

## (II) Legitimation of the role of the nation state: Understanding of and reactions to Internet censorship in Turkey

### **Abstract**

This study aims to explore Turkish citizen-consumers' understanding of and reactions to censorship of websites in Turkey by using in-depth interviews and online ethnography. In an environment where sites such as YouTube and others are increasingly being banned, the citizen-consumers' macro-level understanding is that such censorship is part of a wider ideological plan and their micro-level understanding is that their relationship with the wider global network is reduced, in the sense that they have trouble accessing full information on products, services and experiences. The study revealed that citizen consumers engage in two types of resistance strategies against such domination by the state: using irony as passive resistance, and using the very same technology used by the state to resist its domination.

### **Keywords**

Citizen-consumers, consumption, Internet censorship, resistance, Turkey, YouTube

### **Introduction**

*'Access to this site has been suspended in accordance with decision 2007/386 dated 06.03.2007 of the first criminal peace court.'*

Two extreme views characterise discussion about the Internet. The first argues that 'information wants to be free' (Brand, 1987), considering the Internet as a borderless and boundaryless network – this perspective, occasionally described as the 'ideology of "free"' (cf. Hemetsberger, 2006; Kozinets et al., 2008), pervades public discourse about the Internet. It forms the basis of 'hacker culture' (Brand, 1987; Levy, 2002) and the filesharing community (Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003) and provided the grounds for the emergence of websites such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and the like, which freely disseminate user-generated content globally (Leung, 2009). The second view opposes the 'ideology of free', arguing that file-sharing sites such as Napster and The Pirate Bay erode corporate interests and the interests of nation states (for a user analysis of resistance to global software copyright enforcement, see Lu and Weber (2009); see also MacKinnon, 2008).

Sharma and Gupta (2006) summarise these discussions of such weakening into two key areas of concern: territoriality and sovereignty. They point to the rise of anti-global protest groups as a transnational movement. Considerable scholarly debate concerns whether globalisation, including the rise of the Internet and globalisation of media, has blurred the boundaries between nation states – as theorised by Beck (2000), Castells (2009), Featherstone and Lash (1995) and Robinson (1998) – or whether

nation states retain prominence and continue to be necessary to the existence of the transnational and the global (Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2007). Mihelj (2011: 30) argues that... many processes that are currently seen as features of globalization can be understood as the global rise of the modern nation-state as a key unit of political power and action, and... global parallel spread of nationalism as the dominant discourse of political legitimacy and cultural identity.

This, she claims, also applies to relationships between the Internet's global and national realms. Similarly, Cammaerts and Van Audenhove (2005: 193) find that 'the construction of such a transnational public sphere is burdened with many constraints', concluding that 'to speak of a unified transnational public sphere is therefore deemed to be problematic. In this regard it was also concluded that the transnational cannot be seen or construed without taking into account the local...' (p. 179). Therefore, boundaries between nation states seem to be blurring rather than disappearing in the realm of the Internet.

In this article we seek to move beyond neo-liberal versus neo-Marxist battles over the need to reduce or increase the role of the nation state in regulating the market and social spaces, which have been well rehearsed by Stiglitz (2002) and Ohmae (1990). Instead we question what happens when the state acts to distance the citizen, who has adapted to the role of consumer, from their global peers. The paper takes the Turkish government's censoring of SM (social media) sites such as YouTube as an example of the state's intrusion into society's affairs. It explores Turkish people's responses to government interference in societal and political discourse on websites such as YouTube, posing the following questions: Do citizens believe in the role of government in safeguarding values such as Turkishness, or do they perceive such actions of the state in removing their Internet consumption options to be illegitimate? What sort of resistance do Turkish citizens engage in to deal with such bans?

## **Literature review**

### **Citizen-consumer: consuming the Internet in Turkey**

Castells and Himanen (2002) links the proliferation of the Internet with increased globalisation, and homogenisation of consumer desires, and sees it as central to discourses on consumer rights and empowerment (Harfoush, 2009; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2002). The Internet has also been seen as vital in contemporary strategies of social resistance (e.g. Shirky, 2008). Glickman (1999) defines citizenship in terms of one's right to marketplace participation and consumption, conceptualised as political practice through exercising consumer (non)-choice when consuming and voting (Gabriel and Lang, 2006; McGovern, 1998). Ward (2008) studies the online young citizen-consumer through youth political consumption. Tsai (2010) examines the creation of the citizen-consumer through the use of patriotic advertising and Johnston (2008) considers ideological tensions in the citizen-consumer hybrid. The citizen-consumer framework has been studied in the light of consumption

(e.g. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007); however, a removal of the option to consume, and the way this may affect the citizen-consumer framework, has not been previously considered.

Schlesinger (1991) notes the belief that communication (through media) offers the opportunity to rehearse and confirm collective identities, and his analysis of this (with respect to the European Communities' 'Television without Borders' policy) focuses on the deployment of such media policies to further economic aims or to act as protection from outside influences. He also draws attention to Marxist analysis, which indicates the infiltration of 'national information systems' (p.142) by multinational corporations.

Traditional debates over the intersection between state and media have focused on who controls the message and what such messages are. YouTube has allowed consumers to create, share and consume videos worldwide. YouTube has also hosted ideological battles over copyright and creativity (O'Brien and Fitzgerald, 2006) and discussions over glorifying (gang) violence (Mann, 2008). The Internet has become the main platform for social interaction (McKenna et al., 2002) and, from inception, has been seen as a vehicle to promote global democracy (e.g. Birdsall, 1996), allowing speedy information dissemination and retrieval. E-commerce developments enabled consumers to access a greater range of products and web 2.0 and user-generated content on blogs and review sites (such as IMDB, Trip Advisor, and so on) allow consumers to engage with product and service evaluations, something regarded as a welcome alternative to commercially motivated, paid-for advertising content.

