

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



THE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES PREVENTING DIGITAL  
NEWSROOMS IN TURKEY FROM ADAPTING TO NEW MEDIA

GRADUATE THESIS

ŞÜKRÜ OKTAY KILIÇ

January, 2017

Şükürü Oktay Kılıç

M.A.

2017

THE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES PREVENTING DIGITAL  
NEWSROOMS IN TURKEY FROM ADAPTING TO NEW MEDIA

ŞÜKRÜ OKTAY KILIÇ

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

NEW MEDIA

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

January, 2017

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES PREVENTING DIGITAL NEWSROOMS IN  
TURKEY FROM ADAPTING TO NEW MEDIA

ŞÜKRÜ OKTAY KILIÇ

APPROVED BY:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eylem YANARDAĞOĞLU Kadir Has University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pantelis VATIKIOTIS Kadir Has University

Asst. Prof. Dr. Tolga ÇEVİKEL Galatasaray University

APPROVAL DATE: 16/01/2017

“I, Şükrü Oktay Kılıç, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been  
indicated in the thesis.”

---

ŞÜKRÜ OKTAY KILIÇ



## **Table of Content**

**Abstract**

**Özet**

**Acknowledgements**

1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Research Methodology.....	3
2. Online Journalism in the First Internet Era .....	6
2.1 Main Characteristics of Early News Sites.....	7
2.2 Traditional Content Types in a New Medium.....	8
2.3 First Digital-born News Sites in Turkey .....	10
3. The Emergence of Social Media and Its Impact on Online Newsrooms .....	12
3.1 Disruptors and Shift in Social Media Strategies .....	13
3.2 Reluctance of Online News Media in Turkey.....	16
4. Economic Challenges.....	19
4.1 Business Models .....	19
4.2 Gift Economy .....	21
4.3 Dependency on Online Advertising.....	22
5. The State of Online Advertising Industry in Turkey .....	24
6. Social Media Dilemma for News Organisations: Clicks or Engagements?.....	30
6.1 Shifting Strategies .....	31
6.2 Native Video .....	32
6.3 Business Models for Social Content .....	34
7. Journalists and Their Responses to Changing Expectations .....	36
8. Media Owners and Executives' Focus on Short Term Goals .....	41
8.1 The Current State of Political Environment in the Country.....	43
9. Summary and Conclusion .....	46
References .....	52

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES PREVENTING DIGITAL NEWSROOMS IN TURKEY FROM ADAPTING TO NEW MEDIA**

Şükrü Oktay Kılıç

Master of Arts in New Media

Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eylem Yanardağođlu

January, 2017

The purpose of this thesis is to reveal the significant challenges that digital newsrooms in Turkey have been facing to adapt to newly emerging organisational structures, technologies, platforms, tools, storytelling techniques and business models in new media environment. This study scrutinises how production, distribution and consumption of online news content have evolved from 1996 to present with the emergence of the Internet, social media and related technological advancements in chronological order by going through previously published researches and interviews done with journalists. Face-to-face interviews conducted with selected media experts, editor-in-chiefs and news editors working in online newsrooms of major news media outlets show that both traditional and digital-born news media in Turkey have been having a hard time keeping up with the needs of ever-changing digital media landscape. The significant challenges preventing digital newsrooms of major media organisations in Turkey from adapting to new media are examined under four main topics which are the business models, journalists, media owners and current state of political environment in the country.

Keywords: Online journalism, digital newsrooms, new media, online news, social media, business model

## ÖZET

### TÜRKİYE’DE DİJİTAL HABER MERKEZLERİNİN YENİ MEDYAYA ADAPTASYONU ÖNÜNDEKİ GÜÇLÜKLER

Şükrü Oktay Kılıç

Yeni Medya, Yüksek Lisans

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Eylem Yanardağoğlu

Ocak, 2017

Bu tezin amacı, Türkiye’deki dijital haber merkezlerinin yeni medya organizasyon yapıları, araçları, teknolojileri, platformları, hikâye anlatıcılığı teknikleri ve iş modellerine adapte olmalarının önündeki zorlukları ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmada, internet ve sosyal medya ile bağlantılı teknoloji ve platformlarla birlikte haberin üretim, dağıtım ve tüketim süreçlerinin nasıl evrildiği, bu konuda yapılmış araştırma ve incelemelerden faydalanılarak 1996’dan bugüne kronolojik olarak irdelenmiştir. Türkiye’de en çok ziyaretçiye erişen haber organizasyonlarının dijital departmanlarının yöneticileri ve editörleri ile gerçekleştirilen yüz yüze röportajlar, hem geleneksel hem de doğuştan dijital haber sitelerinin son dönemde dünyadaki yeni medya ile bağlantılı gelişmelere ayak uydurmakta güçlük çektiğini göstermiştir. Türkiye’deki ana akım haber organizasyonlarının yeni medyaya adaptasyonu önündeki güçlükler; iş modelleri, gazeteciler, sermaye sahipleri ve politik ortam olmak üzere dört ana başlık altında incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnternet gazeteciliği, dijital haber merkezleri, yeni medya, online haber, sosyal medya, iş model

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Eylem Yanardağođlu, for her continuous support, encouragement and guidance. I am also grateful for the willingness of my 10 interviewees to share their insights about the challenges they face in adapting to newly emerging platforms, technologies, tools, storytelling techniques and business models in ever-transforming digital media landscape. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my parents and friends for providing me with inspiration and encouragement, without them this study would not have been possible.

## **1. Introduction**

Traditional news media companies in Turkey, similarly with major global news outlets, rushed to launch their websites starting from mid 1990s in order to gain leading positions by taking advantages of being pioneers in the newly emerging medium that was believed to bring great opportunities for them to expand the range of their commercial products (Çevikel, 2004). The main purpose of online departments of traditional news outlets, consisted of mainly small teams of young journalists with relatively better computer skills, was to repurpose the news content commissioned for print or television to keep their websites updated without needing to face significant additional costs of content production.

As the Internet gave people opportunity, which only large media corporations had once, to build their own independent online news organisations with affordable costs, the number of digital-born news sites started to increase in the same period.

However, during the years between 1995 and 2001, which is considered as the first Internet era, digital-born media companies, as well as traditional ones, did not manage to provide their readers with the Internet-specific news content and content types. They rather simply repackaged print and television news in their websites.

New platforms, technologies, disruptive media startups, storytelling techniques and business models have been introduced in the online news industry in parallel with the

rise of social media and the steady increase in the Internet penetration rate worldwide in the second Internet era. Both the success that global digital-born media startups have had and social media giants' shifting strategies to become the hosts of news content urged traditional media companies to go through restructures in their organizations to embrace new media instead of fighting it.

After analyzing the significant developments in the online news industry in the first Internet era (Chapter 2) and the second one (Chapter 3) in chronological order by going through previously published researches and interviews, this study examines why online news media outlets in Turkey, in contrast to the global media organizations, have been quite slow to shift to new media under four main topics determined based on face-to-face interviews conducted with selected digital media experts, chief editors and senior online news editors of major online media companies in their offices.

This study will attempt to answer the following questions in order to explore what the significant challenges that prevent digital newsrooms in Turkey from adapting to new media are:

- What business models do online news organizations implement to generate income? (Chapter 4)
- What is the current state of online advertising market? (Chapter 5)
- How do shifting strategies of social media companies impact digital news outlets? (Chapter 6)

- Do journalists working in online newsrooms have a good grasp of newly emerging platforms, technologies and content types? (Chapter 7)
- What are the difficulties chief editors of digital news outlets facing to convince media owners to invest more in digital? (Chapter 8)
- Does the present state of political environment have effect on investment decisions of digital news media companies? (Chapter 8.1)

Lastly, this study will attempt to reveal what needs to be done to accelerate the new media transformation of news media companies in Turkey. (Chapter 9)

### **1.1 Research Methodology**

To be able to answer the questions mentioned above, I prefer to use qualitative research methods. Even though quantitative research would be useful to reflect the state of digital news media industry of a country, it is not enough alone when it comes to give the meaning of what practices, statistics and data show. What I am looking for at the first place is rather to examine the reasons behind why Turkish digital news media market has still been reluctant to keep up with the digital shift happening in the global news media industry in recent years while major media companies have made great efforts to take leading positions in new media environment. Since my goal is to go further than providing overall information about the Turkish digital news media landscape that can be obtained from quantitative methods I prefer to use qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are implemented when the main aim is to provide deeper understanding on a specific matter (Silverman, 200) and interviews are considered as one of the most adequate method

when perspectives of practitioners are believed to be required to explore the subject of a study (Brinkmann, 2013). Therefore, I conducted qualitative interviews with 10 digital media experts, editor-in-chiefs and online news editors of some of the most visited news sites in Turkey.

