

NETWORKED GATEKEEPING IN 'TWITTER' DURING A CRISIS EVENT: A CASE STUDY OF #TAKSİM IN TÜRKİYE

Semra DEMİRDİŞ*

Received: 31.12.2022 - Accepted: 31.08.2023

Demirdiş, S. (2023). Networked gatekeeping in 'Twitter' during a crisis event: A case study of #Taksim in Türkiye. *Etkileşim*, 12, 216-234.
doi: 10.32739/etkilesim.2023.6.12.220

This study complies with research and publication ethics.

Abstract

Social media allows both elites and non-elites to share real-time information about crisis events, such as terrorist attacks, and express support and sympathy for victims using hashtags. Recently, a terrorist attack occurred in Taksim Square, Türkiye, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. Following the attack, Turkish citizens created the popular hashtag #Taksim to share information and express their emotions about the incident. This article explores the key influencers within #Taksim during the attack on Taksim Square by reviewing literature on hashtags, crisis events, gatekeeping, and networked gatekeeping theory. Through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 285,081 tweets under the hashtag #Taksim, the article examines how key users became prominent in the information flow. The findings demonstrate that *Twitter's* communicative practices (*retweets*, likes, replies, and quote *tweets*) allowed primarily elite actors, such as politicians and mass media journalists, to become key gatekeepers following the attack. This suggests that views of *Twitter* hashtags and their democratizing effects in crisis events need to be reconsidered, as the study highlights the significant role of elites. The findings also confirm that users who played crucial roles in the information flow through #Taksim became more prominent by addressing problematic issues like the refugee problem and freedom of the internet in Türkiye. Additionally, users gained prominence within #Taksim by posting messages accompanied by influential visuals.

Keywords: *Twitter*, hashtag, gatekeeping, content analysis, #Taksim, elite, Türkiye.

* Assistant Professor/PhD, Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, Çankırı, Türkiye.
semrademirdis@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-1929-614X

KRİZ ANINDA 'TWİTTER'DA EŐİK BEKÇİLİĐİ: TÜRKİYE'DE #TAKSİM PATLAMASI OLAYININ İNCELENMESİ

Semra DEMİRDİŐ*

Gönderim Tarihi: 31.12.2022 - Kabul Tarihi: 31.08.2023

DemirdiŐ, S. (2023). Networked gatekeeping in 'Twitter' during a crisis event: A case study of #Taksim in Türkiye. *EtkileŐim*, 12, 216-234.
doi: 10.32739/etkilesim.2023.6.12.220

Bu çalıŐma araŐtırma ve yayın etiĐine uygun olarak gerçekteŐirilmiŐtir.

Öz

Sosyal medya, elit ve elit olmayan aktörlerin terör saldırıları gibi kriz olayları hakkında gerçek zamanlı bilgileri paylaşmasına olanak tanımaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu aktörler, *hashtag* kullanımı ile mağdurlara desteklerini ve sempati-lerini gösterebilmektedirler. Türkiye'de Taksim Meydanı'nda meydana gelen terör saldırısında çok sayıda ölüm ve yaralanma meydana gelmiŐtir. Saldırının ardından Türk vatandaşları olayla ilgili bilgi paylaşmak ve duygularını ifade etmek için popüler #Taksim *hashtag*'i oluŐturdular. Makale *hashtag*'ler ve kriz olayları ile eŐik bekçiliĐi ve aĐ eŐik bekçiliĐi teorileri hakkındaki literatürü gözden geçirerek, Taksim Meydanı'ndaki saldırı sırasında #Taksim *hashtag*'inde etkili olan kilit unsurların kimler olduĐunu araŐtırmaktadır. Bu makale, #Taksim kapsamındaki 285.081 tweet için nicel ve nitel içerik analizi uygulayarak, *hashtag* kapsamındaki bilgi akıŐı içinde kilit kullanıcıların nasıl öne çıktıĐını incelemektedir. Bulgular, *Twitter*'ın iletiŐimsel uygulamalarının (*retweet*, beĐeni, yanıtlama ve *tweet* alıntılama) öncelikle politikacılar ve profesyonel gazeteciler gibi elit aktörlerin saldırının ardından kilit eŐik bekçileri olmasına izin verdiĐini göstermiŐtir. ÇalıŐma elitlerin önemli rolünü gösterdiĐinden, *Twitter hashtag*'lerin kriz olaylarındaki demokratikleŐtirici etkilerinin yeniden gözden geçirilmesi gerektiĐini öne sürmektedir. Bulgular, #Taksim üzerinden gerçekteŐen bilgi akıŐında önemli rol oynayan kullanıcıların, Türkiye'deki mülteci sorununu ve internet özgürlüĐü gibi sorunlu konuları ele alarak öne çıktıklarını doĐrulamaktadır. Ayrıca kullanıcılar, #Taksim içerisinde etkili görsellerle birlikte yaptıkları paylaŐımlarla ön plana çıkmayı baŐarmıŐlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Twitter*, *hashtag*, eŐik bekçiliĐi, içerik analizi, #Taksim, elit, Türkiye.

