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MEDIA LITERACY, FACT-CHECKING, AND CYBERBULLYING: INFORMATION VERIFICATION METHODS

Araştırma Makalesi

Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The acceleration of digitalization and post-truth debates due to the pandemic process focuses on technology and its effects. As the order evolves from the known universe to the Metaverse, individuals are also in the middle of a centralization where one single instrument controls everything with technological proximity. Centralization forces everyone into a more accessible and efficient communication process by consolidating many possibilities into a single device, but it also makes the spread of information faster and more uncontrolled than ever, diminishing the importance of truth. This post-truth world creates individuals who create their reality, impacting the growth of individuals the most. Cyberbullying emerges at this point, endangering children and teenagers' development and mental health. From a media perspective, technological advancements do not guarantee correct information dissemination. As the spread rate and opportunities increase, so do false information and news. It triggers the spread of false information, fake news, and cyberbullying when the truth is irrelevant. Therefore, the need for verifying information arises. Fact-checking methods are directly related to digital literacy and media literacy problems. Understanding how to verify the information and protect against false, deceptive, and fake news is crucial. The study examines two information verification platforms. Research findings reveal that news is verified by various methods and techniques using numerous tools by platforms, primarily by photo or video content, resulting in the detection of information distortions such as false connection and fabricated-manipulated content. The study also found that various photo/video verification tools and anonymous websites were frequently used.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Cyberbullying, Information Verification, Fact-Checking.

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MEDYA OKURYAZARLIĞI, DOĞRULUK KONTROLÜ VE SİBER ZORBALIK: BİLGİ DOĞRULAMA YÖNTEMLERİ

Pandemi süreciyle birlikte hızlanan dijitalleşme ve post-truth tartışmaları, teknoloji ve etkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Düzen, bugün bilinen evrenden Metaverse'e evrilirken, diğer açılardan da bireyler, tek bir enstrümanın teknolojik yakınsama ile her şeyi kontrol ettiği bir merkezileşmenin içindedir. Merkezileşme, pek çok olasılığı tek bir cihazda toplayarak herkesi daha erişilebilir ve daha etkin bir iletişim sürecine zorlasa da bilgi/haber yayılımını hiç olmadığı kadar hızlı ve kontrolsüz hale getirmektedir. Hız ve kontrol eksikliği hakikati önemsizleştirerek; bu post-truth dünyasında bahsi geçen kendi gerçeğini üreten-yaşayan bireyleri ve toplumları yaratmaktadır. Bu durumdan en çok büyüyen ve gelişen bireyler olumsuz etkilenmektedir. Siber zorbalık tam bu noktada ortaya çıkmakta, maruz bıraktıkları ile çocuk ve ergen gelişimini ve psikolojik sağlığını tehlikeye atmaktadır. Medya açısından değerlendirildiğinde teknolojik gelişmeler, doğru bilginin dolaşımını garanti etmemektedir. Dolaşım ivmesi ve olanaklar arttıkça, yanlış bilgilerin/haberlerin yayılması da artmaktadır. Bu da hakikatin önemsizleştiği bir ortamda yanlış bilgilerin, sahte haberlerin yayılmasını, aynı şekilde siber zorbalığı da tetikleyebilmektedir. Bu nedenle, bilgiyi/haberi doğrulama gerekliliği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Doğrulama kontrol yöntemleri, dijital okuryazarlık ve medya okuryazarlığı sorunlarıyla doğrudan ilişkilidir. Hangi bilgilerin nasıl doğrulanacağını; yanlış, hileli ve sahte haberlere karşı nasıl korunacağını anlamak çok önemlidir. Çalışma bu eksende iki bilgi doğrulama platformunu mercek altına alarak çeşitli sonuçlar elde etmiştir. Araştırma bulguları; haberlerin platformlar tarafından çeşitli yöntem ve tekniklerle birçok araç kullanılarak, çoğunlukla fotoğraf veya video içeriklerinin, doğrulamaya tabi tutulduğu, bunun sonucunda hatalı ilişkilendirme, uydurma ve manipülasyon gibi bilgi bozukluk kategorilerinin tespit edildiği ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmada; sıklıkla çeşitli web sitelerinin, foto/video gibi doğrulama araçlarının kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medya Okuryazarlığı, Siber Zorbalık, Bilgi Doğrulama, Teyit.

INTRODUCTION

The world is becoming increasingly computer-based, and manual work has long since turned into computer work in seconds. This process, which can be computerized or digitalized, has created societies that can process and move much faster than human power. However, the acceleration of digitalization brings with it many new concepts and issues. Discussions on post-truth ideas, alternatively, as "irrelevance of the truth," are intensifying. Individuals filter, believe or follow the facts they create through the media. The amount of technology usage increased with the pandemic increases this situation even more. Information learned with new media opportunities can spread rapidly, and it is seen that individuals adopt and disseminate information/news that is suitable for their worldview. In such an environment, individuals create their reality, in other words, echo chambers, in their virtual reality,

with increasingly digital activity. According to the echo chamber effect, internet facilities, new media, and websites cause users to filter unwanted messages and design their echo chambers. Thus, users become deaf to opposing views in the virtual environment; by forming homogeneous groups, they only follow the internet resources and accounts suitable for their opinions (Colleoni vd., 2014: 319).

On the other hand, technological developments realize convergence, defined as the combination of devices in a single device developed in the past for different purposes and now gathered in smartphones, tablets, and computers. This centralization drives individuals to acquire and consume information faster than ever before, especially with Metaverse. It will be taken a step further by incorporating augmented reality technologies into the process.

