

# DECLARATION OF JOURNALISTS

Journalism in the Face of Digital Monopolies

Local Media Declaration

# MEDIA

## MEDIA SOLIDARITY GROUP

The Press Council, **The Contemporary Journalists Association**, The Press Labourers Branch of DİSK, **The Association of Journalists**, Haber-Sen, **The Izmir Journalists Union**, The Photojournalists Association, **The Turkish News Cameramen Association**, The Journalists Union of Türkiye, **The Diplomatic Correspondents Association**, **The Economy Correspondents Association** and The Embassy Correspondents Association

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The Press Council, The Contemporary Journalists Association, The Press Labourers Branch of DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions), The Association of Journalists, Haber-Sen (The Press, Publication, Communication and Postal Workers' Union), The İzmir Journalists Association, The Parliamentary Correspondents Association, The Turkish Journalists Union, The Photojournalists Association, The Turkish News Cameramen Association, The Diplomatic Correspondents Association and The Economy Correspondents Association.



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# JOURNALISM IN THE FACE OF DIGITAL MONOPOLIES (2025)

## INTRODUCTION

Digital monopolies have emerged as one of the most powerful phenomena of today's global and social landscape. Driven by economic and technological concentration, these monopolies have become deeply embedded in our political, cultural, and personal lives.

The most visible examples of these monopolies are digital platforms and artificial intelligence tools, led by five major U.S. based companies: Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft. The dominance these companies have established over human and societal life—thanks to their access to vast datasets at no

cost, their ability to use this data for commercial and political purposes, and their lack of effective public or legal oversight—has created a new form of digital colonialism.

This dominance extends deeply into journalism and freedom of expression. Today, digital monopolies and AI tools have become the primary—and often the only—gateways for journalism to reach the public. They play a decisive role in shaping the visibility of news, generating traffic, and influencing advertising revenues, all while exercising unchecked control. At the same time, they generate billions of dollars in profit each year from the content created by journalists and media outlets.

Yet they do not pay any digital royalties to journalists or media organizations, who are the original producers of this content. Despite capitalizing on the digital traces and personal data of nearly all citizens in the countries where they operate, these platforms are not subject to meaningful taxation.

The need to raise a united voice against this erosion of journalism, democracy, and public life by digital monopolies is more urgent than ever. As journalism

organizations, we have come together to defend our labor, our commitment to original and quality reporting, and our right to freedom of expression, in response to the exploitative practices of digital platforms and AI tools that profit from the work of journalists.

On May 15–16, 2025, we organized a workshop and a conference in Ankara, bringing together journalists, legal experts, policymakers, academics, and civil society representatives. We examined how to safeguard media organizations, journalists, journalism itself and freedom of expression in the face of this rapidly evolving landscape. We identified the key areas of concern, and from there, shaped a set of proposals and demands which we compiled into this final declaration.

This document should not be seen as a closing statement, but rather as a roadmap marking the beginning of a new phase in our collective struggle. It is a call to all our colleagues to join forces in defending our rights, our profession, and our freedom of expression against the new colonialism imposed by transnational digital monopolies.

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## **DIGITAL MONOPOLIES AND THE THREATS THEY POSE**

- The monopolization of traffic, visibility, copyrights, and advertising by global digital platforms—combined with the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into journalistic practices and even its transformation into a news source—now constitutes a critical threat to journalism.
- Digital monopolies and AI have triggered a fundamental transformation across the media and journalism sectors. This transformation has introduced challenges that must be addressed. The media industry, which has not yet fully adapted to this shift, now faces a new wave of change—one even more radical and disruptive than the digital revolution itself.
- Led by Google, digital platforms have begun to exert control over freedom of expression, the public's right to access information, and news distribution, all through opaque and unaccountable practices. This has fostered a hegemonic system of digital colonialism over journalism.

