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## TWEETING POLITICAL FEAR: TROLLS IN TURKEY

Duygu ÖZSOY\*

### Abstract

Fear is an important instrument in establishing and sustaining political power. In Turkey, trolls generally make hashtags that provoke social fear of returning to the pre-republic religious and traditional values. For example, #homosexualityshouldbe-prohibited, #womenshouldnotwork, #girlsshouldnotbeeducated, #theshariashouldbedeclared, #thosewhodonotfastshouldbe-deported. These hashtags become trending topics in a short period of time because they attract critical tweets in response to their controversial and provocative statements. On the one hand, trolls provoke social fears; on the other hand they ridicule those fears. In this study, trolls will be discussed within the framework of fear and politics. In depth interviews were conducted with trolls, looking to answer questions about who a troll is, what they do, if they have any intention or purpose, and what limits they may have, etc. The next part of the study looked at the question of whether a troll can create new political language, and if they can, what are the opportunities and problems with this new language within the context of fear and power.

**Key Words:** *Twitter, troll, trolling, political fear*

### Korku Politikası ve Türkiye’de Twitter Trolleri

#### Özet

Korku, politik iktidarın kurulması ve sürdürülmesinde önemli bir enstrümandır. Türkiye’de Twitter trolleri genellikle #homoseksuellikyasaklansin, #kadinlarcalismasin, #kizlarokulagitmesin, #seriatgelsin, #oructutmayanlarsinirdisiedilsin gibi *hashtag*ler üreterek Türkiye’de egemen olan seküler korkuları aktive etmeyi hedeflerler. Bu *hashtag*ler, bu fikirlerin Twitter’da gündeme getirilip savunulmasından kaygıya kapılan insanların attığı eleştirel tweetler aracılığıyla kısa zamanda *trending topic* olur. Troller

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\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Atatürk Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi

bir yandan korkuyu provoke ederken bir yandan da onu gülünçleştirir. Çalışmada, Türkiye'deki Twitter trolleri, korku ve iktidar bağlamında ele alınmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında, trollerle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmış ve öncelikle troll kimdir, neyi amaçlar ya da bir amacı var mıdır, trollüğün sınırları nelerdir ya da trollün sınırı olur mu gibi soruların yanıtları aranmıştır. Ardından, korku ve iktidar bağlamında, troll yeni bir politik dil üretebilir mi, eğer üretiyorsa bu yeni politik dilin imkânları ve problemleri nelerdir sorularının yanıtları üzerine bir tartışma yürütülmüştür.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Twitter, troll, trollük, korku politikası*

## INTRODUCTION

Main aim of this study is to examine the discussions that have been started by twitter trolls in Turkey by triggering the political fear. Fear is an important element in establishing and sustaining the political power. Individual, who is in a constant conflict with other individuals in order to protect his own existence in the natural state, accepts to assign a part of his possessions to a central power for his security. By this way, fear produces the power. As is indicated by Çetin; 'individuals, who suffer because of their fears, come together with such people and establish social and political structures where they could suffer jointly and overcome the fear of suffering separately with the fear of suffering together' (Çetin 2012: 9). The dominant who is scared of losing the power keeps the fear alive in order to sustain its power and for that purpose, he constantly produces new fears and fearful objects. Individuals, races, social groups, etc. who are made an object of fear are exposed to the process of oppression and exclusion.

Fear has served as an important instrument of establishing the power throughout the Republic Period in Turkey. Reaction used to be considered the greatest threat for the Republic and the "fear of reaction" has kept being an important source of fear until today, despite having been in a weakening way. Fears that have been created by the powers of the Republic Period serve as significant supplies for trolls, as well. Trolls frequently create hashtags that provoke the social fear regarding bringing back the religious and traditional values of the pre-republic era. Troll plays a game by manipulating the language of fear that is used by the power. As Donath says 'trolling is a game about identity deception, albeit one that is played without consent of most of the players' (Donath 1999). However, in these hashtags, trolls spread fear by writing in the language of what is feared, rather than the language of those who

cause fear. In this game, the subject that causes fear and the object that is feared become the same.

