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About ASSAM International Refereed Journal

ASSAM International Refereed Journal (ASSAM UHAD) is published with the aim of contributing original research and scholarly studies in the field of social sciences to the academic literature. Established in 2014, the journal is committed to publishing high-quality and academically rigorous works that serve as reliable references for researchers and scholars.

ASSAM International Refereed Journal is a peer-reviewed academic journal. Until 2017, it was published biannually. Between 2017 and 2020, three electronic issues were published annually in April, August, and December. As of 2020, the journal returned to a biannual publication schedule, releasing issues in April and November each year. While the journal was published in *volume* and *issue* format until 2023, it has continued its publication life solely in *issue* format as of 2024.

Beginning with the November 2025 issue, the journal has adopted a paid publication policy. Detailed information regarding publication fees is available in the “Fee Policy” section on the journal’s official website. As of 2025, ASSAM International Refereed Journal is published exclusively in English.

The journal welcomes scholarly works that fall within the broad scope of the social sciences, including interdisciplinary studies. Since October 2017, manuscript submissions have been accepted through the ULAKBİM DergiPark system.

ASSAM International Refereed Journal is an online, open-access publication. By providing free access to academically produced studies, the journal aims to support institutions and individuals engaged in scientific research and to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge.

Each manuscript submitted to the journal is evaluated through a double-blind peer-review process by at least two independent reviewers who are experts in their respective fields. For a manuscript to be accepted for publication, reviewers must submit positive reports indicating that the study is suitable for publication. Only one article by the same author or group of authors may be published in a single issue. Accepted manuscripts are placed in a publication queue and published in subsequent issues. Authors have no influence over the peer-review process or the decisions of the editorial and administrative boards.

All accepted manuscripts are edited in accordance with the journal’s publication policies and formatting guidelines before being published on the system. Authors and readers may freely access and download published issues from the journal platform.

In line with its publication policy and academic vision, ASSAM International Refereed Journal publishes special issues in addition to its regular issues. Within this framework, the “Mass Communication-Special Issue” aims to address contemporary theoretical and practical transformations in the field of mass communication from a multidimensional perspective. This special issue brings together original scholarly contributions focusing on current topics such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems, new media environments, and the social implications of communication technologies. Coordinated by an expert Special Issue Editor, the issue seeks to make significant contributions to the mass communication literature and to encourage interdisciplinary academic debate.

Editor-in-Chief
Professor Ali Fuat GÖKÇE

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Editorial Preface

Dear Readers,

As ASSAM INTERNATIONAL REFEREED JOURNAL, we are pleased to present our special issue entitled “*Mass Communication-Special Issue*” which brings together contemporary theoretical discussions and empirical studies in the field of communication. The discipline of mass communication is undergoing a profound transformation driven by digitalization, artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems and the expanding literature of the network society. This shift calls for a systematic reassessment of existing theoretical paradigms as well as established literary conventions.

This special issue includes ten original scholarly articles addressing a broad thematic spectrum, ranging from journalism in the new media environment and algorithmic journalism to internet television, digital security, brand loyalty, neuromarketing, disaster communication, and climate resilience. The contributions examine the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of mass communication through an interdisciplinary perspective, offering valuable insights that strengthen the relationship between theory and practice.

The articles featured in this issue critically explore the impact of artificial intelligence on journalistic content, the transformation of communication models through digitalization, and algorithmic journalism within the context of the click economy from a media literacy perspective. In addition, the issue discusses contemporary reflections on network society theories, the effects of CEO-induced crises on corporate reputation, the role of digital media in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, the evolution of internet television from global and local perspectives, and the political and strategic dimensions of cyber security discourses.

Within this framework, the “*Mass Communication-Special Issue*” aims to contribute theoretical depth and analytical diversity to ongoing debates in the field of mass communication, serving as a valuable reference source for researchers, academics, and practitioners alike. All articles included in this issue have undergone a rigorous peer-review process and have been published in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and scientific quality.

The editors would like to express their appreciation to all authors, reviewers, and editorial board members for their valuable intellectual contributions and rigorous engagement throughout the preparation of this special issue. Their collective efforts have been instrumental in ensuring both the scholarly quality and thematic coherence of the volume. It is anticipated that the studies brought together in this issue will enrich ongoing debates within the field of mass communication and serve as a reference point for future research.

Sincerely,

Editor

PhD Student Muhammed AKSU

Special Issue Editor's Preface

In today's world, the rapid development of information and communication technologies has had profound and multidimensional effects on all areas of social life. In particular, the intensification of the digitalization process has fundamentally transformed the nature of media institutions, the functional role of journalism, the structure of communication models, and the mechanisms through which public discourse is formed. These transformations are not limited to technological dimensions alone; they also reshape social relations, political decision-making processes, economic behavior patterns, and the formation of cultural identities. In this context, media has emerged not merely as a tool for information transmission, but as a complex social institution that plays a strategic role in shaping public consciousness, regulating power relations, and disseminating ideological influences.

The special issue of the ASSAM academic journal entitled “Mass Communication” aims to examine these transformation processes within a scientific, theoretical, and analytical framework. The studies included in this issue address the changes occurring in the contemporary media and communication environment from various scholarly perspectives and comprehensively evaluate the effects of digital technologies on information production and consumption. In this respect, the special issue seeks to make significant contributions to both theoretical debates and practical applications by presenting current issues in media studies through an interdisciplinary perspective.

With the formation of the information society, classical models in the field of media and communication have increasingly been replaced by more complex and flexible structures. Traditional one-way communication mechanisms have evolved into interactive, network-based, and user-oriented models. This process has weakened the boundaries between information producers and consumers and has transformed audiences from passive recipients into active participants. Consequently, the contemporary media environment has emerged as a product not only of technical innovations but also of the transformation of social behaviors and communicative relationships.

Journalism, within this new reality, faces both significant opportunities and serious challenges. While digital technologies have substantially increased the speed and scope of information production, they have also brought fundamental principles such as reliability, objectivity, ethical responsibility, and professional standards back to the forefront. Automated systems, algorithmic decision-making mechanisms, and big data analytics directly affect the professional identity of journalism, making the issue of balance between human agency and technological tools increasingly visible. In this context, the special issue brings together scholarly studies that critically assess the transformation of journalism.

The digitalization process has also transformed the structure of the communication economy. The rise of commercial interests in the media sector, the prominence of the attention economy, and the management of audience behavior through measurable indicators have raised concerns regarding content quality. The evaluation of content based on popularity metrics and the prioritization of information aimed at rapid consumption may lead to the marginalization of analytical and in-depth journalism. In this regard, media literacy, critical thinking, and the audience's ability to interpret information carry strategic importance for society. The scholarly approaches presented in this special issue not only describe these problems but also propose solution-oriented conceptual frameworks.

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Historical and ideological factors also play a decisive role in the formation of the contemporary media environment. The intellectual heritage, traditions of political enlightenment, and ideas of statehood that hold an important place in the history of social thought continue to form the foundation of communication discourses today. Media studies should not focus solely on contemporary technologies; they should also examine how the intellectual legacy of historical figures is recontextualized in the modern era. The academic approaches presented in this special issue establish a connection between history and the present, enabling a broader understanding of the developmental dynamics of media and public consciousness.

The digital transformation of audiovisual media also occupies an important place within the conceptual framework of the journal. Digital platforms have transformed traditional broadcasting models by enabling personalized content consumption, interactivity, and the elimination of time and space constraints. This transformation has created new forms of relationships between media producers and audiences and has accelerated the flow of information on a global scale. Alongside global trends, comparative analyses of regional and national media experiences contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary communication processes.

The theoretical foundations of the information society hold particular significance in current media research. Network-based social structures, digital connectivity, and the decentralization of information flows have transformed the principles of social organization. Media fulfills both a connective and a regulatory function within this new social structure. This special issue contributes significantly to academic debates by linking theoretical approaches that explain the structure of contemporary society with media realities.

Strategic communication and corporate reputation have also gained increasing importance in the contemporary media environment. Information disseminated through digital platforms can make crisis situations more rapid and far-reaching in their impact. Under these conditions, the communication strategies, ethical attitudes, and sense of social responsibility of institutions and leaders play a decisive role in shaping brand image. Media studies provide a scientific foundation for the development of the field of strategic communication by addressing these processes not only from an applied perspective but also within a theoretical framework.

Today, media is closely associated not only with information and economics but also with security and risk communication. The global increase in environmental risks, natural disasters, and climate change has heightened the importance of reliable and rapid information dissemination. Digital media platforms have become important tools for awareness-raising, early warning, and social mobilization. Media research examines, at a scientific level, the key factors shaping societal attitudes toward sustainability and security in this context.

At the same time, the contemporary communication environment has facilitated the emergence of new scientific orientations in the study of consumer behavior. In-depth analyses of human psychology, emotional responses, and decision-making mechanisms are widely applied in media and marketing strategies. When examined comparatively with traditional communication theories, these approaches enable a more accurate understanding of the mechanisms through which modern media influences audiences.

In the digital age, issues related to information security and cyberspace have also become central areas of media research. The control of information flows, digital security discourses, and the representation of power relations in the media reflect the political and strategic dynamics of contemporary society. Media functions in these processes both as a

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transmitter of information and as an instrument of ideological influence. Scholarly approaches contribute to a deeper understanding of the new challenges of the digital era by analyzing these complex relationships.

In conclusion, the special issue of the ASSAM academic journal entitled “Mass Communication” addresses current issues in contemporary media and communication research within a systematic and conceptual framework. The studies presented examine the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of digital transformation through a holistic approach and explain the changing functions of media institutions on a scientific basis. As editors, we believe that this special issue will serve as a valuable scholarly resource for researchers, academics, and practitioners working in the field of media and communication and will provide a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for future studies.

Special Issue Editor’s

Assoc. Professor Aytekin ZEYNELOVA

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Yeni Medya Ortamında Yapay Zekânın Gazetecilik İçeriği Üzerindeki Etkisi

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Journalistic Content in The New Media Environment

Sabina İZZATLI¹

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Özet

Bu çalışma, Yapay Zekâ'nın (YZ) değişen yeni medya ortamında gazetecilik içeriğini nasıl dönüştürdüğünü incelemektedir. Dijital teknolojiler haberin üretilme, dağıtılma ve tüketilme biçimlerini yeniden tanımlarken, YZ modern gazetecilikte kritik bir araç olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Otomatik haber yazımı ve veri analitiğinden, kişiselleştirilmiş içerik sunumu ve izleyici etkileşimine kadar birçok alanda YZ, haber odası pratiklerini ve editoryal karar alma süreçlerini yeniden şekillendirmektedir.

Makale, medya kuruluşlarının doğal dil üretimi, makine öğrenimi ve algoritmik öneri sistemleri gibi YZ araçlarını nasıl kullandığını inceleyerek, verimliliği ve izleyici erişimini artırma çabalarını ele almaktadır. Ayrıca, büyük veri kümelerinin işlenerek eğilimlerin ortaya çıkarıldığı ve araştırmacı gazeteciliğe katkı sağladığı veri gazeteciliğinde YZ'nin artan rolüne dikkat çekilmektedir. Hız, ölçeklenebilirlik ve kişiselleştirme gibi avantajlara rağmen, çalışmada algoritmik önyargılar, editoryal şeffaflığın azalması ve YZ üretimi içeriklerin özgünlüğüne dair etik kaygılar gibi olası sakıncalar da değerlendirilmektedir. Vaka analizleri ve güncel eğilimler ışığında bu araştırma, gazetecilik süreçlerinde insan denetiminin sürdürülmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma dijital toplumda gazeteciliğin geleceğine dair devam eden tartışmalara katkı sunmakta; YZ'nin yeteneklerinden yararlanırken gazetecilik etiği, güvenilirlik ve demokratik değerlerden ödün verilmemesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yapay Zeka, Gazetecilik, Yeni Medya, Algoritmik Önyargı, Haber Otomasyonu

Abstract

This research focuses on the issue of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in journalism and its implications for the digital media ecosystem. AI has become an indispensable asset in contemporary journalism as digital paradigms shift the processes of news production, distribution, and consumption. This article aims to address the manner in which media companies apply AI, including Natural Language Processing (NLP), deep learning, and recommendation algorithms, to improve productivity and expand audience size. It also explores the growing significance of AI in data-driven journalism, where vast amounts of data are processed to discover patterns and validate investigative stories.

Through case studies and analysis of current trends, this research emphasizes the importance of maintaining human oversight in journalistic workflows. It argues that while AI can augment journalism, it must be guided by professional standards, ethical principles, and a commitment to public interest. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about the future of journalism in a digital society. It calls for balanced integration of AI in newsrooms' policy by leveraging its capabilities without compromising journalistic integrity, credibility, and democratic values.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Journalism, New Media, Algorithmic Bias, News Automation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overlap between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and journalism is becoming a topic of more interest in academia, industry, and the society. The media industry experienced the effects more than any other as mainstream media continues to undergo digital transformation and adopt AI. From automatically generated news content to news recommendation systems based on AI algorithms the production, distribution, and consumption of news is changing thanks to artificial intelligence. Bringing together this consumption device, this explains a bit about how some of the relations have been challenged among the sectors- what we would construe as journalistic labor, this is also a place where editorial authority falls into question, or what an audience is/Means. Tools based on artificial intelligence, including Natural Language Generation (NLG), machine learning algorithms and predictive analytics, are already in use in newspapers in different parts of the world. These tools can automatically write news articles based on structured data, examine large data sets for investigative reporting, and tailor content to individual users' tastes. The implementation of such technologies in newsrooms has introduced new efficiencies and possibilities for new media journalists, but it has also raised significant ethical and practical questions. Concerns about algorithmic bias, loss of editorial transparency, and the authenticity of AI-generated content have sparked debates about the future of journalistic integrity. At the same time, the broader media environment is undergoing a convergence driven by digital platforms, real-time publishing, and interactive user participation. In this dynamic landscape, AI not only accelerates news production but also redefines the relationship between journalists and audiences. As such, it becomes crucial to critically examine how AI affects not just the speed and style of journalism, but its core values- accuracy, objectivity, and accountability.

This article investigates the impact of AI technologies on journalistic content production and dissemination. It aims to analyze their dual potential: to enhance journalistic innovation and quality on one hand, and to endanger credibility, editorial independence, and public trust on the other. The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and journalism has become a defining focus of both academic inquiry and media industry transformation. Over the past decade, digitalization and automation have restructured every stage of the news process from information gathering and content creation to distribution and audience engagement. Within this transformation, AI has emerged not only as a technological instrument but also as a cultural and ethical force reshaping journalistic norms, professional roles, and audience expectations. AI-based systems such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, and predictive analytics are now used in leading newsrooms to assist with transcription, translation, data visualization, and even automated article generation. Tools like OpenAI's GPT models, Google's T5, and Automated Insights' Wordsmith have already demonstrated the capacity to produce coherent and contextually relevant narratives in real time. These developments have prompted extensive debate about the implications of algorithmic decision-making for editorial integrity, accuracy, and public trust. Yet, despite growing scholarly attention, many studies remain descriptive, emphasizing technological potential while overlooking the empirical realities of how AI is adopted, governed, and perceived within journalism. The absence of comparative and data-driven perspectives has created a research gap: how do media organizations in different socio-economic contexts integrate AI, and what ethical, organizational, and audience challenges accompany this integration?

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the impact of Artificial Intelligence on journalistic content in the new media environment, with particular attention to the practical and ethical dimensions of this transformation. It investigates how AI tools influence content production, editorial processes, and audience engagement while assessing their broader implications for credibility, autonomy, and democratic discourse.

Methodology note:

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive and comparative approach. It synthesizes empirical data from recent global reports most notably the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 and the Thomson

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Reuters Foundation's 2025 Insights Report, as well as secondary academic literature and newsroom case studies. By combining theoretical analysis with contemporary survey data, the study aims to provide a balanced view of AI's dual potential: as both an enabler of journalistic innovation and a source of new ethical and professional challenges.

In doing so, this paper contributes to ongoing debates about the future of journalism in the AI era, arguing that technological integration must be accompanied by transparent governance, professional ethics, and continued human oversight. Only through such an approach can AI serve as a constructive tool for enhancing journalistic quality and sustaining public trust in the digital information ecosystem.

2. THE ROLE OF AI IN JOURNALISTIC CONTENT PRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence has significantly transformed the landscape of journalistic content production, with one of its most prominent applications being automated content generation. Through Natural Language Generation (NLG) algorithms, AI systems can create coherent and contextually relevant textual outputs from structured datasets. Media organizations increasingly deploy these systems to produce content with minimal or even no human intervention.

Tools such as OpenAI's GPT models, Automated Insights' Wordsmith, and Google's T5 exemplify how AI can produce news articles, financial summaries, weather reports, and sports recaps in a matter of seconds. These platforms are trained on vast corpora of language data, enabling them to understand patterns, replicate journalistic tone, and adapt to specific stylistic requirements. For instance, the Associated Press has utilized Wordsmith to automatically generate thousands of earnings reports each quarter, significantly reducing the time and labor required for repetitive, data-driven reporting tasks. According to Automated Insights, the number of published financial recaps at AP rose from 300 to 4,400 per quarter, resulting in a 12-fold increase. The company claims that while its NLG platform hasn't yet displaced any reporters, it has freed up the equivalent of three full-time employees across AP. It also reports that 20% of employee time that was spent on manual production of financial recaps has been "freed up" (Faggella, 2018).

The integration of automated content generation enhances newsroom productivity by offloading time-consuming and formulaic reporting tasks. Journalists, in turn, can allocate more resources toward complex storytelling, investigative journalism, and critical analysis-areas where human judgment, ethical reasoning, and narrative creativity remain essential.

However, this shift also raises questions about authorship, accountability, and the editorial standards of machine-produced content. While AI-generated articles may deliver speed and scale, concerns persist regarding factual accuracy, contextual nuance, and potential biases embedded in training data. Ensuring editorial oversight and ethical usage is thus critical as newsrooms increasingly incorporate automated writing systems into their content strategies.

Moreover, automated content generation offers notable advantages for modern journalism, but it must be balanced with professional oversight to preserve quality and credibility in the information ecosystem.

3. DATA JOURNALISM AND ANALYSIS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a pivotal role in advancing data-driven journalism by enabling more sophisticated methods of data analysis, pattern recognition, and insight generation. In a media landscape increasingly shaped by big data, the ability to interpret and contextualize complex datasets is essential for producing in-depth, impactful journalism. AI technologies-particularly machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), and predictive analytics-support journalists in uncovering narratives that would be difficult or even impossible to detect manually.

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Machine learning algorithms can process vast and unstructured datasets to identify trends, anomalies, and correlations that may not be immediately visible to human analysts. For example, AI-assisted tools can detect irregular financial transactions suggestive of fraud, analyze emissions data to trace climate change contributors, or map disinformation networks during election cycles. In such contexts, AI acts as a powerful augmentative tool, not replacing human journalists but enhancing their ability to conduct high-quality investigative work.

One of the landmark examples of data journalism benefiting from AI was the Panama Papers investigation, where journalists collaborated with data scientists to analyze over 11 million leaked documents. AI-based tools facilitated entity recognition, keyword filtering, and network mapping, helping reporters identify connections between offshore companies and political elites (Obermayer & Obermaier, 2016).

Moreover, newsrooms such as The Guardian, ProPublica, and The New York Times have increasingly incorporated AI tools into their data journalism units, using algorithms to sort, clean, and visualize complex datasets (Gray, Bounegru, & Chambers, 2012). These tools are especially vital in projects involving real-time data monitoring, such as tracking COVID-19 infections, election results, or police misconduct.

However, reliance on AI in data journalism also introduces new ethical and methodological challenges. Algorithms may inherit biases from their training data or prioritize statistically significant but contextually misleading correlations. Journalists must therefore maintain a critical stance toward the tools they use, ensuring transparency in methodology and human verification of AI-generated insights.

Overall, AI-enhanced data journalism offers new possibilities for accountability and depth in reporting. It empowers journalists to work more efficiently and analytically, while underscoring the need for ethical frameworks to govern the use of such powerful technologies.

4. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND CONTENT PERSONALIZATION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a cornerstone in enhancing audience engagement and content personalization within the digital media ecosystem. AI-powered recommendation algorithms, employed by major platforms such as Google News, Facebook, and Twitter (now X), analyze vast amounts of user data—including browsing histories, click behaviors, and social media interactions—to tailor news feeds and content suggestions to individual preferences (Napoli, 2014). This personalization seeks to increase user satisfaction and retention by delivering relevant, timely, and engaging content, thereby optimizing the overall news consumption experience. These recommendation systems use complex machine learning models to predict what content a user is most likely to engage with, ranging from topical news stories to multimedia formats. Personalized content streams enable media organizations to connect more effectively with audiences, offering curated information that aligns with their interests and informational needs (Pariser, 2011). Moreover, personalization can empower niche and minority perspectives by facilitating targeted dissemination, which traditional one-size-fits-all journalism may overlook.

However, the benefits of AI-driven personalization come with significant risks. One prominent concern is the creation of "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers," phenomena where users are predominantly exposed to information that confirms their existing views while dissenting opinions and diverse perspectives are filtered out (Sunstein, 2017). This selective exposure limits the diversity of viewpoints in public discourse, potentially exacerbating social polarization and undermining the democratic function of the press to inform and challenge society (Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016: 298320). The underlying algorithms, optimized for engagement metrics such as clicks and time spent, may inadvertently prioritize sensational or emotionally charged content, further skewing audience perceptions (Tufekci, 2015). Additionally, the opacity of algorithmic processes raises questions about

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transparency, accountability, and the ethical implications of influencing public opinion through automated curation.

Mitova et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive five-nation study on news recommender systems. They found that across different countries, users consistently desired both transparency understanding how content is selected, and control over their personalized news feeds. The research emphasizes that users with greater awareness of algorithms and privacy concerns particularly demand these features

In summary, AI-enabled audience engagement and content personalization offer powerful tools for tailoring news consumption, but must be managed carefully to preserve pluralism, prevent misinformation, and uphold the integrity of democratic discourse.

5. CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a dual and complex role in the domain of misinformation and fake news. On one hand, AI-powered tools have been developed to detect, flag, and reduce the spread of false information across digital platforms. Machine learning algorithms analyze patterns of language, source credibility, and dissemination behaviors to identify content that may be misleading or fabricated (Shu et al., 2017: 22-36). Fact-checking initiatives increasingly incorporate AI to automate verification processes, enabling faster responses to viral misinformation (Graves, 2018). On the other hand, AI technologies also empower malicious actors to create and distribute highly realistic but deceptive content, posing new challenges for journalism and society. Deepfake technology, which uses generative adversarial networks (GANs) to produce convincing synthetic videos and audio, has been employed to fabricate speeches, news clips, and interviews that appear authentic (Chesney & Citron, 2019: 1753-1819). Such synthetic media can be weaponized to manipulate public opinion, harass individuals, or undermine democratic processes.

The proliferation of AI-generated misinformation threatens journalistic integrity by blurring the lines between genuine reporting and fabricated content. News organizations face increasing difficulty in verifying sources and authenticating visual and textual materials, while audiences struggle to discern fact from fiction (Lazer et al., 2018: 1094-1096). This erosion of trust undermines the foundational role of journalism as a reliable informer in society. Moreover, the ethical implications extend beyond technical challenges. The deployment of AI in content moderation raises concerns about censorship, bias in algorithmic decisions, and accountability (Diakopoulos, 2019). There is also the risk that efforts to combat misinformation may inadvertently suppress legitimate dissent or alternative viewpoints.

To address these threats, scholars and practitioners advocate for a multipronged approach combining technological innovation, media literacy education, and regulatory frameworks. Advances in AI explainability and transparency are essential to ensure that misinformation detection tools are fair, unbiased, and accountable (Wang et al., 2006: 954-9547). Collaborative efforts between technologists, journalists, and policymakers are critical to developing ethical guidelines that balance free expression with the need to protect public discourse.

6. THE RISK OF DEHUMANIZATION IN JOURNALISM

The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalistic practices presents significant risks related to the dehumanization of news production. While AI technologies offer efficiency and scalability, an overreliance on automated systems may diminish the essential human elements that underpin responsible and ethical journalism. Critical aspects such as ethical judgment, cultural sensitivity, nuanced interpretation of context, and the application of moral reasoning remain areas where human journalists continue to outperform AI systems (Lewis & Westlund, 2015: 19-37). Journalism is not merely about the transmission of facts but involves complex processes of investigation,

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verification, and contextualization that require empathy, intuition, and ethical deliberation (Ward, 2010). Human journalists interpret ambiguous information, weigh competing narratives, and make decisions grounded in societal values and journalistic ethics-capabilities that AI, in its current form, cannot fully replicate (Culver & Whipple, 2020: 220-239).

Fully automated news production risks creating content that, although syntactically correct, may lack depth, emotional resonance, or cultural awareness. This can result in coverage that is superficial or insensitive to the social and political complexities surrounding the news (Carlson, 2018: 354-367). Moreover, AI systems operate based on data patterns and programmed rules but do not possess the capacity for moral accountability, raising concerns about who is ultimately responsible for the content generated (Diakopoulos, 2019).

The dehumanization concern extends to audience perceptions as well. Audiences may find AI-generated news less trustworthy or credible if it lacks the perceived authenticity and ethical grounding of human-produced journalism (Gorwa, 2020). Furthermore, the reduction of human roles in newsrooms could affect the diversity of perspectives and critical debate essential for a vibrant democratic society. To mitigate these risks, scholars advocate for a hybrid model of journalism where AI serves as a tool to augment rather than replace human judgment (Napoli, 2019). Emphasizing collaborative human-AI workflows can preserve the indispensable human qualities of journalism while leveraging technological advantages. Additionally, ongoing training for journalists in digital ethics and critical media literacy is essential to navigate the evolving landscape responsibly.

7. POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR ETHICAL AI INTEGRATION IN JOURNALISM

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) increasingly influences journalistic content production and dissemination, the development of robust policy frameworks becomes essential to guide its ethical and responsible use. Media policies, both at national and international levels, play a critical role in establishing standards that ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI applications within newsrooms. Regulatory bodies and professional organizations are beginning to address challenges posed by AI technologies, including concerns over algorithmic bias, data privacy, misinformation, and the potential dehumanization of journalism. Policies that promote algorithmic transparency require news organizations and platform providers to disclose how AI systems curate and generate content, allowing for public scrutiny and informed consent (Diakopoulos, 2019).

Self-regulatory codes and industry guidelines complement formal regulations by encouraging newsrooms to adopt ethical AI practices voluntarily, such as maintaining human oversight and upholding journalistic values even in automated workflows (Napoli, 2019). Additionally, data protection laws like the GDPR influence how journalists collect and use personal data in AI-driven personalization and audience targeting. Effective policy frameworks must balance innovation with public interest, fostering an environment where AI augments journalistic quality without compromising integrity or democratic principles. Collaboration among policymakers, technologists, media professionals, and civil society is crucial to designing adaptable policies that respond to rapidly evolving AI capabilities.

Moreover, clear and enforceable policies are indispensable to ensure that AI's integration into journalism supports ethical standards, protects audiences, and sustains trust in the media ecosystem.

8. EMPIRICAL REFLECTIONS ON AI INTEGRATION IN JOURNALISM: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Recent global surveys and industry reports illustrate the diverse ways Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are being integrated into journalistic practice. This section provides an empirical overview, highlighting how different media organizations and cultural contexts approach the adoption of AI tools for news production, audience engagement, and editorial management.

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A 2024 Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism survey, conducted across 46 countries and published in its Digital News Report 2024, revealed that 60% of newsroom managers now use AI tools for at least one editorial or production-related task. The most common uses include automated transcription (68%), headline optimization (54%), and data visualization (49%). Yet only 18% of the surveyed organizations reported having formal ethical guidelines governing AI use, exposing a significant policy gap between technological adoption and editorial oversight.

The same report also explored public attitudes toward AI in journalism, showing widespread skepticism among audiences. According to the findings (see Figure 1), 52% of respondents in the United States and 63% in the United Kingdom stated that they would feel uncomfortable with news produced mostly or entirely by AI systems. While audiences are more accepting of AI for

Proportion who say they are comfortable using news produced in this way

Selected markets

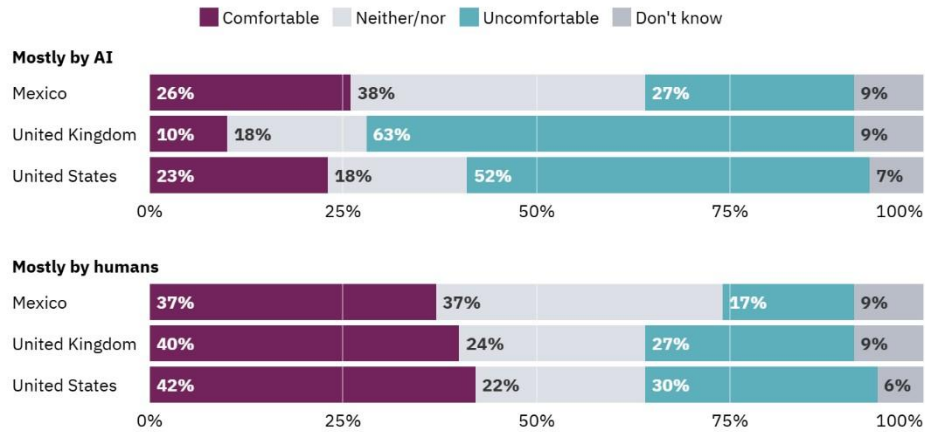


Table 1: Q2_AIComfortlevel_2024. In general, how comfortable or uncomfortable are you with using NEWS produced in each of the following ways ...? Mostly by artificial intelligence (AI) with some human oversight. Mostly by a human journalist with some help from artificial intelligence (AI). Base:

Total sample in each country ≈ 2000.

In addition, a Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) report, “Journalism in the AI Era: Opportunities and Challenges in the Global South” (January 2025), surveyed more than 200 journalists from emerging economies and found that over 80% already employ AI tools in their work primarily for translation, summarization, and fact-checking. However, only 13% of respondents said their organizations had a formal AI usage policy, and nearly 70% expressed concern that automation could reduce editorial employment or ethical standards.

The pattern suggests a clear “comfort gap”: the more direct the role of AI in producing news (especially replacing human authorship), the less comfortable audiences feel. Meanwhile, AI used in a supportive/back-stage role is more acceptable.

Comparative evidence also underscores important regional and institutional differences. In Western contexts such as The New York Times and The Guardian, AI tools assist human journalists by automating routine tasks and supporting audience analytics while preserving editorial control. In contrast, non-Western outlets like China’s Xinhua News Agency and South Korea’s Yonhap have

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adopted fully automated AI anchors and machine-written news briefs, demonstrating a stronger institutional embrace of AI as a replacement rather than a supplement (Tandoc & Maitra, 2022).

Together, these data points reveal that AI's integration into journalism is far from uniform. While its efficiency and analytical potential are broadly recognized, concerns about transparency, job displacement, and editorial ethics persist. Empirical findings therefore highlight an urgent need for

context-sensitive policy frameworks and hybrid human–AI models to ensure that automation strengthens rather than undermines journalism's democratic and ethical foundations.

Just as AI encompasses a wide range of technologies and applications, audience opinions on its use in journalism are far from uniform. While there is an initial tendency toward skepticism, closer examination reveals that audiences hold more nuanced views depending on the type of AI application. Our research identifies areas where AI is more readily accepted and others where caution or even avoidance is advised. Audiences tend to be most comfortable with AI when it operates behind the scenes, enhancing the user experience through personalization and accessibility. In contrast, they are more wary of AI handling public-facing content, sensitive topics, or synthetic media that could be mistaken for reality, especially when errors could have significant consequences. Across the board, there is strong agreement that humans should remain involved, and fully automated processes are generally seen as unacceptable. Transparency regarding AI use is essential for maintaining trust. Publishers must carefully balance disclosure: too much or unclear labeling may alarm those with low trust or limited understanding, while insufficient explanation could leave audiences feeling misled or uncertain about what to trust.

These are still formative times for AI in journalism, and public perceptions are likely to evolve as people gain more hands-on experience with AI tools in daily life. For now, certain roles particularly those requiring human judgment, empathy, and connection remain areas where human oversight is essential, and where news organizations should ensure humans stay at the forefront.

9. CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fundamentally reshaping the production, distribution, and consumption of journalistic content in profound and multifaceted ways. On one hand, AI offers promising advancements that have the potential to greatly enhance newsroom efficiency, enabling faster content creation through automation, more personalized news experiences via sophisticated recommendation systems, and deeper analytical capabilities through data-driven journalism. These technological innovations allow journalists and media organizations to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving new media environment, reaching wider and more diverse audiences while uncovering complex stories that may have previously gone unnoticed. However, alongside these benefits come substantial risks and ethical challenges. The increased reliance on AI raises concerns about misinformation and fake news, as AI-powered tools can be exploited to create deceptive synthetic content that threatens public trust and journalistic credibility. Editorial control is also challenged by opaque algorithms that influence which news reaches audiences, potentially reinforcing filter bubbles and undermining pluralistic discourse. Moreover, the automation of journalistic processes risks dehumanizing news production, reducing the critical ethical judgment, cultural sensitivity, and contextual understanding that only human journalists can provide.

The future of AI in journalism hinges on its responsible adoption, which requires transparency in AI applications, accountability for automated decisions, and robust ethical frameworks guiding the integration of AI tools. Maintaining strong human oversight is imperative to safeguard the core values of journalism—integrity, truth-seeking, and accountability to ensure that AI serves as a tool to augment rather than replace the essential role of journalists as watchdogs of democracy.

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The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism represents one of the most transformative developments in the history of media. While early discussions centered primarily on automation and efficiency, recent empirical evidence demonstrates that AI's impact is far more complex affecting editorial ethics, professional identity, audience trust, and global inequalities in technological adaptation.

As the Reuters Institute's 2024 global survey confirms, the majority of newsrooms have already adopted AI tools for essential editorial functions such as transcription, content optimization, and data visualization. Yet, only a minority have developed formal policies to regulate these uses, underscoring a persistent ethical and regulatory gap in contemporary news ecosystems. Furthermore, audience attitudes remain cautious: across 46 countries, more than half of respondents 52% in the United States and 63% in the United Kingdom expressed discomfort with AI-generated news, particularly when machines take over creative or editorial decisions. These findings suggest that technological acceptance within journalism cannot be divorced from public perceptions of trust and authenticity.

Complementary research from the Thomson Reuters Foundation (2025), focusing on the Global South, provides an equally significant perspective. While over 80% of journalists report using AI in some capacity, only 13% say their organizations maintain clear ethical guidelines for its use. This imbalance between rapid adoption and ethical preparedness highlights the need for global cooperation and professional training to ensure equitable and responsible AI integration.

Taken together, these empirical insights reveal both the promise and the peril of algorithmic journalism. AI can enhance the analytical capacity and operational efficiency of newsrooms, support investigative reporting through big-data analysis, and enable personalized content distribution. However, unregulated or opaque implementation risks dehumanizing journalism, eroding editorial independence, and amplifying algorithmic biases that may distort public discourse.

The future of journalism in the AI era will therefore depend not on the technology itself, but on how institutions govern it. Policymakers, editors, and educators must collaborate to design transparent frameworks that promote ethical innovation. Such frameworks should ensure that AI serves as a tool for augmentation strengthening journalistic integrity rather than substituting human judgment. Media organizations should prioritize training programs that integrate digital literacy, algorithmic transparency, and ethical reasoning into newsroom practices.

In conclusion, AI is reshaping not only how journalism is produced and consumed but also what journalism means in a democratic society. A constructive and ethically grounded approach to AI integration anchored in human oversight, accountability, and inclusivity offers the most sustainable path forward. In this vision, technology becomes not a threat to journalism's moral core, but a catalyst for its renewal in the digital age. While AI represents a transformative force with the potential to revolutionize journalism, a balanced approach that embraces innovation while vigilantly addressing its risks is crucial. This approach will help foster a media ecosystem that benefits from AI's capabilities without compromising the foundational principles that uphold public trust and democratic discourse.

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Ahmet Ağaoğlu'nun Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluş Döneminde Bir Aydın ve Devlet Adamı Olarak Katkıları**Ahmet Agaoglu's Contributions As An Intellectual And Statesman In The Foundation Period Of The Republic Of Türkiye *****Mahir GARİBOV¹****Atıf/Citation:** Gamberov, M. (2025). Ahmet Agaoglu's Contributions As An Intellectual And Statesman In The Foundation Period Of The Republic Of Türkiye. *ASSAM International Refereed Journal Special issue*, 12-19.<https://doi.org/10.58724/assam.1782482>**Özet**

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşu, yalnızca bir askeri zafer değil, aynı zamanda siyasi düşüncenin, entelektüel mirasın ve kültürel dönüşümün de bir zaferiydi. Bu süreçte etkili olan isimlerden biri, Azerbaycan doğumlu Türk aydını ve devlet adamı Ahmet Ağaoğlu'ydu. Hem Azerbaycan hem de Türkiye'deki siyasi ve kültürel alanlardaki aktif katılımı, Cumhuriyet'in ilanına ve kurumsal yapısının oluşturulmasına önemli katkılarda bulunmasını sağladı. Ağaoğlu, bireysel özgürlük, hukukun üstünlüğü ve ulusal egemenliğin güçlü bir savunucusuydu. Onun siyasi düşünceleri, Atatürk'ün liderliğinde şekillenen Cumhuriyet ideolojisinin temel ilkeleri olan laiklik, milliyetçilik, halkçılık, devletçilik, devrimcilik ve cumhuriyetçilik ile büyük ölçüde örtüşüyordu. Özellikle, onun laiklik anlayışı, din ve devlet işlerinin ayrılmasının ötesine geçerek, bireyin zihinsel ve siyasi özgürleşmesini de kapsıyordu. Ağaoğlu'nun milliyetçilik anlayışı etnisiteye değil, ortak bir kültür ve siyasi birliktelik temelinde şekillenen vatandaşlık kimliğine dayanıyordu. Eğitimi, bu ulusal bilincin geliştirilmesinde kilit bir araç olarak görüyordu. Hem bir gazeteci hem de Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi üyesi olarak bu fikirlerini sürekli dile getirdi. Yazıları ve siyasi faaliyetleri, Atatürk'ün bir çok reformunun felsefi temelini oluşturmuş ve onu modern Türkiye'nin önde gelen entelektüel mimarlarından biri yapmıştır.

