

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VERIFICATION/FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS IN TURKEY: dogrulukpayi.com and teyit.org

TÜRKİYE'DE DOĞRULAMA/TEYİT PLATFORMLARININ KARŞILAŞTIRMALI İNCELEMESİ: dogrulukpayi.com ve teyit.org

Gökmen Hakan KARADAĞ* - Adem AYTEN**

ABSTRACT: The developments in Internet and new communication technologies have many negative impacts besides its positive impacts. In recent years, the most widely articulated one of these negative impacts is the notion of “fake news”. The notions of “fake news,” “post-truth era” and “echo chambers” are increasingly being topical issues. Fake news, the most important indicator of the post-truth era, is mostly circulated and spread through social networks. Researchers are scrutinizing the role of especially Twitter and Facebook algorithms in spread of fake news. If the solution of this problem that emerged in digital environment will be found again in the same platform, development and efficiency of fact-checking organizations is gaining importance. The two prominent fact-checking organizations in Turkey are “teyit.org” and “dogrulukpayi.com”. The scope of the research is comparison of the structures and working manners of these two fact-checking organizations. To conduct the research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were done with authorized team members of the organizations. Doğruluk Payı and Teyit have similarities on human resources, financing and organization; however, they exhibit differences on the scope and process of verification/fact-checking and assessment. Both organizations do not require being a journalist or having a journalistic education to be a verifier/fact-checker and operate with a multi-disciplinary staff. According to interviewees, one of the most difficult thing about being a verifier/fact-checker in Turkey is excessive polarization. Another difficulty about the fact-checking of politicians' statements is that these statements are mostly value-based.

Keywords: Post-truth, fake news, fact-checking, verification, media.

ÖZ: İnternet ve yeni iletişim teknolojilerinde yaşanan gelişmelerin birçok olumlu sonucu olduğu gibi olumsuz sonuçları da söz konusudur. Bu olumsuz sonuçların son yıllarda en çok dile getirileni “sahte haber” kavramıdır. “Sahte haber”, “hakikat sonrası çağ” ve “yankı odaları” kavramları gündemde giderek daha fazla yer almaktadır. Hakikat sonrası çağın en önemli göstergesi olan sahte haberler en çok sosyal ağlarda dolaşıma girmekte ve yaygınlaşmaktadır. Araştırmacılar özellikle Twitter ve Facebook algoritmalarının sahte haberlerin yayılmasındaki rolünü mercek altına almaktadırlar. Dijital ortamda doğan bu sorunun çözümü yine bu ortamda bulunacaksa, “doğrulama” mekanizmasının gelişimi ve etkinliği önem kazanmaktadır. Türkiye’de en çok öne çıkan doğrulama platformları teyit.org ve dogrulukpayi.com’dur. Çalışmada bu iki organizasyonun işleyişi ve yapılanması karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmektedir. Araştırmayı yürütmek için her iki yapının yetkili ekip üyeleriyle yarı

* Dr. Öğretim Üyesi - İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi/İstanbul - gokmenkaradag@aydin.edu.tr - (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6087-4098)

** Dr. Öğretim Üyesi - İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi/İstanbul - ademayten@aydin.edu.tr - (ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1968-8776)

yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Doğruluk Payı ve Teyit, insan kaynakları, finans ve örgütlenme itibarıyla benzerlikler göstermekte ama doğrulama/teyit süreçlerinin kapsamı ve derecelendirmesi bakımından farklılık arz etmektedir. İki organizasyon da bu iş için gazeteci olma veya gazetecilik eğitimi alma şartı gütmemektedir. Görüşme yapılan profesyonellere göre Türkiye’de bu işi yapmanın en zor yanlarından biri aşırı kutuplaşmadır. Ayrıca siyasetçilerin demeçleri, olgulardan ziyade değer ifade ettiği için, çoğu zaman doğrulama yapmaya uygun değildir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hakikat sonrası, sahte haber, doğrulama, teyit, medya.

1. Introduction

Internet is a system where time and place limitations disappear and bilateral and concurrent information get into circulation. This system can also be subscribed, attained and accessed. It empowers potential trends due to its nature and is associated with being dynamic. What maintains dynamism is the power of information and communication technologies that develops constantly and transfers individuals and societies at the same time. This feature supports the aphorism of McLuhan “we shape our tools and then our tools shape us” as well as “Laws of Media” (Uzun, 2013: 109-113).

While the ways of communication of people are rearranged on Internet social organizations/groups that have never communicated with each other get in touch and interact through social media due to the feature of interaction. This has risen a participatory culture among internet and social media users. A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices (Jenkins et al, 2009; XII).

