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The rapid diffusion of fake news: An analysis of content on migration, refugees, and conflict on international fact-checking platforms

Sahte haberin hızlı yayılımı: Uluslararası teyit platformlarında göç, mülteci ve çatışma eksenli paylaşımların içerik analizi

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Abstract

After the 2016 election campaign of the former United States President Donald Trump in 2016, the concepts of post-truth, disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation gain popularity. This study examines fact-checking efforts by International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) member organizations across ten countries between January to November 2023 focusing on disinformation disseminated on social media platforms. The study was designed as a case study and the content was analyzed with the content analysis approach. The research questions were determined as follows: 'Which media platforms are more commonly used to disseminate refugee-focused fake news or content?', 'Which content types are commonly used to spread fake news/content?', 'What are the common topics employed in fake content in these countries between January to November 2023?' The findings revealed that social media platforms *Facebook* and *X* were frequently used to disseminate disinformation and various types of fake news and content. Titles and text-supported video content were the most employed typology in these posts. Across the researched countries, four recurring issues were identified: disinformation about protests in France, fake news related to conflicts, and information about financial aid, opportunities, and accommodation facilities for refugees. Notably, false information on mass protests rapidly spreads alongside fake news in multiple countries.

Keywords: Fake news, fact checking platform, social media, migration, refugee

Öz

2016 yılında eski Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Başkanı Donald Trump'ın seçim kampanyasının ardından, hakikat ötesi, dezenformasyon, yanlış bilgi ve kötü bilgi kavramları popülerlik kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma, Uluslararası Teyit Ağı (UTA) üye kuruluşları tarafından Ocak - Kasım 2023 tarihleri arasında on ülkede gerçekleştirilen teyit çalışmalarını inceleyerek, özellikle sosyal medya platformlarında iletilen dezenformasyona odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma bir durum tespit çalışması olarak

tasarlanmış olup içerik analizi yaklaşımı kullanılarak bulgulara ulaşılmıştır. Araştırma soruları şu şekilde belirlenmiştir: 'Mültecileri konu alan sahte haber veya içerikleri yaymak için hangi medya platformları daha yaygın olarak kullanılmaktadır?', 'Sahte haber/içerik yaymak için hangi içerik türleri yaygın olarak kullanılmaktadır?', 'Bu ülkelerde incelenen dönemde yaygın olarak kullanılan ortak başlıklar neler olmuştur?' Bulgular, *Facebook* ve *X* gibi sosyal medya platformlarının dezenformasyon ve çeşitli sahte haber ve içerik türlerini yaymak için sıkça kullanıldığını ortaya koymuştur. Başlık ve metin destekli video içerikler en çok kullanılan tipoloji olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırılan ülkelerde dört tekrarlayan konu tespit edilmiştir: Fransa'daki protestolara dair dezenformasyon, çatışmalarla ilgili sahte haberler ve mültecilere yönelik finansal yardım, olanak ve konaklama imkanları hakkındaki yalan içerikler. Özellikle kitlesel protestolara ilişkin yanlış bilgilerin birçok ülkede sahte haberlerle birlikte hızla yayılması öne çıkmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sahte haber, teyit platformları, sosyal medya, göç, göçmen

Introduction

Time and space-independent communication was normalized by the popularization of internet access and social media platforms. The popularization of the internet has led to the concept of a "global village" as introduced by McLuhan (2020) and introduced a hybrid human lifestyle that included virtual and physical domains. The development, spread, and impact of social phenomena that affect life in the physical domain have often been determined by real or fake truths that are propagated in the virtual domain. In addition to facilitating the flow of information, the virtual domain, a domain of information creation, unfortunately, did not only lead to positive outcomes. The analysis of the boundless opportunities provided by the internet and related social consequences should include the significant issue of false content that could induce social conflict, and this concept. For this reason, the subject is widely researched by academics.

Social media, which has become a part of daily life, is not currently only a medium where users search for information or events of interest, but the medium has also been internalized by users. Furthermore, users share the information they collect on these platforms and post it to other users, serving as a unit of publication (Kılıç & İspir, 2020, p. 267; Segado-Boj et al., 2019, p. 92). With the increase in the popularity of social media, fake news and content began to be created and spread. Such content did not only disseminate rapidly (Dedeoğlu, 2016, p. 59) but also began to significantly affect society, leading to social conflicts. Negative phenomena such as the spread of racist discourse, hate speech and xenophobia became effective in the development of social conflicts (Cerase & Santoro, 2018). Spread of unconfirmed, unfiltered, or fake content on social media could lead to negative outcomes (Gülmen, 2020). Fake news and content on refugees and immigrants are the particular emphasis of the current study since these have the potential to divide society and lead to social conflict.

The fact that social media that users employ as a news source became a source of fake news distinguishes social media from conventional media. The laws, ethical codes, and principles that bound conventional media do not exist for social media (Lee & Ma, 2012, p. 332). Uncontrolled and unedited social media platforms are anonymous news sources (Chen et al., 2019, p. 3). Thus, false/fake news and content could easily be generated and disseminated on social media and manipulate public opinion.

The circulation of fake news and content that could lead to social conflict and street movements increases the significance of the present study. These movements and their social consequences could lead to collective and individual concerns (Kılıç & İspir, 2020, p. 268). The present study aimed to determine how fake news and content on cross-border compulsory refugee and migrant movements are produced and disseminated on social media platforms, on fact-checking organization reports on fake news context, content, and distribution.

