

FACTCHECKING IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

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FACTCHECKING IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

ABSTRACT

Today, developments in information and communication technologies have made it easier to communicate and access information than any technology has done in the past. Today, through smart mobile phones and tablet or laptop computers that provide internet access, human beings can access the content they want at any time and communicate instantly with people on the other side of the world. This situation has enabled the public, which previously existed as a passive audience in the face of the media, to take part as an “active” audience. At this point, it has opened the door to many new debates about the media’s role, power, and discourse.

Considering that this new social structure brings about many negative situations, such as the violation of the surveillance, privacy, and freedoms of individuals, it can be said that new technologies make it equally easier to access all kinds of information, especially confidential information about people through social media channels, as well as the conveniences they add to the field of communication and information. Therefore, the media and ethics debate, which previously only targeted the governments, has been an issue for everyone connecting to social networks today.

However, the inflation experienced in both news production and news circulation has led to the concern of verifying the contents in the new media, and this concern has led to the establishment of many news and information "verification" sites.

Although the concept of "verification", which entered the literature as "fact-checking," was actually developed within by the political campaigning process, today, many national and international newspapers have created "news, content, information verification" channels, which they call "fact-checkers."

Fact-checking sites are emerging as a new media discourse where false or fake news and claims are debunked. However, the question of which "facts" are "fact-

checked," which "untrue" or "fake" news are selected and refuted, and to what extent they affect the opinion of the public remains hot.

The concept of fact-checking is parallel to the emergence of the concept of post-truth. With its current meaning and use, the concept of post-truth should be considered as a political projection of the concept of fact-checking in the media.

The concept of post-truth was used for the socio-political environment that brought Donald Trump, elected President of the United States in the 2016 elections, to power. It was because although the American mainstream media portrayed Trump as a "mind-blowing" profile, his election as the president pushed both the media and political scientists to seek a reality "beyond the truth."

Inspired by Baudrillard's work (2011, p. 56), which goes beyond McLuhan's motto of "the medium is the message" and emphasizes that medium is a simulacrum that tries to change reality by settling into it like a chronic disease, it can be said that the concepts of fact-checking and post-truth are also our "new *tellaks*." ¹

In this thesis, we will focus on the "fact" in the concept of fact-checking and look for an answer to the question of "which fact." Although the concept of fact-checking rises as a journalistic term, both its emergence and its claim make it necessary to address it both epistemologically, philosophically, and politically. For this reason, in this thesis, the concept of fact-checking will be examined within the framework of postmodern thought and praxis. Although undoubtedly the breadth of this framework exceeds the limits of this thesis, we aim to present a perspective in this direction in the study.

Keywords: *Agenda-Setting, disinformation, discourse, fact-checking, gatekeeping, post-truth, postmodernity.*

¹ Traditionally, the turkish bathhouse masseurs who soapes and scrubbes their clients.

FACTCHECKING IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

ÖZET

Günümüzde bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerindeki gelişmeler, iletişim kurmayı ve bilgiye ulaşmayı geçmişte hiçbir teknolojinin yapamadığı kadar kolaylaştırmıştır. Bugün akıllı cep telefonları ve internet erişimi sağlayan tablet ya da dizüstü bilgisayarlar aracılığıyla insanlar istediği içeriğe istediği zaman ulaşabilmekte ve dünyanın öbür ucundaki insanlarla anında iletişim kurabilmektedir. Bu durum daha önce medya karşısında pasif olan izleyicinin “aktif” bir izleyici olarak yer almasını sağlayıp sağlamadığı gibi medyanın rolü, gücü ve söylemi hakkında da birçok yeni tartışmaya kapı aralamıştır.

Bu yeni toplumsal yapının bireylerin gözetim, mahremiyet ve özgürlüklerinin ihlali gibi birçok olumsuz durumu da beraberinde getirdiği düşünüldüğünde, yeni teknolojilerin iletişim ve enformasyon alanına kattığı kolaylıkların yanı sıra sosyal medya mecraları aracılığıyla kişiler hakkında başta mahrem bilgiler olmak üzere her türlü bilgiye ulaşmayı da bir o kadar kolaylaştırdığı söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla daha önce sadece hükümetleri hedef alan medya ve etik tartışması, bugün sosyal ağlara bağlanan herkesin meselesi haline gelmiştir.

Ancak hem haber üretiminde hem de haber dolaşımında yaşanan enflasyon, yeni medyada yer alan içeriklerin doğrulanması kaygısını doğurmuş ve bu kaygı birçok haber ve bilgi "doğrulama" sitesinin kurulmasına yol açmıştır.

Literatüre "fact-checking" olarak giren "doğrulama" kavramı aslında siyasi kampanya sürecinin içinde gelişen bir kavram olsa da günümüzde ulusal ve uluslararası birçok gazete "fact-checkers" adını verdikleri "haber, içerik, bilgi doğrulama" kanalları oluşturmuştur.

Fact-checking siteleri, yanlış ya da sahte haber ve iddiaların çürütüldüğü yeni bir medya söylemi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Ancak hangi "gerçeklerin" "fact-check" edildiği, hangi "doğru olmayan" ya da "sahte" haberlerin seçilerek

yalanlandığı ve bunun kamuoyunun görüşünü ne ölçüde etkilediği sorusu sıcaklığını korumaktadır.

Fact-checking kavramı, post-truth kavramının ortaya çıkışıyla paralellik göstermektedir. Günümüzdeki anlamı ve kullanımıyla post-truth kavramı, fact-checking kavramının medyadaki siyasi izdüşümü olarak değerlendirilmelidir.

Post-truth kavramı, 2016 seçimlerinde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Başkanı seçilen Donald Trump'ı iktidara taşıyan sosyo-politik ortam için kullanılmıştır. Zira Amerikan ana akım medyası Trump'ı "akıllara durgunluk veren" bir profil olarak resmetse de, onun başkan seçilmesi hem medyayı hem de siyaset bilimcileri "gerçeğin ötesinde" bir gerçeklik arayışına itmiştir.

Baudrillard'ın (2011, s. 56) McLuhan'ın "araç mesajdır" mottosunun ötesine geçerek, medyanın kronik bir hastalık gibi içine yerleşerek gerçekliği değiştirmeye çalışan bir simülakr olduğunu vurgulayan çalışmasından esinlenerek, fact-checking ve post-truth kavramlarının da "yeni tellaklarımız" olduğu söylenebilir.

Bu tezde fact-checking kavramındaki "fact"e odaklanacak ve "hangi fact" sorusuna cevap arayacağız. Her ne kadar fact-checking kavramı bir gazetecilik terimi olarak doğsa da hem ortaya çıkışı hem de iddiası onu hem epistemolojik hem felsefi hem de politik olarak ele almayı gerekli kılıyor. Bu nedenle bu tezde fact-checking kavramı postmodern düşünce ve praksis çerçevesinde incelenecektir. Kuşkusuz bu çerçevenin genişliği bu tezin sınırlarını aşsa da çalışmada bu yönde bir perspektif sunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dezenformasyon, eşik-bekçiliği, gündem belirleme, hakikat ötesi, postmodernite, söylem.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Media is a comprehensive concept that combines many communication tools in a single range. In the literature, media is divided into printed media (newspapers, magazines, books, academic journals, etc.), audio media (music recordings, radio, audio, etc.), visual media (television and cinema), and finally, new/digital media (internet, new communication technologies, and electronic media) (Barbier & Lavenir, 2001, pp. 25-26)

Although media diversity or inflation, which occurs with the increase in digital media use and participation, is considered a "democracy gain," this inflation has also opened a great door to significant disinformation, the dump of which might be said to surpass Bentham's (1995, p. 35) "panoptic tower."

Virilio (2003, pp. 107-125) emphasizes that the real-time perspective of telecommunication creates a new "surface area." He argues that "the message is no longer the vehicle; instead, it is the speed of the message" against McLuhan's (2005) famous saying, "The medium is the message."

This area emerges as a new "public space" that permeates every moment of our lives socially, economically, politically, and culturally, where we can communicate interactively without time and space limitations.

The most crucial characteristic distinguishing this new public space from the public space idealized by Habermas (2007, p. 135) within the "communicative action" framework is that it creates a slippery ground with its openness to temporary and unstable momentary identities.

It has been discussed for more than a century how the upgrading of information plays a role in reinforcing the power of the media and how it affects the perception of reality. We can characterize post-truth and fact-checking discussions as a continuation of this tradition.

Although the concepts of *gerçek* and *hakikat* are used interchangeably by the (TDK) Turkish Language Association ¹(2023), we should say that the reason why we use the word *hakikat* as the Turkish equivalent of the concept is that post-truth refers to the purpose of creating a truth discourse by staying within the circle of reality, not the unreal. According to Williams (2005), the founder of pragmatism, truth changes because reality itself changes, leading us to pieces of truth instead of absolute truth. That is, truth is a process (Williams, 2005:11). In this sense, post-truth is not the claim that truth does not exist but that facts are subject to our point of view (McIntyre, 2018:11)

According to Orhan Hançerlioğlu's (1977) *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Truth does not express objective reality itself but its reflection in thought and the conformity between thought and its object." Hançerlioğlu explains the difference between the two words as follows:

Reality makes us wish for objective reality, and truth makes us wish for the subjective reflection of this objective reality in our minds. For example, a pen we hold is real; its reflection is truth. The articulation of both concepts in their true form needs to be clarified. Therefore, there is an objective aspect in our subjective truth, and truth is as objective as it is subjective. Truth is never subjective; we call it subjective because it is reflected in our subjectivity. Otherwise, it is always objective because it is reflected in something objective. Is what we see the truth? Or is it a dream? Our truths are approximate, therefore relative. (Hançerlioğlu, 1977, p. 276)

The importance of the post-truth concept emerges more clearly at this point because it allows us to question the context that reveals it and the concept itself.

The birth of fact-checking is undoubtedly not only paralleled by the emergence of digital media. If the concept of post-truth is considered only within the framework of technology-media, it will offer a reductionist perspective.

¹ TDK: <https://sozluk.gov.tr/> see: "hakikat", "gerçek" Access Date: 20.08.2023

The concept of fact-checking followed a parallel course with the idea of post-truth. The inflation in fake news production during the 2016 presidential elections in the US with Donald Trump's presidency and Trump's "media versus media" discourses are undoubtedly the most influential factors that made the concept of fact-checking prominent. However, we can also read the idea of fact-checking as a new investment in the media industry.

Today, news verification sites are established to prevent information/news pollution from catching up with the production and consumption speed of fake news due to the circulation speed and the assembly-line-based technique of newsmaking in digital media.

Still, fact-checking sites can easily fall into this fake news cycle. For instance, the Turkish news verification platform *teyid.org* published incorrect news about the "allegation that the flag of 'No' was hung on the Bavarian State Opera House for the referendum." Then, it made a "correction" but published the news using the "hashtag" rather than the "correct" label.¹

Many lies and false news, especially during the 2016 elections in the USA, have been the subject of great controversy. Google then rolled out 'Fact Check' in several countries. Google has now made this application available worldwide. Wherever 'Google News' is in use and in all languages where search results are available, news that has successfully passed the fact-checking process of Google News is included in Google search results as "fact-checked." In addition, Google, which has developed a fact-checking tool, provides its users with a fact-checking search page service.²

¹ Teyit: <https://teyit.org/referandum-icin-bavarian-devlet-opera-binasina-hayir-bayragi-asildi-iddiasi/>

² Google fact-checked: <https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer>

In addition, summits where international fact-checking sites come together today occur regularly.¹ The increasing number of these sites as an "assurance" investment shows that media owners also undertake concerns about news production and the reliability of information; these sites are rapidly becoming "media kits" that keep the media power alive.

In the report titled "The Rise of Fact-checking Sites in Europe," published by the Reuters Institute,² information is presented on how fact-checking sites operating in 20 different countries are organized, how they are funded, and how they work. The research shows that these sites primarily work by creating an NGO (non-governmental organization) model and that they define themselves as social activists.

The concept of fact-checking is modern due to its theoretical framework. Post-truth is an attempt to question the idea of postmodernity again through fact-checking. Referring to Cemil Meriç's (1999:63) saying that truth is "a Goddess who wears a different dress in each age," we can say that the truth is redefined and subsequently falsified through fact-checking, which is done with the claim of revealing the truth.

In this study, by evaluating fact-checking as a new media discourse, we will discuss how frequently the news verification sites operating in Turkey, Teyit, Doğrula, and Doğruluk Payı, check the fake news in the "Disinformation Bulletin" published by the Presidency Communication Directorate. The aim is to show how successful the fact-checking channels are in the fight against fake news as they claim, and whether these channels are the new media gatekeepers.

Before doing this analysis, we will discuss the network society, information society, fact-checking, post-truth, news, discourse, ideology, and the concept of postmodernity to show the gray area of the distinction between lie and truth.

¹ International fact-checking summits: <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/apply-now-for-the-seventh-global-fact-checking-summit-in-oslo/>

² Reuters Institute: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/rise-fact-checking-sites-europe>

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review, we will evaluate the notion of postmodernity in terms of its connection with the concepts of the network society, fact-checking, and post-truth; then, we will discuss where the border between lie and truth passes in the relationship between news, discourse, and ideology.

2.1. Postmodernity

Although postmodernity refers to a situation that follows modernity, it mostly corresponds to the diversity and transformation of individual and social identities. In this respect, postmodernity represents a detachment from modernity rather than an evolutionary phase (Sarup, 2014, p. 186).

For postmodernists, there are truths, not a single truth, resulting from our different positioning in the face of problems. In this assumption, people's motivations arising from social, psychological, or other reasons can affect how they handle the concepts they use. According to this argument, reality or truth is not absolute; it can vary according to position and has relativity within this framework.

By its very nature, postmodernism cannot fit into a definition because it is already against such deterministic definitions. In other words, it is possible to encounter many definitions of postmodernism as much as the number of postmodernists (Sarup, 2014, p. 186). That is why Williams (2005, p. 165) states that postmodernity creates the most vigorous resistance and liberating thought against uniformity. On the other hand, it might be argued that the "character" of postmodernism, which does not say exactly anything but says everything, fits the definition of "character erosion" defined by Sennett (2008:10-11). However, the

primary motivation of postmodernism is to be a discourse against the monopoly of knowledge in the broadest sense.

Postmodernism is an understanding that opposes the modernist argument that there is a singular and unchanging nature of reality. Postmodernism states that there is no objective reality, so that no proposition can carry a universal claim. Another important argument is that "neither the individual nor collectivity" has the power to represent reality (Sarup, 2014, pp. 206-213).

Jean-Francois Lyotard (2014, pp. 70-102), one of the leading figures of postmodern thought, emphasized that modern ideas are out of fashion, that there is no single use of truths, that there should be a skeptical approach to metanarratives, and even that all definite facts should be approached with suspicion.

According to Lyotard, language has become an object of technology in post-industrial societies. The invasion of language by technology has inevitably led to changes in the status of knowledge. Lyotard said:

One of the most popular research topics today is the efforts to simplify and translate language by translating information into pieces of information. The "performance" or "highest efficiency," which has become increasingly the only criterion, is also applied to language. (Lyotard, 1994, pp. 14-18)

The primary purpose of this new approach, which Lyotard (1994, p. 24) calls "communication ideology," is to turn sentences into messages coded, deciphered, sent, and divided into groups so that what is not translatable or comparable is not considered linguistic.

In addition to being a radical criticism of modernity or modernism founded by Descartes, postmodernism, above all, refers to the existence of various minds instead of a single, immutable, and universal sense, as it objects to the rationality of modernity, the absolute authority of reason to solve all the problems of humanity in all areas, and emphasizes the relativity and dependence of knowledge on context and focuses on language and context instead of reason, truth or integrity (Cevizci, 2017, pp. 317-319).

Although the term postmodernism has been shaped around the debates over the legacy of its predecessor (modernity), postmodernism has moved this framework to many areas, from architecture to art, film, academia to philosophy and thought.

Architectural spaces have been the most visible face of this "rebellion" of postmodernity. While modern architecture has centralization and aggregation, the opposite is seen in postmodern-style architecture (Sim, 2006, p. 18).

In the birth of postmodernism, the influence of Europe's political history in the 20th century should not be ignored. This history has witnessed two great world wars, the rise of fascism, the attempts of modern and enlightened Europeans to bring civilization to non-Europeans or their "barbarian" neighbors, and the wars of liberation of the colonies against the so-called civilized states. All these adverse and unexpected developments have been influential in the birth of postmodernism by casting a shadow on Western humanism, progressivism, optimism, and the claim that it is the antithesis of barbarism and, thereby, causing modernism to be questioned (Cevizci, 2017, p. 321).

According to Daniel Bell, while there was a machine-dependent production power in industrial society before postmodernism, this power was based on knowledge in the post-industrial period. For Bell, the new and central feature of post-industrial society is the codification of theoretical knowledge and a novel relationship of science with technology (Bell, 1999, p. 24).

In summary, postmodernity has brought "an understanding of the modern, which should be read with the paradox of the past (modo) of the future (post) time, and which defends the logic of modernism in one way or another against its rigidity... and a pluralist understanding of morality" (Lyotard, 1994, pp. 17-58). Alternatively, according to Baudrillard, postmodernism is a game played with the remnants of things that have been destroyed. There is no meaning, no progress, only movement in it (Baudrillard, 2011, p. 35).

This structure of postmodern thought constitutes its philosophical representation of the network society formed under the guidance of today's communication technologies. Today, we can read the rise of both fact-checking

formations and post-truth discourses as an objection to the "anything goes character" of postmodern thought. However, this does not require us to unquestioningly accept the "authority claim" of fact-checking formations and post-truth discourses on knowledge and truth.

2.2. Network Society

Van Dijk (2018) defines the network society as a modern type of society that connects an infrastructure of social and media networks, which determines how all segments of society are organized (p. 42).

Manuel Castells (2008), on the other hand, states that the network society, which modern societies have formed since the 1980s, is the source of the unity of diversities in global restructuring and the spread of information and communication technologies to all layers of modern social life:

A new world is taking shape at the end of this millennium. There are three factors in the emergence of this process: the information technology revolution, statism and the economic crisis of capitalism and its subsequent restructuring, and the emergence of cultural and social movements such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism. The interaction between these processes and the reactions they triggered brought along a new dominant social structure, that is, the network society; a new economy, that is, the informational/global economy; and a new culture, that is, the culture of real virtuality. (Castells, 2007, p. 486)

According to Castells (2007), in the information age, flows across people's cultural spaces have become the case. With the elimination of time by technology, the clock-time logic of the industrial age has been surpassed, and history has melted into the culture of the eternal, disembodied social relations and built a culture of virtuality in global flows that transcend time and space (p. 503).

According to Castells, the beginning of the development of information technologies and the transition to the world's network society occurred in the early 1970s, and in the United States, the process that started with the invention of the transistor during the Second World War continued with the transition to the silicon chip in 1954 and, most importantly, the invention of the microprocessor, that is the computer placed on the chip, in 1971. Internet technology, primarily used for military purposes, has created the technological infrastructure of network formation with a simultaneous development process (Castells, 2007, pp. 46-50).

The "ubiquity" and "expense-footedness" state, which are primarily discussed in the context of migration and identity debates, constitute the most memorable feature of Castell's (2008) "Network Society." Freedom of expression has been replaced by freedom of movement in the network society.

Van Dijk (2018, p. 99) emphasizes spacelessness as the most prominent feature of the network society. According to him, "ground geography" has been replaced by "flow geography" in the network society. Van Dijk (2018) states that the network society consists of individuals, groups, and organizations connected by social and media networks and that these networks both expand and contract (global). The network society emphasizes that it is not a homogeneous and central structure but a heterogeneous and multicenter structure. (Dijk, 2018, pp. 72-55).

Theorists known for their work in political communication, such as John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, and Harold Lasswell, promoted the spread of information by the mass media as a substantial development in the name of public opinion and conscious democracy (Meyer & Hincman, 2014, pp. 82-93).

Adorno and Horkheimer, from the Frankfurt School, who evaluated the results of the information industry, focused on the opiating aspect of the media regarding the masses and thought that the Industrial Revolution had blunted the quality of human communication by introducing techniques everywhere. (Maigret, 2013, pp. 87-90).

Undoubtedly, these views expressed concerns that despite the increase in information, the quality of information was declining, and therefore "truth" was ignored.

The influential role of small or large wired or wireless media networks in shaping today's network society shows how appropriate the concerns about ignoring the truth are. Stating that there is a sense-ratio between the effectiveness of our senses, McLuhan (2005, p.24) says that each media, while highlighting a particular importance, changes how people perceive the world by reducing the effectiveness of others. It evaluates the media in two categories: "hot" and "cold." It defines warm sensation as a passive tool (photo, radio, cinema) that the receiver does not need to participate in and cold media as a tool (television, telephone) that requires active participation.

