Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 3
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajmmc Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 2407-9480 DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc

July 2026

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajmmc Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 2407-9480 DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Published by the Athens Institute

Athens Institute is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. Athens Institute is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from Athens Institute's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens"…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is Athens Institute's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in Athens Institute's name.

The ***Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC)*** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas from mass media and communication. The Journal encourages the submission of works that engages issues of international scope and that explore matters of theoretical importance across a diverse range of topics from journalism, to strategic communication, to economics, public policy, politics and technological change as they relate to media and society. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the Mass Media & Communication Unit of the Athens Institute. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
ISSN NUMBER: 2407-9480 - DOI: 10.30958/ajmmc
Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026
Download the entire issue (PDF)

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications

Editorial and Reviewers' Board

President's Message

All Athens Institute's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by Athens Institute throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the basic academic standards, which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, Athens Institute will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the third of the twelfth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications (AJMMC), published by the Mass Media & Communication Unit of* Athens Institute.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

Athens Institute

A World Association of Academics and Researchers

26th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 10-15 May 2026, Athens, Greece

The Mass Media & Communication Unit of Athens Institute organizes its **26th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media, 10-15 May 2026, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Communications, Mass Media and other related disciplines. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-MED.doc).

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. John Pavlik**, Head, Mass Media and Communication Research Unit, Athens Institute & Professor, Rutgers University, USA.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **13 October 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **12 April 2027**

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026 – Pages 159-172

Hiring Priorities and Skill Expectations of Magazine Editors When Considering Candidacy of Journalism School Graduates

By Adam Pitluk[*], *Narae Kim*[±], *Jennifer Wilson*[•] *& Jeff Inman*[○]

This study examines how legacy media hiring editors evaluate recent journalism school graduates amid production and technological changes, with particular attention to expectations shaped by generative AI. When considering the history of journalism education as both professional preparation and civic training, this study builds on prior research documenting disconnects between newsroom hiring priorities and academic curricula development. Drawing on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, a survey of judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards assessed the importance of 16 skills in current entry-level hiring as well as anticipated needs over the next five years. Results show that interpersonal and collaborative competencies—specifically teamwork and communication—are considered most valued across both timeframes, which deviates from past research. Formal credentials and narrowly defined production skills ranked lowest, while digital, data, social media, and AI-related competencies showed significant projected growth. Overall, results suggest editors favor adaptability, engagement, and professional judgment over credentials alone in practice.

Keywords: *journalism education, magazine journalism, legacy media, hiring practices, generative AI, student involvement, media skills*

Journalism education, since the founding of the Missouri School of Journalism in 1908, has historically been viewed as an essential equalizer in objective writing and reporting as well as a blueprint of how to preserve and promote freedom of speech and of the press in democratic societies (Smith, 1990). Situated at the intersection of professional practice, civic responsibility, and higher education, the purpose of university journalism programs is to train practitioners to articulate—and at times contest—disputed information with an attempt to derive fact-based communication (Minow, 2018). Although the methods employed have pivoted—from the trailblazing Missouri Method of the early 1900s to the establishment of a silo-toppling multimedia journalism major at the University of Kansas in the early 2000s—journalism schools have functioned as both mirrors of the profession and engines of reform (Anderson, 2007). Understanding the historic role of journalism education draws attention to the normative ideals, pedagogical

[*]Associate Professor, Edwards College of Communication, Media & Culture, Coastal Carolina University, USA.
[±]Assistant Professor, Reynolds School of Journalism, University of Nevada-Reno, USA.
[•]Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Drake University, USA.
[○]Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Drake University, USA.

debates, and civic aspirations that have shaped how journalists are taught and how their work is received by a news consuming public.

According to Barnhurst and Nerone (2003), early journalism education in the United States and Canada arose in response to rapid industrialization and the expansion of mass-circulation newspapers. As news organizations grew and flexed their influence, concerns mounted about sensationalism, specifically as it pertains to politically uneven reporting. Reformers argued that journalism, like law or medicine, required formal education grounded in ethics, history, and social science (Zelizer, 2004). The founding of the Missouri School of Journalism in 1908, followed by programs at Columbia University in 1912, Northwestern University in 1921 and the University of Iowa in 1924, reflected an effort to professionalize journalism by embedding it within the university (Pulitzer, 1912; Pitluk, 2021b). These early schools framed journalism both as a blue-collar-esque trade that involved dogged gumshoe reporting as well as public service essential to democratic life (Pitluk, 2021b).

The mid-20th century marked a period of consolidation and self-confidence for journalism education. Accrediting bodies, such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), formalized standards that emphasized ethics, law, and diversity alongside reporting skills were the primary aims. During this period, journalism schools helped institutionalize ideals such as objectivity, verification, and independence, which came to define a mainstream journalist's professional identity (Tsfati et al, 2020). While these ideals were often contested—particularly by critics who pointed to their cultural and political assumptions—they nonetheless provided a shared framework that journalism educators transmitted across generations.

However, times change, and while legacy media editors recognize the value of 21st-century journalism education in a digital and machine-learning age, the expectations and priorities of what skills they want from recent journalism school graduates are pivoting for the first time in over 100 years of journalism education. This exploratory study of legacy media hiring editors in the AI age—is the beginning of empirical studies to track this pivot.

Literature Review

The evolution of journalism education from its trade-school infancy to one of civic duty and independent truth-seeking was deeply influenced by Progressive-era thought. The concept was ballyhooed by John Dewey in the 1920s, who espoused that teaching technical skills such as reporting/writing and editing were essential, but so was cultivating informed judgment and social responsibility (Hernon & Metoyer-Duran, 1992). Courses in political science, economics, and sociology became central to curricula, reflecting the belief that journalists must understand the structures they report on. As Carey (1989) later argued, journalism education has always carried an implicit theory of democracy, whether acknowledged or not.

At the same time, journalism schools have consistently wrestled with tensions between theory and practice. Critics from within the profession have often accused universities of being too abstract or disconnected from newsroom realities, while

academics have cautioned against reducing journalism education to vocational training (Pitluk, 2021a). This tension has proven productive as well as persistent. The laboratory newspaper, the campus radio station, and later the digital newsroom all emerged as pedagogical compromises—spaces where students could practice journalism while reflecting on its purposes and consequences. In this sense, journalism education has historically functioned as a site of experimentation, testing new forms of storytelling married with technology and professional norms before they become widespread in industry.

Since the mainstreaming of the World Wide Web in 1999 and the advent of social media in the 2010s, the historic role of journalism education has been challenged by what history has shown are fundamental changes in media economics and technology. The decline of legacy news organizations, the pivot to online outshining print news, the rise of social media, and most recently, the creation of generative AI raised questions about what journalism schools should teach and whom they should serve (Pitluk, Wilson, & Inman, 2025). Yet these disruptions have also renewed the relevance of journalism education's civic mission. Far from becoming obsolete, journalism education has reasserted its role as a stabilizing force—one that anchors rapidly changing practices to enduring democratic values. The question becomes whether journalism schools are teaching the skills that legacy media hiring editors need, as past research concluded that there is a disconnect between newspaper industry hiring editors and journalism academic administrators vis-à-vis necessary skillsets (Pitluk, 2019).

More than a decade ago, Wenger (2012) published a content analysis—at the time the only study of its kind—examining employment opportunities posted by the top 10 American newspaper and broadcast journalism companies between 2008 and 2009. The study coded more than 1,400 job postings to identify the most desirable skills and attributes sought in journalism candidates. Findings revealed a notable shift over time, particularly an increased emphasis on web, multimedia, and social media competencies. However, skills associated with broader professional competencies, such as leadership or critical decision-making, played little role in hiring practices during this period (Wenger, 2012; Wenger & Owens, 2012; Wenger et al., 2018). Instead, the vast majority of skills emphasized in job postings were technical or practical in nature. Based on these findings, Wenger and Owens (2012) concluded that "educators would do well to get ahead of the industry need by preparing students who are ready to step into leadership roles in the area of social media and mobile delivery".

As a follow-up, Wenger and colleagues (2018) conducted a subsequent study aimed at isolating the specific skills and attributes required of journalists seeking employment in contemporary newsrooms. The authors sought to examine both the enduring traditional competencies emphasized by accredited journalism programs and the emerging areas of expertise necessary for professional success. Using content analysis, the researchers examined job postings from the top 10 broadcast and top 10 newspaper companies in the United States, as identified by a 2015 *Pew Research Center* report ranking media organizations by revenue. Across more than 1,800 postings, the most frequently advertised positions—categorized by job title—were reporter (n = 330), producer (n = 134), web writer (n = 88),

photographer (n = 72), internships or unpaid positions (n = 71), web producer (n = 68), anchor (n = 66), editor (n = 61), executive producer (n = 43), and assignment editor (n = 40) (Wenger et al., 2018).

Three years later, Pitluk (2021a, 2021b) did two qualitative studies also on the intersection of journalism hiring practices and pedagogy of journalism education. He interviewed 14 newspaper editors to determine their hiring needs from recent journalism school graduates, and he interviewed 16 journalism school administrators to determine the skills pecking order that administrators expected of recent graduates. All 14 newspaper editors emphatically agreed that strong writing and reporting skills are by far the most important qualities in newly hired journalism school graduates; all other skills were divided, with none earning a majority (Pitluk, 2021b). On the academic side, however, the various journalism school administrators listed a range of different skills as most important in the pursuit of a journalism degree. Those skills that tracked at the top were ones that used the following terms: ethics/values/ communications law 100 percent; news skills/writing/reporting 100 percent; curiosity/analysis/synthesis/ critical thinking 81 percent; technology/social media/coding/ multimedia 75 percent (Pitluk, 2021a). Another striking finding emerged in efforts to triangulate best practices for teaching the skills editors value: 100 percent of newspaper hiring editors said no academic administrator had ever contacted them to help inform curriculum in ways that would benefit newsrooms (Pitluk, 2021b). Conversely, 100 percent of academic administrators reported that no newspaper hiring editors had ever reached out to discuss the curriculum being taught. (Pitluk, 2021a). As such, Pitluk exposed a communication disconnect between industry and the academy, with writing and reporting skills being the only ones both sides agreed as most necessary for recent journalism school graduates.

Therefore, the presumption among journalism practitioners in the magazine and legacy media journalism industry, which has similar hiring tendencies to the newspaper industry, is that a solid journalism education will prepare students with writing and reporting skills for the journalism workforce across disciplines. That was the only measurable expectation among the two. However, because the fast-paced industry has evolved in the past five years—and ceding that academia typically changes at a slower pace than the business community—the question arises whether the writing and reporting skillsets traditionally associated with a journalism education are still the most desirable skillsets of a recent journalism school graduate in the magazine journalism industry in 2026 and for the next five years.

The definition of magazine for this research is the one used by the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME). ASME defines a magazine as a print or digital publication issued or updated regularly in a consistent format, shaped by a distinctive editorial perspective and trusted by readers to provide timely information relevant to their interests (American Society of Magazine Editors Guidelines, 2015). Magazines are usually characterized by the use of print or digital technologies to create a visually rich, immersive experience (2015). Magazine storytelling in print and online, including podcasts and videos, is characterized by extensive reporting, informed analysis, stylish writing, a distinctive point of view and the use of graphics to enrich the experience of the reader (2015).

Because this research crosses into the social science realm of psychology, the researchers used a theory from the discipline of education psychology. The theoretical lens through which this study is viewed is Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984). Astin asserted that "a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development" (p. 522). Central to this theory is the idea that student learning and development are not guaranteed simply through exposure to coursework or curricular offerings. Rather, meaningful educational outcomes depend on the extent to which students actively engage—both physically and psychologically —with their academic environment.

Astin (1984) defined student involvement as the amount of energy a student devotes to academic experiences and the broader higher education setting. Highly involved students are characterized by substantial investment in studying, significant time spent on campus, consistent participation in student organizations, and frequent interaction with faculty members and peers. In contrast, uninvolved students tend to minimize time spent on campus, disengage from extracurricular activities, devote limited energy to academic work, and have infrequent contact with faculty and fellow students (Astin, 1984). The theory therefore emphasizes behavior and engagement rather than institutional inputs alone as determinants of educational effectiveness.

Within this framework, students who actively seek out internships, externships, or other experiential learning opportunities exemplify Astin's concept of involvement. These activities require students to extend their learning beyond the classroom and to invest additional time and effort in professional and academic development. As such, the intangible qualities a college experience has to offer—especially teamwork and communication—transform a recent college graduate into an attractive new hire. Recent research by Melin (2025) affirms this theory, as the research indicates that critical learning in higher education—especially in media and communication studies—must be embodied, performative, and experiential, not only cognitive or text-based.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine whether non-traditional journalism pedagogy and life lessons learned on campus (and not heretofore researched from the perspective of a magazine hiring editor) are measurable traits that magazine hiring editors are looking for. Various forms of student involvement occur outside the formal curriculum in order to better understand which non-academic criteria magazine hiring editors value when evaluating candidates for entry-level positions. By focusing on perspectives not fully captured through prior research, this study illuminates how experiential engagement and campus socialization complements traditional academic measures in shaping employability outcomes, which magazine hirings editors expressed that they want.

Research Questions

Taken together, the history of journalism education reveals a field defined less by static curricula than by ongoing negotiation over journalism's social purpose. However, are journalism schools preparing students with the tools needed by magazine hiring editors? Whereas past research examined the intersection between

the needs of the newspaper industry and the pedagogical instruction of journalism schools, the purpose of this research is to determine which tools magazine hiring editors believe recent journalism school graduates need to be equipped with in order to succeed in the industry. Additionally, as generative AI is still in its infancy—irrespective of the profound impact and effect it is already having in the fields of communications, mass communications, and journalism—do magazine hiring editors foresee the desired skill set of recent journalism school graduates changing in the next five years. This study examined three research questions:

> RQ1. When hiring entry-level candidates, how important are different skills to magazine editors, and do perceived importance levels differ across skills?
>
> RQ2. When hiring entry-level candidates in the next five years, how important do magazine editors expect different skills to be, and do perceived importance levels differ across skills?
>
> RQ3. Are there significant differences between editors' current skill importance ratings and their expectations for the next five years?

Methods

Participant Recruitment and Survey Procedures

Study population: The target population comprised professional judges for the 2025 National Magazine Awards, an event hosted by the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) in partnership with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. A comprehensive list of 226 judges was initially identified.

Sampling rationale: This specific group was selected for two primary reasons. First, their professional standing as editorial leaders, publishers, and directors across legacy and digital media platforms ensures high expertise and credibility in responding to inquiries regarding entry-level hiring trends. Second, utilizing this pre-vetted list was significantly more efficient and accurate than manual individual searches, which ensured that the researchers could reach the most appropriate industry experts simultaneously. After excluding two judges who were members of the research team, a final contact list of 225 individuals was established.

Data collection procedures: The research team employed two data collection strategies to maximize response rates. First, in-person recruitment was employed. During the ASME award events held at Columbia University, a research team member distributed QR codes to attending judges. These codes were presented via various formats, including business cards and informational displays at registration tables. From this strategy, 6 responses were obtained (n = 6, 10.71%). Second, three rounds of mass emails were sent to the identified judges by April 23, 2025. Out of the 225 initial addresses, 184 were confirmed as valid, excluding one research team member and 41 bounced emails. The number of respondents collected via email solicitation was (n = 50, 89.29%). Through these combined methods, a total of 56 judges (N = 56) completed the survey, and their responses were utilized for the final data analysis. This resulted in a final survey response rate of 30.43%.

Survey Questionnaires

Core Skills and Competencies: The survey assessed 16 distinct sets of skills and competencies identified as critical for entry-level media professionals (Wenger et al, 2018; Pitluk, 2021a). These skills included: writing, reporting, editing, visual reporting/ storytelling, video production (e.g., on-camera experience), audio-visual production (e.g., podcast or narrative media production), social media proficiency, creative/design-oriented skills (e.g., Adobe, Canva, WoodWing), data-driven/analytical skills (e.g., Google Analytics, Python), AI-based programs and tools, ability to work independently, verbal communication, teamwork, previous journalism experience (e.g., student newspapers, internships), theoretical knowledge of journalism principles, and possession of a journalism degree. Each skill was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "*Not at all important*" to "*Extremely important.*" To capture both current and future perspectives, the same set of competencies was presented under two different questions. Respondents were first asked, "When hiring entry-level candidates recently, how important was each of the following skills to you?" This was followed by a forward-looking question: "To what extent do you expect entry-level candidates to possess the skills below to be successful within the next 5 years?"

Demographic and Professional Background: The survey collected data on respondents' professional backgrounds. This included years of experience in the field ($M = 23.32$, $SD = 8.69$), current employer information, and specific experience related to hiring entry-level employees during the previous year, 2024 (Yes: n = 31, 55.36%; No = 24, 42.86%; Can't remember: n = 1, 1.78%).

