**Media’s Effect on Online Dating Practices: Turkish TV Marriage Programs and Online Dating as a Medium**

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**INTRODUCTION**

For the last 10 years, major private television networks have been broadcasting series of highly criticized reality shows with good ratings. As these shows continued to be screened, their large advertisement revenue is generating controversies. These shows with their ratings and controversial advertisement revenues are still invading precious broadcast time to this date.The practices of the TV shows forged the basis for the online dating community in Turkey. The language that is used online as well as its increasing popularity is in parallel with these TV shows. This study analyzes the TV show within the cultural context and tying it to online dating practices.

One of the primary criticism for the TV shows was the occupation of the valuable broadcast time that could be utilized for current issues in Turkish society. Despite all the criticism these shows got, another analogue to Reality TV, marriage shows currently occupy and continue to occupy valuable broadcast time.

Just because a topic is being discussed a lot in daily life, it does not always have a big impact on the society. Despite this, we still talk, discuss and criticize these shows in media and other outlets that are being broadcasted on a variety of channels. These shows are far from being a reference to a similar occurrence in daily life, yet they still find a way to be relevant. Online dating practices also are an important issue of daily experience; alternative dating sites such as Solcuolsun.com (users are primarily left leaning) or religious marriage sites are among the biggest networks. The niche group that the sites addresses, categorize and define the users life styles and social status.

**Understanding the TV Marriage Shows**

There are a number of reasons why these TV shows have been taking up so much space in our agenda. Firstly, the mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio channels and internet broadcasting) are being controlled by a handful of broadcasting companies. Thus, a single subject can be repeatedly published in a variety of different media owned by a single company. As the same type of shows are being repeatedly broadcasted on different channels of the same network, the strength of the shows agenda increase, pushing them into our everyday life by repetition. Television networks have also been blocking other types of shows by filling up their daytime schedule with marriage shows that have long screen time. Leading audience to complain about the omnipresence of the marriage shows in every channel they watch.

While this is the strategic point in the high ratings of marriage shows, we should not skip the audience’s interest. Values that form the traditional structure of Turkish society are still largely a taboo and have an untouchable status. Everything related with marriage is a curious subject in Turkish society. To put it short, these shows contain interesting elements worthy of audiences’ attention.

In conclusion, networks are being managed in a way that keep their audience interested to a delicate subject by utilizing their affiliated networks’ advertisement power and it’s capabilities.

While the power of media can be debated, let’s open a parenthesis; it is power originates from its ability to present “things” to its audience. This “power” shapes around 2 aspects. First one is “choosing” and the second is “presenting as you like”. Roles of the television and other mass communication methods are being increasingly questioned as society begins to examine the ethics of how this power is being wielded.

Ratings of programs being broadcasted on television have an important aspect in the public relations with the media, investment in its infrastructures and its perceived cultural value. As the government monopoly of the mass media declined after Turkey’s moved towards free market economy, the notion that a public service is being performed by television broadcasters declined, while they began to be solely perceived as a commercial entity. These changes shaped the contents of broadcasts. Higher ratings results in increased advertisement of the shows; popular shows get more screen time for higher ratings, leading to a positive feedback loop. As Korkmaz Alemdar and İrfan Erdoğan puts it, “Popular culture is not a consumption. It is the active building and distribution of meanings and pleasures in the social system”. [[1]](#footnote-1)

On top of the dubious economic relationship between political powers and media bosses, controversy have arisen on the heavy influence of the political establishment on the contents of the media. We can claim with ease that the deciding factor for the broadcasting of individual programs and networks editorial policy as a whole is to be consistent with the dominant agenda of the sector. The primary reason for the preservation of this consistency is because of other commercial interests of media tycoons.

Various theories have been created since the initial widespread use of mass communication devices on a global scale. Each of these theories have their merits, however the impact media has on its audience is still debatable. Judging this impact without taking other variables and social dynamics into account will only oversimplify the problem.

In this context, before we discuss whether marriage shows have any effect on society or not and how successful they are, we should ponder about impact of televisions.

Rather than assessing the direct impact marriage shows broadcasted on Turkish television has on it’s audience or it’s indirect impact on society, this study aims to figure out the purpose of these shows. In order to do this, a wider perspective is needed.

Society underwent a change as mixed economy, a foundation principle of Turkish Republic, moved towards liberal economy. Researching a society without taking thousands of years of culture into account would make the microstructure/macrostructure models to rigid for practical use. Therefore, it is vital to keep the bond between the two in mind, as this will be of great help in the understanding the subject.

We need to investigate the aim of this process and the conditions that it was prepared under for these heavily criticized shows on the headlines listed below.

