

Intermedia Agenda-Setting at the Network Level: Turkish Women's Volleyball Team in Media and Instagram

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Abstract: McCombs (1992) highlighted the evolution of the agenda-setting concept, which has expanded from public issues to encompass gender-related topics, particularly in sports media. Research indicates that male athletes receive significantly more coverage than female athletes, often portrayed in ways that emphasize power and dominance, while female athletes are depicted through the lens of femininity and family life. This disparity influences audience perceptions of female athletes' importance. In Türkiye, media coverage of female athletes is similarly limited, with negative portrayals and objectification prevalent, especially in football. However, Turkish women's volleyball presents a notable exception, as female athletes have surpassed male counterparts in elite competitions. Their achievements in 2023 gained significant attention from both national and international media (e.g., Anadolu Ajansı, The New York Times). This study employs McCombs' agenda-setting theory to analyse the influence of Instagram on mainstream media coverage of the Turkish Women's Volleyball Team's triumphs in 2023. While traditional agenda-setting theory has demonstrated that media shapes public perceptions, the rise of social media has altered this dynamic, allowing citizens to influence mainstream narratives. Utilizing a network agenda-setting (NAS) framework, the study will explore whether Instagram content about the volleyball team's success influenced mainstream media coverage or vice versa. The NAS model posits that media connects different issues in news stories as bundles, transferring the salience of these bundled messages to the public. Given that Instagram boasts over 2 billion users globally, including 58.7 million in Türkiye, this study aims to assess the correlation between Instagram and traditional media agendas. It hypothesizes that mainstream media anticipates the public's Instagram agenda (Hypothesis 1) and that Instagram posts predict the content of newspapers (Hypothesis 2).

Key Words: Sports Media, Instagram, Agenda Setting, Turkish National Women's Volleyball Team

1. Background

Recent studies indicate that female athletes in Türkiye receive limited media coverage, often portrayed negatively or objectified (Tiryaki, 2023). The sports press in Türkiye has primarily centred on football, where male players are depicted as hegemonic figures, reinforcing patriarchal norms and the idealization of both female and male bodies (Irak, 2020). Female athletes typically receive minimal coverage unless they achieve notable international success, at which point the media often emphasizes national pride over their athletic achievements (Yenilmez and Çelik, 2020).

In contrast, Turkish women's volleyball occupies a unique position, with top female athletes frequently outnumbering their elite male counterparts. Their remarkable victories in 2023, including championships in the FIVB Nations League and CEV EuroVolley, received attention from both national and international media. Headlines such as "How Türkiye's 'Sultans of the Net' ruled volleyball in 2023" from Anadolu Ajansı and "As Turkey Struggles, Women's Volleyball Team Provides a Point of Pride" in The New York Times highlight this exceptional coverage, emphasizing the significance of the Turkish women's volleyball team.

Given the established influence of mass media in agenda-setting, this study employs McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory, which has evolved to identify three levels: the first level focuses on what topics are prioritized in media coverage, while the second investigates how the public perceives these issues (McCombs et al., 1998). The emergence of social media has transformed this dynamic, allowing citizen input to potentially influence mainstream media narratives. The network agenda-setting (NAS) model, introduced by Guo and McCombs (2011), suggests that media connects various issues as bundled messages, transferring their salience to the public (Guo, 2012). While many studies affirm the NAS model's efficacy in Western contexts (e.g., Vu et al., 2014; Vargo & Guo, 2017), recent research in Türkiye indicates that media may primarily influence pro-government individuals, leaving pro-opposition individuals less affected (Melek, 2023). This suggests that the NAS model may face limitations in a competitive authoritarian context like Türkiye, highlighting the need for further investigation.

This study will use an intermedia agenda-setting framework at the network level to explore the relationship between Instagram posts and newspaper coverage of the Turkish Women's Volleyball Team's victories in 2023.

A comprehensive analysis of media outlets across different political perspectives will be conducted alongside an examination of Instagram posts, including captions, hashtags, and tags related to the team's achievements.

Instagram, with over 2 billion monthly active users globally (Stacy, 2023), is among the top social media platforms in Türkiye, whereas of June 2023, there were 58.7 million users (Dierks, 2023). A global survey indicated that a significant proportion of sports fans engage with sports content on social media, with 31% following sports on Instagram (Greenfly, 2022). This study hypothesizes that Instagram content could influence mainstream media agendas.

