

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMBATING DISINFORMATION

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FOREWORD

Disinformation, which has become a significant problem in Turkey, can spread rapidly, especially through social media, and can be harmful to society's psychology. In order to protect against the harmful effects of disinformation, psychosocial strategies to combat it, as well as regulations in the fields of education and law, will reduce the harmful effects of disinformation and prevent its spread in society.

A person affected by disinformation can suddenly see their career, family, and essentially their entire life damaged. Similarly, an institution can quickly lose its reputation due to disinformation. Since the positive effects that can counteract the negative effects of disinformation on individuals or institutions cannot spread as quickly as the disinformation itself, the spread of truth must also be accelerated.

This book presents interventions and seven policy recommendations on what can be done against disinformation in Turkey, which ranks first among the countries most exposed to disinformation, as part of the fight against disinformation.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Fatih KIRIŞIK

Rector of Karabuk University

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INTRODUCTION

Disinformation has become an extremely important problem today as a result of developments in communication technologies. On the internet and on social media platforms, where ideas are freely shared, malicious individuals can very easily spread fake news by targeting another person, an institution, or certain groups. In order to prevent this situation—which has become a national security issue—the production and dissemination of fake news must be prevented.

In democratic societies, the free expression of ideas is one of the fundamental requirements of democracy. This freedom, however, is sometimes misunderstood and leads to the violation of others' spheres of freedom, thereby giving rise to disinformation and concepts related to disinformation. In its simplest form, deliberately producing fake news to harm a person constitutes disinformation. Disinformation is an act that occurs through the dissemination of fake news produced by malicious individuals who target a specific

person or institution at a specific time. In combating disinformation, a multidimensional approach is required so that both freedom of expression is protected, and necessary sanctions are imposed on those responsible for disinformation. For disinformation not to occur, deterrent policies must be clearly and explicitly established. Nevertheless, society must also be made aware—through education—of how to recognize and respond to individuals who attempt to produce and spread disinformation within the community. Therefore, this paper discusses disinformation and its related concepts, types, and examples, and presents policy recommendations regarding what can be done to counter disinformation.

1. The Concept of Disinformation and Its Historical Development

The development of communication technologies and the evolution of communication practices have made the concept of disinformation increasingly significant. From the past to the present—particularly with the widespread use of mass media—states, institutions, and even corporations have both employed and been exposed to disinformation as a communication technique. Disinformation is defined as the deliberate production and dissemination of information known to be false, with the aim of misleading, directing, or manipulating the target audience. Wardle (2017, para. 1) defines disinformation as “the intentional dissemination of false information.” Similarly, the concept is described in the European Commission’s report as “false, misleading, or manipulative information created and disseminated with the intention of causing public harm” (De Cock Buning, 2018: 10–11).

Emerging in various forms of factually inaccurate content, disinformation constructs a distorted reality in the public sphere through false information, fake news, and misleading content. Therefore, disinformation weakens trust relations in democratic societies and negatively affects rational, deliberation-based discussion processes, pluralism, and the culture of tolerance (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017: 44; Lazer et al., 2018: 1094). Such content, especially when disseminated through social media platforms, harms individuals’ ability to make decisions based on accurate information (Lewandowsky et al., 2021). Although the concept has gained significance with the development of new communication technologies such as the internet and social media, its origins date back to earlier periods.

The concept of disinformation was officially used for the first time in the early 1920s in the Soviet Union and was derived from the Russian term “dezinformatsiya.” According to Ion Mihai Pacepa, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin ensured that the term would resemble a Western-origin word and appear similar to French by having it used in the form “désinformation” (Pacepa & Rychlak, 2013: 35–37). During this period, disinformation became part of the “active measures” strategy as an extension of intelligence activities, with the aim of influencing public opinion in enemy countries through the systematic and deliberate dissemination of false information (Shultz & Godson, 1984: 15–20). According to Shultz and Godson (1984), this strategy incorporated elements of psychological warfare, propaganda, economic manipulation, and diplomatic pressure, making disinformation an instrument of influence that extended beyond the media alone. Between the 1950s and 1980s, disinformation became a central tool of Soviet foreign policy and included activities such as producing forged documents to influence decision-makers in target countries, disseminating content that discredited Western leaders, and manipulating ideological narratives through the media (Shultz & Godson, 1984: 150–180). This communication strategies based on disinformation have continued to function as a fundamental component of Russia’s foreign policy from the Soviet era to the present day (Acampa, 2024: 13).

