

Remembering Gezi: The Digital Memory Practices on Twitter During the Anniversaries in the Face of Populist Challenges

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Building on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the tweets posted during the anniversary weeks between the years 2014 and 2021, this empirical study examines digital memory practices in the face of populist communication challenges on Twitter for the Gezi protests, which marked a critical milestone in the political history of Turkey. Based on existing literature on digital memory practices, empirical data, and contextual considerations, we proposed a typology of digital memory practices on how the Gezi was remembered on Twitter. We identified five types of memory practices: *representational and symbolic practices; commemorating martyrs; legitimizing and resisting fake memories; bridging memories and public agendas; and keeping up and mobilizing practices*. This study also shows how populist communication tactics extend to the realm of memorialization, wherein activists challenge them in their digital memory practices by refuting false accusations, resisting fake memories, and subverting misrepresentations.

Keywords: memory, social movements, digital media, populism, Twitter, activism, Gezi

May 28, 2021, marked the eighth anniversary of the Gezi protests, which became a critical milestone in the political history of Turkey. On the same day in 2013, a small group of organized environmentalists initiated the protests to prevent the cutting down of trees and demolition of the Gezi Park in Taksim to reconstruct the Ottoman barracks and build the 94th shopping mall in Istanbul (Kuymulu, 2013). However, the excessive use of police violence against peaceful protestors and the attitude of Erdoğan, the prime minister of that period, transformed these small-scale protests into a nationwide mobilization against the interventionist policies of the authoritarian government (Gürcan & Peker, 2015). Gezi was framed strategically and could be identified as one of the latest heterogeneous

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autonomous movements organized on the “hybrid space between Internet social networks and occupied urban space” as the 15-M movement, Occupy movements, and Arab Spring (Castells, 2012, p. 11). Twitter, which was already adopted in Turkey as “a vivid public arena in which insurgent voice could be raised against the AKP’s rhetoric of a ‘new Turkey’” (Ural, 2021, p. 1087), became the most predominant and discussed social media platform during the protests (Saka, 2020).

In today’s hybrid memory ecologies, a multiplicity of remembering practices, mnemonic content, and commemorative performances is converged across older media, digital media, and occasions in urban spaces (Merrill, Keightley, & Daphi, 2020). However, Gezi protestors and activists faced trials, systematic bans, detentions, ill-treatment, and police intervention during Gezi gatherings, activities, and commemorative events (“Turkey Marks Eighth Anniversary,” 2021). Increasing violence and bomb attacks during the massive protests following the June 2015 elections, the state of emergency imposed by the 2016 coup attempt, and harsh policing policies also led to the withdrawal of the people from the streets. Despite tighter regulations on social media, censoring practices, trolling activities, and disproportionate political sanctions against social media users in the aftermath of the protests, Twitter continued to serve as a movement area for Gezi supporters, where activists and various oppositional actors could share real-time information, communicate, access non-partisan oppositional media, reach larger groups, and circulate digital artifacts and memories in the context of authoritarian populism (Karataş, 2021).

Building on the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of Twitter data between 2014 and 2021, this empirical study examines the digital memory practices of Gezi supporters and opponents during the anniversary weeks. Thus, we captured the tweets containing the word “Gezi” every year between 2014 and 2021 during the anniversary week of the 2013 Gezi protests. Our data set enabled us to investigate both protagonists’ and antagonists’ media practices in relation to collective memory about the Gezi resistance. In this way, we present a typology of digital memory practices adopted by the Gezi supporters on Twitter in the face of populist challenges.

The Gezi Resistance and Twitter

In June 2013, the Gezi protestors occupied the Gezi Park and the streets surrounding Taksim, transforming the place into a city of tents, a carnivalesque and autonomous commune based on cooperation, freedom of speech, humor, and solidarity, as in other prefigurative contemporary movements in the 2010s (Castells, 2012; Ors & Turan, 2015). It was regarded as a united resistance against the ruling government and its hegemonic policies. A plurality of autonomous groups and individuals participated in the protests but with their previous affiliations, orientations, and motivations. Thus, the Gezi was mainly characterized by inclusive framing and diversity and deliberative democratic practices. This inclusive frame of the Gezi challenged the populist polarizing discourse being imposed effectively by Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) for a long time (Kaya, 2017).

Unlike other right-wing populist leaders who adopt anti-media populism that considers mainstream media as serving the elite interests (Krämer, 2017), President Erdoğan complained about Twitter more than the established media during the protests. He called Twitter “the worst menace to society” due to the adoption of Twitter as a source of real-time information and communication by the protestors, as the

Internet was relatively open and free compared with heavily state-controlled established media (Saka, 2020, p. 33). The failed coverage of the protests led to increasing frustration with the media outlets and became a breaking point for the audience in Turkey, signaling an increasing need and demand for alternative media platforms and information sources (Yasin, 2013). Gezi protestors adopted Twitter not only as a source of information but also as a tool for mobilization, organization of events, international communication, tactical coordination, documentation of the protests and police brutality as well as archiving (Saka, 2020). Access to the Internet was not entirely restricted, but social media platforms were not accessible in moments of turmoil. The protestors shared technical instructions to overcome blocks and censorship. They successfully promoted alternative sources of news and citizen journalism and raised local and global awareness. Besides these instrumental uses, the protestors employed Twitter for expressive and discursive practices, particularly for the symbolic production and construction of collective identity (Chrona & Bee, 2017).