Araştırmanın temel amacı, Ağaoğlu'nun entelektüel mirasını, siyasi faaliyetlerini ve Cumhuriyet'in ideolojik yapılanmasına olan katkılarını bütüncül biçimde değerlendirmek; onun liberalizm, milliyetçilik ve modernleşme fikirleri arasındaki denge arayışını çözümlemektir. Ağaoğlu, Azerbaycan'daki fikir hayatından Osmanlı ve erken Cumhuriyet dönemine uzanan süreçte, Doğu ile Batı arasında bir köprü kurmaya çalışan öncü bir aydın olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Çalışma, onun düşünsel dönüşümünü, toplumsal modernleşme konusundaki görüşlerini ve Kemalist ideolojiyle kurduğu etkileşimi ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlamda Ağaoğlu'nun Üç Medeniyet, Türk Hukuku Üzerine Makaleler, Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde ve İptidai Türk Aile Hukuku gibi temel eserleri, araştırmanın birincil kaynaklarını oluşturmuştur. Metodolojik olarak çalışma, nitel araştırma yaklaşımına dayanan tarihsel-analitik yöntem çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür. Bu kapsamda, dönemin gazete yazıları, arşiv belgeleri, tanıklık anlatıları ve mevcut bilimsel literatür incelenmiş; Ağaoğlu'nun fikirlerinin hem kuramsal hem de siyasal bağlamda gelişimi karşılaştırmalı biçimde analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca karşılaştırmalı analiz (Ağaoğlu'nun çağdaş aydınlarla fikrî benzerlik ve farklılıklarının tespiti) ve söylem analizi yöntemleri kullanılarak onun ideolojik tutarlılığı, modernleşme ve hukuk reformu konularındaki yaklaşımı derinlemesine değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, Ahmet Ağaoğlu'nun Cumhuriyet'in kuruluş döneminde yalnızca bir düşünür değil, aynı zamanda siyasal yapının şekillenmesine katkı sunan bir uygulayıcı olduğunu göstermektedir. Onun liberal bakış açısı, bireysel özgürlük, hukuk devleti ve eğitim reformu konularındaki görüşleri, dönemin modernleşme politikalarıyla kesişmiş; bu durum Cumhuriyet ideolojisinin entelektüel temellerinin oluşumuna önemli ölçüde etki etmiştir. Bu çalışma, Ahmet Ağaoğlu'nun Türk modernleşme sürecindeki yerini yeniden değerlendirmekte ve onu hem düşünsel üretimi hem de siyasal eylemiyle erken Cumhuriyet'in şekillenmesinde belirleyici bir figür olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Ayrıca karşılaştırmalı analiz ve söylem analizi teknikleri aracılığıyla Ağaoğlu'nun liberalizm, milliyetçilik ve modernleşme fikirleri arasındaki ilişki çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, Ağaoğlu'nun yalnızca bir düşünür değil, aynı zamanda Cumhuriyet'in ideolojik ve hukuki temellerinin oluşumunda etkin bir aktör olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ahmet Ağaoğlu, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi, Türk Tarih Tezi, Milliyetçilik, Modernleşme

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Abstract

The establishment of the Republic of Türkiye was not only a military triumph but also a victory of political thought, intellectual legacy, and cultural transformation. One of the influential figures in this process was Azerbaijani-born Turkish intellectual and statesman Ahmet Agaoglu. His active participation in the political and cultural spheres of both Azerbaijan and Türkiye enabled him to contribute significantly to the declaration of the Republic and the formation of its institutional framework. Agaoglu was a strong advocate of individual liberty, the rule of law, and national sovereignty. His political thought largely aligned with the core principles of Republican ideology shaped under Atatürk's leadership-secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, revolutionism, and republicanism. Particularly, his understanding of secularism extended beyond state-religion separation to include the intellectual and political emancipation of individuals. His concept of nationalism was based not on ethnicity, but on a civic identity grounded in shared culture and political unity. He viewed education as a key tool in fostering this national consciousness. As both a journalist and a member of the Grand National Assembly, Agaoglu voiced these ideas consistently. His writings and political actions provided a philosophical foundation for many of Atatürk's reforms, making him one of the prominent intellectual architects of modern Türkiye. The main objective of this research is to comprehensively evaluate Ağaoğlu's intellectual legacy, his political activities, and his contributions to the ideological formation of the Turkish Republic; and to analyze his quest for balance among the ideas of liberalism, nationalism, and modernization.

Ağaoğlu stands out as a pioneering intellectual who sought to build a bridge between East and West throughout a process extending from the intellectual life of Azerbaijan to the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. The study aims to reveal his intellectual transformation, his views on social modernization, and his interaction with Kemalist ideology. In this context, Ağaoğlu's major works *Üç Medeniyet* (Three Civilizations), *Türk Hukuku Üzerine Makaleler* (Essays on Turkish Law), *Serbest İnsanlar Ülkesinde* (In the Land of Free People), and *İptidai Türk Aile Hukuku* (Primitive Turkish Family Law) constitute the primary sources of this research.

Methodologically, the study was conducted within the framework of a historical-analytical method based on a qualitative research approach. Within this scope, periodical writings, archival documents, witness accounts, and existing scholarly literature were examined; and the development of Ağaoğlu's ideas in both theoretical and political contexts was analyzed comparatively. Furthermore, through the use of comparative analysis (to identify intellectual similarities and differences between Ağaoğlu and his contemporaries) and discourse analysis methods, his ideological consistency as well as his approaches to modernization and legal reform were evaluated in depth.

The findings of the research demonstrate that Ahmet Ağaoğlu was not only a thinker during the formative period of the Republic but also a practitioner who contributed to the shaping of its political structure. His liberal perspective, and his views on individual freedom, the rule of law, and educational reform intersected with the modernization policies of the period; this convergence significantly influenced the intellectual foundations of Republican ideology.

This study re-evaluates Ahmet Ağaoğlu's place within the Turkish modernization process and positions him as a decisive figure in the formation of the early Republic both through his intellectual production and his political engagement. Moreover, through comparative and discourse analysis techniques, the study elucidates the interrelationship between Ağaoğlu's ideas of liberalism, nationalism, and modernization. The findings indicate that Ağaoğlu was not merely a thinker but also an active agent in the formation of the Republic's ideological and legal foundations.

Keywords: Ahmet Agaoglu, History of the Republic of Türkiye, Turkish History Thesis, Nationalism, Modernisation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose Of The Research

The main purpose of this research is to examine the role played by Ahmet Ağaoğlu as an intellectual and statesman during the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, and to reveal the influence of his ideas and activities on the intellectual, political, and legal foundations of the Republic. The study also aims to analyze how Ağaoğlu's views on Turkish nationalism, legal understanding, and modernization shaped the identity and administrative structure of the newly founded state. In this study, Ahmet Ağaoğlu's original works, contemporary newspaper articles, archival documents, eyewitness accounts, and the existing scholarly literature were examined as primary sources. Through this methodological approach based on qualitative research methods, Ağaoğlu's ideological and intellectual contributions were comprehensively evaluated within their historical context.

Methodology

This study was conducted on the basis of a historical-analytical method. Ahmet Ağaoğlu's original works, contemporary newspaper articles, archival documents, eyewitness accounts, and existing scholarly literature were examined as primary sources. Through this methodological approach grounded in qualitative research methods, Ağaoğlu's ideological and intellectual contributions were evaluated within their historical context. In addition, the study employed comparative analysis (comparing Ağaoğlu's ideas with those of his contemporaries) and discourse analysis methods.

Ahmet Ağaoğlu occupies a notable position in the history of Turkish thought, having undergone an intellectual evolution from the waning days of the Ottoman Empire to the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye. Distinguished as a jurist, journalist and politician, Ağaoğlu was renowned for his ideas on Turkism, Republicanism and modernisation. Despite challenging conditions, under his leadership the Anadolu Agency fulfilled its duties to the best of its ability, playing a crucial role in sustaining media outlets during difficult times. Ağaoğlu is renowned for his views on the ancient history and cultural heritage of the Turkish nation, and his scholarly perspectives on Turkish history have attracted considerable attention. While researching the past of the Turkish nation, he conducted in-depth analyses of the legal structures of ancient Turkish societies, comparing them with Western legal systems - particularly with regard to family law.

After completing his education in Paris, he established the first library and reading room in his hometown of Shusha in 1896. In 1905, he founded the clandestine Difaî organisation to combat the Tsarist government and the Dashnak Armenians. In 1909, he settled in Istanbul, initially serving as an education inspector before becoming the director of the Süleymaniye Library. He was also among the founders of the Turkish Homeland Society and the Turkish Hearth Society, contributing significantly to the dissemination of Turkist ideology.

With his high level of education and broad outlook, Ahmet Ağaoğlu consistently put forward enlightening ideas, advocating that the sociological integration of a nation could be achieved through linguistic and cultural unity. He primarily focused on restoring prestige to Turkish identity, reminding Turks of their heritage and placing Turkism at the core of unifying and integrative policies. He also fostered political, social, economic and cultural relations between East and West. He believed that the concept of the nation was the ultimate goal for individuals, emphasising that the national ideal would unite society, foster a shared sense of purpose and strengthen communal bonds. He argued that without a national goal, a society would remain scattered, weak and powerless. During this period of nationalist thought, the prevailing aim was to unite a fragmented population around common ideals, promote authenticity, and instil national loyalty. According to Ağaoğlu, a nation was no longer a scattered mass, but rather a cohesive community united by a shared goal.

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Following Azerbaijan's declaration of independence in 1918, Ahmet Agaoglu returned to his homeland as a political advisor to Nuri Pasha, commander of the Caucasian Islamic Army. This army departed from Anatolia with the aim of liberating Baku from Armenian and Bolshevik forces. Elected as a member of the newly established Azerbaijan Republic's parliament, he was chosen to represent Azerbaijan at the Paris Peace Conference. However, following the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, he was forced to return to Istanbul with the Ottoman forces withdrawing from the Caucasus.

Research on Ahmet Ağaoğlu has primarily focused on his role in both Azerbaijani and Turkish history. Salih Zeki Haklı (2018) analyzed how Ağaoğlu interpreted Kemalism from a liberal perspective, while Celal Özdemir (2024) emphasized his influence on the ideology of the early Republican period. Ağaoğlu's works such as *Üç Medeniyet* (Three Civilizations), *Türk Hukuku*

Üzerine Makaleler (Essays on Turkish Law), and *İptidai Türk Aile Hukuku* (Primitive Turkish Family Law) served as key primary sources in this study.

This study is grounded in the following theoretical frameworks:

1. Theories of Nation and Nationalism - Ağaoğlu's understanding of nationalism is evaluated within the conceptual frameworks of national identity and imagined communities as developed by theorists.
2. Modernism and Enlightenment Theories - Ağaoğlu's intellectual world is analyzed through the principles of secular and law-based governance characteristic of the Enlightenment era.
3. Theory of Political Modernization – The ideological role assumed during the foundation of the Republic is examined in relation to constitutional development, the press, and education.
4. Postcolonial Perspectives – Ağaoğlu's ideas and actions against both Russian and Ottoman imperial practices are interpreted as forms of intellectual resistance within a post-imperial context.

2. AHMET AĞAOĞLU DURING THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE YEARS

He examined the impact of nationalism in European political history, defining it as a force that unites the entire nation as equals, regardless of class distinctions. In his view, nationalism transcended economic, political and cultural differences to foster societal integration. He defined a nation as a community united by a shared consciousness, national will, and common goals. He stated that “the term ‘nation’ applies only to communities whose collective conscience has been formed, which act under their own governance, and whose members are united in purpose through intellectual and exploratory endeavours” (Agaoglu, 1927: 24).

During the formative period of the Republic of Turkiye, Ahmet Ağaoğlu's ideas and initiatives in the fields of nationalism, law, education, and the press exemplified his contributions to statebuilding both in Azerbaijan and in Turkiye. His conception of national identity was founded not on ethnic or religious bases, but on the principle of a voluntary unity constructed through a shared language, history, and culture. The research demonstrates that Ahmet Agaoglu was not merely a journalist or politician, but an intellectual who exerted a significant influence on the formation of national ideology. His ideas and actions continue to hold relevance today, particularly in relation to the construction of modern Turkish identity and the consolidation of Republican values.

2.1. Ahmet Ağaoğlu as an Intellectual Leader in the Formation of the Republic

Ahmet Ağaoğlu served as an intellectual leader in the establishment of the intellectual and legal foundations of the Turkish Republic. His intellectual outlook played a decisive role in shaping the ideals

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of national unity, the rule of law, secularism, and modernization. Ağaoğlu's contributions to the transition toward the republican model in both Azerbaijan and Türkiye rendered him not only a national but also a historical figure of significance for the entire Turkic world. His conception of the nation was based on a model of "unity" shaped not by ethnic or religious identities, but by a shared language, culture, and legal framework. This approach, differing from the ethnically oriented nationalism of his era, offered a more civic and inclusive model an idea that is contemporarily expressed through the concept of Turan. Agaoglu's ideas were not only retrospective but also forwardlooking in nature. He regarded teachers and intellectuals as the bearers of historical consciousness and defined them as the guardians of national awareness. During the Republican period, the intellectual model represented by Ağaoğlu was not limited to the production of ideas; rather, it was characterized by direct participation in the state-building process and active engagement in political, legal, and cultural spheres.

2.2. Ahmet Ağaoğlu's Intellectual Legacy and Its Contemporary Relevance

Ahmet Ağaoğlu's ideas and activities should be regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of Republican ideology. His understanding of nationalism was not merely a political ideology, but also a model of citizenship and coexistence. He regarded language, culture, and law as the essential components of national identity, rejecting ethnically or religiously based approaches, and thereby offering a paradigm that remains significant both in his own time and in the contemporary context.

The broader integration of Ağaoğlu's ideas into the educational system would be beneficial for the transmission of his history-, law-, and enlightenment-based perspective to future generations, serving as a means to strengthen national consciousness and civic awareness.

3. PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS

During the proclamation of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was wary of prolonged debates potentially leading to undesirable outcomes. He therefore requested that figures such as Ahmet Agaoglu, Yunus Nadi, Celal Nuri and Ziya Gökalp prepare drafts for the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye. However, due to the lengthy and detailed nature of these drafts, Atatürk amended certain articles of the existing constitutional law to align it with republican principles, adding a few new provisions in the process (Agaoglu, 1933: 125).

Ahmet Agaoglu played a significant role in drafting the 1924 Constitution, contributing substantially to the embedding of secularism and the rule of law in the constitutional framework. Following the transformation of the Anadolu Agency into a joint-stock company in 1921, he was elected chairman of its board in 1925. Agaoglu emphasised that the cultural and legal structures of the Turks possess a unique, collective character, distinct from those of the West. This perspective highlights how the libertarian principles acquired by the Turkish nation throughout history are deeply embedded in its legal system. In his analysis of the development of nationalism in Europe, he advocated enlightenment, secularisation and the advancement of science to dismantle feudalism in the East, emphasising the need for a new form of organisation and governance. Nationalism, based on the ideas of national sovereignty and the nation, began to spread rapidly worldwide after the French Revolution. Agaoglu argued that the historical roots of the Turkish nation extend back to ancient times, emphasising the significant contributions of Turks to world civilisation. Agaoglu's works clearly reflect the historical policy of the Republic and the mission assigned to intellectuals within this framework. He emphasised the importance of raising generations that are not indifferent to the past, but engage with it consciously in order to carry it forward into the future. This places significant responsibilities on both intellectuals and educators. This perspective is highly significant, influencing the development of historical awareness and national memory to this day.

Following the proclamation of the Republic, he emphasised that the Turkish nation had entered a period of historical awakening. He described the beginning of this new era as 'paving a path',

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symbolising the effort to rebuild the historical identity of the Turkish nation. This approach reveals that his understanding of history was not just about learning about the past, but also about using this knowledge to inform the nation's future. He argued that the era of indifference to history must end, and that intellectuals should be active and creative agents within the modernisation process rather than passive ones. He placed significant responsibility on Turkish intellectuals and youth, emphasising the need to expand the scope of, and enrich the methodology for, historical research (Ağaoğlu, 1932: 269). Agaoglu emphasised the importance of education in achieving individual freedom, and stressed that educational reforms were crucial in the fight against ignorance. He opposed absolutist forms of governance and championed the republic, constitutionalism and popular sovereignty. His concept of the 'rule of law' closely aligns with Atatürk's principle that sovereignty belongs to the nation, forming the foundation of the Republic's regime. It is also known that Ahmet Agaoglu played an influential role in drafting the 1924 Constitution, with his views on constitutional institutions and the legal order being taken into account.

4. REVOLUTIONİSM, THE REPUBLIC AND MODERNİSATION

Ahmet Agaoglu was a thinker who was not only focused on the past, but also oriented towards the future. He argued that Westernisation and modernisation were intellectual revolutions, not merely technical transformations. In this regard, his understanding of revolutionism, which encompasses continuous renewal, progress and intellectual transformation, is directly aligned with his concept of modernisation. Agaoglu emphasised the importance of education in achieving individual freedom, and stressed that educational reforms were crucial in the fight against ignorance. He opposed absolutist forms of governance and championed the republic, constitutionalism and popular sovereignty. His concept of the 'rule of law' closely aligns with Atatürk's principle that sovereignty belongs to the nation, forming the foundation of the Republic's regime. It is also known that Ahmet Agaoglu played an influential role in drafting the 1924 Constitution, with his views on constitutional institutions and the legal order being taken into account.

Agaoglu was a person intellectual who laid the groundwork for ideas that aligned with Atatürk's principles and the Republic's reforms. His views on secularism, nationalism, populism and revolutionism significantly strengthened the Republic's theoretical foundation (Haklı, 2018: 7). Following the proclamation of the Republic, opposition groups did not remain silent and continued to express anti-republican sentiments in various newspaper columns. Velit Ebuziyya, who had written extensively against the Republic before its establishment, persisted in his opposition after the proclamation. In his article titled "Gentlemen, you have named the state, but can you fix its affairs?" he openly expressed his opposition to Ahmet Agaoglu and Celal Nuri, who played significant roles in the Republic's establishment (Turker, 1998: 42). He wrote: "The sole wish of both the elite and the common people of this country today is to end this noisy, gossipy, and distressing period of regime change and to begin works that genuinely serve the nation's interests. If the leaders and members of the Republic proclaimed yesterday are confident, they can achieve this, we say to them, 'Then may your Republic be blessed, gentlemen!'" (Demirel, 1994: 10).

The issue of the freedom of Muslim Turkish women stands out as one of the most prominent themes that runs consistently throughout Ahmet Bey Ağaoğlu's extensive body of work. In all periods of his intellectual production, Ağaoğlu regarded women's emancipation as one of the crucial problems of his time. He questioned the social and moral conditions surrounding it, strongly criticized ignorance, superstition, domestic and societal oppression, and violence, and consistently emphasized the honorable and dignified position that women deserved to occupy in society. (Asker A. 2019: 337)

During the national struggle, Agaoglu was one of the most effective members of the Guidance Committees formed to instill this spirit in the public. He undertook a seven-month guidance tour in

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Anatolia, delivering conferences, publishing newspapers, and establishing schools in cities such as Ankara, Samsun, Trabzon, Gumushane, Erzurum, Kars, and their surrounding districts. During this mission, he corresponded with Atatürk and earned his appreciation for his services. Upon returning from his mission to the East, Agaoglu took on several roles in Ankara, including General Director of

Press and Intelligence, Director of the Anadolu Agency, and chief columnist for *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*. During this period, he supported the publication of *Sırat-ı Mustakım*, and *Küçük Mecmua*, and he published semi-documentary works such as *The Pontus Issue* and *Greek Atrocities and Brutality in Anatolia*. Additionally, within the framework of the 'Free Advanced Lectures Scientific Institution', he taught History of Civilisation classes on Mondays. During this time, he faced serious accusations in the Assembly and the press, but Atatürk defended him, stating that he would achieve the reforms 'by relying on aides like Ahmet Agaoglu Bey' (Atatürk ansiklopedisi, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

According to Ahmet Agaoglu, a nation is a structure rooted in a shared will and a collective desire to live together. It comprises individuals united by a common purpose in thought and action, fostering a robust societal framework. Agaoglu's contributions to the Republic demonstrate that he was not just a politician or journalist, but also a notable figure in the intellectual endeavour to establish a national identity. Addressing those who sought to base nationality solely on religion, he argued that religion alone was insufficient. He proposed that nationality arises from the convergence of three elements: firstly, language and its various forms, such as literature, art, and music; secondly, religion; and thirdly, ethnicity. By emphasising the deep-rooted presence of the Turkish nation in history, he defended its place within universal civilisation and contributed to the development of a scientific approach to history. By basing the concept of the nation on voluntary elements, he showed that he did not support ethnic nationalism. In this regard, his efforts should be regarded as a significant contribution to the historiography of the Republican era and the construction of national identity. His speeches emphasised the Turkish nation's responsibility to fulfil its historical duties and reflected his belief that understanding history involves utilising this knowledge for the nation's future, not just learning about the past. This approach highlights his view of historical consciousness as a matter of national consciousness, and emphasises the important role of educators in transmitting this consciousness. His contributions during this period have established him as a figure of great importance not only to the Republic of Türkiye, but also to the wider Turkish world. He also regarded Turkish educators as not merely conveyors of knowledge, but as cultivators of historical consciousness, emphasising the sacred and indispensable nature of this responsibility. He emphasised the pivotal role of teachers in passing historical consciousness down through the generations.

His intellectual contributions were anchored in the ideals of national unity, secular law, education reform, and modern citizenship. He argued that national identity should rest not on ethnicity or religion alone, but on shared language, culture and legal frameworks a stance that aligned with the emergent republican ideology and legal modernization agenda. His involvement in drafting constitutional or legal frameworks further reinforced his practical role in state formation. In the educational sphere, Ağaoğlu also contributed by teaching at the Ankara Law School (*Hukuk Mektebi*) where he offered constitutional law courses and by promoting the formation of modern reading rooms and libraries as a way to advance citizen awareness and modern social formation. In short, Ahmet Ağaoğlu played a dual role both as a thinker shaping the ideological foundations of the early Republic of Türkiye, and as a participant in its institutional construction (press, parliament, education, law). His legacy thus marks him as a leading "enlightened intellectual-leader" in the early Turkish Republic.

Ahmet Agaoglu was a key figure in the political and cultural struggles for the establishment of the Republic in both Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Through his intellectual contributions and statesmanship,

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he played a significant role in building the institutional frameworks of the Republic in both countries. Consequently, his works and ideas on the concept of the Republic are highly valued in the Turkish world.

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Dijitalleşmenin Yeni İletişim Modellerini Dönüştürme Süreci

The Transformation Process of New Communication Models Through Digitalization

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Özet

Dijitalleşme, günümüzde teknolojik ilerlemelerin hız kazanmasıyla toplumsal, ekonomik ve kültürel alanlarda köklü değişimlere yol açan bir süreçtir. Teknolojinin hızlı gelişimi, kitle iletişim araçlarını dönüştürerek yeni iletişim ortamlarını hayatımızın vazgeçilmez bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Bu dönüşüm, özellikle internetin yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte sosyal ağlar aracılığıyla sosyoloji, kültür ve ekonomi alanlarında da belirgin etkiler yaratmıştır. Geleneksel medya yerini dijital medyaya bırakırken, bu süreç kitle iletişim araçlarının çeşitlenmesini ve etkileşimi artırarak topluma derin etkiler yapmıştır. Bu makale, dijitalleşmenin medya, gazetecilik, toplumsal katılım ve finansal sürdürülebilirlik üzerindeki etkilerini incelemekte; ayrıca yeni medya ve dijital platformların iletişimdeki rolü ile ortaya çıkan etik sorunları ele almaktadır. Çalışma, literatür taraması yöntemiyle gerçekleştirilmiş olup, dijitalleşmenin iletişim modellerine etkisini betimleyici bir çerçevede değerlendirmektedir. Alan yazındaki güncel çalışmalar ışığında, dijitalleşmenin medya ve gazetecilik pratiklerinde meydana getirdiği dönüşümler ve bu dönüşümün toplumsal sonuçları analiz edilmiştir. Dijitalleşme, toplumun her yönünü etkileyen güçlü bir dönüşüm sürecidir. İletişim teknolojilerinin gelişimi, medya ve gazetecilik pratiklerinde köklü değişiklikler meydana getirmiş; internetin yaygınlaşmasıyla sosyal medya ve dijital platformlar daha interaktif ve kişiselleştirilmiş içerikler sunma imkânı yaratmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijitalleşme, Gazetecilik, Haber, Yeni Medya, Dijital İletişim

Abstract

Digitalization is a process that has led to profound transformations in social, economic, and cultural spheres as technological progress has accelerated in recent years. The rapid development of technology has reshaped mass communication tools, making new communication environments an integral part of daily life. This transformation has had a significant impact—particularly through social networks—on sociology, culture, and the economy. As traditional media has been replaced by digital media, the diversification of communication tools and the increase in interaction have deeply influenced society. This article examines the effects of digitalization on media, journalism, social participation, and financial sustainability, as well as the role of new media and digital platforms in communication and the ethical issues that have emerged in this context. Conducted through a literature review, the study adopts a descriptive approach to assess the influence of digitalization on communication models. In light of recent studies, it analyzes the transformations digitalization has brought to media and journalistic practices and evaluates their social consequences. Digitalization represents a powerful transformation process that affects every aspect of society. The advancement of communication technologies has caused fundamental changes in media and journalism practices, while the widespread use of the internet has enabled social media and digital platforms to offer more interactive and personalized content.

Keywords: Digitalization, Journalism, News, New Media, Digital, Communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digitalization is considered one of the greatest revolutions transforming nearly every aspect of life. In particular, the rapid advancement of communication technologies has fundamentally changed numerous processes, from access to information and news production to content distribution and audience interactions. This transformation, which has redefined the concept of traditional media, has also had profound effects on the journalism industry, leading to the emergence of an ecosystem known as "new media."

New media, leveraging the opportunities provided by digitalization, has established a faster, more interactive, and multi-dimensional news production and distribution mechanism. However, this transformation has not been limited to mere technical innovations; it has also introduced new dimensions to broader issues such as social interaction, content diversity, and financial sustainability. This article examines the fundamental dynamics of new media while delving into the impact of digital communication technologies on the journalism sector and exploring the broader societal repercussions of this transformation.

The evolution of media has not only reshaped journalistic practices but also redefined the relationship between readers and writers, as well as the revenue models of media organizations. In this context, both the advantages and challenges brought by digitalization will be assessed, and the impact of multi-channel media and content diversity on journalism will be discussed.

2. FOUNDATIONS OF NEW MEDIA

Media has diversified and significantly expanded with the emergence of digital technologies alongside traditional communication tools. This evolution has brought fundamental changes in the way media reaches the masses (Castells, 2000, p. 29). Traditional media generally includes classic communication tools such as print publications, radio, and television (Bagdikian, 2004). These media types undertake the task of delivering information to large audiences and interpreting social events. While traditional media encompasses classical communication tools such as newspapers, television, and radio, digital media includes the internet, social media, blogs, and online news sites (Pavlik, 2001, p. 44). Traditional media typically addresses broad audiences and provides one-way communication. However, digital media enhances interaction among individuals by offering interactivity and content tailored to specific target audiences, creating a more personalized experience (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 32).

The impact of digital media on society is of great importance. Digital media assumes the role of interpreting, analyzing, and reporting social events to the public. This influence stems from the media's capacity to raise awareness and shape public discourse. Media contributes to societal awareness and, with its ability to interpret current events, affects social norms (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This impact makes media a significant actor in shaping public opinion and directing political and cultural changes. The role of media is considered a fundamental element in the healthy functioning of a democratic society. Through news, current events, and information flow, media enhances the general knowledge level of society and contributes to the functioning of a democratic system (McChesney, 2004, p. 354).

The role of media extends beyond mere information transmission. As one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, media provides information, encourages participation, and offers a platform for diverse opinions through diversity and freedom. However, this role also brings ethical responsibilities.

Journalism standards such as objectivity, accuracy, and impartiality are critical to ensuring that media influence is exercised fairly and reliably (Ward, 2009, p. 279).

The concept of media has been examined from various perspectives in different disciplines. For instance, Habermas (1989) views media as a part of the public sphere and argues that media plays a role

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in supporting democratic debate and political participation. Journalism is a crucial component of media, ensuring the dissemination of news to the public. It is based on journalistic principles and ethical standards, playing a critical role in informing the public and fostering participation in democratic processes.

Media has undergone significant transformations over time. Starting with newspapers and radio, traditional media experienced substantial changes with the widespread adoption of television. However, the most significant transformation occurred with the rise of the internet and digital technologies. The internet has enabled the rapid dissemination of news and interactive access to content by users. This transformation has also significantly impacted journalistic practices. Digital media facilitates the rapid spread of news and provides journalists with new tools and platforms. While this allows news to reach a wider audience, it also presents new challenges regarding the reliability and accuracy of information.

Media plays a crucial role in public information, education, entertainment, and political participation. It informs the public, enables discussions on social issues, and holds political leaders accountable. Moreover, media contributes to the functioning of democratic processes.

The development and widespread use of information and communication technologies at the end of the 20th century have led to significant changes in all aspects of life. From individual lifestyles to professional training, from education and science to culture and art, every field has been influenced by information and communication technologies (Hülür & Yaşın, 2023, p. 9). The electronic communication environment we are born into reshapes and restructures social cohesion patterns and personal lives in every aspect. This process has made it necessary for individuals to reconsider and evaluate every established thought, ideology, action, and institution. In Marx's words, "all that is solid melts into air." Everything is changing. An individual's thoughts, behaviors, work, and relationships are dramatically transforming. Societies are shaped more by their relationship and communication with the media than by their direct interactions with each other.

In the past, media environments were shaped by print technology and the rigid structures of letters. While the alphabet promoted specialization and impartiality, electronic media technology encourages integration and participation. Understanding media's functions and operations is essential for comprehending social and cultural change. The rapid advancement of communication technologies has introduced numerous new concepts into media literature, such as new communication technologies, new media, the internet, social media, and social networks. The emergence of new media technologies has been made possible by the historical convergence of developments in computer and media technologies. Manovich argues that the developments leading to the emergence of new media date back to the 1830s (2001). According to him, this development process began with Charles Babbage's "analytical engine" and Louis Daguerre's invention of the "daguerreotype," continuing until the mid-20th century with the development of the modern digital computer.

Manovich suggests that the convergence of these two historical developments and the digital conversion of existing media led to the emergence of new media. The internet, upon its emergence, was seen as a utopia based on free, instant, and unlimited exchange. It was initially regarded as a means of escape from the passive popular culture created by television, which connected people through mass consumption. However, the internet first connected the military, then the academic community, and later expanded into commercial and political domains influenced by advertising and financial logic. Thus, the commercial and political potential of the internet transformed it from a utopian vision into a tool of mass consumption and control. Consequently, while initially perceived as a symbol of freedom and connectivity, the internet has been criticized for evolving into a medium shaped by commercial and political forces, facilitating mass consumption and control.

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New media has fundamentally changed the field of communication by converting analog media into digital representation (Manovich, 2001, p. 78). The internet has enabled equal-speed access to any data, allowed digitally encoded data to be played in countless ways, and facilitated the display of different media types on computers. According to Binark, new media is a form of media based on interaction between the source and recipient of a message, occurring at high speed through multimedia elements and containing digital codes (Binark, 2007, p. 5). Similarly, Törenli defines new media as a system connected to digital networks, featuring interactive, fluid networking and multimedia capabilities (Törenli, 2005, as cited in Yanık, 2016, p. 904). Although definitions of new media vary among researchers, they converge on common characteristics. Rogers identified three key features of new media: interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity, emphasizing interactivity in particular (Rogers, 1986, p. 5-7).

Accordingly, new interaction features of media have transformed traditional communication systems, enabling a level of communication where both the source and the recipient can mutually shape the content. Unlike other studies in the field, Rogers argued that new media possesses a demassification characteristic (Yanık, 2016, p. 903). Demassification refers to the ability to automatically reach individuals within a mass audience based on shared and unique characteristics, rather than delivering the same mass content to everyone (Rogers, 1986, p. 274).

This capability of demassification stems from the computerized nature of new media. Computerized media can address every individual and entity within the media environment, making demassification possible even in highly interactive settings. Rogers' final characteristic, asynchronicity, refers to the ability of new media to sustain interactions between the source and the recipient at different times and through various trajectories (Rogers, 1986, p. 276). With this feature, new media allows individuals to determine when they receive messages, increasing the likelihood of message reception while giving users greater control over the content. These new formations, emerging with the advancement of communication technologies, have led to significant transformations in social, cultural, and economic domains.

3. THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ON THE JOURNALISM SECTOR AND DIGITAL MEDIA

The concept of digital media, which encompasses all new communication technologies, has a rather broad definition. With the emergence of new media, which Manovich defines as "environments that direct existing media into numerical data interactively and provide production, distribution, and sharing through computers," all traditional media forms have become connected to digital technology. The collaboration created by digital technology through 0s and 1s has enabled new media to reach large audiences. Following the printed and audiovisual media types, digital media, which is both a product and a tool of today's developing technology, has seen a significant increase in its importance and impact on human life. In the modern era, it would not be incorrect to state that digital media permeates every aspect of life and its influence is becoming increasingly evident (Manovich, 2001, p. 19).

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has radically transformed traditional media tools and journalism practices, making this transformation a crucial factor affecting the journalism sector. In this context, the impact of digital communication technologies on the journalism sector is a comprehensive issue that shapes both the functioning of media organizations and public access to information. Traditional journalism consisted of a series of steps, including the collection, organization, and publication of news. However, the rise of digital communication technologies has significantly altered these processes. The internet, social media, blogs, and other digital platforms have diversified news sources, increased access to instant information, and strengthened interactions with readers (Smith, 2018, p. 498).

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Digitalization has also increased the speed and flexibility of journalistic practices. The instant publication of news has created a need for rapid responses to evolving events, posing new challenges for traditional news sources. As a result of digitalization, significant changes have occurred in journalistic content and presentation. The use of visual elements, interactive graphics, and video content has increased, offering readers a richer and more engaging experience. Additionally, news sites and applications have enhanced user engagement by providing personalized content tailored to readers' interests and preferences, thereby diversifying revenue models (Jones, 2019, p. 84).

Digital communication technologies have also promoted the consumption of news through mobile devices. Mobile applications and web-based platforms have enabled users to access news anytime and anywhere, expanding the journalism sector's reach to a broader audience. With the rise of social media, the speed and scope of news dissemination have increased significantly. As news shares, discussions, and comments are instantly published on social media platforms, the impact of events on public discourse has accelerated. However, the impact of social media on news sources and content should not be evaluated solely from a positive perspective. Misinformation and news manipulation spread through social media have challenged journalistic ethics and accuracy standards (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 47).

The effects of digital communication technologies on the journalism sector have fundamentally transformed news gathering, editing, presentation, and dissemination processes. This transformation has led to a journalism profession that is faster, more diverse, and more interactive. However, challenges such as the increase in misinformation and news manipulation have also emerged. In the future, the journalism sector's efforts to manage this technological transformation and uphold ethical standards will be crucial for the healthy and reliable evolution of the media.

4. THE RISE AND EFFECTS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The rise of digital communication has undergone significant evolution in recent years due to rapid advancements in communication technologies, creating profound effects in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. This evolution has fundamentally transformed traditional media perceptions and enabled individuals to play a more active role in accessing information, producing content, and interacting. This section focuses on the definition, characteristics, and societal impacts of digital communication. Digital communication refers to communication carried out through information and communication technologies, including digital platforms such as the internet, social media, email, blogs, and online forums. Digital communication has overcome time and space limitations, creating a global interaction space and offering individuals a wide range of content (Negroponte, 1995, p. 92).

One of the key features of digital communication is enhanced interactivity. Users not only access content but can also produce and share it (Jenkins, 2006, p. 248). Unlike traditional media, this increases the potential for individuals from all segments of society to have their voices heard. The rise of digital communication has significantly influenced media and journalism practices. Alongside traditional media organizations, independent journalism and blogs allow individuals to present various perspectives on social issues, increasing diversity. However, this also raises new concerns regarding the reliability and accuracy of news.

The societal effects of digital communication are multidimensional. These communication tools can enhance political participation and enable more individuals to engage in democratic processes. However, due to filter bubbles and algorithmic limitations, individuals may be confined to specific information, leading to opinion polarization (Pariser, 2011, p. 204).

The rise of digital communication has fundamentally altered communication paradigms and created profound effects on societal dynamics. Interactivity, diversity, and speed are the fundamental

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characteristics of digital communication, and these factors have led to significant changes in access to information, communication, and participation in social events. However, the new challenges and issues brought about by these changes should not be overlooked.

5. DIGITAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

Digital media has led to a fundamental transformation in journalism, reshaping various stages from news production to distribution. Digitalization, which expands the boundaries of traditional journalism, has made it possible for news to be presented in a faster, more accessible, and interactive manner. With the widespread use of the internet and the influence of social media platforms, news consumption habits have changed, and readers have transitioned from being passive consumers to active participants. This process is not only a technical transformation but also necessitates a reassessment of fundamental elements such as the societal function, ethical principles, and financial sustainability of journalism. Digital media presents both opportunities and challenges, significantly impacting the dynamics of the journalism sector.

6. NEWS PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION PROCESSES

As in every field, changing and developing technology has also altered the field of journalism. The operation of traditional media has changed, new types of journalism have emerged with technological advancements, and transformations have occurred in all journalism practices. Today, some newspapers have ceased their print publications, while others continue both print and online versions. Considering that people meet a significant part of their information needs through virtual platforms, it is crucial for newspapers to maintain a digital presence. Therefore, explaining the evolving and transforming practices of journalism is essential for understanding new media and the changes it brings. Additionally, understanding the impact of changing journalistic practices on reality is considered beneficial (Eldridge & Franklin, 2021).

Online journalism has undergone several stages to reach its current form. Initially, it began by copying traditional newspaper content verbatim. Later, it included news beyond those in print newspapers, shared across various platforms. At the latest stage brought by technological advancements, audience participation has been integrated into this process, leading to new journalism models with distinct names. Some of these include mobile journalism, participatory journalism, data journalism, citizen journalism, mainstream/online journalism, drone journalism, robot journalism, and hyperlocal journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003, p. 24).

Journalistic practices shaped by new media are referred to by various terms such as "electronic journalism," "virtual journalism," "internet journalism/news reporting," "journalism 2.0," "online journalism/news reporting," and "digital journalism." Traditional and new media journalism share fundamental methods regarding news production, writing, and dissemination. For example, the 5W1H rule is applicable to both types. News headlines, style, news leads, and writing techniques largely follow common practices. However, differences between print and digital environments have also affected journalism practices. The focus here is not to explain all the differences but rather those that are connected to the issue of reality (Napoli, 2020).

In traditional journalism, journalists, reporters, cameramen, or photojournalists must be physically present at the scene to produce news. They gather relevant footage, obtain information from individuals or institutions, conduct necessary interviews, and relay the collected data to editorial teams for editing, designing, and printing. Sometimes, extensive archive research is required. Additionally, traditional newspapers face numerous challenges and limitations such as circulation, printing costs, advertising difficulties, limited content space, distribution, pricing, physical labor, ownership structures, monopolization, censorship, and regulation. For instance, high production and distribution costs limit

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content diversity. Similarly, the necessity for content to fit within newspaper pages reduces variety. Production and distribution costs also affect the reach of news, impacting factors like news dissemination, repetition, and the reinforcement of perception. Another significant difference in traditional media that strongly influences reality is the ownership structure. Ownership from outside the journalism sector leads to monopolization, conglomeration, or cartelization, influencing content manipulation, limitations, and types of news. The practice of producing news in a single newsroom and publishing it in different newspapers under different names creates the illusion of perspective diversity. Repeated and reinforced information is perceived as true. However, when content serves ownership interests rather than public benefit, news production processes may become profit-driven and sometimes detached from reality. Apart from ownership, journalists, reporters, and presenters may also reflect their ideologies in news reporting. Furthermore, the reliance on text and static visual content can influence the perception of reality. A written report differs from an event being visually observed. Carefully chosen words significantly impact reality perception, whereas visuals provide a relatively broader interpretation opportunity. However, for newspapers, this aspect is limited to photographs (Schudson, 2011, pp. 183-184).

According to Pavlik, online news content exists on three levels. First, online journalists repurpose content obtained from affiliated news organizations. Second, journalists create original content. Lastly, there are news contents specifically designed for the web (Pavlik, 2001, p. 43). Online journalism involves presenting a news story on a website using at least two media formats with interactive and hypertextual elements.

The omnipresence of the internet is now supplemented by mobile technologies. A significant portion of internet use is now conducted through mobile devices. News can be produced, shared, and rapidly disseminated at any time and place. Due to the predominance of mobile devices and technologies, this new publishing type is called "Mobile Journalism" (MoJo). Individuals engaging in this activity are termed "Mobile Journalists" (MoJo). This phenomenon emerged with Web 2.0, enabling user-generated content. With the advancement of communication technologies, users have become amateur cameramen, photographers, chief editors, content managers, and reporters of their media content. This has led to the concept of citizen journalism. Citizen journalists differ in that they independently gather, verify, narrate, and present information rather than reporting from the field to an editorial center for processing (Kalsın, 2016, pp. 85-86). While this diversification of news sources has facilitated access to news content, it has also exacerbated employment issues for professional journalists.

Journalism and news production play a crucial role in the healthy functioning of democratic societies. Journalism conveys events, thoughts, and opinions impartially, informs the public, and contributes to democratic processes (Ward, 2011, p. 88). Journalists bear the responsibility of documenting facts and informing society, adhering to principles of objectivity, accuracy, and impartiality.