-Neo-Liberal Order and Social Engineering

-Marriage in the Structure of Turkish Society

-Mass Communication Devices, Media and Its Effects

**1- ABOUT MICROSTRUCTURE/MACROSTRUCTURE**

**1.1 Neo-Liberal Order and Social Engineering**

People in Anatolia, usually dubbed as Turks, are traditional and sentimental. Neo-liberal policies imposed after the military coup in September 12th 1981 caused a change in this society, which provides an interesting case study for sociologists.

The magnitude of changes, which had occurred were large enough to spark off conspiracy theories. A change that traditional Turkish-Islamic structure and Anatolia’s multi-cultural nature left marks on its culture. It was a period where spiritual values got replaced with material values.

Foundations of this change had been set with a strikingly hasty manner with pro-liberal Anavatan Partisi (ANAP) coming to power shortly after 1982. Following governments didn’t see any hindrances building up their policies upon this understanding. The most important aspect of the era was the social construct, subjected to change by the force of the newly created free market economy. Closed and financially self-sustained construct left its place to a relatively pro-liberty and a market where capitals roam freely.

While liberal policies created the middle class and designed to continue it’s existence, middle class was trying to make easy profit. Through privatization of public properties, mining rights, civil construction industry and projects; a socio-economic imbalance was created. No longer was social status to be measured with education or ethics, it was now measured with money. Popular culture has successfully changed the main goal of the individual and the society, which is the task of earning more money indefinitely.

In 2014, 32 years since the military coup, we can feel the resulting policies more sharply. It is suffice to look at the current socio-economic and political state, if we were to discuss how much of these were natural and how much of these were results of those policies with the data we have.

It wouldn’t be unrealistic to say all this strategic undertaking was for the reconstruction of the country’s political environment and social construct. Without a shadow of a doubt, there was a big effort to create a country that was prepared for the new socio-economic and political landscape.Here, we have the chance to observe and study a large-scale usage of social engineering, a term that we hear often.

Social engineering is described as a job that can manipulate the identity of the society, it’s social texture and control it’s reactions, desires, passions and hatred.

Social engineering can be done by other professions with the help of financial support, communication and various other assistances. Also local supporters are produced. Like Tunç Sipahi emphasized on, cultural codes being inherited from family and learned from social circles doesn’t change the fact that they are produced. ‘Consent’ is produced and masses are established in order to achieve transition of ‘power’ to them.

In this context, neo-liberal system could not ignore a tool such as the mass media considering it used all its resources towards that goal. In the first half of 1990’s, private stations started broadcasting without any government license; in fact, the governments of that period had preferred to turned a blind eye and at times, even supported the illegal broadcasts, meant the missing part of social engineering was starting to participate.

It would not be erroneous to state Turkish television networks were formed with this mindset. In order to compete in free market, a new kind of relationship between the broadcasters and political figures were formed, these became the two most important components that define the media.

It would be easier to understand the unqualified contents of television shows, if we think about how much social support is needed for an understanding that supports conservatism in social life and free market in economy.

“Marriage Shows” are another product of this lower quality circle. However, before we move on to the contents of these shows, we should take a look at the institution of marriage in the typical Turkish family structure.

**1.2 Marriage in the Structure of Turkish Society**

Anatolia, home to a mixture of cultural values, has a dominant Turkish identity in its geopolitical structure.

In his book, *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, Ziya Gökalp, named the Turkish nation as “Not as a union of race, tribe, geography, politics or volition but as a community of people that received the same teachings of language, religion, ethics and sense of aesthetics”. Yusuf Akçura, did not use the word “race” as in the biological definition but as a sense of culture, custom and a partnership of history.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Historian Karal [[3]](#footnote-3), voiced his opinion in the foreword of Yusuf Akçura’s essay “Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset” with: “With the proposal of creating a middle class, Yusuf Akçura had more influence on Turkish Revolutionary movement than Ziya Gökalp”.

Turkish Revolution, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was founded on these principles; this gave people from different cultures in Anatolia with an official identity.

Even with it’s many local properties, institution of marriage that has been built around this common understanding continues to this day. Although Turkish Revolution ensured many rights for women, the institution of marriage remained patriarchal.

Another aspect of institution of marriage in Turkish family values is that everything stays in the household. Home and marriage are viewed as private, with the rules of law being seen as inapplicable or at the very least, a tendency to not to put it into practice.

The third aspect of marriage is the necessity to procreate. The continuation of lineage is not only important for the parents but for the family of parents and even for relatives and friends. Therefore, biological parents are not the only one entitled, it is everyone who has a sentimental bond with it. In this case, it forces the parents to produce children within a set timeframe, a slight preference for male offspring has been observed.

In every society, there are different meanings associated with the institution of marriage. While conflicting with individualism, this institution founded on heterosexual values, transfers the conservative values to the next generation. This is the reason why political authorities support and defend the institution of marriage. If we evaluate marriage over Gramsci’s [[4]](#footnote-4) hegemony concept, it would be clear why the authorities are putting so much importance to this institution.

