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The Social Media Revolution in Political Communication: A Case Study about the Turkish Local Elections of March 2019

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Abstract

Social media started to shape people's lives. Social media brought a revolution in all the markets. This includes media, music, education and politics too. By the invention of web 2.0 every sector starts using social media as new type of communication in the 2010s. This new type of communication start dominating especially the new generation who start using social media more than the previous generations. The politicians start using social media as well as the others who want to attract the attention of their audience. This paper is about how politicians shape their communication by using social media in their promotion and marketing in the elections. In the first part of the paper there is a conceptual research about social media term and its updated specifications. In the second part of the paper the use of social media in politics and elections is explored historically with examples and case studies from the world. How do the politicians use social media in their election campaigns? What kind of interaction do they prefer? The research part of the paper contains the municipal elections that were done in Turkey in the 31st of March 2019. The research explores the social media use of the winners and losers of municipal elections done it Turkey in the two big cities İstanbul and Ankara. The research gives a detailed descriptive analyse of how the Turkish politicians used social media interaction in their competition in the local elections.

Keywords: Facebook, Politics, Politic Campaigns, Social Media, Turkey, Twitter.

Introduction

Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, and Seymour (2011) argue that that the emergence of social media is not a new phenomenon since human beings have always developed the technologies that the ease the process of communicating with each other. the era of social media began in 2006, when Myspace became the most popular social networking site in the united states. Other social networking sites had emerged and fallen into oblivion prior to 2006, but none had shown the promise of widespread adoption the way Myspace did. Facebook overtook MySpace as the most popular social networking site in 2008. Facebook had launched in 2004, but it was only restricted to Harvard students at first, and later to college students in the United States, before it extended to all members of the public above 13 years of age. Statista points out that the most popular social networks as of January 2019 were Facebook with 2.2 billion users, followed by YouTube with 1.9 billion users, and then WhatsApp, which has 1 billion users. Facebook messenger had 1.3 billion users WeChat, a Chinese social network site had 1.083 billion users and Instagram had 1 billion users.

**Figure 1.** *Social Media Platforms and their Penetration*
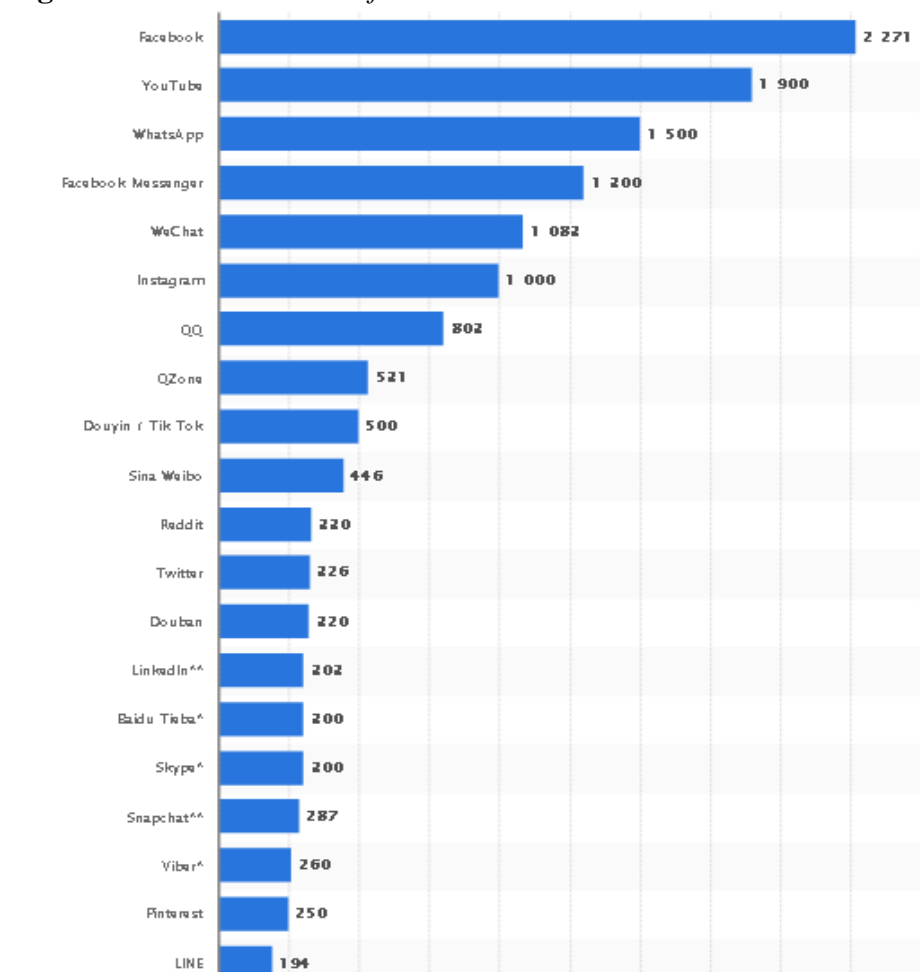
Source: Statista

Facebook is the most widely used social network, which gives the company significant clout when one notes that Facebook Inc. owns both Facebook Messenger and Instagram. In the recent past, the company has faced significant challenges relating to privacy concerns and the role that the platform plays in enhancing democratic governance. Revelations emerged that detailed that Russian actors used the platform to sow disinformation and undermine the democratic process during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States.

One of the most important facts about Facebook is that Facebook dominates the social media market. Facebook owns Whatsapp, messenger and Instagram. The total numbers of people using these four platforms are about 2.7 billion people.

Figure 2. *Facebook's Social Media Dominance*
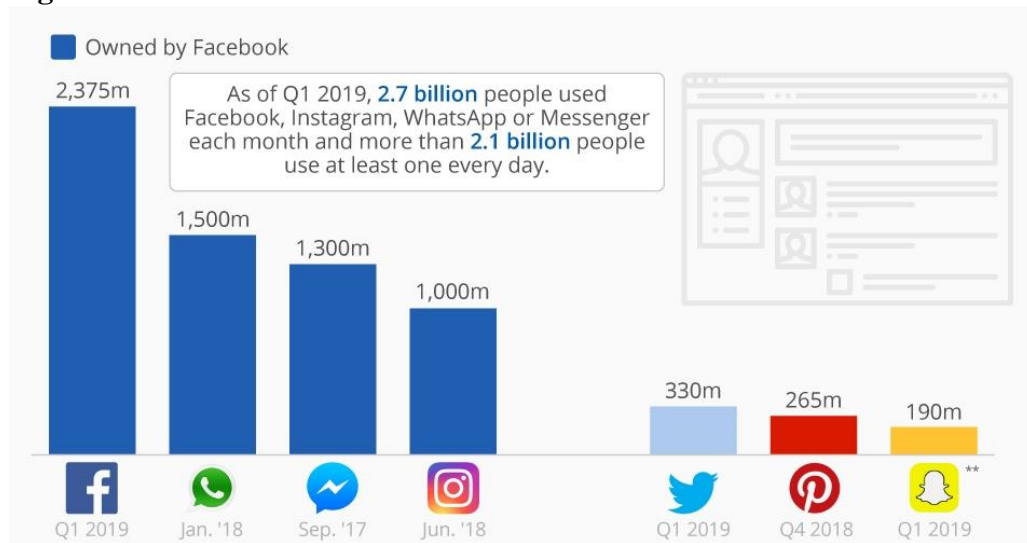
Source: Statista

Twitter, which is a robust platform for political debates, despite its small number of users compared to Facebook, has taken proactive action to prevent the use of the platform for political disinformation. Twitter and Facebook are the most widely used platforms in elections and by politicians. Research has shown that the two platforms have failed in the aspiration that they would raise the level of bipartisan dialogue. Instead, users in both sites tend to associate with people and ideas of similar ideological orientation, which traps them in an echo chamber (Christopher A. Bail, Twitter's Flawed Solution to Political Polarization).

