

**Pop Polyvocality and Internet Memes:  
As a Reflection of Socio-Political Discourse of Turkish Youth in Social Media**

**Şeyda BARLAS BOZKUŞ**

Marmara University

Faculty of Communication

Radio, Television and Cinema Department

"in this hyper-memetic era  
If you don't spread, you are dead."  
Henry Jenkins

**Abstract**

Rising significance of social media in protest movements has led to the dissemination of the Internet subculture among young people in Turkey. Using visual rhetoric, the Internet memes carry a set of symbols and ideals that transmitted socio-political structure on the Internet. The story memes is crucial in understanding the digital culture as the identity of an Internet subculture, but also as a cultural artifact. Memes are influenced by the behavior of social groups, especially the mobs. The aim of this study is to analyze populism and polyvocal public discourse through Internet memes of the *Gezi* Park movement. This article considers the centrality of the intertextual nature of memes as a unique form of visual rhetoric and contributes to user-generated activist rhetoric in the social media. The Internet memes carry on visual political rhetoric and facilitate conversation between diverse positions. As a case study, *Gezi* Park are analyzed as to explore memes explore the manifestation, behavior and ideal of the public movement in Turkey.

**Keywords:** The Internet memes, populist discourse, The Internet subculture, pop polyvocality, visual rhetoric

## Popüler Çok Seslilik ve İnternet Capsleri: Türk Gençlerinin Sosyal Medya Üzerinden Sosyo-Politik Söylemini Yansıtmaları

### Özet

Protesto hareketlerinde rol oynayan sosyal medya, gençler arasında İnternet alt kültürünün yayılmasında da önemli bir etkidir. İnternet capsleri (İngilizce'de *meme* olarak adlandırılan) görsel retoriği kullanarak ideal semboller üretir ve bu semboller İnternette sosyo-politik kültürün taşıyıcısı durumdadır. Capsler sadece dijital kültürün bir parçası değil aynı zamanda bir alt kültür yaratıcısıdır. Capsler alt sosyal gruplardan özellikle moblardan etkilenir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı *Gezi* Parkı eylemleri sırasında İnternet capsleri üzerinden yayılan populist ve popüler çok sesli söylemi incelemektir. Makale temelinde capslerin metinlerarası özelliğini ele alarak kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan görsel aktivist retoriğın sosyal medya aracılığıyla nasıl hayata geçirildiğini ele alacaktır. İnternet capsleri görsel politik retoriğın farklı olgularının birbirleriyle iletişim kurmasını sağlar. Örnekleme olarak seçilen *Gezi* Parkı capslerinin amacı söylem yaratma, aktif hareket halinde olma ve halk hareketi olarak *Gezi*'nin sosyo-kültürel ideallerini göstermektir.

**Anathar Kelimeler:** İnternet capsleri, populist söylem, İnternet alt kültürü, popüler çokseslilik, görsel retorik

### Introduction

İnternet memes<sup>1</sup> are multimodal artifacts remixed by countless participants, employ popular culture for public commentary. In this study, İnternet memes are analyzed as a way of communication and genre, generally employed populist arguments and popular texts. These texts, being part of İnternet subculture, can be identified in polyvocal public discourse. Being incomplete and arbitrary, there are three approaches in conceptualizing memes: generative systems, chaos theory and new aesthetic tendency in public discourse. In this realm, the study illuminates how İnternet memes have contributed in building a public popular discourse dominant among the Turkish youth, in the case of *Gezi* Park Movement.

İnternet memes are the units of popular culture. They are articulated, transformed and imitated by mostly young generation of artists or graphic designers. For the İnternet users, memes are also shared culture that mediate political and social images in photoshops, texts,

---

<sup>1</sup> Meme is translated "caps" in Turkish.

languages. This paper aims at analyzing how Turkish youth illuminate questions on polyvocality in mediated public discourse through meme culture. Hence it investigates the issue of the use of technology, the media of communication, and cultural forms in order to promote evolution of the Internet art. After describing theoretical framework of the Internet memes, the Gezi Park meme will be evaluated.

### **Identifying Logic and Types of the Internet Memes**

The Internet is appropriated by a variety of groups in their cultural and political struggles. The worldwide emergence of the anti-globalization, anti-war and anti-capitalist movements is considered to be an effect of the hegemonic use of the Internet. Subculture activism plays a major role in a vital new space of politics and culture in which a wide diversity of individuals and groups have used emergent technologies to help produce new subcultures, social relations, and forms of politics (Kahn and Kellner, 2008). Because of being critical and reconstructive, the meme itself is a visual art form existing on the Internet web site, blogs and social media platforms and also in form of information and social interaction standpoint.

According to Patrick Davidson, in his essay *The Language of the Internet Memes*, "an Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (2009, p.122). Basically, the Internet memes are analyzed in the three ways in terms of their structures, that is to say, the ideal, the behavior, and the manifestation. These elements are main the logic of the Internet meme. Through defining typology of the memes, Knobel and Lankshear mentioned two types namely: static and remixed memes. Static ones are not elaborated by different users. However, second type remixed memes are "replicated via evolution, adaptation or transformation of the original meme vehicle" (Knobel and Lankshear, 2005). Most of the memes in the Internet belong to the second type the remixed ones.

In this paper it is argued the meme genres serve as valuable keys for understanding broader dimensions of digital world as well as the Internet culture. The Internet meme is a form of visual entertainment which can manifest in many different forms: reaction photos, stock characters (animated GIF), photo fads, or even videos. Especially photo based memes shared three frames: describing memes first as *hypersignification*-the code itself becomes the focus on the attention,

second as *prospective photographs*-photos are increasingly perceived as the raw material for their future incarnations, and third as *operative signs*- textual categories that are designed as invitations for creative actions (Shifman, 2014, p.341).

Memes are combination of digital technologies and participatory culture of the Internet. Digitalization and the Internet has provided a technological basis for creating multi-sided images. The use of new communication technologies led to the development of a personal participatory environment in the Internet and proliferation of highly creative personal contribution. For instance, and the first type is reaction photoshop. These are collections of edited images created in response to a set of photographs which may be labeled as "memetic photos." The second is stock character macros (images superimposed with text) that refer to stereotypical behavior. The third type, most used version of meme, is photo fads. These are staged photos of people who imitate specific position in various settings (Shifman, 2014, p.341).

