

## Disinformation in Times of Disaster and Crisis

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### Abstract

This research is based on 3 consecutive disaster (pandemic, earthquake and flood) in Turkey. During these successive disasters, it has been observed that the traditional and social media handling of similar news has changed. The political stance, in particular, affects the way the news is reflected, causing the elements of disinformation to increase and the target audience to be affected by the views of the news encoder. Although the political stance displayed by the traditional media tools is clear, the political views and goals are not always clear because the news flow in the new media is carried out in the context of personal accounts. Within the scope of the research, 3 examples were selected for each disaster shared by the Turkish people on Twitter, one of the social media tools, during 3 disasters. Similar news in the traditional media was also examined and a comparison was made between the two media channels. The semiotic method was used in the study. The semiotic method was used in the study. One of the possible results of this study is the finding that disinformation elements change according to the way the news is presented in social media and traditional media. On the other hand, despite the fact that the news in social media is produced by people, it has been noticed that sometimes these news are more accurate than traditional media and that the disinformation desired to be created in the traditional media is tried to be prevented.

**Keywords:** Earthquake, Flood, Pandemic, Semiotic, Türkiye, Twitter

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In disaster and crisis environments, the most basic need is to establish correct communication. In addition to traditional mass media, the delivery of information to the masses is now widely carried out through social media tools (Şahin and Bayrak, 2022: 169). The rapid transfer of data by social media and the distribution of information by a large number of people at an uncontrollable level led to questioning of its reliability. On the other hand, the fact that the reconstruction of the truth has become easier with the diversification of technological possibilities makes the situation even more important. The spread of fake news sharing on social media and the emergence of a conscious disinformation environment deepens the reliability problem (Khan et al., 2020).

Social media users, who become more active users in times of crisis and disaster, exhibit a voluntary and eager attitude to access and disseminate information through these platforms. In some cases, it can be seen as an advantage to have such easy access to fast information. However, it is still vital for statements made through official channels to find a response in society and for information to be distributed consciously and through the right hands in times of crisis and disaster. Because, especially in the social media environment, the sharing and spread of deliberately distorted and false news can lead to anxiety, fear and misdirection in society.

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In addition to studies on social media and disinformation, there are also many studies in the literature on news about combating disinformation on social networks. In this context, a study conducted by Yegen (2018) examined the disinformation problem on social networks and individuals' efforts to access real news within the scope of "Truth Share" and "Lie Var" platforms. The findings of the study indicate that the most effective method in combating disinformation is social and user awareness. According to another study, it is emphasized that verification platforms such as Teyit.org should be expanded in the fight against disinformation (Erkan and Ayhan, 2018). Another study conducted by Fallis (2015, p. 401) revealed that disinformation damages the general understanding of trust in societies and that taking precautions in this regard is vital. Another study suggested that failure to combat disinformation emerging through social media tools is an obstacle that blocks effective communication in society. It was also added that correct communication and sorting techniques can be successful in combating disinformation (Lewandowsky, 2021: 1). Fetzer (2004: 231) states in his study that disinformation is designed to deceive the masses and is an activity aimed at hiding true information, thus damaging trust and belief in society. In this context, he adds that studies carried out to prevent disinformation will rebuild trust in society.

The Covid-19 virus, which first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019, has become a global problem for the whole world in a short time. Various measures have been taken in each country to prevent the virus, which has become a pandemic. In Turkey, especially in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic through contamination, the implementation of curfews and the preference of working from home, hybrid and distance education methods have increased the use of social media (we are Social, 2022). As of 2022, even if the pandemic has not ended all over the world, the normalization process has been entered. Before the transition to the normalization process could be fully realized, on February 6, 2023, two earthquakes with a magnitude of 7.8 and 7.6, which affected 11 provinces in Turkey, occurred in a row. In this event, which is also described as the "disaster of the century" by WHO, too many people lost their lives and the desired success could not be achieved in search and rescue efforts due to the lack of communication and the intensity of disinformation (LeMonde, 2023). While the earthquake rescue efforts were not completely finished, a flood disaster occurred in Şanlıurfa near the earthquake zone (Kirby, 2023). Traditional media tools aim to produce a public discourse with the messages they produce in order to continue to hold the economic power within the scope of their political views (Wittel, 2012: 390-392). On the other hand, one of the main problems in new media is individual content production (Altıntop and Bak, 2022: 321). It is thought that the medium in which the message is encoded has an effect on the structure of disinformation. This situation brings to mind Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase "The medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1965: 7). At the same time, most importantly, it draws attention that the tool itself can be an element of disinformation rather than the message conveyed by the media.