Conceptual framework and literature review

False/fake news and content, which are coined as disinformation in daily language, were described as "information disorder" in the literature (Kermer & Nijmeijer, 2020; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The lowest layer of information disorder includes 'disinformation,' 'misinformation' and 'malinformation.' Disinformation refers to deliberately created information to cause harm. Misinformation is associated with false information that was not created with malintent, while malinformation spread to cause harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Several authors described disinformation in the literature. A general definition emphasized that disinformation deliberately aims to mislead and is based on false information (Kırık & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 121; Tudjman & Mikelic, 2003). Fake information created and spread on social media aims to manipulate public opinion. The content that was designed and spread based on lies, could be dangerous. Misleading content that could affect social life (politics, culture, health, economy, etc.) could damage both individuals and society at different levels and is considered an important problem (Fallis, 2014, Woolley & Howard,2018)

Videos, photographs, text, audio elements, and artificial intelligence are employed to create misleading content. Fake news and content are published on the internet

and social media platforms with edited and falsified photographs, by alienating the context and the videos, and publishing posts with misleading titles and texts (Erdoğan, 2013; Kırık & Yılmaz, 2018, p. 121; Edson et al., 2018, p.138).

Due to advances in artificial intelligence, fake content, especially deepfake, leads to significant problems in the reliability of news. Voices and faces could be combined with deep learning technology, generating inaccurate speeches as if they were spoken by that person. These items are generated through the training of algorithms using deep learning techniques (Temir, 2020, p. 1012).

Deformation, distortion, and decontextualization of the truth is called the post-truth era. In this era, the truth became insignificant, and the power of social media in the lives of the users and the rapid spread of lies became the most important issues. Today, many people repost information on social media without questioning, and they consider everything they perceive as the truth rather than searching for it, leading to the distortion of the facts (McIntyre, 2022, p. 91-95).

The most significant examples of the post-truth era could be observed in politics. It was determined that Donald Trump told six thousand three hundred and seventy lies during his presidency (McIntyre, 2022, p. 16). Beyond the fact that politicians try to convince the masses of the reality of a make-believe universe, it should also be noted that lies spread six times faster than the truth, the effects of which are unpredictable (McIntyre, 2022, p. 17).

Since lies spread much faster than truth online, they have the potential to cause serious harm. It is important to understand the negative effects of fake news and content with high power of dissemination and impact on society and the factors that motivate individuals to spread and believe this news (Shu et al., 2020a; Cheng et al. 2021). As part of the fight against disinformation, certain websites started to check and verify the facts claimed by such posts. Among these sites, snopes.com is one of the oldest that has been published since 1996, during the early years of the internet (Graves, 2016, p .28). The *FactCheck.org* supports political discourse and is published by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, is a non-profit platform founded in 2003 (Graves, 2016, p .29).

In addition to the independent platforms that fact-check the information available on the internet, IFCN, the subject of the current study, is an association of several fact-

checking platforms around the globe that was founded in 2016. IFCN was established to ensure that fact-checking organizations are accredited as reliable (International Fact Checking Network, 2023). IFCN currently has one hundred twenty-four active members and has specified five main criteria for fact-checking reliability. These include fairness and impartiality, resource transparency, financial and organizational transparency, transparency about the employed method(s), and an open and honest revision policy (İrvan, 2022).

The established fake-checking platforms are far from the desired level of efficacy. The improvement of the digital media literacy levels of internet users, their skills to distinguish fake and real news, and more importantly, raising awareness about fake news are extremely important challenges. Several studies have been conducted based on various perspectives and in several scientific disciplines to address the issue based on multiple dimensions (Akıncı, N., 2008; Alıcı & Gökbulut, 2017; Apuke et al, 2023; Machete & Turpin, 2020; Jost et al., 2020; Hammouchi & Ghogho, 2022).

Studies conducted on refugee/immigrant issues and fake news and content that could lead to social conflict, the main topics of the present study. Due to increasing migration, countries need to consider and plan social harmony in a society that includes individuals of different ethnic origins, with different beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and languages. Social unrest could emerge due to political, economic, social, and legal problems; thus, the establishment and maintenance of social harmony within these different but interrelated structures are an important issue. Furthermore, social adaptation requires time and resources and could be disrupted by the disinformation on social media platforms. However, locals who believe or choose to believe disinformation could complicate progress, lead to hate speech, and refuse to meet on common ground with the "outsiders" (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Currently, individuals can create their friend circles on social media platforms, close themselves within echo chambers that propagate what they like to hear and generate news and content (McIntyre, 2022, p. 69). Any content that meets user expectations, even if it is fake, could be accepted and spread, polarizing the society. It would not be wrong to argue that individuals would act similarly to politicians to create their universes based on lies. This would ultimately provide a basis for the acceptance, propagation, and consumption of the fake content.

The review of the international and domestic literature on the control of disinformation revealed that an increasing number of studies have been conducted based on different dimensions in various disciplines. One of these, *The Hype Machine* (Aral, 2022) is a compilation of fake content published globally, where the current times are described as 'the end of reality.' In the description of the current information ecosystem, Aral argued that digital networks consist of connected individuals with similar views and beliefs (2022, p. 75). This also demonstrated the speed of the dissemination of false content. Aral's study was conducted in 2018 and is among the significant studies that reported the striking nature of fake news. In the study that covered eleven years, Aral reported that one hundred twenty-six thousand *Twitter* (now *X*) threads spread false information to 3 million people (2022, p. 77).

In a study on immigrants/refugees and disinformation, Ruokolainen & Widén (2020) focused on perceived misinformation and normative misinformation. The study focused on the validity and perceptions of the information that was shared with refugees/immigrants and suggested that they should be exposed to only accurate information during adaptation.