Another combination of the Internet is named as LoLspeak which is a complex and systematic reimagining of the English language. It is most often associated with the popular, productive and long-lasting Internet meme "LoLCATS." This style of the English language is characterized by the manipulation of multiple linguistic levels. The LoLspeak is a trend in the Internet memes, this style extensively makes use of animal figures not only of cats but also of penguins, dogs, and sheeps. According to Gawne &Vaughan, the use of LoLspeak is an important factor in the maintenance of the on-line community, but they do not analyze this language only offer us explorations of when it is used (2011, p.108). As an example of the Internet memes, LoLCATS are a kind of genre gathering a social group in the Internet. The social group especially works on an important contribution in understanding the linguistic play. Particular sentences, styles, social categories, and identities construct a complete picture of how language plays a role in new media. In the next part, this study will illuminate theoretical discussions on the meme genre.

### **Social Media Populism: Meme as a Cultural Discourse**

Many Internet subcultures have developed from file sharing and cultural commentary sites. Members of the forums at share a common visual vocabulary and technological literacy. After communication builds the shared vocabulary, the groups begin to accumulate a shared identity and to produce cultural objects for the consumption of other groups. The groups that make the Internet memes are more or less share similar characteristics. Contemporary digital culture provide communal belonging. Thus, Internet memes contribute to the set of ideas around which communities gather and act.

Digital inhabitants, people who spend their time online, can be analysed in terms of Bourdieu's theory of social capital. His sociological framework, "social capital," leads to contemporary online trends in the Internet culture. Social capital is the networks, norms and trust that exist in a social organization. It can enable to gather groups in community (Bourdieu, 1986). Conceptualization of social and cultural capital addresses an important question: how are Internet memes are used to create membership-based distinctions within the web-based community?

In the age of the Internet, the theoretical framework social capital partly related to the new digital social capital. Internet memes are one of the expressions of the new form of digital social capital, and they reflect the knowledge of social collective intelligence. For this reason, this form of the Internet subculture has dynamic structure that integrate artists in collective social process as well as strengthens ties with-in the group. By the way, a meme contains certain vocabulary that can be interpreted through particular language of digital social capital as well as it informs us about the habitus of the digital inhabitant (Julien, 2015, p.367).

Studying the Internet subculture, the participatory media was critical in terms of new discussants and new means of discussion in the social movements. Expressing of social and political attitudes of the youth through "transmedia mobilization" is crucial. In this realm, the Internet memes have involved in social media devices. Image memes can be defined as populist means reflecting the public perspective. Public discourse in the Internet is mostly related to socio-political situation of the country, especially young generation criticize current political situations through the Internet memes. Memes can be conceptualized as "political act" or "performance of citizenship"- engaging with personal and public concern (Bym & Shah, 2011, p.5). For this reason, they are unique in terms of having agenda for understanding of social and cultural processes. The populist culture in Internet engaged in pop participation and variety of

political actions. H. Jenkins argues that people tend to display "Photoshop for democracy," meaning that they combined their political view with photographs, text and macro images (Jenkins, 2006).

In this realm, thinking the Internet memes in terms of Habermas' theory of public sphere opens a new path for theoretical discussion. The public sphere was the liminal space where private citizens engaged in public deliberation about social and political issues. He sees the public sphere as historical artifact and, his notion of public sphere is a singular, overarching, accessible (Habermas, 1962, 1991). However, healthy public sphere must cover many different perspectives and encounters of people talking to each other. Nowadays, participatory media starts a new topic of discussion on virtual public sphere. The Internet memes are civil acts showing us how people use the public sphere as a medium of reflecting their discursive and visual models. Getting more and more public discussion in participatory media, people can develop their collective political and social efforts for the Internet subculture.

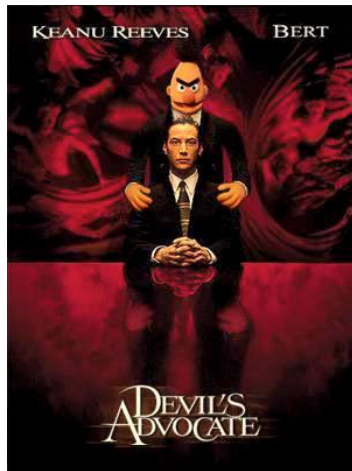
Visual sociologist W.J.T. Mitchell made the case for a "pictorial turn." He argues that "we live in a culture of images...We are surrounded by pictures."For this reason, images are starting point for rhetorical scholars (Mitchell, 1994, p.5). As contribution to this literature, studying memes in Turkey is a starting point for discussing politics and culture in digital age. Moreover such a study illustrates how visual rhetorical criticism has typically focused on bounded texts, context and deconstructed images.

Internet memes are virtual rather than being actual. They set visual rhetorical structure that depend on the conceptualization of context, mainly image-text coherence and power. Focusing on historical and cultural context, memes can be considered as dedicated image genres and types which reproduce certain discourses of power, following a Foucauldian approach which focuses more on visual practices like state surveillance (Foucault, 1984). As memes circulate, they carry on the rhetoric of political campaigns, producers, marketers, and consumers in the capitalist system. The media texts are reconstructed as their messages stand still in different contents in order to reproduce the political truth. The next part will deal with the short history of memes in digital subculture.

## Rise of the Meme in the Digital Age

The earliest examples of the Internet memes were the emoticons. The "sideways smiley face," created in 1982, has a very minimalistic form. It was composed entirely of punctuation marks (Börzsei, 2013, p.6). The function of this example was to communicate non-verbal information and to entertain. The emoticons were developed as new language of the new technology which played crucial role in the creation of a new culture.

Another experimentation with new technology is the web site of "Bert is Evil" designed in 1997 by the Dino Ignacio. The site aimed to collect documents and images of Bert who was one of the famous characters of Sesama Street. "Bert is Evil" is an early example of online visual humor. ([www.bertisevil.tv/](http://www.bertisevil.tv/)) Creator of the web site Ignacio illustrates how reality imitate the Web in the character of Bert who was one of the first "children of the chaos" (Börzsei, 2013, p. 9).



**Image 1:** Devil's Advocate



**Image 2:** Bert, Adam and

Eve

**Internet Access:** <http://bertisevil.tv/pages/bert039.htm>  
<http://plaza.v.wave.com/bert> (8 December 2015)

Starting from the early 2000s, the term Web 2.0 has described a number of new technologies changing the decade-old Internet. As a popular one "All Your Base Are Belong to Us" was badly translated opening sequence of video game Zero Wing(1989). The meme was created in 1998, but it achieved worldwide popularity in 2000. The beginning of the Zero Wing-

"All Your Base Are Belong to Us" has manipulated pictures of street signs, restaurant awnings, cinema fronts, advertising cartoons, T-shirts, tattoos, and golf balls.