The Internet provides resources, sometimes called 'sites' or 'platforms', for people to discuss political issues (e.g. Russell and Echchaibi, 2009; Zhou, 2009). Politicians use SM platforms to distribute messages. Global citizens discuss and argue about politics in general and political processes and decision making in particular. Politics is regularly performed and consumed on YouTube. Naim (2007) argues that YouTube has become a force for social and political change. The Chinese government monitors and censors what Chinese citizens consume and post in relation to politics (e.g. MacKinnon, 2008). As also exemplified by Twitter-supported news updates on the developments in the Arab Spring, SM constitutes a politically charged space. Hence, government intervention/ censorship of YouTube is likely to invoke (politically charged) reaction and resistance, although such acts may never leave the sphere of the Internet. This is what Schlesinger (1991) highlights when discussing the intersection between the media, the state and the nation: the struggle to identify the 'culture' that is being defended through state involvement with production and control of communication media. YouTube can be viewed as a space for contestation of collective identity. Schlesinger (1991: 160) notes that what is often omitted from discussions about national culture is 'a view of culture as a site of contestation... which problematizes "national culture" interrogating the strategies and mechanisms whereby it is maintained and its role in securing the dominance of given groups in society'. This concern is central to our analysis.

### **Online environments**

Pace's (2008) study conceptualises YouTube as a consumer narrative. However, it is also possible to view SM as an extension of the fourth estate, illustrating the role of SM platforms in negotiating struggles between the state and civil society. SM are increasingly of interest to researchers in the areas of communications (e.g. Theocharis, 2011; Van Zoonen et al., 2011) and consumer research (e.g. Pace, 2008). Although there is literature on how to approach analysing SM such as YouTube (e.g. Pace, 2008) and on understanding the appeal of user-generated media (Arvidsson, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2005), the ban or removal of such media from citizen-consumers' lives has not been addressed from the citizen-consumer perspective. Ozkan and Arikan (2009) drew on a student sample to reveal citizens' attitudes towards online censorship in Turkey. Their findings indicate that university students' attitudes toward Internet censorship vary: '[w]hile the percentage of participants in favor of legal regulation of web access is 43.5%, this ratio decreases to 16% when the opinions about the court decision related to YouTube are questioned' (Ozkan and Arikan, p.53). This study aims to build on their work to provide a broader understanding of reactions to censorship.

### **Resistance**

Resistance has been studied from different angles in communications (Fung, 2002; Lindgren and Lundström, 2011; Wyatt et al., 2005) and consumer research (e.g. Fiske, 1989; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). Dobscha (1998) considers the tactics employed in resisting being a consumer by looking at informants' lived experiences and how consumers rebel against marketing. Kozinets and Handelman (1998) examined consumer resistance toward specific corporations. In both studies, the consumers rebel against a dominating external system. These debates suggest that people are not subservient to dominant structures, but subvert these structures through everyday practices (cf. De Certeau, 1984). For Foucault (1988: 94), domination is inscribed in power, provoking resistance: 'Where there is power, there is resistance... this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'. Dominance, in the instance of censorship introduced by the state/government, can also be conceptualised as removing citizen-consumers' freedom to consume SM. Hence, citizen-consumers are expected to engage in resistance.

**Context of the study.** A number of countries, such as the UAE and China, have restricted access to certain websites. Among these, Turkey's ban of YouTube and other websites has attracted attention due to the incongruity between this action and perceptions of Turkey as a secular democracy. According to Reporters without Borders (2012), 1309 websites were made inaccessible by the Telecommunications Directorate as of November 2007. To understand the Turkish government's reasons for online censorship and citizenconsumers' responses to it, a brief discussion of the general political environment is pertinent.

In 1923, Atatürk and his followers introduced the Modernisation Project, seeking to Westernise and secularise Turkey (Ahmad, 1993). After the 1980s, the role played by Islam progressively changed from a personal expression/act of faith to a politically charged movement (Sandikci and Ger, 2002), which formed the basis of the current Justice and Development Party (JDP) government's ascent to power. Law 5651 was brought in on March 2007 to allow government officials to block access to websites if their content is found liable to incite suicide, pedophilia, drug abuse, obscenity or prostitution, or to violate a 1951 law forbidding any attacks on the Turkish republic's founder, Atatürk. To enforce this, the government scans websites and bans those containing certain words and sentiments which are seen to violate its political and religious views. Therefore, almost no sites with sexual/pornographic content are accessible, bringing the number of forbidden websites to thousands. On 7 March 2007, Law 5651 was used to ban YouTube and 1039 SM sites, as well as about 6000 other websites. Although the current JDP government – known for its Islamic orientation and conservatism – claimed political power by promising greater democracy, under its rule, YouTube (one of 7000 sites) was banned in Turkey from March 2007 for more than 18 months and currently a number of websites are still banned, inspiring continued debate about censorship in Turkey. Such Internet censorship is evidence of the present government's wider lack of commitment to democratic principles. RSF ranks Turkey at 148 of the 179 countries included in the 2012 press freedom index; currently, there are more than 100 journalists in jail in the country (Index on Censorship, 2012; Letsch, 2012). Turkey has the world's highest number of detained university students, with between 770 and 2824 students currently detained without conviction (Hurriyet Daily News, 2012, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, 2012). RSF (2009) argues: 'Banning sites of a pornographic or pedophile nature or those that promote drug abuse is obviously justifiable but banning sites... because of content that is in some way critical of Atatürk violates free expression'. It notes that in its banning of political websites, Turkey is in breach of European laws: it must tolerate all views and criticisms of the state (European Court of Human Rights, *Handyside v. UK*, December 1976). The most recent Committee to Protect Journalists (2012) report on the current practice of jailing journalists argues that the democratic arena in Turkey is fundamentally flawed, with Internet censorship one aspect of the non-democratic practices currently in use. Turkey was reported as making minuscule progress and even deteriorating in certain areas of democracy, such as minorities' rights to express themselves, freedom of speech and freedom of the press (European Commission 2012).

