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Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

The Information Warfare Role of Social Media: Fake News in the Russia - Ukraine War

Sosyal Medyanın Bilgi Savaşı Rolü: Rusya – Ukrayna Savaşında Sahte Haberler

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Abstract

It is known that information activities concerning the agenda are carried out on many media tools, especially social media, in cases of interstate crisis, conflict, and war. However, unlike traditional media, subjective evaluations on social media platforms can spread suddenly without being verified. This situation causes fake news to spread, and many people even show a reflex to believe it. This research deals with the fake news of the Russia-Ukraine war that broke out at the beginning of 2022; 125 fake contents analyzed by Teyit, Dogrula, Dogruluk Payı, and Malumatfuruş sites were taken as a sample. In this study, which aims to reveal the extent to which social media platforms pave the way for information wars, it has been determined that fake content is shared on many media tools, including online news sites, YouTube, and, in particular, Twitter. It has been determined that almost half of this content was shared in the first week of the war, and montage and editing techniques were frequently applied to the content. The study also brings up the establishment of an official communication network in accordance with the 24/7 working conditions to confirm fake news.

Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian War, Information Warfare, Fake News, Fake Newsers, Fact-Checking Platforms.

Öz

Devletlerarası kriz, çatışma ve savaş hallerinde sosyal medya başta olmak üzere birçok medya araçlarında konuya ilişkin bilgilendirme faaliyetlerinin yapıldığı bilinmektedir. Fakat geleneksel medyadan farklı olarak sosyal medya platformlarında subjektif değerlendirmeler doğrulanmadan bir anda yayılabilmektedir. Bu durum sahte haberlerin (fake news) yayılmasına hatta pek çok insanın buna inanma refleksi göstermesine neden olmaktadır. 2022'nin hemen başında patlak veren Rusya – Ukrayna savaşındaki sahte paylaşımları konu edinen bu araştırmada; Teyit, Doğrula, Doğruluk Payı ve Malumatfuruş sitelerince analiz edilen 125 yalan/yanlış içerik örneklem olarak alınmıştır. Sosyal medya platformlarının bilgi savaşlarına ne derece zemin hazırladığını ortaya çıkartmayı amaçlayan bu çalışmada başta Twitter, online haber siteleri ve YouTube olmak üzere pek çok medya aracında sahte içeriklerin paylaşıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Yalan/yanlış içeriklerin neredeyse yarısının savaşın ilk haftasında paylaşıldığı ve içeriklere montaj ve kurgu tekniklerinin sıklıkla uygulandığı belirlenmiştir. Çalışmada, dezenformasyon teyidi için 7/24 çalışma koşuluna uygun olacak şekilde resmî bir iletişim ağının kurulması da gündeme getirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya – Ukrayna Savaşı, Bilgi Savaşları, Sahte Haberler, Sahte Haber Üreticileri, Doğrulama Platformları.

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Introduction

Although the wars between today's societies are fought on the front line, it can be stated that these wars are carried out at the point of managing perceptions. Information wars are waged not only by the states party to the war but also by those living in other states in order to create a positive or negative perception about the countries participating in the war. The most basic strategy applied in this sense is fake news. It is challenging to struggle with fake news in our social and political lives, and its results have been destructive. In this period, called post-truth, facts have begun to lose their importance, thus paving for the viral dissemination of fake news. "Post-truth" is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as referring to or indicating situations in which appeals to emotion and personal belief have a more significant impact on public opinion than factual facts. The concept highlights the depreciation of truth or the search for truth in empowering false "facts" that comply with personal feelings and emotions (Kavaklı, 2019, p. 665).

The masses tend to believe in contentious matters without questioning and resort to sharing them on social media platforms. Users seldom check internet information because they often view news as being more trustworthy than other sorts of information available online. For this reason, it is crucial to check the validity of the news on fact-checking platforms. As a solution to fake news on social media, the efficacy of three mechanisms for source ratings can be applied to articles when they are first published to combat fake news on social media: user source rating, user article rating, and expert rating. Expert rating involves expert reviewers' fact-checking articles, which are aggregated to provide a source rating -where users rate the sources themselves- (Kim, Moravec, & Dennis, 2019, p. 993). Unless the appropriate policies are put into force, censorship criticism may arise with regard to the free information source of the internet. Except for indisputable matters such as hate speech, violent content, and sexual abuse of children (Binark, 2010, p. 673), some restrictions should be imposed on those who disseminate fake news.

Since the beginning of 2014, Russia has been waging advanced hybrid warfare in Ukraine that mainly depends on what the Russians refer to as "reflexive control," an aspect of information warfare (Snegovaya, 2017). Putin launched a variety of tried and canny tactics, covering denial, trickery, concealment of Kremlin objectives, justification of the war legally, the use of military force and the threat of nuclear weapons, the mobilization of resources globally, and the reshaping of the Ukrainian conflict's narrative through social media. By creating blogs, assaulting opposition websites, and making comments on Facebook and Twitter, the Kremlin administration tries to influence the views of Western countries and other countries (Peters, 2018, p. 1162). In this sense, 400 trolls from the St. Petersburg-based "Internet Research" organisation employ fictitious Facebook and Twitter profiles to propagate misinformation while working 12-hour shifts (Van Herpen, 2016, p. 35).

This research, which deals with the fake news spread in the Russia-Ukraine war, has been based on questions that stand out in fake content, which factors play a decisive role in fake posts about the war, and what kind of function social media has. The fact that the work coincides with the disinformation law adopted this year, especially in order to inform the public correctly, reveals the topicality and importance of the subject. The research uses the document and content analysis method to reveal the fake content created about the war. In the study, 125 content analysed by Teyit, Doğrula, Doğruluk Payı, and Malumatfuruş sites were taken as samples. In the acquisition of these sites, the criteria for sharing content in Turkish, actively analyzing the war during the war, and keeping the

sites up-to-date were effective. Due to the subject's sensitivity, the study also establishes an official verification platform, which will be created simultaneously.

