

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION IN
RELATION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS: A CASE STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN
PLANE CRISIS (2015)

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION IN RELATION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS: A CASE STUDY OF THE RUSSIAN PLANE CRISIS (2015)

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This thesis focuses on explaining the influence of social media on public opinion in relation to foreign affairs and analyses the alternative consciousness, which is the confusion that social media and the internet create in people. With bans and other restrictions imposed by the Turkish government, the internet has increasingly been perceived as an effective field for opposition. Examining the reception, interpretation and dissemination of views and messages through Twitter about the shooting down the Russian fighter plane by the Turkish air forces near Syrian border in 2015, this thesis investigates to what extent the social media has become a novel platform to discuss various political issues and to produce alternative opinions and to what extent the social media merely has turned into another tool of propaganda to manipulate public opinion in Turkey.

Keywords: Social Media, Twitter, Agenda Setting, Spiral of Silence, Foreign Policy

ÖZ

SOSYAL MEDYANIN DIŞ POLİTİKAYA İLİŞKİN TÜRK KAMUOYU ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: RUS UÇAĞI KRİZİ (2015) ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu tez sosyal medyanın dış politikaya ilişkin kamuoyu üzerindeki etkisini açıklamaya odaklanmakta ve sosyal medya ve internetin halkta yarattığı kafa karışıklığı olan alternatif bilinci analiz etmektedir. Türk hükümeti tarafından uygulanan yasaklar ve diğer kısıtlamalarla birlikte internet giderek daha fazla şekilde bir muhalefet alanı olarak algılanır hale gelmiştir. Bu tez, 2015 yılında Suriye sınırı yakınlarında Türk hava kuvvetleri tarafından bir Rus savaş uçağının düşürülmesi hakkında Twitter’da paylaşılan görüşler ve mesajlara ilişkin algı, yorumlama ve yayımlama süreçlerini inceleyerek sosyal medyanın çeşitli siyasi meselelerin tartışılması ve farklı fikirler üretilmesi için ne kadar özgün bir platform olduğu ve sosyal medyanın ne kapsamda Türk kamuoyunu manipüle etmeye yönelik adeta yeni bir propaganda aracı haline geldiğini araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Twitter, Gündem Koyma, Suskunluk Sarmalı, Dış Politika



To Barkın Bayoğlu

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the extent of usefulness of the social media as an agenda setting medium in relation to foreign affairs in particular and its effectiveness on public opinion in terms of being an alternative to the traditional media and overcoming the traditional media's monophonic environment¹. In this regard, messages posted on *Twitter* aftermath a diplomatic and military crisis happened between Turkish Republic and the Russian Federation in 2015 when Turkish airforces shot down a Russian military jet near the border between Turkey and Syria will be analysed. In doing so, the internet as an alternative news source and a platform for dialogue among Turkish audience will be questioned, and arguments that promotes social media as a platform to avoid government propaganda will be tested.

While presenting new horizons to the users such as "observation, filtering, distribution and interpretation of news"², it can be argued that the social media did not free people from traditional propaganda and political pressure under an oppressive political authority. It is because of the fact that the social media may have different effects on different societies under different conditions. Hermida et.al. argued that social media has the possibility to by-pass the gatekeepers³, however as Poell and Borra's study suggested, social media may ignore one aspect of an issue,

1 Here, the term 'monophonic environment' is not used to indicate that the traditional mass media in Turkey is totally under control of one ideology and so on. But the fact that nearly every dissident newspaper and journalist is under heavy pressure of the government cannot be ignored. Imprisoned journalists on the bases of different accusations, as it is discussed in the second and third chapters, can be used as a threat to silence the opposition. Therefore it is clear that the political authority, even if it cannot control it totally, may be making great effort to control this environment with the bureaucratic and judiciary power in their hands.

2 Hermida, Alfred, Seth C. Lewis Rodrigo Zamith, "Sourcing the Arab Spring: A Case Study of Andy Carvin's Sources on Twitter During the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 2014, p. 481.

3 Ibid. p. 482.

and also a small number of users would become dominant⁴ as can be happened in traditional media under certain circumstances. Therefore it is important to focus on some country specific dimensions of the social media practices. In Turkish case, the Russian plane crisis was chosen to analyse as it had too many effects on Turkish public in various areas of life from political to economical, and it created a great interest among public right after it happened. The impact spreaded over social media in time and it occupied the users for a long time, even after the coup attempt on the 15th July, 2016. And this impact seems to be a result of government's and users' choices of which concept and information would be true or considered to be useful in political terms.

Since its commercialisation in 1990s, the internet has quickly become a medium that attracts citizens around the world. Its global success in getting into houses of millions of people, to a certain extent, created and still creates an illusion that everything on the internet is as objective as it gets, for free. Paying for newspapers has been a matter of debate in 1920s⁵. However, it can still be argued that psychologically paying for the newspaper of choice contributes the reader's assumption that he/she gets true information. Paying for the newspapers meant paying for the truth, the truth that manufactured by someone for the public. Internet has seemed to break this necessity and given people option to choose what they get as the truth, as if there is no other middle-man that decides what would people pay for. The simplicity in reaching information without paying for each day/week/month is something that the internet achieved. In theory, the audience can reach any content on internet without an extra effort, 'free' and can choose between them. This effortlessness is one of the main reasons for internet's news sources' success.

One English proverb says, "the free cheese is only found in a mousetrap". Very capitalist it is, but as true and valid for the social media and internet. Advertisement

4 Poell, Thomas and Erik Borra, "Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr as Platforms of Alternative Journalism: The Social Media Account of the 2010 Toronto G20 Protests", *Journalism*, 13 (6), 2011, p. 708-709.

5 Lippmann, Walter, *Public Opinion*, Project Gutenberg:
[http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6456.epub.noimages?
session_id=2c2e96c0bccd197acc54c8b11717c1d5ed45296f](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6456.epub.noimages?session_id=2c2e96c0bccd197acc54c8b11717c1d5ed45296f) (Accessed: 27.03.2017), 2004, p. 196.

economy is the main reason for a website to refine its content in the way that it could get more visitors. While In addition to that, in the age of social media, individuals are being bombed by an information flow which they actually cannot handle and thus become more vulnerable to perception management⁶. Fuchs argues that social media has an advertising mechanism, "... by which corporations exploit Internet users who form an Internet prosumer/produser commodity and are part of a surplus-value generating class that produces the commons of society that are exploited by capital"⁷. This exploitation would serve both commercial and political interests. Advertisement has reached an abusive stage on internet and there is not much thing to do in order to avoid it. One can face advertisement in a common blog post, while the author seems telling his/her story, promotes a brand or a product in the post.

Apart from the content that aimed at promotion, social media is actually argued by Meraz and Papacharissi to be "quickly developing into a platform for news storytelling, enabling collaborative story writing but more typically, collaborative filtering and curating of news"⁸ and they even argued that it represents an alternative to dominant news economy⁹. Now there is a space out of control of hegemony and governments, it is argued by Köseoğlu and Al¹⁰. However, "communication technologies have always penetrated into our lives promising 'much more democracy' since the radio, but every time ended up getting under dominant powers' guidance."¹¹ Internet is no exception to this claim as states have already been

6 Odyakmaz Acar, Necla, "Özgürlük Alanı Olarak Sunulan Sosyal Medya ve Taksim Gezi Parkı Eylemleri", *Akdeniz İletişim Dergisi*, 20, 2013, p. 208.

7 Fuchs, Christian, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, Sage: London, 2014, p. 33.

8 Meraz, Sharon and Zizi Papacharissi, "Networked Gatekeeping and Networked Framing on #Egypt", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18 (2), 2013, p. 2.

9 Ibid.

10 Köseoğlu, Yakup and Hamza Al, "Bir Siyasal Propaganda Aracı Olarak Sosyal Medya", *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, 8 (3), 2013, p. 112.

11 Turan, Selahattin, "Bir Meşrulaştırma Aracı Olarak Bilişim ve Kitle İletişim Teknolojileri: Eleştirel Bir Bakış", *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İİBF Dergisi*, 1 (2), 2006, p. 82.

looking for the ways to check on it and we witness on different parts of the world that a power tries to limit the audience's reach to internet because of various reasons. In Turkish experience, internet has become another platform of propaganda for political authority, and the social media become another aspect of life that the political authority tries to take advantage of it.

While social media can be used to prepare, provoke and suppress the public about any political matter, it is a tougher task for a government during a major crisis like the Russian Plane Crisis in 2015, to legitimize the actions and get consent and approval from all parties or at least assure that there will not be too much dissent as it needs that all parties of the public should unite in order to sustain well being of their country. With the social media's claimed functionality among public, it is expected to be tougher. However, as it is argued in this thesis, the social media can be used, to amplify political authority's arguments, and to drown the public with flow of misinformation and partisan thoughts.

To discuss and test the arguments made above, at first, in the second chapter, some core theoretical concepts related to traditional mass media like agenda setting, gatekeeping, partisan reading and spiral of silence will be explained and then these concepts will be discussed in relation to internet and social media. Some examples from different countries' efforts to control the agenda online will be discussed. In the third chapter, the Turkish online presence will be analysed in terms of online habits of Turkish internet users and their opinions about social media's effects on democratisation. Turkish state's efforts on controlling the online environment and scholars' works on Turkish public online and that social media is a platform that is vulnerable to manipulation, censorship, pressure from dominant groups and the audience actually repeats the content that is being mentioned by political leaders, political parties, traditional news sources will be discussed. Partisan reading creates an illusion that there is a monophonic environment and therefore any idea that contradicts with the one that a person has is quickly radicalised and is claimed to be a marginal one. In the fourth chapter, with a case study on the Russian plane crisis,

based on a detailed survey and analysis of the *Twitter* messages, the arguments in the first two chapters will be tested through a discourse analysis on the collected data.

1.2. Sources

In the second chapter of the thesis, mainly the works of Walter Lippmann, Herman and Chomsky and Christian Fuchs were used to build a theoretical concept of relationship between public, mass media and the internet. Also other books and articles were used to explain and discuss the concepts mainly related to mass media in order to relate them to internet environment. In the third chapter, statistics and other online sources were referred to explain Turkish online presence as well as printed works of Turkish scholars. In the last chapter where a case study was analysed, a different approach of research was needed, and *Twitter* was used as the main source.

As the primary source of public opinion, a set of Twitter data that were collected according to keywords and limited with a time span will be used. Books and articles were used as well in order to explain theoretical concepts and construct a theoretical framework which the case study in this thesis would be based on. To investigate the social media environment regarding a foreign policy incident, social media platforms may differ in their composition of contents. While the Turkish Facebook users are higher in number than Twitter users as it will be shown in the third chapter, Twitter was selected as the source of data as it is easier to reach the content publicly than Facebook. Because of the Twitter's functionality, users can choose either their tweets can be shared public or privately. It means that a user can choose to keep his/her tweets as secret, and only followers that this user approves can see the tweets, or the user can choose to share his/her tweets publicly, which means everyone who wants to follow this user can do it without the approval of this user. In Facebook, on the other hand, there are more complicated settings and it seems to focus on 'friendship' more than Twitter. Twitter is more like a platform to follow anything one can find and there is no need to get an approval if the followed user has already chosen to share his/her tweets publicly.

This is actually an issue when someone works with social media data. Because of this technical characteristic and the privacy choices of the audience, a researcher has only the option to reach the public content. However, on Twitter it is easier to follow anybody than becoming friends on Facebook, and since the Twitter is a micro-blogging platform, its first and nearly only function is posting-sharing content. Twitter does therefore seem to be more reliable as a public content source and is chosen.

Twitter itself, however, has a feature that filters tweets before showing the results of searchings. To reach tweets, we have two options on *Twitter*: a) Rest API¹² b) Streaming API. “An API (Application Programming Interface) is a description of how a software component may interact with other software components.” With APIs, a query can be sent to the web server and the web server replies this query with the related information. On *Twitter*, Rest API filters messages according to parameters that were set by *Twitter* and able to hide certain tweets when a user use search functions. The Search API, which is a part of the Rest API, “...allows queries against the indices of recent or popular Tweets...[and]...searches against a sampling of recent Tweets published in the past 7 days.”¹³ So, professionally, one cannot collect every tweet he/she wants once it is older than 7 days over that API. And also, these -at most- 7 days old tweets are not going to be ‘all’ tweets that filtered by the keyword the person sought, since it would be the ‘sample’ of tweets that *Twitter*’s algorithms has prepared. Also, “*Twitter*’s advertising strategy manipulates the selection of *Twitter* search results, [...]. Not those tweets, [...] that attain most attention are displayed, but preference is given to tweets, [...] defined by *Twitter*’s advertising clients.”¹⁴ This looks like a great difficulty in doing research on *Twitter*, since there is something that manipulates the samplings in a way or another. By using *Twitter*’s own search function on the website, in this thesis, this problem is

12 <https://www.quora.com/What-is-an-API-4/answer/Victor-Vartan-Pambuccian?srid=dbcw> (Accessed: 27.03.2017)

13 <https://dev.twitter.com/rest/public/search> (Accessed: 27.03.2017)

14 Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, p. 198.

tried to be tackled since the tweets were used as contents just the same as a newspaper article.

In addition to the *Twitter* data, news stories and official statements will be used to draw a picture of the plane crisis between Russia and Turkey in 2015. However, in Turkish case, it is impossible to find direct press releases from political institutions. In this regard, official websites of Turkish Presidency, Office of Prime Minister, Chief of Staff, National Defense Ministry and Ministry Foreign Affairs were searched through, and nothing could be found on contemporary websites related to the Russian Plane Crisis in 2015. With some efforts, only one official statement could be reached, which is going to be mentioned in the last chapter. Other official statements that is going to be mentioned in this thesis were collected from news articles and video records of these officials released on *Youtube* and other similar websites.

Newspapers' websites have a characteristic, that they usually show two different time stamps for the reports or articles they have published. One is the time that this content was published, and the second is usually for the date it is updated or edited. While the news articles were used according to their publication dates, in some cases it is not possible to understand if the content that is being referred to in the thesis was added to the website after the edit or not. Or for example, Anadolu Agency, has no exact time in hourly basis, therefore it is difficult to understand when a news article was published exactly. It complicates the situation when hours are important in a situation.

The tweets that were referred to in all chapters were kept untouched in terms of typos and any other grammatical errors. As it can be seen, there were lots of misspellings and other writing errors, all of which also indicate the literary capacity of the users. They were kept in that way to show the level of knowledge of the people about their native languages. Therefore, all the grammatical errors on quoted tweets are as in their originals.

CHAPTER 2

OLD AND NEW MEDIA: A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Public opinion can be described as the dominating opinion¹⁵ determined by individuals in a public, which is “supposed by some to be the great engine of democracy, determining what governments do.”¹⁶ As it is described by Price as a social and communicative process¹⁷, it requires a dialogue and a conscious choice over which side would be chosen¹⁸. However, public needs information in order to make choices and preferences. It can be said that the media is the main tool for getting the information related to the events and issues that need to be analysed and evaluated for the public. The public gets these information through various sources and these sources are “likely to have ... salience and credibility, and therefore quite a range of impact on the public.”¹⁹ In todays world, newspapers, television, radio and other printed material are called ‘traditional media’, while internet blogs and other social media platforms are called ‘the new media’. While it will be asserted later in the chapter that some scholars argue that the social media changed the way the public opinion gets its shape, in this chapter it will be argued that on its basics, the social media inherited some of the concepts that related to traditional media and the public opinion is still being affected by the similar dynamics of traditional media.

15 Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth, "The Spiral of Silence A Theory of Public Opinion", *Journal of Communication*, 24 (2), 1974, p. 44.

16 Page, Benjamin I., Robert Y. Shapiro and Glenn R. Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion?", *The American Political Science Review*, 81 (1), 1987, p. 23.

17 Price, Vincent, "Social Identification and Public Opinion: Effects of Communicating Group Conflict", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 53 (2), 1989, p. 198.

18 Ibid.

19 Page et.al, "What Moves Public Opinion?", p. 24.

The traditional media's ways of creating a public opinion should be understood on the basis of perception. Perception can be manipulated, altered, influenced by different means. Therefore the core characteristics of it should be differentiated. According to Walter Lippmann, as he wrote in his book *Public Opinion* published in 1922, "The analyst of public opinion must begin, ..., by recognizing the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture working itself out upon the scene of action."²⁰ Sometimes reporters directly manipulate the 'scene of action' in order to get their desired image of that scene, where they are not able to do it, they make 'adjustments' to pictures they took in order to present the audience a specific and desired image. While this is the most obvious way of manipulating a fact, until it arrives at the first page, a manufactured picture follows a path to there and passes through different evaluation processes.

These processes and paths can be argued to be very similar on social media, regardless of the interactivity between users and the claims that social media liberated the storytelling. The claim is that the social media liberated the citizen from passively consuming "party propaganda, government spin or mass media news, but is instead actually enabled to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions."²¹ On traditional media, 'party propaganda', and 'government spin' are seemed to be accepted as 'normal' in this assumption. While actually it is not, with a close inspection, the similar dynamics and practices could be easily seen on social media. However, without understanding the real dynamics on traditional media, it is not possible to explain or examine the situation on social media. It can be argued that the 'party propaganda' and 'government spin' concepts can be also used to understand the fact that on social media it is not hard to establish that kind of state control, plus some other methods special to internet can simplify controlling the climate on the internet and manipulate the public. In this chapter, the

²⁰ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 11.

²¹ Loader, Brian D. and Dan Mercea, "Networking Democracy? Social Media Innovations in Participatory Politics", in *Social Media and Democracy*, Loader, Brian D. and Dan Mercea (eds.), Routledge: New York, 2012, p. 3.

terms such as gatekeeping and spiral of silence are going to be explained and then they will be discussed in relation to agenda setting, and agenda setting will be explained in relation to social media. While social media is seen as a free-dome, on which everybody lives democratically and are immune to power related manipulation, propaganda and filtering of the content, by different scholars and by public in general, it is going to be argued that social media is not so 'free' in terms of avoiding propaganda and being interactive as people anticipate.

2.1. Agenda Setting, Gatekeeping and Spiral of Silence on Traditional Media

It was asserted that the media is one of the main sources of information for the public in order to have an opinion. Governments and corporations, may and can interrupt with the content in the media in order to follow their own interests and impose them on to public and thus unify the public opinion in a desired idea. Three of the theoretical concepts to understand and explain the effects of this kind of interruption are agenda setting, gatekeeping and the spiral of silence. Each of them deals with different aspects of manipulative interruptions and 'distortions' in traditional mass media, -intentionally or unintentionally- caused by officials, decision makers and media workers, such as journalists and editors.

In traditional media, images are prepared to be understood easily, without so much confusion. It includes a very strong "suggestion" to the audience about how they should perceive an image. People are "... constantly exposed to suggestion."²² The news are presented with exact images and ways which are tunnelling audience to a deliberate way of action. So, the media, in a way, dictate people what to think. The media shape a reality that it wants audience to see. It is called "framing" and it is done by focusing on "story lines, symbols, and relevant stereotypes."²³ As a result of framing, as McCombs claims, "[t]he media not only can be successful in telling us what to think about, they also can be successful in telling us how to think about

²² Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 152.

²³ Naveh, Chanan, "The Role of the Media in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Theoretical Framework", *Conflict & Communication Online*, 1 (2), 2002, p. 8.

it.”²⁴ While one traditional newspaper publishes an article on a country which is culturally and geographically distant to the targeted audience, that newspaper has a duty to draw a picture of that country to give the audience an idea of why this article is important and why this country is now important. What this newspaper pictures about that country is up to the editors of the newspaper and the author of the article, and that picture is not the constant truth. One can argue that the media only gives the information without declaring any opinion, but as Lewis argues, “... just by talking about X rather than Y”, media simply affect people’s opinions²⁵. Because, by giving one type of information instead of other, media decides for you “what to think about”. The audience become limited to the informational boundaries of newspapers or TV programmes. For example, when a news article about the air pollution in China is published, it is important to give some relevant information about the country. Without telling to people that the pollution caused because of mass industrialisation which is mostly caused by Western companies that have factories located in China, the media would only tell that China is highly dependent on coal instead of green energy sources because of its industrialisation. In the heads of the audience, China would be a country that uses coal only and which has zero interest in other resources. But the Western audience will never become aware that the Western companies are paying extremely low wages in China comparing to other countries, and actually westerners are in the first place responsible for the pollution and poor conditions in China. Or, as Couldry suggests, “[...] media naturalize not a coherent ‘picture’ of the world but certain dimensions, categorical features and ‘facts’ that disable alternative accounts of the world and so themselves get embedded, [...], in everyday actions and understandings.”²⁶ So, an average western reader would never think of these ‘low wage and massive work force for Western

24 McCombs, Maxwell, "A Look at Agenda-setting: Past, Present and Future", *Journalism Studies*, 6 (4), 2005, p. 546.

25 Lewis, Justin, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along With It*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2001, p. 102.

26 Couldry, Nick, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*, Polity: https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Nick_Couldry_Media_Society_World?id=VWoeAAAAQBAJ (Accessed: 02.08.2017), 2012, p. 126.

companies' because of the pictures that were cultivated in his/her head by the newspapers. One of the core reasons for that behaviour could be explained with political economy. As Herman and Chomsky asserted, "mass media relies on ads"²⁷ The attempt of media about not relating the pollution issue in China with western companies can be understood in that way, since either the major news media are owned by some of these companies' affiliations or "large corporate advertisers on TV will rarely sponsor programs that engage serious criticisms of corporate activities"²⁸.

Political interests are also important when it comes to present news related to foreign issues. As McCombs and Shaw's work on agenda setting suggests, mass media can influence salience of attitudes²⁹. Because, "The information in the mass media becomes the only contact many have with politics. [...] Most of what people know comes to them "second" or "third" hand from the mass media..."³⁰ In 1968, this claim was an unarguable truth since there was not much possibility to get information directly from a politician or any other 'high ranked' official³¹, because of the physical distance between the official authority and an ordinary citizen. The reporters and mass media were the 'medium' between public and official authority. An average voter/citizen relied vastly to the mass media to get any kind of -true-information, or he/she should rely on other people's second hand information which cannot be trusted as true and needed to assume that they were saying the truth. Newspapers were one of the biggest sources of information, and information was not freely flowing around the world, but it was being selected, decided whether to be published by the people positioned in certain points of the publication. These are

27 Herman, Edward S. and Chomsky, Noam, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon Books: New York, 2002, p. 14.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

29 McCombs, Maxwell E. and Shaw, Donald L., "The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (2), 1972, pp. 177-78.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

called gatekeepers. Those people are who decides to give one fact about China, for example, but not the other.

“Gatekeeper” is a term that was used first by Kurt Lewin³². He explained how and after which processes a food is served, from deciding what to buy and what to cook and how to prepare the plate and finally whether to serve the dish or not³³. The whole buying, cooking, preparing and serving processes have their own turning points in terms of whether to do something or not. The person (or different people) who decides what to do in every point is a gatekeeper. In the newspaper and communication field, this theory was tried to be presented and tested by David Manning White, and after, by Johan Galtung and Ruge in their works³⁴. According to them, there are some news that attract some readers, and some news that attract only another portion of people around the world. And also, some events become news more widely around the globe than some others, according to their attributes. Gatekeepers are the ones who decide which information passes through the flow of information and being served to the audience. They do that by “[...] exercising their own preferences and/or acting as representatives to carry out a set of pre-established policies. They also decide whether to make changes in the item.”³⁵ Gatekeeping process includes attributes such as timeliness (whether the event occurred in an appropriate time to be served to the audience), proximity (whether it happened in a geographically or culturally close place to the audience), importance (how big the event is), impact, interest (what is the audience’s past preferences of events to read), being unusual (an event or situation that happens rarely; being authentic)³⁶ in the most Western countries where a variety of news media who positioned themselves in different political positions freely present themselves. In a -mostly- democratic

32 Shoemaker, Pamela J. and Vos, Tim P., *Gatekeeping Theory*, Routledge: New York, 2009, p. 11.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

34 White, D.M., "The Gatekeepers: A Case Study in the Selection of News", *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 1950, pp. 383- 390; Galtung, j. and Ruge, M., "The Structures of Foreign News", *Journal of Peace Research*, 2 (1), 1965, pp. 64-91.

