Perception of Truth and Political Attitudes in the Post- Truth Age

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Summary: In the second quarter of the 21st century, politics has become a field not only of ideas but also of emotions, beliefs and personal realities. This transformation is shaped around the concept of "post- truth " and is radically transforming the perception of social reality. This study examines how individuals' perceptions of information and truth are shaped, which sources of information they trust and how these perceptions relate to their political attitudes. The relationship between social media usage habits, ways of accessing information and political orientation has been analyzed using survey data in the case of Türkiye.

Truth, individual perception of truth has increasingly taken on a subjective structure and that this subjective structure has become a determining factor in political preferences, polarization, and even public consent. The findings show that information trust is directly related to political polarization; individuals trust information that is consistent with their beliefs rather than reality. This situation points to the need to redefine public reason in contemporary democracies.

Abstract: Of the second quarter of the 21st century , politics has increasingly become a domain not only of ideas , but of emotions , beliefs , and personal realities . This transformation is encapsulated in the concept of the "post- truth " era , which has significantly reshaped the perception of social reality. This study investigates how individuals construct their perceptions of truth and information , which sources they trust , and how these perceptions Correlate with political attitudes . The Relationship between social media usage , access to information , and political orientation is analyzed through Survey data collected in the Turkish context .

The findings Reveal that in the post- truth era , individual perceptions of truth have become increasingly subjective , shaping political preferences , polarization , and even the formation of public consent . The results indicate That trust in information is directly linked to political polarization; individuals are more Likely to I believe information That aligns with their preexisting beliefs rather than objective facts . This suggests a critical need to Reconsider the role of public Reason in contemporary democracies.

Keywords: *Post- truth , perception of truth, information trust, political attitudes, media sociology, public consent, digital politics.*

Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to examine how individuals' perceptions of truth are shaped in the post- truth era and how these perceptions are related to political attitudes. In particular, it investigates how social media usage practices shape the interaction between the level of trust in information sources and individuals' political orientations. The study aims to reveal which information sources individuals consider "trustworthy," their tendencies towards information that coincides with their political beliefs, and the impact of perceptual distortions on political polarization. This study, conducted through the example of Türkiye, aims to evaluate the reflections of the post- truth phenomenon, which is discussed on a global scale, in the local context and to make an original contribution to the intersection of sociology of knowledge and sociology of politics.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study aims to examine the relationship between individuals' perceptions of information and truth and their political attitudes in the post- truth era. In this context, the main research questions are as follows: To what extent do individuals trust information? How does social media use shape the perception of truth? Is political orientation a determinant in the evaluation of information sources?

The main hypotheses developed in line with these questions are as follows: (1) As the frequency of social media use increases, information trust decreases; (2) Political orientation affects trust in information sources; (3) There is a positive relationship between the perception of truth and political polarization. These hypotheses aim to explain the effect of the relationship that individuals establish with information on political orientations in the post-truth context.

Method

Research Design

This research was conducted in order to examine the relationships between individuals' perception of truth, information trust and political attitudes in the post- truth era, under the leadership of Assoc . Prof. Dr. Cuneyt Yilmaz and Prof. Dr. Derya Berrak, and with the contribution of graduate and doctoral students, on behalf of St. Clements University, in collaboration with the Departments of Political Science and Sociology. The study aims to analyze individuals' levels of information trust, their social media usage practices and their relationship with their political orientations.

The research was conducted in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir provinces between December 15, 2024 and February 10, 2025; a mixed method approach was adopted. In this context, surveys and semi-structured interviews were used together.

Research Group

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method and were composed of individuals with different socio-demographic characteristics living in three major cities in Türkiye. The research is based on two main sampling groups:

- The survey group included a total of 243 participants. Attention was paid to including individuals from different age groups, education levels and political orientations.

- In the interview group: One-on-one, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 61 individuals with different media habits and political identities. Both face-to-face and online interviews were conducted with the participants.

Data Collection Tools

Two main data collection tools were used in the research: Questionnaire Form (See Annex-1) and Semi-Structured Interview Form (See Annex-2).

Questionnaire

The survey form applied to 243 participants consists of closed-ended questions and 5-point Likert-type scales. The survey is structured in three main sections:

- Information Trust Scale: To measure the level of trust that participants have in different media sources (TV, social media, news sites).

- Post- Truth Perception Scale: To assess how individuals distinguish between reality and belief (created with original items).

- Political Attitude Scale: To determine the participants' political orientation, voting behavior, media preference and political participation levels.

- Demographic Information Form: It includes variables such as age, gender, education level, occupation, city of residence, political identity declaration, social media usage frequency.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews conducted with 61 participants were designed to understand individuals' perceptions of truth, their trust in information and the impact of their political attitudes on these perceptions in the post- truth era. The interviews (See Appendix 2) were structured to support the survey results contextually and were conducted in a semi-structured manner; basic questions were asked to each participant, but themes were deepened with follow-up questions when necessary. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.

Privacy and Voluntariness Statement (Shared Verbally and Written)

This interview is being conducted as part of a scientific study. All information you share will be kept confidential and will only be used for scientific analysis purposes. Your identity will not be disclosed at any stage, and interviews will be coded with pseudonyms. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary; you can end it at any time.

