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NEWS READERS' PERCEPTION OF CLICKBAIT NEWS

ANIL KARACA

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ANIL KARACA



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of Master's in the Program of New Media.

ISTANBUL, MAY, 2019

I, ANIL KARACA

Hereby declare that this Master's Thesis I have prepared is entirely my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources in accordance with the rules.

ANIL KARACA



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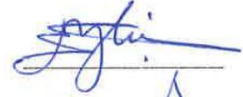
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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This work entitled **NEWS READERS' PERCEPTION OF CLICKBAIT** prepared by **ANIL KARACA** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **23.05.2019** and accepted by our jury as **MASTER'S THESIS**.

APPROVED BY:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eylem Yanardağođlu (Advisor) (Jury)



Assoc. Prof. Dr. iđdem Bozdađ (Jury)



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erkan Saka (Jury)



I certify that the above signatures belong to the faculty members named above.

Dean of School of Graduate Studies

Prof. Dr. Sinem AKGÜL AIKMEŐE

DATE OF APPROVAL:

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NEWS READERS' PERCEPTION OF CLICKBAIT NEWS

ABSTRACT

This thesis is aimed to reveal the impact of the clickbait content to online news readers. Study focuses on the readers' perception of the clickbait and analyzes their behavior to these content and examines how they interact with these news. To understand these effects, study has three research sections made of interviews and survey analysis. First part is an online, quantitative survey research. Attendees answer questions regarding their habits of consuming news, the mediums they use to consume news and their perception of clickbait content. On the second, qualitative part of the research, attendees who also participated the previous survey explain their interaction with clickbait content via open ended answers. In the last part, which includes the results of the interviews, two digital news outlet executives and an anti-clickbait initiative manager share their experiences with the clickbait content and commentate on the background process of the creation of these content. By scrutinising the environment of digital news and online news readers' remarks, this thesis offers a perspective of the clickbait awareness in Turkish news reader audience and how they interact with these type of content.

Keywords: clickbait, clickbait headlines, digital news, new media, effect of clickbait headlines to readers, social media, clickbait journalism

HABER OKUYUCULARININ TIK TUZAĞI HABER ALGISI

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, tık tuzağı içeriklerin çevrimiçi haber okuyucularına etkisini ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Tık tuzağı algısına odaklanılan tezde, okuyucuların bu tip içeriklere yönelik tavırları ve onlarla nasıl etkileşime geçtikleri incelenmiştir. Bu etkileri anlamak için hazırlanan araştırma, mülakat ve anket analizleri olmak üzere üç araştırma bölümünden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmanın ilk bölümü, niceliksel çevrimiçi anket araştırmasını içermektedir. Bu bölümde katılımcılar; haber tüketim alışkanlıkları, haber okumada kullandıkları araçlar ve tık tuzağı içeriklere yönelik algılarıyla ilgili soruları yanıtladılar. İkinci, niteliksel çevrimiçi ankete, önceki ankete de katılım sağlamış kişiler yanıt vermiştir ve tık tuzağı içeriklerle olan etkileşimlerini anlatmışlardır. Son bölümdeki mülakat sonuçlarında ise, iki dijital haber merkezi yöneticisi ve tık tuzağı karşıtı bir inisiyatifin yöneticisinin, tık tuzağı deneyimleriyle ilgili paylaşımları ve bu tip içeriklerin oluşturulma süreciyle ilgili yorumları yer almaktadır. Bu çalışma, dijital haber evrenini ve çevrimiçi haber okuyucularının görüşlerini irdeleyerek, Türkiye'deki okuyucu kitlesinin tık tuzağı farkındığına dair bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: tık tuzağı, tık odaklı habercilik, tık tuzağı başlıklar, dijital habercilik, yeni medya, tık tuzağı başlıkların okuyucuya etkisi, sosyal medya

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1. INTRODUCTION

While news outlets are focusing their strategies on “digital first”, these policies have affected the characteristics of the news as well. Since advertisers’ attention shifts from traditional media (Okazaki, 2006), digital media became one of the biggest ways to profitability for news outlets. Attracting readers to increase traffic to their websites is transcendental for the survival of all media companies (Bazaco, et al., 2019) This taken into account, news stories are started to taken into account as a way of raising profits. For doing this, digital newsrooms started to use ‘clickbait’ contents. ‘Clickbait’ refers to “content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page” (‘clickbait,’ n.d.).

Clickbait is commonly used by news outlets to provoke readers to read their stories. With this need emerged, news editors are using provocative headlines which offers limited information related to the article, thus create curiosity to the story and force the reader to click the shared link to learn what the article includes. Much of this process is driven by economic incentives, as circulation continues to fall and news producers depend more and more on online advertising revenue based on page views (Barthel, 2015). Usage of these headlines is both criticized and supported by many. Chen, Conroy and Rubin, 2015, criticized the usage of clickbait as, “reporting unverified rumors as truth and willfully manipulating facts to entice more readers to click and share links is harmful to both the notion of journalistic integrity and the public good, especially in the online environment.” (Chen et al., 2015)

To understand the effects and the characteristics of the clickbait content, this study examined and summarized the emergence of online journalism, new media, social media and digital news economy in the beginning. Then, via surveys and interviews, opinions and reactions of news readers regarding clickbait gathered and analyzed to reflect what kind of impact clickbait content has on digital news consumers.

1.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on online news readers who are frequently exposed to clickbait content in social networks. To determine what kind of impact these catchy headlines has on readers, qualitative and quantitative online surveys and interviews with newsroom executives are used in this research. With the results of the surveys and interviews, this study will try to reflect the Turkish news readers' perception of the clickbait and look into their interaction with the stories which has these kinds of headlines. Also, interview with the media executives scrutinized the background process of creation of these type of content.

In the quantitative survey research, attendees were asked questions regarding their habits of consuming news, the mediums they use to consume news and their perception of clickbait content. The qualitative survey asked open-ended questions to attendees about their feelings and reactions to clickbait content and wanted them to answer these questions with their remarks in order to evaluate and examine their perception to clickbait concept. In the last part, which include the results of the interviews with news managers, two digital news outlet executives and an anti-clickbait initiative manager share their experience with the clickbait content and commentate on the process of the creation of these content. The quantitative survey, which is created as an online survey and disseminated in social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, reached 1380 digital news consumers and included 21 questions regarding their habits of internet usage, consuming news and their remarks regarding the stories which include clickbait. The qualitative survey gathered 100 answers from attendees who also attended the first survey, and via 6 open-ended questions, the study analyzed their feelings and interactions with clickbait content.

In the interviews chapter, Former managing editor of Hurriyet Emre Kızılkaya and BirGun.net executive Hakan Demir shared their experiences about clickbait creation and digital news economy. Their remarks shed a light on Turkish newsrooms and production of digital content which also includes clickbait practices. Interview with the anti clickbait Twitter initiative Limon Haber aimed to reflect the critics about clickbait usage and current situation in Turkish digital news atmosphere in terms of clickbait discussions.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF ONLINE JOURNALISM

The 21st century brought a big challenge to journalism. With the emergence of the internet, like any other sector, journalism had to adapt to the novelties and opportunities it provides as well. After the launch of the World Wide Web, many newspapers went online. In the United States, Chicago Tribune was distributed by America OnLine (AOL) since May 1992. In Europe, The Electronic Telegraph launched as an online version of The Telegraph, is considered one of the digital newspaper pioneers (Noci, 2013). State of the News Media report indicates that by 2008, the World Wide Web (WWW) became the second information source for the American audience (Nieman Foundation, 2009).

In Turkey, internet journalism started to emerge beginning in 1996 by media giants who move their newspapers to the internet environment (Çevikel, 2004). In 1995, Aktüel Journal moved its content to the web and this made it the first online publication. First newspaper appeared on Turkish web was Zaman, although it did not move all its content to the internet. In 1996, Milliyet made this move and became the first internet newspaper with the whole its content available on the web. In the following years, Hürriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, and other media giants followed Milliyet's steps and became online (MEB, 2011).

Even though there is no common ground on defining the social media in the literature and there are various definitions of scholars, Bolton et al., (2014), simply summarizes the term as “any online service through which users can create and share a variety of the content.” Mobile phones, tablets, personal computers, and smart technologies created an online atmosphere, where information is gathered, created, and disseminated. Thanks to the opportunities of the internet, the flow of information and news became instant and huge in volume via social media, instant messaging applications, e-mails, and mobile texts. With the emergence of “Web 2.0” technologies, which encourage participation, are inherently social and open (Borau et al., 2008), the face of traditional news articles changed and they became interactive with hyperlinks, videos, and other multimedia elements, thus the emergence of online journalism started. Interactivity, customization

of content, hypertextuality, and multimediality are the elements that are redefining the nature of journalism in the perspective of the internet (Deuze, 2001).

Raising usage of the internet and social media eventually forced the news outlet to focus on digital publications rather than printing. British news outlet The Guardian decided to offer all its content “Web first” in 2011 after £33m cash losses for 2010 (Guardian, 2011) Today, in the U.S., 93 percent of the adults get at least some news online either via mobile and desktop devices (Pew Research Center, 2018).

With the popularity of online news increased and internet infrastructure developed, more people started to have a chance to reach the internet and read their news online. This popularity caused by many reasons. Since it's written on computers and is digital, online news is very fast to reach to its audience and they are constantly up to date. Also, online news readers can reach the news whenever and wherever they want. Ability to use multimedia elements such as videos, audios, and images are other striking features of online journalism. Additionally, ability to create a personal archive, interactive interaction, instant feedback, hypertextuality and opportunity to find different kinds of news which are not present in traditional media can be counted as features why online news became so popular and advantageous (Karaduman 2003: 143).

2.1 NEW MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

Thanks to the yields of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) online journalism found a massive field to itself in order to reach audiences. Recent developments and innovation in the field of digital technology brought us smartphones, social media and whole new cyberspace, the online world of computer networks (Merriam Webster). In this atmosphere, as McLuhan describes as a ‘global village’ (McLuhan, 1962), “new media” emergence altered the traditional way of news consumption and production.

There are many descriptions of the new media by scholars. In general, this term refers to interactive digital media that involves some form of computing opposed to “old media” such as TV and radio. “New media” has the ability to combine text, audio, digital video, virtual reality, the Web, e-mail, chat, smartphones, computer applications and any source of information that is accessible by personal computers. (Logan, 2010). The new

media, as Manovich describes, is native to computers or relying on computers for distribution.

One of the biggest difference between new media from “old media” is being highly interactive. This interactivity formed a strong tie between readers and publishers. Digital stories are now distributed in a giant network of social media, and users are able to respond to them and give instant feedbacks via their personal accounts. (Manovich, 2001)

In the traditional way of news distribution, a person only had limited sources, such as a printed newspaper, radio or TV channel. Now with the new media, a feed reader application, for example, can offer hundreds of different news from different outlets, even with the ability of personalization and categorization options.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA’S IMPACT ON ONLINE JOURNALISM

The popularization of social media channels also had a substantial impact on online journalism. Social network sites in general, are the websites that are used by people for primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Even though there are dozens of social network sites created before, such as Six Degrees (1997), Friendster (2002), LinkedIn (2003); Facebook (2003), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006) rapidly became the giants of social network websites, which are used by millions of users today, throughout the world.

Citing company statistics, there are 261 million international Twitter users and Facebook has over 2.32 billion monthly active users as of December 31, 2018, (Facebook). This wide network of online users inevitably attracted news outlets as well. Considering the constant flow of information and stories shared on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites, newsrooms had to transform in order to follow up on the agenda. There are two factors determining which social media site has the most news flow and interaction, its overall popularity and the extent to which people see news on the site.

According to Pew Research Report (2018), Reddit, Twitter and Facebook have the biggest news ecosystem. 67% of American Facebook users access news on the platform, as do 71% of Twitter's users and 73% of Reddit users. In this atmosphere, news articles are mainly focused on web dissemination. The constant flow of information in these social networks brought new challenges to online newsrooms for web apparency. Thus, applications like SEO and web page optimization became a vital component of online journalism.

News outlets who want to become more visible in search engines such as Google, Bing, Yandex started to use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) applications on news articles. SEO is the process of web page design strategies that are used in raising the visibility on the search engine results. SEO's main goal is to bring more visitors to your website by using meta keywords and other SEO techniques. (Ledford, 2009). The transition of journalism towards digital brought new challenges to journalists. To appear in the search results and news aggregators, an online journalist has to write an article which is SEO-friendly and able to be found by search engines (Richmond, 2008). These Web 2.0 need in journalism led news outlets and journalists to follow up digital trends and information consumption habits in order to make their websites and articles have a better chance reach their online followers (Giomelakis, Veglis, 2015), since natural search is responsible for nearly half (47 percent) of all visits (Safran, 2013).

Considering these numbers and trends, we can suggest that digital technology innovations shaped digital newsrooms. Since the importance of social media stands in front of us as an agenda platform, for digital journalists of today, it is inevitable and common to pitch a story from social media. Assistant professor of journalism at the University of Colorado-Boulder Patrick Ferrucci examined (2018) this connection between journalists and social media and he found out that journalists take social media as an environment to get to know of what people are thinking, understand them and use it in a way to interact with the public. A digital journalist who spoke to Ferrucci states this note which indicates the relationship between a journalist and social media:

“I can find sources in about a 10th of the time than if I went looking for someone new in some other way. And I'm also not reliant on the same sources for every story. I can bring a host of voices into the news daily.” (Ferrucci, 2018)

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE JOURNALISM IN TURKEY

Turkey, with more than 80 million population, is a big market for social media giants. Similar to other countries, the usage of social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and other sites kept rising over the years. As of January 2019, Hootsuite and We Are Social Global Digital Yearbook report (2019) indicates that there are 52 million active social media users in Turkey, who make up the 63 percent of the whole population. The report also states the amount of mobile social media users in Turkey are 44 million people. In terms of internet access, the report shows that 59 million people in Turkey are actively using the internet.

In 2013, when Gezi Park protests occurred in Istanbul, Twitter gained popularity and became one of the biggest news sources for protesters and public since there was a lot of criticism towards mainstream media which are accused of being biased and broadcasting pro-government. When protesters needed to find a way to communicate with each other and to be informed regarding the events, Twitter came to help. After the Gezi Park protests became nation-wide on May 31, usage of Twitter increased dramatically and daily tweet numbers rose around 6 million in a single day (Tunç, 2014).

This day and forward, Twitter and other social media platforms evolved to becoming a main channel and alternative to mainstream media for news consuming. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, has a big impact on the dissemination of news. A study conducted by Cem S. Sütçü and Serkan Bayrakçı, who looked into the impact of Twitter regarding dissemination of the news (2014), found out that stories in newspaper's websites are shared two times more on social media. This number rose up to 9 times more if a newspaper focuses more on social media. Results also showed that stories which included many comments from readers also have a high amount of shares on social media platforms.

