

Network-Based Alternative Media in Türkiye: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspective of Media Managers¹

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Abstract

This study examines how digital-born media managers in Türkiye interpret the demand for alternative media and how they justify their claims to “alternativeness” within a politically and economically constrained media environment. The study does not directly measure audience behavior; rather, it analyzes how the concepts of demand and “alternativeness” are constructed within managerial discourse under conditions of media capture and platform dependency.

Semi-structured online interviews were conducted between January 14 and January 24, 2025, with media managers from Gazete Duvar, Gazete Pencere, Medyascope, T24, and Journo. The data were analyzed through a phenomenological reduction process that included verbatim transcription, identification of significant statements, line-by-line coding, and clustering of meaning units into themes using Maxqda 2024. The analysis resulted in four main themes: the definition and perception of alternativeness, social impact and public sphere formation, managerial interpretations of audience demand, and structural

constraints.

Findings indicate that managers frame alternative media as addressing audiences from diverse political positions who seek reliable, non-mainstream journalism. However, alternativeness does not emerge as a fixed identity but as a negotiated positioning. While some outlets strategically adopt the label, others reject it and emphasize professional journalism instead. In the Turkish context, alternativeness appears less as a structural category and more as a positioning practice shaped by political polarization, economic precarity, and regimes of algorithmic visibility. The study contributes to the literature by shifting the discussion of alternative media from normative definitions to managerial meaning-making within a constrained media ecosystem.

Keywords: Alternative media, Networked media, Media capture, Editorial autonomy, Digital journalism.

JEL Codes: L82, O33, Z13

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1. Introduction

The fact that the media has become an industry has led to a binary distinction between those who set the agenda and those who follow it, with the exception of public broadcasting. The agenda has been intervened directly or implicitly, depending on the form of government (democracy, autocracy, etc.). Critical political economy perspectives have long argued that mainstream media may reproduce dominant ideological frameworks (Özçetin, 2019).

With the impact of the internet and social media, changes have begun to occur in this binary distinction. For example, readers have both taken the user name and gained the ability to produce content (Çetin, 2019). Thanks to the Internet, which promised a relatively free environment compared to today, individuals were able to escape from the pressure of the governments in their small media and had the opportunity to express themselves (Durdu, 2024).

In this study, it is questioned whether alternative media, which is outside mainstream media and expands its field with the impulse given by social media, really carries the qualification of alternative media as it is perceived.

It is a widely expressed opinion/argument that the network-based media, which has developed as an extension of a technological formation, is often described as challenging the dominance of traditional media structures (Şahin & Şahin, 2016). However, is there a community that demands an alternative media? The answer to this question was also sought.

Traditional media's integration with power centers has fueled the search for a medium that can genuinely serve as a fourth estate. Network-based media, perceived as outside political and economic influence because of its fragmented structure, has emerged as a key focus of this search and is frequently perceived as a potential alternative (Erimli & Özçağlayan, 2023).

Recent scholarship on media capture has demonstrated how political parallelism and ownership concentration have reshaped the Turkish media system and constrained pluralistic journalism (Akser & Baybars, 2024). These structural transformations form the broader context within which digitally native initiatives operate. At the same time, the increasing distribution of news through aggregators, search engines, and social media platforms has intensified institutional dependency on digital platforms. Comparative research shows that the degree and implications of this dependency vary across media systems (Nicolini et al., 2025).

A review of the literature reveals that theorists primarily discuss the definition and framing of alternative media, favoring disadvantaged groups in

content, the establishment of new production and distribution channels, participation and the use/non-use of capitalist financing tools (Santana & Carpentier, 2010; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). Academic studies, on the other hand, have mostly focused on the observation of selected alternative media through participant observation and how close it comes to the definition of alternative media (Tuğla, 2014; Taylan, 2008). The literature on alternative media largely revolves around definitions and normative criteria. Selected cases are often measured against theoretical expectations. Yet this leaves a basic tension unresolved: in a context like Türkiye, how is the demand for alternative media actually understood? Instead of treating demand as a measurable audience category, this study focuses on how digital-born media managers interpret and articulate this demand. It asks how alternativeness is justified, negotiated, or even strategically framed within a media environment shaped by polarization, media capture, and economic pressure. The issue, then, is not simply whether alternative media exists, but how alternativeness is constructed and sustained under constraint.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Core Definitions of Alternative Media

The term 'alternative' derives from the Latin *alter*, meaning "the other of the two," positioning mainstream and alternative media as relational poles rather than isolated categories (Arıkan, 2023). Despite extensive scholarly engagement, a universal definition remains elusive, and alternative media has historically been described as "insurgent journalism," applied to diverse practices shaped by sociopolitical contexts (Harcup, 2005).

Systematic theorization emerged with Downing's *Radical Media* (1984), which framed alternative media as a vehicle for social and political transformation (Ceyhan, 2009; Downing et al., 2001). Subsequent debates questioned whether alternativeness should be defined normatively or structurally. Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) ask whether alternative media must be exclusively oppositional and progressive, while Downing (2003) demonstrates that even normatively problematic cases may meet structural criteria of "alternative," underscoring the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the term.

In response, Sandoval (2009) argues that "critical content" must constitute the minimum common denominator of alternative media. Yet defining alternativeness solely through content risks overlooking structural dependencies. Even outlets such as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, despite their critical stance, may not structurally qualify as alternative due to the-

ir financing models. Atton (2002) moves the debate forward by identifying criteria related not only to radical content but also to production, distribution, participation, and horizontal organization. These dimensions become particularly complicated in the context of digital-born and entrepreneurial journalism initiatives in Türkiye (Keten, 2023), where economic precarity and platform dependency blur the boundary between critique and incorporation.

Alankuş challenges Western-centric definitions for marginalizing local media dynamics, a problem especially visible in non-Western contexts (Alankuş, 2008). Adaklı similarly argues that merely reversing dominant paradigms does not suffice; alternative media requires creative and political imagination (Adaklı, 2010). For this reason, reducing alternative media to a simple binary opposite of the mainstream (Erimli & Özçağlayan, 2023) is theoretically insufficient. The concept demands a multidimensional evaluation that accounts for both structural positioning and discursive practice.

Building on definitional debates, theoretical discussions have sought to explain both the emergence and the normative grounding of alternative media. Historically, alternative media has been closely associated with social opposition movements and marginalized groups (Alankuş, 2008). As media systems became increasingly industrialized, mainstream institutions aligned with political and economic elites, reinforcing monopolization and standardized content under neoliberal restructuring (Ülkü, 2017). In this context, the inability of traditional media to effectively scrutinize power intensified the demand for alternative forms whose defining feature became criticality (Akveran, 2018).

“Critical media, in contrast, are characterized by critical form and content. There is oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc” (Fuchs, 2010: 179). Fuchs distinguishes alternative media not merely through oppositional discourse but through structural differences in production, organization, financing, and distribution. Whereas mainstream media rely on advertising, hierarchical control, and high-cost technological infrastructures, alternative media are conceptualized as grassroots, participatory, and less dependent on commercial imperatives. This structural emphasis complicates attempts to reduce alternativeness to content alone. Within this broader debate, Bailey et al. (2007) identify four models of alternative media community service, alternative to the mainstream, civil-society-integrated, and rhizomatic thereby questioning the tendency to equate “alternative” with inherent oppositionality. Yet this typology does not entirely settle the issue; it shifts the analytical focus rather than dissolving the conceptual ambiguity. Similarly,

debates structured around objective and subjective approaches move beyond institutional positioning and instead differentiate between content-centered and process-oriented definitions (Sandoval, 2009; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). In the Turkish context, these discussions intersect with analyses of digital labor and “*üretüketim*,” where participatory media practices may appear empowering, although they simultaneously conceal forms of hidden labor (Çetin, 2019).