After recovering from the first shock of this unexpected outburst, Erdoğan's governing AKP immediately launched a political campaign against the protests. They organized rallies, which targeted their voters as well as public opinion, through the coordinated action of the state and non-state actors. Pro-government mainstream TV channels and newspapers put forth several allegations, such as the protestors having sex parties, planned massacres and damages, attacking veiled women, and drinking a cat's blood ("Geziciler' Bu Güne Kadar Neler Yaptı," 2015). Also, several outlets claimed the protests were plotted by the Jewish lobby, the Central Intelligence Agency, the United Kingdom, Soros, Otpor, or similar foreign-backed actors. For instance, the Turkish daily *Takvim* published a fake interview with Christiane Amanpour and claimed that she confessed that she was paid for CNN's false coverage of the protests to damage Turkey's economy (Fung, 2013). Following the protests, the government also redesigned the media outlets over the coverage of the demonstrations through firings, resignations, and investigations (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2013). The high-level adoption of Twitter by the protestors led to the extension of stricter controlling strategies like surveillance and prosecutions. Besides imposing restrictive legislation, the ruling party adopted a social media strategy, by hiring more than 6,000 employees in 2013 to dominate social media through hierarchical coordinative work of politicians, pro-government accounts, trolls, and bots (Saka, 2020). They spread government-friendly content, push specific hashtags for trending topic lists, and suppress dissenting voices (Yeşil, 2021). Also, requests for removing anti-government content from Twitter have been deployed as a routine practice. After being imposed with advertising bans three times, Twitter agreed to appoint a local representative in Turkey in 2021, complying with the latest repressive social media legislation enacted by 2020 ("Sosyal Medya Devleri," 2021).

Freedom House announced that by September 2020, 36,000 people had been subjected to investigation for insulting President Erdoğan, 12,000 of whom were put on trial, and 3,831 were convicted, including 308 children (Freedom House, 2021). In 2021, an Istanbul court reopened the controversial Gezi trial, of which the first case had started in 2016, and gave life imprisonment to Osman Kavala, a businessman and philanthropist, for orchestrating an attempt to overthrow the government, who had been imprisoned since November 2017. Seven co-defendants were each sentenced to 18 years for assisting Kavala (Kucukgocmen, 2022). Besides antagonistic communication and control over the media, the verdict likely created a climate that stoked fear, silencing government opponents and criminalizing Gezi and other anti-government protests (Esen, 2022).

Movement-Related Digital Memory Practices and Media Practices Approach

Social movements are the most prominent areas for the formation of collective memories, while collective memory is regarded as a cultural resource for establishing activist communities, challenging, and shaping public opinion, and impacting the political system (Kubal & Becerra, 2014). Memory performs a central role, not least in the recent prefigurative movements as they offer the capacity to interpret reality and link the past to the present (Gongaware, 2010). However, the construction of memory is not created in isolation, but within "continuous power struggle" (Smit, 2020, p. 86). Still, past events and memories are turned into collective identity or shared frame through a constant process of comparison, negotiation, and reconstruction in interaction with the public sphere (Halbwachs, 1992/1925). In addition to the relationships with the public sphere, including allies, bystanders, and adversaries, the reactions of the ruling group(s) and the political system define the opportunities and constraints for collective action. The ruling groups may attempt to discredit the framing of the movement, turn public opinion against the movement, and legitimize its repressive response against the movement, particularly for the movements that challenge the dominant political system and symbolic order (Melucci, 1996, p. 355). While this public dimension makes memory an "inherently mediated phenomenon" (Neiger, Meyers, & Zandberg, 2011, p. 3), memory making becomes inherently political (Sturken, 1997) and contentious (Zamponi, 2018) for the movements that aim to challenge the dominant political system and cultural codes. Thus, memory making for these movements can be described as "a field where different groups clash because every actor proposes their narrative of the past, which is strictly tied to their own collective identity and to the future that every group imagines" (Zamponi, 2018, p. 16). On the other hand, the recent affordances enabled by information and communication technologies, particularly digitalization and globalization with the rise of social media platforms, affect and reconfigure the repertoire, frames, and organizational structure as well as memory work and memory practices in social movements (Hoskins, 2009; Merrill et al., 2020). This convergent, ubiquitous, fluid, and temporary communication afforded by the new media ecology leads to different and hybrid forms of memory by meshing and bridging private and public memory, different media formats and memory products, and processes of remembering and forgetting (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, & Reading, 2009; Hoskins, 2009, p. 28). The possibility of faster, automated, and easier curation, circulation, and revocability of nascent memory forms calls researchers to rethink activists' memory work and sociotechnical practices (Merrill et al., 2020; Smit, 2020).

The recent scholarship suggests directions for future research that inevitably needs to explore activists' memory practices in today's digital and networked media ecology. With the rise of social media, we witnessed a growing body of research that questioned and analyzed the different ways and memory practices in which the past is remembered and reconstructed through appropriating social media platforms (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2016; Richardson-Little & Merrill, 2020; Smit, 2020; Zamponi, 2020). While these empirical studies provided significant theoretical and methodological implications, they also helped in the coding of Twitter data and the interpretation of findings as they conducted content-based analyses of similar types of data on Twitter and/or Facebook. The first empirical study that guided our research was Smit's (2020) multimodal textual analysis on the Facebook group page Justice for Mike Brown. He distinguishes four types of memory work: "networked commemoration, memetic resurrection, digital archiving and curation, and crowd reconstruction" (Smit, 2020, p. 96). His typology of memory work examines both technological affordances and content as it is informed by "a continuous interplay between practices (what

and how people do), technology (the material artefacts that enable, shape, and constrain this doing), and cultural forms (the type of content or object that is produced through interactions between humans and technologies)" (Smit, 2020, p. 95). In the qualitative analysis of the hashtag use for the commemoration in Italy and mnemonic practices, Zamponi (2020) identifies five types of digital memory practices on Twitter: "online sharing of offline activism, references to mainstream media material, quotes and ritual cultural references, personal biographies in shared commemorations, the appropriation of a certain memory of the past to advance or support political claims situated in the present, and militant claims of memory struggles" (p. 141–171). While this typology of digital memory practices is based on practices, narratives, and counternarratives, Kaun and Stiernstedt (2016) focus on more technological affordances and constraints of the specific social media platform. Based on a Facebook page analysis, surveys, and interviews with the users, their study identifies more overarching types of digital memory practices. Employing the media practice approach, they suggested "storing practices, representational practices, and connective practices" (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2016, p. 199). Richardson-Little and Merrill's (2020) comparative analysis of the affordances and limitations offered by Facebook and Twitter helped us to study contentious memory work for movements. Through a close reading of Facebook groups and Twitter hashtags, the authors indicated that the closed Facebook group helped the far-right group to organize, mobilize, and reinforce a group identity, providing them with a safer and uncontested space. However, more open, and public terrains on which their claims and opinions were contested, like street demonstrations and Twitter, initiated counterdemonstrations and digital countermobilizations.