Information Warfare

In large part of human history, the wars aimed to gain and annex territories, and these wars were called "First Wave" wars, but the wars at the end of the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries were the "Second Wave" wars, and they aimed to seize economic wealth all over the world. In the wars since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the objective has been to control the information flow (Stein, 1995, p. 32). Therefore, the "Third Wave" has been called information warfare. Knowledge-based movements have been blocking industrialisation since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and industrial countries have begun to transform into communication societies. Furthermore, with the developments in technology, information has begun to be used effectively. Social media, which has become an integral part of daily life today with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, has reached a level that affects people's perceptions, behaviours, and choices in many areas of life (High & Solomon, 2011, p. 125).

Information has played a crucial role in many fields like economy, technology, education, and the military. The states have begun to use information in military strategies, defence, attack, and intelligence. For this reason, the growth and development of information and intelligence-based technologies have led to the rise of information warfare. The concept of information operations has turned into a holistic, systematic, and organised war perception (Özdağ, 2014, p. 185). The ultimate goal of this war is to destabilise a nation or an institution of common beliefs, to destroy the ability of coexistence, to justify the war and attacks directed at that society, to blur the functions of the institutions providing security and change the societal organisation type to increase its effectiveness (Mucchielli, 1991).

Contrary to the wars we witnessed in the past, information warfare targets all the electronic systems of a country and tries to dominate civil and state information systems. One of the mass communication tools, the internet, has eased the use of information warfare or the term called "dirt spill" (Sopilko, Swintsytsky, Padalka, & Lyseiuk, 2022, p. 335). Information warfare is also defined as a group of activities such as computer espionage and sabotage, intelligence and espionage operations, communication eavesdropping, perception management, and electronic swash (Denning, 1999, p. 1). General Clark evaluates what they did before the Iraqi war as disinformation dissemination, listening to the enemy's communications, psychological operations through media, sending e-mails to Iraqi leaders, and the interference of some journalists into command-control systems of the country (Clark, 2004).

We can see the other example of information warfare in the war between Georgia and Russia in 2008. While the Georgian army was bombing South Osetia, all the internet newspapers were disclosed to a cyber attack. On the other hand, Russians retaliated against these attacks with counter-attacks from five hundred different sites. The authorities were all aware of the necessity of setting up special organisational, administrative, and strategic information warfare units to combat more effectively in the information war. The main objectives of the Russian information warfare units were strategic analysis, creating information effects, and information struggles. The main objective of information warfare consisting of defence operations is to prevent the adversaries' information attacks that target information systems, communication networks, and the public's mind. Information

warfare is a type of war that aims to intervene (offensive information warfare) or to stop the intervention (defensive information warfare) on all kinds of information and information resources and to guide the decision-making process to the information that will arise from this information and information resources (Denning, 1999, p. 5).

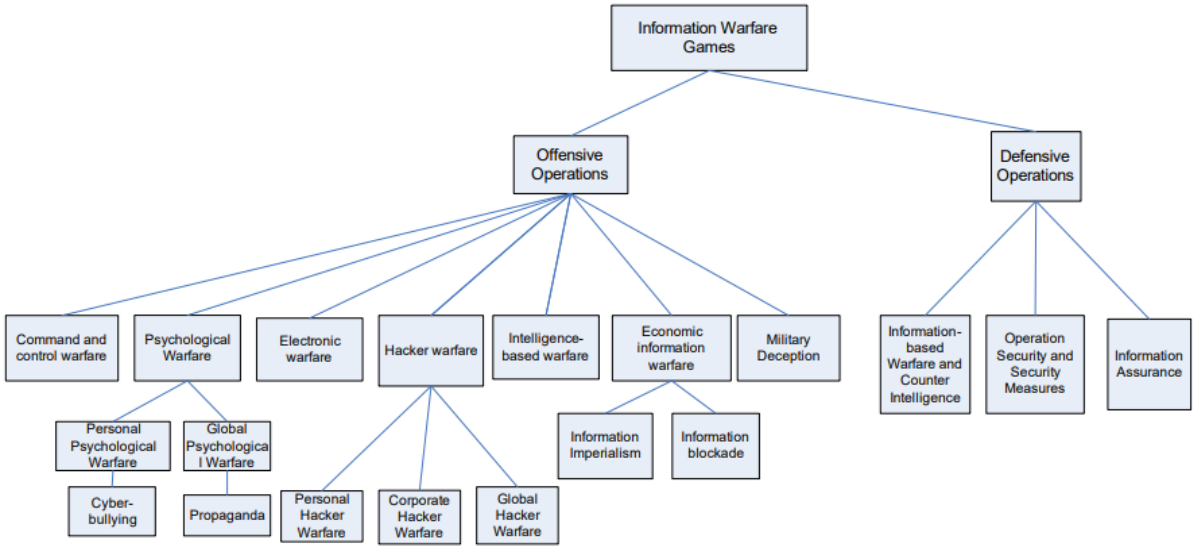


Figure 1. *Framework to Classify Information Warfare Games (Kasmarik, Hardhienata, Shafi, & Hu, 2016, p. 7)*

As seen in figure 1, the attacks against primarily the human mind and other information systems and prevention activities of these attacks are carried out. It is also stated that information warfare is a unit of non-conventional war concepts (Kershner, 2001, p. 14). In addition, information warfare is a kind of activity to gain information superiority with the aim of national military strategy. Thus, the side having the crucial information will have the advantage of directing the war in line with its plans.