- Web browsers and search engines, increasingly monopolized, are confining news access to “explore” pages and social media feeds. Meanwhile, AI tools that are beginning to replace search engines are severing the link between news traffic and media altogether.
- These digital monopolies and their AI tools, which lack transparent internal oversight, prioritize corporate goals over social responsibility and public interest. In doing so, they eliminate competition and widen existing inequalities in the media landscape.
- These platforms, which now dominate the distribution and visibility of journalistic works, have also tightened their grip on the digital advertising market—shrinking the revenue streams of digital media outlets.
- The non-transparent rules, algorithms, and parameters set by these platforms obstruct the circulation of journalism, foster injustice, and jeopardize the sustainability of independent media.
- In Türkiye, digital platforms and AI tools exploit legal loopholes to profit from the content of journalists and media outlets without sharing that income—or paying taxes.
- The lack of clear regulations or international agreements that could define ethical standards for digital spaces or establish copyright models has left journalists, media outlets, and publishers vulnerable and defenseless against these tech giants.
- The commercial and political relationships between platforms and governments contribute to the creation of a digital environment that undermines media freedom and freedom of expression. We are witnessing access restrictions, accounts being made invisible, and unlawful bans—all signs of a digital space under siege.
- These platforms also collect user data—including media consumption habits—through opaque methods and repurpose it for commercial gain, in clear violation of individuals’ privacy rights.

## **IDEAS AND PROPOSALS**

- Journalism associations and media outlets must stand together in a joint effort to counter the dominance of tech giants and the rapidly evolving threats posed by artificial intelligence to the future of journalism.
- As search engines, web browsers, and—most significantly—AI tools begin to reshape the flow of information, journalism must also adapt. This transformation calls for updating how media connects with its readers and viewers, and raising public awareness about this shift.
- In response to the practices of tech giants that undermine journalism—and by extension, democracy—new institutional models must be developed, such as “journalism cooperatives,” which can foster economic solidarity and strengthen editorial independence.
- To reduce the media sector’s dependence on the technologies provided by digital monopolies, and to enable the development of independent technological solutions (such as AI tools), there must be public, open-source, and autonomous support mechanisms.
- Civil society organizations should also be engaged in efforts to help readers and audiences recognize the value of journalism and news. Instead of relying on revenue from digital platforms, media outlets should develop reader-supported income models, such as subscriptions.
- The algorithmic structures and corporate operations of digital platforms—as well as the use of AI in journalism—must be made transparent and subject to oversight by national and international journalism organizations and supranational bodies like UNESCO.
- New regulations must be introduced to break up the monopolies of digital platforms and to ensure the responsible use of AI tools. Institutions such as the Competition Authority, the Personal Data Protection Authority, and the Press Advertising Agency should be involved alongside journalism organizations.
- Global tech giants and AI companies must share the revenue they generate from journalistic content by paying

digital royalties to journalists and media outlets. Journalism organizations should have a seat at the table in any negotiations between the state and these companies, and public interest must be a guiding principle in such discussions.

- A fair and transparent system tailored to Türkiye's context and the needs of journalism must be established for distributing digital royalty revenues—including those generated from AI-assisted search results. This system should be managed by an autonomous coordinating body and ensure access for small-scale news publishers as well.

- A Digital Copyright Law must clearly define how digital revenues are to be distributed to journalists and media organizations. Ratings, click counts, or the number of accredited press card holders should not be the only criteria in this distribution. Qualitative factors such as originality and frequency of citation must also be given weight.

- The Digital Services Tax should be revised to include digital platforms that collect user data and track virtual activi-

ty. A portion of the tax revenue collected from these platforms should be used to support press freedom and freedom of expression.

- The Press Advertising Agency's criteria for distributing official public ads should be updated to prioritize high-quality journalism. Its data on online news sites and the sanctions it imposes should be transparent and publicly accessible.

- Regulations adopted in different countries to address the dominance of digital platforms, the growing role of AI in the information economy, and their expanding influence over access to knowledge must be studied and synthesized. A broad line of international cooperation and joint action should be built together with journalism organizations and media outlets.

- We must not forget that the struggle we wage today against digital monopolies will have a lasting impact on the future of media, freedom of expression, and democracy. All media organizations, journalism associations, and journalists must act with this awareness.



