

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN DIGITAL MEDIA AND ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF GENERATION Z

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<i>Atf</i>	Gürel, E. & Eyüboğlu, E. (2023). Political Communication in Digital Media and Online Political Participation of Generation Z. The Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication, 13 (4), 980-994.
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ABSTRACT

Today, thanks to the use of data mining and machine learning on social media platforms, all personal data of individuals has become accessible. The effective use of this data has also started to transform political communication. In this study, data was collected from 356 social media user university students aged 18-24 studying in Istanbul through an online survey to analyze the impact of the use of personalized digital data and post-truth content in political communication on Generation Z's online political participation. According to the findings, the participants are not indifferent to the political agenda, but they show a passive online political participation behavior, as well as they worry that their personal digital data will be used in situations they do not consent to, and they are not completely sure about the accuracy of the online political content they encounter. These results, in relation to each other, show that young people both enter the spiral of silence of the digital age and feel the pressure created by the concept of surveillance society.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Data Mining, Personalized Digital Data, Online Political Participation, Political Communication, Digital Communication.*

DİJİTAL MEDYADA SİYASAL İLETİŞİM VE Z KUŞAĞININ ÇEVİRİMİÇİ SİYASAL KATILIMI

ÖZ

Günümüzde sosyal medya platformlarında veri madenciliği ve makine öğrenimi kullanımı sayesinde bireylerin tüm kişisel verilerine ulaşılır hale gelmiştir. Bu verilerin etkin bir şekilde kullanılması siyasal iletişimi de dönüştürmeye başlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, siyasal iletişimde kişiye özel dijital veri ve post-truth içerik kullanımının Z kuşağının çevrimiçi siyasal katılımı üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmektir. Bu çalışmada genel tarama modellerinden kesitsel araştırma seçilmiş olup, araştırma tekniği olarak çevrimiçi anket tekniği kullanılmıştır. Örneklem tekniği olarak kartopu örnekleme kullanılmış olup, İstanbul'da okuyan 18-24 yaş arası 356 sosyal medya kullanıcısı üniversite öğrencisinden çevrimiçi anket yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Elde edilen verilerden katılımcıların siyasi gündeme karşı ilgisiz olmadıkları ancak pasif bir çevrimiçi siyasal katılım davranışı gösterdikleri, bunun yanı sıra kişiye özel dijital verilerinin onay vermedikleri durumlarda kullanılacağı endişesi yaşadıkları ve karşılaştıkları

çevrimiçi siyasi içeriklerin doğruluğundan tam olarak emin olmadıkları sonucuna ulaşmıştır. Bu sonuçlar birbiriyle ilişkili olarak gençlerin hem dijital çağın suskunluk sarmalı içine girdiklerini hem de gözetim toplumu kavramının yarattığı baskıyı üzerlerinde hissettiklerini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Z kuşağı, Veri Madenciliği, Kişiyi Özel Dijital Veri, Çevrimiçi Siyasal Katılım, Siyasal İletişim, Dijital İletişim.

INTRODUCTION

Although digital communication technologies and social media are seen as a platform that contributes to democratization, on the other hand, it has become a medium for political manipulation during the 2016 US Presidential elections and the Brexit referendum. Especially with the development of big data and machine learning, the use of personal data and the analysis of the voter's psychographic map, the production of content aimed at misleading voter decisions, and the inability to control the spread of false or misleading information have caused political communication to gain a different dimension. For a long time, many scientists have discussed the impact of the internet, especially the Web 2.0 era, on politics and have introduced the concept of *Virtual Politics* (Hegazy, 2021: 237) in parallel with the new digital society phenomenon. According to a joint study conducted by Cambridge and Stanford University in 2014, ten actions of a person on the internet are sufficient for computer-assisted personality predictions, thanks to the algorithms developed by companies that collect data such as Google and Facebook. Thanks to this data, companies can easily show personalized advertisements or content to individuals (Youyou et al. 2015). When the political communication changes in Turkey are examined, it is seen that a widespread political troll culture is formed. It is accepted that the political troll culture in Turkey started to come to the fore on Twitter, especially during the Gezi Park events in 2013. İşliyen (2018: 245) states that trolling, which carries out a black propaganda activity against politicians, is associated with almost every political party, but it is not clear that these activities are directly or indirectly related to political actors. According to the study by Yetkin (2020: 40) examining the activity of artificial accounts on Twitter in the 23 June 2019 Istanbul local elections; It was stated that an intense troll and bot account activity was observed in order to change the agenda and mislead the voters. According to the research, it has also been concluded that such artificial accounts are used not only by political actors, but also by interest groups trying to change or mislead the public agenda.