Information warfare is also a war launched to dominate societies and minds. We can see examples of information warfare in the last twenty years. Russia, which is one of the superpower countries of the world, initiated cyber attacks against some countries and tried to blur the flow of information. In the framework of information warfare, cyber assaults against Estonia in 2007, Georgia and Lithuania in 2008, Kyrgyzstan in 2009, Ukraine in 2014, and Türkiye in 2015 might be analysed. The Russian Federation is well recognised for having a large information warfare capability that includes cyber espionage, cyber counter/espionage, misinformation, electronic warfare, psychological warfare and propaganda, and cyber assault. The new generation of information warfare techniques can also be seen in the cases of Arab Spring events in the broadcasts of Al Jazeera in 2010, CNN's broadcast activities during the First Gulf War in 1991, the intervention of Russia in Chechnya between 1994-1996, and the live broadcasts made by international media organisations during the Gezi Events (Darıcılı & Özdal, 2017, p. 28). Sputnik News, which is the propaganda tool of Russia, has always launched some misleading, manipulative, and directing broadcasting, and it has functioned as a weapon of the Russian state. In November 2015, as a result of Russian warplanes' border violation, Türkiye shot down those planes, and Sputnik social media tried to manipulate this incident as aggressive propaganda by stating that Türkiye supposedly helped ISID (Iraq and Damascus State).

During the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, Online Social Networks (OSNs) have been a key source of information in previous studies of large-scale information

discourse during crises and social movements (Haq, Braud, Kwon, & Hui, 2020, p. 212), especially in terms of 'information warfare,' where such platforms may be used to spread propaganda and disinformation. Information warfare and campaigns persisted throughout the battle, both in the build-up and after the invasion. This has happened on several social media sites, including Twitter. Russian disinformation campaigns are carried out both at home and abroad. However, Ukrainians have waged a social media war against Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin by using social media platforms to endorse the Ukrainian cause and arouse international attention and support for their current predicaments (Cohen, 2022). In the aftermath of the violence, social media sites have made steps to counteract misinformation and disinformation (Bushwick, 2022).

Managing Perceptions on Social Media with Fake News

Perception management, or in other words, civil information warfare, is a kind of strategy aiming to manage the perception system of the public or a group of people (Özdağ, 2014, p. 193). It is the creation of the desired behavioural change in these target groups by influencing the target groups' emotions, thoughts, and lifestyles with certain information (Military Factory, 2022). In perception management, people are waged with the aim of seizing and directing their minds in line with how they are asked to think, feel, and decide. The perception managers try to control the beliefs, cultures, values, and lifestyles of a target community or people and destroy their understanding by replacing fake news and imposing their views and strategies.

Elsbach states that subjects like identity management, image management, and reputation management are now being scientifically addressed with perception management. As stated in a motto, *"The one who gives the information determines the judgment"*, society is bombarded with the information how perception makers desire or shape (Elsbach, 1994). In this process, a new reality is tried to be formed, and people are geared to believe these plotted realities. In our world, which is becoming more global and integrated with technology every moment, people are in very close contact with the internet and social media. Today, almost every home has a computer, and every individual has a good or bad smartphone. Now, we can share with the whole world in a few seconds the events we experience in our daily life, our emotions, our reactions, and whether we approve or disapprove of a person, an event, or an object. Using the developed computer technology, documents, speeches, pictures, and videos can easily be montaged or distorted, thus creating fake news and cheating people. Perception management is not propaganda, but perception management is the shaping of messages according to an interactive communication process (according to the level of perception) that the target audience can understand, and these messages create the desired attitude and behaviour change in the target audience (Garfield, 2002, p. 32).

In a one-way, vertical process known as propaganda, a message is imposed on the intended audience, while perception management takes place in versatile and horizontal communication (Erol & Ozan, 2014). There are typically four steps to perception management: Getting the target audience's attention, sharing and presenting comparable information to hold their attention, making the provided information compatible with their perceptions, and repeating the information across various communication channels to maintain the same position (Callamari & Reveroni, 2003, p. 3). If you are not personally involved in the news or an event, it is advised to confirm the news or event that you are aware of on social media from several different sources. The masses may show adverse reactions to the news created by perception management.

The information warfare components in the perception management process are classified as distortion or manipulation, news or information fabrication, deception, social engineering, accusation, conspiracy theories, defaming, harassment, and censorship. These are all used to direct and blur people's minds in the desired way. Large-scale propaganda is as ancient as contemporary mass persuasion, while lies and distortion in interpersonal communication are as old as rhetoric (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1867). People tend to distribute fake news quickly and extensively on digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter, contrary to classical propaganda techniques. Unverified information has been freely available on trendy sites and has not been reviewed by traditional news organisations. Information fabrication, or fake news, is generally a preferable way on social media to distort the news by using some technological device. The messages to be delivered may be communicated to the target audiences more effectively by making use of perception management methods through social media tools. False information generation and dissemination are not brand-new occurrences.

According to Burkhardt, as long as people have lived in communities, false stories have grown with writing and communication technologies (Burkhardt, 2017). Following the 2016 US presidential elections, the phrase "fake news" has more meaning in today's digital media environment (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 232). The definition of this term has changed from referring to satirical television programs (Hartley, 1996, p. 32) to misleading material produced to intentionally mislead the public (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1866).

