

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE GEZI UPRISING IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the Gezi Park uprising based on newspaper accounts of the events. Encroachment of Gezi Park was just one of the steps toward the neoliberal urbanization of Istanbul. However, the peaceful protests of environmentalist groups and the brutal police response to them have triggered widespread uprisings that lasted for about 20 days in all major cities of Turkey. The protestors with different socio-economic, ethno-cultural and ideological-educational backgrounds took the streets for various reasons, yet what lied under the uprisings was the general dissent to the ultra-conservative policies and neo-liberal order. It could be asserted that the ways Gezi Park uprisings are covered, or not covered at all, depends on the market positions and their political inclinations of the companies that own the media outlets. Therefore, in this study, the newspapers were categorized under three groups as pro-government, neutral and oppositionist. For unraveling how the newspapers approached the Gezi Park uprisings, two newspapers were selected for each category: Star and Yeni Safak as pro-government, Hurriyet and Milliyet as neutral, Sozcu and Cumhuriyet as oppositionist. Newspapers' coverage of the uprisings during the period of May 27 to June 16, when the uprisings were at their peak, were analyzed through the content analysis method. Results showed that the newspapers tried to manipulate the public opinion based on their political stances. Pro-government newspapers portrayed the events as "demonstration" to degrade the impact, whereas the opposition newspapers presented them as "riot" to boost the participation. Accordingly, the pro-government newspapers mostly preferred the photographs of police officers as "public heroes against vandalism", while the opposition newspapers largely favored the pictures of protesters as "champions of democracy against dictatorship". Newspapers taking a neutral stance often emphasized the negative effects of chaos on economy.

Keywords: Gezi Uprising, Newspaper Coverage, New Social Movements

1. Introduction

The Gezi Park uprising (also known as Gezi uprising) can be considered within the context of the new economic order and neo-liberal policies in the world. New socio-economic order, which emerged with globalization, has caused inequality, poverty and excessive exploitation, especially in the underdeveloped countries (Simsek & Yetkin, 2016). In such an environment, groups which are working as precarious and annoyed by the government policies have led to the emergence of new social movements.

In the neoliberal order, the best expression that defines the values adopted by the new middle class, that was created by the office employees and service workers, is the concept of the "new social movements" (Coskun, 2007, p.6). New social movements, which include leaderless middle class individuals with higher education, are expressed as the movements that emphasize the quality of life in terms of ideology and purpose (Coskun, 2007, p.135).

It can be said that rather than achieving economic or political gains; the struggle of the new identities and new ways of life within the framework of cultural politics lies beneath the motivation of members of the new social movements approach. While mentioning the basic features of today's social movements, Melucci (1996) emphasizes the diversity in purpose of these actions, their low bargaining power, lack of will on controlling the power in the political system, and their opposition on distinction between private and the public spheres (p.102).

New social movements were understood as the reaction of the middle class against the understanding of exploitation which occurs with the everyday life's taken under more bureaucratic and technological control along with governments' more and more opening every aspects of life to consumption. (Crossley, 2002, p.159). In this sense, new social movements can be considered as the opposition of the middle class, who has different identities, but common expectations, against everyday life's being further bureaucratization with the pressure of the state, and market's turning everything into materials of consumption. Hardt and Negri (2004) emphasizes that in today's social movements, the working class does not take place as the primary driving force; but rather different groups come together and struggle for a common goal (p.120). Different groups that led new social movements move around a common purpose as long as they keep their demands in a well-presented case. The main subject of the new social movements is not the working groups which act with economic demands; rather it consists of white collar service sector working individuals who are defined as middle class and acts for identity, lifestyle, environment, human rights, and against globalization.

The Gezi Park uprising or resistance may be considered within the context of new social movements. It started because of the commercial building that was intended to be built around Taksim Square in Istanbul by destroying the environment. Like the commercial transformations that happened in other cities, this project soon turned into a struggle for hegemony in city. The government's previous urban transformation projects had aimed to transform lifestyles of people; that's why different groups, which are called as "new middle class", claimed rights on the city (Kurtulus, 2014, p.274).