35 Shoemaker and Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory*, p. 15.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

country like one of these, gatekeeping process -usually- is a matter of what the newspaper wants to present to its audience or ideologically -or financially- what is appropriate. In more totalitarian regimes, gatekeeping process includes some other concerns like 'not drawing attention of the government', 'to avoid being prosecuted because of printing something that controverts with the mainstream media' etc.. This kind of oppression is sometimes so systematic that the gatekeepers and the audience start censoring themselves in advance. One type of self-censoring practice is called 'spiral of silence' and was formulated as a theory by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. According to Neumann,

Willingness to expose one's views publicly varies according to the individual's assessment of the frequency distribution and the trend of opinions in his social environment. It is greater if he believes his own view is, and will be, the dominating one or [...] is becoming more widespread.³⁷

Actually this theory is to explain how the Nazi Party could rule Germany and was able to commit the most evil atrocities without being opposed massively by German citizens, at least, "there was not an organised civil resistance" as Hannah Arendt quotes from Gerhard Ritter³⁸. In addition, Germans in general were optimistic about the future under Hitler administration, and they knew that "*the Führer 'in his great goodness had prepared for the whole German people a mild death through gassing in case the war should have an unhappy end'*"³⁹, in that environment, Germans who opposed to the Nazis mostly kept themselves silent and the opposition has been easily -and totally- silenced and destructed. Because, as Neumann argues, people tend to voice their opinions when they observe that their view is becoming (or has already become) the dominant one and stay silent if they assess that their views are the 'unpopular' ones⁴⁰. Once the unpopular views start remaining silent, it starts a monophonic environment that increasingly mutes every 'dissident' opinion but one

37 Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence", p. 45.

38 Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report On the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books: New York, 2006, p. 98.

39 *Ibid.*, p.110. Italics are on original.

40 Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence", p. 50.

dominant. Like a spiral, at last there is only one voice that can be heard. Once the spiral is totally formed, the single or weak opposing voices are accused of being ‘radical’, ‘non-patriotic’, ‘infidel’, the public starts, so to speak, subconsciously feeling insecure when they even have one opposing view among themselves. The public opinion would already be shaped to reflect uniform and stereotypical ideas.

Neumann accepts that the spiral of silence can be achieved by using mass media.⁴¹ As it was already argued above, by representing one type of information but not the other, opinions can be influenced, thus a great pressure on a ‘silent majority’ can be formed. So, creating a spiral of silence requires a great deal of control over media, which is achieved by the gatekeepers. Gatekeeping and the spiral of silence are the phenomena that being used to set the agenda and to guarantee that the agenda would be consolidated.

2.2. What is ‘New’ About Social Media?

Until here, the importance of gatekeeping and spiral of silence in agenda setting on traditional media was explained. It is going to be argued, in this section, that the internet is not immune to these techniques and phenomena. Though on internet, it is a lot easier to hide or manipulate the fact that the internet is not a totally free place and to argue that people are immune to gatekeeping and spiral of silence. While this is wrong, there are also other interests that states and commercial entities try to follow. Gatekeeping has changed its form a little on internet, and the rhetoric and efforts of officials or other power holders have stayed the same on internet in order to create a spiral of silence. Agenda setting, technically changed its way, however the term persists on social media.

There is a difference between early years of the internet and social (new) media, in terms of publication. The first period of internet is called ‘Web 1.0’. This term underlines the one way communication of web sites. Web sites needed “active, knowledgeable human actors who create the structure of the WWW, links, new Web

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 51.

sites... Without the human beings, the Web is a dead mechanical entity that is not self-organising”⁴². “Active, knowledgeable human actors” mean editors, coders and reporters who create a Web site from scratch and put the information on it solely. They are selected, elected and -most of the time- professionals whose job is to keep that site alive. Therefore, news websites for example, can be included in this Web 1.0 era as they have a very similar structure to the traditional mass media’s news publishing structure. Web 2.0, or social media, on the other hand, signifies a new era on the internet in which interactive actions have massively increased. In the era of Web 2.0, the websites using this technology only need coders in the background and the roles of content creators are filled by ordinary users, who supply content for web pages.

Social Media is a “collective intelligence” which promotes “participation instead of [only] publishing”, which has “users as contributors”, that highlights “rich user experience”⁴³. The main difference from the traditional media is that it uses only internet as the communication medium and therefore has a great speed, thus a post (new/message) on it has a great chance of spreading just in a few hours, becoming a global phenomenon. According to Dorothy Denning, there are five modes of internet using: “collection, publication, dialogue, coordination of action, and direct lobbying of decision makers.”⁴⁴ Internet presents a universal library, acts as a global forum, a meeting place and provides tools for political means.

The second main difference is that now readers themselves are creators of the most of the contents that was published on internet. Except traditional media’s ability to push news which are decided by a corporate gatekeeper up there in a newspaper or TV channel building, now audience has the ability to choose its own news sources, news articles and decide what to see, what to read. It is the positive side of internet

42 Fuchs, Christian, *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*, Routledge: New York, 2008, p. 123.

43 Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 4-7.

44 Denning, Dorothy E. "Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism: The Internet as a Tool for Influencing Foreign Policy", *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, Arquilla, John and David Ronfeldt (eds.), RAND: N/A, 2001, p. 243.

and it is also the most highlighted part of it. The internet also has a dark side that is not being mentioned most of the time. First, social media is a place where the audience is being exploited as unpaid workers. It is a place that entertainment is much more important than anything else. As Fuchs argues,

Observers who argue that the contemporary web and social media are participatory, cause revolutions, facilitate democracy or advance the public sphere, facilitate an ideology that celebrates capitalism and does not see how capitalist interests predominantly shape the Internet.⁴⁵

According to data from 2013 on *Twitter*, for example, there is only one political figure (Barack Obama) in top ten users who has the most followers, and the other 8 are singers and popular culture figures⁴⁶ such as Justin Bieber and Katy Perry. The list has not changed in 2017 and there is only one political figure (again Barack Obama) on the list of most followed users on Twitter according to Statista⁴⁷. This should be seen as a fact that the users on the internet have a life outside of the social media and keep showing interest online for what they have been already interested in offline. As Fuchs argues above, that dynamic is already celebrating capitalism, and actually this is a new era in it. So, it does not lead to a break from commercialisation and commodification, the social media has expanded it. It was argued above that the traditional mass media need advertisements to survive. However, in traditional media, there are only generic commercials that have to address everyone watching it, therefore, one film for a product, one newspaper advertisement that was prepared for all readers have tried to reach the correct consumer. The advertisement sector is now more advanced that on internet all advertisements can differ according to user behaviour. For example, Google has an online advertisement management service, Google AdSense, and it produces 'personalised advertisements'. According to Google, "[p]ersonalized advertising enables advertisers to reach users based on their interests, demographics (e.g.,

45 Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, p. 102.

46 *Ibid.* p. 101.

47 "Most Followed Accounts on Twitter Worldwide as of July 2017", *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273172/twitter-accounts-with-the-most-followers-worldwide/> (Accessed: 05.09.2017)

"sports enthusiasts") and other criteria.”⁴⁸ The only thing a website owner has to do is to apply for the Adsense service, and then advertisements which are personalised for every single user would appear on the website without an extra effort. A user who searches terms “car prices” on a search engine for example, would see advertisements related to automotive, while another user who mostly searched some geographic places would see travel advertisements like hotel prices or flight bookings. On social media, advertising is easier than it was on traditional media, now the corporations have the ability to pinpoint future costumers according to their online behaviour.

Second, there are still similar gatekeeping processes to traditional media on internet, but now it changed its shape and it also gave users more options, but the mechanism behind it stays the same. Now on social media, everyone, even a software which can search and filter through the data can be a gatekeeper itself, in terms of acting over content to be displayed. Users decide, which tweet is ‘correct’, which tweet is ‘helpful/useful’, which tweet is filled with ‘propaganda/advertisement’. In the age of Web 2.0, every person becomes a gatekeeper of his/her own, and is also able to contribute to content on the web as ‘users’. The term ‘user’ is important, since the audience is not only readers in cyber space anymore, they are contributors, they are editors, they are the consumers while they are also creating the content that they consume.

Social media’s functions can be explained under different categorisations. Social media is, a platform to be free as it creates a base for interaction and communication and publication. It is a platform to be followed as it makes it easier to follow one’s publications and promotes it, thus actually pressurizing people to act according to some limits to get more attention. It is a platform to be convinced as it enables the interaction and everybody now has a stage or podium as it is in Hyde Park. And it is a platform to set the agenda as it is being used and controlled by the governments

48 <https://support.google.com/adsense/answer/9713> (Accessed: 15.05.2017)

and corporations. These attributions have both positive and negative dimensions in terms of their contribution to the public's well-being.

2.2.1. A Platform To Be Free

Social media can be considered to be 'free' in comparison with traditional media since users can be both creators and consumers and it is still a place that is difficult to keep totally under control. There was a proposal from Beth Noveck that suggests "networked groups should be legally and practically recognized by governments as responsible entities capable of contributing to political decision making."⁴⁹ This proves that some scholars believe that social media has the power to influence real-world politics. Couldry argues that,

The internet, because of its basic networked features, has generated new possibilities for political association, mobilization and action. [...] We can now meet and organize politically with people we don't know and can't see, doing so at great speed, across local, regional and even national boundaries.⁵⁰

It is claimed that social media contributes to freedom of expression and it enables people to reach information rapidly⁵¹. Shirazi argues that,

the intensity of citizens' participation in demanding changes in legal, political and social matters and the intensive use of social media indicate that the internet has the potential to be a multivocal platform for silenced and marginalized groups to have their voices heard.⁵²

It seems problematic as it actually suggests leaving a 'battle front' and moving to another one which is not proven to be as effective as the real protests and other physical acts. In the 21st century, protesting against a government, holding support meetings on streets are being confronted by states more heavily than before. Using tear-gas, plastic bullets, brutal force, riot police and other law enforcement bodies

49 Noveck, Beth, *Wiki Government*, Brookings Institution Press: New York, 2009, quoted in: Couldry, *Media, Society, World*, p. 171.

50 Couldry, *Media, Society, World*, p. 157.

51 Shirky, Clay, "The Political Power of Social Media Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change", *Foreign Affairs*, 90 (1), 2011, p. 29.

52 Shirazi, Farid, "Social Media and the Social Movements in the Middle East and North Africa", *Information Technology & People*, 26 (1), 2013, p. 43.

easily suppress a movement. Plus, this risk of brutality frightens too many people and makes them refrain from going out to streets.

Apart from organising real-world events or making announcements, news briefings over social media, activism ‘online’ is getting popular. That type of activism is called ‘keyboard activism’ or “slacktivism”⁵³, and includes retweeting a critical post, sharing messages over internet and attending online arguments but offline, or in the real world, remaining silent and being an ordinary citizen since “[...] real actions [...] demand a higher commitment”⁵⁴, and keyboard activists are not interested in real world events. This actually creates a non-real, almost fictional freedom that could be really useful for authoritarian regimes.

Internet becomes the medium that seems to be immune to brutal police force when people hold their meetings there. It created a phenomenon that can be called ‘retweet planet’. To ‘retweet’⁵⁵ something over *Twitter*, or sharing a critical text over Facebook can be enough for the people to convince both themselves and others that he/she is a politically active and responsible person. It became a universal phenomenon that people were engaged in it nearly every part of the world, so it has created its own ‘planet’, online, and squeezed whole society inside this online planet. While people enjoy a degree of freedom of expression, they are easily kept away from streets and protests which have the possibility to raise more awareness for an issue, or to cause a real change. Social media creates an illusion that when someone shares or ‘likes’ a post, this person is so relieved as if he/she has done his/her duty to the society. This illusion is so strong that there had been even some Facebook campaigns named like “Like this post 1000 times so that little girl in the picture can finally get the medicine/treatment she needs!”. From a range from this to organising real-world events online, social media directly penetrated into peoples’

53 Placek, Matthew A., “#Democracy: Social Media Use and Democratic Legitimacy in Central and Eastern Europe”, *Democratization*, 24 (4), 2017, p. 634.

54 Van Laer, Jeroen and Peter Van Aelst, “Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires”, *Information, Communication & Society*, 13 (8), 2010, p. 1162.

55 Sharing another user’s message by clicking “retweet” button on *Twitter*. The same post is shared in one’s own timeline with a reference to the original poster.

lives. This is something that a government could wish for since in this way people are really kept away from streets and the system could be kept as it is. This is the ‘freedom’ that internet provides people with, and with the economic benefits, sharing everything that someone does enables governments to ‘adjust’ this freedom more easier than ever. Social media is free as much as a country is free in reality. Otherwise, there are a variety of ways to limit this freedom and orchestrate the content as an authority wants to be. These ways are going to be explained in the Chapter 3 while examining the Turkish internet experience.

2.2.2. A Platform To Be Followed

Social media made ‘following’ people lot more easier than before, in two different meanings of the word. First meaning, to be followed as a ‘person of interest’, and to be followed as a social media user. Being followed as a ‘person of interest’ can be both in reality or being stalked by someone who is overly interested in other person. On *Facebook*, people shares their photos, and ideas. On another social media platform, *Swarm (Foursquare)* the same people check themselves into a place where they visit, get badges and other titles according to their visited locations and statistics. *Google Maps* has an option to save a person’s location history, which *Google* can create a timeline and show a complete history of a person’s travels, and movements around a city. With just three applications, an official or commercial institution/agency who were granted access to these data by paying for it with advertisement interest or with a court decree, can easily know what a certain person thinks, believes, opposes or supports; what this person likes to eat the most; what places this person visits the most; what could be this person’s next holiday destination; what can be sold to this person; who are this person’s close friends; what these friends also think, eat, where they visit, and what can be sold to them as well.

For security forces, these data can be priceless, for companies, these data are the most valuable capital for advertisement. In this thesis, this dimension of being followed is kept in background and the second meaning, to be followed as just a

social media user is emphasised more, but this surveillance dimension shall never be ignored while thinking over social media.

Social media provides users the opportunity to create their 'channels', also provides people an opportunity to choose what they want to share, though as a result of algorithms and great social interaction that the internet has, they have a similar problem with the traditional mass media: 'rating'. Users are both 'followers' and 'posters', and as a poster, a person needs to keep in mind the environment he/she posts, otherwise he/she would lose followers and become unpopular. This brings a pressure on users that could mean that a part of social media users do not even post according to their true opinions, beliefs or lifestyle. Even more, there are cases sometimes people doing frantic things only to get posted on social media, to feel 'famous', such as live posting a rape incident online⁵⁶. Being followed has also a financial dimension, since it was argued above that the internet is potentially a very fertile place for advertisement sector. A person who publishes videos on *Youtube*, who is called 'Youtuber', can earn a reasonable amount of money from the advertisements he/she get while video is being viewed by others. These are similar ads to the ones that are seen on television, when a user watches a video, there are several commercial pauses during the stream. So, a publisher would not want to lose that opportunity in a capitalist society and could try to be 'nicer' for as many people as possible.

Social media is a place which does not actually bring multivocality to society since most of the users are what is called 'partisan readers'. According to this hypothesis, "... people will avoid information that they expect will be discrepant of disagreeable and seek out information that is expected to be congruent with their pre-existing attitudes."⁵⁷ This means that a user on *Twitter* for example, would follow only like-minded users and would read only the stories he may mostly like, while -as a feature

56 "Ohio woman accused of live-streaming rape on Periscope", *CNN*, 14.04.2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/14/us/ohio-periscope-rape-case/index.html> (Accessed: 15.05.2017)

57 Bennett, W. Lance and Shanto Iyengar, "A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication", *Journal of Communication*, 58 (4), 2008, p. 719.

of the platform- ignoring and hiding all other -disappointing- content from the timeline. “In the era of “old media,” ..., it made little difference where voters got their news. The offerings of all news organizations were sufficiently homogeneous and standardized to represent an “information commons.””⁵⁸ Today internet users have the ability to read alternative news, change and choose what to read. However, with filtering and hiding mechanisms on social media, a user would never have the chance to come across an alternative message and realise or at least witness any other option around his/her environment. In that sense, there is no difference between traditional mass media and social media, since it is possible to get exposed to only one type of content without being able to see an alternative one.

Besides being partisan readers, people can also be gatekeepers on social media. They have the chance to help social media in deciding which content needs to be promoted or which needs to be hidden, or less promoted, or completely deleted, even such people are able to point to another user to censor him/her completely. Nearly in every social media platform, including *Facebook* and *Twitter*, users have the option of ‘reporting’ other users for their inappropriate/abusive behaviour on website. In addition to that, by ‘liking’ or ‘sharing’ the content, users also help the website in deciding which content to be promoted. ‘Trends’ are one of the most important things now in cyber space, because of their relation to the advertisement sector. ‘Trends’ section on *Twitter* shows the most ‘retweeted’ and liked content or ‘hashtags’ (#), which work like name tags or labels to organise messages according to these labels. When a user uses a hashtag in his/her message, then this message is shown along with same tagged messages, thus it creates an organised platform, while also easing the determination of trends.

Apart from *Twitter*, on another platform, *Instela*⁵⁹, users have the chance to hide a user’s all entries from readers by voting or directly blocking a specific entry as well

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 717.

⁵⁹ *Instela* was founded in 2004 as *İTÜ Sözlük* at that time, as a collaborative ‘dictionary’ which has its own ‘authors’ and ‘moderators’ to create its content. It is based on the same concept as *Ekşi Sözlük*, which is the most popular of this genre.

as blocking the user him/herself. An algorithm then decides according to some parameters, if the content from this specific user should be prevented from being shown in timelines of other users and readers⁶⁰. By enabling that kind of feature, the contributors of *Instela*, theoretically have the chance to determine the environment of the website and decide what to be shown to readers who arrive from search engines or other websites to *Instela*. This takes the privilege of creating content for a website from its owner and administrators, shares it to the all registered users of it.

With two examples above, it is clear to say that with financial and political interests, people also tend to be cautious on social media when they share something online. When they are not cautious, their followers can easily stop seeing the content these users share, thus anybody can easily become a gatekeeper/partisan reader on a social media platform, and can even moderate the content to some extent on behalf of other users.

2.2.3. A Platform To Be Convinced

With the so-called freedom and interaction, social media enables users to have instant conversations with people around the world. On *Twitter*, for example, ‘mentioning’ feature makes it possible to answer or comment to a tweet that has been posted by another user. People can then answer to that ‘mention’ and so on. A dialogue appears. On *Facebook*, again the same is possible by ‘commenting’ to the posts other people have shared on timeline. With these features, a public and instant dialogue can be established, just like a coffee house chatter.

By commenting and mentioning, political discussions can be made on social media and naturally, the classical mechanisms that have been mentioned above can also be practised here, too. Some celebrity accounts, for example, are being flooded with mentions on *Twitter* because these celebrities expose their political views freely on *Twitter*. Supporters of opposite political thoughts comment on their messages, swear at these people and in some occasions even take legal actions against them. A tweet

60 <https://tr.instela.com/instela-da-fazla-eksi-oy-alan-girinin-gorunmemesi---15424857> , <https://tr.instela.com/instela-moderasyonu---16352188> (Accessed: 19.05.2017)

like this: “300 Akhisar residents, they salute you all, tomorrow Salihli, and Manisa on Thursday”⁶¹ can get answers like this: “@LeventUzumcu those who love the motherland, the flag, the nation would ever care to spit on your face because that spit would be wasted even people listening to you would know what the”⁶² as the first reaction, since Levent Üzümcü is a dissident actor. Some users hence try to provoke him even replying a tweet that only contains greetings and information about the location of his next plays.

So, the interactivity does not only make it possible to hold meaningful and progressive discussions on social media, but also enables a group of people to attack others a lot easier than they could do in real life. This characteristic contributes to spiral of silence and any other oppressive action since it enables to reach a group of people easily, quickly and anonymously. Indeed, on social media, a user does not have to give true information about him/herself. This fact makes it harder to take legal actions against people who use their social media accounts to attack or bully others online. These type of users are called ‘trolls’ and they represent a downside of online living. Although it is not difficult to locate such users as their connection details are usually being saved by ISPs (Internet Service Provider)⁶³, and trolling (or online bullying) is not a prosecution-free act, in countries like Turkey and Russia, where the impartiality of judiciary system is disputable, some hate crimes may be committed without any obstacles, while some others are strictly prosecuted. Russia, for example used trolls “to oppress political dissidents, journalists and others publishing facts that show Russia’s authoritarian regime...”⁶⁴. Where an oppressive government enjoys its powers, *Twitter* or any other social media platform does not

61 “300 Akhisarlı, selâmları var hepinize, yarın Salihli, perşembe de Manisa.”, 28.03.2017, <https://twitter.com/LeventUzumcu/status/846816369828155392> (Accessed 29.03.2017)

62 “@LeventUzumcu vatan bayrak millet sevgisi olanlar sizin yüzünüze tükürmez bile çünkü o tükürüğe yazık sizi dinleyenler bile ne olduğunu iyi”, 28.03.2017, <https://twitter.com/SERDARBAYRAK69/status/846823968417959938> (Accessed 29.03.2017)

63 Durnagöl, Yasemin, “5651 Sayılı Kanun Kapsamında İnternet Aktörlerine Getirilen Yükümlülükler ile İdari ve Cezai Yaptırımlar”, *TAAD*, 2(4), 2011, pp. 387-388.

64 Aro, Jessikka, “The Cyberspace War: Propaganda and Trolling As Warfare Tools”, *European View*, 15 (1), 2016, p. 122.

make any sense in terms of freedom, since the government still has ways to silence the opposition. Muting the opposition is sometimes practised through prosecuting individuals⁶⁵, while sometimes it can occur as a total blockage of a specific platform to be reached from a specific geography, like Bahrain and Jordan did in 2006 by blocking Google Earth and Skype⁶⁶, or complete shut down of internet, as it had happened in Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt during the Arab Spring⁶⁷. There were instances that online activists were even arrested⁶⁸.

2.2.4. A Platform to Set the Agenda

As a platform to set and follow an agenda, social media have similar functions with other communication mediums. But still, there is a distinction needs to be made between two actions that relate to internet or social media: 1) “Real actions that are supported ... by the internet”⁶⁹, and 2) ...”virtual actions that are internet based.”⁷⁰ Simply, the first type of actions “... refer to the traditional tools of social movements that have become easier to organize and coordinate thanks to the internet”⁷¹, such as creating events on Facebook that give details of a real world event like a concert or a sit-in, enabling people to connect with like-minded people or enabling people simply to get the updates about that event. Second type of actions are the ones totally based on internet, which means that there is no chance to talk about them otherwise. These actions are various but main acts include some hacking and cyber attack attempts which aim to damage or exploit an individual’s or a state’s cyber capabilities⁷². Since

65 Howard, Philip N. and Muzammil M. Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media", *Journal of Democracy*, 22 (3), 2011, p. 39.

66 Warf, Barney, "Geographies of Global Internet Censorship", *GeoJournal*, 76 (1), 2011, p. 12.

67 Howard and Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media", p. 37, 39.

68 Dewey, Taylor, Juliane Kaden, Miriam Marks, Shun Matsushima and Beijing Zhu, *The Impact of Social Media on Social Unrest in the Arab Spring*, Stanford University: Stanford, 2012, p. 17.

69 Van Laer and Van Aelst, "Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires", p. 1148.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Kierkegaard, Sylvia M., "EU Tackles Cybercrime", in *Cyber Warfare and Cyber Terrorism*, Colarik, Andrew M., Leck J. Janczewski (eds.), Idea Group Publishing: Hersher, 2007, p. 433.

the main focus of this thesis is in agenda setting and public opinion, first type of actions will be examined.

