

A Critical Look at How Child Murder News is Shown in the Media: Case Study of Sabah and Sol Newspapers

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Abstract

In today's world, the way child murder cases are represented in the media goes beyond simple reporting, becoming a site where ideologies and cultural values are reproduced. This study examines how the murder of Narin Güran (2025) was represented in two Turkish newspapers with opposing political orientations: Sabah and Sol. The aim is to explore how the language, visuals, and discourse strategies used in these reports shape public understanding of child murders and gender-based violence. The study employs Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze news texts on both the micro level (word choice, headlines, representation of the victim and perpetrator) and macro level (ideological context, power relations, and social structure). The theoretical framework integrates Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the Frankfurt School's culture industry theory, and Yılmaz's (2019, 2025) studies on media ideology and representation. Findings reveal that Sabah framed the event through dramatized, individualized, and perpetratorfocused discourse, while Sol contextualized the case within gender inequality and child abuse. This contrast demonstrates how media, depending on its ideological stance, can frame violence either as a personal tragedy or as a social problem. Overall, the study offers a critical perspective on how child murder cases are represented in the media, emphasizing the role of ideology in the discursive construction of violence. The results suggest that media functions not merely as an information channel, but as an ideological mechanism that produces social meaning and identity.

Keywords: Media, representation, child murders, Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, culture industry, Narin Güran

1.Introduction

The representation of child murders in the media extends beyond the act of reporting; it reflects deep-seated ideological structures, social values, and cultural anxieties. Media narratives surrounding such tragic events shape public perception and play a decisive role in constructing social meaning. As Hall (1997) emphasizes, representation is not a mere reflection of reality but a process through which meaning is produced and circulated within specific ideological frameworks. Through language, visuals, and framing, the media not only conveys information but also reinforces or challenges dominant social discourses.

This study examines how two ideologically distinct newspapers, Sabah and Sol, represented the murder of Narin Güran, a case that sparked national attention and debate. The study aims to reveal how these newspapers, positioned on opposing sides of Turkey's political spectrum, framed the same incident through different linguistic, visual, and ideological strategies. The comparative approach enables a deeper understanding of how ideology determines what is emphasized, silenced, dramatized, or normalized in journalistic discourse. The research employs Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which explores how power, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, or resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (Van Dijk, 1993). Van Dijk's framework provides both macro and micro levels of analysis, allowing the study to examine how linguistic choices reflect broader ideological orientations. Complementing this, the theoretical perspective of Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry (2002) offers insight into how mass media transforms structural violence and moral crises into consumable spectacles, often diluting their social significance through sensationalism.



Bağcı (2023, 2024) found that in promotional media, the use of music and symbolic visuals enhances audience engagement by evoking emotional resonance a finding that parallels how sensational headlines in news coverage attract readers through affective intensity rather than analytical depth.

The present study also builds upon Yılmaz's (2019) doctoral dissertation, which analyzed how identity and ideology were discursively constructed in the Turkish Cypriot press. That research revealed how ideological polarization and political narratives shaped collective identity and representation. Similarly, Yılmaz and Bektaş (2019) demonstrated that newspapers with differing ideological orientations reproduced national and political discourses through selective framing. In her later works, Yılmaz (2025a, 2025b) expanded this inquiry to media representation and digital culture, exploring how social media, children's programs, and popular culture operate as ideological instruments that construct meaning and identity.

Drawing on this scholarly trajectory, the current research situates the representation of the Narin Güran case within the intersection of ideology, discourse, and the culture industry. By analyzing how Sabah and Radikal constructed this event through distinct ideological lenses, the study aims to uncover how language, imagery, and narrative strategies transform acts of violence into media discourse. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to understanding how the press participates in the reproduction or disruption of social inequality and moral perception in contemporary Turkish media.

Child murders, as reflected in the media, go beyond mere acts of reporting; they constitute ideological and cultural representations through which moral boundaries, social values, and collective sensitivities are reproduced. In this sense, the media does not simply inform the public but constructs discursive frameworks that define notions such as innocence, guilt, justice, and morality.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Public Sphere

Habermas (2003) defines the public sphere as a space where "private individuals come together as a public" to critically discuss issues of common concern and to monitor public authority through rational debate (pp. 51, 93, 105–107). In his historical model, the public sphere emerges in places such as coffeehouses, salons, and the press, where individuals exchange ideas about public matters. It is the foundation where democratic legitimacy is produced and where public reason is formed through social deliberation.