Thematic Structure and Interview Questions

Theme	Aim	Question Example
Perception of Truth	Questioning how they establish the distinction between reality and opinion	"How do you know if information is correct?"
Information Trust and Source Selection	Understanding the information sources they find trustworthy and their media habits	"What sources of information do you trust the most? Why?"
Interaction of Political Belief and Knowledge	Analyze how political views affect information choice.	"Does your political views affect whether you believe a news story?"
Social Media Perception	Assess awareness of algorithmic routing and types of information exposure	"Do you think the content you see on social media is chosen specifically for you?"
Polarization and Truth	Exploring experiences of knowledge-based polarization	"How do you feel when sharing information with

	and social implications	people who have different opinions?"
Public Consent and Knowledge Struggles	Measuring awareness of information production, disinformation and persuasion processes in the public sphere	"Do you think that information today is more of a tool for persuasion or a conveyance of reality?"

Interview End Open-Ended Follow-up Questions (Optional)

- "What do you think determines the difference between correct information and incorrect information in society?"

- "What solutions do you suggest to increase media literacy?"

- "What do you think is the main reason for the information trust crisis you are experiencing today?"

Coding and Analysis Process

The interviews obtained were analyzed using MAXQDA and/or manual content analysis and classified under thematic codes. The following main categories were identified during the coding process:

1. Perceived Trust

2. Epistemic Approach to Truth

3. Political Interaction and Filtering

4. Algorithmic Awareness

5. Polarization and Ideological Confirmation

6. Criticism of Public Information

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 program. In addition to descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression were used to test hypotheses. The internal consistency of the survey form was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient; scale reliability coefficients were found to be between .81 and .88.

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method. The data were coded according to themes, frequency analysis was performed, and supported by descriptive analysis.

Ethical Process

The research process was carried out with the approval of the Ethics Committee at St Clements University. All participants were included in the study by signing the voluntary participation form. The confidentiality of personal data was protected, and the interviews were anonymized. It was clearly stated to all participants at the beginning of the study that the data would be used for scientific purposes only.

Scale Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated for each subscale used in the study . The internal consistency of the scales is as follows:

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Information Confidence Scale	α = 0.84
Post- Truth Perception Scale	α = 0.87
Political Attitudes Scale	α = 0.81

In addition, the validity of the scales was tested by applying confirmatory factor analysis (CFA); the items showed high loading values on the relevant factors (loadings: between .61–.78). Each scale was developed based on conceptual foundations in the literature and the item validities were supported by expert opinion.

In order to test the applicability and comprehensibility of the survey form, a pilot study was conducted with 15 participants before the data collection process. As a result of short feedback interviews with the participants, some statements were simplified and minor revisions were made in the order. The data obtained from the pilot study were not included in the main data set and were used only for the purpose of evaluating the functionality of the survey. The Cronbach's Alpha values calculated for the internal consistency of the scale were retested after the pilot study and α > It was observed that it was at the level of 0.80 .

Literature Review

In recent years, the fragility of trust in information has been intensively discussed in both social science and media studies literature. In this period, defined as *the post- truth* era, individuals' opinions, emotions, and identity orientations overshadow objective reality; knowledge-based discussions give way to belief-based preferences (McIntyre , 2018). Although this conceptualization was first brought up for discussion in the 1990s (Keyes , 2004), it has rapidly attracted academic attention, especially with the 2016 US elections and the Brexit process.

In this context, the concept of information trust has also been established on an interdisciplinary basis between political science and media sociology. In the literature, the relationships between individuals' levels of trust in information sources and their political orientations are addressed in different dimensions. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) argue that media consumption is often chosen in line with individuals' political identity and that this choice reinforces the sense of trust. Similarly, Garrett (2009) and Stroud (2010) show that individuals tend to be exposed to information in "epistemic homogeneity" and develop resistance to information from opposing sources.

The social media environment offers a platform that accelerates these processes and makes them more visible. In particular, filtering the content presented to the user through algorithms in line with a certain view, echo *chambers chambers*) and information bubbles (*filter This dynamic has paved the way for discussions of concepts such as bubbles* (Pariser , 2011; Flaxman et al., 2016). This dynamic feeds not only information preferences at the individual level but also political polarization at the societal level (Tucker et al., 2018).

the post- truth era emphasize that trust in information is related not only to the source but also to the individual's identity positioning . Carpini (2017) states that although access to information has increased, trust in information has decreased, leading to a narrowing of the rational discussion ground, especially in political communication. Waisbord (2018) argues that in the post- truth era, information and emotion are shaped together and this mixed structure affects political preferences.

In the Turkish context, structural factors such as media ownership, freedom of expression, and political polarization directly affect trust in information. Studies show that the media system is being restructured in parallel with polarization trends and that individuals mostly turn to sources that are compatible with their political views (Yeşil, 2014; Kaya & Çakmur, 2010). However, in the Turkish context, it is seen that empirical studies on how the post- truth phenomenon is experienced at the individual level, especially on information trust and perceptions of truth shaped around social media use, are limited.

