

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “Whose Voice Resonates?” A Study on the News Content of Four Alternative Digital-native News Websites in Turkey

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the news content of Turkish digital-native news websites, namely Diken, Gazete Duvar, Kısa Dalga, and T24. Employing both quantitative and qualitative content analysis approaches, the study initially investigates the utilization of sources and framing techniques within the news articles presented on these platforms. The findings underscore the imperative of embracing reporter-driven journalism to amplify the voices of disadvantaged individuals and groups and foster an alternative news agenda. Furthermore, while these websites prominently exhibit a critical framing towards the government and official entities, a distinguishing feature is adopting a balanced language, rather than one showing positive bias, when reporting on the opposition and associated individuals and institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Alternative media, mainstream media, journalism, digital-native, content analysis*

**Öz**

*Bu çalışmada, Türkiye’deki dijital doğumlu haber sitelerinden Diken, Gazete Duvar, Kısa Dalga ve T24’ün haber içerikleri incelenmiştir. Nicel ve nitel içerik analizi yöntemlerinden yararlanılan araştırmada, öncelikli olarak bu sitelerin haberlerinde kaynak kullanımı ve çerçevelenmeler ele alınmıştır. Ortaya çıkan sonuç, özellikle muhabir temelli haberciliğe yönelmenin, dezavantajlı kişi ve grupların sesini duyurmada ve alternatif gündem inşasında kritik öneme olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca bu sitelerde iktidar ve resmi kuruluşlara yönelik eleştirel çerçevelenme dikkat çekerken, muhalefet ve ilişkili kişi ve kurumlar hakkında ise taraflı değil daha çok dengeli bir dilin tutturulduğu gözlemlenmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Alternatif media, ana akım media, gazetecilik, dijital doğumlu, içerik analizi*

## Introduction

In Turkey, digital native news websites that operate within the framework of critical journalism principles and are outside the mainstream are commonly referred to in everyday usage with terms such as "alternative," "independent," and "oppositional.". However, in academic discourse, media practices that symbolize a departure from the mainstream are comprehensively studied under the broad category of "alternative media" (Atton, 2006). Classifications focusing on the different features highlighted by this definition, such as "radical media" (Downing et al., 2001), "grassroots" or "community media" (Howley, 2005), "citizen media" (Rodriguez, 2001), "activist media" (Waltz, 2005), "critical media" (Fuchs, 2010; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2009) and "other media" (Alankuş, 2008), are also made to explain the different facets of this definition. The purpose of this study is to determine whether Diken, Gazete Duvar, Kısa Dalga, and T24, four news websites in Turkey that are not part of the mainstream media, indeed serve as examples of alternative journalism. Instead of focusing on their organizational structures within the newsroom or their revenue models, this approach looks at what they cover in their news, sourcing of the report and whose viewpoints they include. Such a study carried out through the content analysis of news stories, offers a data set to examine whether or not they represent an alternative to the mainstream.

The origin of the word "alternative" can be traced back to the mid-15th century, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and is derived from the Latin words "alternare" and "alternativus." In contemporary usage, the term signifies things that are available as another possibility, relating to activities that depart from or challenge traditional norms or one of two or more possibilities (Oxford Languages, n.d.). In studies related to alternative media, different criteria are adopted, primarily focusing on the differences with mainstream media, such as the revenue model and the relationships with the state and corporations, organizational models within newsrooms, the involvement and participation of the audience and

user-generated content producers, as well as the assessment of the editorial line and the content. Alternative media is defined in its broadest sense as a radical challenge to the professional and institutional practices within the mainstream (Atton, 2003, p. 267). The framework presented by a participant in Noam Chomsky's seminar offers another broad definition: A media structure under citizen control as opposed to state or corporate control (as cited in Atton, 2006, p. 17). John Downing (2001, p. ix), criticized the concept's "oxymoronic" nature through the assertion that "everything is an alternative to something else". The diversity exhibited over time and space by the communities, formations, structures, and entities referred to as alternative media, as well as the changes and transformations they undergo within various socio-political contexts aided by the possibilities of technology, almost render it impossible to provide a singular definition with universal inclusivity. Therefore, the effort to provide a detailed definition of "non-mainstream media" has been an ongoing quest. Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2015) identify four main approaches in studies concerning alternative media. The first approach considers media in the context of serving a community, which could be a geographical community or a virtual/online community. The second approach, as mentioned above, places the focus on being an alternative to the mainstream. This could involve an antagonistic struggle against hegemony or an agonistic, supplementing, or complementary relationship. The third approach evaluates alternative media as a part and component of civil society, examining its relationships with the state and market. Lastly, there is the "rhizomatic" approach that highlights diversity, multiplicity, fluidity, and even ambiguity. Here, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of a rhizome, a non-linear, anarchic, and nomadic network structure is employed to understand the diverse hybrid structure of alternative media (for example, a media practice that touches upon both the local and global, emerges when an event requires it, and can subsequently fade into silence, occasionally forming relationships with the market and the state [Bailey, Cammaerts, Carpentier, 2015]).

Alankuş (2008, p.121), draws attention to the diversity and hybridity of "media initiatives that are representative of counter-globalization, inequalities, discrimination and the search for another world by those who are subjected to inequalities and discrimination, and that try to flourish horizontally and in networks" and proposes the definition of "other media" in contrast to the mainstream media. At this point, it should also be mentioned that the fluidity of the new media environment brings with it a convergence between the mainstream and the "other". Rauch (2016), states that with the ever-increasing convergence in the media, scholars started to drift away from a binary categorization of alternative and mainstream media underlining the fuzzy relationship between the two. By comparing various studies in the field, she argues that, the similarities and differences between the mainstream and the alternative media vary depending on the regime types and also on the periods that they operate. Under the conditions of political and economic instability and under authoritarian and military rules alternative and mainstream media demonstrate greater differences than in liberal democratic contexts in which there is a higher level of economic development, technological access and press freedom.