Fraser (1990, p. 61) criticizes Habermas's concept of a single, unified public sphere and argues that multiple counterpublics exist. These counterpublics reflect the diversity of social groups and identities, showing that the public sphere is plural, competitive, and identity-based rather than homogeneous. Fraser (1990) points out that online environments often deviate from Habermas's ideal of rational-critical discussion and instead become spaces of emotional reactions and identity conflicts. Thus, today's public sphere has evolved into a multi-layered field shaped by ideological clustering rather than a single, consensus-oriented forum.

With the process of digitalization, the boundaries of the public sphere have moved from physical to virtual spaces. Ünal (2025, pp. 312–315) emphasizes that digital media transforms individuals into both producers and consumers of content, personalizing public debate and making visibility a new form of participation. Platforms such as YouTube, X, and Instagram allow individuals not only to express opinions but also to produce collective emotions and reinterpret social events.

Castells (2013, pp. 42–46) conceptualizes this transformation as part of the "network society," in which communication power circulates through interconnected networks. In



this new structure, individuals play both public and private roles simultaneously. The digital public sphere thus becomes a space not only for information exchange but also for the reproduction of identities, ideologies, and emotional affiliations.

In conclusion, the public sphere has evolved from Habermas's (2003) rational and participatory model into what Castells (2013) describes as a network-based and emotionally charged space. While this transformation expands opportunities for democratic participation, it also leads to the spread of polarization, hate speech, and ideological echo chambers in online environments.

2.2. Digital Public Sphere

In the digital era, the boundaries of the public sphere have expanded beyond physical spaces such as coffeehouses, salons, and printed media described by Habermas (2003). Castells (2013, pp. 42–46) defines this transformation through the concept of the "network society," in which communication circulates through digital networks and users act simultaneously as producers and distributors of meaning. The digital public sphere is therefore not a single, centralized arena of rational debate but a fluid, decentralized and emotionally driven field of interaction.

Couldry (2012, pp. 17–23) approaches this transformation through the notion of "media practices." He argues that social media does not simply facilitate communication but creates performative acts of visibility and belonging. Through likes, comments and shares, users perform identity, emotion and ideology in ways that transform participation into a visible social ritual. Ünal (2025, pp. 312–315) also emphasizes that digital media turns individuals into both creators and consumers of discourse, personalizing public participation and redefining visibility as a new form of engagement.

Yılmaz (2025a) highlights that participation in online spaces is not purely communicative but also performative, based on the desire to be seen. In her study on children's media, Yılmaz (2025b) demonstrates how digital environments reproduce cultural identity and ideology, while in her analysis of popular culture (2025c) she shows that visibility operates as an ideological mechanism within the culture industry. These findings reveal that social media is not only a space of expression but also of symbolic power, where users construct and display their identities within ideological boundaries.

Similarly, Yılmaz and Bektaş (2019) show how newspapers with different ideological orientations reproduce national discourse through selective framing and representation. This dynamic continues in digital contexts, where ideological positioning shapes not only news production but also audience reactions and public debates. Polat and Bayrak (2025, pp. 128–132) support this argument, stating that digital platforms form "networked publics" in which users mirror and reproduce each other's emotional responses, creating a shared field of affective. Research supporting this argument suggests that digital platforms form "networked publics" where users mirror and reproduce each other's emotional responses. In the Turkish context, these dynamics become especially visible during social crises or controversies, revealing how digital platforms function as distinct ideological and emotional publics. Users' reactions demonstrate that the digital public sphere operates as a space where affect, ideology, and ethics intersect. In conclusion, the digital public sphere reflects a structure in which democratization and polarization coexist (Yılmaz, 2019; Ünal, 2025; Castells, 2013; Couldry, 2012; Yılmaz, 2025a–c; Talas & Kaya, 2007; Talas & Öztürk, 2015).

2.3 Representation of Child Murder News in the Media

The way the media represents child murders plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of violence and morality. News texts are not neutral reflections of reality; they construct meaning through language, framing, and imagery (Van Dijk, 2015; Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b). In Turkish media, child murder stories are often presented with



emotional and dramatic language, focusing on personal tragedy rather than the structural causes of violence. Headlines such as "shocking confession" or "heartbreaking tragedy" attract attention but reduce the social and gendered context to individual misfortune.