A local study conducted by Hanifi Kurt (2014), scrutinize the social media habits of journalists. Paper states that 44% of the journalists in Izmir, Turkey use it to "follow the agenda and add new information to a current story." 32% says that their first reason to

use social platforms is “finding a story.” It might be assumed that these numbers have increased over the years.

2.4 CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Participatory nature of social media networks created new concepts to online journalism. Even though the concept of “Citizen journalism” is not a new phenomenon (Hughes, 2011), with the emergence of social media, it reached its peak acknowledgment in public. Via social media and the internet, citizens are no longer need to be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects (Benkler, 2006). From 9/11 attacks to ‘Arab Spring’ and Gezi protests, Twitter and social media became a tool for citizens to produce their stories with photos, videos, and tweets and share them with their online followers.

As Murthy (2011) indicates, Twitter, in terms of speaking to the masses, can be counted as a tool like a microphone. Even though there are many criticisms towards the credibility, ethics and content quality of the citizen journalism, Roberts and Steiner (2012), argue that citizen journalism deserves and requires much more robust and complex discussions of ethics in order to be beneficial of the people they serve.

2.5 DATA JOURNALISM

Data journalism is another rising section of online journalism. Recent publications named Panama Papers and Paradise Papers, which prepared with a large amount of leaked data by a big team of journalists across the world can be counted as prime examples of data journalism (Stalph, 2018). Stalph’s analysis (2018) indicates that some of the quality European news outlets who are working with data produces interactive and non-interactive charts and maps, uses governmental data and present data-driven stories in parallel with traditional news reporting. These charts, maps and other types of data visualization techniques are widely used in the data journalism departments of the news outlets. Google News Lab and PolicyViz survey (2017) indicates that 42 percent of journalists surveyed said that they are using data regularly to tell stories. Survey also unveiled that 51 percent of news organizations have a dedicated data journalist on staff. Even though data predates newspapers and has been used in journalism for hundreds of

years (Rogers et al., 2017) digital opportunities provided a useful playground for journalists for the creation of data-driven projects. Dal Zotto, Schenker, and Lugmayr (2015) argue that data used in news articles in order to improve the information of the story and developing the content dates back to the 1800s. Journalists used data, and statistics before the emergence of the internet, so calling data journalism is a new profession could be deficient. What makes data journalism ‘modern’ today is that the opportunity brought by Web to analyze and gather the datasets which are used in the news articles.

Since there are many online tools available like Tableau, Open Refine, Carto and RawGraphs (Temple University) for data mining, cleaning, and visualization; creating a data-driven and an interactive story became an easy task for data journalists. Traditional journalism also uses data journalism elements such as bars, charts, and infographics, yet online journalism differs with interactivity and space for the content.

2.6 THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL JOURNALISM

Started with the World Wide Web and keep growing with Web 2.0, online journalism has a big, messy future ahead. The massive amount of information spread through the Web put detailed, in-depth journalism is at stake since people meddle with constant distraction created by streams of online messages and information. This situation is considered as a central challenge to news outlets, whose mandate is to inform the public (Nordenson, 2008). Nordersen argues that news media, as well as many online businesses, compete for attention. With podcasts, video and live streams, breaking news and many other multimedia elements, newsrooms try to catch the attention of the online readers in the overload of the Web. Considering this problem of ‘overload’ of information, there are many problems appeared, regarding the credibility of the online news. Especially after the recent elections in the Europe and U.S, the term “fake news” became a worldwide phenomenon. Wardle (2017), categorizes “fake news” under the types of misinformation and disinformation. She argues that there are three elements of the information ecosystem, which is the motive, the way of dissemination and the types of content. Wardle widens the prior categorization of Elliot Higgins and defines the reasons of “fake news” under 8 P’s: Poor Journalism, Parody, to Provoke or ‘Punk’, Passion, Partisanship, Profit, Political Influence or Power, and Propaganda.

As Wardle indicates, there are seven types of mis- and disinformation, such as:

- “Satire and parody – No intention to cause harm but has the potential to fool
- Misleading content – Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual
- Imposter content – When genuine sources are impersonated
- Fabricated content – New content is 100 percent false, designed to deceive and do harm
- False connection – When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content
- False context – When genuine content is shared with false contextual information
- Manipulated content – When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive”

While discussions and critiques towards digital journalism reach its top these days, citizen journalism altered the dominance of professional journalism in terms of breaking news, social media provide massive amount of information, personal blogs, and alternative media outlets are shaking the throne of mass media and there is a decline in their influence (Mensing, 2010). In this digital era of journalism, newsrooms evolve with new storytelling techniques and business models. This novelties also bring new requirements to journalists. Since digital tools offer different platforms to disseminate a story, Juan Senior, a Reuters Institute fellow, and partner at Innovation Media Consulting say that journalists have to master some new techniques, such as multimedia, graphics software, video editing, digital narratives and visualization (Alejandro, 2010). Innovations in digital media affected journalism education as well. The practices of today, which were created when information was scarce and distribution was generally one way through (Mensing, 2010) is considered old school and inadequate. Journalism education is now adapted to the new techniques and like professional journalists, journalism students also need to learn to deal with massive amount of information, distribution of information on the network, intense competition and a communication process that is interactive and asynchronous (Mensing, 2010). Constant growth in ownership of mobile devices also might draw a path for the future of

online journalism. Advertisement numbers show that in the United Kingdom, mobile ads revenues rose £0.4 billion in 2013, while newspaper revenues declined £0.1 billion in the same period (Reynolds, 2014). A survey indicates that there is a 31% increase in reading news from a mobile device by U.S. adults between 2013 and 2017. 94% of both those ages 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 get news on mobile (Lu, 2017). State of the New Media Report (Pew Research Center, 2015) states that 39 of the top 50 news sites have more mobile traffic than computers. Looking at these numbers, it could be fair to say that online journalism of the future will be closely in touch with mobile devices and may be shaped for it completely.



3. DIGITAL NEWS ECONOMY

The emergence of Web 2.0 and the new media had an undeniable impact on journalism, thus forced the news industry to evaluate their economic models and revenue sources to keep up with the rapidly growing digital ecosystem. Convergence culture on digital media brought many opportunities for advertisers and created a massive market to consider and invest. This, inevitably, affected news outlets and their business models as well. Traditional newspapers around the world used a solid model for revenues: readers, marketers and classified advertisers. This business model which is widely used throughout the world provided a sustainable flow of revenue to newspapers until the emergence of internet and thus industry “faced pressure due to a decline in advertising and subscription revenues” (Holm et al., 2013). Studies indicates the reasons for this decline with these factors:

- “the increasing importance of the internet as a content delivery channel
- the entry of new competitors
- the emergence of digital reading devices
- an overall decrease in advertising expenditure during the financial downturn
- changes in media consumption by the younger generations.” (Doctor, 2010; Grueskin et al., 2011; VDI/VDE-IT, 2011 in: Holm et al., 2013)

3.1 BUSINESS MODELS AND REVENUE SOURCES

There are many business model frameworks created by various scholars and authors in the literature. Fetscherin and Knolmayer (2004), for example, offered a structure for business models of digital content with five key components: product, consumer, price, revenue, and delivery. Their study argues that this model is a “more consistent way to compare business models of companies to identify key profit drivers.”

The digital subscription model is also preferred by many outlets such as the New York Times, The Economist, and Financial Times to increase revenues. Even though there are various models which news outlets use for profitability, online advertising is considered

to be the most common model. A research conducted by Chyi and Sylvie (2001) regarding regional, and national online newspapers in California, Texas, Florida, and New York, showed that ‘online advertising served as a revenue source for almost 80% of the sites, fewer than 20% adopted e-commerce, and only 3% charged a subscription fee’. Online advertising revenues provide a steady income for the news outlets; thus, they are able to offer their stories for free. The digital subscription model is also commonly used in revenue models since it requires weekly, monthly or yearly transactions, so it guarantees the income (Bulut & Karlıdağ, 2019).

For example, Financial Times’ (FT) subscription model provides four different offers to become a subscriber: Trial, Essential, Unlimited and Team or Business Access. A Financial Times reader can try the subscription model by paying 1,00 € for 4 weeks. Essential offer is 4,39€ per week, yet it does not provide all content. The unlimited offer, as the name implies, gives unlimited access to FT content if you pay 10,50 € per week. Last option is Group offer, which is a ‘pay based on use’ model which provides different types of payment options regarding the usage (Financial Times, 2019). Many news giants across the world such as the New York Times, Washington Post and The Guardian uses similar subscription methods and urge their readers to support them via online subscription. Recent revenue report of The New York Times (NYT) can be considered as a valid example to the importance of this model. NYT reports show that “3.3 million people pay for the company’s digital products, including its news, crossword, and food apps, a 27 percent jump from 2017.” The report also emphasizes that the outlet’s online subscription revenue reached 400 million U.S. dollars with nearly 18 percent raise in 2018. Another striking detail from the report is that for the first time, digital advertising revenues surpassed the print in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Peiser, 2019). These numbers, even though they are limited to NYT, implies that digital subscription and online advertising is going to play an important role in online news business revenues.

A report named “The Story So Far - What We Know About the Business of Digital Journalism, (2011)” which is prepared by Bill Grueskin, Ava Seave and Lucas Graves scrutinizes the digital news economy and point out key elements of digital advertising, online profitability and situation of news outlets in post Web 2.0 environment.

The report indicates that digitization of news brought a whole new mindset to both journalism and news economy. On the readers' side, it created a massive pool of information which is generally offered for free. But when it comes to publishers, it created many competitors and rivalry. Boczkowski (2004a) examines this rivalry and digital transformation of newspapers in his book “Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers” and hints that traditional newspapers were defensive at first and they established online news branches for to catch up with new competitors, not for looking at the future possibilities of the internet. He argues that their vision was limited regarding the digital atmosphere and they mainly focused on short term profits rather than planning a model for the future. (Boczkowski, 2004a)

The digital environment is cheap to adapt and perform in terms of publishing when compared with the traditional print industry, and novelties in advertising such as targeting and personalization provided more opportunities in profitability. It is easier to reach more people online, yet this is not a guaranteed way to increase revenues. Grueskin, Seave, and Graves argue that digital market also created new ways to make a profit for news outlets, such as selling online archives and online subscription. When it comes to reader profiles and statistics, digital platforms provide massive information. Services like Google Analytics allows publishers to analyze their reader base and consider their online publishing strategies. On a marketing perspective, this data is generally demanded by advertisers who are now able to see how many people are actually consuming their advertised product or service. Yet these advantages can also be reflected as disadvantages. Tailoring and personalization of content and advertising might be beneficial for publishers and advertisers, but privacy regulations set a limit to the information that can be reflected to advertisers by publishers. (Grueskin et al., 2011)

These different revenue models are used by both mainstream and independent/alternative news outlets throughout the world. Yet advertising and other business models do not designate the only factor for resources. Although it did not emerge with the new media, media ownership and concentration has kept its impact on digital journalism as well. Since newspapers are businesses in market economy, they are affected by the effects of it like any other sector. There are two types of concentration which media firms can integrate: Vertically, which means that “integrating formerly independent economic entities of different production levels into one company”, or

horizontally, which is “merging companies of the same production level.” These integrations can reduce the independence, diversity and plurality of voices in general and when uncontrolled, it can lead to a fusion in competition and raising monopoly. Although there are various disadvantages like mentioned, mergers like these can also form a sufficient resistance to threats of the globalised economy and provide economic and structural power (Dohnanyi, 2003).

Explaining the news economy without scrutinizing the critiques towards ownership and business models in the media industry would be a naive attempt. Since mass media affects the whole public opinion and is a great tool to manufacture consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), it can be used as a tool by power elites. As Herman and Chomsky proposed the ‘Propaganda Model’ in their book “Manufacturing Consent”; ownership and advertising are two of the role players in filtering the information in favor of the power, before it reaches to the public. This filtering process is considered as a threat to independent and objective information. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that by media ownership, big media corporations and conglomerates focuses the profitability and their motive is to keep it at its best. Therefore, critical journalism might stand in the way of the needs and aims of these owners. Advertising is another important factor in news economy. Mass media is funded by advertisement to reduce their production costs and increase their revenues. Thus, the media avoids contradicting with the advertiser’s interests and products.

Herman and Chomsky point out that these filters have a big impact on objective journalism because they designate economic principles that directly affects the objective and independent media production. Even though they have created this model 31 years ago, its framework is still applicable and present in today's media atmosphere. Digitization, the convergence of the mass media and social media, as Herman (2000) comments, ‘permit media firms to shrink staff even as they achieve greater outputs, and they make possible global distribution systems that reduce the number of media entities.’ He discusses that some say new technologies are breaking the corporate stronghold and opening an interactive, democratic media atmosphere, yet he emphasizes that there is no evidence to support this view. He even implies that new technologies are ‘exacerbating’ the problem. Herman claims that if the internet left to the market, it cannot serve ‘the democratic ends.’

In 2019, there is a strong monopoly in digital companies. NetMarketShare data shows this dominance in computer/mobile technology sector. Microsoft Windows has 87.45% of the market share in desktop/laptop computers. In mobile, Google's Android has 70.21% while Apple's iOS has 28.24% market share. Regarding search engines, Google has the strong dominance with 77.76% market share in both mobile and desktop/laptop computers (NetMarketShare, 2019) These companies and their aggregating services such as Google News and Apple News plays an important role in news distribution of digital era. Google News launched as a beta in 2002 and offers a flow of articles from various news outlets and magazines. As of 2013, it has more than 50 thousand news sources all around the world. By 2015, Google News offered services in 37 languages including Turkish (Kemler, 2015). Apple News is an aggregator service of Apple which is similar to Google News, but only available on Apple devices such as iOS and Mac. Apple News offers news articles and topics which users can pick their publishers and follow its news via Apple News app (Bishop, 2015). Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, pointed out that Apple News has over 85 million monthly active users in the U.S., U.K., and Australia. He emphasized that this is a new record. (MacRumors, 2019). These two aggregators are some of the widely used applications in news dissemination throughout the internet. Even though there are other competitors such as Flipboard, Bundle (Turkish) and Feedly, Google News and Apple News are the top choices of the publishers. Since there is a massive competition on news dissemination on social media, publishers partner up with aggregator services to become more visible on the web. Via push notifications, these aggregators increase the chances of news outlets getting more traffic.

