

Celebrity Culture and Social Role of Celebrities in Türkiye during the 1990s: The Case of Türkiye, Newspaper, Radio, Television (TGRT) Channel

Authors : Yelda Yenel, Orkut Acele

Abstract : In a media-saturated world, celebrities have become ubiquitous figures, encountered both in public spaces and within the privacy of our homes, seamlessly integrating into daily life. From Alexander the Great to contemporary media personalities, the image of celebrity has persisted throughout history, manifesting in various forms and contexts. Over time, as the relationship between society and the market evolved, so too did the roles and behaviors of celebrities. These transformations offer insights into the cultural climate, revealing shifts in habits and worldviews. In Türkiye, the emergence of private television channels brought an influx of celebrities into everyday life, making them a pervasive part of daily routines. To understand modern celebrity culture, it is essential to examine the ideological functions of media within political, economic, and social contexts. Within this framework, celebrities serve as both reflections and creators of cultural values and, at times, act as intermediaries, offering insights into the society of their era. Starting its broadcasting life in 1992 with religious films and religious conversation, Türkiye Newspaper, Radio, Television channel (TGRT) later changed its appearance, slogan, and the celebrities it featured in response to the political atmosphere. Celebrities played a critical role in transforming from the existing slogan 'Peace has come to the screen' to 'Watch and see what will happen". Celebrities hold significant roles in society, and their images are produced and circulated by various actors, including media organizations and public relations teams. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing their influence and impact. This study aims to explore Turkish society in the 1990s, focusing on TGRT and its visual and discursive characteristics regarding celebrity figures such as Seda Sayan. The first section examines the historical development of celebrity culture and its transformations, guided by the conceptual framework of celebrity studies. The complex and interconnected image of celebrity, as introduced by post-structuralist approaches, plays a fundamental role in making sense of existing relationships. This section traces the existence and functions of celebrities from antiquity to the present day. The second section explores the economic, social, and cultural contexts of 1990s Türkiye, focusing on the media landscape and visibility that became prominent in the neoliberal era following the 1980s. This section also discusses the political factors underlying TGRT's transformation, such as the 1997 military memorandum. The third section analyzes TGRT as a case study, focusing on its significance as an Islamic television channel and the shifts in its public image, categorized into two distinct periods. The channel's programming, which aligned with Islamic teachings, and the celebrities who featured prominently during these periods became the public face of both TGRT and the broader society. In particular, the transition to a more 'secular' format during TGRT's second phase is analyzed, focusing on changes in celebrity attire and program formats. This study reveals that celebrities are used as indicators of ideology, benefiting from this instrumentalization by enhancing their own fame and reflecting the prevailing cultural hegemony in society.

Keywords : celebrity culture, media, neoliberalism, TGRT

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