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# The Clicking Economics of Media and Shifts in News Content: The Case of North Cyprus Online Media

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## ABSTRACT

The new media ecology has resulted in shifts in news content. The audience metrics that provide data about the preferences, expectations, and habits of the audiences based on clicks bring about the creation of new strategies and business models to increase income. The theory of the political economy of media says that just as economic relationships shape the whole of society, they also affect the production, distribution, and consumption of media content, forming the theoretical infrastructure of this study. On this basis, the study aims to reveal how the news content of Northern Cyprus' internet newspapers is shaped according to the number of clicks. The social media pages of four online newspapers in North Cyprus were analyzed using the content analysis method. On this basis, the aim of this article is to reveal how shifts occur in news content depending on consumer participation, social media, and clicks that have emerged with the development of internet technology. Content analysis was conducted considering the multimedia infrastructure of Internet journalism, and the coding was done by taking different media formats such as news text, video, and photography. The results show that the production phase, topic, and content of the news are affected by audience interaction data.

## KEY WORDS

Business Models. Clicking. Digital Journalism. North Cyprus. Political Economy of Media. Social Media.

# 1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to reveal how shifts occur in news contents, depending on consumer participation, social media and clicks, within the new media ecology that has emerged with the development of internet technology. In order to understand the core of this study, it is important to examine the political economy of new media, which provides a framework for understanding the business models of new media. Since the political economy of media is related to how media content is produced, dispersed and consumed within a society and the powers that affect these,<sup>1</sup> it must be stated that although this study focuses on the political economy of online newspapers, it focuses on new business models that are closely related to the forms of online newspaper audience metrics and digital traffic rather than commercial elements within the news. As the study assumes, news content and subjects in digital journalism change according to these relationship forms. As stated by Curran et al., market-focussed systems in many areas of the world prevent conscious citizenship by providing soft news instead of hard news.<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, this study examines the relationship between social media, interaction and multimedia to show how news subjects change as a result of the market focussed approach of internet newspapers in North Cyprus. In this context, the theory of the political economy of media was used as a basis to answer the question “How does news content change in Northern Cyprus’ digital newspapers in order to increase income and receive more clicks?” This theory enables the examination of the media business models on a multi-layered basis. The content analysis method was used both quantitatively and qualitatively, which provides a basis for the evaluation and interpretation of the systematic relationship between the number of clicks and news content. This study examined the interaction rates and methods used to increase these interaction rates (which is a primary criteria for publishing organisations to increase their income) of the *Kıbrıs Net Haber*, *Haber Kıbrıs*, *Ses Kıbrıs* and *Topuz* newspapers for a period of one month between 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2021 and 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. The findings of the study confirm that the content of news has changed as a result of online journalism that attempts to increase click rates due to economic concerns. Besides, results surprisingly show that the most popular content in North Cyprus online newspapers is “death notices”, which are more notices rather than news.

## 1.1 Political Economy, Digital Labour and New Business Models of New Media

Digitization is restructuring the media economy with a complex convergence movement that brings about the formation of certain production patterns in journalism, as in many other fields.

McChesney, who reviewed a large body of literature regarding digitalisation, states that there are two main views about the internet. While there are those who take a technological determinist approach like “celebrants”, who argue that internet technologies eliminate the monopoly of large companies and allow democracy to develop. He also states that there are “sceptics” who fear that internet technology reshapes people into the image of technology that is flattering our intellect and lessening our creativity.<sup>3</sup> McChesney who stated that both situations are not sufficient to shed light on the situation, claims that the political economy approach can

<sup>1</sup> APUKE, O. D.: Another Look at the Political Economy of the Mainstream and New Media. In *International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> CURRAN, J., IYENGAR, S., LUND, A. B., SALOVAARA-MORING, I.: Media System, Public Knowledge and Democracy: A Comparative Study. In CURRAN, J. (ed.): *Media and Democracy*. London, New York, NY : Routledge, 2011, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> MCCHESENEY, R. W.: *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*. New York, NY : New Press, 2013, p. 12.

form a basis in evaluating the digital revolution. McChesney explains the reason for this by stating: “The way capitalism works and doesn’t work determine the role the internet can play in society. The profit motive, commercialization, public relations, marketing, and advertising – all defining features of contemporary corporate capitalism – are fundamental to any assessment of how the Internet has evolved and will likely evolve.”<sup>4</sup>

Mosco stated that the political economy of communication media is the study of relationships, particularly the power relationships between the production, distribution and consumption of resources.<sup>5</sup> Murdock and Golding dwell on how the changing organization of the media with digitalization should be analysed, and discuss the necessity of discussing the changing organization of contemporary capitalism and the interactions between financialization, marketization, globalization and digitalization, which are the main drivers of change.<sup>6</sup> Fuchs embodies this by saying that all social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Weibo*, *BlogSpot* and *LinkedIn* convert the data of users (content, profiles, social network and online behaviour) into a commodity. He stated that this is a business model that prioritises targeted advertising and that if this was not the case, the producers of social media would not be able to exist.<sup>7</sup> Due to this, content creators such as journalists, web creators and blog creators produce content that will encourage readers and contain information that they can sell to these readers. In a way, media owners are in a position where they can control the information that will be both appealing to the interests of their readers and also not disturb the marketers.<sup>8</sup>