Fake news is usually generated in crises such as the outbreak of pandemic, fire, war, revolution, and events that profoundly affect the masses. Fake news sometimes involves information that, when contrasted with the truth, is highly startling and causes people to worry. Since fake news intends to attract attention, it is frequently exaggerated considerably compared to reality (Derman, 2021, p. 68). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the fabrication, circulation, reading, and commenting of the news has been a fostering basis for conspiracy theories and fake news (FN), which have spread the seeds of suspicion, fear, and anxiety among the masses. Although journalists do not control access to information anymore, people reach a great variety of sources and facts through social media, and some of these facts contradict the statements made by the authorities, and they may be fake or misleading (Newman et al., 2020). Users who have been "exposed" to internet misinformation are said to be spreading fake news like a "virus." The suggested solutions to the fake news issue generally mirror antivirus software because they both try to locate and quarantine any potentially harmful false information on the internet before it can infect its intended targets (Chen, 2017).

Method

This research aimed to reveal the contents of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which were disseminated to the public from various media and examined by verification platforms. In this context, the content analysed by the verification sites before and in the first eight weeks after the war was determined as a sample. At this point, the content shared on the pages of the verification platforms of Teyit, Doğruluk Payı, Doğrula, and Malumatfuruş, which share content, are included in the sampling. Among these platforms, there are only two platforms registered with The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). These are Teyit and Doğruluk Payı sites (IFCN, 2022). In order to ensure data diversity in the research, four validation platforms were taken. In the absence of other verification platforms, the criteria for sharing content in Turkish, actively analysing the

war during the war, and keeping the sites up-to-date were effective. The research did not include the situation assessments of the four sampling verification platforms and the shared assessments to increase the public's digital literacy level about war. On the other hand, almost all the contents of the four sites were falsified; therefore, the majority of the study's dataset consisted of falsified posts.

In the case of national and international situations, in particular crises, war, economic depression, and some severe cases, the evaluations made by the verification platforms in order to inform the public correctly can mediate in the dissemination of conspiracy theories and fabricated/inaccurate content. At this point, the research is also crucial in terms of digital literacy skills. On the other hand, the fact that 40 articles of the disinformation law, which has been discussed in public in recent months, have been passed by the parliament also reveals the topicality of the issue.

In the study, research data were analysed using a two-stage method. In the first stage, document analysis was used. Various documents are collected, reviewed, questioned and analysed in document analysis. However, using the document analysis technique with content analysis is recommended rather than using it alone (Sak, Şahin Sak, Şendil, & Nas, 2021). In this context, the contents of the verification platforms that are the subject of the research were collected with the document analysis technique in the first stage, and content analysis was carried out on the mentioned documents in the next stage. It is recommended to use both types of analysis in the research; The processes of limiting, verifying, reading in detail and in depth, identifying categories and themes with content analysis, analysing data and reporting were applied respectively (Kiral, 2020, p. 183). The contents of the four research-involved verification platforms were coded according to the following questions.

1. When was the content verified?
2. When was the content (word, image, or video) subject to fake news first shared?
3. From which media source was the fake post shared?
4. What methods and techniques were used to prepare fake news?
5. Who/what happened to be the leading actor in fake content?
6. In which week of the war was fake news shared?
7. What is the tricky aspect of fake news?

Findings

A total of 125 fake content were included in the study by four verification platforms in Türkiye, which cover fake news about the Russia-Ukraine War (Teyit.org, 2022; Dogrulukpayi.org, 2022; Dogrula.org, 2022; Malumatfurus.org, 2022). These contents constitute the number of content that has been falsified or verified by verification platforms in Türkiye in a total of nine weeks, starting with the week before the war started and the week the war broke out. Although the contents analysed by each platform differed, it was seen that some of them were similar. In order not to increase the margin of error regarding the data set, only the content of one platform was included in the study for similar fake content. Here, priority is given to the platform that first analysed the fake content in question. If the said platforms confirm similar content, attention is also paid to the fact that they are similar to the questions determined for the research. If the same content was analysed oppositely, then both were included in the dataset.

The research showed that the platform that verified the fakest content was ranked as Teyit, Dogruluk payı, Doğrula, and Malumatfuruş. On the other hand, in terms of digital media literacy, these platforms have also written several bulletins and reviews in order to inform and warn users on their web pages and to give the audience a critical perspective on all kinds of news about the war reflected in the social and traditional media. These contents prepared by the editors were not included in the research data.

The first question of the research was designed as in which weeks of fake news about the war were shared. Accordingly, at the very beginning of the war, only two fake news was examined by verification platforms, while in the first week of the war, this number increased dramatically, reaching 60. In the second and third weeks of the war, the number here decreased to a quarter. It has been determined that the number of content analysed by verification platforms, especially in the fifth week of the war, gradually decreased and progressed to a certain extent in the following weeks. This finding obtained here is similar to the graphic of the content shared about the war on Twitter (Pavlyshenko, 2022, p. 2). The weekly confirmed content numbers are presented in figure 2.