### **1.1. Disinformation and Media**

Traditional media refers to forms of communication that existed before the advent of digital technologies, such as newspapers, radio, and television. These mediums have played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. However, the rise of disinformation, characterized by the deliberate spread of false or misleading information, has become a significant concern in the digital age (Aldwairi and Alwahedi, 2018).

The concept of disinformation, which points to a deterioration and negativity in information, means that a piece of information is deliberately or unintentionally misrepresented or deformed. It is a fact that disinformation that is deliberately produced and shared with the aim of creating public opinion, mobilizing the masses and creating chaos is much more dangerous than unintentionally spreading misinformation (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017).

The proliferation of disinformation in the digital age has raised concerns about its effects on the credibility of traditional media sources. The rise of disinformation in traditional media has posed significant challenges to the integrity and credibility of news reporting. Disinformation in traditional media has become a pressing concern in today's information landscape (Colliander, 2019).

Several studies have examined the impact of disinformation on traditional media. Tandoc et al. (2018) found that false information spreads faster and wider than accurate information on social media platforms, potentially undermining the credibility of traditional media. Furthermore, Vosoughi et al. (2018) demonstrated that false information can influence the public's beliefs, leading to misperceptions and polarization. The dissemination of disinformation can erode public trust in traditional media outlets, affecting their reputation and credibility. While traditional media outlets strive to uphold journalistic standards, they have also faced challenges in combating disinformation. The phenomenon of "fake news" gaining traction on traditional media platforms has been observed (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Journalistic norms, such as the need for speed, limited resources, and editorial biases, can lead to the inadvertent amplification of false information. Furthermore, disinformation campaigns may exploit traditional media's reliance on sources and information that align with pre-existing narratives (Lewandowsky et al., 2020).

In addition to disinformation in traditional media, with the development of technology, disinformation discussions have started to be made for social media. The proliferation of social media platforms has revolutionized the way information is shared and consumed, providing individuals with unprecedented access to a vast amount of content. Disinformation refers to deliberately false or misleading information created and spread with the intention to deceive or manipulate the public. The rapid rise of social media platforms has transformed the way information is disseminated and consumed, leading to significant implications for the spread of disinformation (Ireton and Posetti, 2022).

Disinformation exhibits several key characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of misinformation. It is often intentionally created and disseminated by individuals or organized groups with ulterior motives, such as political manipulation or financial gain. Disinformation tends to exploit cognitive biases, playing on emotions and pre-existing beliefs to increase its impact and likelihood of acceptance. Additionally, it often adopts a persuasive narrative and employs various techniques to appear credible, making it challenging for users to discern fact from fiction (Karsai et al., 2020).

The widespread adoption of social media platforms has provided fertile ground for the rapid dissemination of disinformation. Social media platforms facilitate the rapid sharing of content through networks of connected users, allowing misinformation to reach a wide audience within a short period. Furthermore, algorithms employed by these platforms often prioritize engaging and sensational content, amplifying the reach and impact of disinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Additionally, the anonymity and ease of creating and sharing content on social media platforms make it difficult to track the origin of disinformation, further complicating efforts to mitigate its spread (Pennycook and Rand, 2019).

The consumption of disinformation can have detrimental effects on individuals, leading to a misinformed citizenry. Exposure to false information can distort perceptions, shape opinions, and even alter behavior. Studies have shown that individuals exposed to disinformation are more likely to develop false beliefs, which can perpetuate a cycle of misinformation (Pennycook, 2020). Furthermore, disinformation can erode trust in traditional media sources and democratic institutions, leading to a decline in civic engagement and participation (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017).

At the societal level, the impact of disinformation is far-reaching. It can exacerbate social divisions, polarize communities, and undermine public discourse. Disinformation campaigns aimed at sowing discord or manipulating public opinion have the potential to disrupt democratic processes and threaten social cohesion. Moreover, the proliferation of disinformation during public health crises, elections, and other critical events can have severe consequences, undermining public trust and jeopardizing public health and safety (Lewandowsky et al., 2020).

Social media, which is defined as online platforms where users can easily and freely produce content, share it quickly and reach large masses, has created great changes in our communication styles. Thanks to the instantaneousness and interaction feature of social media, information is shared by a large number of people, and people can exist in this environment with anonymous accounts. The inherent lack of control of social media leads to disinformation. Intentionally disseminated information that is false or inaccurate on social media, which allows the circulation of many untrue and untrue information, initiates the disinformation process (Pennycook, 2020). Efforts to combat disinformation face numerous challenges. The sheer volume and speed at which information spreads on social media platforms make it difficult to detect and address misinformation effectively. The decentralized nature of these platforms and the lack of regulatory oversight further complicate mitigation efforts. Additionally, the line between disinformation and free speech is often blurred, raising concerns about censorship and the potential for unintended consequences when implementing countermeasures (Guess et al., 2020).