Fuchs, who has conducted multiple studies on the political economy of new media, invites us to look to the notion of the “audience commodity” mentioned by one of the pioneering figures of political economy, Dallas Smyth, and stated that Smyth’s concept option has evolved into the “internet prosumer commodity”.<sup>9</sup> According to him, the audience commodity theory can be applied to the notion of “digital labour” used in social media platforms today.<sup>10</sup> Gandini, who stated that Smyth’s concept of “audience commodity” is an important theoretical basis for the notion of “digital labour”, claimed that Smyth’s theory explains that the compulsory viewing practice of commercials that television audiences watch when subjected to advertising and marketing messages represents some form of unpaid work.<sup>11</sup>

The term digital labour is defined by Scholz as capturing users with the free labour and surplus value of the communication activities and selling the data obtained from the users to advertisers.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Fuchs stated that exploitation of digital labour consists of three aspects, coercion, alienation and appropriation.<sup>13</sup> The notion of coercion is explained by him as ideological enforcement that tent to the users to engage in communication. They are persuaded that their

<sup>4</sup> MCCHESENEY, R. W.: *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*. New York, NY : New Press, 2013, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> MOSCO, V.: *The Political Economy of Communication Rethinking and Renewal*. London : Sage Publications, 1998, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> MURDOCK, G., GOLDING, P.: Political Economy and Media Production: A Reply to Dwyer. In *Media, Culture & Society*, 2016, Vol. 38, No. 5, p. 766.

<sup>7</sup> FUCHS, C.: Theorising and Analysing Digital Labour: From Global Value Chains to Modes of Production. In *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2013, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> APUKE, O. D.: Another Look at the Political Economy of the Mainstream and New Media. In *International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies*, 2018, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> FUCHS, C.: Theorising and Analysing Digital Labour: From Global Value Chains to Modes of Production. In *The Political Economy of Communication*, 2013, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> FUCHS, C.: Dallas Smyth Today – The Audience Commodity, the Digital Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory. Prolegomena to a Digital Labour Theory of Value. In *TripleC*, 2012, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 708.

<sup>11</sup> GANDINI, A.: Digital Labour: An Empty Signifier? In *Media, Culture & Society*, 2021, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 371.

<sup>12</sup> WITTEL, A.: Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory, In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2013, Vol. 17, No. 7, p. 906.

<sup>13</sup> FUCHS, C.: Dallas Smyth Today – The Audience Commodity, the Digital Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory. Prolegomena to a Digital Labour Theory of Value. In *TripleC*, 2012, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 708.

lives would be less meaningful without sharing and the creation and maintenance of social relations. With the concept of alienation, he underlines that the owners of those platforms and profits are companies, not users. The concept of appropriation implies that users contribute to the success of corporate internet platforms by spending time on them, which in turn generates value through their unpaid digital labour. This labour includes creating social connections, making user-generated content, and generating data such as profile information and browsing behaviour. Such data is a valuable commodity that internet corporations can sell to advertisers, who can then use this data to target specific user groups. In essence, the users' digital labour serves as a form of capital accumulation for these platforms, with users contributing to the platform's success but receiving no financial compensation in return.<sup>14</sup>

This has resulted in the business models of traditional newspapers changing to new media models. Where the source of income was previously dependent on print circulation and advertising in traditional media, it only focusses on advertising in digital newspapers. Traditional business models focussed on keeping the content prices low to create an audience and then selling those audiences to advertisers who want access to them. This model was made easier by publishers who have virtual monopolies over production and distribution within certain geographical regions, which limits competition for both the viewers and advertisers. It is very difficult to continue these forms of monopolies in the current digital age.<sup>15</sup> The main reason for this is the increase in the number of internet newspapers, which has reduced publication costs in comparison to traditional media and conduct global publications. Munger, who examined how the structure of the online media industry has developed throughout the life of the internet, stated that the reputation of the firm is a strong indication of the quality of information and that the social information such as the number of 'likes' and 'shares' of a post provide an alternative source of credibility.<sup>16</sup> He also stated that each news item being distinctive and in competition with all other news to gain interest lies at the basis of this macro level phenomena and that the pressure of trying to attract attention changes the form and content of the stories.<sup>17</sup> Lehtisaari et al. touched on the importance of social media platforms for media companies within this developing new business model and that it provides a potential source of new customers. He stated that the changes in advertising and media consumption behaviour play a key role in the two-sided business model of journalism companies that earn income from both the readers and the advertisers.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2 Social Media, Personalized Journalism and Active Users

Social media is defined as *"a group of internet-based applications that build the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"*.<sup>19</sup> Traditional media organisations or media organisations that only publish through the internet use social media actively in order to reach larger audiences with their

<sup>14</sup> FUCHS, C.: Dallas Smythe Today – The Audience Commodity, the Digital Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory. Prolegomena to a Digital Labour Theory of Value. In *TripleC*, 2012, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 708.

<sup>15</sup> VILLI, M., PICARD, R. G.: Transformation and Innovation of Media Business Models. In DEUZE, M., PRENGER, M. (eds.): *Making Media. Production, Practices, and Professions*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2018, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> MUNGER, K.: All the News That's Fit to Click: The Economics of Clickbait Media. In *Political Communication*, 2020, Vol. 38, p. 377.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 377.

<sup>18</sup> LEHTISAARI, K. et al.: Comparing Innovation and Social Media Strategies in Scandinavian and US Newspapers. In *Digital Journalism*, 2018, Vol. 6, No. 8, p. 1031.