While our study draws from this existing body of literature, emerging research also needs to consider advanced manipulation, persuasion, and dissemination techniques enabled by digital media, particularly studies on authoritarian populist regimes where post-truth politics and fake news have become increasingly prevalent. Memory scholars also signal a paradigmatic shift in approach to media ecology in the post-broadcast age, characterized by the continuous transformation of media and audiences, as memory is also exposed to distinctive influences, modifications, and shaping practices (Hoskins, 2009). The rise of nationalist right-wing populist parties and movements in recent years has led to a growing body of literature concerned with how the right-wing populists adopted the affordances of online technologies to spread populist content and transformed our communication environment (Earl, James, Ramo, & Scovill, 2021; Krämer, 2017; Tumber & Waisbord, 2021). Over the past decade, nondemocratic regimes have shifted their intervention strategies toward proactive subversion and co-option of social media for their own political goals rather than total suppression (Gunitsky, 2015). They adopt techniques like "mobilizing regime supporters to disrupt planned rallies, plant false information, monitor opposition websites, and harass opposition members" for discourse framing of public opinion and mobilizing their own supporters (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 45). In particular, the authorities tend to adopt more complex and multifaceted national propaganda campaigns that "mix accurate information, misrepresented information, and disinformation" to suppress and oppose social unrest (Earl et al., 2021, p. 292). Fake news and falsehoods can be purposively constructed and disseminated by the populist political leaders and mainstream media, which dominate the news to enforce manipulated narratives to polarize society and delegitimize protestors (Tandoc Jr., 2021). Moreover, these viral and misleading fake news, conspiracy theories, and disinformation can be created purposively and disseminated on social media through automation and troll armies to enforce manipulated narratives, polarize society, prevent the ability of the public to find the truth, disrupt democratic public discussions, discriminate against, and delegitimize political opposition (Frissen & Opgenhaffen, 2021). In

some cases, they can “even outperform real news in terms of user engagement and popularity” (Frissen & Opgenhaffen, 2021, p. 271). Thus, memory studies also should incorporate data on disinformation and fake news into research and investigate what happens after fake news is disseminated and enters public memory.

Based on existing literature on digital memory practices, empirical data, and contextual considerations, we adopt Couldry’s (2012) conceptual “media practices approach” in our research because it allows empirical studies exploring the intersection of digital media and activism to grasp a broad plethora of regular and social media practices of audience concerning their needs. A practice approach does not ask questions treating media as “objects, texts, apparatuses of perception or production processes, but to what people are doing in relation to media in the contexts in which they act” (Couldry, 2012, p. 110–111). This approach moves the center of media research

from texts towards the broader set of practices related to media, we can get a better grip on the distinctive types of a social process enacted through media-related practices, practices involving not just producer and performers but also interactive audiences, audience members who would like to become performers, and non-viewing members of the public who become affected by that wider process. (Couldry, 2012, p. 123)

The broader understanding of memory (Smit, 2020) and the openness of the media practices approach (Couldry, 2012) allow our study to grasp complex and diverse movement-related digital memory practices, particularly for Twitter in post-Gezi Turkey, which are transformed, extended, and/or limited by the state, networked movements, and social media platforms within a populist sociopolitical context in a continuous power struggle.

Data and Methods

For a deeper analysis of digital memory practices on Twitter over time, we conducted a mixed-methods research, combining quantitative digital methods and content analysis. Firstly, we tracked the tweets containing the word “Gezi” from the dates May 27 to June 3 every year between 2014 and 2021 by Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolkit (4CAT)² retrospectively at the end of June 2021. This allowed us to study digital media practices and capture mnemonic practices on the anniversaries as it provides a continuous time series for detecting regular and shifting practices, affordances, and contexts over time. The tool was not able to retrieve the deleted tweets by the users for various reasons before June 2021. Still, we were able to detect the mentions of the deleted or removed tweets or users, and when we followed these mentions, we observed very few tweets to be deleted among the most visible retweeted tweets.

In total, we retrieved 966,137 tweets. We beneficially and pragmatically employed a set of standardized metrics offered by Twitter for analyzing our data. We combined them as “reliable and comparable measures” to provide new insights into the communicative patterns of these two groups for their collectivities, which operate on each other (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2014). As the retweeting functionality offers “an affirmation of the contents of a particular tweet, and a way of spreading a conversation more

² 4CAT was created at OILab and Digital the Methods Initiative at the University of Amsterdam.

widely" (Halavais, 2014, p. 35), we first listed the tweets retweeted more than 100 times in rank order of their frequency. We preferred to manually analyze these 954 most retweeted tweets based on the close reading of the tweets' body text, author, year, URLs, retweets, and images due to two reasons. First, the analysis of tweets is a challenging process for text-mining systems because of the informal language used and stylistic differences like irony, sarcasm, etc. Second, extracting opinion was required to differentiate the popular practices and actors among both Gezi supporters and opponents (Risse, Peters, Senellart, & Maynard, 2014).

In our study, we coded what these users did with Twitter about the Gezi protests during the anniversary week according to the keywords used, main practices, usage of URLs, retweets, and images, and the role of the user (news media, journalist, ordinary user, celebrity, etc.). Combining deductive and inductive approaches to coding, we derived some codes from the media memory practices literature and generated some codes on mnemonic practices from the data based on the local communicative contextual differences in post-Gezi Turkey. Through content analysis, we also categorized tweets as pro-Gezi, anti-Gezi, irrelevant, or neutral tweets, based on the wording (e.g., hero vs. traitor, martyr vs. terrorist), tone of voice (swearing, humiliating, threatening, accusing, sarcastic, condemning, complimenting, celebrating), narratives (solidarity, peace, resistance, humor), and counternarratives (vandalism, Western wannabe, anti-Islam, terror, foreign powers).³

Then, we detected the most retweeted Twitter accounts within the data set to identify the most visible and leading contributors to the mnemonic practices over time. Alongside reading the contributors' Gezi-related tweets, we visited their Twitter accounts profiles and examined their tweet content to classify them into ingroup (Gezi supporters) and outgroup (Gezi opponents) and distinguish their roles. Although the hashtags and retweets need a closer look to classify, the classification of these popular users in the communication was relatively clearer due to their recognizable positions, tweeting patterns, and wordings. This analysis contributes to a better understanding of which specific actors and connective leaders participated in and how they contributed to the memory making on Twitter.

