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Digital Atatürk, Collective Memory, and Political Longing: A Sociological Analysis of AI-Generated Representation of Atatürk on YouTube



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Abstract

This study investigates the sociopolitical and affective implications of an AI-generated simulation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, published on the *Siber Sörfçü* YouTube channel. In the context of contemporary Turkey's political crises, leadership vacuum, and collective memory anxieties, the AI Atatürk video has sparked intense public attention. Based on a qualitative thematic analysis of 1,852 user comments, the study identifies four central themes: (1) Those Who Felt Emotions and Those Who Miss Atatürk, reflecting viewers' nostalgic and affective engagement; (2) Comparison with the Present and the Permanence of Atatürk's Ideas, highlighting how Atatürk is invoked as a moral and political benchmark against contemporary dissatisfaction; (3) Supporters of Artificial Intelligence Leadership, where some viewers symbolically support AI-led governance as a response to perceived failures of human leadership; and (4) Appreciation of Technical Achievement, demonstrating admiration for the simulation's realism, innovation, and immersive quality. Rather than isolated reactions, these themes are intertwined, revealing how AI functions as both a commemorative and speculative political tool. Drawing on theories of collective memory (Halbwachs), social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann), digital nostalgia (Niemeyer & Keightley), and algorithmic power (Beer), the study shows how AI-mediated representations of historical figures serve as emotional and symbolic responses to current sociopolitical conditions.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence · social construction of reality · Atatürk · algorithmic power · spiral of silence · collective memory



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Introduction

In the digital age, artificial intelligence (AI) is not just a tool for technological innovation but a key player in reshaping historical narratives, collective memory, and national identity. In Turkey, where Atatürk remains a dominant figure in political and cultural discourse, his AI-generated recreation has sparked intense public debate. This study examines how this AI mediated representation functions not only as a nostalgic engagement with the past but also as a response to contemporary sociopolitical concerns. In doing so, it sheds light on how Atatürk's legacy is reimagined in the 2020s, at a time when national identity, leadership, and digital technology intersect in unprecedented ways.

Although AI-generated representations of historical figures such as Roman emperors, British monarchs, and religious leaders are present on YouTube, Atatürk's case stands apart due to his unique role in shaping Turkey's modernization and national identity. Unlike many historical leaders who are confined to the past, Atatürk remains an active reference in contemporary political discourse, frequently cited as a benchmark for leadership, governance, and societal values. Therefore, the AI-generated portrayal of Atatürk is not just a digital recreation; rather, it emerges as a contested space where Turkey's cultural memory and future aspirations intersect.

Especially over the past quarter-century, Turkish society has experienced a series of interrelated crises—including economic instability, deepening political polarization, recurring social traumas such as earthquakes, refugee-related tensions, and gender-based violence, as well as growing public debates around trust in judicial and educational institutions. In this climate of uncertainty and perceived institutional fragility, historical figures—particularly Atatürk—have regained symbolic prominence. Notably, this resurgence has moved beyond official commemorations and entered digital spaces, where AI-generated representations allow users to simulate conversations with Atatürk or envision how he might respond to today's challenges. These forms of interaction reflect a desire not only to reconnect with the past, but to seek guidance and reassurance through symbolic figures that represent national unity, rationality, and leadership. In this sense, AI-mediated repre-



sentations of Atatürk function as emotionally charged narrative devices that help users articulate a longing for a better past associated with Atatürk, or orient themselves toward that imagined past as a symbolic resource for making sense of the present.

The public fascination with Atatürk's image is not a new development limited to the era of artificial intelligence. Rather, it reflects a longer trajectory of technologically mediated memory practices. From colorized archival photographs and Atatürk-themed calendars to televised commemorative advertisements and even 3D visual recreations, each technological phase has contributed to shaping and reshaping his symbolic presence. Studies such as Özyürek (2006) and Bora & Onaran (2003) have illustrated how the state-centered narrative around Atatürk gradually transformed into more emotionally personalized and popular representations. In this light, the recent rise of AI-generated Atatürk content should not be seen as a rupture but as part of a historical continuum in which new media technologies mediate nostalgic attachments. What distinguishes AI is its capacity for interaction, simulation, and immersion—features that deepen emotional engagement and potentially alter public perceptions of historical authority. Future research should further investigate whether these newer forms of digital interaction have shifted public responses to Atatürk's image compared to previous media formats.

The rise of AI-generated representations of Atatürk on digital platforms has coincided with the accelerated circulation of nostalgic content, resulting in a shift not only in form but also in public reception. Unlike earlier forms such as printed calendars, statues, or televised tributes, AI-generated Atatürk invites interactive engagement—viewers ask questions, interpret responses, and emotionally invest in a simulated dialogue. This participatory dynamic intensifies affective attachment and allows nostalgia to become more immersive and emotionally co-produced. Furthermore, the platform-driven nature of this content contributes to its rapid mass dissemination, transforming nostalgia into a collective and highly visible experience. As Niemeyer and Keightley (2020) argue, digital nostalgia is increasingly shaped by the logics of commodification and algorithmic amplification. In this context, users' emotional connections with AI-mediated Atatürk content are not merely expressions of historical longing but are also shaped by the commercial



and viral dynamics of digital culture. Thus, public reactions to AI-generated Atatürk may differ significantly from earlier responses by being more participatory, emotionally intensified, and entangled in platform economies. At the same time, this evolving reception contributes to the normalization of AI technologies in everyday life, enabling broader public adoption while also facilitating the rapid expansion of tech companies through emotionally engaging cultural content.

Atatürk's AI recreation is not merely a historical reconstruction; it is also a digital reproduction of nostalgia introduced as an alternative solution to the multilayered crises of modernity in contemporary Turkey. As Boym (2001) argues, nostalgia is not merely a yearning for the past but a means of reinterpreting history in response to contemporary concerns. Boym (2001), distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct an idealized past, and reflective nostalgia, which critically engages with history and acknowledges its complexities. The AI-generated recreation of Atatürk reinforces a fixed and enduring perception of the past while simultaneously reshaping his legacy into a dynamic and evolving cultural symbol influenced by digital technologies. The widespread emotional reactions to this digital recreation illustrate how AI serves as both a preserver and a transformer of historical narratives.

Nostalgia is a concept that carries various complexities in its relationship with modernity in Turkey. For some groups, nostalgia represents an idealized "paradise of the past," a shared historical memory that emerges after periods of war, poverty, and societal fragmentation, ultimately symbolizing national resilience and unity (Bora & Onaran, 2003). In Turkey, admiration for Atatürk has not remained static; rather, it has evolved into a nostalgic phenomenon that continues to grow across different segments of society. In recent years, AI powered programs on YouTube have increasingly been used to generate music videos featuring Atatürk's voice (Keskin, 2024). Similarly, AI driven visual production models have been frequently employed on social media to generate portraits of Atatürk, often emphasizing his strength, authority, and charismatic leadership qualities (Karapekmez, 2023). Some studies have even utilized AI based applications to analyze



Atatürk's clothing style, predicting what he might wear if he were alive today (Bayraktar, 2024). These technological interventions, including AI-generated imagery and sound, have contributed to digitally reviving Atatürk, reinforcing his presence in contemporary cultural memory. In other words, AI-generated or digital representations of Atatürk have become increasingly popular in recent years.

