directly informs the “atmospheric turn” in the humanities, which signifies a recent surge in scholarly interest in the concept of atmosphere (Griffero, 2019, 2021; Warner, 2024). According to Warner (2024, p. 12), this significant “turn” is underway in film theory, marking a return to rigorously defining cinematic atmosphere. Building on classical theorists like Jean Epstein, contemporary scholars, influenced by philosophers such as Gernot Böhme, are exploring the spatial and sensory aspects of film. This shift entails a renewed focus on atmosphere that highlights the immersive, pre-reflective contact between viewer and screen, prompting a reconsideration of cinematic engagement beyond narrative comprehension and allowing for more nuanced accounts of affective involvement and attunement.

Warner (2024) delineates the interconnectedness of cinematic “atmosphere,” “tone,” and “mood,” arguing that cinematic tone transcends mere authorial attitude by incorporating essential sensorial resonance from the sound-image. Mood is framed as a governing affective state, comparable to ‘*Stimmung*,’ that merges atmosphere and attunement, with Warner embracing the nuanced interplay between a film’s objective elements and the subjective experiences it fosters. Warner claims that atmosphere is the most inclusive of the three terms: “It is the overall stylistic and affective system in and through which film space acquires tonal qualities that express and acclimate us to a mediating mood, be it faint or conspicuous, gradual or instant” (Warner, 2024, p. 30).

Strpko (2024) argues for a revised understanding of mood in narrative cinema, suggesting that prevailing analyses have insufficiently accounted for the moods spectators bring to their viewing experiences. The author critiques models that primarily assess a film’s success by its ability to evoke an equivalent mood in the viewer. Instead, Strpko introduces “sympathetic attunement” to describe how viewers can be affectively invested in a film’s art mood without necessarily experiencing an identical

human mood. This perspective shifts the focus toward a more phenomenologically grounded account of the viewer's pre-existing dispositions and their interaction with the film's constructed mood.

Film narratology operates on the assumption that film viewing occurs solely through the mind. Hven proposes a model of film as an affective-experiential interaction (Hven, 2022). He argues that the relationship between the viewer and the narrative world is established not merely through the film text's signs or mental representations but through bodily perception and affective engagement. According to this approach, the diegesis emerges as a domain in which the viewer's cognitive and emotional investments are structurally integrated into the film experience. In this context, the narrative world is not a reflection of reality, but a distinct mode of existence shaped by the viewer's embodied experience (Hven, 2022). The film is not just a story to be watched, but an environment to be lived in and film scholarship can benefit from viewing films as enacted worlds that engage our embodied perception, rather than just texts to be read.

Spadoni (2020), who views atmosphere as a component of a film's narrative and aesthetic integrity, draws on Böhme's theories to position atmosphere as an "intermediate phenomenon" between the film and the viewer. Böhme (2017, pp. 11–24) proposes atmosphere as the central concept of a new aesthetics, aiming to capture the affective and embodied interaction between individuals and their environments. Atmospheres, according to Böhme, are spatially diffused moods that emerge from the interplay of environmental qualities and subjective experiences, bridging the divide between subject and object. In doing so, he helps us understand the dynamic and interactive nature of the film experience.

According to Spadoni, atmosphere is not merely something that exists within the film (like a background element), it is also something the viewer experiences and, co-produces (Spadoni, 2020). Atmosphere clings to everything in the film, from the set design to the costumes, and at the same time, it transfers to the viewer; it resides neither solely within the film nor solely within the viewer but emerges at the intersection of the two (Spadoni, 2020, pp. 10–12). In other words, "the space of the atmosphere is co-constituted by the perceiver – i.e., the film spectator" (Boer & de Roo, 2025, p. 16).

According to Groves (2014), cognitive film theory tends to regard the viewer and the film as isolated entities and, falls short in explaining the diversity of emotional responses among viewers. Cognitive theory often assumes that films "shape" or "direct" emotional responses in the viewer, which reduces all viewers to passive recipients. In contrast, affect theory argues that the boundaries between the viewer and the film become blurred during moments of emotional experience. The viewer ceases to be a separate subject observing the film from the outside and instead begins to exist in an emotional connection with it. The viewing experience transforms into a state of trance, operating through what Groves refers to as "affective rapport" between the viewer and the film.

Christiansen (2019) notes that the philosopher Gernot Böhme offers one of the influential definitions of atmosphere as an aesthetic concept, describing it as a key intermediary that reveals the co-presence of subject and object. What is significant about atmosphere, according to Böhme as cited

by Christiansen (2019, p. 2), is its experiential nature; the focus of atmospheric aesthetics, rather than being on what something represents, lies in how it becomes present. According to Warner (2024, p. 13) atmosphere is “a sensorial quality that diffusely pervades a film’s environments without necessarily being secondary to narrative and without being relegated to the background.” This insight aligns cinema-focused phenomenology with broader aesthetic debates, foregrounding the interplay between viewers’ embodied attention and the material textures of the screen world. According to Sinnerbrink (2024, p. 231), atmosphere serves as a “more encompassing term designating a dynamic relational phenomenon defined by the reciprocal interaction between embodied subject and material environment.”

As Christiansen (2019) argues with regard to literary works, a fictional piece is not merely composed of narrative plot and characters; it affects the recipient through the emotions, sensations, and world-building it evokes. He states that, “a genre, any genre, is an archive of atmospheres that taken together produce a distinctive cognitive environment, a particular way of thinking with literature (but happily across media)” (Christiansen, 2019, p. 10). This perspective allows for a clearer understanding of genre resemblances, revealing shared “background feelings” and subjective forms that transcend overt stylistic devices. Indeed, Christiansen suggests that “some genres... are often better captured through atmospheres” (2019, p. 10).

According to Andiloro, we can recognize genre not only through prominent narrative features, but also by sensing a text’s atmospheric background and relating it to other texts in the same genre. This process evokes a complex, holistic reaction in us—affectively and bodily (Andiloro, 2023, p. 562). Therefore, genres can be constructed and distinguished through narrative structures but also through the atmospheres they evoke in the audience. Andiloro’s framework helps convey that the “vibe” of a hangout film is not simply a passive quality but something that is actively co-created by the atmosphere of the movie and the embodied, affective response of the viewer. The feeling of hanging out is a result of this successful attunement. Drawing on Andiloro’s conceptualization of attunement, derived from Heidegger’s notion of *Stimmung*, it becomes possible to examine the hangout film as a genre, if it can indeed be considered one, in terms of viewers’ embodied and affective experience. By engaging bodily and emotionally with this distinct cinematic atmosphere, viewers enter a shared experiential space, recognizing hangout films not merely through narrative or thematic elements but through the holistic affective state—the attunement—they foster.

3. Methodology

It appears that there is a general consensus regarding the concept of the hangout film. However, analyzing hangout films across a wide range of genres would exceed the scope of this study; therefore, the analysis is limited to a single case. Richard Linklater’s 1993 film *Dazed and Confused*, one of the most frequently cited examples when discussing hangout films, has been selected as the subject of analysis. As Silberman (2021) emphasizes, “If you could only pick one film to describe the hangout movie, most people would pick ‘Dazed and Confused’.” Consistently ranking at or near the top of nearly

every hangout film list, it has even been described by Quentin Tarantino as “the greatest hangout movie ever made” (Ferrier, 2023).

