

# Social Media as the New Public Sphere: An Example of Turkey

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**Abstract:** Social media, whose individual and social usage is increasing day by day, is also increasing its presence in our lives as the most important communication medium. Social media is a communication network in which the user publishes and circulates the content he / she produces. Today, many individuals and institutions are actively using social media. This makes immediate access easier to any website; contents, articles, news, thoughts, daily events, photos can be seen through social media, and anyone can reflect their views within a social network. The word that best describes social media, which is frequently spoken by today's people, is "sharing". The main issue that will be discussed in this study is whether social media is the new public space or not. The public sphere is also a common area where ideas and opinions are shared on an individual and social scale. In this sense, the study includes a theoretical analysis and discussion while focusing on the concepts of social media and public sphere.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

When we start to mention the concept of social media, we actually talk about social networks shaped through internet technologies. These social networks tell us the ways in which different users can enter the internet network from different places and in different time periods by means of a computer or a computer equipped tool. Thus, social networks develop as communication platforms, expanding on a global scale and causing new network societies to develop and spread. These network connections growing over the internet are formed through 'protocols', that is, agreements between mutual users and consequently they turn into networks (Ryan, 2010).

These communication platforms, which we can define and name as social media or social networking sites, allow users connecting to these networks to create profiles and personal web pages and to develop an online social network and to provide individual information about themselves. These platforms also mediate the formation of "virtual friendships" and thus the emergence of new forms of socialization. While social network is given to these web sites, these web sites have the characteristics of web sites where daily relationships and communication forms are shaped and are called social networks (Tiryaki, 2015).

Social media or social networking sites, blogs, sharing platforms, forums or chat sites allow partici-

pants to reach different requests and achieve satisfaction. Users can share their opinions in these areas as well as reaching different opinions and making comments. They can share and distribute photos, videos, audio files or text files (Vural and Bat, 2010).

## 2 REVIEW

Social networks, which started to enter our lives especially in the 2000s, are increasing their importance with both the number of users and the capacity to address different areas. Today, when social network is mentioned, the following social networks, especially Facebook, come to mind.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google+(Plus), Pinterest, Reddit, Digg, Github, Stumble Upon, Snapchat, Tumblr ve Siledeshare

When we look at the number of users, we can see which social media site is widely used on a global scale. According to 2019 figures, the number of Internet users in the world is 2.5 billion. This figure also shows us the number of active internet users on a global scale. Another point this figure tells us is that on the global scale, one out of every three people is an internet user.

While the number of internet users above increases each day, the power and importance of the internet increase and cause many different areas to be

transferred to the internet. The Internet is beginning to play an important role in the destiny of humanity from today to tomorrow. Social media users, which naturally form a subgroup of Internet users, constitute a large group of 1.8 billion people on a global scale. The remaining mass of internet users has the potential to become a new social network user for tomorrow. Thus, the number of internet users increasing day by day shows us the potential level of new social media users, which is also increasing.

According to 2019 figures, the distribution of social media users to different social media platforms is as follows;

Facebook: 1,35 billion  
 QQ (Tencent): 829 million  
 Qzone: 645 million  
 Whatsapp: 600 million  
 Wechat: 436 million  
 LinkedIn: 332 million  
 Google+: 300 million  
 Twitter: 284 million  
 Tumblr (230 million)  
 Weibo: 156 million

The numbers given in the above lines show us the size of social media use on a global scale.

The development of internet technology, especially in the last 10 years, lies primarily behind this development level of social media platforms. Especially in the development process of web 3 technology from web 2 technology, internet users have turned from being passive users into active, producing and sharing users.

In another perspective, web 2 internet technology is like a continuation of a revolution in 1984 when Apple released Macintosh computers. (-: 1995: 143-145) Both developments have enabled personalization in terms of information and communication technologies, while paving the way for personal use, they have also created the infrastructure for increasing personal creativity and sharing all the outputs of this process in the public sphere thanks to these technologies.

According to 2019 data, the Internet access rate by population in Turkey is 45%. This shows us that 35 million people have access to the internet and that they are in a relationship with the internet. It is also possible to say that social, economic and daily relations are now shifted to the internet and in many areas the Internet is turned into a sharing platform. Just as the fact that 35 million people interact with the internet is an important indicator, the presence of 36 million Facebook accounts in our country is also an important sign of the process. Of course, this number of 36 million contains some unhealthiness, such as fake accounts, multiple accounts, corporate accounts, and

the accounts that are inactive even though they exist (Ismet, 2019).

