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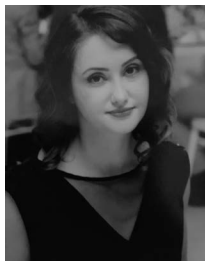
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THE CONCEPT OF VIRTUAL NATIONALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: SOCIAL MEDIA PERSPECTIVES OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT:
The widespread use of computer-based technologies, mostly the Internet, constitutes a new dimension in the study of virtual nationalism. The use of distance- and time-shrinking information technologies – such as social media, virtual communities and websites of nationalist groups – has changed the structure and context of nationalism as well as the scholarly discourse on related topics in the digital age. Social media enable identity expression, exploration and experimentation; phenomena that are considered natural for the human experience. It is necessary to acknowledge that there are many different factors which inspire and shape the Internet communities and interactions they make within themselves. It is essential to comprehend the motives behind these influences in order to understand the group interactions on social media platforms. In this study the authors focus on the nationalist discourse in virtual communities and on social media; mainly the opposition and resistance manifestations in the cultural and social contexts are discussed. The authors thus offer a set of theoretical outlines on the given topic and base their analysis of some nationalists' social media posts on the inductive method of inquiry. The study also concentrates on the need to figure out the negative consequences of such social media sharing in relation to various virtual groups and general users.

KEY WORDS:
communication, digital age, nationalism, social media, virtual community, virtual nationalism

Introduction

Technological advancements play a central role in the organisation of society and in the shaping of opportunities and constraints, meanings and ways of life. People and various social groups adapt technology to their needs and interests, transforming the organisation of social life and profoundly changing the structures of current society. Apart from the basic ideologies and pressure groups, the Internet and specifically social media offer a more civil, conscious, confident communication environment compared to the 'traditional' ways of information dissemination. Social networks are the pattern of today's social life and outline the dominant functions and processes related to the rise of the 'network society'. Although the relationship between the concept of "nationalism" and information dissemination as such is closely tied, many of the conditions, under

which information and communication networks function in nationalist contexts, are rather new. In this study the nationalist discourse in virtual communities and on social media – mainly the oppositional and resistance parts in the cultural and social contexts – are discussed.

The nation is known for being united and holding together. We speak the same language and sing the same songs. We share the same fate and history. So, are we a nation? Or is there a realm of existence waiting to be discovered by all people? Does this discovery mean simply a kind of perception or does it have a more abstract context? Since the issue in question is the existence of a nation as a real realm of our being, we should start from its actual foundations and ontological bases.

An ontological base refers to the true, right, actual, acceptable and sensible reasons and justifications of an object's existence, i.e. to the basic structure and factors that enable the object to exist as that object; the main ground on which the object rises as if it is the continuation of that ground. We are thus able to explain why this existence is as it is and is not (or should not) be some other way. An ontological base explains the congruence of mind, system and fact and directs us to inspect the form and context of this existence in the present time and its adventures throughout the history. This base should be investigated. Since the purpose is to reveal the existence indisputably, its ground in the object/human world should also be revealed.[1]

The social reality in question is a large social group from the perspective of sociology. This group, the large mass that exists within the structure explained by the concept of "nation", should have basic structural factors. In addition to the concept of "nation", we also use the concepts of "public" and "community". The same ontological foundations are also valid for these social groups.

Nationalism Discourse on Social Media

Anderson argues that the print language laid the bases for national consciousness, which created the possibility of a new form of imagined community – the "nation". Firstly, language constituted unified fields of exchange and communication. Secondly, language created a power different from the older administrative vernaculars. Anderson further explains that the end result was a fundamental re-organisation of the way the world's peoples were divided. And thus began a global transition to an era of nationalism and increasing internal homogeneity within a global system of nation states.[2] Poster divides the third stage of the mode of information into two "media ages". These "second media age" technologies, exemplified by the Internet, produce qualitatively different possibilities than those of the "first media age".[3] At this new stage, based on the technologically determinist approach, a new sense of community and even a new culture are in question; the determination and transformation of a new form of communication, known as "cyber-culture", is placed in the centre of our attention.