Journalism, as a broad field of communication, aims to provide reliable and unbiased information, attract public interest, and contribute to discussions in democratic societies. News production helps understand social norms and values while also influencing the comprehension of political, economic, and cultural issues. One of the fundamental principles of journalism, objectivity, requires news to be presented impartially, avoiding personal opinions and biases to maintain credibility (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 202).

Technological and societal changes have influenced journalism and news production processes. While traditional media operated through print newspapers, television, and radio, digital media has brought online news sites, blogs, and social media platforms to prominence (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001, p. 97). Digitalization and technological advancements have significantly altered news production and consumption. Social media, online news sites, and other digital platforms have expedited news

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dissemination while also raising concerns about accuracy and credibility. Journalistic ethics ensure that news is presented truthfully, safeguarding transparency and public interest (Ward, 2009). These ethical guidelines uphold journalists' credibility and public trust. However, commercial pressures, political influences, and other external factors can challenge their application.

7. READER-WRITER INTERACTION AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Digital communication technologies have transformed readers from mere consumers of information into active participants who also produce content (Hermida, 2010, p. 302). Interaction through social media platforms has increased discussions about news content and encouraged social participation. In this regard, the journalism industry's closer engagement with the public via social media has the potential to enhance participation in democratic processes. Reader-writer interaction and social participation are key areas where communication processes and information exchange allow individuals to interact within social, cultural, and political contexts (Tandoc & Maitra, 2022).

Reader-writer interaction refers to the process by which individuals engage with written materials. This interaction is not limited to printed books but also includes digital media, news sources, blogs, and social media platforms. Reader-writer interaction enhances individuals' access to information, comprehension capacity, and critical thinking skills. It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' worldviews, understanding different perspectives, and expressing their own thoughts (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 166). Moreover, reader-writer interaction supports individuals in becoming more conscious and effective participants in social contexts.

Social participation refers to individuals' capacity to actively engage in social, political, and cultural processes. Since reader-writer interaction enhances individuals' access to and understanding of information, this interaction can influence social participation. Access to information increases individuals' awareness of social issues, directing them toward more effective participation. Literate individuals tend to participate more actively in public opinion formation processes because their access to information and critical thinking skills strengthen their ability to understand and influence social issues. The relationship between reader-writer interaction and social participation is complex and involves a mutually reinforcing interaction. Since literate individuals possess a broader knowledge base, they are better equipped to understand and impact social issues. At the same time, social participation can enhance individuals' ability to understand and respect different viewpoints, fostering healthier communication within society (Putnam, 2001, p. 402).

Reader-writer interaction and social participation are essential elements that shape individuals' access to information, comprehension abilities, and capacity for social engagement. This interaction fosters the development of informed and active individuals who contribute to democratic processes, cultural diversity, and social justice. Future research and educational strategies should aim to better understand and strengthen this crucial relationship between reader-writer interaction and social participation.

8. MULTIMEDIA CHANNELS AND CONTENT DIVERSITY

Digital communication technologies have enabled media consumers to access various content formats (Pavlik, 2001, p. 78). The integration of video, audio, text, and visual elements across multiple media channels provides media organizations with a broad spectrum of options to cater to readers' preferences and habits. This development increases content diversity in the journalism industry, enhancing its potential to reach a wider audience.

The existence of multiple media channels has expanded content diversity, playing a crucial role in addressing different interests within society and providing access to diverse perspectives. Different cultural, social, and political content allows media consumers to gain various viewpoints and develop

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critical thinking skills. For example, the diversity of Turkish media content—including political, cultural, educational, and entertainment-focused content—plays a significant role in meeting the needs of different groups in society and fostering a democratic discussion environment. Similarly, in the Russian media landscape, the presence of diverse content catering to different social groups supports social diversity and enhances participation in democratic processes (Larina & Ponomarev, 2015, p. 152).

However, the proliferation of multimedia channels and content diversity has also introduced some challenges. Issues such as misinformation, content reliability, and the filter bubble effect can make it difficult for media users to access accurate and trustworthy information (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 49). While multimedia channels and content diversity enrich societal information exchange and promote participation in democratic processes, the associated challenges of information complexity and reliability must be carefully addressed in media literacy and public policy discussions.

9. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND REVENUE MODELS

Digitalization has brought new challenges and solutions to financial sustainability in the journalism industry. Changes in advertising revenues, the evolution of subscription models, and new financial models for digital content production represent significant steps toward reducing the industry's dependence on traditional revenue sources (Picard, 2014, pp. 180-181). Financial sustainability refers to an organization's ability to manage its financial resources in a manner consistent with ethical, environmental, and social responsibilities, ensuring long-term success and resilience. It is typically assessed based on financial performance, transparency, adherence to ethical values, and commitment to environmental and social responsibilities (Newman et al., 2024).

Revenue models are key factors that determine a company's income-generating strategies and have a direct impact on financial sustainability. These models are generally evaluated in conjunction with a company's business model, customer segmentation, and competitive advantage. Moreover, revenue diversification and the expansion of income sources are strategies that can enhance a company's financial sustainability (Kandır & Özkul, 2018, p. 440).

Financial sustainability often involves an increased emphasis on corporate environmental and social responsibilities. Sustainability strategies aim to enhance financial performance and secure long-term competitive advantages. The concept of social responsibility is frequently associated with financial sustainability, highlighting that companies adhering to societal expectations and sustainability principles can improve their financial success.

10. CONCLUSION

Digitalization has brought about revolutionary changes in media and journalism, as in many other areas of society. Digital media has transformed social communication by accelerating access to information and strengthening interactions among individuals. Compared to the one-way and limited structure of traditional media, digital media has become interactive, enabling immediate feedback. This transformation has allowed individuals to become content creators and reach a much broader audience through social media and other digital platforms. Consequently, social participation and contributions to democratic processes have increased.

However, this rapid transformation has also introduced significant challenges and ethical concerns. The rapid spread of information in digital media has raised new concerns regarding accuracy and reliability. In particular, misleading information disseminated via social media platforms has emphasized the need to uphold trust and ethical standards in journalism. Journalists and media organizations must place greater emphasis on fact-checking processes and develop effective strategies to combat misinformation and manipulation. Additionally, the emergence of "clickbait" content, driven by commercial concerns, poses a growing threat to journalistic principles of objectivity and accuracy.

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Although digitalization has encouraging effects on social participation, more ethical and sustainable approaches to information access and content production must be adopted. In this context, content moderation by digital media platforms and the efforts of media organizations to uphold ethical journalism standards are critical for the healthy evolution of the media ecosystem. In the future, legal regulations and widespread media literacy education will be essential for ensuring that digital media evolves into a more ethical and reliable structure. The full utilization of the opportunities presented by digitalization and its transformation into a socially beneficial process will depend on the continued commitment of the media industry and society to ethical standards.

While digitalization offers great opportunities for media and journalism practices, it also brings serious ethical challenges. The future progress of this transformation will depend on efforts to enhance information reliability, prevent the spread of misleading content, and ground social participation on ethical principles.

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Algoritmik Habercilik ve Tıklanma Ekonomisi: Medya Okuryazarlığı Perspektifinden Değerlendirme**Algorithmic Journalism and the Click Economy: An Evaluation from a Media Literacy Perspective**
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Özet

Bu çalışma, dijital medya ortamlarında algoritmaların içerik üretiminden sunuma, kullanıcı davranışından haber dolaşımına kadar uzanan etkilerini incelemekte ve bu dönüşümün medya okuryazarlığı açısından yarattığı sorun alanlarını ele almaktadır. Amaç, algoritmik gazetecilik pratiklerinin medya içeriklerinin yapısını nasıl dönüştürdüğünü, bu dönüşümün etik, yapısal ve demokratik etkilerini analiz etmek ve medya okuryazarlığını bu bağlamda yeniden değerlendirmektir. Yöntem olarak kuramsal literatür taraması, güncel alan çalışmaları incelemeleri ve eleştirel medya teorilerinin karşılaştırmalı analizi kullanılmıştır. Christian Fuchs, Tarleton Gillespie, Nick Srnicek, Adorno-Horkheimer ve Habermas gibi düşünürlerin yaklaşımları, dijital kapitalizm, algoritmik yönlendirme ve kamusal alan kuramları bağlamında bütünleştirilmiştir. Bulgular, dijital içerik üretiminin kullanıcı etkileşim verileri ve tıklanma ekonomisi doğrultusunda biçimlendiğini; haber başlıklarında duygu ve merak uyandırıcı unsurların ön plana çıktığını; algoritmaların kullanıcıları pasif tüketicilere dönüştürerek eleştirel düşünme becerilerini zayıflattığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, algoritmik yönlendirme süreçlerinin şeffaf olmaması, içerik görünürlüğünde adaletsizlik ve bilgi dolaşımında tekelleşme gibi demokratik işleyişe zarar veren sonuçlar doğurduğu tespit edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, medya okuryazarlığı yalnızca bireysel bir beceri değil, dijital çağda demokratik bilgi altyapısını korumaya yönelik bir direnç pratiği olarak ele alınmalıdır. Çalışma, medya okuryazarlığının erken yaşlardan itibaren eleştirel ve çok katmanlı bir şekilde eğitime entegre edilmesini, algoritmik sistemlerin şeffaflaştırılmasını ve yasal düzenlemelerle kamu yararı odaklı platform sorumluluğunun güçlendirilmesini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Algoritmik Habercilik, Tıklanma Ekonomisi, Medya Okuryazarlığı, Dijital Kapitalizm, Eleştirel Medya

Abstract

This study examines the effects of algorithms in digital media environments, spanning from content production to presentation, user behavior, and news circulation, and addresses the issues this transformation creates in terms of media literacy. The aim is to analyze how algorithmic journalism practices transform the structure of media content, evaluate the ethical, structural, and democratic impacts of this transformation, and reassess media literacy within this context. The method includes a theoretical literature review, analysis of recent field studies, and a comparative analysis of critical media theories. Approaches of thinkers such as Christian Fuchs, Tarleton Gillespie, Nick Srnicek, Adorno-Horkheimer, and Habermas are integrated within the frameworks of digital capitalism, algorithmic mediation, and public sphere theories. Findings indicate that digital content production is shaped by user interaction data and the click economy; emotional and curiosity-inducing elements prominently appear in news headlines; and algorithms convert users into passive consumers, weakening critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the lack of transparency in algorithmic mediation processes, inequality in content visibility, and monopolization of information circulation are identified as outcomes that harm democratic functioning. In conclusion, media literacy should be regarded not only as an individual skill but also as a practice of resistance aimed at protecting the democratic informational infrastructure in the digital age. The study recommends integrating media literacy into education from early ages in a critical and multilayered manner, increasing the transparency of algorithmic systems, and strengthening platform accountability focused on public interest through legal regulations.

Keywords: Algorithmic Journalism, Click Economy, Media Literacy, Digital Capitalism, Critical Media

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital media environment, news production and consumption have evolved into a dynamic and complex structure. While traditional journalism paradigms were limited to passive recipients such as readers or viewers, algorithms have now become central actors determining the flow of content. This shift has profound effects on what, how, and in what form the news reaches the audience. It can be argued that this transformation is not merely technical but also carries risks in terms of ethics, democracy, and the flow of societal information. In particular, the convergence of algorithmic practices with digital news platforms' click-based economic models creates a critical problem area concerning the quality, diversity, and reliability of news. Therefore, this study aims to examine the phenomena of algorithmic journalism and the click economy within a critical theoretical framework from the perspective of media literacy.

In this context, the central questions are as follows: How do algorithms structure the flow of news content? How do click-driven business models affect the quality of news? And how can media literacy protect users from digital manipulations in this process? In the introduction of the article, the aim is to trace these questions and outline the main contours of the discussion at the level of the problematization.

First and foremost, the question “How do algorithms influence the content and presentation of digital news?” is of significant importance. Algorithms rank, filter, or recommend content based on metrics such as user engagement, click-through rates, and reading time. This process creates a feedback mechanism that feeds the cycle of “popular content becomes more visible, leading to more clicks.” For example, a piece of content with an emotionally charged headline on a news website is more likely to attract readers' attention; the algorithm, in turn, promotes this content to higher positions. As a result, content producers tend to favor elements that can attract users-sensational headlines, prominent visuals, striking expressions. This trend may push principles traditionally valued in journalism-such as balance, objectivity, and in-depth analysis into the background. This phenomenon is also discussed in the literature within the context of “algorithmic media logic” (e.g., the works of Gillespie; see Tarleton Gillespie, 2014). At the same time, the opacity of algorithms their “black box” nature-makes it difficult for users to understand why they are exposed to certain content.

Secondly, the question “What are the effects of the click economy on the quality of news?” points to the economic foundations of content production processes. Digital media companies derive a significant portion of their revenue from ad clicks, pay-per-click models, and user volume. This situation promotes the logic of “the more clicks, the more revenue” for content creators. For instance, a study conducted in Turkey found that approximately one-third of economic news items employed clickbait (sensational headlines designed to attract clicks) (Küçükvardar, 2023:155). The widespread use of clickbait and attention-grabbing visuals undermines the delicate balance related to the accuracy, context, and analytical depth of news. In an experimental study by Molyneux and Coddington, it was also shown that clickbait headlines have the potential to lower readers' perceptions of the accuracy and quality of the news (Molyneux & Coddington, 2019). This result indicates that click-driven content production may not only damage reader trust but also erode the public function of journalism.

Moreover, click-based strategies also limit content diversity. Users' “news diet” tendencies, shaped by algorithms, lead platforms to organize content balance according to their own metrics. A study led by Makhortykh and de Vreese found that users' click traces tend to align with the content flow, and that users' reading preferences exhibit limited diversity (Makhortykh et al., 2021). In other words, although users' choices may appear “free,” they often occur among a restricted set of options determined by algorithmic guidance. This poses a risk to public opinion diversity and the democratic environment for debate.

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Thirdly, the question “To what extent can media literacy be effective in dealing with these digital manipulations?” is a central issue on both theoretical and practical levels. Media literacy, in its traditional definition, encompasses individuals’ abilities to analyze, critically evaluate, and produce media messages. However, in the digital age, this concept has been expanded to include algorithm awareness, filter bubbles, and data-tracking strategies. In this context, the concept of “algorithmic literacy” is widely used in the literature (Gagrčin, Naab & Grub, 2024). This approach aims to enable users to understand how algorithms work, what data inputs they are fed with, and according to what criteria they recommend content and to use this knowledge both critically and actively.

In an experimental study, media communication students were assessed for their awareness of algorithmic media processes, and it was found that their tendency to ask the question “Why Is This Here?” was correlated with their level of critical reading (Enhancing Algorithmic Literacy; Anàlisi). This result indicates that media literacy education can enhance users’ capacity to recognize algorithmic guidance and develop responses to it. On the other hand, research by Swart involving young users revealed that the level of algorithmic literacy is generally low, and although users may develop tactics to cope with algorithmic selection, these strategies remain limited (Swart, 2020). This demonstrates that media literacy initiatives must be addressed not only at the individual level, but also at the systemic level integrated with education, policy, and platform design tools.

Media literacy not only enhances individual awareness, but also nurtures users’ collective capacity and a culture of critical thinking essential for the democratic flow of information. However, it is important to consider the power asymmetries inherent in digital media systems. Platform owners and media institutions may not be transparent in sharing information about how algorithms function; mechanisms for independent monitoring and accountability may be limited. In such a context, even though media literacy empowers the individual, it may not be sufficient on its own to cope with systemic manipulations.

2. ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM AND THE CLICK ECONOMY

In the digital age, algorithms have become not merely technical infrastructures, but central determinants in the production, distribution, and consumption of media content. In "The Black Box Society" (2016), Frank Pasquale examines how the invisible operations of search engines, recommendation systems, and automated filters influence decisions about which information spreads and who gets access to it. Bernhard Rieder’s "Engines of Order" also sheds light on the historical evolution of classification, ranking, and recommendation algorithms in the processes of organizing information, showing that these are not merely technical mechanisms but are deeply intertwined with social and cultural practices.

Media organizations use algorithms in content recommendation systems by analyzing user behavior (such as clicks, shares, reading time), demographic data, and previous viewing history. These systems are designed to increase visibility in line with the platform’s objectives: more user engagement and higher interaction rates. However, one of the problems that arise from these functional mechanisms is the creation of “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers” situations where users are confined to content that aligns with their ideological, emotional, or informational preferences. As a result, algorithms make only certain parts of the news visible, leading to a narrowing of the public information sphere (Orujov & Gulmammadov, 2025).

The digital media environment has transformed nearly every aspect of journalism from the production process to publication and interaction with readers. The volume "Digital Transformation in Journalism and News Media: Media Management, Media Convergence and Globalization" (edited by

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Kamalipour & Friedrichsen, 2017) reveals how media organizations have had to restructure their content strategies, business models, and production processes in response to digitalization.

Another example is the edited volume "Journalistic Metamorphosis: Media Transformation in the Digital Age" (Vázquez Herrero, Direito Rebollal, Silva Rodríguez, et al., 2020), which explores the new opportunities digital technologies provide in journalism, including storytelling, increasing audience participation, audiovisual content diversity, and data journalism. In addition, the article titled "Digital Newsroom Transformation: A Systematic Review of the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Journalistic Practices, News Narratives, and Ethical Challenges" systematically demonstrates how artificial intelligence creates both opportunities and risks in newsrooms such as automation, content personalization, and ethical responsibility.

In this process of transformation, news producers are faced with the challenge of maintaining traditional standards of accuracy, analytical depth, and objectivity, while also responding to pressures for speed, appeal, and user engagement. Social media platforms also have a significant impact on journalism: news is now shaped not only by editorial decisions of institutions, but also by users' perceptions of shareability and social media interactions such as likes and comments.

The click economy refers to a system in which the revenue models of digital media organizations rely heavily on clicks, ad impressions, page views, and user engagement. The aim of this system is to keep users on the site or platform as long as possible and to maximize advertising revenue. Özen Çatal and Emin Akkor (2023), in their article "The Clicking Economics of Media and Shifts in News Content: The Case of North Cyprus Online Media," observe that online news platforms in Northern Cyprus develop content strategies based on click metrics and tend toward sensationalist headlines and narratives focused on maximizing clicks.

The click economy operates through the following mechanisms:

Sensationalization of headlines: Use of emotional triggers, curiosity elements, and ambiguous statements.

Attracting attention through visual media and multimedia content: Visual stimuli are intensified using photos, videos, and graphics.

Continuous updates and trend-driven content production: Current topics likely to interest readers are highlighted.

Algorithmic visibility based on user interaction: Engagements such as shares, comments, and likes affect the visibility of content via algorithmic systems.

These mechanisms affect the quality of news in several ways: the verification process is shortened; short, quickly readable texts are preferred over in-depth analysis; and context-free headlines become increasingly common.

Click-oriented business models, combined with algorithm-driven content production, gradually transform news into a commercial commodity a product designed for user interaction and advertising revenue. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's theory of the culture industry addressed this transformation as early as the mid-20th century: within this framework, cultural products become standardized, shaped according to consumer expectations, and cultural values are commodified.

In the modern media economy literature, Shoshana Zuboff's "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" emphasizes that user behavior data tracked, analyzed, and profiled shapes news and content

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flows based on commercialized user behavior. Zuboff describes a system in which user attention and engagement are turned into capital (Zuboff, 2019).

Similarly, Kate Crawford's "Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence" discusses how large technology companies control the distribution of news through algorithmic systems, and how this control affects both content diversity and information justice.

For example, if an economic news item on a major news portal is headlined with "Is This Company Going Bankrupt?", and the content includes uncertainty and fear elements instead of financial and technical details, the headline will attract clicks; the algorithm will then recommend or promote this content more frequently. In this case, the attention-grabbing function of the news overshadows its informative function. This can both limit the reader's right to be accurately informed and weaken the quality of public discourse.

While the function of algorithms is to regulate content flow, select visibility, and reward user interaction-based behavior, the transformation of digital journalism alongside these technical and institutional shifts encourages faster, more visual, and engagement-oriented content. The click economy, in shaping content strategies, headlines, and news products to attract users, commodifies the news; as a result, core journalistic values such as accuracy, context, and depth may increasingly be pushed into the background.

3. MEDIA LITERACY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The concept of media literacy was initially built on the ability to understand, critique, and analyze the effects of content produced by traditional mass communication tools such as print media, cinema, and radio. Today, however, media literacy encompasses a more comprehensive and multilayered skill set shaped by digital tools, social media, algorithmic content curation processes, user data, and interaction-based production and distribution mechanisms (Potter, 2004). W. James Potter's "Theory of Media Literacy: A Cognitive Approach" approaches media literacy within a cognitive framework, focusing on how messages are filtered, how meaning is constructed, and the role of personal and content-related knowledge structures that determine an individual's level of media literacy.

Secondly, the book "Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012) discusses the historical development of media literacy, media education practices, and the new skill sets brought by the digital age (e.g., digital literacy, visual media literacy). This work suggests thinking about media literacy not merely as message analysis, but within the broader context of media production, consumption, and its public role.

Historically, media literacy emerged in the 1960s through studies on media effects, propaganda, and advertising analysis. In later periods, it became intertwined with fields such as cultural studies, critical theory, and analyses of the communication climate. Thinkers like Marshall

McLuhan and Stuart Hall emphasized dimensions of media messages beyond "content"—highlighting "form," "encoding/decoding," and the "active role of the audience." These approaches underline the necessity of evaluating media literacy today not only in terms of content, but also in terms of processes and broader economic-political contexts.

Critical media literacy is one of the most influential branches within the discipline of media education. The critical approach argues that media is not merely a tool for content transmission but also an apparatus that reproduces power relations, ideologies, capital interests, and social norms. This approach analyzes questions such as: whose interests does the media serve? Whose voices are heard or silenced? Which values and perspectives are normalized? For example, "Critical Race Media Literacy"

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(Cubbage, 2022) examines how media is constructed in the contexts of racism, identity, and ideology, and how media texts function within these frameworks. This text sees media literacy not only as a set of technical or functional skills but also as a practice intersecting with social justice, identity politics, and power relations. Another example, the article "Media Education as Theoretical and Practical Paradigm for Digital Literacy: An Interdisciplinary Analysis" (Gomez Galán, 2018), evaluates both the theoretical framework and practical applications of media education; it focuses on how factors such as digitalization, the rise of the information economy, media ownership, and the influence of global media organizations can be incorporated into educational paradigms. This provides a strong contribution to the aspects of critical media literacy that highlight social context and power relations.

Critical media literacy shifts the audience from being passive consumers to active participants who question, analyze, and when necessary, produce alternative content. This approach emphasizes the ability to critically assess media messages in terms of their formal and structural aspects before responding emotionally or ideologically.

With the digital age, the relationship between media producers and publishers and users has significantly diverged from traditional publishing paradigms. Users are no longer merely consumers of content; they also take on roles as producers, commentators, sharers, and re-shapers of content. Social media has become a space where users can comment on, share, redistribute, and even create content themselves. While this creates a form of challenge to publishing authority, factors such as content moderation, advertising revenues, and algorithmic visibility transform the user-publisher relationship into a complex, two-way influence field. For example, Joelle Swart's article "Tactics of Algorithmic Literacy" (Swart, 2020) examines young users' perceptions and practices regarding algorithmic news selection; it finds that young people develop tactics such as questioning why they encounter certain content in algorithmically curated feeds, recognizing filters, and seeking alternative sources. However, these practices are not widespread, and most users still may not fully understand how the algorithm operates.

The study "Algorithmic media use and algorithm literacy: An integrative literature review" by Gagrčin, Naab, and Grub (2024) reveals that algorithmic literacy is shaped both by individual awareness and structural conditions. Factors that mediate users' understanding of media texts and algorithmic steering mechanisms include education, access to technology, transparency of the media sector, and social environment. This relationship also redefines the media consumption experience: user-publisher interaction, clicks, likes, and shares become criteria that confer visibility by publishers and algorithms. This situation encourages publishers to produce content based on what will generate more engagement, which can sometimes come at the expense of the public function of news.

Algorithmic steering encompasses all technological applications such as content recommendation systems, ranking, personalization, and filtering. This steering usually happens through invisible, coded decisions; data collection, model training, optimization criteria (e.g., user engagement, time spent on page), and advertising revenues feed and guide these systems.

Within the context of media literacy, the concept of algorithmic steering raises the following issues:

1. Transparency and accountability: Users' lack of knowledge about the criteria according to which algorithms present content leads to increased manipulative elements in steered media experiences. In this regard, media literacy education should function as an effort to show users how algorithmic decision processes work and to "open the black box."

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2. Algorithm awareness: Users need to understand the existence of algorithms, how and what they influence, and develop the ability to question why certain content appears. The study by Gagrčin et al. (2024) highlights that algorithm awareness enhances users' digital media literacy and is critical in identifying filter bubbles and biases.

3. Critical analysis skills: Media literacy is not only about verifying the accuracy of content but also involves the ability to analyze how content form, headline selection, audiovisual elements, and background variables such as algorithms' use of user history and demographic data shape the content.

4. User agency and alternative paths: Users should not remain passive in the face of algorithmic steering; it is important for them to turn to alternative sources, seek multiple perspectives, access information diversity, and take an active role in media production (e.g., blogging, using alternative media).

Educational institutions, media organizations, and political actors should rethink media literacy within the algorithmic context; curricula should include pedagogical tools that increase the visibility of algorithmic processes through interactive learning, case studies, simulations, and user experiences.

The concept of media literacy has evolved from traditional content-focused approaches toward a more integrated understanding that includes critical, formal, and structural analyses. The critical media literacy approach makes visible the relationships between power, ideology, and economic interests and media content. As the user-publisher relationship is redefined in the digital age, media literacy is a crucial tool for users to understand algorithmic steering processes and make heterogeneous, conscious choices in response to these guidances.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section will focus on the interactions established between digital capitalism, the culture industry, the logic of algorithmic media, and public sphere theories, comparatively examining the perspectives of thinkers such as Fuchs, Gillespie, Adorno-Horkheimer, and Habermas. The aim is to demonstrate how these theoretical approaches relate to each other in terms of continuity and rupture within the context of contemporary digital journalism and the click economy.

Christian Fuchs, with his critical studies on digital capitalism, reveals how information technologies operate within the context of capital accumulation, surveillance, data extraction, and the reshaping of user labor. According to Fuchs, digital capitalism commodifies users' attention, data, and interactions; advertising, tracking, and the "algorithmic environment" controlled by platforms form the core of this capital accumulation. Another significant contribution is the invisibility of the ideological functions of this system: users often do not realize these surveillance and steering processes. (Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2017)

On the other hand, Nick Srnicek in his work "Platform Capitalism" (2016) analyzes how platforms have emerged as new organizational forms of capitalist logic, developing monopolistic tendencies through network effects, data ownership, and economies of scale. According to Srnicek, platforms, unlike traditional production processes, are based on invisible data flows, user behavior, and algorithmic optimization processes rather than physical labor related to "production." This approach carries an important continuity with Adorno and Horkheimer's cultural industry theory concepts such as "standardization of products," "massification," and "passive audience."

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, in "Dialectic of Enlightenment", used the concept of the culture industry to depict how cultural products are transformed under capitalist logic through mass production, repeatable templates, emotional manipulation, and production aligned with consumer expectations. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944) Adorno's analyses of "standardization" and

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“commodification” can be reinterpreted in the context of digital capitalism: for example, the algorithms in Srnicek’s platform logic evoke Adorno’s emphases on the “tendency toward sameness” and the “guidance of consumer taste” in the culture industry.

However, there is also a rupture here: while Adorno’s critique of the culture industry largely focused on the one-way transmission of messages by centralized media institutions, today’s digital media environment has introduced processes such as user-producer interaction, participation, and resharing. Users are not only consumers but also take on roles as sharers, commentators, and even producers of content. Moreover, whereas Adorno’s analysis perceived the role of technological tools in content distribution more homogeneously, contemporary theorists like Gillespie and Fuchs examine in detail how the internal logic of algorithms and platforms metric-based optimization, recommendation engines, visibility strategies actually operate.

Tarleton Gillespie, in "Custodians of the Internet" and other writings, reveals how algorithms are approached as tools that enable or restrict the visibility of media content. According to Gillespie, algorithms do not merely recommend content; they determine in which context and to which user the content will be visible. Thus, the algorithmic logic depends on economic and technical criteria such as advertising revenues, engagement metrics, and user behavior. This situation transforms the ideal condition assumed in Habermas’s public sphere theory: because while rational discussion and equal participation are crucial in the ideal public sphere, algorithmic media may narrow the boundaries of this ideal.

Habermas’s public sphere theory describes a space where public reason can emerge beyond private interests; the media serves as a bridge for the transmission of information through journalism in this space. However, according to Gillespie’s analysis, the media is no longer just a bridge but also a filtering, steering, and visibility-rewarding system. For example, some news content is prioritized by algorithms with “high engagement potential” headlines; these headlines often contain emotional triggers; rational critique and counterarguments, which are central to Habermas’s ideal public sphere model, are often overshadowed in this environment. This transformation signals the rupture between Habermas’s public sphere and Gillespie’s concept of the “algorithmic public sphere.” While media ownership, public service media, and impartial news delivery are significant in Habermas’s framework, for Gillespie, visibility, engagement, and algorithmic optimization criteria reshape these elements.

Critical media theories encompass a broad field extending from Adorno-Horkheimer’s work through Marxist media analyses, cultural studies discipline, and contemporary digital media criticism. These theories examine how culture, power, ideology, and capital relations are reproduced through media. In their analyses of the culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the commodification of culture, the passivization of audiences, and the weakening of critical thinking are strategies for the continuity of the capitalist system. Fuchs reworks critical media theories within the specific conditions of the digital age. Accordingly, media ownership, surveillance, data ownership, and the normative steering practices of algorithms are part not only of capitalist interests but also of ideological and social engineering functions. Fuchs’s books "Digital Labour" and "Social Media: A Critical Introduction" show how users’ labor (for example, content production and interaction provided through their data) is processed as an invisible but profitable commodity.

There is a point of continuity between Adorno’s cultural industry approach, Fuchs’s digital capitalism, and Srnicek’s platform capitalism analyses: all three argue that cultural and media products are subject to capital, commercialization, and standardization; furthermore, even the consumer’s active choices are limited within these systems. However, Gillespie’s algorithmic media logic associates these systems not only with the content production process but also with new tools that actively control content distribution and visibility.

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To concretize the situation with an example: imagine a large global news platform. This platform uses algorithmic recommendation engines; it shapes high-engagement headlines based on the past clicking behavior of reader groups. This system aligns with Srnicek's analysis of platform capitalism because visibility and advertising revenues depend on this engagement. At the same time, Adorno's critique of standardization and commodification in the culture industry can also be observed here: headlines, language use, and visuals of the news may transform into similar templates. From Gillespie's perspective, this algorithmic steering can limit information diversity among users; from Habermas's perspective, the richness of the public sphere, rational debate, and visibility of countervoice may be impaired.

Another example: a political discussion on social media platforms. If algorithms prioritize content with similar views by referencing users' previous political preferences, sharing history, and interaction habits, the resulting public sphere deviates from Habermas's ideal model; because instead of equal participation, homogeneous opinion clusters ("echo chambers") form. While Fuchs evaluates this situation from the perspective of surveillance and data capitalism, Adorno and Horkheimer see this homogenization as a form of cultural integration pressure.

The main thesis emerging within this theoretical framework can be interpreted as follows: digital capitalism and platform logic confirm some classical assumptions of cultural industry critique, while simultaneously expanding this critique with new variables such as visibility, algorithmic steering, and data economy. There are both logical continuities (e.g., commodification, standardization, the pressure of economic interests on culture) and original ruptures (e.g., user agency, fragmentation of distribution by algorithms, visibility inequalities) between Adorno's understanding of the culture industry, Fuchs's conclusions, and Srnicek's platform analyses.

Habermas's public sphere theory, together with Gillespie's analyses, points out that the public sphere must be reconsidered not only in terms of content but also algorithmic steering, visibility economy, and platform design. In this way, a new ground emerges for democratic information flow and critical media literacy; media policies, platform regulations, and transparent algorithmic practices should be included in this ground.

5. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF CONTENT PRODUCTION IN DIGITAL MEDIA

Content production in digital media environments not only answers the question "what is published?" but also critically involves how these contents are shaped, what motivations underlie their creation, and how they evolve based on user interaction. This section will present a structural analysis through four subtopics: attention-grabbing strategies in news headlines; emotional/curiosity-inducing structures in content production; the impact of user interaction data on content policies; and profit-driven algorithmic content delivery.

News headlines provide the first point of contact with the reader in digital media and largely determine the visibility of the work. Publishers increasingly use attention-grabbing strategies systematically in headlines. As an example, Özsalih (2024:46) demonstrated through a quantitative analysis of headlines shared on NTV's Twitter account that emotional words used in headlines aim to increase "clickability." Such words tend to attract reader interest, evoke curiosity, and simplify the context (Özsalih, 2024:51). A large-scale study involving 47 U.S.-based news organizations analyzed approximately 23 million headlines from 2000 to 2019 and revealed that the proportion of headlines containing negative emotions (anger, fear, disgust, sadness) has increased over time (Choi, Lee & Ji, 2021). This indicates that media organizations tend to adopt dramatic, emotion-based headline strategies rather than neutral or informative ones. The study "Clickbait for Climate Change," focusing on climate

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change news, compared supportive and dismissive headlines; dismissive headlines contained richer emotional vocabulary and generated higher sharing and interaction (Xu, Laffidy & Ellis, 2022). These examples confirm that headlines function not only to convey information but also to exert influence over readers.

Attention-grabbing headline strategies are also reflected in content structure. The curiosity gap strategy creates a desire to click by making the reader feel there is something “missing” without providing complete information. For instance, the use of question sentences in headlines (“What’s going on?”, “What is the unknown truth?”), ambiguous expressions, or important but incomplete clues is common. Moreover, some studies on reader response show that when a balance is struck between “emotion vs. interest,” content tends to be more sustainable in terms of both interaction and reader satisfaction (Kim & Lee, 2021). Headlines that evoke curiosity and interest guide readers toward the news with more positive attitudes; negative emotions, although effective at grabbing attention in the short term, bring long-term psychological costs (Kim & Lee, 2021). Research focusing on video content finds that sensational (tabloid) style and negative content elements increase viewing time especially among young users; however, as age increases, the audience tends to prefer more balanced and informative content (Hendriks Vettehen & Kleemans, 2018:123). This highlights the growing importance of target audience analysis in content production.

User interaction data such as click counts, shares, likes, reading time, etc. have become critical metrics for digital news producers. These metrics play a strong determining role both in the selection of content topics and in their form. The study titled “Selling News to Audiences: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Emerging Logics of Algorithmic News Personalization in European Quality News Media” found that quality news organizations in Europe are sensitive to these metrics; user behaviors shape content policies; and in cases where advertising-driven business models and user expectations conflict with editorial values, content with high engagement is generally preferred (Helberger et al., 2019).

Similarly, the research “Content Creators Between Platform Control and User Autonomy” explains that there is a tension zone between content creators and platform owners; algorithmic control policies and engagement metrics of platforms exert pressure on the balance between creative freedom and user expectations (Hödl, 2023: 502). For example, although “small stories,” local news, or in-depth analyses shared by users are valuable in terms of perception, they struggle to gain visibility due to low click or share rates, which directs producers toward content with broader appeal.

Profit-driven algorithmic content presentation is the structuring of “what” and “for whom” is visible according to algorithmic criteria. Here, media organizations and platforms follow the criteria of algorithms that seek to maximize engagement, visibility, and advertising revenue; content production processes and distribution strategies are adjusted accordingly. For example, a field study on local media organizations in Indonesia observed that investigative journalism was harmed due to dependency on social media algorithms and the fact that a large portion of revenues came from clickbased advertisements (Frontiers, 2025). This type of profit-oriented presentation increases the risk of superficiality, decontextualization, and the use of unverified sources in content.

The lack of transparency in algorithmic content presentation, where content is prioritized or marginalized based on criteria invisible to users, also creates ethical concerns. Users often do not know why certain content is recommended or displayed; this situation leaves users vulnerable to manipulation. Additionally, profit-driven strategies that encourage the use of emotionally charged headlines and visuals are frequently observed: dramatic expressions such as “shocking details,” “unknown facts,” “what everyone should know...,” as well as terms like “crisis,” “disaster,” and “scandal” are used to attract attention. Although such strategies increase visibility through the algorithm, journalistic values

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like the depth of the news, accuracy of sources, and presentation of counterarguments are often pushed to the background.

6. CRITIQUE OF ALGORITHMIC JOURNALISM FROM A MEDIA LITERACY PERSPECTIVE

The algorithmic news environment has the potential to turn users into passive recipients who are shaped rather than active consumers. Algorithmic recommendation systems, filter bubbles, and suggestion engines evaluate users' previous preferences and interaction history; based on this, they decide which content will be visible. In these systems, user choices are often made within the limited pool of options set by the algorithm.

The study titled "Algorithms in the newsroom? News readers' perceived credibility and selection of automated journalism" found that readers do not perceive a difference in accuracy or credibility between automated (algorithmic) and human-produced content; however, this trust assessment does not reflect in their selection behavior or consumption preferences (Wölker & Powell, 2021). This indicates that even when users are aware, they may remain behaviorally passive. Similarly, the study "Factors Influencing Algorithmic News Apps Use and Its Impact on Media Literacy" states that with the widespread adoption of algorithmic recommendation applications, individuals tend to use these systems without questioning them; users generally accept a "whatever comes" news flow; and due to the lack of transparency in content options and algorithmic feedback systems, they are condemned to a guided consumption model (Li, 2025).

Passivity is a serious problem area in terms of media literacy because it limits not only content presentation but also the critical process regarding content. Users consume content based on the initial impact of a news headline or algorithmic suggestion; instead of reading deeply, fact-checking, or exploring different perspectives on an event, they make decisions based on the ready-made options presented.

In algorithmic journalism, the perception of the content takes precedence over the content itself. The algorithm predicts what will generate more engagement and rewards emotional triggers, curiosity-inducing elements, and sensational headlines. In this case, the informative or analytical aspects of the news may be relegated to the background. For example, the article "Algorithmic Gatekeeping and Democratic Communication" examines algorithmic visibility policies shaped by economic, cultural, and political preferences regarding which news becomes visible on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. This study reveals that priority is given more to the perceptual value of news—that is, its engagement potential—rather than its content value (Garajamirli, 2025: 8). Additionally, the intensive use of visuals, headlines, and emotional charge creates "perceptual pressures" that attract user attention. The study "Images, Emotions, and Credibility: Effect of Emotional Facial Images on Perceptions of News Content Bias and Source Credibility" finds that visual emotional triggers such as angry or furious facial expressions influence users' perceptions of bias in the content and the credibility of the source (Karduni, Wesslen, Markant & Dou, 2021). This shows the determining role of form, visuals, and perception-inducing elements alongside the content itself. Due to user history and interaction history, some content is systematically foregrounded or marginalized in algorithmic presentation; this leaves a framing effect on the user's perception of the world. This mode of presentation produces social knowledge based on "news perceptions" rather than "news alternatives."

Lack of media literacy means the absence of tools to critique these guided consumption and perception-based presentation processes. Individuals tend to accept news without conducting in-depth analyses, questioning source reliability, or evaluating different perspectives. Numerous studies show that individuals with high media literacy are more resistant to misinformation and evaluate the credibility

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of news sources more critically (Enhancing Algorithmic Literacy; Noguera Vivo & Grandío Pérez, 2024). However, those without this skill are more easily swayed by news based on superficial elements such as striking headlines, visual impact, and emotional triggers.

Lack of media literacy makes individuals vulnerable to misleading headlines, incomplete information, or even deliberate disinformation. The study “The Impact of Affect on the Perception of Fake News on Social Media: A Systematic Review” finds that emotionally charged false information overwhelms cognitive processing capacity and creates higher belief and sharing tendencies among individuals (Soc. Sci., 2023) (Mdpi, 2023). This means that lack of media literacy both increases information pollution and undermines public trust.