According to Börzsei, the popularity and success of this particular meme lies in the meme editing software. This software has two basic functions: cut-copy-paste and text tool. For this reason, it is easy to make the Internet memes (Börzsei, 2013, p.11). In addition to the software development, the growing number of message boards, forums, and social networks offer a free platform to share and enjoy the Internet memes.

From the beginning of the 2000s, spreading popular icons in the memes has increased in the Internet. Well known characters in memes such as "Tourist of Death," "Little Fatty," "Advice Dog," "LoLCATS," "Forever Alone," "Cereal Guy," "Superhero," Sarkozy was there," "Kenya Interrupts" were addressing political and social issues in humorous and iconic forms as well as using cartoon characters. "Advice Dog," "Socially Awkward Penguin", "Courage Wolf" or "Foul Bachelor Frog" are the example of the "Advice Animals" series that had identified of human with animals in order to reflect the manipulating nature of human behaviour. Advice animals and LoLCATS also resemble comics like Troll face, Cereal Guy.



**Image 3:** Advice Animal Series

**Internet Access:** <http://webtrends.about.com/od/reddit/tp/Advice-Animals-Internet-Memes.htm>  
[http://agnel.rssing.com/chan-1526439/all\\_p25.html](http://agnel.rssing.com/chan-1526439/all_p25.html)  
<http://tr.pinterest.com/pin/456833955925075985/> (8 December 2010)

The Internet memes also transmitted visual information. By communicating mostly through chaotic media space, the Internet memes are becoming conventional type of humor. Börzsei



argues that starting from the 2000s, online meme culture has witnessed continuous increase in localized Internet memes. The ongoing process of glocalization turned the Internet meme into a global vehicle that allowed people to talk about their local topics (Börzsei, 2013, p.20).

The Internet memes is based on both local and global culture utilizing Internet activism and radical political discourse. The political discourse based on memes allows instant reaction and encourages virality. Much more than other subcultures like boarders, punks, mods- or followers of the New Age; the Internet subcultures, have taken up the questions of local and global politics and attempted to construct answers both locally and globally as a response. The use of technology, the media, and cultural forms promote a revolution of everyday life-and increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment. According to Kahn and Kellner, to a meaningful extent, the new information and communication technologies are revolutionary, since they do constitute a revolution of everyday life being presently enacted by the Internet subcultures. (<https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/oppositionalInternet.htm>)

Memes serve a wide variety of social, cultural, and political purposes from conveying feelings in the interpersonal settings to publicly protesting against government. According to Ryan Milner, memes are invoked by the different groups to express their views on current socio-political issues (Millner, 2013). Memes function as a part of the Internet sub-culture, contributing to the set of ideas. Furthermore, memes are especially suited for consideration as rhetoric within the contemporary social movements because memes perform a connective action for people who participated collective actions in public sphere.

Nowadays, the Internet memes are in the center of collective action in the case of Occupy Wall Street Movement in September 2011. The OWS memes has carried both collaborative and individualistic characters portrayed through visual digital media. A variety of OWS memes functioned as pop polyvocality in public discourse. Only a limited number of studies have conducted the role of memes as visual politics and activist rhetoric. As communication sociologists, Huntington and Milner in their studies use the American Dream myth as a framework to examine the various elements of American culture. Looking at the Pepper Spray Cop memes draw on the dueling myths of the American dream to achieve a rhetorical purpose (Huntington,2015; Milner, 2013).



**Images 4:** Pepper Spray Cop remixes focusing on historic moment of protests and American politic icons

Internet Access: <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/11/25/chinese-Internet-users-shrug-at-pepper-spraying-cop/>  
<http://www.webpronews.com/uc-davis-pepper-spraying-cop-is-the-Internets-new-favorite-meme-2011-11/>  
[Pepper Spray Cop took on historical icons as populist humor. These memes appropriate the iconic displays of protests in the last century. The first image is taken from an unknown Chinese protestor, called "Tank Man." In this image, Pepper Spray Cop has come to stop the tomfoolery. The second meme is a remixed one with the powerful image of a Buddhist monk who has burnt himself alive in protest religious persecution in 1963. The third image is a photo of American troops raising the flag over Iwo Jima after a long battle with Japan during the WWII. This image is reflected so important, the reason is that Pepper Spray cop remixes against American patriotism, and ideals, and liberty in the memetic photos.](https://www.google.com.tr/search?q=pepper+spray+cop&biw=1366&bih=579&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjh9MLNwujKAhUGiivKHR4IDuQQ_AUIBigB#imgcr=9kMbraIHzbqDUM%3A(10 December 2015)</a></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)



**Image 5:** "Pepper Spray Cop" remixes popular icons, cartoons, and historic images

Internet Access: <http://gawker.com/5861742/uc-davis-pepper-spray-cop-will-answer-your-burning-questions>  
<https://crazyemailsandbackstories.wordpress.com/2011/11/27/pepper-spray-cop-is-butt-of-global-joke/>  
<http://www.craveonline.com/site/178545-pepper-spraying-cop-ruins-your-childhood> (8  
 December 2010)

Pop networks are mobilized for polyvocal discourse of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Using pop texts, popular icons, cartoons and historical image which are given above are crucial examples of the participatory media. The first well known photo is the cover of iconic music group the "Beatles Abbey Road" that is remixed with Pepper. The second is Pepper Spraying articulated "Wounded Freedom Fighters" painting depicting the American Civil War shows us history and politics is used as symbol of visual discourse. And the last meme is taken from an old popular cartoon "Dennis the Menace" which represented the pop characteristic of the media participation.