Figure 3. *Number of Global Social Media Users Projected to 2021*
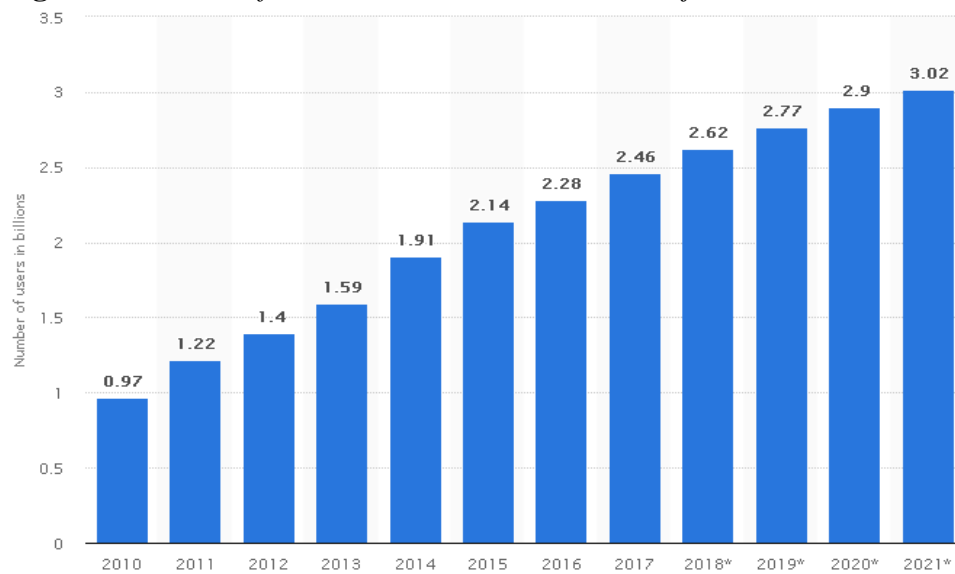
Source: Statista

Statista reports that the number of global social media users continues to grow. Statista estimates that in 2019, the world will have 2.77 billion, a growth from 2.46 billion users recorded in 2017. The use of social networking sites is highly popular, as measured by engagement rates. The number of social media users will grow continually with growing internet and mobile penetration across the world. North America leads the world in the number of social media users, as social networking sites have 66 percentage penetrations in the region. In 2016, Statista reports that 81 percentages of the people in the United States had a profile on a social networking site. Similarly, the United Kingdom had a social media penetration rate of 58 percentages, with Facebook reaching of adult internet users in the United Kingdom. Women in the United Kingdom have a higher likelihood of using social networking sites compared to males. In 2015, 11 percentage more women had social media profiles compared to males. The highest rate of social media penetration is among young people even though the proportion of people above 34 years who have a presence on social networks is growing. The research shows that 85 percentages of people on Facebook live outside of the United States and Canada. In terms of gender, 56 percentages of Facebook users are males while 42 percentages are females. As of 2017, 24 percentages of women between 18-34 years constitute Facebook's global active users compared to 35 percentages of males between 18-34 years. studies report that 79 percentage of twitter users live outside the united states, with 24 percentage of male internet users being twitter users and 21 percentage of female internet users using the -platform. the largest demographic for twitter users is individuals between 18-29 years, who comprise 37 percentage of users of the platforms and only 25 percentage of twitter users being between 30-49 years. College students are the largest growing demographic on LinkedIn, which is the largest social media site for professionals. For YouTube, 55 percentages of users are male and 45 percentages are females, with the platform

growing among users above 35 years faster than any other adult category. For Instagram, 68 percentages of users are females, with 38 percentages of internet users using Instagram compared to 26 percentages of all male internet users. Statistics show that 59 percentages of internet users between 18-29 years use Instagram and 33 percentages of internet users between 30-49 years using Instagram. For Snapchat, 43 percentages of users are in North America and 33 percentages are in Europe, with 50 percentages of users being below 25 years, and 23 percentages of users being high school students. the largest demographic on Snapchat is the age bracket 18-24 years, with the bracket of 25-34 years comprising 26 percentage of all Snapchat users.

The other advantage of social media is that it provides a platform that infuses discipline and coordination in the affairs of political movements. Political movements have the advantage to organize a significant number of individuals without the need for traditional systems of management and control. This has allowed larger political movements to assume the roles that require coordinated actions such as protest movements and run campaigns in the public media. These were the roles that have traditionally been carried out by formal organizations.

Governments should also understand that limiting technologies work against their growth. In this case, they may fail to utilize technologies that can be used to drive both political and economic coordination of actions. This may lead to the creation of opportunities for investments and have the potential to expand the markets to which their people have access to. Investing in social media is a strategy that will ensure that self-governance is promoted and perfected rather than threatened.

Differences between technological determinism (TD) and social construction of technology (SCOT) include that TD holds that technology considerably influences the society, and society does not have any influence on technology. SCOT however holds that society considerably influences technology. TD argues that only technological factors and not social; influences determine whether a technology will fail or will be successful. SCOT argues that social factors and influences largely determine whether a technology will fail or will be successful. TD further postulates that technologies are successful due to their inherent superiority and their success is evidence of their superiority while failed technologies are inherently inferior, even when we cannot perceive how.

SCOT postulates that successful technology or failed technologies can succeed or fail not just because of superiority and inferiority. TD moreover perceives that technological development takes place in a linear fashion with conception of technologies, their development and implementation. SCOT perceives that the development of technology takes place in a recursive manner. Social factors are used to refer to the manner in which developers of a technology attempt to shape the consumption of a technology, and the process of adoption, rejection or modification of the technology by users so that they use it or see it differently (Hofman and Novak, 2012, 23). This allows the technology to become a different artefact to various social groups due to their interpretive flexibility.

Both technology determinism and social construction of technology are historical and social theories that lack fixed answers and whose discussion has led

various perspectives on the complexity of social and technological advancement and change. Both of the theories are focused on causal relationships of cause and effect and they both face difficulty in isolation or distinguishing causes and effects. Both theories offer an independent variable explanation which allows them to make strong claims that are highly attractive to a large number of people. Their justification would make both theories significant in offering explanations and predicting theories. Both theories require simplification as there is great difficulty in isolation of single causes for any social processes and to offer proof of a factor as a primary determinant.

Social Media and Social Networking Sites

Social media refers to the strategy and the channels available for broadcasting while social networking sites refer to the tools that make it possible to connect with other people. Furthermore, Cohen (2009) reports that, "the difference is not just semantics but, in the features, and functions put into these websites by their creators which dictates the way they are to be used."

In fact, there are several differences between social media and social networking (Lilleker and Jackson 2013). One, social media refers to the media used in transmitting or sharing information with a large audience. In contrast, social networking is the action of engaging with people of common interest and building a relationship around a community of people. Bedell (2010) reported that another difference between social media and social networking is the communication style. Social media is simply a communication channel, and it does not mean the site or application that a user visits. In contrast, social networking refers to the two-way process of communication and engagement. The core of social networking is the act of conversation between users, which offers a basis for developing relationships.

Social Media Usage as a Tool of Politic Marketing

The campaign of barrack Obama is reputed to be the gold standard in the usage of social media in elections. The campaign of barrack Obama used digital analytics to continuously efforts at engaging the candidate's supporters. With the progress of the campaign, its email campaign became more effective and the conversion rates increased significantly. Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, Surowiec, and Baranowski (2014) explore the role of social media in the elections in Poland. They found that polish political parties have used social media to become more engaging and interactive with the electorate and to mobilise them. Polish political parties designed their online activities to inform supporters and to engage them on matters resonant to them. However, the authors argued that social media denied the polish electorate the same or more opportunities to participate in the political process as the offline campaigns did.

Political marketing emerged in the 1952 elections when Dwight Einsenhower sought the assistance of Thomas Rosser Reeves Jr., a seasoned advertising executive to help him shift his image from a military general to a potential civilian

commander-in-chief (Maarek, 2008). Thomas Rosser implemented direct marketing to sell Eisenhower's promises based on his "unique selling propositions" and he implemented targeted television advertising. The triumph of Eisenhower led to the embrace of political marketing and its expansion to exploit all types of audiovisual mass media to help a candidate every vote possible (Maarek, 2008). This paper explores the use of political marketing in the 2015 election in the United Kingdom.