Participatory culture takes place in a network society. Network society is a virtual and diverse social organization that occurs with the spread of information and communication technologies where individuals linked by networks and there is lower centralization (Van Dijk, 2016: 69). Individuals are engaged in content production especially in social media as part of the participatory culture in the network society. This makes each user a content producer.

One of the most important features of the Internet is speed. Content/sharing on the Internet can spread very quickly and reach millions of people in a short time. The Internet is also an unsupervised area, and users have the idea that there is endless freedom in this unsupervised space. In addition, content shared on the internet mostly does not go through any editorial control. Users can also share contents with controversial subjects in this environment due to the infinite perception of freedom and the lack of editorial control.

The increase in the number of controversial content has also led to a loss of truth. According to Keyes (2017), who described this era of loss of

truth as the “post-truth era”, the internet is the remarkable tool of this period and is *a mishmash of rumor passing as fact, press releases posted as news articles, deceptive advertising, malicious rumors, and outright scams*. (266) Keyes’ statement means that internet contains dangers and threats at the same time. (Uyanık, 2017: 333-334). Lately, the most prominent of these threats is the notion of “fake news.” On the other hand, freedom, protection and accuracy of information gradually gain importance and the “public’s right to correct information” is emphasized.

The main focuses of the research are the notions of “verification/fact-checking” and “verification/fact-checking organizations”, which are associated to above mentioned developments. In other words, while “fake news” appears as one of the dangers/threats on Internet, “fact-checking” takes a stand against this and is associated with the “public’s right to know”. To what extend could fact-checking organizations be effective on the fight against fake news is an important question in relation to public’s access to correct information and indirectly to the quality of democracy.

The scope of the research is comparison of the structures and working manners of two fact-checking organizations *dogrulukpayi.com* and *teyit.org* which are members of International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) in Turkey. To conduct the research semi-structured in-depth interviews were done with authorized team members of the organizations.

Academic studies about verification/fact checking platforms are available in Turkey. Some of them are about *teyit.org* or *dogrulukpayi.com*. However, in this study, both organizations were examined together and comparatively according to the following parameters: demographic data, scope of the verification/fact-checking, tools used for verification/fact-checking, organizational structure, financing, collaborations, social media use, types of content with most interaction and difficulties of verification/fact-checking in Turkey.

2. The Notion of Fake News

The notion “fake news” in English has various correspondences in Turkish: “yalan haber (false news)” (Uluk, 2018; Varlık, 2018; Kavaklı, 2019; Ünal ve Taylan, 2017), “dijital dezenformasyon” (digital disinformation) (Ünver, 2018), “sosyal medya dezenformasyonu” (social media disinformation) (Yegen, 2018), “sahte içerik” (fake content) (Uyanık, 2017), “yanlış bilgi/haber” (false information/news) (Çavuş, 2018), etc. These different usages indicate that academia has not agreed on a common term for fake news in Turkish. However, the definition and connotations of this notion in English resources also vary.

English Cambridge dictionary defines fake news as false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke (URL1). Collins dictionary on the other hand defines it as false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting (URL-2). The definition in

the Collins dictionary includes the word false, thus emphasizing that true and false can be distinguished from one another. The word post-truth which expresses the period on which fake news has gained prevalence and efficacy was chosen as the Word of the Year 2016 by the Oxford Dictionaries due to being an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (URL-3). The prefix “post” in the word “post-truth” should be taken to mean as irrelevance and disconnection with truth rather than as “after” or “beyond” as in its normal sense (Berghel, 2017: 80). In other words, the prefix post is used meaning “belonging to an era where the notion it was affixed became unimportant or unnecessary” (As cited in Uzunoğlu, 2016: 2).

The issue of fake news, which has become a subject of discussion again and again with the concept of the post-truth era, is not actually new and has not emerged with the new media either. Hempel said that *in the final war of the Roman Republic, Octavian used disinformation to help him beat Mark Antony. In earlier times, however, propaganda often originated from people in power and was distributed through traditional mass media channels* (Hempel, 2017). The event that took place in the 19th century when the mass journalism became widespread and which became a history as the “Great Moon Hoax” is one of the important events that should be emphasized in the history of journalism. The allegations that the human-bat hybrid creatures or even an advanced civilization live on the moon, were published for four days in a series of six articles with illustrations and detailed descriptions. The information in the news is based on the evidence allegedly obtained by Sir John Herschel –he had nothing to do with these events-, one of the famous astronomers of the time. In this early period when the news started to turn into commercial commodities, New York Sun reached a big circulation increase with the lie “There is life on the moon” and continued this increase for a long time. (Özer, 2016; 24 -26)

In the 1890s, rival newspaper publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst competed over the audience through sensationalism and reporting rumors as though they were facts, a practice that became known at the time as “yellow journalism.” (URL-4) One of the motivations for 1890s newspapers engaging in yellow journalism is the same as for fake news creators today: Exaggerated news with shocking headlines gets attention of public and sells papers (or prompts mouse-clicks), promoting the sale of advertising.