* Doktor Öğretim Üyesi, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi, Sanat, Tasarım ve Mimarlık Fakültesi, Çankırı, Türkiye.
semrademirdis@karatekin.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-1929-614X

Introduction

On the afternoon of 13 November 2022, people were enjoying a sunny Sunday in the popular dining and shopping destination of Taksim Avenue in Istanbul, Türkiye. There was the usual crowd, including locals and tourists shopping and eating at the cafes and restaurants. At around 16:20, a blast left many people dazed, while others were thrown to the ground (Gauthier-Villars et al., 2022). Former Istanbul Governor Ali Yerlikaya made the first statement about the incident on his *Twitter* account:

Today, at around 16:20, an explosion occurred on Taksim İstiklal Street in our Be-
yoğlu district. Our police, health, fire, and AFAD teams were dispatched to the
scene. There are casualties and injuries. The developments will be shared with the
public.

Following the explosion, the Turkish Red Crescent's *Twitter* account shared a tweet saying that "Blood was sent to nearby hospitals after the explosion in Istanbul. There is no urgent need for blood at the moment". Later, it was explained that six people were killed, and 81 people were wounded in the explosion (Gauthier-Villars et al., 2022). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also stated that the perpetrators of the explosion would be punished. Speaking at a press conference in Istanbul, Erdoğan condemned the incident, describing it as a "vile attack" and stating that there was a "smell of terror" in the air (BBC, 2022). Turkish authorities said that the terrorist attack on Taksim Square was organized by the YPG/PKK terrorist group in Syria (Bayar, 2022). According to footage from surveillance cameras, the attack was carried out by Ahlam Albashir, a Syrian national, who was later arrested (Spicer et al., 2022).

Following the incident, users began to circulate hashtags such as #Taksim, #bomba (#bomb), #patlama (#explosion), and #istiklalcaddesi (#istiklalavenue) on *Twitter*. Turkish citizens not only expressed their anger toward the terrorist attack and the perpetrators but also expressed their sorrow for the victims and their families. After an explosion occurred on Istanbul's İstiklal Avenue, Türkiye's Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK) acknowledged that they implemented bandwidth limitations, particularly on social media platforms (Netblocks, 2022). As a result of these limitations, some individuals experienced difficulties accessing the internet. Interestingly, despite the restrictions, access to *Twitter* remained unaffected because people were able to access social media platforms using VPN and similar apps (Netblocks, 2022). There are several examples of *Twitter* being used as a means of expressing anger and sorrow in the wake of a terrorist attack. For instance, *Twitter* users created compassionate hashtags such as #JeSuisCharlie to show their support for the victims of an Islamist terrorist attack in Paris (Giglietto & Lee, 2017). Turkish citizens have also used *Twitter* as a news medium to report information about events as they occurred. They were able to access and post real-time information related to the terrorist attack on Taksim Square through hashtags. Users posted tweets to share their eyewitness

ness perspectives on the incident through hashtags and included images and videos showing Taksim Square.

By applying quantitative and qualitative analysis, this article explores the *Twitter* users who contributed to #Taksim and the gatekeepers who were the most influential actors under the hashtag. This article addresses this question by offering the first in-depth analysis of the gatekeeping dynamics of #Taksim. The article explores how influential actors became more prominent in the information flow through the hashtag by reviewing literature on hashtags and crisis events, as well as gatekeeping and networked gatekeeping theory. It presents the results of a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 285,081 #Taksim tweets shared as the attack unfolded on 13 November 2022.

This article contributes to the emerging literature on crisis hashtags by presenting the results of the first study on the #Taksim hashtag on *Twitter* after the terrorist attack. Specifically, two research questions emerged during the review of literature on hashtags and crisis events, as well as gatekeeping theory:

RQ1: Who contributed the most to #Taksim and became key users?

RQ2: How did key users become more prominent in the information flow through #Taksim?

Literature Review

Hashtags and crisis events

Social media platforms, such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, play a significant role in understanding the interpretation of crisis events and the formation of responses after a crisis (Steensen, 2018). In this respect, social media provides tools to make sense of emergency events (Heverin & Zach, 2012). The use of *Twitter* has rapidly increased, evolving from coordinating political discussions to becoming a communicative space for crisis communication (Rogers, 2013). Since 2006, *Twitter* has become a widely used platform for communication purposes on the Internet (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). Presently, the platform has approximately 486 million users, making it the 14th most popular social media platform in the world (Kemp, 2022). Unlike other social networking sites, posts on *Twitter* are public by default and can be found by users searching the site or following their *Twitter* feed. Each user can, therefore, create public messages to initiate conversations, participate in discussions, and follow the debates of others (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). There are various methods for communicative practices on *Twitter*, such as replying to a conversation, retweeting original messages, and mentioning other users (Lee et al., 2020). The platform has also been used to report breaking news and share information on crisis events (Murthy, 2018), which has garnered academic and journalistic attention. More specifically, hashtags have led to *Twitter* being called a 'killer app' for its role

in the communication of publics around specific issues and events globally (Bruns & Burgess, 2015).

The hashtag involves manually entering a keyword with the symbol '#' to indicate an issue, association, or event on *Twitter* (Murthy, 2018). The hashtag was proposed by Chris Messina (technologist) in mid-2007. He described the idea as a messy proposition to improve "contextualization, content filtering, and exploratory serendipity within *Twitter*" (Messina, 2007). Users can search, like, and mention tweets through a common hashtag. Additionally, users can communicate in an ad hoc public square where they gather to discuss events and breaking news (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). The use of hashtags is, therefore, a form of communication that helps people connect with others during crisis events. Moreover, users can access information or join a conversation around a specific topic or event by searching hashtags without needing permission (Chaudhry, 2014).