Specifically, we will investigate whether mainstream media influenced public issue agendas on Instagram or vice versa. We predict that the mainstream newspapers' issue agendas during 2023 anticipated the public's Instagram issue agenda (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, we anticipate that public Instagram posts regarding the Turkish National Women's Volleyball Team predicted the content in newspapers (Hypothesis 2).

2. Methodology

In the present study, content analysis will be employed as the chosen methodological approach. By using content analysis, researchers are able to draw replicable and valid conclusions from texts and other significant materials (Krippendorff, 2004). Moreover, this methodology permits a systematic and objective examination of existing content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

2.1 Data Collection

2.1.1 Instagram Posts

To examine Instagram posts about Turkish National Women's Volleyball team during the golden year 2023, "mentionlytics" is used to collect captions, and tags made by regular citizens from May 31, 2023 to September 24, 2023. This allows for data collection throughout the entire competitive schedule of 2023 for Turkish Women's Volleyball (the CEV Women's Volleyball European Championship: August 18-24, 2023, FIVB Volleyball Nation's League: May 31- July 02, 2023 and 2023 FIVB Women's Volleyball Olympic Qualifications: 16-24 September). Mentionlytics searches and collects worldwide Instagram posts starting with the following hashtags: #fileinsultanları, #kadinvoleyboltakımı, #voleybolmillitakımı, #cevkadınlaravrupaşampiyonası, #milletlerligi, #voleyboltürkiye. Specifically, "Mentionlytics" uses these hashtags as entry points in their Instagram application program interface (API) to gather and download relevant posts. Any hashtags not listed above were not included in the sample. Instagram API crawls usernames and professional journalists, media outlets, and any institutional or official account are excluded from the sample. Therefore, this sample is representative of all Instagram posts created by typical citizens. We realize that posts from bots or fraudulent Instagram accounts may be included in this sample since spam accounts cannot be manually identified. The writers eliminated all Instagram posts with locations outside of Türkiye based on location id and location tagging data supplied by Mentionlytics. All Instagram posts will be examined as an "Instagram Index" to measure the overall Instagram issues mentioned.

2.1.2 Mainstream Newspapers

To compare Instagram posts to mainstream media content, we examine national newspapers from different political camps during 2023 Golden Year. Since Türkiye Volleyball Federation archives all the news about Türkiye's volleyball that appeared in the Turkish mainstream media on their official website, we collect the news from this archive (<https://tvf.org.tr/basinda-voleybol/>). In our analysis, the newspapers are examined as a "Newspaper Index" to measure the overall issue agenda in the mainstream press.

2.1.3 Content Analysis

The study focuses on analysing daily posts on Instagram, considering various elements such as captions, hashtags, and tags as the unit of observation. Similarly, for newspapers, the unit of observation will be the daily content related to the Turkish National Women's Volleyball team published in newspapers. Two project assistants are responsible for coding the newspaper articles as well as the Instagram captions, hashtags, and tags.

2.1.4 Codebook Construction and Coding Procedure

First, we conduct a preliminary analysis using an inductive approach to construct a codebook. Later, the emerging themes are placed as dyadic variables in the codebook and both news media and Instagram content are coded using the codebook consisting of dyadic variables. The research assistants code both the newspaper articles and Instagram content to determine frequencies of variables. Once the coding procedure is finished, the co-occurrences of these emergent themes will be determined, and data matrices will be created using the frequency of the co-occurrences of the variables for both media. To determine the NAS effect between media (outlets vs Instagram content), we conduct an analytical approach involving the implementation of the Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP) correlation and the Multiple Regression Quadratic Assignment Procedure (MRQAP) analysis. With this procedure we determine the network agenda of the media outlets and Instagram network agenda regarding which issues are linked together about the volleyball players and whether there is a significant association between these network agendas.

3. Originality of the Research

Our study makes notable contributions to the field of sports media research in three primary dimensions. Firstly, it addresses the critical gap in the scholarly literature by examining the portrayal of Turkish women athletes in news media, shedding light on their representation within the mainstream media. This investigation represents a pioneering effort to explore news coverage specific to women's volleyball in Turkey, which has been largely overlooked within the existing body of research. Additionally, our study extends the scope of intermedia agenda-setting by focusing on Instagram posts. This aspect assumes significance as Instagram has received limited attention in agenda-setting studies, thus offering an opportunity to enrich the literature and bridge the existing research gap.

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