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**Digital Generation and Political Persuasion in Turkey:
What about Social Media use?**

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ABSTRACT

The digital space, especially social media, has become the privileged place of political debate due to provide new opportunities for the appearance and the representation of politicians. However, the politicians should take into consideration that using social media is not sufficient to political persuasion to young citizens and they should also investigate their way of use, their attitudes, and values. The present study aims to figure out the use of social media as a means of political persuasion based on a qualitative survey on the young generation social media uses in Turkey. Further, the study's objective is to record new meanings of political persuasion given by the digital generation and understanding the attitudes and values of this generation. The research is based on 34 semi-structured interviews, 15 women, and 19 men, who actively use social media. The main results of this study showed that Turkish young generation hesitates to use social media as political scene, pays attention to source credibility and prefers to see the politicians as an 'ordinary' people in their daily life through their private social media account. In addition, this research affirmed the high effectiveness of the use of humor for political persuasion.

Keywords: political persuasion, social media, digital natives, Turkish young citizens.

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Introduction

The digital space had become the privileged place of political debate. Especially, the use of social media creates a privileged scene of innovative appearance for politicians who wish to recruit and persuade young citizens. This hyper-connected generation forces political actors to review their communication strategies and take on new challenges. However, using their favorite communication tools is not enough to persuade this digital generation, the politicians must also adapt their way of use, understand their motivations, their attitudes and their values.

The information society indicates a well-defined generation separated by its ability to use new information and communication technologies. The digital divide is more than a question of access, but also reflects the generational difference marked by the different ways of adapting the Internet (Aytuna & Çapraz, 2018). The use of social media of this generation is a privileged field of observation in the context of a reflection on political persuasion since these young people report a generation particularly marked by an innovative and interactive mode of communication. Studies use different names for describe this generation: generation Y (Bolton, et al.2013), generation millennium, generation of internet. (Ng, 2012). All these different terms underline the same aspect: it is the first generation that has grown up with continuous technological innovations and introduces them in all its communication activities are often described as “digital natives” – they have grown up with technology and are expected to be highly skilled in the digital environment and strong users of social media.

Turkey represents the youngest population in Europe. According to the Turkish Statistical Institution (2017), 16-24 year olds make up 16.3% of the total population and 87, 5% of this generation is online. Provided with the socio-political situation of Turkey, the digital platforms represent a privileged space to access political information, to create certain interactivity and to express itself in freedom. Beyond the novelty of digital uses, it is therefore a new culture of participation and persuasion. In fact, social media might be ideal forums for political persuasion. The attributes of these platforms create a deliberative space that may facilitate persuasive outcomes.

The present study aims to investigate the use of social media as a means of political persuasion based on a qualitative survey on the young generation social media uses in Turkey. Then, the research allows also obtaining a nuanced understanding of the political representations, attitudes and values of this generation in the current social and political context of Turkey. How does this "digital generation" give new meaning to political persuasion? As a result, this research looks at the needs and uses that this particular generation makes of social media for accessing political messages.

Literature Review

Social media have become pervasive communication channels for candidates during election campaigns. Although academic research on social media political campaigning has flourished in the past several years (Boulianne, 2016; Gibson, Römmele, & Williamson 2014; Larsson, 2015; Jungherr, Schoen, & Jürgens, 2016; Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018). There are several studies that investigate the influence of social media on young citizens' political attitudes and behaviors. The 2008 American presidential election brought a stream of literature that examined this social media impact on young citizens (Fernandes et al.2010; Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010). Some studies reports the young people political persuasion forms. They suggests mainly that young people may be abandoning traditional modes of citizen participation (voting, party membership and reading the newspaper), in favour of a more personalized politics through digital networking or consumer activism (Loader, 2007) The young citizens engage with politics in a much more individualized way and choose to work horizontally with their peers, rather than with hierarchical authority, thus their social circles are an important source of information, as well as support (Bennett, Wells, and Freelon, 2009). Another study analyzes the relationship between the online political humor and political attitudes of young adults (Baumgartner, 2007). These studies are often qualitative, using focus groups, interviews or text-based discourse analysis, to place the understanding and the everyday experiences of young people.