Following the emergence of disinformation in Russia, it is observed that Western countries also employed it during the Cold War years. In the 1950s, the concept of disinformation was predominantly used to refer to state-sponsored propaganda (Oxford English Dictionary, 2025). Although the term itself was not explicitly expressed before the 1950s, it had been functioning in practice. The roots of disinformation in the United States and Europe date back to the propaganda efforts carried out by dominant political powers during the First World War. In particular, the propaganda activities conducted by the United Kingdom through “Wellington House” and later the “Ministry of Information” demonstrate that disinformation was used during wartime as a means to influence public opinion (Taylor, 2003; Smith, 2024, paras. 7–20). In the United States, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), established during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, similarly produced and distributed various manipulative materials to persuade the public to support the war, paralleling the activities in the United Kingdom (Maxwell, 2015: 76–77). This period may be regarded as the first stage in which disinformation became part of modern communication strategies in Western countries.

In the Cold War period that began after the Second World War, disinformation showed a tendency to become institutionalized as a systematic state policy in the United States and Europe. In the United States, the CIA conducted various “information operations” in Latin America, Asia, and Europe in order to counter Soviet influence (Lucas, 1999; Fein, 2004). Similarly, in Europe, NATO countries established psychological warfare units to counter Soviet disinformation and developed policies that can be described as information warfare (Scott-Smith, 2007: 19). During this period, “disinformation” came to be defined not only as the dissemination of false information but also as a propaganda and psychological warfare tool used to diminish the influence of opposing ideologies. In summary, the use and development of disinformation have taken place within the context of power, propaganda, and warfare. However, it is observed that with the widespread adoption of new communication technologies such as the internet and social media, disinformation has gained a different dimension. In the past, because the groups producing media content were specific and limited, controlling content in traditional media tools could be achieved more easily; yet with internet technologies, content production has expanded beyond a single professional group and has transformed into a structure in which every individual can become a producer. This situation has made the control of produced information and content more difficult. Moreover, the changes in the essence, meaning, use, and structure of information within content have necessitated an understanding of different related concepts. In this context, the following section explains the concepts related to disinformation.

2. Concepts Related to Disinformation

Making the concept of disinformation analytically comprehensible is possible by examining similar concepts related to information. In communication practices, while deliberately distorted information may be present in the construction of knowledge and messages, there are also different forms of messaging. In this context, concepts such as Misinformation and Malinformation—which can be referred to as types of information disorder—along with Agnotology, Infodemic, Infobesity, and Manipulation, are among the concepts that need to be examined. In the following section, these concepts will be elaborated upon with examples.

The concept of misinformation refers to situations in which information is incorrect but not produced or disseminated intentionally. In other words, this type of information covers cases in which the producer is unaware that they are engaging in an incorrect act and does not have the intention to cause harm (Bölükbaşı, 2021: 14). Particularly after 2010, the rise of social media usage has led this concept to occupy a central place in communication studies. Because misinformation is not intentional, it includes situations such as an old image being shared as if it were from a current event, a real news story being misunderstood due to misleading headlines, or content being conveyed incorrectly due to translation errors (Fallis, 2015). Although the disseminators of such content are generally well-intentioned, sharing information without verification or fact-checking can nevertheless lead to various harms.

The concept of malinformation is derived from the Latin word *male*, meaning “badly,” and is used similarly in English with the prefix “mal-,” which carries the same meaning. In this context, the term can be translated into Turkish as “malicious information” or “harmful information.” Malinformation is fundamentally based on accurate information; however, it refers to the dissemination of accurate information in a way that is removed from its context, manipulated, or used for purposes other than intended, with the aim of causing harm. For example, the unauthorized leaking of the email correspondences of Hillary Clinton and Emmanuel Macron to the press and the use of these materials for political defamation are concrete examples of malinformation (Erdoğan et al., 2022: 14–15). According to the report of the Council of Europe, malinformation is defined as a type of information that involves removing or manipulating real information from its context with the intention of harming the recipient. For instance, the unauthorized public release of a political figure’s private correspondence and the use of this information to serve immediate political goals are among the situations that correspond to the concept of malinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Similarly, the sharing of a photograph that was taken accurately but is deliberately presented within the context of a false event—such as using an image from a protest to convey a different message—falls within the scope of malinformation (Wertón & Carney, para. 4).