Therefore, in parallel with this convergence, information/news dissemination and accessibility have increased with several new opportunities. Although this situation offers everyone a more accessible and effective communication process, there are also negative aspects. With new media, new gadgets spread information/news at tremendous speeds, making the spread uncontrolled. Both the speed and the lack of control are transforming individuals and societies living in a post-factual context.

The spread of information disorder can be detrimental to the individuals who grow and thrive best in these conditions. This is where the concept of cyberbullying comes in, and it can endanger people's development and mental health. Under the influence of deception and immersion, it is possible for adolescents to be placed in awkward situations and mentally exhausted by threats, blackmail, or fraud. It is possible for individuals exposed to cyberbullying to develop many mental disorders.

The flow of information/news is a key indicator in the field of new media. Information that occasionally moves in a fast flow can cause an inaccurate flow of information/news. It may trigger or pave the way for the dissemination of misleading information activities (disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation) and cyberbullying. Therefore, checking and verifying the information encountered or obtained through new media platforms is crucial.

In contrast to the misleading information activities arising from this perspective, fact-checking platforms disseminate correct information, verify the information on the new media platforms, and produce results about its accuracy. Fact-checking and verification methods are related to digital and media literacy, requiring knowledge, skills, and equipment. In this way, individuals will be able to prevent the spread of inaccurate information/news by analyzing and evaluating information from production to consumption; In this context, it is essential to understand what information is there, how to verify it, and how to protect individuals from false, fraudulent, and fake news. Additionally, it is a significant step in the fight against cyberbullying, and individuals who identify accurate information reduce the possibility of being deceived, scammed, and bullied.

Therefore, information/news verification as part of media literacy in the fight against cyberbullying is crucial, as suggested in the literature and on various fact-checking websites. This study discusses this issue, and various information was accessed through the descriptive survey method. In view of the results, media literacy (including new media literacy) is essential from the perspective of the communicator as a protective shield of the individual in the environment of digitalization and post-truth.

In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of media literacy and fact-checking in line with increasing digitization and post-truth concepts in recent years, underlining that this can be an effective tool in the fight against cyberbullying. Although there are many studies in different fields, this study provides essential details and insights into the communication literature to address the issue of fact-checking media literacy.

1. Media Literacy In The Context of Digitization and Post-Truth

The first thing that comes to mind is the concept of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, which are the essential elements of literacy. However, the use of many different modes of communication today has broadened its perspective on the concept of literacy; It has begun to be defined as the ability to share meaning through symbolic systems for full participation in society. The notion

of literacy has expanded with the emergence of new types of texts and literacy. These concepts include information literacy, media literacy, media literacy education, visual literacy, news literacy, health media literacy, and digital literacy (Hobbs, 2010: 17).

We see that an incredible transformation has begun with digitalization; Factories are evolving into dark factories and cities into smart cities. In such an age, the transformation of literacy becomes inevitable. The increasing number of media tools affects more and more people. Media competence proves to be an essential field in this context. Today the term implies machinery in which messages produced for a given distance are transmitted with visual, auditory, and literary elements using different technologies (Buckingham, 2003). It includes traditional print media (books, newspapers, direct mail) and audiovisual media (radio, television, films, video games); Computer-based communication types (smartphones, computer games, internet, social media applications) can be listed.

While media literacy refers to the skills of understanding, analyzing, and criticizing media content in a passive sense, it includes the ability to produce printed, audio, visual, and multimedia messages as an active skill (Buckingham, 2007: 3; Fedorov, 2015: 35). Media literacy is an analytical and research-oriented and multidimensional skill that leads people to ask critical questions about what they see, hear and read in communication tools. While this critical perspective has shifted to radio and newspapers, then to cinema and television, and more recently to media tools used in the digital technologies axis, media literacy education has emerged as a measure to protect the content in related media from harmful to protect against impacts (Scheibe, 2009: 68-71).

Media production can have different forms and content. It affects the selection and reception of messages from the media. Individuals in visually culture-oriented societies have more visual media types than written culture-oriented societies. It is changing how individuals are exposed to media messages and their media consumption habits. On the other hand, this situation has led to the media being used as an instrument by political institutions and those in power to influence,

manipulate and gain legitimacy with the increasing technological possibilities. Political discourse has long been an integral part of everyday life, and this discourse creates movement in a far-reaching societal process. In today's conditions, this movement is rapidly evolving into a structure based on effectively creating interactions using the internet and social media. The concept of manipulating public opinion, or simply deceiving it, is a natural element of everyday functioning that we can see in today's conditions at any time and in any area; we normalize it when we encounter it, and we do this normalization by we refer to people's perspectives. Nowadays, people are willing to tell harmless lies to see the bright side of the world and their lives and produce thoughts in that direction.

The phrase Post Truth, used to describe the time when communication changed significantly and the definition of reality changed, has become a fundamental definition for this new era in which the truth is unrelated to evidence or knowledge but is evaluated with perception, point of view, and benefit-harm relationship. In the work of the same name as the definition, Keyes states that truth has been replaced by credibility in today's world while focusing on the causes of lies and deception throughout human history. With its structure facilitating lying and dissemination, cyberspace has become an ethics-free zone where cheating is encouraged rather than sanctioned (Keyes, 2019: 259).