Last, we listed the top-20 hashtags used every year in the data set and analyzed them according to their frequency of use over time. The tweets containing a hashtag mark show the wish of the users to take part in a larger communicative process and their interest in the relevant topic (Bruns & Moe, 2014). The hashtagged tweets allow the senders to reach a massive number of users beyond their primary follower network and increase their visibility by appearing in trending topics. It is not possible to identify the hashtags clearly without understanding the context, content, and users. Thus, we read the tweets under these hashtags and identified which group employed each dominantly. While some hashtags were neutral keywords like location and names (#Istanbul) that could be used by both parties, some of them were very sloganized and peculiar, like #GeziyiUnutma (#DonotForgetGezi), #GeziDayanismadir (#GeziisSolidarity), and #IhanetinYildonumu (#TheAnniversaryoftheBetrayal). Although different users or user groups may write under the same hashtag, the politically conflictual groups promote and tend to use certain case-specific hashtags for making their narratives more public and avoid using the other group's hashtag. This analysis

³ The most retweeted tweets were coded twice as pro-Gezi or anti-Gezi positions by the two authors separately and confirmed with their full agreement.

allowed us to identify the popular topics as well as patterns of similarities and differences in memory practices at the macro level of communication over time.

Research Findings

The overview of the Twitter activities demonstrated that pro-Gezi users dominated Twitter during the anniversary weeks over the years in terms of top hashtags, most retweeted tweets, and top retweeted accounts. We also analyzed the use of retweets, hashtags, and URLs among all tweets containing the Gezi word by year, as shown in Table 1. The highest number of tweets were posted about the Gezi protests in 2014, the very next year. We also observed the highest percentage of original tweets and tweets containing URLs. The tweets in the first four anniversaries contain higher percentages of URLs (51%–41%), hashtags (41%–33%), and original tweets (36%–24%) compared with the average of the whole conversation. Therefore, it can be argued that more Twitter users tended to participate more actively, post their own tweets, and engage in public communication for online commemoration in 2014 compared with the other years. However, the communication over the next three years, with a lower number of total tweets and hashtag use, seemed to be focused on spreading information and showing their stand as the users preferred to retweet than post. While the higher activity may be attributable to the recency effect and the more open political context of the earlier parliamentary system before the new presidential system based on the one-man rule, the relative inactivity in the next three years can be attributed to the aversion of users to post overtly political tweets following the coup attempt in 2016 and the victory of Erdoğan in the referendum for the presidential system in 2017. Due to the increasingly repressive political context posing a high risk/cost to online activism, Twitter users might prefer safer private zones such as WhatsApp or Facebook groups rather than open and public platforms such as Twitter or offline activism (Kocer & Bozdağ, 2020). In the last two years, the number of tweets has significantly increased, mostly due to the significant growth of anti-Gezi Twitter activity. However, the communication has become increasingly dominated by retweets, with the lowest level of hashtags and URLs. This shows that Twitter communication in the last two years has been dominated by a relatively smaller group of users compared with other years. The rapid increase of anti-Gezi tweets and hashtags in the last two years can be regarded as reactive and negative populist behavior (Moffitt, 2016) as the anti-Gezi tweets and hashtag campaigns targeted particularly the politicians of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) due to their supportive tweets on Gezi after CHP's victory in the 2019 local elections for the metropolitan cities. This empirical evidence shows online media practices as well are strongly affected by "specific regularities in actions that relate to media, and regularities of context and resources that enable media related actions" (Couldry, 2012, p. 35).

Table 1. The Use of Retweets, Hashtags, and URLs Among All the Tweets Containing the Gezi Word by Years.

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Overall
Total tweets	276,553	109,615	96,298	71,409	69,753	54,983	145,911	141,615	966,137
Retweets	177,224	73,739	66,448	54,544	56,879	43,932	110,639	118,939	702,344
Hashtagged tweets	92,658	45,109	35,870	23,253	19,356	13,709	29,298	34,990	294,243
Tweets with URLs	141,492	56,790	47,496	29,399	18,501	12,564	29,363	31,093	366,698

Pro-government journalists, AKP officials, and influencers contributed to an increasing Twitter activity and audience reach by posting anti-Gezi content in line with the official rhetoric. The most persistent practices were delegitimizing the protests based on vandalism and betrayal, targeting, and criminalizing the prominent figures and celebrities joining the protests, accusing foreign powers, criticizing the opposition for supporting the Gezi, and circulating fake memories based on the pseudo-events.

On the other hand, the critical alternative media, and the individual accounts of dissident journalists, who were exiled from mainstream media, celebrities, influencers, archival accounts, and politicians of left-leaning opposition parties were the most effective and persistent pro-Gezi accounts for the memorialization of Gezi on Twitter during the anniversaries (Figure 1). In the wake of the Gezi protests, a plethora of nonpartisan alternative media outlets and citizen journalism initiatives emerged or attracted attention due to their success in the protests. Twitter popularized these nonpartisan news sources among a larger audience that seeks to access critical news and unreported stories on mainstream media (Saka, 2020). Due to the polarization and exclusion of critical voices in Turkey, we adopted a pragmatic and inclusive definition of alternative media in our categorization. Thus, we included all outlets that express oppositional stances and critical news. We observed that the mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet* owned by Dogan Media was retweeted by the users in the first two anniversaries. However, as the position of *Hürriyet* shifted after its sale to the pro-government media conglomerate Demirören, we detected only *Sözcü* as the mainstream media outlet in the most retweeted accounts. These findings show the growing distrust in mainstream media of pro-Gezi users and their exclusion from mainstream media.