The interviewees have been chosen by considering their representative roles in digital departments of media companies that they are currently working or worked for with the view of their opinions, as the insiders, would help me to reveal the challenges being faced by their organisations in adapting to new media environment.

Digital media experts, chief editors and online news editors with whom I conducted face-to-face qualitative interviews during March 2015 and October 2016 were:

1. Bülent Ayanoğlu, Editor-in-chief, Milliyet Online
2. Kaan Kayabalı, CEO and Co-Founder, Onedio
3. Yusuf Özhan, Digital Media Group Coordinator, Es Medya
4. Bülent Mumay, Former Digital Media Group Coordinator, Hürriyet Online
5. Can Tüzüner, Former Head of Social Media Trend and Traffic, Hürriyet Online
6. Hüseyin Narin, News Editor, Milliyet Online
7. Ali Özgür İnan, News Editor, Milliyet Online
8. Kübra Akalın, News Editor, Posta Online
9. Murat Kıvanç, News Editor, Hürriyet Online
10. Demet Bilge, News Editor Vatan Online

Ayanođlu, Kayabalı, Özhan, Mumay and Tüzüner were asked about their take on the current state of digital news media in Turkey, digital strategies that their organisations implementing and significant challenges that they think online journalism industry in the country has been facing. The questions asked senior online news editors Narin, İnan, Akalın, Kıvanç and Bilge focused on their daily routines, workflows, working conditions and training opportunities.

Even though my perspective, as a journalist working in the field of news media for six years, on Turkish-language digital media can be considered as critical, I was very careful while preparing the interview questions for this study to avoid the risk of influencing the answers of the interviewees.

The face-to-face interviews conducted with 10 practitioners in the digital news media industry in Turkey are supported with the findings of latest surveys, reports and researches published by both global and local media organisations, institutes and market research companies, as well as participatory observations carried out in the online newsrooms.

## **2. Online Journalism in the First Internet Era**

In 1997, I have promoted as the director of Ihlas-net, one of the very first Internet service provider companies of Turkey, and there were only 30-40 Turkish language websites on the Internet back then. I did not know much about how the Internet works. My only advantage was that I was good at Microsoft Word (Laughter). After a few months of tackling to understand this new world, I launched one of Turkey's first digital-born news websites called netgazete.com in 1998. I thought that many people would rush to the site once I launch it, but it did not, of course, happen. Because the rate of households with the Internet access was very low and the connection speed was too slow. Nobody seemed to be caring about online news and it was very disappointing in the beginning (Ayanoglu, B. 2016, personal communication 20 October)

What Bülent Ayanoglu, 53-year-old veteran journalist, now editor-in-chief at Milliyet Online which is among Turkey's most-visited websites, has to tell about the early years of online journalism based on his personal experience indicates important keywords explaining the state of digital news media in the country in mid 1990s.

Similarly with global media organisations, major news outlets in Turkey, too, have started to launch websites of their newspapers, magazines, television and radio channels in 1996 (Çevikel, 2004).

There were four main reasons for why legacy news outlets in Turkey rushed to move online in mid 1990s.

The Internet had been seen as the arrival of next big thing that would create its own economy with “very high valuations” by media companies. This perspective led them to see the Internet as a new medium where they should invest in to expand the range of their commercial products (Cevikel, 2004; Küng & Picard & Towse, 2008).

Widespread predictions suggesting that traditional journalism and its business models would die in a short span of time with the rise of digital journalism and the Internet economy pushed legacy news organisations to move online swiftly (Lasica, 1996).

Profit-oriented news organisations were enthusiastic to take certain advantages of being pioneer players of the newly emerging industry to gain leading positions.

Many media corporations in Turkey such as Dogan, Cukurova, Bilgin, Uzan and Dogus entered the sector by establishing their own Internet service provider companies. As there was a need of making the Turkish language Internet space more attractive in the eyes of customers who they aimed at selling access to the Internet, they launched the online versions of their traditional news brands (Çevikel, 2004).

## **2.1 Main Characteristics of Early News Sites**

It was mainly young journalists, with better computer skills than rest of newsrooms, who were appointed to work for online departments of newspapers and television channels in the first Internet era that took place between 1995-2001 according to Ayanoglu. He states that the newspapers’ main purpose with their websites were gaining prestige rather than covering latest news in real time in the early years of digital journalism. “What we were doing was basically updating the website once a day with some of the news published in

print edition at the start.” (Ayanoğlu, B. 2016, personal communication, 20 October)

Studies analysing the state of digital journalism in the early years of the Internet and the interviews conducted with news media executives and journalists who were managing the online operations of global established news outlets show that the organisation and structure of online newsrooms in Turkey were similar with the ones in the U.S. and Europe.

Major news media companies took the advantage of being able to repurpose the news content commissioned for newspapers or television channels in order to keep their websites updated without facing the significant increase in the costs of their content production operations. As websites of the traditional news outlets funded by major media companies had enough financial resources to advertise themselves to the Internet users, they managed to dominate the online journalism industry in Turkey. Therefore, Turkish language digital news media landscape was quickly filled by news content commissioned for traditional mediums.

## **2.2 Traditional Content Types in a New Medium**

In 2003, a study analysing 23 newspapers’ websites in Turkey reveals that most of online news content published on those sites was repurposed from print news. There were only Hürriyet and Milliyet that provide additional digital-only news stories along with print news in their websites according to the study (Çevikel, 2004). Similarly, another study conducted by researchers from 16 European countries in 2003 shows that 70 per cent of online news were exactly the same with the ones

published in newspapers (Van der Wurff & Lauf, 2005). With the exceptions of online sections of a few major global news companies' websites such as CNN Interactive (Sorensen, 1998) and The New York Times' CyberTimes (Nisenholtz, 2001), most of news websites updated their content once or twice a day by taking their traditional brands' publication deadlines into consideration (Salwen, Garrison, Driscoll, 2005).

There was only Hürriyet Online that was using audio and video along with text and image in its news articles out of 23 online newspapers, according to Çevikel's study. (Çevikel, 2004) Likewise, Bernard Gwertzman, veteran journalist shifted to new media in 1996 as senior editor, then editor of The New York Times on the Web, said, in his discussion with Martin Nisenholtz, chief executive officer of New York Times Digital, about their five years on nytimes.com, that they were not able to use even graphics since the technology that they had was so primitive in the early years of Internet journalism. (Gwertzman, 2001) However, it was not what online newspaper Nisenholtz was envisioning. He believed, 'naively' he says, that the online news articles should be combined with sound, video, animation and software itself could make the news reports more interactive enabling readers to manipulate them as they consume them. The New York Times tried out what Nisenholtz dreamed of with its digital-only section Cyber Times. The editor of the section Rob Fixmer put simulations and animations inside of articles. Nisenholtz narrated the result that they got as follows:

“They didn't work. They worked! But people did not use them all that much. I still think this will happen. I think that it require much better technology and broad band” (Nisenholtz, 2001).

Looking at the new media storytelling techniques consistently implemented or experimented with by digital news media organisations today, we see that Nisenholtz was quite right about his vision all along. However, the Internet did not change the way how news produced and presented dramatically and create its own content types during the years between 1995 and 2001. Traditional news outlets mainly considered their websites as additional distribution and marketing channels to reach wider audience in the first Internet era.

### **2.3 First Digital-born News Sites in Turkey**

The Internet gave individuals opportunity to build their own media organisations as it has reduced costs of distribution dramatically. Digital-born news media companies have started to enter the industry with the arrival of the Internet in mid 1990s.

Turkey's first digital-born news site XN was launched in 1996. Net Gazete and other small-scale online news outlets launched their websites in the late 1990s. The number of digital-born news sites significantly increased in 2001 as the country went through an economic crisis and many journalists who lost their jobs in traditional news media took the Internet to continue their work (Çevikel, 2004). Independent news sites aggregating stories mostly from news agencies, newspapers and television channels were able to put very little original content to the country's online news

circle and did not have the same competition conditions with traditional media companies in the first Internet era for mainly economic reason.



### **3. The Emergence of Social Media and Its Impact on Online**

#### **Newsrooms**

Interactive websites and content types created in combination with video, sound, picture and animation have become one of the essences of Web in the second Internet era, which has been “bringing the extreme changes promised by the first” (Küng & Picard & Towse, 2008).

In contrast to first Internet era, the emergence of new platforms and technologies, often associated with Web 2.0, a term popularised by Tim O Reilly to refer to a more interactive and participatory characteristics of digital products and content (Newman, 2009), the second Internet era changed the way how online news content produced and distributed in many respects.