Yet participation-based models are not without critique. Access to media remains structured by existing hierarchies (Ünal, 2015; Mora, 2008), and fragmented publics may struggle to constitute durable counter-public spheres (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). Habermas’s analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas, 2013; Özçetin et al., 2012) further underscores how capitalist pressures constrain communicative rationality. Participation, therefore, cannot automatically be equated with emancipation (Sandoval, 2009).

From a critical standpoint, alternative media must be evaluated through their capacity to challenge hegemonic structures rather than solely through participatory form. Even outlets that employ capitalist financing mechanisms may qualify as alternative if they sustain critical content and consciousness (Sandoval, 2009; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). These tensions reveal that alternativeness is neither purely structural nor purely discursive; it is negotiated within broader political-economic transformations a tension that becomes particularly salient in Türkiye’s contemporary media environment.

Türkiye’s media landscape can be understood through three major phases: Neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s, the expansion of digital journalism in the early 2000s, and the political rupture following the 2013 Gezi protests.

2.1.1. 1980s–1990s: Neoliberal transformation and concentration

The 1980 military coup and the 24 January economic decisions initiated neoliberal restructuring, enabling cross-sector capital groups to enter the media field (Adaklı, 2010). Public broadcasting weakened as commercialization expanded, narrowing the space for pluralistic voices (Ceyhan, 2009). The relocation from Babiali to İkitelli symbolized a shift toward technologically driven journalism, while columnists emerged as “new aristocrats” (Bali, 2011). By the 1990s, five major media groups controlled nearly 80% of the market (Baytar, 2013; Adaklı, 2010), limiting opportunities for alternative journalism. These transformations laid the structural groundwork for later debates on media capture and self-censorship (Akser & Baybars, 2023).

2.1.2. Early 2000s: Digital openings and entrepreneurial journalism

The rise of online journalism in the 1990s introduced new possibilities. Bianet, pioneered rights-based digital news (Çoban & Ataman, 2015), while newspapers gradually established online editions (Çevikel, 2023). The 2001 economic crisis, which left over two thousand journalists unemployed (Gürel, 2001), accelerated entrepreneurial journalism initiatives (Kaya, 2010). Over time, entrepreneurial models became central to Türkiye's alternative media ecosystem (Keten, 2023). As mainstream outlets moved toward digital platforms (Tuğla, 2014), live broadcasting and new media practices began to compete directly with traditional media (Şahin & Şahin, 2016). Online outlets increasingly diversified into commercial and socially driven formats (Çevikel, 2023).

2.1.3. 2013 Gezi protests: A break in visibility and trust

The Gezi protests marked a significant rupture in public trust. Citizens collectively produced and circulated information (Çoban & Ataman, 2015), while the "penguin documentary" became emblematic of mainstream media failure (Yüksek, 2015). *"Following the Gezi resistance, the political significance and practical modalities of video activism underwent further transformation in response to shifting media and political conditions. The concentration of media ownership and the widespread use of legal and administrative sanctions against journalists led to the convergence of activist and journalistic practices. Activist footage began to circulate through independent digital platforms, contributing to the reshaping of news production and distribution processes"* (Doğanay & Kara, 2025: 18). This rupture accelerated the visibility and legitimacy of network-based alternative media.

2.1.4. Post-2011 media capture and digital authoritarianism

From 2011 onward, intensified media capture produced a hybrid control environment (Akser & Baybars, 2023; Coşkun, 2020). Research shows how capture became embedded in newsroom practices and institutional structures (Akser & Baybars, 2024). More than 90% of media outlets came under direct or indirect government influence (Özgür, 2025), and post-2016 purges further constrained journalistic autonomy (Zihnioğlu, 2023).

Regulatory interventions, including the 2020 social media law and the 2022 disinformation law (Andı et al., 2025), expanded digital oversight. Algorithmic visibility mechanisms and platform dependencies introduced additional structural constraints (Adal,

2025). These developments correspond with a shift toward competitive authoritarianism (Esen & Gümmüşçü, 2016), increasingly described as "hybrid digital authoritarianism" characterized by troll networks, bans, throttling, and shutdowns (Yücel, 2025).

"Turkish public has experienced intense disinformation and the circulation of fake news. The widespread use of fake news has evolved into an informally accepted political strategy of the government, as no substantial measures have been taken to counter it. Thus, the government-friendly media have utilized fake news for propaganda to manipulate and deceive the public" (Kaptan, 2025: 33).

Together, these dynamics define the structural and political conditions within which network-based alternative media operate. Alternative media in Türkiye therefore emerge not in a neutral digital space but within an environment shaped by concentration, regulatory intervention, and platform dependency.

The literature on alternative media largely revolves around definitions, normative criteria, and structural characteristics. Most studies either assess whether specific outlets fit predefined models or empirically measure audience demand. However, particularly in Türkiye, where media capture, political polarization, and platform dependency shape journalistic practice, insufficient attention has been paid to how the demand for alternative media is interpreted and discursively constructed by media actors themselves. This absence is not only methodological but conceptual.

Rather than assuming alternativeness as a fixed category, this study addresses this gap by examining how digital-born media managers in Türkiye interpret demand and justify their claims to "alternativeness." In doing so, it shifts the focus from normative classification and audience measurement to managerial meaning-making within a constrained media environment.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore how digital-born media managers in Türkiye interpret the demand for alternative media and how they evaluate their own claims to alternativeness within the current political and media environment. Rather than directly measuring audience demand, the study examines how this demand is perceived, framed, and articulated by media managers themselves.

Current literature does not address, in an integrated way, how alternative media demand is constructed within managerial discourse in Türkiye and how digitally native outlets justify their position as "alternative." This gap defines the research problem: analyzing managerial interpretations of audience

demand and assessing how these outlets substantiate their claim to alternativeness under conditions of media capture and political pressure.

In line with this purpose, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do digital media managers in Türkiye interpret and frame the demand for alternative media?
2. How do digitally native, network-based media outlets justify, negotiate, or reject their claim to 'alternativeness'?

In this context, the significance of the study lies in examining both the perceived audience demand and the construction of alternativeness through the lived experiences and interpretations of media managers. In a context marked by intensified media capture, these insights contribute to communication scholarship by revealing how alternative media position themselves within a constrained political-economic structure.

3.2. Methodology of the Study

The study employed phenomenology, a qualitative method that explores lived experiences to reveal the essence of phenomena as perceived by individuals. Following Husserl, phenomenology neither seeks objective facts nor external reality but requires bracketing the natural attitude to reach a phenomenon's core (Yalçın, 2022). Thus, the researcher is expected to set aside personal feelings, thoughts, and prejudices about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2015). As Baltacı points out, qualitative research prioritizes depth and detail over generalization, focusing on the internal and conceptual structures of events and phenomena (Baltacı, 2019). Similarly, Uslu and Demir emphasize that the phenomenological approach is especially valuable for revealing unknown experiences, perceptions, and meanings through in-depth interviews (Uslu & Demir, 2022).

Phenomenology was chosen both for its epistemological stance and its suitability for exploring alternative media managers' perceptions, experiences, and meaning-making regarding the demand for alternative media in Türkiye and whether network-based outlets qualify as alternative.

3.3. Population of the Study

All network-based alternative media in Türkiye Broadcasting in Turkish constitute the population of the research. The study population was formed based on the Türkiye Digital Media Report prepared by the International Press Institute (IPI) (Kızılkaya & Ütücü, 2021). Only digital web journalism media, digital social media and video-based news commentary platforms were included in the study population.

3.4. Sample of the Research

Polkinghorne emphasizes that the number of participants in phenomenological research can range between 5 and 25 (Creswell, 2015: 81). In this study, a list of network-based alternative media organizations in Türkiye was first compiled based on previous academic studies and the International Press Institute's (IPI) Digital Media Report. The sample was determined from the universe of digital-born alternative media in Türkiye using a quota sampling method. The quotas were defined along three axes: financing model (donation/grant-hybrid, advertising, subscription/PDF), publication format (text-oriented, video-focused, hybrid), and editorial self-positioning ("alternative mainstream," rejecting the "alternative" label, emphasizing "independence").