Atatürk's digital revival also reflects broader cultural shifts in Turkey, where historical figures are being reinterpreted in increasingly personalized ways. As Özyürek (2006) suggests, Atatürk's legacy, once a state-driven narrative, has increasingly become an individualized and emotionally charged phenomenon. In the digital age, this shift has been further amplified by social media and AI technologies, which allow users to interact with historical representations in new and immersive ways. The AI-generated Atatürk is not merely a reflection of the past, but an evolving figure shaped by contemporary political and cultural concerns. His digital presence plays a role in shaping collective memory by reinforcing a shared historical consciousness while also demonstrating how nostalgia is mediated through technology.

In a YouTube video published by a user named "Siber Sörfçü" (the channel's administrator has not revealed his real identity and uses the pseudonym "Siber Sörfçü"), seven questions were posed to an AI-generated representation of Atatürk. The questions include: "How can Turkey's economy be improved?", "What do you think about Syrian refugees?", "What measures can be taken against the increasing violence toward women?", "Should Turkey reinstate the death penalty?", "Which football team do you support?", "What should Turkey's stance be on the Russia-Ukraine and Palestine-Israel conflicts?", and "If you were alive today, what would you do for our country?". AI Atatürk's answers emphasize consistently adhering to reason, science, and knowledge; prioritizing national interests; enhancing the economy by increasing exports while decreasing imports; supporting local production and farmers; and pursuing peaceful policies in international politics. As shown in Figure 1, the creator of the channel asks contemporary political and social questions, and the AI-generated Atatürk responds with answers based on historical

references. The figure emphasizes the dialogic structure of the video and its role in creating a sense of digital proximity to symbolic leadership.

By examining user interactions with AI-generated representations of Atatürk, this study aims to explore how nostalgia, collective memory, and algorithmic power intersect in the digital age. While AI offers new ways to engage with history, it also raises ethical concerns regarding historical authenticity, digital manipulation, and the political instrumentalization of AI-generated narratives. This study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on the role of technology in shaping historical consciousness and national identity, using Atatürk's AI recreation as a case study to understand the broader implications of digital memory and mediated nostalgia in 21st-century Turkey.

Conceptual Framework

One of the significant works in the field of phenomenological sociology is Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, which explains how individuals construct their social world and has become one of the foundational texts of modern sociology. This work argues that social reality is an ongoing phenomenon that is continually constructed through socialization. According to Berger and Luckmann, this construction process begins with individuals' efforts to make sense of the world around them, and these meanings are transformed into a social reality through shared norms and values (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Today, these interactive processes are not limited to face-to-face interactions but gain a new dimension due to the impact of technological innovations. Technologies like AI, in particular, significantly contribute to reshaping individuals' meaning-making processes, thus influencing their perception of social reality. In this context, when evaluating the impact of AI-based tools on the social production of meaning, it is also important to discuss how this transformation offers solutions to the crises associated with modernity.

Berger and Luckmann evaluate the meaning crisis faced by modern societies within the context of the increasing pluralism brought about by modernity. At the root of the meaning crisis lies the tendency of modern societies to encompass diverse lifestyles, value systems,



and forms of knowledge. This situation makes it difficult for individuals and groups to arrive at a shared perception of reality and undermines the legitimacy structures upon which social order is based (Berger & Luckmann, 2015). In their in-depth analysis of the meaning crisis, Berger and Luckmann argue that this crisis has the potential to reveal the constructed nature of social order, which can be seen as a positive aspect. However, they also highlight the risk of creating disorientation and insecurity among individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 2015, pp. 60-65). In this context, AI-based tools further deepen the meaning crisis by rapidly altering the ways in which social realities are constructed and reshaping the processes through which individuals adapt to these new realities.

Today, the process mentioned above is not limited to face-to-face interactions between individuals but has gained a new dimension with the impact of technological innovations. Technologies such as AI, in particular, significantly contribute to reshaping individuals' worlds of meaning and social perceptions of reality. In this regard, it is essential to develop a theoretical perspective on how AI-based tools transform the processes of social meaning production. While technological innovations, especially AI, offer new tools that could contribute to solving the meaning crisis, they also harbor the potential to deepen this crisis. AI, by transforming the legitimizing power of language in the way Berger and Luckmann described, contributes to the formation of new symbolic universes. For instance, AI-supported language models, through digital media, highlight specific words, phrases, and narratives, allowing for the redefinition of social norms and values. In this context, AI has become both a facilitating and transformative actor in the construction of individual and social realities.

Recent debates among sociology researchers demonstrate that AI has now become a social phenomenon and actor. Accordingly, through its multidimensional interactions with humans, AI has evolved into a social actor, necessitating an expansion of the concept of socialization in sociology (Woolgar, Beer 1985). This evolution raises the fundamental question of agency: can AI truly act? Borch and Min (2023) argue that second-generation machine learning systems, which independently generate trading rules without direct human input, challenge classical notions of human-centered agency. Similarly, Borch (2022)

shows that these systems exhibit autonomous behaviors that emerge from their internal logic and interactions, supporting a rethinking of agency in socio-technical systems. These forms of AI are not merely tools but actors embedded in and shaping social fields. Considering that technology has become an integral part of culture and significantly influences different cultural groups, particularly on digital platforms, it is crucial to recognize that technological phenomena are essentially social phenomena (Eynon & Young, 2021). In this context, interpretive sociology is more suitable for positioning AI as a social actor (Wolfe, 1991). With its potential to influence and support social and cultural changes, AI is not merely a technical tool but also a phenomenon shaping the structure and organization of societal knowledge (Schwartz, 1989). Therefore, understanding the societal impacts of AI requires addressing not only its technological dimensions but also its sociological and cultural contexts. Thus, following Latour (2005) and other Actor-Network Theory (ANT) scholars, we might argue that the technological dimensions of AI are inherently embedded within their sociological and cultural contexts, rather than existing as separate or purely technical phenomena.

Beer (2017) emphasizes the powerful influence of algorithms in shaping social reality and their role in individuals' meaning-making processes. The concept of “algorithmic power” is central to this transformation. Algorithms accelerate individuals' access to information while simultaneously creating uncertainty about how this information will be interpreted and understood in a social context. They determine which media content users are exposed to and when they will see it. While scholars such as Zuboff (2019) argue that algorithms exert profound control over users—central to the notion of surveillance capitalism—others, such as MacKenzie (2021), question the extent of this power by highlighting the limitations of algorithmic mechanisms like cookies and pixels. These debates reveal the need for a more nuanced approach that avoids attributing totalizing influence to algorithms. In this context, algorithms may not simply impose meaning upon individuals, but rather function within a dynamic feedback loop, shaped by the very data users generate. Drawing on Mead's (2015) concept of the “significant other,” algorithms can be understood as interactive entities that contribute to identity formation and social

negotiation within digital environments. This perspective shifts the view from algorithmic dominance to co-constitutive relationality. Moreover, algorithms influence not only individuals' media consumption habits but also the symbolic and structural organization of social spaces. In this process, they act as central organizing forces in society—producing what Lundahl (2022) calls “algorithmic meta-capital” by shaping media access, consumption hierarchies, and the distribution of symbolic value. Understanding the societal role of algorithms, therefore, requires not only a recognition of their technical functions and socio-political effects but also a critical, dialogical examination of their broader implications for democracy, diversity, and social cohesion.

Scott Lash's concept of "post-hegemonic power" argues that instead of traditional authoritarian or ideological control, technological processes infiltrate individuals' daily lives unconsciously (Lash, 2007). In this context, the promises of democratization and power distribution associated with Web 2.0 have fallen short, leading to what Beer (2009) describes as a state of "technological unconsciousness," where algorithms influence users unconsciously, directing them without their awareness. Similarly, the algorithms of social media platforms affect the information individuals are exposed to and how it is presented. These algorithms have been regarded as a new form of "agenda-setter" (Wohn and Bowe, 2014). In this framework, social media platforms play a central role in the reproduction of reality. Individuals internalize the shared information and attitudes within their social networks, constructing their individual and collective realities.