As the development of this "cyber-culture" breaks through the physical boundaries of all information in all places and at all times, cyberspace will become a more embracing culture.[4] However, one of the problems which beset any analysis of cyberspace is the difficulty related to clarifying what it means exactly. The term "cyberspace" hints at a 'space' being created where none previously existed.[5] There are many competing definitions of cyberspace. Some view it as a *"fictional construct; others as imaginary, but in development; yet others as real and present. Some equate cyberspace with virtual reality, others with electronic storage and transmission of information, or with computer-mediated communication, or with communication over computer networks".*[6] It is also seen as an individual conceptual space; or as a product of social interaction. Some describe cyberspace

as in no sense a physical entity. As Strate et al. put it: *"It isn't a thing; it isn't an entity; it isn't an organisation. No one owns it; no one runs it. It is simply Everyone's Computers, Connected."*[7]

Virtual nations need to be neither oppositional nor secessionist; similarly, the struggle diasporic populations engage in needs to be neither secessionist nor oppositional, and the work of collective identity may simply amount to an enlarging or a de-territorialisation of the existing nation. This, incidentally, may be the most common, if not most spectacular, form of virtual nationalism (or Trans Sovereign Nationalism).[8] In countries with large diaspora populations, one might even imagine the development of state-sponsored virtual nations on the Internet, ensuring the continued loyalty and identification of citizens or ex-citizens living abroad. In terms of economic and strategic interests, such an enlarging of the national interest makes perfect sense.[9]

The territorial integrity of nations is often taken as the premise for a functioning, unifying national identity. Yet, the economic and technological developments of recent decades have made it necessary to question this assumption. It can no longer be taken for granted that the people, who identify with a given nation, inhabit the same space, nor can it be assumed that cultural homogenisation takes place at the level of the nation through mass media. When the Internet appeared, many social scientists and commentators predicted that it would threaten the cultural integrity of nations; that the non-territorial character of the Internet would lead to fragmentation and unprecedented cultural differentiation, making it difficult, eventually impossible, to uphold a collective sense of national identity based on shared images, representations, myths and so on. Although it is too early to draw any conclusions regarding the long-term effects of the Internet, experiences so far suggest that such predictions were mistaken. In fact, nations thrive in cyberspace, and the Internet has in the space of only a few years become a key technology for keeping nations (and other abstract communities) together. In this 'global era' of movement and de-territorialisation, the Internet is used to strengthen, rather than weaken, national identities.[10] With the Internet's rapid evolution, and in parallel with it, social media becoming widespread, we see that the concepts of "nation", "public" and "community" are addressed on a different basis in terms of these social groups. The social medium that has the highest number of users worldwide, *Facebook*, holds an important potential for these kinds of social groups and virtual communities and their interests.

On the other hand, the definition of "community" is rather vague, especially in the era of information dominance. Are those so-called 'online communities' really communities? Are social networking sites such as *Facebook* communities? Or are there any social groups that are constituted through *Facebook* communities? Identity theories provide us with a certain perspective to understand these issues. Social identities, as self-reflected answers to the question 'Who am I' or 'Who are we' drawn from experience based on previous social interactions, help people define themselves and give them guidelines for proper social intercourse with others in the social life. According to the identity theories, a community can be viewed as a set of people who share certain distinctive identities. By providing relatively stable, consistent and enduring answers to the question 'Who are we', a community identity serves as a coherent bonding for all community members, which also helps them discriminate themselves from other people outside the community.[11]

As the most popular social networking site (though definitely not the first of its kind), *Facebook* allows its users to share their personal information, photos and interesting news and hypertext links in their profiles, along with providing a forum for discussions and information exchanges on a variety of topics among a virtual network of friends (and friends of friends). In addition to the opportunities for exchange and discussion provided by users' message boards, there are numerous interest groups and 'pages' focusing on a variety of issues, interests and topics; from the most mundane of interests to the most serious political debates and activist initiatives. Members can create their own themed groups on any topic and invite other members to join in. In these groups, the members can post to message boards, add pictures and post news or hypertext links.