Maarek (2008) notes that the dominance of political marketing has influenced the field of election campaigns in several ways. To begin with, political marketing has shifted the focus of election campaigns to swing voters, from the perception that they have a significant influence on election outcomes. The outcomes of the process are that it has depoliticized politics. The need to target swing voters, who tend to have least interest in politics leads parties to abandon the core of their political campaigns and resort to populism. Furthermore, political consultants and public opinion results have forced many politicians to withdraw from some of the decisions deemed unpopular.

The analysis of election campaigns in the United Kingdom show that parties designed their political communication and products based on market intelligence. Gibson and Römmele (2009) point out that election campaigns in the United Kingdom comprise of national elections and a series of local elections. The national focus of election derives from the trend of voting patterns following party lines because a party needs a majority of members in the House of Commons in order to form a government. Political marketing is significantly involved in local elections that are likely to change from one party to another in different elections. Such local campaigns target marginal constituencies who are likely to vote but have low affiliation to a political side, which makes them highly vulnerable to persuasion (Wring & Deacon, 2010). National and local elections in the United Kingdom follow a hypermedia strategy, meaning that political communication uses all forms of media to deliver messages to the broadest group of voters, while using new technologies to target specific group of voters.

The 2015 general elections in the United Kingdom was distinct in several ways. One, Dermody (2015) demonstrates that the major political parties felt the pressure to differentiate themselves in the face of economic recovery after the recession that had stagnated growth. The second factor that made the 2015 general election unique was the coalition government, and the failure to differentiate themselves and project competence would have meant that Labour and the Conservatives would have lost votes to the marginal parties such as the UK Independence Party or the Green Party. Furthermore, the 2014 Scottish referendum had allowed the marginal parties to gain significant influence. The decisive issue in the election was the party capable of repairing the economy of the United Kingdom. Anstead and O'Loughlin (2014) highlight that the coalition resulting from the 2010 general election led to the various economic reforms, which contributed to stabilising the economy and spurring limited growth. In the 2010 general election, the major parties recognized that they had to articulate clear and distinguishable strategy for fiscal responsibility and reduction of the national debt. Furthermore, since the conservative party had been in a coalition with the

liberal democrats from 2010 to 2015, they had to establish distinct political brands. Dermody (2015) shows that the results of the elections were contrary to what opinion polls predicted. whereas the conservative party was expected to win 279 seats, it won 330 seats, while the labour that was predicted to win 269 seats won 232 seats and the liberal democrats won 8 seats when it was expected to win 25 seats.

Marland (2003) acknowledged that although politics can be marketed as a commodity, it is a substantially complex product. A key part of the political marketing process is taking positions on the relevant issues that resonate with potential voters. Clarke et al. (2009) characterised elections as a time when political parties competed to increase the awareness of the public over their positions on vital issues and using whatever means necessary to persuade voters that the issues a party is espousing matter to them.

Pich, Dean, and Punjaisri (2014) point out that the reason the conservative party won in 2010 and again in 2015 is because the party understood that articulating resonant issues was not enough in itself to win an election. The party won because it developed a brand that convinced voters that it had the necessary credibility to effect the needed changes if given a chance. Credibility is the outcome of past experiences with a brand as well as the perceptions about the character of a brand. The brand of political brands is judged based on historical positions of a party, the perceived influence of the current leader, and the party's current efforts in solving the challenges facing the society. Pich and Dean (2015) posit that media campaigns and communications are important to help shape the perceptions of a party and its leader. Party leader occupies several positions as the spokesperson and symbolic leader of a party. The United Kingdom has banned political advertising on the medium of television, which forces campaigns to compensate by advertising on other media such as newspapers and magazines and newspapers and on the internet.

According to Smith and French (2009), party branding seeks to create of party including what the population ant the ethos it stands for and the activities it performs on behalf of a voter. Brand communication in the process of party branding is important because it helps to capture the essence of a brand and to make the ethos a brand espouses socially and politically relevant to voters, which would then translate into support for the party position. Brand communication is necessary because most people are not very interested in parties, even though they possess a vague or broad sense of what parties represent due to long-term exposure. Therefore, parties needed to develop effective communication strategies that would amplify their reach and help develop acceptance of the overall message of their brand character.

Wring and Deacon (2010) shows that political parties in the United Kingdom attempt media management despite its complexity. The goal of the parties is attaining endorsement of various media brands, which have loyal target audiences and distinct agendas. Broadcasters in the United Kingdom pursue objectivity in their coverage of political parties and candidates. In contrast, print journalists are openly partisan, and they reinforce the message of the parties they support. Media endorsement is important because it helps to bolster the character of either a party

or candidate brand and it gives credibility to the proposals a party or a candidate has espoused.

The conservative party's short campaign that lasted from March to May 2015 benefited from the expertise of Lynton Crosby, directed the party's election strategy. Dermody (2016) shows that Lynton Crosby received assistance from Jim Messina, who had served as part of the election campaign of barrack Obama in both 2008 and 2012. Crosby developed a 40-40 strategy for the conservative party. The strategy meant that the conservative party would target 40 seats that the liberal democrats held and it would defend another 40 seats that the labour party threatened to snatch. To begin with, Crosby demanded to coordinate the message of the entire party. He commissioned private polls to identify the issues that were salient in the constituencies they targeted. The polling also helped to reveal the dominant themes. He focused the resources of the party in the key seats that the party targeted and the party had constituency activists who helped to promote the party's objectives. Moreover, Crosby helped the party to exploit the question of Scottish nationalism to seize the traditional supporters of the party's opponents. In addition, Crosby began rumours about a potential coalition between the Labour Party and the SNP, which the party exploited to convince wavering voters to support the conservative party, since the rumoured coalition would be detrimental to the economy.

Messina helped the conservative party to use new technologies and social media to reach targeted voters. Messina's experience with the campaign of barrack Obama allowed him to deploy data mining, personalised messaging, and micro-targeting to segment the voters who would be responsive to the party's message. according to Ashcroft and Oakeshott (2015), Messina developed a voter database and system for profiling voters that was so accurate that it directed candidates and activists to specific properties in an area, which in some areas, was the only one a candidate or activists visited and they had to travel to another street for another responsive individual or family. Hawkins (2015) points out that the Conservative Party spent close to 100,000 pounds each month on advertising on the social network Facebook, and 3,000 pounds on Facebook advertisements targeting individual constituencies.

Mullen (2016) shows that the conservative party avoided debating issues relating to the national healthcare service as well as immigration because both the labour party and the UK Independence Party polled favourably on those issues than the party. Instead, the party focused its message on the fact that it alone had an economic plan that would benefit the United Kingdom in the long-term. The Conservative Party chose to focus on five campaign themes: eliminating the country's budget deficit, reducing income tax, creating more employment opportunities, limiting migration flows and capping welfare, and delivering excellent education and skills training for young people.

The Labour Party employed a different political marketing strategy. Dermody (2016) highlights that the party hired David Axelrod, who played a vital role in the election campaign of barrack Obama of 2008 and 2012. Unlike Crosby, David Axelrod did not have complete control of the election strategy of the Labour Party. In fact, other election strategists for the labour party criticised him for offering his

advice remotely through email and telephone. David Axelrod developed five strategic components for the labour party in the short election that lasted from March to May 2015. Firstly, he directed the labour party to focus its attention and resources on 106 seats and he asked the party to mobilise its core base of supporters in those constituencies. Axelrod identified that the party needed to increase voter turnout from 60 percentages to 70 percentages in order to win the targeted seats. Similarly, to the strategy of Crosby, Axelrod used focus group research and he commissioned private polling to identify the primary themes the party should emphasise during the campaign. One difference between the strategy of Axelrod and Crosby is that Axelrod advertised the labour party to focus on a mass communication strategy while Crosby employed an advanced segmentation approach. Dermody (2015) faulted the decision to narrowly target brand communication messages to the seats Crosby had identified in his 40-40 strategy because it meant that a larger proportion of the electorate did not view the election advertisement messages of the Conservative Party. Another aspect of Axelrod's strategy was that the labour party should engage in crowdfunding to narrow the spending gap with the conservative party. In the short election campaign, the labour party raised 2.7 million pounds from crowdfunding.

