

PUBLIC SPHERE - POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT RELATIONSHIP IN TURKEY: ANALYSING POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS OF JDP IN GENERAL ELECTIONS 2011

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Abstract: *Public sphere* is a social space, open to active individual access and free discussion, rescued from state intervention, where communicative action free from violence and individual benefits is undertaken; and rational-critical discourse is built. *Political advertisement* is the type advertising which aims at directing voters or the government to a particular action, having them adopt a certain view or approach. The concept of political advertising emerged with the practice of using commercial advertising techniques to promote a party, candidate or an idea.

Justice and Development Party (JDP), has been ruling Turkey since 2002. The leader of the party is Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It is a conservative party and has carried out some practices that could be regarded as negative. Anti-secular attitudes are also among these practices. Thus, analysing the political advertisements of JDP has proved to be interesting.

Public sphere studies are mostly conducted through news stories and columns in media. In that sense, it is significant to analyse political advertisements in terms of public sphere. In this study, the political advertisements of the ruling Justice and Development

Party (JDP) in the process of Turkish General Parliamentary Election, 2011 have been analysed.

The political advertisements in question have been analysed via *Sabah* newspaper. The reason for choosing *Sabah* is that it supports JDP as an example of partisan press. The samples have been taken from 2 weeks before the elections. Accordingly, as a full-page advertisement is published every day, 14 political advertisement analyses have been conducted in total. Political advertisements have been analysed using qualitative text analysis. As the study follows the path of public place-political advertising relationship, it finds meaning in itself.

Keywords: Public sphere, political advertisement, negative and positive political advertisement, text analysis, *Sabah* newspaper, JDP.

I. INTRODUCTION

The *public sphere* concept presents a suitable frame for Turkey where the word “democratisation” is constantly uttered; however, it is not (cannot) be put

into practice as a “package”. *Political advertising*, also, gains in importance as an essential means of communication in shaping public sphere during active political periods.

In parallel with the economic and political developments in Turkey, analysing *political advertisements* published in media regarding creating a *public sphere*, which is one of the central concepts of democracy discussions both in Western societies and Turkey, is the main concern of this study. In this context, the relationship between public sphere and political advertising in Turkey is analysed through the political advertisements concerning Justice and Development Party (JDP) published in *Sabah* newspaper before the Turkish General Election, 2011.

II. PUBLIC SPHERE

Jürgen Habermas argues that as the boundaries between state and society blurred, the bourgeois public sphere eventually eroded (Habermas, 1997; McCarthy, 2004: 91-92). In the course of refeudalisation of public sphere, media replaced discussion and speaking places. In that sense, commercialisation of media rendered critical rational discussions of public sphere into a place of cultural consumption (Timisi, 2003: 66-67).

Thus, bourgeois public sphere, which emerged in the eighteenth century, has turned into a so-called public sphere today created by media with the transformations it undertook in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Habermas defines this as *refeudalisation*, claiming that the feudal public sphere is back (1997: 196-201).

Habermas evaluates monopolisation of media and its becoming depoliticised as a tool for producing mass culture in accordance with its turning into a part of advertising world and its development as an advertising activity of public relations that see public opinion as target audience (Habermas, 1997: Chapter: VI).

The hijacking of communicative questions by monopolistic concerns seemingly converts citizens customers and politicians into media stars protected from rational questioning (Stevenson, 2008: 90). Besides, not only the social structures but also the political functions of bourgeois public sphere have been transformed. Contemporary new communication tools are also added to the concentration and technological-organisational coordination in print media industries. These new communication tools, and in general the consumption service that culture industry provides, have transformed public sphere into a platform for advertising (Thompson, 1997: 244-245). However, what distinguishes the political feature of advertisements is the public relations practice. Private advertisements target consumers whereas public relations take “public opinion” as its target audience by creating new events or using events to draw attention (Habermas, 1997).

In that sense, public sphere has transformed into a so-called public sphere for economic and political propaganda, rather than a place for rational-critical debates. The boundaries of this public sphere are extended with the spreading media. The mission to protect and legitimise status quo is undertaken by professionals who are expert in *advertising* and *public relations*. Thus, in this so-called public sphere, people who form the public opinion are pushed into a *passive*

audience status against various social issues and developments (Kejanlioğlu, 1994-1995).

In Turkey, individuals that make up the society have weak bonds with other cultural production areas. That is why; media in Turkey “plays a pivotal role in organising the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world” (Golding and Murdock, 2002: 59). In such a position not only visual media, newspaper reports and columns (Bali, 2002: 230) but political advertisements also take up an important place. During the course of reconstruction of press in Turkey following 1980, one of the most significant indicators of transformation in newspaper content is the spread and increase of political advertisements in active political phases.

III. POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Political advertising is defined as “*the process used by a political party or candidate through purchasing time and place in mass communication channels in order to affect political beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of their voters by giving them political messages*” (Tokgöz, transferring from Kaid, 1991: 257). The feature of political advertisements is that they have a fee, which distinguishes it from news report (Tokgöz, 1991). Political advertisements are a type of advertisement that political parties and candidates use in their campaigns to influence their voters. Political and commercial advertisements have similarities and differences. Both target sale. Political advertisement may use the commercial advertisement techniques. Political advertisements have a fundamental role in elections (Perloff and Kinsey, 1992: 53). As a matter of fact, political advertising tries to create meaning in favour of the political party or candidate that is

advertised. Political advertising war is a war of meaning. In political advertising spots, a struggle to fix or create images of groups, subjects and candidates in the voters’ minds goes on (Biocca, 1991: 27).

Political advertisements have two types: *Negative* and *positive* political advertisements. Negative political ads are divided into two categories. These are *comparative* and *contrast* ads. A predominantly negative political campaign involves assault on the opposing candidate, his/her party or issues that he/she addresses to (Skaperdan and Grofman, 1995: 49). Positive political advertising emphasizes the virtues of the candidate that is advertised and does not say much about the opponents. On the other hand, negative advertising uses elements of negative sides of the opponents (Shapiro and Rieger, 1993: 135). Researches show that negative advertising has a significant amount of influence on voters’ beliefs and attitudes (Garrazone, 1985; Tinkham and Weaver-Larisey, 1993: 378). Besides, it is argued that negative advertising is more effective compared to positive advertising and it makes voters feel more confident while making their decisions (Garrazone, 1985; Tinkham and Weaver-Larisey, 1993: 378).

During General Election, 1950 in Turkey, free propaganda on radio was done for the first time. In that election, Democrat Party’s “Enough, time for people to speak” slogan was effective in winning them a victory. The first political advertisements in print media were used during General Election, 1977. Free propaganda on television started during that campaign, too (Tokgöz, 1991). In General Election, 1977 Justice Party published political advertisements in *Hürriyet* newspaper. Made by Cenajans, these are regarded as the first examples of political advertisements published in print media in Turkey (Topuz, 1991).

Political commercials were first aired in General Election, 1987.

IV. METHOD

Qualitative analysis method is preferred in this study. Political ads which was published on the newspaper are accepted as a text. These ads texts were analysed and commented periodically with text analysis technique (Kümbetoğlu, 2005; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2004). In the study, political advertisements regarding Justice and Development Party (JDP) published in *Sabah* newspaper, chosen to represent partisan media, before Turkish General Election, 2011 are analysed through *text analysis*. 14 advertisements published in a course of fourteen days between 29 May-11 June establish the time limitation and analysis object of the study.

V. EVALUATING DATA

In the study, 14 JDP political advertisements are analysed. 9 of those are positive and 5 are negative advertisements. Each positive advertisement has its own theme. Their forms are similar to one another. Some used a portrait of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan whereas others used full-length portraits of him. Slogan-like headlines in large fonts are used in those advertisements. The slogan that says, "Turkey ready, target 2023" is also used. Also, Yes for JDP on ballots are also emphasized. To give an example, in the first advertisement "World Leader in Culture and Tourism" is the headline. In this advertisement, firstly people's wishes are expressed with the sub-head that says, "Our people had dreams". For example, it says

"People wished our unique potential for tourism to be revealed and hoped to get the rank we deserve in tourism". Following this kind of information, by saying "We made all these dreams true", practices of JDP government are told. In one of them, it says, "Now we have a detailed inventory of our cultural heritage in all our cities". Then, "Now we have even bigger targets" sub-head explains the upcoming practices. One line suggests that: "There will not be a city without a culture centre". With this advertisement, JDP informs that what they have done in tourism suits to people's wishes and they have more to do. Thus, as the ruling party they emphasized that they have worked and they will work more. At the end of the advertisement text the slogan that says, "Turkey Ready, Target 2023" is used. Consequently, JDP informs the voters that they want to stay in power and they have more to do.

In the second advertisement, with the headline that says, "Big targets for a big country" national automobile, plane and satellite production is said to be in process and achieved. These three productions are given under separate sub-heads. For instance, under the sub-head that says, "We are making our own automobile" it says, "The project has started. Our car will be on the roads soon...". Accordingly, JDP again wants to announce that they are working and they make the voters' dreams come true. The issues brought up in advertisements are significantly big targets. They have not been realised for many years. JDP argues that only they made/can make them come true. The advertisement ends with the slogan that says, "Our nation is ready for big targets".