The concept of post-truth, which appears at this very point, separates the concepts of *truth* and *trust*; has brought the ideas of rejection of truth and questioning of *trust* to the fore. Reliability is human property, while *trust* is behavior towards other constructions. Based on this distinction, Macleod states that there are four main requirements for the establishment of *trust* (Jandrić, 2018: 103):

- The consciousness of human beings, both injured and potentially damaging,
- Thinking "good" about other people in a minimum of common,
- "Optimism" that, in the common minimum, they are capable of all human structures.
- The status of each of these is indisputable for *Trust*.

With post-truth, we live in a world surrounded by truths independent of reality. Due to the digitalizing world, the structures of social perceptions, and the circulation speed of the internet and social media, individuals are more vulnerable than ever. In an environment where individuals can produce and manipulate information, it is pretty natural to have reservations about trusting identities, messages, and channels from which information/news is obtained. The concept of post-truth appears as an end to this natural reservation. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the individual to be able to select the messages produced with media literacy. In this context, media competence does not only mean knowing the technical aspects of the media; The individual also needs to know the structural characteristics of the press (ownership, ideological position, cultural perspective) because a media literate person is not a passive audience but an active participant (Erdem, 2018: 22).

People strategically and often unconsciously shape their online identities according to social expectations (Whitty and Joinson, 2008: 143). In this way, people ensure that they emphasize their competencies and that they are seen as more important in other people's eyes or within the framework of their desires and how they want them to appear. Understanding the structure of accurate information/news in such an environment is inconvenient for everyone. Therefore, media literacy education is an important acquisition.

International institutions and organizations started to discuss the importance of media literacy education in many different projects; In a world adorned with messages created by all written and visual media sources, the idea that new and rich communication skills are needed to live as an active citizen has begun to be advocated (Turkoglu and Şimşek, 2016: 95).

Media literacy education became widespread in European countries until the 1980s. After the 1980s, 'media literacy' was included in countries' curricula, such as the USA and Canada, where this education is widely given (Sezer, 2019: 75). While media education developed after the 1970s in developed countries, it took place in Turkey's agenda in the 2000s (Topuz, 2005: 19).

Media literacy education focuses on four main stages (Altun and Pembecioğlu, 2018: 21):

- Access
- Analysis
- Evaluation
- Production

Although literacy seems to be a reading and writing skill, media literacy and different skills need to come together. It is expressed that an individual's access to media messages, analysis and evaluation of these messages, and ability to produce new messages.

Nowadays, modern devices work based on artificial intelligence, and each device offers a few data collection, storage, processing, and analysis methods and numerous services thanks to its algorithms. These algorithms are highly complex and are shaped according to the user experiences of individuals by combining many different algorithms. *Google* collects data about individuals' interests and communication methods through *Google Mail*, *Amazon.com* shopping orientations data, *Facebook* sharing orientations, and social networking behaviors; *Google Maps* reveals the places visited and users' physical movement history (Jandrić, 2018: 107).

The post-truth concept is a complex issue regarding its truth-reliability structure and in terms of collecting and using information, evaluating the minimum knowledge and ability necessary to do so, including concepts such as truth and fraud, facts and emotions, logic, and instinct. Individuals must analyze all these structures to distinguish between post-truth and reality. For this reason, media literacy should be seen and evaluated as an essential field.

2. The Issue of Cyberbullying and the Importance of Media Literacy

Bullying has been defined as the repeated exposure of one or more people to negative actions over time. Harmful activities can be conducted through physical contact, words, and gestures (Olweus, 1994). Bullying studies started in Scandinavian countries, first in Norway. Dan Olweus was the first to conduct studies on this subject. Especially after the 1970s, studies on bullying gained momentum.

While "mobbing" was preferred to describe bullying in the early days, the idea of "bullying" began to be widely used later.

Cyberbullying is defined as the malicious and ongoing use of information and communication technologies by a person or a group to harm others using technology (Belsey, 2008). On the other hand, Aricak (2011) defined cyberbullying as harming a person or group by another person using technology. Willard (2007), on the other hand, defined cyberbullying as cruelty to others by sending and publishing harmful content using the internet or other digital technologies such as mobile phones. Slonje and Smith (2008); emphasized that for an event or situation to be called cyberbullying, it should be done intentionally, to cause harm, to be conducted continuously, and the cyberbully and cyber victim should have different technology usage levels. In this section, the continuity part is seen as a topic discussed in cyberbullying. The occurrence of cyberbullying once also allows it to be described as cyberbullying (Kaya, 2020). In cyberbullying, victims do not have the opportunity to escape from negative comments and posts launched about them on the internet. In addition, because these comments and posts spread to gigantic peer groups quickly, victims are also attacked and abused by people they do not know (Campbell, 2005; Tokunaga, 2010).

A few conditions must be met for a situation to be labeled cyberbullying. First, the bully's perpetrator has hostile feelings toward the victim and aims to harm that person. Second, the situation that the abuser inflicts on the victim should be viewed as a harmful situation. Another condition is that negative behaviors and events continue online and offline. The final condition is an imbalance in the distribution of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2008).

Different approaches have been used to classify the types of cyberbullying. According to Smith vd. (2008), who made the first type in this classification according to the kind of electronic devices used, categorized the types of cyberbullying as text messages, e-mails, websites, instant messaging, chat rooms, and photo/video viewing in their study on adolescents. Another classification was

made according to the content of the actions. Willard (2007) examined this type, the most common classification type, in seven categories. In this classification, harassing, cyber harassment, and cyber threat directly refer to cyberbullying; slander, exclusion, disclosure, and pretending to be someone else are expressed as indirect cyberbullying (Eroğlu, 2014). Another categorization classified according to the content of cyberbullying is Bauman (2014)'s seventh classification. This classification showed parallelism with the type of Willard (2007). According to Bauman (2014), cyberbullying is classified as flaming, harassment, denigration, masquerading, outing and trickery, social exclusion, and cyberstalking. Several of these types of bullying are a significant part of cyberbullying incidents.