The incident, which ignited the protests, started in early morning of May 28, 2013 in Istanbul Gezi Park, spread all over Turkey and continued until June 16, 2016. In the context of Taksim Pedestrianizing Project, the government wanted to demolish the last green area in Taksim, which is called Gezi Park, and build a shopping complex including a mall, a mosque, a hotel, and a renovated military headquarter. To do so, the security forces burned tents of the environmentalist groups who were there to stop construction, and applied disproportionate force on these people and so the incidents began.

The social groups that participated in the Gezi uprising are as follows: Environmentalists, gays/lesbians, human rights activists, socialists/social democrats, civil society advocates, anti-globalization groups, people who resist alcohol and abortion ban, Alawites, the unemployed, students, fan groups of sports teams, the oppressed by the conservative policies etc. Participants were the individuals, which carry the fragmented identities of society, and the Gezi uprising united all these individuals for a common cause/purpose.

In this new world order, it is important how the media approaches new social movements and how it presents the social movements to public. Gamson and Wolfseld (1993) emphasized the importance of social movements' being represented in media for achieving their goals. They signified social movements' needs for media in three main points. First, it is important for social movements to be visible to make their views and demands announced. Media is also important

to push authorities to take action. Second, social movements need to be on media to be confirmed and approved by the public. Third, social movements need media to change the power balance and the scope of the conflict in the desired direction.

How they are framed and presented by the media is vital for new social movements. It becomes critical how the participants and/or parties of the public events are presented to the general population and how they perceive their images and causes.

In the context of this conceptual framework, the question of “How the Gezi Uprising was presented in Turkish national press?” forms the problematic of this study. Toward this goal, possible answers to the following questions were sought:

1. How did the newspapers react to Gezi Park events from beginning to the end?
2. How were the Gezi Park news located on the pages of newspapers?
3. What kinds of photos, related to Gezi Park events, were published in the newspapers?
4. Who were the major actors portrayed in the news and photos related to Gezi Park events?
5. What were the sources of the news related to Gezi Park events?
6. Which issues about Gezi Park events were highlighted in the newspapers?
7. Did the coverage of newspapers change depending upon their political stances?

2. Method

2.1 Research model

The Content analysis method was used in this study. According to Berelson (1984), content analysis is a technique which makes an objective, systematic and quantitative definitions of communication's written/open content. It aims to obtain concrete results in a systematic way within the framework of numerical grouping from the communication texts (cited in Gokce, 2006, p.23). Thus, in-text affinities and differentiations would be revealed. For this purpose, it is important to find out to repeated points which constitute the main structure of the text (Gokce, 2006, p.28). According to Merten (1983), content analysis is a method which examines the social reality by making inferences about the non-obvious features of the social context from the obvious features (cited in Gokce, 1995, p.25). Also, Neuman (2006) defines content analysis as a technique in which communications' objective, systematic and quantitative content are revealed. In this research technique the words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message transmitted are expressed as content (p.466).

2.2 Population and sample

The population of this study consisted of the daily national newspapers in Turkey. The study does not have an aim to generalize the results to entire media. The important thing is to put forth the general situation of how the newspapers presented Gezi Park events. Therefore, certain limitations were effective while choosing the sample of the study.

While determining the sample of the present study, judgmental sampling technique was used. First, the sample of the newspapers, which might be categorized as “oppositional”, “pro-government”, and “central/neutral” according to their political stance, was selected. As oppositional newspapers “Cumhuriyet and Sozcu”, as pro-government newspapers “Star and Yeni Safak”, as central/neutral newspapers “Hurriyet and Milliyet” were chosen. The second step on determining the sample was “limiting the date range” of the published news. The date range of the sample was limited with 21 days in between May 27 2013, in which the Gezi Events were started, and June 16 2013, in which the events officially finished. The final step on determining

the sample was to decide “what kind of newspaper content” would be included in the study. All the pages and all the contents, except from commentaries, of the selected newspapers were included in the study. The selected newspapers were provided from the Library of Anadolu University in Eskisehir and the National Library in Ankara during June 2014.

