RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Target of information disorder: Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey

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Abstract

Information disorder can be presented as a problem in this age of accelerating digitalization and communication. For this reason, research on this concept is important in terms of deepening the subject. In this research, a study was conducted on the university entrance practices for Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey. The allegation that Syrians entered the university unconditionally and without examination has been examined through the students and graduates of university life in Turkey in 2016 or later. How these students or graduates acquire, evaluate, interpret, share and confirm relevant information is examined.

The study's methodology was qualitative. The target audience is chosen to be undergraduate students currently enrolled in universities or 2016 graduates and beyond. The timing preference is due to the fact that word about Syrians' access to higher education only began to circulate in 2013–2015. To allow the participants to respond to the questions with specific dimensions and to provide the research new meanings, a semi-structured interview was used. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the interviews were done over the internet. Interviews are conducted with 38 people (n = 38). The interviews take place from July 13 to August 6, 2020.

As a result, each participant is familiar with the news and information regarding Syrians' unrestricted, cost-free access to higher education via hearing, reading, and viewing it. The majority of participants claimed that this information is reactive and vital and that the majority of it is gained through text-based or face-to-face communication, even if social media and face-to-face interactions account for the majority of the information's sources. Face-to-face sharing is by far the most common sort of sharing. Confirmation culture is not high among participants.

Keywords: Syrians under Temporary Protection, Information Disorder, Turkey, University, Higher Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The politicization of the migration issue and its more radical expression in daily life both by political parties and by the public put refugees and immigrants at the target point. Especially in the process leading up to the elections, seeing the issue of migration as a tool to gain votes and accusing immigrants and refugees with the current economic crisis complicates the issue even more. Part of this complexity is the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and out-of-context information. In this study, the access of Syrians under temporary protection to higher education, which can be shown as an example of disinformation, is discussed. The news that Syrians entered universities without exams and conditions took place both in digital and print media, creating an unshakable social reality in this direction.

Over 3,5 million Syrians have been living in Turkey under temporary protection for roughly ten years. (Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, 2023) Even though hate speech against them is only seldom directed at them, they nevertheless have to contend with incorrect information, fake news, and other deceptive materials. For instance, various false information on a variety of topics, such as enrolling in higher education without an exam, free of charge, and unconditionally, having their vehicles inspected for free, and receiving special treatment at hospitals just because they are Syrians, is occasionally spread through traditional media, digital platforms, and verbal communication. However, none of the news or information that is being spread is based on accurate information.

The final decade of the 20th century was defined by the technological revolution, which accelerated the acquisition of knowledge and increased the variety of sources. The processes for gathering and producing information in daily life have undergone drastic alterations as a result of this shift, which is still ongoing. In addition, "*digital social networks have substantially facilitated the process of information sharing and knowledge construction*."(Jang and Kim, 2018, p. 295) Today, information is available much more quickly from a variety of sources, especially through digital platforms. Both positive and bad effects of dig-

italized knowledge acquisition practices exist, including increased exposure to incorrect information and diversification of information acquisition methods. Positive effects include the ability to access millions of pieces of information with a single click. The quick information sharing and access made possible by new social technologies also leads to the spread of false information and exposes people to risks like being exposed to false information. (Jang and Kim, 2018, p. 295; Vosoughi, Roy and Aral, 2018, p. 1146)

Topic of enrollment to universities Syrians choose without any restrictions or exams has been published in social media channels, news websites, television shows, online forums, and written national newspapers. (Cumhuriyet, 2012; Sabah, 2013; ekşisözlük, 2020; 'Sinan Oğan: Suriyeliler İstediği Üniversiteye Sınavsız Giriyor', 2020) A conceptual framework is needed to better analyze the issue. This conceptual framework is information disorder.

1.1. Conceptual Framework: Information Disorder

False content, fake news, and information pollution are concepts that do not adequately describe the current situation. The majority of the materials aren't even intentionally false anymore; rather, they are actual and exploited in inappropriate ways. As a result, according to Wardle, information disorder is the best way to describe the current situation. (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017b; Wardle, 2018a, 2018b) Wardle divides information disorder into 3 sub-categories as disinformation, misinformation and malinformation, based on i) whether the content is wrong and ii) whether there is an intention to harm.

