

## Digitalization Against Monopolization: Polyphony in Turkish News Media

### Dijitalleşme Karşısında Tekelleşme: Türk Haber Medyasında Çok Seslilik

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#### ABSTRACT

Discussions on monopolization and oligopolization in Turkish media have largely centred around the claim that media plurality has significantly diminished, particularly since 2002. However, the rapid pace of digitalization and the growth of online journalism have reignited these debates. This study explores the impact of digitalization on media plurality. Until the 1980s, Turkish media exhibited diverse ownership patterns, though most outlets adhered to the official state ideology. Despite being owned by different entities, a state-controlled homogeneity prevailed. In the late 1980s, as large conglomerates entered the media sector, a process of monopolization and oligopolization ensued, concentrating media ownership in the hands of powerful capital groups. This led to increasing economic pressure on the media, and by 2002, criticisms of diminished plurality continued to grow as monopolistic and oligopolistic tendencies intensified. Although ownership patterns have shifted over time, economic oligopolization persists. Nevertheless, the digitalization process has introduced new players, fostering a more democratic and pluralistic media environment. The rise of digital platforms has created opportunities for alternative media outlets and independent journalists, allowing new voices to emerge. Consequently, while monopolistic trends remain dominant in the traditional media landscape, digitalization has facilitated greater media plurality, partially alleviating the pressures of monopolization on traditional media outlets.

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## ÖZ

Türk medyasındaki tekelleşme ve oligopolleşme tartışmaları, özellikle 2002 yılından itibaren çok sesliliğin kaybolduğu iddiası üzerinden şekillenmiştir. Ancak, hızlı dijitalleşmenin etkisi ve internet gazeteciliğindeki gelişmeler bu tartışmaları yeniden canlandırmıştır. Bu çalışma, dijitalleşmenin medyadaki çok seslilik üzerindeki etkisini ele almaktadır. 1980'lere kadar Türk medyası sahiplik açısından çeşitlilik gösterirken, medya kuruluşlarının büyük çoğunluğu resmî devlet ideolojisine bağlı kalmıştır. Bu dönemde medya, farklı sahipler tarafından yönetilse de devletin kontrolü altındaki tek seslilik hüküm sürmüştür. Ancak 1980'lerin sonunda büyük holdinglerin medya sektörüne girmesiyle tekelleşme ve oligopolleşme süreci başlamış, medya sahipliği büyük sermaye gruplarının elinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Bu süreç, medya üzerinde büyük bir sermaye baskısının oluşmasına neden olmuştur. Özellikle 2002'den sonra medya üzerindeki oligopolleşme ve tekelleşme artmış, bu da çok sesliliğin kaybolduğuna dair eleştirilerin devam etmesine neden olmuştur. Medya sahipliği yıllar içinde değişiklik gösterse de ekonomik oligopolleşme yaygınlığını sürdürmüştür. Bununla birlikte dijitalleşme süreci, sektöre yeni oyuncular kazandırmış, yeni seslerin ortaya çıkmasını sağlayarak daha demokratik ve çoğulcu bir medya ortamını teşvik etmiştir. Dijitalleşme, medya alanında köklü değişimlerin önünü açmıştır. Dijital platformların yükselişi, alternatif medya organlarının ve bağımsız gazetecilerin sesini duyurabilmesi açısından önemli bir fırsat yaratmıştır. Sonuç olarak, Türkiye'de medya sektöründe tekelleşme eğilimleri hâlâ önemli ölçüde mevcut olsa da dijitalleşme ile birlikte daha çoğulcu bir medya ortamı oluşmuş ve bu durum, geleneksel medya üzerindeki tekelleşme baskısını kısmen hafifletmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tekelleşme, dijitalleşme, oligopolizasyon, çevrimiçi gazetecilik, medya sahipliği

## INTRODUCTION

The monopolization of the Turkish media constitutes one of the most critical areas of debate today. The central issue in this debate is the concept of polyphonic journalism. Whether during the 1990s or after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power in 2002, this issue has remained central to the political agenda, with the media's inherent political biases becoming a focal point in ongoing discussions. The media's tendency to form monopolies and oligopolies in Türkiye, along with the issue of political bias, remains key topics of heated debate in both the political sphere and academic literature. Despite their long-standing presence, oligopolization and entrenched political biases in the media gained unprecedented attention in public and

academic discussions beginning in 2002. The dominant practices prior to 2002 hindered any investigation into the causes of oligopolies, monopolies, and political biases in the media, creating significant blind spots that obscured discussions on the impact of digitalization on the sector.