This study employs a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, integrating aesthetic criticism with phenomenological description to provide a multi-faceted analysis of the film. The analysis is methodologically grounded in Andrew Klevan’s (2019) concept of “aesthetic criticism,” conducted specifically through the lens of atmosphere. As Klevan outlines in his text, this critical approach “prioritizes the evaluation of form and style,” aiming to foster a deeper appreciation of a work’s particular qualities and achievements by asking how its different elements come together to create a significant and intelligible experience (Klevan, 2019, pp. 409–410). Accordingly, this analysis offers a detailed account of how the film’s formal elements, including temporal rhythm, character interaction, and sensory design in cinematography and sound, operate together to generate a distinctive ‘hangout’ atmosphere. In this framework, atmosphere becomes the central aesthetic quality to be understood and appreciated, embodying Klevan’s call for a criticism that is responsive to the specific, experiential, and formal excellences of a work.

This methodological choice is deliberate, as an emergent and affective quality like atmosphere often eludes analyses centered on narrative progression or thematic decoding. Klevan’s approach, with its emphasis on particularity and close reading, provides the necessary tools to articulate how atmosphere is not merely a backdrop for the story but is itself a primary achievement of the film’s artistry. It moves the critical focus from ‘what’ the film is about to ‘how’ it feels to inhabit its world, moment by moment. The value of this method, therefore, lies in its capacity to trace the intricate relationships between disparate formal choices and demonstrate how they coalesce into a coherent, perceivable quality.

This study then employs a phenomenological description to articulate the subjective experience of engaging with the film. This approach is methodologically grounded in both the theory of atmosphere and Crotty’s (1998) conception of phenomenology as a return “to the things themselves.” In the context of the film analysis, the ‘thing itself’ is the cinematic work as a phenomenon that presents itself directly to consciousness. This phenomenological stance is particularly conducive to an analysis of cinematic atmosphere, as it prioritizes the felt sense of a film’s world over purely semiotic or ideological decoding.

Following this approach, the analysis privileges my own first-person engagement, tracing how the film’s formal strategies shape and modulate perception. Consequently, rather than confining the argument to a single dimension, the study elucidates how the aesthetic, affective, and structural layers of the film operate in conjunction. Through a multi-methodological approach, I aim to produce a rich, multi-faceted understanding of *Dazed and Confused* as a paradigmatic hangout film.

4. Findings: The Atmospheric Assemblage of *Dazed and Confused* as a Hangout Film

Dazed and Confused chronicles a single day in Austin, Texas, on the last day of school in 1976. The film focuses on the mundane events, graduation parties, and youthful rituals that unfold between graduating high school seniors and incoming freshmen. Instead of a distinct main character or dramatic plot, the film explores friendships, the search for identity, and the feelings of both freedom and uncertainty that come with adolescence through various characters.

A four-step approach was adopted to analyze the atmosphere generated by the film: (1) temporality and rhythm, examining how the film structures time and pacing; (2) character ensemble and interactions, considering how relationships and performances cultivate a particular mood; (3) aesthetic and sensory design, focusing on the construction of cinematography, music, and production design; and (4) viewer-film interaction, addressing the viewer's experience, emotional engagement, and responses during the act of viewing.

4.1. Temporality and Rhythm

The entirety of the film's events occurs within a single day, commencing on the morning of the last day of school, progressing through an evening party, and concluding at dawn. During this temporal span, the narrative lacks a concrete conflict requiring resolution or a definitive objective for the characters. The film effectively captures the liminal space of the final high school day, a complex atmosphere marked by both the emptiness of closure and the anticipation of what lies ahead. The film unfolds through multiple fragmented narrative lines, detailing such moments as seniors anticipating the hazing of freshmen, preparations for the party, and teenagers loitering around the Emporium, the pool hall, with scenes linked fluidly rather than structured around dramatic turning points.

Whereas traditional film analysis first seeks to comprehend the narrative—addressing the film's subject matter and the functioning of its plot—and subsequently focuses on how atmosphere is created to enhance this story, Hven (2022, p. 62) argues, conversely, that “the narrative content should itself be understood on the basis of its atmospheric qualities.” Thus, it is possible to assert that atmosphere is the primary and constitutive element and that the loose structure of the film's plot is precisely a means of creating this very atmosphere. We comprehend the film's story through its atmospheric qualities.

The party at the Moon Tower, serving as the film's resolution, functions less as a dramatic apex and more as an interactive space where all characters converge. The camera navigates through the crowd, engaging with various conversations and episodes: stoners engrossed in conspiracy theories, adolescents awkwardly attempting to drink beer, a girl playing the guitar and singing, a character commenting on the decades (“The 70's, oh my God, they obviously suck”), etc. A point-of-view shot is employed when prominent character Mitch wanders through the party, positioning the viewer as an individual similarly attempting to mingle within the party environment. The sole semblance of conflict arises from the discussion and subsequent rejection of the alcohol and drug waiver that the coach pressures Pink to sign. However, this interaction is never brought to a dramatic resolution; instead, the character's firm stance and life philosophy are foregrounded.

This one-day time frame provides integrity, yet its loose progression and lack of urgency create an affective rhythm within which the characters and the audience can settle. One reason *Dazed and*

Confused has become a cult film amenable to multiple viewings is its structure, which allows for immersion in its ambiance from any starting point. Rather than diligently following narrative logic, the audience can linger within the scenes, effectively savoring the “spaces between events.” This ‘languid’ temporal pacing constitutes a core characteristic of the hangout film aesthetic. The film integrates the vacant and free time of youth, unencumbered by responsibility, thereby providing the audience with an experience of temporal immersion rather than adherence to a traditional storyline. As Hven (2022, p. 41) emphasizes, “among the most attractive features of cinema is indisputably its ability to embed its audience in atmospheric worlds or affectively charged virtual environments” and this is successfully implemented in *Dazed and Confused*.

4.2. Character Ensemble and Interactions

The film’s character dynamics, comprising a diverse ensemble, serve as an additional indicator of its hangout film nature. The film foregoes a single protagonist, instead offering a sprawling character mosaic composed entirely of young individuals, with over twenty distinct names introduced. Common typologies prevalent in American youth films, such as jocks, nerds, attractive girls, and bullies, are all present, with the film maintaining a neutral stance. Illustrative examples include Mitch, who undergoes a process of acceptance by an older peer group; Pink, a football player hesitant to commit to his coach; the perpetually observant trio of nerd friends, Mike, Tony, and Cynthia; Wooderson, an older character who nonetheless associates with high school students; and Slater, the omnipresent stoner. Through a distributed focus, a microcosm of youth is established, thereby affording the audience opportunities for engagement with diverse characters. The viewer navigates the various social configurations as an invisible peer, which in turn cultivates a sense of collective belonging to the overarching group.