Dermody (2016) contend that another difference between the two parties in the election campaign is in their existence or lack of disciplined focus. The conservative party focused solely on the issue of the economy. In contrast, the labour party shifted from issue to another. In the first month of the election, it focused on saving the National Health Service, which it shifted to helping young people in the second month and cost of living in the third month.

Dermody (2016) found that British political parties in the 2015 election chose between using a theme of hope or fear to present their messages. Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd (2011) found that negative political advertisements can be effective in persuading the electorate. The effect arises from the fact that disliking a political party can significantly influence the attitudes and behaviour of voters more strongly than liking a party. Therefore, negative messages, especially personality attack advertisement lead the electorate to perceive that the candidates being disparaged are less qualified, less honest and sincere, and more likely to be financially irresponsible. Furthermore, Ruiter et al. (2014) note that attack advertisements are more memorable, understandable, and highly visible, which makes them more engaging to the electorate, which helps in increasing voter turnout. However, attack advertisements must be factual, or otherwise, the sponsor risks backlash effect that may lead voters to cast their votes for the attacked opponent for the unsubstantiated attacks meted out on him.

However, the drawback of attack advertising is that it heightens political negativity, alienates voters, and trivializes political argument, which reduces the participation of the electorate and lowers accountability of the democratic process. Stevens (2009) attack advertisements in elections contribute to the mood of political cynicism and they reduce trust in the political process while reducing the efficacy of individuals in the political process. The overall effect of attack advertising is that it creates avoidance since the electorate come to perceive political leaders as unworthy and undeserving of the offices they occupy.

Consequently, the electorate come to reject the political system because it is filled with untrustworthy leaders.

Carraro, Gawronski, and Castelli (2010) point out that the positive benefit of political advertising is that it enhances the evaluation of a political candidate and it raises political motivation. A positive advertisement increase candidate likeability and bolsters the evaluation of the competence of a candidate. Research has found that the electorate feels closer to candidates using positive tropes to promote themselves. However, electorates judge candidates who use negative advertisements to be more competent, but less likeable. Even though voters dislike candidates who use negative advertising, they consider them to be powerful and they would still support them.

In the 2015 election in the United Kingdom, the conservative party used negative messages and attack advertisements to advance its campaign themes. The negative message focused on the rumour that the labour party was going to form a coalition with the Scotland national party, which would be detrimental to England. The campaign used the negative message to galvanise swing voters and partisan voters to vote conservative ad prevent the impending doom. The conservative party through their agency, M&C Saatchi, designed attack advertisements that manipulated the latent fears of the targeted voters (Wring & Deacon, 2010). The negative message strategy extended to personal attacks of Ed Milliband, the leader of the Labour Party. The personal attack advertisements are believed to have led to the declining popularity of Ed Milliband and to have caused the labour party to lose the elections as decisively as the party did.

Campbell and Lee (2016) focus on the role that party branding played in the British election campaign of 2015. Campbell and Lee focus on the online political posters of the various parties, which tended to capture the core brand messages of the campaigns. Baines et al. (2011) noted that political posters served various functions including persuading voters, familiarizing voters with a party or a candidate, helping to engage the electorate, and showing the presence of a campaign in various locations, as well as demonstrating that a campaign is strong. Norris and Curtice (2008) noted that online political posters helped political parties to reach voters who have low engagement with other forms of media, and who need brandin because it helps them to process political messages. Furthermore, since the supporters of a political party would be willing to share the messages of their parties online, online posters allow parties to amplify their persuasion and to extend their influence. Campbell and Lee found that the Labour Party led political parties in the production of online political posters while the liberal democrats had the least online political parties of all parties (Dumitrescu, 2011). Their research found that the Labour Party utilized text-only online political posters more than other parties. In addition, they found that the Labour Party made posters that incorporated the quotations sourced from party supporters, which attempted to reconcile the transactional aspect of such posters with the potential to build relationships that social media provides. The online political posters bore messages focusing on policy themes with less than a quarter focusing on party values. The authors concluded that online political posters seemed to have

replaced the print-based posters that were often produced targeting low engagement voters.

Social Media Use by Politicians

The power of the public to engineer a massive demonstration of public outcry, as well as a rapid response to the challenges that they judge to be against their welfare has never been greater than it is. This is made possible and easier by the technological frameworks such as the internet; and especially, the social media. The global networked population has been dramatically growing to the tunes of billions of users. Social media has also transitioned to be the main platform that drives how the society engages in conversations with itself. The civil society, citizens, activists, non-governmental organizations, corporate organizations and governments have also transitioned most of their information and transactions online. They have established presence on social media to drive stakeholder engagement and enhance the process of the delivery of public services (Sussman, 2000).

It is also a fact that, with the increase in complexity and the participation-centered communication landscape that is taking shape, the networked populations of the world are also gaining increased access to sources of information. They are also finding opportunities to engage in crafting and shaping the issues of their time through their freedom to public speech. They are also realizing that they possess an enhanced capacity to bring people together alongside the similar interests and demand changes or improvements in public action or policies. The protests that are rocking most of the world, and the Arab uprising are demonstrations that the greater access and freedom that the internet through the social media can be coordinated and channeled towards demanding public change (Sussman, 2000).

Political Movement and Social Media

Clay Shirky observed that the application of social media tools such as text messaging, use of e-mails, the conversations spread through photo sharing, and social networking do not offer any single outcome that could be expected beforehand. He argues that attempts to speculate on the impact of these social media engagement tools as unpredictable phenomena. The other question that concerns the application of social media engagement tools is whether they enhance the democratic process (Wolcott & Goodman, 2000).

Statistics point to the fact that over half of the global political movement actions are coordinated through the use of social media engagement tools. This is despite the fact that almost half of the world's authoritarian governments are trying to limit their citizen's access to the internet. It is argued that governments around the world should commit themselves to the idea of internet freedom as a priority policy objective. Internet freedom will lead to strengthened civil societies, and because it aligns with the freedoms of expression that most constitutions of the world guarantee their citizens. Caution is also drawn to the idea of tying internet freedom to short-term objectives such as those that are specific to a country or

meant to assist dissident groups or those that are targeted towards causing a change of regime. It is posited that such short-term internet freedom objectives will be ineffective. When they fail, their consequences can be ominous (Altintas, Aydin, & Akman, 2002).

Governments, in a bid to encourage and foster internet freedom, should entrench the public's freedom to access information. It also should facilitate the freedom and initiatives of its citizens towards the production of their own media such as the right of the citizens and activists to express their ideas through blogging.

Clay Shirky argues that governments and civil societies and other stakeholders should not overestimate their emphasis on internet instrumental tools that are politically-appealing, are oriented towards generating action at the expense of a media platform that will allow citizens to engage in private conversations among themselves.

Opportunities for freedom are provided by the media platforms such as social networking sites by enhancing the levels of participation of the individuals in the conversations and public policy initiatives. Thus, internet freedom is a basic step to ensure that communicative freedom is guaranteed so that political freedom can be enhanced. There is the challenge that is faced through the use of social media platforms and tools for organizing political movements. In this case, outsiders cannot easily understand the local conditions regarding the citizens' dissent of governments. The other challenge is that external assistance holds the potential of casting suspicions what might have been a peaceful demonstration of opposition as being the work of foreign elements (Wolcott & Goodman, 2000).

Social Media and Turkey

Turkey is very active in social media. According to Statista's April 2019 data Turkey is the 7th country the world and 1st country in Europe who has the most Twitter users.