Real actions which are supported by internet mean that internet is being used as a means, instead of the primary weapon to reach a political goal. Social media “...were singularly powerful in spreading protest messages, driving coverage by mainstream broadcasters...”⁷³. But, again quoting Howard and Hussain, “In the MENA, dissent existed long before the internet...”⁷⁴ and internet cannot be credited alone in creating social movements or shaping the public opinion. Except intentional messages that aimed to form an organisation which requires partisan reading in reality, there is a great gap in the system that prevents governments from pushing the content that they want to be highlighted. China’s efforts to censor *Google* search results that being shown in China and force Google to remove warning messages when ‘politically sensitive’ content is being searched⁷⁵ or to block popular services⁷⁶ reflect the Chinese government’s will to control the information flow even online. While there are not many examples of attempts similar to China’s from other countries yet, there is a great possibility that other countries also may try to control the online information flows. Manipulating, completely censoring search results or blocking certain services indicate that the Chinese government is trying to control the online agenda. The main Chinese method is keeping social media alive but under boundaries and interrupt with it when needed.

To control and shape social media environment, China employ social media users who are getting paid to drive social media conversations and general agenda to a desired way. These type of paid social media experts are called “Fifty Cents Army” by the public since they are earning 50 cents per message they post. The Chinese

73 Howard and Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media”, p. 41.

74 Ibid.

75 “Google’s dropped anti-censorship warning marks quiet defeat in China”, *The Guardian*, 04.01.2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/jan/04/google-defeat-china-censorship-battle> (Accessed: 30.03.2017)

76 “China blocks YouTube”, *The Guardian*, 25.03.2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/25/china-blocks-youtube> (Accessed: 30.03.2017)

government chose this way, because, Rongbin argues, “on the one hand, state propaganda is becoming increasingly ineffective. [...] some studies have found a negative correlation between the exposure of official propaganda and citizen’s trust in the government.”⁷⁷ So China tries to tackle the problem of ineffectiveness by actually doing what is called ‘black propaganda’, which “...describes material emanating from an undisclosed source, so that the receiver either has no idea where it is coming from or incorrectly identifies the source.”⁷⁸ There are differences among the paid commentators, according to their duties and their capabilities. Some of them “...work like reporters or columnists in traditional media” and others are “more like online ‘trolls’”⁷⁹. The difference between the two is that the latter group acts as average citizens⁸⁰. However, the main goal is to control the content that is published and to manipulate the online discussions by posting pro-government messages. Poell also claimed that Chinese example of censorship is a little different from other states’, because in reality the Chinese government does not intervene jokes or criticisms about the government or officials but deletes any message related to a collective action or protest movement⁸¹. It proves that Chinese authorities are in an effort to lock citizens in the boundaries of ‘keyboard activism’ and prevent any real world action, so to say, in really changing things in the country.

To tackle censorship and filtering, people are using coded languages, pseudonyms, misspelled words, but using these symbolic language frequently can be seen, according to Poell, as a self-censorship⁸². This self-censorship then can be seen as a successful spiral of silence practice and it is clear to say that social media is not

77 Han, Rongbin, “Manufacturing Consent in Cyberspace: China’s ‘Fifty-Cent Army’”, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 44 (2), 2015, p. 112.

78 Taylor, Philip M., *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003, p. 225.

79 Rongbin, “Manufacturing Consent in Cyberspace”, p. 113.

80 Ibid.

81 Poell, Thomas, “Social Media Activism and State Censorship”, in *Social Media, Politics and the State*, Trottier, Daniel and Christian Fuchs (eds.), Routledge: New York, 2015, p. 196.

82 Ibid., p. 195.

‘that’ free in a country which is not free in general. For example, in Iran, the Revolutionary Guard monitors online activity, and there is a widespread fear of using anti-filter software, therefore one can deduce that self-censorship is “very extensive” in Iran⁸³.

Here *Facebook* should be mentioned for its two steps, since states also try to control online environment and news sources to keep citizens under more pressure. Facebook’s first step is called “Free Basics”, and the other is a mechanism that detects fake news on Facebook and hides them from users. “Free Basics” is a software that enables a user to reach internet free of charge, but with a ‘limited’ content. As argued by Nyabola, “Free Basics” should be a dictator’s dream since a standard user can only see news which were already curated by an authority, only use some portion of the internet that the authority allows⁸⁴. The second step has come up after the United States Presidency race as there were criticisms about the fake news that has been posted on Facebook during the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States⁸⁵. According to news reports, this feature was introduced to work as a fact checker and will notify the user if a post flagged as fake or disputed. It is not difficult to assume that once a post is flagged as fake news it will become ‘unarguably’ fake and still there is not enough explanation what would happen if something is falsely flagged as fake, or what would happen to some not well known but honest websites’ news reports.

These two features are actually two different things that threaten the freedom and reachability of internet and do not fit in the liberal ideals. One should keep in mind, after all, *Facebook* (and any other social media platform) is a commercial body and activists online are dependent on a social media environment that they cannot do otherwise if a social media platform one day changes policies at the expense of

83 Ibid., p. 193.

84 Nyabola, Nanjala, “Facebook’s Free Basics Is an African Dictator’s Dream”, *Foreign Policy*, 27.10.2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/27/facebook-plan-to-wire-africa-is-a-dictators-dream-come-true-free-basics-internet/> (Accessed: 30.03.2017)

85 “Facebook tackles fake news”, *cnn.com*, 15.12.2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/15/facebook-tackles-fake-news.html> (Accessed: 30.03.2017)

activists. This is to say, one day *Facebook* can decide that allowing protestors, dissents to post whatever they like is not financially profitable and start deleting these posts and users, without any intervention from an authority at all.

However, fake news is a real problem on internet. The authenticity and accuracy of the messages shared through social media should always be questioned. While blogging is argued to be an alternative journalism⁸⁶, it is claimed that “bloggers, in general, know little about independent verification of information and data”⁸⁷. That is because, news networks like *RT* offers a “Fake Check”⁸⁸ page that provides real stories behind some of the most shared fake news. The problem here is that, being able to post anything without ‘fact checking’ can be presented as freedom and objectiveness, while checking what users are posting may be abused by the commercial entity. Therefore, *Facebook*’s attempt to tackle fake news can be considered to be both positive and negative. It would reduce fake news shared but this can be read as a granted authority to *Facebook* to withdraw anything that disturbs a corporation, as the source of a considerably ‘non-mainstream’ news would be disadvantaged against a corporate giant’s power. In terms of tackling false information on internet, one could trust his/her knowledge and intellectual capacity, though it is not always possible to have a background knowledge on everything and easily differentiate lie from truth. Therefore the content on social media could actually bring more trust in mainstream news sources rather than the bloggers or other distinctive sources on internet for well-educated and intellectual people. However the partisan reading would still be an effective phenomenon for the people.

In that environment, the public’s interest in foreign policy is important. As it was argued above, social media is not totally immune to propaganda and control. One can conclude, that on the internet it may not be possible to enrich one’s knowledge

86 Small, Tamara A., “What the Hashtag? A Content Analysis of Canadian Politics on Twitter”, in *Social Media and Democracy*, Loader and Marcea (eds.), p. 113.

87 Andrews, Paul, “Is Blogging Journalism?”, <http://niemanreports.org/articles/is-blogging-journalism/> (Accessed: 29.06.2017)

88 “FakeCheck”, <https://fakecheck.rt.com/en/stories> (Accessed: 27.06.2017)

and effectiveness on a country's foreign policy applications. On the contrary, it can be argued that a government can use the social media in order to affect its citizens' foreign policy perceptions and therefore 'manufacture' and get those citizens' consent for a foreign policy move, such as declaring a war on another country, or sending troops to an oversea country in order to 'bring that country democracy and prosperity'. Social media seem to be as useful as traditional mass media in terms of creating an agenda by political authorities.

Until here, mentioned mostly the questionable and semi-legal ways of manipulating the agenda online. However, also governments and other official bodies use social media as a formal propaganda/public relations tool, just like dissents. Presidents, prime ministers, ministers and institutions' official accounts, heads of universities, mayors, governors and holders of other official posts have their own accounts and sometimes they get into arguments on social media. Official accounts are sharing messages and news everyday on social media prepared by their public relations branches or their private handlers. For example, the President of the United States has an official *Twitter* account, @POTUS, which stays the official account of Presidency and changes display names with the Presidents elected. British Prime Minister Theresa May has an account on *Twitter*, @theresa_may, while there is also an official account of the Conservative Party as @Conservatives. While these social media accounts are powerful in informing citizens about official events, press releases, they are also acting as a counter-propaganda agent on internet as they are official and publishing information at first hand.

Social media accounts of traditional news media and news websites are also working as an agenda-setting factor. Nearly all newspapers or news TV channels have their own social media accounts, like @BBCWorld. They are mostly working by posting headlines of news on *Twitter* and linking the post to the website of that news channel as follows: "@BBCWorld: US beefs up muscle in Somalia fight <https://t.co/DdUUBVnFjI>"⁸⁹ They are considered to be trustworthy because they are

89 <https://Twitter.com/BBCWorld/status/847534157215485953> (Accessed: 30.03.2017)

peoples' 'old well-known' news sources. Because they are already credible among citizens and their names are known, thus they are followed by a great majority on social media also for reaching to news. For example, @BBCWorld account has 20.7 Millions followers August, 2017, it was 18.8 millions in March, 2017. Therefore, the content they share becomes important in terms of agenda-setting online. It is safe to say that the same process with gatekeeping engages with the online posting processes of these newspaper accounts, because as already mentioned, these accounts' messages are mostly referring to news articles and reports on their own websites, which are already prepared according to traditional news-making understanding.

It may seem to difficult to set a uniform agenda online, since it seems to be limitless and easy to distract. As Bennet and Iyengar stressed, "the kind of communication that reaches such personalized audiences tends to travel through multiple channels and may require interactive shaping in order to be credible and authentic."⁹⁰ But the efforts that have been demonstrated above show an increasing effort that states and traditional media actors try to control online presence as well.

As argued in this chapter, social media and internet, like any other fields of life, are directly connected to the general freedom of people living in a country and the state's loyalty and commitment to human rights. Internet can be argued to reflect the freedom a person has in real life in his/her country. Therefore, internet solely does not mean that an X national is as equal online as a Y national in sharing thoughts and reaching information. Economic and political interests of a corporate firm or a political institution could lead to direct blockade, prosecution of individuals, and manipulation of content online with trolls and other fake news sources. An individual's own knowledge and attention are important in finding an online-only source credible, and these are not for granted for everyone. Therefore it can be argued that social media is actually not a reliable source of information without verifying the content every time. While emerging efforts to prevent misinformation

90 Bennet and Iyengar, "A New Era of Minimal Effects?", p. 716.

could be said to have positive effects, it is not clear if it can be used to silence the legitimate dissident information flow. As it was in traditional media, being today's million dollar worth companies, platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter* would care about their own interests rather than users'. Loader and Mercea argues that,

equipped with social media, the citizen no longer has to be a passive consumer of political party propaganda, government spin or mass media news, but is instead actually enabled to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions.⁹¹

This seems to assume that internet is totally free from political intervention, and the users are well informed, thus they are totally engaging with alternative sources on the internet. However, they already accept the fact that “the most active political users are social movement activists, politicians, party workers and those who are already fully committed to political causes.”⁹² Therefore, it can be argued that those who use social media to reach alternative content should already be committed to political activism and expected that they are already uninterested in traditional mass media's framing of news. As it was shown in this chapter, Loader and Mercea's arguments cannot be accepted as a universal reality, and it can be argued that these assumptions can even be regarded as exceptions. More than it is asserted, the online community would be politically limited, manipulated with false information, democratically intolerant. The next chapter will focus on the Turkish case of internet use and country-specific dimensions of agenda setting and other experiences will be discussed. In addition to these general observations and practises that was highlighted in this chapter will be tried to be explained in terms of a country with a political, social and economic climate like Turkey.

91 Loader and Mercea, “Networking Democracy? Social Media Inovations in Participatory Politics”, p. 3.

92 Ibid., p. 4.

CHAPTER 3

TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION ONLINE AND TURKISH FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Turkish online presence has its own characteristics in addition to general facts which were discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the online habits of the Turkish public, control endeavours and methods of the political authority and the results of such characteristics will be discussed.

As Herman and Chomsky asserts, mass media relies on ads⁹³, and the Turkish mass media is not an exception to that, therefore the dominant climate in corporate relations affects mass media's behaviour. Turkish public opinion has therefore been relied on the content that this ad-dependent, economically concerned mass media supply. According to what Loader and Mercea argued, the social media should have changed this dynamic and made it possible to reach original content different than what traditional media could provide also in Turkey. The aim of this chapter is to show that the traditional media in Turkey was not any different then others around the world in terms of gatekeeping, creating a spiral of silence and serving for economic and political interests and to present a picture of Turkish online public. Turkish public's interest and knowledge related to foreign policy issues and public's reaction in general will tried to be explained.

3.1. Turkish Online Presence

Turkish public is very engaged with internet in general. According to Turkish Statistical Institute, the number of Turkish internet subscribers in 2016 was approximately 62 millions⁹⁴. International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) numbers also indicate that around 78% of Turkish population have an internet

93 Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 14.

94 "Number of Fixed Telephone, Mobile Telephone and Internet Subscribers", *Turkish Statistical Institute*, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab_id=1580 (Accessed: 25.06.2017)

subscription in their households⁹⁵. According to Gülüm Şener et.al.'s study on social media habits of Turkish population in 2014, 96% of all participants said that they were using Facebook and 32% of all participants were also using Twitter⁹⁶, while Statista's study shows that in 2016 26% of respondents were using Facebook and 18% were using Twitter⁹⁷, and the total number of social media users in 2016 was projected to be 34 million by Statista⁹⁸. With these high numbers, it should be expected that Turkish public would engage in conversations, be open to discussion, free from government propaganda and could be able to reach the content alternative to mass media. Based on such assumptions, some Turkish scholars even claimed that "social media is more objective in comparison with traditional media because it is harder to censor"⁹⁹.

The nature of this objective environment has the risk of being full of wrong information, as it was shown in the previous chapter. Indeed, teyit.org¹⁰⁰, a Turkish website founded in 2016, analyses news being shared through social media that are mostly coming from 'anonymous' or internet sources, provides accurate results with the news article or reports in question by checking the facts with state officials who can be responsible about the claims in the report or with other real life sources. According to its own statistics, as of August 2017, 236 Turkish news that being

95 "Core Indicators on Access to and Use of ICT by Households and Individuals", *International Telecommunication Union*, http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2017/CoreHouseholdIndicators_July2017.xls (Accessed: 14.10.2017)

96 Şener, Gülüm, Perrin Öğün Emre and Fatih Akyıldız, "Türkiye'de Sosyal Medyanın Siyasi Katılıma Etkileri", *Folklor/Edebiyat Dergisi, Yeni Medya Çalışmaları Özel Sayısı*, 21 (83), 2015, p. 82.

97 "Distribution of Social Media Used in Turkey 2016-2017: Which Social Media Do You Use?", *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/570098/distribution-of-social-media-used-turkey/> (Accessed: 24.06.2017)

98 "Forecast of Social Network User Numbers in Turkey From 2014 to 2021", *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/569090/predicted-number-of-social-network-users-in-turkey/> (Accessed: 24.06.2017)

99 Çıldan, Cihan, Mustafa Ertemiz, Evren Küçük, Kaan Tumuçin and Duygu Albayrak. "Sosyal Medyanın Politik Katılım ve Hareketlerdeki Rolü", *Akademik Bilişim*, 2012, p. 3.

100 <https://teyit.org/> (Accessed: 15.09.2017)

shared massively on social media that they have analysed out of 308 total are false news, which equals nearly 77% of the news that have been checked¹⁰¹. On the basis of this information, it can be argued that freedom and objectiveness that social media offer can easily be regarded as the illusion of partisan reading. This also shows that people using social media are not always well-informed, rational and responsible citizens since they believed and shared these news on a massive scale without checking their authenticity. From that point, the claim that social media enabled objectiveness should not be accepted as 100% true, as false news can be also used for provocation and propaganda, which cannot be regarded as 'objective'. A false new that was printed on a newspaper or broadcasted on TV, or posted on a corporate news website can easily face an official disavowal by the victim of that false news report, the authors and their agency can be forced to apologize and share the truth with their audience, they can face other legal sanctions as well. While it is not completely impossible to do that on social media, the speed of that false news' dissemination through users, most of the times the primary source of this new is forgotten and therefore, even if a legal action is taken against this falsity and the source corrected its wrongdoing bona fides, the false news may still be travelling around the internet and even can get more attention than the disavowal. 77% false news statistic shows that the last argument would not be disregarded in the Turkish case.

The numbers show that fake news are disseminating on a massive scale among Turkish users. A citizen sharing fake news may also show another dimension of question of freedom. People mostly share news articles that they find 'informative' and which they think that it would provide them with social status¹⁰². It can be argued that people in countries experiencing governmental control over internet refrain from sharing messages which could face legal or other types of sanctions, or cause heated arguments with other users. With data mining capabilities of social

101 <https://teyit.org/> (Accessed: 15.09.2017)

102 Lee, Chei, Long Ma and Dion Goh, "Why Do People Share News in Social Media?.", in *Active Media Technology*, Zhong, Ning, Vic Callaghan, Ali A. Ghorbani and Bin Hu (eds.), Springer: Heidelberg, 2011, pp. 113-114.

media, people are again refraining from getting involved in politics on social media. Therefore, fake news' popularity on social media could be seen as a move similar to the Chinese users using coded languages or pseudonyms in order to escape from prosecution. People abstain from sharing direct opinions, and rather share news reports that fit their political view, it can be argued. However, Tosunay and Çolak discuss that because of the marginalisation of dissident opinions in traditional media; and the things happen to the people supporting these 'marginalised' ideas affect people's eagerness to auto-censor themselves¹⁰³. Through the media, people are subconsciously made believe that they are the minority and they are not entitled to voice their opinions. Again this exemplifies the spiral of silence, or in Turkey what is called "mahalle baskısı" (peer pressure)¹⁰⁴. According to the study of Gülüm Şener et.al., sharing news or messages related to political/social problems is not popular in Turkey (Writing posts: 36% and sharing news: 37%) in comparison with "following"(43%) and "liking"(52%) these kind of posts¹⁰⁵. It gives the idea that Turkish online population tends to 'follow' and get news from social media but not interested in sharing their own opinion or getting involved in political discussions as much. According to Osman Metin, "Every Twitter user does not post messages with political content. Very few share their political opinions. The majority keeps quiet and observes what is happening."¹⁰⁶ Even though it was argued that the social media enables dissident propaganda¹⁰⁷, as a result of 'partisan reading', the propaganda itself may not be as effective as it is intended in terms of changing one's opinions. In the case of Turkey, according to 2015 data, 34% of Turkish *Twitter* users reported that they followed users with opposing views¹⁰⁸, and people who were replying posts

103 Tosunay, Duygu, and Figen Ünal Çolak, "Sosyal Medyada Otosansür: Facebook Örneği.", *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi*, 4 (2), 2016, p. 928.

104 Ibid., p. 929.

105 Şener et.al., "Türkiye'de Sosyal Medyanın Siyasi Katılıma Etkileri", p. 83.

106 Metin, Osman, "Sosyal Medyanın Siyasal Toplumsallaşmaya Etkileri: Bir Alan Araştırması", *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 18 (2), 2016, p. 236.

107 Köseoğlu and Al, "Bir Siyasal propaganda Aracı olarak Sosyal Medya", p. 119.

108 Şener et.al., "Türkiye'de Sosyal Medyanın Siyasal Katılıma Etkileri", p. 84.

with opposing thoughts were fewer (14%)¹⁰⁹. Tosunay and Çolak's study shows that Turkish users do not accept friendship requests from users who they do not know personally¹¹⁰. This can be seen as a sign that partisan reading should be observed among Turkish online public. It is clear that, this observatory audience is silent in both sharing and reacting to political opinions. With fake news that are being shared added to this inaction, the environment in which the Turkish audience is active cannot be regarded as an homogeneous place that provides users with an objective and healthy platform to exchange opinions and information.

According to the 2015 study of Eroğlu and Yılmaz, more than 60% of Turkish scholars that were participated in the survey conducted by the authors believed that the censorship online has affected their academic research (63,8%) and their motivation to post their thoughts online (68,1%)¹¹¹. Both with devaluating the meaning of an act and discouraging people from sharing thoughts openly, social media contributes more than anticipated to the spiral of silence in that sense. Therefore, it seems that it is too optimistic to think about internet's ability to give people a sudden freedom, independent from what they are experiencing in their lives outside. The overall profile of an ordinary citizen from the information above would be a person, who continuously scrolls down in his/her social media account and sees posts other people share, likes these posts, shares him/herself some of them in own account and does not have the real opportunity to check which of the 'important' posts are based on real stories and which are based on false news. The person would also be thinking that the news from other than major sources are more accurate. This point, however, is not specific to Turkey. In the United Kingdom for example, as Anstead et.al. quotes from Coleman et.al.'s study, "for working class citizens, information posted on the internet by *people like them* had more credibility than

109 Ibid.

110 Tosunay and Çolak, "Sosyal Medyada Otosansür", p. 938.

111 Eroğlu, Şahika and Bülent Yılmaz, "Akademisyenlerin Türkiye'de İnternet Sansürüne Yönelik Yaklaşımları: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Örneği", *Bilgi Dünyası*, 16 (1), 2015, pp. 91-92.

news from elite journalists”¹¹². It is an environment that is possible to bomb people with well-engineered manipulative messages, because actually, trusting ordinary people can be a sign of partisan reading since it is clear that a person makes a choice between two sources according to his/her belief. It is similar to what is called ‘bush telegraph’, or ‘fısıltı gazetesi’ in Turkish. ‘Bush telegraph’ mostly refers to ‘false news’ that are disseminated by ordinary people. While these news may not be produced especially for agitating public, the outcome, especially online, would be agitating.

Also people with official power may use social media and messages similar to ‘bush telegraph’ in style. Social media can be controlled and kept inside desired boundaries by officially supplying the content that wanted to be debated by the citizens. This can be done by having user accounts, just like any other person. In the Turkish case, as well as in some foreign cases, even municipalities have social media accounts that interact with users. Some of the most famous Turkish official *Twitter* accounts are Ankara Metropolitan Mayor İ. Melih Gökçek’s account (@06melihgokcek) and Municipality of Kadıköy’s official account (@kadikoybelediye). Former is a personal account of Gökçek himself which, he has been using to communicate with people living in his area of responsibility -in appearance- and the latter is an official social media account of the Municipality’s public affairs department which is established for interacting people residing there. Turkish President and Prime Minister, other ministers have their own *Twitter* accounts, thereby they are already engaged in politics on social media¹¹³. These accounts are different in terms of effects and their messages’ magnitudes comparing with ordinary citizens.

An ordinary message that been shared through an official account or a political figure may steer a discussion easily and because of the authoritative power the

112 Ampofo, Lawrance, Nick Anstead and Ben O’Loughlin, “Trust, Confidence, Credibility: Citizen Responses on Twitter to Opinion Polls During the 2010 UK General Election”, in *Social Media and Democracy*, Loader and Mercea (eds.), p. 95. Emphasis in original.

113 President of Turkey: @RT_Erdogan and @tcbestepe ; Prime Minister: @TC_Basbakan.

person has, these messages can even be seen as direct signals of threat. For example in 2011, İ. Melih Gökçek has posted a message on *Twitter*, saying that his attorney would be screening all tweets that being posted in reply to Melih Gökçek and would take necessary legal actions against the users who insulted Gökçek¹¹⁴. This was more than enough to discourage people from expressing themselves openly on social media. According to the 2013 publication of *Türk Sağlık-Sen* (Turkish Health Union), civil servants had been subjected to investigations because of their actions on social media¹¹⁵. On different dates, various people were either investigated or jailed over charges related “insulting the President of Turkish Republic” because of their messages on social media¹¹⁶. Especially celebrities and politicians who have been prosecuted because of their messages on social media drew attention because of these people’s status among citizens. For example, Fazıl Say, a very famous Turkish pianist and compositor was sentenced because of one of his tweets that allegedly insulted “religious beliefs of a part of the society”¹¹⁷. Because of the lack of sufficient legal protection of users’ rights online, it can be argued that Turkish public is restricted in terms of social media activities. Prosecutions of celebrities are empowering the situation. It can help creating the perception among ordinary citizens such as, “they even prosecute these whealthy and famous individuals”. Threatening people with prosecution, a person with a governmental authority in the background can be argued to be very different from an ordinary citizen’s messages on social media. The gravity an official body’s messages have should be expected to be stronger than an ordinary citizen.