### **History of Memes in the Turkish Social Media**

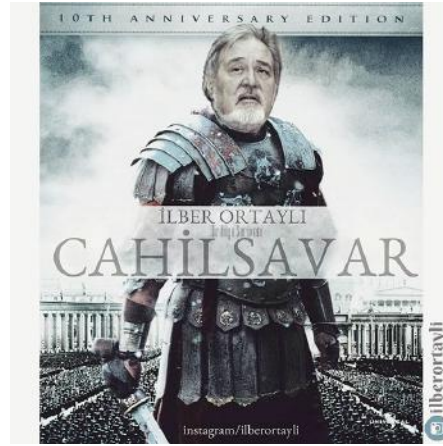
As an expression, the Internet memes indexes various social attitudes and affections. In the Turkish case, the word "meme" is changed as "caps" that transmit political messages via elements of popular culture. Studying such modal expressions can help us contemplate on the ongoing criticism on visual rhetoric in a digital media environment. In Turkey, digital culture is mainly shaped by the Millennial/ the Generation Y (used the term for people who were born in the early 1980s to the early 2000s). They were the first generation who has grown to up with computers in their homes, thus developing a different sense of belongings and creating variety of models for visual communication. The Generation Y effectively used social media and networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

Most of the memes in the Turkish Internet sites are taken from favorite television series, old Turkish films (Yeşil Çam genre), politicians, popular figures such as Nur Yerlitaş, Fatih Terim, Prof. Dr. İlber Ortaylı. Memes are continually changed, revised, reinterpreted, and shared. By this way, memes as a part of the Internet sub-culture illustrate us popular figures of everyday life.



**Image 6:** New York Statue of Liberty-Nur Yerlitaş

**Internet Access:** [http://caps.indir.com/caps\\_543e35405b3ca](http://caps.indir.com/caps_543e35405b3ca), <http://www.instawebgram.com/i/ilberortayli> (10 December 2015)



**Image 7:** Cahilsavar-İlber Ortaylı



**Image 8:** Assassins Keedi Mission Trafo



**Image 9:** I'm going to the transformer, Gentlemen

**Internet Access:** <http://www.trendcaps.com/ke-di-trafo-capsleri/>, <http://oksijenci.com/trafoya-giren-kediler/> (10 December 2015)

Parallel to Turkey's political agenda caps (memes) change rapidly. During the Turkish local election 2014, electricity problem became one of the popular image of street cat. "Mission Trafo," "Assassins Keedi," "Transformer Joke" are mostly shared on Facebook and Twitter to criticize the political approach of the Turkish government. Analyzing the Turkish memes have two outcomes. Firstly, the Internet memes are not simple images, they are anonymous and collective phrases of reflecting the political messages of the social opposition against the

government. It is easy to said that Turkish youth express their feelings and attitudes through anonymous art works. Secondly, political phases are directly linked to the images of popular images that makes visual humor. For example, Ddos (Distributed Denial of Service Attack) are applied by Anonymous hacker group in the attack for global companies' websites such as Mastercard, Amazon, and Paypal. In order to start the Internet attack, Anonymous<sup>2</sup> used a button "Shoop da Whoop" that is one of the famous Internet memes (Tekrin, 2015, p.130).

In Turkey, it is impossible to estimate the number of memes in shared on the web sites. Collective production of meme is done by individuals, a group of graphic designer, visual communication designer and advertisers. Especially, blog and comic sites are the places where memes are produced and shared through social media platforms. Bobiler.org is one of the most popular Internet site in Turkey providing opportunity to young artists in displaying their memes. On this site, people can share videos and comments from bloggers and social media users. The founder of the bobiler.org is Ozan Tüzün who is an advertiser, studied communication in Sydney, opened a blog for himself to show his visual art projects in 2006. Then his blog has become a collective site to gather young visual artists, advertisers and independent researchers who started to add their art work on the blog in 2007. Türkmen's aim was to protect "bobiler.org" as independent site for young artists, made the bobiler eligible for "the community of creative people" (<http://webrazzi.com/2014/04/01/sosyal-garaj-bobiler-ozan-tuzun/>) As presented above the Internet earlier that Internet memes have become signs of recognition of group member and are also new examples of digital social capital that provided exchange in online interactions.

The logic behind the bobiler.org is visualization of social, cultural and political criticism not only in Turkey but also in the world. The site acts as textual side of "*Ekşi Sözlük*" (Sour Dictionary) and "*İnci Sözlük*" (Pearl Dictionary) which are among the famous Internet sites of participants' dictionary in Turkey. Every month, approximately one million people entered the site to comment and share memes in social media platforms. Moving tags, *supir monte* (super assembly), sector papers, compilations are the main sections of the bobiler org. Visitors directly shared memes, photos and videos through the site in their social media profile. Also they can use vote for selection of the best of the week. The best examples of memes are collected and labeled

---

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous is a loosely associated international network of activist and hacktivist entities. The group became known for a series of well-publicized publicity stunts and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on government, religious, and corporate websites.

as "the bests" in the bobiler.org. Thus, circulation of memes are very rapid by using social media for new platform of socio-political critics.

Another famous meme blog is *İnci Caps* (Pearl Memes) is an amateur version of bobiler.org. The web site is open to everyone who wants to add or comment caps and is divided under different titles such as legend caps, caps and video components, trolls, comparative caps flow, represented caps, hieroglyph caps (Kullar and İnci, 2015). *İnci Caps* creates successful Internet dialect strengthening ties with amateur bloggers and creative young people. *İnci Caps's* humorists are able to speak their street language without any limitation. Most of the memes are mainly based on the style of prospective photographs that is one type of meme. Compare to the bobiler.org, *İnci Caps* directly gives the message and pays less attention to do intertextual references among memes. For this reason, it is easy to understand and analyze *İnci Caps*. İnci memetic photos are generally selected from films, popular series, historical photographs which are easy to articulate images and write comment on them. The following section focuses on the *Gezi* Park memes that were highly circulated on the Internet during the *Gezi* movement on June/July 2013 and became vivid picture of the Internet subculture in Turkey.

### **The Gezi Park Memes as a Case Study of Political Opposition in Digital Media**

Memes as expressions engaged with texts can provide information about how the young people reflect their energies, tendencies, and demand in the social field. In contemporary social media environment, visual practices convey messages in a rapidly changing social context. Modes that are used in memes are shaping rhetorical categories and expressing energies, anxieties and criticism of Turkish youth about the current socio-political system.

Examining digital-based discourse, memes are especially suited for consideration as rhetoric within contemporary social movements because memes perform a connective action for "citizens to participate in collective actions, while maintaining their sense of individuality" (Shifman, 2014, p.129). "*Occupy Gezi*" generated its own internationally recognizable 'network culture' players including: participatory media, civil journalists, alternative computing specialists, algorithmic curators, hacktivists, culture jammers, provocateurs, solidarity platforms,

crowd-funding campaigners, trending topic/meme/hoax starters, flash mobs and digital documentarians (Kara, 2015, p.44).