Nielsen and Graves conducted a study on the perception of fake news through focus group discussion with participants from four different countries. The findings of the study revealed the perceptions of audience of fake news as follows: satire (not regarded as news, funny, amusing and parody contents), poor journalism (superficial, inaccurate, sensationalist), propaganda (hyperpartisan content, politicians lying, extreme spin/PR), some advertising (ads and pop-ups, “around the web” links, sponsored

content) and fake news (for-profit fabrication, politically motivated fabrication, malicious hoaxes). It is important to put emphasis on the notions of spin/PR and hyperpartisan, which are formed after the notion of spin-doctor, due to their association with the subject of fake news. Spin-doctors aim to influence or direct people without their knowledge or will, thus they may cause behavior or opinion changes. Spin practices filled with various tactics are continued especially within the scope of public relation based on the principle of confidentiality and sustainability, and push the profession towards a dangerous position (Özgen & Bayraktar, 2014: 13). Hyperpartisan contents are defined as combination of decontextualized truths, repeated falsehoods, and leaps of logic to create fundamentally misleading view of the world (Benkler et al., 2017).

A study by Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2017) named 'Defining "Fake News"' examined the studies on fake news and revealed the things which were defined as fake news. The studies revealed the following six types of fake news definition: 1) news satire, 2) news parody, 3) news fabrication, 4) manipulation, 5) advertising and 6) propaganda (147). Both studies reveal that the scope of fake news is quite widespread and contain both disinformation and misinformation. Malinformation can also be included in the scope of fake news.

Disinformation is defined as dissemination of missing, false or in other words, unconvincing information to misguide a specific audience about the truth. Misinformation is defined as transmission of accurate information in a missing, false or unfair way (Tunç, 2010: 248). Wardle and Derakshan (2018) have added malinformation to these notions and explained the differences as follows: Misinformation, people who disseminate false information believe that it's true; disinformation, people who disseminate false information know that it's false; malinformation, information is based on reality but is used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country (44). The phrase "kötücül bilgi (malicious information)" can be used as the Turkish correspondence of malinformation (Silsüpür, 2018).

3. Fact-Checking and Verification

Oxford dictionary defines verification, a romance word meaning doğrulama (verification) or teyit (confirmation) in Turkish, as the process of establishing the truth, accuracy, or validity of something. Its philosophical meaning in Turkish dictionary is the whole of processes which are performed to check the accuracy of an assumption through experiments and logical demonstrations (URL-5). According to teyit.org, the notion of fact-checking means doing various acts to check the accuracy of a news.

The notion of fact-checking, doğruluk kontrolü in Turkish, is the act of controlling the accuracy of statements and claims in nonfictional texts. It separates into two: 1) internal fact-checking and 2) external fact-checking. According to Uluk (2018), fact-checking is the whole of activities to prove

right or wrong of claims within the statements of social and political agents that influence society on media and especially on online contents (99).

Organizations which perform verification or fact-checking can be defined as follows based on their definitions: Non governmental self-control initiatives which control the accuracy of claims in the circulation in an objective and transparent way (online) and act according to the public liability in terms public's right to correct information to decrease information pollution which are created by contents shared on social media.

3.1. A Short History of Verification/Fact-Checking Organizations

Snopes.com is the first organization to begin perform online fact-checking. In 1994, Snopes was founded by David Mikkelson to investigate urban myths, deceptions and folks. Today, website of Snopes is the Internet's oldest and supreme fact-checking resource (URL-6).

Spinsanity, which is the first objective verification organization focused on the politics in the US, was founded by Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer and Brendan Nyhan, who newly graduated from university and were disturbed by the increasing spin dominance on American politics. The aim of founding Spinsanity was to form a watchdog which is dedicated to reveal deceptive claims of experts and press and is not a partisan (URL-7). This organization stopped its activities on July 19, 2005 because the founders parted ways, and this was announced on the web site.

