

A Research on a New Form of Power Brokerage in the Context of Celebrities Extending from the Local Scale to the Global Dimension

Yerel Ölçekten Küresel Boyuta Uzanan Ünlü Kişiler Bağlamında Yeni Kudret Sımsarlığı Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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Abstract

Through social media, local actors can become influential figures (influencers) who achieve global fame through their own efforts. This brings to mind the power brokering that was effective in the era of conventional mass media. However, it is argued that power brokering no longer works due to the structure of today's social media. Therefore, this study examines the evolution of fame brokering (referred to as power brokering throughout the study) in the age of social media, comparing it with its predecessors in mass media. Although the rise of consumers to the position of content creators (prosumers) creates the impression that traditional human brokers have disappeared, this research assumes that a new, invisible system has taken their place. Here, within the scope of qualitative research methodology, the social media posts of 10 (ten) internet celebrities in Turkey, determined through field survey, were subjected to document and content analysis. The findings suggest that users successfully transcend local boundaries to achieve global recognition through content creation and sharing. However, the study concludes that the freedom of content creation is subtly controlled by the ideological and commercial interests of the platform owners. Consequently, social media platforms and their algorithms function as the new, decentralized power brokers by establishing content restrictions and monetizing user data, ensuring that a form of brokerage continues to operate behind the scenes.

Keywords: Power Brokerage, Celebrity, Influencer, Content Production, Kitle İletişimi.

Öz

Sosyal medya yoluyla yerel aktörler kendi çabalarıyla küresel boyutta şöhrete kavuşan etkileyici figürler (influencer) haline gelebilmektedir. Bu durum konvansiyonel kitle iletişim medyası döneminde etkili olan kudret sımsarlığını akla getirmektedir. Ancak günümüz sosyal medyasının yapısı nedeniyle kudret sımsarlığının artık çalışmadığına yönelik düşünceler dile getirilebilmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmada, sosyal medya çağında şöhret sımsarlığının (çalışma boyunca kudret sımsarlığı olarak anılmaktadır) geçirdiği evrim, kitle iletişim medyasındaki öncülleriyle karşılaştırılarak incelenmektedir. Tüketicilerin içerik üreticisi (prosumer) konumuna yükselmesi, geleneksel insan sımsarlarının ortadan kalktığı yönünde bir izlenim yaratsa da bu araştırma yeni, görünmez bir sistemin onların yerini aldığını varsaymaktadır. Burada, nitel araştırma yöntemi kapsamında, alan taramasıyla belirlenen Türkiye'deki 10 (on) internet ünlüsünün sosyal medya paylaşımları doküman ve içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Bulgular, kullanıcıların içerik üretimi ve paylaşımı yoluyla yerel konumlarından küresel tanınırlığa ulaştığını doğrulamaktadır. Ancak çalışma, içerik üretim özgürlüğünün, platform sahiplerinin ideolojik ve ticari çıkarları tarafından incelikte kontrol edildiği sonucuna varmaktadır. Buna göre, sosyal medya platformları ve algoritmaları, içerik kısıtlamaları ve kullanıcı verisinin ticarileştirilmesi yoluyla yeni, merkezi olmayan kudret sımsarları olarak işlev görmektedir ve bir tür sımsarlık sisteminin perde arkasında işlemeye devam etmesini sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kudret Sımsarlığı, Şöhret, Sosyal Medya Ünlüsü, İçerik Üretimi, Mass Communication.

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Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has fundamentally challenged established conventions regarding celebrity ve power mechanisms inherited from the era of mass media. In the second decade of the twentyfirst century, the role undertaken by global social media channels such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok has led to the claim that the process of “becoming famous”, which was monopolized by traditional media actors, has been democratized. In this digital ecosystem, the potential for individuals to share their talents, content, and stories with audiences worldwide without any intermediaries has reminded us of the necessity of a new social contract, because it holds the promise that anyone can create their own media and become famous. This scenario pointed towards a structure where the user simultaneously became both a consumer and a producer of content as a prosumer (Mutlu & Bazarci, 2017, p. 28). However, behind the rhetoric of this democratization, a profound transformation in the structure of the celebrity economy has taken place; for even if the traditional brokers have disappeared, the power relations inherent in the path to celebrity have been reshaped.

During the era of conventional mass media, an individual’s ability to reach large audiences and gain media visibility was only possible through power brokers operating in the arts, politics, sports, or media sectors. These human-centric brokers acted as gatekeepers and filters between talented individuals and the masses, regulating both the selection of content and the access to distribution (Bilge, 2023, pp. 343-344). In this system, the broker, as the authority holding the power, was the central actor deciding who would become famous, when, and to what extent. This structure had turned celebrity into a controlled by a effective narrow elite group. The innovation brought by the digital age appears to have disrupted this hierarchy. In contexts like Türkiye, from early internet figures such as Mahir Cagrı to today's YouTube stars with millions of followers, local talents have been observed achieving global recognition by transcending geographical boundaries. These new figures are referred to as “glocal figures” because they draw their content from local cultures while transporting it onto global platforms (Mutlu & Bazarci, 2017, p. 28). This transformation unfolds independently of the control of traditional media and creates a sphere of influence beyond national borders.

This promise of democratization and the rhetoric of unmediated communication constitute the fundamental problem addressed by this research. Even though traditional power brokers may have exited the stage with the proliferation of content platforms, the hypothesis that a new institutional structure has emerged to assume the function of power brokerage gains prominence. This study posits that this new structure operates not through personal authority, like the traditional brokers, but rather through systemic mechanisms such as algorithmic constraints, data harvesting, and commercial/ideological guidance. In this context, the central question driving this research is: Has power brokerage truly disappeared with the advent of the internet’s promise of liberation, or has it merely changed its form, becoming institutionalized within the platforms themselves to serve their interests?