1   KOKTURK, M.: *Nation and Nationalism: Critical Essays-1.* Istanbul : Otuken Publications, 2016, p. 15-16.
2   ANDERSON, B.: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* New York : Verso, 1991, p. 44-45.
3   POSTER, M.: *The Second Media Age.* Cambridge : Polity Press, 1995, p. 18-19.
4   ANYEFRU, E.: Cyber-nationalism: The Imagined Anglophone Cameroon Community in Cyberspace. In *African Identities*, 2008, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 254.
5   STRATE, L.: *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment.* Cresshill, NJ : Hampton Press, 1996, p. 3.
6   STRATE, L.: *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment.* Cresshill, NJ : Hampton Press, 1996, p. 4.

7   STRATE, L.: *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment.* Cresshill, NJ : Hampton Press, 1996, p. 51.
8   CSERGO, Z., GOLDGEİER, J. M.: Nationalist Strategies and European Integration. In *Perspectives on Politics*, 2004, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 21-37.
9   ERIKSEN, T. H.: Nationalism and the Internet. In *Nations and Nationalism*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 13.
10   ERIKSEN, T. H.: Nationalism and the Internet. In *Nations and Nationalism*, 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 1.
11   ZHANG, S., JIANG, H., CARROLL, J. M.: Social Identity in Facebook Community Life. In *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking*, 2010, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 67.

Groups and pages can be public with an open membership (usually triggered by clicking on the 'like' icon) or public with a closed membership.[12] We dare say that every person who lives in Turkey and has access to the Internet or to the mainstream media outlets knows what *Facebook* is. Strangely enough, if you do not have a *Facebook* account, you seem not to exist, since *Facebook* is one of people's most basic criteria for being social and visible. This implies that *Facebook* must be a kind of adaptation to the 21st century, in which disparities are generated and new hierarchies are established – out of sight, out of mind. What makes *Facebook* different is the existence of an area where anonymity is eliminated to a large extent, if not entirely; each user is monitored by an 'invisible eye'. We do not freely enter into identity games behind various nicknames anymore. Instead, we are compiling the phrases of 'us' that we use in the everyday life. Of course, we can also say that we exhibit our faces with different make-up. So, what do these faces reflect?

It is the fact that *Facebook* users mostly use their own names when they sign up. As the social medium's own name suggests, the views of our identity, our photographs, our friends and details regarding who we really are form the basis of our existence on this site. The way we define ourselves has always been established within the borders of politics and social space. The points to be considered are how a community representation is created, how the youth is desired to be, or how Istanbul is fictionalised in the advertisements of *Mavi Jeans*.[13] Of course, we can also see all these indicators on the fan page of Ugg boots on *Facebook*.[14] However, another important point that needs to be highlighted here is the necessity of questioning the assumption that the young people in Turkey are apolitical and have lost themselves in the consumer culture. However, at this point, it should be noted that anonymity is not only enabled by the ability to be invisible, but also by the ability to be visible whenever and however one wants, and that the apparent anonymity enables us to cross the wall of impact and responsibility that is inevitably created by face-to-face communication.

One user describes the young people using *Facebook* by saying: *"Students in the 1980s were so similar to the young people today. Students do not know about politics or economy, they just study and pass. Today's youth is called nylon youth, as well as Internet youth."*[15] Another user describes *Facebook* as *"a meeting point, particularly for occupational groups and the people sharing the same political views"*.[16] How should we approach activities and protests on *Facebook*, which is both a tool for finding romantic partners and a platform displaying Turkish flags on profile photos to demonstrate Turkish people's support of various protests?

It is known that *Facebook* is a platform for many different kinds of social organisations. Of course, enabling various organisations and protests to be publicly shown does not mean that *Facebook* is a platform where different views are always discussed in a democratic framework or solutions for problems in Turkey or in the world are sought. There can also be invitations for quite extremist public actions as well as invitations for concerts or birthday parties.