In Turkey, there are few studies on social media political campaigning and there is almost any particular academic research on young people political persuasion forms. In the survey conducted on 200 Turkish undergraduate students, the role of social media on political participation and impacts on the democracy and political attitudes are examined (Çıldan et a.l, 2012). Another study conducted in a particular University in Turkey has showed that the use of social media by political party leaders has not a significant influence on young voters (Aydın & Gülsoy, 2017). Recently Ministry of Youth and Sports has published research about the young voting behavior in local election (Karabulut & Önder, 2017) based on 1117 young voters between 18-34 years old and has revealed that educated participants were interested in about the effect of the internet in terms of voting behavior.

Methodology

The research is based on 34 semi-structured interviews, 15 women and 19 men, who actively use social media. The youngest participant was 18 years old; the oldest was at the age of 24. The research took place over the period from September 2017 until February 2018 in Istanbul. (Note that the date of Turkish Parliamentary and Presidential Election on the 24 June 2018 has announced in April, originally scheduled for the 3 November 2019. It means that the research doesn't cover the electoral campaign period.) The educational and occupational distribution are as follows: 12 graduate students, 4 high school students, 16

undergraduate students, 7 participants are both studying and working, 2 secondary school graduates and working as a tradesman.

Research questions are mainly based on two chapters; first we are investigating political participation. Is there a politician or social media account with political content that they follow? Do they participate in political activities (action, demonstration, hiking, meeting, etc.) outside the online environment? Are there any accounts that they follow or watch because you are just enjoying it, even if it is contrary to your own opinion? Do they follow election campaigns? Is there an application they use to reach political news? Have they signed or shared a petition in circulation?

Secondly, we were investigating the persuading process of social media messages. What do they pay attention first in social media accounts with political content? What is the most important factor that affects the credibility of the political message? How social media affects the credibility of the message? Do they prefer to communicate with politics actors through social media? And Why? How do they interpret the politicians' sharing of personal information / personal lives through social media accounts? Do they have a politician or politics-based social media account that they follow? Do they share the messages of others with political content? Are you sharing photos, videos, viral advertisements about political events?

Research Results

The results of this study confirm the fact that social media sites present new opportunities for interactive, user-centered political experiences. However, it shows also that Turkish young generation hesitates to use social media as political scene. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat can do not seem serious enough as political source. Generally the study corpus shows that most participant prefer Twitter as political information source. There is almost no newspaper reader. The news on TV may also be watching if they are with their parents. Recent studies focus on the young's political communication forms and suggest that the web may be an effective mobilization tool and serve to increase interest and participation in politics among young people. Recently, Yamamoto, Kushin & Dalisay (2017) shows that the affordances of online social networks enable dynamic information exposure and political experience and present unique opportunities for young adults to be involved in politics. Younger citizens are more prolific users of digital media than older citizens (Lenhart et al., 2010; Loader, 2007). Since use of digital media has been found to have positive effects on political participation (Boulianne, 2009; Lupia and Philpot, 2005; Xenos and Moy, 2007), this suggests that younger citizens' greater use of social media may compensate for the decline in their use of traditional news media (Palfrey and Gasser, 2009).

Social media may function as a leveler of generational differences in political participation. For Turkish young's the lack of trust is the main obstacle for political participation. It can be summarized in two main reason; they should be

afraid that they will not control the content which can injure their social and political identity and something will happen to them such as the security problem.

I do not share for security reasons (H, 24 years old, male, graduate student)
For example, when I sign or say something political on social media, I have to think how it impacts my future life. (D, 22 years old, female, undergraduate student)

Otherwise, the young generation use social media to get political information or to political expression in limited way. But still social media promise new persuasion process of political communication like using humor, interactivity or leader sympathy. But also has also some obstacle for persuading young's adults such as lack of trust to online platforms and source credibility

Source Credibility

Source credibility is a significant tool of persuasion and political actors often strive to improve their credibility in order to advance the acceptance of their message. Previous research in social psychology laboratories has consistently shown that credibility enhances message acceptance. If people do not trust or believe what they see or hear from online media sources, they are less likely to pay attention to it (Johnson, & Kaye, 1998). The influences of source credibility on communication effectiveness were first suggested by Hovland and Weiss (1951). Later researches such as the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion, developed by Richard Petty, John Cacioppo, (1986) shows that in the case of low involvement, media users will rely on peripheral cues such as source credibility when responding to a persuasive message – such that messages from high credibility sources are more likely to persuade.