Cyberbullying can cause some negative consequences, as in traditional bullying. It is seen that both the victim and the bully involved in cyberbullying are negatively affected by this process. While some of the studies were conducted by comparing the effects of cyberbullying with traditional bullying, the other part was conducted over a few problem areas related to cyberbullying or caused by cyberbullying. Although it has equivalent products to traditional bullying, there are studies claiming that the results of cyberbullying are more severe and long-lasting (Machmutow vd., 2012; Sakellariou vd., 2012; Sticca vd., 2013). There is also a higher risk of suicide due to the distinctive characteristics of cyberbullying (Bonanno and Heymel, 2013).

When the studies on the results and effects of cyberbullying are examined, it is understood that this phenomenon is a problem in different countries and Turkey. When the results obtained from the studies are evaluated in general, it may cause a decrease in the physical health and well-being of the adolescents, physical problems such as sleep problems, headache, loss of appetite, psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and psychosocial problems such as isolation and exclusion (Ovejero vd., 2016).

Various situations, such as a high number of viewers or anonymous bullying, can be practical on the adverse effects experienced by virtual victims (Dredge vd., 2014). The victimized anxiety experienced by the cyberbullied person may be that he

does not know the person who curses him, insults him, or puts him in a tricky situation (Garnefski and Kraaij, 2014). In addition, the possibility of not knowing how many people may have seen the message, sharing, or digital material that put him in a demanding situation and the chance of reaching too many people can increase the anxiety experienced by the victim (Ovejero et al., 2016).

Cyberbullies; exhibit behaviors such as sending angry messages, teasing, teasing, threatening, obtaining privileged information with fake accounts, or trying to spread them. In addition, cyberbullies can also engage in the following behaviors: fight, harm, slander, impersonation, exclusion, cyber threat, cyber harassment, and unauthorized use of someone else's information on the internet. Research shows that the age group abused by cyberbullies is usually people under the age of thirteen. Although there is typically an age limit on social media platforms, many children are introduced to the Internet and social media world by showing their age. It makes the job of cyberbullies easier. Types of cyberbullying reported by online users included (Altun and Pembecioğlu, 2018: 95):

- Online aliasing - 27%,
- Attempts to embarrass someone - 22%,
- Physical threats - 10%,
- Sneaking (Stalking) - 7%,
- Persistent harassment - 7%,
- Sexual harassment - 6%.

In the literature, these behaviors are classified as types of cyberbullying. There are many known types of cyberbullying in the sources. Willard (2007) categorized distinct types of cyberbullying as follows:

- Flaming
- Harassment
- Denigration
- Impersonation
- Outing and Trickery
- Exclusion
- Cyberstalking

Although these types categorize different behaviors, it is possible to encounter any or more of them in real life. Due to the relationship between the bully

and the victim, factors such as location, time, and the category of bullying may also vary. It is seen that the studies on cyberbullying are primarily quantitative. In many studies conducted in different countries, it is seen that the extent of cyberbullying among school-age children and youth is investigated.

Cyberbullying is also becoming a special issue on the axis of digitalization. According to January 2021 data, 7.83 billion people live worldwide, and 5.22 billion are smartphone users. In addition, 4.20 billion people have been identified as active social media users (WeAreSocial, 2021). The most rational conclusion that can be drawn from these numbers is that more than half of the world's people are exposed to various amounts and types of information on the internet daily. Studies support this view.

The findings of studies conducted with children and adolescents in many countries, especially in developed countries in terms of technology use, revealed that students are involved in cyberbullying in different forms, such as victim, bully, or bully/victim (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004; Beran and Li, 2005; Kowalski and Limber, 2007; Arıcak vd., 2008; Topcu, 2008; Bayar, 2010). Many studies investigating cyberbullying, cyberbullied students' rate and perpetrators, and the factors associated with their involvement in cyberbullying have also been investigated. In these studies, which examine the relationship between gender, age, frequency of internet-based communication tools, family characteristics, involvement in peer bullying, and other similar variables with cyberbullying, it is seen that the variables mediate each other.

Current data reveals how many young people and children can be victims of cyberbullying (GuardChild, 2021):

- The number of sexual assault cases due to social media has increased by 300%.
- Twenty-nine percent of online sex crime relationships were initiated on a social networking site.
- In 26% of online sex crimes against minors, criminals disseminate information or pictures of sexual intercourse.
- Fifty-five percent of teens give their personal information to someone they do not know, with details of their photos and physical characteristics.
- Thirty-three percent of internet-related sexual crimes involved social networking sites.

- Twenty percent of teens update their profiles daily, and 64 percent upload their photos to social media platforms. Forty-two percent use fake images of various avatar images and anime characters.
- Fifty-five percent of families with 12-year-old children say their children have an account on Facebook, and 76 percent say they give their children access.
- Fifteen percent of teens say they have been cyberbullied.
- Eight percent of these young people say they are physically involved in violence because of social media posts, and 25 percent say they have had a face-to-face argument or conflict.
- Sixty-two percent of 13- to 14-year-olds are friends with their family on Facebook.

