

VIEWER PERCEPTIONS ON AI-SUPPORTED DIGITAL NEWSCASTERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION THEORY

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This study complies with research and publication ethics.

Abstract

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is gaining increasing momentum in the publishing industry, as in many other sectors. AI applications, which are generally used for technical support in the background in traditional media operations, have become more visible in recent years. Newscasters created with AI have started to be used on digital platforms. This study focuses on the impact of 'Alexa', Türkiye's first digital news anchor created with AI, on the viewers of the *RoboTV* channel operating on the *YouTube* platform. In this direction, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 individuals who had experience with 'Alexa', and the data obtained were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify themes, in the context of 'parasocial interaction theory'. As a result of the research, it was revealed that the satisfaction level of the viewers with the broadcast content transmitted by the AI anchor was lower compared to the content presented by the human anchor. Participants stated that the lack of emotion and facial expression of the AI news anchor made it difficult for the audience to establish an emotional connection with the anchor. This research shows that the adoption of AI anchors in broadcasting has a direct impact on audience perception and satisfaction with broadcast content. The results provide a basis for future research by providing insights into how viewers evaluate the use of AI technologies in the media sector at this stage.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, digital newscaster, viewer perception, parasocial interaction.

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YAPAY ZEKÂ DESTEKLİ HABER SUNUCULARI ÜZERİNE İZLEYİCİ ALGILARI: PARASOSYAL ETKİLEŞİM TEORİSİ BAĞLAMINDA NİTELİKSEL BİR ANALİZ

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Bu çalışma araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Öz

Gelişen yapay zekâ teknolojileri, birçok sektörde olduğu gibi yayıncılık sektöründe de giderek daha fazla yer edinmektedir. Geleneksel medya operasyonlarında genellikle arka planda teknik destek amaçlı kullanılan yapay zekâ uygulamaları, son yıllarda daha görünür hale gelmiştir. Dijital platformlarda yapay zekâ ile oluşturulmuş haber spikerleri kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Bu çalışma *YouTube* platformunda faaliyet gösteren *RoboTV* kanalında, Türkiye'nin ilk yapay zekâ ile oluşturulan dijital haber spikeri 'Alexa'nın izleyiciler üzerinde bıraktığı etkiye odaklanmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda Alexa'yı izleme deneyimi olan 12 kişi ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiş, elde edilen veriler nitel içerik analiziyle temalara ayrılarak 'parasosyal etkileşim kuramı' bağlamında analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda izleyicilerin yapay zekâ sunucusu tarafından aktarılan yayın içeriğinden memnuniyet düzeyinin, insan sunucunun sunduğu içeriğe kıyasla daha düşük olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcılar, yapay zekâ haber spikerinin duygu ve yüz ifadesinden yoksun olmasının, izleyicinin sonucu ile duygusal bağ kurmasını zorlaştırdığını belirtmiştir. Bu araştırma, yayıncılık alanında yapay zekâ ile oluşturulan sunucularının benimsenmesinin, izleyici algısı ve yayın içeriğine yönelik memnuniyet üzerinde doğrudan bir etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Sonuçlar, yapay zekâ teknolojilerinin bu aşamada medya sektöründe kullanılmasının izleyiciler açısından nasıl değerlendirildiğine dair bilgiler sunarak, gelecekteki araştırmalar için bir temel oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yapay zekâ, dijital haber spikeri, izleyici algısı, parasosyal etkileşim.

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Introduction

In recent years, digital newscasters created with AI have become increasingly widespread on digital platforms and play an important role in interacting with viewers. While successful examples of the use of AI announcers have been observed in countries such as China and Japan, steps have started to be taken in this field on digital platforms in Türkiye. On the *RoboTV* channel operating on *YouTube*, an announcer created with AI has been broadcasting for 2 years.

This study aims to examine the effects of 'Alexa', Türkiye's first digital news anchor created with AI, on viewers. In the study, the feelings and thoughts of the viewers towards *Alexa*, the difference between this digital announcer from traditional announcers, and the effect of AI technology on media consumption habits are discussed. In the theoretical part of the study, firstly, the concept of AI and its development process are discussed, and the place of AI in the media sector is mentioned. Then, the AI-supported newscaster is evaluated in the context of parasocial interaction theory. In the application phase of the study, the responses obtained from the interviews with 12 individuals who were determined to be the audience of the AI announcer were divided into themes and analysed in light of the 'parasocial interaction theory'.

The limited number of studies conducted on the impact of artificial intelligence-based media applications on viewer behaviour increases the importance of this research. In particular, the extremely limited number of studies focusing on artificial intelligence-supported news anchors in communication research conducted in Türkiye makes this study unique in the field. This research, conducted using the example of 'Alexa', offers a new and in-depth perspective on how AI-based media content is perceived by viewers. In this regard, it is believed that this study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on the effects of AI in the media field, both through the findings it presents within the framework of parasocial interaction theory and through the data it reveals about Turkish broadcasting practices.