Furthermore, critiques put forth by Sandoval & Fuchs (2010), particularly within the context of the characteristics mentioned earlier regarding the affirmative stance toward alternative media, also demonstrate that non-mainstream and participatory organizations might not always lead to public good. Despite liberating content and news production from the monopoly of professional journalists and organizations and involving "prosumers" on a smaller scale, this approach could be more costly in terms of time and resources compared to a professionally organized structure. The message may be delivered to a limited audience and, contrary to expectations, could be confined within the walls of an "alternative ghetto." Additionally, while internet technologies allow lower-cost and user-friendly tools to enable the engagement of a wider range of content producers, the persistence of digital

inequalities and the necessity for economic means to become visible/audible must be considered, especially within the context of the media-capital relationship. The participative and horizontal organizational form was thought to play a progressive function, but it has also evolved into a tactic widely used by conservative media groups and even more so by extremist or radical groups in their communication activities. Furthermore, when examined in the context of platform capitalism, participation might not necessarily be interpreted as media democratization; instead, it could be evaluated as the reinforcement of capitalist relations through the commodification of the efforts of "prosumers" sold to advertisers as commodities (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010).

At this point, it is crucial to briefly mention platform capitalism and the revenue models in the context of alternative digital news media. In an environment dominated by traditional mass media, especially television, as the primary information source, the advertising industry, which was the main instrument for covering costs and generating profits in news and content production, became influential in editorial choices. Advertisers possess a strong and often hidden impact on the exclusion of certain topics as well as shaping content (Aydoğan, Başaran, 2012). According to Smythe (2006), viewers/readers also become commodities in this process. In mass media, the audience is transformed into products sold to advertisers. This is largely applicable to "free to use" internet platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. as well. One notable difference is that what is marketed to advertisers is not just the passive audience of the old days, but also today's prosumers (those who write messages, upload photos and videos) (Fuchs, 2009). Today, most readers reach the news and the news organizations reach readers/viewers through platforms. According to the Reuters Digital News Report data (Newman et al. 2023), 30% of the respondents said their primary source for reaching news online was social media platforms. Vincent Mosco further emphasizes that the dominance of platforms in the flow of information is not merely a journalistic concern, but rather a democracy issue. Highlighting the power of these profit-

driven corporations to shape public discourse, Mosco (2019), argues that such power, independent of the universal principles of journalism, could only be restrained through public oversight. Similarly, in Turkey, while the share of printed newspapers in the advertising pie continues to decline, it is obvious that digital news sources are losing the majority of their advertising revenues to platforms like Google and Facebook (Çevikel, 2020).

Today, alternative digital news media seem to meet the mainstream in an area dominated by platform capitalism in terms of revenue sources. Further, the organizational structures of the newsrooms in or out of the mainstream, although usually different in size, resemble each other with the replication of "profitable" models. Therefore, defining what alternative is becomes more complex under these circumstances. Finding an answer to the question "do alternative media seek to redress power imbalances? If so, are they able to?" posed by Fenton (2016, p. 11) could be a crucial place to start. At this stage, Fuchs' (2010) recommendation of a content-focused approach might offer media academics a functional analysis tool. According to Fuchs (2010), the aim could be to reach the broadest possible audience with critical content without negating professional production within a capitalist system or imposing constraints based on non-commercial revenue models.

At this juncture, it's also necessary to mention the notion that journalism can be conducted alongside activism and opposition. As Sözeri (2016) points out, this boundary can become blurred in situations where freedom of the press is restricted under intense pressure and censorship, and where traditional mechanisms for reporting news become inoperable. However, at the same time, a journalistic practice defined only through the lens of being "non-mainstream" with its opposition to the ideology of objectivity and rejection of professional norms can pose challenges (Yıldız, 2020). Under normal circumstances, when journalism is pushed to the point of denying universally accepted ethical codes, there's a risk of deviating from the goal of the general public good and being politically ineffective. Sandoval and

Fuchs (2010), argue that it is possible to be an alternative to the mainstream, even in a capitalist system with similar organizational structures and revenue models to that of the mainstream. Content produced within the framework of ethical principles is expected to demonstrate "suppressed possibilities of existence, antagonisms of reality, potentials for change, questions domination, expresses the standpoints of oppressed and dominated groups and individuals and argues for the advancement of a co-operative society" (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010, p. 148).

### **Alternative media in Turkey**

Çoban and Ataman (2015), examine alternative media in Turkey through three significant periods. According to this perspective, which conceptualizes alternative media in the context of social movements and counter cultures created against the authorities, the first period is characterized by the 1908 Revolution in the Ottoman Empire. The second period encompasses the alternative newspapers and magazines published until the 1980 coup d'état in the 1970s. The third period begins with the Gezi uprising. This approach includes newspapers, radio, and internet sites, as well as critical humor magazines, political publications, films, and film festivals in the analysis set while going beyond focusing solely on journalistic activities. However, even within the context of journalism alone, the Second Constitutional Monarchy era after 1908 also signifies a turning point. Taylan (2012) also notes that the first radical/oppositional newspaper was the socialist weekly "Gave" published in İzmir in 1908.

After 1923, all through the Republican period, journalism practices outside the mainstream allowed for the emergence of a wide range of publications and a rich archive in various mediums such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television over a span of 90 years. In this lengthy period, media-power relations were, of course, frequently tense. According to Sözeri (2016), apart from a brief period following the 1960 coup d'état, when journalists' rights toward media owners significantly increased, they consistently

experienced major rights losses, particularly during coup eras. Adaklı (2014) argues that the Motherland Party government's lengthy dominance after the 1980 coup established the framework for the banking and financial sector's integration with the media, making it accessible to large corporations in particular. This foundation allowed for the establishment of an organic relationship between political power and the media throughout the Justice and Development Party era (Adaklı, 2014). However, by the early 2000s, with the widespread use of the internet, both the transition of this tradition to digital platforms and the establishment of new alternative news outlets against the growing power and influence of mainstream media conglomerates had become standard practices. Already by 1995, print-based newspapers and news magazines had started to introduce their websites, and TV channels had joined this trend by 1996 (Narin, 2017). An example of the first digital-native news website in Turkey can be traced back to the year 1998 with the establishment of the "Net Gazete" website (Çevikel, 2020, p. 94). Starting from the 2000s, numerous similar news websites outside the realm of the mainstream have also emerged. Gürcan (2005) asserts that the severe economic downturn in the media industry, which resulted in nearly four thousand media sector employees losing their jobs, was the primary cause of this. However, the failure of many of these sites' revenue models prevented them from creating original, exclusive news content and made it impossible for them to subscribe to news agencies. As a result, they frequently used other online content without even changing the punctuation, a practice known as "copy-paste journalism" (Gürcan 2005).