Researchers have explored the use of hashtags during emergency situations, such as terrorist attacks (Burnap et al., 2014; Steensen, 2018; Tikka, 2019; Reilly & Vicari, 2021) and natural disasters (Bruns & Burgess, 2014; Pourebrahim et al., 2019). For example, Burnap and colleagues (2014) examined *Twitter* communication during a terrorist attack in Woolwich in 2013. They highlighted that tweets posted with hashtags were more influential because of their discoverability. Tikka (2019) investigated crisis communication on *Twitter* related to the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017 and found that crisis responses from ordinary users were influential in shaping public experience during the attack. Studies have also focused on the communication dynamics of *Twitter* during natural disasters. Pourebrahim and colleagues (2019) examined the use of *Twitter* during Hurricane Sandy in the Caribbean in 2012. They found that the platform played a valuable role in providing the most important information related to the disaster. Authorities could use such data to identify storm damage and plan relief efforts. In summary, these informative hashtags have helped users access and share real-time information, enabling effective communication with others during crisis events.

Gatekeeping theory

Gatekeeping theory was first proposed by Kurt Lewin during his work to persuade Iowa women to eat more beef (liver, kidney, and other secondary meat pieces) (Roberts, 2005). It became a venerable theory in communication studies between the late 1940s and early 1950s (Deluliis, 2015). The first researcher to apply this theory to mass communication was Lewin's student, David Manning White (1950), whose analysis of watchdog decisions by a newspaper editor named Mr. Gates examined the subjective factors that influenced watchdog decisions. Later, it was used in the model of gatekeeping and media gatekeepers, and in hundreds of subsequent media studies (Roberts, 2005).

For example, Gans (1979) applied the gatekeeping theory in examining the national news, including print and broadcast, following the Watergate scandal. Gans studied how four major news organizations actually worked, how they selected information, reported news and stories, and what they omitted about the scandal (2004).

According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), gatekeeping theory can be defined as "the powerful process through which events are covered by the mass media, explaining how and why certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention" (p.1). O'Sullivan and colleagues (1994) described 'gatekeepers' as personnel who have the privilege of making strategic decisions in news media organizations, such as editors. Although the degree of autonomy of gatekeepers varies, they control the flow of information in newspaper newsrooms. At different points, multiple gatekeepers can open or close the news gate in the process (Schwalbe et al., 2015). The gatekeeping process is important because it determines the selection of information and the content and quality of messages to be disseminated in the mass media, such as news. The theory describes the powerful process by which events are covered by the mass media and explains how and why certain information is passed through gates or closed off from media attention. Thus, this process helps to understand how even seemingly insignificant watchdog decisions can play a role in shaping the viewer's worldview and highlights the potential dangers in this process (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

There are five levels for the analysis of gatekeeping: individual, communicative routines, organizational, social institution, and social system (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Individual analysis focuses on the individual gatekeeper's characteristics or their communicative products, such as emails, webpages, blog posts, updates, statuses, and podcasts. Communication routines analysis focuses on a profession's practices embodied in judgments, instincts, and news values. Organizational analysis plays a role in making some news media different from others. The forces influencing gatekeeping decisions in a small rural news organization will be different from those in large national operations. Social institution analysis concerns the forces acting on an organization, such as governments, advertisers, and activist groups. Finally, social system analysis focuses on how abstract forces, such as culture, ideology, politics, and economics, influence the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Increased audience interactivity on digital platforms has offered researchers a new level of analysis for the gatekeeping process in which users participate as secondary gatekeepers through the platform (Chin-Fook & Simmonds, 2011).

Networked gatekeeping theory

The increasing use of digital platforms, such as social media sites, has led researchers to explore how the gatekeeping process works through online

platforms, as mentioned earlier (e.g.: Meraz & Papacharissi, 2016; Molina, 2019; Dovbysh, 2021). Scholars have highlighted how users have become their own gatekeepers within the digital world, leading to a threat to the hegemony and power of media gatekeepers, such as editors and professional journalists (Bruns, 2011). It is observed that news sources outside the field of traditional journalism, without professional standards, are taking their place alongside journalism giants. However, professional journalists claim that their privileged position as gatekeepers is secure, as they are considered the most ideal persons for gatekeeping. Nevertheless, they have acknowledged that the role of uneducated citizen journalists in making decisions about newsworthiness has increased markedly (Singer, 2006). Barzilai-Nahon (2009) stated that traditional gatekeeping theory cannot fully adapt to changing communication technology and environments. Existing definitions of the theory are contradictory and insufficient to ground an adaptive theory; therefore, a new gatekeeping theory is needed. This is because the Internet has introduced new roles for the 'gate', 'gated', and 'gatekeeper' (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009).

Networked gatekeeping environments are used to describe environments that allow various actors to engage in horizontal conversations to advance and filter content. While the gatekeeping process exposes the news applications of elite gatekeepers, such as editors, gatekeeping in networked environments offers ordinary users (the non-elite) the ability to create news messages with measurable impact (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). A 2022 report by the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* revealed that more than 4 out of 5 adults now access their news from digital channels, whereas only 3 out of 5 get their news via traditional sources of news such as television (Newman, 2022). On social networks, users can engage in gatekeeping processes by providing feedback on a particular subject. Some users share and post news story links when they do not publish content themselves (Deluliis, 2015). Through the use of social media platforms, non-elite actors can play an important role in shaping public debates (Pearce et al., 2019).

