



UPPSALA  
UNIVERSITET

Department of Informatics and Media  
Master's Programme in Social Sciences,  
Digital Media and Society specialization

Two-year Master's Thesis

*Artificial Agendas: Polarization and  
Partisanship in the Turkish Mainstream  
Media through Fake News*

**Ali İhsan Akbaş**

June 2019

## PREFACE

*Writing a master thesis is a difficult process. However, it is easier when one feels the support of his beloved ones.*

*I would like to thank my wife, Ayşe Gizem, who has endured all of my troubles during this process, and before. I am grateful to her.*

*I am also grateful to my family, whose support and prays I always felt even from thousands of kilometers away.*

*I would also like to thank Senior Lecturer Cecilia Strand, my thesis advisor. Her comments and recommendations really helped me in the process of writing.*

*Lastly, I am thankful to the Swedish Institute, for providing this unforgettable opportunity of studying and learning in Sweden.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	2
LIST OF TABLES.....	5
LIST OF FIGURES.....	5
ABSTRACT .....	6
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.1 BACKGROUND/CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>1.2.1 Mainstream Media.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.2.2 Fake News.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1 JOURNALISM .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>2.1.1 Journalism in a Pre-Digital Landscape.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>2.1.2 Journalism in the Digital Age .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>2.2 NEWS SELECTION: CLASSICAL GATEKEEPING.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>2.2.1 Gatekeeping and Gatewatching in the Contemporary Media Landscape .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>2.3 MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION: THE AGENDA-SETTING .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>2.3.1 Agenda-Setting in the Digital World.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<b>2.4 NEWS ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA: GATEKEEPING AND AGENDA-SETTING .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.2 THE DISCOURSE THEORY .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.3 DISCUSSIONS OVER FAKE NEWS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>3.4 FORMS OF FAKE NEWS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.5 POLITICS AND NEWS MEDIA IN POLARIZED SETTINGS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>3.5.1 Media Content and News Media.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>3.5.2 Media Fragmentation and Partisan News.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>3.5.3 Mainstream Media, Social Media, and Misinformation.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<b>3.6 MEANING OF FAKE NEWS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLARIZATION.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>4.1 DATA.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>4.1.1 How Teyit Works?.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>4.1.2 Sampling .....</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>4.1.3 Definition of Data Entries .....</i>	<i>52</i>
<b>4.2 METHOD.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<i>4.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>4.2.2 Discourse Activity Schema .....</i>	<i>55</i>
<b>4.3 ETHICS .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5 ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5.1 FAKE NEWS AND TURKISH MAINSTREAM MEDIA .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5.2 THEMES WITHIN FAKE NEWS.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>5.3 THEMES OF POLARIZATION .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<i>5.3.1 Government-Opposition Divide.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>5.3.2 Secular-Religious Divide .....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>5.3.3 Economy.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>5.3.4 Education .....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>5.3.5 Conclusion .....</i>	<i>82</i>
<b>5.4 THEMES OF PARTISANSHIP .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<i>5.4.1 Anti-Immigration.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>5.4.2 Anti-USA.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>5.4.3 Anti-Israel.....</i>	<i>87</i>

5.4.4	<i>FETO</i> .....	88
5.4.5	<i>Conclusion</i> .....	90
6	<b>CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION</b> .....	92
6.1	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	92
6.2	<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	94
6.2.1	<i>The Problem of Fake News in the Turkish Media</i> .....	94
6.2.2	<i>Implications of Media in Polarized Settings</i> .....	96
7	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	98
	<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	105
	<b>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEYIT</b> .....	105

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 - List of media owners and news organizations in Turkey. ....	11
Table 2 - Data Sets, Amount of Fake News, and Data Entries. ....	51
Table 3 - Typical Codification of a Fake News Item in Data Set 3. ....	54
Table 4 - Examples of Non-Contextual Fake News Items .....	62
Table 5 - Themes of Polarization and Partisanship .....	63
Table 6 - Divergent Groups of Mainstream Media Organizations in Turkey. ....	84

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1- Overlook of a Teyit Report.....	49
---	----

## ABSTRACT

This thesis revolves around the subject of fake news, a phenomenon that has been highly discussed with the advent of the internet-based media. It aims to shed light on the problem of fake news and its implications in the Turkish mainstream media by mainly departing from the discourse theory, as well as by using additional theoretical approaches over fake news and media in polarized settings. In that sense, five research questions were developed to understand how fake news items disseminate in the Turkish media ecosystem, and what this could mean for the Turkish mainstream media specifically from the contexts of political partisanship and polarization. In order to answer the research questions, a total number of 687 fake news items have been analyzed in three different data sets. After providing an overall picture of the problem of fake news in the Turkish media ecosystem, the thesis specifically focuses on fake news items that circulate within the Turkish mainstream media. Overall, 77 fake news items are further subjected to an analysis of discourse activity schema in order to find out the narratives that the fake news items are connected to the Turkish political and social context. The research shows that the use of fake news items in the Turkish mainstream media indicates divergent and conflicting epistemologies over certain social and political themes, which are government-opposition divide, secular religious divide, economy, and education. Moreover, the research also indicates that certain social and political themes are under the discursive hegemony of certain groups within the Turkish mainstream media organizations. These themes are found to be anti-immigration, anti-US, anti-Israel, and FETO. Eventually, two main points are discussed in relation to the given theoretical background. First, the problem of fake news in the Turkish mainstream media indicates a damaged understanding of journalism in the country, which requires a reorientation and reexamination. Second, media in polarized settings may increase partisan alignments and divergent epistemologies, which can lead to the use of fake news items in order to empower certain agendas.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Mass media platforms constitute an integral part of daily communication in our lives. Traditional media, as in newspapers, radio, and television, have created the main hinges of mass media before the internet era. In the late 90s and early 2000s, most of the world have met the internet, and the novel platforms of communication that have emerged with it. Social media platforms, private messaging apps, and video streaming websites have introduced platforms through which people can communicate by creating one to one, one to many, many to one, and many to many channels. While these channels of communication proliferated among people, traditional mass media platforms have found themselves in a position of integration with the internet-based communication platforms.

Among the many good opportunities that are provided with the novel platforms of communication based on the internet, some problems have occurred as well. While internet-based platforms provide a convenient communication for people, these platforms have increasingly become vulnerable to the poor quality of content with regards to accuracy and truth. As internet-based platforms proliferate, more and more people have been involved in the environment of the internet media. This meant increasing amount of fake news items in almost all kinds of news production, from political news to tabloid press. In that sense, in an environment where internet based media is extensively used, fake news has turned to be a phenomenon that is quite effective in the epistemology of people who use the internet to be informed about the outside world.

Today, the internet provides one of the main platforms through which journalism is practiced. Prior to the internet, traditional mass media, meaning newspapers, radio, and television, were the only platforms that journalism and mass media could reach millions of people every day. However, now, the internet platforms introduce the same opportunities to journalists with less cost and convenient channels. Journalism and news media, therefore, are prone to be affected from the poor quality of content on the internet. Moreover, in the case of politically polarized and fragmented media environments, the relation between journalism and fake news seems even more critical to provide a further look.

In order to make contributions over the studies of fake news and journalism in polarized settings, this research focuses on Turkey, the number one country in dissemination of fake news items, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report of 2018 (Newman et. al., 2018).

Additionally, Turkey as a country introduces one of the most notable contexts of polarization within its mass media (Kaya & Çakmur, 2010). Departing from the existing research, this study aims to provide an academic look over the problem of fake news in the Turkish media. It specifically focuses on the existing discourses of fake news items that circulate in the mainstream media in Turkey. It is argued that fake news items within the internet, broadcast and newspaper platforms of the Turkish mainstream media organizations exhibit discourses of polarization and partisanship under certain social and political themes that are related with the Turkish context. In that sense, by analyzing a number of fake news items that are covered by Turkish mainstream media organizations, the thesis explores whether fake news discourses exhibit polarization and partisanship over political and social issues in the country.

Within the scope of the research aim, five research questions are introduced. The first research question focuses on the most common mediums on which fake news items are disseminated. Overall, 687 fake news items are categorized in three groups of mediums by departing from the reports of Teyit, a verification and fact-checking organization.

***Research Question 1:*** What are the media through which fake news items most commonly disseminate in the Turkish media?

The second research question focuses on the forms of fake news items that circulate within the Turkish mainstream media. In order to answer the second question, the study of Tandoc et al. (2018) over the classification of fake news items have been used as a theoretical model over the data of 155 fake news items that appeared on the Turkish mainstream media.

***Research Question 2:*** What are the most common forms of fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

The third research question focuses on the role of mainstream media platforms in order to find out which platform on mainstream media is more commonly used in the dissemination of fake news items. In order to answer the third question, data of fake news items that are socially and politically relevant with the Turkish context, which amount to 77, are grouped under three categories, as in *printing, broadcasting and internet*.

***Research Question 3:*** Which platform of the Turkish mainstream media is more commonly used in the dissemination of politically and socially relevant fake news items?



The fourth and fifth research questions are focused on the discourses of polarization and partisanship within the fake news items that circulated in platforms (as in internet, broadcast, or newspaper) of at least one Turkish mainstream media organization. The method of discourse activity schema has been used to extract existing discourses over the data of 77 fake news items that are relevant in the Turkish social and political agenda. Discourse activity schema is a methodological approach linked to the discourse theory, one of the most influential theories in the social sciences.

***Research Question 4:*** What are the discourses of polarization within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

***Research Question 5:*** What are the discourses of partisanship within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

In order to answer the clarified research questions, the research employs three different data sets, as Data Set 1, Data Set 2, and Data Set 3, that are comprised of fake news items. All data are gathered from Teyit, a fact-checking and verification organization that operates in Ankara, Turkey. At first, a total of 687 fake news items are collected (Data Set 1). Afterwards, 155 of these fake news items are inspected to be covered by at least one mainstream media organization in Turkey (Data Set 2). Finally, 77 fake news items, which are found to be related with the political and social context in Turkey, are put into a new data set (Data Set 3). The last group of fake news are further grouped under themes in terms of the social and political issues that they are covering. Thereafter, discourses within specified themes of fake news items on Data Set 3 are analyzed with a method called discourse activity schema, which is recommended for use on news items by Machin and Hansen (2013).

The research mainly relies on the discourse theory. However, the author has crafted a theoretical application of the discourse theory to the contexts of fake news and polarization in the theoretical background of the thesis. Furthermore, two additional and important theoretical constructs, which are the agenda-setting theory and the classical gatekeeping theory, are also mentioned in the literature review of the thesis to provide a ground for the main assumption that this research departs from: news items that we see on mass media platforms are there through careful conceptions of various gatekeeping processes that determine whether they can pass a particular gate or not (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Relatedly, gatekeeping practices of mainstream media organizations are closely determined by particular agendas, or themes as

indicated within the research, that the organizations prefer to set. The study also discusses in the literature review that the role of social media regarding how practices of the gatekeeping by media organizations are now transforming more into the practices of gatewatching, a term that Bruns (2005) suggests.

Although theoretical constructs on news curation constantly evolve, they share a common implication: Coverage of and discourses within news items refer to the practices through which the mainstream media organizations define their stances, as in the agendas they like to set, or the roles they prefer to perform as gatekeepers and/or gatewatchers. Therefore, the dynamics of polarization and partisanship in Turkey are studied through fake news items that are given place by the Turkish mainstream media organizations. The study considers that polarization and partisanship within the Turkish mainstream media organizations constitute a major problem for the credibility of journalism in the country. In the following part, the general and academic knowledge on the Turkish mainstream media will be provided.

## **1.1 Background/Context**

This research, with a theoretical approach briefly stated above, will look at the mainstream media in Turkey through fake news items. The mainstream media in Turkey are mainly directed by business media conglomerates that own TV channels, magazines, and newspapers. However, since the focus of this research is mainly on journalism and news production, the term Turkish mainstream media refer to the news organizations of these media companies that are mainly in the business of professional news production and dissemination. The process of news production and dissemination are conducted through various platforms, as TV channels (broadcasting), newspapers (printing), or news websites (internet), by these news organizations to produce and disseminate news items.

The model of media ownership as businesses has long been the case in the Turkish media. In fact, Finkel (2000), focusing on the 1990s, pointed at the ties between financial interests of media owners and governing elite as the greatest danger facing the Turkish press (p.155). Table 1 introduces a relevant part of the current media holdings in Turkey for this thesis, as well as the news organizations within the scope of these holdings.

*Table 1 - List of media owners and news organizations in Turkey.*

<b>Owner</b>	<b>News Organization</b>	<b>Platform</b>
Albayrak Holding	Yeni Şafak	Internet, Printing
Demirören Holding	Milliyet, Vatan, Hürriyet, Posta, Kanal D, CNN Turk	Internet, Printing, Broadcasting
Turkuvaz Holding	Sabah, A Haber, Takvim	Internet, Printing, Broadcasting
Es Medya Group	Star, Akşam, Güneş, 24	Internet, Printing, Broadcasting
Estetik Group	Sözcü	Internet, Printing
Birgün Holding	Birgün	Internet, Printing
Cumhuriyet Foundation	Cumhuriyet	Internet, Printing
Yeni Neşriyat Group	Milli Gazete	Internet, Printing

The history of Turkey is abundant with examples of high integration between politics and news media (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012). The independency of the Turkish media has been an important part of the discussion. One of the highlights in the academic literature is the issue of ownership. Christensen (2007) shows three developments in the Turkish media that problematized independence: the concentration of media ownership, the breakup of unions by media owners, and government legislation that restricted critical reporting. Kaya and Çakmur (2010), pointing to partisan alignments between media outlets and political actors, argue that the Turkish news media cannot fulfil its watchdog function due to high levels of political parallelism and concentration of ownership in the hands of the economic elite (cited in Yeşil, 2018).

Recent studies highlight that Turkey’s media system matches the characteristics of the polarized pluralist model (Panayırıcı et al., 2016). Accordingly, especially after 2013, with the corruption probe that was a highlight in the country’s agenda, the political parallelism in the mainstream media has increased dramatically (p. 552). In that sense, the state of being “deeply divided into two camps” the media is still, or even more so, “the principal locus of bitter political strife (Kaya and Çakmur, 2010). This study provides a further look at the parties of the political strife in the Turkish media, which are mostly aligned as pro or against the government. It is shown that increasing levels of political alignment now shift towards political polarization and partisanship with the functional use of fake news items. In that sense, the danger of becoming part of propaganda seems as a problem in the current conditions of the Turkish media.

One of the main points of this study is that the mainstream media in Turkey have a partisan and polarized outlook when it comes to various issues that are relevant in the country's social and political context. Therefore, the main analysis is devoted to the analysis of fake news content circulating on the Turkish mainstream media. From a theoretical point of view, it will be argued that the polarization and partisanship in Turkish media can be explained through divergent gatekeeping discourses over social and political themes, which are revealed through fake news items that are covered by the mainstream media. Moreover, divergence of the discourses is connected also to the media agendas of various organizations within the Turkish mainstream media, such as *Sabah*, *Cumhuriyet*, *A-Haber*, *Birgün*. As indicated by Shoemaker and Vos (2009), gatekeeping is eventually a process of narrowing millions of messages down to a handful of news to create a medium, or a picture, between the public and the outside world. Understanding the processes of narrowing down to create divergent agendas is to be the main subject for further analysis.

## **1.2 Definition of Key Concepts**

### **1.2.1 Mainstream Media**

Although this study benefits from a broader group of studies on misinformation and fake news on social media, the main focus will be on the Turkish mainstream media, its role in covering fake news content, and showing implicit partisanship. For the sake of providing specificity of language (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), in the following part of the thesis, a framework over the concept mainstream media, as well as concepts of fake news and misinformation, are to be introduced.

Mainstream media is regarded as “broadcasting and publishing run for profit or funded by the state, seen as favoring the market model and unchallenging, conformist content; as distinguished from counter-hegemonic alternative media”.<sup>1</sup> The definition itself highlights the conformist and widespread content of mainstream media, even though the content approach alone does not seem to be sufficiently covering the extent of what the mainstream media actually represents in this study. In the context of Turkey, the prevalent role of mainstream media in society is enabled through certain organizations that use certain physical means, such

---

<sup>1</sup> Oxford - A Dictionary of Media and Communication. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Published online: 2016.

as newspapers and televisions, which help transferring of media agenda to the public agenda. Such organizations can be state-funded institutions or private companies, however in all cases, they are effective in disseminating information among the public. This is because the organizations have both capital and physical means to create channels of information, embodied in television, newspaper, radio, or the internet, between themselves and the public.

Therefore, for the remaining part of the thesis, an important addition to the overall definition of mainstream media would be thinking it together with the concept of mass media. Mass media mainly refer to the physical, and technological, means of media production, as in newspapers, television, radio, and the internet. That said, these means are actually an integral part in the creation of a possible mainstream media as they provide ways through which news can widely disseminate among people. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) orient the technology of media production with the role of organizations that “transmit information to many people such as those that create web pages, news portals or blogs on the internet, newspapers, television and radio companies, as well as magazines” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009:5). As mentioned before, the mainstream media in Turkey are directed by business media conglomerates that own various platforms, such as TV channels, radios, magazines, and newspapers. On the account of professional journalism and news production, the news organizations within these media companies are the main constituents of the Turkish mainstream media. With this in mind, in the following parts of the study, the concept of mainstream media will be used as *corporate news media organizations that operate through the platforms of mass media, as in printing, broadcasting and the internet.*

In that sense, the main difference between the concept of mainstream media and alternative media in Turkey is the corporate affiliation. This is because while mainstream media are owned by media companies, alternative media are not corporately owned.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the alternative media sources in the Turkish media ecosystem are not going to be included within the scope of this study as they are not owned by media companies, and therefore they do not fit under the term mainstream media.

---

<sup>2</sup> Oxford - A Dictionary of Media and Communication. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Published online: 2016.

### **1.2.2 Fake News**

News is defined as the output of journalism (McQuail, 2013). The current phenomenon of the increasing deviation of news content from accuracy and objectivity, especially on the internet, has been referred with various concepts, such as fake news, disinformation (House of Commons, 2019) misinformation (UNESCO, 2018), or mal-information (Wardle & Derakhsan, 2017). However, the implications of these terms in the academic literature carry similarities when it comes to how they refer the problems that they appoint. Prevalent use of false information on mass media platforms, mainly on the internet, constitute the basic premise of the problem that these concepts aim to point. Thus, especially when the dominant effect of online fake news on the Turkish mainstream media is considered, the habitual use of the term ‘fake news’ stands as a better option, as it successfully conveys the general problem that reaches out to the core implications of misinformation, disinformation, or mal-information.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

The introduction part is followed with the literature review part, where recent discussions on journalism as well as the concepts of news selection, agenda-setting, gatekeeping, and gatewatching are introduced. Afterwards, the theoretical framework part introduces the theoretical constructs on which the thesis is build, namely the discourse theory with additional discussions over both misinformation and polarization. After the theoretical background part, methodology part introduces the data and methods that were employed in order to conduct the analysis. In that sense, Teyit, the fact-checking organization that provided data for this study, is introduced. The methods, which are comprised of an in-depth interview, qualitative content analysis and discourse schema analyses, are also indicated in the methodology part. The analysis part introduces the themes and discourses schemas that are extracted from fake news items after applying the above-mentioned methodology. Lastly, implications from the analysis part is discussed in the discussion part.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following part introduces a review of existing academic studies on a variety of subjects, including journalism, agenda-setting, gatekeeping, and gatewatching. All these fields of research have been undergoing important developments with the advent of the internet-based media, therefore this review more particularly takes recent academic works into consideration. However, especially from a point of journalism, pre-digital times will also be covered in order to provide a more concrete picture of what has been changing in the field. That said, as this study focuses on polarization and partisanship in the Turkish mainstream media through divergent discourses in certain social and political themes, studies on the relation between media and politics in the form of agenda-setting will be the main discussion in this review. Finally, academic contributions regarding gatekeeping and gatewatching will also constitute an important part of the review, as the processes of news selection and news curation are fundamental in defining discourses that set media agendas in the way of partisanship and polarization.

### **2.1 JOURNALISM**

#### **2.1.1 Journalism in a Pre-Digital Landscape**

Journalism is defined by McQuail (2013) as “the construction and publication of accounts and contemporary events, persons or circumstances of public significance or interest, based on information acquired from reliable sources” (p. 14). One of the characteristic features that spares journalism as a profession has been its legitimacy of producing news items. News is the central product of journalism, and it refers to an accurate account of a real event (Kershner 2005). Journalistic accounts of real events can be in the form of visual, textual, or mixed contents that are prepared by professional journalists, who are typically undertaken within larger news organizations (McQuail, 2013). The news organizations, with their “established and transparent rules and procedures” (p. 15), constitute the informal body of “the press”, which generally refers to the ‘mainstream’, professional, and established sector of news media, especially newspaper and broadcasting (p. 17). However, with the advent of digital platforms, organizations constituting the press extend their operations to the internet media as well.

Before the proliferation of the internet, newspapers, along with radio and television, have constituted the main body of mass communication platforms, which have been denoted by the term mass media. Journalism, in that sense, has closely been related to the printing press and broadcasting in the course of news production and dissemination. Such printing and broadcasting mass media platforms of news production and dissemination are distinct from public access, which rendered journalism also as a distinct form of profession. In that sense, journalists hold what has been called as “the power of the press” (McQuail, 2013), a concept that referred to the influence over the formation and development of a public discourse in a society. Journalists, therefore, are regarded as professionals who have a wide range of responsibilities against the society in which they live. Journalism has been mentioned together with professional values such as objectivity, independence, truthfulness, and equal treatment to the public groups (Kaplan, 2010; McQuail, 2013).