The large-scale public protests in the summer of 2013 and the mainstream media's inability to report those events according to universal ethical standards due to the owners' tight ties to the government represent another critical turning point in the 2000s. Similar to Çoban and Ataman (2005), Çevikel also regards the Gezi protests in 2013 as a turning point, highlighting the diversity brought by journalists who lost their jobs due to political reasons or the closure of their institutions,

and who entered the "post-Gezi period" as owners, managers, or employees of digitally-born news platforms (Çevikel, 2023). Therefore, different from the global trend, the transformation of the media sector from paper based to digital is not only due to decreasing advertisement revenues and technological innovation but also due to political reasons. During the Justice and Development Party rule, significant portions of the media was taken over by bosses close to the government, and many experienced and talented journalists were pushed out of the sector (Keten, 2023). By the end of 2022, Turkey ranked 149th out of 180 countries according to Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index, which 90% of the media is stated to be under the government control. In this media landscape, other than a handful of nationwide TV channels and a few national newspapers, it is primarily the digital news media that pursue critical journalism. A recent study on digital-native media in Turkey also included "non-mainstream" media outlets, demonstrated that the main obstacle in sustainable news and/or content production process is the revenue model (Harman, 2023). Many alternative media organizations cannot survive on the basis of the crowdfunding approach. They engage in a competition that sometimes amounts to "clickbait" in order to benefit from the digital advertising revenues, of which the large digital platforms mentioned in the section above take the lion's share. Further, a study by Kızılkaya and Ütücü (2021, p. 5), demonstrated that the three pro-government media outlets in Turkey received more than 90% of Google's "top stories" positions. While independent media was highlighted only 26.2% of the time in Google news despite the fact that their digital reach of 33.5 million users was about to catch pro-government media's 47.8 million users. Many of the critical news outlets also turn to funds and grants in these circumstances and attempt to diversify their sources of income. Two of the four news websites that are the focus of this study, Kısa Dalga and Duvar, are known to have benefited from international funding (Korkmaz, 2022; Chrest Foundation, n.d.). The news in the pro-government media that T24 received funding were refuted by Doğan Akın, the

founder of the website (Akin, 2020). No such information could be found regarding the Diken website.

## Methodology

This study employs a dual approach, utilizing both quantitative content analysis to scrutinize the sources of news stories as well as the individuals, and entities portrayed within the news, and qualitative content analysis to delve into the nuanced news frames pertaining to the government, the opposition, and associated individuals and institutions. First, a content analysis of digital-native Turkey-based critical news websites "Duvar" (gazeteduvar.com.tr), "Diken" (diken.com.tr), "T24" (t24.com.tr) and "Kısa Dalga" (kisadelga.net) is conducted by analyzing the news presented in the "slider" or "carousel" part of their desktop homepages. One limitation of this research is that some other prominent digital-native news websites such as Bianet and Medyascope were not included because of their different web page layouts. Further, other forthcoming news websites that have a higher penetration rate but are part of media groups that engage in broadcast journalism and/or publish newspapers, such as "Halk TV", "Sözcü" and "Artı Gerçek" were not taken into account because they also produce news content for TV and print media and occasionally share contents among these different departments.

According to Berelson (1952, p. 8), content analysis "is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". Duverger (2015) states that in a content analysis, parts of a text such as words, phrases, paragraphs, etc. are placed in a number of predetermined categories. These are later classified into a set of statistics and could then be analyzed with mathematical procedures. However, it should be noted that different media could also be treated as textual. There are several types of content that can be used for content analysis, including words or labels in ad copy, news articles, movies, themes in political speeches, specific posts, or complete Facebook interactions (Riffe et al., 2019). Unlike traditional

media tools such as newspapers, radio, and TV, websites demonstrate a more dynamic nature and include a considerable volume of data (Herring, 2004). Secondly, further complexities for content analysis occur because of hypertextuality and multimedia content (McMillan, 2000). In order to minimize these problems, the sample is narrowed down only to the news/content offered in the sliders of the websites. Sliders (or carousels) are frequently used by such websites because they allow the multimedia content to be delivered in an organized and compact manner while allowing publishers to expand the usage of limited screen space (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 45). These are the most prominent and frequently updated sections of the abovementioned websites.

In the study, the news stories (text, audio-video, photo galleries) and op-eds with news values about Turkish politics that appear in this part of the home pages sequentially between the dates August 14-20, 2023 are analyzed. The chosen time frame is between 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., which is the time period when web pages are updated the most according to news industry standards in Turkey. In the morning period, until noon, the carousel/sliders mostly contain the op-eds of mostly staff or freelance op-ed writers, and during the night, the websites are not updated as frequently as during the working hours of the staff. News and op-eds about, foreign news, arts and culture, lifestyle, magazine, sports, and finance are not coded unless they have a political dimension related to the current agenda of the country. While examining the first ten news articles of these sliders was the main goal, another limitation became apparent. Due to journalistic resource limitations in newsrooms and, unless anything spectacular occurs, less political activity in the country, the news content is updated less frequently on weekends than on weekdays. Further, on Diken's website, there are also observable limitations in the volume of content that relates to the study's topic. As a result, there are differences in the numerical metrics between the websites. Therefore, in the next section conclusions regarding the content are contrasted using percentages rather than numbers.