So far, we have come up with a framework for generations we define as the middle age. With the parents’ power of influence over their children, we can safely assume that the framework we mentioned will have an effect on the next generation.

In order to analyze young generations thoughts on life and marriage better, Nazmi Avcı’s “Toplumsal Değerler ve Gençlik“[[5]](#footnote-5) study has much to offer.

This study has been made on young people receiving education in Süleyman Demirel University’s faculties and two-year programs in Isparta during the years 2005 and 2006. Accordingly;

Most important sense of value according to subjects’ native region:

East-Southeast Anatolia: 48.4% a beautiful world, 46.6 percent having a place in heaven

West Anatolia: 40% a comfortable life

Central Anatolia: 54% a beautiful world

Mediterranean : 39.8% a beautiful world, 35.7% a comfortable life

Subjects’ biggest desires

Financial Independence : 44.9%

To Have a Nice Family : 26.9%

Note: 81% of female students differ from males’ by concentrating on expectations other than (house, car; being the first in every field; financial independence) having a nice family.

Devotion to religious values

Yes, I am devoted : 51.7%

No, I am not devoted but I have faith: 32.9%

Meaning of marriage with devotion to religious values

Yes, I am devoted and I think family is a sacred institution : 53%

It is essential for the continuation of society : 42.4%

I am not devoted in any way but I have faith and I think family is sacred : 48%

It is unnecessary : 21.4%

It is necessary : 30.2%

It is clear as the results of this study show that new generation has conflicted views on marriage. Youth’s biggest concern being uncertainty in their future, they tend to steer for financial independence. With the current world order and liberal economy, building up a traditional family with what little money they earn seems impossible even without the struggle of their everyday life.

In this current situation, with the views on traditional marriage and the reality that we live in, there will be inevitable conflict. On one hand: comfortable lifestyles, that young people dream of, and a happy marriage; exploitation of labor on the other. Since the two are contradictory, what kind of world can we promise to our younger generations?

The best course of action for the new free market system is to avoid creating more contradictions, which will upset and enrage the masses, increasing the amount of populist elements.

As the mass media is one of these areas, looking at its attitude on this matter, will without a doubt give us a new perspective to comprehend the subject.

**1.3 Mass Communication Devices, Media and Its Effects**

Debates about mass communication devices started in the 1920s, during the rise of popular press along with the cinema and radio. Many empirical studies were conducted in the 1930s followed by other studies over the years.

Lazarsfeld and Merton with their publications in 1948, Horkheimer and Adorno[[6]](#footnote-6) with “ Dialectic of Enlightenment” in 1947, Marshall McLuhan from Canada with “Understanding Media” in 1964, F.R. Leavis often remembered from Leavivism from 1960’s United Kingdom, Stuart Hall after Raymond Williams with his published work “Communications” and French philosopher Jean Baudrillard on the other hand are the first names come to mind.

These studies, containing quite different approaches to the media’s power and effect on an era’s social structure, tried to solve the relation between media and society like today.

Neil Postman summarized the influence of television on its audience in his book[[7]](#footnote-7)2 (Amusing Ourselves to Death, Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business) in these words; “Because there are better ways to learn the truth, they would have a healthier influence on cultures that adopt them. My actual aim is to convince you that the decline of an epistemology based on printed words with connection to the rise of an epistemology based on television causes serious results for public life, stupefying us more every passing minute.”

Communication between individuals and industrial society changes the status of social-political structure profoundly, and because of this it seems like the communication field will continue to be a debated topic in the future, as it has been subject to many studies in the past. Television, arguably still the most important communication device, is in the middle of these debates. It boldly comes inside our homes, inviting itself with its content. Content creators and producers favor television for this reason.

Producers who work in television aim to make the best of this invitation. To stay long in a place you have been invited, requiring knowledge of what the homeowner wants. We call this the ‘production approach’.

Production approach contains two elements: determining the content of program and its technique. These can be named as ‘Content Approach’ and ‘Effect to Purpose Approach’.

‘Content Approach’ is unique to public broadcasting and ignores the demand of audience. Producer turns the information received from experts to television shows, abiding television production principles. Purpose of this approach is to raise awareness among people about their basic rights and freedoms, therefore providing a better understanding of the world.

‘Effect to Purpose Approach’ is unique to commercial broadcasting. It dwells on how viewers will experience the message and what their reactions are going to be more than content. Producer creates the program while keeping the message in mind.

What is being done by this approach is to merge the program with elements people can relate to therefore increasing ratings. Viewers tend to accept information on television as long as their needs are satisfied. So there has to be a pre-satisfaction. There is a need for distinctive traits that will provide pre-satisfaction on television. This will make the program appealing at least for some viewer groups. These traits are such as; thriller, action, sexuality, comedy, information, importance, values, reality, curiosity, innovation. Television programs are increasing their ratings through these codes, making them popular thus sustaining their visibility.