Ten cases were initially selected to represent these quotas. Five of the invited organizations declined to participate. Consequently, the research proceeded with interviews involving representatives of Gazete Duvar, Gazete Pencere, Journo, T24, and Medyascope. Following Polkinghorne's recommendations, it was concluded that five cases would be sufficient, and the study continued with the existing participants.

In addition to Polkinghorne's recommendation for phenomenological research (5–25 participants), the sample size was further guided by the concept of information power. *Qualitative interview studies may benefit from sampling strategies by shifting attention from numerical input of participants to the contribution of new knowledge from the analysis. Information power indicates that the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower number of participants is needed* (Malterud et al., 2016: 1759). Given the study's focused aim, the high specificity of the participants, the established theoretical framework, and the depth and quality of the interviews, the information power of the present sample was deemed sufficient despite the modest number of cases.

The selection of these five outlets is methodologically and analytically significant, reflecting variation in financing models, publication formats, and editorial self-positioning. Editorial self-positioning differs: Gazete Duvar calls itself an "alternative mainstream," T24 and Medyascope reject the "alternative" label in favor of journalism itself, and Journo emphasizes independence as a criterion. Their varied audience profiles, as described by the managers, provide insight into how demand for alternative media is interpreted across different segments in Türkiye and how network-based outlets position themselves in response to this perceived demand.

To enhance transparency, the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants are outlined below. The five participants held senior editorial and managerial positions within their res-

pective organizations. The interviewees consisted of three editors-in-chief/general coordinators and two senior editorial coordinators. Their ages ranged from 44 to 60, and their professional experience in journalism ranged between 22 and 37 years. All participants were male senior media professionals, reflecting the gendered composition of top editorial leadership within the selected outlets. This level of seniority and professional background is analytically significant, as the study focuses on managerial meaning-making processes.

3.5. Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on digital-based alternative media in Türkiye web, social media, and video outlets to directly examine the networked media ecosystem. Print newspapers and television channels were excluded due to their distinct institutional structures and limited use of interactive, participatory digital networks. This scope enables analysis of alternative media dynamics through the multi-channel distribution and participatory practices unique to digital environments.

Interviews were conducted between January 14 and 24, 2025, on prearranged dates, each lasting about one hour and audio-recorded for verbatim transcription. This duration allowed participants to share detailed experiences and perceptions, ensuring data depth and timeliness.

Participants may have spoken cautiously on some issues due to political and economic pressures. Another limitation is that data reflect only the perspectives of media managers, excluding journalists, reporters, and readers.

3.6. Data Collection

Interviews were one of the first data collection tools that came to mind in phenomenological studies. The interview has various advantages, such as interaction, flexibility, probing and probing to reveal the experiences of the phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Interviews with alternative media managers were conducted through the Zoom platform and the managers were asked questions in accordance with a semi-structured interview technique. The questions determined before the interviews were tested in a control group and necessary corrections were made. Interviews were conducted with the editors-in-chief and news coordinators of Gazete Duvar, Gazete Pencere, Medyascope, T24 and Journo. In order to prevent the identity of the participants from being disclosed, participants were named as Participant 1 and Participant 2. Accordingly, Gazete Duvar participant will be referred to as "Participant 1", Gazete Pencere participant as "Participant 2", Medyascope participant as "Participant 3", T24 par-

ticipant as "Participant 4" and Journo participant as "Participant 5".

3.7. Analysing the Data

According to the reductionist method in phenomenological research, "a list of important statements is developed. The researcher then finds statements about how individuals experience the subject matter and lists these important statements. They are then grouped into larger units of information called meaning units or themes" (Creswell, 2015: 84).

Data analysis followed a phenomenological reduction process. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and significant statements were noted during the initial reading. Second, statements reflecting participants' experiences were identified and coded line by line. Third, similar codes were grouped into meaning units and organized into preliminary categories. These categories were then compared, refined, and merged to form higher-order themes. Throughout the process, codes and themes were iteratively checked against the raw data to ensure consistency and to minimize researcher bias. The final thematic structure was established only after repeated comparison and confirmation across all interviews. The study was analyzed using the Maxqda 2024 Qualitative Data Analysis Program.

3.8. Validity and Reliability

While various methods to ensure validity and reliability in quantitative research, it is more difficult to measure and ensure these concepts in qualitative research (Baltacı, 2019). In qualitative studies, it is important to establish long-term interactions with participants to increase the credibility of data. For this reason, the interviews were conducted twice on two different dates: Pre-interview and post-interview. In addition, at the end of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything they wanted to add to ensure participant approval. To support the methodological soundness of the research, the opinions of academic members working on the research methods were obtained.

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4. Findings

The code cloud, created before thematic analysis, clarifies interviewees' perceptions of network-based alternative media and highlights key trends shaping the study. By visualizing conceptualizations and po-

ints of emphasis, it reveals through frequency analysis the prominent codes that illuminate the study's main research questions.

Interviewees frequently highlighted **"Differentiation from Traditional Media,"** noting that alternative outlets diverge from the mainstream not only technically but also in content production, journalistic approach, and public responsibility. This distinction is both discursive and formal. **"Diversity of Media"** and **"Diversity of Agenda"** capture their ability to cover wide-ranging topics across multiple platforms, while **"Network-Based Alternative Mainstream"** signals that some have developed their own mainstream structures. **"Alternative Discourse Production"** and **"Original News Approach"** reflect meaning at the level of content and representation, whereas **"Journalism in the Shadow of Corporate Interests"** criticizes traditional media's independence problems. Finally, **"Interaction with Social Movements"** and **"Intertwined with Activism"** indicate that these outlets both report on and participate in social opposition (Figure 1). Codes

such as **"Digital Publishing,"** **"Fast and Flexible Journalism"** and **"Fast Access to Information"** which stand out in line with the requirements of the digital age, reflect the importance given to speed and accessibility in content production, while the codes **"Versatile Perspective"** and **"Public Opinion Forming Effect"** reveal the pluralistic structure and effectiveness of these channels. The **"Hybrid Structure"** describes the hybrid forms developed between traditional and alternative structures, while **"Institutional Credibility"** and **"Reliable Journalism"** emphasize the sustainability and reputation concerns of these structures. The codes **"Independence"** and **"Impartiality"** reveal internal debates about the ideological and economic positioning of alternative media; **"New Media Ecosystem"** shows the interaction of these structures with current media technologies. Finally, the codes **"Resistance to Change and Pressure"** and **"Reader Contribution"** reveal both the process of confronting external pressures and the interactive and participatory relationship forms established with the audience (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Code Cloud Obtained as a Result of the Analysis - Most Repeated Codes

Based on the findings obtained from the interviews within the scope of this study, the data were analyzed using a phenomenological analysis design. In this context, according to the hierarchical code sub code model, the following four basic themes were revealed (Figure 2).

1. Definition and Perception of Alternative Media: Participants offered varied definitions of alternative media, emphasizing freedom, independence, and the effort to create a counter-hegemonic discourse distinguishing it from traditional outlets.
2. Social Impact and Public Space Creation: This theme explores alternative media's capacity to expose social problems, raise public awareness, and support social movements by generating counter-discourses that challenge dominant media and foster democratization.
3. Reader Profile for Alternative Media: This theme reflects how managers interpret and describe their readership rather than offering a direct measurement of audiences. The analysis addresses both audience profiles and the motives attributed to them by the participants. Managers consistently portray readers as individuals seeking independent and reliable information, often turning to alternative media due to distrust of traditional outlets.
4. Challenges and Limitations: Publishers face financial constraints, low advertising revenues, and difficulty developing sustainable models, while censorship, state intervention, and social pressures further restrict content production and distribution.