In Turkey, the *Gezi* Park demonstrations started on 28 May 2013 which initially contested to the urban development plan of Taksim Square by the Istanbul Municipality. Social media played a key part in the protests, since most of the conventional media channels downplayed the protests. Most of the participants were disseminating their messages via social media outlets like Twitter (twitter) and YouTube (youtube.com). In the days and weeks that followed, media coverage protests grew. This was concurrent with the increase in protestors, demonstrations, participating cities in Turkey. When police disbanded the initial occupation of *Gezi* Park on June 15, 2013, the *Gezi* movement altered social and cultural forms across Turkey as does its broader influence on Internet meme discourse. Due to the inability of using traditional media organizations, participatory media were central to the *Gezi* youth. The mainstream media were often silenced by the government. Thus the less regulated, faster-paced and potentially richer information sources on social media became the center of the mass communication.

The international media often compared the *Gezi* Protests to Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, citing both fundamental of the differences, the nature of the appeals, and similarities. The occupation of physical spaces played significant role in the social media platforms. In the digital world, state took control to consciousness of mass communication. For this reason, communication networks determined practical source of the state-power relationship in new media (Castells, 2013, p.22).

In the *Gezi* Park movement, electronic media draw mediated discourse through 'old' and 'new' methods of knowledge diffusion. According to Costanza-Chock, "transmedia mobilization" is "extensive offline, analog, poster and print-based, and 'low-tech' forms of media production with "cutting edge technology and use" (Costanza-Chock, 2012, p. 378). In USA, the new form of mobilization is firstly engaged with the Occupy Wall Street Movement. OWS was one of the most significant anti-capitalist movement emergent in New York City on September 2011. A large number of the Internet memes related to the Occupy movement spread through the social media via Facebook, twitter, and Youtube, and mobilized the youth action in all over the

country. Similar To OWS, the Gezi youth effectively used the Internet technology as well as the Internet sub culture.

Social media contributed to the construction of the media ecology that was part of the inevitable living conditions for the protestors, but singling out social media as the only factor that made the Gezi Protests a success would be an exaggeration. The dangers of “slacktivism” or “clicktivism” were not particularly obvious in the case of the Gezi protests, because social media's integration into the media ecology blurred the boundary between online and offline activism through information exchange (Hacıyakupoğlu and Weiyu, 2015).

Analysis of the Gezi Park art activism requires a discussion on protest art. Protest art is a broad term that refers to creative works concerned or being produced by activists and social movements. Kuryel argues that art-activism, cultural activism, culture-jamming, interventionism, kommunikationsguerilla, otonomguerilla, tactical media, tactical frivolity, radical ridicule particularly cover the term protest art (Kuryel and Özden Fırat, 2015, p.21). New media devices, were extensively used during Gezi park movement and transmitted activist art works, visual images, and photographs.

Most of the Gezi memes on the Internet are remixing images from history, pop culture and everyday life forms. Images articulate popular figures especially the politicians, artists, pop icons, sportsman, designers, together with ordinary people. Social media as the main medium mass communication during the occupation of Gezi Park served as the official channel for spreading the memes. The Gezi Park memes has certain functions. Iconic images such as Gezi Park public figures became a type of metaphor. They can be re-conceptualized for symbolic association. These symbolic ties have brought the online community together. The practices of visual arguments are central to the rhetorical communication characteristics of meme. In this case study, intertextuality and visual codes are key elements of memes' rhetorical power. These should be considered in our rhetorical analyses of Gezi Park memes. Juxtaposition of the text and image or multiple different images is a part of the metaphor that visual rhetoric stand.





**Image 10:** Iconic Public Figures of the Gezi Park Movement

Internet Access: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gezi\\_Park\\_protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gezi_Park_protests) (10 December 2015)

Metaphoric discourse in the *Gezi Park* memes included the images of iconic figures. These are the most well known public figures that carried certain meaning in themselves. The *Gezi Park* figures can represent the relationship between "the people and power." When the meme image inserted the icons illustrated above, the message of the visual rhetoric was directly related to intertextual meaning. Thinking Internet meme as cultural capital of a certain group, it is argued that people faced with a specific meme-related subculture. In this sense, using *Gezi Park* public figures in memes requires not only digital literacy or general meme literacy but also a specific meme-related subculture. This type of communal belonging was formed and signified social, cultural and political purposes of interpersonal settings. These figures had become visual identity of *Gezi* movement in the media as they incorporated many marginal and subversive points of view. For this reason, Milner's term polyvocal discourse can be utilized in our analysis of the *Gezi Park* memes (Milner, 2013).

In the *Gezi Park* movement, artistic imagination and collective action of the youth exposed disobedience against state force and revolutionary ideas which were bases of the protest visual art works. The basic dynamic of the action was to imagine a new system which opened up a new path for young generation. Certainly, the 90s generation used much more popular icons and graffiti in order to express their feelings and thoughts. Like "Winter is coming"(Game of Thrones), "See Eastward," Gandalf was still lacking for seven days" (Lord of the Rings), "Fight

Club" became well known slogans that were used in *Gezi* graffiti (Kuryel and Özden Fırat, 2015, p.40). This shows us that there is a strong relationship between protest art and popular culture themes. Popular culture, for example in the case of Che Guevara, commercializes resistance of the hero by changing nature of public image. Reading popular culture through memes illustrates collective creativity and resistance in making revolutionary visual art work in social media. Six different models used in Gezi Park memes are objects of analysis in the study.

### First Model of the Gezi Park Meme Offers claims about the Relationship of People and Power



**Image 11:** Siyahlı Kadın /Woman in Black Solution



**Image 12:** #Çare Drogba /Drogba is the

Erişim:<http://www.duzceyerelhaber.com/haber-detay.asp?id=16244>,<http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/gezi-park%C4%B1-semboelleri/> (10 December 2015)

During the *Gezi* Park demonstrations, many iconic figures were ordinary people such as "Woman in Black," "A Man who read a book," "Women in Red," "For Vildan Teyze," "Standing Man," but their resistance in demonstrations against police force and state system made them popular in public view. Some of the photoshop of the *Gezi* Park memes are directly related to those public figures. The memes existed primarily to protest the sheer use of force by the police. Details of the iconic images are considered in order to analyze the juxtaposition-, embodied in the *Gezi* Park Spirit as an interpretive framework. In the first image, the Woman in Black figure serves illustrating the civil resistance of demonstrators against extreme police power, on the other hand, in the second meme, a former *Galatasaray* football player Didier Drogba club stand

against the pressured water. This indicates that Drogba resisted against extreme state control like Woman in Black.