Artificial Intelligence: Conceptual Framework, and Its Use in the Media Field

Since ancient times, humans have been toying with the idea of creating intelligent machines or self-moving beings. From the automata developed by Chinese and Egyptian engineers to the mechanical beings of ancient Greek mythology, many examples point to the relationship between human intelligence and the machine (Rezk, 2023, p. 2). This historical background has paved the way for the human mind to be seen not only as a biological structure but also as an imitable mechanism. Systems that mimic human intelligence are becoming increasingly important, especially in information processing and problem solving. In this context, the concepts of 'intelligence' and 'AI', which attract attention with both their philosophical and technical aspects, are among the most discussed topics of our age.

Intelligence is the ability to produce accurate and efficient solutions to complex problems that humans encounter in their environment. AI refers to man-made systems that can learn or discover a correct and efficient solution method in cases where the definition of a problem is known but the solution path (algorithm) cannot be determined (Köroğlu, 2017, p. 2). These systems can mimic mental processes such as thinking, learning, decision making, and problem solving (Keleş & Akçetin, 2017, p. 113; Mijwil, 2015, p. 3). AI products that can perform only human-specific abilities such as feeling, predicting behaviours, and making independent decisions are generally referred to as 'robots' (Değirmenci, 2018, p. 20).

When the literature on AI is examined, it is seen that this concept is generally handled within the framework of two basic dimensions. In the first approach, the ability of machines supported by a computer program to think and make choices like humans is at the forefront. According to this perspective, the ultimate goal of AI is to imitate human intellectual processes and reach a human-like structure over time. The other approach is based on the ability of machines to make fully rational and robust decisions, free of emotions and human weaknesses. According to this view, AI aims to go beyond human intelligence and reach a perfect and ideal level of intelligence (Russell & Norvig, 2003, p. 21).

There are four main areas where AI is most widely and effectively used today. These can be examined under the headings of voice recognition and understanding, image processing, natural language processing, and reasoning (Sucu, 2019, p. 208).

1. Voice recognition and understanding: Every spoken sound is digitised through a microphone; sound waves are converted into frequencies, and these frequencies are converted into letters and words. In this process, the signals are translated into digital codes of zeros and ones in real time. Great progress has been made in this area thanks to advances in deep learning and voice analytics technologies. An example of these technologies is *Siri*, the virtual assistant application used in *Apple's iOS* operating system.

2. Image processing: The human eye can perceive every light-reflecting object in its environment, and these images can be mentally classified and stored in memory for a long time. In an attempt to mimic this natural process, AI takes images through cameras and starts processing each pixel into digital codes. At this stage, advanced AI algorithms come into play to understand what the pixels represent. These technologies are widely used in applications such as visual recognition, object detection, face recognition and scene analysis.

3. Natural language processing: It is a complex process for AI to read, interpret and respond to written or spoken texts. AI-supported natural language processing techniques have been developed to enable computers to analyse

these layers accurately. Thanks to these developments, machines can now not only read and recognize texts, but also make connections between texts, infer meaning and interact with language at a similar level to humans.

4. Reasoning: Reasoning refers to the ability to make correct decisions in uncertain situations with multiple variables. Humans can decide what to do in various situations based on their past experiences, intuition, and logical deductions. Similarly, AI systems analyse available data, evaluate possibilities, and alternative solutions to reach the most appropriate outcome.

Today, AI is used to develop a variety of robots that have the intellectual characteristics, behaviour, experience and perceptual abilities of humans. Many technologies, such as image recognition and driverless cars, have become possible thanks to advances in AI. However, AI has reached where it is today at the end of a long development process.

The current state of AI has led to our age being referred to as the 'age of AI' (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019, p. 8). This is because AI systems are gaining more and more human characteristics every day, affecting not only individual lives but also the labor market. Robots and AI-supported applications are now being integrated into many professions where people work and are radically changing the way of doing business.

AI is playing an increasingly critical role in the media industry today. Especially in areas such as digital content production and advertising, the possibilities offered by AI provide great advantages for media companies. AI applications in media are concentrated in eight main areas. These are content recommendation systems, audience engagement, enhancing user experience, optimizing messages, content management and production, audience analysis and automation of operational processes (Chan-Olmsted, 2019).

In recent years, there have been significant transformations in the media industry, especially in the field of news, thanks to the potential of technological approaches. AI has become an effective tool that can offer solutions to many problems faced by the news industry. In this context, Ceron and De Lima Santos (2022), in their study analysing the adoption process of AI in the news industry, revealed that technology has been developed more intensively in areas such as machine learning, computer vision, planning, timing, and optimization. However, it is noteworthy that these technologies are not yet fully established in the field of journalism.