## **METHOD**

As Philips indicates; “paradoxically, trolling is both real and pretend, both playful and malicious” (2011: 69). This paradoxical and contradictory identity of the troll makes it hard to be understood only from outside. I made a contact and conducted deep interviews with trolls within the scope of the study, since this would enable us to extend our knowledge on trolls and trolling. In the study, I interviewed with eight trolls and used their twitter nicknames in the phase of writing. However, since only one of the trolls refused to allow his name or nickname to be used, he was mentioned as @x throughout the paper. While @esatce, @sovergecerim, @kurekli\_batur, @panpichulo and @x were interviewed face to face, @mefakest, @olumvarhaci, and @muhmmdogan were interviewed via e-mail.

This study primarily based on their own expressions and looking for the answers to who troll is purposes of troll or do they have any, limits of troll, advantages of the style of their writings. In this context this study aims to portray the profile of troll and then discusses about the twitter trolls in Turkey, within the context of fear and power.

## **1. DEFINING THE TROLL**

Trolls generally prefer a provocative, abusive, sexist, racist, inflammatory and disruptive writing style. All of the trolls interviewed were of the same opinion regarding that this writing style is a source of pleasure for them. While talking about the general features of a troll, the trolls not only emphasised that there is no homogenous and uniform profile of troll, but also stated that good trolls are smart, intellectual individuals who are aware of the street jargon and the outer world.

@esatce: There are trolls who write in quite different manners and use different styles. They involve students, the people who serve in the senior management of the government, as well as academicians.

@x: People have such a viewpoint regarding trolls: they are the most asocial individuals of the world, who sit at home all day, weigh between 100-150 kg, escape from other people and spend their whole time for masturbating. It certainly is not like that; they all have a life, most of them are married people

who are well acquainted with the street and other people. As a matter of fact, if you don't know the street jargon, you have no chance to survive. A troll without a street culture immediately manifests himself. You need to be a judge of character.

@kurekli\_batur: Even though it can not be generalised to all of the trolls, I think that trolls are smart people who are acquainted with the street culture, which makes them different from others.

Some writers see their activity useless. In their essay named *Searching for Safety Online: Managing "Trolling" in a Feminist Forum* writers claim that, 'trolling entails luring others into pointless and time consuming discussions' and the troll is 'a fictional monster waiting under the bridge to snare innocent bystanders' (Herring et al. 2002: 372); and also in another essay named *Picturing Usenet: Mapping Computer-Mediated Collective Action* it is said that 'the ultimate goal of a troll is to draw unwitting others into useless discussions' (Turner et al. 2012). And Philips says about their style of writing:

Trolls taunt unsuspecting targets with seemingly racist, seemingly sexist and/or seemingly homophobic language; post shocking imagery, including pornography and gore, in order to derail conversation; and flood discussion threads with non sequiturs or grotesque distortions of other users' positions (Philips 2011: 68-9).

So, let's ask the question: Do they see their own act as "pointless and time consuming" and do they take the advantages of the style of their own language, as they say? Regarding a troll's preferring such style, the first reason is about having fun; however, there are also some other reasons: According to the troll, this language is also an objection to the pattern of permanent thinking, prejudices, stereotypes, stable patterns of mind and to the past.

@x: Instead of writing with intellectual language, trolls use a brand new jargon. Because this is their preference. It is possible for them to write with intellectual language, as well. They could write about cinema, a political blog; but they just don't prefer because the feedback of intellectual information provides an ego satisfaction. They prefer this way since they seek no ego satisfaction. They have a great intellectual background, but at the same time, are at peace with the street. They are not like those who are settled in Galata or Cihangir. There are only 4-5 men like them. Essence of the matter is to avoid transforming the intellectual background into benefit. I know what you know as

well, but I am not as retarded as you. That's all. I have a quick-wit; I don't regard things one sidedly, which you do.