Turkstat data also shows the numbers that support this situation:

- 64.4% of children used a mobile phone/smartphone.
- 32.3% of children checked their mobile phone/smartphone every half hour.
- Digital gaming time was higher in boys.
- The most played type of digital game was the war game.

As can be seen, as the time spent by children and young people on the internet regarding cyberbullying increases, there may be a change in the amount of false information and exposure to cyberbullying. Internet usage habits of children as users can also affect this, but as the world becomes increasingly digital, this result becomes more likely.

At this point, we are faced with the issue of media literacy again. As individuals' internet consumption increases, misinformation and negative situations they are exposed to force individuals to be more careful, and we encounter the necessity of media literacy as a way of doing this. As stated before, media literacy positively affects individuals' knowledge levels regarding cyberbullying, detecting false information, and ways to protect themselves by raising awareness about media production and consumption practices.

3. Importance of Media Literacy and Information Confirmation Methods in Combating Cyberbullying

As a communication phenomenon, the news is "the latest, newest and most interesting information about events, people or things happening somewhere in the real world" (Dursun, 2004: 69). Tokgöz (2012), on the other hand, explained the

news as "it is a summary of an event, idea or problem that takes place at any time." News is the code consisting of sound, image, text, or a mixture of these, that concern some or most individuals in social life and convey the event, problem, or thought that takes place in a certain period. At the same time, information consisting of content that informs, educates, teaches, entertains, makes us happy, or upsets us in daily life is also described as news.

Authenticity is the essential criterion that should be in some news. Reality is facts that exist and whose existence is independent of perceptions and interpretations. The fact that reality exists independently of thought and what is conceived. Reality exists independently of consciousness and is not a product of mental design. While there is always subjectivity in perceiving and interpreting stimuli, objectivity is not relativity and subjectivity. The fact of truth, on the other hand, is to present the existing reality as it is and to convey it without any change or distortion (Türk, 2014: 16).

Discussions about fake news and false information were encountered when the written press developed and electronic mass media set. In particular, the interventions to the news content in the media to gain political interest or political power were discussed together with the problems such as news ethics and media ownership. The emergence and spread of the internet, and especially the social media platforms that entered our lives in the 2000s, have made this situation even more complicated. It has been possible to transfer the information produced in internet environments, especially in social media channels based on user-centered content production, to large masses of users without having to go through the verification process and editorial process (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017: 211).

Undoubtedly, it is not possible for various journalistic initiatives not to emerge in today's world, where false/fake news is rife. Fact-checking centers reflect this new reporting practice. Fact-checking centers aim to reach accurate information and share it with the public by comparing data from diverse sources by following a method in which they have determined whether the suspicious news that attracts public attention is trustworthy or not. In addition, these centers measure the accuracy

of the information given by the news sources, the politicians' speeches, and the statements made to the public.

Although one of the reasons for the emergence of fact-checking centers is the dubious news created by the accelerated information flow in connection with technology, successful verification is closely related to the effective use of technology. The need for verification begins with the fact that most information sources are false. Origins may deliberately or innocently lie when providing information, their memory may be misleading, or they may be out of context or misunderstanding. They may be in danger and unable to give everything they know, or they may not be able to see the whole picture as things unfold.

The job of verifiers is not to repeat sources and materials but to interrogate those sources and the information they provide, cross-validate them with other credible sources, and question what is true (before printing or publication) to weed out what is wrong or cannot be verified (Silverman, 2017). On the other hand, the verification activity is not conducted only on a real-time event; it is even applied to the content that has been circulated most of the time. Today, because many people have smartphones, the news content produced by users has also increased. Most of those who own these phones through smartphones that can take photos and videos try to do "journalism" from time to time. However, these technically able people do not know journalism practices, leading them to spread the content without thinking. Claire Wardle, who works on user content verification, states that verification is a critical skill that can be done with free online tools and traditional journalistic techniques. State that no technology can automatically verify user-generated content with 100% accuracy; Wardle states that the human eye or traditional research will not be enough, and combining the two methods can give the correct answer. According to Wardle, four elements must be checked or verified when a journalist or humanitarian worker accesses or sends information or content via social media. 1. Origin: Is this an original part of the content? 2. Source: Who uploaded the content? 3. Date: When was the content produced? 4. Location: Where was the content produced? (Silverman, 2017).

When the organizational structures of the accuracy control centers are examined, it is seen that there are two different approaches. The first of these is the centers within the corporate media, and the other is the fact-checking centers established by civil initiatives. Many big news organizations worldwide, such as AP, AFP, Reuters, and BBC, have established truth control centers within their corporate structures. According to a European accuracy control centers study (Graves and Cherebini, 2016: 30), both methods are used in different countries. In Western Europe, fact-checking is mainly in the corporate media, while in Eastern Europe, fact-checking based on NGOs is more common. It is possible to talk about another method besides the two mentioned managements. This method can be evaluated under the corporate media category, or it can be considered as a different third category. Technology companies such as Google and Facebook have also started to do fact-checking.

According to the report prepared by the Oxford University Reuters Institute (Newman vd., 2018), Turkey was the country with the highest rate of fake news, with a rate of 49%. In the face of this determination, it is evident that Turkey needs accuracy control centers.

Corporate media create no fact-checking center in Turkey. However, there are websites established by civil initiatives. It is possible to list the fact-checking organizations in Turkey: YalanSavar.org, Malumatfurus.org (formerly Muhtesip), EvrimAgaci.org, DoğrulukPayi.com, Teyit.org, Gununyalanlari.com, Fact-checking Turkey and Dogrula.org. Only DogrulukPayi.com and Teyit.org are a member of the IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network). Each of these entities has focused on different verification issues.