There are several studies in Turkish on fake news and content on immigrants and refugees. These studies, mostly conducted on Syrian refugees, employed various approaches, such as thematic analysis, multi-modal text analysis, descriptive content analysis, and in-depth interviews (Çaycı, 2021; Alışık & Aslam, 2022; İris & Kesgin, 2023; Taş, 2018; Göncü & Sim, 2019).

Another research context for fake news has been content typology, which is another topic of the current study. In their study on content typology, Edgerly et al. (2020) investigated the impact of news headlines on the reader's intentions to verify the accuracy of the said news report. Recent studies focused on content to categorize fake news typologies by distinguishing various formats and news content types (e.g., text and/or multimedia) (Bakdash et al. 2018; Fraga-Lamas & Fernández-Caramés 2020; Hasan & Salah 2019; Masciari et al. 2020; Parikh & Atrey 2018).

Undoubtedly, there are further studies in the literature on fake news, disinformation, and immigration. The search of the related keywords on Web of Science (WoS) revealed more than ten hundred articles published since 2019. To quote Aral (2022, p. 77), fake news science is still in its infancy in the clarification of how and why fake news spreads

in the virtual world. Thus, various social science studies would provide a novel focus on the issue in the comprehension of the phenomenon.

The present study was designed to address a single issue in this labyrinth of uncertainty. The literature review revealed no studies where fake news and content, dissemination channels, and content typology were analyzed based on the comparison of fact-checking platforms in several countries during the same period. It could be suggested that the present study would contribute to the field due to this analysis and since it covered an 11-month period.

Aim and methodology

Gone are the days when the benefits of social media such as democratization, liberation, and collaboration were emphasized with the promise of a better future. Today, individuals know that the content and news spread on social media could be fake and lead to disinformation. However, both confinement in echo chambers and the tendency to trust in the news, even when they are false, allow more rapid dissemination of false content when compared to the truth.

Aim

The present study was designed to determine disinformation associated with migration and refugee issues. It was envisaged that the present study would contribute to the comprehension of the issue, which could lead to social conflicts, especially due to its impact on the dissemination of hate speech. The study aimed to analyze the issues associated with the control of disinformation prominent in fact-checking sites based on the research questions and sub-questions.

1. Which media platforms are more commonly used to disseminate refugee-focused fake news or content?

2. What is the most common content type?

3. What are the common themes encountered in fake content in the countries of study between January to November 2023?

Methodology

The study was designed to determine the scope and distribution of fake news and content on social media based on IFCN member fact-checking site reports between January to November 2023. The research was designed as a case study and the study data were analyzed with descriptive content analysis approach and archive review.

Sample and data collection

One hundred sixty-two fake news were identified on social media and conventional press during the period of analysis. The top ten countries that received the highest number of immigrants/refugees in 2023 were determined based on the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) database. Among the countries listed in Table 1, Iran, Türkiye, Germany, Pakistan, Uganda, Russian Federation, Poland, Bangladesh, Sudan, and Lebanon received the highest number of immigrants.

Table 1: Number of refugees in 2023

Country	Number of refugees in 2023
Iran	3.443.522
Türkiye	3.368.976
Germany	2.509.506
Pakistan	2.080.501
Uganda	1.512.681
Russian Federation	1.249.342
Poland	989.877
Bangladesh	961.801
Sudan	926.433
Lebanon	799.175
France	641.626
United Kingdom	365.262
Romania	139.081
Ireland	99.048

The fact-checking platforms operate in the countries listed in the table, which have been reviewed as members of IFCN. It was determined that there were no fact-checking platforms in Iran, Uganda, Russian Federation, and Bangladesh. This was the most significant limitation of the present study.

In addition to the countries that received the highest number of refugees, France, the United Kingdom, and Ireland were also included in the study. Although the United

Kingdom (UK) left the European Union (EU) after Brexit, it was included since it is a European country that still accepts refugees, Ireland was included since it is a similar country and accepts refugees, albeit a small number, and France was included due to its EU membership. Finally, Romania was included in the research since the conditions in Romania were like Poland, it is an EU country, and a high number of Ukrainian refugees live in Romania. These four countries also host IFCN member fact-checking platforms.

The fact-checking websites examined in the study are as follows: *Full Fact, Factual, Maharat-News, Br, Soch Fact Check, Demagog, The Journal, Teyit, Fact Check Afp* and *211 Check*. After the determination of the scope, confirmed and false reports on the topics of 'refugees, migration, migrants' that were posted in the eleven months were collected with the MAXQDA software.

Coding

The main theme was determined as 'migration/refugees' in the study, and the authors coded the remaining themes within three rounds. During the first round, the date interval was determined. Thus, all texts were reviewed to achieve mastery of the issue. In the second round, one of the research questions, the theme of dissemination platforms, was addressed, and the media and social media platforms were identified. In the third round, the fake news and content typologies in mass media were determined. To ensure validity and reliability, the codes were revised by experts during the coding process. Expert recommendations were discussed, and the codes were revised accordingly.

Findings

The list of all countries included in the study and from which data was collected or not collected is presented in Table 2. The list is topped by the Turkish occurrence of fake news and content, marked at (n=45) as determined by fact-checking platforms. The UK ranked second based on frequency (n=35), and the finding was significant since the country received much fewer refugees when compared to the top ten nations. Also, based on Table 1, only four fake news were reported by the fact-checking platforms in Germany. However, it should be noted that significant informative content on refugees, migration, and immigrants was identified in the reports by German that fact-checking organization. It was deemed necessary to mention this since it was noteworthy that the fact-checking site played a role in raising public awareness and presenting related problems, state policies, and future perspectives.

