

Journalism's transformation through digitalization in Turkey: Applying search engine optimization to journalism^{*}

Türkiye'de gazeteciliğin dijitalleşme yoluyla dönüşümü: Arama motoru optimizasyonunun gazeteciliğe uygulanması

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Abstract

The development of web technologies has had significant effects on journalism, and journalism practices on the Internet reveal an algorithm-based structure. In this context, search engines, Google in particular, have become one of the most important tools enabling the news to go from the producer to consumer. A contemporary style of journalism has emerged in which the news published on the web is optimized for Google, and this type of journalism can be expressed as search engine optimization (SEO) journalism. While SEO journalism on one hand embodies important practices that shape journalism in the digital age, it has been the subject of important discussions on the other. These discussions focus on how producing news by focusing on algorithms contradicts the professional principles of journalism. This study aims to examine the structure of journalism as shaped by search engine algorithms. The study takes within its scope and consideration the frequency with which news sites in Turkey are visited. The article conducts qualitative research by determining an appropriate sample from among the most visited news sites and examines the problems with SEO journalism based on the findings obtained from in-depth interviews with the SEO managers of these news sites.

Keywords: Digital media, journalism, search engines, Google, SEO

Öz

Web teknolojilerinin gelişmesi gazetecilik üzerinde önemli etkiler yaratmış ve gazetecilik faaliyetlerinin internet ortamında gerçekleştirilmesi algoritma tabanlı bir yapıyı ortaya çıkarmıştır. Başta Google olmak üzere arama motorları haberlerin üreticiden tüketicie ulaşmasını sağlayan en önemli araçlardan biri haline gelmiştir. Günümüzde web üzerinde yayınlanan haberlerin Google için optimize edildiği güncel bir habercilik türü sürdürülmektedir ve bu habercilik türü arama motoru optimizasyonu (SEO) haberciliği olarak ifade edilebilir. SEO haberciliği bir yandan dijital çağda gazeteciliği şekillendiren önemli

uygulamaları bünyesinde barındırırken, diğer yandan da önemli tartışmaların konusu olmaktadır. Bu tartışmalar, algoritmaları göz önünde bulundurarak haber üretmenin, gazeteciliğin meslek ilkeleriyle çelişmesi üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, gazeteciliğin arama motoru algoritmaları tarafından şekillendirilen yapısını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında, Türkiye'deki haber siteleri, ziyaret edilme sıklıklarına göre ele alınmaktadır.

En çok ziyaret edilen haber sitelerinden uygun bir örneklem belirlenerek nitel bir araştırma yapılmakta ve bu haber sitelerinin SEO yöneticileriyle gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilen bulgular ışığında SEO haberciliğinin sorunları incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital medya, gazetecilik, arama motorları, Google, SEO

Introduction

The development of new technologies affects lived experience, in this age as in every period of history. With the cycle of change, and reflection upon that change, occurring more quickly than ever before, talking about practices arising from the digital age has become possible. The transmission of data and technological developments in the field of computers have become dominant factors in all communication infrastructures through digitalization (Dijk, 2018, pp. 78–79), with media being one of the areas where digitalization has had the most intense impact, and the need for the media to reshape itself has emerged in accordance accordingly has emerged with the daily renovations, changes, and transformations in communication technologies. One of the influential areas of this transforming structure in the media has been journalism practices. New structures have emerged in the production and consumption stages of the news. Chayko (2018, p. 189) stated journalism and news transmission to have clearly changed through the Internet and digital technologies and journalists and news organizations these days to operate with a 24/7 news flow. With mobile devices, personalized news applications, and social media channels having become tools where news can be followed instantly, the phenomenon of journalism has also become integrated with information technologies, and concepts such as big data, artificial intelligence, robot journalism, and data journalism have entered the journalism literature. One of the most important developments to have affected journalism is search engines, in particular Google.

Google performs functions far beyond being a search engine with both its usage rate and market share and has had significant effects on journalism. Influencing many sectors with its digital marketing tools, products, services, and revenue models, Google holds the largest market share of 92% of the world's search engines. Google is also the

leader in Turkey, with a market share of 80.89% and a usage rate of 85% (Statcounter Globalstats, 2022).

SEO journalism and its features

Google's influence on journalism has manifested through SEO practices. This new type of journalism has arrived at an extremely important point regarding how news sites reach their readers. SEO journalism involves various stages, from the selection of news topics, the editing of news texts, and the structure of news sites to the monitoring of published news, and refers to a journalism practice under the dominance of Google.

Much conducted research has revealed the features of SEO journalism, its primary applications, the technical stages of SEO implementation, its differences from traditional journalism, and SEO practices as a profession (Deniz & Korap Özel, 2018; Doğan, 2021; Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015, 2016; Giomelakis et al., 2019; Bulut, 2019; Ledfor, 2009; Dick, 2011; Lopezosa et al., 2019; Güzel & Özmen, 2018; Saran, 2021).