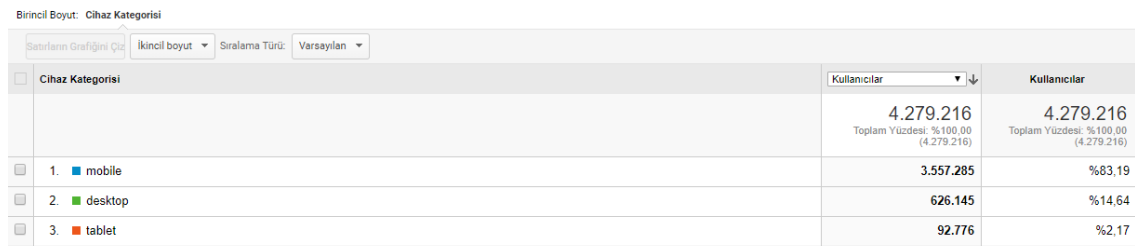
This system looks beneficial for both parties, yet there are some criticism and lawsuits regarding these news aggregating method's copyright strategies. One of the examples of this is AFP vs. Google case. Back in 2005, Agence France Presse (AFP) filed a lawsuit to Google since it uses AFP's copyrighted articles and photos in their feed. Since they sell their content to outlets which pay for the license, AFP claimed that Google News meddled in copyright infringement. After two years, Google and AFP settled the copyright case and entered a licensing deal which made Google able to post and disseminate AFP content (Isbell, 2010).

These legal disputes between news outlets and tech giants can be considered as a developing problem of post Web 2.0 digital era. Massive distribution of information through the internet poses a threat to licensing and creates many copyright infringements. Many social media giants which aggregate and disseminate news, especially Google and Facebook, are criticized in this manner for not being able to restrict these infringements and illegal use of content. For example, recently approved copyright law called “The Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market” in European Parliament (EP), sparked controversy regarding some articles of the law. EP claims that the law aims to help musicians, performers and news publishers to gain more from their work and compromise better in deals on online platforms. Many European press associations, including the Turkish Anadolu Agency (AA, 2019), approves and lobbied for the law since the directive is going to be beneficial to their online revenues. Although it may look like a good thing to set borders on online news dissemination, there are many critiques towards it. Article 13, which is one of the most discussed and criticized articles of the law, would require social media platforms such as Facebook, Google/YouTube, and Twitter to monitor copyright infringements and illegitimate use of content more aggressively. Also, these giants would be responsible for any possible copyright problems created via their platform, thus become liable from any illegitimately published content. This liability raised questions towards the actions of these social media giants in order to avert these copyright infringements. There is a rising fear of possible precautions set by platforms and the term “upload filter” is emerged to describe the concerns. To prevent infringement, establishing possible filters is considered to pose a threat to freedom of expression online. ‘Link tax’ is another term offered to criticize Article 11, which require social media platforms to get permission or pay a licensing fee to embed the content links from publishers. This considered as to target Facebook and Google primarily since they are the most used news aggregators (Sterling; Ranger, 2019). These developments regarding legality in online news publishing seem to be discussed by many in the future and play a significant role to shape the business models of both publishers and online news aggregators.

3.2 DIGITAL NEWS ECONOMY IN TURKEY

In order to continue functioning, internet newspapers heavily depend on advertising revenues (Bulunmaz, 2011). Since the written press is a sector that includes high-cost applications such as printing and distribution, it is affected greatly by the decline of advertisements and thus, results as income loss (Özçağlayan, 2008). Therefore, any economic pressure could easily have a bitter result for workers and outlets such as layoffs and downsizing. With the raising usage of mobile devices, the importance of digital platforms in income balances of the company has significantly rose up. According to Pew Research survey (Fedeli & Matsa, 2018), ‘six-in-ten U.S. adults (58%) often get news on a mobile device, 19 percentage points higher than the 39% who often get news on a desktop or laptop computer.’ Report also indicates that young people access news via mobile devices more than elders. ‘About seven-in-ten adults ages 18 to 29 (71%) often get news on a mobile device, compared with 37% of those ages 65 or older.’

Dominance of mobile news consumption assumed to be same in Turkey as well. As an example, Turkish news outlet BirGün’s Google Analytics data shows that, monthly traffic of the outlet’s website come mainly from mobile devices.



Birincil Boyut: Cihaz Kategorisi		Kullanıcılar	Kullanıcılar
Cihaz Kategorisi		4.279.216 Toplam Yüzdesi: %100,00 (4.279.216)	4.279.216 Toplam Yüzdesi: %100,00 (4.279.216)
1. mobile		3.557.285	%83,19
2. desktop		626.145	%14,64
3. tablet		92.776	%2,17

Figure 3. 1 Google Analytics Page of BirGün Daily

Between 13 March 2019 and 11 April 2019, website had 4.279.216 unique visitors and 3.557.285 of them visited the website from mobile devices, which makes up the 83,19% of the whole traffic. (Personal access, 2019)

This dominance of mobile user interaction, attracts advertisers to digital platforms. Like in any other country, Turkish news outlets also widely benefit the opportunities of digital advertising. According to Bulut & Karlıdağ study (2015), which investigates 12 digital news outlets, Turkish newspapers, like their foreign counterparts, “use ad types

like banners, posters, rich ads, content sponsorships, search engines.” Even though mainstream media in Turkey has other income sources since they are owned by big corporations, they use online advertisements in their websites as well. Some direct advertisements such as political party ads or company ads also can be seen on newspapers’ websites. Content and advertisement aggregators such as Google Ads, AdMatic, AdChoices, and Ligatus are also widely used by digital news platforms for increasing revenues.

Bulut & Karlıdağ (2019) study summarizes what kind of advertisements that Turkish news outlets generally use in table below:

Table 3. 1 Revenue Model Table (Bulut & Karlıdağ, 2019)

Revenue model	Description	Examples
Advertisement	Direct-serving ads and Google etc. private ads served through intermediaries	Adil Medya.com, Agos.com, Aydınlık.com, BirGün, Diken, Ensonhaber, Evrensel, F5Haber, Gazete Duvar.com, Gazete Emek.com, Gazete Manifesto.com, Gercekgundem.com, Haber.com, Haber 3, Haberler, InternetHaber, Karar.com, MedyascopeTV.com, Objektif Haber, Oda TV, Sesonline.net, Son Dakika, Sol Haber, Son Sayfa, SuperHaber, Türkiye Haber Merkezi, T24,
Voluntary donations	Users can make a donation for content production.	Medyascope.tv.com
Fund/Project	Funds and projects provided by the EU and non-governmental organizations	Bianet.org, Medyascope.tv.com, T24

Most of the digital newspapers are giving places for the private ads that are distributed by digital ads platforms including Google Ads, AdMatic, Criteo/AdChoices, EngageYa, Ligatus and ReklamStore. Study indicates that there are various ways of income that Turkish digital media uses in order to increase the revenues. Even though most of the outlets use advertisements, there are other methods which are being used. Subscription models and public funding are getting popular amongst internet newspapers. Since there is a lot of competition in the market, newspapers look for other sources to survive. There are ongoing examples of subscription models that can be shown such as Sözcü, BirGün and Evrensel. Sözcü has a subscription model which is called Sözcü Plus. Outlet offers no-ads version of the website, online PDF version of the printed newspaper plus archives and Sözcü Plus exclusive stories in its subscription plans. There are two options of payment to subscribe: Either paying 10.99 Turkish liras (TL)

for a month, or 109.99 TL annual payment which also includes a gift of book which is written by Sözcü columnists (Sözcü, 2019). BirGün also offers a subscription model, which has 4 different payment options: Blue, Green, Red and Special subscription. Outlet offers different gifts with these packages such as books, bags, invitation of dinner with BirGun employees, and thank you cards. Prices vary from 225 TL to 2700 TL (BirGün, 2019). Evrensel also has a subscription model that has 4 packages. Readers can subscribe to outlet monthly; prices are ranged from 30 TL to 300 TL (Evrensel, 2019).

Public and organizational funding is another way which Turkish independent outlets are commonly using. European Union and NGO funds are used by outlets such as T24, Bianet and Sendika.Org. Patreon is also used to raise public funds by Turkish independent news outlets. Crowdsourcing aggregators like Patreon are gaining popularity in Turkish news environment, and not just for outlets. Journalists are often broadcast via Periscope and other live video platforms as well and they urge their readers/viewers to support them via services like Patreon. Ünsal Ünlü, who is a journalist that regularly broadcast podcasts and videos has 546 supporters in Patreon whom financially support his independent work of journalism (Patreon, n.d.). These crowdsourcing aggregators could be considered as an important channel for journalists and independent newsrooms to maintain their work and provide alternative voices of journalism in the social networks.

Press Advertising Agency (PAA) which aggregates the publishing of official and public institutions' advertisements in newspapers and magazines also creates an important income for the outlets. Agency also audits the newspapers and magazines periodically or based on complaint, in order to see if they breach the press codes and regulations (PAA, n.d.).

Massive increase in mobile device, therefore social media usage in last couple of years, started to make news outlets take radical actions. The Independent became the first national newspaper in the U.K. to cease all print editions in March, 2016. Owner of the newspaper Evgeny Lebedev, who claimed that, "The newspaper industry is changing," emphasized in his announcement that they took this decision because the readers change

their way of consuming news and “they are showing us that the future is digital,” (Independent, 2016).

There are examples of closures occurred in Turkey as well. First of them was the end of printed Radikal in 2014, two years before it completely shut down by the owner company Dogan Media Group. Radikal, in 2014, closed its print services with the claim “future of the press lies in the digital” and continued its publishing only on the Web. 2 years later, in March 2016, Dogan Medya decided to end Radikal altogether. The reason of the act announced as “economic problems.” (Evrensel, 2016)

Habertürk boss took the same action last year. Ciner Group, who is the owner company of the Habertürk, took the decision of ceasing print version of the 9-year-old newspaper and thus, it went fully digital. Mehmet Kenan Tekdağ, who is the boss of Ciner Media, sent an e-mail to employees of the newspaper, announcing the reasons of the closure. He underlined that the decision of the closure came after the “irrepressible” decline in sales and advertisements (T24, 2018).

Ownership concentration in the Turkish press also poses a threat to polyphony of journalism. RSF’s Media Ownership Monitor (MOM) report (2016) indicates that in the printed press market, there is a concentration of four ownership with 59% share, which can be observed: Doğan (22%) Turkuvaz (15%), Esmedy (12%) and Estetik Media (10%). As report remarks, online market has a similar result. Four big media owner has the 55% of the viewer share: Demirören (20%), Doğan (17%), Turkuvaz (9%), and Yeni Medya (9%). After MOM report has been published, a big acquisition happened in the Turkish media sector. In 2018, Demirören Medya purchased the Doğan Medya and became the biggest media group in Turkey. After this development, comparing MOM report, Demirören became the most dominant media group in both printed and online media sectors. After the acquisition, circulation of the newspapers which belong to Demirören raised up to nearly 900 thousand. According to BBC Turkish article, which is citing Medyatava numbers (2018), this means Demirören now controls the 31,6% of the daily newspaper sales in Turkey, which is around 3,1 million in numbers.

Demirören first entered the media sector by acquiring Milliyet and Vatan newspapers from Doğan Holding in 2011. While the company flourished in AK Party’s governance, by expanding into another sectors from energy to real estate, construction, petroleum

and media, administration of the Demirören Holding is known by having close ties to President Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling AK Party government (MOM, 2016). Big media group owners such as Demirören, Doğuş, Ciner, Albayrak and Doğan, conduct an activity in construction, energy and mining business sectors beside media. Therefore, these companies attend to public tenders and sign arrangements with the state. MOM report shows that 7 out of 10 most popular newspapers owned by companies which has relationships with the government. This network of relations and raising monopoly in the Turkish press are criticized by many scholars, dissident media professionals and politicians in terms of press independence and freedom.

These examples indicate that the rise of the social media, its undeniable effect on journalism and balances in the media ownership concentration is going to change newsrooms and the practice of journalism itself. Considering Turkey, we can assume that digitization trend will be discussed further and independent newsrooms which has a constantly growing follower numbers, going to create a strong competition to mainstream media. To compete in this massive playground, companies and small newsrooms need to follow up the consumer trends and innovations in the digital technologies.

3.3 ATTENTION ECONOMY AND DIGITAL JOURNALISM

The arrival of the internet created a world-wide pool of constantly flowing information. To monetize this atmosphere, advertising embraced digital platforms and created tools for making revenues. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter connected billions of people on the internet and these platforms offered their services to the public for free. Even though there is no payment required to use these services, people spent their valuable time and attention to consuming the content. “While the consumption of these digital services is enormous, it is difficult to evaluate their value since none of these sites charge users for online consumption.” (Brynjolfsson and Oh, 2012).

The term ‘attention economy’ appeared with the discussions of quantifying the value of these ‘use for free’ services. Having the people’s attention creates the possibility of

transferring it to another person or product and monetize it. “Attention is the portal to people’s minds and a necessary condition for all successful communication; from teaching and knowledge presentation to persuasion, seduction, and manipulation. This makes attention extremely valuable for everyone with something to sell.” (Hendricks and Mads, 2019). When considered, this importance of the attention economy was impossible to avoid by digital journalism. Therefore, it embraced by digital press thoroughly. This is performed by various methods, such as click-baiting, which aims to provoke the readers with catchy headlines to enter the website and make them stay to increase analytics numbers in order to gain revenues from online advertisements. Even though “There is a tendency towards click-baiting in eight out of every ten of the European news media” (Orosa et al., 2017:1270), there is criticism towards these attention-grabbing headlines as well. Gideon Lichfield, editor-in-chief of MIT Technology Review discusses in his Nieman Lab article (2018) that attention economy is facing decline with the paywalls set up by many of the news giants such as New York Times, Bloomberg and Business Insider with charging for their content completely or partially and building subscription models. Lichfield criticizes the attention economy for being “toxic” and holds it responsible for “garbage content, fake news, and the excessive power of the giant social-media platforms.”

Clickbait’s effect on digital journalism will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.

4. WHAT IS CLICKBAIT?

As discussed previously in the research, constant and global dissemination of the information in the post Web 2.0 era, forced newsrooms to shape and evaluate their methods with the novelties in digital technology in order to reach audiences and stand out in the increasing competition. To stand out in this abundance of information flow, digital newsrooms use catchy headlines to provoke readers into reading the shared content. The term ‘Clickbait’ is used to describe these types of headlines, which Cambridge Dictionary explains as, “articles, photographs, etc. on the internet that is intended to attract attention and encourage people to click on links to particular websites.” (‘Clickbait’, n.d.).