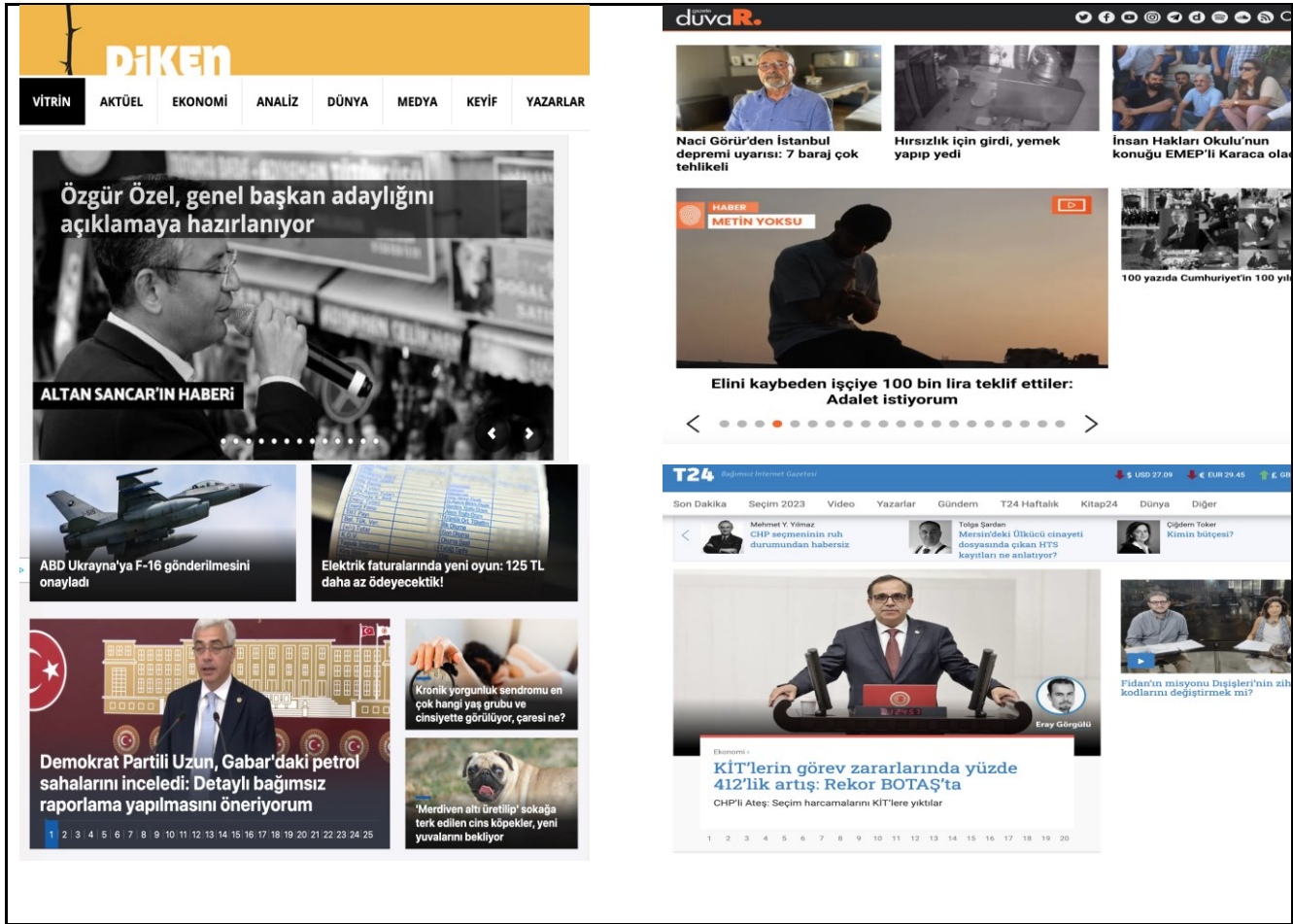


Figure 1 The Carousel/Slider sections of Diken, Gazete Duvar, Kısa Dalga and T24

In this research, first of all, the type of content in the slider parts are listed (text-based news, audio-video, photo gallery, and op-ed). News stories that include both text and audio-video content are cross-coded. Secondly, sources of the news are analyzed under three main categories: “Exclusive” (news published with a byline of a journalist employed in/by the outlet), “external” (other media organizations, news agencies, social media/user generated content, and institutions/politicians/civil society), or “no source”. The “no source” category includes news stories that have no byline and no attribution is made to anybody or any organization. “External” source cluster are further categorized into three: Pro-governmental, critical/oppositional, and impartial/balanced. Thirdly, the source in terms of whom s/he represents is analyzed (government

officials, opposition figures, civil society, experts, celebrities, and ordinary people).

Analyzing the sources of the news has been an essential topic in studying the media content. In news, the types of sources for direct quotations, commentaries, or other forms provide significant information. By examining the attributions to organizations and institutions, impartiality or balance of the news production process could be revealed (Geray, 2006). It is obvious that governmental organizations and political leaders, as the source of news, are the main agenda-setters due to their control over legitimate information (Bourdieu, 1998; Berkowitz, 1987; Cobb & Elder, 1971; Tuchman 1978). Although the alternative media is expected to offer more critical sources and “give voice to the voiceless”, there have been contrasting results when the sources of the alternative media outlets have been studied. In a