Data Analysis

A total of 56 responses were utilized for the final data analysis. Two partially completed responses were retained and included in the final analysis stage. Descriptive statistics, including means (M) and standard deviations (SD), were calculated for each core skill to explore overall importance patterns. To address RQ1 and RQ2, Repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test statistical differences in perceived importance across the 16 core competencies. For RQ3, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the 16 skill sets based on their perceived importance in current hiring contexts versus their expected importance over the next five years.

Results

> RQ1. When hiring entry-level candidates, how important are different skills to magazine editors, and do perceived importance levels differ across skills?

Award-winning magazine editors rated the importance of 16 skills when hiring recent graduates for entry-level positions in their recent hiring decisions. Substantial variation was observed in editors' perceptions of skill importance. Interpersonal and collaborative skills received the highest ratings, whereas

technical production skills and formal credentials were rated as less important. Specifically, teamwork *(M* = 4.45, *SD* = 0.74), communication (*M* = 4.41, *SD* = 0.71), ability to work independently (*M* = 4.32, *SD* = 0.74), and writing (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = 1.01) ranked highest. In contrast, journalism degree credentials (*M* = 1.61, *SD* = 0.78), AI-related skills (*M* = 1.66, *SD* = 0.82), audio-visual production (*M* = 1.79, *SD* = 1.11), and video production (*M* = 1.91, *SD* = 1.20) received the lowest importance ratings. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics associated with each of the sixteen skills.

To examine whether this importance differed significantly across these 16 skills, a one-way Repeated-measures analysis of variance (Repeated-measures ANOVA) was conducted. Because Mauchly's test indicated a violation of the sphericity assumption ($W = .001$, $\chi^2(119) = 370.86$, $p < .001$) and given the large number of within-subject levels, a multivariate approach was adopted. Pillai's Trace was used as the primary test statistic due to its robustness to violations of sphericity. The multivariate test revealed a significant difference in importance ratings across the 16 skill types (Pillai's Trace = .753, $F(15, 40) = 8.15$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .753$). These findings indicate that editors prioritize certain skill types (e.g., teamwork, communication, writing) over others (e.g., AI-related skills, journalism degree credentials) when evaluating recent graduates for entry-level positions under current hiring conditions in the magazine industry.

> RQ2. When hiring entry-level candidates in the next five years, how important do magazine editors expect different skills to be, and do perceived importance levels differ across skills?

Editors rated the expected importance of the same 16 skills for entry-level candidates' success over the next five years. Overall, clear differences were observed in editors' expectations. Interpersonal and collaborative competencies remained the most important skills, including teamwork (*M* = 4.57, *SD* = 0.69), ability to work independently (*M* = 4.56, *SD* = 0.77), communication (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.69), and writing (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 0.69). Formal credentials and production-oriented skills continued to receive lower ratings, including journalism degree credentials (*M* = 1.80, *SD* = 0.86), and audio-visual production (*M* = 2.94, *SD* = 1.07). Several digital and platform-related skills were rated at moderate levels of importance. These included social media skills (*M* = 3.63, *SD* = 1.07), editing-related competencies (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 0.88), data-related skills (*M* = 3.26, *SD* = 1.07), and AI-related (*M* = 3.07, *SD* = 1.15) and video production (*M* = 3.07, *SD* = 1.04) skills, suggesting that editors anticipate broader skill requirements beyond traditional editorial competencies in future entry-level roles (see Table 1).

A Repeated-measures ANOVA was also conducted to examine whether expected importance differed significantly across these 16 skills. Mauchly's test again indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated ($W = .001$, $\chi^2(119) = 359.62$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, a multivariate approach using Pillai's Trace was applied. The multivariate test revealed a significant difference in importance ratings across the 16 skill types (Pillai's Trace = .492, $F(15, 38) = 2.45$, $p = .013$, partial $\eta^2 = .492$). This indicated that certain skills and competencies (e.g., teamwork, ability to work independently) were considered more important than others (e.g., journalism degree credentials) for hiring entry-level employees in the next five years.

Editors' responses comparing current hiring practices with expectations for the next five years revealed both similarities and notable change in perceived skill importance. Overall, the general pattern of skill prioritization remained consistent across the two time points; interpersonal and collaborative competencies remained consistently prioritized, with teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing ranking among the most important skills in both current and future hiring contexts.

At the same time, several skill areas showed noticeable changes in perceived importance. In particular, digital and technology-related competencies showed higher mean ratings in future expectations compared to current hiring practices. AI-related and data-oriented skills increased from being among the lowest-rated skills in current hiring to moderate levels of importance in future expectations. The pattern suggested a growing emphasis on digital and emerging technologies in the industry. Social media and editing-related skills also demonstrated modest increases in perceived importance. Traditional production skills such as audio-visual and video production, as well as a journalism degree, remained among the lowest-rated skills in relative importance, although their mean importance ratings increased in future expectations. Taken together, these descriptive patterns suggest that while core interpersonal skills are expected to remain central, magazine editors anticipate a gradual shift toward greater importance of selected technical and digital competencies in the coming years.

> RQ3. Are there significant differences between editors' current skill importance ratings and their expectations for the next five years?

Based on the descriptive comparison of current and future skill importance, paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to examine whether the observed changes in perceived importance for each skill were statistically significant. To control for family-wise error across the 16 paired tests, *p*-values were adjusted using the Holm correction.

Results showed statistically significant increases in expected importance for 10 skills with large to medium effect seizes: video production ($t(53) = -8.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$), AI-related skills ($t(53) = -8.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$), audio-visual production ($t(53) = -7.28$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.99$), data-related skills ($t(53) = -6.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.90$), reporting ($t(53) = -5.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.72$), editing ($t(53) = -5.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), visual skills ($t(53) = -5.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), design ($t(53) = -4.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.62$), social media skills ($t(53) = -4.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$), and journalism degree credentials ($t(53) = -2.84$, $p = .039$, $d = 0.39$).

In contrast, prior experience was the only skill that showed a statistically significant decrease in expected importance ($t(53) = 3.14$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.43$). No statistically significant changes were observed for writing, independent work, teamwork, communication, or knowledge-related skills ($ps > .05$), which remained consistently high in the importance assigned to core interpersonal and foundational competencies. Table 1 summarizes the results of the analysis.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Paired Comparisons of Editors' Ratings of Skill Importance for Current Hiring and the Next Five Years*

Skill	Current hiring (N = 56)	Future hiring (N = 54))	Δ (Future – current)	*t*(53)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Writing	4.16 (1.00)	4.43 (0.69)	0.26	-2.44*
Reporting	3.54 (1.06)	4.19 (0.80)	0.67	-5.26***
Editing	2.73 (1.02)	3.56 (0.88)	0.85	-5.07***
Visual storytelling	2.80 (1.29)	3.50 (0.95)	0.72	-5.04***
Video production	1.91 (1.20)	3.07 (1.04)	1.17	-8.09***
Audio-visual production	1.79 (1.11)	2.94 (1.07)	1.17	-7.28***
Social media proficiency	2.98 (1.24)	3.63 (1.07)	0.65	-4.20***
Creative/Design-oriented skills	2.41 (1.54)	3.02 (1.25)	0.57	-4.57***
Data-driven/analytical skills	2.38 (1.00)	3.26 (1.07)	0.89	-6.64***
AI-related skills	1.66 (0.82)	3.07 (1.15)	1.41	-8.07***
Ability to work independently	4.32 (0.74)	4.56 (0.77)	0.19	-2.02*
Verbal communication	4.41 (0.71)	4.44 (0.69)	-0.02	0.22
Teamwork	4.45 (0.74)	4.57 (0.69)	0.07	-1.00
Previous experience	3.45 (1.06)	3.06 (1.17)	-0.44	3.14*
Knowledge of journalism principles	3.02 (1.04)	3.17 (1.04)	0.13	-1.41
Journalism degree	1.61 (078)	1.80 (0.86)	0.20	-2.94**

Discussion

Taken together, the findings of this study offer a textured portrait of how elite magazine editors currently evaluate entry-level journalism candidates and how they anticipate those expectations will evolve in the near future. Drawing on responses from 56 judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards—individuals who occupy positions of considerable authority within both legacy and digital media—the study captures hiring priorities at a moment of professional transition rather than crisis. What emerges is not a wholesale rejection of traditional journalism values, but a recalibration of how those values are enacted in contemporary newsrooms.

Under current hiring conditions, editors clearly privilege interpersonal and collaborative competencies over formal credentials or narrowly defined technical skills. Teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing were consistently rated as the most important attributes when evaluating recent graduates. These findings suggest that editors are less concerned with whether candidates arrive fully formed as technical specialists and more focused on whether they demonstrate the habits of mind and behavior necessary to function within complex newsroom and field environments. Journalism, as these results quietly reaffirm, remains a social practice—one dependent on collaboration, judgment, and the capacity to work productively with others under conditions of uncertainty.

Equally notable is what editors do not appear to prioritize. Journalism degree credentials, along with audio-visual production, video production, and AI-related

skills, were rated among the least important factors in recent hiring decisions, this despite virtually all magazines having a digital and/or multimedia component. This does not imply hostility toward journalism education or technology but rather reflects skepticism toward credentials as proxies for readiness. Editors appear to evaluate candidates less on where or how they were trained than on what they can contribute in practice, reinforcing long-standing tensions between professional education and professional gatekeeping.

When editors turned their attention to the next five years, continuity outweighed rupture. Interpersonal competencies remained central, with teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing again occupying the top tier of importance. This is particularly important because Edogor (2025) posited that mass media institutions are considered primary forecasters of trends and as a result, of media content. At the same time, the data reveal a measured but statistically significant shift in expectations around digital and technological skills. AI-related competencies, data skills, video and audio-visual production, editing, design, and social media all increased in perceived importance, moving from marginal considerations to moderate expectations. These changes suggest not a technological determinism, but an acknowledgment that journalists will increasingly be asked to operate fluently (and fluidly) across platforms and tools that did not previously define entry-level work.

Importantly, the only skill to decline in expected importance was prior experience. This finding complicates common assumptions about an increasingly competitive entry-level market and suggests that editors may be more willing to invest in on-the-job development, provided candidates possess strong foundational skills. Core competencies such as writing, teamwork, and communication showed no significant change across time, underscoring their durability amid technological change.

Overall, the findings point to a profession that is evolving without abandoning its core commitments. Editors appear to value adaptability over specialization, engagement over credentials, and collaborative capacity over technical mastery alone. For journalism education, the implication is not to chase every emerging tool, but to continue cultivating involvement, judgment, and professional confidence—while creating space for students to encounter and experiment with the technologies that will shape journalism's next iteration.

Limitations and Future Study Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings; however, these limitations can be addressed in future research. First, the sample is limited to judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards, a highly specific and elite group of magazine editors. While this ensures expertise, it restricts the generalizability of the results to the broader population of hiring managers in journalism, particularly in local, non-award-focused, or emerging media organizations. Future research could employ data collection methods that allow researchers to reach more diverse pools of editors and journalists and to collect a broader range of opinions and perspectives on similar research agendas. In addition, including journalism educators in higher education institutions and students pursuing careers in relevant fields as potential participants could support

the same or similar research agenda and allow researchers and practitioners to gain a more comprehensive understanding of expectations across diverse groups. Second, the final response rate was 30.43% (N = 56), meaning a majority of potential participants did not respond. Although the response rate is consistent with established benchmarks for elite-level professional surveys, which range between 15% and 35%, nonresponse bias may have influenced the results (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Cycyota & Harrison 2006), as those who chose to participate could systematically differ in perspectives from nonrespondents. Future research should aim to include nonresponse bias checks or employ broader multi-channel recruitment approaches to further validate the representativeness of these professional insights. Third, the survey relied on self-reported assessments of skill importance, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall inaccuracies, especially regarding future expectations. Future research could address these limitations by employing triangulation through qualitative interviews or longitudinal observations, which would provide a more nuanced understanding of actual hiring behaviors beyond self-reported data.

However, as this is the first study of its kind in the wake of generative AI and other paradigm shifts in magazine newsrooms, it is consequential and lays groundwork for future studies of its kind.

References

"American Society of Magazine Editors Guidelines," (2015). Retrieved from https://www.asme.media/editorial-guidelines

Anderson, E. (2007). *Media usage of Journalism students of the University of Missouri-Columbia*. University of Missouri-Columbia.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *25*(4), 297-308.

Barnhurst, K. G., & Nerone, J. (2003). The form of news: A history. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *28*(2).

Baruch, Y., & Holtom, B. C. (2008). Survey response rate levels and trends in organizational research. *Human Relations, 61*(8), 1139-1160.

Carey, J. (1989). *Communication as Culture*: Essays on Media and. *Society. Boston: Unwin Hyman*, P15.

Craft, S., Davis, C. N., & Jenkins, J. (2025). *Principles of American journalism: An introduction*. Routledge.

Cycyota, C. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2006). What (not) to expect when surveying executives: A meta-analysis of top manager response rates and techniques over time. *Organizational Research Methods, 9*(2), 133-160.

Dewey, J. (2001). The public and its problems. *Hermes, La Revue*, *31*(3), 77-91.

Edogor, O. I. (2025). Conceptualising the Mass Media as 'The Social Scientific Oracle'. *media and*, 125.

Hernon, P., & Metoyer-Duran, C. (1992). Discussion forum: the public. *Government Information Quarterly*, *9*(1), 1-10.

Melin, M. (2025). Embodied Critical Learning through Performance Teaching. *Athens Journal of Mass Media & Communications 11(1).*

Minow, M. (2018). The Changing Ecosystem of News and Challenges for Freedom of the Press. *Loy. L. REv.*, *64*, 499.

Pitluk, A. (2019). The Value of a Journalism Degree: An Analysis of what Newspaper Editors Consider when Hiring Journalism School Graduates and what Journalism School Administrators Consider when Educating These Graduates. Retrieved from https://shareok.org/items/ca224383-6e17-4471-a6f1-e668cec36475

Pitluk, A. (2021a). Head of the Class: A Study of What United States Journalism School Administrators Consider the Most Valuable Educational Tenets for Their Graduates Seeking Careers at US Legacy Newspapers. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *15*(6), 590-599.

Pitluk, A. (2021b). Help wanted: A qualitative study of what newspaper editors consider when hiring journalism school graduates. *Newspaper Research Journal*, *42*(3), 314-329.

Pitluk, A., Wilson, J., & Inman, J. (2025). Helpful or Hurtful: Legacy Magazine Journalism Wrestles with the Advent of AI Technology in Newsrooms. *Journalism Practice*, 1-16.

Pulitzer, J. (1912). *The school of journalism in Columbia University* (Original work published 1904). Retrieved from https://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_9365645_000/ldpd_9365645_000.pdf

Smith, J. A. (1990). *Printers and press freedom: The ideology of early American journalism*. Oxford University Press.

Tsfati, Y., Boomgaarden, H. G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegenthart, R., Damstra, A., & Lindgren, E. (2020). Causes and consequences of mainstream media dissemination of fake news: literature review and synthesis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *44*(2), 157-173.

Wenger, D. H., Owens, L. C. (2012) Help wanted 2010: An examination of new media skills required by top U.S. news companies. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator 67*(1): 9–25.

Wenger, D., Owens, L., & Thompson, P. (2014). Help wanted mobile journalism skills required by Top U.S. news companies. *Electronic News*, *8*(2), 138-149.

Wenger, D. H., Owens, L. C., & Cain, J. (2018). Help wanted: Realigning journalism education to meet the needs of Top U.S. news companies. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, *73*(1), 18-36.

Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking journalism seriously: News and the academy*. Sage Publications.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026 – Pages 173-182

Unifying Theories of Journalism through the Principles of Quantum Physics

*By Brian L. Massey**

Journalism theories are more alike than they appear. Deep down, at a quantum-like scale, they are interconnected as emanations of the same fundamental oneness. This paper explores that concept in two ways. It first develops the concept by comparing Kholod's "quantum journalism" with two quantized perspectives of mass media. Then it seeks proof of the concept in quantizing critiques of two dissimilar theories of journalism. It finds an inherent unity between the theories.

Keywords: *journalism theory, quantum journalism, quantizing critique, quantum social science*

Introduction

Journalism theories are not as independent from each other as they seem. We observe each one as being tangibly unique in how it conceives of and knows the slice of journalism that concerns it. Yet at a deeper level, they all are emanations of an intangible whole. They are waves of the same ocean. Dancers in Bohm's (1990) ballet of electrons, separate yet moving together, "guided by a common pool of information in the form of a score" (p. 281).

Bohm used the "dance" as an analogy for the concept that incredibly tiny electrons and the human mind behave with a "basic similarity." That is because they are aspects of the same fundamental essence. "In some way, and to some degree,

> everything [in the universe] enfolds or implicates everything. … [T]his enfoldment relationship is not merely passive or superficial. Rather, it is active and essential to what each thing is. It follows that each thing is internally related to the whole, and therefore, to everything else … in the primary reality of the implicate order. (Bohm, 1990)

The implicate "everything" unfolds into infinite "many things" in the shared social reality that is the explicate order. So, too, would it be for journalism theories. They are cognitive artifacts of the mind that unfold as (seemingly) discrete intellectual proffers to explain something about journalism. Yet, they all are connected; they are of the same whole.