SEO is defined as "the process of making a website appear at the top of the results list given by a search engine" (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, 2022). According to Doğan (2021, pp. 128–129), implementing SEO involves certain stages. This process starts with the job search before moving on to the stages of competitor analysis, keyword analysis, link building, search engine strategy, technical planning, and monitoring and analysis. SEO applications are seen to be conducted as the output of a detailed process.

Ledford (2009) explained SEO as the sum of strategies to improve a website's presence and visibility in search engine pages. Korap Özel and Deniz (2018, p. 164) stated the differences between SEO journalism and traditional journalism to be the subject of the news, news factors, business practices, news sources, news writing, and journalism purposes. Another study from (Deniz & Korap Özel, 2018, p. 84) underlined the possibilities the new media environment has brought to reveal many structural differences from traditional journalism as follows:

Digital journalism has many aspects that are structurally different from traditional journalism due to the possibilities offered by the new media environment. Speed, competition, changes in the factors affecting the news production process, and the differing working conditions of the journalist are some of these changes.

There have also been changes in the basic aims of journalism. In traditional journalism, first of all, informing the public and having a high circulation of the newspaper are the main objectives. In digital newspapers, getting clicked and getting more advertisements is more important than other purposes.

Giomelakis and Veglis (2015, p.23) shed light on the primary applications of SEO journalism in the world. When looking at the historical process related to the use of SEO in the field of journalism, important developments are seen to have occurred after 2008 in particular. According to Giomelakis and Veglis (2015, p. 23), many online news organizations after 2008 started including SEO experts among their staff in order to carry out SEO applications, with Daily Mail appointing an SEO manager and The Guardian creating the company's SEO team in 2008, as well as the BBC employing an SEO specialist journalist for the first time in 2009. In addition, company training started being emphasized as well as different experiments starting with regard to news writing. The LA Times received the first feedback out of all of these attempts, seeing a significant increase in user traffic after hiring an SEO chief in 2011. Other news organizations also experienced similar developments.

One of the studies on the place of SEO in the news media was carried out by Giomelakis and Veglis (2016, p. 390), who examined 30 websites in the Greek media and concluded SEO to have gained an important place in newsrooms. Accordingly, a new journalism process had also emerged in which the number of clicks on a news article came to the forefront. Their research claimed the presence of search engines would continue to be a reason for the use of SEO in the field of journalism, and for this reason, journalists and media organizations need to develop their own news sites and attach importance to web technologies. The results of Giomelakis et al.'s (2019, p. 11) study on four news organizations in the Greek media concluded search traffic measurement tools and Google analysis services to be in use by all news organizations. Dick's (2011, p. 462) study on three news organizations in England understood their SEO practices to directly affect the workflow in the news centers.

Bulut (2019, p. 129) approached SEO journalism in the context of news sites in Turkey and drew attention to the fact that Turkish news media are faced with two serious situations. According to Bulut, news sites on one hand need to compete with rival sites by acting according to optimization principles and commercial concerns while ignoring journalistic values, but on the other hand, they also need to protect the values that should be given to both the news and journalists.

Certain advantages and disadvantages have emerged with the increased application of SEO in journalism. Duman (2018, p. 277) listed SEO's advantages under headings such as longevity of news, original and up-to-date content, easier access to content, and higher ranking of news in search results. Lopezosa et al. (2019) drew attention to the enrichment of news sites and the rapid spread of information through SEO, and also stated SEO to be a process for helping web editors produce quality content and feel creative.

Repetitiveness, creating spam, long and irrelevant titles, and wasted time have been conveyed as some of the disadvantages of SEO journalism (Duman, 2018, p. 277), while Güzel and Özmen (2018, p. 225) also criticized journalism according to Google as follows:

Having a presence in the digital world is synonymous with being at the top of Google search results. In this environment, SEO journalism has become widespread as a basic journalism practice and a new line of business. This situation is interesting. SEO activities carried out to generate more clicks and traffic have led to the basic elements of journalism being ignored. The obligation to write news according to SEO rules and the attractiveness of the provided traffic provided (i.e., the wishes and demands of the user/reader/customer) have largely taken the Internet media in Turkey captive and put click-bait journalism at the center of the business. Events that did not enter the pages of newspapers or news bulletins 20 years ago have begun making headlines on websites. This has spread to all media and caused a serious decline in the quality of both journalistic responsibilities and news content.

Emphasizing how global technology companies generate revenue through the news media, Saran (2021, p. 610) stated journalism to have turned into an act of producing content compatible with algorithms and making sense of users' reactions to this content.

SEO practices are basically carried out as a practice that aims to have users reach the news in the shortest way; while this points to the rules observed in traditional journalism such as originality and speed on one hand, on the other reasons have also been discussed such as creating a media environment where Google is a monopoly and contradicting the ethical principles of journalism. Although several studies have been conducted on SEO journalism, the constantly changing nature of algorithms might make existing findings obsolete. For this reason, updating the findings with

recent research is vital for discovering how the changing algorithms have affected recent SEO journalism practices.