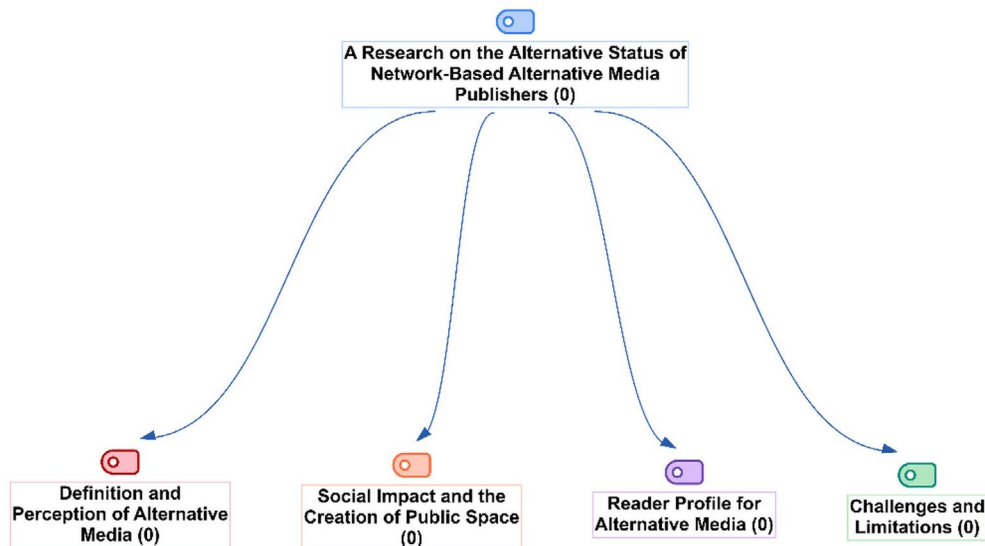


Figure 2. Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model-Themes

The results showed that the interviewees had a significant density around certain themes. We determined which themes, categories and sub codes were emphasized more. Thus, the prominent issues and perspectives of alternative media broadcasters were identified and how these themes were made sense by the broadcasters was revealed.

1) The first theme analyzed according to the model was **"Definition and Perception of Alternative Media"**. Within the framework of this theme, certain sub codes that the interviewees concentrated on emerged. In this context, the most emphasized element was **"Differentiation from Traditional Media"** (f=13). The participants stated that alternative media is organized in a form that differs from traditional media structures and discourses and that this differentiation is a fundamental determinant. As Participant 4 noted, *"In Türkiye, journalism has weakened so much that anyone doing proper journalism is labeled as alternative."* Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized the structural nature of this distinction: *"There can be no alternative to journalism itself, yet within the current media environment we are automatically perceived as alternative"*. Following this, the sub codes **"Digital Publishing"** (f=10) and **"Alternative Discourse Production"** (f=10) reveal that alternative media are active through digital media and construct new, critical discourses against dominant discourses. **"Versatile Perspective"** (f=9) shows that the interviewees evaluate alternative media as a structure that does not reduce alternative media to a single perspective and includes the voices of different social segments. As Participant 3 highlighted, *"This organization initially emerged as a YouTube channel. The website was established later, followed by the launch of other digital platforms"*. Similarly, Participant 2 emphasized the centrality of digital-native production processes: *"Internet teams focus on producing original news because it is the only way to survive in digital media"*.

Sub-codes such as **"Network Based Alternati-**

ve Mainstream" (f=8) and **"News Orientation"** (f=8) indicate that alternative media creates its own ecosystem on digital platforms and is structured on the basis of news production. The codes **"Impartiality"** (f=7) and **"Hybrid Structure"** (f=7) reveal that these publications both maintain their claim of independence and have a mixed structure that brings together different media practices. Other prominent sub-codes include **"Original Journalism"** (f=6), **"Interconnectedness with Activism"** (f=5), **"Libertarian Stance of Alternative Media"** (f=5), **"Fast and Flexible Journalism"** (f=5), **"Reader Contribution"** (f=5), **"Independence"** (f=4) and **"Reliable Journalism"** (f=4). As Participant 1 explained, *"As Gazete Duvar, we had to build our own ecosystem in the digital sphere; finding space in the mainstream was simply not possible"*. Similarly, Participant 3 highlighted the hybrid nature of contemporary newsrooms: *"We operate with a hybrid structure; we follow traditional newsroom routines while also adapting to the pace of digital platforms"*. These sub codes reveal a tendency for alternative media to offer innovative, participatory and dynamic structures. Lastly; **"Rights Orientation"** (f=3), **"Emphasis on Participatory and Pluralistic Broadcasting"** (f=3), **"Local Reflections of Current Issues"** (f=3), **"Stance Against Dominant Discourse"** (f=3), Codes such as **"Critical Perspective"** (f=2) and **"Pursuit of Truth"** (f=2), which are expressed with lower frequencies but are considered qualitatively important, show that alternative media exhibits a stance against the mainstream not only in terms of form but also in terms of content. As Participant 5 emphasized, *"Alternative media should prioritize rights-based journalism; otherwise it becomes indistinguishable from the mainstream"*. Similarly, Participant 1 noted, *"Local stories matter because they reveal what the mainstream either overlooks or intentionally avoids"*. Through these sub codes, the interviewees drew a multidimensional framework for the definition and perception of alternative media (Figure 3).

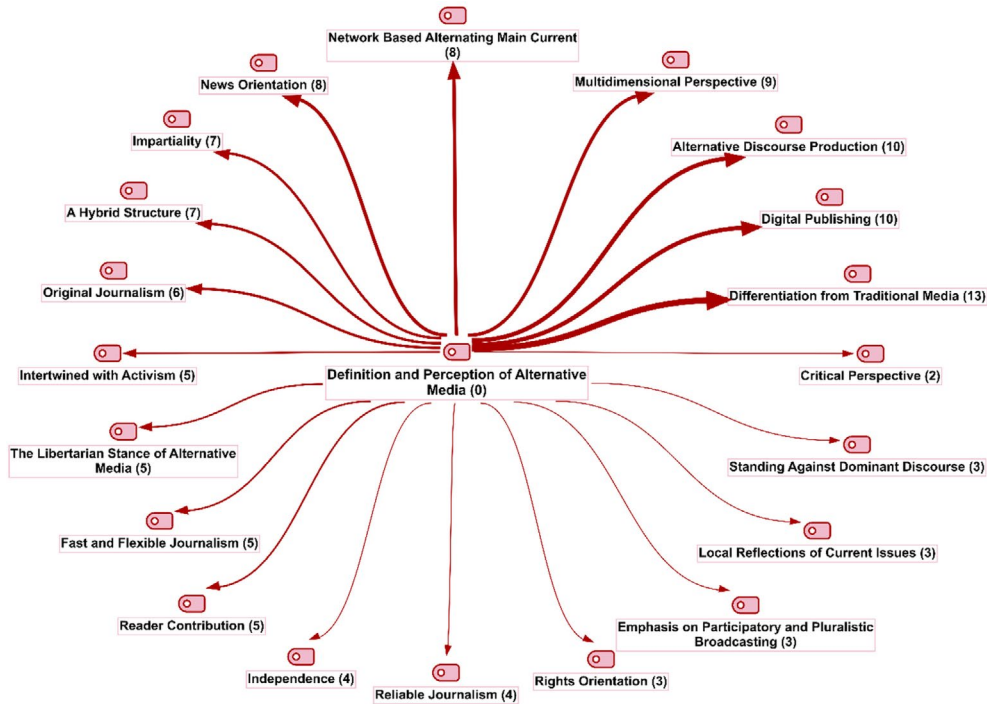


Figure 3. Code Sub-Code Sections Model - Alternative Media Definition and Perception Theme and Sub-Codes

The absence of a unified definition of alternative media is reflected in the interviewees' own positioning. Participants articulated divergent understandings shaped by Türkiye's political and media environment.