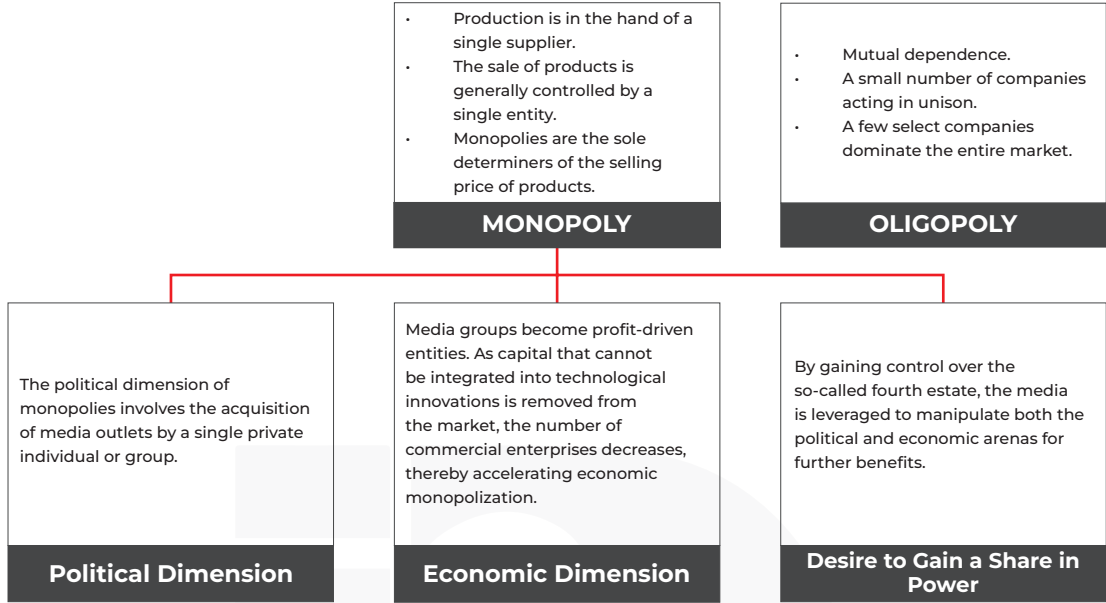
This study explores how digitalization has contributed to polyphony in the news media, as well as its effects on media ownership and property relationships. It initially aims to outline the conceptual framework of monopolies and oligopolies. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical development of media ownership, this article will review several studies from domestic literature addressing media ownership, monopolies, oligopolies, the media's stance on military interventions, and the evolution of proprietary relationships in the media. It will then illustrate how media ownership has expanded horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, grounding these developments in a relevant theoretical framework. Accordingly, it will compare digital news outlets with traditional media ownership to determine whether polyphony has indeed been achieved in the current media landscape. Finally, the article will move beyond discussions of traditional monopolistic forms, focusing instead on the proliferation of digital outlets and the advantages of media polyphony, particularly as digital news sources increasingly attract users over print media.

### **Monopolies: Their Types and Dimensions**

Conceptually, a monopoly occurs when a single entity controls the production facilities of a commodity and unilaterally administers its sale and pricing. An oligopoly, on the other hand, involves a small number of interdependent firms that work together to maintain shared dominance of the market. Examining how the political, economic, and power dynamics of monopolies interact can lead to a deeper understanding of these concepts (Demers, 1999, p. 42; Nebiler, 1995, p. 36).

While media monopolies share similarities with monopolies in other sectors, they differ in that they aim for more than just material gains. Media monopolies seek to influence and manipulate individuals' economic and political judgments. Economically, a few wealthy media conglomerates dominate the market, often pushing smaller entities that cannot adapt to technological advances out of the sector, thereby reducing the number of firms. Politically, media monopolies involve private individuals or groups controlling media outlets to advance their own or their company's interests. These political monopolies, also known as monopolies of authority, work in tandem with economic monopolies to secure personal privileges. In regimes where such monopolies are prevalent, they often result in strict government control over all media outlets, including the press, leading to media manipulation (Danışman, 1982, pp. 17–22).

**Table 1. Oligopolies and the Three Dimensions of Monopolies**



Source: (Danışman, 1982, pp. 17–22; Demers, 1999, p. 42; Nebiler, 1995, p. 36)

The monopolization of economic and political power often leads to a desire to participate in and wield that power. As Sönmez argues that the pursuit of intangible assets and potential revenue explains why capitalist ventures outside the media sector invest in the seemingly unprofitable media industry (Sönmez, 2003, p. 112). These intangible assets include the ability to (i) reach the masses, (ii) communicate messages in a preferred manner, (iii) influence society, (iv) exert available power, (v) expand one’s share of power, and (vi) use one’s power to counter or challenge rival capital groups and political entities (Kadioğlu, 2018, p. 117).

Forming a political and economic monopoly offers numerous advantages, such as increased political influence, the ability to sway political circles and use the media as a tool of coercion, enhanced investment opportunities across various sectors (e.g. winning government contracts and obtaining credit from state-owned banks), privileged access to government incentives, the capability to use media for advertising owned banks and companies, and greater involvement in diverse marketing activities through the media (Aytaliyeva, 2010, p. 88; Topuz, 2003, p. 9). In addition to the three dimensions discussed above, Doyle asserts that monopolies in the media sector expand in three directions: horizontal, vertical, and diagonal (Doyle, 2002, p. 13).

Horizontal expansion occurs when a single entity acquires multiple media outlets, leading to a reduction in independently staffed press organizations. This type of monopoly arises when separate editorial operations are consolidated under one entity.