The figures of Internet and social media usage for Turkey indicate a similarity with the ones in South America and especially in Brazil. According to population and number of Facebook users, the ranking of countries is as follows;

1 United States	313,847,465	166,029,240
2 India	1,205,073,612	62,713,680
3 Brazil	193,946,886	58,565,700
4 Indonesia	248,645,008	51,096,860
5 Mexico	114,975,406	38,463,860
6 United Kingdom	63,047,162	32,950,400
7 Turkey	79,749,461	32,131,260
8 Philippines	103,775,002	29,890,900
9 France	65,630,692	25,624,760
10 Germany	81,305,856	25,332,440

(<https://webtiryaki.com/index.php?topic=121.0>)

When we look at the time the users spend on social media, we see the following figures;

The users in Turkey spend an average of 2 hours 32 minutes on Social networks where a user in the United States spends an average of 40 minutes. There has been a significant increase in the use of mobile lines in recent years among the Turkish users who spend about 5 hours a day on the internet, and internet provider companies have been implementing special applications for our country in this process. In social media usage, Facebook ranks first with 93% and Twitter ranks second with 72%. Google and LinkedIn social media platforms rank third and fourth (Erkek, 2016).

While Social networks are used by more people every day in the world and Turkey, they have been transformed into a common sharing area where individual or corporate users communicate, establish political, economic and cultural relations. Naturally, this "communication process" raises the following question. "Is social media and therefore the internet a public domain of our age?" "Is the new public sphere social media now?"

The concept of public sphere has emerged and developed as a result of the bourgeoisie and hence the capitalist market relations. Public sphere primarily defines a part of society. Society communicates individually or in groups in this area, exchanging opinions and ideas. The most important feature of the public sphere mentioned here is that it is open to all citizens and everyone can participate equally as a 'citizen' here. (Habermas and Jurgens, 1995) Habermas underlines that there is absolute equality among those who share the public sphere, emphasizing that those who come together in the public sphere are equal parties 'while talking'. In this context, the public sphere

and the public community formed thereon are general and everyone can participate in this debate. (Habermas, 2003) For example, coffeehouses have played a historically important function in the formation of public sphere and ‘community’ in the development process. (Habermas, 2003) The public sphere is the center of public debate. It also serves as a garden where modern democracies bloom.

Based on the concept of Habermas’ Public Sphere, Howard Rheingold is the first name to say that the new public sphere is the Internet. The concept of “The Virtual Community” is the conceptualization of the virtual society. The conceptualization of virtual society implies that virtual spaces are public spaces. Thus, Habermas’ concept of ‘public sphere’ is adapted to the internet and ‘virtual spaces’. Conversations and interviews that people perform together as a face-to-face and interpersonal communication take place in electronic environment or virtual world today. The point that is similar in both is that it is independent from economic or political power. (Sayımer, 2008) The equality of the parties in the public sphere mentioned by Habermas takes place at this point.

While social media is turning into a multilateral discussion and sharing environment, it is inevitable that it will become a center where political communication takes place. The public sphere is also an area where the politicians and society meet in a social dimension. In this study, we examined the social media usage of AKP candidate Binali Yıldırım and CHP candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu in terms of June 23 local elections in Istanbul.

### 3 DISCUSSION

Table 1: Twitter Information of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Candidates Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu.

	date of participation	Following	Follower
Binali Yıldırım	Mayıs 2016	5	1,9 Mn
Ekrem İmamoğlu	Kasım 2011	487	3,1 Mn

Table 2: Twitter Information of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Candidates Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu.

Binali Yıldırım	Hour	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Live broadcast	Audience	Photo	Video	Views
	7:53 PM	4,8 B	7,6 B	65,1 B					
	7:57 PM	401	2,1 B	22,8 B					
	7:58 PM								
	7:58 PM	330	3,1 B	31,4 B					
	7:59 PM	4,1 B	6,7 B	115,8 B					
	7:59 PM	1,2 B	2,8 B	13,5 B	Stop to	432,2 B			
	3:09 PM	1,6 B	9,3 B	49,3 B					
	1:28 PM	159	2,2 B	11,9 B			1		150,7 B
	1:45 PM	770	2,3 B	12,8 B					
	1:54 PM	31	77,6	3,2 B			4		
	1:59 PM	732	3,1 B	27,1 B			1		453,3 B
	12:42 AM	2,6 B	14 B	51,6 B			1		1,1 Mn
	12:29 AM	959	8,5 B	33,2 B			1		643,9 B
TOTAL	12 tweets	17,872	63,876	437,700	1	432,200	4	4	2,348,100

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Both candidates actively used social media before the June 23rd Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Elections. While both candidates used social media to communicate with voters, they presented their elective messages to the masses through these channels. In this process, AKP candidate Binali Yıldırım received 17,872 comments, while CHP candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu received 21,361 comments. Binali Yıldırım received 63,676 retweets while Ekrem İmamoğlu received 131,800 retweets. Binali Yıldırım’s shares received 437,700 likes and İmamoğlu’s shares received 1,196,200 likes.

The figures here show us that political communication process through social media is not only limited to sharing, but also a mutual communication process. Politician’s shares have been responded by followers with likes and comments. Social media has mediated the emergence of a public debate, feedback and social thought.

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