The fact that the volume of social media data flow is huge and at the same time very difficult to analyze makes manual analysis almost impossible. At this point, AI-supported systems make important contributions by processing high volumes of data quickly and reliably. Today, there is a significant convergence between AI and the field of communication. Advances in this technology have led to more powerful and effective solutions that work together with systems

used in everyday life. People now regularly communicate with digital assistants such as *Amazon's Alexa* and *Apple's Siri*, and these interactions are increasing thanks to the Internet of Things.

Media organisations have not remained indifferent to these developments and started to benefit from AI-based technologies in news production and distribution processes. Guzman and Lewis (2020) emphasise that media organizations such as the Associated Press are actively using AI to produce and publish news content. These technologies have the potential to transform media consumption habits by enabling audiences to access the content they are interested in more easily.

AI Supported Newscasters in the Context of Parasocial Interaction Theory

Today, the effects of media content on individuals extend beyond merely providing information or entertainment; they are also shaped by the emotional and psychological bonds that viewers form with media characters. In this context, the one-way, symbolic and often unwitting relationships that the audience develops with media characters are explained by the concepts of 'parasocial interaction' and 'parasocial relationship'. A clear understanding of the distinction between these concepts, as well as the mechanisms through which such bonds are formed, constitutes a crucial foundation for the analysis of audience behaviour, particularly within the context of digital media.

Parasocial interaction refers to the one-way emotional bonds that viewers form with media characters, and this relationship can transform the media consumption process into a social experience for viewers (Schramm et al., 2024). According to the parasocial interaction theory, viewers develop certain emotions such as affinity and admiration with media characters over time while consuming media content. Viewers establish a one-way emotional interaction with the newscaster, TV series actor, or moderator they see on the screen.

Another concept closely related to the concept of parasocial interaction is the parasocial relationship. Although these two concepts are often used interchangeably, there is an important difference between them. While parasocial interaction refers to the immediate reactions and the feeling of interaction that the audience gives while watching the media content, parasocial relationship defines the longer-term and permanent emotional attachment that occurs as this interaction deepens over time. In other words, the viewer's comments and thoughts about the media character that continue after the program are considered as parasocial relationships (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011).

In terms of parasocial interaction theory, some factors make it easier for viewers to establish a relationship with media characters. First of all, in the

program, news bulletin, or series where the media character is present, performances very close to reality are exhibited. These performances should not be understood only in terms of acting. Whether it is media content, a news bulletin, or a discussion program, real issues from life are conveyed. The second factor is that media characters communicate directly with the audience, addressing them directly by looking them in the eye and saying, 'dear viewers, good evening, etc.'. Factors such as these make it easier for viewers to sympathize with media characters (Auter, 1992).

Tsay and Bodine (2012, p. 192) state that parasocial interaction is established through stages such as guidance, face-to-face communication, closeness and familiarity. In this direction, guidance is when a media character is perceived as a role model and a guide for the viewer. Face-to-face communication is the stage where the audience wants to meet the media character in real life and learn about him/her. Intimacy is the stage where the audience establishes an emotional bond with the media character and sees him/her as a friend, while familiarity is the stage where the audience identifies with the media character, finds something in themselves and experiences a sense of similarity.

The parasocial interaction with media characters is parallel to the basis of the social relationships that individuals establish in their daily lives. In their daily lives, individuals establish social relationships with people who are similar to themselves, who are beautiful, impressive and reliable. These factors are also valid for parasocial interaction. The physical attractiveness of media characters, their impressive tone of voice and speech, as well as their perceived similarities with the audience, contribute to their overall appeal (McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Hoffner, 1996; Arda, 2006; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

Trustworthiness, which has an important place in interpersonal communication, is another important factor for parasocial interaction. The more trust the audience has in the media character, the stronger the parasocial interaction is. The ability of viewers to make inferences about the media character and to make certain judgments such as realism and credibility, improves the trust relationship between them. For example, a moderator being married, being seen to uphold moral values and not witnessing any incidents that may damage his/her reputation are judgments that may constitute trust for the audience.

Today, it is much easier, faster and there are more options to access, listen to and watch the news. There are many news channels and newscasters on national, international and digital platforms. Recent technological advancements have led to the emergence of AI-supported applications in the fields of journalism and broadcasting. In fact, in addition to news produced with AI, newscasters produced with AI technology are also included in broadcasting

life. In the *RoboTV* news channel operating on the digital platform *YouTube*, an AI announcer named *Alexa* has been presenting the news for 2 years.

Considering the speed of development of AI technology, it is predicted that such innovations will increase. For this reason, it is important how AI news anchors are received by society and what kind of impact they leave on the viewers. At this point, questions such as how viewers find AI radio presenters, with what expectations they watch them, and whether they feel feelings such as trust, sincerity and closeness arise. The answers to these questions will be examined in the application phase of the research.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted with a qualitative method as it focused on the audience experiences of the news anchor created with AI on the *RoboTV* channel operating on the *YouTube* platform. The aim of the research is to analyse in-depth the views of the viewers about the news anchors created with AI and their positive or negative thoughts about this anchor¹.