Vertical expansion, on the other hand, involves control over every stage of the technical process—from media content production to distribution—by a single entity. An example of vertical expansion is when a media conglomerate gains ownership of news agencies, paper production facilities, printing presses, and advertising operations (Toktokan, 2010; Yapar Gonenç, 2012, pp. 44–45).

Diagonal expansion, also referred to as diagonal integration or cross-media ownership, is the third type of monopoly. This form of expansion occurs when a single entity acquires mass communication media across distinct domains, such as television, newspapers, and radio (Yapar Gonenç, 2012, p. 45). Diagonal media ownership leads to a reduction in the number of firms operating within the sector, consolidating control under a few dominant media conglomerates (Kuyucu, 2013, p. 160). The danger of diagonal expansion lies in the loss of autonomy among different media outlets, resulting in media homogeneity (MacBride, 1980, p. 104; Topuz, 2003, p. 8). This homogeneity undermines public awareness by enabling manipulation by those holding political and economic power, ultimately threatening the core democratic principle of pluralism (Toktokan, 2010, p. 60).

### **A Bird's Eye View of Monopolization and Oligopolization in Turkish Media**

During the single-party era in Türkiye, media was under strict state control, serving as a tool to promote the Kemalist ideology across the population. Despite this control, alternative viewpoints to the state-sanctioned narrative began to emerge. In the second half of the 1950s, the press once again adopted its single-party stance, actively contributing to the conditions leading up to the military coup of May 27, 1960. Following this, during the military memorandum of March 12, 1971, and the subsequent coup of September 12, 1980, the press was entirely under military oversight, publishing only content aligned with official state propaganda.

Consequently, the Turkish press prior to 1980 can be characterized as a pro-junta, monophonic entity that was antagonistic toward civil society and wholly under the influence of official state ideology. During this period, the press operated under a political monopoly with unfettered control, actively working to garner public support for the military interventions and coups in which it had played a significant role in instigating (Altun, 2011, p. 123; Çelikiz & Kuzucanlı, 2019, p. 116; Topuz, 1989, pp. 200–204; Yavuz, 2017, pp. 115–116).

Several small media groups, unable to cover increasing operational costs, went bankrupt during the 1980s. Liberal policies facilitated the entry of wealthy businessmen into the sector, which quickly moved to acquire ownership and control over various Turkish media outlets. In 1979, Aydın Doğan—a wealthy businessman with interests

in multiple sectors—achieved a notable feat by purchasing shares in the newspaper *Milliyet*. The early 1990s saw the establishment of Star 1, Türkiye's first privately owned television channel, breaking the state monopoly on the sector and prompting large, wealthy groups to launch new television channels. This led to a diagonal expansion of the existing press monopoly to include television channels. Similarly, the political monopoly that existed before 1980 extended into the economic sphere.

Starting in the 1990s, powerful conglomerates began to expand horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, eventually acquiring ownership of newspapers, distribution companies, radio channels, television channels, and banks. This expansion can be seen as a natural response to the economic conditions of the 1990s, which led to the oligopolization of Turkish media. During this period, the media was highly monophonic, in sharp contrast to the polyphonic nature that emerged post-2000. This monophonic, oligopolistic media structure became a significant component of the fourth estate and played a major role in the post-modern coup of February 28, 1997 (Çağlar, 2013, pp. 97–98; Özkır, 2009, pp. 96–100).

By the early 2000s, nearly every media conglomerate owned a bank. However, this period coincided with one of the most devastating economic crises in the history of the country. The resulting crisis led many banks to declare bankruptcy, which in turn severely impacted media conglomerates. The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund of Türkiye (TMSF) took control of the media outlets belonging to these bankrupt banks and eventually sold them to competing businessmen starting in 2005. Interestingly, this had the unintended effect of providing a platform for new, alternative voices to emerge in the media.

### **Post-2000: Diversification of Oligopolies and Polyphony**

Between 2003 and 2005, Doğan Holding owned the newspapers *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Vatan*, and *Radikal*. In addition to these four publications, *Yeni Şafak* and *Star*—owned by Albayrak Group and Uzan Holding, respectively—were, and continue to be, among the most prominent print newspapers in Türkiye. Between 2005 and 2007, *Star* was purchased by Sancak Group from the TMSF. Ciner Group, which had been a joint owner of *Sabah* from 2000 to 2005, gained full ownership in 2005. However, after failing to repay its debts, Ciner Group lost control of *Sabah* to the TMSF in 2007, and the newspaper was sold to Çalık Holding in 2008. These ownership changes among media conglomerates led to a complete restructuring of the Turkish media landscape. Prior to 2000, political power was divided among coalition governments, while the media landscape was highly monopolized. After 2002, political power consolidated under a single party, while media ownership became more fragmented.