The emergence of social media platforms, allowing Internet users to create their own network and communicate with each other through content (Alejandro, 2010), along with consistent progress in the Internet penetration rates worldwide, has been one of the most important developments occurred in the second Internet era so far. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, with their hundreds of millions of active users, have created new content types which are typical to the Internet. They changed information and news consumption habits of

users who have had opportunity to play active role in content creation and get content that they create to broader audience. Moreover, they have become most important trigger for news media companies to rebuild their old digital strategies considering their visitors “as a collection of isolated individuals” (Peretti, 2016).

### **3.1 Disruptors and Shift in Social Media Strategies**

Traditional global news media companies started to build new dedicated departments within their newsrooms with new posts such as social media editors, breaking news reporters, community managers in order to deliver their journalism to wider and younger audience on those platforms as of 2009 (Alejandro, 2010). Most important task of those new departments was to drive as many traffic as possible with intriguing social media posts, mainly created out of online news content published on their websites. However, digital-born media outlets such as Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Vox and Vice have challenged the early social media strategies of traditional news outlets by using social networks for not only generating traffic to their websites but also providing their followers with newly emerging content types such as quizzes, listicles, interactive maps, graphs, info cards, charts, short, information filled, appealing videos and GIFs produced uniquely for those platforms and building a “more intimate connection with audiences” (Peretti, 2016).

After taking hold a huge distribution power which major media companies had once, reaching to the level where it is almost impossible for any media companies to compete with, social media giants, as well, have enhanced their investments in news content by hiring news editors, launching new products and platforms, aiming at

transforming themselves into hosts of content types which are typical to their platforms instead of being used only as traffic sources to news sites.

The rise of the digital-born media companies and native content strategies of social media platforms together have made it inevitable for traditional news media companies to go through extensive restructures in their operations.

Digital-born entertainment and news content startups have had in terms of producing content in creative ways, developing new business models to earn money from those content, steadily increasing numbers of visitors and followers they reach with their websites and social media pages, along with enhancing investments made by social media platforms in online news industry, have urged traditional news media outlets to transform. Traditional news media outlets' efforts to keep up with new media age can be best seen in The New York Times' comprehensive internal digital innovation report prepared by a committee including strategy managers, reporters and news editors with different areas of specialisation in 2014.

The report, ironically obtained by BuzzFeed, analysing the recent moves of both the paper's traditional and digital-born competitors aiming at reorganising their newsrooms based on digital-first strategies, increasing role of social media platforms, technologies, and tools in digital news industry, admits that The New York Times was failing in understanding the success of digital-born media companies which gained thanks to their "sophisticated social, search and community-building tools and strategies". The report describes digital born media companies as disruptive

innovators and explains how they disrupted comfort zones of traditional news outlets as follows:

Disruptors introduce new products that, at first, do not seem like a threat. Their products are cheaper, with poor quality — to begin with. For BuzzFeed, a disruptive innovation might be social media distribution. Over time, disruptors improve their product, usually by adapting a new technology. The flash-point comes when their products become “good enough” for most customers. They are now poised to grow by taking market share from incumbents (The New York Times Company, 2014).

The report also reveals that even though the significant drop in homepage, in which online news outlets used to rely on in order to distribute their content, and minutes spent per visitor, the company was late to embrace social media platforms, new media content types, technologies and tools. The New York Times has gone through a digital transformation, according to a spokesperson of the paper who spoke to the Mashable, by implementing what the report recommends. They have built better personalised tools for its readers, started using social media platforms more effectively, created/enlarged new departments dedicated to innovation and audience growth, set training programmes for its staff, updated the website with features where readers can follow stories easier, invested in new content types such as quizzes and tried to find ways of repackaging and capitalizing on its older content to remake itself for new media age over the past three years (Fiegerman, 2016).

After going through internal discussions, restructures and reorganisations in their operations and strategies, most traditional news companies around the world, especially in the U.S. and Europe, have been now embracing social media platforms, new tools, features, digital-first strategies and newly emerging content types

(Alejandro, 2010). Despite the problems and challenges that news media organisations have been facing in this huge shift to digital, traditional news outlets, with their increasing investments, proved that they will be in competition with digital born media companies in new media age.

Social media has been becoming a news source for more and more users every passing year according to the Reuters Institute's annual digital news reports. Surveys the institute conducted with more than 50 thousand Internet users in 26 countries show that 51 per cent of its entire sample use social media platforms as a source where they find, read, watch and share news in 2016. Facebook is the most popular news source for users, according to the report, that has 1.79 billion monthly active users as of the 3rd quarter of 2016 (Statista, 2016). The report also reveals that proportion of the Internet users in Turkey who use social media as a news source is even higher than the worldwide average. 73 per cent of the Internet users says that they use social networks as a news source in Turkey (Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 2016).

### **3.2 Reluctance of Online News Media in Turkey**

Despite the increasing number of users who turn to social media platforms for news, major mainstream news outlets in Turkey are still reluctant to go through digital transformation processes and investing in new platforms, tools and content types in order to adapt to new media age. The number of digital-born independent news companies has been increasing, however, they, with the only exception of Onedio which provided their users with news content in its homepage since 2015 but still

recognised with its entertainment content, have not been considered as threats by traditional ones urging them to adapt to digital-first strategies. On the contrary, digital-born news media companies such as Ensonhaber, Internethaber, T24 and Diken, mostly built by veteran journalists who lost their jobs in the mainstream media, have becoming more similar to traditional news media outlets day by day. They implement traditional news outlets' primitive ways of generating traffic such as providing their readers with the cheapest possible content mostly produced for print or television, implementing click-based social media and homepage strategies in order to be able to compete with them in terms of reach. Non-profit independent digital news outlets such as Bianet, 140journos, dokuz8haber, Medyascope, which usually rely on funds and donations, on the other hand, have been trying to use new media specific storytelling techniques in their reporting and embrace native social media strategies to reach broader audiences. However, because of the limited resources and staff, they have not been able to aim at taking leading positions in the online news media industry in Turkey. Traditional news media outlets have been still dominating the online news industry. The huge shift happening in the media industries around the world, has barely started to occur in Turkey's digital news media landscape.

The reasons lying behind why digital news media organisations in Turkey are reluctant to embrace social media platforms, newly emerging technologies, tools and storytelling techniques will be analysed under four main topics in the following chapters.

First of all, I will examine business models that news media organisations implement in order to generate income from their digital operations. The main focus will be on online advertising as it is the main source of revenue for digital news media industry in Turkey. Secondly, I will take a look at how journalists working at online newsrooms are responding to ever-changing needs of digital news media landscape. Working conditions, training opportunities and available technologies in online newsrooms will also be analysed based on interviews and participatory observations. Thirdly, the significant challenges that the interviewed chief editors face in trying to convince media owners and executives to allocate more resources to online departments will be examined. Finally, I will analyse how the current state of political environment in the country affects news media companies' digital investment decisions.

## **4.Economic Challenges**

One of the major challenges that both legacy and digitally native news media organisations have been facing in Turkey is building healthy business models to generate sufficient amount of online revenues. To debate their quality of journalism without analysing the economics of the Internet can lead us to deficient conclusions.

### **4.1 Business Models**

There are three fundamental types of business models that enable profit-oriented news providers to generate online revenues with their websites, which are sales of advertising spaces to commercial companies, digital subscription packages and other products to readers. (Gallaugher et al., 2001; Ihlström & Palmer, 2002)

Sales of advertising is the most frequently used online revenue source among these three (Küng & Picard & Towse, 2008) as the other sources of revenue require news providers to differentiate themselves from others and which seems to be impossible in Turkish news media market where almost every online newsrooms, most of them do not have dedicated reporters or correspondents, rely on same newspapers, television channels, local and global news agencies for their news reporting.

Digital subscription, which has been a healthy revenue source for significant number of news outlets in the US and Europe, is not at the heart of publishers' financial strategies in Turkish news industry. There are only two digital news outlets partially implement digital subscription as a business model in Turkey.

Sözcü Online has recently launched its ad-free version of its website for those who subscribe by paying 11 Turkish Liras for a month while restricting visitors to access to the articles if they use an ad blocker. The website still continue to be free for its readers who do not mind using it with ads around. Therefore, Sözcü's decision of launching ad-free version of the website for its subscribers should be considered as a measure for preserving its advertising revenues as number of people using ad-blocking software has continued to increase over the past several years in Turkey. 31 per cent of online news consumers use ad blockers in Turkey, making it the 3rd country with most ad blocker users out of 26 countries. (Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 2016).

Milliyet Online is "selling - access to - its searchable archives" (Ihlstrom & Palmer, 2002) including its print issues from 1950 to 2007 for 10 Turkish Liras for each page under the link of [gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr](http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr) while all of its daily updated content remains accessible for free.