Baudrillard (2011, p. 83) says that television is "a model of daily life, something that foretells what will happen, something that breaks our connection with the real world by presenting us with world views." Addressing the effects of means of communication and broadcast products, Baudrillard analyzes what kinds of interventions are carried out on reality and meaning. According to him, although we encounter more and more news daily, we live in a world where meaning is less produced. This is due to three assumptions (Baudrillard, 2011, p. 119).

According to the first assumption, the news produces meaning but cannot prevent the general loss of meaning. According to the second assumption, just as the news has no relationship with the meaning, the news belongs to another order. The assumption on which the third and Baudrillard emphasize is as follows: There is a compulsory relationship between news inflation and meaning deflation, in which meaning is destroyed by news (Baudrillard, 2011, p. 118). Therefore, the development of the global media and the fact that the news is accessible regardless of time and space makes no sense to reach the truth.

Aldous Huxley's (2003) prediction about where the rise of technologies and information in the Brave New World will reach seems to be realized today. According to Huxley, there is no need to be subjected to external pressure to detach people from reality and deprive them of their consciousness and history. Because in Huxley, society is in love with the executioner. In this process, which is called the "digital age" or the "information age," people will start to like the pressure created by the power and upgrade the technologies that direct their thinking skills and perceptions of

reality. In Huxley's *New World*, contrary to Orwell's (2000) warning in 1984, the danger that awaits us is not to be without information or to hide the truth but to enjoy a situation where the truth loses its importance by being rained with information (Postman, 2011, p. 173).

At this point, the argument that the media gained its independence is not unwarranted. The myth of "free, independent, participatory" media, expressed about new communication technologies, has been realized, but the truth has turned into another form.

Esser (2014), in his study discussing the effect of the media on politics, states that the media has gained a central position in most political routines such as election campaigns, government communication, public diplomacy, and image building without the need for politicians to travel from city to city thanks to the omnipresence of the media. Thus, politics is shown as the media space (Esser, 2014, p. 43).

In summary, the network society, which refers to the integration of society with digital culture and its becoming a part of the sociology of everyday life, is shaped within the framework of mass media and the possibilities and impossibilities offered by these tools. Undoubtedly, the "interactivity" feature of information technology that shapes the network society makes it impossible to stay outside the network. As a matter of fact, the network society and the information society are intertwined like fingernails and toenails.

2.3. Information Society

The idea of information society is used to express a new social structure shaped by communication and information technology developments. However, Castells (2008) uses the term *informational society* rather than *information society*. according to him, since all past societies were based on information, only the concept of *informational* meets the unique identity of this age.

The term informational refers to the characteristics of a specific social organization, in which the production, processing, and transfer of information have become the main sources of productivity and power due to the new technological conditions that have emerged in this historical period. My terminology is to establish a parallelism with the distinction between industry (industrial) and industrial (industrial). An industrial society (a common term in the sociological tradition) is not only a society with industry but also a society in which the social and technological forms of industrial organization spread to all areas of activity, starting from the main activities within the framework of the economic system and military technology, and extending to the objects and habits of daily life. My use of the terms "informational society" and "informational economy" aims to explain today's transformations in a more concrete way that goes beyond the common observation that information and knowledge are important for our societies. One of the key elements of informational society is the logic of creating networks in its basic structure. (Castells, 2008, p. 25)

The information society refers to a situation in which the selected information about what is happening in the world is presented in a biased and incomplete yet excessive way. This flow of information lasts non-stop throughout the day. Our ontological inquiries that arise in the occasional interruptions in the internet access that provides this flow clarify our dependence on information. The flow of information is so parallel with the feeling of security that as the flow continues, we feel that we are in a place where we know ourselves and can have more or less control, that is, in our home. In our current information society, it is now necessary to question ontologically and epistemologically what information is and how it is accessed.

Even knowledge no longer means "scientific knowledge" and has begun to be used in the sense of "information" (Geray, 2003, p. 124). Lyotard (2014, pp. 12-18) said that knowledge would no longer become a tool of one's mental and personality formation but a market commodity bought and sold. Giddens (2005, p. 76) also says that services, ideas, and social relations in the information society have become commodities and become commoditized by becoming priceable and marketable.

Plato [375-365 BC] (1973) quotes a story about King Thamus in his *Phaedrus*. In the story told by Socrates to his friend Phaedrus, Thamus once hosted the god Theuth, the inventor of geometry, astronomy, calculus, and writing. Theuth shows Thamus his inventions and tells him they should be used in Egypt. Plato [375-365 BC] (1973, pp. 95-96) continues the story as follows:

Thamus studied all the inventions and said which ones he liked or disliked. Regarding writing, Theuth said: "My king, this invention is the recipe for the wisdom and memory of the Egyptians." Thamus: "O inventor of inventors, it is different to predict whether inventing will benefit or harm those who use it because those who start to use writing will not use their memories and become forgetful. They will depend on some external rather than internal resources to remember things. The recipe you offer is for reminder, not memory. When it comes to wisdom, students will reach fame thanks to their untruthful wisdom, but these students, who lack a guide, will have information. Perhaps they will be considered wise, but they will be ignorant of many things,

and instead of being true sages, they will be a burden to society with the pride of wisdom.

This story is undoubtedly crucial in terms of showing us how accurate Plato's prediction is, as well as how intense the "informational violence" we face today in terms of its consequences. When we say informational violence, we mean using information, as Plato says.

Indeed, Neil Postman (2016, p. 65) said, "unsupervised information can be deadly." Baudrillard, on the other hand, in his study (Baudrillard, 2011, p. 44), where he questioned the truth based on the idea that knowledge was simulated under the direction of power, criticized the "informational violence" over the fact that the US actually fought in the 1991 Gulf War and that this war was carried to television just like an ordinary movie: "While watching the Gulf series, no one gave up their drink and food" (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 123).

In addition to watching the war as if watching a movie, many series are watched today as if they are part of the political day. As McLuhan (2005, p. 11) stated about information tools, "*We shape our tools, and as a result, they shape us.*" For example, historical series such as *Payitaht Albulhamit* and *Diriliş Ertuğrul* can become reference points for our social identities and politics. Another exemplary consequence of media-driven information is that the "flat-world idea" finds buyers today.

In this study, in which we focus on the presentation of truth rather than where it stands as a value or as a specific value or whether it is sought or not in this time which Virilio calls the "Information Bomb" (2003), we can perhaps see our position on the concept of truth better by looking beyond truth.

2.4. Post-Truth

Truth is a pharaoh who travels from age to age, a Goddess who wears a different dress at every age. (Meriç, 1999, p. 63)

The Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines post-truth as "*the situation in which objective facts are less effective than emotions and personal opinions in forming public opinion on a subject.*" According to the dictionary, the suffix "post," which comes before the word "truth," emphasizes that the specified concept has become insignificant or irrelevant rather than referring to the aftermath of a situation or event such as "post-war."

The concept of post-truth was first used in 1992 by screenwriter and novelist Steve Tesich in his article titled "A Government of Lies" in *The Nation* magazine.¹ In this article, Tesich touched upon the Iran/Contra scandal during the Reagan era and discussed the position taken by the US administration during the First Gulf War, concluding: "We saw what the state wanted to show us, not what really happened, and

¹ Counterpunch: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/02/15/post-truth-is-the-truth-as-he-sees-it/>

we didn't even question it. This made us feel good because our state protected and watched over us. "¹

We also see that the concept is included in *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty in Contemporary Life*, published by Ralph Keyes in 2004. Keyes focuses on the normalization and adoption of lying and deception, which lead to the collapse of honesty, and the fact that those who engage in these behaviors do not find this situation strange.

The concept of "truthiness," which is also parallel to today's definition of the post-truth concept, was expressed by US actor and comedian Stephen Colbert in 2005 and was chosen as the word of the year 2005 by the American Polish Association. According to Colbert, people are divided into two: "those who use their brains to reach the truth" and "those who believe from the heart" (The Colbert Report, 2005).

The association defined the concept of "truthiness" as "the preference of concepts and phenomena that are desired to be true instead of concepts or phenomena that are known to be true" (American Dialect Society, 2006). Furthermore, there is information that the emergence of the concept of post-truth was pioneered by the term "decay of truth" developed by Rand Corporation (Kakutani, 2018, p. 14).

Many different sources are shown regarding where the concept was first used. In this thesis, we believe that it would be more appropriate to focus on the popularity and context of the post-truth concept rather than where it was first used.

We think that it is not a coincidence that the concept of post-truth follows a course parallel to the concept of fact-checking as its media counterpart or projection. One refers to politics and culture (we mean Trump and the cultural aura of the electoral base that brought him to power), while the other represents a "war" of the media against the media.

¹ The Nation Magazine: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/post-truth-and-its-consequences-what-a-25-year-old-essay-tells-us-about-the-current-moment/>

Post-truth seems to be positioned as a modern reaction to postmodern thought and praxis because positivist thought now embraces this concept. Therefore, the discussion of truth is reopened around this concept.

Although M. Kakutani (2018, pp. 27-30) formulated the subtitle of his work titled *The Death of Truth* as “The Art of Lying in the Age of Trump,” he attributed the loss of reality, which he thinks he climbed to the top with Trump, to overall news addiction, and most importantly, to the “information democracy,” which he associated with the “wisdom of the crowds” instead of actual knowledge.

Kakutani (2018, p. 48) quotes the former Trump campaign manager about the opposition media: “*You took everything Donald Trump said literally, and the American people did not.*” This sentence is essential because the knowledge that brought Trump to power points to a type of knowledge that his opponents do not have or approve of. Thus, unregistered or unapproved truth information was recorded as “post-truth.”

Furthermore, Kakutani (2018), who stated that more than 400 “Science Walks” were held against Trump in 35 states of America in April 2017, represents the argument developed against postmodern thought, which he defined as post-truth in the following sentence, quoted from Stanley Fish: “*With the death of objectivity, the obligation to be true disappeared. Now I just have to be interesting*” (Kakutani, 2018, p. 37).

It is noteworthy in terms of showing us the harmony of the conservative thought represented by Trump with postmodern thought and the naturalization of the “marriage” of left-wing thinkers, including Kakutani, with science.

If our perceptions of reality are dependent on ideas, if theories themselves can make different discourses about the same problem at the same time, and most importantly, if the choice between ideas is determined by individual beliefs or persuasion methods instead of rational-empirical principles, where is “objectivity,” “reality,” or “truth”?

Thomas Kuhn says it does not make sense to try to reach universal and objective knowledge because even if we leave aside psychological or sociological

processes, it is paradigmatic for us to reach knowledge. Different paradigms reach different information, and scientific revolutions occur with the displacement of these paradigms. Thus, Kuhn rejects the existence of an observational neutral science, as in postmodernism (Anlı, 2011).

According to Heidegger, predictions turn to prejudices, and then these prejudices risk and test predictions in the way of complete understanding of the text, that is, in the case of applying them to objects. Pre-views and prejudices that do not fit the objects are eliminated in this crucible, and those that fit emerge in a strengthened and renewed way (Gadamer, 1988, p. 72).

Gadamer said this when describing Heidegger's concept of prejudice. "Biases are not necessarily grounded and erroneous so that they inevitably distort the truth. On the contrary, the historicity of our existence requires precisely the prejudices that form the beginning of our experiences" (Gadamer, 1977, p. 9). Therefore, we can say that our prejudices are prerequisites for us to understand something.

Keyes (200, p. 28) states that no one "lies" anymore," "speaks wrongly," "makes wrong judgments," or "makes mistakes." As a matter of fact, using the expression "I was not honest" instead of "I lied" sounds better and alleviates the traces it will leave on the individual exposed to the lie. Alleviating the discourses involving lies with language games also helps to reduce the ethical concerns that lying will create in the individual. The fact that hiding the truth is not such a bad thing is internalized, and the idea that the lie told is not exactly a lie is widely accepted.

Keyes (2004, p. 25) mentions the existence of a third category in the post-truth age, which can be considered neither exactly true nor false. Keyes called this category, which consists of ambiguous expressions, "enriched truth," which softens the behavior of lying by covering up the truth firmly.

Accordingly, at a time when media dominance prevails, reality is produced and transmitted to people through media tools. The media, which chooses the facts to be published by choosing for us among the dozens of information out there, offers us a copy of their images. On the other hand, people do not react to real people and places but to the images produced by the media (Giddens, 2008, p. 153). In this way,

the realities allowed by the media were reproduced in the form of images; the line between the images accepted and experienced by people and the reality was lost.

As Postman points out; We do not see reality as it is, but as our languages are. Our languages are also our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors form the content of our culture. (2011, p. 24)

To summarize, the concept of post-truth has once again become the most debated and contested topic of postmodernism within the framework of "truth" in terms of the "contextual mind" of postmodernity, which breaks down the presuppositions of the modern world and is born into a world where almost everything is contextual and far from elastic and universal assumptions. Fact-checking organizations can be defined as the rising stars of these truth discourses or searches as new media tools.

2.5. Fact-checking

The concept of fact-checking is mainly used in the sense of verification. The first verification site was *snopes.com*, which focused on urban legends and quirks in 1994; *Spinsanity* (now dissolved) was established in 2001; and more politically severe *FactCheck.org* was founded in 2003. These initiatives took advantage of the internet and published instant refutations and corrections.

Focusing on this to a large extent without placing news in any context and using the truth-falsity criterion dominates the technical discussions that prevent the content of the news from being discussed in depth. It is forgotten that every event can gain meaning within its context. Thus, not the gigantic differences between entirely opposite worlds but the endless efforts to verify and falsify the facts in the explanations preoccupy perceptions.

In his book titled *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*, published in 2016, Lucas Graves discussed three major verification platforms operating in the USA and examined the functioning of the verification mechanism (Graves, 2016, p. 20). Lucas conducted a detailed analysis of

FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and Washington Post's Fact Checker, which he described as pioneers in the development of the verification system (Graves, 2016, p. 41). Graves described verification as a form of journalism, noting that units for verifying information coming into the newsroom before it is published have existed for a long time. In the USA, there are departments that have been conducting internal verification in the press organs since the 1920s. These departments have been established to prevent reporting unfounded allegations and sharing false information with the public. However, emphasizing that this verification process is the opposite of the verification mechanism used today, Graves (2016, pp. 25-26) emphasized that verification platforms are checking already-shared news, investigating suspicious allegations shared with the public, and trying to attract the public's attention to this issue.

As Graves points out, the biggest problem of verification platforms is actually the fact-checking of the news that has entered circulation and the problem of "selling" the news again after it has already been purchased by the public. However, it is noteworthy that these platforms are primarily non-profit organizations.

The first question that arises here is the methods by which the claims to be confirmed are selected. At this point, there are also criteria, such as the fact that the selected news is based on verifiable facts and the prioritization of the most important news for the public, which is precisely where the theories of filter bubbles and gatekeeping raise a remarkable question: Whose facts and which filters do the prioritized facts pass through? Based on what and by whom? These questions remain the most crucial questions for fact-checking institutions and news sites.

As a matter of fact, fact-checking platforms in Turkey, including teyid.org, verify news through the methods and principles they have determined in the "verification manuals" they have published. We learn the opinions of these verification platforms about whether some news is true or false through the verification handbooks they publish.¹

¹ Teyid: https://teyit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/dogrulama_el_kitabi-baski.pdf

Jason Reifler (2010), in his research paper, *When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions*, found that following President Bush's reports that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, fact-checked reports of the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq failed to reduce misperceptions for the most determined participants, and even worse, in some cases reinforced misperceptions among ideological subgroups.

Another research report by the New America Foundation (2012) titled *Misinformation and Fact-Checking: Research Findings from Social Science* shows that giving participants confirmed information about whether Obama was born in America and whether he was born from a Muslim family did not change their political views, instead, more information did not always show that their views changed accordingly, as people were closer to confirmation bias (accepting information that confirms their beliefs) and non-confirmation bias (ignoring information that weakens their beliefs). This may explain why verification platforms are so unpopular and ineffective, and sometimes can even worsen misperceptions.

Morgan Marietta (Marietta, Barker & Browser, 2015), a professor at the University of Massachusetts, argues that targeted objectivity has not been approached well in her study, in which she investigated whether the three fact-checking institutions agreed on the topics they chose and the outputs they achieved. In the study focusing on 2012-2013, it is stated that PolitiFact carried out 16 checks on the problem of racism, which was one of the prominent agendas at that time, and Fact Checker and FactCheck.org did not carry out any checks on this issue.

No one is interested in yesterday's corrected lie today because it remained in the past and has already entered the memories as data. Lies spread six times faster than the truth, according to a 2018 study published in the journal *Science* that assessed the twelve-year activity of 126,000 Twitter users (Langin, 2018).

According to Stuart Hall, who argues that the functioning of the media is ideological, this functioning produces social consent to the actions of the political elite (Hall, 1994 p. 99). Therefore, the media has to develop its discourses to develop its existence and maintain its dominant position. As a matter of fact, when we

evaluate fact-checking platforms in this way, we can say that they, similar to Baudrillard's (2011, p. 31) "Disneyland," produce overall social consent, which covers a hyperreal information network like "Disneyland" (but this time without entertainment).

The consent that fact-checking organizations produce in this regard requires both ideological and discourse analysis. It would be naive to think that news selection itself is subject to discourse and an ideological agenda and that fact-checking organizations are exempt from this subordination. At this point, it would be useful to look at the position of news between discourse and ideology.

2.6. News, Discourse, and Ideology

When we look at the dictionary (TDK, 2023), we see news as information on a fact obtained through communication or publication organs. However, most events do not take place in newspapers or news media. The most crucial factor distinguishing the news from an ordinary event is that it is produced by media professionals (Girgin, 2014, p. 116). This makes it inevitable to question the relationship established by the socio-economic, political identity, or the tendency of the person or institution making the news with its discourse and ideology and with the decision to cover something as news or not. As a matter of fact, the editorial preferences experienced during the news publication are determined by those editors' ideological identities (van Dijk, 2008, p. 106).

Sözen (1999, p. 21), who defines the century as the century of discourse, emphasizes that there is no universal reality anymore; on the contrary, there are realities, and reality is built with and within discourse. Ricoeur (2007, p. 125) who extracted the archaeology of the concept of discourse, notes that: "Just as the equivalent of the spoken language is the visible reference, the equivalent of the

written language is the discourse. Discourse is the indicator that goes beyond the function of showing and disclosing what already exists.”

According to Van Dijk (2000), discourse is an essential social practice that is influenced by ideologies and determines how we adapt, learn, or change those ideologies, as well as collective beliefs and, therefore, identification criteria for group members. That is, ideology is one of the primary forms of social cognition, as well as defining the identity of a group and, therefore, its subjectivity (Dijk, 2000, pp. 9-18). In a sense, ideology is a way of representing oneself and the other (even beyond).

Emphasizing that identity is a communicative formation as we realize our identities through daily communication practices, Mumby (2019) says that communication processes and tools are now in the service of economic value production, so our world and the news about it are also determined within the framework of neoliberal hegemonic discourse (Mumby, 2019, pp. 214-238)

In this sense, the fact that the news contains power in its discourse makes it inevitable for us to think of it within the framework of a post-structuralist approach that sees and evaluates the text discourse as a construction of meaning.

Thomas Meyer (Meyer & Hincman, 2014, p. 13), known for his work on the role of media texts in the formation of social and political power, says that the dominance of the extremely ‘short time frame’ of the production cycle of the media in the public sphere of politics causes the loss of the value structures that are associated with the long-term horizon of the political process. Meyer states that the media is a discourse tool and a powerful actor that produces and filters the discourse itself (Meyer & Hincman, 2014, p. 15). There is a fundamental difference in Meyer's and Van Dijk's approach to the issue. Meyer says that the media and media logic occupy and subordinate the political sphere to themselves. (Meyer & Hincman, 2014, p. 13). On the other hand, Van Dijk (2004, p. 128) draws attention to the economic elite's effectiveness in producing the media structure.

According to Van Dijk (2004, pp. 375-382), media organizations often present themselves as the “voice of the corporate master” since they cannot be completely

isolated from the political and economic system in which they are located. In this respect, media organizations emerge as pre-audited supervisory institutions.

Again, according to Van Dijk (2004, pp. 372-375), how information is presented in the media and the persistent emphasis on some issues create a dominant climate of opinion.