A battle for hegemony also exists within this platform. It should be noted that the Internet is an entirely made-up platform. The site's designers influence our lives taking place on virtual platforms much more than any architects of our houses and surrounding landscapes will ever be able to influence our ordinary reality. On *Facebook*, one can directly see the videos that her/his friends watch, the groups in which they participate and the changes they make on their profiles. This visibility, this awareness is the most critical point of the hierarchies produced by the users: the numbers and the visibility they render. Our level of strength depends on how many we are, how we will 'conquer' a site visited by over 130 million people monthly, and what we are going to show to the world. Yes, this is one side of politics as well. The fact is that Turkish young people are abandoning the apolitical stance and starting to address politics through nationalism, which they actually assume to be something other than politics. The facts that nationalism is accepted as natural and the virtual world is based on this assumption of 'naturalism' mean that many of them tend to accept (and identify with) various political programmes presented in the 'spirit of nationalism' without question.

"Nationalism", rarely discussed and dealt with systematically before the 20th century, started to be handled as an academic topic and analysed through a more objective perspective as late as in the 1920s. At this point, what flamed the debate on nationalism was its relationship with the process of modernisation. The view that nations and nationalism belong to the modern age once dominated in these musings. According to this perspective, which does not consider nationalism free of such processes as secularisation, urbanisation, foundation of central states and industrialisation, nations became a sociological reality in the period of nationalism, and nationalism created the nations.[17] As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s definition suggests, the term "nationalism" is generally used to describe two phenomena: 1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity; and 2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination. The first part of the definition raises questions about the concept of a "nation" (or a "national identity"), which is often defined in terms of common origin, ethnicity or cultural ties, and especially about whether an individual's membership in a nation should be regarded as non-voluntary or voluntary.[18]

Based on this description, a reminder about the historical path is needed; nationalism, the principal base of the process of forming nation states that shaped the dominant political way of thinking and the world maps in Europe in the early 19th century and around the world in the 20th century, has begun to take on negative connotations in Anglo-Saxon communities and in the countries that share the ideals of the European Union, along with the rise of the ideas of democracy and equality.

This historical acceptance shows that the perception of nationalism varies by community, and its level and effect are determined by historical and cultural dynamics since humans are the products of the national, regional, political and economic value judgments of the communities in which they live. Social production tools only 'produce' people who have specific identities. It is possible to trace this kind of acceptance based on the perception of national identity.

National identities are arbitrary discursive constructs in nature. National identity is substantiated in relation to a historical narration of material events, beliefs and values in such a way that a (seemingly) coherent consistency and continuity over time is rendered. In a broad sense, identity refers to the social positioning of the self and Others. In that spirit identity follows two basic meanings: absolute sameness (among members of in-groups and out-group) and distinctiveness (between the two groups).[19]

Since nationalism is regarded as a natural, uniting, simulating and/or discriminating power, generating it on platforms such as *Facebook* can be considered as strange and even ironic within the context of the claim of universality. However, there is a way to analyse this strangeness. To do so, the concepts of "nationalism" and "national identity" should be read within the context of countries' historical and sociological conditions, that is, cultural identity. The subjects of social media practices, i.e. the topic we are address, are not included in this, eluding its cultural identity components, contrary to the claims of universality.

The Internet enables social movements to cross national boundaries in ways simply not possible in any previous era. In this new global era, the existence of online white supremacist social movements has been scrutinised from three distinct angles. First, scholars such as Castells have examined how racial identity and globalisation are connected in online social movements.[20] At this point, we encounter communities and countries that have a myth of origin based on strict values such as nationalism or which gather around a social contract defined with more flexible and more universal values. The clearest discrimination between these communities and countries is the difference between "thick and thin cultures".