Besides, Sözcü and Milliyet do not use those digital subscription models as main source of their online revenues, and incomes earned from selling online content are far away from being sufficient to cover their digital operations.

One of the most important reasons for why there has not been a single success story in Turkish online news market in terms of creating a digital subscription model as a healthy business model is that the social structures in the countries in which online news outlets succeeded in creating profitable models by selling news content and Turkey are very different according to Bülent Mumay who worked in top executive positions, lastly as digital media group coordinator at Hürriyet Online. Mumay argues that traditional news organisations and publishers are reluctant to take any risk to invest in their digital operations in order to improve the quality of journalism they produce on their online platforms as they have not figured it out how to convince online news consumers to pay for their content (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March).

The other type of business models for online news organisations is non-news sales.

Even though some online news organisations in Europe has managed to generate revenue by selling different types of online puzzles, personalised tips about beauty or health (Harvey, 2004) non-news categories of news sites, as well, can be accessed free of charge in Turkey.

#### **4.2 Gift Economy**

It is important to note that providing information free of charge does not make news media organisations non-profit companies. Selling data of their visitors to advertisers is enough to make them players of “commodified Internet economy” (Fuchs, 2009).

As all mainstream news sites in Turkey, just as typical social networking sites and many other Web 2.0 applications, free to users, they compete with each other in generating more traffic to their websites, gain more users in their mobile applications and followers in accounts that they have on social media platforms. The more unique visitors, page views, followers, users that news media outlets get, the more revenue they generate by selling advertising spaces to commercial companies. Therefore, media companies provide their readers with free content as gifts (Fuchs, 2009) in

order to sell them as a commodity to third parties. News media companies, with their use of advertising models as the main source of generating revenue, manufacture audiences by offering them free content as gifts and once they gain significant number of readers consuming their content, sell their time to advertisers as a commodity. Audience's role in generating economic value for the media companies, of course, did not start with the Internet - this is the very same reason why newspapers and magazines are cheap to purchase, and many news channels are not charging viewers to watch their programmes- but it is clear that the Internet has enabled them to distribute the content that they produce to a wider audience with much lesser costs and collect more personalised data on their readers. The Internet users are actually working as "audience-labour" (Nixon, 2014) without knowing it while visiting news websites and spending time reading, watching, or listening to news on these websites as their time are "essential component of the contemporary economy and its structure of value" (Burnett & Marshall, 2003).

#### **4.3 Dependency on Online Advertising**

As most profit-oriented media organisations in Turkey have been having a hard time building healthy business models by selling information, they are heavily relying on online advertising as a source of their revenue. Therefore, to collect personal data of their visitors has become quite important for news media organisations in order to not only create influential editorial, engagement or audience development strategies but also in order to "use the collected user data to offer better-targeted advertising or to sell additional products to visitors" (Schiff, 2006). Most of the news sites in Turkey require registration only if visitors want to leave comment on news articles.

However, they are still able to collect data of their visitors by using internal data management systems, third party analytics services and comprehensive insights shared by social media sites. Hürriyet took a further step to collect more personalised data of its visitors by launching Hürriyet Sosyal which requires visitors to sign up for the site in order to access to opinion pages and use some additional features as creating profile, curating homepage of the site and engaging with columnists in May 2014. Vuslat Doğan Sabancı, chairwoman of the Hürriyet newspaper, argued that with the company's investments in Big Data, they improved satisfaction of its users and advertisers, in a speech she gave in the Smartcon 2015 conference in Istanbul May 2016. She explained the company's aim with Hürriyet Sosyal as "presenting more efficiently targeted consumer base to the advertiser" along with providing users with better personalised content based on their interests. (Sabancı, 2015) In July 2015, two months after her speech promoting Hürriyet's success in its data strategy, the company gave up on the Hürriyet Sosyal due to the decrease in its traffic, lifted access restriction on opinion pages for its non-signed-up visitors and continued with earlier version of hurriyet.com.tr.

## **5. The State of Online Advertising Industry in Turkey**

Online advertising revenues of news media outlets in Turkey have been increasing year by year. However, according to media executives whom were interviewed for this study, the size of online advertising market in the country is still not sufficient to improve the quality of journalism that digital news media organisations produce by investing in new technologies, platforms, storytelling techniques, staff and training programmes. While revenue expected to be generated by selling online advertising amounts to US\$ 80,178m in the U.S., it amounts to US\$1,032m in Turkey in 2016 (Statista, 2016). According to Interactive Advertising Bureau Europe, online advertising market with value of €36.4m surpassed the television advertising market in 2015 in Europe (IAB Europe, 2016). Likewise in the U.S., according to the eMarketer's report published in March 2016, advertisers will spend more on online advertising than on television in 2017. (eMarketer, 2016) However, The Association of Advertising Agencies in Turkey's report published in March 2016, reveals that despite of the 25,4 per cent growth in online advertising market in 2016, it remains small comparing to television advertising spendings - in the vicinity of 22,9 per cent of total advertising spendings while the same rate is 50,5 per cent for television (Reklamcılar Derneği, 2016).

Interviewed chief editors working in digital departments of major news media companies consider the present state of advertising industry in Turkey as a main

factor which prevents online newsrooms from adapting to new media environment. Being heavily dependent on online advertising as a source of income causes various problematic practices in digital news media industry in Turkey.

It is not indigenous to only the Turkish market, of course, however, it can be easily noted that home pages and article pages of sites of most major news organisations in Turkey are surrounded by more banner and pop-up ads than the ones belonging to global news outlets. It is almost impossible to watch news videos on news sites without waiting at least 5 seconds for skipping pre-roll video ads.

As online advertising based on display or click has the biggest share in the market (IAB Turkey, 2016), meaning that the more page views news media organisations get, the more money they earn from ads, they use “cheap ways” (Kayabalı, K. 2016, personal communication, 31 March) of generating traffics to their websites. Most visited news sites in Turkey produce more entertainment content on topics such as celebrities, sexuality than news content, copy-paste other news organisations' content without giving credit to them in a proper way, use very problematic language on news about women, apply clickbait social media posts and headlines, auto-refresh article pages in a very short span of time, create endless gallery pages and use same information with different forms to enhance the number of gallery pages in order to generate more visitors and minutes spent per visitor.

Kaan Kayabalı, CEO and founder of Onedio which has been long criticised for not investing in original news content, believes that online advertising revenues remain quite small in Turkey in comparison to the U.S. “Unfortunately, online advertising

revenues remain small. Amount of money content sites earn from a single visitor in the U.S. twenty times more than Turkey”. He argues that even though digital investments in the US are capable of converting themselves into cash, they, as well, have questions in their minds regarding profitability of their initiatives. According to Kayabalı, online incomes constitute less than 10 per cent of total revenues of traditional news media companies and decisions in meetings of boards of management made accordingly. Kayabalı argues that despite the fact that many online news consumers complain about seeing mostly irrelevant women pictures, clickbait content on news sites that they visit to be informed about the country and the world, news outlets keep applying these practices in order to increase their online income coming from advertising by gaining more traffic to their websites. The success four-year-old start-up Onedio has had in terms of reach without applying click-bait headlines or social media posts can be considered as a good example for online departments of major traditional news outlets. Kayabalı states that even though he is aware of that he can increase the Onedio’s web traffic even more and generate higher amount of advertising revenue if Onedio produces clickbait content as its competitors do, he does not believe that his startup can build a healthy relationship with its users by misleading them (Kayabalı, K. 2016, personal communication, 31 March).

Bülent Mumay agrees that it does make sense for a startup aiming at creating loyal, returning visitors by avoiding clickbait content. However, when it comes to mainstream news media outlets, he argues that there is no shortcut solution to the problem as follows:

Think about a website (referring to Hurriyet.com.tr) which generates 4.5 million visitors, 60 to 70 million page views per day. If they stop doing clickbait today, this traffic will decrease at least 30 per cent. Managers of online departments of news media organisations cannot afford this loss, because along with editorial strategies, they are also responsible of making sure that the company earns the amount of money that is satisfactory for the owners, and it puts them under pressure. Advertising income and hence number of traffic the website gets are still one of the most important success measure for managers. They unfortunately produce or allow their team to produce clickbait content because they see it as only way to keep the numbers up. Because it is how the Internet economy works in Turkey (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March).