According to Foucault (Urhan, 2010, p. 15), since discourse is considered a theoretical formation and an organized social practice, it concerns power and knowledge and produces both knowledge and power. Knowledge is the power that is desired to be seized through discourse. According to Foucault (2014, p. 41), "What is true is the correct appearance of the discourse. If the discourse says the information is accurate, it is true. Therefore, it is not important what the truth is but how the discourse is produced."

However, the concept of power, which Foucault positions next to the concept of discourse, is not a negative association but a positive one. According to him (Sarup, 2017, p. 113), power is not a matter of ownership. Nor is it something that is beneath or at the service of the economy. According to Foucault, power has an attribute that resembles a fishing net with ropes extending everywhere.

Alvin Toffler (2008), who defined the information and computer-based revolution as the "third wave" after the agricultural and industrial revolutions, states that the most significant change brought by digital media is removing information from the masses through means of communication:

Today, the effects of mass media tend to decrease rather than increase. Communication tools targeting individuality instead of mass are gaining dominance in many areas. Newspapers can be considered as the first example in this regard.... Newspapers, which are the oldest means of mass communication, are rapidly losing circulation today.... In the same way, audiovisual publishing is transforming... The de-massification of information by means of communication has also distanced our minds from massiveness. While the "mass mentality" created by the standard images presented to large

masses today is ending, small masses exchange 'fragmented image culture' among themselves. (Toffler, 2008, p. 210)

Although Toffler's approach shows that information is individualized, the media, through tools such as fact-checking, actually massifies information/news constantly. Fact-checking emerges as a new media language that absorbs the problem of trust in information created by new communication technologies.

Chomsky (2003:210-220) argues that the change in the media structure in favor of the dominant economic power serves to "control the public mind". He also draws attention to the fact that mass mergers in media organizations and the laws enacted in this context are organized for the same purpose.

In 2020, the United Nations launched an initiative called "Pause", which aims to make people stop and think when posting about Covid-19 on social media. The campaign is accompanied by the hashtag #takecarebeforeyoushare.

Initiatives such as these, as well as the verification hashtags launched by social media companies against false information, although they aim to provide healthy information, the imposition of "editorial rules" by these companies, especially Twitter's blocking of many of Trump's tweets in the 2020 US elections and the subsequent closure of his account, raise more serious concerns. Indeed, the "twitter files" revealed by Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter (2022) include revelations that the US government paid Twitter millions of dollars to censor information from the public, the censoring of leaks from Biden's son Hunter Biden, the suspension of Trump's account, as well as internal correspondence about Twitter's former management's involvement in the US military's manipulations in the Middle East.

The fact that these revelations are covered as tabloid value rather than mobilizing the sanctions expected as a result of the revelation of the truth suggests that the media has activated "tabloid" as a fourth force or "soft power" other than news, discourse and ideology.

The magazine uses magazine discourse to ensure and reinforce the loyalty of individuals to the screen with its reproductive structures "for everyone" in the distortion of reality. The magazine discourse is an indispensable producer/carrier of

this process with its structure that structures the real world outside of causal relations, detaches facts from their contexts, glorifies the "perpetuation of transience" and "transmits ideology through entertainment" (Ergül, 2000:71). As a matter of fact, Postman (2011:76) defined the age we live in as the "Age of Show". Postman argues that it is the nature of the medium that the content of ideas must be relegated to the background in order to meet the requirements of the interest in millions of short-term and ever-changing pictures, that is, to meet the values of the spectacle (Postman, 2011:106). This determinist view of Postman is supported by many thinkers, for example McLuhan (2014) and Castells (2008).

Due to the importance of technology in human history, technological determinism has been discussed by various thinkers. Raymond Williams, in his *Key Words* (2012), in which he examines the cultural histories of words, explains the meaning of determinism as follows: "In its most general sense, determinism recognizes that there are pre-existing and often 'external' conditions that fix the course of a process or event. 'External' conditions often refer only to what is outside the will or desire of the individuals involved in such a process" (Williams, R. 2012:121).

Freedman argues that Williams put forward his thesis before the widespread use of the Internet, but it is arguable that it remains relevant in today's digital universe (Freedman, 2002:426-427).

The debate on whether media, news and discourse tools and technology determine our "geography of meaning" in the broadest sense of the term is a common topic of discussion in post-printing and post-industrial societies. Technological-media tools have a major role in shaping our world, especially since mobile networks have entered our pockets, or more accurately, they have become a part of our body. So much so that today it has become a chicken and egg paradox.

However, the editorial choice of which news items in particular should occupy our agenda today has become more complex in today's digital media compared to yesterday's conventional media. Thresholds and categorizations such as "main headline", "front page", "page three", which were subject to a certain period of time (daily) in conventional media, have been replaced by "all-headlines" indefinitely.

Algorithmic interventions regarding which news should or should not be circulated and for how long are at the initiative of the relevant companies. As a matter of fact, the fact that companies such as google and facebook cooperate with fact-checking organizations and leave you alone with the algorithmic choices of their editors when you search for anything has taken the issue of agenda setting and threshold guarding to a completely different dimension.



2.7. Agenda Setting and Gatekeeping

The concept of gatekeeping was first introduced by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947, 1951). With this theory, Lewin pointed to channels and gatekeepers to explain the focal points of social changes. Although there is no official definition of gatekeeping, it can be defined as an information control process that generally includes "selection, addition, storage, display, channelization, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localization, integration, ignoring and deletion of information" (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008, pp. 2-3).

Similar to gatekeeping, agenda-setting shows people what to think about. As a matter of fact, while gatekeeping refers to the effect of the media in determining the priorities of public opinion, agenda setting refers to the interactive relationship between the media and society in shaping the list of importance. In general, the gatekeeper can be defined as determining what the public thinks and is worried about (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007).

Due to the scarcity of resources and the challenges surrounding information gathering, traditional media institutions were given the task of compiling information, filtering this information, selecting the contextually most appropriate information, and disseminating it to the public through mass media channels. The actors of this filtering and information selection consisted of “gatekeepers;” that is, elite newsmakers and editors selected and published stories that they saw as crucial for their audience.

This one-way flow of information created a gatekeeping and agenda-setting function for traditional mass media institutions in the twentieth century. In contrast, the scarcity of information on issues of public interest was reversed mainly due to the increasing accessibility and availability of the Internet as the century progressed. Instead, there is now a plethora of information readily available to the public, especially those with access to the Internet (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007).

According to Meraz (2009), this abundance has changed the picture of the gatekeeping and agenda-setting effects of mass media on the public. The public is now given more than a handful of options for where to consume their news. In addition, with the creation of social media, user-generated content has empowered the public with the means to become their own keepers and agenda-setters.

With the new communication technologies, "gatewatching" has started to be used instead of the concept of gatekeeping. Gatewatching, developed by Bruns (2003) as a new concept, is more suitable to meet the news media in the new communication environment.

Gatewatchers make the news public by pointing to sources rather than printing or broadcasting it. Thus, it increases the speed of reporting news by enabling journalists to transfer the source's information anywhere on the internet without waiting for gatekeepers' personal/corporate evaluations.

Although the personal prejudices of professional journalists continue to be effective in their news, the fact that readers resort to different news sources causes a decrease in this effect. More importantly, gatewatchers are not required to have

professional journalistic skills. Gatewatching is based on general online search skills rather than journalism skills (Bruns, 2003).

Gatewatching, described by Bruns (2003), is carried out today by everyone connected to the network who shares from different sources on online social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, along with personal blogs.

However, filter bubbles and echo chambers generated by algorithms on networks today contribute to the tendency of verification bias of individuals. Pariser (2011) calls the transformation of software, which determines the content that users will encounter based on their search history, likes, avoidances, followings, locations, and many other online and offline behaviors, into an algorithm consisting of information that will support the user's biases, the "eternal you cycle." This cycle is carried out by algorithmic mechanisms, which the author says form an overall "attention economy" (Pariser, 2011, pp. 14-39).

Attention economics is also governed by Tim Wu's (2017) "attention traders." Wu (2017, p. 326) says that this commercial network, which started with the daily newspaper, reached its peak with TV broadcasts, then computers, and finally, when we come to the twenty-first century, with the phones we carry with us at any moment, and that the new limit will be determined by the open fate of attention traders (Kakutani, 2018, p. 91). After all, our most valuable "property" is our attention.

Today, the fact-checking formations that have risen as a new media discourse are expected to fight against the algorithmic filters mentioned above, but the fact that they themselves are caught in this filter network and claim truth on top of it makes it inevitable to evaluate these formations as our new threshold watchmen.



2.8. Fact-Checking Organizations in Turkey

Four Turkey-based platforms are signatories to the principles determined by the International Fact-Checkers Network (IFCN), which gathers verification formations worldwide under one roof. Although the Verify Syria Platform is based in Turkey, it only produces analyses of the Syrian civil war. Other formations,¹ such as Malumatfuruş and Teyit Hattı, which have started the verification business in Turkey in addition to Teyit,² Doğrula, and Doğruluk Payı, can also be mentioned.

Among the IFCN signatories, Teyit and Doğrula are very similar in structure. Doğruluk Payı is distinguished from these two formations by the analysis files it

¹AA: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/teyithatti/p/teyit-hatti-hakkinda->

²Malumatfuruş: <https://www.malumatfurus.org/hakkinda/>

creates on issues such as economy, politics, and everyday life. Teyit and Doğrula usually perform daily verifications within the framework of their own criteria. In addition to these analyses, Teyit follows the statements of the politicians and provides a separate verification service for them.

These three platforms, each operating as a media company, define themselves as non-profit organizations. These entities, which share their sources of income transparently on an annual basis, also share detailed information about their corporate identities and financial status on their web pages.

With Turkey's transition to the presidential political system in 2018, the Prime Ministry General Directorate of Press and Information, which regulated the state's relations with the media until then, was abolished with the prime ministerial office. Instead, the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications was¹ established, and the General Directorate of Press and Information's duties were entrusted to this institution. Prof. Dr. Fahrettin Altun's Directorate of Communications established the Center for Combating Disinformation in 2022, and the first publication of this center, the Disinformation Bulletin, was published in October 2022. This bulletin, which was stated to be weekly when it was established, was also published daily in case the agenda was busy.

In establishing such a state institution, the speed of circulation of fake news and the development of fact-checking organizations in Turkey, which claim to check fake news, acting within the framework of "their own agendas," have been influential factors. Furthermore, the fact that each institution establishes mechanisms to verify and deny the claims against it politically or commercially parallels the faster public acceptance of the "lie-striking-magazine" information. Also, the fact that fact-checking formations started to create a "power locus" can be cited as a reason for political institutions to take measures under the title of fighting against disinformation on their own initiative.

¹İletişim Başkanlığı: <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/teskilat-semasi>

During the election struggle between Britain's conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Labor Party's head Jeremy Corbyn, conservatives changed the name of their official Twitter account to "FactCheckUK."¹ They tweeted that declared Boris Johnson the winner of the election. The incident prompted a debate in the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) over who should accept the news as true or false, so much so that IFCN now checks the news of non-accredited fact-check sites as an authority figure. The fact that the news has started to be referenced by news sites accredited to IFCN shows that people have started to leave the "reality of the news" to the authority of these institutions. *Cumhuriyet*'s report that "It emerged that the images in the video claimed by Fahrettin Altun, Head of Communications of the Palace to show 'our republican president listening to a prayer in Granada' were not from Granada,"² *Yeniçağ*'s report that "Teyit.org denied the video Ahmet Hakan carried to his corner and through which corner he criticized CHP's leader Kılıçdaroğlu,"³ and the news website *Ulusal*'s report that "Teyit.org denied the allegations of the organized crime organization leader Sedat Peker"⁴ might be given as examples of this.

Again, one of the most prominent moments in the police attacks against the protests that started after Melih Bulu was appointed as the rector of Boğaziçi University was the claim that a police officer who dived among the students walking to the university said, "Look down." The phrase soon became a slogan, first with the

¹ Poynter: <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/a-political-party-has-masqueraded-as-a-fact-checker-whats-next/>

² Cumhuriyet: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dogrulama-platformu-teyitorg-sarayin-iletisim-baskani-fahrettin-altunu-yalanladi-1730522>

³ Yeniçağ Gazetesi: <https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/service/amp/teyit-orgdan-ahmet-hakana-yanlanlama-219185h.htm>

⁴ Ulusal: <https://www.ulusal.com.tr/gundem/sedat-peker-in-o-iddiasina-teyit-ten-kanitli-yanlanlama-h283738.html>

hashtag #WeWeWillNotLookDown. The police then released a new video filmed from a different angle, suggesting that the police officer actually said, “from below.” The news site *Gazeteduvar* published the first news by referring to Teyit.¹ Against this, *Sabah* newspaper said, “They even confirmed the lie! Teyit.org became Yalan.org,” with analyses of the financial structure and external partnership arrangements of Teyit to suggest that it makes biased news.²

These examples will undoubtedly open up the structure, working areas, activities and models of fact-checking organizations, which have emerged as new threshold watchdogs both in the world and in Turkey, and the role of algorithmic choices that determine the virality of news circulated via google, facebook and instagram in the relationship between these companies and fact-checking organizations will undoubtedly be discussed further.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Purpose and Scope

It can be assumed that one of the central claims of verification platforms is to decipher unfounded news aimed at manipulating society by reaching open sources or interested parties. The first of the "Principal Codes," to which the platforms accredited by IFCN agreed to be signatories, was determined as being impartial and fair when performing the verification. In this context, we understand that the relevant verification platforms have a claim to be impartial. So, are there limits to this claim? What we mean is, is it enough for a verification platform to be “impartial” in its verification?

¹ Gazete Duvar: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/teyitorg-inceledi-polis-once-asagidan-goz-goze-geldigemiz-ise-asagi-bak-dedi-haber-1512299>

² Sabah: <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2021/02/05/yalani-bile-teyit-etti-teyitorg-oldu-yalanorg>

In order to find the answer to this question within the scope of the research while assessing the impartiality of IFCN-accredited formations, we started with the media gatekeeping concept we mentioned earlier. Traditional media was the gatekeeper of society. Then, could the verification platforms have taken over the gatekeeping function of the media by fact-checking certain news items but not others they determine by "editorial" selection? To fulfill the principle of impartiality, which news is selected besides the content examined is also essential. For example, on what grounds was the claim that the Turkish armed forces used chemical weapons, discussed extensively on social media platforms in October 2022, not considered worthy of verification by fact-checking sites? While the relevant news was discussed on social media platforms and was almost the number one issue on the agenda of politics, fact-checking sites have never addressed this claim, which clearly contradicts the claimed priorities of the related sites in their news selection criteria. On the other hand, in January 2023, Republican People's Party (CHP) Deputy Özgür Özel's claim that the Ministry of Interior had established a mercenary troll army was found worth verifying by using open sources almost on the same day. It was published after a detailed verification process. The effect of the two claims on Turkey's agenda suggests that the choices made to verify certain news items in terms of their prevalence were made by considering a specific agenda.

In this context, we decided to use the verification works published by the Directorate of Communications of the Republic of Turkey under the name of weekly *Disinformation Bulletins* to make comparisons. Of course, it is not possible for a state institution to be impartial. Although the relevant institution is meant to support and maintain the dominant political view, it also aims to undertake the task of a verification platform. Therefore, determining the extent to which the news examined by these bulletins is checked by the IFCN-accredited sites in Turkey, that is Teyit, Doğrula, and Doğruluk Payı, will give us an idea as to whether the editorial choices of these platforms coincide with the news that make up the dominant political and therefore social agenda and to assess their claim of impartiality.

Table 1

Shows the extent to which the news items in the Disinformation Bulletin are taken into consideration by verification bodies.

Number of news items analyzed in Disinformation Bulletin	Number of news items on Turkey's agenda and interaction	(Teyit, Doğrula, Doğruluk Payı) Number of news analyzed by Fact-check organisations	Number of news items which occupied the Turkish agenda and was not included in the agenda of Fact-check organisations
88	25	11	14

In this study, it has been determined that 25 of the 88 news items in the Disinformation Bulletin of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey's Directorate of Communications for 12 weeks were highly engaged in the Turkish agenda and interacted on social media channels. Of the 25 news items, only 11 of them were evaluated by fact-checking channels, while 14 news items were not evaluated by the relevant channels despite occupying the agenda for days or even weeks.

3.2. Hypotheses

The primary hypotheses of this research can be formulated as follows.

- 1- News verification sites, also known as fact-checkers, play the role of gatekeepers by determining which news will be subject to verification and whether it will come to the public agenda.
- 2- News verification sites build a new position of power for themselves through claims of impartial verification/falsification of news.

3.3. Research Method

In order to test the above hypotheses, we searched for the news in a total of 12 *Disinformation Bulletins*, which were published by the Directorate of Communications between October 2022 and December 2022, using the three most basic keywords of the relevant news items in the search engines of the Turkey-based *teyit.org*, *doğrulukpayi.com* and *doğrula.org* websites, accredited to IFCN. We selected these keywords from the spots in the related newsletters. For example, the keywords "656, Mosque, and PVC" were selected from the heading "656-Year-Old PVC Installations to the Mosque." We determined the intensity of discussion about it on social media by determining whether they were shared by Twitter accounts with at least 100 thousand followers in the relevant date range and whether these shares became the subject of at least 100 retweets and 100 likes by using the advanced search tool of the Twitter platform. If even a single account fulfilling the relevant criteria shares it, it might enable approximately three million users to interact with this news. For example, the October 1-8 Disinformation Bulletin determined that two Twitter accounts with an average of 1.5 million followers shared the news item "The Presidency of Religious Affairs earns income from interest." Therefore, examining this widely circulated news by the aforementioned verification sites could not be considered an unwarranted expectation. However, this news item did not come under the radar of any of the three sites in the sample.

In summary, in our methodological framework, we first presented the news items the Directorate of Communications considered as disinformation in detail. We then determined to what extent this news circulated on Twitter according to the abovementioned criteria. Finally, we investigated whether these news items were handled by the sampled verification platforms. By making analyses in line with the findings, we tried to determine whether the verification platforms keep up with their claims.

3.4. Contribution to the Literature

When the keyword "verification" is used in the National Thesis Center database of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), it is seen that there are only four master's theses and two doctoral dissertations. Considering that verification platforms, known as fact-checkers, which have gained a significant position in new media journalism, are the subject of so few theses, it is possible to say that any study on these platforms or their actions will positively contribute to the relevant social sciences literature. Some of these theses in the YÖK database examined the Teyit platform alone. There is no thesis examining the Doğruluk Payı and Doğrula platforms. Similarly, no thesis was found on the Disinformation Bulletins published by the Directorate of Communication. In this respect, we believe that our thesis will fill a gap in the literature.

3.5. Limitations

The fact that our research focused only on comparing the IFCN-approved platforms with the *Disinformation Bulletin* did not allow the research to be conducted on a broader basis to cover different formations. We think that more comprehensive research, including these platforms as well as others without IFCN approval, is vital for the field. In addition, due to time constraints, we have only reviewed the first quarterly publications of the *Disinformation Bulletin*. In this respect, it is possible that such a publication in its infancy may ameliorate its criticized weaknesses in the future. If similar studies cover different time intervals through random sampling in the future, such limitations will be overcome.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. 1-8 October 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

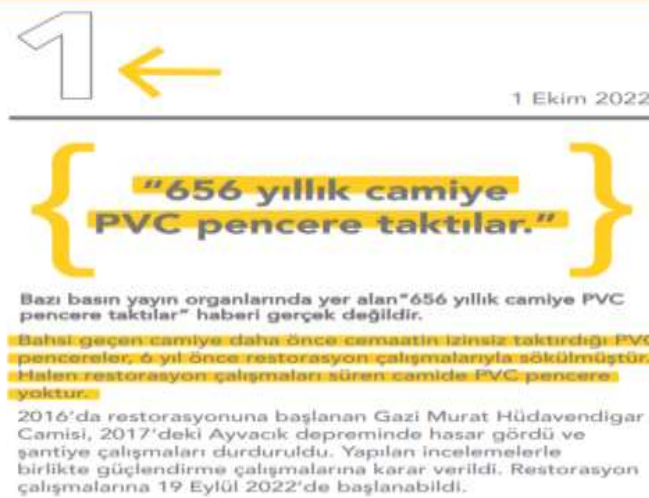
Four news were included in the disinformation bulletin dated 1-8 October 2022, published on the Directorate of Communications of the Republic of Turkey website. In the bulletin, four claims were evaluated under the headings of "They attached PVC to the 656-year-old mosque." dated October 1, 2022; "The Directorate of Religious Affairs generated 58 million 17 thousand liras of interest income in 2021," dated October 4, 2022; "The Turkish Coast Guard pushes immigrants violently

to Greece," dated October 6, 2022; and "There is a shortage of 600 million cubic meters in natural gas warehouses," dated October 8, 2022.