According to Kono and Clegg, *"a thick culture means that a group of members believes in certain assumption and follows similar patterns of decisions. Members responding similarly to questionnaire items about*

12   KHOSRAVINIK, M., ZIA, M.: Persian Nationalism, Identity and Anti-Arab Sentiments in Iranian Facebook Discourses: Critical Discourse Analysisand Social Media Communication. In *Journal of Language and Politics*, 2014, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 762.
13   For more details, see: *The Campaign Mavi Jeans "Here is Istanbul" Movie Series, 2017. Full HD Video*. [online]. [2017-09-24]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rKS_bsy3Lg>.
14   For example: *Ugg Boots Online – Facebook Community Page*. [online]. [2017-09-24]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Ugg-Boots-Online-1731653837064081/>.
15   *I Love 80's – Facebook Fan Page*. [online]. [2017-10-02]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/80ler>.
16   *I Love 80's – Facebook Fan Page*. [online]. [2017-10-02]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/80ler>.

17   AKSAKAL, E.: A Look at Turkish Nationalism in the Light of Modernist Nationalistic Theories. In *Journal of Social Sciences*, 2015, Vol. 54, p. 203.
18   MISCEVIC, N.: *Nationalism*. [online]. [2016-09-02]. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/nationalism>.
19   KHOSRAVINIK, M., ZIA, M.: Persian Nationalism, Identity and Anti-Arab Sentiments in Iranian Facebook Discourses: Critical Discourse Analysisand Social Media Communication. In *Journal of Language and Politics*, 2014, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 759.
20   CASTELLS, M.: *The Power of Identity. Vol. 2 of the Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford : Blackwell, 2010, p. 77.

culture are a sign of a thick culture. Members believe in the common values of the organisation, and the standard deviation between the sums of their attitudes will be small. In the case of thin culture, members share the common values to a lesser extent, with a greater deviation around the mean score".[21] For instance, in "thick" cultures, the distinction between central and pivotal values is clear, and people respond accordingly, while in "thin" cultures, there tends to be greater disagreement and ambiguity.[22]

The study by Mishler and Pollack is another contribution to introducing the distinction between thick and thin cultures.[23] It also enables us to determine the position of Turkey in the relevant cultural differentiation. "The essential idea of thick culture is that societies are distinguished and structures (and individual behaviour) are fundamentally conditioned by a primordial force, unseen but highly palpable, which contains the genetic code of all that is collectively important and meaningful in that society."[24] A classic definition of a thick culture is Tylor's understanding of this culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".[25]

Social media are regarded as having unique language and oratory culture. It has been observed that the oratory tradition, which is a holdover from days when oratory arts were dominant and writing was not yet widely used, still influences the written culture. "Oratory is an art of public speaking, delivering a speech in front of an audience. It has two aims including to persuade and to explain."[26] Politicians, artists and opinion leaders can write long posts by splitting them into numbered or long parts. Posts can be shared with determining numbers (1, 2, 3...) and can reach the masses. This can be regarded as a continuation of the oratory tradition.

The 'otherisation' process carried out by chauvinistic identities that despise, humiliate, exclude and even resort to violence against the others is one of the clearest examples that show the relationship between thick identities and the others. On the contrary, thin identity keeps negotiable areas by not choking the community with clear-cut and strict criteria. Thus, a tolerant kind of identity definition comes out. However, we must indicate that thin identity also bases upon certain progress and values, and thus sets bounds to other identities.[27] It is clear that Turkey has a strict culture with patriarchal political and cultural values. The most concrete expression of this situation is obvious if we consider the nation's founding values that are clearly defined and never skipped on the historical path.

Nationalism Discourse on Social Media in the Context of Situation in Turkey

As Yasa claims, "the identity of the Republic of Turkey is based on founding values defined as the basic and integrative principles of its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Nationalism, republicanism, secularism, populism, etatism and revolutionism are the basic principles, and national independence, national sovereignty, national unification, peace at home and in the world, scientism and rationalism, civilisation and modernisation, humanity and philanthropy are some of the integrative principles. The integrative power of the values and dynamics that define a nationalist, homogeneous identity such as national sovereignty and national unification and the potential of this power to be used in every period should be paid attention to at this point".[28]

In other words, in Turkey, as in many countries around the world, nationalist elites have mostly acted on basis of nationalist assumptions even while fulfilling their mission of internal civilisation, and this passion has frequently been brought to the agenda as the 'return of the repressed', particularly in times of crisis, right up to the present. It is inevitable that nationalism, the myth of origin of a community which brings that community into existence, through which that community defines its own identity and the Others in it, and even to which that community is connected as to almost the only power bringing its components together in times of crisis, appears in all means of communication and on all social media platforms. This prevalence leads to the fact that people or groups fed with the ideology of nationalism become visible on many social media platforms, particularly on *Facebook*, and especially in the crisis this country has been going through recently.

