

## PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDIA


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**ABSTRACT.** Information, transmitted through communication or media, plays an important role in the communication between individuals and communities. This information raises awareness about the events. On the other hand, information in news is not always conveyed correctly. The inaccurate transfer of information as incomplete or destroyed, on purpose, is an example of disinformation. This process constitutes an important part of social perception management in the media, especially in the discourse of war and peace. Though perception management has been used throughout human history, it became a concept within the 20th century. It was the US Department of Defense to conceptualize this method for the first time but later on it increased its popularity day by day in the 21st century, which is also known as the age of technology. People's easy and quick access to information causes the same amount of information pollution, and this situation makes perceptions affected by many factors making them vulnerable to external interventions. As a result, perceptions can be easily manipulated, mass movements can be created, and social events can be easily manipulated. In this context, perception management, which has become more and more important day by day, attracts the attention of individuals, states, companies and institutions and organizations such as civil society. In the study, textual, linguistic and visual elements in war discourse were examined with the method of content analysis. In this article, definition of perception, its process and factors affecting to it are discussed, and the conceptual and historical background of perception management is conveyed.

**Keywords:** *Perception Management, Social Media, Propaganda, Mass Movement, Manipulation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding and interpreting what perception management is varies according to individuals, states, institutions and organizations. As a result of these differences, some define perception management as deceiving the target audience in line with their own interests, while others see it as a communication discipline to be used for their purposes. According to some, it is a set of techniques used to persuade marketing and sales. Individuals instinctively practice perception management in terms of justifying their own ideas to others, asserting themselves and directing them in line with their own interests. States implement perception management in terms of influencing other states, creating an international image and guiding the people of the target according to their interests. Companies use this method in order to overcome their rivals or to increase their potential competitiveness. Political parties also use that method in order to reduce the voting potential of the rival parties and also to eliminate and prevent the opposition. When states apply this practice within their borders, it is called "Perception Management", and when they apply this internationally, it is called "Public Diplomacy". The use of perception management by institutions and organizations in line with their interests is carried out

under the name of "Public Relations". As can be understood from here, perception management is a multidisciplinary concept and it is important as a method frequently used in areas such as communication, psychology, business and political science. In the 21st century, where the globalization process accelerates, perception management, which has been applied in various ways in every period of human history, has paralleled with the development of technology and has become one of the most important issues of today's century. In this context, this article aims to provide information on the theoretical background of perception management practices by examining the concept of "perception".

Perception management is one of the propaganda methods that is mostly used to bring masses to the desired point. The main purpose is to enable individuals to reach the desired result with their own will by influencing their emotions, motives, and goals. It can be referred to by different names such as psychological operation, soft power, perception management, public relations, public diplomacy and even marketing. From its definition it can be said that perception management is one of the persuasion techniques. It would not be wrong to call these persuasion methods "manipulation". No matter how mitigated the terminology is used, the result is always the same: To convince a group of people.

There are some rules to be followed in perception management. For the correct perception management technique, it is necessary to pay attention to some issues such as adapting to the values of the target audience, paying attention to the culture of the target audience, taking an approach above expectations, being lean and focusing on the result. Perception management tries to fully control people by manipulating the media. It is mostly believed that people tend to be more interested and openminded when it comes to the visuals and voices that they are seeing and hearing rather than what they have learned or read on a book. As a result, media have huge coverage here, most of the visuals and voices directly come from it therefore it can be easier to manipulate people through media. Perception management makes an effort for people to learn the "desired" thing at a higher level.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / METHODS -THE CONCEPTUAL DIMENSION OF PERCEPTION AND PERCEPTION**

Perception is epistemologically a central problem in the theory of knowledge. In our roots, all our empirical knowledge is based on how we see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world around us (O'Brien, 2004). While Lawrance treats perception as "the mental interpretation of physical sensations produced by stimuli from the outside world" (Lawrance 2000), İnceoğlu defines it as a sensory information. It refers to obtaining information from the outside world with the help of the senses of hearing, taste, sight, smell and touch (İnceoğlu 1993: 41).

Based on the definitions, the concept of perception can be evaluated as the process of interpreting and conceptualizing the stimuli received by the sensory organs and renaming the data obtained by the sensory organs. Perception is the whole of the physical, neurological and cognitive processes that begins with sensory stimuli reaching the sensory receptors and pass through the recognition, realization, grasp, perception and definition of the perceived sensation. Perception is a witness of what is happening around a person (Callamari and Reveron, 2003: 2).