Participant 1 from *Gazete Duvar* describes the outlet as an "alternative mainstream," arguing that political developments have blurred the boundaries between mainstream and alternative journalism. Participant 2 from *Gazete Pencere* stated: "Actually, when we say alternative, we can include all elements outside the mainstream. This can include both the left wing and the extreme right wing. I also include digital media as a third option."

Participant 3 from *Medyascope* rejected the label: "We are not alternative media. There is no alternative to journalism." Similarly, Participant 4 from *T24* stated, "Since journalism is weak in Türkiye, the work of doing proper journalism is called an alternative. It has become very confusing; those in opposition are called alternatives. We do not aim to view ourselves as an alternative."

Participant 5 from *Journo* emphasized objectivity: "Instead of such subjective concepts that everyone may perceive differently, objective criteria should be used, such as independence."

These statements indicate that alternativeness is perceived less as a fixed identity and more as a contextual designation shaped by political polarization and the weakened condition of mainstream journalism.

Divergent views also emerged regarding citizen journalism. Participant 3 stated, "Ordinary citizens are only a source of news for us. Anything that co-

mes from there must pass through the verification mechanisms. Citizens cannot be journalists." Participant 2 expressed caution: "All of them need to be questioned. Thus, there is a serious need for editorial knowledge and verification. However, the speed of the Internet and the lust for clicks cause mistakes to be made." In contrast, Participant 1 stated, "We have become the address of an effort to combine citizen journalism with conventional media and adapt it to the Internet."

All interviewees also emphasized their commitment to covering marginalized groups and producing original reporting despite structural constraints. Participant 1 noted, "We subscribe to almost all of the agencies. Each agency had its own language baggage. We have changed the title, spots, and introduction of the news." Participant 4 emphasized, "We do a lot of news that requires deep work. The readership rates of LGBTI news and news about disadvantaged groups cannot be compared to magazine content... We cannot avoid these news items because they do not create traffic."

2) The second theme, "**Social Impact and Creation of Public Space**," highlights network-based alternative media's influence on social processes and the public sphere. Interviewees most often cited "**Public Opinion Forming Effect**" (f=7) and "**Interaction with Social Movements**" (f=7), noting that alternative media can shape opinion and amplify social movements. "**Transformative Media Role**" (f=6) reflects its potential to transform social structures, while "**New Media Ecosystem**" (f=5) underscores its integration with emerging digital communication dynamics. Unlike traditional outlets, alternative media foster a more horizontal, interac-

tive, and participatory environment. **“Contribution to Awareness Campaigns” (f=4)** shows its role in raising social sensitivity, and **“Formation of Alternative Publics” (f=3)** indicates new spaces where marginalized groups can voice their agendas. As Participant 5 noted, *“When we publish stories on social issues, we immediately see responses from civil society networks; this shows how influential alter-*

native media can be in raising awareness”. Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized, *“Alternative platforms give space to groups who have no channel to speak elsewhere; this alone creates a new kind of public sphere”*. Overall, alternative media act not only as news producers but as agents of social transformation and creators of new digital publics (Figure 4).

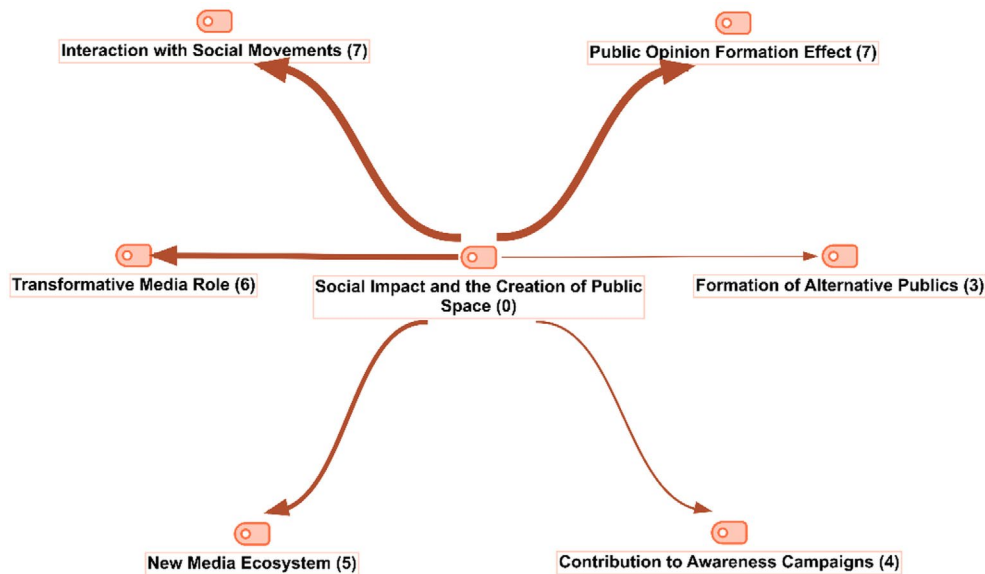


Figure 4. Code Sub-Code Divisions Model - Social Impact and Public Space Creation Theme - Sub-Codes

Under this theme, interviewees were also asked whether alternative media fragment the public sphere or influence mainstream outlets. Participants generally rejected the idea that alternative media cause fragmentation. Participant 5 argued that rather than fragmenting the public sphere, alternative media counteract monopolization and monotony. He also noted that his research was cited not only in Türkiye but also by outlets such as Reuters, BBC, and the Wall Street Journal.

Participant 1 stated, *“It would be too ambitious to say that alternative media set the agenda, but we have seen that many of the news we report are adapted to their own language and published in the mainstream media 1-2 days later,”* suggesting a reciprocal relationship between mainstream and alternative outlets. Participant 2 similarly observed, *“We use both the news of Duvar and the news of ABC with reference. Therefore, visibility does not decrease. But on the other hand, we come to the point where all fifty media outlets use the same news. The quality of content is decreasing. This is also due to the lack of staff.”* While emphasizing increased visibility, he also pointed to concerns about declining content quality.

Participant 3 stressed that visibility must be accompanied by credibility: *“It is important for these organisations to increase their visibility. There is an organic way and a fraudulent way. The dishonest way is to get a bot account, write news with seo content, put ridiculous photos, etc. Or you can do it organically like us. Of course, this takes years.”* These state-

ments indicate that social impact is understood not merely in terms of reach, but in relation to journalistic standards and institutional reputation.

3) The third important theme was **“Reader Profile for Alternative Media”**. This theme examines how managers describe the audiences of network-based alternative media and the reasons attributed to these preferences. Analyses related to the theme were structured into two main categories: **“Audience”** and **“Reason for Preference”**.

According to the findings obtained in the category of **Readership**, the interviewees defined various groups regarding the reader profile of alternative media. The most emphasized sub-code was **“Intersection Cluster-All Segments” (f=4)**, which indicates that alternative media can appeal to different segments of society and is followed by a wide range of audiences. Additionally, more specific audience groups were identified. These groups include **“Youth” (f=1)**, **“Academics” (f=1)**, **“Dissidents” (f=1)**, **“Activists” (f=1)**, **“Conservatives” (f=1)**, **“Foreign Readers” (f=1)** and **“Journalists” (f=1)**. These sub-codes suggest that managers perceive alternative media as being followed not only by a certain ideological group but also by individuals from different views and social positions. Thus, managers evaluate alternative media as appealing to different audience profiles in terms of both pluralism and diversity. (Figure 5). As Participant 3 explained, *“Our audience is diverse by nature; we reach people who would never follow the same outlet in the mainstream sphere”*.