As regards the claim that "They attached PVC to the 656-year-old mosque," which is the first news of the October 1-8 Disinformation Bulletin, it is stated that the news was published in some press organs without disclosing their names. According to the bulletin, the photographs showing Gazi Murat Hüdavendigâr Mosque with PVC windows are old. These windows, which were installed by the community on its own initiative, were removed with the restoration works that started 6 years ago and are still ongoing in the mosque.

Figure 1

The first news item of the Disinformation Bulletin 1-8 October 2022: "They installed PVC windows in the 656-year-old mosque"



Restoration studies of historical artifacts are one of the topics that create interest in social media. During the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), many similar news items were used to convey the message that the AK Party was ignorant about historical artifacts. One of the most popular of this news was the restoration of Şile Castle in 2015. Critical posts likening the restored version of the castle to the famous cartoon character SpongeBob were shared intensively on social media.

Figure 2

Sample tweet that likened Şile Castle Restoration to a cartoon character¹



Senior architect/restoration expert from ITU Faculty of Architecture, one of the experts in the field at the beginning of the restoration works of the castle, and also a member of the Architectural and Urban Conservation Working Group, Prof. Dr. Although Kemal Kutgün explained to news organization BIANET (2015) with examples that the restoration was carried out in the most accurate way scientifically; however, the intense reaction of social media and other news organizations continued to determine the agenda. Therefore, the evaluation of such news by the disinformation bulletin can be considered reasonable in order to prevent disinformation.

In order to determine the power of the first news item of the Disinformation Bulletin, "They installed pvc on a 656-year-old mosque", to influence the agenda, first

¹ Source: <https://twitter.com/errdemglr/status/636265371226378240?s=20&t=Gor-72YHd63n9NuD7M0zmw>

of all, the keywords "mosque, pvc, window" were searched in the advanced search section of Twitter between October 1-3, 2022 by considering the minimum criteria.

Figure 3

The first news item reviewed in Twitter Advanced Search.



The criteria of a share with a minimum of 100 retweets and 100 likes could not be found between the aforementioned dates. Therefore, it can be said that this news did not have an intense interaction on social media.

In the second step, this news was searched in the search engines of teyit.org, dogrulukpayi.com, and dogrula.org sites using the exact keywords. No relevant news was found in any of the three verification platforms. The result did not change when

each keyword was searched separately. The fact that this news is not considered worthy of verification can be argued to demonstrate that these platforms follow criteria such as high interaction rates in social media in their editorial selections.

Another news subject to verification by the Disinformation Bulletin was the news claiming that the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DİB) benefited from interest revenues. According to some media outlets, DİB obtained some of its budget from interest revenues in 2021.

Figure 4

Analysis of the Disinformation Bulletin on DİB.



Although interest is seen as a normalized transaction at every stage

in Turkey's current economic system, since it is prohibited in Islam, it can be seen as an oxymoron situation in which the organization responsible for regulating Islamic practices in the country comes in this way. In this case, it can be considered inevitable that such a claim will come to the agenda about DİB, which is thought to benefit from unexplained income in its budget. However, it is evident that not taking the opinion of

DİB, the party of the claim, while making such news will not be compatible with the ethical rules of journalism. As a matter of fact, the Directorate of Communications declared that the news was disinformative and that the alleged revenues were not obtained from interest. In the Twitter search we made during the period when the relevant news item was on the agenda, it is seen that the two accounts (@kacsaatolduson with 1.1 million followers and @Haber with 489 thousand followers) brought this claim to the agenda. The tweets they sent had a very intense interaction rate, as well.

Figure 5



Twitter Advanced Search results about the news on DİB.

This news item, which has reached a vast audience on Twitter and should be defined as scandalous regarding the relevant institution, was searched with the keywords "religion, interest, and income" and in the sampled fact-checking sites and was found to be considered not worthy of verification by them. On the other hand, there is a confirmed news item in Teyit during that period regarding the amount of the budget allocated to DİB.

The third new item in the Disinformation Bulletin was the Greek Minister of Migration's allegation that the Turkish Coast Guard forces deported refugees trying to cross the Aegean Sea to Greek territorial waters.

Figure 6

Analysis of Disinformation Bulletin dated 6 October 2022



Regarding the prominence of the relevant news item on Twitter, a search was made with the keywords "Greece, immigrant, and minister," and it was discovered that the news did not reach a prevalence according to the criteria we set.

Figure 7

Twitter search results about the claim on the Turkish Coast Guards.



Again, in the searches made on the pages of the verification platforms with the same keywords, it was seen that this claim was not subject to verification. This claim, which was probably taken into consideration by the Ministry of Communications for diplomatic reasons, did not reach a virality that would occupy the political agenda on social media. Thus, the result was expected.

The last news item discussed in the 1-8 October Disinformation Bulletin was shared by some national press organs like *Yeniçağ* and *Birgün* through their Twitter accounts and claimed that Turkey is deficient in natural gas warehouses.

Figure 8

Disinformation Bulletin analysis on natural gas deficiency.



Although no prevalence that meets the criteria of the research was found in the advanced search results on Twitter, this news was shared from the official accounts of *Birgün* with 2.1 million followers, and *Yeniçağ* with 275 thousand followers. Still, it was found that this claim was not evaluated by the fact-checking sites analyzed.

4.2. 9-16 October 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In the bulletin evaluating the second week of October, nine news/claims were assessed. The bulletin's most important agenda was the accident in a coal mine in Bartın on October 14, 2022. The allegations of negligence of state institutions regarding this

accident occupied the agenda in both traditional and social media channels at that time. According to the bulletin, some information in the report of the Court of Accounts, which was the subject of the allegations and prepared before the explosion in the relevant mine, was "distorted" and put on the public agenda.

Figure 9

9-16 October 2022 Disinformation Bulletin on Bartın Mine Accident.



Since the starting point of the related claims is the reports of the Court of Accounts, the keywords "Court of Accounts, *degaj*, and Bartın" were used for the Twitter prevalence search. It is seen that the prevalence of these claims brought up by influential political figures such as Zafer Party (ZP) Chairman Ümit Özdağ and CHP

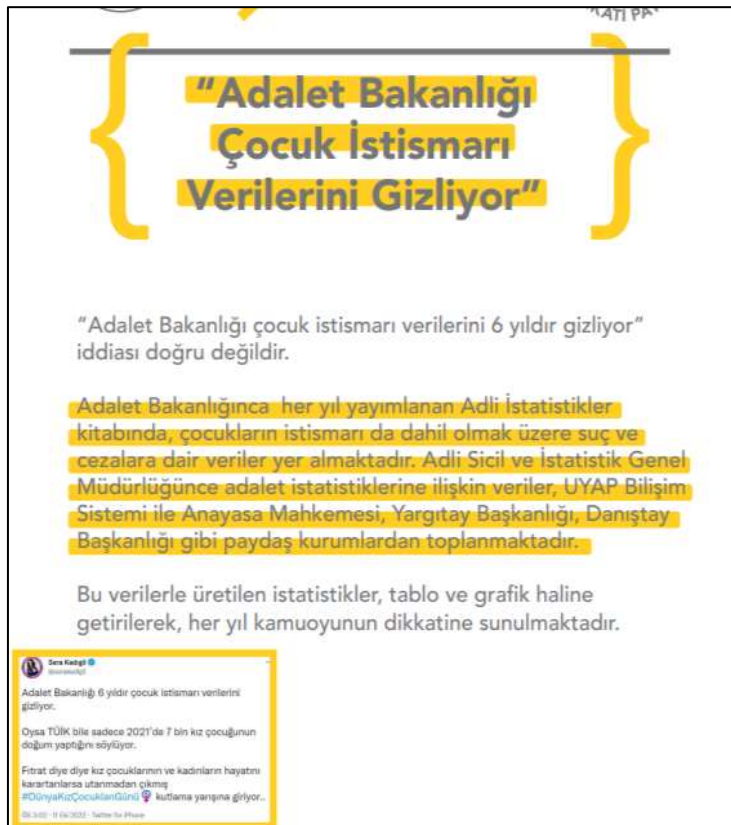
On the other hand, the Directorate of Communications defends the thesis that the relevant Court of Accounts report addresses possible general risks in mines, while the claimants and verification sites argue that the report specifically refers to the mine where the accident occurred.

The second claim in the bulletin is the Greek Minister of Migration's accusation that Turkey mistreated 92 refugees. In the bulletin, it is stated that Greece resorted to disinformation to cover up its own crimes. As with the previous similar claim, it was seen that this news did not meet the prevalence criteria of the research on Twitter. Likewise, the verification sites did not take into account these claims of Greece.

The third claim in the bulletin included a tweet image from the account of Sera Kadıgil, the Istanbul deputy of the Turkish Labour Party (TİP). This tweet argues that the Ministry of Justice has been hiding child abuse data for the last six years.

Figure 11

Disinformation Bulletin analysis of allegations of child abuse.



In the bulletin, this claim is denied by citing the *Judicial Statistics* book published annually by the Ministry of Justice. In the Twitter prevalence search, it was observed that the relevant claim did not reach the prevalence to comply with the research criteria in an account other than the Turkish Labor Party Deputy Sera Kadıgil's. As a result of the searches made on the pages of the verification sites, it was found that this claim by Sera Kadıgil was not taken into consideration by them either.

The fourth claim examined by the bulletin was the news that "Mukhtars irregularly registered foreigners," which was stated on a television channel. In the bulletin, in which the related channel is not disclosed, the claim was evaluated as disinformative because the mukhtars did not have such an authority. No such claim has been encountered on Twitter and the analyzed verification platforms within the relevant date range.

The fifth story of the newsletter examines a claim shared on her personal Twitter page by Ruhat Mengi, who previously worked as a columnist in various newspapers. According to the allegation, the state officials were able to read the WhatsApp messages with three blue ticks. It was observed that this claim, which was described as disinformation by the bulletin, did not reach a prevalence on Twitter.

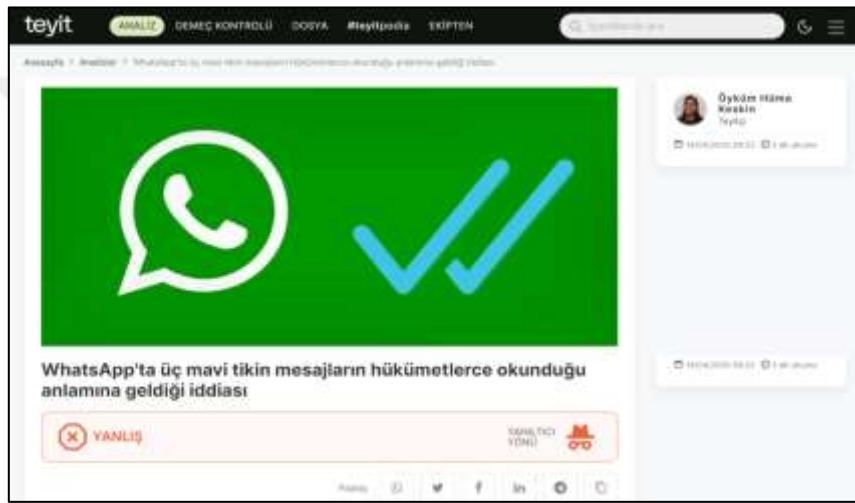
Of the verification platforms, this claim was only addressed on the Teyit's web page and classified as false. This verification, which is in line with the bulletin, seems to belong to 2020, however.

Figure 12

*Twitter Advanced Search result of
WhatsApp themed claims.*



Figure 13



Analysis of
Teyit's claims on
WhatsApp.

Another claim examined in the bulletin is that a female student studying at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University was raped and attacked with a knife. Against the tweets about the incident, the university declared that the allegation was examined by the police forces and turned out to be unfounded. The related claim did not reach a prevalence on Twitter and did not find a place on the pages of the verification platforms either.

Figure 14



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Bulletin on the allegation about the rape of a female university student and the related Twitter search result.

4.3. 17-23 October Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

17-23 October Disinformation Bulletin discussed five claims that occupied the agenda in the related week. The most important is the allegation that the Turkish Armed Forces used chemical weapons against the terrorist organization PKK by showing some videos as evidence. This claim has been widely evaluated in the bulletin.

Figure 15

17-23 October 2022 Disinformation Bulletin analysis about the allegations against the Turkish armed forces.



These claims and the reactions that followed them became one of the main agenda items in the country's traditional and new media environments at that time. Therefore, the expectation that this agenda would also be on the agenda of verification platforms was not unwarranted because it was a hot news item that met the criteria of "virality, urgency, and importance occupying the public agenda. In such an atmosphere, the Disinformation Bulletin has allocated three pages to the relevant claims. It has developed a discourse that references international agreements and the inventory of the Turkish Armed Forces that the claims are false. It also drew attention to the extent of the disinformation by exposing that some of the images circulated with the allegation that "TSK used chemical weapons" belong to the events in Syria.

Figure 16

The Ministry of National Defense's statement against the claims about the use of lethal weapons.



 **MİLLÎ SAVUNMA BAKANLIĞI**
BASIN AÇIKLAMASI

20 EKİM 2022

ASILSIZ KİMYASAL SİLAH İDDİASINA İLİŞKİN AÇIKLAMA

Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerimizin terörle mücadelesi artan bir şiddet ve tempoda azim ve kararlılıkla devam etmektedir.

Mehmetçiğin son derece onurlu ve şeffaf bir şekilde sürdürdüğü terörle mücadeleyi lekelemek, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin başarısına gölge düşürmek isteyen çevrelerce periyodik bir şekilde gündeme getirilen "Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri tarafından 'kimyasal silah' kullanıldığına" yönelik iddialar tamamen asılsız ve gerçek dışıdır.

Daha önce defalarca açıklandığı gibi Silahlı Kuvvetlerimiz tarafından uluslararası hukuk ve anlaşmalarca yasaklanmış mühimmat kullanılmamaktadır. Bu tür mühimmat Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri envanterinde bulunmamaktadır.

Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerimiz, bugüne kadar komşularımızın ve tüm dünyanın gözü önünde icra ettiği bütün harekât ve operasyonlarda uluslararası hukuktan doğan meşru müdafaa haklarımız kapsamında sadece teröristleri hedef almakta; sivillerin, tarihî, dinî ve kültürel varlıklar ile çevrenin zarar görmemesi için azami dikkat ve hassasiyet göstermektedir.

Tüm bu dezenformasyon çabaları Kahraman Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerimizin kararlı mücadelesi sonucu çökme noktasına gelen ve bulunduğu zor durumdan kurtulmak için yalan ve ahlak dışı yollarla çıkış arayışında olan terör örgütü ve müzahirlerinin beyhude çırpınışıdır. Teröristler için adalete teslim olmaktan başka çare yoktur.

Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri terörle mücadelesini en son terörist etkisiz hale getirilinceye kadar sürdürmeye azimli ve kararlıdır.

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In this process, which shook the country's agenda and then led to the arrest of TTB President Şebnem Korur Fincancı, the verification platforms seem to have ignored these claims. No negative or positive content has been created regarding them. When the verification platforms deal with a claim, it is not only possible to reach definite conclusions, such as true or false. There are also gray area options such as “Hybrid” or “Verification Failed.” Therefore, the only explanation for not evaluating these claims may be editorial selection. According to some criticisms, it might be because these formations receive a significant part of their revenues from foreign institutions and organizations.¹ If they take a "hawkish" stance against the PKK or its political extensions, these revenues might be significantly risked. At this point, it might be argued that developing income models based on diversified financing obtained from volunteering individuals will allow such platforms to act boldly against any disinformation that has serious social consequences.

Figure 17

Teyit's search results with the keywords “chemical, PKK, and weapon”.

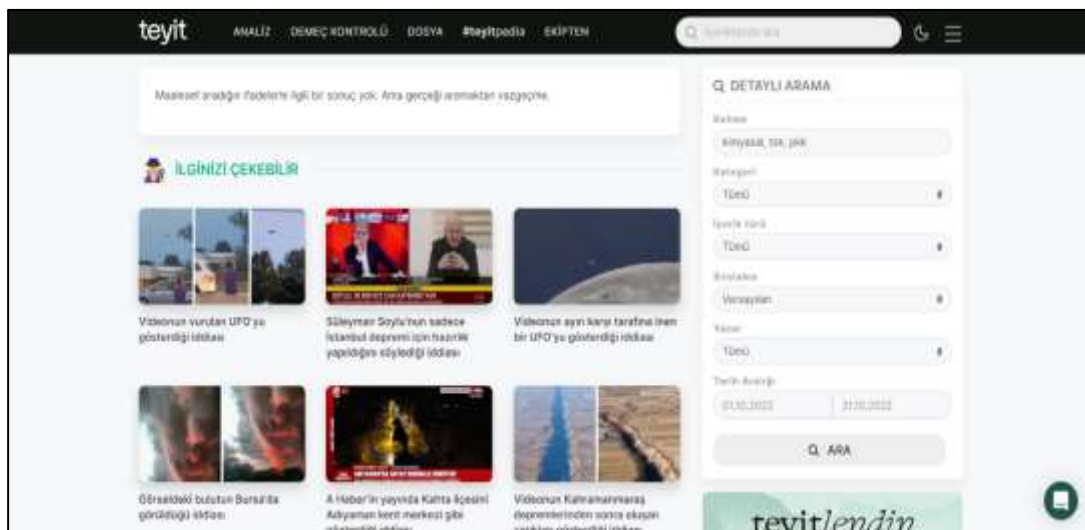
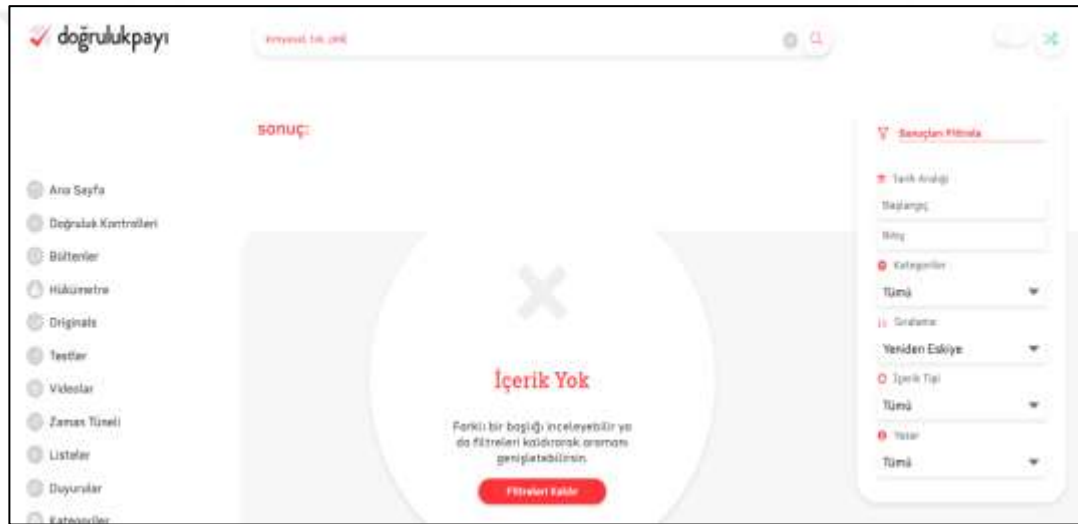
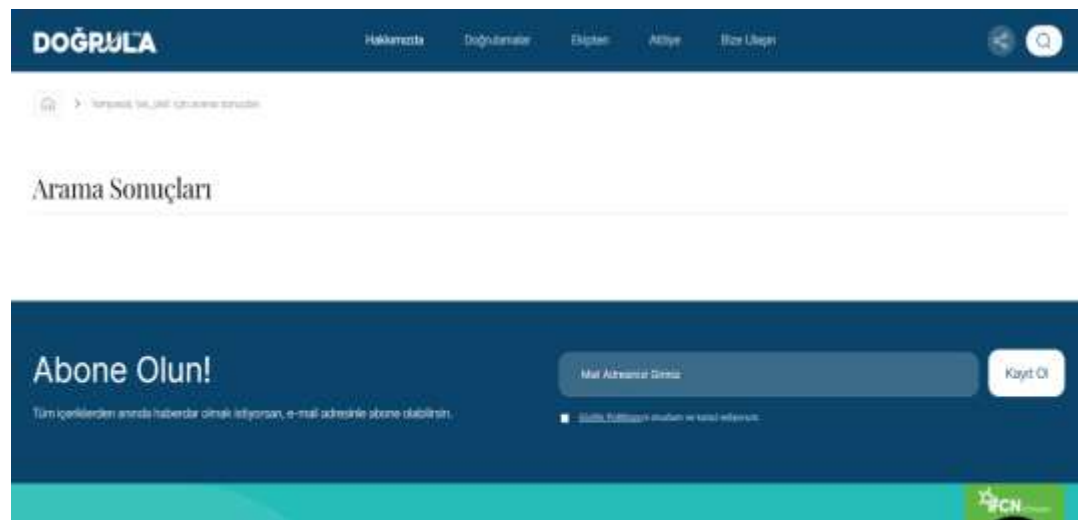


Figure 18

Doğruluk Payı and Doğrula's search results about the claims related to the use



chemical weapons.