<sup>19</sup> KAPLAN, A. M., HAENLEIN, M.: Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. In *Business Horizons*, 2010, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 60.

content. Furthermore, social media is also an important resource for journalists regarding the creation of news content. Just as journalists use social media to ensure interaction with audiences, they also use it to observe and incorporate the information published by the accounts of internet users in their reports.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, social media and digital resources have become important journalism practices to ensure data verification. The research conducted by the *International Centre for Journalists* in 2019 shows that over half of journalists use digital resources for gathering data.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the internet Technologies defined as Web 2.0 have made it easier for individuals to observe, select, filter, distribute and comment on situations.<sup>22</sup> This forces media organisations to create user-generated content in the news gathering and distribution process in order to survive.<sup>23</sup> Tandoc states that this has resulted in the journalist being caught between editorial decisions and audience preferences.<sup>24</sup> In addition to communicating with the journalist directly on the internet, the user also has the opportunity to comment, share, like, etc. on the news. This allows communication between those in the newsroom and those outside, and shapes how news is gathered, processed and interpreted.<sup>25</sup> The most important success criterion of newsrooms has become the number of clicks that news articles receive through accessing their audience via social media, which most of the time randomly appear in front of the reader. According to *International Centre for Journalists'* data from January 2021, 4.2 billion people out of the 4.6 billion digital users in the world are active social media users.<sup>26</sup>

Web analytic programs enable journalists to access the data that shows the news consumption of readers and which channels they follow the most via scanning numerous data. Algorithms can be defined as data interpreting systems that consist of different user data comprising coded audience behaviours (likes, shares, comments, search words, interactions and connection with others, etc.).<sup>27</sup> These programs provide journalists with information about the popularity of the news, the location of the viewer, how long they spent on the site and the website that directed the user to that information.<sup>28</sup> Additionally Lee and Tandoc state that “Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook also provide lists of trending topics determined by algorithms tracking what people are posting and sharing, along with real-time data on a post’s number of likes, comments, and shares”<sup>29</sup> showing what form of data social media platforms provide about the user.

<sup>20</sup> TANDOC JR., E. C., VOS, T. P.: The Journalist Is Marketing the News. In *Journalism Practice*, 2016, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 956.

<sup>21</sup> See: OWEN, D., BAHJA, F., MOSHAVI, S.: *The State of Technology in Global Newsrooms*. Washington, D.C. : ICFJ, 2019. [online]. [2022-02-08]. Available at: <<https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/2019%20Final%20Report.pdf>>.

<sup>22</sup> HERMIDA, A.: Social Journalism: Exploring How Social Media Is Shaping Journalism. In SIAPER, E., VEGLIS, A. (eds.): *The Handbook of Global Online Journalism*. Chichester : John Wiley & Sons, 2012, p. 309.

<sup>23</sup> See: SRISARACAM, S.: Ethical Use of Online and Social Media in News Reporting of Thai Newsroom. In *The Asian Conference on Media & Mass Communication 2014 MEDIASIA2014*. Nagoya : IAFOR, 2014, p. 273-286.

<sup>24</sup> TANDOC JR., E. C., VOS, T. P.: The Journalist Is Marketing the News. In *Journalism Practice*, 2016, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 950.

<sup>25</sup> LEE, E.-J., TANDOC, E.: When News Meets the Audience: How Audience Feedback Online Affects News Production and Consumption. In *Human Communication Research*, 2017, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 436-437.

<sup>26</sup> DIXON, S. J.: *Number of Worldwide Social Network Users 2018-2027*. [online]. [2022-05-24]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>>.

<sup>27</sup> NORSTRÖM, L., ISLIND, A. S., SNIS, U. M. L.: Algorithmic Work: The Impact of Algorithms on Work with Social Media. In *Proceedings of the 28th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)*. Marrakech, presented on 15th-17th June 2020. [online]. [2022-05-24]. Available at: <[https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2020\\_rp/185](https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2020_rp/185)>.

<sup>28</sup> LEE, E.-J., TANDOC, E.: When News Meets the Audience: How Audience Feedback Online Affects News Production and Consumption. In *Human Communication Research*, 2017, Vol. 43 No. 4, p. 438.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 438.



As seen in the study conducted by *Reuters* on newsrooms based in Europe and North America that aimed to show how editorial analytics affect news practices, today, new metrics such as social interaction, engagement time and loyalty, rather than old metrics such as page views or browser browsing, are increasingly becoming effective in editorial decision-making processes.<sup>30</sup> Another worldwide study conducted by the *International Centre for Journalism* shows that news centres value the number of clicks more than the reactions of the audiences towards the news.<sup>31</sup> Arenberg and Lowrey state that this commodified news process encourages journalists to create easy content such as soft news, PR-oriented stories, and news based on viral content from social media, and stated that this was concerning.<sup>32</sup>

In today's news world, where user requests greatly affect the content of news, it is undoubtedly important to be aware of the news consumption habits of audiences. The internet provides an unlimited number of options for audiences to access news. Audiences can access news content via Web 2.0 applications in many ways and follow the same news from many resources. Research shows that people increasingly find and access online news via various pathways including search engines and social media rather than finding access directly via news media organizations' own websites.<sup>33</sup>

Readers have the freedom to select what news they will click on, but participation is not limited to this, thus making the user both a consumer and a producer. Users take part in the production of the news, not only by commenting on stories and sharing news via social networks, but also by sending tips or visual-audio materials, participating in instantaneous questionnaires and suggesting content.<sup>34</sup> Audiences who interact with news stories make stories more visible and some users add their own messages when sharing stories, thus personalising and shaping the news. Due to this, online newspapers are encouraged to share their control with audiences. They try to do this by ensuring increased communication among their readers, promoting reciprocal conversations and providing opportunities for personalised journalism.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.3 Relations of Clicking and News Presentation