The excessive use of political manipulation methods that aim to misinform and mislead the public has started to change the political participation behavior of individuals. This change in behavior has also led to a change in the definitions of political participation. For example, the level of interest, which is considered as the lowest and passive level of political participation, has started to evolve into an active level with behaviors such as following news and political posts, especially in online political participation. Therefore, it can be said that silence in online political participation is also a form of behavior. This change has also led to the differentiation of political participation behaviors between generations. Ağırdir (2020: 153) states that, young people care deeply about many social issues and groups, but they do not need either political parties or the media to express and popularize their leftovers.

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of the use of personalized digital data and fake content in political communication on the online political participation (OPP) of Generation Z. The reason for taking the Z generation as a sample is that this generation is the most diverse and multicultural among all generations. In addition to being in constant communication with his environment, he interacts with people from many different corners of the world. Generation Z, who are accepted as World Citizens, share all kinds of thoughts or events in the form of written, photograph or video on their social media accounts, thanks to digital technological tools such as smartphones and tablets, which have become a part of their daily lives. They have established an emotional connection with social media, which covers a large part of their daily lives (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). In connection with this, according to a study conducted in the USA in 2011, it was determined that 79% of the Z generation individuals, whose smartphones are prohibited, develop stress symptoms (Grail Research, 2011: 8).

OPP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF GEN Z IN TURKEY

When the historical process is analyzed, it is possible to talk about political communication practices since the settlement of humanity. Political communication came to the agenda with its usage patterns before it started to be defined as a concept. This usage first emerges as the common symbolic thinking and reasoning ability in the paintings drawn on cave walls (Tokgöz, 2020: 21-22). The social events that developed over time shaped public power, which is the basic element of the state. With the establishment of the city-states called sites in Ancient Greece, which are the first example of the modern state, the first exchanges of goods began, thus giving rise to all kinds of social, economic, and political relations (Ekinci, 2016: 9).

Political communication practices in the contemporary sense emerged with the development of democracy. With technological developments, mass media has become an indispensable part of political life. The widespread use of mass media such as radio and television has further accelerated the process of forming public opinion and disseminating ideas (Çankaya, 2019). Habermas (2022: 84) stated that for the formation of social order, healthy and strong ties should be established between the rulers and the ruled; stated that political communication is a dynamic process for both parties. Lilleker (2013: 11), on the other hand, has a similar view with Habermas on the issue of establishing a link between the state and the citizen, and states that political communication also plays a stimulating role in democratic systems. Technological developments in time have also been reflected in political communication. Lilleker (2013: 15) states that the structure of political communication has also changed with democratization. He explains that ordinary citizens, who started to be interested in politics over time, tended to more political participation and turned into active citizens as their access to information became easier and their education level increased. This situation brings the need for different communication techniques and models in political communication. Meriç (2019: 11) states that this need for communication increases especially during election periods. However, this is not only limited to the election periods, but also in the post-election period, the actors in power must be in constant communication with the public. This communication process should be based on obtaining the consent of the voter. In order to obtain this consent, a political communication style based on persuasion is adopted.

In democratic systems, politicians must influence society through persuasion and gain public support. The main purpose of political communication activities carried out with different methods such as election campaigns, public opinion polls and rallies is to create political participation. According to Kapani (2019), political participation starts from a simple action such as voting in elections and includes much more intense and active activities. In parallel with Kapani, Daver (1993) explains political participation as a concept that shows the attitude and position of the individual in the face of the political system as well as his/her behavior. However, political participation is a set of actions that cannot be limited to political activities such as voting or exercising the right to protest. In this respect, Tokgöz (2020: 145) defines political participation as a wide range of activities starting from a simple interest and curiosity in politics to actions.

At this point, it is necessary to talk about the levels of political participation. Levels of political participation vary according to the individual. Dahl (1963) categorized the levels of political participation as *interest*, *caring*, *knowledge*, and *action* and stated that these four levels are interrelated. The degree of following political events indicates interest, the degree of importance and sensitivity attributed to them indicates caring, and the information about these political events indicates knowledge. Dahl linked the level of knowledge with being open to and following the media. Actions are the movements and efforts made to influence the decisions of politicians.

Like Dahl's view, Zetra, et al. (2022) argue that public information and political participation are central to democratic processes and that there is a positive relationship between information and the act of voting. In addition to these views, they draw attention to the issue of political awareness and argue that

there is a need to better understand how political knowledge and awareness simultaneously affect political participation. Based on this, they explain political awareness as being aware of the rights and obligations of political participation, being concerned about sociopolitical conditions, being aware of political issues and feeling needed. Individuals' political awareness is strongly influenced by their awareness of the importance of their participation in political life, their awareness of their rights and obligations to participate in politics, their concerns about the current socio-political situation, their concerns about various political issues and various political issues. The level of awareness leads citizens to try to increase their political knowledge for their political participation.

With the development of communication technology, the widespread use of the internet and social media has also changed the fields of political participation. Although traditional mass media such as television is still used today, the development of internet technologies and especially the widespread use of social media applications have led to its use as a propaganda tool, which has changed the channel of political participation.