In light of these findings, we primarily discuss the digital memory practices of the pro-Gezi users during the anniversaries in the context of increasing populist communication on post-Gezi Twitter. We identified five types of digital memory practices on Twitter: Representational and symbolic practices; commemorating martyrs; legitimizing and resisting fake memories; bridging memories and public agendas; and keeping up and mobilizing practices. Although these practices are often intertwined and overlap each other, we distinguished them according to their primary focus and principal purposes in mediated communication.

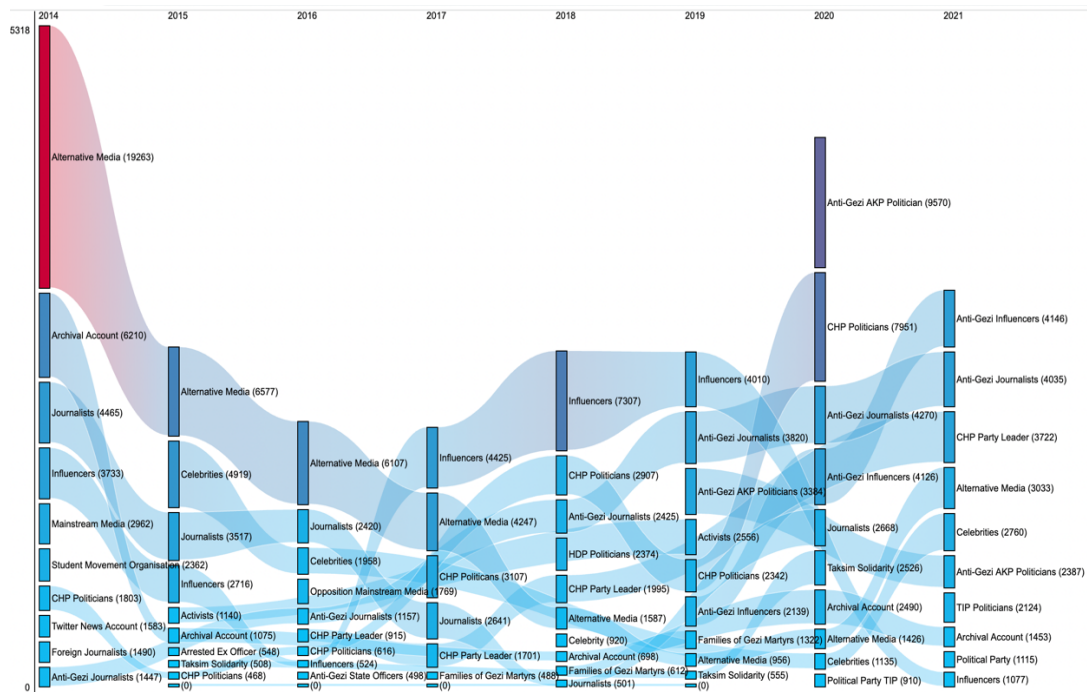


Figure 1. The most retweeted users by years among the tweets containing Gezi.

Representational and Symbolic Practices

Building on the exemplary practices in the aforementioned studies, “memetic resurrection” in Smit (2020), “representational media memories” in Kaun and Stierstedt (2016), and “quotes and ritual cultural references” in shared commemorations in Zamponi (2020), we categorized these practices under the umbrella term “representational and symbolic practices” as they are often intertwined in the representation of private and public memory, online and offline content, and political and personal. The users engage in different ways with these prominent and persistent practices: posting commemorative commentaries, sharing personal and public memories, and circulating iconic images, videos, songs, stories, arts, and news related to the protests. Professional journalists and influencers with a high number of followers played an important role in the production, circulation, and interaction of this type of tweet because of Twitter’s visibility algorithm based on popularity and relevance. However, our analysis shows that Gezi supporters successfully exploited the hashtag mechanism of Twitter to boost their visibility and employed Twitter as an online collective platform for producing, curating, and circulating content under memorializing hashtags such as #GeziyiHatırlat (#RemindGezi), #GeziyiUnutma (#DonotForgetGezi), #GeziYYaşında (#GeziXYearsold), as shown in Figure 2.