### **2.1.2 Journalism in the Digital Age**

With the emergence of the internet, social media, as constituted by multiple platforms for communication, offered an extensive ground for non-journalists to engage in the field of journalism (Wall, 2015). This has been possible as opportunities to produce news items have increased with the emerging ways of producing visual and textual content. Social media “has challenged traditional beliefs of how news should look”, since “a tweet, which at most is 140 characters long, is considered as a piece of news, particularly if it comes from a person in authority” (Tandoc et al., 2018). Additionally, it has become easier for a wide range of users to produce and disseminate content in the form of news through social media. Journalistic practices conducted within the social media environment in the name of digital journalism have “changed binary relationships between producers of journalism and the people they purport to serve” (Eldridge II & Franklin, 2017). In that sense, the line between producers and consumers of journalism seems to be blurred with the advent of the internet-based media.

The ways to produce and disseminate journalistic content, mainly in the form of news, are more particularly accessible to wider public access through the internet. This gets more interesting as social media increasingly stand out as an important medium for more and more people to access daily news. In the context of the United States, a survey has found that 44 percent of the population get their news from Facebook (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) also note the increasing reliance of Americans on social media, especially Twitter and



Facebook, for their everyday news, as well as during the periods of elections. The authors report that the importance of social media lagged behind traditional media, especially television, as a source of information about the 2016 election. Still, they conclude that social media is “an important but not dominant source of political news and information” (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017, 23). Research, however, also shows that printed newspapers seem to gradually make way for digital channels, specifically among younger generations (De Waal & Schoenbach, 2010; Newman, et al., 2015; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). The quality and frequency of content on social media therefore seems to be critical in effecting public opinion, especially for younger generations.

The following parts will delve more into the professional aspects of journalism in news production. The theoretical approaches of gatekeeping and gatewatching will be introduced in order to provide a background over how news selection and curation have been conducted in the previous as well as current times. Later, in order to discuss the role of media in the public opinion, the agenda-setting aspect of media will be introduced. Finally, the gatekeeping and agenda-setting aspects of the media will be discussed together to understand what kind of theoretical approaches can be conducted over news items in the following chapter, the theoretical framework.

## **2.2 NEWS SELECTION: CLASSICAL GATEKEEPING**

News as a construct is the product of journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007). Considering the long-run endurance of the printed media as well as the prevalence of visual media in current societies, news constitutes an important part of common knowledge that is shared by many people. Moreover, with the advent of social media and the internet, news is even more effective in forming opinions and understandings among the overall people (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). In that sense, this part will introduce research on previous and current processes of production and dissemination of news items.

One of the existing fields of research on news items is conducted within the scope of the classical gatekeeping theory. The theory has founded by Kurt Lewin, an influential social psychologist whose work marked the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lewin coined the concept of gatekeeping (Lewin, 1947) to “examine how objective problems, such as the movement of goods and people, are affected by subjective states and cultural values” (Deluliis, 2015).

According to Lewin, a particular item goes through multiple *channels* from discovery to its final use. Along with the channels, there exist *sections*, which refer to points of decisions (Deluliis, 2015) on that particular item regarding which channel to be. Items are directed on such sections, or points of decisions, by *forces* that operate within the channels. In other words, forces operate through decisions made on items to be in or out of channels. *Gates* are points at which forces change direction in determining whether to keep an item inside or outside of a channel (Lewin, 1947). Eventual decisions for a particular item to be inside or outside of a channel are made by *gatekeepers* that control the gates.

As a student of Kurt Lewin, David Manning White (1950) was the first scholar who applied the concept of gatekeeping to a study of journalism and communication. He suggested that the “travelling of news item through certain communication channels was dependent on the fact that certain areas within the channels function as gates”. Accordingly, such gate sections are governed either by impartial rules or by ‘gatekeepers’, and in the latter case, an individual or group is “in power” for making the decision between “in” and “out” (1950, p.383). To understand these gates, his study analyzes “a morning newspaper of approximately 30.000 circulation in a highly industrialized mid-west city of 100.000”. The editor of the newspaper, referred as Mr. Gates, is described as “a man in his middle 40s”, and has approximately 25 years’ experience as a journalist (White, 1950). According to White, news is selected upon certain criteria, and in most cases, such criteria are determined by significantly subjective standards by Mr. Gates. In fact, White quotes “it is only when we study the reasons given by Mr. Gates for rejecting almost nine-tenths of the wire copy (in his search for the one-tenth for which he has space) that we begin to understand how highly subjective, how reliant upon value-judgement based on the “gatekeeper’s” own set of experiences, attitudes or expectations the communication of “news” really is” (1950, p. 386).

As mentioned, White was the first scholar who applied Lewin’s theory of gatekeeping, which was originally designed to explain social change through a combination of “the concepts and methods of natural science and economics with social science” (Deluliis, 2015), to the field of media and journalism. However, later generations of media scholars have found the conceptual framework of the gatekeeping theory quite useful in understanding and explaining the design of media systems, especially in the sense of journalism. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) later transformed the main premises of the gatekeeping theory into a more media-oriented conceptual framework. The role provided by gatekeeping, which has defined by the two as a “process of

culling and crafting bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day” (p.1), is regarded as the center of the media’s role in modern public life. In that sense, the two scholars broaden the theoretical approach of gatekeeping to media studies, and define five levels of analysis in studying the gatekeeping processes: individual, communication routines, organizational, social institutions, and social system.

*The individual level of analysis* considers “the characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of individual people affect the gatekeeping process”. It follows the point of Mr. Gates (White, 1950), which was the subject of White’s early gatekeeping study conducted over a local newspaper. *The communication routines level of analysis* focuses on routines, which are defined as “patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). It is a distinct level of analysis, because such routines can cause positive or negative forces over the gatekeeping decisions. The organizational level of analysis concerns factors that are specific to each organization and therefore create differentiations among each other. Such factors may be filtering and preselection systems, organizational characteristics, or boundary roles. *The social institution level of analysis* mainly considers institutions in a social system that can affect communication organizations, and therefore, the gatekeeping processes. At this point, institutions that design social fabric within a society in terms of political, economic, or social dimensions are significant in the overall understanding of the gatekeeping processes. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) point financial markets, governments, audiences, or interest groups as the examples of social institutions that are effective in gatekeeping. Lastly, *the social system level of analysis* explores the role of social systems, social structures, ideologies and cultures in understanding gatekeeping processes and how such processes shape media messages. Similar events can produce different messages through different interpretations and gatekeeping processes that are put into operation within different social systems. In that sense, overall analyses of broader systems provide clearer understandings over the gatekeeping processes that function within the media systems of a given social context.

### **2.2.1 Gatekeeping and Gatewatching in the Contemporary Media Landscape**

The gatekeeping theory continues to be one of the influential theories in media and communications literature. With the advent of the internet and social media platforms, the classical gatekeeping theory has expanded into research fields that include online networks and

groups, which known as networked gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009; Deluliis, 2015). Today, along with only mass media outlets, certain gatekeeping mechanisms are prevalent within online networks as well (Al-Rawi, 2019). In that sense, the gatekeeping processes are even more important in providing an answer for how contemporary media environments operate through the five levels of gatekeeping processes. The gatekeeping theory successfully explains how news are produced and disseminated out of countless events that occur every day in societies worldwide by introducing an extensive range of analyses. That said, this study benefits not from the overall analyses of gatekeeping processes as suggested by Shoemaker and Vos (2009), but from the very basic premise of their work: news items that we see on mass media platforms are there through careful conductions of various gatekeeping processes that determine whether they can pass a particular gate or not.

In the contemporary media landscape, with the introduction of social media platforms and the internet-based communication, a new concept of gatewatching has been suggested by Axel Bruns (2005, 2018). The concept is coined mainly to explain the changing dynamics of news selection and curation in the environment of social media and news websites. Bruns builds the concept of gatewatching mainly regarding the internet, which, according to him, “is an egalitarian, open-access medium which is particularly well suited to liberating the exchange of alternative, non-mainstream content and ideas” (2005; p. 2). In that sense, he defines gatewatching as the continuous observation of material that passes through the output gates of news outlets and other source, in order to identify relevant such material for publication and discussion in the gatewatcher’s own site (Bruns, 2005).

Gatewatching implies an information environment where the role of big media companies and gatekeepers are decreasing day by day due to the social media effects that empower citizens as journalists. There are two sides of this process: news organizations and citizens. Bruns defines the news organizations (the mainstream newspapers and broadcasters, and their online offshoots) as the first tier of the media, while the citizens and their increasing journalistic practices as the second tier of the media. On the account of citizens, Bruns (2018) introduces three key elements that are in effect with the social media that empower citizens in the media environments. These three elements are gatewatching as a foundational information-sharing practice; collaborative news evaluation by distributed networks of participants; and the transformation of news from finished products to unfinished process (2018, p. 32). These key elements pave the way into a media environment, which he calls as “citizen media”, where the

vast majority of citizen journalists turned their focus towards major functions of journalism in contemporary society; which are analysis, interpretation, and commentary (Bruns, 2018).

On the account of news organizations, Bruns underlines that the primary gatekeeping processes have been transformed to the gatewatching practices. Rather, organizations observe stories that are covered in mainstream and alternative outlets and connect those stories to their own and therefore expand their content. In addition to shaping news content, news organizations adapt to the existing social media environment through addressing personal branding, measuring audience engagement (Bruns 2018, p. 224). The flexible and fluid structure of content sharing on social media allow more than that for not only news organizations but also individual journalists as well. Journalists can curate content, promote stories, create a personal branding, connect with news sources, monitor developments, and engage with audiences solely through social media (p. 175). In that sense, gatewatching content on social media is connected to a number of novel activities that not only empower citizen journalists but also change the ways that news organizations and professional journalists work.

Gatekeeping and gatewatching should be thought together with what has been called as news curation. The concept of gatewatching, in fact, is very much related with the new ways of news curation that are developed with the advent of social media. Today, news production by mainstream media do not mean the final versions of news, as citizens can now select the news stories that they were interested in and that they believed they could make a meaningful contribution to, and add to the existing mainstream coverage by pulling together, juxtaposing, interpreting, and critiquing various mainstream reports, background information, and source materials (Bruns, 2018). Today's news curators on social media are users who devote a substantial amount of effort and care to this activity. They monitor large variety of sources on a topic or around a story, carefully select interesting material on this topic, and disseminate it to an interested audience ranging from thousands to millions (Lehmann et al. 2013a: 863). In that sense, Bruns (2018) states that by continually monitoring one's timeline it is possible to remain aware of the activities and interests of the accounts one follows, and the information gatewatching choices made by those accounts determine the view of the world that the user is exposed to (p.115). Gatewatchers, therefore, operate as news curators who both identify new news articles and other materials on the websites of mainstream and alternative news organizations and of other relevant sources share them within the social media space, and help

to selectively amplify the visibility and circulation of other users' posts by liking, sharing, retweeting, and commenting on them (Bruns, 2018).

In today's media ecosystem, where 'mainstream' media no longer play the dominant role they once used to, Keane (2009) argues that citizens must instead exercise their "minority" civic duties (p. 47), implicating the empowered opportunities for citizens to create, curate, and disseminate news content. In an environment where the prevalence of mainstream media as news sources is shaken by new citizen journalism and news blogging sites, its agenda-setting power is also being fundamentally transformed into a less effective form (Bruns, 2018, p. 35). Still, further discussion on the agenda-setting of conventional journalism as well as the process of transformation is required, which will be introduced in the following section.

### **2.3 MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION: THE AGENDA-SETTING**

The agenda-setting theory is one of the widely used theoretical constructs that has been influential in the studies on the intersection of politics and media since its introduction in 1972. The theory is a critical contribution to academic researches that focus on the role of media in the social life, especially in relation with public opinion. Its roots lie within Walter Lippmann's classic book, *Public Opinion*, in which Lippmann suggests "part of our behavior pertinent to public opinion is, for the most part, a response to the pictures in our heads shaped by mass media coverage of the world outside" (Lippmann, 1922). Accordingly, mass media is quite effective in determining what to think about for people through its selective approaches in covering events. In that sense, newspapers and televisions arrange the material that they publish or broadcast in certain ways that create prioritization over thinking about the outside world.

Maxwell McCombs, one of the influential theoreticians of the agenda-setting function of mass media on public opinion, coins two important concepts, public agenda and media agenda, to provide a clear understanding over the theory. According to McCombs (1977), public agenda refers to the issues or topics in the forefront of public attention and concern. That said, McCombs suggests that various factors are important in the overall understanding of public agenda, as the public is comprised of individuals as well as smaller communities created by networks of individuals. Such factors are intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community agendas, which overall constitute public agenda through significance levels attributed by the public to events. In that sense, the significance level of an issue depends on its importance for an

individual, its frequency of discussion between individuals, or its importance for a particular community.

Media agenda basically refers to the agenda of mass media instruments, as in newspapers, television, the internet, and radio. According to McCombs, studies on media agenda are mainly focused on analyses of content provided by newspapers and television channels, due to their dominant influence in disseminating news. That said, the gravity and roles of mass media outlets may differ in defining agendas within different contexts. For example, a study from McCombs and Shaw suggests that newspapers have more influence in determining the agenda compared to television outlets (Shaw & McCombs, 1977). It is argued that the basic nature of the agenda seems often to be set by the newspapers, while television primarily reorders and rearranges the top items on agenda. Still, both the mediums are effective in the orientation of public opinion through selective news production and dissemination, and therefore, agendas that they set matter.

The agenda-setting influence of mass media towards public opinion has been described in three ways (McCombs, 1977). At the basic level, mass media affect public opinion through creating *awareness* on certain subjects that were previously not known by the public. This is related with the fact that most of the people in society depend on media to obtain information about various issues. In that sense, awareness is created only if media cover a particular topic through its platforms, and otherwise people remain uninformed about the topic. Additionally, media transfer *priorities* from its agenda to the public agenda. In other words, it defines importance of issues, which can similarly be regarded as important by the public as well. Lastly, media determine *salience* to issues in varying degrees through emphasis and repetition. In that sense, media rank issues in a scale importance within its own agenda, which can also affect the public agenda.

An important dimension of the agenda-setting theory is that it describes the relation between media agenda and public agenda in terms of not only salience of issues but also salience of attributions to particular issues. Media seem to be effective in what McCombs (1977) writes as “the distribution of opinions as pro and con once an issue is before the public”. Moreover, he argues that just like saliences of certain issues vary in terms of importance and media coverage, saliences of attributions to certain issues also change. In that sense, media do not always provide

equal treatment in covering saliences of issues, or saliences of attributions to issues, which is an additional factor to explain differentiating effects of media agenda to public agenda.

One of the first empirical studies of the agenda-setting role of media in public opinion has been conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972) through a study that is designed to measure the effective role of media agenda on voter agenda. Even though their research specifically asked them to make judgements without regard to what politicians might be saying, the two found that “the media appear to have exerted a considerable impact on voters’ judgements of what they considered the major issues of the [political] campaign” (p.180). Especially, the transferred salience on issues by media to voters has been found to be correlated with the emphasis that is invested on the issues. Given the critical role of media as the primary source of political information for individuals, the agenda-setting effect of mass media has been shown through voters that tend to share the media’s composite definition of what is important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.184).

### **2.3.1 Agenda-Setting in the Digital World**

Studies on agenda-setting have been first formulated in the 70s, a time when newspapers and television were almost unrivaled elements of mass media. Today, the advent of the internet-based communication has enabled novel platforms for news communication. In fact, studies show that the internet increasingly provides the flow of political information in our daily lives (Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Gil De Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009), and that an increasing number of people receive their news directly from social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Christian, 2012). In this new communication environment, what we know as mass media have surely gone through significant changes. Certain views argue that the classical agenda-setting theory remains inadequate in truly explaining the relations between mass media and public opinion (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). However, evidence suggests that the agenda-setting role of communication media continues, and that there is a small divergence in the contemporary media use patterns among different generations in the context of the United States (McCombs, 2015). Moreover, various research on the subject confirm that media agenda still sets the public agenda (Althaus and Tewksbury, 2002; Conway and Patterson, 2008).



Regarding the current media environment, a study from McCombs and Shaw (2014) suggests that the agenda-setting role of mass media seems to be applicable even more. Along with traditional concepts of the theory, as in basic agenda-setting and attribute agenda-setting, novel platforms of the internet and social media pave the way for prospective fields of research that can be driven forward through the theory. As an example, McCombs and Shaw (2014) argue that the agenda-setting effect shows itself in social networks, since we can talk about networked forms of media and public agendas, as well as about attributions of importance and salience within such networks. Another example is the concept of *agenda melding*, which is described as “finding or creating personal communities through intimate, often unconscious, processes of borrowing from a variety of agendas” (p. 794). Such processes of determining likeminded agendas by various people as well as contexts are empowered with the extensive communication environment provided by the internet. The agenda-setting research can be expanded to understand the dynamics of such agenda melding processes, as well as the interactions of such processes within social communities (p. 795).

Agenda melding actually relates with a broader question relevant within a current inquiry of the agenda-setting research (McCombs, 2015). Accordingly, agenda-setting effects can be analyzed in three levels. The first level considers the transfer of object salience from media agenda to public agenda, while the second level considers the transfer of attribute salience within the same direction. According to McCombs (2015), departing from what Lippmann said as the effect of media in determining “the pictures in our heads” (Lippmann, 1922), the first level seeks “about what the pictures are”, and the second level seeks “what the principal characteristics presented in these pictures are” (p. 353). The third level, which suggests a more encompassing look over the agenda-setting role of the media, asks “what the pictures are”. At this point, McCombs (2015) asks whether “the news media transfer the salience of a more integrated image”, or “a more comprehensive picture of an object and its attributes”. In a world with effective technological advancements in the field of communication, raising such questions introduces a potential for further research on the agenda-setting effects of the current media environment on public opinion.

## 2.4 NEWS ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA: GATEKEEPING AND AGENDA-SETTING

What we encounter as news on mainstream media actually constitute a very tiny percentage of the overall events in our societies. At this point, the classical gatekeeping theory offers an explanation. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) write that the gatekeeping theory essentially implies that “messages are created from information about events that has passed through a series of gates and has been changed in the process” (p. 22). The overall gatekeeping process is the selection of messages that are created from information about events to finally become news items that are published and transmitted by a mass medium, which marks the end of the traditional gatekeeping process (p. 24). Similarly, Barzilai-Nahon (2009) defines gatekeeping as “the process of controlling information as it moves through a gate or filter”, and associates it “with exercising different types of power”, such as news selection, or information control. Al-Rawi (2019) labels the same process as “information filtering”, similar to Shoemaker (1991), who asserts that gatekeeping is more related to cutting down billions of messages into a few hundred ones that reach us every single day.

The process of production of a news item involves a series of gatekeeping decisions in both selection and filtering of news. Such decisions are mainly positive for a particular news item if there are positive forces that support it to pass through gates. Newsworthiness, as an example, can operate as a positive force. If a message promises newsworthiness, gatekeepers are more likely to make decisions about it to become a news item. However, there are cases in which newsworthiness remains not enough as a positive force, as it is a “cognitive construct that only partially predicts which events to make it into the news media”, and “only people can decide whether an event is newsworthy” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 25). The element of decision was already pointed by Lewin (1947), the initial theoretician of the traditional gatekeeping theory, when he was saying “understanding the function of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the *decisions of the gatekeepers*, and changing the social process means that are influencing or replacing the gatekeeper” (Lewin, 1947). Considering journalistic practices, as in the case of Mr. Gates, White (1950) went further and noted that “it begins to appear that in his position as ‘gatekeeper’ the newspaper editor sees to it that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman, as the representative of his culture, believes to be true”.

At this point, it is safe to say that the news outcome of a particular platform within mainstream media organizations is basically designed through narrowing down of information bits from countless events as a result of decision makers on gatekeeping channels. Al-Rawi (2019) calls this decision-making process as filtering activity that is connected to a *gatekeeping discourse*, and, through a quantitative analysis of 8 million tweets as well as 1350 news stories, he finds a partisan rift in the gatekeeping discourses of mainstream media and social networking sites in the American context. He quotes “it seems that there is an obvious ideological divide that separates MSM and SNS in relation to fake news due to the different gatekeeping discourses, for the former has emphasized the role of Russia and its connection to Trump, yet this topic is not prominent on Twitter as Trump and his supporters have dominated the discourse” (Al-Rawi, 2019, p. 14). In this analysis, Al-Rawi finds clear gatekeeping processes in the mainstream media that determine the way news items are made. He observes that traditional news organizations continue news selection processes through journalists who follow certain standardized and centralized rules in gatekeeping in order to make sense of the world and provide an overview of “important” events that they believe their readers seek and need (p. 3).

For its analysis, then, this study regards news items on mainstream media as final outcomes that are produced through certain gatekeeping processes resulting in discourses, which will be subjected to further analysis in the Turkish context. Moreover, news items on mainstream media can also be approached as elements that constitute media agenda, which, as discussed within the agenda-setting theory, is quite effective in determining public agenda. In that sense, an overall picture over news items on Turkish mainstream media suggests that news items can be regarded as the final outcomes of certain gatekeeping procedures as well as the elements that constitute media agendas of organizations. To objectify, it is safe to judge a hypothetical newspaper, Paper A, from its news content in terms of how it defines its agenda, and how it creates its overall design of news through its gatekeeping processes. In other words, for a particular issue of Paper A published in a particular day, all the news items on the newspaper constitute data to analyze what kind of “picture” the newspaper sees in the outside world (*gatekeeping*), and what kind of “picture” it wants to be seen when looked at the outside world (*agenda-setting*).