The way the trolls explain the style they use reminds us of Bourdieu's concepts of "symbolic interest" and "cultural capital". Being different from Marxism, Bourdieu does not limit the notion of interest with the material aspect of social life. As Swartz points out; 'Bourdieu broadens the idea of economic interest to include symbolic or non- material pursuit as well as material ones' (Swartz 1998: 66). Bourdieu's concept of "strategy" can be explanatory for us to understand troll's motivation to oppose the people who use this "strategy" for gaining power. It is also one of the reasons for trolling.

Bourdieu speaks of action as strategy to emphasize the interest orientation of human conduct. (...) Action as strategy conveys the idea that individual practices are fundamentally interested, that actors attempt to derive advantages from situations. (...) A form of power as capital in the differentiated societies that Bourdieu conceptualizes by extending the logic of economic analysis to ostensibly noneconomic goods and services is cultural capital' and 'his point is to suggest that culture can become a power resource (Swartz 1998: 67, 75).

Trolls think that trolling irritates those with power at most. Therefore, according to @x; 'individuals with power, money and a high ego are disturbed due to trolls. As a matter of fact, when people are disturbed, irritated and get aggressive, this condition supports trolling.' Just like Bourdieu's thought that 'all cultural production is reward oriented, and that stylistic preferences are selected and rejected in ways that are analogous to the general notions of investment and search for profits in the economy' (Swartz 1998: 66), trolls think that liberal, and democratic tweets of people that are respectful to different opinions and sensitive towards social problems actually have an interest-based quality. Individuals attain a symbolic power by means of these tweets. Trolls think that individuals who tweet in that way occasionally act, but they generally internalise this problematical attitude. The troll either dismasks the person who acts, or makes him face himself. However, trolls assert that they don't perform trolling primarily for the purpose of obtaining an objective or benefit; indeed, such behaviours comprise a reason of motivation for trolling. In other words, individuals who display such behaviours become a hunt for trolls. While some trolls think that trolling cannot be performed for an objective and indeed, this aimlessness is what makes trolling attractive, others emphasise that the primary

objective is to have pleasure and they obtain a benefit as a result of the activity of trolling.

@x: Individuals who affirm trolling think as follows: trolling shows how stupid the people are, and reveals their real attitudes towards incidents. I don't think so. Everyone has a conscience but trolls should easily ridicule an accident news, or autistic, spastic individuals. Trolls have no limit. Supposing that someone who is really appreciated by everyone is dead and there is a hashtag about him; you ridicule, manipulate or write false information in your tweet in either a planned or unplanned way. This is not about showing how cruel the people could be. The reason is very simple. It could give pleasure to you or not. There were times I felt an incredible pleasure about ridiculing the death of someone. Nothing ever disturbs me. I like interfering with taboos. Trolls don't have taboos; it contradicts with what you do. It doesn't have to provide a benefit in the end. It is impossible to separate it as harmful or useful. I think this is what people actually like about trolling.

@muhmmdogan: I have neither an aim, nor a concern. I just do it for fun. I think no one has an aim. I believe that the reason for trolling to have been favoured so much is its aimlessness.

In addition, some trolls think that there are some acquisitions that are obtained as a result of the activity of trolling.

@esatce: Acting like a sensitive person is the most abject action for me. Especially the phenomena derive a great profit from this and make people believe what they say by acting like sensitive people, but we know that they are not really that much sensitive. For instance, I wrote the phone number of an insect disinfestation firm on a very cold day and tweeted about calling this number to help homeless people on streets, which was spread by hundreds of people. That is to say, no one called this number but then they criticised me about being inglorious since I was trolling on such a subject.

@Fahrettin: It is so much fun to molest and annoy celebrities. Because among celebrities, even those who claim to be the most democratic or leftist are very egoistic people. They have excessive clichés and prejudices. They react so severely even to the slightest implication that they immediately start threatening with opening a case and stuff. One thinks that they are very famous, rich, popular, populist but he also wants to ponder them.

Trolls consider the language they use as an alternative way of thinking, as well. This new language also creates a new way of thinking. According to trolls,

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the language of trolling enables individuals to question the usual patterns of thinking, as well as prejudices and opinions defended. For instance, @esatce told that trolls make fun even of the views that are close to them and he is able to see his mistakes better when he writes his views in a style of trolling.