Whether a television program’s has an economic, political, or ideological agenda, increasing its ratings will always be one of the primary objectives. Higher the program’s ratings, the higher percentage of the population it reaches, this will enable its agenda to permeate into others people in the society, affecting much wider social and political areas. The goal is to create an area of effect, not to give information.

According to an article Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz published in 1974,[[8]](#footnote-8) the viewers choose according to three expectations from the content of television programs.

These are:

1 - Cognitive demand: Viewers demand to receive information about the society they live in and around the world.

2 - Looking for an escape: The desire of the people to look for an escape from the stress of their daily lives and to have a pleasant time.

3- Identification Function: Viewers emphasizing on something from their lives or status.

This study is insufficient in the separation of the audience’s demands for present day. For what is information and what is entertainment isn’t so clear anymore as lines are blurred. Even worse, concepts switched places. Of course no concept is pure; and have practical transitive properties. However if these transitive properties start to keep experiences from being analyzed, then it would mean serious troubles would emerge. After this point we start to participate willingly to the demands of ruling structure, even moving together with them. In order to do this, the bourgeois tend to use every mechanism they have to something other than its intended use.

Based on the last sentence; let’s look at how marriage shows manage to invade so much broadcast time and our agenda even though they don’t have high ratings and an important presence in the advertisement revenues.

**2. MARRIAGE SHOWS ON TURKISH TELEVISION**

Instead of democratization of producing information and its spread, with the commercialization of media, we see that it has become easier to direct information for the powerful owners of the media.

Only certain groups collecting the main revenue of media, advertisements, means power is also collected in these groups. Advertisement pie in Turkey is shared between a couple big media groups. As an example, only five television channels in Turkey hold the 68% of total revenues from advertisements since 2010. These are:

Doğan Medya Grubu- Kanal D (24%)

Turkuvaz Medya-ATV (20%)

Doğan Medya Grubu-Star TV (9%)

Çukurova Grubu-Show TV(9%)

FOX (7%)

The most sought out advertisement period in television is ‘prime-time’ when the viewer count is at it’s highest. Advertisement competition mostly occurs during this time period. According to this, we can assume shows broadcast during this period are the most preferred types by the viewers.

Media Monitoring Center’s research in 2008 indicated domestic soap operas have an eye-catching dominance in genres that get the most advertisements.

According to the research by İstanbul Chamber of Certified Public Accountants (İSMMMO) when we look at prime time and outside prime-time data, soap operas have 40 percent; news programs have 29 percent and women’s programs have 6 percent viewing rates. Revenues of soap operas broadcast on prime time and women’s programs broadcast outside prime time differ greatly. For example, 70 percent of advertising revenues of ATV in Turkey come from soap operas, while women’s shows are the closest contender with only 16 percent.

Most important viewers of these shows are women. Purposes of women’s television usage shows proportional differences compared to males.

WHY DO YOU WATCH TELEVISION?

DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Female** | **Male** |
| Education | 3.3% | 3.4% |
| Entertainment | 23.7% | 17.8% |
| News-Informatıon | 29.4% | 50.8% |
| All | 43.6% | 27.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

As we can see in the statistics above, television is a source of entertainment for women, in addition to benefit the flow of news-information and education processes. So the line between information, processes-education and entertainment starts to disappear. This leads us to this conclusion; women accept things popular culture presents as information.

While Turkish people got introduced to reality shows quite late, it is quite early for private television networks. Shortly after private networks started broadcasting, reality shows like “Biri Bizi Gözetliyor”(Big Brother), “Evcilik Oyunu”(Playing House), “Gelin-Kaynana”(Bride vs. Mother-in-law) launched and marriage shows of today followed.

First marriage show on private networks was a production presented by Ebru Akel named ‘…’. Successors followed such as “Evlen Benimle” (Marry Me) in ATV, “Ne Çıkarsa Bahtına” in Flash TV, “Su Gibi” in Fox TV, “Desti İzdivaç” in Star TV.

In conclusion, contrary to popular opinion, although marriage shows invade a wide period of time, they have low advertising revenues and ratings.

At this point we should ask the first question again: what can we take from these programs staying on air all week against all objections?

Before we try to find an answer, we should take a look at which elements marriage shows are prepared with and what considerations they have.

**2.1 Sociological Analysis of the Shows**

For most of us marriage shows are “a waste of time”; however, it is a great research opportunity for sociologists with its subject, participants and affairs around the marriage concept. Can these shows give us an idea about Turkish society’s approach to marriage?

Because of their participants, diversity and an open attendance, we have an important sample group. Still, would these data be enough for us to make correct observations? In the end we are talking about a television show. So, let’s write down the subjects below in order to make healthy observations and analysis.

1. Representative properties of the participants of the show, meaning their ability to represent their society.
2. Participants’ sincerity to show their true characters and identities.