This review has introduced discussions on journalism in pre-digital and digital periods. Afterwards, it focused on discussions in the literature that focus on the production and dissemination of news, and the overall effects of media on public through news content. It is

highlighted through the gatekeeping and agenda-setting theories that news items have been a way to understand social and political stances within the actors of mainstream media, as news items are carefully determined through various gatekeeping procedures, and they are used to draw pictures and agendas in the minds of the public. It is also clarified that the advent of internet-based platforms and social media have empowered citizens as journalists through gatewatching practices, and therefore the importance of mainstream media as the sole sources of information has devalued among the public. Still, news content on mainstream media reach millions of people each day, and mainstream media constitute a critical actor for creating knowledge through its discourses that determine its gatekeeping and agenda-setting processes. Thus, the following chapter will utilize a theoretical background that suggests looking at the discourses of news items that circulate within mainstream media.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, after introducing the research questions, the theoretical background of the thesis will be provided. The study mainly relies on the discourse theory and its implications within the current discussions of fake news. Additionally, the theory will be supplemented by theoretical approaches on fake news and on media in polarized settings. In that sense, first, a general overview of the discourse theory will be provided. Afterwards, current approaches on fake news and media in polarized settings will be supplemented to the theoretical framework of this study.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explores polarization and partisanship in the Turkish mainstream media ecosystem. Specifically, it aims to understand the discourses of the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media in the context of partisanship and polarization. It has been argued that the divergent discourses that derive from fake news items are indicators of partisanship and polarization in the Turkish mainstream media. That said, fake news as a concept in itself also displays discursive structures as it is commonly used as a demeaning slur by certain actors against others in a politicized way. Thus, a clear definition of the concept of fake news is also going to be provided.

News on mainstream media provides critical implications over what people can think on various issues regarding social, economic, political, entertainment, or else. Although news varies in terms of subject-matter, the theoretical body of this study is mainly oriented from implications of news on political and social subjects. Moreover, this study is mainly focused on fake news and their social and political implications within the Turkish mainstream media. In that regard, five research questions are developed:

***Research Question 1:*** What are the media through which fake news items most commonly disseminate in the Turkish media?

***Research Question 2:*** What are the most common forms of fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

**Research Question 3:** Which platform of the Turkish mainstream media is more commonly used in the dissemination of politically and socially relevant fake news items?

**Research Question 4:** What are the discourses of polarization within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

**Research Question 5:** What are the discourses of partisanship within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

In the following part, the discourse theory, which is the main theoretical point of departure for this study regarding the given research questions, is provided.

### **3.2 THE DISCOURSE THEORY**

Discourses are broader ideas communicated in many forms as textual (Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2000; Wodak & Kroger, 2000), visual, or audial. Foucault, one of the prominent theoreticians of the discourse theory, defines discourses as the models of the world (1972). Language, at this point, is a critical component of discourses. The use of language within texts, as in the choice of words, grammar, or humor, is connected to the construction of the world through discourses. In fact, Burr (2003, p. 64) defines discourses as “practices which form the object of which the speak”, highlighting the role of language and practice in constructing discourses.

Discourses are social artefacts that claim to be derived from the truth, which, according to Burr, is an important characteristic that lies at the heart of discussions of identity, power, and change (Burr, 2003). Discourses are alleged products of knowledge that are widely accepted by the society. In the Foucauldian sense, knowledge “is intimately bound up with power” (p. 68). In other words, knowledge creates power within its constructs of the world. Burr remarks, at this point, that the available forms of language, or discourses, set limits upon not only what we can think and say but also what we can do and be done to us (2003). In the process of transferring knowledge through discourses, language gains a crucial importance as a way of transcending meaning among people. A bit of knowledge extracted from the outer world is dependent on the subject’s stance within that world, and transferring that piece of knowledge to another subject is closely related with the way that is chosen by the initial subject to tell the subject’s observation.

Discourses are highly important as their impact can extend the language and turn into practice. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) suggest that discourse should be thought together with kinds of participants, goals, values, and locations. Such an understanding of discourse is also applicable to texts on media, as most of the news items suggest particular participants, goals, values, and locations. At this point, Hansen and Machin (2013) gives the example of a headline that is covered by *Daily Mail*, a British newspaper, on 25.10.2007. The headline goes as “*Britain will be scarcely recognizable in 50 years if the immigration deluge continues*”. The two authors, by departing from the approach of Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), introduces participants of the discourse as “real British people and immigrants” (2013, p. 118). The included value within the discourse is an “indigenous culture”, and the headline suggests a necessity to defend this culture. According to the two authors, the discourse of the headline represents a group of people who should not see incomers as an opportunity for change and growth, but as a threat to be repelled, and something that will change them.

Discourses within media texts also refer to their examination through discourse activity schemas, a theoretical approach that highlights the narratives and activities within the media texts. Discourse activity schemas are proposed by Hansen and Machin (2013) to understand the broader social and political implications of the overall narratives to which media texts are linked. A discourse schema is comprised of activity sequences associated with the knowledge or discourse that is disseminated (Hansen and Machin, 2013). In that sense, creating a discourse schema over textual items links narratives, which are socially produced ideas, to the kinds of knowledge disseminated and legitimized in society by media texts (p. 159). Discourse activity schema as a method better serves the aims of media text analysis, which, the two argue, is not to simply describe texts but to connect them to socially constructed ideas about the world, people, and events (p. 153). In analyzing narratives, Hansen and Machin stresses “the need to be able to draw out the narrative sequence of events, the deeper structure, in a way that shows how this is connected to broader social and political issues, issues that can be found in movies, news items, political speeches, toys, etc.” (p. 159). Therefore, the suggested analysis of discourse schema is not only applicable to narratives, but to all genres (Machin and Van Leeuwen, 2007), including media agendas.

Understanding the discourses of fake news items that circulate within mainstream media, therefore, can be possible through looking at them as activity sequences that are narrated.

However, the theoretical implications of fake news should also be introduced in coordination with the discourse theory to provide a more comprehensive understanding on the relation between fake news items and their discourses. In that sense, in the following part, discussions over fake news items are to be introduced.

### **3.3 DISCUSSIONS OVER FAKE NEWS**

There have been many discussions over the concept of fake news, given that the phenomenon has been prevalent with the advent of the internet based media platforms. In the context of politics, the term ‘fake news’ has gained a sarcastic meaning with political developments occurred over the course of years. The term, recently with the right-wing politicians, is said to be a polarizing term (Al-Rawi, 2019) that is politically weaponized (Erlanger 2017), propagandized (Habgood-Coote, 2018), and is used to discredit ‘mainstream’ media organizations (Waisbord, 2018). Critiques of over the term went even further to stopping the use of the term ‘fake news’, arguing that the concept does not introduce any conceptual or semantic contributions (Habgood-Coote, 2018). That said, as will be pointed later in this section, the concept is widely used in various academic studies, and the phenomenon that it addresses will constitute an important part of this thesis. In that sense, the term ‘fake news’ will be the main concept to cover the body of news content that will be subjected to further analysis

Today, social media sites are not only marked by having a mass audience, but they also facilitate speedy exchange and spread of information (Tandoc et al., 2018). However, increasingly large information is now communicated online on a daily basis. The extent and density of information platforms and networks aggravate the control over the creation and dissemination of information on the internet platforms. This also affects the practice of journalism conducted online, as people who produce and disseminate online news can be non-journalists. The internet, therefore, may involve news platforms whose attachments to journalistic values are weaker than other mass media platforms. Fake news, in that sense, is more likely to be prevalent in the context of online platforms. Neither misinformation nor fake news are novel in the sense that what the two as concepts point in real life (Tandoc al, 2018; Waisbord 2018). False information in news items always existed since the initial days of mass media (Marcus, 1993). However, the extensive prevalence, speed and scale of misinformation and fake news, as a phenomenon that affects social and political processes, has become possible through the internet-based media platforms (Waisbord, 2018). Thus, the advent of the internet-based media



seems as the utmost reason for the occurrence of fake news as a widely discussed phenomenon in the academic field

To understand the emerging implications of the phenomenon, various studies have developed definitions for the concept of fake news. Habgood-Coote (2018, p.8) classifies such definitions of the concept in the literature as the following:

- 'Fake news' expressed the property of being false and (presented as) news (Montgomery-McGovern 1898; Oxford 2016; Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Levy 2017; Collins 2017)
- 'Fake news' expresses the property of being (completely) false, intended to deceive, and created for financial gain (Silverman and Alexander 2016; Silverman 2017b);
- 'Fake news' expresses the property of being false news that is produced knowingly (Klein and Wueller 2017; Lilleker 2017; McIntyre 2018);
- 'Fake news' expresses the property of being false or misleading information that is presented as news, and circulated with the intention to mislead and to be spread (Rini 2017; Gelfert 2018);
- 'Fake news' expresses the property of being claims from fake sources (i.e. first we define 'fake news sites', then anything they produce falls under 'fake news'), (Aikin and Talisse 2018; Lazer et al. 2018).

Although they vary, definitions allow drawing common implications on the concept of fake news. Firstly, definitions underlie that deviations from factual information is a characteristic of fake news. In that sense, premises suggested by fake news items are partly or completely false, which gives the reason for their "fakeness". Definitions also imply that fake news exists for a particular motivation. In other words, fake news items are produced in consideration with motivations that can be either explicit in news content or not. These motivations can be better understood within relevant social or political contexts in which fake news items circulate.

A growing literature exists on social and political reasons as well as consequences when it comes to the proliferation of misinformation and fake news (Guo & Vargo, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2017; Al-Rawi, 2018; Brown, 2018; Jankowski, 2018). The studies almost exclusively focus on misinformation and fake news that occur online, as online misinformation is the most prevalent phenomenon in the studies of fake news. From a societal perspective, Waisbord (2018) argues that fake news points to "the developments that reflect seismic changes in public communication", through "the end of information scarcity, multilayered news and communication environments, and the active role of publics in news production, access, and

use” (p. 1868). He suggests that traditional boundaries in media content are becoming uncertain. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), at this point, coin the concept of ‘information disorder’ to describe the current landscape of the social. Such a disorder implies a fundamental challenge, according to Waisbord (2018), as “the transformation of public sphere driven by the digital proliferation of opportunities for public expression and identity communities with different epistemologies in their engagement with news and information”. Divergent epistemologies within the public, enforced through increasing magnitude of divergence within media platforms, fragment the conditions of intersubjective agreement for the production of widespread knowledge, which, in other words, refers to truth (Waisbord, 2018). Rather than being shared among the overall branches of the public, truth stands as characteristic rules and regulations that are valid only within intragroup dynamics. In that sense, Waisbord (2018), exemplifying the case of scientific knowledge, argues that discussions that revolve around concepts of fake news and post-truth indicate the collapse of the modern project of disciplining knowledge.

It is not surprising that such major changes within the social and political contexts have been shaking the foundations of journalism. The increasing prevalence of a relativist understanding among the public over social and political developments has also been affecting journalistic standards, and even further, the credibility of professional journalism. The once-unmatched ability of journalism to determine what is real and visible for large publics (Waisbord, 2018) is now being challenged by alternative forms of news production and dissemination, mainly through online platforms. Moreover, these platforms shrink the effectivity of news gatekeeping, which had mainly been practiced by professional journalists and news organizations. The set of knowledge introduced by professional journalism, in that sense, remains as yet another epistemology among the countless others that proliferate through “information and misinformation, truth and lies, scientific and unscientific, facts and fiction” (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1870) that extensively circulate within the online platforms.

Today, it is quite possible to find influential and extensively known fake news items that have affected public discourse and media landscape in almost every country. Silverman (2016) notes that from Pope Francis endorsing then Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump to a woman arrested for defecating on her boss’ desk after she won the lottery, fake news stories have engaged –and fooled –millions of readers around the world. Certain fake news items even caused political turbulence, as in the example of Pakistan’s defense minister (Goldman, 2016).

Accordingly, the minister has tweeted on December 23, 2016 a menacing response to a false report that Israel had threatened Pakistan with nuclear weapons. In that sense, one should never underestimate the potential effects that fake news items can have in almost all societal and political levels. That said, Jankowski (2018) states that content and message analyses over fake news has only begun, and urges more research to better understand the characteristic of fake news items, which he exemplifies as the frequencies of and trends in occurrences, styles of narratives, and varieties of typologies. In the age of internet-based media, fake news matters because it has real consequences (Goldman 2016; Lopez 2016).

### **3.4 FORMS OF FAKE NEWS**

In order to provide a broader understanding over the ways through which fake news items are produced, a model that is provided by Tandoc et al. (2018) seems as important. The model is prepared by examining 34 academic articles that used the term “fake news” between 2003 and 2017. Eventually, the model determines six common types of fake news items, which are news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda.

The first, news satire, describes news items that typically use humor or exaggeration to present audiences with news updates (p. 141). A key point in satire news is that they are produced mainly with concerns of delivering entertainment, rather than information first and foremost. Producers of news satire call themselves comedian or entertainers, instead of journalists and newscasters. (Tandoc et al, 2018). Similarly, parody news, which is another type frequently encountered in fake news items, uses non-factual information to inject humor (Tandoc et al., 2018). In that sense, parody news items are entirely made up through fictitious news stories. It constitutes a way of making criticisms over social and political issues, however, since they are fictitious, eventually they remain as fake news.

The third type, fabrication, is news articles which have no factual basis but are published in the style of news articles to create legitimacy (p. 143). According to Tandoc, there is no implicit understanding between the author and the reader that the item is false. The credibility of fabrication news comes from the fact that such news items are created in consideration with factions that are prevalent with social tension within the society. Tandoc et al. (2018) point that such news items resemble smaller parts of a bigger narrative that appeals to the beliefs of the

audience. In that sense, fabricated news items constitute a bigger threat in the case of deep social and political differences in a society.

The fourth type, manipulation, involves disruption and manipulation of real images or videos to create a false narrative (p. 144). According to Tandoc et al., while the previous categories generally referred to text-based items, manipulation describes visual news. With the advent of photography, along with digital technologies that allow conducting operations over video and photo material, manipulation has become an efficient way in producing fake news. At this point, misappropriation, which is giving non-manipulated photos and videos out of their original context in order to support a particular narrative, also stands as a part of photo manipulation. At this point, Tandoc et al. (2018) give an example that involves a viral sharing via Twitter of a photo showing buses purportedly being gathered to transport anti-Trump protesters (Maheshwari, 2016).

The fifth type that occurs frequent in the studies of fake news is the motive of advertisement and public relations. Such news contents are produced with a concern of financial gain, and involve so-called clickbait headlines in order to appeal more audience. Although desiring more clicks is a common practice even for regular mainstream media news websites, there are cases that involve covering of fake news contents in the form of an actual news. In that sense, advertising also seems as a common motivation in the classification of fake news.

Lastly, propaganda stands as another common type of fake news production. It refers to news stories which are created by a political entity to influence public perceptions (p. 146). The purpose of propaganda news is to benefit a public figure, organization, or government. Khaldarova and Pantti (2016), in their study over a Russian news channel called Channel One, indicates that propaganda news infers “strategic narratives” and “a tool for political actors to articulate a position on a specific issue and to shape perceptions and actions of domestic and international audiences” (p. 893). In that sense, propaganda news deviate from the objective stance of journalism and aims to persuade rather than to inform its audience.

The types of fake news can be gathered under the overall motives of misinformation. From the point of view political thought, Brown (2008) suggests that misinformation, both deliberate and inadvertent, affects individuals’ proper functioning of decision making procedures. Accordingly, if citizens are to make enlightened collective decisions, they need to rely on true

factual beliefs, but misinformation impairs their ability to do so (Brown 2018). Today's environment of extensive misinformation endangers the true functioning of the collective, which should be properly functioning in the case in democracies. That said, fake news and online misinformation may have additional threats in the case of non-democratic settings. Researchers already confirm that misinformation creates conflicts among divergent epistemic structures, whose implications can be found in online political discussions evolving in so-called 'echo chambers' (Karlsen et al, 2017). Thus, the influence of misinformation in politically polarized settings can pave the way for such echo chambers to extend within society. The following part, in that sense, will evaluate relevant discussions regarding the landscape of the internet and media in polarized environments.

### **3.5 POLITICS AND NEWS MEDIA IN POLARIZED SETTINGS**

Fake news has been unfavorable to journalism not only as a phenomenon itself, as in the mass proliferation of false information discrediting professional journalists, but also as a politically weaponized trope against mainstream media organizations, especially by the hands of right wing politicians to avoid criticisms from the press (Waisbord, 2018; Erlanger, 2017). That said, in the context of politically polarized systems, the recent media environment has more to offer regarding the studies of political developments in the context of the advent of the internet-based platforms. In this part, recent discussions in the political science literature will be introduced with a special focus on polarization, including the discussions over news media, polarization, and partisan news. Just like the concept of fake news, these subjects have also been discussed frequently in the literature as they too are important in providing a comprehensive theoretical approach for this study.

#### **3.5.1 Media Content and News Media**

Before delving into the discussions of polarized media settings, a broader look over the relation between media and politics would be helpful. A variety of studies that orient on the American context (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Zaller and Chiu, 1996) suggest that news outlets tend to reflect ideological and political perspectives expressed by actors in institutional politics, such as the president, administration officials, and congressional members of the two main parties in the American politics. Relatedly, in the context of democracies, existing studies over news media focus on content analyses and surveys, tracking how television, print, and

online media influence electoral politics through shaping public opinion, voter attitudes, and behavior (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Couldry, Livingston, & Markham, 2010; Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovara-Moring, 2009; Van Kempen, 2007). Thus, news media in democracies connote an element that bridges institutional politics with the rest of the public, and influences overall public opinion.

The effects of news media on public opinion is studied under the concept of news learning. At this point, the internet-based media once more show an influence over the traditional explanations over news learning. In their study over the role of visual attention in news learning, Kruikemeier and others (2018) suggest that the degree of news learning among subjects is interchangeable depending on the news platforms. They show that reading print news still leads to more news learning than reading news on a news website. However, their work also shows that citizens spend more time reading on a website if the articles they choose to read are included, conducting to more learning (Kruikemeier et al. 2018). What this study confirms is that increasing selectivity in the consumption of news leads to more specific knowledge about a particular topic, while less selectivity provides a broader knowledge on varying sets of issues that news items cover.

In a high-choice news media environment provided by internet-based media, news selectivity, or selective exposure, has created conflicting opinions. Some authors have regarded selective exposure as negative due to superficial nature of online reading (Ackerman & Goldsmith, 2011; Mangen et al., 2013). Prior (2018) pointed that if people are more selective in their media choices, such as focusing more on a specific topic, and get access to online news, they become less knowledgeable about politics. However, there have been other opinions that approach positively to selective exposure, arguing that the effects of self-selection increase user agency (Bucy, 2004; Lee & Ma, 2012). Yang & Grabe (2011) have argued that as citizens have more control over what they choose to read online, they are empowered to select news that they find most interesting and valuable. When further implications of selective exposure over political knowledge are considered, however, results provided by Kruikemeier and others (2018) eventually support a rather pessimistic view of online news reading. Accordingly, through the increased effects of news selectivity, the media lose its role as a ground on which differentiating ideas are introduced and, when appropriate, criticized to reach out progressive decision making. In the following part, this phenomenon will be introduced in detail.

### **3.5.2 Media Fragmentation and Partisan News**

The inflation of information sources over the internet-based media environment, as introduced, has created low accountability to journalistic platforms online. Scholars believe that a high-choice media environment, empowered by the internet-based platforms, reduces critical aspects of journalism for people who like to embrace core beliefs rather than objective facts (Kruijemeier et al. 2018). In that sense, current developments in the studies of news media that consider tendencies of selective exposure on the internet approach the current media environment from points of fragmentation and post-factuality (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Especially in politically polarized media environments, the literature on both political polarization and selective exposure postulates that in the case of self-selecting news items, people avoid information that counters their priors, while searching for information congruent with their existing beliefs (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). In this context, Hameleers & van der Meer (2019) point that as misperceptions primarily persist when tightly intertwined with strongly held beliefs or ideologies, misinformation is inherently related to political polarization. Taber and Lodge (2006) also suggest that people's motivations to confirm and reinforce their partisan identities may outweigh their desire to make accurate decisions, causing political polarization (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

The role of partisan news media seems to be critical at this point, since partisan news media outlets are more likely to give the audience "what they want". Baum & Groeling (2008, 2010), introducing a perspective from the American context, define partisan media as opinionated media, in which outlets and programs that fit the news within a political narrative and create a coherent conservative or liberal interpretation of the day's events. Although discussions over partisan news have increased with the advent of the internet-based media, mainstream media can also display partisanship effects. Baum and Groeling discuss this phenomenon in two characteristics of the mainstream media. Accordingly, first, when discussing a given news story, mainstream media outlets selectively focus on the set of facts that is most congenial to their side. An example is the coverage of global warming on Fox News looks quite different from MSNBC's coverage (Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, & Leisewowitz, 2012; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). These shows also vary the tone, language, and so forth to further emphasize which side has the "right" argument (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Second, mainstream media outlets also selectively choose which stories they will air. In the context of American politics, "right-wing sources discuss stories that make Democrats look foolish and

inept, and left-wing ones similarly emphasize stories that highlight Republican foibles” (Baum and Groeling 2008, 2010).