The critique of algorithmic journalism from the perspective of media literacy sometimes culminates in the argument that democratic information circulation is harmed. While diversity in the public sphere, access to different viewpoints, objective information, and opportunities for critical discussion are crucial for democratic societies, algorithmic visibility policies can weaken these conditions.

The study “Algorithmic Gatekeeping and Democratic Communication” examines visibility structures and shows that economic, cultural, and platform interests decide which news is prioritized; these decisions sometimes render less prioritized issues invisible, narrowing public debate and marginalizing local or critical content while amplifying elite news sources’ voices (Garajamirli, 2025). Similarly, the field study “Logics, tensions and negotiations in the everyday life of a news ranking algorithm” shows that news ranking algorithms in the newsroom increase the pressure of market logics such as advertising and page views; meanwhile, editorial values and democratic priorities (“public interest,” “diverse perspectives”) sometimes remain in the shadows (Svensson, 2023).

The harm to democratic information circulation is not only related to which news is visible but also to the weakening of individuals’ ability to critically filter and evaluate that news. Individuals without media literacy may lack skills to recognize counter-voices, detect manipulations, or question disinformation and misleading narratives; this can support social polarization, information monopolies, and ideological bloc formations.

The critique of algorithmic journalism from a media literacy perspective is vital not only as a technological or economic phenomenon but also in terms of social and democratic functions. User passivity, guided consumption models; the perceptual presentation of news overshadowing its contextual, verified form; the creation of an environment vulnerable to information pollution, disinformation, and manipulation due to lack of critical media literacy; and damage to the diversity, pluralism, and participatory public sphere of democratic information circulation all constitute the critical face of algorithmic journalism.

7. CONCLUSION

The increasing role of algorithms in digital media from content production to presentation, and from consumer behavior to news circulation directly affects the structural, ethical, and democratic dimensions of journalism. Algorithmic journalism, operating as a system driven by economic logic, centers on click rates and user engagement; this leads to journalistic principles such as accuracy, objectivity, and the public function of news being sidelined. Media literacy emerges as one of the strongest tools for individuals to establish a critical relationship with digital media amid this transformation. However, media literacy remains weak and fragmented within current media systems.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop solution-oriented strategies and adopt a multilayered intervention approach.

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The secrecy surrounding the role of algorithms in content selection causes serious problems in terms of both information justice and media ethics. Without making the decision-making mechanisms of digital platforms' content recommendation systems transparent, protecting users from algorithmic manipulation is impossible. In this context, both technological and legal regulations are needed to ensure the transparency of algorithmic systems. For example, the criteria on which news feed algorithms base their content recommendations should be presented to users in a clear and simple language. "Transparency panels" can be developed as digital tools that explain the decision logic of content preference algorithms to users. At the same time, it should be mandatory for platforms to disclose what kind of ranking or restrictions they apply to the visibility of news sources. To ensure accountability, independent auditing mechanisms must be established; content algorithms should be regularly examined for their ethical, political, and economic impacts. In this regard, transparency commissions formed with the participation not only of technological actors but also of the state, academic circles, and civil society can oversee the compliance of algorithms with democratic values.

Media literacy is a fundamental citizenship skill that must be systematically imparted not only at the university level but starting from primary and secondary education. Today's children and youth are local users of the digital media age; however, critical thinking and algorithmic awareness are not innate but competencies that need to be taught. Therefore, media literacy education should include not only basic knowledge such as "what is news?" or "how to verify sources?" but also higher-level critical skills like understanding algorithm functions, content manipulations, the commercial logic of platforms, and developing resistance to forms of disinformation. Curricula should integrate modules such as media production, visual literacy, news analysis, algorithm literacy, and digital ethics. Students should be raised not only as content consumers but also as content creators; thus, their relationship with digital media should be constructed in an active and critical, rather than passive, manner.

Digital media platforms have become not only tools for delivering content but also media actors that decide in what context, to whom, and how news is presented. Therefore, digital platforms should bear public interest responsibilities similar to traditional media organizations. Through legal regulations, the algorithms of digital platforms should be opened to public scrutiny, advertising models should be made transparent, and more effective intervention mechanisms against misleading content should be developed. For example, regulations similar to the European Union's Digital Services Act should be adapted to local contexts and integrated into the media ecosystem. Additionally, fairer distribution systems should be established to prevent content producers from being penalized by algorithms; incentive systems should be developed for investigative journalism, local news production, and content focused on the public interest. Such regulations are necessary to prevent algorithmic injustice.

Beyond technological or legal regulations, it is important for individuals to reach a level of awareness that questions and improves their own media consumption practices. Users must realize that their freedom to "choose" the content they encounter in news feeds is largely determined by algorithms. This awareness encourages users to make conscious choices, follow news from diverse sources, analyze content through cross-verification methods, and develop critical reading habits that are not easily manipulated. For this purpose, digital media literacy campaigns can be disseminated through civil society organizations and local media. Moreover, platforms should provide their users with guiding information about algorithm operations, the logic behind content recommendations, and similar topics.

Algorithmic journalism and the click economy are profoundly transforming media production, content formation, and consumer behavior. This transformation points to a system where media content is not only a carrier of information but also restructured to attract attention, create emotional impact, and generate commercial profit. This system renders users passive; it turns news from a source of public information into a consumable digital object. The content flow determined by algorithms indirectly

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influences not only what users are exposed to but also how they think and what they believe. Therefore, media literacy is no longer just a skill but a necessary practice of resistance to protect the informational infrastructure of democratic societies. Developing this practice requires holistic and coordinated policies in technology, education, law, and civil awareness.

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İnternet Televizyonculuğunun Tarihsel Gelişimi: Dünya’da ve Azerbaycan’da Paralel Süreçler

The Evolution of Internet Television: A Comparative Analysis of Global and Azerbaijani Trajectories *

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Özet

20. yüzyılın sonlarına doğru dijitalleşmenin hız kazanmasıyla birlikte geleneksel medya yapıları dönüşüme uğramış; internet temelli yayıncılık yeni bir televizyonculuk biçimi olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Dünya genelinde özellikle IPTV, OTT (Over-the-Top) platformlar ve sosyal medya destekli yayıncılık modelleri ön plana çıkarken, Azerbaycan’da bu dönüşüm daha geç bir tarihte ve farklı dinamiklerle gerçekleşmiştir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, küresel ölçekte yaşanan teknolojik ve yapısal dönüşüm ile Azerbaycan’daki gelişmeleri karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmektir. Bu bağlamda, internet televizyonculuğunun gelişim süreci; tarihsel, teknolojik, hukuki ve sosyokültürel boyutlarıyla ele alınmıştır. Çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemine dayalı olarak yürütülmüş; literatür taraması, doküman incelemesi ve karşılaştırmalı analiz teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, Azerbaycan’da internet televizyonculuğunun büyük ölçüde geleneksel medyanın dijitalleşmesi yoluyla geliştiğini; bağımsız dijital yayın girişimlerinin ise sınırlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca altyapı eksiklikleri, regülasyon boşlukları ve medya etiği sorunları da sürecin yavaş ilerlemesine neden olmaktadır. Buna karşın genç izleyici kitlesi arasında dijital yayınlara olan ilginin hızla arttığı tespit edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, Azerbaycan’ın internet televizyonculuğu alanında küresel gelişmeleri takip etmekle birlikte, yerel ihtiyaçlara uygun yapısal, hukuki ve teknolojik düzenlemelere ihtiyaç duyduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *İnternet Televizyonculuğu, Dijital Medya, Medya Dönüşümü, Azerbaycan Medyası, OTT Platformlar*

Abstract

Towards the end of the 20th century, with the acceleration of digitalization, traditional media structures underwent a transformation, and internet-based broadcasting emerged as a new form of television. Globally, broadcasting models supported by IPTV, OTT (Over-the-Top) platforms, and social media came to the forefront, whereas in Azerbaijan, this transformation occurred later and with different dynamics.

The main objective of this study is to comparatively analyze the global technological and structural transformation alongside the developments in Azerbaijan. In this context, the development process of internet television is examined through its historical, technological, legal, and sociocultural dimensions.

The study was conducted based on a qualitative research method, utilizing literature review, document analysis, and comparative analysis techniques. The findings reveal that internet television in Azerbaijan has developed largely through the digitalization of traditional media, while independent digital broadcasting initiatives remain limited. Moreover, deficiencies in infrastructure, regulatory gaps, and media ethics issues contribute to the slow progress of the sector. On the other hand, it has been observed that interest in digital broadcasting is rapidly increasing among the younger audience.

In conclusion, while Azerbaijan follows global developments in internet television, there is a clear need for structural, legal, and technological regulations tailored to local needs. In this regard, the study emphasizes that internet television should be addressed not only from a technological perspective but also from social, cultural, and legal angles.

Keywords: *Internet Television, Digital Media, Media Transformation, Azerbaijani Media, OTT Platforms*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly advancing digital age, the media sector has become one of the most affected areas of transformation. Especially since the last quarter of the 20th century, traditional media structures have gradually been replaced by digital-based, flexible, multi-channel, and user-centered broadcasting formats. One of the most striking outcomes of this transformation, internet television, should not be evaluated merely as a technical innovation, but rather as a profound paradigm shift in the production, distribution, and consumption of media. Internet-based broadcasting has eliminated the boundaries set by the classical understanding of television, significantly easing geographical, temporal, and structural constraints, and has created a new media ecosystem (Lotz, 2017).

This study aims to examine the historical development of internet television on a global scale and within the context of Azerbaijan, and to comparatively analyze these two parallel processes. Today, the concept of "television" no longer refers solely to a physical device or scheduled programming; instead, it signifies a multi-directional media system that enables viewers to access desired content at any time. Internet television forms the foundation of this new system. In this respect, the study seeks not only to outline the historical trajectory of a technical innovation but also to offer a multi-layered analysis encompassing the transformation of media structures, changes in viewer behaviors, gaps in regulatory frameworks, and discussions on media ethics.

In media studies literature, internet television is closely associated with new media theories. Jenkins' (2006) concept of "convergence culture" emphasizes the blurring boundaries between traditional and digital media, underlining that users are now both content producers and consumers. This indicates that internet television is not merely a broadcasting model but also a component of participatory culture. Similarly, Castells' (2009) notion of the network society highlights the decentralized and interactive nature of internet television. Therefore, internet TV is not only a technological advancement but also a cultural phenomenon that affects the structure of society.

The main research problem of this study is to understand how the rapidly developing field of internet television on a global scale has evolved in Azerbaijan, how this process has been shaped by local conditions, and what factors have accelerated or slowed down its development. Accordingly, the study aims to explore the historical development of internet television on both levels by identifying similarities and differences in terms of technology, legal frameworks, socio-cultural structures, and audience behavior. Specifically in the case of Azerbaijan, the late onset of this transformation, limited technical infrastructure, regulatory deficiencies, and ongoing debates regarding media ethics expand the research scope of the study.

This topic is highly relevant today as media consumption habits are rapidly changing. Younger generations have almost completely abandoned traditional television broadcasts, preferring to access content via mobile devices, social media platforms, or OTT (Over-the-Top) service providers. For instance, platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ have reached millions of subscribers worldwide, while user-generated platforms like YouTube offer a wide range of content from news to entertainment. This transformation is also evident in developing media markets such as Azerbaijan. The increasing number of YouTube-based channels and the rise of individual content creators indicate that this area is undergoing a dynamic process of growth. However, there are significant challenges to this development: insufficient internet infrastructure, low levels of digital media literacy, lack of legal regulations, and state control policies over the media hinder the full institutionalization of this new media form.

Conceptually, internet television can be defined as a form of digital broadcasting that delivers content over IP (Internet Protocol), allowing users to access content independent of time and location. In this context, not only professional broadcasters but also individuals and small media enterprises can act as content producers. In this sense, internet TV differs from traditional television by being decentralized, polyphonic, and interactive. For example, the growing number of YouTube channels in Azerbaijan in recent years produces both political and cultural content, and many of these broadcasts

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are followed by hundreds of thousands of viewers. However, the majority of these channels are not subject to any legal supervision and exhibit serious shortcomings in terms of broadcasting standards. This situation diminishes content quality and poses risks in terms of media ethics.

This study will address these developments from a historical perspective and will attempt to reveal both the global transformation and Azerbaijan's place within this process. It will particularly analyze how media policies, technological developments, and cultural structures have influenced this evolution. Moreover, the comparative approach employed in the study aims to make not only similarities but also local differences more visible. Internet television is not merely a form of broadcasting; it is also a crucial tool that shapes how societies access information, perceive current events, and form public opinion. In this regard, it is expected that the study will contribute to the literature on media studies and serve as a guide for media policymakers and content developers alike.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNET TELEVISION ON A GLOBAL LEVEL

Internet broadcasting is a phenomenon shaped by the digitalization process of the media industry, one that has fundamentally transformed traditional broadcasting norms. This transformation is not only a result of technological advancements but also closely tied to changes in media consumption habits, the increasing control of users over content, and the interactive opportunities provided by digital platforms. Especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the emergence of internet-based broadcasting initiatives in the United States is considered the starting point of this global transformation.

One of the earliest examples of internet broadcasting was the launch of RealNetworks in 1995 and its RealPlayer software, which enabled the transmission of video and audio files over the internet. Despite the limited bandwidth of the time, RealPlayer allowed users to stream media content online, representing a revolutionary step (Tollin, 2014). This marked the first significant alternative to the one-way and time-bound nature of traditional television broadcasting. During the same period, initiatives such as Broadcast.com brought the concept of internet broadcasting into the media agenda by enabling live events to be transmitted online. The sale of Broadcast.com by its founder Mark Cuban to Yahoo in 1999 for approximately \$5.7 billion attracted the attention of investors who had recognized the early potential of digital broadcasting (Anderson, 2006).

By the mid-2000s, the transformation in this field became more visible. In particular, broadcasting models known as IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) and OTT (Over-the-Top) began to define the technical and commercial framework of internet broadcasting. While IPTV delivers television content to users via closed networks, OTT services provide content directly through an internet connection, thus remaining largely independent of traditional broadcasters. This distinction has led to a democratization and diversification of the entire process, from content production to distribution. Netflix is one of the most symbolic examples of this shift. Founded in 1997 as a DVD rental service, Netflix transitioned to a digital platform in 2007 and developed a subscription-based streaming model. This date is widely considered a turning point in the global rise of internet broadcasting (McDonald & Smith-Rowsey, 2016).

Netflix's move to digital streaming represented not only a technical shift but also had significant implications for content production and viewer behavior. The ability for users to access any content at any time gave rise to new consumption practices such as "binge-watching." This model quickly paved the way for platforms like Hulu (2008), Amazon Prime Video (2011), and Disney+ (2019) to enter the market with similar structures. During the same period, user-centric platforms like YouTube made substantial contributions to the evolution of internet broadcasting. Founded in 2005, YouTube allowed users to upload and share videos, breaking the monopoly of professional broadcasting and popularizing the term "prosumer" (producer + consumer) (Burgess & Green, 2018).

The expansion of internet broadcasting is also deeply connected to developments in technological infrastructure. In particular, the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies transformed the internet from a mere information-access tool into an interactive space where users could produce and share content. Web 2.0, through tools such as blogs, social media, and online video platforms, enabled

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individuals to take on more active roles in the media, significantly contributing to the socialization of internet broadcasting (O'Reilly, 2005). As a result, not only major media corporations but also individual users began broadcasting via platforms like YouTube, Twitch, and Vimeo thereby promoting decentralization and plurality in the media landscape.

Moreover, the development of mobile technologies and the increasing speed of internet access have played a decisive role in the global spread of internet broadcasting. The widespread adoption of smartphones, coupled with the advent of 4G and later 5G mobile internet technologies, has allowed users to access content from virtually anywhere. This has further reinforced the spatial independence of media consumption, taking television from a fixed device in the living room to a portable experience in one's pocket. For example, research conducted after 2010 found that younger audiences increasingly preferred mobile devices over television for content consumption, with some users never having developed a habit of watching traditional TV at all (Napoli, 2011).

Each of these developments demonstrates that internet broadcasting is not merely a technical evolution but also a cultural, economic, and sociological transformation. Today, internet broadcasting is not only a tool for watching content; it also functions as a space for social interaction, political expression, commercial marketing, and cultural representation. In this sense, the global emergence and development of internet broadcasting should be viewed as a reflection not only of media technologies but also of human behavior, expectations, and cultural trends.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNET TELEVISION IN AZERBAIJAN

The development of internet television in Azerbaijan has gained momentum over the past fifteen to twenty years, in parallel with global trends. Traditionally, broadcasting operated via television and radio frequencies under a licensed and regulated structure for many years, but the broader availability of the internet and changes in legal regulations have started to open up this area. The first digital broadcasting examples generally began with small news portals or websites offering community focused content; over time, internet channels with video content and live broadcasting proliferated.

For example, Mediatv.az started primarily as an information portal and gradually increased its video content offerings among the early digital structures (mediatv.az, 2025). Along with the establishment dates of such platforms, internet oriented television initiatives such as Kanal 13 (2008), SƏS TV (2008), ANTV.WS (2009), YURD TV (2011), MUZ TV (2012), APA TV (2012), Vision TV (2013), Meydan TV (2013), Toplum TV (2016), Baku TV (2016), QHT TV (2017), Reaksiya TV (2018), Media Türk TV (2021), Sehiyye TV (2022) are notable. These channels tend to broadcast on local issues, civil society perspectives, cultural contents, or lifestyle and health topics, thereby meeting viewer needs that fall outside the scope of traditional broadcasting. However, detailed academic studies open to the public on most of these examples regarding their founding dates, content intensity, audience reach or technical infrastructure are limited. Currently, global channels such as "CTV movie", "CTV music", "CTV kids", and local internet channels such as "Tehsil TV", "Neftçi TV" are being watched more actively.

The digital transformation of traditional media organizations has played a significant role in institutionalizing internet television in Azerbaijan. In particular, national TV channels and public broadcasters have begun offering summaries of broadcasts, live streaming options, or repeat segments via their websites; integration with social media has increased audience interaction (Orujov and Gulmammadov, 2025). For instance, the state media organization AzTV's activities in digital media are progressively expanding. Yet, in this transformation process, the mechanisms of content oversight and control, and the limits of legislation remain important determinants (Audiovisual Council "Law On Media", 2022). This creates a transitional area that produces both technical and legal boundaries between traditional media and internet television.

Independent internet TV initiatives and individual content creators on platforms like YouTube have also become more active. Such initiatives generally operate with smaller budgets, focusing on local audiences or addressing social issues directly. However, compared to traditional media organizations,

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these independent entities face more fragile situations in terms of financing, technical infrastructure, and licensing.

A marked distinction is observed between state supported and private initiatives in Azerbaijan's internet television. Media policies, laws, and regulatory bodies influence the media space including internet media. The "Law On Media" passed in 2022 provides that media outlets broadcasting via the internet might be subject to certain regulatory requirements, including licensing of platforms (Audiovisual Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022). Also, public broadcasting institutions receive technical and financial support from the state, while private or independent internet TV channels largely rely on advertising revenue, donations, or individual contributions to sustain operations.

There are significant technical, legal, and financial challenges that limit the development of internet television in Azerbaijan. Technically, the internet infrastructure, broadband access, sufficient data transmission capacity for video streaming, and latency issues especially in rural regions reduce access and quality. Legally, licensing regulations, ambiguity about the place of internet broadcasts in broadcasting law, conflicts of jurisdiction among regulatory bodies, and undefined content control responsibilities expose broadcasters to uncertainty. For example, under Azerbaijan's media regulation, there is discussion about whether "internet TV broadcasting requires a license" some officials state that channels broadcasting via platforms such as YouTube or Facebook may not need a license, but when a channel streams from its own website and broadcasts for a prescribed daily duration, license requirements could apply (Audiovisual Council of Azerbaijan, 2022). Financially, limited advertising revenue, weak sponsorship, high production costs, and an unstable revenue model make sustainability difficult for private internet TV channels.

Moreover, social and cultural issues including media ethics, content quality, oversight mechanisms, and censorship are also experienced. Independent media outlets especially internet broadcasters often face disputes with governmental or regulatory bodies in matters of freedom of expression. For example, there are instances where internet TV channels like Kanal 13 have been accused of distributing "false information," which has led to legal or administrative restrictions on access or suspension of broadcasts.

In conclusion, internet television in Azerbaijan is still an evolving field with considerable potential. The variety of founding examples demonstrates diversification in internet TV through both public and private initiatives. Yet there are existing deficiencies in technical infrastructure, legal regulation, and financial sustainability. Updating the legislation, clarifying licensing requirements for platforms, strengthening infrastructure, and increasing media literacy are essential steps for internet television to advance in Azerbaijan more institutionally and effectively.

4. COMPARISON OF GLOBAL AND LOCAL PROCESSES

The emergence and evolution of internet television have varied according to different social, cultural, and technical contexts around the world. While internet-based broadcasting began developing in the late 1990s in technology-leading countries such as the United States, the process evolved more slowly and with different dynamics in countries like Azerbaijan, which underwent digitalization at a later stage. In this section, the development of internet television globally and in the specific case of Azerbaijan will be examined comparatively in terms of timeline, technological infrastructure, legal regulations, audience habits, and content production processes.

Looking first at the timeline, the key milestones in the global development of internet television were marked by Netflix launching its streaming service in 2007 (McDonald & SmithRowsey, 2016), YouTube popularizing user-generated video sharing in 2005 (Burgess & Green, 2018), and the emergence of ad-supported OTT (Over-the-Top) platforms like Hulu in 2008. These developments allowed users to access broadcast content independent of time and place, thus overcoming the limitations of traditional television. In contrast, the first examples of internet television in Azerbaijan began to emerge after 2008, and this late start was largely due to insufficient technical infrastructure and legal uncertainties (İrfs.org.az, 2009).

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Differences in technological infrastructure play a significant role in explaining this divergence in timing. Countries such as the U.S., South Korea, and some Western European nations enabled the fast and high-quality distribution of video content by spreading broadband internet early on (Oughton et al., 2023). For example, by the 2010s, over 70% of users in the U.S. had access to high-speed internet, whereas in Azerbaijan, this rate was below 30% during the same period (ITU, 2011). This created a serious imbalance in terms of access to and production of video content. Moreover, while major platforms like Netflix developed their own CDN (Content Delivery Network) infrastructure to minimize latency in content delivery (Böttger et al., 2016), many internet television providers in Azerbaijan remained dependent on third-party platforms like YouTube.

There are also notable differences between global and local processes in terms of regulation and censorship policies. For instance, in the U.S., content regulation is largely market-based, while in Europe, broadcast content is overseen through stricter media regulations (Napoli, 2011). In the context of Azerbaijan, the “Law on Media” adopted in 2022 introduced new licensing and content regulation mechanisms for internet broadcasters (Audiovisual Council of Azerbaijan, 2022).

Audience habits and cultural influences are also critical factors in shaping the direction of internet television. Global studies have shown that younger viewers are turning away from traditional television and increasingly consuming content through mobile devices (Starosta & Izdorczyk, 2020). This consumption model has also brought about behaviors such as “binge-watching” (watching multiple episodes in succession) (Chang & Peng, 2022). In Azerbaijan, while mobile device usage is widespread among younger users, the adoption of internet television remains limited to smaller audiences. Reasons for this include the low quality of content, lack of producer diversity, and broadcasting formats that do not align with local cultural codes.

Differences in content production and distribution are among the most significant factors separating these two media ecosystems. While global platforms include both high-budget professional productions (e.g., Netflix original series) and user-generated content (e.g., YouTube videos), content production in Azerbaijan is mostly limited to broadcasts prepared by state-supported media institutions or low-budget individual productions. This directly affects both the diversity and quality of programming.

Moreover, global content producers are increasingly using advanced technologies such as AI-supported content editing, targeted advertising, and data-driven content recommendation systems (Heliyon, 2024), while many digital broadcasters in Azerbaijan still rely on manual content management and low-interaction systems. This technological gap negatively affects both user experience and viewer loyalty.

In conclusion, there are significant structural, cultural, and technological differences between global and local developments in the field of internet television. Global media giants, with their investment capacity, infrastructure support, and regulatory freedom, are developing innovative models in internet broadcasting, while broadcasters in countries like Azerbaijan can only follow these developments to a limited extent. To close this gap, not only technological investments but also reforms in media policies, expansion of freedom of expression, and enhancement of digital media literacy are required. In this way, the interaction between the global media system and local media can be built on a more equitable and productive foundation.

5. THE ROLE OF INTERNET TELEVISION IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA

Internet television has exerted profound influences on younger demographics, altering their daily routines, time allocation, attention spans, identity formation, and social relationships. Young people increasingly prefer on-demand content over fixed broadcast schedules. Studies show university students mix watching, sharing, and sometimes creating digital video content, but active interaction (creation) remains far less common than passive consumption or sharing (Asgher & Gohar, 2022). This shift in consumption is not just about device preference (mobile, tablet, laptop), but about autonomy over content timing, format, and genre.

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One frequently observed effect is binge-watching, which allows contiguous consumption of episodic content and breaks from serialized waiting (Asgher & Gohar, 2022). This can produce both positive outcomes (immersive storytelling, communal conversation) and negative ones (sleep disruption, reduced attention to real-world tasks). Moreover, younger viewers are more likely to adopt multi-screen habits: simultaneously engaging with social media while watching internet TV, pausing for commentary, sharing moments, or looking up related information online (Eichner, Lozano, & Hagedoorn, 2021).

Another consequence is identity and value formation: exposure to global genres, non-local languages, and diverse socio-cultural norms can influence youths' preferences, self-perceptions, and aspirations. Media scholars argue that such exposure can broaden horizons but also provoke tensions when local cultural frames are sidelined or misrepresented (Eichner et al., 2021).

A key characteristic of internet television in the new media era is its deep integration with social media platforms. This integration takes multiple forms: content promotion, second-screen interactivity, user engagement, and content co-creation. For example, "Social TV" refers to the phenomenon where television (or streamed video) content is augmented by social media interactions real-time commenting, sharing, user reviews, hashtags, etc. The influence of factors such as age, gender, and technology familiarity mediate how willingly viewers engage with Social TV features (Pathak, 2018).

Traditional broadcasters and internet-native platforms use social media both to distribute snippets (e.g., trailers, highlights) and to harvest user feedback, which in turn shapes editorial decisions. Dautović (2022) shows how television editors use social networks both as platforms to broadcast and as sources for content, illustrating convergence in media production and distribution.

Internet television has transformed how news, entertainment, and political content spread. In the news domain, live streaming, internet-only channels, and hybrid models deliver content more flexibly. Audiences expect immediate updates, video clips, and interactive components (polls, comments). Social media acts as a multiplier: content created for internet TV often goes viral clips or segments are shared, reposted, and commented upon far beyond their original broadcast (Du & Lee, 2022).

Entertainment content is evolving as well. Serialized dramas, reality shows, and original productions are made with multi-platform strategies that anticipate sharing, memeification, and audience participation. Certain productions, such as teen dramas, have won international followings through multi-platform storytelling and social media-driven engagement, transcending traditional geographic boundaries (Eichner et al., 2021).

Political content has become more democratized citizens, opposition figures, and advocacy groups use internet TV and streaming to bypass traditional gatekeepers. However, the speed and reach of this dissemination carry risks such as misinformation, polarization, and sensationalism. Exposure to both traditional TV news and non-traditional online sources shapes users' perceived credibility and encourages political participation (Du & Lee, 2022).

The rise of internet television is reshaping journalism in terms of professional norms, workflows, business models, and ethical challenges.

1. Changing Roles and Skills

Journalists increasingly must be multi-skilled, including video production, social media engagement, live streaming, data visualization, and multimodal storytelling. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are being adopted for automation of routine news writing, content personalization, and data analysis, forcing journalists to adapt or risk obsolescence (Wang, 2025).

2. Speed vs. Accuracy Trade-offs

With internet television and social media amplifying speed, there is pressure to deliver breaking news quickly. This sometimes leads to errors, less rigorous fact-checking, or sensationalism. The traditional gatekeeping role of journalism is under strain (Kaul, 2013).

3. Audience Engagement and Participatory Journalism

The new model often involves the audience as contributors: user-generated content, eyewitness footage, comments, corrections. Journalism is no longer purely one-way dissemination. Journalists are

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embracing interactivity, crowd-sourced information, and increasingly transparent editorial practices (Kaul, 2013).

4. Business Model Disruption

Traditional revenue streams such as broadcast licenses, subscriptions, and advertising tied to linear broadcasts are challenged. Internet television requires new monetization strategies including subscription OTT models, microtransactions, sponsorship, digital ad revenue, premium content, and paywalls. The pressure to attract clicks and shares sometimes shifts editorial choices (Pathak, 2018).

5. Ethical and Regulatory Challenges

Issues of copyright, user privacy, algorithmic bias in recommendation systems, misinformation, and fake news become more prominent. Journalists and internet television channels must navigate complex legal frameworks, often in jurisdictions where regulations are underdeveloped. Amplification of extreme or polarized content remains a concern (Wang, 2025).

Internet television in the new media age is not merely a technical or distributional shift but is reshaping how media is consumed, news is produced, entertainment is offered, and civic life is engaged. For younger generations, control over content what, when, and how they watch along with platform mobility and social interaction, are central. Social media has become an integral part of the internet television ecosystem, amplifying reach and enriching content but also introducing vulnerabilities like misinformation and echo chambers.

Journalism remains critical but must evolve rapidly. Journalists must balance speed and interactivity with credibility and depth while developing new literacies in data, AI, and multimedia. Audiences are fragmented, less loyal to single outlets, and demand transparency and engagement.

Ultimately, internet television presents both opportunities and challenges: expanding access and participation, enabling novel formats, but also threatening quality and ethical standards. Especially in later digitalizing countries, infrastructure, legal frameworks, digital literacy, and industry norms must evolve simultaneously to share benefits widely and mitigate harms.

6. CONCLUSION

The evolution of internet television has fundamentally transformed the landscape of media consumption, production, and distribution across the globe. Emerging from the technological breakthroughs and shifts in audience behavior in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, internet television represents a paradigmatic change from traditional broadcast models to more decentralized, on-demand, and interactive media ecosystems. This transition has been facilitated by advancements in broadband infrastructure, the proliferation of mobile devices, and the integration of social media platforms, which collectively enable unprecedented accessibility and user engagement. The global media environment now reflects a multifaceted interplay of technological innovation, regulatory frameworks, cultural practices, and economic considerations.

At a macro level, countries with advanced digital infrastructures and liberal media environments have become pioneers in internet television, exemplified by the rapid growth of platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, and Hulu. These platforms have redefined audience expectations by offering personalized, high-quality content that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. Concurrently, social media integration has enhanced interactivity, fostering new forms of viewer participation and community-building around content. The emergence of binge-watching behaviors, the diversification of content genres, and the fluidity between user-generated and professionally produced material mark the new normal of internet television.

However, this global narrative does not unfold uniformly across all regions, particularly in countries experiencing later stages of digital adoption. Azerbaijan, as a case in point, occupies a distinctive position within this continuum. The country's internet television sector remains nascent relative to early adopters, constrained by infrastructural limitations, nascent regulatory mechanisms, and content production challenges. While the internet penetration rate and broadband availability have improved steadily in recent years, they still lag behind global averages, which inhibits seamless

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streaming experiences and wide-scale adoption. This digital divide is compounded by a regulatory environment that, although evolving, still imposes considerable restrictions on media freedoms and licensing procedures. The 2022 “Media Law” introduced new licensing requirements and content controls that aim to structure the burgeoning internet media sector but also risk reinforcing state oversight over content.

From a content perspective, Azerbaijan’s internet television landscape is characterized by limited diversity and professionalization. Most available content is either state-sponsored or produced by small-scale independent creators with constrained budgets and technical expertise. Consequently, the variety and quality of internet television offerings do not yet meet the sophisticated demands of increasingly tech-savvy and globally aware audiences. Cultural considerations also play a role; local content producers often struggle to balance between international trends and national cultural codes, leading to a mismatch in audience expectations and content relevancy. Furthermore, the absence of advanced content recommendation algorithms and artificial intelligence-powered systems places Azerbaijani platforms at a competitive disadvantage compared to global streaming services that optimize user engagement through data analytics.

To foster a more vibrant and competitive internet television ecosystem, Azerbaijan must pursue a comprehensive development strategy that addresses technological, regulatory, and content production dimensions. On the technological front, significant investments are required to enhance broadband infrastructure, expand mobile internet coverage, and improve data centers and content delivery networks (CDNs). Increasing the availability of high-speed internet will not only facilitate better streaming quality but also encourage the emergence of innovative content formats, including high-definition video, virtual reality, and interactive broadcasts. Partnerships with international technology providers and participation in regional digital initiatives could accelerate these infrastructure enhancements.

From a regulatory perspective, the state should aim to strike a balance between necessary oversight and enabling freedoms that encourage creative expression and market competition. Reforming the legal framework to simplify licensing processes, protect journalistic and creative independence, and safeguard user privacy and intellectual property rights would help cultivate a more enabling environment for internet television growth. Establishing clear guidelines on content moderation, disinformation management, and advertising standards aligned with international best practices will further enhance transparency and public trust. Importantly, regulatory bodies should engage with stakeholders including content creators, technology firms, civil society, and academia to ensure inclusive and adaptive policymaking.

Content production represents the third pillar requiring strategic attention. Capacity-building programs targeting media professionals, filmmakers, and digital content creators could elevate production standards and diversify offerings. This may include training on narrative techniques, technical skills, digital storytelling, and audience analytics. Supporting independent content creators through grants, incubators, and distribution platforms will stimulate innovation and grassroots creativity. Additionally, fostering collaborations between Azerbaijani and international producers can facilitate knowledge transfer and co-productions that appeal to both local and global markets. Emphasizing culturally resonant narratives and multilingual content could help better engage domestic audiences while showcasing Azerbaijani culture internationally.

Looking ahead, the future of internet television in Azerbaijan and globally will be shaped by the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and interactive broadcasting systems. AI-powered recommendation engines, content moderation tools, and automated editing processes will increasingly personalize and streamline viewer experiences. Interactive formats, including choose-your-own-adventure storytelling, live audience polling, and real-time feedback, will transform passive viewing into participatory experiences, enhancing engagement and loyalty. Moreover, immersive technologies like VR and AR have the

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potential to revolutionize content delivery by creating multisensory environments that blur the lines between entertainment, education, and social interaction.

In the Azerbaijani context, embracing these innovations presents both opportunities and challenges. Early adoption of AI and interactive broadcasting could compensate for resource constraints by automating routine production tasks and enabling small producers to compete on quality. However, these technologies also require advanced digital skills, ethical frameworks, and infrastructure readiness. As such, investment in digital literacy and technology education will be crucial to build a workforce capable of harnessing these tools effectively. Public and private sector collaboration can play a pivotal role in fostering innovation ecosystems that integrate technology startups, creative industries, and academia.

Furthermore, the socio-political implications of internet television's evolution merit careful consideration. Increased access to diverse content and platforms can democratize information and cultural expression, fostering pluralism and civic engagement. Conversely, without robust safeguards, the proliferation of internet television could exacerbate challenges related to misinformation, polarization, and censorship. Ensuring that technological advancements align with human rights principles and ethical media practices will be essential to realize the full societal benefits of internet television.

In conclusion, internet television embodies a transformative media phenomenon that has reshaped global communication landscapes by empowering audiences, diversifying content, and challenging traditional media models. While countries at the forefront of digital innovation have leveraged these changes to expand media access and influence, Azerbaijan remains in the developmental phase, grappling with infrastructural, regulatory, and creative limitations. Addressing these challenges through targeted technological investments, regulatory reforms, and content capacity building will be pivotal to fostering a dynamic and resilient internet television sector. Moreover, proactive engagement with emerging technologies such as AI and interactive broadcasting promises to unlock new possibilities for audience engagement and content innovation. By strategically navigating these pathways, Azerbaijan can position itself not only as a consumer but also as a competitive producer and innovator in the evolving digital media ecosystem.

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Ağ Toplumunun Geleceği: Manuel Castells ve van Dijk'in Ağ Toplumu Üzerine Düşünceleri

The Future of the Network Society: Reflections of Manuel Castells and van Dijk on the Network Society

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Özet

Bu çalışma, dijitalleşmenin toplumsal yapıyı dönüştürme biçimlerini Manuel Castells ve van Dijk'in "Ağ Toplumu" kuramları çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki hızlı gelişmeler, bireylerin toplumsal, ekonomik ve kültürel yaşamlarını yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Castells'e göre ağ toplumu, bilgi üretimi ve paylaşımının toplumsal örgütlenmenin merkezine yerleştiği yeni bir formdur. Van Dijk ise bu yapının dijital eşitsizlikleri derinleştirme potansiyeline dikkat çekmektedir. Her iki düşünür de ağ toplumunun yalnızca teknolojik değil, aynı zamanda sosyokültürel bir dönüşüm olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Çalışmada, bir yöntem olarak nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olarak bilinen betimsel içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu kapsamda dijitalleşmenin bireylerin sanal varoluş biçimlerini, zaman-mekân algısını ve toplumsal katılım pratiklerini nasıl dönüştürdüğü tartışılmıştır. Bulgular, ağ toplumunun ekonomik üretimden kültürel temsillere kadar çok boyutlu bir dönüşüm aracı hâline geldiğini, ancak dijital uçurumun giderilmemesi hâlinde küresel eşitsizlikleri artırabileceğini göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak makale, Castells ve van Dijk'in kuramsal yaklaşımlarını karşılaştırmalı biçimde ele alarak, ağ toplumunun geleceğine ilişkin fırsat ve riskleri bütüncül bir çerçevede irdelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijitalleşme, Teknoloji, Ağ Toplumu, Manuel Castells, van Dijk.

Abstract

This study examines how digitalization transforms social structures within the theoretical framework of Manuel Castells' and van Dijk's Network Society theories. The rapid development of information and communication technologies has reshaped individuals' social, economic, and cultural lives. According to Castells, the network society represents a new form in which the production and circulation of information are placed at the center of social organization. Van Dijk, on the other hand, highlights the potential of this structure to deepen digital inequalities. Both theorists emphasize that the network society is not merely a technological transformation but also a sociocultural one. The study employs descriptive content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, as its methodological approach. Within this scope, it discusses how digitalization transforms individuals' modes of virtual existence, perceptions of time and space, and forms of social participation. The findings indicate that the network society has become a multidimensional vehicle of transformation from economic production to cultural representation yet may exacerbate global inequalities if the digital divide is not addressed. In conclusion, the article comparatively analyzes Castells' and van Dijk's theoretical perspectives, offering a holistic evaluation of the opportunities and risks concerning the future of the network society.

Keywords: Digitalization, Technology, Network Society, Manuel Castells, van Dijk

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technologies represents one of the fastest social transformations in human history. These technologies have not only enhanced individual skills but have also led to the restructuring of the social order. From the hunter-gatherer era to the present, societal evolution has progressed through successive stages: the Agricultural Society, the Industrial Society (Society 3.0), the Information Society (Society 4.0), and today's Network Society (Society 5.0). Toffler (Toffler & Toffler, 1996, p. 88) explained these stages through the metaphor of “three waves,” identifying the agricultural society as the first wave, the industrial society as the second wave, and the information society as the third wave.

According to Castells (2008), digitalization has enabled a new form of communication in which individuals can interact beyond the constraints of time and space, thereby giving rise to a new social formation known as the “network society.” This structure represents not merely a technological transformation but also the reconfiguration of modes of production, communication processes, and social relations. Van Dijk (2020), focusing on the social and cultural dimensions of the network society, emphasizes how the inequalities brought about by digitalization influence social participation. Both scholars interpret the network society as an era in which digital technologies have become a fundamental force transforming the very structure of society (Ceyhan & Akalın, 2021; Latour, 2011).

In conclusion, the future of the network society can advance only under the conditions of sustained technological development, the elimination of digital deficiencies, and the support of these efforts through sustainable global policies and national strategies. In line with this theoretical framework, the present study aims to evaluate the future of the network society through the perspectives of Castells and van Dijk.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE NETWORK SOCIETY APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITALIZATION

Today, the foundation of social communication and cultural change largely rests on technological advancements. Since the mid-20th century, digitalization which constitutes the essence of concepts such as “network society” and “digital society” has been regarded as a fundamental phenomenon that began to spread during this period. From that point onward, the concept of digitalization has been discussed as a structure referring to the production, processing, and transmission of numerical data based on information and processing technologies (Aktaş, 2023, pp. 34–35).