The primary aim of this research is to analyze the institutional and technological forms into which the human-centric power brokerage structure of the traditional media era has evolved within the social media ecosystem. Focusing specifically on content production practices on centralized platforms like YouTube, the study will investigate how the apparent freedom of content creation is subtly controlled and directed by the ideological and commercial interests of the platform owners (Fuchs & Chandler, 2021, p. 86).

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by arguing that social media platforms and their algorithms function as the new, decentralized power brokers, replacing traditional human intermediaries. The originality of this work lies in shifting academic attention away from the success of individual figures or user interaction, and towards the structural platform architecture -technological and commercial- in which this success occurs. This approach seeks to fill the academic gap between the myth of democratization and the reality of corporate control, offering a critical sociological and communication perspective on the new dynamics of power relations and the celebrity economy in the digital age.

1. Literature-Based Conceptual Background Study

1.1. A Historical Approach to the Concept of Brokerage

The concept of brokerage has a long-standing history in socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres. Etymological accounts trace the term to the Aramaic “sîfsârâ,” referring to a bargainer, and to the Persian “sîbsâr,” indicating an intermediary who facilitates exchanges between buyers and sellers

(Kallek, 2009, p. 215). Classical sources document brokerage like functions across ancient civilizations. These banking duties reportedly included "argentarii" acting as money changers (Rauh, 1989, p. 46), "mensarii" having the role of helping people in their economic difficulties (Niczyporuk, 2012, p. 61), and "coactores" being tasked with collecting money and giving it to their employers (Dunbabin, 1999, p. 200). Similar patterns are observed in Ancient Egypt, where broker like figures brokeraged elite trade networks by organizing the exchange of goods across distant regions (Civgin, 2015, p. 375).

Historical records therefore indicate that brokerage was never limited to mere transactional brokerag; rather, it constituted an institutional mechanism for reducing risk, minimizing information asymmetry, and enabling exchanges across social or geographical distances. Brokering roles further evolved through the Middle Ages, where intermediaries solved communication and transportation problems in emerging markets. By the late nineteenth century, brokerage was legally recognized in Germany as a distinct profession, signaling its full institutionalization within modern capitalist economies (Karayalcin, 1968, p. 498). These data demonstrate that brokerage, as an intermediary service, dates back to ancient times. It also reveals that different forms of brokerage have been experimented with throughout history, and that each civilization has developed its own brokerage system (Mecelle, 2025, pp. 424-425-469).

Beyond its economic meaning, brokerage has also been a political category. Otto von Bismarck, for instance, was described as an "honest broker" for mediating interstate conflicts during the Congress of Berlin (Altintas, 2019, p. 72). This illustrates how the broker may act as a neutral or seemingly neutral figure capable of shaping relationships, facilitating negotiations, and influencing power dynamics. In anthropological terms, intermediaries connect multiple social worlds, circulating information, translating meanings, and shaping the very relationships they manage (Bräuchler et al., 2021, p. 2; Paine, 1971, p. 21). The broker is therefore not only a facilitator, but an active agent in creating new hierarchies, identities, and opportunities.

Modern scholarship highlights how brokers operate at the intersection of social, cultural, political, and economic networks. Their influence derives not only from technical brokeraging but also from their position within systems of social capital, trust, and legitimacy. As Demirag (2010, p. 23) argues, brokerage often relies on institutional power, familial connections, and access to elite networks, enabling brokers to determine who enters a field, who is promoted, and whose visibility is amplified.

These historical observations are central to understanding the transformation of brokerage in the digital era. While the economic and political brokerage served as a visible broker between two parties, digital platforms operate as algorithmic, infrastructural, and opaque brokerage (Dede, 2024, pp. 36-39). The contemporary celebrity economy, shaped by content platforms, continues to rely on brokerage mechanisms; however, this study argues that these mechanisms are shifting from human decision-making processes to socio-technical systems managed by platform owners.

1.2. Power Brokerage and the Making of Celebrity in the Traditional Media Era

The traditional mass media environment relied heavily on human brokers who acted as gatekeepers. These power brokers -producers, editors, talent managers, impresarios- curated content, selected individuals for exposure, and orchestrated the process of becoming a celebrity. They could elevate or suppress any aspiring figure, thereby turning celebrity into a scarce resource accessible only through privileged networks (Bilge, 2023, pp. 343-344; Demirag, 2010, p. 23). In the fields of cinema, music, literature, and visual arts, the broker's power functioned as a filtering device, determining which individuals acquired symbolic capital and market visibility. As Demirag emphasizes, talent alone rarely determined success; rather, privilege, cultural capital, and strategic patronage shaped career trajectories. The notion that "freedom does not actually work in the art world" (Demirag, 2010, p. 23) encapsulates the hierarchical system through which human brokers maintained influence.

These dynamics were not unique to Türkiye. Celebrity studies scholars have long argued that celebrity is manufactured through institutional processes rather than discovered naturally. Boorstin described the celebrity as "a person who is famous for being famous," highlighting the institutional role of media in constructing celebrity beyond talent or achievement (Boorstin, 1992, p. vii). Similarly, Marshall viewed celebrity as a form of cultural power generated through mediated visibility (Marshall, 2014, p. 51). The production of celebrity therefore resembles a brokerage system: individuals require a broker to mediate their relationship to audiences, distribute their content, and legitimize their public persona. Such brokerage was deeply hierarchical and exclusionary (Hamann & Beljean, 2019, s. 43).

