



A New Dilemma for Turkish Public Administration: Combating Disinformation in the Context of Public Policy

Türk Kamu Yönetimi İçin Yeni Bir Açmaz: Kamu Politikası Bağlamında Dezenformasyonla Mücadele

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ABSTRACT

Today, when technological developments and digitalisation have become widespread rapidly, it has become quite easy to access and disseminate information. However, this process has also led to an increase in misleading and false information, thereby posing serious threats to individuals, social order, and public administration. Disinformation, which refers to systematically produced and disseminated misleading and manipulative activities aimed at specific goals, is a pressing issue that currently occupies the agenda of many countries due to the grave dangers it entails. Accordingly, the study addresses disinformation, which has become a significant problem, with a focus on Türkiye, and analyzes the legal, institutional, and practical dimensions of the fight against disinformation within the context of public policy.

The study includes the phenomenon of disinformation, the effects of disinformation on public administration, and the developments that pave the way for disinformation. The aim of the study is to reveal the effects of disinformation on public administration and to contribute to the development of mechanisms to combat it. In terms of methodology, the study makes use of the literature and the process model from public policy approaches. The study concludes that there is a directly proportional relationship between technological transformation and disinformation, that public administration is one of the most significantly affected mechanisms by disinformation, and that the fight against disinformation in Türkiye has recently taken on an institutional form. Due to the limited number of studies addressing the issue of disinformation in the context of public policy, this study is expected to contribute to the literature.

Keywords: Disinformation, Combating Disinformation, Public Administration, Public Policy, Social Media

Öz

Teknolojik gelişmeler ve dijitalleşmenin hızla yaygınlaştığı günümüzde, bilgiye ulaşmak ve onu yaymak oldukça kolaylaşmıştır. Ancak bu süreç yanıltıcı ve yanlış bilgilerin artışıyla dolayısıyla bireylere, toplumsal düzene ve kamu yönetime karşı ciddi tehlikeleri de beraberinde getirmiştir. Sistematik biçimde üretilen, belirli amaçlar doğrultusunda yayılan, yanıltıcı ve yönlendirici faaliyetleri ifade eden dezenformasyon büyük tehlikeler barındırması nedeniyle günümüzde pek çok ülkenin gündemini yoğun bir şekilde meşgul etmektedir. Çalışma buradan hareketle önemli bir sorun haline alan dezenformasyonu Türkiye özelinde ele almakta ve kamu politikası bağlamında dezenformasyonla mücadelenin yasal, kurumsal, uygulama boyutlarını analiz etmektedir.

Çalışmada dezenformasyon olgusu, dezenformasyonun kamu yönetimine olan etkileri, dezenformasyona zemin hazırlayan gelişmelere yer verilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı dezenformasyonun kamu yönetimine olan etkilerini ortaya koymak ve ona karşı mücadele mekanizmalarının geliştirilmesine katkı sunmaktır. Yöntemsel açıdan literatürden ve kamu politikası yaklaşımlarından süreç modelinden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışmada teknolojik dönüşüm ve dezenformasyon arasında doğru orantılı bir ilişki saptanmış; kamu yönetiminin dezenformasyondan etkilenen en önemli mekanizmalardan biri olduğu ve Türkiye’de dezenformasyonla mücadelenin son dönemlerde kurumsal bir hal aldığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Kamu politikası bağlamında dezenformasyon konusunu ele alan çok fazla araştırma olmaması nedeniyle çalışmanın literatüre katkı sağlaması öngörülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dezenformasyon, Dezenformasyonla Mücadele, Kamu Yönetimi, Kamu Politikası, Sosyal Medya

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INTRODUCTION

Disinformation has become one of the most significant concerns of the digital age we live in. Especially during extraordinary times such as political elections, earthquakes, floods, and pandemics, disinformation tends to emerge more prominently in situations that involve the public and are led by public actors. Often, it manipulates the public, distracts the attention of public administrators, and disrupts the functioning, stability, and plans of public institutions, ultimately leading them into crisis. Looking at recent history, we observe several instances of disinformation attempts during events such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK, the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and the earthquakes in Türkiye on February 6, 2023. Therefore, a new and powerful issue, namely disinformation, has emerged in both societies and governments today.

Disinformation has become a global threat to many areas, including freedom of expression, democracy, and security. Undoubtedly, the rise of digital technologies, the internet, social media, and many other factors have significantly contributed to its increasing scale. These factors have made disinformation faster, cheaper, unregulated, and harder to trace. It is fast because, thanks to technology, it can spread across the world within seconds. It is cheap because disinformation can be spread anywhere and at any time where there is internet access. It is unregulated and hard to track because there are many digital platforms, each with millions of users and billions of content shares. Monitoring and regulating all of this in a stable manner is incredibly difficult.

In the face of all these challenges, the fight against disinformation today is carried out through a variety of collaborative and diverse strategies. Governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, technology companies, artificial intelligence, fact-checkers, and universities are among the most important partners in this struggle. Digital media literacy, public awareness, disinformation education and campaigns, strategic communication, public diplomacy, and legal and administrative sanctions are among the most commonly used strategies in combating disinformation. These strategies are sometimes used independently and at other times in tandem, with the goal of achieving the most effective response.

Wars, economic crises, pandemics, earthquakes, floods, and political elections are all extraordinary situations that concern the entire society, and during these times, it is vitally important that public actors convey information in an open, clear, and transparent manner. Disinformation, defined as the spread of false or misleading information, typically emerges during such extraordinary periods and includes strategies to manipulate the public and undermine the stability of states and institutions.

The European Union has recently implemented successive legal regulations in the fight against disinformation. Following this, countries such as Germany, France, the UK, India, Türkiye, Australia, Russia and many others have recognized the threat of disinformation and carried out legal reforms. Therefore, it can be said that disinformation has become an extremely important global issue that requires urgent action. This study focuses on this significant and current problem by examining the legal and institutional dimensions of the fight against disinformation within the context of public policy, specifically in the case of Türkiye.

In this study, which addresses the steps taken to combat disinformation in Türkiye, along with institutional and legal regulations, the conceptual framework and characteristics of disinformation are first presented. Second, the relationship between technological transformation and the rise of disinformation is clarified. Third, the effects of disinformation on public administration, the fight against disinformation as a public policy, and the legal and institutional regulations implemented in the context of public policy in Türkiye are discussed.