New York Times editorial (2017) also sheds a light on the definition of clickbait. NYT senior editor Martin Bulik explains that their main motive is, to be honest with their readers. He criticizes the conception of “a headline should summarize the story” and he emphasizes that their first rule is to make the reader feel satisfied after consuming the content. Bulik summarizes NYT’s perception of clickbait with these words: “One cardinal rule is that we don’t want headlines that leave readers feeling cheated when they’ve finished the article. That’s our definition of clickbait.” (New York Times, 2017)

Before scrutinizing the clickbait, it might be beneficial to look into the tabloidization of journalism in order to understand the concept thoroughly. Tabloid journalism, which is also called as ‘yellow journalism’ and ‘bad journalism’ is produced with stories which are based on sensationalism, scandals, sports, entertainment, and over-exaggeration. (Örnebring and Jönsson (2004).

This type of journalism is emphasizing on personalization, simplification, and sensation in order to reach more people and it is often criticized for lowering the quality and meaning of the journalism practice which is focused on public good and democracy – “since detailed truthful reporting of important events gave way to stories that were more sensational in nature” (Chakraborty et al., 2017). Örnebring and Jönsson (2004), who examine this tabloidization in the journalism, argue that tabloid journalism is “breeding cynicism and a lack of interest in politics, while ignoring the real political issues in favour of superficial political scandal.” Tabloid journalism is criticized for creating

distraction and setting “shadow on the topics that are important to the lives of people in a given society.”. Tabloidization is popular because it is focused on manufacturing the content for more and more customers. This economic incentive is sometimes going to lengths of ruling out the ethics of information (Popović & Popović, 2014). Chen et al., (2015) research indicate that tabloidization and digitization of the journalism encourage the usage of clickbait headlines for attracting the interest of the news consumers.

Journalism, by tradition, requires attention-grabbing headlines to make the story interacted by many readers. Although it is an old technique, digital journalism brought a new incentive to the concept of headline creation. New York Times (NYT) Senior Editor Mark Bulik, in his piece in NYT, explains how the outlet decides on headlines. Digital analytics opportunities provide possibilities to outlets to test different types of headlines in order to assess the interaction of the readers. Bulik, in his article, clarifies how NYT chooses their headlines:

“The Times is using a tool that allows us to simultaneously present two different headlines for the same article on its home page. Half of the readers on the page see one headline; half see the other. The test measures the difference in readers clicking on the article and lets us know if the numbers are statistically significant. If so, the winning headline goes on the home page for all readers.” (Bulik, 2016)

Bulik’s elucidation regarding the headline picking process shed light on the impact of digital technology on online journalism. He explains, “it’s possible to see which headline attracts more readers.” Since digital journalism is operating in the attention economy and making revenues from online advertisements, journalists are now required to write a headline which readers should click and consume the news. “If the readers do not click (or tap) on the headlines, they do not read the stories, leading to less activity on the news page and, thus, less potential for commercial revenue.” (Blom & Hansen, 2014). Lee et al., (2014) study, research extensively on the correlation between reader clicks and interaction with the news articles and its effects on editorial behavior. Study reveals that reader interaction and preferences indeed play a role in the future story choices of the journalists. Citing the outcomes, study deduces that online newsrooms are getting more and more dependent on digital tracking tools (such as Google Analytics and Yandex Metrica) to understand what readers are clicking the most and

they create a road map to produce similar content which readers will more likely click and read.

To ‘lure’ the readers into the website, there are many ways and types of clickbait usage in headlines, photographs and other elements of the story. Headlines are the most common area of clickbait usage. With headlines, journalists try to allure the audiences into reading the content which is described in the headlines that present limited information regarding the article (Hurst, 2016).

Although there are no certain rules to determine clickbait, there are several techniques in the creation process of clickbait content. Literature provides many definitions to clickbait headlines, so in order to explain these headlines in detail, this thesis will cite the Bazaco et al., (2019) study, which offers an analytical model of defining clickbait content. While describing the table, different studies and examples from the news outlets will be used in order to give a detailed explanation of main and subcategories.

Table 4. 1 Analytical model for defining variables of clickbait (Bazaco et al., 2019)

A. PRESENTATION VARIABLES	1. Incomplete information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of the most relevant data • Unanswered questions • Use of enumeration and lists • Deliberate ambiguity
	2. Appeals expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocative • Imperative • Singularisation of reader
	3. Repetition and serialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic reiteration • Reiteration of frames • Dosage of data in successive deliveries
	4. Exaggeration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyperboles • Comparisons of superiority and superlatives • Neologism formed with prefix “super” • Intensifying adjectivisation
B. CONTENT VARIABLES	5. Soft news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft or sensational content • Personal, emotional, episodic or anecdotal representation frames
	6. Striking audiovisual elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shocking and/or odd photos and videos • Use of funny memes • Image manipulation

The study differentiates clickbait content in two main categories (Table 4.1), which are Presentation Variables (A), that thematically characterizes the clickbait content and Content Variables (B), which are narratively created clickbait content.

A. Presentation Variables

A1. Incomplete information: Study indicates that this type clickbait headlines “do not advance any information but invite readers to discover the result of the subject for which they bait readers, with the adverb” (Palau-Sampio, 2016). These headlines focus on leaving the information out of the headline, therefore sparking interest in unanswered questions regarding the content. Enumeration and lists are considered in this variable as well, which are the types of headlines that provoke readers into clicking the content with numerical and list headlines such as “15 strangest to cutest cat breeds you’ve never seen before” (Unbelievable-Facts.com, 2015). Deliberate ambiguity is another tactic of incomplete information. It focuses on the “lack of clarity or precision in the writing of the headline intended to sow doubts in the reader.” (Bazaco et al., 2019). These types of clickbait often based on double grounding in meaning. Brone & Coulson, (2010) explains deliberate ambiguity in their study and present this example of headline in terms of explaining the concept: “For example, in ‘Russia takes the froth off Carlsberg results,’ the key element, ‘takes the froth off,’ is significant both metaphorically, where it refers to the detrimental impact of Russia, and metonymically via a contextual link between the company Carlsberg and beer, its best-known product.’ (Brone & Coulson, 2010).

A2. Appealing expression: According to the study, these types of headlines openly demand readers to interact with the content. “Click and learn”, “Click and watch” templates often used in this practice of headline writing, such as this: “TIKLAYIN nerede oy kullanacağınızı öğrenin” (CLICK and learn where you are going to vote) (Haber7, 2011).

A3. Repetition and serialization: In some cases, where the outlet sees from the analytics that shared content receive a massive amount of interaction, they might reiterate and reshare the original content later in the day or even next day, in order to keep the profit.

A4. Exaggeration: To raise more attention, editors write exaggerated headlines with hyperbolic claims to intensify and emphasize the content. This is generally done by using hyperbolic adjectives such as “You Won’t Believe, Amazing etc.” and using exclamation marks. Nature Microbiology article (2019) raise attention to these kinds of

headlines and emphasize that they harm reporting of the science news. The article suggests that “tabloid headline writers should dial down their hyperbolic rhetoric and avoid sensationalism when reporting scientific discoveries” (Nature Microbiology, 2019)

B. Content Variables

B5. Soft News: Clickbait content creation is abundantly seen in the field of “soft news”. There are two main categories of news which is discussed by many scholars. ‘Hard news’, which is considered to have more news value than other topics, can be listed as economics, politics, and social matters. ‘Soft news’ on the other hand do not require punctuality and has a wide range of subjects such as gossip, human stories and offbeat events (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). Soft news may not hold information that would be beneficial to the public good, yet with emotional emphasis, it encourages readers to consume the content.

B6. Striking audiovisual elements are used to help headlines raise interest. Bazaco et al., (2019) study indicate that “photography, gallery of images, videos and even memes and gifs” are commonly used to strike reader attention.

4.1 CLICKBAIT CONTENT ANALYSIS

In order to give tangible examples of the theoretical clickbait identification framework which is discussed earlier, study will pick three clickbait headlines from Hürriyet newspaper which are used in 26th of April, 2019 and analyze its elements to explain how it is taken into account as clickbait by the study.

1st example: **“12.5 milyon kişiye devlet ödeme yapacak! İşte o tarihler”** (Government will pay to 12.5 million people! Here are the dates) ¹

This headline is used to announce the news of payment which is provided by government to retired people before each religious holiday. Instead of stating what the payment is and who it will be given to, Hürriyet just indicated that government is going

¹ Headline is shared in Hürriyet’s Twitter account, accessed in 26.04.2019, 09:51 AM. Available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/galeri-12-5-milyon-kisiye-devlet-odeme-yapacak-iste-o-tarihler-41194634>

to pay 12.5 million people and urged the readers into clicking to link with “Here are the days” indicator. Since there is no clarification regarding the payment, newspaper expected readers to click to headline and explore what is the payment, who will get it and when it will be received. These three questions are hidden in this headline, and therefore readers have to click and read the news to find out. Thus, this headline is considered as a clickbait headline.

2nd example: “*Türkiye’de ilk... Binlerce turist bunun için akın edecek*” (First in Turkey... Thousands of tourists will swarm for this”²

Hürriyet used this headline to announce Turkey’s first touristic submarine which is expected to have 22 thousand visitors in 2019. Outlet, which did not specify what it actually is in the tweet, used only a photograph of the submarine’s interior which shows some people looking outside of its windows. By using “First in Turkey” sentence, headline creates excitement over its features and announcing “Thousands of tourists will swarm”, outlet exaggerates the expected outcome. This “soft news” headline is created to provoke readers into clicking link by expanding the expectation from story’s outcome.

3rd example: “*Şeftali bahçesinde korkunç olay! Yakalandılar...*” (Horrible event in peach garden! They are caught...) ³

This headline of Hürriyet only specifies that the event is occurred in a peach garden and people who are caught for some reason. The story tells that a man is murdered and thrown away into a peach garden and his murder suspects are taken into custody by a police operation. By using “horrible” adjective, headline targets emotion of the readers and since there are no other indicators specified in the headline, users are drawn into clicking to the link. The tweet also has an image which only shows hard blurred figure. By providing very limited information regarding the story, this headline also can be considered as a clickbait headline.

² Headline is shared in Hürriyet’s Twitter account, accessed in 26.04.2019, 10:03 AM. Available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/turkiyede-ilk-binlerce-turist-deneyimlemek-icin-akin-edecek-41194008>

³ Headline is shared in Hürriyet’s Twitter account, accessed in 26.04.2019, 10:18 AM. Available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/seftali-bahcesinde-korkunc-olay-yakalandilar-41194677>

4.2 CRITICS REGARDING THE CLICKBAIT CONTENT

By summarizing the analytical model of clickbait variables, it can be seen that there are several methods and models which are used to raise the audience's attention, used by newsrooms and content creators.

Literature review shows that clickbait is a widely used method, yet it also sparks critics. Clickbait headlines are considered a harmful way to increase website traffic, since these catchy headlines can “misrepresent the article and diminish the newspaper's brand and squander readers' trust” (Hindman, 2015:20)

Chen et al., (2015) study, which recognizes clickbait as “false news”, primarily focused on creating a tool that automatically detects the clickbait headlines. Their study proposes a detection model that may identify clickbait with linguistic patterns such as “suspenseful language, unresolved pronouns, a reversal narrative style, forward referencing, image placement, reader's behavior, and other important cues”. Study sees clickbait as “misinformation” and aims to detect these contents and assist news aggregators, content managers, and news consumers in order to eliminate and filter these contents.

Chakrabaty et al., (2016) study also work on a similar aim. Engineers who argue in their study that clickbait usually leave readers disappointed after consuming the content since it does not provide the information which is promised. To battle with clickbait, study claims that its proposed model of clickbait detection extension has “93% accuracy in detecting and 89% accuracy in blocking clickbait” content (Chakrabaty et al., 2016).

Social media giant Facebook is also in a battle with clickbait headlines. In the company's Newsroom blog article (2017), engineers of Facebook explain that users are complaining about misleading, sensational or spammy content. Facebook article counts clickbait headlines in these categories and openly declares their fight against clickbait: “We're always working to determine what stories might have clickbait headlines so we can show them less often.” The company emphasizes that it created a team who works specifically in this case, and they work in identifying the clickbait headlines. With this effort, the company aims to lower the rank of the clickbait content in the News Feed. (Facebook Newsroom, 2017)

Clickbait usage is discouraged by search engines as well. To understand the effect of clickbait in the perspective of technicality, study will cite the Yoast Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plugin's blog post (2016). Yoast, which is one of the most downloaded SEO plugins in the content management system WordPress, argues the disadvantages of clickbait headlines in profitability of the websites. Yoast is directly against the usage of clickbait. Company, in their blog post, discuss the negative effects of clickbait. Article argues that clickbait articles increase the bounce rates of the traffic. Bounce rate is bad for profitability, since it implies the percentage of visitors which leave the website after consuming only one content. Yoast blog indicates that clickbait content does not hold up the expectations of the readers, therefore users will bounce back to search engines. Connected to this, article also claims that higher bounce rates which are occurred by clickbait, will decrease the website's rankings in the search engines and Google notices the bounce rates generated by the pages. As discussed earlier in the study, Facebook is also fighting with the clickbait content. (Van de Rakt, 2016)

Sections until this part of the thesis scrutinized the previous literature from the point of the emergence of the digital journalism, business models which are used in the digital newsrooms and finally the definitions and characterizations of clickbait headlines. It can be seen that usage of clickbait headlines are playing an important role in digital journalism and used by many news organizations. Further in the research, thesis will investigate how these kinds of headlines effecting news readers, if they have a role in their trust regarding to article or the outlet itself, and to what extend they react to clickbait headlines.

5. RESEARCH SURVEY ANALYSIS

In order to investigate how news readers interact clickbait headlines, study offered two different online surveys. These two surveys shared in social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. First quantitative survey aimed to understand online news readers' internet usage habits and their views and opinions regarding clickbait content. Second survey, which asked attendees about their income, the city they are living in and their work, prepared to gather more specific and qualitative answers regarding online news consumption and clickbait perception. This survey was offered only to the people who have attended the first survey. Addition to these two surveys, study reflects opinions and experiences of three media executives who managed digital newsrooms. In interviews with these media executives, study reflected professional point of view regarding clickbait creation and business models of the digital newsrooms. Finally, study includes an interview with an anti-clickbait initiative called "Limon Haber", which is a Twitter account that have more than 60 thousand followers, dedicated on fighting news outlets which are posting clickbait content on Twitter. Interview with Limon Haber remarks the answers of why this public initiative gained so much popularity, and experiences of the account owner regarding the digital news atmosphere and clickbait practices in Turkey.

With this three way approach, this study tried to present the current situation in Turkish digital news, business models of online outlets, the reasons and outcomes of clickbait production and finally, readers' interaction, trust and involvement to clickbait headlines.

5.1 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

In the first survey, readers have faced questions regarding their demographics, their habits of consuming online content and news, which social media platforms they use, their choices of social media platforms to follow news, which news outlets they mostly follow and trust, which medium is their most trusted source of news, and finally, their opinion regarding clickbait in news headlines.