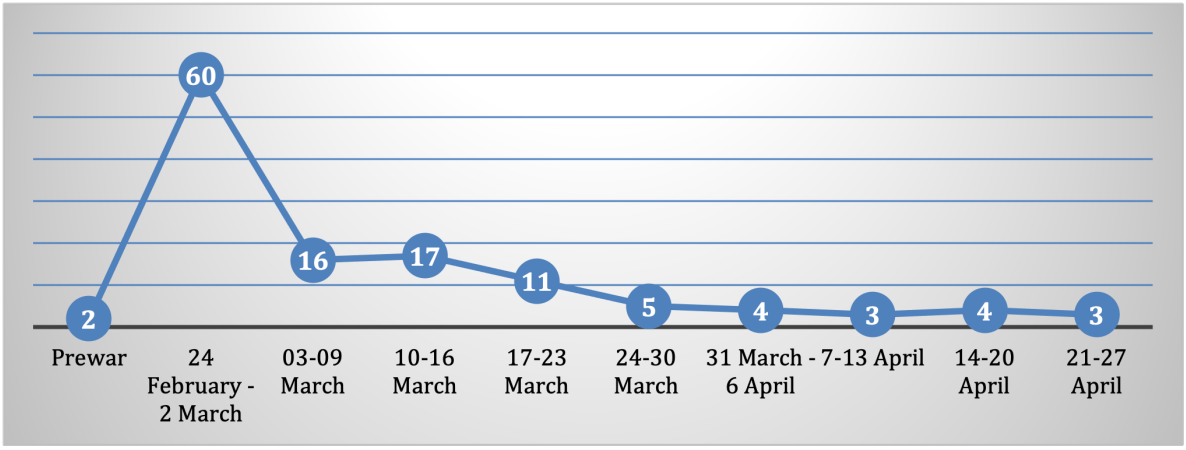


Figure 2. *Weekly Content Fact-Checking Counts*

The second question of the research has been determined as what the technical features of the falsified fake news are. Accordingly, it has been determined by the verification platforms that half of the content in question has been prepared from the contents of 2022, the beginning of the war, and the remaining half has been prepared by applying editing or montage techniques to the contents shared in the pre-war internet environments. Most of these contents were shared by making changes to the video and photo. In addition to these, it has been determined that official statements made by the authorities of the state or international organisations and statements made by famous names are given here by distorting or fabricating. Therefore, it is understood that in creating fake news, not only the images of the current year but also the content of the anonymous users, which are not known much in the past years, was prepared by the users, and the users applied some techniques to these contents and served them to the media platforms. Here, it can be stated that fakenewsers want to increase the credibility of fake content, mainly based on well-known politicians or artists.

Table 1. *Technical Specifications of Falsified Fake News*

Original Date of Content			Preparation Techniques		
Year	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Year**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
2010	2	1,6	Montage	13	10,4
2012	1	,8	Anonymous Video/Photos	68	54,4
2013	2	1,6	War games	6	4,8
2014	9	7,2	Movie/TV scenes	2	1,6
2015	9	7,2	Changing official announcement	9	7,2
2016	1	,8	Fake (Fabrication)	27	21,6
2017	3	2,4	Production styles	Frequency	Percentage
2018	2	1,6	Video	61	48,8
2019	5	4,0	Photograph	49	39,2
2020	12	9,6	Text	15	12,0
2021	17	13,6			
2022	62	49,6			

The question of what kind of technical features fake news has and in which media tools these contents are shared comes to the fore. In this context, it has been revealed that 37% of the fake news in question is shared on Twitter. This platform was followed by online news sites (18%), YouTube (17%), traditional media (11%), TikTok (6%), Instagram (6%), Facebook (3%), and WhatsApp (2%). Figure 3). What is striking here is that 37 of the 48 contents shared on Twitter were shared by anonymous accounts and nine by community accounts on Twitter.

YouTube, the social media where the second most fake content is shared, is not only a source for sharing content but also for sharing the mentioned fake content on other social media tools. A study conducted with YouTube Türkiye users determined that those who watched the content about the Russia-Ukraine war developed various conspiracy theories (Tam & Kurtuluş, 2022). In this respect, YouTube plays a leading role in the production of fake news content. On the other hand, it has been seen that TikTok, which is a relatively new application compared to other social media platforms, has also started to be used for sharing fake content. Based on these findings, it can be suggested that fake news spreads, especially from social media sharing networks (71%).

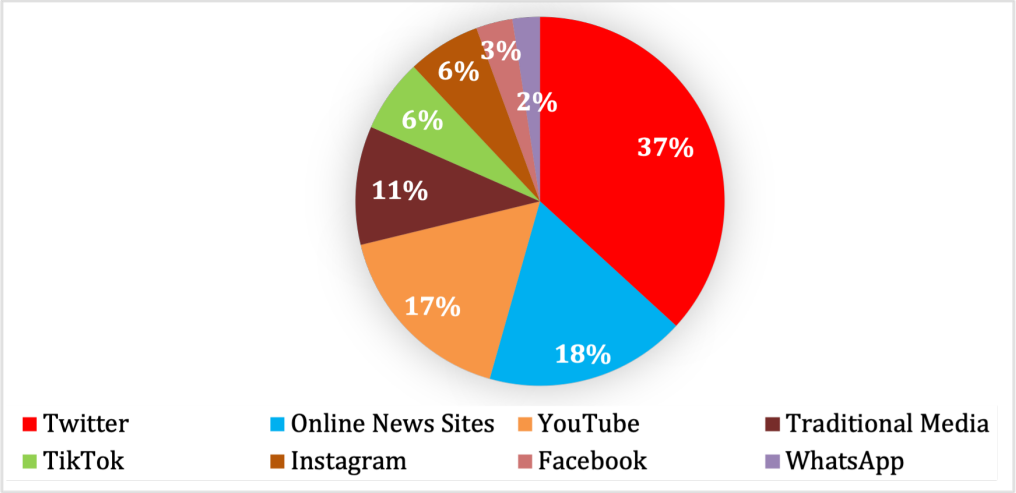


Figure 3. *Media tools that fake news are shared*

Almost a third of the content produced by fakenewsers in the war between Russia and Ukraine was about Russian soldiers and their attacks (32.8%). Here, images of the war moments launched by Russia from the air and land in the first days of the war have gained intensity. Apart from that, institutions (12.8%), Ukrainian soldiers and their attacks (11.2%), celebrities (11.2%), V. Zelensky (8.8%), injured or killed Ukrainians (8.0%), V. Putin (7.2%), USA, NATO and EU (5.6%) and Türkiye (2.4%) were also highlighted in their fake news content.