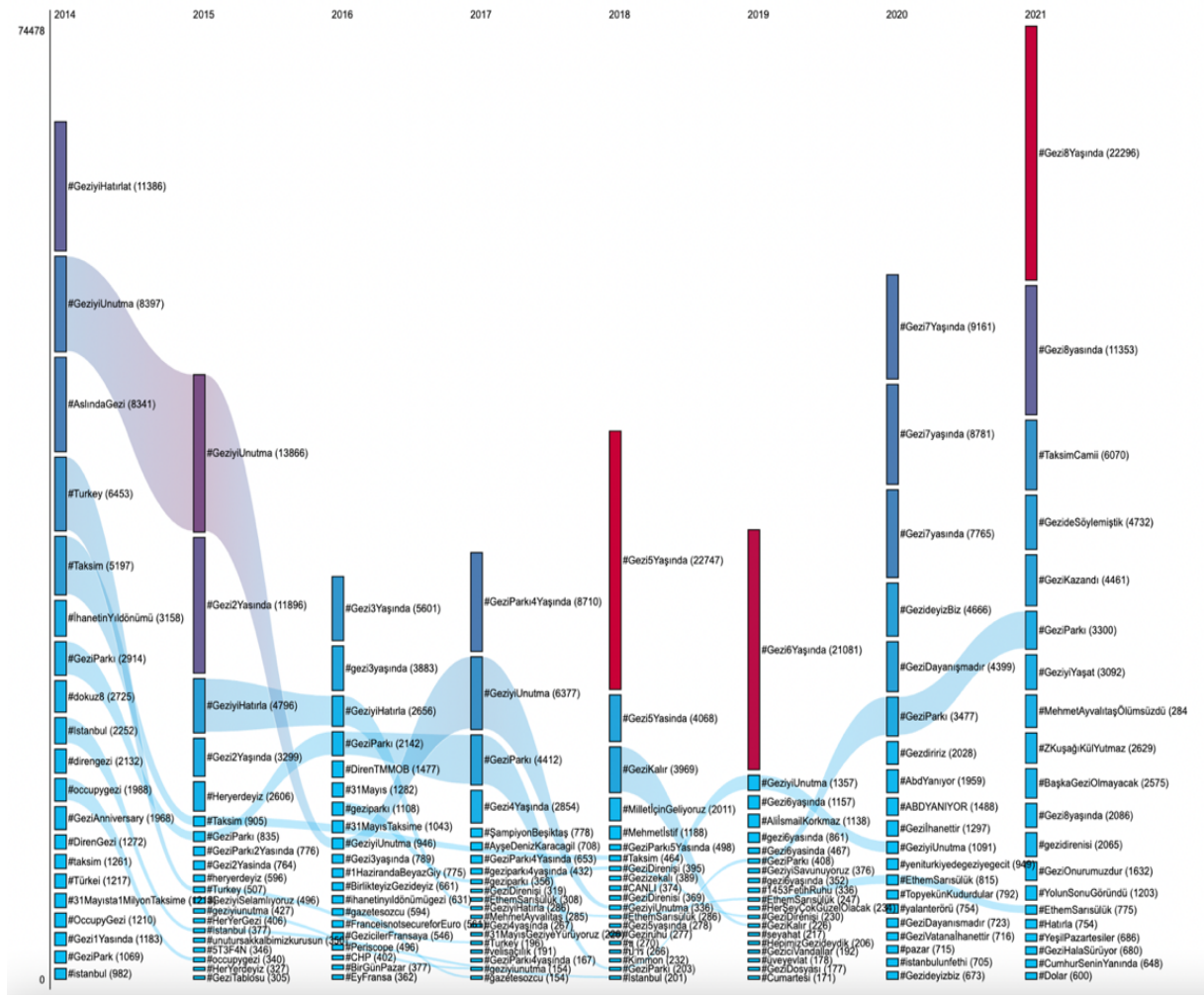


Figure 2. Analysis of the most popular hashtags among the tweets containing Gezi.

Gezi supporters mostly retweeted the posts that shared nostalgic memories from the Gezi Park and protests. These tweets usually included emotional and affective expressions around the themes of solidarity, peace, pluralism, equality, humor, and creativity to define the Gezi spirit. Although these practices of pro-Gezi users may appear to target ingroup pro-Gezi users, the inclusive, tolerant, and respectful language salient in their tweets seem to be adopted strategically and performatively to challenge the simplistic enemy-friendly dualism formed with the right-wing populist communication, particularly in the first three years. As Twitter is a more public platform compared with other social media platforms, it also enabled the contestation of their narratives and claims, even memories, sometimes leading to online battles over the hashtags (Richardson-Little & Merrill, 2020).

In response to the pro-Gezi users' representational practices, we observed a more noticeable increase in anti-Gezi retweets, retweeted users, and hashtags containing the word betrayal (*#ihanetinyıldönümü*, *#Geziİhanettir*), consistent with binary representations of polarized communication championed by populism (Waisbord, 2018). Pro-government journalists, AKP officials, and influencers as the top tweeters contributed to an increasing Twitter activity and audience reach by posting anti-Gezi content in line with the official rhetoric. The content analysis of the top tweets showed that their counternarratives focused on vandalism, the adverse effects of the protests on the economy, property damage, and conspiracies with enemies such as the West. However, the users tended to tweet, comment, and reply to the pro-Gezi users in more threatening, humiliating, and intimidating tones over the years, which was in line with the tone of the pro-government established media (Gencil Bek, 2021). Also, they contested the Gezi memory by appropriating other memories of an alternative past, counter to the memory of Gezi, like "the Ottoman Conquest of Istanbul on 29 May 1453" and "15 July Coup Attempt," when they represented Gezi protestors as anti-authentic, alienated, Western-wannabe through such a nationalistic and religious discourse. In 2020, anti-Gezi users celebrated Erdoğan's inauguration of the Taksim mosque during the Gezi's anniversary week and the conversion of the Hagia Sofia museum into a mosque as a victory of Erdoğan against the Gezi protestors. We also observed that the anti-Gezi users often quoted from AKP leader and President Erdoğan's speeches and symbolized him against the Gezi as a messianic savior figure in their tweets, in line with the central positioning of populist leaders in presidential systems (Moffitt, 2016, p. 63). Increasing memory battles, aggressive and humiliating speeches, and militant posts likely limit the interaction between the groups. Even for commenting on each other's tweets, they did not mention the user but attached screenshots of each other's tweets to not interact with each other.

Commemorating Martyrs

The other common and persistent practice was commemorating Gezi martyrs and reclaiming justice for the deaths of these protestors, as Smit (2020) identified in his study as "networked commemoration" as well. Appropriating the names of these protestors as hashtags or using more inclusive hashtags like *#GeziŞehitleriÖlümsüzdür* (*#GeziMartyrsareImmortal*), pro-Gezi users memorialized the protestors who lost their lives and expressed their grief by sharing their pictures, memories, and stories of how they lost their lives. Extending the memorialization beyond the Gezi protestors, the pro-Gezi users commemorated other protestors as well, like Metin Lokumcu, who died due to tear gas in the Hopa protests against hydroelectric power plants in 2011. This shows that the pro-Gezi users engaged with the past by making connections between the past and present protests.

The most active and retweeted users tweeting under these hashtags were the families of the protestors (Figure 3), while many users offered their condolences by replying to these tweets. Besides sensational and emotionally charged tweets, this connective commemoration could also be considered a form of protest against police violence to demand justice and mobilize outrage against injustice. It seems that Twitter made it easier for critical users and dissident journalists to make their voices heard, document police violence, and spread the evidence beyond their personal networks. As is to be expected, users most frequently retweeted the accounts of alternative media and journalists or attached links to the news items. These accounts did not only serve as news sources but also as archival resources by covering the biographies of the protestors, the trials over the deaths of the protestors, and interviews with their families.