Let’s not forget that every television show has a design and every design has a team working behind it. The purpose of this team is to introduce projects suited to network broadcasting policies with the goal of staying on air as long as possible with high ratings.

While these shows create their own target audience, they receive more criticism than their ratings, taking up space in our agenda. These shows achieve their real success through this conflict.

Before we touch on what this design is built upon and what it contains, we should mention a few points about the contents and the structure of shows.

1. These shows have nothing to do with the arranged marriage practice in our custom. Arranged marriage requires certain rituals. In this marriage type, families come together before their children. Sociologist Süheyb Öğüt explains this situation: it is possible to claim that the matchmaking shows, recently appearing on screen, are to a certain extent, a modern version of the arranged marriage practice. However we should stress that it only corresponds to an arranged marriage to a certain degree. The main reason behind arranged marriage is because families know each other on first hand or indirectly.
2. It contains an important part of characteristics of the women in its society. We can list these as; women seeing marriage as a salvation, having no financial freedom as the employment of women is inadequate, feeling the need to go under someone else’s authority instead of being an individual, to have a chance to start a new life or even changing their social status.
3. In these shows, family establishment is encouraged with conservatism instead of ‘sexual revolution’ that signals a new social order. Prof. Dr. İsmail Hakki Ünal, member of Board of Religious Affairs, comments are supporting this claim by saying, that it is a good thing marriage shows are encouraging people to marry and create families but while this is being done they should be careful not to hurt the values and morals of society.
4. All the instruments of capitalism support institution of marriage. Because marriage contains all the elements needed to be captured by the wheels of capitalism.
5. It is an indicator of government failure, the inability and unwillingness to provide social security for women. Women see their husbands as a social security, not their jobs, skills or government. Women are encouraged to be employed by their husband by not working, thus leaving them to their husband’s mercy.
6. Other than government, it is an important result that shows us how inadequate these non-governmental organizations are about woman’s rights. Apparently civil organizations have failed their duties, if we look at these shows.
7. It is interesting that there are so many participants over 50 years old. Thinking about marriage at this age, shows us that our elders are asking for a nest of their own. Elder population of Turkey which is around 5 million people who is over 65 years old, are looking for peace in marriage not in nursing homes.
8. It is where man and women who wants to get married are defined with certain lines, thus standardizing family. While women search for a man that can take care of her and her kids, who will be good with her family and a husband that has to have a job and a house, while the men’s look for a woman who is well manicured, tame and who can look after his kids and housework even if she has a job. In short, television shows, display marriage as a shelter.
9. Both sides show an attitude complying with values like monogamy, neo-local (staying in a separate house from family) and official wedding in these shows…

As you can see, marriage shows have been designed to defend the marriage institute and generally accepted version of the family structure, to ensure its continuation. Television turns this into the accepted culture for masses, therefore creating a reference for the public to reproduce their own popular culture.

On the other hand, show doesn’t ignore social changes while bringing the traditional values to the screen. These shows have women approaching men, asking questions and declining them. So, while they still hold traditional values, they also have more current values. While they increase their viewer base, they can take advantage of the conflict of romantic and reality and be the center of discussions.

Now, let’s look at how marriage shows are adapted to television under the guidelines above. This adaptation contains the properties that make the show watched and debated in various parts of society.

**2.2 Components of the Show and Keeping Audience Interested**

There are two main components needed to make a show. One of these is the subject of the show, idea-product and the other is the suitors, meaning the audience.

Products of the show is the participants who wanted to marry someone, suitors is the audience watching curiously what is happening.

Subject of the show is open to manipulation in every way. This accordance is a system that doesn’t require coercion. This is a system formed because of the desire people have, finding a suitable partner. Conflicts generated by this desire, carries an invaluable television material. If we add the fact that this process is much more conflicting in conservative societies, we can say that social interest to this will be much more higher.

On the other hand, even though finding a partner is a private matter, it doesn’t only concern you. There are always other relevant individuals. Like a stone dropped in water, ripples it generates will get bigger as you move forward; meaning, curiosity, excitement, interest, faith, desire, disappointment. Everyone who adds a feeling to this event will witness this excitement, live it.

Finding a partner stays as a topic until after getting married and having kids. So, that troubles in family, events and developments are followed with interest. If the relationship didn’t end in marriage, rumors will spread, until finding a new candidate.

In short, source material itself is so powerful, variable and from life itself, only thing left to do is to make it suitable for television format.

Second element is the suitors, which is the audience. Audience isn’t only the witness to what they watch, they are also the intelligent participant of it. Situations, comments about people who are exposed to it, highly anticipated decisions, results of these decisions everything is followed with interest. Whether it is conscious or not, conservative system is supported and social problems get disrupted, this is how unemployment, bribery, corruption of politics, anti-democratic practices, etc. leaves their place to stories like abandoned women, a widow with 5 kids, a man having been cheated on.