Partisan media’s framing of the news paves the way for partisan group identity. The framing of news items as a struggle between the major political actors and groups cause the public gravitating to understand political issues through the lens of partisanship (Price, 1989; Yzerbyt et al., 2006). As a result, Iyengar and Han (2009) point that citizens can more easily match their news consumption to fit with their ideological preferences. Levendusky (2013), furthermore, has found that like-minded media have a significant effect on how viewers see the opposition. He notes that “watching like-minded media makes viewers feel more negatively toward the other party, rate them less positively along a number of dimensions, have less support for bipartisanship, and less trust in the other side to do what is right for the country” (p. 576). Further, Taber and Lodge (2006) point that as people dislike one party more, they may be more likely to engage in partisan-motivated reasoning, which can also polarize attitudes. Overall, partisan news outlets motivate less support of bipartisanship and less trust among the viewers. However, partisanship is seemingly capable of causing further problems in the current media environment. The following part will consider potential interpretations from the literature for cases in which partisanship divergence extends to mainstream and social media in a way that includes misinformation.

### **3.5.3 Mainstream Media, Social Media, and Misinformation**

This part introduces broader implications over problems of misinformation and fake news on the current landscapes of the mainstream and social media. For the sake of a quick recover over the subject, Brown’s (2018) study over the effects of misinformation over collective decision-making capabilities of the public seems useful. Brown mentions a variety of psychological findings that suggest misinformation can influence people’s beliefs (Brown 2018). An interesting finding among these works notes that people “rely on fiction as a source of information, even when fiction contradicts relatively well-known facts about the world” (Marsh and Fazio 2006). Another one implies that fake news articles arouse surprise and disgust more strongly than does true information (Vosoughi et al. 2018). In that sense, empirical evidence confirms that misinformation is effective. Brown (2018) further notes that “misinformation creates a gap between the degree of political competence people must have if the mechanisms of collective wisdom are to function and the epistemic situation of our actual compatriots” (p.



205). In that sense, although “a certain level of individual epistemic competence required so that inclusive democratic deliberation can bear fruit, misinformation frequently impedes democratic citizens from reaching that level (p. 207).

Social media platforms, where no control over news media content exists, seem to be more problematic in the case of advancing misinformation. Lisa-Maria Neudert (2017) has found that misinformation and junk news content play a substantial role on German social media, accounting for roughly 20 percent of all political news and information on Twitter. Similarly, Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy and Sinan Aral (2018) have found that “falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than truth in all categories of information”, and that “the effects were more pronounced for false political news” than for other types of fake news. In that sense, mainstream media are not immune to be under the threatening effects of misinformation. In fact, mainstream media organizations are even more problematic at this point, which is something that can better be described by Luhmann’s slightly exaggerated words as “what we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media” (2000, p. 1). In an environment where mainstream media lose credibility, Kang and others (2011) argue that fake news might also undermine the legitimacy of overall journalism, especially with the fluid sources of social media where the actual information often gets removed, or at least perceived as a distance in most cases (Kang et al. 2011). Moreover, Talisse (2018) points that the term fake news, in many cases, already functions as an epistemic slur that insults the epistemic character of the institution that produced the story. This undoubtedly stands as bad news not only for mainstream media organizations but also for overall journalism.

### **3.6 MEANING OF FAKE NEWS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLARIZATION**

At this point, it is important to include an evaluation of the concept fake news in consideration with the given theoretical framework on discourses and polarization. The effect of fake news on public agenda has already been regarded as alarming by various researchers in the age of social media. Today, the proliferation and expected impact of fake news on people’s social and political beliefs have become more prevalent (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017a; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2017). Still, what does fake news mean in the sense of given theoretical background?

What contribution does it make to this research? There are two points to introduce how fake news introduces a substantial perspective into this study.

First, as previously mentioned, news is described as an accurate account of a real event (Kershner, 2005). However, real events are transformed to news items through humans, who have characteristic perspectives. Furthermore, in the time of mass media, news items are disseminated through mainstream media organizations, which have editorial stances. One can argue that applying gatekeeping mechanisms and/or promoting certain media agendas through preferred discourses are perfectly natural at this point, as they basically are embodiments of editorial stances, or individual perspectives. Although problematic, this can still be a true proposition, however, for real events. The basic premise of fake news is accepted to be that it conveys false messages on events, which did not happen as reported in ways that fake news items infer. Given that news is socially constructed, and that journalists often exercise subjective judgement on which bits of information to include and which to exclude (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Tuchman 1978), the coverage of fake news items on mainstream media organizations, which rely on professional journalism, constitutes a different phenomenon that cannot be explained through perspective or editorial stance. This is because fake news items do not correlate reality, and therefore, the reasons behind their existence on mainstream media should be sought not in journalistic practices but in gatekeeping discourses and desired agendas.

The second point is that studying mainstream media from a perspective of fake news offers opportunities to observe political and social implications of misinformation. Fake news items pose a real problem when they reach millions of people online, and coverage of them on mainstream media do not help at this point. They are even more dangerous in the context of politically polarized and partisan media environments, such as Turkey, due to the discussed effects of the media in polarized settings. This is because messages conveyed by fake news constitute greater threats in sensitive times and places. Brown (2018) argues that fake news, and in a broader context, misinformation, harm collective decision-making capacities and intellectual capabilities of people. Accordingly, propaganda, in relation with misinformation, attempts to trigger emotions, to elicit desires, and to shape beliefs in large audiences through mass communication (Brown 2018, p. 199). Unstable and polarized environments, either socially or politically, make people more vulnerable against propaganda enabled by fake news. Furthermore, as Tandoc et al. (2018) suggests, fake news has also been invoked to discredit some news organizations' critical reporting, which further blurs the discourse around fake news

(p. 138). This basically creates a messy environment in which truth and fake simply do not matter. When mainstream media cover fake news items, they also become a part of propaganda. Eventually, the overall credibility of journalism in social and political developments, and even more, the common sense among people, seem to be at stake.

After providing an overview of the discourse theory and its connection with news items, this part has introduced theoretical approaches on fake news and on media in polarized settings. Lastly, it has discussed the role of fake news items in these discussions, as a way to provide a ground for the methodology of this study. It has been clarified that discourses are productions of knowledge transferred through various means of communication, among which news items, both fake and factual, also take place. Today's prevalent phenomena of fake news and misinformation show that fake news items may be in various typologies, such as propaganda, and manipulation, which also carry create and/or empower certain discursive constructs. This may be problematic in the circumstances of polarization within media, which, as discussed, affects a variety of news-related phenomenon from news learning to selective exposure to social echo chambers. Moreover, a potential relation mainstream media and fake news can be regarded not as editorial stances or journalistic preferences but as problematic gatekeeping discourses and desired agendas. In that sense, the theories and approaches that comprise within this part are selected in order to highlight the potential harms of such a relation to overall journalism and public consensus in a given context.

This study suggests its methodology from the discourse theory through qualitative content analysis with an approach of discourse activity schema that will be applied over a collected data of fake news items. The approach of discourse activity schema is not just an analysis of the form of the text, but the analysis of the form of the knowledge that underlies the text (Hansen and Machin, 2013, p. 62). In that sense, just like other forms of the narrated media, news items as texts also refer to actions that are sequenced in time, and discourses within fake news items can be analyzed through their activity schemas which underlie in texts. As the analyzed news items stand as fake, they mainly do not correlate to any real event, at least happened in the way they suggest. Still, they are produced in the form of news, actually reported by certain mainstream organizations, and therefore embed certain details, such as actions, characters, and settings, in their forms. Through the details of actions, characters, and settings, which are called as 'indices' (Barthes, 1977, p. 92), news items still attempt to provide a picture in the minds of their consumers. In that sense, indices are important in having a better understanding over the

agenda that is produced by news items. Indices within news items are also fundamental in having a positive force to pass through particular gatekeeping discourses, as they support the desired agendas of media organizations. Understanding fake news items that circulate within mainstream media, therefore, can be possible through looking at them as activity sequences that are narrated. In the following part, this methodological approach will be developed.

## 4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to find out the discourses of fake news within the Turkish mainstream media, the study benefited from a multitude of fake news items that circulate within the mainstream media in Turkey. The fake news items are collected from *Teyit*, a verification and fact-checking organization operating in the country. The working mechanism of the organization is carefully introduced in order to provide reliability over the data. Once the data is introduced, the study employs qualitative content analysis with an approach of discourse activity schema, as suggested by Hansen and Machin (2013). In that sense, first, the texts are coded and classified under certain themes with data entries determined through conducting qualitative content analysis. After finding out the common themes within the fake news items, discourse activity schemas within each determined theme are created to reveal divergence of discourses within the fake news items. The discourses of polarization and partisanship within the Turkish mainstream media over each theme are evaluated through divergent structures of the discourse activity schemas that are the results of the analysis.

### 4.1 DATA

In order to have a comprehensive understanding over the issue of fake news in Turkey, as well as to provide explanations for its circulation within the Turkish mainstream media, this study conducts analyses over a selected fake news content. The fake news content provided by Teyit, which consists of 687 news items, is placed on an Excel sheet according to certain qualitatively determined data entries, which will be explained later. The news items were collected from the website of Teyit, an organization that conducts fact-checking and validation operations over news items that dominate the Turkish news media. In the following part, first, the functioning and methodology of Teyit will be provided in order to create a solid ground for the data of fake news items. Afterwards, the data set will be introduced with more detail to provide a clearer understanding on what it represents. Lastly, the sorts and scope of analyses conducted over the data set will be introduced.

#### 4.1.1 How Teyit Works?

Teyit is an online-operating civil society organization that conducts fact-checking and verification over news and statements that emerge within the Turkish media ecosystem. It was

founded in mid 2015, but has started to fully operate after June 2016. Starting with the coup attempt of July 2016, until today, Teyit has witnessed one of the most turbulent times in the Turkish history in terms of political and social developments. The organization has a considerable audience with its favoring stance towards an objective and fact-based understanding of journalism. Currently, Teyit has a team of 10-15 people, which is comprised of interns, authors, project assistants, and editors. The organization regards its line of work within the borders of journalism, and therefore it can be regarded as an effort to prevail non-partisan journalism in Turkey. As a transparent organization, Teyit openly shares detailed information about its organization policy, methodology, and team members on its website.<sup>3</sup>

In order to have more information about the organizational structure and working processes of Teyit, a semi-structured in-depth interview is conducted on 27.03.2019 with an editor from the organization. The interview questions can be found in the appendix. As a part of the data collection, the interview aimed to have more information about the functioning of the organization especially in verification of news items. Additionally, the initial communication processes of Teyit and the methodologies that the organization employs in order to inspect fake news items are also consulted. In that sense, the following parts are written in line with the data collected from the in-depth interview and the organization's website.

The majority of Teyit's work is focused on claims, rumors, and news items that proliferate mostly within the internet-based media, such as social media platforms and news websites. This is because online news media are dominant in providing environments through which fake news items emerge and spread. However, in some cases, news items that appear on printing and broadcasting platforms can also be within the scope of Teyit. In a context where fake news may have serious deficits in people's rational interpretations about social and political developments, Teyit has a functional role in countering fake news, especially on the internet.

As fake news items mainly disseminate on the internet, the organization has oriented its operations mainly on the internet-based media. Teyit employs two main ways to discover fake news items. First, special applications, such as *CrowdTangle*, are used in order to scan online platforms to find out news items that get the most interaction in a given period. This allows the organization to follow online platforms regularly, and conduct verification and fact-checking

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://teyit.org>

analyses on a particular news item if necessary. Second, Teyit has a system that provides communication with third-party users, such as citizen and/or professional journalists. Anybody can request a verification report from Teyit on a particular news item through certain channels, such as WhatsApp, e-mail, or Facebook messenger. It is stated that Teyit receives 124 messages and 24 fake news notices per day through its accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, and email.

Suspicion is the key word for both of the ways through which fake news items reach out Teyit. However, there are additional methods for Teyit to spotlight a potential fake news item. News items that got high numbers of interaction on the internet platforms, that initiate discussion among people, or that contribute to the formation of any particular agenda among people are substantially put into further examination by the organization. For a given time, news items that are collected by the organization members, or that are sent to the organization by third-party users, come together in an application called *Dubito*. *Dubito* is a workspace specifically designed by Teyit for the use of its editors. It provides convenience for collective work with plenty of news items in a manageable way. It also provides in-group communication within the organization during verification and checking processes through its commenting features. Another important feature of *Dubito* is that it records news items forever within the online archives of the organization. In that sense, if a news item made its way to *Dubito*, it is archived by assignment of a specific link, and even if the news item is deleted by its original source, the link stays forever within the organizational archives. This is quite practical to conduct analyses over news items as well as to document online misinformation. As a transparent organization, Teyit provides all the stages of verification processes accessible to third-party users through online services connected to *Dubito*. In that sense, anybody can view the status of a particular news item from scratch to the end.

After a news item is inspected by Teyit, or reported to the organization, an editor begins regular verification process. From a number of news items within *Dubito* workspace, three standards are followed by the organization for the sake of determining when and how to examine a particular news item. This process is called prioritization. First of all, a news item must be verifiable and checkable. A news item that lacks a particular premise, such as ones that mainly contain comments or personal opinions, does not appeal to Teyit's line of work. Secondly, a news item must be important in the sense that it gets high interaction among people. Frequency of sharing or retweeting, or number of likes and comments are useful elements that determine

the significance of a news item in that sense. In addition, if a news item has harmful implications, such as targeting a particular group, indicating discrimination, or promoting conflict, it is prioritized for further examination. Lastly, news items on urgent matters and particular events that concern the public opinion closely, as the case of the coup attempt of July 2016, or a case of mass shooting, are also prioritized in the process of verification and checking.

There are four categories that Teyit classifies the news items that are subjected to the process of verification. The names of these categories are *true*, *false*, *mixed*, and *uncertain*. In order to classify a news item in a particular category, Teyit requires at least two evidences from different sources that indicate accuracy or error within the news item. Additionally, the evidences must be confirmable and accessible by any third-party user in order to be credible. In that sense, Teyit provides quite a clear line of distinction between true news items and false news items. If a news item is classified within a category of *true* or *false*, since its categorization is supported by at least two different evidences, no room remains for further debate on the degree of accuracy over the news item. The organization also clearly states that there has not been a problem or complaint about a categorization failure in that regard.

If the confirmation of the claim is not supported by at least two sources, which is the case when evidences are not strong or accessible enough, a news item is classified as *uncertain*. Also, news items whose premises are not entirely true or false are put into the *mixed* category. That said, Teyit clarifies that the organization mainly operates on news items that are likely to be false. If a particular news item is found to be true, there are cases that the organization does not publish it. This is because Teyit is not another news platform, and it is determined to counter predominantly false information spreading within the media. That is why the number of news items that are classified as false is six times more compared to the number of news items that are classified as true. Still, if a news item causes contradictions among the public, since its verification matters, Teyit conducts its process of verification over the news item, and publish the results on its website even though it is classified as true.



## OECD, Türkiye'nin yüksek gelirli ülke olduğunu açıkladı iddiası doğru değil

MEHMET ATAKAN FOA × 28/12/2016 × 13:35

**İDDİA:** OECD Türkiye'nin de içinde yer aldığı 8 devletin orta gelirli ülkeler sınıfından yüksek gelirli ülkeler sınıfına geçtiğini açıkladı.

**YANLIŞ**

25 Aralık'ta [Sabah](#), [Akşam](#), [Star](#) gibi bazı haber sitelerinde yer alan iddiaya göre, Ekonomik İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Örgütü (OECD), gelişmiş ülkelerdeki düşük, gelişmekte olan ülkelerdeki yüksek büyümenin, ülkelerin gelir klasmanında değişime neden olduğunu belirterek, "2015'in orta gelirli ülkeleri Çin, Kolombiya, Kosta Rika, Endonezya, Kazakistan, Meksika, Güney Afrika ve Türkiye şu anda yüksek

Figure 1- Overlook of a Teyit Report<sup>4</sup>

The photo above shows one of the reports of Teyit. The particular fake news item has also been analyzed in the analysis part. The report gives the basic premise of the fake news item in a red box, which indicates that it is false. Right above the red box, information of date and name of the author can be collected. This particular news item has been covered by three mainstream media organizations in Turkey, namely: *Sabah*, *Akşam*, and *Star*. The names of the mainstream media organizations are given in blue, which refers to sources of the news items in the original websites.

A couple of issues can be highlighted regarding the validity of the data set that is prepared through Teyit reports. As a civil society organization that has restricted financial and human resources, Teyit has certain limitations in the verification process of fake news items. Each day, numerous tweets, news items, and other kinds of texts that carry messages regarding the Turkish

<sup>4</sup> <https://teyit.org/oeecd-turkiyenin-yuksekk-gelirli-ulke-oldugunu-acikladi-iddiasi-dogru-degil/>

social and political context circulate on the Turkish media ecosystem. It is basically not possible for Teyit to cover and confirm all these texts that circulate within the Turkish media. In that sense, the organization too has developed its “gatekeeping” mechanism to select which news to verify, which can be questioned in the sense of effectivity and objectivity. After all, people who work under the brand of Teyit also have political opinions and world views that may affect the way that they operate the verification processes. Although the editor from Teyit has clarified that the selection and verification of news items are conducted through open and objective procedures without aligning neither to the government nor the opposition, this aspect of the data can always be subjected to further questioning. Still, the obtained data over the working processes of the organization from the interview as well as from online sources suggest that Teyit provides a credible system in its methods of selecting and verifying news content. Therefore, the fake news items that are provided by Teyit can be used as reliable sources of data for the following parts.

#### **4.1.2 Sampling**

From June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, to April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in a period of more than three years, Teyit has conducted processes of verification over 877 news items in total. Among these, 687 of them are classified as “*false*”. In that sense, an initial data set is prepared by collecting the data of 687 fake news items in an Excel sheet, which constitutes *Data Set 1*. It includes fake news items that originated and spread within all types of media environments, which are operationalized in three groups as social media sites, independent news websites, and mainstream media organizations. In other words, Data Set 1 includes all the fake news items that Teyit ever reported, without regard to whether a particular news item is covered by a mainstream media organization or not.

In order to see the fake news items that is covered by at least one mainstream media organization more clearly, a separate data set, which is *Data Set 2*, has been created out of Data Set 1. Data Set 2, which is comprised of 155 fake news items in total, is therefore collected the fake news items that are covered by at least one mainstream media organization in Turkey. Each news item on Data Set 2 is coded in terms of their relevance with the Turkish social and political context. In that regard, while 78 of fake news items are coded as not relevant, 77 fake news items on mainstream media are found to be relevant with the Turkish social and political

context. The remaining 77 fake news items, which are relevant with the Turkish social and political context, are carried into a new data set, which is named as *Data Set 3*.

The fake news items on Data Set 3 are grouped under certain themes in terms of their relevance on the Turkish social and political context, such as *government-opposition divide*, *economy*, or *immigration*. In order to answer the RQ4 and RQ5, fake news items that are grouped under each theme are subjected to discourse activity schema analysis, which will be described in detail in the following parts. In that sense, Data Set 3 constituted the main data set on which discourses within the fake news items on Turkish mainstream media are studied.

*Table 2 - Data Sets, Amount of Fake News, and Data Entries.*

<b>Data Set</b>	<b>Amount of Fake News Items</b>	<b>Data Entries</b>
Data Set 1	687	<i>Date, News, Link, Medium</i>
Data Set 2	155	<i>Date, News, Link, Medium Form</i>
Data Set 3	77	<i>Date, News, Link, Medium Form, Platform</i>

In preparation of the data entries, the format of a standard Teyit report was of a great help. When verifying and checking a news item, a standard Teyit report includes information about the initial content, time, as well as source of the news item, actor(s) within the news item, and medium(s) through which the news item is created and/or disseminated. In that regard, *Date* referred to the date of analysis, *News* referred to the actual fake news content, and *Link* referred to the link that directs to the Teyit report.

For a particular news item, information for each data entry is extracted from the report that is produced by Teyit for that fake news item. For a particular fake news item, the author only systematically transferred relevant data from Teyit reports to the data sets without further intervention. In the following part, each data set will be introduced with specific information about data entries.

### 4.1.3 Definition of Data Entries

**Medium – Data Set 1:** Medium refers to the types of medium through which the fake news item has been covered and/or disseminated. Three types of medium are defined by the author at this point according to the most typical occurrence. These types are *Social Media*, *Independent News Website*, and *Mainstream Media*. Information regarding medium for a specific fake news item is collected from Teyit reports. The data entry *Medium* helped in answering the RQ1.

The type *Social Media* refers to common social networking sites (SNSs), which are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. According to Teyit reports, many fake news items are created and disseminated through such SNSs without being put into a form of news content. Basic statements about a particular event or a social group are treated as news on social media, and circulate through within SNSs even though they are not covered by an independent news website or a mainstream media organization.

*Independent News Website* refers to online news portals that predominantly cover regular daily news without any organizational affiliation under a common mainstream brand in Turkey. In that sense, numerous news websites in the Turkish media ecosystem operate without a corporate affiliation with a business media group, which is the main difference between the types of *Mainstream Media* and *Independent News Website*. There are cases that *Independent News Websites* produce and/or spread fake news items by transforming statements on SNSs into the forms of news content.