Technologies such as AI further contribute to this process by mediating individuals' interactions with meaning and subtly influencing their perceptions of social reality. However, this influence is not always straightforward or unidirectional—individuals often engage with content they disagree with, resist, or even mock. Sometimes, a user might watch a video they find absurd, not because they endorse it, but because they reject or ridicule it. In such cases, the algorithm may misread the engagement and recommend similar content, but this does not necessarily result in a shift in preference or worldview. This highlights the complex, negotiated relationship between algorithmic suggestion and human interpretation. Rather than acting as a dominant force in shaping meaning, AI can

be understood as a significant—but context-dependent—mediator of social norms and values. Its effects emerge not solely from what is shown, but also from how individuals interpret, resist, or reinterpret algorithmically curated content. Beer's work examines the transformative potential of algorithms on social structures while also emphasizing their role in exacerbating the meaning crisis. While AI enables individuals to access information more quickly, it also contributes to gaps in how this information is contextualized socially. Beer (2017) refers to this as a "digital meaning void," which complicates individuals' efforts to reconstruct coherent social realities. In short, AI and algorithms play a dual role—both shaping and destabilizing meaning-making processes in the construction of social reality.

The impact of AI technologies on collective memory and identity is creating a new area of discussion in today's digital age. Halbwachs' concept of collective memory emphasizes that individuals' perceptions of the past are shaped by their social contexts and group identities (Halbwachs, 1992). According to Halbwachs, who defines collective memory as a "record of similarities," "History is the record of changes, while collective memory is the record of similarities, and it naturally convinces the group that it remains the same because it focuses on the group, whereas the changes concern the group's relationships or interactions with other groups" (1980, p. 86). Halbwachs' conceptualization of collective memory is often understood as "communicative memory," where history is orally transmitted from generation to generation (Assmann, 1995, pp. 126-127). In the context of Halbwachs' notion of collective memory, the use of AI technologies plays a significant role in the reconstruction of social memory. Specifically, the reproduction of historical figures like Atatürk through AI paves the way for constructing new forms of collective memory by reshaping the popular and media representations of historical narratives and leader figures. AI's ability to reinterpret the past and recreate prominent figures in collective memory transforms individuals' perceptions of historical reality. However, this process increasingly blurs the boundaries between historical reality and the new reality produced through technology. As AI reproduces the voices, visuals, and ideas of historical figures in digital environments, it creates a new digital reality that shapes individuals' collective



memories. At the same time, the overlap between this digital reality and historical reality generates complex effects on both individual and collective identities.

Beyond Halbwachs' (1992) framework of collective memory, Davis (1979) highlights the role of nostalgia in shaping both personal and collective identity. Nostalgia, according to Davis, is not merely a sentimental longing for the past but a process through which individuals construct and affirm their historical and cultural identities. Similarly, Jameson (1991) critiques nostalgia in postmodern society, arguing that it often presents an idealized version of history rather than an accurate representation of the past. These perspectives offer valuable insights into how AI-generated recreations of historical figures like Atatürk serve not only as digital reconstructions of memory but also as emotionally and ideologically charged reinterpretations of history.

This reconstruction of historical figures through AI is deeply intertwined with nostalgia, which plays a crucial role in shaping collective memory. Boym (2001) argues that nostalgia is not merely a longing for the past but an active process that reflects contemporary cultural and political anxieties. She distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which seeks to recreate a lost past in its original form, and reflective nostalgia, which critically engages with history and acknowledges its complexities. The AI-generated recreation of Atatürk demonstrates both aspects: while some users express deep emotional responses and a desire to "bring back" his presence, the technological mediation of his figure also highlights the constructed nature of memory itself, prompting discussions about the reinterpretation of history in the digital era.

Similarly, Özyürek (2006) examines how Kemalist ideology has transitioned from a rigid state-centered doctrine into a more personalized and emotionally charged form of nostalgia. In the digital age, this transformation is further amplified by AI, as individuals interact with technologically mediated representations of Atatürk, reinforcing their own emotional and political connections to his legacy. The digital Atatürk, therefore, is not just a representation of historical memory but a symbol of continuity, authority, and an idealized modernity that resonates with contemporary social anxieties. This aligns with



the broader notion that AI technologies do not merely reconstruct the past; they actively shape how societies negotiate and reinterpret historical narratives.

AI-generated representations of historical figures like Atatürk play a significant role in shaping collective memory in the digital age. These recreations do more than simply bring the past into the present, as they actively reshape historical narratives and create a complex relationship between historical authenticity and digital fabrication. The intersection of nostalgia and AI raises important questions about how history is remembered, reinterpreted, and reconstructed through technology. These AI driven narratives do not exist independently but are deeply integrated into the digital media landscape. Social media platforms, algorithmic curation, and digital storytelling further influence how historical figures are perceived and engaged with. Understanding this dynamic is essential for examining how collective memory evolves in an era where technology continuously mediates and redefines our connection to the past.

Media enables individuals to acquire information about social and cultural elements they do not directly experience in their daily lives. In this process, media creates a symbolic reality that shapes social perception, beliefs, and memory (Adoni & Mane, 1984). In this context, Couldry and Hepp (2016) discuss the role of media and technologies in the production of social memory, exploring how digital technologies reshape our relationship with the past. With the new possibilities offered by AI, individuals are reconstructing their perceptions of the past within a different, digitalized framework. However, this leads to a transformation of the concept of social memory and the reshaping of collective identity. The reconstruction of historical figures through AI has the potential to significantly influence individuals' perceptions of the past, creating a profound transformative effect on social identity and memory. This process, through the digitization of collective memory, alters how individuals connect with the past and makes historical narratives more flexible and dynamic. Thus, AI technologies' impact on collective memory reshapes not only perceptions of historical reality but also the processes by which societies construct their identities

Noelle-Neumann's (1974) spiral of silence theory provides an important framework for understanding how opinions are shaped at the societal level and how individuals express their views. According to this theory, individuals tend to hesitate to express opposing opinions when they perceive that dominant views in society could lead to social exclusion or negative reactions. Complementing this perspective, Ronald Burt's (2001) "echo hypothesis" emphasizes how individuals tend to reinforce their existing beliefs through repeated exposure to similar opinions within tightly-knit social networks. Rather than fostering diversity of thought, this echo effect amplifies pre-existing biases and encourages conformity. In online environments, individuals may not only avoid expressing dissent, but also engage more confidently with content that echoes their own views—even when doing so involves irony, critique, or strategic silence. This nuance reveals that silence or engagement does not always equate to agreement, but rather reflects a complex interplay of social and algorithmic forces. Just as in real life, individuals in online environments are also inclined to avoid expressing different opinions in the face of the majority's dominant views (Liu & Fahmy, 2011). In online settings, anonymity somewhat reduces the fear of isolation; however, the fear of social acceptance and exclusion still leads individuals to limit their voices on digital platforms. As in offline environments, when people perceive that their views are in the minority in online environments, they are hesitant to share these opinions. Especially on platforms such as social media and forums, many individuals fear negative reactions or exclusion from those who hold the majority opinion; so tendency may vary depending on personal traits, as some users intentionally adopt contrarian or radical positions to challenge dominant views or to gain visibility. In this context, a study on online discussion forums revealed that individuals' willingness to share neutral and negative opinions decreased due to the fear of isolation (Askay, 2014). Research related to the spiral of silence theory shows that users on social media do not always exhibit hesitation, isolation, or fear against dominant views. One study noted no support for the generally accepted assumptions of the "spiral of silence" theory. This study's findings indicated that exposure to mass media in climate change discussions in Germany did not significantly impact individuals' perception of public opinion; instead,



when individuals saw themselves as part of a minority, their willingness to speak in society actually increased rather than decreased. Furthermore, online anonymity and low-threshold expressions increased individuals' willingness to express their opinions (Porten-Che   & Eilders, 2015). Studies show that the generally accepted situations in the spiral of silence theory do not occur at all levels. Moreover, Habermas (2023), in his recent work *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*, critically reassesses the spiral of silence theory in the context of algorithmically-mediated digital platforms. He argues that digital personalization and fragmentation not only intensify dominant narratives but also reinforce individuals' reluctance to publicly express dissenting views. Consequently, this structural shift in digital media might further suppress critical engagement, particularly when historical narratives or prominent cultural symbols like Atat rk are digitally reconstructed and presented in idealized forms.