The present study tested for Turkish young citizens have confirmed the source credibility priority for political persuasion. And then the question was reduced to find out to the credible source description. Using Social Media as a persuasion tool indicate effective characteristics of the source, in particular attractiveness. Source attractiveness has also positive effects on attitude change when there is a similarity between source and receiver (Simon, Berkowitz, & Moyer, 1970). The interviewees of the study revealed the source credibility importance in different way. They are looking for consistency between what the political actors say in social media and what they realize in offline world. Some insist on anonymity of the source such an obstacle on source credibility and some other insist on leader appearance.

I'm not interested in politicians' posts. After all, it is their consultants who dict. (O, 24 years old, female, graduate student)
I believe much more TV or assembly speeches than social media posts. I believe only twitter... But only social media post by themselves aren't effective... we also need to see it for real. (H, 18 years old, male, working)

Leader Attractiveness

Political communication through social media has become increasingly focused on personalization of politics (Enli & Skogerbo 2013). Personalized and interactive online political communication has effect on young's political involvement. Internet-based technologies, especially the social media, provide individual candidates with opportunities to run campaigns more independently of the central party. Especially in Western societies, voters demand to see politicians' personal and private side besides their public image on social media. Therefore, social media has become a space that enables candidates and citizens to get personal encounters. Political candidates have started to present themselves as a multidimensional person with personal and private personal and private sides as well as public images in order to come into prominence with attractive news in media competition. (Lilleker and Vedel 2013). The interviewees of the study declare that they prefer to see the political Leader as "ordinary" person. The similarity and attractiveness of the leader image have proclaimed as effective persuasion tool.

I'm curious about their private life. How is the relation with his wife? For example, I like Obama and Trudeau. They behave as ordinary people instead of scaring people. (H., 24 years old, male, graduate student)

When a political leader shares photos with his family, the person seems friendlier. (N., 18 years old, male, working)

I do not follow anyone, but if I would I will follow the Prime Minister of Canada, I suppose that man is very good. I hate politics. I only like that guy. He is not a racist, for example, he eats fast food with the young people. He has a simple life in a normal way. I think he's a good person. (O. 18 years old, female, working, high school education)

Consistency and Objectivity

When we have asked to young people what do you pay attention first in social media account with political content, they have affirmed that they are looking for consistency between what the political actors says in social media and what they are realizing in offline world. Otherwise beside the leader appearance in social media, the young people examine the content of the message. Consistency and objectivity are two main factors affirmed by interviewee for message acceptance.

The most noticeable thing in a political message is the harmony of the personality and discourses. Because sometimes it's really inconsistent. (M., 18 years old, female, working)

I pay attention primarily to the style. If the message excludes some persons or some groups, I don't read it, even if it's funny. (D., 22 years old, female, undergraduate student)

Social Interaction

Social media allow young to interact with others through online expression such as sharing multimedia commentary. There is evidence that individuals are becoming increasingly reliant on others in their online social networks for news recommendations and political information, and that their knowledge, opinions, and behaviors are affected by the information stream and social dynamics within these sites (Bode, 2016; Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015). There are two related explanations for how social interaction can lead to persuasion on social media: First social interaction on social media should have direct effect on persuasion because of the elevated importance of social influences (Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zuniga, 2016). Secondly, social interaction offers an opportunity for politicians to develop personalized communication. Turkish young citizens have affirmed also the importance that they accorded to personal contact with the political actors.