In this context, the study examines the relationship between individuals' trust levels in information, their post- truth perceptions and their political orientations in the case of Türkiye.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of truth is not only a philosophical but also a social and political construction. The transformation of the relationship that individuals establish with truth in the post - truth era is not only a matter of communication in this context; it also necessitates rethinking the relationship between knowledge, power and social structure. The theoretical framework of this research is based on three fundamental intellectual foundations: Baudrillard's simulation theory, Foucault's truth regime approach and Habermas's communicative action theory.

argues that in modern society the boundaries between reality and representation have disappeared and that this situation can be called hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1983). Hyperreality refers to a situation where representations replace reality; here, individuals establish relationships with media projections of reality rather than with reality itself. In the context of post- truth , *individuals* ' trust in the information they obtain through the media due to its presentation style and emotional resonance rather than its content is directly related to Baudrillard's theory. Information is evaluated not in terms of its truth value but in terms of its "appearing real" form.

Michel Foucault, truth is not a fixed or transcendent category; it is a production defined within the knowledge-power relations of a certain period. Foucault (1980) states that every society produces a certain "truth regime" and that these regimes define the accepted forms of knowledge, legitimate speakers and legitimising institutions. In this context, the post- truth era heralds a new truth regime in which the influence of "expert knowledge" in the classical sense has lost its effect; instead, elements such as "viral knowledge", "emotional truth" and "personal opinion" have come to the fore. The division of trust in knowledge based on political identities can also be read within Foucault's knowledge-power axis.

Jürgen Habermas argues that modern society is based on an effort to establish a public sphere that operates on a rational basis. This public sphere is considered a ground where individuals can freely discuss common issues and where communication based on knowledge and reason is possible (Habermas , 1989). However, in the post- truth era, the superiority of emotions, personal opinions and beliefs over knowledge leads to the weakening of communicative reason and the fragmentation of the public sphere. In this context, political attitudes are shaped not by rational evaluations but by identity-based affiliations; this shows that the idealized idea of public reason established by Habermas has eroded.

This study considers three basic theoretical approaches together while understanding the relationships between individuals' trust levels towards information, their post- truth perceptions and their political orientations. Baudrillard's simulation theory sheds light on the fact that individuals reproduce the truth through media representations rather than directly experiencing it. In this context, in the post- truth era, information gains "reality" through its appearance rather than its content; presentation becomes more effective than truth.

Foucault's concept of regimes of truth analyzes the relationship between knowledge and power, allowing us to explain which types of information individuals accept as "truth," which sources they trust, and how political positioning affects these choices. In the context of post- truth , individual information trust is not only a cognitive process, but also interwoven with ideological and cultural power relations.

Habermas's theory of public sphere and communicative reason provides a theoretical basis for understanding the fragmentation of the knowledge-based discussion environment and the polarization of individuals in line with their identity positions. The replacement of rational dialogue with emotional reactions and opinion-based information is causing the erosion of public reason in the communication structure of the post- truth era.

When these theoretical approaches are evaluated together, the main problematic of the study, "the way individuals relate to the truth," is addressed not only in relation to media or politics, but also to information regimes, forms of representation, and public communication dynamics on a broader scale.

Conceptual Frame Work

The research focuses on three main conceptual focal points in order to make sense of the relationships that individuals establish with information in the post- truth era: the concept of post-truth, *information trust* , and *political attitude* . The concept of post-truth refers to the pushing of objective facts behind emotions and personal beliefs in public opinion formation processes (Oxford Dictionaries , 2016). McIntyre (2018) evaluates post-truth as a kind of information crisis and emphasizes that individuals act with emotional and ideological tendencies rather than truth-based evaluations. Waisbord (2018) defines this period as a belief system in which knowledge is replaced by belonging. In this context, post-truth does not only mean the circulation of false information; it also means the spread of structural distrust of knowledge. Trust in information is related to individuals' perception of an information source as accurate, reliable and impartial. This trust is shaped not only by the content but also by who, how and in what environment the information is presented. Johnson and Kaye (2004) define trust in information as both a cognitive and emotional tendency. The construction of this trust is much more fragile in digital media environments because in media such as social media, the accuracy of information as well as its ability to spread rapidly and resonate are important (Flanagin & Metzger , 2007). It is stated in the literature that individuals' trust in information is closely related to their political orientations, media habits and social positions (Tsfati & Cappella , 2003; Metzger et al., 2010). Political attitude is a multidimensional concept that encompasses individuals' evaluations, orientations, and feelings toward political events, actors, and institutions. These attitudes are based not only on rational calculations but also on the individual's identity world, affiliations, and life experiences (Converse, 1964). In societies where political polarization increases, individuals tend to trust

information that aligns with their own ideological positions more easily, while they more easily reject information from opposing views (Stroud , 2010; Flynn et al., 2017). This situation reveals that political attitudes direct not only political preferences but also the ways in which information is accessed. The three fundamental concepts discussed in this research—trust in information and political attitudes in the post-truth era—are not considered as independent structures, but as mutually influencing each other. The post-truth information environment transforms the way individuals determine both what information they trust and which political identities this trust coincides with. Therefore, while these concepts explain perception, trust, and belief systems at the individual level, they also enable the analysis of structural dynamics such as polarization, information pollution, and the transformation of the public debate environment at the societal level.

Findings

Participant Profile and Descriptive Findings

The data obtained within the scope of the research were collected from a total of 243 participants as a result of field studies conducted in three major cities of Türkiye (Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir). The participants were selected through purposive sampling to show diversity in terms of socio-demographic variables.

IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 program was used in the analysis of the data. In the descriptive analyses, frequency (n), percentage (%) distributions, central tendency measures (mean, median) and dispersion measures (standard deviation, variance, skewness and kurtosis values) were taken into account. In continuous variables, compliance with normal distribution was assessed through histograms, QQ plots and skewness-kurtosis values.

In addition, in order to analyze the relationships between variables, Pearson correlation was used when parametric conditions were met, and in comparative group analyses, t-test for independent samples and one-way ANOVA tests were used. In cases where parametric assumptions were not met, Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal –Wallis tests were used.

The data obtained within the scope of the research was evaluated on 243 participants who varied in terms of gender, education level, political orientation and media usage habits. 49.8% of the participants were female, 49.4% were male and 0.8% defined themselves outside binary gender categories. This distribution largely overlaps with the general population structure of Türkiye and provides a balanced sample for gender-based comparative analyses.
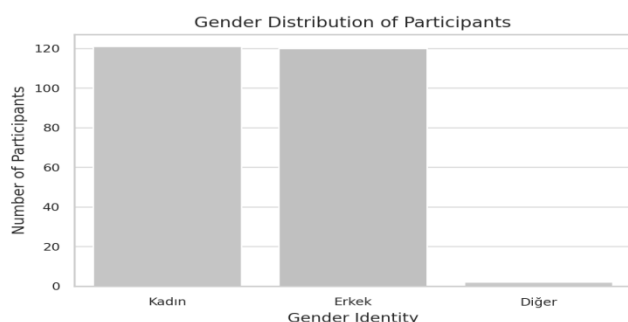

When the education levels of the participants are examined, it is seen that 25.5% have high school, 23% have bachelor's degree, 23.9% have master's degree and 27.6% have doctorate degree. The relatively high rate of higher education enables the evaluation of

attitudes towards knowledge within an analytical and critical framework.
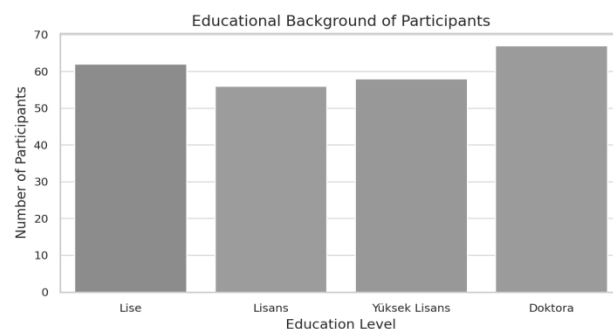
In terms of political orientation, participants defined themselves as 21% center, 20.6% undecided, 16.9% center-right, 15.2% right, 14.8% left and 11.5% center-left. This distribution indicates a sample structure with balanced representation of different ideological positions.
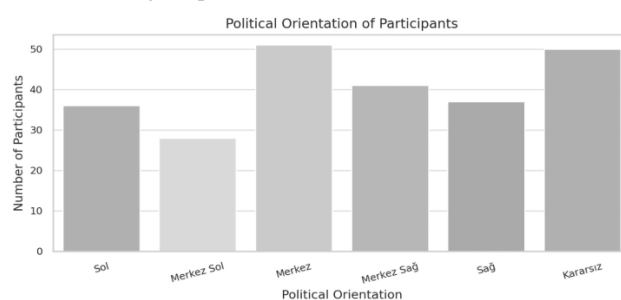
When the participants' social media usage duration was examined, it was calculated that the average daily usage duration was 3.27 hours (SD = 1.58). This duration indicates the prevalence of social media-based information acquisition practices and provides a suitable context for analyzing the relationship with the levels of trust in the accuracy of information.
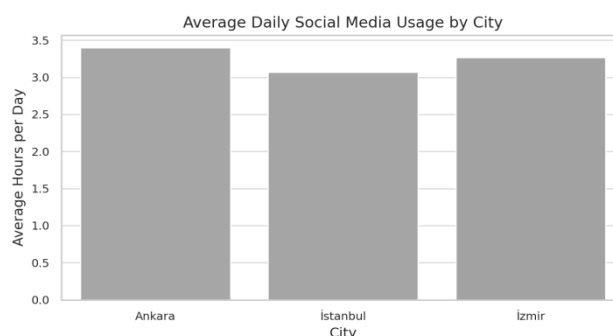
When the daily social media usage durations of the participants were compared by city, it was seen that the average usage duration of individuals living in Ankara was 3.40 hours, which was higher than other cities. This duration was calculated as 3.07 hours on average in Istanbul and 3.27 hours in Izmir. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine whether there was a significant difference between the daily social media usage durations of the participants by city. According to the results, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups ($F_{(2, 240)} = 1.00$, $p = .370$). This shows that social media usage habits are similar between the cities.

Findings Regarding Information Confidence Levels

The Information Trust Scale, which was created to determine the participants' trust levels towards information sources,

consists of six items. Scored with a 5-point Likert-type rating, this scale aims to measure trust tendencies towards social media, traditional media, academic publications and independent research organizations.

The total score obtained from the scale varies between 6 and 30, and the average score of the participants in this study was calculated as 18.14 (SD = 5.20). This value shows that the general level of trust in information is at a medium-high level. According to item-based analyses, participants reported relatively lower trust in social media sources, while academic publications and independent research organizations stand out as the sources of information with the highest level of trust.