@Fahrettin: A reaction has been created towards the clichés and prejudices of people in the social media. Making fun of people's cliché; that's the funniest part but you need to do this without evoking anything. Trolls don't have concerns such as "there are inconsistencies here, so let's react", "let's give a social message". Everyone just seeks after having fun. And they use anonymous accounts to prevent cases. This is the essence of the matter; having as much fun as possible anonymously.

@esatce: We -the trolls- don't have any concerns; when we do, we can't perform trolling. We all say that here is a platform for fun. But I don't think so. A man who comes here to write has his own concerns. He has something to change or someone to affect. Yes, we can't change individuals or their opinions, but we can show them the possibility of such a thing. Each troll has different concerns, different beliefs and different life styles, which they can't express with their own identities. Turkey's judicial system, the oppression environment that was created after the coup and frustration caused by customs and traditions compel individuals to express themselves with anonymous identities. In other words, trolling is actually a revolt. When you propound a discussion with an anonymous identity, they have no chance of disclosing you. I think that trolling is a reflection of a troll's pain. We question our past on twitter. While some people do it just for fun, some do it since they really want it and others do it since they believe that they are supposed to be there.

@sovergecerim: My account was closed twice due to the spam notification. I tweeted about the Alevi community in 2009. The Alevis always claim that they are lynched which is true, but when I wrote a joke about them, they all lynched me on twitter. They actually contradict with themselves. Alevis are always in the mood of being losers, but when I wrote something about them, they tried to do the same thing to me. Similarly, I once wrote another joke about Kurds and my account was closed by them afterwards. Trolling has such a feature; you create a subject of discussion, which eventually reveals the actual faces of people. I want people to get mad at me, so that they can recognise themselves.

Another reason for trolls to prefer this style is that they think that they cannot convince people by writing in the usual style.

@sovergecerim: I personally object urban transformation, gentrification. A guy wrote about how our prime minister does good jobs. I am an atheist but Koran has a statement, which is as follows: “one day, a person will take everything you have and then you will understand what’s going on”. I sent this to the guy. He said that I was right. But if I had written about the inappropriateness of urban transformation, he would have say me to fuck off.

@esatce: We are trying to create awareness. Actually, the whole world has it but our country has a bit greater, people easily forget the incidents. We, on the other hand, criticise the past by acting like idiots, because these problems are present even today. Trolls are individuals who write in an attempt to raise awareness without having a concern about this.

Trolls are mostly criticized that they give harm to the freedom of speech conditions on Internet. Dahlberg negotiates whether online discourse is in fact extending public sphere by comparing Habermas’ normative conception of the public sphere. One necessities of Habermas’ ideal public sphere is sincerity. The meaning of sincerity is clearly explained as Dahlberg puts forward: ‘Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as relevant to the particular problem under consideration’ (Dahlberg 2001). However trolls have an opposite attitude.

Suspicion of a troll can lead to participants’ re-evaluating how they post and how seriously they take other posters. Participants may become cautious about self-revelations and about believing the revelations of others. Participants may even decide to keep silent, or to withdraw altogether from the group concerned. In this way, trolls can cause a lot of damage to online deliberations (Dahlberg 2001).

Trolls never accept criticisms regarding the fact that their style destroys the free environment of speech of the internet and they object standardisations such as “ideal public sphere”, “ideal speech in public sphere” and “ideal language of discussion”. Trolls believe that the language they prefer is one of the several ways of expressing themselves and this language provides a new freedom for them, rather than destroying the freedom of speech.

@cihat: However, it extends the area of freedom. Let’s suppose that there is a serious discussion on the agenda. Serious according to whom? This is the



greatest question. Universal realities or truths never exist. This actually is the essence of the matter. Let's say it is serious or not serious to me, it was serious 1 hour ago or it is serious 1 hour later. When you understand this, everything will seem to be very easy. When you discuss about Darwin or evolution with any Muslim, he will instantly make fun of it saying 'now that we were evolved from apes, why don't we evolve back to them haha', but when you criticise Muhammad in a discussion with a Muslim, he will get mad. He can't understand that there would be people who would adopt the ideas of Darwin. What is your superiority? You think that your religion has a superiority. But other people just don't.