As can be seen from Wardle's Venn diagram, disinformation is defined as information that is purposely created incorrectly in order to hurt an individual, social group, organization, or nation. Contrarily, misinformation is false information that has not been intentionally spread to hurt others. For instance, misleading material regarding COVID and its treatment has been circulating on digital platforms, yet most internet users want to tell others about the disease's spread or the best ways to treat it. Wardle's third idea, "malinfor-

mation," describes information that is accurate but is exploited to hurt someone, a group, or a nation.(Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017b, p. 21)

Table 1. Wardle's Venn Diagram: Types of Information Disorder
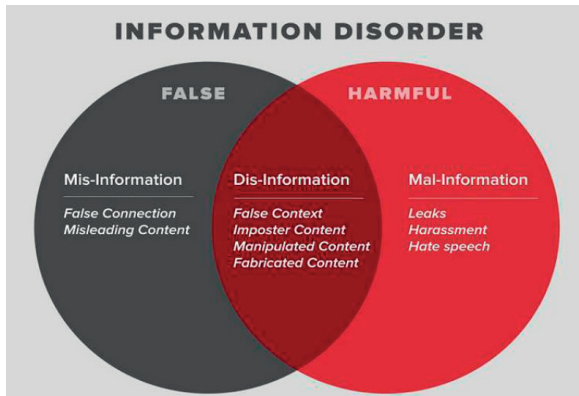
There are 3 elements and 3 phases of information disorder. The first element is the agent. This agent could be us, a political party, a newspaper, an intelligence agency, or anyone else in their daily business. What is important here is the purpose of the people who created and disseminated this information. The second element is the message. It is important whether the message is visual software, whether it contains resources, its design and how close it is to reality. Especially the videos created with artificial intelligence and looking very real have started to play a role as a tool in the spread of such false information. (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017b, pp. 25–42) Third element is interpreter. Wardle states that "*audiences are very rarely passive recipients of information. An 'audience' is made up of many individuals, each of which interprets information according to his or her own socio-cultural status, political positions and personal experiences. … In an era of social media, where everyone is a potential publisher, the interpreter can become the next 'agent,' deciding how to share and frame the message for their own networks*."(Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017a, pp. 27–28)

The first of the stages is the creation stage. The concept of zero patience is very important here, because it is almost impossible to determine where this information first came from. The second stage is the production stage. At this stage, information has been produced visually, verbally or in writing and has come to a position where people can see and hear it. The third stage is the dissemination stage. Here, digital platforms begin to spread among people through methods such as social media and face-to-face chat. Micro-examples are included in this diffusion process, such as when a tweet on Twitter is liked and it falls in front of another user. (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017a)

Moreover, the effectiveness of this information's permanence also depends on who provides it, who uses it, where they use it, and whether they have previously been exposed to it. The information's source is crucial. because people frequently believe and spread rumors that they have heard from others close to them. (Shah, 2020) The person consuming the material also contributes to the spread and duration of information disorder. While a person's likelihood of accepting knowledge that contradicts their worldview is limited, they can promote their own opinions and reproduce newly learned information according to their worldview and stereotypes. Believability of information is also influenced by prior experiences and cultural influences. (Leung, 2019; Wasserman, 2020) Particularly in face-to-face interactions and the transmission of information from ear to ear, this condition results in an increase in the separation from reality. (Grabmeier, 2019) Additionally, once some time has passed, the source may be forgotten and the information may be taken as true because there is no longer a way to check and confirm whether the information is true or not. Inability to question is more prevalent, particularly when it comes to information gained through social media. (Tanca, 2020)

2. METHODOLOGY

The study's methodology was qualitative. The target audience is chosen to be undergraduate students currently enrolled in universities or 2016 graduates and beyond. The timing preference is due to the fact that word about Syrians' access to higher education only began to circulate in 2013–2015. To allow the participants to respond to the questions with specific dimensions and to provide the research new meanings, a semi-structured interview was used. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the interviews were done over the internet. Interviews are conducted with

38 people (n = 38). The interviews take place from July 13 to August 6, 2020. The participants' ages range from 20 to 29, with a 23.36 average. 18 of the participants are graduates of the state university, 20 of them are students or graduates of the foundation university, and there are 26 women and 12 males among them.