Addressing the issue of disinformation requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders. Media literacy programs can equip individuals with critical thinking skills to discern reliable information from disinformation. Collaboration between technology companies, policymakers, and civil society organizations can lead to the development of effective content moderation and fact-checking mechanisms. Enhancing transparency in social media algorithms can mitigate the amplification of disinformation. Furthermore, fostering a culture of media responsibility and promoting ethical journalism can contribute to the reduction of disinformation's influence (Pennycook and Rand, 2021).

The pervasive spread of disinformation through social media and traditional media platforms presents significant challenges for individuals, societies, and democratic processes. Understanding the characteristics and mechanisms of disinformation is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat its spread. By addressing the challenges associated with disinformation and promoting responsible media practices, stakeholders can work towards fostering an informed and resilient society in the face of disinformation's threats (Ireton and Posetti, 2022).

Processes such as witnessing, reaching certain information and confirming in news production have evolved into a process where the user is at the center of social media. This situation has allowed information that is not sure of its accuracy to enter the circulation. In particular, crisis moments such as Covid-19 and earthquakes are the periods that pave the way for the increase of disinformation (Aydın, 2023).

While the information age has led to a change in the journalism profession, it has brought innovations in the news production process and journalism understanding. As a result of the prevalence of digital technologies alongside traditional media, the news flow has evolved into a different area. The centralized and institutionalized mass-produced structure of traditional media is completely changing. And the media universe is being reshaped in a new ecosystem and with new actors (Ireton and Posetti, 2022).

The most important factor that differentiates new media from traditional media (such as newspapers, radio, television, cinema) is that it has an interactive structure. These tools allow the

simultaneous transfer of large amounts of information and the user to give feedback. The concept of citizen journalism in the literature gained popularity with social networks in this process. Anyone who can connect to an internet network also has the power to fulfill the practice of journalism. In this context, this study aims to examine the difference between traditional journalism and citizen journalism in social media, which are fed from each other over time and still diverge at some points. Marshall McLuhan's Medium is the message idea was taken as a basis while discussing the disinformation in the way these two tools handle the news and in the content.

### **1.2. Marshall McLuhan – Medium is the Message**

Marshall McLuhan, a renowned media theorist and cultural critic, coined the phrase "The medium is the message" to emphasize the profound influence of media on human perception and social change. Marshall McLuhan, an influential figure in media studies, introduced the concept of "The medium is the message" in his groundbreaking book, "Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man" (1964). This phrase encapsulates McLuhan's central thesis that the medium through which information is transmitted has a greater impact on society and individuals than the actual content conveyed.

To comprehend McLuhan's assertion that the medium itself shapes our perceptions and social structures, it is essential to delve into the theoretical foundations he established. McLuhan proposed that media act as extensions of human senses, altering the ways we perceive and interact with the world. He argued that each medium possesses inherent qualities that influence our understanding of the message it conveys. References such as "Understanding Media" (McLuhan, 1964) and "The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man" (McLuhan, 1962) provide insights into McLuhan's theoretical framework and his examination of various media forms.

McLuhan's concept of "The medium is the message" has profound implications for the study of communication. Traditional models of communication often prioritize the content of the message, neglecting the significant role played by the medium itself. By emphasizing the transformative power of media, McLuhan challenged the prevailing notion that content is separate from the medium. References such as "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business" (Postman, 1985) and "The Consequences of Information: Institutional Implications of Technological Change" (Innis, 1951) highlight the lasting impact of McLuhan's ideas on communication theory.

McLuhan's concept also aligns with the notion of technological determinism, which posits that technology shapes society rather than the other way around. By asserting that the medium is a significant factor in social change, McLuhan challenged traditional understandings of culture and technology. References such as "Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology" (Postman, 1992) and "The Social Shaping of Technology" (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1999) provide additional insights into the interplay between technology, media, and cultural shifts in relation to McLuhan's concept.

McLuhan's concept of "The medium is the message" continues to resonate in contemporary media studies and cultural analysis. However, it has also faced criticism for its potential oversimplification of complex communication dynamics. References such as "Understanding Media: Extensions of Man: Critical Edition" (McLuhan and McLuhan, 2003) and "Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords" (During, 2001) explore both the enduring relevance and the limitations of McLuhan's concept, allowing for a balanced assessment of its significance in the present day.

With the expression "Medium is the message", McLuhan undoubtedly emphasizes that the transmitted messages cannot be considered independently of the transmission systems. If it is the

tool that shapes the content, then what we say has become less important than determining how we communicate what we have to say. McLuhan's belief in technological determinism is best described by the sentence "we shape our tools and in turn they shape us". According to McLuhan, the impact of the tool is strong and intense. According to him, the tool influences people uncontrollably and unconsciously.