Traditional media conglomerates -television networks, record labels, newspapers- controlled distribution channels and limited access to visibility. Aspiring artists, athletes, actors, or musicians needed alignment with influential intermediaries to navigate these gatekeeping structures. The narrative of the struggling artist who seeks validation from powerful industry figures has been repeatedly reproduced in cultural texts, including cinema and popular media (Amazon Prime, 2023; Imdb.com, 1966). Through this system, human brokers shaped the moral, aesthetic, and commercial standards of celebrity. Celebrity was therefore not merely a reflection of public opinion but a curated outcome of institutional power. In the discussion section this historical perspective is help, for the assess whether social media has dismantled this system, democratized celebrity, or transformed brokering into new, algorithmic forms.

1.3. Platform-Based Celebrity, Digital Democratization and the Emergence of New Power Brokerage

The rise of social media platforms challenged the hegemony of traditional power brokers. Early digital culture theorists celebrated the shift from passive audiences to active prosumers -individuals who both produce and consume content- (Mutlu & Bazarci, 2017, p. 28). Web 2.0 rhetoric emphasized open participation, user-generated content, decentralization, and democratized visibility. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok promoted a narrative that anyone could achieve celebrity without institutional approval. The removal of human intermediaries seemed to create a flattened communicative environment where audience engagement, rather than gatekeeper decisions, determined visibility. Digital platforms therefore appeared to disrupt hierarchical structures by assigning agency to users themselves.

The emergence of “glocal celebrities” -figures who combine local cultural identities with global digital reach- illustrates this perceived democratization. In Türkiye, early cases such as Mahir Cagri (Donkeyontheedge.com, 2025) and later figures like Baris Ozcan (Instagram.com, 2025) or Nusret Gökçe (Instagram.com, 2025) exemplify how individuals can achieve worldwide recognition through viral content, platform circulation, or algorithmic amplification. From a sociological perspective, this shift aligns with transformations in identity and self-presentation in late modernity. Marshall (2004, p. 51) characterizes modern society as an “age of anxieties,” where individuals continuously negotiate their identity through mediated visibility. Social media intensifies these dynamics by enabling individuals to perform, curate, and disseminate digital selves to global audiences.

As argued by Dijck and Poell, social media platforms are not neutral intermediary institutions; they are socio-technical systems embedded in institutional logics, algorithmic governance, and data-driven processes (Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, while the ability to bypass traditional institutions has reinforced the belief that celebrity status has become merit-based, it must be argued that these underlying infrastructural forces beneath platform visibility weaken the narrative of democratization. Because, while the digital age eliminated the human intermediary, it also brought with it a new, less visible type of platform brokerage (Kurt, 2020, pp. 120-121).

Recent scholarship in digital media, surveillance capitalism, and platform studies challenges the assumption that social media dismantles brokerage. Instead, platforms constitute new power brokers whose influence is embedded in algorithmic infrastructures, content policies, monetization systems, and data extraction practices. Fuchs and Chandler (2021, p. 86) describe digital platforms as global advertising companies that profit from user-generated content and the commodification of big data.

Platforms enforce rules -content standards, recommendation systems, shadow banning, monetization thresholds- that shape creators’ strategies, production styles, and public visibility. In this sense, platforms act much like traditional brokers, but operate through algorithmic decision-making rather than personal discretion. Their influential power is (Dede, 2024, pp. 36-39):

- a. Infrastructural, dictating what types of content formats are permissible,
- b. Algorithmic, determining which posts are amplified or suppressed,
- c. Commercial, directing revenue flows, monetization, and advertising models,
- d. Ideological, shaping public discourse by privileging particular forms of expression over others.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal illustrates the extent to which platform-mediated data collection can influence political processes (BBC.com, 2019). Such cases reveal how platforms, under the guise of technological neutrality, accumulate unprecedented power-far surpassing that of traditional

human brokers. Moreover, platforms position themselves as philanthropic or democratizing tools, offering free services to users while generating profit through targeted advertising (Levac & O'Sullivan, 2010, p. 49). The slogan attributed to Henry Ford “any color you want, as long as it’s black” serves as an apt metaphor: users appear to have limitless creative freedom, but only within narrowly defined parameters determined by the platform’s technical affordances and commercial interests (Hughes, 2024). Thus, although social media eliminates the need for traditional intermediaries, it reintroduces brokerage through opaque algorithmic systems. The “broker” is no longer a person, but the platform itself (Hamann & Beljean, 2019, p. 43).

1.4. Glocalization and the Circulation of Local Talent on Global Platforms

The concept of glocalization helps explain how local cultural expressions gain global visibility. Glocalization defines as the interplay between global flows and local particularities, generating hybrid cultural forms adapted for global consumption (Ritzer, 2003, p.194). In digital contexts, glocal celebrities draw on local identity markers -language, humor, cultural references- while leveraging platform affordances to reach global audiences. In Türkiye, figures such as Sofi Omer, Yusuf Dikec, and Kandıralı Ferdi (Tablo 1) exemplify how local performances can gain international resonance through virality, remixing, and algorithmic circulation. These individuals may not initially seek celebrity, yet platform-based amplification can transform them into global figures.

In the Fuchs (2014), Dijck and Poell (2013) studies argues, glocal celebrity does not negate brokerage; rather, it underscores how platform algorithms recalibrate the relationship between locality and visibility. According to them, the global dissemination of local content is not purely organic; it depends on:

- a. Algorithmic recommendation,
- b. Cross-platform sharing,
- c. Content-format compatibility,
- d. Audience engagement metrics,
- e. Platform-driven virality cycles.

Scholarship on digital labor emphasizes that users contribute uncompensated labor by producing content, generating engagement, and providing personal data. Fuchs (2014) argues that platforms like Facebook and Google exploit user labor by extracting surplus value from data and advertising. Dijck and Poell (2013), who agree with this view, also argue that content creators operate in a dual dilemma, being enabled to achieve celebrity status by platforms while simultaneously being subjected to the following structural constraints (Fuchs, 2014, p. 223; Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 13):

- a. Data-driven content governance,
- b. Opaque ranking and recommendation algorithms,
- c. Differential monetization opportunities,
- d. Platform-dependent identities consisting of curated personas,
- e. Volatility of platform reputations and content cycles.

