# Yeni Medya Çağında Sosyal Medya ve Dezenformasyon İlişkisi

## The Relationship Between Social Media and Disinformation in the New Media Age

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**Abstract**

With the transition from traditional media to new media, in recent years, discussions on disinformation have increased due to intentionally or unintentionally shared false information, and the issue of combating disinformation has become a major agenda item. The integration of people with new media has led to the expression of the concept of creating value together, transforming media from an object to be consumed into an organism that can be produced, shared, transformed and constantly renewed by everyone. By using social media platforms, people have found the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences worldwide; however, they have also started to be exposed to thousands of messages whose accuracy is not clear at any moment. During this process, individuals have become unable to avoid being victims of a bad effect due to the manipulation and black propaganda created by disinformation. In this context, the aim of this study is to contribute to the scientific literature on the manipulation and perception created due to disinformation, which is an important problem of the age, by scanning the literature on the causes and consequences of false information spread through social media platforms in the new media age. For this purpose, a compilation study has been presented by scanning the terms "disinformation" and "disinformation on social media".

**Keywords:** Disinformation, Social Media, New Media

**Öz**

Geleneksel medyadan yeni medyaya geçişle birlikte son yıllarda kasıtlı ya da kasıtsız paylaşılan yanlış bilgiler yüzünden dezenformasyona yönelik tartışmalar artmış ve dezenformasyonla mücadele konusu gündemi oldukça fazla meşgul eder hale gelmiştir. Yeni medya ile insan bütünleşmesi, birlikte değer yaratma kavramının telaffuz edilmesine yol açarak medyayı tüketilen bir nesne olmaktan çıkarıp; herkes tarafından üretilebilen, paylaşılan, dönüştürülen, sürekli yenilenen bir organizmaya dönüştürmüştür. Sosyal medya mecralarını kullanarak insanlar, düşüncelerini, fikirlerini, deneyimlerini dünya çapında paylaşma imkânı bulmuş; ancak aynı zamanda her an doğruluğu net olmayan binlerce mesaja maruz kalmaya başlamışlardır. Bu süreçte bireyler dezenformasyonun yarattığı manipülasyon ve kara propagandadan dolayı kötü bir etkinin kurbanı olmaktan kaçamaz hale gelmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmanın amacı, yeni medya çağında sosyal medya platformları yoluyla yayılan yanlış bilginin sebep ve sonuçları üzerine literatürü tarayarak çağın önemli problemi olan dezenformasyon nedeniyle yaratılan manipülasyon ve algının yer aldığı bilimsel alanyazına katkı sağlamaktır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda "dezenformasyon" ve "sosyal medyada dezenformasyon" terimleri taranarak derleme bir çalışma sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dezenformasyon, Sosyal Medya, Yeni Medya.

**Introduction**

The new century began as a century in which communication and human relations took a completely different form because of new media. It has become quite ordinary to know the events that develop anywhere in the world simultaneously as if they were happening right next to us. The concept of globalization was redefined as the transformation of the world into a small village, as McLuhan (1971) put it, and explained as the result of more communication and interaction. Communication established through social networks created a virtual world. Different cultures of different geographies came together on common ground due to social media tools, and mass transformations occurred.

Unlike traditional media, social media provided users with features such as content production, sharing of their production and interaction with other users. Users had the chance to use elements such as text, audio, video and photographs in their content. Users transformed from passively receiving messages to actively disseminating information. By using social media tools, people had the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences worldwide (Yağmurlu, 201, p. 6).

The skill of social media tools in accessing and rapidly disseminating information came along with some problems. Because of disinformation, distortion of information according to Turkish language association (2018), and news containing misleading and false information in the fields of culture, politics, medicine and economy, individuals and societies have encountered content that can cause serious financial, emotional and even physical damage (Fallis, 2014).

In this context, the aim of this study is to contribute to the scientific literature on the manipulation and perception created by disinformation, which is an important problem of the age, by reviewing the literature on the causes and consequences of false information spread through social media tools in the new media age. For this purpose, a compilation study was presented by scanning the terms "disinformation" and "disinformation on social media".