The internal consistency of the scale was found to be quite high (α = .84) and the correlation level between the items was statistically significant and consistent. These results show that the scale is psychometrically adequate in terms of validity and reliability. It was observed that the participants were selective in sharing information and did not tend to spread information whose accuracy was uncertain on social media.


Perceived Trust in Information Sources
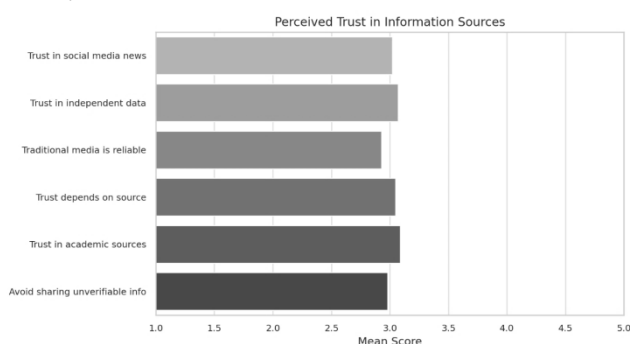
Post- Truth Perception

Truth Perception Scale, which was used to assess participants' post- truth orientations, consists of six items aimed at measuring individuals' perception of reality, belief-based understanding of truth, and subjective relationships with knowledge. The scale is structured with Likert-type responses rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale has high internal consistency (**Cronbach's Alpha = .87**) and the scale was evaluated as a reliable measurement tool in this context.

When the total scores of the participants were examined, an **average score of 18.46** (**SD = 5.09**) was calculated. This value indicates that the perception of post- truth is **at a medium-high level** throughout the sample . Especially the high scores given to statements such as "Reality may vary from person to person" and "What I believe in is more valuable than someone else's truth" show that individuals tend to develop a belief-based and relative approach to knowledge rather than an objective one.

The items in the scale reveal that individuals who are in contact with social media tend to select and remember information that is consistent with their own worldview rather than to verify what they see. This situation shows that in contemporary communication environments, the source of the information or its compliance with the individual's belief system is more decisive than the information itself; it suggests that truth is evaluated in a context where it is shaped by identity affiliation rather than an epistemological reference.

Post-Truth Orientation among Participants
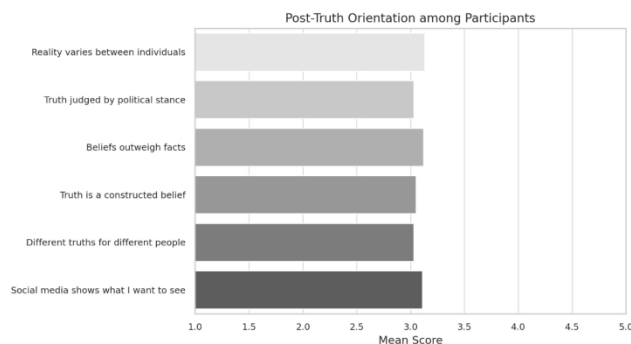
Political Attitudes Scale Findings

The Political Attitudes Scale, which was used to assess the effect of political orientations on information perception, consists of six items and is structured with Likert-type responses ranging from 1 to 5. The internal consistency of the scale was found to be high (Cronbach's Alpha = .81) and was used reliably in the analyses.

The mean of the total scores obtained by the participants from the scale was calculated as 18.14 and the standard deviation was calculated as 4.91. This value shows that political attitudes affect the relationship established with information at a moderate level. Especially the high scores given to the statements "My political views affect my perspective on information" and "I am distant from information coming from opposing views" indicate that individuals shape their information access and evaluation processes in line with ideological perspectives.

However, responses to statements such as "It is not possible to access unbiased information today" and "Most voters accept information that they emotionally believe in as true" show that individual information practices are shaped emotionally and based on identity. The findings reveal that political orientation is an important variable that affects not only access to information but also the processes of accepting and interpreting information.

Political Attitudes towards Information
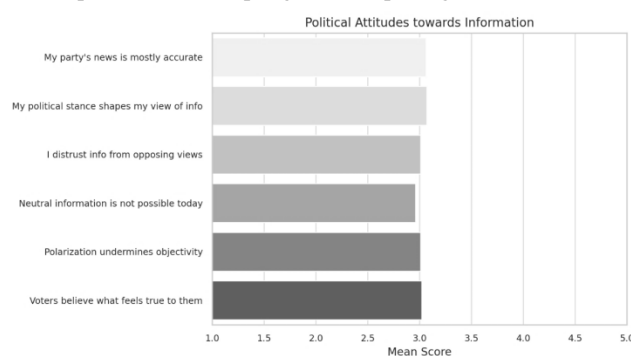
Pearson correlation analysis was applied to determine the relationship between the three basic measurement scales at the level of total scores . According to the analysis results, a negative but statistically weak relationship was found between Information Confidence and Post- Truth Perception ($r = -.04$). Similarly, a non-significant relationship was observed between Information Confidence and Political Attitudes ($r = -.01$).

A positive but very low correlation was found between Post- Truth Perception and Political Attitudes ($r = .06$). These values show that the relevant scales are conceptually independent psychological constructs and that each scale measures different orientations.

As a result, there is no significant linear relationship between information trust, post- truth perception and political attitudes at the sample level. This situation reveals that individuals' information trust levels, their ideological positions and perceptions of truth can vary independently of each other.