1. Conceptual Framework and Characteristics

Disinformation has the potential to cause significant harm to individuals, societies, and states, leading to various crises at local, national, or international levels. It is critical to clarify disinformation—defined as the distortion of accurate (or verifiable) information for specific purposes, turning it into a tool of perception, threat, and crisis—by comparing it with related or associated concepts. In this context, to better understand the core framework of the study, key concepts such as disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, misinformation, and infodemic are explained under this section.

The concept of disinformation originates from the Latin term *informationem* (nominative *informatio*), meaning draft, concept, idea, or information communicated about a specific subject (Etymonline, 2024a). While the term itself is quite old, its use with the prefix “-dis” (indicating absence, negation, or opposition) to convey different meanings and functions is relatively more recent. Disinformation is defined as deliberately and often covertly disseminated false information intended to influence public opinion or conceal the truth (Merriam-Webster, 2024). In the literature, various definitions of disinformation can be found. For instance, disinformation is described as false information deliberately and effectively communicated to influence individuals, societies, or nations. It is misleading information with a deceptive function, posing a critical and serious threat to the quality of information (Fallis, 2015, p. 401). As these definitions suggest, an honest mistake, an act of negligence, or an unintentional error does not qualify as disinformation. Instead, disinformation requires deliberate intent, a purpose of deception, and the presence of false information. Therefore, disinformation can be characterized as a problematic form of misinformation, organized and intentional enough to rule out randomness.

Another significant concept is manipulation. According to the Turkish Language Association (TDK) dictionary, manipulation is defined as “altering or directing information through additions and omissions” (TDK, 2024). Derived from the Latin term *manipulus* (meaning to manage or control individuals) (Etymonline, 2024b), manipulation can be described as “deliberate actions intended to deceive and guide users by controlling or artificially influencing a situation” (Kanaç, 2018, p. 11). Although manipulation and disinformation share similarities in terms of “directing,” these concepts generally differ from one another. Manipulation primarily focuses on steering human behavior to achieve a specific outcome, whereas disinformation is based on the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information (Pathak, K. Srihari, & Natu, 2021, p. 358).

The concept of misinformation has recently become one of the most frequently encountered terms and is often confused with disinformation. Misinformation can be briefly defined as erroneous information (Arslan, 2025, p. 366). Misinformation refers to the spread of false information without intent or a motive to cause harm. While misinformation typically arises from sharing unverified information, disinformation involves the deliberate dissemination of false information (Adams et al., 2023, p. 1437). In other words, disinformation occurs when information is intentionally falsified and deliberately spread (M. d'I. Treen et al., 2020). Therefore, the distinguishing factor between the two concepts lies in the intent—whether benevolent or malicious—behind the act of spreading false information.

Propaganda derives from the Latin term “*propagare*”, meaning to advance, expand, disseminate, or increase. While the concept has ancient roots, its rise to prominence and widespread use is relatively recent. Its historical origin traces back to the 17th century, specifically to the Roman Catholic Cardinals’ Commission (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) established by the Pope to spread Catholic faith (Cull et al., 2003, p. 317). However, propaganda gained popularity in the first half of the 20th century during the two world wars that profoundly affected the entire globe and the subsequent bipolar world order

led by the Soviet Union and the United States. Propaganda refers to systematically disseminated biased information, typically by a political leader, party, or government, aimed at spreading or promoting an ideology or viewpoint. It achieves this goal by targeting the emotions and thoughts of the masses (Parlak, 2011, pp. 650–651). Propaganda and disinformation share similarities in their distortion of information to serve specific purposes. However, propaganda is generally focused on promoting a political ideology, whereas disinformation can be carried out for a wide variety of purposes. Propaganda uses either accurate or false information to promote an idea or ideology, while disinformation deliberately spreads false information. Therefore, while both target “information,” they differ in their purposes and methods.

Lastly, another concept that must be addressed is infodemic, a term widely used during the pandemic period. Derived from the combination of the English words information and epidemic, this term refers to the rapid spread of fake news, speculation, misinformation, and manipulated information (Eyüboğlu & Kodak, 2023, p. 530). As a concept describing the dissemination of information, particularly misinformation, infodemic tends to become more prominent during extraordinary situations such as pandemics, earthquakes, or floods, making it more difficult for people to access accurate information. Disinformation and infodemic share similarities in terms of the “spread” of false information. However, while disinformation is defined as “false and deliberately created information intended to harm an individual, social group, organization, or country” (Ferreras, 2024), infodemic refers to a condition that complicates or even obstructs access to accurate information. As can be understood from this fundamental conceptual analysis, there are many terms that share similarities with disinformation. However, significant differences generally exist between disinformation and these related concepts.

Disinformation has several distinctive characteristics. These characteristics can be summarized as follows (Silva & Vaz, 2024; Levak, 2020, pp. 30–32; Broda & Strömbäck, 2024, pp. 160–161; Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020, pp. 4–5):

- It is intentional: Disinformation is deliberately created and disseminated to deceive or manipulate the target audience.
- It distorts facts and accurate information: Disinformation often presents facts or accurate information in a distorted manner to serve a specific purpose or agenda.
- It is not accidental: The act of distorting information, misleading people, or creating perceptions is not accidental. Disinformation is a systematic, organized, and planned activity.
- It targets emotions: Disinformation focuses on sensitive topics for society, triggering emotions like fear, anger, and resentment. This, in turn, amplifies attention, engagement, and sensationalism.
- It has a specific purpose: Disinformation is carried out with a particular aim in mind. For example, it can serve to harm individuals, institutions, societies, or states directly; erode trust; disrupt order and functionality; shape perceptions; manipulate opinions; incite economic crises; provoke public unrest; and even contribute to war.
- It relies on anonymous and misleading sources: Disinformation often originates from unverifiable, untraceable, and unreliable sources, making it difficult to identify and combat.
- Disinformation can manifest itself in many different forms and across various platforms: Today, disinformation can appear in written, visual, and auditory forms on various platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, X (Twitter), Snapchat, Spotify, Instagram, or television.

- It has proliferated with technological advancements: Although disinformation itself is an ancient phenomenon, its emergence as a significant global issue is relatively recent. While disinformation has existed as long as human communication, its modern form leverages technology to achieve greater speed, impact, and influence. Today, its defining characteristic is its broader dissemination, increased potency, and expanded reach and audience.