Digital media have further expanded the scope of political participation by facilitating forms of political activity. Social media are paving the way for new forms of political participation, many of which tend to require less time, effort and financial resources than physical acts of political participation. In contrast to a decline in physical political participation in some Western democracies, online forms of participation have enabled stronger participation of politically underrepresented populations such as women, ethnic minorities, youth, less educated and low-income individuals (Ruess, et al.,2021: 2).

The scope of the concept of political participation has gradually expanded with digitalization. Taking this process into account, Gibson and Cantijoch (2013) have tried to determine to what extent the internet has multiplied and expanded the repertoire of participatory actions. The extent to which these fields of action are interrelated or independent of each other has also been part of their research. In their research, they observed that as online political participation expands to include social media-based political activities, such as posting content to a blog or joining a social networking group, it also allows for the measurement of independence. In particular, Gibson and Cantijoch, who have attempted to map the types of OPP that exists and to analyze in their work whether they replicate offline types of behavior or where they differ, support the idea that a form of social participation can be defined as online; however, they conclude that it occurs independently of an individual's offline community participation (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013). On the other hand, when we look at the relationship between social media and democracy, it carries risks that can be problematic as well as benefits. Segesten and Bossetta (Akyol, 2021) argue that digitalization can lead to the opposite as well as expectations that citizens' participation in political processes will increase and democracy will improve. Giving the example of hashtag posts on Twitter, he states that the posts made here inflame political debates and lead to social polarization. Sharing between opposing views, sometimes leading to hashtag wars, can cause the polarized society on such digital platforms to further divide. Aksoy and Türkölmez (2020) argue that social media use contributes to democracy, increases political participation, and builds a new public sphere. However, they also explain that areas such as the security of personal data, cyber-attacks, political manipulation, and censorship that come with the use of digital data cause debates on ensuring an equal and free democratic environment.

In the light of all these definitions, it would be useful to consider political participation in its broadest form, ranging from the most basic level of interest, such as following the agenda and news, talking about political issues, to voting in elections, carrying any symbol indicating political opinion, and becoming a candidate in elections. In addition to these, activities such as civil disobedience, strikes, petitions and protests are also part of political participation. However, with the development of internet technology and artificial intelligence technologies, while changes and transformations are taking place in almost all areas of life, the methods of political communication used by politicians in the position of leaders with their masses have also begun to change radically with this new era. These changes have enabled many

activities in political participation to be directed online, especially through social media platforms. Today, many political participation behaviors such as signature campaigns, protests and demonstrations, activities aimed at influencing the decisions of politicians (public opinion power), and following the political agenda are carried out online. Although classical political communication methods have not yet completely disappeared, it is understood that traditional communication strategies are gradually being replaced by communication strategies that progress in line with artificial intelligence technologies /algorithm developments. This situation negatively affects the free expression of individuals in digital environments and creates pressure and fear of surveillance on citizens. These negative feelings also affect political participation behaviors and cause them to exhibit spectator behavior, especially in online environments.

Undoubtedly, such changes in political participation also affect the perspective of generation Z towards politics and the behavior of political participation. Generation Z, which was born and grew up in a time when the developments in digital technologies were the most intense and fastest, is considered the generation with the easiest and fastest access to information among the generations that have ever lived (Sarıoğlu & Özgen, 2018). It has been observed in researches that the Z generation, who can easily reach many different information at the same time and in a very short time, also has very different dreams and perspectives on life, and in connection with this, their plans and goals are very different, and they are composed of creative but quickly bored individuals with advanced motor skills (Berkup, 2014: 223). Kūçūşabanođlu (2021: 26) states that the social events into which Generation Z was born also brought along one of the biggest problems for them. He adds that the concept of freedom is also very important for Generation Z, which is the generation of young people who have the most future anxiety so far. Ethnic, religious, sexual, and ideological issues, which were previously considered taboo, are freely expressed by Generation Z individuals. From this perspective, it is thought that Generation Z is the generation that will redefine and transform social norms and values.

These characteristics of Generation Z and the social period in which they were born have also affected their perspectives on politics and politicians. In political communication, they prefer a way of communication that makes concrete promises about the future rather than politicians who constantly present the past in front of them and talk about the past. The tools and language used by politicians who want to reacclamation Z, who expect a clever political communication that is far from falsity, original and with a sense of humor, are also changing while producing their policies and discourses. Ađırdır (2020) states that young people care deeply about many social issues and events, but they no longer need political parties or media to express and disseminate their ideas. He argues that thanks to communication technologies, they can both communicate their ideas and establish solidarity by meeting many new ideas and establishing solution-oriented and hierarchical organizations. This experience also changes their expectations from politics. This view of the youth in Turkey to politics has led to the differentiation of actors. YouTubers, which are followed with interest by young people, have evolved into political actors with the claim that they can see the gap in politics and offer platforms where they can represent the youth themselves or ensure their political participation. Examples of these actors are Ahmet Sonuç, known as Jahrein, and Ođuzhan Uđur. Jahrein produces game content on Youtube and Twitch platforms, and interviews internet phenomena and political actors. As the voice of the Z generation, he announced that he will be an independent parliamentary candidate in the 2023 Turkish general elections. Again, while Ođuzhan Uđur produced content for various programs on Youtube, he started to host programs such as *Mevzular: Erken Seçim Özel ve Mevzular: Açık Mikrofon*, and brought many politicians together with voters, especially young voters, with these programs broadcast on Youtube (Gürel, 2023).