Pulling the curtain back on that is this paper's purpose. To be clear, the goal is not to stir all existing journalism theories into a "theory of everything" but to introduce the concept of interconnectedness into journalism studies.[1] Quantum social theory (QST), from the interdisciplinary field of quantum social science, is an apt framework for the task.

*Professor, East Carolina University, School of Communication, USA.
[1]The phrasing is borrowed from Scolari (2012).

QST holds that unlike planets, intergalactic dust and other large bodies in the universe, human activity is not neatly explained by the orderly, mechanistic rules of classical Newtonian physics. Instead, the theory says, the ways of we humans make a better fit with the odd and probabilistic behavior that quantum physics ascribes to subatomic particles (Barad, 2007; Holtfort & Horsch, 2023; Zohar & Marshall, 1994; Wendt, 2015). Humans are not particles, of course, but the gist of QST is that the same quantum theory that explains them also explains us and our social systems.

As its toolkit, this paper takes up Murphy's (2021a) "strategy of quantizing critique …through translation" (p. 10). It involves acknowledging the Newtonian underpinnings of existing theory and replacing that with a new "physical imaginary" (p. 3) fashioned out of the vernacular of quantum physics. Clothe it, if you will, with a "new set of assumptions that sketches the contours of the possible within which a theory can operate" (p. 8). Open a new door for it. Enable it to explore new questions.

To open journalism theory to new possibilities by revealing their deeper holism, that is the paper's importance and contribution to the literature. First, it develops proof for the concept of theory interconnectedness by standing up Kholod's (2021) quantized journalism against two other expressions of quantizing mediated communication. One is Myers's (2025) Quantum Media Theory, and the other is Bhadra's (2024) quantized framework for interpreting digital media content.

Next, the paper moves to its core task: testing the concept on two existing theories of seemingly irreconcilable approaches to journalism. One is news ecology, which, as a theoretical framework, likens news and journalism to the workings of natural ecosystems. The other is field theory, which turns journalism into a conceptual arena of competition for symbolic power.

Proof of Concept

Kholod, Myers and Bhadra do not describe it this way, but their work fits the strategy of quantizing critic through translation. They each recast non-quantum aspects of their subjects into the language and physical imaginary of quantum physics. Each of them, in some way, and to some degree, moves into the next step of quantizing through application (Murphy, 2021a) by fashioning their subjects into quantum versions of themselves. Only Myers reworks an existing theory.

Starting Points

Kholod approaches his quantizing of journalism through "monistic idealism" (2021, p. 1). It is an amalgam of ancient transcultural philosophies of oneness: that "reality is, in some fundamental sense, one rather than irreducibly many" (Phiolopedia, 2026). It is upon monism that Kholod erects his focal argument that journalism is best understood not by its many parts but by the unity of them. To actualize that, he turns to quantum physics, which itself is embedded with elements of monism (Päs, 2023). The outcome is a reworking of normative journalism into a "social institution, [meaning] a theoretical and practical form of social activity of specialists in social

communications and based on ideas that are hypothetically formulated in mathematics and quantum mechanics"[2] (2021, p. 1).

Myers frames "quantum media theory" (QMT) as an "emerging field" (2025, p. 25) and quantized variant of the media ecology theorizing that began with McLuhan (1964) and Postman (1970). Myers's focal argument is that media ecology theory is self-constrained by its *raison d'être* focus on the technologies of mass communication—the proverbial "medium"—as being far more impactful than any content they deliver to audiences. That, he finds, leaves media ecology conceptually ill-equipped for the dawning "Quantum Era," where AI "blur[s] the lines between technology and the message it delivers" (2025, pp. 13-14) by functioning as both medium and content co-creator. He describes QMT as a "dynamic model of media as nonlinear, entangled systems operating across dimensions of time, identity, and information" (p. 24).

Bhadra's focal argument is that the classical way to interpret legacy, or linear, media content is not up to the task of taking on multimodal digital content. Compared to "old media" content, he says, digitally delivered content is embedded with far more linguistic, visual and auditory complexity. It speeds across networks of digital platforms. It gets remixed and recontextualized into "divergent meanings" (2024, p. 6056) and re-distributed by audience members. Bhadra's solution is a quantized reworking of the "old" interpretive frameworks.

Seeking Unity in Translation

Despite their different starting points and subjects, Kholod, Myers and Bhadra each find parallel translations in the quantum principles of *superposition* and the *observer effect*. They each, in some way, conceive of "meaning" vis-á-vis "information" as existing in a superposed-like state of all probable meanings. They each, in some way, define "audience" as a collective observer who discerns a meaning from the possible many. With Kholod, the journalist is also an observer.

To the layperson, superposition no doubt seems bizarre. To the physicist, it is a state of existence where subatomic particles are anywhere at any momentum (Huges et al., 2021, p. 4). The observer effect is the phenomenon of observation changing reality. Social scientists know it as the Hawthorne effect, whereby people behave differently when they know they are being studied (Spencer & Mahtini, 2017). In quantum physics the effect manifests as the concept of wave-particle duality.

In its wave form, the particle is in a *super*position—it is not directly observable because it is "flowing" as a probability of all positions and momenta (Ananthaswamy, 2023; Caltech Science Exchange, n.d.-a; Fortier, 2025). Observation changes that. When the wave is put under measurement, it reveals itself as its visible particle form. In that moment, it "fixes" into one of many probable positions or momenta. Physicists call the reveal a "wavefunction collapse." A wave function is a mathematical expression of the probability of any superposed particle becoming visible at a singular position or

[2]"Quantum mechanics" and "quantum physics" are often used interchangeable to mean the theories and study of the behavior of matter and energy at the scales of atoms and subatomic particles. Technically, quantum physics is the broad *study of*; quantum mechanics is a facet of that. It provides the math.

momentum. To catch sight of a particle is to actualize one of the probabilities. With that, the job is done for the probability-prediction math, and it "collapses."

Kholod conceives of information as being in superposition. But we can directly see "information" as a tangible event, activity, facts and figures. Meaning is probabilistic; it is superposed as all possible probabilities of it. As Kholod describes it, information is "a portion of energy (quantum)" (2021, p. 6). In physics, "quantum" denotes the smallest unit of energy. While he does not use the word "meaning," Kholod connects it to what he calls the "'charge' of information" (p. 6). As Kholod describes it, the quantum journalist-observer actualizes one of many possible (energetic) meanings for a unit of information and embeds it into a unit of news content that is disseminated to an audience. Members of the audience download their own probability meanings for the news content. Different journalists, different audiences, different meaning-interpretations.

By comparison, QMT, as Myers describes it, sees the way media operate as being in a "state of superposition—where multiple meanings, interpretations, and realities exist simultaneously until observed and engaged by an audience" (2025, p. 26). That is, audience members discern the medium's effect on them by actualizing one of many superposed probabilities of it. Bhadra, like Kholod, sees content as tangible and meaning as superposed probabilities.

Divergences

Kholod alone invokes the principle of uncertainty. It holds that the observer can measure either the particle's position or momentum with the greater precision. It is a tradeoff: the more certainty about position, the more uncertainty about momentum and vice versa (Hilgevoord & Uffink, 2024). The quantum journalism parallel is the "journalistic product" (Kholod, 2021, p. 5), presumably the day's newspaper, broadcast or website, or any of the individual units of news, opinion and advertising content the product contains. He defines uncertainty as product quality, and he argues that one can precisely know it for either the product or a content unit.

Myers writes that besides superposition, QMT also parallels "entanglement, and uncertainty" (2025, p. 24), but does not explicitly address the latter. He and Bhadra both discuss quantum entanglement, which NASA Science (2025) calls "one of the most far-out phenomena of quantum theory." Entanglement is an interconnection between two or more particles that lets them influence each other no matter how far apart they are in spacetime. It is like "observing one dancer and finding them in a pirouette, then automatically knowing the other dancer must also be performing a pirouette" (Caltech Science Exchange, n.d.-b). Myers describes "media entanglement" as a principle of QMT. He defines it as "digital information … [being] instantaneously interconnected across platforms and geographies" (2025, p. 26). Bhadra (2024) discerns entanglement in the "synchronized reactions" (p. 6057) of social media audiences to trending or viral content.

Quantizing to find Unity

Kholod's quantized version of journalism stood up well in comparison to Myers' and Bhadra's quantized approaches to mass media. Unity in theory came as parallel translations of quantum superposition and the observer effect. The question now is whether the concept of theory interconnectedness will hold up when it is applied to the non-quantum aspects of two very different approaches to journalism. It turns out that by inheritance from their "parents," the two approaches already share elements of the quantum.

Origins

Ecological perspectives. News ecology and the construct of a news ecosystem are offspring of media ecology (Wiard, 2019), which itself is a reimaging of the basics of ecology, the academic discipline. Ecology is the *study of* "natural organisms, their relationships with their physical environment and the interactions among them" (Hellenic Ecological Society, n.d.). The *place of study* is the ecosystem. In Odum's (1953) foundational definition, the ecosystem is a place of energy flows that make the circle of life. Flora, fauna, microbiota and their environment are "inseparably interrelated and interact upon each other" (p. 9) in the ecosystem. Sunlight, soil and rain sustain the plants, which sustain the herbivores, which sustain the carnivores, and in time, they all feed nature's cleanup crew, the decomposers.

There are undertones of quantum entanglement in the definition. By the 1971 third edition of his book, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, "the principle of 'wholeness'" in in nature (p. 8) had joined the definition. So did the "idea of the unity of organisms and environment (as well as the oneness of man and nature)" (pp. 8-9).

Ecologists operationalize "ecosystem to be a "geographic area … [such as] a natural wilderness area, a suburban lake or forest, or a heavily used area such as a city" (Ecological Society of America, n.d.). Likewise, media ecologists see media ecosystems as spaces of interactions that interconnect the technologies of mass communication and human perceptions, behaviors and organizations. Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) takes it full circle by tying media ecology back to the emergence of the concept of "urban ecology" in the 1920s.

Field theory. Journalism field theory derives from Bourdieu's (1993)[3] field theory. Thousands upon thousands of words have already been spent on interpreting the thoughts of Bourdieu. This paper takes the summarizer's path. To no doubt over-simply, a "field" is a theoretical space of competition for the power to determine the legitimacy of a social domain. Law, politics, education, the arts, the sciences, they and more are social domains. Within domains, human activity creates cultural goods: a dance, song, government policy, toy, car, research paper, news story. They inherently carry intangible meanings and in that sense, they become what Bourdieu calls "symbolic goods … a two-faced reality, [as] a commodity and a symbolic object: Their specifically cultural value and their commercial value remain relatively independent" (p. 113).

The competition is waged within and among fields, and it basically is a struggle over who gets to hold the reins of "cultural consecration." That is

[3]The book is a compilation of Bourdieu's seminal works dating back to 1968.

Bourdieusian shorthand for the power to confer recognition and legitimacy upon a symbolic good or social domain. The struggle itself involves hierarchies of actors within a field and among different fields. Relationality is an organizing feature. As Bourdieu explains,

> one cannot fully comprehend the functioning of the field … as a scene of competition for properly cultural consecration—i.e., legitimacy—and for the power to grant it unless one analyzes the relationships between the various institutions. (p. 116).

Relationality, networks of relationships, parallels quantum entanglement. Superposition and the observer effect are implicit in the nested constructs of symbolic goods, value and capital. Symbolic *goods* are metaphorical vessels of symbolic *value*, which can be built up into symbolic *capital* as prestige, reputation, power or authority (see, Bourdieu, 1970/1984; Ihlen, 2018; Southernton, n.d.-a,b). Or perhaps not. It depends on which meaning an observer downloads from the "cloud" of all probabilities of meaning for the constructs. It is the observer who "means" the symbolic things into existence.

Quantizing Critique

To the ecological. News ecology is the study of the effects on audience and society from the technologies of news distribution and consumption. Wiard (2019) defines news ecology as "an approach, a process" for investigating "how citizens get acquainted with the news as well as the diversity of technologies involved in news use." Wahl-Jorgensen finds that scholars tend to invoke "ecological metaphors … as a sensitizing concept; a ubiquitous and general shorthand for the complexities of the technological, social, and legal environment in which we now communicate (2016, p. 15).

Wiard (2019) defines the news ecosystem as "an actual condition of news … a given, something that is there." It is the place of study—and the terrain for quantizing critique through translation. Monism runs through notions of a news ecosystem. A oneness is implicit in Nielsen's (2015, p. 27) depiction of the news ecosystem as "individual actors [who are] parts of a wider environment." It is apparent in the proposition that Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) discerns from studies in the news ecology genre. "[I]n the era of a networked and highly diverse media landscape," she writes, "we can no longer study individual media organizations, texts, and practices in isolation" (pp. 15-16). Morgan (2019) makes the momism clear: "A news ecosystem, like a natural ecosystem, is made of networks of interdependent parts."

Morgan does something else in that single sentence. She implies parallels to quantum entanglement (interdependency). The entangled parts manifest as "ensemble[s] of individuals, organizations, and technologies" gathered as a geographic community or "around a particular issue," and engaged in the production and consumption of news (Anderson, 2016, p. 412). They present as audience interactions with news platforms and cultural influences on news production (Boyles, 2017), and as "24/7 news outlets, different news platforms and diverse production arrangements" (Cottle, 2007, p. 2).[4]

[4]Cottle calls it "news ecology," but the description fits the news ecosystem.

Superposition comes into the news ecosystem as the being and knowing of the medium's effects on those that inhabit a news ecosystem. Any "effect" is an interpretation by meaning-making. And meaning is superposed in a state of all probabilities of it. Journalist, audience member or researcher, each can realize a different probability of meaning.

To the field. From the view of field theory, journalism is a sphere of cultural activity, which makes it a social domain and a field of competition for symbolic capital. It is an intra- and inter-field competition for control over the normative journalistic task of defining which events, issues and social actors are legitimately "newsworthy." To be judged newsworthy is to be judged as meriting recognition and attention, first, by journalists, broadly defined (see Basinée & Nollet, 2019), and second, by the public as audiences of the symbolic goods of journalism. Those who control the judging are engaged in a journalistic version of Bourdieusian cultural consecration. Journalism's main competitors are the fields of economics and politics, as Swartz (2019) sees it, or politics and science, as Benson (2019) sees it. To the victors go the "symbolic power … to impose a viewpoint as the legitimate one, the true one" (Benson, 2019, p. 36).

Competitors are inherently entangled through their interrelatedness as contestants vying for symbolic power as "the" dominant arbiter of what is and is not a legitimate news reality. Benson (2019) invites the analogy of hierarchical "many-body" entanglement by mapping journalism as a field within fields. He nests journalism within a "field of cultural production," which is nested within a "field of power," which is nested within a far larger and "all-encompassing field of social classes" (p. 465-466).

There are echoes many-body entanglement in Maares and Hanusch's (2022, p. 737) depiction of journalism field theory as the study of "social structures and power relations." Willig, Waltrop, and Hartley (2015) implicitly depict news reception, content and production as entangled arenas for the competition for symbolic capital. Couldry (2003, p. 657) affords journalism a competitive advantage as a "pivotal" field that passes the "knowledges of other, more specialized fields" to "wider audiences."

Likening the sociological concept of "field" to philosophical concepts of "oneness" is an easy reach. Waging power struggles within and across fields culminates in a singularity of purpose. Superposition is an easy reach too. Newsworthiness, symbolic value and symbolic capital cannot self-create. They cannot unfold out of the implicate order of their own accord. They are meanings, indeterminate and superposed until an observer downloads one probability out of the many.

Conclusion

Murphy (2021a) argues that when we translate the non-quantum "core concepts" of theory into the vernacular and physical imaginaries of quantum physics, we create a "common parlance for [expressing] their complexity" (p. 66). Quantizing is a standardizing tool, in other words. It renders theories and theoretical perspectives comparable, by taking them back to their fundamental unity of oneness. Quantizing opens the door to a new ontological perspective of journalism theories as interconnected on a fundamental scale.

At its core, journalism is a quantum-like macrosocial system of superposed meanings and entangled actors and activities. At their core, each theoretical conception of journalism is an enfoldment of them all. They are like stem cells: an undifferentiated "one" in the implicate order but capable of differentiating into varied intellectual proffers in the explicate. To put it into a quantum vernacular, journalism theories look different because scholars "mean" them that way. Each theory is the manifestation of the probability-meaning scholars downloaded from the superposed cloud of all possible meanings of "theory."