The type *Mainstream Media*, lastly, refers to corporate organizations that are dominant in printing, broadcasting, and internet media in Turkey, which are described in the Introduction section (p. 7). Organizations under the type of *Mainstream Media* operate under a corporate brand, and in that sense, they conduct professional activities of journalism in Turkey. Along with platforms of broadcasting and printing, organizations under *Mainstream Media* operate on the internet media as well. When it comes to internet news, the difference between *Mainstream Media* and *Independent News Websites* is that the audience of independent news websites are mostly limited with internet users as these websites only operate on the internet. *Mainstream Media*, however, refers to internet websites of the organizations, as mentioned, whose

ownership extends more than one means of mass media through corporate affiliations, as in the internet (news websites), printing (newspapers), broadcasting (TV Channels).

**Form – Data Set 2:** The fake news items that are categorized as *Mainstream Media* regarding their *Medium* are transferred into Data Set 2, which has a total of 155 fake news items. In order to find out the most common forms of fake news items on the mainstream media, an additional data entry of *Form* has been added to Date Set 2. The data entry *Form* helped in answering the RQ2.

Form defines the way that a fake news item is produced. At this point, this study has benefited from the study of Tandoc et al. (2018), who have operationalized fake news through examining 34 academic articles published between 2003 and 2017. Their study reveals six common forms of fake news, which are *news satire*, *news parody*, *fabrication*, *manipulation*, *advertising*, and *propaganda*. More information on the model has been provided in the theoretical framework.

The process of grouping the news items into forms are qualitatively conducted by the author upon information provided by Teyit reports in consideration with the following criteria:

- If a premise or event that is reported by a particular news item has not grounded by no real event whatsoever, the news item is coded as fabrication.
- If a premise or event that is reported by a particular news item is real, however is falsely mediated through a certain political implication, the news item is coded as propaganda.
- If a premise or event that is reported by a particular news item is real, however is falsely mediated through decontextualized footages or photos that do not belong to the reported premise or event, the news item is coded as manipulation.
- If a premise or event that is reported by a particular news item is real, however is falsely mediated from a satirical source and treated as a real news item, the news item is coded as satire.
- If a premise or event that is reported by a particular news item is real, however is falsely mediated from a parody source and treated as a real news item, the news item is coded as parody.

- If a premise or event that is signified by a particular news item is real, however is prepared in consideration with advertisement concerns in the form of clickbait news, the news item is coded as advertising.

**Platform – Data Set 3:** Data Set 3 is the collected data of fake news items that are both covered by at least one mainstream media organization in Turkey, and relevant with the Turkish social and political context. In that sense, there are 77 fake news items that are placed into the Data Set 3.

As previously stated, *Mainstream Media* is described as corporate media organizations that control more than one media platforms under corporate brands. These platforms are categorized as *printing*, *broadcasting*, and *internet*. Thus, in order to understand which platform is most commonly used in disseminating fake news by the Turkish mainstream media, Data Set 3 includes an additional data entry called *Platform* in addition to the previously defined data entries. *Platform* gives information for a particular fake news item on which platform(s) it is covered, as in *printing*, *broadcasting*, or *internet*. In that sense, the data entry *Platform* helped in answering the RQ3. Information regarding the platform of a specific fake news item is collected from Teyit reports.

*Table 3 - Typical Codification of a Fake News Item in Data Set 3.*

<b>Date</b>	31.05.2017
<b>News</b>	Statue constructed by Beylikdüzü Municipality costed 8 million TRY.
<b>Medium</b>	Güneş
<b>Form</b>	Fabrication
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

## 4.2 METHOD

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

The study classifies fake news items according to given data entries in order to conduct analyses and understand what they constitute as a main picture. Thus, in order to provide a clear analysis over the social and political implications of fake news items on the Turkish mainstream media, news items on Data Set 3 are grouped into certain themes through a qualitative content analysis.

The grouping of fake news items into themes are conducted through qualitative codification of fake news items according to their subjects, which will be demonstrated further in the analysis section. In the end, eight common themes are appointed out of the fake news items. Examples of themes are *secular-religious divide*, *education*, or *economy*, etc. Although the subjects of the fake news items vary, a majority of them could be grouped under such common themes that are related with the social and political context of Turkey. Detailed information on themes are provided on the Analysis section.

Once the fake news items on Data Set 3 are grouped into themes, the study takes the next step in order to reveal divergent discourses within the appointed themes. For that, the method of discourse activity schema is used. More information on the process of discourse schema formation is given in the following part. Eventually, divergence within themes shown through created discourse schemas provide an outlook over the Turkish mainstream media organizations in the sense that how their gatekeeping discourses, as well as media agendas, differ.

#### **4.2.2 Discourse Activity Schema**

As indicated before, discourse activity schema as a method is proposed by Hansen and Machin (2013) as a way of analyzing media texts to understand the broader social and political implications of the overall narratives to which they are linked. A discourse schema is comprised of activity sequences associated with the knowledge or discourse that is disseminated (Hansen and Machin, 2013) A discourse, according to the authors, is generally regarded as a broader idea communicated by a text (Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2000). As discourses allow different kinds of narratives to be composed, the true implications of narratives therefore can be understood from the discourses that compose them.

According to Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) discourses have associated sequences of activity as well as related identities, values, settings and times. The sequences of activities can be communicated by a range of texts, types, genres and modes of communication, such as language, images or sounds (Hansen and Machin, 2013, p. 160). Thus, sequences of activity for a discourse reveal its building blocks, and can be thought as a discourse schema. According to Hansen and Machin (2013), this level of analysis has been recognized in many other approaches to narrative such as those of Levi-Strauss (1963), Wright (1975), and Bettelheim (1976) (Hansen and Machin, 2013, p. 161).

An example from a basic news headline is provided by the two authors:

*“Two Israeli soldiers were killed by militants today in the Gaza strip. Israeli governments pledged reprisals.”* (Hansen and Machin, 2013, p. 161)

The suggested sequence of activity by the news headline can be unpacked as the following:

**There is a social order.**

(setting – Gaza)



**There is a disruption of social order.**

(there is an unprovoked attack)



**Order is restored.**

(there is punishment or eradication of threat)

According to the Hansen and Machin (2013), the above introduced sequence of activity leads the audience to an underlying socio-cognitive schema, which can also be regarded as the discourse activity schema of the news headline. The two authors, in fact, name the above schema as *The Conflict Resolution Discourse Schema*, and generalize it into a broader range of other genres as this narrative is quite common among the U.S. Presidents when they talk about world terrorism. The same discourse schema has been initiated during the peak of War on Terrorism in advertisements, political speeches, news stories and items, TV Programs, and movies.

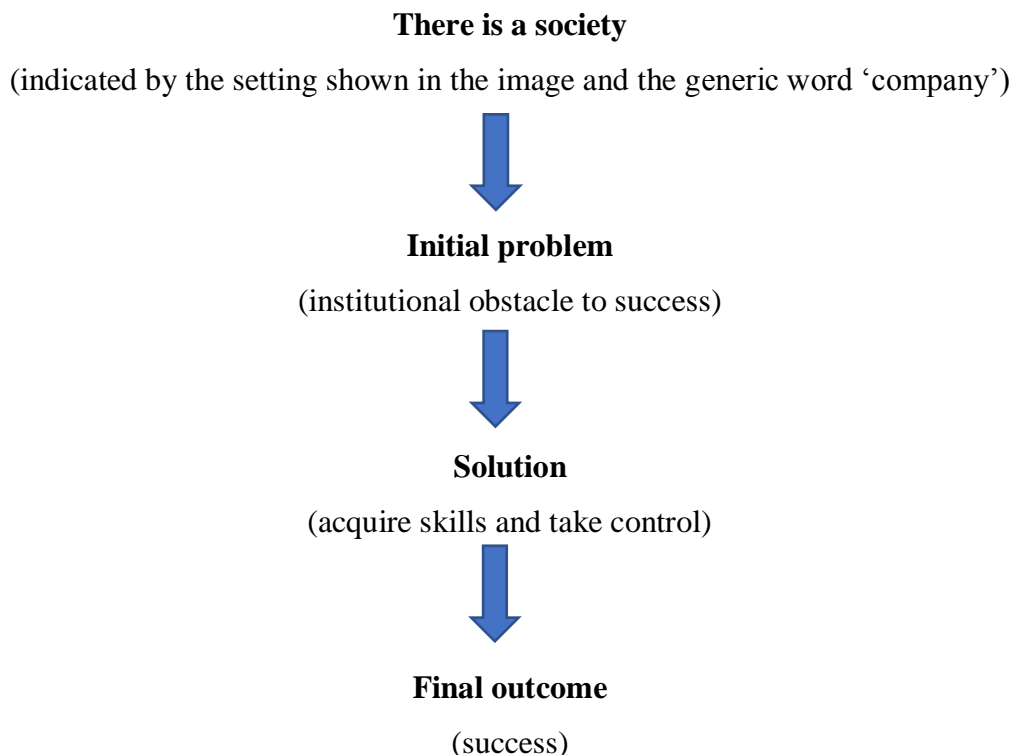
Another example by Hansen and Machin (2013) is called *The Problem-Solution Discourse Schema*, which is commonly found women lifestyle magazines. The authors extract an excerpt from *Marie Claire* magazine (May 2010) that was preceded by a photograph of a woman dressed in casual clothing, and sat informally holding a note book looking off to the left of the frame towards a large window as if musing (p.167). The text goes as following:



Yet, it is still possible to scale the corporate ladder in spite of layoffs, Here, Bob Calandra, coauthor of *How to Keep Your Job in a Tough Competitive Market*, offers advice for gingerly negotiating a title bump:

- **Act like the boss.** If your manager gets canned, set up a meeting with her supervisor right away. Calandra’s no-fail script: “I’m not looking to be promoted, but I also recognize no one wants chaos. I know the ins and outs of my boss’s job, so feel free to tap me for any of her work while we’re in this transitional phase.” To come off a hero, you can’t appear as if you’re expecting anything in return.
- **Pollyanna gets the corner office.** Be a relentless cheerleader for the company, even if it means irking coworkers. Your manager is bound to pick up on your positive outlook and use you as a model.
- **Mind your alliances.** If watercooler gossip reveals your cubemate is on management’s hit list, publicly align yourself with the office hotshot, even if it makes you feel like Tracy Flick. Appearances matter –and you can always commiserate with your axed colleague over cocktails later (your treat).

Hansen and Machin (2013) unboxes the text above, showing that this seems-to-be-advice text actually is formed within a narrative that is pretty commonly given for most of the problems introduced by women magazines. The authors draw the discourse activity schema of the text as below:



The text implies a woman who faces with a problematic workplace situation. However, Marie Claire, instead of framing such problems from a perspective of gender inequality and male-

dominated workspace, narrates them as if they are related to personal issues only. Social and political problems behind these issues are usually overlooked or taken out of context through simple narratives.

Similar to the given examples, the premises of fake news items as reported by Teyit are analyzed through creating common patterns of discourse activity schemas. As they made it into the mainstream media, these text items are already prepared in the form of news. Thus, each news item has a certain narrative and sequences of activity. In order to connect news items within a broader discourse schema, a right level of abstraction is required. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) suggest a relatively high level of abstraction as necessary for yielding discourse schemas. In that sense, each theme is to be analyzed through discourse schemas, which are created through a level of abstraction on fake news items. Relatedly, discourse activity schemas of fake news items are prepared through connecting activity sequences of a news item to broader social and/or political ideas that are being communicated.

### 4.3 ETHICS

This study is conducted in full consideration of the research ethics principles followed by the Swedish social science and humanities research. The ethical standards of the study are determined in coordination with the Swedish CODEX of rules and guideline for research. In that sense, the eight main ethics principles<sup>5</sup> of the Vetenskapsrådet, the Swedish Research Council, have been defined. These ethics principles are the following:

1. You shall tell the truth about your research.
2. You shall consciously review and report the basic premises of your studies.
3. You shall openly account for your methods and results.
4. You shall openly account for your commercial interests and other associations.
5. You shall not make unauthorized use of the research results of others.
6. You shall keep your research organized, for example through documentation and filing.
7. You shall strive to conduct your research without doing harm to people, animals or the environment.
8. You shall be fair in your judgement of others' research.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.vr.se/analys-och-uppdrag/vi-analyserar-och-utvarderar/alla-publikationer/publikationer/2017-08-29-god-forskningssed.html>

In consideration with the following principles above, this thesis reports only the factual outcomes of the conducted methodology through the research process. There have been no commercial interest or exchange in any phase throughout the study. Data are collected through the verbal and written permissions from Teyit. The organization is a non-profit, and transparent civil society organization, whose operations are coordinated in full compliance with the official laws of the Republic of Turkey. All data, including the interview, are documented and recorded in files, which can be provided upon request. Additionally, the interview, as well as the use of relevant interview data, have been within the knowledge of the organization member who was interviewed. No personal information that may be harmful to a specific individual, community, or organization is included. All parts of the analysis items are subtracted from accessible platforms that are available to all third-party users.

## 5 ANALYSIS

This part provides analysis over the fake news items within the created data sets, namely Data Set 1, Data Set 2, and Data Set 3, in consideration with the given research questions. Data Set 1 includes 687 reported fake news items within the overall Turkish media ecosystem, which is categorized as *Social Media*, *Independent News Website*, and *Mainstream Media*. Data Set 2 includes 155 fake news items that are covered by at least one Turkish mainstream media organization without regard to social or political relevance. Lastly, Data Set 3 includes 77 fake news items that are determined by the author as politically and socially relevant with the context of Turkey. More information regarding relevancy of news items is provided under the following *Themes of Fake News* part.

Eventually, the fake news items in Data Set 3 are grouped under certain themes in order to provide a clearer analysis, as well as to introduce issues on which the discourses of fake news items diverge. In the following part, first, overall picture of the problem of fake news in the Turkish mainstream media is provided in consideration with the given research questions of RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. Afterwards, themes with which fake news items are grouped are broadly introduced. Finally, the analysis of discourses will be conducted under the theme titles, answering the questions of RQ4 and RQ5.

### 5.1 FAKE NEWS AND TURKISH MAINSTREAM MEDIA

In order to provide an overall outlook of the fake news problem within the Turkish mainstream media, the first three research questions are formulated. While the first question is answered by using Data Set 1, the second question is answered by using Data Set 2, and the third question is answered by using Data Set 3.

**Research Question 1:** What are the media through which fake news items most commonly disseminate in the Turkish media?

Among the collected 687 fake news items on Data Set 1, around 66% have been coded as *Social Media*; around 23% have been coded as *Mainstream Media*; and around 9% have been coded as *Independent News Websites*, while the remaining 2% have not been clarified due to missing data. In that sense, 456 fake news items spread only on social media, while 64 of them were

covered by at least one independent news website but not a mainstream media organization, and 155 of the fake news items on Data Set 1 are covered by at least one mainstream media organization.

**Research Question 2:** What are the most common forms of fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

Over the 155 news items on Data Set 2, which are covered at least one mainstream media organization, around 8% (13) were formed as *parody*, around 29% (45) were formed as *fabrication*, around 35% (55) of them were formed as *manipulation*, and around 26% (40) of them were formed as *propaganda*. The remaining part, which is approximately 2%, were equally shared by the forms of *advertisement* and *satire*.

**Research Question 3:** Which platform of the Turkish mainstream media is more commonly used in the dissemination of politically and socially relevant fake news items?

Around 79% (60) of the fake news items on Data Set 3 spread on the internet platforms of mainstream media, while around 12% (9) of them were spread on broadcast platforms, and around 9% (7) of the fake news items spread on printing platforms.

Since this study is specifically focused on discourses of fake news items on mainstream media, further content and discourse schema analyses have been conducted on the fake news items that have circulated within such platforms and that are in any way related with the Turkish social and political issues. In the following part, more information regarding the relevancy of fake news items are provided. Afterwards, the appointed themes are introduced in order to answer the questions of RQ4 and RQ5.

## 5.2 THEMES WITHIN FAKE NEWS

Out of 155 fake news items that are covered by mainstream media organizations, 77 of them are found to be in any way related with the current social and/or political landscape of Turkey, and therefore are categorized under defined themes. The rest of the fake news items, which amounts 78, are reported non-contextual events or stories, such as magazine news, urban myths, or clickbait headlines.

A majority of the fake news items that belong to the latter group are turned to be in the forms of fabrication and parody, since there are plenty of cases that a news item that is produced in a parody website has made into a news portal of a mainstream media organization. As the fake news items that belong to the latter group, which has no considerable relation with the Turkish political and/or social agenda, they were not included in Data Set 3. Thus, they are grouped under themes, and therefore they will not be subjected to further analysis. Below are some examples of non-contextual fake news items that are covered by Turkish mainstream media.

*Table 4 - Examples of Non-Contextual Fake News Items*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>News</b>
15.12.2016	Fabrication	Oxford University has decided to use genderless pronouns.
07.01.2017	Parody	Man coops and feeds his daughter who uses Snapchat filter with dog food.
20.01.2017	Manipulation	Footage of Condoleezza Rice with Usama bin Laden.
21.03.2017	Parody	David Rockefeller's sixth heart plant successful at age 99.
12.12.2017	Fabrication	Space Virus is to wipe the world off on 23 <sup>rd</sup> of December.
05.09.2018	Fabrication	The Turkish city Çorum is the center of the world according to Google Maps.
16.01.2019	Manipulation	Video footage of a bear chasing a skiing woman.

The remaining 77 fake news items on Data Set 3 are distributed under following themes through a qualitative content analysis. The themes both provide convenience for the order of the analysis and show the main subjects over which polarization and partisanship occur within the Turkish mainstream media. In that sense, following themes are defined through a qualitative codification of the 77 fake news items: *Government-Opposition Divide, Secular-Religious Divide, Economy, Education, Anti-Immigration, Anti-USA, Anti-Israel, and FETO*.

The first group of themes, which are Government-Opposition Divide, Secular-Religious Divide, Economy, and Education, provide clear indications over the existing polarization environment in the Turkish mainstream media. The remaining themes, however, which are Anti-Immigration, Anti-USA, Anti-Israel, and FETO rely on discourses that are individually

raised either of the two divergent parties within the mainstream media organizations. In that sense, after analyzing the first group of themes from a perspective of polarization in consideration with the RQ4, the second group of themes are going to be introduced from a perspective of partisanship in consideration with the RQ5. The theme groups are introduced in Table 3 in accordance with on which basis the analysis will be provided.

*Table 5 - Themes of Polarization and Partisanship*

<b>Themes of Polarization</b>	<b>Themes of Partisanship</b>
Government-Opposition Divide	Anti-Immigration
Secular-Religious Divide	Anti-USA
Economy	Anti-Israel
Education	FETÖ

### **5.3 THEMES OF POLARIZATION**

The following parts aim to answer the below research question with the application of discourse activity schema analysis to the fake news items that are grouped under the four themes of polarization. These four themes are *Government-Opposition Divide*, *Secular-Religious Divide*, *Economy*, and *Education*.

**Research Question 4:** What are the discourses of polarization within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

#### **5.3.1 Government-Opposition Divide**

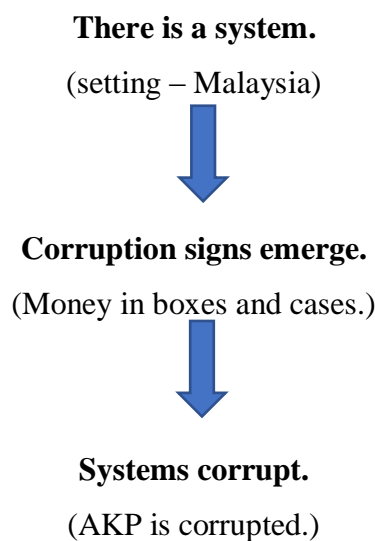
Themes of polarization in the Turkish mainstream media organizations frame events as a struggle between the two major political movements in the Turkish political system. The government, which is embodied by AKP (the Justice and Development Party), and opposition movement, which is embodied by CHP (the Republican People's Party). The Government-Opposition Divide seems as the most extensive theme that conveys multiple discourses of both the parties through the fake news items. While the government-aligned media organizations mainly include discourses of corruption, treason, and fraud against the opposition, media organizations that are in line with the opposition includes discourses of corruption, oppression, and foreign policy failure.

The following section analyses the discourse activity schemas of selected fake news items covered by mainstream media organizations under the theme of government-opposition divide. In that sense, first, media organizations that are aligned with the opposition are analyzed. Common discourses of the fake news items from the opposition side are grouped as *government corruption*, *foreign policy failure*, and *hegemony*.

***Government Corruption: AKP is corrupted***

<b>Date</b>	16.05.2018
<b>News</b>	Footage of Proceeds of Corruption from the House of the former Prime Minister of Malaysia
<b>Medium</b>	Sözcü
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

In this news item, Sözcü, one of the most critical media organizations against the government in Turkey (Panayırıcı et al., 2016), covers a footage that allegedly shows proceeds of corruption as boxes and cases that are full of money in the house of Necip Rezak, former Prime Minister of Malaysia. However, in fact, the footage does not show the house of Necip Rezak. It is taken during a corruption operation conducted against two officials working in the Malaysian Water Authority. As the premise of the news item is falsely mediated through decontextualized footages, the news item is categorized as manipulation. The activity sequences of the discourse can be extracted from the news item as the following.