The third advertisement is about defence industry practices. First what the nation wants is told. According to this, people want their national warplane,

helicopter, warship and tank. In short, "People demanded a strong defence industry for a strong Turkey". The advertisement claims that JDP made these dreams come true. Many weapons that used to be imported are produced in Turkey now. On top of that, they are exported. National tank, national warship, drone, tank and helicopter are either being produced or about to be produced. The advertisement points out that Turkey will have completed its production process in these areas by 2023.

In the fourth advertisement, under the headline that says, "Big Transformation in Health" people's dreams, their practices and future plans are explained. For example, people "did not want to be afraid of going to hospitals and did not want to suffer in long queues". Now all dreams have come true, and everybody everywhere gets the best and fastest health service. And now JDP has even bigger dreams. For instance, Turkey will be the health tourism centre of the region that includes Europe, Middle East, Africa, Central Asia and Russia.

In the advertisement with the title "Justice is the foundation of the state", the justice system is questioned. People want reforms to make justice independent and impartial. Demands like this are listed and they are said to be realised. After that, targets in justice system are revealed. For example, the justice system will work more efficiently. In the advertisement, Prime Minister Erdoğan's full-length portrait is used for the first time. Erdoğan is confidently walking towards the future. Above Erdoğan's photograph, the slogan says, "Turkey Ready, Target 2023". On the right bottom corner, yes vote...

In the advertisement with the headline "Our Flag Everywhere" Erdoğan is pictured while walking. People

want a Turkey that is closely involved in world decisions. JDP government has realised this. Now, the target is "to create a Turkey that is a world leader with its democracy, economy and culture in its 100th anniversary of republic".

The advertisement with the headline "Big Country, Trademark Cities" mentions the projects done or to be done in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Diyarbakır. Erdoğan's portrait is used. Besides, photos of projects from those cities are displayed.

The advertisements that have been analysed so far are positive advertisements. After this point, JDP uses 5 *negative comparative advertisements*. After that, they go back to positive advertisements and publish two more. In positive advertisements, as one can see, they followed a successful strategy by mentioning first people's dreams, then their practices and further plans. Erdoğan takes up the centre of the advertisements. Accordingly, "one leader" theme is emphasized. Erdoğan is presented as the leader who made people's dreams come true.

From 5th to 9th June 2011 negative comparative advertisements are also published in *Sabah* newspaper. The first negative comparative advertisement is published on 5th June as the eighth advertisement. The headline was "For advanced democracy...". Erdoğan's portrait is used. There is a yes vote above the picture. In the advertisement first the opponents are mentioned. The opponents are depicted as lawyers of gangsters, people refusing change and abusing bloodshed, etc. The comparison highlighted the following: "The ones who ended restrictions for a free society, the ones who started Turkey's big change, the ones who rescued democracy from tutelage, the ones who set off for a new constitution, the servants of the people, not the

masters?". Under this, it says, "You will decide on our future". Under all these, it says, "You have the stamp, it is your decision; let stability continue, let Turkey grow". In this advertisement, the opponents are discredited, whereas JDP is praised. JDP is presented as the address for stability. Therefore, like the previous advertisements, they wanted to appeal to voters' both opinions and feelings.

The advertisement published on 6th June, with the headline "For a big economy" primarily criticises previous governments' economy policies. First the question asking, "Are you going to vote for those who threw the country into a crisis and fled, crashed you under inflation and interest rates, asked for loans from financial institutions abroad, bankrupted banks, ruined economy?" is pointed out, then JDP achievements in economy are emphasized. The questions asking whether the voters are going to vote for those who increased welfare and income, wiped out inflation and high interest rates, broke records in export, paid the debts and created new job opportunities with huge investments, and made Turkey one of the biggest economies in the world are highlighted. Under this, the statements that in a way became slogans for JDP advertisements are given: "You will decide on our future"; "You have the stamp, it is your decision". Prime Minister Erdoğan's full-length portrait while walking is used to increase the power of persuasion; economic achievements of JDP are highlighted, and voters are asked to stamp "Yes" on the JDP emblem in the election for the stability to continue.

Correlatively, in the next advertisement with the headline "For a Social State", we can see a negative comparative advertisement content. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seen looking at the horizon and depicted as a

man of the people. The advertisement summarises the practices of opposing parties as follows: "The ones who deprived people of health and education, ignored the poor, ridiculed the help for needy and condemned them to desperation, and neglected people's problems, or us?"