*Table 1. Content analysis coding table*

Cate gory	Coding Rules	Remarks
Type of news	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Text-based news</li> <li>2. Op-ed</li> <li>3. Audio-video</li> <li>4. Photo gallery</li> </ol>	Analysis of the format of the news. Op-eds are judged according to certain "news value" standards that are based on exclusivity. This is relevant to narratives where the author shares facts and/or data for the first time to the general public as a result of efforts like interviews, data analysis, investigations, and similar pursuits.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exclusive with byline</li> </ol>	
Sources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. External                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Other media organizations</li> <li>b. Agencies</li> <li>c. Social media</li> <li>d. Institutions / politicians / civil society</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	Firstly, news sources are examined by looking at whether they include the byline of a reporter, editor, or writer. Secondly, external sources are grouped into four categories. This second cluster is also analyzed with regard to journalistic integrity and, if there is one, the political engagement of the news outlet.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. No source</li> </ol>	
Sources 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government officials and/or govt. affiliated institutions and/or officials</li> <li>2. Opposition and/or opposition affiliated institutions and/or officials</li> <li>3. Civil society</li> <li>4. Experts and/or journalists with an expertise</li> <li>5. Celebrities</li> <li>6. Ordinary people</li> </ol>	To investigate whose voice resonates in the news narrative, a sub-grouping was created with regard to outside sources. Cross-coding was done in news stories with more than one sources.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Positive</li> <li>b. Negative</li> <li>c. Impartial/balanced</li> </ol>	
Framing	Government and/or govt. affiliated institutions	Analysis of the representation of government and opposition figures, and policies and those of institutions affiliated with them in three categories if the new story addresses them.
	Opposition and/or opposition affiliated institutions	

research in which journalists from both the mainstream and alternative media were interviewed, Tony Harcup (2003) concluded that mainstream journalists privileged the powerful over the powerless, whereas in the case of the alternative media, the results were exactly the opposite. On the contrary, Atton & Wickenden (2005) suggest that even as an activist newspaper, the UK based SchNEWS displayed similar sourcing routines as the mainstream, and the "ordinary" people's visibility was considerably low compared to the elites (in this case, the elites are those that belong to the dissident camp rather than the establishment).

Finally, as the last part of the analysis, the general frames of the contents in the selected news are analyzed regarding the approach towards the government and opposition policies under three broad categories: Positive, negative, and neutral. Entman (1993, p. 52) argues that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text". Therefore, to test the general hypothesis that the critical and alternative media are particularly anti-government and pro-opposition, the framing of the government and opposition politicians, policies, and affiliated institutions are analyzed in news stories related to this purpose.



## Findings and discussion

Diken (“Thorn” in English) was founded by Harun Simavi in 2014, Gazete Duvar (“the Wall” in English) (by Vedat Zencir in 2016, and Kısa Dalga (“Short Wave” in English) was established first as a podcast platform in 2019 and as a news website in 2022 by Kemal Göktaş. The oldest is the T24, which was founded by Doğan Akın in 2009. Akın, Simavi and Göktaş are all journalists who have worked in the mainstream for many years. According to the data of SimilarWeb data (2023), their country ranks are 203, 93, 2533, and 96, respectively. In the period between May-July 2023, Diken had 32.05 million visitors, Duvar had 57.51 million, Kısa Dalga had 2.2 million, and T24 had 54.98 million visitors. Although these news websites differ in terms of rating performance, this does not mean that there are dramatic differences between them. The study demonstrates that their effectiveness is not always impacted by the content variations between them (which are a product of editorial decisions, newsroom structure, and resource availability).

In this research, 260 news pieces are analyzed (ten sequential news items from Duvar, Kısa Dalga and T24 every day in the given period) for a week. Due to the frequency of the number of news items subject to the research in the time period in question, a total of fifty news items from Diken were included.

A substantial majority of the news articles published in the slider sections of these websites are text-based (241 out of 260). In addition to this, overall seven articles are in op-ed style with news value, while six pieces of the content are audio-visual such as podcasts and/or video stories, and other contents consist of photo galleries. Upon examining the sources of these news articles, a general pattern especially about Diken, Kısa Dalga and T24 emerges (Figure 2)<sup>1</sup>. A considerable amount of news (nearly %72 of the overall content) originates from external sources beyond the respective newsrooms. More precisely, 30,4% of articles are sourced from other media outlets, 11,2% from news agencies, 14,2% from various social media platforms, and 16,1% from various institutions, including governmental, non-governmental, civil society, and international organizations. Notably, over 5% of the news articles (12 out of 260) lack a byline or any specified source attribution. Kısa Dalga stands out as more than 30% of its news content (22 out of 70) is directly sourced from news agencies, with Doğan News Agency (DHA) and ANKA being the primary contributors. In contrast, T24 does not attribute any news sources to news agencies. The utilization of news agencies by Diken and Duvar is also minimal, comprising only 8% and 4% of their content respectively.

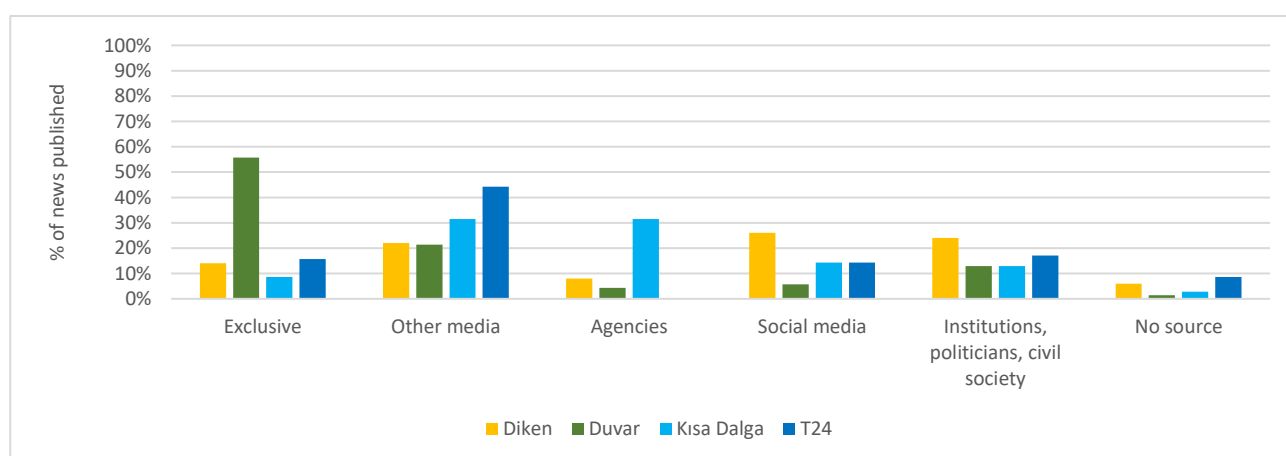


Figure 2. News source

<sup>1</sup> In some news stories, more than one source was used.