Agnotology is an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the examination of ignorance, doubt, and the absence of knowledge that is produced, sustained, or encouraged in line with cultural, institutional, or political interests. Agnotology emphasizes that ignorance is not merely a passive condition, but rather an actively constructed process shaped by ideological, economic, or political motives. In this regard, agnotology examines manipulations within knowledge-production processes, distorted narratives disseminated through the media, and the deliberate amplification of scientific uncertainty (Schiebinger & Proctor, 2008; Proctor, 1995: 8-9). Examples such as climate change denial, the tobacco industry's efforts to downplay or ignore health risks, or the intentional obfuscation of certain historical events can be listed as agnotological cases. Thus, agnotology offers an approach aimed not at the mere absence of knowledge, but at understanding who controls knowledge, how they control it, and for what purposes. In this respect, it provides an analytical framework for understanding information policies and the communication practices of dominant powers.

Another concept that must be examined to make sense of disinformation is infobesity. Infobesity is used to describe situations in which individuals are exposed to far more information in their daily lives than they actually need, as well as the negative consequences of this excessive information load. Web 2.0-3.0 technologies and smart devices, which have developed in the information age, have made information accessible at any moment and from any place, thereby causing individuals to remain in a constant flow of information and creating an environment of "information invasion" (Ersöz & Kahraman, 2020: 431). In the literature, this concept is also expressed as "information overload." The concept is also used to describe the reduction in individuals' ability to make sense of, select, and make decisions about the information they receive, due to their cognitive limitations (Moko et al., 2023: 20; Belabbes et al., 2022: 144). Infobesity leads to psychological effects such as stress, loss of time, confusion, and mental pressure in individuals (Ersöz & Kahraman, 2020: 431). Therefore, even when information is accurate, its excessive quantity can lead to negative consequences.

Another concept, the infodemic, refers to a situation in which an excessive amount of both accurate and inaccurate information makes it difficult for people to access reliable information. The term has been used particularly in the 2020s to analyze the impact of information pollution and inaccuracies spread through social media on public health. Although its usage increased during the pandemic period, the term was in fact first introduced in 2003 in an article by journalist and political scientist David Rothkopf in *The Washington Post* (Merriam-Webster, 2020, para. 7). Formed by combining the words "information" and "epidemic," the infodemic (information epidemic, excessive information load, spread, and asymmetry) is considered a potential source of crisis that may negatively affect public health policies (Choi, 2024: 1-2). This situation creates negative effects on public safety and public health. For example, excessive information of uncertain quality regarding an epidemic disease or crisis can hinder access to accurate information and thereby deepen the existing crisis. The fundamental feature distinguishing an infodemic from infobesity is that, in an infodemic, it is not known whether the information circulating is true or false.

Another concept related to disinformation is manipulation. In the context of communication studies, manipulation is addressed as deliberate steering within media content (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019: 110). In this regard, presenting individual emotions, beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes as if they represent the collective opinion of society can be considered an effective strategy that facilitates the spread of disinformation as a tool of manipulation. Presenting information removed from its original context in a way that creates a strong emotional impact not only directs the perception of the target audience but also lays the groundwork for the formation of incorrect opinions, attitudes, and behaviors in public discussions. These manipulative processes deepen social and political polarization while also eroding trust in actors such as the media, politicians, and public institutions—actors that rely on credibility (Balci Aydoğan, 2024: 104). Manipulation is carried out through various strategies such as selective presentation of information (concealing part of the information), framing (presenting events from a particular perspective), emotional stimulation (triggering emotions such as fear, anger, or hope), and persuasion through repetition (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001: 45–78). With the development of mass communication tools, manipulative techniques have become instruments that transform individuals' ways of accessing information and their perceptions of reality. These techniques are also widely used in advertising, propaganda, crisis communication, and psychological warfare. Therefore, in order to make sense of and manage disinformation, it is considered important to understand the types of information and the processes by which content is constructed.

3. Types of Disinformation and Examples

Although it is possible to trace the history of disinformation back to the invention of writing, the earliest written records date to the Roman period. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, his nephew Octavianus is known to have launched a disinformation campaign aimed at gaining political power by causing Marcus Antonius to lose the trust of the Roman people. His campaign, which targeted Antony's relationship with Cleopatra to persuade the Roman public that Antony did not embody Roman values, is considered an ancient version of modern disinformation techniques (Verishagen & Zerr, n.d.: 16). Another example is the fabricated news published by the New York Sun in 1835, claiming that life had been discovered on the Moon—an act motivated by commercial interests (Verishagen & Zerr, n.d.: 19–20). A more recent example is the United States' Vietnam War. The Pentagon Papers, published by The New York Times in 1971, revealed false statements that led to the initiation of the Vietnam War. According to these documents, the United States used the claim that its navy had been attacked in order to justify expanding the war against Vietnam; however, in reality, the attack had never occurred. These examples demonstrate that disinformation is not merely a problem of the modern era, but rather a tool that has been used throughout history in struggles for power.