# LOCAL MEDIA DECLARATION (2025)

## JOURNALISM AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

- Journalism education in schools of communication should be updated with digital transformation in mind. Schools of communication should be provided with the necessary infrastructure. New journalists should be equipped with tools and practices suited to the current era.
- Journalists, newspaper owners, and communication faculties all over the country should initiate a discussion around professional unity in journalism and the law governing the profession.
- National and local media outlets should be encouraged to prioritize hiring communication faculty graduates. Mechanisms should be established to ensure that communication students can intern at local media organizations in their respective provinces. Collaboration between media organizations and communication faculties should be strengthened through formal protocols, and the implementation of these agreements should be monitored.
- The number of communication faculties and their student quotas should be adjusted to reflect actual needs, and the quality of education should be improved. Internship stipends for students working in the media should be covered by universities and public funds.
- Journalism should not be confined to minimum-wage labor. Royalty programs for freelance journalists should be expanded and made more accessible.
- Journalism-related legislation should no longer serve as a tool for state control over the media. Legal frameworks should be designed to protect journalists and journalism.

- Professional journalism organizations should provide legal support, empowering local journalists to understand and defend their rights, including in cases of mobbing or other forms of workplace abuse.
- The status-based disparity (civil servant vs. contractual staff) among employees at governmental media organizations should be eliminated.
- The stringent requirements imposed by the Press Advertising Institution (BİK) on local media outlets should be reviewed and relaxed.
- BİK regulations should take into account the realities of local media. In this context, quality rather than quantity should be prioritized when evaluating journalistic content.
- The algorithms used by the Press Advertising Institution to track visitors, along with how official ads and payments are distributed, should be transparent.
- The mandatory minimum staffing levels required of local newspapers and news websites by BİK should be revisited.
- Mechanisms should be developed to protect local media and journalists from pressure by local officials and politicians.
- Professional associations should organize events and initiatives to strengthen collaboration between local and national media outlets.

## **TECHNICAL CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS IN LOCAL MEDIA**

- Satellite transmission fees should include affirmative measures for local broadcasters. Local channels, which have lower advertising revenues, should not be charged the same as nationwide television networks.
- Regulatory fines imposed by Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) should be scaled differently for local TV channels compared to national ones.
- The purchase of domains for news websites should be subject to taxation. Media outlet proprietors should also be

- The dangers posed by the growing trend of governmental organizations and municipalities creating their own media units in place of independent local outlets should be highlighted. Cooperation and incentive mechanisms between governmental organizations, municipalities, and local media should be strengthened to support independent and impartial journalism.
- Acquired rights related to press card eligibility should be safeguarded, and arbitrary practices in the issuance of press cards should be eliminated. Press card decisions should involve consultation with journalists and professional organizations.

## **CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSITION TO DIGITAL MEDIA**

- Local journalism should be supported in its fight against algorithms used by social networks, service providers, and search engines that negatively impact website traffic, as well as against SEO reporting that undermines news quality.
- To enable journalism to operate within the framework of ethical standards

rather than the opaque systems of social networks, service providers, and search engines, a solid economic foundation should be established.

- Training programs on journalism ethics should be expanded to counter practices that harm the profession, such as “citizen journalism,” “digital content creation,” and “unoriginal, AI-generated reporting.” The distinction between journalism and other forms of information dissemination should be clearly defined.
- Local media should be provided with intensive training in digital technologies so that it can keep pace with rapid developments in digital platforms and produce high-quality journalism on new media outlets.
- Legal and institutional regulations should be introduced—led by journalism associations—to protect journalists, as intellectual laborers, from being reduced to “digital workers” on global social media platforms. Journalists’ organizations should take the lead in these efforts.

## **ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN JOURNALISM**

- A professional code of journalistic ethics should be established and unified through the participation of all professional journalism organizations. Instead of legal frameworks that impose political pressure or the threat of imprisonment, the media's self-regulation mechanisms should be strengthened. Journalists themselves should lead in defining and internalizing ethical principles.
- Journalism associations should make a concerted effort to ensure

that ethical standards and practices are upheld.

- Efforts should be made to encourage freelance and digital journalists to join unions and professional associations. Dialogue should be promoted to ensure core journalistic principles are adopted across all platforms.
- Within the framework of ethical standards, journalism organizations should take greater initiative in promoting media literacy, and independent media ombudsman institutions should be encouraged.

## Signatories of Local Media Declaration

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