Perception Management has three purposes:

- To create public opinion both at home and abroad in order to gain and preserve legitimacy.

- To convince the enemies what will happen to them as a result of their actions.
- To influence the behavior and attitudes of the target audience in the desired direction.

If we briefly touch on the factors affecting the perception style (Otara, 2011: 22):

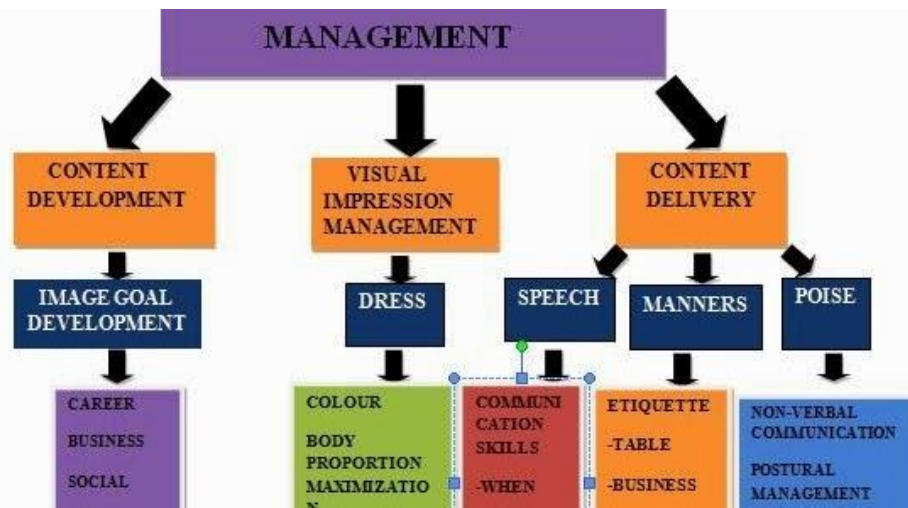
**Habits:** Habits occur slowly and sometimes unconsciously. Individuals perceive objects, situations and conditions differently according to their habits. As an appropriate example, it can be shown that a retired soldier throws himself on the ground, hearing the sudden and noisy explosion of a car tire.

**Motivation:** Motivating factors increase the sensitivity of the individual to the stimuli that he sees as meeting his needs due to his past experiences. For example, a thirsty individual has a perceptual set to search for a water fountain or hotel to quench their thirst; this increases the likelihood of detecting restaurant signs and decreases the likelihood of visualizing other objects at that moment.

**Learning:** Learning plays an important role in the process of perception. People perceive it according to their learning level.

**Specialization:** The expertise of the person who assigns himself to a particular organizational role causes him to choose certain stimuli and ignore others. Therefore, in a long-written report, the head of the department will first see the text related to his department.

**Social background:** perceptions of individuals are based on social backgrounds. Socially developing individuals have a more positive attitude than others.



With the rapid development of technology, it has become very easy for people to access and transfer information. People have the opportunity to share content and information as they wish, and at the same time, they can benefit from the shared information to improve themselves according to their interests. In addition to the advantages of rapid access to information, there are also disadvantages. One of the most important disadvantages is the reliability of the resources. While doing a research on any subject on the internet, we tend to come across multiple sources in a really short period of time and some of this information can sometimes be misleading (Bakan&Kefe 2012). At this point, we should not forget the fact that information can be transformed as desired and changed for the sake of creating a perception.

In recent years, the importance of perception management has increased, and related to that there also has been a significant increase in the number of studies on this subject (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Accordingly, perception management has started to be addressed with issues such as identity management, image management and reputation management with an interdisciplinary approach (Elsbach, 1994). When studies on perception management are examined, it is seen that they are dealt with and related to concepts such as propaganda, manipulation, psychological warfare, covert operation, public diplomacy, and soft power.

Spaiser defines perception management as a genre in information wars. Accordingly, as a type of information war perception management is carried out in order to affect the emotions, thoughts and behaviors of the target audience (Spaiser 2008: 4). According to Nye (2005), perception management is the skillful use of persuasion or propaganda. Groups' attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are affected by perception management. For this reason, perception management is also a form of psychological operation. According to Garfield, perception management is not propaganda. In perception management the messages are conveyed in such a way that the target audience can understand these shaped messages that cause the desired attitude and behavior change in the target audience (Garfield 2002: 33).