Table 2: Identified fake news and content

Country	Number of fake news & content about refugees
Iran	-
Türkiye	45
Germany	4
Pakistan	12
Uganda	-
Russian Federation	-
Poland	18
Bangladesh	-
Sudan	3
Lebanon	1
France	21
United Kingdom of Great Britain	35
Romania	2
Ireland	21

Although they were among the top ten countries that received refugees, the frequencies were three (n=3) and one (n=1) in Sudan and Lebanon, respectively. The topics of the three reports identified by the Sudanese fact-checking site included the bullying of an African child in France, the murder of Ugandan citizens, and protests in France. The Lebanese fact-checking site reported housing assistance problems for Syrian citizens in Lebanon. It was significant that in these two countries, fake news and content that could provoke the public and lead to social conflict about refugee and migration issues were not identified by the fact-checking platforms.

The frequency of reported fake news was two (n=2) on the fact-checking site in Romania with similar economic, cultural, and social properties when compared to Poland. According to official UNHCR data, Poland received 989.877 immigrants as of 2023, while Romania received 139.081. The information verified in Romania is a statement made verbally that contains incorrect information. Apart from this verification, no other verification of fake news has been encountered through the platform included in the research in that country. The difference between the frequency of fake news and content in Poland and Romania was proportional to the number of refugees they received. A significant finding was the frequency of fake news in Ireland (n=21), which ranked last in the table developed with the UNHCR data. It was observed that in Ireland, which received a much lower number of refugees when compared to other countries, the number of fake news and content on the subject was higher than in several countries at the top of the list.

Finally, the frequency of fake news was (n=21) in France. The identified content was associated with the protests in France, isolated events, and developments in other countries.
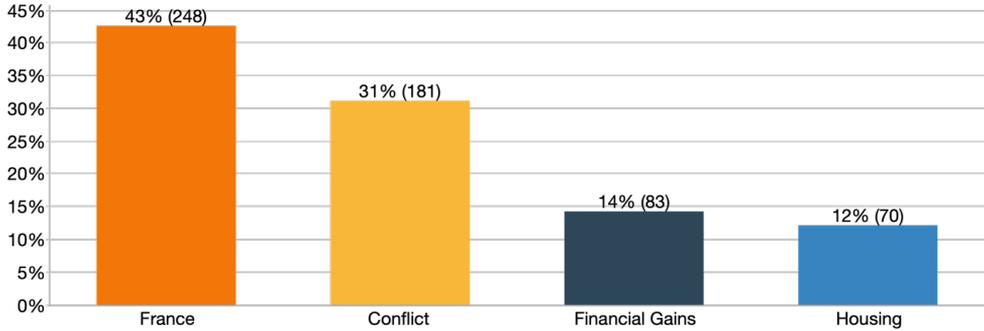
Figure 1: Distribution of sub-themes associated with refugees/migrants

The distribution of the verified fake content about refugees and migrants on fact-checking sites is presented in Figure 1. The global repercussions of the French protests were also observed among the verified content on fact-checking sites. During coding, France emerged as the sub-theme with the most verified content frequency (43%). The Conflict sub-theme, a main topic of the study, ranked second (31%), followed by financial gain (14%), and housing (12%).
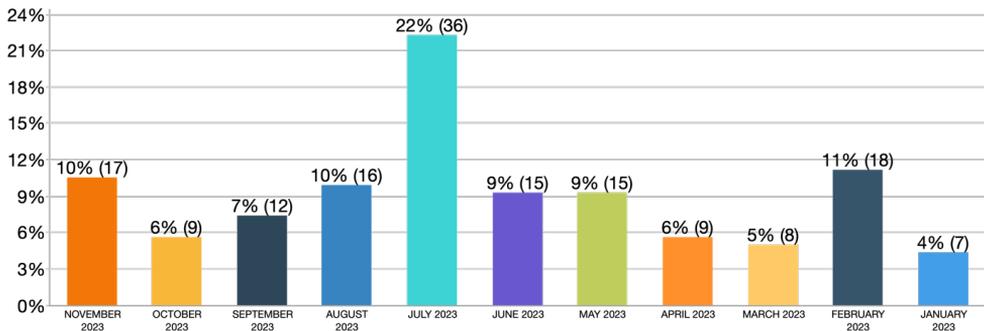
Figure 2: Chronological distribution of fake content

The chronological distribution of fake news and content as reported by national fact-checking sites is presented in Figure 2. The chronological distribution exhibited a similar increase to the distribution of sub-themes presented in Figure 1. Fake news about the events in France, which were at their height in July, rose in that period. In other months, the frequency of fake news on refugees and migration issues varied between 4% and 11%.

In the next paragraphs, the issues associated with particular countries are discussed in detail based on the scope and frequency of the content reported for each country.

The platforms where fake content was disseminated

The platforms where fake news/content spread were identified based on the reports of national fact-checking sites. These platforms varied; however, the possibility that certain platforms could be excluded by the fact-checking sites could be a limitation of the present study.