Mumay considers online news outlets' dependency on click-based advertising revenue as the most important reason for why there has been that many clickbait content in almost every major news sites. He argues that native advertising model would be an answer to how news outlets can reduce this dependency. However, advertisers in Turkey does not quite understand what native advertising is and why it is better than click-based advertising for their brand, according to Mumay:

We visited a lot of advertisers to convince them to have an agreement which is not based on clicks but qualified sponsored-content. We offer them creating in-depth content rather than placing their banner on the website. As they know the content will not be read as many people as those who display their banner ad, they do not quite understand why they should pay same amount of money for a sponsored-content. (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March)

Major news organisations in Turkey have been losing their loyal readers due to clickbait content strategies as online news consumers have now alternative sources - independent online news startups such as Bianet, 140journos, dokuz8haber, Diken and Turkish services of global news outlets such as Al Jazeera, BBC, Deutsche Welle - for news. Nevertheless, Mumay emphasises that because the number of traffic that major news outlets generate far more than those alternative news sources do, managers of traditional new media organisations, he included himself as well, are

not able to evaluate the situation properly from time to time. “They drive huge numbers of traffic, so you do not see that 1 per cent of your loyal readers left you due to clickbait content,” he says and suggests that therefore, mainstream news media do not consider this loss as a potential threat for their brands.

Yusuf Özhan, digital media group coordinator of ES Medya owning Star, Akşam, Güneş newspapers and 360, 24 television channels, argues that news organisations produce clickbait social media posts and content when they do not believe in the power of content they provide their users with. He believes that online news consumers in new media environment are very active and critical, they see when a news organisation is trying to push them to click on a link with tricks and refuse to leave social media platforms to read that content. Therefore, strategies aiming at driving more traffic to websites with clickbait content rather than informing readers in a proper way are not sustainable for online news media outlets (Özhan, Y. 2016, personal communication, 7 September).

Can Tüzüner, former head of social media trend and traffic of Hürriyet Online, (he was on duty at the time I interviewed him) suggests that as online departments of news media organisations have no any dedicated reporter and correspondent bringing original content in, they all rely on very limited number of news sources. The easiest way of generating traffic, therefore, aggregating sensational news content. He does not admit claims suggesting that news providers aggressively produce that kind of content because online news consumers are highly interested in reading them. “It is wrong to say that most visited news topics are the ones about rapes, harassments, homicides. Human stories, for instance, gets more clicks than all of those topics

mentioned above,” he says. However, Tüzüner believes that generating traffic by producing high-quality news content requires news media outlets to go through a total restructure:

As news media companies, we all report on sexual harassment and rape incidents in a way as if we condemn these kind of incidents and are so sorry and angry that they occur, but in actual fact, we know that it will get a lot of clicks. There is a sort of latent sexuality in the society why this sort of news get a lot of clicks and news media outlets do know it. They do not bring these reports into the forefront to sensitise society, they do it because at the end of the day, the only thing that is important is the number of traffic that they generate. News media outlets need to reorganise themselves in order to keep their traffics up by producing original in-depth news content (Tüzüner, C. 2016, personal communication, 28 March).

According to Tüzüner, being able to provide original news content comes at a price and most publishers consider having reporters or correspondents who can bring original content in too costly.

## **6. Social Media Dilemma for News Organisations: Clicks or Engagements?**

Social media platforms with their native content strategies have been deepening the concerns of digital news outlets about creating profitable business models in Turkey for nearly 3 years now. Turkish language online news departments have started to create their official accounts on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter in early 2009 with the main motivation of using those platforms as new and additional sources of traffic to their websites. News media organisations and social media platforms provided mutual benefits for each other at the start. Social media platforms, with their ever-growing numbers of active users, gave news media organisations opportunity of reaching wider audiences, who they are not capable of engaging with through their own distribution channels. Social networking sites, in return, took advantages of having news organisations providing up-to-date information to make their platforms more attractive and useful for their users. However, the win-win relationship between social networking sites and digital news media has been going through a restructure with the great efforts and investments have been made by the Silicon Valley's giant companies, especially by Facebook, in order to host news content on their platforms natively rather than being only sources of traffic to other websites since 2013.

## 6.1 Shifting Strategies

There have been many new platforms (Medium, Snapchat, Periscope, Apple News), tools (Instant Articles, Accelerated Mobile Pages, Instagram Stories) and features (enabling content creators to upload longer native videos, 360 degree photos/videos, and do live broadcasts) launched/acquired by social media and tech companies over the past three years as they heavily compete with each other to become the main, if not only, source of various type of information. The main characteristic of new content types, tools and features introduced by social media giants is that they do not require users to leave platforms they are on by clicking on links directing them to other websites for consuming the content.

Facebook, with its “video-first strategy” (Guyn, 2016), has had the most significant impact on content and social media strategies of news media outlets. Hours of daily video watch time on the platform has started to be growing consistently in early 2014 with the rise of its native video player which auto-play videos and counts views. Facebook reached 100 million video watch time per day as of January 2016 (Constine, 2016).

Global news media organisations, especially digital-born ones, eagerly or reluctantly, were quick to adapt to Facebook’s shift-to-video strategy even though there were no - have still not been - a proper monetization models put in place. 2014 was the year when the number of video content with its very own characteristics which are typical to Facebook; mostly 1-3 minute long, including subtitles and texts written on scene with at least two colors, a sound selected based on the emotion the content aiming to give consumers, sometimes with presenters telling the story with a humorous

language, has started to fill the news feeds of the platforms' users. To provide and publish those visually appealing videos on Facebook natively, however, comes at a price for online news organisations that consider the platform as only a traffic source to their websites. It is because native video is a content type which is consumed by users in social networking sites and social media strategies of most of legacy news outlets focus on driving as many traffic as possible to their websites by sharing intriguing posts and tweets in order to make users want to visit their websites to consume the whole content.

## **6.2 Native Video**

As digital-born global news media organisations such as BuzzFeed, Vice, Vox are valued not only based on visitors they generate to their websites but also their reach on social media platforms, they did not mind playing the game with Facebook's rules. With the help of those companies, Facebook's hard push on video did not leave any other choice for traditional global news outlets rather than embracing video content in order not to be left out in cold in the battle for reaching younger audience. Therefore, they have started to build/enlarge their video departments and video content has become unarguable dominant content type on social media platforms in two years.

In Turkey, there are only a couple of news outlets, Al Jazeera's digital-only Turkish service Al Jazeera Turk and independent social media news start-up 140journos, using native video on the pages they have on social media platforms as of 2016. One of the main reasons for why both traditional and digitally native news outlets do not

embrace native video, even though they see this social media friendly content type gets more engagements than any other one, is, again, their high dependency on online advertising, according to Can Tüzüner.

Tüzüner believes that as news media in Turkey has been failing in finding ways of generating income rather than display or click-based online advertising, they keep resisting to provide their followers on social media platforms with new media content types, such as infographics, interactive charts, maps, graphs and especially with native videos. “Social media platforms are urging news outlets to produce content uniquely them,” he says and explains the news media organisations’ dilemma with new media content types by giving the native video case as an example.

When you upload a video, for instance, on Facebook natively, you will not be able to generate any traffic to your website out of this post, because you give away the content without asking people to visit your website, meaning that you give up on advertising revenue you would earn by making people watch this video on your player in the website which has pre-play video advertising. On the other hand, you will have more user engagement which helps you to keep growing on the platform such as likes, shares and comments with the native video than you do with a link post. So, it is the dilemma we have been facing. In the end of the day, what we earn money from is the views that we get on our website, not the user engagements we have on Facebook (Tüzüner, C. 2016, personal communication, 28 March).

The number of traffic generated from social media platforms is still the most important, if not only, measure of success for managers, editors, and producers who are responsible of creating and managing strategies on social media platforms in Turkey. Therefore, they put most of their efforts, during the daily operations, on achieving large numbers of traffic by creating and sharing clickable posts on social media platforms.

Tüzüner believes that as long as the number of traffic generated from social networking sites remains the most important role of social media desks, managers and editors of those desks will have no chance to embrace social media specific new media storytelling formats.

The main factor which prevents news outlets from being able to produce content with new media storytelling techniques and use social media platforms as a reporting tool as well as a source for traffic is the high costs of restructuring online newsrooms by creating new departments for emerging platforms and content types, hiring journalists with multi-skills which the new media news industry require or training existing staff, purchasing new technologies and new services, according to Yusuf Özhan.

### **6.3 Business Models for Social Content**

Social media companies, especially Facebook, have been long criticised by news media organisations and other content providers for not offering proper ways of earning money from content produced dedicatedly for those platforms. Facebook has convinced 365 online publishers around the world including The New York Times, BuzzFeed, BBC, The Atlantic, Bild, Spiegel, The Guardian to publish their content directly on its new product Instant Articles which loads articles far more faster within the platform than mobile web by offering to share the advertising revenue that the platform generates for each article page with them in 2015. Hürriyet was the only news organisation from Turkey has signed up for the platform (Hürriyet, 2015).