McLuhan underlines that in his theory of "the medium is the message" he does not say that the message is of no importance. However, he emphasizes how valuable it is to understand the tool in order to be able to examine and make sense of the effects of technology on people. Therefore, it is the tool itself rather than the message that prepares the ground for disinformation. Similarly, it is the tool itself, rather than the message, that has an impact on the Society.

The features of vehicles allow people to do many things. Messages are coded according to the characteristics of the vehicles. For example, thanks to social media, individuals can use various technological features to encode messages and increase credibility. The tool can strengthen or reduce the impact of the message. Marshall McLuhan's phrase "The medium is the message" remains a landmark concept in media studies, offering a profound perspective on the transformative power of media in shaping human perception and society. As new media forms continue to emerge and shape our lives, McLuhan's ideas remain indispensable for understanding the intricate relationship between media, communication, and culture.

## 2. METHOD

Within the scope of the research, 3 examples were selected randomly for each disaster shared by the Turkish people on Twitter, one of the social media tools, during 3 disasters. News examples were analyzed with Saussure's semiotics method. In this context, the relationship between the signifier and the signified has been examined. In general, the same news selected randomly as the subject in traditional and social media were compared.

Ferdinand de Saussure was a Swiss linguist and semiotician who made significant contributions to the field of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols. His theories laid the foundation for structuralism and have had a profound influence on various disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, literary theory, and philosophy. Saussure's semiotic method is best known for his concept of the sign and his distinction between *langue* and *parole*.

The sign, according to Saussure, consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical or perceptible form of the sign, such as a word or an image, while the signified is the mental concept or meaning associated with the sign. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional, as there is no inherent connection between the two (Saussure, 2016).

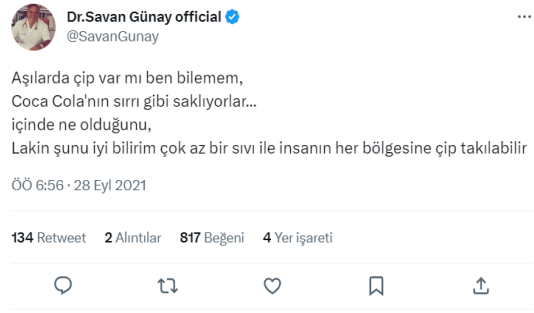
Saussure further developed the distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* refers to the underlying structure of a language, including its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. It is a system of signs shared by a community and exists independently of individual usage (Culler, 1986). *Parole*, on the other hand, refers to the actual use of language by individuals in speech or writing. Saussure argued that the study of language should focus on *langue*, as it represents the collective and systematic aspects of communication (Saussure, 2016).

### 3. FINDINGS

#### Covid 19 1<sup>st</sup> Example

Similar news stories selected on Twitter, one of the social media tools, were compared with traditional media.

In the first Twitter news, it was informed that vaccines have chips and are not safe. On the other hand, support was received from the views of Bill Gates in order to refute the issue in the newspaper article. Thus, the public is informed first-hand with reliable information (Picture 1).



Picture 1. Covid 19 1st Example on Twitter

**Signifier:** A tweet stating that there are chips in vaccines, the vaccine content was compared with Coca Cola. It is stated that the formula of both is secret. Since the person who shared this is a doctor, it has received more attention in the public. In the last sentence of the tweet, it is stated that a person can easily be chipped with the vaccine (Picture 1).

**Signified:** It is thought that Covid 19 vaccines aim to harm individuals in the appearance of a vaccine. It is desired to initiate many changes in the world with the vaccine. These expressions were used as a disinformation tool. In particular, the use of these expressions by a doctor is harmful to both medicine and people's belief. The spread of such views in the society has damaged the process and caused information pollution (Picture 1)

**Signifier:** Bill Gates, who has important studies on vaccines and is one of the key names in the world, made a statement about corona virus vaccines. This statement is related to the fact that the chip claims in coronavirus vaccines do not reflect the truth (Picture 2).



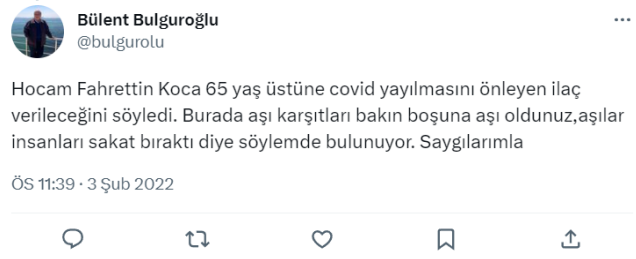
Picture 2. Covid 19 1st Example on Traditional Media

**Signified:** Having the views of a respected person like Bill Gates, who is an expert on vaccines, in the media, has the meaning of enlightening and persuading the society. The aim here is not just Bill Gates' explanation, but an opinion leader to share his expert opinion. This explanation may

have made the decision of the undecided about the vaccine. It also answers the alleged chip claims about vaccines in media such as social media where the opinions of individuals stand out (Picture 2).