According to Martemucci (2007: 3-8), perception management can be partially considered as strategic communication, due to the fact that the studies on strategic communication and perception management took place at the same time. But perception management is not synonymous with strategic communication. While the results of the messages given in perception management are important, in strategic communication, the message itself and the way it is delivered are more important.

In the historical process, methods like force, intimidation, etc. were used as the first choice to defeat the enemy. These methods give results in the short-term, however it has been observed that in the long-term new problems occur or the old problem reappears. Because an enemy who is not persuaded or does not accept defeat has the potential to take action to win by getting stronger and using different methods in the future.

Perception is not only a matter of subjective capacity to capture and connect with the outside world it is also closely related to the concept of modernity (Styhre, 2008: 26). As Sun-Tzu's stated "Perfection is not to win the face of a hundred war. The real skill is to make the enemy submissive without fighting." in his work "Art of War", perception has been reintroduced with a different understanding (Öksüz, 2013: 13).

## **HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGE OUR PERCEPTION?**

Perception is the function of separating and integrating the stimuli from the outside world to our sensory organs. Our perceptions can often change, be distorted or distorted according to each person's unique experiences. In other words, the transformation of the senses into perception can be affected by the personal comments of the people. Information can reach the masses and serve the purpose of influencing their views and opinions via using perception management.



The method used to act in order to influence and change people's perspectives or ideas is perception management. The purpose of perception management is to affect the target audience. Individuals can only be affected by their own desires in the desired way and can only be achieved through a perception. While performing perception management, it is necessary to know the concepts of perception, attitude, behavior and what affects them. Although each person's family structure, values, cultural perspectives and habits are different, these all are among the factors that affect perception management. Internet facilitates the speed at which information is disseminated and influenced.

The messages to be delivered can be conveyed to the target audiences more easily by using perception management techniques through social media tools. Individuals being affected by these messages may also vary depending on their own wishes and needs. Twitter is one of the social media platforms where perception management is noticeable and mostly performed. Without checking the accuracy of their content, the news that people encounter is spreading rapidly. This situation can also lead to misinformation which means inaccurate information is intentionally disseminated. Misinformation spreads faster than real information. It is frequently used in the whole world in the field of media. Especially during the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic period we are in, there have been a lot of online rumors and fake news. Fake news contains information that is quite surprising compared to real information and that triggers people's concerns. Fake news is mostly very exaggerated compared to reality as the purpose is to get the attention of people. The World Health Organization (WHO) explained the disinformation that spread during the pandemic period with the concept of "infodemic" and then started to publish the main news on its own website. People had to fight against fake news while fighting the epidemic crisis. As can be seen, with the development of technology, the psychological power of social media has reached different dimensions and has become unbearable (Styhre, 2008).

We can give an example of the presidential elections held in the USA in 2016 as a different dimension of perception management on social media. At the time of the election, it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica accessed confidential information from 50 million Facebook accounts to influence the presidential election. In doing this, Cambridge Analytica used an algorithm that extracts psychological profiles of users interacting with Facebook. Five major factor theories used by psychologists were used in the algorithm, and scores were given on five main personal traits: openness, responsibility, extroversion, adaptability, and emotional balance. They categorized people according to their personality traits like adventurous, harmonious, etc. Facebook users have been profiled according to the content they like, their shares, the videos and

photos they comment on. Cambridge Analytica worked with Donald Trump's campaign before the election and used this data. So today, it is possible to gather a lot of information about people from social media platforms and online profiles. Every single post and likes that made on social media actually gives a clue of who we really are. However, for any content shared on social media, the message each person receives and perceives is not the same. People's past life experiences, social lives, cultural differences and moral structures can also affect the message they receive. So, as can be understood from here, people with different cultures tend to interpret the same message quite differently than others (Garfield, 2002).

In fact, all of us may have been subjected to perception management in a way that we do not even realize while scrolling down on social media. A situation that we did not even notice in a video we watched or any visual or written text we saw may have caught our attention and lead us to show a positive tendency towards it. In the same way, we may think of buying a product that is not even considered to be advertised, and we can even find ourselves clicking on that same product and pay for it (Van Dijk, 1998).