As stated above, the innovations brought about by Web 2.0 technology have also resulted in changes to the presentation and language of the news through the reshaping of requests and expectations of the user and the effects on the production, presentation and distribution phases of the news. Pavlik defines this new form of news as "contextualised journalism" and stated that this has five basic areas of multimedia communication, namely hypermedia, increased public participation, dynamic content and personalisation. He also states that contextualized journalism not only embodies the multimedia skills of digital platforms, but also the customization of addressable media and fluent, hypermedia and interactive aspects of online communication.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> CHERUBINI, F., NIELSEN, R. K.: *Editorial Analytics: How News Media Are Developing and Using Audience Data and Metrics*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2016, p. 36. [online]. [2022-02-24]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/editorial-analytics-how-news-media-are-developing-and-using-audience-data-and-metrics>>.

<sup>31</sup> OWEN, D.: *The State of Technology in Global Newsrooms*. Washington, D.C.: ICFJ, 2017. [online]. [2022-02-08]. Available at: <<https://www.icfj.org/our-work/2017-state-technology-global-newsrooms-survey>>.

<sup>32</sup> ARENBERG, T., LOWREY, W.: The Impact of Web Metrics on Community News Decisions: A Resource Dependence Perspective. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2019, Vol. 96, No. 1, p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> See: NIELSEN, R. K., SCHRØDER, K. C.: The Relative Importance of Social Media for Accessing, Finding, and Engaging with News: An Eight-Country Cross-Media Comparison. In *Digital Journalism*, 2014, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 472-489.

<sup>34</sup> See: TENENBOIM, O., COHEN, A. A.: What Prompts Users to Click and Comment: A Longitudinal Study of Online News. In *Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 198-217.

<sup>35</sup> CHUNG, D. S.: Interactive Features of Online Newspapers: Identifying Patterns and Predicting Use of Engaged Readers. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2008, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 658-659.

<sup>36</sup> PAVLIK, J.: *Journalism and New Media*. New York, NY: Colombia University Press, 2012, p. 218.

Rich emphasises that the most important changes in journalism practices as a result of the use of interactive aspects and the adoption of interaction in online journalism are: changes in the presentation, distribution and perception of the news. Studies have shown that online audience feedback affects subject selection, story placement and performance evaluation processes within news production.<sup>37</sup> As the methods by which journalists create news change with new technology, the resources that viewers use to follow the news also transfer to social media. Studies show that the number of readers that visit media websites through search engines are decreasing, whereas the number of readers who access news via social networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* have increased.<sup>38</sup>

The study that Fürst conducted on the role that the audience preferences play in affecting the quality of the news resulted in the findings that audience metrics cause journalists to produce soft news, and that more clicks affect the topic selection of the news and breaking news being prepared.<sup>39</sup> As well as many studies showing that audience analytics are effective in selecting the topic of the news, Poell and Dijck drew attention to the fact that breaking news is created in an informal and conversational manner.<sup>40</sup> Aral and Zhao stated that the sharing of news on social media platforms changes the content of the news to some extent. According to them, the articles shared on social media include headlines and short passages that reduce the informational value of clicking on the original article and that if the user adds a personal summary when sharing the content, this is reduced even more.<sup>41</sup> The study conducted by Duffy et al. on the increase in video usage in the news to meet the increased audience demands also shows that not only the content of the news but also the way in which it is presented has been affected.<sup>42</sup> It can be said that the demands of the audiences who prefer to consume the news content in a short time and watch it instead of reading it, paved the way for this transformation.

## 1.4 Online Journalism and Social Media in North Cyprus

In order to understand the structure of internet journalism in North Cyprus, the history of the Turkish Cypriot press must first be examined. The island of Cyprus is divided, whereby two separate societies of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots live in different parts. The press has played an important role throughout the history of the island for the two communities who have frequently struggled for power and political gain to express themselves. Until 1974 when the island was physically divided, the main role that the press played was as a tool in the political fight of the Turkish Cypriots, and from this time onward, the press entered a time when politics was driven by the economy. A period of capitalist maturity then occurred until the 2000s.<sup>43</sup> The press, which played a role in the national struggle up to 2004, was used as a tool for the political sides who were both for and against the UN Annan Plan that was put to the people of North Cyprus in a referendum.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> LEE, E.-J., TANDOC, E.: When News Meets the Audience: How Audience Feedback Online Affects News Production and Consumption. In *Human Communication Research*, 2017, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 438.

<sup>38</sup> BAZACO, A., REDONDO, M., SÁNCHEZ-GARCÍA, P.: Clickbait as a Strategy of Viral Journalism: Conceptualisation and Methods. In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 2019, No. 74, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> See: FÜRST, S.: In the Service of Good Journalism and Audience Interests? How Audience Metrics Affect News Quality. In *Media and Communication*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 270-280.

<sup>40</sup> POELL, T., VAN DIJCK, J.: Social Media and Journalistic Independence. In BENNET, J., STRANGE, N. (eds.): *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free?* London : Routledge, p. 193.

<sup>41</sup> See: ARAL, S., ZHAO, M.: *Social Media Sharing and Online News Consumption*. [online]. [2023-11-04]. Available at: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3328864>>.

<sup>42</sup> DUFFY, A., LING, R., TANDOC JR., E. C.: The People Have Spoken (The Bastards?): Finding a Legitimate Place for Feedback in the Journalistic Field. In *Journalism Practice*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 9, p. 1139.