Research questions

1. What are the viewers' positive or negative opinions about AI newscasters?
2. Do viewers feel an affinity towards the AI newscaster? Is there a sense of trust or intimacy?
3. Unlike human newscasters, what kind of impact do AI newscasters have on listeners?
4. Are there significant differences between different age and gender groups in viewers' opinions about AI presenters?

Population and sample of the study

The population of the study comprises viewers of AI-generated newscasters, which have been developed and implemented in various countries around the world. As a sample, 12 individuals of different ages and genders watching 'Alexa', the AI newscaster of the *RoboTV* channel broadcasting on *YouTube*, were determined. The purposive sampling method was used to determine these people. The inclusion of the participants in the study was based on the criteria of being over the age of 18 and having watched at least 20 videos of the

¹ In order to carry out this research, ethics committee permission was obtained from Çankırı Karatekin University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at its meeting numbered 52.

channel in question. With 6 female and 6 male participants, sufficient data saturation was reached, and it was observed that the data repeated itself after a while. The participants were explained the purpose and scope of the research and were informed in writing that their names would remain confidential, and that the data would not be used outside of this research. Additionally, a voluntary participation form was administered between the participants and the researcher, confirming that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were given pseudonyms during the analysis phase.

Table 1. Name, age and gender information of the participants

Name	Age	Gender
Tuna	40	Male
Nilay	45	Female
Mercan	60	Male
Ayla	55	Female
Hakan	50	Male
Eda	33	Female
Selim	37	Male
Ceylin	25	Female
Arda	22	Male
Lale	41	Female
Kuzey	32	Male
Doğa	28	Female

Data collection technique of the research

The study employed the in-depth interview method, a widely used qualitative data collection technique. The interview is a research technique that is pre-planned for a purpose, progresses in the form of asking and answering questions within the framework of a certain subject and mutual interaction is established between the parties. The interview technique is divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this study, a semi-structured interview comprising 20 open-ended questions was conducted to maintain the integrity of the subject matter, allow participants to express their views freely, and facilitate the elaboration of responses when necessary. Interviews are frequently used in qualitative studies as they reveal the views, experiences and preferences of the participants on the subject. Some of the questions asked to participants in this study are as follows:

1. How would you rate the artificial intelligence announcer's speaking style and tone of voice?
2. Do you find the artificial intelligence announcer reliable?
3. Was the artificial intelligence announcer able to establish an emotional connection with you? Why?

Data analysis

Online interviews were conducted with the participants at time slots of their choosing, with prior notification that audio recordings would be made during the sessions. These recordings were subsequently transcribed by the researcher. The resulting data were analysed thematically using the *MAXQDA* software, and the identified themes are presented in the Findings section. Thematic analysis was conducted in the *MAXQDA* programme as follows.

1. Data export and preparation: Interview recordings were transcribed into written form, and transcript files were created and imported into *MAXQDA*. Data files for each participant were defined as separate documents in the system.

2. Preliminary reading and pre-coding notes: All data were read multiple times by the researcher to obtain initial impressions, and the researcher's observations were recorded on the document using the 'memo' (note-taking) tool.

3. Open coding: The interview texts were examined line by line to identify meaningful units of expression, and open codes were assigned to these units. The codes were created by remaining faithful to the data, using direct participant expressions or interpretive labels (e.g., 'emotional distance,' 'sense of artificiality,' 'lack of trust').

4. Grouping codes and creating themes: Codes with similar meanings were clustered under *MAXQDA*'s 'code system' tab, thereby creating overarching themes and sub-themes. During this process, semantic coherence was established between the data, and the themes were structured in relation to the research questions.

5. Examining relationships between themes: Transitions and patterns between themes were visualised using *MAXQDA*'s 'Code Map' tools; this analysis established structural relationships between themes.

6. Selection of sample quotes and reporting: Highly representative participant statements for each theme were identified using *MAXQDA*'s 'Code-Paragraph' mapping and used in the reporting.

Ethics committee permission for the research

In order to carry out this research, ethics committee permission was obtained from Çankırı Karatekin University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at its meeting dated 24.04.2025 and numbered 52.

Findings

This section includes the data analysis and interpretations made to answer the research questions. The categories created within the scope of the research are as follows.

Table 2. Audience evaluations of AI newscaster

1 st Category:	Audiences’ general attitudes towards AI newscaster
Codes:	Positive approach, negative approach
2 nd Category:	Perceived sincerity and authenticity of the AI newscaster
Codes:	Emotional connection and sincerity, a sense of reality
3 rd Category:	Reliability and credibility of the AI newscaster
Codes:	Credibility effect of the newscaster, the effect of credibility on the news
4 th Category:	Presentation quality and competence of AI newscaster
Codes:	Mechanical voice and expression, interpretation and expression, representation
5 th Category:	Viewers’ comparison of human and AI newscaster
Codes:	Natural presentation of a human newscaster, cold and distant presentation of an AI newscaster

Audiences’ general attitudes towards AI newscaster

In this section, the general attitudes of the participants towards the AI newscaster are discussed. While 10 out of 12 participants have a negative attitude towards the AI newscaster, only 2 participants have a positive attitude.