As can be seen in the search results, the verification platforms remained indifferent to confirming these claims. Moreover, although different keywords (Fincancı, Tanrikulu, etc.) were used to search for the event with the thought that the previously used keywords would be insufficient, the result did not change.

In the retrospective searches made for the claims in the bulletin that "Turkey is getting the technology of the Typhoon Missile from North Korea" and "Hundreds of

Syrians have started to work as teachers in the National Education Staff since 2011," it was seen that the relevant claims did not reach the intensity to comply with the research criteria. The search with keywords on the verification sites found no results for these claims.

The claim, the subject of the analysis titled "No Certificate is Required to Become a Contractor" in the bulletin, was shared on Twitter by an anonymous account named ATAKIZ (@ATAISIK_) and has reached a very intense prevalence.

Figure 19



Tweet from the account @ATAISIK_

The basic message of the relevant claim is that the contractors responsible for the construction of the buildings are not certified by the state. The bulletin states that this claim is not true and that persons who want to work as contractors should obtain a certificate of authorization from the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization.

As a result of searching the claim on the verification sites, it was seen that only the Teyit platform took the claim to its agenda. In the analysis made by Teyit, the claim was considered as a whole, and it was concluded that the verification of the claim should be evaluated as "Hybrid" since the certificate is a legal obligation for paper collecting. However, considering that the sole purpose of the aforementioned Twitter user to inform that a certificate is required to collect paper is to reinforce the lie that a certificate is not needed for contracting, it is seen that this content directly serves disinformation.

Therefore, based on correct information of secondary importance, we find it highly problematic to evaluate this content as "Hybrid" instead of "False" in a way that causes the main message to be overshadowed. If an artificial intelligence considered this content, it would find it a "Hybrid," but human intellect should be able to comprehend that the content contains a message independent of the paper collecting certificate. On the other hand, the newsletter by the Directorate evaluated the claim as false by focusing on the original message of the content.

Figure 20

Teyit's analysis of the claim on the contracting certificate.

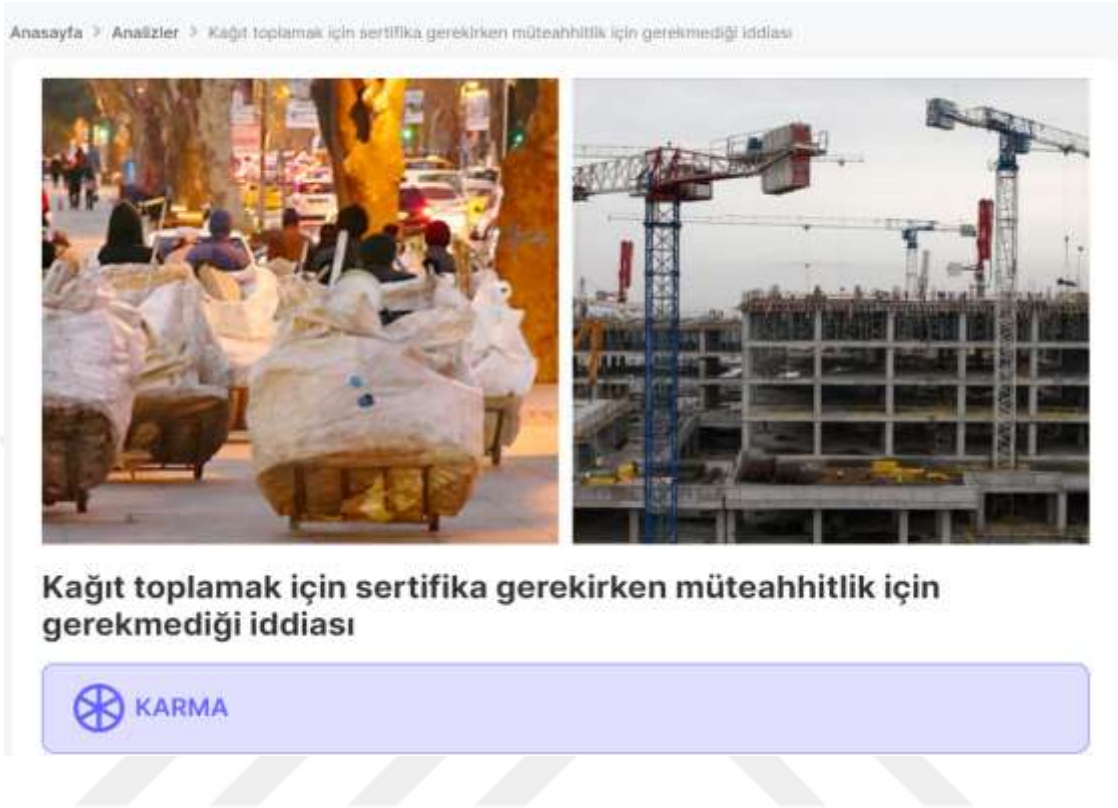


Figure 21

"Kapadokya'ya Gelen Heyetin UNESCO ile İlgisi Yok Turistik Ziyaret Çarpıtılıyor" İddiası

Bazı basın yayın organlarında, "Kapadokya'ya gelen heyetin UNESCO ile ilgisi yok. Turistik ziyaret çarpıtılıyor" iddiası doğru değildir.

Kültür Ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Avrupa Birliği ve Dış İlişkiler Dairesi Başkanlığının 15/09/2022 tarih ve 24150 sayılı yazısı ile, Çekya'dan gelecek UNESCO'da görevli Dr. Martina Paskova ve Jakup Kaspar'ın yanı sıra Çekya Büyükelçiliği Müsteşarı Pavel Danek ve beraberindeki heyetin Göreme Milli Parkı ve Kapadokya bölgesine bir ziyaret gerçekleştirme talebi bildirilmiştir.

Analysis on Disinformation Bulletin about the visit of the UNESCO officials.

The last claim checked in the Bulletin was that "The delegation coming to Cappadocia has nothing to do with UNESCO." The latest claim, titled "The tourist visit is being distorted," was shared on Twitter by three accounts that reached approximately 1,750,000 followers. In the bulletin, the allegations that the relevant visit was not an official one were denied by official correspondence, and it was reported that a delegation from the Czech Republic, including representatives of UNESCO in the Czech Republic, met with equivalent local authorities.

It is understood that the first of these three accounts with the most interaction on Twitter is the user @bahadir_ozgr, who writes "Journalist" in their bio. This user made this sharing based on a news article on the official website of *Evrensel* newspaper. There is also a link to the relevant news in the post. It criticized that the

delegation, which was introduced as a UNESCO delegation, is not affiliated with the Turkish UNESCO Committee.

Despite this, UNESCO officials have affirmed/approved the tourist activities carried out in Cappadocia in the media organizations that are affiliated with the government. The news was based on several local non-governmental organizations claiming that the delegation from Czechia had nothing to do with UNESCO. However, it is seen that there was official correspondence with UNESCO officials in the delegation, even if they are not from Turkey.

This situation has revealed a "hybrid" structure that also overshadows the central message of the news. News made to criticize the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was tried to be reinforced with a populist lie, and the accuracy of the news was overshadowed. Likewise, the news itself is no longer available in the content shared on Twitter by other multi-follower accounts. The whole message of the content emphasizes the claim that the delegation is on a touristic trip, not an official one.

Figure 22

Twitter search results of about the claim on the UNESCO officials' visit.



No evaluation of this content was found in the searches made on the verification sites.

4.4. 24-30 October 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this week's newsletter, six items were evaluated by the newsletter. One of these is the arrest of the then TTB President Şebnem Korur Fincancı, who mentioned the allegation that the TSK used chemical weapons against the terrorist organization PKK elements in a channel close to the PKK, which came to the fore in the previous bulletin.

Fincancı, who appeared on the Media News television channel with a live connection, stated that she watched the relevant footage and evaluated that a chemical gas affecting the nervous system of people was used, and said that independent committees should investigate the incident. These views of Fincancı support the allegations that the TSK uses chemical gas. However, the source of the information is a video that does not show any TSK forces.

Following these allegations, HDP's Former Co-Chair, Selahattin Demirtaş, who was in prison, posted on Twitter and requested that an international delegation examine the related allegations. Likewise, the HDP, a party with a group in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, also submitted a question proposal on the subject and asked whether the Ministry of National Defense would invite international delegations to the relevant regions (BBC, 2022).

Figure 23.

The tweet of @ hdpdemirtas regarding the chemical weapons allegations.



The source of these allegations is the statement made by the People's Defense Center (HSM) affiliated with the PKK. On October 18, 2022, HSM issued a press release claiming that the TSK killed 17 PKK members using chemical weapons and stated that they would help to the extent possible if international delegations came to the region for examination (RUDAW, 2022).

Figure 24

Tweets criticizing Fincancı's arrest.



The bulletin stated that Fincancı's arrest took place because it was considered propaganda of the organization and that the incident had nothing to do with Fincancı's oppositional identity. No analysis was found on the verification sites that included either the allegations addressed by the bulletin or those against the TSK by Şebnem Korur Fincancı.

In the second analysis of the bulletin, the allegations regarding the powers and sanctions of the Press Announcement Agency (BİK) were discussed through the legal regulations known as the *Anti-Disinformation Law*, which was worked over in the parliament then. With this regulation, called the "Censorship Law" by the opposition,

allegations have been made that BİK will impose sanctions on media organizations. It is possible to reach claims with high interaction rates on Twitter regarding the discussions about the law with the keywords "censorship" and "law." These allegations were described as disinformation in the bulletin based on the text of the law. No analysis was found on the verification sites in the searches made for the relevant claims. Only Teyit includes some content that gives a kind of opinion under the heading #teyitpedia.

Figure 25



It has been determined that the analyses in the bulletin under the headings of "Turkey does not have an Air Defense System," "Government Closed Karabük Iron and Steel Factories (KARDEMİR)," "Military Vehicles Belonging to Greece are Shipped to the Border of Turkey," and the claim about TOKİ regarding the financing of housing projects did not reach sufficient interaction on Twitter, and there was no content related to these claims on the verification sites

4.5. 31 October - 6 November 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this bulletin issue, which analyzed six contents, the first content was the claims about TOGG, the domestic electric car. On 29 October 2022, some claims

were made on Twitter that there was no production line at the TOGG Gemlik Campus, which was opened by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and that the vehicles were produced in and brought from Italy.

Figure 26

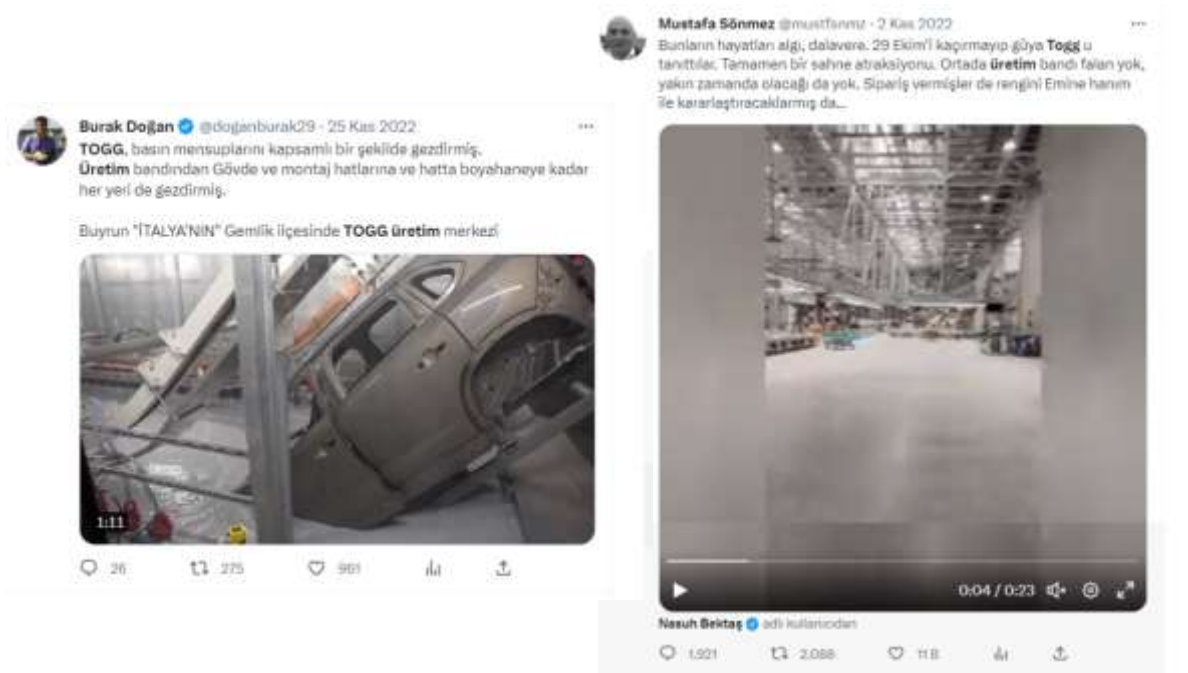
Tweets about the production of the TOGG trolley.



In the allegations shared in the accounts with approximately 500 thousand followers, there were accusations that the government deceived the public by opening of the TOGG factory on 29 October Republic Day. It is understood that the statements made by the journalist Fatih Altaylı on television at that time, "The production line is not ready, a few vehicles have come from Italy for the opening," are the source of these claims. In the bulletin, the technical specifications of the Gemlik Campus were given in detail, and it was stated that the production continued, and these claims were described as lies. A group of journalists was invited to the TOGG factory in November, and a video was published, including the production stages.

Figure 27

Positive tweets regarding the production of the TOGG trolley.



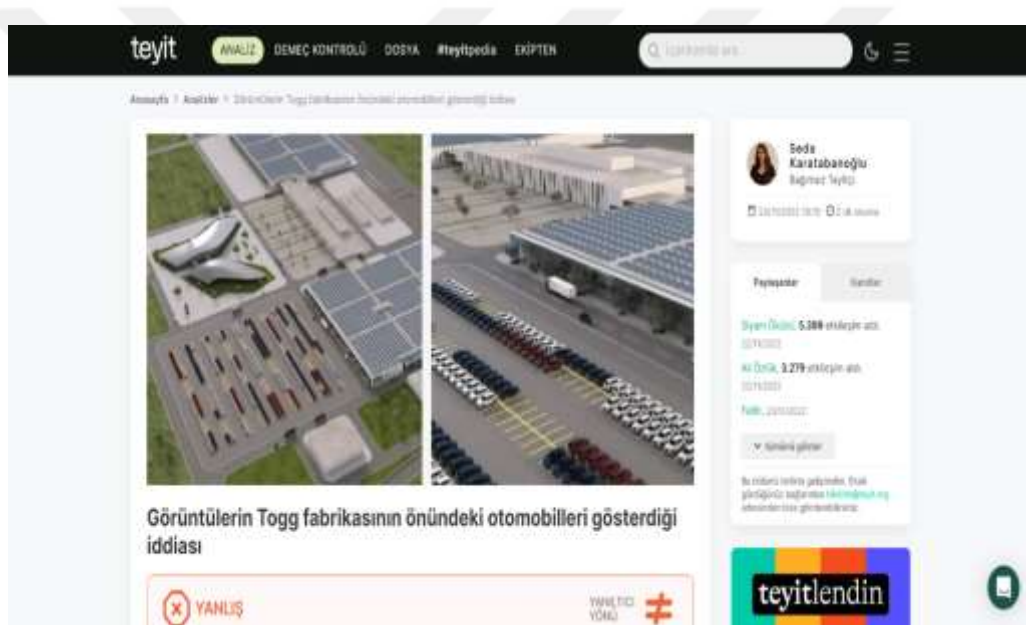
In the advanced search on Twitter, it was discovered that this issue has been brought up as a topic with a very intense interaction rate by opposing views. However, no analysis on this subject was found on the relevant dates in the verification sites. The most pertinent finding about this search on the areas of verification platforms is on 14 December 2022, on other Twitter posts that were interacted with intensively, yet more than a month after the original discussions. Teyit and Doğrula analyzed the posts shared by some users. They showed the three-dimensional project animation of the TOGG Gemlik Campus to prove that the TOGG factory is in production and classified them as "False."

However, when examining these posts, which were understood to arise from the claims about whether TOGG was produced, this issue was not addressed in the analysis, and it was only said that the relevant posts presented the animation as

accurate. However, Teyit determined the characteristics of the production line by referring to the TOGG official website in another related analysis. Therefore, it is seen that the video dated December 4, 2022, used in an analysis by Teyit conducted in February 2023, could function as a source against the claims that TOGG does not have a production line. In this case, the verification sites preferred to remain silent against this disinformation that occupied the agenda.

Figure 28

Confirmation analysis on the production of TOGG trolley.



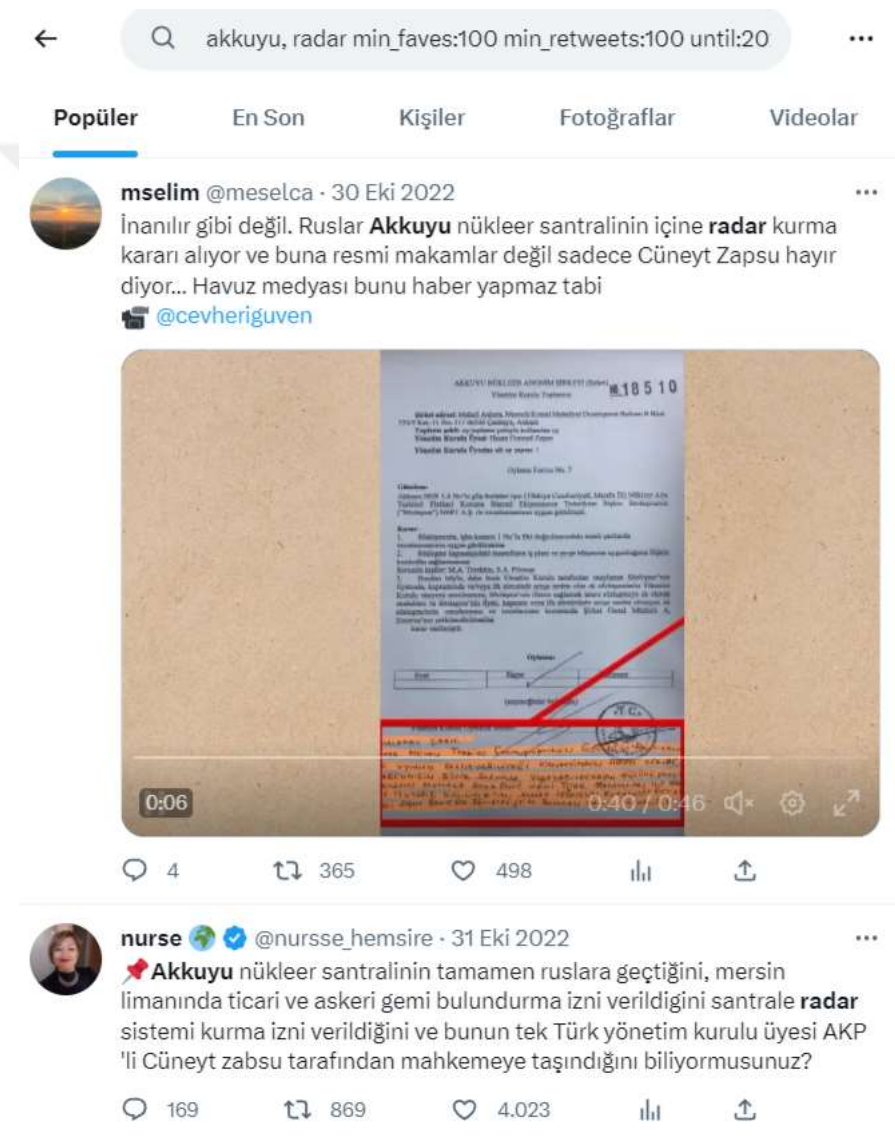
The second analysis in the bulletin is on the radar systems planned to be installed within the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant. There have been claims on social media that a radar will be installed in the power plant built with the partnership of Russia and this will create a disadvantage in terms of Turkey's military interests. It is understood from the Twitter search that the source of the allegation is Cevheri Güven, a fugitive from the Fetullah's Terrorist Organization (FETÖ).¹ In the bulletin, it was

¹T.C. Ministry Of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/feto.tr.mfa>

informed that the radars would be installed by ASELSAN and controlled by Turkish law enforcement agencies, and the allegations were denied.