This process can be better understood through the lens of Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944) concept of the culture industry, which explains how media transforms structural problems into emotional and consumable narratives. The dramatization of violence in child murder news reflects this mechanism, as emotions replace social analysis and turn public trauma into a product of media spectacle. Bağcı (2023, 2024), in her neuroscientific analysis of Turkey's tourism promotion films, similarly found that symbolic visuals and emotional music guide audience perception by stimulating affective responses rather than rational reflection. This finding supports the idea that cultural products including newsu se emotion as a means of ideological control.

Previous research by Yılmaz (2025a, 2025b) also demonstrated how social media and television formats function as ideological tools that shape public identity and perception. Similarly, Yılmaz (2025b) showed that representations in children's media, such as Caillou and Nasreddin Hoca, reproduce specific cultural and ideological codes through narrative framing. These findings align with the current study's conclusion that news discourse functions as a cultural mechanism reflecting moral and ideological constructions within society. Comparable theoretical approaches can also be observed in Yılmaz's (2019a) study on the construction of Turkish Cypriot identity in the press, as well as in Yılmaz and Bektaş's (2019b) research on the reproduction of national discourse across ideologically diverse newspapers. In a similar vein, Zor et al. (2019) emphasized the role of television production in shaping the viewer's socio-cultural values, providing an additional theoretical foundation for understanding how media discourse influences moral perception and collective emotion. Gümüş (2023) also underlined that contemporary media environments operate as entrepreneurial and social spaces where symbolic capital and visibility shape public influence. This observation complements Yılmaz's (2025a, 2025b) findings on digital identity construction and reinforces the idea that media representation functions not only as communication but as a socio-economic performance of ideology and power.

As Van Dijk (2015) argues, linguistic strategies such as passive sentence structures ("the body was found") conceal responsibility and turn the act into an isolated event. This use of language depoliticizes violence and prevents readers from questioning institutional neglect or systemic issues. Yılmaz (2019a) highlights that media discourse reflects ideological positioning and serves as a site where meaning and identity are constructed through selective emphasis. This is also evident in the representation of child victims, who are frequently depicted through sentimental narratives rather than being connected to broader issues of child protection and social policy.

Visual elements further reinforce these meanings. Photos of crying parents, police at the crime scene, or blurred images of the victim serve emotional appeal rather than analytical context. As Hall (1997) and Yılmaz (2025b) note, visual representation in media carries ideological weight by shaping what is visible and what remains unseen. While such imagery creates empathy, it also turns social trauma into a consumable spectacle a pattern that Yılmaz (2025b) identified in her critique of the culture industry and televised narratives of violence.

Another significant aspect is the ideological framing of perpetrators and victims. Media often personalizes the crime, describing the offender as "a jealous husband" or "a desperate mother," thereby normalizing violence through emotional explanation. This mirrors the patriarchal discourse structures observed in Turkish media (Yılmaz & Bektaş, 2019b; Kara, 2016a; Kara, 2016b). Instead of addressing institutional responsibilities, such framing relocates accountability from the system to the individual, a tendency consistent with Van Dijk's analysis of ideological discourse reproduction.



Therefore, the representation of child murders in newspapers must be analyzed not only at the linguistic level but also in terms of its ideological, visual, and structural dimensions. This study applies Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover how media discourse transforms acts of violence into emotional narratives, concealing systemic inequality and moral responsibility. The aim is to expose how the press frames violence against children as personal tragedy rather than a symptom of social and institutional failure a finding consistent with Yılmaz's (2019a, 2025a, 2025b) broader research trajectory on media, ideology, and representation.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and comparative research design based on Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Culture Industry Theory of Adorno and Horkheimer.

The aim is to reveal how ideologically different newspapers construct the same incident, the murder of Narin Güran, through discourse, language, and visual framing. Within this framework, both linguistic and visual representations were examined to uncover how power relations, ideology, and cultural codes shape the media's portrayal of child murders.

Critical Discourse Analysis was used to identify how meanings are produced and reproduced within media language, while the Culture Industry perspective provided a theoretical basis for understanding how violence and tragedy are commodified and transformed into consumable media products.

3.2. Data Collection Process (Scope and Limitations)

This study examines a total of six news articles. Three of them were published in Sabah Newspaper, representing a conservative political stance, and three were from soL News, which follows a left-wing or socialist orientation. Because some of Sabah's reports on the Narin Güran case are no longer accessible, the data set was limited to three articles from each newspaper. The selected news articles, published between February 2024 and June 2025, were analyzed comparatively in terms of their headlines, language use, discourse structures, and contextual framing. This scope ensures ideological balance and provides a grounded basis for comparative analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure: The analysis was carried out in four main stages.