Hangout films are often structured around the principle that it is the sympathetic and interesting characters who ultimately save the day. Quentin Tarantino (*Waterbucket*, 2007) remarked on this, stating that in these films, it “takes a long time... to feel that you know the person and you like them,” thereby highlighting their typically long and highly interactive nature. *Dazed and Confused* achieves this through minor interactions that reveal the characters’ idiosyncrasies and the authentic sense of friendship among them. The dialogue is notably “organic,” heavily featuring everyday conversations and casual banter. Seemingly trivial discussions, such as girls debating gender roles in *Gilligan’s Island* in a restroom, Tony recounting a strange dream about Abraham Lincoln to Mike, dating gossip, and inside jokes, contribute significantly to the film’s atmosphere. These conversations do not serve any plot function; however, they immensely enrich our understanding of who these characters are and foster a sense of intimacy.

As mentioned previously regarding the party setting, there’s a prevailing sense that the viewer is part of these friendly exchanges. Additionally, the incorporation of memorable lines is instrumental in the film’s acquisition of cult status and its identification as a hangout film. As a result, the central element of the character dynamics is the cultivation of camaraderie, which extends beyond the diegetic world to

encompass the audience. Such encompassing exemplifies what Spadoni (2020, p. 11) described: the atmosphere “wraps in the other direction” to include viewers. The film subtly encourages a collective endorsement of all characters. As one commentator puts it, “the M.O. [Modus Operandi] of the hangout movie... is a preference for vibe and character over pure narrative momentum” (Forrester, 2024).

4.3. Aesthetic and Sensory Design

Beyond narrative structure and character interactions, the film’s aesthetic choices, spanning both visual and auditory registers, substantially intensify its hangout atmosphere. The form and content of the film cohere harmoniously. Reflecting the spirit of the era through its texture, the film naturalistically constructs its time and space. The use of a distinctly warm color palette in the cinematography serves to visually encode the film’s nostalgic and mellow mood. The film grain (being shot on 35mm) adds to the period feel; as one critic noted, “the fabrics and colors feel lived in, with muted film grain and so much denim,” capturing “an atmosphere that feels radically authentic” (Land, 2023). This visual authenticity serves to cultivate a sense of nostalgia by transporting the viewer to a setting approximately two decades earlier than the film’s own. The greater the credibility of the diegetic world, the more accessible it becomes for the audience to comfortably immerse themselves within it. The same can be said for production and costume design. Everything, from cars to accessories, interiors to clothing (as previously indicated by the Land’s [2023] reference to denim), was meticulously designed to align with the spirit of the era. The world created by these tangible details significantly contributes to the film’s atmosphere. It is plausible to assert that the film conveys a sense of realism even to those who did not live through that period or have never visited the USA. All these elements collectively enable the film to become a convincing time capsule on an affective level.

The camera work is predominantly deliberate and observational. Linklater’s frequent employment of medium shots and two-shots foregrounds the ensemble cast, placing a distinct emphasis on the dynamics of group interaction rather than individual action. However, as noted in the aforementioned sequence of Mitch navigating the party, the film also employs tracking shots that move in tandem with the characters. For instance, a slow tracking shot follows Wooderson, Pink, and Mitch as they enter the pool hall. This shot serves a dual purpose: it not only showcases their camaraderie but also acquaints the audience with the setting and its peripheral characters. The film’s editing rhythm is fluid, a pacing that facilitates the use of such long takes.

One of the most salient and critically acclaimed aspects of *Dazed and Confused* is its soundtrack, which Linklater himself refers to as “the major element of the movie” (Linklater, 2015). From Aerosmith to KISS, Deep Purple to Black Sabbath, the hits featured in the film transcend mere background music; they constitute the lifeblood of the film’s emotional resonance. Aerosmith’s *Sweet Emotion* plays during the film’s opening, initially accompanying a slow-motion shot of an orange sports car cruising through the school parking lot, followed by sequential depictions of the main characters socializing at school. The song’s relaxed and groovy tone foreshadows the film’s languid pacing. Alice Cooper’s *School’s Out* encapsulates the euphoria and liberation experienced by youth as the final school bell rings and they exit the premises. As the party concludes in the early morning, Lynyrd Skynyrd’s

melancholic and serene *Tuesday's Gone* simultaneously signals the film's impending denouement and the youths' farewell to a certain phase or experience. Throughout the entire film, music is pervasive, serving to smooth temporal jumps and scene transitions. This musical presence reinforces a sense of continuously lived time, thereby creating a seamless cinematic experience. According to Sinnerbrink (2024, p. 238), atmosphere theory questions the rigid separation between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, suggesting that sound operates more as an expressive element that shapes a film's mood than as a simple narrative device. In this view, soundscaping blends musical, ambient, and emotive elements, making sound central to a film's atmospheric experience. It is possible to observe a similar dynamic in *Dazed and Confused*, particularly evident in scenes where the film's use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound intertwines. A notable instance occurs as Wooderson, Pink, and Mitch enter the Emporium in slow motion, accompanied by Bob Dylan's *Hurricane* playing in the background. This non-diegetic music subsequently transitions into diegetic sound, becoming the song heard playing within the pool hall as the characters interact in the space. A comparable dynamic is evident with War's *Low Rider*: the track commences as non-diegetic music and subsequently transitions into a diegetic element, heard as the characters listen and sing along to it on the car radio.

4.4. Intimacy, Attunement, and "Vibing"

Hangout films such as *Dazed and Confused* have the potential to cultivate a participatory mode of spectatorship. As previously examined, through its multi-character structure, camera movements, open compositions, and conversational tone, the film subtly positions the viewer as an insider. It breaks down the viewer-screen barrier without ever needing to resort to blatant forms of audience address. Consequently, a form of viewership characterized by empathetic attunement and facile identification emerges.

My own viewing process of *Dazed and Confused* illustrates a dynamic viewer-film interaction, one defined by the emotional responses and profound sense of familiarity that the act of rewatching provokes. Tarantino's statement regarding the film—"every time you watch it, every three years or four years, the characters are like your friends, and it's just like you're hanging out with them again, seeing your old friends" (Ferrier, 2023)—is also applicable to my own viewing experience. The practice of re-engaging with the film at least once annually underscores the profound emotional attachment I have established, primarily with its characters. It can be argued that my perceived equal distance from each character originates from the film's balance between subjective immersion and objective observation. The film occasionally positions itself closely to certain characters, allowing for their subjective perspectives to be witnessed. This technique casts the audience in the role of a group participant, whose perspective shifts from focusing on the emotions of one friend to appreciating the collective dynamic from a slight remove. However, this is analogous to briefly engaging with some individuals at a party in real life, after which one naturally desires to continue interacting with others. While I identify with the observational and ironic perspective of the film's nerdy trio, Cynthia, Mike, and Tony, I also feel an affinity for the other, more popular teenagers, as I find their sincerity and attitudes to be authentic.

Furthermore, a notable sense of mutual understanding and empathy exists among the cliques within the film. This element reinforces the distinctive engagement cultivated not with a single protagonist, but with the ensemble cast as a whole—a defining characteristic of the hangout film.