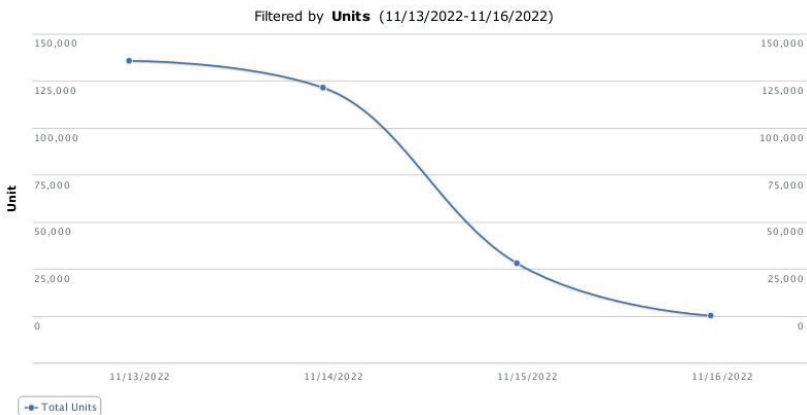
To understand how elite and non-elite actors negotiate within information flow through digital platforms, scholars have focused on the networked gatekeeping process during crisis events. Scholars have ascribed a significant role for ordinary users as key gatekeepers during times of crisis, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami (Meraz, 2011), and terrorist attacks (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016; Reilly & Vicari, 2021). Social media platforms, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, rely on algorithms to promote online content that may be of interest to users (Zhou et al., 2019). Additionally, elite actors, such as professional journalists and politicians, maintain prominent roles as gatekeepers (Chadwick, 2017). These actors control information and news content that reaches the public, using privileged access for content (Thorson & Wells, 2015).

Data and Methods

The hashtag #Taksim was the most popular on *Twitter* following the explosion, with users posting a great number of tweets under it. Therefore, the study focused on this hashtag to provide general information about the gatekeeping dynamics during this time. To access a *Twitter* dataset created through #Taksim, the study used *DiscoverText*. This allows researchers to collect, archive, and sort texts collected via *Facebook* and *Twitter* Graph APIs (Shulman, 2011). Additionally, *DiscoverText* users can create reusable custom machine classifiers or "sifters" to identify the content that is most (or least) relevant before utilizing additional classifiers to group content into topics, sentiment, and other categories (Shulman, 2011). To speed up a process that typically takes weeks or months when words are sorted in spreadsheets, *DiscoverText* integrates hybrid data science techniques, and users can get a high-level understanding of the data landscape via deduplication and intelligent clustering of near-duplicates (Shulman, 2011).

With *Twitter* data, these groupings are a roadmap to the digital footprint of viral *tweet*'s. A historical search for the query #Taksim between 13 and 16 November 2022 generated a dataset of 285,081 tweets during the attack. The current study includes the analysis of 285,081 tweets posted under the hashtag #Taksim. These tweets were collected with the *Twitter API* via *DiscoverText* and then analyzed via *DiscoverText*. This showed that a great number of tweets were posted to articulate opinions and emotions about the incident through the hashtag. Once the collection of the dataset was completed, it was coded using the *DiscoverText* program. *Figure 1*. demonstrates the composition and distribution of the tweets over time using the hashtag.

Figure 1. Time track for the tweets posted under #Taksim (source: DiscoverText)



As seen in *Figure 1* above, the number of tweets peaked in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. It then started to decline gradually, reaching its lowest level three days after the incident. Drawing upon work on networked gatekeeping (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2016; Vicari, 2017), the study examined gatekeeping dynamics and influential actors in #Taksim by tracking specific interactions on *Twitter*, such as retweets, likes, quote tweets, and replies (Mazza et al., 2022).

By applying quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the study identified the key gatekeepers who were the most influential actors using the hashtag. For example, the users who most frequently retweeted, liked, quote tweeted, and replied were identified as the key gatekeepers during the incident. Previous work has focused on prominent users across three communication markers of *Twitter* (retweets, @signs, and via) (e.g., Cha et al., 2010; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Therefore, this study offers a more comprehensive analysis of influential users by investigating other conversation markers (e.g., replies, likes, and quote tweets). The top 50 tweeters across each conversational marker were also coded according to their affiliation. For this process, the coding scheme provided by Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) was used, and the top tweeters were categorized based on the criteria demonstrated in *Table 1*. In addition, the study conducted an examination of key users' accounts to understand how those users became more influential than others within #Taksim.

Table 1. Categories for influential users for #Taksim

Category	Example
Mass media journalist	@nedimsener2010
Politician	@suleymansoylu
Institutional actor	@istanbul_EGM
Celebrity	@NurettinSonme
Online digital producer	@filmdenkare
Individual account	@individual account_1 (pseudonym)
Activist	@TTAgrup
Social media influencer	@theburaakk
Writer	@abdullahagar2