The post-2010 era is characterized by an increase in polyphony, driven by a series of legal reforms. Article 9, Section 1, Clause d of Law No. 6112 on the Establishment of Radio and Television Enterprises and Their Media Services, enacted in 2011, limited media organizations to owning no more than a thirty-percent share of the market. Additionally, constitutional amendments made in 2011 had a significant impact on Doğan Holding, one of the most influential media conglomerates at the time, forcing it to transfer the newspapers *Milliyet* and *Vatan* to Demirören Group. Along with the market share limits, new regulations were also introduced concerning private radio and television ownership.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, Law No. 6112 aimed to tighten media ownership regulations for commercial organizations and to prevent monopolistic practices. Article 19, Section 1, Clause f of the law increased the permissible share of foreign capital in media service providers. Before this amendment, Article 29 of Law No. 3984 restricted foreign entities to owning up to twenty-five percent of shares in only one private radio or television service provider. Following the 2011 changes, foreign entities could own up to fifty percent of a single media service provider and could hold shares in up to two private radio and/or television service providers (Sözeri & Güney, 2011, pp. 20–21; Radyo ve Televizyonların Kuruluş ve Yayın Hizmetleri Hakkında 6112 Sayılı Kanun, 2011, p. 11391; Yıldız, 2016, p. 335). The primary motivation for these regulatory changes was the rising interest from foreign entities in Türkiye's media sector, driven by the country's expanding economy (Sözeri, 2009, p. 210).

Doğan Holding, which held a dominant position in television, print media, radio, magazines, news agencies, and distribution networks until 2011, began to reduce its investments in the media sector due to both government measures aimed at curbing diagonal expansion and the company's own economic challenges. Despite its near monopoly in the Turkish press through control over distribution networks, Doğan Holding was compelled to sell its newspapers *Milliyet* and *Vatan* to Demirören Group. In 2018, Doğan Holding sold its remaining media assets to the same conglomeration, effectively exiting the media sector. Meanwhile, Çukurova Holding and Doğu Group continued to operate in the sector. As of 2015, four conglomerates—Demirören, Turkuvaz, Türk Medya, and Doğu—have overseen the bulk of media operations, with Ciner Group also maintaining an active role in the sector (Kuyucu, 2013, p. 154; Özdurdu, 2011, p. 31).

Since 2011, several independent media firms have remained active in the Turkish press alongside the central media groups. The owners of the newspapers *Sözcü*, *BirGün*, and *Cumhuriyet* are Burak Akbay, BirGün Yayıncılık ve İletişim Ticaret A.Ş., and the Cumhuriyet Foundation, respectively. Currently, six groups—Türk Medya, Doğu,

<sup>2</sup> As part of these regulations, the following clause "organizations involved in production, investments, imports, exports, marketing, and finance shall not be permitted to broadcast on radio or television" was repealed. With this repeal, joint-stock companies gained the right to establish radio and television stations.



Albayrak, Ciner, and Turkuvaz Medya—have achieved significant diagonal expansion,<sup>3</sup> controlling a substantial portion of print media outlets in Türkiye and owning key central media venues. Over time, Ciner Group has shifted its focus away from print media to acquire new media outlets. Çalık Holding, which entered the media sector in 2013, had a brief presence before exiting. In contrast, Albayrak Group has neither purchased nor sold any outlets during its time in the sector. Doğuş Group has expanded its media holdings by acquiring additional television channels and a radio station.

The Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) media network pursued aggressive horizontal, vertical, and diagonal expansion strategies from 2002, significantly growing its media presence over eleven years. However, in early 2016, all FETO-affiliated outlets were seized by the government and shut down after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, based on court rulings under counter-terrorism measures. Following the acquisition of *Star* and *Akşam* newspapers, which had been taken over by the TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund), Sancak Group began expanding horizontally by acquiring *Güneş* newspaper in 2010 and later ventured into television with new channels in 2013. By 2017, Sancak Group sold all its media assets to Türk Medya, which then undertook its own diagonal expansion. Although Turkuvaz and Demirören entered the media sector only in 2010, they have quickly become dominant players, amassing a substantial portion of the media landscape. Both conglomerates, with diverse sectoral interests, have successfully engaged in horizontal, vertical, and diagonal expansion within the media landscape.

In summary, media ownership in Türkiye experienced a significant transformation starting in 2005. Examples of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal expansion are evident from 2002 to 2018. Media conglomerates sometimes exit the sector entirely or sell their outlets, creating opportunities for new voices to emerge. While it is incorrect to compare the post-2000 era directly with the monophonic, monopolistic media structure of the 1980s and 1990s, where media outlets were controlled by a single entity, a new oligopolistic structure did emerge. The key distinction of this new status quo from the previous monopolistic structure is the increase in the number of conglomerates within the oligopoly, leading to a more diverse and polyphonic media landscape.

### **Polyphony: An Effect of Digitalization**

Digitalization is the process of transforming audio, images, and text into formats that can be utilized in multimedia environments on computer systems (Tankosic & Trifunovic, 2015, p. 175; Uçan, 2012, p. 363). Törenli describes digital technology as “All forms of information—data, audio, music, text, photographs, and images—that, through the

<sup>3</sup> Diagonal media expansion or concentration occurs when a single entity operates in multiple mass media platforms (like television, newspapers, radio) and/or owns businesses in sectors outside the media industry (Uluç, 2003, p. 283).



use of microprocessors, can be converted into bits or computer language.” (Törenli, 2005, pp. 98-99). New media technologies built on three foundational elements—*interactivity*, *demassification*, and *asynchronicity*—integrate existing digital technology into communication systems. Interactivity, a key concept in this framework, individualizes media consumption by offering diverse user options. In this model, individuals are seen as active participants or users, rather than passive readers or listeners.