Via this data, study analyzed the behaviours of the online news readers in a broad perspective. By looking at the medium they use, their trusted sources of news medium and how they perceive and interact with clickbait headlines, study tried to reflect how Turkish online news readers consume the stories, which news outlet they trust, what medium they prefer and if clickbait headlines have an impact on their news consumption or not.

To understand these variables, in the first survey, attendees were asked 24 quantitative questions. This online survey gathered 1.383 answers from different parts of the online community. In this chapter of the thesis, answers of these attendees will be analysed and presented.

There is a need to emphasize that these results may be counted as biased and does not reflect a certainty regarding the current situation of Turkish news atmosphere. To not intimidate the attendees, range of income and political affinity were not asked in the survey. Twitter was the main medium in sharing the survey, thus sample size and the way survey was disseminated sets a limit on objectivity and reliability of the outcomes.

5.2 QUANTITATIVE SURVEY ANALYSIS

5.2.1 Demographics

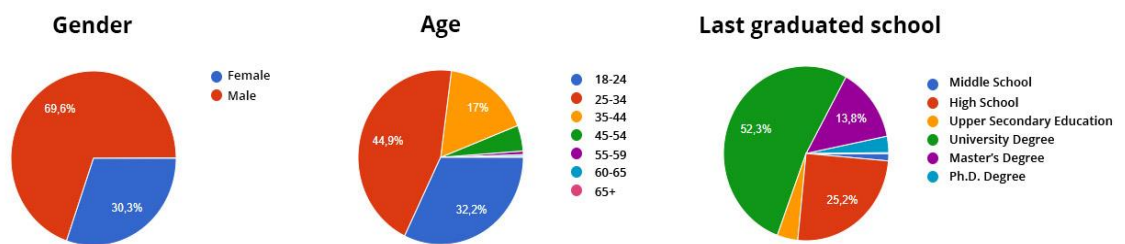


Figure 5. 1 Demographics of the attendees

95,2% of the attendees said they heard the concept of clickbait before. In order to make people complete the survey, clickbait examples had been presented and explained in the first part of the survey. 69,6% percent of the survey attendees were male, and 30,3% of the attendees were female.

People who have answered the survey was mostly between 25-34 years old. 44,9% of attendees were in this range of age, followed by 32,2% 18-24 years old and 17% 35-44 years old. 52,3% of the attendees specified that they have an university degree. It is followed by people who have high school degree 25,2% and master's degree 13,8%. These numbers show us that first survey is mainly based on sample which has majority of male attendees who has an university degree and aged between 25-34.

5.2.2 Internet usage habits

In the next chapter, users have asked their habits of using the internet. Out of the 4 questions (Home computer, Work/School Computer, Mobile Phone and Tablet), results show that mobile phone is the most used way to use internet. 93,1% attendees said they are connecting to internet via mobile phones. Home computer followed with 47,1% and work/school computer 26,8%. Tablets are the least popular way of connecting internet according to survey, which only 6,5% attendees said that they are using tablets for using the internet.

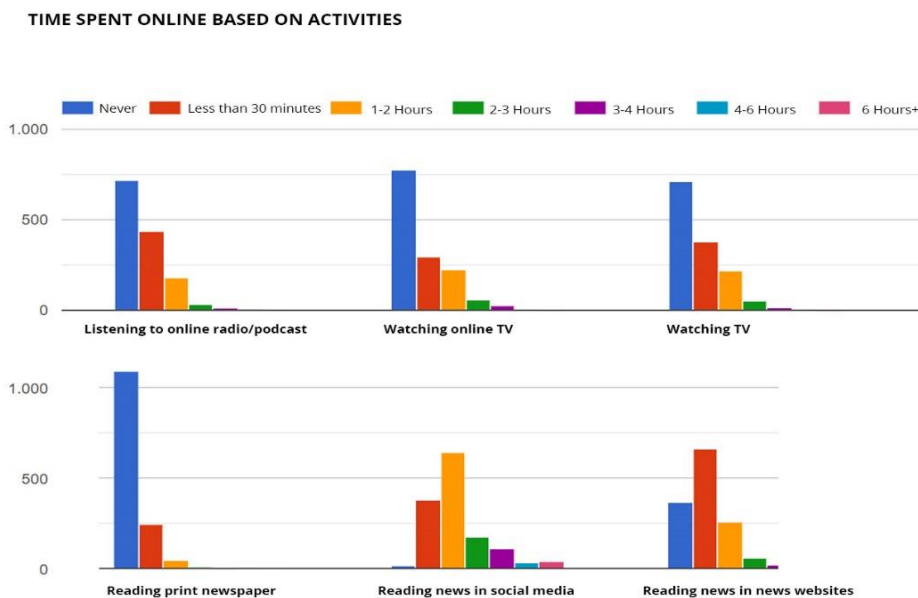


Figure 5. 2 Online activities of the survey attendees

The survey also asked the attendees about their online activities. Results indicate that people who have answered the survey are reading their news in mainly social media. Listening to online radio/podcasts, watching online and physical TV showed similar results which majority of attendees remarked that they do not do these activities while browsing the internet. The most striking outcome in these graphics are news consuming habits. Almost 80% of people stated that they do not read printed newspaper at all. Results are showing that people are preferring to read news in social media rather than television or printed newspapers. Longest time spent to read news is via social media, which majority of the people said they spent at least 1-2 hours to consume news. These results can be considered as an indicator to shift of journalism from print to digital.

Time spent online for consuming online content and communicating with people

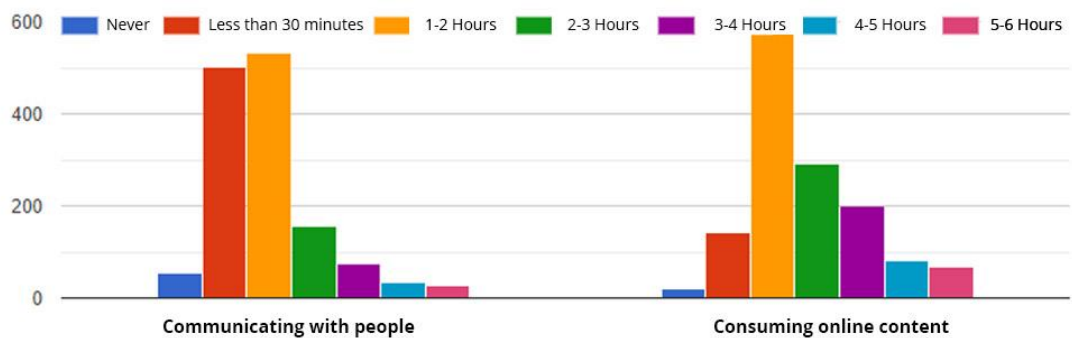


Figure 5. 3 The ways attendees use their time online

Next chapter of the survey asked people the amount of time they spent in communicating with people and consuming content. The results show that people tend to consume content more than communication with people. Comparing two variables, almost equal (532-577) people indicated that they both communicate and consume content for 1-2 hours a day. But looking at the further answers, it can be seen that people who remarked that they consume online content surpass people who said that they are communicate with people. 1.032 out of 1.383 attendees said that they spare time for online communication between 30 minutes and 2 hours. When we look at the consuming content ratio, we see people spend more time on reading and interacting with online content.

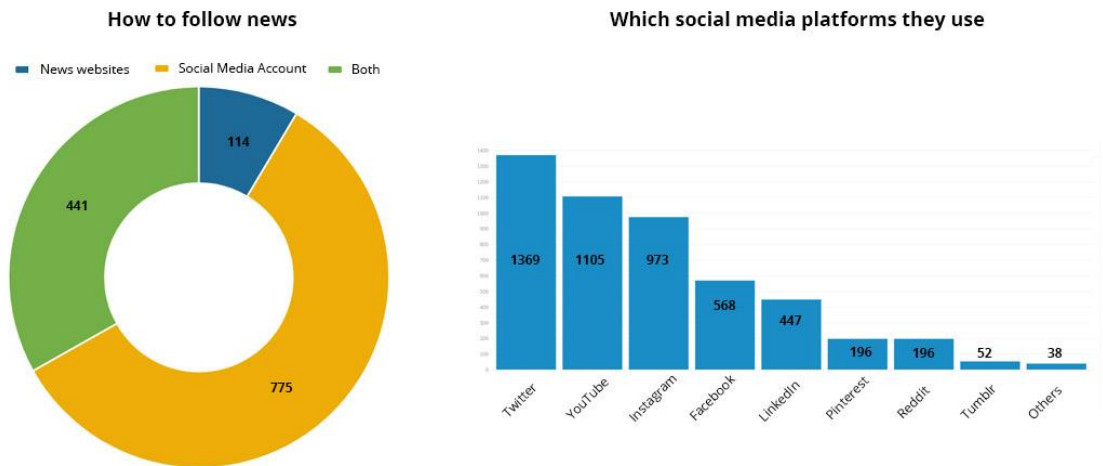


Figure 5. 4 Which mediums survey attendees use to follow news and their usage ratio of social media platforms

Survey indicates that majority of people follow news via their social media accounts. Results, which emphasizes the importance of social media platforms in news consumption, shows people mainly choose their social media accounts in order to reach news, rather than entering the news outlets websites directly. As results points out, Twitter is the most used social media platform, followed up by YouTube and Instagram. When considered in the perspective of news consumption, these outcomes can reflect that people are choosing Twitter for instantly accessing news and breaking stories, and via using YouTube and Instagram, they choose to watch and see what is going on in the agenda.

5.2.3 News outlets and reader trust

News outlets attendees follow in social media

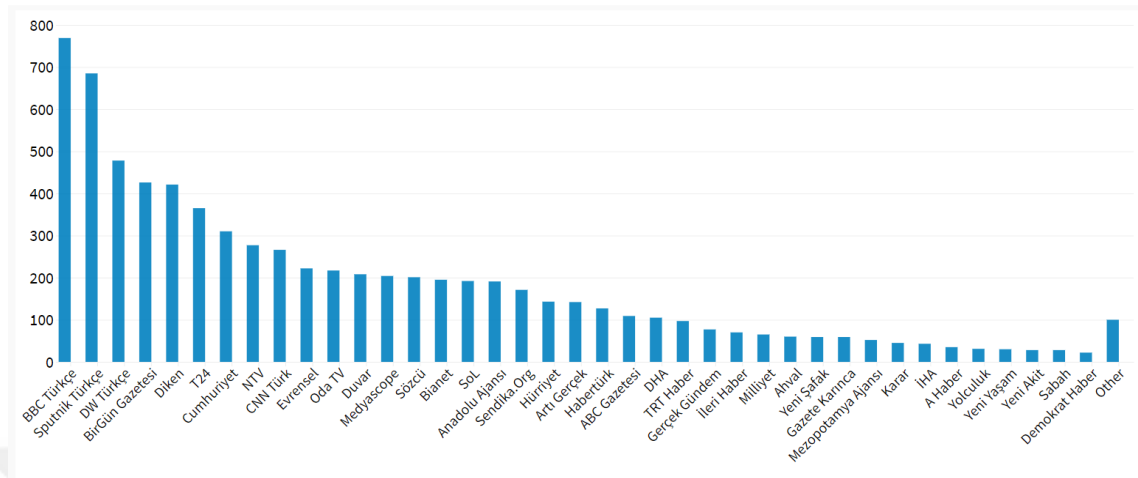


Figure 5. 5 Ranking of social media accounts of the news outlets which attendees are following

In this chapter, survey asked which Turkish news outlets online news reader follow and trust their broadcasts. Results show that there is a direct proportion between followed and trusted outlets. Generally, most followed outlets are also the most trusted ones. Survey outcome also showed an eye-catching detail. According to survey, 3 out of 5 mostly followed and trusted outlets are foreign news organisations’ Turkish services, which is in order of BBC Turkish, Sputnik Turkish and Deutsche Welle Turkish. This detail could be read as mainstream and alternative Turkish media fails to establish trust in readers, which steer them to follow foreign media organizations’ Turkish services. Results also show that mainstream media of Turkey, such as Hürriyet and Milliyet are losing their power in the digital news ecosystem. Also, first 3 news outlets which attendees specified as they trust and follow are internet-based organizations. This might be presented as example of readers’ shifting habits to digital platforms rather than printed newspapers.

Trusted news outlets

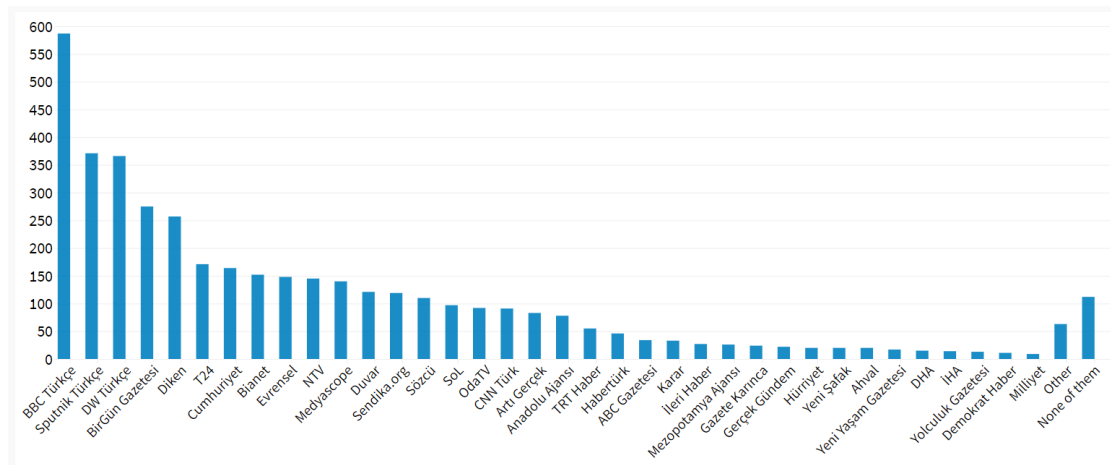


Figure 5. 6 Ranking of social media accounts which users are following

Earlier in the research, figure 5.2 showed that majority of the online news readers do not read printed newspapers. Comparing these two outcomes indicate that the shift towards digital publications has a considerable impact on printed newspapers.

