

Social Media in Turkey: How Tweets Appeared on Printed Media in 2012

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Abstract. What are the adoption rates of social media in Turkey? How are social media used? What is the current state and what are the trends? In the first section of this paper, these questions are targeted for 2012. In the second section, the following questions are asked: How did tweets appear on printed media? Who were the tweeters? What were the major events on Twitter that were reflected on printed media? To answer these questions, 3 mainstream printed newspapers were checked to delineate the Twitter panorama of Turkey in 2012. The main foci were tweets by celebrities, politicians and others. The paper concludes with some observations that may shed light on future understandings of social media in Turkey: Tweets functioned less as vehicles of alternative media and more as the personal diary of celebrities. As such, tweets reinforced the mainstream newsmaking and celebrity culture, rather than undermining them.

Keywords: Social media, Twitter, Popular Culture and Turkey

1. Social Media Trends in Turkey

Social media has been hailed as an alternative to the printed media. As the number of social media users is rising, this trend is visible in various forms in Turkey. Social network site usage takes a significant portion of online time in Turkey [1]. In parallel to the global trends, the percentage of people connecting to Internet is rising [1]. Furthermore percentage of connection by mobile phones, although still low, is increasing each year [1]. Mobile onliners are the most innovative in terms of adoption of new Internet uses and habits [1]. Twitter started its service on April 2011 in Turkish language [2], although some of the users were using it in English anyway. Istanbul is the 12th city in terms of the number of tweets per users, while Turkey is the 11th country [3].

According to Socialbakers, Turkey ranks the seventh in the number of Facebook users with almost 32 million users and a penetration rate of 41.18% [4]. Turkey's LinkedIn ranking is 25th with nearly 75,000 users which corresponds to almost 1% of the population [5]. Ref [6] provides the following figures for online users in Turkey: 61 million mobile phone subscribers, 6 million mobile Internet users, 35 million Internet users, 156 million blogs, 30 million Facebook users, 5 million Twitter users and 1 million LinkedIn users, which shows that Socialbakers findings have been outdated in a short time. According to Yandex, there are 3.8 million tweeters in Turkey. This is only 2.5% of the global users [7]. Finally, there are 700,000 users of mobile banking services [8].

The average age of Facebook users is increasing each year, with 42% over 18 [1], which opens up the possibility that it can be used for alternative media building and lifelong learning. White collars, educated people and high income users are the pioneers in Facebook use in Turkey, while housewives are the ones that adopt Facebook the latest [1]. While women's participation to labor is declining, this portion of the population (i.e. housewives) is becoming important, as integration of these to the so-called 'connected world' will be necessary to raise Internet penetration rates [1].

Nearly 75% of internet users over 18 years of age in Turkey has a Facebook account. This figure is 23% for Youtube and 11% for Twitter over 18 years of age [1]. These correspond to 32% (Facebook), 5% (Twitter) and 10% (Youtube) for the population over 18 years of age [1]. 62% of Facebook users and 65% of Twitter users are male, although males constitute 51% of the total population. The percentage of 18-28 age range for Facebook and Twitter is 59% and 61% respectively, while that of 29-43 age range is 32% and 33%

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[1]. Percentages of Facebook and Twitter use directly increase by education level with 11% and 1% to 74% and 26%. Such a proportional increase is not observed for Youtube [1].

Facebook penetration among Turkish people of 18-28 age range is 63%. For Twitter, this is 10%, while it is 22% for Youtube. The same values are 28% (Facebook), 4% (Twitter) and 7% (Youtube) for 29-43 age range; and 8% (Facebook), 1% (Twitter) and 2% (Youtube) for people older than 44 [1]. Ref [9] finds that younger users are on social media for socialization and making friends, while older users consider social media as a tool of entertainment and passing time. This is consistent with the global trends (cf. [10]).

The penetration rate of Facebook is the lowest among pensioners (10%) and highest among students (86%). For Twitter, the lowest is for agricultural employees (0%), while the highest is for free-lancers (20%), with students ranking the second highest (19%) [1]. As the income increases among economic levels, Facebook penetration rises (from 16% to 62%). Same holds for Youtube, while it is not the case for Twitter. Yet, the richest are the ones that have been penetrated by Twitter the highest (18%) in Turkey [1].

Statistics show that Facebook is for less educated with 24% of users without a high school diploma for Facebook; while only 9% of Twitter users are without a diploma [1]. Half of Facebook and Twitter users are employed, while 11-12% are unemployed. The percentage of students among users is 19% for Facebook and 29% for Twitter. The same values for housewives are 15% (Facebook) and 7% (Twitter) [1].

Ref [6] observes that in the aftermath of Van Earthquake 2011, for rescue and support efforts, Twitter was used as an announcement board and for posting suggestions, while Facebook was used for organizing support events by Turkish users. In the higher education settings, the following statistics are remarkable: Given the existence of 165 universities (62 private and 103 public) in Turkey (as of July 2012), 78 university presidents and 61 public universities have no Twitter accounts [2].

After presenting the trends and statistics of social media, next section explores how Twitter and tweets appeared on Turkish printed media in 2012.