@muhmmdogan: Sarcastic language comprises the essence of trolling. Trolls approach all kinds of discussions including political and cultural discussions in a sarcastic way. Everyone expresses themselves differently. Revoking the right of trolls to express themselves has the same meaning with doing trolls an injustice, which is claimed to be possessed by those who criticise trolls.

@olumvarhaci: It is sufficient for those who don't want us to unfollow or block us. We restrict no one's freedom area. Twitter enables such activities as a medium. People are well aware that trolls are also present in this channel while opening an account. You are free to follow, unfollow, block or report as spam.

## **2. ORGANISED TROLLING VIA HASHTAGS**

Trolling is generally a personal activity; when a troll trolls someone, other trolls might also join the fun and start tweeting with similar contents against the target person, but this generally develops in a spontaneous way. On the other hand, the trolling samples that are performed by starting hashtags, which is discussed in this paper, are organised trolling activities. Trolls start hashtags that would activate social fears and make them trending topics on twitter.

As is indicated in the introduction section, fear is an important instrument for establishing and sustaining the power, and governments have always tried to establish and sustain social governance by political fears throughout the history of republic in Turkey. Trolls aim to activate fears regarding the possibility of bringing back religious and traditional values of the pre-republic era that were created by the governments of the Republic Period by means of hashtags such as stone those who are dressed inconveniently to death, Destroy Anıtkabir,

Don't send girls to school, We want shariah, Ban homosexuality. Because as Aktay(2010) indicates; one of the greatest conspiracy possibilities that were determined during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey is the reaction conspiracy, which means grounding the fundamentals of the government on religion just like before. Hashtags started by trolls instantly appear on the top of the list of trending topics through the tweets of twitter users, who strictly oppose these views and criticise these hashtags.

As Çetin points out; 'fear is always present in everywhere. Politics started when this was explored and started to be managed, directed and adopted in bodies and souls of human beings' (Çetin 2012: 17). The power owner not only scares but also gets scared. According to Aktay, 'the fear of the power owner has two dimensions: Fear of losing the power and establishing a power through this fear by seeming scared or scaring the people' (Aktay, 2010: 9). The power establishes dominance over the society with the help of mass conspiracies it creates. 'Conspiracies might undoubtedly be true but they generally are exaggerated or completely made up in a striking way' (Aktay, 2010: 19). Author call this process "the generation of mass conspiracy by the government". This concept is a type of the phenomenon of "moral panic" from some aspects. 'Since the mass conspiracy is generated by the government, it causes greater damages than the moral panic'(Aktay 2010: 37). And as Baker(2001) says, 'moral panics are potential features of all communities, however large or small, including Internet or virtual communities where hierarchies may be less immediately recognizable'.

The goal of this study is to analyse the trolling activity, twitter users reactions to hashtags isn't discussed deeply. Briefly, these reactions can be categorized roughly in three main groups. Some doesn't recognize trolling and get anxious about that the way of thinking and these thoughts can be trending topic. These are the people who see this tweets and hashtags as a danger for society. They could even tell them to go and live in Iran or Saudi Arabia. Their tweets generally reflect these anxieties. The second group is aware of that it is a trolling activity. They feel angry to the first group because their anxious tweets make these hashtags trending topic and find them stupid. They think that the only way to stop a troll is to ignore him/her. As Shachaf and Hara indicates 'to ignore trolls as much as possible in order to limit their activities, is perceived to be the best practice in online communities, it is assumed that if ignored, the troll will leave' (Shachaf and Hara 2010: 360). Alongside being aware of that it is a

trolling activity, the third group thinks a limitation for trolling is necessary. They claim that despite the freedom of speech on Internet, mocking of certain issues should not take place. This is like a code of living for them. It can be said that these certain issues are their taboos. Trolls make their taboos look ridiculous and they think this decrease the power of the idea, person or situation they care.