According to Ünver (2020), the first fact-checking initiative in Turkey, YalanSavar.org (Fight Against Lies), was established in 2009. Founded by a group of scientists and science enthusiasts, the platform has started fact-checking by debunking false claims and fake scientific content about swine flu (H1N1) on the internet and social media. Another of the first verification platforms in Turkey was Muhtesip (Moral Guard), which was founded in 2009 but started its activities in

2010. However, it later ended its activities in Turkey due to various reasons in 2015, and its founders launched a new initiative called Malumatfurus (Pontification) to continue their first goal of disproving the claims of columnists. About a year after YalanSavar started its work, another science-based platform to debunk claims emerged. On November 5, 2010, Evrimagaci.org (the Evolution Tree) was launched as a civic initiative at the Middle East Technical University (METU) by student associations interested in evolutionary biology to verify science, evolution, and popular biology. Although originally set up as a Facebook account, it soon grew into a digital hub for research in popular science, evolutionary biology, and genetics, directly criticizing creationist authors and arguments. Years after the first wave of fact-checking platforms emerged in Turkey, Turkey's first independent political truth-checking initiative, DogrulukPayi.com (partly correct), began publication in June 2014. After launching its activities as an initiative of Izlemeyiz Vakfi (Foundation of Following), DogrulukPayi.com was founded by a team of recent graduates from the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations. The original purpose of DogrulukPayi.com was to support the claims of all competing politicians and parties in their election campaigns when political discourse is becoming more aggressive and exaggerated, and the number of independent journalistic options is shrinking. Teyit.org was established shortly after DogrulukPayi.com, which marked a turning point in Turkey's fact-checking journey. The trigger for the founding of the group was the IS bomb attack on October 10, 2015 in Ankara's train station. Teyit.org, whose main activity is fact-checking, also prioritizes the creation of methods and standards for verification bodies in Turkey, creating tools and methods for all Turkish digital media users to self-check claims. After the emergence of DogrulukPayi.com and Teyit.org as the two leading political accuracy control initiatives, rivals with different political views emerged. The first of these initiatives was Dogrula.org, founded in June 2017. A similar initiative in English was launched by the Anadolu Agency (AA), which began refuting the claims of international news organizations in October 2019. Two other pro-government initiatives emerged at the same time as Dogrula.org. Gununyalanlari.com (Lies of the Day) and Fact-CheckingTurkey are organized by the Bosphorus Global Relations

Center, also known as Bosphorus Global, a public relations research initiative affiliated with and funded by the Turkish government. Unlike other fact-checking initiatives, Gununyalalari.com (and its English language version, Fact-Check.tr) simply chooses to refute unsubstantiated claims. From this perspective, there is no random selection process for fact-checked claims, and they do not follow the fact-checking protocols implemented by other IFCN member platforms. Although Fact-CheckingTurkey serves as the English version of Gununyalalari.com, its content is more concerned with international news about Turkey.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A descriptive survey model is used in this study. In the descriptive survey model, science has the properties of observing, recording, recognizing the relationships between events, and reaching generalizations about the immutable principles being controlled. In other words, the descriptive function of science is paramount (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In the study, a total of 703 verification posts were selected and analyzed using targeted sampling methods. Contributions were selected to ensure that the websites shared by fact-checking platforms teyit.org and doğrulukpayi.com contained contributions between 2021 and 2022. In this context, the Post Classification Form was used for the analysis of the identified articles. The form was partly adapted based on "the Publication Classification Form" developed by Kutu and Yaşar (2012). Some changes have been made to this form, which is used to classify articles on educational science and its sub-areas, and the proportions have been analyzed. The classifications were proceeded independently by the researchers and then discussed. The analysis is carefully performed, and the articles scored to ensure validity and reliability based on the consensus of the researchers. The content analysis technique was used to evaluate the data obtained. The posts were analyzed by content analysis, which included descriptive information about the type of sharing, its content, the subject of the sharing, its method, data collection tools, sample, data analysis methods, discussion, and suggestions. The data obtained were interpreted by percentage and frequency and presented with tables and graphs. Based on the data obtained, it was found that most of the sharing are made by journalists,

volunteers, and collaborators working on the teyit.org and dogrulukpayi.com platforms, respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of Shares Included in the Research by Information Fact-Checking Platforms

Fact-Checking Platforms	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
teyit.org	358	50,92
dogrulukpayi.com	345	49,08
Total	703	100,00

For this purpose, the posts determined using the purposeful sampling method were distributed, as shown in the table above. As a result, teyit.org is 50.92 percent, and dogrulukpayi.com is 49.08 percent.

Table 2. Content Type Distribution By Fact-Checking Platforms

	teyit.org		dogrulukpayi.com			
Content Types	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*	Total	Percent
Photo	180	50,28	178	51,59	358	50,92
Text	25	6,98	33	9,57	58	8,25
Video	153	42,74	134	38,84	287	40,83
Total	358	100	345	100	703	100,00

There is descriptive information about the type of content shared on information review platforms by examining the table above. The basic elements in the posts have been considered.