2. Technological Transformation and the Rise of Disinformation

With the pervasive digitalization surrounding humanity today, the practices of accessing, utilizing, and disseminating information have undergone a complete transformation. While it is now possible to access information within seconds and share it worldwide in the same timeframe, this technological transformation also brings significant challenges and the potential for crises. Though the time- and space-transcending nature of technological advancements is often seen as a functional and beneficial asset for societies and states, it simultaneously introduces considerable difficulties (Aguilar Viana, 2021, p. 29). One of the core factors enabling these challenges and crises is disinformation, which manipulates accurate information to make it misleading and false for specific purposes.

Disinformation has been significantly advancing as a national and international problem, driven by the development, proliferation, and increased accessibility of technology. Undoubtedly, one of the primary mechanisms most affected by this phenomenon is the state and its public administration, which acts as a bridge connecting the government to its people. Public administration fulfills critical responsibilities such as ensuring the functioning of the state, meeting societal needs, delivering public services, and maintaining public order and operations. Disinformation can disrupt these structures, processes, and operations in various ways, leading to severe crises. Thus, it has become imperative for public administration to develop effective methods, approaches, and mechanisms to combat disinformation. Likewise, public administrators must be well-prepared and trained to address and counteract disinformation effectively.

Disinformation frequently emerges during extraordinary circumstances such as pandemics, wildfires, earthquakes, and floods, as well as exceptional periods like political elections, wars, economic crises, and social upheavals, adversely affecting public perception. In this sense, disinformation acts as a form of misinformation epidemic, which, if not addressed promptly and effectively, can become chronic and open the door to severe damage. As previously mentioned, the area where this damage is felt most acutely is public administration. This is because public administration—the state itself—is the primary and fundamental actor during extraordinary and exceptional situations. Therefore, the segment most exposed to disinformation is the public administration, public administrators and governments, which are the primary actors in the fight against disinformation.

Technological transformation affects both societies and states (and their public administrations). The impact on states is primarily reflected in the gradual transformation of the methods, systems, tools, and equipment used to deliver services. The motivation behind this transformation lies in aspects such as providing faster, more efficient, effective, and higher-quality services, reducing costs, and simplifying access to these services. As a result, digital platforms, applications, services, websites, and virtual activities have inevitably become an integral part of daily life. At this point, the shift from the analog world to the digital world has become an unavoidable reality for both societies and states.

The most significant connection between technological transformation and our subject is disinformation. There is a direct correlation between technological advancements and the increasing prevalence of disinformation. This is because technological transformation has introduced numerous tools (such as the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence) that make disinformation more powerful and effective while also increasing its variety and prevalence. As a result, the modern world

faces significant challenges in combating disinformation. In recent years, disinformation has particularly gained momentum through social media platforms, creating a broader context for misinformation dissemination (Gjerazi & Skana, 2023, p. 364).

With technological advancements and digitalization, there are now numerous social media platforms of various structures and types. Disinformation can manifest on these platforms in a wide variety of forms, with high frequency, speed, and significant impact. This situation poses considerable difficulties for countries in identifying the sources of disinformation, tracking it, combating it, and developing preventive measures. In response to these challenges, countries are continuously restructuring their public administrations in legal, organizational, and technological terms and establishing new methods, procedures, and principles to combat disinformation. Various images and videos on social media that attempt to create perceptions, advertisements and news broadcasts on television, campaign materials used during political election processes, fabricated information, documents, and statements, unrealistic products on websites, or openly accessible pages, dictionaries, and forums (such as Everipedia and Wikipedia) that anyone can easily manipulate, impersonated or “hacked” public websites, AI-supported deepfake content, and many more are among the commonly encountered tools, methods, and examples of disinformation today.

A disinformation attempt involving the hijacking of a social media account belonging to an individual with millions of followers or a political party leader, the takeover of a globally broadcasted news or financial channel, or a state website with critical functions can reach millions of people within seconds and cause significant damage. Thus, the digital world, which has emerged through technological transformation, has a structure that diversifies, spreads, and generates disinformation.

Artificial intelligence (AI), which is becoming increasingly prevalent and integrated into all areas of life, is considered one of the most advanced developments brought about by technological transformation. AI can be defined as the ability of intelligent computers, machines, or artificial entities to perform logical actions, solve problems, complete tasks, make predictions, and engage in communication and interaction, similar to biological entities like humans (Zuniga et al., 2024, pp. 320-321). In other words, AI refers to machines acquiring certain human-specific attributes and autonomously utilizing them.

The capability of AI to accelerate and facilitate the processes of generating and disseminating information makes it an exceptionally effective and unique feature for disinformation. AI has the potential to use visual and auditory imagery (such as deepfake content, fake voices, and written depictions) to significantly influence societies, institutions, and governments, distort perceptions, and interfere with decision-making processes. Consequently, in the current era, disinformation has integrated with new and unconventional technologies like AI, making it more impactful and destructive than ever before.

Today, individuals can find themselves caught up in disinformation due to various inclinations. A person seeking greater financial gain may be drawn to news about investment opportunities; someone desiring a healthy lifestyle or hoping for a cure for an existing illness may be swayed by manipulative medical treatment information; and a politically ambitious individual may show heightened interest in declarations, documents, or content that claims to offer an advantage over a rival. Disinformation thrives particularly in relation to these and similar scenarios, targeting the individuals, institutions, and groups involved in such matters.

The examples highlighted above reflect developments introduced by technological transformation that have simultaneously provided a fertile ground for disinformation to proliferate. In other words, disinformation has been able to strengthen and become more effective through the opportunities

created by technological advancements. These examples also underscore both the critical importance of combating disinformation today and the significant challenges inherent in this process.

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon; it has a historically deep-rooted background. What is new is the increased prevalence of disinformation, its larger-scale impact, and its ability to manifest in a wide variety of forms and structures, all facilitated by advancing technology. Thus, technological transformation is not only a process that simplifies the functioning of societies and governments but also one that eases the operations of disinformation. Technology makes accessing, producing, and disseminating information remarkably simple and rapid, all at a very low cost. Disinformation actors take advantage of these opportunities, using cost-free platforms such as social media or messaging applications to repeatedly re-establish their presence at every opportunity. In fact, this reality constitutes one of the greatest challenges in combating disinformation. While public administrations must make substantial investments—such as gathering expertise, building infrastructure, and conducting technological research—to fight disinformation, producing and spreading disinformation incurs no costs for its perpetrators. This disparity highlights the uphill battle faced in addressing the issue.