<sup>43</sup> ERCAN, E. E.: KKTC'de Basınında Ekonomi ve Siyaset İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Saha Araştırması. In *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2021, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 331-333.

<sup>44</sup> HANÇER, E.: Kıbrıs Türk Basınında Sahiplik Yapısı ve Haber Üzerindeki Etkileri. In *Küresel İletişim Dergisi*, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 1-2.

When the recent structure of the Turkish Cypriot media is examined, it can be separated into the three groups of public broadcasting, newspapers associated with political parties and newspapers that belong to businessmen. Erçakıca states that due to North Cyprus having a small population, commercial publishing has never fully developed and that the newspapers other than those who publish with political aims are directed towards the economic benefits of their owners.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, it is possible to say that internet journalism in North Cyprus has also played a role in remodelling journalism from a political-oriented tool to an economic tool.

The internet began to be used in North Cyprus for journalism purposes towards the end of the 1990's in the same way that it was around the world, by sharing the news that is published in written publications via the internet. The first online newspaper in North Cyprus was the *Kimgazet* newspaper, which began publication in 1997 and stopped its services not long after that. The reason that this newspaper, which was established by a journalist, had a short life span was claimed by one of its founders, Süleyman Ergüçlü, to be due to the economic implications of the internet structure.<sup>46</sup> In a newspaper column, Ergüçlü wrote that at the end of the 1990's, the internet access in North Cyprus had not yet been enabled in a healthy manner, that the newspaper could not reach readers, and thus, the advertisers had no interest in the newspaper meaning that it could not continue due to economic difficulties.<sup>47</sup> The first traditional newspaper that began online publication in North Cyprus was *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, which was the most popular published newspaper at that time. The newspaper began publishing its news that it produced in published form over the internet on a daily basis in 1997 and began online publications. The first online newspaper which pursued its service solely on digital platform that still continues its publications is the *Kıbrıs Postası*, founded under *Citypress Yayıncılık Ltd*. After this newspaper began publication, online versions of current newspapers appeared. Unlike the others, this newspaper first published on the internet, and then switched to simultaneous print publications. Today, many newspapers who have printed versions also have online versions where they post instant news in North Cyprus. It is not possible to say that all the online newspapers, of which it is impossible to know the exact number, conduct real journalism. There are many newspapers that share news that they obtain from agencies, where some are ideological and others only aim to receive advertising.

An examination of the Information Technologies and Communications Authority's data for September 2021 reveals that there are 250,211 fixed broadband internet (Wireless, xDSL, Hotspot, Fiber) subscribers and 682,433 registered active mobile subscribers in Northern Cyprus. The number of subscribers using mobile internet has determined that internet and data income makes up 27.3 percent of the total income of *K. K. Turkcell* and 12.8% of the total income of *Telsim*.<sup>48</sup> When this data is evaluated according to the North Cyprus population which is 382.000 in 2021,<sup>49</sup> it can be said that internet usage is in excess of the rates of North Cyprus population. On the other hand, according to research results of a study conducted in North Cyprus, 67.8% of users use the internet to communicate with each other, and 49.2% of users use it to follow the news on social media and the internet.<sup>50</sup> While nearly half of social media and internet users use digital media to follow the news, a large proportion of users access the news of online newspapers from social media instead of from the newspaper's website.

<sup>45</sup> See: ERÇAKICA, H.: Kıbrıs Türk Basınına Tarihsel Bir Bakış: ENOSİS'E Karşı Mücadeleden Kamuoyu Tacirliğine. In *The Journal of Academic Social Science*, 2019, Vol. 92, p. 339-350.

<sup>46</sup> ERGÜÇLÜ, S.: *Kim Gazet*. [online]. [2022-12-06]. Available at: <<http://www.erguclu.eu/>>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> *Elektronik Haberleşme Sektörü 3 Aylık Veriler Raporu 2021 – 2. Çeyrek*. [online]. [2021-11-09]. Available at: <<https://www.bthk.org/Documents/raporlar/pazar-verileri-sektorel-raporlar/2021%20Q2%20Raporu.pdf>>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ekonomik Ve Sosyal Göstergeler. Economic and Social Indicators*. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.devplan.org/Eco-sos/Book/SEG-2019.pdf>>.

<sup>50</sup> ÖZE, N.: Gündelik Yaşamda İnternet ve Sosyal Ağları Kullanım Pratikleri: Kuzey Kıbrıs Vaka İncelemesi. In *İntermedia International e-Journal*, 2016, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 295.



When all this data is evaluated, it reveals that social media networks are an important platform for online newspapers to reach readers. Due to this reason, online newspapers also share all news that they share on their website on social media and use eye-catching headlines that sometimes even twist the truth in order to draw readers to their websites.

## 2 Methodology

This study argues there has been a shift in news content after digital media started to be used more frequently as a tool to obtain news. Understanding that the main reason for this is because it is closely related to economic power relationships in society. In this sense, this study analyses the political economy of digital media and new business models. In this context, the research question of this study is “How has the news content in the digital newspapers of North Cyprus changed in order to increase income, and in connection, increase the number of clicks?” In order to answer this question, this study investigates whether multimedia options such as which content receives more interaction from videos, photographs etc. affect the number of clicks. Also examined, in online newspapers in North Cyprus that continue to publish only thanks to advertising income what the similarities and differences between the selected newspapers are in this regard. It is considered that users in the North Cyprus media access news through social media rather than the news web pages, and this data was collected over *Facebook*, which is the most commonly used social media platform in North Cyprus.