2.3 Collecting data

In obtaining data from newspapers, a special coding form was used. This coding form was based on the quantitative content analysis form for newspapers, which was prepared by Northwestern University Readership Institute Media Management Center. Also, some additions were made in accordance with the needs of the current study. Then, the coding form was applied to the selected newspapers by two coders. The answers of the following questions for each news were sought:

- What is the name of the newspaper?
- Who is the coder?
- Who is doing data entry?
- Is the news published on cover page?
- Is the news published on any of the section covers of the newspaper?
- In which section of the newspaper is the related news published?
- Is cover page news continued on inside pages?
- What is the position of the news on the page?
- How many photos published with the news?
- What are the contents and themes of the photos?
- What is the source of the news?
- What is the type and theme of the news?
- What is the source of news content/parties of the news?

A pilot study was applied to provide consistency between the coders and it was achieved between the coders by discussing the results of the pilot study (above 90%). Then, each coder has dependently analyzed the news via the coding form.

3. Analyzing data

The content analysis form, which was prepared in order to gather data, consisted of a total of ten sections in the context of the question under examination. The collected data were analyzed within the framework of “Presentation of news” and “Presentation of photographs” headings and the subheadings related to these categories.

3.1 Findings

Presentation of news

In total, there were 3676 published news in the selected newspapers. Approximately 27% of the news was published on the cover page and 73% of the news was presented in other pages.

Table 1: Distribution of the News about Gezi Park Events According to News Pages

	f	%
Includes cover page news	989	26.9
Doesn't include cover page news	2687	73.1

When considered in context of each newspaper, Cumhuriyet published most news with 819 news. The 27% of the news were published on the cover page of the newspaper. The rest 73% were published in the internal pages. Hurriyet published the least news (331 news, 9% of all news); 34% of this news was published on the cover page and 66% were published in the internal pages. When the newspapers classified according to their editorial policies or stances, it is seen that Cumhuriyet and Sozcu, which were considered oppositional newspapers, published most of the news with 1305 news (36 % of all news). Hurriyet and Milliyet, which were considered neutral newspapers, took second place with 1220 news (33%). Star and Yeni Safak, which were considered as pro-government newspapers, published only 1151 news (31%).

3.2 Newspaper sections in which the news published

Most of the news was published in the News/Actual/Agenda section of the newspapers with 1450 news (40%). This section was followed by “Front page” with 999 news (27%), “Politics” with 522 news (14%), “Economy” with 379 news (10%), “Magazine/TV/Media” with 110 news (3%), “World/Foreign News” with 95 news (2%), “Culture/Art” with 95 news (2%). Less than 1% of the news were published in “Sports” (22 news) and “Health” (4 news) pages.

When more detailed analysis was done within each newspaper, it is seen that in Cumhuriyet (54%), Hurriyet (40%), Milliyet (40%) and Sozcu (54%) most news were published in the News/Actual/Agenda sections. In Star, the news was mostly published in the Politics section (46%), in Yeni Safak they were mostly published in the front page (39%).

Table 2: Distribution of the News According to Sections for Each Newspaper

Newspaper Section	Newspaper						Total
	Cumhuriyet	Hurriyet	Milliyet	Sozcu	Star	Yeni Safak	
Front page	22.5%	11.3%	22.2%	7.8%	11.5%	24.6%	990
News/Actual/Agenda	30.1%	9.1%	24.3%	17.8%	3.1%	15.4%	1463
Politics	.6%	.0%	25.0%	10.0%	46.8%	17.7%	521
Economy	13.9%	7.1%	26.3%	16.3%	21.1%	15.3%	380
World/Foreign News	26.0%	36.5%	37.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	96
Culture/Art	58.5%	7.4%	19.1%	.0%	14.9%	.0%	94
Magazine/TV Media	3.7%	14.7%	25.7%	32.1%	23.9%	.0%	109
Sports	71.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	28.6%	.0%	21
Health	.0%	50.0%	.0%	50%	.0%	.0%	2
Total	22.3%	9.0%	24.2%	133%	14.4%	16.9%	3676

3.3 Types of the news

In the specified date range, when the types of news' were considered, it is seen that 77% of all the news were general news, 13% of them were in-depth news and 10% of them were comments or criticisms. When each newspaper was examined the findings were as follows:

- In Cumhuriyet, 72% of news were general news, 14% of them were in-depth news and 14% were comments.
- In Hurriyet, 82% of news were general news, 14% of them were in-depth news and 4% were comments.
- In Milliyet, 77% of news were general news, 14% of them were in-depth news and 9% were comments.
- In Sozcu, 80% of news were general news, 12% of them were in-depth news and 8% were comments.
- In Star, 85% of news were general news, 8% of them were in-depth news and 7% were comments.
- In Yeni Safak, 75% of news were general news, 13% of them were in-depth news and 12% of were comments.