Within the citizen-consumer framework, is there an acceptance that the state apparatus/government's actions are legitimate in protecting its founding principles, which can supersede evaluations of the specific actions of the state in the eyes of its citizens? In addressing this question, the following research questions inform our study: do the citizens believe in the role of government in safeguarding such values as Turkishness or do they perceive such actions

of the state as illegitimate in removing their Internet consumption options? What sorts of resistance do Turkish citizens engage in to deal with the bans?

## Methods

This study employs two different interpretive methods. Firstly, 12 individuals were recruited, using maximum variation purposeful sampling (see Patton, 1990), and interviewed in-depth to understand a diverse set of citizen-consumers' reactions to censorship and to address the research questions. Table 1 below outlines the backgrounds of the informants.

Interview data were analysed using a hermeneutic approach (e.g. Thompson, 1997). The scripts were first read by the researchers to create free nodes, after which the scripts were read altogether again, the free nodes transformed into tree nodes, and the hermeneutic circle continued on until saturation. As suggested by Thompson et al. (1989), inferences were based on the entire data set, based on iteration. Once final themes were agreed, each transcript was re-examined for final write up. We also undertook a netnography, which Kozinets (2010) indicates is suitable to study issues such as identity, social relations, learning, communications and creativity. The netnography included reading and interpreting entries on the popular Turkish user-generated content site EksiSozluk ('the Sour Dictionary'; <http://sozluk.sourtimes.org>), henceforth referred to as 'SD'), which is based on moderator-approved 'writers' (contributors) creating entries under nicknames. The website's purpose is to generate dictionary-like definitions of concepts, places, people, events and experiences.

Several academic studies have discussed this site ([http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/...](http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/...acts-and-papers/); <http://aeural.googlepages.com/youthlang.ppt>), which is known for politically charged discussions among members and disquiet generated among a diverse set of people – from columnists to artists – and is a key site of contestation and creation of shared meaning in Turkey. Tables 2 and 3 provide the gender and age distribution of this site's users.

Writers come from all walks of life: conservative, democrat and liberal. Posts (entries) under the topic the banning of YouTube in Turkey were followed for a period of three years and consisted of 815 entries (starting with the first entry and the ban's implementation).

A British English Literature academic, fluent in both Turkish and English, who has lived in Turkey for more than 37 years translated the data into English. The data were then thematically analysed.

Table 1. Interview informants.

Pseudonym	Profession	Gender	Age
Anna	High school teacher	Female	54
Berk	University student	Male	21
Umut	Academic	Male	32

Begum Academic Female 38  
Deniz Investment banker Male 27  
Murat Photographer Male 30  
Ozge Sales manager Male 32  
Ceyda Hairdresser Female 29  
Tekin Mid-level manager Male 44  
Ozlem Lawyer Female 39  
Necla Graduate student Female 24  
Muge High school teacher Female 42

Table 2. Gender distribution on the Sour Dictionary.

Gender Number of users  
Female 67,859  
Male 168,447  
Other 7475

Table 3. Age distribution on the Sour Dictionary.

Age Number of users  
< 18 6540  
18–25 144,840  
26–30 50,672  
31–40 31,867  
41–60 5642  
> 60 1155  
Unknown 3137

Online communities such as SD are tangible for participants (Kozinets, 2010): 'because culture is unquestionably based within and founded on communication... online communication media possess a certain ontological status for their participants.

These communications act as media of cultural transaction – the exchange not only of information, but of systems of meaning'. (p.12). Since SD 'writers' build and exchange their own systems of meaning, over time, what has been written on the topic has become the culture of this online community. Following Kozinets (2002), one of this study's authors has a deep understanding of and familiarity with the group in terms of membership, interests and (in this case) political orientation, as she has been a 'writer' for four years and a registered reader for 10. The ethical issue of informed consent in doing netnography (Kozinets, 2002) was considered. Although writers are warned that all the information generated in the dictionary is public, and managers of the site warn against quoting without permission, the necessary permission to directly use quotes within this text has also been obtained. To further anonymise the writers, the representative entries are cited in this paper with a random number. Drawing on Kozinets (2010), data gathered from the SD site were treated as ethnographic field observations rather than text. Observations were examined to identify patterns in participants' conduct. As is common in ethnographic studies, quotes used are particularly clear examples of patterns found in our data.

## **Findings**

Interview data yielded two dimensions: one regarding general consumption of SM, and one regarding everyday consumption. The issues of general SM consumption was also linked to the dominance of the state and the current government. We identified macrolevel issues, such as general concerns about questions of evolution or politics, and micro-level issues at the basic level of the consumer's engagement with the market.

The following section reports on the macro and micro-level issues of concern to SD contributors.

### **Macro-level: effects of censorship on the consumption of SM**

Citizen-consumers see banning websites as evidence of a larger ideology of state suppression. As in other areas of life, critiques and alternative viewpoints on religion and policies are restrained by governmental interventions. Website censorship merely proves this point. For example, informants commonly expressed the promotion of particular viewpoints over others. The commentator below considers the YouTube ban as the beginning of the engineering of a thought system favouring one view over the other (such as creationism over evolution). This reflects the widely held worry of the self-identified secularists contributing to the SD, that religion is taking precedence over civil law:

I did feel strange when YouTube was banned, but ... sadly we got used to it. I think it's the moment we start getting used to it that it kind of means we are accepting what they are putting on our plate. We joke about it ... that time there was a UN or a NATO convention and YouTube was available in the conference room but banned elsewhere ... the Prime Minister said he could reach YouTube without any difficulties ... We were angry at first but now the tragedy has turned into a sad, funny reality ... YouTube is one thing, but there are others like Richard Dawkins's site ... that are banned, this is very scary. In a way YouTube being banned can also be said to be ... engineering the thought system and the available viewpoints of the society, but Richard Dawkins' website, that's blunt ... hegemony for you right there to ban it ... like 'you are not even allowed to think about evolution' ... I find it creepy. (Berk)