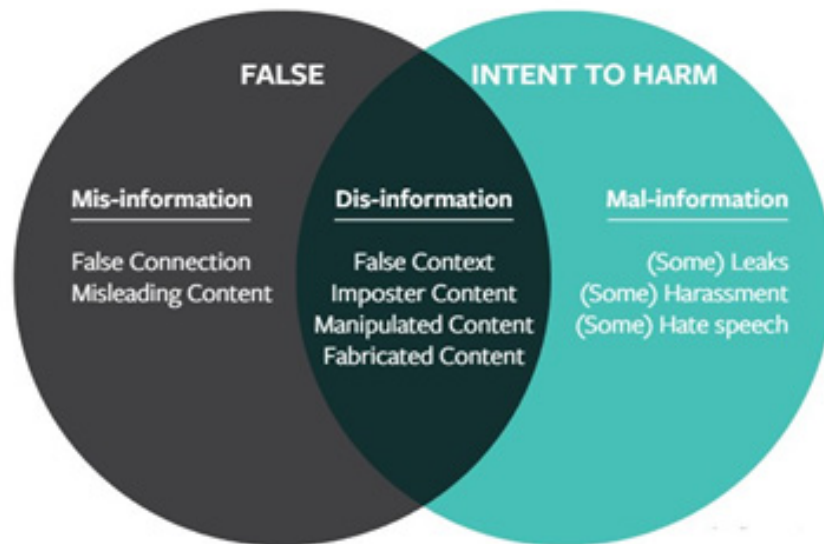


Figure 1: Information Disorder (Source: Ireton and Posetti, n.d.: 45)

As previously stated, disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is deliberately and intentionally produced and disseminated (Turcilo & Obrenovic, 2020). One of the primary aims of disinformation is to manipulate individuals or masses by severing their connection with reality and preventing them from making sound decisions. In this way, individuals who unknowingly believe in disinformation become instruments serving the interests of the persons or groups that spread false information (Aydın, 2023: 2620).

The rise of social media and the increasing ease of access allow private companies, individuals, or groups to disseminate disinformation effectively in order to gain political advantage or profit. Moreover, it is also possible to encounter states that use disinformation as a means of propaganda or legitimization. One of the most striking historical examples of disinformation is the incident known in literature as the Nayirah Testimony. During Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a young Kuwaiti girl speaking before the U.S. Congress claimed that Iraqi soldiers had entered hospitals, removed babies from incubators, and left them to die. This testimony generated strong public outrage in the United States and created substantial societal support for military intervention against Iraq. However, it was later revealed that the testimony was fabricated. Nayirah was actually the daughter of Kuwait's ambassador to the United States, and her statements were part of a disinformation campaign orchestrated by the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton (Darda, 2017: 80–82). The aim of the campaign was to manipulate public opinion and provide legitimacy for the Gulf War.

Therefore, disinformation varies in terms of intent, content, and effects, and it requires different strategies of counteraction. Disinformation can be produced and disseminated through various methods, and these are mostly classified according to content types. The most well-known of these are the following:

False context refers to presenting accurate information or visuals within a misleading narrative by removing them from their actual event, time, or circumstances.

Misleading content aims to direct the reader toward an incorrect interpretation by distorting or altering the meaning of existing information.

False connection occurs when an image, quotation, or headline is presented as if it were related to an entirely different event.

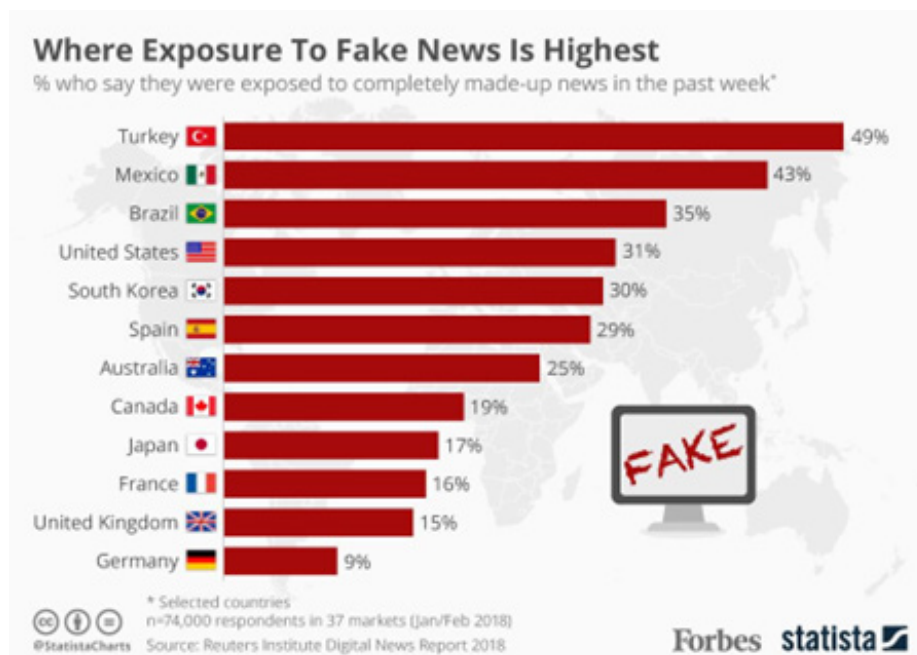
Manipulation is the deliberate alteration of existing information or images by selectively editing, cropping, or adding elements.

