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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: COMPARISON OF AKP AND CHP'S FACEBOOK COMMENTS IN THE LOCAL ELECTIONS OF 30 MARCH 2014

Abstract:

The developments in the field of internet and computers have paved the way for the formation of social media and a new media was born. Also, these developments created new platforms for communication. Rapid changes have occurred especially in the last decade. These changes have led social media to develop and pervade into every aspect of our life. In this respect the web 2-based internet has offered people new social environments where they can share their ideas, feelings and knowledge and even their creativity.

Particularly, these developments in social media were seen for politicians as a new field of propaganda and political communication. For this reason, social media platforms are used as an important means for political advertising in election campaigns. This situation arising as a result of technological developments has given rise to the widespread appearance of political communication in social media platforms. The use of social media becomes highly important for politicians in political campaigns. Therefore, the notion of 'digital politics' and 'online politics' have found a place in the political and academic literature.

□This study is an examination of the working of campaigns taking place in social media during the 30 March 2014 local elections in Turkey. The use of Facebook in political campaigns as a means of political communication is analyzed using the content analysis method. In this way, the political discourses of AKP and CHP are compared on the basis of their campaigns in the last local elections.

Keywords:

Political Communication, Social Media, Local Elections

JEL Classification: D72

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of social media as a means of political communication on the last local elections in Turkey. For his purpose, relevant entries in facebook from February 13 to March 28 are analyzed. The method applied is comparative content analysis. Two Turkish political parties, with rival ideologies, are selected as subjects of comparison, RPP (Republican People's Party) and JDP (Justice and Development Party). Political communication messages of the candidates of RPP and JDP in Edirne are taken as samples of analysis. The messages were shared by the candidates on their official facebook pages: on www.facebook.com/recepgurkanchp (by RPP's candidate) and on www.facebook.com/ahmetgunsen1 (by JDP's candidate).

BACKGROUND

Social media such as blogs, online chat, RSS, social networking sites, social bookmarking, forums, podcasts, e-mail chains, virtual worlds, wikis are interactive communication environments on the Internet, which are easy to use and open to participation.¹ The Internet, which has entered into our lives via computers, has provided us with social platforms and these social platforms have led to a more prevalent use of the Internet in turn.

The importance of social media stems from the fact that it allows its users to share information, ideas, feelings and interests. The most important facet of areas of common sharing is their being areas of interaction. Thanks to these interaction areas, people cease to feel intellectually or sentimentally isolated.

Today, people use social media to meet their needs for communication, research, entertainment, etc. This makes social media an important means of communication. Social media users may easily reach whatever they are looking for.

According to Ward, contrary to traditional media barring their users from content creation and development, social media is a media allowing for an effective participation of its reader.² Palmer describes social media as online applications, platforms providing interaction and cooperation, as well as the possibility of sharing

¹ www.spannerworks.com/ebooks 5

² Ward, S. (2012) Social Media Definition. Small Business: Canada. 22.03.2102 date, <http://sbinfoCanada.about.com/od/socialmedia/g/socialmedia.htm>.

content.³ Hatipoğlu views social media as a huge playground where ideas, texts, digital assets, brands, products, and opportunities are presented, discussed, praised, or criticized.⁴

The following table shows the increase in the use of social media over five-year periods since 1995.

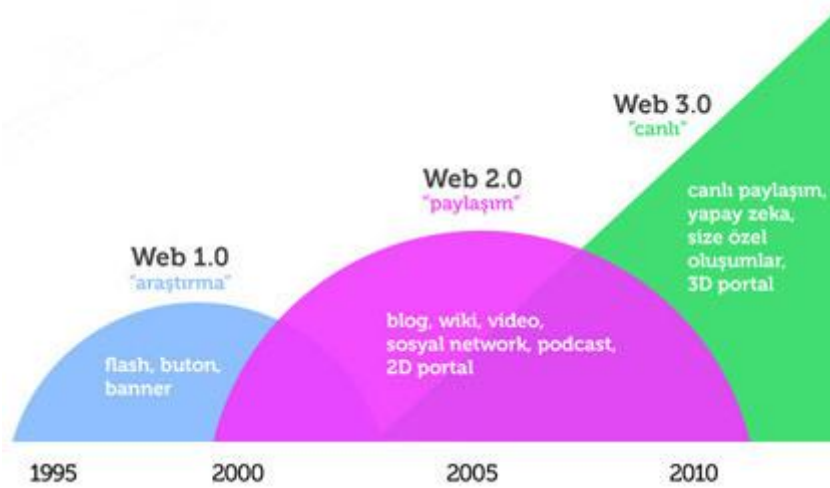


Table1: Overview of the development of social media development.⁵

Nowadays social media is important as it meets people's material and spiritual needs such as communication, shopping, emotional satisfaction, and intellectual development. Individuals can share their momentary thoughts and feelings and can enter into discussions that result in new ideas. In a sense, social media allows for an experience of the real life in a virtual environment.⁶