As numerical data began to generate diverse impacts across social, communicative, and cultural domains, the concept came to be broadly defined as “digitalization” (Kılınç, 2021, p. 85). According to Dufva et al. (2019), digitalization is one of the fundamental forces capable of shaping the future. In this context, it is anticipated that, as a megatrend, digitalization will provoke extensive debates concerning the future of humanity.

The penetration of technological advancements into all areas of life has paved the way for significant changes in the social and cultural dynamics of individuals. The digital transformation that emerged as a result of progress in information and processing technologies is fundamentally linked to the development of computers and the internet. Moreover, the advancement of wireless communication technologies has played a crucial role in understanding the process of digitalization.

In assessing the significance and position of the internet, the evolution of the web assumes a determining role. The first stage of this evolution, known as Web 1.0, represents the early phase of the internet and is commonly defined as the “read-only web.” Developed in the early 1990s, this period encompassed websites composed of static HTML pages, allowing users only to view content. This structure, which offered highly limited user participation, was eventually replaced by Web 2.0 technologies (Ersöz, 2020).

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Web 2.0 is defined as a new digital environment in which users are no longer mere consumers of content but also become content creators, combining the functions of reading, writing, and sharing. A review of the literature reveals that this web transformation marks the early indications of the “information access society” and is regarded as the first stage of digital transformation. In this context, it is noted that among the key components of this new web era are elements such as big data and augmented reality (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 2001; Tuncer, 2013, pp. 3–5).

Schumacher defines the process of digitalization as the material transformation of individual analog and similar information flows into digital bits. He also considers it as the development of an infrastructure through which digital communication is restructured across many areas of social life. In particular, it is essential to examine the significance of technological systems in performing operations without human intervention (Schumacher et al., 2016).

There are various perspectives regarding the importance of the internet network in conceptualizing digitalization as a global, network-based phenomenon. Indeed, the global spread and recognition of the internet hold great significance in this regard. Through globalization, different societies have become acquainted with the internet network, making the use of its offered services a necessity. The internet initially took shape in the 1960s with ARPANET, developed by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) under the U.S. Department of Defense. Designed as a network infrastructure enabling communication among different computers, ARPANET laid the foundations for the modern internet (Smith & Kollock, 1999). With the further development of the internet, it became inevitable for individuals to come together within a digital environment, regardless of time or place. The ability to transmit various types of content such as images, videos, and text through a single digital platform has led users worldwide to embrace the internet as a tool for information sharing and exchange (Özbey, 2022).

As a concept, digitalization has gained a significant place in individuals’ social lives and has paved the way for the emergence of notions such as the digital society and digital culture. The effects of digitalization have become particularly evident in economic, cultural, and social dimensions, transforming economic structures, production processes, and professional definitions, thereby reshaping sociocultural dynamics (Schumacher et al., 2016). Within this process of transformation, the role of technology in the collection, storage, and utilization of information has become increasingly important (Yankın, 2019).

Since the mid-1990s, the expansion of the internet’s areas of use and the increase in the number of computer users have been regarded as the beginning of a new era. The widespread adoption of the internet across all domains, combined with innovations in information and communication technologies, has profoundly influenced individuals’ everyday practices from news consumption to shopping, and from communication to entertainment. This development laid the groundwork for the emergence of a new social structure defined as the “network society.”

Following globalization, the expansion of socialization processes has shaped the new dynamics of the modern world by bringing together diverse cultural, economic, and social structures, thereby contributing to the emergence of the network society approach (Söztutar, 2022, p. 61).

The structuring of internet technology within the digitalization process has brought forth an indepth debate over whether a transformation from an industrial society to a network society, as proposed by Bell (1973), has indeed occurred. Bell argues that the fundamental determinants of economic and social development have become knowledge and information. In this context, it is emphasized that production and distribution processes in the economy are now driven by knowledge-based inputs.

A review of the literature indicates that the concept of the information society is often used as a precursor or terminological equivalent to the term network society (Stevenson, 2006, pp. 297–299). With the emergence of the network society, it is asserted that social structuring now takes place through

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networks and that this structure is shaped by access to and the free circulation of information. This process can be understood as analogous to the free circulation of goods and services in the industrial society except that, in the network society, information itself becomes a shareable and manipulable element.

Among the defining indicators of the modern world, the network society is characterized by the replacement of traditional media communication forms with new media dynamics. In the formation of this new social structure, the ability to comprehend computer-mediated communication processes has gradually merged with individuals' efforts to construct new identities within mobile communication and network culture. This transformation compels individuals to make their digital skills and information competencies an integral part of their everyday life practices (Altunay, 2015, pp. 419–420).

The transformation in question, driven by the penetration of digitalization into all spheres of social life, has rendered discussions on the emancipatory and democratizing potential of the network society increasingly critical. Today, network-based forms of social organization facilitate access to information and enhance interaction among individuals. However, this situation also brings about new forms of control, surveillance, and inequality. In this context, contemporary critical approaches to the network society are shaped around three main perspectives: surveillance capitalism, algorithmic bias, and techno-determinism.

Zuboff's (2021) concept of surveillance capitalism addresses the core dynamic of the digital economy. According to Zuboff, users' online activities such as search histories, location data, and clicking behaviors are collected by large technology corporations and transformed into economic value. Thus, individuals unknowingly become producers within a market system in which their behaviors are converted into data. Castells' (2007) observations on the economic and cultural determinacy of information networks demonstrate that this process has given rise to a new configuration of power. As Zuboff highlights, this new network order also constitutes a digital surveillance regime. In this context, user participation ensures the continuity of the system through mechanisms of traceability and steerability (Talay, 2022). In Turkey, studies on social media usage have also revealed that individuals' digital identities have become economic data commodities and that privacy has gradually eroded in this process (Kalamani, 2019).

Another major criticism directed toward the network society today emerges through the concept of algorithmic bias. Although digital technologies were long perceived as neutral tools, recent studies have shown that algorithms are shaped and even guided by social biases (Bilgici, 2023). Indeed, there are arguments suggesting that search engines systematically reproduce sexist and racist patterns in their results. Similarly, O'Neil (2016) notes that algorithmic systems can reproduce structural inequalities within public policy, credit evaluation, and employment processes. This phenomenon is closely related to van Dijk's (2020) conceptualization of digital inequality. According to Dijk, access to digital technologies is not merely a technical privilege but one that is closely tied to social status, education, and cultural capital. Therefore, algorithmic bias is not only a coding problem but also a deep social issue encompassing questions of power, representation, and justice. From this perspective, the network society is not an egalitarian structure in which everyone participates equally, but rather a multilayered system defined by levels of access to knowledge and technology.

The techno-determinism critique represents one of the most fundamental debates concerning the network society. This critique challenges the assumption that technological progress directly determines social change. Lister (2009) emphasizes that technology is not an autonomous or self-propelling force but a phenomenon shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. According to Lister, unless technology is guided by human values and democratic processes, it can serve oppressive structures. In this respect, Castells' (2008) emphasis on the transformative power of information technologies can be complemented by Feenberg's notion of critical technological rationality. Technological advancement is

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not an end in itself; it must be evaluated in harmony with social justice, ethical responsibility, and cultural diversity.

With the rise of the network society, the production, dissemination, and circulation of information have created a new global system. However, the core dynamics of this system have introduced multilayered problems such as the transformation of individuals' digital traces into objects of surveillance, the shaping of public discourse through algorithmic direction, and the reproduction of social power relations through technological infrastructures. Therefore, a critical perspective on the network society demonstrates that it is necessary to reconsider not only technological progress but also social inequalities, ethical boundaries, and democratic participation.

In conclusion, the discussions on surveillance capitalism, algorithmic bias, and technodeterminism offer a critical framework for understanding the theories of the network society proposed by Castells and van Dijk. While digitalization provides opportunities for freedom, transparency, and access to information, it simultaneously entails the risk of turning these processes into new forms of surveillance, control, and inequality. Hence, the future of the network society will be shaped not only by technological advancements but also by ethical norms, democratic values, and patterns of social participation.

3. METHOD

This study is a theoretical investigation conducted within the framework of a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting phenomena within their contextual settings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2022). Accordingly, this research employs descriptive content analysis and comparative theoretical analysis methods. Descriptive content analysis aims to systematically review academic studies developed around a specific concept or theory, revealing common themes, similarities, and differences. The primary objective of this method is not merely to summarize existing knowledge, but to develop a conceptual synthesis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this study, the network society theories of Manuel Castells and van Dijk are examined using the comparative theoretical analysis method. This approach analyzes and explains theoretical similarities and divergences by comparing the perspectives of two or more theorists on the same phenomenon. In this respect, the study serves as both a theoretical qualitative inquiry and a secondary data analysis, focusing not on generating new data but on systematically interpreting and synthesizing the existing body of knowledge.

4. RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIM, SIGNIFICANCE, AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

As is well known, every scientific study arises from a specific need. In today's world, the rapid acceleration of digitalization is profoundly transforming the social relationships of both individuals and institutions. This transformation demonstrates that information and communication technologies represent not merely a form of technical advancement, but also a process of social and cultural restructuring.

The central problem of this study is to analyze the effects of digitalization on social structures and to explain this transformation within the framework of the concept of the "network society." The aim of the study is to comparatively examine the network society theories of Manuel Castells and van Dijk, thereby revealing how digitalization redefines modes of social organization. In this context, the research offers both a theoretical synthesis to the existing literature and a holistic evaluation of the opportunities and risks concerning the future of the network society. Thus, this study seeks to open new avenues for discussion regarding the relationships among individuals, society, and technology in the age of digitalization.

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5. DIGITALIZATION, NETWORKS, AND SOCIETY: THE FORESIGHTS OF MANUEL CASTELLS AND VAN DIJK

The process of digitalization, accompanied by the accelerated circulation of information and communication networks, is regarded as a pivotal turning point that has profoundly transformed social structures worldwide. During this period, the increasing flow of information has rendered social relationships independent of physical space and has given rise to a new realm in which individuals interact within digital environments. In a broader sense, this era is considered the beginning of digitalization, with particular emphasis on the decisive role of networks in the production, sharing, and management of information.

The concept of the network represents the organizational structure of complex systems in both nature and society. According to van Dijk (2020), networks consist of three fundamental elements: nodes, ties, and flows. A tie represents the relationship established between two nodes, and for a structure to qualify as a network, at least three nodes must be connected through two ties. Within this framework, nodes occupy a central position in information and communication processes; the efficiency of a network depends not on the number or characteristics of its nodes, but on their overall capacity to contribute to the functioning of the network (Şat, 2022, p. 9).

Bulut (2020) notes that the network structure, much like the organs in the human body, consists of interconnected components, with each node contributing to the overall functioning of the system. In this regard, digital networks continually restructure themselves as dynamic systems that facilitate the circulation of information, excluding redundant nodes and forming new connections. In doing so, the network not only maintains its performance but also ensures the continuity of information sharing.

According to Castells (2006), this configuration represents one of the fundamental organizational forms of modern society. The network society is understood as a new social formation in which the production and circulation of information constitute the defining elements of economic, cultural, and social processes. Therefore, digitalization is not merely a technological transformation but also a symbol of a new, network-based form of social organization.

According to Latour (2011), the network society is a decentralized and dynamic structure in which individuals, institutions, and technological systems are interconnected through networks of information, communication, and interaction. In this context, flexibility, adaptability, and reorganizability are among the fundamental characteristics of networks. As open systems in which individuals and institutions can continuously join or leave, network structures have transformed not only modes of operation but also forms of socio-cultural relations.

With globalization, the diminishing impact of geographical distances has accelerated the development of horizontal social networks and facilitated the decentralization of social organizations. During this process, the decentralization of power has become more apparent, and the boundaries between physical and virtual spaces have increasingly blurred. New social, economic, and cultural formations have emerged as a result of this transformation (Öztürk, 2014).

Individuals and groups within the network society gain an advantageous position in terms of access to information and connectivity capacity, while those excluded from the network face the risk of economic and social marginalization. Thus, while networks are often regarded as inclusive structures that promote participation and collaboration, they simultaneously generate a new form of digital inequality. According to Latour (2011), information networks, by introducing flexibility into production processes, possess the capacity to shape demand, redefine employment patterns, and transform leisure practices thereby leading to profound changes within the social structure.

The primary aim of Manuel Castells' studies on the theories of the "information society" and the "network society" is to explain the rapidly changing social structures that emerged from the late 20th century onward and their impacts on individuals. Castells argues that the profound transformations in communication and information technologies have redefined the forms of social organization. This

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process of transformation gained momentum in the 1990s with the wave of globalization that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, leading to fundamental changes across economic, cultural, technological, and political domains.

According to Castells (2001, p. 133), “The network society is, in fact, the reconstruction of a model of social interaction by individuals through the aid of new technological possibilities in order to create a new form of society.” In this context, the network society is not merely the outcome of technological transformation but also signifies the reorganization of communication forms, production processes, and cultural interactions. With the widespread diffusion of the internet, the production, sharing, and circulation of information have accelerated on a global scale, giving rise to a new social order characterized by constant interconnections among individuals, communities, and institutions.

In Castells’ framework, the concept of the “network” is defined as a flexible, dynamic, and multilayered structure that regulates interactions among individuals and organizations. This structure leads to the decentralization of power while enabling the global redistribution of information flows. Consequently, information represents the fundamental productive force of the network society. In contrast to the industrial society where “capital” and “labor” were at the core of production the network society is centered around “knowledge” and “information” (Başarmak & Öktem, 2019).

The network society represents a dynamic structure composed of connections and relationships among various units. According to Castells (2008, pp. 88–96), this structure is shaped by four fundamental variables:

1. Information is the primary raw material of the network society. The production and sharing of knowledge lie at the core of all economic, cultural, and social processes.
2. The diffusion of information technologies is one of the main factors determining the structural character of the network society. The manner in which technology spreads across society directly influences individuals’ levels of access to information and their modes of social participation.
3. The establishment of relationships within the logic of networks is among the most distinctive features of this society. Connections between individuals, institutions, and systems are formed not through traditional hierarchical structures but on the basis of horizontal and multidirectional relationships.
4. The technological paradigm is grounded in the principle of innovation. Constant change and development constitute the fundamental dynamics that ensure the sustainability of the network society.

The combination of these elements establishes the general framework that defines the functioning and social structure of the network society. According to Şat, this framework also represents a form of social organization centered on the production, sharing, and transformation of knowledge (Şat, 2022, pp. 10–11).

In Castells’ works, the concept of the network society is based on the argument that social functioning operates through a network-based structure. Social structures and actions organized around electronic information networks constitute the foundation of today’s internet infrastructure. According to Castells, networks are not defined merely by the physical locations of computers or users, but rather by the specific networks through which these connections are established. This perspective leads to a transformation in the traditional meanings of space and time.

Castells explains this transformation through the concepts of “timeless time” and “space of flows.” Timeless time refers to the dissolution of sequential temporality in the digital age, resulting in a state of continuous simultaneity. Meanwhile, the space of flows represents the circulation of information, capital, and communication independent of geographical boundaries. With the emergence of the network society, national borders have become increasingly permeable, and the world has transformed into a structure characterized by growing interdependence. Castells emphasizes that in this new order where traditional boundaries have largely dissolved the importance of the networks to which users are

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connected has increased, positioning these networks at the core of the global system. However, according to Castells, these networks are not evenly distributed; rather, the flows of information and communication tend to concentrate in favor of developed countries. Consequently, nations such as the United States occupy a central position within the network society, giving rise to a structure in which the capitalist system shapes the circulation of information according to the global backbone of the internet (Castells, 2001; Castells, 2007; Demir, 2021).

New communication technologies, while shaping individuals' lifestyles, are simultaneously shaped by everyday life itself, permeating all aspects of social existence. According to Castells, individuals' maps of meaning are no longer formed around what they do, but rather around who they are or who they believe themselves to be. In the network society, relationships among individuals and groups become increasingly instrumentalized while remaining susceptible to fragmentation; this, in turn, can lead to interactions with strangers being perceived as potential threats (Castells, 2006, p. 4).

Castells (2006) also emphasizes that civil society has been reshaped through digitalization and information technologies. In this context, information technologies particularly the internet have emerged as critical tools for the organization of social movements within the network society (Binark & Sütçü, 2017, pp. 155–156). Although the internet is often perceived as a chaotic structure, research has revealed the existence of certain patterns and cyclical dynamics. In this context, the patterns known as the “Seven Laws of the Web” reveal that, contrary to the perception that the Internet has grown randomly, users operate according to certain rules and structural principles. The seven laws in question are presented below (Huberman, 2001; Castells, 2004; van Dijk, 2020).

1. Network Articulation: Nodes join networks to achieve effects that exceed their individual capacities. This makes participation in networks highly attractive.
2. Network Externality: As more units join a network, the participation of others is encouraged, and the network grows rapidly. Strong units establish standards.
3. Network Expansion: In large networks, clusters and bridges form between them. Intermediaries (e.g., search engines) become critical components of the network.
4. Small Worlds: In large-scale networks, units can reach each other within a few steps, which triples the potential for interaction.
5. Attention Scarcity: Although content on the network is limitless, users' attention spans are finite. This limits the number of followers or audiences that content creators can sustain.
6. Power in Networks: Only a few powerful units can establish multiple connections within networks, which has the potential to increase inequality.
7. Reinforcement of Trends: Networks amplify general trends rather than individual ones. Information technologies enhance the connectivity and strengthening capacity of these networks.

According to van Dijk, the network society represents a new model of society. In this model, relationships are no longer formed through face-to-face or traditional means of communication but are instead shaped through new media tools such as virtual environments and social networks (Çağırkan, 2022). Dijk regards the network society as the fundamental structural unit of digital media networks and emphasizes that these structures should play a decisive role in the individual, group, social, and cultural organization processes of society. In this context, the network society is considered a modern form of social organization (Aktaş, 2023).

The interconnectedness of users within a network-based society has brought significant debates to the forefront. Indeed, van Dijk (2020), in his work *The Network Society*, states that throughout history, a single communication structure has evolved into a virtual environment that connects all social activities (as cited in Değerli, 2021, p. 69). This structure demonstrates that networks facilitate the establishment of social relationships and connections by enabling rapid and effective interaction (Söğüt,

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2022). Thus, the network society represents a social structure grounded in continuous and multidirectional flows of communication among both individuals and institutions.

Another definition of the concept of the network society first appeared in 1999 in van Dijk's book, where he introduced it as a new model of society. In this model, Dijk predicted that social relationships would no longer occur through face-to-face and traditional means of communication, but rather through virtual environments and social networks characterized as forms of new media (Çağırkan, 2022).

According to Dijk, another key characteristic that defines the network society is the transformation of the relationship between time and space. Among the core dimensions of the network society, the significance of these spatial and temporal shifts is particularly emphasized. With the emergence of the network society, individuals continue their daily lives without fully realizing that the distinctions between work time and leisure time as well as the boundaries of physical space are gradually becoming blurred (Altunay, 2015, p. 420).

When explaining the structure of the network society, Dijk (2020) draws attention to the concept of "invisible pathways." These pathways are defined as parts of an abstract reality that cannot be directly observed. According to Dijk, people are socially connected not only through physical infrastructures such as electrical cables, water pipes, gas lines, sewage systems, mailboxes, telephone wires, and cable television but also through computer networks such as the internet, new media, and virtual environments. Through these invisible pathways and digital spaces, social interaction forms a complex human network that generates an interconnected process of individualization among people (Ceyhan & Akalın, 2021, p. 147).

Dijk (2020) defines the network society as a social formation that possesses the infrastructural foundation of media networks, which enable modes of organization at individual, group/organizational, and societal levels. According to Dijk, these networks are increasingly interconnecting all units of the social structure. Furthermore, the "social networks" that he describes as social systems existing at every level and subsystem of society establishing concrete connections through abstract relationships can be classified into four levels: individual relations, group/organizational relations, societal relations, and global relations (Dijk, 2020, pp. 19–25) (see Figure 1).

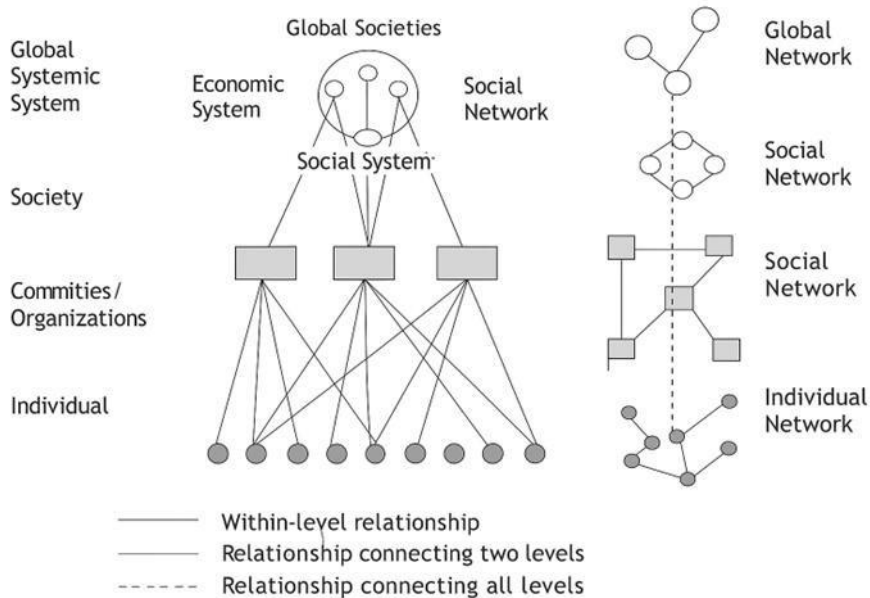
The social networks highlighted in the figure illustrate how individuals can meet their communication needs and information demands according to their specific interests. In this context, the concept of the "network society" examines the growing interconnectedness of individuals, groups, organizations, and communities through the widespread use of information and communication technologies. Thus, the network society can be understood as a concept that encapsulates the transitional phase of contemporary social and technological developments.

Figure 1. Four Social Units and Levels Connected Through Networks

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Source: (van Dijk, 2005, p. 35)

As a result of all these studies, Castells (2007, 2008) and van Dijk (2020) evaluate the network society as a continuation of the information society, with its changing structure and mode of communication. While information in the media of the information society generally reaches specific target audiences, in the network society, information can reach wider audiences through networks via new media and the internet. In this context, the network society is defined by interconnectedness, access to knowledge and accumulation, and the ability to communicate and collaborate on a global scale. Castells (2001, 2007) emphasizes that the environment he defines as the “internet galaxy” reshapes all areas of social life. This environment has affected the ways individuals, institutions, and groups access information (Öztürk, 2014).

According to van Dijk (2020), the network society strengthens social networks between individuals and communities through digital media and virtual environments, yet if digital inequalities persist, these connections cannot be equally reflected across all segments of society. This observation can be confirmed by various examples in recent years.

The Arab Spring (2010–2012) demonstrated most vividly and early on the power of digital networks to guide social movements. The protests that began in Tunisia with Mohamed Bouazizi’s selfimmolation quickly spread through platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), and YouTube, leading to large-scale social transformations in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. This movement revealed that digital networks removed news circulation from state control, creating a horizontal public sphere where individuals could communicate directly (Babacan, Haşlak, & Hira, 2014). However, the same process also revealed what Castells (2008) calls the “contradictory nature of networks.” Initially seen as tools of democratization, digital networks soon turned into mechanisms that strengthened state surveillance, censorship, and data-tracking policies.

A few years later, the Cambridge Analytica scandal (2016) demonstrated how social media data could be used as an instrument of political manipulation, showing how information flows in the network society could be redirected. This incident reversed Castells’ notion of the “power of networks,” revealing that networks could be shaped not to enhance democratic participation, but rather according to political and economic interests (Vardarlier & Zafer, 2020).

The 2013 Gezi Park protests made visible the potential of the network society for digital activism and online solidarity in Turkey. Social media accelerated information sharing and enabled diverse

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groups to come together through horizontal communication networks. However, the rapid spread of disinformation during the same period also revealed the dual nature of social media (Yeniçıktı, 2014).

The #MeToo movement (2017), in turn, provided another powerful example on a global scale of the network society's capacity to generate digital participation and social awareness. Through online networks, women made their voices heard and exposed gender-based injustices. Nevertheless, new ethical challenges such as digital mobbing and violations of privacy also emerged (Güntürkün & Altunay, 2023).

During the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, the use of social media demonstrated the importance of the network society in the processes of information sharing, solidarity, and mutual aid during crises. Digital platforms accelerated post-disaster information flows and enabled individuals to communicate and organize direct assistance. However, the rapid spread of misinformation once again brought the ethical and factual reliability problems of digital communication to the fore.

Finally, the 2025 Nepal Gen Z protests revealed the power of the network society to generate political awareness among younger generations. Following government restrictions on social media platforms, the protests were organized through Discord, Instagram, and Telegram, rapidly evolving into a large-scale youth movement across the country (Önel, 2025). This event illustrates the dual nature of digital networks: while they strengthen democratic participation, they also reinforce the mechanisms of state control and surveillance. The Nepal case confirms van Dijk's (2020) warning about digital inequality, showing that access to technology remains a decisive factor in political participation.

In conclusion, the network society, along with increasing access to information and communication, creates profound changes in the ways of living, working, interacting, and organizing, and provides new opportunities for communication. This structure has led to new forms of social, economic, and political organization. However, it also generates negative effects on privacy, security, traditional social structures, and human interaction, leading to concerns such as misinformation, exclusion, and cybercrime. The network society continues to evolve rapidly, and understanding its future effects and consequences is of great importance (Yıldırım, 2023).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Today, the network society represents a social structure driven by digitalization and globalization, in which information and communication technologies play a central role. Castells (2001, 2007, 2008) emphasizes that the internet and new media have reshaped social interactions and influenced individuals' forms of social identity, power, and participation. Van Dijk (2020) highlights that in the network society, information functions not only as a tool for production and sharing but also as a fundamental resource that determines the distribution of social and economic power.

Castells' notion of the "interactive society," referring to the new form of society created through internet-based communication, raises a central debate: does the internet foster the formation of new and virtual communities, or does it disrupt individuals' relationships with society and the "real world," thereby questioning the individual's role and significance within the network society? Among the critiques directed at Castells' network society theory, the most prominent is that of technological determinism. Critics argue that social structures are not shaped solely by technological developments but are also influenced by cultural and political factors. Another point of contention concerns the claim that the network society exacerbates global inequalities. Societies lacking access to information and technology tend to be left behind in this process. Regarding the power of networks, Castells seeks to question their controlling influence over individuals. Although individuals appear to be freer in the network society, they have in fact become increasingly dependent on global networks and the entities that control big data.

In the context of the role of technology in social transformation, Herbert Marcuse also offers a critical perspective, arguing that technology has created a one-dimensional society. According to Marcuse, in an ideal system, there exists a dialectical relationship between humans and the broader social

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structures they create, such as technology; individuals invent, use, and modify technology to meet their needs and express themselves (Marcuse, 2016). Through this reciprocal process, both technology and humanity evolve together. From this standpoint, Castells' theory serves as an important analytical tool for understanding the profound impact of information technologies on social structures. Today, with the rise of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and blockchain, the evolution of the network society continues. This ongoing transformation raises new questions about how economic, political, and cultural structures will be shaped in the future.

At this point, the network society represents a social structure accelerated by digitalization and globalization. At its core lie knowledge, flexibility, global connectivity, and technological infrastructures. Dijk's theory offers significant insights into understanding the future of modern societies, while also drawing attention to the social injustices, alienation, and privacy concerns brought about by digitalization.

Drawing attention to the extraordinary gap between technological advancement and social underdevelopment, Dijk argues that economies, societies, and cultures are largely built around interests, values, institutions, and systems of representation that limit collective creativity, appropriate the products of information technology, and channel human energy toward self-destruction. Nevertheless, Dijk also emphasizes the need to address digital inequality, asserting that nothing nourished by information and supported by legitimacy will change without conscious social action.

If people around the world become knowledgeable, active, and communicative, and if institutions assume their social responsibilities, the network society theories of Castells and van Dijk will provide a significant framework for understanding how digitalization and technology transform social structures. However, in the network society, issues of security and privacy have emerged due to the control of information flows and the monitoring of individuals' private lives. Moreover, the accelerated pace of this structure may weaken the sense of social solidarity, as individuals tend to form more superficial relationships, while information overload can lead to alienation and anonymity.

The theories of van Dijk and Castells reveal not only the opportunities but also the challenges presented by the network society. While global networks accelerate access to information and services, digital inequalities and social exclusions have become increasingly pronounced. The gap between digital skills and access deepens social injustices. To reduce digital inequalities, cooperation between governments and social structures is essential.

In this context, the development of the network society will lead to further social and cultural transformations in the future. Moreover, implementing active solutions to prevent digitalization from exacerbating social inequalities will enable the network society to evolve into a more equitable and inclusive structure. Indeed, this transformative process where digitalization is approached both as an opportunity and a threat renders social structures increasingly complex.

In future studies, within the framework of the rise of the network society and the effects of digitalization on social structures, the functioning of networks and the forms of interaction between individuals and groups can be comparatively examined across different social and cultural contexts.

Although Castells and van Dijk draw on similar themes in explaining the network society, their theoretical approaches differ significantly in terms of their epistemological and ontological foundations. Both scholars share the view that the production, distribution, and circulation of information have become the central determinants of social structure; however, they differ in how they conceptualize the nature of this transformation. From an epistemological perspective, Castells's approach is grounded in a structural and macro-level analysis. Castells (2008) argues that information and communication technologies constitute a fundamental force that transforms capitalist relations of production. According to him, the network society represents a reorganization of economic production, cultural representation, and political power. Within this framework, information functions as a source of power that determines the reconfiguration of social structures. Castells's approach is rooted in a structuralist epistemology

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inspired by the Marxist tradition and presents an explanatory model that integrates information technologies into the economic and cultural infrastructure of society. Therefore, Castells's notion of the network society focuses less on individuals' subjective experiences and more on the holistic dynamics of social organization reshaped through networks.

In contrast, van Dijk's approach adopts a more micro-sociological and communication-oriented epistemology. Dijk (2020) explains the network society through processes of social interaction, communication, and participation. For him, networks are not merely technological infrastructures but also cultural structures through which social relations are shaped. Dijk conceptualizes the network society as a framework in which individuals interact through digital media and construct their social capital via access to information. In this regard, his approach reflects a more pragmatic understanding of knowledge, centered on communicative interaction and the concept of digital inequality.

From an ontological standpoint, Castells's notion of the network is explained through the concept of the "space of flows," which constitutes a distinct mode of existence. This ontology reflects a dynamic order in which time and space are redefined within network structures, and in which information, capital, and communication circulate beyond geographical boundaries. For Castells, the network society represents a broad ecosystem encompassing everything from material to cultural production.

By contrast, van Dijk's ontology is more human-centered. He regards networks not only as technological systems but also as ensembles of social relations grounded in individuals' processes of meaning-making. Accordingly, van Dijk's conception of the network society rests on an ontological foundation where communicative practices shape social reality. For Dijk, a network extends beyond digital technologies to embody a new form of social organization through which individuals connect, share, and learn from one another.

As emphasized by Castells (2001, 2007), the widespread diffusion of information and communication technologies has enabled the formation of continuous and multidirectional networks among individuals, groups, and institutions, leading to the reconfiguration of social relations into a more flexible and space-independent structure. Similarly, van Dijk's (2020) perspective on the network society demonstrates that digital networks connect all units of social structures, accelerating the flow of information while drawing attention to issues of social inequality and injustice.

In this context, future studies may comparatively examine the dynamics of different network structures and social relationships, offering a deeper analysis of the network society's impact on individuals, groups, and institutions. Furthermore, the effects of the flexible and decentralized nature of the network society on processes such as social organization, collaboration, and knowledge sharing could be evaluated.

Such analyses can reveal the transformative power of digitalization on social structures, while also providing important insights into the opportunities and potential risks associated with the network society. Thus, the theories of Castells and van Dijk can serve as a solid framework for guiding future research. In conclusion, while Castells' and van Dijk's theories help us understand the profound effects of digitalization on social structures, they also underscore the necessity of developing strategies to address fundamental issues such as digital inequality and globalization.

The network society shaped by digitalization and globalization has profoundly transformed the ways in which individuals live, communicate, and interact. Castells and van Dijk emphasize that digital technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for global connectivity, information sharing, and civic participation; however, they also deepen digital inequalities and raise concerns regarding privacy, surveillance, and social fragmentation. For a more inclusive and equitable digital future, it is essential to promote digital literacy, develop inclusive technology policies, and strengthen global cooperation. Moreover, interdisciplinary research and ethical frameworks are increasingly needed to address the challenges posed by emerging technologies. Ultimately, the evolution of the network society must be

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guided by conscious social action so that technological progress can remain aligned with human development and democratic values in a sustainable manner.

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CEO Kaynaklı Krizlerin Kurumsal İtibara Etkisi: Üst Düzey Yöneticilerin Kişisel Hatalarının Marka İmajı Üzerindeki Rolü Üzerine Analiz**The Impact of CEO-Induced Crises on Corporate Reputation: An Analysis of the Role of Executive Misconduct in Shaping Brand Image***Khalil GULİYEV¹*

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Özet

Bu çalışma, üst düzey yöneticilerin kişisel davranışlarının ve kararlarının kurumsal marka imajı üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Günümüzde CEO'lar ve yöneticiler, sadece şirket politikalarının değil, aynı zamanda kurumun kamuoyundaki algısının da başlıca taşıyıcıları hâline gelmiştir. Bu nedenle bireysel hataların ya da tartışmalı söylemlerin şirketlerin itibarını ciddi şekilde etkileyebileceği bir dönemdeyiz. Çalışmanın amacı, yöneticilerin neden olduğu kriz durumlarında kurumların nasıl bir halkla ilişkiler (PR) stratejisi izlediğini analiz ederek, bu stratejilerin etkili olup olmadığını değerlendirmektir. Bu kapsamda çalışma, farklı sektörlerden seçilen örnek vakalar üzerinden yürütülmüştür. Araştırmada nitel yöntem kullanılmış; medya haberleri, sosyal medya paylaşımları ve kurumların resmi açıklamaları gibi ikincil veriler doğrultusunda vaka analizi yöntemi benimsenmiştir. Bulgular, krizlerin doğrudan şirketin kurumsal imajına zarar verebileceğini, özellikle zamanında ve şeffaf bir iletişim stratejisi yürütülmeyen durumlarda halkla ilişkiler çabalarının yetersiz kaldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, bazı durumlarda CEO'nun imajının marka kimliğiyle fazla özdeşleşmesinin, krizi daha da derinleştirdiği gözlemlenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: CEO Krizi, Halkla İlişkiler, Kurumsal İtibar, Kriz İletişimi, Vaka Analizi

Abstract

This study examines the impact of senior executives' personal behaviors and decisions on corporate brand image. Today, CEOs and executives are not only responsible for company policies but also serve as the primary representatives of their organizations in the public eye. As such, we are in an era where individual mistakes or controversial statements can significantly affect corporate reputation. The aim of this study is to analyze the public relations (PR) strategies adopted by organizations in crisis situations caused by executives, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. In this context, the study is conducted through selected case studies from different sectors. A qualitative method was employed in the research, and case study analysis was carried out based on secondary data such as media reports, social media posts, and official corporate statements. The findings reveal that such crises can directly damage the corporate image, and that public relations efforts often fall short, especially when timely and transparent communication strategies are not implemented. Furthermore, it was observed that in some cases, the over-identification of the CEO's image with the brand identity exacerbated the crisis.

Keywords: CEO Crisis, Public Relations, Corporate Reputation, Crisis Communication, Case Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an era where corporate visibility and transparency are at an all-time high, the personal actions and reputations of chief executive officers (CEOs) and senior executives have become deeply intertwined with the public image and credibility of the organizations they represent. The individual behaviors, ethical standings, and communication styles of these top-level leaders no longer remain in the private sphere; rather, they extend outward to impact corporate stakeholders, investor confidence, media narratives, and ultimately, brand equity. In this sense, CEOs are not merely decision-makers; they have become symbolic representatives of the corporation's identity, values, and vision.

Crises originating from the personal misconduct, controversial statements, or ethical lapses of CEOs often referred to as CEO-induced crises have emerged as a unique subset of organizational crises. Unlike operational or technical failures, these crises center on the perceived moral or behavioral failures of an individual who, in many cases, personifies the brand itself. The stakes are amplified when CEOs are viewed as visionaries, founders, or charismatic figureheads, making the organization vulnerable to reputational fallout through the principle of associative identity transfer (Gaines-Ross, 2003). In such cases, the public does not easily distinguish between the leader and the brand, amplifying both the scope and intensity of the reputational damage.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, CEOs serve as narrative agents in shaping corporate meaning. Their public actions and statements are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by audiences who seek coherence between a company's professed values and its leadership's conduct. When this coherence is disrupted by scandal or misconduct, a symbolic crisis occurs, wherein trust, legitimacy, and perceived authenticity are challenged. Moreover, from a critical theory viewpoint, CEO misconduct also exposes structural asymmetries in corporate power, where personal privilege can shield decision-makers from accountability until public scrutiny forces a reckoning. These crises also foreground the ideological dimensions of leadership, capitalism, and the commodification of identity, wherein individual failings translate into brand-level consequences.

Meanwhile, stakeholder theory emphasizes the interdependence between organizations and their multiple audiences employees, investors, customers, and communities. When a CEO's actions violate stakeholder expectations, a legitimacy gap emerges, prompting demands for corrective measures, transparent communication, and symbolic reparations (Freeman et al., 2010). In such scenarios, the burden of restoring trust often falls on the organization's public relations (PR) and corporate communication teams. The strategies adopted whether defensive, accommodative, or transformative can significantly influence the trajectory of the crisis and the organization's long-term reputational resilience.

Consider the abstract example of a globally recognized technology brand whose CEO is accused of workplace harassment. Even before legal proceedings commence, social media discourse may construct a narrative of toxicity and cultural failure, framing the brand as complicit. Investors may interpret the controversy as a governance issue, employees may question leadership credibility, and consumers may initiate boycotts. Regardless of the internal reality, perception becomes the dominant currency and unless countered by effective crisis communication, the symbolic weight of the CEO's actions can irreparably damage the corporate image.

The growing frequency and impact of such incidents underscore the need to examine the interplay between executive behavior, public perception, and strategic communication. Previous scholarship has explored the dynamics of crisis communication (Coombs, 2007), CEO branding (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016), and organizational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), yet there remains a research gap at the intersection of personalized leadership failures and institutional reputational responses. What makes a CEO crisis distinct is not merely its content, but its symbolic intensity: it is a personalized drama with institutional consequences, often unfolding in real-time across media platforms (Orujov and Gulmammadov, 2025).

This study aims to investigate how organizations navigate the reputational crises caused by CEO misconduct and what public relations strategies they employ to mitigate reputational damage.

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Specifically, the research seeks to understand:

- How do CEO-related crises impact corporate brand image and stakeholder trust?
- What crisis communication strategies are employed in response to CEO misconduct?
- To what extent does the CEO's symbolic role within the brand identity influence the severity of reputational damage?

To address these questions, the study employs a qualitative methodology based on case study analysis, drawing from diverse sectors such as technology, finance, and consumer goods. Using secondary data including media coverage, social media responses, and official corporate statements this research examines how PR responses are crafted, how stakeholders react, and whether the organization manages to restore credibility.

By focusing on the symbolic, strategic, and communicative dimensions of CEO-induced crises, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the modern CEO as both a leader and a liability. In doing so, it also highlights the ethical and reputational complexities that organizations must navigate in an age of hyper-visibility and instantaneous public judgment.