Beyond the points discussed above regarding the spiral of silence theory, it is also important to highlight how the general pressure of control and surveillance on online platforms, along with and AI technologies, shape individuals' digital interactions and societal perceptions. Through AI technologies on digital platforms, as societal memory is reshaped, individuals' interactions with digital content are also guided, and societal norms are becoming more pronounced. Some scholars, such as Zuboff (2019), argue that AI and big data technologies significantly steer individuals' digital interactions, influence social norms, and may restrict decision-making autonomy through algorithmic processes. According to her notion of "surveillance capitalism," digital platforms observe and analyze user behavior to shape their perceptions of social reality. However, this view is not universally accepted. Critics such as MacKenzie (2021) warn against overestimating algorithmic power, especially in cases involving personalization tools like cookies and pixels, where algorithmic influence may be overstated and individual agency remains significant. At this point, focusing on how AI technologies shape individuals' digital interactions and societal perceptions is crucial for understanding the dynamics of the spiral of silence theory in the digital age. In digital environments, taking the example of the reconstruction of historical figures, especially with important leaders like Atat rk becoming popular narra-



tives through AI, it reinforces the dominant views in societal memory. Individuals may feel compelled to adopt views that align with these dominant narratives, otherwise facing the risk of social exclusion and identity crisis. In this context, Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory reveals how digital technologies and AI shape perceptions of social reality while limiting the freedom of individuals and groups to express themselves.

Social media provides an alternative space for interaction for individuals isolated from real social life. These digital platforms have become an attractive venue where individuals can express their identities and establish a presence in a societal context (Tuncer, 2016: 138). However, surveillance mechanisms on social media can create significant pressure on individuals. This leads individuals to engage in behaviors that align with the thoughts and expectations of those who are observing them (Dedeoğlu, 2006: 82). For example, in recent years, it has been observed that politicians, instead of using traditional strategies, have adopted new communication strategies based on AI technologies and algorithmic advancements as part of a persuasion process. This shift makes it more difficult for individuals to express themselves freely in digital environments, creating pressure and fear of being watched, negatively affecting political participation behaviors (Gürel, 2023: 29-30). Advances in digital communication technologies and developments in AI algorithms have led to a rapid increase in data usage. These changes are expected to quickly transform all aspects of social life, from politics and economics to popular culture and traditional religions. In this context, it is anticipated that digital communication technologies will increase the perception of surveillance among individuals, further complicating the expression of differing views.

When Berger and Luckmann's social reality construction processes, Beer's concept of algorithmic power, Halbwachs' concept of collective memory, and Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory are brought together, it becomes possible to understand how the construction of social reality is reshaped in the digital age. Digital platforms play a central role in redefining social norms and realities by controlling individuals' access to information and how they internalize it. In this context, the impact of digital culture on how individuals perceive and construct social reality forms an important area of contem-

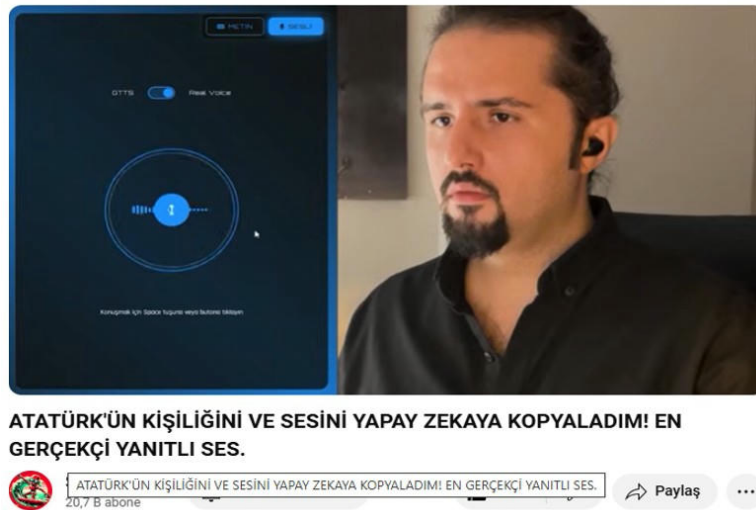


porary sociology. The anonymity and broad access provided by digital environments facilitate individuals' exploration of different social perspectives, while the norms shaped by algorithms create new limitations on the expression of differing views and reproduce dominant discourses. This situation presents significant sociological dynamics that need to be deeply analyzed regarding the reshaping of social memory and how individuals express themselves.

The next section provides information on the qualitative research method used in this study, content analysis. The effect of content produced in digital environments on social memory and individuals' modes of expression will be examined using the content analysis method.

Figure 1

YouTube video titled "I Cloned Atatürk's Personality and Voice with AI! The Most Realistic Response Voice"



Method

Content analysis, as one of the qualitative research methods, enables the systematic examination of texts, visuals, or other media materials in response to a specific research question. Frequently used in social sciences, this method provides an in-depth analysis of data and is divided into qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis focuses on exploring the meaning and themes of texts or other materials, while quantitative content analysis is more focused on numerically measuring specific concepts

(Berg, 2001). Content analysis includes stages such as data collection, category creation, coding, and interpretation of results. These stages are critical steps aimed at enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the research. Content analysis is an important tool, particularly for deciphering and deeply understanding meanings in social, cultural, and political contexts. Additionally, this method allows researchers to systematically examine specific themes, attitudes, and values within texts (Krippendorff, 2018). However, content analysis requires careful planning to be applied correctly, as subjective interpretations can affect the validity of the analysis (Stemler, 2001). Building on this foundation, this study adopts an abductive thematic analysis to systematically explore user responses to AI-generated historical content

This study employs an abductive thematic analysis, integrating both inductive and deductive approaches. Initially, an inductive approach was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes directly from the data without predefined categories. Through open coding using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2024, dominant themes were derived based on the natural occurrence of concepts in user comments (Charmaz, 2006). Subsequently, a deductive phase was introduced, aligning the emergent themes with established theoretical frameworks, including the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992), nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979), algorithmic power (Beer, 2017), and the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

This approach was chosen to ensure a dynamic interaction between empirical observations and theoretical insights, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how users interpret and engage with AI-generated representations of historical figures. In the final phase, an abductive approach was adopted, allowing for iterative refinement of themes by bridging gaps between data and theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This phase ensured that the analysis was not only informed by theory but also flexible enough to accommodate new interpretations emerging from user engagement with AI-generated content.