114 <https://twitter.com/06melihgokcek/status/24256744049868801> (Accessed: 24.04.2017)

115 “Facebook Memurların Kabusu Oldu”, *Türk Sağlık-Sen*, 2013, http://www.turksagliksen.org.tr/facebook-memurlarin-kabusu-oldu_arsiv_12103 (Accessed: 17.07.2017)

116 “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’a Sosyal Medyadan Hakarete Hapis”, *Habertürk*, 27.05.2016, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1245245-cumhurbaskani-erdogana-sosyal-medyadan-hakarete-hapis-cezasi> (Accessed: 18.07.2017); “Erdoğan’a Hakaret’te Bugün: İhbar Üzerine Sosyal Medya Paylaşımından Tutuklama”, *Diken*, 26.08.2016, <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogana-hakarete-bugun-ihbar-uzerine-sosyal-medya-paylasimina-tutuklama/> (Accessed: 18.07.2017)

117 “Fazıl Say’ın Mahkumiyet Gerekçesi”, *Bianet*, 18.04.2013, <http://bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/145972-fazil-say-in-mahkumiyet-gerekcesi> (Accessed: 19.07.2017)

Apart from the legal action threats from officials and their messages that contribute in setting the agenda online and silence other users, another one of the main factors that contributes to spiral of silence on social media in contemporary Turkey is a group of people who are called “aktrol”s. They are a great number of users on various social media platforms who support AKP and its policies fanatically and try to saturate major dissident users on a platform by ‘trolling’¹¹⁸; verbally abusing, insulting, threatening with -personal- legal action and physical harm. Although the term “aktrol” has first been mentioned in 2012¹¹⁹, Adaklı argues that their activity has increased after the election held in 7th of June, 2014¹²⁰. This increase of activity can be understood, since this election was the first loss of power of single party government in past 12 years. These “aktrol” groups are similar to “fifty cents army” of China, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, though in Chinese experience, this “fifty cents army” can be argued to act like a mediator between the government and citizens in most situations¹²¹, therefore some of them cannot be called directly as trolls, and there is no proof that all *aktrols* are being paid by the government at that time. However, AKP has an official social media office that determines the content of propaganda of AKP and general public relations agenda¹²². This proves that there is a body that affects the content and the ‘unofficial’ supporters of AKP would share on social media. With the contribution of *aktrols* and its online public affairs office, the ruling party has already engaged with social media in Turkey, thus it can be argued that the agenda setting is a matter of social media usage in Turkey.

118 “Trolling: (7) to post inflammatory or inappropriate messages or comments on (the Internet, especially a message board) for the purpose of upsetting other users and provoking a response”, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/trolling> (Accessed: 26.04.2017)

119 Adaklı, Gülseren, “Kürt Sorununun ‘Çözüm Süreci’ Biterken AKP Medyası ve Psikolojik Savaş”, *Mülkiye Dergisi*, 39 (4), 2015, p. 33.

120 Ibid., p. 23.

121 Han, “Manufacturing Consent in Cyberspace”, p. 117.

122 Altuncu, Özgür and Yaşar Kaçmaz, “İşte AKP’nin ‘Yeni Türkiye Digital[sic] Ofisi’: 200 Kişi, 24 Saat, Çift Vardiya.” *Radikal*, 08.05.2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/iste-akpnin-yeni-turkiye-digital-ofisi-200-kisi-24-saat-cift-vardiya-1352335/> (Accessed: 24.04.2017)

The efforts do not stop with actively influencing content by creating alternative contents and discouraging people by bullying, but also blocking what is being shared on social media and the internet can be observed. This is where the government institutions turn out to be the biggest gatekeepers on internet. In 2007, Law No. 5651 on the Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of Such Publication has entered in force¹²³. It gave Telecommunications Communications Presidency (TİB) the authority of ex officio blocking of a web page¹²⁴. With this law, it is clear to say that the online censorship has been now codified and legalized in Turkey. After the implementation of it, between November 2007 until October 2008, authorities blocked accessing to 1115 web pages from Turkey, while 77% of these actions were taken ex officio by TİB¹²⁵. With the amendment to the Law in 2016, TİB was repealed and the person to ex officio block access is now the president of Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK)¹²⁶. This means that one institution acts as the gatekeeper about the content on the internet and one person, the president of BTK himself can block any web site that he would like to. The number of blocked websites were 110,700 in 2015¹²⁷. One of the most recent and the most famous blocking order was issued about Wikipedia.org on 29 April, 2017¹²⁸.

However, internet is a universe that its boundaries are not so rigid. Most of the blockade of authorities could be surpassed by different methods, the most popular

123 Akdeniz, Yaman, and Kerem Altıparmak, *İnternet: Girilmesi Tehlikeli ve Yasaktır*, İmaj, 2008, p. 15.

124 “Erişimin Engellenmesi Kararı ve Yerine Getirilmesi”, Madde 8 (4), *İnternet Ortamında Yapılan Yayınların Düzenlenmesi ve Bu Yayınlar Yoluyla İşlenen Suçlarla Mücadele Edilmesi Hakkında Kanun*, No: 5651, 2007, <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5651.pdf> (Accessed: 19.07.2017)

125 Akdeniz and Altıparmak, *İnternet: Girilmesi Tehlikeli ve Yasaktır*, p. 27.

126 Geçici Madde 4 (1), *İnternet Ortamında Yapılan Yayınların Düzenlenmesi ve Bu Yayınlar Yoluyla İşlenen Suçlarla Mücadele Edilmesi Hakkında Kanun*, No: 5651.

127 “Turkey”, in *Comparative Study on Blocking, Filtering and Take-Down of Illegal Internet Content*, Swiss Institute of Comparative Law: Lausanne, 2015, p. 711.

128 Maher, Katherina, “Wikimedia Vakfı Türk Makamlarından Vikipedi Erişimini Yeniden Sağlamasını Talep Ediyor”, 30.04.2017, <https://blog.wikimedia.org/tr/2017/04/30/wikimedia-vakfi-turk-makamlarindan-wikipedi-erisimini-yeniden-saglamasini-talep-ediyor/> (Accessed: 28.06.2017)

ones are changing the DNS (Domain Name System) numbers, using proxy or VPN (Virtual Private Network) servers. DNS servers are like address books of internet. Every web page that is known as, for example, abc.com has a unique IP (Internet Protocol) number which works like a constant address of a house. abc.com is a domain name, and it is associated with a constant IP number which points to a physical server location, every time a domain name changes its location, the IP number changes, just as it happens in real life when Holmes family moves from Baker Street 201B to Downing Street 10. They are the same Holmes family, though their address has changed. Therefore, every time a user writes a web page address to the address bar, the browser first sends this address to a DNS server, this server seeks for the indexed IP number of that name and directs user to the desired web page.

TİB (later BTK) used to make blocking by only deleting -or forcing the services to delete- related web page's DNS records from the Turkish DNS services, which could be easily surpassed by changing DNS numbers to another one. Then TİB began forcing ISPs (Internet Service Providers, e.g. Superonline) to block directly reaching dedicated IPs of these web sites from inside of Turkey. Then Turkish users started using VPN services. While VPN is commonly used by various commercial and governmental agencies for security reasons, since it actually sets an encrypted tunnel between two computers that theoretically no one can see the transmission and steal important data, these security features enable users to by-pass web-pages blockades. With a VPN software, the computer first establishes a secure connection with another server abroad (e.g. Germany), then the desired web page is reached from that location. Thus, the ISPs in Turkey can only see that the user is connected to a 'legitimate' web server in Germany and since they cannot read the data between the user and the German server because of the encryption, the censorship is by-passed. There are lots of VPN services that basically work in that logic, both paid and free. The most popular ones in Turkey are ZenMate, TunnelBear, Private Tunnel, Hotspot Shield. After they became too popular in Turkey, the government started blocking

these VPN services, too¹²⁹. Even if there are different methods that a person can establish one's own VPN server abroad by using hosting services¹³⁰, with blocking user-friendly options, the government seems to gain an excessive control over online content being presented to Turkish public, since it is impossible to expect everybody using computer is both interested in DIY (Do It Yourself) culture and has enough technical knowledge to do it. Neither people have enough information and desire to be engaged with such complex methods to overcome internet censors, nor it would be the way people could reach information in a free and democratic society.

Government's and its institutions' efforts in controlling online environment were not left without responses on legal basis. Some scholars have already appealed in different high courts of Turkey. One of them is the appeal to the decision of a court that blocks 357 different websites¹³¹ because of images and videos assistant of private secretary of the then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan kicking a citizen during a demonstration after an accident happened in a coal mine in 2014, with 301 deaths¹³². Other appeals are to a decision that blocks 309 another websites on the ground that they are making terrorist propaganda¹³³, to the decision of blocking Charlie Hebdo websites of which office was attacked by Islamist terrorists¹³⁴, decisions to block accessing to *Youtube*¹³⁵ and *Twitter*¹³⁶ websites. However, even if some of the appeals are accepted by the courts, the need of going to a court to lift a

129 "VPN servisleri engellendi", *Gazete Duvar*, 05.11.2016, <http://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/teknoloji/2016/11/05/vpn-servisleri-engellendi/> (Accessed: 26.04.2017)

130 <https://www.digitalocean.com/community/tutorials/how-to-set-up-an-openvpn-server-on-ubuntu-16-04> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

131 <http://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/?p=1589> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

132 "Protestoya Tekmeli Yanıt", *Hürriyet*, 15.05.2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/protestoya-tekmeli-yanit-26420976> (Accessed: 19.07.2017)

133 <http://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/?p=1549> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

134 <http://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/?p=1544> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

135 <http://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/?p=1533> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

136 <http://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/?p=1530> (Accessed: 28.04.2017)

ban decision for a website means that there is a de-facto censorship and when nobody resists to it, it would become the rule. With all the facts that were written above, it is safe to say that Çildan et.al.'s arguments on neutrality of social media are not accurate enough, when there is a political body that wants to control the environment on internet and there are already masses that being bombed with a great amount of false information and refrain from sharing opinion because of the actions of the political authority. And the relative power that an individual would have on social media cannot be argued to be equal to the effectiveness of a politically popular figure or a person that politically feels confident of being ideologically supported by the political authority. Political authority has various methods to limit the reachability of internet and to transform the cyber environment by engaging own users and misinformation channels on social media. These efforts result in creation of a spiral of silence and strenghtening gatekeeping.

3.2. Turkish Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Ersin Kalaycıoğlu in his 2009 work argues that “International relations and foreign policy rarely captures the attention of voters in Turkey; most voters are oriented towards the major political parties through party identification and economic concerns”¹³⁷. While Kalaycıoğlu also says that “voters ... show little interest or understanding in foreign policy matters.”¹³⁸, with the finding, it should be read that voters are totally dependent to their parties for information and stance when it comes to foreign policy towards a country or in general. It also makes it possible to say that a voter's opinion regarding to foreign policy can also be manipulated by external factors, since he/she is dependent on information given by others. Being open to information sent by anybody on internet without verification, one risks being vulnerable to propaganda. With a mass media which is under control by political figures, which has other reasons to be self-censored or politically one-sided, it is clear that one can never be sure that he/she is getting accurate information.

¹³⁷ Kalaycıoğlu, Ersin, “Public Choice and Foreign Affairs: Democracy and International Relations in Turkey”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40 (40), 2009, p. 80.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

According to studies conducted in the United States during 1950s, scholars argued that individuals' opinions on foreign policy would not affect their voting preferences¹³⁹. That is to say, that governments' foreign policy actions have less importance in the eyes of the voters and therefore it can be said that governments are more independent while determining their foreign policies. On the contrary, there are some findings that individuals' opinions on foreign policy are affected the most by their political party choices¹⁴⁰. It can be attributed to the lack of information of public regarding to foreign policy decisions and decision making process itself. However, according to a research conducted in the past years in the USA concluded that very few people from the public have information about foreign policy issues¹⁴¹. With the commercialisation of internet, now it can be expected that the public is well-informed and more interested in foreign issues. Boundaries of domestic politics and international politics seem to be more transparent and interactive¹⁴². However, based on the arguments in the previous pages, it can be said that internet's contribution in acquiring true information on foreign policy in Turkey would also be limited, need a level of intellectual background to differentiate and reach meaningful information. The general problems regarding social media and internet such as partisan reading, agenda setting and false information's relative unavoidability is expected to be effective also on shaping of a online public opinion on foreign relations. To see whether internet and social media made any difference regarding to public opinion's relation to foreign policy issues in Turkey, a general understanding of public opinion – foreign policy relation regarding Turkey is needed.

139 Almond, Gabriel, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, Brace: Harcourt, 1950, p. 69, Cited in: Hatipoğlu, Emre, Osman Zeki Gökçe, Berkay Dinçer, and Yücel Saygın, "Sosyal Medya ve Türk Dış Politikası: Kobani Tweetleri Üzerinden Türk Dış Politikası Algısı", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 13 (52), 2016, p. 177.

140 Ibid., p. 178.

141 Aldrich, John H., John L. Sullivan and Eugene Borgida, "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting : Do Presidential Candidates 'Waltz Before A Blind Audience ?'", *The American Political Science Review*, 83 (1), 1989, p. 124.

142 Duran, Burhanettin, "Türk Dış Politikasının İç Siyaset Boyutu : 2010 Değerlendirmesi.", in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı*, Duran, Burhanettin, Kemal İnât and Mesut Özcan (eds.), SETA Yayınları: Ankara, 2010, p. 17.

Some studies show that Turkish individuals' attitudes toward foreign policy are mostly affected by their economic expectations¹⁴³. This is to say that Turkish individuals' opinions on a certain foreign policy issue can easily change or can easily be manipulated, as it is not bound with an ethical or other philosophical stance. During AKP's first ten years of ruling, Turkish foreign policy became something that AKP tried to highlight as a governmental success. "Zero problems with neighbours" has been the 'motto' of then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu and was pointing to a break from the defensive foreign policy understanding and aimed to a pro-active foreign policy towards economic/cultural peripheries of Turkey, which are ex-Ottoman Empire countries¹⁴⁴. This was a great propaganda material for AKP at that time as it was presented as a great transformation in understanding of Balkan and Arab states in the eyes of Turkish public. In addition to its uniqueness in terms of perception of these regions, the economic dimension of this foreign policy on itself was a plus for AKP in domestic politics, because one of the goals of this policy was to make Turkish foreign trade take off, both export and import. This activism has helped AKP in terms of domestic politics, as Duran suggests¹⁴⁵. It gave a momentum which arguably brought some economic prosperity to the country through foreign trade as the export has increased¹⁴⁶.

With this momentum, when the Arab Spring wave hit Syria, Turkey's neighbour and one of the countries that Turkey had a good economic relationship, it can be said that it did not cause too much public concern especially among AKP supporters. On the scale of official policies, refugees were welcomed as guests who fled from the war in their home country. Some time after the influx of refugees into country, the government began a bargaining operation with the European Union (EU) in return

143 Hatipoğlu et.al., "Sosyal Medya ve Türk Dış Politikası: Kobani Tweetleri Üzerinden Türk Dış Politikası Algısı", p. 179.

144 Uslu, Nasuh, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Orta Doğu Yaklaşımı", *Bilgi*, 52, 2010, pp. 149-150.

145 Duran, "Türk Dış Politikasının İç Siyaset Boyutu", p. 24.

146 Türkiye, *Dış Ticaret-Yıllara Göre İhracat (Milyon \$) (Yıllık), 2009-2016*, Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr/gosterge/?locale=tr> (Accessed: 05.09.2017)

for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens within the Schengen Area, even sometimes threatening the EU countries with releasing all the refugees through the borders with Bulgaria¹⁴⁷. In 2016, Turkey reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) \$6.0 Billion donation, and 99% of it was directed to assist Syrian refugees¹⁴⁸. The thing here is that Turkey donated the second highest amount, while the USA is the one who donated the most. While the two countries' donated amount is close to each, their GDP (Gross National Product) and GNI (Gross National Income) numbers are in no comparison¹⁴⁹. Therefore it is clear that the donations have an effect on Turkish economy, in addition, the economic burden that around 3 million refugees cause started being felt by the public and thoughts against refugees and news relating the adverse effects of taking so many refugees are expressed and shown more than before. According to a German Marshall Funds survey conducted in Turkey in 2015, 84% of the respondents were worried about refugees from Syria¹⁵⁰. While there is only one fact, people tend to see it as it fits to their prejudices and other concerns, in other words, interpreting the situation according to their world beliefs. Foreign policy is not an exception to that. While there is not too much attention to the foreign policy, the attention towards it tends to be affected by some limited concerns when there is an exceptional situation in international relations.

During the referendum campaigns in Turkey before the voting on 16 April 2017, a series of small-medium scale diplomatic crises occurred. The mainstream media gave the news of the crisis in the Netherlands, in which the Minister of Family and

147 "Erdoğan'dan AB'ye: 'Mültecileri otobüsle göndeririz'", *BBC*, 08.02.2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/02/160208_erdogan_juncker_tusk (Accessed: 22.05.2017)

148 "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2017", Development Initiatives, <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GHA-Report-2017-Full-report.pdf> (Accessed: 29.06.2017)

149 "Gross Domestic Product", OECD, <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm> (Accessed: 05.09.2017) and "Gross National Income", OECD, <https://data.oecd.org/natincome/gross-national-income.htm> (Accessed: 05.09.2017)

150 *Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015*, German Marshall Funds of the United States: New York, 2015, p. 12.

Social Policies, Dr. Fatma Kaya were refused to enter to the country to have a pre-referendum meeting with Turkish voters. The news were focused on the human rights, segregation, and drew a picture as Turkish mission was fighting for human rights without any other intention and the European countries were fascist countries as a whole¹⁵¹. The meetings were cancelled in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, and these cancellations were criticized by the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan¹⁵². The situation seems to be used by AKP as a means to raise the nationalistic and Islamist reactions in the public against the ‘Christian’ Europe before the 16 April referendum, one can conclude, if the attitudes of presenting the situation by television channels and newspapers were observed. Here it is clear that Herman and Chomsky’s observations about media’s ability to serve societal purposes by “framing of issues, filtering of information and emphasis and tone”¹⁵³ were coherent, as Turkish mass media presented European countries as non-democratic and Turkey as a world-class democracy, so to say. Resulted in gatekeeping, media acted according to their common interests with the political authority and set the agenda accordingly.

The Turkish online public regarding to foreign affairs, can be argued, to have lacked accurate information for a long time, as their means of getting information have been manipulated and used by political powers in order to get desired result (consent) from the public. Public in general lacks democratic tools to challenge the established order especially in countries where elites in power experience great authority. While it was argued that internet and social media could change the situation in favour of public in reaching the information from different sources and could provide them with a platform to express themselves freely and feel ‘out of the

151 “Hollanda’da neler yaşandı? Bakan Kaya’dan önemli açıklamalar”, *TRT Haber*, 12.03.2017, <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/hollandada-neler-yasandi-bakan-kayadan-onemli-aciklamalar-303462.html> (Accessed: 22.05.2017)

152 “Bakanların katılacağı etkinlikler, hangi ülkelerde, neden iptal edildi?”, *T24*, 11.03.2017, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/bakanlarin-katilacagi-etkinlikler-hangi-ulkelerde-neden-iptal-edildi,393142> (Accessed: 22.05.2017)

153 Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 298.

box', the internet can also serve the quite opposite purposes, in a country like Turkey for example, as it was presented in this chapter. For Turkish public opinion, these conclusions can be made: The intellectual capacity of a user is important, which is dependent to the education that one gets through his/her life, as it is important to check facts on the internet and have an opinion based on them. Second, the internet is not totally immune to control of government in Turkey, as there is always a way to control it. So, the internet is not for granted, and the political authority can simply totally or partially block a content and hide it from its citizens. While this censorship could be overtaken by individual efforts, it is not easy for a person who is not an expert on computers. In addition to that, the prosecution of individuals based on their messages on social media is also a limiting factor to the online public opinion. Third, through both manipulated content and other users' (*Aktrols*, for example) interventions, the environment can be steered to a desired way and the climate of it can be easily changed. In the end, having the means of democracy would not mean as much as it was argued, and the efforts would be left premature because of the actors' intellectual deficiencies. Even though a well aware, educated person who succeeded in reaching accurate information and intellectually capable of analysing what is objectively true and false does not mean that this person is not going to become apolitical and more open-minded. Because of partisan reading, internet usage does not guarantee consumption of pluralistic information¹⁵⁴, and this person could simply prefer which of the sources please him/her most. Even if this user could connect with opposite thoughts and can read other news than his/her personal/ideological preferences, "the heightened heterogeneity of the social media networks does not necessarily mean that individuals become more open-minded and moderate"¹⁵⁵, and the person can simply stay politically polarized. Indeed, Lee et.al. suggests that the high heterogeneity and political discussion are associated with

154 Ceron, Andrea and Vincenzo Memoli, "Flames and Debates: Do Social Media Affect Satisfaction with Democracy?", *Social Indicators Research*, 126 (1), 2016, p. 229.

155 Lee, Jae Kook, Jihyang Choi, Cheonsoo Kim and Yonghwan Kim, "Social Media, Network Heterogeneity, and Opinion Polarization", *Journal of Communication*, 64 (4), 2014, p. 715.

more polarized opinion about party and ideology¹⁵⁶. This deduction also seems to be coherent with the Turkish case. Since the public opinion on foreign policy issues is highly affected by preferred political party's stance, online public opinion would also be in accordance with this.

In addition to these, as discussed in the previous chapter, a majority of social media users still rely on accounts of traditional mass media and therefore use them as a source in terms of news. While this could be a positive point in terms of tackling fake news, it also reflects that people are getting news from traditional media, and using social media for 'sharing' them. In that regard, it can be argued that social media is a factor that helps disseminating the views that were on traditional media, therefore amplifying them. As it was shown in this chapter, Turkish users mostly follow others and rarely participate in discussions, while mostly share news articles and others' messages. In other words, actions and interaction on social media, in some countries and in some situations, could be so limited and passive that the existence of it does not make any difference in terms of democratising public opinion and enriching knowledge of the public and interaction. In the next chapter, these two assumptions will be exemplified by analysing the tweets that were posted in the aftermath of a foreign policy incident, caused by the downing of a Russian war plane near the border between Turkey and Syria on 24th of the November, 2015.

156 Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE RUSSIAN PLANE CRISIS (2015) AND TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION

ONLINE

The Russian plane crisis, which happened right after a heated election period in Turkey in 2015, is chosen to test the main arguments of this thesis which were put forward in the previous chapters, as it involved different dimensions of interests of Turkish public, from political to economic, and it affected the stance of Turkey regarding different foreign policy issues, especially in the Syrian Civil War. Economically, it has not just affected the stance of Turkey, but it also directly affected the Turkish economy, thus it affected the public indirectly but practically. It is one of the biggest crises that happened during the AKP rule, and it is the only occasion in this era that Turkey had to militarily face with a power that competes with the United States. Because of these aspects, it created a massive interest among the public, as well as online. That is why this crisis is selected as a perfect test case to study public opinion online regarding to foreign policy issues.

International crises are different from domestic ones, as they occur in the name of two or more states and usually disregard the individuals included in a nation. One person can be affected by an international crisis even if that person is in another country thousands of kilometers away, by just being the citizen of the country that is subjected to the crisis. Therefore international crises would provide a good setting for nation-wide propaganda, and mass media's importance can also be argued to increase. Also, during these crises, all citizens can be expected to aim their country's well-being, however it is not to argue that everybody should act in the same way. Their methods or ideas could differ in ensuring the state's well-being, or survival, though the aim would be common. This is what would be evident in social media data. While as argued previous chapter, some users may not be using social media in their accounts but for some specific goal or reason, such as promoting a desired message or idea, the content in the collected data should be regarded as citizens'

different ideas on their state's well-being by others, and then be separated according to their real aims.