Parody consists of humorous or satirical content, often written in the format of news; however, such content may sometimes be misunderstood and perceived as real.

Imposter content (Imitation) aims to lend credibility to false information by creating accounts or identities resembling trustworthy individuals or institutions.

Fabricated content is completely fictional from beginning to end and is produced with the intention of deception and harm. (Editorial Teyit.org, 2025)

The diversity of disinformation methods also makes combating it a multifaceted effort. For this reason, international organizations and states have taken various steps to counter disinformation. The strategies developed by international actors provide important examples for Türkiye as well. For instance, NATO, adopting a military-oriented perspective, has considered disinformation as part of hybrid warfare and established the Hybrid Threats Centre in 2018 (Ateş, 2022: 1574–1586). The United Nations General Assembly's report A/77/287 addressed disinformation within the context of protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, putting forward an approach that prioritizes safeguarding freedom of expression (Assembly United Nations, 2022). The Global Engagement Center (GEC), operating under the U.S. Department of State, has proposed the development of multilayered defense strategies by offering preventive (or defensive) and punitive (or offensive) measures (Global Engagement Center, 2023).



Source: (McCarthy, 2018)

The 2018 Reuters Institute Digital News Report shows that Türkiye is the country most exposed to disinformation.

In Türkiye, disinformation is generally evaluated within the framework of political polarization, low trust in the media, and the lack of oversight on social media. During election periods, natural disasters, and moments of crisis, the spread of disinformation accelerates, reducing the public's capacity to access accurate information. For example, during the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, false emergency calls, inaccurate location reports, and fabricated images circulated on social media adversely affected disaster management. Similarly, during election periods, fabricated videos, manipulative visuals, and statements taken out of context influence the public's decision-making process. Such disinformation content is often supported by bot accounts, troll networks, and sponsored posts. Especially social media platforms play a critical role in the circulation of disinformation. The creation of echo chambers by algorithms causes users to encounter only the content that reinforces their existing views. This situation both deepens polarization and facilitates the spread of false information in ways that distort perceptions of reality. Additionally, micro-targeting and the use of personal data to conduct customized propaganda further increase the impact of disinformation.

4. What Should Be Done to Combat Disinformation?

Just like an infectious disease, fake news spreads rapidly and causes an outbreak of false information—an infodemic. According to Han (2022), efforts to counter the infodemic solely with truth will fail. The reason for this is that fake news spreads so quickly that it outruns truth, making it impossible for truth to catch up with it (Han, 2022: 28). Fake news is shared 70% more frequently on social media compared to factual information (Aral, 2022: 85). Moreover, a study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) found that on the platform X (Twitter), fake news spreads six times faster than real news (Hari, 2023: 138). This is because digital media society is characterized by scandal and outrage (Han, 2024: 17). Fake news attracts greater attention, which leads to higher click rates on the internet and social media platforms. Aral (2022: 63) states that fake news is sensational and therefore more striking and persuasive than routine news. One of the reasons why a concept like “doomscrolling” (constant scrolling for negative or distressing news) (Alan, 2022) has entered our lives is precisely this. Social media users keep scrolling until they encounter a sufficiently dramatic or distressing piece of news; once they reach a level of saturation, they enthusiastically begin sharing that news with others, which in turn increases the speed at which an intriguing piece of negative or fake news spreads. However, despite all of this—and although truth struggles to catch up with fake news—doing nothing is not an option. Therefore, the steps that must be taken to reduce the spread of fake news are listed below as bullet points, followed by policy recommendations.