A moment of notable sincerity occurs when Mitch, upon returning home, offers a transparent lie to his mother; her decision to indulge him, despite her obvious awareness, is a nuanced touch. The film eschews the clichéd adolescent-family conflict prevalent in the teen genre, opting instead for a more authentic and intimate interaction. The narrative emphasizes that the adolescent's all-night adventure is not about reckless peril but about growth. This approach enabled me to experience the film through shifting positionalities, at different moments feeling like a friend, a younger sibling, a parent, or a mentor. The result was a multi-layered empathic engagement, an experience I have rarely had with traditionally structured teen films.

Although *Dazed and Confused* is a fixed and unmodifiable work of art, it affords viewers a sense of agency in their engagement. Because the plot is less pronounced, the viewer's gaze can wander without losing the main narrative thread. Consequently, attending to background characters and peripheral details, as in my own viewing experience, becomes an integral part of my enjoyment of the film. For instance, vignettes such as a teenager attempting to light his cigarette amidst the chaos of Mike and Clint's fight, Sabrina's shy glance when she is unable to flick a bottle cap as the other girls do, and Wooderson's bragging about the technical details of his car, are not only memorable and pleasant details from the viewing experience but also lend the film a profound sense of verisimilitude.

As Andiloro (2023, p. 562) emphasizes, Martin Heidegger's concept of "Stimmung", which emerges from the interaction between human beings and their surrounding world, offers a compelling framework for understanding the mechanics of an atmosphere-centered theory of genre. Translated into English as "mood" or "attunement," this concept provides valuable insight into the viewing experience of a hangout movie. Rather than experiencing an atmosphere passively, we actively "attune" ourselves to it. Whenever I sit down to watch *Dazed and Confused*, I am drawn back into its meandering flow of an aimless summer evening, and by sinking into its unhurried rhythms I rediscover what it feels like to be young and free with nowhere particular to go. I become immersed in the film's rhythm, in the texture of the characters' dialogue, and in the emotional undercurrents that run throughout. The result is an immersive slice-of-life atmosphere that feels like being there with the characters, our bodily mood tuning itself to the film's until the boundary between "us" and "the film" softens. What links such films under the same genre is not a shared plot structure but rather their ability to generate comparable attunement experiences through recognizable atmospheres.

4.5. Atmospheric Convergences Across Hangout Films

It is possible to argue that the findings presented in the analysis section apply to many of the hangout films mentioned in the Introduction. In line with Hven's (2022) proposal, interpreting narrative as a derivative of atmosphere is explanatory not only for *Dazed and Confused* but also for the structural logic of hangout films. In films with low plot density, such as *American Graffiti*, *Diner*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Clerks*, *Before Sunrise*, and *Everybody Wants Some!!*, narrative energy concentrates in the

ordinary flow of events, spatial circulation, and temporal lingering. In films unfolding within compressed time frames—one day, one night, or one weekend—strategies of loose rhythmic construction are clearly observable.

Hangout films also share a common texture in terms of ensemble structures and character interaction. Films such as *Slacker*, which follows Austin's offbeat characters in a loosely connected flow, *Friday* and *Do the Right Thing*, which foreground everyday tensions in neighborhood spaces, and *Easy Rider*, which centers on hippies driven by desires for freedom and rebellion, position the viewer in an oscillation between following characters and becoming an unseen member of their social group. What comes to the fore is not eventfulness, but participation in conversation, everyday micro-crises, and contingent encounters.

Tarantino's emphasis on developing intimacy by spending time with characters in hangout films helps explain their rewatchability and the formation of cult status. Whenever I revisit a favorite hangout film—such as *Dazed and Confused*, *The Big Lebowski*, or *Napoleon Dynamite*—I find myself undergoing a process of attunement. That recurring experience suggests that hangout films generate recognition through recurrent forms of embodied social proximity, where viewers are with characters rather than merely watching them.

As noted above, aesthetic and sensory design constitutes another defining feature of hangout films. Period texture, soundtrack curation, fluid editing, and transitions between diegetic and non-diegetic sound function as the structural supports of their atmospheric integration. These elements, evident in films such as *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, or *The Big Lebowski*, operate as indispensable affective engines. They shape the generic configuration of hangout films and, in doing so, generate comparable regimes of attunement.

In accordance with these considerations, hangout films become more discernible as a category precisely through the attunement they invite. Thus, we might say hangout films form a modal genre defined by atmosphere: they are recognizable by the holistic feel they evoke in audiences. This feel is co-created by the viewer's affective response. As Andiloro (2023, p. 562) notes, we respond to a genre's atmosphere affectively and bodily, and this reaction allows us to link one film's vibe to another of its kind.

Conclusion

The term "hangout film" has gained currency among critics and cinephiles to designate a loosely defined mode of filmmaking. One reason this article is significant is the apparent lack of prior academic studies specifically addressing this subject. While hangout films can encompass a variety of genres, they are unified by a shared ethos. This shared ethos reflects a cinematic approach that prioritizes atmosphere and character interactions over narrative structure. Accordingly, these films tend to engage viewers through affective immersion rather than plot development. This article has argued that films are

not only narratives to be decoded but also embodied, emotional experiences that can dissolve the boundary between the on-screen world and its audience.

Although it is important to examine hangout films in terms of narrative structures or character qualities, this study aims to conceptualize these films as atmospheric assemblages. Hangout films provide a rich case for the cinematic application of atmosphere theory, constituting an affective generic constellation that audiences approach not only for narrative but also for a specific feeling and experience. The findings indicate that hangout films are better understood not through taxonomic criteria alone, but through a relational model of cinematic experience. In line with Böhme's (2017) and Spadoni's (2020) account of atmosphere as an "in-between" phenomenon, and with Warner's (2024) expanded view of atmosphere as the film's holistic stylistic-affective system, "hangout-ness" emerges at the intersection of textual design and spectator attunement. This also supports Hven's (2022) account of the experiential quality of diegesis and Groves' (2014) concept of affective rapport. The film is not interpreted merely as a narrative object; it is inhabited as an affective environment. From this perspective, hangout films offer a concrete case for theorizing genre through embodied co-presence rather than plot architecture.

Within genre theory, then, the hangout film can be approached, in Altman's (1999) terms, as a genre formation characterized less by semantic or syntactic regularity than by atmospheric and pragmatic coherence. This claim is consistent with Tasker's (2022) argument about the productive "impossibility" of genre. It redefines genre as a dynamic and negotiable process. What links hangout films is not a fixed iconography or a shared narrative grammar, but a recurrent structure of affective invitation that organizes the possibility of "being with" characters, spaces, and temporal drift.

The coalescence of the film's textual attributes and spectatorial experience generates an atmospheric assemblage that defines it as a hangout film. In this sense, the hangout film emerges not from formal elements alone but from the relational intensities that constitute its atmosphere. Thus, the "hangout film" may be fruitfully understood as a genre grounded in atmospheric assemblage, where what binds texts together is less a narrative formula than a shared affective resonance.

A screenwriter or director can use all the right ingredients to create a hangout film. However, it is the viewer who knocks on the door of that film, takes a seat in the empty chair next to the characters, and feels like a part of that environment. Without this personal and affective engagement, even the best-written film may become merely something watched and quickly left behind. For instance, while some viewers may find it easy to form a connection with the characters in *The Big Lebowski*, others may perceive them merely as strange and exaggerated figures. Although the film's textual features remain the same, the affective engagement of these viewers differs. For the former, the film is more likely to be experienced as a hangout film, for the latter, it is not. Accordingly, future research can extend this discussion through spectator-centered methods, such as reception studies and cross-cultural comparison. It may also test whether patterns of attunement recur across different national cinemas.