3. The Effects of Disinformation on Public Administration

In the context of public administration, "information" is an indispensable element because public service is built on social communication, the flow of information, and the control, storage, and processing of data. Therefore, the exposure of public administration to disinformation or the manipulation of public information and data can lead to significant crises within public administration and, consequently, society at large. In other words, disinformation within public administration can result in social problems, threats to public security, the erosion of public trust, the inability of public administration to fulfill its fundamental duties, a loss of confidence in public administrators, the weakening of public institutions, and the disruption of public processes.

One of the fundamental characteristics of disinformation is also that it brings many negative consequences by distorting information, which is one of the most important components of decision-making processes. In this context, disinformation, by affecting public opinion, preferences, and tendencies, can potentially change the course of an election, weaken efforts to combat a major disaster, or cause internal unrest in a country. This situation has manifested itself concretely in many recent events. For example, during the wildfires in Australia in 2020, which reached disaster-level proportions, official authorities stated that the fires were caused by lightning strikes; however, disinformation rapidly spread on social media claiming that the fires were started by arsonists (Nguyen & Bogle, 2020). Similarly, during the 2022 national elections in Brazil, it was found that fake images and videos generated by artificial intelligence were used to spread false information (Ünver, 2023, p. 2). In 2017, as a result of hate speech that spread rapidly on social media, a military operation was organised against the Rohingyas (Muslim people) living in the Rakhine State of Myanmar and hundreds of thousands of people living there had to migrate to other countries as refugees (Schissler, 2024, s. 1-2). These examples concretely demonstrate that an effective public administration should be free from disinformation and highlight the importance of combating it. However, in the digital age brought about by technological transformation, achieving this has become increasingly complex and challenging. As demonstrated in many studies, there is a significant relationship between the rise in disinformation and the widespread use of social media, the increasing use of digital platforms and the internet, as well as the development of mobile technology (Selakovic, et al., 2024; Nasiri & Hashemzadeh, 2025; Shu et al., 2020, pp. 3–4). This is because digitalization has increased and diversified sources of disinformation while drastically reducing the costs of accessing, reproducing, and disseminating information, thereby empowering disinformation actors (KaabOmeir, et al., 2024, s. 430).

An effective fight against disinformation can be achieved through a series of important steps, such as implementing legal and economic measures, making fact-checking systematic and swift, developing artificial intelligence tools, promoting contemporary media literacy, fostering national and international cooperation, expanding public-private partnerships at local, national, and international levels, producing updated plans, policies, and strategies, and actively utilizing technology to combat disinformation (Obushna et al., 2023, s. 471). Similarly, to mitigate the negative effects of disinformation on public administration, it is essential for public administrators and infrastructure to be prepared for such challenges, and for citizens to make informed and rational decisions throughout this process.

In the digital age we live in, there are significant and diverse obstacles to accessing accurate information and truth. One of the main reasons for this is disinformation, which permeates almost every aspect of human activity and daily life, including public administration systems. Disinformation and its derivatives make it difficult to distinguish between real and fake news, creating substantial problems, particularly for traditional institutions and public administration. This is because public administration is built on information and relies on data to perform its core functions. Moreover, public administration occupies a unique and privileged position in the creation, collection, utilization, and storage of information. As an open system, public administration refines the information and inputs it receives from its environment and transforms them into public services. For this reason, it is continually targeted by various trends, interests, groups, ideas, demands, and, notably, disinformation actors. In other words, the critical and privileged structure of public administration makes it a target for various parties seeking to advance their own goals and interests.

As can be seen, public administration, which conducts its activities through information, data, communication, plans, and programs, has a dual structure: it is both exposed to disinformation and actively involved in combating it. The extensive amount of information and data possessed by public administration due to the services it provides makes it particularly vulnerable to disinformation. In this context, public administration is at risk in various areas, including disinformation in public services, disinformation in public information or news presentation, disinformation targeting public employees, disinformation in public decision-making processes, and disinformation in government activities (Privy Council Office, 2024). Mitigating these risks fundamentally depends on the implementation of effective public policies. For this reason, the following section addresses the issue of disinformation within the context of public policy, aiming to provide a detailed and clear explanation.

4. Purpose, Scope, Method and Findings of the Research

4.1. Purpose and Scope

The effects of disinformation, which has become more widespread in the digital age with technological transformation, on public administration and the topic of combating disinformation have become a highly important area of study. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the effects of disinformation on individuals, social structures, and public administration, as well as to evaluate the strategies followed in combating disinformation within the context of public policy. The study aims to reveal Türkiye's disinformation combat strategies with its legal and institutional dimensions and analyze how disinformation is addressed in the context of public policy. Given that the study focuses on a current issue, is on the agenda of countries at the global level, and there is a lack of extensive research on disinformation in public administration in Türkiye, it is expected to contribute to the literature. This study, which addresses disinformation within the context of public policy, particularly focuses on the practices in Türkiye. In this context, the legal and institutional framework of disinformation combat strategies in Türkiye has been analyzed.

4.2. Method

In this study, the literature on disinformation is utilised and the issue of disinformation is evaluated within the framework of the process model from public policy approaches. The process model serves as a roadmap that systematizes the public policy formulation processes. In this model, public policies are generally created through a specific process. This process consists of the stages of problem identification, definition, agenda-setting, option identification, decision-making, implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of this implementation. In the study, the issue of combating disinformation is addressed within the context of public policy, using the process model framework.

4.3. Findings

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon; however, with the digitalisation brought about by technological transformation, it has become more widespread and difficult to control and combat. In this study, it has been observed that digital platforms that have developed with technological transformation have a significant impact on the spread of disinformation and this situation has significant effects on public administration.

Disinformation has been on the rise in both Türkiye and the world, particularly in matters that concern the general public. For instance, it has been observed that disinformation increases during events such as wildfires, earthquakes, floods, or election periods.

It has been understood that public policies developed to combat disinformation, both globally and in Türkiye, have followed a trajectory parallel to increasing digitalization. Accordingly, there has been a growing tendency toward increased regulation of social media and digital platforms in both Türkiye and around the world. These findings indicate that combating disinformation has become increasingly important and that rather than adopting a single strategy, multiple strategies should be implemented.