4.1. Preventing Public Outrage

The waves of outrage generated by fake news are highly effective in attracting sudden attention and directing that attention toward a particular target, and naturally, just as the emergence of such outrage is rapid, its disappearance can also occur with the same speed (Han, 2024: 17). For the rapid dissipation of outrage triggered by fake news, new topics must enter the public agenda. If no such topics exist, consecutive statements must be issued emphasizing that the disinformation consists of false information, and efforts should be made to keep these statements on the agenda. However, it is not possible to eliminate the outrage created by fake news solely through such statements. This is because fake news generally attacks individuals' psychology and emotions. The emotional assault that emerges on collective psychology leads to excessive reactions. These emotional reactions cannot be immediately neutralized when confronted with facts. This is because emotions leave deeper and more lasting marks on people. In contrast, facts that appeal to human reason cannot immediately eliminate the damage caused by emotional attacks on society. To counteract the psychological effects caused by fake news, counter-messages that appeal to the emotions of the public may produce more effective results.

4.2. Statements from Authorities

The emergence of disinformation most often occurs through anonymous and bot accounts, and it spreads rapidly (Swenson & Goldin, 2024). In fact, Han's (2022) statement that truth cannot catch up with fake news resembles, in a sense, a struggle against an invisible and rapidly spreading insidious enemy. In this struggle, the involvement of real individuals may enable truth to reach fake news. As the status of these real individuals increases, when statements are delivered from primary, authoritative sources—the impact of disinformation will correspondingly diminish.

4.3. Combating Stabilized Disinformation

A scandal society—an outrage society—rises suddenly and dissipates just as quickly. For public discourse to form, stability, consistency, and continuity are required (Han, 2024: 17). Scandals that spread solely through social media may be forgotten as rapidly as they emerge. However, when mainstream media also focuses on these scandals, it grants them stability. Reporting on the issue in prime-time news bulletins, continuously discussing the fake news in programs on news channels to keep it on the agenda, and commentators interpreting fake news in a supportive manner all undermine efforts to combat disinformation. Nevertheless, presenting factual information together with evidence can contribute to reducing disinformation. Accurate news presented with its evidence can also be covered in mainstream media as a direct response to fake news; and by directing expert commentators to provide analysis on the facts, it becomes possible to counteract disinformation that has gained stability.

5. Policy Recommendations

A variety of communication strategies can be used in combating disinformation. These communication strategies may not be sufficient to eliminate disinformation entirely. On the other hand, communication strategies themselves require an application as strong as disinformation. Although it may appear as if disinformation emerges spontaneously, it in fact results from an extensive preparation process. This makes it necessary, in the fight against disinformation, to organize disinformation management activities before disinformation emerges. In this context, the measures that need to be taken in combating disinformation are addressed broadly in the form of policy recommendations.

5.1. Media Literacy Education to Prevent the Unquestioned Acceptance of Media Content

The normalization of fabricated content by media consumers is one of the most significant causes of the spread of disinformation. Media content that is constructed by certain individuals or groups and presented to the public is accepted by people as it is—much like the air they breathe (Jolls & Thoman, 2008: 71). For individuals not to consume content as it is during media use, the importance of media literacy education comes to the forefront. Media consumers must be aware that media content is prepared and delivered by someone and that they should possess a high level of awareness in this regard. Although media literacy education is provided in Türkiye in the 7th and 8th grades of middle school, it should begin at earlier grade levels and be taught by individuals who have completed higher education in the field of communication. If this cannot be implemented, regular seminars should be given in primary, middle, and high schools by academic experts in media studies from universities.

In addition to increasing individuals' overall media literacy, news literacy should also be strengthened. By organizing news literacy trainings/seminars, social media users should be informed about fact-checking platforms.

Parasocial interaction—defined as forming an emotional connection with fictional characters in media contents similar to the tendency in news consumption to immediately believe every encountered news item and to react impulsively. In this regard, news literacy will help individuals develop more conscious news consumption habits and prevent them from giving sudden, emotional reactions to the news they consume. Thus, news consumers will approach disinformation—which often emerges in society in the form of scandals—in a more questioning and critical manner.

5.2. The Necessity of Clear and Explicit Statements in the Disinformation Clause

The provision known as the Disinformation Law, adopted by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) on 18 October 2022, was added to the Turkish Penal Code, and is included in Article 217/A, paragraph 1, of the TPC as follows:

ARTICLE 217/A – (1) Any person who publicly disseminates false information regarding the country's internal and external security, public order, or public health, solely for the purpose of creating anxiety, fear, or panic among the public, in a manner capable of disturbing public peace, shall be punished with imprisonment from one to three years.