Objects that cause fear become taboo in the course of time. Taboo means sacre, consacre; as well as dangerous, horrible, forbidden, dirty. The term taboo also has a meaning like avoidance; it basically is encountered in prohibitions... Taboos create a sense of danger on people. As a matter of course, people want to avoid dangerous situations as much as possible and escape from it and protect themselves if they are in such a situation. Thus, due to the thought of danger it involves, fear is a feeling that brings along the behaviour of protection, escape (Çetin 2012: 40).

Using the elements of fear generation that is used by the power is a frequently-used method in trolling as well. Trolls agree on a subject that would activate social fears and determine a hashtag accordingly. And then they start constantly tweeting on the subject by using this hashtag, enable their tweets to be retweeted with the help of twitter retweet bot and their followers support trolls by tweeting, as well. By this way, the hashtag is enabled to be seen by other twitter users. @sovergecerim said, "Followers of trolls are active members; they are like guards rather than just followers. A troll with 2000 followers could be more effective than a phenomenon with 100 thousand followers." Consequently, in such hashtags, followers of trolls become a part of the game. As soon as the tweets with hashtags become apparent, others immediately start tweeting against those who start that hashtag, by showing their angers and concerns. By this way, the hashtag appears on the list of trending topic. @muhmmdogan, @panpichulo, @olumvarhaci and @mefakest are leading trolls, who have recently started hashtags that have a negative content aimed at the values of the Republic and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, and target to provoke especially the Kemalists, who constitute a mass that rigidly adopts Atatürk's views:

All of the elements that caused the Ottoman Empire to be destroyed consist of principal fears about the establishment of the Republic. The most important elements that destroyed the Ottoman Empire were as follows; Progress of the Western civilization from all aspects and political, economic and

military underdevelopment of the Turks compared to the west; nationalism movements; national unity and solidarity; threat of ethnical, religious, denominational and class discriminations; lack of an authoritarian government system and an authoritarian leadership as a strong guide. Atatürk tried to build the modern republic on such fears. From this aspect, he started by destroying the fears and reconverting the threats that were produced by these fears (Çetin 2012: 221).

Trolls, being organized, use these elements of fear. Trolls told us how they started such hashtags as follows:

@muhmmdogan: Everyone suggests an idea and we try to make the best idea, which would draw the greatest attention of people, a trending topic.

@mefakest: In the beginning, someone from the group used to have an idea and write, and we used to continue. We have become more organised afterwards. We talk about, agree on a subject and then write it. When we become trending topic, we withdraw into our shells and watch the tweets written ☺

@olumvarhaci: One of us mentions about making a trending topic, we accept it, determine the subject and write about our most favourite idea. Thanks to them; Kemalists make the hashtags trending topic by criticising us. When they become trending topic, we laugh at and make fun of what they write.

@panpichulo: We have a group of four persons who write to one another via whatsapp; once we decide on a subject, one of us starts the hashtag on twitter. We have fake accounts, through which we make retweet bot. We make our tweets retweeted. Once our hashtag appears on the list of trending topics, we immediately start writing opposite opinions. For instance, if we attack the Kurds in the hashtag, we instantly start sending tweets that defend the Kurds.

@mefakest: We advance upon the fears of Kemalists. Because I think that these fears are groundless. Those who take our tweets seriously are hunted but others join the fun.

@panpichulo: I find the fears of Kemalists very stupid; therefore I troll them and have a lot of fun. I am actually serious about Kemalists. I am doing this seriously by hiding behind trolling. I literally pour out.

@muhmmdogan: Hashtags are an essential entertainment for us; we generally attack Kemalists since they take the bait at most. And we enjoy this. We have hunted a number of Kemalists.

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As we see above, their activity on twitter is not detached with trolls real identity. In the era of Republic, political powers have made some groups, especially religious conservatives to be seen as The Other; as Çetin indicates, ‘political power make some groups look like horrible beings and present them as a source of fear in order to establish the power in the society (Çetin 2012: 44). And nowadays, some conservative trolls are settling up with former political power groups, like Kemalist who have lost political power. As Philips says:

In the context of trolling, we cannot overlook the ways in which trolls’ raced, classed, and gendered bodies undergird and provide context for trolling behaviors. This is not to say that there exists a simple one-to-one relationship between the people behind the trolls and their trolling personas. But a very basic level, trolls’ terrestrial experiences –levels of education, access to media and technology, political affiliation or lack thereof – influence their online choices, including (and most basically) the ability to go online at all (Philips, 2002: 2-3).