Accordingly they were coded as separate sources.

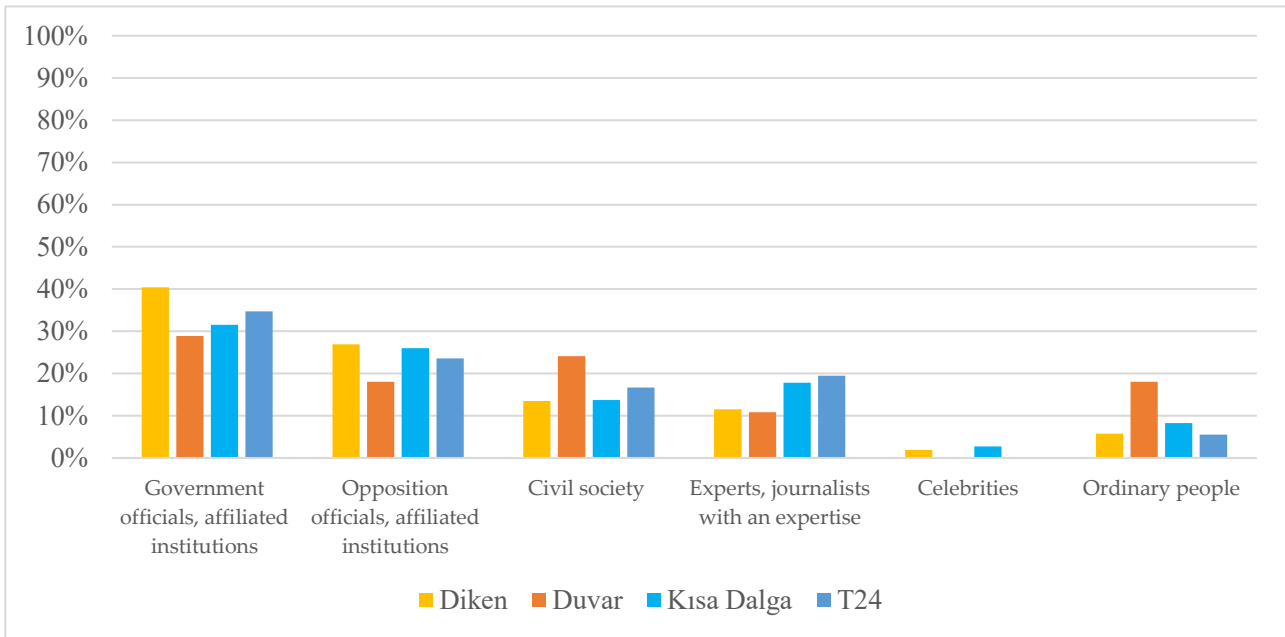


Figure 3. News sources ("whose voice resonates?")

Moreover, at this stage of the analysis, one correlation emerges that calls for further investigation. That is the link between the news's subject and its source. At this point, it is observed that the news website Duvar differs significantly from Diken, Kısa Dalga and T24. Figure 4 illustrates the correlation between the percentage of exclusive news (comprising stories written by staff and/or freelance reporters and writers) and the percentage of stories which includes ordinary citizens cited as news sources.

Duvar is noted to have the most stories with a byline (39 out of 70). There are many journalists that report for this news outlet not only from major cities like İstanbul, and Ankara but from different cities. One report from Van (Cesur, 2023), covers the story of villagers who face immense difficulties in their everyday lives because of the lack of basic infrastructure. Another report (Başakçioğlu, 2023), from an İzmir based reporter about the protests of the people of Marmaris against the local municipality for their planning of a central public

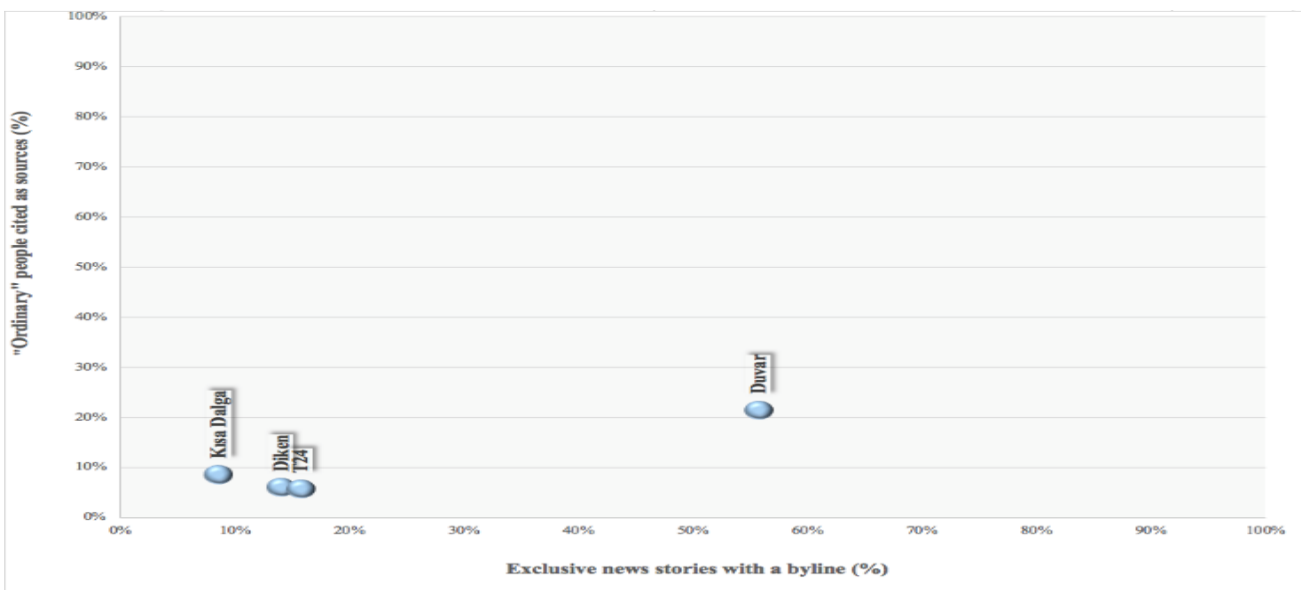


Figure 4. Percentage of ordinary people's stories covered in relation to exclusive stories produced

square as a commercial area. One from Hatay (Günaydın, 2023), in which earthquake victims speak about the hardships they face in finding an adequate shelter after the collapse of their houses, and, one video report from Batman (Yoksu, 2023) in which one young man tells about his struggle for justice after he lost his hand because of an accident at the workplace.