In traditional media, individuals must sift through a variety of messages broadcast to a broad, heterogeneous audience to find the content most relevant to them. However, with the rise of demassification in new media, users are empowered to directly access the specific messages that align with their personal interests, bypassing those they find irrelevant. Additionally, new media provides users with time-independent access to information, enabling them to send and receive content at their own convenience. This development has effectively eliminated the requirement for synchronous communication, allowing for greater flexibility and personalization in how information is consumed. (İspir, 2013, pp. 19–20).

Indeed, traditional journalism faced a transformative shift with the rise of digitalization. The established practices of print-based journalism were carried over into the digital realm, adapting to technological advancements. Newspapers that transitioned to online platforms were labelled as new media, seamlessly integrating text, images, video, and audio content (Aydoğan, 2013, pp. 31–32; Çatal, 2017, pp. 7463–7464; Değirmencioğlu, 2016, pp. 604–605; İspir, 2013, p. 18).

With the proliferation of satellite systems in the 1990s, nation-states gained the capacity to broadcast domestic content beyond their borders, initiating the gradual collapse of long-standing media monopolies. This technology broke many of the sector’s previously accepted norms, most notably by allowing the 1991 Gulf War to be televised globally, almost like a serialized TV show. Concurrently, the rapid expansion of the internet, alongside satellite developments, had a profound negative impact on traditional television and radio broadcasts, hastening the advent of the digital revolution (Koloğlu, 2006, p. 160). Although the first attempt at online journalism occurred in the USA in 1979, it was unsuccessful. However, by 1993, the media and business sectors heavily invested in the growing field, leading to significant developments. The first true online journalism endeavours as we understand them today began in 1995, with *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in the USA and the *International Herald Tribune* and *Daily Mirror* in Europe being early adopters. The rapid expansion of digital journalism can be attributed to its relatively lower investment costs compared to traditional print and visual media.

Türkiye closely followed global developments in digital media, with the magazine *Aktüel* making the first move into this new realm in July 1995. Two years later, newspa-

pers such as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Sabah* began digitizing their content. *Milliyet*, then owned by Doğan Holding, was the first Turkish newspaper to publish its entire print content online. As digitalization efforts accelerated, several independent internet sites, including *Nethaber*, *Habertürk*, and *İnternethaber*, emerged and proliferated significantly after 2000 (Kara, 2012, pp. 441–442; Koloğlu, 2006, pp. 180–181).

## Opportunities Created by Digitalization

Improvements in internet technology, increased internet usage, and the rising costs associated with publishing and reading print newspapers led to a decline in print newspaper circulation toward the end of the 1990s. The large media conglomerates that had once dominated traditional media quickly recognized the potential of web-based journalism and invested in digital platforms. As a result, print publications transitioned to a digital environment, where they swiftly established a significant and influential presence (Çakır, 2007, pp. 123–125; Kazaz, 2013, pp. 220–229; Kılıç & Övür, 2019, p. 122).

Online journalism involves producing newsworthy content in a digital environment while adhering to the same ethical and professional standards as traditional journalism. This form of journalism has introduced several benefits and sparked important discussions regarding the evolving nature of journalism, especially its newfound freedom from time constraints (Aydoğan, 2013, p. 34). According to Singer, contemporary journalism prioritizes quick access to news over the accuracy that once defined the field, and social media platforms have increasingly become the primary news source for many people (Singer, 2003, p. 152).

With faster reporting enhanced by numerous audio and visual elements, online journalism has significantly accelerated the speed at which followers can access information, all while reducing the financial burdens typically associated with print media (Çatal, 2017, pp. 7463–7464; Deuze, 1999, p. 373; Matheson, 2004, p. 453). This format has streamlined the processes of gathering, disseminating, receiving, and interpreting information, allowing users to provide immediate feedback. The combination of these technological innovations and the interactive features of digital platforms sets online journalism apart from its traditional counterpart (Alemdar & Uzun, 2013, p. 222; Aydoğan, 2013, p. 30; Çakır, 2007, p. 123; Deuze, 2004, p. 104; Polat, 2018, pp. 50–53). By providing users with the ability to access and compare the same news story from multiple sources and perspectives, digital media has succeeded in dismantling media monopolies, ushering in a new, polyphonic era of journalism. Online journalism in Türkiye is a vibrant and growing sector, improving in effectiveness over time. In addition to high circulation print newspapers that also publish online, there are firms that exclusively publish newsworthy content on the internet (Table 2).