### Covid 19 2<sup>nd</sup> Example:

In the second Twitter news, it was shared that vaccines crippled and harmed people (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Covid 19 2<sup>nd</sup> Example on Twitter

**Signified:** In this tweet, which claims that vaccines incapacitate people, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca also includes the information that individuals over the age of 65 will be given drugs to prevent the spread of the virus. This information is presented without any evidence (Picture 3).

**Signifier:** It is aimed to influence the opinions of the public by creating a disinformation environment with this unfounded information. Such negative theories can even cause chaos in society. People's minds are clouded and they are asked to act with fear. Randomly shared information without providing any evidence only causes information pollution. At the same time, considering that there will be people who believe in them, it is possible to say that it seriously harms the society. On the other hand, in the newspaper article, it was emphasized that the virus itself, not the vaccines, was the main cause of harm, and expert opinions were used (Picture 3).

**Signified:** In the news about the prevention of unfounded information and disinformation shared on Twitter, one of the social media tools during the Covid-19 period, it was stated that especially the accounts that share about vaccines will be permanently blocked (Picture 4).

### Covid: Twitter, aşılarla ilgili yanlış bilgi yayan hesapları kalıcı olarak engelleyecek

Meltem Spring  
Özel Dezenformasyon Muhabiri  
3 Mart 2021



Picture 4. Covid 19 2<sup>nd</sup> Example on Traditional Media

**Signifier:** This news, which is a precaution against individuals trying to create chaos and information pollution in the society, is also an indicator of the government's seizure of social media posts. As can be understood from this news, the shares on Twitter about vaccines affect the society. Many people refused to be vaccinated because they believed this information. The media



clearly highlights government policy here. Even if Twitter is a social media network, it has a significant impact on people (Picture 4).

### Covid 19 3<sup>rd</sup> Example

In the third Twitter news, it was humorously shared that a coronavirus hospital was built in China within 48 hours (Picture 5).



Picture 5. Covid 19 3<sup>rd</sup> Example on Twitter

**Signified:** Information and evidence photos are presented together in the tweet. It has been claimed that a coronavirus hospital was built in 48 hours after the state of emergency declared in China on 2 photos. Then, it was humorously stated that the virus caught China unprepared and that's why it had to build a hospital in such a short time. In the picture on the right, construction equipment and a field are visible, while the picture on the left shows the finished state of the hospital (Picture 5).

**Signifier:** Although it was not possible to build such a hospital in a time that is called impossible, the sudden emergence of the virus and its spread at an unexpected speed caused people to believe everything. Especially in any channel of the media, sharing with photos is much more convincing. At the same time, since the virus came out of China, it may be related to people wanting to believe that those who built the hospital in an impossible 48 hours will also end the virus. Since the epidemic caught people at the most unexpected moment and many things called impossible happened, people who see this post may say why not. However, this causes serious disinformation in society and damages people's perceptions and beliefs. On the other hand, the same news was given in a bold and serious way, even with its photographs in a newspaper. However, the fact of the matter is that the hospital was built in 10 days and another newspaper gave this news (Picture 5).

**Signified:** The news is about the hospital built in 10 days due to the coronavirus in China. Below the spot text is the photograph of the hospital (Picture 6).

**Signifier:** The information that the hospital, which was claimed to have been built in 48 hours on Twitter, was actually built in 10 days was confirmed by this news. Although 10 days is a short time to build a hospital, 48 hours is a much more realistic time. In particular, specifying the time in the news on this subject is related to the solution to the virus. It is desired to create the perception that those who build hospitals in such a short time will find a solution for the virus in people's minds. In fact, this news is also disinformation. Because specifying the time in the news and showing a photograph as a proof is about making humanity believe that something that is difficult in the minds is real (Picture 6).



Picture 6. Covid 19 3rd Example on Traditional Media

**Signified:** This newspaper article is the same as the Twitter article. Even the image used on twitter was used in this news. The news contains comments. The news was presented as "superhuman effort in China". In other news, it is stated that the hospital was built in Wuhan, while in this news it is said that it was built in Huanggang. The same image was used as the news that is said to have been built in Wuhan (Picture 7).