For the abovementioned investigation to be conducted, content analysis, which is a “research method for the subjective interpretation of text data”<sup>51</sup>, was used. Quantitative content analysis was used for the systematic grouping and significant comparisons of the data and the interpretation and contextualization were conducted qualitatively. Parveen and Showkat, who stated that content analysis can be done both qualitatively and quantitatively, claimed that content analysis helps the researcher understand the studied topics in accordance with the frequency and significance of its variables and helps interpret the subtext and contexts.<sup>52</sup>

Based on the data of *Kıbrıs OnAir*, which publishes statistics regarding the follow-up and interaction rates of news sites on a weekly basis, four internet newspapers that allow access to analytical data among the 20 most interactive online newspapers that also broadcast *WEB TV* on *Facebook* were included in the study. In this context, within the duration of the study, the researchers were appointed as managers of the social media (*Facebook*) pages of the *Haber Kıbrıs*, *Kıbrıs Net Haber*, *Ses Kıbrıs* and *Topuz* newspapers to collect the data.

The reason that this study focusses only on newspapers in North Cyprus that publish through the internet rather than the web pages of traditional newspapers, is that unlike traditional newspapers, newspapers that publish online only gain income through advertisements. The fact that there are no paid memberships or paywalls practices for the internet newspapers in North Cyprus also provides a better setting to evaluate the clickbait economy. The mentioned newspapers also engage in internet television broadcasting. Contrary to the common application of internet television around the world, internet television broadcasting in North Cyprus is conducted through *Facebook* instead of *YouTube*. This helps provide faster news and enables the videos that receive more interactions to be shared. The fact that the four newspapers within the scope of this study used different methods to share videos is important with regard to examining which forms of videos receive the most interactions.

<sup>51</sup> HSIEH, H.-F., SHANNON, S. E.: Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. In *Qualitative Health Research*, 2005, Vol. 15, No. 9, p. 1278.

<sup>52</sup> See: PARVEEN, H., SHOWKAT, N.: *Modul 27: Content Analysis*. [online]. [2022-11-15]. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318815342\\_Content\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318815342_Content_Analysis)>.

The study was conducted over a one-month period beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2021 and ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. A total of 400 news reports were examined out of the first 100 news reports of each newspaper that gained the most interactions (likes, shares, comments) in order to analyse how social media interaction affects news content. The mentioned news reports were separated into groups of news text, video and photographs in order for the multimedia characteristics to be defined. Additionally, the news reports were coded according to their topics for the main research argument to be tested. The news reports were separated into codes including “Current Affairs”, “Politics”, “World”, “Health”, “Crime”, “Economy”, “Exclusive Content”, “Education”, “Accidents”, and the most common in traditional and internet journalism in North Cyprus, “Death Notices”. Furthermore, in order to examine the reflection of multimedia use, which is one of the main aspects that separates internet journalism from traditional media,<sup>53</sup> has on the click rates, videos containing news in North Cyprus internet newspapers have been coded according to their source. These were then categorised according to the sites’ own news programs, news containing videos and non-original video content from the internet under the codes of “private”, “agenda”, “Internet” and “program”. The private category is formed from short news videos which are produced by online newspapers themselves, the agenda category is formed from live videos which are given from location by newspaper themselves, Internet category is formed from videos which is taken from the Internet and produced by other sources and finally the program category refers the long-term programs (news programmes, guest programmes, interviews, etc.). For the data obtained from the study to be significant, it is also beneficial to examine the number of followers for each newspaper that are included in the study. Although these numbers may seem low, considering the population is only 382,000, they are actually high. The number of current followers on the commercial *Facebook* page of *Haber Kibris*, which was established on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 is 199,000, and the *Kibris Net Haber Facebook* page, which was established on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015, has current 34,000 followers. The *Topuz* newspaper established its commercial *Facebook* page on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2020 and has 32,000 current followers. The *Ses* newspaper opened its *Facebook* page on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 and has 14,000 current followers.

### 3 Findings and Discussions

The 400 posts that received the most interaction during the one month follow up of online newspapers included in the study were first examined under the categories of news, videos and photographs. Although there are photographs, both from the archives or taken by themselves, used in the news evaluated under the news category, the posts examined under the photograph category are photographic/graphic posts that do not include a news text. In this context, 301 out of the 400 posts obtained from the four news sites were news, 88 were videos and 11 were photographs.

Newspaper	News	Video	Photographs
Haber Kibris	99	1	-
Net Haber	59	39	2
Ses Kibris	73	27	-
Topuz	70	21	9
Total	300	88	11

TABLE 1: Total Publication Distribution

Source: own processing, 2022

<sup>53</sup> See: PAVLIK, J.: *Journalism and New Media*. New York, NY : Colombia University Press, 2012.

This shows that news articles received the most shares at a rate of 75%, while videos were shared at 22% and photographs were shared at 3% out of the 300 posts that received the most interaction. The data indicates that *Haber Kibris* and *Ses Kibris* newspaper posts in the form of only images did not make it into the top 100 posts that received the most interaction whereas these types of posts shared by *Kibris Net Haber* and *Topuz* newspapers received the most interaction. Although the number of written news posts of the sites is higher than the number of posts containing videos, the fact that the latter have more interactions at a rate of ¼ directs news sites to post news containing videos.