In Türkiye, the public policies developed to fight disinformation have largely been realized within legal, institutional, educational, and collaborative frameworks.

5. Combating Disinformation in the Context of Public Policy

Public policy refers to the actions or inactions chosen by governments (Dye, 2013, p. 3). It is defined as the deliberate action or inaction of the state aimed at solving societal problems (Akdoğan, 2011, p. 77). For an issue to be addressed within the context of public policy, it must first come onto the agenda of the political authority, which is one of the public policy actors. This can occur either spontaneously or through demands made by various segments of society. From this point, the issue undergoes a series of processes, eventually reaching the stage where it can be evaluated within the public policy context. This process is commonly referred to as the public policy cycle.

The public policy cycle is a concept designed to organize, simplify, and sequence the complexities of policymaking. Its origin is attributed to Harold D. Lasswell, regarded as the founder of public policy (Capano & Pritoni, 2022, p. 5). This cycle breaks down the large and complex structure of public policy processes into manageable parts, allowing for step-by-step analysis. The public policy cycle generally consists of the following stages (Bridgman & Davis, 2003, p. 100):

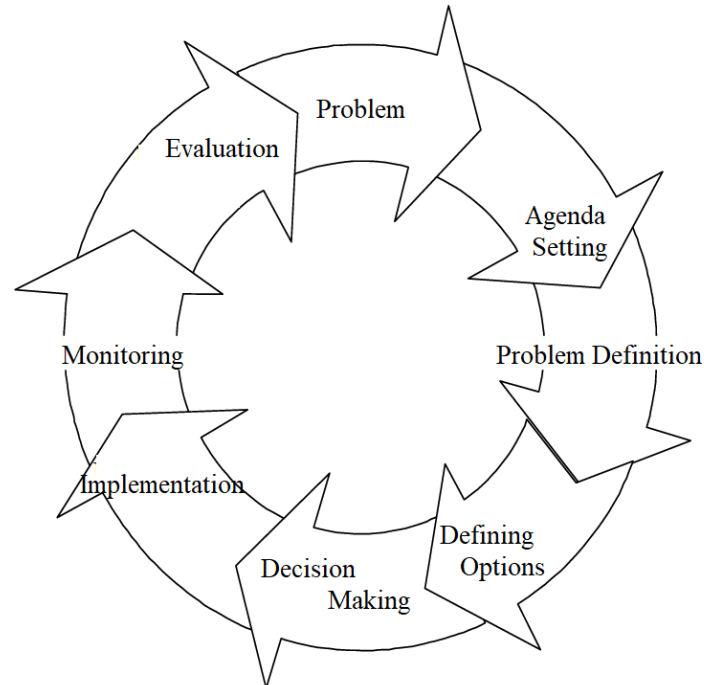


Figure 1: Policy Cycle (Bridgman & Davis, 2003)

- **Problem:** This is the stage where a societal issue requiring resolution emerges.
- **Agenda Setting:** At this stage, the problem is recognized, draws the attention of political authority, and is formally discussed by public policy actors, making it a concrete agenda item.
- **Problem Definition:** This stage involves clearly identifying the issue. Key aspects, such as what the problem is, its causes, who it affects, and the possible consequences, are clarified.
- **Decision-Making:** At this stage, the solution to the problem is selected and decided upon. Alternatives are evaluated, and one or more are chosen as the preferred solution.
- **Implementation:** This is the stage where the selected solution is put into action.
- **Monitoring:** The effects of the public policy are observed and tracked at this stage.
- **Evaluation:** This stage involves critically analyzing the enacted public policy, assessing its strengths and weaknesses, identifying areas requiring updates, evaluating its effectiveness in resolving the issue, and determining the extent to which goals have been achieved.

In the context of the public policy cycle:

- **Problem:** Disinformation, while historically rooted, has become a global issue in modern times due to technological transformations.
- **Agenda Setting:** Over the past 15 years, disinformation has seen a significant upward trend and has frequently been featured on the agendas of nations.

- **Problem Definition:** Following various disinformation incidents during events such as political elections, pandemics, natural disasters, and social crises, it has become evident that disinformation must be clearly defined.
- **Decision-Making:** Today, many countries (e.g., the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Germany, France) have made significant decisions and developed strategies to combat disinformation.
- **Implementation:** Countries have implemented various policies to combat disinformation, including multi-stakeholder collaboration, media literacy programs, artificial intelligence tools, societal awareness campaigns, criminal and administrative sanctions, and legislative regulations.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Nations are seen to follow and assess the effectiveness of the policies they have implemented to combat disinformation and update them as necessary. For example, Australia, which enacted the Online Safety Act in 2021, plans to update it in 2024 and introduce age restrictions for social media usage.

There have been many important developments that have pushed countries to formulate public policy on disinformation. In this context, it is useful to discuss some disinformation initiatives in order to understand how big and important a problem disinformation is and to demonstrate that it must be combated. We can list some of the cases that are extremely important and current in terms of our subject, that closely concern and affect countries, and that force them to produce public policy against disinformation as follows.

- **2016 U.S. Presidential Election:** Shortly before the 2016 presidential election, significant evidence emerged indicating that large-scale disinformation on social media platforms influenced the course of the election. A study conducted on this issue analyzed tweets from 2.2 million users during the election period and found that 25% of these were fake or highly biased. These tweets, originating from fake and bot accounts (accounts not belonging to real individuals but driven by artificial intelligence), spread news, posts, and content favoring one candidate and discrediting the other, leading to voter disinformation (Bovet & Makse, 2019).
- **Brexit Referendum:** The Brexit process, where the United Kingdom held a referendum to leave the European Union, witnessed numerous disinformation efforts. During the referendum, misleading claims such as the high costs of EU membership for the UK, the UK sending £350 million per week to the EU, Türkiye's impending accession to the EU, and an expected influx of immigrants due to EU migration policies were widely circulated (Parnell, 2023, pp. 187-188).
- **Russia-Ukraine War:** Another significant case of disinformation relates to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Both sides effectively used disinformation as a non-lethal weapon of war. A striking example involved the creation of deep-fake videos using artificial intelligence, featuring political leaders of both countries (Zelensky and Putin). These videos were used to deliver false war-related instructions to commanders and citizens. For instance, a deepfake video of Ukrainian leader Zelensky urged people to "retreat and surrender," while a retaliatory deepfake of Russian leader Putin declared, "we lost the war, peace has been declared." Both videos quickly went viral on X (Twitter), being shared by millions (Twomey et al., 2023, pp. 4-6).
- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** During the pandemic, numerous disinformation campaigns emerged globally, spreading false claims such as the virus being manufactured in a laboratory, vaccines being harmful, and medications worsening the disease's progression (Naeem & Boulos, 2021, p. 2).