3.4 Locations of the news in the news page

To indicate the positioning of the news on a particular page, the pages of the newspapers were divided into four equal parts. Then, location of the news in the page is determined according to these equal parts. It is observed that the news are mostly located in the lower left part of the pages (28%), this was followed by lower right part (24%), and very few news took place in all parts at once (3%)

Table 3: Location of the News in the News Page

Location of the News in the News Page	f	%
News is located in the upper left part	460	12.5
News is located in the upper right part	469	12.8
News is located in the lower left part	1044	28.4
News is located in the lower right part	877	23.9
Taken place in both upper left and upper right part	290	7.9
Taken place in both lower left and lower right part	231	6.3
Taken place in both upper left and lower left part	102	2.8
Taken place in both upper right and lower right part	111	3
Taken place in all parts	92	2.5
Total	3676	100.0

When the newspapers were compared with each other, although some minor variations were evident, there was no statistically significant difference among the newspapers regarding the location of the news on the pages. Generally speaking, Cumhuriyet (25%) and Sozcu (16%) preferred the upper left part, Hurriyet (13%) and Milliyet (25%) used the upper right part most, Star (16%) and Yeni Safak (19%) preferred the lower right part in presenting news about the Gezi uprising. These were the most visible differences.

3.5 Sources of the content of the news

In preparing the contents of the news presented, the most frequently used technique was “expression of reporter” and the figure, who was represented most, was the “reporter” himself or herself (35%). This was followed by “government officials” (18%), “NGO representatives and opinion leaders” (13%), “opposition politicians” (10%). The figure, which was least used as a source of the news, was the “President of Turkey” of the time (0.7%). Statements of foreign government representatives (2%) appeared more in news than the statements of the President of Turkey.

Table 4: The Source of the Content of the News/Figures of the News

Figure/Source	f	%
Citations from Other Newspapers	33	.9
Statements of Government Officials	677	18.4
Statements of Opposition Politicians	374	10.2
Statements of Celebrities	244	6.6
Statements of NGO Representatives and Opinion Leaders	477	13
Statements of Ordinary People	197	5.4
Social Media	91	2.5
Reporter's Expression	1301	35.4
Foreign Government Officials	117	3.2
Statements of President	24	.7
Statements of International Organizations	58	1.6
Foreign Publications	74	2
Opposed Statements of Governments Officials and Opposition Politicians	9	.2
Total	3676	100.0

The reporters were the sources and main figures of the news almost in all newspapers. Aside from their own reporters, the figure or the source of the news most were “Statements of NGO Representatives and Opinion Leaders” in Cumhuriyet (21%). In all of the other newspapers, the figure or the source of the news most were the “Government officials” (Hurriyet 14%, Milliyet 19%, Sozcu 12%, Star 34%, Yeni Safak 25%).

3.6 Themes of the news

Considering the total number of articles published in newspapers, it was found that most of the news focused on Taksim/Gezi Resistance (25%). This was followed by “passive resistance” (9%), impact on economy (8%) and “Prime Minister” (8%). The themes which were least taken parts in the news were as follows: “Martyr Police/Military members” (.2%), “hero policemen image” (.4%) and NGOs (.6%).

The theme which was most mentioned in all newspapers was Taksim/Gezi Park Resistance theme. However, while it was labeled as such in Cumhuriyet and Sozcu; it was labeled in Star and Yeni Safak as Taksim/Gezi Park protests, and these newspapers didn't use the concept of “resistance.” Hurriyet and Milliyet used both “resistance” and “protests” to designate the Gezi Park events.