Graduate student Necla interpreted online censorship as a manifestation of a kind of fascism preventing people from accessing other viewpoints, seeing on- and offline censorship as linked and bans being more easily introduced/implemented because the public does not react with organised resistance. She believes that people's attempts to find short-term technical remedies make it more acceptable for the authorities to implement bans:

I come from a family that has taught us to question such acts of ... for the lack of a better word, ideological fascism ... Do you remember why YouTube was first banned ... it did have an ideological side, but the very fact that it didn't allow the people to see that other viewpoints existed, then it has just become fascism. We all know how this works ... create people that think



within certain boundaries ... some people say 'well if you change your DNS server preferences then it works', well that's a lot of crap, that just means we have accepted this ... and we agree to live like that. Not that I don't do it myself, but ... nobody went out to demonstrate ... [it] is very irritating... (Necla)

Deniz believed that the government's secret agenda led to censorship. This is part of wider discourse about the current (pro-Islam) government's handling of the secularist vs. Islamist debates. He believes website bans are just the tip of the iceberg, as government has wider plans to slowly isolate Turkish people from the West and Islamise the country. Informants in Sandikci and Ekici's (2009) study about the politically charged brand rejection of Cola Turka, a cola with religious/fundamentalist connotations whose parent company is claimed to have strong links with the current government, found similar arguments:

This is not at all ... Adnan Oktar persuading the authorities that the content in Dawkins' website was belittling him ... I think this was accepted by the government because they well match with what the majority of secular people think is the hidden agenda of this government. (Deniz)

Adnan Oktar, who is known for promoting creationism in Turkey (National Center for Science Education, 1999), persuaded the Turkish government to block websites in the name of defending creationism and his own public image. In 2007, Oktar filed a libel suit against EkşiSözlük (IFEX: The Global Network for Free Expression, 2007). The site was suspended until the entries on Oktar were removed. Access to the country's third-highest selling newspaper, Vatan (IFEX, 2007), to Wordpress.com (Eteraz, 2007), to the Union of Education and Scientific Workers' website (Bianet, 2008) and to Richard Dawkins' official site was blocked following Oktar's complaints (Butt, 2008). The ban was lifted on 8 July 2011.

Similarly, Tekin argues that such bans, carried out in the name of protecting 'Turkishness' and Atatürk's respectability, constitute a 'master plan' of Islamising Turkey. Teacher Anna believes the government uses the lack of parental monitoring online to justify censorship of websites:

... there is no informed parental monitoring in Turkey, not the same way as in the Western world ... not to the same level of sophistication. Hence, the government uses these as an excuse to ban ... sites that are not even related to things of obscene nature ... there could be obscene things on YouTube but rather than having that content removed or limited to children, banning it for maintaining the state line of thinking is a bit too far. (Anna)

Hence, the citizen-consumer perceives such acts of banning consumption of online material as part of a wider political movement developing in Turkey. Such fears are widespread among the 'secular elites' adhering to the secularism of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who have engaged in public protest, documented by newspapers, academics and anecdotal evidence alike:

[S]ecular middle class people ... took to the streets in a series of massive demonstrations in April and May 2007, armed with symbols such as Turkish flags and photographs of Mustafa Kemal. On these so-called 'Republican Meetings' people shouted slogans such as 'We are all Kemalists, we are all Turks', 'Atatürk youth is on duty', 'No sharia, no coup', and 'Turkey is secular; it will remain so.' For the first time in a long period, the elites of Turkey who were used to leading highly-individualized lives formed a collective body in public space for the sake of expressing the same concerns (Transatlantic Academy, 2010).

The analysis suggests that people observe and respond to local interventions by the state on websites by treating them as 'accounts' (Scott and Lyman, 1968) of a macroorder or ideology which, in their view, politicians and policy-makers wish to impose on citizens. This ideology involves a particular view of 'Turkishness' and of the role of religion in people's lives that the citizen-consumers of these sites do not share. This links back to Schlesinger's (1991) discussions regarding the negotiation or contestation of 'nationhood' via the media. The communications media are seen as a venue for collective identity formation. In the age of SM, we can argue that a range of voices enter into that communication sphere to contest the depiction of certain views as accurate representations of the nation. We could interpret the responses of SD contributors as part of the imagining process discussed by Anderson (2006) – or, indeed, unimagining, reacting against current government depictions of Turkishness. SD contributors produce accounts such as their views on parental monitoring as an excuse for the state's censoring measures, to support their view that the government is trying to impose a particular kind of macro-order. Thus, we can see the citizen-consumers' accounts not only as expressions of resistance to governmental activities, but also as descriptions of a particular macro-order influencing their lives. These accounts are produced in response to local events, such as the banning of particular websites. We could also interpret the sentiments of SD respondents as linked to Sharma and Gupta's (2006) distinction between the nation and the state. SD respondents seem to be engaged in reclaiming alternative models of the nation from the apparatus of the state.

### **Micro-level: citizen-consumers' engagement with the (global) market**

On the micro-level, citizen-consumers are concerned that such censorship will prevent them from participating in the global consumption of (social) media. Citizen-consumers' responses to governmental activities arise when they see their opportunities to use websites, such as Blogger, or to contribute comments to YouTube and other restricted sites removed because the government blocks access to them. For example,

Blogger ... a perfect way to cut off our information on what other people think, eat, drink, post, view, use, watch, photograph, smile about, cry about ... if I'm gonna buy a new camera, I want to know what ordinary people say

about it on such blogs, I mean, of course, first I buy into the idea that these are real people and not some ad agency ... but the fact that it's not accessible just annoys me, as a person ... a photographer, as a citizen, as a consumer ... this means I cannot use it to say and post things ... now we are cut off from the loop and our voice does not exist in the world. This is very dangerous ... someday we might end up like Iran ... one of my biggest fears (Murat).