Aim and Methodology

The study aims to examine through various dimensions how the news articles on websites are harmonized with algorithms so as to become prominent in search engines, particularly with Google. Due to the frequent updating of algorithms, SEO journalism is constantly being structured with new features, and the study will attempt to understand this in line with the SEO journalists' experiences.

The current study has obtained data using the in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interview technique. The interviews were held between April 28-May 17, 2021. Interviews involve controlled and purposeful verbal communication between the researcher and the people who are the subjects of the research (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 271). These interviews with the SEO managers of news sites attempted to have them convey the most up-to-date developments regarding the structuring of SEO journalism, which were then analyzed through the experiences of the professionals currently applying this practice.

The universe of the study consists of the websites that carry out journalism activities on the Internet, that concentrate on the phenomenon of news, and that perform SEO applications in Turkey. Among these news sites, the study has selected the four most visited news sites as the sample of the research and held interviews with their SEO representatives. The selected news sites were determined as the most visited according to data from Alexa.com (accessed April 14, 2021), with these news sites being ranked according to the frequency of visits. In this context, the researcher interviewed SEO managers such as the SEO editor at Ensonhaber.com, the SEO coordinator at Hurriyet.com.tr, the SEO Team Leader at Milliyet.com.tr, and the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) at Sozcu.com.tr. The researcher encoded the names of the interviewed SEO managers as P1, P2, P3, and P4, respectively. The goal of SEO is to make news sites more visible from search engines and to attract more visitors to a site. Therefore, meeting with the SEO managers of the most visited news sites makes up this the significant contribution of this study.

By focusing on understanding how SEO practices play a role in journalism, the questions of this research have been formed as follows:

RQ1: How does SEO change the way readers engage with the news?

RQ2. How does SEO change journalistic practices?

RQ3. What are SEO-practicing journalists' perspectives toward journalism ethics?

Findings

This section of the study contains the findings that have been obtained from the in-depth interviews.

SEO journalism as shaped by reader behaviors

This study questions what SEO journalism means and what kind of structure it has. The point the participants emphasized is that SEO is actually a type of journalism based on reader behavior, and they conveyed the following opinions in this regard:

SEO journalism has taken its place in news practices in recent years and seems will be applied for many years; it is also referred to as Google Journalism. What turns SEO content into news is the readers. SEO journalism is a question-and-answer flow between the public and the journalist, which has benefits both ways. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

Stating how SEO journalism is also called Google Journalism, P1 emphasized how content becomes newsworthy based on the readers.

Along with digitalization and the increase in online experiences, different search methods have emerged in search engines. You look for a subject one way on the Internet, I look for it a different way, and we also look for different topics. There is already a trend system that Google has set up to regulate this, as well as other tools like this. This is what distinguishes SEO journalism, the point of distinction being that readers search in different ways. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

P2 emphasized the readers' side of news and stated the distinction regarding SEO journalism to have formed by the way readers search for the news.

SEO tries to get websites to rank in better positions using relevant keywords. All the processes done to move a website to the top of search engines fall under the

umbrella of SEO. SEO journalism means producing content by identifying trending topics. In order to do this, one needs to use trends to predict what readers are and will search for. An SEO journalist should think like a reader and create content with empathy. In this way, content is produced according to the readers' desires. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

Accordingly, P3 stated SEO journalism to have the feature of empathizing with readers, where the reader influences the trends, and thus the trends also affect the news.

If the subject is internet journalism, I am in favor of the widespread use of SEO-compatible journalism as the correct definition. SEO changes the original structure of the news and can restrict editorial freedom. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

Meanwhile, P4 stated SEO practices to have aspects that restrict editorial freedom. SEO is understood to be formatted according to the way readers search. Accordingly, readers affect trends, and trends affect the news. Readers' behaviors are monitored by news sites, who then take a corresponding position. Concepts such as algorithms, big data, and artificial intelligence are also understood to be very important in SEO journalism.

The element of keywords in the distinction between SEO and traditional journalism

This study examines the differences between SEO journalism and traditional journalism. Here are some views on how SEO practices such as keyword usage transform news texts:

While writing SEO news, a keyword is determined, and this word is repeated frequently so as to be noticed by the search engine. In this respect, SEO news texts are not considered quality content in the context of journalistic practices because the aim is to find out what the reader is looking for, to answer the question, and to increase the number of visitors while doing this. Therefore, it is more of a commercial consideration. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

Saying that SEO news are evaluated as low-quality content, P1 draws attention to the economic dimension of SEO journalism and the importance of increasing the number of visitors.

Maybe the difference between traditional journalism and SEO journalism starts here. When doing SEO journalism, you try to write your news within the framework of keywords. This was also abused a lot in the early days of SEO. In traditional journalism, you can write a very striking headline without using keywords at all. But nowadays, that doesn't matter to Google's algorithms. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

Emphasizing the structure of SEO journalism as created within the framework of keywords, P2 states here that keywords are an important distinction between traditional journalism and SEO journalism.