Social media users are called 'millennium people'. The dates of birth of these people vary between 1978 and 1994. The number of online users between the ages of 16 and 32 is continuously on rise. 75% of social media users of the millenium group navigate through the social media sites about 23 minutes every day. 59% of the rest read the news from the internet.⁷

People using social media can easily reach video sharing sites, can share videos and can download their favorite videos. In the same way, people can share

³ Palmer, A., Koenig-Lewis, N. (2009). "An experiential, social network-based approach to direct marketing", *Direct Marketing: An International Journal*, 3 (3), 162–167.

⁴ Hatipoğlu, H. B. (2009), "Sosyal Medya ve Ticaret Hayatına Etkileri" 16.03.2012 tarihinde <http://www.cio-club.net/Makaleler/PDF>.

⁵ www.Royalpingdom.com.

⁶ Akkan, E. and S. Bozyiğit, (2012) "The importance of the Internet in Tourism Marketing: A Study on Hospitality Industry in the TRNC, 1 East Mediterranean Tourism Symposium, University of Ages

⁷ www.pingdom.com

their pictures, communicate their ideas and common interests and set a date to meet each other in social media sites. Of these, Facebook is the most popular. The number of Facebook members has exceeded 800 million people. Facebook serves in 70 different, offering both personal and institutional sharing options. More than 80% of Facebook members are outside the United States.⁸ According to 2014 data, Turkey ranks 4th in the world for the number of Facebook users.

#	Country	Users
1.	United States	154 040 460
2.	Indonesia	39 568 620
3.	India	33 587 640
4.	Turkey	29 951 960
5.	United Kingdom	29 942 160

Tablo 2: The top five countries of the use of Facebook. (cf. <http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/207-turkey-is-facebook-world-country-no-4> 6.08.2014, 11:01)

The percentage of Facebook users in Turkey is increasing by 1% every year.⁹

#	Country	Users	Growth	Pen.
4.	Turkey	29 951 960	+254 480 +0.86% ↑	38.50%

Table 3: The ratio of Facebook users in Turkey. (cf. <http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/207-turkey-is-facebook-world-country-amino-4>, 6.08.2014, has been 11:03 hours)

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

The politicization of the content of communication is what makes "political communication." This notion needs to be addressed in the lights of concepts of "sovereignty", "management", "government" and "power. Political communication serves a particular purpose. It strives to persuade the target audience in a direction chosen by the sovereign. The ideological jargon used for persuasion is determined by the by the person engaged in politics and his/her companions. As for the target audience, they are ready to receive and accept the messages sent without thinking in

⁸ <http://ipad.about.com/bio/Daniel-Nations-92025.htm>

⁹ <http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/207-turkey-is-facebook-world-country-no-4>, 6.08.2014, hour 11:03.

the cultural context they live in. Sometimes, the reception is realized by the mediation of opinion leaders. In both cases, the audience is affected and manipulated.

Political communication is not a process of communication carried out only during elections held every four-year. As pointed out by Öztuğ, the duration of political communication must be taken as the political campaign – the election period – and the non-election period.¹⁰ Swanson describes political communication as the paradigm of convincing voters.¹¹ It would unduly narrow down its scope to define political communication as a paradigm of convincing voters during elections or to consider it as electoral communication. Aziz refers to the concept of political communication as a type of communication carried out with various communication means and techniques in order to impose certain ideological aims on social groups, masses, countries or blocks and thereby to realize these aims when necessary.¹² Also, opposing the positivist-empirical approach confining political communication to an electoral process or voting behavior she adds that the scope of political communication covers every area of the society beyond voting and election as an integral part of the behavior of families, economy, culture and all the political institutions in daily life.¹³

In short, political communication is a type of communication produced again and again in both periods of elections and non-election in every part of the society through the dominating ideology using many different in a continuous manner. It is the mass media that is the major instrument used for producing such a form of communication in today's world.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Local elections are the most important instruments for maintain a healthy democratic government. Hence, local governments, as governing units where people and the political power or parties are closest to each other, bear particular importance for the dominant political power. The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey requires the decision-making bodies of local governments to be elected by people. The door has been left open for the executive branches excluding the decision-making bodies (e.g. the governor) to be assigned by the central government.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ferruh Öztuğ, (2004), *Political Communication Manager*, MediaCat Publications, Istanbul, p.18

¹¹ Dan Nimmo and David L. Swanson, (1990), “ *The Field of Political Communication; Beyond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm*, *New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book*, . Newbury Park: Sage, s. 8.