**Signifier:** This 3 news also contain disinformation in relation to each other. In this news, the image on Twitter was used and the name of the place where the hospital was built is different. Therefore, all news points out that the virus will end in the same way as this impossible construction was done. The hospital corresponds to the cure to the virus. Just as humanity was in a difficult situation with the virus from China, the remedy will come from China again. A few months later, it was confirmed that all these statements were true with the discovery of the coronavirus vaccine by China for the first time. All these cause serious confusion and disinformation in the society. Increasing the credibility of the news, especially by using the opportunities provided by the tools, increases the power of disinformation (Picture 7).



Picture 7. Covid 19 3rd Example on Traditional Media

### Earthquake 1<sup>st</sup> Example

While false news was published on Twitter and traditional media tools, many people realized these and made news stating that they were lies to raise awareness of people (Picture 8).

**Signified:** It is stated that in Hatay, one of the cities most affected by the earthquake, the wall of the Yarseli Dam cracked and an emergency team should come to the region. It is also added that it rains a lot in the region. Short and clear texts were not used in the tweet (Picture 8).

**Signifier:** This news is one of the numerous disinformation made at the time of the earthquake. The tweet, in which very realistic and precise expressions were used, was denied after a short time. People who make such news want to draw attention to themselves. They want it to be known that they worked hard during the earthquake and mobilized the authorities. These people tend to share all the news they hear without confirming it. This causes serious disinformation and chaos in both the authorities and the society. In the first example, while the news that the dam collapsed in the earthquake was reported in the Twitter news, it is stated that this news is a lie in the newspaper (Picture 8).



Picture 8. Earthquake 1st Example on Twitter

**Signified:** In the news, it was clearly stated that the news of the dam burst in Hatay, shared on Twitter and many similar social networking sites, is false. In order to ensure the credibility of this news, the opinions of the governor of Hatay are included (Picture 9).

**Signifier:** During the earthquake, traditional media served as a police officer, questioning the authenticity of the news shared on social media. Here it aims to increase its own credibility. With the emergence of social media, traditional media remained in the background. In important moments such as earthquakes, individuals have come to prefer to receive news from social media instead of getting news from traditional media. Twitter, which is a tool that allows individuals to share first-hand, has become a real news outlet. Therefore, traditional media warns the society in order to protect its own place and not to lose it to social media tools such as Twitter. With this news, the reliability of Twitter was once again questioned by the public and eyes turned to traditional media. However, this does not mean that traditional media does not disinformation. On the contrary, since traditional media represents certain institutions, organizations and governments, it causes disinformation in a more complex and difficult to understand way. Since it is a difficult tool to control, it is not easy to detect disinformation news like Twitter (Picture 9).

### Deprem bölgesinde 'baraj patladı' yalanı: Resmi makamlar açıkladı

Cumhuriyet yazarı Murat Ağirel, sosyal medyada dolaşan, "Hatay'da barajın patladığı" iddialarına ilişkin bir video yayımladı. Ağirel, "Zor ama sakin kalmak gerekiyor" ifadelerini kullandı.



cumhuriyet.com.tr



14 Eylül 2023 10:22:00  
14 Eylül 2023 10:22:00



Picture 9. Earthquake 1st Example on Traditional Media

### Earthquake 2<sup>nd</sup> Example

In the second example, the Twitter news was similarly made in traditional media (Picture 10).

**Signified:** In the Twitter report, it was stated that those who died in Elbistan, which was affected by the earthquake, were not buried and kept waiting. Under the sharing, a photograph was shared as a proof, although it is not clear (Picture 10).

**Signifier:** Sharing news in social media with photos makes it more effective. In this post, it is emphasized that the authorities and governments did not do their part during the earthquake process. In general, in this earthquake, where there were too many deaths in the history of Turkey, the delay of the authorities in search and rescue efforts and the fact that there were too many deaths is a subject that has been criticized both in social media and in some traditional media tools. So actually, a lot of Twitter has been shared to emphasize this fact and to mobilize people. This news was subsequently denied by both the traditional media and the governorship of Elbistan. Although the truth of the matter is not known for sure, it has been forgotten like other news in the post-truth era. Therefore, the message that the tool gives us today is not content but only sharing. It is not so important to reach the conclusion or the truth. This finding therefore highlights the importance of two-way evaluation of tools (Picture 10).



Picture 10. Earthquake 2nd Example on Twitter

**Signified:** The same Twitter news was shared in a newspaper article with exactly the same expressions and a similar image. The number given in both news is 1500. The news is coded with emotional expressions (Picture 11).

**Signifier:** Sharing the same Twitter news in a traditional media tool and using the same image strengthens the opinion of the public regarding the accuracy of the news. On the other hand, given that the newspaper is anti-government, some people doubt the accuracy of the news. Disinformation has been emphasized in many places about this news. Failure to report again after the district governor of Elbistan denied this news raises the possibility that the news may be false. However, reality is just and illusion in the post-truth era (Picture 11).