Neuman (2013, p. 49) notes that content production on digital platforms is inherently shaped by the affordances and biases of the medium. For creators, this means that celebrity is contingent not only on talent or audience reception but also on compliance with platform norms and algorithmic expectations. Thus, user autonomy is limited. Similarly, Van Dijck argues that in this new digital environment, individuals are encouraged to display visibility, but platform systems ultimately decide who gets access to their performances (Kurt, 2020, p. 121). This argues further supports the argument that platforms now function as institutionalized agents of power.

This conceptual framework, synthesizing historical, sociological, and digital media research, reveals that the transition from traditional to digital brokering is not a linear power distribution but a restructuring of its mechanisms. It appears that traditional human mediators have not disappeared; instead, they coexist or are replaced by algorithmic systems that replicate brokering functions on a much larger scale. Considering the literature data, it is evident that brokering remains a central mechanism in the celebrity economy. Social media platforms, as decentralized but powerful intermediaries regulating the production, circulation, and commercialization of celebrities on a global scale, are replacing the old, creating a fundamental operational difference. This study aims to highlight

this difference in an environment where algorithmic preferences reflect corporate interests, advertising priorities, and broader socio-political pressures. This work, which shows the global-local trajectory of internet celebrities in Türkiye, presents empirical evidence that platforms function as new intermediaries determining which cultural products transcend local boundaries.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design for the purpose of investigate how the traditional human-centered power brokerage model is transformed within the socio-technical architecture of social media platforms. This approach is considered appropriate when a conceptual understanding of structural mechanisms is desired (Neuman, 2013, p. 49).

The specific objectives of the study are:

- a. To identify the structural role played by platforms in the journey of celebrity from local to global, through the example of internet celebrities in Türkiye.
- b. To empirically demonstrate how the algorithmic and commercial restrictions of platforms limit the autonomy of content creators.
- c. To present a conceptual conclusion asserting that social media platforms themselves are positioned as the new, institutional power brokerage.

Shortly, the aim is to obtain empirical evidence that how platforms function as new mediating institutions. To achieve this objective, the study integrates two complementary qualitative strategies:

- a. Field survey-supported sampling, used to identify a relevant group of Turkish internet celebrities, and
- b. Document and content analysis, used to examine the digital traces, platform activities, and media representations of the selected figures.

This multi-method qualitative design allows the study to move from empirical observation to conceptual theorization while maintaining coherence with grounded theory principles, particularly the emphasis on theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). The research population is defined as individuals residing within Turkey who have achieved fame through the internet. However, to overcome the time and accessibility issues arising from the vastness of this population, a sample representative of the population was created.

Sampling Logic:

A single-question survey was conducted to create the sample. The target population consists of individuals residing in Türkiye who have gained measurable celebrity primarily through internet-based platforms. Given the extremely large and heterogeneous nature of this population-ranging from micro - influencers to globally recognized figures- probabilistic sampling is neither feasible nor appropriate for the goals of this study. Thus, the research adopts a purposive sampling strategy, with the explicit aim of identifying individuals who exemplify different trajectories of “glocal” celebrity, content creation practices, and broker-platform relationships. To construct a sample that reflects public perception of prominent internet celebrities, conducted a short, single-item field survey immediately prior to the preparation of the article. The survey asked participants: “Name the first internet celebrity that comes to mind.” The survey was distributed through X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook without demographic targeting, thereby reducing researcher bias in the selection of respondents. A total of 103 valid responses were collected. This number was deemed adequate because responses reached saturation, a threshold in qualitative research indicating that additional data would not meaningfully alter the emerging patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). The ten most frequently repeated names were compiled to form the final sample. The selection of these ten individuals considered the diverse cultural and geographic factors in order to enhance representation in Türkiye. This selection also ensured sufficient diversity in the celebrities' career trajectories, content types, and degrees of intentionality (planned, semi-planned, unplanned) in celebrity design.

Research Hypothesis and Questions:

As a result of the literature review, the hypothesis to be proven in the research is formulated as follows:

In the context of celebrity design, power brokering in digital media environments has not disappeared, but has been transformed and recreated through social media platforms and algorithms.

To test this hypothesis, the following questions, which guide the methodology, were attempted to be answered:

- 1- How has the traditional power brokering structure evolved in the digital media environment?
- 2- How do social media platforms and algorithms play a role in the production of glocal celebrities?
- 3- What functions have social media companies undertaken as corporate power brokers?

Here, three main data sources were used:

- a. Public social media accounts of each celebrity on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and X.
- b. Digitally archived content containing references to the celebrities, including news articles, interviews, program appearances, and viral posts.
- c. Search-engine results retrieved using each celebrity's name as a tag to assess how far their visibility extends and how they are framed within online discourse.

Using multiple publicly accessible sources ensures methodological triangulation and enhances the credibility of the analysis (Neuman, 2013, p. 49).

Data Collection Procedures:

The dataset consists of publicly available documents and content created by ten selected Turkish internet phenomena. The collection is limited to content published between 2018 and 2025, encompassing the period when algorithmic optimization and platform commercialization peaked. This period was chosen also considering the criterion of ease of access to the data relative to the time period in which the research was conducted. Each selected celebrity has posted a large volume of online content, which constitutes a major practical limitation. To overcome this limitation, the study systematically analyzed:

- a. The most-viewed posts across each celebrity's platforms (e.g., Instagram's view counts, YouTube's viewer statistics),
- b. Supplemental posts that generated notable public engagement, and
- c. Cross-platform circulations of viral videos.