The following section outlines the conceptual framework underpinning this study, including a review of relevant theories on crisis communication, corporate reputation, and executive image management.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the reputational consequences of CEO-induced crises requires an interdisciplinary framework that integrates concepts from communication theory, organizational behavior, branding, and symbolic interactionism. This section outlines the theoretical foundations that inform this study, focusing on how personal misconduct by senior executives can impact corporate reputation and brand identity. The key concepts include crisis communication theory, stakeholder theory, corporate reputation, CEO branding, and symbolic leadership.

One of the most influential models in crisis communication is Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2007). SCCT emphasizes the alignment between the nature of the crisis and the communication strategy adopted by the organization. Crises are categorized into three primary types: victim, accidental, and preventable. CEO-induced crises, such as personal misconduct, are generally perceived as preventable, involving high levels of responsibility and potential blame attribution to the organization.

According to SCCT, in cases of preventable crises, accommodative strategies such as apologies, corrective actions, and CEO resignation are more effective than defensive approaches. The public expects accountability, and failure to meet these expectations can exacerbate reputational harm. For example, if a CEO is involved in a workplace harassment scandal and the organization initially defends the executive, the lack of empathy or transparency may be interpreted as institutional complicity.

Coombs (2007) also introduces the concept of intensifying factors, such as prior reputation and crisis history, which influence public reactions. If the CEO or company has a negative track record, even minor controversies can escalate rapidly. This insight is crucial in CEO crises, where personal behavior becomes symbolic of organizational culture.

Stakeholder theory, originally developed by Freeman (1984) and expanded by Freeman et al. (2010), posits that organizations are accountable not only to shareholders but to a broader network of stakeholders, including employees, consumers, suppliers, regulators, and the media. In the context of CEO misconduct, stakeholder expectations are often violated, leading to a legitimacy gap the distance between organizational behavior and societal norms.

Legitimacy, as defined by Suchman (1995), is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate.” When a CEO acts in a way that contradicts public norms e.g., making discriminatory remarks or engaging in unethical behavior the legitimacy of the organization itself is questioned. The public may interpret the CEO's behavior as reflective of

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broader institutional values, prompting demands for accountability, cultural reform, or leadership change.

In this regard, stakeholder theory informs the urgency of effective crisis communication: reputational recovery depends on how well an organization can restore moral alignment with its stakeholder expectations.

Corporate reputation is defined as the collective assessment of a company's credibility, reliability, and social responsibility, shaped over time through stakeholder perceptions (Fombrun, 1996). A CEO's personal brand becomes a critical component of this reputation, especially in firms where leadership is highly visible or charismatic.

Fombrun and van Riel (2004) argue that reputation is a form of symbolic capital that organizations leverage for competitive advantage. When that symbolic capital is damaged through CEO scandals or misconduct the loss is not merely economic, but symbolic and relational. For instance, a CEO involved in financial fraud undermines not only investor trust but also internal morale and consumer loyalty. Restoring this damage requires narrative repair reframing the organizational story to dissociate the brand from the crisis.

Moreover, the halo effect in reputation studies suggests that stakeholders often conflate CEO attributes with organizational values. This is especially dangerous in times of crisis, as negative CEO traits (arrogance, recklessness, insensitivity) are projected onto the corporate brand. Thus, CEO reputation and corporate image are tightly interwoven, often indistinguishable in public discourse.

In recent years, scholars have explored the notion of CEO branding, where top executives are not only corporate leaders but also public personas with distinct symbolic value (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). This is particularly common in tech companies and startups where CEOs act as visionaries, influencers, and the "face" of innovation. However, this branding comes with a risk: overidentification between CEO image and corporate identity.

When a CEO's personal values or behavior diverge from societal norms, the brand is often perceived as inauthentic or misaligned. For instance, when a sustainability-oriented brand has a CEO who is exposed for environmental negligence, the resulting inconsistency can lead to public distrust. This dynamic illustrates what Goffman (1959) would call a "performance breakdown" in the dramaturgical metaphor of leadership where the front-stage persona fails to align with backstage reality.

CEO branding also intersects with media logic, where visibility and charisma are often prioritized over governance and ethics. The symbolic power of the CEO thus becomes a double-edged sword: a source of reputational strength in normal times and a vulnerability in crisis.

Drawing from symbolic interactionism, particularly the work of Erving Goffman (1959), CEOs can be seen as actors in a societal stage who perform roles imbued with symbolic significance. Their behavior communicates not only personal values but also the norms, ethics, and culture of the organization they lead. In this interpretive framework, a CEO's misconduct is not just an individual failure but a symbolic violation of expected norms.

Stakeholders interpret the CEO's actions through social scripts and collective meaning-making processes. For example, a CEO's insensitive remarks during a social crisis (e.g., pandemic or political unrest) can be perceived as a betrayal of moral leadership, triggering backlash even if the remarks were not directly related to company operations. The symbolic weight of the CEO's position amplifies the public's emotional and moral reactions.

This interpretive approach helps explain why some CEO crises trigger disproportionate responses: the issue is not just what the CEO did, but what it represents in a broader moral or cultural context.

This theoretical and conceptual framework demonstrates that CEO-induced crises are not solely operational or reputational problems; they are symbolic events that challenge organizational legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and brand identity. The convergence of SCCT, stakeholder theory, reputation studies,

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CEO branding, and symbolic interactionism provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine how and why such crises unfold and how organizations can respond.

These frameworks guide the empirical analysis in the following sections, where real-world case studies are explored to understand the interplay between executive misconduct, public relations strategies, and corporate image restoration.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the impact of CEO-induced crises on corporate reputation and brand image, with a particular emphasis on the role of strategic public relations communication. Given the symbolic and interpretive nature of the research topic wherein leadership behavior intersects with organizational identity, stakeholder perceptions, and media narratives a qualitative methodology provides the most suitable framework for rich, context-dependent analysis.

The objective of this research is not to test causal hypotheses or produce generalizable results, but rather to develop an in-depth understanding of how CEO misconduct or controversial leadership behaviors affect corporate image and what communicative strategies organizations use to respond. Accordingly, this section outlines the research approach, case selection criteria, data sources, and analysis process.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

The research employs a case study method, which is particularly effective for investigating contemporary, real-life phenomena within their natural contexts. This method allows for an exploration of the complexity of CEO-related crises, offering insights into the organizational dynamics, media framing, and public reception involved in each case.

Within the broader case study strategy, a multiple-case design is used, which allows for comparative analysis across diverse sectors and crisis types. Each case functions as an individual unit of analysis, while also contributing to the development of cross-case themes. The multi-case approach enhances analytical robustness and increases the transferability of insights.

The study is exploratory and interpretive in nature. Rather than relying on numerical indicators or formal coding schemes, the analysis emphasizes narrative structures, symbolic meanings, and communicative patterns. The interpretive paradigm acknowledges that meaning is constructed through discourse and social interaction, which is especially relevant when analyzing the reputational effects of high-profile leadership scandals.

5. DATA COLLECTION

The research is based entirely on secondary data sources, given the retrospective nature of the cases and the public availability of relevant materials. These data sources include:

- News articles and investigative reports from international and national media outlets
- Social media content, including platform-based user reactions, trending hashtags, and public sentiment surrounding each crisis
- Official corporate communications, such as press releases, public apologies, CEO statements, resignation letters, and investor briefings
- Open letters and internal memos that became public during the crisis period
- Archived interviews and public speeches made by the CEOs involved

The use of triangulated secondary data ensures that each case is analyzed from multiple angles, reflecting both the organization's narrative and stakeholder perceptions. This diverse data landscape allows for a nuanced reading of the reputational dynamics at play during each crisis.

6. CASE SELECTION CRITERIA

The five case studies selected for this research were identified using purposive sampling, based on specific inclusion criteria that ensured the relevance and richness of each case:

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1. CEO-Centric Origin: Each crisis had to be directly or primarily caused by the behavior, speech, or decision-making of a sitting CEO or equivalent top executive.
2. Public Visibility: The crisis must have received significant media attention and triggered public discourse, ensuring sufficient data for qualitative interpretation.
3. Reputational Consequences: There must be observable effects on the organization's public image, stakeholder trust, or internal legitimacy.
4. Sectoral Diversity: Cases were selected from different industries (e.g., technology, finance, consumer goods) to allow for cross-sectoral comparison.
5. Temporal Range: Crises from the past decade were prioritized, to ensure the availability of digital data, including social media content.

The final selection includes five CEOs and organizations that meet all of the above criteria and offer unique analytical insights due to the nature and context of each crisis.

The five selected cases are:

- Elon Musk – Tesla/X
- John Stumpf – Wells Fargo
- Jae-Yong Lee – Samsung
- Travis Kalanick – Uber
- James Watt – BrewDog

Each case varies in terms of geography, corporate structure, and leadership style, which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the symbolic and communicative dimensions of CEO crises.

7. CASE ANALYSES OF CEO-INDUCED CRISES

To illustrate the theoretical and conceptual dynamics discussed in the previous sections, this study now turns to the in-depth analysis of five high-profile cases where CEOs played a central role in triggering reputational crises. Each case is examined through the lens of public discourse, stakeholder reactions, and the organization's communicative responses. The selected examples span different sectors, geographies, and leadership styles, offering a comparative view of how CEO behavior can either align with or disrupt corporate identity. Particular attention is paid to the symbolic construction of the CEO figure and the extent to which the organization managed to contain or amplify the reputational fallout. The cases also highlight the communicative strategies ranging from silence and denial to transparency and resignation used to manage public perception.

8. ELON MUSK AND THE BLURRING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PERSONAL PERSONA AND CORPORATE IDENTITY: A CASE OF REPUTATIONAL SPILLOVER AT TESLA

Elon Musk, as a highly visible and influential CEO, represents a unique phenomenon in contemporary corporate leadership. His public persona has become inseparable from Tesla's brand identity, illustrating the growing trend of CEO personal branding impacting corporate reputation (Harris, 2021). Musk's active use of Twitter (rebranded as X), especially since acquiring the platform in 2022, has introduced significant reputational risks for Tesla due to controversial tweets involving political statements, aggressive rhetoric, and engagement with conspiracy theories.

This case exemplifies the dangers of over-identification between a CEO's personal identity and a company's brand image. As Fombrun (1996) argues, corporate reputation is a collective construct influenced not only by organizational actions but also by the symbolic figureheads associated with it. In Musk's case, his embodiment of the "techno-visionary" archetype attracts both admiration and criticism, complicating Tesla's public perception. The alignment between Musk's idiosyncratic communication style and Tesla's corporate image creates a dual-edged sword: while it attracts innovation-oriented consumers, it alienates stakeholders who expect corporate social responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

Musk's self-positioning as a "free speech absolutist" clashes with emerging stakeholder expectations for ethical leadership and responsible communication (Kernaghan, 2022). His tweets on

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sensitive subjects such as gender identity and public health measures have provoked consumer boycotts and negative social media campaigns, including #BoycottTesla, which illustrate how CEO rhetoric can catalyze consumer activism that threatens brand equity. This dynamic reflects stakeholder theory's emphasis on balancing diverse interests, where corporate leaders are expected to navigate complex social values alongside business objectives (Freeman, 2010).

Tesla's response to these crises is characterized by a notable organizational silence. Rather than issuing public statements or distancing itself from Musk's remarks, Tesla has often maintained a silent stance, effectively allowing Musk's personal brand to overshadow the corporate narrative. This strategy, however, conflicts with best practices in crisis communication literature, which emphasize timely, transparent, and empathetic communication to preserve stakeholder trust (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2018). The lack of an official corporate response may exacerbate reputational damage by signaling tacit approval or indifference (Coombs, 2007).

Economically, Musk's online behavior has correlated with Tesla's stock price volatility and increased investor uncertainty. Market analysts have noted that Musk's dual role as CEO of Tesla and owner of Twitter creates distractions that could impact Tesla's strategic focus and governance (Financial Times, 2025). Furthermore, regulatory bodies have scrutinized Musk's social media disclosures for compliance with securities laws, reflecting the broader implications of CEO communication on corporate governance (SEC, 2023).

Despite these challenges, Musk remains a central asset to Tesla's brand identity, symbolizing innovation, disruption, and technological leadership. This duality presents a paradox wherein Musk's personal brand simultaneously enhances and endangers Tesla's reputation. Charismatic leaders may embody reputational capital but also increase vulnerability to public backlash when personal conduct conflicts with societal expectations.

In summary, the Tesla case underscores the complexity of managing CEO-driven reputational risks in an era of heightened media visibility and stakeholder scrutiny. It reveals the need for organizations to establish clear boundaries between personal expression and corporate responsibility, as well as proactive communication strategies to mitigate spillover effects from executive behavior. The case also raises important questions about governance structures and the balance between individual autonomy and organizational accountability.

9. LEADERSHIP FAILURE AND ETHICAL CRISIS AT WELLS FARGO: ANALYZING JOHN STUMPF'S ROLE IN THE FAKE ACCOUNTS SCANDAL

The Wells Fargo fake accounts scandal of 2016 represents a profound ethical crisis within the banking sector, demonstrating how leadership failures at the highest level can precipitate widespread organizational misconduct. Under CEO John Stumpf's leadership, Wells Fargo employees engaged in opening millions of unauthorized accounts to meet aggressive sales targets, a practice that went undetected or ignored for years despite internal warnings (Corkery & Cowley, 2016). Stumpf's delayed response and lack of accountability exacerbated the crisis, resulting in significant damage to the bank's reputation and financial penalties.

A key aspect of this crisis was Stumpf's defensive posture when confronted with allegations. His public statements initially minimized the severity of the issue and deflected responsibility onto lower-level employees, which diminished public trust and intensified stakeholder skepticism. This response contradicts recommended crisis communication strategies advocating transparency and acceptance of responsibility to restore organizational credibility (Coombs, 2007).

The scandal also underscores the integral relationship between corporate ethics and reputation management. Wells Fargo's image, traditionally anchored on trust and integrity, was severely tarnished, illustrating how ethical lapses can erode stakeholder confidence rapidly (Palazzo, Krings, & Hoffmann, 2012). The scandal serves as a clear example of how ethical culture or its absence permeates all organizational levels, influencing behaviors and decision-making (Schein, 2010).

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Crucially, the crisis exposed the direct influence of CEO leadership on corporate culture. Stumpf's tenure was marked by an aggressive sales culture, where unrealistic performance pressures encouraged unethical conduct among employees (Jennings, 2018). The tone at the top, set by Stumpf, failed to prioritize ethical standards or risk management, fostering an environment where misconduct could flourish (Brown & Treviño, 2006). This aligns with research indicating that CEO behavior significantly shapes organizational ethical climate.

The consequences extended beyond reputational harm; regulatory bodies imposed billions in fines, and Stumpf was summoned before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee to explain his role, ultimately leading to his resignation (U.S. Senate Committee, 2017). These actions illustrate the increasing demand for executive accountability in corporate governance, particularly in financial institutions where public trust is paramount (Mallin, 2018).

In conclusion, the Wells Fargo fake accounts scandal highlights how CEO failure to address ethical breaches promptly and transparently can amplify reputational damage. It demonstrates the necessity of ethical leadership, the cultivation of a responsible corporate culture, and strategic crisis communication in protecting organizational legitimacy.

10. JAE-YONG LEE AND THE SAMSUNG CORRUPTION SCANDAL: LEADERSHIP, ETHICS, AND CROSS-CULTURAL CRISIS IMPLICATIONS

The Samsung corruption scandal involving Vice Chairman Jae-Yong Lee (also known as Jay Y. Lee) offers a compelling example of how leadership failures at the executive level can threaten a corporation's ethical standing and brand reputation on a global scale. In 2017, Lee was arrested and later convicted for his role in a bribery scandal connected to former South Korean President Park Geun-hye. Prosecutors alleged that Samsung provided financial support to entities controlled by Park's confidante in exchange for political favors that would secure a controversial merger between Samsung affiliates, consolidating Lee's control over the conglomerate (Choe, 2017).

This case highlights the dangers of conflating corporate governance with political influence, especially within the context of South Korea's "chaebol" system large, family-owned conglomerates with complex ownership structures. Lee's actions reflected a deeper systemic issue: a corporate culture that often blurs the boundaries between business and political power (Chang, 2018). While Samsung initially attempted to distance itself from the charges, its perceived lack of transparency and accountability significantly damaged public trust, both domestically and internationally.

From a cross-cultural ethics perspective, this scandal also underscores the challenges global companies face when local corporate traditions clash with international expectations for governance and integrity. Although South Korean business culture has historically tolerated closer ties between conglomerates and the state, global stakeholders particularly Western investors viewed the scandal as a severe breach of ethical conduct (Kim, 2020). The resulting reputational fallout not only threatened Samsung's brand equity but also drew attention to broader issues of leadership accountability within emerging markets.

Furthermore, the delayed and ambiguous public response from Samsung's top leadership failed to adhere to crisis communication best practices, such as timely disclosure and acceptance of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). Jae-Yong Lee's silence during key moments of the crisis, and Samsung's initial framing of the issue as a misunderstanding, exacerbated perceptions of corporate opacity. As research suggests, stakeholders expect senior executives to embody ethical leadership, particularly during times of crisis (Brown & Treviño, 2006). The scandal illuminated a significant gap between Samsung's public image as an innovative global tech leader and the internal leadership behaviors that contradicted that image.

The long-term consequences of the scandal were multifaceted. In addition to legal penalties and leadership disruptions, Samsung faced increased regulatory scrutiny and was compelled to reform its corporate governance practices. Jae-Yong Lee's eventual apology and public commitment to dismantle

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the company's future hereditary succession structure were seen as attempts to restore public trust and align more closely with modern standards of transparency and accountability (Reuters, 2020).

In conclusion, the Samsung corruption scandal involving Jae-Yong Lee serves as a critical case study on how executive misconduct can destabilize corporate legitimacy and damage global brand reputation. It emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership, culturally sensitive crisis management, and transparent governance especially for multinational corporations operating at the intersection of diverse legal and ethical systems.

11. TRAVIS KALANICK AND THE UBER CORPORATE CULTURE CRISIS: LEADERSHIP, ETHICS, AND THE PITFALLS OF HYPER-GROWTH

The 2017 crisis surrounding Uber and its former CEO Travis Kalanick illustrates how an organization's rapid growth, when untethered from ethical leadership and corporate accountability, can culminate in severe reputational damage. The scandal emerged from a series of publicized incidents revealing systemic issues within Uber's workplace, including sexual harassment, gender discrimination, bullying, and a hyper-competitive, toxic culture cultivated under Kalanick's leadership (Fowler, 2017; Isaac, 2017). These revelations, coupled with the viral #DeleteUber movement, catalyzed investor pressure that ultimately led to Kalanick's resignation as CEO.

At the heart of the crisis was Kalanick's aggressive leadership style, often described as combative and "bro-centric," which set the tone for Uber's internal culture. His emphasis on disruption and market dominance at all costs fostered an environment in which unethical behavior was overlooked or even incentivized in the name of performance (Gelles, 2017). As Brown and Treviño (2006) argue, the behavior of senior leaders is a primary influence on the ethical climate of an organization; in Uber's case, Kalanick's conduct shaped a corporate ethos where rule-bending and internal competition flourished unchecked.

The company's rapid scale-up often hailed as a Silicon Valley success story exposed a structural tension between growth and governance. Uber prioritized expansion and investor returns while neglecting to establish basic mechanisms for accountability, HR oversight, and employee protections (Scheiber, 2017). This neglect resulted in not only internal dysfunction but also external reputational damage, especially as incidents of misconduct, such as harassment claims and the use of software like "Greyball" to evade regulators, surfaced in the media.

Crisis communication efforts during this period were inconsistent and poorly managed. Uber's initial responses to employee concerns lacked transparency and empathy. For example, after former engineer Susan Fowler published a detailed blog post outlining systemic sexism and HR negligence, the company first questioned her credibility before later launching an investigation (Fowler, 2017; Isaac, 2017). Such delayed and defensive communication runs counter to established crisis management principles, which emphasize early acknowledgment, acceptance of responsibility, and genuine commitment to reform (Coombs, 2007).

In response to mounting criticism, Uber commissioned an independent investigation led by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, resulting in the "Holder Report". The report made over 40 recommendations addressing HR policies, leadership accountability, and organizational restructuring. Many of these were accepted and led to leadership changes, including the departure of Kalanick and the eventual appointment of Dara Khosrowshahi as CEO, who aimed to repair Uber's image and rebuild trust with both employees and the public.

The Uber case underscores how toxic leadership and a permissive culture can undermine longterm brand equity, even in companies that achieve rapid market success. It further illustrates the increasing demand from stakeholders not just customers and regulators but also investors for ethical leadership and responsible governance in tech firms.

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12. TOXIC LEADERSHIP AND BRAND AUTHENTICITY IN CRISIS: THE JAMES WATT-BREWDOG ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE SCANDAL

The leadership controversy surrounding James Watt, co-founder and CEO of BrewDog, represents a modern case of toxic leadership within a purpose-driven brand. Despite BrewDog's market positioning as a rebellious and ethical craft beer company with strong sustainability and social values, internal accusations in 2021 revealed a deeply problematic workplace culture characterized by fear, bullying, and burnout (BBC News, 2021). The scandal poses significant questions regarding the alignment between a company's public image and its internal leadership practices.

In an open letter published by a group of former employees under the name "Punks With Purpose," BrewDog leadership particularly Watt was accused of fostering a "culture of fear" and using intimidation and pressure to push performance at the cost of employee well-being (Punks With Purpose, 2021). These allegations included claims of micromanagement, sexism, and prioritization of aggressive growth over staff welfare. The contradiction between BrewDog's outward values (e.g., anti-corporate, employee-friendly) and its internal realities led to significant reputational fallout.

From a leadership ethics standpoint, James Watt's behavior reflects what scholars describe as toxic leadership a style marked by narcissism, authoritarianism, and manipulation, which negatively impacts organizational health (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Although charismatic and visionary, Watt's leadership seemed to blur the line between passion and pressure, enthusiasm and exploitation. According to Brown and Treviño (2006), ethical leadership is not only about personal integrity but also about shaping ethical behavior across the organization a role Watt appears to have failed to fulfill.

Crisis communication from BrewDog in response to the allegations was initially defensive and vague. Watt's public responses focused on intent rather than impact, suggesting the company had grown too fast to maintain proper HR structures, while avoiding direct acknowledgment of specific accusations (The Guardian, 2021). Such responses deviate from best practices in crisis management, which emphasize transparency, responsibility, and corrective action (Coombs, 2007).

Interestingly, the crisis also challenges assumptions about authenticity in brand management. BrewDog had built its identity on being "punk," anti-authoritarian, and progressive. The internal cultural dissonance damaged not only its employer brand but also its consumer credibility. As Beverland (2005) notes, brand authenticity must be consistently maintained across both internal and external practices; when leaders fail to live the values they promote, brand equity suffers.

Ultimately, BrewDog initiated an independent review of its workplace culture and HR policies, but skepticism remains about the sincerity and depth of its reforms. While Watt retained his position as CEO, the incident offers a cautionary tale for founder-led firms whose leaders become synonymous with the brand: when leadership falters ethically, the brand itself becomes compromised.

13. PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

In an era marked by increased public scrutiny, social media amplification, and stakeholder activism, effective public relations (PR) strategies are critical to managing organizational reputation particularly during crises. The manner in which companies communicate, both internally and externally, can influence not only public perception but also long-term brand equity, investor trust, and employee engagement. Strategic communication, rooted in honesty, consistency, and transparency, has thus emerged as a fundamental component of crisis management and corporate ethics (Heath & Johansen, 2018).

Public relations strategies during crises are broadly categorized into proactive and reactive approaches. Proactive communication involves preparing for crises through scenario planning, stakeholder mapping, and the cultivation of strong media relationships, while reactive strategies are activated once a crisis emerges and often determine how effectively an organization contains reputational damage (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Both types require alignment with a company's core values and the expectations of its stakeholders.

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One of the most influential models in crisis communication theory is Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which argues that the response strategy should be aligned with the type of crisis and the level of perceived responsibility (Coombs, 2007). For instance, in victim crises (e.g., natural disasters), organizations are less likely to be blamed, and sympathy-generating strategies are recommended. In contrast, in preventable crises (e.g., ethical misconduct or negligence), companies are expected to accept full responsibility and take corrective action.

Consider the case of the Boeing 737 Max crisis (2018–2020), where two fatal crashes led to a global grounding of the aircraft model. Boeing's initial response, which included delayed acknowledgment of design flaws and an emphasis on regulatory compliance, was widely criticized as defensive and opaque (Gelles & Kitroeff, 2019). The company's failure to communicate with transparency and empathy deepened stakeholder distrust, underscoring how misaligned PR strategies can exacerbate the reputational fallout of technical or ethical failures. Eventually, Boeing shifted to a more conciliatory tone, but the damage had already impacted its market position and stakeholder relationships.

In contrast, Johnson & Johnson's response to the 1982 Tylenol cyanide poisoning case is widely cited as a textbook example of effective crisis communication. The company immediately issued public warnings, recalled over 31 million bottles of Tylenol, and cooperated fully with authorities. It also introduced tamper-evident packaging demonstrating both responsiveness and commitment to public safety. Johnson & Johnson's use of a values-driven communication approach, centered on transparency and customer protection, allowed the brand to recover its reputation and even strengthen consumer trust in the long term (Berg & Robb, 1992).

Social media has added new complexity to crisis communication. The speed and reach of digital platforms mean that organizations must respond in real-time, often before the full scope of a crisis is understood. Digital platforms have shifted the power balance between organizations and stakeholders, enabling public narratives to be shaped rapidly and often outside of traditional media control. For example, during the #DeleteUber campaign in 2017, Uber's delayed and inconsistent messaging failed to counter the viral backlash, allowing public sentiment to turn decisively negative. This underscores the importance of real-time listening, social media monitoring, and agile communication teams capable of responding with clarity and purpose.

Internal communication is equally critical during organizational crises. Studies show that employee trust is a strong predictor of both organizational resilience and recovery (Men & Bowen, 2017). When companies engage in open and inclusive internal communication providing accurate updates, acknowledging employee concerns, and reinforcing shared values they are more likely to sustain morale and prevent internal dissent from escalating into public scandal. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Microsoft's regular CEO town halls and transparent health and policy updates helped reinforce a sense of trust and alignment across a decentralized workforce (Kantrowitz, 2020).

The framing and tone of crisis messaging are also essential. Benoit's Image Repair Theory emphasizes five main strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1997). The effectiveness of these strategies depends largely on their authenticity and audience expectations. A poorly executed apology or one that appears insincere can further alienate audiences, while a well-crafted, values-aligned apology can begin the process of reputational repair. When Starbucks faced a public backlash after the wrongful arrest of two Black customers in 2018, the company closed thousands of stores for racial bias training and issued a direct apology, aligning its response with its brand values of inclusivity and social responsibility (Wong, 2018).

Moreover, cultural context plays a critical role in determining how PR strategies are received. In collectivist societies, public contrition and humility are often expected, while in individualist societies, assertiveness and direct engagement may be better received (Hofstede, 2001). Multinational corporations must therefore tailor their communication not only to the crisis type but also to the cultural expectations of different stakeholder groups. Toyota's response to its 2010 recall crisis, which varied

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between the U.S. and Japan, exemplifies the challenges of navigating cross-cultural expectations during crises.

In conclusion, effective public relations strategies during crises require more than tactical responses they demand a deep understanding of stakeholder psychology, communication theory, organizational ethics, and cultural nuance. Proactive planning, transparent messaging, timely engagement, and alignment with core values are fundamental to protecting and restoring organizational legitimacy in times of crisis. As the reputational stakes of corporate missteps grow higher, strategic communication must evolve from a reactive function into a central pillar of responsible leadership and sustainable brand management.

14. CONCLUSION

The exploration of CEO-led crises across various industries ranging from banking and technology to consumer goods and craft brewing reveals a consistent and critical pattern: leadership behavior and organizational ethics are deeply intertwined, with direct consequences for corporate reputation, employee well-being, and stakeholder trust. Whether it is the Wells Fargo fake accounts scandal, Uber's toxic workplace culture, or BrewDog's internal leadership controversies, these cases illustrate how executive decisions and communication styles can either mitigate or exacerbate ethical failings within a company.

One of the central findings of this analysis is the decisive role that leadership plays in shaping corporate culture. CEOs are not only strategic decision-makers but also powerful symbolic figures whose values, attitudes, and behaviors cascade through the organization. In each case, the tone set at the top directly influenced employee conduct, risk tolerance, and the acceptance or rejection of ethical norms. The misalignment between a company's stated values and the actions of its leaders often led to significant reputational damage, internal dissatisfaction, and public backlash.

Another key insight is the importance of timely, transparent, and empathetic communication during crises. Organizations that failed to acknowledge their faults or attempted to shift blame were met with intensified criticism and loss of stakeholder confidence. In contrast, those that adopted a proactive, values-driven approach acknowledging responsibility, apologizing sincerely, and implementing meaningful reforms were better positioned to begin the process of reputational recovery. Consistency between internal and external communication was especially crucial, as employees increasingly act as brand ambassadors whose voices influence public perception through digital platforms.

Furthermore, the interplay between organizational growth and ethical governance emerged as a recurring theme. In many of the cases examined, rapid expansion appeared to outpace the development of internal controls, human resources infrastructure, and accountability mechanisms.

High-performance cultures, when left unchecked, often morphed into high-pressure environments where unethical behavior was overlooked or normalized. This raises important questions about the sustainability of growth models that prioritize short-term market gains over long-term ethical resilience.

Crisis communication strategies were found to be most effective when they were tailored not only to the nature of the crisis but also to the expectations of stakeholders. The most damaging outcomes occurred when companies underestimated the emotional and symbolic dimensions of public response. In the age of social media, reputational harm can spread rapidly and unpredictably, making real-time communication capabilities and ethical leadership non-negotiable aspects of modern corporate strategy.

Finally, the comparative analysis across sectors and cultures suggests that while the specific contexts of each crisis vary, the underlying leadership challenges remain remarkably similar. Organizations across industries must therefore institutionalize ethical leadership development, invest in robust internal communication systems, and embed integrity into their strategic planning processes. The long-term legitimacy of any organization increasingly depends not only on financial performance but also on the character and credibility of its leadership.

In conclusion, CEO-led crises are not isolated failures of individual behavior they are systemic reflections of broader leadership philosophies and organizational priorities. Addressing them requires

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more than reactive PR strategies; it demands a fundamental rethinking of how ethical leadership, corporate culture, and strategic communication intersect to shape organizational identity and trust in the modern era.

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Afet Risklerinin Azaltılması ve İklim Direnci İçin Dijital Medya

Digital Media in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience

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Özet

Bu araştırma, afet risklerinin azaltılması ve iklimle ilgili konularda medyanın dijital yönünün nasıl işlediğine dair bir çalışmayı sunmaktadır. Dijital medya, günlük yaşamı, iletişimi, ticareti, ekonomiyi ve kültürü önemli ölçüde etkilemekte ve aynı zamanda dijital bağımlılık yaratmaktadır. Dijital medya, dünyanın en acil sorunları arasında yer alan afetler ve iklim riskleriyle başa çıkmada istisnai bir rol oynamaktadır. Toplumun hazırlıklı olmasını teşvik etmenin, dayanışmayı artırmanın ve iyileşme süreçlerini geliştirmenin yanı sıra, dijital medyanın etkili kullanımı; dijital eşitsizlik, dezenformasyon ve daha dayanıklı bir toplum inşa etmek için gerekli olan iş birliğine dayalı yapılar gibi zorlukların aşılmasına bağlıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, dijital medyanın iklim değişikliğinin olumsuz etkilerine karşı stratejiler geliştirme ve insan direncini artırma potansiyelini araştırmaktır. Çalışma aynı zamanda bireyler, topluluklar veya devletler gibi sosyal birimlerin doğal afetlerle başa çıkmadaki uyum sağlayıcı (adaptive), absorbe edici (absorptive) ve dönüştürücü (transformative) kapasitelerinin bütünsel işlevlerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu araştırma, iklim değişikliği ile ilgilenen dijital ve iklim gazetecileri için de bir rehber niteliğindedir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, insanlara, politika yapıcılara ve ilgili paydaşlara, etkilenen bölgelerde yaşayan nüfusun direncini artırmak için uygun uyum stratejileri geliştirmelerinde yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dijital Medya, Afet Risklerinin Azaltılması, İklim Direnci, Dijital Eşitsizlik, Uyum Stratejileri, Gazetecilik, Yeni Medya, Algoritmik Önyargı, Haber Otomasyonu

Abstract

This research presents a study on how digital side of media in disaster risk reduction and climate issues. Digital media plays an exceptional role in addressing disasters and climate risks, which are considered among the world's most pressing challenges. Along with promoting community preparedness, enhancing solidarity, and improving recovery processes, its effective use depends on overcoming challenges such as digital inequality, disinformation and the need for collaborative frameworks to fully realize its potential for building a more resilient society. On this basis, this material will follow qualitative research methods and explain essential matters with collected datials about impact of digital media. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of digital media in developing strategies to counter the negative impacts of climate change, in enhancing human resilience and comparing the traditional and digital journalist approach. The study also focuses on the integrated functions of adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capacities of social units such as individuals, communities, or states in coping with natural disasters. This research is also a guide for digital and climate journalists who engage with climate change. The results of this study will help people, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders develop appropriate adaptation strategies to enhance the resilience of populations living in affected areas.

Keywords: Digital Media, Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Resilience, Digital Inequality, Adaptation Strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the most actual and popular issue around the world. The world today is facing climate change and disaster risks, although various methods and measures are being taken, preventing them is not so easy. On this basis, different studies show how digital media plays a pivotal role in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience. The media itself is the key to promoting or strengthening awareness from several sides. Disaster risk reduction is one of them which is effective for climate change according to activities of media.

Meanwhile it is well known that the digital side of media is more widespread than that before. Thus, when it is said media, it is understood as the digital media, however it could not be considered as digital media every time in every situation. Realities and exaggeration can be presented via digital media in any circumstance for several reasons.

It should be noted that risk management regulates climate issues or makes panic because of wrong implementations and media is a mediator in this condition. Furthermore, disaster risk reduction (DRR) is mostly utilized in risk concept. Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development. Disaster risk reduction is the policy objective of disaster risk management, and its goals and objectives are defined in disaster risk reduction strategies and plans (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2017).

On the other hand, digital media is the power, tool, or the equipment in different fields. Nevertheless, only media can increase the knowledge of DRR in climate change and develop climate resilience. So, coming to the definition of digital media itself, includes a broad range of formats such as text, images, audio, video, and interactive materials, all made possible through digital technologies. The expansion of the internet, together with the growth of mobile devices, has played a crucial role in opening up content creation to the wider public. As a result, the distinction between producers and audiences has become less defined, with users taking on active roles within the digital environment. Continuous technological innovation has driven the evolution of digital media, reshaping how content is produced, distributed, and engaged with (Strasburger, 2023).

Commence to the influence of digital media on society and culture, it is extensive and complex. Abraham (2020) mentions that when combined with the internet and personal computing, it has spurred innovation across fields such as publishing, journalism, public relations, entertainment, education, commerce, and politics. So, digital media could impact on society especially the popular circumstances. It does not mean that the existing process is really important, however it is the result of media impact and the interest of some organization.

According to the United Nations, climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns. However, climate resilience is the capacity of ecosystems, communities, or organizations to foresee, prepare for, and adapt to the effects of climate change. It involves recognizing climate-related risks and weaknesses and taking appropriate actions to address and manage them effectively.

Interreg Central Europe (2024) explains that The Climate Resilience Guide aims to support the creation of urban areas that are stronger and better equipped to handle the impacts of climate change. By securing political backing, performing thorough risk assessments, identifying and evaluating the most effective adaptation strategies, implementing these plans efficiently, and consistently monitoring and assessing progress, cities can establish strong, sustainable approaches to address climate change challenges.

In this context, this research aims to contribute to the comprehension of the interactions that exist among digital media, disaster risk reduction, and climate resilience. In addition to examining these methodological challenges, it is also intended to contribute to identifying the opportunities and limitations of digital media in promoting resilience strategies. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform both academic discourse and practical approaches to strengthening disaster preparedness in the context of climate change.

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2. DIGITAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Mantulenko (2020) emphasizes that the term media originates from the Latin word *medius* or medium, meaning “middle layer.” It serves as a channel for conveying information from one source to another. In contrast to traditional means of communication, contemporary media deliver information primarily in digital formats. So, now digital form is very famous, and no wonder it is the most effective form of media according to the technological innovations. Digital media encompasses all types of content developed with the aid of technology and disseminated via websites and social media platforms. Its creation, modification, and distribution rely on electronic devices and digital technologies.

- Social media posts
- Websites and web pages
- Electronic books and podcasts
- Digital audio (mp3s)
- Email marketing and blogs
- Mobile apps

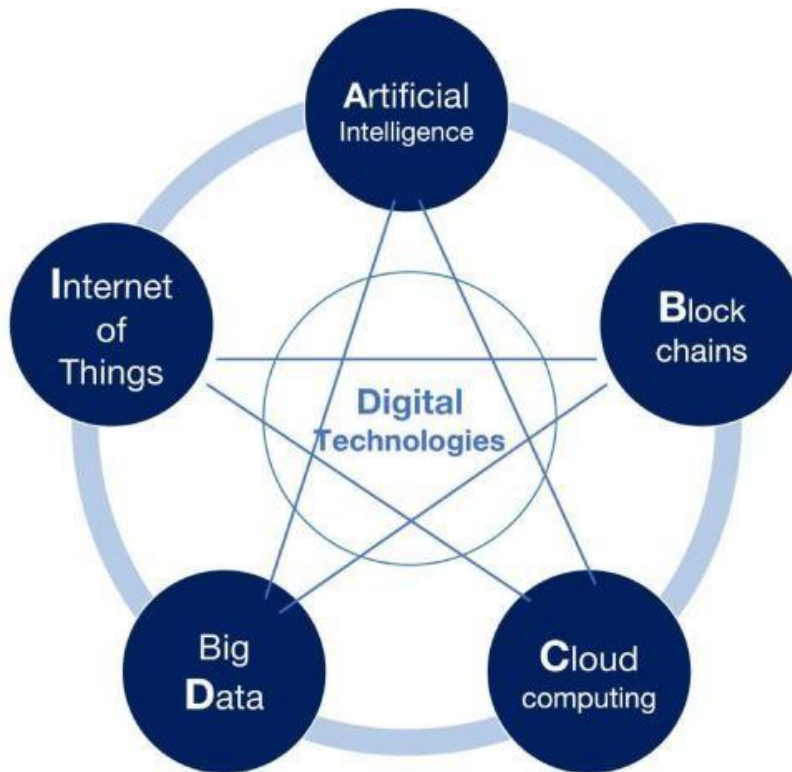
The examples given above are the strong indicators of digital media.

Digital media provides broader accessibility compared to traditional media, as it overcomes geographical and financial barriers that often restrict audiences. Its benefits include cost efficiency, worldwide reach, ease of access, higher levels of engagement, interactivity, and continuous innovation. For instance, in the contemporary digital environment, audiences can instantly stream films of their choice without delay (Price, 2025).

Digital media exists in a variety of forms, each serving different purposes and audiences. Audio media includes podcasts, music, and audiobooks, where sounds are transformed into digital codes that computers convert into audible waves. Social media platforms allow users to create, share, and interact with digital content such as texts, photos, videos, and audio, enabling communication across communities. Digital videos consist of moving images displayed in rapid succession and are widely available on streaming services, social networks, and educational platforms. Advertisements in digital form include banner ads, animations, email marketing, and social media campaigns, all designed to communicate products or services. Databases act as digital storage systems, organizing and managing data that applications, search engines, and websites utilize to operate efficiently. Video games are interactive digital media, combining images, sounds, texts, and videos while responding to real-time user inputs. Together, these examples demonstrate the versatility, interactivity, and broad reach of digital media in contemporary society.

Figure 1. Interconnected ecosystem of IABCD technologies.

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This figure shows digital technologies which affect digital media directly or in some ways. Sometimes it could be assessed that media can impact on them.