As argued in the previous chapter, however, it can be said that knowledge of the Turkish public on foreign affairs is limited. This makes public's reactions to the international incidents more interesting and worth examining to see the approximate level of knowledge of the public about foreign policy. As was shown that Turkish online public opinion is vulnerable to all of the concepts that were discussed in the second chapter such as spiral of silence, agenda setting and gatekeeping. The combination of this vulnerability with a foreign incident would uncover problems which could not be seen otherwise, since the public's knowledge is more dependent on official accounts when it comes to a foreign policy incident.

The Russian plane crisis is also important because of the fact that the newly elected government immediately found itself in one of the biggest crises in Turkish history. The summer before the crisis has witnessed one election and a period of uncertainty in Turkey, when then the ruling party AKP could not get enough majority in the parliament to form a government on its own. After the half-hearted efforts to form a coalition, the elections are renewed on the 1st of November, 2015, and the newly elected AKP cabinet officially started working on the 25th of November, 2015.

The crisis also happened after the Russian and American military forces agreed on some of the details related to the future of Syria and the groups fighting. Turkey's position in the Syrian Civil War therefore became uncertain after the United States changed its stance with other western countries. In addition, Turkmens in the Bayırbucak region started to be used as a propaganda material in Turkish media before the plane crisis, that can be said to legitimise Turkish interventionist behaviour, however it can be said that Turkey was left alone in that matter in international arena. Therefore the Russian plane crisis was an incident that tested Turkish foreign policy in a very fragile environment.

4.1. The Russian Plane Crisis

4.1.1. The Incident and the International Response

On the 24th of November, 2015, Turkish news sources announced that the Turkish General Staff declared that the Turkish Air Force shot down a warplane near the border with Syria. The first news report about this was at 09:31¹⁵⁷. This report, quoting Office of the Presidency, said that the plane was a Russian one. However, according to the same report, the Turkish General Staff announced that the plane's nationality was unknown. *Sabah*, known as a pro-government newspaper, gave the news about this incident as “nationality of the plane is unidentified”, while using the “the Russian Plane” statement in the title of this report¹⁵⁸, which was released around 11 o'clock, while it had already reported that the downed plane is to be a Russian plane at 09:37¹⁵⁹. The official statement by the Turkish General Staff was made at 10:55, according to archive.org's¹⁶⁰ snapshot of the Turkish military's official website¹⁶¹, because the original statement is not available on the official website itself anymore. While the General Staff said that the plane's nationality was unidentified, the Turkish Presidency has made an announcement, stating that the nationality of the downed plane was ‘presumed to be’ a Russian plane, according to news reports at 10:45¹⁶², which is before the Turkish General Staff's now-

157 “Suriye Sınırında Rus Savaş Uçağı Düşürüldü”, *Habertürk*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1157674-suriye-sinirinda-ucak-dustu> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

158 “TSK'dan flaş Rus uçağı açıklaması”, *Sabah*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/11/24/tskdan-flas-rus-ucagi-aciklamasi> (Accessed: 10.05.2017)

159 “Suriye Sınırında Uçak Düşürüldü”, *Sabah*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suriye-sinirinda-ucak-dusuruldu-40017924> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

160 A website that takes snapshots of websites on different dates. See: <https://web.archive.org/> (Accessed: 31.07.2017)

161 https://web.archive.org/web/20151124152949/http://www.tsk.tr/3_basin_yayin_faaliyetleri/3_1_basin_aciklamalari/2015/ba_97.html (Accessed: 30.07.2017)

162 “Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kaynaklarından Düşürülen Uçakla İlgili İkinci Açıklama”, *Hürriyet*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskanligi-kaynaklarindan-dusurulen-ucakla-ilgili-ikinci->

unavailable statement. The Russian Ministry of Defence has declared that "... an aircraft from the Russian air group in the Syrian Arab Republic crashed on the territory of Syria supposedly shot down from the ground."¹⁶³ The time of the announcement was 11:59 (UTC+3), 10:59 in Turkish local time (UTC+2). Before that, *Sputnik*, a Russian newspaper reported that an "unidentified" plane was shot down near Turkish – Syrian border referring to Turkish news sites¹⁶⁴. As it can be seen, the first four hours after the incident the information was confused and a clear impression of what happened cannot be understood. However, these conflicting statements and news reports from the Turkish side show that, at that time either the Turkish side was not sure about the nationality of the plane and there were only speculations about it among the Turkish newspapers, or the Turkish side tried to soften the reactions from both the Russian officials and the Turkish opposition, making confusing statements as a diplomatic manoeuvre.

The incident received a great coverage on international scale, as it has happened right on the border between Syria and Turkey. Since there are different armed groups in Syria and major states like the USA and the Russian Federation have been supporting different fractions in the civil war since 2011, a NATO member's downing of a Russian military plane got great attention especially from the other NATO members. Under international spotlight, the Turkish side announced, as reported in the Turkish daily newspaper *Hürriyet*, that the government immediately began taking necessary actions in order to inform the United Nations and NATO, relating the incident, informed the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban ki Mun with a diplomatic letter and emphasized that Turkey defended its

[aciklama-40017980](#) (Accessed 11.02.2017)

163 "Russian aircraft Su-24 crashed in Syria", Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 24.11.2015, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12066609@egNews (Accessed: 02.08.2017)

164 "Unidentified Plane Crashes in Syria on Border With Turkey - Turkish TV", *Sputnik*, 24.11.2015, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201511241030636232-military-plane-crash-syria-turkey/> (Accessed: 30.07.2017)

airspace according to the rules of engagement¹⁶⁵. Furthermore, according to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Turkey called on an emergency meeting with NATO the day the incident happened, and informed its allies, including the United States¹⁶⁶. *Hürriyet*'s report was posted at 19:24 Turkish local time (UTC+2), while *The Guardian*'s was at 15:01 Eastern Standard Time (UTC-5), which was 22:01 Turkish local time.

The Turkish claims were based on “repetitive violation of Turkish airspace” by the Russian military aircraft and continuation of these violations despite the diplomatic notes exchanged with the Russian side regarding the issue in October in that year¹⁶⁷. Russia's counter arguments were based on the claims that the downed plane has not been in Turkish airspace when it was shot down¹⁶⁸. Right after that the Turkish Chief of Staff released a radar trace image which belonged to the downed plane's flying path according to Turkish military radars and claimed that the Russian aircraft flew over Turkish airspace for 17 seconds before it was shot down¹⁶⁹. According to the Russian accounts, though, the Russian plane had not violated the Turkish airspace and been flying parallel to the Turkish border over Syrian airspace. They claimed that they had a proof that the Russian plane did not violate the Turkish airspace¹⁷⁰. However, then they announced that “it will take time to decipher the black box” of

165 “Türkiye’den BM’ye Mektup: İhlal 17 Saniye Sürdü”, *Hürriyet*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiyeden-bmye-mektup-ihlal-17-saniye-surdu-40018319> (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

166 “Nato and UN seek calm over Turkish downing of Russian jet”, *The Guardian*, 24.11.2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/24/nato-and-un-seek-calm-over-turkish-downing-of-russian-jet> (Accessed: 30.07.2017)

167 “Rus savaş uçağı ikinci ihlalde vuruldu”, *Hürriyet*, 25.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/2-ihlalde-vuruldu-40018363> (Accessed: 12.02.2017)

168 “Rusya’dan ‘Uçak Türk Hava Sahasını İhlal Etmedi’ İddiası”, *Hürriyet*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/rusyadan-ilk-aciklama-40017988> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

169 “Genelkurmay’dan Düşürülen Uçakla İlgili Açıklama”, *Hürriyet*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/genelkurmaydan-dusurulen-ucakla-ilgili-aciklama-40017991> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

170 “Rus Uçağı 40. Dakikada Düşürüldü”, *Sputnik*, 18.12.2015, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/rusya/201512181019738490-rus-ucak-karakutu-turkiye-kayit/> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

the downed plane¹⁷¹. Therefore, the Russian side could not present any evidence from the black box and the incident is still unclear.

The main arguments from both sides can be considered partly unproven, and these caused a speculation over whether the Russian plane was cruising in Turkish airspace when it was shot by a missile from Turkish F-16 fighter jets. Different news sources and officials of different countries judged situation differently. Three main arguments were: 1) The Russian plane never violated Turkish airspace¹⁷² 2) The jet violated the Turkish airspace but shot by a missile while it was flying over Syrian territory already¹⁷³ and 3) The jet violated the Turkish airspace and shot while still flying over the Turkish territory, therefore Turkey had the right to shoot the plane. Each of these claims were accepted as truth by the different parties of the incident. It is not clear which of these claims is true, thus it is clear that the public as well as international community and states would have believed and supported the idea what is objectively plausible in their judgement, or fitting one's interests in their opinions.

4.1.2. The Official Responses

About the crisis, three main actors can be mentioned whose statements have determined the agenda time to time. The first actor is Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan, as the head of the state, had announced on 26th November, 2015, that “the warnings could be different if it was known that this was a Russian

171 “Rusya Kayıtları Açıklıyor”, *OdaTV*, 21.12.2015, <http://odatv.com/rusya-kayitlari-acikliyor-2112151200.html> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

172 “#SYRIA Russian Su-24 aircraft was shot down on its way to Hmeymim airbase in the territory of Syrian Arab Republic by a Turkish F-16 fighter”, 24.11.2015, https://twitter.com/mod_russia/status/669142504940429312 (Accessed: 02.06.2017) (Official Account of Russian Ministry of Defence) and according to *Sputnik*, the Ministry of Defence stated that “The analyses we have conducted showed that our plane has not violated the Turkish airspace”, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201511241019216204-turkiye-suriye-askeri-ucak-rusya/> (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

173 “Russian jet hit inside Syria after incursion into Turkey: U.S. official”, *Reuters*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-impact-idUSKBN0TE04M20151125> (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

plane”¹⁷⁴. While this statement can be understood as if the Turkish side would have never shot the plane down if they knew it was a Russian plane, it can also mean that different, maybe some extra, measures could have been taken before shooting it down. The mass media, especially the oppositional news have used these words with emphasizing the first meaning. The spokesperson of Turkish government, Numan Kurtulmuş also made a similar statement on the 27th November, saying that “this incident would have not happened if it was known that it was a Russian plane”¹⁷⁵. The second important statement that Erdoğan made was the one that he claimed that “the pilots are the ones who made the mistake”¹⁷⁶ on the 14th December, 2015. In its context, the statement claimed that the ‘Russian’ pilots were the ones who made the mistake of violating the Turkish airspace, thus rejecting the Turkish state’s wrongdoing. It can even be understood as a diplomatic move indicates that Russian state did not officially intend or order to violate the Turkish airspace and the incident was caused by pilots’ fault, therefore the Turkish side did not have hostile thoughts on the Russian government or did not believe that Russians had an agenda on harming relations between two countries. From the tension between two countries, the latter would be accepted as the motive of the statement, since the companies in the Russian Federation, especially tour operators started boycotting Turkey, according to a news article on the 25th of November, 2015¹⁷⁷. In addition to this, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s statements which will be shown in following pages on Turkey’s role and motives in shooting the plane might have caused the change in stance of the Turkish President. Around 20 days after the boycott news,

174 “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Rus Uçağı Olduğu Belli Olmuş Olsaydı”, *Hürriyet*, 26.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-rus-ucagi-oldugu-belli-olmus-olsaydi-40019383> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

175 “Numan Kurtulmuş: 'Rus Uçağı Olduğunu Bilseydik Bu Olay Olmazdı'”, *Milliyet*, 27.11.2015, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/numan-kurtulmus-rus-ucagi/siyaset/detay/2154872/default.htm> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

176 “Erdoğan: Yanlış Pilotlar Yaptı”, *Sputnik*, 14.12.2015, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201512141019646635-erdogan-yanlis-pilot/> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

177 “Russian Businesses Boycott Turkey over Jet Incident”, *RT*, 25.11.2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/323400-russia-business-turkey-jet/> (Accessed: 01.08.2017)

and some 15 days after Putin's statements, Erdoğan claims in his statement that the incident should not affect the economic relations between two countries, probably in order to soften the Russian economic reaction. While on the 26th November he was saying it would have ended differently if it was known that it was a Russian plane, on the 14th December the rhetoric changed into something implying that the Russian pilots are responsible for it and actually the important part of the 14th December speech was the part about the economic measures. It could be understood that in this 20 days period the Turkish side experienced or calculated the probable economic consequences of the incident.

The second political actor is then the Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu. A day after the incident, he spoke in the AKP's group meeting in the parliament, and emphasized the fact that the rules of engagement was ordered by himself in person. While nearly every news source reported it as "I personally ordered the shooting of the Russian plane", the exact statement should be heard to understand what he meant. The part regarding the issue says:

In this regard, as the operations in Bayırbucak region intensified especially last week, this matter has been highlighted in the security summit that we had right before our oath-taking ceremony on Sunday, it was stated that we will take any measures if any of these developments concludes with a violation of Turkish airspace and necessary orders were given to our armed forces by me in person¹⁷⁸

This statement was used by mass media regardless of their alignment with the government as "Davutoğlu ordered the shooting himself in person". While the two sentences sound similar, there is a difference as in his original statement Davutoğlu emphasizes the fact that he gave an order according to rules of engagement and regardless of the single incident, the latter suggests that Davutoğlu had time to decide whether to order the shooting of the plane, as if it was a one time decision. This difference makes sense when it comes to the pilots' accusation of being

178 "Bu çerçevede, özellikle son bir hafta içinde, Bayırbucak bölgesinde saldırıların yoğunlaşması üzerine, Pazar günü yemin törenimizden hemen önce yaptığımız güvenlik zirvesinde de bu husus bir kez daha vurgulanmış, bu gelişmeler eğer Türk hava sahası ihlaline yol açacak bir sonuç doğurursa her türlü tedbiri alacağımız dile getirilmiş ve o toplantıda da silahlı kuvvetlerimize de gerekli talimatlar bizzat tarafımızca verilmiştir.", 25.11.2015, <https://youtu.be/Aar4za4ipx8?t=2m47s> (Accessed: 05.07.2017)

members of Fethullah Gülen's terrorist organisation (FETÖ)¹⁷⁹, or comments that points to the conspiracy of some powers' interference by intentionally shooting the plane down in order to weaken Turkey's position in international arena¹⁸⁰. The first statement does not seem to conflict with the claim as pilots and others who were authorised to execute rules of engagement that were decided by the government. The second, and manipulated, version indicates that Davutoğlu was directly involved this single situation and he ordered the shooting of Russian plane in that moment, thus the claims about FETÖ pilots or other conspiracy theories point directly to Ahmet Davutoğlu. He rejected his direct involvement in the Russian plane incident on the 31st December, 2015, according to news articles¹⁸¹. However, as the head of the government, in his first statement he took the political responsibility of the incident and actually in his both statements he highlighted the fact that the pilots or other decision makers in the army followed the orders that were given by the government. The another fact that should be kept in mind that, according to his statement in the Parliament on 25th of November 2015, he underlined that the orders were revised after the airspace violations made by aircraft coming from Syrian airspace. The changing rhetoric at the end of December 2015, can again be attributed to the economic situation Turkey faced after the boycott decisions of Russian companies.

The third actor was the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. In a press conference after meeting with then French President François Hollande, on the 26th of November, 2015, Putin rejected the claim that the Turkish side had not known the nationality of the plane at the time of violation, saying "Our planes have

179 "Cem Küçük: Rus Uçağını Fethullahçılar Düşürmüş Olabilir", *Yeni Akit*, 27.12.2015, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/cem-kucuk-rus-ucagini-fetullahcilar-dusurmus-olabilir-116518.html> (Accessed: 05.07.2017)

180 "Rus Uçağı Tuzak mıydı", *Yeni Şafak*, 8.12.2015, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/abdulkadirselvi/rus-ucagi-tuzak-miydi-2023471> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

181 "Başbakan Davutoğlu: Pilot Uçağı Düşürmeseydi Suç İşlemiş Olurdu", *T24*, 31.12.2015, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/basbakan-davutoglu-pilot-ucagi-dusurmeseydi-suc-islemis-olurdu,322472> (Accessed: 01.08.2017)

identification marks that are easily visible. They were obviously our planes”¹⁸² and emphasizing that they already “warned [their] US partners in advance about where [Russian] pilots would be operating”¹⁸³. On the 30th of November, he answered a question relating Turkey as follows:

We have just received additional information proving that unfortunately, large volumes of oil, industrial volumes coming from oil fields controlled by ISIS and other terrorist organisations, enter Turkey’s territory. And we have every reason to believe that the decision to shoot down our plane was dictated by the desire to ensure the security of these oil supply routes to Turkey.¹⁸⁴

Russian news sources emphasized the claim that Turkey conducted an oil business with ISIS, however they argued that it is nothing to do with accusing Turkey and they are just “using these facts in their war on terror”¹⁸⁵. But the statements made by Putin had a strong effect on Russian press and therefore it became internationally popular.

The crisis deflated after some time, yet was not completely resolved, and it affected the relations between the Russian Federation and Turkish Republic for a long time period. The incident had economic and political consequences for both countries. Turkish tourism and agriculture sectors were affected on a large scale because of the embargo Russia issued on Turkish goods and lack of Russian tourists coming to Turkey later in 2016. While it was presented as “grocery is going to be cheaper in local markets” by Turkish newspapers¹⁸⁶, the decrease in export can be said to shake Turkish economy. In January, 2016, the overall export fell 22% comparing to the

182 “Press Statements and Answers to Journalists’ Questions Following Meeting with President of France Francois Hollande”, Official Transcript, the Kremlin: Moscow, 26.11.2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50792> (Accessed: 25.07.2017)

183 Ibid.

184 “Press Statement and Answers to Journalists’ Questions”, Official Transcript, the Kremlin: Moscow, 30.11.2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50850> (Accessed: 25.07.2017)

185 “Kremlin: Amacımız Türk Yönetimini Suçlamak Değil Terörle Mücadele”, *Sputnik*, 01.12.2015, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/rusya/201512011019391701-kremlin-turk-teror-mucadele/> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

186 “Rusya Krizi Meyve-Sebzeyi Ucuzlatacak!”, *Sözcü*, 27.11.2015, <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2015/ekonomi/rusya-krizi-meyve-sebzeyi-ucuzlatacak-996186/> (Accessed: 04.07.2017)

previous year's numbers¹⁸⁷. Because of the fact that Russian customers did stop travelling to Turkey for holiday, the loss broadened when the summer season has started and the total tourist numbers fell 30% in 2016 comparing to the previous year¹⁸⁸.

The Turkish public went into discussions within this climate during the first days and weeks, while everything was yet to be clear and especially Turkish officials were adjusting their positions according to the international community's and Russia's responses, economic expectations and domestic political goals. Therefore, the Turkish public opinion on Twitter seems to be conflicted as well.

4.2. The Turkish Public Opinion According to the Twitter Data

It is clear from this case study and before mentioned statistical data, that the Turkish audience is using *Twitter* actively. Though, being active does not always mean that there is productivity. In this section, collected data related to the Russian plane crisis are going to be analysed to test the arguments made in the previous chapter.

4.2.1. The Collected Data

The term “Rus uçağı” (the Russian plane) was searched through the *Twitter*'s search function and the whole results page was saved as text, chronologically. According to number of results, the tweets were saved on a 24 hour basis or these time span extended because of the fewer numbers. For the first day of the incident (24.11.2015), 7137 tweets came up from the search, and on second day (25.11.2015), this number has decreased to 2791. The search conducted from 24th November, 2015 to 31st July, 2016. A total of 31,500 tweets were collected. After the incident was uncovered, the tweet counts show differences from month to month. After the high number in November for only six days, in December, there were

187 “İhracatta Büyük Düşüş”, *Cumhuriyet*, 29.02.2016,
http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/ekonomi/489300/ihracatta_buyuk_dusus.html (Accessed: 04.07.2017)

188 “Turizm Geliri 2016’da Yüzde 29,7 Azaldı”, *BBC*, 31.01.2017,
<http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38808081> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

5,056 tweets, in January 2016, 2,250; February, 1,024; March, 556; April, 903; May, 1,085; June, 1,363; and in July, the number was 2,211. While it is understood that the popularity of the incident decreased between January and April, then the tweets increased because of some other incidents that were either connected to the incident or the audience and mass media claimed a coherence with it. These factors will be discussed in the following pages.

The tweets were then read through and patterns, repetitive messages, content that otherwise would be unrelated but posted in order to target some groups were noted and analysed to understand what they meant and why they were posted. Tweets were divided into some artificial groups according to their contents, as 'nationalistic', 'pro-government', 'dissident', 'news/information', and 'bullying'. Nationalistic tweets included tweets that only promote Turkish national identity, implicating that Turks should defend their territories and righteousness of the action the Turkish side took without consisting a hate speech or targeting any individual or group of people. Pro-government tweets are tweets that highlight the fact that the government is right about executing the rules of engagement and with this action these tweets are implying that this was the right action to take because of the interests of Turkey and because it was the right thing. Dissident tweets are tweets both making fun of the incident because of the possible consequences and the struggle these consequences might bring to Turkey; and tweets that criticise the government about provoking a conflict with a super power and a major actor in Syria, and/or the legitimacy and timing of the action. The tweets that are included in news/information are the tweets that mostly share information that is either neutral or claimed to be neutral and news articles on other news websites and social platforms. Since these news/information tweets are theoretically following a lead and sharing the content which is already on the internet or on traditional media, they actually make an example of the idea that social media has not got as much original content as it seems. The last group, the bullying tweets are the tweets especially focus on silencing people or discouraging them from defending an idea, by accusing, threatening, sometimes doing them based on false or manipulated facts.

4.2.2. The Analysis of Tweets

The majority of tweets are outgoing links to other web platforms, including other social media platforms and news websites, being in the above mentioned news/informational group of tweets. The most popular sources are *Cumhuriyet*, *Sol Haber*, *Hürriyet*, *T24*, *OdaTV*, *Sözcü*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Yeni Akit*. The result was reached by searching the web addresses of news websites. These are the news websites that a link to their pages were shared more than 100 times for each of them.

The first group of tweets to be analysed are bullying tweets. These tweets were shared mostly at the beginning of the incident, and changed characteristics after the nature of the incident and stance of the government have changed. These tweets, according to data in hand, have mostly been shared when the government had a powerful stance on the issue, or something happened that positively affects governments credibility.

From the tweets, it can be understood that some accounts try to legitimise downing of the jet regardless of the plane was inside or outside of the Turkish airspace. As exemplified and discussed below, there are many tweets that try to associate any critical reaction to alleged treason and Turkish hatred. It is already popular in Turkey to portray people who had any strong criticism or opposition to the government as traitors, or to try associating a dissident movement with any other criminal groups in order to suppress it. Indeed, all anti-AKP individual and groups were portrayed as if they were all so scared and sad about the downing incident and as if they were all pro-Russian in this situation, while all the opposing ideas about the Russian plane incident were portrayed as treason. And while a nationalistic discourse was used to label everyone who criticises the act of Turkish Airforce as traitor, all the critics are also reduced as the groups that are already anti-AKP and therefore criticising the incident just because their only aim is to criticise AKP. These two set of tweets draw a picture that show 1) Criticising the act of Turkey is an act of treason, 2) All anti-AKP groups or groups that AKP was already fighting against were assumed to be critical of the downing incident, because they are already enemies of AKP and they were traitors or supporting traitors. In some examples, all critics, terrorist groups are

degraded into one united body against AKP and Turkey, the differences between them has been disregarded, so even legal and legitimate criticisms were tried to be criminalized.