Figure 4. *Leading Countries based on Twitter users as of April 2019 (in millions)*
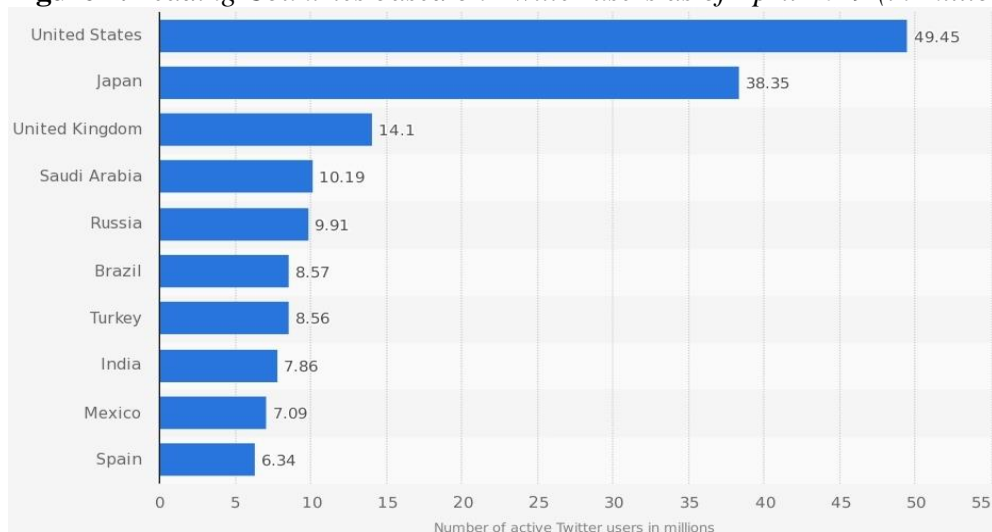
Figure 5. *Share of Individuals in Turkey Participating in Social Networks from 2013 to 2018*
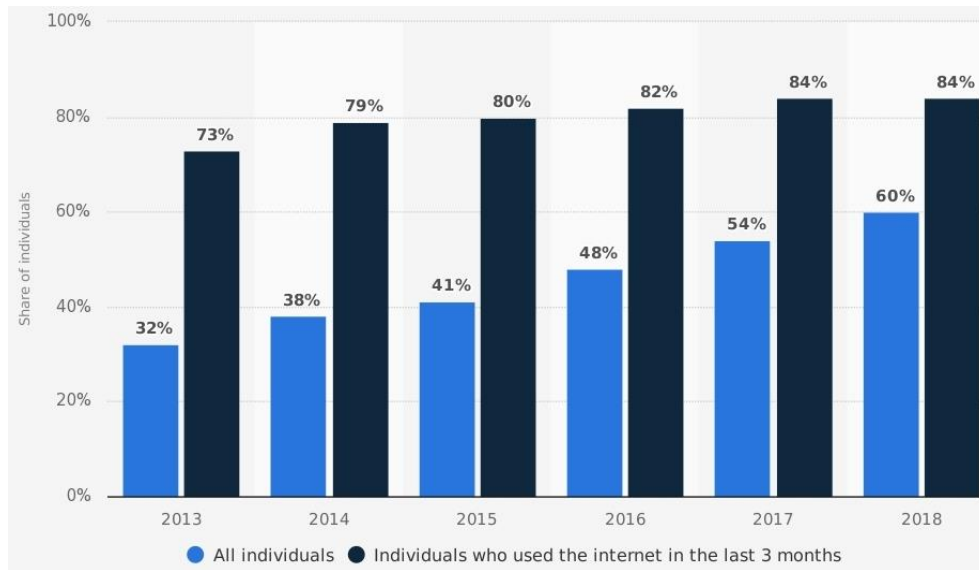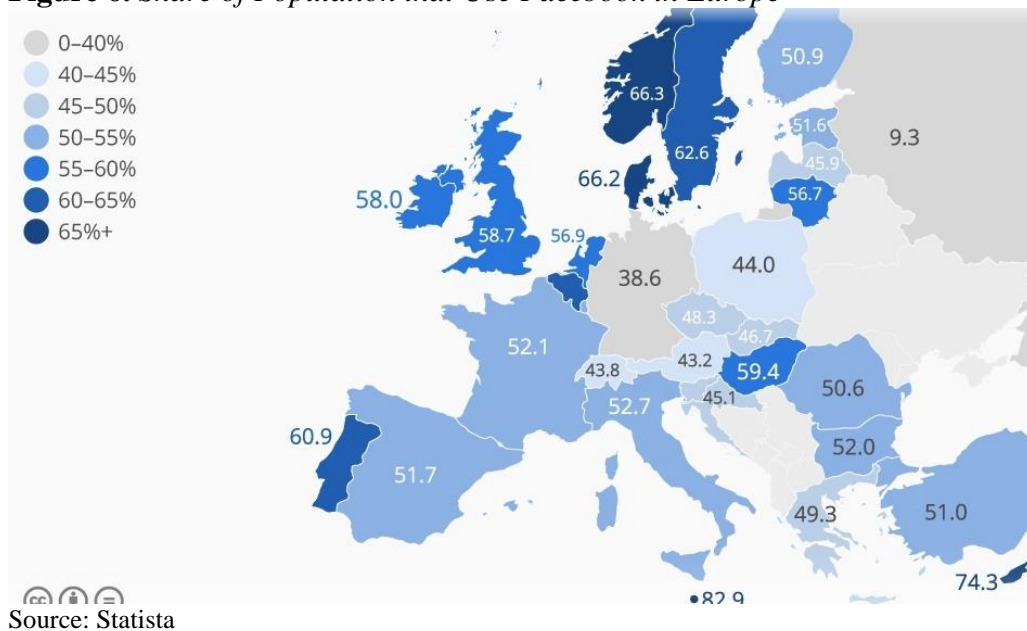

Figure 6. *Share of Population that Use Facebook in Europe*

Source: Statista

The penetration of Facebook is 51.0 percentages in Turkey. Both the numbers of Twitter and Facebook users of Turkey forced politicians to use social media more active to express their ideologies and campaigns.

According to statists voters still learn first from traditional television about the candidates but social media is coming in the fourth medium after newspaper. We should also underline that social media is only one percent behind of newspapers.

Figure 7. *Medium those Voters First Learn About Candidates*
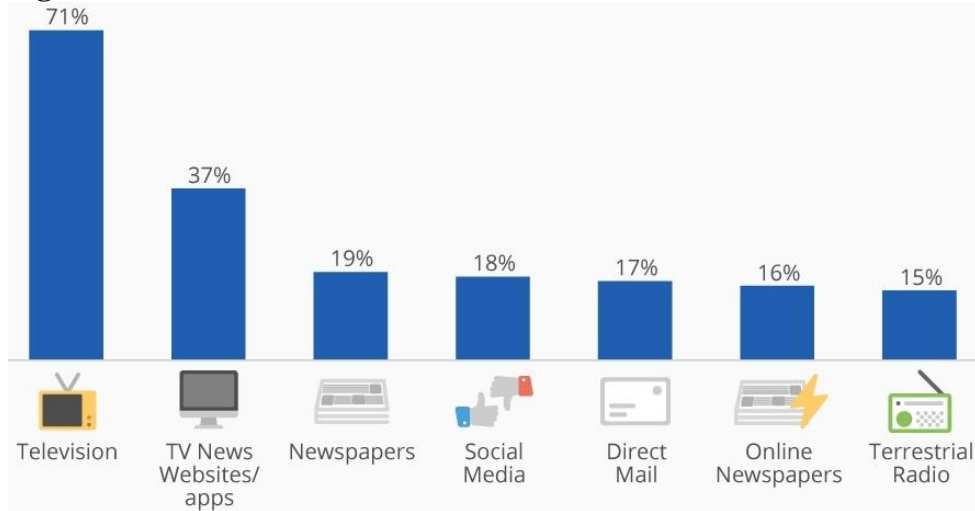
Source: Statista

The Aim and Method of the Research

Municipal elections in Turkey were carried out on Sunday, March 31, 2019. During the election period, 11 people were nominated for Istanbul metropolitan municipality. Three of these eleven candidates were independent candidates, while eight of them were the leaders elected by political parties. Although there were eleven candidates, the elections were completed under competition of two major alliances. Binali Yıldırım, who was the candidate of alliance established by the ruling party AKP (Justice and Development Party) and the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), and Ekrem İmamoğlu, who was the candidate of alliance established by the main opposition party CHP (Republican People's Party) and İYİ Party, competed for Istanbul. HDP, representing the Kurdish ethnic group in elections in Turkey, did not nominate anyone form Istanbul.