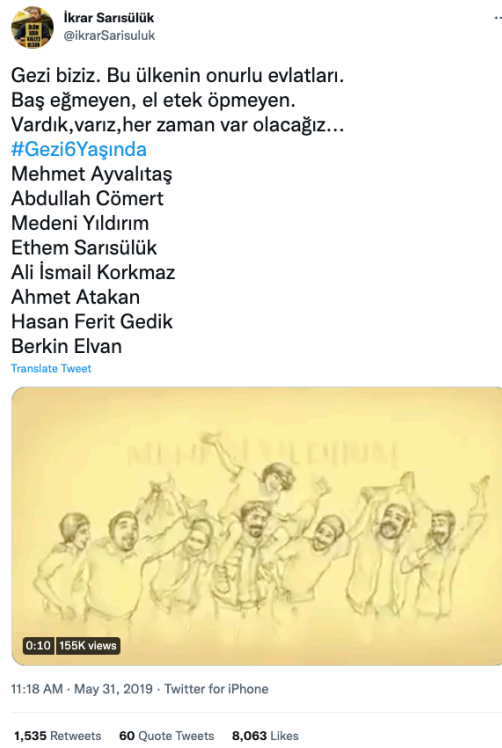


Figure 3. Ikrar Sarısülük (brother of Ethem Sarısülük; 2019). Translated text: We are Gezi, we do not come to heel, we do not cringe. We were, we are, we will be . . . #Geziis6YearsOld.

On the other hand, a few popular anti-Gezi account users, such as the pro-government *Akit* columnist tweeted to memorialize the police officer Mustafa Sarı, who fell from a bridge while pursuing the protesters during the protests, to blame the protestors as traitors for throwing him from the bridge when he was defending his country although his family circle denied this accusation. Documenting and archiving practices helped to refute the claims of state-backed sources and raised public pressure about current affairs. In this way, reporting the truth and combating misinformation challenge dominant memory making and attempt to prevent false and distorted facts from becoming memory.

Legitimizing and Resisting Fake Memories

Different from other practices in the literature, we observed deliberate and distinctive practices to prove the legitimacy of the movement, which confronted fake memories, illegitimate actions, and hegemonic representations. Some pro-Gezi accounts undertook the mission of reminding the public about and resisting the fake memories and their fabricators and providing corrective information and evidence such as in the Kabatas and Dolmabahçe events. In the context of the state-controlled media and populist politics, these users extensively tried to document and/or present evidence about the pseudo-events and illegitimate actions of the government, like the police violence during the protests and anniversaries. Although the pseudo-events could not be proven by the claimants and corrected by

evidence during the protests, fake memories were fabricated through manipulation techniques, hoaxes, and repetition of these fake news by the politicians and pro-government mainstream media (Lowen, 2018; Saka, 2020). The most mentioned memory in the data set, the Kabataş case, started with a controversial interview published in the pro-government daily *Star*. The interview was of a woman who claimed that a group of protestors composed of half-naked men with leather gloves attacked her and her baby. The daughter-in-law of a mayor from the ruling AKP, she accused the protestors of insulting her Islamic attire, attacking her headscarf, kicking her baby, and urinating on her. Erdoğan repeated this case in his rallies even years after although the video footage supporting the claims of assault was never found in the investigation and never shared with the public as Erdoğan promised (Orucoglu, 2015). Kanal D released CCTV footage refuting the allegations and showed that the woman and protestors were talking for a few seconds on the woman's call, without any physical contact. Despite the case being remembered as the "Kabataş lie," Erdoğan continued to repeat this conspiracy several times in his rallies, and 14 columnists from five pro-government newspapers wrote columns defending the veracity of the incident and condemning the Gezi protestors for denying a woman's allegations in 2015 ("14 Columnists Appear with Same Headline," 2015). The other allegation that Erdoğan asserted in several speeches was that the protestors entered the Dolmabahçe Mosque with their shoes and drank alcoholic beverages inside the mosque, which the protestors had been using as a shelter for the injured during the fierce clashes with the police. However, Fuat Yıldırım, the muezzin of the mosque, denied seeing that alcohol was consumed in the mosque and was exiled to a village for contradicting Erdoğan. Pro-Gezi users extensively tried to combat these fabricated/fake memories by declaring these events as "lies" and exposing fake news and manipulative or misleading information during the protests (Figure 4). They targeted pro-government mainstream media and journalists for their role in fabricating and spreading fake news by explicitly calling them "liars," as seen in Figure 5 while some uploaded screenshots of the news published or broadcasted during the protests to remind the public about the absurdity and delusiveness of the allegations. Notably, specific Twitter accounts like *KacSaatOldu?* (HowManyHoursHasitBeen?), *ArsivUnutmaz* (ArchiveDoesnotForget), and *TarihtekiBugun* (TodayintheHistory) identified themselves and served as a reminder with the mission of defending the reality of the events against fake memories, mis/disinformation, and conspiracy theories over the years with their posts recalling the police violence and the Dolmabahçe and Kabataş events, often in an ironic tone, using humor and ridicule.



Figure 4. Arşiv Unutmaz (2021): The muezzin of Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Mosque said, "I am a reverend; I cannot lie, alcohol was not drunk in the mosque in Gezi," and although his wife is seriously ill, he was exiled. Although hundreds of Fridays passed, the claimed videotape was not presented to the public.



Figure 5. Pro-Gezi Influencer (personal communication, June 1, 2019): "On the 6th anniversary of Gezi, we do not forget Kabataş liars either!" #Gezi6YearsOld.

As a counterpart to these pro-Gezi accounts, Günün Yalanları (The Lies of the Day) account, posted videos and photos during the anniversaries to refute the fake news and misinformation spread by the protestors and accused some international media like CNN of mis-coverage of the protests. The account describes itself as a project of Bosphorous Global, in which pro-Erdoğan pundit Hilal Kaplan and her husband

run AKP-backed social media operatives (Yeşil, 2021). In reverse, these accounts claimed that the protestors spread fake news and disinformation through social media when the ruling government was the target and victim of post-truth communication (Gencil Bek, 2021).