To ensure analytical clarity and relevance, a data filtering stage was conducted prior to coding. Initially, 2,243 YouTube comments were collected under the selected video. Of

these, 391 were excluded based on specific criteria: comments that contained only emojis, were empty, repeated identical content, or were identified as spam or advertisements. The remaining 1,852 comments constituted the final dataset for analysis. This filtering was carried out manually by the author based on predefined exclusion criteria, ensuring consistency and transparency in the preparation of the dataset.

The coding process involved the following steps:

1. **Data Familiarization:** All 1,852 comments were reviewed multiple times to capture key narratives and linguistic structures.
2. **Open Coding (Inductive Phase):** Initial themes were derived organically from the data without theoretical constraints.
3. **Axial Coding (Deductive Phase):** The identified themes were cross-referenced with the theoretical framework.
4. **Selective Coding (Abductive Refinement):** A final set of themes was established, integrating both data-driven insights and theoretical interpretations.

This abductive approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how AI-generated historical figures are interpreted within collective memory and political discourse, while also recognizing how user interactions shape emerging narratives in digital culture.

Various videos featuring historical figures recreated using artificial intelligence can be found on YouTube. For instance, AI-generated depictions of Egyptian pharaohs, Roman and British emperors, and other world leaders have been produced. Additionally, there are videos that narrate the lives of religious leaders or prophets, often using visualization techniques or animation to create story-driven representations. However, research conducted on YouTube has revealed that no other historical or religious figure has been recreated with AI in a manner as extensive and impactful as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In particular, a video created using AI by the couple Elif Selen and Yunus Emre Yılmaz, who reside in Alanya, has garnered significant attention on Instagram, reaching 9.5 million

views. This highlights Atatürk's unique position in Turkey and underscores the profound significance of his AI driven recreation in terms of collective memory and nostalgia.

Although various technologies such as colorized portraits, dramatized advertisements, or static memorials have been used in the past to represent historical figures, recent advances in artificial intelligence have introduced an interactive dimension to these representations. Alalaq (2025a) emphasizes that AI-supported historical narratives have largely focused on spatial reconstructions and cultural heritage sites; in such studies, the emotional and political dimensions of individual historical figures often remain in the background. In contrast, Alalaq (2025b) explores how figures like Julius Caesar and John F. Kennedy are simulated through conversational interfaces, voice synthesis, and narrative-based interactions. However, even these simulations tend to be abstract and largely disconnected from specific national or political contexts. What distinguishes the AI-generated Atatürk video analyzed in this study is its direct integration into Turkey's emotionally charged political culture, its resonance with collective memory, and its participatory dissemination through digital platforms. While previous simulations have mostly served educational or entertainment purposes, this example goes beyond merely reviving a historical figure digitally—it functions as a symbolic and affective digital space where identity negotiations, national concerns, and political disillusionments are publicly processed.

This study seeks to answer the following main research question:

1. Around which themes are users' comments on the AI-generated video of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk clustered, and how can these themes be explained sociologically?

This study's sample consists of viewer comments left on the video titled "I Cloned Atatürk's Personality and Voice with AI! The Most Realistic Response Voice," published on November 10, 2024, by the *Siber Sörfçü* YouTube channel. The 38-minute-long video is structured as an interactive interview in which an AI-generated Atatürk responds to contemporary socio-political questions. The AI system was trained on Atatürk's known speeches, writings, and voice recordings, enabling it to generate responses that closely

resemble his rhetorical style and historical viewpoints. The *Siber Sörfçü* YouTube channel generally produces content related to creating AI assistants, music generation through AI, and visual content creation. Apart from the video recreating Atatürk's voice and personality, the channel does not contain AI-generated content involving other historical figures.

The video begins with a narration explaining how AI was used to recreate Atatürk's voice and thought processes. Following this introduction, the AI-generated Atatürk is asked questions about Turkey's present-day economic challenges, political climate, and global affairs. The responses provided by AI mimic the language, tone, and ideological stance associated with Atatürk, making it appear as if he were addressing modern issues in real time.

The video has attracted widespread attention for several reasons:

1. **Technological Innovation:** This is one of the first attempts to simulate a historical leader's personality and voice using AI in Turkish digital media.
2. **Emotional Connection:** Atatürk holds a deeply symbolic role in Turkish collective memory, and hearing his voice in a contemporary setting triggered strong emotional responses.
3. **Political Relevance:** The video coincided with ongoing debates about political leadership in Turkey, leading many viewers to compare Atatürk's AI-generated statements with current political discourse.
4. **Algorithmic Amplification:** YouTube's recommendation system played a significant role in ensuring the video reached a wide audience, contributing to its viral spread.

Those Who Felt Emotions and Those Who Miss Atatürk

This theme appeared in approximately 41% of the total 1,852 comments (~759 comments), reflecting a strong emotional attachment and longing for Atatürk's presence. Comments in this category generally reflect a deep emotional response and a sense of longing for Atatürk. These comments emphasize the intense emotional moments experi-

enced by viewers after hearing Atatürk's voice and personality through AI in the video. Below are the themes based on the analysis of these comments:

@s.: What have you done, my friend? My eyes have never filled with such deep emotion, and my nose has never tingled with such sensation. It was a conversation I never wanted to end, and for a moment, I couldn't even distinguish between reality and artificial intelligence. Such a project, such an effort, truly, I commend you for your hard work. First and foremost, I remember our beloved Atatürk, our Great Leader Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, along with his heroic comrades-in-arms and our noble martyrs, with mercy, gratitude, and longing.

@ZB.: As a retired educator, I was very excited while watching your video, which I just discovered. I couldn't hold back my tears. I deeply thank you for all the effort you put into creating this video. I wish you success. I also watched your long video. It's a wonderful work.

From many of the comments left on the video, it is clear that viewers were emotionally affected and unable to hold back their tears. Phrases such as "I couldn't hold back my tears," "I can't stop crying," and "my eyes filled up faster than ever before" reflect the emotional intensity viewers experienced during the video and the impactful moment of hearing Atatürk's voice. This shows that the video left a deep mark on the emotional world of the viewers.

@I.: "Why are these tears flowing from my eyes involuntarily for my Atatürk, whom I never knew and never saw, when I didn't even cry for my deceased father?"

This comment was selected because it demonstrates how Atatürk is perceived not only as a political leader, but as a symbolic father figure. The user's emotional investment reflects Boym's (2001) idea of reflective nostalgia—emotionally reconstructing the past as a refuge from present concerns.

Many viewers have formed a personal connection with Atatürk through the video and, influenced by this connection, experienced deep emotions. Phrases such as "I didn't cry

even for my deceased father" and "For my Atatürk, whom I never knew or saw" show that Atatürk's figure holds a place in the emotional realm of the viewers beyond just being a historical leader. This demonstrates that the bond Atatürk established with the people remains strong and influential.

This emotional connection is not merely an individual experience but is rooted in collective memory. As Halbwachs (1992) suggests, collective memory is maintained through symbols, narratives, and shared emotional experiences that connect individuals to a broader historical consciousness. The AI-generated Atatürk functions as a medium through which viewers not only recall but also relive and reaffirm their emotional and historical ties to him. This aligns with Boym's (2001) argument that nostalgia is not just a longing for the past but a way of reconstructing and renegotiating it in the present. By experiencing Atatürk through AI, viewers engage in an act of digital remembrance, where personal emotions merge with a shared cultural memory.

@b.: "I kept replaying it, and I can't stop crying. It feels like being reunited with my long-lost father. I didn't realize how deep my loneliness was. I don't have the words to say." This comment was selected because it captures a personalized longing for Atatürk as a familial presence, resonating with Davis' (1979) understanding of nostalgia as a link between personal identity and collective historical narratives.