**Table 2. Ownership of Print Newspapers and Online News Websites in Türkiye (2024)**

Year Established	Media Outlet	Newspaper/Website Owner	Firm
1918	Akşam	Zeki Yeşildağ	Türk Medya Group
1920	Anadolu Ajansı	Republic of Türkiye	Republic of Türkiye
1924	Cumhuriyet	Alev Coşkun (President of Foundation)	Cumhuriyet Foundation
1948	Hürriyet	Yıldırım Demirören	Demirören Holding
1950	Milliyet	Yıldırım Demirören	Demirören Holding
1970	Türkiye	Ahmet Mücahid Ören (Executive Board Chairman)	İhlas Holding A.Ş.
1982	Güneş	Zeki Yeşildağ	Türk Medya Group
1985	Sabah	Ömer Faruk Kalyoncu	Turkuvaz Media Group/Kalyon Group
1993 <sup>4</sup>	Yeni Akit	Ramazan Fatih Uğurlu	Akit Medya Group
1993	İhlas Haber Ajansı	Ahmet Mücahid Ören (Executive Board Chairman)	İhlas Holding A.Ş.
1994	Takvim	Ömer Faruk Kalyoncu	Turkuvaz Media Group/Kalyon Group
1994	Yeni Şafak	Ahmet Albayrak	Albayrak Media Group
1995	Posta	Yıldırım Demirören	Demirören Holding
1999	Star	Zeki Yeşildağ	Türk Medya Group
1999 <sup>5</sup>	Demirören Haber Ajansı	Yıldırım Demirören	Demirören Holding
1999	Mynet	Emre Kurttepelı	Mynet Medya Yayıncılık Uluslararası Elektronik Bilgilendirme ve Haberleşme Hizmetleri A.Ş.
2000	Bianet	Nadire Mater and Ertuğrul Kürkçü	IPS İletişim Vakfı
2000	İnternet Haber	Hadi Özışık	İnternethaber Yayıncılık A.Ş.
2003	Haber 7	Zekeriya Karaman	Nokta Elektronik Medya A.Ş.
2004	Bir Gün	İbrahim Aydın	Bir Gün Yayıncılık ve İletişim A.Ş.

<sup>4</sup> Akit was established in 1993 and changed its name to Yeni Akit in 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Before its acquisition in 2018, Doğan Holding had sold Doğan Haber Ajansı (DHA) to Demirören Holding.

2006	En Son Haber	Serkan Kalemçiler	EnSonHaber Medya Hizmetleri A.Ş.
2006	Haberler	Cengiz Teymur	Yeni Medya Elektronik Yayıncılık Ltd Şti
2007	Sözcü	Burak Akbay	Estetik Yayın A.Ş.
2007	Oda TV	Soner Yağın	Proje-Ct Prodüksiyon İletişim Tan. Dan. Halkla İlişkiler Ltd. Şti.
2009 <sup>6</sup>	HaberTürk	Turgay Ciner	Ciner Yayın Holding
2009	T24	Doğan Akın	Tempo24 Basın Yayın Prodüksiyon Ltd. Şti.
2014	Diken	Harun Simavi	Keskin Kalem Yayıncılık ve Tic. A.Ş.
2014	Süperhaber	Cengiz Er	Super Medya Haber Prodüksiyon Yayın ve Reklamcılık Ticaret Limited Şirketi
2016 <sup>7</sup>	Karar	Mehmet Aydın	Karar Yayıncılık A.Ş.

Source: Table compiled by the author.

Table 2 lists popular news websites associated with both established print newspapers and online-only news outlets. It shows that, except for *AA*, *DHA*, *İHA*, and *Mynet*, all other outlets were founded after 2000. This growth in online journalism reflects the broader trend of digitization. Notably, the news outlets listed in the table are owned by different commercial entities, indicating that monopolization has not taken hold in the digital news sector. The diversity of ownership among the fourteen most popular online news websites suggests that digitalization has reduced the prevalence of monopolies in Türkiye. Furthermore, the variety in publication standards among online news websites, such as *T24*, *Oda TV*, *Bianet*, *Mynet*, and *Diken*, underscores that online journalism is not monophonic, offering a range of perspectives distinct from traditional media outlets.

Apart from *Sözcü*, *Karar*, and *BirGün*, all print media outlets were established before 2000. Despite multiple changes in ownership, these outlets continue to operate under the owners listed in Table 2. The table further shows that Turkuvaz Media Group owns *Sabah* and *Takvim*; Demirören Holding owns the central news outlets *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Posta*; and Türk Media Group owns *Star*. Other than these three conglomerates, no other entity owns more than one newspaper. Since the newspapers considered central media (i.e. *Sabah*, *Takvim*, *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Posta*, and *Akşam*) are divided among these three large conglomerates rather than being controlled by a single entity or family, claims of a complete monopoly or even oligopoly in the central media

<sup>6</sup> HaberTürk ceased printing physical newspapers in 2018, the same year it fully transitioned to online journalism.

<sup>7</sup> Although Karar initially produced content exclusively online at karar.com, it began publishing a print newspaper in 2016.

sector would be unfounded, at least concerning print news outlets. Given the variety of print and online news outlets discussed in this study (e.g. *Sözcü*, *BirGün*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Diken*, *Aydınlık*, and *T24*), it is reasonable to assert that the field of journalism in Türkiye has become significantly more polyphonic than before.