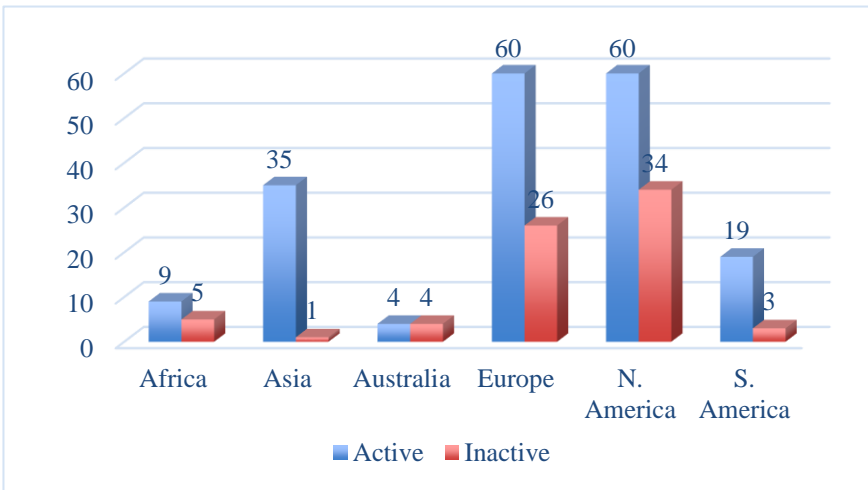
FactCheck.org was founded on December 2003 as a project of Pennsylvania University Annenberg Public Policy Center. The founder of the organization, Brooks Jackson was a reporter for Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal and CNN for years, and joined to Annenberg Public Policy Center after 2003. FactCheck.org defines its mission as follows: "We are a non-profit organization which advocates to consumer for voters and is not a partisan and we aim to decrease the level of deception and complication in American politics. We monitor the accuracy of the statements told during television advertisements, discussions, speeches, interviews and news bulletins by prominent politicians in the US. Our aim is to realize the best journalism practices and increase the knowledge and understanding of society." (URL-8).

PolitiFact was commenced as an independent project by the Florida-centered Tampa Bay Times journal (old St. Petersburg Times) and was founded by Bill Adair, Washington Bureau Chief of the journal, in 2007. It focused on checking the explanations of politicians and ranking them based on accuracy since its foundation. These were performed by professional journalists and editors. Ownership of the organization transferred to Poynter Institute of Media Studies, which is non-profit and owns Tampa Bay Times in 2018. The aim of this move was to make PolitiFact function as a non-profit national news organization (Holan, 2018).

Another USA-centered organization, Washington Post journal initiative was founded in 2007. Verification column within the journal was

put into practice as of September 19, 2007 during the US presidency campaign. The journal initiative was revitalized on January 11, 2011 by senior journalist Glenn Kessler as a permanent feature. The “fact-checker” team of the journal included Kessler along with reporter Salvador Rizzo and visual producer Meg Kelly (Kessler, 2017).

Verification/fact-checking organizations have become widespread not only in USA but all around the world since 2007. According to Duke Reporters’ Lab which formed a database of verification/fact-checking organizations operating all around the world, there are 262 verification/fact-checking organizations, including 187 active and 73 inactive and 1 in referee (URL-9). Of them 66 are members of Poynter Institute of Media Studies which was realized by IFCN, and verified signatories of IFCN Code of Principles Guide (URL-10).



Graph 1. Number of Active and Inactive Verification/Fact-checking Organizations in terms of Continents (URL-9)

120 of 187 active verification/fact-checking organizations are in Europe and North America. These two are regions where democratic countries are dense. And considering that 2/3 of verification platforms are non-profit organizations, it is thought that there is a positive correlation between the proliferation of these platforms and strong civil society.

3.2. Classification of Verification/Fact-checking Organizations

A research was conducted at the 5th Global Fact-Checking Summit organized in 2018 with the participation of 42 members out of 57. The findings of the study 64.3% of 42 IFCN signatory verification/fact-checking organizations define themselves as non-profit organizations. Due to the IFCN research almost 2/3 of the verification/factchecking organizations are non profit organizations.



Graph 2. Distribution of IFCN signatory verification organizations based on organizational structures (Funke, 2018).