The posts about Bayraktar and SİHA gained intensity in the content shared about Türkiye. In the states that were not a party to the war, fake news was created by distorting official statements, and content based on defamation or power predominated in the posts about Putin and Zelenski. In order to appeal to the sensitivity of a particular segment of the people who have nothing to do with the war, it has been tried to give dirty information to the public about the wounded or killed Ukrainians based on movies, TV series, or images from previous wars. Prominent main actors in fake content highlighted by a particular person, institution, state, or leader are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. Leading Actor Featured on Fake News

	Frequency	Percentage
Russian Soldiers and Attacks	41	32,8
Institutions	16	12,8
Ukrainian Soldiers and Attacks	14	11,2
Celebrities	14	11,2
V. Zelenski	11	8,8
Injured or Died Ukrainians	10	8,0
V. Putin	9	7,2
USA, NATO, EU	7	5,6
Türkiye	3	2,4

What is wrong with the content analysed by verification platforms? Within the framework of the question mentioned above, it was determined that 73 of the 125 contents analysed by the relevant platforms were produced under the title of erroneous association, 22 of distortion, 17 of fabrication, 7 of decontextualisation, and 6 of their manipulation. In the content that is the subject of faulty association, a previous image or video is presented as if it happened right now, and textual expressions have been changed or taken out of context in distortion. It has been determined that content is produced from scratch with various techniques in fabrication and that manipulative content tries to push the masses toward certain attitudes or behaviours.

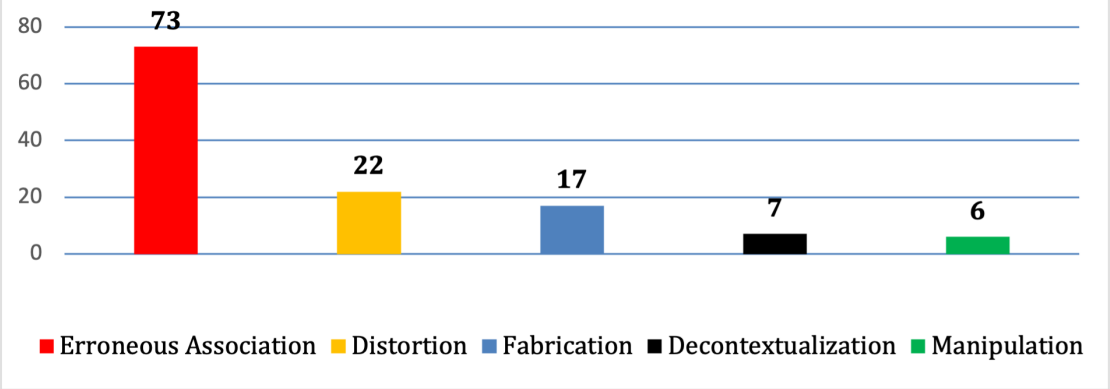


Figure 4. *The Misleading Aspect of Fake News*

Conclusion

In this study, which examines the fake news shared in the Russia-Ukraine war, 125 content falsified by four verification platforms was taken as a sample. The study found that fake news about the war intensified in the first week of the war in general. It can be stated that these contents were deliberately made from the very first moment of the war, not only to manipulate the masses but also to increase the number of interactions on social media, such as the number of views, likes, and comments. Anonymous individuals have been much more prominent in producing fake news. On the other hand, it was also determined that these anonymous contents were shared as images of the moment of war on national news channels. Here, it also shows that the gatekeepers broadcast the news contents of the national media channels without verification. The fact that such content is provided on national channels and news sites other than social media tools, where the anonymous side is strong, shows that the media should be more careful in situations such as international crises and war.

The research shows that the platform that confirms the fakest content is Teyit, Dogruluk Payı, Dogrula and Malumatfurus. It was found to be shared that half of the 125 fake news collected between February and April 2022 were based on movies, war games and statements shared before the war, and the other half were created on social media using montage, fiction, faulty association or distortion techniques of images, people, leaders or important situations that emerged from the beginning of the war. Nearly half of the fake news is videos, and the other half is based on photographs and texts. It can be said that a portrait of brutality is drawn in almost all fake content shared, and emotionality is emphasised here. These fake contents were especially shared on Twitter, online news sites, YouTube and Tiktok applications. It has been determined that fake news spread in the WhatsApp application, albeit in very small numbers. It can be claimed that WhatsApp groups are intermediaries in sharing such fake content. In conclusion, it has been obtained in the study that social media applications are a significant actor in the production and spread of information wars and fake news.

Images of Russian soldiers and their attacks were greatly appreciated in fake news about the Russia-Ukraine war. In these contents, it has been seen that the fake news producers about the war acted unfairly to put Russia's position in the war. On the other hand, in the fake news about the Ukrainian side, the economic, social and human collapse and destruction of the country due to the war were displayed, and Russia was shown as the main cause of this situation. While anti-Putin discourse is dominant at the level of leaders, the image of a brave and honourable statesman in Zelenski has been tried to be given in fake content. Although he was not involved in the war, he also included posts about the USA, NATO and EU, which users think are the cause or indirect parties of the war. In fake news related to Türkiye, images of UAVs and SİHAs in Northern Iraq and Syria operations were included, and an attempt was made to create a perception that these were military casualties inflicted on Russia.