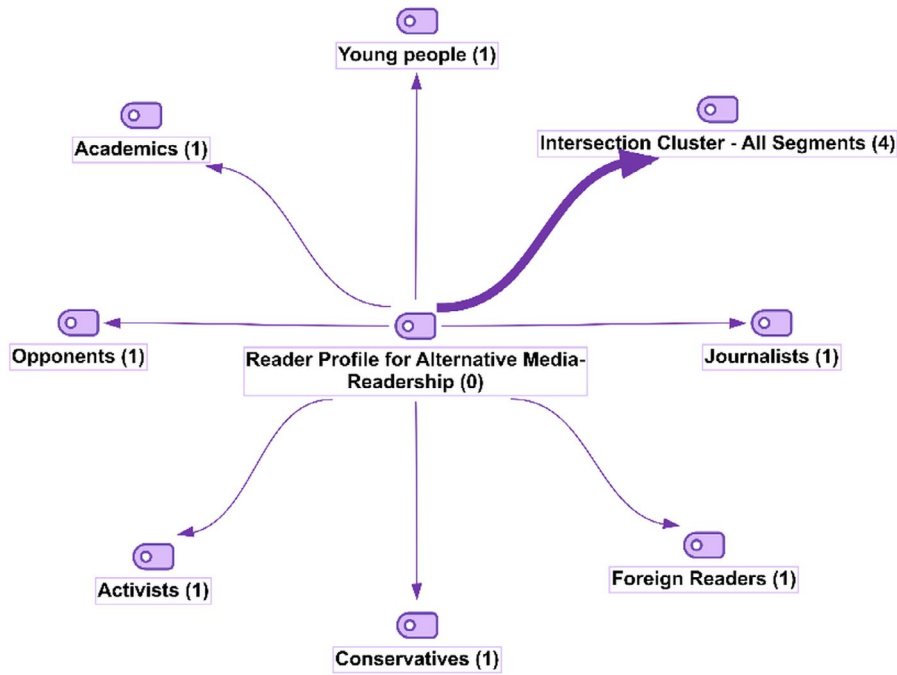


Figure 5. Code Sub-Code Sections Model-Reader Profile Theme for Alternative Media-Reader Audience Category

The “Reasons for Preference” category reflects how managers interpret the functional, contextual, and structural factors driving the choice of network-based alternative media. The most frequent sub-code, **“Diversity of Media”** (f=12), shows their flexibility to deliver content across multiple platforms and formats. Next, **“Agenda Diversity”** (f=6) highlights their ability to surface issues overlooked by the mainstream. **“Access to Fast Information”** (f=4), **“Institutional Reliability”** (f=4), and **“Original News Approach”** (f=4) further reflect perceptions of timeliness, credibility, and originality (Figure 6). Participant 1 noted, “We cover issues that never make it into mainstream agendas, and readers come to us precisely for that”.

Less frequent but noteworthy sub-codes include **“Interest Changing with Political Developments”** (f=1) and **“Increased Access in Times of Crisis”** (f=1), indicating that managers observe an increase in interest in alternative media, especially during periods of political uncertainty or crises. Participant 2 stated, “Whenever political tension rises, we see a clear spike in readership because people seek non-manipulated information”. Participant 4 emphasized, “During crises, readers turn to us because our updates are immediate and not filtered through political interests”. Overall, this category suggests that managers attribute readership demand to the flexible, pluralistic, and dynamic structure of alternative media, which they believe offers an alternative to the limitations of traditional outlets.(Figure 6).

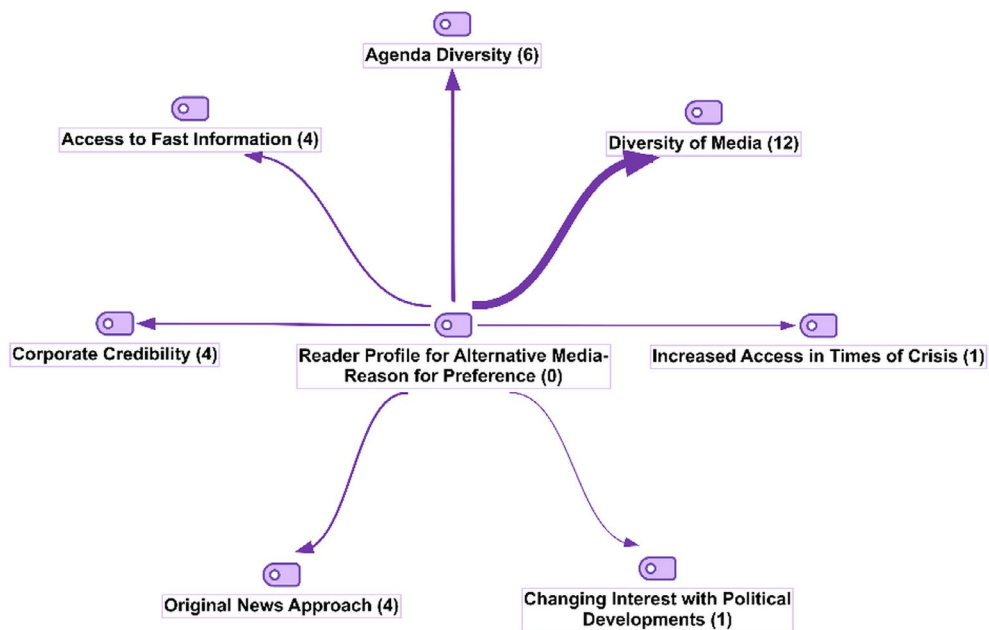


Figure 6. Code Sub-Code Sections Model - Reader Profile Theme for Alternative Media - Reason for Preference Category

In this section, the interviewees were first asked to provide information about the channels they bro-

adcast. Accordingly, the presence of media in the sample in the channels is as follows:

Table 1. Alternative Media and the Channels They Broadcast on

Alternative Media	Gazete Duvar	Gazete Pencere	Medyascope	T24	Journo
Social Media Platforms	Bluesky	Facebook	Blusky	Dailymotion	Facebook
	Dailymotion	Instagram	Facebook	Facebook	Instagram
	Facebook	PDF Baskı	Instagram	Flipboard	Linkedin
	Instagram	X	Linkedin	Instagram	X
	Soundcloud	YouTube	Spotify	Linkedin	
	Spotify		X	X	
	Tiktok		YouTube	YouTube	
	X				
	YouTube				

According to Table 1, all outlets in the sample actively use multiple digital platforms in order to maximize accessibility and distribution. Gazete Duvar broadcasts on nine channels, Gazete Pencere on five, Medyascope on seven, T24 on seven, and Journo on four. Facebook, Instagram, and X are used by all outlets, while YouTube functions as a central platform for most of them. This distribution pattern indicates that network-based alternative media operate within an expanded and interconnected digital environment rather than through a single primary channel.

However, interviewees describe this multi-platform presence less as a strategic preference and more as a structural necessity. As Participant 1 stated, *"Using many platforms is not a choice anymore; it is a matter of survival for alternative outlets."* Participant 4 similarly noted, *"We try every way to deliver our news to our readers. But our strength is in written content. For example, Medyascope is based on videos."* Participant 3 explained the gradual expansion process: *"This place first emerged as a YouTube channel. Then the website was established. Other social media channels were opened as time passed. But we cannot access all of them because we do not have enough manpower."* These statements suggest that platform diversification increases visibility but simultaneously intensifies organizational pressure.

Algorithmic dependency further complicates this structure. Participant 1 explained, *"Our whole endeavor is to create a democratic environment and get out of echo chambers. The problems of people that need to be discussed are not even on the agenda of the media. For journalists, this is a daily test. You may find yourself endeavouring to report what is readable and popular. The way out of the echo chamber is to report reliable, accurate news."* Despite efforts to expand across platforms, visibility and sustainability remain shaped by technological infrastructures beyond editorial control.