Table 3. Methods and Tools Used By Fact-Checking Platforms

		Methods		Tools/Techniques
Provenance	1	Content Verification	Reverse Image Searches	*Google Images, Yandex, TinEye, RevEye Reverse Image Search*
	2		Video Verification	*InVID Verification Plugin,*
	3	Other	Anonymous Spaces	*Reddit, 4chan, Gab.ai, Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups*

KARANFİLOĞLU, Mehmet ve SAĞLAM, Murat (2023). Media Literacy, Fact-Checking, and Cyberbullying: Information Verification Methods. Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi (e-gifder), 11 (1), 305-337.

Source	1	Verifying Uploader's Info	Checking the uploader's profile, Checking the uploader's earlier posts, Checking the uploader's location, Checking the uploader's contact information	
	2	Tracking Digital Footprints	Searching for similar accounts, Checking account pictures, Searching for other accounts with the same post, Identifying the person, Checking embedding information of posts, Checking uploader's personal accounts (*e-mail, phone number, social media accounts, etc.*).	
	3	Identifying Automated Accounts	Checking post amounts per day, Checking any uploader's other misinformation posts, Checking if accounts post as cyborgs or bot accounts.	
	4	Twitonomy	When did they join, and what does their tweet history look like over time? What is their average tweet count per day? What percentage of their tweets are retweeted? Which users do they retweet the most? Which users do they reply to the most? What are their most used hashtags?	
	5	Checking Domains		*viewDNS.info*
	6	Searching for Social Media Investigators		*Spokeo, Pipl*
Date	1	Checking Time Stamp	Exif data (Exchangeable image file format): time, date, camera settings, device information, and even coordinates	*Jeffrey's Exif viewer, SunCalc, Wolfram Alpha*
Location	1	Locating the image or video.		*whopostedwhat*
	2	Searching for the location on a map or satellite image for cross-reference		*Google Maps, Google Earth, Yandex Map, Bing Maps, Wikimapia*
	3	Examining images or videos to identify the location.		
Motivation	1	Checking posts to see if an accidental eyewitness did it		
	2	Checking uploader's info to see if they are an activist or agitator		

	3	Checking uploader's info if they are in affiliation with a government, corporation, or research organization.	
	4	Checking uploader's info if they are in membership of online communities.	

According to the report published by First Draft, various tools, websites, and applications can be used to verify the information (Urbani, 2019). Accordingly, when acquiring information/news digitally, the five pillars of verification should be followed: Provenance, source, date, location, and motivation. Whether it is an original source, the source of information, the date of sharing, and the place of sharing should be checked, and an attempt should be made to understand the motivation of the uploader who shared the post. In this regard, it was found that the fact-checking platforms examined consist of content verified using the techniques and tools mentioned above in this context.

Table 4. Verification Tools, Applications, and Websites Used in Fact-Checking Platforms

Methods	Tools/Applications/Websites
Photo Verification	*Google Image, RevEye, Verexif, Karma Decay, Yandex Images, TinEye, Fotoforensics, Bing*
Video Verification	*InVID, watch frame by frame, deturl, YouTube Comment Scraper*
Audio Verification	*Audacity*
Finding People	*Spokeo, Pipi, WebMii, who posted what, Advanced LinkedIn search, Mapchecking*
Anonymous Web	*4chan search, 4stats.io, Gab, Reddit, TrackReddit, Nasa, Wayback Machine, Licenceplate, worldlicenceplate, Nasa Firms, Copernicus*
Domains	*ViewDNS.info, ICANN whois search, Wayback Machine*
Social Media Tools	*Snap Maps, MetaSuite*
Twitter Tools	*Twitonomy, Hoaxy, TweetDeck, InVID, Folloerwonk, TweetBeaver*
Browser Plugin	*InVID, RevEye, Wayback, CrowdTangle, Google Translate, Reverso*
Monitoring/Locating	*Spike, CrowdTangle, Google Alerts, TrackReddit, Flightradar24, Planefinder, Planespotter, Marinetraffic, Vesselfinder, Google Earth, Google Maps, Baidu Maps, Global Forest Watch*
Measuring Spread	*BuzzSumo*

Source: (Urbani, 2019)

As is known, fact-checking platforms use many digital tools, applications, and websites listed above to verify the accuracy of false information/news by carefully checking and researching. In this context, when examining the First Draft

recommendations (Urbani, 2019), it was found that the other fact-checking platforms examined as part of the research used the tools mentioned above.

Table 5. Fact-Checking Platforms and Information Disorder Types

	teyit.org		dogrulukpayi.com			
Information Disorder Type	*f*	%	*f*	%	Total	Percent
False Connection	241	67,44	250	72,55	492	70,21
Fabricated Content	33	9,30	47	13,73	81	11,70
Manipulated Content	42	11,63	14	3,92	55	7,45
Misleading Content	8	2,33	20	5,88	29	4,26
False Context	17	4,65	7	1,96	23	3,19
Parody/Satire	8	2,33	0	0,00	8	1,06
Accurate	8	2,33	0	0,00	8	1,06
Undefined	0	0,00	7	1,96	7	1,06
Imposter Content	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Total	358	100,00	345	100,00	703	100,00

According to the findings, most of the post contains many types of information disorder classified by Wardle. As can be seen from the table above: False Connection is 70,21%, Fabricated Content is 11,70%, Manipulated Content is 7,45%, Misleading Content is 4,26%, False Context is 3,19%, and Parody/Satire is 1,06%. However, it was observed that no detection was shared as Imposter Content (0.00%).