There are high number of tweets that called the incident as a help to Turkmens fighting against the Syrian (Assad) regime, because allegedly Russians were bombing Turkmens by claiming that they were bombing ISIS. The reaction from these users are in line with the discussion made in previous chapters that partisan reading limits a person's perception about an information or an event. The prejudices could be used in legitimising an act. In a tweet it says, "The russian aircraft we downed is just another humanitarian aid that we gave our Turkmen brothers."¹⁸⁹ In another tweet it says, "Our limits were tested. We know how to defend our Turkmen brothers. Even if it requires downing a Russian plane."¹⁹⁰ With these tweets the incident can be understood as if the Turkish government was already at an operation which was aimed at helping Turkmens and it gave the moral reason to shot down the plane, not the claim that the Russian plane violated the Turkish airspace. Secondly, Putin argued that there were no Turkmens or any other civilians in the area that the Russian Airforce operated in his statements on the 30th of November, 2015¹⁹¹. Indeed there was no proof presented by the Turkish government which falsified Putin. In addition to this nationalist rhetoric, also religious proximity was used to legitimise and confront critics about the incident: "There was no voice from people while Turkmens and Muslims were being killed. The world is shaken because of two downed Russian planes. Everyone panicked when we say stop to a tyrant."¹⁹²,

189 "Düşürdüğümüz rus uçağı Türkmen kardeşlerimize Yaptığımız insani yardımlardan Sadece bir tanesidir.", 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/HurDavalıyız/status/669243931171909633> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

190 "Haddimiz zorlandı. Türkmen kardeşlerimizi korumayı biliriz. Rus uçağı düşürme pahasına dahi olsa.", 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/TKDAhmetDilek/status/669258744258289664> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

191 "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions", 30.11.2015.

192 "Türkmen'ler,müslümanlar katledilirken hiç kimsenin sesi çıkmıyordu 2 Rus uçağı düştü dünya ayağa kalktı.Zalime dur deyince her kes panikledi", 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/MahmutYahya1/status/669176774614343680> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

“Assume the Russian plane didn’t commit a flying violation. Did not it take off to kill the muslims in Syria. You’ll be shattered infidel #Rus”¹⁹³. With these type of tweets a psychological pressure on the public which suggests “if you are a nationalist (a Turk) or a good Muslim, you should not be criticising the downing the jet or question the legitimacy of it in terms of international law because it helped our kin” was tried to be constituted. This is consistent with AKP’s self-acknowledged pro-active foreign policy stance and the insistence on interfering with the Syrian Civil War. However, the official stance of downing the jet is clear and it seems that on social media this stance has been bent. Even if there are Ahmet Davutoğlu’s above mentioned statements about Bayırbucak, it is clear to say that the government’s official response to the plane incident was far from directly involving Turkmens in the situation.

Some tweets associated the incident with a former tension happened between the opposition and the government and again tried to legitimise the shooting of the plane as it helped to Turkmens. “The Turkish government gave the Russian plane to Turkmens as a gift, instead of MİT trucks that were blocked because of the traitors.”¹⁹⁴, “The mentality that interfered with the MİT trucks mourns for the Russian plane.”¹⁹⁵ are two examples of that associates an alleged scandal known as “MİT trucks” among Turkish public. In early 2014, three trucks were stopped by Turkish gendarme and then some of the personnel travelling with the trucks had declared themselves as personnel from National Intelligence Agency of Turkey (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT), therefore those trucks had to be released as these personnel declared that the load was state secret¹⁹⁶. On the 29th of May, 2015, a

193 “Diyelim ki uçuş ihlali yapmadı rus uçağı. Suriyede müslüman öldürmek için hareket etmedimi. Dilim dilim dağılacaksın kâfir #Rus”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/eypdmr28/status/669226934933528576> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

194 “Türkiye Hükümeti; Türkmenler'e, vatan hainlerinin engellediği MİT tırları yerine Rus uçağı hediye etti.”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/byaradanakul/status/669104484174442496> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

195 “Mit tırlarına müdahale eden zihniyet Rus uçağı için yas tutar olmuş...”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/Anhalil/status/669078596967899136> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

196 “MİT Tırları Soruşturması: Neler Olmuştu”, BBC, 27.11.2015,

journalist, Can Dündar published an article claiming that these trucks were carrying firearms bound to ISIS headquarters, which meant that Turkey was helping terrorists via its own national intelligence¹⁹⁷. While Can Dündar and the newspaper's chief of Ankara bureau Erdem Gül were prosecuted on the base of espionage by publishing a state secret¹⁹⁸, the government claimed that the weapons were bound to Turkmen who were fighting in Syria¹⁹⁹. The journalists were jailed on the 26th of November, 2015. After that, the rhetoric "The problem is not the Russian plane, but the Russian servant"²⁰⁰ has risen. This was tweeted around 60 times at this day by different accounts. The claim that Turkey is supporting a terrorist organisation (ISIS) made by Russia is confronted with the claim that Turkey supported Turkmen in Syria, however it is not clear whether these Turkmen were also members of ISIS or they were just fighting for their lives and freedom against the Syrian government. According to international law, in both situation, Turkey might be acting against the law. Here it is seen that the online public does not seem to know that a country sending weapons to a combatant group fighting against a legitimate government in another country may be considered an unlawful act²⁰¹, or ethically does not have a problem with this in certain circumstances, for example when the combatant group is culturally close enough. Actually, Erdoğan himself does not seem to be aware what he implied on the 24th of November, 2015, when he said "what difference does it make if there are weapons in these trucks bound to Turkmen?"²⁰² The date of that statement is important, as it is the day that the Russian plane was shot. The users

http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/11/151127_mit_tirlari_neler_olmustu (Accessed: 03.06.2017)

197 Ibid.

198 "Can Dündar ve Erdem Gül Cezaevinde", *BBC*, 26.11.2015, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/11/151126_can_dunhdar (Accessed: 03.06.2017)

199 "MİT Tırları Soruşturması", *BBC*.

200 "'Mesele Rus uçağı değil Rus uşağıdır' ((Turgay Güler-Ülke TV)", 26.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/eroltayhan/status/669979705295028224> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

201 Pazarıcı, Hüseyin, *Uluslararası Hukuk*, Turhan Kitabevi: Ankara, 2004, pp. 533 – 534.

202 "Erdoğan: MİT tırları Türkmenlere yardım götüren tırlardı", 24.11.2015, <https://youtu.be/BY6gglT2gPI?t=40s> (Accessed: 01.08.2017)

supporting the act would not know about the international law, but it is clear to say that the political authority's affirmation increases the degree of ignorance.

Another group of tweets mention different opposition newspapers and attributed them fake headlines, aligning them with Russians or demonstrating as they were already known as liars. One of the most posted tweets is "Hurriyet: The downed plane was out for buying bread"²⁰³. These group of tweets refer to a killing of a 15 year old boy, Berkin Elvan. He was shot with a tear gas capsule on his head by a police officer during Gezi protests on the 16th of June, 2013. He entered in a coma after the shooting and died after 269 days. Some witnesses said that the boy raised his hands and shouted at police "I'm going to buy bread, don't shoot"²⁰⁴. These witness testimonies and the claims were considered to be a lie by the pro-government people as then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that he was a terrorist²⁰⁵. By referring to that incident in 2013, these group of tweets attempted to create an assumption that *Hürriyet* would be lying again for the sake of its "anti-AKP" stance, whatever the truth about the downing incident was. The same was done for some other dissident newspapers such as *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* and the one that mostly associated with Fethullah Gülen, *Zaman*. While on the 25th November, *Zaman* had published an article that does not openly criticize the government about the incident, on the contrary found the Turkish side right referring to the international law and reflected Turkish scholars' comments on the ongoing situation²⁰⁶, because of the tension between Fethullah Gülen's movement and the AKP that peaked in 2013, *Twitter* users seem to position themselves against the

203 "MANŞET: Hürriyet: Rus uçağı ekmek almaya gidiyordu @Hurriyet", 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/cadircioglu57/status/669111330868215808> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

204 "Görgü tanıkları: "Berkin ellerini kaldırarak 'Ekmek almaya gidiyorum' dedi'", *Hürriyet*, 19.03.2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gorgu-taniklari-berkin-ellerini-kaldirarak-ekmek-almaya-gidiyorum-dedi-26027894> (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

205 "Erdoğan Berkin Elvan'ı Terörist İlan Etti Annesini de Yuhalattı", *Cumhuriyet*, 14.03.2014, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video/50743/Erdogan_Berkin_Elvan_i_terorist_ilan_etti_annesini_de_yuhalatti.html (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

206 "'Müdahale Hukuken Doğru Siyasî Süreç İyi Yönetilmeli'", *Zaman*, 25.11.2015, http://web.archive.org/web/20151125193308/http://www.zaman.com.tr:80/dunya_mudahale-hukuken-dogru-siyasi-surec-iyi-yonetilmeli_2329242.html (Accessed: 01.08.2017)

newspaper directly from the beginning and put it in the same pot with all other critical newspapers, as a result of what it is explained above as a political strategy of AKP. There are tweets that reflect this strategy. One example is, “Zaman, hürriyet, sözcü, cumhuriyet, aydınlık etc. newspapers are mourning after the Russian plane was downed. What a pity.. Not sorry for your loss.”²⁰⁷ In more than 100 tweets, *Zaman* newspaper is mentioned as if it had a headline saying “AKP shot down the innocent plane”²⁰⁸. It is again to refer to a news item that *Zaman* published and then again claimed to be a lie by pro-government newspapers²⁰⁹. According to these tweets, it is assumed without any other proof that these oppositional newspapers would already be opposing the incident because they were just liars and they would lie again or try to discredit the AKP government, making them traitors. So these tweets are to discredit these newspapers as news sources. This behaviour can be argued to be an effort to establish a monodic environment on Twitter. According to these examples about newspapers, it can be said that Turkish online public acted according to their general political stance and their already polarized views about newspapers, without really assessing these newspapers’ positions on the Russian plane incident.

Next group of tweets are which mention “Pray for x” campaigns on social media. There were some spontaneous reactions to bombings happened in different European cities on social media, which was changing profile pictures to another photo with a transparent flag of the country that the bombing happened. It was done in the past when Paris attacks were happened²¹⁰. In tweets posted after the downing

207 “Zaman, hürriyet, sözcü, cumhuriyet, aydınlık vb.gazeteler *Rus uçağı* düşürölünce yasa girmişler. Vah vah vah..ne diyelim başınız sağ olmasın.”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/umity21/status/669077355068039168> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

208 “...Zaman:Akp masum uçağı vurdu ...”, 24.11.2015, https://twitter.com/Sedat_Y_/status/669198873215266816 (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

209 “Zamanın Masumu Dolandırıcı Çıktı”, *Sabah*, 23.04.2015, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/04/23/zamanin-masumu-dolandirici-cikti> (Accessed: 02.06.2017)

210 “Paris attacks: How to change your Facebook profile picture and other ways you can help”, *Telegraph*, 15.11.2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11996735/Paris-attacks-How-to->

of the Russian plane, again a discourse of “traitors” and “cowards” have been used to refer to these social media reactions and tweets like followings were posted: “The Russian plane is down. Change your profile pictures to the Russian flag you humanists!!”²¹¹, “Those who oversaw the Turkmen massacre the Russian plane is shot down now go and raise your Russian flags [...]”²¹², “The Russian plane was shot because there has been a violation of borders Traitors inside our country now would change their profiles to the RUSSIAN flag!!!!”²¹³, “The Russian plane is downed let’s make your profile the Russian flag you Armenian ...”²¹⁴. These flag focused tweets seem to use a discourse that labels humanists as traitors, or “Armenian descents” (a highly popular pejorative use of ethnicity among Turkish nationalists, labelling anyone who is in treason to Turkish interests as having Armenian blood). Also the Gezi movement and a similar campaign to changing profile pictures to flags were mentioned together, “I wonder if Gezi supporters would meet at Taksim and make a demonstration saying we’re all natashas because the Russian plane was shot down”²¹⁵. This rhetoric refers to two different ideas. First reference is to “we are all Armenians” campaigns carried in Turkey after a Turkish-Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink was shot dead by an alleged nationalist. The slogan was first used during the funeral of Dink and then became a popular slogan among the leftists in general as it is claimed to reflect solidarity with the minorities of Turkey. The second

change-your-Facebook-profile-picture-and-other-ways-you-can-help.html (Accessed: 03.06.2017)

211 “Rus uçağı düştü. Profillerinizi Rus bayrağı yapın hümanistler!!”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/kucukenisteeee/status/669083777893834752> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

212 “Türkmen Katliamını Görmezden Gelenler Hadi Şimdi de Sınırlarımız İhlal Eden Rus Uçağı Düşürüldü Açın Rus Bayraklarınızı [...]”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/emrears08/status/669114444207792128> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

213 “Rus uçağı Türkiye Devleti Tarafından Sınır ihlali yapıldı diye düşürüldü İcimizdeki hainler profillerini RUS bayragini koyarlar şimdi !!!!”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/semihhuy/status/669164985264795648> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

214 “Rus uçağı düşürüldü hadi profilinizi rus bayrağı yapın ermeni ...”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/asametak/status/669218160411869185> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

215 “Geziciler Rus uçağı düşürüldü diye taksimde toplanıp hepimiz natashayız diye gösteri yaparmı acaba”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/oezcanduman/status/669649672110231552> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

reference is to a name which is popular among Russians, Natasha (Which is a kind of abbreviation of Natalia). In Turkey, Natasha is used as a pejorative name because of the flow of people from ex-Soviet countries during the 1990s. Immigrating from their homes because of poverty, and sometimes illegally smuggled into the country, many Slav women have chosen or forced to work as prostitutes in Turkey and they were called Natashas while referring to them. With that references it can be said that tweets also used a racist and sexist discourse to identify critics of the downing of the Russian plane.

This sexist rhetoric was also used solely as an argument to alienate the critics. One of the most popular expression is “The borders are our honor (purity)”, associating it to the honor of a person. “According to trace analysis the Russian jet has violated the borders without question. The border means honour, Turk never lets his/her honour to be harmed!”²¹⁶, highlighting that the Russian plane had to be shot in order to protect the Turkish honour. Atilla Taş, a Turkish singer who has been using Twitter actively and very popular until his imprisonment, has criticized the situation in a humoristic way and one of the users replied him as follows: “The state would again be the one that wrong if this plane crosses the border and comes into your mother’s bed. The borders mean honour. How can a person without honour understand that !!”²¹⁷. Or this tweet which says “People who criticise our country about the Russian plane incident are the enemies of motherland and honour, my friends. The border is our honour and nobody can cross it, period”²¹⁸ suggests that anyone who criticises the incident in any way would be the enemies of motherland, meaning: traitor.

216 “İz analizine gör Rus Uçağı sınır ihlalini net bir şekilde yapmış,Sınır Namustur,Türk namusuna hanel getirmez.!” , 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/Assos39/status/669098141464059904> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

217 “@AtillaTasNet O rus uçağı sınırı geçip ananızın yatağına girse size göre yine suçlu devlet olacak. Hudut namustur. Namussuz ne bilsin !!”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/Ferhat034/status/669194431728259072> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

218 “Düşürülen Rus uçağı meselesinde ülkemizi eleştirenler vatan ve namus düşmanıdır arkadaşlar Hudut namustur ve kimse o sınırı geçemez nokta.”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/mus0795/status/669466384703889408> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

Leftists who were labelled pejoratively as “communists” are the one other group that were portrayed as worried because of the incident. An example of it is, “The communists who called Turkey coward two months ago as we didn’t shoot down a Russian plane are now shitting themselves saying why did you do that :d”²¹⁹. There are also tweets like, “When the communists will react I wonder because as you know their owners’ (Russian) plane destroyed.. #türkmendağı”²²⁰, “Isn’t there any leftists yet to say that the Russian plane was in Turkey to buy bread?”²²¹. From these tweets it is understood that there is still an understanding of old “leftists are the spies of Moscow” rhetoric (similar to the McCarthyism in the USA), which was popular in Turkey until the late 1980s, in the environment of the Cold War. Obviously, today the Russian Federation is neither a communist country nor leftists are proven to be spies of that non-communist country, but some users, even if they have not experienced the Cold War era engaged with such stereotypes and used such stereotypes to create spiral of silence.

The main opposition party in the Parliament, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP – Republican People’s Party) was also targeted by associating the initial responses from the party with treason-like acts. The party’s leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s first tweet about the incident reads, “I am watching the worrying incidents on the Syrian border with a great attention and concern for the sake of our country.”²²² Bullying tweets attributed the reactions from parties like CHP, opposition groups like Gezi movement to their sadness about the incident itself, as if they are sad because of their “camp’s” plane was shot, not an “enemy” one. Thus, the legal and legitimate

219 “İki ay önce rus uçağı dusurmedik diye korkak Türkiye diyen komünistler şimdi ise neden böyle birşey yaptınız diyerek altına siciyor :d”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/alkamme/status/669106513517158400> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

220 “Komünistler ne zaman harekete geçecek acaba malum sahiplerinin (Rus) uçağı yerle bir edildi.. #*türkmendağı”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/kursatkok/status/669119952260042752> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

221 “Rus uçağı hakkında Türkiye'ye ekmek almaya gelmiş diyen bir solcumuz çıkmadı mı hala”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/bekirsogutlu/status/669098784887054336> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

222 “Suriye sınırındaki endişe verici olayları ülkemiz adına büyük bir dikkat ve kaygıyla izliyorum.”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/kilicdaroglu/status/669165041845977093> (Accessed: 07.09.2017)

opposition tried to be substituted for an enemy and portrayed as traitors, or reinforce the treason rhetoric which was also popular in pro-AKP news media. There are tweets such as, “We are shooting at a Russian plane and CHP is crying. You were saying that you are soldiers of Atatürk, weren’t you son of bitches Moscows ...”²²³, “Guess that the Russian plane has crashed on the roof of CHP headquarters. [...] Strange, very strange statements”²²⁴. Such tweets can be seen as a contributor to the spiral of silence, since they try to marginalise the main opposition party’s reactions and by doing that try to control the dissident reactions and minimise them.

It is also important to look at some tweets that have referred to different popular figures in Turkey. In one tweet, Nasuh Mahruki, a well-known search & rescue figure especially famous for his Search and Rescue Team (AKUT)’s efforts after the earthquake disaster in 1999 in Marmara region, was bullied because he criticised the downing of the jet posting a message saying, “Those who voted for AKP for a fake stability, are you happy now with confronting world’s super power because of a war that was not ours, instead of 0 problems?”²²⁵ The tweet got a response as follows: “@nasuhmahruki Treason is not for sale It is not the same as saving goats Those who kept silent while Turkmens were shot at now make fuss about the russian plane.”²²⁶ In some tweets, political figures such as opposition party leaders were accused of treason or being silent about killings of Turkmens, or meaning that some terrorist groups are supported by Russia. Selahattin Demirtaş, now imprisoned for prosecution on the accusations such as “founding or leading armed terrorist

223 “Rus uçağı vuruyoruz CHPliler ağlıyor. Hani lan Atatürkün askerleriydiniz orospu oğlu moskoflar ...”, 24.11.2015, https://twitter.com/Alp_Er/status/669161554823221255 (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

224 “Sanırsınız ki, Rus uçağı CHP Gn.Merkezinin çatısına düştü.[...] Garip garip açıklamalar.”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/aslanimdat1071/status/669469109822844928> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

225 “Sahte bir istikrar için AKPy’e oy verenler, memnunmusunuz 0 sorundan bizim olmayan 1 savaş için dünyanın süper gücüyle kafa kafaya gelmekten?”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/nasuhmahruki/status/669243793959424000> (Accessed: 07.09.2017)

226 “@nasuhmahruki Hainlik şerefsizlik parayla değil Bu keçi kurtarmaya benzemez Türkmenler vurulurken sessiz kalanlar rus uçağı için çemkiliyor”, 24.11.2015, https://twitter.com/safi_temiz/status/669247977702170625 (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

organisation” and “making propaganda of terrorist organisations”, then the leader of HDP (People’s Democracy Party), which allegedly has relations with PKK (a terrorist organisation that had killed thousands of civilians and soldiers in the name of freedom of Kurds), was mentioned saying, “@hdpdemirtas you are looking like a dumb aren’t you [...] how the russian plane is shot it has a great meaning”²²⁷, implying that HDP (and PKK) was also hit by shooting down the Russian plane. However this account did not post a message on that date. There was however a news report on the 24th of November that quotes Selahattin Demirtaş saying “You cannot do anything when Russians violate the Turkish airspace” on the 7th of October²²⁸. Other opposition leaders such as Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of CHP and Devlet Bahçeli, leader of MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) were also accused of not being patriotic, in tweets like this: “@kilicdarogluk and @dbdevletbahceli There is not a single statement a single tweet from both of you about the downed Russian plane. Is this your patriotism?”²²⁹, “Hey Kılıçdaroğlu, the Russian jet is down but not a single word from you. You defended Russia just in order to criticise Erdoğan. Shame on you”²³⁰. While there was no open criticism on Twitter from Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, these tweets imply that the main opposition has not supported the Turkish claims as it should have done by a patriot, and they are not patriotic enough that even opposition leader is supporting Russians. It creates a perception that suggests the main opposition party in Turkish politics is cooperating with the ‘enemy’. The tweets regarding Devlet Bahçeli are demanding a statement from him

227 “@hdpdemirtas mal mal bakıyorsun değilmi (sillo) rus uçağı nasılda düşürölüyor manası çok büyük”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/tylerleo22/status/669333247810265089> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

228 "Demirtaş Rusya'nın Hava İhlaline Sesiniz Çıkıyor Demisti", *ensonhaber.com*, 24.11.2015, <http://www.ensonhaber.com/demirtas-rusyanin-hava-ihlaline-sesiniz-cikmiyor-demisti-2015-11-24.html> (Accessed: 07.09.2017)

229 “@kilicdarogluk ve @dbdevletbahceli Düşürülen Rus uçağı Hakkı'nda tek bir açıklamanız tek bir Tweetiniz yok.Bu mu sizin vatan severliğiniz.?”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/ilkeryasineagle/status/669470367329726464> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

230 “Ey Kılıçdaroğlu! Rus uçağı düştü ama sana laf düşmüyor.sırf Erdoğanı eleştirmek için kendi ülkeneye karşı rusya yı savundun. Yazıklar olsun.”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/erdogancelil58/status/669639405229973505> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

and criticizing his silence: “@dbdevletbahceli The Russian plane? Where is your opinion?”²³¹ It can be seen that the user replies a tweet dated 21st of November, 2015 from Devlet Bahçeli in which he shows solidarity with Turkmen, saying, “Dear Turkmen brothers, don’t worry, you are rightful, you have faith and you will definitely win. I am always with you”²³². Another user mentions him and asks, “@dbdevletbahceli where are you great leader...! I wonder if you are angry with your? country”²³³. Again, as it can be seen, it is a reply to a tweet of Bahçeli which criticises the government because of its inaction in helping Turkmen.

One of the tweets actually manipulated the facts in order to support the legitimacy of the downing of the jet. The tweet reads, “The Russian plane wasn’t shot while it was on a touristic trip. It deliberately entered our territories with full speed, was warned 10 times both in Russian and English and then shot down. Read it right!”²³⁴ So, the tweet suggests that in the light of correct information, Turkey was right to shoot the plane down, while the tweet has a mixture of manipulated content deliberately, or it is a proof of lack of information that the audience has. First, the exact speed of the plane cannot be known as it was not mentioned by any official, including the letter sent by Turkey to the UN Secretary General. But, according to time and distance information on the letter, it can be calculated that the plane was flying with a speed of approximately 390 kilometres per hour, which is around one in eight of its real full speed. Again, according to the letter addressed to the UN and the news sources, the plane was warned only in English and also it was not proven or clear that the plane has deliberately entered into the Turkish airspace. This claim has been made

231 “@dbdevletbahceli Rus uçağı? Hani yorum?”, 24.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/MehmetAliMetiny/status/669411502584152064> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

232 “Türkmen kardeşlerim, merak buyurmayın, haklısınız, inanıyorsunuz ve mutlaka da kazanacaksınız. Her zaman da sizlerleyim...”, 21.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/dbdevletbahceli/status/668112729559969796> (Accessed: 07.09.2017)

233 “@dbdevletbahceli neredesin büyük lider...! yoksa rus uçağı vuruldu diye küstün mü? devletine”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/d830f69c9f554cc/status/669672220818567168> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

234 “Rus uçağı gezintide vurulmadı.. Bilinçli olarak son sürat topraklarımıza girdi,Rusca ve İngilizce 10 kez uyarıldı ve vuruldu! Doğru okuyun!”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/divanehep/status/669598890262425603> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

also in the following day, however there is not such information that the warnings were made in Russian. On the 26th of November, after the statement of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a user posted a message saying, “Why did you do the so called warnings (that you fictionalised) in Russian instead of Assyrian if you did not know that it was a Russian plane?”²³⁵ As it is understood from the recordings shared by the Chief of Staff, the warnings were made in English²³⁶, which is the ‘Lingua Franca’ of international aviation. But highlighting them as if they were proven facts, the user tried to manipulate the perception of the incident and set the minds of the readers in a desired way. In another tweet it says, “There was a martyr caused by a russian plane in 2012... you can now rest in peace the Chiefcommander got your revenge...”²³⁷ Again this tweet has both some correct and wrong information. In June 2012, a Turkish jet was downed by the Syrian air defence²³⁸. However, the tweet was written as if the jet was shot by Russian planes and therefore associated the incident on 24th November, 2015 with this, arguing that this should feel as a revenge.