The above-mentioned case studies show how dangerous disinformation is, that it can be encountered in many events and issues, and that it can occur in any country, regardless of the country. In the face of the spread of these and similar disinformation initiatives, many countries have taken very serious decisions and put them into practice. For example, in Germany, the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) regulating social media platforms entered into force on 1 January 2018. In France, the Law against Information Manipulation entered into force on 20 November 2018. The Online Safety Act was adopted in the United Kingdom and entered into force on 26 October 2023. Russia enacted the Fake News Act on 18.03.2019 and Australia enacted the Online Safety Act in 2021. Similarly, many important regulations have been implemented in Türkiye within the scope of combating disinformation, and these regulations are discussed in the following section.

6. The Legal and Institutional Framework for Combating Disinformation in Türkiye

Türkiye is among the countries most exposed to disinformation. For this reason, many important steps have been taken, and public policies have been established to combat disinformation. These policies include legal, institutional arrangements, administrative and criminal sanctions. In the context of the policy cycle, strategies to combat disinformation can be outlined as follows.

Problem Identification and Agenda Setting: The frequent increase in information pollution, especially on issues that concern the general public (such as the 6 February 2023 Earthquake, Covid-19 Pandemic, 2021 forest fires, political election periods), and the frequent occurrence of false news on social platforms that disrupt public order have caused the issue of disinformation to enter the agenda of the government and society. If we are to consider the case of the 6 February 2023 Earthquake: After the successive earthquakes in Türkiye on February 6, 2023, many disinformation-laden news stories, posts, and visuals were shared. For example, claims circulated those countries had recalled their ambassadors from Türkiye 24 hours before the earthquakes, the earthquakes were linked to a U.S. warship in the Bosphorus, earthquake aid could be purchased in installments, second-hand clothing donations were not accepted, and scenes from earthquakes in other countries were presented as the February 6 Türkiye Earthquakes (Aydın, 2023, pp. 2613-2616).

Defining the Problem and Identifying Options: Disinformation is defined as a situation that distorts accurate information and makes it difficult to access information safely. It was decided to implement legal and institutional arrangements to combat disinformation.

Decision Making and Implementation: Türkiye has implemented many legal and institutional arrangements to combat disinformation, especially after 2018.

Evaluation: The legal and institutional policies implemented are periodically updated and the ineffective parts of the regulations are reformulated. For example, in 2025, a new restructuring of RTÜK under the name of RİTÜK was put on the agenda by expanding its jurisdiction to include internet broadcasts.

If the legal and institutional regulations implemented in the context of combating disinformation in Türkiye are to be presented in order:

6.1. Legal Framework

Disinformation frequently comes to the agenda in Türkiye. It is observed that disinformation attempts increase especially during social, political, and economic events that concern the entire country. This is because, in such events that affect the general public, public actors strive to inform society in a correct, clear, and transparent manner at regular intervals. However, disinformation exploits these environments and processes and quickly finds a place for itself.

Türkiye ranks among the countries most exposed to disinformation (İletişim Başkanlığı, 2022). According to a study conducted in 2018 by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) at the University of Oxford, involving 74,000 participants across 37 countries, Türkiye is among the top countries in terms of disinformation. 49% of participants stated that they had encountered completely fabricated stories for political or commercial reasons (Yanatma, 2018, p. 25). In response to the increasingly deepening and seemingly unsolvable issue of disinformation, Türkiye has implemented a series of legal and organizational regulations.

The first of these regulations was the enactment of Law No. 5651 in 2007, titled The Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed via Such Publications. This law primarily focused on specific crimes committed in the online environment and addressed disinformation by imposing measures and sanctions targeting content, hosting providers, and access providers. In other words, the law concentrated not directly on disinformation but on the mechanisms facilitating it.

However, in 2022, a more comprehensive step was taken with significant updates made to several laws. The "Law on the Amendment of the Press Law and Certain Laws," numbered 7418 and commonly referred to in public as the "Disinformation Law," introduced crucial regulations to combat disinformation.

To begin with, the preamble of the law is of particular importance as it outlines the main framework for addressing disinformation. The preamble draws attention to a wide range of topics, including digitalization, disinformation, social media platforms, and the problems arising from these areas. Some of the justifications for these regulations are expressed as follows:

- The profound impact of the digital world on human life and the diversification of social media platforms have led to numerous sociological and legal issues, as well as violations of personal rights.
- Despite earning billions of dollars in revenue and gaining access to vast amounts of private information through extensive user bases and data, social network providers and other actors operating behind the scenes in the digital world fail to develop the preventive and protective mechanisms needed to safeguard individuals' rights. They have not taken effective measures and often resist the legitimate demands of users and states.
- The internet, with its transnational nature, ease of rapid access and wide sharing, and its decentralized, highly variable, and dynamic global network structure, allows malicious users to conceal their identities and carry out illegal activities.
- Creating and sharing illegal content under fake names and accounts, targeting individuals with differing political views, competitors in various fields, or individuals from different religions or ethnicities with insults, slander, or defamation, undermines reputations and fosters hatred and discrimination.
- Individuals whose personal rights are violated expect the state to protect their constitutionally guaranteed rights. The state's obligation in this area is to play a regulatory role that ensures the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms while also safeguarding freedom of expression. Consequently, states must protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of their citizens against both other users and social media platforms.
- The deliberate creation and dissemination of false news (disinformation) pose a significant threat by undermining individual and societal agency and obstructing citizens' right to access accurate information.

- Disinformation, by exploiting various freedoms, primarily freedom of expression and the right to access information, prevents the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.