Nadler (2019) offers a reminder that finding the interconnectedness among theories is a necessary beginning step. The "ecosystem metaphor," he writes, "pushes us towards thinking of news media [as] self-organizing structures ruled by an order of intelligence more complex than human planning" (p. 834). The same can be said of the constructs of field theory and Kholod's quantized reimaging of normative journalism. The next step, and all that follow, put us on a quest for the "common pool of information" (Bohm, 1990, p. 281) that synchronizes music and movement into a ballet—and probabilistic meaning into a unity of varied forms of journalism theory.

References

Ananthaswamy, A. (2023). Particle, wave, both or neither? The experiment that challenges all we know about reality. *Nature*. https://tinyurl.com/33v45pew

Anderson, C. W. (2016). News ecosystems. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, and A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism* (pp. 410-423). Sage.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway*. Duke University Press.

Basinée O., & Nollet, J. (2019). Journalism as a field. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.906

Benson, R. (1999). Field theory in comparative context: a new paradigm for media studies. *Theory and Society*, *28*(3), 463-498. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108557

Bhadra, A. (2024). Redefining mass media from the lens of quantum theories: an introduction of concepts and theories. *African Journal of Biomedical Research*, *27*(4S), 6056-6061. https://doi.org/10.53555/AJBR.v27i4S.4729

Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bohm, D. (1990). A new theory of the relationship of mind and matter. *Philosophical Psychology 3*(2): 271-286. *h*ttps://doi.org/10.1080/09515089008573004

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.) Routledge. (Original work published 1979)

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: essays on art and literature*. Columbia University Press.

Boyles, J. L. (2016). Building an audience, bonding a city: digital news as a field of care. *Media, Culture & Society*, *39*(7), 945-959. DOI: 10.1177/0163443716682073

Caltech Science Exchange (n.d.-a). *What is superposition and why is it important?* https://tinyurl.com/2xupw4ex

Caltech Science Exchange (n.d.-b). *What is entanglement and why is it important?* https://tinyurl.com/ms3rjkcf

Cottle, S. (2007). Ethnography and news production: New(s) developments in the field. *Sociology Compass*, *1*(1), 1-16. DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00002.x

Couldry, N. (2003). Media meta-capital: extending the range of Bourdieu's field theory. *Theory and Society*, *32*(5-6) 653-677. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:RYSO.0000004915.37826.5d
Ecological Society of America (n.d.). What is ecology? https://tinyurl.com/bdemxve5
Fortier, T. (2025, February 5). 5 concepts can help you understand quantum mechanics and technology—without math! National Institute of Standards and Technology. U.S. Department of Commerce. https://tinyurl.com/56bx9482
Hellenic Ecological Society (n.d.). About us. https://www.helecos.gr/en/about-us
Hilgevoord, J., & Uffink, H. (2024). The Uncertainty Principle. In E. N. Zalta and U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://tinyurl.com/4z2nzzw3
Holtfort, T., & Horsch, A. (2023). Social science goes quantum: Explaining human decision-making, cognitive bias and Darwinian selection from a quantum perspective. *Journal of Bioeconomics*, *25*(2), 99-116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10818-023-09334-w
Huges, C., Isaacson, J., Perry, A., Sun, R. F., & Turner, J. (2021). *Quantum computing for the quantum curious*. Springer.
Ihlen, Ø. (2018). Symbolic capital. *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication*, *1*(4). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0190
Kholod, O. (2026). Quantum journalism. Principles of methodological institutionalization. (Google Translate, Trans.). *Social Communications*, *12*(1), 22-37. DOI: 10.51423/2524-0471-2021-12-1-1. (Original work published 2021)
Maares, P., & Hanusch, F. (2022). Interpretations of the journalistic field: a systematic analysis of how journalism scholarship appropriates Bourdieusian thought. *Journalism*, *23*(4), 736-754. DOI: 10.1177/1464884920959552
McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. McGraw-Hill.
Morgan, F. (2019). What is a news ecosystem? Democracy Fund. https://tinyurl.com/4mrjvjky
Murphy, M. P. A. (2021a). *Quantum social theory for critical international relations theorists: quantizing critique*. Palgrave MacMillan.
Myers, J. (2025). *Media ecology for the 21st century: Theories of culture, communication, and consciousness*. Springer.
Nadler, A. (2019). Nature's economy and news ecology: scrutinizing the news ecosystem metaphor. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(6), 823-839. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2018.1427 000
NASA Science (2025, April 2). What is the spooky science of quantum entanglement? https://tinyurl.com/5v5xpcur
Nielsen, R. K. (2015). Introduction: The uncertain future of local journalism. In R. K. Nielsen (ed)), *Local Journalism. The Decline of Newspapers and The Rise of Digital Media* (pp. 1-25). I. B. Taurius & Co.
Odum, E. P. (1953). *Fundamentals of ecology*. W. B. Saunders Company.
Odum, E. P. (1971). *Fundamentals of ecology* (3rd ed.). W. B. Saunders Company.
Päs, H. (2023). *The One: how an ancient idea holds the future of physics*. Basic Books.
Philopedia. (2026). Monismus. https://tinyurl.com/nset7e75
Postman, N. (1970). The reformed English curriculum. In A. L. Eurich (ed.), *High school 1980: The shape of the future of American secondary education* (pp. 160-168). Pitman Publishing Corporation.
Scolari, C. A. (2012). Media ecology: exploring the metaphor to expand the theory. *Communication Theory*, *22*(2), 204-224. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2012.01404.x
Spencer, E. A., & Mahtani, K. (2017). *Hawthorne effect. In Catalogue of Bias 2017*. https://tinyurl.com/ycxnxzkr
Srivastava, A. K., Müller-Rigat, G., Lewenstein, M., & Rajehel-Mieldzioć. (2024). Introduction to quantum entanglement in many-body systems [Preprint]. Arxiv. arXiv:2402.09523v2
Swartz, D. L. (2019). Spotlight: Pierre Bourdieu and the journalism field. In (J. E. Katz, & K. M. Mays (eds), *Journalism and truth in an age of social media* (pp.36-38). Oxford University Press.

Symbolic capital. (n.d.-a). *In Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture* (E. Southerton, Ed.). https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412994248.n532

Symbolic value. (n.d.-b). *In Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture* (E. Southerton, Ed.). https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412994248.n533

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2016). The Chicago School and ecology: a reappraisal for the digital era. *American Behavioral Sciences*, *60*(1), 8-23. DOI: 10.1177/0002764215601709

Wendt, A. (2015). *Quantum mind and social science: Unifying physical and social ontology*. Cambridge University Press.

Wiard, V. (2019). News ecology and news ecosystems. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.847

Willig, I., Waltrop, K., & Hartley, J. M. (2015). Field theory approaches to new media practices: an introduction and some theoretical considerations. *MedieKulur*, *31*(58), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v31i58.20671

Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (1993). *The quantum society: mind, physics and a new social vision*. Morrow.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026 – Pages 183-198

The Internet, Academic Integrity, and College Student Practices: A Contemporary Perspective

By Amani Ismail[*] & Gayane Torosyan[±]

This paper investigates one of new media's recent academic controversies, namely students' increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic settings. Through anonymously surveying undergraduate college students about their positions on academic integrity/misconduct and their own college practices, the study seeks to navigate the technology/society complex by illuminating how we can situate the contemporary education landscape within expectations of student work authenticity and how ethics possibly fit into theories of internet centrism and technological determinism. To answer the study's research question, we designed a survey that we administered to students enrolled in a media law and policy undergraduate course at a medium-sized East Coast university. The survey was administered anonymously on Blackboard, and students received course credit for completing it. The responses of students under the age of 18 were excluded from the study through a pre-screening process. Survey questions totaled 10; they inquired (in this order) about: sources used in research assignments; whether they have previously used paraphrasing computer software in courses and which (if any); whether they believe universities should allow students to use AI-based computer software to improve their assignments and to justify their position; whether they believe universities should use text-matching software to detect originality and to justify their position; the school level when they first learned about plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct; and whether they believe universities are right to apply a penalty for academic misconduct and to justify their position. The survey included both closed-ended questions (required) and open-ended questions (optional). Findings point to thought-provoking notions on how intellectual property, fairness in assessment, and the fruits of technology are perceived and interact within a wider dynamic. The paper also highlights the ongoing nature of a multidimensional debate.

Keywords: *Academic integrity, Artificial Intelligence, Education, Technology, Internet, New Media*

Introduction

> 'New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop'
> (Postman, 1992, p. 20).

The devise of the Internet was a turning point in the world of media and communication, bringing to the fore issues about globalization, cultural exchange, as

[*]Associate Dean, Mass Communications Programme Lead, School of Humanities and Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire hosted by Global Academic Foundation, Egypt.
[±]Professor, Department of Communication and Media, State University of New York at Oneonta, USA.

well as access to and circulation of information. Like essentially all phenomena, this digital revolution has come with both fruits to bear and challenges to grapple with. One such challenge is the vivid manifestation worldwide of intellectual appropriation (often in the form of plagiarism), particularly common among university students when tasked with written assignments.

The continued evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its frequent student use towards plagiarism – with ChatGPT being the most recent centerpiece of this discussion – further complicates the matter, especially that text-matching software (e.g., the more traditional Turnitin and novice ZeroGPT, among others) is seeking to keep pace.

The practice of academic misconduct – be it in the form of plagiarism, collusion, or otherwise – invites into question the genuine level of mind- and character-building that takes place among the younger generations. By extension, it sheds light on how well-positioned the academy is in helping advance the cause of human progress. At the same time, it inadvertently points to the role of other societal institutions – including family and civil society – towards this cause (a suggested future direction of research).

This paper postulates the problem of academic misconduct using various related lenses. One, the basis of the pedagogical expectation of authenticity in student work and how educators and students negotiate the dynamic of ethics as a fundamental standard in assessment. Second, the law and policy framework within the academy (educational institution policy). Third, through surveying sample undergraduates, this study interrogates how college students perceive intellectual property and academic misconduct against a backdrop of increased use of AI in facilitating their writing assignments and how these perceptions elucidate whether university education is serving its purpose in teaching students about academic integrity.

Below, the paper presents the conceptual framework it hinges on followed by the research question, method rationale and protocols, and finally our findings and conclusion.

Conceptual Framework

Academic integrity is the larger umbrella under which belongs the discourse on plagiarism and other types of academic malpractice. Impersonation of another student and forgery, for instance, are standard examples of academic misconduct (Douglas & Watt, 2019).

Aside from vast cyberspace, with the plethora of content it already offers, technologies like 3D copying make extensive reproduction increasingly easier (see Mandel et al., 2016).

Indeed, academic integrity is central to educational institutions' reputation and credibility. The onset of the pandemic-imposed lockdown in 2020 heightened the need to try curbing academic misconduct as students' performance of assessments became less monitored given the online shift (Reyneke et al., 2021). Arguably, there are three distinct forms of plagiarism: copying others' work and presenting it as your own, blending someone else's arguments with your own without acknowledging the

original source, and paraphrasing someone else's work also without acknowledgment (Neville, 2010 in Reyneke et al., 2021).

Holden et al. (2021, p. 2) synthesized the reasons why 'individuals may choose to depart from academic integrity', grouping them into four distinct categories: *individual* (opportunity, incentive and rationalization); *institutional* (presence of a 'cheating culture'); *medium-related* (in-person versus e-cheating, with overall mixed evidence as to which medium features more violations), and *assessment-specific* (formative versus summative, essay versus exam, with more evidence still wanting in those areas to arrive at more settling conclusions).

In Conway and Groshek's longitudinal study of media college students' perceptions of plagiarism and fabrication, journalism students initially recorded higher concern over academic ethics than non-journalism students (e.g., public relations, graphic design, and advertising), even suggesting harsher penalties for offenders. Findings also indicated, however, that said gaps between the two camps narrowed, as non-journalism students eventually exhibited views closer to their journalism peers. Ultimately, the study concluded – based on comparing student views early on in their college careers versus near-graduation, that 'students' ethical beliefs are malleable and the college experience, including internships, student media, and classroom instruction, can bring about a heightened awareness of ethical issues' (Conway & Groshek, 2008, p. 139).

Determining students' prior awareness of plagiarism and what it entails during their early university days as well as communicating with them on the topic frankly come highly recommended as potential effective treatments for the issue. As well, personalizing assignments arguably helps make plagiarism more difficult to commit (Davis, 2011).

In a meta-analysis involving nursing students, '[t]he prevalence and the perceived prevalence of plagiarism were significant predictors of clinical dishonesty' (Fadlalmola et al., 2022: 499), indicating that college behavior is not necessarily unrelated to subsequent conduct in the workplace.

Moriarty and Wilson (2022, p. 22) argue that in handling academic integrity cases against students, both justice (ensuring fairness, due process, alignment of punishment with violation) and consistency (across the system of both process and outcome) are crucial, that the two values are intimately connected to the point where '[c]onsistency creates impartiality, both in perception and reality, and both are important'.

Departing from the foregoing framework, our study poses the following two-fold research question:

(a) How do college students perceive intellectual property and academic misconduct against a backdrop of increased use of AI in facilitating their writing assignments?
(b) How can we contextualize the findings in (a) within literature on the technology/human progress dynamic?

Method

Rationale

To answer the study's research question, we designed a survey (available in Appendix A at the end of this paper) that we administered to 61 students enrolled in a media law and policy undergraduate course at a medium-sized East Coast university. The course is offered to second-year Media Studies students and a mixed group of other majors at various levels of undergraduate studies. This course explores how the law and common practice impact media industries and journalism interests. Topics include the First Amendment, libel, invasion of privacy, free press, fair trial, regulation of obscene and sensitive content, regulation of advertising, ethics, and intellectual property. The survey was administered anonymously on Blackboard, and students received course credit for completing it. The responses of students under the age of 18 were excluded from the study through a pre-screening process.

Survey questions totaled 10; they inquired (in this order) about: sources used in research assignments; whether they have previously used paraphrasing computer software in courses and which (if any); whether they believe universities should allow students to use AI-based computer software to improve their assignments and to justify their position; whether they believe universities should use text-matching software to detect originality and to justify their position; the school level (elementary school or later) when they first learned about plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct; and whether they believe universities are right to apply a penalty for academic misconduct and to justify their position. The survey included both closed-ended questions (required) and open-ended questions (optional).

Among the various advantages of survey method is allowing for: relatively straightforward recruitment and consenting procedures with numbers of participants, gathering 'accurate data about an individual's subjective memories …, knowledge, attitudes…and perceptions about experiences' (Kennedy et al., 2022, p. 2), consistent administration of questions across a sample, and relatively low-cost deployment within rapid timeframes.

Survey Protocols

The survey was administered after acquiring approval from The Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participant students were provided with a consent form (also approved by IRB), which they signed before taking the survey. The survey was administered in a second-year college media law class where the students first received an introduction to the topic of intellectual property law, and then a discussion on its applicability in college education. All 68 students in the class were invited to answer a series of survey questions exploring their understanding of the topic, but only the 61 responses of students over the age of 18 years were used as part of the data for the present study. The number of respondents declining to answer some of the (optional) open-ended questions is as high as 32, ranging anywhere from 3 unanswered to 32 unanswered.

The selection of study participants was administered through a brief series of questions that screened out underage students and registered written consent from those who agreed to be part of the present research project. Participating students were told that the study posed minimal risk associated with submitting assignments though Blackboard, an online learning management system that guarantees anonymity within its survey function.

Regardless of the nature of their answers and their contribution to the study, students received a standard amount of credit for participating in the classroom assignment even if they opted out of the research portion of it. Coercion was avoided by ensuring that the students' choices regarding participation in the research study did not affect their grades.

The responses were coded as: (a) *supporting* the use of digital or internet-based tools to enhance assignments with no penalty for students doing so; (b) *opposing* the use of digital or internet-based tools for assignments and supporting penalties for students doing so; and (c) *ambiguous* if they comment on the complexity of the question requiring case-by-case or contextual approaches to the use of digital tools and the penalties administered towards students doing so ('it depends,' 'yes, but on the other hand…' – contradictory arguments viewing the question from more than one perspective).

Findings

General Overview

The survey began by addressing the most frequently used sources of information that the participants relied on while completing their course assignments. The format of the question was 'select all that apply,' which is why the sum of results does not have to result in 100%.

In the portion of the survey inquiring about their use of available resources for academic work, half of the respondents indicated that they relied on their university's online library. One- third of the respondents mentioned using Google Scholar, and more than one-tenth of the group (nearly 11%) mentioned JSTOR as a source of information used to complete research assignments for class. Notably, more than 7% of the respondents used the physical library on campus.

Only 1% of all responses to the follow-up question asking to list sources not mentioned as one of the options in a multiple-choice question ('When given a course assignment that involves research, which sources do you most frequently use? Select ALL that apply') referred to other sources such as Wikipedia or Google, and one respondent suggested adding 'official websites of legitimate organizations and official government websites' as a potential source of information for research.

Another background question asked survey respondents if they ever used computer software like Grammarly helping paraphrase sentences and clauses for their college assignments. Approximately 53.4% of all respondents answered 'yes,' with about 45% answering 'no.' The remaining 1.7% of the group left the question unanswered.