Traditional news is less detailed and simpler than SEO news. Because keywords are the priority in SEO news, the content can be much more detailed. If this situation goes unchecked, readers may not read it. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

Stating how SEO journalism has become more detailed with the keyword element, P3 drew attention to the danger of the situation going unchecked.

Keywords have an important place in Google's algorithms in terms of reaching more people according to readers' search preferences. This also has the effect of weakening the originality of news and the language used. Focusing only on keywords and ignoring words that enrich the language but are not sought after by the reader cause the news language to become corrupted, repetitive, and disidentified. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

According to P4, the more that news texts are prepared within the framework of similar keywords, the more the news loses its originality and meaning and becomes identical.

The opinions of the participants on this subject were focused on how the element of keywords negatively affects news texts. SEO journalism differs from traditional journalism through its set up, structure, and especially keyword element. Not applying the techniques used to adapt to algorithms in a measured way is understood from the conveyed opinions to cause news to go unchecked, resulting inevitably in negative impacts on journalism.

Content pool formed by SEO's effect on news sites

Another striking point on the news sites that carry out SEO practices is the change in news content. With this change, content other than what is usually defined as news has also started to occur alongside current news flows, and new developments related to any person, event, or situation on the agenda are also turned into news content. In addition, certain topics that are expected to be searched for at certain times or that are always searched for constitute the most important traffic flows of news sites. The participants commented on this issue as follows:

Besides agenda tracking, SEO also cares about the type of content known as evergreen content, which refers to content that readers always read, with content such as which teas are good for colds or how can we protect ourselves from mosquitoes being examples of evergreen content. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

Drawing attention to the type of evergreen content based on reader curiosity, P1 says that these contents always occupy a certain volume of searches and remain useful for a long time.

In fact, the same concern is always present at the root of the work. We reflect things that way in the news because that's how people search. The diversity of content on news sites is all related to this. (P2/ Hurriyet.com.tr)

P2 emphasizes here how the content pool on news sites is also determined by the way people search.

Keeping up with the conditions and innovations is a requirement and touching on different issues besides the current news flow is necessary in Internet journalism especially. Like everything else, our society consumes news quickly. This type of content has to be on almost every website in order to compete with other sites and remain current. However, content that is too intense can disturb readers. Despite this, determining who the audience is and including what they want on the site is important. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

Drawing attention to the necessities of the era and the importance of competition, P3 states again that the readers are the ones who determine the content pool.

These contents in the style of “who is” and “what is” can be used not as news but as elements that deepen the news. However, because this type of content is frequently repeated and updated, news sites have turned into archived garbage. (P4/ Sozcu.com.tr)

P4 emphasizes here that attention should be paid to the distinction between the news itself and the elements that deepen the news.

The participants’ comments show the content pool of news sites to be shaped in line with readers’ curiosity. Using non-news content too much is also understood to harm the phenomenon of journalism. However, this type of content also feeds SEO journalism as a requirement of the age of digital media. As a result, the SEO phenomenon can be said to have a say in what kind of content will occur on news sites.

Google’s algorithms or reader expectations?

Some criteria exist that should be observed when creating news texts that are suitable for SEO, one of which is to prepare news text that appeals to Google by focusing on algorithms. Another one is to write news text that is remarkable and satisfying while also containing news elements in a way that will meet readers’ expectations. The scope of this study questions how the balance between these elements is ensured or whether any priority is being observed while writing SEO-oriented news. The participants’ views in this regard can be conveyed as follows:

Complying with Google’s algorithms while responding to reader expectations is the foundation of SEO journalism. However, there are two options here. The first is to communicate content readers have already expressed curiosity about using the logic of what it is, what details it has, and how it causes wonder. The second is to make the content interesting. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

P1 emphasizes the importance of satisfying readers’ curiosity and says this should be done according to Google’s algorithms.

In fact, the balance is always based on text the reader can understand and where they can immediately find the answer to a question they are looking for. Sometimes while editing news text, however, we have to use certain words more frequently.

We are in such a rush that we can sometimes exceed certain rules regarding certain content or news. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

According to P2, who states that, even though readers' expectations should be given priority, the competition among news sites does not always allow this.

In fact, both should be given equal importance. It would be wrong to give priority to one and ignore the other, because if you do not act in accordance with Google algorithms while trying to reach the audience, you may not be able to reach the audience. Therefore, content should be produced in accordance with readers' expectations of the reader while also paying attention to Google's algorithms. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

Drawing attention to the element of balance, P3 emphasizes here that neither side can be ignored.