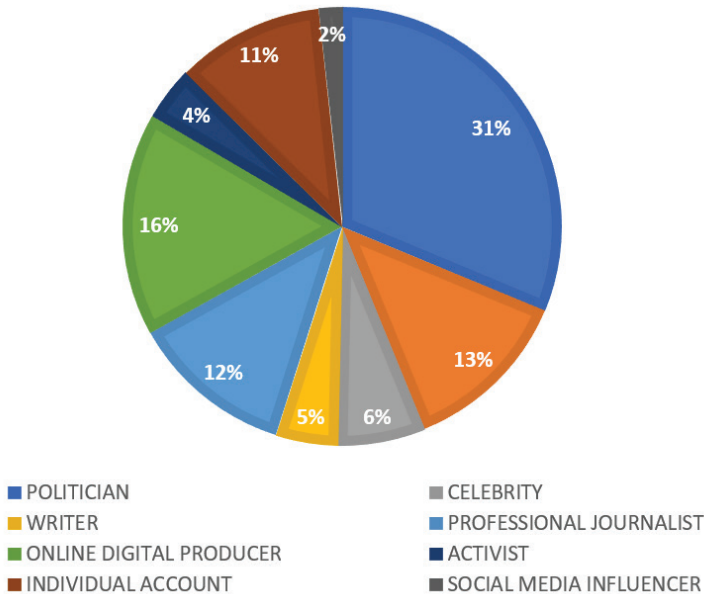
No generalizations about the story of the attack on Taksim Square through #Taksim could be made, as several hashtags, such as #bomba (#bomb), #patlama (#explosion), and #istiklalcaddesi (#istiklalavenue), were also used dur-

The tweets not only shared real-time information about the incident but also expressed the users' emotions about it using #Taksim. Tweeters frequently used the word 'patlama (explosion)' (83,944 tweets) in their expressions. It was detected that place names such as İstiklal, Beyoğlu, and İstanbul, pertaining to the area of the explosion, were among the most used words in the tweets collected during the incident. Users called İstanbul a beautiful and vibrant city and expressed their sorrow about the event. Some users also expressed good wishes and emphasized the importance of people living in İstanbul getting through this process together. It was also found that users often expressed their sympathy for the victims and their families with the words 'Allah'tan (from God)', 'rahmet (mercy)', and 'geçmiş olsun (get well soon)'. Others expressed their anger towards the attack and its perpetrators with the words 'lanet (damn)', 'terör (terror)', and 'saldırı (attack)'.

Elites were the most influential actors using #Taksim

A total of 285,081 tweets were sent by 135,653 users who shared once on the night of the attack. It suggests that there was a widespread distribution of user activity using #Taksim. It was found that the top 50 contributors to online content distributed via the hashtag accounted for 11% of the tweets, which makes up 1% of the dataset. Figure 3 shows the classification of the top 50 users using #Taksim.

Figure 3. The classification of the top 50 users using #Taksim

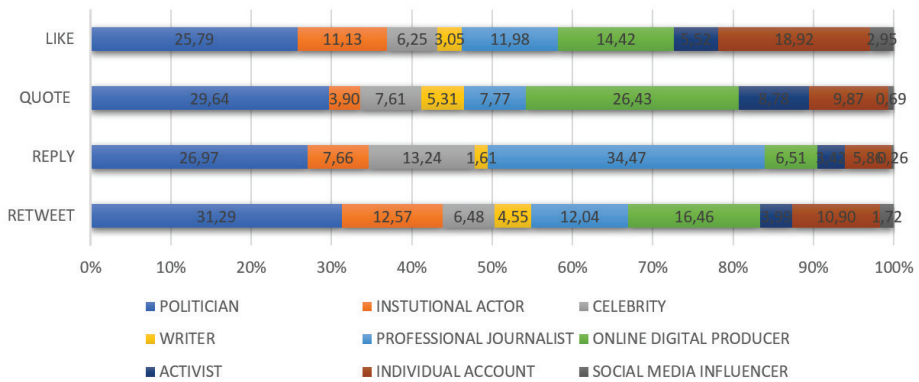


The results suggest that most of these tweets were shared by elite actors such as politicians, online digital producers, and mass media journalists. It shows that elite actors were the most influential users of #Taksim, especially immediately after the incident. For instance, @umitozdag (a politician) was among the top gatekeepers, and half an hour after the explosion, he tweeted: "I wish God's mercy to our citizens who lost their lives as a result of the explosion on IstiklalCadde in Taksim, and I wish a quick recovery to the injured..."

Moreover, the analysis of influential actors showed how the accounts of online digital producers, politicians, and mass media journalists were highly engaged users among this group (Figure 3). Previous research has shown that non-elite actors have a significant role in gatekeeping dynamics on Twitter (e.g., Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Vicari, 2017). However, the findings of this study indicated that #Taksim was predominantly supported by elite users who played a significant role in the information flow following the terrorist attack.

#Taksim gatekeeping dynamics

Figure 4. #Taksim gatekeeping dynamics by markers



- **The retweet marker:** The study examined the most influential users across each conversational marker (retweets, likes, replies, and quote tweets) using #Taksim and found that the four communication practices enabled different actors to become prominent, producing different gatekeeping dynamics (see Figure 4).

It was found that politicians (e.g., @suleymansoylu), online digital producers (e.g., @yirmiucderece), and institutional actors (@Besiktas) dominated the gatekeeping dynamics by posting the most retweeted tweets. The messages sent by politicians such as @suleymansoylu (6.8 million followers), @vekilince (6.9 million), and @umitozdag (2.5 million) were among the top five most fre-

quently retweeted tweets. These accounts were managed by Türkiye's leading politicians. For instance, @suleymansoylu belongs to former Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, who actively uses *Twitter*. During his term as Interior Minister, official announcements and messages were sent to inform the public through *Twitter*. His tweets about accusations against the American state and messages about terrorists in Türkiye received a high rate of interaction. One of his tweets was the most retweeted tweet in the dataset (9,437 retweets), where he mentioned: "We also caught the person who organized the terrorist attack. If we hadn't caught them, they would have fled to Greece today. We do not accept the American Embassy's condolences, we reject it #Taksim".