When the themes of the news were further analyzed for each newspaper, the results were as follows: In Cumhuriyet, the themes that most presented were “Passive Resistance” (13%), “Harsh Intervention” (9%), “Prime Minister” (8%) and “Wounded People and Detentions” (7%). In Sozcu, the themes that most presented were “Prime Minister” (12%), “Passive Resistance” (10%), “The Impact of Events to Economy” (10%), and “Wounded People and Detentions” (6%).

In Yeni Safak, the themes that most presented were “The Internal and External Links that Triggered Gezi Events” (19%), “The Impact of Events to Economy” (11%), “Vandalism and Disrespect to Values” (10%), “Wounded People and Detentions” (7%). In Star, the themes that most presented were “The Internal and External Links that Triggered Gezi Events” (15%), “Vandalism and Disrespect to Values” (13%), “The Negative Impact of Events to Economy” (9%), “Prime Minister” (7%).

Table 5: Themes of the News

Theme of the News	f	%
Passive Resistance	311	8.5
Intervention to people's Lifestyle	33	.9
Disruptions / Removal of Trees	54	1.5
Construction of Mall / Prevention	74	2
Internal / External Links	236	6.4
Pepper Spray / TOMA / Plastic Bullets	98	2.7
Wounded People and Detentions	246	6.7
News of Death	61	1.7
Prime Minister	288	7.8
Artists	106	2.9
NGOs	22	.6
Vandalism / Disrespect to Values	167	4.5
Hero Policemen Image	13	.4
Policemen	133	3.6
News of Harsh Intervention	195	5.3
Taksim/Gezi Resistance	907	24.7
President	29	.8
Social Media	101	2.7
Foreign Press	74	2
The Impact of Event to Economy	304	8.3
The Impact of Event to Tourism	30	.8
Referendum	33	.9
Turkish Media	30	.8
Lawyers	21	.6
Conflict	24	.7
Martyr (Policemen/Soldier)	8	.2
The Outs	78	2.1
Total	3676	100.0

It is generally accepted that Hurriyet and Milliyet preferred to remain neutral (neither supported the government nor the protestors) during the Gezi Park uprising. When the themes of the news in these newspapers were considered, the results were as follows: The most presented themes in Hurriyet were "Passive Resistance" (12%), "Wounded People and Detentions" (11%), "Prime Minister" (9%), "Harsh Intervention" (9%). In Milliyet, the most presented themes were "Passive Resistance" (9%), "The Impact of Events to Economy" (9%), "Wounded People and Detentions" (8%), Prime Minister (8%).