Other online news organisations in the country that also want to take advantages of Facebook's mobile platform have to face up to loss in online advertising revenue. Similarly, a document obtained by the Wall Street Journal reveals that Facebook has signed contracts worth more than \$50 million with 140 media companies and celebrities to use its live video tool in 2016 (Perlberg & Seetharaman, 2016). It is unknown that if any news organisation from Turkey was among those companies. Those non-transparent agreements carried out between Facebook and news media companies can be considered as the platforms' first steps to encourage news outlets to use its products by not only penalizing those that resist to adopt them with its secret algorithm but also paying them for content they produce for the platform. However, news media companies in Turkey seem not to be able to eagerly adapt to social media platforms' new tools, features and content types until there is transparent, proper monetization models in place for everybody who would like to take.

## **7. Journalists and Their Responses to Changing Expectations**

One of the effects that technological changes in new media environment have had on journalists is that they have been changing the way how journalists do their job, according to John Pavlik (Pavlik, J. 2000), who is among the first scholars researching the effects of new media technologies on journalism (Küng & Picard & Towse, 2008). With the emergence of new technologies, platforms and content types, there are new posts such as social media editors, community managers, data journalists, multimedia editors, interactive designers “have been and are still being created in newsrooms since 2009” (Alejandro, 2010). Meanwhile, new tasks as editing pictures, videos and graphics, producing infographics, maps and charts, creating most shareable social media posts have been added to existing ones expected from journalists to perform in today’s online news media landscape (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March).

Most of the journalists, including chief editors, who work at online departments of both digital-born and legacy news outlets have been mainly shifted to digital from print and broadcast media with traditional mindsets in Turkey. As even most visited news websites with the most crowded newsrooms, usually established by veteran journalists who spent years in traditional media, have been considered as last ditches where journalists who lost their jobs in mainstream news media organisations to work, often for lesser wages, the structure and organisation of digital-born news

media organisations, just as online departments of legacy news media outlets, are not built based on the needs of today's new media landscape.

Journalists, who work under ever-increasing pressure of being able to write and publish as many news articles as possible during their shifts while racing against time since the faster they break a news on social media platforms, the more traffic websites get, find very little time, if any at all, to update themselves by learning essential skills to keep up with perpetually transforming new media environment. It is unfair to expect journalists working in online newsrooms to be able to do everything with equal excellence without putting a vision in place and setting training programmes accordingly, offering them better working conditions and time to think of better ways of telling stories and building proper structures within the organisations enabling transformation of knowledge among them.

As a digital media group coordinator of a legacy news media organisation owning television channels and newspapers, Yusuf Özhan remarks that there are two types of journalists working in his team. The first type involves journalists who do not really know and are not interested in learning how to use new technologies and services efficiently except for need-to-know ones to be able to publish a news article in a website.

The other type is that journalists, often relatively younger ones, who are adapting to new technologies quickly as they see that they can do their job better and improve their careers by being multi-skilled. The first type of journalists, will be eliminated from the industry in time, Özhan believes. The only way of having more of the

second type of journalists in online newsrooms, according to him, is making new technologies and services available not only for those who are working in departments such as new media, social media, video and interactive but also for whole staff of organisations (Özhan, Y. 2016, personal communication, 7 September).

“Everybody is too busy with their daily routines in the newsroom” says Can Tüzüner, who is a bit pessimistic about the structure of online news organisations in which, he believes, journalists are not given chance to gain skills to be able to provide high-quality content enriched by new media storytelling techniques because all online departments of news media focus on generating maximum possible revenue with minimum cost (Tüzüner, C. 2016, personal communication, 28 March).

Bülent Mumay, as well, highlights that the number of tasks what journalists expected to perform at the same time in online newsrooms has been increased significantly and the current organisation and structure of online news departments are too far away from encouraging journalists who shifted to digital from print or broadcasting to become “digital journalists” (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March).

Online news editors, along with chief editors and department managers of digital news outlets, who I interviewed with, state that the main measure of success for their positions is, too, traffic. The insights that news editors share into online newsrooms they work for reveal that there are no proper working conditions, fair workflows,

measurements of success and training programmes have been provided by digital news outlets for journalists in Turkey.

“The motivation of getting the news articles read by as many people as possible push us to write sensational and exaggerating headlines from time to time, I must admit,” says Milliyet’s Ali Özgür İnan:

A news editor writes and publishes 30 to 50 news articles in the website on a regular day. There is a local news department consisted of only two news editors publishing the average number of 700 news stories per day. Therefore, there are even times when we really hate looking at what we write (İnan, A.Ö. 2016, personal communication, 20 October).

Hüseyin Narin, also an online news editor at Milliyet, argues that there is no way a journalist who work under the given conditions in digital news outlets in Turkey can improve her/his skills based on the needs of newly emerging platforms or tools during shifts at work (Narin, H. 2016, personal communication, 20 October).

Number of news stories that a news editor writes per day and the clicks that those stories get are being counted by managements in some online news departments and such practices put journalists under pressure to provide as many news article possible without considering their newsworthiness properly, according to Vatan’s Demet Bilge (Bilge, D. 2015, personal communication, 20 April).

Online news editors have been trying to their job under difficult working conditions according to Hürriyet’s Murat Kıvanç:

We need to be very quick at reflecting the latest updates in the website while thinking of the most interesting headlines, often consisting of a question to make people wonder what the news is about. We do not even afford to have a lunch break for more than 15-20 minutes in busy days (Kıvanç, M. 2015, personal communication, 3 March).

Kübra Akalın, news editor at Posta, believes that there are no proper workflows put in place in online newsrooms. It is “horrible to work” in an digital news industry where, she thinks, priorities always set based on hits and advertising rather than high-quality journalism. The only way of reaching a better state of online journalism in the country, according to Akalın, is rebuilding the whole structure and organisation of digital news outlets from scratch (Akalın, K. 2015, personal communication, 4 April).

## **8. Media Owners and Executives' Focus on Short Term Goals**

Global traditional news media organisations, criticised for failing in seeing the potential that the new media holds for them, have been allocating the significant amount of their resources to digital investments in recent years. New York based research company CB Insights' analysis about the investments of major media companies in digital-born content startups, last updated in October 2016, reveals that 21 traditional media companies including Comcast/NBCUniversal, Walt Disney, Fox, and Axel Springer made \$4.5 billion-worth of investments in digital media companies such as BuzzFeed, Mashable, NowThis and The Dodo (CB Insights, 2016). Along with restructuring digital departments of their own news outlets based on the ever-changing needs of new media landscape, major global news organisations and publishers have also been trying to prepare themselves for the digital future by investing in digital-born media startups.

However, in Turkey, legacy news media companies are not still eager enough to form digital-first strategies since television and print products remain key revenue sources for them. Media owners and executives in top managements of traditional news outlets in the country, therefore, do not take the risk of cannibalising their offline revenues with digital-first strategies. According to Mumay, this is one of the reasons for why owners and top management staff of traditional media companies are not convinced to go through a new media transformation process by allocating

resources in creating and implementing digital-first strategies within their operations, and investing more in new technologies, platforms, and content types.

Mumay suggests that owners of major established media companies are well aware of that revenue sources of their organisations will eventually shift from broadcast and print to digital. However, the main challenge they have been facing, he argues, is that they have not figured it out how to compensate the loss in circulation and advertising revenue of their newspapers with digital investments in the current state of online news industry in the country. Top management staff within the mainstream media is not brave enough, according to Mumay, to restructure the whole installation of the organisations based on a digital-first strategies for fear of hurting their traditional brands. He believes that there is very little hope that traditional media outlets in Turkey would take necessary actions in order to adapt and implement strategies embracing new media rather than fighting it in the near future unless they completely separate the managements of their digital operations and traditional ones (Mumay, B. 2016, personal communication, 30 March).

Can Tüzüner, on the other hand, emphasises that top management staff in the mainstream media companies in Turkey frequently change and since they do not know how long they manage to keep their positions, they usually focus on achieving short term goals with the easiest and cheapest possible ways instead of taking risks of putting innovative strategies into practice. “New media transformation of a news

company is not something that can occur overnight and it needs a strong leadership that manage the transformation processes,” he says, “To be honest, the online news industry in Turkey is not interested in a new media transformation. The industry is too busy trying to save itself in the short term” (Tüzüner, C. 2016, personal communication, 28 March).

What digital divisions within the media companies in Turkey are expected is to generate more revenue than they are capable of earning today, according to Yusuf Özhan. However, he states that annual budgets of digital operations are determined by representatives of top management based on estimated short term incomes (Özhan, Y. 2016, personal communication, 7 September). Therefore, chief editors and managers of digital departments of established news media organisations have been facing difficulties in convincing media owners and top management staff of their companies to allocate resources in creating new departments for emerging platforms and technologies, hiring new staff with essential skills to be able to use new media friendly news content types as they cannot guarantee short term return on those investments.