Although there are places where the two intersect, the economic order created by Google algorithms has led to the trivialization and corruption of journalistic principles in Turkey as well as in the world. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

P4 states algorithms to determine competition and economic priorities. One understands from the answers that have been given that readers' expectations should be met in accordance with Google because acting only accordance with readers is not possible in a competitive environment. By not taking the algorithms into account, news articles do not reach the reader, and if news texts do not satisfy readers, the algorithms do not make the news visible.

The relationship with readers and Google's tools

Another prominent issue in SEO journalism is the relationship with readers. SEO journalism is a type of journalism that develops through practices involving things such as what readers do, what they search for, and how they search. Therefore, how the relationship with readers is determined is also important in news production. The research also questions within its scope how readership is targeted, how reader habits are determined, and what tools are used in this regard, with the following opinions being conveyed in relation to this:

The first rule in making SEO news involves readership analysis. Noticing the topics of interest, determining the target audience, and responding accordingly are important. Real benefits are achieved once these three steps are applied. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

P1 explains the analysis process in three steps and is understood to draw a framework in which both the news site and readers will benefit.

In fact, the best SEO content is that which the reader doesn't notice at all as such. Capturing the perfect text that will not disturb readers or make any difference while reading is very important for the relationship with readers. While doing this is difficult, this is how Google's algorithms proceed. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

Emphasizing how algorithms are moving toward a structure results in readers not feeling the SEO effect, P2 actually draws attention to Google's ever-differentiating dynamic structure.

The participants' opinions toward Google's tools and products are as follows:

Google Trends shows the search volume for any word entered with regard to a certain time period. In other words, it provides data on things such as how many searches were made, how the search was made, and from which regions. Google Ads reflects all users' actions on the Internet. In this way, one can understand what readers want and conduct research accordingly. Google Search Console detects problems, errors, and statistics on a site and signals when a problem occurs. One monitor instant response regarding your site using Google Analytics, letting one access information about reading statistics regarding a piece of news. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

P2 emphasizes here the different features of each of Google's tools and says that news sites can benefit in many ways from these.

Tools like Google Trends and Google Analytics are like magic wands within easy reach. Thanks to these tools, one can get information about readership and view the read rates and search volumes. Using these tools allows one to produce much more effective SEO content. Monitoring these tools frequently is useful for producing

the right content and seeing how much interest different content draws. These tools contain the answers to many questions such as which topic was researched during the day and which news was read more. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

One understands from what P3 has stated that the way to attract more visitors to a website is to use the data obtained from Google's tools.

Google's tools contribute to improving content better and learning many statistics about content. In this respect, they show the effect of not only SEO journalism, but also the journalism that should be. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

P4 emphasizes how Google's tools contribute to improving news content, and P4's statements reveal how many Google products and tools have had a serious impact on the supply-demand cycle between news sites and readers. People can learn much data related to the searches made on Google and behaviors performed on news sites using Google tools. Google is understood not only to determine the rules of the game but to also offer the conditions to ensure that the game is played in the most correct way.

Is Google a tool or a purpose?

The process currently exists where news sites have to act according to Google's rules in order to be visible and easily seen by readers. The research also questions within its scope how this situation Google has created can be evaluated in the context of a media monopoly. The participants' views on this issue can be conveyed as follows:

Showing the news on the first page of a search result is very important in online journalism. In fact, being on Google is not enough anymore for many institutions and organizations: Being on the first page is necessary. As such, journalism practices are also affected, of course. Online mainstream media holds the lead in terms of both economic power and influence. If you observe Google's rules, you will always be the winner. Institutions that are able to allocate a budget for the information that will provide this do not even allow others an opportunity. How many users are redirected to Google and how many to other websites? In fact, the answer to this question includes the answer to the process of media monopolization. The struggle in SEO journalism is understandable given who has the monopoly of the first pages. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

One may deduce from P1's statements that a system is present that is maintained under the monopoly of economic power in digital media, just as in traditional media.

This is actually very problematic. There is one search engine, and one set of search traffic comes from it. It's a hard truth to accept, but unfortunately you have to stay within Google's framework right now, because there is no alternative. And many people used it. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

Underlining the lack of an alternative to Google, P2 supports the idea that the system Google has created is a media monopoly.

Such a situation inevitably arises. Every site that wants to rank higher in Google searches and increase its organic traffic starts doing similar things. Readers can consider this situation to be a monopoly. In fact, following Google's rules should not be the main goal of news sites. Google should be used as assistive tool. In this way, news sites can provide content diversity and differentiate themselves from other sites. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

According to P3, news sites that want to be authentic should use Google as an assistive tool, not as a goal.

Google contributes to advertising and providing access to news sites. However, Google obviously is also creating a media monopoly with its algorithms and nurturing an order that kills journalistic ethics. A Google algorithm that rewards identical news sites and content causes this industry to remain below the desired level. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

P4 is saying here how Google is a monopoly through its structure that rewards a system that destroys journalistic ethics and principles.