In the study, the social media usage of Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem Imamoğlu, two favourite names of Istanbul province elections, was examined. It was examined how the two leaders used social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook accounts during the campaign period, and how they interacted with the social media. The review was conducted in February and March when the political campaign intensified. Social media shares on Twitter and Facebook made by two politicians during February 1, 2019 and March 31, 2019 were examined. In this descriptive and qualitative study, posts that Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu shared on their Twitter and Facebook accounts were examined.

In the study, the two leaders' social media platform usage was examined through posts shared by both politicians on their Twitter and Facebook accounts. Answers to the following questions were sought in this study:

- What is Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım's intensity of using their Twitter and Facebook accounts? What kind of differences occurred between two politicians' usage of Twitter and Facebook accounts?

- How did the social media accounts of Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım on Twitter and Facebook grow during the election campaign?
- How was the interaction of posts shared by Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım on their Facebook and Twitter accounts?
- Which were the most interactive posts by Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım?
- Is there a correlation between the election results of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality on March 31, 2019 and the social media interaction of Yıldırım and İmamoğlu competing in these two elections?

As a result of the elections of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality held on March 31, while Ekrem İmamoğlu, who entered the elections on behalf of CHP, received 4 million 171 thousand 118 votes, the AK party's candidate Binali Yıldırım received 4 million 149 thousand 656 votes. Receiving 48,80 percent of the votes, Ekrem Imamoğlu completed the elections ahead of Binali Yıldırım who received 48,55 percent of the votes. As a result of these elections, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which had been in the control of AK Party candidates since 1994, passed to another party, to CHP, for the first time after a 25-year break. Another issue that drew attention to the 31 March elections, which was historically the most important and fierce elections in Turkish political history, is that more than 1 million young people have voted for the first time. The findings and analyses obtained in the study were as follows.

Figure 8. *The Results of Local Elections in Turkey*

Ekrem İmamoğlu %48,80			Binali Yıldırım %48,55	
Ekrem İmamoğlu		CHP	4.171.118	%48,80
Binali Yıldırım		AK PARTİ	4.149.656	%48,55
Necdet Gökçınar		SAADET PARTİSİ	103.300	%1,21
		DSP	30.817	%0,36

Source: Habertürk Newspaper, 2018

Prior to the analysis of the social media data in the study, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Binali Yıldırım's visibility performances in traditional media were examined based on data by Media Monitoring Center (Medya Takip Merkezi), a research company.

Table 1. *Internet and Printed Media Reflections of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Candidates*

	Internet Media	Printed Press	Total
Binali Yıldırım	53,601	2,755	56,356
Ekrem İmamoğlu	35,491	1,990	37,481

Source: Media Monitoring System

As a result of the research conducted by Media Monitoring Company by referring to more than four thousand newspapers published in Turkey and over ten thousand web sites during March 1-31, 2019, name of Binali Yıldırım appeared more in the traditional media.

Table 2. *YouTube and TV Appearances of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Candidates*

	YouTube	TV	Total
Binali Yıldırım	128	4,899	5,027
Ekrem İmamoğlu	155	3,553	3,708

While Binali Yıldırım appeared more on traditional television channels, Ekrem İmamoğlu was more visible in YouTube media, which can be called digital television. This data was the first finding that Ekrem İmamoğlu was more powerful than his opponent in digital media.

Findings of Research

The Facebook analysis of two politicians and their findings are given below:

Number of fans in Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Facebook fan page, increased from 192,027 to 214,688 with an increase of 22,661 during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019. During this period, 501 posts shared from the page received 507,719 likes, 36,560 comments and 64,079 shares.

Number of fans in Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook page increased from 295,079 to 446,920 with an increase of 151,841 during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019. During this period, 561 posts shared from the page received 6,724,730 likes, 36,560 comments and 765,191 shares.

Figure 9. *General Evaluation of Data from Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Facebook Page*

215K
Total Number of Fans

501
Shared posts

608K
Number of Interactions

Total number of fans of the page reached 214,688 on 3/31/2019. During the period, the page grew by 11.801 percentages by gaining 22.661 new fans.

A total of 501 posts were shared on the page wall during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. The most shared post type was videos with a total number of 261.

Contents shared by the page during 2/1/2019 – 3/31/2019 received a total of 507,719 shares, 36,560 comments and 64,079 shares.

A total of 501 posts were shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. 228 of posts shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period were in photo type. 261 of posts shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period were in video type.

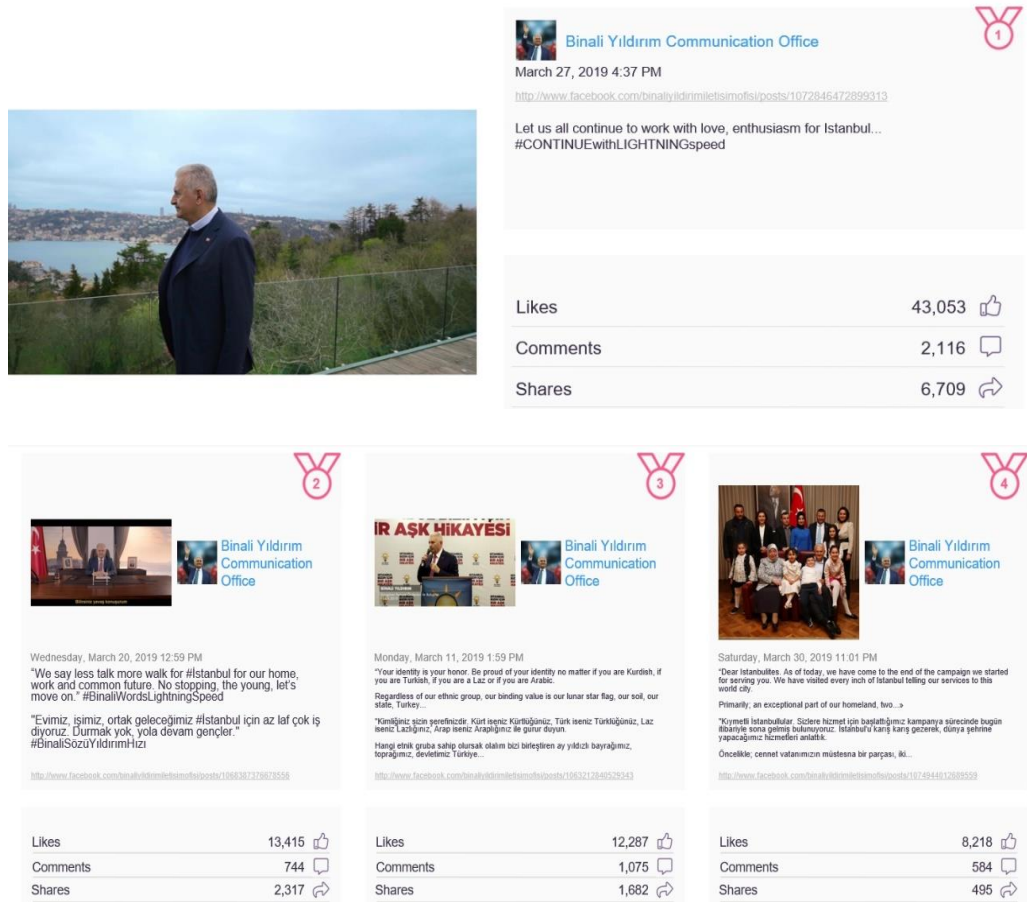**Figure 10.** *Posts Receiving Most Interactions of Binali Yıldırım in Facebook*

Figure 11. *Evaluation of Data for Posts, Posts Types and Likes, Comments and Shares Details for Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Facebook Page*

501 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 507,719 likes. 501 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 36,560 comments. 501 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 64,079 shares.