As seen in the tweet, Soylu displayed a similar attitude, accusing the United States and underlining that they did not accept the condolences of the American Embassy. Moreover, the accounts of @umitozdag and @vekilince belong to the leaders of the *Zafer Partisi* (Victory Party) and *Memleket Partisi* (Homeland Party) in Türkiye. @vekilince also has a great number of followers (6.9 million). İnce often uses *Twitter* for announcements and notifications, and most of his tweets are about his election promises. Messages posted from @vekilince's account about education, youth issues, freedom, and democracy received high interaction from other users. Following the Taksim case, he tweeted criticizing the limitation on freedom of news about the explosion, mentioning, "The mentality, which imposes a broadcast ban on the news of the explosion and slows down the internet, causes harm instead of ensuring the safety of people's lives #Taksim". This tweet was retweeted by a large number of users, allowing it to spread rapidly on *Twitter* (2,236 retweets). It was also observed that @umitozdag's account increased the number of followers by keeping the refugee problem on the agenda. Frequent tweets criticizing the policies towards refugees in Türkiye were posted from @umitozdag's account. For instance, Özdağ posted a tweet to criticize the policy of providing Turkish citizenship to refugees who buy a house in Türkiye. He also sent messages to highlight that if his party comes to power, all asylum seekers in Türkiye will be sent back. The tweet in which he mentioned the explosion in Taksim also pointed to the houses given to Syrian refugees. This tweet gained great attention from others and was quickly retweeted (5,741 retweets). In sum, politicians sent messages to inform the public or express their feelings about the event. They also referred to topics that they had underlined at other times, such as the refugee problem, and received high interaction from other users.

- **The reply marker:** The content produced by mass media journalists (e.g., @mehmetgecgell), politicians (e.g., @vekilince), and celebrities (@CengizCoskuun) were frequently replied to by other users, as seen in *Figure 4*. Mass media journalists and politicians quickly created and posted tweets to report real-time information related to the terrorist attack on Taksim Square using the hashtag. It was observed that mass media journalists such as @mehmetgecgell and @nedimsener2010 posted tweets expressing their

feelings in relation to the explosion. Although Şener posted a tweet containing information about an update on the explosion, Geçgel only expressed his feelings about the event. On the other hand, they both shared a picture of the baby carriage of a child who died during the explosion. Geçgel shared the picture, referring to those who planned the explosion with the words 'baby killers and bloodless'. By referring to their emotions, @mehmetgecgell and @nedimsener2010 might have influenced others' feelings, leading them to take part in the conversation about the explosion.

For example, politicians such as @suleymansoylu played an influential role by tweeting a status update on those responsible for the attack. This tweet gained wider attention from users who quickly replied to it (2,400 replies) under #Taksim. It was also found that individuals were not prominent within the reply marker, suggesting that the reply function enhanced the elites' (namely mass media journalists, politicians, and celebrities) ability to become gatekeepers in the networked environment. Therefore, they might have used this environment to engage in horizontal conversations for advancing and filtering content related to the attack, as highlighted by Meraz and Papacharissi (2013).

- **The quote tweet marker:** In the practice of quote tweeting, different users came to the fore in the networked environment through #Taksim compared to the reply function. The findings showed that although elites such as politicians, mass media journalists, and online digital producers were among the top gatekeepers, non-elites such as individual accounts also appeared as key gatekeepers within networked environments. This suggests that the use of this marker opened opportunities for non-elites by allowing them to become influential users. It was observed that social media content creators such as @BreakingNLive_, which was dedicated to breaking news content, played a key gatekeeping role as its tweet about the latest development of the attack was shared frequently by other users with their comments using #Taksim. It was found that the accounts of social media content creators such as @filmdenkare and @BreakingNLive actively share or produce content using *Twitter* that motivates site visits.

- **The like marker:** The *Twitter* like feature allowed different elite actors to become key gatekeepers during the incident. Tweets by politicians (e.g., @zyapicioglu), online digital producers (e.g., @HaberdenHabere_), and institutional actors (e.g., @istanbul_EGM) were frequently liked by other users (Figure 4). This shows that elite actors produced online content that was often supported by other users with this feature. For instance, the tweet by the Official *Twitter* Account of Istanbul Provincial Police Department (@istanbul_EGM) stated that "The terrorist who carried out the Terrorist Bomb Attack on Istiklal Street was Caught. The studies initiated regarding the incident continue..." The tweet gained wider attention as a large number of users (14,000) liked it. This suggests that tweeters engaged in an emerging development with the use of *Twitter's* socio-technical infrastructure and more specifically

communication practices. Non-elites, such as individual accounts, were also identified as influential actors within the like marker. Specifically, the tweet posted by @individual_account_2 was liked by 41,800 users, thus non-elites also appeared in the dataset as key gatekeepers.