## 1.     The New Media Age

Especially in the last decade, new media, which has changed individual and social culture, lifestyle and even economic parameters, has entered our lives with many advantages as well as a series of negativities. With the cheap, easy and fast communication opportunities it offers, new media has become a medium that everyone from seven to seventy can easily access in the virtual environment, regardless of time and place. Access to information and the circulation of information have never been this fast in human history before new media. The easy and fast circulation of information has also brought the problem of misinformation to the agenda. New media, with its ability to bring together different environments known as multimedia or multiple environments, allows the use of media such as text, still images, moving images and sounds together (Lister et al, 2003, p.9).

New media is a multi-media area that is used via computers, the Internet and later mobile devices, where anyone who has these devices can follow the content created quite easily and cheaply, where the user can produce content themselves and comment on the created content (Thompson, 1995, p.132).

New media has become the most important part of today's people with its features such as communication, access to information, entertainment, and transformation in the economy. The integration of new media with people will provide the rise of the concept of co-creation of value, transforming the media from being an object to be consumed into a cybernetic organism

that can be produced, shared, transformed, constantly renewed and ultimately articulated by everyone (Yanık, 2016, p.901).

New media, which is integrated with people, affects people's values, perception, culture, in short, their lifestyles. From this point of view, it is inevitable that new media will need security measures that will positively affect society and some regulations so that it does not disrupt social order. Before reaching the unpredictable results of the chaos caused by the manipulation via the circulation of false information might bring, the necessity of certain regulations and awareness efforts regarding the issue of false information and perception formed in social networks are among the warnings of social scientists. With manipulation, the structure and content of the message between the receiver and the sender in the communication process are intervened. The main purpose of this intervention is to plant wrong ideas in minds, to change ideas or to direct ideas. Therefore, it can be said that manipulation is a kind of persuasion that is consciously designed to ensure the production of consent (Elitaş, 2022,p. 115).

## 2.    The term "Disinformation"

In the last 10-15 years, social media platforms such as X, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become the first source of information for disseminating and following news. Thus, these platforms have the power to direct and manipulate people.  Considering the existence of many accounts that create false information by opening fake accounts on social media and the lack of a mechanism to reveal the accuracy of the content they share, the impact of fake information on the international arena can be understood. For example, according to a study conducted in the USA, the reading rate of fake news about Trump published on Facebook and other social media outlets exceeded the reading rate of the Washington Post (Özcan, 2018, p.3).

With the transition from traditional media to new media, discussions on disinformation have increased in recent years due to false information shared intentionally or unintentionally, and the issue of combating disinformation has become a major topic on the agenda. Disinformation, which means incorrect information, is generally considered black propaganda because it uses false information and aims to manipulate. It is not the accidental transmission of incorrect information as in "misinformation", which is false information, but is done consciously to weaken opponents or manage perceptions (Bektaş 2002, p. 38).

The first use of the concept of disinformation comes from the definition of "disinformation", which was defined as activities aimed at deceiving rivals during the Soviet Union period. (Kux, 1958, p.19) Disinformation is defined as the creation, presentation and dissemination of verifiable false or misleading information that may harm the public, for the purpose of economic gain or deliberately misleading the public (European Court of Auditors, 2020).

The term disinformation, which means false information created to harm and far from reality, is often used incorrectly instead of the terms misinformation and malinformation. First of all, it should be noted that these three concepts are different from each other. Disinformation is broadly defined as the intentional spread of false information intended to mislead or harm, according to the U.S. Department of State (Nemr & Gangware, 2019), which is largely consistent with other definitions of disinformation.

The term misinformation is defined by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) as information that is false but not produced with the intention of harming. Known as the unintentional sending of false or misleading messages to the public, misinformation does not aim to harm. It is the concealment of the truth or the provision of false information with the aim of influencing the

masses. Anti-vaccination posts against the 2019 Coronavirus can be given as examples of misinformation that has the power to change the masses' decisions and opinions on a certain issue. The delivery of correct information to the masses with malicious intent to harm someone is called malinformation.

