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Disinformation in the Turkish Media Landscape: A Thematic Analysis of Teyit.org Fact-Checks

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital media has facilitated unprecedented access to information while simultaneously intensifying the circulation of disinformation. This study examines the types and thematic distribution of disinformation in Turkish online media through an analysis of fact-checking content published by Teyit.org, an independent verification platform operating in Türkiye. Drawing on 140 pieces of suspicious content verified between October 25 and December 25, 2023, the study employs qualitative and quantitative content analysis to identify dominant disinformation patterns across multiple thematic categories.

The findings reveal that disinformation constitutes a dominant feature of the digital information environment, with 83% of analyzed content classified as false. Conflict-related content, particularly concerning the Israel-Hamas war, accounted for the largest thematic category, with all items in this group identified as false. High levels of disinformation were also observed in political, health, lifestyle, economy, and technology-related content, indicating that misleading information extends beyond crisis-driven or political contexts into everyday media consumption. In contrast, education-related content exhibited no instances of disinformation, suggesting varying levels of vulnerability across thematic domains.

The study further demonstrates that disinformation frequently transcends clear thematic boundaries and is predominantly disseminated through visual formats, particularly video content, highlighting the growing challenges posed by digitally manipulated media. These findings underscore the limitations of traditional media gatekeeping mechanisms and illustrate the critical role of independent fact-checking platforms in documenting and countering information disorder.

Keywords: disinformation, fake news, fact-checking, Teyit.org, conflict-related fake news, media literacy, Türkiye

1. Introduction

The rapid circulation of disinformation has emerged as a central challenge in contemporary digital communication, altering how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed across online platforms (Bilişli et al., 2024). Disinformation thrives in environments where algorithmic amplification and user-generated content enable misleading or false claims to reach broad audiences with unprecedented speed, often outpacing efforts to verify or correct them. Research shows that disinformation spreads more quickly on social media than verified information, driven by emotional engagement and platform dynamics that prioritize virality over accuracy (Surjatmodjo et al., 2024).

The environments, dissemination speed, and formats of fake news have been expanding rapidly over time. Within this evolving landscape, verification platforms play a critical role in addressing the ethical challenges posed by misinformation. This growing necessity has led to a continuous rise in the number of fact-checking initiatives globally. In Turkey, the proliferation of such platforms has also accelerated. Although some may exhibit structural and functional limitations, they nonetheless contribute meaningfully to the broader effort to counter disinformation and uphold information integrity.

This issue is particularly salient in Turkey, where high internet penetration and widespread social media use have transformed digital platforms into dominant arenas for public discourse and news consumption. Over 66% of the Turkish population regularly uses the internet, and a significant portion of these users engage with social media daily, making online platforms a primary source of information for many (Yanardağoğlu, 2022). The prominence of social media as an information source has, in turn, facilitated the rapid spread of misleading and unverified content, as public figures and media leaders have acknowledged its growing role in disseminating disinformation.

Empirical research in the Turkish context illustrates the societal implications of this transformation. For example, Bilişli et al. (2024) examine how well-educated individuals from Generations X, Y, and Z in Türkiye accessed and verified news during the February 6, 2023 earthquake, demonstrating how moments of crisis intensify the circulation of unverified information and expose limitations in news verification practices. Such findings underscore that disinformation is not merely a technological issue but a complex social phenomenon shaped by media systems, audience behavior, and broader political and cultural contexts.

The Turkish media environment is marked by a complex interplay of political polarization, diverse digital news sites, and intense online engagement, all of which shape how audiences encounter and interpret information. Studies have documented deepening polarization in public discourse, which can exacerbate vulnerabilities to disinformation by reinforcing selective exposure to content that aligns with pre-existing beliefs (Uluşan & Özejder, 2024).

Understanding the thematic contours and narrative structures of disinformation in online media is essential for assessing its broader societal impacts. Existing scholarship has often focused on specific events or isolated topics, yet there is a growing need for systematic analyses that examine how disinformation manifests across multiple domains of public interest. By examining verified claims and contested information circulating within Turkey's digital news environment, this study seeks to map the thematic distribution of disinformation and highlight the areas where misleading content is most prevalent.

Through this comprehensive approach, the research contributes to an enriched understanding of disinformation as a multifaceted phenomenon embedded within the broader media landscape. It also underscores the importance of empirical investigations into narrative patterns and thematic emphases in online disinformation, which are critical for developing more effective responses from scholars, media practitioners, and policy makers.

2. Literature Review

Understanding disinformation requires more than identifying factual inaccuracy; it calls for a broader examination of how media shape reality and public perception. Disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation are not isolated phenomena – they reflect deeper cultural, technological, and epistemological shifts in the way societies produce and process information.

Public fact-checking organizations, often grounded in the analysis of both primary and secondary sources, were developed to meet the growing demand for reliable information. These platforms aim to systematically evaluate claims and enhance the transparency of public discourse.

By the mid-2000s, the use of fact-checking platforms began to spread across Europe, paralleling their growing popularity in the United States. The first fact-checking initiative on the European continent was launched in the United Kingdom to monitor and assess claims during the general elections. This model was subsequently adopted by other countries, with similar platforms established in the Netherlands and France in 2008. Today, European verification platforms monitor not only electoral processes but also a wide range of public issues and discourses (Graves & Cherubini, 2016).

Today, fact-checking platforms continue to operate either independently or in affiliation with civil society organizations. According to Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017, p. 65), these platforms can be categorized into three main types based on the interests and engagement patterns of their users.