Picture 11. Earthquake 2nd Example on Traditional Media

**Signified:** This newspaper article, which states that the news shared both in some traditional media and on Twitter is not true, included the views of the district governor of Elbistan in order to strengthen the accuracy (Picture 12).

**Signifier:** Considering that the newspaper that published this news is close to the government, this and similar newspapers stated that they fulfilled the duty of verifying their Twitter news in an effort to prevent disinformation during the earthquake. Therefore, this news actually emphasizes that the government in general did its part during the earthquake process. It is also noteworthy that the other party did not make any new news after the news prepared on the basis of the opinions of the government officials. There are two possibilities here. Either twitter and the anti-government media are really disinformation. Or hang disinformation was made with this news. Even the views of the government official were included in order to make it difficult to refute the information. Today, the control and continuous increase of information leads to the fact that the reality of many similar news is not known. In this case, both media channels accuse each other of disinformation (Picture 12).



Picture 12. Earthquake 2nd Example on Traditional Media

### Earthquake 3<sup>rd</sup> Example

In the third Twitter example, it was deciphered by the newspaper article that the images claimed to be in Hatay were not from there (Picture 13).



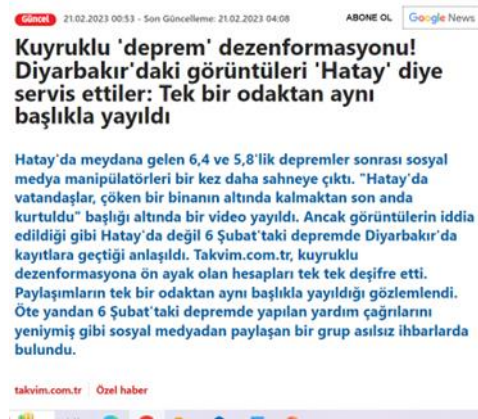
Picture 13. Earthquake 3rd Example on Twitter

**Signified:** Citizens who survived at the last moment from being under a building that collapsed during an earthquake in Hatay were mentioned in the Twitter post. The sharing was even supported by a video (Picture 13).

**Signifier:** This news initially seems very likely during the earthquake period. However, various media outlets later stated that the images shared were not from Hatay, but from Diyarbakır and belonged to the past years. There was even an apology statement from this Twitter account. There are many posts made just to get hits by using images from the past like this and this one. Some are noticed, while others may not. Since social media is a sensation-loving environment, shares are made for clicks and interaction. This has caused disinformation on Twitter to become uncontrollable. In fact, since such fake news is shared many times by many people, even the first person who shared the news cannot be found sometimes. Here, the traditional media fulfilled a similar task and confirmed the twitter news (Picture 13).

**Signified:** In the news, it was stated that the images of the destroyed buildings shared on Twitter were not from Hatay, but from Diyarbakır. It has even been stated that these images do not belong to the 6 February earthquake, but are from previous years. The news directly emphasized social media disinformation (Picture 14).

**Signifier:** It has been stated by this and a few other media organizations that the news shared by so many people on Twitter is unfounded. Attention was drawn to disinformation in social media. Citizens have been warned. With this news, it is aimed to emphasize that the only reliable news channel is the traditional media. It can also be deduced from this news that it is not reliable to receive news from social media. At the same time, even evidence images may not be real. This will cause people to look at everything with suspicion. In time, desensitization will begin. Today, many people remain unresponsive to events and stay away from even the news (Picture 14.).



Picture 14. Earthquake 3rd Example on Traditional Media

### Flood 1<sup>st</sup> Example

Since disinformation news about floods are generally in this way, only 2 examples were chosen instead of using similar examples (Picture 15).



Picture 15. Flood 1st Example on Twitter

**Signified:** The sharing started with the statement “the media does not show these images”. It was stated that sewerage was mixed with the mains water in Şanlıurfa, where the flood was experienced. There is a photo below the post. In this image, the people waiting in the water queue can be seen (Picture 15).

**Signifier:** Similar to other posts, it is noteworthy that the expressions are supported by a photograph. The development of technology and the fact that tools allow for the addition of evidence such as photos and videos are an indicator of the development of disinformation. Many people create a reality in their minds without knowing whether the video and photo they see are real. The aim here is some basic values that are wanted to be believed. For example; wrong government policies, damage to the public, late and wrong response in disasters and crises. While drawing attention to these issues, there are many posts that highlight disinformation, although there are good intentions and posts aimed at raising public awareness. Here, it is the target audience who will make the distinction and form their opinion (Picture 15).