Graves and Cherubini (2016) conducted a similar study on fact-checking organizations operating in European countries. They classified the organizations in Europe based on the findings of their research as follows (8-10): a) Newsroom model: Very few number of fact-checking organizations are associated with the established media company and these mostly locate in Western Europe. b) Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) model: Independent fact-checking organizations based on non-governmental organization operating outside of traditional newsroom. It constitutes most of the fact-checking organizations in Europe and it is also widespread among the Eastern European countries. c) Fact-checking organizations which are either entirely independent or operate as a relief organization or NGO for a specific goal. According to both studies, four types of verification/fact-checking organizations can be mentioned:

1. Newsroom model: It is widespread in Western Europe and has examples in USA.
2. NGO model: It is widespread in Eastern Europe.
3. University initiatives.
4. Entirely independent or cooperates with a public-minded organization/NGO.

Verification organizations can also be classified based on their domains as well as their organizational structures. Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017) classified verification services into three main category based on their domains: (1) Political and public statements in general, (2) Online rumors and hoaxes and (3) Specific topics or narrowly scoped issues and events (As cited in Pavlevska et al., 2018: 6).

4. Verification/Fact-Checking Organizations in Turkey

The first verification platform established in Turkey is teyit.org. There are six organizations define themselves as fact-checking organizations in Turkey which are yalansavar, malumatfuruş, bilim kazanı, doğrula.org, doğruluk payı and teyit.org. Only two of these organizations are IFCN members and are committed to comply with principles designated by the IFCN, that's why these two organizations are chosen as cases. Comparing to English correspondences, the best examples of fact-checking and verification in Turkey are Doğruluk Payı and teyit.org, respectively (Saka, 2019).

4.1. Doğruluk Payı

Doğruluk Payı was founded as an initiative of the Dialogue for a Common Future Association (DCFA) which was founded on January 16, 2014. The name of the association was converted to İzlemedeyiz Association with the decision taken on the 2nd Extraordinary General Assembly which took place in 2017. İzlemedeyiz Association carries out activities such as claim and, commitment checks, data mining and capacity increase through Doğruluk Payı and Veri Kaynağı projects with an aim of making Turkey more democratic and transparent.

Doğruluk payı defines itself on its official Facebook page as follows: Doğruluk Payı is an entirely independent initiative of İzlemedeyiz that aims to hold politicians more accountable and to support citizens to access accurate information more easily in Turkey (URL-11).

Doğruluk Payı team follows statements of agents who affect politics on a daily basis then checks the accuracy of these statements with public resources and shares the results with public opinion. The aim of this organization is to form a society that demands accuracy from politics in Turkey (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019).

Doğruluk Payı team considers a) whether the claim can be verified/falsified and b) claim is relatively controversial and about an important subject while selecting claims to investigate. They also make assessments based on three different criteria while checking the claims, which are a) qualitative and quantitative data which are presented as foundations of the claim being equal to data on public resources, b) the quality of the resources through which qualitative and quantitative data are verified/falsified and c) the aim of stating the claim and convenience of the context. Accuracy of the claims is indicated through the doğruluk payı scale (truth-o-meter) which includes five different stages. These stages are a) false b) mostly false c) half true d) mostly true and e) true (URL-12).

4.2. Teyit

Commonly known as Teyit.org, was founded with the leading of the journalist Mehmet Atakan Foça in 2016. Teyit is a social effect-focused, non-profit social initiative that does not issue their income and operates on behalf of the Teyit Media Research Association.

With their own words, Teyit operates to enable Internet users access accurate information by performing verifications on various domains including commonly known false facts, suspicious information coming to fore on social media, claims brought up by media and urban myths. Thus, Teyit aims to enable citizens who use Internet as a primary source of news and non-governmental organizations learn which information is correct or false on online platforms, bring them into having critical thinking habit and increase new media literacy (URL-13).

Teyit scans news on Internet and selects and investigates suspicious ones then share the result with their users. Their verification process is as follows:

1) Scanning: Scanning of suspicious news and gathering them on the management panel named dubito.

2) Selecting and prioritizing: Claims gathered on the management panel prioritized according to a) verifiability, b) prevalence and c) importance criteria.

3) Investigating and publishing: In this stage, designated claims are divided among the editors of teyit and editors start to investigate them. If at least two evidences can be obtained indicating accuracy or fallacy of the examined claim (if these evidences are on resources that can be verified and accessible to all users), the editors should proceed to the analysis stage. All of the evidences obtained should be included in the analysis.

Assessment of the claim which is examined based on data obtained can be made on four different categories, which are a) correct, b) false, c) mixed and d) unclear (URL-14).