Audience not only cares for the problems on screen, they make suggestions to find solutions. That is how they participate actively as a volunteer in the designed system.

This two elements of marriage shows taken from real life, feeds the real life with other figures. Instead of family, relatives, friends there is a lodge. People on this lodge make comments and direct the couple, while they are on the spotlight as well. For this reason they have to attract the audience and couples by making right comments and giving good directions.

Process is very simple and clear; a presenter represents authority and directs the whole thing. Participants are under presenter’s full control and they bow down to it. This presenter-director represents the fair order.

Show also has lawyers, psychologists and sociologists. Instead of using their knowledge and information, these people prefer to hide behind their titles and talk big words. So, knowledge get sacrificed for ignorance once again. Here intuition is used instead of mind. While keeping in mind it’s target audience presenter tones simple words by fluctuating them, grabbing you; it’s like a friend came to visit you, a neighbor or even a close relative. There is also a hidden authority behind the presenter’s warm approach like; do me a wrong and you will pay for it. Presenter’s authority on the candidates and thoughts on them is a reason itself to watch the show.

Orchestra plays appropriate music for the show and its audience, cheering them up. Everything is now ready for the couple to see each other. We see a writing below the screen telling us a surprise is waiting for us. At the same time couple move behind the opposite sides of the screen, asking each other questions. Presenter tells us the information they forgot to mention there. A short music break after they ask questions to each other; then comes the comments from the other participants on the lodge. Each comment from them gives audience a new perspective. Participants turn comes after the comments of lodge; audience holds their breath as the long awaited time comes. Excitement peaks as the curtain between them opens. This is the moment we have all been waiting for, what will the invited person say about the person he sees for the first time? Yes or no. If the answer is yes, candidates go to their corner where they have tea. This is the first step before they make any more decisions. However if the answer is no, candidates withdraw for a later time. Meanwhile viewers call and express their interest to candidates from the lodge. If they get a positive reply back, a date is set. During this time presenter gives examples from the weeks before, orchestra starts playing music, songs are sung, hands are clapped afterwards we get a new couple behind the curtain. While this process goes on, we see a couple from weeks before getting married.

For 4 hours, same scenario repeated with different actors, audience never gets a chance to question what they watch. They are now a part of this game. They may have to experience the past, present and future all at the same with intertwined messages making, while events go before their eyes like a film. Live music, lodge, candidate couples, presenter, subtitles, past couples decisions, surprises set for the couples who decide to get married, viewer calls, poems, dramas told, shedding tears and laughter. In short, those never ending marriage rituals, family gossip, all the running around, cheerful and sad moments are reproduced in various ways and presented to the audience. Every program is like a condensed version of the premarital period and after.

In contrast to all its fuss, show, oversees the conservative side of the society, presenting and reproducing the same subject to us over and over again for hours. Many elements making show attractive for the audience are put together precariously; however the main aspect is the marriage process filled with questions. In this process select couples are placed in front/back of the curtain with different demands. Viewer starts to worry for them. Will this two person be a couple or not? Are they fitting for each other? They got along and left together, what if they are not right for each other? This man will only use this women or that women is just a gold-digger...

When the base material is so rich and ready to put mental processes in motion, this game looks like it will stay on television for years to come. Television using its own narrative to recreate this process, reveals a colossal drama when its’ combined with the obligatory nature of marriage. For those who accept it… We are living in a reality, where an old social event shaped by traditional values is presented with its design on television.

So much so, life of what is real, switch places with what should be and stands before us as the true real. To put it briefly, our sense of reality gets re-established. If we push a bit harder, we are going to be able to believe a frog can turn into a prince when it’s kissed.

But the story doesn’t end here - it is just starting. How so?

**3. CLAIMS**

Readings made about television ratings, shows that women programs are watched around 6% mark. Whereas it has very striking figures on occupying society’s agenda. It becomes a topic in daily life conversations, gets written and argued about because of its participants or because of something they did on the show. Even commented by politicians.

Broadcasted marriage shows in Turkey get criticism especially for:

* For hurting the values of the marriage institution,
* Causing insecurity with participants,
* Taking up long screen times during daytime.

Against all criticism, another matter we should stand on, Esra Erol presenting a show on Fox TV with her name on it, having two million followers on her Facebook page.

What this format appeals to, what it affects and exploits is rather obvious.

The television producers’ job is to make money. Producing a show that is watched for 4 hours with little cost is a big achievement, even a victory, from a commercial perspective.

However the real achievement is television successfully maintaining its hegemonic structure. These shows occupying all of television against all criticism, exaggerated ratings and low advertising revenue is the most important point. To maintain their permanence, new characters and scenarios must be created. Whatever necessary must be done in order to achieve it. Claims are often made about some participants of these shows being hired from casting agencies.

There are many examples of these with concrete evidence. Like some of the participants rumored to be seen as extras in soap operas quite often.