According to these informants, not having access to consumer reviews and attempts to negotiate authenticity is problematic. They argue that they are being removed from a global flow of information, even if only partially. Anna, the high school teacher, also pointed to a similar issue:

The Internet is a place where one can learn about the advances in ... medicine and new methods in teaching. Like when you go to a doctor's, they can easily learn what the rest of the world is doing about this illness ... it makes them connect to their professional peers, so they are on top of things. If they keep censoring websites ... How will we learn what the rest of the more advanced world is doing? (Anna)

Informants felt disconnected from global information flows, limiting their communication with the wider global network. This disconnection contrasts with the ideal of the Internet as facilitating the free flow of information. They perceive governmental activities to be interfering in their freedom and imposing a political order that will preclude them from gaining access to global resources.

We can see how local restriction encourages citizen-consumers to produce accounts of a macro-order that differs from the order which policy-makers try to create. The ideology of the 'free Internet' stands in sharp contrast to state regulation of global resources.

A more detailed analysis of a particular case of censorship, i.e. the banning of YouTube, and citizen-consumers' response to it, will shed light on people's view of censorship and the strategies they use to tackle this removal of the freedom to consume the Internet.

The looking-glass ban: how does this make us look in the eyes of the world? The informants evaluated the consequences of the YouTube ban for Turkey's image in the eyes of the rest of the world. Similar to the 'looking-glass self' (Cooley, 1902), they provided their understanding of how westernised countries with more freedom perceived the YouTube ban and how this affected the image of Turkey for those countries.

... they are making us look bad in the eyes of the world. The first time I heard this, I said this is not gonna be the first. ... They turned it back on (YouTube) and ... I still was not convinced, I was like, there's more to come ... it had gone off and on again so many times that it had started feeling normal. I know it's so bad to say it's normal, and this, I still think it's outrageous, but if

it happens so many times in a row, you start perceiving it as normal (writer 222).

Another user notes that this censorship is so regressive that even North Korea, one of the countries most criticised for its attitude towards freedom of speech, seems better in comparison:

... it will make the North Korean citizen feel like they live in a liberated, democratic environment (writer 112).

Writer 554 likens Turkey to China:  
... the event which makes me hope/expect for government to say 'we put on a short play'. What difference is there between us and China?

Writer 17 indicates that while Turkey criticised China for censoring Google, it is now in the same category. This account also links to a looking-glass self: the fear that the Western world will think of Turkey as 'Ottomans', as people that wear headscarves, censor the Internet and are uncivilised. This user expresses the fear of an expected deterioration in Turkey's nation-brand: What we made fun of all these years like 'China censored Google' is now hitting back at us ... the image of the Turks outside of Turkey is: Muslim country, they wear headscarves ... censor the Internet, and they are barbarians ... I am guessing it's gonna be people's first choice for a holiday destination after this...

Users referenced the film *Midnight Express*, which famously portrayed Turkey as undemocratic, and created concern that outsiders would perceive Turkey as undemocratic and not up to Western standards. Writer 521 compares the effect of the YouTube ban to the impact of that film, again indicating that the image of the nation-brand will further deteriorate:

the ban ... is a nightmare. If at this time we are living through an embarrassment like 'Midnight Express', it can only be a nightmare.

A similar fear of being seen as a third-world country is evident:

... proof that we live in any third-world country ... Iran has also banned YouTube not so long ago, now don't be screaming in the streets things like 'Turkey will not be Iran' because it already is (writer 665)

Many writers discuss how the global press reported the censorship. Their entries reflect the fear that Turkey will be viewed as backward, restricting freedom of speech. Writer 29's entry illustrates their cynicism by ending with 'well done', a similar statement to another user's 'your medals are with me, come get it', belittling the current government and the restrictions imposed by the state.

the news that has made it to the global media  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6427355.stm>.

The headline is 'freedom of speech'... in a few days the site will be accessible again but the thousands of people that read the piece on the BBC website will only remember turkey=/=freedom of speech equation. (Writer 29)

Writer 204 questions the exact role of the nation state in making decisions on such matters:

Is it the role of the state ... to find out the right course of action for its people and execute it on their behalf? Or is it only responsible for making things work? ... this changes with the way the government is run. Is Turkey not a democratic, social, and legal state run on the basis of a republic? Does the government have the right to diminish the rights of its people or decide for them?

Such statements indicate a clear disenchantment with and questioning of the legitimacy of the state's actions similar to those raised by Hall (1986); however, the forms of resistance are less direct and politically tainted than may be expected. The following section outlines respondents' forms of resistance.

The netnographic data reveals that citizen-consumers conceive state interventions, such as the censorship of global sites, as examples of social order contrasting with their view of a global world order. They produce accounts reflecting their view of Turkey's place in a world organised by global trade and exchange systems in addition to the free Internet by considering restrictions of access to the global Internet as 'backward', 'thirdworld- like', and so on: everything modern Turks do not want to be seen as. This illustrates the collision of two worldviews: that of the 'free Internet' with that of the 'state-ruled' Internet. This collision encourages some citizen-consumers to respond to and resist the government's activities.

### **Strategies of resistance against the dominance of the state**

User entries revealed two kinds of strategies against the ban: first, mocking the issue, and second, using technical means to overcome the ban and access the censored websites.

#### **Irony as resistance: 'Access to Thought Has Been Denied by the Court'**

Writer 88 has written a hypothetical scenario telling their children about the ban in the future:

... News that I will enjoy adding to the list of magnificent events to tell my kids.

- children you won't remember but back in our time they tried to ban YouTube.
- what is YouTube

- so you see, this thing that you used to upload videos with...  
Year 2007, strange things are happening in Turkey. People totally misunderstand liberalism.