Zou and Zafrani (2018) describe these three concepts, which are incorrectly used interchangeably, as follows: These concepts differ in terms of the originality of the content and the intent of the source. In disinformation, the message is false and the source edits the message with malicious intent. In misinformation, the content is false but the intent may not be malicious. Misinformation is the unintentional transmission of false information. Malinformation is the deliberate transmission of content to the masses in order to cause harm.

**Tablo 1.** Differences Between Disinformation, Misinformation and Malinformation

|  | **Originality of the Content** | **Intention** |
|---|---|---|
| **Disinformation** | False | Malicious |
| **Misinformation** | False | Unknown |
| **Malinformation** | True | Malicious |

Journalism, "Fake News" and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Practice, published by UNESCO in 2018, made the distinction between disinformation, misinformation and malinformation based on whether the source of the message was intentional or not. Many countries are trying to control the spread of false information by enacting laws on the subject. Examples of these include the Communication Network Enforcement Act (NETzDG) that went into effect in Germany at the beginning of 2018, the Honest Ads Act that remained as a bill in the US in 2019, and the Fake News Bill that was postponed in Brazil in 2022. In our country, in 2022, the Center for Combating Disinformation was established under the Presidency of Communications and a weekly bulletin containing false information was started to be issued as a warning. The Disinformation Law was enacted as a law that came into effect in order to "prevent the spread of false information".

Hamm (2020) divided disinformation campaigns into 4 categories:

• Foreign influence operations: Other countries sharing false information to undermine another country.

• Political disinformation: Political parties sharing false information to undermine other political parties.

• Profit-oriented disinformation: Sharing false information for the purpose of making a profit.

• Issue-based disinformation: Sharing false information around a topic to manipulate perceptions.

The aim of disinformation, as Hamm emphasizes, is to manipulate public opinion with false information. The most important rule in manipulation is to keep the real purpose secret. In order to operate this rule, strategies such as lying, emotional exploitation, playing the victim role, humiliation, emotional violence, deprivation and creating a sense of guilt are usually used (Björnsson, 2016, p. 637-653).

### 3.      Social Media Tools

In the last decade, journalism has shifted to social media due to its low cost, easier and faster interaction, and widespread use. However, the deliberate serving of false information on social media, "fake news", has caused us to question the reliability of social media again (Khan, 2020, p. 1).

Social media tools can be classified as blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networks, video sharing networks, photo sharing networks, audio and music sharing networks, location tools, social bookmarking networks and virtual worlds according to their content and creation purpose (Bostancı, 2015, p.58). According to Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008), the features of social media tools can be grouped under five headings as allowing content sharing, social media platforms being based on social interaction, participants in social media being able to create, share and discuss all content, all content being able to be provided as a link to other external networks and members actively participating in the site having their own accounts.

Mayfield (2008) states that social media platforms are the most important media tools of the digital age and also lists their features as follows:

• Participation: It provides feedback advantage to its users due to its dialogic, symmetrical and interactive features. It makes users more active and effective.

• Openness: Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. It encourages information, voting and commenting. There are almost no obstacles to logging in and using the content.

• Dialogue: Unlike traditional media, social media platforms have a structure that allows two-way communication.

• Community: On social media platforms, users can join communities according to their areas of interest (sports, culture-art, finance, politics, etc.) and interact with users with similar interests.

• Connectivity: Among the most important features of Web 2.0-based social media platforms is the ability to connect with other platforms and increase users' experiences by enriching the content.

Fake news shared on social media are short articles that are maliciously constructed and contain attention-grabbing elements such as music, sound, and striking colors, without any substantiated information. Ciampaglia et al.'s (2018) study demonstrates that users are more likely to think that news is accurate and unbiased when it is shared by someone they trust. Moreover, since platforms algorithmically prioritize posts by users, especially those of close friends they interact with, the spread of misinformation is encouraged. Algorithmic bias, in this case, stems from the design of most social media platforms that prioritize interaction and favor popular content over trustworthy content in users' feeds (as cited in Persily & Tucker, 2020).