One from Hatay (Günaydın, 2023), in which earthquake victims speak about the hardships they face in finding an adequate shelter after the collapse of their houses, and, one video report from Batman (Yoksu, 2023) in which one young man tells about his struggle for justice after he lost his hand because of an accident at the workplace. It is evident that this outlet leads other by a wide margin in its use of "ordinary people" and civil society institutions as sources for news and, reflecting their struggles and concerns (see figure 4). Further, it is observed that Kısa Dalga fills this gap to some extent through its subscription to the ANKA news agency, which also occasionally reports on the political and social problems in different part of the country by interviewing ordinary citizens. On the other hand, other outlets not only use external resources more for their news production but also give prominence to developments in the political sphere where usually it is a politician that is quoted (Sancar, 2023; Görgülü, 2023). It is also observed that both Kısa Dalga and T24 sometimes publish the news produced by the Turkish services of BBC and DW. This arrangement allows for automatically acquiring news from a partner channel (BBC, DW), driving traffic to both websites. This also prevents tampering with the source news's text, title, and images. At this point, it is essential to introduce critical notions about the "participation" of non-professionals in the content production process. Bailey, Cammaerts, Carpentier (2015), distinguish between participation "in" the media, that is, the participation of non-professionals in the production of the media output, and participation "through" the media which means the ability to participate in public debate and self-representation. They define participation in the media as one of the key differences between the alternative and the mainstream. However, other

than a handful of op-eds in all these four websites, the news is produced either by staff reporters, editors, and freelancers or appropriated from other "professional" sources.

When we look at the political affiliations of other media organizations used as sources, we do not observe a dramatic difference between the news websites in question (see figure 5). When the media in Turkey is considered in the context of power relations and polarization, even agencies (AA, DHA, İHA), which are conventionally assumed to deliver impartial and equitable news, tend to exhibit a pro-government inclination. In contrast, the ANKA news agency primarily focuses on the activities and statements of the opposition. A similar situation is also observed for traditional media organizations. Therefore, in this section, the "impartial/balanced" category includes reputable international news organizations and agencies, which are known for working within the framework of the principles of journalistic ethics they have announced, as well as publications in Turkey, especially those that publish sectoral analyses

It should not come as a surprise that officials and public institutions are still important sources of information, even for the alternative media especially in countries like Turkey, where centralization is consolidating at a growing pace. Further, it is not unexpected that the analyzed news websites utilize content from organizations that generate critical and oppositional perspectives more since they are founded to counter the problems in the mainstream rather than relying on state institutions, governmental bodies, and affiliated media outlets responsible for disseminating official statements.

It is evident that the government, politicians in power and those in the governing alliance, government affiliated, and public institutions receive greater coverage in news stories than those of the opposition (see figure 6 & 7). The data illustrates that coverage of these subjects is predominantly portrayed with a negative, critical frame. In contrast, news concerning opposition parties, politicians, and affiliated institutions tends to adopt a more neutral tone.

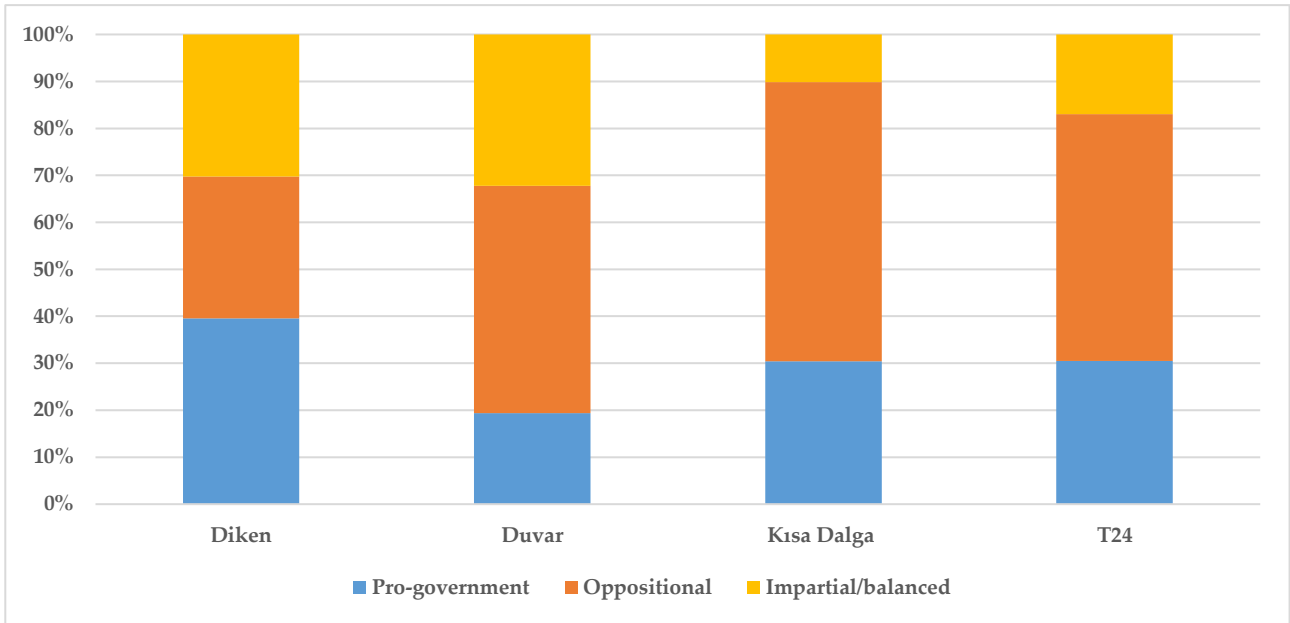


Figure 5. The political stance of the other news sources that are utilized

Notably, a substantial portion of the "positive" framing originates from press statements issued by politicians and officials, in which they reaffirm their policies. These statements, which are occasionally published, either as a direct transcript from a TV coverage or via the feed of a news agency or directly from a social media post, without an extra editorial effort like fact-checking or providing a broader framework about the claims etc., result in a positive framing of the subject and/or subject matter. Further, it can be argued that these news sites, although disp