According to the news item, after the corruption operation, people spill out into the streets, chanting against the former prime minister. In the final part of the news item, there is a section headlined “Reminds Turkey”. The section refers to the corruption operations of 2013 in Turkey, which also was widely discussed with the footages of money in the boxes and cases. An interesting detail about the news item is that it first occurred as a tweet of a Twitter user. The tweet implies that religious governments are doomed to be corrupt even though they seem exhibit religious and moral features. The implications of the tweet and the actual news item can be analyzed through the common discourse of government corruption in the Turkish opposition media.

***Government Foreign Policy Failure: Turkey has a failed foreign policy***

<b>Date</b>	22.10.2016
<b>News</b>	President Erdoğan said “Mosul is ours.” during an official school opening.
<b>Medium</b>	Cumhuriyet
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above news item reports that Turkish President Erdoğan has claimed rights on the Iraqi city of Mosul during an official school opening. However, according to the Teyit report, instead of “Mosul is ours”, Erdoğan said “Mosul was ours” during the event, meaning he used the simple past tense during his speech. Still, *Cumhuriyet*, one of the leading opposition news platforms, has reported the event through falsely mediating the actually happening, which therefore makes the news item classified as propaganda. That said, the news item can be analyzed within the scope of a common discourse in the opposition-aligned media about the Turkish foreign policy, whose implications can be seen in the fake news item as well. The activity sequence of the discourse can be reported as below:

**Turkish foreign policy is formed by AKP.**

(Turkish political actors shape the foreign policy.)



**The foreign policy is in a poor situation.**

(Turkey is involved in conflicts in the Middle East.)



**AKP has failed.**

(Turkish foreign policy has failed.)

<b>Date</b>	19.11.2017
<b>News</b>	According to the International SOS, Turkey is the 9 <sup>th</sup> most dangerous country in the world.
<b>Medium</b>	CNN Turk
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

A similar observation can be made for the fake news item above. It reported that Turkey is the 9<sup>th</sup> most dangerous country in the world based on data from International SOS. However, according to Teyit, the organization does not specify lists of countries sorted in accordance with being dangerous. Another index from the organization, however, includes Turkey among the 10 countries that are most affected from terrorism<sup>6</sup>. *CNN Turk*, a mainstream media organization that was operating under Doğan Group until April 2018, combines the implications from the two separate articles in a way that creates an overall message of “Turkish foreign policy is in a poor situation”, as a means of empowering the existing discourse of failed foreign policy.

---

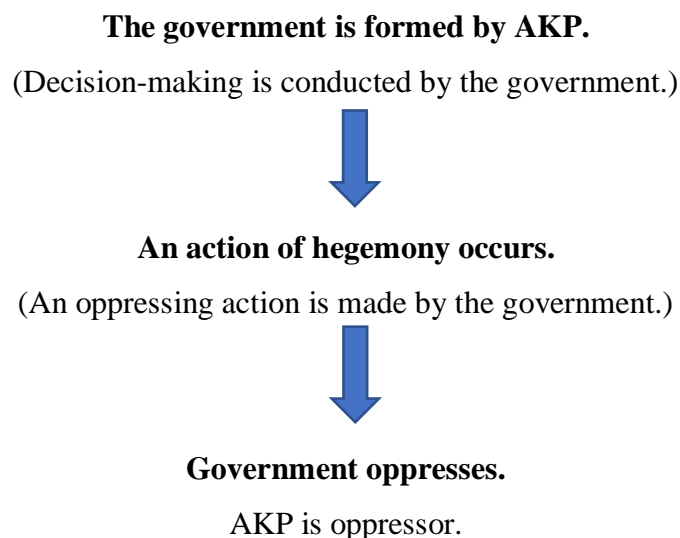
<sup>6</sup> <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/terrorism-index/>

### *Government Oppression: AKP is Oppressor*

<b>Date</b>	30.03.2018
<b>News</b>	“Kurds Mosque” name has changed to be “Turks Mosque” in the Turkish city Kilis.
<b>Medium</b>	Cumhuriyet, Birgün
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The fake news item above implies a form of oppression from the government side. The first news item reports that the name of a mosque has been changed from “Kurds” to “Turks” in the city of Kilis. *Cumhuriyet* and *Birgün*, two prevalent opposition-aligned mainstream media organizations, introduce the coverage of the event in a language implying oppression over cultural landscape in the region. However, according to the Teyit report, the name of the mosque has never changed, and the complication results from a wrongfully placed signboard. Currently, the name of the mosque remains to be “Kurds Mosque”.

The existing discourse of hegemony and oppression against the government in the Turkish opposition media seems to be prevalent in its gatekeeping mechanisms as well. Below, the activity schema of the discourse of oppression as used in the news item is provided.



Fake news items with similar discourse schemas from the opposition-aligned mainstream media organizations can be found below:

<b>Date</b>	28.05.2018
<b>News</b>	After Muharrem İnce meets SOLOTURK members, a stunt plane group, the scheduled show of group has been cancelled.
<b>Medium</b>	Sözcü, Birgün
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above news item focuses on Muharrem İnce, who was the main candidate of opposition for the presidential election of 2018. Accordingly, a scheduled show of SOLOTURK, a stunt plane group in the Turkish Army, has been cancelled due to its meeting with Muharrem İnce. However, according to Teyit report, the cancellation of the scheduled show has been decided long before the actual meeting between İnce and SOLOTURK. The event, still, reported by *Sözcü* and *Birgün*, two of the opposition media organizations, as a form of oppression within the given discourse schema.

<b>Date</b>	12.07.2018
<b>News</b>	Turkish state theatres have been shut down.
<b>Medium</b>	Cumhuriyet
<b>Form</b>	Fabrication
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above news item constitutes another example. It basically suggests the closure of state theaters in Turkey. State theaters are commonly known in the Turkish public opinion as reinforcing a powerful form of opposition with its plays as well as statements from its actors. Thus, the event of closure is reported by *Cumhuriyet* in a discourse of oppression, in accordance with the discourse activity schema provided above. That said, the news item has not grounded with reality, and the state theaters are still active today in Turkey.

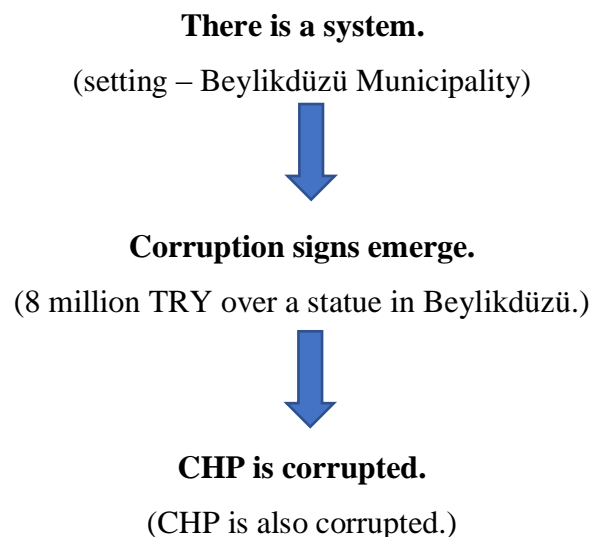
All the fake news items above imply a similar form of oppression discourse against a person or a group from the opposition side. In the following parts, fake news items that are covered by

government-aligned mainstream media organizations are analyzed. Common discourses of the fake news items are grouped under the titles of *opposition corruption*, *betrayal*, and *fraud*.

***Opposition Corruption: CHP is corrupted***

<b>Date</b>	31.05.2017
<b>News</b>	Statue constructed by Beylikdüzü Municipality costed 8 million TRY.
<b>Medium</b>	Güneş
<b>Form</b>	Fabrication
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

On the other side of the corruption discourse, the government-aligned mainstream media organizations sustain a discourse of opposition corruption through systems that are governed by CHP, the main opposition party. In the fake news item, *Güneş*, a government-aligned mainstream media organization, reports that a statue that is constructed by Beylikdüzü Municipality costs 8 million TRY, implying a form of corruption in the municipality. Since the mayor of the municipality is a CHP member, the tone of the news item follows a discourse of opposition corruption, whose implications is prevalent in news items focusing on similar issues by the government-aligned media organizations. The discourse activity schema as indicated by the news item is the following:



The fake news item above has further implications on CHP. As part of the mentioned statue features Makarios III, an influential Greek Cypriot clergyman, the government-aligned media depart from a nationalist discourse and frequently puts CHP in a position of betrayal. In the

following part, the discourse of betrayal that is prevalent in the government-aligned mainstream media is introduced with additional examples of fake news items.

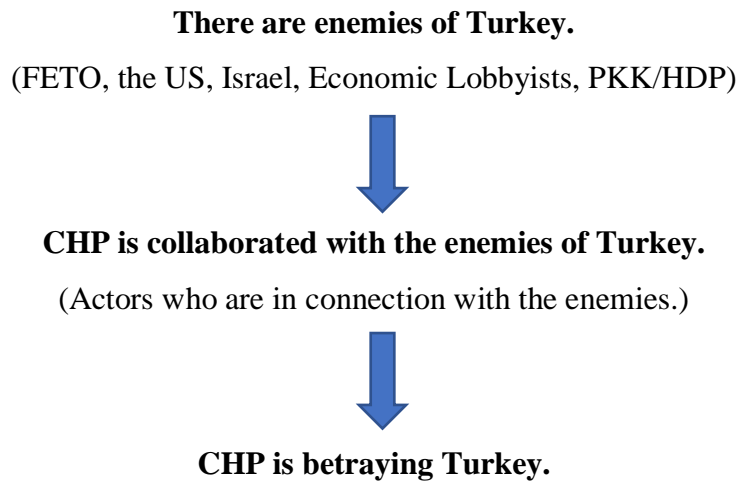
***Opposition Betrayal: CHP is betraying Turkey***

<b>Date</b>	22.06.2018
<b>News</b>	Alleged photo of Muharrem İnce on a coffee shop during the coup attempt.
<b>Medium</b>	Takvim, A Haber, Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The news above, which shows a photo of Muharrem İnce on a coffee shop during the coup attempt, actually is a manipulated montage of a photo. It is covered by government-aligned mainstream media organizations of *Takvim*, *A Haber*, and *Yeni Akit*. Muharrem İnce was the opposition candidate for the presidential elections of 2018, therefore, the government-aligned mainstream media organizations were mainly covering him in a way that discredits his campaign, this time through the coup attempt. The coup attempt of 2016 is one of the most important events around which the mainstream media build a form of us-them discourse. As the key executers of the coup attempt are closely related to the Fethullah Gülen Movement, which is later abbreviated as FETO (Fethullah Gülen Terror Organization) by the Turkish state, a strong “enemies of Turkey” discourse has become prevailed in the government-aligned media organizations. The enemies of Turkey discourse included FETO, the USA, foreign economic lobbyists, and PKK/HDP as enemies. In that case, Muharrem İnce, and therefore CHP, is put in a pacifist position during the turmoil of the coup attempt, which connects him to the “them” side of the us-them discourse, suggesting betrayal.

<b>Date</b>	11.10.2017
<b>News</b>	Öztürk Yılmaz, a CHP Parliamentarian, has said “The USA should punish not all of Turkey but only people who support AKP” upon cancellation of Turkish visas by the USA.
<b>Medium</b>	A Haber, Star, Güneş, Akşam
<b>Form</b>	Fabrication
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

Similarly, the news items above is widely covered by government-aligned mainstream media organizations, as *A Haber*, *Star*, *Güneş*, and *Akşam*. This news item is also reported in the form of an existing enemy, this time the US after the visa crisis. The US-Turkey relations have long been problematic due to the developments in Syria. Additional issues, such as FETO and economic sanctions, only made the relations worse. The second news item is basically effective at this point. Although there has not been such a statement by Öztürk Yılmaz, CHP deputy, the above news item fabricates so. In both the news items, there is an actor from CHP who is somehow connected with an enemy of Turkey, as the tones used by the mainstream media imply. Below is the common discourse activity schema used in the fake news items by the government-aligned mainstream media organizations.



<b>Date</b>	04.05.2018
<b>News</b>	Footage of Necmettin Erbakan, saying “Do not be deceived and act together with CHP”
<b>Medium</b>	Yeni Şafak
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Manipulation

The news item above also has similar tones of language that can be explained with the overall agenda that is aimed to be initiated by the government-aligned media organizations against opposition. In the third fake news item Necmettin Erbakan, one of the prominent figures of Turkish conservative politics, allegedly warns his followers against CHP in a video footage. The news item is reported by *Yeni Şafak*, one of the prominent government-aligned media

organizations. However, Teyit reports that the video footage has been manipulated, and therefore, not real.

<b>Date</b>	28.02.2019
<b>News</b>	Izmir Metropolitan Municipality distributes kilos of potatoes and onions that are stocked in 2016.
<b>Medium</b>	Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above news item accuses the municipality of İzmir, which is controlled by a mayor from CHP, of stocking large amounts of onions and potatoes, and therefore causing their prices to increase in the market. In the year 2018, economic conditions in Turkey caused prices of onions and potatoes to majorly increase in a way that harms household economic stability. The government-aligned media mainly relate such economic cases to speculative foreign economic lobbyists. The news item, therefore, is connected to and introduced through the existing discourse of betrayal.

<b>Date</b>	18.03.2019
<b>News</b>	Sezai Temelli, HDP co-chairman, said “Istanbul and Ankara will be run by HDP if CHP wins”.
<b>Medium</b>	CNN Turk, Posta
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above fake news item within the discourse of betrayal is reported recently regarding the 2019 March local elections in Turkey. During the elections, CHP and HDP, the pro-Kurdish party, went into a strategic partnership for the elections. Indicating that, the government-aligned mainstream media, which regard HDP as one of the dangers to the national security of Turkey, asserts its agenda on CHP through the discourse of betrayal. At this point, it is remarkable that CNN Turk, which was previously analyzed in a case of opposition-aligned media, now seems as a part of government-aligned media. On April 2018, Doğan Group, a relatively opposition-aligned business media group that included many broadcasting and printing media

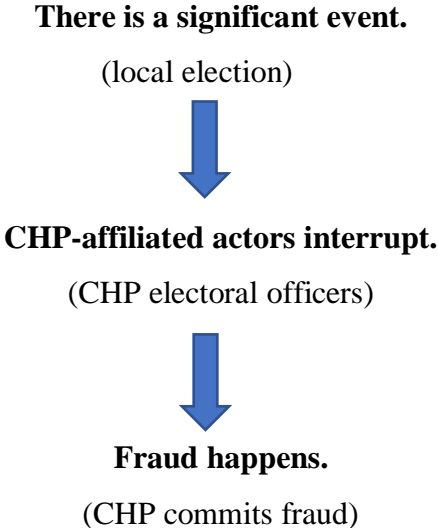


organizations, including CNN Turk, has been purchased by a business group that has close alignments with the government. This seems as a case confirming the existing discussions that mainstream media in Turkey have broader characteristics deriving from ownership.

*Opposition Fraud: CHP commits fraud*

<b>Date</b>	02.04.2019
<b>News</b>	30 electoral officers have been arrested in Istanbul due to election fraud.
<b>Medium</b>	A Haber, Sabah, Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above fake news item is extracted from the prevalent mainstream media organizations that are aligned with the government. They are reported after 31 March 2019, the recent local election day in Turkey. However, it is categorized as fabrication, as it relies on fabricated facts or manipulated footages. Still, the news item is reported by the government-aligned mainstream media in a way that accuses CHP and CHP-affiliated organizations with fraud during the elections. The following discourse activity schema is created in order to visualize the pattern of the agenda by the government-aligned media organizations against CHP.



<b>Date</b>	02.04.2019
<b>News</b>	Footage of CHP officers caught on election fraud and attacking police who prevents them.
<b>Medium</b>	Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The news item above resembles the first one regarding the used tones and languages in content. However, it is categorized as manipulation, as it relies on manipulated footages. In this case, the footage belongs to another event that is not related with the March 31<sup>st</sup> elections in Turkey. This news item is reported by *Yeni Akit*, a government-aligned media organization. It empowers the provided discourse activity schema through its content.

<b>Date</b>	2.04.2019
<b>News</b>	CHP admitted its fraud in İstanbul's district of Arnavutköy.
<b>Medium</b>	Takvim, Sabah, Akşam
<b>Form</b>	Fabrication
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above fake news item is another example from the government-aligned media that empowers the discourse of opposition fraud in elections. It is reported by, *Takvim*, *Sabah*, and *Akşam*, three prominent mainstream media organizations in Turkey. However, the news item is classified as fabricated as it does not rely on factual information.

### 5.3.2 Secular-Religious Divide

#### *System under AKP is pro-Islam*

One of the common themes of polarization in the fake news items appears to be secular-religious divide, something that has long been a part of discussion in the Turkish social and political agenda. In that sense, the divergent discourses regarding the secular and religious divide are also visible in the mainstream media organizations. In this part, fake news items that are reported by the opposition-aligned mainstream media organizations are analyzed through a common discourse activity schema that is extracted from the news items.

<b>Date</b>	29.08.2016
<b>News</b>	Newly appointed head doctor of GATA Haydarpaşa Education Hospital is a woman wearing headscarf.
<b>Medium</b>	Cumhuriyet
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The news item above reports that the head doctor of GATA, a military hospital institution, is appointed by the government as a woman who wears headscarf. The issue of headscarf, especially in the late 90s, constituted a central point of discussion regarding the secular and religious divide in Turkey. In fact, the real versions of above exemplified fake news item were quite common in the mainstream media organizations that held secular positions. In this case, however, *Cumhuriyet* falsely reports a non-factual news item by mistaking the woman with some other official. Headscarf as a symbol of religious life still covered within the agenda of *Cumhuriyet*, connected to an overall counter-conservative discourse. The secular and religious division in Turkey has always been connected to a discourse of progress and regress. The implications regarding the progress/regress discourse are still findable in the above news item.

The discourse activity schema of the news item is provided as the following.

**There is a system controlled by conservatives.**

(AKP controls the system.)



**Pro-Islam themes appear in the system.**

(Headscarf-wearing woman appointed.)



**System is becoming religious.**

(System is regressing.)

<b>Date</b>	23.11.2016
<b>News</b>	Turkish Radio and Television Board (RTÜK), for the first time ever, allowed a public service advertisement about a religious group on television.
<b>Medium</b>	Hürriyet
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

As in the case of headscarf, religious groups are also a center of discussion among the religious and secular divisions in Turkey. The above fake news item is non-factual in the sense that there were previously aired religious groups in the Turkish television. However, *Hürriyet*, a part of opposition-aligned media organizations before April 2018, has reported the news item in a way that can be read through the given discourse activity schema. RTÜK, in this case, was regarded as a regressing state institution that is part of a system ruled by conservatives.

<b>Date</b>	9.12.2016
<b>News</b>	Families of children who lost their lives in a dorm fire in Adana did not press charge against the religious dormitory board.
<b>Medium</b>	CNN Turk, Hürriyet
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above news item is important in showing another point of discussion within the secular and religious division. The role of religious institutions and groups in providing housing and dormitory services is always questioned by secular divisions in the country. The fake news item above covers a further implication of an actual event, which was a fire in a religious dormitory due to which a number of students have lost their lives. According to the news item, none of the families who lost their children have pressed charges against the religious dormitory board. This is in fact not true, as almost all the families have pressed charges against the board. Still, *CNN Turk* and *Hürriyet* reported the event in a way that empowers the existing discourse of regressing and religious system.

### *System under CHP is anti-Islam*

<b>Date</b>	04.04.2019
<b>News</b>	The municipality of CHP has stitched up a cross in a square.
<b>Medium</b>	Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

On the other side of the religious-secular divide agenda, a prevailing interpretation of CHP's secular characteristics as "anti-Islam" seems to be the common discourse. In the above example, a fake news item that uses a manipulated photo in order to infer that a municipality that is run by CHP has stitched up a Christian cross in a square. The news item reported by *Yeni Akit*, one of the government-aligned mainstream media organizations in Turkey. The discourse activity schema extracted out of the news item is the following:

**There is a system controlled by seculars.**

(CHP controls the system.)



**Anti-Islam themes appear in the system.**

(Cross, targeting journalism, etc.)



**System is becoming anti-Islam.**

(CHP is anti-Islam.)

<b>Date</b>	08.02.2019
<b>News</b>	Journalist Ruşen Çakır reported a news about Erbakan as a "very dangerous person".
<b>Medium</b>	Yeni Şafak
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Print

The government-aligned media organizations have long characterized CHP with a discourse of anti-Islam, mostly pointing to the periods of single-party rule in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another example, however fake, is the above news item that is reported by Yeni Şafak. Accordingly, Ruşen Çakır, a leftist and secular journalist, has said in late 90s that Necmettin Erbakan, one of the prominent conservative leaders in Turkey, is a very dangerous person. However, in fact, the statement reported by Ruşen Çakır actually belongs to a US military general of the time. The tone and implications of the news item, again, confirms the given discourse schema.

In the following part, economy, another theme of polarization, is analyzed in respect to the two divergent discourses within the fake news items on the Turkish mainstream media.

### 5.3.3 Economy

#### *Economy decreases in Turkey*

<b>Date</b>	03.01.2019
<b>News</b>	Economist Mahfi Eğilmez has guessed dollar lira ratio as 7.5 in 2019.
<b>Medium</b>	Milli Gazete
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

Economy stands as another theme of polarization among the Turkish mainstream media organizations. In the above news item, *Milli Gazete*, currently an opposition-aligned newspaper against the existing government, alleges that an Mahfi Eğilmez, a Turkish economist, has guessed dollar lira ratio as 7.5 in 2019. That said, according to the Teyit report, the economist has not made such a statement in his panel speech. Thus, the news item is categorized as propaganda. The language of the above news item, in that sense, sorts together with a discourse that is described below.