The distribution platforms of fake content are presented in Figure 3. *X* ranked first (43%), followed by *Facebook* (30%). Other platforms where fake news/content were disseminated included conventional media (12%), *TikTok* (7%), *Instagram* (4%), *Telegram* (2%), *WhatsApp*, and *YouTube* (1%).
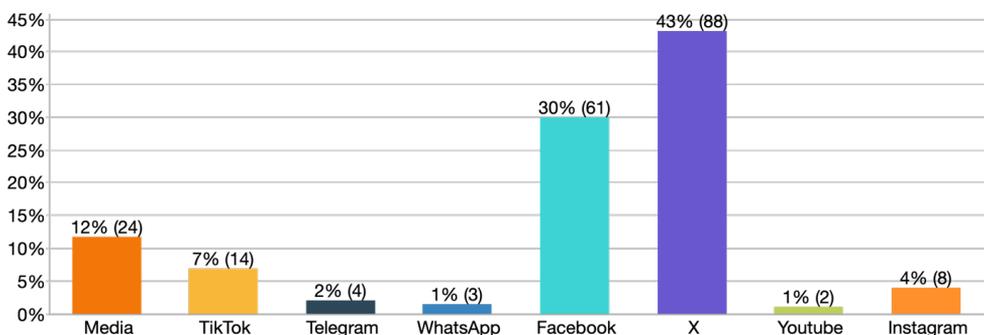
Figure 3: The platforms where fake content was disseminated

Significant findings were determined on the national distribution of fake news and content on the platforms (Table 3). For example, the analysis of the countries with the highest frequency on *X* revealed that Türkiye led the bunch (n=35), followed by France

(n=18), Ireland (n=13), Pakistan (n= 8), and Sudan (n=4). The analysis of the countries with the highest frequency on *Facebook* revealed that Poland led the bunch (n=18), Ireland (n=16), France (n=10), United Kingdom (n=9), and Pakistan (n=8).

Table 3: Fake news' distribution platforms

COUNTRY	PLATFORM							
	MEDIA	TIKTOK	TELEGRAM	WHATSAPP	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE	INSTAGRAM
France	1	3			10	18		2
Germany	4							
Ireland		2	4	1	16	13		
Lebanon						1		
Pakistan	1	1		1	8	8	2	4
Poland		3			18	6		
Romania	2							
Sudan				1		4		
Türkiye		5				35		
United Kingdom	18				9	3		

One of the most interesting findings on the platform of fake news distribution was determined with the UK fact-checking site dataset. The analysis revealed that the most common disinformation channel in this country was the press/media (n=18). In the UK, conventional media was followed by *Facebook* (n=9) and *X* (n=3).

It was observed that disinformation generally spread on several new media platforms simultaneously. Especially *Facebook* and *X* were prominent among the platforms where disinformation was spread simultaneously. Content was also disseminated simultaneously on *Instagram* and *X* as well as *Instagram* and *Facebook*. Although *TikTok* is known for entertaining content, it was also used to spread disinformation. The content was spread on this platform simultaneously with *Facebook* and *X*.
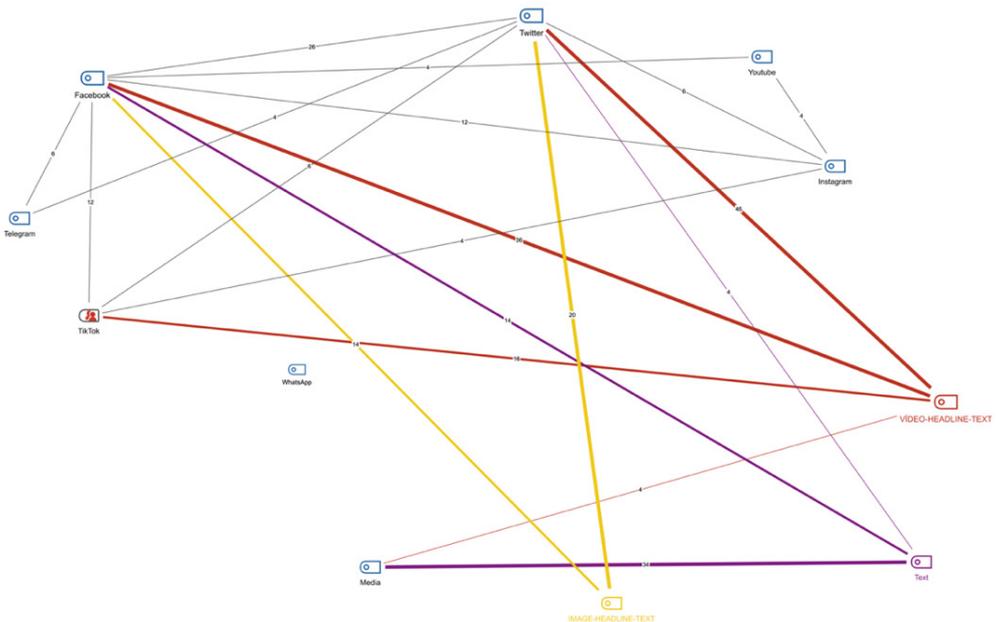
Content typology

The correlation between content typology and dissemination channels was also analyzed in the study. Aïmeur et al. (2023) proposed a typology for the content published on social media platforms. They developed detailed textual and multimedia properties for a content typology. The textual properties included the title, hyperlink, resource, and content. The multimedia properties included images, videos, audio, and gifs/animations. Demuyakor & Opata (2022) indicated that users tend to believe and share video content more.