Correlation Between Scales
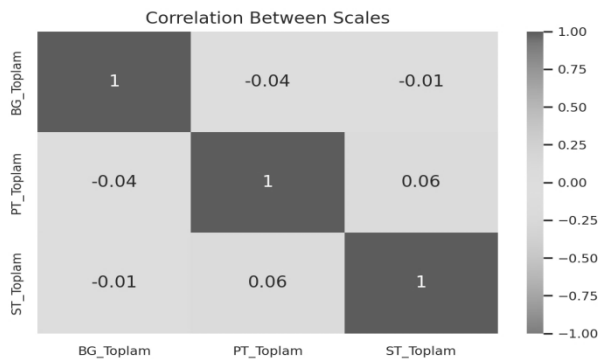
Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to determine the extent to which the information confidence levels of the participants can be explained by some basic variables. The dependent variable was the information confidence total score (BG_Total), and the independent variables were post- truth perception (PT_Total), political attitude (ST_Total), daily social media usage time and education level. The F test result for the overall significance of the model showed that the established regression model was not statistically significant ($F_{(4, 238)}$ = 0.38, p = .820). The obtained R² value (R² = 0.006) shows that the information confidence variable is explained by these four independent variables at a rate of only 0.6% . The regression coefficient of none of the independent variables was found to be significant ($p > .05$).

These results suggest that participants' trust in information may be shaped independently of variables such as post- truth orientation, political orientation, level of education, or media use. Information trust may be related to individual experiences, source-based evaluations, and deeper social-psychological factors.

Predictors of Information Trust (Regression Coefficients)
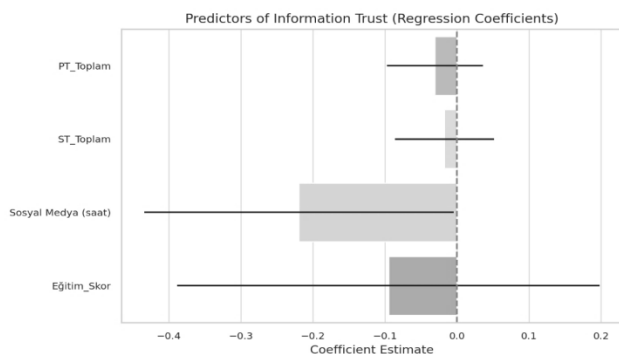
Open-Ended Question Findings – Thematic Analysis

The open-ended questions in the last section of the survey aimed to evaluate the relationship between participants' trust in information, social media use, political attitudes and information through their personal comments. The responses were coded using the content analysis method and classified under common themes. 154 out of a total of 243 participants responded to this section.

"How do you distinguish whether information is true or not?"

The responses were grouped under three main themes:

- Source Inquiry (n = 89): Most participants indicated that they pay attention to the source when evaluating the reliability of information. Academic publications, official institutions, and international news agencies were frequently cited as reliable sources.

- Comparative Reading and Cross-checking (n = 46): A significant number of participants stated that they verify information by comparing it with information from different sources. This approach is especially common among participants with higher education levels.

- Content Consistency / "Makes Sense" (n = 19): Some participants stated that they accept information as true if it "makes sense" or "matches their own reasoning." These responses demonstrate the existence of verification practices based on individual intuition.

"What do you think about the flow of information spread through social media?"

The answers to this question are classified into four main trends:

- Concern about Information Pollution and Manipulation (n = 67): The majority of participants stated that the information circulating on social media is mostly unverified, biased or manipulative.

- Speed and Accessibility (n = 41): Some participants acknowledged that social media offers advantages in terms of accessing information quickly and following the agenda, but emphasized that this does not eliminate reliability problems.

- Perception Management and Algorithmic Filters (n = 31): A group of participants stated that social media causes users to become trapped in their own opinion bubbles and that algorithms shape the flow of information.

- Potential to Access Independent Information (n = 15): A small number of participants stated that they found the opportunity to access alternative sources of information on social media that are not covered in the mainstream media valuable.

"Does your political views affect your trust in information? Please explain."

The answers are summarized under three headings:

- Affects (n = 64): These participants stated that their political views affect the way they approach information, and that they are particularly more critical or distrustful of information coming from opposing views.

- Does not affect (n = 51): A significant portion of the participants stated that they position their approach to information within a supra-political framework and make evaluations based on the impartiality of the content.

- Complex Interaction (n = 29): Some participants evaluated the effect of political views on information not as absolute but as "a filter to be aware of." These comments show that the relationship established with information is shaped by both ideological and personal awareness levels.

The answers given to the open-ended questions reveal that the relationship that the participants establish with information is multidimensional and contextual. While the participants exhibit critical reflexes in accessing information, on the other hand, individual intuitions, political attitudes and media habits also shape this process. The answers regarding social media in particular indicate that the contemporary information environment contains both opportunities and threats at the same time.

Semi-Structured Interview Findings – Thematic Content Analysis

Semi-structured interviews conducted with a total of 61 participants were evaluated using thematic content analysis method. Responses were received from each participant in line with 6 main themes. Responses were coded within the framework of content analysis and categorized under theme headings, and frequencies and rates for each theme are presented below.

Perception of Truth

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Truth is relative/personal	36	59%
Truth is scientific/data based	25	41%

The majority of participants stated that truth is not objective but rather an individual and relative construct. This reflects the epistemological relativity that is characteristic of the post- truth era.