2.1 Disinformation

Disinformation, derived from the French term meaning "distortion of information," refers to the deliberate dissemination of false or manipulated content to mislead audiences or advance specific agendas. According to Merriam-Webster, it involves spreading information with the intent to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. Wikipedia similarly defines it as deliberately incorrect or unrealistic content. The primary goal of disinformation is not necessarily to promote a direct lie, but to foster doubt and uncertainty by distorting the truth. As Baudrillard (2021, p. 48) argues, media exert control through constant repetition, leading to the erosion of reality and an increase in public distrust. Disinformation thus challenges the very essence of reality by disrupting trust in facts, decisions, and institutions.

While upholding the right to freedom of expression, writing, and publishing within the information society, the rapid advancement of communication technologies has significantly accelerated the flow of information. As a result, individuals are no longer confined to content controlled solely by state mechanisms but are now active participants in a global information environment. However, this expansion has also led to the deliberate use of information for distortion, redirection, and manipulation.

To conceptualize this phenomenon, the term disinformation has been introduced. Disinformation refers to the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information with the aim of shaping public opinion, influencing behaviors, or achieving political, economic, or ideological objectives. In the context of the digital age, the very perception and communication of reality have become subject to transformation. Consequently, society now operates within a complex and often ambiguous communicative landscape, where truth and falsehood can easily be blurred.

Ashkyn (2015) defines disinformation as a tool for manipulating public opinion. Moreover, he notes that the term disinformation was first introduced in the 1920s to describe the ideological propaganda efforts of capitalist countries directed against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. According to the author, the concept has since become embedded in scholarly discourse, particularly in Western academic traditions, largely due to its theoretical development within the fields of communication and political science.

Among the many existing definitions of disinformation, Ladislav Bittman (1998) characterizes it as the intentional transmission of false messages to the public or to a group of decision-makers, with the aim of deception. Deliberate disseminators of disinformation so-called disinformers – are fully aware that the information they provide is inaccurate (James & Fetzer, 2021). As part of this process, active agents may fabricate sources and construct fictitious events in order to lend credibility to the false narratives they promote.

James and Fetzer regard (2021) disinformation as a manipulative instrument employed to pursue political objectives or strategic interests, often involving the blatant misrepresentation of facts presented to the public. According to these scholars, one of the key challenges in disinformation research is the difficulty of accurately assessing its scope and societal impact, as the boundaries between truth and falsehood are constantly shifting within the information environment, where even historical narratives are subject to reinterpretation.

One of the most significant effects of disinformation is its ability to become indistinguishable from reliable information through repeated exposure, ultimately embedding itself in public consciousness as perceived reality. In this context, a defining characteristic of disinformation is its intentional deviation from factual accuracy and its capacity to diminish the credibility of truthful information by generating informational noise and redundancy.

Vladimir Volkoff (1999) argues that although disinformation may involve falsehoods, its primary objective is not simply to lie, but rather to manipulate public opinion. He emphasizes that the strategic intention behind disinformation distinguishes it from mere deception. According to Volkoff (1999), four essential conditions indicate the presence of disinformation. First, when all sources repeatedly disseminate the same information, creating an artificial sense of consensus. Second, there is a noticeable absence of reliable or verifiable data, despite an increasing volume of information being circulated. Third, discourse becomes highly polarized, framing one side as entirely virtuous and the other as purely evil. Fourth, a collective alignment of public opinion emerges, moving predominantly in a singular direction.

The primary objective of disinformation is not to convey an outright falsehood, but rather to lead individuals to a state of uncertainty in which the truth itself becomes questionable. It neither explicitly affirms nor denies specific claims; instead, it aims to distort reality in such a way that doubt and ambiguity prevail.

Disinformation undermines the very foundations of reality by fostering distrust in every judgment and decision. Baudrillard (2021) argues that the principal mechanism through which the media exerts control is the incessant repetition of messages, a process that accelerates the erosion of objective reality. Consequently, society faces a dual crisis: a growing skepticism toward reality and a simultaneous struggle with the credibility of the media.

According to Aydin (2020), the primary reason disinformation poses a global threat lies in the unprecedented speed of technological advancement. Media outlets increasingly prioritize immediacy, thereby contributing to an expanding climate of distrust. In this context, the value of disinformation stems largely from the uncertainty it creates. It represents both a threat and a potential opportunity for the media. However, this dynamic has had particularly adverse effects on journalism. The profession struggles to maintain its relevance as it fails to keep pace with the rapid dissemination of information through social media. While digital platforms enable instantaneous access to information, traditional media outlets lag behind, which undermines public trust and exacerbates issues related to bias, informational overload, and the erosion of objectivity.

As a result, the contemporary information environment often conflates fact and opinion, making it increasingly difficult

for audiences to distinguish between the two (McIntyre, 2019). In this regard, media ethics must be placed at the forefront of efforts to combat disinformation. Since media ethics is intrinsically linked to the public's right to accurate information, it plays a crucial role in mitigating information distortion. Nonetheless, current realities reveal that government policies are frequently intertwined with the internal agendas of media organizations and the ethical frameworks of journalism, further contributing to the manipulation and distortion of information.

The position of journalists also plays a critical role in the dissemination of disinformation. A journalist's primary responsibility is to seek the truth by asking pertinent and probing questions. However, in today's accelerated information age, this foundational principle is often compromised. Virilio (2003) characterizes this shift as a consequence of the globalization of real-time telecommunications, particularly through the Internet, where the information revolution is transforming into a revolution of systematic whistleblowing. This has led to the emergence of rumour, suspicion, and panic, eroding the professional ethics that underpin the pursuit of truth and ultimately constraining freedom. In this context, Virilio (2003) emphasizes that mass interactivity in the circulation of information exacerbates both its distortion and uncontrolled dissemination.