At first, I was like, “wow, where is this going?” It’s both a dystopia and a great technology showcase. It is imposing technologically. I was interested because it was an innovative approach (Arda).

It was an interesting experience, especially knowing that the announcer was an AI. It was a bit strange at first, but then I got used to it (Ceylin).

It was very strange, I didn’t feel comfortable at all. I’m not used to such things. It’s not necessary. Don’t let robots present the news (Ayla).

I didn’t like it much, to be honest. I felt cold, dull, and expressionless. I tried not

to be prejudiced, but I'm not ready for a robot announcer. Let AI be in the field of health or something (*Hakan*).

The two participants who had a positive approach to the AI-supported announcer were younger than the other participants in terms of age. It is possible to interpret the fact that young people find the AI announcer interesting and curious as an indicator that they prioritize differences in their media preferences and have a tolerant attitude towards innovations. This situation is also related to the fact that the young generation grows up with technological tools (Fillion, 1992, p. 157). Brunetti (2024, pp. 1-8) states in his studies on the sociology of AI that children and young people have a more optimistic and interested approach towards robots.

Hakan, who is older, wants AI technology to be used in areas such as health, but not in social areas. Akbaş (2024, p. 164) states that people tend to adopt this system when it provides an advantage from AI technology. Stock and Merkle (2018) also argue that the acceptance of robots by society is closely related to the fact that robots meet people's social and emotional needs as well as material services. Based on this information, it can be said that the AI announcer is perceived negatively by most of the audience because it does not provide any tangible or intangible benefit to the audience.

Perceived sincerity and authenticity of the AI announcer

This theme encompasses viewers' perspectives on whether they felt an emotional connection and a sense of sincerity with the AI newscaster, as well as whether the newscaster conveyed a sense of realism. 11 participants stated that they could not establish an emotional connection with the AI announcer and that they did not find it sincere and realistic. Only one participant indicated that they found the AI announcer realistic.

When I first saw her, I had the perception of a real person. Her physical appearance is like a real announcer. It evokes a perception of reality on the screen (*Doğa*).

She didn't seem very sincere. I don't know, she doesn't make eye contact like a human being, and there is no warmth in his voice. She only conveys information, evoking no emotional response. She doesn't feel human, she is a product of technology. A smile or a pause would have been effective (*Mercan*).

I didn't feel it was sincere. Visually, it's very neat and cleanly designed. But it still has a bit of a 'digital avatar' vibe, so it's not human (*Tuna*).

I can never make an emotional connection, because a connection is a mutual vitality. Connecting with code is like hugging a cable. It feels foreign and cold. For one thing, it is very bad that there are no gestures and mimics. If there were gestures, I would have been able to establish some closeness (*Nilay*).

It is noteworthy that *Doğa* states that although she knows that the announcer is supported by AI, her image evokes a perception of reality on the

screen. This situation can be evaluated in the context of Jean Baudrillard's postmodernism and simulacra theories. According to Baudrillard, modern society is increasingly overflowing with simulacra; that is, reality itself is now composed of copies, and these copies manipulate the perception of reality. However, this does not have the same effect on the rest of the participants. Participants expect a human expression with gestures and facial expressions, such as smiles and pauses, while watching the news to connect with the anchor. Molin and Nordgren (2019, p. 21) state that the robots' appearance and behaviours being like other humans make it easier for them to relate to humans. This is in line with the parasocial interaction theory. According to the theory, people can communicate parasocially to the extent that they can see similarities with media characters.

Reliability and credibility of AI news anchor

In this theme, the opinions of the participants on whether they find the AI newscaster reliable and credible are included.

I don't find her trustworthy. On the contrary, I listen with caution. For me to find her trustworthy, I need to think that he evaluates things, that he makes sense of things. She doesn't even have feelings or thoughts. How can I trust her? (*Lale*).

Even though it seems trustworthy, it doesn't sit well with me. When you see a person, you trust them by their eyes, by the way they look. There is nothing like that here. When I don't trust the announcer, I can approach the content with skepticism. It's as if the news is delivered through a digital automation system; there is no emotion, no responsibility. I think human influence is still important at this point (*Eda*).

I didn't feel an affinity to find it trustworthy. I can't trust a robot when I don't even trust real announcers. Of course, this distrust affects my watching the news. I couldn't see the seriousness of the news. I felt like watching an animated movie (*Selim*).