However, since the similar-style trolling activity could easily be deciphered after a while, the troll has to change his writing style. Therefore, trolling has a constantly changing and updated language.

@panpichulo: Trolls wrote to us about how our Kemalist hashtags bothered them. Some other people also told the same thing. And we had a break.

@sovergecerim: Trolling through hashtags is actually a good method, but it loses its effect when it is done continuously. The effect would be greater if it was done from time to time, like once a week or a month.

Trolling increasingly becomes more popular and the number of trolls increases in parallel with popularity. New trolls generally start by imitating the style of old trolls in the beginning, the old trolls, on the other hand, create new styles for themselves since their style becomes a cliché due to this reason. Considering two reasons for trolls to change their language on twitter; while the first one is associated with becoming a cliché, the second one is associated with the fact that a successful trolling activity could be performed without implicating that it is indeed trolling. Trolling could easily be deciphered when it is always performed with the same style. While trolling through hashtags was a method that was used by old trolls on twitter in previous periods rather than the present time during the period when I started this study, it was a method that was used by new trolls more frequently in a relative way. Such hashtags used to

appear on the list of trending topics almost every day. Since this frequency deciphers trolling, new trolls have recently started to make such hashtags more rarely, compared to the previous period. In our interviews, @x, who has been trolling on twitter for a long time, stated that trolling has increasingly been becoming popular and as a consequence, the problem of being included in the main movement is encountered. He also asserted that when the trolling activity is deciphered and a troll becomes a celebrity, trolls are unable to perform trolling easily and this condition lessens the pleasure that is felt during this activity. Besides, he complained about the fact that the trolling language loses its fineness as the trolling jargon becomes popular and a greater number of people open a troll account in an increasing way.

@x: I am never into hashtag organisations. This incident just repeats itself. Let alone having fun, I think this is disgusting. Successful trolls are smart and sophisticated people. They know a lot of things and are able to learn easily what they don't know. They combine their intellectual knowledge with the street jargon. Thereby, when they are on the web, the people they encounter are not so far from them; they can easily analyse those people. They can estimate what they will write. But a guy aged 20 can see the incidents on twitter. And then comes the hashtag. But this guy knows nothing at all; he is an idiot. What I am trying to say is that the trolling is not such a thing that idiot guy can do. In my opinion, the number of trolls on twitter is 6-7.

@kurekli\_batur: Since hashtags become a cliché, most of the trolls don't join them anymore. There are trolls, who became twitter members at a later period and try to have fun only through hashtags. They are more likely to start hashtags.

@esatce: We trigger the fear because we want people to face their fears. By this way, people would probably realise that their fears are actually ridiculous. After involving the provocative hashtag in the list of trending topics, we tweet about who the heck says this. And then we lean back and watch their reactions. This actually is a lot of fun. But since the hashtags provoking the Kemalists started to bother us, we gave up, because always the same things were written. Always the same people were hunted. It became apparent that this was trolling.

@x: We made a hashtag regarding the abolition of Arabic letters. We had a skeleton crew of 11- 12 persons, none of the present trolls can do such a thing easily; the level was so high that people became confused. I cannot tell you the

pleasure I felt that time. It was incredible but we can't see it anymore. We made another hashtag about reopening the madrasas. A man at that level cannot realise his fear. Silliness is everlasting. Regarding the trollings we made as a group, they were like going out to play football, having fun and returning home. There is a group, the target is to have fun and then it is over. Gaining social benefit in the end; this is nonsense.

Even though @x considers the idea of obtaining a benefit as a result of the activity of trolling meaningless, some of them believe that trolling, which activates fears of people, makes people face their fears and shows them that their fears are unrealistic and might become a subject of entertainment.