Table 4: Content typology of fake news
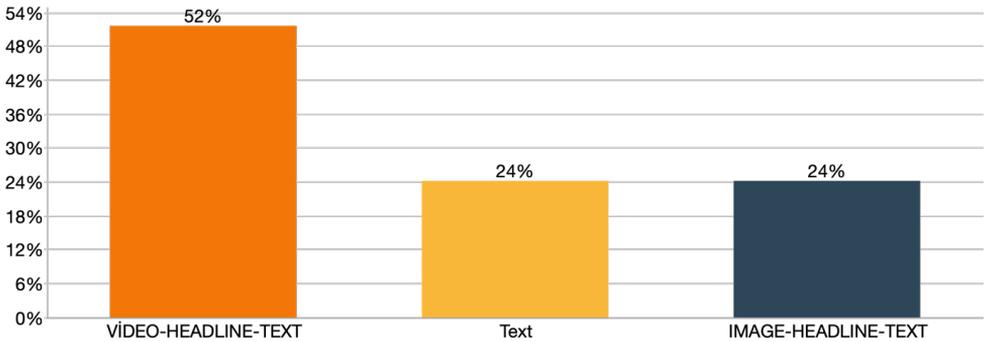
The content typology findings of the study are presented in Figure 4. More than half (52%) of disinformation was in the form of videos. The content analysis conducted in the study revealed that 24% of the content was textual and 24% was visual. It has been determined that textual content was prominent in content disseminated by the press/media. The content that included a video, title, and text was most frequent.


Figure 5: Content typology and dissemination channels

The channels employed to disseminate different types of content are presented in Figure 5. It was determined that video content was preferred on *Facebook*, *X*, and *TikTok*. These issues were analyzed comparatively since understanding the content typology based on the dissemination channel would guide the process of the control of fake news.

The analysis of the visual content, another content typology method, revealed that this content was disseminated on *Facebook* and *X*. The final type of content encountered in the study was textual content. It was determined that textual fake news and content was disseminated on the press and *X*.

Common issues

In content analysis, the topics with the highest frequency were determined. Figure 6 displays the most frequently coded topics.
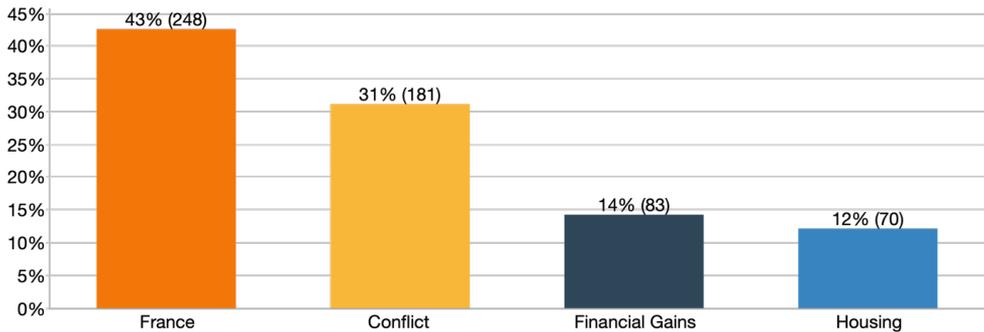
Figure 6: Common issues with the highest frequency

It was determined that the topic with the highest frequency was the events in France, also known as the Nahel Merzouk[1] incident (Euronews, 2023). This theme was identified in most reports in several countries included in the study (n=248). Social media users were informed about fake news on the incidents in France by the fact-checking sites in France, Pakistan, Poland, Türkiye, and Sudan.

Figure 7: Fake news on France reported by fact-checking sites in Türkiye (Source: Teyit)
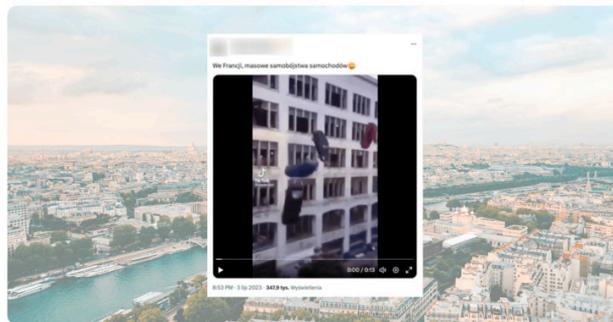

Figure 8: Fake news on France reported by fact-checking sites in Poland (Source: Demagog)

Examples of fake news and content published around the world during the protests in France are presented in Figure 7 and Figure 8. An old video, shot in a different location, was published on social media, and posted by several users, with the title announcing that vehicles were thrown out of the parking lot during the protests in France. Fact-checking sites in various countries analyzed the content and reported that the report was fake.

The issues that could lead to social conflict were analyzed to determine the frequency and it was observed that the theme ranked second (Figure 5). The frequency of the phenomenon of conflict was determined as one hundred eighty-one (n=181), and during coding, the terms "harassment," "attack," "aggression," and "theft" identified in fake news and content were associated with the theme, and the impact of the inclusion of fake reports in the posts on the tensions between immigrants/refugees and locals was analyzed. Fake news associated with conflict was identified by fact-checking sites in the UK, Germany, Pakistan, Poland, Iceland, Türkiye, France, and Sudan.

In frequency analysis, financial opportunities available for immigrants/refugees ranked third eighty-three (n=83). It was determined that this issue was included in fake news and content not only in Türkiye but also in the UK, Pakistan, and Ireland. The local public believed that several privileges were provided for immigrants/refugees by governments. This idea, along with the production and distribution of fake content, resonated with the public, leading to problems in social welfare and peace.
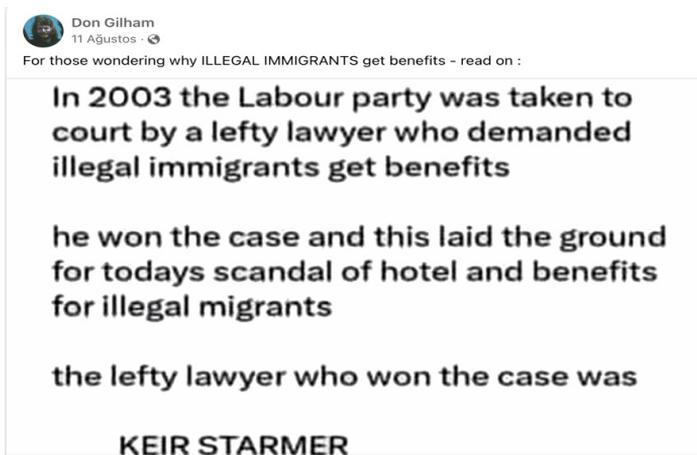
Figure 9: The claim that illegal immigrants could benefit from various privileges in the UK.