Similarly, Alver (2007) notes that the increased speed of information production restricts journalists' capacity for verification and fact-checking. The pursuit of immediacy undermines the foundational values of traditional journalism, thereby diminishing public trust and radically altering the role of the media. Kaya (2016) adds that people no longer experience world events directly but rather through media-mediated interpretations. Consequently, whether disinformation is disseminated systematically or individually, it undermines the credibility of the press. Journalism itself is undergoing transformation. As Kaderoglu (2019) explains, media industrialization, the integration of production tools with digital technologies, and rigid hierarchical structures have collectively weakened the autonomy of journalistic practice. As professional discretion is curtailed and oversight intensifies, journalism becomes increasingly instrumentalized. This process facilitates the infiltration of disinformation into journalistic content, thereby violating core ethical standards.

2.2 Misinformation

Misinformation is generally understood as a distortion of information, yet it remains less widely recognized than disinformation. However, examining both concepts is essential for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary information-related challenges. According to Koohang and Weiss (2003), misinformation refers to false information that is disseminated without any deliberate intent to deceive. Kumar and Getakumari (2014) further highlight that the concept of misinformation is often subject to confusion, particularly in public discourse. If disinformation and misinformation are considered two sides of the same coin, misinformation represents a collection of falsehoods that lack intentionality, whereas disinformation is disseminated knowingly and purposefully.

Tunch (2010) defines misinformation as the distribution of content that is incomplete, distorted, or biased—without the awareness that the information is inaccurate. The distinguishing feature between the two concepts lies in the intent: misinformation is shared without the purpose of causing harm, and the individual spreading it often believes in its accuracy. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) similarly argue that misinformation consists of false or misleading content that is not intended to be harmful. Zollo and Quattrociocchi (2018) describe it as the dissemination of unverified rumours, while Scheufele and Krause (2019) characterize it as the unintentional spread of disinformation.

Kavaklı (2019) also observes that misinformation, by offering incomplete or biased narratives, often converges with disinformation in practice, despite differing in motive. These conceptual differences are clearly articulated in the report "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Research and Policy-Making Framework" published by the Council of Europe in October 2017. The report identifies misinformation as a category of information disorder that reflects a common set of challenges emerging from misrepresentation, distortion, or misunderstanding of facts.

Misinformation often emerges from the gradual distortion of events and circumstances over time. Individuals who disseminate misinformation may do so to align with or advance the interests of the social, political, or ideological groups to which they belong. The relationship between disinformation and misinformation has become increasingly intertwined due to the rapid pace of technological advancement and the speed with which information spreads in the digital environment. As a result, large segments of the public may place trust in inaccurate content before any fact-checking or verification process occurs. This phenomenon significantly undermines public confidence in the media and raises serious concerns about the reliability of information in contemporary journalism.

2.3 Malinformation

Malinformation is a concept that is less commonly referenced in scholarly discourse compared to disinformation and misinformation. Unlike misinformation, malinformation involves the use of factual and verifiable information. However, similar to disinformation, its primary intent is to inflict harm. The term derives from the Latin prefix mal- meaning

"bad," and in English, "malinformation" refers to the misuse of accurate information in a way that becomes misleading or damaging. This concept describes cases where truthful content is removed from its original context or disclosed inappropriately, resulting in adverse consequences for individuals or the public interest. Malinformation is most frequently associated with the exposure of sensitive or private data – such as leaked personal communications or confidential documents – that would otherwise be protected from public access under ethical or legal norms.

Paul Virilio (2003) emphasizes the impact of speed in the information age. The acceleration of communication creates what he calls the "information bomb," where the velocity of messages overtakes the capacity for reflection and verification. This temporal compression facilitates the viral spread of disinformation and misinformation, especially in digital environments.

From a post-Soviet perspective, Sergey Volkov (2011) discusses the fatigue and distrust that arise from prolonged exposure to contradictory or manipulative media narratives. In such a context, audiences become skeptical of all sources, creating fertile ground for alternative realities and conspiracy thinking.

Finally, Kadıroğlu (2019) highlights how institutional pressures, editorial constraints, and technological hierarchies reduce journalists' autonomy. As journalistic labor becomes increasingly industrialized, the space for critical investigation narrows, allowing disinformation to circulate unchecked under the guise of objectivity.

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation are not merely challenges of accuracy—they are symptoms of deeper structural transformations in the media ecosystem. By integrating theoretical frameworks from media sociology, communication studies, and critical theory, this study situates information distortion within the larger dynamics of post-truth, mediatization, and epistemic crisis.

3. Disinformation and Fact-Checking in Turkey

The Turkish media system has experienced profound structural changes driven by digitalization, political polarization, and increasing pressure on traditional journalism. As legacy media credibility has declined, audiences have increasingly turned to online news outlets and social media platforms as primary sources of information (Newman et al., 2019). While digital media has expanded access to information, it has also weakened traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, creating conditions in which misleading and false content can circulate widely and rapidly.

Scholarly research identifies political polarization as a central factor shaping Turkey's vulnerability to disinformation. Studies on Turkish media highlight how partisan news environments and polarized political identities contribute to selective exposure and reinforce echo chambers, limiting audiences' willingness to engage with corrective information (Yesil, 2016; Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018). Within such contexts, disinformation is more likely to resonate when it aligns with pre-existing beliefs or ideological positions, particularly during elections, protests, or international conflicts.