Not all the participants found the AI announcer reliable and credible. In studies covering the sociological effects of AI, it is stated that the most important factor that enables virtual robots to be trusted and accepted by humans is social and emotional elements (Molin & Nordgren, 2019, p. 7). In addition, the fact that the participants did not trust the news because they did not trust the news anchor is an important data in terms of the presence of AI technology in the broadcasting sector. Yeniceler Kortak (2022, p. 709), in his study evaluating the relationship between AI and news, concluded that viewers have a negative approach to the use of AI technologies in the news and that the news is not perceived as real after AI is used.

The fact that viewers see the AI announcer as a 'digital avatar', 'animated movie', and that they do not find the news serious can be interpreted as a sign that using AI technology in news presentation will not be an easy transition

for the public. Rubin and Step (2010) found that news anchors are seen by the public as guides explaining the world and as a source of social information in their study on parasocial interaction. Based on this information, it is seen that news anchors are always in an important place in the eyes of the audience in terms of conveying the issues that directly concern the public, as one of them.

Presentation quality and competence of AI news anchor

This section focuses on the participants' evaluations of the AI announcer in terms of his/her tone of voice, expression and ability to represent a human being while presenting the news. Although all the participants regarded the AI newscaster as effective in conveying information, they found it lacking in interpretative depth and expressive delivery and considered it inadequate in representing a human presence due to its lack of emotional expression.

There are areas where AI is successful: Speed, clarity, not making mistakes... But the human part is still severely lacking. It would be too much to expect things like perception, intuition, and irony from AI yet (*Kuzey*).

It would be more realistic if it commented, but I would not prefer a robot to interpret the news about life. Does the cost of living affect the robot? Does the bitter news make the robot sad? No. Its interpretation would not be convincing (*Tuna*).

Her face is beautiful; her voice is perfect but tasteless. It is exactly like the voice of this age: Polished but emptied. Maybe she represents a person visually, but emotionally, she is like a ghost. Present but absent (*Selim*).

Physically beautiful and nice. But there is no excitement. Reading the news is one thing, telling it is another. It can visually represent a person, but without details such as facial expressions, emotions, and eye contact, the representation is incomplete (*Ceylin*).

Although the participants found the AI announcer good in terms of tone of voice, giving information and not making mistakes while speaking, they stated that the announcer lacked gestures and facial expressions while presenting the news, did not make any comments and that the announcer should have emotions. For this reason, AI announcers are inadequate in many aspects. Wirtz et al (2018) argue that robots can only be accepted if they understand the needs and expectations of humans and act accordingly. It is also noteworthy that most of the participants found the AI announcer physically beautiful, albeit emotionless. However, in addition to physical attractiveness, the compatibility of the media character with the target audience is also important in terms of parasocial interaction. Audiences interact more with people who have similar attitudes and values, even similar physical appearance, both physically and socially (Byrne & Nelson, 1965). The fact that a presenter and an audience have similar attitudes and value judgments is considered social attraction because it strengthens the relationship between them. Social attraction leads to a stronger parasocial interaction than physical attraction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

Audience comparison of human newscasters and AI newscasters

In this section, the participants' comparisons between the human announcer and the AI-assisted announcer are discussed.

When I watch real announcers, I get an emotion about the news. I experience things like surprise and anger. The announcer's attitude integrates with the news. But I have never experienced this with the AI announcer. The anchor and the news cannot integrate. It puts a distance between me and the news (*Nilay*).

A human announcer tells a story; AI reads data. The difference is like listening to a fairy tale and reading a prospectus. I chose the human announcer. At least if he/she makes a mistake, I'll say it's human (*Mercan*).

There is a huge difference compared to human presenters. AI is like a 'voice information card', whereas the human announcer is like a narrator. The human announcer's gestures, eye movements, and accents are very different. With AI, it's all superficial, hollow (*Kuzey*).

While all participants found human announcers natural and sincere, they found AI announcers cold and distant. Participants see the AI announcer as a mere information transmitter and think that he/she cannot replace a human being in terms of emotion, interpretation, and expression. Human announcers, on the other hand, even if they present the news in a biased manner, seem more sincere to the participants because they are one of them. The emotion of the human announcer is important for the participants. Giles (2002) argues that viewers establish stronger parasocial relationships with media characters about whom they can make inferences.

In addition, most of the participants do not favor the possibility of AI announcers replacing human announcers in the future.