### **8.1 The Current State of Political Environment in the Country**

2016 was one of the most turbulent years in Turkey’s history. The year will be remembered with the failed military coup attempt which left 265 people dead, 22 bombings killing at least 360 people by ISIL and armed Kurdish groups, ongoing campaigns against PKK and curfews in the south-east of the country, military ground operation in Syria and the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Ankara along

with discussions over constitutional change package introducing a shift of Turkey's parliamentary system to presidential one. It was also the year when Turkey has become the country with the highest number of journalists in jail worldwide. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 81 journalists who are facing anti-state charges such as being a member of terrorist organisations or producing propaganda for them, obtaining and publishing secret documents and insulting the president are imprisoned in the country (CPJ, 2016). With the statutory decrees issued during the state of emergency declared after the 15th July coup attempt, the government has closed down 131 media companies including newspapers, news agencies, magazines, television and radio stations (Human Rights Watch, 2016) on accusations that some of those news media organisations have links to Gulen organisation, and the others to PKK, both designated as terrorist organisations by Turkey.

Along with other difficulties the media organisations have been facing to adapt to the needs of today's digital news media landscape, the current state of the country's political environment, which is believed to be deepening polarisation of the society by many, is considered as a factor which prevents media companies, especially digital-born media startups, from investing in enlarging and improving the capacity of their newsrooms, according to Kaan Kayabali. "It might be economy-related reasons for other news media organisations, but it is the political ones for Onedio why we think twice before investing in news," he says. Kayabali states that Onedio plans to invest in investigative journalism by enlarging its newsroom and provide proactive news even though they know that it is quite difficult to earn money with that kind of content on the web in Turkey. However, he says that it has been an

ongoing discussion among the company's top management whether or not it is a logical move for Onedio to invest in investigative journalism in the current political environment in the country. Kayabalı complains about increasing polarisation among the society's components and considers readers' comments under the news articles that Onedio publishes as a discouraging factor.

We do not feel a political pressure as Onedio does not side with any political parties or ideologies. We have a strict editorial focus on balance and impartiality, try to cover what different components of the society think about what is going on in the country. Nevertheless, we are being labelled as PKK supporters one day for covering an incident takes place in the south-east, and AKP supporters the next day for publishing a news article including a statement of a government member (Kayabalı, K. 2016, personal communication, 31 March).

Can Tüzüner, as well, believes that the state of current political environment is one of the reasons for why news media organisations are reluctant to invest in high-quality journalism. He argues that both journalists and news media organisations are in a state of fear. However, political pressure on media can not be shown as an excuse for not adapting to new platforms, technologies and content types by news media companies, according to Tüzüner, as there are no political obstacles stopping online journalists and news outlets from providing their readers with news produced and presented in creative and modern storytelling techniques of new media age (Tüzüner, C. 2016, personal communication, 28 March).

## **9. Summary and Conclusion**

Many new technologies, tools, business models and content types have been introduced and successfully used by both digital-born and traditional news organisations in the global online news industry in recent years. Major global legacy news outlets have been clearly reinvented themselves by going through extensive restructures in their organisations as a result of the rise of digital-born media startups and the increasing role that social media platforms and new technologies have been playing in the online news industry. Despite the significant progress of recent years, new media transformation in the global online news industry has not been completed yet. Online news media organisations have been still experimenting with producing news content for various mediums in new Internet-specific formats by using new technologies. Meanwhile, the search for better business models, technologies and platforms for online news content has continued.

Media experts, chief editors and news editors whom were interviewed for this study agree that online news organisations in Turkey, both traditional and digital-born ones, have been failing in keeping up with the huge digital shift taking place in the global media industry in recent years. Despite the fact that it is widely acknowledged in the media industry in Turkey that online news content production, distribution and consumption processes have been changing significantly, major news media

organisations are still reluctant to take necessary steps in order to keep pace with ever-transforming digital media landscape.

Although the proportion of the Internet users who get their news online (90%) is higher than many other countries in Turkey (Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 2016), major online news organisations, with very little exceptions, still repurpose print, television news and repackage news from a handful of news agencies without adding any additional information. There is only Hürriyet, among the online departments of traditional news outlets, has dedicated reporters working for only digital in order to produce original news content. Most visited profit oriented digital-born portals including Onedio, Mynet, İnternethaber, Ensonhaber, Haber7 and T24 do not have reporters or correspondents in their newsrooms either. Online news editors who are expected to aggregate as many news stories as possible from newspapers, television channels, news agencies, social media platforms and other news sites are too busy with their daily routines. Therefore, online news media in Turkey does not provide the Internet users with original news content. News stories featured in homepages, mobile applications and social media pages of every major news sites are almost always same as they are all relying on same news sources.

Emerging new media storytelling formats such as social videos, interactive graphics, charts, maps, info cards, 360degree videos/photographs, newsgames and GIFs are quite rarely used in the news stories by most visited news sites. Social media strategies of major news outlets are mostly click-oriented as they consider social networking platforms as one of the most important traffic sources to their websites.

The main motivation of news editors and social media editors in online newsrooms is

generating the most-possible traffic and being under pressure of reaching very large number of visitors on a daily basis urges them to produce clickbait headlines, social media posts, using mostly non-newsworthy sensationalists stories and publishing entertainment content more than news content. A few online news organisations produce news in new content formats and upload them on social media platforms natively. Social media news startup 140journos is the only digital-born media outlet provide native news content and distribute them natively on various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. Digital-only Turkish services of global news organisations such as BBC Türkçe, Al Jazeera Türk and DW Türkçe take advantages of being parts of large media networks and use news content produced in new storytelling types of various sections of their networks. However, both Turkish services of global media networks and independent digital-born news media startups which have been trying to implement new media storytelling techniques in recent years remain way smaller than major online news outlets that dominate digital news in terms of traffic and reach.

In brief, to a large extent, digital news media in Turkey is still not capable of creating original online news content, implemeting new media storytelling techniques in their news reporting, building native social media strategies aiming at reaching wider audience wherever they are without pushing them to visit their websites.

This study examined four main problems that prevent major online news outlets from adapting to new media based on the interviews conducted with practitioners and participatory observations carried out in online newsrooms.

News organisations' dependency on online advertising models "first developed in the 1990s and early 2000s" (Nicholls, Shabbir, Nielsen 2016) is at the root of the problems. The only revenue source of online departments of traditional news media companies is click or view-based online advertising models. There is only digital-born entertainment and news media startup Onedio implementing native advertising in its website. All news sites in Turkey can be accessed free of charge since no online news outlet in Turkey uses subscription-supported business models as a main source of revenue. As digital news industry in Turkey has not managed to build solid business models for content, major news organisations generate their online revenues from advertising spaces positioned in every possible corners of their websites. This urges online news departments of major news organisations to implement primitive ways of generating traffic and prevent them from building native content strategies for social media platforms.

Secondly, journalists who have shifted to digital after spending years in traditional news media dominate online newsrooms. Most of the digital-born news sites in the country is founded by journalists with traditional media background as well. As digital-born news sites are not capable of hiring multi-skilled journalists for economical reasons, they are considered as the last ditches by many journalists where they can continue their work by accepting lower salaries in case they lose their jobs in the mainstream media (Yanatma, 2016). Most of the online journalists working in online news outlets do not have an adequate grasp of ever-transforming digital media landscape and are not skilled to produce news in new media content types. Online news editors whom were interviewed for this thesis reveal that they do not have enough time to focus on learning new skills during their work hours and are not

being trained to become capable of providing content in newly emerging creative ways by the media companies that they work for. It explains that why there are very few news content enriched with video explainers, interactive graphics, charts and maps is featured in the news sites.

The third challenge that digital news media in Turkey have been facing in reinventing itself is the major media companies' strategies focusing on only short-term profit maximisation. Media owners are quite reluctant to make long-term investments in digital media according to the interviewed chief editors. Because short-term return on their investments in newly emerging platforms, technologies, content types and staff can not be guaranteed, executives in top managements who represent the owners tend to stick to strategies aiming at maximising their revenues by keeping the costs as lowest as possible. Therefore, significant amount of resources has not been allocated in building digital-first strategies in digital news media in Turkey.

Lastly, the current political environment in the country is considered as one of the challenges that news media organisations facing while making investment decisions. Turkey has gone through one of the most turbulent years in its modern history in 2016. The failed coup attempt, bomb attacks, military operations against PKK and curfews in the southeast of the country, discussions over constitutional change package and ongoing state of emergency declared after July 15th coup attempt have accelerated the polarisation of the society. Moreover, the number of journalists who have been jailed in the country has increased to 81 in 2016, making Turkey the country with the highest number of journalists in jail worldwide. (CPJ, 2016) Kaan

Kayabalı, CEO and co-founder of Onedio that has been long criticised for not investing in original news content, says that the present state of political environment of the country is the main reason stopping Onedio to allocate more resources in digital news. “It might be economy-related reasons for other news media organisations, but it is the political ones for Onedio why we think twice before investing in news” (Kayabalı, K. 2016, personal communication, 31 March).