A substantial portion of the existing literature on disinformation in Turkey has focused on fake news during periods of war and international conflict. In particular, the Russian–Ukrainian war has attracted significant scholarly attention, with studies examining the circulation of misleading narratives, propaganda, and manipulated content in Turkish media and social platforms (Akyüz & Özkan, 2022; Uluşan & Özejder, 2024; Aydın, 2025). These studies demonstrate how wartime conditions intensify the production and dissemination of disinformation, often exploiting emotional appeals, nationalist framing, and uncertainty surrounding rapidly evolving events.

While this body of research provides important insights into conflict-related disinformation, its thematic concentration also reveals a limitation in the literature. By prioritizing war-related fake news, existing studies tend to overlook other domains in which disinformation circulates on a regular basis, such as health, science, economy, lifestyle, and entertainment. As a result, disinformation risks being conceptualized primarily as a crisis-driven phenomenon, rather than as a persistent and multi-sectoral feature of everyday digital media consumption.

In response to the broader disinformation challenge, fact-checking initiatives have emerged as significant actors within Turkey's media landscape (Aydın, 2020). Fact-checking is commonly conceptualized as a form of verification journalism aimed at restoring transparency and accountability through systematic evaluation of public claims (Graves, 2016). In polarized media environments, fact-checkers often function as alternative credibility providers, particularly for digitally engaged audiences who express skepticism toward mainstream media institutions.

4. Research Methods

This study employs qualitative content analysis to investigate the types and prevalence of disinformation circulating in Turkish online media. Qualitative content analysis is well-suited for examining how meanings are constructed within media texts and for identifying dominant narrative patterns and discursive strategies through which disinformation is propagated.

The empirical material for this study consists of publications from Teyit.org between October 25 and December 25, 2023. Teyit.org is an independent fact-checking platform founded in Türkiye in 2016, operating within the framework

of verification journalism. The platform is dedicated to investigating, verifying, and contextualizing claims circulating across social media and digital news environments. Adhering to principles of transparency, accountability, and methodological rigor, Teyit.org provides a reliable source for identifying prominent instances of disinformation and contested claims within the Turkish information ecosystem.

Teyit.org classifies disinformation into four categories: true, false, manipulated, and suspicious. A team of experienced editors conducts content analysis through a comprehensive verification process, which draws on open-source investigations, expert consultations, and technical analysis tools to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Content published on the Teyit.org platform was further classified into thematic categories to determine the distribution of disinformation across different areas. The categorization process included the following categories: politics, lifestyle, health, science, sports, economy, art, technology, urban legends, entertainment, education, and the Israel–Hamas war. This thematic classification enables a systematic analysis of both the prevalence and focus of disinformation across various sectors of public interest.

5. Results

Between October 25, 2023, and December 25, 2023, Teyit.org reviewed a total of 140 content and publicly shared the verification outcomes. Of these, 83% items (n=116) were identified as false, 16% (n=22) as true, 1% (n=1) as mixed, and 1% (n=1) as inconclusive, highlighting the overwhelming prevalence of false information during this period (see *Figure 1*).

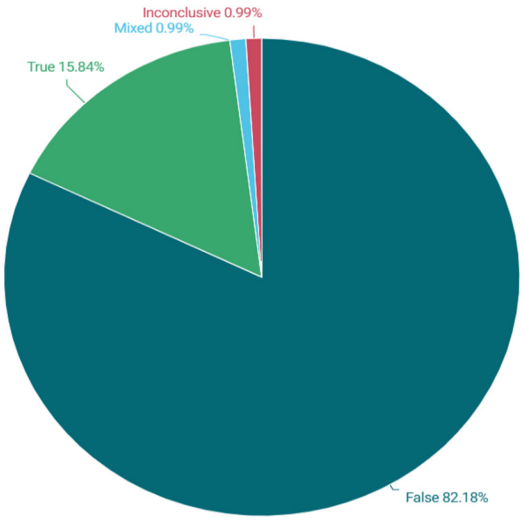


Figure 1. Analysis Results of Suspicious Content Reviewed and Published (Incorrect, Correct, Mixed, Unable to Conclude)

Data was further classified into thematic categories to examine the distribution of disinformation across different subject areas. The categories included politics, lifestyle, health, science, sports, economy, art, technology, urban legends, entertainment, education, and the Israel-Hamas war, with some items assigned to multiple categories due to overlapping subject matter.

The analysis revealed that the *Israel-Hamas* war category contained the highest concentration of content, accounting for 22 per cent of all analyzed items (n = 46), all of which were classified as false. This finding indicates that media content related to this ongoing geopolitical conflict was entirely composed of disinformation, manipulation, or inaccuracies, underscoring the heightened vulnerability of media systems during periods of conflict and the critical role of independent verification platforms.

This result is particularly significant given that the Israel-Hamas conflict is a globally salient issue that dominates both traditional and digital media agendas. The complete absence of verified information within this category highlights how conflict-driven news environments facilitate the rapid circulation of misleading narratives. Beyond exposing structural weaknesses in media systems, the pervasiveness of false content in this context has broader implications for public trust. Widespread exposure to disinformation may erode confidence in digital platforms and encourage audiences to seek alternative sources of credibility, including independent fact-checking initiatives.

In the *politics* category, 36 items were analyzed, with 94.4% (*n=34*) classified as false and 5.5% (*n=2*) as true. The content in this category largely reflects politically charged topics dominating the global agenda in recent months. The predominance of

false content within this category raises further concerns regarding the reliability of political discourse on new media platforms. The *lifestyle* category included 29 items, 79.3% (n=23) of which were false and 20.6% (n=6) true. The *science* category contained 24 items: 41.6% (n=10) false, 50% (n=12) true, 4.1% (n=1) mixed, and 4.1% (n=1) inconclusive.