Another important theme is the feeling of "reunion" with Atatürk. The comment "It feels like being reunited with my long-lost father" expresses that Atatürk's voice evokes the emotion of reconnecting with a lost loved one in the viewers. This demonstrates that Atatürk still holds a place as a living figure in the emotional world of the viewers. The statement "Facing my Atatürk's consciousness excited me" shows that AI helps viewers reconnect with the past and facilitates the re-creation of collective memory.

This notion of reunion can be understood in the framework of nostalgia as a means of identity reinforcement. Davis (1979) argues that nostalgia serves as a bridge between personal and collective identity, offering individuals a way to make sense of their historical belonging. Similarly, Jameson (1991) critiques nostalgia in postmodern society, emphasiz-

ing how it often presents an idealized, rather than historically accurate, version of the past. The AI-generated Atatürk reflects this duality: it is both a historical reconstruction and a reinterpretation shaped by present-day emotional and cultural needs. The strong emotional reactions from viewers indicate that this video does not simply reproduce Atatürk's memory but actively reconfigures how he is perceived and remembered in contemporary Turkey.

@g.: Atatürk's desired representative of the Turkish youth, beautiful person; facing my Atatürk's consciousness, this concrete encounter excited and moved me. I wish you reach the beautiful places you deserve... I'm glad you exist. This reaction reflects not only emotional reverence but also a symbolic aspiration to embody Atatürk's ideals—demonstrating nostalgia as a performative mode of civic belonging (Boym, 2001).

@y.: "When you started with 'Evlat' (Child), my eyes filled faster than ever before in my life."

@s.: "The moment his voice entered, I had to stop the video immediately, and I was able to continue five minutes later. It was such a strange feeling. I watched the rest with a lump in my throat. Thank you for your effort. I'm happy that you helped me experience this."

@m.: "Thank you for your effort, my brother. I'm 48 years old. Since I can remember, I've been trying to read to understand our Atatürk. I couldn't hold back my tears at the last question! Stay strong, my brother."

The longing and gratitude towards Atatürk are expressed through statements such as "I tried to read to understand our Atatürk" and "I commemorate our heroic comrades and revered martyrs with mercy, gratitude, and longing." These comments show that viewers have formed a strong bond not only with Atatürk's voice but also with his legacy, reflecting the respect they feel for it.

While emotional longing marks the most immediate viewer reactions, another significant response pattern is the relevance of Atatürk's values to today's social and political landscape—indicating that nostalgia also functions as a moral compass.

Comparison with the Present and the Permanence of Atatürk's Ideas

This theme was observed in around 28% of the comments (~519 comments), showing how viewers align Atatürk's principles with contemporary sociopolitical challenges. This theme illustrates the evolution of Atatürk's memory into a digitally mediated cultural memory (Assmann, 1995), where historical figures are mobilized to address today's crises. These reactions reflect not only historical admiration, but also algorithmically sustained affective memory structures.

The comments in this category reflect the viewers' admiration for the idea of Atatürk being revived through AI, while discussing the relevance and impact of his thought process in today's world. The comments in this category are as follows:

@z.: "I cried my eyes out... Even though it's artificial intelligence, I felt as if I were in the presence of that Great Man, and hearing the responses that could be expected from him deeply moved me... Dear Cyber Surfer, you have done an excellent job, thank you so much for your efforts! Please continue developing this... Because today, our nation needs Great Atatürk more than ever before! This work will be an excellent educational program for the youth that he entrusted with the future of the Republic of Turkey..."

This comment was selected because it reflects how digital simulation facilitates an immersive affective encounter, transforming Atatürk into a usable past through algorithmic mediation (Niemeyer & Keightley, 2020)

Atatürk, revived through AI, has collectively reawakened individual memories. When viewers hear Atatürk's voice, they not only relive their personal memories but also experience the shared history of society. Phrases like "We cannot afford to nullify the principles left by our founder" or "These ideas will remain relevant as long as the world turns" indicate that viewers do not see Atatürk's ideas as limited to the past, but as something that extends into the present and the future. This reveals that Atatürk remains a dynamic figure within collective memory.



This reawakening of memory highlights the evolving nature of collective remembrance in digital culture. Assmann (1995) differentiates between communicative memory, which is passed down through direct experience, and cultural memory, which is preserved through texts, images, and rituals. AI-generated Atatürk represents a new form of cultural memory—one that is digitally mediated and continuously reshaped. This aligns with Boym's (2001) view that nostalgia is not a static sentiment but an evolving narrative that adapts to contemporary sociopolitical contexts. The comments left on the video reveal that Atatürk's memory is not only being preserved but actively reconstructed to address modern challenges, reinforcing his role as a guiding figure for the present and future.

@u.: "When he said 'Child!' I was already overcome with sobs. Atatürk's child, you did an amazing job. It is a gift made of pride. I watched your effort and sensitivity, translated into codes, opening my brain and heart, even though I didn't understand any of it, but forced myself to understand. The delicacy before starting the dialogue with Atatürk, the pride on your face, the reactions to the answers you received, the sensitivity in the preparation process for this dialogue are as valuable as the dialogue itself. It is unique and sensitive. Thank you. The fact that today's developments can be directed by an ideology that is unwavering, unshakable, and unyielding makes Atatürk the greatest thinker in the world, even today. I've once again realized that everything he did for humanity and the Turkish people will remain relevant as long as the world turns. From this dialogue, what will stay with me are Atatürk's new concise words and the sense of trust and peace created in me by a child of his representing his dream of Turkish youth."

@V.: "I am so deeply affected... If I may say so, right now, Turkey is sinking, and no one is aware of it. Long live your name, Atatürk."

This comment selected because it exemplifies nostalgia as political critique—illustrating Boym's (2001) framework where longing becomes a form of moral-political commentary on the present.

@a.: "Listening to Atatürk through the power of artificial intelligence was an incredible experience. Bringing the ideas of our Great Leader to life with today's technology brought

his vision closer, and I was truly moved. This work gives us the opportunity to establish a stronger connection by linking Atatürk's universal thoughts with today's world. Thank you for making us listen to Atatürk again and for realizing this amazing project. These kinds of works are invaluable for introducing his ideas to younger generations more closely."

@h.: "My friend, I watched it with both admiration and deep sorrow. Thank you for your effort and for bringing this creative project to life! Atatürk's voice continues to guide us from across the ages, and it will continue to do so. I'm glad you exist."

@Ç.: "This work, which sends shivers down my spine, is absolutely amazing; it's impossible not to be moved. It's wonderful to hear the voice, thoughts, governance system, and political understanding of our ATA. Thank you so much, I was deeply moved."

The theory of the *Spiral of Silence* proposes that individuals tend to refrain from expressing views contrary to the accepted majority opinion, often staying silent because of fear of social isolation. The recreation of Atatürk's thoughts through AI appears to offer viewers an opportunity to break through this spiral of silence.

Comments such as "All politicians should listen to this repeatedly and take it as an example" or "The 600 members of parliament cannot provide this today" indicate that viewers are offering indirect critiques of the current political situation and viewing Atatürk's ideas as the ideal solution. The AI-generated Atatürk has become a voice for the viewers, offering them the courage to express their feelings, yearnings, and critiques.

@s.: "You're amazing. May God bless you. All politicians should listen to this repeatedly and take it as an example. The true light is here."