5. The Scope and the Methodology of the Research

The research defined the notions of fake news and verifications, and revealed the occurrence and development of verification/fact-checking organizations in Turkey and around the world. The number of verification/fact-checking organizations in Turkey is limited. Doğruluk Payı and teyit.org organizations which have signed the IFCN Code of Principles which was established as an initiative of the Poynter Institute of Media Studies, and have a certificate were selected as the examples among this limited number of verification/fact-checking organizations to examine the verification/fact-checking organizations' structures, verification processes, features and functions by comparing them to each other. Moreover, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Batuhan Ersun, the executive director of doğruluk payı, and Gülin Çavuş, the chief editor of teyit.org.

Interviews were recorded and deciphered. Some questions were standardized, and some questions were prepared as open-ended in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The information obtained from the in-depth interviews were subjected to content analysis and some information was tabulated.

6. Findings

6.1. Demographic Data

Table 1. Number of Individuals Working in the Organizations and Sex-based Distribution

| Name of the organization | Number of individuals (including the team leader) | Sex | |
|--------------------------|--|------|--------|
| | | Male | Female |
| Doğruluk Payı | 11 | 6 | 4 |
| Teyit.org | 10 | 9 | 2 |

Organizations are regarded as small scale enterprises due to the number of employees. On the other hand, *doğruluk payı* has a more homogeneous distribution based on sex.

Table 2. Education Levels of Team Members

| <i>Education level</i> | <i>Doğruluk Payı</i> | <i>Teyit.org</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Undergraduate student/graduate | 2 | 5 |
| Postgraduate student/graduate | 4 | 6 |
| Doctoral student/graduate | 3 | |
| Unknown | 1 | |

Table 3. Educational Background of Team Members

| <i>Specialization</i> | <i>Teyit.org</i> | <i>Doğruluk payı</i> | <i>Specialization</i> |
|--|------------------|----------------------|--|
| Ankara University Faculty of Political Science | 1 | 3 | Political Sciences |
| Global Politics and International Relations | 1 | 1 | Sociology / Media and Communication Systems |
| Journalism | 2 | 1 | Journalism |
| Photography and Film and Video | 1 | 1 | Economy |
| Political Sciences and International Relations | 1 | 1 | Political Sciences and International Relations |
| Political Sciences and Public Administration | 2 | 1 | International Relations |
| Economics | 1 | 1 | Industrial Design |
| Communication Design | 1 | 1 | No data |

When education levels of team members working in this organizations are examined, the findings indicate high levels of education. Half of the *teyit* team is either undergraduate students or graduates, and the other half is postgraduate students or graduates. One third of the *Doğruluk Payı* team continues to doctorate education. Education domains of team members of both organizations are social sciences and political sciences and international relations are also intensive. Both organizations do not oblige people to have been a journalist to be a fact-checker and operate with a multi-disciplinary staff structure. Opinions of *Doğruluk Payı* and *Teyit* on the necessities of verification organization and the qualities they look out while forming the staff are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Opinions of Both Organizations on Necessities for Verification and the Qualifications They Look out in Their Staffs

| | <i>Necessities of verification/fact-checking organizations</i> | <i>Required qualifications of the staff</i> |
|---------------|--|---|
| Teyit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talented human power • Objectivity • Transparency • Familiarity with advanced technologies • Following academic researches • Being able to create social influence • Critical thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to go after the truth and reality • Originated from various disciplines • Dedicated to reduce polarization with objectivity • Digital media literacy • Improved digital abilities |
| Doğruluk Payı | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity • Independence • Transparency • Advanced writing and editing skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With strong sense of suspicion • Not give up on wondering • With idealistic aspects • Advanced writing skills • Story telling ability • Ability to search on Internet |

6.2 Scope of the Verification/Fact-checking

While Doğruluk Payı aims to verify claims stated by politicians, teyit.org performs verifications on various domains such as commonly known false facts, suspicious information coming to fore on social media, claims brought up by media and urban myths.

6.3 Tools Used for Verification/Fact-checking

Doğruluk Payı does not use a special software/application during the fact-checking process but uses open resources (data from Turkish Statistical Institute, periodical reports published by ministries, records of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, reliable NGO reports, reports and data about Turkey published by international organizations such as the OECD, IMF, World Bank (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019). However, teyit.org uses various online searching tools as they can handle every type of video and photograph content shared on social media as well as political claims. Reverse visual search methods on search engines, software such as Invid for video verification, “citizen evidence” website of the International Amnesty Organization for Youtube videos, Forensic web and Foto Forensic for photography analysis, SunCalc to evaluate sun rise, sun set, shadow length and etc. for photography analysis, map/traffic applications, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Foursquare (Gülin Çavuş, personal communication, April 16, 2019).