Interaction with readers is similarly constrained. Participant 4 remarked, *"We want to engage more, but limited staff means we cannot respond as sys-*

tematically as we would like." Participant 2 stated, *"We mostly receive feedback from the newspaper's e-mail account. We do not open comments on YouTube because it requires serious energy. It can also have legal consequences."* Participant 3 emphasized membership-based engagement: *"It is important because there are thousands of people who support us through memberships. Both on YouTube and Patreon. Therefore, we want to grow this audience. The goal for us is to build the audience there, to have this conversation and to have people introduce our presence to others. We get back to everyone."*

Overall, while network-based alternative media expand across multiple platforms to increase reach, their visibility, sustainability, and participatory capacity remain structurally mediated by technological and organizational constraints.

4) The final theme, **"Challenges and Restrictions,"** highlights the structural, economic, and sectoral problems facing network-based alternative media from production to distribution. Interviewees most frequently cited **"Journalism in the Shadow of Corporate Interests"** (f=8), indicating that capital ties and conflicts of interest suppress independent journalism and weaken resistance to hegemonic structures. **"Future of the Media Sector"** (f=6) and **"Resistance to Change and Pressure"** (f=6) further reveal that sectoral uncertainty and institutional resistance to innovation pose major obstacles for alternative outlets (Figure 7).

Economically based problems were captured by the codes **"Economic Sustainability Problems"** (f=5), **"Advertising Difficulties"** (f=5), and **"Income Diversification"** (f=4), reflecting the absence of sustainable financial models, limited advertising access, and challenges in generating alternative revenues—all serious threats to long-term viability. **"Censorship and Self-Censorship"** (f=4) and **"Resistance to Change and Pressure"** (f=6) underscore political constraints that can curb independent news production. Finally, **"Human Resources/Team Limitations"** (f=4) and **"Lack of Institutionalization"** (f=3) show how small staffs and weak institutional structu-

res hinder consistent content production (Figure 7). Digital publishing brings its own challenges. Sub-codes such as **“Copyright Struggle”** (f=3), **“Platform-Based Blocking”** (f=2), and **“Digital Security Risks”** (f=2) highlight technical and legal issues including content protection, limited visibility, and cybersecurity threats. Participant 3 noted, *“When platforms limit our visibility, it directly affects our income and our ability to sustain journalism”*. **“Prejudices against Alternative Media”** (f=3), **“Public Visibility”** (f=2), **“Inevitability of Transformation”**

(f=1), and **“Change in the Reader–Media Relationship”** (f=1) reflect difficulties in social acceptance, adapting to shifting consumption habits, and redefining audience relations. As Participant 1 stated, *“Some people dismiss us outright just because we are not part of the mainstream structure”*. Overall, the theme **“Challenges and Restrictions”** shows that alternative media confront multidimensional structural and practical obstacles that directly shape production processes (Figure 7).

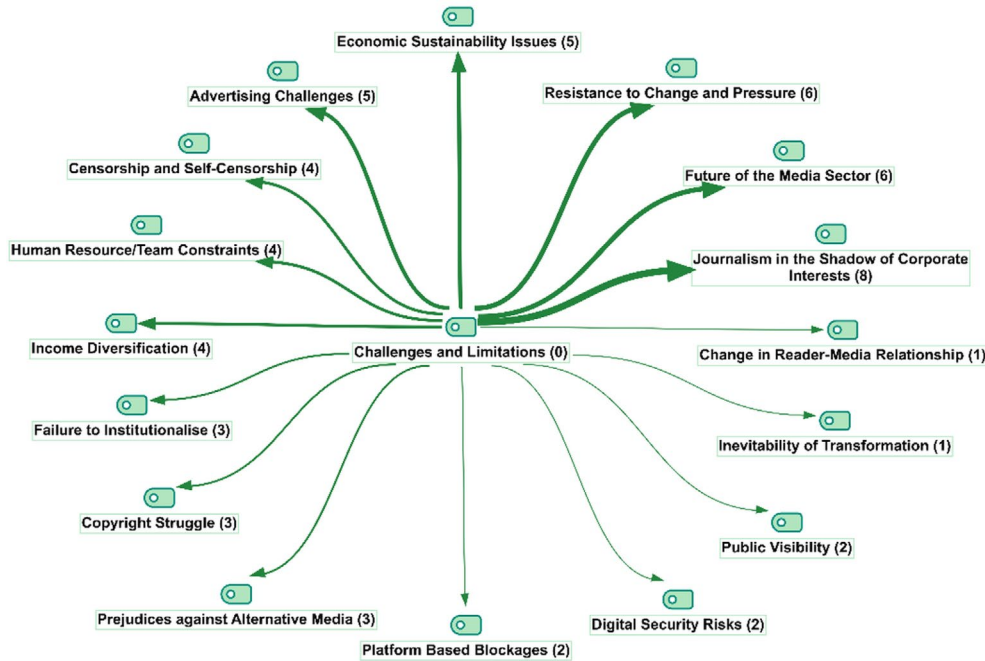


Figure 7. Code Sub-Code Segments Model - Challenges and Constraints Theme - Sub-Codes

The following table was constructed based on the data obtained from the interviewees regarding working conditions and organizational structure.

Table 2. Alternative Media and Working Conditions - Organisational Structure

	Place of Work	Office Layout	Number of Employees in the Team	Volunteer Work	Decision Making Processes	Hierarchy
Gazete Duvar	Apartment	Open	40	Non	Participation Available	Horizontal
Gazete Pencere	Apartment	Room	18	Authors	Limited Participation	Horizontal
Medyascope	Plaza	Open	27	Non	Limited Participation	Horizontal
T24	Business Centre	Open	50	Non	No Participation	Vertical
Journo	Business Centre	Open	11 permanent 200 copyrighted	Non	Participation Available	Horizontal

According to Table 2, Gazete Duvar and Gazete Pencere operate from apartments, T24 and Journo from business centers, and Medyascope from a plaza. All outlets use open-office layouts, except Gazete Pencere, which converted apartment rooms into offices. Team sizes vary considerably: T24 employs the largest staff, followed by Gazete Duvar (40), Medyascope (27), Gazete Pencere (18), and Journo (11 permanent staff and 200 copyright-based contributors). Voluntary participation is generally absent, except for periodic volunteer writers at Gazete Pencere. Decision-making processes are described as participatory at Gazete Duvar and Journo, limited at Gazete Pencere and Medyascope, and non-participatory at T24. Hierarchical structures are horizontal in all outlets except T24, which maintains a vertical hierarchy.

Regarding participation in managerial decision-making processes, Participant 1 stated: *"In cases required by the daily hierarchy of journalism, we definitely act according to the classical newspaper organisation. We hold meetings on what the orientation of the newspaper should be at critical times and on the financial situation,"* emphasizing that horizontal organization coexists with professional newsroom routines.

Participant 2 noted, *"Of course, we share strategic or editorial policy decisions. But in this business, there needs to be someone who has the final say"* pointing to a model of limited participation within a structured leadership framework.

The most explicit defense of hierarchy came from Participant 4: *"Journalism is a hierarchical profession. Of course there is a hierarchy in decision-making processes. Let's not think of it like a fanzine made by young people coming together. Therefore, there is a serious hierarchy."*

These statements indicate that although alternative media frequently emphasize independence, their organizational structures vary between participatory and vertically organized models.

Regarding revenue structures, interviewees described diverse and evolving financing strategies. Participant 1 stated that they use digital subscriptions, crowdfunding, digital advertising, grants, and Patreon. Participant 2 explained: *"We cannot find grants and crowdfunding. We buy digital adverts, Google adverts are very critical for us. Apart from that, we have small advertisements from private companies. Our PDF newspaper has subscribers, is it enough to turn the wheel? For 5 years we have been struggling to survive."*

Participant 3 described a shifting revenue mix: *"When I arrived in 2019, funding was 95 % grants; now grants are down to 40 %, with 60 % from our own income. Sources include subscriptions (Patreon, YouTube, and soon the website), advertising (direct sales, sponsorships), and programmatic reve-*

nues from Google and YouTube. We are also eligible for Press Advertisement Agency support. Currently, grants provide 40 %, memberships 30 %, and advertising 30 % of income."