When the type of sharing that received the most interaction was evaluated on the basis of newspapers, it was found that 99 of the 100 shares that received the most interaction in *Haber Kibris* online newspaper were news, while a video share entered the top 100. *Kibris Net Haber* for which the video category received the most interactions out of their 100 posts with the most interactions, had 39 videos, 59 news and 2 photograph posts on their list. For *Ses Kibris* newspaper, 73 news and 27 videos were among the 100 posts that received the most interaction. A total of 70 news and 21 video and 9 photograph posts were included in *Topuz* newspaper's 100 posts that received the most interaction. By publishing a single photograph, the *Topuz* newspaper highlighted a question related to the photograph and created a questionnaire. It can be said that one of the reasons why the *Topuz* newspaper has more photographic topics among the most interactive posts compared to other news sites is that the method frequently applied by the newspaper in question is effective.

While audio/video/text contents that are separate from each other in traditional media can be presented together on the internet, the audience has a wide choice in terms of deciding from which newspaper and in which format they will follow the news. Undoubtedly, media networks speed up the process of this content reaching the reader and they ensure that the audience can randomly access large amounts of news. Perceived audience demand for video, the perception that large platforms, especially *Facebook*, are encouraging and rewarding video, and the higher advertising rates associated with video motivate news organizations to pursue the opportunities offered by online news video.<sup>54</sup> In this context, grouping the news of the internet newspapers included in the research under news (depends on text), photo and video codes is relevant in terms of results. The results have worth in terms of both the weight of news containing videos among the most clicked news and the prevalence of internet newspapers using video content.

Due to their multimedia infrastructure, online newspapers have the opportunity to share videos as well as text and photographs and when these are examined according to their distribution of subjects, it is seen that special news is the video content that receives the most interaction. Within the scope of video content with which readers interact, there is no significant difference between live broadcasts related to the agenda, soft news content videos taken from various local/foreign websites and news programs and interviews made in the form of *Web TV* programs of online newspapers.

Video Contents	<i>Haber Kibris</i>	<i>Net Haber</i>	<i>Ses Kibris</i>	<i>Topuz</i>	Total
Private	-	11	-	13	24
Agenda	-	1	19	2	22
Internet	1	13	2	5	21
Program	-	14	6	1	21
					88

TABLE 2: Video Contents According to Their Topic

Source: own processing, 2022

<sup>54</sup> KALOGEROPOULOS, A., NIELSEN, R. K.: Investing in Online Video News. In *Journalism Studies*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 15, p. 2208.

Therefore, when videos amongst the posts that received the most interaction are examined, it is seen that 24 of the special news, 22 of the videos about the agenda, 21 of the online videos and 21 of the videos made up of the newspapers' own programs are the posts that received the most interaction. The fact that there is no significant difference between these results leads us to the conclusion that the videos in internet newspapers are clicked on according to their content, regardless of their sources. Audiences do not consider about whether the video contents are produced by newspaper themselves or taken from another platform.

### 3.1 Contents with the Most Interactions

News content, which is the primary content of online newspapers, is examined under the ten main headings of death, world news, current affairs, health, crime, economy, exclusive news, politics, education and accidents. In this regard, it is interesting how the subject of news that attracts the most interaction is death. It is seen that the second topic is current affairs and that the other news topics received nearly half the interactions of these other two topics.

	Haber Kibris	Net Haber	Ses Kibris	Topuz	Total	Percentage	Haber Kibris	Net Haber	Ses Kibris	Topuz	Total
Total News Amount (written)	99	59	73	70	301	News Amount	99	59	73	70	301
Death	27	31	23	3	84	Death	27.3	52.5	31.5	3	27.9
World	24	1	-	20	45	Current Affairs	25	10.2	29	21	26.9
Current Affairs	25	6	29	21	81	World	24	1.7	-	20	19.9
Health	5	2	6	3	16	Exclusive	2	15.3	1	13	8.3
Crime	8	2	5	6	21	Crime	8	2	5	6	7.0
Economy	3	4	3	4	14	Health	5	2	6	3	5.3
Exclusive	2	9	1	13	25	Economy	3	4	3	4	4.6
Politics	1	2	2	-	5	Accidents	4	2	2	-	2.7
Education	-	-	2	-	2	Politics	1	2	2	-	1.7
Accidents	4	2	2	-	8	Education	-	-	2	-	0.7

TABLE 3: The News Topics That Received the Most Interaction as Number and Percentage

Source: own processing, 2022

According to the calculations conducted on the total news posts that received the most interactions, death news received the highest interaction with 27.9% and was followed by current affairs news with 26.9%. The third topic that received the most interaction with 19.9% was world news followed by exclusive news with 8.3%. When advertisements are considered, it is seen that they were mostly on news about death due to this topic gaining the most interactions from audiences as a result of North Cyprus being a small community. When the content of this news is examined, it is seen that it does not include details about the death itself and includes a limited amount of information pertaining to the death, at what date and time and where the deceased was from. Due to North Cyprus being a small community where everyone knows each other, this news topic received the most interaction and it can be said that the reason for the topic of current affairs being second is the need of the audience to obtain news about what is happening around them.

When the interaction rates are examined as a whole, although the table shows that the highest interaction was received on the news topic of death, the analysis conducted separately on each newspaper shows some differences in categories that obtained the most interaction.