The political participation of Generation Z has been a controversial issue both in Turkey and around the world. Benedicto (2008) emphasized that studies on this issue have shown that voting rates among young people have decreased, that young people are not actively involved in political parties, that they do not believe in these structures or are not interested in political processes, and that they are alienated from

classical political structures. Today, it is seen that the frequencies between Generation Z and politicians are very different. While Generation Z exhibits different attitudes from classical voter behavior, they position themselves far away from traditional politics. In 2020, a survey on what Generation Z in Turkey understands from politics concluded that 78.9% of them do not want to enter politics. In the same study, when the question *What comes to your mind first when you think of politics?* was asked, 70% of the results that created negative perceptions such as confusion, chaos, discussion, bad words, etc. were reached. The rate of those who think that politicians understand young people is only 11.9 (Küçükşabanoğlu, 2021: 49-50). However, in the same survey, 81.2% of young people stated that they would vote if there is an election in Turkey in 2023 (Küçükşabanoğlu, 2021: 35).

Generation Z is a generation that can think systematically, is closely related to current developments, and can easily organize. For this reason, they also carry a great potential for political power (Ağırır, 2020). In recent years, political parties and their leaders have started to share animated viral videos in their election advertisements and campaigns to turn this power of Generation Z into voting potential. However, Generation Z expects campaigns that are more realistic and offer promises about their future lives rather than political campaigns based on animated, rap music and free internet distribution (Küçükşabanoğlu, 2021).

METHOD AND FINDINGS

In this study, cross-sectional research was selected from general survey models and online survey technique was used. Snowball sampling was used, and data was collected from 356 social media user students of Generation Z (18-24 years old) studying in Istanbul between December 2021 and March 2022 through an online survey. The most important feature of this research is that it is a preliminary study that examines the political participation behaviors of young people in Turkey in the online environment and analyzes what situations they encounter in the digital environment and how they affect these behaviors. Another importance and difference of this study is that it determines the OPP of the Z generation between the ages of 18-24, who are university students in a metropolis like Istanbul. This is due to the assumption that they have a certain level of education and culture and have a certain awareness of OPP, digital media literacy and personal data breaches, and can distinguish between true and false information. It is also important that the study was not carried out during an active election campaign period in which the debates regarding the 2023 General Elections of Turkey were taking place. Due to these features, the study lays the groundwork for future studies. The scales were prepared with a 5-point Likert type. Reliability analyses of the scales are carried out, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient are .860, .780, and .820 respectively. According to the results, the questionnaire was reliable.

When the demographic data of the respondents are analyzed, 66.3% of the 356 respondents are female and 33.1% are male. The average age of the participants is around 21 years old. In the frequency of social media use of the participants, WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube and Twitter were the most used social media platforms during the day. BIP, Signal and Twitch were the least used platforms.

In the survey, participants were asked which social media platform they use the most to follow the political agenda and news. According to Table 1, Twitter is the most used social media platform with 58%. Instagram ranked second with 23% and Youtube ranked third with 12.6%. Participants who stated that they follow the political agenda through tools such as Google, news websites and applications, reddit, ekşisözlük and Telegram were grouped under the other option.

Table 1. Platforms for political agenda and news

Platforms	n	%
Youtube	45	12,6
Facebook	4	1,1
Twitter	207	58,0
Instagram	82	23,0
Tiktok	3	0,6
Other	15	4,7
Total	356	100,0

It examined whether there is a difference between the OPP of these participants according to the platform they follow the political agenda. ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a difference in OPP according to the platforms they follow the political agenda and news. To understand whether there is a difference in behavior between platforms, intergroup values were examined. According to Table 2, a statistically significant difference was found between the groups and differences were found in the OPP behaviors of those who follow the political agenda from different platforms [$F(5,350)= 3.620$; $p<.05$].