**Image 13:** Gezi 1 Year Old  
Erşim: <http://bobile.org> (10 December 2015)

The meme above, is "Gezi 1 Year Old." This original photo is taken in Beyoğlu. The photo of *Siyahlı Kadın* Woman in Black is used for symbolizing the first anniversary of Gezi Park and its celebration with a birthday cake. Toma (Intervention tool for social events) was illustrated while spraying- water on the cake in order to blow the candle on it.



**Image 14:** Kırmızılı Kadın/ Woman in Red



**Image 15:** "Woman in Red" Meme Version"

Internet Access: <http://www.theverge.com/2013/6/7/4405412/ceyda-sungur-lady-in-red-photo-becomes-symbol-of-turkey-protests> <http://www.haberself.com/h/4266> (15 December 2015)

As another meme example of the relationship people and power indicates an incidence of pepper spraying of the police on the demonstrators is used in two different images. The photo in Image 14 taken at Taksim square during the protests was one of the best known photos of the Gezi Park movement. Pepper spray cop extremely used gas to a civilian namely "Woman in Red dress." This photo was appropriated as a reaction to using extreme power of the police. In the meme namely "Woman in Red", pepper spray cop was revised different women identities. The

veiled woman image show the point of view of the conservative ideology. The Pepper Spray Cop considered as attack on Republican ideals and modernity. In the veiled woman meme, the conservative ideology was confronted with a counter-attack of the protestors, as the police spray was positioned against the veiled woman who represented the government and its ideology.

### Second Model of the Gezi Park Memes Textual Reference of Popular Culture in Films, Cartoons, and Art Works



**Image 16:** Kitap Okuyan Adam/ Man who read a book



**Image 17:** Osman Hamdi Bey-Man who read a book

Internet Access: <http://www.gercekgundem.com/guncel/35409/ysk-onunde-ohal>  
<http://www.bobiler.org> (15 December 2015)

The photo in Image 16 shows us non-violent demonstration of a Gezi protester who was reading a book in front of the police force. The meme, taken from the photo, indicates us how intertextuality works on the same action. Metaphor in this meme designates a formal process of interpretation, a relation or coming together of subject (interpreter) and object(text). Generally, metaphor works like a frame that affect how audience can see or interpret (Jenkins, 2014, p.453).

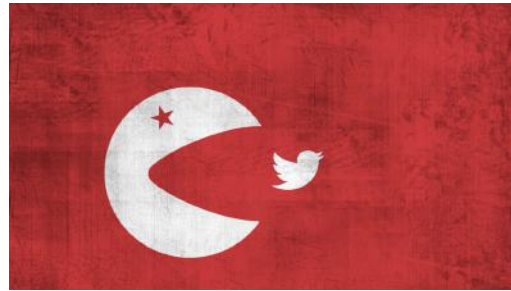
The first photo was taken during the first days of the *Gezi* movement. In the second meme, metaphor is Osman Hamdi Bey's famous painting "Ab-ı Hayat Çeşmesi" (Ab-ı Hayat Fountain) of 1904. Osman Hamdi Bey in his painting was reading a book in front of a mosque fountain. His image was remixed to *Gezi* park iconic figure "reading man." Historic painting in this type of meme was engaged with production of enjoyment and create local metaphor.

As more popular examples, the Gezi Park reaction photoshop memes are taken from popular TV series or films such as the Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, and Shameless. During the Gezi Park movement, police force excessively used to pepper spray and thus become a sign of the "mythical" public revolt. Legolas, who was an Elf prince had superior visual ability in the Lord of the Ring series as he, fought against the enemy Sauron. The Legolas in the screenshot meme used gas mask-conveying the message of fighting enemies/authoritarian state system.

The second meme is the issue of government's prohibition of access to Twitter in July 2013. The meme "Pack-Man eat Twitter" ironically indicates old popular icon as a threat for the new social media namely Twitter. Pack-Man, one of the earliest versions of the video games released in 1980 represented the state political power in the meme. Banning, prohibiting, proscription which are considered as basic tools of the authoritarian state apparatus and thus packman is remixed with the dominant state figure.

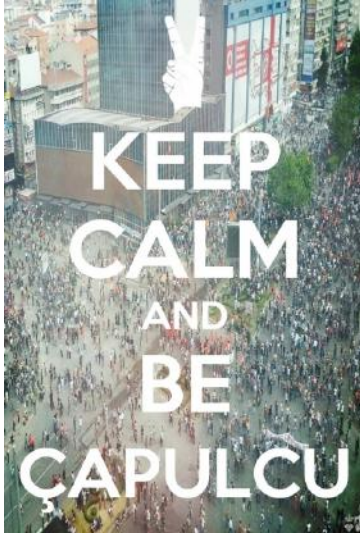


**Image 19:** What do your Elf eyes see Legolas?



**Image 20:** Pack-Man eat Twitter

Internet Access: <http://listelist.com/direnceziparki-eylemlerinden-cikan-en-yaratıcı-calismalar/>  
<http://drrichswier.com/2014/03/23/turkeys-foolhardy-twitter-ban-backfires-a-twitter-turkey/> (10 December 2015)



**Image 21 :** Keep Calm and Be Çapulcu



**Image 22 (a):** Talcidman at Taksim Gezi Park

Internet Access: <https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/46865652345522457/>  
<http://listelist.com/gezi-parki-eylemlerinin-kahramanlari/> (15 December 2015)



**Image 22 (b):** Talcidman

"Keep Calm and Carry on" was the original motivational poster that was produced by the British government from Second World War Poster in Britain. After fifty years, this slogan "Keep Calm and Be....." was rediscovered and reproduced. In a short time, Keep Calm and Carry on provided visual insight by the modernization and commercialization of the historic design, and became a popular worldwide expression. The new version spread through the Internet and social media. During the *Gezi* Park movement, the poster was reinterpreted within current socio-political circumstances. The background of the poster is Taksim Square and the popular term "Çapulcu" (looter) remixed in the motto. As the popularity of the meme in social media increased, "being Çapulcu" has turned into one of the mottos of the *Gezi* Park youth.

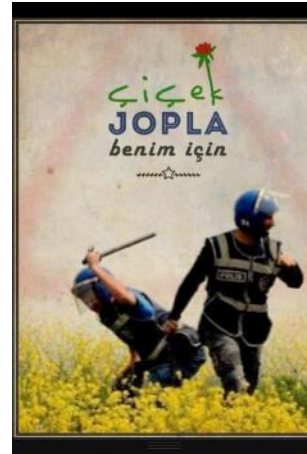
The second memetic poster is designed with legendary public figure "Talcidman." He is a unknown person, helped people who were affected from excessive use of pepper spray. He took his name from stomach tablet, Talcid. The role of the Talcidman in the *Gezi Park* is "to serve and protect from those who are supposed to serve and protect." Attributing a superhero role to Talcidman who was a modern-imaginary icon of the *Gezi Park* public figures, re-contextualized civic talk on the Internet.