Content	Haber Kibris
Death	27.3
Current Affairs	25
World	24
Crime	8
Health	5
Accidents	4
Economy	3
Exclusive	2
Politics	1
Education	-

**TABLE 4:** Haber Kibris Newspaper Distribution of the Most Interactive Content by Categories

Source: own processing, 2022

Content	Net Haber
Death	52.5
Current Affairs	10.2
Exclusive	15.3
Economy	4
Crime	2
Health	2
Accidents	2
Politics	2
World	1.7
Education	-

**TABLE 5:** Net Haber Newspaper Distribution of the Most Interactive Content by Categories

Source: own processing, 2022

Content	Ses Kibris
Death	31.5
Current Affairs	29
Health	6
Crime	5
Economy	3
Politics	2
Education	2
Accidents	2
Exclusive	1
World	-

**TABLE 6:** Ses Kibris Newspaper Distribution of the Most Interactive Content by Categories

Source: own processing, 2022



Content	Topuz Newspaper
Current Affairs	21
World	20
Exclusive	13
Crime	6
Economy	4
Health	3
Death	3
Accidents	-
Politics	-
Education	-

**TABLE 7:** *Topuzr Newspaper Distribution of the Most Interactive Content by Categories*

Source: own processing, 2022

The same as the general ranking is seen in *Haber Kıbrıs*, while more than half (52.5%) of the news that received the most interaction of *Kıbrıs Net Haber* was death news, and special news was the second category that received the most interaction. The topic that received the least interaction for *Kıbrıs Net Haber* was world news, whereas the second category that received the most interaction was exclusive news. While the ranking of death and current affairs news was parallel to the general ranking in *Ses Cyprus*, world news entered the top ten for this newspaper. In *Topuz* newspaper, in which death news only constituted 3%, the most interaction areas are seen in the form of current affairs, world news and exclusive news.

## 4 Summary

The video posts of the four newspapers that were examined show similarities. For example, 27% of the videos that ranked in the 100 posts that received the most interaction were exclusive news topics and 24% were live publications under the topic category of current affairs. Videos obtained from the internet and TV programs that are the own production of the *WEB TV* of the newspapers make up 24% of the posts in the first 100 that received the most interactions. Only one video that the *Haber Kıbrıs* newspaper obtained from the internet entered the first 100 posts that received the most interaction, whereas 70% of the videos that entered the rankings from the *Ses Kıbrıs* newspaper included videos related to current affairs. The TV programs of the *Kıbrıs Net Haber* newspaper came first, and exclusive news ranked the highest for the *Topuz* newspaper. For *Ses Kıbrıs*, which had no exclusive news among the news that received the most interaction, the highest interaction was for their current affairs news, then their TV programs and online publications. *Kıbrıs Haber Net*, whose topics all ranked close to each, other had the highest rankings for online publications and exclusive news. On the other hand, in the *Topuz* newspaper, 62% of the videos included in the 100 shares that receive the most interaction were exclusive news videos. This was followed by the videos obtained online.

There are also photographs within the top 100 posts that received the most interactions for the *Topuz* and *Kıbrıs Net Haber* newspapers. Other than news, *Kıbrıs Net Haber* also shared tables that were made into photographs on *Facebook* that showed statistical information, whereas the signs of the personalised publishing strategy of the *Topuz* newspaper can be seen in their photographs. The newspaper posts photographs with questions that trigger discussion and comments. For example, they post an image of a traditional Cypriot dish and ask what the name of that dish is or what the name of that image is compared to. Due to its sensitivity in terms of protecting cultural values, the comments on these photographs increase interaction.

## 5 Conclusion

In addition to traditional news sources, the internet, which is a common source of news today, has made the qualities of the news such as being read, followed, clicked and shared measurable. Online newspapers that are in competition with traditional media sources or with their own peers use the information that they obtain about the number of followers and the amount of interaction they receive via various algorithms and use these data to compete and to obtain more advertising. This study, was conducted over a one-month period in August 2021 and examined the social media accounts (*Facebook*) of the *Haber Kıbrıs*, *Kıbrıs Net Haber*, *Ses Kıbrıs* and *Topuz* online newspapers, which they use as a primary source to reach their readers/audience, presents data showing the news-click relationship in North Cyprus. When the 100 posts of these four newspapers that received the most interaction during the aforementioned period were analysed, it was seen that the social/cultural aspects of Cyprus also affect news selection and click rates. The most interesting conclusion of this study, which shows the difference between internet newspapers in North Cyprus and those in other countries, is that the most clicks were received for “death notices”. Therefore, newspapers post news of deaths on their social media pages in order to increase their click rates. These types of news items are preferred to increase the interaction according to the socio-cultural structure of Cyprus in order to strengthen the data presented to the advertisers.

The data presented in this study show that the *WEB TV* posts that online newspapers share on their *Facebook* page also increases interaction. *WEB TV* publications that are widely used in Cyprus are carried out in the form of live broadcast discussion programs, press conferences that that show current affairs, live activities and protests, special interviews and videos from the internet that include interesting news content. The fact that videos have an important place among the most interactive shares of newspapers stands out as a tool that online newspapers use to promote more interaction.

When the sharing and click data of the newspapers that are included in this study are examined, it is seen that each online newspaper has their own personalised methods and priorities to increase their rate of readers/audience and ensure more interaction. This shows that in addition to appealing to the general public, newspapers adopt different methods to create followers. It is seen that internet newspapers published in North Cyprus select most methods to increase their interaction rates and receive more advertisements. The fact that last minute news, which provides an overview of information rather than news that, contains announcing news, increasing the interaction rate of newspapers determines the content of the news and it can be said that internet newspapers select content that gains the most interaction on Facebook in order to increase their potential to gain advertisements.

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