Figure 29

Tweets about Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant.



The accuracy analysis of these claims, which were spread by accounts with approximately 145 thousand followers, could not be found on the verification sites analyzed. According to the information in the bulletin, "With the protocol in

November 2021, it was decided that the radars developed by Turkey's defense industry giant ASELSAN would protect the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant region. The control and inspection of the radars are carried out by the law enforcement agencies of Turkey. " This claim, which can be easily verified from publicly available sources, meets the criteria of importance and prevalence. First, it is about the country's national defense. Secondly, although Cevheri Güven's account, which made the claim, is banned in Turkey, its prevalence has reached a vast audience considering its 575 thousand followers. At this point, it is thought that the editorial selection processes of the verification sites led to the ignorance of these claims.

In the bulletin's analysis titled "Rabies Issue Lied Out," the subject is the statements of some social media accounts that animal quarantine was applied in the region after an incident in Bitlis, which were codified as not true. According to the bulletin, cases of rabies were encountered in the region, and the animal quarantine measure was implemented by the governorship. In the Twitter search for the incident, no account was found to deny the rabies incident. There is also no analysis of the incident on the verification sites.

Unfounded allegations Regarding the AFAD Exercise were examined by the bulletin. Also, the allegations that only the rocket sent to space by China could fall to Turkey checked in the bulletin under the title of "China's Long March 5B Rocket Will Fall to Turkey" and that "US Warplanes Violated TRNC Airspace" have become widespread on Twitter. The bulletin states that the relevant offices of the two countries have developed close cooperation on the issue, and the allegations that Turkey is among the points where the rocket may fall constitute an example of how disinformation is spreading rapidly. Regarding these three analyses, no content was detected on the parallel verification sites.

4.6. 7-13 November 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this bulletin, seven claims were evaluated under the headings of "Allegations Regarding Anadolu Agency Allowance," "The President Filed a Lawsuit Against 305 Children," "Teaching Career Steps Exam Postponed," "3 Women's

Bodies Found in a Garden in Sarıyer, Istanbul," "Connection Roads at Some Stations in Gaziray Not Completed," "The Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Covered Some Expenditures from the Promotion of the Personnel," and "Syrians in Edirne Gathered in Front of Atatürk's Bust for Free Supplies." The searches made on Twitter regarding the Anadolu Agency, Presidential defamation cases, and Teaching Career Step Exams showed that the allegations did not reach sufficient prevalence. Again, the verification platforms did not fact-check these claims. It emerged that the source of the claim titled "3 Women's Bodies Found in a Garden in Sarıyer, Istanbul" is Fatih Altaylı, a journalist with 2.4 million followers. Based on the excavation video carried out during the raid on the residence of a foreign national, the sharing of Altaylı, which will later be denied by the General Directorate of Security (EGM), has reached a very intense prevalence due to his high number of followers. Moreover, the fact that the opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu also quoted and commented on news about this claim led to the spread of the claim to a much wider audience.

Figure 30.

@fatihaltayli's tweet about the founding of dead bodies.

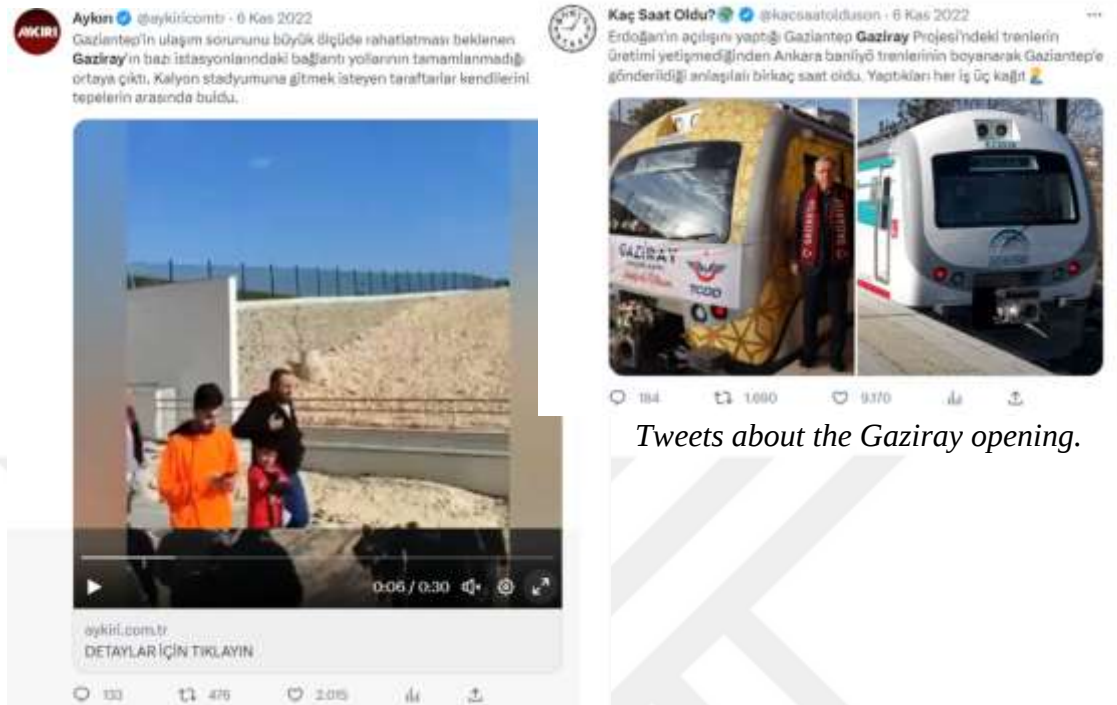


In the bulletin, it was shared that EGM excavated the relevant dwelling upon suspicion. Still, nobody was found, and it was stated that the claim was disinformative.

The verification sites should have considered this claim, which was shared by an experienced journalist with a vast audience and might be used to prove some issues the opposition accused the current government of. However, it was determined that the verification sites included in the research did not find the subject worth investigating at any level.

Another topic in the bulletin was the Gaziray project, which was opened with the participation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Some media outlets reported that citizens who went to the opening of the Gaziray project, which was put into service in the city of Gaziantep, walked on a dirty road and that the stadium connection roads of the project were not built. According to the bulletin, although the connection roads were completed, these images emerged while the citizens were trying to reach the opening area through some shortcuts. This news topic was found to achieve prevalence on Twitter. But it was seen that it met with ignorance, as in the verification sites' response to the video shared by Altaylı.

Figure 31



Tweets about the Gaziray opening.

In the search made by the research criteria, it was observed that another claim about the Gaziray project had reached an intense prevalence on Twitter. Accordingly, since the delivery of the train sets produced for Gaziray was delayed, the Gaziray project was initiated with the ones rented from Ankara Başkentray company. Although there was no fact-checking of this claim in the bulletin, Teyit and Doğrula platforms preferred to analyze this claim and concluded that the allegations were true. In the analysis based on the production of the train sets by the same company, it was determined that the sets used in Başkentray were leased to Gaziray within a contract. This situation, which is presented as a negative event by some social media accounts and news sites with the insinuation that the opening is a make-believe, is criticized on social media.

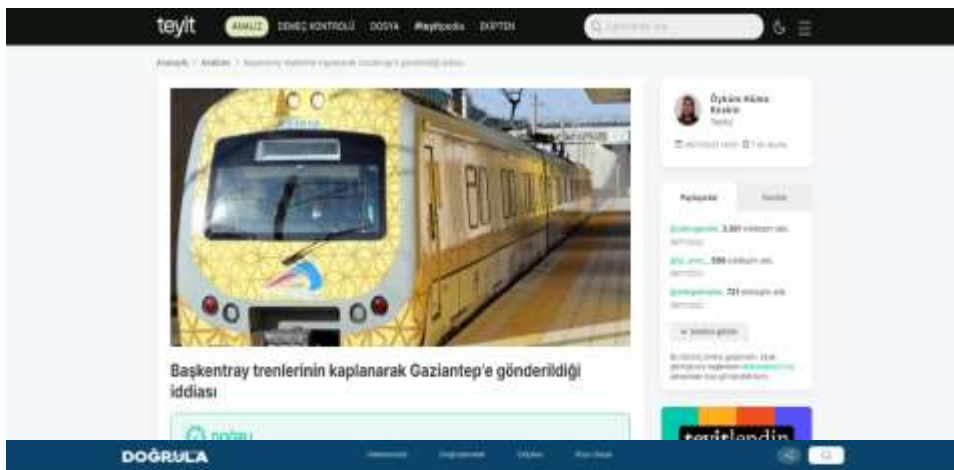
While the claim that the bulletin preferred to analyze refuted a lie, the claim that the verification sites chose to analyze was the posts implying that Gaziray was opened as dysfunctional. The analysis only discusses whether the leasing action is correct, and the extent to which this situation affects the Gaziray project is not presented. Did the fact that the company producing the train sets fulfilled its

obligations by leasing the trains procured from different affiliates due to the disruptions in the production processes cause the Gaziray project to become dysfunctional? Has Gaziray, which was put into service with rental sets, stopped its activities after the opening? Or has the state been harmed through Gaziray? Insufficient verification analyses without answering all these questions can only be explained by an editorial attitude that serves the prevalence of these claims.



Figure 32

Gaziray analyses of Teyit and Doğrula.



The last claim discussed in the bulletin was a news spread from the account @dailytrakya, famous for producing asparagus news on social media. According to the report, a young man in Edirne gathered hundreds of Syrian immigrants before the Atatürk statue on November 10 at 09.05, promising "free provisions will be distributed." It was stated that the image used in the share was a sculpture in Samsun, and the photos showed the crowd of people formed after an attack attempt on the relevant statue, and it was determined that the share was unfounded.

Figure 33

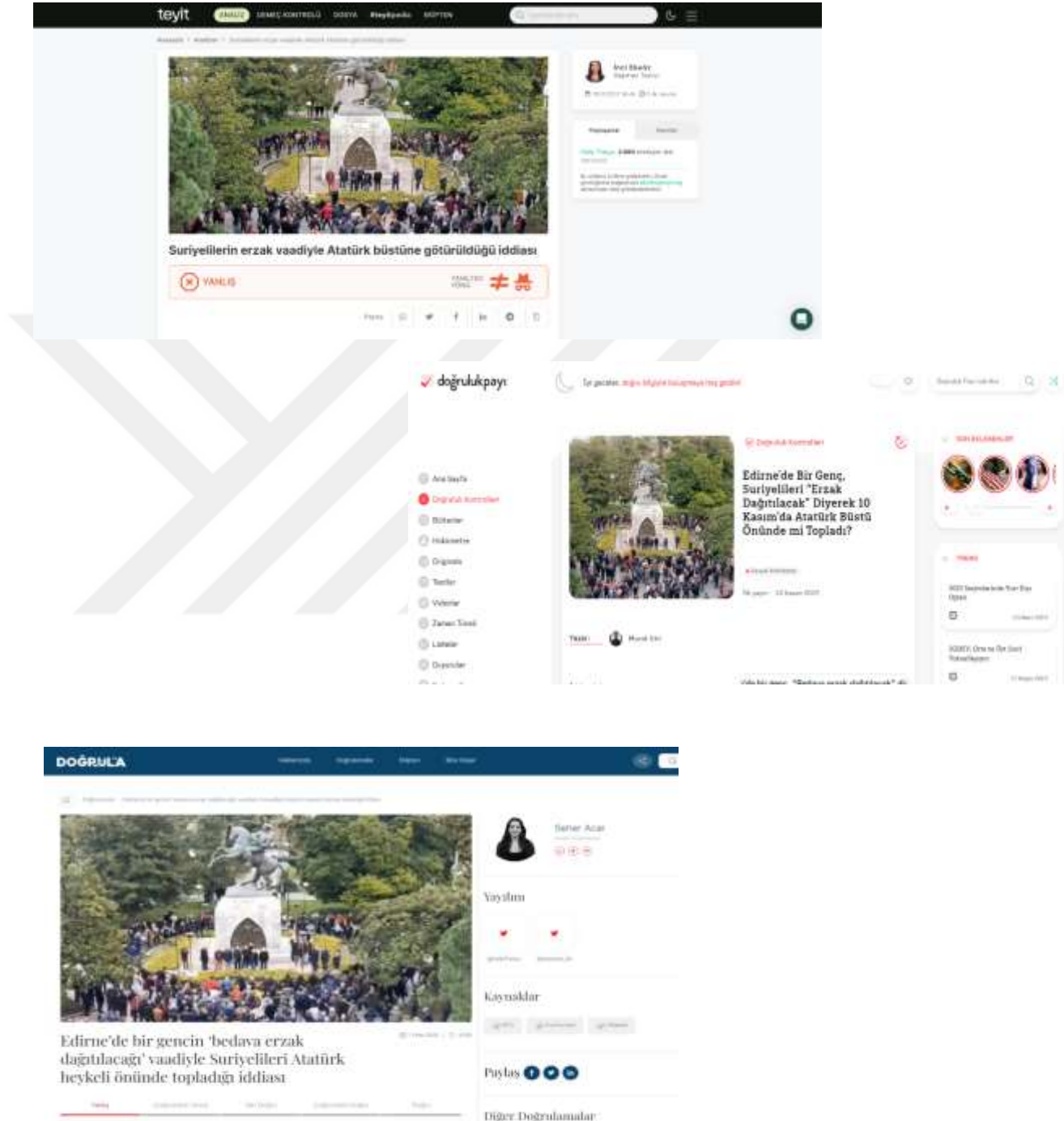
Tweets about the claim regarding Atatürk's statue.



In the search we made using the Twitter advanced search engine, it was seen that the share of the relevant account was still available. The verification platforms have also found it worth examining. They analyzed the share made on November 10, 2022, stating that the share was misleading and incorrect.

Figure 34

Analyses of Teyit, Doğrula, and Doğruluk Payı of the claim regarding Atatürk's statue.



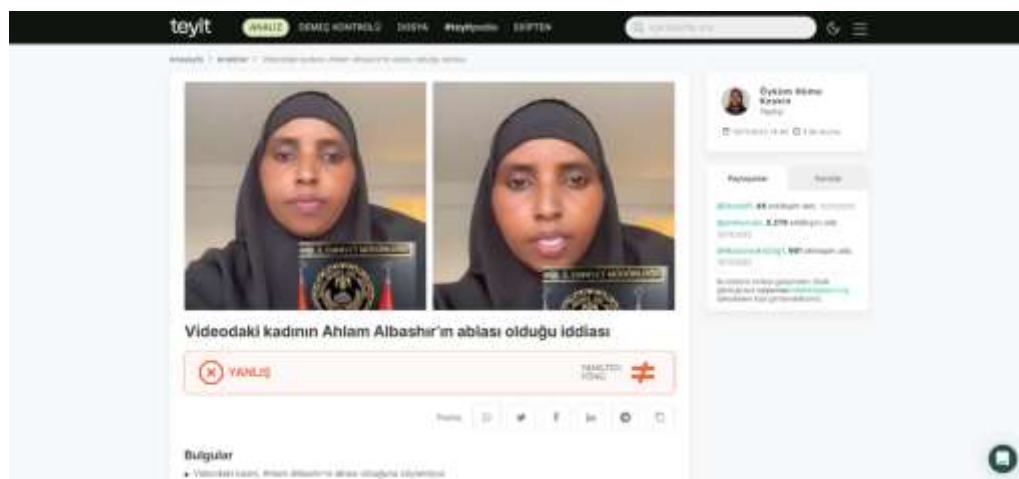
4.7. 14 – 20 November 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this week's bulletin, the allegations about the bombing terrorist attack in Istanbul on November 13, 2022, were discussed: "Somali woman said she was the sister of İstiklal Street attack perpetrator Ahlam Albashir," "The perpetrator of the

terrorist attack on İstiklal Street went home and waited for the police," "She warned her citizens in Britain three days before the terrorist attack on İstiklal Street," "The attack on İstiklal Street was carried out by a person named Jiyan Tosun," "The Greek citizen injured in the terrorist attack on İstiklal Street was asked for money for treatment," "Minister M. Nuri Ersoy applied to the ministry of culture and tourism to expand the hotel land affiliated to his own company." The allegations examined under these headings mainly were the issues that became widespread on social media immediately after the attack.

The bulletin, which analyzes the allegation that the perpetrator caught in the attack was not related to the incident through the video of a Somali person spread on social media after the attack, states that the video was intentionally mistranslated. Accordingly, it was said the posts shared to hide that the fact that the attacker caught was related to the PYD/YPG misrepresented the woman's words in the video. The video was said to disinform the public that the perpetrator is Somali based. According to the bulletin, the person speaking in the video gave a speech to the Somali community living in Turkey, urging them to be careful after the incident.

Figure 35



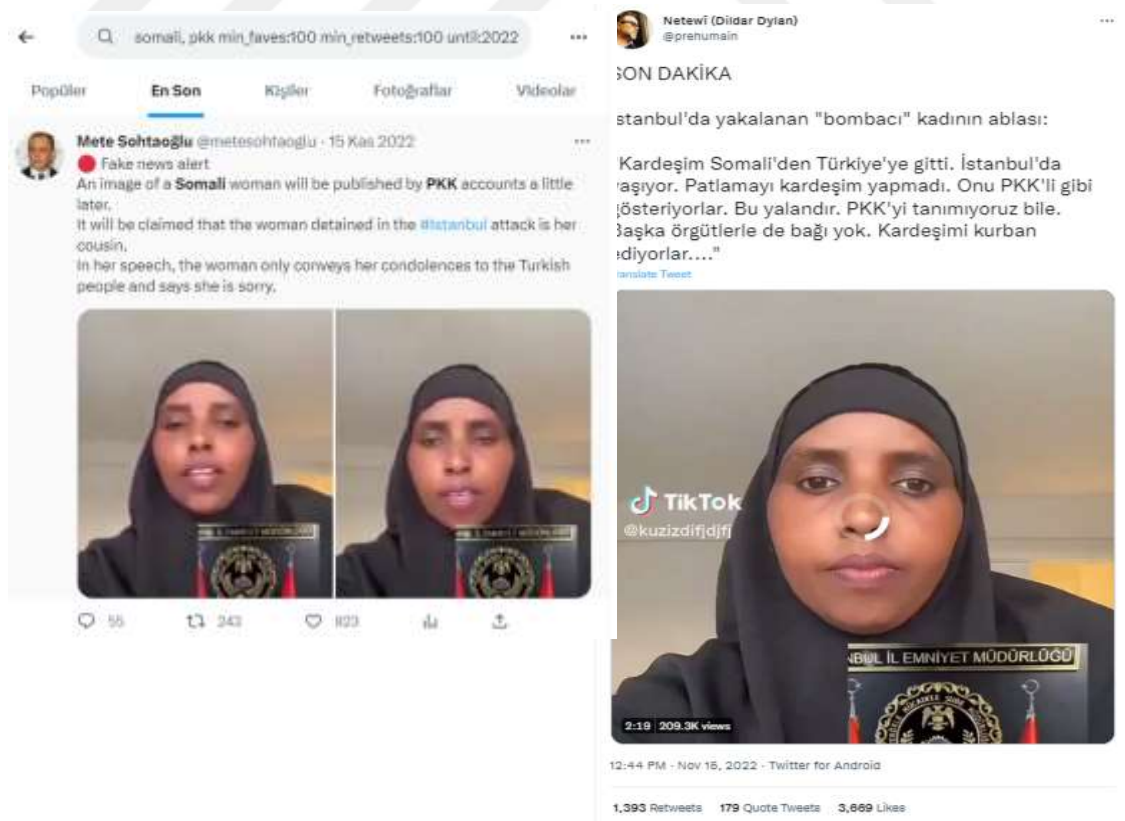
İstiklal Street attack.

*Analysis
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It is seen in the analysis made by Teyit, which fact-checked the claim as “untrue,” that this claim is the subject of posts that receive intense interaction from PKK sympathizer accounts. These accounts tried to cover up the relationship of the incident with the PYD/YP by claiming that the information shared by the state about the perpetrator was inaccurate.

Figure 36

Disinformative tweets about the attack on Istiklal Street.