Participant 4 stated: *"We once used crowdfunding for video production, which was successful but not repeated. We have an inactive Patreon account, and our main income is advertising. In the early years, lacking ad revenue, we produced video content for various organizations' websites, which initially sustained us. As advertising declined, we returned to video production and added a third income source organizing events."*

Only Participant 5 diverged from these mixed models: *"We do not accept advertising, sponsorship, subscriptions or donations. The copyright support project is entirely financed by the Journalists' Union of Türkiye and the European Union."*

Interviewees also emphasized sectoral and legal pressures. Participant 1 stated, *"We have difficulties from transport to technical facilities. Not to mention the financial dimension."* Participant 2 added, *"When you have a budget, you can find staff. You can employ experienced editors instead of trainee editors. Otherwise, you have to run after the work yourself... Another difficulty is that, for example, our responsible manager was detained."*

Participant 3 highlighted legal and financial strain: *"Our most important problem is financial and human resources. For a while, we used to receive 10-15 content removal notices a week. This was a tiring situation. There are times when we think twice whether we should report this news."*

Participant 5 noted, *"We do not face problems that are very different from the problems encountered in journalism in the world in general. In the case of Türkiye, access restrictions and violations of freedom of the press are added to these problems."*

Overall, these findings show that network-based alternative media operate under intertwined economic, organizational, and legal constraints that directly shape editorial practice and institutional sustainability.

5. Discussion

The findings show that, from the perspective of digital media managers, "alternative media" in Türkiye is not a fixed identity but a strategically negotiated position. While Gazete Duvar defines itself as an "alternative mainstream," T24 and Medyascope deliberately distance themselves from the label, emphasizing professional journalistic standards. This divergence suggests that alternativeness operates less as a stable category and more as a contextual stance shaped by political polarization and credibility concerns. In this respect, the Turkish case does not merely confirm Atton's (2002) claim that alterna-

tive media resists singular definition; it shows that rejecting the “alternative” label may itself function as a tactical positioning within a polarized media environment.

Participants’ emphasis on independence from corporate conglomerates and political patronage aligns with Sandoval and Fuchs’ (2010) argument that autonomy and critical function constitute core dimensions of alternative media. However, under conditions of entrenched media capture, autonomy appears not only as an ethical commitment but also as an operational necessity. Alternative outlets in Türkiye do not simply expand discursive diversity; they partially compensate for structural deficiencies in mainstream journalism. This quasi-public role complicates classical understandings of alternative media as marginal or purely counter-hegemonic, suggesting instead a hybrid positioning between opposition and institutional substitution.

Audience patterns, as described by the interviewees, further complicate conventional assumptions. Managers emphasize that engagement through Instagram, YouTube, and messaging applications reflects the platform-dependent infrastructures within which alternative media in Türkiye operate. While digital participation is often associated with youth engagement, participants indicate that sustainability relies equally on subscription-based and diasporic support networks. According to the managers, the presence of transnational subscribers situates Turkish alternative media within a dispersed communicative sphere that extends beyond national boundaries. At the same time, they acknowledge that this expansion increases reliance on corporate digital platforms and reinforces structural dependency.

Similarly, the findings on readership reflect managerial interpretations rather than direct audience measurement. Although outlets describe heterogeneous and cross-sectional publics, participants note that political positioning and platform ecology shape patterns of concentration. Managers report that demand appears to intensify during moments of political crisis, when audiences seek non-manipulated and reliable information. In this sense, alternativeness emerges in their accounts not only as a structural distinction from the mainstream but also as an epistemic resource grounded in trust and verification within a polarized media environment.

The findings on organizational structure show that alternative media do not necessarily operate through fully horizontal models. While some outlets describe participatory decision-making, others openly defend hierarchical newsroom structures as professionally necessary. This suggests that alternativeness does not automatically mean the absence of hierarchy.

The findings also complicate the assumption that alternative media necessarily fragment the public

sphere. Interviewees describe a reciprocal relationship in which alternative and mainstream outlets circulate, adapt, and reference one another’s content. Social impact, therefore, appears to depend not only on visibility but also on credibility and professional standards. This suggests that network-based alternative media operate within a shared media ecology rather than as isolated counter-publics.

Financial fragility and regulatory exposure constitute intertwined constraints. Consistent with Fuchs (2010), outlets rely on mixed revenue models combining advertising, subscriptions, grants, and donations. Yet unlike many Western contexts, economic precarity in Türkiye intersects directly with legal interventions, algorithmic visibility regimes, and broader authoritarian tendencies. Alternative media thus operates within a dual pressure structure market dependency and political constraint that transforms sustainability into both an economic and democratic challenge. Under such conditions, alternativeness cannot be reduced to content or participation alone; it must be understood as a precarious negotiation within asymmetrical power relations.

These findings suggest that alternative media cannot be reduced to participation alone. In the Turkish context, alternativeness is grounded less in organizational form and more in the persistence of critical journalistic practice under constraint. Yet this practice does not unfold in an open communicative space. It operates within a platformized news ecosystem where algorithmic infrastructures shape production, circulation, and reception processes, conditioning visibility and indirectly delimiting editorial autonomy (Schneiders & Stark, 2025). Alternativeness, therefore, emerges not as a structural given but as a continuously negotiated position within layered asymmetries of political, economic, and technological power.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how managers of five digital-based media outlets in Türkiye interpret and negotiate the meaning of “alternative media” under conditions of political and economic constraint. Rather than treating alternativeness as a predefined category, the phenomenological approach revealed it as a lived and strategically constructed position. The findings suggest that “alternative media” does not operate as a stable identity but as a relational claim sometimes embraced, sometimes rejected depending on institutional credibility, audience expectations, and the broader political climate.

Empirically, the outlets studied expand the public agenda by amplifying marginalized voices and cultivating heterogeneous audiences, including digital-native users and diasporic subscribers. Yet this expansion does not occur in a structurally open

field. Financial fragility, algorithmic visibility regimes, regulatory interventions, and authoritarian governance trends shape everyday editorial practices. Alternative media in Türkiye thus operates within a dual pressure structure where market dependency and political constraint intersect. Under such conditions, sustainability becomes not merely an organizational concern but a democratic question.

Conceptually, the findings complicate binary formulations that position alternative media as external to mainstream or capitalist structures. The cases examined here do not stand outside the system; they navigate within it. Revenue diversification, platform reliance, and editorial autonomy coexist in tension. Alternativeness, therefore, appears less as structural separation and more as a negotiated practice enacted within asymmetrical power relations. In contexts marked by media capture and weakened public-service journalism, alternative media may function not solely as counter-hegemonic actors but as compensatory formations that partially fill institutional gaps. This shift in emphasis reframes alternative media as context-bound, relational, and structurally embedded rather than normatively pure or oppositional by definition.

The study is limited by its focus on five cases and by its reliance on managerial perspectives. However, in line with Malterud's "information power" framework (Malterud et al., 2016), the depth and specificity of the interviews provided sufficient analytical grounding. No substantially new themes emerged after the fifth interview, suggesting adequate information power within the defined scope. Future research could incorporate journalists and audiences to explore how alternativeness is experienced beyond managerial discourse, or undertake comparative analyses to examine how different configurations of political economy reshape alternative media practices across contexts.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the Usak University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive. This study was approved by the Usak University Social Sciences and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee. Approval Code: 2024-156 Approval Date: July 4, 2024.

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