Table 2. ANOVA for political agenda and news platforms

Variable		KT	df	KO	F	Sig
Online Political Participation	Between groups	2682,170	5	536,434	3,620	,003*
	Within groups	51870,010	350	148,200		
	Total	54552,180	355			

* $p<.05$

Tukey analysis was applied to determine between which groups the difference occurred. According to the Table 3, it was determined that the difference in behavior was between the users of YouTube ($\bar{X}=40.15$) and other ($\bar{X}=29.73$) and Twitter ($\bar{X}=42.28$) and other ($\bar{X}=29.73$) platforms. In other words, the online political participation behaviors of the users who follow political agenda and news especially on Youtube and Twitter are more active than the participants who follow them on other platforms. Although Instagram is the second most used platform, it can be said that the more passive attitude of those who use it is due to the tabloid dimension of Instagram and the fact that it is a more closed system compared to Twitter.

Table 3. Tukey for political agenda and news platforms

Variable	(I) Political Agenda	(J) Political Agenda	MD (I-J)	SS	Sig
Online Political Participation	Youtube	Other	10,42222*	3,62951	,049*
	Twitter	Other	12,55652*	3,25514	,002*

*p<.05

In connection with these, it was also tested whether the perceptions of trust in online information differed according to the users of different platforms. A behavioral difference was found between Twitter and Instagram. Again, Twitter users are more cautious about the content they encounter and feel the need to verify this content more.

To measure the level of relationship between dependent and independent variables, Pearson Correlation test was applied first, and then multiple regression test was applied. The results of Pearson Correlation analysis were conducted to determine the level and direction of the relationships between the variables. According to the results, when we look at the relationships between OPP, which is the dependent variable, and other variables, a positive and significant relationship was found with the perception of trust in online information and the need to verify fake news ($r=-0.299$, $p<.01$) and the perception of personal digital data security ($r=-0.290$, $p<.01$). Positive and significant correlations were also found between the independent variables.

Multiple regression analysis was also conducted to measure the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. According to the Table 4, the regression coefficient was found significant at a rate of 12.8% ($R^2 = 0.128$) ($R=0.35$; $R^2 = 0.128$; $F=25.908$; $p<.05$). Considering the results obtained, it was found that both the perception of trust in online information and the need for fake news verification 22.4% ($\beta=-.224$; $p<.05$) and the perception of personal digital data security 21.0% ($\beta=-.210$; $p<.05$) were significantly positively related. Accordingly, there is a directly proportional relationship between participants' perceptions of trust in online information and digital data security and their online political participation behaviors. In other words, as the participants' trust in online information increases, their OPP increases, and as their trust decreases, their participation decreases. A similar situation is also observed in the perception of personal digital data security.

Table 4. Relationship between Independent Variables and OPP

Independent Variables	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	7,088	4,964		1,428	,154*
Perception of Trust in Online Information	,348	,083	,224	4,204	,000*
Personalized Digital Data Security	,238	,061	,210	3,937	,000*

* p <.05 F=25,903 ** R=0,35 R2 =0,128

Findings on OPP

The results of the participants' answers to the survey questions about their online OPP behaviors are examined. The OPP behavior scale developed from Velasquez's (2012) *Social Media and Individual - Collective Activism*. Firstly, in the OPP scale, participants were asked whether they share their opinions about a political issue on social media platforms with a 5-point Likert scale. A total of 53.1% of the participants disagree with this statement and therefore stated that they did not share a political opinion on social media. In relation to this, the participants were asked how much they agree or disagree with the statement *I share links about political issues on social media*. A total of 71.9% of the participants stated that they do not share links about political issues on social media platforms. In general, if it is necessary to evaluate the individual sharing behaviors of the participants in online environments, they show an attitude that they do not prefer to share any opinions, links, etc. with political content.

Questions were asked about the participants' behavior of following social media accounts according to their political views or politicians. They were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement *I follow the social media accounts of the politician or political party I support*. A total of 42.1% of the participants stated that they do not follow the social media accounts of the political figures they support. Similarly, participants were asked whether they follow other people or accounts with similar views on social media and 45% of the participants stated that they do. The answers given by the participants to these questions show that even if there is a political party or politician they support, following their social media accounts or interacting with them is weaker than following accounts close to their own views. This situation can be interpreted as young people attach more importance to ideas rather than their loyalty to political leaders or institutional structures.

In the same scale, the participants were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement *I talk about political content I encounter on social media with close friends or family*. In addition, they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, *When I disagree with others, I prefer to remain silent instead of engaging in a debate on social media*. In connection with this question, they were also asked whether they prefer to remain silent on controversial issues rather than openly posting on social media. In the answers given to these statements, 59% of the participants stated that they discuss the content they encounter on social media with their friends, 60.1% stated that they prefer to remain silent on social media when they disagree, and 51.1% stated that they do not share controversial issues on social media. Most of the participants who hesitate to share their own political views online also stated that they do not share the content shared by others. However, they generally prefer to remain

silent online, but do not remain indifferent to the political content they encounter and share these issues with their circles.