Although the posts that made this misleading claim were found to have been deleted in the Twitter search, the links archived by Teyit provide information about the intensity of the post. Within the framework of the relevant criteria, only the post reached was the one shared by the journalist Mete Sohtaoglu. No analysis of this incident was found on Doğruluk Payı and Doğrula platforms.

Another claim included in the bulletin and deemed worthy of examination by the sampled verification platforms was that the attack was carried out by a lawyer named Jiyan Tosun. Although the post about this claim, which was first shared by Adem Taşkaya, a member of the Zafer Party known in the public for his racist views, was removed, it became popular on social media and widely circulated. The bulletin stated that this share was a lie based on the statement of the main perpetrator. In the Twitter search, it was seen that posts targeting Jiyan Tosun were made quite widely and received intense interaction.

Analyzing this incident, Teyit stated that Tosun went to Küçükçekmece Police Station 20 minutes after the incident took place and determined that the claim was unfounded. Other validation platforms do not offer an analysis of this event, however. Also, the Twitter search discovered that this particular news did not reach sufficient prevalence.

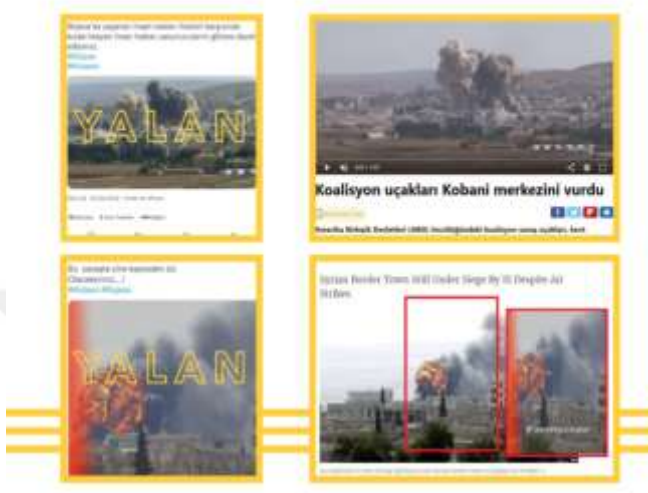
4.8. 21-27 November 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

The first analysis of this week's newsletter covers the Talon Sword Air Operation in Northern Iraq and Syria. In some social media accounts, it was emphasized that these claims serve disinformation by exposing that the visuals used to support the claim that the TSK hit civilian settlements in these operations belong to previous events.

Figure 37

*Analysis of Disinformation
Bulletin on Claw Sword
Operation.*

2- Paylaşılan bir diğer görüntü de, yine 2014 yılında terör örgütü DEAŞ'ın kontrolünde olan kente yönelik koalisyon hava bombardımanını göstermektedir.



These claims, which were made by using the images of the airstrikes carried out by the Coalition Forces deployed in Syria on different dates, were probably detected and refuted by the backward search of the images. It is understood that many domestic and foreign political accounts, which touted these operations carried out by Turkey as revenge for the attack on İstiklal Street, which occupied the agenda the previous week, were organized on Twitter against this operation. Of the dozens of posts that meet the criteria of the study, the examples we put below appealed to an average audience of 400 thousand people and reached a certain prevalence.

Figure 38

Disinformative tweets against



Operation Claw Sword.

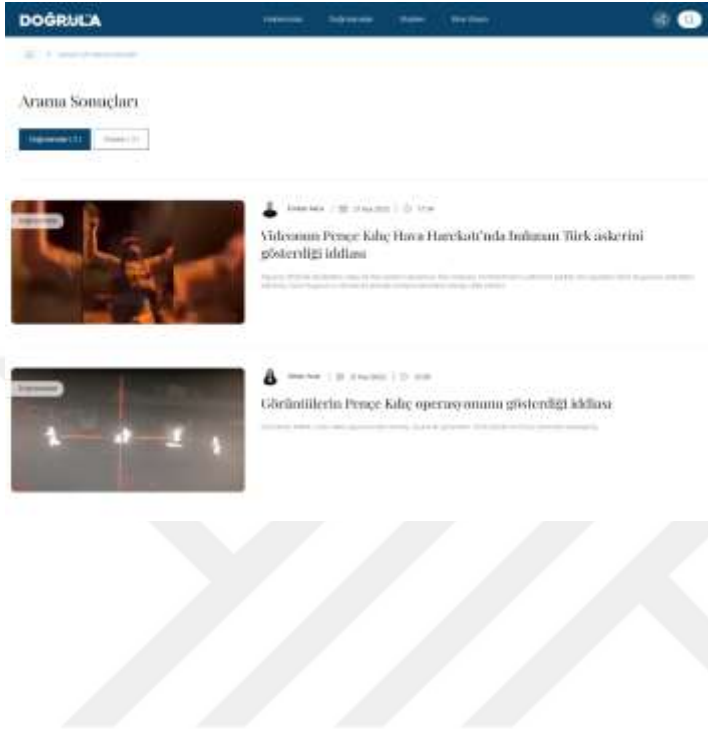


According to the bulletin, these operations carried out by Turkey using its rights arising from international agreements were intended to be manipulated on social media and by some foreign press organizations such as *Independent* and *L'Orient-Le Jour*. Against the allegations that the operation was aimed at civilian Kurds, it was stated by the bulletin that it only aimed at the military objectives of the YPG/PKK.

The posts the verification platforms preferred to analyze regarding this operation and the disinformation afterward are pretty interesting. Although there are also dated images shared on social media and in the foreign press against the operation, they preferred to analyze the images used by the accounts supporting the operation. Admittedly, the primary motivation of the posts using video game images and different military images is to create a public opinion supporting the operation. However, the primary reason for the posts against the operation is to mobilize the international public against such an operation. They aimed to create the impression that civilian residential areas were hit with the use of fake images and, thus, tried to draw the attention of the states that have a say in the region.

Figure 39

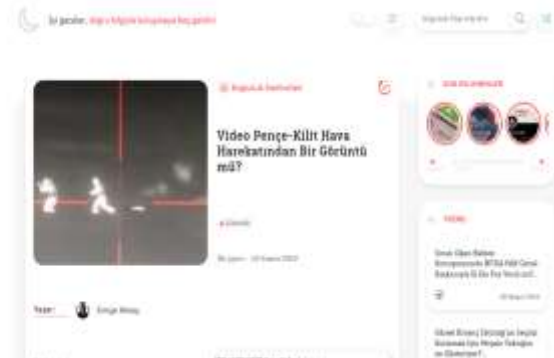
Teyit.org search result for Operation Claw Sword.

**Figure 40**

Doğrula and Doğruluk Payı search results for Claw Sword Operation.



doğrulukpayı



In such a bilateral event, it is ironic that all of the sampled verification platforms jointly evaluate the event in a biased way. Because what is expected from them is to assess objectively whether this operation is aimed at civilians or, at least, to determine the negative images shared about the operation. However, they focused only on the misleading posts of one party and seemed to adopt a biased political position, even if they did not want to be.

It was observed that the analyses titled "23 November 2022 Düzce Earthquake" and "Party District Governor" in the bulletin did not reach sufficient prevalence on social media.

The following analysis of the bulletin is the claim that the motion by HDP to investigate the Taksim Attack in the Turkish Grand National Assembly was rejected by the AK Party and MHP votes. This is the most striking example of disinformation among the bulletin analyses. On 23 November 2022, the claim shared on the Twitter account of Meral Daniş Beştaş, the Deputy Chairman of the HDP Parliament Group at the time, grew like an avalanche, as her total number of followers was almost 3.5 million. Teyit's Twitter account is also among these accounts. The claim was described as true in the analysis shared by Teyit on its web page.

Figure 41

Tweets on the parliamentary question given by HDP



The ordinary citizen who saw this post and its verification will no longer have any doubts about the truth of the claim as an entity that carries out verification activities for the "carefully" selected issues shared that the claim is valid. However, the aforementioned parliamentary question in the analysis denies the analysis itself. The title of the motion given by HDP includes a request "to reveal the government's relations with ISIS (Islamic State) extensions such as FSA and HTS in the context of Syrian Foreign Policy." The establishment of a research commission within the Turkish Grand National Assembly about the attack is included in the part of the proposal that we can only see from the posts of Meral Daniş Beştaş.

Figure 42

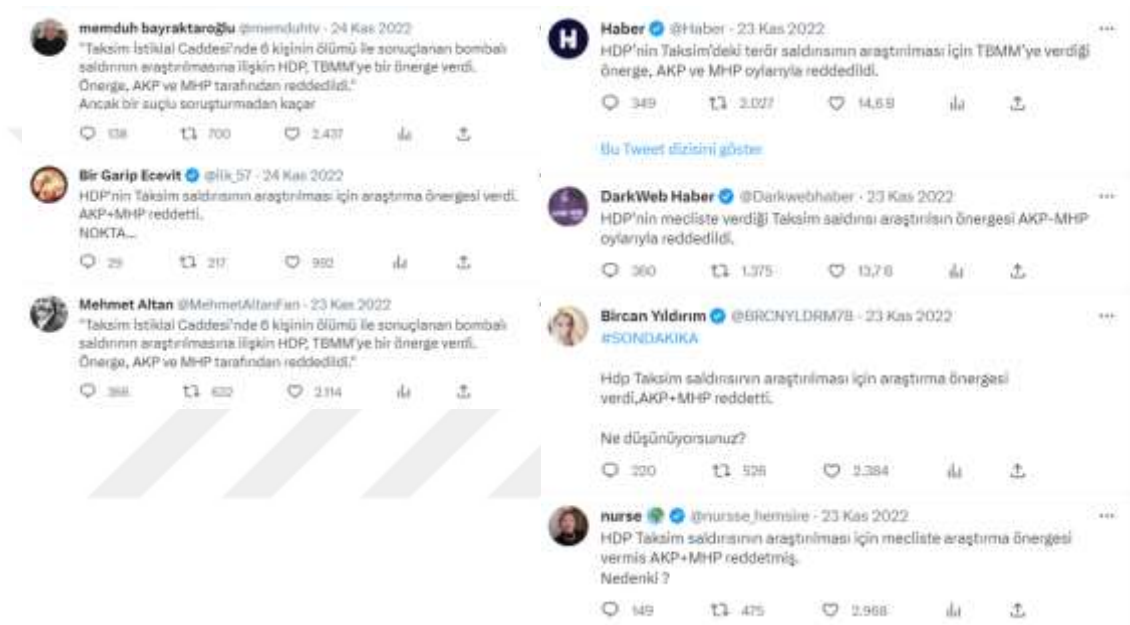
Shares of @ meraldanis account about the motion.

It is understood that HDP has contributed to the information pollution against the attack with the posts announcing the rejection of this motion as the prevention of an attempt to clarify the Taksim Attack. In its analysis that verifies this claim as accurate, Teyit completely ignored the HDP's accusation that the government is engaged in illegal activities in Syria and seems to have carried out a contextually inaccurate analysis even if it might be considered technically correct. In the analysis of the allegation, the explanations of the AK Party members regarding why the motion was rejected were not covered either. If the request to establish a commission of inquiry for the Partition Attack was denied, it is clear that the reason for the denial is also a subject of analysis. In light of all these evaluations, it is seen that a

verification platform might serve as an instrument for the agenda-setting operation of any political party since the claim was inaccurately presented to approximately 3.5 million users.

Figure 43

Tweets about the HDP motion.



Another analysis in the bulletin, which has become widespread on social media, is also related to the Taksim Attack. According to the allegation shared by CHP Istanbul Deputy Gürsel Tekin, three Syrian individuals in Istiklal Street make fun of the Taksim attack and its victims in a Tiktok video.

Figure 44

Disinformative tweets about the attack on Istiklal Street.



The bulletin examining this claim, shared by some xenophobic accounts, determined that the video was published one week before the attack and stated that the claim was a lie. The three validation platforms selected for the study examined this claim and reached the same conclusion.

Another analysis in the bulletin is about a post by Zafer Party Leader Ümit Özdağ, who is known for his racist rhetoric in public. According to the post, six Afghan and two Turkish citizens were hospitalized in Konya. Using the statement of the Governorship of Konya regarding the incident, the bulletin emphasized that the incident occurred between groups of Turkish citizens and that any foreign national was not connected to the incident. This incident, which was only shared by Özdağ yet has reached a high level of prevalence on Twitter, has not been on the radar of the verification platforms.

Figure 45

Disinformative tweet shared by @umitozdog account.



In the following bulletin analysis, the posts about removing a monument in Düzcce of the symbolic Rabia hand sign, which became popular in Egypt during the Arab Spring events and was then identified with the AK Party, were discussed. According to these posts, the statue of Rabia was quietly removed at midnight. In the bulletin, it was determined that the posts were disinformative, using images from 2019. Accordingly, with the municipality's decision, the statue was moved from the intersection point where it was located to a park for traffic safety reasons in 2019. These posts, shared by opposition accounts such as EkveTV and Türkiye Gerçekleri and reached approximately 1 million people, attracted the attention of the two verification platforms, Teyit and Doğrula, which found it worthy of examination.

They determined the claims were false by emphasizing that the statue was not removed. Only its location was changed.

Figure 46

Disinformative tweets about Rabia Monument in Düzce.

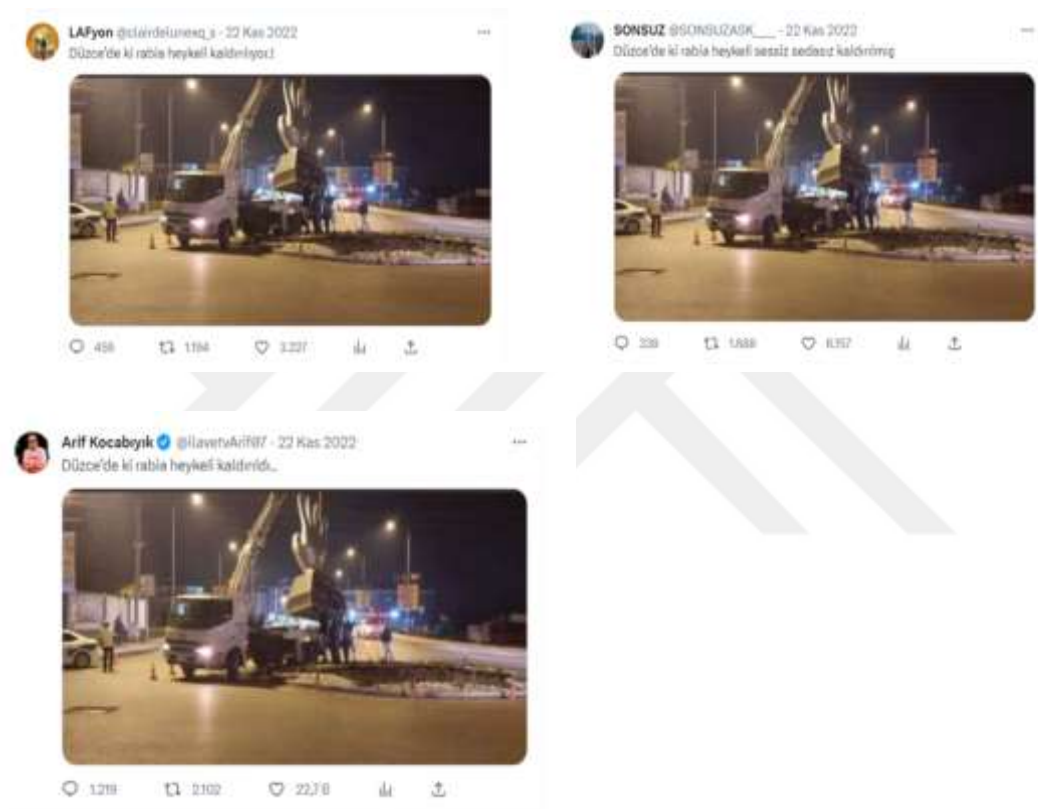
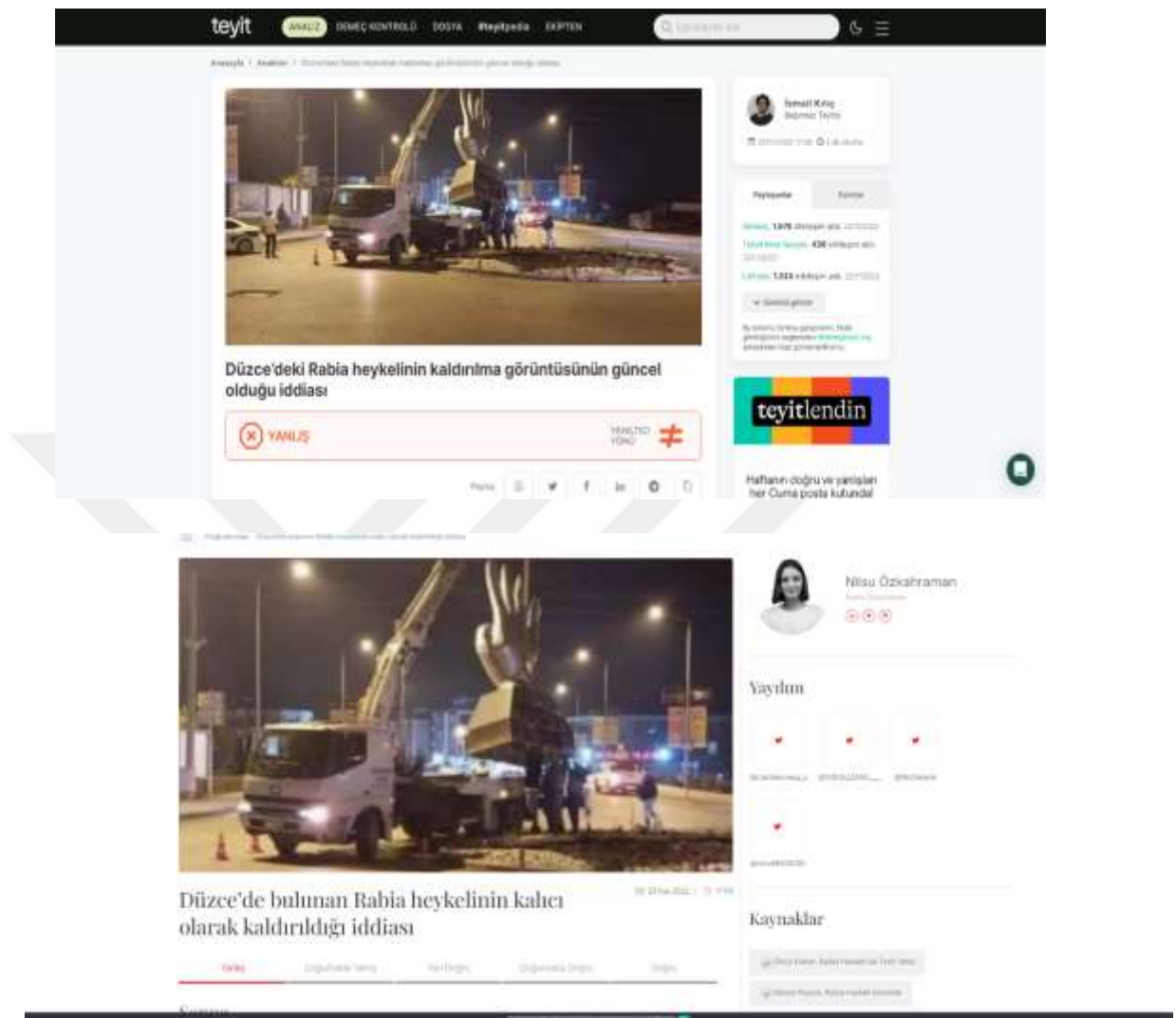


Figure 47

Analyses of Teyit and Doğrula on Rabia Monument claims.



It was that the claims titled "Turkey Ranks First on 'Violence Against Women' According to OECD Data" and the allegations titled "The USA May Have Triggered the Düzce Earthquake with the HAARP System," the last two analyses of the bulleting, did not reach a sufficient prevalence on Twitter between 21-27 November. 2022 No analysis of the verification platforms was found for these claims.

4.9. 28 November – 4 December 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In the bulletin covering the week of November 28 – December 4, there were seven analyses titled "Turkey warned foreign embassies against security threats," "Turkey's possible operation in Northern Syria strengthens Daesh," "Air compressor

tender specifications include the condition of being made in Greece," "Tekke and zaviye students overflowed to the streets," "Person attacking the doctor is a Syrian national," "Claims regarding the TOKİ application fee," and "YSK's Report Determines that the Number of Syrian Voters is 466 Thousand 105."