Information Sources

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Trust in academic sources	38	62%
Trust in official institutional sources	27	44%
A cautious approach to social media	41	67%
Social media information is fast but problematic	28	46%

While the majority of participants find it practical to access information on social media, they seriously question these channels in terms of reliability.

Political Beliefs & Knowledge

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Political views affect knowledge	43	70%
More trust in your own party news	28	46%
Trying to approach information objectively	18	30%

Political orientation stands out as a factor that significantly affects participants' level of trust in information.

Social Media Perception

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Social media is manipulative	39	64%
Algorithms drive content choice	33	54%
Social media is useful for accessing information	22	36%

While most participants use social media as a source of information, they have developed an awareness of algorithmic manipulation and filter bubbles.

Polarization and Truth

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Has difficulty tolerating opposing views	31	51%
Polarization pollutes information	26	43%
Even the truth has become controversial	21	34%

Public Consent and Disinformation

Child Theme	Number of Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Information is used as a tool for persuasion	44	72%
Information is distorted, manipulation is common	36	59%
What is right and wrong, the distinction becomes difficult	19	31%

Thematic analysis findings revealed that attitudes towards information are directly related to political beliefs, media habits and perception of truth. The majority of participants stated that they approach information not with rational basis but with identity-based, ideological and emotional frameworks; this shows the multidimensional nature of the information trust crisis.

Argument

This research aims to shed light on the individual reflections of today's information crisis by analyzing the interaction between individuals' trust levels towards information, their post-truth orientations and political attitudes in the case of Türkiye. The findings are both consistent with the trends defined in the global literature and reflect some breaking points specific to Türkiye.

Although the participants' information trust is at a medium-high level, it has been observed that trust is built based on the source and ideological proximity rather than objective content. This situation is consistent with the "source-centered evaluation strategies" emphasized in the studies conducted by Metzger and Flanagin (2013) on information reliability. In the context of Türkiye, in parallel with the findings of Bilir and Ceren (2021), individuals mostly accept information as reliable as long as it is

compatible with official or academic authorities. Data on post-truth orientations have shown that individuals build their perceptions of reality on the basis of personal belief, political identity, and emotional closeness. A significant portion of the participants stated that they act according to the belief that is compatible with the information, not the information itself. This tendency is consistent with McIntyre's (2018) approach, which defines post- truth as an epistemological crisis. In addition, as stated by Waisbord (2018), it is observed that trust in information is gradually being replaced by verification processes based on belonging. Although the effect of political attitudes on the perception of information seems limited at the quantitative level, qualitative data revealed that individuals are more cautious and even distant towards information from opposing political views. This finding can be associated with Sunstein's (2001) concepts of digital echo cameras and political filtering. In a similar way, in the studies conducted by Aktan and Yıldız (2020) in Türkiye, it is seen that political polarization has a direct effect on the ways of accessing and interpreting information. Social media, on the other hand, was evaluated as the fastest way to access information by the participants, and was met with intense doubt in terms of reliability. The fact that the participants saw social media as "a door that opens not to information but to approval" is similar to Boyd's (2014) " networked In parallel with the definition of " publics ", it shows that the digital space is experienced as a means of producing visibility. In addition, it has been observed that, especially in the context of Türkiye, social media content is evaluated according to interactions based on emotional resonance rather than information, especially among young participants (Kalaycıoğlu, 2022). The findings obtained within the scope of this study suggest that the information crisis is not only a matter of technical or individual access, but can also be addressed in a multi-layered context intertwined with the construction of social trust, the form of political representation and digital literacy levels. The participants' attitudes towards information are not limited to trust in certain sources or content; they sometimes sit in a more complex framework woven with identity-based affiliations, belief structures and emotional closeness. In this context, it can be argued that the relationship that individuals establish with information in the post-truth era tends to be shaped more on the axis of interpretation, experience and affiliation, rather than an absolute rationality. In this context, where knowledge is experienced as a practice of producing meaning and taking a position rather than an objective reality, it can be assumed that individuals' attitudes towards knowledge are shaped in interaction with different social, political and cultural actors. This suggests that the relationship established with knowledge is not fixed, but a structure that is renegotiated over time, with context and with relational positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aims to offer a conceptual framework for understanding the social and individual dynamics of today's information environment by exploring how individuals engage with information in terms of trust, perception, and political orientation. The findings suggest that attitudes toward information are shaped not only by content itself, but also by factors such as identity affiliations, source preferences, and political positioning.

A discernible pattern of source-based selectivity and ideological alignment emerges in participants' approaches to information. This indicates that individuals' relationships with information may be increasingly influenced by emotional, identity-driven, and contextual factors. Particularly within digital spaces such as social media, the boundary between information and belief appears to be increasingly blurred, and trust is often grounded in familiarity and affiliation rather than in objective verification.

In this regard, the current information crisis may not stem solely from exposure to misinformation, but may also reflect broader phenomena such as declining social trust, growing skepticism toward media, and the intensification of political polarization.