At this point, we need another reminder. Although it once shaped the world's history and maps, nationalism has been assigned with negative meanings and values through the historical acceptance of the concepts such as democracy, universality and rejection of marginalisation, and has been pushed into a hidden corner at the social level – except during explicit crises – like many similar concepts. Therefore, it is inevitable that the relevant concept becomes more visible on a social media platform that allows one to express her/his thoughts and opinions using anonymous identities without the interference of good manners or face-to-face communication.

Anonymity lifts inhibitions and can lead to unusual acts of kindness or generosity, or it can lead to misbehaviour (harsh or rude language and acts that are illegal or harmful). People use the protection of anonymity to reduce the social risks of discussing unpopular opinions and taboo topics, and to create different personas online than they exhibit offline.[29] Based on the sense of nationalism in Turkey explained above, the founder of one of the most popular 'Let's show the power of Turks' groups on *Facebook* explains why he founded it by saying: "My friend sent me an invitation, but I didn't care because I didn't know English. But when a few of my friends also sent it, I wondered why and I joined it. It was only in English then. It was the end of 2007. Everyone was founding a group, and I wanted to found a group too, but I was thinking that my group should be universal and the largest group. I am the founder of the largest Turkish group with 1,000,000 members."[30] Thus, being a Turk and proving the power of Turks via such a global platform becomes one of the aims of visibility on *Facebook*. The higher our number of followers is and the more dominant we are, the more superior the Turkish nation is. Why? From these people's point of view, there is no need for a reason; 'Let's just show the power of Turks', as they would say.

Today, nobody would evaluate the family or the school as the main source of information anymore. More specifically, the young people admit that they do not get their information through their families. According to the available research data, the school is not the primary source of information for most of the students; if the student lives in a rural environment, however, it becomes a bit more important. Social media are nowadays positioned as the main source of information for many social groups. In Turkey and abroad, many individuals accept the social media as the primary source of information. The friends surrounding their social networks are also accepted as their real-world friends. Thus, the peer pressure and social networks dominate and guide the people in the most crucial decisions. Age is an important factor of how to get information as the youngest social groups obtain little to no information through the press; moreover, considering the fact that they have less access to social media due to their parents' restrictions, they also learn less through the social networks. Friends become their main source of information. As the child gets older, the preferred information sources quickly move towards online social media.[31]

One interesting fact is that the claims of being 'above' and superior to everyone – along with the speeches about proving and conquering – are actually based on the idea that some unknown and unspecified people are better. A sort of Internet 'citizenship' is formed through various actions and by joining certain networks.

21   KONO, T., CLEGG, S.: *Transformations of Corporate Culture: Experiences of Japanese Enterprises*. New York : Walter de Gruyter, 1998, p. 16.
22   BUONO, A. F., BOWDITCH, J. L.: *The Human Side of Mergers and Acquisitions: Managing Collisions Between People, Cultures, and Organizations*. Washington : Beardbooks, 2003, p. 148.
23   For more information, see: MISHLER, W., POLLACK, D.: On Culture, Thick and Thin: Towards a Neo-Cultural Synthesis. In POLLACK, D., JACOBS, J. (eds.): *Political Culture in Post-Communist Europe: Attitudes in New Democracies*. Ashgate : Aldershot, 2003.
24   TYLOR, E. B.: *Primitive Culture*. London : J. Murray, 1871, p. 1.
25   MISHLER, W., POLLACK, D.: On Culture, Thick and Thin: Towards a Neo-Cultural Synthesis. In POLLACK, D., JACOBS, J. (eds.): *Political Culture in Post-Communist Europe: Attitudes in New Democracies*. Ashgate : Aldershot, 2003, p. 240.
26   ONG, J. W.: *Orality and Literacy, Technologizing of the World*. Istanbul : Metis Publishing, 2012, p. 131.
27   ASKIN, M.: Kimlik ve Giydirilmiş Kimlikler. In *Journal of Institute of Social Sciences*, 2007, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 215.
28   YASA, D.: *The Principles of Kemalism*. Ankara : Aydogdu Publishing, 1988, p. 169.