Table 6: Themes of the News for Each Newspaper

Theme of the News	Newspaper						Total
	Cumhuriyet	Hurriyet	Milliyet	Sozcu	Star	Yeni Safak	
Passive Resistance	35 %	12.9 %	29.6 %	16.1 %	3.2 %	3.2 %	311
Intervention to people's Lifestyle	45.5 %	9.1 %	36.4 %	9.1 %	0 %	0 %	33
Disruptions/Removal of Trees	38.9 %	11.1 %	33.3 %	1.9 %	3.7 %	11.1 %	54
Construction of Mall / Prevention	28.4 %	12.2 %	16.2 %	13.5 %	18.9 %	10.8 %	74
Internal/External Links	6.4 %	1.7 %	8.5 %	1.3 %	33.1 %	49.2 %	236
Pepper Spray/TOMA/Plastic Bullets	25.5 %	6.1 %	30.6 %	23.5 %	6.1 %	8.2 %	98
Wounded People and Detentions	22.4 %	14.2 %	28.5 %	12.2 %	6.5 %	16.3 %	246
News of Death	31.1 %	14.8 %	19.7 %	11.5 %	13.1 %	9.8 %	61
Prime Minister	21.9 %	10.8 %	24.3 %	20.8 %	12.5 %	9.7 %	288
Artists	14.2 %	13.2 %	28.3 %	14.2 %	18.9 %	11.3 %	106
NGOs	9.1 %	0 %	0 %	9.1 %	72.7 %	9.1 %	22
Vandalism/Disrespect to Values	3.6 %	4.2 %	8.4 %	3.6 %	41.9 %	38 %	167
Hero Policemen Image	15.4 %	0 %	15.4 %	7.7 %	30.8 %	30.8 %	13
Policemen	26.3 %	5.3 %	28.6 %	15.8 %	9 %	15 %	133
News of Harsh Intervention	36.4 %	15.4 %	31.8 %	11.3 %	3.1 %	2.1 %	195
Taksim/Gezi Resistance	24.5 %	8 %	23.8 %	15 %	14.1 %	14.6 %	907
President	17.2 %	20.7 %	27.6 %	6.9 %	6.9 %	20.7 %	29
Social Media	34.7 %	6.9 %	27.7 %	3 %	7.9 %	19.8 %	101
Foreign Press	20.3 %	8.1 %	29.7 %	17.6 %	8.1 %	16.2 %	74
The Impact of Events to Economy	10.5 %	7.9 %	26.3 %	16.4 %	16.4 %	22.4 %	304
The Impact of Events to Tourism	23.3 %	10 %	33.3 %	6.7 %	26.7 %	0 %	30
Referendum	0 %	3 %	30.3 %	12.1 %	24.2 %	30.3 %	33
Turkish Media	26.7 %	3.3 %	26.7 %	23.3 %	6.7 %	13.3 %	30
Lawyers	14.3 %	9.5 %	28.6 %	28.6 %	9.5 %	9.5 %	21
Conflict	16.7 %	0 %	33.3 %	16.7 %	0 %	33.3 %	24
Martyr (Policemen/Soldier)	0 %	25 %	25 %	25 %	0 %	25 %	8
The Outs	17.9 %	6.4 %	10.3 %	6.4 %	23.1 %	35.9 %	78

Total 22.3 % 9 % 24.2 % 13.3 % 14.4 % 16.9 % 3676

3.7 Themes of photos and figures involved in photos

Within the specified date range, there were 5271 photos published in the newspaper selected for the sample. When the use of photos in the news was examined; it was observed that while there were no photos or graphics in 28% of the total news, photos and graphics were used in 72% of the news. The newspapers mostly preferred to use only colorful photos along with news. This was the case in 46% of the news. This was followed by news that used only black and white photos (18%) and news which used both black and white and color photographs (6%).

Table 7: Themes of Photos/Parties Involved in Photos for Each Newspaper

Photo Descriptions	Newspapers						Total (n)
	Cumhuriyet	Hurriyet	Milliyet	Sozcu	Star	Yeni Safak	
Photos consisting of icons related to political thoughts	33.3%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	33.3%	6
Photos which show authority applying force	61%	0%	24.4%	4.9%	0%	9.8%	41
Photos which show protesters applying force	0%	0%	32.3%	3.2%	25.8%	38.7%	31
Photos which show protesters and security forces clashing	0%	33.3%	0%	0%	66.7%	0%	3
Photos which show protesters and security forces not clashing	40%	0%	40%	20%	0%	0%	5
Photos which show only the security forces	29.4%	11.8%	35.3%	5.9%	11.8%	5.9%	34
Photos which show only the protesters	47.2%	5.2%	29.2%	6.1%	4.7%	7.5%	212
Photos which show security forces and protesters together	33.3%	0%	40%	0%	0%	26.7%	15
Photos which show Prime Minister	9.5%	7.3%	27.9%	12.8%	19%	23.5%	179
Photos which show Government Officials	4.9%	7.6%	22.5%	10.3%	28%	26.7%	329
Photos which show wounded people	17%	14.8%	27.3%	13.6%	9.1%	18.2%	88
Photos which show opposition politicians	17.1%	13.9%	25.4%	11.9%	12.7%	19%	252
Photos which show the President	16.7%	25%	0%	25%	33.3%	0%	12
Photos which show foreign Government Officials	5.2%	8.2%	37.1%	12.4%	12.4%	24.7%	97
Photos which show images of the post-conflict wreckage	0%	0%	22.2%	33.3%	0%	44.4%	9
Photos which show representors of NGO and Opinion Leaders	6.3%	5.3%	22.1%	23.2%	20%	23.2%	190
Photos which show artists, writers and celebrities	14.4%	12.4%	35.5%	16.4%	14%	7.4%	299
Composite Photos	22.1%	11.7%	18.9%	21.6%	9.5%	16.2%	804