Addressing this crisis requires a multi-layered response— one that not only considers individual dispositions but also involves institutional and societal engagement. Promoting critical media literacy, fostering multidimensional thinking, and encouraging comparative evaluation across information sources are essential. Equally important is the creation of supportive social and institutional environments that enhance individuals' capacities to access and verify information beyond mere cognitive skill. Furthermore, strengthening pluralistic and dialogic public spaces where individuals from diverse political and cultural backgrounds can engage on common epistemic grounds may contribute to rebuilding trust in a more inclusive and democratic knowledge ecosystem.

Limitations

This study was carried out within a specific time frame and among a purposively selected sample group, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to broader populations. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of perceptual and interpretive biases, particularly in relation to personally sensitive topics such as political orientation and media trust. Moreover, the context-dependent nature of the examined variables suggests that attitudes toward information may vary over time and across sociopolitical environments. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and drawing broader inferences from the study.

NOTIFICATIONS

- ➢ **Evaluation:** Evaluated by internal and external consultants.
- ➢ **Conflict of Interest:** The authors declared no conflict of interest related to this article.
- ➢ **Financial Support:** The authors reported no financial support related to this article.

Ethical Statement

….. Journal's publication ethics; aims to ensure that scientific research and publications are carried out in accordance with basic principles such as honesty, openness, objectivity, respect for the findings and creations of others and is a nationally based scientific journal in the field of social sciences that aims to achieve this. Helsinki declaration criteria have been taken into consideration.

ANNEX-1: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT SURVEY FORM

The Post- Truth Era - On behalf of St. Clements University

Voluntary Participation and Privacy Statement

This survey form was prepared within the scope of a scientific research aimed at understanding the trust levels of individuals towards information, their perception of truth and their political attitudes in the post- truth era. The data obtained within the scope of the study will be analyzed anonymously and will not be shared with third parties in any way.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can stop participating at any time. By checking the box below, you consent to this statement:

☐ **I have read the above statement and agree to participate voluntarily.**

A. Demographic Information

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ I do not want to specify

3. Education Level: ☐ High School ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate

4. Working Status: ☐ Employed ☐ Student ☐ Unemployed

5. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married

6. Daily social media usage time: ___ hours

7. Your most frequently used social media platform: _____

8. The statement that best describes your political orientation:
   ☐ Left ☐ Center-Left ☐ Center ☐ Center-Right ☐ Right ☐ Undecided

9. How often do you vote:
   ☐ Every election ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

B. Information Confidence Scale

(Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements)
1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Undecided | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

No	Expression	1	2	3	4	5
1	Most of the news I encounter on social media is credible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I trust the data of independent research organizations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Traditional media (TV, newspapers, etc.) is still the most trusted source of information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I trust based on the source, not the information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I trust academic publications more.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I do not share information on social media that I am not sure of its accuracy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

C. Post- Truth Perception Scale

No	Expression	1	2	3	4	5
7	Reality may vary from person to person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	I evaluate whether information is true or not according to my political stance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	What I believe in is more valuable than anyone else's truth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Truth is often a constructed belief.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	There may be different realities for different people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	I see what I want to see on social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

D. Political Attitudes Scale

No	Expression	1	2	3	4	5
13	The news of the party I voted for is mostly accurate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	My political views affect the way I view information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I keep my distance from information coming from opposing views.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	It is not possible to obtain unbiased information today.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	Political polarization eliminates the objectivity of information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	Most voters accept information that they emotionally believe is true.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

E. Open-Ended Questions *(Can be answered optionally)*

1. How do you distinguish whether information is true or not?
....

2. What do you think about the flow of information spread through social media?
....

3. Does your political view affect your trust in information? Explain.
....

ANNEX-2: Semi-Structured Interview Form

Study Title: *Perception of Truth and Political Attitudes in the Post- Truth Era* Institution: St. Clements University

Interviewer: Name SurnameParticipant Code: G-___Date: ___ / ___ / 2025Duration: Approximately 30–45 minutesInterview Method: ☐ Face to face ☐ Online

This interview is being conducted as part of a scientific study. Participation is voluntary. All information you share will be kept confidential and analyzed for academic purposes only. If recorded, it will only be accessible to the researcher .

☐ I have read the above information and agree to participate in the interview voluntarily.

Thematic Interview Questions

Theme	Aim	Question Examples
1. Perception of Truth	Understanding how they establish the difference between fact and belief	- How do you distinguish whether information is true? - Is truth personal?
2. Information Sources	Questioning trusted sources of information and reasons for media preferences	- Which sources do you trust? Why? - Do you trust social media news?
3. Political Belief & Knowledge	Examining the impact of political views on knowledge and belief-based confirmation bias	- Does your political view affect your approach to information? - Do you trust news from your own party more?
4. Social Media Perception	Measuring awareness and critical reading capacity regarding algorithmic content streams	- Do you think that the content you come across on social media is selected? - Is social media a tool for you to obtain information?
5. Polarization and Information	To examine feelings and experiences regarding sharing information with individuals with different views.	- How do you feel when you get into an information debate with someone who has an opposing view? - Does polarization affect information trust?
6. Public Consent and Persuasion	Understanding the instrumentalization of information, disinformation and public opinion formation practices	- Do you think information provides more reality or is it a tool for persuasion? - How can information pollution be dealt with?

Open-Ended Completion Questions (Optional)

What do you think is the main reason for the information trust crisis?
Is the media environment sufficient to access accurate information?
Who or what should determine the difference between "true knowledge" and "belief" in society?

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