This writer uses a scenario to illustrate the depth of the issues and indicates that the children of the future will grow up with different technologies, making it impossible for them to understand what this generation went through.

it's an incomplete enforcement ... I am making a list of harmful Internet sites for the government officials, I hope they will do what is needed. Or else at a time like this when we need an independence war period-like spirit, at a time like this when the entire world is against Turkey, when Orhan Pamuk is going around the block, etc. ... My list of web-sites that should be banned: <http://www.google.com>, <http://www.yahoo.com>, <http://www.msn.com>, <http://www.hotmail.com> ... (to block traitors and terrorists' potential communication) (writer 209)

Another informant used irony to illustrate the seriousness of the situation, referring to the famous – and also famously criticised – discourse that 'at a time like this when we need to unite as a country in an independence-war kind of spirit because the rest of the world is against us'. This discourse is also frequently mocked by users of the dictionary and is in fact discussed under several SD headings, thus making use of conversations and riding on the common understanding of the dictionary users.

On typing [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) in Turkey, one finds the message: access to this site has been suspended in accordance with decision 2007/386 dated 06.03.2007 of the first criminal peace court, which is parodied by writer 129 as 'access to thought has been banned by the order of the court', mocking the very official language of the ban and transforming it into a format that is widely used by dictionary users. Although this sentence is very short, its significance also lies in the twist that the language of the state has been sourdictionarified: in other words, transformed into the everyday language of the SD users, thus changing it from a cold, unreachable court decision to something that can be mocked. The use of irony against dominating forces emerges as a form of resistance, widening the range of activities practised by consumers as resistance.

**Using technological means as a coping/resistance strategy: gradual acceptance**  
Søraker (2008) found that proxy servers were commonly used to circumvent online bans. This is the case for SD contributors. Rather than resisting the ban through protest, consumers found technological means by which to circumvent it. SD members below indicate that this ban is merely ideological rather than actual, as it is easily possible to overcome it:

... it's not difficult to hire a dedibox for 29.90 euro or a machine people can use as a proxy ... then come and try and shut this system down (writer 167).

Writer 174 referred to the ban as: meaningless and nonsense. Because in about 20 sec you can change your dns setting and go on YouTube...

However, the pervasiveness of the attack on such forms of expression was acknowledged. Following De Certeau (1984), the government are using resistance strategies against the resisters:

it is going to go on if people keep on writing the correct IP addresses .. As the IPs are deciphered ... the Internet Service Providers will keep on banning. (writer 232)

### **Discussion and conclusion**

We return to our research questions to consider the implications of our findings. Do the citizens believe in the role of government in safeguarding such values as Turkishness, or do they perceive such actions by the state as illegitimate in removing their Internet consumption options? What sorts of resistance do Turkish citizens engage in to deal with the bans?

In addressing these questions, we acknowledge that citizen-consumers evaluate censorship on two levels: first, relating to more macro-level issues such as the role of the state and the implications of the ban; second, relating to micro-level issues such as its effect on the relationship between the individuals and the global community. The second finding outlines the citizen-consumers' understanding of the ban, its effect on their lives and Turkey's image and their resistive practices against the ban. Our data revealed two kinds of reactions to censorship: making fun of it and using technological means to override it. The citizen-consumers' understandings of video censorship mainly centred on making sense of what Internet censorship is, and its effects on global perceptions of Turkey.

What is apparent is that SM (following on from other forms of media, as discussed by Schlesinger (1991) are a central venue for the contention of 'cultural and ideological dominance in the articulation of the discourses of nationhood' (pp.170–171). SD contributors linked the YouTube ban to wider state attempts to promote one type of national identity over alternatives. This 'imagining' of Turkey, and of the steps necessary to defend Turkishness, was contested by the SD contributors. The culture of avoiding censorship through such mediums as proxy servers has become the norm over time and the relationship between the citizen-consumers and the state takes place in a dialectical fashion, with one resisting the other but at the same time shaping it, as suggested by De Certeau (1984) and Drezner (2005). Although citizen-consumers think the state should not introduce such bans, they normalise coping mechanisms such as using proxy servers as a way of dealing with the situation and hence do not impose concrete sanctions on the state through votes, as was seen in the elections in 2011. However, the general opinion seems to be that using channels such as proxy servers to avoid censorship means accepting such bans more readily and agreeing to operate in a limited information sphere. Such reactions stretch the notion of citizen-consumer beyond the conceptualization of consumer-citizenship as a reactive voting

behavior (e.g. Gabriel and Lang, 2006), suggesting that the ideas of consumption and citizenship need not compete or be commensurate, as Johnston (2008) expects. The notions can co-exist, and can act as alternate social identities or types of self-presentation. That the consumption place (Internet) of the product (YouTube videos) is also the site of resistance (there was only one 'physical demonstration' against the ban) indicates consumers' use of the hegemony's own tools to resist hegemony (in this case, technology as manifested through proxy servers), echoing De Certeau's (1984) suggestion that people use the very tools of the system to resist it. Apart from the lack of access to global views about themselves or a specific topic, the censoring of Blogger.com also affected how citizen-consumers accessed others' opinions about products, services and experiences.

Frustration about the inability to access user reviews of products from others' blogs or pages was clearly articulated. As Schlesinger (1991) notes, ideas of the nation state are linked to the growth and spread of global capitalism, and our analysis finds that SD contributors object at the level of consumer as much as that of citizen. Conversely, as demonstrated by the views of one informant (Anna), the state more easily assumes this role of 'censor' by appealing to the need for more (informed) parental monitoring of children's Internet consumption via Internet censorship: in this way, censorship is made to appear more legitimate and necessary.

We contribute to wider media censorship discussions by uniting the conceptualisations of the consumer and the citizen. By introducing the notion of the consumer citizen, we offer a contemporary analysis of the deployment of censorship in the SM age and the continuing importance of communication media in contributing to the 'imagining' of the nation state, and an understanding of how citizen-consumers resist contemporary censorship in a globalised world. In this way we illustrate the weakness in arguments proposing that the world wide web undermines national borders, as we demonstrate that such developments can be viewed as shifting discussions of the role of the state and representations of the nation onto a global stage while retaining a local impact, hence offering preliminary confirmation of Mihelj's (2011) argument that the modern nation state is on the rise globally.

#### Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

#### References

- Ahmad F (1993) *The Making of Modern Turkey*. London: Routledge.  
Anderson B (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.  
Arvidsson A (2008) The ethical economy of customer coproduction. *Journal of Macromarketing*



28(4): 326–338.

Beck U (2000) *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bianet (2008) Evolutionist Dawkins' Internet site banned in Turkey. Available at: [bianet.org/english/religion/109778-evolutionist-dawkins-internet-site-banned-in-turkey](http://bianet.org/english/religion/109778-evolutionist-dawkins-internet-site-banned-in-turkey) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Billig M (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: SAGE.

Birdsall WF (1996) The Internet and the ideology of information technology. INET96 Proceedings.

Available at: [http://www.free.net:8001/Docs/inet96/e3/e3\\_2.html](http://www.free.net:8001/Docs/inet96/e3/e3_2.html) (accessed 6 June 2012).

Brand S (1987) *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT*. New York: Viking.

Butt R (2008) Missing link: creationist campaigner has Richard Dawkins' official website banned

in Turkey. *The Guardian*, 19 September. Available at:

[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/19/religion.turkey](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/19/religion.turkey) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Cammaerts B and Van Audenhove L (2005) Online political debate, unbounded citizenship, and the problematic nature of a transnational public sphere. *Political Communication* 22(2): 179–196.

Castells M (2009) *Communication Power*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Castells M and Himanen P (2002) *The Information Society and the Welfare State: The Finnish Model*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Committee to Protect Journalists Report (2012) Turkey's press freedom crisis.

Available at: [cpj.org/reports/2012/10/turkeys-press-freedom-crisis.php](http://cpj.org/reports/2012/10/turkeys-press-freedom-crisis.php) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Cooley CH (1902) *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner's.

De Certeau M (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. London: University of California Press.

Dobscha S (1998) The lived experience of consumer rebellion against marketing. In: Alba JW and

Hutchison WJ (eds) *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 25. Provo, UT: ACR, pp. 91–97.

Drezner D (2005) Globalization, coercion and competition: the different pathways to policy

convergence. *Journal of European Public Policy* 12: 841–859.

Eriksen TH (2007) Nationalism and the Internet. *Nations and Nationalism* 13(1): 1–17.

Eteraz A (2007) Shooting the messenger. *The Guardian*, 20 August. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/aug/20/shootingthemessenger> (accessed 29

September 2009).

European Commission (2012) Turkey progress report 2012. Available at: [ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Featherstone M and Lash S (1995) *Global Modernities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Fiske J (1989) *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Foucault M (1988) An aesthetics of existence. In: Kritzman LD (ed.) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*. New York: Routledge, pp. 47–53.

Fung A (2002) Identity politics, resistance and new media technologies: a foucauldian approach to the study of HKnet. *New Media & Society* 4(2): 185–204.

Gabriel Y and Lang T (2006) *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and Its Fragmentation*. London: SAGE.

Giesler M and Pohlmann M (2003) The anthropology of file sharing: consuming Napster as a gift. In: Keller AP and Rook DW (eds) *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 30. Provo, UT: ACR, pp. 94–100.

Glickman LB (1999) *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hall S (1986) Popular culture and the state. In: Bennett T, Mercer C and Woolacott J (eds) *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, pp. 22–49.

Harfoush R (2009) *Yes We Did: An Inside Look at Social Media Built the Obama Brand*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders.

Hemetsberger A (2006) Understanding consumers' collective action on the Internet: a conceptualization and empirical investigation of the free- and open-source movement. Research Synopsis, Cumulative Habilitation at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

Hurriyet Daily News (2012) Number of students in jail hits 2824 in Turkey. Available at: [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/number-of-students-in-jail-hits-2824-in-turkey.aspx?pageID=238&nID=27286&NewsCatID=339](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/number-of-students-in-jail-hits-2824-in-turkey.aspx?pageID=238&nID=27286&NewsCatID=339) (accessed 30 October 2012).

IFEX: The Global Network for Free Expression (2007) Court blocks access to popular website following defamation complain. Available at: [www.ifex.org/turkey/2007/04/23/court\\_blocks\\_access\\_to\\_popular/](http://www.ifex.org/turkey/2007/04/23/court_blocks_access_to_popular/) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Index on Censorship (2012) Freedom Index 2011/2012 Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html> (accessed 25 Feb 2013).

Izberk-Bilgin E (2010) An interdisciplinary review of resistance to consumption, some marketing interpretations, and future research suggestions. *Consumption Markets & Culture* 13(3): 299–323.

Johnston J (2008) The citizen-consumer hybrid: ideological tensions and the case of whole foods market. *Theory and Society* 37: 229–270.

Kozinets RV (2002) The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research* 39: 61–72.

Kozinets RV (2010) *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: SAGE.

Kozinets RV and Handelman JM (1998) Ensouling consumption: a netnographic exploration of boycotting behavior. In: Alba J and Hutchinson W (eds) *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 25. Provo, UT: ACR, pp. 475–480.

Kozinets RV, Hemetsberger A and Schau HJ (2008) The wisdom of consumer crowds: collective innovation in the age of networked marketing. *Journal of Macromarketing* 28(4): 339–354.

Letsch C (2012) Dozens of Kurdish journalists face terrorism charges in Turkey. *The Guardian*, 11 September. Available at: [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/10/kurdish-journaliststerrorism-charges-turkey](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/10/kurdish-journaliststerrorism-charges-turkey) (accessed 30 October 2012).

288 *new media & society* 16(2)

Leung L (2009) User-generated content on the Internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment. *New Media & Society* 11(8): 1327–1347.

Levy S (2002) *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. New York: Penguin.

Lindgren S and Lundström R (2011) Pirate culture and hacktivist mobilization: the cultural and social protocols of #WikiLeaks on Twitter. *New Media & Society* 13(6): 999–1018.

Livingstone S, Bober M and Ellen J (2005) Active participation or just more information? *Information, Communication & Society* 8(3): 287–314.