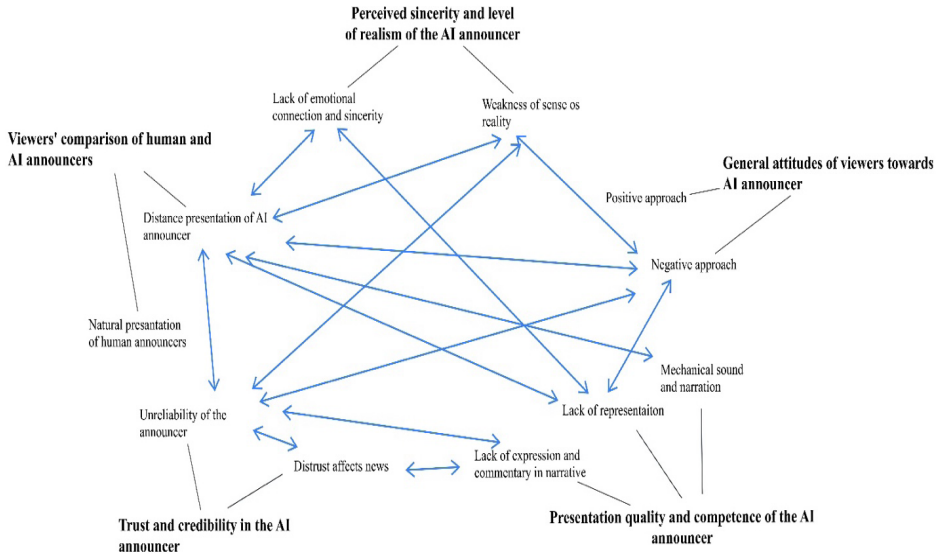
It doesn't sound good. Technology should advance but not replace everything. The human element should not be lost. It would be very bad if robots replace people. Life should not be like a science fiction movie (*Ayla*).

Of course, the technical support of AI should increase, but we are not socially ready for this in professions that interact with humans. If AI provides all the news in the future, I feel like it will be a hollow world. It can help, but humans should remain at the center (*Eda*).

Participants generally expressed a preference for AI technology to serve as a supportive tool rather than a replacement, particularly in professions that involve direct human interaction. One participant, for instance, likened the idea of robots replacing humans to a science fiction film, indicating that perceptions of AI are shaped by media portrayals and broader societal influences. Akbaş (2024) states that the way AI is represented in the media and popular culture shapes people's attitudes and expectations towards AI. According to him, if there is a widespread fear or concern about AI in a society, this may limit the acceptance or use of AI. Similarly, a positive perception of the societal benefits and potential of AI can lead to its wider adoption.

An evaluation of the significant relationships between themes and codes

Figure 1. Code-based and relational analysis of audience opinions on AI presenters



In line with the findings obtained in this study, various significant relationships were identified between the themes and sub-themes derived from the audience's opinions. These relationships show that the participants' evaluations of the AI-assisted announcer are not only limited to individual codes, but also that certain intellectual attitudes and perception patterns overlap with each other.

When the effects of AI announcers on audience perception are analysed at the thematic level, meaningful unities are observed among various codes that come together under the heading of 'emotional distance and lack of trust'. The codes 'lack of emotional connection and sincerity', 'cold and distant presentation', and 'mechanical voice and expression' indicate that the AI announcer is inadequate in conveying human emotions and therefore cannot establish an empathic relationship with the audience. This deficiency is embodied in the code 'weak sense of reality'; when viewers compare the performance of the AI announcer with that of a real human presenter, the artificiality is felt more clearly.

This situation also triggers the code 'the announcer's lack of trust'; the artificiality of the way of presentation damages the sense of trust as much as the accuracy or intention of the content presented by AI. The code 'lack of representation' points to the more socio-cultural dimension of this theme. Participants stated that the AI anchor did not show sufficient representation of cultural codes, social contexts or individual diversity. As a result, these

codes create a sense of disconnection and alienation on emotional, cognitive and socio-cultural levels, weakening the audience’s relationship with the AI announcers.

While the code ‘lack of trust in the announcer’ reflects a general feeling of distrust among listeners towards the AI presenter, this distrust also directly affects the perception of content. In the statements of the participants, this situation is embodied through the code ‘distrust affects the news’; the lack of trust in the announcer also creates doubts about the accuracy, impartiality and value of the news presented. In this context, there is a close relationship with the code ‘lack of interpretation and expression’ observed in the presentation of the AI announcer. The announcer’s inability to make any comment on the news content and to use expressive tools such as intonation and emphasis effectively weakens the emotional context and semantic depth of the news. This creates a distance in the audience not only from the content but also from the artificial entity presenting it. Therefore, when the lack of trust and the limitation of interpretation and expression are taken together, it is seen that AI announcers are questioned not only in terms of technical competence but also in terms of communicative competence in their reporting practices.

Table 3. Participant profile and thematic attitudes

Participant	Age	Gender	General Attitude	Thematic Emphases
Tuna	40	Male	Positive	Aesthetic interest, technical curiosity
Nilay	45	Female	Negative	Emotional coldness, sense of artificiality
Mercan	60	Male	Negative	Emotional distance, lack of warmth
Ayla	55	Female	Negative	Resistance to innovation, preference for traditional media
Hakan	50	Male	Negative	Skepticism about AI in social domains, emotional detachment
Eda	33	Female	Negative	Lack of emotional depth, skeptical approach
Selim	37	Male	Negative	Sense of artificiality, lack of trust
Ceylin	25	Female	Positive	Curious, open to innovation
Arda	22	Male	Positive	Innovative, open-minded
Lale	41	Female	Negative	Does not find it trustworthy
Kuzey	32	Male	Ambivalent	Hesitant, undecided
Doğa	28	Female	Positive	Aesthetic interest, visual realism perception

erant. This shows that young people are more open to innovations, while older participants prefer the use of AI in technical fields rather than social fields.