6.4 Organizational Structure

Table 5. Distribution of Positions of Doğruluk Payı and Teyit Teams

| <i>Position</i> | <i>Teyit</i> | <i>Doğruluk payı</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Team leader | 1 | 1 |
| Coordinator of digital operations | | 1 |
| Chief editor | 1 | |
| Editor | 1 | 6 |
| Interaction editor | 1 | |
| Project assistant | 1 | |
| Writer | 2 | |
| Digital content strategist | 1 | |
| Graphic designer | 1 | |
| Videographer/video editor | 1 | 2 |
| Producer | 1 | |

When compared the distribution of roles on the organizations, it is fair to state that teyit has a more functional and detailed wok distribution.

This is probably because teyit uses a larger number of software and digital application (stated in headline 6.3.) during the verification process.

6.5 Financing

Financing of the organizations shows similarities. Both organizations only accept individual contributions. Doğruluk Payı receives support from funds (Swedish Research Institute, The Netherlands Consulate in Istanbul, European Regional Development Fund) that support non-governmental organizations while Teyit benefits from Think Civil Project of European Union, British Embassy Ankar , Swedish Embassy Ankara and European Endowment for Democracy.

6.6 Collaborations

Both organizations are members of IFCN and they get in touch and collaborate with other members through Slack channel which is the communication and mailing network of IFCN. Doğruluk Payı collaborated with Doğan News Agency, Hürriyet and CNN Türk in the past as a noncommercial collaboration. The association of Doğruluk Payı with this media organization which used the contents created by Doğruluk Payı with giving references ended when the group was sold to Demirören group which is closer to the government (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019). Teyit made a third party verification agreement with Facebook on May 2018. Facebook does not ban the content which Teyit determined as false information but it reduces interaction (Gülin Çavuş, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Teyit's analyses made before presidency election dated June 24, 2018 made Facebook to ban 14% of fake news showed up on Facebook pages. This rate increased to 18% in 2019 local elections. Now, this collaboration transfers to Instagram which is owned by

Facebook (Avşar, 2019), and Google collaborates with Doğruluk Payı in Turkey under the project named “news fact.” If a subject searched on Google has already been checked by Doğruluk Payı, it is presented to user as “correct” or “false” and Google ensures that this information ranks at the top

6.7 Social Media Use

Both organizations considers the features of social media applications while creating contents based on which one they would use. Most interactive social media for political content are Twitter and Facebook for both organizations. On Instagram, they maintain another attitude. Doğruluk Payı creates more colorful contents which tell their stories with visuals, have less text and arouse curiosity on Instagram (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019). Teyit considers Instagram as a tool to reach young audience and focuses on video contents on this platform, benefits from stories and tries to increase interaction with Instagram Show (Gülin Çavuş, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Lately, both organizations have focused on Youtube video content investments. Doğruluk payı creates content for Youtube, which do not exist on their website. These contents are adopted as the “infotainment” model. Teyit also considers Youtube as a more amusing platform. They make more amusing videos to catch those moving away from news. However, the objective here is not to generate income. Because their follower and view numbers are far from the income generation threshold numbers of Youtube. They aim to reach to a part of a mass who they have not reached through other platforms. Follower numbers of Doğruluk Payı and Teyit on different social media platforms are presented on Table 5.

Table 5. Number of social media followers of Doğruluk payı and Teyit (as of 2019, June 26)

| <i>Social Media</i> | <i>Doğruluk payı</i> | <i>Teyit</i> |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook | 115,620 (2014, May 8)* | 68,599 (2016, Oct 21) |
| Twitter | 155,226 (2014 May) | 448,648 (2016 Aut) |
| Instagram | 18.9 K (2014, Aug 6) | 100 K (2016, Oct20) |
| Youtube | 15,806 (2015, Aug 25) | 15,637 (2016, Dec 31) |

*Dates in brackets indicates the date when related organization opened an account on that social media platform.

Although Teyit has opened accounts on Twitter and Instagram later than Doğruluk Payı, it got more followers than Doğruluk Payı. This can be associated with the verification scope of these organizations. Teyit can handle subjects on a larger scale than Doğruluk Payı.

6.8 Types of Content with Most Interaction

Both organizations divide their contents into various categories. First three categories of Doğruluk Payı with most interaction are 1) Economy, 2) Politics and 3) History in connection with political discussions (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019). First three categories of Teyit with most interaction are 1) Politics, 2) Life and 3) History (Gülin

Çavuş, personal communication, April 9, 2019). A research on content of teyit.org between January 1 and December 31, 2017 found that almost half of the content (47.5%) was associated to politics. Urban myths followed political news with the rate of 13.7% (Şahin, 2018: 158).