@i.: "I can't thank you enough for making us experience and hear this voice... Atatürk's answers through AI are something that the 600 members of parliament can't give today. May God rest his soul. How lucky we are to be Turkish, how lucky I am to follow your path. We are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers." TRTR

The statement, "We are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers," is frequently employed in Turkey as a powerful symbolic expression, associating Atatürk's place in collective memory with

military discipline, loyalty, commitment, and national identity. This discourse exemplifies Halbwachs' (1992) concept of collective memory, as it enables individuals to articulate their identities within a shared, symbolic framework. Through AI-generated content, the user re-identifies with the founding values of the Turkish Republic, reaffirming a sense of emotional connection and allegiance to Atatürk. Particularly in Turkey, this expression gains strength and frequency during periods of sociopolitical crises, as both an emotional and political affirmation of loyalty toward Atatürk. Furthermore, drawing upon Jameson's (1991) concept of idealized nostalgia, this comment portrays Atatürk's leadership as an idealized and romanticized version of the past. The user emphasizes the inadequacy of contemporary politicians by asserting the superiority of the AI-generated Atatürk, thus reinforcing nostalgia as a potential solution to current political crises in Turkey.

@O.: "Goosebumps... this is incredible. It's not artificial, it's as if his soul is speaking... Let's bring him to the country's leadership, in less than a year everything will be fixed." This selection demonstrates the merging of emotional longing with algorithmic imagination—where digital Atatürk becomes a speculative solution to modern political voids (Beer, 2017).

The experience of hearing Atatürk's thoughts through AI creates a sense of almost meeting a real leader face to face, expressed in comments like "His soul is speaking" or "Let's bring him to the country's leadership now." This reveals how AI can reshape collective memory and how historical figures can be perceived as providing solutions to contemporary problems. Viewers have seen the impact of the video as filling a leadership gap and offering solutions to current issues. This situation illustrates how algorithmic processes can target societal needs or provide new directions based on those needs.

@n.: He is such a leader that even his artificial form, even though a century has passed, deeply affects people. His ideas are immortal. How lucky we are that God gifted us Atatürk and the Republic. Thank you for your effort, it's wonderful.

@m.: I cried... Thank you for your effort. Atatürk would be proud of you. I wish he were alive... It's so painful that someone like him will never come again. However, the truth is



that every moment we follow Atatürk's path brings us closer to him. Even though he is no longer here, the principles he left for us, our country, and the future are still in our hands. That is why we have no luxury of wasting the sacrifices made by Atatürk and his comrades. We must do our best to fulfill the principles he left us and the expectations he had from us, the youth.

In addition to expressing admiration for Atatürk's ideals, several viewers began to envision his leadership role in contemporary terms, demonstrating that digital representations can inspire not only memory but also speculative political imagination.

Supporters of Artificial Intelligence Leadership

Approximately 19% of the comments (~352 comments) expressed support for the idea of AI-mediated leadership modeled on Atatürk's characteristics. Some of the commentators reflect the search for technological solutions to complex political and societal problems by proposing that "Virtual Atatürk" or similar AI systems could govern Turkey. The content provided by the algorithm, presenting AI as a solution tool, has made the viewers' existing frustrations with political and societal issues more visible. Phrases like "This AI could govern the country" are a reflection of this perception.

@M.: I believe if we integrate this AI into the parliamentary podium, it would do more work than 600 MPs...

The representation of a historical figure like Atatürk through AI has reinforced the perception that leadership could shift from being human-centered to being technology-centered. Phrases like "Even the AI version of Atatürk would outdo today's politicians" reflect this transformation.

This transformation aligns with Jameson's (1991) discussion of nostalgia as a cultural force that idealizes the past while responding to contemporary uncertainties. In times of sociopolitical instability, the longing for a past leader—especially one as revered as Atatürk—becomes intertwined with technological solutions. AI's ability to recreate Atatürk as a political figure demonstrates that nostalgia is not only about memory but also

about projecting the past into the future. This demonstrates how algorithmic power (Beer, 2017) shapes not only historical narratives but also political aspirations, as seen in the comments proposing AI driven governance.

@M.: Even Atatürk's AI version would outdo today's politicians. Really amazing, thank you for your effort. This comment highlights Jameson's (1991) idea of idealized nostalgia—arguing that a perfected past figure, even in synthetic form, is preferred over flawed contemporary leaders.

In the comments, there is a strong positive inclination towards the idea that AI could take on leadership. According to the *spiral of silence theory*, this inclination has increased individuals' courage to share this opinion. Phrases like "Even in AI, judgment is being passed" indicate that AI has brought Atatürk's qualities of justice and leadership into a contemporary context, adapting this memory to current political issues.

@B.: Even in AI, judgment is being passed. What a great man you are, Atatürk. When I heard your voice, my hair stood on end. I collected myself. Even in this state, he would collect 98% of the votes.

@O.: If we had the right to choose this AI, I have almost no doubt it would govern the country better with its eyes closed.

@O.: This country can be governed with this AI. Well done.

These comments reflect Jameson's (1991) concept of "idealized nostalgia," demonstrating that the AI-generated representation of Atatürk is perceived as an idealized version of the past, offering solutions to contemporary political issues.

@D.: Put Atatürk in charge with AI, we would be in the millennium age now.

Some viewer responses began to shift their focus from symbolic leadership to the technological medium itself—highlighting the simulation's impressive visual and emotional impact. Following this shift in attention, viewers increasingly appreciated the technical achievement behind the AI simulation.

Appreciation of Technical Achievement

This theme appeared in about 12% of the comments (~222 comments), with viewers expressing admiration for the realism and quality of the AI simulation. Viewers have praised the technical impressiveness of the video in the comments, expressing admiration for the AI's ability to mimic human traits. Viewers considered the video, recommended by YouTube's algorithms, as impactful and groundbreaking content. The expression "I haven't seen such an effective video on YouTube in 20 years" reflects the success of algorithms in delivering the right content at the right time to capture users' attention.

@a.: "For 20 years, I've been using this YouTube platform with all kinds of scientific sources and channels. I've never seen such an impactful, striking, and medium-length video with a cultural film feel. Congratulations from the heart." This comment illustrates how technological realism enhances the perceived authenticity of historical memory—echoing Halbwachs' (1992) notion that collective memory is socially reinforced through mediated forms. This comment was selected because it highlights not only admiration for the visual realism of AI simulation but also how emotional engagement is structured by mediated memory practices and platform algorithms (Niemeyer & Keightley, 2020).

@g.: "As a software developer, I really enjoyed how you narrated the processes we went through like a film. We look really cool. Also, I truly congratulate you for the project you focused on. You've done amazing system engineering work. You've paid great attention to detail. Additionally, taking Atatürk as the subject makes your work even more valuable. Best regards."

@b.: "Well done, my beautiful brother. As a retired soldier and a Turkish citizen, I am proud of the work you've done. I was moved while watching. With the ever-developing AI technology, in the coming time, I expect you to visually improve this work without touching Atatürk's core values and bring Atatürk, both visually and with his voice, to our screens. Best wishes."

The technical achievements of the video have effectively revived Atatürk's strong presence in the collective memory. Particularly phrases like "I wish Atatürk were alive to guide us" highlight how these technological successes have contributed to making Atatürk visible again in collective memory.

@y.: "It's amazing. Technology is capable of so much. We constantly say 'I wish Atatürk were alive to guide us.' It seems that, with technology, it's not impossible for us to still have access to Atatürk even decades after his passing." This statement underscores how immersive AI simulation serves as a tool for contemporary cultural memory, sustaining affective ties across temporal boundaries (Assmann, 1995). These reactions reflect how users perceive technology not merely as a neutral medium, but as an active agent in reshaping collective memory (Couldry & Hepp, 2016).