The advertisement emphasizes that JDP government improved retirees' pensions, public servants' and workers' salaries, increased scholarships, gave succour to the poor and worked day and night for the nation. The voters are asked to stamp "Yes" on the JDP emblem along with the slogan, "Let Stability Continue, Let Turkey Grow".

On 8th June, the slogan that asks voters if they are going to choose "the ones who turned our cities into mountains of garbage, left without water, turned our civilisation heritage into ruins, never pounded a nail in their lives, never imagined a dream, let alone a project", or "the ones who dig mountains, pass seas, build roads, bridges, new cities, bring water, race against the world, and make our cities trademarks" highlights the superiority of JDP through negative comparative advertisement technique.

The advertisement published on 9th June is the last negative comparative advertisement example. With the headline "For a Leading Country", the visual image of the advertisement shows Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's full-length portrait of travelling around the world. In the background there is a world map consisting of little portraits displaying Erdoğan's meetings with world leaders, which emphasizes foreign expansion of Turkey. Therefore, in support of the visual, JDP is praised whereas opposition is criticised. The advertisement stresses the question whether we will be on the side of those who make Turkey's voice heard, help the needy and the oppressed, earn Turkey power and respect

against the policies that alienated Turkey to its region. With slogans similar to previous ones, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stands out in the context of JDP; it is pointed out that JDP should be supported for stability and Turkey.

The last two advertisements are seen to use positive advertisement technique. The first one with the headline "For Solidarity and Amity" and conclusion "We Are All Turkey"; and the second one with the headline "We Are All Turkey" are composed of poems that have been recited by JDP in election squares since 2002. In both advertisement texts, nationalist-conservative values are put forward. When compared to the other advertisement texts, the most significant feature of the last two ads is that they address to cultural identities in Turkish geography. Particularly unity of religious and sectarian identities is pointed out. Between past and present; country, history, flag, Ottoman legacy and War of Independence are embraced. Discrimination and separation are objected, and more freedom and democracy for everybody are demanded. By fighting against discrimination and terrorism, it is suggested that differences will be respected and bloodshed will end. The advertisement points out this could only be realised by JDP, which never left any business unfinished, as it is the party of Turkey. The following statement summarises the overall theme for the two advertisements: "We are the voice of unity, solidarity and brotherhood. We do politics for peace, not for fight, to solve problems not to create them." In the first advertisement, Erdoğan has a small portrait; on the other hand, under the long text, the visual depict Erdoğan as a charismatic man of people. In the last advertisement, the poetic and shorter text gives a photo of Erdoğan from waist up. The hand reaching up on the heart enriches the plausibility Erdoğan who is associated

with JDP, and emphasizes the cultural unity in the Turkish geography, which could only be realised by JDP as they are "the party of all Turkey".

VI. CONCLUSION

Much of power struggle now take place via *media*, which should be a democratic and autonomous institution. That is why; political rulers always use media as an ideological tool. In Turkey, with the advent of 1980s (the years when civil society was tried to be abolished), although the oppressive tools of the state were in use, media was needed for propaganda. In that sense, political advertisements were spread by the authority and used in producing social consent.

Indeed, following the 3rd November 2002 Elections, and Justice and Development Party's (JDP) coming to power as a representative of Islamist section, Islamist society also substantially entered into "public sphere" and reinforced its power through the practices in the period.

Domination of partisan media has begun to be voiced in Turkey recently. In this study, JDP advertisements published in *Sabah* newspaper before 2011 Election set the example of this.

The fact that out of 14 JDP advertisements 9 were reflected as positive and 5 as negative comparative advertisements emphasizes that how a public sphere perception was formed in the framework of alleged political partisanship.

Furthermore, these advertisements brought forward the following topics to create a certain public sphere through promises concerning post-2011 and statements regarding things that had not been done in Turkey's economic-political past:

With the slogan “Turkey Ready, Target 2023”, in the context of positive advertisements, culture and tourism world leadership, national automotive and defence industry (automobile, plane, helicopter, tank, ship, etc.), health, justice, urbanisation; in the context of nationalist-conservative values “solidarity and amity”; and in the context of preventing terrorism “unity” have been emphasized.

Under various headlines, negative comparative advertisement themes in *Sabah* newspaper are as follows: Democracy, economy, social state, urbanisation and trademark cities, and foreign politics.

In this sample analysis, deducing from political advertisements published by JDP and the public sphere it tried to create, it could be argued that: In Turkish politics, media and advertisers, who are attributed a significant meaning in creating a “public sphere”, publish in favour of political and economic authorities and reproduce the dominant ideology of the power. In constructing today’s public sphere, media and advertisement relationship, is one of the key actors in determining and directing public interest. Moreover, how the audience perceives the advertisement contents and texts shared by media is important in terms of communicative action.

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