In the OPP scale, it was also questioned whether the participants interact with political actors through online platforms. When the participants were asked the statement, *I communicate with political actors and political parties through social media by writing messages, making comments, etc.*, 82.6% of them stated that they do not interact with political figures through social media. In addition, it was asked whether they try to influence the decisions of politicians through activities such as hashtags/likes/messages/sharing/comments etc. on social media. In this statement, 55.9% of the participants stated that they do not participate in social media activities (public opinion power) to influence the decisions of politicians. Participants generally avoid interacting with political actors by stating that they do not participate in activities such as writing comments on social media and participating in hashtag activities. In general, the reasons why young people prefer to remain silent in online environments despite being sensitive to political issues are analyzed in the following section.

To analyze the relationship between Generation Z's perception of trust in political information on social media and online political participation behavior, Öngel's (2019) study *Reality in News and the Phenomenon of Beyond Reality in Online Journalism* was utilized.

Participants were asked how much they agree or disagree with the statement about awareness of fake news (Chart 1). In total, 78.4% of the participants stated that fake news on social media is generated through troll or bot accounts, and 83.7% believe that fake news manipulates public opinion. Moreover, 87.1% of the participants stated that fake news caused polarization among the public and 73.6% stated that it harmed democracy.

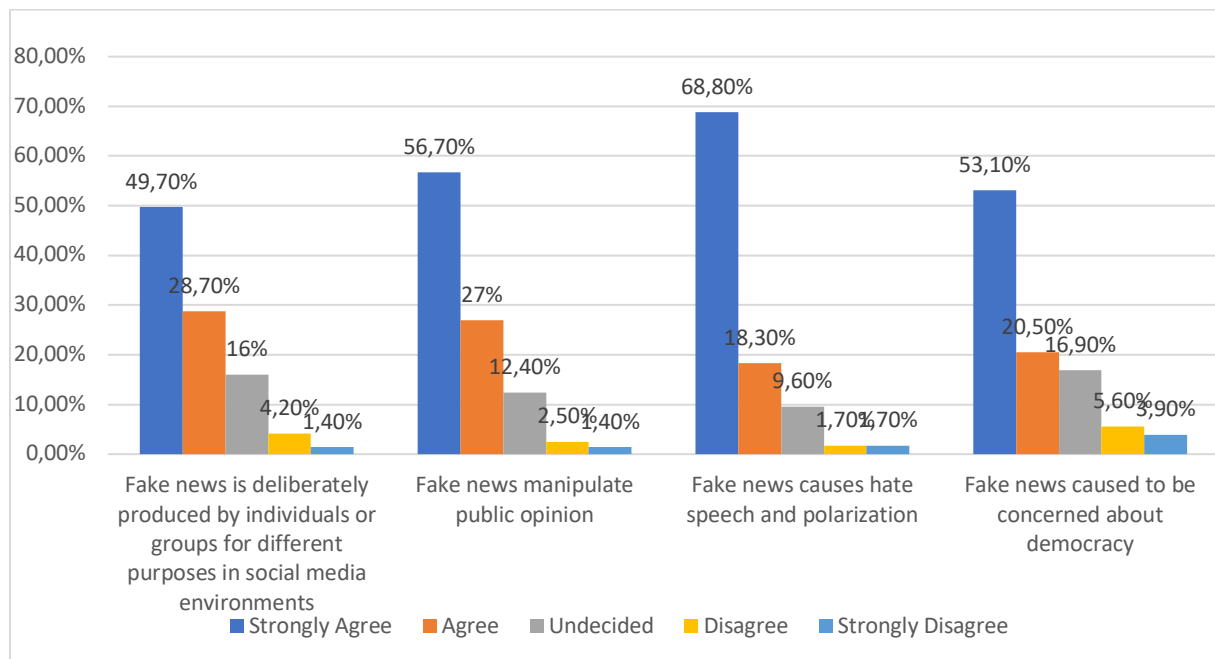


Chart 1. Fake news awareness

When asked whether they find the news about political candidates or parties on social media platforms reliable or not, 44.4% of the participants stated that they were undecided. Respectively, 16.9% strongly disagree, 27.5% disagree, 7.6% agree and 3.7% strongly agree with this statement. It is understood from the answers given by the participants that they are aware that artificially produced political content is a part of smear propaganda and that it causes polarization in society and harms democracy. Considering that Twitter is the platform that participants use the most to follow political content and that the most

intense trolling campaigns are seen on this platform, these results can be interpreted as natural. Regarding this issue, Twitter announced that 7,340 accounts created in Turkey between June 9, 2008 and January 18, 2020 were removed.