¹² Aysel Aziz, (2003), *Political Communication*, Nobel Publications, Ankara, p.3

¹³ Aysel Aziz, *ibid*, p. 117

¹⁴ Bilal Eryılmaz, *Public Administration*, Lecturer Publishing, London, (2010), p.139

Local elections in Turkey are conducted in accordance with the principles stated by the Law Concerning the Election of Local Authorities and Councils and of the Commission of Elders. According to Article 1 of the law, local elections held in Turkey fall into three categories: the election of members of the provincial council, the election of the mayor and the city council and the election of the members of the village council and the commission and elders.¹⁵ In the local elections in Turkey, it is crucial for the local government representatives elected to represent the people of that region and to respond to their needs and demands.

TURKEY 30 MART 2014 LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS AND SAMPLE EDİRNE

The local elections held in Turkey on 30 March 2014 were marked by two major parties. One of them is RPP, which the oldest party in Turkey. The other is JDP, the youngest party in Turkey.

According to the research done by KONDA, the demographic features of the voters of the 30 March Elections are crucial for understanding their voting behaviors. Speaking in terms of gender, 51% of the women and 49% of the men voted for JDP and 54% of the women and 46% of the men voted for RPP. In educational terms the picture is as follows. 67%, 23% and 10% of the JDP votes are graduates of primary schools, of high schools and of universities, respectively. As for the RPP voters, the percentages the primary school, high school and university graduates are, respectively, 43%, 35% and 22%. As for the monthly income levels, we see that %8 of the JDP voters earn around 700 TL, %37 of them earn between 701 and 1200 TL and 35% earn between 1201 and 2000 TL. The monthly income levels for the RPP voters are 700 TL for 6%, 701-1200 TL for 23% and 1201-2000 for 36%.¹⁶

Edirne ranks 27th among 81 provinces according to the 2012 Developmental Index of the Provinces. The statistical reports by the State Statistics Institute about the distribution of the national gross product across the provinces indicate similar results. According to these statistical reports, the national gross product per capita in Edirne amounts to 112% of the average level of the country and this places Edirne on the rank of 17th among the provinces.¹⁷ The statistical data published by the Ministry of Education show that the ratio of literacy is higher than the average level of literacy in

¹⁵ The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey.

¹⁶ KONDA, the Voter Analysis After the 30 March Local Elections, 16 April 2014, p. 15.

¹⁷ http://www.edirneozelidare.gov.tr/default_B0.aspx?content=443.4.09.2014, hour 15:10.

Turkey. The literacy among the Turkish women seems to be higher than the average. However, when it comes to higher education, the Turkish women lag 2 points behind the average level in Turkey.¹⁸

In short, there is a considerable difference between the JDP voters and the RPP voters in terms of their levels of education and income. As the levels go down, people tend to vote JDP and as they rise people get more likely to vote RPP.¹⁹ Edirne serves as a good example of such tendencies as a city where people are comparatively richer and more educated.

CONTENT ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE



Date 2014	REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (RPP)	Date 2014	JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (JDP)
14 February	Edirne together we aspire to govern ...	13 February	Edirne Change Readiness, I'm ready, ready for my team, my project is ready
18 February	The unifying power of Edirne	24 February	Always Nations. Always Service
18 February	Our doors will be open to everyone ...	26 February	I'm Ready, My Team is ready, My Projects is Ready, our Edirne is Change Readiness ...
23 February	Everyone said it would be the right one when it comes to Edirne ... We are coming to bring the concept of Edirne ... More beautiful Edirne, Edirne richer, happier coming to Edirne ... In the presence of the Union, comes to live in a free form ...	6 March	Edirne young people to work in their hometown ... Immigration will not have to... Tourism development will be invested ... Edirne. Our antebellum history, culture and nature tourism and cultural center of the Balkans, the new will. Will open a new boutique hotel in Edirne ... New job opportunities will increase tourism revenues will occur ... Edirne ...
1 March	In the presence of wealth, in the free form	8 March	I'll blow this town ...
3 March	Freethinkers, as an individual, existing and Edirne, depending on the country, the guardian of Atatürk Principles and Revolution,	11 March	Edirne to the poor, unemployed, of Edirne Edirne win win ...