In the *economy* category, 19 items were analyzed: 78.9% (n=15) false and 21% (n=4) true. Similarly, the *technology* category included 19 items: 78.9% (n=15) false, 15.7% (n=3) true, and 5.2% (n=1) inconclusive. In the *health* category, 10 items were examined, with 90% (n=9) false and 10% (n=1) true (*see Figure 2*). This was also an area where many fake news repeated from previous years, which points to the longevity of false pseudoscientific messaging (Golbeck et al., 2018; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Based on this analysis, pseudoscientific and health-oriented fake news remain in circulation and recipients' consciousness longer than other types of disinformation, with their influence being renewed by new circumstances.

The *entertainment* category contained 10 items, all of which were false. In art, 83.3% (n=5) of 6 items were false, and 16.6% (n=1) was true. The education category included 3 items, all verified as true, making it the only category with no disinformation. The *sports* category included 2 items, both false, and the *urban legends* category contained 1 false item.

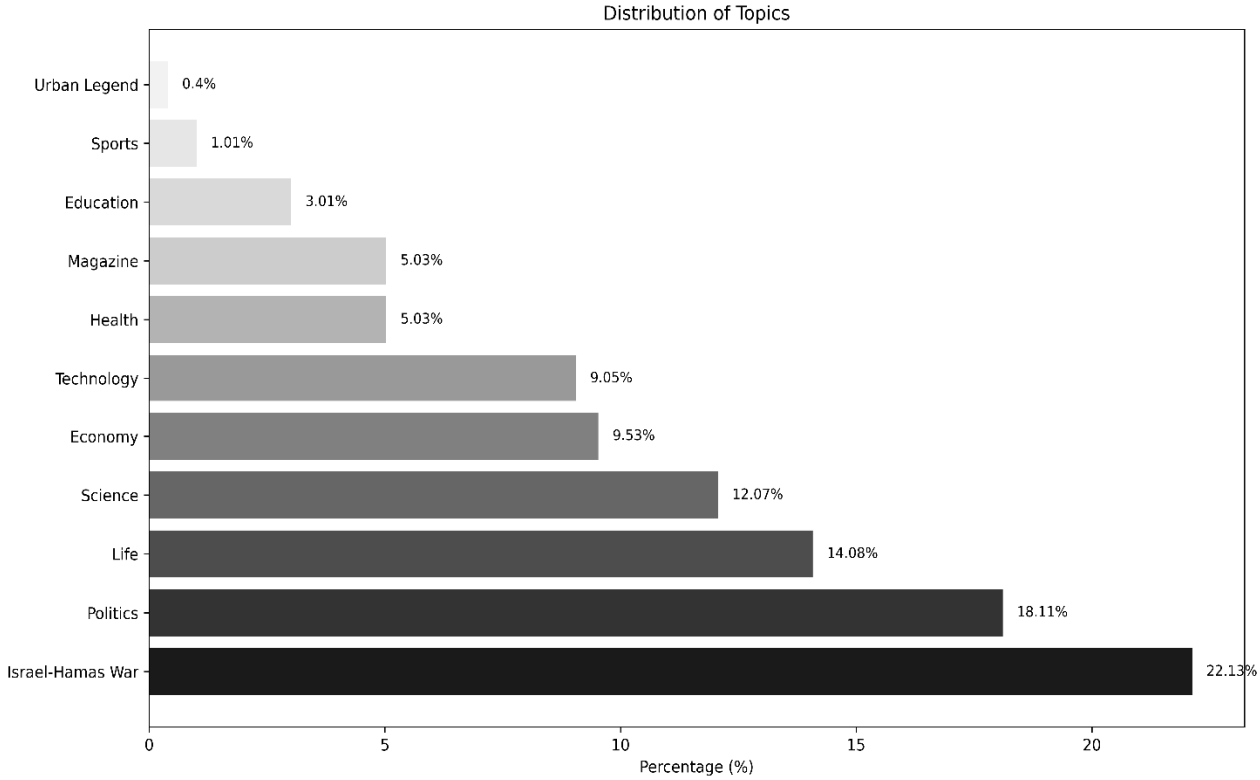


Figure 2. Categories of Suspicious Content Reviewed and Published

These results illustrate the pervasive nature of disinformation across diverse subject areas, not limited to politically or scientifically sensitive topics but extending to lifestyle, cultural, and entertainment domains. The disproportionately high rate of false information in categories such as Israel-Hamas war, politics, sports, and urban legends highlights the critical importance of systematic verification mechanisms to safeguard information integrity in the digital age.