In the perception of trust in online information and the need to verify fake news scale, participants were also asked questions about their need to verify online political information. The participants were asked the statement *I compare different news sources before believing political news on social media*: 2.2% strongly disagree, 5.3% disagree, 19.7% are undecided, 27% agree and 45.8% strongly agree. Participants were also asked whether they talk to those around them before making a definite judgment about the political content they encounter on social media. The answers given by the participants to this question are as follows: 5.1% strongly disagree, 10.1% disagree, 25.6% undecided, 35.4% agree, 23.9% strongly agree. Participants were also asked whether they investigate the authenticity of the politician they support from various sources when they encounter information on social media that contradicts their views and beliefs. The responses to this statement were 36.2% strongly agree, 33.4% agree, 18.8% undecided, 6.5% disagree and 5.1% strongly disagree. Looking at the answers given, it is concluded that the intensity of disinformation in online environments creates a need among the participants to investigate the reality of the political content they encounter on social media from different sources or to talk to those around them and reach a decision. This situation also affects the OPP of young people, causing them not to actively participate in digital environments.

Finally, it was examined whether there is a significant relationship between the personal digital data security concerns of Generation Z and the OPP of Generation Z. Participants were asked how much they agree or disagree with the statement *I am concerned about my sensitive personal information* being shared with third parties (*ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, etc.)*. The responses to this statement are as follows: 39% strongly agree, 20.5% agree, 19.4% undecided, 13.2% disagree, 7.9% strongly disagree. To evaluate the responses given to the personal digital data security perception scale, it is seen that the participants are concerned that their sensitive information such as sexual orientation, ethnic origin, political opinion, etc. are stored as data and shared with third parties through their actions on social media.

When the participants were asked the statement, *I think that only the data of those with a criminal past or criminal potential are monitored*: 39% strongly disagree, 23.3% disagree, 22.5% are undecided, 9.3% agree and 5.9% strongly agree. In addition, the statement *I think that only the data of those with opposing views are monitored* was also asked. For this statement, 33.7% of the participants strongly disagreed. This was followed by 22.2% disagree, 22.8% undecided, 12.1% agree and 9.3% strongly agree, respectively. It is thought that not only people with a criminal past or people with opposing views, but also ordinary citizens are monitored through audio or video on social media applications. These results again affect the online political participation behaviors of young people and cause them to be unable to participate freely in digital environments.

Participants were also asked about their awareness of the use of their digital data for political interests. They were asked whether they encountered advertisements or posts in line with their political stance due to their behavior on social media. The answers given by the participants to this question are as follows: 12.6% strongly disagree, 13.2% disagree, 28.4% undecided, 21.3% agree, 24.4% agree. In connection with this question, participants were also asked whether political parties try to contact them by using their personal digital data on social media. 27.2% of the participants strongly disagree with this statement, 21.6% disagree, 28.1% were undecided, 10.7% agree and 12.4% strongly agree.

Respondents were also asked whether they were concerned about their private digital data being used for government policies and political interests that they would not support. The responses to this statement were 31.7% strongly agree, 19.4% agree, 23.3% undecided, 13.2% disagree and 12.4% strongly disagree. Participants were also asked about their thoughts on losing faith in democratic

elections when their data is used in political campaigns. For this statement, 36.2% strongly agree, 24.2% agree, 23.6% are undecided, 8.1% disagree and 7.9% strongly disagree. In the answers given to these statements, 51.1% of the participants stated that they were concerned about the use of their personal data in government policies that they would not support, and 60.4% stated that the use of their personal data in political campaigns would shake their belief in democratic elections.

In the personal digital data security perception scale, participants were also asked questions about the measures they take against data breaches. Participants were asked whether they allow the social media applications they use to access various information by collecting their cookies and personal data for the analysis of their online behavior. The answers given by the participants to this question are as follows: 15.2% strongly disagree, 13.8% disagree, 30.1% undecided, 28.7% agree, 12.4% strongly agree. When the participants were asked the statement "I use vpn/dns services or regularly clean my browser and cookies to keep my data private", 17.1% strongly agree, 12.9% agree, 25% were undecided, 24.2% disagree and 20.8% strongly disagree. In the results regarding the measures taken by the participants against these personal data breaches, it is seen that they do not yet have sufficient knowledge or awareness on this issue. If there is not enough or correct information in society, fear and anxiety begin to form there. The issue of digital data security is a current issue that is much discussed today and how to determine the boundaries has not yet been clarified by institutions and governments, leading to a lot of information confusion by both the public and administrators. Therefore, even though young people are so concerned about personal data breaches, their inability to take the necessary precautions is due to the lack of sufficient and clear information on this issue.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings, it is possible to talk about an audience that follows the political agenda but is less interested in the political party or politicians it supports. It is known that Generation Z is generally distant from politics, politicians, and bureaucratic structures in political parties. Therefore, the decrease in young people's following of politicians or political parties is in line with this general view.