Another direction for future research is to investigate the hangout film as an "experiential genre." Akin to Linda Williams's (1991) concept of "body genres," which groups films such as pornography,

horror, and melodrama that, despite different content, elicit similar corporeal responses in spectators, hangout films could be defined by the distinctive sense of relaxation and companionship they cultivate. To this end, it may be useful to employ an emotional lexicon that includes culturally specific concepts such as the Danish notion of “hygge” and the Dutch sense of “gezelligheid.”

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Exploring News Coverage of Education: A Case Study of Turkish News Portals

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Abstract

The media holds the potential to play a pivotal role in facilitating a robust communication process within education policy debates. When effectively implemented, this communication process enables the media to contribute to shaping public opinion and conveying the demands of students and parents to decision-makers. Reciprocally, the perspectives of policymakers can be disseminated through the media to all stakeholders within the educational sphere. However, this assumption relies on an idealized environment where the primary objective of news media is to inform the public, and where society places a high degree of trust in the news organizations it follows. The primary objective of this study is to examine the coverage of education-related news in the media. The methodological framework is grounded in content analysis. Considering the transformations driven by the rapid evolution of digital journalism over the last decade, major news portals operating in Turkey were selected for the sample. The selection of these portals was based on criteria including web traffic, political orientation, and ownership structures. The sample comprises 9119 education-related news items and columns published across ten Turkish news portals (birgun.net, cumhuriyet.com.tr, haberturk.com.tr, hurriyet.com.tr, milliyet.com.tr, sabah.com.tr, sozcu.com.tr, yeniakit.com.tr, yenicaggazetesi.com.tr, yenisafak.com) during the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. The study seeks to answer the main research question: "How is education represented in digital news portals in Turkey?" The overall results indicate that routine news reports constitute the vast majority of the sampled content, whereas opinion pieces and investigative articles regarding education remain limited. Furthermore, the data reveals a rapid proliferation of clickbait-style texts and SEO-driven content. This trend appears to be contaminating the content of education news and posing a significant threat to quality journalism.

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Introduction

The historical background of education is as old as the history of humanity. Throughout history, people's need for education has been met through informal and formal means, primarily by their parents, their immediate environment and teachers. However, it was not possible for formal education to spread to all layers of society until industrialization and modernization of societies. With the development of industrialization, the need for education has increased individually and socially in a multidimensional way in the axis of the understanding that knowledge is power, and school-based education has spread to all layers of society (Lufer, 1989).

From an individual perspective, education serves vital functions and purposes, including the discovery and cultivation of individuals' talents and skills, thereby addressing their psychological, social, and material needs. From a social perspective, education fulfils crucial functions and purposes, such as promoting social justice, ensuring the continuity of social culture, facilitating effective communication within society, and strengthening society scientifically and economically (Portelli & Menashy, 2019). Due to both the impact and the increasing importance of these functions, governments, families and individuals are spending more money, time and effort on education. The demand for education, the duration of education, and the increase in its dissemination to the masses have continued rapidly until today. The process of compulsory education, which originated during the Ottoman modernization period, continued into the Republican era. Compulsory schooling, implemented as a five-year period until 1997, was extended to eight years in 1997 and to twelve years in 2012. In addition to the expansion of compulsory education, factors such as improved accessibility to schools through urbanization, the rising quality of education, and the increased potential for achieving higher social status and income through schooling have boosted enrollment rates (Bakış et al., 2009; Gökşen et al., 2006; Tansel, 2002). According to statistical studies, in the case of Turkey, between the 2007-08 school year and the 2023-24 school year, the enrolment rate in primary and secondary education was above 90%, while at the secondary level, this rate increased from 70% to 88%. At the higher education level, the number of students increased from 21% to 42% (Ministry of National Education, 2024, p. 1). Another study shows that in higher education, the number of students increased from over 5 million to over 7 million between the school years of 2012-13 and 2023-24 (Council of Higher Education, 2023). The rise in enrolment has further increased the need for news and commentary on education-related developments and has raised the potential for education to become one of the most important issues on the political and media agendas. These changes necessitate the expectation of more informative and in-depth news and commentary on education from news organizations.

People in decision-making positions regarding education policies may think that they are fulfilling the expectations of students and their parents. To meet these expectations in a qualified way, a strong communication process about education needs to be ensured. The media has a potentially powerful role at this point. When the communication process is conducted properly, the media can help shape

public opinion and reflect the wishes of students and their parents to decision-makers. Similarly, the opinions of decision-makers can be conveyed to all actors in the world of education through the media (Baker, 1994). By means of an education-oriented communication process, it may be possible to negotiate the policies developed in relation to education within a broad social framework. In this sense, it is of great importance that developments, innovations or changes in education are presented in depth in the media agenda. Thus, informative and guiding media content related to education will have positive effects for students and their parents. However, it is difficult to say that the reality of education is always fully and accurately reflected by current communication processes. Instead of presenting educational content in a holistic, accurate and objective manner, media organizations may pursue subjective goals and instrumentalize education for their own purposes (MacMillan, 2002).

A general review of the studies on how education-related issues and events are covered in the media in Turkey reveals prominent results. Accordingly, the number of news reports on education is insufficient; the news content fails to inform the public in depth; the media organization in which the news is published fails to achieve objectivity due to its ideological stance; and the journalists, who prepare the news coverage and comments, are not sufficiently equipped and lack expertise in the field of education (Berkant & Cömert, 2013; Demirci, 2002; Taşdemir & Kuş, 2011; Yaylacı & Beldağ, 2018; Yüce & Çoban, 2019). Although these results point to important problems, the scope of the studies conducted so far is narrow and mostly covers research periods determined on a single event or subject. This article comprehensively addresses the issue of education in digital news portals in Turkey. As in previous studies, the focus of the study is not on a single topic related to education (e.g. “teachers” or “curriculum”); instead, all news texts published on education were analysed with a holistic approach, covering all components of education such as students, parents, teachers, curricula, educational administrators and policy makers in the field of education, regardless of subject. This research aims to reveal how education is covered by the Turkish news media and to explore the impact of profit-oriented news content on education coverage. The study seeks to answer the main research question: "How is education represented in news portals in Turkey?"

Studies examining the historical background of education-related news in Western countries show that education is a field that is often overshadowed compared to other types of news. Although there was an increase in the number of news reports on education after 1950, it was observed that education did not receive the same attention as news reports on politics, sports, health, science and crime. Since the 1980s, it can be argued that the visibility of education-related news in the media has increased as education started to be included in political issues (Shine, 2019).

When we focus on the present day and Turkey, despite the great potential of the education sector and the fact that “education” is presented as the solution to all problems in most discussions, it is difficult to say that the news about education in the media is sufficient in quantitative and qualitative terms. The studies conducted on education coverage show that education-related content in the media is mainly intensified when secondary, high school and university exams are on the agenda. As the agenda moves away from these exam calendars, the amount of education news decreases (Demirci,

2002). In addition, when internationally respected exams, such as the PISA test, present poor data for a country, it is seen that issues related to education in that country can be visible on the news agenda, albeit temporarily (Shine, 2019). The lack of media attention to education is a contradiction not only in Turkey but also in other countries around the world. For example, according to Mencher (2003), media attention to sports competitions organized at universities in the USA is higher than media attention to educational issues that concern millions of young people.