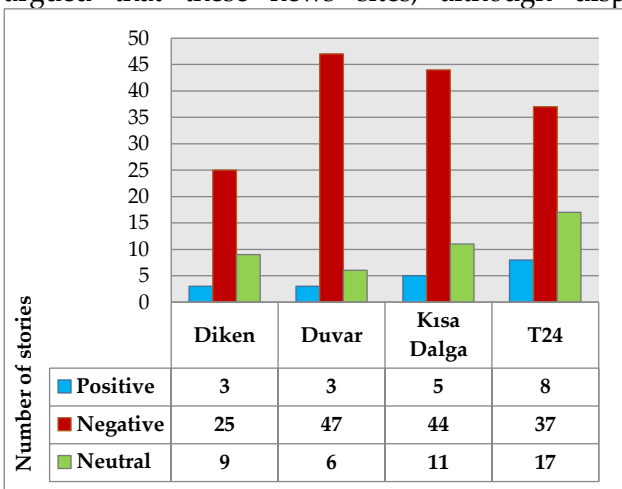


Figure 6. Framing of the news about the government and affiliated institutions

laying a critical stance about the government, ruling elites and state institutions' policies, their

orientation may not inherently align with the pro-opposition viewpoint.

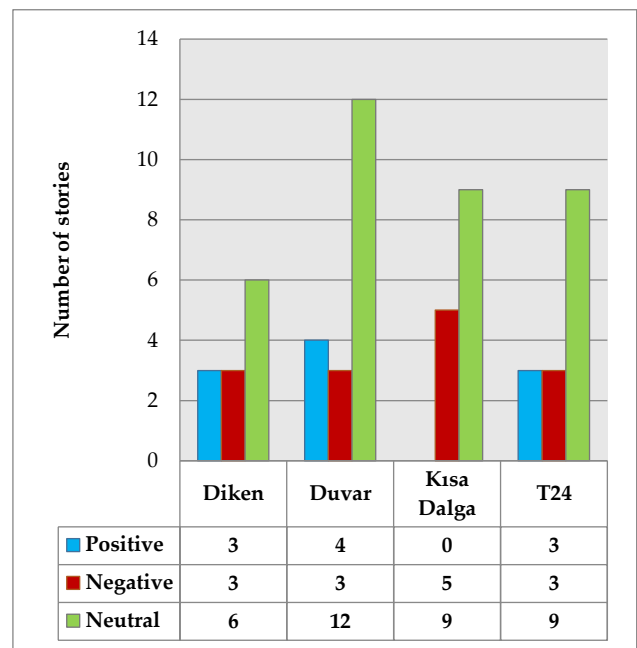


Figure 7. Framing of the news about the opposition and affiliated institutions

### Conclusion and future research

The founders of the four news websites that are the focus of the research define their aims as follows: Harun Simavi of Diken: "To be the thorns of the media, which is being transformed into a rose

garden in our country, and to defend our democracy, fundamental freedoms, and secularism, which began to shake from its roots.” (Simavi, 2014). Vedat Zencir of Duvar: “Gazete Duvar will never be a mission newspaper. It will be a newspaper that does its own work... We made an effort to be with people who stand out with their journalistic identities rather than their oppositional identities and who have stability in this regard.” (Karaca, 2016). Kemal Göktaş of Kısa Dalga: “Kısa Dalga’s motto is good journalism. We try to do what good journalism requires...” (Korkmaz, 2022). Doğan Akın of T24 “We are not the voice of any community. We don’t have any fixed opinions, ideological engagement. Journalism without ideological obsessions, without financial obligations, without working unregistered, is possible.” (T24, 2021). Although none of the founders stress the concept of alternative journalism in an academic sense, they underline the need to counter the mainstream. In a country where more than 90% of the media is under the control of the government through different mechanisms, pursuing critical journalism qualifies news outlets as alternatives to the mainstream. However, there is still one unanswered question at this point: “Whose voice is heard in these outlets? Is it the agenda set by the elites (be it from the government or the opposition) or the problems, concerns and, struggles of ordinary citizens and the civil society circles that we are hearing?”. Approached from the framework established by Sandoval and Fuchs (2010), a real alternative to mainstream should focus on oppressed and dominated people while underscoring the antagonisms in society and seeking possible potentials for change. Establishing the link among the hegemonic political agenda and its effects on disadvantaged groups is a vital starting point for an alternative journalistic effort. This study demonstrates that, although harboring many similar traits, it is not possible to categorize these news websites as a monolithic structure. The differences may not be very noticeable at first glance. However, analyzing the editorial choices made and investigating whose voice is being “heard” in news stories helps to understand whether what is being done really

constitutes an alternative to the mainstream. The number of reporters in different parts of the country reporting the problems and struggles of ordinary people, groups and organizations that are unheard in the media is more vital in the number and diversity of op-ed writers in countering the mainstream. The overreliance on other media as sources creates a vicious circle of the existing agenda, at least from a critical perspective. Further studies about the reasons why non-mainstream critical news outlets cannot fulfill this condition are vital, especially by analyzing not only the volume and sources of revenues and sustainability in newsrooms but also by concentrating the allocation of already limited resources with regards to editorial policy.

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