It would be more useful to articulate the broadly used expressions in the disinformation clause in a narrowly defined and clearly understandable manner. The phrase “solely for the purpose of creating anxiety, fear, or panic among the public” in the article reflects the intent behind the act of disinformation. However, the purpose of disseminating disinformation is not limited to these expressions. Instead of the phrase “false information,” explicit terms such as “fake news” or “false content” should be used. Disinformation may not solely be intended to create anxiety, fear, and panic among the public. Conducting character assassination, spreading slander, lies, insults, degrading or humiliating expressions against a particular individual or institution constitutes a clear violation of human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. If such disinformation is conducted through the media, the rights and freedoms of individuals and institutions must be protected by law. Otherwise, extremely serious problems will arise, such as social unrest, disorder, disruption of public order, individuals attempting to protect their own rights, and the erosion of trust in the state and the legal system.

5.3. Institutions Having Their Own Verification Platforms

It is important for institutions to establish their own “Verification Platforms.” At the very least, their websites should include a tab titled “News Verification Center.” Although an institution may already have a space designated for making public statements, a dedicated section on the institutional website created solely for combating disinformation will meet this need. For example, a tab on an institution's website titled “News Verification Platform,” used exclusively for this purpose, can reduce the spread of disinformation by sharing content aimed only at verification. Disinformation targeting the institution or its personnel will be addressed here, and these responses will be circulated through the institution's social media platforms. Another important point is that, foremost among institutional personnel, conscious individuals who stand on the side of truth should share the content published by the institution's verification platform with their own followers through their personal social media accounts. Although this may appear to be a small step, considering that social media networks largely consist of connections formed based on homophily—meaning similarities in shared characteristics, interests, or demographic features—it becomes highly significant.

Homophily is the principle that contact between similar individuals occurs at a higher rate than contact between dissimilar individuals (McPherson et al., 2001: 416). Homophily plays an important role in the spread of fake news (Aral, 2022: 105). In brief, homophily refers to the continuation of the connections we establish with our close social circles also on social media. Social media consists of people whom users follow, know, and trust. Likewise, their followers are also composed of similar individuals. For this reason, homophilous connections can also play an important role in the dissemination of accurate news. This is because people will be more likely to believe the correct version of a news item if they see that individuals they know and trust are sharing the verification posts published by the institution. Constantly exposing people to fake news increases their tendency to believe it, and this is referred to as the Illusory Truth Effect (Aral, 2022: 84–85). Conversely, attempting to expose people to accurate news more frequently—even if such news does not receive as many views as fake news—will still accelerate the spread of truth through homophiles connections. The spread of disinformation also operates in this way. People tend to discuss events that create public outrage. Since fake news often contains scandalous elements, its rate of dissemination is higher than that of factual news. To counter this, the dissemination of accurate news must be increased in order to reduce the spread of disinformation.

In these days, apart from print and visual media, social media platforms have become highly prominent. The fact that these social media platforms are predominantly based in foreign countries makes it difficult to prevent disinformation spread through these platforms. Social media platforms bring certain content and posts to the forefront while concealing others. In particular, posts whose visibility is reduced create the perception in the public that no response has been given to disinformation, that silence has been maintained, and that it has been accepted. Posts whose visibility is increased, on the other hand, play a highly manipulative role in distorting public perceptions and fostering belief in disinformation. Therefore, new-generation disinformation countermeasures must also be developed against foreign-based social media disinformation.



5.4. The Necessity of Sanctions Against Anonymous and Bot Accounts

Users on social media who hide their identities through pseudonyms respond more aggressively to news shared online compared to real individuals (Kaya, 2022). This is because individuals whose identities are concealed can express their true thoughts disrespectfully by taking refuge in anonymity. This situation demonstrates that respect is tied to identifiable names and that anonymity excludes respect. Anonymous communication encouraged by the digital environment destroys respect and becomes responsible for the spread of a culture of thoughtlessness, bluntness, insult, lies, and slander (Han, 2024: 13). The spread of this culture paves the way for disinformation. A user who spends time anonymously on social media is also more likely to make numerous aggressive posts about fake news with ease. Furthermore, even though bot accounts are limited in number, they possess the power to alter the climate of opinion and, particularly during elections, manipulate the decision-making process of voters (Han, 2022: 26). For this reason, it is necessary to introduce regulations for anonymous accounts and bot accounts.

Taking legal measures against disinformation carried out through anonymous and bot accounts is extremely important for the safety of society. The individuals or groups to whom such accounts belong can be identified through agreements made with the relevant social media platforms, and legal procedures can then be initiated accordingly.