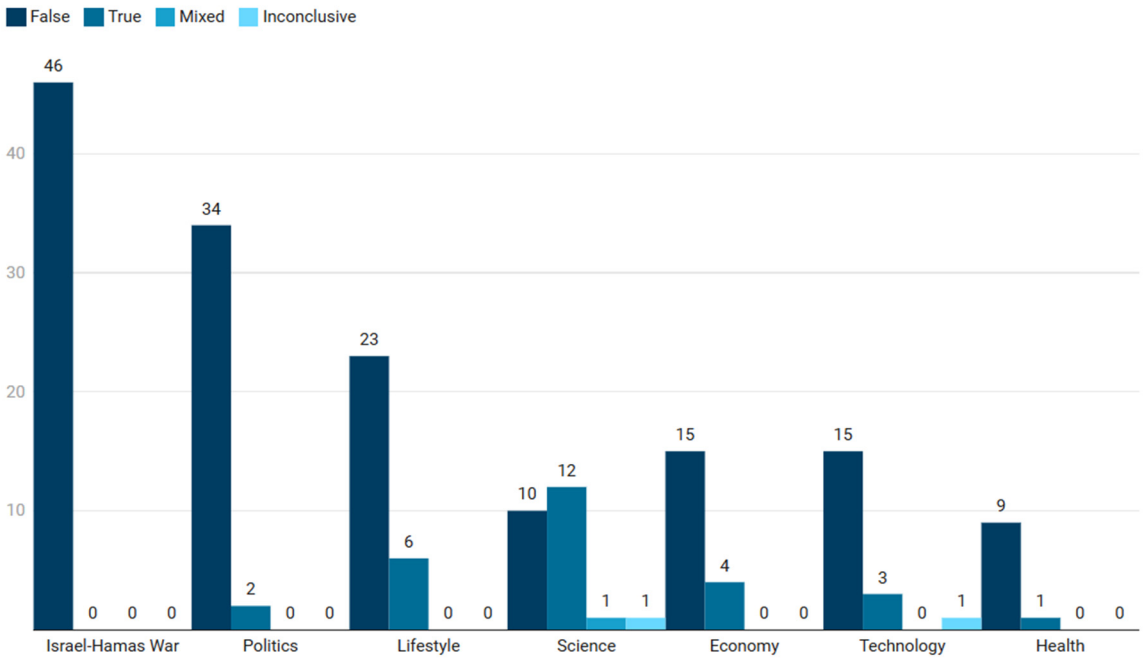


Figure 3. Analysis of the Categories Examined (Israel-Hamas War, Politics, Life, Science, etc.)

As a result of the evaluations conducted by editors at the Teyit.org platform, it was determined that the majority of suspicious content disseminated via social media platforms, websites, and media outlets predominantly consisted of videos and social media posts. During the review period, 59%items (n=82) were categorized as videos, followed by 21% items (n=30) as social media posts, 19% (n=26) as photographs, and 1 items (n=2) as news articles. These findings suggest that visual formats, particularly videos, play a significant role in the circulation of potentially misleading or false information online.

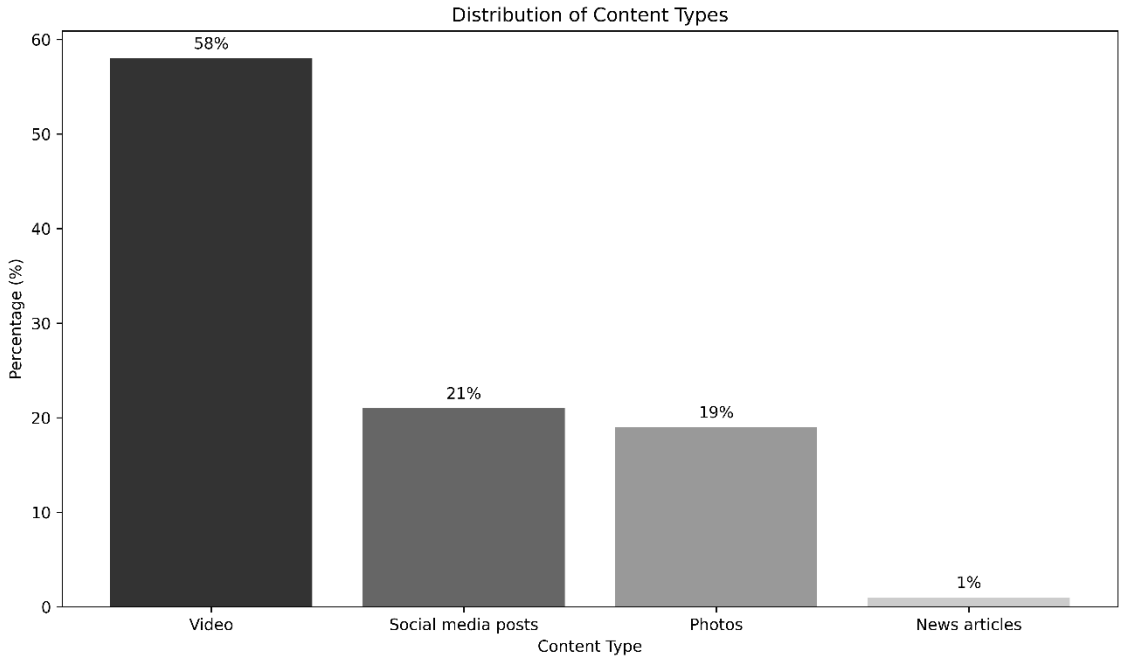


Figure 4. Types of Suspicious Information Reviewed and Published

The information reviewed and verified by Teyit.org has been disseminated across a range of platforms, including both new media and traditional media outlets. The analysis revealed that most suspicious content had been shared concurrently on multiple platforms, with a predominant presence on new media. Based on the findings, the primary platforms on which suspicious information was circulated include Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, newspapers, YouTube, online news portals, websites, television channels, and Telegram.

According to the data, 46% (n=128) containing false or misleading information were shared on Twitter, followed by 13% items (n=37) on TikTok, items 10% (n=28) on online news sites, items 9% (n=24) on Instagram, and 7% items (20) on Facebook. Other platforms included YouTube (6%, n=16), television channels (4%, n=12), newspapers (4%, n=11), websites (1%, n=4), and Telegram (0.3%, n=1).