One aspect of perception management is the subliminal messages. A subliminal message is defined as a sign or message embedded within another object. They are designed to go unnoticed. Some things we hear and see are recorded in our brain and can then be reflected in our attitudes and behaviors. Some subliminal messages can be used in advertisements, especially for products whose sales are desired to increase, and people may attempt to buy those products without realizing it.

## TYPES of PERCEPTION

In addition to the argument that perception occurs through sense organs, factors like desire, expectation, knowledge and culture have an important place in subjects at the time of perception. In this context, we can classify perception types as symbolic, visual, emotional and selective perception.

Symbolic perception is the perception that people create in the face of symbols, that people are affected and formed by their culture (Güney, 2012: 93). In this sense, the individual perceives the messages that are suitable for his/her needs and interests from the network of messages that surround her/him and begins to function selectively. According to İnceoğlu this can be unselective such in the cases of a news headline, a color, a voice, a photograph, a slogan, or a short striking music as advertisers often use (İnceoğlu 2010: 75).



The person forms a large part of his impressions of the external environment he is in through seeing. Therefore, the sense of sight emerges as an important dimension in the perception and meaning of the environment, and thus in establishing a relationship with the environment (İnceoğlu, 2010: 79). Although seeing biologically alone is a prerequisite for perception to occur, it is not sufficient (Güney, 2012: 94). Visual perception is essentially a biological process.



Selective perception is the tendency to overlook and forget more quickly about stimuli that cause emotional discomfort and contradict our previous beliefs. For example, a teacher may have a favorite student because they are biased due to in-group favoritism. The teacher ignores the student's success (Stone, 1966).

Emotion perception refers to the capacity and ability of recognizing emotions in others, in addition to the relevant biological and physiological processes. Emotions are typically viewed as having three components: subjective experience, physical changes, and cognitive appraisal; emotion perception is the ability to make accurate decisions about another's subjective experience by interpreting their physical changes through sensory systems responsible for converting these observed changes into mental representations (Plutchik, R 2002).

## **PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT AND MANIPULATION**

Perception management means controlling the perceptions of individuals. It can also be described as an effort to control what an individual or audience thinks about. The main purpose of perception management is to change the attitude and eventually behavior of the individual through his thoughts. Perception management is frequently used in advertisements to direct the target audience's purchasing behavior. It is possible to say that mass media have very strong effects (Johansson & Xiong 2003). This power of mass media can be achieved when perception management techniques are used correctly together with the mass characteristics of the targeted society. Besides the press, television and radio, the technological tools such as internet and social media are used within the framework of perception management. Perception control is used worldwide to enable different target audiences to perform the desired behavior by the controller through the whole media (Utma, 2018: 2904).



As for manipulation, it is possible to say that perception management is done by methods such as deception or misdirection. Manipulation is used only if a semi-awakened mass appears. It is unnecessary to manipulate the masses that can be handled by direct pressure; because they already do what is spoken out clearly. In other words, if people are like a newborn kitten, if their eyes are not opened, if it is not to be opened, or if it is possible to be managed with a stick, there is no need for manipulation (Schiller, 1993: 10 cited in Utma, 2018: 2911). Manipulation is more dangerous than perception management. Unfortunately, perception management and manipulation are frequently used worldwide in today's media.



Various theories have been put forward with different perspectives regarding the media. It is not possible to call these theories completely true or false because each thought actually focuses on a different dimension of the media and shows its potential power. It is a known fact that media contents have an impact on the individual and therefore on the society. According to the theory known as the Hypodermic Syringe or Magic Bullet Model, the message of the media content directly affects the individuals in the target audience in the way the sender wants. According to the Agenda Setting Theory, although the media does not say what the society will think, it has the power to direct what it will think about. According to Althusser, the media controls society as one of the ideological devices of the state. Gramsci, on the other hand, claims that the media participates in the continuous construction of social meaning in line with the dominant



discourses and therefore has a hegemonic function. The Uses and Satisfaction Approach differs from the thoughts in which the target audience is considered passive, according to which what is important is not the purpose of the media but the purpose of the target audience (Yüksel, 2020).

As it is revealed in the theories, it is a fact that the media is effective on the target audience. However, there are different opinions about exactly how the media affects the target audience. With the technological developments, individuals have become constantly exposed to media messages, regardless of whether they are traditional media or new media. Considering the exposure to so many messages and their frequency of repetition, it is seen that it is socially important to control media messages. Perception management and manipulation are frequently used in advertisements and promotions. In addition, perception management and manipulation can be used for pro-government or anti-government propaganda or for spreading ideologies (Siegel, 2005).

## PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT AND MEDIA

Media is generally defined as "Communication environment" and "Communication tools" in the current Turkish dictionary. As can be understood from the definition, media is a general concept that expresses both the medium in which communication takes place and the means that enable communication to take place. From past to present, people have communicated primarily for the purposes of understanding and obtaining information. The emergence of the media phenomenon also took place with the aim of people getting information. In the historical process, communication efforts of people to obtain information have changed with technological advances. Individual communication has turned into mass communication that enables reaching thousands of people at the same time, thanks to the innovations in developing communication technologies. In this transformation process, different communication tools were used in parallel with technological developments. Media such as newspapers, radio and television emerged, and with the inclusion of the internet in the communication process, a major step was taken in the field of mass communication. Although the channels that human beings use for their needs to access and be informed have changed due to the opportunities created by technology, these needs seem to have not changed throughout history.



Media is characterized as having various functions due to the developing technological possibilities and the aim of the mass to make use of the media. With the functions of providing news and information, socialization, education, agenda / public opinion and entertainment, the media has become a platform that almost every individual can access today. Therefore, starting from childhood, individuals are exposed to media messages and effects through various media contents (Van Dijk, 1998). The learning process of the individual starts with the family and close environment and continues with the media. The media messages exposed in this learning process have the power to shape the individual's personality.

There are generally two views that stands out in approaches to media and its effects and can be described as opposite of each other. According to the first of these views, the media is in a passive and transmitting state. In the view that the media is accepted as a passive transmitter, a passive media perception prevails. It is argued that the media reflects the reality as it is and is objective in this process. The other view argues that it is not possible for the media to be objective and uninfluenced by certain pressure groups or ideologies. This view, which accepts the media as an active participant that plays an active role in shaping the messages in the communication process, is much more appropriate to today's reality (Fombrun, J.C. & Riel, C.B.M.Van 2004) . Media contents can be shaped by political, economic or social factors, as well as by the ideologies of the person who produces the media or those who own the media. For this reason, it is not possible to say that the media is an objective platform that reflects reality as it is (Garfield, 2002). At the same time, there are cases where media messages are deliberately biased, distorting the truth, apart from the factors that inevitably participate in the production process of media content and cause it to be shaped (Kamalski & Sanders 2008). For the purpose of propaganda, manipulation, agenda creation or more commercial profit, some media contents are prepared in a way that is far away from reality.



### **1.Propaganda**

The term "Propaganda" which originally dates back to the 1600s, draws attention as the most used concept by political scientists in the 19th century. The First World War between 1914-1918 provided wide opportunities for the use of "Propaganda". However, defining propaganda has been a contradictory and time-consuming process. In his thesis, Wreford claims that the word propaganda is an "ugly word" but defines propaganda as "the process of spreading interesting information and opinion". Later H.D. Lasswell

defines propaganda as "the management of collective attitudes through the manipulation of distinct symbols (Lasswell 1927)." Especially the press should have an important place when examining today's mass and communication tools in terms of "Propaganda". This is because the press is well developed and widely used. (Qualter, 2015: 4) According to Baudrillard, the world we live in is a universe of deterrence. The most useful weapon of this is defined as "image + word = media".



Propaganda is a powerful weapon in war. In this case, the aim is usually to portray the inside or outside enemy as inhumane and create hatred against him. By using some special words or avoiding using certain specific words, the enemy is blamed for things he has never done, and this creates a false image in the mind (Ersaydı, B. & Çevik 2011). In most of the cases propaganda wants to give the feeling that the enemy is the cause of a real or imagined injustice. At the same time, the people must believe that their nation is right.

Propaganda is one of the psychological warfare methods. Examples of political propaganda: Britain's propaganda against Germany in World War I. Nazi Germany's propaganda against Poland. Propaganda at the beginning of World War II.

The first serious propaganda work was initiated after the Nazi invasion attempt of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union displayed less propaganda power than Nazi Germany before the Barbarossa Operation. In his speech in 1941 at the Parade of the October 1941 Revolution, Joseph Stalin stated that the Nazis exhibited a superior propaganda, "*If we judge the real situation of Germany, not according to the fancy statements of the German propagandists, it will not be difficult to understand that the fascist German invaders are on the brink of disaster.*"

In an even narrower and less used sense of the word, propaganda already means giving believers false information to support them in their beliefs. The hypothesis is that if people believe something that is not true, they will experience constant doubts. As these doubts are disturbing, they will want to get rid of them and will therefore be open to the approval of those in power (Kearney 1984). That is why propaganda is mostly directed at those who already believe in the purpose.