Using statistics collected from *b2press.com* (B2Press, 2024a, 2024b), Table 3 compares the bounce rates<sup>8</sup> and average time spent on websites affiliated with print newspapers and online-only news outlets. Regarding the websites belonging to print newspapers, the table indicates that *Sözcü*, *Hürriyet*, and *Cumhuriyet* are the top performers in terms of average time spent on their websites, suggesting that users are more engaged with these platforms. In contrast, the websites of print newspapers such as *Aydınlık*, *Yeni Şafak*, and *Yeni Akit* exhibit significantly lower levels of user interaction. Specifically, users spend only thirty-three seconds on *Aydınlık*'s website, thirty-four seconds on *Yeni Şafak*'s website, and one minute eleven seconds on *Posta*'s website, respectively. Moreover, bounce rate statistics from *b2press.com* indicate that *Hürriyet* (54.47%), *Milliyet* (52.33%), and *Cumhuriyet* (47.21%) have the highest bounce rates among the surveyed websites belonging to print newspapers. In contrast, *Aydınlık* (13.34%), *Karar* (14.53%), and *Yeni Akit* (21.69%) have the lowest bounce rates in this category. This suggests that users are less likely to engage further with websites of traditional newspapers compared to those with an exclusively online presence.



<sup>8</sup> Bounce Rate represents the percentage of visitors who enter a website and leave without interacting further, such as by clicking on another page, advertisement, video, or image. An ideal bounce rate typically ranges from 30% to 50%. Websites with a bounce rate higher than 50% should consider strategies to encourage visitors to stay longer and engage more with the content.

**Table 3. Average Time Spent Reading and Using Media Outlets<sup>9</sup>**

**Data from B2Press 2024 (a)**

	Websites	Average Time Spent on Websites (Min: Sec)	Bounce Rates
Websites Belonging to Print Newspapers	sabah.com	02:57	43.99%
	sozcu.com	06:00	43.54%
	milliyet.com	03:02	52.33%
	hurriyet.com	03:15	54.47%
	birgun.net	02:21	32.73%
	cumhuriyet.com	03:11	47.21%
	takvim.com	02:42	37.22%
	posta.com	01:33	36.06%
	yenisafak.com	00:34	41.30%
	star.com	01:56	35.53%
	turkiyegazetesi.com	01:25	31.73%
	aksam.com	01:50	41.74%
	yeniakit.com	01:11	21.69%
	karar.com	01:39	14.53%
	aydinlik.com	00:33	13.34%
Online News Websites	ensonhaber.com	03:55	36.01%
	haberler.com	04:39	39.10%
	bloomberght.com	09:02	60.16%
	haber7.com	04:02	32.73%
	haberturk.com	03:57	40.89%
	gazeteduvar.com	01:50	30.46%
	halktv.com	00:39	15.07%
	superhaber.tv	01:51	58.67%
	cnnturk.com	01:31	61.14%
	ntv.com	01:50	53.87%
	diken.com	03:43	36.88%
	internethaber.com	01:52	36.32%
tgrthaber.com	05:33	45.70%	
t24.com	03:21	45.57%	

Source: <https://tr.b2press.com/haber-siteleri> (B2Press, 2024a)

<sup>9</sup> This table was created by the author using data obtained from (B2Press, 2024a) for circulation, interactivity, time spent on the website, and bounce rate from July 2024.



Among online-only news outlets, users spend the most time on *Bloomberg* (nine minutes and two seconds), *TGRT Haber* (five minutes and thirty-three seconds), and *Haberler* (four minutes and thirty-nine seconds). Conversely, *Halk TV* has the shortest average time spent at just thirty-nine seconds, followed by *CNN Türk* (one minute and thirty-one seconds) and *NTV* (one minute and fifty seconds) and *Gazete Duvar* (one minute and fifty seconds). Regarding bounce rates in this category, *CNN Türk* (61.14%), *BloombergHT* (60.16%), and *Süper Haber* (58.67%) are most likely to see users leaving the site without further interaction. Conversely, *Halk TV* (15.07%), *Gazete Duvar* (30.46%) and *Haber 7* (32.73%) are the ones with the lowest bounce rates, respectively.

The data in Table 3 reveal that online news websites generally retain users for longer periods compared to the websites of print newspapers. For example, *haber7.com*, which operates exclusively online, sees users spending significantly more time on the site. In contrast, websites linked to both online and print newspapers have notably shorter average user engagement times. Additionally, many online news websites have lower bounce rates, indicating deeper user engagement with these platforms. Conversely, websites like *Aydınlık* and *Karar* experience very brief user visits. Notably, some online news sites, such as *CNN Türk* and *BloombergHT*, exhibit high bounce rates, suggesting that users are less likely to explore additional pages after accessing the site. Overall, online news websites are emerging as more interactive and preferred platforms, as reflected by their longer average times spent and lower bounce rates.