These tweets can be considered to be efforts to minimise the opposing thoughts and arguments about the downing of the jet. As it is shown with this analysis, critics of the downing of jet were tried to be portrayed as traitors; who were, as it was shown, also supporters of the Gezi movements, Fethullah Gülen’s movement, PKK and communists. There is a double process of creating a spiral of silence, while critics were pictured as traitors, the picture of traitors were drawn as these different movements and organisations are one united entity. While claiming that only PKK supporters are criticising the incident, it was added that Gezi supporters are also

235 “+Madem Rus uçağı olduğunu bilmiyordunuz, sözde (kurguladığınız) "uyarıları" neden Suryanice değilde Rusca yaptınız?”, 26.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/HzCudi/status/669938471134486529> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

236 “Rus Uçağı Böyle Uyarıldı”, *Hürriyet*, 25.11.2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/video/rus-ucagi-boyle-uyarildi-123030> (Accessed: 11.02.2017)

237 “2012 yılında rus uçağı tarafında düşürölüp şehit olan pilotumuz vardı ya.. sen rahat uyu şehidim Başkomutan intikamını aldı...”, 25.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/DilmacBerat/status/669428154650517506> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

238 “Suriye Türk Jetini Vurdu”, *Sabah*, 23.06.2017, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/06/23/suriye-turk-jetini-vurdu> (Accessed: 06.06.2017)

criticising the downing of this jet and therefore they conclude that the Gezi movement supporters are aligned with terrorists. As argued in Chapter 2, spiral of silence starts when people with dissent ideas remain silent as they assess that there is another dominant, or popular, and even fancy voice. Then the spiral is closed as any opposite voice is labelled to be “radical”, “enemy”, “extreme” and exterior to the real values of the community. With the efforts of users supporting government at the time of the incident, opposition was totally marginalised and therefore their voice was tried to be silenced.

Majority of the tweets seem to be affected by the officials’ statements and the news articles about these statements, thus suggest that the agenda on social media was largely set by either officials or has followed the traditional mass media. However as shown in the examples, even with a controlled mass media, and even if the majority get the information from the mass media, this information is somehow misinterpreted and misunderstood.

There are examples that reflects the lack of knowledge and information of some users, with oppositional views, on Twitter. One of them is referring to Ahmet Davutoğlu’s above-mentioned statement that had been served as “I ordered the shooting”, saying: “The man who made ten warnings in 17 seconds and simultaneously called the Prime minister and explained the situation, plus shot Russian plane should be brought to the You Got Talent show”²³⁹. This is most probably caused by the fact that all the news sources used the same or similar headline for it in their websites, which was “I ordered the shooting”, and this headline did of course not offer any additional information about it. The tweet may seem to be making an ironical statement, which implies that there is no way ordering a shooting of a plane in seconds. However, it also shows that the person did not read the actual story either. While it is easy to fact check, or click on the links to the news sources to see the real meaning, otherwise were used either because of users’

239 “17 saniyede 10 uyarı yapıp üste Başbakanı arayıp durumu izah etme vakti bulan, birde Rus uçağı vuran adamı Yetenek Sizsiniz çıkarmak lzm...”, 28.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/delisalvoo/status/670711240004640768> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

understanding and beliefs, which cause partisan reading as mentioned in the Chapter 2, or because of a deliberate manipulative effort.

Again, after Erdoğan's above mentioned statement that briefly quoted as "It is the pilots who made a mistake", the tweets mostly assumed that Erdoğan implicated Turkish pilots, and the users with opposing views acted accordingly. One tweet even progressed the idea, saying: "Erdoğan when the Russian plane shot: 'We acted according to rules of engagement' Erdoğan today: 'Our pilots are responsible for the wrongdoing. We warned them not to shoot'"²⁴⁰ While there is no such statement from the President, it can easily be understood as such when the headlines quoting "It is the pilots who made the mistake". Another tweet reacting to the statement says, "'Downing of the plane is the pilot's fault.' If you sin, they make you suffer for it. The situation of the person today who once was cheering over shooting the Russian plane."²⁴¹ It can be argued, based on this tweet, that the user tended to see it as an apologetic statement, while the same statement can also be seen as an assurance that the Turkish Air Force was right in shooting the Russian plane because the Russian pilots have mistakenly violated the Turkish airspace, as argued before.

On the 28th of November, four days after the Russian plane incident, the President of Diyarbakır Bar, Tahir Elçi was shot dead during a press announcement. After that a wave of tweets were shared as follows: "One party government of AKP's: 1st day: Russian plane shot down 2nd day: Journalists have been arrested 3rd day: Bar President was shot dead"²⁴² This single tweet was retweeted 185 times, in addition to 95 other tweets that emphasize the same facts with nearly identical words, such as, "The government was formed. Day 1: Russian plane was shot down. Day 2: Can

240 "Rus uçağı vurulunca Erdoğan: "Angajman kurallarının gereğini yaptık" Bugün Erdoğan: "Hatanın sorumlusu pilotlarımız. Vurmayın diye uyardık"", 14.12.2015, <https://twitter.com/UkAlAcAdl/status/676476614201487361> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

241 ""Rus uçağının düşürülmesi pilotun hatası." Yersen haramı, maymun ederler adamı. Rus uçağı düşürdük diye sevinç çığı atanın bugünkü hâli.", 14.12.2015, <https://twitter.com/tuncayopcin/status/676631659140149249> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

242 "Tek başına AKP iktidarının; 1.GÜNÜ: Rus Uçağı DÜŞÜRÜLDÜ 2.GÜNÜ: Gazeteciler TUTUKLANDI 3.GÜNÜ: Baro Başkanı VURULDU", 28.11.2015, <https://twitter.com/yahyayavuz0/status/670648175586320384> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

Dündar and Erdem Gül, who made the news article about MIT trucks, were arrested. Day 3: The Bar President was killed.”²⁴³ The tweets refer to the fact that the new government was formed a few days ago and immediately brought problems to the country. It shows that the audience engaged with the identical, therefore banal content while saying nothing at the end, indicating the discussion about the ‘retweet planet’ is accurate.

Retweeting is important as it can be understood as an affirmation of the content that is retweeted, and the retweet count contributes to a message’s popularity and readership. However, this can be abused to highlight a desired message by using fake accounts, or trolls. This type of action, in the end, would be a manipulation of the content and therefore would affect the reliability. After the 30th of November, these type of tweets increased dramatically. Furkan Foundation is a foundation established in 1994 by Alparslan Kuytul, who is the leader of the Furkan movement, a religious movement and community that acts similar to Fethullah Gülen’s movement. Furkan Foundation turned against AKP after supporting it until 2014 allegedly after local authorities started rejecting their applications for venues to hold their meetings²⁴⁴. Their supporters and disciples are apparently using the kind of techniques that mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, abusing the retweet feature with fake accounts. They shared statements of the leader of the Foundation massively every time he made a statement. One statement of Alparslan Kuytul, the leader of the Foundation, has been retweeted more than 400 times, which was one of the most retweeted messages in this dataset which refers to the statement in the website of the foundation²⁴⁵. The importance of this phenomenon is that the retweet

243 “Hükümet kuruldu 1.gün:Rus uçağı düşürüldü 2.gün:Mit Tırları haberini yapan Can Dündar ve Erdem Gül tutuklandı. 3.gün:Baro Başkanı öldürüldü.”, 28.11.2015, https://twitter.com/Said_Amedi/status/670586954665336832 (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

244 “Furkan Vakfı Grubu Lideri Alparslan Kuytul AKP’ye Savaş Açtı”, *OdaTV*, 16.11.2014, <http://odatv.com/bize-niye-vermiyorsunuz-geri-adim-atan-serefsizdir-1611141200.html> (Accessed: 15.09.2017)

245 “Hocaefendi’nin, Rus uçağı ile ilgili yaptığı açıklamalarının, alaya alınması hakkında...”, 05.12.2015, <https://twitter.com/alparslankuytul/status/673107411444604928> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

counts can easily be misperceived as that the most retweeted reflects the dominant opinion. Therefore, it can be argued that these retweet counts affect the climate of the Twitter regarding the Russian plane incident.

Another one of the most retweeted messages is a message that claimed the downing of the Russian plane is a trap. On the 8th of December, 2015, the first argument about whether the downing of the jet was a trap for Turkey to weaken it on international arena was made by a pro-government author²⁴⁶. His article was shared more than 190 times at that day. While on 11th December *OdaTV*, which is a oppositional news web site, claimed that there is an ongoing investigation about whether the warnings did in fact reach to the Russian pilots²⁴⁷, Cem Küçük claimed that the pilots that shot the Russian plane down might be members of Fethullah Gulen's terrorist organisation²⁴⁸.

These claims were surfaced again when the coup attempt on the 15th of July, 2016 happened. The tweets after the coup attempt mainly suggested that the pilots that shot the Russian plane were responsible for the shooting and, consequently for the crisis Turkey had and still has with Russia. While the critics of the shooting were accused to be members of FETÖ, after the coup attempt the climate totally changed. This is consistent with the officials' statements, as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that the pilots who shot the Russian plane were arrested after the coup attempt²⁴⁹. However, it is impossible to determine the relationship between the incident and these pilots' relation to the terrorist organisation. The fact that these pilots' ties with

246 "Rus Uçağı Tuzak mıydı?", *Yeni Şafak*, 08.02.2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/abdulkadirselvi/rus-ucagi-tuzak-miydi-2023471> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

247 "Rus Uçağı İçin Kumpas Soruşturması mı Var", *OdaTV*, 11.12.2015, <http://odatv.com/rus-ucagi-icin-kumpas-sorusturmasi-mi-var-1112151200.html> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

248 "Cem Küçük: Rus Uçağını Fetullahçılar Düşürmüş Olabilir", *Yeni Akit*, 27.12.2015, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/cem-kucuk-rus-ucagini-fetullahcilar-dusurmus-olabilir-116518.html> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

249 "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Rus Uçağını Düşüren Pilotların Pensilvanya ile Bağlantıları Olabilir!", *T24*, 20.07.2016, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-rus-ucagini-dusuren-pilotlarin-pensilvanya-ile-baglantilari-olabilir,351051> (Accessed: 06.07.2017)

a terrorist organisation does not discredit the legitimacy of Turkey's action against a foreign plane that violated the Turkish airspace as regularly stated and defended by the political authorities at that time, the radar records that officials released and the earlier statements of officials about the legitimacy of the shooting were clearly ignored by the *Twitter* users. The deduction and the comparison of the coup attempt and the Russian plane crisis were like the following: "It was announced that one of the F-16 pilots that bombed the parliament is the pilot who shot down the Russian plane. In this case the Russian plane had been shot in order to create chaos."²⁵⁰ Similar messages were shared heavily until 31st July 2016. The users again seem to follow the dominant political discourse that leaders used and accepted it without questioning the contradictions and statements of the President of Turkey and the Prime Minister.

As it was discussed in this chapter, the Russian plane crisis caused a wave of misinformation and bullying online, in order to silence the oppositional voices which means a formation of spiral of silence as it also aimed to threaten the future opposition. Supporters of the political authority tried to limit the flow of information actually deliberately or unintentionally manipulating the facts, in favor of the government. Since the main information source was proven to be the traditional media organs, *Twitter* was also limited in the boundaries of gatekeeping processes of traditional mass media. Therefore, as it is claimed to happen in traditional media, it is clear to say that the agenda was set by the political authority about the plane crisis at the time of crisis, and its after effects were also felt after the coup attempt on the 15th of July, 2016, when again the political authority decided to blame the FETÖ for the downing of the jet.

250 "Kendi Milletini bombalayan F 16 pilotlarından birinin, Rus uçağını düşüren pilot olduğu açıklandı. Demek ki *Rus uçağı* kaos için düşürülmüş.", 16.07.2016, <https://twitter.com/bulvar7258/status/754269747848572928> (Accessed: 09.05.2017)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Social media has been argued to have a positive effect on reaching true information and enhance democracy by enabling communication among people around the world. However, as discussed in this thesis, it can be used to manipulate the truth and control the agenda, even to create a spiral of silence.

As it was argued in the Chapter 2, social media platforms in different countries are limited and the content on the internet is manipulated and restricted by governments through prosecutions, legal blockades and employing social media users in order to steer the conversations. In Chinese example, the government employs social media users in order to steer conversations on social media and interfere with any type of criticisms. In the Middle East, activists can face prosecutions for sharing dissident content. These prove that the social media is not as different as it was argued from the traditional media in terms of being vulnerable to government propaganda and agenda setting efforts. It was even shown that to some extent it is possible to engage in gatekeeping on internet. With its dependence on monetary gain, advertisements, the internet is proved to be a similar medium to traditional mass media. Internet, depends on advertisers, big companies and governments in order to survive economically as traditional media does. Social media, therefore, can act against their users' interests in order to sustain its own survival. On the other hand, users also can affect the popularity of an information on social media and the real information can never become known by most of the users. All factors together allow an authority to make black propaganda easily.

Turkish audience engaged with internet well, according to statistics. However, quality should be seen more important than the quantity. In the Turkish case, the political authority has taken and sometimes takes some specific measures in order to block dissent content by closing web sites, blocking their addresses, prosecuting popular oppositional figures and employing its own troll groups. While it is possible

to overcome some of the blockades by changing DNS addresses or using VPN services, it is not feasible as it requires a reasonable knowledge of computer systems. In this manipulated environment, the public without a basic knowledge and with a lack of general interest about foreign policy, as it was discussed, cannot have a reliable opinion by following social media only, and as it was on international cases, must rely on traditional media to get true information. Also, studies show that Turkish social media users usually refrain from sharing their own thoughts because of the legal consequences and the reactions they get online when they share a dissident thought. This phenomenon contributes to the political authority's efforts in controlling the agenda. As it was discussed, the government has used minor crises and other foreign policy developments in domestic politics as a propaganda means.

Analysis of the tweets related to the Russian plane crisis in 2015, therefore, did not bring a surprising result. When it comes to a major crisis like this, in Turkish example, the public could not get required information through social media, traditional media was needed to rely on an information. In addition to this, there were instances that some users even lacks basic understandings of some concepts related to international relations and decision making, therefore acted upon their false assumptions, therefore created a mass of false information. Dissemination of false information on social media is proven to be an effective phenomenon in a crisis on this scale. It can be argued that some groups have used this in order to promote their own agenda about the Russian plane crisis, in most cases, amplifying the government's rhetoric on the crisis.

Bullying was used to silence the dissent users and messages, threatening or implying their so-called hidden agendas over criticizing the incident, which contributed in creation of the spiral of silence. All these efforts are responsive to the political authority's general stance on opposition in real life, and users who serve to the government's interests seem to being encouraged from the fact that they would be free from legal action after whatever they do on social media. This is, actually, one of the consequences of a successful spiral of silence. The stance of these users seemed to change after the coup attempt on the 15th of July, 2016. When the Russian

plane crisis began in November 2015, critics of the shooting were being accused of being members of FETÖ, however after the coup attempt, this rhetoric directly changed to put the blame of the shooting to FETÖ. This shows that many users follow the political authority's stance on issues, and easily change a rhetoric according to policy changes of the government. This proves the point that Turkish public relies on their party choices about foreign policy issues, and also it proves that the political authority has the ability to easily steer the discussions on social media according to its own rhetoric. The social media is proven to be an amplifier of the traditional mass media and political authority's discourse.

Therefore, in a country like Turkey, in which the education statistics according to the 2015 study of OECD, are well below OECD average²⁵¹, it is clear that the social media can be used by the political authority to increase its pressure over the public, control the agenda as well as on traditional mass media, and silence the dissent voices with legal threats, internet blockades and using trolls. The claimed positive effects of social media need a basic knowledge of fact checking online, a decent political and social freedom, well educated citizens and a democratic society. Otherwise, social media would be another mass media platform which is controlled or manipulated by the powerful.

251 "PISA 2015", <http://www.compareyourcountry.org/pisa/country/TUR?lg=en> (Accessed: 15.09.2017)

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TRKE ZET

SOSYAL MEDYANIN DIŐ POLİTİKAYA İLİŐKİN TRK KAMUOYU ZERİNDEKİ ETKİŐİ: RUS UAĐI KRİZİ (2015) ZERİNE BİR ALIŐMA

Bu tez 24 Kasım 2015 gn Suriye sınırı yakınlarında Trk Hava Kuvvetleri tarafından bir Rus jetinin dŐrlmesi sonrasında meydana gelen diplomatik kriz ve bunun sosyal medyadaki yankılarını analiz etmektedir. Geleneksel medya iin kullanılagelen kavramlar olan “EŐik BekiliĐi” (Gatekeeping), “Suskunluk Sarmalı” (Spiral of Silence) ve “Gndem Koyma” (Agenda Setting) gibi kavramların aslında sosyal medyaya da uyarlanabilir olduĐunu ve sosyal medyanın aslında bir zgrlk alanı gibi sunulurken, siyasi otoritenin kamuoyu oluŐturma ve muhalefeti baskılama aralarından birisi haline gelme potansiyelinin bulunduĐu gsterilmeye alıŐılmıŐtır. Bu amala, uak krizinden sonra yayınlanan Twitter mesajları toplanmıŐ ve internetin alternatif bir haber kaynaĐı olarak iŐlevselliĐi, Trk kullanıcılar arasında konuya iliŐkin diyalog oluŐturmaya uygun bir platform olup olmadıĐı ve sosyal medyanın hkmet propagandasından kaınmak iin uygun bir platform olduĐu iddiaları sınanmıŐtır.

Sosyal medya platformları, Fuchs’un tartıŐtıĐı Đekliyle bir reklam ekonomisi zerinde varolurlar. Bu nedenle de internet kullanıcılarının esasında bu ekonomi ierisinde farkında olmadan smrlen bir grup olduĐu sylenebilir. Meraz ve Papacharissi ise sosyal medyanın giderek bir “hikaye anlatım” mekanı olduĐundan bahsederler. Bu argmanın hareket noktası, sosyal medyanın aslında ieriĐini kullanıcıların hazırladıĐı bir ortam olarak tasarlanmıŐ olmasıdır.

Hikaye anlatımının doĐrudan kullanıcıların kendilerine gemiŐ olması, sosyal medyanın demokratikleŐme ve zgrlk anlamında ilerlemeye yol atıĐı argmanını ortaya ıkar mıŐtır. Ne var ki, Selahattin Turan’ın da belirttiĐi gibi, radyodan bu yana her teknolojik geliŐmenin demokratikleŐmeyi ileri taŐıyacaĐı ne srlmŐ ancak

sonuç hep daha fazla baskı olmuştur. İnternetin de bu süreçteki yeni bir evre daha olduğunu kanıtlamak amacıyla, yukarıda anılan, geleneksel medyaya ait kimi kavramlar, internet özelinde de tartışılmıştır.

Tezin ikinci bölümünde, ilk paragrafta bahsedilen kimi kavramlar tartışılmış, bu kavramların sosyal medya ve internete uyarlanabilirliği gösterilmiştir. Bu amaçla, farklı farklı ülkelerde sosyal medya ve internete yönelik baskı ve kontrol uygulamaları ile gündem belirleme pratikleri anlatılmıştır.

Kamuoyu, bir toplumdaki bireylerce yoğun olarak savunulan ve bu nedenle de baskın hale gelen görüşü ifade etmektedir. Page ve d., bunu demokrasinin ana unsuru ve hükümetlerin ne yapacağını belirleyen ana etken olarak ifade ederler. Ancak, kamuoyunun bir konuda baskın ya da değil, herhangi bir fikir sahibi olabilmesi için bilgiye ihtiyacı vardır. Bu bilgi kaynağı geleneksel medya olarak da anılan radyo, televizyon ve gazete-dergilerdir.

Bu durumda, kamuoyu oluşumunda medyanın önemi büyüktür. Halihazırda geleneksel medya, bir olayın ya da bilginin nasıl sunulacağına dair belirli bir yöntem izlemekte ve aslında kamuoyunun oluşumuna, haberin veriliş şekliyle müdahil olmaktadır. Bir haberde, eğer takipçi kitleye coğrafi-kültürel olarak uzak bir konu ve olaydan bahsediliyorsa, ilgili yayın organının bu kitleye haberin geçtiği yer ile ilgili ya da haberin anlaşılmasına yardımcı olacak daha başka şeylerle ilgili bir temel sağlaması, bir çerçeve sunması gerekir. Bu nedenle, örneğin, haberi hazırlayan gazeteci, editör, doğrudan fiziksel olarak olay yerine müdahalede bulunabilir, bazı gerçekleri takipçi kitlenin daha kolay anlayacağı şekilde verebilir ve nihayetinde ortaya alternatif bir resim çıkmış olur.

Bu durumda, ortaya çıkan haber ya da sunulan resim bizi önceden belirlenmiş bir noktaya doğru çekme amacı taşımaktadır. Lippmann, insanların “sürekli olarak tavsiyeye maruz kaldıklarını” söyler. Yani, medya aslında insanlara ne düşüneceklerini de söyleme becerisine sahiptir. Bunu “hikayelere, sembollere ve ilgili stereotiplere” odaklanarak yapar. McCombs, bu sayede medyanın yalnızca ne düşünüleceğini değil, o düşünülen hakkında nasıl bir düşünce yolu izleneceğini de

belirlediğini iddia eder. Lewis de, medyanın basitçe X yerine Y maddesinden bahsederek insanların görüşlerini etkilediğini söyler.

Hangi maddeden bahsedileceğinin seçiminin siyasi ve ekonomik sebepleri de dahil olmak üzere çeşitli sebepleri vardır. Ekonomik sebepleriyle ilgili olarak Herman ve Chomsky, medya kuruluşlarının arkasındaki büyük holdingleri ve onların çıkarlarını, medya sektörü ve bu holdingler arasındaki reklama dayalı ilişkiyi gösterir. Siyasi olarak ise, yine ekonomik temelli olmak üzere, ilgili medya organının artık bazı hükümet yanlısı-karşıtı firmalardan reklam alamaması, ya da doğrudan siyasi erkin yasal ya da yasadışı tehditleriyle karşı karşıya kalması gibi nedenlerden bahsedilebilir.