When the academic literature on education coverage in Turkey is examined, it can be stated that the national press does not adequately and accurately inform the audience about educational developments. Taşdemir and Kuş (2011) examined how the curricula changed in 2004 were represented in newspapers. In the study, it is stated that the change in education programs is reflected with superficial information. According to the studies of Yaylacı and Beldağ (2018) and Berkant and Cmert (2013), it was revealed that the coverage of education in newspapers is both insufficient in number and far from objectivity. Similarly, Yce and Çoban (2019) emphasized that news about education in newspapers is generally published on the inside pages and in small sizes, and educational issues that concern the whole society are not often covered on the front pages.

The problems in education news coverage are not limited to the superficiality of news texts. For example, according to Uygun (2012), news coverage of teachers' issues is mostly far from the expertise of educators and is ideologically biased. Çetin and Demirkasımođlu (2015) and Levent and Çayak (2018) claimed that unethical behaviors of teachers and educational administrators are intensively reported in the press, while their ethical behaviors or achievements are rarely reported. In Altun and Kirit's (2005) study, it is emphasized that school administrators are generally presented with a negative image in the press, while positive news about administrators in the field of education are rarely found in news content. Analyzing how teachers are represented in the Turkish press, Kahveci and Paksoy (2019) state that positive news stories about teachers are available in the press but negative news items are more frequent. In the study, it is claimed that even in negative incidents that are not related to the teaching profession, the coverage emphasizes that the perpetrators of the incidents are teachers, and ideological bias is remarkable in general news about education. Contrary to its importance, education has not been able to produce an area of specialization in the field of journalism to which a sufficient level of academic research has been directed. There are a certain number of studies that contribute to the field at the international level (Gerbner, 1967; MacMillan, 2002; Shine, 2018, 2020; Shine & O'Donoghue, 2013). In Turkey, on the other hand, there is no research focusing specifically on education coverage except for two studies by Dağtaş and nal (2019a, 2019b).

The main purpose of this study is to understand how education is represented in news portals in Turkey. To elaborate the main research question mentioned in the Problem section above, the study aims to answer the following sub-research questions (SRQs):

SRQ1: What is the general distribution of education-related content on news portals and what is the general tone of the texts?

SRQ2: What is the pattern of education-related news coverage in terms of text type and story focus?

SRQ3: How do profit-oriented practices like clickbait, advertorial and SEO techniques influence education news coverage?

Before answering these questions, it would be useful to explain the sampling and methodological framework of the research.

1. Method

To answer the research questions of the study, method of content analysis is adopted. Content analysis is a versatile research method that can be used qualitatively and quantitatively. It is frequently preferred for analyzing various texts and transcripts of speeches, as well as for analyzing the meanings carried by visuals, graphics and even non-verbal behaviors or messages (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015). Although the qualitative aspect of content analysis is a debated topic, the quantitative part is based on the interpretation of symbols and concepts in the text by expressing them quantitatively (Koçak & Arun, 2006). It is important to adhere to the method in determining the implicit messages and symbols other than the apparent meanings in the texts analyzed using content analysis and for the coders to work in an overlapping manner to eliminate the problem of objectivity. Nevertheless, encountering differences in interpretation during the application of content analysis does not jeopardize the principle of objectivity. The important point is that the method and the categories and codes created for content analysis are followed (Koçak & Arun, 2006).

In this study, news articles and columns about education in Turkey were analyzed using quantitative content analysis method. The analysis process focused on three aspects, namely the genre of the content and the portal on which they were published, the main topics (themes) covered in the texts, and the general impression created by the texts. Thus, news and opinion articles on education were evaluated in a multidimensional way in a wide sample and time interval.

The textual analysis sample of the study consisted of news portals. Over the last two decades, printed newspapers have been steadily losing circulation, while the power of digital journalism has been growing with the impact of social media. In this context, the study sampled the seven Turkish news portals with the highest traffic in 2021, according to Alexa (2021) data. An analysis of their general political leanings reveals that, with the exception of sozcu.com.tr, these portals (namely haberturk.com.tr, hurriyet.com.tr, milliyet.com.tr, sabah.com.tr, yeniakit.com.tr, and yenisafak.com.tr) maintain editorial policies aligned with the ruling government. To ensure a more balanced and politically representative sample, three additional portals known for their openly oppositional stances (birgun.net, cumhuriyet.com.tr, and yenicaggazetesi.com.tr) were purposefully included (Brown, 2016). In this framework, news texts and opinion articles published in 10 news portals on education constitute the sample of this study.

The sample consists of 36 months, spanning from 2020 to 2022. During most of 2020 and 2021, education was conducted via distance learning, which significantly increased its visibility in the media. Selecting these years allows for an analysis of how education was represented in news coverage during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent return to normalization. For a news text or a column to be included in the research sample, it must meet the following two criteria:

1. The text must be published in 2020, 2021 and 2022 and on selected news portals,
2. The focus of the text must be on education (a concept or topic related to education must be mentioned in the title or the lead).

The news texts and commentaries selected for the sample were analyzed by quantitative content analysis method. Content analysis categories and codes were created for the analysis. In order to do this, firstly, the research questions were utilized, and then the categories and codes were created through the literature review and the pilot study on news items related to education. Since content analysis allows an inductive approach, it was possible to create new categories and codes from the data during the coding period (Neuman, 2006).

Inter-coder reliability was tested on 500 sampled texts coded by four independent researchers. Following the framework of Miles and Huberman (1994), where reliability is defined as the ratio of agreements to the sum of agreements and disagreements, the minimum acceptance level was set at 70% (Bryer, 2023). The coding data were processed using the ReCal2 web-based service (Freelon, 2024), ensuring that inter-coder consistency reached at least the 70% requirement across all categories. After the coding of the categories was completed, the results were quantified through frequency analysis and percentage distributions.