3. CLIMATE RISKS AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Climate change poses significant risks to societies, individuals, and the planet, manifesting through various environmental and socio-economic challenges. A recent global study indicates that wildfires have become increasingly deadly and economically devastating, with half of the most costly wildfires occurring in the last decade, primarily driven by climate change and intensified by higher temperatures and drier vegetation (Readfearn, 2025). Similarly, California's glaciers in the Sierra Nevada, which have existed since the end of the last Ice Age, are projected to disappear entirely between 2050 and 2100 due to rising temperatures, threatening freshwater supplies and ecosystems.

The European Environment Agency warns that climate change and environmental degradation are jeopardizing Europe's natural resources and economic security, with over 80% of protected habitats in poor condition due to overexploitation, pollution, and invasive species. Additionally, the EAT-Lancet Commission reports that shifting to healthier, largely plant-based diets could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths annually and reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by 15%, highlighting the interconnectedness of climate change, health, and food systems (Walling, 2025).

Climate risk describes the possible adverse consequences of climate change for ecosystems, economies, and human societies. The rise in global temperatures alters climate systems, influencing weather patterns, natural environments, and human livelihoods. As awareness of these impacts grows, researchers and policymakers are increasingly focused on assessing climate risks and developing strategies to reduce their effects.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction highlights Every year, it is observed that climate risks are increasing. Because of this, international organizations and countries are taking action to protect the Earth. "Climate change, vulnerability, and inequality interact with each other in a chain-like manner: disadvantaged groups suffer relatively more from the negative impacts of climate change, which in turn reduces their ability to minimize exposure risk, prevent potential impacts, cope with climate and disaster effects, and recover. As a result, even greater inequalities emerge. In his speech

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Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General also told that climate change is the defining issue of our time, every day we fail to act is a day that we step a little closer towards a fate that none of us wants- a fate that will resonate through generations in the damage done to humankind and life on earth.

Drought, heatwaves, infectious diseases, sea level rise, and wildfires are major issues in the world. And all of these subjects are priorities for digital media.

On the other hand, (Sarker et al., 2020) today, social media plays a crucial role in nearly every aspect of life and serves as a major source of big data. It is recognized as one of the most important communication tools for disaster management, offering diverse and multidimensional information about disaster events. Although social media has limitations due to the variety and nature of its data, it remains highly effective for disaster management purposes. Traditionally, communication during disasters involved organizations, victims, affected communities, and vulnerable areas. However, big data-driven technologies now allow these issues to be addressed more accurately and in real time. Since different types of disasters are linked to specific disaster types, phases, and causes, technology-based communication can significantly accelerate disaster management processes. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, IMO, WeChat, and QQ influence nearly all stages of disaster management. Social media data must be carefully collected, processed, analyzed, and used in decision-making to manage disasters effectively. Likewise, decisions about disasters can be widely and quickly disseminated through social media. Researchers have emphasized the importance of social media in disaster management and in enhancing resilience.

(Sarker et al., 2020) Climate change vulnerability is recognized as a global challenge. Big data has significant potential as a key approach to addressing the adverse impacts of climate change worldwide. This study aims to develop context-specific adaptation strategies to enhance climate change resilience through the use of big data technologies. It defines resilience as the ability to recover and return to a previous state after experiencing adverse impacts. The study emphasizes the combined role of adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capacities of social units in responding to natural disasters. Big data technologies can provide valuable information about upcoming risks, current challenges, and recovery processes related to the impacts of climate change. Furthermore, big data is identified as a powerful tool for policymakers, administrators, and relevant stakeholders to take timely and effective action before, during, and after disasters-such as through early warning systems, weather forecasting, emergency evacuations, rapid response, relief distribution, needs assessments, and training programs to build skilled personnel.

4. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL JOURNALISTS IN REDUCING CLIMATE RISKS

A digital journalist is a communication professional who produces and disseminates news content through digital platforms, including online news portals, social media, and multimedia applications. This role requires proficiency not only in traditional journalistic practices, such as research, reporting, and verification, but also in digital tools for multimedia storytelling, data visualization, and audience engagement. Digital journalism reflects the convergence of technology and media, enabling faster dissemination of information, interactivity with audiences, and broader global reach. Within academic discourse, the digital journalist is often viewed as a central actor in shaping public opinion, enhancing participatory communication, and responding to the challenges of the digital information environment.

A digital journalist, when reporting on crises such as climate risks or disasters, must balance the principles of accuracy, responsibility, and social impact. While it is essential to present factual information transparently, ethical journalism also requires sensitivity to the potential psychological effects on the audience. Awareness-raising should be prioritized, ensuring that the information not only informs but also educates the public about prevention, preparedness, and resilience. Therefore, the journalist's task is not merely to transmit events as they occur, but to contextualize them in a way that supports informed decision-making and minimizes unnecessary panic.

Digital journalism has contributed to climate risk reduction by raising public awareness, promoting sustainable practices, and pressuring governments and corporations to act more transparently

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on climate issues. For example, a study among 221 university students in the UAE showed that social media significantly improved their understanding of climate change and government policies addressing it. However, digital media also faces risks such as misinformation, sensationalism, and its own carbon footprint from data consumption. These risks can be addressed through fact-checking, media literacy programs, ethical reporting, and the adoption of greener technologies in digital platforms.

Digital journalists play a pivotal role in reducing climate risks by transforming complex environmental data into accessible, engaging narratives that raise awareness and drive action. Through digital platforms such as news websites, interactive maps, podcasts, and social media, they make scientific information understandable to broad audiences, motivating behavioral change and policy attention. Their storytelling often connects global climate phenomena to local experiences, enabling citizens to grasp the urgency of climate adaptation and resilience. For example, the BBC's Climate Watch uses real-time data visualizations and reporting to show climate trends, emissions, and policy impacts around the world, helping audiences see connections between global change and local action.

A powerful example of their impact can be seen in university settings: a recent study of Arab university students found that social media activity had a strong positive correlation with improved climate change awareness, revealing how digital journalism and related communication channels can shape environmental knowledge. In that study, students with higher social media use exhibited greater climate awareness, suggesting that strategic digital reporting and educational campaigns through social media can produce meaningful effects (Alqawasmi et al., 2025). However, to maintain credibility and effectiveness, journalists must uphold accuracy, transparency, and ethical sensitivity—avoiding misinformation and fear-based narratives. By combining factual integrity with technological innovation, digital journalists become catalysts for sustainable awareness and collective action, contributing directly to climate risk reduction.

5. CODE OF ETHICS FOR DIGITAL MEDIA

The code of ethics for digital media establishes a set of professional standards that digital journalists and media organizations must follow to ensure responsible, accurate, and fair reporting. It requires adherence to principles such as truthfulness, transparency, accountability, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm to the audience.

(Tilak, 2020) Ethics are the internal guiding principles, moral values, ideals, and beliefs that individuals use to evaluate or interpret a situation and determine the proper course of action. According to the Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English, ethics is a system of moral principles through which individual actions and decisions can be judged as right or wrong. Jay Black and Chris Roberts, in their book *Doing Ethics in Media*, explain that the term "ethics" originates from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character or having good character. In the field of media, news plays a crucial role. The concept of information ethics relating to news, data, and other materials focuses on the moral principles that govern the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information, as well as the ethical standards that guide human behavior in society.

Media ethics is a branch of applied ethics that examines moral principles and their application in various aspects of public, private, and professional life, including areas such as health, law, technology, and leadership, with a focus on moral and media standards. It is also referred to as journalism ethics. Ethical communication encourages individuals to reach their full potential by recognizing and respecting the worth of others. In such communication, both participants are trusted, respected, and valued, fostering positive interaction. Life without rules, values, and ethics is unimaginable, as laws and ethical principles apply to everyone like individuals, businesses, society, journalists, and the media alike.

Media serves as a driving force in delivering valuable information that contributes to the development of individuals and society. However, at times, media outlets may act unethically for personal gain by publishing content that defames or accuses individuals or institutions. Therefore, adhering to a code of ethics is essential to prevent practices such as bribery, defamation, cheating, blackmail, and misuse of power for personal benefit.

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Media ethics is a branch of applied ethics that deals with real-world actions, principles, and moral considerations across various domains, including public, private, and professional life, as well as health, law, technology, and leadership. A person's actions often depend on the availability of moral guidance and information.

According to Milan Kundera (1984), the media holds immense power, capable of compelling people to listen and pay attention. Similarly, Melisande (2009) emphasized that media ethics aims to prevent control over the flow of information, promote diversity and plurality in media content, and encourage objectivity by considering all sides of an issue thereby enhancing the accuracy and truthfulness of reporting.

The primary responsibility of the media is to provide the public with accurate, fair, and balanced information. This includes delivering reliable news, data, and entertainment, as well as facilitating discussions on legal, political, and economic matters that impact society. Media ethics ensures that this information is presented truthfully and responsibly, promoting trust, transparency, and integrity in communication.

Digital Media Ethics (DME) can be viewed as inherently inclusive, originating from its highly interdisciplinary foundation. It stems from Information and Computing Ethics (ICE), a specialized branch of applied ethics within philosophy that already integrates ethical principles with various areas of information and computer sciences. Additionally, DME incorporates knowledge from technical disciplines such as computer and software engineering to build a well-informed understanding of the capabilities and functions of computing technologies. It also relies on empirical insights into the actual and potential uses, practices, and impacts of these technologies in the real world (Ess, 2017).

The digital revolution has drastically transformed the media environment, changing the ways information is produced, distributed, and received. This transition from traditional media's clear ethical frameworks to a complex digital sphere where information circulates instantly and the boundaries between creators and consumers are increasingly indistinct has introduced both new opportunities and significant challenges. As a result, media ethics are continually evolving, adjusting to emerging realities and addressing previously unseen ethical issues (roy, 2025).

The transition from traditional media's role as a gatekeeper to the algorithm-controlled landscape of social media carries significant ethical consequences.

6. CONCLUSION

According to Mangalagiu, one of the challenges of the 21st century is giving attention to the "complex and causal linkages between human, technological, environmental and global biophysical systems" (Shaw, Kakuchi, & Yamaji, 2021). Thus, climate change is linked to impacts that place significant stress on essential civil infrastructure systems, such as transportation, energy, and utility networks, which support the built environment, supply energy, and facilitate the movement of people and goods.

However, emerging digital technologies also have disadvantages, as they heighten vulnerability to cyber-attacks, which in some instances can escalate into cyberwarfare, creating risks to security, citizens' privacy, and the spread of misinformation. These technologies also depend heavily on power supply and the interconnections among their operators (Argyroudis et al., 2022).

(United Nations, 2025) As an inevitable reality, climate change is accelerating, with 2024 recorded as the hottest year to date, approximately 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels. Extreme weather events are becoming more severe, leading to the largest climate-related displacement in 16 years, along with worsening food insecurity, economic losses, and instability. While one year above 1.5°C does not mean the Paris Agreement has been violated, it is a clear warning to increase ambition and accelerate action during this crucial decade, as current global efforts remain far below what is required.

Eventually, it must be considered that COP-s should accept as an important factor for the development and awareness of climate matters. This process is the key to solve or the opportunity to finding the solutions to this problem around the world.

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(Radwan & Ayyad, 2024) For instance; four main themes regarding climate change were highlighted in the COP27 agenda: mitigation, adaptation, finance, and collaboration. Each theme included specific sub-themes that reflect the key challenges of climate change. The mitigation subthemes encompassed global warming, efforts to increase ambition from all parties, the creation of work programs, and addressing droughts. Adaptation sub-themes included extreme weather events (such as heatwaves, floods, wildfires, and rising sea levels), strengthening the global action agenda, fostering political will, and supporting African communities. Finance sub-themes involved transparency and accountability, ensuring the flow of funds and facilities, progress in fund delivery, and providing adequate and predictable financial resources. Collaboration sub-themes focused on inclusive representation and participation, adopting sustainable economic models, partnering with the private sector and civil society, and implementing climate-friendly solutions. These issues directed to the media channels for informing international community. The purpose consisted of mentioning obstacles and gather people.

On the other hand, the forthcoming global climate summit represents a vital chance to adjust course by advancing climate finance commitments, strengthening multilateral cooperation, and implementing ambitious national climate strategies across all sectors to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 (United Nations, 2025).

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss are connected with media resilience. The media resilience increase climate resilience and deepen the awareness.

Finally, the real progress reveals that climate action remains well below the level required to meet the commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Global temperatures crossed the threshold of 1.5°C in 2024, which was the hottest year on record. Carbon dioxide levels stand at 151 per cent above pre-industrial levels, the highest level in over 2 million years, while ocean acidification and species extinction risks continue to rise (United Nations, 2025).

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Nöropazarlama Verileri Işığında Marka Sadakati: Geleneksel İletişim Kuramlarıyla Karşılaştırmalı Bir İnceleme

Brand Loyalty in the Light of Neuromarketing Data: A Comparative Analysis with Traditional Communication Theories

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Özet

Bu çalışma, geleneksel marka sadakati modelleri ile nöropazarlama yaklaşımlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak inceleyerek, tüketici davranışlarını anlama ve marka sadakati oluşturma süreçlerinde bilinçdışı etkilerin rolünü ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Geleneksel pazarlama teorileri, tüketici sadakatini genellikle bilinçli tutumlar, niyetler ve tekrarlanan satın alma davranışları üzerinden açıklarken; nöropazarlama, karar alma süreçlerinde duygusal ve bilişsel nörolojik mekanizmaların etkisini ölçerek daha derinlemesine bir analiz sunmaktadır. Çalışmada, literatür taraması yöntemi kullanılarak geleneksel iletişim kuramları (AIDA modeli, ELM, Kullanımlar ve Doyumlar Kuramı) ile nöropazarlamanın temel teknikleri (fMRI, EEG, göz izleme, yüz kodlama) incelenmiş; Apple Inc. örneği üzerinden iki yaklaşımın bulguları karşılaştırılmıştır. Bulgular, Apple markasına sadık tüketicilerde beyin ödül ve bellekle ilişkili bölgelerinde (vmPFC, hipokampus) yüksek düzeyde aktivasyon gözlemlendiğini, bu durumun marka ile kurulan duygusal bağın ve kimlik temelli aidiyetin göstergesi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Araştırmanın sonuçları, nöropazarlamanın geleneksel yöntemleri tamamlayıcı nitelikte olduğunu ve tüketici sadakatini anlamada daha bütüncül bir yaklaşımın gerekli olduğunu göstermektedir. Pazarlama iletişimi stratejilerinin, sadece rasyonel fayda temelli değil, aynı zamanda duygusal ve nörolojik uyaranlara hitap eden bir yapıda tasarlanması gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, pazarlama araştırmalarında disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşımın önemine işaret ederken, aynı zamanda etik sınırların da gözetilmesi gerektiğini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nöropazarlama, Marka Sadakati, Tüketici Davranışı, fMRI, EEG, Duygusal Bağ

Abstract

This study aims to comparatively examine traditional brand loyalty models and neuromarketing approaches in order to reveal the role of unconscious influences in understanding consumer behavior and building brand loyalty. While traditional marketing theories generally explain consumer loyalty through conscious attitudes, intentions, and repeated purchasing behaviors, neuromarketing provides a deeper analysis by measuring the effects of emotional and cognitive neurological mechanisms in decision-making processes. Using the literature review method, the study analyzes traditional communication theories (AIDA model, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Uses and Gratifications Theory) and core neuromarketing techniques (fMRI, EEG, eye-tracking, facial coding), and compares the findings of both approaches through the example of Apple Inc. The findings reveal that in consumers loyal to the Apple brand, high levels of activation were observed in brain regions associated with reward and memory (vmPFC, hippocampus), indicating a strong emotional bond and identity-based attachment to the brand. The results of the research show that neuromarketing is complementary to traditional methods and that a more holistic approach is needed to understand consumer loyalty. It is emphasized that marketing communication strategies should not only be designed based on rational utility, but also in a way that appeals to emotional and neurological stimuli. In this context, the study highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in marketing research and also recommends that ethical boundaries be respected.

Keywords: Neuromarketing, Brand Loyalty, Consumer Behavior, fMRI, EEG, Emotional Bond

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a global marketplace where consumers are bombarded with countless brand messages daily, building and maintaining brand loyalty has become a strategic imperative rather than a marketing luxury. Amid increasingly saturated markets and rapidly shifting consumer preferences, traditional communication strategies are no longer sufficient to capture the complexities of consumer behavior. This study explores the phenomenon of brand loyalty through a dual lens: traditional communication theories and the emerging field of neuromarketing, offering a comparative analysis that seeks to bridge the gap between established theoretical models and novel, neuroscience-based insights into consumer decision-making.

The problem this study addresses lies in the limited explanatory power of conventional marketing models when it comes to understanding the emotional, subconscious, and often irrational drivers of brand loyalty. Traditional approaches such as the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) or the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) are grounded in rational choice theory and focus on conscious, linear processes of persuasion. However, decades of behavioral research and more recently, advances in neuroscience have increasingly suggested that consumer loyalty is not purely the result of rational evaluation but is significantly influenced by emotional, automatic, and even unconscious neural processes (Kahneman, 2011; Plassmann et al., 2012, p. 20). Thus, neuromarketing offers a compelling alternative by allowing researchers to observe and measure the physiological and neurological reactions that traditional methods often overlook.

Brand loyalty itself is a multidimensional construct that has long intrigued scholars and practitioners alike. It encompasses both behavioral loyalty (repeated purchases over time) and attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment, trust, and advocacy), and plays a central role in sustaining long-term profitability. Loyal customers are less price-sensitive, more likely to forgive mistakes, and more inclined to recommend brands to others, thereby acting as informal brand ambassadors (Oliver, 1999, p. 40). Understanding how and why consumers become loyal is critical for designing more effective marketing strategies. Yet, traditional self-report measures such as surveys and interviews often fail to capture the true underlying motivations behind loyalty, particularly when consumers themselves are unaware of these drivers.

In recent years, neuromarketing has emerged as a provocative and promising discipline, blending neuroscience, psychology, and marketing to uncover the hidden mechanisms of consumer behavior. By using tools such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), eye-tracking, and facial coding, neuromarketing allows researchers to explore the brain's real-time responses to marketing stimuli. These methods provide valuable data on emotional arousal, attention, memory encoding, and decision-making processes variables that are notoriously difficult to assess using traditional techniques (Hubert & Kenning, 2008, p. 278).

However, the rise of neuromarketing has not been without controversy. On the one hand, its proponents argue that it provides deeper and more objective insights into the consumer psyche, allowing brands to design campaigns that resonate on an emotional level and build authentic connections. For instance, studies have shown that emotionally charged advertisements activate regions such as the amygdala and ventromedial prefrontal cortex, areas associated with emotion and value judgment (Plassmann et al., 2008, p. 1053). This kind of neural data is invaluable in understanding why certain brands, like Apple or Coca-Cola, inspire deep emotional loyalty. On the other hand, critics raise concerns about ethical implications, such as manipulation, privacy, and the commercialization of brain data (Ariely & Berns, 2010, p. 287). Moreover, neuromarketing studies often rely on small sample sizes and expensive equipment, which limits their scalability and generalizability. There is also an ongoing debate about whether these findings can be meaningfully translated into actionable strategies without oversimplifying the complexity of the human brain.

Despite these limitations, the increased integration of neuroscientific methods into marketing research reflects a broader shift towards interdisciplinary approaches in understanding consumer

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behavior. Rather than replacing traditional theories, neuromarketing can complement them, offering a more holistic framework that accounts for both conscious and unconscious processes. For example, while the ELM posits that consumers process persuasive messages through central or peripheral routes depending on motivation and ability, neuromarketing can help determine which neural mechanisms are activated during each route, offering empirical support or refinement of the theory.

The aim of this study is to investigate how neuromarketing data enhances our understanding of brand loyalty, and how it compares to insights derived from traditional communication theories. By conducting a comparative analysis, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the key conceptual and methodological differences between traditional communication approaches and neuromarketing in studying brand loyalty?
2. How do neuromarketing findings contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer-brand relationships?
3. What are the potential synergies or conflicts between these two paradigms?

The scope of this research is deliberately theoretical and analytical. Rather than collecting original data, the study synthesizes and compares existing findings from both domains, using Apple as a focal brand due to its well-documented case studies in both traditional and neuroscientific literature. The choice of Apple is strategic, as it is often cited as a prime example of emotional branding and deep customer loyalty, making it an ideal subject for examining how different models explain the same phenomenon from different angles.

In terms of academic contribution, this study offers a novel comparative framework that integrates communication theory with neuroscientific evidence, an approach that is still relatively underexplored in the literature. It also contributes to the ongoing discussion about the future of marketing research and whether it should lean more towards technological, data-driven models or remain grounded in socio-psychological traditions. The findings may provide valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners seeking to navigate this evolving landscape.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To fully grasp the evolving nature of brand loyalty in the context of neuromarketing, it is essential to revisit and critically examine the traditional communication theories that have historically shaped our understanding of consumer behavior. These frameworks developed in eras dominated by mass media and rational-choice paradigms offer foundational perspectives on how audiences receive, process, and act upon marketing messages. By exploring these established models, this section aims to provide a comparative baseline for later analysis, where the strengths and limitations of traditional approaches will be juxtaposed with insights emerging from neuromarketing research.

3. TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION THEORIES

Traditional communication theories have long provided the intellectual foundation for understanding how marketing messages influence consumer behavior. These theories, while diverse in their origins and assumptions, generally share a reliance on linear models of persuasion, audience rationality, and conscious decision-making. They have guided marketers in crafting campaigns that assume a direct cause-and-effect relationship between a message and a consumer's response. This section explores five key theories that have significantly shaped the field: the AIDA model, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the Two-Step Flow Theory, and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory.

AIDA Model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action). The AIDA model, one of the oldest and most widely used frameworks in marketing, was first introduced by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in the early 20th century. It posits a four-stage process by which advertising messages persuade consumers: capturing Attention, generating Interest, creating Desire, and prompting Action (Strong, 1925). The model implies a sequential journey, where consumers move linearly from awareness to purchase decision.

In practical terms, marketers applying the AIDA model design advertisements that begin with eye-catching visuals or headlines (attention), followed by engaging content that explains the product's

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benefits (interest), emotional appeals or scarcity triggers to evoke desire, and finally, a strong call to action encouraging immediate response.

While the AIDA model offers a clear and actionable structure, its reductionist assumptions have been increasingly questioned. It overlooks the non-linear and emotional aspects of decisionmaking, assuming that all consumers follow a rational path from awareness to action. In an era where brand loyalty is often emotional and subconscious, this model may fail to capture the full picture. For example, a loyal Apple customer may skip most of these steps entirely due to an already formed brand attachment, challenging the linear logic of AIDA.

Uses and Gratifications Theory. Originating from media and communication studies, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) shifts focus from the sender to the receiver, proposing that audiences actively select media and messages to satisfy their psychological and social needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). In marketing, this theory suggests that consumers seek out brands and content that fulfill specific gratifications, such as entertainment, social interaction, identity reinforcement, or information-seeking.

This theory is particularly relevant in the age of digital and interactive media, where consumers exercise significant control over the content they engage with. For instance, a consumer may follow a brand on Instagram not because of exposure to a persuasive ad, but because it aligns with their personal identity or community interests.

UGT offers valuable insight into consumer agency, but it tends to underestimate the role of unconscious influences and emotional priming. It assumes that consumers are always aware of their needs and deliberately choose media to meet them, which may not hold true in many real-world scenarios where branding effects operate beneath conscious awareness.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a dual-process theory of persuasion that distinguishes between two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. When consumers are motivated and able to process information, they engage in central processing, carefully evaluating arguments and evidence. In contrast, when motivation or ability is low, they rely on peripheral cues such as attractiveness of the spokesperson or music in the ad.

ELM is particularly useful in understanding how different types of consumers respond to the same message. A tech-savvy consumer might process a smartphone ad through the central route, focusing on specifications and reviews, while another might be persuaded via peripheral cues like celebrity endorsement.

While ELM recognizes the variability in consumer processing depth, it still hinges on the idea that persuasion results from cognitive effort, either low or high. It doesn't fully account for the visceral, emotional, and neural mechanisms now observable via neuromarketing. For example, fMRI studies show that branding can activate emotional and memory-related brain regions even when consumers are not consciously processing information (Plassmann et al., 2012), suggesting a third, non-cognitive route may exist.

Two-Step Flow Theory. Proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), the Two-Step Flow Theory emphasizes the role of opinion leaders in mediating media effects. According to this model, information flows from media to these influential individuals, and then to the wider audience through interpersonal communication. It suggests that people are more likely to be influenced by peers or authority figures than by direct media exposure.

In a marketing context, this theory aligns well with influencer marketing, word-of-mouth strategies, and brand evangelism. Consumers often trust the recommendations of people they admire or relate to more than corporate advertisements.

However, this theory may oversimplify the complex, networked, and decentralized nature of modern media. With the rise of social media and user-generated content, the distinction between opinion

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leaders and followers is increasingly blurred. Moreover, like other traditional models, it assumes conscious information processing, leaving out the subconscious forces that shape attitudes and loyalty.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Originally developed by Everett Rogers (1962), the Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains how new ideas, technologies, or products spread through a social system over time. It identifies five adopter categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, and emphasizes factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability in determining adoption rates.

This model has been widely applied in marketing to segment consumers and develop targeted strategies for product launches. For example, tech companies often focus early marketing efforts on innovators and early adopters to generate buzz and social proof.

However, the theory assumes that adoption is based on rational evaluation of innovation characteristics. It fails to consider the emotional resonance or unconscious associations that often drive early adoption areas where neuromarketing can offer deeper insights. Emotional triggers, identity alignment, and neurobiological responses to novelty may all influence adoption in ways traditional models do not predict.

4. NEUROMARKETING: CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES

Neuromarketing is an emerging interdisciplinary field that applies the tools and insights of neuroscience to the study of consumer behavior and decision-making. By combining elements of psychology, neuroscience, and marketing, neuromarketing seeks to uncover the non-conscious, emotional, and cognitive processes that influence consumer preferences, brand perceptions, and purchase intentions (Lee, Broderick, & Chamberlain, 2007). Unlike traditional marketing research methods that rely heavily on self-reported attitudes and conscious reflections, neuromarketing aims to directly observe and measure brain activity and physiological responses to marketing stimuli. This allows marketers and researchers to understand how consumers truly respond to advertisements, packaging, pricing, and branding often revealing insights that lie beyond awareness.

At its core, neuromarketing is built on the assumption that much of human behavior, including consumer decisions, is not purely rational or deliberate but is instead shaped by subconscious and emotional mechanisms (Kahneman, 2011). Emotions, memories, and instinctive reactions often guide choices faster than logical reasoning can intervene. Neuromarketing provides tools to access these hidden layers of human behavior.

The practical application of neuromarketing depends heavily on several key technologies that allow researchers to observe and quantify physiological or neural responses. The four most widely used techniques are: fMRI, EEG, eye-tracking, and facial coding.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) is one of the most powerful and widely known tools in neuromarketing research. It measures brain activity by detecting changes in blood oxygenation levels a proxy for neural activity across different regions of the brain (Hubert & Kenning, 2008). When consumers are exposed to stimuli such as advertisements, logos, or product images, fMRI can identify which areas of the brain are activated, providing clues about emotional engagement, reward anticipation, memory formation, or cognitive conflict (Knutson et al., 2007, p. 151).

For instance, an fMRI study by McClure et al. (2004) famously demonstrated how brand knowledge influences perception: participants rated Pepsi higher in blind taste tests, but when they were told they were drinking Coca-Cola, brain areas associated with emotions and memory (particularly the medial prefrontal cortex) became more active, leading to higher preference for Coke. This study highlights the power of branding in shaping neural experience, independent of the physical product itself.

Despite its precision, fMRI has limitations. It is expensive, requires specialized equipment and trained personnel, and has low temporal resolution meaning it can't track rapid changes in brain activity. Nevertheless, it remains a gold standard for understanding deep neural correlates of consumer behavior (Plassmann, Ramsøy, & Milosavljevic, 2012).

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EEG is a more portable and cost-effective technique that measures electrical activity in the brain using electrodes placed on the scalp. It has excellent temporal resolution, capturing changes in brain activity within milliseconds, making it ideal for testing dynamic stimuli such as video advertisements or interactive digital experiences (Vecchiato et al., 2014).

In neuromarketing, EEG is often used to assess emotional arousal, attention, and cognitive workload. For example, higher activity in certain frontal regions of the brain may indicate positive emotional engagement, while greater asymmetry between hemispheres can reflect approach or avoidance behavior (Davidson, 2004, pp. 225-230). This can help advertisers understand not just whether a consumer likes an ad, but whether they are emotionally compelled to act on it.

Unlike fMRI, EEG lacks spatial accuracy it can't pinpoint exactly which deep brain structures are involved. Still, its real-time feedback capabilities make it highly valuable for optimizing ad sequencing, website design, or user interfaces (Khushaba et al., 2013).

Eye-tracking technology is used to measure visual attention by tracking the movement, fixation duration, and saccades (rapid eye movements) of the eyes as consumers view stimuli. This technique does not directly measure brain activity but is grounded in the premise that where people look reflects what they find relevant or interesting (Wedel & Pieters, 2008).

Eye-tracking can be applied to assess which parts of an ad or webpage draw the most attention, how long consumers fixate on a product on a shelf, or whether key branding elements are being overlooked. For example, if an eye-tracking heatmap reveals that viewers ignore the product logo or call-to-action, marketers can revise the design to improve visibility and engagement.

Moreover, combining eye-tracking with EEG or facial coding can yield multimodal insights showing not only what consumers look at, but also how they feel while doing so (Ariely & Berns, 2010).

Facial coding involves analyzing micro-expressions on a consumer's face to detect emotional responses such as happiness, surprise, anger, or disgust. This is based on the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) developed by Ekman and Friesen (1978), which categorizes facial muscle movements that correspond to basic human emotions.

This technique is particularly useful in measuring spontaneous, unconscious reactions to ads, packaging, or product experiences. Unlike surveys, which can be biased or filtered, facial coding captures authentic emotional reactions in real-time (Lewinski, Fransen, & Tan, 2014).

For example, a consumer may smile when watching an ad, even if they later report being "neutral" about it. This disconnect between facial expressions and verbal feedback underscores the value of using physiological measures in marketing research.

Neuromarketing doesn't just measure raw physiological responses it interprets them within the context of consumer psychology and behavior. By decoding the brain's reactions to marketing stimuli, researchers can infer key dimensions such as:

Emotional arousal: Is the consumer emotionally engaged or indifferent?

Memory encoding: Will the consumer remember the brand or ad later?

Motivational direction: Is the consumer likely to approach or avoid the product?

Decision-making conflict: Does the consumer feel uncertain or ambivalent?

These insights help marketers understand why some campaigns succeed while others fail, often in ways that traditional methods cannot detect. For instance, an ad may receive high satisfaction ratings in post-exposure surveys but still fail to drive sales. Neuromarketing might reveal that, although the ad was likable, it didn't trigger reward centers in the brain or form strong associative memories, both of which are critical for purchase behavior (Knutson et al., 2007; Plassmann et al., 2012).

Furthermore, neuromarketing challenges the long-standing assumption in traditional models that consumers are always rational agents. Instead, it supports the view that brand loyalty, preference, and even price sensitivity are shaped by non-conscious emotional and neurological factors (Morin, 2011, pp. 132-135).

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5. BRAND LOYALTY: DEFINITIONS AND DIMENSIONS

Brand loyalty has long been a central concept in marketing literature, considered both a strategic goal and a performance indicator for long-term brand success. At its core, brand loyalty refers to a consumer's consistent preference for and repeated purchase of a specific brand over time, often despite competitive offers or changes in market conditions (Oliver, 1999). However, brand loyalty is not a singular or homogeneous construct; rather, it encompasses multiple dimensions, including both behavioral loyalty and emotional (or attitudinal) loyalty, each reflecting different underlying mechanisms of consumer commitment.

Behavioral loyalty is typically defined by observable consumer actions, such as frequency of purchase, repeat transactions, or long-term usage of a brand (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). For example, a customer who consistently buys the same brand of coffee every week, without necessarily having a strong emotional connection to it, would be exhibiting behavioral loyalty. This form of loyalty is often driven by habit, convenience, or price incentives, and while it can be profitable in the short term, it is also vulnerable to disruption a cheaper or more accessible alternative may quickly shift consumer behavior.

In contrast, emotional or attitudinal loyalty is rooted in a deeper psychological and emotional bond between the consumer and the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994, p. 100). Consumers with high emotional loyalty often view the brand as part of their identity or lifestyle and may even defend or advocate for it in social settings. For instance, fans of Apple or Harley-Davidson often express their loyalty not only through repeated purchases but also through brand evangelism, where the brand becomes a symbol of personal values or cultural belonging (Fournier, 1998, pp. 350-361). Emotional loyalty tends to be more resilient, as it persists even when faced with competitive pricing or minor dissatisfaction.

The measurement of brand loyalty must therefore account for both behavioral and emotional components. Traditional metrics such as repurchase rate, share-of-wallet, or customer lifetime value (CLV) focus primarily on behavioral outcomes. However, these do not always capture the strength of the consumer-brand relationship. To assess emotional loyalty, researchers use psychometric scales measuring dimensions such as trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, and brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 86). Neuromarketing tools like EEG or facial coding are increasingly being used to detect unconscious emotional responses that complement self-reported data, offering a more holistic view of brand loyalty.

In addition to measurement, brand loyalty is influenced and reinforced by loyalty programs and customer experience strategies. Loyalty programs such as point-based systems, tiered memberships, or personalized rewards aim to incentivize repeat behavior and create a sense of exclusivity or appreciation (Sharp & Sharp, 1997, p. 480). While such programs can effectively drive behavioral loyalty, they do not always foster emotional attachment unless integrated with meaningful experiences.

This is where customer experience plays a pivotal role. Positive interactions across the customer journey from website usability to customer service to post-purchase support can significantly enhance both satisfaction and emotional loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, pp. 71-93). For example, brands like Amazon or Starbucks achieve loyalty not just through convenience or rewards, but by delivering consistent, personalized, and emotionally satisfying experiences. Research indicates that customer experience is a better long-term predictor of brand loyalty than promotional incentives alone (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017, p. 390).

6. NEUROMARKETING INSIGHTS INTO BRAND LOYALTY

Brand loyalty is not merely a behavioral pattern it is deeply embedded in the neurological architecture of the brain. Recent advances in neuromarketing have shed light on how consumers process, internalize, and maintain loyalty to certain brands, revealing that these preferences are often shaped by emotional and unconscious brain mechanisms rather than solely by rational evaluations or habitual behavior. Understanding how the brain reacts to brands offers marketers a unique opportunity to influence long-term consumer attachment at a deeper, more durable level.

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One of the central insights from neuromarketing research is the role of the brain's reward system in shaping brand loyalty. The ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), the nucleus accumbens, and the striatum are among the key regions that activate when consumers encounter brands they favor (Knutson et al., 2007; Plassmann et al., 2007). These areas are associated with anticipation of reward, emotional valuation, and pleasure, and their activation is often stronger when the consumer has a prior positive association with the brand.

This neural activation forms the basis of what might be termed "emotional brand equity" the value derived not from product features or price, but from how the brand makes the consumer feel. For example, brand messages that stimulate dopaminergic pathways can foster feelings of excitement, pleasure, and trust, leading to the formation of durable emotional connections (Dooley, 2012). When a consumer is loyal to a brand like Apple or Nike, their brain may activate reward circuits in a way similar to those triggered by music, food, or even social bonding.

These emotional ties have neurological roots that go beyond mere preference. The amygdala, a brain region involved in emotion processing and memory encoding, is frequently activated during brand exposure, particularly when the brand is associated with personal or social meaning (Yoon, Gutchess, Feinberg, & Polk, 2006, pp. 32-38). This suggests that emotionally charged brand experiences are more likely to be stored in long-term memory, increasing the chances of recall and influencing future decision-making.

One of the most widely cited neuromarketing studies that illustrates these principles is the Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi fMRI experiment conducted by McClure et al. (2004). In the blind taste test phase, participants showed greater activation in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex when consuming Pepsi, indicating a stronger immediate reward response. However, when participants were told they were drinking Coca-Cola, their hippocampus and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex areas associated with memory and brand identity were more active, and they reported preferring Coke. This shift demonstrates the power of brand knowledge and emotional memory in altering actual sensory perception and preference.

The Coca-Cola study is a prime example of how branding can override objective experience through neural mechanisms. Even when Pepsi elicited a stronger taste-based reward, the emotional associations with Coca-Cola's brand image its nostalgic ads, global identity, and cultural significance tipped the preference toward Coke. This suggests that emotional branding can reshape the subjective experience of consumption, creating loyalty that is less about product quality and more about how a brand is neurologically encoded in the consumer's brain.

Neuromarketing research further reveals that brand loyalty is sustained through repeated activation of these emotional and reward pathways over time. Consistent exposure to emotionally engaging brand messages can reinforce the neural networks associated with trust, familiarity, and positive affect. As Schaefer and Rotte (2007) note, the orbitofrontal cortex, which evaluates subjective value, shows increased activity when consumers view brands they trust or have previously chosen, suggesting that loyalty is not just a habit but a neural preference pattern.

These insights have profound implications for marketing practice. Traditional surveys and focus groups often fail to capture subconscious drivers of brand attachment, whereas neuromarketing techniques like fMRI, EEG, and facial coding can uncover hidden emotional responses that strongly predict future behavior. For example, Ramsøy et al. (2019) found that EEG-based measures of attention and emotional arousal were more accurate predictors of ad effectiveness than self-reported liking. Such findings highlight the potential of neuromarketing to optimize advertising, product design, and brand strategy by aligning them with how the brain processes information emotionally and unconsciously.

Moreover, neuromarketing allows marketers to detect micro-responses that may signal early signs of disengagement or declining loyalty. A subtle drop in emotional activation during brand interaction before it becomes visible in behavior can be a valuable indicator for intervention. In this way, neuromarketing tools provide not only diagnostic value but also predictive power, enabling brands to act proactively rather than reactively.

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However, it is important to approach neuromarketing findings ethically and responsibly. As Morin (2011) argues, leveraging neuroscience to manipulate consumer behavior raises concerns about autonomy, consent, and transparency. The goal should not be to exploit unconscious vulnerabilities, but to enhance genuine emotional alignment between brands and their audiences.

7. CODE OF ETHICS FOR DIGITAL MEDIA COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: TRADITIONAL THEORIES VS. NEUROMARKETING

In the study of consumer behavior and brand loyalty, two major paradigms offer differing but complementary lenses: traditional communication theories and the emerging field of neuromarketing. While traditional models such as the AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and the Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasize conscious cognitive processes, neuromarketing focuses on subconscious emotional and neural responses. This section offers a comparative analysis of these approaches across key dimensions, exploring their methodologies, data types, consumer insights, and effectiveness in measuring brand loyalty.

Data Type: Verbal vs. Biological. Traditional communication theories primarily rely on verbal and self-reported data, such as interviews, surveys, and behavioral observations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). These tools gather consumers' conscious thoughts, intentions, and attitudes, often through structured questionnaires and focus groups. For example, the Theory of Planned Behavior posits that behavior is a result of deliberate intention, shaped by attitudes and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991, p. 85). This approach is accessible, cost-effective, and widely used in both academic and commercial contexts.

In contrast, neuromarketing uses biometric and neurological data including brainwaves (EEG), blood flow (fMRI), skin conductance, heart rate variability, and facial expressions to assess consumers' non-conscious reactions (Morin, 2011; Plassmann et al., 2012). These methods aim to bypass the limitations of self-reporting, such as social desirability bias, memory errors, or limited introspective access (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 236). For instance, a consumer may verbally express liking an advertisement, while biometric signals show emotional disengagement or cognitive overload, revealing a deeper discrepancy.

Consumer Analysis: Conscious Decision vs. Subconscious Reaction. Traditional models conceptualize consumers as rational decision-makers who evaluate messages and products based on perceived utility, value, or informational content. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), for example, suggests that consumers process persuasive messages either through central routes (deliberate, rational evaluation) or peripheral routes (surface cues). These models are effective in structured decision-making contexts such as B2B marketing or high-involvement purchases where cognitive reflection is prominent.