In light of all these reasons, this legal regulation was enacted primarily to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, combat the threat of disinformation, and align the legal framework with current circumstances and developments. With this law, which consists of 40 articles, a series of amendments and adjustments were made to various laws, and additional provisions were introduced. Some of these laws include: Law No. 195 on the Establishment of the Press Advertisement Agency, Law No. 2004 on Enforcement and Bankruptcy, Law No. 2886 on State Procurement, Law No. 5187 on the Press, Law No. 5237, the Turkish Penal Code, Law No. 5271, the Code of Criminal Procedure, Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed via Such Publications, Law No. 5809 on Electronic Communication...

• Law No. 5187 on the Press

With the amendment to the Press Law, online news websites have been categorized as periodical publications (Article 2/c). In addition, these websites are now required to display their workplace address, trade name, email address, contact phone number, and electronic notification address. They must also indicate the date a piece of content was first published and the date of its subsequent updates on the content itself in a manner that remains unchanged each time it is accessed (Article 4). Furthermore, the amendment obligates online news websites to submit declarations to the Office of the Chief Public Prosecutor. Lastly, if an individual harmed by content on an online news website submits a correction or response, the responsible editor of the website is required to publish the statement without any alterations or additions. This must be done within one day of receiving the statement and displayed on the same page and section as the original content, with the same font size and formatting, and with a URL link provided (Article 14).

• Law No. 5237 Turkish Criminal Law

One of the most notable and debated aspects of the amendments is Article 217/A of the Turkish Penal Code. This article addresses the public dissemination of misleading information and is as follows: 1) Any person who publicly disseminates false information about the country's internal and external security, public order, or general health, in a manner likely to disturb public peace, solely with the intent to create fear, anxiety, or panic among the public, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of one to three years. 2) If the perpetrator commits the offense by concealing their true identity or within the framework of an organization's activities, the sentence imposed under the first paragraph shall be increased by half.

With this regulation, disinformation has, for the first time, been legally classified as a criminal offense in Türkiye. As can be inferred from the provision, actions that incite fear, anxiety, or panic among the public, threaten the country's internal and external security, or disrupt public order constitute the conditions for this offense.

The most significant criticism of this regulation is the lack of clarity in the law regarding who or which authority will determine whether the information is false and by what criteria this determination will be made.

• Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed via Such Publications

With the amendment to Law No. 5651, it has been specified that in urgent situations, decisions to block or restrict access to content will be implemented by the Information and Communication

Technologies Authority (ICT). The scope of crimes for which content removal or access blocking orders can be issued has been expanded (e.g., the publication of documents related to the duties or activities of the National Intelligence Organization (NIO) and the disclosure of NIO personnel are among such crimes).

If a social platform representative is a natural person, they are now required to reside in Türkiye. Furthermore, social media platforms with more than 10 million daily accesses are obligated to appoint representatives who are fully authorized and responsible in technical, administrative, financial, and legal matters (Article 34 of Law No. 5651).

• Law No. 5809 on Electronic Communication

5809 stipulates that an administrative fine from 1 million Turkish Liras to 30 million Turkish Liras may be imposed on providers who do not fulfil the obligations stipulated in the law or who provide services without authorisation, and that the internet band traffic of an over-the-network service provider who fails to pay the administrative fine in due time and does not fulfil the obligations stipulated in the regulations of the institution within 6 months following the notification to be made by the institution or who provides services without authorisation may be reduced by up to 95 percent (Art. 38).

When the regulations are evaluated as a whole, it is evident that significant steps have been taken in combating disinformation.

First, one of the major issues surrounding disinformation—social media platforms—has been addressed and reorganized. The requirement for social media platforms to establish representatives and for these representatives to be natural persons residing in Türkiye aims to ensure direct access to interlocutors, facilitate rapid information gathering, and identify the source of disinformation effectively.

Second, the inclusion of internet news websites under the category of periodic publications, the obligation for such sites to provide workplace addresses, trade names, email addresses, contact phone numbers, and electronic notification addresses, as well as the requirement to indicate the initial publication date of content and subsequent update dates, are measures designed to detect, track, and control disinformation.

Lastly, with these legal regulations, disinformation has been officially classified as a crime, administrative and criminal sanctions have been clarified, and penalties have been concretely defined. Thus, it has been explicitly stated to those engaging in disinformation that their actions now constitute a crime and that they may face severe legal consequences.

In essence, this demonstrates a shift in Türkiye's approach to combating disinformation—from suppressive policies to preventive policies. Prior to these regulations, actions were primarily taken after disinformation had already occurred. However, post-regulation, policies have been implemented to prioritize preventing disinformation before it arises.

6.2. Institutional Infrastructure

Efforts to establish an institutional infrastructure to combat disinformation in our country are relatively recent. The increasing prevalence of internet news sites and the diversification of social media platforms have necessitated the institutionalization of measures to address the growing problem of disinformation. Some of the institutional initiatives taken in our country to combat disinformation are as follows:

• Strategic Communication and Crisis Management Department

Established in 2020 under the Presidential Directorate of Communications through Presidential Decree No. 66, this unit represents one of the significant steps taken in the fight against disinformation. The department was founded with objectives such as determining fundamental policies in communication and crisis management, combating manipulation and disinformation, and coordinating national and international activities in the fight against disinformation. Tasked with overseeing two critical and strategic processes—crisis management and combating disinformation—the department's responsibilities (CBK Art. 6/A) include:

- Identifying psychological operations, propaganda, and perception management activities targeting Türkiye and taking action against all forms of manipulation and disinformation.
- Analyzing internal and external threats to Türkiye and implementing necessary measures in terms of strategic communication and crisis management.
- Ensuring cooperation with relevant institutions and organizations in line with strategic goals, objectives, and national interests, and coordinating efforts among all institutions within its scope of authority.
- Formulating strategic communication policies and crisis management activities and implementing them when necessary (e.g., during crises, disasters, states of emergency, imminent war threats, mobilization, and wartime).

The Strategic Communication and Crisis Management Department is one of the first organizations independently established to combat disinformation. In addition to its focus on disinformation, it holds authority and responsibilities in crisis and communication management, as well as in ensuring coordination and alignment among all related institutions.