**Signified:** It was reported in the news that mains water supply to the city in Şanlıurfa has started again. In the news, supported by the views of the mayor of the city, a visual as proof was shared (Picture 16).

**Signifier:** In the news, an important issue such as the mixing of sewage into the mains water mentioned on Twitter was never mentioned. It is said that water was given back to the city in a very positive way. The news was supported by the opinions of the mayor of the city. Highlighting the desired parts of the topics and cutting certain parts in the news is also an example of disinformation. Therefore, as in other news, it is not possible to talk about a clear situation here (Picture 16).



Picture 16. Flood 1st Example on Traditional Media

## Flood 2<sup>nd</sup> Example

**Signified:** In the post, it is stated with a visual that Balıklıgöl, a historical place in Şanlıurfa, has disappeared (Picture 17).

**Signifier:** According to this post, it is understood that Balıklıgöl, which was affected by the flood, has disappeared. The fact that Balıklıgöl's photo is included in the post also supports the news (Picture 17).



Picture 17. Flood 2nd Example on Twitter



**Signified:** Despite the fact that Balıklıgöl in Şanlıurfa was affected by the flood, the safety of the fish is shown with a photograph in this news. It was emphasized in the news that the reason why the fish did not appear for a period was the stress after the flood (Picture 18).

**Signifier:** On the other hand, many people on Twitter have published fake news saying "the lake with fish has disappeared". Balıklıgöl that means lake with fish is very historical place. Maybe you know that. Afterwards, this news was denied with images and videos in the traditional media. However, some organizations of the traditional media also made fake news similar to the news on Twitter. This situation is thought to be related to the political point of view (Picture 18).

## Selden etkilenen Balıklıgöl'deki balıklar "güvenli bölgede"

Harran Üniversitesi'nden yapılan açıklamada, Balıklıgöl'deki balıkların sel sonrası stresten dolayı göl içindeki çeşitli mağaracıklara geçtikleri belirtildi.

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Paylaş



Picture 18. Flood 2nd Example on Traditional Media

First of all, it is possible to say that there is a lot of disinformation news on social media, especially during the pandemic process. I did 100 tweet reviews. I chose the ones that stand out from this news and are talked about a lot.

In general, it is possible to say that traditional media tools serve to correct the disinformation on Twitter during the pandemic process.

Within the scope of this study, corrections and warnings were made in the traditional media regarding the 3 news items selected.

Dozens of fake accounts like @fahrettinkoca34 pretending to be the Minister of Health have been opened. In addition to fake accounts, supplement products that are claimed to be effective against coronavirus have been introduced to the market. Advertisements were made to famous names and social media phenomena.

Later, it was revealed that these types of products were not approved by the ministry and were unlicensed. An investigation was launched against the names who shared stories about the product.

#### 4. CONCLUSION and EVALUATION

In all three times of crisis, the posts on Twitter are shorter and in the form of propaganda. It is the tool itself that provides this. Dozens of fake accounts like @fahrettinkoca34 pretending to be the Minister of Health have been opened. In addition to fake accounts, supplement products that are claimed to be effective against coronavirus have been introduced to the market. Advertisements

were made to famous names and social media phenomena. Later, it was revealed that these types of products were not approved by the ministry and were unlicensed. An investigation was launched against the names who shared stories about the product. The tool gives individuals the chance to express their views in the form of propaganda and slogans. This ensures that Twitter shares are more memorable than the news shared in the traditional media.

Traditional media, by its nature, prefer to explain at length by providing evidence. However, this evidence can sometimes itself be an element of disinformation. It is also expected to be more wary of disinformation than Twitter, as traditional media represents an institution or sometimes governments.

Both tools claim to be the most accurate one. On the other hand, what is right and wrong is not easily understood by the public. This confusion causes the society to be apolitical and insensitive. It is possible to say that the trust in traditional media as a tool is higher than social media. According to McLuhan, it is possible to say that traditional media as a tool is an expression that corrects and opposes disinformation. On the other hand, social media paints an image that is open to more disinformation and untrusted.

Since social media is an environment where all users can do citizen journalism and there is no control, it is more open to disinformation. However, social media also has the power to control disinformation in traditional media. Clear and sufficient information should be provided and media control should be made a more important phenomenon. Since the shares on Twitter are made by individuals, they are coded in a humorous and sincere manner. Although it contains disinformation, Twitter is not a news tool but a social networking medium. Therefore, the coding of the tool evokes this idea in the mind.

Looking at the examples, it is seen that serious and fake news with many evidences are also shared in traditional media tools. This is much more damaging than Twitter sharing. Because people use the media as a means of getting news.

Since the news is coded in different ways and delivered to different target audiences by both tools, it has been determined that the elements of disinformation have changed in terms of the coding style.

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