2. Findings

2.1. Distribution and overall tone of the texts

Texts containing the word “education” in news articles and columns published in 10 news portals in Turkey in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were examined. As a result of the analysis, a total of 9119 texts that met the research sampling criteria were identified and included in the analysis. When analyzing the frequency of these texts, Habertürk and Sabah are the first two portals with the most intensive coverage of education. The least two are Cumhuriyet and BirGün. The numerical distribution and their general tone according to all news portals in the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Distribution of the texts according to their general tone

News portals	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Total
haberturk.com.tr	2140 (78,3%)	553 (20,3%)	39 (1,4%)	2732
sabah.com.tr	977 (58,6%)	673 (40,5%)	15 (0,9%)	1665
yeniakit.com.tr	948 (85,1%)	153 (13,8%)	13 (1,1%)	1114
milliyet.com.tr	811 (81,5%)	155 (15,6%)	28 (2,8%)	994
hurriyet.com.tr	669 (69,2%)	278 (28,8%)	20 (2%)	967
sozcu.com.tr	301 (63,6%)	10 (2,1%)	162 (34,2%)	473
yenicaggazetesi.com.tr	154 (50%)	66 (21,3%)	90 (28,7%)	310
yenisafak.com	160 (52,6%)	123 (40,6%)	21 (6,8%)	304
cumhuriyet.com.tr	175 (58,3%)	20 (6,7%)	107 (36%)	302
birgun.net	113 (43,8%)	18 (6,9%)	127 (49,3%)	258
Total	6448 (71,2%)	2049 (22,6%)	562 (6,2%)	9119

According to the results obtained, there are significant differences in the number of texts according to the news portals. This data alone should not lead us to conclude that the news websites publish more content place more importance on education. Especially news portals such as Habertürk and Sabah, which publish the highest number of contents, are much more active and content-rich news websites in general. In these news sites, some news items can be changed, updated and re-published throughout the day. This may increase the number of news items. On the other hand, in terms of the number of clickbait/SEO news, it is seen that these news portals are the top two media organizations as well. Sabah and Habertürk news websites published majority of the clickbait/SEO news content accessed in the sample. BirGün and Cumhuriyet news websites, which publish the least amount of educational content, did not publish any clickbait/SEO news. At this point, the low number of education news reports does not mean that these news portals do not value education.

Table 1 also reveals the general tone of education-related content. In the analysis, 6448 of the news texts did not contain any result that would create a positive or negative impression. In 2049 texts, it was determined that there were information and comments that would create a positive impression, and in 562 texts there were information and comments that would create a negative impression. When the quantitative distribution of the texts forming positive impressions is analyzed, Sabah, Habertürk and Hürriyet are in the top three. Sözcü, BirGün and Cumhuriyet display the least number of items that create a positive impression. The highest number of negative impression-forming texts are found in BirGün and Sözcü.

In the result of the analysis on the general tone in which news portals reflect news about education, a very clear distinction stands out. The news portals such as Habertürk, Sabah, Yeni Akit and Hürriyet, which explicitly or implicitly support the political power published positive news about education 10 times higher than negative news. The limited number of negative news texts on these

portals occasionally criticize the policies of the political power, but this is limited to expressing a minor or local setback. On the other hand, news portals such as Sözcü, Yeniçağ, Cumhuriyet and BirGün, which have a negative editorial policy against the political power, have much more negative news items than positive ones.

2.2. Focus of Texts

The theme of “Education management and policy” was the most coded theme in the focus of the sampled texts. Under this theme, the Covid-19 pandemic, interruption of education due to reasons such as weather conditions or holidays, schools starting education, legislative changes, personnel and building needs, budget, and the activities of education administrators are the most prominent topics. The theme of “Education programs” ranks second. Within the scope of this theme, exams, teaching methods, distance education practices, course contents and changes, school achievements, educational projects are the most salient topics. In the third theme, “Students”, there are news texts dealing with topics such as students' achievements, aids (mainly financial) provided to students, situations where students are victimized, and student health. Under the theme of “Activities of non-education actors”, activities by non-educators such as mayors, governors, businesspeople or NGO representatives such as aid, visits, organizing cultural and sports activities related to education were the subject of news articles. The theme “Teachers” includes news items on professional success, victimization, appointments, vocational training, personal rights and accusations against teachers. The theme “Parents” is the least coded one. Within the scope of this theme, there are news items on parents' demands and complaints, and their educational expenditures. Data on the quantitative distribution of themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Distribution of themes

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Education management and policy	4176	45,8
Education programs	2322	25,47
Students	1416	15,53
Activities of non-education actors	734	8,04
Teachers	413	4,52
Parents	58	0,64
Total	9119	100

The distribution of themes in the coverage illuminates a significant number of points about the aims of this study. According to the results here, it is seen that news about education administration and education policy dominate the content related to education, but when the topics under this theme are analyzed, it is seen that a significant portion of the texts are created as routine news. In this case, it can

be said that the media agenda on education is mostly shaped under the control of those who manage education. It can be argued that the media also contributes to this primarily despite the different news produced by a small number of news websites that display an oppositional attitude. Another important point is the influence of routine news, press releases and ready-to-publish news content from news agencies in the formation of education coverage. Issues related to education, especially the influence of the Turkish Ministry of National Education on the content, are shaped by administrators and politicians.

Another outstanding point in the themes of education news is that the voices of students and parents are rarely heard. What is even more striking is that non-education actors are the subject of education content much more intensely than teachers and parents due to their direct or indirect activities related to education. To summarize, the fact that teachers, who are an important part of the education system, are at the center of education news is a rare occurrence on news websites in Turkey. In terms of the editorial policy of Turkish news portals, the presence of teachers and parents at the center of education coverage seems to be insignificant.

2.3. Texts according to their types

The education-related texts were categorized into five distinct genres. Based on the frequency distribution across these categories, news reports emerged as the most prevalent type, followed by clickbait and SEO-oriented content. The distribution of texts by type is shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Distribution of texts by type

News portals	News report	Clickbait/SEO	Advertorial	Opinion article/ Investigative report	Total
haberturk.com	2098 (76,8%)	513 (18,8%)	117 (4,3%)	4 (0,1%)	2732
sabah.com.tr	1012 (60,8%)	600 (36%)	33 (2%)	20 (1,2%)	1665
yeniakit.com.tr	587 (52,7%)	472 (42,3%)	37 (3,4%)	18 (1,6%)	1114
milliyet.com.tr	655 (65,9%)	275 (27,7%)	16 (1,6%)	48 (4,8%)	994
hurriyet.com.tr	704 (72,8%)	204 (21,1%)	16 (1,7%)	43 (4,4%)	967
sozcu.com.tr	220 (46,5%)	185 (39,1%)	4 (0,8%)	64 (18,7%)	473
yenicaggazetesi.com.tr	293 (94,5%)	8 (2,6%)	2 (0,6%)	7 (2,3%)	310
yenisafak.com	267 (87,9%)	17 (5,7%)	7 (2,4%)	13 (4%)	304
cumhuriyet.com.tr	262 (86,8%)	0	0	40 (13,2%)	302
birgun.net	250 (96,9%)	0	0	8 (3,1%)	258
Total	6348 (69.6%)	2274 (24,9%)	232 (2.6%)	265 (2.9%)	9119

It is a predictable result that "news report" was found to be the most common text type in the sample. However, there are some points in the distribution of text types that are not in line with expectations and can be seen as an important set of results for this study. The first one of these is the high number of news items in the "Clickbait/SEO" type in education-related content. Clickbait is described as "a headline that strategically withholds information to entice the reader to click on a link" (Mukherjee et al., 2022, p. 483). The term is evaluated as a strategy to increase traffic to a page that uses tactics such as sensationalist stories, eye-catching headlines, incomplete information, pre-eminence of soft news, repetition and serialization, and use of hyperboles (Bazaco & Snchez-García, 2019). Furthermore, clickbait is considered to be related to disinformation, where polarized discourse is commonly used in headlines to attract readers' attention (Palau-Sampio, 2022). Other studies, evaluated clickbait as a common strategy in various forms of online journalism, including health (Dhoju et al., 2019) and sports (Ramon & Tulloch, 2021) journalism. Current study demonstrates that education news is no exception when it comes to the prevalent use of clickbait strategies.