¹⁸ TR21 and Turkey, the ratios of preschool education, the Statistics of National Education, NEM, 2010-2011/2009-2010.

¹⁹ KONDA, Ibid p. 17.

5 March	Everything for a better Edirne ...	12 March	How much longer it will be our Adrianople? Our children how much you will work out of town? Edirne you how much we will deal with transportation problems? How much infrastructure and superstructure will be our problem?
6 March	Our Edirne, Europe's shining star in our power to make the promise to work ...	13 March	Anytime I'll be there for you ...
9 March	My respects to all citizens who believe in us and trusting offers, our Adrianople in our power to make Europe's shining star promise to work ...	14 March	Edirnes' economy will be alive and Develop
10 March	Municipal debt and other financial discipline and all our problems will solve by completing our process of institutionalization.	15 March	Urban transport will be cheaper in Edirne.
12 March	To farmers in the field to lay claim to	18 March	My brother got the project for the students.
16 March	CHP for everyone out there ...	18 March	A nation stands upright ...
16 March	Not to vote, hearts aspire to. Employees to choose from, but for the future of the employees will continue to be ...	20 March	EDİRNE a modern city infrastructure problems solved
18 March	Livable for an enviable Edirne, Edirne for a Democratic Transparent Accountable participants meet at the Republican People's Party.	21 March	One plane will be landing this city, Fast Train Future, the economy will improve, will end up unemployed in Edirne, Edirne Edirne to win to win!
18 March	We love to Edirne. We will com efor serving. Bu yola yüreğimizi koyduk.Ya başaracağız.	22 March	I'm ready to stand up Edirne, again are you ready?
19 March	More beautiful, more rich in Edirne, Edirne happier for our goals will perform.	24 March	Let's not waste more than 5 years 5 minutes, stop and think ...
19 March	We are all thieves, all of the rogue, all in pursuit of corrupt officials. No matter where we will stick to the sides ...	27 March	The poor and the unemployed will stay in Edirne, Edirne Will Win...

19 March	Edirne to deserve the favor of the people will work harder. We will continue to serve. Everything is more beautiful and richer for Edirne ...	27 March	Economy in Edirne will Develop Edirne will be alive!
20 March	You'll grow with the support of Edirne.	27 March	No obstacles in front of people with disabilities to stay!
21 March	Edirne's put stones on the stone will be next. More beautiful, together we will build a richer Adrianople.	27 March	Edirne Youth Migration will not have to!
21 March	We love Edirne. Our goal is common ... common ... we love all the days I wish lucrative.	27 March	There is much to do for young people!
22 March	Lawlessness, theft, acts of corruption, our Freedom on March 30, we will give our answer to those constraints.	27 March	Our Edirne Infrastructure Issues Will Be Resolved a modern city!
23 Mart	Hand in hand together we will manage to Edirne. Happy, peaceful Edirne will be a city where people live	28 March	Problems of Edirne all I know ... I'm coming with this team to solve problems!
25 March	More beautiful, richer, happier Adrianople will succeed together.	28 March	Together we will bring change to Edirne.
26 March	I will try to Edirne. Edirne Services will give deserved.	28 Mart	Dear edirneli the 5 Minute Stop and Think! Let's not lose more than 5 years ...
27 March	Our unity is in progress. Our people, the working people will continue to be with our brothers and sisters.	29 March	5 Minutes Stop and Think! Let's not lose more than 5 years!
28 March	Valuable for us all. We will not alienate anyone. In existence in unity, we will live in a free format.		-----
29 March	Not me, we are. We will not succeed unless we will never be anything. In Edirne'yi, Turkey to Are you ready to manage all together.		-----
30 March	We can have a beautiful future together. The day we arrived it began the struggle. Go to the polls. Use your vote. Take control of the future.		-----
30 March	Modern Edirne Modern President		-----

1.  REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (RPP) 34.619% 36,9
2.  JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT (JDP) 28.127% 29,9

CONCLUSION

Social media, especially Facebook, is prevalently used in Turkey. For this reason, we have called attention to the importance of using social media in political communication campaigns in this country. In fact, Turkish politicians use social media in both local and general elections as much as they can. Besides, social media is effectively used in Turkey also in non-electoral political communication. This paper highlights these facts and offer a list of political slogans that two competing parties expressed in social media in the last local elections in Turkey.

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