Table 6. Fact-Checking Platforms and Distribution of Information Verification Methods Used

	teyit.org		dogrulukpayi.com			
Methods	*f*	%	*f*	%	Total	Percent
Anonymous Web	302	84,36	340	98,55	642	91,32
Photo Verification	300	83,80	321	93,04	621	88,34
Video Verification	158	44,13	102	29,57	260	36,98
Twitter Tools	45	12,57	66	19,13	111	15,79
Measuring Spread	45	12,57	19	5,51	64	9,10
Monitoring/Locating	16	4,47	13	3,77	29	4,13
Social Media Tools	7	1,96	10	2,90	17	2,42
Finding People	3	0,84	1	0,29	4	0,57
Audio Verification	3	0,84	0	0,00	3	0,43
Domains	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Browser Plugin	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00

Total	358*		345*		703*	
*More than one method was used in some shares. Percentage calculations were made according to the number of 703 shares examined and their distribution between the two platforms.						

Furthermore, as seen from the table above, the methods used by both platforms to verify the information are similarly common. Overall, it can be seen that both platforms use anonymous web methods at 91.32 percent and photo verification methods at 88.34 percent. It ranked third in video verification with 36.98 percent, which is consistent with the fact that the research-based sample consists primarily of photo and video content. On the other hand, the fact that this content is mainly from the false connection type also supports this data. These results also provide information about the importance of media literacy and the methods used to combat cyberbullying.

In summary, this research provides information on media literacy issues and cyberbullying arising from digitization in literature. Numerous sources were viewed and analyzed in the study. Apparently, the topic has been studied in different areas. According to Bhat, Chang, and Linscott, cyberbullying may negatively impact the school success of exposed students. Moreover, some psychological disorders and youth suicides are linked to cyberbullying. As a result, they report that some initiatives targeting young people, families, and school personnel draw attention to media literacy and implement practices aimed at the detrimental usage of social media (Bhat, Chang, and Linscott, 2010).

Furthermore, according to Kurniasih, Kuswarno, Yanto, and Sugiana, all participants in their study use the internet at home via a computer or smartphone. Therefore, media literacy is expected to start at home to overcome cyberbullying. Schools, parents, students, regulations, and environmental conditions are critical factors in minimizing cyberbullying in children. It is essential to introduce internet features and privacy awareness, understand the legal implications, and transfer internal policies to children to avoid cyberbullying (Kurniasih, Kuswarno, Yanto, and Sugiana, 2020).

According to Bhat, Chang, and Ragan, a saturation of information communication technologies (ICTs) requires initiative-taking and comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies. At the center of efforts are the education and regulation of students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members. The foundation of effectively preventing cyberbullying is determining actions and behaviors and their consequences and boosting broad media literacy. Programming shall increase knowledge and awareness of the problems and effects of irresponsible internet service in general and cyberbullying. In addition, it should attain with the rapidly developing electronic age by considering both positive and adverse opportunities proposed by the legislation (Bhat, Chang, and Ragan, Cyberbullying in Asia, 2013).

According to Beyazit, Şimşek, and Ayhan, practical strategies for the prevention of cyberbullying are the use of information and communication technologies by adolescents on parental control, education on both information technology, and media literacy courses for parents and teachers (Beyazit, Şimşek, and Ayhan, 2017).

According to Jäger, Amado, Matos, and Pessoa, cyberbullying was related to new technical developments and usage patterns, lack of media literacy and media education, and appropriate law, control, and reporting. The approaches to combating cyberbullying recommended by experts and trainers include providing advanced information on ICTs and e-security, good rules, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement (Jäger, Amado, Matos, and Pessoa, 2010).

According to Akça, Sayımer, Tuesday, and Başak, combating cyberbullying is overseen as a type of violence at school, focusing on its causes and effects on students and preventing cyberbullying activities with examples from the world and Turkey. The concept of digital literacy or new media literacy has also been discussed as one of the tools to combat cyberbullying (Akça, Sayımer, Tuesday, and Başak, 2014).

According to Özmen, the conceptual framework of cyberbullying, the reasons for the increase in digital violence (ease of access to the internet, the anonymous

structure of the internet and the concealment of the identity of people, the desire to increase the number of likes of their posts), awareness of cyberbullying (presentation of cyberbullying in the media, the opinions of parents, teachers) new media in preventing cyberbullying Suggestions on the importance of literacy and how cyberbullying can be thwarted (Özmen, 2018).

According to Akça and Sayımer, it is to draw attention to the risks of the digital environment, especially for children, and the need for new media literacy education in this context. As a result of the study, it has been seen that there are many quantitative studies on children's internet and social network usage habits and cyberbullying experiences in many countries, including Turkey, and some of these studies have equivalent results. Some have different results depending on the sample and questionnaire. On the other hand, it has been stated that there are few studies on the effect of family surveillance on cyberbullying, and there is a need for research that focuses on the fight against cyberbullying and uses different methods and techniques (Akça and Sayımer, 2017).

The fact-checking platforms offer both societal and individual benefits. These platforms help to combat the spread of false information, protect against misinformation, and promote a more informed society. At an individual level, they help promote critical thinking and digital/media literacy, enabling individuals to make more informed decisions. Additionally, by reducing the spread of false information and combating misinformation, they can help to reduce the impact of cyberbullying, hate speech, and other forms of online harassment.

The study emphasizes the importance of media literacy and fact-checking in line with the increasing digitalization and post-truth concepts in recent years and underlines that this can be an effective tool in the fight against cyberbullying. Although there are many studies in different fields, this study provides essential details and insights into the communication literature to address the issue of fact-checking media literacy.

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