In the second theme, which measures the perceived sincerity and reality level of the AI announcer, most of the participants describe *Alexa* as 'cold', 'emotionless', 'mechanical' and 'insincere', and see her only as a tool that conveys information. The fact that the AI announcer was not perceived as a real media character largely prevented the establishment of a parasocial relationship with her. This is in line with the basic principles of parasocial interaction theory. According to the theory, viewers develop a 'sense of kinship' with media characters to the extent that they identify with them and see human aspects (gestures, facial expressions, emotional reactions) in their behaviour. However, the AI announcer is unable to establish this closeness because he does not possess the basic elements of human communication. The findings show that the AI anchor is unable to interact with the audience due to the lack of emotional connection and sincerity. Especially in news presentation, the lack of human reactions such as facial expressions, gestures, emphasis and voice intonation caused *Alexa* to be perceived as a 'visual and audible information transmitter' rather than a 'character'. This prevented the viewer from making a 'personality attribution' to the announcer, and therefore from seeing her as a social actor. When evaluated in the context of Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, while *Alexa* was expected to create the illusion of reality in the audience, the fact that the audience largely recognised this artificiality and positioned her as a 'digital avatar' shows that the simulation failed.

In the third theme, which evaluates the reliability and credibility of the AI news anchor, one of the striking findings of the research is that the anchor has created a serious trust gap in the viewers in terms of these two basic elements. All the participants stated that they did not find the news presented by 'Alexa' credible. This distrust is based not only on the accuracy of the content, but also on the artificiality of the presentation style, the lack of commentary and emotion, and the fact that the anchor is not a human being. In this context, it is seen that the phenomenon of trust in the media is not only related to the objectivity of information, but also to the voice, body and face through which that information reaches the audience. If the audience does not trust the news anchor, it directly damages their belief in the content. Thus, presentations created with AI become open to question not only technologically but also epistemologically.

In the fourth theme, which assessed the presentation quality and competence of the AI news anchor, it was found that while the audience acknowledged the anchor's technical competencies – such as error-free speech, clarity, and effective information delivery – the absence of emotional expression significantly limited its ability to represent a human presence. Participants found 'Alexa's voice flat, monotonous and artificial, leading to a sense of disconnection and distance regardless of the content of the presentation. This

shows that the technical competencies of AI announcers are not sufficient alone for them to become media characters; performative elements such as expression, interpretation and emotional depth are also important.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the AI announcer was physically attractive, but this feature was not sufficient to establish parasocial interaction. In cases where physical attractiveness is not combined with social attractiveness, a strong relationship between the audience and the character cannot be established. The audience tends to form a deeper bond with media characters who have similar values and with whom they can share a sense of common experience. This supports Rubin and McHugh's (1987) social attraction theory. 'Alexa's lack of any reference to human experience prevented her from being seen as 'one of us' by the audience.

In the fifth theme, which evaluates the participants' comparisons between human announcers and AI announcers, the participants stated that human announcers were found to be warmer and more sincere because they were able to show emotional reactions even if they were prone to error, had human experience and could add comments according to the context of the news. AI, on the other hand, was considered more distant and unreliable because it lacks these characteristics. The fact that some participants found the use of AI in technical fields such as health and engineering acceptable, while distancing themselves from such uses in fields that require social interaction (e.g. media, education, psychology) indicates the development of domain-based selective trust in AI.

Finally, the conceptual connections made between the themes reveal that emotional distance, insincerity, lack of authenticity and lack of trust are at the root of the AI anchor's failure. These shortcomings can be considered not only as individual audience evaluations, but also as part of a broader societal questioning of whether AI is ready to be a 'media character'.

As a result, AI-assisted newscasters show certain technical achievements in terms of presenting information; however, they have serious deficiencies in communicative dimensions such as establishing emotional connection, building trust, and creating sincerity, which are the expectations of the media audience. In this context, for AI to gain 'character' status in the media, it needs to develop not only technological development but also social acceptance, cultural adaptation, and depth of communicative meaning. The audience's attachment to a media character is not only based on physical appearance or information presentation, but also on the emotional resonance with that character. For AI announcers to establish this resonance, it seems essential to develop more advanced, culturally code-sensitive, flexible structures that can mimic emotional expressions in the future.

The study makes a unique contribution to the literature on artificial intelligence and communication in Türkiye, particularly in terms of the subject mat-

ter it addresses and the conclusions it reaches. No other study on this subject was found in the relevant literature review. However, this study is limited to the *RoboTV* channel broadcasting on the *YouTube* platform. Researchers interested in this subject are advised to conduct research on artificial intelligence-supported news anchors broadcasting on television, which can reach wider audiences.

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