In their words: Students' (Non)Use of AI in Academic Work

Narrowing down on the use of paraphrasing software for college assignments, the survey asked the participants to list all such programs they have used. For this multiple-answer question, the total sum of percentages did not have to equal 100%.

Almost 45% of valid responses to this question mentioned Grammarly, with nearly 14% naming QuillBot. Nobody reported using Hypotenuse AI, but approximately 1.7% of respondents mentioned using Paraphraser, and about 22.4% chose 'other.' More than 17% of the student participants left this question unanswered.

While surveys are typically used as quantitative research tools, a few additional open-ended questions were employed to provide the respondents with sufficient space for elaborating on their 'yes' or 'no' answers instead of adding a third, often ambiguous 'other' option, or a slot for a non-answer. The analysis of these additional open-ended questions allowed for making more qualitative sense of the quantitative results emanating from the survey.

Therefore, in seeking to capture all possible answers, the survey provided space for participants to add any paraphrasing computer software that was not listed in the previous question. Only one person (or less than 0.02%) mentioned ChatGPT together with QuillBot, the latter coming up only twice among the answers to this question. The rest of the answers appeared redundant or absent.

Three core open-ended questions directly addressed the students' perception of academic integrity, the ethics of using artificial intelligence, and the moral dilemmas associated with penalizing violations of intellectual property rights. One of these open-ended questions was preceded by a yes-or-no question addressing the appropriateness of using computer software based on artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, to improve their assignments. Sixty-two percent of respondents answered 'yes' to the question on whether such software is appropriate in the classroom, 36.2 % answered 'no,' and slightly over 1.72% declined to answer.

The subsequent qualitative question about the ethics of using AI software to complete class assignments invited students to take additional time to think about their answers to the previous, open-ended one, and to write down their thoughts more fully.

Comparing the answers to the open-ended question with the frequency of the previous 'yes' or 'no' responses revealed that when addressing the same concept in an open-ended form, more students recognized the ambiguity of the situation regarding the ethics of using AI-based software in academic work. That is, 18.5% of respondents agreed to the statements of the question only in part, such as: 'Yes, I think that it could be useful, but not for looking up exam answers.'

Partial affirmation was also expressed in responses to survey questions that referred to the appropriateness of using text-matching software to detect plagiarism, and to the questions about the severity of penalties that plagiarizing students deserve, in the respondents' opinion. Open-ended questions thus provided more insight into responses that would have otherwise fallen into the generic categories of 'other' or 'neither,' which often accompany the standard 'yes' or 'no' format.

Navigating the Technology/Society Complex

In their short-answer feedback to the survey questions some of the student answers referred to the inevitability of technological progress in the workplace and hence its appropriateness in the classroom, the uniqueness of the internet as compared to other media, and the equalizing nature of digital technologies that often provide access to knowledge to certain groups of people in places where advanced knowledge would otherwise be out of reach. These responses referred to ethical dilemma consistent with digital media theories known as *technological determinism* and *internet centrism*.

The terms *technological determinism* and *internet centrism* are loosely defined here as theoretical frameworks for some of the respondents' justification of technological takeover leading to the blurring of ethical lines. The question among media scholars is whether technology is driving society towards new moral and cultural standards, or if it is society defining the directions of technological advancement. Lindgren (2022) posits that there is unresolved tension between the two viewpoints, but the duty of intellectuals is to maintain a balance between these opposing approaches to the question.

In his 1992 book *Technopoly,* Neil Postman expressed concerns about technology turning into extensions of the human mind, and eventually taking over. The potential alteration of ethical standards regarding the use of smart technology represents what Postman describes as 'the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology' (Postman, 1992, p. 52). It appears that the ethical and technical barriers protecting society 'from the masses of information "generated by technology" have crumbled,' leaving humans at the mercy of 'technology itself to protect' the world 'from the monster' (Lindgren, 2022, p. 56)

One of the respondents referred to the accessibility of internet-based technologies with a direct statement: 'I believe students should be able to use these tools because they can help them learn the material even when not in class.'

Others argued that because of its ubiquitous nature, the use of artificial intelligence should be legitimized for all students, not only for those who can exploit it without consequence. While answering an open-ended question about the appropriateness of allowing computer software using artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) as a tool for improving college-level assignments, one student wrote:

> 'I think that if these types of software are available to our current society, then we should be able to use them without consequences. It isn't fair to have some students use it because some professors can't detect it, and then other students aren't allowed. I think that students should be given all available materials to be able to I the highest grade they can get.'

Another respondent viewed the ubiquitous nature of the internet leading to the inevitability of its usefulness as a learning tool: 'I feel either way the information we use in essays comes from the internet, we do not know this information before research so why not have a tool to help us with our thought and make it sound better and also make sure we are collecting the correct information.' This example represents a category of student responses that resonate with the media theory of *internet centrism* (Lindgren, 2022):

> 'I feel either way the information we use in essays comes from the internet, we do not know this information before research so why not have a tool to help us with our thought and make it sound better and also make sure we are collecting the correct information?'
> 'The internet has become our most abundant resource and should be encouraged and used to its fullest potential in higher education.'

As exemplified by the student comments above, the theory of *internet centrism* addresses the 1990s predictions about the internet shaping society with "its global reach, its interactivity, and its relative uncontrollability" (Lindgren, 2022, p. 54).

> 'These technologies may also have contributed to lowering barriers to obtaining knowledge and the establishment of social connections' (Lindgren, 2022, p. 54). Curran (2012) argues that society influences the internet much strongly than the internet shapes society, which is why any future predictions of digital technology taking over humanity can be wrong if 'based on inference from the digital technology, rather than from evidence about what people actually do with technology' (Lindgren, 2022, p. 54).

Among reasons listed as arguments in support of banning artificial intelligence in student work, critical thinking stands out as the factor most at risk: 'The use of artificial intelligence removes a student's ability to practice critical thinking skills which is the most important characteristic higher education should provide. AI gives you the conclusion/end product without the student needing to process the information and really get to understand it. The use of AI will lower the amount of effort student's put into their assignments.'

The percentage of respondents declining to answer this open-ended question rose to 5% from the previous value of slightly over 1.72% for the 'yes' or 'no' question regarding the appropriateness of using artificial intelligence or similar software to complete academic assignments. With some 18% of respondents describing their views in the form of a dilemma, a higher portion of the sample – some 42% - stated support for the use of such software in academic work.

Approximately 34% of the answers to this question were negative, which nearly matched the same measure of 36% for the 'yes' or 'no' question. Overall, the answers to the question about supporting the use of AI-based software in classrooms indicate a less than 7% prevalence of the number of students in favor of such use versus those who indicate opposition against it.

One of the responses opposing the use of artificial intelligence in academic work refers to the failures of AI bots in science:

> 'AI bots only know what they have been fed to reproduce. An NPR article showcased that an AI attempted to calculate a theoretical rocket science problem, the result was that the computer needed more variables in order to complete the problem, it couldn't do it. A student who relies on AI is bound to reproduce what someone else has written, which could have been produced by an AI as well resulting in an endless telephone to the point of becoming incomprehensible. If a student cannot write a paper properly then that is a shared failing of both the education system and the student's own laziness and unwillingness to engage in an education.'

Another respondent draws a parallel between learning and professional work, arguing that tools allowed in the real world should also be acceptable in college. The following response was coded as *ambiguous*:

> 'It's difficult to say. Considering Yesterday in Media Writing, a representative from Otsego Media came in to talk to us about character development and revealed that they use AI to come up with [characters] for movies they work on and cited their current one as an example. So, if AI is used in a work environment, then you'd think students should be able to use AI. Well, the difference is that students are in the process of learning to do stuff for themselves, AI will only continue to improve, but it's not perfect, so knowing how to do certain skills by themselves is arguably more important than getting to take the easy way out from the get-go.'

A similar argument is found in one of the responses supporting the use of artificial intelligence as a supplemental tool for learning: 'It could be a good starting point to generate ideas. If it is used in the real world or future workplaces, why should it be banned from academia?'

The ethical lines between allowing and banning artificial intelligence start blurring when student respondents ventured into separating parts from their homework from its entirety:

> 'I think that students should be able to use AI to help with their course work. AI can have a lot of good information and get it to you very quickly. I don't think that we should be able to use AI to do all of our work, for example writing an entire essay. I do think it should be used as an aiding tool for students.'

Lines are also blurring for students who confuse citations with plagiarism: 'Many academic assignments require the use of previous works, so the line of what counts as plagiarism blurs.'

Overall, the respondents' concerns about the use of artificial intelligence-based tools to enhance their academic performance can be summarized by the following comment, coded as *opposing* the use of internet tools: 'It makes students lazy, decreases educational value, takes away authenticity and critical thinking, and constitutes cheating.'

On Policing Academic Misconduct

Moving from student behavior to measures that universities may need to implement as efforts to prevent or penalize plagiarism, the survey addressed the use of text-matching software in a 'yes' or 'no' question and its open-ended follow-up that provided the respondents with time and space to elaborate on their prior comments in more detail. Specifically, the question prompted to elaborate on universities using Turnitin or similar text-matching software to test the originality of student work by first agreeing or disagreeing with such use, and then explaining their positions.

Slightly more than 65.5% of all respondents agreed with the appropriateness of using plagiarism detecting software at universities, with almost 32.8% replying 'no,' and an almost consistent 1.72% of respondents declining to answer this question as they did to several others.

When the same concept was presented in open-ended form, almost half of all answers – 49% - supported the use of text-matching software to prevent plagiarism in class. With 20% of all responses stating opposition to such measures in academia, as much as 19% of answers addressed the ambiguity of the situation by tackling possible errors in text-matching procedures, the chances of inadvertent plagiarism, and the ubiquitous presence of internet-based tools in other aspects of life, which made their use in academia seem almost inevitable.

The proportion of missing or N/A responses to the open-ended question about the use of text-matching software is significantly more, at 13%, than the 1.72% of blank answers to the previous 'yes' or 'no' question on the same topic. The highest number of blanks may be explained by the optional nature of this open-ended question that allowed the respondents to elaborate on their previous answers using additional time and space, but only if desired. One of the supporters of anti-plagiarism measures wrote:

> 'I think using text-matching software is necessary because of how easy it is to plagiarize. From an educator's perspective, you want to know that your students are understanding material and using their own words from research they find, instead of copying and pasting information they discover. I also think this helps teach how to cite sources correctly, without the penalty of plagiarism on somebody's work.'
> Because the group of students in the surveyed class represented a broad spectrum of majors, including education, several respondents acknowledged the relevance of the survey questions to their future careers in pedagogy.

Ambiguous responses addressed several aspects of the question, including the complex and seemingly undetectable nature of artificial intelligence-generated material: 'I think both yes and no for this question. Turnitin is a tool to ensure there is no plagiarism of other people's work, but if turn it in is going to say that the use of Grammarly for example is plagiarism then I do not think so. When thinking about it, how could Turnitin say that Grammarly was plagiarized when all of the AI responses are different each time.'

Another aspect of uncertainty among respondents referred to legal and aesthetic nuance involved in the detection of original artistic work:

> 'There are possibilities of accidental plagiarism, which can happen and be easily resolved. There should be an added feature to scan for AI written papers. In the case of wording that is similar (British MP [Lord Neil Kinnock] who threw a hissy fit over something incredibly trivial [in Joe Biden's 1988 presidential campaign]) there is debate as humans will copy speech patterns of one another and the formats that are required of certain types of academic papers require a formality of writing that is bound to be similar but can fall under a gray area in which, depending on what lawyer you are talking to, they will take one side or the other. In the instance of music, you cannot own a certain key signature since that is simply just a way the music is constructed upon, a format of an eight-note bar that is vaguely similar but [the plaintiff] won because of popularity of the musician herself and a good lawyer. There are more [egregious] examples [like] the "amen break" being the most sampled drum line in recorded music history where the creator received no royalties and died homeless in 2005, or the iconic guitar riff of "Come As You Are" by Nirvana being a direct rip-off of the Killing Joke's "Eighties" and the only reason there was no legal action taken was because the latter band did not have the money to sue Nirvana since their

> record label was not as wealthy. It all comes down to who has the most money and nothing to do with actual originality.'

In coherence with earlier positive comments on the use of technology to enhance schoolwork, some respondents elaborated on the universal availability of digital tools as a pretext for abandoning universities' efforts to detect plagiarism: 'It goes with the last question, I believe that students should be able to use all types of technology to be able to write the best that they can with any technology available to them…' The same respondent also argued that because of the value of learning without supporting tools, the students choosing to do so are already enjoying an advantage over those who elect to apply supporting software. The penalty is the fact that a cheating student would not learn as much as an honest one, the respondent implies.

The survey also inquired about the stage of schooling where each respondent had been introduced to rules of academic dishonesty. Thirty-one percent stated that they learned about plagiarism in elementary school, slightly more than 55% indicated junior high or middle school, 10.3% mentioned high school, but none referred to university. The percentages of 'not sure' or missing answers were precisely the same at slightly over 1.72% for each parameter.

When asked if they think that universities are right to apply penalties for academic misconduct such as plagiarism, almost 83% of the respondents said 'yes,' with 15.5% replying 'no,' and again, 1.72% declined to answer. When invited to elaborate on their responses to this question, a clear 67% majority of the respondents supported some form of penalty for academic dishonesty. A noted portion of the responses (16%) recognized a dilemma in situations when students violated the ethical standards unintentionally, for example: 'As I said in a previous answer, I think it's unfair because people do accidentally plagiarize sometimes due to using wrong citations and things like that.'

Other responses in this group, coded as *ambiguous,* addressed the complexity of the matter and the need for a nuanced approach to cases of inadvertent academic dishonesty:

> 'I do believe that in certain circumstances like completely copying someone else's work and saying it's your own should be penalized. However, I do think that the circumstances surrounding plagiarism are very strict right now and sometimes I feel like it's hard to use any source without feeling like I might be accidentally plagiarizing.'

Some of the responses call for a situational approach in considering a small amount of plagiarized material less punishable than claiming false authorship for an entire paper:

> 'Morally, I want to say yes to that question, however I think again it depends on the situation, a minor offense should not be punished to the full extent, if an entire 10-page essay is plagiarized then yes I agree but I think it is situational.'

Some respondents separated violations of intellectual property rights from the use of artificial intelligence, claiming that the latter does not disadvantage an original author: 'Plagiarism and using artificial intelligence to help improve assignments are completely different because the material being created is not someone else's original work.'

While 14% of the respondents declined to elaborate on the open-ended question regarding punishment for plagiarism, only 3% of respondents expressed opposition to penalties for academic dishonesty. Some of the responses arguing for stricter rules against plagiarism regarded it as a measure of fairness towards learners who work hard to earn their grades:

> 'It's not fair for those students who spend all day writing a paper or working on their essay just for a student to look up someone else's paper or use a website to write their paper for them in a matter of a second.'
> 'If one person plagiarisms and the rest of the class uses their own writing it is not fair. Artificial intelligence is a good way to help you start an essay and give an idea about what to write. But the whole essay should not just be written by the AI program.'

Several respondents anchored their positions in the moral and ethical standards of society:

> 'I do believe that universities have the right to penalize students for plagiarizing, as it is morally wrong in our culture, and originality is needed to be perceived as trustworthy and authentic. If students choose to go against these rules and take someone's original work without citing it, the university has the right to apply a penalty against that person.'

Only three participants responded to the question about penalties for plagiarism in academia by claiming support for softer rules: 'There should be no penalty for plagiarism.'

> 'I do think that when students use academic dishonesty there should be points taken off or told to redo the assignment in their own words, but I do think that this is sometimes taken too far when students are kicked out of school or put on punishment for this, because in the real world we are able to use other resources and It can be helpful in school work, too.'
> 'As I said before, plagiarizing an essay shouldn't get a kid kicked out of school, kids have stayed in school for less. Essays are not that deep, it's not a book, and it's not a real job; were just submitting the essay for a grade, it doesn't matter.'

Discussion

As relatively limited as the scope of the current study is – being confined to one classroom in one public university – it certainly raises a wealth of issues to contemplate. Prime among these is: where should educators draw the line in determining the acceptability of use of AI-based tools in college education, and on a more profound level, what is the role of intellectuals as guardians of ethics in balancing the influence of technological determinism over acceptable moral societal norms?

With the recent development of more sophisticated AI tools like ChatGPT, we are countering what we may eventually come to designate as a post-AI landscape. It

appears too early in the game to settle (if a settlement is even reachable) the criteria and guidelines for (dis)allowing the use of said tools. Educators familiar enough with the nature of content that ChatGPT generates are aware that the produced text, tends to lack (for lack of a better description) a quintessential human element that characterizes material originated by human beings. Put another way, it sounds automated or mechanistic in a manner that is better 'sensed' than 'explained' in a narrative as the current one.