29   For more information, see this conference proceedings: KANG, R., BROWN, S., KIESLER, S. (eds.): *CHI'13: SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. Conference Proceedings*. New York : ACM, 2013.
30   This group was established solely in Turkish and today it is not so active. See the group page: *I Can Find One Million People to Show the Power of Turks – Facebook Group Page*. [online]. [2016-09-02]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/34423887548/>.
31   GUNDUZ, U., CAGLAYAN, I., PEMBECIOGLU, N.: Future of Journalism: Dissemination of Innovations and Social Media Horizons. In *10th International Symposium Communication in the Millennium. Conference Proceedings*. Istanbul : Istanbul University, 2013, p. 187.

Of course, this citizenship is mainly based on how we fulfil our 'service' to our nation on *Facebook* (citizen = a member of the Turkish nation, a follower of Atatürk's principles).[32] You can be a citizen and prove how a good citizen you are by participating in the required protests, joining the groups that will prove the power of Turks and inviting all the people on your friend list to join the cause. The people who generate an official discourse and wear an official 'face' on *Facebook* first try to 'found' a Turkish nation or a 'face of Turkey' so that they can claim its superiority.

As well as the efforts to generate a 'face of Turkey', the presentation of this 'face' is also important. According to this rhetoric, we should both convince ourselves of this superiority and prove it to the world. Behind all this number fetishism is a lack of confidence and the fear of being 'low' in the hierarchy of nations. If Turks are 'above everyone' and all enemies of the Turkish nation are 'naturally' below, to whom we should prove this superiority? Paradoxically, various forces want to ignore or split the Turkish nation. The threat is real since these forces are competent. Then is it Turks who are 'below'? This tension, one of the main conflicts related to Turkish nationalism, is also one of the most prominent themes of the efforts to prove Turkish superiority on *Facebook*.

Conclusion

It is easy to claim that there is no way to escape social media. They are more than just a concept; use of social media is becoming a lifestyle because social media are a form of our 'presence' in the society of today. It is not a luxury or a game anymore. Serious institutions are taking online social networks more and more seriously because reaching people has never been easier. The new developing communication tools are providing the individuals with new values that require some changes in the traditional value structures. This new interpretation process demands new decision-making strategies, which develops a certain controversy between the value changes and the decision-making. These factors show us the potential of communication advancements.

Because of its potential for high-context communication, *Facebook* is undeniably extremely popular in Turkey. Many observers and commentators of the current affairs, such as the professional blogger Mike Butcher, have also attributed this popularity to the early translation of *Facebook* into Turkish, Turkey's generally young population (the median age is 27.7 according to the *CIA World Factbook*)[33] and the large Turkish population living abroad, while noting that Turkey's *Facebook* use (fifth highest in the world in 2013) is disproportionately high compared to countries with similar characteristics.[34] To provide an example of this popularity, the fan page of 'Türk Bayrağı' (the Turkish Flag) has 3,087,567 fans (by comparison, a fan page related to '*Facebook*' itself has 7,408,146 fans).[35]

The main impact of the digital age on citizens and their daily life can easily be seen throughout the responses on social media. It is interesting that even if the messages are so negative, the people do not give up mass media, e.g. watching television. Watching news is especially important since it represents attempts associated with learning about life and being ready for it in its positive sense. However, excessive watching of news creates a limit that causes a burnout; people might give up their natural optimism. Most important is that, even if the audience members possess some unique reception traits regarding the 'richness of perception', interpretation, recollection, binding or developing, this news could be normalised and unified. That also means the creativity of individuals and the society as a whole is somehow vanishing.