**There is an economic system.**

(Reports regarding the Turkish economy)



**System is not managed properly.**

(Dollar ratio is increased against lira.)



**Economy decreases in Turkey.**

(The overall economy is in poor hands.)

Decreasing value of Turkish lira against US dollar has been a problem of the Turkish economy for a long time. It has also been a way for opposition to empower the existing discourse of economic regression in the country.

#### *Economy develops in Turkey*

<b>Date</b>	07.11.2016
<b>News</b>	S&P has raised Turkey's credit rating.
<b>Medium</b>	Takvim
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

From the side of government-alignment media organizations, the discourse of economic development seems as more prevalent within the selected fake news items. The above news item is reported by *Takvim*, one of the mainstream media branches that belongs to the government-aligned media. Accordingly, S&P, a credit rating institution, has increased credit rating of Turkey, indicating economic development and strength. The news, however, is categorized as propaganda since the its use of language deviates from truth. Accordingly, S&P does not increase Turkey's overall credit rating, but tags Turkey's economy outlook as optimistic.

**There is an economic system.**

(Reports regarding the Turkish economy)



**System is managed properly.**

(Credit Rating, High Income, etc.)



**Economy develops in Turkey.**

(The overall economy successfully functions.)

<b>Date</b>	28.12.2016
<b>News</b>	OECD states that eight countries, including Turkey, has passed from middle income countries to high income countries.
<b>Medium</b>	Sabah, Akşam, Star
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The above fake news item is another example of a news item prepared in accordance with the given discourse schema. In this case, government-aligned mainstream media organizations of *Sabah*, *Akşam*, and *Star*, state that Turkey has become a high-income country according to the OECD criteria. However, the fake news item also stands as propaganda as it deviates from truth. The fake news item derives from a misinterpretation from the OECD's annual manual. That said, the developing economy discourse is empowered by such media organizations at the cost of covering fake news items.



### 5.3.4 Education

#### *Education System is Broken in Turkey*

<b>Date</b>	30.05.2017
<b>News</b>	National Education Ministry of Turkey has awarded a dervish robot with 1 million TRY.
<b>Medium</b>	Sözcü, Birgün
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The last theme of polarization that can be observed from the fake news items is education. Education has been one of the issues over which the mainstream media organizations have always had polarizing and divergent discourses. In the above news item, *Sözcü* and *Birgün* report that the National Education Ministry of Turkey has awarded a Mevlevi dervish robot with 1 million TRY during a contest. The news item is categorized as propaganda, because the award of 1 million TRY is not given to a specific project, but is the total budget of the contest. However, the news item is introduced in a way that exists as one of the polarizing discourses in the Turkish mainstream media. The discourse of broken education system in Turkey has mainly been pointed through ridiculous and non-innovative projects taking big prizes in state sponsored contests like the one in the news item. In that sense, the above fake news item has also made its way through the gatekeeping discourses of the two opposition media outlets.

**There is an education system.**

(setting – Turkish education system)



**The education system produces ridiculous outputs.**

(Mevlevi dervish robot)



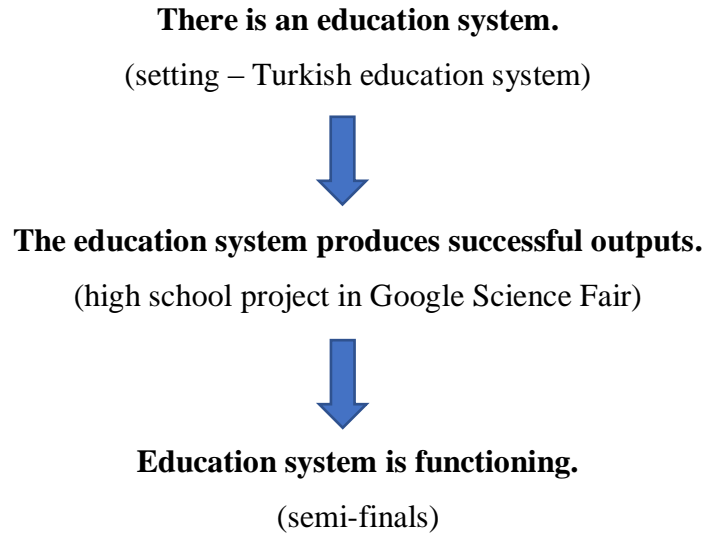
**Education system is corrupted.**

(robot awarded with 1 million TRY.)

### *Education System is Functioning in Turkey*

<b>Date</b>	14.12.2018
<b>News</b>	High school project is in semi-finals of the Google Science Fair.
<b>Medium</b>	Hürriyet, Yeni Şafak
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

On the other side of education discourses within the mainstream media can be shown as the functioning education discourse. In the above news item, *Hürriyet* and *Yeni Şafak* report that a project from a high school in Turkey has made it to semi-finals in Google Science Fair. However, Teyit reports that the date of the news item is actually before the date of announcing semi-final projects in the fair, and yet the project was still among the candidates for that time. Thus, the above news item is classified as propaganda since it deviates from truth in a way that empowers a particular discourse in the mainstream media.



### **5.3.5 Conclusion**

This part has evaluated the fake news items that are grouped under the themes of government-opposition divide, secular-religious divide, economy, and education. The fake news items, as they are covered by various organizations within the Turkish mainstream media, offered divergent discourses within each theme, indicating polarization under the given themes. The government-opposition divide seems as the most extensive theme in the sense that it offers

various discursive constructs of polarization under different subthemes, such as opposition corruption, government corruption, opposition betrayal or government oppression. This indicates a deep cleavage between AKP and CHP, the main government and opposition parties in Turkey. In addition, fake news items under the themes of polarization also suggest divergent and conflicting discourses regarding secular and religious divisions, economy or education in Turkey.

Fake news items that are grouped under the themes of polarization are mainly formed as propaganda, fabrication, and manipulation. It is common that a footage or a photo is decontextualized in order to convey a particular message, as well as that partially true information is falsely mediated. Fake news items are also formed as fabrication, meaning that they do not have a factual ground at all. In that sense, the use of fake news items in polarized settings seems to be mainly motivated by mainly political reasons. This also shows that mainstream media in Turkey are deeply divided within the appointed themes of polarization. They seem to create conflicting gatekeeping discourses, which eventually pave way for conflicting epistemologies partially supported with fake news items as shown by the provided discourse schema analyses.

In the following part, fake news items that are grouped under the themes of partisanship are analyzed in order to answer the last research question.

## **5.4 THEMES OF PARTISANSHIP**

Until now, analysis of the fake news items has showed that the Turkish mainstream media environment have polarized around two main line of divergent discourses regarding the themes of government-opposition, secular-religious, economy, and education. These divergent and conflicting groups of discourses in the Turkish mainstream media are made visible through the fake news items that are covered. While the first group of discourses, represented by the organizations such as *Sözcü*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Birgün*, mainly have an oppositional and critical stance towards the political and social status quo in Turkey, the second group of discourses, represented by the organizations such as *Yeni Şafak*, *Sabah*, *Yeni Akit*, *Akşam*, *Star*, mainly have a supportive and promotive stance regarding political and social status quo in the country. In that regard, it is possible to name the members of the first group as critical media organizations,

while the members of the second group as promotive media organizations, as shown in Table 3.

*Table 6 - Divergent Groups of Mainstream Media Organizations in Turkey.*

<b>Critical Media Organizations</b>	<b>Supportive Media Organizations</b>
Sözcü	Yeni Şafak
Cumhuriyet	Sabah – A Haber
Birgün	Yeni Akit
Milli Gazete	Akşam
	Star
	Güneş

**Research Question 5:** What are the discourses of partisanship within the fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media?

In order to answer the above research question, themes of partisanship are defined in accordance with fake news items that support individual agendas of either of the two groups, again, through empowering their existing discourses on within a particular theme. In that sense, there have not been divergent and conflicting discourses from the two sides that are inspected in the fake news items grouped under the themes of partisanship. However, the fake news items within the themes of partisanship still support a particular social and political agenda that are driven by the above stated representatives of either the two groups.

Through a qualitative content analysis over the fake news items, the common themes of partisanship that are determined are *anti-immigration*, *anti-USA*, *anti-Israel*, and *FETO*. While the anti-immigration agenda is mainly promoted by the first group, the critical media organizations, the rest of the agendas are promoted by the second group, namely the supportive media organizations. In the following parts, these themes will be unpacked through the selected fake news items.

### 5.4.1 Anti-Immigration

<b>Date</b>	21.09.2017
<b>News</b>	Syrians living in Turkey do not pay for phone bills.
<b>Medium</b>	Sözcü
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The fake news item above is reported by Sözcü, one of the members of the critical media organizations. According to the news item, Syrians who are living in Turkey are not obligated to pay their phone bills, and therefore can talk on the phone for free. The language and tone of the news item clearly promotes the prevalent discourse in Turkey that implies Syrians are living as a burden to the Turkish tax payer. However, in reality, the news item deviates from the fact as it does not cover the truth entirely. According to the Teyit report, free call service is only for a specific call center on the Syrian border of Turkey, which is run by the state for Syrians who are in the process of deportation. *Sözcü*, however, has reported the event as if it is the case for the entire immigrants in Turkey, in a way that is connected to the prevalent discourse of anti-immigration in the Turkish mainstream media.

### 5.4.2 Anti-USA

<b>Date</b>	23.09.2016
<b>News</b>	Photo of USA base in Kobane.
<b>Medium</b>	A Haber
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Broadcast

The fake news item above are part of a widely accepted anti-USA discourse especially in the supportive media organizations in Turkey. In the above news item, *A Haber*, a national TV channel in Turkey that is part of a government-aligned media organizations, reports montaged photos and footages in order to link the USA with one of the armed groups in Syria, namely Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). SDF is regarded as a national threat to Turkey. Therefore, the coverage of the news item departs from the linkage between the USA and SDF, and news item is reported as a part of the anti-USA discourse in the Turkish mainstream media.

<b>Date</b>	05.01.2017
<b>News</b>	US General Wesley Clark admitted that the USA has founded DAESH.
<b>Medium</b>	A Haber
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Broadcast

In the above news item, a connection between the US and another armed group in Syria, namely DAESH (ISIS), is suggested. This time, it is alleged that the US General Wesley Clark has admitted that the USA has founded DAESH. However, the news item uses decontextualized footages in a non-factual way, and therefore is formed as *manipulation*. This news item is also reported by *A Haber*, a government-aligned mainstream media organization. It is, again, connected to the recent discourse of anti-US that is partially prevalent in the Turkish mainstream media.

<b>Date</b>	20.01.2017
<b>News</b>	Photo of Condoleezza Rice with Usama bin Laden.
<b>Medium</b>	Aydınlık
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The news item above, similar to the first two, is reported through manipulation of a photo in a non-factual way. The montaged photo shows Usama bin Laden and Condoleezza Rice together as they are close, indicating a conspiracy approach towards the concept of War on Terror that was prevalent in the US during the Bush administration. The news item is relatively recent, and in that sense, it empowers the existing discourse of the USA linkage with other terrorist groups. This discourse has become far more prevalent after 2014, when the US government decided to arm certain groups in Syria, such as SDF. Since SDF is recognized as a terrorist group by Turkey, the US-Turkey relations got worsened after 2014 under the effect of the prevalent discourse in the Turkish mainstream media regarding the linkage between the US and terrorist groups.

<b>Date</b>	06.03.2017
<b>News</b>	Two US, Two German, and one UK agents have participated to a meeting for “No” campaign for the 2017 referendum in Buyukada, Istanbul.
<b>Medium</b>	Takvim
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

The news item above is reported by *Takvim*, an organization that is grouped under the supportive media organization in Turkey, during the constitutional referendum of 2018. The referendum has been a critical event in the country’s history as it promoted a regime change from parliamentarianism to the presidential system. The period also witnessed a high level of polarization among the mainstream media organizations, as supportive media organizations promoted “Yes”, while critical media organizations promoted “No”. In this news item, *Takvim* reports the event with a photo of a meeting scene, again, in connection with the discourse of linkages among foreign powers that work counter to the Turkish interests. That said, according to the Teyit report, the photo in fact belongs to an irrelevant meeting held in the USA. Therefore, the form of the news item has been coded as *manipulation*. Still, the foreign power against Turkish development discourse is one of the prevalent discourses that is especially empowered by the group of supportive media organizations in Turkey.

### 5.4.3 Anti-Israel

<b>Date</b>	26.12.2017
<b>News</b>	Footage of Israeli soldiers set a dog attack against a Palestinian kid.
<b>Medium</b>	Sabah
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Internet

Another theme of partisanship within the supportive media organizations relies on the prevalent discourse of anti-Israel. Israeli atrocities in Palestine have long been covered in the Turkish media with a powerful discourse of anti-Israeli sentiment extensively embraced in the Turkish mainstream media. However, the supportive mainstream media organizations have always been one step further in the anti-Israeli discourse as it generally awakens powerful reactions among the Turkish public. The above fake news item is an example of the anti-Israeli reflections by

*Sabah*, one of the supportive mainstream media organizations. It reports a footage of a dog attack on a child, allegedly set by an Israeli soldier against a Palestinian kid. Although the event does not include an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian kid, the news item reports the video in a way that decontextualizes and manipulates the video in order to empower the existing anti-Israeli discourse.

<b>Date</b>	01.08.2018
<b>News</b>	Footage of an Israeli kindergarten where children are propagandized against Turks.
<b>Medium</b>	A Haber, Yeni Akit
<b>Form</b>	Propaganda
<b>Platform</b>	Broadcast

The second news item shows a kindergarten environment where children are propagandized against Turks is reported. It is reported by *A Haber* and *Yeni Akit*, two of the prominent members of the supportive media organizations. However, according to the Teyit report, the event that is covered by the news item is actually a parody sketch designed by a comedian to criticize the Israeli prime minister Netanyahu. Still, the news item is reported by the supportive mainstream media organizations in a way that is connected with the anti-Israeli discourse in Turkey.

#### **5.4.4 FETO**

The Fethullah Gülen Terror Organization, or FETO, constitutes the last theme of partisanship regarding the supportive media organizations in Turkey. Fethullah Gülen, the leader of an organization that calls itself Hizmet (Service) in Turkey, had already been regarded as a national security threat by the Turkish state especially in late 1990s. After 2002, the organization and the AKP government were in an alliance that mainly grounded on reformer approaches against the status quo. However, the relations between the government and the organization, given the confidential and cult-like structure of the movement in bureaucracy, judiciary and military, have eventually turned out to be an active conflict between the organization and the Turkish state. In the following years after 2013, the organization has been redefined as a terrorist organization called FETO, and it has been excluded from all segments of the state. After the failed military coup of 2016, whose key decision-makers were part of the organization, a



discourse of FETO has become quite prevalent especially within the supportive mainstream media organizations. The FETO discourse is distinctively apparent in the supportive mainstream media organizations compared to the critical mainstream media organizations, partly because the former has been a functional part of the government agenda regarding the anti-FETO policy.

<b>Date</b>	08.10.2016
<b>News</b>	Photo of passport that is given by Vatican to Fethullah Gülen.
<b>Medium</b>	Takvim
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Print

In the news items above, *Takvim*, a member of supportive media organizations, reports a manipulated photo of a passport that allegedly given to Fethullah Gülen by Vatican. The news item is connected to a discourse of FETO-foreign power linkage that is quite prevalent in the Turkish mainstream media. FETO is currently regarded as a group that is working with foreign powers against the potential development of Turkey, and therefore the existing discourses of anti-FETO is closely related with the organization's linkages with foreign actors. In that sense, certain fake news items are also employed to empower the discourse.

<b>Date</b>	25.10.2016
<b>News</b>	Photo of an area in the US that is bought by Fethullah Gülen Organization to be used as a base.
<b>Medium</b>	Akşam
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Print

The second news item, which is reported by *Akşam*, uses a decontextualized photo of an area that is reported to be belonging to the Fethullah Gülen Terror Organization. The news item too is connected to the anti-FETO discourse due to a linkage between the organization and a foreign power, this time the US. The organization has been one of the most problematic issues between the deteriorating relations of the US and Turkey, since the leader of the organization currently lives in the US. This fake news items, in that sense, is connected to both the anti-US and anti-FETO discourse that are prevalent in the Turkish mainstream media.

<b>Date</b>	28.10.2016
<b>News</b>	Meeting of Altan Tan, an HDP Deputy, and Harun Tokak, a member of Fethullah Gülen Organization, in Northern Iraq.
<b>Medium</b>	Akşam
<b>Form</b>	Manipulation
<b>Platform</b>	Print

In the above news item, again, a manipulated photo of an alleged meeting between a HDP deputy with a FETO member is reported. In this news item, FETO is associated with HDP, the pro-Kurdish political party that is regarded as having close connections with PKK, a terrorist organization that is recognized by the Turkish state. In that sense, FETO is one more time reported as connected to the existing discourse of foreign powers threatening the Turkish national security. It is worth noting that all three fake news items are placed in printed platforms of the mainstream media, and not on the internet platforms as usual.

#### 5.4.5 Conclusion

This part has evaluated the fake news items that are grouped under the themes of partisanship, which are found to be *anti-immigration*, *anti-US*, *anti-Israel*, and *FETO*. Departing from the groups of media organizations that have either critical or supportive stances towards the status quo in Turkey, the themes of partisanship are comprised by discourses that are supported by either of the two determined groups. In that sense, the themes of partisanship differed from themes of polarization in that the latter themes have offered divergent and conflicting discourses, while the former themes introduced only single dominant discourses by either supportive or critical groups of media organizations. It is found that the discourse of anti-immigration is prevalent within the critical mainstream media organizations, while the discourses within the remaining themes are mainly prevalent in the supportive media organizations.

The themes of partisanship have shown that fake news items can be used by mainstream media organizations to empower their stances towards certain discursive positions. At this point, the theoretical approach on the discourse theory is important to remember. Foucault (1972) associated discourse with power, as discourses correlate to produced knowledge in shaping the collective ideas and actions of a society. In that sense, themes of partisanship point that

considerable efforts are made by the Turkish mainstream media organizations to create knowledge within certain intellectual fields of the Turkish society. Additionally, one should remember that although themes of partisanship are shown through fake news items in this analysis, it does not mean that they do not correlate with the reality. All of the discourses that are analyzed above actually relate to certain factual events, and to understandings that are derived from these events. Still, supporting these discourses through fake news items may be problematic, which will be discussed more in the following section.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

This study has provided a deeper look over the Turkish mainstream media landscape through fake news items. In order to provide an overall picture on the problem of fake news in the Turkish mainstream media, five research questions were developed. The first research question asked the most common media through which fake news items disseminate in the Turkish media. It has been shown that the majority of the fake news on Turkish media ecosystem (66%) have been disseminated only through social media, while approximately a quarter (23%) of fake news items are covered by at least one defined mainstream media organization in Turkey. Therefore, social media seem to be the most common platform on which fake news items disseminate in today's media landscape.

After the overall media landscape of Turkey, the research has focused on the Turkish mainstream media and its problem of fake news. The second research question asked the most common forms of fake news items that circulate in the Turkish mainstream media. Departing from the model of Tandoc et al. (2018), fake news items were grouped into six categories as parody, satire, fabrication, advertisement, manipulation and propaganda. The majority of the fake news items (around 61%) are found to be formed as either manipulation or propaganda, while a relatively small portion of fake news items are found to be fabrication (29%).

For the remaining research questions, the thesis has made a distinction among the fake news items in accordance with their relevance in the Turkish social and political context. The third research question asked the common platforms of the Turkish mainstream media in the dissemination of politically and socially relevant fake news items. It was found that around 79% (60) of the fake news items spread on the internet platforms of mainstream media, while around 12% (9) of them were spread on broadcast platforms, and around 9% (7) of the fake news items spread on printing platforms.

The fourth and fifth research questions have focused on the implications of the use of fake news items in the Turkish mainstream media. In that sense, while the fourth question asked the discourses of polarization within the fake news items that are socially and politically relevant in the Turkish context, the fifth question asked the discourses of partisanship for the same group

of fake news. Partisanship and polarization have been determined upon the existence of divergent and conflicting discourses within the appointed themes in the fake news items. The themes of polarization have found to be government-opposition divide, secular-religious divide, economy, and education. Regarding the themes of polarization, it is shown that oppositely aligned parties in the Turkish mainstream media promote divergent discourses over each of these themes. Additionally, the themes of partisanship were found to be anti-immigration, anti-US, anti-Israel, and FETO. The themes of partisanship inferred that although there is no divergence regarding the discourses, conflicting parties of the Turkish mainstream media suggest partisan discourses within the exhibited themes. Partisan discourses within fake news items seem more common in government-aligned media, as three out of four themes of partisanship discourses are embraced by supportive media organizations. The remaining theme of partisanship, anti-immigration, seems as prevalent among the opposition-aligned media.