@olumvarhaci: Trolling is an entertaining activity. While some people have fun by harassing, others try to defend an opinion in principle even though they look like ridiculing. We are ethical trolls. This is our difference from others. We move through values. In the hashtag that was about opening Atatürk's mausoleum, we actually aimed to show that Atatürk has a reproachable aspect. Atatürk established the republic but he also erased the Turkish history of 4000 years and an important past.

@Esatce: Regarding Sevan Nişanyan; we made a hashtag about deporting Sevan Nişanyan after his writing about Muhammad. Nişanyan's opinions contradicted with mine but among those who joined the hashtag, there were individuals who agreed with Nişanyan, as well. A person can think about such a thing. What did we get when we did this? Hundreds of ignorant people on twitter learned what deportation means via Google. They learnt that our country had deported Armenians once upon a time. They learned that Armenians were sent off out of this country. Is it our mission to teach people what deportation means? No, there are hundreds of academicians and a great number of researchers who have been writing on this subject for years. But no one cares about what they write.

Timing is also an important factor of trolling. Dates which people attach great importance turn out to be great opportunities for trolls. For example, gains of republic as laicism and woman's liberation are mentioned loudly in the days around Republic Day in Turkey. And trolls don't miss this opportunity to drag Kemalists, the strictest ones into their trolling game.

@esatce: We used to have some hashtags. They were about deporting those who do not fast, stoning women who don't cover themselves to death, keeping women out of school. In the hashtag about keeping women out of

school, I sent a tweet regarding whether Atatürk sent his daughter Zübeyde Hanım to school or not (Zübeyde is Atatürk's mother, not daughter). I was apparently having fun, but they were responding that there were no schools in that period. We made a hashtag about the shariah reception. I was sitting at home before October 29 Republic Day and thought that these people would believe me whatever I did. And I intended to prepare an invitation card of the republic reception on photoshop. Because people apparently have a foolish fear of shariah. The Shariah will never return but indestructible taboos of people trigger that fear. On twitter we wrote that the republic reception was cancelled and prepared a new invitation card of reception. With the help of photoshop, this invitation card became the same with the original invitation cards of the presidency reception. In the dress section, we wrote an obligation for women to wear dresses without decollete and for men to wear loose trousers. In such a case, even if he believes it, a normal person will at least check it via the web site of the presidency. But everyone believed this. It was in the news on the web. Abdullah Gül (President of the Turkish Republic) and his shariah reception became a trending topic on twitter.

## CONCLUSION

Is trolling political? If it is, what are the characteristics of it? Generally, the political aspect isn't the first priority for trolls, some doesn't pay attention, some accept the political aspect but to have fun still has the great importance and some deny. Referring trolls sayings as we see above, it can be said that trolling has a political aspect. Also, some of the trolls I've interview with have important positions in politics. Some are the members of political parties and some are the members of non-governmental organizations.

Troll and the rules of his game are not always innocent, guiltless and well-intentioned. Because the main objective of this game is fun and "transgressive humour" (Philips 2011). As Donath indicates, 'responding to a troll is very tempting, especially since these posts are designed to incite' and also 'responding troll can be costly' (Donath 1999). Even the twitter users who support trolls and are involved in their game of hashtags might face with the punishment of having their accounts reported as spam and closed at the end of the game. For instance, trolls occasionally call some of their followers for twitter users, who have fun just like trolls by means of hashtags that defend opinions opposing the values of the Republic, to 'report those republic enemies



and reactionaries as spam'. Or they might point someone, who opposes that hashtag, as a target by making fun of their tweets. By this way, they start a new and destroying game within the game.

Anonymity is indispensable for the troll. It is evident that the anonymous identity creates a negative area of freedom that destroys expression freedom of others from time to time. However, the anonymous identity and the writing style that could be used by means of this identity also create a positive area of freedom, which enables the person to escape from the oppression of both the daily life and political power. Expressing the self with an anonymous identity enables the person to be freed from the oppression mechanisms that are created by family, work and school environment, friends, political powers, culture and tradition. Some of the trolls have another twitter accounts on which they use their own identities and the people they communicate face to face generally know only these accounts. The confidence that is created by hiding the real identity enables them to easily criticise, question and even ridicule all kinds of oppression mechanism. This also indicates the political aspect of trolling.

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