Creating and confronting the Others is becoming an art and a kind of human engineering in the late modern age, and the new media are an effective tool for it. The individuals are positioning not only themselves, but also the Others via this re-positioning. With the help of the modern technologies and new media, it is much easier and efficient. Through the different roles the individuals gain as senders and receivers, they filter the incoming messages and forward the outgoing messages with more consciousness. This filtering position has also an impact on the individual. Thus, the impact of the media and visual spectacles is always more powerful than the influence of the 'ordinary' press. The words 'social' and 'society' have become the key concepts in all fields of social studies. Citizenship – often seen as positive – also ties each individual to a state with boundaries that limit mobility. However, 'society' and 'social facts' are losing the importance once attributed to them within today's "liquid modernity".

Social media have become a widely discussed media form, which nonetheless is in plain sight due to the fact that users can share their opinions, emotions and thoughts without having to impose self-censorship and because social media content is created primarily by users. It is adequate to question, however, whether social media, which have gained their strength through their effect on the masses, can even reach different, so far untargeted segments of the society. Both organisational structures and non-professional users look for people who express common emotions, thoughts and opinions by sharing posts on social media platforms and they turn into an active power by constituting communities with other like-minded users.

Although virtual media are specified as virtual, the environments where they take place and the communication acts with other people in these environments take place in real-time. Social interaction is becoming easier thanks to these virtual environments; this situation allows people to socialise primarily in the virtual environments. Separated from the pressures originating from their superego, users can express themselves in the virtual space, getting together to 'escape' from their mundane roles and being able to share freely.

Facebook, a platform where people (but not institutions) exist virtually, in relationships which mostly imitate the real life, does not offer a dialogue that would be directly shaped by any official discourse. On the contrary, it is a platform shaped by a plethora of personal discourses. Therefore, it should be formed in a different hierarchy. Perhaps that is why numbers are so important and why there are so many debates about the discourse and national identity.

The debate about what is Turkish has expanded beyond the physical, i.e. geographical boundaries of the country. By looking at the locations of *Facebook* users, we could say that the virtual nationalism, along with better Internet access and more exposure to other viewpoints (as well as the increased need to define 'Turkishness' to maintain a sense of identity), is playing a large role in the debate. These factors will likely have a serious impact on these discussions on the virtual nationalism. As our study shows, Internet social media provide a way of seeing how comments are received and discussed today.

Considering that for those who believe in the existence of such a discrimination the personal and public discrimination does occur in front of their friends' and acquaintances' 'eyes' (as is clear in the examples related to joining various groups and the flag protest), the tension generated is important to understand nationalism. The question of finding out to what extent nationalism is approved also makes us join these closely watching 'pairs of eyes' and, in a way, forces us to take a position; as in case of the flag protest. Questions such as 'Have you changed your profile photo?', 'Have you shared a video about Atatürk?',[36] or 'Have you joined a group to show the power of Turks?' will be among the important foundations of the personal discourse for those who generate the nationalist discourse. Even if these group invitations are accepted by people randomly, the increasing numbers will, unfortunately, make an important contribution to the establishment of virtual hierarchies and the approval of extreme nationalism.

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32   Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) is the national hero and founder of the modern Turkish Republic. The Principles of Atatürk show his modern perspective that created a modern country. These basic principles are: republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism, revolutionism. For more details, see: MANGO, A.: *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey.* New York : The Overlook Press, 2002.

33   *CIA – The World Factbook, 2017.* [online]. [2017-09-26]. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

34   GUNDUZ, U.: Social Media, Civil Disobedience and the Reflections on Social Media. In MURAT, A., BUYUKASLAN, K. A. (eds.): *Social Media Researches Vol. 1 – Socialized Individual.* Konya : Cizgi Kitabevi, 2013, p. 138-139.

35   WITHERS, J. S.: *YouTube and Music: Competing Expressions of Turkish Nationalist Sentiment in the Virtual Sphere.* [Bachelor's Thesis]. Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh, School of Arts and Sciences, 2010, p. 58.

36   For more details, see: *Our Great Leader Atatürk, 2017.* [online]. [2017-09-24]. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/UluOnderimMustafaKemal/>.

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