Other issues that present themselves include the expectation for originality of student output and the extent to which the academy – represented in its intellectuals who are also regarded as guardians of ethics – is seeking to uphold and reinforce the values of student creativity, pride in one's work, and the vitality of bearing the fruits of one's genuine labor.

Multiple and varied schools of ethics populate the pedagogical sphere, which means that the right/wrong binary will vary from one setting to the next depending on a host of factors including, but not limited to, institutional culture, societal culture, and educators' own backgrounds, and may even vary across time. For instance, among the arguments figuring into this debate is that AI is only an inevitable eventuality of human mind creativity, which seems to justify (for some people) its usage in academic tasks. On the other hand, a counterargument is that the resort to AI as a mass production outlet of ready-made assignments only furthers student apathy and exacerbates the already prevalent problem of students' under-reading and exclusively technology-driven research.

The current study offers but a glimpse into a world of competing perspectives as far as the factoring of AI in education is concerned. And although it is an undergraduate-based study, the controversies stirred here are certainly mirrored in other levels of education, be it pre-university or even post-graduate studies. Scholars and educators today find themselves confronted with a reality they are obligated to engage in; the direction and handling thereof are far from clear and will require substantial time and experience to allow the various scenarios to evolve.

References

Conway, M., & Groshek, J. (2008) Ethics gaps and ethics gains: Differences and similarities in mass communication students' perceptions of plagiarism and fabrication. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (Summer), 127-145.

Curran, J. (2012). Reinterpreting the Internet. In J. Curran et al. (Eds), *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge, pp. 3–33.

Davis, L. (2011). Arresting student plagiarism: Are we investigators or educators? *Business Communication Quarterly, 74*(2), 160-163.

Douglas, S., & Watt, G. (2019) Plagiarism, academic integrity and the law. *e-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching, 13*(2), 73-79.

Fadlalmola, H., Elhusein, A., Swamy, D., Hussein, M., Mamanao, D., & Mohamedsalih, W. (2022). Plagiarism among nursing students: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Nursing Review, 69*, 492-502.

Holden, O., Norris, M., & Kuhlmeier, V. (2021). Academic integrity in online assessment: A research review. *Frontiers in Education, 6* (Article 639814), 1-13.

Kennedy, E., Jensen, E., & Jensen, A. (2022). Methodological considerations for survey-based research during emergencies and public health crises: Improving the quality of evidence and communication. *Frontiers in Communication, 6* (Article 736195), 1-7.

Lindgren, S. (2022). *Digital media and society* (2nd ed.) SAGE.

Mandel, G., Fast, A., & Olson, K. (2016). Intellectual property law's plagiarism fallacy. *Brigham Young University Law Review, 2015*(4), 915-984.

Moriarty, C., & Wilson, B. (2022). Justice and consistency in academic integrity: Philosophical and practical considerations in policy making. *Journal of College and Character, 23*(1), 21-31.

Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*. New York: Knopf.

Reyneke, Y., Shuttleworth, C., & Visagie, R. (2021). Pivot to online in a post-COVID-19 world: Critically applying BSCS 5E to enhance plagiarism awareness of accounting students. *Accounting Education, 30*(1), 1-21.

Appendix A

1. When given a course assignment that involves research, which sources do you most frequently use? Select ALL that apply.

    a. Your university's online library
    b. Google Scholar
    c. EBSCOHost
    d. JSTOR
    e. Your university's on-campus library (physical facility on campus)
    f. Other(s):

2. For your university courses, have you ever used computer software that helps paraphrase sentences and clauses (e.g., Grammarly)?

    a. Yes
    b. No

3. If you have previously used computer software that helps paraphrase sentences and clauses, which ones were they? Select ALL that apply.

    a. Grammarly
    b. QuillBot
    c. Hypotenuse AI
    d. Paraphraser
    e. Other(s):

4. Do you think that universities should allow students to use computer software that uses artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) to improve their assignments?

    a. Yes
    b. No

5. Explain your answer to Question 4.

6. Do you think that universities should use Turnitin or other types of text-matching software to find out if students are submitting their original work?
    a. Yes
    b. No

7. Explain your answer to Question 6.

8. Where did you first learn about plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct?

a. Elementary School
b. Junior High School
c. High School
d. University

9. Do you think that universities are right to apply a penalty for academic misconduct such as plagiarism?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. Explain your answer to Question 9.

Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications
Volume 12, Issue 3, July 2026 – Pages 199-218

National Populist Discourse as Lack of Content: Critical Discourse Analysis on Headlines in Newspapers Regarding Political Agenda and Their Reflection on Osman's Story in Television Dramas

*By Sunguralp Şolpan**

Starting from the 1990s, a right-wing political surge or a national populist wave has been clearly perceived especially in Western democracies. Mass media entities such as television undoubtedly have an immense part in this political success. This makes media products under the shadow of political influence a strong case study when examining the political discourse, thus creating an important research field regarding media studies and political sciences. As political hegemonies are built upon discourse, every discursive field becomes a battleground for different groups that strive to create and maintain their corresponding hegemonies. National populist political figures -or populist politics in general- are the textbook example of this fact since the discourse they create is either inclusive or exclusive in nature, the former creates greater political mobilization around them, while the latter solidifies the mobilization they attained earlier at the expense of an excluded group. In this study, the narrative structures of the first episodes of two series about the founder of the Ottoman Empire, Kuruluş "Osmancık" (1988) and Kuruluş Osman (2019) are analyzed with Greimas' actantial method in order to identify the differences and similarities pertaining to different political discourses. In addition, front pages of four newspapers in total favoring the ruling party (two for each) at their time are also examined employing van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis method in order to determine the political discourse of the Özal and the Erdoğan governments and their parallels with the television series. The results have shown that the perspective from which Osman's story is told changes shape drastically in line with the political agenda of the Özal and the Erdoğan governments respectively, meaning that their particular political discourse fills in the blank parts of the story. Thus, this study shows that political discursive influence results in a lack of meaningful content, which is deemed as the main ingredient of populist discourse.

Keywords: *National Populism, Actantial Method, Critical Discourse Analysis, Lack of Content, Turkish Politics, Hegemonic Structure.*

Introduction

As the nationalist fever is on the rise in Western democracies (Art, 2020) and mass media is said to have a strong influence upon this right-wing political "success" (Rydgren, 2007), national populism and its long shadow cast upon any kind of mass media have become a popular yet puzzling topic for many fields of study such as political sciences or communication. As it is a cross between populism

*Lecturer, Yeditepe University, Türkiye.

and nationalism (Jansen, 2011), this kind of political discourse results in messages against the economic and cultural changes brought upon people by traditional politics (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, pp. xxi-xxiii) that are echoed by many. Those echoes eventually made national populist the third successful global populist wave (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This popularity has resulted in numerous articles and other forms of academic work, and many more will probably be produced in the near future considering the growing political power of the national populists.

As most of the research attempt on national populist politics are conducted to understand the ongoing state of Western democracies, examples outside that domain such as Turkey should prove useful in order to understand this global political phenomenon. Turkish state and mass media products on television are intertwined with each other ever since there are televisions in the country as the first television channel of the country were created and overseen by the state even today. This makes Turkish television an apparent field for discursive struggle and examining its products should yield valuable information about the nature of media framing and mass media propaganda. Also considering the fact that Turkey was the second country in exporting television series in the world as of 2018 (Uştuk, 2019), political discourse in Turkey and its effect on media products constitute an intriguing case study to say the least.

Adding to that, there is a surge of Turkish historical television dramas in recent times. Those series seemingly generated a far-reaching cultural influence, rising demand in countries such as Uganda (Kyeyune, 2021) and Bangladesh (Kamruzzaman, 2022). Particularly, this study focuses on two series about Osman Bey -the founder of the Ottoman Empire-, which are *Kuruluş "Osmancık"* (1988) and *Kuruluş Osman* (2019). While their similar names alone could be seen as a reason for comparison, it was theorized at the outset of this study that two renditions would reflect different perspectives of the Özal government of the 1980s and the Erdoğan government of the late 2010s. Thus, examining the two under the terms of political discourse could point towards how political messages are conveyed to the public within entertainment products, which is not an expected source of political messages at the first glance.

The first episodes of both series and the front pages of several newspapers close to the ruling side were examined and compared in order to find differences between two eras and two different rulers. Differences found in discourse for the same story and similar political structures arguably underline the influence of national populism on how -and why- people tell stories, and understanding the nature of this influence should bring us one step closer to understand the nature of populist discourse.

This article starts with a literature review on national populism, discourse, hegemony, and the historical accounts for both 1988 and 2019. The case study is divided into three parts; *the narrative structures* where the episodes from both series are examined, *the newspaper analysis* where the articles from sample newspaper group are discursively analyzed, and *the discussions* where the findings from both examinations are compared and interpreted.

Literature Review

National Populism

Populism is a profoundly difficult concept to define in and of itself (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 1). The fact that it is a frequently used concept even though it is often generalized and misused (Brett, 2013; Canovan, 1981, pp. 3-5) adds to that conceptual blunder. The term itself comes from the Ancient Greek word *populares*, which can be translated as "*courting the people*" (Eatwell, 2017). Despite numerous remarks on how difficult it is to define this concept; there are different approaches to explain what populism is.

Some scholars state that populism is an ideology built upon a two-sided struggle between good and evil (Hawkins, 2019, p. 57). Others define it as an anti-establishment political strategy of a previously unknown leader aimed to create mobilization amongst an unorganized constituent group (Barr, 2009; Weyland, 2001). Some argue that it is an attempt to "*flaunt the low*" (Ostiguy, 2017) and create a form of political identification as a result (Panizza, 2017). Finally, it is also defined as the "*discursive construction of an enemy*" (Laclau, 2005b, p. 39). Even though any of those definitions does not openly contradict one another, each of them has their shortcomings and therefore none of them can be accepted as the definition of populism, they all are a definition.

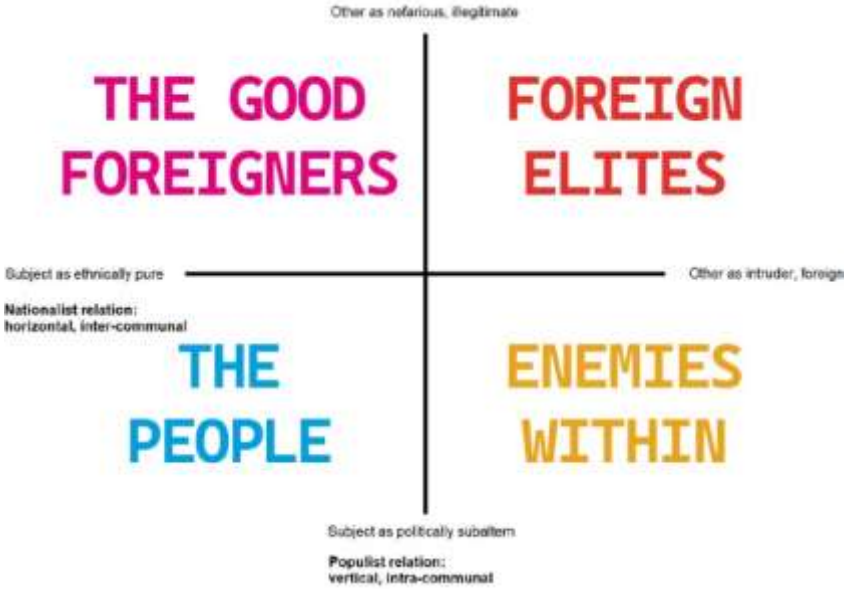
This last, *discursive approach to populism* yielded a more abstract yet extensive understanding about populism (Peruzzotti, 2019, p. 33) by also considering the social reality that allowed populist politics to flourish (Laclau, 2005a, pp. 18-19). Consequently, this approach is deemed more adequate on measuring the influence of populism on any given political situation (de Cleen et al., 2021, p. 156). Because the discursive approach is too generalizable, meaning that it can be applied to almost any political situation (Mouzelis, 1985) is arguably the only reason it provides us with a definition and not the definition of populism.

There is another political concept nearly as enigmatic and frequently used as populism that should be mentioned at this point, *nationalism*. Nation is mostly regarded as a modern term that is defined as an "*imagined community*" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Also argued to be abstract communities (James, 1996, pp. 5-8), nations are a form of community amongst strangers. In that vein, nationalism becomes "*an ideology that emphasizes loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligations outweigh other individual or group interests*" (Kohn, 2020). In short, nationalism is the ideological link to a nation for anyone who links themselves to said nation.

Populism is a thin ideology, meaning that its inherent struggle must be defined by a full ideology in order to generate a lasting conflict (March, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Woods, 2014, pp. 10-11). In contemporary settings, these links are mostly perceived between populism and nationalism (Jansen, 2011), which are said to constitute the third widespread populist wave after the agrarian wave of the 19th century and the Latin American wave of the 1930s (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). A national populist is someone who "*prioritizes the culture and interests of the nation, and promises to give voice to a people who feel that they have been*

neglected, even held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites" (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. ix). As one can easily deduce, even the definition is a cross between populism and nationalism.

Figure 1. *A Spatio-dimensional Illustration of Populist and Nationalist Discourses*



Source: Venizelos, 2021 (Colored explanations are added by the author)

A cross between populism and nationalism creates two distinctions of a people (Figure 1); the vertical axis is used to distinguish people from elites while the horizontal axis is defined by national identity (de Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; 2020). This scheme allows a political figure to generate political discourse that creates enough tension to sustain a societal conflict long term.

Discourse, Hegemony, and Media Framing

In a brief sense, discourse is "*a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts*" (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Within academic settings, discourse could refer to anything between a "*textual unit larger than a sentence*" and "*overall social system*" (Torfing, 2005, pp. 6-9). Also considering the emergence of new media as in "*the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication*" (Manovich, 2001, p. 18), one can perceive that a targeted political discourse of the kind populists tend to use could impact the entire societal structure.

Hegemony was first defined as "*the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group*" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). Mumby (1997) offers a more detailed definition, stating that hegemony is created by the power relations between certain groups at the top, namely the governmental body, the mediators, and different interest groups. Those interest groups are in a discursive struggle between each other, and that struggle yields political power to the winner. This also influences conflict within the

establishment and therefore society, rendering the greater group an uncivil society (Ruzza, 2009). In short; the discursive political conflict expands on every level of society, which results in a surge of political power for certain individuals who produce and reproduce said discourse.

In other words, mass consent that would generate a hegemonic power is created within the realm of discourse. Persuasion takes place in symbolic fields such as mass media products, which are produced with the help of "*metaphors, catchphrases, and other condescending symbols that frame the issue in a particular fashion*" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). A frame is a particular image of an issue which is created by selecting and highlighting certain parts in order to influence a certain way of thinking and related attitude (Chong & Druckman, 2007). These frames are generated by attaining greater relevance to certain values on any subject discussed within the reach of the public (Nelson et al., 1997). For example, a refugee crisis can be framed as humanitarian aid or a security risk under different perspectives and both of those frames would influence certain responses from audience groups in the form of a political attitude.

Not even an educated mind is exempt from the effects of exposure to media framing, rather it is known to have similar effects on less educated and highly educated people alike (Bartels, 2003, pp. 63-64). Entman's (2004, pp. 9-13) cascade model illustrates that frames generated by the state shape the frames used by other elites, media, news frames, and public in that specific order suggesting the fact that echoes of the frames are created within the hegemonic structure. These echoes then become the main influence for any certain discourse at the time created by any figure of the hegemonic structure.

Looking at another angle, media framing is known to be an "*integral part of propaganda since it is communication itself*" (Karapanagiotis, 2024). As hegemony is the result of a discursive struggle and media framing generates more space for the same struggle to take place, logically those frames are the means to create and maintain said hegemony. Frames have that much of an effect because they are made to persuade people towards a singular opinion, which is essentially what propaganda is (Walton, 1997). In short, media framing, hegemony and propaganda are terms referring to the process of manipulating people with the means of mass media.

Political Discourse in the Özal and the Erdoğan Eras

Before turning to the case studies, the historical background that led to both renditions of Osman's story on television should be briefly examined. Namely Özal's government in 1988 and Erdoğan's government in 2019 and how they came to be holds importance in order to understand why and how their media framing efforts are created.

Özal's reign in the 1980s is regarded as a turning point for economic globalization (Das, 2004, p. 63). The military coup of 1980 changed the entire political structure (Kepenek, 2011, p. 71; Sarfati, 2017). Özal's Motherland Party (MP) won the elections held in 1983 by a landslide; as prominent political figures of the past were banned from politics at the time and immediately generated liberal economic policies that prioritized an outward-oriented market (Hiç, 2008, pp. 113-119; Pamuk, 2008, pp. 298-300). This economic momentum faded away after the first few years of MP rule (Keyder, 2006) meaning that Özal's political reign without any rivals and holding onto liberalization nearing its end in 1988.