Figure 12. *General Evaluation of Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook Page*

Total number of fans of the page reached 446,920 on 3/31/2019. During the period, the page grew by 51.458 percentages by gaining 151.841 new fans. A total of 561 posts were shared on the page wall during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. The most shared post type was videos with a total number of 312. Contents shared by the page during 2/1/2019 – 3/31/2019 received a total of 6,724,730 shares, 634,637 comments and 765,191 shares.

Figure 13. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Fans for Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook Page*

Total number of fans of the page reached 446,920 on 3/31/2019. The page has gained 151,841 new fans during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. Total number of fans of the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period increased by 51.458 percentage.

Figure 14. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook Page*
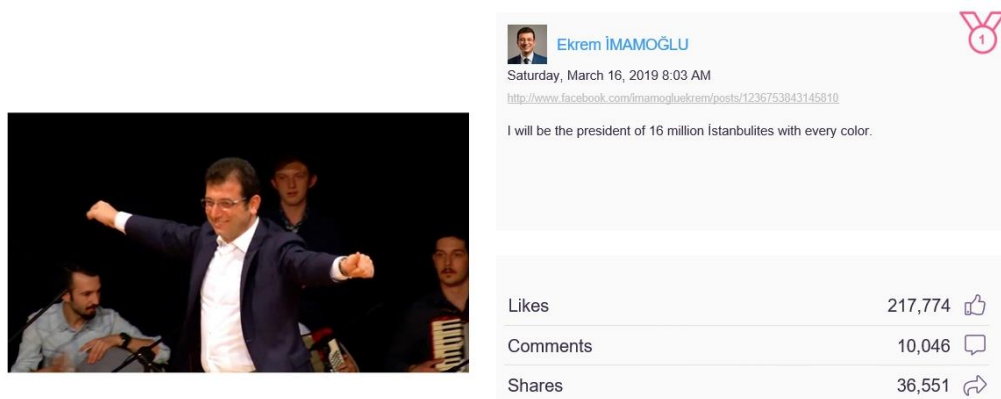

A total of 561 posts were shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. 249 of posts shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period were in photo type. 312 of posts shared by the page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period were in video type.
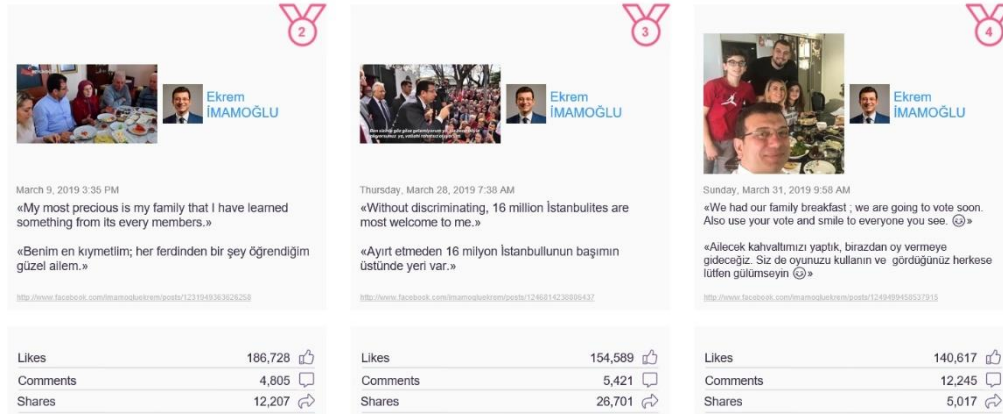
Figure 15. *Evaluation of Data for Posts, Post Types and Likes, Comments and Shares Details for Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook Page*

561 posts shared by Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 6,724,730 likes. 561 posts shared by Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 634,637 comments. 561 posts shared by Ekrem İMAMOĞLU Facebook page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 765,191 shares.

Figure 16. *Posts Receiving Most Interactions*

Likes	186,728	
Comments	4,805	
Shares	12,207	

Likes	154,589	
Comments	5,421	
Shares	26,701	

Likes	140,617	
Comments	12,245	
Shares	5,017	

The Twitter analysis of two politicians and their findings are given below:

Number of followers in Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter account, increased from 1,227,330 to 1,277,697 with an increase of 50,367. During this period, 1,035 posts shared from the page received 1,502,197 likes and 421,048 retweets.

Number of followers in Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter account, increased from 212,300 to 382,279 with an increase of 169,979. During this period, 625 posts shared from the page received 3,277,178 likes and 505,764 retweets.

Figure 17. *General Evaluation of Data from Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter Page*

Total number of followers of the account reached 1,277,697 on 3/31/2019. During the period, the account grew by 4.104 percentages by gaining 50.367 new followers. A total of 1,035 posts were shared on the account page during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. The most shared post type was texts with a total number of 409. Contents shared by the page during 2/1/2019 – 3/31/2019 received a total of 1,502,197 likes and 421,048 retweets.

Figure 18. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Followers for Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter Account*

Total number of followers of the account reached 1,277,697. The account gained 50,367 new followers during the research period. Total number of followers of the page during this period increased by 4.10 percentage.

Figure 19. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter Account*


A total of 1,035 posts were shared by the account during the research period. 406 of posts shared by the account during this period were in photo type. 181 of posts shared by the account during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period was in video type.

Figure 20. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter Account*

A total of 1,035 posts were shared by the account during the research period. Account posts received a total of 1,923,245 interactions during this period. Ratio of interaction for the most successful 10 posts to all posts during 2/1/2019 – 3/31/2019 period was 9.8 percentage.

Figure 21. *Posts Receiving Most Interactions in Binali Yıldırım's Twitter Acount*
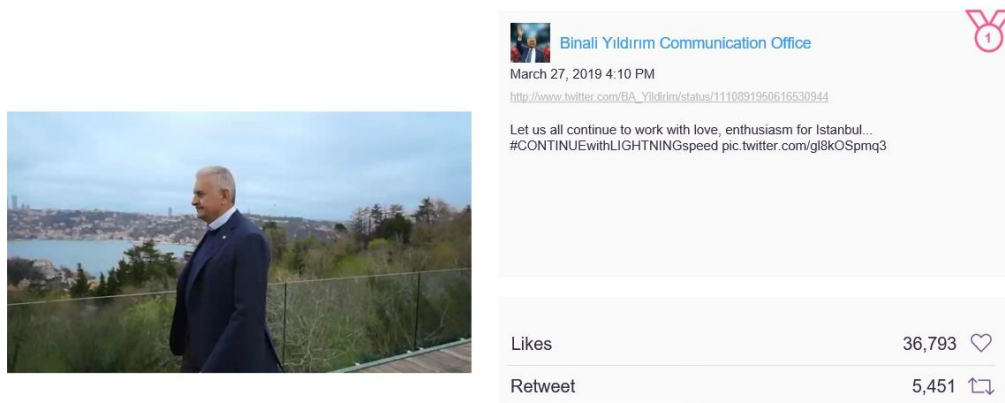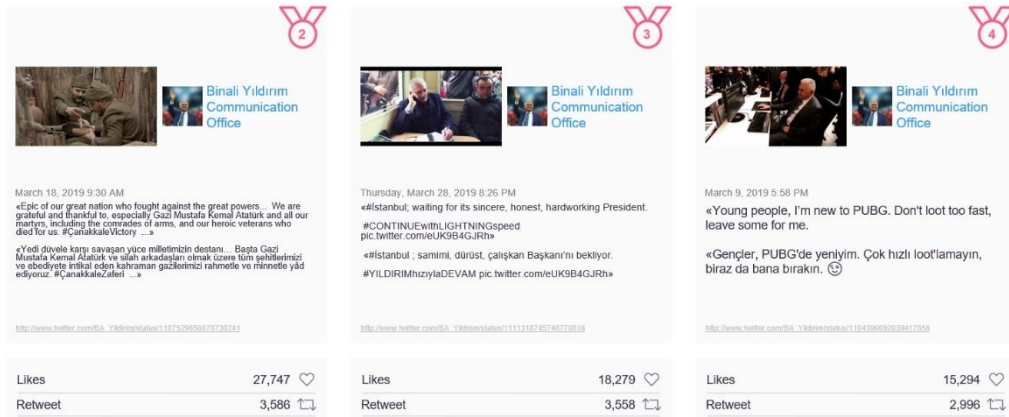
Figure 22. *Evaluation of Data for Posts, Post Types, Likes and Retweet Details for Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter Account*

1,035 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter account during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 1,502,197 likes. 1,035 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter account during this period received a total of 421,048 retweets. 1,035 posts shared by Binali Yıldırım Communication Office Twitter account during this period received a total of 1,923,245 interactions.