Hem yukarıda bahsedilen, medya organının kendi kendisini yaşatabilmesi için gerekli kaynakları elde etmek, hem de bir yandan bu ekonominin bir parçası olan izleyici-okur kitlesini kaybetmemek için haber içeriklerinde bir çeşit kontrol mekanizması uygular. Buna “eşik bekçiliği” adı verilir. Eşik bekçisi kavramı ilk olarak Kurt Lewin tarafından pazar alışverişinden mutfağa, oradan pişirilip masaya servis edilene kadar aşama aşama bir yemeğin yapım sürecinden hareketle kullanılmıştır. Her bir kritik noktada kişi ya da kişiler, hangi içeriğin alınacağı, bu içeriğin ne şekilde değerlendirileceği, buradan hangi yemeğin çıkacağı ve en son masaya nasıl servis edileceği gibi konularda karar verici noktasında bulunurlar. Bu fikir daha sonra David M. White tarafından, sonrasında da Johan Galtung ve Mari Ruge tarafından iletişim alanına uygulanmıştır. Bu yaklaşıma göre, bir olayın meydana gelişinden itibaren, basım-yayınına kadar geçen süreçte, belirli kişiler bu olayın haber olarak verilip verilmemesi, verilecekse nasıl verileceği, ne şekilde verileceği konularında karar vericidirler. Eşik bekçiliği herhangi bir gelişmiş demokraside, ilgili gazetenin bir haberi kendi okuyucu kitlesine uygun bulup bulmaması ya da olayın gerçekten haber değeri taşıyıp taşımadığıyla, gazetenin kendi görüşlerine uyup uymadığı ile sınırlıyken, bazı ülkelerde ise bunlara ek olarak ‘hükümetin dikkatini çekmemek’, ‘ana akım medyayla ters düşen bir şey yayınlamak tehditlere açık hale gelmemek’ gibi hususlar da eklenmiştir.

Kiři ve kurumların baskı görmemek için oto-sansür uygulamaya başlamaları ve bunun toplumda yaygın bir pratik haline gelmesiyle, tek sesli bir medya ve toplum ortaya çıkar. Bu sürece Noella-Neumann tarafından “suskunluk sarmalı” adı verilmiştir. Noella-Neumann’a göre, “Kiřinin kendi görüşlerini açıklıkla ifade etme isteęi bu kiřinin sosyal çevresindeki dięer görüşlere göre deęişkenlik gösterir. Eęer kendi görüşlerinin baskın olduęunu sezerse, görüşlerini dıřa vurması daha kolaydır.” Aksi halde kiři kendi görüşünü kendisine saklayacaktır. Bu bir sarmal olarak yayılır ve en sonunda toplumda yüksek sesle dıřa vurulan tek bir hakim düşünce kalır. Noella-Neumann bu fikri Almanya’da ırkçı Nazi Partisi’nin iktidara geliři ve sonrasında muhalefeti tamamen susturmasından almıştır. Hakim tek bir fikir kaldığında, artık muhalif görüşleri dile getirenler de toplumun geri kalanı tarafından hainlikle, vatansever olmamakla, radikal ve kafir olmakla suçlanacaktır.

Sosyal medya, geleneksel medyanın bu sınırlayıcı unsurlarından arınmış bir ortam olarak tezahür eder. Ne var ki, internet ve sosyal medya ortamında bir haberi ya da olayı manipölasyon malzemesi haline getirmek daha kolaydır. Ayrıca, internet ortamında eşik bekçilięi kavramı, deęişikliğe uğramakla birlikte yaşamını sürdürmektedir ve muhalif sesleri susturmak için onlar üzerinde baskı kurma imkanı artmıştır.

Çin, Rusya, Mısır gibi ölkeler, internet bağlantılarını zaman zaman doğrudan keserek, zaman zaman belirli site ve servislere erişimi engelleyerek, internet üzerinde eşik bekçilięine benzer bir pratik yürütmektedirler. Sosyal medya kullanıcıları ve siyasi aktivistler gözaltına alınmakta, yargılanmakta ve tutuklanmaktadır. Google’ın, Çin’deki kullanıcılara gösterdięi arama sonuçlarını Çin hükümetinin isteęi doğrultusunda revize etmesi, bu konudaki çabaların başarısını gözler önüne sermektedir.

Facebook ve *Twitter* gibi sosyal medya platformları, içerikleri popölaritesine göre sıralayarak içerik akışına müdahil olmaktadırlar. Bunun haricinde, *Facebook*’un, paylaşılan içeriklerdeki sahte haberleri ayıklamaya yönelik algoritması, hem sahte haberlerin temizlenmesi açısından olumlu, hem de o kadar meşhur olmayan, küçük

çaplı bir haber sitesinin haberinin kimseye gösterilemeden kaybolabilme ihtimalini yaratmasından dolayı da olumsuzdur.

Sosyal medya, yayıncılık, etkileşim ve iletişim konusunda bir platform sağladığı için özgürlükçüdür denilebilir. Takip edilmeyi mümkün kılan, bu nedenle de aslında kullanıcılar üzerinde, takipçilere hoş görünme baskısı kuran bir platformdur. Teoride herkese fikirlerini yazabileceği bir serbest kürsü vermiştir. Ancak aynı zamanda, büyük şirketler ve devletlerin büyük oranda kontrolünde kalan bir alan olarak, gündemin yönetimi ve propaganda açısından kullanışlı bir platform haline gelmiştir.

Sosyal medyada gerçek ve yalan haberi birbirinden ayırt etmek zordur. Bu durumda insanlar kolaylıkla paniğe ve şiddete sevk edilebilir. Kullanıcılar her zaman bir haberin gerçekliğini sorgulayabilecek eğitim ve genel kültür seviyesinde olmayabilirler.

Bunun haricinde, troller eliyle, siyasi aktörler ya da sanatçılar gibi halk arasındaki popüler figürlere karşı yıldırma politikaları izlenebilir ve kullanıcıların sosyal medya üzerinde de kendilerini rahatlıkla ifade etmeleri engellenmeye çalışılabilir. Tezde bu konuyla ilgili çeşitli örnekler verilmiştir.

Sosyal medyada aşırı vakit geçirmenin sonucunda, ‘retweet gezegeni’ şeklinde bir fenomenin ortaya çıktığından bahsedebiliriz. Sosyal medya üzerinde yürütülen kampanyalar, her şeyi paylaşma modası ve herkesin o veya bu şekilde görünür olması neticesinde, insanlar kendi evlerinde bilgisayar başından ‘bu haberi 100 kere paylaşarak bu çocuğun tedavisine katkı sunabilirsin’ gibi içeriklere maruz kalmaktadır. Bunun neticesinde ortaya bir mesaj paylaştığında, bir içeriği beğendiğinde yurttaş sorumluluğunu yerine getirmenin mutluluğuyla başka bir aktiviteye girişmeyen bir kullanıcı profili ortaya çıkmaktadır. En nihayetinde toplum bir bakıma gerçekten değişime yol açabilecek kitlesel hareketlerden, evlere hapsedilmektedir. Bunun halk nezdinde itirazsız kalmasındaki en büyük etken, dünya çapındaki pek çok direniş hareketinin güvenlik güçleri tarafından büyük bir şiddetle bastırılması ve göstericilerin başlarına gelen türlü olaydır.

Üçüncü bölümde, Türkiye’de internet kullanımı ve Türk halkının sosyal medya ve dış politikaya dair algıları araştırılmış, hükümetin sosyal medya ve internet alanını kontrol altında tutmak için kullandığı yöntemler ve halkın buna tepkisi örneklendirilmiştir. ‘Taraftar’ okuyucu (partisan reader) kavramı tartışılmıştır.

Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu rakamlarına göre, Türkiye’de yaklaşık 62 milyon internet abonesi bulunmaktadır. Gülüm Şener ve d. tarafından 2014 yılında yürütülen araştırmaya göre, katılımcıların %96’sı *Facebook*, yine bütün katılımcıların %32’si ise *Twitter* kullandıklarını belirtmiştir. *Statista*’nın verileri ise 2016 yılında toplam sosyal medya kullanıcı sayısını 34 milyon olarak vermiştir.

Çıldan ve d., “sosyal medyanın daha nesnel bir platform olduğunu, zira sansür uygulamanın daha zor olduğunu” iddia etmişlerdir. Ancak, sosyal medya ve internette dolaşan bilgilerin doğrulundan emin olamaması bir problem teşkil eder. İnternette yayılan haberlerin doğruluğunu teyit etmek amacıyla 2016 yılında kurulmuş teyit.org’un kendi verilerine göre, Ağustos 2017 itibariyle analiz ettikleri haberlerin yaklaşık %77’si yalan haberdur. Bu başlı başına, internetteki yalan haber dolaşımının bir problem olduğunu gösterir. İnternetteki bir bilginin dolaşım hızının yüksekliği ve bir anda pek kişi tarafından görülüp tekrar paylaşılması sebebiyle, örneğin bir yalan haberdan dolayı mağdur olan bir kişinin gerekli yargı yollarına başvurarak haberin ilk kaynağının bu yanlışını düzeltmesi, haberi tekzip etmesi sağlanabilse de, çoktan dolaşıma girmiş ve pek çok kişi tarafından paylaşılmış olan bir yalan haber, bu tekzipten çok daha fazla ilgi çekmeye devam edebilir.

Gerçekte, yalan haberi ya da belirli tipte bir haberi paylaşmak da bir başka şeye işaret eder. Lee ve d., kişilerin kendilerine sosyal statü sağlayacağına ve faydalı olduğuna inandığı haberleri paylaştığından bahseder. Bu durumda, kullanıcıların yoğun baskı altında olduğu ülkelerde kişiler doğrudan kendi mesajlarını paylaşmaktansa, kendi fikirlerine uygun düşen haberler yoluna gitmektedirler, denilebilir. Bu şekilde belki de çeşitli yasal sonuçlardan bir bakıma kaçınılmış olmaktadır. Ancak özünde bu durum ‘tarafdar okuyuculuğu’ artırmaktadır. Bu da, bir okurun yalnızca kendi hoşuna giden, kendi siyasi görüşüne uygun içeriklere değer vermesi ve bu nedenle farklı içerikleri gözden kaçırmaya yol açmaktadır. Bu

durumda da, sosyal medyanın gerçekten farklı görüşler arasında bir diyaloga yol açmadığı görülecektir.

Bunun üzerine, tezde örneklendiği gibi, çeşitli hesaplardan Türk sanatçılara yönelik saldırı mesajları, hatta bu kişilerin yargılamalarla karşı karşıya kalmaları, Türk kullanıcılar da bir oto-sansür mekanizmasını tetikleyebilir. Bu da başlı başına, sosyal medyada da bir suskunluk sarmalı pratiğinin mümkün olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır. İstatistiksel veriler de, insanların sosyal medya üzerinde aslında siyasi içerik paylaşmaktan imtina ettiklerini göstermektedir. Köseoğlu ve Al, sosyal medyanın muhalif propagandayı mümkün kıldığını iddia etseler de, ‘tarafar okurluğun’ bir sonucu olarak, ilgili muhalif içeriğin halihazırda o içerikten haberdar olan ve zaten böyle bir propagandaya ihtiyacı olmayan kitle içerisinde kaldığı ve diğer çevrelere ulaşmadığı önce sürülebilir.

Kullanıcıların yalan haberi hızlıca yayabilmelerine imkan sağlayan bir durum da, insanların bir kısmının büyük haber merkezlerinden çok, kendileri gibi birinden gelen habere daha fazla itibar etmeleridir. Coleman ve d. İngiltere’de yürüttüğü çalışmalarda bunu tespit etmiştir. Türkiye için de böyle bir gerçeklikten bahsedilebilir, zira bu durum da tarafar okuyuculuğa katkı sunmaktadır. Bu şekilde sosyal medyadaki bilgi kirliliği artmakta ve aslında yerine getirdiği iddia edilen alternatif haber platformu olma işlevini özellikle Türkiye’de yerine getirememektedir.

Bu bilgi kirliliğinin yanı sıra, sosyal medya resmi propagandaya karşı koymak konusunda da iddia edildiği gibi başarılı bir platform değildir. Halihazırda devlet başkanları, başbakanlar, belediye başkanları ve diğer resmi kurumlar ve siyasi figürlerin resmi sosyal medya hesapları bulunmaktadır. Bu hesaplar üzerinden paylaşılan mesajlar da gündemi belirleyici bir etkide bulunmaktadır. Hem, sahip olduğu siyasi güç sebebiyle bu kişilerin paylaştığı mesajların ağırlığı sade bir vatandaşın mesajından çok daha fazla olacaktır, hem de Melih Gökçek örneğinde görüldüğü gibi, paylaşım yoluyla doğrudan muhalifleri hedef alarak ya da tehdit ederek, kendilerine yönelik paylaşımlarda da otosansürü teşvik etmektedirler. Buna

daha önce de bahsedilen trol hesapları eklendiğinde, sosyal medyanın aslında marjinal gruplar açısından tehlikeli bir ortam olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

İçerik paylaşımıyla suskunluk sarmalı yaratımı haricinde, siyasi otorite doğrudan içeriğe erişimi engellemek suretiyle de internetteki en büyük eşik bekçisi rolünü üstlenmektedir. 5651 sayılı *İnternet Ortamında Yapılan Yayınların Düzenlenmesi ve Bu Yayınlar Yoluyla İşlenen Suçlarla Mücadele Edilmesi Hakkında Kanun* internette yayınlanan içerik hakkında pek çok düzenleme getirmiştir. En önemlisi, Telekomünikasyon İletişim Başkanlığı'na re'sen web sayfalarını engelleme yetkisi veren hükümdür. 2016 yılında ilgili madde değiştirilerek TİB kaldırılmış, re'sen kapatma yetkisi Bilgi ve İletişim Teknolojileri Kurumu başkanına devredilmiştir. 2015 yılına kadar erişime engellenmiş site sayısı 110,700'dür.

Bu yasaklamaların etrafından dolaşmak anlamına gelecek, DNS (Alanadı Hizmeti) adreslerinin değiştirilmesi ya da VPN (Sanal Özel Ağ) uygulamaları kullanmak gibi çeşitli teknolojik imkanlar bulunsun da, hem resmi kurumların bu yolları engellemek konusunda etkin yollar izlemesi, hem de toplumdaki herkesin bilgisayara dair bilgisi ve ilgisinin bu kadar fazla olmasının beklenemeyecek olması nedeniyle bu çabalar yeterli olmamaktadır. Demokratik kurumları düzgün işleyen ve toplumsal kültüründe demokrasi yerleşmiş olan toplumlarda böyle bir çabaya da gerek kalmaması gerektiği söylenebilir.

Türk kamuoyunun dış politikaya dair tutumuna ilişkin, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, Türk halkının genel olarak parti tercihleri doğrultusunda hareket ettiği tespiti yapar. Ek olarak Türk halkının dış politika ve uluslararası ilişkiler gibi konulara dair ilgisi ve bilgisi de sınırlıdır. Bu da kamuoyunu esasta propagandaya açık hale getirmektedir. İlk bölümde tartışıldığı gibi, kamuoyunun oluşumunda bilgi önemlidir ve kendisinde bulunan eksik bilgiyi telafi etmek için halk geleneksel medya araçlarına yönelmektedir. Bu durumda, bazı araştırmacıların iddia ettiği gibi sosyal medyanın bu konuda geleneksel medyaya alternatif bir bilgi kaynağı sunup sunmadığı sorusu önem kazanır.

Eldeki örnekler, hali hazırda AKP hükümetinin dış politika meselelerini, çeşitli ufak krizleri ya da göreceli başarılarını bir iç politika malzemesi olarak kullandığını göstermektedir. AKP'nin “komşularla sıfır sorun” politikası doğrultusunda 2011 öncesi dönemde eski Osmanlı coğrafyası ile kurulan iyi ekonomik ilişkiler böyle bir başarı olarak sunulmuştur.

Yakalanan göreceli ekonomik gelişmeler ışığında, Suriye'deki iç savaş neticesinde Türkiye'ye akın eden Suriyeli göçmenler ilk yıllarda halkta bir rahatsızlık yaratmamışsa da, Suriyeli göçmenlerin ülke ekonomisine bindirdiği iddia edilen yükler neticesinde Suriyeli mültecilerin varlığı bir rahatsızlık unsuru olmuştur. Alman Marshall Fonu'nun 2015 yılında Türkiye'de yaptığı çalışmada ankete katılanların %84'ünün göçmenlerden rahatsızlık duyduğu tespit edilmiştir. AKP hükümeti de sayıları yaklaşık 3 milyona yaklaşak mültecileri Avrupa Birliği ile Schengen bölgesine vizesiz seyahat için bir pazarlık unsuru gibi kullanmıştır.

Eldeki bilgiler ışığında, Türk kamuoyunun sosyal medya üzerinde sürekli bilgi kirliliği olan bir ortamda olduğu, bunun üzerine siyasi iktidara yakın kullanıcıların diğer kullanıcılara yönelik sistematik saldırıları ve hükümetin yasal kovuşturmaları bir tehdit unsuru gibi kullanmasının yanında sitelere ve içeriklere yönelik engellemeler altında, sosyal medyadan alternatif ve doğru bir bilgi edinmesinin çok zor olduğu söylenebilir. Halihazırda Türk halkının uluslararası ilişkiler alanına dair bilgisinin azlığı, onları başka bir kaynağa mahkum etmekte ve sosyal medyanın yetersizliği neticesinde elde yine geleneksel medya organları kalmaktadır.

Dördüncü bölümde, Türkiye ve Rusya arasında 2015 yılı Kasım'da ayından itibaren yaşanan uçak krizine yönelik *Twitter* mesajları toplanmış, toplanmış olan bu veri setindeki mesajlar incelenerek söylem analizi çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. Bu sayede, tezin genelinde öne sürülen iddialar denenmiş ve sonuçlandırılmıştır.

Rus uçağı krizinin seçilme sebebi, Türkiye'nin yakın tarihindeki en büyük krizlerden biri olmasıdır. Gerek ekonomik, gerek siyasi olarak iç ve dış politikada büyük yankı uyandırdı. 24 Kasım 2015 günü, krizin ilk saatlerinde, Türk medyasında ve yetkililerin açıklamalarında bir tutarlılık bulmak zordur. Olay aydınlandıkça

hükümetin de tutumu belirginleşmiştir. Özellikle Türkiye Cumhurbaşkanı R. Tayyip Erdoğan, dönemin Başbakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu ve Rusya Federasyonu Başkanı Vladimir Putin'in açıklamaları, gerek geleneksel medyada, gerek sosyal medyada gündemi belirleyen unsurlar olmuştur.

Olayın sosyal medyadaki yankılarını analiz etmek ve savları test etmek üzere, “Rus uçağı” ifadesi *Twitter* üzerinde aranmış, 24 Kasım 2015 ile 31 Temmuz 2016 arasında yazılmış olan toplam 31.500 adet tweet metin dosyası olarak kaydedilmiş ve mesajların tamamı okunmuş ve analiz edilmiştir.

Toplanan mesajlarda, büyük çoğunluğun geleneksel medya organları arasında sayılabilecek haber sitelerine verilen bağlantılardan oluştuğu görüldü. Bunlar haricinde kalan mesajlarda ise çeşitli siyasi gruplara ve popüler kişilere yönelik saldırı nitelikli pek çok mesajın bulunduğu tespit edildi. Bu tarz mesajların içeriğinde yoğun olarak seksist bir söylem kullanıldığı görüldü. En önemlisi, mesajların çoğunda pek çok farklı muhalif grup, AKP'ye karşı tek bir unsurmuş gibi sunulmuştu. Bunun haricinde, çeşitli geleneksel yayın organlarının geçmişte yaptıkları haberlere atıf yapılarak, yalan haber yaptıkları, ‘yine’ devletin çıkarlarına karşı hareket ettikleri iddia edildi. Muhalif görüşte olanların vatana ihanet içerisinde olduğu sıklıkla başvurulmuş bir başka söylemdi.

Rus uçağının düşürülmesini savunan mesajlar hükümetin ilk haftalarda olayın siyasi sorumluluğunu açıkça sahiplenmesinden hareketle Rus uçağının düşürülmesini eleştirenlere FETÖ (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü) üyesi oldukları iddiasıyla saldırırken, hem izleyen kış aylarında bazı hükümet yanlısı yazarların iddiaları, hem de özellikle 15 Temmuz darbe girişimi sonrasında değişen iklimle birlikte Rus uçağının düşürülmesini de FETÖ ile ilişkilendirme çabasında olmuşlardır.

“Hepimiz Ermeniyiz” gibi Türkiye’de sol siyaset içinde yaygın olan bir söylem ve özellikle Avrupa’daki terör saldırıları sonrasında yaygınlaşan, sosyal medya profili fotoğraflarının terör kurbanı ülke bayrağıyla değiştirilmesi gibi dayanışma hareketlerine de atıfla, AKP politikalarını eleştirenlerin bu sefer de “Hepimiz

Nataşayız” diyerek sokaklara çıkacakları, profil resimlerini Rus bayrağı yapacakları gibi mesajlar paylaşılmıştır.

Milliyetçi/mukaddesatçı bir söylem tutturularak, Rus uçağı Suriye’nin Bayırbucak bölgesindeki Türkmenler’e yardım etmek için düşürülmüş gibi mesajlar paylaşılmış ve bu mesajlar üzerinden, yine olayı eleştirenler vatansever/milliyetçi olmamakla suçlanmıştır.

Bazı mesajlar, tamamen yanlış bilgiye dayalı olarak yanlış sonuçlara varmaktadırlar. Bir mesajda Rus uçağının Rus uçağı olduğu bilinmiyordusa neden Rusça uyarıldığı sorulmaktadır. Lakin hiç bir resmi belgede böyle bir bilgi bulunmadığı gibi, Türk Genelkurmay’ı tarafından paylaşılan telsiz kayıtlarında da uyarıların İngilizce yapıldığı görülmektedir.

2014 yılı sonrasında AKP’ye karşı tavır alan Furkan Vakfi’nin, pek çok farklı hesapla, Twitter üzerindeki paylaşım sayılarını şişirdiği görülmüştür. Bu mesajlar farklı kullanıcılar tarafından 400 kereye varacak kadar fazla şekilde paylaşılmıştır. Bu da esasta, sosyal medyada dolaşıma sokulan bilginin, sitelerin altyapısındaki ya da işleyiş yapısındaki açıklar kullanılarak kolayca manipüle edilebileceğini göstermektedir.

Analiz edilen *Twitter* mesajlarından ve önceki bölümlerde yürütülen tartışmalardan hareketle, sosyal medyanın, geleneksel medyada karşı karşıya kalınan eşik bekçiliği kavramını bir miktar değişmeyle de olsa miras aldığı, sosyal medyanın da çeşitli şekillerde alternatif bilgiye erişmede etkin bir araç olmadığı tespit edilmiştir.

Siyasi otoritenin suskunluk sarmalı oluşturma çabalarında sosyal medyayı da etkin bir şekilde kullanabileceği görülmüştür. Bu konuda trol hesapları ve resmi hesaplardan paylaşılan içeriğin belirleyici olduğu iddia edilebilir. Ayrıca siyasi iktidar, site kapatma ve içeriğe erişimin engellenmesi yoluyla hem eşik bekçisi konumunda olmakta, hem de içerik sahiplerini bir bakıma cezalandırmaktadır.

Türk kamuoyu, yanlış haber ve bilgilerle dolu bir sosyal medya ortamında, alternatif ve geleneksel medyada bulamayacağı içeriğe ulaşmakta sıkıntı yaşamaktadır.

%77'ye varan bir oranda yanlış bilginin dolaştığı bir ortamda, etkin bir demokratik etkileşimden söz etmek zordur. Ek olarak vatandaşların maruz kaldığı yargı tehdidi ile birlikte halkta otosansürün yaygın olduğu söylenebilir.

Kendisini ifade eden topluluğun, uluslararası ilişkiler ya da dış politikaya dair bilgileri bir yana, kendilerini ifade etmek için yeterli bir donanıma sahip olmadıkları söylenebilir. Mesajlarında görülen yoğun yazım yanlışları ve anlatım bozuklukları bunun bir kanıtıdır. Sonuç itibarıyla, siyasi iktidarın gerçek hayatta sağlamakta başarısız kaldığı bir demokrasi ve özgürlük ortamının, sadece sosyal medya üzerinden telafi edilebilmesi imkansızdır. Sosyal medyanın alternatif bilgi ve haber kaynağı olarak etkin bir alternatif olması, o ülkenin genel refah ve eğitim seviyesiyle de doğru orantılıdır. Aksi halde, sosyal medya da, geleneksel medya araçlarının yanında, siyasi iktidarın baskısı ve kontrolü altında kalacaktır.

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