When the relationship between the perception of trust in online information and the need to verify fake news and OPP is examined, it is concluded that the participants generally find the content on social media false and misleading. At the same time, it was concluded that they think that online content is deliberately manipulated, or fake news is circulated by individuals or groups. A very high 83.7% of the participants stated that fake news manipulates public opinion and 87.1% of the participants stated that these fake news cause hate speech and polarization. These results also reveal the disinformation brought about by the political troll culture in Turkey. A similar situation was analyzed when respondents were asked about the social media platform, they use most to follow the political agenda. 58% of the participants stated that they follow the political agenda on Twitter and 23% followed the political agenda on Instagram in second place. When perceptions of trust in online information were measured according to the political agenda platform followed, differences were found between Twitter users and Instagram users. Twitter users are aware that political content circulates much more on this platform and is more susceptible to disinformation, and since they are exposed to more information pollution, they also feel the need to be cautious and control all kinds of content. In the responses to the surveys, 73.6% of respondents stated that fake news is a concern for democracy. This result is an answer to the question of whether the use of political trolls and bot accounts in Turkey poses a problem for democracy. Similarly, according to the findings, it was determined that the participants follow accounts or people close to their own political views and are closed to different views. This situation shows that they are inevitably exposed to echo chambers and filter bubbles. Participants, who think that there is a lot of misleading content on social media by trolls, bot accounts or real people, follow like-minded accounts, news sources they trust, or talk and discuss the political content they encounter with their own circles to protect themselves from this content.

When we look at the impact of concerns about the use of personal digital data on OPP, the participants are concerned about the storage of their actions such as posts, likes, and comments on social media and the sharing of this data with third parties such as state authorities and companies. They are especially concerned about the storage and sharing of sensitive data such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, political views, and generally prefer to hide this information in their social media accounts. It is thought that not only people with a criminal past or opposition views, but also ordinary citizens are monitored through audio or video on social media applications. These concerns are also reflected in OPP. Participants who do not prefer to make political posts on social media and prefer to remain silent on controversial issues prefer to show a more passive OPP. 51.1% of the participants stated that they were concerned about their personal data being used for government policies or political interests that they would not support. The development of data mining and artificial intelligence technologies, which are part of digitalization, has led to the use of micro-targeting methods in political campaigns. When the participants were asked whether they have encountered political advertisements or posts on social media with such micro-targeting methods using their psychographic data, the answers showed an equal distribution in general, with the highest rate of 28.4% being undecided. This is since there is no clear information about the use of such an application in Turkey yet and that there is no clear information among the public and therefore among the participants. In addition, 60.4% of the participants stated that they would lose faith in democratic elections if this method was used. All these results also affect the OPP of the participants, causing them to be unable to actively participate in digital environments.

To summarize these results, young people are not insensitive to political issues, they follow the agenda, but generally prefer to follow and remain unresponsive. Displaying a passive OPP, young people show their presence as silent followers. This attitude stems both from the concern that their personalized digital data will be used in cases where they do not give their consent and from the fact that they do not want to react to information that they are not sure about in online political content they encounter. It is also possible to say that the current situation in Turkey is also effective in these attitudes. It can be interpreted that when they engage in online political participation in any way or show their reactions, they are worried about being exposed to a lynch culture or being used against them in the future or that their reaction will not be useful.

This situation expressed by young people shows that they have entered a spiral of silence under the conditions of the digital age and that they feel the pressure created by the concept of surveillance society. The fact that every action they take in digital environments is stored as data, or that the social media applications they use monitor them through audio and video and share this data with third parties without their consent, causes young people to feel themselves in a kind of prison and to be unable to react sufficiently on political issues. Moreover, thanks to the advances in artificial intelligence and algorithms, this surveillance and control function has become directly individualized.

The inability of young people to express their opinions on political issues on digital platforms leads to a spiral of silence. The reason behind the increasing silence of young people may be that they think that politics cannot find a solution to their problems, that they feel like a minority, and that they are afraid of being ostracized or penalized when they share their opinions. The silence of young people causes them to be unable to make their voices heard in a democratic way because they cannot actively participate in OPP. However, according to the results obtained from the sample, although young people feel themselves under panoptic pressure and cannot express their reactions sufficiently, they do not stop following the political agenda. This situation also overlaps with Gibson and Cantijoch's definition of online passive participation. This passive participation of young people in social media channels as news followers, viewers, etc. can enable much more effective and productive types of behavior, especially during election periods. In addition, considering the answers given by the participants, it can be thought that they can realize much more active OPP when the necessary democratic and free environment away from surveillance is provided.

To encourage more active political participation of young people in digital environments; Digital open sessions can be held on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, which are both used by young people and suitable for political sessions. These open sessions for young people can be prepared in a way that is open to the participation of everyone, by pre-announced in digital media, and in a way that young people can easily talk about their problems with political party leaders and get solutions. It has been observed that young people exhibit a passive and anxious attitude in their online political participation behaviors. The obtained results lay the groundwork for future studies. The scope of the study can be expanded by using these data obtained by conducting similar studies on the post-election political climate and perspectives on politics.

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