Likewise, officials of Turkey’s first and only marriage agency said they declined an offer from the producers requesting access to their portfolio.

Even though every TV show is a design, it shouldn’t contradict with its claim. Marriage shows claim they set out from the attendance of real people planning their futures’, however there are rumors going around contradicting that. There is a fiction here with every aspect of it. This fiction is aimed to keep these shows on air as long as possible.

Serap Öztürk’s article has this to say about “Evlilik Programları/Show’ları” (Marriage Programs/Shows) “This staged show receiving disapproval from the individuals of the society continues to be a point of interest. Comments from the audience and the experts of the fiction and nonfiction concept, adds life to the show. Life is the experience of past things. It is possible to determine this clash of personal differences concept on screen is more damaging than any good. Is it impossible to understand the participants extra time to free time? To think staged scenes reflect the reality of life is the real inexperience.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

As this is the situation, we can say effort to maintain these program are not in line with their ratings and advertising revenues.

**Parallels Between the TV Show and Online Dating Sites in Turkey**

**4. CONCLUSION**

In the beginning of the article we proposed that it is difficult to understand the subject of marriage shows without examining the topics, institution of marriage in Turkish society, media influence and the restructuring of society.

We will continue to have different results as long as new data, on the effect of media on society, is gathered. As ‘New Media’ enters the lives of younger people as a more decisive and an effective communication model this is especially true. However, it is an irrefutable fact that society’s mutual cultural values have a much higher priority to set its own level of consciousness.

As the understanding, thought, belief, tradition, cultural remains of old way of producing loses their dominance, they don’t go away and they haven’t.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Sovereign powers have many practical strategies for their own management, to gain the consent of people under their dominance. We call this hegemony for short. What the sovereign power wants to do, is to make the other part of society to accept their values. They tend to do this by their consent. Military coup in September 12 1981 and aftermath of it is the most apparent indication of this. Media is one of the most important instruments for this and becomes successful often in short-term operations.

Young population showed their discomfort of the oppressive structure in Gezi Park Protests, which started in İstanbul in June 2013 and quickly spread to all of Turkey in a short amount of time.

In a survey done by Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) in 2007 on 2727 subjects, some questions have been asked about the preservation of cultural values that constitute the identity of Turkish society.

Results of the survey are very striking and contradictory to what is being claimed on television.

OPINIONS ABOUT THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL VALUES THAT CONSTITUTE THE MUTUAL IDENTITY OF TURKISH SOCIETY IN TURKEY

(WHICH OF THE TWO OPTIONS ARE CLOSER TO YOUR OPINIONS BELOW?)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number | Percentage |
| Cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved. | 2489 | %91,3 |
| There is no need to preserve the cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey. | 80 | %2,9 |
| No opinion. | 158 | %5,8 |
| Total | 2727 | %100 |

Source : Seta, October 2011

• While 91,3 percentage of the total subjects think cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved, 2,9 percentage think there is no need for it.

OPINIONS ABOUT THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL VALUES THAT CONSTITUTE THE MUTUAL IDENTITY OF TURKISH SOCIETY IN TURKEY

(DISTRIBUTION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low Level | Medium Level | High Level |
| Cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved. | %90,6 | %92,3 | %94,2 |
| There is no need to preserve the cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey. | %2,8 | %3,7 | %2,7 |
| No opinion. | %6,6 | %4,3 | %3,1 |
| Total | %100 | %100 | %100 |

Source : Seta, October 2011

• While 90,6% of the participants who have low level education, think that cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved, 2,8% of them said there is no need for it.

• While 92,3% of the participants who have medium level education, think that cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved, 3,4% of them said there is no need for it.

• While 94,2% of the participants who have high level education, think that cultural values that constitute the mutual identity of society in Turkey should be preserved, 2,7% of them said there is no need for it.

•A homogeneous spread is seen in all categories.

As we can understand from the survey, Turkish society defends their cultural values with an overwhelming majority, furthermore this opinion gets more popular as the level of education increases.

Again, from the same survey, it becomes clear that the Turkish people have a negative opinion about marriage shows.

OPINIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF MARRIAGE SHOWS ON FAMILY STRUCTURE AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

(WHICH OF THE TWO OPTIONS ARE CLOSER TO YOUR OPINIONS BELOW?)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Number | Percentage |
| I think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | 2156 | %79,1 |
| I don’t think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | 395 | %14,5 |
| No opinion. | 177 | %6,5 |
| Total. | 2727 | %100 |

Source : Seta, October 2011

OPINIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF MARRIAGE SHOWS ON FAMILY STRUCTURE AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

(DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Female | Male |
| I think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | %76,7 | %81,5 |
| I don’t think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | %15 | %12,9 |
| No opinion. | %7,3 | %5,6 |
| Total. | 2727 | 100,0 |

Source : Seta, October 2011

OPINIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF MARRIAGE SHOWS ON FAMILY STRUCTURE AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

(DISTRIBUTION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low Level | Medium Level | High Level |
| I think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | %77,5 | %80,1 | %88,8 |
| I don’t think, marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships. | %15,5 | %13,2 | %9,3 |
| No opinion. | %7,0 | %6,7 | %1,9 |
| Total. | %100 | %100 | %100 |

Source : Seta, October 2011

• 77,5% of low level educated, 80,1% of medium level educated and 88,8% of high level educated, said that they think marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships.