### Third Model of the Gezi Park Memes: Deconstruction of Language and Icons



**Image 23 :** ChePulcu

Flowers for me)



**Image 24:** Çiçek Jopla Benim İçin (Coshing

Internet Access: <https://twitter.com/baharsozen/status/462183541376548864>

<http://www.trendcaps.com/tag/gezi-park-capsleri/> (10 December 2015)



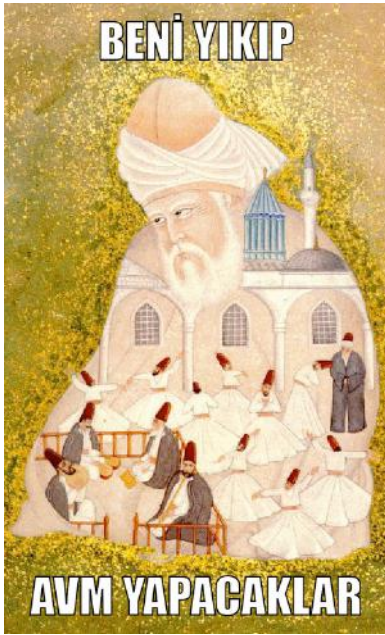
**Image 25:** Tomalı Hilmi (Hilmi, the man from the land of TOMA) **Image 26:** TOMA Taksim Çöl Olmasın(TOMA: Taksim shall not be desert)

Internet Access:<http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/alternatif-gezi-park%C4%B1-direni%C5%9Fi-film-afi%C5%9Fleri/1/ters/>  
<https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/389350330256406289/> (10 December 2015)

Degeneration of language in the Internet memebase structure created new content in the Internet humor. The memetic genre is a contested for the terrain of popular icons which were extensively used in the *Gezi* Park protest art works. Che Guevara's famous photo was written as "Che Pulcu" that referred to term "Çapulcu (looter)." In the second meme, the motto is "Çiçek Jopla Benim İçin" (Coshing Flowers for Me) taken from Zülfü Livaneli's popular song "Güneş Topla Benim İçin." This shows that language, used in this meme, has metaphoric meaning. The background of the memetic poster covered flowers that were coshed by two police men. Ironic deconstruction of language with well-designed background in the meme influenced the reader. Bakhtin conceptualization discourse as "polyphonic"- comprising many sounds created by many vocals, is crucial to understand logic and structure of the Internet memes (Milner, 2013, p.2359). Polyphonic structure in "Çiçek Jopla Benim İçin" exemplifies the ironic and peaceful of communication of the Internet memes.

#### Fourth Model of the *Gezi* Park Meme: Historical Artifacts and Miniatures





**Image 27:** Mevlana



**Image 28:** The Sultan

Internet Access: <http://listelist.com/nerdesin-askim-ehl-i-hiref-tumblr/> (15 December 2015)



**Image 29:** Vildan Teyze with the Anonymous mask & An Armed Civil Miniature

Internet Access: <http://zaziedancelametro.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/gezi-park-ve-v-for-vendetta-maskesinin.html>

<http://listelist.com/nerdesin-askim-ehl-i-hiref-tumblr/> (15 December 2015)

Historic references in Turkish are memes generally derived from an art form called Ottoman miniatures which can be linked to the Persian miniature. Hz. Mevlana, Ottoman Sultans, janissary soldiers, harem, viziers and administrations were depicted in minimalist forms in the miniature style. Meme forms were reconstituted miniatures conveying political criticism. In the first meme, Hz. Mevlana symbolized the moral characteristic of Anatolian Islamic heritage, also referring to the collapse of social morality and political ethics in Turkey. As a second image, Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Selim wears a gasmask and a black cardigan which symbolizes the phrase frequently used in the protests that is to say "Don't go down to Tophane, civil polices are there." Sultan Selim in miniature is symbolized as a political figure protecting his public from the oppressive power.

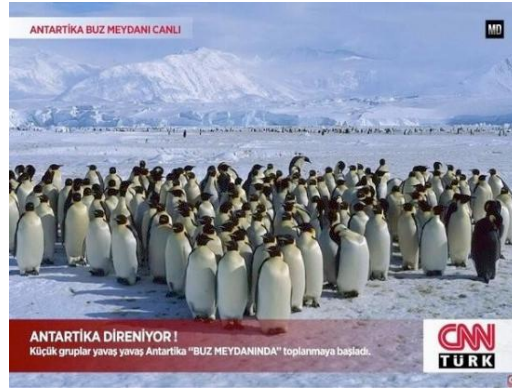
Miniatures as media artifact are captured and uploaded by being remixed with "image macros." Overlaying text on image is a populist reaction to confront the structural contradiction in the political field. The last but not the least, an armed civil miniature shows us how a *Çapulcu* becomes an armed civil in the *Gezi* Park. The mask that he carries in the miniature like the Internet hacker group Anonymous, was used by the demonstrators during the *Gezi* Park. The mask in the hand of the figure refers to hacker identity.

### **Fifth Model of the Gezi Park Meme: Resisting Penguins**

Intertextual meaning of the meme is crucial in order to understand symbolism behind the meme. Penguins were the mascot animal of the *Gezi* Park memes. They were used in order to criticize the silent mass media and liberal news channels which ignored the *Gezi* Park events. "Antarctica Resisted" is one of the well-known advice animal photoshop that spread rapidly in the social media platforms. *Penguen*/Penguin (the name of popular humor magazine in Turkey) covered Antarctica penguins on the magazine to support the resistance of the youth in Turkey.



**Image 30:** Antarctica Resisted (1)



**Image 31:** Antarctica Resisted (2)

**Internet Access:** <http://haberciniz.biz/foto-galeri-taksim-gezi-parki-pankartlari-21933-p3.htm> (15 Decemeber 2015)

In the first meme, a group of armed penguins said: "the problem is not the melting glaciers and in the subtitle, it wrote that the weather condition of Istanbul is 27 degrees and gassy. And Ankara is gassy in the evening." The armed penguins in the meme represented the people who were against limitations and political oppression of the state apparatus. As in the case of the second meme (live on Antarctica Ice Square the same title is used and small groups started to gather in the Antarctica ice square. The small groups referred to the protests groups in Turkey, in this example the meme carried a message inside similarly political cartoons, sometimes Internet meme would not be so popular. For this reason, the readers ,who enjoy meme, are drawing attention to non-linear way thinking and discontinuous relationship of the social media environment.