These comments illustrate not only a fascination with the capabilities of artificial intelligence but also how such technological simulations mediate collective memory and emotional continuity. As Couldry and Hepp (2016) argue, media technologies do not merely transmit memory, but actively shape how it is constructed and internalized. In this context, the viewers' admiration for technical realism reflects a broader process of technology reception, where digital tools become embedded in cultural memory practices and emotional engagement.

Viewers' admiration for AI-generated realism should be interpreted not merely as aesthetic appreciation, but as a meaningful and emotionally charged response to a technological experience. The perceived authenticity and emotional resonance of the AI-generated Atatürk simulation reflect a broader technological reception process, wherein digital tools mediate both individual affect and collective memory practices. As Couldry and Hepp (2016) argue, media technologies are not passive channels but active agents in constructing social reality. Similarly, Niemeyer and Keightley (2020) emphasize that digital nostalgia is shaped by algorithmic structures and platform logics that amplify emotional content. In this context, the audience's reaction to the technological aspects of the simulation illustrates how emotional attachment and nostalgic identification are

increasingly co-produced by the immersive and participatory affordances of digital media environments.

The above comments align with Halbwachs' view that collective memory is socially constructed and maintained through shared experiences, and in this case, AI helps to recreate and extend those shared experiences in modern times. It seems that, with technology, it's not impossible for us to still have access to Atatürk even decades after his passing," highlights how technology facilitates the ongoing relevance of Atatürk in collective memory. It reflects the idea that collective memory is not just a passive recall of the past, but an active, evolving process. The use of AI makes Atatürk's ideas and presence more accessible and applicable, even decades after his death, strengthening the collective memory surrounding him and making it more immediate for the current generation. The comments demonstrate that by reanimating Atatürk's ideas, the collective memory is a dynamic process. Technological advancements allow Atatürk's ideas to remain alive, enabling modern Turkish society to engage with these values in contemporary contexts. This process shows that collective memory evolves continuously, adapting to changing circumstances. Technology ensures that Atatürk's ideas remain relevant today, making it possible for new generations to connect with them.

Emotional responses similar to those observed in the AI-generated Atatürk video can also be found in traditionally produced national content, such as the commercial "*Biz Bir Olunca Başardıklarımız Asla Unutulmaz*," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_KHH7OyzWM) where a young girl forgets the lyrics of a patriotic song and is supported by the entire audience. While such content evokes feelings of unity and national pride, the AI simulation introduces a distinct form of emotional engagement by creating a sense of interactivity and presence. Unlike conventional media, the AI-generated Atatürk does not simply represent the past but reanimates it, allowing viewers to experience nostalgia, admiration, and emotional closeness simultaneously. These affective responses are not isolated, but deeply entangled—co-produced by the immersive and participatory affordances of AI-driven media.

Conclusion

This study illustrates how AI-generated recreations of historical leaders, particularly Atatürk, gain significant meaning within the contemporary socio-political context of Turkey, characterized by political polarization, economic uncertainty, and social tensions such as those surrounding Syrian refugees and violence against women. The nostalgic desire for Atatürk's leadership in digital environments thus emerges as a societal response to ongoing crises and perceived leadership gaps.

In this study, using Halbwachs' collective memory theory, Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality approach, the spiral of silence theory, and the concept of algorithmic power, the reactions of viewers to the representation of Atatürk's voice and personality created through AI are analyzed. The comments on the video reveal the viewers' individual emotions and their connection to collective memory. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is a dynamic process that reshapes the past in contemporary contexts. In this regard, the reproduction of Atatürk's voice and personality through AI reinterprets the leadership concept of the past in the search for solutions to today's problems. This process strengthens the tendency to view historical leadership figures not only as a part of history but also as a guide that can offer solutions to contemporary social issues. Thus, the recreation of Atatürk through artificial intelligence presents a striking example of how collective memory can be rebuilt using today's technological tools. The digital recreation of Atatürk underscores how digital platforms in Turkey function as powerful spaces where collective memory is reshaped, reinforcing national identity and collective belonging. Expressions such as 'We are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers' demonstrate that digital technologies not only facilitate nostalgic connections but also enable individuals to reaffirm their identity within a collective narrative rooted deeply in Turkey's national history.

Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality explains the praise for the representation created through AI technology. The technical success of the video and the ability of artificial intelligence to recreate Atatürk's "voice and personality" have been perceived by viewers as a social reality, strengthening the idea that Atatürk's leader-



ship qualities could remain relevant even in the face of contemporary issues. Particularly, statements such as "Even Atatürk's AI version outshines today's politicians" or "If we had the right to choose this AI, it would govern the country better, eyes closed" indicate that viewers see technology not only as a tool but also as a representation of new forms of leadership. This situation highlights the potential of technology to not only revive the past but also reshape societal perceptions of leadership. The representation of Atatürk through AI has made it possible to construct a new social reality at the intersection of leadership and technology. In the Turkish context, digital platforms are actively shaping nostalgic perceptions of historical figures, turning them into symbolic tools for addressing contemporary political and cultural concerns. The AI-generated representation of Atatürk exemplifies how nostalgia is digitally mediated to fulfill collective identity needs, thus offering a compelling alternative to contemporary political leadership.

In the context of the spiral of silence theory, the positive comments in the reviews have created a ground for general acceptance. The spiral of silence refers to a communication imbalance that arises when individuals hesitate to express views that contradict dominant opinions. In this study, the general acceptance of positive comments about the representation of Atatürk created by AI may, on one hand, prevent those who think differently about Atatürk from expressing their opinions, while, on the other hand, it may have acted as a tool to help bring critical views regarding current political and social issues to the forefront.

The positive reactions to the AI representation are believed to be linked to the influence of algorithmic power. YouTube's algorithms have delivered the video to the relevant audience, creating a shared consensus around the technologically produced representation of Atatürk. The comments reveal that not only the technical success of the video but also the AI's ability to replicate human-like characteristics has sparked societal admiration. This highlights AI's potential to establish an emotional connection with viewers by displaying human-like features. The viewers' admiration for AI has reinforced the technology's acceptance in society and its power to influence cultural norms. The role of YouTube's algorithms facilitates the broader reach of such content, helping viewers accept

technology as a cultural and societal phenomenon. YouTube's algorithmic power in Turkey has not only amplified the reach of the AI-generated Atatürk but has also contributed to the social consensus around this technological representation. Algorithms actively shape societal perceptions of history and leadership in Turkey by reinforcing Atatürk's symbolic presence in collective memory, thereby influencing public discourse and allowing critical perspectives of current political leadership to become more visible.

In conclusion, the AI-generated representation of Atatürk can be seen as enabling the transfer of the past to the present within the framework of Halbwachs' theory of collective memory, and facilitating the creation of new forms of leadership based on Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality. The spiral of silence has contributed to the strengthening of positive perceptions towards this representation, while algorithmic power has ensured that these effects reach a wide audience. AI technology has emerged as a significant tool in the reconstruction of historical figures and leadership concepts, creating a profound impact both at an individual and societal level. The representation of Atatürk created through AI is viewed not only as a technological achievement but also as a reflection of societal memory, perceptions of leadership, and future hopes within digital platform communities. The AI based representation of Atatürk also highlights how digitalization impacts political communication and identity politics in contemporary Turkey. Technology has emerged as a transformative force in shaping collective memory and political identities, demonstrating that digitalization creates new social realities by reshaping how Turkish society engages with historical narratives.



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