**Figure 23.** *General Evaluation of Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter Account*

Total number of followers of the account reached 382,279 on 3/31/2019. During the period, the account grew by 80.065 percentage by gaining 169.979 new followers. A total of 625 posts were shared on the account page during the research period. The most shared post type was photos with a total number of 290 posts. Contents shared by the page during this period received a total of 3,277,178 likes and 505,764 retweets.

Figure 24. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Followers for Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter Account*

382K
Total Number of Followers

170K
Change in Number of Followers

80.07%
Follower Change Rate

Total number of followers of the account reached 382,279 on 3/31/2019. The account gained 169,979 new followers during this period. Total number of followers of the page during the research period increased by 4.10 percentage.

Figure 25. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter Account*

625
Total Posts

290
Photo

186
Video
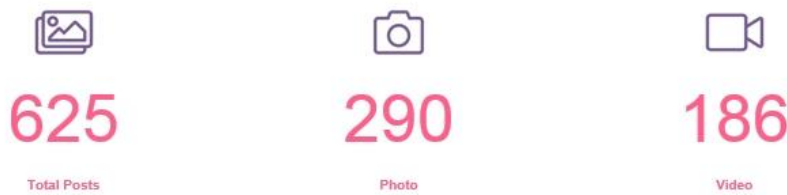
A total of 625 posts were shared by the account during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. 290 of posts shared by the account during this period were in photo type. 186 of posts shared by the account during this period were in video type.

Figure 26. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter Account*

625
Total Posts

3.8M
Total Interactions

25.3%
Share of Most Successful 10 Posts

A total of 625 posts were shared by the account during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period. Account posts received a total of 3,782,942 interactions during the research period. Ratio of interaction for the most successful 10 posts to all posts during this period was 25.3 percentage.

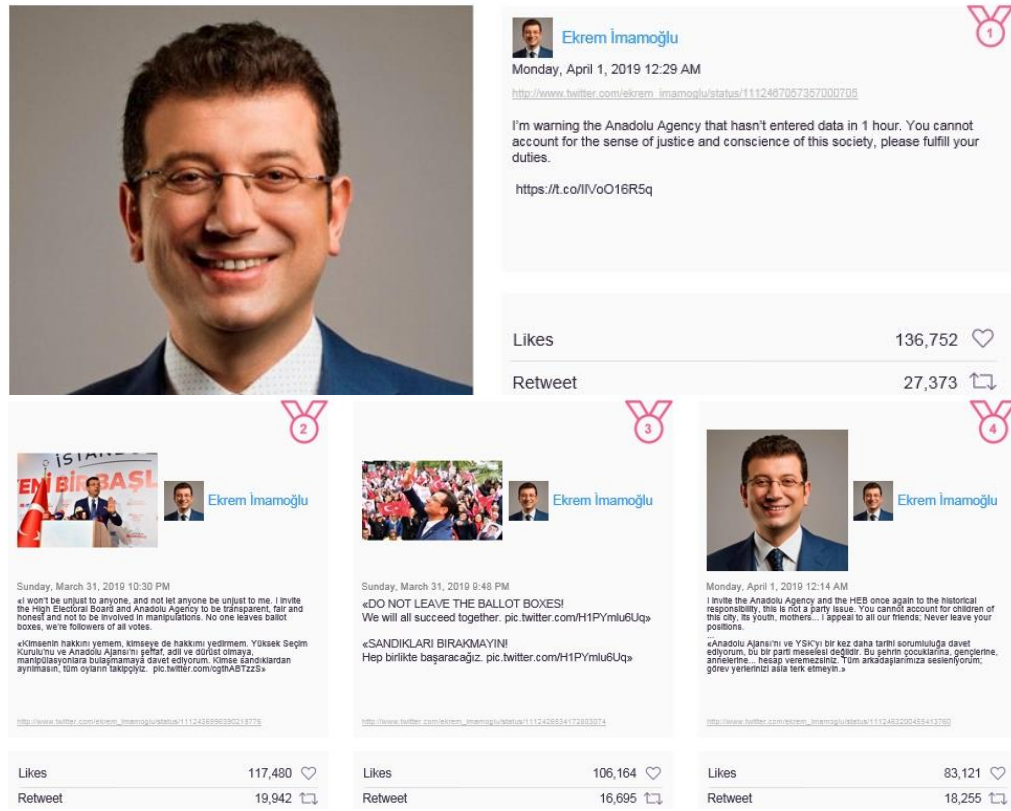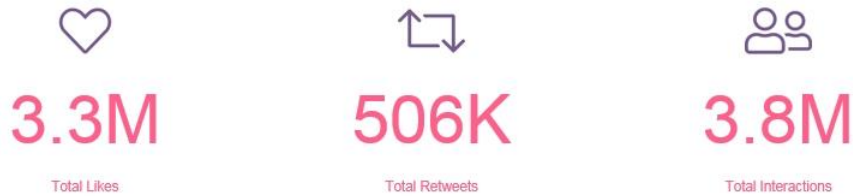**Figure 27.** *Posts Receiving Most Interactions*

Figure 28. *Evaluation of Data for Number of Posts, Post Types, Post Shares and Details for Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter Account*

625 posts shared by Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter account during 2/1/2019 - 3/31/2019 period received a total of 3,277,178 likes. 625 posts shared by Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter account during this period received a total of 505,764 retweets. The 625 posts shared by Ekrem İmamoğlu Twitter account during the research period received a total of 3,782,942 interactions.

Conclusion

Analysing uses of personal Twitter accounts during the campaign period by Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu competing in the candidacy of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in elections held on March 31, 2019 in Turkey, it was observed that Yıldırım shared more posts compared to İmamoğlu, but İmamoğlu

received more interaction than Yıldırım. While Ekrem İmamoğlu shared 625 posts on Twitter during the two-month research process, Binali Yıldırım shared 1,035 posts during that period. There is a difference of twice the amount in terms of total posts that two leaders shared on Twitter. When the total interaction of these shared posts (retweet-likes) was examined, it was seen that, while Binali Yıldırım received 1.9 million interactions, Ekrem İmamoğlu received 3.8 million interactions. This rate suggests that Ekrem İmamoğlu's popularity on social media platform, Twitter, was higher.

Analysing Facebook shares, it was found that there were no big differences between the two politicians' posts. While Ekrem İmamoğlu shared 561 posts on Facebook, Binali Yıldırım shared 501 messages. While there was not serious difference between numbers of posts shared by two politicians, a very serious difference between interactions (likes–shares) made for these posts. While Binali Yıldırım's Facebook posts received a total of 608K interactions, Ekrem İmamoğlu's Facebook posts received a total of 8,1 million interactions. İmamoğlu Facebook posts received approximately twelve times as much interaction as the opponent's posts.

Interactions received by two candidate's social media platform on Twitter and Facebook showed a significant difference in the favour of Ekrem İmamoğlu. This data gives a hint about the election preferences of young people who frequently use social media. Besides, a serious difference in favour of Ekrem İmamoğlu was observed in the social media aspect of election promotion campaigns carried out by İmamoğlu and Yıldırım. It can be said that there is a proportional relationship between digital media campaign interactions and the election results in favour of Ekrem İmamoğlu who won the elections by taking the most votes in the elections. With reference to this finding, it is important to consider the impact of digital media campaigns on selection results, as well as the implications of estimating election results.

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