2. Appearance of Twitter on Turkish Printed Media in 2012

Twitter increasingly appears on Turkish printed media. A search on the top mainstream newspaper (Hürriyet) ends up with more than 10,000 results since 2008 (as of 18 December 2012). Thus, printed media provides a corpus for discourse analysis and other less linguistic forms of analyses. In this section, some of this Twitter-related news will be presented and discussed. Among those 10,000 results, more than 3,500 appeared on 2012. Another mainstream newspaper (Milliyet) was also tracked to double-check the effects of Twitter on the traditional media. Searching 'Twitter' as a keyword returned nearly 5,000 news (as of 18 December 2012). Among the newspaper sections that mentioned tweets or Twitter, football and celebrity sections topped the list, as football and TV series constitute the main part of Turkish popular culture. People tweet before, during and after football matches and TV series (cf. [11,12]). Furthermore, newspapers occasionally publish headlines featuring Turkish series characters as if they are real life persons. A third mainstream newspaper (Posta) yielded 1,561 results (as of 20 December 2012).

Much like football, social media has become an instrument of war, conflict, tension and aggression. Twitter served as a platform to disseminate hatred and hate speeches. Although it didn't lead to physical violence as in the case of India (e.g. [13]), the tensions were escalated through tweets. On the other hand, some physical assaults on ethnic lines are attributed to spread of hate and false news on Twitter (cf. [14]). Fake news about the military conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia among mostly Turkish tweeters caused diplomatic and political tension [15]. Twitter has been observed to be a safe haven for warmongers in the case of a possible Turkish-Syrian conflict (cf. [16]).

Various celebrities contacted the relevant authorities for fake Twitter accounts in their names (e.g. [17, 18, 19]); while some others sued each other due to tweets that are (thought to be) insulting and/or defamatory (e.g. [20, 21, 22, 23]). Pop singers drew attention for their focus on social media campaigns for their new albums, rather than typical campaigns based on visual and written media (cf. [24]). A popular musician comments that Twitter allows more popularity than cassettes of the old days [25]. However, on a negative note, false death reports for actors and singers by tweets of celebrities and non-celebrity tweeters stirred

anger [26, 27, 28]. This caused controversy about authenticity and reliability of informal news on Twitter [26, 29].

A Turkish TV series star wrote to the prime minister on Twitter and asked him to stop the end of the TV series [30, 31]. (Some of the TV series halted or were under pressure to halt, due to the harsh comments on these series by the prime minister.) A remarkable point about his tweets is the following: He tweeted a paragraph by dividing it into 140-character tweets. So he is a traditional media user and a non-traditional new media user as well.

As minor events, the following can be listed for uses of Twitter by celebrities:

- A TV hostess was bullied by a fan on Twitter [32].
- The family of a recently deceased singer looked for a publisher for her memoirs on Twitter [33].
- The first marriage ceremony on Twitter in Turkey was performed by a mayor with the attendance of bride and groom [34, 35].
- Boyfriend of a pop singer proposed marriage to her on Twitter [36].
- A Turkish sports columnist lost his job due to one of his tweets [37].

Two shocking and interesting events about using Twitter in 2012 were the following: A well-known Turkish international classical music composer has been prosecuted for tweeting Omar Khayyam's verses on religion, as they were considered as blasphemy [38, 39, 40]. Secondly, after the disclosure of the real-life identity of a Twitter user which had drawn attention due to her comments on religion and related issues, she was reported to receive death threats and to have difficulties in doing her job (teaching) [41].

Tweets were also on politicians' agenda. A Turkish parliamentarian was sanctioned to pay compensation to a judge about whom she tweeted [42, 43]. Likewise, a minister sued a party official for his tweets [44, 45]. A parliamentarian swore on another parliamentarian on Twitter and fortunately apologized later on [46]. The mayor of Ankara stated that he sued 800 users for their tweets about him by legally tracking their IP numbers [47]. Simultaneous tweeting was a source of dispute among parliamentarians when some of them realized that other party members are tweeting about the parliamentary session [48].

Although, politics hit the lines in tweets, civil rights campaigns didn't appear strong on Twitter in 2012. For example, it was found that among 7 million Tweet users, only 20,000 shared green (nature-friendly) tweets. Only 960 tweets among 1.7 million tweets were about green issues. The most common green issues on Twitter were nuclear power plants, genetically modified organisms, urban renewal, wildfires and climate change respectively [49].

3. Conclusion

This paper shortly presented social media trends and statistics of 2012 in Turkey; and described the major events about how tweets appeared on the printed media. These were roughly categorized under the following: Celebrities, politicians and others. The main difficulty about tweeting opinions has been observed to be that tweets are usually not edited or cross-checked by a second eye. Secondly, as the responses are immediate, tweeters don't think much before posting. Thirdly, since it is a synchronous mass media, written and oral speech are mixed up to lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, this written-oral ambiguity blows up colloquial and slang expressions that usually appear to be insulting on screen without context and non-verbal supports. It can be concluded that in 2012 Twitter was far from being an alternative to printed media in Turkey; instead, it was used more like a short diary by celebrities, politicians and others. That would explain why tweets frequently appeared on printed media.

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