It can be classified according to the propaganda source. The source of white propaganda is clear. Among the types of propaganda, it is the propaganda made most clearly. The greater the reliability of the source, the stronger the white propaganda. The reliability of this source and the legitimacy of the purpose in question determine the effectiveness of the propaganda. Fake news is presented as it is, without resorting to slander and distortions. The source is definite Black propaganda seems to come from a friendly source, but the truth is the opposite. Gray propaganda seems to come from a neutral source, but it actually comes from the opposite side (Tarhan 2003:37). Propaganda can be implemented in very cunning ways. For example, wrong information about foreign countries can be supported in the education system. Since few people will need to check what they have learned in school, this false information will be repeated by journalists and families, and the idea that false information is a well-known fact will spread to the media without direct intervention without anyone realizing the truth or the source.

## ***2. Disinformation***

Disinformation is the dissemination of false or incomplete information or, in other words, fake news, in order to direct or mislead the target person, group or audience for a specific purpose. In some cases, the source of the information in question is disclosed to the target person or audience, which is called open disinformation. But sometimes, no source information is provided about this flow of information, or false information is given, which is called closed disinformation (Siegel, 2005). It is difficult to examine or analyze the quantity and quality of distorted information (news), but it can also be defined as false, incomplete or completely false information that is used to achieve a specific goal especially political or economic (İnceoğlu 2010). Especially the political powers can disinform the masses in line with their own purposes, through mass media, in line with their own interests (Stupak, 2000). Although the facts and the targeted purposes are hidden for a while with the misinformation, the facts emerge sooner or later. Especially conscientious journalists and alternative media channels enlighten the masses with accurate information.

## ***3. Hate Speech***

Although it is used frequently, there is no clear definition of hate speech in the world. Many countries have made legal regulations that prohibit many expressions in the sense of "hate speech". Accordingly, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers defines "hate speech" as follows: The term "hate speech" is justified in terms of violence and discrimination against migrants and minorities such as ethnic centrism and intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism, anti-semitism, xenophobia, racist hatred and similar hate speech. It is defined as all kinds of expressions that show and radiate. (Weber, 2009: 3) "Due to the features that distinguish new media from traditional media (newspaper, magazine, radio, television and cinema) - because of its digital, open to interaction, hypertext feature, ease of spreading and being virtual - hate speech is (Lister et al. 2003: 13) According to Binark, in order to eliminate hate speech in daily life and in virtual space, different genders, different sexual preferences and various communication opportunities and environments need to be developed and it is also needed to increase recognition and dialogue between orientations, ethnic identities, sects, races and cultures. (Binark 2010: 51)



#### ***4. War Discourse***

Every society has supporters of war, and in recent years this section has been called the "Hawks". Those who support peace are called "Doves". Likewise, there are the same polarizations within the mass media. The famous communication scientist Noam Chomsky wrote about such events in his book "Media Control". Chomsky gives examples of countries such as Nicaragua, Vietnam, Guatemala and Afghanistan.



The massacres committed by America in these countries had no media coverage. The only thing the media did on these issues was that the fight against terrorism was being fought and America was right anyway. The real underlying causes of this war were somehow ignored.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Social media tools and perception management techniques enable the messages to be delivered to the targeted people and to direct them to the targets determined according to specific wishes. Human psychology, which is open to external factors by its nature, can be affected by perception management along with the psychological power of social media on communities. For this reason, it is necessary to be skeptical about the

information red and obtained on social media and the information channels should be diversified. It will be possible for people to reach the true meaning of the messages only when they are evaluated with reliable, clear and evidence-based information.

Perception management and manipulation activities can be used in order to direct the target audience and to change the thoughts, attitudes and behaviors of the target audience. Perception management and manipulation examples are also frequently encountered in politics. It is possible to see the clearest examples of this situation in newspapers with different ideologies dealing with the same event. Newspapers with different ideologies try to report the same event in different ways and present news that are suitable for the perception of their target audiences.

Such perception management and manipulation examples are frequently encountered not only in our country but also throughout the whole world.

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