A similar situation applies to the use of search engine optimization (SEO) in journalistic practices in the online environment. Concerned with increasing traffic to their sites, news portals use certain strategies to make a news article appear higher on search engine results.

It is worrying to see how much education content is being influenced by clickbait/SEO style content, which looks like news and is written with the skills of a SEO editor to get "clicks" from readers and to appear at the top of search engines. In particular, the fact that news portals, which often use headlines that are designed to mislead readers and have nothing to do with the main text of the news, try to increase traffic and click-through rates shows us that a significant proportion of education-related content is not written by journalists and editors specializing in education journalism.

The two types of texts that are evaluated as few in number are "opinion article" and "investigative report". The fact that Turkish news portals did not sufficiently use these two types in their coverage of education is an important finding for the study. This shows that the news portals generally represent education within the framework of covering routine issues. This reveals the inadequacy of conveying the issues and events related to education to the society in depth and in a multidimensional way. In particular, the absence or insufficiency of opinion articles and investigative reports on education shows that issues related to education in Turkey are not discussed in the media in a qualified and sufficient manner. The fact that news sites, with a somewhat simplistic approach, mostly present routine news from news agencies or compiled from press releases, limits the impact of social communication on education. The high amount of routine news also points to the scarcity of special coverage and investigative reports. Based on the findings presented, the following section interprets the study's results, exploring their implications and their relationship with the existing literature.

Conclusion

As emphasized and discussed in the previous sections, the aim of this article was to find out how education is represented in Turkish news portals. Therefore, the main research question of the study was "How is education represented in news portals in Turkey? The overall results suggest that the political and profit motives of each news portal shape the representation of education in their coverage.

Within the analyzed corpus, the theme of "Education management and policy" emerged as the predominant category, encompassing 4176 news items. A significant characteristic of this thematic cluster was the pronounced salience of the Covid-19 pandemic, which served as a central focal point for the overall news coverage.

When the news reports coded as "neutral" are examined, it is seen that these news reports are mostly limited texts that can be called "routine" and have a daily and limited news value. Texts in the routine news genre often do not explicitly reflect the ideological stance of the news site, nor do they explicitly include any commentary or political approach. In particular, the news coverage produced from press releases, various activities of students and teachers, opening and closing of schools, routine statements of officials related to education were evaluated within this categorization. It should be emphasized that media content on education in Turkey is largely based on such "neutral" content. This is also related to the fact that the intensity of clickbait/SEO news items increase the neutral tone in the overall coverage.

Studies by Karabıyık (2022), Şirvanlı (2021), Kahveci and Paksoy (2019), Çiçek and Uysal (2019) reveal that Turkish media organizations reflect their political stances in news texts and columns and adopt an approach that guides the reader. This study's results also show that the general tone of each news portal constructs its education coverage according to its political stance. The coverage of pro-government news portals such as Sabah and Habertürk consists mainly of a positive agenda. This leads to a lack of critical stance in majority of news media and reduces the possibility of finding solutions to the problems of the education system in Turkey. Accordingly, the criticism and presentation of the negative agenda of education can only become a strong voice in the news content of the Turkish opposition media.

Although the figures seem to indicate that the content is determined according to the ideological stance, it is necessary to draw attention to two other aspects. First, an education content patterned with negative news keeps negativity and education issues together. In a country like Turkey, where people have a strong belief that they can prepare a good future for their children through a good education, this can lead to a weakening of this belief. On the other hand, this kind of news coverage has the potential to reveal the problems related to education and draw the attention of the authorities to the problems. The second striking point is that there are very few negative news items in the news about education on news websites close to the political power. This situation can be interpreted as ignoring the existing problems most of the time.

Most text types found in the sample are news reports. This is quite normal, but most of the reports were constructed by routine events and heavily influenced by the content of news agencies. This shows that Turkish news portals do not give special importance to education content, and they tend to cover education by using extra-organizational news material. Moreover, the portals do not prefer to discuss the problems of the education system in detail by preparing special news dossiers and creating more space for opinion articles. Besides, the coverage of education in the Turkish news portals is mainly directed by the education management, especially by the influence of the ministerial level. Therefore, it can be argued that the education agenda in Turkey is usually covered by the voice of education administrators, while the views of students and their parents are often overlooked. The disequilibrium of news sources inevitably weakens an ideal communication process aiming at a better level of education.

Although SEO is seen as a necessary component of online news publishing in the current environment, research on the issue raises concerns about how "web visibility pursuit may override ethical journalism principles, reduce content diversity, and propagate misinformation" (Bastos et al., 2024, p. 25). From the perspective of journalists, there are some ethical problems with the use of SEO, which include the creation of a Google-focused journalistic practice, the use of clickbait headlines without an answer to the question(s) posed in the news story, spam content and excessive repetition of keywords, the exploitation of shocking events, the robotization of journalists, the creation of information pollution, the manipulation of public expectations, and leaving ethical principles to the conscience of journalists (Deniz & Korap zel, 2018, p. 78). Both clickbait and SEO practices raise certain questions about the ethical principles of journalism; however, their impact in generating traffic for online news outlets cannot be overlooked. In this study, it was explored that the use of clickbait and SEO strategies is also remarkably common when it comes to education coverage. This reveals the extent to which the Turkish news media use education coverage as a tool for profit-oriented news production and website trafficking. Moreover, the use of clickbait educational content to such an extent reduces trust in journalism and increases the suspicion that digital news content is not a trustworthy journalistic endeavour.

Another important point that emerges from the results on text types is the issue of advertorials. Considering the professional principles and ethics of journalism, the type of advertisement referred to as advertorial has been a subject of debate as it can blur the boundary between advertising and news content (Kim et al., 2001). In the case of Turkey, advertorials promoting private schools and private universities frequently appear in newspapers (Dađtař & nal, 2019a). The number of advertorials, which may seem insignificant in the total number of texts that this study focuses on, has problematic points when considered within the framework of professional principles. In advertorials, it is normally stated at the end or somewhere else in the text that this content is an advertisement (Arslan, 2019). In most examples in this study, the statement that the content is an advertorial was not used. In some cases, even interviews were made with the administrator or owner of the private education institution that advertised. It is not possible to accept such texts as education coverage. It can be argued that such

texts -even though they constitute a limited portion of education related content- violate professional and ethical rules.

All in all, this article has argued that education coverage in Turkey is mainly based on routine news coverage where the daily activities of education are intensively covered. This type of coverage usually overlooks education stories that are based on in-depth analysis or investigation. The content of education coverage is constructed with a positive tone, but this is by and large due to the structure of the Turkish news media order, where political power largely dominates the news organizations.

The quality of education reporting in Turkey could be enhanced through the employment of additional education correspondents and the production of more sophisticated investigative coverage of educational issues, both domestically and internationally. Future research on education coverage should focus on television and social media contents, which would enrich understanding of how education is portrayed in Turkish media. Moreover, the production of education coverage remains an under-researched area. Researchers should investigate how education journalists operate and construct content concerning educational mechanisms and related phenomena.

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