In their study to examine the spread of misinformation, Vosoughi et al. (2018) tracked 126,000 separate posts on Twitter covering different topics between 2006 and 2017. They found that the posts were tweeted and retweeted more than 4.5 million times by 3 million people. Among these posts, false ones spread significantly faster, wider (i.e. to more users), and deeper (i.e. with more reshares) than true ones.

When the literature on disinformation and social media is reviewed, it is seen that false information spread through social media circulates faster and more widely than true information. Studies on the subject also point out how convincing fake news is when it appears on social media. With today's technology, the simultaneous sharing of posts on social media all

over the world has accelerated the news information cycle, allowing information to "trend" and go "viral" much more quickly (Garfield, 2011).

Jang et al. (2018) proposed two approaches to control misinformation other than government regulation: the literacy approach and the corrective approach. The literacy approach suggests educating users to distinguish misinformation from knowledge and to increase their cognitive abilities. The corrective approach is to establish fact-checking sites that provide users with more opportunities to check real news and to remove fake news. The first approach can be criticized because it places responsibility on citizens for the spread of misinformation and will only have a limited effect as the volume of content removed increases.

The following demands are included in the initiatives of developed countries to improve the moderation models of social media sites:

• Increase transparency in how social media sites create their algorithms and how they use the data they obtain.

• Social media sites take more responsibility to prevent the spread of misinformation, prioritize and develop appropriate methods for detecting disinformation and effective content moderation.

• Develop effective methods to strengthen society against disinformation and increase cooperation and communication with civil society organizations and relevant public institutions (Balkan and Ülgen, 2023).

The relationship between social media and disinformation in the new media age highlights both the opportunities and challenges posed by digital platforms. While social media has transformed how information is disseminated and accessed, it has also become a breeding ground for the spread of disinformation. The rapid pace of content sharing, the lack of regulation, and the prevalence of algorithms that prioritize engagement over accuracy contribute significantly to the spread of false or misleading narratives. As a result, individuals are increasingly vulnerable to manipulation and deception. However, this digital landscape also offers opportunities for combating disinformation, such as through media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, and greater platform accountability. Moving forward, a collaborative effort among governments, tech companies, and citizens is essential to foster a more informed and responsible online environment. Ultimately, addressing disinformation in the social media era requires a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of truth, promoting critical thinking, and ensuring that digital spaces are used ethically and responsibly.

**Conclusion**

In the new media age, the development of new communication technologies such as social media has greatly affected daily life and social structures. The use of new communication technologies in many areas such as education, business, economy and health has required prioritizing the concept of disinformation because the increase in disinformation poses serious threats to individuals and societies.

Unlike traditional media, social media allows users to search for information and share their own content within their own networks. The algorithm of social media allows users to follow and recommend content within their own networks according to their behavioral patterns or interests (Tufekci, 2015).

The aim of the study is to discuss the source of false information spread through social media tools in the context of the concept of disinformation in the literature, its differences from misinformation and malinformation, and possible solutions to the spread of false information. Types of false information are widely shared by users assuming it to be true. Disinformation is

the sharing of false or untrue information with malicious intent to undermine institutions, individuals, or society. The manipulative features of information that is intentionally spread in society cause economic, cultural, and physical harm to users.

As Castells (2005) puts it; "as societies lose their dominance over networks, the social determinism of networks will increase, the power of flows overtaking the flows of power". Considering the feature of social media that spreads false information, it is urgent to take measures to solve the problem in a democratic way.

**Conflict of Interest Declaration/ *Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı:***
There are no potential conflicts of interest in this study
*Bu çalışmada herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.*

**Etik/ *Ethic:***

Çalışmada bilimsel, etik ilkelere uyulmuş ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmalar kaynakçada belirtilmiştir.

*In the study, scientific and ethical principles were followed and all the studies used were indicated in the bibliography.*

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