The first headline discussed was the allegation put forward by the foreign news agency Reuters that a warning was sent to foreign embassies in the Republic of Turkey due to security threats. Immediately after the attack on İstiklal Street, which we discussed in the previous bulletin, it is understood that such a news item emerged due to the current atmosphere of Turkey. The bulletin described the news as disinformative by saying that no such warning was made to any embassy from the relevant institutions of Turkey. Considering that the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, which owns the bulletin, is one of the most competent institutions in accessing accurate information on such issues, it seems reasonable that the bulletin does not need extra verification while signing such an analysis. The fact that this claim was shared only by Reuters shows that it has reached a high prevalence online and offline, even if it does not meet the research criteria. Therefore, the necessary conditions might be argued to have been created for this news to be subjected to a verification process. However, it was observed that the verification platforms do not address this claim.

In the context of the claim that "Turkey's possible operation in Northern Syria strengthens Daesh," the bulletin provides information on an article published in the magazine *Foreign Policy*. The central claim of this article is that there is a risk of ISIS reactivation in the region as part of a possible operation against SDF/YPG elements, as ISIS is supported by Turkey's Coalition Forces in Northern Syria. The bulletin offers statistics that evidence that Turkey has achieved significant success against the ISIS organization and will not allow ISIS to strengthen in the region. In the search made on Twitter, it was seen that the news did not reach any prevalence. No analysis was found for this claim in the search about the verification platforms.

In the bulletin, the allegations of "Air compressor tender Specifications include the condition of being made in Greece" and "Tekke and zaviye students overflowed to the streets" focused on the news items published in the conventional

media. No results were obtained in our search for the reflection of these claims on social media.

The following analysis of the bulletin was about the claim that "The person attacking the doctor is a Syrian national." According to the analysis made by Teyit, which we saw shared by some news outlets, a Syrian national attacked a doctor because he did not want his wife to be looked after by a male doctor. In our Twitter search, the person who received the most interaction for this claim was Ümit Özdağ. The post of this politician, who has approximately 2.6 million followers, has reached a high level of prevalence by being retweeted thousands of times. In the analysis of the bulletin, it was stated that both sides of the incident were Turkish citizens by showing evidence. In the analysis made by Teyit, which put this claim on its agenda, it was similarly said that the person who carried out the attack was Turkish. No analysis of this claim was found on the pages of Doğrula and Doğruluk Payı.

Figure 48

Disinformative tweet of the account @umitozdag about the attack against a doctor.



Figure 49



Teyit's analysis of the claim on the attack against a doctor.

His post, which served to spread this claim, which was found to be false/disinformation by the Bulletin and Teyit, is still on Ümit Özdağ's personal Twitter account. We have previously stated that an exclusive verification service is only required for this politician. Again, it is impossible to understand how this person, who manipulated public opinion with dozens of lies, such as this post containing xenophobia, was not subjected to any sanctions.

In particular, the refugee population faced by Turkey with the evolution of the Syrian crisis that started in 2011 as a civil war is used by many political groups to spread disinformation, especially by political movements that try to be on the agenda with policies fueled by xenophobia in order to turn this situation into a political gain. In the last analysis in the bulletin, the allegations about the number of voters announced by the YSK (Supreme Election Committee) were discussed. Accordingly, in the report of the YSK, it is claimed that there are 466 thousand registered Syrian-born voters. The Twitter search shows that this claim has reached quite a widespread prevalence. In the posts made by the accounts with a total of 496 thousand followers,

it is claimed that the data announced by the Ministry of Interior, which claimed that there are 120 thousand Syrian-born voters in Turkey, was refuted by the YSK report. When the image purported to be from the YSK report is closely examined, it is understood that it was not published by YSK but by a data mining and data analysis formation called Polymeter. According to the related report, it is claimed that there are 460,215 Syrian-born voters based on the voter information given to True Party (*Doğru Parti*) and Hometown Party (*Memleket Partisi*) by YSK. These claims, which were presented as definite information without seeking answers to critical questions such as what kind of equipment the research company Polymeter had to prepare such reports and to what extent the data provided to the company reflected that of YSK, were denied in the bulletin with the knowledge that YSK did not have such a report. This example shows that the Disinformation Bulletin serves a critical purpose, just like other verification platforms. It is thought that using the advantages of being the publication of a state-owned institution and examining such claims more comprehensively and analytically will increase the prestige of the bulletin.

These claims have not been included in the radar of the platforms examined within the scope of the research. However, such claims, which concern election security and are of high public interest, might be said to meet the criteria of urgency, importance, and virality. Of course, it cannot be expected that every claim put forward by the bulletin will be evaluated. However, we believe that examining widely shared content by determining a standard of virality will serve the mission to which verification platforms aspire better than they currently do.

although the sources containing the claim that Syrian nationals earned apartments from the TOKİ were searched for by trying different keywords, they could not be detected. This suggests that the tweets were deleted.

The first claim, spread on Twitter, is that the MHP Provincial Chairman Fatih Özbek injured another person with a gun in the city center in Hakkari, and the tradesmen closed the shutters in protest. The video shared by the Twitter account *Haber*, which has about 500 thousand followers, received a severe interaction rate. It has been observed that the relevant page does not include the denial published by Hakkari Governorship in response to this claim. This page, whose username is @news, does not have a web page or any information about whom it belongs to; it is a vivid example of how easily disinformation can be realized in our age.

It is understood that this claim, which is not considered worthy of examination by the verification platforms, is an act of disinformation made against the public reputation of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the coalition partner of the government. It might be questioned whether the platforms turned a blind eye to this claim due to a particular political choice.

Figure 51

Disinformative tweet of @news.



Figure 52

Hakkari Governorship press release dated 8 December 2022.

Hakkari MHP İl Başkanı Fatih ÖZBEK'in ateşli silah kullanmak suretiyle bir şahsı yaraladığı şeklinde asılsız iddialarla ilgili Basın Açıklaması

08.12.2022

07.12.2022 günü bazı basın yayın organları ve sosyal medya hesapları tarafından Hakkari MHP İl Başkanı Fatih ÖZBEK'in ateşli silah kullanmak suretiyle bir şahsı yaraladığı şeklinde asılsız iddialar paylaşılmaktadır.

Kimliği belirli iki şahıs arasında alacak verecek konusundan kaynaklı husumet sonucu ateşli silahla yaralama olayı gerçekleşmiş olup, konunun şüpheli olaydan kısa zaman sonra yakalanmış, adli tahkikata bağlanılmıştır. Bahsi geçen olayla MHP İl Başkanı Fatih ÖZBEK'in bir ilgisi yoktur.

Ayrıca bu konu kasıtlı olarak kullanılarak huzur ve güven ortamını bozmaya çalışan şahıslar hakkında gerekli adli süreç başlatılmıştır.

Kamuoyuna saygıyla duyurulur.

Hakkari Valiliği

Another claim was that the rules drawn for TOKİ houses in Gaziantep and Hatay have privileged foreign nationals. In this claim, which was also shared on the Twitter page of the Kayseri Provincial Presidency of the Victory Party (ZP), which adopted xenophobia as its distinguishing line and received intense interaction, people with foreign names were selected from among 4200 people and consecutively listed in order to give the impression that there was no person of Turkish origin among those who were entitled a TOKİ apartment. These claims, which spread on Twitter, have also come under the radar of the sampled platforms. In the analysis of the claims discussed by Teyit and Doğrula, it was stated that the relevant list was created by manipulation, and the persons entitled to participate in the projects were Turkish citizens of Syrian origin.

Figure 53

Teyit's analysis of the claims on TOKI draws.

[illegible]

4.11. 12 – 18 December 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this week's newsletter, five claims were put on the agenda: HDP Deputy Garo Paylan's Allegations regarding the Disinformation Bulletin, allegations regarding President Erdogan's candidacy statement, and the claims that "Identity information of the citizens of the Republic of Turkey is Sold," "Employees will not be able to shop with their meal tickets," and that "Minister of National Education Mahmut Özer made activities in Arabic."

Figure 54

Tweets about the presidential elections.



When we look at the Twitter spread of these claims put on the agenda by the bulletin, it was determined that the two claims achieved a prevalence that met the study's criteria. However, none of the allegations covered by the bulletin were included in the agenda of the platforms. Although this is understandable for the claims that do not have a Twitter presence, President Erdogan's candidacy, which was widely discussed at that time (expressed by three accounts with more than 800 thousand followers according to our research), and the fact that the issue of meal tickets, which concerns millions of employees, were surprisingly not found worth examining by the verification platforms. In this context, it might be said that the Disinformation Bulletin tracks the pulse of social media relatively better.

Figure 55

Tweets about the use of meal tickets.



On the other hand, while *Hürriyet* writer Noyan Doğan claimed in his column that meal tickets would not be valid in grocery shopping, this news item, which became widespread on Twitter, missed the radar of the platforms analyzed.

4.12. 19 – 25 December 2022 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In this week's newsletter, five allegations were analyzed under the headings of "The perpetrator of the racist attack in Paris is Mehmet," "Halk TV was given the penalty of 'praising terror with mimics,'" "Four-fifths of the direct investment in Turkey consists of real estate," Cigarette extinguished on the face of the 11-year-old child staying in the House of Compassion (*Şefkat Evi*)," and "There is no doctor in the cardiology department at Hatay Dörtyol State Hospital." Considering the spread of these allegations on Twitter, it was seen that the punishment given to Halk TV and the allegations of violence against a child staying in the House of Compassion reached a prevalence that meets the criteria. However, none of the claims checked in the bulletin, including those that meet the criteria, were covered by the platforms.

Figure 56

Tweets on closure penalties issued by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council).



The crime of "praising terrorism with gestures," which was first put forward by CHP RTÜK member İlhan Taşçı and which is about the penalties imposed on Halk TV by the Council, seems to have reached more than two million views along with other Twitter accounts that shared the claim. Although it is stated in the bulletin that this allegation is not true and that the penalties were given due to the statements legitimizing terrorism, no document has been submitted for the reasons of RTÜK. The fact that the verification platforms have overlooked such a conflict may be considered contrary to the nature of the verification action. In this context, once more, the disappearance of "objectionable" issues from the agenda of verification platforms, so to speak, seems to be highly problematic in terms of the social role assigned to them.

4.13. 26 December 2022 – 1 January 2023 Disinformation Bulletin Analysis

In the last bulletin of the year, ten claims were subjected to verification under the headings of "the Turkish army is withdrawing from the zap," "84 percent increase in natural gas," "789 thousand 774 children do not have school registration," "We have been finding the same gas and the same oil for years," "The announced inflation rate is below the truth," "123 percent increase in bridges and highways," 'Perverted'

immigrant was released," and "Market bags were increased," in addition to the claims regarding the reliability of Turkish Statistical Institute (Turkstat) data and the historical artifact in the ancient city of Aizanoi.

When we look at the Twitter spread of the claims checked in the bulletin, we observe that the claims about natural gas price hikes and grocery bags have reached sufficient prevalence. On the other hand, the verification platforms have only addressed the claim regarding the price of grocery bags. When the claim that natural gas was increased by 84 percent is examined, it is understood that the increase was not made to natural gas but to service fees such as meter connection, cancellation, and subscription. However, the @news page, which we have previously seen as a significant contributor to the spread of such disinformative claims, presented this increase a few days ago by associating it with the statement of the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources that no increase will be made in natural gas and preferred to manipulate the public.

Figure 57

Tweet of @news user on natural gas hike.



In the search conducted within the scope of this study, it has been noted that many pages have gained popularity in social media channels with the claim of "new generation journalism" in the style of @news page. It is understood that such pages, which often do not specify the source of the news they share, do not disclose their institutional structure publicly and have almost no commitment to the honest

reporting mission arising from the historical codes of the traditional media. These pages publish news to gain popularity and thus commercial gain through many followers and interactions or to manipulate public opinion for their political agendas. One of the most noteworthy is the "new generation" news page broadcasting under the username @pushholder. The tag of this organization can only be reached with a Google search. It is possible to learn that the founder of this page, which consists of two people, is a young entrepreneur named Sercan Kılıç, from an advertorial in traditional media. This young entrepreneur understood to be studying Computer Engineering at Okan University from his public LinkedIn page. He manages a news page with 2.5 million followers and is viewed by millions. As can be understood from these open sources, it is a terrible situation for today's journalism that a person who has not received any training in this field reaches 2.5 million people in journalism, a profession with a mission of informing and educating the public. Like the news they make about the price of grocery bags, @pushholder-style pages that publish a claim without any research or verification do not correct it despite being rejected or not publishing this rejection, so they are almost like a mine for fact-checkers.

Figure 58

Images from @pushholder's Twitter account.



It was stated that this claim, which was subjected to analysis by Teyit and Doğrula, was false and that the citizen would pay 25 kuruş again. However, 38.5 kuruş per bag would be charged within the scope of the recycling deductions taken from supermarkets by the state. It is clear that neither the bulletin nor these verification acts by Teyit and Doğrula will not be read in the face of the disinformation caused by Pushholder's related post reaching 4.2 million views. Moreover, whether the audience following such pages would also follow the verification platforms, including the bulletin, is another media literacy problem.

4.14. Review of Findings

Our primary purpose in designing this research was to obtain findings on how the verification platforms that emerged within the framework of the new generation of journalism practices function and justify their claim to fact-check the truth. For this, we examined 88 news in 13 bulletins published by the Turkish Communications Directorate Disinformation Bulletin, a biased publication by nature, for three months. In this direction, we first checked whether the news items covered by the bulleting reached sufficient prevalence on Twitter (at least 100 tweets and 100 likes), which is considered highly influential as a news platform. 25 out of the 88 news stories met these minimum criteria.

When we looked at which of those 25 news items were covered by the fact-checking platforms of Teyit, Doğrula, and Doğruluk Payı, we found that only 11 news were examined in at least one. Therefore, considering that the claim in a tweet that has received 100 retweets and 100 likes might potentially reach an average of one million views, it was observed that the 14 claims that occupied the public-political agenda were not handled by these platforms that claim to work to ensure that the

society reaches the correct information. This ratio is thought to result from editorial choices of the verification platforms, as mentioned earlier.

The fact that fact-checking organizations that keep the gate of information, so to speak, with the claim of being independent and impartial miss some essential claims that occupy the public-political agenda both in quality and quantity requires us to rethink the functionality of these organizations. As an overall result of this research, we think that the criteria these organizations use to decide which news to fact-check should be disclosed. Such a disclosure will bring along a structure more suitable for the position these formations see as suitable for themselves. In this sense, our main suggestion is that the "human factor" should be less involved in news verification. In particular, artificial intelligence applications can now take the decision to select news items for verification. The human factor should only come into play at the verification stage of the claims which will follow this selection.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the question of whether the concept of fact-checking has developed in the media industry in parallel with the concept of post-truth and whether the fact-checking tools, which claim a truth claim in this context, are the new gatekeepers of the media and which truth or lie these channels open and which they close their eyes to.

At this point, the discussion of post-truth could only be meaningful if there was some kind of confrontation with traditional conceptions of truth. For this reason, in this study, we tried to evaluate from a postmodern perspective how fact-checking channels, which are new media tools of verification, incorporate the concepts of truth, post-truth, and lie.

Postmodern thought offers a contextualized form for the knowability of truth or reality. Although postmodern thought is accused of "muddying the waters," so to speak, because of this character, it offers us a rich literature in terms of ontic,

epistemic, socio-economic archaeology of knowledge, truth, and truth discourses. It can be said that the approaches that define the age we are living in as the post-truth age are coming to terms with postmodern thought from a neo-Marxist perspective and that the fact that they use fact-checking tools to the maximum extent while doing so does not cover the fact that fact-checking channels are an essential element of the capitalist media market, which instead strengthen it. For this very reason, this study explains that fact-checking should be addressed within the framework of post-truth and postmodern discourses.

At the end of our study, it is understood that fact-checking organizations, idealized in the name of journalism, have many shortcomings. Most news items in the verification bulletins published by a state institution were not subjected to verification even if they seemed to meet the evaluation criteria of independent verification bodies. We believe that there is no justification for the omission of disinformative news, such as the allegation that the Turkish Armed Forces used chemical weapons, which set the agenda of Turkey on a global scale in October 2022 and which meets almost all the evaluation criteria of the verification bodies and whose analysis is possible from open sources.

Such omissions may well have political justifications. People working in fact-checking organizations may have a political agenda. The ethical thing to do is stop presenting themselves as a neutral organization. If their motives are non-political, they should explain why they do not analyze the news that meets the criteria they have announced. It is not unreasonable to expect them to make an effort to improve themselves without taking refuge in excuses such as insufficient workforce, which can be overcome with artificial intelligence software. Otherwise, they should choose between being a classic news organization or a control mechanism that monitors news organizations.

With new media tools, the most critical change in journalism is the speed of information. Rather than the quality of the news, media organizations have entered into a race to see who will share the news first or who will receive more interaction. This "new generation journalism" approach, which breaks away from all the ethical codes of traditional journalism, is one of the leading causes of disinformation. The

delusion that verification organizations alone can oppose such a gigantic problem is, of course, irrational. As seen in our study, verification organizations, which emerged with the mission of identifying and deciphering misleading news unbiasedly, almost disappear when it comes to situations that plunge the country into chaos. These organizations, whose criteria for news evaluation are "urgency, importance, and virality," turn their heads the other way when the Turkish Twitter agenda is shaken by certain news. It is more important to discuss what new fact-checking organizations should do rather than the motives behind these behaviors. If a fact-checking organization values urgency, it should be able to analyze a news story without the public being manipulated by fake news. If it prioritizes significance, it should focus on the political agenda, which is the artery of society. If it prioritizes virality, it must address agendas formed within quantitative standards.

While criticizing the weaknesses of verification organizations, another point that should not be overlooked is the new generation of news organizations that impose a heavy workload on them. The public must access accurate news, so governments adopt regulations to legalize such news organizations. For such organizations to be recognized by the public, requiring them to have a corporate web page with a detailed list of their administrative and editorial staff is necessary to prevent anyone from doing news reporting irresponsibly. The fact that the state, which expects many responsibilities to be fulfilled, from the prosecutor's office to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), even for a simple school newspaper, disregards organizations that reach five million unique views with a tweet and whose relationship with journalism is not open to the public, prepares the end of journalism in the classical sense. One of the measures to be taken in this regard should be to ensure that journalism is practiced by people trained in this field.

In this study, we have endeavored to look at the issue from a more original perspective than the studies examining the relationship between journalism and verification organizations. A more comprehensive study, perhaps the first of its kind, especially on the Disinformation bulletin, will bring more meaningful results and suggestions on the issues addressed. We believe that the IFCN-approved ones and other organizations that provide verification services independently should be

examined in detail within the scope of such studies. With the increase in these studies, we believe that verification organizations will be drawn to a more realistic ground in the context of society and news relations.

Most importantly, however, future studies should seek to distinguish the conditions under which fact-checking reduces misperceptions from those under which they fail or backfire. Many citizens seem reluctant to revise their beliefs in the face of accurate information and attempts to correct these false beliefs may worsen matters. Identifying the best way to provide accurate information would advance understanding how citizens process information and help strengthen public understanding of democratic debate and the political process.

Furthermore, basing the revenue model of verification bodies on diversified funding from voluntary individuals and funds would allow such bodies to act boldly in the face of any allegations. However, the fact that these verification organizations share their revenues transparently on their channels makes it essential to evaluate the debate on financing conventional media in a new framework. Indeed, as Baudrillard says, transparency is also the absolute threat of our time (Baudrillard, 1995:117). It is also worth discussing and researching whether the donation model acts as a political and economic catalyst. In our opinion, this deserves a discussion so broad as to be the subject of another thesis.

Returning to the topic at hand, the fact-checking organizations' disappearance, so to speak, on "inconvenient" issues, as we have repeatedly seen, seems highly problematic regarding the social role they are assigned. At this point, for example, the allegations dealt with by the Disinformation Bulletin should be accepted by fact-checking organizations as a kind of denunciation. Thus, analyzing the extent to which the allegations that attract the attention of the institution responsible for state communication are true or false reinforces the objective identity of verification bodies. Furthermore, given the positive connotation of the option of "mixed" as a way of evaluating news other than the true-false option, it may be suggested that verification bodies use a more accurate concept instead of this option. Because in its current form, the "mixed" news category means "both offside and goal", to put it in

soccer terminology. As is well known, the goal of an offside move is considered invalid.

Finally, fact-checking channels are not expected to evaluate every claim made. However, the claims that deserve public attention meet the urgency, importance, and virality criteria. Just as in this research, even examining widely shared content by determining a standard of virality will serve the mission to which verification formations aspire more than their current standards.



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