The participants' responses converge with regard to Google's current status having created a media monopoly. One understands from the conveyed opinions that Google has become a reality in the digital age in which we live, a reality that surpasses big media companies in terms of monopolizing the media. The definition of search engine remains extremely superficial for Google, and one can state Google to be an oppressive factor for news organizations regarding the new media environment.

Editors who know the Google language in news centers

Another factor that formed from the structuring created by SEO journalism is the employment of SEO editors in news centers. SEO practices that need to be carried out require a number of different skills apart from traditional journalistic ones. For this reason, SEO editors who can handle the technical side of the business work in newsrooms' SEO units. The research also questions the issue of how the structuring and functioning of newsrooms have changed and transformed in this process. The answers the participants give to this question are as follows:

An SEO editor is actually a concept that started being heard in the last decade, during which news centers opened up room for them. The recruitment process for SEO editors was also seen as an admissions process. A new field has emerged in journalism practices that had not been done or seen before. But as Plato stated, "Necessity is the mother of invention." (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

P1 is understood to have said that having each new developed product meet certain needs also creates the need for those who develop and implement that product.

I don't think there has been a transformation in newsrooms. The SEO editorial was added to the news team. Units arise from the needs of each period, and SEO is like that. There was a need, and a team was found to meet that need. This summarizes the situation. A team was formed that added visitors to the news site and monitored the entire agenda within the framework of Google. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

Emphasizing the need just like P1 had, P2 states how a role change had occurred rather than a transformation in the media.

Needs are changing. No one wants to be left behind when contesting with competitors. For this reason, both SEO editors have been employed in news centers as well as SEO training being given to existing editors. All this has been done to keep up with the times, but it has also caused the language of the news to change. The proliferation of SEO editors has been able to cause traditional journalism and journalistic language to fall by the wayside. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

Based on P3's statements, one can conclude that having SEO knowledge has become important as a criterion for employing journalists.

In terms of SEO-compatible journalism, editors must exist who know the Google language. However, SEO editors' function has in fact deviated from its purpose. Having fewer reporters and more SEO editors is not in the public's interest. (P4/ Sozcu.com.tr)

The conveyed opinions reveal the form of employment in news organizations to have been structured in line with the needs. No great historical experience exists with regard to SEO, and as a new practice, SEO has also brought new meaning to job descriptions. The new needs in news organizations are understood to have arisen as a result of the competitive environment, and those who do not meet these needs will be left behind.

New competencies expected from journalists and academic opportunities

The study has stated within its scope how journalists and SEO editors are expected to have and develop certain new competencies and discussed these in the context of the business strategies required by SEO practices. The study has also questioned what kind of duties have fallen upon the communications faculties that train the journalists who are expected to acquire these competencies. The participants' opinions on this subject can be listed as follows:

Journalists should be people who can take action as soon as the action begins. Foresight and empathy are two of the most important features to have in an SEO editor. An SEO editor should be able to evaluate all the questions that may be asked about the news and should be able to give an answer by putting himself in the shoes of the reader. Communications faculties are the basis for raising good journalists in theory and in practice. For this reason, faculties should attach importance to SEO journalism and add it to education as soon as possible by strengthening its theoretical foundations. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

Pointing out how journalists should have a dynamic structure, P1 emphasizes the importance of being able to think like a reader.

Like regular editors, SEO editors often call and get opinions from authorized sources. They turn what they see around them into news. Although SEO editors are thought to constantly be looking at Google Trends, this is not the case. Actually, there is a lot of hard work involved. For example, one of the most important reflexes to have as an SEO editor is speed, because the things that are being searched for on the Internet are searched for within a certain period of time. In other words, that subject will stop being searched for after a while, or maybe it will be searched for again in a year. In short, SEO editorship is not an easy field in media organizations. Of course, I wish schools had this kind of education. But Google is not a system that stays the same all the time. Algorithms can change as often as every six months. What we're talking about right now may not mean anything next year. Digitalism has a very different flow. How can schools give SEO training? How can something be done on an academic scale? Believe me, I can't even imagine how. But something like this can be done: At the very least, people can be trained who are able to write neat texts, produce content using the different meanings of words without disturbing the integrity of meaning, and write news. These people can be provided with technical knowledge. It would be great if schools had such a department that constantly updated its academics. (P2/ Hurriyet.com.tr)

P2 states that, although SEO editors' work may seem easy, they actually have a way of working that requires much effort. They interpret the constant change in algorithms and trends as the biggest challenge to the job.

Journalists who will do SEO work should be fast. They should be able to notice instant developments and turn them into news. This requires close monitoring. Producing content by following many different sources and having a good command of various subjects also helps. They need to have a good command of tools such as Google Analytics and Google Trends. Each additional piece of information that is learned not only in terms of content but also about the software side helps them stand out in terms of SEO studies and journalism. In this respect, students should be provided with the opportunity to practice much more while being taught this job. (P3/ Milliyet.com.tr)

By drawing attention to the software dimension of web pages, P3 is understood to be saying that having software knowledge is a feature that makes an SEO editor stand out.