5.5. The Requirement That Media Sector Executives Be Graduates of Communication Faculties

The following statement included under the heading “Eligible Personnel” within the section “General Qualifications of Newspapers and Websites Authorized to Publish Official Announcements” of the Press Advertisement Agency’s (Basın İlan Kurumu) Regulation on Official Announcements and Advertisements should be expanded (Press Advertisement Agency, 2023):

“To have graduated from the communication faculties of higher education institutions (Amended phrase: OG-6/3/2024-32481), from communication-related departments of other faculties, from master’s or doctoral programs in the field of communication, or to hold an equivalent diploma recognized by the Council of Higher Education.”

The fact that newspapers employ communication faculty graduates merely to qualify for publishing official announcements indicates that the editorial quality of newspapers is being overshadowed. In order to prevent disinformation and to raise the journalistic profession to higher standards, a requirement should be introduced in Law No. 5187 on the Press stipulating that the responsible editor or the owner of the periodical publication must be a graduate of a communication faculty.



5.6. Establishment of the Türkiye Media Authority

A Türkiye Media Authority should be established as a professional body with the status of a public institution, tasked with ensuring the intellectual and financial security of media sector employees, formulating media ethical principles, monitoring the implementation of these ethical principles, planning in-service professional training, and determining the criteria for obtaining professional titles.

In Western countries, press councils composed of voluntary press members play an influential role in carrying out these functions. These Western press councils are quite successful in enforcing press ethical principles. However, in Türkiye, professional organization operates through professional bodies that have the status of public institutions. Establishing a professional organization in the media sector—similar to those in other professions—would provide significant benefits in many respects, including the protection of media workers' rights, adherence to media ethics principles, and ensuring that activities are conducted within the framework of the law (Kırışik et al., 2019).

5.7. Publication of a Disinformation Bulletin in Prime-Time TV and Radio News Broadcasts and in Newspapers



It is proposed that the “Daily Disinformation Bulletin,” to be prepared under the coordination of the Directorate of Communications of the Presidency, be broadcast regularly within the prime-time news bulletins of all national and local television and radio channels. This practice aims to provide rapid, transparent, and accurate information in response to content that misleads the public.

The bulletin will be aired as a fixed two-minute segment within the prime-time news broadcasts on all national and local television and radio channels. It will be delivered to viewers every evening in the same duration and format. In this way, both the informative function will be fulfilled and the watchability of the news flow will be preserved.

In national and local newspapers, a weekly disinformation bulletin prepared under the coordination of the Directorate of Communications will be published every Sunday as a half-page section. Thus, accurate information will be conveyed to broad segments of society through the print media. Traditional media audiences will be made aware of disinformation on a weekly basis. A corporate, regular, and reliable source of information against disinformation will be established. With this practice, the public will be informed quickly and accurately in the face of false information. Public awareness of disinformation will increase through the media.

CONCLUSION

Solution proposals for combating disinformation should be addressed at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. At the individual level, critical thinking and media literacy education enable individuals to develop resilience against disinformation. At the institutional level, independent oversight mechanisms, ethical journalism standards, and transparent public communication should be supported. At the system level, the regulation of social media algorithms, the detection of both account networks, and the development of digital legislation consistent with international standards are required. For Türkiye, safeguarding democratic values, involving civil society in the process, and supporting local journalism should be among the long-term strategies in the fight against disinformation.

Disinformation is not merely a technical communication problem, but also a societal crisis of trust. Therefore, combating it should not be limited to fact-checking alone; it must also be supported by policies that reduce social polarization and rebuild public trust. Full and accurate information is a fundamental requirement for the survival of democratic societies. Effective disinformation management in Türkiye is possible only through a multi-stakeholder, rights-based, and transparent strategy. In this regard, several policy recommendations have been presented: strengthening media literacy to prevent the uncritical acceptance of media content; incorporating more comprehensive, clear, and explicit provisions into the disinformation law; establishing institutional verification platforms; regulating anonymous and bot accounts through agreements with social media representatives in Türkiye; requiring media sector executives to be graduates of communication faculties; establishing a Türkiye Media Authority; and publishing a disinformation bulletin in TV-radio prime-time news broadcasts and in newspapers.

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Disinformation is not merely an individual problem that hinders access to accurate information; it is also a multidimensional issue that threatens social structures, democratic institutions, individual security, and public safety. With the acceleration of information flow and the proliferation of social media platforms accompanying the digitalization process, combating disinformation has become a national security issue as it facilitates the spread of false and misleading information to large audiences. The study examines in detail disinformation, which is becoming increasingly complex and whose individual and societal impacts are growing more severe. Furthermore, by defining disinformation, its types, historical background, and examples, the study presents policy recommendations on what can be done to combat disinformation.