Table 2: Participants' Data

Participant	Sexuality	Age	State / Foundation
1	Female	22	Foundation University
2	Male	22	State University
3	Female	22	State University
4	Female	21	State University
5	Female	21	State University
6	Female	20	Foundation University
7	Female	22	Foundation University
8	Female	24	Foundation University
9	Female	25	Foundation University
10	Female	25	Foundation University
11	Female	24	State University
12	Male	22	State University
13	Female	21	Foundation University
14	Female	26	Foundation University
15	Female	26	Foundation University
16	Male	24	State University
17	Female	27	Foundation University
18	Female	25	Foundation University
19	Female	25	Foundation University
20	Male	25	State University
21	Female	25	Foundation University
22	Female	22	State University
23	Female	20	State University
24	Female	26	State University
25	Female	24	State University
26	Female	23	Foundation University
27	Female	23	Foundation University
28	Female	24	Foundation University
29	Male	22	Foundation University
30	Female	23	Foundation University
31	Male	24	State University
32	Male	28	State University
33	Male	29	State University
34	Male	22	State University
35	Female	22	Foundation University
36	Male	22	State University
37	Male	24	State University
38	Male	26	Foundation University

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Messages as an Element and Interpretation

While 81% of the participants (n = 31) claimed to have heard general news and information about Syrians' access to higher education, 100% of participants (n = 38) claimed to have read, seen, and/or heard information and news regarding Syrians' unconditional, free, and examination-free access to higher education. Examining the sources from which the participants gain disordered information reveals that they occasionally obtain information from multiple sources, with digital platforms and face-to-face interactions standing out overall. 37.50% (n = 21) reported having acquired it through face-to-face conversation, compared to 55.36% (n = 31) who claimed to have received it from digital platforms.

Table 3. Source of Information That Participants Learnt

Source of information	Number	%
Social Media	25	44,64%
Television	4	7,14%
Internet	6	10,71%
Friend	16	28,57%
Family	5	8,93%
Total	**56**	**100,00%**

In general, the reactions of the participants were reactive. They stated that they showed a reaction to the existing situation. Approximately 95% of the participants said that the information conveyed to them was given as a reaction.

Although the way of obtaining information is mostly social media and friend/family environment, another important issue is how these messages are interpreted. The answers of the participants were examined under certain themes. The words "injustice," "competition," and "displeasure" were frequently used by participants to explain their initial feelings and thoughts. An example of what was mentioned regarding injustice is participant 34's statement, which is as follows:

"I experienced a sense of being an idiot. For our dreams, we are heading to the special/private class-

room. I felt this situation was unjust and upsetting. (Participant 34)"

The statements made by participant 15 serve as further illustrations of the competition theme:

"I did not like that the man obtained a profession when he joined without a test, especially when there was so much unemployment. Particularly at my university in my nation... We will have the same university name and label when we graduate from the same institution. I feared that my professional situation would be the same in future. (Participant 15)"

One example of the displeasure code is the comment made by participant 21 that "*a person feels awful nevertheless, it feels bad for someone else to have such an advantage even though you come somewhere.*" As a result, it becomes apparent that participants use comparison more in terms of competition, displeasure, unfairness, and quality. Participants combined these codes more to communicate their thoughts and feelings. For instance, Participant 21's comment combines the feelings of competition, displeasure, and unfairness: "*When I initially learned about it, I assumed there would be injustice if it were true. In such a circumstance, any Human Being already feels awful and does not welcome him.*" (Participant 21)

3.2. Dissemination of Messages and Intention of Agents

The half of participants (n = 18–50%) said they preferred not to share information, while the half of participants (n = 19–50%) said they shared information. A total of 19 participants shared information with friends (68%), family (24%), and social media users (8%). It is impressive that close environments receive 92% of the information. It was discovered that 86.36% of the sharing took place in person, 9.09% took place on social media, and 4.55% took place through messaging services.

Face-to-face and close circles have come to the fore in spreading the message. In addition, the agent's intention is also important. It should be examined for what purpose he communicated, what information he conveyed, what he said.

The motivation of those who intend to share the

information they have learned with others was the feeling of being wronged. Sharing this sense of injustice with others is at the forefront. This shows that disinformative information can affect the emotions of people who acquire the information. It should be noted, nevertheless, that asking someone in person about the accuracy of information may not yield the desired results depending on their knowledge, prejudice, and worldview as well as the dynamics of the micro-social group they are a part of. The sentences that follow serve as an illustration of sharing motivated by feelings of injustice:

"I spread it everywhere, I shared it. I made it clear that the system is unjust. Probably a year after I was getting ready for college, I learned about the news." (Participant 17)

"I have spoken my opinions during the discussions. I've already said that it's unfair. I told my university friends that it is unjust for certain people to enter privileged positions when others work so hard. I informed him because we were talking about this at the time." (Participant 3)

When at a glance why some participants do not share information, an important finding is encountered. Participants who knew the correct information did not disseminate the information. Other reasons are skepticism and lack of desire to share information. Participants who learned the correct information generally stated that they did not share the information for two reasons. The first of these is that he does not focus on the subject more or talk to his surroundings because he already knows the right information. The second reason is the desire to stay away from tensions and discussions that may favor correcting misinformation. When such news is shared, it is possible to experience tensions in circles of friends or on digital platforms. These two sentences are example of them:

"I belong to the aggressive group that constantly talks to people about immigration and how they are wrong about it. I chose not to tell anyone the news because doing so makes things stressful. (Participant 10)

"I was reluctant to discuss my ideas with my friends. I now explain it to those I believe will understand it. However, because it is a political problem, I do not currently prefer to share, and I am considering starting a business that anyone may purchase from. (Participant 12)"

3.3. Culture of Confirmation

Confirmation culture is an important issue because an people that knows how to verify and validate information can critically evaluate the information it receives. The capacity to do this gives people the power to fight information disorder. For example, it is important to confirm the information obtained from close circle or social media, both by reverse visual search and by researching from reliable sources, for the dissemination of correct information. In this sense, it was analyzed how much the participants had the confirmation culture. While 31.58% of the participants (n = 12) confirmed the information and news they had learned, 68.42% of the participants (n = 26) did not. This shows that most of the participants are far from the confirmation reflex. More people (60.53% - n = 23) express a lack of belief in current viewpoints on news and information. Currently, 18.42% (n = 7) believe they are correct, while 21.05% (n = 8) are suspicious. Being skeptical is important in a way. Being skeptical in an environment where the confirmation culture doesn't work properly prevents things from getting worse.

Moreover, all of the participants in the confirmation process are aware that the current news and information about Syrians' access to higher education is inaccurate and that this is why they are participating in the confirmation process. This means that every participant who has confirmed the information has access to the correct information. Participants who successfully completed the confirmation process learned the right information regardless of whether it is related to the subject or not. In addition, the rate of those who say that they do not believe the news despite not confirming it is not low. Those that claim they do not confirm have a high incredulity rate (42.31%, n = 11). However, 57.69% of people overall do not believe they are mistaken.

4. DISCUSSION

Before general discussion, it should be noted that the enrolment of Syrians to university is not unconditional and free. With the decision of YÖK (CoHE – Council of Higher Education), 2 types of entry rights have been granted in the broadest sense. The first of these is the entrance with the YÖS (Foreigner Student Exam) exam. The YÖS exam is a decentralized type of exam administered by each university. The fee for each exam is different. The second is horizontal transition. This method is most used. However, horizontal transfer is not unconditional. It requires the release of original documents and the availability of transcripts. (Atesok *et al.*, 2019; Özde Ateşok, Komsuoğlu Çıtıpıtıoğlu and Özer Yürür, 2020) According to the quotas at the universities, those who made lateral transfers were placed.

Each participant is familiar with the news and information regarding Syrians' unrestricted, cost-free access to higher education via hearing, reading, and viewing it. The majority of participants claimed that this information is reactive and vital and that the majority of it is gained through text-based or face-to-face communication, even if social media and face-to-face interactions account for the majority of the information's sources. It was discovered that when the participants initially heard the information, whether or not they thought it was accurate, they felt that it was unfair, that it would cause them to fall behind in the competition, and that they were dissatisfied with the situation.

Face-to-face sharing is by far the most common sort of sharing, even though the disorganized knowledge acquired is more frequently shared with friends. The participants wanted to express the injustice and inquire as to whether the information was accurate or understood when they shared the information. On the other hand, those who didn't share did so out of fear, skepticism, or knowledge of the truth.

There is little confirmation response. There are much more participants than those who believe the news to be real but have questions at this time. The confirmed participants are all aware that the information disorder about access to higher ed-

ucation that is false. Affirmation has been found to be more effective in helping people find and remember proper knowledge than interacting with Syrian students at their university.

5. CONCLUSION

As a result, information disorder is an important and big problem that needs to be addressed. It is a fact that digitalization has increased and daily practices have been digitized with the COVID epidemic. In addition, it should not be forgotten that face-to-face communication is still the easiest and fastest form of communication despite everything. This reality shows that information disorder is an issue that needs to be tackled.

In this research, an examination was made on access to higher education. As mentioned above, the confirmation reflex is one of the most important elements. Considering that false information spreads much faster than correct information, the confirmation reflex needs to be developed. Additional studies on confirmation will be illuminating in this regard.

Finally, all issues related to all life-related themes, not just refugees or immigrants, can become the subject of the information disorder. However, it should be noted that considering the issue of immigration, which has become politicized in the process leading up to the elections in Turkey, such information disorder may be instrumental in mobilizing certain segments of society or convincing them to get votes. In this sense, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the need to be careful about issues such as hate speech.

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