Total 18.2% 9.8% 25% 15.5% 13.9% 17.6% 2606

The figures that were portrayed in the photos most were as follows: Government Officials (9%), Artists, writers and celebrities (8%), opposition politicians (7%), only the protesters (6%), representatives of NGO and opinion leaders (5%), Prime Minister (5%), foreign government officials (3%), wounded people (2%), and policemen (1%). Composite photos are a very important variable while analyzing the photos which affects the distribution of percent of the other photos because they involve more than one variable.

When the representation of the figures depicted in the photos were further analyzed for each newspaper, the results were as follows: in Cumhuriyet, the most represented figure was the protesters (21%). In Hurriyet (15%), Milliyet (16%) and Sozcu (12%) “celebrities” were the most presented parties; while in Star (25%) and Yeni Safak (19%) the most presented figures were the government officials. In fact, these percentages clearly show the ideological positions/stances of each newspaper during the events.

Conclusions

Media, as a whole is one of the indispensable element of the democratic life, it is even called “the fourth force” after legislation, government, and judiciary. A healthy and functioning democracy depends on well-informed citizens (Ozgen, 2002, p.33). In Turkey, during the “Gezi Park uprising”, which happened in 2013, media’s role was highly discussed. In this regard, the press has emerged as a particular branch of media which received heavy criticisms. Considering these criticisms and discussions, the news coverage of the six daily newspapers (Cumhuriyet, Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sozcu, Star, Yeni Safak) were examined via content analysis in this study. By doing so, the answer of “How did newspapers cover the events during the Gezi uprising?” was investigated in the present study.

The results showed that the opposition newspapers attached more importance to events than other newspapers and published more news from the first moment of the protests. Also, both opposition newspapers and pro-government newspapers, as two opposite poles, gave place to comments and criticisms more than the newspapers which were accepted as neutral press. However, while the critics in opposition newspapers were against the government, the critics in the pro government newspapers were against to the protesters. This situation shows that during the events there was a manipulation fight over the readers.

Another important field of struggle showed itself in the themes of the news. In general, all the press focused on “Gezi Events” theme. However, while the opposition newspapers published these event by describing them as “resistance”; the pro-government newspapers described them as “protests” or actions”. The remaining two newspapers described the events both as “protests” and “resistance” in different news. In addition, the oppositional newspapers designated the events as “passive resistance” and they criticized the Prime Minister because of his negative attitudes against the protesters; thus, they justified the events and the individuals who participated in the protests. On the other hand, the pro-government newspapers highlighted the violent actions of some protesters during the events, often referred to these events’ negative influences on the economy, and designated the protests as “vandalism” and even called the protesters “violent vandals”. A similar situation showed itself in the themes of the photos. Pro-government press generally showed the activists’ violence and their damage to public property. Also, via the photos they published, they created images of government as a victim and hero

policemen. On the contrary, the oppositional press showed the violent acts of the police and justified the acts of the protesters in the photos they published.

Finally, in the photos while the oppositional press generally gave place to the protesters, and oppositional artists, authors and academics; the pro-government press showed the government officials. Milliyet and Hurriyet, as the impartial press, also gave place to the artists and authors as public figures. However, at this point, the important thing is the category of “composite photos” as mentioned in the findings. A significant number of the published photos include more than one category. The data are discussed in this study regarding to the categories were separated clearly from each other, and the composite photos were excluded from the analysis.

As a result, the Gezi uprising was a very important phenomenon in the political history of Turkey, not only because of its results as a social event, but also because of the power struggle it caused on the media both during and after the events. It is generally accepted that the Turkish media is bound by owners’ commercial interests and political ties with the government. That’s why, democratic performance of the newspapers was not satisfactory during the most important political uprising of contemporary Turkey. They positioned themselves based on their ideological orientations and positioned themselves accordingly. Future research should try to explore motives and drives of such an approach by comparing the coverage of various media for similar events around the world.



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