Amount of trust in news platforms

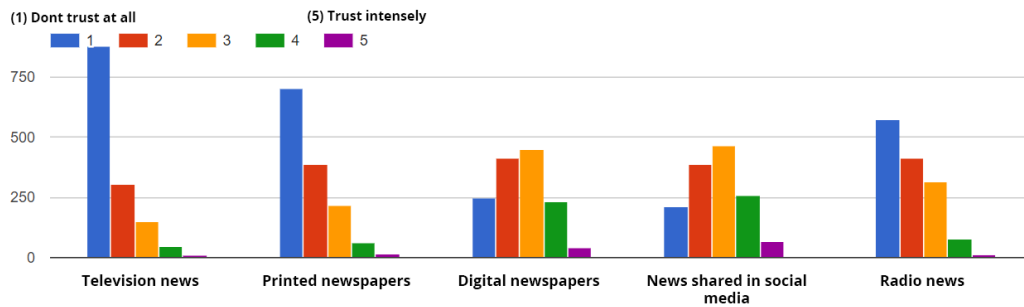


Figure 5. 7 Ranking of most trusted news mediums

Figure 5.7 shows the results of the attendees about which platform they trust the most regarding the news consumption. Answers also show that printed newspapers are not a trusted source for attendees. According the outcome, people mostly trust news shared in

social media⁴ and digital newspapers, rather than television, radio or printed newspapers. Scantiness of complete trust regarding any medium is another noticeable outcome of this survey question. People who took the survey easily said that they do not trust some of the mediums, yet there is a very limited sample who said they completely trust any medium in order to follow news. This section of the survey showed that;

- There is a noticeable shift towards digital media from printed newspapers.
- Foreign news outlets’ Turkish services are mostly followed and trusted news sources to Turkish news readers.
- Mainstream media is losing power to alternative/independent digital newsrooms.
- Social media surpasses television, radio and printed newspapers regarding news consumption and trust.

5.2.4 Reactions to clickbait content

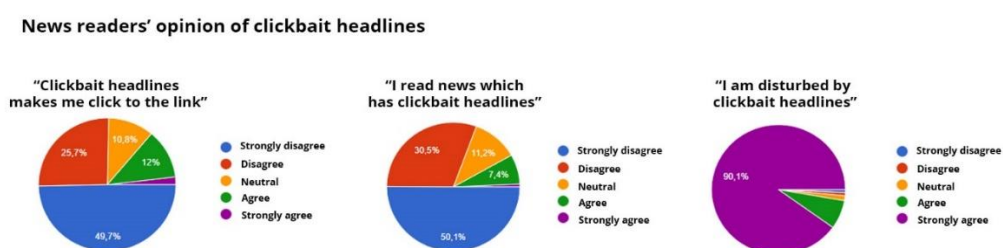


Figure 5. 8 Interaction with clickbait headlines

Last chapter of quantitative survey asked attendees what do they think about clickbait headlines and if these headlines effect their opinions and trust regarding the news outlet which are using clickbait. Via these propositions, thesis wanted to scrutinize what Turkish readers think of these headlines and how do they interact with them. Figure 5.8 includes the answers of attendees regarding their interaction with news articles which has clickbait headlines. Majority of the attendees said that clickbait headlines do not make them to click the link of article. Second graphic indicates that online news readers

⁴ This variable explained to attendees that by ‘news shared in social media’ option, survey aimed journalists, citizen journalists, influencers and regular social media users who shares information and news.

do not read the news articles that are shared in social media and has clickbait headlines. 90% of the attendees strongly emphasized that they are feeling disturbed by these types of headlines.

News readers' opinion of clickbait headlines

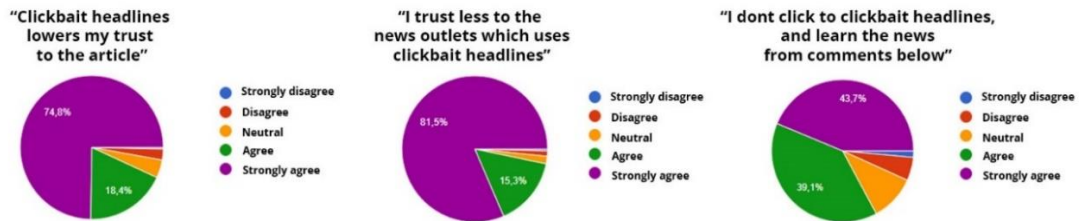


Figure 5. 9 Clickbait headlines' impact on reader trust

Next figure is showing the impact of clickbait headlines to news readers trusts regarding the articles and news outlets. People who strongly agreed to the proposition of “Clickbait headlines lowers my trust to the article” made up 74,8% of the attendees. When it comes to the trust regarding the news outlets, the ratio increases. 81,5% of the people who answered the survey remarked that they trust less to the news outlets which uses clickbait headlines often. Another striking outcome of the survey is that majority of attendees agreed with the proposition of “I do not click to clickbait headlines and learn the news from comments below.” This result show that most of the people do not prefer to click to link of the article and read what the story is about from comments of the social media post such as tweets and Facebook shares.

News readers' opinion of clickbait headlines

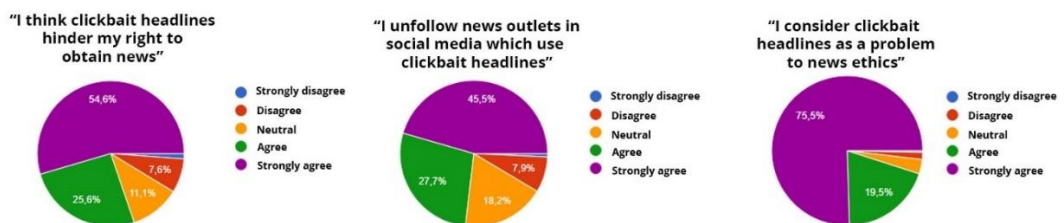


Figure 5. 10 Clickbait as an ethical issue

In this section, survey intended to see if clickbait headlines are considered as a journalistic ethics problem by readers. Attendees come together in proposition that remarks clickbait is an obstacle to right to obtain news. 80% of people said that clickbait headlines hinder their right to obtain news. 75% of the readers also specified that clickbait headlines can be considered as a problem to journalistic ethics. When survey asked attendees if they unfollow news outlets' social media accounts because of clickbait usage, even though majority agrees the proposition as other questions, the ratio of people who said "strongly agree" drops and "neutral" increases. This outcome indicates that people hesitate on unfollowing the news outlet completely even though they have negative feelings regarding clickbait headlines.

These results regarding the clickbait perception of online news readers shows us that clickbait practices create a negative perception of journalism. To summarize the answers, majority of the attendees agreed that;

- They prefer not to click to the articles which has clickbait content in social media,
- They feel disturbed by clickbait headlines,
- Clickbait headlines lowers their trust regarding the story and news outlets,
- They believe clickbait headlines are harmful to journalistic ethics,
- And frequent clickbait usage may result as readers unfollowing the news outlets in social media.

Clickbait headlines are seen as a tactic of news editors to bring more visitors to website and with more traffic, they aim to raise their outlet's online advertisement revenues. Yet outcome of this survey indicates that even though clickbait is still widely used among news outlets, it harms the bond of trust between the outlet and readers. Survey result indicates that readers have a common negative sense of clickbait headlines and they trust more on stories which does not include clickbait. It must be clarified again that this survey do not completely reflects the clickbait perception of the whole online news readers. This restricted survey aimed to educated, frequent digital news consumers who are familiar to clickbait concept. By getting answers of more than 1.000 news readers who are mostly university, master's and Ph.D. graduate and spend most of their time on consuming digital content, study managed to reach the wanted sample. Further in the

research, answers of qualitative survey, interviews with the news executives and anti-clickbait initiative Limon Haber will be thoroughly examined.

5.3 QUALITATIVE SURVEY

With the first, quantitative survey, study reflected the opinions of online news readers regarding clickbait headlines. The outcome showed that majority of the attendees dislike clickbait concept and it affects their trust to the stories and news outlets. In order to profoundly understand why people are against the usage of clickbait headlines, study offered another survey to people who already attended to the first survey. This qualitative survey, which included 6 open ended questions, asked attendees to explain their views about clickbait. This survey got 100 attendees who already answered the previous survey. To analyze the sample better, qualitative survey, in addition to first survey, asked attendees about their work, income and the city they live in. These data will provide more informative outcome regarding the clickbait perception further in the research. By analyzing the extended demographics of the second survey, study compares both surveys to seek consistency in between and scrutinize the profiles of the attendees by their answers.

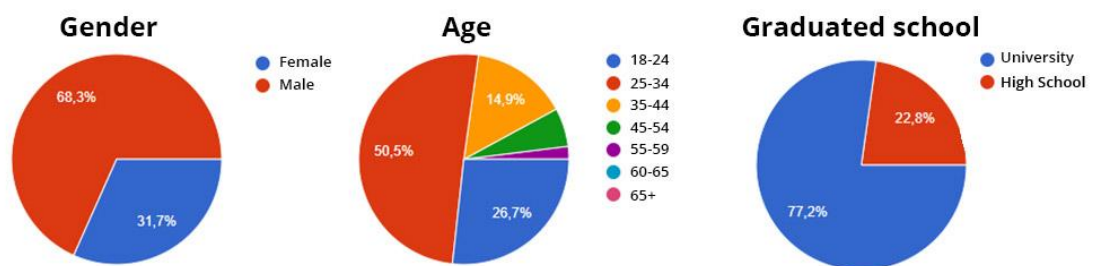


Figure 5. 11 Demographics of qualitative survey

Demographics of attendees in the second surveys show consistency with the first survey. The majority of people who took the survey are male (68,3%), aged between 25-34 (50,5%) and graduated from university (77,2%). Previous survey showed the similar ratios.

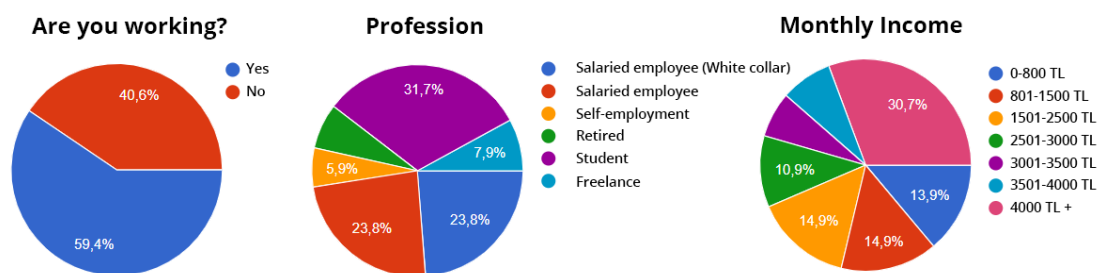


Figure 5.12 Profession and income

Addition to first survey, second survey asked attendees about their profession and rate of income as well. Results indicate that majority of the people who participated to survey are working (59,4%), doing white collar and regular jobs (%23,8 + %23,8) and make more than 4.000 Turkish liras (%30,7) per month. Adding demographics too, these numbers refer that sample of the both surveys, in majority, are university graduates who work in white collar/regular jobs and earn better than minimum wage.

In the second survey, attendees were asked again their habits of internet usage and results were similar to the first survey. Majority of attendees specified that they do not read printed newspapers (78) and prefer to consume news from social media (68) and website of the newspapers (31) between 30 minutes to 3 hours a day. Most of the attendees (46), compared to other answers, said that they spent most of their time (30 minutes to 1 hour) reading news on social media. Question regarding the mediums attendees use also seemed to support this outcome. %73,3 of the attendees said they follow news from social media accounts of the news outlets.

5.3.1 Open ended questions regarding clickbait

In the last part of the survey, attendees were asked about their thoughts about clickbait headlines. Via open ended questions, people who participated the survey expressed their opinions and criticism towards these types of headlines and news outlets who frequently use them in social media and their websites. To analyze these answers, study will focus on two different approach. At first, the general analysis will summarize the answers with by categorizing keywords related to the questions. In the second part, some of the

answers will be analysed by profile of the attendee to see reactions regarding clickbait in broad perspective of the culture. Tables below indicates the valid answers of attendees by categories and reasons they stated.

Question 1 – Are you reading news which has clickbait headlines?

Table 5. 1 Answers to qualitative questions

YES	NO	SOMETIMES
4	67	26
REASONS ⁵		
(I read, because...)	(I don't read, because...)	(Sometimes, because/when...)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Curiosity” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is a waste of time” • “They will keep doing it if i click” • “Unnecessary information” • “To protest clickbait” • “Irritated by it” • “Angry to clickbait” • “Feel like stupid and deceived” • “Creates unrealistic expectations” • “I don't care” • “News without information, i don't want them to make 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I get tricked” • “I try not to read but it creates wonder so compulsorily i read” • “I get tricked and click the news which raised a big curiosity” • “News has sensational headline” • “If it is a story that will really get my attention, i click even it is a clickbait” • “Only if i get really curious” • “If i want to read”

⁵ Reasons are selected from answers and categorized in brief by keywords. Selected keywords are determined from the most common answers. This method is chosen because most of the attendees gave similar answers to the questions.

	<p>money”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When i read the content, i see headline is irrelevant to story” • “Most of them are garbage content with no value” • “I think they are dishonest” • “It is not nice to be taken as fools” • “They are deceptive” • “I dislike the content” • “Just for being out-of-spite” • “I feel it is an insult to my logic” • “I feel deceived” 	
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97 valid⁶ answers to this question indicate that majority of the attendees (67) do not read clickbait content. While only 4 said they read content with clickbait headlines, and 26 people said they read them occasionally.

People who said they read clickbait content, stated only the factor of “wonder”.

When looking at to the people who do not read clickbait content, there are different reasons for this behaviour, but people find common ground on several factors. One of these factors is “feeling deceived”. Many of the attendees said that they feel deceived

⁶ Answers which included bad language and irrelevant responses were eliminated to present a more sensible and valid outcome.

when click and read the clickbait story, because they stated that headlines do not match the content. There are also some strong criticism to clickbait headlines, such as “feeling insulted”, “garbage content”, “waste of time” and “taken as fools”. These answers suggest that clickbait headlines make readers feel insulted when they misrepresent the content. Out of this result, it can be assumed that clickbait content also has an emotional effect on readers, rather than just action. Results indicate that people sometimes act on emotions when they face clickbait headlines, and they show their reaction to them by different actions such as not reading the content.

Question 2 – What do you think about clickbait headlines?

Second question aimed to learn what online news readers think about clickbait headlines and how they feel about them. By asking attendees to explain their thoughts of clickbait headlines, study examined the impact of these headlines to news readers emotionally. To analyze the results, this section focuses on some answers reflected from the survey to present readers’ perception of clickbait.