Prioritizing the most-viewed content provides meaningful insight into the visibility mechanisms through which platform algorithms amplify creators, as well as how third-party content creators sometimes act as inadvertent brokers. This selective approach is consistent with qualitative methodologies that emphasize information-rich cases rather than exhaustive enumeration.

Document Analysis:

Document analysis was applied to all textual and audiovisual materials that provide contextual information about each celebrity's celebrity trajectory and media representation. Document analysis entails searching, reviewing, and systematically interpreting documents for a defined research objective (Karasar, 2012). This method allowed the study to trace:

- a. How celebrities are portrayed in digital news sources,
- b. How fans, platforms, or other actors frame their content, and
- c. How narratives around their celebrity are constructed.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis was used to examine both posted content and platform-level metadata. Content analysis enables the systematic categorization of communication patterns and themes in audiovisual or written materials (Neuman, 2013, 49). The analytic procedure included:

- a. Open coding; identifying recurring patterns in content formats, aesthetic strategies, and engagement behaviors;
- b. Axial coding; examining the relationship between content strategies and visibility outcomes;
- c. Selective coding; integrating findings into broader conceptual categories related to platform power and brokerage.

Through these steps, the study analyzed not only what celebrities post but also how platform infrastructures -recommendation algorithms, monetization systems, content restrictions- shape their celebrity trajectories.

Operational Definitions

To ensure conceptual precision, in this study, key terms are coded as follows:

Internet celebrity (Unplanned): An individual whose public recognition originates primarily from digital platforms.

Glocal figure (Semi-Planned): A content creator who draws on local cultural expressions while achieving global reach through platform circulation (Ritzer, 2003, p. 194).

Celebrity design (Planned): The degree to which an individual's visibility is strategically constructed by themselves or external actors.

Power brokerage (planned, semi-planned, unplanned): Any mechanism -human or algorithmic- that mediates between creators and visibility, controlling or influencing access to audiences (Bilge, 2023; Bräuchler et al., 2021)

Ethical Considerations

All data analyzed were obtained from publicly available digital sources. However, the study adhered to ethical principles by avoiding the disclosure of personally identifiable audience information and preserving the integrity and context of the analyzed content to prevent misrepresentation of the creators' intentions. The research did not involve human subjects, private communication, or intervention. Therefore, the study falls into the category of academic studies that do not require ethical committee approval according to applicable guidelines.

Limitations

During the research several methodological limitations is appeared. The limitations and the method followed to overcome these limitations are given below.

- a. High volume of social media content: The analysis prioritized high-engagement posts, which may not capture the entirety of creators' digital identities.
- b. Platform opacity: Algorithmic processes remain proprietary; thus, conclusions rely on observable outcomes rather than direct access to platform mechanisms.
- c. Self-presentation bias: Celebrities' online personas have been considered mediated performances that may not reflect their offline identities.
- d. Survey sampling constraints: Field research relies on voluntary responses that may not adequately represent the demographic makeup.

Despite these limitations, triangulating multiple data sources and applying systematic qualitative analysis mitigates potential reliability and validity concerns. In conclusion, the methodology used in this study strategically integrates field survey-supported sampling, document analysis, and content analysis to examine the structural transformation of power brokerage within social media ecosystems. Thus, by examining the career trajectories of individual celebrities within broader socio-technical dynamics, the study is able to move beyond anecdotal observations and offer a conceptual assessment of how platforms function as new, algorithmic agents of power.

3. Research Findings, Analysis, and Discussion

3.1. Research Findings

The empirical component of this study, grounded in content and document analysis of ten Turkish internet celebrities, demonstrates the complex and diversified nature of contemporary power brokerage within the social media ecosystem. Thus, it becomes clear how celebrity is produced, circulated, and institutionalized through platform infrastructures. The sample, derived from a field survey reflecting public perception, comprises figures who have achieved glocal recognition, drawing on local cultural markers to reach a global audience (Ritzer, 2003, p. 194). The findings are systematically categorized based on the operational coding definition of celebrity design (Planned, Semi-Planned, or Unplanned) and their observed mechanisms of visibility, which reveal the nuanced evolution of power brokerage (Bilge, 2023; Bräuchler et al., 2021).

3.1.1. Taxonomy of Glocal Celebrity and Visibility Metrics

The data collected across platforms (YouTube, Instagram, X) confirm the transition from traditional media gatekeeping to a more user-centric environment, enabling varied paths to visibility. As summarized in Table 1, the sample demonstrates a wide spectrum of digital reach, ranging from figures like Mahir Cagri (0.0032 M.W. /Million) to figures with significantly higher visibility, such as Nusret Gökçe (37.2 M.W. /Million). The high volume of "Most-Watched" (M.W.) posts is a primary indicator of platform-driven amplification and audience engagement, a key measure in the digital economy.

Table 1: Social media usage, global recognition, and celebrity design of local celebrities

Name of Fame	Social Media Platforms Account Names			M. W. /Million	Global Recognition	Celebrity Design
	Youtube	X	Instagram			
Omer Celik	Keko Production	Sofimerofficial	Sofimer_official	35	International	Unplanned
Yusuf Dikec	Yusuf Dikec	yusufdikec	yusufdikec	46	International	Unplanned
Mehmet Ali Sulan	Cizreli Mehmet Official	cizrelilili	cizrelimehmett	12	National	Semi-planned
Mahir Cagri	İnternet Mahir	MahirCagri	cagri.mahir	0,0032	International	Planned
Mahsun Karaca	Roportaj Adam	RoportajAdam	roportajAdam	12	National	Planned
Veysel Mutlu	VeyselMutluOfficial	_veyselmutlu	veysel.mutlu	220	National	Unplanned
Baris Ozcan	Baris Ozcan	BarisOzcan	barisozcan	6,7	National	Planned
Ferdi Gulezen	Kandirali Ferdi	kandiraliiferdi	kandiraliferdi	1,4	National	Semi-planned
Nusret Gokce	Salt Bae	NusretGokce	nusr_et	37,2	International	Planned
Oyku/Berk Gurman	Paga play	Oyquuu/BerkGurman	Berkgurman/oykugurman	29	National	Planned