It's important for journalists to take the pulse of the public, and one way to do that is by looking at search trends. The academy should always attach importance to producing news, making it accessible to large masses, and enlightening the public, and SEO needs to be seen as part of the business, not as a goal. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

P4 is understood to be focused on the contributions using web tools offers in terms of social benefit.

According to the participants' responses, the characteristics that a journalist should have in the new journalism environment are as follows: speed, foresight, empathy, strict agenda tracking, mastery of different topics, ability to use Google's tools, and software knowledge, with being fast appearing to be particularly important.

Another issue the research queries involves what kinds of duties have befallen communications faculties in the new journalism environment. Most participants stated that communication faculties should work on SEO journalism, emphasizing how communications faculties should reinforce theory and create opportunities for students to practice. Having communications faculties also include SEO as a type of journalism in journalism education was also stated as being beneficial, but no clear proposals were made on how this could be done practically.

SEO journalism and ethics

One of the most discussed aspects of SEO journalism is the relationship applied methods have with journalism ethics. SEO practices have been criticized for some of their features, such as news texts being constructed around keywords, the news being created with the concern of being clicked rather than in accordance with the professional principles of journalism, and information that is sought not being presented in the text (click-bait).

The research has also questioned within its scope the kinds of problems SEO journalism creates and can create in terms of journalism ethics. The participants have made the following comments on the subject:

Discussing any SEO code of ethics is similar to a discussion about politics or religion. Both sides feel strongly. Most search engine optimization practitioners

understand the code of ethics, but not all practitioners use SEO safely. SEO is very prone to abuse in terms of implementation and operation, and having SEO experts carry out their work in good faith is important. Certain problems can be encountered from the perspective of journalism ethics. According to journalistic principles, accurate information is conveyed to the reader in a short, unbiased, and concise manner. With regard to SEO, the purpose and path that are followed serve to benefit different elements, and everything is shaped by Google's rules. (P1/Ensonhaber.com)

P1 emphasizes that, although journalists know the rules of ethics, they may not follow the rules because the algorithm does not fully allow this.

SEO practices in journalism have been implemented very poorly during certain periods. Google's algorithm at that time also enabled this a lot. That's why things that we can't even call content have been used in various negative ways using attention-grabbing headlines without having any actual information or by not giving the information until the last page. We are currently thinking about and working on how we can do better. Journalism is a very sacred business, and the prestige of journalism in society is very different. We are talking about an industry that has no day, night, or holiday. It's the same with digital media. That's why there were people who abused this job, as in every profession. It occurs much less now because the measures Google has taken in this regard are working. Those who abused it have ruined themselves in the industry because they can no longer make a profit or provide as much benefit as before. People's reactions and the comments they made on the subject on social media have helped to improve this. Is it perfect where it is now? No, it still has its shortcomings. But it's much better now. This job also has its difficult parts: Some things happen very instantaneously, and editors can also notice their mistakes. For example, once a screenshot of a piece of news is taken and shared on social media, it is irreversible. Even if that error is fixed after 30 seconds, it doesn't matter. Looking at it from such angles, I think that SEO editors are unfortunately treated a little unfairly. People forget they are humans who have a very difficult job and instead treat them like robots. In fact, every mistake that occurs is not very long term. Despite this, however, SEO has a bad image. (P2/Hurriyet.com.tr)

Making a comparison between the past and the present in their evaluations, P2 states that SEO practices are no longer as abused as they had been and that despite this, negative perceptions about SEO still persist.

The relationship between SEO and ethics is a very controversial topic. The practice of SEO has been abused more and more as the field expands and competitors increase. In fact, Google intervenes in such cases. In extreme cases, penalties and bans may occur. Of course, these are situations that do not comply with journalistic ethics. But SEO has an undeniable place in today's journalism. For this reason, not overwhelming readers and presenting them with the subjects they seek in a concise manner have become necessary. SEO can do its work by avoiding unnecessary information and word pollution. In the age of technology, nothing is more natural than for a news site to try to get their content to the top of a major search engine like Google. Boundaries need to be clearly drawn, and producing content inconsistent with journalistic ethics may result in losing users. In this sense, all news sites should review their content. (P3/Milliyet.com.tr)

P3 draws attention to the sanctions Goggle has imposed regarding the abuse of algorithms and, just like P2, draws attention to the fact that broadcasting that does not comply with journalism ethics will result in the loss of readership.

Underlining that I do not find the concept of SEO journalism to be correct, I would like to state that significant damage has been done to the ethics, character, and reputation of journalism. In this sense, I agree with the criticisms and embrace their justifications. (P4/Sozcu.com.tr)

Meanwhile, P4 states how SEO practices have damaged the reputation of journalism, emphasizing the presence of SEO in journalism to be unethical.