(Full Fact)

lot the reason asylum seekers get support

AUGUST 2023

WHAT WAS CLAIMED	OUR VERDICT
Keir Starmer took the government to court in 2003.	Six asylum seekers took the government to court in 2003. Mr Starmer was the barrister representing five of these people, and did not initiate or bring the legal action himself.

1 of 2 claims

post on Facebook claims that Sir Keir Starmer took the government to ourt in 2003 to demand that "illegal immigrants" could receive hotel ccommodation and benefit support.

he post says: "For those wondering why ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS get enefits - read on:". It then includes an image, with the following ording: "In 2003 the Labour party was taken to court by a lefty lawyer ho demanded illegal immigrants get benefits

e won the case and this laid the ground for todays scandal of hotel and enefits for illegal migrants

he lefty lawyer who won the case was

Figure 10: A verification report by a fact-checking site

(Source: Full Fact)

Fotoğrafın göç idaresi yetkililerinin Suriyeli sığınmacılara yaptığı ziyareti gösterdiği iddiası

Seda Karatabanoğlu
14 Eylül 2023 14:15 • 2 dk okuma

Bulguları Gör   Paylaş   Abone ol

Sosyal medyada paylaşılan fotoğrafın Amasya İl Göç İdaresi yetkililerinin, kentte yaşayan Suriyeli sığınmacıları evlerinde ziyaret ettiği ve okul çağındaki çocuklarına kırtasiye malzemeleri hediye ettiği anları gösterdiği iddia edildi.

📍 Amasya İl Göç İdaresi yetkilileri, Amasya'da ikamet eden Suriyeli sığınmacıları evlerinde ziyaret edip okul çağına gelen çocuklara kırtasiye malzemeleri hediye etti.

Figure 11: Confirmation of a report on privileges in Türkiye.

(Source: Teyit)

Figure 12: Confirmation report about the privileges provided for refugees in Ireland
(Source: The Journal Fact Check)

The Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12 presented above included verification analyses conducted by fact-checking sites on fake news and content in the UK, Türkiye, and Ireland. The posts included various privileges available in the UK, educational stationery assistance in Türkiye, and health privileges available for refugees in Ireland.

Housing/accommodation facilities were determined as another problem in frequency analysis that could endanger social peace. It was observed that fake news and content on government housing assistance for immigrants/refugees that was not available for the citizens was refuted by fact-checking sites, and the reality was communicated to the public. The frequency of this issue was seventy (n=70).
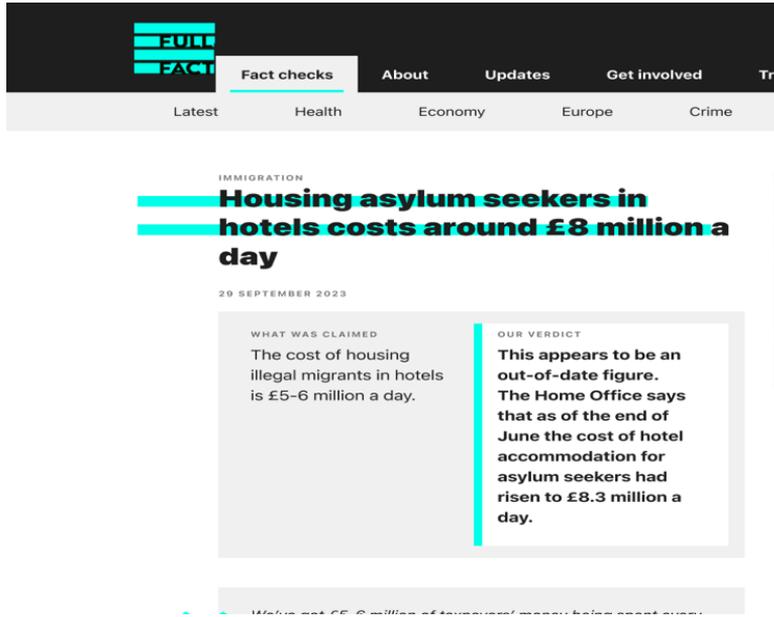
Figure 13: Analysis of fake news on housing in the UK by a fact-checking site
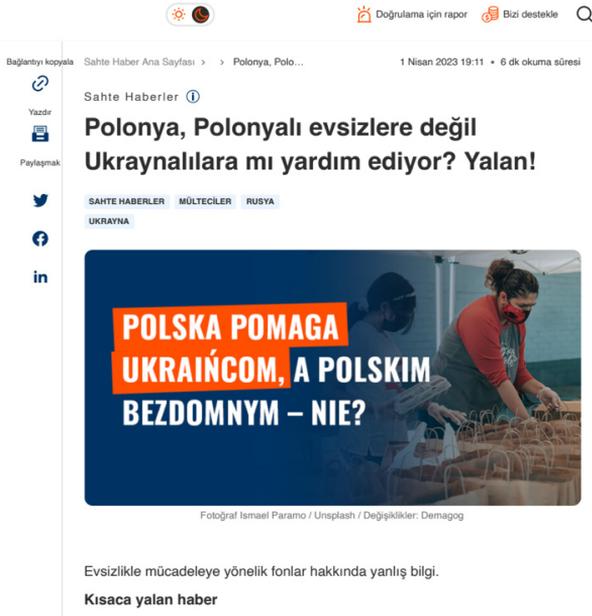
(Source: Full Fact)

Figure 14: Analysis of fake news on housing in Poland by a fact-checking site
(Source: Demagog)

The verification analyses of the fake news circulated on housing in the UK and Poland conducted by fact-checking sites are presented in Figure 13 and Figure 14.