Table 1 examines 10 internet celebrities who exhibit local characteristics. Focusing on the X, Instagram, and YouTube accounts, we attempt to understand the extent of celebrity achieved through the most-watched (M.W) posts. In the second stage, we examine the search results of celebrity names entered as tags in search engines. From this, we examine whether these celebrity designs are planned and how they are described in the news stories they feature, to understand their relationship to a new type of power brokerage. The table clearly illustrates a fundamental pattern across the sample: although all individuals originate from local cultural contexts, their celebrity trajectories extend beyond these boundaries through glocal visibility made possible by algorithm-driven amplification. In each case, celebrity is not merely a function of talent or originality but is shaped by the infrastructural logic of platform systems. When read categorically, the planned, unplanned, and semi-planned findings in the table can be distinguished as follows:

a. Unplanned Celebrity Design: This category includes figures like Sofi Omer and Yusuf Dikec. Their celebrity originated not from deliberate content strategies but from the viral circulation of uncurated, authentic, or contextually specific actions (Bilge, 2023). Sofi Omer's global recognition stems from halay videos, with one post exceeding 35 million views, even being shared by international figures (Sputnik, 2022). Critically, the analysis reveals that his online presence is mediated by other content creators, such as "Keko Production," who assume the role of celebrity designer and distributor, suggesting a shift from self-production (prosumer) to an inadvertent form of human brokerage. An Olympic athlete Yusuf Dikec's celebrity was unanticipated, triggered by the virality of his shooting style. Similar to Sofi Omer, the spread of his image and identity was initially beyond his control, orchestrated by social media platforms and the network effects created by other content creators (TRT, 2024). His subsequent posts, reaching 46 million views, illustrate how an initial unplanned trigger can be algorithmically amplified and then strategically maintained.

b. Semi-Planned Celebrity Design: Veysel Mutlu, Cizreli Mehmet and Kandirali Ferdi exhibit a mixed trajectory. Their initial rise was likely accidental or community-driven, but they subsequently engaged in deliberate content production to sustain their celebrity. The case of Cizreli Mehmet is particularly illustrative: after a video went viral, he was invited to perform with Anne Marie (YesilGazete, 2017). His desire to pursue performance suggests an ex post facto (after the fact) self-brokerage strategy. Kandirali Ferdi, whose celebrity is "not entirely under his control," continues to perform in a "fun manner" to engage his followers, demonstrating a conscious effort to align with platform engagement metrics despite the unintentional nature of his initial visibility.

d. Planned Celebrity Design: This category, including Oyku Berk Gurman, Mahsun Karaca (Röportaj Adam) (Yıldırım, 2025), Baris Ozcan, and Nusret Gökçe (Salt Bae), represents the traditional, commercial model of celebrity adapted to the digital environment. Nusret Gokce's success is an example of calculated, globally-focused self-brokerage. His content production -specifically the "Salt Bae" performance- is a commercial strategy that utilizes platform aesthetics and virality cycles (Instagram.com, 2025). This case confirms that platforms are effective tools for global content distribution when strategically aligned with commercial interests. A distinct example of planned content creation, Baris Ozcan employs educational, artistic, and technological content, strategically cultivating a "storyteller" persona since 2014. His millions of subscribers on YouTube demonstrate a successful long-term strategy of adhering to platform-favorable content formats (long-form video, high production value) and aligning with a positive, inspirational platform discourse. Mahir Cagri also stands out in this category as one of the first internet celebrities. Unlike others, Cagri reached a wide audience not through a highly followed social media platform, but through an internet blog.

As conceptualized by Ritzer (2003), glocalization involves the intertwining of local particularities with global circulation mechanisms. The celebrities selected for analysis here utilize local characteristics -regional gestures, culturally ingrained humor, musical traditions, and aesthetic styles- as a resource that gains global significance through platform infrastructures. This finding underscores that local identity is algorithmically revalorized within the global attention economy. All ten figures, irrespective of their celebrity design, utilized social media to achieve glocal status. Their content, rich in local cultural references (e.g., halay from Hakkari, specific performance styles, local humor), was successfully translated and amplified across global channels (YouTube, Instagram). The findings confirm that this global dissemination is not purely organic but depends on infrastructural elements such as algorithmic recommendation, cross-platform sharing, and audience engagement metrics, all controlled by the platform architecture (Ritzer, 2003, p. 194).

3.2. Analysis: The Dual Nature of Digital Brokerage

Drawing on the conceptual framework discussed in the literature, the empirical findings can be interpreted through three interrelated eachother analytical lenses: algorithmic governance, commercial platform logic, and the restructuring of brokerage power. The preceding findings provide substantial evidence that the celebrity economy in the digital age operates under a dual system of intermediation, validating the study's central hypothesis that power brokerage has not disappeared but merely transformed. The analysis below systematically separates the role of the platform (infrastructural brokerage) from the continued, albeit modified, function of human actors.