### Sixth Model of the Gezi Park Memes: Advertising Poster



**Image 32 :** Why do you come to "Gas"?"



**Image 33:** Riot Raki

Internet Access: <http://www.ohadiyorumm.com/gaza-niye-gelmedin/>,  
<http://www.blendbureaux.com/riot-raki/> (20 Decemeber 2015)

The Internet activists, who were working in the fields of advertising, visual communication design and digital art, produced highly selective creative works. They did not only use cut-and-paste techniques, but also added symbols and codes revealing certain social and cultural processes. The term "children of chaos" is widely used for members of a chaotic media space (Börzei, 2013, p.25). They are also children of chaos in the Gezi memetic discourse. The advertisers format beer and raki symbols as provocative elements in the meme.

The first example is "Sobayı Yak ack" (Stove Oil) that is the brand of the pepper spray, represented deconstruction language and intertextual forms (a bottle of beer-pepper spray). Also, the "Riot Raki" advertising shared more or less the same idea. Three bottles on the cover of the poster represented the phase of the *Gezi* Park movement as public revolt. In 2013, alcohol regulation was issued by the government and reacted fiercely, the political opposition. For this reason, alcoholic drinks beer and raki in the memetic poster that indicates one of the main reason of the Gezi Park movement was reacting the governments' restrictive regulations on individual freedom and democratic public sphere.

### Conclusion

This study argues that pop polyvocality was fundamental to interrelations between memes and the *Gezi* Park movement. A polyvocal public sphere values diverse perspectives, logics, and ideas. Memes, as part of internet subculture, carried many discursive modes. Visual rhetoric which was a part of the logic of *Gezi* Park movement engaged with issues of wealth, power, inequality, and civil disobedience. Polyvocality depends on the a wider contribution to virtual public sphere. The memetic genres spread on the sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tumbir. Reading the characteristics of the *Gezi* Park memes, intertextual analysis played a crucial role in mixing popular images in politically generated one. *Gezi* Park is considered to be a subculture activism which has been materialized in a vital space of politics and culture. A diversity of individuals and groups helped to produce viral forms of politics, social relations, and culture. The *Gezi* Park subculture promoted its agenda by remixing videos, photos, popular texts, icons and cartoons.

As the protests grew in early June 2013, participatory media and memetic practices were employed for conversation of the *Gezi* Park in the Internet. Pop images and texts intermixed to everyday political icons, popular figures and historic (canonical) images in different types on memes which began to carry populist perspective on the movement. As the Internet subculture, *Gezi* memes are rich in terms of visual rhetoric utilized iconic images of *Gezi* people and reconstructed controversial topics in-Turkish society. As a result of the Internet activism, the ongoing struggle with the government contributes to opening up space for new oppositional alternative voices and practices.

## Bibliography

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Richardson J. (Eds.), (pp.241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Börzsei, K.L. (2013). Makes a Meme Instead: A Concise History of Internet Memes, [http://works.bepress.com/linda\\_borzsei/2](http://works.bepress.com/linda_borzsei/2)
- Castells, M. (2013). *İsyen ve Umut Ağları*, Ebru Kılıç (Tr). İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Costanza-Chock, S. (2012). Mic check! Media Cultures and the Occupy Movement, *Social Movement Studies*, 11(3-4), 375-385.
- Davidson, P. (2012). The Language of Internet Memes. In Michael Mandiberg (Ed.), *The Social Media Reader*, (pp.53-58). New York and London: New York University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1984). *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rainbow (Ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Converge Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, E. S. (2014). "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric: Circulating Memes as Expressions," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 100(4):442-466.
- Julien, C. (2015). Bourdieu, Social Capital and Online Interaction, *Sociology*, 49(2): 356-373.
- Kahn, Richard;
- Knoble, M.; Lankshear, C. (2005). "Memes and Affinities: Cultural Replication and Literacy Education." Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, 30 November 2005, Miami.
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hacıyakupoğlu, G.; Zhang, W. (2015). Social Media and Trust during the Gezi Protests in Turkey, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 20:4, 450–466.
- Huntington, H. (2015). Pepper Spray Cop and the American Dream: Using Synecdoche and Metaphor to Unlock Internet Memes' Visual Political Rhetoric, *Communication Studies*, (pp.1-17), DOI number: 10.1080/10510974.2015.1087414, 1-17.
- Gawne, L.; Vaughan, J. (2011) I can haz language play: The construction of language and identity in LOLspeak, *Proceedings of the 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference*, <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/9398>
- Kahn, Richard; Douglas Kellner. Internet Subcultures and Political Activism, Internet access <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/oppositionalInternet.htm>
- Kullar, U.; İnci, S. (2015). *İnci Caps: Kutsal Mizah Kırbacı*. İstanbul: Epsilon Yayıncılık.
- Kuryel, A.; Begüm, F.Ö. (2015). Sunuş: Küresel Ayaklanmalar Çağında Direniş ve Estetik. In Aylin Kuryel and Begüm Özden Fırat (Eds.), *Küresel Ayaklanmalar Çağında Direniş ve Estetik*, (pp.9-57). İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Milner, R. M. (2013). Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement, *International Journal of Communication*, 7, (pp.2357-2390).
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Shifman, L. (2014a). *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Shifman, L. (2014b). The Cultural Logic of the Photo Based Meme Genres, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 13(3):340-358.
- Nissenbaum A.; Shifman, L. (2015). Internet Memes as Contested Cultural Capital: The Case of 4chan's/b/board, *New Media & Society*, (pp.1-19), DOI:10.1177/1461444815609313.

- Tekin, D. (2015). Bir Yeni Medya Fenomeni: İnternet Meme'leri ya da Caps'ler. In Ahmet Çetinkaya, Ali Murat Kırık, Özgür Erkut Şahin (Eds.) *Bilişim ve*, (pp.123-134). İstanbul: Hiperlink Yayınları.
- Uyanık, Ş. (2015). Toplumsal Hareketlerde Anonim Örgütlenmeler ve İsyan Ağlarının Mülksüzleştirilmesi. In Yasemin İnceoğlu, Barış Çoban (Eds.) *İnternet ve Sokak*,(pp. 224-256). İstanbul: Schola Ayrıntı Yayınları.