Lu J and Weber I (2009) Internet software piracy in China: a user analysis of resistance to global software copyright enforcement. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 2(4): 298–317.

McGovern C (1998) Consumption and citizenship in the United States, 1900–1940. In: Strasser S, McGovern C, Juddt M, et al. (eds) *Getting and Spending: European and*

American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 37–55.

McKenna KYA, Green AS and Gleason MEJ (2002) Relationship formation on the Internet: what's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues* 58: 659–671.

MacKinnon R (2008) Flatter world and thicker walls? Blogs, censorship and civic discourse in China. *Public Choice* 134(1–2): 31–46.

Mann BL (2008) Social networking websites – a concatenation of impersonation, denigration, sexual aggressive solicitation, cyber-bullying or happy slapping videos. *International Journal of Law and Information Technology* 17(3): 252–267.

Mihelj S (2011) *Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Naim M (2007) The YouTube effect. *Foreign Policy* 158: 103–104.

National Center for Science Education (1999) *Cloning Creationism in Turkey*. Available at: <http://ncse.com/rncse/19/6/cloning-creationism-turkey> (accessed 25 February 2013).

O'Brien D and Fitzgerald B (2006) Digital copyright law in a YouTube world. *Internet Law Bulletin* 9(6 & 7): 71–74.

Ohmae K (1990) *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*. London: HarperCollins.

Ozkan H and Arikan A (2009) Internet censorship in Turkey: university students' opinions. *World Journal on Educational Technology* 1(1): 46–56.

Pace S (2008) YouTube: an opportunity for consumer narrative analysis? *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 11(2): 213–226.

Patton MQ (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. London: SAGE.

Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (2012) Hard times for Turkish dissenters. Available at: [pulitzercenter.org/reporting/turkey-human-rights-freedom-of-speech-economy-seyma-ozcanjailed-journalists](http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/turkey-human-rights-freedom-of-speech-economy-seyma-ozcanjailed-journalists) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Reporters without Borders (2012) Press freedom index. Available at: [en.rsf.org/press-freedomindex-2011-2012,1043.html](http://en.rsf.org/press-freedomindex-2011-2012,1043.html) (accessed 30 October 2012).

Robinson WI (1998) Beyond nation-state paradigms: globalization, sociology, and the challenge of transnational studies. *Sociological Forum* 13(4): 561–594.

Russell A and Echchaibi N (2009) *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and*

Networked

Publics. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Sandikci Ö and Ekici A (2009) Politically motivated brand rejection. *Journal of Business Research*

62(2): 208–217.

Sandikci Ö and Ger G (2002) In-between modernities and postmodernities: theorizing Turkish consumptionscape.

In: Broniarczyk SM and Nakamoto K (eds) *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 29.

Valdosta, GA: ACR, pp. 465–470.

Yalkin et al. 289

Schlesinger P (1991) *Media, State and Nation: Political Violence and Collective Identities*.

London: SAGE.

Scott MB and Lyman SM (1968) Accounts. *American Sociological Review*

33(1): 46–62.

Sharma A and Gupta A (2006) *The Anthropology of the State*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Shirky C (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*.

London: Penguin Press.

Søraker JH (2008) Global freedom of expression within nontextual frameworks. *Information*

Society 24(1): 40–46.

Stiglitz JE (2002) *Globalization and Its Discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Theocharis Y (2011) Young people, political participation and online postmaterialism in Greece.

*New Media & Society* 13(2): 203–223.

Thompson CJ (1997) Interpreting consumers: a hermeneutical framework for deriving marketing

insights from the texts of consumers' consumption stories. *Journal of Marketing Research*

34(4): 438–455.

Thompson CJ and Coskuner-Balli G (2007) Countervailing market responses to corporate cooptation

and the ideological recruitment of consumption communities. *Journal of Consumer*

*Research* 34(2): 135–152.

Thompson CJ, Locander WB and Pollio HR (1989) Putting consumer experience back into

consumer research: The philosophy and method of existential-phenomenology. *Journal of*

*Consumer Research* 16: 133–146.

Transatlantic Academy (2010) A very secular affair: the power struggle of Turkey's elites.

Available at: [www.transatlanticacademy.org/publications/very-secular-affairthe-power-struggleturkeys-elites](http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/publications/very-secular-affairthe-power-struggleturkeys-elites) (accessed 30 October 2012).

- Tsai WH (2010) Patriotic advertising and the creation of the citizen-consumer. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies* 2(3): 76–84.
- Van Aelst P and Walgrave S (2002) New media, new movements? The role of the Internet in shaping the anti-globalization movement. *Information, Communication & Society* 5(4): 465–493.
- Van Zoonen L, Vis F and Mihelj S (2011) YouTube interactions between agonism, antagonism and dialogue: video responses to the anti-Islam film. *New Media & Society* 13(8): 1283–1300.
- Ward J (2008) The online citizen-consumer: addressing young people's political consumption through technology. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11(5): 513–526.
- Wyatt S, Henwood F, Hart A, et al. (2005) The digital divide, health information and everyday life. *New Media & Society* 7(2): 199–218.
- Zhou X (2009) The political blogosphere in China: a content analysis of the blogs regarding the dismissal of Shanghai Leader Chen Liangyu. *New Media & Society* 11(6): 1003–1022.

#### Author biographies

Çağrı Yalkın is a lecturer in advertising at Kadir Has University, Turkey. She previously lectured at King's College London, where she taught on marketing and consumer behaviour. Her research covers several topics in marketing, with an emphasis on fashion consumption and marketing, consumer resistance on and offline and consumer socialisation.

Finola Kerrigan is a senior lecturer in marketing at King's College London, where she teaches and researches a range of issues related to marketing, with a specific interest in the marketing and consumption of arts and culture, branding and social media.

Dirk vom Lehn is a lecturer in marketing, interaction and technology at King's College London. He teaches on marketing with a special interest in social interaction, practice and technology and conducts studies of social interaction in museums, optometric practices and street-markets