3.2.1 The Platform as the Algorithmic and Infrastructural Broker

The most significant analytical inference from the glocal celebrity trajectories is the definitive shift of power from personal patronage (the traditional human broker) to infrastructural governance (the social media platform). Platforms, as observed in the literature, are not neutral intermediaries but socio-technical systems governed by corporate, algorithmic, and data-driven logics (Dijck & Poell, 2013).

a. Algorithmic Gatekeeping: For "Planned" figures like Nusret and Baris Ozcan, the platform's algorithms serve as a filter and an amplifier. Their success is contingent upon compliance with platform norms and algorithmic expectations (Neuman, 2013). Nusret's highly stylized, repeatable content (the Salt Bae ritual) is perfectly suited for cross-platform dissemination and virality cycles, the engine of algorithmic amplification (Ritzer, 2003). Baris Ozcan's choice of long-form, educational, and professionally produced content on YouTube aligns directly with the platform's monetization and advertising models, which prioritize high-quality, brand-safe content (Fuchs & Chandler, 2021). The platforms, therefore, act as brokers by dictating permissible content formats and determining which posts are amplified or suppressed, replacing the traditional editor or producer. This situation is strongly reflected in the data, as Dijck and Poell (2013) describe platforms as socio-technical gatekeepers. Now, algorithms, not human agents, decide which content will be amplified or marginalized. The tendency for celebrities' visibility to be disproportionately dependent on one or two successful viral videos demonstrates the selective amplification function of platform algorithms. This creates a structural gatekeeping mechanism similar to the hierarchical power exercised by traditional celebrity agents (Bilge, 2023; Demirağ, 2010).

b. Data-Driven Commercial Interests: The rise of glocal figures demonstrates how local culture is commodified through platform architecture. Figures like Sofi Omer and Yusuf Dikec, whose content

is authentic and spontaneously viral, generate massive amounts of user data and engagement (views, shares, comments). The platform, in its role as a broker, extracts surplus value from this user labor (Fuchs, 2014). The platform benefits from the glocal content by monetizing the attention and data flow, regardless of whether the creator intended the celebrity. This analysis confirms that the freedom of content creation is subtly controlled by the ideological and commercial interests of the platform owners, as hypothesized. In line with Fuchs and Chandler's (2021) argument that platforms operate as global advertising corporations, the findings show that celebrity production is deeply intertwined with the monetization of user data and engagement metrics. Planned content creators respond to this commercial logic by aligning their production strategies with platform affordances in order to optimize visibility.

c. Reconfigured Brokerage Power: While traditional power brokerage relied on interpersonal brokering, platforms now perform brokerage at an infrastructural scale. They define access to audiences, curate and rank visibility, impose content formats and norms, regulate monetization flows, shape public discourse through moderation and recommendation systems. Thus, the structural power once held by human intermediaries has been absorbed into the architecture of platform capitalism (Bräuchler et al., 2021; Paine, 1971).

3.2.2 The Persistence of Human and Community Brokerage

The analysis of "Unplanned" and "Semi-Planned" celebrity figures reveals a significant finding: the traditional human broker has been replaced not just by algorithms but also by a decentralized network of inadvertent and community-based human intermediaries.

a. Inadvertent Brokerage: The cases of Sofi Omer and Yusuf Dikec demonstrate that the initial leap to visibility was often orchestrated by third-party content creators (e.g., Keko Production, other world-famous figures). These figures, operating outside the formal brokerage system of traditional media, act as decentralized gatekeepers who identify, capture, and distribute content, effectively serving as the first layer of intermediation that primes the content for algorithmic virality. Their action reduces the information asymmetry for the platform's algorithm, enabling the content to be recognized and subsequently amplified.

b. Coexistence with Self-Brokerage: The "Semi-Planned" trajectory (Cizreli Mehmet, Kandıralı Ferdi) shows an immediate shift to self-brokerage upon achieving accidental celebrity. Once the platform's algorithm has validated the content with high engagement, the creator is compelled to consciously design their ongoing content (content style, frequency, engagement strategies) to sustain the visibility. This demonstrates the limited user autonomy (Neuman, 2013), as the initial celebrity only grants access to the stage, but the platform's continuous algorithmic expectation dictates the subsequent performance.

In summary, the digital celebrity journey is a multi-layered brokerage process: A spontaneous human act of creation or sharing (often by an inadvertent human broker) is fed into the platform, which then applies its infrastructural power (algorithmic and commercial criteria) to filter, amplify, and ultimately institutionalize the celebrity.

3.3. Discussion

The core finding that platforms and their algorithms function as the new, institutional power brokers (Kurt, 2020) is strongly supported by the glocal trajectories of the Turkish internet celebrities. The traditional, human-centric model of brokerage, which relied on personal authority, elite networks, and discretion (Bilge, 2023; Demirag, 2010), has been largely supplanted by a system based on algorithmic, infrastructural, and opaque mechanisms.

In the mass media era, celebrity was a scarce resource controlled by a narrow elite (Bilge, 2023). The digital age, while appearing to disrupt this hierarchy, has merely replaced one form of scarcity with another. The modern scarce resource is not access to the channel but algorithmic amplification. Even figures with "unplanned" celebrity, like Yusuf Dikec, ultimately have their visibility sustained or suppressed by the platform's algorithmic preferences, which reflect commercial, advertising, and corporate interests (Dede, 2024; Fuchs & Chandler, 2021). The platform, therefore, acts as a decentralized but globally powerful intermediary that orchestrates the entire cycle of content production, circulation, and monetization (Bilge, 2023; Bräuchler et al., 2021).

The ideological and political dimensions of platform governance become evident when cases such as Cambridge Analytica are considered (BBC, 2019). Platforms do not simply distribute content; they

structure visibility, influence discourse, and condition public behavior (Dede, 2024, pp. 36-39). Thus, power brokerage in the digital age is not only an economic mechanism but a sociopolitical system of power.

The study's results directly address the tension between the myth of democratization (Web 2.0 rhetoric of open participation and user agency) and the reality of corporate control. The glocal celebrity phenomenon is often cited as evidence of meritocracy, where local talent can bypass traditional institutions (Marshall, 2005). However, the analysis shows that the ability to transcend local boundaries and achieve global reach is not a function of unmediated communication; it is a function of successful interaction with the platform's institutional governance. Although early digital discourse celebrated the rise of prosumers and the liberation from institutional media control (Mutlu & Bazarci, 2017), the empirical evidence reveals that celebrity remains highly dependent on opaque algorithmic processes. Opportunities for visibility remain unequal and unpredictable, undermining the myth of democratization.