The opinions conveyed by the participants emphasize the aspects of SEO practices that conflict with journalistic ethics. Most of the explanations emphasize SEO as an area that is very open to abuse. One can understand from the conveyed opinions that SEO journalism is not fully compatible with journalism ethics and that SEO's story is seen to be written in connection with algorithms. As algorithms change and transform and Google's rules are renovated, the way SEO is applied and perceived will also change. Conducting SEO journalism by considering journalism ethics is very difficult, especially

in today's conditions. The participants also conveyed the difficulty of simultaneously adapting to both professional principles and algorithms, and at the very least, minimizing these contradictions and being very meticulous are necessary in this regard.

Discussion and Conclusion

The developments in the last quarter of the 20th century created structural changes in the media, during which Internet and web technologies were updated rapidly and the use of computer tools gained importance in many fields and sectors. The phenomenon of digitalization has opened the doors to a new era in which media products have been diversified by processing elements such as texts, sounds, and images together and presenting them to users through various platforms. A cyclical process can be mentioned in which reader habits have changed through the digital tools that are used today, with needs reproducing themselves with each new habit. The models put forward in regard to meeting these needs continue to be developed within the framework of capitalist production relations.

Previous studies on the implementation of SEO practices in the field of journalism have arrived at results regarding the structure that has been shaped by Google's older algorithms (Korap Özel and Deniz, 2018; Duman, 2018; Lopezosa et al., 2019; Giomelakis et al., 2019; Deniz & Korap Özel, 2018; Güzel & Özmen, 2018). However, as stated in the previous parts of the current study, Google's algorithms are not fixed and are constantly updated. Therefore, new studies in the field are also needed. This study has been carried out within the context of Turkey and, by aiming to meet this need, presents some current results about SEO journalism's current application and effects.

As a result of the study, SEO journalism is seen to have become a journalistic practice shaped by reader behaviors. The most important criteria in this regard involve thinking like readers, acting by predicting what readers will search for, and being able to use measurement tools to analyze these things.

Just as Korap Özel and Deniz (2018, p. 164) revealed in their study, the current study has also shown some differences to exist between SEO journalism and traditional journalism. This study has shown one of the most important differences between them to be the use of keywords and understands that keywords should be used in a controlled

manner in news texts, as the uncontrolled use of keywords distracts readers from the news and negatively affects journalism.

News sites that implement SEO are seen to also include non-news content. Although this type of content is part of SEO strategies, having them appear in front of other actual news contents damages the phenomenon of journalism. This study has shown how Google has currently developed a new understanding regarding issues such as repetitive content and spam content, which Duman (2018, p. 277) had shown to be some of the disadvantages of SEO journalism. According to this result, because Google penalizes news sites that abuse algorithms, misleading content is unable to be produced to the same extent as it had before.

SEO journalism is an area that needs to be addressed both in terms of Google's algorithms as well as readers' expectations. The competitive environment and commercial concerns of news sites may cause the balance between these two elements to deteriorate and the goal of adapting to algorithms to gain importance. For this reason, importance is had in being compatible with algorithms as well as in producing texts that are as creative and original as possible. Thus, the attempt should be made to achieve this balance. This research result also supports the emphasis on quality content and creativity as put forth by Lopezosa et al. (2019) regarding SEO journalism.

Because Google renovates its algorithms, the SEO strategies of news sites also get renewed. Having a media environment where Google is such a focal point allows one to consider this to be a serious pressure factor and a form of media monopoly for news sites. As Saran (2021, p. 610) has also stated, global technology companies namely are seen to earn some serious income from the news media.

SEO editors these days have become a facet of newsrooms' employment processes. Therefore, journalists should have such competencies as the ability to acquire software knowledge and use Google's tools, in addition to their current skills. This result coincides with the need for journalists to attach importance to web technologies, as put forth by Giomelakis et al. (2019, p. 11). Journalists are also expected to have features such as speed, foresight, strict agenda-following, and a higher potential than in the traditional period.

Faculties of Communication have duties in the new journalism environment that includes SEO journalism, but the constant change of algorithms has been an obstacle

to creating a basic curriculum. Despite this, Faculties of Communication should provide opportunities for students to practice SEO and implement practices that will provide gains and support them technically.

SEO journalism has aspects that conflict with journalism ethics due to being an area that has been open to abuse, and the study's findings in this regard are in line with the problems revealed in previous studies regarding SEO journalism (Deniz & Korap Özel, 2018, p. 84; Duman, 2018, p. 277; Güzel & Özmen, 2018, p. 225). The significant things that appear in SEO journalism are not the professional principles or ethical rules of journalism, but having more clicks, more advertising, and greater revenue.

As stated in the research, digital media, Google's algorithms, and reader habits are all constantly changing and being refreshed. For this reason, detailed studies should continue being conducted that examine SEO's effects on journalism. In addition, studies have shown gaps to exist regarding the academic aspects of SEO journalism. Universities, especially Faculties of Communication need to fill these gaps by conducting in-depth studies on SEO journalism.

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