Discussion and conclusion

In this age where truth has lost its meaning, it has become more difficult to pursue the truth and control disinformation. Based on intended use, technology that could benefit humankind could also be used as a dangerous weapon. As the phenomenon of fake reports becomes common every day via technological tools, the lack of media and digital media literacy hinders the ability of individuals to distinguish between the real and the fake. Access to deep fake technology led to covert lies in videos and images, and people are at greater risk of disinformation.

As mentioned in the introduction, in the current state of global events, where disinformation has become a part of daily life, the masses who were forced to migrate for various reasons face social integration problems in the new society they migrated to. While it is difficult enough to achieve social harmony without disinformation, fake news, and content make it even more difficult for both the citizens and newcomers to live together.

In recent years, the Syrian War and the Ukrainian-Russian War have caused significant migration. In addition to the migration due to economic, political, or social problems, migration associated with war seriously affects the peace in several nations. Disinformation contributes to further deterioration of the disturbed peace, polarization of people, and sharpening the ideologies.

Thus, in the present study designed to determine disinformation associated with migration and conflict in 2023, the research sample included the top ten countries that received the highest number of refugees and four countries in Europe. Iran, Uganda, the Russian Federation, and Bangladesh were excluded from the study due to the lack of IFCN member fact-checking sites in these countries. This was a limitation of our study.

In the study, 162 posts were identified about migration. 43% of the posts that were published and fact-checked were about the protests in France, 31% were about conflict, 14% were about financial opportunities, and 12% were about housing.

The present study attempted to respond to three research questions. The first was about which media platforms were employed more to disseminate fake news/content about refugees. This question was answered in Figure 3. Thus, *X* was the most employed medium (43%), followed by *Facebook* (30%). These findings demonstrated that these two platforms were used by the users in the dissemination of disinformation. Although the founding purpose of IFCN was to control disinformation, the findings indicated that efforts must be increased. On the other hand, Elon Musk's statement on his account that *X* was the only reliable platform for honest information contradicted the study findings (Teknolojioku, 2023).

The study also strived to determine the most frequently used content type. Several previous studies were conducted on content typologies employed to disseminate fake news. Fake content could be posted as false texts, hyperlinks or embedded content, and videos (Demuyakor & Opata 2022), visuals (Masciari et al. 2020; Shen et al. 2019), or auditory elements (Demuyakor & Opata 2022). Shu et al. (2020b) reported that multimodal content could also be used to disseminate disinformation. The present study demonstrated that videos supported by a title and text were the most frequent content typology (52%). It was also determined that only textual content was employed by the press, images supported by titles and texts were also employed following the videos on social media platforms.

The final research question aimed to identify common themes across the fake content published in the countries included in the study. Protests in France were the leading theme in these posts. Issues such as harassment, attacks, aggression, and theft that could lead to social conflict were the second most frequent issues in the conflict sub-theme. Financial assistance or opportunities that were provided for the refugees were among the issues observed in more than one country in the study. Finally, the housing issue was also employed to disseminate disinformation in several countries.

The findings of the study that covered a period of eleven months demonstrated that social conflict could be fueled by fake news or posts about refugees. Possible alleviation of hate speech, the alienation of the individuals, and sharpened ideologies could increase the intensity and scope of disinformation. It is important to find common ground to ensure social peace. Thus, shortly, disinformation should be controlled, facts and lies should be distinguished, and the speed of the dissemination of the facts should be reversed to allow them to spread faster than fake news. Aral (2022) reported the

speed of the dissemination of fake news and content. The present study findings were consistent with Aral's report. It was observed that fake news and content spread rapidly and globally.

Future studies could analyze the reports by non-IFCN member fact-checking platforms in countries with high refugee populations. Furthermore, Pakistan and Sudan could be of further interest since they have IFCN member fact-checking platforms, which have fact-checked several fake news. It was observed that fake news and content checking were quite limited in certain countries with high refugee populations.

The development of new strategies by *Facebook* and *X*, which are the most powerful social media platforms where fake content is promoted, would assist the holistic quest for the truth. Thus, future multidisciplinary research on the users of these two platforms could help understand user decisions on disinformation and unravel their behavior. Future studies on fake news that would be conducted with individuals instead of the analysis of big data would help understand the phenomenon of disinformation.

Endnotes

1   Nahel Merzouk was a 17-year-old French citizen of Algerian and Moroccan descent who was shot by a police officer at a traffic stop in the Parisian banlieue, or suburban outskirt, of Nanterre. Initial reports by the police stated that Merzouk had driven into police which resulted in officer Florian Menesplier shooting and killing him. However, video footage contradicted this official account and demonstrated that officers at the scene were not in any danger. President Emmanuel Macron denounced Merzouk's killing as 'inexplicable' and 'inexcusable'. While the officer is under investigation, it is yet unclear what or if justice will be rendered. Protests and demonstrations in Nanterre and the rest of France followed for a few days as many ethnoracial minorities mobilised against ongoing and unacknowledged state racism and police violence against them. And not for the first time were national and international media consumed with images of cars and buildings on fire, with armed police officers guarding the streets (Beaman, 2023).

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