There are 96 valid answers to this question and majority (86) have negative feelings regarding clickbait content. People who said they are irritated by clickbait content mostly think that they are getting “deceived” by clickbait and feel “humiliated.” Words used in these answers such as “hate”, “annoying”, “humiliating”, “irritating”, “disgusting”, “garbage”, “unnecessary”, “trap”, “trickery”, and “misleading” are some of the reactions of online news readers to clickbait content. These qualifications indicate that many of the attendees are strongly against the clickbait practices. Even though majority considers clickbait as a negative factor to news presentation, there are some attendees (10) who takes clickbait as a “grey area”. These people stated that news outlets use clickbait content to raise revenues. One person, who is an university graduated male that works as a freelancer and spend his 2 to 3 hours read online news on social media stated that, “I cannot say if it is ethical or not. It’s (clickbait) more in the grey area, yet it is widely being abused”. Another person who is a male student and spend 30 minutes or less to read online news thinks clickbait as a tool to make profitability. He remarked that “Sometimes I think it is necessary for them to earn money. Yet there are such stories, after a while they force people to lose interest to the

news source.” There are answers that blame the clickbait for devaluating the news content as well. One person, who is an university graduate, freelance working male that follow news from social media broadcasts such as YouTube and podcasts, considers clickbait as a threat to news quality. “Even though most of them (clickbait content) do not hold news value,” he says, “when they do, it kills the content of the news”. He emphasize that clickbait not just block the right to get informed, but also blunts the will of acquisition of knowledge. Then he criticizes the clickbait content and via these effects, he says “(Clickbait) is no different than internet advertisements.” Another male university student who considers clickbait as an understandable method of publishing and reads clickbait content if it “catches his attention”, justify the usage of clickbait with the saying “One's bread and butter.” These answers shows us that majority of people hold negative feelings to clickbait usage and get disturbed by them emotionally. These feelings even raise up to hate and disgust in some people. Although the majority dislike clickbait, there are some people who thinks it’s a tactic to make money and says it is an understandable method.

Question 3 – In your opinion, why news outlets use clickbait headlines?

In third question, survey asked attendees to share their thoughts regarding the clickbait creation. Considering the valid answers (93), majority (80) of the attendees think that it is made for economic reasons such as raising revenues from online advertisements and clicks and hit rates. Others claim that clickbait is made for raising curiosity and to become the most read news outlet. There is also another striking point of views and claims, such as printed newspapers are losing importance and revenues, therefore via digital broadcasts, news outlets try to restore their incomes. Answer of a female worker who never reads printed newspapers and prefer to follow news from social media channels of the news outlets states that by using clickbait headlines, news outlets “Try to gain income since they can’t do it with selling printed sales,” and she remarks that “Therefore, news outlets aim to increase their click rates and visible advertisement numbers.”

Another point of view is that clickbait is used for making an “unnecessary” story, as attendee stated, readable. A female student attendee, who spends her 4 to 5 hours to read

news on social media argue that “There are a lot of unnecessary news,” and she claims that instead of “real news”, news outlets try to fill up pages with clickbait content. “Reader do not want to read these type of news,” she argues, and with catchy phrases, she claims “(story) gets more clicks.”

These answers indicate that majority of online news readers thinks clickbait is made because of economic concerns of the news outlets.

Question 4 – What do you think about news outlets which use clickbait headlines?

Via this question, survey tried to understand what kind of impact clickbait headlines have on the bond of trust between readers and news outlets. As the answers before, majority (87) of the valid (93) answers shows that clickbait is considered as a bad influence to trust of the readers. Attendees mostly describe clickbait using outlets as being “unreliable”, and some of them use these descriptions to explain news outlets which use clickbait content: “Unreliable”, “They do not have the principle of work ethic”, “I oversee them”, “I don’t trust other articles of the outlets as well even though they don’t use clickbait on them”, “They have no vision”, “I don’t think they are doing the right kind of journalism”, “I don’t take them as reliable sources”, “Disgusting”, “Completely unreliable” and “I get sceptic about their news and think that they are doing everything for money, and lose my trust”.

A female university student argues in her answer that news outlets which use clickbait are “ethically harming the profession of journalism,” and she claims that this is done for economic purposes.

A female university graduate, white collar employee, strongly criticize the clickbait using news organisations. She describes these news outlets as being “imposters” and “swindlers” and she claims that these outlets “steal the time of the reader, which is the most important thing,” and adds “I don’t qualify them as journalists, but marketeer”.

But some disagrees with the majority. An university graduate male who spend his 2 to 3 hours on reading news on social media, blames news outlets who uses clickbait as being “dishonest,” yet he adds, “but it’s (clickbait) in the nature of their work.” Another attendee who is a 25-34 years old white collar employee and spends 4 to 5 hours

reading news both in social media and news websites, thinks clickbait is a “necessity” for some of the news outlets.

These qualifications summarize that news outlets which use clickbait content are seen as unreliable sources of information. Answers also suggest that usage of clickbait has a negative impact on the dignity of the companies in the eyes of readers.

Since the majority of the attendees seem to be on the same page regarding the negative effect of the clickbait, it can be discussed that readers trust less in the outlets which use clickbait content. In the survey, most of the attendees stated that clickbait plays a direct role on their views and trust about news outlets and they tend to avoid them.

Question 5 – How clickbait headlines affect your trust regarding the news?

After scrutinizing the effect of clickbait headlines on news outlets in the perspective of readers, this question aimed to investigate if these headlines affect the trust of the readers in the news as well. Survey findings show that as news outlets use news which has clickbait headlines, they are also losing credibility in the eyes of readers. Out of 95 valid answers, the majority (86) of the attendees said that clickbait headlines affect their trust in the article in a negative way. People who say they are negatively affected by clickbait (32) directly stated that they do not trust news with clickbait headlines. Others who gave short statements remarked that they are just negatively affected by clickbait content. To summarize the answers, these words can be given as examples: “(Clickbait) affects me negatively”, “It devalues the news”, “I don’t trust news with clickbait headlines, so I do not click them and try to block it so I will not face it again”, “I absolutely do not trust them”, “Clickbait affects me negatively. If I see a news outlet use clickbait, I do not read their stories anymore. Even if I see their articles, I do not care”, “I unfollow news outlets who use clickbait”, “I do not trust clickbait news and clickbaits change my point of view regarding the outlet’s editorial policies”.

In the answers, there are pessimistic points of view as well. Some attendees stated that they do not trust news completely, therefore clickbait headlines do not make any difference.

Contrary to others, 5 out of 95 attendees said clickbait headlines do not affect their trust regarding the news article. A self employed, university graduate male who said he does not read clickbait articles in previous questions, implied in this question that clickbait cannot be compared with trust. He said that clickbait headlines “Do not affect,” him, since “There is a difference between the content and the methods of increasing the numbers of followers.”

Another attendee, who is a male university student that spends 2 to 3 hours reading news in social media, also do not consider clickbait as a factor of trust. He said that clickbait headlines do not have a direct impact on him, even though he “usually does not read,” clickbait content, he says, “But when I do, I decide if I trust the news or not after finish reading the story.”

Similar to views about news outlets, majority of the attendees sees clickbait is a factor that affects the credibility of the news and it plays a role on choices of the readers.

Question 6 – What could news outlets do in order to reduce the number of clickbait headlines?

Last question asked attendees about their opinions about reducing the clickbait usage of news outlets. Since there are many suggestions by readers to outlets, study categorized the answers in 5 topics in order to analyze them and will present two, most detailed answers in detail by citing the responses of the attendees in all categories. Answers, in general, focused on these 5 factors that news outlets can do in order to reduce the amount of clickbait content:

- 1. Editorial education / change in news policies** – 14 attendees
- 2. Using descriptive/informative summaries as headlines** – 47 attendees
- 3. Quality/creative/ethical and honest reporting** – 18 attendees
- 4. Reader protest** – 1 attendee
- 5. Less and correct clickbait** – 3 attendees

1- Under the section of editorial education and change in news policies, study compiled the answers which suggested an education program to editors to urge them not to use clickbait content and changes/bans to clickbait production process. 14

attendees suggested a way to reduce clickbait by educating the staff and changing policies that promotes clickbait creation. One male, student attendee, who specified earlier in the survey that he does not read clickbait content, explains that changing business models and educating the editors can be a solution to clickbait: “Reducing clickbait should become a principle. Editors can be trained. Advertisements can be sold by not pay-by-click, but the time reader spends on the news.” Another attendee, who is a middle aged female white-collar employee, qualifies the clickbait usage as an “option” of the outlet and criticize news outlets who uses clickbait content for “being disrespectful” to the job and the readers; therefore, suggest a change in business model.

- 2- Majority of the attendees (47) suggested that headlines and social media shares should include descriptive and informative summaries. They want news outlets to be clear about the content of the news in headlines, and write simple, descriptive and short headlines. One freelance worker and university graduate male attendee says that he only wants to see what the story has to tell. He gives example of “Instead of writing ‘Horror in the county’, they could just write whatever happened in the county. If it is an important incident, I will click to read the details anyways.” Another attendee who is a male, self-employed university graduate, says that “Headline should explain the subject of the news clearly and without any implications. If anyone wonders, they would just click and read anyways.”
- 3- 18 attendees offered being more creative, ethical and honest in reporting and creating more quality content would reduce the amount of clickbait usage. By following these rules, attendees suggest news outlet could gain more traffic, since quality and honest reporting attracts readers into reading the content. A female university student attendee explains in detail that what type of headlines she would interact or not: “First of all, stories that holds news value should be covered as news. Nobody cares about what happened to the lover of an actor who plays the side character in a tv series which no one even remember anymore.” She also criticizes the exaggerations used in clickbait headlines: “Another subject is that (outlets) exaggerates the headline in order to raise attention. For example, I would not click

to ‘Famous actor hospitalized’ headline, because I do not know if ‘the actor’ is someone I am curious about. Another example is that I would not click to a headline like ‘He said such words!!!’, but I would click on a headline such as ‘Ahmet Yılmaz made sexual harassment claims about his old role partner Ayşe Kartal’, because if a story have news value, even the headline has limited information, it will spark curiosity.” Another male student attendee who qualifies news outlets which use clickbait headlines as “unreliable”, says that he prefers to follow news outlets which do not use these kind of headlines. He gives examples of BBC Turkish and Deutsche Welle Turkish and says, “Foreign originated organizations like them do not use clickbait headlines. I use them more often and their stories are definitely more satisfactory. If they (clickbait using outlets) increase quality of their news, they will already gain more clicks and I think they would not need to use clickbait trickery.”

- 4- One out of 83 valid answers offered a reader protest on news outlets which uses clickbait content. This attendee, who is middle aged male and paid employee, offers to steer the news outlet with reader comments in regard of clickbait usage, yet he is pessimistic: “There are a lot of people who believe and follow these clickbaits and they do not get disturbed by them. So, we are not taken into account as disturbed readers, even though we warn them.”
- 5- Some people are okay with clickbait, as 3 of the attendees have stated. But they want these headlines presented in some limitations. Their main emphasis is that clickbait content should at least not “be old and fake”, also should be used in “an understandable dosage.”

Addition to these categories, only one of the attendees, who is a university graduated male, said that news outlets “cannot do anything about it (clickbait),” and added, “They should make money.”

5.4 OUTCOME

By analyzing these invoices of the digital news readers, this study tried to present a profile of clickbait perception in Turkish news readers. Results indicates that majority of the attendees dislike clickbait content and they are against the usage of them in a strict manner. To summarize the results, it can be said that digital news readers feel deceived and manipulated by clickbait content shared in social media and used in news outlets' websites. Attendees specified that they prefer not to clickbait headlines because sometimes they face misleading / false content that has nothing to do with the promised headline. Majority of them believe that clickbait headlines are used for economic reasons, such as increasing the number of clicks in order to raise profitability from advertisements. Majority qualifies news outlets which frequently use clickbait headlines as unreliable and they say they are negatively affected from news articles with clickbait headlines, so, do not trust the clickbait content. To reduce the amount of clickbait content, most of them offer that news outlets should include descriptive and informative summaries in their headlines and news presentations.

6. INTERVIEWS WITH THE NEWS EXECUTIVES

Survey analyses indicated that clickbait practices are commonly disliked by digital news readers. People said that they feel tricked and manipulated when they read news which includes clickbait headlines. Also, the analysis showed that the majority of the digital news readers believe that clickbait content is used for economic purposes, such as increasing traffic of the website and advertisement revenues.

To investigate deeper about the reasons of clickbait production and business models of Turkish newsrooms, the study will narrate the interviews with two digital newsroom executives in the Turkish press. One of them is Emre Kızılkaya, who is a former journalist and managing editor of Hurriyet.com.tr. The other interviewee is Hakan Demir, who is the managing director of BirGun.net. Study picked one mainstream and one alternative news company to interview, in order to reflect different editorial policies and business models. Interviewees were asked about their company's editorial policies, the process of news creation, business models, their thoughts about the future of digital journalism, and how their organizations handle the clickbait concept.

With the rising popularity of social media, traditional newsrooms faced a necessity to digitize their content and open internet services in order to adapt the changing reader habits of news consuming. Since there are many different social media platforms present, digital newsrooms needed to produce different content for different platforms, such as videos for YouTube and pictures for Instagram. Hurriyet.com.tr, which established in 1997, is considered as one of the first newspapers in Turkey that moved to digital platforms (Hurriyet, n.d.). Emre Kızılkaya, who spent 16 years working for Hurriyet, explained the news production system in his newspaper. He said there was a phase of transformation in the company, in order to converge digital and printed services. He stated that before this process, printed and digital departments of Hurriyet worked like a different broadcast. Then, with the intervention of top management, Kızılkaya said that Hurriyet started the digitization and integration process. Kızılkaya,

who specified that he took an active role in this process, emphasized that the digitization process not only physically occurred, but also in an editorial way such as the unification of business flow and objectives. He explains the details of this phase as follows:

Therefore, digital service was able to gather news from all of Hurriyet's correspondents, rather than one reporter who worked just for the digital service. Design of the news started to develop with including digital service in the process as well, and objectives started to unify. In addition to agencies, we were able to gather news from our domestic and abroad reporters. (Kızılkaya, E. 2019, personal communication, 16 April)

Hakan Demir, who manages the digital service of the BirGun, stated that they have different aspects of news production. He said that since BirGun.net is the website of the printed BirGun, they move all the content produced in printed paper to the website on a daily basis. According to Demir, BirGun has different sources for news gathering. He remarks that internet editors also take part in news creation, whenever they are assigned, they become reporters as well. BirGun.net also have subscriptions to press agencies and have content agreements with technology, literature and cinema blogs, Demir says. He summarizes the content creation process as follows:

In BirGun.net, there are multiple stages of news production. First, we reflect all the content produced by the printed newspaper and its reporters. News, interviews, special reports are disseminated from our website as original content. In digital service, news are produced by information provided by different sources, and reports of editors and reporters. The digital service team of BirGun.net is made of news and video editors, presenter, and reporters. (Demir, H. 2019, personal communication, 30 April)

In the interviews, news executives were also asked to explain what kind of business models digital services of their companies are working with and what is the impact of digital service revenues into general profitability of the company. Since the majority of the survey attendees claimed that clickbait headlines are used for economic reasons, via this question, the study aimed to investigate how digital newsrooms work in the manner of the economy.