6.9 Difficulties of Verification/Fact-checking in Turkey

Frequently stated problem of Turkey, polarization also takes place on social media. Social graphics which appeared as a result of mapping studies of news media on Twitter provide evidences about the occurrence of echo chambers (Doğu, 2017: 16). Lately, misinformation and fake news have become a key issue in Turkey, one of the countries where politics and news media polarized the most (Yanatma, 2018: 25). Polarization also complicates the working conditions of verification/fact-checking organizations. The Executive Director of Doğruluk Payı says that psychological burden of fact-checking in Turkey is heavier than other countries (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019). The Chief Editor of Teyit says that it is quite difficult to make people believe in objectivity in polarized societies and just like other journalists, they sometimes experience uneasiness while looking into some claims (Gülin Çavuş, personal communication, April 9, 2019). Another difficulty experienced by Doğruluk Payı is that although politicians in Turkey talk too much, their statements can not be fact-checked due to the context of their speeches. As these speeches are value-based, they stay out of the radar of Doğruluk Payı (Batuhan Ersun, personal communication, April 16, 2019).

7. Conclusion

Fake news, the most important indicator of the post-truth era, is mostly circulated and spread through social networks. Verification organizations, which emerged as one of tools against fake news, are non-governmental organizations that are based on the understanding of social responsibility and pay regard to public's right to know. Verification/fact-checking organizations are external self-control structures based on a reformist idea (Weberlyen/Durkheimist sociological approach). Thus, social organizations which operate with an understanding of user/reader or social responsibility disclose the creators/resources of fake news and try to generate social pressure on them.

The two prominent fact-checking organizations in Turkey are "teyit.org" and "dogrulukpayi.com." In the study a comparative analysis of functioning and structure of these two organizations was conducted and semi-structured in depth interviews were done with the authorized persons of both organizations. Doğruluk Payı and Teyit, which are members of IFCN, had similarities on the number of human resources, financing and organization; however, they showed differences on the scope and process of verification/fact-checking, and assessment.

Both Doğruluk Payı and Teyit are extensions of non-governmental organizations and operate with an aim of social responsibility. Team

members working in these organizations had high educational levels. Both organizations do not require being a journalist or having a journalistic education to be a fact-checker and operate with a multi-disciplinary staff. When compared the distribution of roles in the organizations, it is fair to state that Teyit has a more functional and detailed work distribution. This is because Teyit uses larger number of softwares and applications during the verification process.

Doğruluk Payı carries out fact-checking on the statements of politicians and public figures through open sources and shares the results with public. Teyit has a wider range of scope. It verifies various suspicious information coming to fore on social media, claims brought up by media and urban myths. Teyit employees use numerous online search and investigation tools because they handle every kind of video and photographic content on social media.

Both organizations consider the features of social media while creating contents based on which one they would use. Most interactive social media for political contents are Twitter and Facebook for both organizations. Lately, the organizations, which adopted more colorful style on Instagram, diverged to video content investments on Youtube.

One of the most difficult thing about being a fact-checker in Turkey is excessive polarization. Polarization increases the psychological burden of fact-checking and causes unease while investigating some claims. Verification/fact-checking organizations have difficulty in making people believe to their objectivity in excessively polarized environments. Another difficulty about the verification of politicians' statements is that they are mostly value-based.

It is important for verification organizations to make third party news verification agreements with popular search engines or social media platforms for the efficacy of the fight against fake news. While Teyit's analyzes made before presidency election dated June 24, 2018 made Facebook to ban 14% of fake news showed up on Facebook pages, this rate increased to 18% in 2019 local elections. Doğruluk Payı collaborates with Google in the scope of the project named "news fact" in Turkey. Social media platforms where fake news emerge and spread need to develop more effective algorithms on this process.

Increasing the number of verification organizations and expanding their capabilities and staff will enable them to handle more content and put the results in the circulation more quickly. This will contribute to users' media literacy levels and their abilities to have a critical approach to the contents. These organizations may also enable users to acquire basic verification skills which they can perform on their own and the verification organizations have already started work on this.

However, how big the verification organizations bore a hole on echo chambers is a significant investigation subject. First of all, social media

platforms may need to change the algorithms they use to determine the contents that they present to users based on their features. However, the problem is beyond that. What kind of differences are there between the responds of users when they see a verification complying with their opinions and when they see the opposite? Could the truths that are revealed after verification affect users' opinions? The answers to these questions may shed light on whether the case of "truth's becoming obsolete" which defines the post-truth era.

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