I wish that they would contact me, so I could ask questions, such as about the exam system. I still don't believe it, but I would be pleased to have a feedback. (O., 18 years old, female, working)

I follow some politicians personal social media account. And I like to make comments. I wish that they follow me also (S., 20 years old, female, undergraduate student)

Use of Humor

Social media have transformed the political landscape, and such technologies will continue to be relevant in the future for political messages (Hendricks & Schill, 2016). One of the primary outcomes of the digital transformation is that people now have the ability to select content that suits their interests. Prior (2007) found that, in a high choice media environment, people who prefer entertainment media to coverage of news and current events are likely to seek entertainment-oriented programming and rarely, if ever, encounter political information. Arceneux and Johnson (2013) explored the implications of the entertainment/news-seeking divide in a series of experiments on media choice and persuasive effects.

The convergence of social media and political comedy provide a possible counter-force to the digital affordance that allows disinterested users to avoid political information. Though entertainment seekers may not deliberately seek information about politics and current affairs, they may encounter this information inadvertently through entertainment media. For example, Baum (2002; p. 91) argued that entertainment media could "expand the size of the attentive public" by exposing entertainment-oriented media consumers to information about politics and current affairs. Social media hold the potential to catalyze an even greater expansion of the attentive public through the viral video phenomenon. Specifically, when political comedy is shared through social media and

entertainment websites people who may not follow politics may be exposed to political comedy through social media.

There is substantial evidence that the Internet in general and social media in particular, facilitate exposure to diverse political perspectives. Initial research on the Internet suggests that incidental contact with diverse political content is more likely to occur online (Brundidge, 2010). Because exposure to political information (especially heterogeneous political information) often occurs accidentally in spaces not specifically devoted to political conversation (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009), humorous content on social media could provide an ideal space for inadvertent exposure to political information as well. This is especially true given the weak ties maintained through social media as users maintain connections with a wider variety of people (Hampton, Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Though most of the existing research deals with exposure to political difference through social media, it is an encouraging signal that social media may also present uninterested entertainment seekers with opportunities to consume political comedy.

The present study is primarily focused on the persuasive effects of entertainment media on political attitudes. Turkish young citizen affirmed also that they are interested with political comedy even they are disinterested with political information.

I'm not following political accounts. But I'm looking accounts with political humor. Humor represents my feelings. (İ., 18 years old, female, undergraduate student)

I like to follow funny political memes, images and videos but I don't like to participate to political discussion. (N., 23 years old, male, graduate student)

Sunstein, (2009) demonstrated that group discussions influence people through three mechanisms: persuasive arguments (new information is entered into consideration), reputational pressure (people want to fit in and feel uncomfortable being contrarian), and confirmation (the presence of multiple perspectives all echoing the same view creates the impression that the position is legitimate). All of these mechanisms are likely to surface in Facebook discussions of political comedy, as people can present additional information to contradict the claims made by the video. A social media context in particular is designed for user-to-user interactivity, which is dialogic in nature (Tedesco, 2007).

Research on the persuasive effects of political comedy demonstrates a fairly consistent direct persuasive effect. Political comedy is best understood not as "fake news," but rather as a form of political dialog that uses parody and satire to critique contemporary news (Baym, 2005).

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the use of social media as a means of political persuasion based on a qualitative survey on the young generation social media uses in Turkey. The findings confirm previous studies realized in different social-cultural contexts that indicate social media represent a privileged scene for politicians' innovative appearance who wants to persuade this digital generation. The contemporary social environment, especially for the young adults, is characterized by the rise of social media. We argue that the political and social context of Turkey shape also the ways of young's social media use for political communication. The results of the present study indicate some reasons such as lack of interest, source credibility or lack of trust to political system for showing social media as a new ideal political communication platform. Trust is most commonly understood to refer to confidence or belief in individuals under conditions of risks. Lack of trust exposed on social media reflects political and social trust questions such as a more interactive governance requirement.

The present study has limitations regarding the data collected. Research was conducted only in Istanbul where Internet use as a percentage of the local population is at the top level in Turkey. Therefore, this study represents an initial attempt to characterize new political persuasion forms effective on the digital generation.

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