Emre Kızılkaya claims that by the time he quit Hurriyet, digital service of the company became profitable in itself. He stated that even the printed section of Hurriyet got shut down, digital service would still be profitable in itself. Kızılkaya says that the main business model of Hurriyet.com.tr was the view-based display advertisements:

In Turkey, the business model of the digital newsrooms were traditionally view-based display advertisements. Majority of the income, around 80%, came from the direct advertisement sales which are positioned on the homepage. Remaining 20% came from advertisements which are in the inner pages and news articles. New, different advertisement

formats, natural ads, video ads, and product placements could also be counted additionally. (Kızılkaya, E.. 2019, personal communication, 16 April)

BirGun.net also makes revenues from digital advertisements. According to Demir, the majority of the income is provided by third-party advertisement services. He emphasized that although digital service seems to generate fewer revenues compared to the company's whole income, in terms of profitability, he said that digital service is more effective: "The cost of the printed newspaper is bigger compared to the digital service, and this can be counted as the reason of this outcome."

Considering the constant progress and change in the social media platforms, like any other sector, news outlets also need to adapt the novelties in the digital environment in order to reach more people online. For this reason, interviewed news executives were asked if their companies follow any agenda on the future of digital news in regard to economic models. Emre Kızılkaya emphasized that online advertisement revenues started to have a trend of decline, therefore they started to think of models that put reader funding at the foundation and creating paywalls. He explains the process as follows:

In 2015, I started working in hurriyet.com.tr. Shortly after, in 2016, with the vision of the board of directors and the CEO, we took the step of digitization and unification of different units. While we were doing this, we had the questions in mind such as 'Can we build a model which is based on reader funding', 'Can we use methods such as paywall, donations and subscriptions etc.' We took this step for covering up the declining advertisement revenues and connect with the readers, therefore by using the brand of Hurriyet and its exclusive contents, we aimed the reader funding. (Kızılkaya, E.. 2019, personal communication, 16 April)

BirGun.net executive Hakan Demir claims that even though new technologies provide different advertisement models, the concept stays the same. He argues that while digital journalism fills up the place of printed newspapers, advertorial models of printed newspapers are shifting towards the digital:

Banners, video contents, and product promotion... This classic advertisement model seems to stay the same for a long time. In addition to these, hidden advertisements which are embedded to contents, product placements in pictures are also considered as alternatives, yet they are rarely used compared to classical advertisement models. BirGun.net is a platform that professional digital advertisers determine and apply strategies. These professionals who are employed by the company have meetings with brands and arrange the placement of advertisements such as Google Ads. (Demir, H. 2019, personal communication, 30 April)

Answers of the digital news executives indicate that in news production, Turkish newspapers are adapting to the convergence of printed and digital services. They aim to act as one and consider digital platforms in regard to news design and formats. Even though they are using classical methods of online advertisement as business models, there are different tactics which are considered to support these revenues such as paywalls, reader funding, and subscriptions.

In the next part of the interview, the study will summarize what these news executives think about clickbait content and if their companies have any measures concerning the clickbait concept.

Emre Kızılkaya, former managing director of Hurriyet, evaluates clickbait as a “bad” practice of journalism, yet he considers the usage of clickbait as being “normal” because he indicates that clickbaits serve the ecosystem which display-based advertisements created in the Turkey and the world. Yet he emphasized that being normal does not justify them to be considered as good and correct. He also states that clickbait usage could be harmful to the news outlets in the long term:

In the long term, clickbait is harmful. In the short term, it is possible to deceive people with misleading headlines and pictures, yet you only gain just one click, but lose the trust of the reader. The constant loop of deception is not a thing that would function for a long time. Sadly, internet penetration in Turkey recently coming up to 90%, which is the rate of the West. Therefore, some (companies) think that ‘the more we deceive, the better’. They decide to win in the short term and lose in the long term. (Kızılkaya, E.. 2019, personal communication, 16 April)

BirGun manager Hakan Demir is on the same page with Emre Kızılkaya. He argues that clickbait is not a proper method of journalistic ethics. He emphasizes that the sole purpose of the clickbait usage is not increasing the number of readers, but unqualified traffic:

It can be seen that readers who are lured into the website by deception do not spend a long time in browsing, and in the long term, they put distance to the publisher which uses clickbait headlines. Even though clickbait provides momentarily gain in traffic, it harms the news outlet greatly in the long term. When readers mark the company in their heads negatively, there is nothing to do for breaking this perception. (Demir, H. 2019, personal communication, 30 April)

Kızılkaya and Demir were also asked that if their companies have any policies regarding the usage of clickbait content. Kızılkaya stated that they took precautions in order to prevent clickbait contents by giving encouragements and applying sanctions to

the editors. He remarked that if an editor is given certain objectives that include click rates, they would even deceive readers in order to accomplish it. He explains the precautions regarding hindering the clickbait content as follows:

To avert the clickbait, we changed the whole objectives which are determined for the editors. We set a limit on page bounce rates, if editors have less than 1-minute ratio on page view time, we counted their score as zero. Therefore they needed to keep the readers in the content for at least 1 minute. By doing this, we aimed to direct them in the right direction. But whatever you do, people (employees) who made clickbait their habits, do not change easily. This method would work only in the long term. (Kızılkaya, E.. 2019, personal communication, 16 April)

Demir, who also gave examples of their methods of headline usages, said they do not have written rules regarding the clickbait content, but they prefer not to use it in general. He emphasized that there are certain things they do in order to make readers wonder about the context of the story:

From time to time, without being misleading, we use some details of the news in the headline, in a way that would spark the attention of the readers. While doing this, we pay attention to make readers understand what the story is all about. Therefore, we do not have a problem leaving expressions that would take the attention of the readers. For example, if ministry published a statement which has 20 entries about chain markets, we do not hesitate to use a headline as 'Statement from ministry regarding the chain markets' But if the statement is about only one subject and can be summarized in one sentence, we prefer to do this. (Demir, H. 2019, personal communication, 30 April)

Considering clickbait production, interviews indicated that news executives are also against the usage of clickbait content, and take concrete steps regarding the limitation of these types of content. Answers to the interview show that even though clickbait creation is discouraged by the administration, sometimes habits of the editors could be a factor of the practice. Both of the interviewees underlined that even though clickbait content may provide short term rise in profitability and reader numbers, in the long term it harms the news outlets in both manners.

6.1 AN ANTI-CLICKBAIT INITIATIVE: LIMON HABER

The surveys which are previously analyzed in this study showed us that clickbait headlines have a negative impact on digital news readers. Many of the attendees specified that they dislike the usage of clickbait and they prefer not to read these types of contents. Hints of this reaction towards clickbait content can be traced to social media platforms. Limon Haber, which is a Twitter account that started a fight against

clickbait and news outlets which are frequently use them. By having more than 65 thousand⁷ followers in the micro blogging website, popularity of this account increases each day. The account targets the news outlets who use clickbait headlines, quotes their clickbait content and explain the context of the story to its followers. Account also retweets Twitter users which do the same and mention itself. Account, which is managed by one person, specified its purpose on biography section of its account as follows: “We squeeze lemon on the misleading, evocatory news summaries which is made for clicks.” By ‘squeezing lemon’, Limon Haber decided to pioneer an active protest in order to eliminate the number of clickbait content shared in Twitter.

In order to scrutinize why this account created and how it became popular, study includes an interview made with the Limon Haber’s creator. He did not want his name to be used in the thesis, but gave detailed answers about the history and actions of the Twitter account. Therefore, thesis will cite him as ‘Cassey Jones’, which he uses as a nickname.

He stated in the interview that since he disliked the clickbait content, he did what Limon Haber is doing first in his personal account. Then in April 2016, he said he created the account. As a reader initiative, he stated that he has some guidelines of sharing clickbait content of the news outlets in his account and emphasized that he is doing this as a “complete volunteer.” He said that Limon Haber does not receive any funds or makes any profits.

He explains that Limon Haber have a base of followers which is made from a variety of people who has different political views and religion and adds “Therefore, (account) has to follow a neutral understanding of broadcast.”

When asked about the methodology he is using to determine clickbait, he said he thoroughly examines the shared content before sharing the story on Limon Haber:

“Specifically, I look at the language of the headline in political news. If the headline has manipulative, provocative, misleading, and biased tone, I pass that story. If the headline has no judgements or accusation and written as neutral, I share that story. To make Limon Haber as neutral as possible, I try to hold a balance in sharing political news. For example, if I shared 2 or 3 stories which is about the government, even if I see more clickbait content in the same subject, I pass that one. As a matter of fact, there are people who unfollowed

⁷ Data accessed from Twitter at 05.05.2019

many of the news outlets to follow only Limon Haber, that's why sometimes I think that 'I should share this news, it needs to be on the daily archive of the Limon Haber.'" (Jones, C. 2019, personal communication, 10 April)

As mentioned before, Limon Haber received thousands of followers in 3 years. When asked the reason of this popularity, account manager claims that Limon Haber responded to a certain need. He stated that readers got "suffocated" by the clickbait content, so the account which fights with the clickbait were greatly endorsed. As another factor, he indicates the element of humor. He specified that humorous language used in the account while sharing clickbait content made readers consume the news by having fun at the same time. He explains the reasons behind the popularity of Limon Haber as follows:

Another reason, as I specified earlier is the code of neutrality. Limon only share the news without doing any propaganda and this is welcomed by the readers. And continuity plays an important role as well. Sharing news every day and in frequent amounts also raised the popularity of the account. Sharing stories which readers sent to us also increases Limon's popularity. Doing this creates a collective spirit rather than a one-way interaction. (Jones, C. 2019, personal communication, 10 March)

Lastly, Limon Haber manager shares his thoughts about why news readers dislike the clickbait content. His responses, which matches with the outcome of the survey analyses indicate that news readers "feel humiliated and deceived" by clickbait content and explain the reasons as follows:

They (readers) feel like they are taken as fools and deceived, justifiably. They lure you to the website with an absurd question and you see after the click- that either the content is irrelevant to the headline, or you have to crawl between the photo gallery to see that question in fact does not have a valid answer or a really simple, one sentence result. 'Are you kidding me?' says the reader, and yes, they literally are. (Jones, C. 2019, personal communication, 10 April)

Via these interviews, the study tried to offer some qualitative perspectives regarding the clickbait usage in digital networks. By asking news executives about their experiences with clickbait and interviewing with an anti-clickbait initiative about its motives, it can be discussed that clickbait is standing as a factor of issue about digital journalism. As executives implied that there are actions to reduce the amount of clickbait content in manner of editorial policies, only time will tell the future of clickbait as a way to reach online audiences.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Emergence of digital journalism and rise of the social media brought many challenges to the profession of journalism. Innovations in mobile technologies altered the habits of consuming content and people started to shift from reading printed content to digital content. Therefore, as any other publications, news outlets also needed to transform in order to increase its reader base. Since social media platforms evolved into massive cyber spaces, they became the biggest aggregator for news outlets in order to disseminate their content. Advantages of the portable devices such as smartphones, laptops and tablets urged people to consume news content on social media rather than buying printed newspapers, since they are easy to reach, fast to read and most importantly, generally free. These shifting habits of news consumption turned social media to a non-stop platform of information flow. In this environment, starting with the mainstream press, news outlets opened and invested in digital branches to reach more readers online. This intense reader-publisher interaction made websites of the newspapers and social media channels a massive market for advertisers.

News outlets which sell digital advertisements faces a problem in these platforms that has massive amount of information, shared instantly and continuously. To raise profitability, websites needed to have many visitors as possible. To catch the attention of these online readers and make them click to their content, news outlets use clickbait headlines and pictures. These contents, which generally includes limited information regarding the context of the article, aims to create a wonder about the content and force readers to click the link of the article in order to see what the story actually tell. Yet, news outlets often face criticism by readers about these type of content for being misleading and deceptive.

This study aimed to investigate what Turkish digital news readers think about clickbait content and if these contents affect their trust in the news and the news outlet. To investigate this, the study conducted two online surveys which targeted news readers. Results have shown that majority of the news readers who participated the surveys dislike the clickbait content and said they play a direct role on their trust to the news and the outlets which are producing these clickbait content. Survey analysis also indicated

that clickbait content make news readers feel deceived and manipulated, thus they tend to ignore stories which include clickbait and even, in some cases, unfollow the news outlets that frequently uses these type of headlines and pictures. Readers, by majority, thinks that clickbaits are mainly used because of economic purposes such as showing advertisements to more people by getting more user traffic.

As for their expectations, majority specified that they want to see descriptive and informative summaries of the content as a headline, instead of misleading and deceptive sentences.

Interviews with news executives concluded in the similar context. Managers are also aware of the negative effect clickbait content does on news readers and they stated that there are actions which are taken into account in order to eliminate the clickbait production. But also, they raise concern over the atmosphere of digital advertisement as being a pushing factor for creation of these type of misleading content.

Action against clickbait content also seems to start organizing reader initiatives. A Twitter account called “Limon Haber” managed to raise more than 65 thousand followers in three years just by sharing the summaries of content shared by the news outlets who uses clickbait content. Popularity of this anti-clickbait initiative could also be shown as an example to the negative effect of the clickbait content on news consumers.

This research used online surveys which are prepared in Google Forms service in order to reach online news readers. To disseminate these surveys, Twitter and Facebook taken as main aggregators. To reach more people, some influencers who have high amount of followers in Twitter were asked to share and retweet the surveys multiple times in a week. This way of reaching people may have been resulted as biased responses to questions. Therefore, it should be considered that survey results may not represents the certain and objective views regarding the clickbait concept. Although it might be considered as biased, survey results show consistent outcomes with previous studies (Hurst, 2016) and research interviews, where news executives point out the similar effects of clickbaits.

To summarize, clickbait practices are considered as a bad influence by Turkish digital news readers. News outlets who decide to use this method have a negative impression in the eyes of most of the online news consumers. It is unsure that what future holds regarding the usage of clickbait by news organizations, but this research tried to shed a light on what consumers feel about clickbait journalism. The results indicate that clickbait practices poses a threat to news outlets in order to maintaining a healthy and constant relationship with readers.



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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information

Name Surname : Anıl Karaca
Place and Date of Birth : Çanakkale, 12/09/1993

Education

Undergraduate Education : Ege University Journalism Program
Graduate Education : Kadir Has University New Media Program
Foreign Language Skills : English / C2

Work Experience

Name of Employer and Dates of Employment:

BirGün Gazetesi – August 2017/Ongoing,
Dokuz8HABER – February 2017/August 2017,
Ege'de Son Söz – 2015/ January 2017

Contact:

Telephone : +90 554 656 01 50
E-mail Address : anilkaraca140@gmail.com