The finding that inadvertent human brokers (e.g., Keko Production, other content creators) are crucial in the initial stage of "unplanned" celebrity does not negate the platform's ultimate power; rather, it highlights the platform's ability to successfully offload its gatekeeping labor onto its users. The platform selectively amplifies content that has already been validated by user engagement, turning every user who shares or amplifies content into a potential, unpaid intermediary. This is a highly efficient form of control, encapsulated by the metaphor: users have limitless creative freedom, but only within the parameters determined by the platforms' interests (Hughes, 2024).

The globalization of content produced in Türkiye confirms the concept put forward by Ritzer (2003) as a form of cultural hybridization adapted to global consumption. The platform acts as the mechanism that selects and standardizes local content (e.g., reducing a long halay ritual to a short, shareable video format) to ensure its compatibility with global, high-speed circulation. This standardization imposes structural constraints on creators, making celebrity contingent on Data-driven content governance and Platform-dependent identities (Fuchs, 2014).

The theoretical implication is clear: the transition to digital media represents not a linear dispersion of power but a radical restructuring of power mechanisms (Bilge, 2023; Kurt, 2020). The broker is no longer the editor who demands content change face to face, but the opaque, institutionalized algorithm whose constraints are felt through monetization thresholds, content restriction, and differential visibility (Dede, 2024). Therefore, the study concludes that contemporary power brokerage is an inherent and systematic feature of platform capitalism, institutionalized within the technology itself to ensure the monetization of user-generated glocal content. Local cultural expressions achieve global reach only when they align with the algorithmic logic of platforms. This suggests that globalization is not purely organic; rather, it is shaped by the platform's technical and commercial infrastructures, which act as filters determining what forms of locality are amplified (Ritzer, 2003).

The synthesis presented in this section demonstrates that although traditional human brokers have receded from the celebrity economy, brokerage itself persists in a transformed, technologically embedded form. Social media platforms now operate as algorithmic, infrastructural, and commercial intermediaries, determining the conditions under which glocal figures emerge, circulate, and sustain visibility.

Conclusion

This study investigated whether -and in what form- the traditional, human-centered model of power brokerage has persisted in the era of social media. The empirical findings produce three interrelated conclusions. First, the emergence of glocal celebrities demonstrates that local cultural expressions can achieve global reach through platform-mediated amplification; visibility is therefore no longer determined exclusively by traditional media gatekeepers. Second, however, this apparent democratization is structurally constrained: platform infrastructures -algorithmic recommendation systems, content-format affordances, monetization rules, and data-extractive commercial logics-operate as institutionalized intermediaries that shape which content is amplified, suppressed, or monetized. Third, human brokerage has not entirely disappeared but has been partially reconfigured: inadvertent third-party sharers and deliberate self-brokering strategies coexist with platform governance to produce celebrity trajectories.

According to answering the research question celebrity brokerage has not vanished; it has changed form. The centralizing authority once exercised by the aforementioned human agents has been redistributed within a socio-technical community where platform algorithms and business models perform large-scale gatekeeping and value extraction. Meanwhile, decentralized human actors such as other users, content curators, and influencers occasionally function as proximate agents feeding the algorithmic systems. This hybrid arrangement preserves asymmetries of visibility and power even as it disperses the loci of mediation.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. Theoretically, it reframes brokerage as an infrastructural and algorithmic phenomenon rather than solely a personal or institutional patronage relation. This shift invites scholars to treat platforms themselves as active brokers within celebrity economies. Methodologically, combining a field-survey–informed purposive sample with triangulated document and content analysis demonstrates a feasible approach for studying platform-mediated celebrity where proprietary algorithmic data are unavailable. Practically, the results highlight some urgent considerations for policy and platform design. These include greater transparency regarding recommendation and moderation criteria, clearer and fairer monetization methods for content creators, and stronger data protection and approval mechanisms to prevent the commercialization of unpaid user labor.

The study also acknowledges its limits. Analysis was restricted to high-engagement public posts and to a specific temporal window and national context (Turkiye), so findings may not generalize across all platform ecosystems, smaller creator tiers, or more recent algorithmic changes. Moreover, because of platform internals remain proprietary, causal claims about algorithmic decision-making are inferred from observable outcomes rather than direct access to platform data. Future research should extend this work by conducting comparative cross-national and cross-platform studies, combining qualitative analyses with platform-provided metrics where available, and investigating the policy impacts of algorithmic transparency initiatives on creators' autonomy.

The key findings can be summarized in the following points:

- a. Intermediation has shifted from personal patronage to infrastructural governance.
- b. While traditional intermediaries rely on personal networks, platforms rely on socio-technical architectures to curate, filter, and disseminate content.
- c. Power asymmetry has intensified.
- d. Platform owners (global corporations) have far greater control over celebrity, visibility, and public discourse than individual intermediaries.
- e. Celebrity continues to be manufactured, rather than emerge naturally.
- f. Even in decentralized environments, celebrity relies on systemic mechanisms (hashtags, trend algorithms, cross-platform dissemination) rather than pure merit.
- g. Global figures illustrate the new intermediation model. Their trajectories reveal how local content circulates globally, not just through users, but through platforms.
- h. Platform capitalism embeds celebrity within ideological and commercial agendas.

In sum, the promise that social media would eliminate intermediaries and deliver unmediated democratization of celebrity is only partially fulfilled. Platforms have redistributed and institutionalized brokerage functions: they enable unprecedented opportunities for glocal visibility while simultaneously embedding new, less-visible mechanisms of selection and extraction. Therefore, understanding contemporary celebrity requires considering both the human networks that generate attention and the platform architectures that institutionalize it.

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