More than half of the fake content is shared on media with false attribution. Here, the two most intense tactics that fakenewsers resorted to in persuading the masses were fiction and montage. Apart from these two methods, making changes to the written explanations was the least preferred strategy. It can be stated here that it is aimed to convince the masses of fake newsers, primarily based on the perception of being convinced of what is seen. It can be stated that the tendency of the masses not to be able to distinguish fiction

from reality and, therefore, to believe in representation has a prominent role here (Taş & Taş, 2018, p. 187).

On the other hand, the lack of critical thinking of the audience or the pollyanna point of view adds added value to the credibility here. It can be said that the media literacy level of the masses is a determinant in both of these factors. The importance of giving pieces of training on media literacy or digital literacy, which is expressed on almost every platform to the masses by the experts on the subject, has once again come to the fore in this study.

Regarding verification platforms, there are many verification platforms in our country. The central question here is how impartial and reliable these verification platforms are. There are ten active verification platforms in Türkiye. Among them, there are only two platforms that are members of IFCN. In fact, at this point, the establishment of a platform called "Dogru mu?" is even considered by the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı, 2021). However, no application has yet been made regarding the discourse at this point. It is known that verification platforms have a significant effect on trust, especially on social media platforms (Tunçer & Tam, 2022). For this reason, it is considered necessary for Türkiye to establish an official verification platform, as in other countries, especially at the point of obtaining impartial and reliable information.

The study examined the contents of the verification platforms for the first two months of the war. Since the war is still going on, it is vital to examine the content on these platforms in the future to bring a more specific perspective on the subject. In addition, it is recommended to research the masses that encounter this fake content. As a result of the data received from the said verification platforms, the following items can be listed as the main characteristics of fake news:

Fake content suddenly proliferates in extraordinary circumstances like a national or international crisis and war.

1. In the fake news about the war, the main actors (leaders, soldiers, citizens) are discussed more intensely.

2. Fake content is often fictionalised by playing on old photos and videos shared on the internet by anonymous individuals.

3. In order to increase the credibility of the fiction of fake content, officials or state authorities and well-known figures are used.

4. War games, previous war moments, TV series, or movie scenes are used in crises, conflict and war situations, war games, last war moments, and movie series.

5. Ambitious, striking and surprising titles are selected and textualised.

6. Conventional media broadcasts fake news without verifying, which plays an essential role in disseminating this type of content.

7. It can be stated that social media platforms lead the way in the first sharing and dissemination of fake news.

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Sosyal Medyanın Bilgi Savaşı Rolü: Rusya – Ukrayna Savaşında Sahte Haberler

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Devletlerarası kriz, çatışma ve savaş hallerinde sosyal medya başta olmak üzere birçok teknolojik araç halkı bilgilendirme adına yayın/yayımlar yaptığı bilinmektedir (Mucchielli, 1991). Bu yayın/yayımlarda ülkeler kendi politikalarını haklı çıkarmak adına bilgi savaşlarını sistematik ve organize bir şekilde algı yönetimi teknikleriyle kullanmaktadırlar (Özdağ, 2014, p. 185). Bilgi savaşı, her türlü bilgi ve bilgi kaynağına müdahale etmeyi (saldırgan bilgi savaşı) veya müdahaleyi (savunma bilgi savaşı) durdurmayı ve bundan ortaya çıkacak bilgilere karar verme sürecini yönlendirmeyi amaçlayan bir savaş türüdür (Denning, 1999, p. 5).

Bilgi savaşları, geçmişte tanık olduğumuz klasik meydan savaşlarının aksine bir ülkenin tüm elektronik sistemlerini hedef alarak sivil ve kamunun bilgi sistemlerine hâkim olmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bilgi savaşı aynı zamanda toplumlar ve zihinler üzerinde hâkimiyet kurmak amacıyla başlatılan bir savaştır. Amerikalı General Clark, Irak savaşından önce ABD'nin dezenformasyon, düşmanın iletişimini dinlemek, medya aracılığıyla psikolojik operasyonlar, Iraklı liderlere e-posta göndermek ve bazı gazetecilerin ülkenin komuta kontrol sistemlerine müdahale ettiğini belirtmiştir (Clark, 2004). Son yıllarda Rusya da bazı ülkelere siber saldırılar başlatarak bilgi akışını bulandırmaya çalışmıştır. Bunun en son örneği ise Litvanya'ya yapılan siber saldırılar olmuştur. Savunma harekatlarından oluşan bilgi savaşlarının temel amacı ise düşmanın bilgi sistemlerini, iletişim ağlarını ve halkın zihnini hedef alan bilgi saldırılarını engellemektir.

Günümüzde uluslararası savaşlar artık cephe hattından ziyade sanal platformlar ve medya üzerinden de yürütülmektedir. Ülkeler kendi ideoloji veya eylemlerini meşru kılmak adına kitlelerin algılarını birtakım teknik ve yöntemlerle yönetebilmektedir. Burada özellikle dünyada milyarlarca kullanıcısı bulunan sosyal ağlarda devreye girmektedir (High & Solomon, 2011, p. 125). Yalan haberlerle sosyal medyadaki algıları yönetmeye çalışan algı yöneticileri, hedef kitlenin veya kişilerin inançlarını, kültürlerini, değerlerini, yaşam tarzlarını kontrol etmeye ve sahte haberlerin yerine onların görüş ve stratejilerini empoze etmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Algı yönetimi bir propaganda olmamasına rağmen hedef kitlenin anlayabileceği etkileşimli bir iletişim sürecine (algı düzeyine göre) göre mesajların şekillendirmekte ve bu mesajlar yoluyla hedef kitlede istenilen tutum ve davranış değişiklikleri yapılmaya çalışılmaktadır (Garfield, 2002, p. 32). Sosyal medya platformlarında yaşanan bu durum uluslararası çapta birçok doğrulama sitesinin yaygınlaşmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Söz konusu doğrulama siteleri birer uzman rolüyle içerikleri en ince detaylarına kadar araştırarak hakikati ortaya koymaya çabalamaktadır (Kim, Moravec, & Dennis, 2019, p. 993).