In conclusion; major online news media organisations in Turkey have not gone through new media transformation process as a result of the rise of social media platforms, newly emerging tools, technologies and content types as global digital media organisations have. In theory, the digital news industry believes that new media holds great opportunities for media industries. However, major players in the industry do not take risks of restructuring their organisations with innovative strategies embracing the new media. It is clearly seen that major traditional news outlets will not invest more in their digital operations as long as they manage to keep dominating the online news industry with their current resources. New media transformation of digital news media in Turkey, I believe, will accelerate when journalists, developers, designers, technologists and business strategists start to work together to provide high-quality journalism, implement creative ways of telling stories, create user-friendly news sites and applications by always interacting with their readers and build solid business models for news content.

## References

Alejandro, J. (2010). "Journalism in the Age of Social Media." *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. [Online] Available at: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Journalism in the Age of Social Media.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Journalism%20in%20the%20Age%20of%20Social%20Media.pdf) [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Qualitative Interviewing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Burnett, R. and Marshall P.D. (2003). *Web Theory* 1st ed. London: Routledge. pp: 120-125.

CB Insights. (2016). *Consolidating The News: How Traditional Media Giants Are Planting Their Flag In Digital Media*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cbinsights.com/blog/media-startup-consolidation/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Christian, F. (2009). "Information and Communication Technologies and Society: A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of the Internet." *European Journal of Communication*. pp. 69-84. [Online] Available at: [http://fuchs.uti.at/wp-content/uploads/ICTS\\_EJC.pdf](http://fuchs.uti.at/wp-content/uploads/ICTS_EJC.pdf) [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Constine, J. (2016). "Facebook Hits 100M Hours Of Video Watched A Day, 1B Users On Groups, 80M On Fb Lite." *TechCrunch*. [Online] Available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2016/01/27/facebook-grows/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Committee to Protect Journalists. (2016). *Turkey's crackdown propels number of journalists in jail worldwide to record high* [Online] Available at: <https://cpj.org/reports/2016/12/journalists-jailed-record-high-turkey-crackdown.php> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Çevikel, T. (2004). “Türkçe Haber Siteleri Ve Türkiye'de İnternet Gazeteciliğinin Gelişimini Sınırlayan Faktörler.” *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi*. pp. 150-161. [Online] Available at: <http://iletisimdergisi.gsu.edu.tr/article/view/5000004937/5000005437> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2017].

eMarketer. (2016). *Digital Ad Spending to Surpass TV Next Year*. [Online] Available at: <http://iletisimdergisi.gsu.edu.tr/article/view/5000004937/5000005437> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Fiegerman, S. (2014). “6 Digital Challenges for The New York Times' New Editor.” Mashable [Online] Available at: <http://mashable.com/2014/05/15/new-york-times-digital/-rrxSpAhBCOqm> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Gallaugher, J.M., Auger, P. and BarNir, A. (2001). Revenue streams and digital content providers: an empirical investigation. *Information & Management*, 38(7) pp. 473-485.

Guynn, J. (2016). "Mark Zuckerberg talks up Facebook's 'video first' strategy." *USA TODAY*. [Online] Available at: <http://mashable.com/2014/05/15/new-york-times-digital/-rrxSpAhBCOqm> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Gwertzman, B. (2001). Interviewed by Bill Goldstein on The New York Times, 22 January [Online] Available at: <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/tech/reference/roundtable.html>[Accessed 10 Nov. 2016].

Harvey, F. (2004). “Screen presence. Online versions of newspapers can stretch brands but publishers are cagey about showing they have repaid their investments”. *The Financial Times*. p.12.

Human Rights Watch. (2016). *Turkey: Media Shut Down, Journalists Detained* [Online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/28/turkey-media-shut-down-journalists-detained>[Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Hürriyet. (2015). "Hürriyet, Facebook'un yeni uygulamasındaki ilk Türk yayıncı oldu." [Online] <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hurriyet-facebookun-yeni-uygulamasindaki-ilk-turk-yayinci-40028118> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Ihlström, C., and Palmer, J. (2002). "Revenues for online newspapers: owner and user perceptions". *Electronic Markets*, 12(4), pp: 228-236.

IAB Europe. (2016). *European Online Advertising surpasses TV to record annual spend of €36.4bn*. [online] Available at: <http://www.iabeurope.eu/research-thought-leadership/press-release-european-online-advertising-surpasses-tv-to-record-annual-spend-of-e36-2bn/> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

IAB Turkey. (2016). *Digital Ad Investments in Turkey grew 20%, completing 2016 first half with 927.6 million TL* [online] Available at: <http://www.iabturkiye.org/sites/default/files/2016-tr-half-year-ad-investments.pdf> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Küng, L., Picard, G.P. and Towse, R. (2008). *The Internet And The Mass Media*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008.

Lasica, J.D. (1996). Net gain. *American Journalism Review*. [online] Available at: <http://www.jdlasica.com/1996/11/01/net-gain/> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2017].

Newman, N. (2009). "The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism." *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. p. 4. [Online] Available at: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism 0.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The%20rise%20of%20social%20media%20and%20its%20impact%20on%20mainstream%20journalism%200.pdf) [Accessed 10 Dec. 2016].

Nicholls, T., Shabbir, N., and Nielsen, R.K. (2016). "Digital-born News Media in Europe." *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. [Online] Available at: [http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-Born News Media in Europe.pdf](http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-Born%20News%20Media%20in%20Europe.pdf) [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Nisenholtz, M. (2001). Interviewed by Bill Goldstein on The New York Times, 22 January [Online] Available at: <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/tech/reference/roundtable.html> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2016].

Nixon, B. (2014). "Toward a Political Economy of 'Audience Labour' in the Digital Era." *TripleC*. [online] Available at: <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/535/622> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2016].

O'Reilly, T. (2005). What Is Web 2.0. [online] Available at: <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/535/622> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Peretti, J. (2016). "BuzzFeed wins the internet daily. Here's what its boss thinks is next." *Recode* [online] Available at: <http://www.recode.net/2016/12/19/14010044/buzzfeed-wins-internet-future-of-media-online-social> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Perlberg, S. and Seetharaman, D. (2016). "Facebook Signs Deals With Media Companies, Celebrities for Facebook Live." *The Wall Street Journal*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-signs-deals-with-media-companies-celebrities-for-facebook-live-1466533472> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Reklamcılar Derneği. (2016). *2015 Yılında Reklam Yatırımlarında %9 Artış Yaşandı*. [online] Available at: <http://rd.org.tr/RD-basin-bulteni.html> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. (2016) *Digital News Report 2016* [online] Available at: [http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf?utm\\_source=digitalnewsreport.org&utm\\_medium=referral](http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf?utm_source=digitalnewsreport.org&utm_medium=referral) [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Sabancı, V.D. (2015). "Smartcon 2015" conference in Istanbul, May 26. [online] Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hurriyet-leads-thanks-to-big-data-says-chairwoman-vuslat-dogan-sabanci.aspx?pageID=238&nID=83000&NewsCatID=341> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Salwen, M.B., Garrison, B. and Driscoll, P.D. (2005). *Online News And The Public*. 1st ed. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 52, 53.

Schiff, F. (2006). "Trends emerging more clearly: business models of news web sites". *First Monday*. [online] Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hurriyet-leads-thanks-to-big-data-says-chairwoman-vuslat-dogan-sabanci.aspx?pageID=238&nID=83000&NewsCatID=341> [Accessed 5 Jan. 2017].

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A practical handbook*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sorensen, E. (1998). News on the Web – The Internet gains with each big story. *The Seattle Times*. p. A2.

Statista. (2016). *Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 3rd quarter 2016*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

Statista. (2016). *Advertising expenditure in Turkey from 2008 to 2015, by medium*. [online] Available at: [Advertising expenditure in Turkey from 2008 to 2015, by medium](#). [Accessed 31 Dec. 2016].

The New York Times Company. (2014). *Innovation*. [online] Available at: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/05/the-leaked-new-york-times-innovation-report-is-one-of-the-key-documents-of-this-media-age/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].

Van der Wurff, R. and Lauf, E. (2005). *Print and Online Newspapers in Europe: A Comparative Analysis in 16 countries*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Yanatma, S. (2016). “Overview of key developments (in Turkey).” *Digital News Report 2016*. [online] Available at: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2016/turkey-2016/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2017].