Having first come to power with the 2002 elections (Jung, 2008, p. 118), Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (JDP) started completely restructuring the economy (Temiz & Gökmen, 2009) and erased the signs of recent economic downfall in a short amount of time (Eğilmez, 2018, pp. 151-152). Yet the economic performance took a downturn in 2009 and has not shown any long-term improvement ever since (Aktas, 2017). Much like the the Özal era and the Menderes era before that, JDP have accelerated economic growth mostly by privatization and leveraging, yet they have failed to take the necessary steps to sustain that growth rate (Eğilmez, 2018, pp. 163-164). Major events such as the Gezi Park protests (Batuman, 2013; Bayhan, 2014) and constitutional amendment in 2017 (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018) have arguably shown authoritarian tendencies of the ruling party, and also the extent of their control over mass media entities.

To sum up, Özal and Erdoğan were both dealt similar cards in the terms of economics, yet their approaches to governance during the selected periods were completely different. This difference is reflected in their discourses; as Özal strived to create alliances while forging global links to Turkish economy, whereas Erdoğan frequently invokes foreign and domestic enemies that relentlessly strive to hinder their progress. Therefore, Özal integrates different groups with political discourse while Erdoğan excludes certain groups in order to solidify political mobilization.

For both discursive construction attempts to work as intended, mass media devices as ideological apparatuses (Althusser, 2014, pp. 86) should reflect said discourses to a degree. This explains why both Özal and Erdoğan benefited from mass media work and also gives merit to the starting hypothesis of this study.

Methodology/Materials and Methods

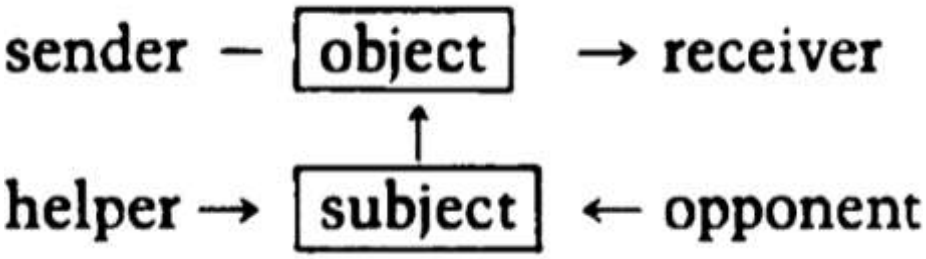
The main examination under this chapter is conducted on the first episodes of the television series Kuruluş Osman (2019) and Kuruluş "Osmancık" (1988) television series. The two series are about the founder of the Ottoman Empire, so the similarities between the two are not just in their name. Osman is seen as a successful leader by Turkish people considering his accomplishments, therefore how Osman is depicted should point to who a successful leader is for Turkish people in both eras.

Since populism is "*a particular mode of articulation*" at its core (Laclau, 2005b, p. 34), the political discourse of each time could have an influence on people's conception of a great leader. This theorized influence would be a prime example of cascading model of media framing theory (Entman, 2004) in action because it will show how political discourse shapes people's perception even upon distant historical events. Therefore, the results of the comparisons within this work should yield an understanding about the nature of hegemonic structure and political communication.

Two series have drastic differences in metrics such as length and episode numbers, so Greimas' actantial mythical model (Greimas, 1983, p. 207) was used to examine them. This method highlights the logic of the relationship between the actants and therefore allows researchers to analyze the details of discourse under different circumstances. These categories were named as actants -and not actors or actresses- since they should not be limited to traditional characters, they can be groups, objects,

animals, thoughts, or any other concept that the story would require (Hébert, 2020, p. 83). The actants are given (Figure 2) in relation to each other and overall narrative;

Figure 2. *Actantial Mythical Model Structure*



Source: Greimas, 1983

At the second phase of the study, the newspapers close to the ruling party were analyzed in order to understand the historical context of each period. Kuruluş Osman (2019) episode was first aired on November 20, 2019; hence newspapers were selected from the third week of November 2019. Kuruluş "Osmancık" (1988) episode was first aired on January 10, 1988; hence newspapers were selected from the first week of January 1988. Only the weekdays were included since the tone of the news changes on weekends.

Following the distinction given in the previous studies (Üçer & Şolpan, 2019), Akşam and Yeni Şafak newspapers were selected for the 2019 series. This distinction was a little harder to make for the 1988 series. Ever since the Özal government had raised the paper prices for the newspaper, print press were pressured economically by the government (Öngen, 2017). This made old newspapers oppose the Özal government to an extent, but big corporations took an interest in the media work at the same time. Capital holders started to buy or create new newspapers (Kadıoğlu, 2018) and these favored Özal more as his neo-liberal policies essentially were what made that new business endeavors possible. Out of those new newspapers, Tercüman and Türkiye were selected for the 1988 series.

The front pages on those newspapers were analyzed under the terms of van Dijk's (1988, pp. 140-148) argument about news comprehension. The area each article covers and the article titles were examined as they are found to be influential on all six levels of comprehension. The articles linked to the ruling party's discourse were divided into four different titles considering the overall discursive structure they created, which are *ruling party's actions*, *terrorist organizations*, *foreign forces*, and *political opposition*.

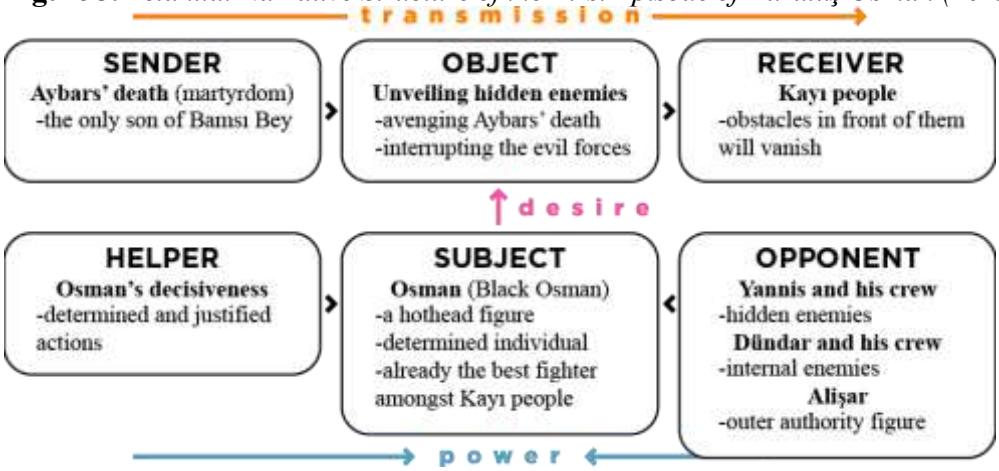
The third and last category serves as a comparison between those data groups and relevant discussion. The gathered data carries meaning only in comparison, since by examining both timelines and series, the changes between the two renditions and their respective periods can be pointed out. Comparisons with these data should reveal political influence over these two renditions of the same historical figure. By examining both timelines in the given samples and comparing two sets, this study aims to identify the effects of political influence on mass media entertainment products and their implications.

Results

The following are the case studies consisting of two parts; *narrative structures* and *newspaper analysis*. As discussed under the methodology title, the narrative structures title is focused on sampled episodes of television series employing the actantial mythical method, and the newspaper analysis title contains critical discourse analysis on the newspaper sample group. Both analyses were done in order to reflect how political discourse conveyed to the consumers through different media products and therefore to illuminate the inner mechanics of the national populist discourse, namely the nature of the specific hegemonic structures and resulting political discourse.

Narrative Structures

Figure 3. *Actantial Narrative Structure of the First Episode of Kuruluş Osman (2019)*

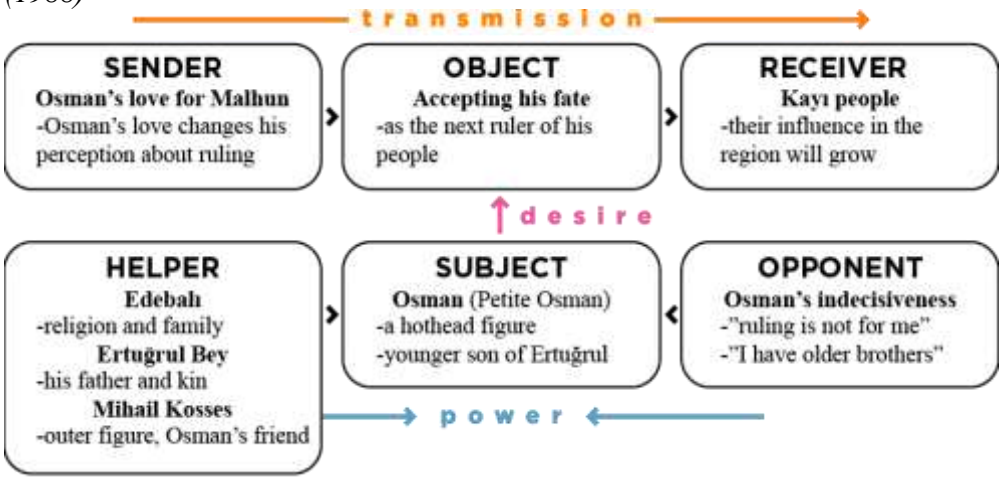


The first episode of Kuruluş Osman (2019) series was aired on 20th November 2019, and it was on a Wednesday. The episode's duration is 142 minutes and was aired in prime time at 20:00. The following is the narrative structure of the episode;

- *Axis of desire:* Osman's destiny is to unveil the hidden forces working against his people. As the third son of chieftain Ertuğrul and the best fighter of his village, he seems to be the clear-cut candidate for the task.
- *Axis of transmission:* Unveiling and eventually stopping said enemies will avenge the vile acts committed against his people, and the Kayı people will benefit greatly as they will not be hindered by any outside figure.
- *Axis of power:* Osman has many enemies both abroad and within his ranks that try to divert him from his destiny for a variety of reasons. Only his decisiveness works against those forces.

The first episode of this series was aired on 10th January 1988, and it was on a Sunday. The episode's duration is 71 minutes and was aired in prime time at 21:00. The following is the narrative structure of the episode;

Figure 4. *Actantial Narrative Structure of the First Episode of Kuruluş "Osmancık" (1988)*

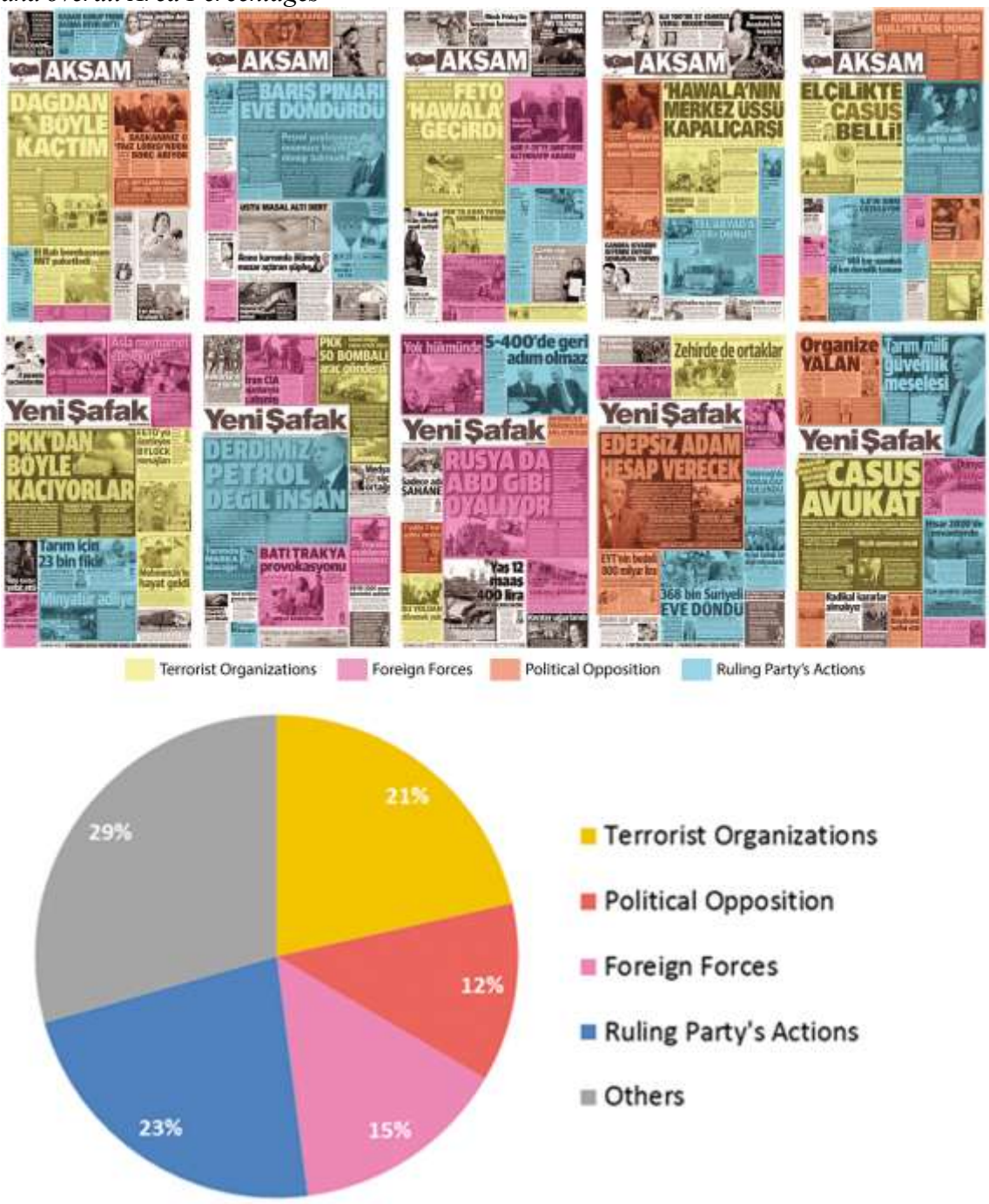


- *Axis of desire:* Osman's destiny is to become the leader that his people need. He just needs to accept his fate and start to walk towards that future. As he is a hothead figure and the youngest son of the chieftain, he is not particularly determined to do so.
- *Axis of transmission:* Osman's perspective starts to change when he saw Malhun for the first time. Malhun's love is the last push he needs towards his destiny. So, he accepts the leadership task and starts to work towards that end.
- *Axis of power:* The only tangible obstacle between Osman and the leadership is his own indecisiveness. Several people help him towards that end, namely Edebalı, Ertuğrul, and Mihail Kosses. In their own way, every single one of them strives to push Osman to a better path, whether by friendship, concern of a father, or the tough love of a mentor.

Newspaper Analysis

The 2019 newspaper (Figure 5) group shows a strong Turkish leadership and their mostly insignificant enemies by underlining;

Figure 5. *Front pages of Akşam (top), Yeni Şafak (middle) Newspapers between 18th and 22nd of November, 2019 with distinguished Areas for Political News Categories and overall Area Percentages*



Source: The online archives from GZT.com, 2020.

Figure 6. *Front Pages of Tercüman (top), Türkiye (middle) Newspapers between 4th and 8th of January, 1988 with distinguished Areas for Political News Categories and overall Area Percentages*

Source: Newspapers photographed by the author in governmental archives.

- *Ruling party's actions* such as the Peace Spring military offensive or innovations in other fields are frequently mentioned since they are painted as triumphs of the Erdoğan government. This group covers 23% of all coverage area.
- *Terrorist organizations* group underlines the vile actions of the terrorist organizations PKK and Islamist Gulen movement, and more importantly how said actions are stopped by the Turkish government. This group covers 21% of all coverage area.
- *Foreign forces* group covers the questionable actions of foreign powers such as warmongering efforts or violence towards certain groups of people. This group covers 15% of all coverage area.
- *Political opposition* is also mentioned through their mistakes in the forms of comparison to past mistakes and related criticism. This group covers 12% of all coverage area.

The 1988 newspaper samples (Figure 6) are vastly different in total coverage area for the related groups. They are also different on how they perceive the Turkish government at the time;

- *Foreign forces* group takes the lead in this group because of the Bulgarian crisis at the time. There was an oppressed Turkish population in Bulgaria at the time and newspapers covered this crisis on all fronts, ranging from the overall exposes to firsthand testimonies from the victims. This group covers 27% of all coverage area.
- *Ruling party's actions* group are about the economic struggles of the Özal government and how Özal and his people are facing these challenging times. There were also articles about the possibility for a presidential election and therefore ceasing the military rule. This group covers 10% of all coverage area.
- *Political opposition* is mentioned briefly in the articles about the presidential election. This group covers 5% of all coverage area.
- *Terrorist organizations* group has a couple of articles about PKK's actions in Germany, as the organization assassinated a German diplomat. This group covers 4% of all coverage area.

Discussion

Comparisons between two data sets presented in the results section can be found under this title. There are certain similarities and differences between two stories, and both show striking parallels with the political discourse generated by the state at their time. The main objective for the case studies was this comparison as they would point towards a change in national populist influence -or lack thereof- between two different eras. The comparisons are divided into two titles similar to the results section.