Konvansiyonel medyada sahte içeriklerle karşılaşmayı önlemek adına eşik bekçileri veya editörler tarafından içerikler doğrulandıktan sonra yayın/yayımlanmaktadır. Her ne kadar bu süreç iyi niyetle sürdürülse de bazen medyanın bizatihi kendisi dahi yalan/yanlış içeriğe konu olabilmektedir. Geleneksel medyadan farklı olarak sosyal medya

platformlarında subjektif değerlendirmeler doğrulanmadan bir anda yayılabilmektedir. Sosyal medyanın katılım ve paylaşılabilir özelliği sahte içeriklerin hemen herkes tarafından üretilmesine zemin hazırlamaktadır. Dahası bu platformlar nedeniyle pek çok insan sahte haberlere inanma refleksi de göstermektedir.

Teyit, Doğrula, Doğruluk Payı ve Malumatfuruş sitelerince Rusya ve Ukrayna arasındaki savaşta yalan/yanlış paylaşımların (125) örneklem alındığı bu çalışmada; sahte haberlerin temelde hangi teknik özellikler barındırdığı, nasıl hazırlandığı, burada hangi aktörlerin başat rol oynadığı, savaşın hangi dönemlerinde sıklıkla yalan/yanlış haberlerin paylaşıldığı, bu içeriklerin yanıltıcı yönünün ne olduğu ve hangi medya araçlarının bu içerikleri kamuoyunda görünür kılmasında belirleyici rol oynadığı ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Doküman ve içerik analizi yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı bu araştırmanın aynı zamanda dezenformasyon yasasına ilişkin 40 maddenin yeni meclisten geçtiği bir döneme rast gelmesi, konunun gerek güncelliğini gerekse önemini kanıtlar niteliktedir.

Araştırmada, yalan/yanlış haberlerin genel anlamda montaj, kurgu veya metinleri çarpıtma yoluyla paylaşıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu içeriklerin neredeyse yarısına yakınının savaşın ilk haftasında sosyal medya başta olmak üzere pek çok medya araçlarından paylaşıldığı ve bu içeriklerin yarısının daha önce anonim hesaplar tarafından paylaşılan resim, video, dizi ve film sahneleri ve savaş oyunlarına ait kesitlerden hazırlandığı belirlenmiştir.

Yalan/yanlış haberlerin paylaşımına aracılık eden en bariz sosyal medya platformunun Twitter olduğu saptanmıştır. Twitter'da özellikle anonim hesaplar tarafından bu tarz içeriklerin paylaşıldığı görülmüştür. Twitter'ın yanı sıra internet haber siteleri ve YouTube'de burada öne çıkan mecralar olmuştur. Çalışmada neredeyse her sosyal medya platformunda yalan/yanlış haberlerin üretildiği sonucunun yanı sıra burada konvansiyonel medyanın da söz konusu sahte içerikleri doğrulamadan paylaştığı tespit edilmiştir.

Çeşitli medya kanallarında savaşla ilgili paylaşılan sahte içeriklerin yaklaşık üçte birisini rus askeri ve saldırılarını içermiştir. Burada çeşitli kurumlar da (Toyota) hedefe alınmıştır. Öte yandan Ukraynalı askerlere yapılan saldırıların yanı sıra ölen veya yaralanan Ukraynalılara ilişkin sahte içerikler, bir takım kurgu ve montaj teknikleriyle kamuoyunda yaydırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Savaşa taraf devletler dışındaki ABD, NATO ve AB hakkında üretilen içeriklerin sıklıkla resmî açıklama veya devlet makamlarındaki şahısların görüntülerinin kullanılarak verildiği, Türkiye özelinde gerçekleştirilen dezenformayonlarda ise Bayraktar ve SİHA'ların eski operasyonlarına ait görüntülerin yoğunlaştığı belirlenmiştir.

Dezenformasyon içerikleriyle karşılaşan bireylerin eleştirel düşünme ve medya veya dijital okuryazarlık seviyelerinin düşük kalmasının onlar üzerinde daha büyük bir etkide bulunduğu iddia edilebilir. Öte yandan doğrulama platformlarını bilen kişi sayısı ile kullanıcıların burada ilk başvurduğu referansların hangisi olduğu konusu da muammalığını korumaktadır. Doğrulama platformlarının bir takım dış ülkelerden aldığı kaynaklarla varlığını sürdürmesi, taraflı ve ideolojist birtakım argümanlarla hareket etmesine yol açacağı düşünülmektedir. Bu nedenle özellikle halkı doğru ve aynı zamanda tarafsız bir doğrulama platformuna yönlendirme adına resmî bir doğrulama platformunun kurulması da çalışmada gündeme getirilmiştir. Bu noktada Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı tarafından 2021 yılında bir adım atılsada halen bu noktada bir uygulama ortaya konulamamıştır. Öte yandan araştırmada, farklı sosyal medya platformlarından

hareketle yalan/yanlış haberlerin diğer yönlerinin ortaya konulması için yeni çalışmaların yapılması da önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya – Ukrayna Savaşı, Bilgi Savaşları, Sahte Haberler, Sahte Haber Üreticileri, Doğrulama Platformları.

Bu makale **intihal tespit yazılımlarıyla** taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

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In this study, the rules stated in the **"Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive"** were followed.

Yazarların çalışmadaki **katkı oranları** eşittir.

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