Neuromarketing, on the other hand, views consumer decisions as emotion-driven and heavily subconscious. Studies in neuroscience show that most decisions are made within milliseconds, often before conscious reasoning even begins (Kahneman, 2011). For example, the limbic system, particularly the amygdala and ventromedial prefrontal cortex, plays a central role in emotional evaluations that influence consumer preference (Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2000, p. 302). Neuromarketing's strength lies in uncovering these rapid, affective reactions that traditional tools often miss.

Loyalty Measurement: Behavior vs. Brain Activation. Traditional loyalty models measure brand loyalty by tracking repurchase intentions, frequency of purchases, and attitudinal commitment. These measurements often rely on longitudinal studies and self-reported scales like Net Promoter Score (Reichheld, 2003, p. 52) or customer satisfaction indices. While valuable, such methods cannot always distinguish between habitual behavior and true emotional loyalty. A consumer may repeatedly purchase a product out of convenience, not preference.

Neuromarketing addresses this gap by identifying neural markers of brand loyalty. For instance, increased activation in the reward centers of the brain (such as the nucleus accumbens) when viewing a brand logo may indicate positive affect and value encoding (Knutson et al., 2007, p. 155). Similarly, consistent engagement of memory-related regions like the hippocampus suggests deeper brand

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association and recall potential (Yoon et al., 2006, pp. 32-39). These insights provide a more granular and predictive understanding of how loyalty forms and persists.

Which Approach Offers Deeper Insights? While both paradigms contribute meaningfully to understanding consumer behavior, neuromarketing offers deeper psychological and emotional insights by accessing implicit, non-verbal, and unconscious processes. It reveals how consumers feel, not just what they say or do. For example, a brand might test well in surveys but fail in market performance. Neuromarketing may uncover that the brand lacks emotional resonance, despite positive stated attitudes.

However, neuromarketing is not a replacement for traditional models it is a complement. Traditional theories are better at capturing contextual, cultural, and narrative elements of communication. They also offer valuable insights into message framing, media influence, and interpersonal communication, which are outside the scope of biometric methods. Therefore, the integration of both approaches often yields the most holistic understanding.

Which Method Works Best, and When?

The effectiveness of each approach depends on the research goal:

For message testing, advertising recall, or purchase intentions, traditional methods may suffice, especially in early campaign development. For emotional branding, packaging design, or consumer experience evaluation, neuromarketing tools provide richer, real-time data. In contexts where consumers are unaware of their preferences or cannot articulate their motivations, neuromarketing excels by capturing latent responses. In high-stakes product launches or rebranding efforts, combining traditional surveys with neuromarketing techniques like EEG or facial coding can identify both explicit perceptions and implicit emotional impact offering a more comprehensive validation process (Ariely & Berns, 2010).

8. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL BRAND LOYALTY MODELS AND NEUROMARKETING INSIGHTS

In today's highly competitive marketplace, understanding and cultivating brand loyalty has become a critical priority for businesses seeking sustainable growth. Traditional marketing models have long focused on consumer attitudes, behaviors, and self-reported preferences to explain and predict brand loyalty. However, the rise of neuromarketing techniques has introduced novel ways to investigate the subconscious and emotional foundations of loyalty. This section provides a comparative analysis of traditional brand loyalty frameworks versus neuromarketing insights, using Apple Inc. as a case example to illustrate practical applications drawn from secondary academic data.

Traditional theories of brand loyalty predominantly rely on self-reported data collected through surveys, interviews, and behavioral tracking. These approaches focus on observable consumer behaviors such as repeat purchases, attitudinal commitment, and expressed satisfaction. For example, Oliver's (1999) definition of brand loyalty emphasizes both behavioral loyalty (repeat purchase) and attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment and commitment). Similarly, Dick and Basu's (1994) framework integrates the strength of consumer preference and the relative attitude towards a brand as determinants of loyalty.

The AIDA model (Strong, 1925), which guides much of traditional marketing communication, highlights a sequential cognitive process starting from attention to action, suggesting that loyalty is a result of sustained positive engagement and desire over time. Meanwhile, satisfaction and loyalty measurement tools such as the Net Promoter Score (Reichheld, 2003) and customer satisfaction indices provide quantifiable means to gauge brand commitment.

Studies on Apple's customer base utilizing these traditional tools consistently report high loyalty metrics. Research by Fornell et al. (2010) demonstrated that Apple users score significantly higher on customer satisfaction and repurchase intent scales compared to competitors, reflecting strong brand equity. These traditional metrics indicate a conscious consumer choice and a high degree of brand attachment based on perceived value, quality, and innovation.

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However, traditional methods face limitations primarily because they depend on conscious self-reporting, which can be biased or incomplete. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) showed that individuals often lack access to the true causes of their preferences, leading to inaccuracies in survey responses. Additionally, these models may not fully capture the emotional and subconscious elements that neuroscience reveals as critical to brand loyalty formation (Kahneman, 2011).

Neuromarketing offers a complementary perspective by employing neuroscience tools such as functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Electroencephalography (EEG), eye-tracking, and facial coding to explore the subconscious brain activity linked to brand perception and loyalty. These techniques measure neural correlates of emotional arousal, attention, and memory, revealing how brands resonate beyond conscious awareness (Plassmann, Ramsøy, & Milosavljevic, 2012).

For Apple, neuromarketing studies have been particularly revealing. Schaefer and Rotte (2007) used fMRI to compare brain responses to Apple and Pepsi branding, finding that loyal Apple customers showed greater activation in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) a region associated with reward and positive valuation when exposed to Apple logos compared to non-loyal participants. This suggests that Apple's brand loyalty is deeply rooted in emotional reward mechanisms rather than merely rational preference.

Further, Morin (2011) highlighted that Apple's consistent product design and sensory experiences trigger memory encoding regions such as the hippocampus, reinforcing long-term brand associations. Facial coding and EEG studies also indicate that Apple's advertising elicits stronger positive emotional reactions and sustained attention compared to many competitors (Vecchiato et al., 2014). These subconscious responses predict real-world purchasing behavior and customer retention more accurately than traditional self-reports (Ariely & Berns, 2010).

Neuromarketing also uncovers how brand loyalty can resemble a "sacred" or identity-related construct, activating brain networks involved in self-referential thought and social identity (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2006, p. 157). This deeper connection explains why Apple customers often describe their relationship with the brand in emotional or almost symbolic terms.

Comparative Analysis

Criteria	Traditional Theories	Neuromarketing Insights
Data Type	Self-reported surveys, interviews, purchase behavior data	fMRI, EEG, eye-tracking, facial coding, biometric data
Focus	Conscious cognitive processes, attitudes, and behaviors	Subconscious emotional responses and neural activations
Measurement of Loyalty	Behavioral loyalty (repurchase), attitudinal loyalty (intent)	Neural correlates of reward, memory encoding, emotional valence

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Strengths	Cost-effective, broad applicability, accessible	Objective measurement of subconscious processes, predictive
Limitations	Biases in selfreporting, may miss emotional/subconscious drivers	High cost, technical complexity, interpretation challenges

Both approaches provide valuable but distinct insights. Traditional models excel at capturing conscious deliberation and expressed attitudes, which are critical in many purchasing decisions, particularly for high-involvement products or services (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). They are also better suited for gathering demographic and psychographic segmentation data.

Neuromarketing, conversely, excels at revealing the implicit emotional drivers that underpin loyalty, particularly in products with strong symbolic or experiential components, such as Apple's technology ecosystem (Knutson et al., 2007). By identifying neural markers of positive valuation and emotional engagement, marketers can design campaigns that resonate more deeply and predict actual behavior beyond stated preferences.

Apple's marketing strategy reflects a sophisticated understanding of both traditional and neuromarketing principles. Traditional survey data reveal consistently high brand loyalty, with customers expressing satisfaction with product quality and ecosystem integration (Fornell et al., 2010, pp. 184-199). Yet, neuromarketing research provides insight into the emotional attachment and identity alignment that sustains this loyalty.

For instance, a landmark study by Schaefer and Rotte (2007) found that the vmPFC activation among loyal Apple users correlated with their self-reported preference, demonstrating how neural data can validate and deepen traditional findings. Similarly, Plassmann et al. (2008) illustrated that brandrelated brain activity predicted consumers' willingness to pay a premium for Apple products, underscoring the monetary value of emotional brand loyalty.

Furthermore, neuromarketing data suggest Apple's focus on design consistency, sensory appeal, and storytelling contributes to strong memory encoding, facilitating recall and preference over competitors (Morin, 2011; Vecchiato et al., 2014). These findings inform Apple's marketing campaigns, which emphasize not only product features but also lifestyle and identity, engaging consumers on both rational and emotional levels.

9. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the intersection of traditional communication theories and neuromarketing approaches in understanding brand loyalty, offering a comparative lens through which both paradigms can be evaluated. The analysis revealed that while traditional models have long provided valuable insights into conscious consumer attitudes and behaviors, they fall short in capturing the subconscious, emotional, and neurobiological dimensions of brand attachment. Neuromarketing, by contrast, presents a compelling complementary framework that delves into the emotional and cognitive mechanisms often inaccessible through self-reporting.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the growing discourse on the limitations of purely behaviorist or attitudinal approaches in marketing. By integrating neuroscience with consumer theory, it encourages a more holistic understanding of loyalty as both a rational and emotional construct. The juxtaposition of models such as AIDA, ELM, and diffusion theories with tools like fMRI and EEG underlines the importance of cross-disciplinary perspectives in consumer research.

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In practical terms, the study offers clear implications for marketers and communication professionals. Brands seeking to build lasting loyalty must move beyond surface-level engagement strategies and instead design campaigns that resonate on a deeper, emotional level. This includes crafting sensory-rich experiences, consistent brand narratives, and personalized content that taps into core identity and values. Moreover, understanding that consumers often make decisions below the level of conscious awareness calls for refined message testing and evaluation methods that include both declarative and biometric data.

For practitioners, the insights presented here advocate for a hybrid approach one that combines the strategic guidance of traditional communication models with the diagnostic precision of neuromarketing. Marketers can leverage traditional tools to map out communication flows and consumer decision-making paths, while using neuromarketing techniques to refine emotional tone, optimize content placement, and enhance memory retention.

Finally, this study highlights several avenues for future research. First, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term predictive validity of neuromarketing data in relation to actual consumer loyalty and retention. Second, ethical considerations around the use of biometric and neurological data in marketing warrant further exploration, especially in terms of consumer privacy and consent. Lastly, as technologies evolve, there is an opportunity to develop more accessible and cost-effective neuromarketing tools that can be integrated into everyday marketing practices across diverse industries and demographics.

In conclusion, the convergence of neuromarketing and traditional theory does not signal the replacement of one by the other, but rather a necessary evolution in marketing science one that acknowledges the complexity of human decision-making and seeks to engage consumers not only as rational actors but as emotional, identity-driven beings.

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Siber Güvenlik Söylemleri ve Toplumsal Güç İlişkileri: Dijital Güvenliğin Politik ve Stratejik Boyutları

Cybersecurity Discourses and Social Power Relations: The Political and Strategic Dimensions of Digital Security

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Özet

Dijital çağda siber güvenlik, yalnızca bilgi sistemlerini koruma pratiği olmaktan çıkarak, siyasal otorite, yönetim ve toplumsal düzenin temel belirleyicilerinden biri haline gelmiştir. Başlangıçta teknik bir gereklilik olarak ele alınan bilgi güvenliği, günümüzde davranışların düzenlenmesi, dijital yurttaşların gözetimi ve ulusal-küresel bilgi akışlarının kontrolüyle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Bu çalışma, siber güvenlik söylemlerinin nasıl inşa edildiğini, dolaşıma sokulduğunu ve güç ilişkilerini meşrulaştırmak amacıyla nasıl kullanıldığını eleştirel bir perspektifle incelemektedir. Eleştirel güvenlik çalışmaları literatürü ve Foucault'nun iktidar-söylem kuramı çerçevesinde, "siber tehdit" kavramının nasıl bir varoluşsal tehlike olarak çerçevelendiği ve bu yolla devletlerin olağanüstü güvenlik önlemlerini nasıl meşrulaştırdığı analiz edilmiştir. Devlet strateji belgeleri, ulusal siber güvenlik politikaları ve medya söylemleri üzerinde gerçekleştirilen nitel söylem analizi, siber güvenlik söylemlerinin çoğu zaman "güvenliklendirme" işlevi gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu süreçte teknik riskler, toplumsal korkulara dönüştürülerek, dijital alanlarda artan gözetim, denetim ve düzenleyici müdahaleler rasyonelleştirilmektedir. Böylece siber güvenlik, yalnızca koruma sağlayan bir araç değil, aynı zamanda kimlerin tehdit, kimlerin korunmaya değer olduğu üzerine toplumsal kararları şekillendiren bir iktidar diline dönüşmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, siber güvenliğin dijital altyapıları koruma amacının ötesine geçerek, çağdaş toplumlarda yeni kontrol biçimlerini ve asimetrik güç yapılarını yeniden ürettiğini göstermektedir. Güvenlik, bilgi ve yönetim arasındaki bu ilişki, dijital çağın yeni bir "teknopolitik düzen" inşasının temel dinamiğini oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siber güvenlik, Güç ilişkileri, Söylem analizi, Dijital egemenlik, Gözetim, Eleştirel güvenlik çalışmaları

Abstract

In the digital age, cybersecurity has evolved from merely a practice of protecting information systems into one of the fundamental determinants of political authority, governance, and social order. Initially approached as a technical necessity, information security today is directly linked to the regulation of behaviors, the surveillance of digital citizens, and the control of national and security studies and Foucault's theory of power-discourse, it analyzes how the concept of "cyber threat" is framed as an existential danger and how this framing legitimizes extraordinary security measures by states. A qualitative discourse analysis of state strategy documents, national cybersecurity policies, and media narratives reveals that cybersecurity discourses often serve a "securitizing" function. In this process, technical risks are transformed into social fears, thereby rationalizing increased surveillance, control, and regulatory interventions in digital domains. Thus, cybersecurity becomes not merely a tool of protection but also a language of power that shapes social decisions about who constitutes a threat and who is deemed worthy of protection. The findings indicate that cybersecurity goes beyond the goal of safeguarding digital infrastructures, reproducing new forms of control and asymmetric power structures in contemporary societies. The relationship between security, information, and governance constitutes the fundamental dynamic of constructing a new "technopolitical order" in the digital age/global information flows. This study critically examines how cybersecurity discourses are constructed, circulated, and employed to legitimize power relations. Within the framework of critical.

Keywords: Cybersecurity, Power Relations, Discourse Analysis, Digital Sovereignty, Surveillance, Critical Security Studies

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the information age, the concept of security has gone beyond the prevention of merely military or physical threats; it now encompasses the protection of data produced, stored, and transmitted in digital environments. This transformation has made information security a fundamental security paradigm of modern societies (Castells, 2010). As digitalization has rendered economic and political processes increasingly dependent on information, it has transformed information security into both a technical and a political issue. Today, even the smallest cyberattack targeting areas such as national security, energy infrastructure, or public administration is regarded as a factor threatening the sovereignty capacity of states (Nye, 2017).

Although the concept of information security primarily aims to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information produced in digital environments, its use carries not only a technical but also an ideological and discursive dimension (Solms & Niekerk, 2013). Through discourses such as “cyber threat” or “national interest,” states and institutions transform security into a means of legitimization, thereby reinforcing both social order and control over the digital sphere. Foucault’s (1977) approach to the relationship between power and discourse provides an explanatory framework for understanding that information security discourses are not solely aimed at ensuring security but also at producing and reconstructing power relations.

Today, information security has evolved from a technical line of defense into a strategic field at the center of national policies. Cyberattacks, data manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and threats to critical infrastructures have created a new arena of competition in international relations (Carr, 2016). In this context, information security discourses redefine the concept of state sovereignty in the digital age, bringing forth the notion of “digital sovereignty” that extends beyond national borders (DeNardis, 2020). This sovereignty is measured not only by the capacity for technical control but also by the ability to regulate information flows and determine normative power over digital infrastructures.

Another significant aspect of information security discourses is their influence on social perceptions of security. The way cyber threats are presented in media and political discourse shapes society’s sense of security needs and fears (Hansen & Nissenbaum, 2009). Particularly, the discursive emphasis on incidents such as “data breaches,” “personal information leaks,” or “national cyberattacks” strengthens the social legitimacy of security policies and facilitates the public’s acceptance of digital surveillance (Lyon, 2018). This situation turns information security into not merely a technological necessity but also a tool for generating social consent.

This research aims to analyze how information security discourses are constructed, by which actors they are produced, and how these discourses are related to mechanisms of political legitimacy, power, and control. The main assumption of the study is that the concept of information security is not merely a “technical necessity” but rather a discursive field through which power is reproduced in the digital age. Therefore, the study approaches information security discourses not only from a protection-oriented perspective but also through the lenses of power, surveillance, and sovereignty.

Drawing on critical security theories (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998) and Foucault’s (1977, 1980) discourse-based approach to power, the research analyzes the political functions of information security discourses. In this context, national cybersecurity strategies, state policies, and media narratives will be examined to discuss how “information security” is defined, through which threats it is legitimized, and what kinds of security perceptions it generates at the societal level.

2. CYBERSECURITY TECHNOLOGIES, INFRASTRUCTURAL POWER, AND THE DIGITAL DEFENSE ECONOMY

Cybersecurity in the contemporary world is not merely a security policy but also a field of power production grounded in technology. The protection of digital infrastructures, prevention of cyber threats, and maintenance of data integrity have become directly dependent on the technical capacities of states and the private sector. Therefore, information security today is not only an issue of “computer

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engineering” but also a matter of national defense and economic sovereignty (Carr, 2016). While cybersecurity technologies aim to enhance the resilience of digital systems, they also redefine global power distribution and economic dependency relations.

The technical dimension of cybersecurity is generally addressed along three main axes: network security, data protection, and critical infrastructure security. Network security relies on technologies such as encryption, firewalls, intrusion detection/prevention systems (IDS/IPS), and secure protocol architectures to ensure the integrity of communication between systems. Although these systems appear to provide technical solutions, decisions about which threats are deemed “priority” or which user activities are considered “suspicious” are entirely political (Deibert, 2013). For example, large-scale traffic monitoring systems implemented by states (such as Deep Packet Inspection) not only block malicious software but also become tools that categorize user behaviors and deepen surveillance infrastructures.

Data protection technologies are similarly as ideological as they are technical. Encryption systems are viewed both as tools that protect individual privacy and as potential security threats from the perspective of states. The 2016 Apple–FBI case is one of the most concrete examples of this duality. The FBI, citing counterterrorism concerns, demanded that Apple create a “backdoor” to bypass iPhone’s security protocols; Apple refused, arguing the need to protect user security. This example clearly demonstrates that technical infrastructures are simultaneously arenas of political decision-making (DeNardis, 2020). Information security technologies, by determining who can access which information, contribute to the reproduction of power relations.

Critical infrastructure security is one of the most strategic dimensions of information security. Sectors such as power grids, energy distribution systems, healthcare networks, and financial systems have become fully dependent on digital networks. A cyberattack on any of these systems can turn not only into a technical malfunction but into a national security crisis. The Stuxnet virus, discovered in 2010, went down in history as the first industrial sabotage software targeting Iran’s nuclear program. This incident demonstrated that the technical dimension of cybersecurity could directly transform into a form of geopolitical power projection (Rid, 2020). Stuxnet proved that information security infrastructures could be used not only for defense but also as offensive tools.

At this point, the political aspect of technical infrastructures can be understood through the concept of “infrastructural power.” Developed by Mann (1984), this concept refers to the state’s capacity to organize and control society through technical systems. In the digital age, this power is being reproduced through cybersecurity networks, data centers, cloud infrastructures, and AI-driven monitoring systems. Infrastructure is not merely technological but also a governmental instrument of power. Examples such as China’s “Great Firewall” or the U.S. “PRISM” surveillance program clearly illustrate how technical systems can be transformed into political control mechanisms. These systems, while normalizing social surveillance through technical legitimacy, simultaneously reinforce digital sovereignty.

Another critical dimension of cybersecurity technologies involves AI- and machine learning-based security systems. In recent years, the use of AI systems in areas such as anomaly detection, behavioral analysis, and threat intelligence has grown rapidly. These systems attempt to predict potential threats by classifying billions of user behaviors through big data analytics. However, their opaque decision-making mechanisms bring with them risks of “algorithmic surveillance” and “digital bias” (Zuboff, 2019). Artificial intelligence is used not only to enhance security but also to monitor user behavior, collect data for economic interests, and enable social manipulation. This situation significantly weakens the democratic accountability of technical security systems.

From an economic perspective, the cybersecurity industry has become an expanding digital defense economy. By the mid-2020s, the global cybersecurity market exceeded an annual value of 250 billion dollars, and it now constitutes a strategic component of state budgets (Floridi, 2022). Cybersecurity technologies lie at the heart of not only national security strategies but also private sector

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investments. Defense contractors, technology giants, and private software developers directly benefit economically from the discursive reproduction of security threats. Therefore, the technical aspect of the “cyber threat” discourse is also a component of economic and political interests. In line with Beck’s (1992) “risk society” approach, the definition and management of security risks have become an “economic sector” in themselves.

The proliferation of cybersecurity technologies has also brought about the problem of digital dependency. Many countries are dependent on the products of a small number of global corporations for security software, hardware infrastructure, or cloud services. This dependence weakens national digital sovereignty while reinforcing technological hierarchies on a global scale. DeNardis (2020) defines this situation as “infrastructural geopolitics,” since the control of technical standards, data flows, and software protocols constitutes a new form of power. Thus, information security technologies not only ensure the protection of systems but also enable the reconfiguration of global power relations through digital codes.

The human and ethical consequences of technical security systems must not be overlooked. Systems developed to enhance security often restrict user freedom. In particular, biometric authentication systems, facial recognition algorithms, and location-based tracking technologies constrain individual autonomy in the name of “security” (Lyon, 2018). These technologies invisibly structure public space, determining who is classified as “trustworthy” and who is seen as a “potential threat.” This process reveals that security technologies are not only technical but also ethical domains of debate. As Han (2017) notes, individuals in the digital age voluntarily surrender their privacy in exchange for the convenience of security. This is the fundamental paradox of the modern surveillance society.

3. THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF INFORMATION SECURITY, DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND CONTEMPORARY POWER STRATEGIES

In the digital age, information security has evolved far beyond a technical concern and has become a central mechanism through which states exercise sovereignty, construct national identity, and regulate social behavior. Cybersecurity technologies now constitute essential instruments for expanding state authority, maintaining economic competitiveness, and deepening systems of surveillance and control (Carr, 2016). As digital infrastructures increasingly underpin political, economic, and social life, the discourse of information security has emerged as a powerful framework that legitimizes new forms of governance, risk management, and geopolitical strategy.

Although information security is often conceptualized as a neutral technical practice, its technical infrastructures—network security, data protection, and critical infrastructure defense—are deeply embedded within political and ideological choices. Network security technologies such as firewalls, encryption protocols, and intrusion detection systems are presented as objective protective mechanisms. Yet decisions regarding which data is considered valuable, which behaviors are labeled suspicious, and which traffic should be monitored reflect political calculations as much as technical assessments (Deibert, 2013). Actions framed as cyber threats in one political context may fall under freedom of expression in another, demonstrating how cybersecurity constructs its own normative boundaries.

This political dimension becomes even more visible in debates on data security. Encryption technologies, designed to guarantee confidentiality and privacy, often come into conflict with national security objectives. The well-known Apple–FBI dispute revealed how technical infrastructures become arenas of power struggles, raising fundamental questions about who holds legitimate authority over data access—states or private corporations (DeNardis, 2020). Consequently, cybersecurity functions not merely as a shield against threats but as a mechanism through which data sovereignty and informational power are contested.

The stakes rise further in the realm of critical infrastructure security. Power grids, transportation systems, financial networks, and energy infrastructures are now fully digitized, making them vulnerable

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to cyberattacks that can trigger national-level crises. The Stuxnet incident, which caused physical damage to Iran's nuclear facilities in 2010, stands as a defining example of the geopolitical implications of cybersecurity technologies (Rid, 2020). This convergence of digital and physical domains has transformed cyberspace into the "fifth domain of warfare," where states pursue both defensive and offensive strategies.

In this context, Mann's (1984) concept of infrastructural power provides an important framework for understanding how cybersecurity expands state authority. Digital infrastructures such as cloud systems, data centers, 5G networks, and AI-driven monitoring architectures enhance the state's capacity to organize and regulate society. Surveillance programs such as China's Great Firewall and the U.S. PRISM project illustrate how technical infrastructures become political instruments that shape the flow of information and the contours of social life (Lyon, 2018). While these systems are presented as necessary for security, they simultaneously normalize practices of monitoring and control.

AI-based cybersecurity systems intensify these dynamics. By analyzing vast quantities of behavioral data and identifying anomalies, they promise predictive security but also raise concerns about algorithmic bias, digital discrimination, and opaque decision-making (Zuboff, 2019). These systems may inadvertently reproduce existing social hierarchies or classify certain groups as inherently risky, transforming technical tools into mechanisms of political surveillance. As such, ethical oversight and transparency have become pressing issues for democratic governance.

The rapid expansion of cybersecurity has also produced a growing digital defense economy. As of 2024, the cybersecurity market exceeded \$250 billion globally (Floridi, 2022). This industry thrives on the discursive amplification of digital risks, echoing Beck's (1992) notion of the "risk society," in which modern economies increasingly depend on the continuous identification and management of new risks. Cybersecurity thus becomes both an economic engine and a generator of political narratives that justify technological intervention.

Moreover, the global distribution of cybersecurity capacities has produced new forms of inequality. A handful of dominant corporations—Cisco, Huawei, Microsoft, and others—define infrastructural standards and influence national security policies, creating a structure akin to digital colonialism (DeNardis, 2020). Dependence on foreign technologies constrains national autonomy, particularly in developing countries, limiting their ability to regulate their digital ecosystems.

The interplay between information security and digital sovereignty demonstrates how cybersecurity has become a fundamental dimension of state power. States now claim sovereignty not only over physical territories but also over data flows, network infrastructures, and the digital identities of their citizens. Policy initiatives emphasizing "cyber independence," "data localization," or "digital resilience" show how technical infrastructures are leveraged to strengthen national authority (Nye, 2017). These policies also enable the expansion of domestic surveillance and governance capacities, recalling Foucault's (1980) insight that knowledge and power mutually reinforce one another. As states manage digital risks, they simultaneously shape the behavior of digital populations through norms, standards, and regulatory frameworks.

Within this digital polity, information security discourse contributes to the construction of national identity. References to "cyber homeland defense" or "protecting the digital nation" frame cybersecurity as a patriotic duty, mobilizing public support and fostering what may be termed digital nationalism. This discursive strategy binds technical security practices to symbolic narratives of unity, sovereignty, and national strength.

Yet these developments raise significant democratic concerns. Measures adopted in the name of national security often limit privacy, restrict freedom of expression, and centralize informational power in state institutions. Authoritarian regimes may use cybersecurity rhetoric to suppress dissent, while democratic governments may expand surveillance under claims of public safety (Bauman & Lyon, 2013). As a result, the balance between security and civil liberties becomes increasingly precarious.

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At the international level, cybersecurity policies shape global power relations. Cyberspace is both a domain of cooperation and conflict, where states attempt to establish normative power through standards, regulatory frameworks, and cyber diplomacy. However, these processes reproduce global asymmetries. Western states often promote their own norms as universal, while developing countries face structural pressures to conform (Deibert, 2013). This dynamic reflects Nye's (2017) concept of information power, whereby control over knowledge production and circulation becomes a decisive element of geopolitical influence.

In sum, the discursive construction of information security cannot be reduced to technological imperatives. Rather, cybersecurity operates as a multifaceted field through which power is exercised, legitimized, and contested. It shapes digital sovereignty, defines national interests, facilitates surveillance, and structures global hierarchies. Analyzing cybersecurity discourse from this integrated perspective reveals its role as a central mechanism of authority in the digital age—a technology of power that governs individuals, societies, and international orders alike.

4. FOUCAULT'S POWER-DISCOURSE FRAMEWORK AND THE THEORETICAL POSITIONING OF DIGITAL SECURITY

Foucault's power-discourse framework provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how modern societies construct knowledge, regulate behaviors, and legitimize security practices. In Foucault's perspective, power is not merely repressive or prohibitive; rather, it is productive, operating through the creation of knowledge, norms, and subjectivities (Foucault, 1977; 1980). This view is essential for analyzing cybersecurity, a field where technical narratives, political interests, and social control mechanisms are deeply intertwined. Cybersecurity discourse does not simply describe digital risks; it actively shapes the ways in which threats, vulnerabilities, and protective measures are socially, politically, and institutionally defined.

For Foucault, discourse is not a neutral representation of reality but a system that produces truth claims and organizes what can be thought, said, and governed (Foucault, 1980). Within this framework, terms such as "cyber threat," "critical digital infrastructure," "digital sovereignty," and "national cyberattack" are not purely technical concepts; they are discursive constructs produced by states, expert communities, and technology corporations. These constructs define which behaviors are seen as risky, which actors are labeled as potential threats, and which interventions become legitimate in the name of national security (Hansen & Nissenbaum, 2009). In this sense, cybersecurity becomes a "regime of truth" that generates authoritative knowledge and establishes a normative understanding of digital order.

Foucault's notion of disciplinary power further clarifies how modern security operates through continuous surveillance, normalization, and the regulation of individual conduct (Foucault, 1977). In the digital environment, these mechanisms intensify through big data analytics, behavioral monitoring systems, biometric authentication, and algorithmic profiling. Cybersecurity infrastructures classify user activities as "normal," "risky," or "suspicious," thereby producing a digital normativity that shapes how individuals behave online. Much like the panopticon, the awareness of constant visibility induces self-regulation, rendering cybersecurity not only a technical safeguard but a disciplinary technology that molds digital subjectivity (Lyon, 2018). Users modify their practices in accordance with standards set by security protocols, risk metrics, and algorithmic evaluations, which operate as subtle forms of behavioral governance.

Foucault's concept of biopolitics adds another layer to understanding how cybersecurity discourse governs populations. Biopolitics refers to techniques for managing life, regulating populations, and controlling collective risks (Foucault, 1977). Cybersecurity discourse extends this logic to the digital domain by constructing categories such as "digital citizens," "critical users," and "high-risk groups." National cybersecurity strategies increasingly emphasize notions of "cyber hygiene," "user awareness," and "responsible digital behavior," all of which function as biopolitical techniques disciplining the digital population (DeNardis, 2020). Through these practices, the state assumes a

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managerial role over digital life, aiming to control not only infrastructures but the behaviors and competencies of entire populations.

Seen through this Foucauldian lens, cybersecurity emerges as a field where technical systems, political agendas, and social regulation converge. Cybersecurity discourse legitimizes the expansion of surveillance systems, the restructuring of state authority, and the normalization of data extraction and monitoring. It shapes the conditions under which power is exercised in the digital age, determining who is protected, who is monitored, and which forms of control are justified. As such, cybersecurity is not merely a defensive measure; it is a discourse that produces new configurations of power and restructures the relationship between individuals, technology, and the state.

This study adopts Foucault's theoretical framework to examine how cybersecurity discourse is constructed, which actors produce it, and how it legitimizes new forms of digital governance. By situating cybersecurity within the broader power-knowledge nexus, the analysis highlights its role not only as a technical necessity but as a foundational mechanism that structures authority, shapes public perceptions, and reproduces asymmetrical power relations in contemporary digital societies.

5. INFORMATION SECURITY, THE SURVEILLANCE SOCIETY, AND THE REDEFINITION OF PRIVACY

In contemporary societies, information security is not merely a technical practice of protection, but a determining element of a new social order and form of power. As digital technologies penetrate every aspect of daily life, individuals' behaviors, modes of communication, and identity constructions have become bound to a data-driven system of traceability. Within this process, the discourse of information security has become one of the most powerful ideologies that legitimizes the surveillance society under the claim of "protecting the individual." The boundary between security and privacy is no longer merely technical but has turned into a political field of negotiation.

As Foucault (1977) argued in his analysis of the disciplinary society, modern forms of power discipline individuals not only through punishment but through continuous surveillance. The panopticon metaphor explains how individuals, feeling themselves constantly watched within an invisible mechanism of control, automatically regulate their own behavior. In the digital age, this model has been reproduced through information security infrastructures. However, this new panopticon is no longer based on the architectural design of prisons or schools, but on the algorithmic order of data flows. Digital panopticism operates through the constant recording, analysis, and classification of individuals' online behaviors, communication histories, and social relations (Lyon, 2018).

Today, information security policies appear to be implemented for the protection of individuals' online existence, yet these practices of protection often result in the restriction of individual privacy. As Bauman and Lyon (2013) describe in their concept of "liquid surveillance," modern forms of surveillance are no longer anchored in fixed institutions or centralized authorities; rather, they produce a dispersed logic of monitoring embedded within the digital infrastructure itself. Liquid surveillance refers to a structure in which individuals continuously supply data both to the state and to private sector actors. Users' social media interactions, location data, purchasing preferences, and even health information are collected as "anonymized" data under the framework of information security, yet this anonymity is often merely symbolic.

This condition lies at the heart of Zuboff's (2019) concept of "surveillance capitalism." Surveillance capitalism is a system that generates economic value from individuals' digital traces. In this system, security technologies function simultaneously as tools that protect the user and as instruments that measure, classify, and predict their behavior. Information security systems do not merely provide defense against attacks; they also establish a data-mining infrastructure designed to anticipate and influence user behavior. Therefore, while information security performs a technically protective function, it simultaneously becomes a tool of economic and political control. As Zuboff notes,

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data collected “in the name of security” often circulates across a wide spectrum of uses from targeted advertising to political manipulation.

In this process, the conceptual meaning of privacy has also undergone transformation. Privacy is no longer an absolute state of secrecy but has turned into a “negotiable” value. Individuals voluntarily share their personal data in order to benefit from digital services, gaining in return access, convenience, or social visibility. Han’s (2017) concept of the “transparency society” explains this transformation: the modern individual no longer rejects surveillance but internalizes it as a productive form of social relation. The act of “self-disclosure” in social media practices shows that privacy is now linked not to individual autonomy but to performative identity construction. In this sense, information security functions not as a mechanism that protects privacy but as a normative system that determines which forms of disclosure are considered “safe” or “legitimate.”

This normative system also reveals how the forms of digital power have been transformed. Within the framework of Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, information security has become a technical form of power that governs not only individuals but entire populations. Through cybersecurity policies, states monitor digital populations, identify risk groups, construct threat models, and use this data in national security strategies. This process can be explained through Deleuze’s (1992) notion of the “control society.” Whereas in disciplinary societies power regulates individuals through specific institutions, in the control society power is continuous, timeless, and operates invisibly. Information security technologies constitute the technical infrastructure of this continuous control.

With the digitalization of surveillance society, the classical tension between security and freedom has acquired a new dimension. States and private corporations use the discourse of digital security to manufacture individuals’ consent. The statement “If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear” serves to morally legitimize surveillance. Consequently, individuals come to accept the loss of privacy as the price of security. However, this consent is often less a conscious choice than a reflection of the inescapable nature of technological infrastructures. Since avoiding digital services would mean social exclusion, individuals share their data under a form of voluntary coercion. This condition strengthens the “subjectifying” character of modern power; individuals are no longer merely the objects of surveillance but also its agents (Han, 2017).

Within this framework, information security policies perform a dual function. On one hand, they claim to protect individuals from cyber threats; on the other, this very claim of protection generates a mechanism of constant traceability and accountability. This mechanism gives rise to what Lyon (2018) calls a “logic of digital surveillance”: individuals must authenticate their identities on digital platforms, record their transactions, and document their behaviors through algorithmic systems. Although this digitalization appears to promote transparency and safety, it simultaneously eliminates individual anonymity.

The pervasive expansion of information security technologies has transformed individual privacy from merely a legal concern into an ontological one. Privacy is now defined not through the distinction between public and private spaces but through data access and data control. In this context, “information sovereignty” should be considered a right belonging not only to states but also to individuals. Yet, in practice, this sovereignty often functions in favor of states or corporations. Users’ control over their personal data is restricted by complex privacy policies and platform agreements. This asymmetric structure weakens the individual’s digital autonomy and makes institutional surveillance permanent under the guise of security.

This regime of surveillance also reproduces social inequalities. The power to access and process data is directly related to economic and political resources. Major technology companies, by controlling global data flows, have gained the power to define information security standards. This situation influences state information security policies and blurs the boundaries between public safety and private interest (Deibert, 2013). Consequently, information security becomes a discursive field that mediates the centralization of power in both public and private domains.

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In an environment where digital surveillance has become the norm, the redefinition of privacy emerges not merely as an ethical necessity but as a political imperative. Privacy must be approached within a broad framework that includes individuals' control over their digital identity, the boundaries of consent, and the social consequences of information sharing. In traditional security approaches, privacy was equated with the protection of secrecy; today, privacy signifies "data autonomy." In other words, the right to determine not only what information is hidden but also how it is used has become an integral part of security itself.

The future of information security policies, therefore, depends on the creation of ethical and legal frameworks that can redefine the balance between surveillance and privacy. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) represents a significant step in this direction, yet the equal implementation of such regulations on a global scale remains extremely difficult. This is because information security is, at its core, a power relation: questions such as whose data is protected, whose data is shared, who watches, and who is watched are not technical but political in nature. Hence, the critical examination of information security discourse is essential to making visible the boundaries of freedom in the digital society.

Foucault's (1980) emphasis on the productive nature of power should be recalled here. Security technologies are designed not only to suppress threats but also to produce new forms of behavior and subjectivity. Information security defines the modern subject as a "digital citizen" a citizen who continuously authenticates their identity, shares their data, and remains accountable and traceable. Thus, security is not merely a practice of defense but also a production of subjectivity.

6. CONCLUSION

In the digital age, information security has evolved beyond a mere technical practice of protection to become one of the most dynamic forms of modern power. Cybersecurity technologies not only redefine the sovereignty of states but also reshape the boundaries of individual privacy. Security today is no longer confined to defending against external threats; it operates as a mode of social organization that governs data flows, regulates behaviors, and legitimizes surveillance. Thus, information security should be understood as both a technical and an epistemological-ideological category.

At the technical level, systems such as network defense, data encryption, and critical infrastructure protection ostensibly serve the purpose of safeguarding digital assets. Yet, behind this protective function lies a political apparatus of information control and surveillance. These infrastructures enhance the infrastructural power of states (Mann, 1984), while simultaneously constraining the autonomy of digital subjects. Particularly, AI-driven threat detection systems, due to their opacity, introduce new ethical dilemmas and extend governance into algorithmic domains. The technologization of security has therefore created a new coded form of politics.

At the societal level, the discourse of information security produces the ideological legitimacy of the surveillance society. Foucault's panopticon model has been reconstituted in the form of a digital panopticon operating through data centers and algorithms. Individuals are continuously monitored, measured, and classified in the name of protection. This mode of surveillance forms the core mechanism of what Zuboff (2019) terms "surveillance capitalism," where personal data are transformed into economic value. Information security technologies thus function as the technical infrastructure through which both the state and capital reproduce power.

In this context, the tension between security and privacy emerges as the central paradox of digital society. Individuals willingly surrender their privacy in exchange for access and security; privacy has ceased to be an inherent right and has become a managed privilege. This transformation necessitates a redefinition of freedom itself. In contemporary digital life, freedom is no longer measured by one's ability to escape surveillance but by one's capacity to maintain autonomy even under its constant gaze.

Therefore, the future of information security policies must be shaped not only by technical solutions but also by ethical, legal, and political principles. Genuine digital security requires a

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framework that guarantees not only the resilience of systems but also the sovereignty of individuals over their own data. This calls for a redefinition of security from a mechanism that merely protects individuals to one that empowers them.

Ultimately, information security stands as one of the most powerful forms of authority in the digital era. Through its dual function of protection and control, it embodies the central contradiction of modernity. Hence, information security should not be perceived solely as a technical issue but as a constitutive axis of social order, freedom, and digital citizenship. Only by approaching it in this way can the balance between surveillance and liberty be ethically reestablished in the digital age.

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