• Disinformation Combating Center

In 2022, the Disinformation Combating Center (DCC) was established under the Directorate of Communications. It became the second independent institutional structure formed to combat disinformation in Türkiye. The center was established through an internal regulatory mechanism and does not have its own regulation, directive, or founding decree. However, information regarding its authority and responsibilities is provided on its official website. According to this information, the DCC was established to detect disinformation—an integral part of domestic and foreign perception operations, conspiracy theories, and manipulation attempts—at an early stage and address it simultaneously. The center's primary functions, as outlined by the Disinformation Combating Center (2024), include:

- News Monitoring: Conducting 24/7 news scanning through a team of expert editors.
- News Analysis: Examining false news spreading or potentially spreading on social media.
- News Verification: Using reliable research and verification methods, including artificial intelligence, to identify the truth of news stories.

Unlike the Strategic Communication and Crisis Management Department, the DCC focuses more on fieldwork, specifically the detection, tracking, and analysis of disinformation. The center tracks, identifies, and conducts detailed investigations of disinformation-laden news circulated in various media (e.g., traditional media, television, internet, and social platforms). It publishes monthly bulletins addressing such issues.

For example, from its establishment until November 2024, the DCC has published a total of 150 bulletins. An analysis of these bulletins reveals that social media platforms and internet news sites are the primary sources of disinformation (DCC, 2024).

• Disinformation Notification Service

Following the earthquakes on February 6, 2023, a significant surge of disinformation was observed, especially on social media platforms, prompting the establishment of the Disinformation Notification Service. This service was integrated into the E-Government system to enable all citizens to actively participate in combating disinformation. By using E-Government and mobile applications, individuals can report disinformation-laden content and news to the relevant authorities. The service saw heavy use from its inception, with the Directorate of Communications announcing that the number of reports submitted via the application reached 6,200 within a short period (İletişim Başkanlığı, 2023).

• Inter-Agency Cooperation Protocol on Combating Disinformation

Efforts to combat disinformation in public administration extend beyond the central level and are implemented at local and regional levels through institutional cooperation. To this end, inter-agency cooperation protocols have been increasingly adopted at the provincial level. These protocols are signed between the Regional Directorates of the Directorate of Communications (19 across the country) and local authorities such as governorships, universities, and provincial directorates. The primary goal of these protocols is to raise awareness among individuals who are less resistant to disinformation and more frequently exposed to it, thereby fostering greater societal awareness.

In Turkey, especially in the recent period, it is observed that civil initiatives contributing to the fight against disinformation by carrying out fact-checking have become widespread. Such initiatives aim to help citizens evaluate media messages more soundly in this process by trying to determine how accurate and reliable the news and information that rapidly circulate in the digital environment are (Çömlekçi, 2020, p. 218). At this point, the efforts of individuals, communities, and non-governmental organizations that perform fact-checking become critical in combating disinformation. In this context, within the scope of combating disinformation, cooperation protocols should be carried out not only among public institutions themselves but also with civil initiatives and should be expanded. Doğruluğu Ne? (dogrulukune.org), Doğruluk Payı (dogrulukpayi.com), Malumatfuruş (malumatfurus.org), Teyit (teyit.org), Doğrula (dogrula.org), Teyit (teyit.org) are some of these initiatives (Karakoç Keskin, 2025, p. 114). With the cooperation to be established between such civil initiatives and public institutions, it is likely to provide significant contributions to the fight against disinformation in public administration.

CONCLUSION

Disinformation is the distortion of accurate information for various purposes and the manipulation of the target audience in line with these purposes. In this respect, disinformation has a very dangerous potential for individuals, societies and states. This study examines the interaction between public administration and disinformation by focusing on the negative impacts and challenges created by disinformation, with a particular emphasis on Türkiye. The study draws attention to the danger of disinformation, reveals its effects on public administration, and also analyses the strategies to combat disinformation in the context of public policy in Türkiye and proposes solutions. In this context, important findings and conclusions have been reached in the study.

In the study, it was observed that although disinformation has a long history, its popularization and widespread use is relatively new. This innovation lies in the fact that disinformation has become more widespread, powerful and effective by integrating with developing technology. In other words, there

is a positive correlation between digitalization and the spread of disinformation. The transition from traditional state structures to a technology-based e-government model has increased the interest and demand for digital platforms. Moreover, the growth and diversification of digital and social media platforms have made these technologies an integral part of daily life. However, given that disinformation largely takes place on these platforms today, digitalization has also brought along a significant disadvantage such as disinformation.

Another result obtained from the study is that disinformation facilitates the dissemination of false information, while at the same time preventing the correct implementation of public policies and decisions and negatively affecting the functioning of public administration. It can lead to deep crises by weakening social sensitivities, political choices and responses to extraordinary situations such as pandemics and earthquakes.

The increasing prevalence of disinformation has created a global trend towards greater control over digital platforms. In other words, there is an increase in control over the internet, social media and digital platforms, which stand out as the source of disinformation. Many countries, including Türkiye, have developed various public policies to deal with this problem.

In the case of Türkiye, it is observed that disinformation has increased significantly in Türkiye in recent years. Due to this increase, disinformation has started to be addressed within the framework of public policy. The fact that the majority of legal and institutional measures developed against disinformation in Türkiye have been implemented in the last five years is a concrete reflection of this development.

As can be seen from this study, combating disinformation in the context of public policy in Türkiye has four important pillars: legal, institutional, educational and multi-partner cooperation. Through legal regulations, it is aimed to limit the flow of disinformation spread through the internet, media platforms and digital platforms and to ensure that these channels act more responsibly. In terms of the institutional dimension, organizations are required to: To inform the public, to ensure information security and public order, to increase the relationship of trust between public administration and citizens. In terms of the educational dimension, it is aimed to raise awareness against disinformation, improve digital literacy and raise social awareness through scientific activities such as anti-disinformation awareness trainings, conferences and workshops. In multi-partner cooperation, it is envisaged to take joint steps to combat disinformation. In this context, important steps have been taken such as universities, non-governmental organizations and social media companies sharing information and cooperating with each other.

As a result, disinformation, which has become an extremely complex and effective danger today, has become a public policy problem that negatively affects individuals, social structure and public administration, and accordingly, Türkiye has made combating disinformation a strategic priority. In this context, in order to prevent or effectively combat disinformation: Implementing deterrent legal regulations, raising public awareness, utilizing innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence, encouraging local, national, international and public-private collaborations, making public actors, administrators and infrastructure resistant to disinformation efforts, developing and expanding digital media literacy, fact-checking applications and platforms, and assigning active responsibilities to social media platforms in combating disinformation are among the critical steps to prevent or effectively combat disinformation.

Compliance with Ethical Standard

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