- 1. Headline Analysis: To examine the ideological framing of the crime through linguistic emphasis and emotional tone.
- 2. Language Structure Analysis: To explore sentence structures, use of active or passive voice, and lexical choices that reflect or obscure agency and responsibility.
- 3. Visual Analysis: To interpret the representational codes in the accompanying images, particularly the visual portrayal of the victim and perpetrators.
- 4. Social Context Analysis: To identify the presence or absence of broader social, gender, and cultural narratives related to violence and representation.

By integrating Van Dijk's critical discourse approach with the Culture Industry perspective, the study seeks to uncover how media discourse not only reflects but also reproduces societal ideologies surrounding violence and gender.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are analyzed in two complementary levels following Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model: the micro level (textual and linguistic structures) and the macro level (ideological and social structures). This two-dimensional approach allows



a deeper understanding of how media discourse shapes and reproduces social meanings surrounding child murder cases in Turkey.

4.1. Micro Level Analysis: Language, Headlines and Visuals

At the micro level, the analysis focused on how lexical choices, sentence structures, and visual framing strategies construct meanings in the coverage of the Narin Güran case. In Sabah Newspaper, headlines were characterized by emotional and dramatic tone, such as "Breaking development" or "Look what she said." These expressions intensified the sense of excitement and urgency but diverted attention away from structural or social factors behind the violence. The use of passive sentences ("The body was found," "The report was added to the case") further obscured agency and responsibility, presenting the murder as a spontaneous or individual event rather than a result of systemic inequality. Emotional adjectives like "tragic," "sad," and "shocking" personalized the narrative and reproduced a sensational tone consistent with the Culture Industry's emphasis on emotional consumption. By contrast, soL News used more explicit, analytical, and context-driven language. Headlines such as "The second day of the trial: The brother also protected Salim Güran" or "Reasoned judgment announced" emphasized legal progress and institutional accountability instead of emotional spectacle. Active voice constructions ("The court postponed the trial," "The judge announced the verdict") clarified agency and attributed responsibility. The articles frequently included social and gender-related terms "patriarchal violence," "child protection failure," "institutional negligence" signaling a deliberate attempt to contextualize the case as part of broader structural violence.

Visual elements reinforced these textual differences. Sabah's imagery centered on the crying mother or family unity, constructing the event as a "family tragedy." No visual cues distinguished the victim from the perpetrators, which blurred moral lines and softened social critique. soL News, however, used courtroom photographs, justice scales, or protest images, visually foregrounding accountability, public awareness, and collective responsibility.

4.2. Macro Level Analysis: Ideological and Social Context

At the macro level, ideological contrasts between the two newspapers became evident in how each framed the causes and meanings of the murder. *Sabah Newspaper* represented the case as an individual and emotional incident, consistent with conservative-liberal market media logic. Its narrative avoided references to gender inequality, state responsibility, or structural violence, instead emphasizing legal procedures and emotional statements. This aligns with Adorno and Horkheimer's *Culture Industry* argument that media transforms critical social issues into consumable moral dramas, thus maintaining the status quo.

In contrast, *sol. News* treated the event as a social and political problem, emphasizing institutional accountability, patriarchal structures, and systemic failures in child protection. This ideological orientation reflects a counter-hegemonic discourse where violence is not merely personal but symptomatic of broader power relations and social injustice. By employing such framing, *sol*'s discourse aligns with Van Dijk's view that language can serve as a tool for social critique and ideological resistance. Overall, the micro-level findings revealed differences in linguistic and visual construction, while the macro-level analysis demonstrated how these textual choices reflect each newspaper's ideological positioning within Turkish media discourse.

5.Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Sabah* and *soL* newspapers revealed that ideological orientation directly influences how media constructs and communicates social violence. *Sabah's* discourse was emotionally charged, depoliticized, and personalized, transforming the Narin Güran case into a private tragedy. In contrast, *soL* contextualized the murder as a reflection of structural gender-based violence and institutional neglect.



These findings confirm Van Dijk's proposition that discourse reproduces ideology through linguistic and narrative strategies. At the same time, they validate the Culture Industry critique that commercial media commodifies suffering, turning collective pain into individual drama.

In essence, while *Sabah* reinforced existing social hierarchies through emotional normalization, *soL* challenged them through critical framing and contextual depth. This contrast highlights the media's dual potential to obscure or to reveal the ideological structures underpinning social violence.

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