Bridging Memories and Public Agendas

Another common memory practice in the anniversaries was bridging memories and current public agendas, as Zamponi (2020) identified as "appropriation of a certain memory of the past to advance or support political claims situated in the present" (p. 160). The top tweet in the data set was on Turkey's economy, which was hit by the depreciation of the Turkish lira and rapid inflation rise, which reduce the purchasing power of the citizen (Figure 6). The same user posted the same tweet on every anniversary since 2018, comparing the Turkish lira and dollar currency in exactly the same wording, with the updated currency rates to highlight the severity of the economic crisis. She ridiculed the Gezi opponents for accusing the protestors of planning the protest operation with foreign enemies as the Turkish lira had lost 0.4 TL against the dollar at the time of the protests. Similar to this tweet, some users provided evidence comparing the current public agenda with the opponents' past claims and revealed their incoherence in a sarcastic way to challenge the counternarratives and contest the populist rhetoric over the protests. Thus, the Gezi protestors countered the past claims and representations and then integrated these counter-memories retrospectively to refute the claims of counternarrative tweets.



Figure 6. Suna Varol (influencer; 2018). Translated text: I wish God does not let anyone be a scoundrel to say, "You ruined the economy" when the dollar increased from 1.88 to 1.92; and dishonorable not to say a word when the dollar rose to 4.92. #Geziis5YearsOld.

Besides this political engagement, users also made symbolic connections between the Gezi and other protests and movements targeted by the government. As "activists are equipped with a repertoire of memory, a set of mnemonic practices that social actors put in place in reference to the past" (Zamponi, 2020, p. 146), the users highlighted that the resistance started in the Gezi continues and is engaged in a collective identity process, which links "present interests to the past in such a way that a collective identity element of the present develops in a way that mirrors that past" (Gongaware, 2010, p. 215). The most frequently referred cases were mining disasters, protests against environmental destructions and megaprojects like Canal Istanbul; the Boğaziçi University protests of the students and academics against

the appointment of the rector by President Erdoğan, and the protests against withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women. The connections of the pro-Gezi users with environmental and ecological movements, student movements, gender movements, and labor movements indicate “the dialectical interplay in which actors simultaneously use the past to interpret the present and the present to interpret the past” (Gongaware, 2010, p. 216).

Keeping Up and Mobilizing Practices

We detected that keeping up news coverage related to the Gezi and mobilizing practices on Twitter still supported offline commemorative events in two ways: spreading the calls for events and sharing the news from the ground, as Zamponi (2020) identified as “online sharing of offline activism” (p. 158). The users shared alternative media content about the Gezi protests, which sustained interest and awareness by continually supplying news about the Gezi trials, commentaries, and stories of the recent offline events related to Gezi. Taksim Solidarity’s account as the representative account posted calls for commemorations when alternative media accounts spread these calls and covered the anniversary events. They contributed to both online and offline memory making by calling for protests, sharing news from the commemorations, and posting about the protests. After the first three years, we observed a significant decrease in retweets of these calls and in the hashtags to mobilize the users for participation in commemorations. The decline in mobilizing practices can be explained by increasing costs and risks of protest participation in Turkey. Also, we observed that the anti-Gezi users tended to reply to this type of tweets more than the pro-Gezi users through harassment and intimidation by threatening the physical safety of the protestors and legitimizing violence. These provocative online communicative interactions might demobilize and discourage protestors from participating in offline commemorations.

Conclusion

This study attempts to contribute to the literature on social movements, memory, and social media in the digital and populist era, by focusing on the memorialization practices for the Gezi protests on Twitter. By combining a broader perspective of memory with the media practices approach, we tried to grasp complex and diverse movement-related digital memory practices within a populist sociopolitical context in a continuous power struggle. Our analysis of the popular retweets, users, and hashtags over the years contributed to a better understanding of the range and quantity of popular actors, practices, and themes participating in memory making on post-Gezi Twitter, while the content analysis showed interactive and defensive memory practices. Based on the existing literature on digital memory practices, empirical data, and contextual considerations, we presented a typology of digital memory practices on how the Gezi is remembered and reconstructed on Twitter in the face of populist communication challenges and identified five types of memory practices: *representational and symbolic practices; commemorating martyrs; legitimizing and resisting fake memories; bridging memories and public agendas; and keeping up and mobilizing practices.*

Misinformation, manipulation, fabrication of information, and intimidation have been increasingly used against collective actions and protestors to discredit the framing of their memory, turn public opinion against the movement, and legitimize repressive responses to such movements. Our study showed that

these populist communication tactics also extended to the realm of memorialization for the enforcement of their own memories and narratives of the past. Fake news and fabricated content were transformed into fake memories in relation to the Gezi protests by the orchestrated work of official sources, mainstream media, and social media users. In this context, Twitter served as one of the few spheres for memory making for the dissident movements in the authoritarian political contexts posing high risks to participation in memorialization in public spaces. Although these populist tactics seemed to discourage some pro-Gezi users from participating actively in online memory making, we observed that pro-Gezi users effectively and actively challenged these populist tactics by refuting false accusations, resisting the fake memories, and delegitimizing representations in their online memory practices. Pro-Gezi users also encountered and dealt with fake news, goal-directed misinformation, humiliation, intimidation, and targeting in all their memory practices on Twitter. Twitter enabled the pro-Gezi users to challenge counter memory making of their opponents through populist tactics and prevent fake news and disinformation to crystalize into fake memories in the long term while it allowed activists to engage in commemorative and memory practices by connecting alternative media, journalists, celebrities, politicians, and ordinary users as an alternative to high-risk offline activism. It seems that digital affordances for manipulation and disinformation tactics with the onset of deepfake, memory making will be much more contentious work in the face of rising populism for the groups challenging dominant power. These considerations show that memory studies should also incorporate data on disinformation and fake news into academic research. For future work, we suggest investigating what happens after fake news is disseminated and enters public memory and addressing the affordances of social media platforms in digital memory further with the issues of manipulation and automation.

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