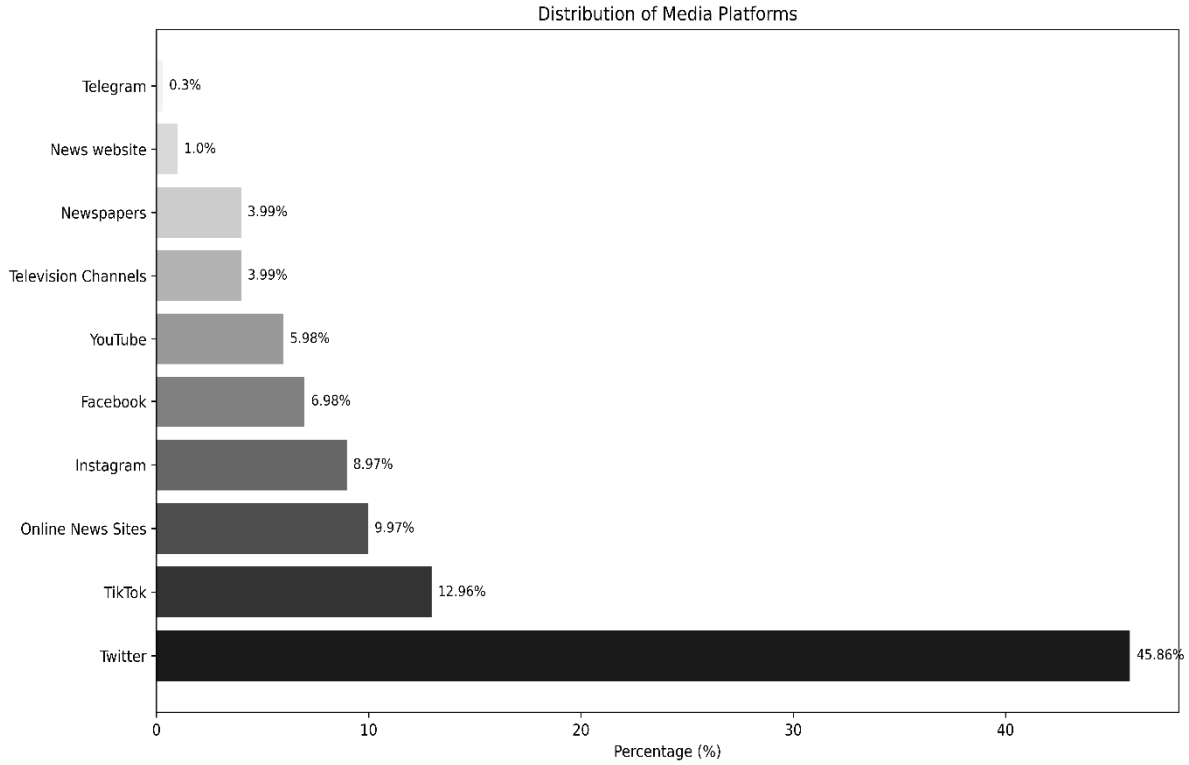


Figure 5. Platforms Where Suspicious Content Reviewed by Teyit.org Is Spread

6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a striking dominance of disinformation within the Turkish online media environment during the analyzed period. Of the 140 content items reviewed, more than four-fifths were identified as false, indicating that misleading information constituted the overwhelming majority of contested online content. This pattern supports existing research suggesting that false information circulates more frequently and persistently than verified content in digital media ecosystems, particularly in highly polarized and fast-moving information environments (Aral et al., 2018). The limited proportion of verified true content further underscores the scale of the disinformation challenge faced by both audiences and verification initiatives.

One of the most significant findings concerns the thematic distribution of disinformation, particularly the concentration of false content related to the Israel–Hamas war. All analyzed items within this category were classified as false, demonstrating how international conflicts create highly fertile conditions for the production and dissemination of misleading narratives. This result aligns with previous research emphasizing that wartime contexts intensify emotional framing, selective reporting, and the circulation of manipulated visual material. While much of the existing Turkish literature has focused on fake news surrounding the Russian–Ukrainian war (Akyüz & Özkan, 2022; Uluşan & Özejder, 2024; Aydın, 2026), the findings of this study suggest that conflict-related disinformation is not confined to a single geopolitical case. As noted by Uluşan and Özejder (2024), misinformation weakens social bonds and contributes to the formation of increasingly isolated online political communities. In the Turkish context, such disinformation tends to evolve into radicalized interpretations of war that emphasize "taking sides," thereby oversimplifying complex geopolitical realities and deepening societal polarization.

Within this contemporary post-truth environment, fake news has increasingly functioned as a modern instrument of influence. The internet enables the rapid and global dissemination of both accurate and misleading information, allowing false narratives to compete with, and at times overshadow, verified reporting (Aydın, 2026). As a result, disinformation has become a persistent feature of digital public discourse, raising concerns about public trust, democratic deliberation, and media credibility.

Political content also exhibited an exceptionally high rate of disinformation, with nearly all analyzed items in this category identified as false. This reinforces earlier scholarship highlighting the role of political polarization and partisan media structures in facilitating the spread of misleading claims in Turkey (Yesil, 2016; Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018). The prevalence of false political content suggests that political discourse remains a central vulnerability within the digital media landscape, where disinformation can function as a tool for agenda-setting, delegitimization, or public manipulation.

Beyond high-stakes political and conflict-related topics, the findings demonstrate that disinformation permeates everyday informational domains. Lifestyle, economy, technology, health, entertainment, and art categories all exhibited high proportions of false content, indicating that disinformation is not limited to moments of crisis but embedded in routine media consumption. Particularly notable is the health category, where the vast majority of content was false, echoing prior research on the susceptibility of health communication to misinformation and exaggerated claims. Similarly, the complete absence of verified true content in the entertainment category highlights how low-risk or seemingly trivial topics may function as channels for the normalization of false information.