Conclusion and Discussion

Drawing upon previous research on networked gatekeeping practices, this study examined the gatekeepers who were the most influential actors under #Taksim. Studies on gatekeeping dynamics have explored user engagement in different conversational practices such as retweet, @sign, and via during a crisis event (e.g., Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Vicari et al., 2020). The study explored *Twitter* users across the communicative practices of retweet, reply, like, and quote tweet using #Taksim, offering a more comprehensive analysis of key gatekeepers within the networked environment during crisis events. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated the significant role of *Twitter* in allowing non-elites to be more influential during crisis events, such as terrorist attacks (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016). However, the findings showed that *Twitter* usage primarily enhanced elite actors such as politicians and mass media journalists to be the key gatekeepers of #Taksim, especially immediately after the incident.

The findings on gatekeeping practices, therefore, dampen optimistic ideas on the enabling potential of *Twitter* infrastructure, as they indicate the primary role of politicians, mass media journalists, online digital producers, and institutional actors within #Taksim following the incident. It also appeared that politicians were the most influential actors as they generated spreadable content in all communicative practices. Although elite actors were at the center of communication practices, non-elites such as individual accounts also appeared as key gatekeepers within networked environments. In particular, they were identified as influential within the quote tweet and the like marker. This finding is consistent with Reilly and Vicari's (2021) findings, who examined the broadcasting and networked gatekeeping dynamics for #PorteOuverte during the Paris terrorist attack in 2015. They found that non-elite actors played a significant role in the networked gatekeeping dynamics, as they identified citizens as top broadcasters within #PorteOuverte. It was observed that non-elite individuals appeared as influential within the networked environment along with elite actors such as politicians and mass media journalists when only elite actors lost interest in the debates. Similarly, Vicari, Iannelli, and Zurovac (2020) found that ordinary users engaged in discussions as gatekeepers within the platform of *Twitter* when media outlets did not actively participate in those discussions.

Additionally, the analysis of influential accounts, namely politicians, showed that they became prominent within #Taksim by addressing debatable topics such as the refugee problem and freedom of the press. More-

over, tweets posted by mass journalists were identified as influential within #Taksim. It was found that tweets about the explosion contained emotionally arousing content. Therefore, those tweets with visuals received more attention and were disseminated by others through #Taksim. It suggests that the users who played an important role in the flow of information through #Taksim became more prominent by addressing problematic issues in Türkiye and sharing effective visuals.

References

- Barzilai-Nahon, K. (2009). Gatekeeping: A critical review. *Annual review of information science and technology*, 43(1), 1-79.
- BBC. (2022). *Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Turkey explosion*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63615076>
- Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. (2011). The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics [Conference Paper]. *Proceedings of the 6th European consortium for political research (ECPR) general conference 2011* (pp. 1-9). The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR).
- _____. (2015). Twitter hashtags from ad hoc to calculated publics. *Hashtag publics: The power and politics of discursive networks*, 13-28.
- Bruns, A., & Stieglitz, S. (2012). Quantitative approaches to comparing communication patterns on Twitter. *Journal of technology in human services*, 30(3-4), 160-185.
- Burnap, Williams, M. L., Sloan, L., Rana, O., Housley, W., Edwards, A., Knight, V., Procter, R., & Voss, A. (2014). Tweeting the terror: Modelling the social media reaction to the Woolwich terrorist attack. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-014-0206-4>
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
- Chaudhry, I. (2014). Arab revolutions: Breaking fear|# hashtags for change: Can Twitter generate social progress in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 943-961.
- Chin-Fook, L., & Simmonds, H. (2011). Redefining gatekeeping theory for a digital generation. *The McMaster Journal of Communication*. 8, 7-34.
- Deluiliis, D. (2015). Gatekeeping theory from social fields to social networks. *Communication Research Trends*, 34(1), 4-23.
- Dovbysh, O. (2021). New gatekeepers in town: How groups in social networking sites influence information flows in Russia's provinces. *Social Media+ Society*, 7(2), 1-11.
- Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBS nightly news, Newsweek and Time*. Pantheon Books.

- _____ (2004). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*. Northwestern University Press.
- Gauthier-Villars D., Ceylan A., and Toksabay E. (2022). *Six dead in Istanbul blast, Erdogan says it 'smells like terrorism'*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/central-istanbul-blast-leaves-multiple-wounded-media-video-2022-11-13/>
- Giglietto, F., & Lee, Y. (2017). A hashtag worth a thousand words: Discursive strategies around #JeNeSuisPasCharlie after the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(1), 1-15.
- Heverin, T., & Zach, L. (2012). Use of microblogging for collective sense-making during violent crises: A study of three campus shootings. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63(1), 34-47.
- Housley, Webb, H., Williams, M., Procter, R., Edwards, A., Jirotko, M., Burnap, P., Stahl, B. C., Rana, O., & Williams, M. (2018). Interaction and transformation on social media: The case of Twitter campaigns. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117750721>
- Islamoglu, U. (2022). *PKK terrorists in Syria ordered deadly bomb attack in Istanbul, admits perpetrator*. AA. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/pkk-terrorists-in-syria-ordered-deadly-bomb-attack-in-istanbul-admits-perpetrator/2737512>
- Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2016). #Ferguson is everywhere: Initiators in emerging counterpublic networks. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(3), 397-418.
- Kemp, S. (2022). *Twitter statistics and trends*. Datareportal. <https://datareportal.com/essential-twitter-stats>
- Lee, S., Chung, J. E., Park, N., & Welch, J. R. (2020). Status and expertise in the structuring of reciprocal exchanges on Twitter: Replies, retweets, and mentions during national diabetes awareness month. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 6242-6265.
- Mazza, M., Cola, G., & Tesconi, M. (2022). Ready-to-(ab) use: From fake account trafficking to coordinated inauthentic behavior on Twitter. *Online Social Networks and Media*, 31, 100224.
- Meeyoung Cha, Benevenuto, F., Haddadi, H., & Gummadi, K. (2012). The world of connections and information flow in Twitter. *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man and Cybernetics. Part A, Systems and Humans*, 42(4), 991-998. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TSMCA.2012.2183359>
- Meraz, S. (2011). Citizen journalism, citizen activism, and technology: Positioning technology as a 'second superpower' in times of disasters and terrorism [Conference Paper]. *International Symposium on Online Journalism* (pp. 27-30). Austin, University of Texas.
- Meraz, S., & Papacharissi, Z. (2013). Networked gatekeeping and networked framing on #Egypt. *The international journal of press/politics*, 18(2), 138-166.