This study has provided a detailed insight into the problem of fake news in the Turkish media. It specifically focused on the current discourses of the Turkish mainstream media from a perspective of partisanship and polarization. It has an up to date approach as it provides a contemporary analysis of the Turkish media, which is being transformed fundamentally under the increasing effects of digitalization. The Turkish media is characteristic in the sense that, according to the Reuters Digital News Report of 2018 (Newman et al., 2018). Turkey is the number one country in the dissemination of fake news item. Additionally, the country introduces one of the most notable context of media polarization. In that sense, this study connects the local discussions of polarization in the Turkish media with the global discussions on fake news, which have increased with the advent of the internet-based media. Therefore, the findings provided by this study offer generalizable outcomes for both the Turkish and the world contexts in terms of media studies. That said, all of the stages of the research, from beginning to the end, is conducted solely by the author of this study. The codification and analysis of fake news items, the common themes, and the discourse schemas are created, again, by the author himself. In that sense, although it is conducted with systematic approaches determined by selected methodologies, problems of reliability may arise due to the potential subjectivity of the research.

## **6.2 DISCUSSION**

### **6.2.1 The Problem of Fake News in the Turkish Media**

Fake news items in the Turkish context are dominantly spread on social media platforms, as more than half of the total fake news items spread only on social media without passing to the mainstream media or independent news websites. However, the mainstream media, which are supposed to have high journalistic and editorial standards, also have a relatively high percentage regarding the dissemination of fake news items. Furthermore, this study shows that the majority of the fake news items covered by the Turkish mainstream media are not entirely fabricated news. In fact, completely fabricated news articles in the Turkish mainstream media constitute a relatively small percentage of fake news items compared to the total number. The remaining percentage of fake news items are mainly formed as either manipulation or propaganda, which means that they partially embraced truth within their content, either textual or visual. Misappropriation of texts and de-contextualization of footages are seemingly two most typical examples of fake news items that circulate on the Turkish mainstream media. Thus, fake news is not entirely nonsense, rather, it constitutes deviated forms of truth.

This confirms Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who state that one of the main motivations of the production of fake news is ideological and financial. From the theoretical approach of fake news, the forms of manipulation and propaganda seem quite problematic as the analyzed fake news items are related with broader social and political discourses regarding the Turkish context. This meant that the Turkish mainstream media organizations produce divergent media agendas through polarized gatekeeping discourses over the production and selection of news items. Fake news items, at this point, are finding ways inside and becoming part of their overall agenda. The divergence of the discourses that fake news items display over the analyzed themes, as in the case of economy or education, shows that Turkish mainstream media organizations have a damaged understanding of journalism. Considering the coverage of fake news items, the media in Turkey are shifting from the position of contributing to the public decision making to the one of spreading political propaganda. This is a problem that considers all of the mainstream media in Turkey, as fake news items are covered both of the analyzed sides, as in government-aligned and opposition-aligned, in the course of practicing journalism. In that sense, media in Turkey require a reexamination (Waisbord, 2018) and repositioning that

is aligned with not any political actor either from the government or the opposition, but objectivity and accuracy.

The study has also shown that the majority of fake news items are disseminated through the online platforms of the mainstream media organizations. Not only the fake news items disseminate mainly on social media, but also the majority of fake news items on the Turkish mainstream media disseminate through its internet platforms. On the Turkish mainstream media, this is the case for both the clickbait and non-contextual fake news items, and the ones that have social and political implications regarding the Turkish context. In that sense, this study one more time confirms online platforms as the most prevalent environments for spread of fake news and misinformation. In that sense, media organizations and journalists must consider even higher standards in their practices of gatekeeping or gatewatching. However, the current situation of the media landscape, not only for Turkey but also for the rest of the world, is in between two fires, as much of the political propaganda that is recirculated via social media originates from mainstream news articles that report the statements made by propagandists and demagogues without sufficient critical framing (Bruns 2018, p. 11). This certainly suggests a pessimistic view regarding the future of journalism if further action for the enhancement of the news media is not taken.

Tandoc et al. (2018) point out that understanding fake news will allow a systematic study of not only what makes individuals believe in fake news, but how fake news affects public discourse. In that sense, the pieces of truth in fake news items introduce a critical perspective over how they are capable of affecting public discourse. Because, as Tandoc et al. (2018) continue, while news is constructed by journalists, it seems that fake news is co-constructed by the audience, as its fakeness depends substantially on whether the audience perceives the fake as real. Fighting fake news and misinformation, therefore, require a two-sided strategy. On one hand, understanding qualitative implications connected to the truth that lies in fake news items, and developing intellectual ideas to counter such implications, can be a way to tackle with fake news and misinformation. On the other hand, in order to constantly reproduce the actual truth, systematic fact checking may be a solution. For example, Matthes & Valenzuela (2012) show that fact-checkers have the potential to outweigh partisan biases in citizens' interpretations of partisan political news.

## 6.2.2 Implications of Media in Polarized Settings

From a political point of view, it is safe to say that the current news media environment in Turkey exhibits a considerable level of partisanship and polarization. Such an environment of polarization is prevalent when it comes to certain issues that have social and political dimensions, such as government-opposition relations or secular-religious divide. The thesis has shown that divergent media agendas also include divergent saliences on the issues that are promoted. As an example, while government-aligned mainstream media organizations promote education with success, opposition-aligned mainstream media organizations label education with failure. Thus, the divergence over themes offers clearer understandings for the political and social polarization and partisanship in the Turkish mainstream media environment. However, polarization does not provide sufficient outcomes for the Turkish mainstream media, as the media discourses on such themes are empowered by fake news items. This seriously damages the credibility of the Turkish mainstream media, a phenomenon that is becoming quite obvious among the citizens of Turkey. In addition, media in Turkey promote partisan discourses over certain themes, such as immigration, or anti-US, by using fake news items in order to reproduce certain agendas. This is, again, a problematic stance towards the normative role of media in a given context, as using fake news in order to promote certain ideas may problematize collective epistemology of societies.

The theories that are used in the study have provided a wide conceptual and theoretical background on which the thesis was able to grow. Concepts of fake news and partisan media provided solid ways to understand and analyze mainstream media outlets in Turkey. That said, both of the theories are still in their infancy regarding the effects of digital media in the current information landscape. As indicated by Schroeder (2018), a further problem that currently bedevils theories of media is that theories that were suited to mass media and interpersonal communication are no longer suited for digital media - since new media often have elements of both (p. 324). Along with the need for more contemporary research that shed light on the current media environment, novel methodologies should be developed within the theories to provide complementary pictures in media studies.

The need for more systemic and contemporary theoretical approaches on fake news in polarized settings can be an example of one of the limitations of this study. Furthermore, quantitative approaches to data of hundreds of fake news items may have provided additional insight over



the implications of the discourses of fake news in the Turkish context. Lastly, a more comprehensive research would include similarities of fake news discourses with the ones of actual news items as covered in the mainstream media, in order to provide a clearer analysis over the divergent discourse on the media organizations in Turkey. However, lack of time and need of extensive workforce for such a study constituted additional limitations. Further research, in that sense, can consider removing such limitations in order to provide more extensive approach. Finally, an interesting implication of this study is that the production and dissemination of fake news items on printing platforms were far less compared to the internet platforms. The differentiating values of journalism across platforms would also constitute a potential research issue as a contribution to the field.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackerman, R., & Goldsmith, M. (2011). Metacognitive regulation of text learning: On screen versus on paper. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 17(1), 18–32.  
doi:10.1037/a0022086

Akser M and Baybars-Hawks B (2012) Media and democracy in Turkey: Toward a model of neo-liberal media autocracy. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5(3): 302–321.

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017a). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31, 211–236.

Al-Rawi, A. (2018). Gatekeeping Fake News Discourses on Mainstream Media Versus Social Media. *Social Science Computer Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318795849>

Althaus, S.L., Tewksbury, D., 2002. Agenda setting and the ‘new’ news: patterns of issue importance among readers of the paper and online versions of the New York Times. *Communication Research*. 29, 180–207.

Barzilai-Nahon K. (2009). Gatekeeping: A critical review. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 43, 433–478.

Baum, M., & Groeling, T. (2008). New media and the polarization of American political discourse. *Political Communication*, 25, 345–365.

Baum, M., & Groeling, T. (2010). *War stories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects: the changing foundations of political communications. *Journal of Communication*, 58, 707–731.

Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1995). *The crisis of public communication*. New York: Routledge.

Bruns, A. (2017). *Gatewatching and News Curation*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang US.

Bucy, E. P. (2004). The interactivity paradox: Closer to the news but confused. In E. P. Bucy & J. E. Newhagen (Eds.), *Media access: Social and psychological dimensions of new technology use* (pp. 42–72). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bucy, E. P., & Gregson, K. S. (2001). Media Participation: A Legitimizing Mechanism of Mass Democracy. *New Media & Society*, 3(3), 357–380.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444801003003006>

Burr, V. (2003) *Social Constructionism*. 2nd Edition. Routledge.

- Couldry, N., Livingston, S., & Markham, T. (2010). *Media consumption and public engagement*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, E., (2018) Propaganda, Misinformation, and the Epistemic Value of Democracy, *Critical Review*, 30:3-4, 194-218.
- Bucy, E. P., & Gregson, K. S. (2001). Media participation: A legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy. *New Media & Society*, 3, 357–380.
- Cassidy, W. (2006). Gatekeeping similar for online, print journalists. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 27(2), 6-23.
- Chaffee, S., Metzger, M., (2001). The end of mass communication? *Mass Communication and Society* 4, 365-379.
- Christensen, C. (2007) ‘Breaking the news concentration of ownership, the fall of unions and government legislation in Turkey’, *Global Media and Communication*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 179–199.
- Conway, M., Patterson, J.R., (2008). Today’s top story? An agenda-setting and recall experiment involving television and Internet news. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* 24, 31–48.
- Corey Anton (2017) Media ecological orientations to philosophy and philosophical problems, *Review of Communication*, 17:4, 224-239, DOI: 10.1080/15358593.2017.1367830
- Curran, J., Iyengar, S., Lund, A., & Salovara-Moring, I. (2009). Media systems, public knowledge and democracy. *European Journal of Communication*, 24, 5–26.
- Deluliis, D., (2015). Gatekeeping Theory from Social Fields to Social Networks. *Communication Research Trends*, ISSN 0144-4646, Vol. 34, N<sup>o</sup>. 1, p. 3-23.
- De Waal, E., & Schoenbach, K. (2010). News sites’ position in the mediascape: Uses, evaluations and media displacement effects over time. *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 477–496. doi:10.1177/ 1461444809341859
- Eldridge, S. & Franklin B. (2017). *The Routledge Handbook of Developments in Digital Journalism Studies Abingdon*: Routledge.
- Erlanger, S., (2017). “‘Fake News,’ Trump’s Obsession, Is Now a Cudgel for Strongmen.” *New York Times*, December 12. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/world/europe/trump-fake-news-dictators.html>.
- Fairclough, N. (2000). *New Labour, New Language*. London: Routledge
- Feldman, L., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., & Leisewowitz, A. (2012). Climate on cable: The nature and impact of global warming coverage on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17, 3–31.

Finkel, A. (2000) 'Who guards the Turkish press? A perspective on press corruption in Turkey', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 147–166.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Gil De Zuniga, H., Puig-I-Abril, E., & Rojas, H. (2009). Weblogs, traditional sources online and political participation: An assessment of how the internet is changing the political environment. *New Media & Society*, 11, 553–574.

Goldman, R., (2016). "Reading Fake News, Pakistani Minister Directs Nuclear Threat at Israel." *The New York Times*, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/24/world/asia/pakistan-israel-khawaja-asif-fake-news-nuclear.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/24/world/asia/pakistan-israel-khawaja-asif-fake-news-nuclear.html?_r=0).

Gottfried, J. and Shearer E., (2016). "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016." *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>.

Guo, L., & Vargo, C. (2018). "Fake News" and Emerging Online Media Ecosystem: An Integrated Intermedia Agenda-Setting Analysis of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. *Communication Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218777177>

Hansen A., Machin D., (2013) *Media and Communication Research Methods*. Macmillan Education UK.

Habgood-Coote, J., (2018): Stop talking about fake news!, *Inquiry*, DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2018.1508363

Hameleers, M., and van der Meer, T. G. L. A., (2019) Misinformation and Polarization in a High-Choice Media Environment: How Effective Are Political Fact-Checkers? *Communication Research*, 1-24

Hayes, D., & Guardino, M., (2010) Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq, *Political Communication*, 27:1, 59-87, DOI: 10.1080/10584600903502615

Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. 2002. *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. (2019). *Disinformation and 'fake news': Final Report* (Report No. HC 1791). London SW1A 0AA.

Ireton, C., & Posetti, J., (2018). *Journalism, 'Fake News', & Disinformation*. Published by UNESCO. ISBN: 978-92-3-100281-6

Iyengar, S., & Han, K. (2009). Red media, blue media. *Journal of Communication*, 59, 19–39.

Jamieson, K. H., & Cappella, J. (2008). *Echo chamber*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Jankowski, W. N., (2018) Researching Fake News: A Selective Examination of Empirical Studies, *Javnost – The Public*, 25:1-2, 248-255.

Kang, Hyunjin, Keunmin Bae, Shaoke Zhang, and S. Shyam Sundar. 2011. “Source Cues in Online News: Is the Proximate Source More Powerful than Distal Sources?” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 88 (4): 719–736. doi:10.1177/107769901108800403.

Kaplan, R. (2010) The Origins of Objectivity in American Journalism. *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*. 25-38. Routledge.

Karlsen, R., Steen-Johnsen, K., Wollebæk, D., & Enjolras, B. (2017). Echo chamber and trench warfare dynamics in online debates. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(3), 257–273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117695734>

Kaya, R. & Çakmur, B. (2010) ‘Politics and the mass media in Turkey’, *Turkish Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 521–537.

Kershner, James W. (2005). *The Elements of News Writing*. Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

Khaldarova, I., and Pantti, M., 2016. “Fake News: The Narrative Battle Over the Ukrainian Conflict.” *Journalism Practice* 10 (7): 891–901.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2007). *The elements of journalism: what newspeople should know and the public should expect*. 1st rev. ed., Completely updated and rev. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Kruikemeier, S., Lecheler, S., & Boyer, M., M., (2018) Learning from News on Different Media Platforms: An Eye-Tracking Experiment, *Political Communication*, 35:1, 75-96, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2017.1388310

Kwak, H., Lee, C., Park, H., & Moon, S.B. (2010). What is Twitter, a social network or a news media? In *Proceedings of the 19th international conference on World Wide Web* Pages 591-600 Raleigh, North Carolina, USA — April 26 - 30, 2010

Lee, C. S., & Ma, L. (2012). News sharing in social media: The effect of gratifications and prior experience. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(2), 331–339. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.002

Lehmann, Janette, Carlos Castillo, Mounia Lalmas, and Ethan Zuckerman. 2013b. “Transient News Crowds in Social Media.” In *Proceedings of the Seventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 351-60. Palo Alto, Calif: AAAI Press.

Levendusky, M., (2013) Partisan Media Exposure and Attitudes Toward the Opposition, *Political Communication*, 30:4, 565-581, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2012.737435

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II. Channels of Group Life; Social Planning and Action Research. *Human Relations*, 1(2), 143–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872674700100201>

- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Lopez, German. 2016. "Pizzagate, the Fake News Conspiracy Theory that Led a Gunman to DC's Comet Ping Pong, Explained." *Vox*, <http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/12/5/13842258/pizzagate-comet-ping-pong-fake-news>.
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *The reality of the mass media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Matthes, J., & Valenzuela, S. (2012, May). *Who learns from cross-cutting exposure? Motivated reasoning, counter attitudinal news coverage, and awareness of oppositional views*. Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, Phoenix, AZ.
- Maheshwari, S. 2016. "How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study." *The New York Times*, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html?_r=0).
- Mangen, A., Walgermo, B. R., & Brønnick, K. (2013). Reading linear texts on paper versus computer screen: Effects on reading comprehension. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 58, 61–68. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2012.12.002
- Marcus, J., (1993). *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1977). *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press*, St. Paul: West Publishing Co.
- McCombs M. E., Shaw D. L., & Weaver D. H., (2014) New Directions in Agenda-Setting Theory and Research, *Mass Communication and Society*, 17:6, 781-802, DOI: [10.1080/15205436.2014.964871](https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.964871)
- McCombs, M., (2015). Agenda Setting, Media Effects on. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Volume 1.
- McQuail, D. (2013). *Journalism and Society* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T. & Christian, L. (2012). What Facebook and Twitter Mean for News, *Pew Research Center*.
- Neudert, Lisa-Maria. (2017). "Computational Propaganda in Germany: A Cautionary Tale." Working Paper No.2017.7. *Computational Propaganda Research Project*, Oxford Internet Institute.
- Newman, N., Levy, D. A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2015). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2015. Oxford, UK: *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2619576

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). Reuters Institute Digital News Report Retrieved from:  
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/digital-news-report-2018.pdf>

Panayırıcı, U. C., İşeri, E., & Şekerciöğlü, E. (2016). Political agency of news outlets in a polarized media system: Framing the corruption probe in Turkey. *European Journal of Communication*, 31(5), 551–567. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116669455>

Papathanassopoulos, S., Coen, S., Curran, J., Aalberg, T., Rowe, D., Jones, P., Tiffen, R. (2013). Online threat, but television is still dominant: A comparative study of 11 nations' news consumption. *Journalism Practice*, 7(6), 690–704. doi:10.1080/17512786.2012.761324

Pickard, V., (2013) Being Critical: Contesting Power within the Misinformation Society, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 10:2-3, 306-311.

Price, V. (1989). Social identification and public opinion: Effects of communicating group conflict. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 53, 197–224.

Prior, M., Bougher, L. D., “Like They’ve Never, Ever Seen in This Country”? Political Interest and Voter Engagement in 2016, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 82, Issue S1, 2018, Pages 822–842, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfy002>

Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009). *The state of the news media: An annual report on American journalism*. Retrieved from <http://www.stateofthemedias.org>

Silverman, C., 2016. “Here are 50 of the Biggest Fake News Hits on Facebook from 2016.” *BuzzFeed*, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/top-fake-news-of-2016?utm\\_term=.iqzA7qdxG#.ihMA0kVRx](https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/top-fake-news-of-2016?utm_term=.iqzA7qdxG#.ihMA0kVRx).

Schroeder, R., (2018) Towards a theory of digital media, *Information, Communication & Society*, 21:3, 323-339, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2017.1289231

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Shoemaker, P. (1991). *Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, 755-769. doi:10.1111/j.1540- 5907.2006.00214.x

Talisse, R. 2018. There’s No Such thing as Fake News (and That’s Bad News) 3: *AM Magazine*, June 9, 2018.

Tandoc Jr. E. C., Zheng Wei Lim & Richard Ling (2018) Defining “Fake News”, *Digital Journalism*, 6:2, 137-153.

Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. *Making News: A Study in The Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.

Van Aelst, P., Strömbäck, J., Aalberg, T., Esser, F., de Vreese, C. H., Matthes, J., ... Stanyer, J. (2017). Political Communication in a high-choice media environment: A challenge for democracy? *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 41(1), 3–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2017.1288551>

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Discourse and Elite Racism*. London: Sage

Van Kempen, H. (2007). Media-party parallelism and its effects: A cross-national comparative study. *Political Communication*, 24, 303–320.

Van Leeuwen, T. J., Wodak, R., (1999). Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse-Historical Analysis. *Discourse Studies* 1(1):83-118 DOI: 10.1177/1461445699001001005

Vargo, C. J., Guo, L., & Amazeen, M. A. (2017). The agenda-setting power of fake news: A big data analysis of the online media landscape from 2014 to 2016. *New Media & Society*. doi:10.1177/1461444817712086

Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. (2018). “The Spread of True and Fake News Online.” *Science* 359(6380): 1146-51.

Waisbord, S., (2018) Truth is What Happens to News, *Journalism Studies*, 19:13, 1866-1878

Wall, Melissa. 2015. “Citizen Journalism: A Retrospective on What We Know, An Agenda for What We Don’t.” *Digital Journalism* 3 (6): 797–813. doi:10.1080/21670811.2014.1002513.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H., (2017). Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking. *Published by Council of Europe F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex*.

Wodak, L. A., Kroger, R. O. (2000). *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Yang, J., & Grabe, M. E. (2011). Knowledge acquisition gaps: A comparison of print versus online news sources. *New Media & Society*, 13(8), 1211–1227. doi:10.1177/1461444811401708

Yeşil, B., (2018). Authoritarian Turn or Continuity? Governance of Media through Capture and Discipline in the AKP Era, *South European Society and Politics*, 23:2, 239-257, DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2018.1487137

Yzerbyt, V., Dumont, M., Mathieu, B., Gordijn, E., & Wigboldus, D. (2006). Social comparison and group-based emotions. In S. Guimond (Ed.), *Social comparison processes and levels of analysis*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Zaller, J., Chiu, D., (1996). Government’s Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945-1991. *Political Communication*. Volume 13. Issue 4: Journalism Norms and News Construction: Rules for Representing Politics.



## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions for Teyit

- 1) Can you please introduce yourself? How did you join Teyit?
- 2) What is your duty in Teyit?
- 3) Why do you think an organization like this should operate? What kind of gap does this organization fill in the society?
- 4) Can you please tell more about the operational and organizational working mechanisms of Teyit?
  - Organization structure? Hierarchy?
  - How do you conduct communication within the organization?
  - How do you find false claims or fake news on the internet?
  - What kind of methodology do you follow when separating news as false and true?
  - How do you obtain data that you use to separate news as false and true?
- 5) Do you keep communication with other fact-checking or verification platforms?
- 6) Can you please tell more about the software you use for in-group communication and work?
- 7) How does your public access system work? What kind false news do people send to you?
- 8) Do you think fake news items share a common template? If yes, what kind of templates do you mostly encounter?