Narrative Structures

At this point, each actant of two structures presented (See Figure 3 and Figure 4) is compared in order to identify the differences and similarities between them.

Table 1. *Side by Side Comparison for Two Actantial Narrative Structures*

	Kuruluş "Osmancık" (1988)	**Kuruluş Osman (2019)**
Sender	Osman's love for Malhun	Aybars' death
Object	Accepting his fate	Unveiling enemies
Receiver	Kayı people	Kayı people
Helper	Edebalı Ertuğrul Mihail Kosses	Osman's decisiveness
Opponent	Osman's indecisiveness	Yannis Dündan Alişar
Subject	(*Petite*) Osman	(*Black*) Osman

- *Subject* in both instances is Osman, a warrior of the Kayı people and the youngest son of Ertuğrul.
- *Object*s of these two characters are vastly different however. In the 1988 series, Osman's main objective is to accept his faith as the ruler of his people. In the 2019 series, Osman's objective is to unveil his people's enemies. The former influences a journey inward, while the latter requires a journey outward to accomplish.
- *Sender* for those two objects is different as well. The 1988 series start the journey with Osman's love for Malhun, whereas the 2019 series start the journey with Aybars' martyrdom. One starts with love therefore life, but the other starts with death.
- *Receiver* for both series is the Kayı people, as in both instances, Osman's actions will benefit his people in the future.
- *Helper* group shows differences as well. In the 1988 series, there are many who help Osman accept his fate (*Edebalı, Ertuğrul, and Mihail Kosses*). In the 2019 series, Osman's decisiveness is the only help he gets towards his goals.
- *Opponent* group shows differences parallel with the helper group. In the 1988 series, Osman's only obstacle towards accepting his faith is his own indecisiveness. However, there are many enemies that would hinder Osman's progress that are divided into three distinct groups (*Yannis, Dündar, Alişar and the people link to those three*) in the 2019 series.
- *Subject* is Osman in both series, but they are slightly different than each other in line with other differences mentioned. Osman in the 1988 series is called *Petite* Osman, underlining that he is still seen as a child in some ways and he has room to grow. Osman in the 2019 series is called *Black* Osman as a testament to his fierce, decisive character.

In short; Osman in the 1988 series struggles within himself for the most part by denying his destiny which was to become the leader that his people need. There are several people trying to steer him to the right direction. Conversely, Osman in the 2019 series is determined to get his people to new heights by doing what others could not. There are those who try to steer him from that path for several reasons. There is no clear reason for that change whatsoever besides the change between Özal's inclusionary and Erdoğan's exclusionary political discourse.

Thus, political discourse fills in the blank pages of history or lack of content in Osman's story in this situation. 1988 series present an exceptional leader who does not have any desire for ruling or power that comes with it, which is a classic discursive approach for a liberal leader such as Özal. Whereas 2019 series present a leader with power and merit that is sent for a nation within a dire situation, which is essentially what the discursive construction about Erdoğan is constructed at the time.

Newspaper Analysis

The front pages of the newspapers were examined in order to identify politically influenced news articles divided under four certain categories; *ruling party's actions*, *foreign forces*, *political opposition*, and *terrorist organizations*.

Those four categories are parts of a discursive struggle that points towards heroes and enemies; thus, assigning good and evil traits to them at certain points. This discursive strategy is used extensively by Özal, Erdoğan, and many others for that matter because they are suitable tools for a national populist discourse specifically for Turkey. The differences between two sets of newspapers (See Figure 5 and Figure 6) are summarized as follows;

- *The coverage amounts* are the first and most apparent difference between the two timelines. Difference in total percentages of political content between two periods (46% for 1988 and 71% for 2019) suggests that the press media has seemingly been politicized more within these 31 years. It should be noted that there was a major refugee crisis in 1988 raising the percentages a great deal, the difference would be greater without the extensive coverage of this major event.
- *The portrayal of the ruling party* is vastly different between two periods even though both Özal and Erdoğan governments have faced rather similar economic challenges at the time. The 1988 newspapers represent Özal as a leader in a dire situation, trying his best to steer the country on the right course, whereas the 2019 newspapers are mostly in denial about any economic struggle at the time, repeatedly praising their leadership. Minor instances of negative economic examples are blamed on the "enemies" such as foreign forces and the factors they have created.
- *The portrayal of others* is the last difference to be pointed out. The 1988 newspaper articles suggest that despite the lingering and layered problems, foreign *allies* and political opposition are needed in order to solve the problems that the Özal government was facing. Özal actively negotiates with foreign figures or what is left from the opposition from time to time, while

terrorist organizations are rarely mentioned and they conduct their terror abroad. The 2019 newspaper articles however paint all three groups as absolute enemies of the state.

Similar to the narrative structures given with the television series, the narrative structure given with the newspapers are vastly different from each other. Not only are they different, but the differences mentioned have parallels within their respective eras, suggesting that the source of these differences is the same. 1988 newspapers are showing a leader with a hard task of maintaining and improving a country which has been through much and still experiences economic struggles, and 2019 newspapers shows a capable leader of a strong country with many enemies. Both perspectives are mirrored in both overall historical context and narrative structures of the television series.

Therefore, political discourse made its way into news media as well, filling in the blanks in this instance too. Lack of meaningful content generated a space for populist political discourse to exist, and this space seemingly grew over time between Özal and Erdoğan eras. As both newspapers and television series fill the lack of content in the same manner, it could be argued that the influence behind that trend is the same, which is national populist political discourse. In each instance, the reality within these media products is shaped by the political discourse generated by the ruling group, which is the defining feature of a media framing scheme.

Conclusion

As evaluated in the literature review in detail; Özal's MP government in 1988 and Erdoğan's JDP government in 2019 faced similar economic problems. They both once had made liberal, free-market policy changes which resulted in tangible economic growth, but that growth spurt was tested and shaped by fundamental political problems around the years picked for the study. This similarity is not reflected on how newspapers present the reality in each period. Newspapers from two different eras paint fundamentally different pictures of reality despite Özal and Erdoğan's similar economic struggles at the time.

The reality presented in newspapers and the narrative structures of both series therefore shows significant parallels, suggesting that political discourse influences the entertainment of common people in their leisure time to the point that mass media entertainment has become another front for political discursive struggle. The fact that there is a change between two renditions of Osman's story alone strongly points towards a strong outside influence since there were no meaningful, groundbreaking findings on Osman's life and accomplishments within the 31 years between the two. Parallels between newspaper articles and overall narratives can be shown as proofs to the fact that said outside influence was political.

Since they work as limbs of a state ideology, mass media devices are undoubtedly an important tool for both of those discursive constructions (Althusser, 2014, pp. 85-87). Also considering the media framing perspective, the state discourse can be expected to reflect on different media products to a degree. As the

example given in this study clearly shows, state propaganda generated by a national populist agenda is infiltrated and therefore can infiltrate entertainment products that is regularly consumed by the masses, to the point that they are not much different than the leader himself talking to the people in a campaign event.

By comparing two renditions of the same story along with the political and historical settings at the time, this study revealed much about that process and therefore the nature of political discourse in general and national populist mobilization which has become the dominant political movement of our time. In line with Entman's (2004) cascading model, findings of this study have shown that political discourse has a vast field of influence in order to generate and maintain a hegemonic structure in the form of status quo. Political articles on a newspaper and prime time entertainment media products can show discursive parallels mainly because of said influence. In other words, the overlaps perceived are not circumstantial, rather they are made with intention.

From that perspective, national populist discourse or populist political discourse in general can be said to parallel Laclau's (1977, pp. 145-146) definition, in which he states that populist discourse is an empty shell lacking any content. This emptiness is the precise target for political actors, in this case the ruling party. Since populism is lack of meaningful content as this definition suggests, it is hard to conceptualize what it is; and this is also why there are many kinds of populism, as it takes the shape of its environment like a clear liquid.

The methodology used within this study was a practical implication for many academic studies to come, meaning that this exact method or versions of it can be used to examine different discursive structures from any time of background. The discussion about populism being *a targeted lack of meaningful content* can also be expected to have academic implications by furthering Laclau's (1977, pp. 145-146) definition on the subject.

This study is limited to two episodes from two series and four newspapers from the week the episodes aired. While those are extreme limits and the study cannot be generalized just with these sets of data in any way, shape or form; the study still underlines the change in mass media production and growing influence of the politics in Turkey. In other words, the examination that can be found within this study shows a change in perspective within the same story that cannot be explained just by creative choices, so it points out the political influence within despite its limited set of data. Future studies could focus on different data with different scales in order to test the arguments made within this study and further our understanding on political discourse, populist politics, and mass media production.

References

Aktas, E. (2017). The Rise and the Fall of the Turkish Economic Success Story under AKP (JDP). *Contemporary Islam, 11*(2), 171–183. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-017-0381-y

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd ed.). Verso.

Althusser, L. (2014). *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (G.M. Goshgarian, Trans.). Verso (Original work published in 1995).

Art, D. (2020). The Myth of Global Populism. *Perspectives on Politics, 20*(3) 1-13.

https://doi.org/ 10.1017/s1537592720003552
Barr, R. (2009). Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics. *Party Politics, 15*(1), 29-48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808097890
Bartels, L. M. (2003). Democracy with attitudes. In M. B. Mackuen & G. Rabinowitz (Eds.), *Electoral Democracy* (pp. 48-82). The University of Michigan Press.
Batuman, E. (2013). *Occupy Gezi: Police Against Protesters in Istanbul*. The New Yorker. Retrieved December 1, 2024, from https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/occupy-gezi-police-against-protesters-in-istanbul
Bayhan, V. (2014). Yeni Toplumsal Hareketler ve Gezi Parkı Direnişi. *Birey ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 4*(1), 23. https://doi.org/10.20493/bt.15516
Brett, W. (2013). What's an Elite to Do? The Threat of Populism from Left, Right and Centre. *The Political Quarterly, 84*(3), 410-413. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923x.2013.12030.x
Canovan, M. (1981). *Populism* (1st ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science, 10*(1), 103–126. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054
Das, D. (2004). *The Economic Dimensions of Globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
de Cleen, B., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2017). Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism. *Javnost - The Public, 24*(4), 301-319. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2017.1330083
de Cleen, B., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2020). How Should We Analyze the Connections between Populism and Nationalism: A Response to Rogers Brubaker. *Nations and Nationalism, 26*(2), 314–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12575
de Cleen, B., Glynos, J., & Mondon, A. (2021). Populist Politics and the Politics of "Populism": Radical Right in Western Europe. In P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, & B. Moffitt (Eds.), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (pp. 155–172). Routledge.
Eatwell, R. (2017). Populism and Fascism. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.14
Eatwell, R., & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. Pelican Books.
Eğilmez, M. (2018). *Değişim Sürecinde Türkiye: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Sosyo-Ekonomik Bir Değerlendirme*. Remzi Kitabevi.
Entman, R. (2004). *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. The University of Chicago Press.
Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach. *American Journal of Sociology, 95*(1), 1–37. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780405
Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare, & G. Nowell-Smith, Trans. And Ed.). Lawrence and Wishart.
Greimas, A. (1983). *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (D. McDowell, R. Schleifer, & A. Velie, Trans.). The University of Nebraska Press. (Original work published in 1966).
GZT.com. (2020). *Gazete manşetleri*. https://gazetemanset.gzt.com/
Hawkins, K. (2019). The Ideational Approach. In C. de la Torre (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (pp. 57-68). Routledge.
Hiç, M. (2008). *A Survey of Turkey's Economy and Politics 1923-2007*. CreateSpace.
Ionescu, G., & Gellner, E. (1969). Introduction. In G. Ionescu & E. Gellner (Eds.), *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (pp. 1-5). The Garden City Press Limited.
Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research, 46*(3), 319–345. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x
James, P. (1996). *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*. Sage Publications.

Jansen, R. (2011). Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism. *Sociological Theory, 29*(2), 75–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01388.x

Jung, D. (2008). "Secularism": A Key to Turkish Politics. In D. Jung & C. Raudvere (Eds.), *Religion, Politics, and Turkey's EU Accession* (pp. 117-134). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kadıoğlu, Z. (2018). Türkiye'de Medya Sahipliği Ekseninde Mülkiyet Yapılarındaki Değişimin Kronolojik Analizi (1950-2010). *İnsan ve İnsan, 5*(16), 100-120.

Kamruzzaman, M. (2021). *Turkish historical series with religious morals expanding conscience of Bangladeshis.* Anadolu Ajansı. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkish-historical-series-with-religious-morals-expanding-conscience-of-bangladeshis/2556471

Karapanagiotis, A. (2024). Framing as an Essential Function of Creating Propaganda: Exploring the Link Between Frames and Propagandizing. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/ 10.2139/ssrn.4977471

Kepenek, Y. (2011). *Development & Structure of the Turkish Economy*. METU Press.

Keyder, Ç. (2006). Moving in from the Margins? Turkey in Europe. *Diogenes, 53*(2), 72–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192106065973

Kohn, H. (2020). *Nationalism*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved November 16, 2021, from https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism

Kyeyune, H. (2021). *Turkish TV series gains traction in Uganda, challenging others*. Anadolu Ajansı. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/turkish-tv-series-gains-traction-in-uganda-challenging-others/2436082

Laclau, E. (2005a). *On Populist Reason*. Verso.

Laclau, E. (2005b). Populism: What's in a Name. In F. Panizza (Ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (pp. 32-49). Verso.

Manovich, L. (2001). *The Language of New Media*. The MIT Press.

March, L. (2007). From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-Populism as a 'Shadow' of Contemporary Socialism. *SAIS Review of International Affairs, 27*(1), 63-77. https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2007.0013

Merriam-Webster. (2024). Discourse. In *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Retrieved December 14, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discourse

Mouzelis, N. (1985). On the Concept of Populism: Populist and Clientelist Modes of Incorporation in Semiperipheral Polities. *Politics & Society, 14*(3), 329–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/003232928501400303

Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition, 39*(4), 541-563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Mumby, D. (1997). The Problem of Hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for Organizational Communication Studies. *Western Journal of Communication, 61*(4), 343–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319709374585

Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance. *The American Political Science Review, 91*(3), 567–583. https://doi.org/10.2307/2952075

Ostiguy, P. (2017). Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.3

Öngen, H. (2017). Devlet Güdümündeki Medyadan Özel Sermaye Medyasına Geçiş: Turgut Özal Dönemi Medya Sermaye Yapısının Değişimi. *Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi,* (59), 26-40.

Pamuk, Ş. (2008). Economic Change in Twentieth-Century Turkey: Is the Glass More Than Half Full? In R. Kasaba (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Modern Turkey Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World* (pp. 266-300). Cambridge University Press.

Panizza, F. (2017). Populism and Identification. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. https://doi.org/ 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.19

Peruzzotti, E. (2019). Laclau's Theory of Populism. In C. de la Torre (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (pp. 33-42). Routledge.

Rydgren, J. (2007). The Sociology of the Radical Right. *Annual Review of Sociology, 33*(1), 241-262. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131752

Ruzza, C. (2009). Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards Uncivil Society? *Policy and Society, 28*(1), 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2009.02.007

Sarfati, Y. (2017). How Turkey's Slide to Authoritarianism Defies Modernization Theory. *Turkish Studies, 18*(3), 395–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2017.1315304

Temiz, D. & Gökmen, A. (2009). The 2000-2001 Financial Crisis in Turkey and the Global Economic Crisis of 2008-2009: Reasons and Comparisons. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies, 1*(1), 1-16. Retrieved from https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ijsshs/issue/26225/276251

Torfing, J. (2005). Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges. In D. Howarth & J. Torfing (Eds.) *Discourse Theory in European Politics* (pp. 1-32). Palgrave Macmillan.

Uştuk, H. (2019). *ABD'den Sonra En Fazla Dizi İhraç Eden Ülke Türkiye*. Anadolu Ajansı. Retrieved September 27, 2023, from https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/kultur-sanat/abdden-sonra-en-fazla-dizi-ihrac-eden-ulke-turkiye/1641524

Üçer, N., & Şolpan, S. (2019). "Packaged Consciousness" Manufactured by Media: Critical Discourse Analysis of April 22nd 2019 Turkish Newspapers' Headlines for the Funeral Incident. *Global Media Journal: Turkish Edition, 10*(19).

van Dijk, T. (1988). *News As Discourse* (1st ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Venizelos, G. (2021). Populism or Nationalism? The 'Paradoxical' Non-Emergence of Populism in Cyprus. *Political Studies*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321721989157

Walton, D. (1997). What Is Propaganda, and What Exactly Is Wrong with It. *Public Affairs Quarterly, 11*(4), 383–413. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40435999

Weyland, K. (2001). Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics, 34*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.2307/422412

Woods, D. (2014). The Many Faces of Populism: Diverse but not Disparate. In D. Woods & B. Wejnert (Eds.), *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives* (1st ed., pp. 1–21). Emerald Books.