At the same time, the science and education categories reveal important contrasts. Science-related content showed a more balanced distribution between true and false information, suggesting that certain domains may be less vulnerable to disinformation or more likely to attract verification and expert scrutiny. The education category, in which all analyzed items were verified as true, stands out as the only thematic area free from disinformation. This finding may reflect stronger institutional oversight, clearer information sources, or lower incentives for sensationalism, pointing to the role of structural safeguards in reducing susceptibility to false claims.

An analysis of the types of shared content reveals that 82 of the items were videos. The verification results indicate that the majority of these videos were classified as false. With the advancement of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, it has become increasingly accessible for individuals to alter visual content. Consequently, both individuals and institutions may exploit editing software to manipulate videos and photographs for ideological or commercial purposes. This manipulation contributes to the spread of disinformation. As a response, users must adopt a critical and skeptical approach when engaging with visual content on digital and social media platforms. Verifying the authenticity of such material is essential to prevent the dissemination of false or misleading information, which can significantly distort public understanding.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the types and thematic distribution of disinformation circulating in Turkish online media by analyzing fact-checking content published by Teyit.org during a two-month period in late 2023. The findings demonstrate that disinformation was not an isolated or marginal phenomenon but a dominant feature of the digital information environment. The high proportion of false content across most thematic categories underscores the scale of the challenge posed by disinformation and highlights the limitations of existing media gatekeeping mechanisms in online news ecosystems.

While digital technologies have significantly increased the speed and accessibility of information, they have simultaneously facilitated the rapid diffusion of misleading and false content. Social media platforms, in particular, have become central sites for the spread of information pollution, amplifying unverified claims through algorithmic visibility and user engagement. In this context, independent fact-checking organizations play an increasingly critical role. Platforms such as Teyit.org contribute not only by verifying contested claims but also by fostering public awareness, promoting media literacy, and encouraging more responsible information practices among users.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the concentration of disinformation related to the Israel–Hamas war, a globally salient issue dominating both traditional and digital media agendas. The fact that all content within this category was classified as false underscores the heightened vulnerability of media systems during periods of armed conflict. Such findings raise serious ethical concerns, as the dissemination of misleading information in conflict contexts can distort public understanding, deepen polarization, and potentially be leveraged for political or ideological manipulation. These dynamics are further reinforced by filter bubbles and echo chambers, which encourage users to consume and share content aligned with their pre-existing beliefs, thereby intensifying information disorder.

Combating disinformation in the digital environment necessitates a shared responsibility at both individual and institutional levels. To ensure access to accurate and trustworthy information, individuals must engage in critical news consumption, cross-reference content, and verify sources. In this context, verification platforms such as Teyit.org serve as indispensable tools, enabling the public to navigate information ecosystems more responsibly and access reliable content amidst widespread digital misinformation.

According to the results of the present study, among the 140 pieces of content reviewed and published between October 25 and December 25, 2023, 116 (83%) were identified as false, 22 (16%) as true, one (0.7%) as mixed, and one (0.7%) as inconclusive. These findings underscore the critical need for content creators and journalists to exercise greater diligence in verifying the accuracy of the information they disseminate. Sharing unverified content not only violates

journalistic ethics but also contributes to the spread of disinformation. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of enhancing digital media literacy among users, enabling them to critically assess the reliability of information encountered on both traditional and digital media platforms. Without such efforts, addressing the growing challenges posed by the production and circulation of false information will remain a significant societal concern.

An analysis of the study's findings reveals that the largest proportion of content shared across both new and traditional media platforms pertains to the Israel-Hamas war. Of the 140 items examined, 46 (32.8%) were related to this conflict. Notably, every item in this category was classified as false. This trend raises serious ethical concerns, as the dissemination of false information on a topic of such global sensitivity contributes to the erosion of human rights and the manipulation of public opinion. The spread of misinformation about the Israel-Hamas war risks distorting public understanding and may be intentionally leveraged for political purposes, particularly on digital platforms. The prevalence of such content highlights the critical need for heightened caution among new media users when encountering and sharing information related to armed conflict. Moreover, these results can be interpreted through the lens of media theory—specifically, the influence of filter bubbles and echo chambers—which suggests that individuals are more likely to consume and share information that aligns with their existing beliefs and ideological positions. Consequently, users disseminating such content may inadvertently or deliberately amplify disinformation by favoring narratives that conform to their own viewpoints, thereby intensifying the information disorder surrounding the conflict.

Furthermore, the efforts of verification platforms alone are insufficient to halt the proliferation of disinformation. It is essential for individuals to cultivate media literacy skills that enable them to critically assess the credibility of information sources and adopt the habit of verifying content prior to sharing. The rapid consumption and dissemination of unverified content on social media amplify the reach and influence of disinformation. In this context, media companies bear a significant responsibility: they must ensure transparency in their algorithms, enforce stricter regulations on content that propagates disinformation, and offer users mechanisms that prioritize and incentivize access to credible and verified news sources.

Therefore, the responsibility for combating information pollution lies not only with individuals but also with media organizations, verification platforms, and technology companies. Platforms such as Teyit.org play a vital role in this ecosystem; however, the public's critical approach toward information disseminated by such sources and the consistent reliance on credible and verified content are equally important. In the digital age, ensuring access to accurate and essential information – and promoting its conscious and responsible use will be among the most critical requirements for the future.

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Author contributions

AI and KK were responsible for study design and revising. MT was responsible for data collection. AS drafted the manuscript and AI revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. In this paragraph, also explain any special agreements concerning authorship, such as if authors contributed equally to the study.

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