**Table 4. Interactivity with Print Newspapers and Online News Websites (2024)<sup>10</sup>**

Print Newspapers	Average Circulations (January 15-21, 2024)	Website Affiliated with Newspapers	Average Number of Visitors (January 2024)
Sabah	112,211	sabah.com.tr	61,000,000
Hürriyet	107,978	hurriyet.com.tr	103,000,000
Sözcü	104,168	sozcu.com.tr	90,000,000
Akşam	101,488	aksam.com.tr	17,000,000
Türkiye	101,393	turkiyegazetesi.com.tr	1,800,000
Milliyet	101,393	milliyet.com.tr	87,700,000
Posta	59,785	posta.com.tr	12,200,000
Takvim	53,060	takvim.com.tr	24,700,000
Yeni Akit	52,768	yeniakit.com.tr	14,000,000

<sup>10</sup> This table compares the average circulation statistics for printed newspapers during the week of January 15th to 21st, 2024, with the number of visitors their online versions received in January 2024. Note that the printed version of the newspaper *Star* is excluded from the table as its paper printing ceased on December 21, 2019.



Yeni Şafak	50,617	yenisafak.com	18,500,000
Cumhuriyet	15,507	cumhuriyet.com.tr	40,400,000
Karar	11,955	karar.com	12,700,000
Aydınlık	10,429	aydinlik.com.tr	5,300,000
Star	N/A	star.com.tr	3,600,000

Source: (B2Press, 2024b; Medya Takip Merkezi, 2024)

According to the data in Table 4, the three most circulated print newspapers are *Sabah*, *Hürriyet*, and *Sözcü*, followed by *Akşam*, *Türkiye*, *Milliyet*, *Posta*, and *Takvim*. However, when examining online clicks, *Hürriyet* leads significantly compared to the other publications. *Sözcü*, *Milliyet*, and *Sabah* follow *Hürriyet* in terms of online clicks. This data does not reveal a clear impact of monopolization or oligopolization. While *Sabah* (owned by Turkuvaz Media Group), *Hürriyet* (owned by Demirören Holding), and *Sözcü* (owned by Estetik Yayın) are the top-circulated newspapers, *Hürriyet*, *Sözcü*, and *Milliyet* have the highest number of online clicks, respectively.

Table 4 shows significant differences in the reach of print newspapers compared to their affiliated online news websites as of January 2024. For example, *Hürriyet* had an average print circulation of 107,978, but its online platform attracted an impressive 103 million visitors, highlighting a shift towards digital consumption. Similarly, *Sabah* and *Sözcü* experienced high online engagement, with 61 million and 90 million visitors respectively, in contrast to their print circulations. In contrast, newspapers such as *Türkiye* and *Yeni Akit* had relatively low online reach despite similar print circulations, reflecting varying levels of success in the digital transition among different outlets.

Moreover, Table 4 indicates that there is no correlation between the number of sales of print versions of newspapers and the number of clicks their online versions receive. This suggests that diversification and polyphony have become more pronounced as newspapers shift from physical printing and distribution to online publication. While the circulation of print newspapers currently remains below two hundred thousand copies, their online versions attract millions of clicks. This clearly demonstrates that readers are increasingly turning to the internet for news instead of print newspapers.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2000s, monopolization and oligopolization have become increasingly prominent topics of media discussion in Türkiye. Early discussions on these issues often overlooked the impact of digitalization on media polyphony, ownership, and property

relations. After examining the concepts of monopolization and oligopolization, this article aimed to provide an overview of the publication policies adopted by the media in Türkiye's post-coup era. It explored how existing political, economic, and societal fragmentations have reshaped media ownership relationships. This analysis utilized the concepts of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal monopolization to assess the political implications of proprietary relations in media, focusing on how digitalization has transformed and broadened media ownership

In the wake of the economic crisis that shook Türkiye in the early 2000s, the TMSF took control of media companies owned by banks unable to meet their debt obligations. As major media conglomerates ceased content production and the numerous media companies acquired by the TMSF were put up for sale, media ownership in Türkiye underwent a complete restructuring.

As a natural consequence of the cutting-edge opportunities brought about by digitalization and the resulting changes in media consumption habits, a multitude of media outlets representing diverse political positions have emerged. This new structure differs markedly from the pre-1980 media monopoly, which was centred on a specific ideology and singular viewpoint, as well as from the 1990s, when the press was dominated by a monophonic oligopoly. Furthermore, the fact that two media conglomerates—Demirören and Turkuvaz—not only acquired the proprietary rights of several media outlets across different sectors but also diversified into various businesses in recent years can be seen as indicative of a diagonal monopoly. However, it is important to note that the people now live in a polyphonic era where print newspapers in Türkiye struggle to reach even one hundred thousand readers, while online news websites attract millions of visitors each day. Indeed, just as digitalization has enabled a proliferation of online news platforms offering diverse perspectives, it has also weakened the monopolistic and oligopolistic structures that characterized earlier eras.

Following 2000, digitalization compelled the media—which had been owned by and transferred among a select group of journalists, families, companies, and conglomerates since the founding of the republic—to undergo profound changes in both ownership and control. The most significant aspect distinguishing post-2000 journalism from its predecessors is the massive proliferation of online news websites. This development has led to the replacement of the monophonic media format with a more efficient, democratic, and polyphonic media landscape. Additionally, although it is not a dimension discussed in this study, the contribution of political power in this process should not be overlooked. Ignoring the influence of political authority would be a significant omission in analyses of media-capital relationships.



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