- _____ (2016). Networked framing and gatekeeping. *The SAGE handbook of digital journalism*, 95-112.
- Messina, C., (2007). *Groups for Twitter; or a proposal for Twitter tag channels*. FactoryJoe. <https://factoryjoe.com/2007/08/25/groups-for-twitter-or-a-proposal-for-twitter-tag-channels/>.
- Molina, R. G. (2019). Networked gatekeeping and networked framing on Twitter protests in Mexico about the Ayotzinapa case. *RIMCIS: Revista Internacional y Multidisciplinar en Ciencias Sociales*, 8(3), 235-266.
- Murthy, D., (2018). *Twitter* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Netblocks. (2022). *Social media restricted in Turkey after blast in Taksim, Istanbul*. Netblocks. <https://netblocks.org/reports/social-media-restricted-in-turkey-after-blast-in-taksim-istanbul-7yNnr0yq>
- Newman, N. (2022). *Overview and key findings of the 2022 digital news report*. Reuters Institute. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary>
- O'sullivan, T., Hartley, J., Saunders, D., Montgomery, M., & Fiske, J. (1994). *Key concepts in communication and cultural studies*. Routledge.
- Pearce, W., Niederer, S., Özkula, S. M., & Sánchez Querubín, N. (2019). The social media life of climate change: Platforms, publics, and future imaginaries. *Wiley interdisciplinary reviews: Climate change*, 10(2), e569.
- Petersen, L., Fallou, L., Havarneanu, G., Reilly, P., Serafinelli, E., & Bossu, R. (2018). November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks and social media use: preliminary findings from authorities, critical infrastructure operators and journalists [Conference Paper]. *ISCRAM 2018 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 629-638). Rochester, NY, USA.
- Pourebahim, N., Sultana, S., Edwards, J., Gochanour, A., & Mohanty, S. (2019). Understanding communication dynamics on Twitter during natural disasters: A case study of Hurricane Sandy. *International journal of disaster risk reduction*, 37, 101176.
- Reilly, P., & Vicari, S. (2021). Organizational Hashtags during times of crisis: Analyzing the broadcasting and gatekeeping dynamics of # PorteOuvrte during the November 2015 Paris terror attacks. *Social Media+ Society*, 7(1), 1-13.
- Rogers, R. (2013, May). Debanalizing Twitter: The transformation of an object of study [Conference Paper]. *Proceedings of the 5th annual ACM web science conference* (pp. 356-365). Paris, France.
- Schalbe, C. B., Silcock, B. W., & Candello, E. (2015). Gatecheckers at the visual news stream: A new model for classic gatekeeping theory. *Journalism Practice*, 9(4), 465-483.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. Routledge.
- Shulman, S. (2011). DiscoverText: Software training to unlock the power of text [Conference Paper]. *Proceedings of the 12th Annual international digital govern-*

ment research conference: Digital government innovation in challenging times (pp. 373-373). College Park, USA.

Singer, J. B. (2006). Stepping back from the gate: Online newspaper editors and the co-production of content in campaign 2004. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 265-280.

Spicer, J., Kucukgocmen, A. & Toksabay, E. (2022). *Turkey blames deadly bomb on Kurdish militants; PKK denies involvement*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-blames-istanbul-blast-kurdish-militants-arrests-22-including-bomber-2022-11-14/>

Steensen, S. (2018). Tweeting terror: An analysis of the Norwegian Twitter-sphere during and in the aftermath of the 22 July 2011 terrorist attack. *Social media use in crisis and risk communication* (pp. 15-41). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Thorson, K., & Wells, C. (2015). How gatekeeping still matters: Understanding media effects in an era of curated flows. *Gatekeeping in transition* (pp. 25-44). Routledge.

Tikka, M. (2019). Ritualisation of Crisis Communication: Crowd-enabled responses to the Stockholm terror attack on Twitter. *Nordicom Review*, 40(1), 105-120.

Vicari, S. (2017). Twitter and non-elites: Interpreting power dynamics in the life story of the (#) BRCA Twitter stream. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(3), 2056305117733224.

Zhou, Y., Dredze, M., Broniatowski, D. A., & Adler, W. D. (2019). Elites and foreign actors among the alt-right: The Gab social media platform. *First Monday*, 24(9).

Ethics committee approval: There is no need for ethics committee approval.
Conflict of interest: There are no conflicts of interest to declare.
Financial support: No funding was received for this study.

Etik Kurul Onayı: Etik kurul onayına ihtiyaç bulunmamaktadır.
Çıkar çatışması: Çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
Finansal destek: Finansal destek bulunmamaktadır.