• 15,5% of low level educated, 13,2% of medium level educated and 9,3% of high level educated, said that they think marriage shows on TV has a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships.

• As the education level increases, rate of people who think marriage shows on TV having a negative effect on Turkish family structure and marital relationships steadily increases.

• As the level of education increases, people who have no opinion about the subject steadily decreases. It is thought to be because of the correlation between higher education and awareness, that this percentage is very low.

Expert Psychologist Çiğdem Demirsoy, gave a statement in Yeni Şafak newspaper about marriage shows claiming, “Perception and expectations about marriage are shaped by family and close social circles. That is why I don’t believe these shows have a direct impact on the institution of marriage and the establishment of family”. Therefore stating, marriage shows have no interest in claiming or presenting anything different about couples meeting and getting married.

Fears and concerns about marriage shows are focused on the argument of them breaking the structure of society. It seems no one intends to change the definitive structure and the traditional rules of marriage, against these fears. Any sexual revolution that hints at a new form of social structure looks to be far away for now. Besides, softened corners of marriage with accordance to today’s conditions are far from the level of fiction in marriage shows.

Participants of these shows are thought to be uneducated, desperate, have nothing better to do and doing it for the money or for being famous. They are accepted as a part of a television show for most of the viewers.

If we rewind and take a look;

A society bound to its tradition but open to change by the present

Debatable effect of media,

Are put to one side,

Then, if we combine these together with the effort to put these shows on air, even with low advertisement revenues and ratings, same question emerges. What could be the reason for this effort?

Answer of this question, should be given with the shows that couldn’t be broadcasted. How so? The real impact these shows have on society is to generate distrust. Real trust issue here, lies with the media imposing shows with questionable content to people instead of informing people to create a democratic and free society. Distrust would be focused on the media, which uses its resources to steal your time and ask for your money in return.

Media, wants us to accept the featureless content by broadcasting shows that people wouldn’t request back and fade away from memory if they get cancelled. However the no matter the age, gender and level of education, audience is well aware of everything; to not to trust “what should be trusted” is what is being tried to be created. In short, media wants us to become “things”.

As Terry Eagleton said, “Reification fragments and dislocates our social experience, so that under its influence we forget that society is a collective process and come see it instead merely as this or that isolated object or institution”. [[11]](#footnote-11)

While Turkish televisions reserve an important part of their broadcast hours to these hollow shows even though there is no demand, news programs are spreading disinformation, doing their part of the society engineering so to speak. In June’s great resistance, “Revolution will not be televised” slogan people wrote on walls shows the current state of Turkish television. Public couldn’t watch a big uprising from their television, CNN Türk showed a penguin documentary instead of broadcasting this big event. In the long run, marriage shows are doing what that penguin documentary did. What this policy has under it is the reaction against dominant power, once the natural progression of society is restored.

The media tycoons know doing their responsibilities would make it difficult for the capitalist system to continue, so they put sensationalist shows on air, keeping people busy thus putting what shouldn’t be to the place of what should be. These shows are not the only option. Numbers indicate that these shows are not bringing revenues or ratings as they make it out to be.

Social construct of Turkish society is evident. Building its future while progressing its own traditional structure with education, science and under the light of modernity. Every part of society actually knows the media and not their minds are stealing their time. Media is stubborn and determined to steal this time. The breaking point starts here; this point is the distrust, media causes by abusing their authority, demanding your time and money. Others will replace today’s marriage shows. It is a fully intentional policy of media to ignore the political, social and economic conflicts and follow a straight path.

It is clear as day that people who watch these shows won’t set their future accordingly and take what is happening there as a reference and the media tycoons are aware of that. Yet the sociological implication the TV shows set for the type of atmosphere has also seeped into the online dating and marriage websites. The marriage websites are designed exactly like the programs; <http://www.evlilikmerkezi.com> states on its welcome page: “… our biggest advantage is that all our users are here to get married”. This statement was also uttered in the opening of almost all the TV shows.

Another similarity of the TV shows with the marriage websites is the economical emphasis. During the shows, the candidate would be asked about their income several times to ensure that the person to marry him or her would benefit from the marriage. Online marriage sites such as memurevlilik.net is based upon the fact that all its users are working for a government institution.

These factors in the TV shows clearly have set the stage for online marriage and dating sites. The expectations of the users are categorized according to the standards set by the marriage TV shows.

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